

Italiani Brava Gente? The Italian
occupation of southeastern France in the
Second World War, 1940-1943

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Many academic works have focused on the German occupation of France in the Second World War, both from the perspective of the occupiers and the occupied. Only a few monographs however had dealt so far with the Italian military occupation of southeastern France between 1940 and 1943. My dissertation strives to fill this historiographical gap, by analyzing the Italian occupation policy established by both Italian civilian and military authorities. Compared to the German occupation policy, the Italian occupation was considerably more lenient, as no massacres were perpetrated and wanton violence was rare. In fact, the Italian occupation of France contrasts sharply with the occupation in the Balkans, where Italians resorted to brutal retaliation in response to guerilla activities. Indeed, softer measures in France stemmed from pragmatic reasons, as the Italian army had not the manpower to implement a draconian occupation, but also due to an humanitarian mindset, especially with regards to the Jewish population in southeastern France. This work endeavors to examine the occupation and its impact on southeastern France, especially at a grassroots level, with a particular emphasis on the relations between the Italian soldiers and the Italian immigrants in the area. Furthermore, much light will be shed on the conflict opposing French officials to Italian ones, and on the differences in policy between Italian civilian authorities and Italian military officials.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my wife Elena, who have agreed to come with me in my fantastic journey in Canada to start a new family far away from our families and friends. I would have never been able to make it without you and this dedication is only a minuscule token of my love for you. Grazie di cuore, Amore mio.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1965, a movie opened in Italian theaters called "Italiani Brava Gente" (Italian goodfellows). Directed by Giuseppe De Santis, the movie narrated the adventures of an Italian unit of the *Corpo di Spedizione Italiano in Russia* (Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia or CSIR) who became firsthand witnesses of German atrocities against the Russian civilian population on the Eastern Front in the Second World War. The shocked Italians were so horrified by the German actions that the Italians befriended the local Russian population and protected it from the Germans' savagery, offering them food and benevolent care. This attitude was encapsulated in an iconic moment in the film when a good-natured Italian young soldier was killed in a field of sunflowers while shielding an innocent Russian girl from crossfire with his body.

De Santis' movie immortalized one of the central paradigms of postwar Italian historiography, that of the *Italiani Brava Gente*. This self-exonerating myth rested on the foundational idea that "the Italian soldier is essentially good-natured, firmly attached to family values, even a bit of a "mummy's boy" (*mammone*); as such, he is incapable of performing violence against the defenseless ones, he eschews reprisals, he does not yield to the overwhelming brutalities of war."¹ The movie fuelled the broadly accepted assumption of the existence of a moral chasm that separated the supposedly heartless Wehrmacht soldiers, always prone to wanton violence, from the supposedly kind soldiers of the *Regio Esercito*,

¹ Gianni Oliva, "Si Ammazza troppo poco," *I crimini di guerra italiani, 1940 -1943*, Milano: Mondadori, 2006, p.6.

whose consideration for the Russian peasants marked them as qualitatively different from the Germans.²

The paradigm of *Italiani Brava Gente* was already deeply ingrained into the Italian public opinion when De Santis shot his movie. Beginning with the signature of the Armistice in September 1943, Italian national unity governments, formed by a coalition of former antifascist parties both on the right and left of the political spectrum, sought to underscore the moderation of Italian behavior towards the civilians of the countries occupied by the Italian army, in marked contrast with the scorched earth policy of the Germans and their brutal history of massacres and reprisals. The goal was to demarcate, as much as possible, the new Italian state from the Fascist regime and its partner in crime, Nazi Germany. Thus, all the atrocities perpetrated by soldiers of the Regio Esercito in the name of Fascist imperialist policy became a crime of solely the Fascist regime, and ultimately of its leader, Benito Mussolini. The myth was especially effective in solely whitewashing Italian military leaders such as Marshall Badoglio and General Mario Roatta, who openly supported the new Italian pro-Allies state, the Kingdom of the South. In reality, their occupation policies respectively in both Ethiopia (1935-1936)³ and the Balkans (1942-1943)⁴ violated the international laws

² More recently, this myth was reinforced by two films, Gabriele Salvatores' *Mediterraneo* (1991) and John Madden's *Captain's Corelli Mandolin* (2001). Both are stories of Italian officers falling in love with Greek women on the Aegean islands.

³ In October 1935, Mussolini, as the first step towards the expansion of an Italian empire in Africa, ordered the Italian army to invade Ethiopia from Italian Somaliland and Eritrea. The campaign against a poor-equipped and badly trained army lasted only six months. In order to crush the resistance of the Ethiopian army, Italian generals Badoglio and Graziani used chemical warfare and indiscriminate bombing against civilians. For more on the Italian war crimes in Ethiopia, see Angelo Del Boca, *I gas di Mussolini: il fascismo e la guerra d'Etiopia*, Roma: Riuniti, 1996. The best monograph on the Italian occupation of Yugoslavia is probably H. James Burgwyn, *Empire on the Adriatic, Mussolini's conquest of Yugoslavia, 1941-1943*, New York: Enigma, 2005.

of war. However, the post-Armistice national governments, even those members from leftist parties who in the past had severely criticized the Italian army as the docile strongarm of the Fascist regime, understood that the support of Italian army upper cadres in the short term was crucial to bolster the legitimacy of the new state. New governments needed the support of the monarchy and questioning the army policy up to 1943 would have inferred criticizing the decisions of the king, as nominally Vittorio Emanuele II was still head of the *Regio Esercito*. Even Leftist parties, such as the Italian Communist Party, the Italian Socialist Party and the *Partito D'Azione*, while sometimes accusing Italian military leaders of war crimes, staunchly defended the rank-and-file, portraying them as innocent victims who had been thrown against their will into an imperialist war which brought them only misery and death.⁵

In addition to garnering the approval of the Italian populace, other foreign policy factors pushed Italian politicians to put as much distance between the new Italian state and the former regime as possible. Italian national governments hoped the peace treaty at the end of the war would not be as punitive as expected.⁶ Indeed, at the beginning of 1945, Italy was beginning to feel increasingly isolated internationally. In February 1945, the newborn Yugoslavian state, headed by the Communist leader Josef Broz Tito, handed a list of forty Italian military leaders wanted for crimes committed in the Balkans during the Second World

⁴ The Italians invaded Greece in October 1940 and Yugoslavia in April 1941 in an effort to start a *Guerra Parallela* (Parallel War) concurrent to the German expansion in eastern and western Europe. In both campaigns though, German intervention was instrumental in bludgeoning local armies into submission. The Italians subsequently occupied part of Greece and part of former Yugoslavia, namely the Slovenian and Dalmatian coastline, Montenegro and Kosovo. The Germans and the Italians carved out two zones of influences in the Balkans, the Germans eager to milk their parts of its resources as quickly as possible, while the Italians were also interested in colonizing the zones in preparation for a future annexation.

⁵ See Focardi, Filippo and Lutz Klinkhammer, "The question of Fascist Italy's war crimes: the construction of a self-acquitting myth (1943-1948)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2004): p.342.

⁶ Claudio Pavone, "Introduction" *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2004): p.272.

War to the United Nations War Crimes Commission. This unsettling move was worsened not only by the news that officers of the Regio Esercito had been executed in August 1944 by the Yugoslavs allegedly for their wartime crimes, but also because of the temporary occupation from May to June 1945 of Trieste and the Italian region bordering Slovenia by Yugoslavian troops.⁷ The Yugoslavian request produced a snowball effect, as other countries such as Greece, Albania and France demanded the extradition of Italian war criminals.⁸ The Italian political leaders understood that there was more than the fate of a few military officers at stake here. By handing over Italian citizens, no matter the gravity of their crimes, the Italian state risked losing its precarious legitimacy, as extradition would infer that Italian courts were not be able to pass impartial judgments. It is not surprising, then, that all Italian political forces, as well as the army and the monarchy, united against the extradition of Italian soldiers. The British and the American governments were sympathetic, if just for the pragmatic reason that the Italian government and army was becoming an important bulwark against the Communist wave threatening to sweep over Europe. The Italian Foreign Ministry (the *Farnesina*) made wide use of the *Italiani Brave Gente* paradigm, insisting on the "good" Italian soldier versus the "bad" German one, putting the blame squarely on the Nazis for any atrocities. This myth was also reinforced by the publication of postwar memoirs of several Italian military leaders trying to clear their names.⁹ In the words of General Roatta, head of

⁷ Focardi, Filippo and Lutz Klinkhammer, "The question of Fascist Italy's war crimes: the construction of a self-acquitting myth (1943-1948)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2004): pp.333-335.

⁸ Gianni Oliva, "*Si ammazza troppo poco, i crimini di guerra italiani 1940-1943*," Milano: Mondadori, 2006, pp.34-35. The new French Republic requested thirty Italian officials.

⁹ For an example of memoirs advancing the idea of a good-natured Italian soldier, see Mario Roatta, *Otto milioni di baionette*, Milano: Mondadori, 1946; Salvatore Loi, *Jugoslavia 1941*, Torino: Il Nastro Azzurro, 1953; Giuseppe Angelini, *Fuochi di Bivacco in Croazia*, Roma: Tipografia Regionale, 1946 and Giacomo Zanussi, *Guerra e catastrofe d'Italia*, Rome: Corso, 1945, vol.1.

the Italian Army in the former Yugoslavian territories, Italian soldiers were at most capable "of stealing a few chickens (or pigs) during the battle without the knowledge of their superiors."¹⁰

Thus, it is unsurprising that, apart from these memoirs, which failed to mention any Italian reprisals or massacres, Italian postwar historiography largely ignored the imperialist campaigns from of Fascist Italy. More than that, Italian society as a whole chose to ignore the 1940-1943 years of conflict. This drive to cleanse Italian history of its Fascist period was epitomized by the trial in 1953 of a cinema screenwriter, Renzo Renzi, who had sparked a debate on the occupation policy in Greece in the cinema magazine, *Cinema Nuovo*. Renzi, himself a veteran of the Greek front, boldly asserted that Italian soldiers had sometimes exercised ruthless repression, shooting hostages and civilians in retaliation against partisans' attacks. Moreover, the rank-and-file, as much as their officers, had a propensity for dating local girls, out of frustration with the Italy's lack of success in its military campaign in Greece. Renzi provocatively claimed to be writing the screenplay for a new movie called *L'armata s'agapò*, literally the "Army I Love."¹¹ The result was a heated debate in the magazine, in which former soldiers of the Greek campaign agreed with Renzi's judgment of the Regio Esercito's shortcomings. Not surprisingly, the Army reacted strongly and, in September 1953, both Renzi and the magazine's editor, Guido Aristarco, were arrested and sentenced to a few months in prison for *vilipendio alle Forze Armate* (public defamation of

¹⁰ Roatta, *Otto milioni di baionette*, pp.178-179.

¹¹ "S'agapò" means "I Love" in Greek and was this nickname was derogatively used by the British to call the Italian army in Greece.

the Armed Forces).¹² In the 1950s, neither the Italian republican state nor its army was prepared to reopen this particular "can of worms."

Up to 1943, The Second World War became simply put, the "forgotten war" in the Italian popular subconscious.¹³ Only the most heroic battles or campaigns such as the Battle of El Alamein or the retreat of Russia were remembered, thanks to several memoirs.¹⁴ Few history textbooks and no memoirs mentioned the disastrous Battle of the Alps or the failed invasion of Greece, let alone the occupation of the Balkans. These dark parts of the story were simply forgotten, and attention was directed instead the Italian Resistance and its fights against the Nazi and republican fascist forces from 1943 to 1945. Even the most authoritative historian of Fascism, Renzo De Felice, in his monumental biography of the Duce and of the evolution of the Fascist regime, scarcely mentioned Italian occupation policies.¹⁵

The historiography on the Italian military occupations and on the Italian army thus dates only from the 1960s. Monographs by Nuto Revelli and Bianca Ceva highlighted the war experience as seen from the perspective of the soldiers.¹⁶ Giorgio Rochat, one of the *éminences grises* of Italian military history, published a book on the Italian army from the

¹² For more on the trial, Oliva, "*Si ammazza troppo poco*," pp.163-169.

¹³ The formula is used by Giorgio Rochat in his essay on the shortcomings of Italian military history, Giorgio Rochat, "La Guerra di Mussolini, 1940-1943," in Angelo Del Boca, *La Storia negata, il revisionismo e il suo uso politico*, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2009, pp.151-172.

¹⁴ For more on bibliography on memoirs, Rochat, "La Guerra di Mussolini, 1940-1943," in Del Boca, *La Storia negata, il revisionismo e il suo uso politico*, footnote 3.

¹⁵ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il Duce, Gli anni del consenso*, Torino: Einaudi, 1974; *Mussolini l'Alleato: L'Italia in guerra*, Torino: Einaudi, 1990.

¹⁶ Nuto Revelli, *La strada del davai*, Torino: Einaudi, 1966; *L'ultimo fronte*, Torino: Einaudi, 1971; Bianca Ceva, *Cinque anni di storia italiana 1940-1945 : da lettere e diari di caduti*, Milano: Comunità, 1964.

Risorgimento to the fall of Fascism with Giulio Massobrio.¹⁷ The memoirs of a military chaplain of a unit quartered in Croatia, dramatically entitled *Santa Messa per i miei fucilati* (Holy Mass for my Executed), described (without passing judgment) the ruthless war between Italian soldiers and Yugoslavian partisans.¹⁸

However, the self-exonerating myth of the "good" Italian soldier remained in vogue until relatively recently. The first two official monographs by the Historical Office of the Italian Army (*Ufficio storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito* or USSME) on the military occupations in the Balkans, while exhaustively complete in their operational details, glossed over the harsher aspects of the policy occupation.¹⁹ Thus, even decades after the end of the war, the darker side of the Italian occupation policy were still a taboo topic. Paralleling Italian imperialistic policy with the German one was still problematic, as was demonstrated by the reaction of the Italian state to the 1989 BBC documentary called *Fascist Legacy*. Enriched with interviews with famous Italian scholars such as Giorgio Rochat and Angelo Del Boca, the documentary stressed the criminal character of the Italian way of war in the conflict with Ethiopia in 1935-1936.²⁰

Moreover, it also focused on another controversial campaign of the Regio Esercito: the occupation of the Balkans in the Second World War. After the successful invasion of

¹⁷ Rochat, Giorgio and Giulio Massobrio, *Breve storia dell'esercito italiano, 1861-1943*, Torino: Einaudi, 1970.

¹⁸ Pietro Brignoli, *Santa Messa per i miei fucilati*, Milano: Longanesi, 1973. In truth, Don Brignoli underlined that most perpetrators of retaliations and atrocities were members of Blackshirts' units.

¹⁹ For the Greece, see Mario Montanari, *L'esercito italiano nella campagna di Grecia*, Roma: Ufficio storico, Stato maggiore dell'Esercito, 1991. In fact, this book stops at the time where the Greek army capitulates and thus does not provide an account of the occupation. For Yugoslavia, Salvatore Loi, *Le operazioni delle unità italiane in Jugoslavia (1941-1943)*, Roma: Ufficio storico, Stato maggiore dell'Esercito, 1978. This book barely made any mention of Italian reprisals, as rightly asserted by Teodoro Sala in his book review, *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 138 (January- March 1980): pp.90-105

²⁰ Ken Kirby, *The Fascist Legacy*, BBC, Great Britain, 1989.

former Yugoslavia April 1941, the Axis powers carved out their own sphere of influence: the Italian took part of Dalmatia (Split, Kotor and the province of Zadar) as the Governorate of Dalmatia and part of Slovenia as the Italian Province of Ljubljana. Moreover, over the summer of 1941, they military occupied Montenegro and Herzegovina along with part of Bosnia. Germany annexed northern and eastern Slovenia, occupied the Serb Banat, as this territory had an important ethnic German minority, and established a military protectorate in Serbia, based in Belgrade, where it created a puppet state headed by Milan Nedić.

Arguably, former Yugoslavia quickly became a minefield for the Axis powers. The military occupation was made complicated by ancestral enmities between the various indigenous nationalities inhabiting the regions. The hatred between Serbians and Croats boiled over. Both sides annihilated each other in a ruthless escalation of violence that spared no one, not even women or children. These ethnic wars were exacerbated by political conflicts between nationalist and Communist organizations. Serbia in particular was the battleground of a merciless fight between the monarchist *Chetnik* faction and Communist partisans led by Josef Tito, the future ruler of postwar Yugoslavia.

However, *Fascist Legacy* underlined that the Italians were hardly less ruthless in their attitude in the Balkans. Italian units, while combing up remote areas in search of partisans, burned down villages and executed hostages in retaliation for partisan attacks, such as the razing of the village of Podhum on 12 July 1942. Moreover, they also deported civilians in concentration camps, where the internees were packed in insalubrious conditions. The powerful indictment of the documentary however never reached the Italian audience. The Italian embassy in London filed a formal protest when the movie was broadcasted on British

television. More importantly, the RAI, the Italian state television, bought the rights of *Fascist Legacy*, but never showed it in what appeared to be a state censorship.²¹

However, important steps towards dissipating the fog shrouding the Italian occupation policy in the Second World War have been accomplished. Tone Ferenc has shed some light on the repression in Slovenia, where the Italian interned more than 20,000 persons out of a population of 360,000.²² In Italy, Enzo Collotti and Teodoro Sala have emphasized the racist and imperialist character of the Italian occupation in former Yugoslavia.²³ Historians have increasingly pointed to the infamous *Circolare 3C*, a directive issued on 1 March 1942 by General Mario Roatta, head of the Italian Army in the former Yugoslavian territories, which decreed a vicious occupation policy of reprisal, summed up in the rallying cry "not tooth for a tooth, but a head for a tooth," to crush the partisans' actions.²⁴

In the last decade, important works have been published definitely debunking the myth of the Italian *buon soldato*. Monographs have considerably revised the assumption that the Italian male, born to a superior civilization, was by nature incapable of acts of cruelty, pointing to the racist undertone of the Italian society which led to the anti-Semitic laws of

²¹ In fact, the documentary was shown on Italian television only in 2003, and not on the RAI channel, but on a minor private one, La7.

²² Tone Ferenc, *There is Not Enough Killing: Condemned to Death, Hostages, Shot in the Ljubljana Province, 1941- 1943*, Ljubljana: Institute for Contemporary History, Society of the Writers of the History of the Liberation War, 1999.

²³ Enzo Collotti, "Sulla politica di repressione nei Balcani," in Leonardo Paggi (ed.), *La memoria del nazismo nell'Europa di oggi*, Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1997, pp.181-211; Teodoro Sala wrote several articles on the occupation of the Balkans, which have been collected in Teodoro Sala, *Il fascismo italiano e gli Slavi del sud*, Trieste: Irsml Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2008.

²⁴ A summarized version of the circular is available in Oliva, "*Si ammazza troppo poco*," pp.173-201. In truth, the directive expressly stated that blind retaliations were counterproductive and would force the population to side with the partisans. To that effect, for instance, churches, schools, hospitals and public works were not to be destroyed in any circumstances. However, its effects should not be underestimated, as the circular bluntly legitimized the campaign of blind repression carried out by Italian units.

1938²⁵ or by recounting several massacres perpetrated by the modern Italian army in Africa.²⁶ The opening of the Yugoslavian archives confirmed the ineffectiveness of the Italian army, whose units found themselves embroiled in a fratricidal war between local ethnic groups they were unable to control.²⁷ Military historians fully acknowledge the massacres committed by Italian troops.²⁸ Even the USSME published a book on the occupation of Slovenia in which he fully acknowledged reprisals by Italian army units.²⁹

Perhaps the most comprehensive work on Italian policy during the Second World War is that of an Italian historian, Davide Rodogno, *Il Nuovo ordine mediterraneo*, which lays out in a comprehensive manner the imperialistic ambitions of the Fascist regime and its inchoate implementation in the European territories occupied by the Italian army.³⁰ Rodogno endeavors to describe the characteristics of the idealized Fascist Empire, bearing in mind (and the author repeatedly underscores this) that Mussolini and his minions were in no way at any moment during the war close to attaining their goal. However, Rodogno insists that an examination of the expansionist project, which was the ultimate goal of all Fascist militants, would shed important light on the true nature of Italian Fascism and of its leader.

²⁵ David Bidussa, *Il mito del bravo italiano*, Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1994.

²⁶ Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, Brava Gente?* Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005.

²⁷ Eric Gobetti, *L'occupazione allegra. Gli Italiani in Jugoslavia (1941-1943)*, Roma: Carocci, 2007. The title is rather odd, as it stems from the expression "Vesela Okupacija" ("Easy Occupation") used by Communist partisans in their stereotypical view of the Italians as mediocre soldiers who should not be taken seriously. In fact, his book contradicts this view akin to the *Italiani Brava Gente* in every aspect.

²⁸ Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre 1935-1943*, Torino: Einaudi, 2005.

²⁹ Mario Cuzzi, *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia 1941-1943*, Roma: Ufficio storico, Stato maggiore dell'Esercito, 1998.

³⁰ Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo, le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940-1943)*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003. For the English translation, *Fascism's European Empire, Italian occupation during the Second World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

The Fascist regime endeavored to create an empire in the Mediterranean area by the means of territorial conquests carried out by the Italian army, just as the columns of Roman legionaries had done a few centuries earlier. The reach of this new empire would be limited to the *Mare Nostrum*, for the Italians longed to extend their dominion over territories bordering the Mediterranean Sea such as Tunisia, Corsica, Dalmatia, the County of Nice and Greece. These territories were important for two reasons. both They were of strategic significance, having ports which would allow the Italian navy to control the trade routes and because many of these regions such as the County of Nice and Dalmatia were the objects of older irredentist claims which preceded the Fascist regime. In fact, the New Mediterranean Order would be organized much like as the Roman Empire.

Governors chosen from the hardline Fascist civil servants would rule the newly-conquered lands as Roman proconsuls. Local populations would be subjected to Fascist laws, but in theory they would retain a certain degree of autonomy. In reality, the Italians intended to control all aspects of governance. Fascist panegyrists repeatedly asserted that no mixing of the New Italian Man with individuals of lesser races would be permitted. Rodogno is adamant that Italian Fascist ideology was racial determinist, whereby some races were deemed inherently superior to others. The racial scale, which placed the Italic race at the top and the Slavs and the Africans at the bottom, explains why, unlike the Ancient Romans, the Fascists failed to assimilate local natives into the Italian social fabric. Rodogno rightly asserts that the Fascist regime looked upon this expansionist push as a campaign to bring a superior civilization to lands which they considered on the fringe of the Western World. This patronizing attitude was, in fact, part of the racist mindset of Fascist bureaucrats, who, like

twentieth-century conquistadores, sincerely believed that they were fighting a "war of liberation" and that it was their moral duty to free the barbaric races from the shackles of ignorance. Thus incorporating these people into the Fascist empire, notwithstanding their ultimate segregation in the future New Order, was merely doing them the favor of being part, as the Italian army would bring a new *Pax Romana*.

At the top of the Fascist Empire stood its leader, Benito Mussolini. Rodogno here clearly adopts an "intentionalist" approach to define the Fascist regime whereby the major foreign policy decisions were first and foremost the product of the aspirations of the Duce. Indeed, the new empire gravitated around the figure of Mussolini, the charismatic leader, who acted as a *condottiere* issuing directives and laying out the master plan for the grand strategy, occasionally helped in this task by a few military advisors. However, Rodogno asserts that this policy formulation did not go only from the center to the periphery, but also the other way. Every Italian local ruler and military officer "worked towards the Duce," in that they attempted as best as they could to implement the imperialist policy stemming from Rome, or significantly, to anticipate the Duce's wishes. This obsession to please their master explains, according to the author, the power conflicts within the Fascist regime, as civil servants and military leaders in the periphery often pursued their own personal agenda while trying to belittle other Italian personnel, all with the intention of anticipating Mussolini's wishes and, in doing so, advance themselves. Conflicts erupted especially between civilian and military officials, such as the dispute opposing Mussolini's plenipotentiary in Yugoslavia Giuseppe Bastianini and the commander of the Second Army Mario Roatta. Bastianini did not hide his contempt for the Italian soldiers in the Balkans who he deemed cowards and for

their leaders who he lambasted as "mediocre generals."³¹ Rodogno is quick to acknowledge that these frictions existed in every dictatorship, even in the Nazi and Soviet regimes. However, the system of governance worked in the context of these totalitarian regimes, because all the contenders bowed to the charisma of their supreme leader. Indeed the same happened in Italy as Mussolini confidently managed and encouraged these quarrels in a *divide et impera* strategy.

More importantly, according to Rodogno, both the civilian and military cadres in the occupied territories, regardless of their personal antipathies and their differences in evaluating local situations, worked towards laying the foundations of the new Italian Empire without reservation. In light of the increasing opposition in the Balkans on the part of local partisans, Italian commanders and governors both issued harsh counterinsurgency directives to crush any rebellion. The Circular 3 C issued by Roatta in March 1942 left little ambiguity as to the intention of Italian commanders. Unit leaders were given permission to raze villages whose population was suspected of helping partisans. Male inhabitants of these villages were to be considered *Favoreggiatori* (a term that can loosely be translated as accomplices) and as such be executed while the remaining population, women, old people and children, were to be deported to concentration camps. Italians never implemented a system of extermination camps like the Germans did, because their goals were not to annihilate local populations as much as to subjugate them, but living conditions in their concentration camps were no less atrocious than in the Nazi ones. The concentration camp on the Rab Island in Croatia in particular accounted for at least 3,000 dead out of 15,000 inmates.

³¹ Rodogno, *Fascism European's Empire*, p.139.

But Rodogno's book is especially revisionist on the topic of the saving of Jews by the Italian army. Until his book was released, many historians such as Léon Poliakov, Daniel Carpi and Jonathan Steinberg asserted that the Italians had voluntarily, and, in some instances with considerable success, shielded the Jews both in the Balkans and in France from deportation. Italian officials and military officers alike, knowing the fate that would await the Jews in German extermination camps, out of compassion and piety actively protected them from anti-Semitic round-ups by both Nazis and local population.³² Rodogno refuses to recognize any humanitarianism in these surprising actions, arguing that the Italians' motivations were purely opportunistic and meant as an act of defiance directed against the Germans. It was a way to demonstrate Italy's independence vis-a-vis its senior partner and the other Axis countries. Moreover, with the coming reversal of alliance, certain elements in Italy wished to position itself favorably vis-a-vis their future allies, hoping that by acting as saviors of the Jews in strident opposition to the other Axis powers, it would improve Italy's chances.

In the conclusion of this brilliant work, Rodogno, by underlining the utter failure of the Fascist regime to build its own empire, reminds the reader that the Italians could have not achieved its expansionist goals without German help and thus their margins of maneuver were thin from the start. The Italian regime tried desperately to build its *spazio vitale* (vital space), but it became clear quickly that the Italians lacked the material means, if not the will, to achieve the vainglorious ambitions of its leader. Nevertheless, Rodogno believes that exploring the ideal empire of the Fascists and in particular their leader Mussolini shed

³² For more see pp.356-359.

important light the truly totalitarian nature of the regime, and highlights the many similarities between the Italian and Nazi expansionist policy. Indeed, the Fascist regime followed in the steps of its senior partner with the economic plundering of the newly-conquered territories, the implementation of severe repressive measures, including deportation, and indiscriminate reprisals. The blueprint was the same, as German and Italian occupation policies differed only on their efficacy, not their overarching goal: the creation of an Empire by means of violence which would lead to colonization and the subjugation of other ethnic groups.

Rodogno's book was shortly followed by another controversial book on the Italian occupation of former Yugoslavia, H. James Burgwyn's monograph, *Empire on the Adriatic*.³³ Arguably one of the most comprehensive studies of the Italian occupation of Yugoslavia, the author strives to depict the occupation in its full brutality, with retaliations and reprisals carried out in a manner similar to the Germans. Nonetheless, he maintains that the two armies differed in at least one important aspect. While the German policy reflected the Nazis' ideological and racial belief in their inherent superiority over the conquered population, Italian reprisals were borne out of a sense of pragmatism, a dread of a war who turning into a logistical and strategic nightmare. For instance, Burgwyn points out the Italian alliance with the Četniks, the Serb nationalist fighters, struck in response to their mutual and pressing need to unite against the Croatian Ustaša and the Communist partisans. Needless to say, neither parties never fully trusted the other and the Italians continued to maintain a patronizing attitude toward the Serbs, whom they believed to be a barbaric ethnic group. This symbiotic

³³ H. James Burgwyn, *Empire on the Adriatic, Mussolini's conquest of Yugoslavia, 1941-1943*, New York: Enigma, 2005; See also his article H. James Burgwyn, "General's Roatta War against the Partisans in Yugoslavia: 1942," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2004): pp.314-329. In fact, the whole issue of the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*

relationship never evolved into a true friendship then and, thus, the Fascist regime had few qualms about ordering its army commanders to abandon the Serbs in 1943 as soon as the Germans insisted the alliance was going against the Axis interests.³⁴

However half-hearted and shaped by circumstances, this alliance between the Italians and the Četniks demonstrates that, contrary to Rodogno's claims, the regime was not as monolithic as it appears. Roatta and his commanders pursued a policy of collaboration with the Serbian minority in Croatia and Dalmatia, contradicting the grand strategy stemming from Rome which instructed them to view the new Croatian state headed by Mussolini's protégé Ante Pavelić and the Germans as their only possible allies in the area. Italian commanders in the Balkans however disobeyed out of pragmatism, not for ideological reasons. The Croatian state, resentful of the Italian protectorate in Dalmatia, which was viewed by Croat nationalists as part of a Greater Croatia, had been only paying lip service to Italian sovereignty while slowly but steadily trying to usurp their authority over the region. At the same time, Communist partisan incursions were wreaking havoc in Italian lines. Thus, local Italian commanders struck the alliance with the Serbs as a last attempt to deal with their common enemies. This down-to-earth policy was firmly rejected by the Italian governor in Dalmatia, Luca Pietromarchi, and by other rabid Fascist officials, who, imbued with anti-Slav chauvinism, complained that the "unholy" alliance with the Serbs was in flagrant disobedience to the Duce's will and risked jeopardizing the Axis balance in the Balkans.

These rivalries within the Italian state should not be seen, however, as any form of humanitarianism or generosity. Burgwyn posits that Italian commanders quartered in the

³⁴ Marina Cattaruzza, *L'Italia ed il confine orientale, 1866-2006*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006;

former Yugoslavia shared a contempt for human life with their German counterparts. If the numbers of casualties directly tied to the Italian occupation were not staggering, it was because the Regio Esercito, lacked the means, not the will. Indeed, Burgwyn bluntly argued that "the behavior of the regio esercito (sic) in Yugoslavia was at times as beastly as the Wehrmacht toward the occupied peoples in that country."³⁵ Thus, in his overarching argument, Burgwyn fully agrees with Rodogno that the myth of the "good" Italian soldier is a fallacy which has not stood the test of time.

If nothing else, Rodogno's book has the merit of analyzing two occupations often neglected until recently: the Italian military occupation of Greece and southeastern France. In Greece, German forces occupied the most important cities such as Athens and Thessaloniki, along with other crucial strategic areas such as part of Macedonia and Crete Island, the Bulgarians took control of Macedonia and Thrace, both long-time territorial claims, and Italy occupied the rest, with the Ionian islands which were directly annexed to the Reign of Italy. Unfortunately, no monograph exists which focuses solely on the Italian occupation of Greece. Mark Mazower's book *Inside Hitler's Greece* is very limited on the Italian policy and deals primarily with the German occupation and little had been written by Italian scholars, with the significant exception of Lidia Santarelli.³⁶

The Italian military occupation of France is another topic that has been poorly studied until recently. The German occupation from 1940 to 1944 and the establishment of the

³⁵ Burgwyn, *Empire on the Adriatic*, p.301.

³⁶ Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: the experience of occupation, 1941-44*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. The only academic contribution to the Italian occupation of Greece is Lidia Santarelli, "Muted violence Italian war crimes in occupied Greece," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2004): pp.280-299. The same author is awaiting the publication of her manuscript *La Marcia su Atene. L'Italia Fascista e l'occupazione della Grecia, 1940-43*, Bologna, Il Mulino.

collaborationist Vichy regime have been thoroughly dissected by modern historiography. A huge body of literature has evolved given us a clear picture of the *Années Noires*, from a political, social and cultural perspective. They are however largely confined to an examination of Vichy and of the German occupation.³⁷ Only a handful mention the Italian military occupation of southeastern France. Even the most comprehensive syntheses on the period devote little more than a few pages to the Italian zone.³⁸ This absence can be explained by the scarcity of monographs on the Italian occupation zone in every language. In the Anglo-Saxon academic world, no book has tackled the topic from a holistic perspective, as the main aspect which has grabbed the attention of the academic community was the extraordinary protection accorded to the Jews by the Italian military and civilian authorities.³⁹ Even the French and Italian literature have produced little until recently. The Italian occupation came under scrutiny in a conference organized by the *Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Cuneo e provincia* (Historical Institute of the Resistance in Cuneo and the Cuneo province) in 1976.⁴⁰ The first book specifically on the CIAF (Italian Armistice Commission with France), Romain H. Rainero's *Mussolini e Pétain, Storia dei rapporti tra l'Italia e la Francia di Vichy*, was only published in 1990.⁴¹ Moreover, the impact of Italian

³⁷ For a comprehensive bibliography on Vichy France and the German occupation period, see Julian Jackson, *France, the Dark Years, 1940-1944*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp.637-646.

³⁸ For instance, Jackson, *France, the Dark Years*, and Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French, Life under the Occupation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, only mentions in passing the Italian zone.

³⁹ See chapter 8. "You have to consider them as individuals living in concentration camps: "The Italian Jewish Policy."

⁴⁰ The conference's proceedings were published in ISRCP, *8 settembre, lo sfacelo della IV Armata*, Torino: Book Store, 1979.

⁴¹ Romain H. Rainero *Mussolini e Pétain, Storia dei rapporti tra l'Italia e la Francia di Vichy*, Roma: Ufficio Storico SME, 1990. The first volume *Narrazione*, was published in 1990, the second *Documenti*, only in 1992. The two volumes were later reprinted in French, *La Commission Italienne d'Armistice avec la France, Les*

occupation policy at the grassroots level has been examined at a French departmental level only by local French historians.⁴² Nonetheless, in the last years, the historiography on the Italian occupation of southeastern France has progressed significantly. The Italian army published a voluminous monograph by General Domenico Schipsi, entitled *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitan francesi (1940-1943)*, which has bridged a gap in Italian military historiography, even though the sheer volume of logistic details makes it difficult to read for all but the most expert.⁴³ On the French side, Panicacci's book, *L'Occupation Italienne, Sud-Est de la France, Juin 1940-Septembre 1943*, is the first work to provide a comprehensive examination of the Italian occupation zone, looking at it from both an Italian and a French perspective.⁴⁴

Thus, my dissertation endeavors to counter the strongly German focus of the historiography of the Second World War, and in particular of the occupation of France. The Italian perspective, which has been missing from the picture of the *Années Noires* for a long time, deserves the attention of the academic community, for it forces a recognition of the different approaches of the Axis partners with regards to the occupation policy. Moreover, I strive to examine the Italian military occupation of southeastern France from June 1940 to

rapports entre la France de Vichy et l'Italie de Mussolini, Saint-Maixent-l'École: Service historique de l'armée de Terre, 1995.

⁴² For the Alpes-Maritimes, Jean-Louis Panicacci and Pascal Molinari, *Menton dans la tourmente, 1939-1945*, Menton: Société d'art et d'histoire du Mentonnais, 1984 and Jean-Louis Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, un département dans la tourmente, 1939-1945*, Nice: Serre, 1989; for the Savoy, Christian Villermet, *A Noi Savoia, Histoire de l'occupation italienne de Savoie, Novembre 1942-Septembre 1943*, Les Marches: La Fontaine de Siloé, 1991; For the Var, Jean-Marie Guillon, *Le Var, la guerre, la Résistance 1939-1945*, Toulon: CDDP, 1994. A full list of local sources can be found in Jean-Louis Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne, Sud-Est de la France, Juin 1940-Septembre 1943*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010, pp.413-422.

⁴³ Domenico Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitan francesi (1940-1943)*, Roma: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, 2007.

⁴⁴ Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne, Sud-Est de la France, Juin 1940-Septembre 1943*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010.

September 1943 at different levels. My dissertation looks not just at state-to-state relations between Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and the Vichy regime, but also at the impact of the Italian occupation policy at a grassroots level. Much attention will be focused on the complex relations between Italian soldiers and the local population; complex because in some border regions, up to one-fourth of the population was Italian or of an Italian heritage.

Finally, my work engages with the debate about the "Italiani Brava Gente," showing, that in striking contrast to Italian policy in the Balkans and Africa and to the German occupation of the rest of France, the Italian policy in France was relatively benign in its use of repression and instead sought to win over the local population through accommodations which lessened the impact of the occupation. Arguably, this softer touch was so not much the product of the nature of the Italian soldier than the consequence of a pragmatic approach intended to avoid the radicalization of the internal situation in France at a time when the inherent weaknesses of the Italian army would not permit it to successfully deal with both an Allied invasion and a French uprising. It is also crucial to point out that Italian civilian and military authorities strongly disagreed on the policy to be carried out in the French territories. Officials from the Italian Armistice Commission with France (CIAF), most of them Foreign Ministry functionaries or Fascist representatives, were interested in preparing the ground for the future annexation of the contested territories and advocated taking a harsher stance generally, but also allowing considerable latitude for native Italian separatist groups. The Army, on the other hand, advocated a softer policy in light of the contingencies of the war. These divergent policies inevitably clashed and led to inconsistencies in occupation policies. In the end, the Army commanders succeeded in enforcing their views and the Italian army

followed a more pragmatic policy intended to avoid escalating tension in the Italian occupation zone. That is not to say that the Italians did not implement harsh measures to curtail any political or military opposition to their rule. In fact, curfews and waves of arrests were recurrent throughout the occupation, but the situation never downgraded into open confrontation with the local population, except partially in Corsica, notwithstanding the fact that the Fascist propaganda had always insisted on its Italian character.

It is important to note that on one key matter both Italian civilian officials and military commanders converged: the rescue of the Jewish community in the Italian occupation zone. Measures were taken to deliberately shield Jews both from both German and Vichy's clutches. Fascist officials and military commanders coalesced perhaps moved by the plea of the Jewish community, and sent the Jews, most of whom were foreign Jews without papers who had flocked in the Italian occupation zone, in Alpine hamlets, protected by Italian army soldiers, starting from January 1943. More surprisingly, the entire operation was financed by a Jewish banker, Angelo Donati, with the approval of the higher echelons of the Fourth Army. This surprising policy, a unique case of an Axis country protecting Jews regardless of their nationality, was not dictated merely by a vested interest in demarcating Italian policy from the German one, but also by a lack of anti-Semitism within both Italian military and civilian circles.

Ultimately, my thesis suggests that the paradigm enshrined in the *Italiani Brava Gente* shibboleth, is certainly exaggerated even if we evaluate the Italian occupation of France. It is true that the military's policy in France from 1940 to 1943 was particularly lenient, especially compared to the subsequent German occupation of the same region, which was

replete with atrocities and executions. However, it is crucial to stress that the Italians acted in a benevolent way not only out of humanitarian concern, but for pragmatic reasons owing to the inherent weaknesses of their occupation army in France. Nevertheless, the humanitarian nature of Italian state officials and military officers should not be downplayed. It appears, then, that the story of the Italian occupation was more nuanced than the historiography to date has posited. The occupation cannot be dismissed as a bland and more ineffective version of the German one, but must be recognized as one with its own independent, if at times convoluted, goals. This dissertation will shed light on the complexity of the Italian occupation of southeastern France, which was of such a different nature than the Italian military occupation of the Balkans.

For my dissertation, my primary sources are drawn chiefly from in two French archives, the Archives Départementales des Alpes-Maritimes (or ADAM) and the Archives Départementales des Alpes-de-Haute-Provence (ADAHP). The choice of ADAM is obvious: the County of Nice was not only the main irredentist objective in the Italian imperialist propaganda, but also a strategic region in terms of the prospective Allied landing. Furthermore, it was an interesting test case for a study of the relationships between the Italian soldiers and the local population, in light of the fact that one-fourth of its population was Italian or of Italian heritage. The rationale behind the ADAHP was to provide contrast: a more inland region, a non-strategic area with a smaller Italian minority, but where Italian units came to close contact with the French population living in small villages. In fact the

Basses-Alpes are an interesting example of how the Italians and the French could cohabit peacefully if their mutual suspicions were not fuelled by irredentist propaganda.

Of course, I also made wide use of Italian archives. The most important for my research was the Archivio, Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore dell' Esercito (AUSSME), supplemented by the Microfilm series T-821, found in the Washington National Archives, (ARC) where I found not only the directives trickling down from the Fourth Army headquarters to the divisions, but also important documents stemming from division and regiment commands highlighting endemic issues of the Fourth Army such as low morale and slackness. The Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASMAE) provided the perspective of the members of the Farnesina, the Foreign Ministry, whose ideological biases often clouded their own judgment in evaluating the strategic and political implications of the occupation. Their conflict with the Italian military personnel should not be underestimated and is well documented in the ASMAE. Finally, I supplemented the AUSSME and ASMAE records with some research in the Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), the Italian state archives, which were mostly useful for their documents on the Italian Commissariat of Menton, providing a close look at the only example of Italianization in France, and for the records of the Italian military justice courts in the Second World War. Unfortunately, as asserted by Giorgio Rochat, all three archives are severely understaffed and underfunded, which made my research sometimes a daunting task, notwithstanding the abnegation of their personnel.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Rochat, "La Guerra di Mussolini, 1940-1943," in Angelo Del Boca, *La Storia negata, il revisionismo e il suo uso politico*, pp.153-154.

Chapter 2

We used to be good friends: Italian immigration to Southern France and the deterioration of international relations, from the 1930s until June 1940

The territories where the 1940-1943 Italian military occupation would take place, the Côte d'Azur and the County of Nice, had always been a cross-border region, in that it had shifted between French and Italian hands repeatedly over the centuries. Indeed, since the end of the fourteenth century, the southeastern part of France has been traded repeatedly between the French kings and the Savoy dynasty which, starting in 1861, would head the modern Italian state. More particularly, the County of Nice, which would later form the bulk of the Alpes-Maritimes department of France, was firmly a part of the House of Savoy's territories for nearly four centuries (1397-1792).⁴⁶ With the advent of the French Revolution, the Savoy region and Nice became part of the French state in 1792. However, in 1815, after the turmoil of the Revolutionary Wars, the County of Nice was united with the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, thus coming again under the rule of the Savoy monarchy.

Discontent among the population in Nice flared up in 1851 as the merchant class was angered by the Savoy monarch's decision to withdraw the city's free port status.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁶ The French *départements* were created by the French Revolution to divide the French territory into areas of more or less the same size. However the County of Nice was too small to be a department, therefore the regions of Grasse and Cannes, bordering the western side of the County of Nice and which were previously attached to the Var department, were added to it, creating the department of the Alpes-Maritimes.

⁴⁷ Since 1388, the city of Nice enjoyed the right to charge duty on goods passing through its harbor. In order to harmonize duties in the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, the monarch decided end this outdated privilege. Furthermore, Nice specialist Alain Ruggiero suggests that the language issue also bothered the population in Nice. Italian was a language seldom used, apart from the judicial world, even though it was the official language of the Piedmont province. Most of the people spoke the Nice dialect and interestingly commercial

County of Nice ultimately joined the French Empire, not because of an internal revolt, but rather as the result of international politics. The King of Piedmont-Sardinia decided to hand over Nice and the Savoy territory to the French as a token of gratitude for their help against the Austrians in the Second Italian War of Independence (April-July 1859). This decision was officially ratified through a plebiscite on 15-16 April 1860, although some Italians, such as the national hero Giuseppe Garibaldi, himself born in Nice in 1807, never accepted the surrender of Nice and the Savoy.⁴⁸

The continual shifting of these territories between Italian and French states was paralleled by an ebb and flow of Italian migrants in and out of southern France for centuries, making this region a peculiar blend of Italian and French culture. In fact, French, Provençal and Italian traditions did not evolve separately but intermeshed together in a variety of ways, including the dialect, the way of dressing and the way of cooking. Italians had been crossing the porous borders into France since the fourteenth century. The majority of Italians coming to France were originally mostly skilled people, such as wealthy merchants or talented artists.⁴⁹ The creation of the Italian state in 1870 paradoxically amplified this migration. Italian Prime Ministers had few resources to address the economic recession that plagued the peninsula in the 1870s and 1880s, which, coupled with a rapidly growing population,

transactions were conducted in French. Alain Ruggiero, "1848-1872: Une nouvelle période d'incertitudes," in Alain Ruggiero (ed.) *Nouvelle histoire de Nice*, Toulouse: Privat, 2006, pp.171-188.

⁴⁸ Giuseppe Garibaldi was an important figure in the Italian *Risorgimento* (literally the "Resurgence"), leading the Expedition of the Thousand (*Spedizione dei Mille*) in Sicily that would ultimately bring about Italian unification. In 1870, an aging but still capable Garibaldi led a small army of a hundred of Italians and other immigrants, the Army of the Vosges, to fight alongside the forces of the newborn French Republic. For more on Garibaldi's life, see Denis Mack Smith, *Garibaldi: a great life in brief*, New York: Knopf, 1956.

⁴⁹ For more on pre-unification migration, see Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000, Anne-Marie Faidotti-Rudolph, *L'immigration italienne dans le sud-est de la France*, Gap: Éd. Ophrys, 1964, vol.1, p.96 and Stéphane Wlocewski, *L'installation des italiens en France*, Paris: F. Alcan, 1934, pp.19-29.

threatened to disrupt the fragile social fabric of the newborn state. The Jacini Commission⁵⁰ attested to the appalling conditions of the Italian agricultural world, where poverty and severe malnutrition was endemic, mostly owing to falling agricultural prices. Peasants' diets consisted of "rye bread or bread made out of a mixture of flour, Saracen corn, potatoes or walnuts, a bit of polenta (corn meal mush), fermented dairy products, plenty of vegetables, almost never any meat or wine, everything badly prepared and even worse cooked."⁵¹ Each household had its own goats, ewes, sometimes even a few pigs, although almost never a cow, due to a lack of fodder. These cattle were never eaten, as the money made from their sale in town markets was a crucial source of income needed to buy basic necessities such as clothes and shoes, or to pay taxes.⁵² Rural homes were nothing like the bucolic houses portrayed in Renaissance paintings, but were rundown shacks infested with lice, where little light entered, and with no sanitation or running water. Small wonder a wave of cholera swept over the Cuneo province in 1884. In fact, the problem of public sanitation and hygiene was aggravated by the fact that isolated villages were even devoid of fountains. Water had to be fetched from mountain streams and brought to the village in buckets. Despite a high infant mortality rate, the population was growing at alarming rate owing to an even higher birth rate. Since the mountainous Piedmontese regions had experienced few of the transformations wrought by the Industrial Revolution, the peasants were still caught by the Malthusian Law

⁵⁰ Count Stefano Jacini (1827-1891), a senator from a wealthy Lombard family, was appointed to head a Commission to investigate the condition of the Italian rural world from 1881 to 1886. For more information, see Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, pp.55-56.

⁵¹ *Atti della giunta per l'inchiesta agraria e sulle condizioni della classe agricola*, under the direction of his president, Senator Stefano Jacini, Rome, 1881-1886, p.636-640, cited in Romain H. Rainero, *Les Piémontais en Provence, Aspect d'une émigration oubliée*, Nice: Serre, 2001, p.46.

⁵² Catherine Blanc, *Une nourrice piémontaise à Marseille. Souvenirs d'une famille d'immigrés italiens*, Forcalquier: Les Alpes de Lumière, 2004, pp.37-39. This book, based on oral testimonies, presents a vivid fresco of the life of Piedmontese peasants at the turn of the century.

of Population.⁵³ To free themselves from the vicious loop, the Piedmontese peasants looked on France as the promised land.

Beginning in the 1870s, thousands of Italians, most of them from Piedmont, bundles on their backs, crossed the French-Italian border, which at that time was no more than a line on a map, in search of a better life. The emigrants settled mostly in the departments bordering Italy, especially in the Provence region and along the Mediterranean shore. In fact, according to the *Direction Générale de la Statistique*, the French governmental bureau which conducted surveys on Italian immigration from 1876 to 1920, 51,867 and 83,320 Italians already resided, respectively, in the Alpes-Maritimes and in the Bouches-Du-Rhône by 1891 one-fifth and one-ninth of the total population of these departments. The 292,000 Italians officially living in France constituted by far the largest group of immigrants, as they represented one-fourth of the non-French population.⁵⁴ What is more, these numbers probably do not tell the whole truth. In fact, census data was based on the results of the 2 October 1888 decree which required foreigners wishing to work in France to declare their actual residence to French municipalities within fifteen days of their arrival. Thus the data greatly underestimated the number of Italian immigrants by not taking into account the widespread phenomenon of seasonal immigration.⁵⁵ Especially at the outset of the Italian

⁵³ This theory suggested that the more a population grew, the more its standard of living decreased due to a depletion of resources and lower wages.

⁵⁴ A primacy they stole from the Belgians at the turn of the century. From 1896 to 1901, the number of Belgian immigrants fell from 395,000 to 323,000, while Italians swelled from 292,000 to 330,000. Janine Ponty, *L'Immigration dans les Textes, France 1789-2002*, Paris: Belin, 2003, pp.42-47. Also Faidotti-Rudolph, *L'Immigration italienne dans le sud-est de la France*, vol.1, pp.19-22.

⁵⁵ Faidotti-Rudolph also underlined the fact that, even in the very unlikely case that seasonal immigrants could have been included in the survey, the results still have to be analyzed with caution, as the results of a census could vary considerably depending on the season when input data was collected. Faidotti-Rudolph, *L'Immigration italienne dans le sud-est de la France*, vol.1, pp.128-129.

migratory wave, immigrants from regions bordering France, fearful of severing all ties to their families and compatriots, emigrated for only a few months at most and then returned to their respective villages. This migratory trend was the norm in the Mediterranean coastal French towns where work in winter abounded in the fast-developing tourism sector. This meshed well with the yearly schedule of the highland Piedmont peasantry, whose agricultural activities always came to a halt at the outset of the cold season.

The matching schedule was not the only enticing reason for impoverished rural people to come to the southern part of France. The geographical distance separating Piedmont from Provence was minimal and this proximity was reinforced by the construction in 1860 of a railway line between Marseille and Ventimiglia. What is more, this geographic closeness was also reflected in a joint cultural heritage reflected in the similarity between the Provençal and Piedmont dialects and in the cooking. This closeness was underpinned by common religious practices, as Catholicism was steadfastly strong in both regions.⁵⁶ Most importantly, however, the immigrants found in France a place to earn a decent salary, sometimes even at the same occupation they had in Italy. In fact, France was in dire need of unskilled labor in the 1870s and in the first half of the 1880s, as its economic expansion was not matched by demographic growth. The demand was especially strong in the construction industry at a time when the Third Republic was improving its road and railway networks. It is therefore not surprising that more and more immigrants chose to stay in the Cote d'Azur

⁵⁶ Rainero, *Les Piémontais en Provence*, p.71. It should be noted that common religious background alone did not guarantee an automatic integration into the French social fabric inasmuch as differences in languages and religious traditions were still difficult barriers. See Luigi Taravella, "La pratique religieuse comme facteur d'intégration," in Antonio Bechelloni, Michel Dreyfus and Pierre Milza (eds.), *L'intégration italienne en France, un siècle de présence italienne dans trois régions françaises (1880-1980)*, Paris: Editions Complexe, 1995, pp.71-83.

and in Savoy, thus passing from temporary to permanent workers' status. Jobs included a wide variety of occupations, mostly less skilled occupations where muscle power was needed, such as miner, mason and construction worker, or in the leisure industry where opportunities for butlers and chambermaids were countless. Moreover Italians, especially children, excelled in itinerant employment as chimneysweeps, bear tamers, puppeteers and street musicians, even at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷

Integration of these Italian immigrants in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was not a smooth process. Most of the immigrants were unmarried males, still in their youth, in an alien milieu without familial support.⁵⁸ A number of these rootless, young and, for the most part, illiterate people fell prey to vices such as prostitution, gambling and heavy drinking, sometimes even finding employment in a criminal underworld already thriving in that part of France.⁵⁹ Moreover children, most of them from southern Italy, were clandestinely transported to France to be exploited in exhausting and dangerous jobs such as mining and glass manufacturing. The latter industry was one with especially appalling conditions: children inhaled toxic fumes daily which resulted in, over the years, almost

⁵⁷ The tradition of Italian itinerant child performers dated back at least to the sixteenth century. For more on their adventurous and often precarious life, see John E. Zucchi, *The Little Slaves of the Harp, Italian Street Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Paris, London and New York*, Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. A shining account of the life of Italian wandering immigrants is found in the novel of Hector Malot, *Sans Famille* (1878).

⁵⁸ One-third of them were twenty years old or less at the end of the century. It is interesting to note that the emigration experience was often seen as an obligatory rite of passage, as much as the military draft. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas*, pp.83-84.

⁵⁹ From 1860 to 1939, the Italian population in the department of the Alpes-Maritimes averaged 21 percent of the total population and 41 percent of the criminal population. See Virginie Cecchetti, "La criminalité italienne devant la Cour d'Assises des Alpes-Maritimes de l'annexion à la veille de la seconde guerre mondiale, (1860-1939)," PhD diss., Université de Sophia Antipolis, 2006.

certain tuberculosis.⁶⁰ Young women generally fared little better as they worked for poor wages in the textile industries or as prostitutes. One of the only exceptions in the otherwise bleak picture of the Italian emigration to France was represented by wet-nurses. Wet-nurses were in high demand among the Cote d'Azur upper bourgeoisie as it was considered inappropriate for an upper-class woman to breast-feed her children. Therefore, young and healthy Piedmontese mothers were brought to France to nourish French toddlers. If, on one hand, this experience could be psychologically difficult as the young mother had to leave her own toddler to another wet-nurse in her native village, on the other hand, wet-nurses in France were paid three times the amount they earned in Italy while enjoying a life well above their previous standard of living. After all, a well-fed nurse was the best guarantee of the growth of a healthy child.⁶¹

Then, beginning in the second half of the 1870s, the western world was hit with an economic recession. All the European countries, including France and Italy, reacted by raising tariffs. This economic strife fuelled the tension brewing between the French and the immigrant workers. As unemployment mounted, the former accused the latter of accepting considerably lower wages and poor working conditions, thus robbing them of jobs. The Italian workers, few of whom belonged to a union, were labeled *briseurs de travail* (rate-breakers) by their French counterparts. The French government did not come to grips with the unemployment in a consistent way and instead tried to check the immigrant tide by

⁶⁰ Zeffiro Ciuffoletti, "Sfruttamento della manodopera infantile italiana in Francia alla fine del Sec. XIX", in Jean Baptiste Duroselle and Enrico Serra (eds.), *L'emigrazione italiana in Francia prima del 1914*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1978, pp.249-257. For more information on the traffic of children, see Rainero, *Les Piémontais en Provence*, pp.164-171.

⁶¹ For an example of Italian wet-nurse emigrating to France, see Blanc, *Une nourrice piémontaise à Marseille: Souvenirs d'une famille d'immigrés italiens*, pp.51-57.

enforcing the 8 August 1893 law which required any foreigner who wished to work or start a business in France to inform the municipality of the city where he planned to reside and forbade employers from hiring immigrant workers not complying with labor regulations.⁶² This law, ostensibly meant to regulate immigration, was in reality a response to a growing French xenophobia at a time of deep economic recession. However, this new law proved insufficient to eliminate the tension between the French and Italian communities. Its enforcement by French authorities was also at best lukewarm as both building contractors and employers lobbied against its implementation for fear that it would considerably lower the availability of cheap labor.

For the vast majority of the French population, these immigrants remained scapegoats for all their problems. Italians were framed as boorish, filthy and mischievous. Although the Neapolitans only accounted for 20 percent of the population, their particularly unflattering reputation tarred all the Italians in the eyes of the French.⁶³ This was a minority who had integrated less quickly than the Piedmontese or the Tuscans because their way of life and culture differed considerably from the Provencal one.⁶⁴ The French population scoffed at

⁶² All the French immigration laws are carefully scrutinized in Ponty, *L'Immigration dans les Textes, France 1789-2002*, 2003.

⁶³ In the words of a French scholar of the 1930s: "These immigrants [the immigrants coming from the South of Italy] are much more indolent, more nomadic and less tidy than their compatriots from the North." Georges Mauco, *Les Étrangers en France, leur rôle dans l'activité économique*, Paris: Colin, 1932, pp.384-385.

⁶⁴ Pierre Milza, *Voyage en Ritalie*, Paris: Payot, 2004, p.75. According to Italian official statistics, from 1876 to 1914, the vast majority of immigrants from the southern part of Italy, the *Mezzogiorno*, emigrated to the American hemisphere. The share of American immigration reached up to 91 percent, in the case of emigrants from the Campania region (Naples) while, on the other hand, two-thirds of Piedmontese and Tuscan immigrants migrated within Europe. Region by region analysis can be found in Gabaccia, *Italian's Many Diasporas*, p.70.

Italian expatriates, regardless of their native region, with derogatory sobriquets such as “Christos,”⁶⁵ “Babis,”⁶⁶ “Macaronis.”⁶⁷

The friction between the two communities boiled over in the last two decades of the century. The main cause of the worsening ostracism in France was the problematic relations between the two countries. Colonial rivalry in Tunisia, the Italian entry into the Triple Alliance and the successive economic war waged between Italy and France fuelled nationalist anger on both sides of the Alps. Open strife erupted in Marseille in 1881 with the so-called “Marseille Vespers,” when spectators cheering a parade of French troops who had previously occupied Tunisia turned into a lynch mob, leaving three Italians dead and injuring several others. Many other minor episodes of violence against Italians marred the ensuing decade.⁶⁸ However, the apex of xenophobic riots came with the infamous incidents of the city of Aigues Mortes. The annual salt harvest in August always attracted a large number of Italian workers to the small medieval town in the Gard department, despite signs of growing hostility from French workers. The French authorities largely ignored the mounting friction. This tension suddenly burst into full-scale riot on 16 August 1893 when French and Italian salt miners turned on each other. For two full days, Italian workers were hunted down by gangs of Frenchmen, leaving nine dead and several dozens injured, according to official

⁶⁵ A nickname probably owing either to the swearing habits of the Piedmont immigrants or to the fact that the Italians were pictured as religious bigots whose assimilation was proving problematic in a country which was becoming increasingly secular.

⁶⁶ “Frogs” in provençal dialect.

⁶⁷ A variety of pasta.

⁶⁸ These minor incidents are reported by Teodosto Vertone, “Antecedents et causes des évènements d’Aigues-Mortes,” in Jean Baptiste Duroselle and Enrico Serra (eds.), *L’emigrazione italiana in Francia prima del 1914*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1978, pp.107-138.

reports.⁶⁹ The massacre caught the attention of the general public; newspapers and French politicians openly condemned the senseless massacre. The public's sympathy towards the Italians ended abruptly, however, with the assassination of French Republic president Sadi Carnot by Italian anarchist Sante Caserio in June 1894. Several “hunts of Italians” were organized across France and rioters went so far as to attack Italian consulates and shops.⁷⁰

Yet these incidents did not seem to discourage the Italian immigrants as their numbers swelled in twenty years (1891-1911) from 289,000 to 419,000, thus making the Italians the most important immigrant community in France. These numbers, moreover, did not reflect the full extent of the Italian tide, as they did not take into account the growing number of naturalizations. Two successive laws, passed in 1893 and in 1899, had opened up the naturalization process to second- and third-generation immigrants. This renewed exodus was owing to a multiplicity of factors. First, the global economy was emerging from recession, as was the French one, significantly improving the job market again. Secondly, the relationship between the Italians and French dramatically improved at this time. As mentioned earlier, Italy had become part of the Triple Alliance in a response to the French annexation of Tunisia. However, this alliance could not resolve the tensions between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire over the “unredeemed Italian lands,” of Trentino, Venezia Giulia and Istria. Italian public opinion unremittingly protested the Dual Monarchy’s

⁶⁹ French state authorities tended to minimize the incidents in order to play down intercultural tensions. Fourteen Italian workers went missing, never to be found. For an accurate account of the incidents of Aigues Mortes and its consequences both in France and in Italy, see Rainero, *Les Piémontais en Provence*, pp.216-223; Milza, *Voyage en Ritalie*, pp.131-138 and also Vertone, “Antecedents et causes des évènements d’Aigues-Mortes,” Duroselle and Serra (eds), *L’emigrazione italiana in Francia prima del 1914*, pp.119-133.

⁷⁰ Enrico Serra, “L’emigrazione italiana in Francia durante il secondo governo Crispi (1893-1896),” in Jean Baptiste Duroselle and Enrico Serra (eds.), *L’emigrazione italiana in Francia prima del 1914*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1978, pp.145-170.

sovereignty over lands which Italian nationalists considered part of the Italian nation. The grudge against the Austrians was not the only reason for a Franco-Italian rapprochement. Italy also sought a degree of stability in the Mediterranean area that no country but France could guarantee. In January 1902, The French and Italian governments signed an accord settling their disagreements over several African territories, outlining their respective spheres of influence. This newly cordial relationship between the Latin Sisters was sealed by a triumphal Parisian *tournée* of the King of Italy Vittorio Emanuele III in October 1903. Nonetheless we must be careful not to push this argument too far. This more relaxed period may have meant that major confrontations between the two communities in France ceased, but rooted prejudices and ancestral enmities survived until the end of the Second World War. Italian migratory waves were still described as “locust swarms” or “barbaric invasions,” while Italian workers were often dismissed as brutish subhumans, not to be trusted and naturally inclined to any imaginable vice.⁷¹ Moreover, in the French collective imagination, the Italian peninsula was still belittled as a land of museums and hotels, with a population lazily exploiting its history for commercial reasons, but which was in no way capable of renewing its past glory.⁷²

The First World War and the postwar years was the zenith of the entente between the French population and the Italian migrants. The reversal of Italian policy and the subsequent siding with the Triple Entente considerably alleviated French xenophobia. Newspapers and journals from both sides of the Alps stressed the Latin character of the two countries, as the

⁷¹ Milza, *Voyage en Ritalie*, pp.143-145.

⁷² This myth still thrived in the 1930s. See Pierre Milza, “L’image de l’Italie Fasciste dans la France des années 1936-1939,” in Jean Baptiste Duroselle and Enrico Serra (eds.), *Italia e Francia dal 1919 al 1939*, Milano: Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale, 1981, pp.281-282.

cradle of modern civilization cast against the Teutonic barbaric hordes.⁷³ Moreover, from the outset of the hostilities, thousands of Italian migrants flowed into recruitment offices to join the French army. The resulting *Légion Garibaldienne*, led by a grandson of Garibaldi, fought valiantly on the Argonne front in the winter of 1914, losing more than one-fourth of its forces.⁷⁴ Although only numbering 3000, an insignificant part of the French forces, their bravery provided considerable fuel for the interventionist propaganda in Italy.⁷⁵ In July 1918, 40,000 Italian soldiers forming the Alpi Brigade were sent to the Marne front, in reciprocation for the French and British divisions sent to reinforce the Austro-Italian front after the rout of Caporetto. This unit bitterly resisted nineteen German assaults at the appalling cost of 5,000 lives and twice as many wounded and missing and was officially praised by the French Commander-in-Chief Marshal Pétain. Pétain's acknowledgment of the Italian sacrifice did much to advance friendly relations between the two communities in postwar France.

Besides tearing down the barriers separating the two communities in France through the contribution of the Italian units on the French front, the Great War, at least in the short term, brought another positive consequence which favored Italian integration in France. The French hecatomb in the First World War brought a severe shortage of manpower.⁷⁶ These

⁷³ For more of the idea of Latinity in the First World War, see Salvo Mastellone, "L'Idea di Latinità (1914-1922)," in Jean Baptiste Duroselle and Enrico Serra (eds.), *Italia e Francia dal 1919 al 1939*, Milano: Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale, 1981, pp.13-20.

⁷⁴ For more on the *Légion Garibaldienne* and its contribution to the Franco-Italian friendship after the war, see Hubert Heyriès, *Les Garibaldiens de 14, splendeurs et misères des Chemises Rouges en France de la Grande Guerre à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, Nice: Serre, 2005.

⁷⁵ Heyriès, *Les Garibaldiens de 14, splendeurs et misères des Chemises Rouges en France de la Grande Guerre à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale*, pp.219-251.

⁷⁶ 1.4 million dead, 1.1 million wounded, with 130,000 of the latter severely maimed. This represented 10.5 percent of the active population. Pierre George, "L'immigration italienne en France de 1920 à 1939: aspects

demographic losses and the consequently plummeting birth rate forced French governments in the 1920s to explicitly entice new immigrants from countries like Italy and the East European nations which were experiencing a demographic explosion.⁷⁷ This pro-immigration policy was sealed by a series of bilateral immigration and work agreements with different European countries between 1919 and 1920, which gave the Third Republic the cheap labor it so dearly needed at a time of heavy infrastructure reconstruction.⁷⁸ Italians spread into northeastern France such as Alsace and Lorraine and into southwestern rural France (an important source of relief for a region that was experiencing its own rural migration) and of course into departments bordering the Alps.⁷⁹

What is more, the reputation of the Italian immigrant in the 1920s and 1930s improved considerably in the French collective imagination. Italians were deemed faster to adapt than, for instance Polish workers, because of the similarity of lifestyle and habits. Shared cultural traits favored the assimilation of Italian immigrants into the French social fabric. Second and third generations of Italian immigrants were found to excel in the French primary school system.⁸⁰ Indeed, Italian migrants were slowly, but gradually, coming to consider France as truly their new home, like the Italian worker in Jean Renoir's movie *Toni*

démographiques et sociaux," in Pierre Milza (ed.), *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940*, Rome: École française de Rome, 1986, p.45. What is more, psychological trauma dramatically curtailed the efficiency of French veterans.

⁷⁷ For a detailed account of the labor market trend in postwar France, see Mauco, *Les Étrangers en France, leur rôle dans l'activité économique*, chapter V "La situation des marchés du travail en France et en Europe après la guerre."

⁷⁸ A work treaty was signed in Rome, 30 September 1919. France and Italy agreed to give immigrant and local workers equal rights and salaries. See Ponty, *L'Immigration dans les Textes*, p.126.

⁷⁹ An enlightening and succinct account of the immigration process in the interwar years from Italy to southwestern France based on the interview of an Italian farmer can be found in Jean Anglade, *La vie quotidienne des immigrés en France de 1919 à nos jours*, Paris: Hachette, 1976, pp.48-63.

⁸⁰ Ralph Schor, "L'image de l'Italien en France entre les deux guerres," in Pierre Milza (ed.), *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940*, Rome: École française de Rome, 1986, p.91.

(1936) who flatly stated: “*Mon pays, c’est le pays qui me donne à bouffer!*” (“My country is the country that gives me something to eat”).⁸¹ On the other hand, French employers lauded the Italian sense of discipline and handiness at work. They also appreciated the fact that Italian workers did not shy away from hard and tiring occupations and would work in virtually any conditions.⁸² It is therefore not surprising that the Italian population in France nearly doubled in a decade, starting from 450,960 in 1921 and peaking at 808,000 in 1931. This massive migration was also encouraged by the progressive restriction of immigration policies in the rest of the occidental world, reflecting a rise in nationalism and xenophobia after the First World War. Thus, for example, Italian immigration in the United States was reduced to a minimal quota of 3,500 workers per year.⁸³

Nevertheless, old prejudices regarding the Italians resurfaced from time to time, following the ebb and flow of international politics and economics. The Roaring Twenties consolidated Italian-French ties, as much as the Great Depression threatened the two communities’ peaceful coexistence in the 1930s. As was the case in the 1880s, in the 1930s, Italian workers were no longer seen as peers but as dangerous rivals vying for the few available jobs. This xenophobic view was not only shared in working class circles, but extended to the upper political echelons, which were quick to ride the demagogic tide. Two senators, Prosper Josse and Pierre Rossillion, complained: “If we had not accepted so many

⁸¹ Tanguy Perron, “L’image de l’ouvrier italien dans le cinéma français des années 30 aux années 50,” in Beccheloni, Dreyfus and Milza (eds.), *L’intégration italienne en France*, p.158. The Italian railway worker in the movie was actually complaining about the arrival of a train of new Italian emigrants, thus hinting of the older emigrants’ distrust of the recent ones, yet to be assimilated.

⁸² Stéphane Wlocevski wrote in 1934: “This workforce [the Italians], is generally reputed as excellent and very disciplined. Its efficiency is markedly superior from those of the other emigrant workforces.” Wlocevski, *L’Installation des Italiens en France*, p.44.

⁸³ Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas*, pp.131-133.

foreigners, we wouldn't have so many unemployed workers [...] Foreigners snatch the bread out of our mouths.”⁸⁴ Nationalist rhetoric insisted on the staunch principle that French people should be given priority in employment.⁸⁵ Those in the liberal professions, such as doctors and lawyers, dismissed the Italian professionals as second-rate because they did not understand French culture and values and would therefore provide less effective assistance to their clients. This fierce competition fuelled chauvinistic views of the Italians as uneducated persons, with little sense of personal hygiene⁸⁶ and little intelligence, not deserving to remain on French soil. As well, Italians were viewed as volatile and dangerous, with an excessive sense of honor which sparked knife fights over even the most trivial reasons.⁸⁷

Notwithstanding this old atavistic image of the Italian rooted in the French subconscious, the 1920s and the 1930s saw an evolution in Italian immigration to France with the arrival of political emigrants fleeing the rise of Mussolini's regime. Italian political immigration in France was not a new phenomenon. Since the 1870s, hundreds of Italian anarchists and socialists had fled to France to avoid repression in the Italian kingdom. However, the coming to power in 1922 of Benito Mussolini, the Duce, fuelled a marked growth in the Italian political diaspora. The new authoritarian Fascist regime admitted no political dissent on the peninsula, and had outlawed all political parties but the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party or PNF). Political opponents were relentlessly

⁸⁴ Prosper Josse and Pierre Rossillion, *L'invasion étrangère en France en temps de paix*, Paris, 1938, pp.40-42, cited in Ralph Schor, *Français et immigrés en temps de crise (1930-1980)*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004, p.11.

⁸⁵ This idea was so rooted in the French mentality that even the powerful Leftist union, the CGT (*Confederation Generale du Travail*), supported propositions favoring French workers over non-French ones, see Schor, *Français et immigrés en temps de crise (1930-1980)*, pp.26-28.

⁸⁶ Italians, as much as other emigrants, were often shunned as vectors of all kind of sicknesses, Schor, *Français et immigrés en temps de crise (1930-1980)*, p.36.

⁸⁷ On 4 August 1884, the *Cri du Peuple*, a populist newspaper, asserted, "There is not a single week where their [the Italians'] knives claim no victim." Cited by Milza, *Voyage en Ritalie*, p.122.

hunted down by the Fascist secret police, the OVRA.⁸⁸ Thousands of anti-Fascists fled to France, as the birthplace of the “Rights of Man and Citizen” was deemed the safest haven for political refugees. These *fuoriusciti* (literally "the ones who went outside") created a wide network of workers’ cooperatives, friendly societies and Italian unions, often affiliated with parallel French organizations. These political exiles found a warm welcome with the *Cartel des Gauches* government of the moment.

Mussolini was quick to react to the work of the socialist and communist Italian refugees by encouraging the creation of *Fasci all’Estero* (“Fascist Organisations Abroad”).⁸⁹ The idea behind this project was to channel the sense of national pride created by the Great War among Italian emigrants into Fascist organizations, thus advancing Fascist interests abroad. Through its consulates, especially those in Nice and Marseille, the Italian state funded a plethora of organizations on French soil, from children’s *Balilla* and *Avanguardisti* to recreational and leisure activities for adults such as the *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*.⁹⁰ In fact, the Italian authorities wanted to recreate in France the same network of associations found in Fascist Italy and which ideally would organize the Italian migrants from “cradle to grave”. In order to instill a sense of belonging to the Italian *patria* into the younger generations, Italian schools were created in the bigger cities where children were taught the economic, cultural and religious history of the Italian peninsula from a Fascist perspective.

⁸⁸ The name is still a mystery. Some says it is related to the Italian word "*Piovra*" (Octopus) to emphasize the omnipresence of the secret police, others believe that the acronym stood for *Opera Vigilanza Repressione Antifascista* (Antifascist Surveillance and Repression Squad). For more on the OVRA, see Mimmo Franzinelli, *I tentacoli dell’Ovra, Agenti, collaboratori e vittime della polizia politica fascista*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999.

⁸⁹ Caroline Wiegandt-Sakoun, “Le Fascisme Italien en France,” in Pierre Milza (ed.), *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940*, Rome: École française de Rome, 1986, pp.432-469.

⁹⁰ The Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) was the main Fascist youth organization. It included children between the ages of 8 and 18, grouped as the *Balilla* (8-14) and the *Avanguardisti* (14-18).

To further their cause, Italian authorities in France were quick to assist any immigrant family in dire straits with food and clothes, a policy which had become common practice during the Great Depression and which would be renewed during the Second World War. Moreover, Italian officials helped jobless workers to find employment.

The Italian state even went so far as to offer economic aid and moral support to the families of militants wounded or killed by political enemies, as in the case of the leader of the *Fascio* in Paris, Nicola Bonservizi, who was gunned down on 20 February 1924 by a *fuoriusciti* commando. Indeed more than thirty Fascist militants and leaders in France were killed between 1924 and 1934,⁹¹ with the Fascist militants retaliating accordingly. The Italian secret police, the OVRA, along with the military secret police, the SIM,⁹² infiltrated agents provocateurs into the Communist and Socialist organizations, and the SIM was instrumental in the murder of two well-known Socialist figures, the Rosselli brothers, Carlo and Nello, in Bagnoles-de-l'Orne on 9 June 1937.⁹³

The significance of this political feud should not be exaggerated. At most, anti-Fascist forces in France peaked at 17,000 militants.⁹⁴ It is true that the Italian community was by far the most politicized of all the foreign communities in France. Nonetheless, Leftist political

⁹¹ Milza, *Voyage en Ritalie*, pp.288-289.

⁹² SIM stands for *Servizio Informazioni Militare*.

⁹³ The murder was carried out by hired killers of an extreme right-wing group, the CSAR (*Comité Secret d'Action Révolutionnaire*), which was partially funded by the Fascist regime. Milza, *Voyage en Ritalie*, p.314.

⁹⁴ Italian postwar scholars, such as Luigi Salvatorelli, wrote of an "exodus" of Italian political expatriates. Some authors maintain that the Italian political diaspora peaked at 200,000 militants. Their judgment seems, however, to be clouded by the need in the postwar years to picture the Italian population as profoundly anti-Fascist. See Pierre Milza, "L'immigration italienne en France d'une guerre à l'autre; interrogations, directions de recherche et premier bilan," in Pierre Milza (ed.), *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940*, pp.29-30. A good summary of the evolution of postwar memory in Italy can be found in Claudio Fogu, "Italiani brava gente, the legacy of Fascist historical culture on Italian politics of memory," in Richard Ned Below, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu (eds.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, pp.147-176.

militants accounted for only two percent of the active Italian population in France and were highly dispersed among different groups ranging from the moderate *Giustizia e Libertà* to the revolutionary Communists. For instance, in the Alpes-Maritimes, out of an Italian population of 90,000, only roughly 1,200 belonged to Leftist organizations.⁹⁵ Fascist organizations probably did not fare better: one Fascist official ruefully noted in 1941 that only four percent of the total Italian population in the region of Paris belonged to a Fascist organization and even less were truly active.⁹⁶ Even in the interwar years, they only numbered approximately 12,000 active members.

Until to the late 1920s, the spread of the *Fasci* was far from successful for several reasons: a lack of coordination between the *Fasci*; the hostility of the Italian diplomatic service, still tied to the old Liberal class; the ineffectiveness of the threat of physical coercion, a strategy normally applied in Italy; internecine fighting among the *Fasci* members; and very low moral standards. After Mussolini's seizure of power, many opportunists, and in some cases, also criminals swarmed the offices of the *Fasci* in a typical Italian *corsa alla tessera* ("the rush to the membership card").⁹⁷ In order to reorganize what had quickly

⁹⁵ The lion's share of the political emigration was absorbed by the *Ligue Italienne des Droits de l'Homme* (500 militants), followed by the reformist Socialist group (250), *Union Populaire Italienne* (200), the Communist group (100), the maximalist Socialist group (40) and finally the Republicans (25). See Ralph Schor, "La surveillance des Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes 1919-1939", *La frontière des Alpes-Maritimes de 1860 à nos jours*. Actes du Colloque de Nice, 11-12 janvier 1990, p.90.

⁹⁶ ASMAE, Ambasciata a Parigi (1861-1950), Box 319, Rapporto n°2335 of France's *Fasci* Inspector E. Marchiandi, Paris, 17 December 1941, pp.1-2.

⁹⁷ Luca De Caprariis, "'Fascism for Export'? The Rise and Eclipse of the *Fasci* Italiani all'Estero," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol.35/2 (2000): 160. Éric Vial, "I *Fasci* in Francia," Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Il fascismo e gli emigrati, la parabola dei *Fasci* italiani all'estero (1920-1943)*, Bari: Laterza, 2003. It is interesting to note that this same issue of attracting opportunists and people of dubious reputation marred the creation of the major irredentist group in the Alpes-Maritimes in the Second World War, the *Gruppi d'Azione Nizzarda* (GAN), see Chapter 3., "The Armistice period (June 1940-November 1942): the role of the CIAF," pp.106-111. Moreover, the GAN movement remained as marginal as the Fascist organizations in

become a dysfunctional organization, the Duce appointed Piero Parini and Dino Grandi to head respectively the Fasci (1928) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1929). They strengthened the ties between local Fascio branches and Italian diplomatic authorities in France, both of which were purged of felons and anti-Fascist officials.⁹⁸

Fascist organizations (as well as anti-Fascist, for that matter) remained marginal compared to a total population of Italians in France, which was nearly one million people, plus another million second- and third-generation Italians. Most of the immigrants, fearful of possible consequences for their jobs, shied away from any form of political activism. To embrace socialist or communist ideas was, at best, frowned upon by French employers and, at worst, openly condemned by Italian officials in France. On the other hand, to support Fascist organizations was a sure way to be held in contempt by Frenchmen, especially in the French border regions such as the Alpes Maritimes which was openly claimed to be Italian by Fascist irredentist propaganda. Thus, and this would become even more blatant in the war years, most of the immigrants were content to remain apolitical, not an easy feat at a time when the surge of ideologies dramatically radicalized politics. To quote an Italian emigrant who arrived in France in the interwar years: “Political activism was for those who had nothing to do.”⁹⁹ It is highly doubtful, therefore, especially in the case of Fascist associations, that all the immigrants who proclaimed themselves active militants did so out of ideological zealotry. What might have seemed to be excessive zeal to a casual observer might

the 1930s, see Chapter 7., "The Italian occupation policy in France: the repressive forbearance of the Italian army," p.320.

⁹⁸ Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo, "Introduzione," in Emilio Franzina and Matteo Sanfilippo (eds.), *Il fascismo e gli emigrati, la parabola dei Fasci italiani all'estero (1920-1943)*, pp. V- XXXI.

⁹⁹ Ralph Schor, "L'integration des Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes," Bechelloni, Dreyfus and Milza, *L'integration italienne en France*, pp.271-279.

have been in reality mere deference to local notables or even an easy way to further one's own interests, be it obtaining a passport, a job or goods.¹⁰⁰ What is more, boundaries between economic and political emigration could be very hazy. Some Italians crossed the border to flee both poverty and political repression at the same time.¹⁰¹ It was not unusual for a worker who initially emigrated for political reasons to choose to withdraw from activism, or for an emigrant coming to France for purely economic reasons to find himself involved in unions or political associations. Finally, it was not unheard of for workers to switch from one political side to the other, especially going from Leftist groups to Fascist organizations.¹⁰²

This opportunistic switching of sides, more commonly and derogatively known in Italy as *voltagabbana* (turncoat), was partly caused by the propaganda of Fascist-endorsed organizations. This propaganda campaign had three purposes: to build up a following in the Italian diaspora in France which could eventually act as a pressure group lobbying for Fascist interests; to counter the *fuoriusciti*'s propaganda against the Fascist regime; and finally to curtail the wave of naturalizations following the 10 August 1927 law¹⁰³ which facilitated the

¹⁰⁰ For instance, the words of an Italian farmer in Southwestern France nicely echoed the thoughts of many Italian immigrants: "Basically, for us adults, politics were not interesting at all: but we accepted this propaganda [the Fascist one] due to the benefits, gifts, books, copybooks, newspapers, rice, pasta, which came with it." Anglade, *La vie quotidienne des immigrants en France de 1919 à nos jours*, p.61.

¹⁰¹ Some examples can be found in Emilio Franzina, "L'émigration et l'imaginaire: France du rêve, France de souvenir," in Bechelloni, Dreyfus and Milza (eds.), *L'intégration italienne en France*, pp.123-154.

¹⁰² The complexity of Italian political emigration is corroborated by the careful analysis of thousands of dossiers of the Tribunal D'Épuration des Alpes-Maritimes, series 318W, the Archives Départementales des Alpes-Maritimes.

¹⁰³ This law "On the Nationality" widened the scope of possible naturalizations, especially in the case of children and minors. The rationale behind the simplification of the process for obtaining naturalization, which granted the same political and civil rights of a French citizen minus the possibility of election, was to help increase the French population at a time when the birthrate in France was fast declining. The law had an instant effect; naturalizations tripled in 1927. See Janine Ponty, *L'immigration dans les Textes, France 1789-2002*, Paris: Belin, 2003, pp.153-157. The wave of naturalizations was especially massive in southeastern France. In only three years (1927-1929), 4 percent of the total Italian population in the Var, Bouches-du-Rhône and Alpes-Maritimes was naturalized. Wlocewski, *L'Installation des Italiens en France*, pp.84-85.

possible assimilation of the second-and third-generation of Italian immigrants.¹⁰⁴ Italian authorities however sometimes had to resort to providing funds for Italian emigrants who wished to return to Italy, in an effort to deny these workers to France, a latter policy somewhat in contradiction with Mussolini's desire to create Fascist enclaves abroad. After all, the Fascists could not possibly hope to create Fascist hubs outside Italy if, in the meantime, they fostered a repatriation campaign.

In truth, it was also a reflection of the paradox of the Italian expansionist policy. It is a truism that since the inception of his regime, Mussolini had aspirations for territorial expansion as he sought to annex French or Slavic provinces considered culturally part of Italy such as Corsica, Dalmatia and the County of Nice. In fact, the Duce deftly exploited, as part of his aggressive foreign policy, a movement rooted in Italian society, the *Irredentismo*. The word stems from *irredento*, literally "unredeemed," called such because its supporters advocated the annexation of territories outside the Italian state, on historical or ethnical grounds. The movement became stronger after the First World War, as the Italians were frustrated by the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Italy had been handed the Trentino Alto-Adige and Trieste but had failed to secure Istria and Dalmatia, therefore, Mussolini had only to add fuel to the already blazing resentment following the "Mutilated Victory" ("*Vittoria Mutilata*").

Moreover, old colonial claims in North Africa re-emerged, such as that on Tunisia. This sudden interest in the African continent was motivated by strategic reasons as much as by external and internal policy. The Fascist bid for colonies was part of an effort to win over

¹⁰⁴ As in 1912, Italian law had established that the determination of nationality was based on neither the birthplace nor residence (*jus soli*), but solely on bloodline (*jus sanguinis*).

the old Liberal class, by stressing the continuity between Italian Liberal and Fascist imperialist policy, as both argued Tunisia in particular held a pivotal strategic role. The French colony was deemed paramount to Italian expansion in the Mediterranean area as Italian control of Tunisian and Sicilian coasts would strategically cut the Mediterranean Sea in half. The push to North Africa was also an important part of the affirmation on the international stage that Italy was willing to fight to get what the Fascists thought was a "place in the sun."¹⁰⁵ In other words, Mussolini wanted to bolster Italian international prestige through the colonization of African territories. The Fascists encouraged the Italians in France to relocate to North African lands, especially their emigrants who were in dire economical straits at the time. In fact, the image of poor Italians struggling to make a living abroad starkly contrasted with the image of "Great Power" cast worldwide by the Fascist regime. As a matter of fact, it appears that the Fascist state never solved the dilemma between bolstering the Italian communities in France and repatriating the Italian emigrants as a way to demonstrate the new prosperity of the Italian state.¹⁰⁶

In any case, the French were certainly not pleased by either policy, seen as interference in French internal affairs. The Duce's boastful annexationist propaganda did little to appease French distrust of the new Italian regime, especially at a time when the Front Populaire's politicians openly sympathized with Italian Leftist leaders in France. The Rome Accords of January 1935 were themselves emblematic of the different visions embraced by

¹⁰⁵ For more on the Franco-Italian dispute in the 1930s, see Juliette Bessis, "La question tunisienne dans l'évolution des relations franco-italiennes de 1935 au 10 juin 1940," in Duroselle and Serra (eds.), *Italia e Francia dal 1919 al 1939*, pp.245-255.

¹⁰⁶ See the 1939 repatriation campaign, Chapter 1. "We used to be good friends: Italian immigration to Southern France and the deterioration of international relations, from the 1930s until June 1940," pp.34-36. Chapter 5. "The Armistice period (June 1940-November 1942): the role of the CIAF," p.91.

the political authorities in both countries. Mussolini, captivated by the dream of conquest since the inception of his regime, strived to revive the myth of the Roman Empire by getting a jumpstart via the conquest of the arid Ethiopian lands.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pierre Laval, sought to appease domestic worries following German rearmament by recruiting Italy as a newfound ally, even at the cost of giving Mussolini a free hand in Ethiopia.¹⁰⁸ Such was the desperation of the French government to find new international partners in the wake of Hitler's unilateral decision to rearm that France promoted the Stresa Conference in April 1935, where, together with Italy and Britain, it reaffirmed its staunch anti-Germanism. Furthermore, France was so upset by the reawakening of its old nemesis that Laval was ready to accept the de facto Italian annexation of Ethiopia with the Hoare-Laval Pact in December 1935. Only public uproar in France and Great Britain over the prospective "sell-out" compelled the two governments to disavow their respective Foreign Ministers.

Mussolini swiftly exploited the Anglo-French wavering over the fate of Ethiopia to steer his policy in the direction of undermining the new order created by the Treaty of

¹⁰⁷ Mussolini's obsession about "a place in the sun" for Italy has been hotly debated by international scholars. Richard Bosworth, much as Fritz Fischer did in the German historiography, underscored the continuity between Liberal Italy's African and Balkan expansionist views and Mussolini's bid for Ethiopia and Dalmatia. MacGregor Knox, on the other hand, posited that Mussolini's dreams of glory greatly surpassed the aspirations of the old Italian liberal class. Moreover the Duce was moved by ideological fervor and ambition to subvert, rather than consolidate, Italian state institutions. See Richard Bosworth, "Italian foreign policy and its historiography" in Richard Bosworth and Gino Rizzo (eds.), *Altro Polo, intellectuals and their ideas in contemporary Italy*, Sidney, 1983, pp.65-85; MacGregor Knox, "Il Fascismo e la politica estera italiana" in Richard Bosworth and Sergio Romano (eds.), *La Politica estera italiana (1860-1985)*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991, pp.287-330.

¹⁰⁸ The academic community has been divided over the extent to which Laval gave Mussolini his approval for Italy's conquest of Ethiopia. Some historians believed that the Duce did not explicitly receive *carte blanche* from the French Foreign Minister. Nevertheless later historiography tends to highlight Laval's acceptance of Mussolini's plans as a means to appease his quarrelsome neighbor. See Bruce Strang, "Imperial Dreams: The Mussolini-Laval Accords of January 1935", *The Historical Journal*, 44/3 (September 2001), pp.799-809.

Versailles. The Duce, as much as his Nazi counterpart, fostered a revisionist foreign policy aimed at breaking the status quo stemming from the 1919 Paris Peace conference. Smoothed by the nomination of Count Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini's son-in-law, as Foreign Minister and the simultaneous sacking of the fiercely anti-German undersecretary Fulvio Suvich, this goal ultimately led to the signing of the Italian-German friendship treaty in October 1936, establishing the nefarious Rome-Berlin Axis. The rapprochement between the two dictatorships was sealed by their joint assistance of the Spanish Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War, both in terms of men, as 75,000 Italians joined the fray, including a division of Blackshirts, 14,000 members of the *Regio Esercito*, and equipment, such as aircraft and artillery.¹⁰⁹

Current historiography seems to agree that Mussolini's imperialistic policy played a crucial role in heightening the tensions that would eventually lead to the second major conflict of the twentieth century.¹¹⁰ It also contributed to the growing unrest brooding inside the Italian community in France and to a growing tension in Italian-French state relations of the 1930s. In the second half of the 1930s, Franco-Italian relations deteriorated markedly over the Ethiopian crisis and the Spanish Civil war. France's hardline stance on the

¹⁰⁹ G. Bruce Strang, *On the Fiery March: Mussolini Prepares for War*, Westport: Praeger, 2003, p.73.

¹¹⁰ This truism has not always been popular in the academic world. In fact, the first postwar Italian historians, most of them authoritative anti-Fascists like Gaetano Salvemini and Luigi Salvatorelli, followed by eminent British historians such as A.J.P. Taylor and Denis Mack Smith, asserted that Mussolini's foreign policy had no consistency whatsoever but was purely propaganda intended to build internal consensus. This was part of a broader argument that the Fascist Regime was an anomaly in Italian history. This *Primat der Innerpolitik* perspective has been increasingly challenged since the 1960s and the 1970s by revisionist historians on both sides of the Atlantic, such as MacGregor Knox and Renzo De Felice, who emphasize the coherence of Fascist policy regarding international matters. Both authors stress the personal involvement of the Duce in Italian expansionist policy. For more on the historiography, see Stephen Corrado Azzi, "The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy," *The Historical Journal*, 36/1 (March 1993) pp.187-209; Strang, *On the Fiery March*, pp.13-39; Robert Mallett, *Mussolini and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1940*, New York: Palgrave, 2003.

enlargement of the Italian colonial possessions in Africa had severe repercussions in the French-Italian border regions. Italian military authorities, backed up by the Fascist establishment, began a forced expropriation campaign in the Alps in 1936, officially aimed at strengthening the Italian line of Alpine fortifications.¹¹¹ All of the sudden, French shepherds, as in the case of the hamlets of Isola and Belvedere in the Alpes-Maritimes, and of Lanslebourg, Bramans and Sollières in the Savoy department, ran into painstakingly long document checks at the borders and, in the most extreme cases, were *sic et simpliciter* dispossessed of their own pasture land in Italy with little compensation.¹¹² These property infringements were an effective barometer of the stormy relationship between the “Latin Sisters.” Whenever the two countries quarreled on the international stage, Italian military authorities tightened their grip, among other things, forbidding the cattle farmers access to alpine pastures for example.¹¹³ On the other hand, on the rare occasions when the international tension receded, local Italian commanders relaxed their control, once again allowing cattle to be moved up the mountains to graze.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ In 1938, the Italian Consul in Nice opposed the seizure of Alpine refuges on the grounds that the French Alpine Club could retaliate by boycotting tourism in the Italian Alps. Thus, the War Ministry decided to temporarily halt the expropriations. See Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (hereafter ASMAE), Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 35, fascicolo 3 “Rifugi alpini francesi in territorio italiano.”

¹¹² ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 42, Note Verbale n°312 of the French Embassy in Italy to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 15 October 1937.

¹¹³ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 42, Telespresso 20858/2870 of the Vice-consul of Italy in Nice to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 16 September 1937.

¹¹⁴ The same pattern continued even after 1940 inasmuch as the French state had to relinquish a small strip of land as a result of the Armistice of Villa Incisa (24 June 1940), which marked the end of the Battle of the Alps. It was almost entirely made up by pasture land, see Chapter 3. “The Armistice period (June 1940-November 1942), the role of the CIAF” and Chapter 4. “The Italian occupation zone: an inchoate colonization?” For more on prewar expropriations, see Romain Rainero, “Aspetti della crisi degli accordi Mussolini-Laval: gli espropri di Vinadio e del Moncenisio,” in Duroselle and Serra (eds.), *Italia e Francia dal 1919 al 1939*, pp.257-270.

At the same time, Mussolini observed with growing interest the international isolation of the French Republic. If nothing else, the Munich Conference laid bare the irresoluteness of France and Great Britain in the face of Hitler's expansionistic demands. There, the French and British Prime Ministers, Edouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain, were so eager to avoid war that they sacrificed Czechoslovakia on the altar of peace in September 1938. In light of this, the Fascist elites decided to step up their irredentist campaign at once. The occasion chosen for the launch of the offensive was a speech delivered by Galeazzo Ciano to the Italian parliament on 30 November 1938. Broadly outlining the Italian strategy, the Italian Foreign Minister boomed: "We will defend, with inflexible steadfastness, the interests and natural aspirations of the Italian nation." This menacing statement was clearly aimed at Italy's western neighbor, as the deputies roared in response: "Tunisia, Djibouti, Corsica, Nizza." This event was especially humiliating for France as her new ambassador to Italy, André François-Poncet, who was targeted by Fascist militants upon leaving the Parliament after Ciano's speech, had just been accredited the day before.¹¹⁵ It quickly became clear that the Fascist regime was heading towards a collision with the French Republic with the creation of a permanent commission for the repatriation of Italians living abroad (CORI) in mid-November 1938. The official goal of the Ciano Commission was clear: bringing back to the peninsula all the Italians who wished it, or at least as many as could be accommodated given domestic economic needs. As with most of the decisions made by Mussolini's regime,

¹¹⁵ Enrica Costa Bona, *Dalla guerra alla pace, Italia-Francia 1940-1947*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1995, p.21; Paul Isoard, "Le 11 Novembre 1942", *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 62 (June 2001): p.191. For more on the indignation cause by the Ciano speech in the French press, even the pro-Fascist extreme right press, see Pierre Milza, "L'image de l'Italie Fasciste dans la France des années 1936-1939," in Duroselle and Serra (eds.), *Italia e Francia dal 1919 al 1939*, pp.291-296.

prestige was key to understanding the real Fascist motivations behind this change of policy. First of all, the return of the emigrants was used as an overt symbol of the relative prosperity Mussolini had brought to Italy. Secondly, the Italian regime had to repatriate their most militant nationals anyway as they were being expelled by the French prefects. Finally and most importantly, Italy hoped to use these people to increase the ranks of its army, while simultaneously denying them to a potential enemy army.¹¹⁶

The issue of potential recruits for a future war was also a concern in France. As early as 1937, Marc Rucart, the Minister of Justice of the Front Populaire government, argued this same point: “I wanted naturalization policy to take into account, primarily, the necessities of national defense...”¹¹⁷ Thus French authorities responded to the Fascist strategy by increasing the number of naturalizations of Italians, with 24,000 naturalized in 1939 and 18,000 in 1940.¹¹⁸ The Italian Ambassador in Paris, Raffaele Guariglia, worriedly noted that naturalizations of Italians in 1939 had doubled or even tripled if compared to previous years.¹¹⁹ Not all the naturalization applications were apparently genuine, however. The Italian diplomatic officials complained that some Italian emigrants, who read little French, were coerced or tricked into signing papers which tagged them as political refugees, while others were lured into enlisting to the French army as a way to fast-track the naturalization

¹¹⁶ Leonardo Rapone, “Les Italiens en France comme problème de la politique étrangère italienne, entre guerre Fasciste et retour à la démocratie,” in Pierre Milza and Denis Peschanski (eds.), *Exils et Migration, Italiens et Espagnols en France, 1938-1946*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994, pp.179-180.

¹¹⁷ *Le Temps*, 5 April 1937, cited in Paul Lawrence, “Naturalisations in France, 1927-1939: The Example of the Alpes de Haute Provence (formerly the Basses-Alpes),” unpublished, ADAHP, BR 8523. Available also on <http://www.history.ac.uk/eseminars/sem16.html> (accessed November 20, 2008).

¹¹⁸ Patrick Weil, “Espagnols et Italiens en France: la politique de la France,” in Milza and Peschanski (eds.), *Exils et Migration, Italiens et Espagnols en France, 1938-1946*, pp.93-94.

¹¹⁹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 41, Telespresso n°2150/896 to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 31 marzo 1939.

procedure.¹²⁰ To further disrupt the network based in the Italian consulates, the French prefects launched a wave of *refoulements*, aimed particularly at notorious Fascists or consulate collaborators. Significantly, more than half of the expulsions were carried out in Corsica, the Savoy departments and the County of Nice, the three territories most prized by the irredentists.¹²¹

No wonder then that the Ciano policy of repatriation had only a limited success. Between February 1939 and June 1940 only 80,000 Italians living in France and in French colonies took advantage of the program, most of them unemployed and single, or ardent militants.¹²² Most of the Italians in France had worked hard to build their own capital, be it a small company or a house, or had married a French woman. Thus they were reluctant to leave. Meanwhile, Daladier responded to the Italian propaganda by touring Corsica and Tunisia. On January 1939, Paul Marchandeu, the Minister of Justice, along with the Mayor of Nice Paul Médecin, reaffirmed the unequivocally French nature of the County of Nice.¹²³ Manifestations of *francité* were not the prerogative solely of the French political elite. French intellectual circles of Provence voiced their anger in books and academic journals, vilifying

¹²⁰ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 41, Telespresso n°10426/2512 of the Italian Consul in Toulouse, Berri, 2 September 1939; Telespresso n°6683/3323 of Italian Ambassador Guariglia to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 30 October 1939.

¹²¹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 41, Telespresso n°2149/895 of Italian Ambassador Guariglia to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 31 March 1939.

¹²² Rapone, "Les Italiens en France comme problème de la politique étrangère italienne, entre guerre Fasciste et retour à la démocratie," in Milza and Peschanski (eds.), *Exils et Migration, Italiens et Espagnols en France, 1938-1946*, pp.180-181.

¹²³ Ralph Schor, "L'image des Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes, 1938-1946," Milza and Peschanski (eds.), *Exils et Migration, Italiens et Espagnols en France, 1938-1946*, p.302.

the irredentist claim of the supposed Italian character of Nice and highlighting the Provence traits of Nice culture and background.¹²⁴

The mounting international tension inevitably erupted into clashes between the Italian and French communities in the Alpes-Maritimes. On 13 April 1939, the arrival of a Fascist notable in the Casa Italiana of Saint-Laurent-du-Var brought two hundred people into the streets to interrupt the Fascist gathering. Local politicians fuelled this mounting xenophobia by requesting the closing of all the *Casa d'Italia* and the abrogation of the 30 September 1919 treaty which granted immigrants the same social rights of the French workers. The spiral of violence was not exclusive to the Alpes-Maritimes department. Incidents ranging from the sacking of shops to beatings took place in the Var, the Savoie and the Haute-Savoie departments and were spreading at such an alarming rate that Italy's Ambassador Guariglia wrote a formal note of protest to the Quai D'Orsay.¹²⁵

In the 1930s, the shifting system of alliances in the European concert soured the relations between Italy and France. The rapprochement of Mussolini's regime with Germany deepened the French distrust of Italy. Indeed, the Italians were instrumental in getting the French historical nemesis out of the cordon sanitaire built by the Treaty of Versailles. No wonder then that this state of tension had severe repercussions on the relations between the French and Italian communities in France. To be sure, the decision of the Fascist authorities to establish a network of Fascist organizations and agencies aggravated the tension. Yet, all these tensions did not erupt in widespread incidents in a region where one-fourth of the

¹²⁴ For more on this French intellectuals' mission, see Alain Ruggiero, "Comment prouver que Nice est bien Française?" *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 33-34 (December 1986- June 1987), pp.127-139.

¹²⁵ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 41, Telespresso n°2992/1276 of Italian Ambassador Guariglia to the Italian Foreign Ministry, 6 May 1939.

population was Italian or had an Italian heritage. The inchoate development in the interwar years of the *Fasci all'Estero* tells much about the nature of the Italian community in France. Apart from the already mentioned inherent weaknesses in the Fascist network, the Fascist ideology's failure to make inroads among the emigrants demonstrates the degree of integration of the Italian minority into the French social fabric. Most emigrants failed to radicalize, as they were genuinely grateful to their host nation. This absence of polarization within the Italian community, as the *fuoriusciti* movement weakened due to growing internal tensions and the Fascist grassroots movement became increasingly discredited by the dubious morality of its own members, would greatly ease the task of the Italian army in the occupation period.

Chapter 3

The Coming of the Second World War and the Battle of the Alps

The Pact of Steel, signed on 22 May 1939, virtually tied the destiny of Italy to that of the Nazi dictator, and the Secret Supplementary Protocols undeniably forecasted an alliance in the eventuality of a war. Scholars have been puzzled by the fact that the Duce and his Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano committed the Fascist regime so deeply to an inherently offensive alliance at a time when Italy and its armed forces were anything but prepared for war. Mussolini himself understood the state of disarray pervading the *Regio Esercito* as demonstrated by a memorandum handed to Ciano before the May meeting with von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister. In it, the Italian dictator insisted on the necessity of postponing an eventual confrontation until 1943 for a plethora of economical, military and political reasons.¹²⁶ Mussolini, even if sometimes prone to irrational behavior, was no fool.

Italy lacked the raw materials, such as coal and oil, urgently needed for the operation of the Italian Navy which, ironically, was the only armed service capable of securing the routes to fuel extraction sites. In fact, Italy's economy had lagged behind the other Great Powers since the nineteenth century. As recently as 1913, the Italian level of industrialization per capita was half that of France and one-third of Germany's, and the ratio remained the same until the Second World War.¹²⁷ Industrial development was further hindered by the government's resort to autarchic plans. The Fascist Regime was determined to demonstrate

¹²⁶ Strang, *On the Fiery March*, pp.256-265. Significantly, the final document of the meeting does not contain any mention of the Italian desire to postpone the war.

¹²⁷ MacGregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies: Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime and the War of 1940-1943*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.23-25.

that Italy could be self-sufficient in food and industrial production. Owing to the lack of the necessary resources, however, the result was disastrous. Severe protectionism undermined Italy's preparation for war, as Italian war industries were not compelled to innovate owing to the lack of competition from foreign companies. Italian heavy industries' production was propped up artificially by state-induced demand.¹²⁸ Small wonder that Italy had an industrial productivity index far below that of the other Great Powers. Italy's financial assets were also depleted as the regime had squandered hard currency reserves to fund the war in Ethiopia and the intervention in the Spanish conflict. As a result, the Fascist regime was caught in a vicious circle: Italy lacked raw materials and needed foreign currency to buy them. In order to obtain the currency, the regime was forced to export part of its war production, especially from the aviation industry, thereby depleting its already meager armament stocks. These structural weaknesses explain Italy's economic dependence on Germany. The Fascist regime had to rely on its senior partner for essential goods in order to upgrade its outdated armament.

Just as Italy was trailing Germany in terms of industrialization, the same could be said for the combat power of its armed forces. The qualitative gap separating the armies of the two Axis powers stemmed in part from their national histories. The most important military theorist of the modern era, Carl Von Clausewitz, wrote in his monumental work *On War* that "the quality of military genius [...] depends on the *general intellectual development*

¹²⁸ For instance, Ford was not able to compete with Italian automobile company Fiat, which, along with its partner Ansaldo, retained the monopoly on the Italian production of tanks and airplanes. See Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies: Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime and the War of 1940-1943*, pp.40-42.

(italics in the original) of a given society.”¹²⁹ In other words, the armed forces of a nation are shaped by the characteristics of the society and by the evolution of its political institutions.¹³⁰ Imperial Germany was built on Prussian victories at arms, which elevated the prestige of its army to soaring heights. The unchecked power of the *Reichsheer* would destabilize the civil-military relations in the German state in the long run, but in the short term proved to be one of the pillars on which the new German state built its international *grandeur*.¹³¹ Adolescents from impoverished Junker families flocked to military academies as the army became a sure means for climbing the social ladder. This praetorian state, where the whole prestige of a nation was embodied in its armed forces, bore a striking resemblance to the Roman Empire. Unfortunately, the Piedmontese army and its Italian counterpart could not stand up to the comparison. The late-nineteenth century Italian army was severely understaffed, despite the fact that, in 1860, two-thirds of the officer corps living in Nice and Savoy chose to remain faithful to the House of Savoy.¹³² The Piedmont War Minister, General Manfredo Fanti, refused to incorporate *in toto* units of the Garibaldi army or to acknowledge the Bourbon army ranks.¹³³ Furthermore, the use of the newborn *Regio Esercito* to quell the brigandage in southern Italy affected the Italian army’s prestige; officers and soldiers felt demoted to the role of policemen.

¹²⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p.100.

¹³⁰ I’m particularly indebted here to MacGregor Knox’s interpretation of the Clausewitzian paradigm. See MacGregor Knox, “The Sources of Italy’s Defeat in 1940: Bluff or Institutionalized Incompetence,” in Carole Fink, Isabel V.Hull, MacGregor Knox (eds.), *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890-1945*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985, pp.254-255.

¹³¹ Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

¹³² John Whittam, *The Politics of the Italian Army, 1861-1918*, London: Croom Helm, 1977, p.62.

¹³³ Giorgio Rochat and Giulio Massobrio, *Breve Storia dell’Esercito Italiano dal 1861 al 1943*, Torino: Einaudi, 1978, pp.24-28. Whittam, *The Politics of the Italian Army, 1861-1918*, p.66. Bourbon officers experienced the humiliation of having their grade lowered by one rank. Most of them resigned.

No monarch on the Italian peninsula could match the military and political expertise of Frederick the Great (1712-1786). No Piedmontese general ever equaled the strategic shrewdness of *Generalfeldmarschall* Helmut Von Moltke (1800-1891) who fundamentally reformed the General Staff.¹³⁴ In fact, Italy's chief of general staff from 1927 to 1940, Marshall Pietro Badoglio, was nothing more than a ceremonial figure who had no role whatsoever in the making of strategy. Until the advent of Field Marshall Ugo Cavallero in December 1940 and his reforms of 1941, the Chief of the General Staff did not even have staff of his own.¹³⁵ The Duce encouraged this divided and ineffective command structure. He refused to implement any inter-service joint command as he feared that the possible accretion of power it might entail ultimately could challenge his rule.¹³⁶ Mussolini's "divide and conquer" strategy was helped by longstanding rivalries between the different services. No service would have ever wanted to submit to the decisions of an integrated command.¹³⁷

Thus, every service carried out its own reforms independently, with disastrous results. The head of the General Staff of the Army, General Alberto Pariani, for instance, failed to foresee the importance of mobile armored warfare. Modern scholars consider his binary division scheme in 1938 that reduced the number of infantry regiments in each division from

¹³⁴ The Prussian General Staff, the first of its kind worldwide, was established in 1806 under the impulse of army reformers such as Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August von Gneisenau who sought to correct the shortcomings of the Prussian army in the Revolutionary Wars. The German General Staff, a core of highly trained officers recruited according to strict criteria, under the guidance of Von Moltke (1857-1877) was instrumental in the Prussian victories against Austria (1866) and France (1870). See William McElwee, *The Art of War: Waterloo to Mons*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974.

¹³⁵ Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, pp.69-70.

¹³⁶ Giorgio Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane, 1935-1943*, Torino: Einaudi, 2005, pp.150-152.

¹³⁷ For instance, the Italian navy and the Italian air force bitterly quarreled in 1939 over naval aviation, in particular the number of planes allotted to navy operations. See John Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals. The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp.489-490.

three to two as one of the major reasons for the woeful unpreparedness of the Italian army. It was intended to enhance a division's mobility. The *guerra of rapido corso* ("war of rapid decision"), remained, however, wishful thinking. The reduction in the size of divisions left unresolved the chronic shortage of armored vehicles and motorized transport. The actual outcomes were to weaken divisional firepower, cause confusion at the tactical level of command, and favor rampant careerism as each of the new smaller divisions required a full slate of officers and thereby opened opportunities for promotion.¹³⁸ In a nutshell, the "war of rapid decision" was only an empty shibboleth which masked the Italian inability to upgrade its armaments and to wage anything but a short war due to its extremely limited stocks of materiel.¹³⁹

If even the most senior political and military leaders would not abandon their outdated theories, it should not come as a surprise that only a few junior officers dared to criticize such conservative approaches to war. A high level of deference permeated the *Regio Esercito*; the upper echelons discouraged open dissent to the point that, during the war, junior officers were loath to take any kind of initiative.¹⁴⁰ Debates in military journals were severely curtailed by censorship. Officers' submissions had to be approved by the army corps commanders in order to be published. Small wonder then that, in the interwar years, there

¹³⁸ The number of divisions increased from thirty three-regiment units to sixty-three two-regiment units.

¹³⁹ For more on the flaws of the binary division concept, see Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane, 1935-1943*, pp.198-200; Daniele Lembo, *La Carne Contro l'Acciaio, Il Regio Esercito Italiano alla vigilia della seconda guerra mondiale*, Copiano: Grafica MA.RO, 2003, pp.59-62; Mario Montanari, *L'Esercito Italiano alla vigilia della seconda guerra mondiale*, Roma: Ufficio Storico SME, 1993, pp.9-20. For a more nuanced opinion on the reform, see Ferruccio Botti and Virgilio Ilari, *Il Pensiero Militare dal Primo al Secondo Dopoguerra (1919-1949)*, Roma: Ufficio Storico SME, 1985, pp.220-230.

¹⁴⁰ Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane, 1935-1943*, pp.175-176. At the opposite extreme, Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS NCOs were trained to devise creative tactical solutions if the need arose. See John A. English and Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *On Infantry*, Westport: Praeger, 1994, pp.67-85.

was little debate over tactics and strategy, unlike in the United Kingdom, France or in Germany.¹⁴¹ Pleas of Italian reformers such as Emilio Canevari (*Lo spirito della guerra moderna* and *La lotta delle fanterie*, 1935) and Sebastiano Visconti Prasca (*La guerra decisiva*, 1934), which attacked the doctrinal stagnancy of the Italian “army barracks” remained largely unheeded.¹⁴² Italian military theory remained tied to anachronistic trench warfare and to Jomini’s paradigm of concentrating the attack on a particular spot in the enemy’s presumably static defensive positions.¹⁴³ Reforms to improve mechanization began only at the start of 1939. Cadets received poor training in military academies and professional development was further marred by practices such as promotions based on recommendation, or in the most blatant cases, on outright nepotism.¹⁴⁴ Ideologically motivated efforts to militarize the Fascist society and the need for mass recruitment at the time of the Ethiopian campaign rushed the training of future officers, further undermining the caliber of the officer corps. Officers of the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (the “Blackshirts”) got transferred to officers’ positions in the army with a mere fifteen days’ training. This absurd policy went so far in 1936 as to grant upper bureaucrats such as

¹⁴¹ Charles de Gaulle, *Vers l’armée de métier*, 1934; English translation, *The Army of the Future*, 1941. For the limit of military debates in interwar Italy, see Botti and Ilari, *Il Pensiero Militare dal Primo al Secondo Dopoguerra (1919-1949)*, pp.163-167.

¹⁴² Botti and Ilari, *Il Pensiero Militare dal Primo al Secondo Dopoguerra (1919-1949)*, pp.177-187. It should be noted that Visconti Prasca’s Comando in the 1941 Greek campaign was so disastrous that he was relieved from his duties just two weeks after the onset of hostilities.

¹⁴³ Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779-1869) was a Swiss noble who first served in the Napoleonic army and later switched to the Russian side. His book, *Précis de l’Art de la Guerre: Des Principales Combinaisons de la Stratégie, de la Grande Tactique et de la Politique Militaire* (1838), is widely asserted to be a response to Von Clausewitz’ *Vom Kriege* (1832). For more on Jomini, see John Shy, “Jomini,” in Peter Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp.143-185.

¹⁴⁴ MacGregor Knox, “The Sources of Italy’s Defeat in 1940: Bluff or Institutionalized Incompetence,” in Fink, V.Hull and Knox (eds.), *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890-1945*, pp.258-259.

prefects, senators, deputies and university professors the rank of lieutenant for attending a few theory lessons.¹⁴⁵

Just as the professionalism of the army was deteriorating rapidly, corruption was thriving among the most important industries. The conflation of these factors compromised the development of the Italian military-industrial complex in the Fascist era. The notion of a military-industrial complex was not a new one. Since the 1890s, the Western world had seen the rise of command technology, whereby the states funded technological innovation through military procurement.¹⁴⁶ This active collusion of government officials, military elites, and arms and heavy industry executives, considered by many scholars as one of the main causes of the First World War, was also one of the predominant traits of the Fascist regime.¹⁴⁷ No one embodied these connections more than Ugo Cavallero. Born in 1880 to a noble Piedmontese family, Cavallero was assigned to the Army General Staff in the First World War. After the conflict, he became general manager of one of the most important industrial companies, Pirelli. In 1925, he was appointed Undersecretary of the Ministry of War but, due to frictions with General Badoglio, he moved back to the industrial sector, heading the metallurgic trust, Ansaldo, from 1929 until his resignation in 1933 when he was accused of corruption, following a scandal about poorly made armor ordered by the *Regio Esercito*.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane, 1935-1943*, p.179.

¹⁴⁶ William Mc Neill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D.1000*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp.262-306.

¹⁴⁷ Eckart Kehr, *Economic interest, militarism, and foreign policy: essays on German history*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, later developed by Fritz Fischer, Hans-Peter Wehler and the Bielefeld school.

¹⁴⁸ The L3 tanks used in the Ethiopian and Spanish war and which would be later used in the Second World War, had an armor so thin even machinegun bullets could penetrate it! Not surprisingly it was nicknamed the "sardines can" ("*scatola di sardine*") by Italian soldiers. Piero Melograni, *La Guerra Degli italiani 1940-1945*, Roma: Istituto Luce, 2003, p.15.

Cavallero was acquitted and returned to the army in 1937 later to be promoted Chief of the Italian Supreme Command from 1940 to 1943.¹⁴⁹ The 1933 affair was only one of the several cases of the unhealthy alliance between Italy's monopolistic heavy industry conglomerates, the upper echelons of the *Regio Esercito* and the state's higher bureaucrats. These shadowy ties severely compromised the quality of armaments production. The L3 tank and its successors remained below par for the entire conflict and the airplanes proved unreliable.¹⁵⁰

The inadequacy of Italy's preparation for war was effectively summarized in a report submitted by Badoglio, the Chief of the General Staff, to Mussolini on 1 November 1939. In an effort to belittle Pariani's planning, General Badoglio informed Mussolini that of the sixty-three binary divisions formally in existence, only ten were fit to go to war, twenty-two were no more than pawns on a battlemap and the remaining divisions were either lacking crucial military equipment such as uniforms or ammunition, or were far below strength.¹⁵¹ Given this and the dearth of raw materials plaguing the Italian economy, the Italian army of 1939 was incapable of sustaining even a limited war. Fascist dignitaries such as Minister of Justice Dino Grandi and Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano were well aware that their country needed at least two or three more years to fully develop its military potential.¹⁵² Mussolini himself, notwithstanding his hope that the Italian army would eventually be the standard-

¹⁴⁹ Ciro Paoletti, *A Military History of Italy*, Westport: Praeger, 2008, p.168.

¹⁵⁰ Some military historians hold the *Regia Aeronautica* in open contempt. Mac Gregor Knox goes as far as to say that the airplanes were "more deadly to their crews than to the enemy." Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, pp.43. In the opinion of this author, the statement is perhaps overly harsh, although the equipment was admittedly poor.

¹⁵¹ Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, pp.494-495.

¹⁵² Michel Ostenc, "La Non-Belligérance italienne, 4 septembre 1939 – 10 juin 1940," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 194 (1999): pp.79-99.

bearer for the new Fascist Italian race, knew that his bellicose rhetoric could only momentarily sweep under the rug the inherent weaknesses of the Italian army.¹⁵³

Small wonder then that Mussolini, after his perusal of the Badoglio report and in light of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 1939 and the following invasion of Poland, opted for a third way, a policy of “non-belligerence.” In truth, “non-belligerence” was more about procrastination than any effort to maintain an equal distance from both the Allies and the Axis, as was purported. The unequivocal stance of the Fascist regime regarding its German counterpart was encapsulated in a letter Mussolini sent Hitler on 5 January 1940. The Duce tried again to dissuade the Führer from launching any major campaigns until 1942, but at the same time he reiterated Italy’s willingness to remain loyal to its ideological partner. Mussolini’s plea to delay a prospective major Axis offensive should not be viewed as part of a mediating strategy. Quite obviously, the Duce desired to delay Italy’s entry to war to the very end in order to allow the navy, the air force and the army time to modernize. This strategy would have maximized Italy’s chances to have a significant impact in the forthcoming war.¹⁵⁴ The surprising alliance in August 1939 of Germany with the USSR could have represented the opportunity for which Italy was waiting in order to distance itself from German expansionist policy and side with France and Great Britain, a strategy endorsed by the Foreign Minister Ciano, who always had been wary of the Führer’s ambitions. On the

¹⁵³ In his diary Ciano recalled hearing Mussolini planning the reforestation of the Apennines in order to drop the average temperature in the peninsula. In Mussolini’s mind, this climatic change would toughen the Italians. Cited by Bianca Valota Cavallotti, “L’immagine Fascista dell’Impero,” in Ennio di Nolfo, Romain H. Rainero and Brunello Vigezzi (eds.) *L’Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938-1940)*, Milano: Marzorati, 1986, pp.121-144.

¹⁵⁴ An analysis of the controversial letter can be found in Ennio Di Nolfo, “Mussolini e la decisione italiana di entrare nella seconda guerra mondiale,” in Di Nolfo, Rainero and Vigezzi (eds.) *L’Italia e la politica di potenza in Europa (1938-1940)*, pp.25-33.

other hand, the devastating blow the Panzer divisions inflicted on Poland in September 1939 could not have failed to impress the Duce, at a time when his own army was anything but efficient. It is understandable then that Mussolini chose to tolerate the sudden German reversal of policy, a decision also confirmed in his memorandum of 31 March 1940. In it, the Duce openly advocated Italy's entry into the conflict, with the goal of breaking the politico-military encirclement in the Mediterranean. This "March to the Ocean" would be achieved through the annexations of the County of Nice, Corsica and some French colonies (Algeria, Tunisia, and Djibouti).¹⁵⁵ Shortly thereafter, the stunning German victories in Scandinavia and on the Western front definitely persuaded the Duce that, by siding with the Nazi regime, he had bet on the winning horse. Indeed, the Scandinavian campaign of April 1940, which flowed smoothly, underlined the capability of the German army to score quick successes without any external help. Yet, until May 1940, the Wehrmacht had only vanquished armed forces of small countries, not in any way comparable in armaments or number of soldiers to their German counterpart. Starting in 10 May 1940, the astounding victory of the Panzer divisions in France, however, demonstrated to the whole world that the Blitzkrieg strategy could smash into pieces the defensive line of one of the most prepared armies in Europe. Instead of focusing on the Maginot Line, the Germans chose to strike through the Ardennes with six Panzer divisions. French units in the sector, the 2nd Army of General André Corap and the 9th Army of General Charles Huntziger, lacked sufficient men to stop them, as the French General Staff had deemed the Ardennes sector, with its steep hills and heavily forested areas, utterly impenetrable. The pincer move, therefore, caught the French troops

¹⁵⁵ Strang, *On the Fiery March*, pp.340-341. Enrica Costa Bona, *Dalla guerra alla pace, Italia-Francia 1940-1947*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 1995, pp.12-17.

completely unaware and cut through the French defenses like a hot knife through butter.¹⁵⁶ Thereafter, the German thrust towards the sea isolated the main ally of the French army, the British Expeditionary Force, along with 170,000 French soldiers, in the Dunkerque pocket. With the successful unfolding of “Operation Dynamo,” (26 May – 4 June), the Allied forces were evacuated across the Channel, thus sealing the fate of France.¹⁵⁷

The astounding victory of the Panzer divisions drove Mussolini to order preparation for an immediate invasion of France across the Alps for fear of being denied a share of the spoils from the lightning success of the Wehrmacht’s campaign. Participation in the conflict was crucial both for domestic reasons (Mussolini’s speeches extensively glorified the *vis pugnandi* or the fighting spirit of the Italian race, which was one of the main characteristics of the new Fascist man) and external interests (Mussolini wanted Italy to be fully recognized as a first-class power).¹⁵⁸ Accordingly, the Duce turned a deaf ear to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the American President Franklin Roosevelt who urged that Italy remain neutral.¹⁵⁹ Instead, he persuaded his skeptical generals to wage war by predicting that the forthcoming conflict would last a few months at most, and so be over before the strains on the Italian military machine overwhelmed it.¹⁶⁰ Mussolini’s tirades against Britain and France in the famous speech from the Palazzo Venezia’s balcony on 10 June 1940 ended all illusions of appeasement. The Duce harangued the crowd, booming that “(a) great people is

¹⁵⁶ Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France, the Nazi Invasion of 1940*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp.33-47.

¹⁵⁷ Jackson, *The Fall of France, the Nazi Invasion of 1940*, pp.94-97.

¹⁵⁸ The Duce allegedly declared to Badoglio in his typically crude style: “I need a few thousand dead so as to be able to attend the peace conference as a belligerent.” Cited in Pietro Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War, Memories and Documents*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976, p.15.

¹⁵⁹ Mallett, *Mussolini and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1940*, pp.219-220.

¹⁶⁰ Costa Bona, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, pp.16-17.

truly such if it considers its own commitments as sacred and does not evade the supreme trials which determine the course of history,” then adding “a nation of 45 million is not really free without access to the ocean.” By opposing the German and Italian “fertile and young nations” against the French and British “sterile and aging nations,” Mussolini officially switched Italy from a policy of “non-belligerence” to one of “parallel war.” On that day, Italy declared war on France.

The 31st March Memorandum and the Piazza Venezia tirade both forcefully asserted Italian irredentist claims on French territories that were long-standing. The cession of the Savoy territories in 1860 had never been completely accepted by nationalists, especially by those in the highest echelons of the state. After all, Italian school manuals in the 1860s still claimed the County of Nice as Italian territory “under French domination.”¹⁶¹ With the rise of Mussolini, these territorial claims were made openly by the Fascist intelligentsia. The irredentist propaganda campaign, which was disseminated throughout the Côte d’Azur by the Marseille and Nice consulates, had seriously eroded relations between the Italian emigrants and the local population. In one instance, 21 April 1924, a violent confrontation erupted between Nice French and Italian Leftist militants on the one hand and members of the local *Fascio* and pro-Fascist Italian notables on the other over the commemoration of Nicola Bonservizi, the head of the Paris *Fascio*, who had been assassinated a few days before. Only

¹⁶¹ Auguste Brachet, *L’Italie qu’on voit et l’Italie qu’on ne voit pas*, Paris: Marion et Flammarion, 1883, p.38, cited in Paul Isoard, “Le 11 Novembre 1942”, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 62 (June 2001): p.189.

the personal intervention of the Alpes-Maritimes prefect prevented the escalation of violence.¹⁶²

This incident did not stop Fascist irredentist rhetoric propaganda in the department. *Il Pensiero Latino*, a journal established in 1925 and which strictly adhered to the irredentist line, was so vehement in its hatred of the *fuoriusciti* and of the French state that was giving them asylum that it was shut down in 1927 by the prefect. Moreover, its director, Giuseppe Torre, was tagged as *indésirable* and expelled from France.¹⁶³ The same fate also befell another Fascist agent provocateur, Ricciotti Garibaldi Jr., the grandson of the Italian national hero Giuseppe Garibaldi.¹⁶⁴ An opportunist who double-crossed anti-Fascist organizations by unscrupulously playing on his family name, Ricciotti Garibaldi Jr. was arrested by the French police in November 1926 and expelled shortly after.¹⁶⁵

In the interwar years, southern France had become the main battleground between Fascist and anti-Fascist groups. Despite repeated leftist intimidation and attacks,¹⁶⁶ the Fasci in the Alpes-Maritimes grew steadily until the late 1930s, largely due to support obtained through the efficient network of Italian state offices and organizations. Not only did the Alpes-Maritimes department now boast a consulate in Nice, two vice-consulates in Cannes

¹⁶² Ralph Schor, "Les Incidents de L'Église Saint-Jaume, premier coup d'arrêt au fascisme italien à Nice (21 avril 1924)," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 62 (June 2001), pp.113-120.

¹⁶³ Ralph Schor, "Le fascisme italien dans les Alpes-Maritimes 1922-1939", *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, vol. 42 (June 1991), pp.134-137.

¹⁶⁴ He should not be confused with his father Ricciotti Garibaldi, who fought alongside Giuseppe Garibaldi in the Franco-Prussian War.

¹⁶⁵ For more on the controversial figure of Ricciotti Garibaldi Jr., see Heyriès, *Les Garibaldiens de 14*, pp.332-344.

¹⁶⁶ The most deadly attack involved the bombing of a restaurant near Nice where Fascist veterans of World War I had gathered, leaving three people dead and fourteen wounded. For an account of the clashes between Fascist and anti-Fascist organizations in the Alpes-Maritimes in the 1920s, see Ralph Schor, "Les Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes 1919-1939," in Milza (ed.), *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940*, pp.583-587.

and Menton, and four consular offices in other cities, it also had six *Case degli Italiani* (Houses of the Italians) in Vence, Grasse, Menton, Beausoleil, Saint-Laurent-du-Var, Cannes, and most importantly, Nice.¹⁶⁷ These buildings acted as foci for the Italian communities inasmuch as they favored the activities of Italian state-endorsed organizations.¹⁶⁸ Local French authorities continued to meticulously track the whereabouts of irredentist groups.¹⁶⁹ In fact, they became so anxious about the Italian nationalist campaign that they reified the Italian migration wave as part of a scheme by the Fascist regime to colonize the French regions bordering Italy.

The suspiciousness of French state officials infected the local population, thus breeding an atmosphere of hostility against the Italians, especially those tied to political organizations.¹⁷⁰ Italian emigrants in France dreaded the coming of a Franco-Italian conflict since the “enemy within” myth was spreading as fast as the German divisions. The emigrants’ anxieties were well-founded. Prefects’ prerogatives had been extended already by the decree of 18 November 1939 which granted them the power to expel or intern “individuals who posed a threat to national defense and to public security.”¹⁷¹ A top-secret dispatch from the Ministry of Interior Albert Sarraut made clear the extent of their new authority: “(T)his decree ... put in your hands a formidable weapon ... a wartime law,

¹⁶⁷ For more on the *Case D'Italia*, see Caroline Pane, *Les «case d'italia»: Presence et representation du fascisme italien en France, Paris et le sud-est*, Master Sciences Historiques et Humanités, Université de Provence Aix-Marseille I, Université de Rome I La Sapienza, unpublished.

¹⁶⁸ Schor, “Les Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes 1919-1939,” in Milza (ed.), *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940*, p.588.

¹⁶⁹ For more on the surveillance of the Fascist militants and Italian state officials by French police, see Ralph Schor, “La surveillance des Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes 1919-1939”, *La frontière des Alpes-Maritimes de 1860 à nos jours*, Actes du Colloque de Nice, 11-12 janvier 1990.

¹⁷⁰ Schor, “Les Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes 1919-1939,” in Milza (ed.), *Les Italiens en France de 1914 à 1940*, pp.605-606.

¹⁷¹ *Journal Officiel*, 19 November 1939.

implemented for the duration of the war ... as long as the war will force us to face exceptional circumstances, which, both internally and externally, threatens the national safety.”¹⁷² It was a serious abrogation of the basic tenets of the Rights of Man and Citizen, paving the way for the repressive Vichy laws to come. Up to June 1940, this exceptional decree was directed against only Leftist activists such as the Italian *fuoriusciti*, as Fascist militants enjoyed immunity thanks to the frantic search by the French government for an entente with Mussolini’s regime.¹⁷³ The respite was brief, however. As the rumors of an impending Italian attack intensified, the Ministry of Interior issued a secret directive on 14 May 1940 which instructed the prefects to immediately “neutralize [Italians who were] notoriously Francophobe or *simply suspects* (italics mine)” upon the opening of the hostilities with Italy.¹⁷⁴

In order to weed out the hostile minority from the majority of Italians who remained friendly to their host country, French authorities, in the wake of Mussolini’s declaration of war on 10 June 1940, immediately plastered every town and village with posters urging Italian residents aged seventeen to sixty to report to the local police by 15 June 1940. In police stations, Italian citizens were invited to file a declaration of loyalty, which could entail an eventual tour of duty in the French army. The response was overwhelming: in Nice alone,

¹⁷² Archives Départementales des Alpes-Maritimes (hereafter ADAM) 171 W 1, Ministère de L’Intérieur, Cabinet du Ministre, dépêche n°12, Le Ministre de l’Intérieur à Messieurs les Prefets, Paris, 14 December 1939, p.4.

¹⁷³ For instance, roughly thirty Italians, almost all anarchists or communists, were arrested in the Alpes-Maritimes, twenty-six of them were imprisoned in the Vernet internment camp. For individual files of the Italians arrested in November 1939 in the Alpes-Maritimes, see ADAM 30 W 101.

¹⁷⁴ ADAM 616 W 241, 14 May 1940 directive from the Ministère de l’Intérieur to Messieurs les Préfets.

more than 5,000 emigrants flocked to police stations in the first three days.¹⁷⁵ In the Grasse region, 1532 signed the declaration, three of them partially (they refused to serve in the French army but agreed to submit to French civil authority). Only six refused.¹⁷⁶ This kind of enthusiastic response was not confined to the Alpes-Maritimes. In the district of Digne-Les-Bains, the capital of the Basses-Alpes, more than five hundred emigrants, the vast majority of the Italian male population, lined up to sign the oath. The same happened in the Forcalquier, another of the larger *arrondissements* in the Basses-Alpes.¹⁷⁷

We must be careful not to infer too much from these numbers. At first sight, the results could give one the impression of the Italian population unanimously siding, with a few exceptions, with their host country, to the point of embracing its fight against their or their ancestors' original country. In most cases, this analysis is probably correct: many Italians wanted to show their gratitude to a nation that had granted them political asylum, economic prosperity and a chance to build a family. Some of them had even seen their children conscripted into the French army. A more careful examination however, reveals a more nuanced picture. It could be argued indeed that more than a few Italians fled out of fear of possible retaliation if they refused. A few, in bad faith, committed themselves to France only to change sides later with the arrival of the Italian occupation force. Such behavior would be severely punished after the war by the various *Comités d'Épuration*.¹⁷⁸ Finally, a minority simply failed to report to the police stations. If some of them, in good faith, were

¹⁷⁵ Jean-Louis Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes 1939-1945, un département dans la tourmente*, Nice: Editions Serre, 1989, p.60.

¹⁷⁶ ADAM, 616 W 241.

¹⁷⁷ A complete list of the Italian residents who filed declarations of loyalty can be found in Archives Départementales des Alpes-de-Haute-Provence (hereafter ADAHP) 42 W 81.

¹⁷⁸ The ADAM 318 W series has numerous examples of this kind of conduct.

not aware of the authorities' injunction, and that was particularly true in the most remote inland areas where communication was difficult, some of those living in towns deliberately refused to heed the order. The French authorities automatically equated this last group with the Fascist militants. Some of these emigrants, however, refused to sign, not out of loyalty to Mussolini's regime, but out of fear of the dreadful prospect of having to face relatives and friends conscripted into the Italian army. Needless to say, the French bureaucracy eyed these recalcitrant emigrants with considerable suspicion.

French authorities did not wait for the deadline to begin their arrests. In fact, sticking to the letter of the 14 May directive, the Prefects opted for a "carrot and stick" strategy. Massive round-ups of suspected Fascist militants were carried out at the same time as the placards were posted. Starting in the afternoon on 10 June, policemen were hastily dispatched to arrest known suspect Italians. This category encompassed any Italian working in or volunteering for Italian-state endorsed organizations such as *Dante Alighieri* and Italian schools, and emigrants working for the Italian state (namely in consulates and in the Embassy), with the significant exclusion of the few Italians with diplomatic or consular status, which immunized them from penalty.¹⁷⁹ Men were handcuffed, sometimes in front of their family, and taken away. A few were even beaten by overzealous policemen or openly ridiculed in the streets by hostile crowds. In fact, it was quite miraculous that nobody got killed in the frenzied atmosphere that followed the start of the Italian offensive strike through the Alps which began on 21 June 1940. The French population was furious over Italy's attack

¹⁷⁹ The precipitous departure of the Italian ambassador in Paris and the few Italians holding diplomatic passports or exit visas is described by Ambassador Raffaele Guariglia in MINCULPOP, *Gli Italiani nei campi di concentramento in Francia; documenti e testimonianze*, Rome: Società Editrice del Libro Italiano, 1940, pp.15-25.

on France, contemptuously christened “*un coup de poignard dans le dos*” (“a stab in the back”). The figure of the traitorous Italian, by nature a turncoat imbued with Machiavellian traits, prone to betraying his old friends for selfish reasons, re-emerged with a vengeance.

All those arrested in the Côte d’Azur were first held in the Beziers (Languedoc) bullfighting arena, staying there for one full week in appalling conditions. Prisoners were forced to sleep in the open in the stands, with little shelter against inclement weather. Food was scarce and of dubious quality, while hygienic standards were abysmal as there were only six washrooms for three thousand people. Eventually all these prisoners were herded into different internment camps, among them Vernet (Ariege) and Saint-Cyprien (Pyrénées-Orientales).¹⁸⁰ Both camps antedated the round-ups of Italians and had been run since their inception by the French army (*Garde Mobile*). The St-Cyprien and the Vernet camps had

¹⁸⁰ Most of this information is from MINCULPOP, *Gli Italiani nei campi di concentramento in Francia; documenti e testimonianze*. This book was commissioned a few months after the armistice by the Italian Minister of Popular Culture (MINCULPOP) in an effort to discredit the French state. The book is presented as a succession of memoirs and letters, sometimes with pictures of the original ones, written in or after the detention. Apart from obvious rhetorical exaggerations and the occasional panegyric of the Duce, the book is a goldmine of interesting details, corroborated by testimonies from more impartial sources such as Leo Valiani, the future partisan leader, and Arthur Koestler, a Jewish-Hungarian author. See also Milza, *Voyage en Ritalie*, p.352; Anne Grynberg, *Les camps de la honte, les internés juifs des camps français (1939-1944)*, Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 1991. Life in Vernet camp is extensively covered in Arthur Koestler, *The Scum of the Earth*, London: Hutchinson, 1968, pp.101-130. Leo Valiani openly endorsed Koestler’s book in his article, “Io e Koestler nel campo di concentramento,” originally published in the October-December 1983 of *Nuova Antologia*, an Italian journal of literature, and which appeared in the appendix of the 1985 Italian edition of *Scum of the Earth*, Arthur Koestler, *Schiama della Terra*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985, pp.249-260. An account of life in the St-Cyprien camp as seen from the perspective of a Spanish Republican can be found in Manuel Andújar, *Saint-Cyprien, plage...: camp de concentration*, Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2003. One of the most detailed books on the St-Cyprien camp and village is the book by Pierre Cros, *Saint-Cyprien 1939-1945, le village, le camp, la guerre*, Canet: Editions Trabucaire, 2001. Surprisingly, the book fails to mention the thousands of Italian prisoners who were interned in the camp. Saint-Cyprien is a renowned seaside town today.

been created in July and October 1939 respectively.¹⁸¹ Prior to the arrival of the Italians, they had housed a heterogeneous population ranging from convicts with non-political criminal records to German and Austrian citizens who had escaped the Nazi regime, foreign Communists, namely those who fought with the International Brigades, and Spanish militants fleeing after the end of the Spanish Civil War.¹⁸² Thus, in an ironic twist of fate, Fascist militants ended up imprisoned with their hated compatriots, the *fuoriusciti*. It is unclear if their distrust of one another was set aside in light of their common misery. One thing is for certain: all endured incredible hardship. In Vernet, prisoners slept in crude shacks with no illumination. The lucky ones were given a little hay to build makeshift mattresses; the less fortunate slept on wooden planks. The food was tasteless at best and spoiled in the worst cases. No cutlery or dishes were provided, so the prisoners had to eat with their hands from discarded tins unearthed from the garbage heaps. The men worked six hours daily at road-building and camp maintenance chores without any kind of protective equipment. As one resident explained, "... as regards food, accommodation and hygiene, Vernet was even below the level of a Nazi concentration camp."¹⁸³ Prisoners in Saint-Cyprien, most of them Italians from the Southern France departments (Alpes-Maritimes, Bouches-du-Rhone, Basses-Alpes, Var), did not fare any better. The Saint-Cyprien camp was twenty-five kilometers from Perpignan on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. This condition exposed the prisoners to quite inclement and changeable weather. The combined effect of sand and wind not only

¹⁸¹ The Vernet and Saint-Cyprien camps were by no means isolated exceptions. In 1939 and 1940, more than 150 internment camps existed. For a complete list of these locations, see Marcel Bervoets-Tragholz, *La liste de Saint-Cyprien*, Bruxelles: Alice Éditions, 2006, pp.174-177.

¹⁸² Anne Grynberg and Anne Charaudeau, "Les camps d'internement," in Milza, Peschanski (eds.), *Exils et Migration, Italiens et Espagnols en France, 1938-1946*, p.150.

¹⁸³ Koestler, *The Scum of the Earth*, p.107.

reduced the prisoners' clothes to tatters, but also encouraged skin diseases.¹⁸⁴ Prisoners slept in the damp sand, with a minimal layer of hay as insulation. Food rations, consisting of sticky rice, a few vegetables of dubious quality and a fetid soup, were minimal. Lice were so widespread they became the most frequent source of conversation among prisoners.¹⁸⁵ Nevertheless, what remained engraved in the collective memory of the Vernet and St-Cyprien prisoners was first and foremost their arbitrary mistreatment by the French military jailers. Italians and prisoners of other nationalities alike were constantly humiliated with insults, slaps with leather crops and occasional beatings, sometimes resulting in hospitalization. Furthermore, the camp guards allegedly profited from a flourishing black market in the camp.

If Mussolini's declaration of war on 10 June 1940 was the beginning of an ordeal for many Italians in France, the same could be said for the Italian armed forces. To fully appreciate the extent of Mussolini's unrealistic order, one must first understand the degree to which the Italian army was still woefully unprepared. The Duce's military advisors had continued to deliver alarming reports. As recently as the end of May, the Army Chief of Staff, Marshall Rodolfo Graziani gave a grim picture of the state of the Italian armed forces. The forty-nine Italian divisions quartered on Italian soil were inferior in terms of firepower to the French divisions, owing to the woeful binary division reform, an inferior number of artillery groups in each division (three against the five of the French divisions) and a shortage

¹⁸⁴ "The Wind! Adjusting the entire life [of the concentration camp] at the whim of its music, in the trances of an infernal spirit, a historical malediction, The Wind!" Manuel Andújar, *Saint-Cyprien, plage...: camp de concentration*, p.60.

¹⁸⁵ *Saint-Cyprien, plage...: camp de concentration*, pp.71-72.

in artillery and mortar ammunition.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, echoing the Duce's 4 May 1940 Memorandum, Graziani lamented the inadequacy of the obsolete artillery guns which dated from the First World War.¹⁸⁷ The artillery was too cumbersome to be carried up the mule tracks to positions where the guns could engage the concrete bunkers dotting the Alps. The bulky artillery in fact was only one factor explaining the appalling lack of mobility of the *Regio Esercito*. The Italian army needed twice as many trucks as it had in order to mobilize its units. The 12,600 requisitioned trucks they did have were of uneven quality, and to make matters worse, all the drivers suffered from poor training.¹⁸⁸ Italian commanders tried to solve the mobility issue with the use of horses and mules, but even the latter, most of which came from the warmer climates of southern Italy, proved unreliable.¹⁸⁹ The Italians were trailing not only in terms of infantry and artillery mobility, but also in terms of tanks. Graziani alarmingly noted that "the two armored divisions were such only on the paper," as the Italian armed forces could boast only light L3 tanks, seventy medium ones and not a single heavy tank or armored car. Thus Graziani ruefully concluded that "(a)s of now, the

¹⁸⁶ Washington National Archives, Archival Research Catalog (hereafter ARC), Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 130, A1163, Rapporto Segreto n°11 al Duce sull'efficienza dell'esercito, Rome, 25 May 1940.

¹⁸⁷ The *Regio Esercito* was still using captured Austrian-Hungarian artillery in the 1940s. MacGregor Knox, "The Sources of Italy's Defeat in 1940: Bluff or Institutionalized Incompetence," in Fink Hull and Knox (eds.) *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890-1945*, pp.258-259. The Duce allegedly confessed in front of army generals that the backwardness of Italian artillery "was a problem which disturbs my sleep." Cited by Mario Montanari, *L'Esercito Italiano alla vigilia della seconda guerra mondiale*, Roma: Ufficio Storico SME, 1993, p.30.

¹⁸⁸ Archivio, Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore dell' Esercito (hereafter AUSSME), DS 85bis, Comando I Corpo D'Armata, Stralcio delle osservazioni e conclusioni relative alle operazioni svolte dal 10 al 25 giugno 1940.XVIII, pp.1-2; Comando Artiglieria del I Corpo D'Armata, Stralcio delle osservazioni e conclusioni relative alle operazioni svolte dal 10 al 25 giugno, p.4.

¹⁸⁹ AUSSME, DS 85bis, Comando Settore Operativo "Bardonecchia," Ufficio del Capo di S.M., Sez. Oper. e Serv., Stralcio delle osservazioni e conclusioni relative alle operazioni svolte dal 10 al 25 giugno, p.16.

Army does not possess the armor and general modern equipment that have made possible the recent swift German penetration.”¹⁹⁰

In truth, the Italian army was not the only one struggling. The *Armée des Alpes*, the French formation that, since October 1939, had the responsibility of guarding the Alpine border, had watched its numbers dwindle rapidly between November 1939 and May 1940. Units had been relocated to the northeastern front to shore up the Maginot Line Proper following the French declaration of war against Germany on 3 September 1939. Thus, the Army of the Alps had lost more than half of its troops in six months, falling from 550,000 in October 1939 to a mere 175,000 in May 1940, with only 85,000 soldiers ready to fight.¹⁹¹ On the other side of the Alps, by 10 June 1940 the Italian army boasted nearly 300,000 privates and NCOs and more than 12,000 officers, divided into the 4th Army in the northern half of the Alps and the 1st Army in the southern half. Therefore, the *Gruppo Armate Ovest* (Army Group West), officially led by the heir to the Italian throne, Umberto di Savoia, Prince of Piedmont, but which in reality took orders from the Army Chief of Staff, Marshall Rodolfo Graziani, outnumbered the Army of the Alps by three to one.¹⁹²

Several factors nevertheless compensated for the imbalance of forces. The geographical features of the Alps clearly favored defense over attack. In 1860, Cavour and Vittorio Emanuele II could not have foreseen that their decision to hand the Savoy and the

¹⁹⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 130, A1163, Rapporto segreto n°11 al Duce sull'efficienza dell'esercito, Rome, 25 May 1940.

¹⁹¹ Henri Azeau, *La Guerre Franco-Italienne, Juin 1940*. Paris, Presses de la Cité, 1967, p.63. Vincenzo Gallinari estimated the French forces in the Alpine region at 200,000. See Vincenzo Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, Roma: Ufficio Storico SME, 1981, pp.75-77.

¹⁹² The full list of the Gruppo Armate Ovest's units is available in Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, pp.51-63. Marius Sarraz-Bournet, a member of the future French delegation attached to the CIAF in Turin, asserts that Italian troops totaled 1 million soldiers. This seems a gross exaggeration, see Marius Sarraz-Bournet, *Témoignage d'un silencieux*, Paris: Éditions Self, 1948, p.60.

County of Nice to France would have such grave strategic consequences eighty years later. France got the lion's share of the mountainous land, giving her the advantage in case of an Italian attack because of two, or in some cases even three, protective parallel ridges. The High Alps formed a formidable strategic barrier with their steep mountainsides and ravines. On the contrary, Piedmont was particularly exposed to possible French attack owing to the lack of depth of its mountain range.¹⁹³

The French army, moreover, did not rely solely on natural barriers. Starting in 1928, French military engineers built a network of concrete fortifications on the Alpine crests which dominated the entire mountain range. The *Ligne Maginot Alpine*, unlike its northeastern counterpart, the Maginot Line Proper, exploited the jagged natural terrain. Therefore, rather than an intricate web of armored forts with an uninterrupted line of interlocking fire, the Maginot Line of the Alps featured isolated, concrete-and-steel positions for machineguns and other weapons, located so as to command the few access routes and mule-paths on the Franco-Italian border, such as the road crossing the Col de Larche in the Basses Alpes. The Alpes-Maritimes border, on the other hand, was considerably more porous than the northern part of the Alps. For this reason, a wide array of small and medium entrenched *ouvrages* dotted the fortified sector from St. Etienne-de-Tinée to Menton, rightfully considered the weakest spot of the *Ligne Maginot Alpine*.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ An orographic study of the Alps can be found in Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, pp.9-17.

¹⁹⁴ For more details on the Maginot Line of the Alps, see Daniel David, "Les fortifications alpines françaises," *Revue historique des armées*, 250, (2008): pp.4-15; J.E. Kaufmann and H.W. Kaufmann, *The Maginot Line, None Shall Pass*, Westport, Praeger, 1997, pp.76-83. It is worth noting that the Maginot Line of the Alps was built before the Maginot Line in northeastern France, as in the late 1920s Fascist Italy was considered a greater threat than Weimar Germany.

It would be a mistake, however, to depict the *Armée des Alpes* as a collection of static units waiting passively in bunkers for the enemy's attack. There were still a number of elite Alpine troops available despite the transfer of the rest of their mobile divisions to the northern front. The French High Command judiciously acknowledged the importance of the *section éclaireur-skieurs* (ski-scout platoons), or S.E.S., in a possible war in the Alps. These deep reconnaissance troops had an intimate knowledge of the mountains as most of them were *enfants du pays*. In June 1940, the S.E.S. would become a constant thorn in the side of the Italian formations, with their hit-and-run tactics.¹⁹⁵ The Italians also had troops who excelled in mountaineering: the *Alpini* and the *Guardie alla Frontiera*, an Alpine corps created in 1937 for the task of manning the defensive network of forts on the Italian side of the Alps.¹⁹⁶ Yet, Graziani himself admitted that the Italian army lacked enough scouting units.¹⁹⁷ In fact, the Italian General Staff was deeply worried about the danger of a French attack across the Alps. As early as January 1938, the P.R. 12 (*Piano Radunata 12* or Staging Plan 12), as well as in its updated versions of April 1939 and March 1940, assumed the formations on the Italian western border would take a defensive stance. This prudence stemmed from the realization that the French army, at least until May 1940, could boast

¹⁹⁵ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, p.75.

¹⁹⁶ The *Guardia Alla Frontiera* (Frontier Guards or G.a.F.) was made official by royal decree on 28 April 1937. For more on the *Guardia Alla Frontiera*, see Massimo Ascoli, *La Guardia Alla Frontiera*, Roma: Stato Maggiore Esercito, Ufficio Storico, 2003; Alessandro Bernasconi and Daniela Collavo, *Dei Sacri Confini Guardia Sicura: la Guardia Alla Frontiera, 1934-1943*, Trento: Temi, 2002.

¹⁹⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 130, IT A1163, Rapporto segreto n°11 al Duce sull'efficienza dell'esercito, Rome, 25 May 1940, p.3.

many more troops in the Alpine region than the Italian army, while the Alpine terrain favored attacks from French territory.¹⁹⁸

Until the onset of the hostilities, Italian military officials at all levels were dubious that the *Regio Esercito* could effectively penetrate the mountains. Graziani and the Under-Secretary at the Ministry of War, Ubaldo Soddu, voiced their skepticism at a meeting with the Supreme Chief of the Italian General Staff, Marshall Badoglio, on 9 April 1940.¹⁹⁹ Local commanders were concerned as well. In a very insightful report dated 4 June 1940, General Luigi Negri, head of the *Corpo D'Armata Alpino*, confirmed these fears, when he outlined the challenges of an attack across the Northern Alpine sector (Baltea – Orco – Sture). He stressed that the Italian units would probably meet “serious difficulties of implementing, sustaining and supporting the attack, owing to the lack of adequate communications routes and of positions accessible to artillery,” while adding that “everywhere the terrain presents serious difficulties while favoring the enemy both as concerns the defense and the counter maneuver.” He later concluded, that in light of the foul weather in the Alpine peaks, at least three months were required to deploy the army in his sector.²⁰⁰

The start of the war also made it glaringly apparent that the Italian chain of command was severely flawed. Amazingly, the commanders of the Army Group West and of the 1st and 4th Armies learned of Italy’s entry to war through the radio broadcast of Mussolini’s speech, as no one in the Army’s upper echelons had bothered to inform them. Only in the late

¹⁹⁸ For more on the evolution of the P.R. 12, see Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, pp.22-38.

¹⁹⁹ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, p.42.

²⁰⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 500, IT 6673, Rapporto Generale Luigi Negri, “L’Operazione, sue modalità e organizzazione,” 4 June 1940.

evening of 10 June 1940, several hours after Mussolini's speech, were hostilities formalized by a telegram from the Army General Staff.²⁰¹ On the other side of the Alps, General Olry, the commander of the *Armée des Alpes*, did not wait for orders to act. On 10 June 1940, upon hearing the Duce's speech, Olry gave instructions to blow up bridges and railways by midnight, using fifty-three tons of explosives, to bar access routes to France. These orders were carried out with such thoroughness and speed that many French civilians living near the Italian border in Savoy and in the Alpes-Maritimes were cut off in their own retreat.²⁰² The overzealousness of the military engineers coupled with the sluggish bureaucracy of French local authorities helps explain why most of the escaping civilians brought very little luggage, as there had been no warning issued. Food supplies and cattle were left behind.

The only exception to the chaotic evacuation of the population living near the Franco-Italian border was the city of Menton. Because the Mentonese coastal region was especially exposed to possible attacks from Italy (the Italian border was only ten kilometers away), and with the steady deterioration of Franco-Italian relations, evacuation plans had been devised in the second half of the 1930s. Fearing that the massing of three Italian divisions near the border was a harbinger of a military invasion, French local authorities launched the complete evacuation of Menton, Carnolès and Cap-Martin on the evening of 3 June, under the codename "Executez Mandrin." More than 13,000 people, with minimal luggage, were transferred in convoys of buses and trucks at first to Cannes and Antibes, and,

²⁰¹ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, p.91.

²⁰² For the Savoy, see Azeau, *La Guerre Franco-Italienne*, pp.52-53; for the Alpes-Maritimes, see Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, pp.61-62.

after a few days, on 7 June, further west in the Pyrénées-Orientales department.²⁰³ As in Savoy, the evacuation was not executed without problems. Local French officials, such as policemen and firefighters, who were responsible for protecting both public and private goods, were also forcefully evacuated by the French army and the local *gendarmerie*. In order to persuade the skeptical dwellers to leave almost all their belongings, the municipal officials in charge of the civilians' departure stressed that the Alpine Maginot line would thwart any Italian strike while in the meantime, French soldiers would guard the houses against any possible wrongdoing.²⁰⁴ Ironically, it seems that these same soldiers extensively looted the homes, especially the most isolated ones.²⁰⁵

If the local French authorities of the *Armée des Alpes* had known how reluctant the Italian General Staff was, they would not have rushed to evacuate the border areas. On 7 June 1940, a telegram from *Superesercito*²⁰⁶ ordered the Army Group West to keep an “absolute defensive behavior both on land and on air,” which meant it was strictly prohibited from crossing the border and from shooting, unless provoked.²⁰⁷ A telegram on 9 June from the SMRE ordered the strengthening of the passive defenses against possible French tank

²⁰³ Pascal Molinari and Jean-Louis Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, Menton: Société d'art et d'histoire du mentonnais, 1984, pp.19-21. A first-hand description of the difficult living conditions of the refugees in the Pyrénées-Orientales can be found in ADAM, Fonds privés, 1 J 236, Victor Lefebure, *Récit manuscrit de l'évacuation de Menton et de la vie à menton pendant la seconde guerre mondiale*, unpublished, Cahiers n°1 “L’histoire des évacués de Menton en juin 1940,” pp.22-103.

²⁰⁴ ADAM, Fonds privés, 1 J 236, Victor Lefebure, *Récit manuscrit de l'évacuation de Menton et de la vie à menton pendant la seconde guerre mondiale*, unpublished, Cahiers n°1 “L’histoire des évacués de Menton en juin 1940,” pp.8-9.

²⁰⁵ Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.21.

²⁰⁶ *Superesercito* (Superarmy) became the codename in telegrams for the Italian General Staff Army in the Second World War.

²⁰⁷ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, p.92.

incursions from the Alps.²⁰⁸ This paradoxical “war without hostilities,” in the words of General Pietro Pintor, the Commander of the 1st Army, was the product of the severe shortcomings of the overall Italian strategy. With little room to maneuver due to the severe lack of resources and the failure of the Germans to provide information, let alone consult with the Italians, the Italian General Staff had a hard time crafting a coherent war policy, even for a limited war such as the Battle of the Alps.²⁰⁹

The timidity of the Italian strategy could also be explained by the gross overestimation of the strength of the French army made by Italian intelligence. Even a few days before the declaration of war, the General Staff was persuaded that “from Geneva to Mentone more than 1 million soldiers had been deployed.”²¹⁰ While Italian generals mused about possible courses of action to overcome the operational stalemate, on the night of 12 June, English bombers dropped bombs on Turin while S.E.S. scouting groups engaged Italian Alpine outposts in skirmishes.²¹¹ This bizarre situation, where the nation which had declared war not only failed to attack but was exposed to enemy incursions, lasted until 15 June.

The collapse of the Reynaud government and the immediate appointment of Marshal Petain, who was widely known as an advocate of a policy of moderation towards Germany, persuaded the hesitant Duce to reverse his strategy in the Alps. On 15 June, Mussolini gave a

²⁰⁸ AUSSME, DS 21, Allegato al Diario Storico Il Corpo D’Armata, Protocollo Segreto SMRE “Difesa attiva a.c.”, 9 June 1940.

²⁰⁹ A few days before the armistice, a circular from the Italian General Staff warned that, due to a shortage of equipment, in particular tent flies, troops were to be stationed in private houses wherever possible. See circolare 9 June, Mario Roatta, Archivio, Ufficio Storico Stato Maggiore dell’ Esercito (hereafter AUSSME), Fondo L/14, b.41, f.1, cited by Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane 1935-1943*, p.248.

²¹⁰ Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (hereafter ASMAE), Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 46, Gallina al Ministero della Guerra, 30 May 1940.

²¹¹ See for instance the swift incursion of a small Italian outpost at the Maddalena pass which caused the death of one Italian NCO and the wounding of two other soldiers, AUSSME, DS 21, Allegato 39 al Diario Storico Il Corpo D’Armata, Rapporto sul fatto d’armi di Colle della Maddalena del 13/6/1940.

peremptory order to Army Group West to switch from its defensive posture to an offensive stance in three days, a task which would have been daunting even for the Wehrmacht, let alone for a poorly mechanized army which lacked even basic equipment. General Badoglio, the Supreme Chief of the Italian General Staff, was flabbergasted by the dictum of the Duce. The Duce, however, was adamant, as he feared that an eventual Franco-German armistice would deprive Italy of the coveted irredentist lands if the Italian army failed to invade French territory before the peace talks.²¹² In compliance with the Duce's orders, two directives trickled down from the Italian General Staff to local commanders; the first one gave the green light for brief incursions into French territory while the second, by stating that the directive P.R. 12 was surpassed by the course of events, instructed the forward units to prepare to cross the Alps in case of a possible disintegration of the *Armée des Alpes*.²¹³

These initiatives, limited as they were, came to a grinding halt shortly thereafter. Late in the afternoon of 18 June, Army Group West received another telegram from *Superesercito* that "the hostilities against France had to be immediately suspended upon receipt of this order," while adding that "the preparation for the previously announced West Group's operations [the offensive in the Alps] should continue at the same pace."²¹⁴ The motivations

²¹² Dario Gariglia, *Popolo italiano, corri alle armi! 10-25 giugno 1940, l'attacco alla Francia*, Peveragno: Blue Edizioni, 2001, p.33.

²¹³ AUSSME, DS 21, , Protocollo 173/Op. Comando I Armata ai Comandi II CA, III CA, XV CA "Colpi di mano e ricognizioni di pattuglie," Diario Storico II Corpo D'Armata, Allegato 46bis, 16 June 1940; Protocollo 167/Op. Predisposizioni operative, from Comando I Armata to Comandi II CA, III CA, XV CA, Diario Storico II Corpo D'Armata, Allegato 48, 17 June 1940; AUSSME DS 18, Protocollo 4809/II/PSS Occupazione posizioni oltre confine, Diario Storico Divisione Alpina Taurinense, Allegato 11, 16 June 1940.

²¹⁴ AUSSME, DS 2072, Protocollo 89 Superesercito al Comando Gruppo Armate Ovest, 17 June 1940.

behind these confused orders still elude scholars.²¹⁵ It certainly highlighted the massive unpredictability of Italian strategy and its utter dependence on external events, traits that became a leitmotiv of the Italian army's campaigns in the Second World War. In the short term, this unilateral ceasefire only worsened the *Regio Esercito*'s readiness. When the Italian soldiers heard the rumor of a suspension of hostilities, they began to celebrate the end of the war and tried to fraternize with their French counterparts. The upper echelons keenly understood that these friendly contacts would make it that much more difficult for the soldiers to resume fighting.²¹⁶ Front commanders were asked to explain to the rank-and-file the "high political reasons" behind the apparently contradictory orders.²¹⁷

The Duce's meeting with the Führer in Munich on the 18 June laid bare the weakness of Italy's position. Mussolini's claims on Nice, Corsica and Tunisia were deemed by Hitler to be serious nuisances in the delicate armistice negotiations with the French delegation. The Italian dictator thus understood that any territorial claim needed to be backed up by a formal military occupation before the start of the armistice talks.²¹⁸ For this reason, on 19 June, Mussolini immediately issued a counter-order urging Italian troops to seek contact with French units and to pursue them in their eventual retreat. This injunction was further motivated by the belief, which later proved fatally wrong, that the *Armée des Alpes* was disbanding in light of Pétain's address on 17 June in which he urged French soldiers to stop

²¹⁵ Dario Gariglio, *Popolo italiano! corri alle armi : 10-25 giugno 1940, l'attacco alla Francia*, Peveragno (Cuneo): Blu, 2001, p.56; Alberto Turinetti di Priero, *La battaglia delle Alpi, 10-25 giugno 1940, La Divisione Superga e gli Alpini nell'Alta Valle di Susa*, Susalibri, 1990, p.47.

²¹⁶ AUSSME, DS 21, Protocollo 186/Op. from Comando 1 Armata to Comando II CA, Diario Storico II Corpo D'Armata, Allegato 55, 17 June 1940; Azeau, *La guerre franco-italienne*, p.114.

²¹⁷ DS AUSSME DS 18, Fonogramma dal Comando Settore Operativo Germanasca Pellice al Comando Battaglione Alpini Pinerolo, Pra', Diario Storico 3° Reggimento Alpini, Allegato 56, 18 June 1940.

²¹⁸ Romain Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France, les rapports entre la France de Vichy et l'Italie de Mussolini, 10 juin 1940 – 8 septembre 1943*, Vincennes: Service Historique de l'Armée, 1985, p.29.

fighting.²¹⁹ Local commanders deluded themselves with the belief that the French alpine army would dissolve as soon as the Italians unleashed their offensive.²²⁰ As a local commander put it, “a strong resistance cannot be anticipated, owing to the shaken morale of French Army units.”²²¹ These rumors spread like wildfire among the lower ranks: Italian officers were already joking with their soldiers about behaving themselves with the French girls,²²² while the Italian General Staff wrongly estimated that the German push towards Lyon would compel the French High Command to dismantle their Alpine garrisons.²²³ Thus, the Italian units ascended the mountain range in orderly columns and taking few precautions. Their purpose was to occupy as much French territory as possible before the armistice was signed. The Italian troops were heading towards certain doom.

On 21 June, the bewildered Italian troops were overwhelmed by a barrage of machinegun and rifle fire, mortar and artillery shells. The Italians, bogged down in the snow and taken by surprise, were easy targets for French marksmen perched above. S.E.S. squads repeatedly ambushed units on the winding mule trails.²²⁴ Italian artillery, essential to counter the French fortified positions, could not be towed up to the summits, due to inclement

²¹⁹ “C’est le cœur serre que je vous dis aujourd’hui qu’il faut cesser le combat.”

²²⁰ AUSSME, DS 5, Protocollo 143 from Comando II Corpo D’Armata on Operazione “M,” Diario Storico 4° Divisione Alpina Cuneense, Allegato 5, 20 June 1940. As a matter of fact, the Italians believed the morale of the Armée des Alpes was already plummeting as early as the beginning of June, before the start of hostilities. See ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 357, IT 4632, Comando del II Corpo D’Armata, Situazione francese sul fronte del II° Corpo D’Armata al giorno 6 giugno 1940-XVIII, 6 June 1940, p.4-5. The Italians were confident the French soldiers originating from the Italian diaspora would be the first to desert.

²²¹ AUSSME DS 18, Protocollo 5000/II/P.S.S. Comandante Taurinense General Micheletti "Occupazione della conca di Bourg S. Maurice e S. Foy," Diario Storico 1° Divisione Alpina Taurinense, Allegato 14, 19 June 1940. Micheletti was in fact more worried about alleged partisan bands of *fuoriusciti*.

²²² Turinetti di Priero, *La Battaglia delle Alpi*, p.62.

²²³ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, p.129. Amazingly, overconfident Italian high officers made the same mistake in the campaign against Greece as they wrongly assumed that the Greek army would offer only minimal resistance at best. See Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane 1935-1943*, p.262.

²²⁴ Gariglio, *Popolo Italiano, corri alle armi!*, p.63.

weather conditions. In fact, the Italians' inability to overcome fortified obstacles was probably the major operational reason for the Italian's poor performance in the Battle of the Alps. Italian units were short of sappers, had only a minimal knowledge of French gun emplacements, and were not helped by Italian air force. Indeed, the chronic lack of cooperation between the *Regio Esercito* and the *Aeronautica* prevented any kind of coordinated assault. Commanders of front-line army units were forbidden to communicate directly with their navy or air force counterparts, as all coordination had to be effected through the higher level command.²²⁵ In any event, the air force had its own problems. Pilots had to fly in newly-arrived airplanes with little training, and in some cases lacked detailed maps of the French border. For the latter reason, and because of heavy fog and recurrent blizzards, half of the bombers in missions over the Alps between the 21 and 24 June did not even locate their objectives.²²⁶ In some cases, Italian airplanes bombed their own troops.²²⁷

The stormy Alpine weather was probably the best ally the French had. Apart from nullifying any possible threats from the sky, heavy snowfalls slowed the Italian progress to a snail's pace. Italian troops' morale plummeted as much as did Alpine temperatures. At night, temperatures sank far below the freezing point, forcing soldiers to huddle together in makeshift shelters which, in almost every case, were torn away by the howling wind. As blankets froze, shivering Italian soldiers were unable to rest, while their French counterparts

²²⁵ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, p.138.

²²⁶ Giuseppe Santoro, *L'aeronautica italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale*, Roma: Danesi, 1950, cited by Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane 1935-1943*, p.251.

²²⁷ For instance, on 23 June, Italian airplanes mistook Capo Mortola for Cap Martin, notwithstanding the fact that the two peaks were ten kilometers apart, thus targeting Italian artillery groups instead of the ones who were pinning down Italian units in Menton. See AUSSME, DS 27, *Diario Storico XV CA*, journal entry 23 June, 11:40 a.m.

were protected in casemates. With little rest, no shelter and thick fog, it is truly remarkable that any Italian units managed to mount assaults on the French positions.

If the Alpine climate strained the soldiers' will to its very limit, it also disrupted the logistics of the *Regio Esercito*. As Italian units had only a few days to ready themselves for battle, they couldn't stockpile food and ammunition supplies in the forward area. The weather, moreover, prevented any provisioning through motorized means. Forward units, cut off from their supply lines, were literally starving. Wounded soldiers had to be carried by stretcher down the precarious slopes to the units' main base. In fact, many local commanders complained that the stormy weather did not permit the units' headquarters to be moved up the mountainous heights where it might have been possible to maintain contact with the troops engaged.²²⁸

From 22 to 24 June, the battle raged along the whole Alpine border. On the northern half of the front, Italian troops were bogged down by the combination of fierce French resistance and extreme weather, to the point that, by the time of the armistice, they had penetrated only four kilometers into French territory. In the south, units of the *Regio Esercito* enjoyed more clement weather and were less hindered by terrain. Therefore, in the Alpes-Maritimes, the Italian army was able to score some minor successes, even though the advance into French territory was hardly a promenade. To compensate for the greater geographical vulnerability there, the French had built a multi-layered cordon of fortifications supported by 38,000 soldiers. On the other side, the *Regio Esercito* mustered five divisions (Cuneo, Ravenna, Modena, Cosseria and Cremona) split between the III *Corpo D'Armata*

²²⁸ AUSSME DS 21, Telegramma Comando Divisione Alpina Cuneense al Comando Seconda Armata, Diario Storico II Corpo D'Armata, Allegato 117, 23 June 1940.

(Army Corps or CA) and the XV CA, with two additional ones in reserve (Cacciatori delle Alpi and Torino motorized division), totaling 80,000 soldiers. On 22 June, Italian troops succeeded in breaking through the Roja valley, occupying the village of Fontan. Further south, the Cosseria division was given the order to advance towards Nice, one of the key irredentist targets, supported on the right wing by Alpine troops coming down from the Vesubie valley and on the left wing by a sea landing of marine troops at the back of the fortifications line. The two roads (*corniches*) leading to the capital of the Alpes-Maritimes were closely watched by several French artillery bunkers, among them those in Cap-Martin, Roquebrune and on Mont Agel. On 22 June, Italian invading columns were halted there by a hail of shells. In the meantime, the planned amphibious operation petered out due to logistical problems.²²⁹ On 23 June, units from the Cosseria division, shielded by the foggy night, bypassed the French fortifications and entered Menton. After furious street combat, the French withdrew from the “City of Lemons,” except for the one impregnable fortified casemate at St Louis bridge.²³⁰

While combat raged in France, armistice talks were firmly underway in Rethondes. If, in light of the crushing military defeat, the French meekly accepted the German conditions,²³¹ they resented the Italian demands. The head of the French delegation, General Hutzinger, clearly stated that the French government would not accept the occupation of his

²²⁹ The Italian Navy was short of small amphibious boats and had to requisition fishing or pleasure boats. The operation was cancelled owing to a wide array of causes: engine failures, overloaded boats which grounded before reaching the shore, rough seas. Gariglio, *Popolo Italiano, corri alle armi!*, pp.135-136.

²³⁰ Bernard Cima, Raymond Cima and Michel Truttman, *La glorieuse défense du Pont Saint-Louis: Juin 1940*, Menton: Cima, 1995, pp.19-21, Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, pp.34-36, Gariglio, *Popolo Italiano, corri alle armi!*, pp.140-141.

²³¹ The most important were the occupation of 60 percent of the French territory, the demobilization of the entire French army, other than 100,000 men necessary to keep internal order, and a payment of 400,000 francs per day to cover the occupation cost of the German army.

territory by a nation “which had never won against France.”²³² This hardline stance was not only motivated by genuine national pride, but was part of a strategy to play the two Axis allies against each other. The French flattered the Germans, while, at the same time, belittled the Italian war effort. The Vichy government was fearful that France would be “polonized,” divided in two between the Germans and the Italians. In fact, these fears were not unjustified. Mussolini was pushing for the Italian military occupation of French territory stretching from the Alps to the Rhone, along with Corsica and Tunisia.²³³ The French resoluteness paid off in the end: Hitler, worried that the Italian territorial claims would derail the negotiations, softened the Italian demands. On 21 June, Mussolini and his General Staff agreed to limit the military occupation of the territories to those conquered in the offensive strike.²³⁴ The Führer’s will however was not the only reason for Mussolini’s acquiescence. The Chief of the General Staff Badoglio cautioned the Duce that the possible occupation of southern France would tie up at least fifteen divisions, a luxury the Italian army could not afford.²³⁵ Mussolini and his military advisors, moreover, could not ignore the disastrous result of the Battle of the Alps.²³⁶ Italian casualties reached 631 official dead and 616 missing while the French had suffered only 37 dead. If nothing else, the disparity in the body count shows that the attacks were as ineffective as they had been costly in human life. The occupation of Menton was the only success of any significance for the Italians.

²³² Rainero, *La Commission italienne d’armistice avec la France*, pp.30-31.

²³³ Rainero, however, asserted that the 18 June memorandum was still backed up by the Duce after the Munich meeting, hence its official presentation in Rome on 21 June as the “Protocols of the Armistice Conditions between France and Italy.” For the full text of the 21 June Protocols, see Rainero, *La Commission italienne d’armistice avec la France*, pp.352-360. In Rainero’s view, the Duce had not been mollified by the meeting with the Führer.

²³⁴ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, pp.216-219.

²³⁵ Costa Bona, *Dalle guerra alla pace*, p.52.

²³⁶ Rainero, *La Commission italienne d’armistice avec la France*, pp.26-28.

Why did the Italian army fare so poorly in the Battle of the Alps? Unquestionably, the daunting terrain and climate were dominant factors. Blizzards and fogs hampered any form of reconnoitering, an essential procedure for artillery preparation.²³⁷ Entire squads got lost or fell prey to avalanches. Snowstorms became so intense that the Italian soldiers had to wear their gasmasks to breathe. The Italian push was constantly slowed down by snow on the higher ground and quagmires in the valleys. These conditions should not however obscure the appalling condition of the Italian army at the onset of war. The only type of tank widely available, the L3, was too light to cross road obstacles and too poorly armored to resist landmines. In one case, a leading tank hit a landmine strategically placed on a narrow road which was the only way up a cliff, thus halting the whole column. The tanks following, unable to move and badly exposed, were mercilessly dispatched by French artillery barrage.²³⁸ In another instance, a tank battalion came to an halt when two tanks became entangled in barbed wire, followed by another which, upon trying to outflank the obstacle, hit a mine, and another which ended up in a ditch on the other side of the road. Yet another two suffered engine failure.²³⁹

The Italian soldier was sent to fight with poor materiel. Infantry rifles such as the 91/38 model, whose mechanism froze in cold temperatures, were still commonplace in the

²³⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 353, IT 4489, Relazione sull'azione offensiva svolta dalla Divisione Tridentina nei giorni 21-22-23-24 giugno 1940, p.11.

²³⁸ Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane 1935-1943*, p.250.

²³⁹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 130, IT A 1165, Comando dell Divisione Motorizzata Trieste, Sezione operazioni, Informazioni e Servizi, Relazione sulla marcia compiuta dalla Divisione Motorizzata "Trieste" dalla zona dei campi a quella di Aosta e sul successivo impiego a cavallo della direttrice Piccolo S. Bernardo - Bourg S. Maurice, p.8. One report posited that 70 percent of the breakdowns were caused by the drivers' ineptitude owing to their lack training. AUSSME, DS 85bis, Comando Divisione Cagliari, Relazione sullo svolgimento delle operazioni alla frontiera occidentale, 10 maggio - 25 giugno 1940-XVIII, osservazioni e conclusioni, p.8.

Alpine corps. Indeed, this type of rifle proved so inaccurate that it earned the ironic nickname of “Il Pietoso” (“The Merciful”).²⁴⁰ Moreover, Italian troops were equipped with uniforms in *lanital*, a surrogate for wool (*lana* in Italian) derived from the casein. This new textile, a product of the autarchic Fascist policies, resulted in shoddy clothes which offered little protection against frigid temperatures while wearing out easily. Italian soldiers were so underequipped that some lacked even socks or waterproof boots.²⁴¹ Non-alpine divisions in particular went to fight dressed in a thin coat and flannel shirt.²⁴² The non-fatal casualty figures of 2,631 wounded and 2,151 cases of frostbite, show that Italian soldiers fell prey as much to the cold weather as to bullets and shells. Italian officers desperately repeated the pleas of their subordinates, like Captain Notari of the *Superga* Division, who wrote: “almost all the soldiers were afflicted by dysentery. Several cases of frostbite or frozen limbs. We are in the middle of a blizzard. Supplies are running short. I cannot communicate with anyone, all radios are broken. [...] The whole battalion is almost collapsing, as it has been 24 hours in open snow. [...] Another night in the same conditions would be difficult to endure.”²⁴³

In truth, the morale among Italian troops was already low before the start of the conflict. The rank-and-file had been puzzled by the period of “non-belligerence,” not understanding why, after years of flamboyant speeches about the new Italian warrior race, the Duce in 1939 had decided to sideline Italy.²⁴⁴ Soldiers had the impression that Italy would never enter the conflict. Discipline was lax as a “peace mentality” spread among the

²⁴⁰ Turinetti di Priero, *La battaglia delle Alpi*, p.6.

²⁴¹ Turinetti di Priero, *La Battaglia delle Alpi*, pp.23-24, Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, p.47.

²⁴² AUSSME, DS 85bis, Comando I Corpo D’Armata, Settore Bardonecchia-Moncenisio, stralcio..., p.8.

²⁴³ Turinetti di Priero, *La Battaglia delle Alpi*, p.99.

²⁴⁴ For more on the period of non-belligerence, Michel Ostenc, “La Non-Belligérance italienne, 4 septembre 1939 – 10 juin 1940,” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 194 (1999): pp.79-99.

ranks of the *Regio Esercito*.²⁴⁵ The Italian Alpine troops moreover had been fraternizing with the *Chasseurs Alpains* until a few hours before the beginning of hostilities. It had not been uncommon to see relatives from both armies chatting over hot coffee and *grappa*.²⁴⁶ The prospect of fighting their neighbors in a war that many *Alpini* considered of dubious merit, left Italian soldiers appalled.

Moreover, instead of using the prewar period to strengthen and train troops, the Italian High Command had disbanded entire regiments and cut back the strength of several divisions.²⁴⁷ Extended leaves were granted to recruits living in rural areas during harvesting season. This policy depleted the officer corps so much that the *Regio Esercito* was short of twenty percent of regular officers (*Ufficiali in Servizio Permanente Effettivo* or *S.P.E.*) on the eve of hostilities. This deficit was tackled by the two-pronged policy of speeding the promotion of junior officers and NCOs while also recalling reserve officers (*Ufficiali di Complemento*). Not surprisingly, these moves considerably lowered the quality of the Italian officer corps, as junior officers were given responsibilities far beyond their level of competence and reserve officers were of very uneven quality, some having not served in the Army for one or even two decades.²⁴⁸

Certainly, the quality of the High Command was no better. Instead of concentrating the attacks on a salient in order to unlock the Alpine Maginot Line, the Army's upper

²⁴⁵ Ugo Marchini, *La battaglia delle Alpi occidentali, giugno 1940, narrazione, documenti*, Roma: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico, 1947, p.117.

²⁴⁶ Azeau, *La guerre franco-italienne*, p.57; Turinetti di Priero, *La Battaglia delle Alpi*, p.33.

²⁴⁷ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, pp.37-38.

²⁴⁸ Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane 1935-1943*, pp.177-182; AUSSME, DS 85bis, Comando Artiglieria del I Corpo D'Armata, Stralcio..., pp.6-7; AUSSME, DS 27, Comando Artiglieria del XV Corpo D'Armata, Ufficio II –Difesa, Protocolo n° II / 186, Diario Storico XV CA, Allegato 36, 24 July 1940.

echelons chose to divide the attacking forces over a wider area.²⁴⁹ The various columns had a hard time coordinating their attacks due to the almost complete malfunctioning of their radios, the batteries of which froze in the Alpine cold.²⁵⁰ Poor communications led to serious tactical blunders. For example, on 21 June, at 2 p.m., the *Corpo d'Armata Alpino* Command sent out the news, later confirmed by the headquarters of the Taurinense division, that the French fort of Traversette, which overlooked the crossing of the Saint-Bernard pass towards the town of Bourg-Saint-Maurice, had been captured by an Italian company of the Alpine battalion Aosta. This information seemed to be confirmed by the fact that the Fort of the Traversette was on the receiving end of artillery strikes from another French outpost, the Fort of the Falconnière. However, this piece of information proved to be completely wrong as later discovered by Italian units crossing the Saint-Bernard pass: the French were still in control of the Traversette and in fact the artillery fire directed against the fort was coming from Italian guns.²⁵¹

The worst error committed by the Italian army commanders was their underestimation of the French army. Italian military officials at all levels shared the mistaken illusion that the *Armée des Alpes* was on the verge of collapse. Even after suffering the French artillery barrage on 21 June, Italian commanders were still persuaded that the “enemy

²⁴⁹ AUSSME, DS 85bis, Comando Settore Operativo “Bardonecchia,” Ufficio del Capo di S.M., Sez. Oper. e Serv., Stralcio..., p.12.

²⁵⁰ AUSSME, DS 85bis, Comando I Corpo D'Armata, Settore Bardonecchia-Moncenisio, stralcio..., pp.12-13. Here again, it should be stressed that the equipment given to Italian units was old and ineffectual, as radio sets dating from 1928 were far too heavy to carry up the trails.

²⁵¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 130, IT A 1165, Comando dell Divisione Motorizzata Trieste, Sezione operazioni, Informazioni e Servizi, Relazione..., pp.3-4.

resistance was dwindling.”²⁵² Roatta’s unrealistic proposal to parachute soldiers behind the French lines on 23 June in order to link with the southbound German army illustrates the extent to which the upper echelons of the Italian army were stymied. That the French were anything but resigned to the defeat was clear by 21 June when Lieutenant-General Marcalli, one of the sub-commanders in the 4th Army, drily noted in the war diary of the IV Army corps, that “the enemy not only does not show signs of retreat, but reacts with increasing violence by the hour, disrupting the liaisons, suspending communications and inflicting casualties.”²⁵³ Historians in fact have mused about the outstanding performance of the *Armée des Alpes* in June 1940. Apart from widespread agreement on the strategic acumen of General Olry, it would appear that the Alpine forces benefitted from the fact that the French General Staff, chiefly preoccupied with the German menace, paid little attention to Alpine front. This “strategic and administrative isolation” explains why the debacle in Northern France had few repercussions on the French Alpine army.²⁵⁴ Thus, the French success in southern France was more than a mere *baroud d’honneur* and it had earned them the Italians’ respect. For instance, the garrison of *Chasseurs Alpains* in the already mentioned Fort of the Traversette, also known as the *Redoute Ruinée*, held in check an entire Italian division for four days, without any resupply in food or ammunition. The Italians were so impressed by such a display of enduring forbearance that they authorized the garrison to march out the fort,

²⁵² ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 353, IT 4489, Allegato 3 alla Relazione sull’azione offensiva svolta dalla Divisione Tridentina nei giorni 21-22-23-24 giugno 1940, Comando della 2° Divisione Alpina “Tridentina,” Ordine di operazioni n°3, 22 June 1940, 9:45 a.m.

²⁵³ Gallinari, *Le Operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi Occidentali*, p.153.

²⁵⁴ Richard Carrier, “Réflexions sur l’efficacité militaire de l’armée des Alpes, 10-25 juin 1940,” *Revue historique des armées*, 250 (2008): pp.85-93.

with their own individual armament, between two wings of Italian soldiers who granted the men the honors of war.²⁵⁵

The importance of the Battle of the Alps should not be underestimated. First of all, it revealed in all its dramatic evidence the weakness of the Italian army at all levels. Materiel was scarce and of dubious quality, and this recurrent weakness throughout the war was matched by the lack of training and the overall poor quality of an officer corps still tied to their caste privileges and largely consisting of hastily-trained reservists. Second, the appalling performance in the Alps set the tone for the disastrous Italian campaign in the Second World War. The Italian army's prestige was considerably tarnished by not having been able to defeat the French units in the Alps. Even if the invasion through the Alps was objectively a difficult task at a tactical level due to the jagged peaks and the dreadful weather conditions, the comparison with the blazing push of the German army in northern France was unforgiving. Moreover, the botched offensive strike severely undermined the morale of the Italian soldiers as well as their trust in their cadres and in the decisions of the Duce. Finally, the Italian setback fuelled French contempt for the Italians. The Italians had tried to shamelessly exploit the state of extreme exhaustion in the French army with the *coup de poignard dans le dos*, and, in the eyes of the French population, had been justly punished for their treacherous move. In fact, this odium for the Regio Esercito will be later confirmed in the first months of the occupation after November 1942.

²⁵⁵ This chivalric episode has been described in great detail in Gariglio, *Popolo Italiano, corri alle armi!*, pp.66-79.

Chapter 4

The Armistice period (June 1940-November 1942): the role of the CIAF

Aware of sitting at the table of the negotiations only by the grace of the Führer, and perhaps ashamed by the disappointing results of the Battle of the Alps, the Italians came to the Italian-French armistice talks, which took place on 23-24 June 1940 in Villa Incisa, with an unexpectedly moderate set of demands. Indeed, the French delegation, headed by General Charles Huntziger, was quite surprised by the temperance of their Italian counterparts, after experiencing the one-sided Franco-German negotiations which ended with the Rethondes *Diktat*. Indeed, in the Rethondes train, the Nazi dignitaries had dealt France a humiliating blow in a clear revanchist spirit. France was stripped of its army, its economic resources and half of its territory. Moreover, more than one million prisoners of war were sent to Germany to labor camps. The Armistice at Villa Incisa, on the other hand, copied only the less severe clauses of the Franco-German armistice, such as the demobilization of the French army, the docking of the disarmed warships in French ports, and the obligation to store in depots all war materiel, but lacked the most punitive articles of the Rethondes armistice such as the enormous indemnities imposed to cover the cost of the occupation troops.²⁵⁶ At Villa Incisa, the French delegation was actually allowed to voice its opinion on several topics addressed by the first draft of the armistice. Manifold issues were smoothed over, in many cases to the advantage of France. For instance, in the

²⁵⁶ A good comparison between the two armistices is available in Rainero, *La Commissione italiana d'armistice avec la France*, pp.47-49.

final armistice document, no mention was made of the irredentist claims raised only a few days before in the 18 June Memorandum.²⁵⁷ As a matter of fact, it was agreed that the Italian army would occupy only the territory which had been seized in the Battle of the Alps. The armistice pushed back the Franco-Italian border, known as the Green Line, but at most a mere ten kilometers inside the old border. This small strip of land was mainly dotted with pastures and a few rural villages, with only one medium-sized town, Menton in the Alpes-Maritimes. To ensure a buffer zone in the eventuality of future conflicts, Article 3 of the Armistice compelled the French army to demilitarize the area up to a distance of fifty kilometers as the crow flies from the occupied territories, a border to be known as the Purple Line. Finally, at the behest of the Italian General Staff, Italian troops were permitted to cross the Green Line in order to facilitate the transportations of supplies to remote Italian outposts. This logistics line (the Red Line) would spark several conflicts between Italian officers and French local authorities. In all, thirteen communes were occupied: nine in the region of Savoy²⁵⁸ (Séze, Montvalezan, Sainte-Foy, Bessans, Bramans, Lanslevillard, Lanslebourg, Termignon, Sollières), two in the Hautes-Alpes (Mont-Genèvre and Ristolas) and two in the Alpes-Maritimes (Menton and Fontan). Additionally, small parts of land were seized in other communes, especially in the Alpes-Maritimes.²⁵⁹ In the end, the Italian occupation zone spanned 82,217 hectares and in theory encompassed a population of more

²⁵⁷ For more on the negotiations on the 24 June, Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.366-372.

²⁵⁸ The Region of Savoy comprises two departments, Savoie and Haute-Savoie.

²⁵⁹ In the Alpes-Maritimes, it included some hamlets in the communes of Saint-Etienne-de-Tinée, some houses in the commune of Isola, small chunks of the communes of Castellar, Breil, Sospel, Saorge, Rimplas, Valdeblore, Saint-Martin-Vésubie, Roquebillière and Belvédère; in the Basses-Alpes it included half of the municipality of Larche and Combremont.

than 28,000.²⁶⁰ (See Map 1) However, it is safe to assume that most of the population, especially in the case of Menton, had already fled before the beginning of the conflict. The Battle of the Alps gave the Italians little land, most of which was devoid of inhabitants, at a staggering cost in human lives.

One of the biggest consequences of the Armistice of Villa Incisa was the creation of the *Commissione di Armistizio con la Francia* (CIAF), which would play a major role in the Italian occupation of France. As underlined by Article XXIII, the CIAF was given the task of “overseeing and controlling [...] the enforcement of the present Armistice Convention.” A few days after the signing of the Armistice, on 27 June 1940, the Duce issued an ordinance which officially sanctioned the existence of the CIAF. The new commission fell under the direct command of the Italian General Staff.²⁶¹ Its structure, housed in its headquarters in Turin, was pyramidal, with as its president General Pietro Pintor, Commander of the First Italian Army in the Battle of the Alps until December 1940, followed by General Camillo Grossi until June 1941 and finally, from 16 June 1941 to 9 September 1943, General Arturo Vacca Maggiolini. Below it were four Under-Commissions: three for each army service (Army, Navy and the Air Force) and one called General Affairs, responsible for the protection of Italian citizens in non-occupied France.²⁶² The Presidency's role was to issue general directives, rule on general matters, interpret the Armistice clauses and manage relations with the German Armistice Commission (CTA)

²⁶⁰ Rainero, *La Commissione italiana d'armistice avec la France*, pp.77-78.

²⁶¹ The full text of the ordinance can be found in Rainero, *La Commissione italiana d'armistice avec la France*, pp.391-2.

²⁶² Some scholars argued that Mussolini deliberately decided that Turin, not Rome, should house the newly created administration, in order to be able to fully control it as Supreme Commander of the Italian army, without any interference from Ministers in Rome. See for instance, Costa Bona, *Dalle guerra alla pace*, p.58.

and Vichy. The President charged the Under-Commissions with more specific questions pertaining to their field, and the Under-Commissions themselves delegated their tasks to different bureaus both in Metropolitan France and in its colonial territories. With the Wiesbaden accords (29 June), the two Axis powers had delineated their respective sphere of influence in the *Zone Libre*, the French territory governed by the Vichy regime. The Italian zone was delimited on the Western border by the Rhone, and on the northern side by the Savoy region.²⁶³ Thus, the CIAF Under-Commissions established delegations in a zone which roughly corresponded to the one the Italian army would occupy in November 1942. The Navy Under-Commission enjoyed permanent delegations in three major ports, Toulon, Ajaccio, and Bizerte, where it could keep an eye on the French Navy. Similarly, an Army office was established in Gap (Hautes-Alpes) to oversee the demilitarization of the Alpine border. French military installations had to be rendered inoperable by the dismantlement of the artillery guns and French engineers were ordered to remove all minefields and roadblocks. As a buffer, a fifty kilometers-deep demilitarized zone was created. Moreover, several other Army offices were created in relevant cities, such as Chambéry, Annecy, Valence, Marseille and Nice to check French army depots and to supervise the French troops' demobilization.²⁶⁴ In fact, Italian authorities were especially worried about a possible resurgence of a French threat, an idea which would soon become an obsessive leitmotiv until the end of the Italian occupation in September 1943. The Italian General Staff of the Armed Forces, the *Comando Supremo*, was so suspicious of an eventual

²⁶³ The Italian zone of influence, in fact, roughly, reflected the Italian zone of occupation established in November 1942, Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, p.58.

²⁶⁴ See Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.64-66. The book boasts also excellent organization chart of the CIAF, see *planches* n°5 and n°7.

resurrection of the French Army, it insisted that the *Regio Esercito* check police rosters, especially to “ensure that soldiers do not disguise themselves as civil servants.”²⁶⁵ The worries of the Italians of a revanchist spirit within the French army were confirmed by the nomination at the head of the French delegation of Turin of Admiral André Duplat, the former commander of the French Mediterranean fleet which had successfully carried out bombing attacks on the port of Genova a few days after the beginning of the hostilities. Duplat was a staunch believer in a strategy of antagonizing the Italians as much as possible and of procrastinating on Italian demands, arguing either that the dire condition of the French economy made certain demands impossible or quibbling about details and the interpretation of the Armistice clauses.²⁶⁶ After all, the French delegation estimated that, in the “land of Machiavelli”, the best tactic to get the best results from the negotiations was to tackle the issues indirectly.²⁶⁷

The Armistice of Villa Incisa was meant only to deal with the most urgent matters, primarily military questions, such as the disarmament of the French army. It is clear then, that, in the beginning, the CIAF served only a military function, as confirmed by its first

²⁶⁵ Memorandum of General Mario Roatta, 25 June 1940. See Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.383-390. It should be noted that these tasks were also applied to the French territories in North Africa and in the Middle East.

²⁶⁶ See Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, p.61.

²⁶⁷ ADAHP 42 W 81, "Compte-rendu de la Conférence interministérielle ayant pour l'objet l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italienne tenue le jeudi 10 décembre 1941 à l'Hôtel Thermal à Vichy," p.8. The French personnel in Turin were not subtle in their contempt for a nation that, in its view, had no reason but its servile friendship with Germany to claim any of victory's spoils. In the words of Marius Sarraz Bournet, one member of the French delegation in Turin, Italian officers of the CIAF were “extremely conceited” and “jealous, not only at a personal level, but also as a country.” In fact, “Italy was more than ever jealous of France” and suffered from an “inferiority complex.” According to Sarraz Bournet, these weaknesses led the Italians to act in an egotistical way. When at a loss for an argument, they simply “banged their fists on the table and gave orders.” See ADAM 616 W 260, “Conférence pour l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italiennes tenue à Vichy le 16 décembre 1940”, p.6, and Sarraz-Bournet, *Témoignage d'un silencieux*, pp.63-69.

roster, in large part military personnel.²⁶⁸ The vast majority of the twenty-six articles of the Armistice Convention dealt with military issues such as the demilitarization of the French army and of its fortresses on the Alpine border which needed urgent clarifications. In fact, aside for the few articles announcing the creation of the CIAF, only Article XXI, which stated that Italian military and civilian prisoners in French prisons should be handed over to the Italian army, had any political relevance. This shortsightedness likely originated from the staunch Italian conviction that the war would end quickly. Confident that the forthcoming Battle of Britain was the last campaign of the war, the Duce was looking forward to a peace treaty which would sanction the expansion of Italy in Europe, a wish he and Ciano repeatedly reasserted in the manifold meetings with Hitler and Von Ribbentrop in the second half of 1940.²⁶⁹ Thus, they were willing to wait to the aftermath of the conflict for the settlement of the political questions such as their territorial claims on the County of Nice.

The definitive postponement of the invasion of Britain upset Mussolini's master plan as the end of the war seemed not so imminent. Nonetheless, the Duce's ambition to incorporate Corsica and the County of Nice into the Italian state had not been tempered by the poor military results in the Alps. The Italians insisted unremittingly on their territorial claims, as they feared Germany and Vichy might form an alliance to the detriment of the Fascist regime. In truth, the Italian worries were not exaggerated. The successful resistance by the French naval forces against Anglo-Gaullist forces in Mers-el-Kebir (14 July 1940)

²⁶⁸ Its military nature is also clear by reading the memorandum the head of the Army General Staff General Mario Roatta sent to the Head of the CIAF, General Pintor, on 25 June 1940, Rainero. *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.383-390.

²⁶⁹ Costa Bona, *Dalla Guerra alla pace*, p.66.

and Dakar (23 September 1940) persuaded Nazi officials that French colonial troops would remain loyal to Marshall Pétain and could thus represent an important element in the control of trade routes to the colonies. Therefore, in the Brenner Pass meeting in October, while giving assurance to the Duce that his territorial claims would not get unheeded, Hitler reaffirmed the importance of co-opting France into an anti-British alliance.²⁷⁰ Albeit in a veiled way, Hitler let the Duce understand that he would not subordinate his grand strategy to the aspirations of his junior partner.

Thus, the alarming scenario of being sidelined by her senior partner to the benefit of France was slowly materializing in the last months of 1940. On 24 October 1940, the famous handshake between Hitler and the Marshall Pétain in Montoire formalized France's entrance "into the path of collaboration." Notwithstanding the fact that the meeting had no tangible consequences for German-French relations, its symbolic meaning cannot be overrated. Vichy had actively sought to launch a new relationship with the Nazi regime. The negotiations between Germany and France emboldened Vichy officials to resist Italian wishes. The French authorities, both civilian and military, countered by using any kind of excuse to delay the implementation of the Armistice. For instance, French military weaponry, ammunition and materiel, which in theory had to be stocked in depots under Italian surveillance (Articles X and XI of the Armistice of Villa Incisa), were concealed in

²⁷⁰ Massimo Borgogni, *Mussolini e la Francia di Vichy: dalla dichiarazione di guerra al fallimento del riavvicinamento italo-francese (giugno 1940-aprile 1942)*, Siena: Nuova immagine, 1991, p.141.

dozens of stashes in isolated places, only to be found later by the Italian army, after the November 1942 invasion.²⁷¹

In light of the evolving political situation, the Italians counterattacked in several ways. First, Italian newspapers, encouraged by the Fascist establishment, started a massive campaign advocating the annexation of territories. Fascist panegyrists pompously predicted that “after the death of the French front, Nice, the Savoy region, Corsica, Tunisia, the French Coast of Somaliland, and other territories [could already be considered as] being returned to Italy or in the process of....”²⁷² Ezio Maria Gray, the Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies, went even further by boldly titling his rather biased historical account, published in 1941, *Le terre nostre ritornano... Malta – Corsica – Nizza (Our lands return...Malta – Corsica – Nice)*.²⁷³ Others gloated that it was about time that Italy got her revenge for the *Vittoria Mutilata* (Mutilated Victory) of the Versailles Treaty.²⁷⁴

More importantly, the CIAF gradually expanded its prerogatives. With the acknowledgement that the war would not end shortly, the CIAF was asked to tackle issues not strictly pertaining to the military field. As a matter of fact, until November 1942, the CIAF rapidly became the sole Italian interlocutor available to French authorities to discuss political, economic, military and financial matters.²⁷⁵ For instance, the CIAF was instrumental in securing the economic deal, struck on 23 August 1940, by which Italy

²⁷¹ For instance, three illegal depots still existed in Nice and Grenoble in early June 1943. See AUSSME, D7 38, Rapporto Mensile n°42 sull'attività della CIAF, 16 May 1943 to 15 June 1943, pp.11-12.

²⁷² Nicola Marchitto, “Il primo mese di vittoriose operazioni,” *L'illustrazione Coloniale*, July 1940, p.25, cited in Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.41.

²⁷³ Ezio Maria Gray, *Le terre nostre ritornano... Malta – Corsica – Nizza*, Novara: Istituto Geografico De Agostini, 1941.

²⁷⁴ Italo Sullioti, *Il Processo di Versaglia: entra la Corte!*, Milano: Editori Associati, 1940, p.112, cited in Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.41.

²⁷⁵ Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire*, pp.210-212.

agreed to trade food for raw materials such as iron, aluminum and coal, which were dearly needed by the Italian war industry. However, accords were a rarity between the two countries. Notwithstanding the fact that this deal was freely negotiated by both parties, unlike the arbitrary requisitions imposed by the German Armistice, economic relations failed to coalesce. Italy and France accused each other of inflating their prices, but the real reason behind the failure was likely French resistance to the idea of feeding the Italian war effort with their own raw materials.²⁷⁶

However, it is in the political domain that the CIAF was most interested in expanding its influence. Its strategy was twofold: on one hand, it wanted to win over the local Italian population; on the other, it wanted to challenge the French state on its own turf to compromise its sovereignty. Both strategies were geared toward the common goal of preparing the ground for a future Italian annexation. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to state that the incorporation of the Provence and the French colonies into the Italian empire as the main *raison d'être* of the CIAF. However, CIAF officials had little to work with. The countries were still formally at war and, thus at least at the beginning, no consulate in the *Zone Libre* could be reopened. The Franco-Italian Armistice text made no mention of any bilateral relations outside military affairs. The only excuse CIAF officials could use to impinge on French internal affairs was Article XXI of the Armistice. In it, the Italian state had demanded the immediate liberation and subsequent handing over to Italian military authorities all “the prisoners of war and the Italian civilians interned, arrested or condemned for political or military reasons or for any deed in favor of the Italian

²⁷⁶ For more on Italo-French economic relations, see Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.151-154.

government.” The second part of the Article XXI had granted the Italian government “the right to request the handing over of any given person with Italian citizenship at the signing of the Armistice, ... who lived in French non-occupied territory.”²⁷⁷ If the first half of the Article was aimed at liberating Fascist militants, alleged or otherwise, detained in camps such as Vernet and Saint-Cyprien, the second part of the article was more controversial. General Huntziger vigorously protested it to his Italian counterpart, General Badoglio, arguing that it would violate the right of political asylum France had given to Italian exiles in the thirties. The French delegation tried to minimize the reach of the article by stressing its one-time effect: only Italians who had been interned in concentration camps before the Armistice fell within the range of Article XXI. Moreover, they argued, Italians freed by the French authorities should be repatriated immediately. Conversely, the CIAF retorted that the French state could not deny any Italian the right to stay on French soil if he was willing to return to his home. As long as the Armistice was valid, the Italian state claimed the right to intervene at any moment “during the whole armistice period to prevent all limitations to the personal freedom of the Italian citizens for reasons connected to the state of war or for acts or feelings in favor of their country.”²⁷⁸ In other words, the CIAF would not accept any arrests or discrimination based solely on political or ethnic reasons for the duration of the Armistice.²⁷⁹ Arguably, much more was at stake than simply the fate of the few Italians on French soil. The French delegation understood that the Italians were using the only political

²⁷⁷ For the full text of the draft, see Rainero, *La Commissione italiana d'armistice avec la France*, p.364.

²⁷⁸ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, n°3867 sull'attività della Sottocommissione Affari Generali, 17 April 1943, p.12.

²⁷⁹ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 7, Document 3/B, Unsigned Nota sull'Articolo XXI dell'Armistizio. In truth, with the passing of time, Article XXI was used less and less to liberate Italians incarcerated after the Armistice. Italians preferred to trade their freedom for that of French prisoners detained in Italian prisons.

article of the Armistice to wrest for itself part of French sovereignty by challenging the French arrests. Clearly, CIAF officials were seeking to delegitimize Vichy as much as they were endeavouring to protect their compatriots.

The ratification of the Armistice did not immediately ameliorate the fate of the Italians held in internment camps. Some prisoners chose not to wait for the Italian authorities to act: they petitioned at once to the prefect of their department of residence for their liberation.²⁸⁰ Some French camp commanders acted on their own volition, shrewdly guessing that, in light of the stalemate in Franco-Italian talks regarding the interpretation of Article XXI, many prisoners would resort to anything to recover their freedom. Commanders gave "their" Italians the opportunity to return to their homes in France and resume their lives, on the condition that they signed a declaration of loyalty to France issued by the camp commanders. By signing it, the prisoner explicitly claimed political asylum and thus was *de facto* seen to be relinquishing their Italian nationality.²⁸¹ Many witnesses reported that the camp commanders used openly menacing arguments in order to break the most stubborn. Men were told they would not be able to see their families again unless they signed the declaration. Interestingly, notwithstanding their near unanimous desire to continue to live on French soil, it appears that most of the prisoners refused to fold under the pressure of the blackmail.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ As an example, see the letter of Vittorio D. from Forcalquier (Basses-Alpes) to the prefect, ADAHP, 42 W 81. The letter, written on 5 July, was received by the Prefecture. Vittorio D., found to have been wrongly accused of Fascist militancy, was eventually released on 14 July.

²⁸¹ A facsimile of the "Declaration of loyalty to France" can be found in MINCULPOP, *Gli Italiani nei campi di concentramento in Francia*, p.78.

²⁸² For firsthand accounts of the declaration of loyalty, see MINCULPOP, *Gli Italiani nei campi di concentramento in Francia*, pp.111-114, 141-142, 148-149. However, no data exists on the number of Italians who agreed to sign.

The prisoners' hardline stance was probably the consequence of the CIAF campaign to have Article XXI enforced. Beginning in early July, two Italian military commissions, headed by Colonel Edmondo De Renzi and Lieutenant Enrico Giglioli, visited the internment camps and provided a preliminary report of the appalling conditions, prompting the Italian state to demand the immediate release of all Italian prisoners.²⁸³ After mid-July, French authorities began to comply, starting with the prisoners who had large families or who had been wrongly accused of Fascist militancy, but eventually moving to liberate even the most ardent Fascists.²⁸⁴ To supervise the enforcement of Article XXI, the CIAF created a bureau, the *Organismo di Controllo Esecuzione articolo XXI*, which was split into two commissions.²⁸⁵ As a result of its work, by 28 October 1940, all Italians had been liberated from French prison camps except 400 *fuoriusciti* in the Vernet camp, most of them former members of the International Brigades who had fought in the Spanish Civil War. Within a few months of the Armistice, French authorities were considering returning these *indésirables* to Italy.²⁸⁶ In February 1941, General Huntziger, in a letter to the Italian

²⁸³ A succinct summary of both reports is available in MINCULPOP, *Gli Italiani nei campi di concentramento in Francia*, pp.304-311. French authorities, on the other hand, firmly challenged Italian complaints about the generally poor conditions of the internment camps, describing for instance Vernet as a *camp modèle*. See ADAM 616 W 260, "Conférence pour l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italiennes tenue à Vichy le 16 décembre 1940", p.29.

²⁸⁴ See for instance the list of Italians resident in the Basses-Alpes and freed from the St-Cyprien camp, ADAHP, 42 W 81Lettre du Lieutenant Colonel Borallo, Commandant du camp de St-Cyprien au Préfet des the Basses Alpes departement, 24 July 1940." Between 8 and 14 July, 21 prisoners were liberated. On 17 July, French authorities released 59 prisoners.

²⁸⁵ For more on the *Organismo di Controllo Esecuzione articolo XXI*, see ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, n°490 "attività dell'*Organismo di Controllo Esecuzione articolo XXI* dal 3 Novembre 1940 al 20 Gennaio 1942," 21 January 1942.

²⁸⁶ ADAM 616 W 260, "Conférence pour l'étude des problèmes poses par l'occupation et la propagande italiennes tenue à Vichy le 16 décembre 1940," pp.28-29.

authorities, officially offered to repatriate the *fuoriusciti*.²⁸⁷ This sudden reversal of policy suggests that, in protesting Article XXI, the French government was more interested in reaffirming what little authority it had than in protecting the Italian *fuoriusciti* from possible Fascist retaliation.

The liberation from internment camps was only the first step in what would be the long journey for these men, as they rebuilt their lives. Many prisoners had lost their jobs and, upon their return, found themselves ostracized by their neighbors and the French administration. The Italian authorities faced the conundrum of how to help these former prisoners and more generally the Italian citizens in France, as well as protect them from possible French retaliation. Yet, by helping the Italian community in France, they also recognized the marvelous opportunity offered by the circumstances to interfere in French internal affairs.

The Italian state started to build up a network in the *Zone Libre*, under the supervision of the General Affairs Under-Commission, to spread its influence. In July 1940, consulate functionaries were attached to the Italian military bureaus in the Free Zone under Italian control, thus underlining the shift towards a more civilian nature of the CIAF. Their reports focused on alleged discriminatory acts, internments or expulsions meted out to Italian citizens and were sent to the *Organismo di Controllo Esecuzione articolo XXI*, which in the meantime had become a permanent bureau in November 1940, housed in the building of the former Italian consulate in Lyons. Vichy, fearful that the activities of these functionaries would undermine its authority, asked in October 1940 if the protection of

²⁸⁷ Grynberg and Charaudeau, "Les camps d'internement," in Milza, Peschanski (eds.), *Exils et Migration, Italiens et Espagnols en France, 1938-1946*, p.155.

Italians could be entrusted to Red Cross offices, as such was already the case in the part of the Free Zone supervised by the Germans.²⁸⁸ Not only did the Italians refuse but they also expanded their network by creating additional bureaus in Avignon, Cannes and Bastia in December 1940.

The Italians were not satisfied by this situation, as the legislative position of these civil officials was based on a rather subjective interpretation of Article XXI.²⁸⁹ They therefore embarked on further negotiations with French representatives in January 1941. The agreement reached on 4 February 1941 in Turin upgraded these civil officials to *Delegati per l'Assistenza ed il Rimpatrio* (Delegates for the Assistance and Repatriation).²⁹⁰ These delegates were formally charged with assisting the Italian communities in France and carrying out the repatriation of emigrants willing to return to Italy. To facilitate their task, the delegates were granted several privileges: the right to meet the local prefect and every Italian citizen; free circulation within their zone of competence; complete freedom to contact the Italian Foreign Ministry, the CIAF in Turin, and Italian border authorities by wire and mail; and the right to freely choose their staff.²⁹¹ In return, Vichy hoped that the Fascist militants would leave France and that the repatriation campaign would considerably thin out the population, thus ultimately reducing the activity of and need for CIAF officials.

At first sight, it is puzzling that the delegates were not given formal diplomatic titles, even though some of them had been consuls in France before the war and now had

²⁸⁸ Red Cross offices in Nîmes, Toulouse and Montpellier were already in charge of Italian interests as of August 1940.

²⁸⁹ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 7, Document 3/B, Nota sull'Articolo XXI dell'Armistizio, pp.1-2.

²⁹⁰ Delegates were also appointed in the German-influenced Free Zone, in Toulouse, Nîmes, Agen, Montpellier and Avignon.

²⁹¹ The full text of the agreement is available in Rainero, *La Commissione italiana d'armistice avec la France*, pp.434-439.

the same prerogatives, except for notary acts, that consuls had always enjoyed according to international law. The Fascist state, however, feared that the official opening of Italian consulates could be interpreted as an implicit acceptance of the non-Italian status of the contested territories, such as the County of Nice.²⁹² It is also likely that this compromise was in part the result of the strained relations within the Italian administration, more specifically between the Italian *Farnesina* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the CIAF. In truth, the Italian diplomatic corps resented the intrusion of an organization headed by army officers into what seemed traditionally the purview of diplomats. As a matter of fact, the CIAF had to take over relations with Vichy as the *Farnesina* did not have representatives in Vichy and could not because officially Italy was still at war in France. In January 1942, Franco-Italian diplomatic relations were renewed but in an embryonic way. The Fascist state nominated Ambassador Gino Buti as "political plenipotentiary" in Paris while appointing only a consul general to Vichy, Count Vittorio Zoppi. This decision echoed the German approach, whose main representative, Ambassador Otto Abetz, was residing in Paris, but technically as the representative of the German government in France and not the German ambassador to Vichy. As Ambassador, Buti was granted only limited power by the Duce, who specifically asked him to refrain from taking any political initiative.²⁹³ Thus, the CIAF kept their diplomatic privileges intact. The upper echelons of the *Farnesina* loathed the recruitment of career diplomats to the CIAF and their dependence on local Italian

²⁹² ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Ministero Affari Esteri, Nota sull'evoluzione dei rapporti bilaterali tra Francia ed Italian, 21 December 1942, p.3. Not surprisingly, the Delegations for Assistance and the Repatriation were officially converted to consulates in January 1943 after the occupation of the Free Zone in November 1942.

²⁹³ Costa Bona, *Dalla guerra alla pace*, p.122.

military delegations in the *Zone Libre*. So, the Foreign Affairs Ministry created the *Direzione Generale degli Italiani all'Estero* (Directorate-General for the Italians Abroad) on 27 November 1940 with the same coordinating role as the aforementioned *Organismo di Controllo Esecuzione articolo XXI*, but apparently the new bureau enjoyed as little leeway as the *Farnesina*.

The uneasiness of the relations between civil and military Italian authorities was such that the CIAF President, General Pietro Pintor, felt compelled to issue a circular in December 1940 to underline the special status of CIAF officials in France. The civil CIAF personnel were not considered part of the *Regio Esercito*, insofar as they were only *Ufficiali di complemento in congedo* (reserve officers on unlimited discharge). Due to their delicate role as mediators between the French state and the local Italian communities, the future delegates were not required to wear their military uniforms “whenever they may be an obstacle to carrying out the civilian tasks of the Control Delegations, instead of facilitating them.”²⁹⁴ Furthermore, as their task required the ability to respond to any local crisis involving Italian citizens, the civil officials were exempted from justifying their trips and from eating at the CIAF mess. This relative freedom however should not be interpreted as an independence from the CIAF headquarters in Turin. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued another circular which emphasized the complete subordination of the delegates to the *Farnesina*, advising that CIAF personnel should be deferential in their dealings with the local Italian Military Delegations. Yet the letter added, although with clenched teeth, that “for necessary reasons of coordination ... civil officials will write every fifteen days a report

²⁹⁴ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Circolare n°8790 del Presidente della CIAF Generale Pietro Pintor, Turin, 5 December 1940, p.2.

on their work ... and will send a copy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs *and to the CIAF Sub-committee General Affairs.*"²⁹⁵ (*italics are mine*). In reality, the *Delegati per l'Assistenza ed il Rimpatrio* were acting as intermediaries between the civilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the military Italian Armistice Commission in France as much as between local Vichy authorities and the Fascist regime.

This rivalry between the Italian civilian and military administrations was one of the main characteristics of the Italian occupation of France. This antagonism was envenomed by a misunderstanding regarding the hierarchical relations between Italian officials: Italian military authorities insisted that military ranks determined the hierarchy in the CIAF bureaus in France. This generated confusion as minor civil servants, in theory, thus enjoyed a higher status than even consul-generals because of their military rank.²⁹⁶ Some officials argued that this convoluted network of organizations was necessary as a double guarantee of assistance to Italian citizens in case of a sudden crisis in Italian-French relations. It is undeniable however that these continual overlapping of spheres of influence undermined the cohesiveness of the Italian strategy in France. If nothing else, the bureaucratic confusion considerably lowered the prestige of Italian officials in the Free Zone in the eyes of French local administrators.

²⁹⁵ Rainero, *La Commissione italiana d'armistice avec la France*, p.155. Unfortunately, the author did not include the original reference. The same idea is found in ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, n°4117/Pr dal Presidente della CIAF Generale Pietro Pintor "Attività dei funzionari consolari nelle Delegazioni di controllo," Turin, 29 August 1940.

²⁹⁶ For instance, a serious conflict set Colonel De Renzi against the Delegation First Secretary in Toulon, De Paolis, to the point that De Renzi requested the dismissal of De Paolis. However, the latter was of higher rank than the former due to the precedence given civil ranks over military ones. See ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Memorandum n°17979 del Presidente della Sottocommissione Affari Generali, Turin, 2 November 1940, p.2.

Yet the importance of the *Delegati per l'Assistenza ed il Rimpatrio* should not be underestimated, both from a pragmatic perspective, insofar as they helped the Italian community in France, and symbolically as a threat to Vichy's legitimacy. While the military delegations carefully supervised the demilitarization of the Alpine zone, the rounding up of French military materiel in guarded depots, and checked that the *Armée d'Armistice* was not expanding outside the limits indicated by the German and Italian armistices, the civil delegations were not idle. First, delegations throughout France were assisting those emigrants willing to return to Italy. Delegates could not issue or renew passports, a privilege only granted to consuls, but were given the right to issue certificates valid for repatriation.²⁹⁷ From October 1940 to March 1943, more than 70,000 Italians repatriated to Italy. The repatriation campaign had mixed results. At the beginning, it enjoyed relative success, as repatriations peaked at 5,000 per month until early 1941. Then their numbers stabilized at 3,000 until the invasion of November 1942, when they plummeted to less than 1,000 each month.²⁹⁸ The gradual petering out of the campaign was attributable to several factors, among them a renewed belief in the imminent annexation of the County of Nice in light of the Italian army invasion. On the other hand, the explosion in numbers at the beginning of the Armistice period reflected the traumas suffered in the internment camps and the surge of discriminatory behavior following the Battle of the Alps.

More importantly, CIAF delegates stepped up to help the Italian emigrants in France as a way to bolster both their personal and the Italian state's prestige. Prior to the official

²⁹⁷ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Lettera al Conte Leonardo Vitetti, Direttore generale degli Affari Politici, Ministero Affari Esteri, 28 February 1942.

²⁹⁸ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, n°3867 "Attività della Sottocommissione Affari Generali, CIAF, 17 April 1943, pp.27-28.

inception of the delegations in February 1941, Italians, even those harboring Fascist loyalties, brought their complaints to the French police.²⁹⁹ With the establishment of the delegation, the CIAF offices in Nice had quickly become a bureau of grievances for the Italian community. The CIAF delegation proved invaluable to Italians who had lost their jobs for economic or political reasons and, more generally, for those who had been discriminated against, allegedly or not. Italians were asking for assistance for matters as diverse as pensions, admissions to seniors' homes, speeding tickets, apartment sales or disputes over untitled land.³⁰⁰ The Nice CIAF delegation also received numerous grievances lodged by Italian citizens who were at loggerheads with their French neighbors for even more trivial reasons. Anything from a disputed right-of-way, noise at night, a dog urinating on a fence, or unpaid rent sparked stormy exchanges. Italians were supposedly tagged with racial slurs such as “Spaghettis,” “Macaronis” and “Sales Piémontais,” and often invited to go back to Italy to eat “Mussolini’s bread” or “polenta.”³⁰¹ Indeed, in a department on the verge of famine, disputes over food became the norm. Italian grocers were accused of making illicit profits by selling under the counter at exorbitant prices or only to Italians. Heated arguments erupted in the endless queues for rationed staples.

Quarrels were made worse by misunderstandings arising from linguistic challenges. As stressed by CIAF delegates, the majority of Italians in France, including those who arrived in the interwar years, were poorly educated. First-generation emigrants did not go to French high school and were unable to understand or communicate in French. In fact, the

²⁹⁹ See for instance the quarrel between two Italian citizens, Joseph U. and Louis P., ADAM 616 W 223, Rapport n°14.766-IV Commissariat Spécial de Nice au préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 12 December 1940.

³⁰⁰ In fact, starting from 27 August 1940, non-French were forbidden to buy any real estate.

³⁰¹ Typical Piedmontese dish of corn meal mush.

difficult challenge of trying to explain to a French bureaucrat the particulars of an individual's situation in Italian coupled with the Italians' mistrust of the French state which had implemented discriminatory legislation were probably the main reasons for the decision of many to file their complaints with the CIAF delegation. It is reasonable to assume that Italian officials encouraged this type of behavior both for propagandistic reasons and as a means of connecting with the local Italian community. We should not forget, however, that these linguistic problems could also be used as an excuse to freely insult the other party. In some cases, the petitioners played the xenophobia card, as they shrewdly understood that their case would be more interesting to the CIAF if there was an anti-Italian element involved. Thus, they tended to exaggerate any slurs which directly attacked Italy and the Italians. Petty quarrels between neighbors which, in time of peace, would have been resolved by Justices of the Peace, easily took on dramatic proportions in a time of occupation.³⁰²

In truth, not all the issues stemmed from petty quarrels or language barriers. In some working environments, the Italians were truly discriminated against. Vichy had unilaterally declared null and void every prewar Franco-Italian treaty and accord, on the grounds that the state of war had severed all legislative ties between the two countries. In particular, the abrogation of the 30 September 1919 treaty, which had granted Italian workers the same social rights as their French counterparts, had severe repercussions for the Italian community. In light of the faltering economy, foreign workers, and especially Italian ones, were the first targeted for layoffs. Employers sometimes used detention in internment

³⁰² Files of Italian grievances can be found in ADAM 104 W 2; 104 W 3; 166 W 29; 166 W 30; 166 W 31 and 616 W 261.

camps as a reason to fire Italian employees. That certainly seemed the case with the dismissal of some Italian emigrants working in the port of Marseille on 11 June, the day the war was declared. In August 1940, the CIAF vigorously protested and the workers were reinstated.³⁰³

If the latter cases were the result of private initiative, French authorities seldom objected to it. As seen in a report by the CIAF delegate in Gap, Eugenio Mazzarini, Italian entrepreneurs were sometimes cut out of calls for tender, as Vichy legislation gave municipalities the authority to refuse to outsource public works to companies managed by foreign entrepreneurs.³⁰⁴ In the Alpes-Maritimes department, Italian entrepreneurs fared little better. Over the century, Italians in Nice had specialized in small grocery stores, lacking both the capital and the skill to start bigger companies. After the defeat, severe shortages of fuel and food prompted the prefecture of the Alpes-Maritimes to forbid the circulation of any kind of gas-propelled vehicles, two-wheelers included, with the noteworthy exceptions of companies deemed “of primordial importance for the supplying of the department,” few of which were Italian-owned. Italian grocery owners voiced their anger to the CIAF delegation, but there was little Italian officials could do in the face of Vichy regulations.³⁰⁵

³⁰³ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, n°3867 "Attività della Sottocommissione Affari Generali, CIAF," 17 April 1943, p.15.

³⁰⁴ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 01, n°107/A di Eugenio Mazzarini, "Situazione politica nella zona delle Alte Alpi nella seconda metà del gennaio 1941, 30 January 1941, p.5.

³⁰⁵ See for instance the case of Adolfo C., ADAM, 104 W 3, Lettera n°445 de la Délégation CIAF de Nice, cas Adolfo C., Cannes, 29 January 1942, and the reply of the prefecture, Note de renseignements n°419, 5 March 1942. Occasionally, French authorities admitted to administrative mistakes and promptly corrected the wrongs. See for instance the complaint of three wine merchants on the scarcity of wine distributed, ADAM, 104 W 2, Lettre du Délégué à l'Assistance et au Rapatriement de Cannes à l'Intendant Directeur Départemental du Ravitaillement Général, 17 October 1941.

Of course, xenophobic measures in France had not been unique to the Vichy regime. In fact, decrees discriminating against non-French populations were not uncommon in the thirties, especially in times of economic and political crisis. On 11 December 1936 alone, ten decrees were implemented establishing quotas in key industries as diverse as dairy products in the Cher department to cork-producing factories in the Bouches-du-Rhône.³⁰⁶ A 21 April 1933 law barred foreign doctors and dentists from practicing, unless their own countries allowed French doctors to practice, while a 19 July 1934 law restricted access to the civil service and legal professions to foreigners who had been naturalized for at least ten years.³⁰⁷

However, Vichy significantly accelerated this xenophobic trend. Fed by the resentment provoked by the humiliating defeat in June 1940, an array of laws curtailing the civic rights of foreigners on French soil was rapidly implemented. The distrust of foreigners was enshrined in the 17 July 1940 law which restricted access to civil service to only those French citizens whose father was of French nationality. The real target behind this watershed legislation was made evident by another law passed on 22 July 1940, which stated that any naturalization after 1927 could be subject to revision. Vichy wanted to separate itself as much as possible from the massive naturalization campaigns of the interwar governments. To this end, Vichy legislators made the 17 July law retroactive. Therefore, recently minted French citizens were not only thereafter denied any possibility of employment in the civil service, but those already working in public administration were fired on the spot. In the Alpes-Maritimes, every Italian working at a municipal level was

³⁰⁶ Ponty, *L'Immigration dans les Textes, France 1789-2002*, pp.201-203.

³⁰⁷ Ponty, *L'Immigration dans les Textes, France 1789-2002*, pp.209-211.

laid off.³⁰⁸ Laws restricting access to liberal professions surpassed those implemented under the Third Republic. Doctors and lawyers, unless French and born to a French father, were forbidden to practice, as stated respectively by the 16 August and the 10 September 1940 laws. Waivers were available only to former soldiers or sons of soldiers who had fought in the wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1940 or by special dispensation granted by the Minister of Justice based on exceptional merit. Italian delegations vehemently protested against these discriminatory regulations with mixed results: although the physicians were no longer stricken from the professional registers, they were not permitted to practice.³⁰⁹

If the Italian delegations took great pain to help these professionals, it was because these doctors and lawyers were in some cases Italian notables who actively supported or at least sympathized with the Fascist cause.³¹⁰ In fact, in return for the Italian state's protection against discrimination, the Italian CIAF expected these professionals to bridge the transition with the rest of the Italian community. Lawyers, along with the Delegates, helped destitute Italian families resolve legal problems such as evictions, breaches of contract, or even criminal charges, by taking care of legal expenses and providing free assistance. Local Italian doctors and pharmacists helped with the distribution of drugs sent by the Italian

³⁰⁸ ADAM, 616 W 241, Lettre du Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes au Ministre de l'Intérieur, 14 November 1941.

³⁰⁹ In the Alpes-Maritimes, in December 1942, for instance, out of 26 registered doctors, two were denied the right to practice and 24 were still waiting to be reintegrated, see ADAM, 616 W 260, Lettre n°6248/dic du Colonel Bonnet, Officier de Liaison à la Délégation CIAF de Nice au Lieutenant Plaja, Délégué à l'Assistance et au Rapatriement de Cannes, 1 December 1942.

³¹⁰ See for instance the case of the lawyer Roberto A. in Nice, a Frenchman born of an Italian father and a French mother, ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 59, n°1432 General Quinto Mazzolini, Delegazione all'Assistenza e Rimpatrio di Nizza, alla CIAF, Sottocommissione Affari Giudiziali, 31 December 1941.

army, starting from September 1940.³¹¹ Furthermore, the CIAF created a network of outpatient clinics, attached to every Delegation office, which could even perform minor surgery and blood tests. Thus, the Nice CIAF delegation endeavored to help all Italian emigrants regardless of their social status by providing moral and legal support.

Food assistance was probably the major asset of the CIAF delegations, in terms of winning the hearts and minds of the Italian and, to a lesser extent, of the non-Italian population in the Italian-controlled *Zone Libre*, owing to the worsening living conditions in Vichy France. It is a truism that civilians have always suffered in the event of military invasion. Soldiers loot and live off the land, and in this respect, the German occupation was no exception. The Nazi state plundered without scruple, seizing raw materials and food supplies, justifying it by referring to Article 18 of the Franco-German Armistice, which stated that the “expenses of the German occupation army will be borne by the French government.” The food issue was aggravated by the fact that the German occupation zone encompassed regions which produced more than three-quarters of the nation's production of wheat, butter and sugar.³¹² Accordingly, the Free Zone's population experienced an increasing deficit in food supplies from the onset of Vichy's regime. On 27 September 1940, at the express behest of the Germans, Vichy refined the use of ration cards. A variety of basic products such as bread, milk, rice, sugar, meat and coffee became available only upon the submission of appropriate ration coupons to the vendor. Over time, the size of the rations diminished and a widespread illegal market flourished.

³¹¹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, n°3867 "Attività Sottocommissione Affari Generali, CIAF," 17 April 1943, pp.23-24.

³¹² Dominique Veillon, *Vivre et Survivre en France, 1939-1947*, Paris: Payot, 1995, p.102.

Southeastern France was more severely hit by rationing than most of the other French regions, beginning as early as the *drôle de guerre* in 1939. During the interwar years, farming productivity in this region was well below the French average owing to the rugged landscape, extended urbanization and the underdevelopment of the agricultural sector. The Alpes-Maritimes relied heavily on nearby departments not only for food, but also for raw materials and fuel. If nothing else, the ravages of war disrupted both the food supply network and the regional agricultural production by disrupting the main axes of communications between the various departments. For instance, the cutting of trade with North Africa stopped imports of a variety of food such as wine, eggs, sardines, wheat and olives.³¹³ No wonder, then, that the official rationing system started to crumble in larger cities such as Nice and Cannes as early as April 1941. Police reports noted alarmingly that “some staples are becoming increasingly scarce: skimmed milk, eggs, fruits,” while meat had become so rare that “the majority of consumers do not even use all their [monthly meat] coupons.”³¹⁴ Not only did the Alpes-Maritimes department underproduce basic staples such as wheat and milk, but it also sheltered a significant minority of wealthy families, who had no intention of compromising their standard of living. The conflation of all these factors fuelled an extensive and very lucrative black market.

Black marketeering in the Côte d’Azur cannot be explained without recognizing the importance of the inland rural departments, which, in peacetime, supplied the coastal regions with basic staples. Generally speaking, these departments were less impacted by

³¹³ Jean-Louis Panicacci, “Le temps des pénuries dans les Alpes-Maritimes (1939-1949),” *Les Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 48 (June 1994), pp.191-192.

³¹⁴ ADAM, 166 W 1, Rapport n°4857, Commissariat Spécial de Nice, 30 April 1941.

food rationing than their more developed counterparts. For instance, in July 1941, the population in the Basses-Alpes³¹⁵ department still enjoyed relative prosperity in terms of food supplies.³¹⁶ This state of grace however rapidly deteriorated within one year: farmers complained in the summer of 1942 that the government's fixed prices for products such as wheat, pork meat and potatoes were so low that they were making hardly any profits. The excessive rigidity of the market prices was not the only grievance found in the farmers' *cahiers de doléances*. The Basses-Alpes faced a severe shortage of both manpower and seeds.³¹⁷ The Digne Prefecture's report also noted the proliferation of the black market in the department, as farmers illegally sold their goods at exorbitant prices to city dwellers coming from the coastal departments such as the Alpes-Maritimes and the Bouches du Rhone. Indeed, urban residents, or their middlemen, were endlessly roaming the countryside in search of food unavailable in city markets. For the above reason, in flagrant contrast to Vichy's propaganda praising the rural *France Éternelle*, farmers were openly labeled in many regions as unscrupulous hoarders of food, profiting from the desperate needs of the French population.³¹⁸

In this bleak context, the help stemming from the Italian delegations, especially in the Alpes-Maritimes, was seen as a godsend by many immigrants. Two thousand tins of condensed milk were distributed over one year in 1940-1941. This charitable act was not

³¹⁵ The department had its name changed in 1970 to Alpes-de-Haute-Provence.

³¹⁶ ADAHP, 42 W 40, Rapport mensuel du préfet des Basses-Alpes au Ministère de l'Intérieur sur l'opinion publique, 31 July 1941.

³¹⁷ ADAHP, 42 W 40, Rapport Mensuel n°2251, Préfecture des Basses-Alpes, Cabinet du préfet, 4 June 1942.

³¹⁸ ADAM 166 W 1, Rapport n°5894 "Situation économique," Commissariat Spécial de Nice, 24 June 1941.

Conflict between city-dwellers and farmers was endemic in the Limousin, Creuse and Haute-Vienne departments. See Shannon L. Fogg, *The Politics Of Everyday Life In Vichy France, Foreigners, Undesirables and Strangers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp.25-46.

only crucial at a time when fresh milk was becoming a rarity, but also because Italian women were denied the priority card, created on 18 June 1941 to allocate extra shares of milk to women with at least two small children.³¹⁹ The Italians organized a network of soup kitchens to ameliorate the daily food intake of the most destitute. For obvious propagandistic reasons, the Italian part of the population was helped first, but the Italians also tried to reach out to the French populace. Soup kitchens were also formally open to French individuals. This endearing campaign to seduce non-Italians enjoyed some success. An Italian report observed that the scarcity of drugs in France induced some Frenchmen to seek help at CIAF clinics.³²⁰

However, it is evident that the majority of the population, even a fair portion of the Italian one, was deaf to the Italian aid. For instance the Italian soup kitchen, a useful means to reach out not only to the Italian emigrants, but also to the French population, had fallen from serving 20,000 meals in the interwar period to 750 in 1941.³²¹ Part of the population even reacted with evident hostility. Local Italian officials received anonymous letters with death threats, while a French butcher even went as far as to hurl insults at CIAF officials from his shop door.³²² As a matter of fact, the CIAF delegates, as the embodiment of the state which gave France the *coup de poignard dans le dos*, became the primary target for the French population's anger. On 9 May 1941, two young men, upon seeing members of

³¹⁹ Foreign mothers could receive a priority card only if all their children were French. The CIAF delegations protested to no avail. See ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Telegramma n°1159/632, Ambasciata Italian a Parigi, and the subsequent French reply, Lettre n°1781/DIC Colonel Salmon, Officier de Liaison auprès de la CIAF de Nice, 5 November 1941.

³²⁰ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, No date (probably autumn 1942), "Relazione annuale sulla collettività residente nella giurisdizione della R. Delegazione di Nizza," pp.7-8.

³²¹ ADAM 616 W 223, "Propagande anti-française exercée par les Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes," unsigned, no date (probably around March 1941), p.29.

³²² ADAM 616 W 215, Lettre n°699 du Général Parizot au Ministère de la Marine, Turin, 12 September 1940.

the Nice delegation of Sea Traffic Control, provocatively yelled “Vive la France, à bas Mussolini.” Chased by the two Italian officials and two French gendarmes, the young men were able to sneak into a soap and washing powder factory and escape capture. The successful flight of the culprits would have settled the matter if some factory workers had not started to sing the *Marseillaise*. One of the delegates lost his temper and yelled back, threatening the workers with possible imprisonment. The placating attitude of the other Italian delegate and the policemen notwithstanding, the excited Italian official became outraged as yet another worker cried aloud “Vive la France, à bas Mussolini!” The head of the Italian delegation of Sea Traffic Control, General Lombardi, filed an official complaint which resulted in closure of the factory for one day and the trial of this last factory worker, who received a six-month suspended sentence.³²³ Other minor incidents compelled the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes in March 1941 to issue an appeal for calm, asking the population to “maintain vis-à-vis members of the Control Commission the most reserved and correct attitude.”³²⁴ Disputes between Italian representatives in France and the local population were not limited to the Alpes-Maritimes. Digne-Les-Bains, the capitol of the Basses-Alpes department, was the scene of two minor incidents in April 1941. In one instance, two members of the small CIAF delegation in Digne were allegedly barred from entering the cathedral for the celebration of Palm Sunday by a few young men and girls who mocked them. It seems however that the incident was the result of a misunderstanding: the young French themselves had been denied entry as the cathedral was packed beyond its

³²³ A detailed dossier on the incident can be found in ADAM 104 W 2.

³²⁴ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, n°3872
Commissario Civile di Mentone Virgilio Magris, Mentone, 20 March 1941.

capacity.³²⁵ In another instance, the head of the local Italian delegation, Lieutenant Viscardi, furiously kicked a drunkard in the street who was hurling half-slurred insults about Italy. Not satisfied, Viscardi threatened to punch a French captain, who had objected to what he thought was excessive action by the CIAF official.³²⁶ In fact, clashes between CIAF officials and the French population happened in most of the departments under Italian control to such an extent that all prefects felt compelled to call for calm. The Italian delegation in Corsica too was not immune to the populace's resentment. On 25 August, a CIAF official, while strolling in Ajaccio, was hit on the nape of his neck with a rifle cartridge case thrown by an unknown passerby. Later that day, a wall of the city's main street was tagged with the ominous graffiti, "A quand la Saint-Barthélémy de la Commission?" ("When will there be a Saint-Bartholomew for the [Italian] Commission?").³²⁷

These minor incidents were representative of the prevailing mood in France. The Italian delegates stressed in their reports that the French populace was deeply hostile, even though they interpreted this as a reflection of the French people's reputedly chauvinistic haughtiness and disdain for all non-French. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to view the French behavior as solely the product of a general attitude of condescension towards all foreigners. Italian officials were loathe to admit that the Battle of the Alps had resulted in a strongly negative reaction among in the French population, especially in the border regions.

³²⁵ ADAHP, 42 W 80, Rapport au Ministère de l'Intérieur sur un incident à la cathédrale de Digne le 6 Avril entre Français et membres du détachement italien de Contrôle, 15 April 1941.

³²⁶ ADAHP, 42 W 80, Rapport du Ministère de l'Intérieur sur un incident avec Chef du détachement italien de Contrôle à Digne, 22 April 1941.

³²⁷ The writer was alluding to the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572 when thousands of Protestants perished in widespread massacres across France. ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 03, Telegramma n°54/33 Vice-console d'Italia a Ajaccio, 25 August 1940.

The French population were increasingly upset at the sight of individuals strolling around their towns in the military uniform of an enemy country which they considered to have not truly defeated France. Indeed, jokes targeting the *Regio Esercito* abounded in the Free Zone, especially after its poor performances in Greece and North Africa in 1941. For instance, a cabaret artist, Pierre Dac, in a sketch performed at the Nice Nouveau-Casino, explained that his car did not need any gas to back up because the reverse gear used “macaroni” as fuel, a reference to at the derogatory nickname used for Italian immigrants in France.³²⁸ In another instance, at a meeting held in la Roche sur Foron (Haute-Savoie) in February 1941, one group of *Compagnons de France*, a Vichy youth organization, cried on stage “Les Macaronis vont se faire casser la gueule” (“The Macaronis would have their faces smashed in”), provoking hilarity and cheers among the audience.³²⁹ Sometimes, the French population resorted to more indirect means to express their contempt. Songs parodying famous Italian or French famous songs sprang out of the blue starting at the end of 1940. One version of *La Marseillaise*, rechristened *Allez, Enfants de l’Italie*, became widespread in Monaco and Nice in March 1941. The song belittled Italian military prestige from the very first verse (“Allez enfants de l’Italie / Le Jour de fuite est arrivé”), then ridiculed their poor campaign in the Balkans (“Il nous faut quitter l’Albanie / si nous ne voulons pas y crever”) and finally derided the most important Italian war decoration calling it the “Order of the Hare.”³³⁰ This parody of the French anthem was by no means the only

³²⁸ ADAM, 26 W 6, Rapport n°1,656 du Directeur de la Police de Nice, Nice 18 April 1941.

³²⁹ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 03, Lettera n°856 CIAF, Sottocommissione per l'Esercito, Chambéry, 21 February 1941.

³³⁰ Complete lyrics of the song are available in ADAM 166 W 26, n°444 R. Ufficio di P.S. di Confine Ponte dell'Unione, Mentone, 25 February 1941. See also ADAM 616 W 241, Rapport n°155/4 du Captain Brodard,

one circulating in the Alpes-Maritimes. In February 1941, at the village of Breil near the Green Line, a 20-year old was caught humming the Fascist anthem "Giovinezza" ("Youthfulness") in the Breil patois, a local dialect similar to Italian. Interestingly, the song already hinted at the beginning of the rationing in Italy ("Avant que l'on chante Jeunesse / 40frs par jours on gagnait / Maintenant que l'on chante Jeunesse / On meurt de faim et de faiblesse").³³¹ It is interesting to note that most of the anti-Italian songs were based on children's popular songs or came from the milieu of the youth. For example, the Grenoble CIAF delegation came into possession of a leaflet of two anti-Italian songs, one of which was based on a popular children song from the French Revolution, *Cadet Rousselle*.³³² The juvenile nature of the anti-Italian propaganda could be even more blatant. In early June 1941, several Italians in Nice received tracts in their mailboxes addressed to them specifically and containing anti-irredentist slogans such as "Nice est Française" (Nice is French) and "Mort aux Piémontais" (Death to Piedmontese). The perpetrators of the tracts were later identified as two young individuals, aged 17 and 18, with no link whatsoever to any political organization.³³³

That is not to say that opposition only ran rampant among the youngest of the French population. In a brilliant attempt to underline the momentary Italian retreat against the Greek army, anonymous adult hands tagged a wall in front of the new Italian territory at

Commandant de la section de Roquebrune - Cap Martin, Roquebrune, 15 March 1941. It is worth noting that the song also became popular in the Hautes-Alpes department, ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 01, n°209 del delegato CIAF a Gap Eugenio Mazzarini "Situazione politica nella zona delle Alte Alpi," 27 February 1941.

³³¹ ADAM, 616 W 223, Rapport du Commissaire Spécial au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, Breil, 9 February 1941.

³³² ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Rapporto n°5989 Presidente della Sottocommissione Affari Generali, Turin 2 April 1941.

³³³ ADAM, 104 W 2, Lettera n°3276 CIAF, 1^{ma} Sezione di Controllo al Prefetto delle Alpes-Maritimes, Nice 3 June 1941. see ADAM 104 W 2, Note de renseignements n°13, 24 June 1941.

the Pont de l'Union checkpoint "Grecs, ici c'est la France" (Greeks, this is France).³³⁴ In some instances, adult French became quite creative in expressing their feelings: Petrol drums shipped from Antibes to Italy as part of the renewal of economic ties were tagged with derogatory slogans such as "Abas (sic) Mussolini mangeur de macarons" ("Down with Mussolini, the macaroni-eater") and "La Grèce c'est plus forte que l'huile (sic) de ricino" ("Greece is more powerful than castor oil").³³⁵ To preserve their anonymity, the perpetrators only tagged the side facing the ground when the drums were in vertical position; thus the insults were discovered only when the drums were unloaded on the other side of the border.³³⁶

Unable to win the heart and soul of the French population, CIAF officials attempted to mobilize local Fascist militants. On 2 August 1940, the CIAF delegation in Marseille organized a mass to commemorate the liberation of the internees of Saint-Cyprien and Vernet, officiated by Don Luigi De Biasi, himself a former Saint-Cyprien prisoner.³³⁷ On 11 August 1940, under the aegis of the Italian consulate in Monaco, the same commemoration was held in the Principality of Monaco, officiated by the same Italian priest. However, the second ceremony was much more eventful. The *Principauté de Monaco*, a sovereign country since 1861, was really a hyphen between Italy and France in

³³⁴ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 03, Nota n°1117 Presidente della Sottocommissione Affari Generali al Sottocommissione per l'Esercito, Turin, 12 January 1941.

³³⁵ Castor oil became an emblem of Fascist violence. Starting in the 1920s, the Blackshirts forced their political opponents to drink great quantities of this laxative. The victims, who had their trousers tied, inevitably soiled their clothes and were thus publicly humiliated.

³³⁶ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 03, Rapporto n°1354 di prot. I "Scritte anti-Italiane sui fusti di carburanti provenienti dalla Francia," Generale di Brigata Ferando Gelich, Segretario Generale della CIAF, Turin, 18 March 1941.

³³⁷ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 17, Rapporto n°16 "Collettività italiana," Delegazione della CIAF Marsiglia, Marseille, 6 August 1940.

the interwar years. It stood midway between Nice and the Italian border, and its population was as much Italian as it was French. That Italian community, however, was heavily divided between a hardcore group of *fuoriusciti*, based in Beausoleil, a commune in the Alpes-Maritimes, and a growing pro-Fascist cell in Monaco, supported by the Italian consulate. Several incidents erupted between 1934 and 1936, following the opening of the *Casa degli Italiani* in Monaco, but these violent episodes did not seem to deter people's affiliation to the Fascists, as allegedly, up to twenty per cent of the Italian adult population held a PNF membership card between 1920 and 1943.³³⁸ On 10 June 1940, after the Italian declaration of war, the Prince of Monaco made the decision to side with his French neighbor, arresting a hundred pro-Fascist Italians, later to be herded into French internment camps. After their liberation, the Italian prisoners returned to Monaco embittered by the trauma of the detention, where they fuelled the tension with their account of the poor conditions while detained. On the opposite end of the political spectrum, the Italian leftist emigrants increasingly felt cornered between reactionary Vichy France and Fascist Italy.

On the day of the commemoration mass for the former detainees of the French concentration camps, a mob of *fuoriusciti* and antifascists gathered outside the church and started to scream insults against Italy and the Italian regime. Two Italian CIAF officials on their way back to Nice cautiously waded through the hostile crowd in Beausoleil. The Monaco police showed up but, according to the consul's report, the only reason the situation did not degenerate in chaos and violence was the self-control of the CIAF

³³⁸ Pierre Abramovici, *Un Rocher bien occupé, Monaco pendant la guerre 1939-1945*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001, pp.38-48.

personnel, not because of the French police's presence.³³⁹ In fact, local Italian authorities in both Monaco and Nice openly accused the French and Monaco police of conniving with the *fuoriusciti*. They demanded and obtained the resignation of the Monaco Head of Police, Le Luc, and the incarceration of the most active *fuoriusciti*.³⁴⁰ In response to accusations that the mass had been a trap to stir up the Leftist expatriates, they pointed out that the officiating priest had previously obtained permission from the Bishop of Monaco; the event had not been advertised in any newspaper; and it had been planned for seven o'clock in the morning. Moreover, allegedly, no Fascist or Italian flags were hung up and the sermon did not mention the political situation.³⁴¹ Thus, it was hardly provocative. Unfortunately, no French police report about the incident was found, but it seems doubtful that local Italian authorities did not anticipate that, at a time of tension between pro-Fascist Italians and Italian political emigrants, the latter supported by French leftists, an event featuring previous internees and Italian officials in military uniform would not be perceived as open provocation.

CIAF delegates, however, found out that the mobilization of local irredentists was a double-edged sword. By December 1940, the head of the CIAF delegation in Nice, Consul Silvio Camerani, was monitoring suspiciously the whereabouts of several “shady characters” and “agents provocateurs” who had made contact with the CIAF delegation. He admonished his subordinates not to mingle with these individuals, as he feared these

³³⁹ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Rapporto n°1548/288 Console Italiano a Monaco Sanfelice, Monaco, 11 August 1940.

³⁴⁰ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Rapporto n°1610/309 Console Italiano a Monaco Sanfelice, Monaco, 24 August 1940.

³⁴¹ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Rapporto n°1640/315 Console Italiano a Monaco Sanfelice, Monaco, 7 September 1940.

outspoken irredentists were being kept under strict observation by the French police.³⁴² Camerani's worries were well-founded. An anonymous French official, probably from the Ministry of Interior, filed a thirty-five-page-long report at the beginning of 1941 on "the evolution and the present situation of the antinational propaganda carried out by the Italians."³⁴³ The French police report focused on the activities of Ezio Garibaldi, the grandson of the Italian national hero, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Ezio Garibaldi, as did most of his siblings, fought in the First World War with the *Légion Garibaldienne* on the Argonne and Alpine fronts. However, the Garibaldi family had divided after Mussolini's rise to power: Sante remained loyal to his Leftist origins while Ezio joined to the PNF, becoming a deputy in the Parliament from 1924 to 1934. After the armistice, Ezio Garibaldi renewed his ties with the irredentist cause. In December 1940, he founded the *Gruppi d'Azione Nizzarda* (Nice Action Groups, also known as GAN) in Rome. In the usual dithyrambic irredentist jargon, the GAN's constitution proclaimed that its overarching goal was "to contribute, by any means, to returning the land of Nice to the fatherland which was iniquitously torn from it in 1860 through blackmail and intrigue (sic)."³⁴⁴ The GAN was open to four categories of people: inhabitants of the County of Nice willing to contribute to the "incorporation of the territories not yet freed, to the Fascist Motherland," Garibaldi's legionnaires, PNF members, and veterans of the Battle of the Alps.

The fact that Garibaldi wanted to make inroads in the *Regio Esercito* was a telltale sign of the intended purpose of the GAN, to act as shock troops for a coup on the model of

³⁴² ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 48, Notiziario politico quindicinale n°1340 Delegato CIAF di Nizza Silvio Camerani, Nice, 10 December 1940.

³⁴³ ADAM, 616 W 223, Dossier "Propagande anti-française exercée par les italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes."

³⁴⁴ ADAM, 166 W 10, Propagande Irredentiste Italienne.

the Fiume putsch of 1919, in which 2,000 Italian irredentists led by the nationalist poet Gabriele D'Annunzio successfully ousted Entente troops from the Dalmatian city, or, in the worst case, as fertile ground for a future military occupation.³⁴⁵ Indeed, 300 irredentists gathered in Menton on 21 December 1940.³⁴⁶ The meeting, headed by Ezio Garibaldi, fuelled wild rumors in the Côte d'Azur that Italian irredentists were preparing a *Marcia Su Nizza* (March on Nice) nicknamed after the October 1922 March on Rome which had brought Mussolini to power. At the end of April 1941, reunions were organized by local GAN with the help of the PNF in support of the cause of *Nizza Italiana* in major Italian cities, especially in the regions bordering France. On 28 April, Ezio Garibaldi chose to celebrate the *Giornata D'Azione Nizzarda* in Savona, an important city at one hundred kilometers from the French border.³⁴⁷ The tone was set by the historical flag of the County of Nice mounted behind the stage, surrounded by the banners of the local towns and Fascist organizations. If the symbolic display of flags was not blunt enough, the speeches removed any doubt. The first speaker, the National GAN Inspector Gustavo Traglia, started his speech by eulogizing the soldiers who had died in the assault of the bunker of St-Louis bridge in Menton, some of them hailing from the Liguria region. He then listed all the alleged French wrongs against Italy and the Italians, ranging from French colonial greediness in North Africa to the massacre of Aigues-Mortes. In fact, many orators stressed

³⁴⁵ In truth, the GAN failed to make inroads in the Regio Esercito, as Italian soldiers were officially forbidden by the Army General Staff to adhere to the irredentist organization. See ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, n°3428 T.C. dal Prefetto CIAF Vittorelli "Iscrizione degli appartenenti alle Forze Armate ai Gruppi di Azione Nizzarda, 14 June 1941.

³⁴⁶ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Rapporto del Commissario Civile di Mentone "Riunione Gruppi Azione Nizzarda," Mentone, 21 December 1940.

³⁴⁷ Most of the details on the celebration in Savona were found in an unsigned report, possibly a newspaper article, in the trial dossier of two Italian irredentists, Jean-Antoine et Jean-Claude A., ADAM 318 W 52.

the poor treatment Italian emigrants had received on French soil. Traglia then advocated the return of the County of Nice, including the Principality of Monaco, to its legitimate homeland: Italy. Ezio Garibaldi briefly spoke announcing that the GAN became officially sanctioned that very day by the Fascist state by incorporating it in the PNF. Finally Garibaldi concluded the meeting with the flamboyant rallying cry "*O Nizza o Morte!*" ("Nice or Death"). Aside from the GAN, Garibaldi launched a newspaper *Il Nizzardo* to promote the irredentist campaign. Published weekly from 15 March 1942 to 27 June 1943, *Il Nizzardo* took its name from an 1860 Italian newspaper which had campaigned against the French annexation of the County of Nice. Its first issue set the tone. In his front-page column, Ezio Garibaldi proclaimed its rallying cry "*Nizza fino alla morte*" ("Nice until death"), and gloated over the impending conquest of the French irredentist lands.

Il Nizzardo was merely echoing the wishes of irredentist militants in the County of Nice who were already excitedly anticipating the coming of *Nizza Italiana*, when "the oppressors will become the oppressed."³⁴⁸ Their Monaco fellows were no less enthusiastic. Irredentists were already speaking of "sunbathing in the shade of our flag." One veteran of the First World War could not wait to meet the Italian army as he planned to "put a wine keg in front of his house to drink with soldiers, especially his fellows, the Alpini."³⁴⁹ However, it is debatable whether the desire to see Nice incorporated into the Italian state truly reflected deep irredentist feelings among the Italian population. Some Italians living in Nice complained about the strict food rationing in the Alpes-Maritimes and hoped that the

³⁴⁸ Records of letters intercepted by the police are available in ADAM, 616 W 190.

³⁴⁹ All the taped conversations are available in ADAM, 616 W 188, Fichier Monaco.

coming of the Italians would improve their living conditions.³⁵⁰ Others viewed the incorporation of Nice simply as a way to see their Italian relatives without the hassle of border controls at a time where Vichy, and sometimes the Italian authorities, openly discouraged travelling between the two countries.³⁵¹

The brazen attitude of the GAN was shunned by Italian officials in France, complaining that the irredentist campaign was harming Italian interests in France. Boastful proclamations of an imminent Italian conquest of the Côte d'Azur by hordes of blackshirts had the effect of radicalizing the French population, thus thinning the already meager chances of winning over the local populace to the CIAF welfare campaign.³⁵² Moreover, the Nice CIAF delegate, Consul Camerani, stressed in his 11 January report that the rumors of a possible coup were just the excuse the French government needed to remilitarize the regions near the border, if within the Armistice's limits.³⁵³

The GAN's attitude was equally rebuffed by Count Quinto Mazzolini, the new CIAF delegate in Nice who replaced Camerani in May 1941. Along the lines of his predecessor, Mazzolini chided the *Gruppi D'Azione Nizzarda* for previous demonstrations and forbade any irredentist demonstration without his consent. For this reason, he explicitly prohibited the disclosure to *Il Nizzardo* of any information from his 1942 March report about the French authorities in the Alpes-Maritimes. Moreover he vetoed the nomination of the son of Lieutenant-Colonel Bandini, one of the most virulent *Il Nizzardo* editorialists, to the CIAF

³⁵⁰ See for instance ADAM, 616 W 190, Rapport n°773, 16 February 1941, and Rapport n°1169, 12 March 1941.

³⁵¹ See for instance ADAM, 616 W 190, Rapport n°1871, 8 May 1941.

³⁵² ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Rapporto n°977 "Gruppi d'Azione Nizzard, Attività ed inconvenienti," Commissario Civile di Mentone, 20 January 1941.

³⁵³ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 48, Rapporto n°130, Delegato italiano CIAF a Nizza Camerani, 11 January 1941.

military delegation in Nice.³⁵⁴ Mazzolini's distrust of the GAN however went beyond a simple difference of opinion over strategy. He questioned the sincerity of some GAN leaders, accusing them of riding the wave of irredentism for reasons of self-interest. Mazzolini was upset that some of these leaders in fact were criminals, charged in Italy with a variety of crimes such as desertion, theft and criminal bankruptcy fraud.³⁵⁵

One episode can serve to underline Mazzolini's contempt for the irredentists in Nice. On 16 May 1942, a major Italian newspaper, *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, reported a brutal physical and verbal attack on Italians by Frenchmen in Nice. But it soon backfired, badly embarrassing the Nice CIAF delegation. Mazzolini discovered that the two victims, notorious irredentists, were completely drunk when they started quarreling with a horse carriage driver and his clients. Moreover, the xenophobic motivation was ruled out, as the French had not known the nationality of the irredentists. Significantly, Mazzolini angrily stated that the two individuals were "among the worst I had ever seen among the ten thousand who had come to my office in one year," and that the *Gazzetta del Popolo* recounted the episode "in a way totally contrary to the facts, so that the version should be regarded as completely false."³⁵⁶

Yet, the irredentists and the Commission did write against their common enemy, the French local authorities, who fought tooth and nail to counter the irredentist propaganda.

³⁵⁴ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 59, Telespresso n°597 R. from Gen. Quinto Mazzolini, Nice, 19 March 1942; ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Telegramma n°16836 P.R. from Gen. Quinto Mazzolini regarding Lieutenant Bandini, Nice, 29 May 1942.

³⁵⁵ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Relazione del Console Italiano Mazzolini sulla sua permanenza a Nizza, 20 March 1943. The lengthy report was divided in three parts: The Italian community (*La collettività italiana*); General situation (*Situazione generale*); and *Gruppi D'Azione Nizzarda*.

³⁵⁶ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Telegramma n°15655 Mazzolini "Articolo della *Gazzetta del Popolo*," Nice, 19 May 1942, and ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Rapporto n°1343 R delegato CIAF Mazzolini sul caso Giov. Battista B., David B., Ranuzzi, Nice, 26 May 1942.

This confrontation stemmed from the fact that some departments, such as the Alpes-Maritimes, Italy's main irredentist claim, was also one of the key departments in Vichy's struggle to assert its sovereignty. The Fascist state equated the Alpes-Maritimes to the 1860 County of Nice and thus stressed its Italian heritage. Vichy, which had already lost half of the French territory to the Germans and with its Empire in dire straits, was very reluctant to part with any part of its metropolitan territory. Therefore, the Prefecture of the Alpes-Maritimes and the CIAF Delegations in Nice and Cannes along with *Il Nizzardo* fought a war of propaganda, resounding speeches and never-ending negotiations over regulations and reports on each other's activities.

The CIAF delegate in Nice, Silvio Camerani, who had been the former Consul on the eve of the June 1940 hostilities, started criticizing the local French authorities as soon as he was back in France, devoting special attention to the Bishop of Nice, Monseigneur Rémond, and to the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes, Marcel Ribière. Both were accused of launching, with the help of the two Nice newspapers, *le Petit Niçois* and *L'Éclaireur de Nice et du Sud-est*, a campaign with the two-pronged aim of belittling the prestige of the Fascist state and reasserting the French character of the County of Nice.³⁵⁷ Furthermore, Camerani accused Monseigneur Rémond of fuelling the patriotism of the French clergy while ostracizing clergymen who sympathized with the irredentist cause.³⁵⁸ Camerani's successor, Count Mazzolini, was even more vitriolic in his criticisms of Monseigneur

³⁵⁷ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 48, Rapporto n°1370 Silvio Camerani al Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Nice, 11 December 1940.

³⁵⁸ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 48, Rapporto n°1420 Silvio Camerani CIAF Sottocommissione Affari Generali, Nice, 17 March 1941. See also the subsequent report on the principal clergymen in the Alpes-Maritimes.

Rémond, unceremoniously labeled as the man who “perfectly summed up the fanaticism of the French officer and of the Gallic clergy always obsessed ... with nationalist ideas instead of divine ones.”³⁵⁹ *Il Nizzardo* moreover blamed Monseigneur Rémond for his uncooperative stance and his speeches were always carefully monitored for any anti-Italian ideas.³⁶⁰ *Il Nizzardo* became the most outspoken vehicle of an Italian campaign aimed at defaming the French authorities in the Alpes-Maritimes. The Prefect Ribière was held responsible for the supposedly thriving Gaullist movement and for the general hostility directed against the Italian CIAF delegation. Even Jean Médecin, the Senator-Mayor of Nice, was targeted for backing a proposal to rebuild *Vieux Nice*, which, in the mind of the irredentists, was an effort to destroy the most tangible proof of Nice’s Italian heritage.³⁶¹

The irredentists' contempt was well-placed, as both Vichy representatives in the Alpes-Maritimes were known for their staunch patriotism and their firm opposition to any Italian annexationist aims. It was widely known that Monseigneur Rémond, a former military chaplain on the Rhine front, was fiercely anti-Italian, especially after the *coup de poignard dans le dos* of June 1940.³⁶² Monseigneur Rémond's hostility towards Italian annexationist claims was supported by the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes, Marcel Ribière. First cousin of the conservative politician and former Prime Minister Pierre-Etienne Flandin, Ribière was a hardline Pétainist, who believed that his mission was twofold: to spread the word of the *Révolution Nationale* as far as possible and preserve the territorial

³⁵⁹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Memorandum delegato CIAF Mazzolini al Ministero Affari Esteri, Affari Generali, Rome, 20 March 1943, Section II, “Sulla Situazione Generale.”

³⁶⁰ Jean-Louis Panicacci, “Un Journal Irrédentiste sous l’Occupation: *Il Nizzardo*,” *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 33/34 (December 1986-June 1987), pp.144-145.

³⁶¹ *Il Nizzardo*, n°20, year IX, 26 July 1942, p.2.

³⁶² For more on Monseigneur Rémond Ralph Schor, see *Un évêque dans le siècle: Monseigneur Paul Rémond (1873-1963)*, Nice: Serre Editeur, 1984.

integrity of southeastern France. The first goal was achieved by implementing, to the letter, all directives issued by Vichy. More than 550 municipal officials in Nice alone were fired after the 17 July law; thirty-five municipal councils, most of which were Leftist municipalities such as Grasse and Saint Laurent du Var, were disbanded; people affiliated with Freemasonry were forced to resign following Vichy 13's August 1940 law against secret societies; and notorious communist militants were hunted down and incarcerated in internment camps.³⁶³

Coincidental to the political cleansing of the department, a widespread campaign to glorify Maréchal Pétain was carried out. In the Alpes-Maritimes, Pétain was especially revered owing to the high concentration of veterans in the region. Indeed, the *Légion Française des Combattants*, created in July 1940 a few weeks after the debacle that was the defeat, was made up of war veterans from the First World War and a select few from the Second World War and was intended to be the chief vehicle for implementing the National Revolution. The Legion became the eyes and the ears of Vichy as its adherents were encouraged to denounce any activity that was directed against the new moral and political tenets to the police authorities.³⁶⁴ The Legion was particularly significant in the Alpes-Maritimes, as a result of the popularity of its local leader, Second World War veteran Joseph Darnand. With its 28,000 members, in a population of 516,000, the Legion received a lot of attention in CIAF fortnightly reports, despite the fact that Italian officials were

³⁶³ Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, pp.98-102.

³⁶⁴ For more on the *Légion Française des Combattants*, see Jean-Paul Cointet, *La légion française des Combattants*, Albin Michel, Paris, 1995.

quick to dismiss it as any real military threat.³⁶⁵ Moreover, because the Maréchal owned a country house in Villeneuve-Loubet, the mayors of nearby villages obtained official permission in March 1943 to rename the region *La Vallée du Maréchal*.³⁶⁶ Pictures and portraits of the “Hero of Verdun” were hung in every municipality in place of the traditional bust of Marianne.

If Pétain’s portraits were omnipresent in the *Zone Libre*, his worship in the Alpes-Maritimes was harnessed to a broader campaign to stress the French character of the County of Nice and preserve France's territorial integrity. In November 1940, a Nice newspaper, *L’Éclaireur Du Sud-Ouest* published the controversial pamphlet “Nice est Bien Française” (“Nice is really French”) written by the most famous Nice writer and historian, Louis Cappatti.³⁶⁷ Local newspapers were also used by French authorities to advertise the start of the public works to be carried out in the department. Country roads were paved and widened and Vichy chose to centralize the cinematographic activity of the *Zone Libre* in Nice’s Victorine Studios. The goal of this vast campaign was twofold: first of all, public works were dearly needed to create jobs at a time when the French economy had ground to a halt due to the war. But more importantly, by investing money, Vichy wanted to send a clear message to the local population and the Italian state alike that the French government was not forsaking the Alpes-Maritimes department.³⁶⁸ For instance, on Labour Day (1 May 1941), the Ministry of Transportation and Communications Jean Berthelot gave a speech in

³⁶⁵ See ADAM, 616 W 61, Région de Police de Nice, Alpes-Maritimes, Fichier départemental, p.23 for the statistical records. For Italian reports on the Legion, AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 15, Rapporto quindicinale CIAF n°10, 15-30 April 1941, pp.7-9.

³⁶⁶ ADAM, 616 W 49, Lettre Secrétariat du Maréchal de France au Préfet Régional, Vichy, 27 March 1943.

³⁶⁷ The complete text is available at the Archives Municipales de la ville de Nice (hereafter AMVN), 2 S 241.

³⁶⁸ The CIAF clearly understood the implication of this campaign. See for instance, AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 15, CIAF Notiziario quindicinale n°10 (15-30 April 1941), p.13.

Nice to herald the construction of a highway that would link, both symbolically and tangibly, Provence with the County of Nice.

Public works were not enough, however, to enthuse the populace. Most conservative regimes make wide use of heroes considered to embody the nation, virtue and spirit of sacrifice, and in this regard, Vichy was not an exception. Vichy's panegyrists chose to exploit a traditional heroine recently canonized in 1920, Joan of Arc. Her cult was not a novelty in France: Since the nineteenth century, the French Romantic Movement had lionized the "Maiden of Orléans." The apogee of her cult, however, was reached after the Armistice. It was a blunt message. Joan of Arc was a French heroine who fought foreign invaders. The Vichy propaganda shrewdly tied the Maréchal's cult to devotion to Joan of Arc. For instance, *L'Éclaireur Du Sud-Ouest* sponsored an essay contest in 1941 for school pupils themed "De Jeanne D'Arc à Pétain, la France continue."³⁶⁹

Nothing however stirred French nationalism as much as Italian irredentist claims. After the already mentioned *Giornata D'Azione Nizzarda* in April 1941, the French population was rabid. CIAF officials in Nice immediately had condemned the irredentists for fear that they would fuel the anger already directed against the Italians still living on French soil. Italian fears were not groundless: on 9 May, an Italian was beaten in a bistro for wearing the Italian medal given to the veterans of the First World War, wrongly mistaken as a display of irredentist badges.³⁷⁰ Vice-consul Fragnito warned at the beginning of May that the French government was preparing a reply to the *Giornata D'Azione*

³⁶⁹ Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, p.107.

³⁷⁰ ADAM, 104 W 2, Procès-Verbal n°812, Police D'État de Nice, 12 May 1941.

Nizzarda.³⁷¹ Across the Free Zone, a massive celebration was held on 11 May, Joan of Arc's Saint day, to rally the populace to the new regime. Only in Orléans, notwithstanding Pétain's visit the day before, did religious public speakers avoid political proclamations and that was because the city was in the German occupation zone.³⁷² In Nice, the celebrations were organized in grand style: flags, rosettes, tricolored ribbons and portraits of Pétain were distributed for free. Twenty-five thousand school pupils paraded in front of Joan of Arc's statue, placed by the organizers on the stairs of the Church of Notre-Dame. More than 20,000 members of the Légion marched on the Promenade des Anglais and gathered for a mass, officiated by Monseigneur Rémond, near the *Monument des Morts* (Monument for the Fallen Soldiers).³⁷³ Nice's historical center was also decked with flags in demonstration of the national fervor of its population.

In fact, the flags became a means to single out unpatriotic citizens. CIAF local authorities complained that those who had refused or neglected to hang flags or ribbons were allegedly threatened by the populace.³⁷⁴ In one case, an Italian woman was labeled a troublemaker as she hung up a black skirt instead of a French flag. Later that day, she discovered that the skirt was stolen.³⁷⁵ French authorities had warned against any kind of disorderly behavior. The Prefect Ribière issued an appeal inviting the population to retain its composure and reminded everyone that “any incident could harm France's interests.”³⁷⁶

³⁷¹ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Rapporto n°2582 Vice-Console Giorgio Fragnito, Nice, 8 May 1941.

³⁷² Gerd Krumeich, “The Cult Of Joan of Arc Under The New Regime,” in Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh (eds.), *Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*, New York: Berg, 1989, pp.97-98.

³⁷³ *L'Éclaireur Du Sud-Ouest*, 12 May 1941.

³⁷⁴ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 15, CIAF Notiziario quindicinale n°11 (1-15 May 1941), p.13.

³⁷⁵ ADAM, 104 W 2, Note de Renseignements n°12 in reply to the letter n°3148 of 31 May 1941 from the CIAF relative to the case of Angela P. in Levens.

³⁷⁶ *L'Éclaireur Du Sud-Ouest*, 10 May 1941.

CIAF officials noted in their report that local Vichy officials so refrained from alluding to Italian irredentist claims in their speeches that they “could have been given in any other French city.”³⁷⁷ In fact, it was the leaders of the Legion, backed up by the Prefect and the head of the LFC, François Valentin, who silenced the few voices in the crowd yelling anti-Italian slogans.³⁷⁸

This self-moderation in the orators’ discourse should not be considered as a disowning of the defense of the national soil. Local French authorities simply wanted to avoid inflaming the political situation in the Alpes-Maritimes. They feared that an eruption of ethnic violence between the two communities could be an excuse for the Italian army to step in. CIAF officials and local irredentists, on the other hand, were still suspicious of Vichy's local representatives as they feared the forbearance in their speech masked a prospective French military resurgence. If no high state officials participated at the Joan of Arc day, the Vichy state was still not far away, as Marshal Pétain was at in his country house in Villeneuve-Loubet for the whole day and was visited successively by the Prefect Ribière, Monseigneur Rémond, Joseph Darnand, and other local French officials. In fact, the grandiose display of French patriotism was probably aimed at the German state as much as the Italian one, in an effort to convince the German officials of the French character of the County of Nice.³⁷⁹ We should not forget that this nationalistic campaign was also aimed at reasserting Vichy's legitimacy in the minds of the French populace. Local Italian authorities rightly argued that this propaganda strategy was also a way of combating the

³⁷⁷ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Rapporto n°2678 Vice-Console Giorgio Fragnito, Nice, 11 May 1941.

³⁷⁸ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Rapporto n°16144/Pr. Presidenza CIAF allo Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito, Turin, 18 May 1941.

³⁷⁹ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Rapporto n°2582 Vice-Console Giorgio Fragnito, Nice, 8 May 1941.

growing influence of the Gaullist movement in the Alpes-Maritimes.³⁸⁰ In fact, the Italians were dismayed by the degree of cohesiveness and coordination between the Legion and the Vichy youth organizations. *Il Nizzardo* harangued the local leaders of the Legion Sauvaigo and Arneodo, for having repudiated their ancestors' country. The birth of a more militant part of the Legion, in December 1941, the *Service d'Ordre Légionnaire* (SOL), was reported by the Italian newspaper with the warning "Watch out for the SOL!" Again, CIAF reports mirrored the worries of *Il Nizzardo*. The February 1942 CIAF report, for instance, gave a detailed account of the onset of the SOL movement. In fact, they were worried that the radicalization of the Legion might presage the rebirth of a revitalized French Army.³⁸¹

Until the Italian military invasion in November 1942, Nice remained one of the cornerstones of the *Révolution Nationale*. To bolster the *francité* of the Côte d'Azur, Darlan visited Nice on 9 October 1941, who, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, of Defense and of the Interior, was the *de facto* deputy of Marshal Pétain. The symbolic importance of this one-day visit, which triggered the usual flags, parade and official speeches, was not Darlan himself, but Pétain. French authorities insisted that the visit had been completely organized by the French government supposedly unbeknownst to Pétain. Both Pétain and the general public had been kept in the dark until the 7 October when local newspapers heralded the incoming visit of the Pétain's dauphin.³⁸² However, as had been the case with Jeanne D'Arc Day, the Maréchal was in Villeneuve-Loubet, which was hardly a coincidence. His

³⁸⁰ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 18, CIAF Notiziario quindicinale n°23 (5 November 1941), p.24.

³⁸¹ AUSSME, CIAF, D7, Box 18, CIAF Notiziario Quindicinale n°30 (15-31 February 1942), p.30-31. Italian fears were not groundless, as the SOL later evolved into the infamous Milice Française. For more on both, see Jacques Delperrié de Bayac, *Histoire de la Milice 1918-1945*, Paris: Fayard, 1969 and the more recent work Pierre Giolitto, *Histoire de la Milice*, Paris: Perrin, 1999.

³⁸² ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 50, Telegramma n°40919 "Visita Ammiraglio Darlan a Nizza," 18 October 1941.

symbolic presence in the department was so important that wild rumors spread that Pétain had attended Darlan's speech incognito and that he himself would visit Nice one month later.³⁸³

Darlan's visit was just the first of the many official trips between February and October 1942 made by leading Vichy officials, including State Secretaries Paul Marion (Information) and René Belin (Work), and leading French fascists such as Philippe Henriot, Charles Maurras and PPF leader Jacques Doriot. All these orators harangued the Nice populace, to the point that Nice earned the nickname of *Fille Aînée de la Révolution Nationale* (Eldest Daughter of the National Revolution).³⁸⁴ However, Marshal Pétain never visited Nice, although he did visit Chambéry and Annecy on 21-23 September 1941. If the pretext for the visit to the Savoy region was to counter the growing resistance movement in the mountains, Vichy's officials acknowledged that Pétain's visit to Nice would probably trigger a backlash from the Italian government, as it would be interpreted as an assertion of France's claim to the city.

In fact, both the prudent attitude of Vichy authorities and the cool reaction of CIAF officials to the GAN militants could help explain why the mutual scorn of the Italian and French communities rarely erupted into violent confrontation. Only one major incident physically pitted Italian civilians against French in the Alpes-Maritimes. On the night of 30 October 1940, Pierre Weck, eighteen years old and French, was strolling back home from the movies with a few friends and his sister in Monaco. On the way, he ran into two Italians

³⁸³ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 50, Nota Ministero Affari Esteri, Rome, 31 October 1941.

³⁸⁴ Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, p.112. The Italian irredentist newspaper *Il Nizzardo* mocked the steady stream of Vichy dignitaries by christening Nice "The Mecca of the National Revolution," see *Il Nizzardo*, n°3, Year IX, 23 March 1942, p.3.

who were allegedly yelling “Viva Mussolini, Vive le Duce.” Weck asked them to stop their singing and in reply got punched. He then fell while fleeing and was repeatedly kicked in the head by a mob of Italians. Pierre Weck succumbed to his wounds at the hospital a few days later.³⁸⁵ This episode caused an uproar in the French community. Wild rumors spread that the Italian surgeon had indicated in his report that the youth had died from hitting his head on the pavement, thus exonerating the two assailants.³⁸⁶ The Italian Consul in Monaco, Sanfelice, confirmed the Italian surgeon’s explanation. In his report of the incident, Sanfelice asserted that the French group had started the confrontation. Pierre Weck was, he reported, particularly virulent in his insults “because of the support of several friends or maybe to act as a braggart to impress some girls.” As soon as the two Italians had threatened to beat him, Weck ran and slipped on the sidewalk, mortally injuring himself by hitting his head on the paving. The Consul’s report moreover accused the local Legion, which had provided legal support to the victim’s family in the trial, of adding to the tension by stirring up a nationalist campaign, by describing the death of Pierre Weck as “a hateful Fascist aggression.”³⁸⁷

Pierre Weck's death happened in the first months after the Battle of the Alps and, coupled with the previous incarceration of allegedly Italian Fascists in June 1940, the unfortunate incident could have foreshadowed the beginning of xenophobic violence. Yet, notwithstanding the increasing uneasiness in the department, owing to the tightening of

³⁸⁵ ADAM, 616 W 241, Rapport n°127/2 Sergent-chef Guillermet "Incident entre jeunes français et italiens survenu à Monaco," Cap D’Ail, 30 October 1940.

³⁸⁶ ADAM, 616 W 241, Rapport n°2877 Commissaire Spécial Beausoleil au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 5 November 1940.

³⁸⁷ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Rapporto n°3193/624 Console Italiano in Monaco Sanfelice, 31 december 1940.

rationing and the growing fear of an Italian invasion, no major crime based on xenophobic motivation was recorded after the Weck incident before the Italian military invasion in November 1942. Even the CIAF delegate in Nice Quinto Mazzolini admitted that the CIAF delegation was often exaggerating the threat for propaganda reasons when he wrote, “I often explain the facts [incidents between French and Italians] to the French authorities with the *necessary dramatization* (italics are mine), but to the Royal [Foreign] Ministry I have to concede that at present time, the Italian community in the Alpes-Maritimes lives almost undisturbed.”³⁸⁸ Xenophobic riots between Italians and French simply never happened and the relations between the two communities never deteriorated to the point of no return. This relative calm stemmed from two factors: first of all, both communities were in an *attentiste* mood, waiting for the armistice situation to clarify itself. Even the most ardent anti-Italian inhabitants were cautious in expressing their contempt, in case of an Italian invasion.³⁸⁹ On the other hand, the Italian irredentists started to tone down the expression of their nationalist feelings, especially in light of the moderation of CIAF officials. However, this does not fully explain why the tension never fully erupted into a racial war. It appears that the absence of widespread violence could also be attributed to the high degree of integration of the Italian immigrants into the French society. Mixed marriages were common and for good reason; both communities were largely Catholic and shared common cultural roots. In fact, each community had suffered from the war equally.

³⁸⁸ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Rapporto n°1343 R delegato CIAF Quinto on Giov. Battista B., David B., Ranuzzi case, Nice, 26 May 1942, p.2.

³⁸⁹ In fact, to a certain extent, French who had quarrels with Italians were denounced and taken into custody by the Italian army after November 1942, see Chapter 7. The Italian occupation policy in France: the repressive forbearance of the Italian army.

A few Italians enjoyed some advantages gratis the CIAF delegations, at least until rationing also hit Italy hard, but this material help was counterbalanced by the limitations imposed on their civic rights, a consequence of the xenophobic laws implemented by Vichy.

Notwithstanding this truce, CIAF officials were treading dangerous ground in the Zone Libre. The Italian CIAF personnel stationed on French soil to supervise the armistice clauses soon became embroiled in a war of influence with local French authorities. Indeed, the impact of the mere presence of delegations of an enemy state, which in the mind of the local population and Vichy authorities had not defeated France, should not be underestimated. Italian delegations always had to move carefully to avoid any direct confrontation with the French state. In their reports, however, they never hid their contempt for the Vichy regime. For instance, Italian officials scathingly noted that in Nice “speeches were more copious than provisions,” hinting here at the worsening rationing situation along the French Mediterranean coast.³⁹⁰ Conversely, Vichy prefects resented the Italians' interference in public matters as Italian officials saw themselves as paladins of the Italian community in France. This confrontation even existed to an intelligence level. The *Deuxième Bureau*, the French military intelligence service, instructed its agents in the Basses-Alpes to carefully monitor the CIAF officials in Digne and report any of their activities that went beyond the scope of their official role, such as food distribution to needy Italians, espionage or arms trafficking.³⁹¹ In fact, the French noted that these activities were

³⁹⁰ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 19, CIAF Notiziario Quindicinale n°29 (1-15 February 1942), p.35.

³⁹¹ ADAHP 42 W 80, Circulaire n°106/S/2-SR/SCA "Instruction particulière n°4, Renseignements sur les incidents eventuels avec les autorités des commissions de contrôle d'armistice," 18 April 1941.

often linked together, for CIAF officials paid local Italians to spy in return for food.³⁹² The quarrel between the two states inevitably fuelled the brooding tensions between the French and Italian communities in France. Italians were seen as the fifth column in France, scouts for the future annexation of France and these suspicions occasionally erupted in violence, although never on a large scale.

As a matter of fact, local authorities and the populace were right. CIAF authorities had a hidden agenda besides the aid of Italian citizens living on French soil. They strove to undermine the newly created French state from within by exploiting the frail legitimacy of a regime born of a crushing defeat which had cut its territory in half. The tool used by CIAF officials was the Armistice, but especially Article XXI, the wide interpretation of which allowed them to impinge on French internal matters. It thus appears reductive to assert that the impact of CIAF delegations "was extremely limited" because of the terms of the Armistice.³⁹³ It is true that they were mostly "dealing with the daily economic interests of the Italian citizens living in France," but this concern for Italian permanent residents in France held far wider consequences at the local level. The CIAF official mediating to reinstate Italian workers who had been laid off or to get an Italian mother access to the *carte alimentaire* reserved for French women with toddlers was not merely affecting the local economy but was also impinging on French internal affairs. His act was political. By doing so he directly challenged the authority of Vichy prefects and the French jurisdiction. For example, by strongly endorsing a program of food distribution to poor Italian

³⁹² ADAHP 42 W 80, Rapport n° S4/2 from the Chef d'Escadron Ogier "sur les personnes en relations avec des Commissions d'Armistice ou Membres de celles-ci," 2 May 1942.

³⁹³ Daniel Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler, the Jews and the Italian authorities in France and Tunisia*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994, p.11.

emigrants, CIAF delegates very effectively belittled the work of Vichy relief agencies such as the *Secours National* or the *Entr'aide Nationale*, whose soup kitchens and fundraisings were coordinated by the Vichyite Legion.³⁹⁴

That the CIAF delegates' actions were inspired mostly by political reasons is evident from their open contempt for the Italian communities in France. There was little humanitarian sentiment underpinning the relief campaign promoted by the Fascist state in France. In a scathing report, Vice-Consul of Nice Count Borromeo admitted that the soup kitchens' popularity did not constitute proof of the Fascists' appeal among the Italian community in France. The vast majority of the Italian workers were modest people, with relatively low incomes and even less education. Their first and foremost worry was to provide food for their children and to find an occupation in the stagnant job market. The Italian delegations provided concrete assistance on both issues. Thus, Borromeo bitterly concluded that "the very aspirations to see Nice being returned to Italy, most of the time, are in the mind of a plain laborer or of the conscientious carpenter only the most genuine expression of his hope of seeing an improvement in his living conditions."³⁹⁵ Mazzolini also dismissed the Italian community as individuals with "poor intellectual level" (*basso livello intellettuale*), further adding that the colony "did not shine either in their past history,

³⁹⁴ ADAM 616 W 241, Note de Renseignements, 24 May 1942; AUSSME, CIAF D7 19, Notiziario quindicinale n°27, 25 January 1942, p.27. To counter this strategy, a top-secret French report suggested a wider development of the *soupes populaires* in order to also include destitute Italians, ADAM 616 W 223, Rapport "Propagande anti-française exercée par les Italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes," no date (probably around March 1941), p.30.

³⁹⁵ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, 1942 "Relazione annuale sulla collettività residente nella giurisdizione della R. Delegazione di Nizza," 22 January 1943.

their way of life or civil obedience." (*precedenti, costumi e disciplina*).³⁹⁶ In fact, the many destitutes living in the Italian community in a territory claimed by the Fascist state were nothing less than a "shame" (*disdoro*) which hurt Italian prestige at an international level. Derogatory remarks regarding Italian permanent residents in France were not confined to southern France. An inspector of the *Fasci all'Estero* Bureau sent to Paris was appalled by the poverty he found among the Italian community in Paris. He deeply deplored the relief campaign promoted by Italian agencies in France as it only benefited those who were "more skilled at whimpering" (*più abili a piagnucolare*).³⁹⁷ Italian officials thus acknowledged that the relief campaign would only benefit the more indigent part of the Italian population on French soil. On the other hand, most of the Italian notables, with a few exceptions, were loath to side with the Fascist state as they were either sincerely grateful to their host country for their prosperity or were wary about being losing all the benefits they had accumulated over the years. Moreover, the fact that the Italian diplomatic personnel were from the upper bourgeoisie, if not from the nobility, prejudiced them against the destitute, for they thought that material poverty not only inferred intellectual paucity but also moral slackness. No wonder then that they failed to connect with the majority of the Italians in France.

It is not surprising then that CIAF delegations even had issues with the minority in the Italian populace who were willing to help them; the irredentists. To be sure, the two parties still shared the same overarching goal of seeing the Italian flag fly in the County of

³⁹⁶ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Relazione Console Italiano Mazzolini sulla sua attività a Nizza, 20 March 1943, Part II Sulla Situazione generale. The translation is taken from Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, p.7. It should be noted that the word *precedente* in Italian also means "criminal record."

³⁹⁷ ASMAE, Ambasciata d'Italia a Parigi, Box 319, Rapporto n°2335 Ispettorato per i Fasci Italiani in Francia, Parigi "Situazione della collettività italiana," 17 December 1941.

Nice one day. They dissented however on the way to achieve this objective. The irredentist movement openly voiced its opinion by any means and aimed to foment nationalist riots within the Alpes-Maritimes hoping eventually to compel the Italian army to cross the border. This outspoken attitude achieved nothing except to breed hostility towards the Italian community and the CIAF. Still it remains undeniable, that CIAF officials, even though they did not fully trust people from the local irredentist movement, were forced to rely on them as they were the only faction in France sympathizing for the annexation cause. Indeed, CIAF delegates never lost sight of their ultimate mission, which was to prepare for the future annexation of the Free Zone. All the CIAF fortnightly reports carefully analyzed the French internal situation with the goal of identifying which forces might eventually oppose any invasion. In the words of Mazzolini, "We never failed to provide any possible support to the idea of our territorial claims."³⁹⁸ Of course, at least until November 1942, this annexationist policy was always carried out in a semi-clandestine way for fear of alarming Vichy officials.

³⁹⁸ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Relazione Console Italiano Mazzolini sulla sua attività a Nizza, 20 March 1943, Part III I Gruppi d'Azione Nizzarda, p.8.

Chapter 5

The Italian occupation zone: an inchoate colonization?

If the CIAF officials enjoyed little leeway and often clashed with Vichy prefects in the *Zone Libre*, the situation was very different east of the Green Line. Here the military occupation had given the Italians complete control over the entire occupied zone. Therefore, local CIAF officials could openly express their desire of annexation with incurring the anger of French authorities. In truth, the zone had little prestige and no economic importance, as it included only a small city, Menton and a few small villages along the border. Nonetheless, the Italians endeavored to make the most of it by Italianizing and colonizing the entire zone, with special regards to Menton. This strategy served two purposes. First, the Italians wanted Menton to become a model of Italianization for the consumption of both Italian and French public opinion. Italians were encouraged to resettle into new conquered territories; the French would be shown the alleged superior quality of life under Italian rule. Most importantly, with the reconstruction of Menton and the occupied zone, the Italians, and especially the CIAF, were willing to experiment with a policy of colonization, which, in the minds of the Italian leaders, would later be carried over in all irredentist lands. Thus, the Italians focused their efforts on Menton, a city known before the war as a tourist resort, widely renowned for its mild climate and breathtaking view of the Mediterranean Sea.

This policy was not well accepted by local Italian military commanders, for the new strip of conquered land held a crucial role in security matters, which superseded its political value, or so they thought. The Italian army was endeavoring to create a new buffer zone

between Italy and France, both to prevent any future invasion of the French army and to screen individuals who transited from France to Italy. Arguably, this security strategy did nothing to facilitate the task of Italian civilian officials who strove to restore the zone and especially its biggest town, Menton, to its former glory, with a two-pronged campaign intended to encourage former inhabitants to return home and tourists to visit the area. Therefore, as it would happen when the occupation zone expanded to include the a wider territory of southeastern France in November 1942, the internecine rivalry between Italian army commanders and Italian CIAF officials over occupation policy in France was ultimately won by the former, who emphasized security measures over political.

Initially, however, the power lay with the CIAF, who did not time underscoring the importance of the zone. On 5 November 1940 a separate bureau, the *Amministrazione dei Territori Occupati*, (Administration of Occupied Territories Bureau) was created in Turin, headed by an Italian prefect who supervised the Civil Commissars and the Italian civil administrators of the municipalities in the Italian occupation zone. It was crucial for the Fascist authorities to re-establish legal order in the occupied zone immediately, as the departure of the French civilian authorities a few days before the war had left a jurisdictional vacuum. The Italians urgently needed to assert the legitimacy of the Italian occupation in the contested zone. Thus, on 30 July Mussolini issued the “Proclamation Concerning the Administration and the Judicial Organization of the Occupied Territories,” which officially sanctioned the coming of the occupied territories under Italian

jurisdiction.³⁹⁹ Appointed by the Italian High Command, this zone's Civil Commissars were subordinated both to the Administration of Occupied Territories' Bureau at the central CIAF headquarters in Turin and to local military commanders, especially with regards to questions of public order.⁴⁰⁰ Nevertheless, each Civil Commissar, whose purview encompassed one municipality, still enjoyed a high degree of autonomy and his role mirrored the role of the French prefect in Vichy France. The Civil Commissar supervised the police force and ruled over municipal councils.⁴⁰¹ Any French decree issued by French local or national administrations had to be approved by the Italian authorities before becoming law in the occupied zone.⁴⁰² Thus, Civil Commissars were one of the most significant features in the Duce's Proclamation and the supreme civilian authority in the occupied zone.

The Proclamation warned that Civil Commissars could release from their duties local French authorities who had abandoned their post prior the conflict and who did not return within ten days.⁴⁰³ This provision was probably meant to force a limited number of French civil servants to return to the occupied territory. The presence of French mayors, in particular, was important both for the Italian and the French states for diametrically opposed reasons. The Italians were hoping to effect a smooth transition from French to Italian administrations, drawing on the knowledge and experience of the French functionaries, as well as to lure French citizens into moving back to the occupied zone.

³⁹⁹ The full text of the "Proclamation concerning the administration and the judicial organization of the occupied territories" is available in Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.407-413.

⁴⁰⁰ Proclamation Articles 2 and 3.

⁴⁰¹ Proclamation Article 4.

⁴⁰² Proclamation Article 5.

⁴⁰³ Proclamation Article 6.

Vichy itself was interested, for reasons of prestige, to ensure a continued presence of some representation of French state authority. For instance, the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes instructed the Mayor of Menton, Paul Durandy, to resume his work, who agreed to do so, crossing the new border (the Green Line) on 29 June.⁴⁰⁴

This did not mean that the Italians were willing to embrace the old administration as if nothing had happened. Durandy was joined after two months by only a handful of municipal civil servants, mostly clerks, handpicked by the Italian authorities. Strict rules were enforced by local Italian authorities in the entire occupied zone, across the four departments. Mayors and the bare minimum of municipal office workers needed were allowed to return to their alpine villages, but other functionaries were forbidden to follow suit.⁴⁰⁵ No other French official - not a firefighter, a policeman, or member of the *Renseignements Généraux*,⁴⁰⁶ not even a postman - was allowed to resume his pre-war position. All these officials were forced to relocate across the border; in the case of Menton, at Roquebrune-Cap Martin.

This moderate, yet condescending attitude towards French officials reflected the Italian two-pronged policy. In the short-term, the occupation zone needed to be rebuilt, especially in the case of Menton, and its infrastructure restored. French administrators were tolerated insofar as they could help restore the economic and social network of the occupied zone. Yet, the Italians always saw them as an intrusive presence that would be dismissed as

⁴⁰⁴ Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.47.

⁴⁰⁵ ADAM 616 W 260, "Conférence pour l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italiennes tenue à Vichy le 16 décembre 1940", pp.8-9. The only exception was the firefighters in some Savoy territories, who were allowed to return.

⁴⁰⁶ The *Renseignements Généraux* was a branch of the police created in 1911 whose role consisted of obtaining information on people or organizations who could undermine the state's security.

soon as the situation stabilized. In fact, in the long run, after the reconstruction period, the Fascist state was determined to Italianize the zone, both by favoring its colonization with immigrants coming from Italy and by stripping the region of its French heritage and administration.

Before contemplating Italianization, however, the Italians were confronted with the poor state of the zone after the short, yet quite destructive, military offensive. Indeed, June 1940 had been a devastating period for the occupied French territory and, in particular, for Menton. Parts of the “City of Lemons” had been partially ruined by Italian shells and street combat. To add insult to injury, Menton had had to endure widespread looting. Italian authorities pointed an accusatory finger at the retreating troops of the *Armée Des Alpes*. While it is possible that French troops may have occasionally looted, it is clear that the Italians were the major culprits. Taking advantage of the forced exile of two-thirds of Menton's inhabitants and almost all farmers in the countryside, some Italian soldiers, as vengeance for their fallen comrades, rampaged through the streets, combing whole neighborhoods in search of portable, yet valuable, goods such as silverware or lingerie. Summer villas of rich English citizens were targeted first both for their luxury goods and because of the certainty that their owners would not return soon to lay claim to their property.⁴⁰⁷ Italo Calvino, who would later become one of the major twentieth-century Italian novelists but was at that time a Fascist *Avanguardista*, testified to the devastation in

⁴⁰⁷ Most of the villas were occupied or given to Italian units or civilians. The 31 August 1941 decree of the Duce, by impounding properties of citizens of hostile countries, *de facto* formalized these expropriations. Administrators were nominated by army Commanders to manage the properties. See ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°852/Int présenté par le Maitre des Requêtes au Conseil d’Etat Theis, Président de la Sous-Délégation pour les Affaires Administratives, à l’Amiral Duplat, Président de la D.F.C.I.A., 11 July 1942, pp.2-3.

Menton which he witnessed when he toured the occupied zone with his fellow Vanguardists. Everywhere, the desolate streets were littered with broken glass, while broken doors lay ajar. Buildings' walls were defiled with patriotic slogans such as *W il Re*, *W il Duce*, *W i morti* and *W la Cosseria*.⁴⁰⁸

The soldiers were not the only category of people roaming the city in search of valuables.⁴⁰⁹ Workers brought from Italy to clear the rubble eagerly joined the pillaging. They probably got the lion's share of the loot, methodically clearing the houses as much as the roads, their trucks filled with furniture and other valuable goods.⁴¹⁰ If it is difficult to estimate the extent of the depredation, it is far more challenging to determine the time period in which most plundering occurred. Most of its inhabitants did not return to Menton until the end of the Italian occupation and so started filing complaints only in November 1943. Therefore, it is unclear how many houses were looted in 1940 or in the following years.⁴¹¹ It is worth noting that the *razzia* also spread to the small villages in the Italian occupied zone. In Breil, for instance, a schoolteacher complained in July 1941 that the furniture of her house had been illegally moved to the new Italian Civil Commissar's house.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁸ "W" in slang means *Viva* (Hurray). The slogans therefore translate as "Hurray for the King," "Hurray for the Duce," Hurray for the dead," "Hurray for the [Division] Cosseria." In some houses, soldiers with a wicked sense of humor tagged the walls with *Grazie, era buono* (Thank you, it was good).

⁴⁰⁹ Italo Calvino, *L'entrata in Guerra*, Torino: Einaudi, 1954, pp.33-44. Calvino interestingly adds that the Italian villages bordering France shared the same fate as their French counterparts. Soldiers from divisions camped near the border, awaiting orders to invade France, pillaged without scruple a few days before the beginning of hostilities. Calvino, *L'entrata in Guerra*, pp.28-29.

⁴¹⁰ Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, pp.44-45.

⁴¹¹ For some of the complaints, which made clear the methodical nature of the looting of buildings, see ADAM 397 W 59.

⁴¹² ADAM 616 W 161, procès-verbal dated July 4, 1941, interview with Mme Francine C.

With the rebuilding of the infrastructure underway, the Italian authorities turned to their overarching objective of integrating Menton and the occupied zone into the Italian empire. Two-thirds of the Proclamation focused on a major overhaul both in the economic⁴¹³ and judicial⁴¹⁴ spheres. Trade barriers between the occupied zone and Italy were lifted, but instituted between the zone and France.⁴¹⁵ The Italian lira was made the official currency while the French franc was officially demoted to a second-rank currency, and the exchange rate set at an outrageous 30 lire for 100 francs.⁴¹⁶ The Proclamation was even more drastic in its revamping of the judicial system. The French were left only with a Judge of the Peace who doubled as *juge d'instruction* (examining magistrate). This same magistrate, however, was carefully supervised by an Italian military prosecutor and had to abide by Italian penal and civil laws.⁴¹⁷ Any crime committed against the Italian military forces was to be prosecuted by a special Italian military tribunal.⁴¹⁸ Finally, depending how far the case might progress, one could only appeal within the Italian legal system to the Turin Court of Appeals.

With the integration of the occupied zone into the jurisdictional, political and economic framework of the Fascist state, the Italian authorities set in motion their long-term goal of Italianizing the whole occupation zone, and in particular in Menton. In the convoluted language of the Italian bureaucracy, the goal of every Civil Commissariat was

⁴¹³ Proclamation Articles 9-12.

⁴¹⁴ Proclamation Articles 21-32.

⁴¹⁵ Proclamation Articles 9 and 12.

⁴¹⁶ Proclamation Article 13.

⁴¹⁷ Proclamation Articles 21-23.

⁴¹⁸ Proclamation Article 25.

*to endeavor as much as possible to contribute to giving a typically Italian imprint. To this end, it should enact a series of measures similar or parallel to those adopted in the national territory and implement a daily and concrete activity through the Italian commissars' offices, with the general aim to achieve a substantial inclusion of this area into the life of the Italian nation.*⁴¹⁹

This campaign developed in two directions. First of all, local Italian authorities were to root the Italian language, customs and traditions in the newly occupied territory. In the meantime, local administrations would be purged of the few remaining French civil servants who would be replaced by Italian ones.

It is a truism that the national language is one of the pillars upon which a nation rests. In fact, since the end of the nineteenth century, mandatory schooling was one of the principal vehicles used by modern nation states to instill a national consciousness in their populace. Pupils were taught to realize that they shared a common culture and history.⁴²⁰ This was the plan of the Commissariats. The Italianization of the occupied zone, nevertheless, was uneven. In the Alpine occupied zone, the Italians tolerated the reopening of French schools. The reason for the difference was simple. Fewer efforts were made to provide school services in Italian in the northern Alpine departments (Savoy, Hautes and

⁴¹⁹ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Rapporto 511/R6/gab Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani al G.B.Marziali, Prefetto CIAF dei Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati, 1 June 1942, p.2.

⁴²⁰ For more on the creation of nations and the harnessing of nationalism by modern states, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983. On how the French public school system in the nineteenth century created a national consciousness in France, see Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976, pp.303-338.

Basses Alpes) as they were not the primary objective of the irredentist plans.⁴²¹ On the other hand, the County of Nice, as well as Tunisia and Corsica, ranked high in the expansionist agenda of the Fascist state especially since Ciano's speech in the Italian Parliament on 30 November 1938. Italian irredentist panegyrists insisted that the French Riviera "belonged unmistakably by the nature of its people, the language spoken, its customs and the religious, civic and warlike spirit [to Italy's Western Riviera]."⁴²² Therefore, Italian officials took great pains to create new Italian schools in that chunk of the County of Nice which had been included in the occupied zone. Menton, due to its demographic and symbolic importance, was a special target of this policy. By October 1942, the Italian administration had set up no less than nine Italian schools, ranging from daycare to secondary schools, with more than 1,000 pupils enrolled.⁴²³

In the Alpes-Maritimes, like the northern Alpine departments, coincidental with the development of Italian schools, the Italian authorities refused to allow the French schools to reopen. This odd situation spurred the French community in Menton to act swiftly to protect their cultural heritage. French teachers and other educated citizens organized clandestine lessons in private houses and even cellars.⁴²⁴ Starting from the beginning of October 1942, the French community went as far as to set up fee-paying French lectures, taught by two clergymen and a university student. Realizing that the Civil Commissar

⁴²¹ Jean-Louis Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne, Sud-Est de la France, Juin 1940-Septembre 1943*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010, p.46.

⁴²² Gray, *Le terre nostre ritornano... Malta – Corsica – Nizza*, p.108.

⁴²³ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Rapporto Renato Freschi, Direttore delle Scuole di Mentone al Commissario Civile di Mentone, 2 April 1943; Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.58.

⁴²⁴ Claude Barneaud, *Les Mentonnais et la Résistance*, Menton: Société d'Art et d'Histoire du Mentonnais, 1992, p.34.

would never give them permission to teach even in private settings, the French ecclesiastical authorities disguised the lessons as Catholic catechism.⁴²⁵ Italian authorities reacted swiftly to what they deemed a threat to Italian sovereignty in the occupied zone. The unofficial schools in San Michele and Sacro Cuore's churches were closed in early November and the French priests were strictly admonished not to stray again from Italian regulations.⁴²⁶ Things were no different in the rural parts of the department. In the municipality of Fontan, the school offered classes only in Italian, with an Italian teacher who came daily from across the border. Pupils who wished to study in French had to take private lessons, paid for by their families.⁴²⁷ The same situation popped up in the hamlet of Isola, where the intransigent Commissar Guido Botto refused to allow the return of the French teacher until May 1942.⁴²⁸

Tied to the issue of the education system was the question of clergy. Both the Italians and the French realized the significance of controlling Catholic worship in a region where the influence of the Catholic Church was still strong. The Catholic religion had always played an important part in the regional identity of both the County of Nice and the bordering Liguria and Piedmont regions. Rural villages were built around churches and the social fabric was woven through local parishes. Clashes between the local French Catholic

⁴²⁵ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, faldone 21, Rapporto n°8/269 Giuseppe Valenti, comandante della 21^{sim} Compagna Speciale CC. RR. al Commissario Civile di Mentone, 15 October 1942.

⁴²⁶ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Faldone 21, Rapporto 784/gab/R6 Commissario Civile di Mentone Giuseppe Frediani alla CIAF, Amministrazione dei Territori Francesi Occupati, 19 November 1942.

⁴²⁷ 618 W 161, Rapport n°2022 de l'Inspecteur de Police Mirlicourtois, Breil, 28 juin 1941. See also Mirlicourtois' other rapport n°3634, 15 décembre 1941 and Rapport n°309 de l'Inspecteur Principal Bonneau, Breil, 2 février 1942.

⁴²⁸ Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes 1939-1945*, p.140.

Church and the Italian one were not new. In the late 1800s, the Italian church had sent priests or missionaries to France to address the needs of the growing Italian community that was otherwise unable to understand the sermons or confess, even though the French Catholic clergy were not always happy with what they viewed as an intrusion into their congregation.⁴²⁹

Again, policies varied markedly between departments within the occupation zone. It seems that the farther the department was from Menton, the more lenient the Italian authorities were concerning the enforcement of occupation policy. Bishops enjoyed free access to those parts of their dioceses located in the Maurienne and Tarentaise valleys in Savoy, even without safe-conducts.⁴³⁰ On the contrary, in the Alpes-Maritimes, the Italians and the French, not surprisingly, locked horns. The Bishop of Nice, Monseigneur Paul Rémond, who in light of his patriotism was quickly identified by Italian officials as a nefarious influence, used his position to undermine the authority of the Italian Catholic Church in the occupied zone. Appealing to the highest Vatican authorities, he successfully lobbied against the Bishop of Ventimiglia coming to Menton, out of fear that such a visit could be construed as a step towards the incorporation of Menton into Ventimiglia's Italian diocese. This suggests that the Vatican adopted a studied neutral stance with regards to irredentist plans, for the inclusion of Menton into a Italian diocese would have been yet another confirmation of the Italian claim over the region. Italian authorities lashed back by

⁴²⁹ Milza, *Voyage en Ritalie*, pp.403-304.

⁴³⁰ ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°852/Int présenté par le Maitre des Requêtes au Conseil d'Etat Theis, Président de la Sous-Délégation pour les Affaires Administratives, à l'Amiral Duplat, Président de la D.F.C.I.A., 11 July 1942, p.11.

denying Monseigneur Rémond a safe-conduct to visit Menton, forcing him to delegate his prerogatives to the eldest clergyman in Menton, Canon Ortman.⁴³¹

The conflict even trickled down at a parish level. From the moment of the creation of the occupation zone, Italian authorities had tried to persuade local parish priests to deliver sermons only in Italian, but were forced to accept masses in French, due to the limited availability of local priests who spoke Italian and their reticence to alienate their old parishioners. Even those who spoke Italian were not necessarily cooperative. In Fontan, a small hamlet in the Alpes-Maritimes divided in half by the new border (the Green Line), the priest, Don Antonio Pellegrino, notwithstanding his Italian nationality and the injunction coming from the Bishop of Ventimiglia, categorically refused to preach in Italian. The Civil Commissar did not dare expel him from Fontan, as Don Pellegrino had been officially supported in his decision by the Vatican who ruled, in this instance, that Fontan, as much as Menton, was still to be considered part of the diocese of Nice. However, he was prohibited from crossing the border to officiate in the French *Zone Libre* and was severely admonished by the Civil Commissar when he preached a mass on Joan of Arc's name-day.⁴³² In the hamlet of Le Bourghet, Italian authorities had even less success. A curate from the nearby commune of St-Étienne de Tinée had to cross the Green Line nearly every day to act both as parish priest and as schoolteacher. This problematic situation stemmed from the decision

⁴³¹ ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°852/Int présenté par le Maître des Requêtes au Conseil d'Etat Theis, Président de la Sous-Délégation pour les Affaires Administratives, à l'Amiral Duplat, Président de la D.F.C.I.A., 11 July 1942, p.11. Schor in his biography of Monseigneur Rémond asserts that the bishop of Nice refused to go to Menton for fear of legitimizing the Italian authorities with his presence. Schor, *Un évêque dans le siècle*, p.116. However no document has been found to corroborate this thesis.

⁴³² ADAM, 618 W 161, Rapport n°2022 de l'Inspecteur de Police Mirlicourtois, Breil, 28 juin 1941, Rapport n°1365 du Commissaire, Chef du Service des Renseignements Généraux à Monsieur le Conseiller D'Etat, Prefet Regional, Intendance de Police (Service des Renseignements Généraux), Breil 13 May 1942.

of the local Civil Commissar to appoint an Italian who had no knowledge of French language and was thus unable to communicate with his French pupils.⁴³³

The forced Italianization was not limited to education and religion, but touched other aspects of daily life. In Menton, road signs were changed to conform to Italian signage. New milestones were erected to mark the kilometers to Rome.⁴³⁴ Street names were renamed after the myths and heroes of Italian Fascist propaganda. Thus, “Promenade du Midi” changed to “Passeggiata Mare Nostrum,”⁴³⁵ “Promenade Georges V” became “Passeggiata Italo Balbo,” and several streets were dedicated to fallen Italian soldiers of the Battle of the Alps.⁴³⁶ The topographic upheaval in Menton included the Italianization of stores’ and buildings’ names: “Palazzo del Comune” replaced “Hotel de Ville” and grocery stores were renamed *Alimentari*. The rest of the occupation zone was not spared this Italianization, as for instance, Fontan, the second largest village in the occupation zone after Menton, saw its “Mairie” become a “Municipio.”⁴³⁷

The forced colonization of the occupied zone was further implemented by Italianizing local administrations. Between 1941 and 1942, the number of Italian civil servants swelled dramatically, as new bureaus were created at the Civil Commissariat to help in the reconstruction of Menton. At the same time, Italian authorities dismissed the most important French civil servants, such as the mayor of Menton, Paul Durandy. Durandy had been given

⁴³³ ADAM, 618 W 161, Rapport n°309 de l'Inspecteur Provincial Bonneaux, Breil, 12 February 1942.

⁴³⁴ Louis Caperan-Moreno, *Histoire de Menton*, Menton: Annales de la Societe d'Art et d'Histoire du Mentonnais, 1993, p.116.

⁴³⁵ *Mare Nostrum* (Latin for *Our Sea*) was a rallying cry for Italian colonialist expansion in the 1880s, later revamped by the Italian irredentist poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, and finally used by the Fascist propaganda as an equivalent to “the place in the sun.”

⁴³⁶ Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.56.

⁴³⁷ 618 W 161, Rapport n°924 du Commissaire, Chef du Service des Renseignements Généraux au Préfet Régional, Intendant de Police, 2 April 1942.

express permission by the Italians to return to Menton and the occupation authorities had wanted to use him as a decoy to lure the French population to return to Menton. Therefore, at the beginning, the relations between Jean Durandy, and the Italian authorities were courteous. In fact, the mayor had been so accommodating that the Alpes-Maritimes Prefect Ribière dryly complained that “(t)he mayor, Mr. Durandy, does not act as a resolute French.”⁴³⁸ Indeed, as a sign of favor, the three chief Italian dignitaries in Menton, among them Civil Commissar Giuseppe Frediani, attended the mayor’s wedding reception on 16 October 1941. As a token of goodwill, Jean Durandy and his new wife also accepted the Italian authorities’ invitation to spend their honeymoon trip in Italy.

However, this forced cohabitation petered out shortly thereafter. Municipal functionaries, as the sole representatives of the French state, were bound to become the target of the Italian irredentist campaign. After all, the most ardent irredentists could not stomach the anomaly of Italian towns headed by French administrations. Across the occupied zone, Civil Commissars were increasingly wary of anything or anyone that might undermine their authority, especially possible contact between French mayors in the occupied zone and French authorities in the Free Zone. For instance, in October 1941 the mayors of Séez, Sainte-Foy and Montvalenzan were dismissed for having travelled to Bourg-Saint-Maurice to attend a meeting with the local prefect.⁴³⁹ In Menton, Durandy and his staff had lost their

⁴³⁸ Archives Nationales (hereafter AN) F 1 C III 1137, Rapport du 4 janvier 1941, cited in Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.52.

⁴³⁹ ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°852/Int présenté par le Maître des Requêtes au Conseil d’Etat Theis, Président de la Sous-Délégation pour les Affaires Administratives, à l’Amiral Duplat, Président de la D.F.C.I.A., 11 July 1942, pp.5-6. It is worth noting that two of these mayors were later reinstated, as no skilled substitutes could be found to handle the *ravitaillement* coming from France. It is interesting to note that a reunion on 28 April 1942 headed by the Savoie prefect to prepare the latter report was not attended by Savoy mayors from the occupied zone, who had been warned by Italian authorities that they would not tolerate any contact with

usefulness in the eyes of the Italian authorities now that the transition period was over. This new hostile stance was embodied in the Menton Civil Commissar Giuseppe Frediani, who made the point in June 1942 that the French town council in Menton enjoyed only a fictitious decision-making power. Frediani in fact had been slowly, but steadily, draining the town council of its rights, passing them over to Italian officials.⁴⁴⁰ By 1942, it became clear that the real puppet master behind the council was the Civil Commissar, who not only held the right, by grace of the 30 July 1940 Duce's decree, to cancel any decision made by the municipality, but also fully controlled the municipal budget. The Italians first targeted the head of the Mayor's personal staff, Marcel Barneaud, who was given a one-week ultimatum to leave the city in April 1942 for alleged anti-Italian espionage and for immoral behavior. The future *Combat* resistant was openly accused of travelling to France to deliver political and military reports on Menton.⁴⁴¹ To tarnish his reputation even further, the Italian authorities hinted at a possible affair, a slander vehemently denied by his wife.⁴⁴²

That the sand in the French mayor's hourglass began to flow was evident by the launching of a campaign to discredit Durandy himself. The full frontal attack came in the 6

Vichy authorities, ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 01, Rapporto n°048 Delegato CIAF Modane "Riunione di autorità e funzionari francesi a Modane-Ville," 30 April 1942.

⁴⁴⁰ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Rapporto 511/R6/gab Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani a G.B.Marziali, Prefetto CIAF dei Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati, 1 June 1942, p.12.

⁴⁴¹ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 3, Rapporto Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani a G.B.Marziali, Prefetto CIAF dei Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati "Barneaud, Marcello, Segretario Municipale di Mentone," CIAF, 9 February 1942. Marcel Barneaud later joined the *Combat* Resistance group and was arrested by the Italians in the 7 May 1943 round-up in Nice. He eventually returned to France in 1944. See Barneaud, *Les Mentonnais et la Résistance*, p.42. Marcel Barneaud was registered as Barnaud Marcel Charles, number 455, in the comprehensive list of French citizens arrested by the Italians in the Alpes-Maritimes from November 1942 to September 1943 available for consultation in ADAM 166 W 9.

⁴⁴² ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 3, Lettera di Mrs Barneaud al Commissario Civile di Mentone, 26 April 1942.

September 1942 edition of *Il Nizzardo*, with an article entitled, “The hopes of the mayor of Menton.” Durandy have been allegedly heard in a cafe in Nice uttering scornful remarks about the Axis powers and predicting that 1943 would be a turning point in the war. The journalist wryly concluded the article by advising the mayor to be more careful in the future.⁴⁴³ The mayor did not get a chance to heed the advice however. Even though Durandy immediately wrote a letter to the Civil Commissar, vehemently denying the article’s allegations,⁴⁴⁴ the Italian authorities had already decided to exile the mayor and to take advantage of the upheaval to dismiss the entire town council.⁴⁴⁵ The Prefect for the Administrated Occupied Territories, Marziali, ruled out both French nominees for the mayor’s office: General Charreyre, a member of the pro-German elite *Groupe Collaboration*, suggested by the French delegation in Turin;⁴⁴⁶ and Marcel Firpo, the head of the local autonomist movement, the *Comité des Traditions Mentonnaises*, backed by Nino Lamboglia, the most prominent irredentist intellectual living in Menton.⁴⁴⁷ In the end, Marziali picked an Italian engineer born in Menton and known for his Fascist sentiments, Giovanni Marengo. Not surprisingly, *Il Nizzardo* hailed the appointment of Marengo as the “end of the misunderstanding,” created by having “a French mayor and a French town council [ruling over] the very Italian (*italianissima*) Menton.” On the other hand, the CIAF report flatly

⁴⁴³ *Il Nizzardo*, Anno IX, n°26, 6 September 1942.

⁴⁴⁴ A copy of the letter can be found in AUSSME, CIAF, M3 34, Lettera di Jean Durandy al Commissario Civile di Menton, 7 September 1942.

⁴⁴⁵ Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, pp.63-64.

⁴⁴⁶ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, fascicolo 14, Lettre n°1688/int. of Admiral Duplat, Président de la Délégation Française à la Commission d'Armistice de Turin au General Vacca Maggiolini, President de la Commission d'Armistice Italienne, 15 February 1943.

⁴⁴⁷ For Firpo, see footnote 54, Chapter 4. The Italian occupation zone: an inchoate colonization?" Nino Lamboglia will be discussed in Chapter 7. The Italian occupation policy in France: the repressive forbearance of the Italian army, pp.302-305.

stated that “on 27 October the installation in the town hall of Mentone of the municipal extraordinary commissar Engineer Giovanni Marengo has been carried out, as a replacement for the French mayor, Engineer Durandy, suspected of treachery against us, and singled out by *Il Nizzardo* and other newspapers.”⁴⁴⁸

If the Menton Civil Commissar was adamant about crushing the last remnants of French sovereignty, he tolerated the Mentonese autonomist movement. No document was found to explain this decision, but the logic behind it probably stemmed from the desire to sever the bonds tying Menton to its French heritage to underscore its cultural affinity with the Italian peninsula.⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, sovereignist aspirations in Menton were not new. In 1848, members of the Mentonese elites, led by a local noble, Carlo Trenca, had staged a bloodless revolution which severed the city’s link with the Principality of Monaco and won the status of “free city for Menton and the nearby city of Roquebrune.”⁴⁵⁰ In June 1848, the city’s inhabitants had voted unanimously in favor of Menton becoming part of the Kingdom of Sardinia. Later, Menton was integrated into the County of Nice and thus became French in 1861.

The Civil Commissar in Menton keenly understood that, by fostering the local autonomist movement, the *Comité des Traditions Mentonnaises*, which consolidated in

⁴⁴⁸ *Il Nizzardo*, Anno IX, n°34, 1 November 1942; AUSSME, Fondo CIAF, D7 37, Relazione mensile n°36 sull’attività svolta dalla Commissione Italiana D’Armistizio nel periodo 16 Ottobre – 15 Novembre 1942-XXI, Amministrazione nei Territori Francesi Occupati, p.2. It is worth noting that, from the perspective of the French state, Durandy remained the mayor of Menton on the grounds that a small part of the municipal territory of Menton was still in the Zone Libre, see ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Faldone 14, Rapporto n°748/gab/R4 Rapporto Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani ad Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati, CIAF, 31 October 1942.

⁴⁴⁹ In the opinion of this author, the Mentonese dialect seems much more related to the Ligurian one than to the Provençal.

⁴⁵⁰ No modern book exists on the life of Carlo Trenca. A good resumé of his life is available at the internet site of the Augustus Hare Society: <http://augustus-hare.tripod.com/mentone12.html>, consulted on 12 June 2009.

February 1942, Italian authorities could make inroads into the French part of the Mentonese population. For this reason, the *Comité* enjoyed relative political and economic freedom.⁴⁵¹ Its president, the controversial Marcel Firpo, became the head of the *Ufficio Assistenza per il Rimpatrio dei Mentonaschi* (Office for the Repatriation of the Mentonese Population).⁴⁵² The newly-created organization, which took over the rooms in the city hall previously occupied by the French police superintendent, was given the task of enticing Mentonese refugees to return and of providing assistance to these Mentonese upon their return in the city. An article in the *Giornale di Genova* described in flattering prose what awaited the Mentonese emigrant entering the office: “In the waiting room, a notice in pure Mentonese stated: “Here you are at home.” This will give the emigrants who get back the certainty that they could express freely their wishes.... Greeted by the Head of the Office Marcel Firpo, a pure blood Mentonese, with his proverbial kindness, the emigrants will find an almost brotherly assistance.... (T)he news of the establishment of the assistance office has had very positive feedback.”⁴⁵³

The Italian state was not the only one interested in repatriating the 10,000 displaced Mentonese still living in southwestern France, mostly in the Pyrénées-Orientales

⁴⁵¹ The *Comité des Traditions Mentonnaises* was partly financed with a one-time payment of 50,000 lire by the Italian authorities. See *Archivio* dell’Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito (hereafter AUSSME), CIAF, M3 34, CIAF, Amministrazione dei territori francesi occupati, “Pro-memoria concernenti le irregolarità esistenti nell’amministrazione del Commissariato Civile di Mentone e proposte sul modo di sanarle,” Torino, 21 September 1942, p.8.

⁴⁵² A detailed dossier on Marcel Firpo is available in the dossiers de procédure, Cour de Justice, Section Nice, ADAM 318 W 63. Furthermore, a few Italian reports on him could be found in ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2. Firpo was sentenced to seven years in prison after the war.

⁴⁵³ *Giornale di Genova*, 17 March 1942. A French translation of the article is available in ADAM 166 W 10, Rapport n°1072 du Commissariat spécial de Menton, replié sur Cap-Martin au Préfet Régional des Alpes-Maritimes, 18 March 1942.

departement. Vichy too encouraged them to return by extending grants to Menton refugees who returned home.⁴⁵⁴ Of course, the primary motivation behind the French state campaign was different, if not completely opposite to the Italian one. By sending back French citizens, Vichy endeavored to reassert the French character of the *Cité des Citrons*. More pragmatic motivations should not however be dismissed: Ten thousand displaced persons were a serious social and economic burden for the Pyrénées-Orientales department, especially in a period of increasing rationing and food shortages, and their departure would arguably reduce tensions between the evacuees and the local population.⁴⁵⁵

However, Menton's refugees were reluctant to accept Vichy's offer for several reasons. First of all, as underlined above, most of the people had lost their belongings in the looting at the cessation of hostilities, and in some cases even their houses or shops. French refugees were neither compensated by the Italian state, as the Italian decree of 26 October 1940 regarding damage related to war events limited the indemnification to Italian citizens, nor by the French state, as French loss adjusters were forbidden to come to Menton to evaluate the extent of material damage.⁴⁵⁶ This very material issue was further worsened by a currency exchange rate clearly disadvantageous for the French, a fact that even the Civil Commissar Giuseppe Frediani could not deny.⁴⁵⁷ Moreover, French citizens would be

⁴⁵⁴ Dossiers of some of these grants can be examined in ADAM, 560 W 215.

⁴⁵⁵ A lively portrayal of the misery of the Menton refugees in the Pyrénées-Orientales is available in Victor Lefebure, *Récit manuscrit de l'évacuation de Menton et de la vie à Menton pendant la seconde guerre mondiale*, unpublished, Cahiers n°1.

⁴⁵⁶ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Rapporto n°18795 Presidente CIAF Vacca Maggolini "Mentone, situazione politica ed economica," Turin, 28 June 1941, p.4. The Italian state spent 800,000 lire to pay war damages for lost goods, Rapporto n°15800 Sottocommissione Affari Generali, Turin, 1 September 1941.

⁴⁵⁷ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Rapporto 571/R5/gab Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani a G.B.Marziali, Prefetto CIAF dei Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati, 1 June 1942, p.3.

cut off from any French administration, with the exception of the municipal authorities, and even they had only infrequent contact with the department's administration in Nice.⁴⁵⁸ What is more, French refugees from Menton, as a condition of returning to their homes, were required to obtain a safe-conduct from Italian authorities⁴⁵⁹ and every Menton dweller, regardless of his or her nationality, was given a new Italian identity card which identified their race.⁴⁶⁰ The bleak prospect of being subjected to Italian laws without the possibility of appealing to French authorities dissuaded more than one possible candidate. This sense of isolation was further heightened both by the new postal policy in the occupation zone (letters sent to France were not only charged international postage rates but were carefully scrutinized by the Italian censors), and by the impossibility of phoning France, a privilege enjoyed only by the Italian authorities.⁴⁶¹ While food supplies were better in the Italian occupied zone than in Vichy's territory, chiefly because the population of Menton received food from the Italian army and, outside Menton, also from the French *Ravitaillement* services, the French understood that this dependency left them at the mercy of the Italian occupiers.⁴⁶²

If this situation was not enough to discourage prospective returnees, the 6 April 1941 decree was a cold shower for many. Pre-war Fascist legislation unilaterally deemed

⁴⁵⁸ The Italian authorities' prohibition went so far as to forbid the posting of placards by the *Secours National*, the French organization which provided assistance to destitute families in France. Discreet fundraising was however allowed. See ADAM 166 W 26, see lettera 7886 T.O. "Manifesti di propaganda per il Secours Nationale (sic)" Prefetto per l'Amministrazione dei Territori Occupati G.B. Marziali ai Commissari Civili, 26 December 1941.

⁴⁵⁹ Proclamation Article 8.

⁴⁶⁰ Giampaolo Guzzi, *L'Occupazione italiana di Mentone (1940-1943): storia postale*, Self, 2003, p.30.

⁴⁶¹ Guzzi, *L'Occupazione italiana di Mentone (1940-1943): storia postale*, pp.12-31.

⁴⁶² ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°852/Int présenté par le Maitre des Requêtes au Conseil d'Etat Theis, Président de la Sous-Délégation pour les Affaires Administratives, à l'Amiral Duplat, Président de la D.F.C.I.A., 11 July 1942, p.9;

each individual of Italian descent to be an Italian citizen, even if he or she had previously relinquished their nationality in order to become French. The 6 April decree however took these even further, severing these individuals' ties with France. The Fascist state deemed their French nationality to have lapsed and thereafter considered them to be full Italian citizens. This new status had a dangerous implication. French citizens of Italian blood could well “receive the postcard” from the Genova or Turin military district and be drafted into the *Regio Esercito*.⁴⁶³ Local fears worsened when, in 1941, the Italian authorities ominously conducted a census of every male between 17 and 24 years of age in the occupied zone.

In response to these moves by the Italian occupation authorities, Vichy attempted to coerce those young Frenchmen living in the Italian zone, but working in the *Zone Libre*, to enlist in the French forces. They threatened to imprison them if they failed to do so. In retaliation, the Italians cancelled the men's safe-conduct passes, even though this measure effectively choked off the economic recovery of the Italian occupation zone by drastically increasing the number of jobless men.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, in light of the ongoing war effort, even those who were deemed unfit for military duty, including minors aged fourteen or older and women, could eventually be called to perform the *servizio obbligatorio del lavoro* (mandatory work service). Given that approximately one-fourth of the population in the

⁴⁶³ From the 1870s until recently, Italian male citizens in their eighteenth year received a pink call-up postcard ordering them to have a medical examination at the Military District of their region. If deemed fit for military service, they would be enlisted for a period of time (normally one year and a half in peacetime, longer at a time of war), between the ages of 20 and 55. See Virgilio Ilari, *Storia del servizio militare in Italia, Vol.3 “Nazione Militare” e “Fronte del Lavoro” (1919-1943)*, Roma: Rivista Militare, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, 1990, pp.307-313. Youths would be occasionally drafted in Menton from January 1942 onward.

⁴⁶⁴ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Fascicolo 14, Lettera of the Commissario Civile di Mentone Virgilio Magris al comandante dei Carabinieri di Mentone, 1 May 1941; Lettera n°2570 f C. Vittorelli, Prefetto per l'Amministrazione dei Territori Occupati; Rapporto A.85 Commissario Civile di Mentone Virgilio Magris all'Amministrazione dei Territori Occupati, 30 May 1941.

region was Italian or had been naturalized in the 1930s, the potential impact of the 6 April decree was significant. The French delegation in Turin vigorously protested to no avail. Conversely, the Italians were adamant that no residents in the occupied zone could be enrolled in the French *Armée d'Armistice*, probably for fear that any French military service would provide the seeds of rebellion.⁴⁶⁵ Italian authorities were so anxious about a possible fifth column emerging in the occupied territory that even youth organizations such as the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse* were banned.⁴⁶⁶

In light of the ongoing tension between the two countries and the dire prospect of living a precarious life in a foreign city, the Mentonese refugees ignored the repatriation campaign. In April 1941, less than 6,800 people were living in Menton, compared to 21,000 in 1939. This number increased only to 7,200 by the end of the occupation in 1943. The decrease in population was even more marked when one takes into account that the figures included the more than 400 Italian civil servants, along with their families, who had relocated in Menton as replacements for their French counterparts. Three out of four inhabitants in Menton were Italian in late 1942, whereas in 1939 they had represented only one-fourth of the total population.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°852/Int présenté par le Maître des Requêtes au Conseil d'Etat Theis, Président de la Sous-Délégation pour les Affaires Administratives, à l'Amiral Duplat, Président de la D.F.C.I.A., 11 July 1942, p.14.

⁴⁶⁶ ADAHP 42 W 81, Compte-rendu de la Conférence interministérielle ayant pour l'objet l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italienne tenue le jeudi 10 décembre 1941 à l'Hôtel Thermal à Vichy, p.21.

⁴⁶⁷ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Fascicolo 1, Civil Commissariat of Mentone, Municipality administration, Rapporto "Evoluzione demografica della città di Mentone."

Unable to persuade Menton refugees to return, the Menton Civil Commissars sought to recruit Italians to Menton.⁴⁶⁸ Starting in 1941, a major propaganda campaign which depicted Menton as the embodiment of the dawn of a new Italian Empire unfurled in Italian newspapers and magazines. The Duce himself had visited the town, only one week after the end of combat, on 1 July, to underline the importance of Menton in the Fascist expansionist discourse.⁴⁶⁹ This explains why Menton's re-population was of such concern to the Italian authorities. Significantly, the railroad line between Ventimiglia, the coastal town across the border, and Menton was not only reopened, but also electrified, as a way to reinforce Menton's link to the Italian territory. The local tourist office, the *Costa Azzurra di Mentone*, commissioned several leaflets which praised the geographic beauty of Menton along with sites such as the Saint Louis Bridge where Italian and French troops had clashed in June 1940. Moreover, a notorious postcard of the XV Army corps portrayed an Italian soldier toppling a border milestone engraved with "France 1861" with his rifle butt, a clear allusion to the 1861 incorporation of the County of Nice into France.⁴⁷⁰ The Fascist state was so determined to use Menton as the symbol of Italy's resurgence that the City of Lemons enjoyed an unusual abundance of food, at least until July 1941, at a time when both France and Italy had already fallen into daily rationing.⁴⁷¹ The campaign had the two-pronged goal of enticing workers, mostly from the Liguria region, to settle in Menton and of helping

⁴⁶⁸ June - November 1940: Aldo Leoni; November 1940 – September 1941: Virgilio Magris; September 1941 – November 1942: Giuseppe Frediani; November 1942 – August 1943: Gino Berri; August 1943 - September 1943: Alberto Castaldi.

⁴⁶⁹ Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.44.

⁴⁷⁰ A display of the leaflets and the postcard can be found in Guzzi, *L'Occupazione italiana di Mentone (1940-1943): storia postale*, pp.51-53.

⁴⁷¹ ADAM 616 W 260, "Conférence pour l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italiennes tenue à Vichy le 16 décembre 1940", pp.25-26.

restore the key sector of tourism. This colonization policy, denounced by both Vichy and French civilians, met with some success, as one out of five inhabitants of Menton in 1941 had not been living in the city before the war.⁴⁷²

No matter, the French Riviera town was hardly the idyllic place it had been before the war. Menton was still half-deserted, its image blemished by soaring unemployment and the impossibility of communicating with the French Free Zone due to a break in the telephone network. Even basic utilities needed for everyday life, such as gas, water and electricity, were in short supply.⁴⁷³ Before the war, Menton depended for water, electricity and gas on a distribution network linked to the *Zone Libre* inasmuch as the municipality had granted these concessions to three French private companies. After the Armistice, the Italian authorities voided these contracts, as they refused to let French technicians into the occupied zone for security reasons. However, the Civil Commissars soon realized that the French companies were the only ones capable of assuring the city's return to the prewar standard of living. No alternative existed for gas distribution and the population had few alternatives other than wood-burning stoves. For water, the Italian army resorted to digging artesian wells. However, this makeshift solution only resulted in a supply of running water for a short period of time each day, and the Mentonese experienced water shortages during summer droughts. Electricity at least was guaranteed by an Italian company, but its poor quality forced the Civil Commissars to reconsider to the French company *Énergie*

⁴⁷² Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.48.

⁴⁷³ P.T.T. (Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones) technicians, evacuated in June 1940, had dismantled and taken with them essential parts of the network hub. For the whole period of the Italian occupation of Menton, only a limited local network was functioning as Italian military authorities used their own network and radio waves to communicate with Italy. ADAHP 42 W 81, "Compte-rendu de la Conférence interministérielle ayant pour l'objet l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italienne tenue le jeudi 10 décembre 1941 à l'Hôtel Thermal à Vichy", p.23.

Industrielle. Negotiations with *Énergie Industrielle*, like those with the gas and water companies, fell through as both sides refused to compromise. The Italians would only allow the French companies to resume their previous positions on the condition that local management and administration would be subcontracted to Italian companies; the French refused to tie Menton to their network if not allowed to bring back their technicians.⁴⁷⁴ Furthermore, the French state tied the electricity problem to the postal policy, as inhabitants of the occupied zone had great difficulties sending and receiving letters from the Free Zone.⁴⁷⁵ They proposed that, in return for permitting these companies to work in the Italian zone, mail from the occupied zone sent to France be charged the French domestic postal rate. Eventually, the prospect of facing another arid summer and damp winter forced the Italian authorities to yield. *Énergie Industrielle*, *Compagnie Générale des Eaux* and *Compagnie Génoise de l'Industrie du Gaz* were allowed into the zone between December 1942 to August 1943 and their employees given safe-conduct passes for the occupied zone.⁴⁷⁶

The Italianization campaign, the plummeting of the standard of living and the extenuating negotiations for the distribution of basic utilities served to exacerbate the already strained relations between the French and Italian communities. Tensions in Menton between the isolated French minority and the Italians were building daily, tearing the

⁴⁷⁴ ADAM 616 W 260, "Conférence pour l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italiennes tenue à Vichy le 16 décembre 1940", p.10; ADAHP 42 W 81, Compte-rendu de la Conférence interministérielle ayant pour l'objet l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italienne tenue le jeudi 10 décembre 1941 à l'Hôtel Thermal à Vichy, p.14.

⁴⁷⁵ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 3, Note Verbale n°307/T.P. de la Délégation Française à la Commission Italienne d'Armistice, 27 February 1943.

⁴⁷⁶ The documentation on the negotiations regarding the electricity network is available in ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2. For water and gas, ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 3.

delicate social fabric of the town. To the outrage of the French community, on the night of 10 April 1942, unidentified vandals toppled the bust of the République in the central square of Menton, which symbolized the 1860 annexation of Menton by France. Brazen Fascist activities such as a weekly Saturday parade of *Avanguardia* and *Ballila* youths in their black uniforms and the celebrations on 23 June of the anniversary of the “capture” of Menton were considered provocations by the French population. Fights erupted in the bistros between Italian soldiers and French youths, the latter eventually ending up in jail for a few days. Shops owned by outspoken Fascist militants were targeted by French youths and their windows shattered with stones.⁴⁷⁷ Anti-Italian graffiti and anonymous pamphlets belittling the Italian invasion and inviting the Italian soldiers to desert were common.⁴⁷⁸ French citizens who collaborated with the occupying authorities, such as Marcel Firpo, the head of the Office for the Repatriation of the Mentonese Population, had their houses defaced with insults such as Sellout (*Vendu*) and Traitor (*Traître*).⁴⁷⁹

The Italianization campaign ran into serious limitations outside of Menton as well. For a local holiday in Fontan, the Civil Commissar brought a musical band from Italy to play in the central square. According to the French police, however, the Italians did not seem to have made inroads into the local population as the majority of Fontan's inhabitants did not show up for the event.⁴⁸⁰ The French populace's attitude was hardly surprising. The

⁴⁷⁷ Barneaud, *Les Mentonnais et la Résistance*, p.37.

⁴⁷⁸ ADAM 166 W 26, Segnalazioni 463/gab/R3, 8 Aprile 1942 and 301 gab/R3, 27 Aprile 1942. del Commissario Civile Dott. Giuseppe Frediani alla CIAF, Amministrazione Territori Occupati, Torino.

⁴⁷⁹ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Rapporto 511/R6/gab Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani al G.B.Marziali, Prefetto CIAF dei Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati, 1 June 1942, p.3.

⁴⁸⁰ 618 W 161, Rapport n°2247 du Commissaire Spécial de Breil, Chef de Service, au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 5 August 1941.

replacement of the word “Mairie” with the Italian equivalent “Municipio” on the façade of Fontan’s town hall during the first days of the occupation clearly demonstrated that, as in Menton, the Italian authorities had no qualms about pursuing their plans for the italianization of the County of Nice.⁴⁸¹ For the same reason, the French population in Fontan abandoned the local celebration of the 1942 Epiphany, despite the fact that they would miss the distribution of children’s toys, food and money. The French likely resented the unscrupulous use of the Twelfth Night for propaganda purposes and its Italianization in the form of *Befana*.⁴⁸² Therefore, as a French report in July 1942 dryly stated, it appears that the Italian effort to instill Fascist values in the French border population had been ineffective. Even the consensus among the Italian population began to waver with the passage of time. On 10 June 1942, the Italian authorities organized a celebration of the anniversary of the declaration of war against France and England. According to the Breil police report, the bulk of the crowd was made up of Italian troops, as even the Italian populace was thinly represented.⁴⁸³ Even that part of the population originally sympathetic to the Duce’s appeal was slowly losing interest, in spite of the favorable rationing conditions enjoyed by the population of the occupied zone.

⁴⁸¹ 618 W 161, Rapport n°924 du Commissaire, Chef du Service des Renseignements Généraux au Préfet Régional, Intendant de Police, 2 April 1942.

⁴⁸² 618 W 161, Rapport n°211 du Commissaire, Chef du Service des Renseignements Généraux au Préfet Régional, Intendant de Police, 23 January 1942. The *Befana* is an Italian tradition tied to the Epiphany which has no equivalent in Anglo-Saxon and French cultures. The Befana can be described as an ugly old witch riding a broomstick, who is supposed to deliver charcoal to mischievous children and candies to obedient ones. The tradition, still widely celebrated, was enmeshed in the fascist discourse and thus transformed into the *Befana fascista* or the Epiphany of the Duce. See Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Fascism, 1922–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p.111.

⁴⁸³ 618 W 161, Rapport n°1717 de l’Inspecteur Principal Bonneau à Monsieur le Commissaire, Chef des Renseignements Généraux, Breil, 13 June 1942.

The implementation of the Italianization policy appears to have been less thorough in the rest of the occupied zone, probably due to the region's insignificance in terms of resources and inhabitants and the minor importance of the Alpine region in the irredentist discourse. The Italian and French archives are not conclusive one way or the other. It appears that notwithstanding the official policy stemming from Turin, relations at the local level in remote areas depended heavily on the whims of the local Civil Commissar or Italian commander. On the scale of flexibility of the Italian policy in the occupied zone, the Alpes-Maritimes, and in particular Menton, stand out as a case of Italian inflexibility, while in the other departments, Italian authorities were more tolerant. This laxity extended even to the treatment of French authorities. For instance, the Prefect of Savoy was given permission to tour Bonneval-Sur-Arc, in spite of having to cross the Italian occupation zone, as the village was one of the four *communes enclavées* ("enclosed villages"), villages in the French *Zone Libre* which were accessible only by passing through the occupied zone.⁴⁸⁴ Furthermore, the Italian attitude towards farmers with fields or houses in the occupied zone was generally lenient.⁴⁸⁵ The occupation authorities also tolerated the summer movement of cattle between pastures in the Italian and occupied zones.⁴⁸⁶ One particular episode exemplifies the easygoing mindset of the Italian occupying forces outside the Alpes-Maritimes. In the Basses-Alpes, Italian forces guarding the border arrested two young hikers from Lyon. Italian authorities insisted that these arrests were only motivated by the

⁴⁸⁴ The other three were Tignes, Val d'Isère in Savoy, and Castellar in the Alpes-Maritimes.

⁴⁸⁵ 618 W 161, Rapport n°3506 de l'Inspecteur Principal Bonneau à Monsieur le Commissaire Spécial, Chef de Service, Breil, 2 December 1941.

⁴⁸⁶ ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°852/Int présenté par le Maître des Requêtes au Conseil d'Etat Theis, Président de la Sous-Délégation pour les Affaires Administratives, à l'Amiral Duplat, Président de la D.F.C.I.A., 11 July 1942, pp.8-9.

fact that the two young men were found with cameras and military maps of the zone, circumstances which meant the border guards could not turn a blind eye, implying that they would have if they could have. The two French were released a few days later without being mistreated and were not charged with any offense.⁴⁸⁷

It is possible that the lassitude of the border guards in the Alpine border was as much a reflection of the virtual impossibility of patrolling the Green Line, which cut through a mountainous range peaking at 2,500 meters above the sea level. The challenging task of securing such a hostile environment was further aggravated by the massive demobilization in the Italian army. More than 600,000 soldiers out of 1.6 million were discharged in October 1940. This drastic decision was ordered by the Duce in the belief that the war would be over in a few months upon the surrender of Great Britain. This decision seriously crippled the Italian war effort as the *esprit de corps* of the Italian units, which, in some cases lost as much as seventy percent of their roster, was irremediably weakened. To halt the hemorrhage, the General Staff chose to draft the army reserves going as far as to recall the 1901 class. To ensure that the Italian war economy would not be compromised, only those who were single, jobless, unskilled or working in a non-vital sector of the economy were targeted. While this new recruitment may have alleviated unemployment in Italy, it worsened the effectiveness of the *Regio Esercito* by raising considerably the average age of the soldiers in the units, not a wise choice for troops who had to work in difficult physical conditions.⁴⁸⁸ All the Italian Alpine outposts were positioned at least

⁴⁸⁷ ADAHP 42 W 80, Rapport n°286 /S du Capitaine Nachbaur, du district de Barcelonnette à Monsieur le Colonel, Commandant le Département Militaire des Hautes-Alpes à Gap, 21 July 1942.

⁴⁸⁸ Rochat, *Le Guerre Italienne 1939-1943*, pp.252-253.

1,500 meters above the sea level. Indeed, because the Armistice line literally ran across the peaks, the Italians were not able to occupy the French lower reaches and were thereby forced to winter in the Italian valleys in the harshest months. Only Maison-Méane's garrison remained in place, but continuous avalanches and heavy snowfalls made the movement of supplies extremely difficult.⁴⁸⁹ While the extreme climatic conditions heightened the sense of isolation felt by the Italian soldiers, they also brought them closer to the local population. As Marius Sarraz-Bournet noted, in the face of the utter isolation of the small rural villages in the Alpine range, the Italian soldiers in the *Presidi* (outposts) and the local population quickly bonded. In addition, many of the Alpine troops came from similar regions just across the border, such as the Valle D'Aosta or the Piedmont, and therefore had more cultural affinity with the local populace than with the rest of Italy.⁴⁹⁰ It was a situation which promoted close contact between Italian civilians and troops on one hand and French civilians on the other.

The case of the *Presidio* of Maison-Méane in the Basses-Alpes department was itself emblematic of the emerging entente between Italian soldiers and the French populace and the carefree attitude of the Italian troops guarding the Alpine border. The Armistice of Villa Incisa had given the Italians a small strip of the eastern border of the Basses-Alpes. As was the case with most of the newly-acquired territories, the strip (147km² of rugged mountainous landscape rolling into pasturelands) was only valuable to the Italians in the

⁴⁸⁹ ADAHP, 42 W 81, Préfecture des Basses-Alpes, Note de Renseignements, 14 March 1941.

⁴⁹⁰ Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre (hereafter SHAT) 1P78, dossier 2, Rapport de Sarraz-Bournet, General Inspector of the Ministry of Interior of Vichy and member of the CIAF French Delegation in Torino, 23 July 1941, cited in Domenico Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, Roma: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, 2007, p.29.

very remote chance that in 1940, the French army would rise from the ashes and attack the Italians. Otherwise, the utility of the occupied French land was minimal as the *Regio Esercito* had failed to secure locations, apart from Menton, that would be effective as bridgeheads in the face of any prospective invasion, especially in wintertime. The Italian presence was truly minimal. The Italians in the Basses-Alpes occupied only two hamlets, Combremont (Commune of Saint Paul de Ubaye) and Maison-Méane (Commune of Larche), which a total of only thirty-two inhabitants.⁴⁹¹ The Italian garrison in Maison-Méane initially consisted of one company of the Borgo San Dalmazzo Battalion of the Alpine Divisione *Cuneense*.⁴⁹² Starting in late 1940, the elite Alpine divisions were progressively transferred to the Greek and Eastern fronts, passing the baton to units of the *Guardia alla Frontiera* (G.a.F.), an Alpine corps created in 1937 with the task of manning the defensive network of forts on the Italian side of the Alps.⁴⁹³ Beginning in 1941, even a few G.a.F. units were relocated to the East to cover the abysmal human cost of the Greek and Russian campaigns.⁴⁹⁴ As a result, the garrison of Maison-Méane never exceeded five

⁴⁹¹ ADAHP 42 W 80, Rapport du Préfet des Basses-Alpes à L'Inspecteur General des Services Administratifs, Délégué à la Commission Italienne d'Armistice, 7 October 1940. The report also includes a map outlining the new border in the Basses-Alpes.

⁴⁹² A summary of the units in the occupied zone can be found in Domenico Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, Roma: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico, 2007, p.17.

⁴⁹³ The *Guardia Alla Frontiera* (Frontier Guards or G.a.F.) was officialized by King's decree on 28 April 1937. For more on the *Guardia Alla Frontiera*, see Massimo Ascoli, *La Guardia Alla Frontiera*, Roma: Stato Maggiore Esercito, Ufficio Storico, 2003; Alessandro Bernasconi and Daniela Collavo, *Dei Sacri Confini Guardia Sicura: la Guardia Alla Frontiera, 1934-1943*, Trento: Temi, 2002.

⁴⁹⁴ In six months, Italian casualties in the Greek campaign amounted to 13,755 dead, more than 63,000 wounded, including 12,368 with frozen limbs, and more than 25,000 missing. For more on the appalling Italian campaign in Greece, see Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane 1935-1943*, pp.259-284.

hundred soldiers, half of them only temporarily quartered there, waiting to be sent to other theatres of war.⁴⁹⁵

This small number of troops arguably contributed to the development of a *modus vivendi* between the Italian occupation army and the French population in the rural regions. From the onset of the occupation, the *Regio Esercito* supplied the occupied hamlets with free food, although starting in January 1941, the quantity of these supplies gradually diminished, due to the tightening rationing of food in the Italian peninsula.⁴⁹⁶ Granted that, as was the case in Menton, this policy had a clear propagandistic purpose, it set the mood for cordial, and in some instances, even friendly relations between civilians and soldiers, as in the village of Larche. There, in October 1940, the Prefect of the Basses-Alpes alarmingly noted that, due to the food coming from Italy and the good manners of the Italians, “a wave of popularity seems to be taking shape in Larche towards our former opponents” to the point that “some people envisage with serenity the prospective annexation of their village.”⁴⁹⁷

The popularity of the *Regio Esercito* was also enhanced by bringing an effective health service system to the region. Italian military doctors were dispatched to remote areas to practice “freely and with dedication.”⁴⁹⁸ It is true that the occupied zone population did not really have a choice, as French doctors from the Free Zone were strictly forbidden by

⁴⁹⁵ ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°2779 du Commissaire Spécial Sangla du Chef de Service à Monsieur le Préfet des Basses-Alpes, 30 May 1942.

⁴⁹⁶ ADAHP 42 W 80, Rapport du Préfet des Basses-Alpes au Ministre Secrétaire d'État à l'Intérieur, 8 January 1941; ADAHP 42 W 81 Rapport du Préfet des Basses-Alpes au Ministre Secrétaire d'État à l'Intérieur, 5 February 1941.

⁴⁹⁷ ADAHP 42 W 80, Rapport du Préfet Des Basses-Alpes au Ministre de l'Intérieur, 26 October 1940.

⁴⁹⁸ ADAHP 42 W 81, Compte-rendu de la Conférence interministérielle ayant pour l'objet l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italienne tenue le jeudi 10 December 1941 à l'Hôtel Thermal à Vichy, p.14.

the occupation authorities to practice in the occupied zone. However, in some cases, even the French population living in the Free Zone near the Green Line did not hesitate to turn to the *Regio Esercito*'s doctors because the French ones had more limited access to drugs than their Italian counterparts. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the isolated hamlets found it easier to reach Italian doctors just across the border than French physicians living in larger French towns, especially in emergencies, such as on 27 July 1942, when a child in Larche, Basses-Alpes, was seriously injured by falling on a wooden stake.⁴⁹⁹ This was not an isolated case. As a matter of fact, the whole population of the border village relied on the Italian military doctor, a routine local French authorities tried to discourage, apparently without much success.⁵⁰⁰

Some young French women were especially interested in mixing with the Italian soldiers. It was not uncommon for French girls to seek out the *Regio Esercito*'s officers, much to the dismay of French authorities. It is worth understanding why Vichy officials objected to this fraternization. In one case, three young girls paid a visit to the Italian guardhouse at the border near Larche in December 1941. The sub-prefect of Barcelonnette reproachfully wrote in his report that "some accordion tunes were heard, which probably indicates that they spent the whole afternoon dancing with Italian soldiers."⁵⁰¹ In Vichy's

⁴⁹⁹ No doctor lived in Larche, therefore local inhabitants called the doctor of the town of Jausiers, 12.5 kilometers away, but the French doctor was not available. Larche, on the other hand, was only two kilometers from the Italian garrison of Maison-Méane. The boy thus received medical assistance from the local Italian military doctor. ADAHP 42 W 82, Rapport n°295/S du Lieutenant-colonel Bertrand, Commandant le District Militaire de Barcelonnette à Monsieur le Colonel, Commandant militaire du département des Hautes-Alpes, 29 July 1942.

⁵⁰⁰ ADAHP 42 W 82, Rapport n°609-HA/I du Colonel Colas, Commandant militaire du département des Hautes-Alpes, Gap, 15 July 1942.

⁵⁰¹ ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport AN.3028 du Sous-prefet de Barcelonnette à Monsieur le Prefet des Basses-Alpes, 3 December 1941.

eyes, these casual relations were intolerable, not only because they compromised the girls' morals and because they feared the civilian population would fraternize with the occupation forces, but also because Pétain's regime, as a way to demarcate itself from the decadent Third Republic, had strictly outlawed public dancing as of July 1940. Dancing was held to be indecorous when so many Frenchmen had been killed or were languishing in prisoner-of-war camps. Finally, the Maréchal had argued that France's defeat had been the result of the moral breakdown of French society. Clearly the French authorities shared his concerns, because they clamped down on what they considered immoral behavior.

The *esprit de jouissance* which had replaced the *esprit de sacrifice* was reified not only in public dancing, but in others facets of everyday life such as cinema, music, literature, prostitution, and gambling.⁵⁰² Vichy officials were especially wary of young French women who socialized with Italian soldiers as they were considered to be compromising their future role as diligent housewives and mothers who would bear and rear French children by doing so, and therefore should not indulge in vain pleasures or casual relationships.⁵⁰³ It is understandable therefore that French officials were even more concerned by a second episode of fraternization between the young French girls and Italian officers in Maison-Méane. On 31 May 1942, three girls, two of them the daughters of the mayor of Larche, met with Italian officers to play football. The French official in his report

⁵⁰² French public opinion barely tolerated casinos, seen as places of debauchery at a time when the majority of the population was suffering. The Alpes-Maritimes Prefect, under direct orders from Vichy, shut down casinos on the French Riviera on 11 November 1942. This decision was severely criticized by some, not only because it left hundreds of people jobless, but also because it merely displaced the issue. Players moved to the Monaco casino, which of course was outside of Vichy's jurisdiction. Many documents on the casinos can be found in ADAM 616 W 166.

⁵⁰³ Jackson, France, *The Dark Years*, p.328. For more on the role of women in Vichy propaganda, see Miranda Pollard, *Reign of Virtue, Mobilizing Gender in Vichy France*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

insisted self-righteously that “[the girls] went so far as to undress in front of the soldiers to play in shorts.” Moreover, it appeared that the eldest daughter of the Mayor, Hélène V., had actually flirted with the Italian captain in command of the outpost of Maison-Méane. Aside from its moral undertone, the report is particularly significant for its articulation of the grave consequences that, from the standpoint of French officials, such fraternization threatened. Hélène worked in the Larche commune and thus had access to French mail. The French official was worried that top-secret documents from Vichy could end up in Italian hands through unprincipled exploitation of the girl’s naiveté.⁵⁰⁴

Thus, the mutual understanding between members of the *Regio Esercito* and the population of Maison-Méane showed that a *modus vivendi* between Italian soldiers and French civilians was not an utopian idea even in a time of military occupation. In truth, the Italians and the French had a symbiotic relationship, in that the Italians enjoyed the company of French civilians who alleviated the tedious boredom of guard duty in isolated border passes, while the local population certainly derived benefits in the form of goods and services. The result is that they tended to forget that they were dealing with enemies. In fact, these relationships were only the prelude to the entente that would take shape when the Italians occupied the *Zone Libre* in November 1942. In the scathing words of a French gendarme, "Self-interest is more powerful than the [patriotic] feeling" ("L'intérêt a plus souvent force que le sentiment").⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ ADAHP, 42 W 80, Rapport n°2915 du Commissaire Principal Sangla, Che de Service à Monsieur le Préfet des Basses-Alpes, 4 June 1942; Rapport n°35/4 de l'Adjudant Doux sur les fréquentations de militaires italiens par des jeunes filles de Larche, 13 June 1942.

⁵⁰⁵ ADAHP, 42 W 41, Rapport n°374/4 du Chef d'Escadron Ogier sur la physionomie du département, Digne, 6 January 1943, p.8

In fact, the population obtained fresh supplies from either the French *Ravitaillement* services or the Italian army, and sometimes from both.⁵⁰⁶ Sometimes, the benefits stemmed not from dealings with the Italian army, but from the nature of the occupation itself. French authorities were flabbergasted to discover that, starting in 1940, shopowners in the occupied zone had no qualms about selling unregulated quantities of rationed products such as dairy products and meat at prices significantly higher than the state-imposed limit, or even bartering them for manufactured goods such as shoes or clothes.⁵⁰⁷ As seen before, the black market was by no means confined to the occupied zone, but it is evident that the geographic location of the occupied zone and the limited nature of French sovereignty over it favored its evolution as a hub in a strong clandestine network in goods. For instance, selling cattle from the French *Zone Libre* in the occupied zone became widespread as the cows sold at fifty percent more than their legal French price due to the official and fixed currency exchange rate which so favored the Italian lira.⁵⁰⁸

Yet, it would be a mistake to view Italian-French relations at a local level only as a mutually beneficial relationship between Italian soldiers and the civilian population. There were mutual needs, but a relationship seems to have developed that went beyond one based simply on need. The occupied zone, especially the Alpine part, was far better supplied than the Free Zone, as it was rich in pastureland. Milk and dairy products were widely available.

⁵⁰⁶ ADAHP 42 W 81, Rapport n°852/Int présenté par le Maître des Requêtes au Conseil d'Etat Theis, Président de la Sous-Délégation pour les Affaires Administratives, à l'Amiral Duplat, Président de la D.F.C.I.A., 11 juillet 1942, p.9, 618 W 161, Rapport n°388 de l'Inspecteur Principal Bonneau à Monsieur le Commissaire, Chef des Renseignements Généraux, Breil, 9 February 1942.

⁵⁰⁷ ADAM 616 W 260, "Conférence pour l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italiennes tenue à Vichy le 16 décembre 1940", p.33.

⁵⁰⁸ ADAHP 42 W 81, Compte-rendu de la Conférence interministérielle ayant pour l'objet l'étude des problèmes posés par l'occupation et la propagande italienne tenue le jeudi 10 décembre 1941 à l'Hôtel Thermal à Vichy, p.24.

Thus, local civilians were less dependent on Italian military aid to feed themselves. In fact, Vichy officials' worries about relationships between French women and Italian soldiers is a telltale sign that a network of friendships was developing. In this regard, the occupation of the border zone in June 1940 anticipated the promiscuous relations which would spring up with the occupation of the Free Zone in November 1942.

Yet, we should not take this argument too far. First of all, it is difficult to gauge the real extent of the relationships based solely on the French reports. Unfortunately, Italian military reports make little mention of this fraternization and no memoirs have been written about the occupation of the Alpine outposts. Moreover, the fraternization and relatively tolerant attitude of the Italian authorities towards the transit of goods and individuals was not the norm everywhere. Crossing the border without papers remained strictly forbidden and was indeed a risky business. In a few cases, Italian sentinels went so far as to shoot at illegal travelers, sometimes with deadly results. On 11 July 1942, a 37-year-old Frenchman was mortally wounded by the *Milizia Confinaria*.⁵⁰⁹ On 28 December 1942, two unidentified adolescents were killed while crossing the border near Carnolès (Alpes-Maritimes).⁵¹⁰ These episodes were a grim reminder that the occupation zone was still a war zone.

As well, despite the occasional entente in the Alpine small villages between the local population and Italian soldiers, the Italians had to finally resort to repressive instruments to curb anti-Italian acts. These ranged from the denial of safe-conducts to persons who were

⁵⁰⁹ Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.65.

⁵¹⁰ ADAM, 616 W 241, Fichier 23, Rapport n°110/4 de l'Adjudant Dousson, Commandant la Brigade de Roquebrune Carnolès Frontière, sur un incident survenu en zone occupée, près de la ligne de démarcation, 28 December 1942.

believed to have an anti-Italian or anti-fascist agenda to meticulous body searches at border checkpoints; from apartment inspections to open intimidation.⁵¹¹ Arrests and imprisonment were the ultimate punishment. From June 1941 to January 1943, more than 1,200 people were arrested, most of them for illegally crossing the border, minor anti-Italian activities, or simply on suspicion of such. For example, the arrival of Axis dignitaries such as German Hans-Gustav Felber, one of the German commanders in charge of southern France, in December 1942, triggered a wave of preventive arrests. A sojourn in jail was generally a first step toward expulsion from the occupied zone to the *Zone Libre*, and thus the time in jail was often short.⁵¹²

The ongoing repressive campaign in the occupied zone hinted at the problematic result of the Italian occupation in the border zone. Since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, the real test is how the colonization system operated in actual practice. It is not an understatement to conclude that the Italian experiment in the occupied zone was a serious failure. The Italians had underestimated the patriotic sentiment of the local French population, who did not intend to relinquish their own nationality and heritage. The failed revival of Menton was also the consequence of the Italian's dismal failure to win the hearts and souls of the local population. The French inhabitants who had fled the Italian invasion did not go back to live in the Occupied Zone for fear of being cut off from the French state and of being ostracized. Moreover, the city was still in shambles in 1942, both structurally and economically, a factor that hardly seduced any prospective Italian colonist. Indeed, the new administration was unable to solve the financial cost of the occupation. The Italian state

⁵¹¹ Molinari and Panicacci, *Menton dans la Tourmente, 1939-1945*, p.62.

⁵¹² ADAM 166 W 26 holds a few dossiers of people expelled from Menton.

had injected 800.000 lire into the local economy, but this was just a fragment of the 195 million lire estimated by the Civil Commissariat as necessary to completely refund the local population for war damages.⁵¹³ The massive expenditure required to pay for the expanded numbers of personnel and for the public works projects needed to rebuild the city irritated more than one Ministry in Rome, at a time when every lira was needed to bolster the war effort in the Balkans and in North Africa. Furthermore, the public cost of the occupation could not be alleviated by taxation. Between 1940 and 1943, no income or property taxes were levied in the occupied zone, as a way to encourage the repopulation of the territory. To add insult to injury, an inspection stemming from the CIAF headquarters in Turin uncovered several cases of corruption and abuses. In a very revealing and scathing letter, G.B. Marziali, the Prefect of the Administration of Occupied Territories, reported a sudden suspicious climb in unnecessary expenditures and budget irregularities, a result of leisure trips being reported as business travel, inflated propaganda leaflets' bills, unscrupulous use of long-distance calls and vehicles, and outrageous expenses for the luxurious renovation of the Commissariat's building.⁵¹⁴ In the same letter, Marziali chastised Frediani for hiring employees without prior permission from Turin. Consequently, he considerably restricted Frediani's freedom of action and strongly advised him to pursue a policy of austerity.

As damaging for the Italian occupation as the malpractice of its officials were the internecine rivalries within the Fascist state. Conflicts between different seats of power

⁵¹³ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Rapporto n°15800 Sottocommissione Affari Generali, Turin, 1 September 1941; Rapporto n°5327 T.O. Prefetto dei Territori Occupati G.B. Marziali, Turin, 2 September 1941.

⁵¹⁴ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Lettera n°4584 of Prefetto dei Territori Occupati al Commissario Civile di Mentone Giuseppe Frediani, 3 July 1942. Frediani issued two successive instructions to his subordinates which echoed the words of Marziali.

mirrored the vested and conflicting interests of the Italian national ministries. Several ministries, such as the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Popular Culture (MINCULPOP) vied for control in order to further their own particular interests. In his June report, Frediani had requested an extension of his power in order to deal with the frictions between the different departments in the Commissariat.⁵¹⁵ In the same report, Frediani affirmed that, as a militant of the PNF, he was shunned by the Italian military *Presidio* (garrison) in Menton. In truth, this conflict was much more than mere political antipathy, as it was indicative of two fundamentally different and ultimately irreconcilable policies. On the one hand, the Menton Civil Commissar Frediani had based his policy on the development of local tourism, the only activity that could have bolstered Menton's prestige and economy in Italy and abroad. Under his supervision, the City of Lemons saw a partial normalization of its life: schools opened, the food distribution network became more organized, and the reopening of the local casino and some hotels attracted a few tourists. A massive propaganda campaign carried out by local and Italian national newspapers touted Menton as the ideal spot for a relaxing sojourn. The *Comité des Traditions Mentonnaises*, under the supervision of Frediani, celebrated the rebirth of the new town by authorizing a Menton exhibition stand at the 1941 Milano Fair, one of the most important in Europe. The Menton stall was graced with a chorus in traditional costume who delighted the public, among them the King of Italy

⁵¹⁵ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Rapporto 511/R6/gab Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani al G.B.Marziali, Prefetto CIAF dei Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati, 1 June 1942, pp.61-62.

Vittorio Emanuele III, with its repertoire of songs in Mentonese dialect.⁵¹⁶ Despite the choir's tour in the neighboring regions which won flattering reviews, even the *Comité's* campaign was partly hamstrung by strict controls at the Italian border.

In strident contrast with Frediani's policy, military authorities prioritized the security of the region over its economic recovery and always underscored that, until the peace treaty was signed, the occupied zone was considered a *Zona d'operazione* (operation zone). Supported in their decision by the local head of the state police, Inspector Rosario Barranco,⁵¹⁷ they tightened their grip on the borders, as they believed that every visitor could be “a possible spy or a currency trafficker.”⁵¹⁸ Italians wishing to enter the occupied zone had to apply for a permit issued by the Italian police. This burdensome procedure, which could take as long as thirty days, discouraged one-day visits from nearby regions and severely hampered any chance for Menton's tourist industry to return to its past levels of success.⁵¹⁹ In April 1942, the military Italian authorities relaxed the border crossing by allowing members of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (the Italian Fascist Party) into Menton on the strength of their membership cards.⁵²⁰ However, it was not enough for the Civil Commissar Frediani, who opposed this rigid policy as it hindered the resuscitation of tourism, the only activity that

⁵¹⁶ Giuseppe Frediani, *La Pace separata di Ciano*, Roma: Bonacci Editore, 1990, pp.122-123. For more on the history of the *Comité des Traditions Mentonnaises*, ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Rapporto 511/R6/gab Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani al G.B.Marziali, Prefetto CIAF dei Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati, 1 June 1942.

⁵¹⁷ Barranco will later play an important role in Nice during the Italian occupation from November 1942 to September 1943, see Chapter 7. The Italian occupation policy in France: the repressive forbearance of the Italian army, p.275.

⁵¹⁸ Frediani, *La Pace separata di Ciano*, p.105.

⁵¹⁹ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Rapporto 571/R5/gab Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani a G.B.Marziali, Prefetto CIAF dei Amministrazione Territori Francesi Occupati, 1 June 1942, p.11.

⁵²⁰ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Faldone 48, Lettera Commissario Civile Mentone Giuseppe Frediani, 18 April 1942.

could have bolstered Menton's economy and prestige. In the end, Frediani was ultimately forced to yield, only because the 30 July 1940 decree stated that the Civil Commissar was subordinate to local military commanders, especially on security matters. The Italian invasion in November 1942 would seal all the borders of the occupied zone, once and for all dooming tourism in Menton.⁵²¹

Therefore, the Italian occupation was seriously weakened by its conflicting goals: it was a military occupation, designed to secure the border and prevent the French army from rising from its ashes, but it was also concurrently used by the Fascist civilian administration as a means to promote Italy's image both in the peninsula and worldwide. The two agendas were not compatible, and the tension would only worsen from November 1942. In truth, the dualism between the Italian army and the civilian authorities was not the only issue explaining the failed development of Menton. The forced Italianization campaign was as responsible as the military contingency. The Prefect of Imperia, Marcello Tallarigo, wrote a terse letter to the Interior Ministry underlining the dreadful approach undertaken by CIAF Commissars in Menton. The latter were guilty of using the same blatant colonization policy carried out in Albania, Africa and in the Balkans. Instead, Tallarigo, explained, it would have been "advisable to implement from the beginning a homeopathic diffusion of the Fascist ideology, given the fact that the organism we were confronted with had never been very

⁵²¹ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Rapporto Commissario Civile di Mentone Gino Berri "Attività del Commissariato Civile di Mentone, 1 June 1942 – 31 January 1943," p.33.

receptive to a prescription with the double tag of Italian and Fascist."⁵²² This possible explanation was corroborated with the example of the successful reconstruction of Montgenèvre, a small village in the Hautes-Alpes department. The local civil commissar, Marquis Saporiti, favored the complete renovation of the village, which had been partially destroyed by the June 1940 offensive. According to Fascist propaganda, the village was rapidly rebuilt and even outshone its former self, quickly becoming a thriving Alpine resort.⁵²³ Arguably, the task in Montgenèvre was far less complicated than in Menton, as the village was smaller, was in a region not directly touched by the irredentist propaganda and had little strategic importance. But the strategy implemented there seemed to demonstrate that a different, softer approach might have stood some chances of winning over the local population.

This partial success did little to mitigate the overall poor results of Italian policy in the Occupied Zone. Its most representative city, Menton, which in the mind of Fascist panegyrists should have been the jewel in the crown of the Italian empire, instead became a thorn in its side. Italian officials grimly acknowledged that the half-hearted revival of the City of Lemons was hurting the prestige of the Italian state abroad as much as the Italian's military appalling performance in the Battle of the Alps.⁵²⁴ Menton, with its rivalries, its shady embezzlement and its empty houses, far from being a showcase for the new idealized

⁵²² ACS, Provincia d'Imperia, Affari di Gabinetto, II, 11, 6, rapporto riservato del 22.3.1943, cited by Jean-Louis Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne, Sud-Est de la France, Juin 1940-Septembre 1943*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010, p.64

⁵²³ La Gazzetta del Popolo, 27 October 1941, cited by Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne, Sud-Est de la France*, p.72.

⁵²⁴ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 20, Rapporto n°18795 Presidente CIAF Vacca Maggiolini "Mentone, situazione politica ed economica," Turin, 28 June 1941, pp.1-2.

Italian empire, instead became a tarnished symbol of the failing Fascist regime, a microcosm of the reality of Mussolini's Italy.

It was clearly a missed opportunity for the Fascist state who could have more effectively exploited the experiment of colonizing a small territory before proceeding to a more populated one such as the County of Nice. It seems, in fact, that the Italians made the same mistake as the Vichy regime, by wanting to rebuild the foundation of the house while the roof was on fire. The Fascist regime, prisoner of its own irredentist propaganda, could not wait until the peace treaty to transform the new zone into an Italian colony. By rebuilding while the war was still raging, the Italians took a great risk. The exigencies of the war would necessarily affect the grander scheme for the reconstruction of the newly conquered territory. Indeed, as soon as the economic situation deteriorated, the living conditions in Menton and the Occupied Zone degraded irreversibly. Moreover, local Italian officials were confronted with their own internal divisions and a hostile population. In addressing these challenges, Italian authorities chose a heavy-handed approach which ultimately backfired. The failure of this italianization campaign probably shaped the occupation policy of November 1942. No document has been found to acknowledge whether the Italians understood their mistakes, but, Italian army top rank leaders did take note of the impossibility of furthering Italy's political goals at a time when the demands of the war suggested security and strategic issues were more important. Thus, when the full-fledged occupation started in November 1942, the army would set aside the political goals and focus solely on military matters.

Chapter 6

The November 1942 Invasion

In November 1942, the situation changed drastically with the full-scale invasion of more than 150,000 Italian soldiers into the *Zone Libre* following the Allied invasion of North Africa. The Italians occupied nine departments of southeastern France, a vast zone delimited by the Rhône on its western border and the Savoy to the north. Many "unredeemed lands" such as the County of Nice, Savoy, and Corsica were occupied effortlessly by the Italian army in just a few weeks. No wonder the irredentist movement hailed this occupation as the achievement of the *Mare Nostrum*, Italy's full control of the Mediterranean Sea. However, what was in theory a political victory shortly became a strategic nightmare. The Italian army was already overstretched in different theaters of war all over Europe and North Africa. The deployment in France had also depleted the already thin defenses of the peninsula's coastline. Poorly organized, suffering from low morale, lacking resources in terms of both manpower and materiel, Italian soldiers wearily spread out along the French Mediterranean shore. In fact, Fourth Army cadres were as worried about a possible uprising by the French population as about a possible Allied invasion. The Italian military, therefore, was not interested in the short term in any policy of colonization or Italianization which would exacerbate the hostility of the French populace. Thus, the Menton experiment was never repeated, to the utter disappointment of both the CIAF officials and local irredentists.

Rumors of a prospective Italian invasion of the *Zone Libre* had started as soon as the ink of the Armistice of Villa Incisa dried, and with a reason. In fact, whenever Italian state

officials felt that the French were cheating or dragging their feet in the negotiations, plans to invade southern France were once again reviewed. As early as August 1940, in light of French hostility at the CIAF level and of the loss of some French colonies to the Gaullist movement, the *Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito* (Italian Army General Staff) or SMRE was given the order to plan an occupation of all the French territory east of Rhône, a plan known as the *Esigenza R*.⁵²⁵ However *Esigenza R* was soon put on hold. On 2 October 1940, the War Undersecretary General Ubaldo Soddu, with the approval of both Mussolini and Badoglio, issued a directive that drastically cut the size of the Italian Army by one-third. Six hundred thousand soldiers, mainly belonging to the 1901-1916 classes, were granted either unlimited furloughs or seasonal, in the case of agricultural workers. The measure severely affected the Italian divisions quartered on the peninsula, as the demobilization did not apply to troops in the Aegean Sea, North Africa or Albania.⁵²⁶ The start of the Greek campaign in October 1940 further drained effectives from the Alpine front, with those divisions falling to forty percent of their previous effectives (seventy percent in the case of Alpine divisions).⁵²⁷

Mussolini's decision to reduce the Italian military forces reflected his belief that the war would be over by the end of the year, or at least that Greece would be settled by the beginning of winter.⁵²⁸ Immediately, the SMRE registered its displeasure. It stressed that the draconian reduction of the *Regio Esercito* would render useless the collective training

⁵²⁵ Literally Exigency R. (R stands for *Rodano* or Rhône). Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.41.

⁵²⁶ Soddu's directive can be found in ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 127, IT A1143, Lettera U. Soddu, Rome, 2 October 1940.

⁵²⁷ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.47.

⁵²⁸ Rochat, *Le Guerre italiane 1935-43*, pp.255-6.

undertaken since the mobilization in 1939, while seriously hindering the *esprit de corps*. It pointed out that Laval's dismissal in December 1940 had compelled both the Germans and the Italians to make preparations for a possible invasion of the *Zone Libre*, for fear that it represented a reversal of Vichy's policy of collaboration. Finally, the SMRE warned that the divisions on the French border would require, after the demobilization, at least three months to become fully operational.⁵²⁹ For these reasons, the old plan, *Esigenza R*, was replaced in February 1941 by a new one, *Operazione 215*. The new invasion's master plan anticipated the occupation of the demilitarized zone, which meant the Alpine departments and the County of Nice. The modesty of its goals was a reflection of the reality of the situation, as almost all nine divisions had been cannibalized for more urgent theaters of war.⁵³⁰

The situation evolved considerably in 1942. Rumors of an invasion increased exponentially in the Côte d'Azur. At first, the offensive was supposed to be on 21 April, the birthdate of the city of Rome,⁵³¹ the next possibility was 30 April, when Senator Ermanno Amicucci, the author of the propagandist book *Nizza Italiana*, gave a particularly virulent irridentist speech.⁵³² May was even more frenzied: three possible dates (10, 24 and 28) were bandied about. It was unclear who spread these panic-inducing rumors and for what reasons. The CIAF accused real estate speculators who wanted to convince the populace to

⁵²⁹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 127, IT A1143, Pro-memoria Roatta n°1224, 13 November 1940.

⁵³⁰ For more on *Operazione 215*, Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.64-67. See also ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 500, IT 6676.

⁵³¹ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 20, CIAF Notiziario quindicinale n°33 (1-15 April 1942), p.33.

⁵³² AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 20, CIAF Notiziario quindicinale n°34 (16-31 April 1942), p.27. Ermanno Amicucci, *Nizza Italiana*, Milano: Mondadori, 1942. It is interesting to note that the first five editions of the book, printed between 1939 and 1942, were published under the title of *Nizza e l'Italia*. Significantly, Amicucci changed the title in the sixth edition, in August 1942.

hastily sell their assets, which would inevitably depreciate with any invasion.⁵³³ In the eighth issue of *Il Nizzardo* (3 May 1942), an anonymous journalist titled his column, “Le Jour viendra” (“The Day Will Come”). A French title in an otherwise Italian publication had a double inference. On one hand, according the columnist, French *agents provocateurs* were creating a red herring in the form of speculation about a possible Italian invasion. These subtle maneuvers supposedly kept the French populace focused on the external threat. It was also a way of exposing the irredentists of the Alpes-Maritimes by tricking them, with false hopes, to expose themselves. On the other hand, the ominous title was also a reminder to the French authorities that they were playing with fire. Using *agents provocateurs* could well backfire, as an Italian invasion of the County of Nice was going to eventually happen and the irredentists would use the army to take revenge on local authorities.⁵³⁴

The escalation in irredentist propaganda matched pace with the worsening of Franco-Italian relations. Ironically, Laval's return in April 1942 now worried the Fascist hierarchy as they feared his reappointment meant a closer rapprochement between Vichy and Berlin. In spite of German officials' reassurances, this suspicion was confirmed in the meeting between the CIAF and CTA (Franco-German Armistice Commission in Friedrichshaven held 10-17 June 1942. The head of CTA, General Vogl, mollified the CIAF by stressing the superiority of the Axis Powers with regards to Vichy, but also insisted that Germany and Italy should be generous with Vichy. As the war began to turn

⁵³³ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 21, CIAF Notiziario quindicinale n°36 (15-31 May 1942), p.35.

⁵³⁴ *Il Nizzardo*, n°8, year IX, 3 May 1942, p.1. An almost complete collection of *Il Nizzardo* can be found in the Archives Départementales des Alpes-Maritimes and in the Archivio Storico dell'Esercito.

against Germany, the Germans were prepared to offer France compensation in order to get full access to its industrial resources and to get the support of its colonial army. The CIAF President Vacca Maggiolini furiously replied that Italy could not accept the minimization of its territorial claims, as the latter were the main reason for Italy's entry into the war in the first place.⁵³⁵ Mussolini and the leadership had not budged from their position of the summer of 1940. They demanded that Italy should be fully rewarded for its war effort and that the Axis should reject any major collaboration with France on the grounds that Vichy would probably ask for compensation in return for its help.⁵³⁶ That Mussolini had no intention to give up his irredentist demands was clear in the heated Italian press campaign demanding the liberation of the *Terre Irridenti* (Irredentist Lands). In the Italian-German meeting in Venice on 22-28 September, Italian officials tried to persuade their German counterparts that France had a hidden plan to instill the seed of discord between the Axis partners as a way to secretly aid the Allied effort. Several arguments were presented as evidence: France's neutrality vis-a-vis the United States, Gaullist dissension which was gaining ground in the French Empire, and the French populace's hostility towards both Italy and Germany.⁵³⁷ They were not persuasive, but it was clear that the Italians vehemently opposed making France a partner.

Therefore, the army was instructed to lay out in May 1942 a strategic plan for a prospective invasion, the *Esigenza Ovest*, (Plan West, or simply known as *Esigenza O*). The occupation was to focus strictly on the territory claimed by Italy: the County of Nice and

⁵³⁵ Rainero, *La Commission d'Armistice Italienne avec la France*, pp.295-6.

⁵³⁶ Costa Bona, *Dalla Guerra Alla Pace*, pp.125-127.

⁵³⁷ Rainero, *La Commission d'Armistice Italienne avec la France*, pp.302-3.

the Savoy region.⁵³⁸ However, in July 1942, the Italian senior military was asked to change the invasion plan to encompass the whole Mediterranean coastline up to Toulouse in southwestern France. This drastic shift in strategy stemmed from the evolution of the war. The Western Allied powers were seeking to open another front, in order to take the pressure off the Soviet Union. The Army Italian General Staff wanted to ensure that France's Mediterranean shores would be adequately defended as rumors of a possible Allied landing in southern France grew in intensity.⁵³⁹ If the Allies were successful, a bridgehead in southern France would give the Anglo-Americans a base to carry out military operation against Italy and Germany, and, thus, the Axis powers wanted to ensure this dreaded scenario would not happen. Therefore, the very nature of the future Italian invasion of France was shaped by strategic requirements. The goals of the imminent Italian military occupation would not be anymore political, but strictly strategic. The invasion was not intended as prelude to an annexation of southeastern France, at least in the short term, but instead would secure Fortress Europe against an enemy landing on a crucial strategic point.

It is therefore not baffling that the British-American invasion of Algeria and Morocco on 8 November 1942, codenamed Operation Torch, triggered the occupation of southeastern France by the Italian army. The Axis feared that the northern Mediterranean area was next in line for an Allied invasion. Moreover, the Germans no longer trusted the Vichy regime. Notwithstanding Petain's immediate call to resist, Hitler was furious at the ambiguous attitude of some high-ranking officers, in particular the obfuscation of Admiral

⁵³⁸ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.72-73.

⁵³⁹ AUSSME, DS 2119, Direttiva n°13788 di prot. "Secondo fronte" dal Stato Maggiore R. Esercito al Capo di S.M., Diario Storico SMRE, Allegato 38, 19 August 1942.

Darlan, who had just happened to be in Algiers to visit his ailing son. Prime Minister Laval, who went to Munich the next day, 9 November, with the daunting task of convincing Nazi officials of Vichy's loyalty, was severely chastised by the Führer.⁵⁴⁰ The “North-African Imbrogio” had finally managed to unite Germans and Italians on the issue of France after two years of dissension. Both Ciano and Hitler agreed that a joint invasion of France was absolutely necessary to prevent a possible Allied landing on that country's Mediterranean shore.⁵⁴¹

At 9:55 p.m. on 10 November, the Chief of the General Staff Army, General Vittorio Ambrosio, wired the formal order to the Fourth Army to begin the latest version of the *Esigenza Ovest*, at 7 a.m the next morning. The Fourth Army was divided into three *Corpi d'Armata* (Army Corps or CA), each one with its own task: the I CA (GaF mobile units, 20° Alpini Sciatori (Alpine Skiers), the Rovigo in reserve) which was deployed along the upper part of the border, would occupy the Alpine departments, from the Savoy to the Hautes-Alpes, mainly through the Modane and Bourg St-Maurice valleys; the XXII CA (GaF, Taro, Emanuele Filiberto Testa di Ferro (EFTF) and Pusteria) was assigned to the center and was given the targets of Basses-Alpes and upper Alpes-Maritimes; the XV CA (Lupi di Toscana, Legnano and Piave mobile units) would deal with the coastline. XXII and XV CA units were given the task to push, first up the river Var and subsequently further west to the line of Cannes - Grasse - Entrevaux.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ Jackson, *France, The Dark Years*, pp.221-223.

⁵⁴¹ Costa Bona, *Dalla Guerra Alla Pace*, pp.128-129.

⁵⁴² AUSSME, DS 1099, Telegramma n°19355 *Superercito* al Comando Quarta Armata, 22.55, Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata, Allegato 12, 10 November 1942.

As had been the case in June 1940, most of the units quartered on the French border were unprepared for action. The I CA was in its winter barracks down the Turin valley far from the border; the key division of the XXII CA was moving east to defend the Liguria coastline; the XV CA had no divisions within thirty kilometers from the border.⁵⁴³ Moreover, many divisions were still severely undermanned. Although orders were issued recalling every officer, NCO or soldier on leave, it did not solve the problem.⁵⁴⁴ The efficiency of the Fourth Army was further marred by the chronic paucity of materiel that continually plagued the Italian Army in the Second World War. In October 1942, the scarcity of shoes in the Fourth Army was endemic, owing to the arrival of soldiers from the Russian and Greek campaigns whose shoes were in desperate need of repair.⁵⁴⁵ In another October 1942 report, the head of the I CA General Federico Romero complained of the lack of food, aggravated by the difficult challenge of finding any staples at a time of heavy rationing in the peninsula. In the meantime, morale was low as the rank-and-file were also growing increasingly worried by the erosion of their allowances and benefits.⁵⁴⁶

To add insult to injury, the Italian alpine forces had been repeatedly weakened in 1942 by the Italian General Staff decision to use full divisions of the Fourth Army as reserves to relieve other units fighting in hotter theaters of war such as Russia, Greece and North Africa.⁵⁴⁷ In September, the *Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito* (Italian General Staff Army or

⁵⁴³ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.114.

⁵⁴⁴ AUSSME, DS 1101, Telegramma n°3830/02 Comando XXII CA, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 18, 10 November 1942.

⁵⁴⁵ AUSSME, DS 1099, Rapporto n°7777/Op. Generale Vercellino "Rapporto situazione per il periodo 20 Settembre – 20 Ottobre 1942," Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata, Allegato 9, 4 November 1942.

⁵⁴⁶ AUSSME, DS 987, "Stralcio della relazione mensile sul servizio "P" (Propaganda) del mese di ottobre, inviata al Comando 4° Armata il giorno 31 ottobre 1942," Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 32, 31 October 1942.

⁵⁴⁷ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.106-107.

SMRE) was so worried about a possible attack on North Africa that two divisions quartered near the French border, the RECo. Cavalleggeri di Lodi and Centauro, were sent to Libya. Just hours before the North African Allied landing, the *Piave* was ordered to move to Naples to bolster the defenses of the Campania coast.⁵⁴⁸ The Commander of the Fourth Army, General Mario Vercellino, complained that the impact of directives was to reduce his units to the point of compromising the occupation of Southern France. He insisted on keeping the *Piave*, as it was one of the only motorized units of the Fourth Army, and he considered it essential to his operation. In a last minute decision, the SMRE, aware of the poor mobility of the Fourth Army, agreed to leave the mechanized companies of the *Piave* division on the French border, notwithstanding the fact that its commander, General Tabellini, was already in Rome to supervise the transfer of the other half of the division.⁵⁴⁹ At 1 a.m. on 11 November, the SMRE postponed “crossing the Rubicon” by twenty-four hours, to the night of 11-12 November.⁵⁵⁰ Then, fifteen minutes later, the SMRE reversed its orders and General Vercellino was invited to cross the border “on 11 November at noon with as many forces as he could muster.”⁵⁵¹

It seems that senior Fascist officials and the Italian military command were in fact torn between the strategic risk of overstretching the already strained logistics of the Regio Esercito and the political need to move deeper into France to occupy as much land as

⁵⁴⁸ AUSSME, DS 1101, Telegramma n°8007/Op. Generale Vercellino, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 17.

⁵⁴⁹ AUSSME, DS 1101, Telegramma n°8053/Op. Generale Vercellino, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 21.

⁵⁵⁰ AUSSME, DS 1016, Phone call Comando Quarta Armata (General Trabucchi) at 1 a.m. on 11 November, Diario Storico XV CA, Allegato 27. For Tabellini’s absence, see AUSSME DS 1099 Diario Storico 4° Armata, 11 November 1942.

⁵⁵¹ AUSSME, DS 1099, Diario Storico 4° Armata, 11 November 1942 entry; Phone message (*Fonogramma*) Capo Ufficio Operazioni, General Gerlier, al Comando Quarta Armata, 8.100 /Op., Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata, Allegato 14.

possible to facilitate its possible annexation at the end of the war. Indeed, the decisive factor was, in all likelihood, the knowledge that German troops were going to invade the Free Zone at 7 a.m, 11 November. If the Italian army wanted to take the coastline and southern France for itself, given its relative lack the mobility, it had to act immediately.

The 1942 Italian occupation of southern France went relatively smoothly and without any major incidents. At noon on 11 November, G.a.F. units crossed the border at three different points (Val D'Arc, Upper Roja and Mentone) paving the way for the divisions of the three Army Corps. The XXII CA, in the middle, fell behind, as its units were still moving up from Turin, far from the French border. Thus until 12 November, only GaF troops had entered the former *Zone Libre*, occupying Breil and Saorge.⁵⁵² In the northern and southern sectors, the Italian units fared better. I CA units in the Alpine sector overcame snowy roads and managed to reach Modane and the Orelle Valley.⁵⁵³ The XV CA met even fewer problems as motorized Piave units, followed closely by Legnano units, entered Nice at 3:30 p.m.. Thus, two out of the three army corps met the goals set by the *Esigenza O*. The Orelle Valley and the crucial bridge on the Var River that linked Nice to the western part of the Alpes-Maritimes department were quickly and easily secured. Only the XXII did not reach its objective, the Mescla Bridge on the Var River.

Nevertheless, the Fourth Army Command was not given the time to savor the relative success of the operation. On 11 November, at 8:45 p.m., the SMRE sent a telegram with new directions for the occupation forces. The Fourth Army was ordered to secure the entire

⁵⁵² AUSSME, DS 1099, Diario Storico 4° Armata, 11 November 1942 entry.

⁵⁵³ AUSSME, DS 987, Phone conversation Comandoo GaF VIII Settore and Comando I CA, , Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 48, 11 November 1942.

southern French territory up to a line drawn from Geneva, skirting Lyons, to Toulouse. As in June 1940, this new line was the consequence of the strategic choices of the Germans. In the Munich meeting with the *Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito* (Italian General Staff or SMG) on 11 November, the OKW emissaries (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, the German General Staff) explained that the invasion of the *Zone Libre* could not be delayed any longer. They made clear that “(i)n the event that the Italian troops, given their formation, [were not able] to advance swiftly, ... armored German units [would advance] certainly towards the coast. German units [would then draw back] to the demarcation line already agreed upon (Geneva-Lyons-Toulouse) with the [subsequent] unfolding of the Italian occupation.” Fortunately, while the Germans were determined that the zone be fully occupied, they were not particularly interested in managing the whole zone themselves. Thus, they were willing to accommodate the Regio Esercito. The OKW representative in Rome Von Rintelen reassured the SMG that the division of the Free Zone would not be shaped just by the swiftness of each army’s deployment in securing the French territory, but also by the distribution and density of Italians among the local population. If the County of Nice, the most heavily populated Italian region in Southern France, was easily occupied by Regio Esercito’s troops owing to its short distance from the Italian border, the SMG was worried about the two other coastal cities with important Italian communities, Marseille and Toulon. Italian officials agreed that both cities ideally should be occupied by Italian troops both as a means to control the whole Mediterranean coastline and as a mark of prestige. A too swift German advance might indeed ruin the party.

Thus, the Italian Chief of the General Staff, General Ugo Cavallero, immediately phoned Vercellino. The new order was to occupy as much territory as possible. Cavallero exhorted the commanders to push forward “day and night,” adding optimistically that troops should be transported by train. Occupying the territory became mandatory to the point that “resupplying should not be prioritized.”⁵⁵⁴ Clearly Cavallero was not reassured by the OKW's blandishments. It is also probable that Cavallero's urge was directly connected to the desire of the Duce and his top civilian aides to occupy as much French territory as possible so as to be in a strong position for the eventual negotiations after the war. Even when Italy was exposed to a grave danger, Italian Fascist officials, obsessed by their imperialistic dreams, could not help but think of the French territory as future war booty.

Cavallero's directive remained nothing more than wishful thinking. The SMG soon discovered that their strategy was far too ambitious. The SMRE master plan for the occupation of the Mediterranean coastline up to Toulouse would have necessitated at least twelve fully motorized divisions.⁵⁵⁵ Moreover, hopes of taking Marseille were soon dashed. When the 10th Armored Division of the *Felber Armeegruppe* stormed the capital of the Bouches-du-Rhône department on the afternoon of 12 November, the Piave units were still some fifteen kilometers from Toulon.

The differences in mobility between the two partners was in part because of the Germans' savvy exploitation of the railway. The Franco-German armistice of June 1940 had established a board of German engineers who had been assigned the task of managing the

⁵⁵⁴ Ugo Cavallero, *Diario, 1940-1943*, Roma: Ciarrapico, 1984, pp.563-566. For the official directive received on 12 November at 2.30 PM by the Comando Quarta Armata, see AUSSME, DS 1099, Telegramma SMRE (*Superesercito*), Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata, Allegato 19.

⁵⁵⁵ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.121.

French railway network in the Occupied Zone. Furthermore, a Franco-German commission in Lyons had supervised the integration of the French railway network into the German. It is not surprising then that the Germans succeeded in moving three entire divisions by train on 11 November.⁵⁵⁶ If the German mobilization had been exemplary, the exact opposite could be said of its Italian counterpart. Right from the start of the invasion, even before crossing the border, the Regio Esercito faced several challenges. Units of the XXII CA, which were already located far from the Alpine border, were further delayed by the shortage of railway carriages and locomotives in Piedmont. Thus, the XXII CA units had difficulty just getting into position along the Upper Roja in the Tenda region.

However, the weakness of the Italian railway network was not the only reason why it took up to ten days for several units to reach their headquarters in Cannes and Grasse, a mere seventy-five kilometers from Menton.⁵⁵⁷ The lack of cooperation on the part of the French CIAF delegation was instrumental in crippling the deployment of the occupation army in the *Zone Libre*. Several I CA and XXII CA units were delayed when the French delegation in Turin denied the Italian convoy permission to use the French network, notwithstanding the local civilian authorities' fear of the consequences of having to billet these troops in their communes.⁵⁵⁸ No wonder French officials guessed the annexationist ambitions behind the operation and thus did whatever in their power to hinder the Italian operation. To make matters worse for the invaders, the Italian army was short of truck drivers and trucks. Old trucks broke down in the middle of mountain trails, leaving entire companies stranded,

⁵⁵⁶ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.136.

⁵⁵⁷ For instance the Genova Cavalleria arrived in Grasse only on 21 November, see AUSSME DS 1099 Diario Storico 4° Armata, Entry 20 November.

⁵⁵⁸ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.135.

forced to continue their journey by foot. In some cases, the disorganization of the convoys was such that entire units got lost and had a hard time finding their way back, as the local population apparently enjoyed giving false directions to the befuddled drivers.⁵⁵⁹ This farcical situation thus forced the Lupi di Toscana division to cover 150 kilometers by foot in three days in order to reach its destination in the Grasse region. Intense negotiations only just defused the situation on 15 November. Italians were finally authorized to run two daily trains from Modane and Menton to both supply and move their garrisons.⁵⁶⁰

The transportation issue had severe repercussions for Franco-Italian relations. Vichy's refusal to allow the movement of Italian troops on its railway network became the Italians' justification for invading the Savoy region. Italian officials argued that quartering of troops in Savoy would not have been necessary if the French had allowed the Regio Esercito's trains on French tracks, which would have enabled the swift westbound deployment of Italian units to Valence and Orange along the Rhône. Outraged French officials retorted that the occupation of Savoy had minimal strategic value in any operation against an Allied landing as the Savoy region was not part of the Mediterranean coastline. In a meeting on 14 November with the CIAF president Vacca Maggiolini, the head of the French delegation, Admiral Duplat, vehemently denounced the Italian strategy, in spite of Italian officials' assurance of the temporary nature of the occupation.⁵⁶¹ French fears were heightened as Italian newspapers celebrated the occupation of southern France as the culmination of the

⁵⁵⁹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3131, Lettera n°04/3832 di prot. Comando XV CA "Contegno delle truppe," 19 November 1942.

⁵⁶⁰ AUSSME DS 1099 Diario Storico 4° Armata, Entry 14 November; Rapporto n°10294/Op. Comando Quarta Armata al SMRE, 17 December 1942, Diario Storico 4° Armata, Allegato 41.

⁵⁶¹ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 51, Faldone I, Document 41, Report on the conversation between Vacca Maggiolini and Admiral Duplat, 14 November 1942.

irredentist campaign. All these factors reinforced the French belief that the Italian army was using short-term and questionable strategic "needs" to achieve the Italians' ultimate goal in the occupation of France: the future annexation of the contested territories.⁵⁶²

The French, however, had misconstrued the Italian motives. The Italian army's sole interest, at least in the short run, was strategic and not political. In both its telegram formally ordering mobilization and the subsequent phone call, the SMRE insisted that the Italian army should "retain a reserved attitude (*contegno assolutamente riservato*) without any reference to irredentism or any political claims," and should not open fire unless attacked first. In other words, as explicitly stated in another directive issued on 14 November, Italian soldiers were to maintain an attitude of absolute reserve even in dealings with the Italian population.⁵⁶³ Even Italian officials such as the Civil Commissars were instructed to be accommodating towards Vichy's representatives.⁵⁶⁴ Along this line, SMRE directives instructed the commanders to inform the French population that "[the invasion] will be carried out exclusively to oppose Anglo-American operations in the demilitarized zone."⁵⁶⁵ To this effect, Italian military airplanes dropped thousands of leaflets in the County of Nice and in the Alpine valleys. Written both in Italian and French, they asked the population for their cooperation and stressed the temporary nature of the occupation, in an effort to quell fears of

⁵⁶² Rainero, *La Commissione d'Armistice Italiana con la Francia*, p.310.

⁵⁶³ AUSSME, DS 1099, Telegramma n°12711/Op. SMRE al Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata, Allegato 30, 14 November 1942.

⁵⁶⁴ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Rapporto n°7728 T.O. the Prefetto CIAF Marziali "Atteggimento da assumere nei riguardi della parte francese," 14 November 1942.

⁵⁶⁵ AUSSME, DS 1099, Phone message (*Fonogramma*) Capo Ufficio Operazioni, General Gerlier, al Comando Quarta Armata, 8.100 /Op., Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata, Allegato 14.

a possible annexation.⁵⁶⁶ To reinforce this, Mussolini, following the advice of the CIAF president Vacca Maggiolini, denied Ezio Garibaldi and all other irredentist leaders' permission to enter the French territory with the Italian troops.⁵⁶⁷

It would be wrong to see this self-restraint as a change of heart regarding Italian territorial ambitions. The Duce and his topmost advisors still believed the irredentist territorial claims were absolutely legitimate. However, they reluctantly recognized that the timing was not right to effect a political annexation such as the one carried out in Menton in June 1940. The contingency created by the Allied landing in North Africa forced the Italians to temporarily shelve their expansionist plans. The defense of the Mediterranean coastline had to be the top strategic priority. The Axis powers could not afford any internal French military action while the Allies were gathering their troops just across the Mediterranean. The SMRE's longstanding fear of a resurgent *Armée d'Armistice* fed this decision. The Italian Army General Staff had continued to be suspicious of the French government's loyalty, considering its attitude towards the Axis powers as dubious (*dubbio*) at best.⁵⁶⁸ As well, the Italians were especially worried that a guerilla insurrection, possibly fed by Gaullists and former members of the army, could erupt in the event of an Allied landing on the French Riviera.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ Full text is available in Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, p.169. One original leaflet can be found in AUSSME, DS 1099, Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata in the Allegati folder.

⁵⁶⁷ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Lettera n°24693 CIAF Sottocommissione Affari Generali al Marchese Don Blasco D'Ajeta, Capo Segreteria del Ministro degli Esteri, Turin, 12 November 1942.

⁵⁶⁸ AUSSME, DS 1099, Phone message (*Fonogramma*) Capo Ufficio Operazioni, General Gerlier, al Comando Quarta Armata, 8.100 /Op., Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata, Allegato 14.

⁵⁶⁹ See for instance the report on 20 November of General Vercellino on the occupation of France, AUSSME, DS 1099, Telegramma n°8772/op. "Occupazione territorio francese," Direttiva 60.100/op., Diario Storico Comando 4° Armata.

In retrospect, the worries of the Italian army were exaggerated. Neither the Vichy army nor the Resistance had the potential to organize a full-scale rebellion against an army, which even in its paucity in equipment and men, was still operational and equipped with heavy weapons and armored cars. Military intelligence had its faults, but so did CIAF's. It was not uncommon for CIAF officers in French territory to write up erroneous or exaggerated evaluations based upon scanty evidence or shaped by their own worries about a French uprising. As a matter of fact, Italians tended to overdramatize their reports. They did it sometimes on purpose, as a way to demonstrate to their superiors that their diligent work was fruitful, and sometimes without realizing it, especially in their constant overestimation of the importance of the threat posed by Vichy organizations. One CIAF official in Gap, Eugenio Mazzarini, was alarmed by the enlistment campaign for the *Armée d'Armistice*. In his opinion, due to the efforts of local newspapers under the supervision of the Hautes-Alpes prefect, a great number of volunteers were flocking to the recruitment centers. In his report, he concluded that "the great flow of volunteers raises many hopes for a rapid [military] recovery."⁵⁷⁰ Interestingly, the head of the CIAF delegation in Gap, General Micheletti, disagreed. He considered the worries of his subordinate exaggerated. He claimed that not only was "the enlistment drive ... not moving at an accelerated rhythm, ... but the Army ... rules out any possibility of undertaking a war campaign." Moreover, Micheletti added, "[the Legion] does not give rise to any suspicious activities."⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷⁰ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 01, Rapporto n°209 Delegato CIAF a Gap Eugenio Mazzarini "Situazione politica nella zona delle Alte Alpi," 27 February 1941, p.4-5.

⁵⁷¹ ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 01, Rapporto n°8023 Presidente CIAF Affari Generali "Situazione politica nella zona delle Alte Alpi," Turin, 17 March 1941.

Indeed, the situation was very different from the one in June 1940. Now the demilitarized zone, along with the vast demobilization of the French Army, ensured the Italians had control of the system of Alpine bunkers and army depots. Thus, there was little opportunity for a rapid French mobilization. At most, in a few isolated cases, soldiers sang the *Marseillaise* or hid their weapons. In most cases, French officials surrendered their arms. This widespread passive behavior was not a coincidence, but stemmed from directives from above. A fierce debate raged among Vichy's upper echelons over the policy the French state should adopt in light of the new military contingency. Hardliners such as General Verneau, the future leader of the *Organisation de résistance de l'armée* (Resistance Organization of the Army), and General de Lattre de Tassigny, felt that the French should exploit popular resentment and rise up against the Nazis. In response to this, some officers of the *Armée d'Armistice* near Montpellier tried to organize an insurgent movement, but their fanciful project was immediately crushed by their division commander. In fact, the majority of the Armistice Army still remained faithful to Pétain. Thus the directive issued by the War Minister General Bridoux two hours after the beginning of the German invasion, was heeded by almost all officers. All units were confined to barracks and were instructed to offer no resistance. On the contrary, when called upon, they were instructed to provide full cooperation.⁵⁷² French local authorities were to be courteous, if not helpful. In Bourg-Saint-Maurice and Grenoble, Italian units were politely received by the local mayors.⁵⁷³ The Italians however had the distinct impression the French civil servants were deliberately keeping their collaboration to a strict minimum.

⁵⁷² Henri Amouroux, *La vie Française sous l'Occupation*, Paris: Fayard, 1961, pp.279-290.

⁵⁷³ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitan francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.145-146.

Nonetheless, the Italians took no chances. In every single village along the Franco-Italian border, border guards and gendarmes were forced at gunpoint to hand over their individual firearms and were, in some cases, even arrested and confined to jail.⁵⁷⁴ Italian commanders gave the order to disarm entire garrisons such as the one in Chambéry, notwithstanding the fact that Vichy's troops generally offered no resistance.⁵⁷⁵ In Castillon, a small village thirteen kilometers north of Menton, the Italian soldiers cut the telephone wires upon arriving, thus isolating the village from the outside. The local mayor, along with the few gendarmes and border guards, were confined to the school and released only at dawn. In Sainte-Agnès, the entire population of the small hamlet was herded to the border post and the French flag ripped from its pole.⁵⁷⁶ The same episode was repeated a few kilometers south, at the border post of the Pont de l'Union in Menton. Italian units spearheading the invasion broke the border fence, tore down the French flag, replacing it with the Italian one, as well as disarmed border guards and arrested a few passersby.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ ADAM, 616 W 241, Fichier 23, Note du Sous-Préfet, Directeur du Cabinet du Commandant Blanc, 25 November 1942. According to the different reports, border guards and gendarmes were disarmed at St-Étienne-de-Tinée, Isola, Breil, Saorge, Castellar, Castillon, Carnolès and Roquebrune. All firearms were subsequently given back, except in Roquebrune.

⁵⁷⁵ AUSSME, DS 987, Phone conversation, Comandante GaF Settore VIII e Capitano Rossi, Comando I CA, 11 November 1942, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 50. The weapons were returned to the French police and border guards within a few hours.

⁵⁷⁶ ADAM, 616 W 241, Fichier 20, Rapport n°3957 Commissaire Spécial de Police à l'Intendant Régional de Police, 14 November 1942; Fichier 19, Lettre du maire de St-Agnès au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 17 November 1942. In his report the mayor mentioned that the Blackshirts stormed his village. To my knowledge, no Blackshirt units took part in the November 1942 occupation of France. It is possible that the mayor mistook irredentists living in France who had donned their black shirts as official Blackshirt units coming from Italy.

⁵⁷⁷ ADAM, 616 W 133, Rapport n°3974 du Commissaire Spécial de Menton à Roquebrune au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, 16 November 1942; ADAM 616 W 134, Rapport du Chef D'Escadron Soymie, Commandant de la Gendarmerie dans les Alpes-Maritimes, Nice, 2 December 1942, p.2. It is interesting to note that the Menton Civil Commissar Frediani minimized the friction with the French authorities in his report, mentioning only "some episodes of passive resistance in the handover of weapons [by French border guards]." ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 2, Rapporto 766/gab/R a G.B. Marziali, Menton, 11 November 1942.

The nervousness of the Italian troops was in part a result of the logistical difficulties arising up from a hastily-prepared invasion. Aside from the already mentioned bottleneck at the border, accommodation for thousands of soldiers was not easily found. In their push towards the occupation of the Basses-Alpes, Italian soldiers of the Taro Division were forced to bivouac in the middle of the downtown plaza in Castellane.⁵⁷⁸ Officers often resorted to quartering their troops in the biggest buildings available: churches, gendarmeries, schools and sometimes in hotels or private houses.⁵⁷⁹ The last alternative was in fact the most problematic. The high number of vacation houses along the coastline rapidly became the alternative of choice for local commanders in search of accommodation for their units. However, as in June 1940, the lack of control, the landlords' absence, and the relative poverty of the rank-and-file resulted in an explosion of looting. In Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, several houses were sacked for goods as diverse as silverware, linens, clothes, kitchen utensils and liquor.⁵⁸⁰ What is more, the hungry soldiers emptied the cellars and the orchards of any edible staple.⁵⁸¹ In some cases, in what became a sad leitmotiv throughout the occupation, the soldiers resorted to outright theft, breaking into garages in search of food and stealing vegetables in gardens.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁸ ADAHP, 42 W 82, unsigned police report, 13 November 1942.

⁵⁷⁹ ADAM, 616 W 241, Fichier 19, Lettre du Maire de Castillon au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 12 November 1942; Fichier 13, Lettre du maître d'école de Castillon, 13 November 1942; Lettre du Maire de La Bollène-Vésubie au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 16 November 1942.

⁵⁸⁰ Even Vichy-owned buildings were not spared. In St-Agnès, the soldiers took linens and blankets from the gendarme headquarters. ADAM, 616 W 241, Lettre du Maire de St-Agnès au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 17 November 1942.

⁵⁸¹ Several statements to the police in Roquebrune can be found in ADAM, 560 W 217.

⁵⁸² For instance, troops of the Taro Division broke down the door of a garage in Roquesteron to steal staples, such as potatoes and cabbage, as well as gas. See ADAM, 159 W 49, procès-verbal n°200, Roquesteron, 14 November 1942.

If finding adequate lodging was problematic, feeding thousands of soldiers, most of them young men with healthy appetites, quickly became a critical concern. The troops spearheading the invasion were often left to live off the land. The Italian troops had to requisition bread and cheese in Castellar the day after crossing the border.⁵⁸³ In one case, a squad of forty soldiers who, upon arriving in Nice, found themselves ignored by the Italian army food service, turned to the local *Casa d'Italia* for food, to the amusement of the local French populace.⁵⁸⁴ In light of the alarming reports pouring into his office, the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes, Marcel Ribière, issued a telegram on 12 November stressing that even Italian troops were bound by French legislation. Thus, “no staple [should] be delivered to the operations troops unless authorized by the *Ravitaillement Général*. ... Only French ration tickets are valid.” Another telegram on 13 November elaborated on the previous one, stating that any kind of provision should be remunerated in hard currency or, in the case of food, in ration tickets.⁵⁸⁵ Ribière insisted local authorities should do everything in their power to enforce Vichy's regulations, as a way to affirm that the French government was still in control of the *Zone Libre*. In a message sent a few days later to the Subprefect of Grasse and to the department's mayors, Ribière was insistent: “You are not occupied. The Italian troops are not occupation troops, but operation troops (*troupes d'opérations*) ... The sovereignty of French authorities is integrally preserved.”⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ ADAM 616 W 241, Fichier 20, Rapport n°3955 du Commissaire Quilici, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, 14 November 1942.

⁵⁸⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3131, Lettera n°04/3832 “Contegno delle truppe,” Comando XV CA, 19 November 1942.

⁵⁸⁵ ADAM 616 W 47, Official Telegrams sent on 12 November 1942 at 12.15 PM and on 13 November 1942 at 17.50.

⁵⁸⁶ ADAM 616 W 241, Fichier 16, Lettre n°23 du Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, Nice, 16 November 1942, p.1. The Prefect went as far as to chastise the head of the Nice Censorship Office for having failed to scratch the

In fact, the expropriations were not so much a result of an Italian desire to wrest sovereignty from Vichy, but a reflection of the disorganization of the *Regio Esercito*. Most French reports emphasized the diverse lines of conduct between Italian units. For example, the attitude of the Italian soldiers in Breil was absolutely correct, unlike the expropriations by their fellows in the nearby villages.⁵⁸⁷ In fact, the Police Commissar in Breil observantly noted that “the majority of the Italian detachment commanders acted, while occupying the villages of this sector, in such different ways that one got the impression that they followed more their personal feelings or resentments than the instructions their leaders had given them.”⁵⁸⁸ Many French reports stressed the demoralized attitude of the average Italian soldier. The Italian rank-and-file was described as “exhausted and poorly-dressed.” The logistical disorganization made obvious to even the most casual observer the inchoate nature of the Italian invasion, reflected in the numerous remarks about the Italian soldiers’ individual carriage. A bystander in Nice noted that many of the soldiers “were marching hanging their heads, looking demoralized in their down-at-heel shoes.”⁵⁸⁹ In the Basses-Alpes, the Digne population negatively commented upon the drab *Regio Esercito* uniforms.⁵⁹⁰ A police report from Castellane in the Basses-Alpes zeroed in on the “general sense of scruffiness, lack of discipline and of good manners” pervading Italian units. War materiel was strewn about haphazardly and left unguarded. The average soldier seemed fed

word “Occupation” from a *Petit Niçois* column title on 16 November 1942, ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 47, Note du Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes au chef de Censure de Nice, 18 November 1942.

⁵⁸⁷ ADAM 616 W 133, Rapport n°3287 du Breil Police Commissaire, 11 November 1942.

⁵⁸⁸ ADAM 616 W 133, Rapport n°3293 du Breil Police Commissaire, 12 November 1942.

⁵⁸⁹ Maurice Blanchard, *Historique de la prise de contact*, unpublished, p.6, Musée de la Résistance, Nice, cited by Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, p.169.

⁵⁹⁰ ADAHP, 42 W 85, Rapport du Commissaire de la Ville de Digne au Préfet des Basses-Alpes, 30 November 1942.

up with the war and seemed to have little enthusiasm and even less willingness to fight.⁵⁹¹ This view of the Italian soldiers was not confined to Vichy officials. The *contrôle postale*, the French police postal surveillance, reported that the Italian soldiers were "in somber mood, tired and defeatists." ("mornes, las et défatistes"). In fact, these soldiers "thin as cuckoos" ("maigres comme des coucous") were so poorly equipped as to look like "an operetta army in filthy rags" ("troupes d'opérettes en vêtements crasseux). The report concluded, "their misery had ended up moving the populace's sympathy" ("fini par émouvoir la pitié générale").⁵⁹²

The morale of the Regio Esercito was reinvigorated in part by the warm greetings they received from the Italian population in France. In Digne, Italian civilians gave the troops hot beverages to fight the Alpine cold.⁵⁹³ In Roquebrune, Italian irredentists, who mistook the advancing columns as the onset of the March on Nice, offered wine, fruits and flowers from the wayside.⁵⁹⁴ Yet, the Italian soldiers were more embarrassed than happy to be greeted in Nice by black-shirted men showing off the Roman salute. One soldier, upon seeing a man making the Fascist salute, allegedly scolded him to put his hand down and invited him to take his place as a soldier instead.⁵⁹⁵

The Italian soldiers were not the only ones annoyed by these irredentist demonstrations. French civil servants stressed that "the behavior of these [Italian] foreigners

⁵⁹¹ ADAHP, 42 W 82, Unsigned police report, 13 November 1942.

⁵⁹² ADAM 616 W 186, Commission de contrôle postale de Nice, Rapport n°3311 "Rapport Mensuel n°12, Année 1942," 31 December 1942.

⁵⁹³ ADAHP, 42 W 85, Rapport du Commissaire de la Ville de Digne au Préfet des Basses-Alpes, 30 November 1942.

⁵⁹⁴ ADAM, 616 W 133, Rapport n°3974 du Commissaire Spécial de Menton à Roquebrune au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, 16 November 1942. It should be noted that in the postwar trials, this friendly attitude towards the Italian troops was harshly punished by the Comités d'Épuration, see Chapter 7. The Italian occupation policy in France: the repressive forbearance of the Italian army.

⁵⁹⁵ ADAM 616 W 134, Rapport du Chef D'Escadron Soymie, Commandant de la Gendarmerie dans les Alpes-Maritimes, Nice, 2 December 1942, p.3.

who had been well received and who often had grown rich in our country” was severely criticized by the French populace.⁵⁹⁶ On the night of the 13-14 November in Cap D’Ail, the houses of those who had celebrated the coming of the Italian troops in the streets a few days before were painted with xenophobic slurs.⁵⁹⁷ In Antibes too, houses of known Italian irredentists were smeared with pitch and in a few instances even became the target of hails of stones.⁵⁹⁸ The same report, however, stressed that no incidents had occurred between the French civilian population and the Italian soldiers. In fact, Italian and French reports alike agreed on the relative uneventfulness of the first days of the Italian occupation of the *Zone Libre*. The Italian soldiers, having received strict orders to avoid any attitude which could be interpreted as political such as fraternization with the irredentist movement and, perhaps, ashamed of invading a land they had not conquered, but had entered almost on the sly, did little to provoke a reaction from the local populace. On the other hand, the French population and army, directed by the local authorities and the military commanders to avoid any opposition to the Italian military operation, may have eyed the invaders with hostility, but refrained from actively opposing the Italian advance.

However, to insist that the Italian invasion and occupation went smoothly would be misleading, for it would sweep under the carpet the impact the Italian occupation had on the Côte d’Azur. The Principality of Monaco is an interesting test case to demonstrate how far the Italian commanders were willing to impinge on local politics, given the fact that, in

⁵⁹⁶ ADAM, 616 W 133, Rapport n°3974 du Commissaire Spécial de Menton à Roquebrune au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, 16 November 1942.

⁵⁹⁷ ADAM, 616 W 134, Rapport n°X/2 du Captain Bidet sur des inscriptions anti-italienne à Cap d’Ail, Roquebrune, 17 November 1942.

⁵⁹⁸ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Telespresso n°330/R.857 dal Delegato CIAF a Cannes Eugenio Plaja "Occupazione della zona da parte delle truppe italiane," Cannes, 12 November 1942, p.3.

November 1942, Monaco was still a neutral state. The *Esigenza O*, the Italian master plan for the invasion, was clear on that point. The units of the XV CA which had to push along the coastline were not to cross into Monaco's territory unless attacked by Monaco units or if defending French troops sought refuge in the Principality.⁵⁹⁹ Notwithstanding this order, a few units crossed the frontier into Monaco, as the *Moyenne Corniche*, one of the roads linking Menton to Nice, bordered the neutral state. This act of trespass, notwithstanding its limited nature, was enough to stir up the nationalistic zeal of the Italian irredentist community. More than four hundred people, twenty of whom donned the black shirt for the occasion, gathered in front of the Prince's palace and in the Place des Armes chanting "Monaco Italienne" and "Vive Mussolini" and singing Fascist anthems.⁶⁰⁰ It was short-lived. During the next few days, the situation reverted to pre-invasion normalcy, except for a small contingent of Italian soldiers left guarding the railway line.

The tension however escalated at the state level on 14 November. The Italian consul in Monaco, Lepri, formally asked for the formal collaboration of the principality in the Italian invasion, later to be sanctioned by a deployment of a Regio Esercito detachment within the city. Emile Roblot, Prince Ranieri's Minister of State, flatly refused, in the face of the Italians' insistence, solemnly declaring that the invasion of the Principality would fundamentally violate the internationally neutral position of the sovereign state of Monaco.⁶⁰¹ In fact, the real target of the Italians was not the Monaco's monarch or his government, but

⁵⁹⁹ AUSSME, DS 1016, n°60.000/op. di prot., Attuazione Emergenza O, 10 November 1942, Diario Storico XV CA, Allegato 24, p.2.

⁶⁰⁰ ADAM, 616 W 241, Rapprt sur des A/S. d'incidents qui se sont produits en Principauté de Monaco à l'occasion du passage des troupes italiennes du Commissaire Principal de Beausoleil au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 14 November 1942; Abramovici, *Un Rocher bien occupé*, p.158.

⁶⁰¹ Abramovici, *Un Rocher bien occupé*, p.159.

the American consul in Monaco, Walter Oberaugh. To understand why the Italian Foreign Ministry was so interested in the US consul, it is necessary to return to October 1942. The US consulate in Nice, as admitted by Oberaugh in his autobiography, had clandestine contacts with the French Resistance in the south of France.⁶⁰² On 5 November, Oberaugh, at that time consul in Nice, was urged by the US embassy in Vichy to open a consulate in the principality as soon as possible. This diplomatic move was no coincidence. Officials in Washington realized that the onset of Operation Torch would mean the end of diplomatic relations with the Vichy regime. The Italians resented this intrusion of diplomatic personnel of the most important Allied state into a territory considered within the Italian sphere of influence, rightly fearing that the consulate would act as a hub of Allied propaganda and espionage.⁶⁰³

This diplomatic wrangling did not prevent the Italians from advancing their program. On 16 November starting at noon, Italian units closed every access to Monaco, whether by sea or by land. They then invited all the American citizens to stay home. No arrests were made, but only because the Italians deemed that all the British and American citizens who had links with the Allied secret services had already fled the city. In the face of this imminent threat to the neutrality of his realm, Prince Louis Ranieri de Monaco wrote to both Pope Pius XII and even to the Führer himself complaining of this breach of Monaco sovereignty.⁶⁰⁴ The pro-French population was also mobilized. On the morning of 16 November, the mass at the

⁶⁰² Walter Orebaugh with Carol Jose, *Guerilla in Striped Pants, an U.S. Diplomat Joins the Italian Resistance*, New York: Praeger, 1992, p.4.

⁶⁰³ The consul Oberaugh was arrested by the Italians on 2 December, deported in Italy and later ended in the Italian Resistance.

⁶⁰⁴ Abramovici, *Un Rocher bien occupé*, p.160.

Monaco Cathedral for the commemoration of the dead princes of Monaco turned into a demonstration of support for the Ranieri dynasty.⁶⁰⁵ The crisis rapidly escalated. On 17 November, Italian soldiers, guided by the Vice-President of Monaco's *Fascio*, as well as an employee at the Italian consulate, Guido Bruni, stormed the US consulate and locked up the consul and his personnel on the second floor.⁶⁰⁶ The Prince, along with his Minister Roblot, reiterated their protests and threatened to break diplomatic relations if the American consul was not allowed to leave the consulate.⁶⁰⁷ Thus, it is evident that even purely strategic decisions had political consequences in the chaotic situation of southeastern France. The Italians needed to protect their advance into the French territory and thus had few scruples about crossing the Franco-Monaco border in order to cover their flanks. Moreover, local commanders, probably influenced by the Italian consul in Monaco, were suspicious of the activities of the Anglo-American community in Monaco, especially those of the American consulate. These security reasons were carefully exploited both by the irredentists and Italian civil authorities to further their own political agendas, which in turn fuelled the anger of local French or Monaco authorities and the local populace.

The atmosphere grew increasingly tense as the most prominent irredentists used the situation to settle scores with some of their political and personal adversaries. On 17 November, a former prisoner of St-Cyprien, Georges A., shielded by two Italian soldiers, was

⁶⁰⁵ ADAM, 616 W 241, Rapport du Commissaire Principal de Beausoleil sur des manifestations de fidélité de la population monégasque à S.A.S. le Prince Louis II de Monaco, Beausoleil, 16 November 1942.

⁶⁰⁶ ADAM, 616 W 241, Rapport du Commissaire Principal de Beausoleil sur des incidents en Principauté de Monaco, Beausoleil, 18 November 1942. According to consul Orebaugh, the invasion of the consulate happened on 20 November. For a firsthand account of the episode, see Orebaugh with Jose, *Guerilla in Striped Pants*, pp.8-12.

⁶⁰⁷ AUSSME, DS 1099, n°3142 di prot. "I" "Occupazione del Principato di Monaco," 17 November 1942, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 36.

illegally caught checking papers in the streets of Monaco. Taken in for questioning by the Monaco police, he was later committed to prison for "usurping the responsibilities of the state" (*usurpation de fonctions*). A few hours later, thirty armed men led by Domenico S., an employee of the Italian consulate, broke down the door of the prison and freed the irredentist.⁶⁰⁸ In some cases, the irredentists targeted people with whom they had quarreled in the past. Charles D., a French croupier at the local casino, was arrested by Italian soldiers allegedly based upon the denunciation of the irredentist Alfred R.⁶⁰⁹ Another report contradicted the first one, explaining that Charles D. had failed to show his personal documents at one of the border posts established by the Italian army along the perimeter of the principality and also had insulted the Italian sentries.⁶¹⁰

No matter the reasons for his arrest, the case of Charles D. was the first of a long series of arrests made by the Italian occupation army along the Côte d'Azur. Already in the morning of 12 November, Italian officials with the help of soldiers of the Regio Esercito had arrested, approximately ten individuals - mostly in Nice, both Italian *fuoriusciti* and French citizens.⁶¹¹ It appears that even local Italian irredentists actively participated in the blitz to capture Italian antifascists, such as in the case of the arrest of the former Communist mayor of Ormea (Cuneo), Carlo Bava.⁶¹² These sudden seizures in the former *Zone Libre* raised a commotion among the populace and caused the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes to send a

⁶⁰⁸ ADAM, 616 W 241, Rapport du Commissaire Principal de Beausoleil sur des incidents en Principauté de Monaco, Beausoleil, 18 November 1942.

⁶⁰⁹ ADAM 616 W 241, Rapport n°3981 du Commissariat Spécial de Menton, 17 November 1942.

⁶¹⁰ ADAM 616 W 241, Rapport n°69 du Maréchal de Logis Giovanelli, Chef de la Caserne de St-Roman, Monaco, 16 November 1942. Charles D. was eventually released after a few days.

⁶¹¹ Exhaustive lists of individuals arrested in the Italian military occupation in the Alpes-Maritimes, sorted both by nationalities chronologically and by alphabetical order, can be found in ADAM 166 W 9.

⁶¹² A detailed report on Bava's arrest is available in ADAM 166 W 9.

formal letter of protest to the Italian local authorities on 19 November underscoring that these police operations were overreaching the official goal of the occupation of France, which was to counter an eventual Allied landing in southern France, and in doing so were further undermining Vichy's sovereignty.⁶¹³ The Commander of the XV Army Corps, General Bancale, replied the next day that the wave of arrests would cease immediately.⁶¹⁴ In fact, these orders originated from the head of the Italian forces in France, General Mario Vercellino, who, in a short telegram on 20 November to the SMRE, ordered the immediate cessation of any activity of the "political police" and "counterespionage."⁶¹⁵

Yet, shortly thereafter the Italians moved towards a harsher policy. The order to terminate the arrest of civilians in the former Free Zone was explicitly called off by the Duce on 24 November and relayed by the Fourth Army Command on 25 November.⁶¹⁶ According to this directive, Italian military commanders had to ask the French authorities and police forces to take into custody "dangerous individuals ... whenever possible and convenient [for the Italians]." In practice, Italian commanders, who deeply mistrusted Vichy officials, often took the situation in their own hands. Between the end of November and the beginning of December, Italian authorities resumed the rounding-up of *fuoriusciti* in Nice, among them Paul A., a former army officer, who had emigrated in France before the war for his political

⁶¹³ ADAM, 616 W 242, Fichier 25, Lettre du Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes au Commandant de la Division Legnano, 19 November 1942.

⁶¹⁴ ADAM, 616 W 242, Fichier 25, Lettre du Général Bancale au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 20 November 1942.

⁶¹⁵ AUSSME, DS 1099, Telescritto n°3225 di prot. "I," Comando 4 Armata al SMRE, Ufficio Operazioni I, 20 November 1942, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 39. The order was relayed down to the Commanders of all three Army Corps. See AUSSME, DS 1101, Fonogramma a mano n°3226 di prot. "I," Comando Quarta Armata ai Comandi I, XV, XXII Corpi D'Armata, 20 November 1942, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 55.

⁶¹⁶ AUSSME, DS 1101, Telegramma n°3366 "I" di prot. "Azione degli organi di polizia italiani nei territori occupati," Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 69, 25 November 1942.

ideas and Armand A., an Italian socialist who admitted campaigning for the enlistment of Italians in the French army and for taking part in the screening of alleged Fascist Italians after the declaration of war on 10 June 1940.⁶¹⁷

To understand this sudden shift, yet again, in policy, it is important to recognize that the Italians had to strike a delicate balance between a harsh policy of rules set in stone and a more lenient and flexible approach intended to ingratiate the civilian population. On one hand, the Italians wanted to avoid antagonizing the French population as they had no forces to spare to deal with a prospective pro-Allied insurrection and they wanted to accommodate French prefects as they needed the local authorities for routine administration. On the other, the Italians did not want to appear too lenient, for fear of losing prestige in the eyes of the Italian community in France. Moreover, establishing their authority in the occupied zone through application of a rigorous policy was also a sign to the French government and the French civilian population that the Italians would not tolerate any interference in the implementation of their occupation.

These shifts in approach can also be seen with a careful look at another document issued on 20 November.⁶¹⁸ In a message to all Fourth Army commanders, Vercellino warned that the relative calm and the absence of reaction in the occupied territories should not lull the Italian army into thinking that the population would remain forever passive. On the contrary, Vercellino admonished, the current situation should be acknowledged as the calm before the storm of an Allied invasion by sea, probably supported by a Resistance uprising. It was a frightening scenario to contemplate, especially in light of the inherent deficiencies of

⁶¹⁷ A detailed account of the two arrests and the motivations behind them can be found in ADAM 166 W 9.

⁶¹⁸ AUSSME, DS 1016, Telegramma n°8772/op. di prot. Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico XV CA.

the Italian army. The Fourth army lacked air support, and its deployment would be marred by logistical issues such as the poor road and railroad networks in southern France, most of which were not under Italian surveillance, and the total dependence of the Regio Esercito on the already existing French communications network. For the above reasons, Vercellino emphasized the new tenets of the Italian occupation: the importance of deploying reserve troops, useful not only to dam any possible leak in the coastline defenses, but also as a way to quell any possible French rebellion; the implementation of an Italian military radio network and a liaison network utilizing motorcycle or bicycle couriers; and the creation of army depots to guarantee supplies of materiel in case of crisis.

The two last parts of the document, titled *Provvedimenti di carattere politico* (Political measures) and *Provvedimenti di carattere informativo e di tutela del segreto militare* (Measures of informative nature and for the protection of military secrets), shed further light on the policy which would be implemented by the Italian occupation army in the next months. Vercellino was skeptical about the possibility of finding a *modus vivendi* with local authorities owing to the bad blood and divergent state interests. However, relations with the civilian populace were an entirely different matter. Winning the hearts and souls of the populace would be a difficult task; nevertheless the Italian army was directed to strive to earn the respect of at least part of the local population, thus “cracking the solidarity of resentment” (*incrinare la compatezza del risentimento e la solidarieta' nel rancore*). Thus, Vercellino deemed it important to implement policy “without faltering or weakness but at the same time without harshness or brutality.” Italian troops and their commanders should always demonstrate propriety and composure (*correttezza di forma and compostezza di vita*) towards

both the French authorities and the civilian population. However, the Fourth Army Command directive also stressed in its last part that the Italian soldiers should limit any kind of contact with the civilian population to a bare minimum. This warning was the result of Italian intelligence reports that Allied agents were trying to fraternize with the rank-and-file in order to gain valuable information and to sow seeds of discord by encouraging the soldiers to desert and by spreading defeatist and scaremongering rumors. To thwart this anti-Italian propaganda, Italian commanders were asked to keep a watchful eye on their underlings. Conversely, the careful use of informants was crucial to garner intelligence on anti-Italian organizations, be it Resistance or Vichy-based. To this effect, local commanders were told to seek help from the CIAF delegates, who, as Italian officials with established social networks, were people well-suited to act as local counselors.

The paranoid attitude of the Italian forces was not entirely groundless, as demonstrated by the unfolding of events at the naval base in Toulon. The main French naval base of the Mediterranean had sheltered the core of the French Navy since the *débauche* of June 1940. Following Article XII of the Armistice of Villa Incisa, the warships had been disarmed and left without fuel to thwart any possible effort to join the Gaullist forces in Africa. The vigorous opposition of the French Navy against its erstwhile ally, the British fleet, at Mers-El-Kébir (3 July 1940) and Dakar (23-25 September 1940), changed the view of the Axis powers, who interpreted this as solid evidence that the French Navy was loyal to the Vichy regime. Thus, the Germans, and, more reluctantly, the Italians, agreed to ease the armistice clauses regarding the Navy.⁶¹⁹ The relaxation soon ceased with the Allied landing

⁶¹⁹ Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, pp.68-70.

in North Africa and the subsequent occupation of southern France. The Germans were worried about the allegiance of the French troops after the confusion caused by Admiral Darlan's betrayal. On 11 November, the Führer himself wrote an incendiary letter to Marshal Pétain, bluntly questioning the loyalty of the French troops in the event of an Allied landing. The fear of a possible French reversal of strategy was heightened on 12 November by an order issued by Admiral Laborde, the head of the French Navy, to the Toulon Navy to warm up the battleships' engines. In any event, the Germans and the Italians would have been unable to reach the Toulon zone at the beginning of the invasion, and therefore they were obliged to leave the French Navy command in place. Thus, Admiral André Marquis, the *Préfet Maritime* of Toulon, was left in control of the *Place de Toulon* (Stronghold of Toulon), which stretched east along the peninsula of Hyères to the cities of St. Raphaël and St. Tropez.

It was clear however that the Axis local commanders were increasingly uncomfortable with the French equivalent of two full divisions in the stronghold, some of which were battalions of the *Armée d'Armistice*.⁶²⁰ A telegram from the Italian Army General Staff dated 24 November reported that “the behavior of the French forces is becoming more dubious and even less clear,” so much that he believed Italian units should be ready to advance in case French units in Toulon joined the coming landing invasion.⁶²¹ In truth, the Regio Esercito was hardly prepared to take Toulon. The reduced enlistment of its divisions, coupled with severe deficiencies in the armored forces, had already impeded the Italian forces' attempt to take Marseille, notwithstanding the large Italian community living

⁶²⁰ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.166-167.

⁶²¹ AUSSME, DS 2078, Telegramma n°20299 dal SMRE, Diario Storico SMRE, Allegato 111, 24 November 1942.

therein. Not surprisingly, the occupation of that city by the Wehrmacht was seen as a humiliation by the Fascist state.⁶²² With Marseille already lost, on 26 November the SMRE sent a telegram to Italian commanders of units near Toulon to prepare for an occupation of the stronghold.⁶²³

The Germans, well aware of the poor condition of the Italian army, were loathe to rely on the Italian units for the forthcoming *Operation Lila* (the seizure of the French naval base at Toulon). Therefore, they did not even bother to notify the XXII CA command, which was fifty kilometers north of Toulon in the town of Brignoles, until the German divisions of the *Felber Armeegruppe* were already besieging the *Préfecture Maritime de Toulon*, Fort La Malgue. Presented with a fait accompli, the XXII CA command had no choice but to update its orders: the Taro Division, which in the previous directive was given the task of occupy the port of Toulon, was instead relegated to occupying the village of Hyères, twenty kilometers east of Toulon, and a few airfields.⁶²⁴

Operation Lila was in fact, a serious tactical blunder. German troops failed to reach the arsenal before the battleships and the submarines were either scuttled or, in some rare instances, scurried away to join the Gaullist forces in North Africa. In all, more than eighty vessels, including fifteen destroyers, three battleships and twelve submarines were

⁶²² AUSSME, DS 1101, Telegramma n°8843/Op. di prot. "Linea di demarcazione tra forze italiane e germaniche nel territorio francese," Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 40, 21 November 1942.

⁶²³ AUSSME, DS 1101, Lettera n°9051 di prot. "Piazzaforte di Tolone," Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 75, 26 November 1942.

⁶²⁴ AUSSME, DS 1101, Lettera n°4078/02 di prot. Comando XXII CA, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 76, 27 November 1942. The XXII CA received a communication from the Felber headquarters at 6 a.m. on 27 November. The German attack on Toulon began at 3 a.m.

purposefully sunk by French Navy personnel. The Axis engineers salvaged only a few ships and divided up the scuttled ships for scrap metal.⁶²⁵

The occupation of Toulon was in fact the key element in what was a much larger operation by the Germans and the Italians to disarm the *Armée d'Armistice*. The Fourth Army Command issued a directive at 11 a.m. on 27 November, ordering Italian troops from the three Italian Army Corps in France to disarm all French military units and to confine them to their barracks, separating the officers from their soldiers. Meanwhile, Italian squads were ordered to ensure that no military goods were smuggled from French armistice depots and to secure all airbases to prevent any defection by the French air force.⁶²⁶ These tasks were carried out at once. French troops were disarmed in department administrative centers such as Digne, Gap, Annecy, Grenoble and Nice, while airbases and important armistice depots brought under Italian control in Orange, Le Pontet, Valence and Grenoble. The whole operation went without a glitch, apart from occasional half-hearted protests by French officers.

Interestingly, the only problems experienced by Italian units were created by their German counterparts. Strategic airbases in the Rhone Valley, along with their armistice depots, while officially in the Italian occupation zone, were seized by Wehrmacht troops. An Italian unit was dispatched to Chambéry only to find the administrative center of the Savoie

⁶²⁵ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.312-313.

⁶²⁶ AUSSME, DS 987, Fonogramma a mano n°9157/op. di prot. Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 122, 27 November 1942, 11 a.m.; Telegramma n°4839/op. di prot. "Provvedimenti di sicurezza," Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 123, 28 November 1942.

department already occupied by German soldiers.⁶²⁷ In fact, these areas were handed over to Italy only three weeks later, starting on 15 December.⁶²⁸ That same day, the Italian Navy command in France, headed by Admiral Vittorio Tur, took over the administration of the port of Toulon.⁶²⁹ Apparently, as German units withdrew, they also took with them some French army materiel from the depots, although its importance seems to have been exaggerated by Italian officials.⁶³⁰

At the heart of the problem in the relations between Germans and Italians were their different views on the occupation of Southern France. The Wehrmacht was worried exclusively about a possible Allied landing on the Mediterranean coast. The occupation of Marseille and Toulon was done solely for strategic considerations, as the two cities were the most important ports in southern France, and because the Italian army was incapable of securing cities of such an important size. The Italian army too had strategic and military motivations for the push, as they sought to grab as many French army depots and supplies as they could before the Germans could put their hands on them. However, they had other underlying motivations. Firstly, their inferiority complex vis-à-vis their senior partner and the French army, especially after the debacle of the Battle of the Alps, surely played into the Italian decision to occupy as much territory as possible. The Italians' purpose was to demonstrate that they could contribute to the defense of France. Furthermore, the Italian

⁶²⁷ AUSSME, DS 987, Lettera n°4877/op. di prot. Comando I CA, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 126, 29 November 1942.

⁶²⁸ AUSSME DS 987, Lettera n°6157/serv. di prot. "Disarmo delle forze francesi, Depositi di protezione," Comando I CA, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 138, 5 December 1942; AUSSME, L-13, Box 225, Lettera A.Gr.Felber. 1814/42, 14 December 1942, cited by Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitan francesi (1940-1943)*, p.208.

⁶²⁹ AUSSME, DS 1101, Lettera n°9856/op. di prot. Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 121, 9 December 1942.

⁶³⁰ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitan francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.209-210.

army was certainly not oblivious to the political motivations behind the invasion. The Fascist state wanted to show to the Italian population in France that it could defend the interests of its citizens spread along the French coast. Therefore, it is understandable that the failure to take the two major cities with important Italian communities, Marseille and Toulon, deeply stung Fascist and military officials.

Regardless of motivation, the Italian Army General Staff had, in fact, no choice, but to leave Marseille and Toulon to the Wehrmacht. If nothing else, the deployment in France had dangerously strained the military resources of the Italian army, as it depleted the reserves which would have been used to defend the Italian coastline. The success of the North African landing only served to highlight the Italian strategic weakness. The Italian front along the Italian shores was already overstretched. The 7,600 kilometers of coastline suddenly became an enormous burden for the Regio Esercito, given the fact that many of its divisions were still mired in North Africa, the Balkans and France. Confronted with the strategic dilemma, the Italian General Staff opted to prioritize the defense of the peninsula. A directive on 7 December to Fourth Army commanders stated that the task of their units was primarily “the occupation and defense of French territories ... and the defense of the national soil.” It minimized the French occupation, stating that while the Italian army should watch over the French coastline and the Swiss border, only a minimal Italian presence was needed in the most important cities and in the French armistice depots.⁶³¹ The SMRE then started to recall units quartered abroad to bolster the Italian coastline defense. On 9 December, the XV CA

⁶³¹ AUSSME, DS SMRE 2079, Lettera n°21260, Allegato 22, 7 December 1942.

Command and the *1° Gruppo Alpini "Valle,"* stationed in Savoy and Isère, were called back to Italy to consolidate the front in Liguria.⁶³²

This decision infuriated General Vercellino, who, supported in his opinion by the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, estimated that the Fourth Army was dangerously weak and that, in fact, additional units should be assigned to France.⁶³³ This was rebutted by General Ambrosio, the head of the SMRE, who bluntly stated that he did not agree with Vercellino and the OKW. He deemed the density of forces on the Italian zone in line with that in the German zone.⁶³⁴ If one looks at the map, Ambrosio seemed to be right: the Italian army occupied 350 kilometers of coastline with four divisions (from the Italian border westbound: Emanuele Filiberto Testa di Ferro (EFTF), Legnano, Taro, Lupi di Toscana). The Germans had deployed three divisions to cover 150 kilometers east from Toulon. Nevertheless, their zone required much more in the way of manpower due to the two cities of Toulon and Marseille.⁶³⁵ Moreover, the German divisions were far superior to the Italian ones in terms of both quantity and quality. Due to the already-mentioned binary reform, the Italian divisions each consisted of only two regiments, instead of three. Moreover, Wehrmacht divisions could each boast six anti-tank companies and at least one battalion of armored cars or tanks, none of which were available to support the Fourth Army units.⁶³⁶ The Regio Esercito also lacked

⁶³² AUSSME, DS 987, Lettera n°9852/Op. di prot. Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 146, 9 December 1942. The Legnano and EFTF divisions became part of the I CA. The Pusteria, formerly in the I CA, was integrated into the XXII CA.

⁶³³ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.229.

⁶³⁴ AUSSME, DS 1099, Lettera n°22187 dal SMRE al Comando Quarta Armata, Allegato 63, 24 December 1942.

⁶³⁵ AUSSME, DS 1099, Map with Fourth Army Italian units on 15 January 1943, Allegato 17.

⁶³⁶ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.238.

any kind of air support.⁶³⁷ It is unlikely that Ambrosio did not know about these differences between the Regio Esercito and the Wehrmacht. His reply instead underscored the secondary nature of the French front as far as the Italian General Staff was concerned. In light of the Allied invasion of North Africa, the defense of the Italian coastline became a primordial point in the Italian strategy. Thus, in autumn 1942, the Italians were no longer interested in conquering colonies for a future empire, but were locked into a defensive posture, suddenly feeling extremely vulnerable.

The weakest link in the chain was without a doubt the mobile division EFTF, which had an incomplete roster and was lightly armed.⁶³⁸ At the beginning of December, the Fourth Army Command chose to switch the EFTF with the Legnano, the flagship division in the Italian array, as the initial sector of the EFTF, St.Tropez-Antibes, was by far the most topographically vulnerable of the Italian occupation zone.⁶³⁹ However, the same Legnano was seriously short-staffed. Its commander, General Marciani, gave the order to reduce to a bare minimum the crews manning the coastline fortifications and those guarding the armistice depot, as more men were needed for patrolling the large sector inherited from the EFTF.⁶⁴⁰

Vercellino's complaints eventually partially paid off. Later in the occupation, the SMRE chose to reinforce the Fourth Army front. Two *Divisioni Costiere* (coastal divisions)

⁶³⁷ AUSSME, DS 1101, Lettera n°4084/02 di prot. "Difesa costiera" dal Comando XXII CA, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 86, 28 November 1942.

⁶³⁸ AUSSME, DS 989, Lettera n°246/op. "Dislocazione corpi e reparti dipendenti – difesa costiera" dal Comando EFTF al Comando XV CA, Diario Storico EFTF, Allegato 52, 22 November 1942.

⁶³⁹ AUSSME, DS 1099, Lettera n°9677/op. "Schieramento del C.A." al Comando XV CA, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 53, 7 December 1942; AUSSME, DS 988, Lettera n°02/2928 di prot. "Scambio di settore fra le divisioni "Legnano" celere "EFTF," Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 31, 5 December 1942.

⁶⁴⁰ AUSSME, DS 988, Lettera n°6521/Op. "Schieramento – Unità di manovra – lavori," Comando Divisione Fanteria Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 38, 16 December 1942.

were created in January 1943 in an effort to buttress the Italian defense line, especially in the zone of Nice. The EFTF, hardly fit to fight an entrenched war, was relieved by the 223rd and the 224th coastal divisions, the latter forming the bulk of the *Presidio Militare di Nizza* (Military Stronghold of Nice), both having been created in late February.⁶⁴¹ However, at closer look, the deployment of these two units was just an attempt to patch up the worn fabric of the Italian defensive network and abotched one at that. The coastal divisions were formed out of a mix of demoralized Alpine troops who had survived the harrowing winter 1942 retreat from the Russian front and poorly trained senior soldiers. Not surprisingly, their equipment was sub-par, even by Italian standards. In the words of one Italian historian, the *Divisioni Costiere* were an "unfortunate invention fitting the Fascist climate" of boastful propaganda full of hot air.⁶⁴²

The buttressing of the Italian forces in France was probably also the result of an evolution in Franco-Axis relations in late 1942. The scuttling of the Toulon navy had infuriated the Axis powers and heightened suspicion that French authorities would prove duplicitous in the case of an Allied invasion. Indeed, at the beginning of January 1943, General Vercellino issued a directive to all Fourth Army commanders warning about the potential escape of Marshal Pétain to North Africa via boat, plane or even submarine. Pétain's villa in Villeneuve-Loubet (Alpes-Maritimes), deemed the logistical base for the escape, was carefully monitored day and night, and no one was allowed in or out of its

⁶⁴¹ The Presidio was probably implemented to give the local military commander a greater autonomy in managing the key city in the Italian occupation zone. AUSSME, DS 1218, Lettera n°3962 di prot. Op. "Piazza Militare di Nizza," Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 13, 28 February 1943. The EFTF fell back as a reserve.

⁶⁴² Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*, pp.323-324.

premises.⁶⁴³ It seems in retrospect that the Italian worries were misplaced: Marshal Pétain, by that time already 86 years old, had requested to stay in the Côte d'Azur simply to enjoy a few days away from the chilly weather of Vichy.⁶⁴⁴

The Italians and the Germans met in the forest of Görlitz on 18 December 1942 to update their policy vis-à-vis the Vichy state. Hitler, while still distrustful of the French, favored a moderate stance, feeling that the Axis powers still needed the Vichy administration to ensure the maintenance of public order in the French territories. This “useful sovereignty fiction” was instrumental to avoid the cluttering French soil with additional Axis troops and civil servants at a time when the Italian and German armies were already lacking able men.⁶⁴⁵ However, the Germans were not shy about reminding the French who was at the helm of occupied Europe. On 27 December, General von Neubronn, the OKW representative in Vichy, gave the French government an official note which officially sanctioned what had already happened one month earlier, the handing over to the Wehrmacht of all the armament, materiel and buildings of the former French army. Moreover, the document added that “the French government should support by any means the orders of the Supreme Commander West.”⁶⁴⁶ In other words, Vichy officials remained in charge of the normal administration, but were bound to obey orders coming from Berlin. France was now a mere vassal of its

⁶⁴³ Italian soldiers were given orders to stop even Italian and German officers, no matter their rank, as rumors circulated that Allied agents could be using Axis uniforms. ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3115, Lettera n°429/S. di prot. “Possibilità tentativo evasione Maresciallo Pétain,” Comando Quarta Armata, 11 January 1943; AUSSME, DS 1102, Lettera n°728/04 di prot. “Intensificazione sorveglianza,” Comando XXII CA, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 52, 11 January 1943.

⁶⁴⁴ The academic community agrees that the “double-jeu” thesis, espoused by the panegyrists of the Marshal after the war, holds no ground. Pétain had never intended to switch sides or to leave France.

⁶⁴⁵ Massimo Borgogni, *Italia e Francia durante la crisi militare dell'Asse*, Siena: Nuova Immagine, 1994, p.162.

⁶⁴⁶ AUSSME, DS 2079, Telescritto SMRE al Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico SMRE, Allegato 52, 30 December 1943.

Teutonic neighbor, a condition made real by the loss of its two biggest strategic assets, the colonial empire and the navy.

The German declaration was based on Article 3 of the Franco-German armistice which stated that “In the occupied French regions, the German Reich exercises the right of the occupant power (*puissance occupante*).” This important article did not have any equivalent in the Armistice of Villa Incisa. Thus, the Italian pretensions rested on shakier legal ground. The Italians however were undeterred. The *Commissione Consultiva per il Diritto di Guerra presso il Consiglio dei Ministri* (the War Law Advisory Committee of the Council of Ministers) came up with a solution to solve the potential impasse. The *Commissione*, basing its judgment on Italian and international war jurisprudence, noted that the Armistice had not ended the state of war between Italy and France. As a matter of fact, the Italian board of jurists argued that by occupying French territory without the consent of its sovereign state, the Italian army had started de facto a wartime occupation (*occupazione bellica*). Therefore, the *Commissione* concluded, “the occupation of an enemy territory entails the effective replacement of the authority of the state which has the jurisdiction over the occupied territory, with the authority of the occupying state.”

This new status held three important legal repercussions. First of all, “the occupant armed forces bring with them their own legal laws and their own jurisdiction.” In other words, Italian soldiers could not be prosecuted by French justice courts, no matter the severity of the crime. More importantly, any person committing a crime against the Italian armed forces, their personnel or their employees would be judged by an Italian military court in Turin. Secondly, the document continued, “the occupant authorities assume the civil

administration of the occupied territory, *which could be carried out also by using the local authorities*" (italics are mine). In fact, the Italians, paralleling Hitler's notion of the "useful sovereignty fiction," gladly relinquished daily administration to Vichy civil servants for both political and pragmatic reasons. This was however, the text insisted, an "autolimitation" (underlined in original), as the Italian state reserved the right to take over the civil administration at any moment for reasons of security and prestige.⁶⁴⁷

On 16 January, a note was sent from Rome to the Laval government via General Avarna di Gualtieri, the Italian General Staff representative in Vichy, which reiterated the major details of the conclusion of the War Law Advisory Committee. The French were bluntly told that the Italians would thereupon "exert all the prerogatives of an occupant power ... with the subsequent legal loss of the French sovereignty on the territories [formerly subjected to the Italian armistice control]. Thus, notwithstanding the aforementioned autolimitation for "political opportunism," the Italian military authorities took upon themselves the right to issue proclamations or decrees.

The CIAF Italian authorities in France were also not forgotten. The note from Rome explicitly underscored the importance of their role as guardians of the Italian immigrants in France. French police authorities were required to communicate any arrest of Italian citizen to local CIAF representatives. No penal proceedings could be initiated and no deportation orders could be executed against Italians without the prior consent of local Italian authorities. Finally, CIAF requests for administrative concessions such as special permits for ration cards

⁶⁴⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3131, Lettera n°1582/dg. "Territori occupati della Francia," Commissione Consultiva per il Diritto di Guerra presso il Consiglio dei Ministri to the Comando Supremo, 30 December 1942.

or exemption from the *Relève*, were expected to be granted.⁶⁴⁸ Thus it seemed, at first sight, that, after November 1942, the role of the CIAF had greatly expanded. Starting on 1 January 1943, Delegates for the Assistance and Repatriation who had operated in the former *Zone Libre* since February 1941 were officially upgraded to the role of Italian consuls. This unilateral decision was made possible by the new events, for the November 1942 military occupation had ended any possible ambiguity regarding the sovereignty of the *Zone Libre*: the opening of consulates which could have been previously seen as the implicit Italian acceptance of the authority of Vichy France in the contested territories was now touted by the *Farnesina* as the prelude of the Italian annexation of southeastern France.⁶⁴⁹

A more careful examination of the Italian occupation, however, reveals a more complicated picture. Relations between Italian civil and military authorities in France were often terse. The commander of the Fourth Army, General Mario Vercellino, and his underlings, did not hesitate in expressing their contempt for the CIAF officials in France. CIAF delegates were often sidelined by local commanders of the *Regio Esercito*. For instance, Consul Alberto Calisse, who had replaced Quinto Mazzolini in August 1942 as CIAF delegate in Nice, wrote a report on the ceremony to pay homage to Garibaldi orchestrated by the commander of the Legnano Division upon his arrival in Nice on 14

⁶⁴⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Lettera without number, "Regime Giuridico del territorio occupato e delle Forze di Occupazione," without date; Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitan francesi (1940-1943)*, p.274.

⁶⁴⁹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, unnamed Appunto Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome, 26 December 1942.

November. Calisse wryly added that the CIAF delegation had not been informed of, let alone invited to, the event.⁶⁵⁰

This episode should not be dismissed as an example of personal antipathy, but as a sign of a profound structural issue plaguing the Italian occupation of France. Italian military and civil authorities clashed, sometimes bitterly, over their roles in occupied France. The army's role was theoretically limited to military and security matters. However, they quickly extended their influence over matters that were the CIAF's prerogative, maintaining that every political issue could impinge on both the prestige and the security of the army. For instance, Regio Esercito commanders took an interest in the fate of Italian citizens in French jails, treading on CIAF toes when they did so, as the liberation of Italian prisoners had always been considered part of the armistice (Article XXI). At the end of November, allegedly in retaliation to a wave of arrests carried out by the Italian occupation army, the French authorities in the Alpes-Maritimes incarcerated a score of Italian immigrants for "public order reasons." General Marciani, the successor of General De Cia at the head of the Legnano, immediately demanded a list of the arrested Italians from the prefect and their immediate release from the Vernet prison camp. Calisse, head of the local CIAF, ruefully explained in his report on the matter that he was not consulted. To add insult to injury, Calisse had only found about the episode because Prefect Ribière had reported Marciani's query to him, as Ribière had insisted that any talks on the matter had to be done via CIAF

⁶⁵⁰ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 59, Rapporto n°2432 R "Manifestazioni Italiane a Nizza," Nice, 14 November 1942, Calisse reiterated his annoyance with the overweening attitude of General De Cia, Commander of the Legnano Division, in another letter to the Foreign Affairs Ministry, ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Rapporto n°2358 R "Collaborazione con il Comando delle Truppe Italiane," Nice, 17 November 1942. In the same letter, Calisse also emphasized the positive disposition of the XV CA Commander, General Bancale, who graciously accepted the help of the CIAF delegation.

officials.⁶⁵¹ On 11 December, the EFTF and the Legnano divisions switched their occupation zones, but the new commander in Nice followed in the footsteps of his predecessors. He informed the prefect that the Italians in the Vernet camp had to be sent back to the Division command, explicitly ordering that the Nice consul "not meddle in this affair."⁶⁵² In light of the alarming reports from the Italian consul, the Foreign Affairs Ministry immediately wrote to its liaison attached to the Fourth Army, Count Vittorio Emanuele Bonarelli di Castelbompiano, to ask General Vercellino to intercede with his local commanders.⁶⁵³

But Bonarelli's reply bore bad tidings. Following two meetings with Vacca Maggiolini, Vercellino insisted that all the CIAF representatives in occupied France should fall under the control of the Fourth Army.⁶⁵⁴ In other words, the commander of the Italian occupation army in France insisted that the CIAF delegations should fall under the army umbrella for any of their actions could impinge on occupation policy and thus had to be preventively authorized by local military authorities. Vercellino's claims were strongly supported by what was happening on the German side. The German Armistice Commission (CTA) was already merging with the German Army Command in the West (*Oberbefehlshaber West* or ObW) headed by General Gerd Von Rundstedt, and the ObW had

⁶⁵¹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Rapporto n°2479 R "Occupazione militare italiana," Nice, 2 December 1942.

⁶⁵² ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Rapporto n°2549 R "Occupazione militare italiana: protezione connazionali e relazioni con le autorità locali," 24 December 1942.

⁶⁵³ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Telespresso n°31061 MAE-Confalonieri "Francia 1-2 Occupazione Italiana," 17 December 1942; in the same box see also Telespresso n°31118.

⁶⁵⁴ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 54, Lettera n°80 da Bonarelli a Vitetti (MAE), 22 December 1942.

progressively taken over the CTA tasks. The remnants of the CTA in Wiesbaden had been relegated to a minor jurisdictional role.⁶⁵⁵

Vacca Maggiolini, undaunted by the German example, at once counterattacked by writing a memorandum to Vercellino in which he argued in earnest that, notwithstanding repeated French violations, the Armistice of Villa Incisa was still in effect. As a matter of fact, for Vacca Maggiolini, "the Franco-Italian Armistice is the only document which exists and the armistice commission is the only agency which embodies in an official and indisputable way the position of superiority of the victorious Italy over vanquished France."⁶⁵⁶ The CIAF president decided to bring the issue to the attention of Chief of the Italian Supreme Command, General Ugo Cavallero, but Cavallero's response proved evasive.⁶⁵⁷ Vacca Maggiolini, fearing that the restructuring of the CTA foreshadowed a similar fate for the CIAF, tried to strike a compromise. In a memorandum sent to Cavallero on 6 January 1943, Vacca Maggiolini agreed that the CIAF military undercommissions (Army, Navy, Air force and Armaments) should be integrated into the Fourth Army administration. However, he insisted the CIAF should keep its role as enforcer of those matters assigned to it by the armistice, such as the management of the French army depots and the liberation of Italian prisoners.⁶⁵⁸

On the issues of Italian prisoners, however, the army commanders refused to stop interfering. On 6 January 1943, the same General Vercellino sent a message to all Fourth

⁶⁵⁵ Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.276-277.

⁶⁵⁶ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 119, Document 51, Memorandum per il Generale Vercellino, Turin, 31 December 1942.

⁶⁵⁷ Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, p.322.

⁶⁵⁸ Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, p.323.

Army commanders, underscoring in bold letters that any arrest of Italian citizens on French soil weakened the prestige of the Italian occupation army. The Regio Esercito was thus honor-bound to free their compatriots in prison, especially those whose only guilt was to have fraternized with the invading army. If French authorities refused to comply with the army orders, local commanders were invited to free the prisoners, *manu militari* if necessary. Moreover, while Vercellino underlined the importance of coordinating the effort with the local Italian state representatives, he added that the latter were especially useful as lightning rods to channel the protests of the French authorities. In other words, their role was to be a passive one: to relieve the army of the burden of endless quarrels with Vichy.⁶⁵⁹ That not much had changed, despite Vacca Maggiolini's protests, was demonstrated by a report a few days later. The Nice consul Calisse complained to the CIAF president that the head of the *Delegazione Esercito Controllo Scacchiere Alpino* (Army Delegation for the Control of the Alpine Front or DECSA) in Nice, a former CIAF bureau which had been attached to the Fourth Army administration on 9 December 1942, was tampering in the consul's business, namely the protection of Italian citizens.⁶⁶⁰

Thus, it was evident that, from the inception of the invasion, Italian civilian and military authorities would have a hard time accepting each other's presence. The CIAF representatives resented the intrusion of the military into what they deemed their private hunting ground, both in terms of territory (the former *Zone Libre*) and activities (the care of the Italian emigrants' interests). Moreover, they feared the proverbial uncouthness of military

⁶⁵⁹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, Telegramma n°165 "I" di prot. dal comando Quarta Armata "Tutela di connazionali," 6 January 1943.

⁶⁶⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 345, IT 4356, Telegramma n°41 /R. di prot. dal Console Italiano a Nizza Calisse, Nice, 16 January 1943.

men would shred the web of networks they had woven locally over two years, both within the local Italian communities and with the French administration. Army commanders, on the other hand, objected to any interference by Italian civilians in the operation of their military occupation. However, the military was almost content to have the CIAF act as a lightning rod for French complaints, as it wished to focus on strictly military matters. The CIAF, of course, resented being the focus of the French authorities' protests without having the authority to address them.

The first part of the Italian occupation of the southeastern France departments thus delineated the ambiguous nature of the Italian occupation policy from November 1942 to September 1943. Fourth Army commanders swung between a policy of strict firmness, both to dissuade internal dissidents from rebelling and to reassert their prestige in the region with an eye to its future annexation, and an attitude of forbearance, intended to avoid any unnecessary confrontation both with the French authorities and with the local population. The firm attitude did not please the French population and Vichy authorities, while the more lenient aspect of Italian policy did little to endear CIAF officials and local irredentists. However, this mixed policy seemed to pay off, at least until 1943, for during the invasion, and no major confrontation erupted in the former *Zone Libre*.

Chapter 7

The impact of the Italian occupation in southeastern France

Any military occupation is always a trauma for the local population, and in that respect the Italian occupation was no different. Local inhabitants were confronted with new constraints such as curfews and evacuations, which made their lives more miserable than they were already were, while food shortages, the black market and thefts became even more widespread. In addition, the Italians inflicted random arrests and round-ups, creating an atmosphere of constant tension. The population's frustration was heightened by the belief that the occupation was not legitimate in that the Italians had not won the war against the French army and by the fear that the invaded territory would be annexed. However, the impact was less than one would think. Soldiers, who were lacking discipline and morale and whose main desire was to get back home, adapted quickly to local conditions by befriending the population and actively participating in bartering and black-marketeering. Indeed, structural factors of the Italian occupation such a widespread laxity within the Italian ranks, the cultural proximity to the Italian population and the shortage of resources allocated to the Fourth Army by the Italian General Staff explains the relatively moderate nature of the Italian occupation.

By the beginning of 1943, the military situation was stabilizing in the Italian occupation zone. The total number of Italian soldiers in France had reached 185,000 at the beginning of the occupation, but fell abruptly in December 1941 to 115,000, and then stabilized at 170,000 between January 1943 and July 1943, with the addition of two coastal

divisions.⁶⁶¹ Most of the XV CA, which accounted for nearly one-third of the Fourth Army, was quartered in Liguria, the Italian region bordering the Côte d'Azur. Therefore, only roughly 105,000 soldiers and officers - the Fourth Army Command (25,000), two army corps (I and XXII, 35,000 each, the roster of three divisions), and the Pusteria division (10,000) - were occupying France. The deployment of the Fourth Army clearly underscored that the defense of the Mediterranean Coast was the strategic priority of the occupation of the former *Zone Libre*. Only thirty per cent of the roster, the Pusteria division, the Raggruppamento Tattico Argens (Argens Tactic Group, XXII CA reserve), and the mobile division EFTF (I CA reserve) were deployed to the inland parts of southern France.⁶⁶² The other seventy percent (Fourth Army Command, I CA and four-fifths of XXII CA) were amassed within fifty kilometers of the coastline.

Beginning in January 1943, the Italian army in France endeavored to bolster the coastal defenses. To this effect, the territory was divided into two zones: the first, christened the Combat Zone, was a zone stretching from the coastline inland roughly thirty kilometers, while the second encompassed the rest of Italian-occupied France. The Combat Zone was by far the most important of the two, as most of the Italian units were huddled along the coastline. Italian military leaders deemed it the most probable location for any Allied

⁶⁶¹ A complete roster of the Fourth Army can be found in the Quarta Armata's *Diari Storici*, AUSSME, DS 1099 (Oct.-Dec. 1942), DS 1127 (Jan-Feb. 1943), DS 1218 (March-Apr. 1943), DS 1320 (May-June 1943). Unfortunately, diaries of the Fourth Army past June 1943 could not be found.

⁶⁶² The *Pusteria* controlled the northern half of the Alpine border (Savoy, Haute-Alpes, Basses-Alpes), the Argens Tactic Group was created in January 1943 as a reserve strategically placed to shore up the coastline defenses between Toulon and St. Tropez, deemed by the Italian Comando the weakest point of the Italian frontline, in the event of a prospective Allied attack. AUSSME, DS 1099, Rapporto n°10822/op. "Nuovo ordinamento dell'Armata," Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 64, 27 December 1942. A map locating the Italian forces in France from December 1942 to June 1943 is available in Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitan francesi (1940-1943)*, p.770.

invasion. The Zone thus needed to be cleared both of its inhabitants and of Vichy organizations.

The Italians had no qualms about expropriating buildings to quarter their troops. Sometimes domestic security needs matched strategic considerations. For instance, the *Fort Carré*, an imposing sixteenth-century structure overlooking the port of Antibes, was requisitioned both because the fortification was strategically well-placed atop a hill and also because it housed the *Chantiers de la Jeunesse*, a Vichy youth organization which the Italians feared was becoming the vanguard of a future army of resistance.⁶⁶³ More serious and problematic for the Italian commanders was that the local population needed to be removed from this zone. The coastline was the most heavily populated zone in southern France and removing the whole population from the Combat Zone would be a challenging task. Army commanders began by encouraging the population, with the help of the prefects, to relocate at least four or five kilometers inland, while in the meantime, forbidding anyone to relocate to the Combat Zone, even if just temporarily, either for weekends or for the summer. As a matter of fact, to enter the new buffer zone, civilians needed a *laissez-passer* from the local prefectures approved by the Italian army.⁶⁶⁴

The coastal defense impinged not only on the everyday life of those who lived near the coastline, but also on those who worked at sea. Once settled in France, the Italian army

⁶⁶³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°561/am/1 "Collegio nazionale di Fort Carré ad Antibes," Comando EFTF, 20 January 1943.

⁶⁶⁴ The telegram 19/op. of the 10 January 1943 from the I CA Comando has not been found, but a good resumé is included in ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 261, IT 3078, Rapporto n°3229 "Sbarramento della zona costiera mediterranea," Comando I CA, 22 April 1943.

had forbidden fishing at night for security reasons to the dismay of local fishermen.⁶⁶⁵ In late January 1943, even fishing during the day was forbidden, a decision that caused a flurry of protests among the local population, for the seafood industry was an important resource at a time of heavy rationing. The populace could not understand the rationale behind these regulations for, in the German Zone, fishing was still allowed during daylight hours.⁶⁶⁶ In the face of the protests, a week later, the Italian military authorities authorized fishing in the Mediterranean but with tight restrictions: the crews and the boats were inspected by Italian soldiers both upon departure and upon their return to harbor. Those few boats allowed to sail at night had to take Italian border guards with them.⁶⁶⁷ As time went by, Italian local commanders loosened the requirement in exchange for ten percent of the daily catch.⁶⁶⁸

The agreements reached with the French fishing community did little, however, to lessen the impact of the Italian occupation, for the buttressing of the coast significantly altered the vista of the Côte d'Azur. The Italian army dotted the Combat Zone with *capisaldi* (strongholds) - fortified positions surrounded by minefields and barbed wire, packed with machine guns, mortars and anti-tank weapons, with a wide range of fire.⁶⁶⁹ The *capisaldi*

⁶⁶⁵ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°1238/inf. "Informazioni varie circa frequentatori del porto di Antibes," Comando Division Legnano, 12 December 1942; ADAM 616 W 133, Rapporto n°25.816 du Commissaire Central de Cannes "Rapport sur l'état d'esprit de la population et la situation économique de la ville," 14 December 1942.

⁶⁶⁶ ADAM 28 W 75, Rapporto n°1.361 du Commissaire de Police Roustan "A/s de l'interdiction de la pêche," 20 January 1943.

⁶⁶⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°822/inf. "Pesca sul litorale francese," Comando I CA, 1 February 1943.

⁶⁶⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°275/22 "Percentuale pescato a disposizione truppe di operazione," R. Capitaneria di Porto Nizza, 31 March 1943. For the full regulations in Provence, Rapporto n°5503/inf. "Regolamento per la pesca sulla costa della Provenza," Comando I CA, 26 June 1943.

⁶⁶⁹ A detailed pattern of a *caposaldo*, along with drawings of its construction can be found in ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 262, IT 3081.

were the bulwark against any prospective Allied beachhead, intended to resist to the bitter end, even if surrounded by enemy forces. Not only ammunition, but provisions, water and sanitary supplies were stored in the event of a long siege. No French civilian was allowed to enter their premises, and the Italian military authorities started to evacuate the population living near the *capisaldi* both out of fear of possible spies, but also in dread of civilians getting in the way should the Allies strike.

It is important to emphasize that the Italian forces chose to entrench themselves in the *capisaldi* out of necessity. A report from General Federico Romero, commander of the I CA, explained that the Italian army was forced to employ defensive tactics such as the P.O.C. (*Posti di osservazione costiera* or Coastal observation post), *nuclei fissi* (static groups) and *capisaldi*, because the scarce number of forces available did not allow it to otherwise effectively cover the whole coastal zone, in spite of the fact that the I CA had been reinforced in January with two coastal divisions and could also boast the flagship division of the Italian forces, the Legnano.⁶⁷⁰ As noted in December by General Vercellino, Supreme Commander of the Fourth Army, entering France had dangerously overstretched the Italian forces. The Italian army commanders were also skeptical about the effectiveness of this defensive network on the French Mediterranean coast. That was clear from the way in which the Italian forces rehearsed responses to mock Allied landing operations. As much emphasis was put on reinforcing the inland fortified positions and on coaching the reserve divisions to shore up

⁶⁷⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 263, IT 3087, Rapporto n°1013/op. "Potenziamento della difesa costiera," 11 February 1943. The *Nuclei Fissi* had the same task of the *Capisaldi*, but were manned by fewer soldiers and were less fortified. The POC were observation posts, with five soldiers on average and a NCO. They were normally positioned facing jagged cliffs, where a full-scale invasion was less likely to happen, but where saboteurs and spies brought in by enemy submarines could enter France.

any leak in the Italian defenses, as on training units to man the *capisaldi*. In fact, General Romero found himself apologizing for the army maneuvers that seemed "in opposition to the faith that we have in the efficiency of the *capisaldi*," for the rehearsals assumed that the Allies would succeed in establishing a bridgehead. Nonetheless, he was also bluntly pragmatic, arguing that "the enemy could intensify its preparation and its push in the attack so as to almost completely eliminate and neutralize the efficiency and the resistance of any *capisaldo*." The Allies held complete mastery of the sea and the air in the Mediterranean theater, especially after their victory in Tunisia in May 1943. This advantage gave them the choice of the battleground. He also pointed out that the Axis had to dilute their defenses along thousands of kilometers of coastline, as the Allies' target for an attack could not be predicted.

Romero was not the only Italian commander worried about the effectiveness of the Italian defensive network along the Mediterranean coastline. Much of the concern was over the quality of the *capisaldi*' construction. General Vercellino, after a tour of the Italian coastline defenses, scathingly noted that "the fieldworks carried out until now are more a testimony to the goodwill of the executors than the solidity of the fortifications." He described the fortifications as "fit at best to stand the sporadic incursions of a few airplanes or shots from light naval units, [but] they are bound to shatter under massive air bombardments, which could not be hindered by the modesty of our anti-aircraft defenses." He urged the units to dig the trenches deeper and to reinforce the bunkers with concrete walls. In addition, he wanted reserve units to be prepared to move quickly to relieve any pressure on *capisaldi*. His logic was that a wise use of reserves placed so as to swiftly

intervene at as many points as possible would go some way towards blunting the important strategic edge that the Allied forces enjoyed by having the freedom to choose the site of the landing. Otherwise, Vercellino declared, the order to resist "to the last man and to the last cartridge" was madness.⁶⁷¹

If the Italian frontline of fortifications was still far from being completed in spring 1943, the rear lines were in even worse condition. The Italians were worried about airborne troops parachuting behind the rear lines, linking up with French insurgents and sabotaging key infrastructure and roads. For this reason, the Fourth Army created the *Nucleo antiparacadutisti* (N.A.P. or Anti-Paratrooper Units), each consisting of forty soldiers commanded by an officer. Every NAP was given its own sector to patrol by either truck, motorcycle or bicycle. However, these second-line units were also second-rate units: their armament was extremely light (they were issued at most a few machineguns) and their roster was filled with the dregs of the Fourth Army. Not surprisingly, commanders of frontline units were loath to lose their best soldiers. Thus, when asked to contribute to the NAP, divisions sent artillery personnel, truck drivers, middle-aged men just to fill out the ranks. The latter category was especially unfit for units whose task of intercepting airborne troops required men capable of quick action and constant patrol.⁶⁷² The inefficiency of the NAP reached embarrassing proportions: in some instances, NAP squads were not given even basic

⁶⁷¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 262, IT 3081, Rapporto n°6300/op. "Organizzazione costiera - Second tempo," Comando Quarta Armata, 18 April 1943; see also ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3095, Rapporto n°4940/op. "Potenziamento della organizzazione difensiva," Comando Quarta Armata, 19 March 1943.

⁶⁷² ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 262, IT 3080, Rapporto n°1901/op. "Difesa antiparacadusti del territorio francese occupato," Comando I CA, 12 March 1943; Rapporto n°203770/1 "Militari per i nuclei antiparacadutisti," SMRE, 20 May 1943.

equipment, such as machine-guns, or even the trucks needed to patrol.⁶⁷³ Besides having poor or insufficient equipment, NAP soldiers displayed an abysmal deficiency in military techniques while drilling: in one instance, it took one-and-a-half hours for a NAP unit to arrive at the scene of a prospective parachute landing, in part due to the fact that this particular NAP leader fell back asleep after the alarm was given.⁶⁷⁴

The ineptness of the NAP was only the tip of the iceberg. The Italian occupation army as a whole was inherently weak both in terms of materiel and men. Fourth Army commanders struggled until the very end with insufficient rosters, inadequate armament and untrained soldiers. The frailty of the Fourth Army can be demonstrated best with an examination of the Division Legnano, both because it was reputed to be the best unit of the Italian occupation army and because its commanders, General Giovanni Marciani (November-December 1942) and General Roberto Olmi (December 1942-September 1943) were very outspoken in their criticism of it, while at the same time never failing to push their troops to better themselves.

The two generals never failed to point out the chronic shortage of men. In fact, they disconsolately noted that they could only raise the number of troops in their division by drawing from other units in the Fourth Army. Therefore, the fragile blanket of the Italian occupation army was always pulled in different directions, laying bare one or more services at any one time. In December 1942, General Marciani gave orders to his subordinate commanders to keep the crews in the fortifications and guarding arms depots to a bare

⁶⁷³ AUSSME, DS 1263, Rapporto n°5480/op. "Materiali per il N.A.P. n°13," Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 55, 20 May 1943.

⁶⁷⁴ AUSSME, DS 1263, Rapporto n°2872/op. "Esercitazione di due N.A.P. con termini del 2 giugno c.a.," Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 113, 4 June 1943.

minimum, as more manpower was required for the mobile units patrolling the coastline.⁶⁷⁵ A more equitable redistribution of forces was nothing more than wishful thinking. A few months later, the new Legnano commander General Olmi, admitted that no soldier could be moved from coastline outposts because local commanders had been given orders to defend the coastline "with feet in the water" ("piedi nell'acqua"). In other words, the Italian army was expected by the Italian Supreme Command to make a stand on the beaches of the Mediterranean. But this was not even enough, as the coastline units actually needed extra soldiers to man the French artillery posts and the Hotchkiss machine-guns which had been withdrawn from the armistice depots. Italian artillery units and non-combat personnel were not faring any better. The Legnano division found itself required to improvise training courses for both radio operators and truck drivers as it was seriously short of trained men for both positions.⁶⁷⁶ Ultimately, local Italian commanders were compelled to use soldiers from reserve units for important chores such as guarding armistice depots, patrolling city streets and anti-paratrooper activities (NAP). The division commander concluded alarmingly that this meant that the reserve units thus cannibalized would be unable to back up frontline divisions in the event of an Allied assault.⁶⁷⁷ The transfer of manpower from one army service to the other was merely robbing Peter to pay Paul.

⁶⁷⁵ AUSSME, DS 988, Rapporto n°6521/op. "Schieramento - unità di manovra - lavori," Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 38, 16 December 1942.

⁶⁷⁶ AUSSME, DS 1263, Rapporto n°4899/op. "Corso addestramento personale r.t." Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 9, 4 May 1943; Rapporto n°5319/op. "Corso addestramento automezzi," Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 39, 13 May 1943.

⁶⁷⁷ AUSSME, DS 1219, Rapporto n°3337/op. "Riserve di settore e di divisione," Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 51, 30 March 1943.

To add insult to injury, the average soldiers' training and morale left much to be desired. Even one month after their deployment to France, soldiers had a hard time orienting themselves in the new territory and easily got lost. Officers lacked even a basic knowledge of the procedures for calling for support from the artillery or reserves.⁶⁷⁸ One of the criticisms leveled against the rank-and-file and officers alike was their excessive search for comfort, to the point that it impacted negatively on the effectiveness of the Italian fortification network. For instance, the locations of regiments' or battalions' headquarters were sometimes too far from their batteries or units, as commanders preferred to stay in more cozy, inland positions than in weather-beaten locations near the coastline.⁶⁷⁹ In some instances, officers and soldiers agreed to place their lodgings as far as possible from one another in order not "to hamper each other's freedom." In other words, at least some officers were turning a blind eye to the irregular behavior of their subordinates just as they themselves did not abide by the rules.⁶⁸⁰ Vercellino was appalled, for example, to discover that many soldiers were idling about on 1942 New Year's Eve and on the first of January, justifying their laziness with the excuse that the period was a holiday in Italy in normal times.⁶⁸¹ More importantly, soldiers were the first to break the curfews established by the local commanders. Unarmed privates were caught strolling in town on days when all leave had been suspended for security reasons after

⁶⁷⁸ AUSSME, DS 988, Rapporto n°6827/op. "Sistemazione difensiva," Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 62, 25 December 1942.

⁶⁷⁹ AUSSME, DS 1016, Rapporto n°9939/op. "Ispezione dei reparti delle g.u. dipendenti," Comando Quarta Armata, 10 December 1942 in Rapporto n°02/2988"Ispezione," Comando XV CA Diario Storico XV CA, Allegato 81, 14 December 1942.

⁶⁸⁰ AUSSME DS 1320, Direttiva n°10.200/op. "Agi e sicurezza," Comando Quarta Armata Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 33, 12 June 1943.

⁶⁸¹ AUSSME, DS 1102, Rapporto n°242/op. "Ispezioni ai lavori di fortificazioni," Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 44, 5 January 1942.

bombing attacks,⁶⁸² and officers often failed to return to their barracks after evening curfew, preferring to stay with civilians in movie theaters or bars.⁶⁸³

The sloppiness in discipline worsened the gaping holes in the Italian security network. Soldiers were ordered by their commanders to stop civilians from taking pictures near Italian military camps and beach fortifications. However, it appears that soldiers were not only allowing passersby to take pictures in the vicinity of the Italian military sites, but they even encouraged civilians to include them in the pictures.⁶⁸⁴ That is not to say that civilians were not taken into custody if they were caught taking pictures while lurking around military premises. However, soldiers were so unfamiliar with cameras that, in some cases, they exposed the film to the sun by awkwardly opening the box without the due precautions, thereby rendering the film unusable as proof of possible crimes.⁶⁸⁵

Moreover, even a casual glance at the transcripts of Italian military court trials reveals the Italian sentries' failure to stay focused on their tasks. Soldiers were found guilty of "abandonment of post or violation of orders," mostly to indulge in vices such as drunkenness and sex. Soldiers could not resist, it seemed, the appeal of bars and women even while on guard duty.⁶⁸⁶ Sometimes, their absence hid darker motivations: one sentry exploited his

⁶⁸² AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°1946/inf. "Festa del lavoro in Francia," Comando Divisione Legnano, 6 May 1943.

⁶⁸³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 269, IT 3105, n°1217/Inf. "Misure protettive da eventuali azioni terroristiche," Comando 67° Reggimento Legnano, 10 May 1943.

⁶⁸⁴ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°1239/inf. "Fotografie della costa ed uso della spiaggia," Comando Divisione Legnano, 8 May 1943.

⁶⁸⁵ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°563/inf. "Sequestro Pellicole Fotografiche," Comando Divisione Legnano, Sezione Informazioni, 22 January 1943.

⁶⁸⁶ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°3039 del processo, 23 March 1943; AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3062 del processo, 2 May 1943.

position as guard at a railway station to steal from the railcars.⁶⁸⁷ In another instance, the sentry abandoned his sentry post to sexually harass a small child.⁶⁸⁸ Leaving his rifle behind to urinate a few meters from the sentry post could get a soldier into serious trouble.⁶⁸⁹ Sometimes, foul weather undermined a soldier's will to stay on duty: a soldier was discovered by his captain repairing the leaking roof of the sentry post. In another instance, two sentries guarding an army vehicle depot took shelter during a rainstorm in a truck instead of staying in the tent which served as sentry post.⁶⁹⁰ Military authorities ruthlessly punished every little infraction.

This negligence was reflected in the shoddy carriage of the soldier of the Fourth Army. Local commanders were extremely condemnatory of their underlings' appearance. For instance, a report of Colonel Caputo, Commander of the Frejus sector, a subunit of the Legnano division, ruefully reported that some soldiers left the collar of their military shirts open, as they argued that the collar was too tight to be buttoned up. Moreover, their uniforms were messy and threadbare; tunics and trousers dusty and sometimes even stained; belts hung loose. Even worse, they strolled around with their hands in their pockets. What was more appalling, though, was the indifference of the officers who witnessed this lack of discipline. Colonel Caputo angrily wrote that "not even one, and I do mean not one of the several officers who were present stepped in to point out the faults."⁶⁹¹ In fact, NCO and junior officers were sometimes the first to offend, especially with regards to their interactions with

⁶⁸⁷ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3127 del processo, 2 May 1943.

⁶⁸⁸ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2878 del processo, 29 January 1943.

⁶⁸⁹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2795 del processo, 23 February 1943.

⁶⁹⁰ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°2823-2855 del processo, 13 April 1943; AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3076 del processo, 2 May 1943.

⁶⁹¹ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto PG.D "Disciplina," Comando Settore Frejus, 17 May 1943.

women. Vercellino's report especially condemned those officers who chastised Italian privates for frivolous relations while being themselves incautious in their affairs.⁶⁹²

Vercellino's diatribe needs to be set in context. The Fourth Army's general and commanders were not bothered by the moral questions raised by the troops having relationships with local women, if they were limited to simple sexual gratification. A reflection of their male chauvinism, they felt soldiers were entitled to "physiological satisfaction of sexual needs (*soddisfazione fisiologica delle necessità sessuali*)."⁶⁹³ In fact, a military chaplain ruefully commented that "a very impressive immorality is pervasive; kindly souls, in the face of the appeal of sex forget their dearest family ties (*affetti più cari*), their most intimate bonds (*vincolo più intimo*), [and even] their more important duties."⁶⁹⁴ Thus, the army commanders tolerated the use of brothels, which were carefully divided between those reserved to officers and those for the rest of the army.⁶⁹⁵ Sometimes, the brothels were shared with the French populace, but in those instances in order to avoid dangerous confrontations, certain timeslots would be reserved for the Italians.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹² AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°7306 "Difesa di segreto militare," 12 maggio 1943.

⁶⁹³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 261, IT 3077, Rapporto n°e/53/rp "Contegno degli ufficiali in rapporto alle relazioni femminili," Comando Aeronautica Italian in Provenza, 6 September 1943.

⁶⁹⁴ Mimmo Franzinelli, *Il riarmo dello spirito, i cappellani militari nella seconda guerra mondiale*, Paese: Pagus Edizioni, p.141.

⁶⁹⁵ For a list of the brothels in Nice, ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3095, Rapporto n°4842 "Riepilogo delle norme disciplinari in vigore nel Presidio di Nizza," Comando Presidio militare di Nizza, 11 August 1943.

⁶⁹⁶ In Digne, the brothel was reserved for the Italians from 5PM to 8PM, ADAHP, 42 W 82, Extraits du registre des arrêtés du maire, 18 January 1943.

Obviously, prostitution was practiced not only in brothels, but in hotels and even private houses.⁶⁹⁷ However, Italian military authorities openly discouraged relationships outside brothels for two reasons. First of all, they feared the spread of venereal disease among the ranks of the Regio Esercito and, to avoid this, prostitutes in brothels were required to undergo periodic examinations by Italian army doctors.⁶⁹⁸ This would have been impossible to manage for those prostitutes operating outside of the brothels.

Secondly, the senior officers of the Italian army were afraid that love affairs would cement into stable relationships. This was frowned upon both on the grounds that it was morally inappropriate for Italian officers to be seen in public with women of an enemy nationality, but also for security reasons. Between the sheets, Italian soldiers and officers could easily blurt out confidential information. Pillow talk was dangerous. Therefore, Italian generals did not hesitate to use heavy-handed tactics to cut off any temptation. For instance, one Navy officer in Cannes fell in love with a Brazilian dancer and moved into her apartment. The two made no effort to keep their relationship secret. This brazen act was too much for the local Italian commander.⁶⁹⁹ The Navy officer was transferred to another city and his lover placed under house arrest in a small inland village.⁷⁰⁰ In fact, the Italian military police suspected the Brazilian dancer of being part of a Resistance network whose members were being carefully monitored by the Italian counterespionage operation. Italian fears were

⁶⁹⁷ ADAHP, 42 W 82, Rapport du Commissaire de Police de la ville de Digne "Enquêtes de moralité et de mœurs," 1 March 1943.

⁶⁹⁸ Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire*, pp.159-161. It is unlikely that Italian doctors bothered to test prostitutes for venereal diseases.

⁶⁹⁹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 269, IT 3105, Rapporto n°3/60 "Elementi sospetti residenti a Cannes," Comando CC.RR. Divisione Legnano, 7 May 1943.

⁷⁰⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 269, IT 3105, Rapporto n°8/71 "Segnalazione su persone sospette residenti a Cannes e relative proposte," Comando 39° Sezione CC.RR. Divisione, Legnano, 5 May 1943.

not entirely groundless it seems. In at least one instance, a soldier, who befriended an Italian woman, came to believe that she was part of a Resistance network. He set out one evening to spy on her and was beaten, apparently by members of the Resistance, as a warning.⁷⁰¹

The loquaciousness of the average soldier, however, was not confined to the bedrooms of squalid bordellos or to the comfortable bed of sultry women. Officers and soldiers of the Regio Esercito were just as careless in public spaces such as streets, plazas and public transportation.⁷⁰² An enemy spy confessed while being interrogated by the Italian police that he had obtained key information on the Italian war situation merely by overhearing the conversation of two Italian officers in a train compartment.⁷⁰³ Furthermore, it is evident members of the Italian occupation army took few precautions to safeguard military intelligence. As a matter of fact, officers used the French telephone network extensively to communicate between units. Not only were their conversations taped, but, in some cases, Italian officers used the phone in French police offices, where French gendarmes could easily eavesdrop on their conversations. Vichy officials apparently were not the only ones who had access to Italian communications; the Resistance had allegedly installed wiretaps on Italian military telephone lines.⁷⁰⁴ The lack of discretion was not limited to slips in front of the local populace. In December 1942, the Italian War Ministry deplored the "careless loquaciousness (*loquacita' imponderata*) of soldiers, who discuss and talk with relatives and friends about

⁷⁰¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 369, IT 4804, Rapporto n°32/7-Seg "Aggressione subita dal caporal maggiore R. Pier Luigi del 78° Reggimento Fanteria Lupi di Toscana," Comando Divisione Lupi di Toscana, 20 December 1942.

⁷⁰² AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°6629/Inf. "Difesa del segreto militare," Comando I CA, 26 July 1943.

⁷⁰³ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°2749/I "Tutela del segreto militare," Comando Quarta Armata, 27 February 1943.

⁷⁰⁴ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°3104/Inf. "Intercettazione conversazioni telefoniche," Comando Divisione Legnano, 23 May 1943.

directives issued by Italian military authorities, causing serious damage to the security of military intelligence."⁷⁰⁵ It appeared that soldiers in France had few qualms about spreading alarming news through the post. In a probable effort to make the account of the invasion more dramatic than it was in reality, one Alpine soldier quartered in Savoy wrote at the beginning of December 1942 to his family that "it has been one week that we have been fighting the French; they are giving us a good thrashing (*botte da orbi*), ... [the unit quartered] in Val Cenischia has already suffered sixty or more casualties."⁷⁰⁶ Officers were also rebuked for the verbosity of their reports. General Olmi, the commander of the Legnano Division, complained in his usual direct style that important documents with vital information on Italian strategy had trickled down even to small outposts headed by junior officers. Olmi rightly asserted that the red letterhead *Segreto* (Secret) or *Riservato Personale* (Reserved for the commanding officer) "did not guarantee in itself [that the] directive would remain private." The situation was made worse by the tendency, the General complained, of local commanders to fob off onerous or tedious tasks to their underlings by passing orders on the formulaic instruction, "assicurazione" ("make it so").⁷⁰⁷

If the Regio Esercito failed to ensure the protection of military intelligence, they also did a generally dismal job in securing the main roadways in southern France. The Italian army, owing to the large extension of its occupied territory coupled with an insufficient number of soldiers, established checkpoints only on the arterial roads. These checkpoints

⁷⁰⁵ AUSSME, DS 988, Rapporto n°162260 "Riservatezza," War Ministry, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 65, 16 December 1942.

⁷⁰⁶ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2919 del processo, 12 March 1943.

⁷⁰⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3115, Rapporto n°4406/op. "Documenti e comunicazioni di carattere informativo e riservato," Comando Divisione Legnano, 16-22 April 1943.

were manned by a squad of six soldiers, led by a non-commissioned officer, one interpreter of the Regio Esercito, one Italian *carabiniere* (Italian military police) and one French gendarme, whose presence was important if only to ensure that no violation was committed by the Italian soldiers.⁷⁰⁸ The Italian directive in fact explicitly stated that the gendarme "should not check either the travelers or the cargo in the car, but only attend and facilitate the check." However, to the dismay of local commanders, some Italian NCOs, out of laziness, permitted the French gendarmes to overstep their bounds and actively check inside cars as well as identification papers.⁷⁰⁹ In fact, the Italian *carabiniere* sometimes forgot to check identification papers, contenting himself with looking only at the travel documents.⁷¹⁰ Once again, criticism on the part of the Italian army's higher echelons highlighted the excessive nonchalance of the Italian soldier in France when checking cars. "(L)eniency and effeminacy" which translated into "smiles, bows and ceremonies" were deemed unacceptable; soldiers should use "tact and courtesy," coupled with "military discipline and firmness."⁷¹¹

Sometimes, this "effeminacy" hid a disconcerting naiveté. One *carabiniere* failed to inspect inside a truck as he took the Red Cross emblem at face value.⁷¹² This gullibility assumed grotesque proportions in January 1943, when an unscheduled German plane landed

⁷⁰⁸ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°1193/Inf. "Posti controllo autoveicoli," Comando Divisione Legnano, 23 March 1943.

⁷⁰⁹ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°7026/op. "Servizio ai posti di blocco e controlli," Comando Divisione Legnano, 27 June 1943.

⁷¹⁰ Travel documents were required for every car travelling in the Italian occupation zone. They indicated the purpose of the travel, its origin and destination, and the goods transported.

⁷¹¹ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°15445/Inf. "Posto controllo autoveicoli n°3," Comando Settore 68° Reggimento, 12 April 1943.

⁷¹² For instance, General Olmi complained that AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°5353/Inf. "Controllo traffico automezzi," Comando Divisione Legnano, 12 June 1943.

in an airport guarded by the Italians. The German pilots justified their emergency landing by blaming their poor navigational skills, for they had lost their way in French airspace. They replenished the plane's tanks and took off after a few hours. A terrible doubt crept in the soldiers' mind as they remembered that the pilots had drawn a sketch of the camp. Later, the Italians were dismayed to find out that no such plane or crew existed in the German records.⁷¹³

This last episode underscored the paramount danger of enemy intelligence-gathering which faced every occupation army. Italian commanders incessantly reminded their subordinates that Allied spies could easily mask their real identity behind Italian or German uniforms. Thus sentinels were expected to check the identification papers of every unfamiliar officer, no matter the grade. However, the army warned, even papers could be falsified, and therefore, guards had the right to question the officers and, if doubt subsisted, to report them to their command.⁷¹⁴ However, it appears that not only did soldiers fail to check papers, but they also had the disconcerting habit of disclosing military information to unfamiliar officers without even checking their identity.⁷¹⁵ Yet, there was more here than merely the NCOs' and rank-and-file's carelessness and lack of motivation. Italian soldiers regarded their officers with a reverential awe which sometimes bordered on outright submissiveness. When sentinels or junior officers asked for papers, they were sometimes chastised by Italian officers who haughtily refused to comply. This issue became so recurrent that the head of the

⁷¹³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 269, IT 3105, Rapporto n°286/I, Comando Quarta Armata, 8 January 1943.

⁷¹⁴ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°92/Inf. "Tutela del segreto militare," Comando Divisione Legnano, 12 January 1943.

⁷¹⁵ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°142/Inf. "Tutela del segreto militare," Comando I CA, 15 January 1943.

Fourth Army General Vercellino publicly disciplined a senior officer for having denied his travelling papers to a junior officer, and who, in retaliation for the check, had reported the junior officer.⁷¹⁶

This snobbish attitude coupled with the abovementioned appalling laxity in the officer corps in part explains the ineffectiveness of the Italian occupation army. A serious gulf had developed between the Regio Esercito officers and their underlings, due to the privileges enjoyed by the officer corps, at a time when the rank-and-file was coping with a sudden decrease in their standard of living. In a circular issued on 25 January 1943 and widely distributed to all the officers of the Italian occupation army, Vercellino sternly rebuked his officers as he noticed the "little interest officers bore in the continuous and overwhelming needs of their soldiers" on one hand, and the "double standards" (*due pesi e due misure*) between officers and soldiers in terms of the conditions of service on the other hand. Vercellino singled out the most flagrant double standards:

When wine distribution is erratic or inadequate, it irritates the soldier to see the van of the officers' mess full of bottles and flasks pass through. When the tobacco distribution is inadequate and the canteen has none, it irritates the soldier to see the officer light cigarettes, one after another. When strategic reasons, or simply railway traffic, call for a limitation on leaves, it irritates the soldier to see the officer sent on leave because "the use of a few seats in first class carriages does not hamper the service." When you remove from the senior soldier,

⁷¹⁶ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°3882/Inf. "Tutela del segreto militare," Comando Quarta Armata, 18 March 1943.

who is far from his family, the possibility of seeing his relatives, oftentimes it irritates to see young officers show off the conquest of venal women.⁷¹⁷

The flagrant disparity between officers and soldiers in the Regio Esercito was certainly not limited to the Fourth Army. In August 1941, the War Ministry issued a directive to inquire about the possibility of adopting a common ration and distribution system, not only for units operating on the frontline, but for all the units in the field. A fairer food distribution system, it was thought, would help strengthen the bond between the officer corps and the soldiers.⁷¹⁸ The result was disappointing. All officers agreed that on the frontline the officers' mess was a luxury that could not be guaranteed. Indeed, in the North African and Greek campaigns, officers of frontline units tended to eat the same rations of their soldiers for logistical reasons, as it would have been too problematic to distribute separate menus. However, the majority of the officer corps fiercely rejected the proposal, generally for specious reasons. First of all, they argued that the soldiers themselves reacted oddly to seeing officers eating at their mess. The presence of their own officers made them uncomfortable. Soldiers were so amazed by the novelty that some thought that it was a part of a collective punishment inflicted on to the officer corps for the campaign's poor results. Furthermore, the generals feared that eating together might lead to "excessive familiarity and loss of prestige" and would put at risk the officers' *esprit de corps*. Secondly, the hierarchical rationing system was instrumental "in putting the officer in the physical and psychological condition necessary

⁷¹⁷ AUSSME, DS 1127, Circolare Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 32, 25 January 1943.

⁷¹⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 395, IT 5024, Direttiva n°146760/prot. "Convivenza degli ufficiali al rancio della truppa," Rome, 26 July 1941.

for the accomplishment of his difficult task" and was therefore needed "for the purpose of the officers' morale." As General Balocco, commander of the Fifth Army Corps pointed out:

[the privileged ration system] would prevent dietary dysfunctions stemming from the fact that cadres, most of them reserve officers, are accustomed, due to their [sedentary] life of study and office, to a light and brain tonic (*tonica-nervina*) diet, easily digestible and with little fat, while the soldier-farmer or blue collar loves rich and fatty staples (large quantities of bread, bacon, stew).

In truth, the officers had a point when they argued that eating at the same time as the soldiers would disrupt the officers' daily administrative chores, which conflicted with the soldiers' dinner hour, but one gets the impression that the Regio Esercito cadres were also just not ready to give up their privileges. In other words, the Italian army was still nurturing an officer caste mentality, stemming from the Bourbon army, which was completely counterproductive in the 1940s.⁷¹⁹

This was in marked contrast to the Regio Esercito's partner, the Wehrmacht, which stressed the necessity of creating a strong bond between officer and soldier, called *Kameradschaft*, a bond which went beyond the simple acceptance of military hierarchical authority.⁷²⁰ The Italians were amazed to see that German units trained with their commanders, who led the rank-and-file in the attack. More importantly, the Italians were

⁷¹⁹ All quotes from ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 395, IT 5024, Rapporto n°05/1504/prot. "Convivenza degli ufficiali al rancio truppa," Comando Corpo D'Armata Celere, 29 August 1941; Rapporto n°02/7520 Comando XI CA, 26 August 1941; Rapporto n°51 R.P del Comandante II CA, Generale Ambrosio, 27 August 1941; Rapporto n°44 R.P. del Comandante V CA ,Generale Balocco, 24 August 1941. The experiment was permanently cancelled a few months later. Rapporto n°5731/29760 "Ufficiali conviventi al rancio," Ministero della Guerra, 12 December 1941.

⁷²⁰ John A. English, *On Infantry*, New York: Praeger, 1984, p.68.

shocked to see that "up to the division command, officers eat the same meal of the rank-and-file."⁷²¹

Perhaps the comparison with the Wehrmacht could, in part, explain why discontent was spreading through the Italian ranks. An artilleryman of the 48th Regiment of the Taro Division openly vented his anger that the mess rations of the regiment were not on par with those of the regiment's command. Only the strong intervention on the part of the commander of the soldier's battery prevented the situation from degenerating into open rebellion.⁷²² Tensions between officers and troops sometimes escalated into open insubordination. Sometimes, soldiers went so far as to threaten higher-ranking officers with death, most of the time while under the influence of alcohol.⁷²³ In a few isolated cases, soldiers had no qualms about coming to blows. A gunner of the 58^o Artillery Regiment of the Legnano Division killed a staff sergeant in cold blood for allegedly insulting him by calling him a "son of a bitch."⁷²⁴

It is interesting to note that the gunner was sentenced only to thirty years of prison, a relatively mild sentence for the murder of a non-commissioned officer. The explanation reflected the cardinal importance of the value of the family in Italy, especially with regards to the figure of the mother. The military court had recognized extenuating circumstances on the grounds that insulting his mother was a severe provocation, especially for a soldier from

⁷²¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Unsigned report "Relazione sulle unità tedesche in transito nel territorio del corpo d'armata," 20 August 1943. The ten-page report bears the seal of the I CA, and was probably edited by a Commander of one of the last units which stayed in France until the 8 September Italian Armistice with the Allies.

⁷²² AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°2932 del processo, 1 April 1943.

⁷²³ See for instance the case of Luigi M. of the Legnano Division, who on Christmas Day, threatened to kill his unit Commander with hand grenades. AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°2863 del processo, 2 April 1943.

⁷²⁴ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3561 del processo, 28 February 1943.

Southern Italy. In another similar episode, a lieutenant who had punched a soldier twice for calling the officer's mother a whore, got his sentence reduced by two-thirds. The military court acknowledged that the accused had justification for his violent act as the soldier had uttered his insult in the Neapolitan dialect in front of regiment's soldiers, most of whom were from Naples.⁷²⁵ In addition, military courts seemed to be far more lenient with officers than with privates. In March 1943, a lieutenant repeatedly punched a private who had refused to lend him a deck of cards. What is informative about this episode was not only the arrogance of the officer, who had overstepped his authority to demand a personal belonging from a subordinate, but also the fact that at first the unit command had tried to downplay the incident and blame the soldier. In fact, only the overwhelming number of witnesses forced the upper echelons to act and even then, the officer was sentenced only to four months.⁷²⁶

Conversely, any insubordination by the rank-and-file was perceived as an attack on the Italian occupation army as a body and was severely dealt with. The simple act of insulting an officer could get the *fante* into serious trouble: Romano V. of the Taro Division was sentenced to four years of prison for having slandered his officer by calling him "*cornuto*" ("bastard") in front of his fellows.⁷²⁷ Soldiers were aware of the untouchable aura surrounding the officer corps. In a telltale episode, an alpine soldier of the 20°

⁷²⁵ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, no number, trial of Angelo M., 19 May 1943.

⁷²⁶ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3543 del processo, 27 May 1943.

⁷²⁷ The soldier got three years and three months for the insult, seven more months because it was committed in wartime, one more month for being in service, and finally another one for the presence of other soldiers. AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2549 del processo, 4 February 1943.

Raggruppamento Alpini Sciatori, Giuseppe L., menacingly yelled to his unit commander that "Only mountains stand still, we will meet [after the war] in civilian clothes."⁷²⁸

From these examples, one could get the impression that the Regio Esercito was an institution rife with tension between officers and soldiers, weakened by a serious lack of discipline. This can be overstated. The Italian army, and the Fourth Army in particular, had many officers who proved not only qualified, but also concerned about the well-being of their subordinates. For instance, a 223° Coastal Division captain lent some soldiers of his unit to local farmers to use as laborers. All the wages were reinvested in buying four sheep, as well as staples at the army canteen. The food was split equally among the soldiers and the officers to augment the daily rations, with a special allocation to those who had worked.⁷²⁹ In another example, a battalion commander complained about the transfer of two of his most able junior officers to another unit. The commander explained that the officers were "most loved by the rank-and-file" and that, upon their departure, many soldiers could not hold back their tears.⁷³⁰

Thus, there were officers, and not isolated cases, who were conscientiously fulfilling the responsibilities. They faced a daunting task in keeping the soldiers' attention riveted on the war at a time when the frontline seemed thousands of kilometers away and the luscious

⁷²⁸ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3671 del processo, 25 May 1943.

⁷²⁹ The captain was formally prosecuted by his Commander because business with civilians was strictly forbidden unless authorized by division Commanders, but upon discovering that the captain did not intend to speculate with the goods, but on the contrary, redistributed the proceeds fairly, the 223° Coastal Division Commander decided to drop any disciplinary measures. ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 268, IT 3102, Rapporto n°31 R.U. "Inchiesta disciplinare a carico del Capitano D. del 512° Bt Territoriale Mobile," 4 April 1943.

⁷³⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 268, IT 3102, Rapporto n°386 R.U. "Sottotenente L. Gaetano," 28 July 1943. The episode occurred in an Alpine unit and it is well known that Alpini soldiers and officers bonded more than any other unit in the Regio Esercito.

landscape of the Côte d'Azur lulled them into complacency.⁷³¹ To bolster the men's fighting spirit, Italian commanders of elite divisions made much of the reputation of their units. Upon his arrival in November 1942 at the head of the Legnano Division, General Marciani issued a directive to be read to all Legnano soldiers that emphasized the major battles fought by the two major regiments, the 67th and the 68th.⁷³² Officers headed reading groups that analyzed newspapers and Italian agency news with the goal of reinforcing the Fascist propaganda.

Italian commanders however acknowledged that they needed to do much more than simply insist on Italian military traditions or praise the Fascist regime to boost the Italian soldiers' morale. Stranded far away from the front but also from his family, the *fante* risked falling into apathy. Therefore, the MINCULPOP sent to France not only Italian or German propaganda documentary reels, but also light-hearted movies to be played using motion-picture cameras mounted on trucks (*autocinema*) or in French movie theaters rented by the Italian army.⁷³³ Each Army Corps created its own musical band which travelled from unit to unit, performing concerts and comedy shows. Hobbies such as chess, draughts and cards were openly encouraged among the rank-and-file, while intra-division football or bocce tournaments enjoyed wide success.⁷³⁴ Furthermore, the Italian army supplied Fourth Army

⁷³¹ AUSSME, DS 1102, Rapporto n°1245/07 "Mentalità combattiva integrale," Comando XXII CA, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 164, 29 February 1943.

⁷³² AUSSME, DS 989, Ordine del Giorno Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Fanteria Legnano, Allegato 11, 22 November 1942. Ironically, Marciani also cited the 1896 Battle of Adua, which was one of the most shameful military disasters of the Italian army. The Battle of Adua ended the disastrous Italian campaign against Abyssinia and was one of the first defeats inflicted on a European state by an African one.

⁷³³ The number of autocinemas was inadequate for such a vast army and thus units, especially the most isolated ones, had to get by with makeshift arrangements. AUSSME, DS 1312, Rapporto n°1027/SA. "Relazione mensile sul servizio A," Comando I CA, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 25, 1 June 1943.

⁷³⁴ AUSSME, DS 1219, Rapporto n°951/A "Relazione mensile sul servizio A," Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 156, 22 April 1943.

units with books and gramophones, and efforts were made to give elementary-level courses to illiterate soldiers.⁷³⁵

The army thus partially contained the loss of morale experienced by the Italian soldiers in France by enhancing their leisure options and bolstering a sense of community within units. Yet, one should not be overly optimistic. No embellished newssheet could hide the appalling string of defeats that had occurred since the beginning of the war. The Battle of the Alps, the North African campaign and the invasion of Greece were indelible stains on the Regio Esercito's World War Two record, nor were they counterbalanced by any significant victory. A war that had been incessantly touted as the war that would lead to the rebirth of the Italian nation had become a desperate defense of the motherland. Beginning in late 1942, the tide of war had decidedly changed and Italy was looking more like a cornered dog than a defiant lion. After Operation Torch, the Allies had taken control of the entire North African coastline except for Tunisia, which eventually fell in May 1943. After that, they dominated the Mediterranean Sea and openly threatened Sicily.

The major consequence of this reversal in national fortune for the soldiers was that army leaves became increasingly difficult to obtain. At the beginning of 1943, leaves became available once again, a decision the military command made explicitly to boost the morale of the Italian troops abroad. Some men had not seen their homes for at least a year. Unfortunately, the decision had one significantly damaging effect. Soldiers who had been led by the military censorship to believe that the home front had been spared by the war, were

⁷³⁵ AUSSME, DS 987, "Relazione mensile sul servizio A," Comando I CA, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 117; AUSSME, DS 1100, Rapporto n°240/SA. "Relazione mensile sul servizio A" Comando I CA, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 26, 1 February 1943.

shocked to see first-hand the great economic difficulties experienced by their families and the devastation of the Allied bombing attacks. The plummeting of the Italians' standards of living, which had been expunged from official Fascist reports and newspapers, instantly became common knowledge among the rank-and-file. Upon their return to France, soldiers rapidly spread the upsetting news to their comrades in arms, who in turn became worried about their relatives.⁷³⁶

In fact, the Italian Supreme Command decided in spring 1943 once again to cancel all leaves for Sicilian and Sardinian soldiers. This drastic measure was issued because rumors of an imminent Allied invasion of Sardinia and Sicily were running rampant. The two islands had been fortified and declared operations zones, which meant the Italian army had to seal their borders. Moreover, the Italian army command feared that Sicilian and Sardinian soldiers would desert en masse if given the opportunity to get back home. This decision, however, fuelled anger and resentment among the soldiers. Some went so far as to forge documents that reported dying relatives in order to get permission to visit their families. Others simply deserted.

Desertions were certainly facilitated by the proximity of the Italian peninsula and the porosity of the Franco-Italian border. Moreover, most soldiers who deserted did so while in Italy, using their leaves as an opportunity to vanish into the countryside, sometimes shielded by relatives and friends. Yet, desertions never became an endemic problem. Records of the Fourth Army show that there was only a steady trickle, even in 1943, averaging sixty

⁷³⁶ AUSSME, DS 1218, Rapporto n°1106 dal Comando Quarta Armata "Relazione del servizio "A" del mese di febbraio 1943," Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 62, 13 March 1943; AUSSME, DS 1217, Rapporto n°1330/02 "Rapport situazione mensile (21 gennaio - 20 febbraio 1943)," Comando XXII CA, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 20, 1 March 1943.

desertions every two months, roughly one desertion per day over the whole period. What is more, the statistics included the cases of soldiers who had returned late from their leaves. These men were generally punished for a short period and then reintegrated in their units. Nonetheless, the possible impact of these acts of insubordination on the overall morale of the rank-and-file cannot be dismissed. The evolution of the attitude of the Italian military leaders is enlightening to this regard. At the beginning of the conflict, the *Comando Supremo* did not fully grasp the long-term implications of the multiple desertions and their policy was therefore very lenient. The Duce's proclamation of 20 June 1940 indicated that sentences of ten years or less for any criminal offence would be postponed until the end of the war. This lax policy was reinforced by another decree, issued on 9 July 1940, which widened the use of suspended sentences, even for desertion, provided the soldier did not defect to the enemy.⁷³⁷ This was in marked contrast to the policy of ruthless disciplinary action for any form of insubordination in the First World War. Giorgio Rochat, a leading Italian military historian, suggests that because Mussolini and his generals believed in June 1940 that the war would end in a few months, they thought that suspending the sentences would keep the soldiers of the Regio Esercito focused on the war. As time went by, however, they became worried about the mounting resentment of the soldiers of a war poorly led and the growing list of failed campaigns. Thus, the protraction of the global conflict forced the Italian army to enforce stricter rules. Offenses were suspended only if their sentences did not exceed three

⁷³⁷ Giorgio Rochat, "La giustizia militare dal 10 giugno 1940 all'8 settembre 1943," Nicola Labanca and Pier Paolo Rivello (eds.), *Fonti e problemi per la storia della giustizia militare*, Giappichelli: Torino, 2004, pp.231-232.

years, and thus, desertions, which were punished with between five and fifteen years, were automatically excluded from any suspension.⁷³⁸

In truth, the morale of the German army was also worsening. But the German commanders had a considerable advantage compared to their Italian counterparts. The Wehrmacht could boast striking successes against Poland, in Scandinavia and against France. Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda made sure to capitalize on these triumphs throughout the war. Furthermore, the German commanders never failed to underline the differences between the German and Italian campaigns. This contempt was expressed even at the rank-and-file level. In fact, news was leaking that the Axis front in Russia was crumbling, and that the relations with the Wehrmacht had become stormy, if not downright hostile. In the laconic words of a Fourth Army bulletin, "the support of the Germans for our troops was not what would have been reasonable to expect."⁷³⁹ This lack of cooperation also shaped the French theater of war. The *Delegazione Trasporti Militari* (Military Transport Delegation) which was in charge of the transportation and distribution of Italian military goods in France felt the sting of ostracism at the hand of the Germans, in addition to the uncooperative attitude of French railway workers. In particular, members of the *Organisation Todt*, the German construction firm in charge of building the Atlantic Wall, requisitioned French locomotives which had been leased to the Italian army, allowing the Italians to use them for only a limited time at the end of each day.

⁷³⁸ Rochat, "La giustizia militare dal 10 giugno 1940 all'8 settembre 1943," Labanca and Rivello (eds.), *Fonti e problemi per la storia della giustizia militare*, p.232. See for instance AUSSME Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3125 del processo against Giuseppe V., 16 June 1943. The soldier was sentenced to six years and six months.

⁷³⁹ AUSSME, DS 1218, Rapporto n°1106 "Relazione del servizio "A" del mese di febbraio 1943," Comando Quarta Armata Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 62, 13 March 1943, p.6 "Conclusione."

In light of this situation, it is not surprising that relations between German and Italian soldiers were at best ones of "mutual respect, but without familiarity."⁷⁴⁰ To add insult to injury, Italian soldiers openly complained that German pay was much higher than theirs.⁷⁴¹ This disparity, on top of the already strained relations between the regular troops and their officers, was aggravated by the fact that the soldiers of the Fourth Army inexplicably were not receiving the special allowance generally given by the Italian army to troops of units quartered outside national territory.⁷⁴² Thus, they could save very little money to send to their own families or to pay for extra food and staples at the unit canteen. Eventually, the protests paid off, but only to a degree. Fourth Army soldiers were granted extra money in June 1943, but to their dismay, the decision was not retroactive, and the soldiers were paid in the devalued French currency.⁷⁴³

In essence, the strategic worsening of the Italian campaign, the deterioration of the Axis entente both at state and at grassroots levels, in addition to the material conditions of the average Italian soldier cast an ominous shadow across the overall morale of the Fourth Army. In March 1943, a local commander alarmingly reported that "many Italian soldiers, while talking with French civilians in shops, quickly confessed to tiredness or even of demoralization," because they had been serving continuously since the beginning of the

⁷⁴⁰ AUSSME, DS 1218, Rapporto n°1106 "Relazione del servizio "A" del mese di febbraio 1943," Comando Quarta Armata, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 62, 13 March 1943.

⁷⁴¹ AUSSME, DS 1127, Rapporto n°4427/op. "Rapporto situazione mensile per il periodo 20 gennaio - 20 Febbraio," Stato Maggiore, Ufficio Operazioni, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 64, 28 February 1943, p.4.

⁷⁴² AUSSME, DS 1217, Rapporto n°1330/02 "Rapporto situazione mensile (21 gennaio - 20 febbraio 1943)," Comando XXII CA, Diario Storico XXII CA, Allegato 6, 1 March 1943.

⁷⁴³ AUSSME, DS 1312, Rapporto n°1027/SA. "Relazione mensile sul servizio A," Comando I CA, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 25, 1 June 1943.

hostilities.⁷⁴⁴ Cracks in the Italian army's morale were so widespread that even French authorities could not help noticing them. A member of the *Renseignements Généraux* who watched the screening of an Italian *Luce* newsreel in the courtyard of the nearby Italian barracks from his apartment's balcony noted that the appearance of the Duce on screen did not spark even a single cheer or any applause.⁷⁴⁵ In June 1943, the French police in Digne were quick to record that the walls of the Regio Esercito barracks were tagged with graffiti such as "Duce, Vogliamo pasta suta pano (sic), vino e congedo." (Duce, we want pasta, bread, wine and discharge).⁷⁴⁶

Food, its quality and quantity, became a recurrent complaint in every single report of Fourth Army commanders for the whole occupation period. In a scathing report, General Vercellino neatly summed up the *cahiers de doléances* submitted by his local commanders. Bread "shows up poorly baked or preserved, ... the quantity of the individual bread ration is not always honored, ... the wine is sometimes undrinkable, and the tobacco distribution is lagging."⁷⁴⁷ The General's ire was aimed at the Fourth Army *Intendenza* (Service Corps) for failing to provide even the most basic staples. The reply from the head of the Fourth Army Service Corps was immediate. General Raffaello Operti excused his underlings, stating that the poor quality of the bread and wine was due to the inherent deficiencies of the Italian military transportation network. For lack of gas and trucks, most of the staples had to be shipped via train. Thus, the distribution bottlenecked at the French-Italian border, as the only

⁷⁴⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°191/inf. "Bollettino Informazioni n°2," Comando 224° Divisione Costiera, 15 March 1943.

⁷⁴⁵ ADAM 616 W 133, Bulletin Hebdomadaire de Renseignement n°3915, Week 7-13 December 1942.

⁷⁴⁶ ADAHP 42 W 42, Rapport n°57/4 du Chef D'escadron Ogier, 23 June 1943.

⁷⁴⁷ AUSSME, DS 1016, Rapporto n°9939/op. "Ispezione dei reparti delle g.u. dipendenti," Comando Quarta Armata 10 December 1942 in Rapporto n°02/2988 "Ispezione," Comando XV CA, Diario Storico XV CA, Allegato 81, 14 December 1942.

railway line linking northwestern Italy to the Côte d'Azur, the Genova-Mentone-Nice-Marseille, became overcrowded and was often the target of the Allied bombing campaign. This slowed down the distribution of food significantly, so much so that the bread had to be baked in a special way to ensure it did not deteriorate before reaching the troops. This process meant, however, that the resulting bread was of poor quality, something about which the troops constantly complained.⁷⁴⁸

Operti's report also hinted that the supply issue was not just due to disruption by Allied bombers, but also due the fragile Italian economy: "Italy is a poor country and did not become richer on 11 November." Indeed, the disarray of the Fourth Army mirrored the breakdown of the Italian economy. The Italian populace was hit hard by the war. The conflict had already reduced salaries to subsistence level and starvation threatened great numbers of people, especially city dwellers. In March 1943, widespread strikes broke out in major centers in northern Italy, the heart of the Italian industrial region. As a consequence, Italian military authorities were unable to reliably supply their troops. Wine was unavailable for weeks, as were other diverse goods such as radios, razor blades and soap.⁷⁴⁹ Soldiers' socks and boots were already worn down by years of war, as the Italian army had lacked the material to repair or replace the threadbare uniforms. Even soldiers coming as reinforcements in December 1942 lacked rations, uniforms and even, in some cases, weapons.⁷⁵⁰ The

⁷⁴⁸ AUSSME, DS 1100, Rapporto n°7281/SM "Rifornimenti alle truppe," Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 35, 11 December 1942.

⁷⁴⁹ AUSSME, DS 989, Rapporto n°251/am1 "Rapporto situazione 20 Dicembre - 20 Gennaio 1943," Diario Storico Divisione Celere EFTF, Allegato 77, 23 January 1943.

⁷⁵⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 340, IT 4303, Rapporto n°3495/QG. "Militari inviati in Francia," Comando I CA, 7 December 1942.

situation had become drastic. Italian soldiers resorted to begging local civilians for food and, in some cases, to outright theft.⁷⁵¹

Compounding the problems created by the severely dysfunctional nature of the Italian army supply system, the local French economy was incapable of filling the gap. A report from the Legnano division officer in April 1943 provides an effective synthesis of the harrowing food shortages experienced in southern France during the Italian occupation. The report underlined the underdevelopment of agricultural production in a region where all the pre-war investment had focused on building tourism infrastructure. Thus, the agricultural output could not cover the regional needs. Everything from flour to vegetables, from hay to meat, had to be imported from the interior. In addition, the local distribution network had been severely disrupted by the war. Thus, the officer warned, there was no "possibility, in case of emergency, of exploiting local resources." On the contrary, if there was a complete interruption of food distribution "the local population would, in a matter of days, lack everything," as "*Ravitaillement* warehouses had only stocks of rationed food products for a few days."⁷⁵²

The Italian army report was not exaggerating. Indeed, the Fourth Army decision to rely on French food producers to feed its soldiers contributed considerably to the depletion of the already meager food supplies in the region. Unquestionably, Vichy's *Ravitaillement* services were certainly not able to keep up with the rations allocated. At the top of the food chain, farmers were increasingly confronted with serious impediments to production, ranging

⁷⁵¹ ADAHP, 42 W 23, "Synthèse bi-mensuelle des intercèptions téléphoniques-télégraphiques et postales, 2ème quinzaine de Décembre 1942," no date.

⁷⁵² AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano faldone 4, Rapporto n°1151/inf. "Dati circa eventuale sfruttamento risorse locali," Tenente Colonello Vittorio Ciocchetti, 29 April 1943.

from shortages of fertilizer and seeds, to a lack of oil and gas for their agricultural equipment. It certainly did not help that 1942 and 1943 suffered extensive droughts in both the spring and the summer seasons. Moreover, the rural communities complained about the strict price controls imposed on dairy products, at a time when the war was driving up the prices of raw materials dramatically. Not surprisingly, the peasants were not motivated to sell their goods to the Vichy *Ravitaillement* services which bought at prices fixed at a level that did not even cover the farmers' basic expenses. Thus, farmers sold their goods on the black market or bartered them.⁷⁵³ The situation in 1943 in the major cities had become nothing short of drastic. Vegetables such as tomatoes and onions disappeared from market stalls, and only the cheapest ones, such as Jerusalem artichokes (*topinambours*) and cabbage, remained available. Even these were becoming a rarity: cauliflower was cut in small parts to meet everyone's ration ticket. Dairy products such as milk and butter became a rarity, fresh fruit was nowhere to be found, nor was olive oil; tickets for *matières grasses* were worth nothing more than the paper on which they were printed. Weekly rations of meat in Nice fell to ninety grams, bones included.⁷⁵⁴

When people did manage to get something, it was not uncommon to discover to their dismay that the quality of the goods was abysmal: sausages and cold cuts turned black within hours of being sold and local authorities reported several cases of food poisoning.⁷⁵⁵ The appalling state of the food supply stemmed not just from the disrupted food distribution

⁷⁵³ ADAM, 616 W 99, "Synthèse des rapports des Préfets de la Zone Libre pour le mois de mars 1943," 15 April 1943; "Synthèse des rapports des Préfets de la Zone Libre pour le mois d'avril 1943," 18 May 1943;" Synthèse des rapports des Préfets de la Zone Libre pour le mois de juillet 1943," 17 August 1943.

⁷⁵⁴ ADAM 616 W 249, Rapport mensuel du mois d'avril 1943 du Ravitaillement Général des Alpes-Maritimes.

⁷⁵⁵ ADAM 616 W 134, Rapport du Chef D'Escadron Soymie, Commandant de la compagnie de Gendarmerie dans Alpes-Maritimes, Nice, 9 March 1943.

network, but was also due to the outright dishonesty of some shopkeepers and producers. One of the most common offences discovered by the *Direction de la répression des fraudes* was the adulteration of goods. Dishonest shopkeepers fobbed off watered down milk (*lait mouillé*) as natural cow's milk and sour wine (*vin piqué*) as red wine. Vichy inspectors became so concerned about the black market that every good sold was required to have its price tag attached. This measure did not stop some merchants from using counterfeit tags on their products: artificially-colored water was passed off as orange or lemon juice and articles of clothing were tagged as silk when they contained none. In some extreme cases, the staples were outright toxic: bread was made with ashes or even sawdust to increase its weight.⁷⁵⁶

Fraud was not confined to the French Free Zone. The XV CA military tribunal, whose jurisdiction encompassed the territory occupied by the Italian army in June 1940, also prosecuted Menton inhabitants for "selling adulterated goods." The Italian authorities were so intent on eradicating illegal practices at a time when heavy rationing was established in the Italian peninsula, that they even charged Fascist militants. In May 1943, two Mentonese women, both registered as members of the PNF, were sentenced to a hefty fine for watered-down milk.⁷⁵⁷ The same fate befell a shopkeeper who sold watered-down wine in July 1943.⁷⁵⁸ Menton shared in the usual array of scams linked to food rationing found in the Second World War period: one common fraud consisted of putting hidden brass weights on

⁷⁵⁶ A summary of the 1942 frauds is in ADAM 157 W 29.

⁷⁵⁷ ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XIV, processo n°260 Luiga R. and Yvonne G., 6 May 1943.

⁷⁵⁸ ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XV, processo n°993 Carlo M., 27 July 1943.

the pan of the scales when the food was weighed;⁷⁵⁹ another was to sell liquor without a permit.⁷⁶⁰ But the most common one remained selling staples far above the legal price.⁷⁶¹

In light of this situation, the "have-nots," most of them city dwellers, vented their frustration at a number of targets. Farmers were the first scapegoats. Antagonism between urban and rural inhabitants was not new to France, but it reached new heights in these times of dire restrictions. In June 1943, an exasperated retired grocery owner, Emile G., picked up pen and paper and wrote to the prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes to denounce the black market network that existed between the city and the countryside. He wrote that "the producers, in light of the growing presence of clients and the advantage of selling their wares directly at their farms, without costs, at unlimited prices, disregard any taxes or state regulations, and desert city markets, hence the absence of staples in the city."⁷⁶² The population's anger was echoed by the Prefect of the Basses-Alpes, Marcel Delpeyrou, one of the rural departments expected to feed the Côte d'Azur. In his monthly reports, the prefect never failed to mention the severe disruption of the food distribution network, in part due to the illegal market fostered by cattle breeders and grain producers, both groups openly hostile to Vichy's price policy.⁷⁶³ The population's anger was not limited to the farmers, but also directed against

⁷⁵⁹ ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XV, processo n°1019 Olga C., 25 July 1943.

⁷⁶⁰ ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XV, processo n°696 Edoardo H., 10 June 1943.

⁷⁶¹ ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XV, processo n°697 Angela Caterina V., 10 June 1943.

⁷⁶² ADAM 616 W 50, Handwritten letter of Emile G. to the prefect, Nice, 22 June 1943.

⁷⁶³ Monthly reports of the prefect are available in ADAHP, 42 W 40.

another category of food producers, the fishermen. In April 1943, the Antibes police accused the fishermen of withholding a considerable part of their daily catch for the black market.⁷⁶⁴

The same report warned that the population was also angry with the government for failing to provide sufficient food to the "have nots" and to crush the black market. Spontaneous demonstrations in front of municipal halls in Antibes and Nice by desperate housewives demanding food were an alarm bell, warning that the rationing system was teetering on the edge of an open chasm. Protests widened to schools. Pupils erupted in anger, for the French state was incapable of supplying school cafeterias, so much so that some schools had had to close their boarding programs.⁷⁶⁵

The local French authorities' inability to address the inequities of the food distribution considerably undermined their prestige in the eyes of the local population, but that was nothing compared to the rumors which were spreading in Nice regarding the privileges enjoyed by the local notables. According to another Italian report, local Vichy authorities were widely corrupt and in league with the traffickers.⁷⁶⁶ One story recounted that a delivery boy bringing goods to the Prefecture accidentally dropped a "large basket filled to the brim with white bread." This rumor was followed shortly by another in which a delivery boy was mistakenly arrested by the French gendarmerie while transporting twenty liters of olive oil to the Bishop's palace in Nice. It is likely, and the Italian military report did not deny it, that these were slanders deliberately spread by irredentists and maybe even by Italian

⁷⁶⁴ ADAM 616 W 135, Rapport n°6095 SP/I "Rapport bi-mensuel," Commissaire de police d'Antibes, 14 April 1943.

⁷⁶⁵ ADAM 616 W 306, Circulaire envoyée aux familles, Collège classique des garçons de Cannes, 22 January 1943.

⁷⁶⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°2888/Inf. "Notiziario n°12," Comando I CA 12 April 1943.

authorities, for they were directed against two of the staunchest opponents of the Italian military occupation, the Alpes-Maritimes prefect Marcel Ribière and the Bishop of Nice Monseigneur Rémond. They had been accused of hoarding two key rationed staples which had become a rarity in southern France and were only found on the black market, bread and olive oil. However, notwithstanding the fact that they were likely fabrications, the widespread acceptance of these rumors by the populace was a telltale sign that the Vichy regime's popularity was dropping like a stone.⁷⁶⁷

To justify their failure in administering the food ration system effectively, local Vichy authorities blamed the Italian occupation. Their reports never failed to emphasize how the Italian army was drawing heavily on the local market to supply its soldiers. In truth, Italian Army Corps commanders had been instructed to stock up on fresh staples such as fruits and vegetables using local wholesalers in light of the difficulty of transporting supplies from Italy. In early December 1942, a gendarmerie report noted that fresh vegetables had vanished from market stalls as soon as the Italian army had occupied the *Zone Libre*.⁷⁶⁸ In the Alpine regions, the Italians bought lumber for heating and forage for their horses and mules, especially in the first critical months after the invasion.⁷⁶⁹ The population was especially enraged that the Italian army food services were permitted to buy significant quantities of staples, even at market stalls, without queuing up.⁷⁷⁰ In fact, the war was not merely an excuse used by French authorities to deny their responsibility for the rationing disaster. There

⁷⁶⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°3307/Inf. "Notiziario n°14," Comando I CA, 15 April 1943.

⁷⁶⁸ ADAM 616 W 134, ADAM 616 W 134, Rapport du Chef D'Escadron Soymie, Commandant de la compagnie de Gendarmerie dans Alpes-Maritimes, Nice, 2 December 1942.

⁷⁶⁹ AUSSME, DS 987, "Relazione sull'attività svolta nel trimestre ottobre-novembre-dicembre dalla direzione di commissariato," Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 173, no date.

⁷⁷⁰ ADAHP, 42 W 42, Rapporto n°2.700 du Commissaire de police de la ville de Digne, 20 May 1943.

is no question that the addition of 160,000 soldiers to the region broke a food distribution network that was already on the verge of collapsing. French historian Jean-Louis Panicacci estimated that, between the Italian occupation (November 1942 - September 1943) and the German occupation (September 1943 - August 1944), foreign armies consumed between two to seven tons of fresh staples each day.⁷⁷¹ In the face of an extreme shortage of food combined with the addition of the high Italian demand, prices for dairy products and fresh vegetables skyrocketed. One kilo of butter which normally sold for 120 francs, cost 750 francs in October; one liter of olive oil rose from 160 francs in October 1941 to 1500 francs by March 1943. Italian army reports made it clear that wholesalers could not keep up with their contracts as local production fell precipitously.⁷⁷²

It was inevitable that the lack of discipline of the Italian soldier, coupled with the increasing food deficit of the region, would fuel an already thriving black market in the Côte d'Azur. Notwithstanding the strict prohibition on any kind of transaction between Italian soldiers and French civilians, a mutually beneficial barter system came into being as soon as the Italian units settled in the former *Zone Libre*. On 22 November, a few days after the invasion, a restaurant owner in Nice was found with a bag containing seven kilograms of beef to be delivered to Italian soldiers. It is interesting to note that the civilian asserted that he had bought the beef from another Italian unit, but his explanation made no sense and was probably given to excuse himself and the beef wholesaler.⁷⁷³ It should not come as a surprise

⁷⁷¹ Jean-Louis Panicacci, "Le temps des pénuries (1939-1949) dans les Alpes-Maritimes," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, vol.48, June 1994, pp.192-197.

⁷⁷² AUSSME, DS 1217, Rapport n°1772/02 "Rapporto situazione mensile (21 febbraio - 20 marzo 1943)," Diario Storico XXII CA, 24 March 1943.

⁷⁷³ ADAM 159 W 46, Rapport n°1214 Traffic de denrées contingentées, affaire Léopold G., 22 November 1942.

then that, starting from as early as November 1942, half of the letters intercepted by Vichy's *contrôle postal* mentioned black market activities, while in the pre-occupation period only ten percent had focused on illicit trade and the lion's share of the letters had focused on irredentist affairs.⁷⁷⁴

Italian soldiers roamed the markets and countryside in search of any edible good. Mutually profitable exchanges were concluded with French civilians accepting virtually any kind of good or equipment to which Italian soldiers had access. Horse feed made by grinding carob pulp (*Energon*) was traded for potatoes,⁷⁷⁵ shoes for money,⁷⁷⁶ and fuel for food.⁷⁷⁷ Fuel, in fact, became a primary currency for all kinds of illegal transactions: it was exchanged for wine (a meaningful barter, as wine was considered as important as food in an army made up of farmers and workers).⁷⁷⁸ Sometimes fuel was simply sold to local civilians.⁷⁷⁹ The fuel trade was particularly successful in rural departments like the Basses-Alpes where local farmers desperately needed it. Between December 1942 and January 1943, four Italian soldiers stole sixty liters of gas from their units' depots and bartered it for ten kilograms of potatoes, ten kilograms of beans and one rabbit.⁷⁸⁰ On 15 January, two truck drivers of another unit quartered in the Basses-Alpes siphoned off a few liters of gas from their vehicle and exchanged it for potatoes and olive oil.⁷⁸¹

⁷⁷⁴ Monthly summaries of the *contrôles postal* can be found in ADAM, 616 W 185.

⁷⁷⁵ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3376 del processo, no date (1943).

⁷⁷⁶ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3198-3455 del processo, no date (1943).

⁷⁷⁷ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3238 del processo, no date (1943).

⁷⁷⁸ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3465 del processo, no date (1943).

⁷⁷⁹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3279 del processo, 6 May 1943.

⁷⁸⁰ ADAHP 42 W 83, Lettre Cab/358 "Arrestation d'une française par les autorités italiennes" du Préfet des Basses-Alpes au Colonel Pansini, Commandant des troupes italiennes à Digne, 18 January 1943. The sentence can be found in AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2867 del processo, 20 March 1943.

⁷⁸¹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2930 del processo, 18 March 1943.

The most striking features of both cases was not just that they happened almost as soon as the Fourth Army units had settled down in their locations, but also that they continued over time. For the above reasons, the Fourth Army Military Tribunal handed down sentences intended to send a message, ranging from eight months to three years. In spite of this, the practice became widespread, for even unit officers were seen striking deals with civilians. In Méailles, a small village in the Basses-Alpes, an officer, along with a few soldiers of the Regio Esercito, was sent to legally buy three hundred kilograms of potatoes. He approached a local producer, offering to barter fuel or pasta for two or three calves. The lieutenant explicitly stated that this latter trade was not part of a regular requisition or purchase, but was to be considered a black market deal.⁷⁸²

In most instances, the troops bartered Italian goods found in army depots in France which were relatively easy to pilfer. Sometimes though, the scheming was much more elaborate. Some soldiers smuggled goods across the border, a much more risky business, but not uncommon. For instance, six soldiers sent to Italy by their commander to buy rice and other staples not available on the local market, also brought back extra bags of rice and forty-liter demijohns of olive oil. Bewildered military authorities discovered that these soldiers, under the cover of regular food distribution, had created a black market network supplying restaurants in the Côte d'Azur with hard-to-find consumer goods.⁷⁸³ In fact, smuggling olive oil, which sold at 800 francs per liter on the black market, was a lucrative business. Several other smuggling rings were dismantled by the Italian authorities. Among them was one headed by an Italian lieutenant, a former restaurant owner in Italy, which meant he knew how

⁷⁸² ADAHP 42 W 82, Rapport n°9/4 du Commandant de la Gendarmerie d'Annot, 4 March 1943.

⁷⁸³ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2887 del processo, 22 March 1943.

to get rationed staples.⁷⁸⁴ Smuggling of goods into France was not just done by Italian soldiers; Italian civilians also participated. On 23 December 1942, a Mentonese was caught trying to smuggle gold jewelry from France to Menton.⁷⁸⁵ Italian border guards also uncovered several cases of illicit French perfumes being brought into Italy via Menton.⁷⁸⁶ Even Italian civil servants actively participated in the black market. A clerk of the CIAF delegation in Nice was caught with jewels and wads of Italian banknotes in his coat pockets.⁷⁸⁷ Sometimes, the diligence of Italian border guards led to unexpected results. One soldier returning from leave was prosecuted for attempting to bring three kilograms of tobacco and several pairs of stockings and socks across the border. However, upon careful examination, the Italian military tribunal realized that the soldier, due to his perfect bilingualism, was a member of the Service "I," the counterintelligence bureau present in every Fourth Army unit. The confiscated goods were meant to reward French informants and the soldier had been previously authorized by his field officer to buy them in Italy. This case, which was in itself emblematic of the lack of communication between different services in the Italian occupation army, was closed with an embarrassed acquittal by the Fourth Army tribunal.⁷⁸⁸

Italian soldiers' black market activities were not the aspect which damaged most the reputation of the Italian army in the eyes of the local populace. Thefts and burglaries by

⁷⁸⁴ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3242 del processo, 8 June 1943.

⁷⁸⁵ ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XIV, processo n°91/16, 5 April 1943.

⁷⁸⁶ ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XV, processo n°1039/42, 1 May 1943; processo n°250 Matteo F., Lorenzo A., Filippo B., 6 May 1943.

⁷⁸⁷ ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XIV, processo n°251, 29 May 1943.

⁷⁸⁸ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3312 del processo, 18 April 1943.

soldiers of the Regio Esercito were more frequent and their effects more visible than contraband across the border. In fact, they became so endemic on the Côte d'Azur as to become a recurrent worry for anyone with valuable goods or staples. French prefects' desks threatened to collapse under the stacks of local authorities' reports. From these reports, it was clear that the Italian soldiers resorted to thievery first and foremost to quell their hunger.

Their first targets were food warehouses. Arguably, food depots of the Italian army were the easiest to access for Italian soldiers, as seen in the aforementioned cases of black marketeering. Thus, the case of three privates of the infantry regiment *Lupi di Toscana* stealing goods from their own regiment food depot should not come as a surprise.⁷⁸⁹ Charitable organizations were not spared by the wave of thefts. Seven Alpini pried open a window of the *Secours National* depot in Chambéry to steal thirty kilograms of chocolate.⁷⁹⁰ And wine was very much a coveted good. In January 1943, dark stains on the floor near a warehouse persuaded a few *Alpini* that the building might store kegs of wine. The thirsty alpine soldiers at first tried, without much success, to siphon off the wine with the help of a hose, but then opted for brute force, smashing the front door of the depot.⁷⁹¹

The easiest prey for the pillagers were the railway cars used to transport food for both the Italian army food service and the *Ravitaillement Général*. The Prefect of the Basses-Alpes complained to his Bouches-Du-Rhône equivalent that, during the night of 12 December, a group of Italian soldiers had broken the lock of a wagon parked inside the

⁷⁸⁹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3639 del processo, 2 July 1943.

⁷⁹⁰ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2839 del processo, 29 March 1943.

⁷⁹¹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3000 del processo, 12 April 1943.

Digne station and stolen five hundred kilograms of potatoes.⁷⁹² On 23 December, twenty-six soldiers were arrested for having cleaned out a wagon of food and soap.⁷⁹³ In most cases, it was only a few individuals who, under the cover of shadows, sneaked into a railway station to grab whatever food and other goods, such as stockings and socks, they could carry.⁷⁹⁴ The pervasiveness of theft is made clear by looking at the reports of the *Delegazione Trasporti Militari* (Military Transport Delegation). Its head, Colonel Martinotti, regularly complained about the incessant "thefts from Italian railways car transporting food, a plague which shows no sign of abating."⁷⁹⁵

To curb the wave of robberies, the Italian army established squads of *Carabinieri* and soldiers to patrol the railway stations. However, in some cases, the same persons who were supposed to be guarding the carriages were found pilfering goods. For instance, two sentries of the Carnoules (Var) railway station were caught stealing a chunk of red meat from a refrigerator carriage.⁷⁹⁶ In another case, two *Carabinieri* who had been expressly posted near a carriage that had been already broken open could not resist the temptation of taking two *provoloni*.⁷⁹⁷ In another incredible episode, two French policemen noticed, while walking beside the depot in Cannes (Cannes Bocca), that an Italian soldier was stealing goods from a wagon. The French gendarmes dashed to arrest him but stopped abruptly as two Italian

⁷⁹² ADAHP 42 W 85, Lettre Cab.6174 "Vols commis par des militaires italiens," Préfet des Basses-Alpes, 17 December 1942.

⁷⁹³ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3041 del processo, 2 April 1943.

⁷⁹⁴ Boxes of military court trials have several cases of theft in wagons, see for instance AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3400 del processo, 1 May 1943; n°3072/2091, 1 May 1943; n°3127, 2 May 1943; n°3637, 27 May 1943; n°3834, 30 June 1943.

⁷⁹⁵ AUSSME DS 989, Rapporto n°906/M "Relazione riassuntiva bimestrale - Diario Storico," Delegazione Trasporti Militari n°613, 1 March 1943.

⁷⁹⁶ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3011 del processo, 3 May 1943.

⁷⁹⁷ The Provolone is a type of cheese with a slightly smoked flavor, AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°4407 del processo, no date.

sentries interceded, giving the pillager time to flee the scene. In the ensuing presumably heated conversation, the Italian sentries feigned ignorance, asserting that neither had seen anyone approaching the wagon. Their bad faith was confirmed when the two gendarmes, after recruiting the head of the station, noted that several bottles of liquor were now also missing, along with all the Italian soldiers.⁷⁹⁸ In fact, the Cannes Bocca railway station became a no man's land in March-April 1943 where Italian soldiers repeatedly plundered carriages. In some cases, the robbers threatened the gendarmes and made away with their goods; in other cases, French policemen managed to arrest the thieves, delivering them to the nearest Italian outpost.⁷⁹⁹

While all these robberies undoubtedly added to the strain on the food supply, the general population was not very aware of them. On the other hand, the plundering of orchards and kitchen gardens was felt directly by French civilians and considerably undermined the image of the Italian soldier in the eyes of the French public opinion. Unfenced fields became easy targets for bands of Italian marauders, who pillaged anything edible, from cabbage⁸⁰⁰ to potatoes, from onions to lettuce.⁸⁰¹ Disheartened beekeepers bemoaned the soldiers who tore apart their beehives in order to get at the honey.⁸⁰² The French population was well aware of the many thefts committed by Italian soldiers. The mayor of Mandelieu, a village near Cannes in the Alpes-Maritimes, bitterly complained to

⁷⁹⁸ ADAM 28 W 75, Rapport n°7036 du Commissariat central de police de Cannes, 20 April 1943.

⁷⁹⁹ ADAM 28 W 75, Rapport du Brigadier Revel, n°5413, 24 March 1943; n°5335, 22 March 1943; Rapport du Gardien de la Paix Bernardi, 20 March 1943.

⁸⁰⁰ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3107 del processo, no date.

⁸⁰¹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2641 del processo, 4 March 1943.

⁸⁰² ADAM 616 W 241, Fichier 23, Incidents Occupation Italienne, Lettre de la Corporation Nationale Paysanne au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 16 December 1942. This case was not isolated. Three Italian soldiers were prosecuted in February 1943 for breaking hives with a stick. AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3189 del processo, 14 April 1943.

Vichy police authorities that fields were often plundered at night. He insisted that, while it was difficult in the dark to distinguish more than black shadows moving along these fields, their vicinity to Italian encampments and the trails of heavy military boot prints left no doubt about the culprits' identity.⁸⁰³ Sometimes, brazen soldiers did not bother to wait for darkness. A farmer in the Basses-Alpes was shocked to discover soldiers cutting down trees on his property in broad daylight. Even more galling, his protests were met with mocking laughter and sneers.⁸⁰⁴

It happened occasionally that local commanders sent patrols in search of pillagers. In January 1943, at Saint Laurent-du-Var, a soldier found stealing vegetables was shot in the leg while fleeing an Italian patrol.⁸⁰⁵ Records of the Fourth Army indicate that, on average, fifty to eighty soldiers were arrested each month for theft, about thirty percent of the total arrests.⁸⁰⁶ These numbers were in line with the average for the Italian army in the Second World War more generally. Recent studies have determined that seventy percent of Italian military tribunals' sentences were for theft, black market, illegal trading (*ricettazione*) or insubordination.⁸⁰⁷ However, it is safe to assume that the thieves actually caught and charged were only the tip of the iceberg. Italian soldiers and officers often turned a blind eye to minor offenses for several reasons. Owing to the dearth of men, and facing a possible Allied

⁸⁰³ ADAM 28 W 75, Lettre du Maire de Mandelieu à Monsieur le Colonel, Commandant la place de Mandelieu, 23 February 1943.

⁸⁰⁴ ADAHP, 38 W 96, Procès-verbal Gendarmerie Nationale de Digne, 23 March 1943.

⁸⁰⁵ ADAM 616 W 241, Fichier 23, Incidents Occupation Italienne, Gendarmerie Nationale, Séction de Cannes, Rapport sur des incidents dûs à la présence des troupes étrangères en opérations, 9 January 1943.

⁸⁰⁶ This data is a rough estimate based on the data found in the *Diari Storici* (logbooks) of the different units. The Fourth Army *Diari Storici* seldom went into detail, and noted only the total number of soldiers arrested each month.

⁸⁰⁷ Giorgio Rochat, "La giustizia militare dal 10 giugno 1940 all'8 settembre 1943," Nicola Labanca and Pier Paolo Rivello (eds.), *Fonti e problemi per la storia della giustizia militare*, Giappichelli: Torino, 2004, pp.239-240.

invasion and partisan insurrection, the theft of goods from French fields was ranked low on the scale of threats. Thus, patrols did not focus on chasing thieves. Additionally, some officers and NCOs felt it would not be advisable to systematically punish every minor infraction. They feared a hardline policy would sour relations between soldiers and officers and considerably deplete the already insufficient number of soldiers on French soil. Thus, military tribunals' sentences appear to have been relatively lenient in the treatment of thefts, unless the stolen goods were the property of the Italian army. Finally, we should not underestimate the pressure put on honest soldiers by their unscrupulous peers. A corporal who had denounced some privates responsible for the theft of honey and chickens received death threats from the culprits.⁸⁰⁸

Given this permissive attitude, coupled with the desperation of the hungry, some soldiers became bolder and bolder and began targeting livestock. Lambs were stolen from passing flocks; rabbits and chickens were pilfered from their enclosures.⁸⁰⁹ They did not hesitate to break doors and locks of shacks and pigpens, even though this "violence on goods" was considered an aggravating circumstance by the military courts.⁸¹⁰ The logical next step in the ladder of offenses was to break into private homes. Hungry soldiers smashed windows, grabbing whatever food they could find.⁸¹¹ Sometimes, they resorted to creative tricks to force the owner to hand over his goods. Two privates, passing themselves off as Italian army police, tried to intimidate a farmer, arguing that his small bonfire which he had lit in front of his house was a beacon for the enemy planes. Threatening him with a hefty

⁸⁰⁸ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3230 del processo, 14 April 1943.

⁸⁰⁹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3340-3190 del processo, no date (1943).

⁸¹⁰ See for instance AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3310 del processo, 6 May 1943.

⁸¹¹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2635 del processo, 10 March 1943.

fine, the *Carabinieri* impersonators agreed to turn a blind eye in exchange for three rabbits.⁸¹² In another classic swindle, an Italian soldier, under the pretext of waiting for the military courier to arrive at the village, invited himself into a home for a glass of wine with the owner, while an accomplice tried to break into the rabbit hutch out back.⁸¹³

Break-ins into private houses were few, however, as the risk of being caught was high. Owners moved heaven and earth to find the culprits as the stolen goods often represented the entirety of their often meager stores, and the difference between survival and serious hardship. Instead, many Italian soldiers resorted to a more direct way to get food - shoplifting. Staples as diverse as cheese, condensed milk, *mortadella* (Italian cold cuts) and sugar were stolen from shop shelves.⁸¹⁴ The populace was particularly incensed by the fact that the soldiers were even shoplifting non-consumable and non-essential goods as diverse as cameras, postcards, souvenirs and jewels.⁸¹⁵ One soldier was even caught stealing a wallet left on a counter by an absentminded customer.⁸¹⁶

Thus, hunger was not the sole motivation for these actions. Italian soldiers were in search of goods either to barter on the black market or for their own comfort. Allegedly, Italian officers were even using cars which were either the property of local municipalities or of private individuals.⁸¹⁷ In Digne, a bicycle which had been reported stolen was found in an

⁸¹² AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3622 del processo, 2 June 1943.

⁸¹³ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3461 del processo, 22 April 1943.

⁸¹⁴ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2735 del processo, 25 February 1943; n°2675, 25 February 1943; n°2628, 12 March 1943; n°2919, 12 March 1943.

⁸¹⁵ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°2848 del processo, 6 May 1943; n°3304, 26 April 1943; n°3108, 6 April 1943; ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XIV, processo n°120, 10 April 1943.

⁸¹⁶ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°2710 del processo, 19 February 1943.

⁸¹⁷ ADAM, 28 W 75, Rapport n°2025, Commissariat de police d'Antibes, 23 February 1943.

Italian military barracks, oddly without its wheels.⁸¹⁸ There were also a few instances of robberies perpetrated by soldiers lodged in civilian houses. In two separate cases, orderlies of Italian officers took advantage of the situation to steal jewelry, silverware and money belonging to their hosts.⁸¹⁹ The greediness of some members of the Italian occupation army was especially evident when the soldiers started looting abandoned houses. There was little chance of finding foodstuffs in houses which had not been inhabited for at least a couple of years. In a repetition of the aftermath of the Battle of the Alps in Menton, isolated country houses, abandoned by their owners who lived outside the region or even outside France, were repeatedly pillaged for their furniture and goods.⁸²⁰ Therefore, their actions were not just driven by need.

The Italian army impacted in the population's everyday life not only by indulging in black market activities and theft, but by their galling misuse of public goods. Just a few days after their deployment in southern France, some soldiers were found washing their clothes in a tank which stored the water feeding several apartment buildings, oblivious to the obvious health issue that they were contaminating the residents' drinking water.⁸²¹ Lacking fuel to keep warm during the cool and humid nights of southern France, Italian soldiers had no scruples about cutting down trees, whether on private property or public land.⁸²² In Cannes, Italian units occupying the aerodrome tore down a few sheds and broke up some furniture to

⁸¹⁸ ADAHP, 42 W 42, Rapport hebdomadaire n°4408 du Commissaire principal Sangla, 10 May 1943.

⁸¹⁹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°2950 del processo, 6 April 1943; n°3268, 12 April 1943.

⁸²⁰ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3498 del processo, 6 May 1943; n°3518, 8 May 1943.

⁸²¹ ADAM 616 W 241, Fichier 23, Incidents occupation italienne, Lettre n°2431 du Directeur du Bureau d'Hygiène à Monsieur le Médecin-Inspecteur de la Santé, Nice, 21 November 1942.

⁸²² ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 47, occupation yachts et aérodromes, Lettre n°3991 de la Mairie de Villefranche-sur-Mer, 22 December 1942.

use for fires.⁸²³ If the disorganization of the Italian invasion was as much to blame as the lack of discipline among the Italian rank-and-file, other incidents reflected a marked lack of respect for French laws. French civilians accused the Italian soldiers of shooting domestic pets such as cats and dogs.⁸²⁴ The Italians also had the nasty habit of hunting game without any recognition of French hunting regulations.⁸²⁵ French reports noted with alarm that these hunters also endangered the local population, for stray shots came perilously close to hitting farmers cultivating their fields and even people strolling in village streets. In fact, military court records report at least one case of a French civilian shot in the leg by an Italian soldier who was hunting hares.⁸²⁶ Italians had even less scruples about fishing, commonly using explosives to increase the size of their catch.⁸²⁷

Moreover, notwithstanding the fact that, owing to the scarcity of fuel, traffic on the roads was light, there were several road accidents involving cars or trucks driven by Italian soldiers. In many cases, excessive speed and reckless driving were a decisive factor, as Italian drivers typically had an arrogant attitude and considered themselves the undisputed masters of the road. On 30 January 1943, an Italian truck driver was not able to get his vehicle around a bend due to his speed and mortally injured a French pedestrian.⁸²⁸ In August 1943, an Italian motorcyclist, while driving at top speed in the village of Sisteron, hit a

⁸²³ ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 47, occupation yachts et aérodromes, Lettre n°1586 du Chef de District Aéronautique, Aéroport de Nice au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 19 November 1942.

⁸²⁴ ADAHP 42 W 83, Rapport de l'Adjutant Giraud sur des incidents provoqués par des troupes italiennes de passage à Castellane, 16 January 1943.

⁸²⁵ ADAM 616 W 241, Fichier 23, Incidents occupation italienne, Lettre du Lieutenant Jomotte sur des incidents dûs à la présence des troupes italiennes en opérations, 5 January 1943.

⁸²⁶ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3325 del processo, 19 April 1943.

⁸²⁷ ADAM 616 W 261, Rapport n°541 de l'Inspecteur Caubel, Ministère de l'Agriculture et du Ravitaillement, 9 August 1943.

⁸²⁸ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3124 del processo, no date.

French civilian. Not content with having injured the civilian, the Italian officer abused the French gendarme who was writing down the motorcycle's license plate and insulted passersby.⁸²⁹ In another unfortunate incident, a French truck which failed to pull over to let past an Italian car became the target of several shots to its tires. In the face of protests from the French prefect, the Italian commander in Digne icily replied that this "natural reaction" of the Italian soldiers was simply the consequence of the careless driving of "French drivers who did not comply with traffic regulations, especially when they are near Italian military vehicles."⁸³⁰ It is worth noting, that this reckless driving also impacted the Italian army. In another unfortunate circumstance, another Italian army driver swerved into the opposite lane to avoid crashing into a horse-drawn carriage. In doing so, the truck collided with a car of Italian *Carabinieri* coming from the opposite direction, killing one officer and severely injuring an NCO.⁸³¹

Additionally, soldiers of the Regio Esercito had assumed responsibility for maintaining law and order from the French security forces, and they resented any intrusion. However, as traffic policemen, their tactics could be unorthodox. Cyclists who failed to stop in the face of soldiers' challenges risked slaps or even a severe beating.⁸³² These incidents sometimes escalated into fights, as in the case on 9 December 1942 in Nice when French citizens came to an unlucky cyclist's defense, and ended up in a brawl with Italian irredentists

⁸²⁹ ADHAP, 42 W 83, Lettre de Monsieur le maire de Sisteron à Monsieur le Préfet des Basses Alpes, 23 August 1943.

⁸³⁰ ADAHP 42 W 83, Lettre n°36 RG/C "Incidents avec les troupes d'occupation italiennes" du Préfet des Basses-Alpes, 3 May 1943, and the attached Italian reply, note n°118 of the French CIAF liaison.

⁸³¹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3398 del processo, 19 April 1943.

⁸³² ADAM, 616 W 242, Fichier 6, Lettre du Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes au Général Commandant la XVeme Division des troupes italiennes Legnano, 14 December 1942.

who vigorously backed up the soldiers.⁸³³ Even essential services such as ambulances and public transportation were not spared. On 19 January 1943, the driver of an ambulance carrying two sick people had the misfortune of crossing a Italian military procession in the streets of Nice. Given the urgency of his task and having received the green light from a NCO, the driver moved forward, thus cutting the procession in half. An officer, deeming the move of the French civilian an impudent affront to the Italian army, immediately rushed to punch the driver in the face. Only the intervention of a French agent prevented the situation from escalating.⁸³⁴ In another incident, a tramway driver had the windshield of his vehicle cracked by a soldier's rifle butt.⁸³⁵ Vichy officials were also targeted, as they were considered both a challenge to the authority of the Italian army in France and a possible threat in the case of an anti-Italian insurrection. French gendarmes who patrolled at night to enforce the curfew were severely chastised by an Italian military patrol when the former directed their flashlight beam into the soldiers' faces.

This episode not only demonstrated that the Italians were wary of any interference in security matters, but also demonstrated the constant tension under which the Italian forces lived. The occupation army was like a coiled spring, in constant fear of possible attacks from

⁸³³ ADAM, 616 W 241, Fichier 23 Incidents occupation italienne, Rapport du Gardien de la Paix Dussert, intervention au sujet d'un double incident, entre soldats civils italiens et civils français, 27 December 1942; For irridentist support of Italian soldiers, see ADAM, 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, Rapport des gardiens cyclistes Durand et Chiodi sur incident place Garibaldi entre soldat italien et public, 9 December 1942.

⁸³⁴ ADAM, 616 W 215, Procès-verbal n°189, Incident entre un officier italien et le sieur C. Edouard, 25 January 1943.

⁸³⁵ ADAM, 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°5/2773 au sujet de l'incident du 22/11/1942 à la Californie entre un soldat italien et civil français, 30 January 1943.

the French population.⁸³⁶ This fear lay behind the curfew measure established by the Italian garrison commander in the small village of Gattières after a sentry opened fire on an individual who, upon approaching the camp and being ordered to stop, instead precipitously fled the premises.⁸³⁷ The obsessive dread of a possible insurgence sparked yet another incident. A tax collector was arrested in mid-January in Nice and his gun confiscated. The arrest stemmed from a misunderstanding: the French civil servant had been seen showing his gun to one of his fellows in a cafe. A witness, who thought the two tax collectors were possible resisters, reported the incident to an Italian patrol who proceeded to arrest the alleged insurgent.⁸³⁸

Nervous Italian soldiers were also prone to overreact when they believed that they had been mocked or insulted by Frenchmen. On 14 December 1942, the gendarmerie of the small village of Vence was stormed by an Italian squad in response to an alleged rude gesture made by a French gendarme at an Italian column the day before. Even though the situation was quickly defused when it became clear that the whole incident was the result of a misunderstanding, the population of Vence was shocked by the excessive use of force.⁸³⁹ French police officers were often suspected of scoffing at Italian troops. Two gendarmes were accused by an Italian officer of making fun of *bersaglieri* troops, whose wide-brimmed

⁸³⁶ ADAM, 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, Rapport des gardiens Ascari et Chameroy sur les menaces par des soldats italiens, 29 November 1942.

⁸³⁷ ADAM, 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°710/2 du Lieutenant Jomotte, sur un incident à Gattières, et dû à la présence des troupes étrangères en opérations, 14 December 1942.

⁸³⁸ ADAM, 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, Commissaire central à Nice, rapport journalier 16 January 1943.

⁸³⁹ ADAM, 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°702/2 du Lieutenant Jomotte, sur des incidents dûs à la présence des troupes étrangères en opérations, 14 December 1942.

hats were decorated with black capercaillie feathers.⁸⁴⁰ The Italians seemed exceptionally sensitive, perceiving insults where none was intended. A gendarme who failed to greet a passing Italian officer was considered to have insulted him, even though, at that time, the gendarme was focused on hunting down poachers.⁸⁴¹

This arrogance and prickliness disturbed and angered the French, who sometimes reacted with sarcasm and irreverence. These rash answers to Italian provocations could considerably envenom a situation. A bartender who, in response to a haughty comment by the Italian officer to the effect that Fascists were not afraid of anything, defiantly answered back that the French too had no fears, was threatened at gunpoint by the officer.⁸⁴² A customer in a bar who, upon hearing an Italian soldier slandering the French army for not being able to resist the Wehrmacht in June 1940, replied that it did not matter because the Americans would soon come to free the French, was immediately arrested and brought to Italian army local headquarters.⁸⁴³ A common site for these kinds of confrontations was the cafe, as a result of immoderate alcohol consumption by Italian soldiers. In January 1943, four soldiers in Thoard, Basses-Alpes, who had been refused wine, fired several shots into the sky to intimidate the owner.⁸⁴⁴ In June 1943, a brawl in a bar in the village of Manosque, Basses-Alpes, between French customers and Italian soldiers rapidly escalated into a wider street

⁸⁴⁰ ADAM, 166 W 11, Fichier Incidents divers, Rapport n°8684/S.P.-2 du Commissaire Divisionnaire de Nice, 21 June 1943.

⁸⁴¹ ADAM, 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°6/4 di Lieutenant Jomotte, 14 January 1943.

⁸⁴² ADAM, 616 W 241, Fichier 23 Incidents occupation italienne, Rapport de l'adjudant Didier sur des incidents entre un Officier italien et une Autorité civile française, 29 December 1942.

⁸⁴³ ADAM, 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°26.511 du Commissariat de police de Cannes, 26 December 1942.

⁸⁴⁴ ADAHP 42 W 83, Rapport n°5/4 du Maréchal des Logis Chef Dagorne sur un incident provoqué par des militaires des troupes italiennes d'opérations, 31 March 1943.

fight.⁸⁴⁵ It is worth noting that in all of these incidents, both Italian commanders and the local authorities worked to resolve the tension and to restore order. Both parties feared street brawls could degenerate into riots with dire consequences for the stability of the region. The local Italian commander certainly did not want to stir up any trouble in a department with few Italian troops and no irredentist claims. To this end, most of the civilians arrested were freed within hours or days. In fact, while these brawls demonstrated the omnipresent animosity between the French populace and the soldiers of the occupying army, their relatively mild endings reflected a will on both sides to diffuse the tension.

Faced with this wide list of criminal activities, ranging from black marketeering to outright theft, one might get the impression that the Italian army was rife with burglars, traffickers and the corrupt. It is important to place the Fourth Army in the context of the wartime occupation of France. None of these offenses were unique to the Italians, for the French civilians also indulged in illicit activities during the occupation. In the words of an historian "almost everything was for sale during and immediately after the occupation."⁸⁴⁶ Black marketeering and illicit trafficking had been thriving in southern France since 1940, long before the Italian army occupied southeastern France. Trips by French civilians into the countryside in search of food were already a common occurrence. In fact, notwithstanding repeated reassurances by Vichy officials, the "Système D" is probably the phrase which embodies the essence of the experience of occupied France, for, no matter the department or the social class, one who had lived in France during the Occupation was bound to deal either

⁸⁴⁵ ADAHP, 42 W 83, Rapport n°3034/Q.7 du Commissaire principal Sangla, 28 April 1943.

⁸⁴⁶ Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French, Life under the Occupation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p.223.

directly and indirectly with the black market.⁸⁴⁷ Many increasingly resorted to either illicit trade or theft to satisfy their needs, often at the expense of the weaker or more honest part of the population. Some unscrupulous persons even resorted to stealing packages sent to the French prisoners of war in Germany by their families.⁸⁴⁸ Thefts of foodstuffs and ration cards had become a daily event in the Côte d'Azur as early as 1941. Thieves raided *Ravitaillement* offices for ration tickets, even blowing safes to get them. This situation became so widespread that Vichy increased the penalty for those who distributed or used counterfeit or illegal ration tickets, in some extreme cases sentencing felons to life sentences.⁸⁴⁹ Moreover, thefts were not limited only to food or the ration system, but encompassed a high variety of goods. For instance, an average of four bicycles were stolen each day in the city of Nice.⁸⁵⁰

As a matter of fact, the Italian presence was convenient for some. It appears that some civilians were quick to blame the soldiers of the Regio Esercito in order to cover their own crimes, knowing how much the population was prejudiced against the occupation army. In January 1943, the CEO of a French distribution company complained to the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes about the numerous robberies targeting the wagons which transported food from Marseille to the department of the Alpes-Maritimes. SNCF, the French national railway company, openly accused the Italian soldiers of the thefts. However, the manager of the distribution company suggested that some of the robberies may have been, in fact, committed by "unscrupulous SNCF employees [who] used these thefts as an excuse to carry out their

⁸⁴⁷ For a good overall view of the black market, see Dominique Veillon, *Vivre et Survivre en France, 1939-1947*, Paris: Payot, 1995.

⁸⁴⁸ ADAM, 166 W 3, Rapport n°1464, Vol de colis de prisonniers sur le trajet Puget-Theniers - Digne, 18 May 1943.

⁸⁴⁹ ADAM 616 W 312, Préfecture des Alpes-Maritimes, Bureau des Affaires Économiques, Communiqué Officiel 77/MI/LM, 15 December 1942.

⁸⁵⁰ Police daily reports for the year 1942 can be found in ADAM, 166 W 1.

own." In support of his theory, one CEO accused SNCF of having allegedly ordered its employees to blame the occupation army as a way to avoid having to refund the plaintiff companies.⁸⁵¹

In fact, starting in the summer of 1943, there were encouraging signs that the Italian troops and the local population had reached a *modus vivendi*. A Vichy police report regarding the Basses-Alpes in May 1943 revealed that, due to the goodwill of both the soldiers and the populace, the atmosphere was much more serene.⁸⁵² By June, "thefts [committed by Italian soldiers] had more or less ceased."⁸⁵³ By this time, Italian soldiers had proven a boon to the local economy. Italian troops "[were] for some categories of shop owners such as coffee shop owners, watchmakers and perfumers a source of profit."⁸⁵⁴ Moreover, many were impressed by the kindness of the Italian soldiers. A woman who had been run over by a car driven by a member of the Italian military was promptly taken by the soldiers themselves to the local hospital.⁸⁵⁵ Relations also improved in the coastal regions. For example, the Sub-Prefect of Grasse took the time to write a letter to the I CA Italian commander to praise the deeds of two Italian soldiers who had helped French civilians put out a fire in a pasta factory.⁸⁵⁶ At a grassroots level, some Frenchmen were praising the Italian soldiers for being "good fellows" (*brave gens*) who were not terribly disruptive to French daily life. The local population therefore "no longer regretted that it was the Italians

⁸⁵¹ ADAM, 166 W 3, Lettre du PDG de Guichard-Perrachon & Cie au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 27 January 1943.

⁸⁵² ADHAP, 42 W 42, Rapport n°4041 /Q.7-2 du Commissaire Sangla, 31 May 1943.

⁸⁵³ ADHAP, 42 W 42, Rapport n°3074 du Commissariat de police de Digne, 4 June 1943.

⁸⁵⁴ ADHAP, 42 W 42, Rapport du Commissariat de police de Digne, 24 June 1943.

⁸⁵⁵ ADHAP, 42 W 42, Rapport d'information du Commissaire Principal, Chef du District de Police des Basses-Alpes, 29 January 1943.

⁸⁵⁶ ADAM, 28 W 75, Lettre du Sous-Préfet de Grasse au colonel Mariani, chef d'Etat Major du Général Commandant le 1^{er} Corps d'Armée, 6 July 1943.

who were occupying [southeastern France] and not the Germans."⁸⁵⁷ In some instances, relations between the Italians and the local population even became friendly, as in the case of an officer in Nice who gave some milk to a French family in return for their hospitality and "acts of kindness" (*gentillesse*) to him and his men.⁸⁵⁸ Even attempts to export or import consumer goods in France sometimes hid more noble motivations. Some soldiers sought to help families in France who were having difficulty due to the extreme shortages of food. An Italian corporal gave eight loafs of bread, stolen from his unit kitchen, to a struggling Italian family in Nice who subsequently had, on many occasions, invited him over to dine and washed his clothes, as a token of gratitude.⁸⁵⁹ This was not an isolated act. Another attempted to bring in illegal olive oil, eggs, and women's stockings as a way to thank his relatives in Nice for their hospitality.⁸⁶⁰

Thus, Italian soldiers were able to reach a *modus vivendi* with the local population, whether French or Italian. Understandably though, the soldiers of the Fourth Army generally became more intimate with the Italian population because of the common language and culture. Various kinds of relationships emerged in the Italian occupation, but perhaps none were more complex than that between the Italian men and local women. It would be a twisted interpretation to view the relationships between soldiers of the Regio Esercito and local women only through the lens of prostitution. In many cases, local girls genuinely fell in love with Italian officers and soldiers, in a way which strongly mirrored the relations between

⁸⁵⁷ ADAM, 166 W 21, Contrôle téléphonique n°2006, 15 March 1943.

⁸⁵⁸ ADAM, 159 W 46, Rapport n°2851, Police régionale d'État de Nice, 29 December 1942.

⁸⁵⁹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 83, n°3137 del processo, 14 April 1943.

⁸⁶⁰ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°2883- 3258 del processo, 4 May 1943.

German soldiers and the derogatively called *Filles aux Boches* (literally Girls for Krauts).⁸⁶¹ The two categories of women, prostitutes and soldiers' lovers, shared the common trait of being generally despised by the population. Every woman who befriended a soldier of either occupation army was almost immediately branded a harlot. Rich women were especially targeted as their villas were often used by the Italian army to billet their officers, thus incidentally encouraging promiscuous contact between the Italians and their female hosts. A fourteen-year-old girl was denounced after the war by her neighbor for having indulged in a debauched life (*vie de débauche*) with Italian, and later, German soldiers. The denouncer, a sixty-year-old school teacher, was horrified by the scandalous attitude of the girl, who "embraced tenderly an Italian [soldier], each day a different one." The teenager was eventually sentenced to four years, not a surprising sentence if we remember the chauvinism of 1940s France and the fact that the teacher was also the local president of the *Comité D'Épuration*.⁸⁶² In another case, a former Italian nun who had become a nurse for a rich widow was accused of an allegedly scandalous attitude regarding the Italian officers billeted in her employer's villa. A witness had seen her "hug (*embrasser*) three or four times" a few Italian officers. The neighbor was so outraged by the presence of what he considered a prostitute in a bourgeois neighborhood that he once yelled her, "You lackey of Mussolini (*Espèce de sale Mussolini*) would be better gone to a brothel than housed in a convent." Another neighbor accused the former nun of "dancing and laughing with Italian officers," an intolerable moral crime in Vichy France. The Italian nurse was ultimately acquitted of any

⁸⁶¹ For more on the relationships, Richard Vinen, *The Unfree French, Life under the Occupation*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp.157-181.

⁸⁶² ADAM 318 W 115, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Christiane O., Déposition de Étienne P.

crime, as both the rich aristocratic widow and the Bishop of Nice Monseigneur Rémond vouched for her.⁸⁶³ However, the fact that she was charged based on these accusations says much about the local attitude towards women's fraternization with Italian troops.

However, some relationships evolved into something stronger than simple flirtation. These love stories rarely enjoyed a happy ending owing to the fact most of the Italian military left France precipitously in September 1943 with the declaration of the Italian Armistice with the Allies. That was the case of a divorced Italian woman in the alpine village of Isola, who befriended a sergeant and then became his lover in February 1943. Notwithstanding the fact that soldiers were not permitted to live with women, the sergeant openly dated her and was extremely fond of her three small children. The Italian soldier was probably a godsend for an unemployed single woman with three children to feed at a time of heavy rationing and when women had great difficulty finding employment. The two had even talked about getting married. Unfortunately, the idyll lasted only a few months until June 1943, when the sergeant's unit was sent back to Italy. The two lovers continued to stay in touch by mail for a short period of time, until in September 1943, when the sergeant was taken prisoner and sent to a POW camp in Germany.⁸⁶⁴ Sometimes, women took drastic measures to continue the relationship in spite of the war. A twenty-one-year-old girl, tired of waiting for news from her fiancée who had left Nice in September 1943, decided, without telling her parents, to cross the border in Menton illegally, paying a hefty 2,000 francs to a

⁸⁶³ ADAM 318 W 134, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Lucia C.

⁸⁶⁴ ADAM 381 W 26, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Antoinette R. The woman was acquitted, as supposedly the French judges understood her reasons for engaging in an innocent relationship with an Italian soldier. It does, however, exemplify the chauvinist and xenophobic attitude of part of the population that her case was brought to the attention of the *Comité d'Épuration*.

guide, and then worked her way to her fiancée's town. There, she lived with his parents for a few months.⁸⁶⁵

Affairs between Italian soldiers and women were certainly an important part of the relations between occupiers and occupied at a grassroots level. Such affairs are hardly surprising given the fact that France was missing one and a half million of its men who were in German prison camps and factories, and that the occupiers were largely young men in their prime. However, relations developed in another important area of daily life: business. The Italian army had arrived in France with its own supply services, and the General Staff's initial plan was to be fully autonomous of French suppliers. However, as explained earlier, it became quickly evident that the Italian army would have to rely on local production, especially in foodstuffs, all the more so as the Italian peninsula itself was experiencing severe shortages. Therefore, Fourth Army commanders quickly established commercial ties with local producers, wholesalers and retailers. At a grassroots level, grocery stores, a trade practiced by many Italians in southeastern France, were often visited by Italian soldiers in search of staples to supplement their inadequate rations. It was not uncommon for Italian grocery owners to sell their goods, out of either patriotism or simple greed, to the Italian rank-and-file, in spite of Vichy's rationing regulations that forbade them to sell to anyone who did not have ration coupons for the corresponding staple.

Of course, some shrewd Italian entrepreneurs quickly realized that the presence of the Italian army was a boon which could be exploited profitably. A few individuals specialized in collecting manure from the horses of the Italian army, a lucrative business at a time when

⁸⁶⁵ ADAM 318 W 29, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Hélène M.

fertilizers were widely unavailable.⁸⁶⁶ Wide margins of profit were also made by businessmen who anticipated the needs of the Italian army. One entrepreneur in Nice made his fortune by selling typewriters to the CIAF office in Nice and movie projectors to Italian units.⁸⁶⁷ Another one specialized in the distribution of coal and wood to heat the Italian barracks. This particular business was a marked success and enabled him to live an expensive lifestyle, according to the French police house search in 1944, which uncovered a large quantity of foodstuffs, including white bread, an extreme rarity at the end of the war.⁸⁶⁸

These profits were widely regarded in postwar trials as illicit hoarding made by Italian immigrants, dismissed at that point as merely "guests" of France at a time when the population was enduring serious economic deprivation. In the vitriolic opinion of a French inspector, each of these individuals was "the typical Italian, who, after having profited from the French hospitality to earn an adequate living, had sided, when the time came, with those backstabbing France, probably as a way to thank us."⁸⁶⁹ These entrepreneurs, in the minds of many French, were doubly guilty of having amassed a considerable fortune during the war years, while helping the army of an enemy state. The popular opinion in postwar France cast them as Fascists or irredentists who maneuvered behind the scenes to prepare the ground for a future annexation. Of course, some of these Italians combined a flair for business with a staunch belief in the future Italian supremacy in southeastern France, but the story was more complex than it appears at first. The case of an Italian building contractor in Nice, Albert O.,

⁸⁶⁶ For an example of manure business, ADAM 318 W 18, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Joseph V.

⁸⁶⁷ ADAM 318 W 118, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Joseph C.

⁸⁶⁸ ADAM 318 W 22, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Jean-Baptiste B.

⁸⁶⁹ ADAM 318 W 111, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Barthelemy G.

who was prosecuted in the aftermath of war for having worked for an enemy country, serves as a good example. A postwar French police report began by stating that the defendant's company had not been in good shape before the war, nor had its condition improved when the war started. No explanation was offered for this but one could infer that the business was doing badly as its chief clients were the local municipalities, which had had their funds drastically cut, one of the consequences of the enormous reparations that Vichy France was paying to Nazi Germany. In addition, and perhaps more significantly, many Italian businesses suffered from the backlash of the *coup de poignard dans le dos*. The local population deserted Italian-owned stores and companies as they did not want to fund what they deemed an Italian fifth column in the region. A tailor in Monaco demanded substantial reparations from the CIAF declaring that, after his detention in June 1940 in French internment camps, his store had been shunned by the French population and the pro-French Monegasques, presumably impacting his bottom line dramatically.⁸⁷⁰

Albert O. and others like him who were shunned by the French population regardless of their political ideas, were delighted to see a potentially good client, the Italian army, come to France. Albert O. testified that he was forced to work for the Italian Corps of Engineers as otherwise his company would have been requisitioned. In the end, the defendant's company built three blockhouses and a few roads for the Italian army. However, while it is plausible that the Italians might have forced him to collaborate, that did not explain why Italian military engineers were often seen dining at his house. In fact, he did not refute the accusation, explaining that "speaking fluently Italian and working for them [the engineer

⁸⁷⁰ ADAM 318 W 35, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Blaise A., translation n°544 of the 16 September 1940 letter sent to the CIAF.

officers], I had no reason to be in bad terms."⁸⁷¹ Thus, business relations could also easily lead to more intimate relations between occupiers and at least one segment of the occupied population.

Indeed, local Italian commanders who needed companies or local people to help their units settle or ameliorate their daily life in France opted for Italian civilians when they could, people with whom they could relate more easily, if just because of language, culture and way of eating. It is not hard to imagine that strong friendships might emerge from first hesitant contacts. Examining the dossiers of the *Comité d'Épuration* for the Alpes-Maritimes, one finds numerous examples of Italian soldiers and civilians socializing in a variety of ways: inviting the soldiers to dinner or to have a drink, chatting, singing and socializing in bars and shops. Soldiers were asked about news from Italy, of particular interest to Italian immigrants coming from the same region, or even from the same city as the troops. In one case, one Italian emigrant discovered that his nephew was stationed near his house.⁸⁷² At a time when crossing the Italian-French border was very problematic for civilians, unless one worked for the CIAF, soldiers returning to Italy on leave were asked to carry packages and letters to the emigrants' relatives and to inquire about their whereabouts.⁸⁷³

Sometimes, the relations between soldiers and civilians were akin to a symbiotic relationship, especially when it came to health care. An Italian from Cannes, having moved to the alpine village of Isola for health reasons, immediately befriended the medical officer of

⁸⁷¹ ADAM 318 W 54, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Albert O. and Ida R. Albert O. got sentenced to twenty years, not so much for his ties with the Italian engineers, but for having denounced two civilians to the CIAF.

⁸⁷² ADAM 318 W 32, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Antoine C.

⁸⁷³ ADAM 318 W 20, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Marie. M., Arthur G., and others, Procès-verbal n°2872/18 Richard P., 28 September 1944.

the local Italian garrison who kindly visited him and his mother-in-law at home.⁸⁷⁴ An Italian villager in Castellon developed a steady friendship with the local commander, as his daughter worked as a nurse for the local unit.⁸⁷⁵ In another mutually beneficial relationship, one Italian woman washed soldiers' clothes in return for food to supplement the meager rations of her children.⁸⁷⁶

In conclusion, the impact of the Italian occupation can be gauged by examining the evolution of the relations between the soldiers of the Fourth Army and the local population. It is difficult to generalize as the occupation encompassed a wide variety of experiences, but certainly a pattern seems discernible. Many of the clashes happened in the first two months of the occupation, when the Italians were uneasy in their role as "protectors" of a population who had no love for them. Continuous warnings by Italian military leaders to avoid any kind of fraternization with the French population and not to trust the French security forces, who could easily turn their weapons against the occupation force in the case of an Allied landing, contributed to the paranoia and fears of many *fanti*. Moreover, local inhabitants were annoyed by the boorish attitude and lack of discipline of the Italian soldiers, combined with a self-conscious arrogance which was worsened by a "couldn't-care-less" attitude regarding the local population and public goods.

The dominant sense of insecurity in the Fourth Army was heightened by the Italian soldiers' low morale. The absence of any fighting spirit was probably a direct consequence the appalling Italian strategy in the whole war and its subsequent string of military defeats.

⁸⁷⁴ ADAM 318 W 124, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Enrico A.

⁸⁷⁵ ADAM 318 W 62, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Gino and Hélène C.

⁸⁷⁶ ADAM 318 W 25, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Charles S.

Italian army cadres knew too well that the invasion of France was not the fruit of an Italian brilliant military campaign, but more a gift from their senior German partner. The Italian army had been severely embarrassed in its confrontation with the French army in June 1940, and most soldiers felt that the French population's contempt stemmed not only from the *coup de poignard dans le dos*, but also from the Italian military debacle. Thus, the arrogance of the Fourth Army soldiers was not the conceited attitude of occupying troops acting as masters by the right of their military might, but arose from a sense of insecurity resulting from a war which had gone wrong from the beginning.

By the end of the year, Italian units had become more comfortable in their role and had settled in the region. The French population had realized that the Italians were more interested in buttressing the coastline defense than annexing the occupied departments, and as a result, the conflict decreased. Moreover, the tension within the Italian army had eased considerably, even to the point of slackness. Both the mild weather and gorgeous landscape encouraged the soldiers to relax, as well as their distance from the battlefield. Italian soldiers were pleasantly surprised to find in the Côte d'Azur a region very similar both in landscape and in culture to their native land. This familiarity was however a mixed blessing. While sightseeing in southeastern France was certainly a welcome respite, especially for the units from the Eastern Front or from the Balkans, it also heightened the melancholy of soldiers who had not seen their families for months and, in some cases, for years. Most of the Italian soldiers, in fact, were not interested in politics and after years spent in the more difficult theaters of war, many simply wanted to enjoy the French Riviera and ultimately to go home.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the commanders of the Fourth Army had a hard time enforcing discipline in southeastern France. Repeatedly, reports acknowledged the sense of impotence on the part of local commanders who had to fight against the boredom and laxity of the Italian army, even before they could think of countermeasures against an Allied landing. Demoralized soldiers, badly trained, poorly equipped, underfed, mentally and physically exhausted by a long war which had been nothing else than a continuous disappointment for Italy, were in no shape to enforce a harsh policy. On the contrary, Italian soldiers adapted very quickly to the situation they found in southeastern France, and in doing so, encouraged the emergence of an illegal economy in the Côte d'Azur. The volume of illicit trade increased dramatically with the arrival of the Italian army. The Italians bartered, sold and traded army goods for food in great quantities. Of course, this deregulated trade and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of underfed young men, poorly supplied by the Italian army services, pushed the French food distribution system to the edge of collapse.

The negative economic impact of the Italian occupation however must be placed in the wider context of the wartime years. It is undeniable that black marketeering, house break-ins and thefts significantly increased with the presence of an army in which discipline was slack and food services inadequate, contributing to the locals' distrust of the occupying forces. However, black marketeering and thefts did not start with the arrival of the Italians, but was a common feature of occupied France since 1940. Living in France during the Second World War, while not as harrowing as an experience as that of Eastern Europe, was a constant struggle to cope with heavy rationing, the impact of the harsh German occupation in the north, and Vichy's strict regulations. The surge in black market activity in southern

France, the poorest part of the occupied country, was only partially due to the Italian military occupation. Other factors such as the progressive deterioration of Vichy's food distribution, the increasing rapaciousness of German plundering, and the droughts in the summer of 1941 and 1942 played a key role. In fact, Italian soldiers were quick to understand that good deals could be struck with local inhabitants, many of whom could communicate in Italian. The Italians never carried out a scorched earth policy, but always tried to barter, sell or buy goods from local food producers, shopowners or even private individuals. Of course, any business relation with the Italian army was strictly prohibited both by Vichy and by Italian army's laws, but the sheer number of trials for black-marketeering by the Italian military tribunal, which probably represented only the tip of an iceberg of illicit trade, shows that many were undaunted by the eventual punishment either because of greed or desperation.

Black market activities were a successful way for the Italian soldiers to become integrated in the local society, but they were not the only one. Italian soldiers befriended an important segment of the local population, the Italians, owing to their common cultural roots, language, as well as the Regio Esercito's lack of discipline. Relations with the populace ranged from sentimental affairs to business partnerships, but it seems the Italian soldiers and officers were very eager to link up with the locals, notwithstanding the repeated warning of their commanders. Italian civilians seem to have been as keen to link up with the troops. The Italians' carefree attitude certainly won the hearts and souls of part of the population. This situation was very different from the other Italian occupations in the Mediterranean area. In the Balkans, one historian noted that "contacts were purely occasional' owing to cultural differences. An Italian *fante* had a hard time communicating with a Slovene or a Croat who

had few cultural ties to Italy and who did not speak a word of Italian, while, conversely, the Italians themselves did not speak any Slovenian or Croatian.⁸⁷⁷ Moreover, the harsher Italian policy in the Balkans stemmed from the supposedly racial superiority of the Italian *Stirpe* over the Slavs, an idea mirroring the Nazi contempt for the Slavic *Untermenschen* even if it never attained the latter's intensity. It was arguably far more difficult for Fascist propaganda to picture the occupation of France as a mission to civilize a primitive culture, given the fact that France was a richer country than Italy and millions of Italian emigrants had come to work in the previous centuries. Therefore, the laxity of discipline within the Italian army, along with the cultural similarities between the Italians and the local population, created ideal conditions for widespread informal relationships, and explained the relatively mild impact of the Italian occupation and the integration of the Italian soldiers into the French social fabric. Moreover, the paucity of the resources allocated to the French front demonstrated that the invasion of France was hardly a priority for the Italian General Staff. Understandably, in light of these structural factors, the Fourth Army command had no choice but to implement an occupation policy of moderation which would not aggravate the already delicate balance in southeastern France.

⁸⁷⁷ Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire*, p.164.

Chapter 8

The Italian occupation policy in France: the repressive forbearance of the Italian army

The relatively benign impact of the Italian occupation was due to more than just the pervasive laxity within the Fourth Army ranks, the cultural proximity between the army and the local populace or the strategic choices of the Italian General Staff. The temperance of the Italian army was part of a planned strategy to avoid escalating the confrontation with the local population. A key priority of the Italian army was to secure the coastline and shore up its fortification against an impending Allied invasion. Therefore, they wanted to avoid stirring up the local population with any irredentist discussion of an annexation of Provence to Italy. This policy, however, did not suit either the CIAF and the local irredentists, both of whom erroneously thought the occupation would immediately bring about the colonization of the region along the model of Menton.

Yet, at the same time the Army still needed to guarantee the security of its troops, and so the Army requested the aid of other security agencies to help them root out any possible Resistance threat. Unfortunately, any historian studying the Italian security agencies is often confronted with the scarcity of documents, many of which had been destroyed in the first days after the September 1943 Armistice. Indeed, details on security agencies in the French occupation zone are fragmentary and not easily verifiable. Upon precipitously leaving the French territory on 8 September 1943, Italian security officials burned confidential

documents such as arrest reports and interrogation summaries.⁸⁷⁸ The official reason was the fear that the Gestapo and the Abwehr, the German military intelligence service, could use the security archives to track down Jews and other dissidents. However, it is plausible that the Italians also wanted to destroy any proof of their own misdeeds as the tide of war was turning. After all, having arrested resisters and anti-Axis partisans would have negatively affected any security agent investigated by purging committees in the aftermath of the conflict.

At the head of the civilian security forces in the Italian occupation zone was Rosario Barranco, the controversial head of the Italian Political Police in the Alpes-Maritimes.⁸⁷⁹ Barranco's early career was that of a brilliant civil servant who served the Fascist regime, but without really compromising himself or dabbling in politics. All seventeen service citations he received in the interwar years were obtained by excelling in thwarting non-political crimes, such as breaking a ring of cattle rustlers in Sicily in 1925-1926. His excellent record, along with his knowledge of the French language, eventually brought him to Nice in March 1939 as police attaché to the Italian consulate there. After the Armistice, Barranco came back to Nice on 24 July 1940 to work as part of the local CIAF armistice commission. He was assisted in his task by a staff of functionaries, among them Luigi Civilotti, the former Fascio secretary in Cannes, and Osvaldo Angrisani, who was killed by resisters on the night of the

⁸⁷⁸ For instance, the destruction of the papers of the Italian counterespionage operations in Nice is confirmed by one member of the SIM quartered in Nice. The CCRR Pietro Speranza, ACS, Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale P.S., Divisione personale P.S. (1890-1966), Versamento 1973, Dossier Rosario Barranco, Dichiarazione Speranza, 20 June 1945.

⁸⁷⁹ A voluminous box on Rosario Barranco is available in ACS, Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale P.S., Divisione personale P.S. (1890-1966), Versamento 1973, dossier Rosario Barranco.

14-15 April 1943.⁸⁸⁰ While the Political Police office in Nice was certainly instrumental, in collaboration with the Vichy police, in the arrests of several *fuoriusciti* living in the Côte d'Azur, such as the future head of the Italian Communist Party, Luigi Longo (known in France by the pseudonym, Luigi Gallo), it appears that Barranco acted more out of a sense of duty than a staunch belief in Fascism.⁸⁸¹ It is revealing that Barranco did not hesitate to arrest Sarni, the head of the Monaco Fascio, as well as a few other local Fascist dignitaries for minor offences.

In addition to Barranco's office, other security agencies moved into the former Free Zone in the wake of the Italian occupation starting in November 1942. The SIM (*Servizio Informazioni Militari*, the Italian military intelligence service), sent two agents to Nice Carabinieri Major Valente, alias Salerno, and Carabinieri Captain Tisani, alias Pescara, Mario di Resta or Aresta both from the XV CA Carabinieri unit.⁸⁸² Moreover, the army had its own counterintelligence agency, the *Ufficio Informazioni (Ufficio "I,")* operating at a

⁸⁸⁰ J. Girard "Contribution à l'étude de l'épuration dans les Alpes-Maritimes," *Recherches régionales, Alpes-Maritimes et Contrées limitrophes*, 16^{ème} Année, 59 (July-September 1976): p.4-6; Mauro Canali, *Le Spie del Regime*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004, pp.473-475.

⁸⁸¹ An undated memorandum written by Barranco called "Promemoria per l'ecc. il Capo della Polizia" deliberately embellished his deeds by boasting about the arrest of Gallo. Actually, Gallo was in the Vernet prison camp as of 1939 as one of the leaders of the International Brigades who had fought in the Spanish Civil War. The memorandum is not reliable, as Barranco wrote it at the end of 1943 to ingratiate himself with the Germans, who were demanding his removal from the Italian police because of his pro-Jewish policy in the first half of 1943. For the full explanation, see ACS, Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale P.S., Divisione personale P.S. (1890-1966), Versamento 1973, dossier Rosario Barranco, "Copia della dichiarazione resa dal dott. Eugenio Appollonio, già capo della segreteria di S.E. Tamburini, capo della Polizia, Roma, 30 May 1946.

⁸⁸² ACS, Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale P.S., Divisione personale P.S. (1890-1966), Versamento 1973, dossier Rosario Barranco, Lettera prot. n°224/50649 from the head of the Italian police "Dr. Rosario Barranco, Commissario di P.S. ed altri presunti criminali di guerra, richiesti dalla Francia," 8 March 1947. In truth, it seems that a SIM agent was already brought to Nice at the beginning of 1942 under the cover of a welfare program to supervise an information-gathering network. See ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Memorandum del Delegato CIAF Quinto Mazzolini al Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Direzione Affari Generali, Rome, 20 March 1943, Section II, "Sulla Situazione Generale."

divisional level since the inception of the occupation.⁸⁸³ The first task of the *Ufficio "I"* was to keep an eye on Fourth Army troops, watching for any sign of defeatism.⁸⁸⁴ Every *Ufficio Informazioni* received a grant from the division to build up a network of informers, divided into two categories: permanent agents (*agenti fissi*) and occasional agents (*agenti occasionali*), all handpicked from among pro-Italian activists in the local population.⁸⁸⁵ Their informers' task was to provide information on anti-Italian organizations, either Resistance- or Vichy-based, and to update the army on the public opinion's views of the occupation army. Often, intelligence officers did not have to search far, as unscrupulous local individuals showed up at the Italian garrisons eager to be recruited, either moved by Fascist ideals or for more base reasons such as petty quarrels and greed. Informers were rewarded with not only money, but also cigarettes and food such as rice and meat.⁸⁸⁶

A typical example of an informers' ring tied to a local *Ufficio "I"* was the one in Antibes started in December 1942. Three Italians, a couple owning a bar and a former Italian army veteran living in France, and two French, a civilian and a former French captain, spontaneously showed up, volunteering to become informants.⁸⁸⁷ The *Ufficio "I"*

⁸⁸³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 369, IT 4807, Rapporto n°6/04 di prot. "Notizie "I" nel territorio occupato," Comando XXII CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 13 November 1942. The *Ufficio "I"* was sometimes named Servizio "I" or Sezione "I."

⁸⁸⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°2220 "I" di prot. "Servizio informazioni sulla tradotta Mentone - Genova," Comando Quarta Armata, Ufficio Informazioni, 16 February 1943.

⁸⁸⁵ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°792/Inf. di prot. "Fondi per azioni informativa" Comando I CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 1 February 1943.

⁸⁸⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 268, IT 3102, Rapporto n°3455/Inf. di prot. "Fondi per azione informativa," Comando I CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 28 April 1943. The document contains receipt forms for the rewards which were completed by the *Ufficio "I"* officer.

⁸⁸⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°616 di prot. Segr. - All.4, "Attività informativa," Comando Reggimento Genova Cavalleria, 15 December 1942.

immediately asked the Nice CIAF delegation for any background information on the prospective agents. A few weeks later, the CIAF delegation informed the Ufficio "I" that the Italian army veteran was in fact extremely unreliable. Information he had provided the CIAF before November 1942 turned out to have been distorted by his personal biases. As well, the French captain had apparently lied about his participation on the Eastern Front in the ranks of the Wehrmacht.⁸⁸⁸ In spite of the dubious reliability of the informers, the Italian army still made use of their information as they swept over Antibes on 4 January 1943 and arrested twenty persons. Soldiers were also encouraged to denounce any suspicious behavior on the part of local individuals, as Italian soldiers who denounced French civilians were automatically granted fifteen days of leave.⁸⁸⁹ Yet, Italian officers soon discovered that this policy backfired as unsurprisingly some soldiers denounced French citizens as having defamed the Fascist regime or the Italian army only because of the prospect of special leaves."⁸⁹⁰

In fact, as the three Italian security agencies built their separate spy networks among the local population, this intricate web of espionage at times caused confusion within the Italian intelligence network. First, the three organizations were not always eager to share

⁸⁸⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°1082/Inf. "Richiesta Informazioni," Comando Divisione Legnano, Sezione Informazioni, 3 December 1942 and the CIAF reply Rapporto n°2550R "Richiesta informazioni: V. Alfredo - C. Henry," Delegazione CIAF a Nizza, 28 December 1942. See also ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°5516/Op. "Informazioni," Comando 68° Reggimento Fanteria Legnano, 5 December 1942. According to French reports, the ring of informers was much wider. ADAM 616 W 242 Fichier 25 Arrêstations civils, Rapport "Individus arrêtés et internés à la caserne Dugommier à Antibes," Commissariat de Police de Antibes, 5 January 1943.

⁸⁸⁹ ADAM 104 W 4, Unsigned Note "Au sujet des arrestations opérées par les autorités italiennes," 6 April 1943.

⁸⁹⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°3705 "I" di prot. "Arresti operai in seguito denuncia di militari delle nostre truppe d'occupazione," Comando Quarta Armata, Ufficio Informazioni, 18 March 1943.

their data. In addition, it was not rare for informants already on the payroll of one agency to be contacted by recruiters of other agencies who ignored the fact that the former individual was already working for the Italian cause.⁸⁹¹ The issue of overlapping tasks and conflicting networks was in part clarified by the December 1942 tour in the occupation zone of the head of SIM, General Cesare Amè, and his talks with General Vercellino. It was agreed that police operations would be headed by both the Political Police and SIM, as confirmed by instructions give to various units before a January roundup of alleged anti-Italians.⁸⁹² Fourth Army units were asked to provide logistical support by way of escorts for the arrested persons and trucks, while CIAF personnel were given the thankless task of warding off the expected complaints from French authorities.⁸⁹³ However, relationships between the different agencies still remained strained, even after the clarifications. In particular, Barranco and Vercellino could not stand each other.⁸⁹⁴ And it appears that the Army frequently had the last say in decisions.

Notwithstanding these differences, all the Italian organizations operating in the newly occupied territory ultimately coalesced in the face of the ongoing menace of an internal French insurrection. To prevent this dreaded scenario, Italian authorities quickly enacted a strategy of massive arrests. However, the implementation of this policy waxed and waned over time, and the Italian army was always quick to tone down its implementation after a

⁸⁹¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 268, IT 3102, Rapporto n°3510/Inf. di prot. "Assunzione agenti," Comando I CA, 30 April 1943.

⁸⁹² Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.394-395.

⁸⁹³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°103/Inf. di prot. "Territorio francese metropolitano. Arresto di sudditi di stati nemici ed internamento di civili," Comando I CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 9 January 1943.

⁸⁹⁴ ACS, Ministero Interno, Direzione Generale P.S., Divisione personale P.S. (1890-1966), Versamento 1973, Dossier Rosario Barranco, "Promemoria per l'Ecc. il Capo della Polizia," undated.

scare. We have already seen that, from the beginning of the occupation of the Free Zone, the Italian army was willing to arrest individuals, most of it resulting from denunciations made by Italian informers. Due to the protest of French authorities, this strategy was called off on 20 November 1942 by Vercellino, only to be reinstated by the Duce five days later. Following the late November crisis which ended with the seizure of Toulon and the subsequent disarming of the *Armée d'Armistice*, the Italian General Staff, fearing an uprising by the French population, gave permission to take hostages (*Prendere ostaggi*), from among either the local notables or anti-Italian activists. However, the order remained vague, as they did not specify what to do with the hostages, leaving the decision to the discretion of the local Army command.⁸⁹⁵ This order was soon succeeded on 12 January with another directive which stated that, in case of attacks, "[the local Italian units] should not detain hostages, but only arrest the individuals responsible for the offences."⁸⁹⁶

That is not to say that the Italian army halted its repressive campaign. The 12 January document itself insisted that even "those who are suspected of complicity" could be arrested. Moreover, a 19 January report from the Legnano Division showed that some units still kept lists of local dissidents who were to be taken hostage in case of attacks, even though their use was limited by the fact that the detention of hostages was to be carried out only "in case of

⁸⁹⁵ AUSSME, DS 1099, Direttiva n°3657 "I" di prot. "Sicurezza delle truppe di occupazione," Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 52, 4 December 1942. The number of hostages escalated depending on the severity of the attack, ranging from three for an attack that had no consequences for Italian property and soldiers to twenty for every Italian victim, double if the target was an officer.

⁸⁹⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°258/Inf. "Ostaggi," Comando I CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 12 January 1943.

urgent needs" (*estreme necessità*, underlined in original).⁸⁹⁷ On 28 January, a Fourth Army Command directive insisted on enforcing the "absolute protection by any means available of the physical and spiritual integrity of the Italian Armed Forces." Thus, Vercellino stated, if the perpetrators of the attacks on Italian troops could not be found, local commanders would have to resort to collective sanctions (*sanzioni collettive*), ranging from mild reprisals such as curfews and the temporary detention of suspects and witnesses to severe ones such as the deportation or internment of local French authorities. Yet, it is worth noting again the self-limitation of the Italian army. The more severe sanctions could be ordered only by the higher echelons of the Fourth Army, such as division commanders or the Fourth Army commander. Moreover, Vercellino himself warned, "collective sanctions are a delicate weapon (*arma delicata*), abuse of which is very dangerous." Thus, he appealed to the sensibility and the tact of local commanders to select a sanction commensurate with the gravity of the offence and the local mood of the population. More pragmatically, the commanders were to gauge the "effectiveness that the sanctions will have [to better local conditions]."⁸⁹⁸ This rather down-to-earth approach of the Italian army's upper echelons underscored the uncertainty of the Italian policy in the first months of the occupation, balancing a hardline stance intended to quash any sign of rebellious behavior against a softer policy favoring a *modus vivendi* with the population. On one hand, the Italians feared that French Resistance leaders, maybe united with officers of the *Armée d'Armistice*, would exploit the transitional phase of the Italian

⁸⁹⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 269, IT 3105, Rapporto n°430/Inf. di prot. "Sicurezza delle truppe d'occupazione," Comando Divisione Legnano, Sezione Informazioni, 19 January 1943.

⁸⁹⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°452/P.1 di prot. "Direttive per la salvaguardia delle FF.AA. italiane e per la tutela del rispetto al prestigio italiano," Comando Quarta Armata, Ufficio Politico, 28 January 1943.

deployment to launch an insurrection against the invading army. Therefore, they needed to show the populace that they were ready to crush any rebellion. On the other hand, they wanted to avoid indiscriminate retaliation which would transform the scorn of the local population into a tangible Resistance movement.

Collective sanctions were, in fact, seldom implemented in the Italian occupation period. However, starting in December 1942, arrests rapidly escalated, changing from a pattern of individual arrests to raids leading to multiple arrests and finally, as of May 1943, to massive round-ups. Periodically, Italian troops, guided by local informers and headed by SIM and Italian police functionaries, stormed apartments and houses arresting individuals accused of being allegedly part of anti-Axis organizations or of having anti-Italian sentiments. The round-ups followed several criteria, such as, for instance, the nationality of the arrested. On 26 December 1942, a wave of arrests hit the Polish community in Nice. Apparently, the arrests were triggered by an incident involving a young Pole who had fired a shot at an Italian soldier, although another rumor suggested that a Pole had been using a radio transmitter to communicate with Allied secret services. Whatever the true reasons, more than twenty Poles, mostly journalists, officers of the former Polish army or civil servants of the defunct Polish state, were arrested.⁸⁹⁹ On 17 January 1943, the Italians went so far as to arrest the Polish consul in Monaco.⁹⁰⁰ Other citizens from Allied states were also targeted, such as British and Americans, as the Italians feared that every person was potentially a spy. Most of

⁸⁹⁹ ADAM 166 W 9, Rapport n°9512 "Incident du 26 Décembre, rue Châteauneuf," Inspecteur Wasilieff, 31 December 1942; Rapport B.S.E. 291 E, Inspecteur Carrere, 12 January 1943. The Box 166 W 9 contains an exhaustive list, compiled by French postwar authorities, of persons arrested in the Italian occupation period in the Alpes-Maritimes, divided by nationality, as well as one complete list in alphabetical order.

⁹⁰⁰ ADAM 166 W 9, Rapport n°185 "Arrestation du Consul de Pologne à Monaco par les Autorités Militaires Italiennes," Commissariat de Beausoileil, 19 January 1943.

the British citizens were apprehended in three distinct sweeps; on 28 December 1942 in Monaco, in Nice on 9 January and in Cannes on 26 January.⁹⁰¹ Arguably, though, the majority of arrested people were either Italians (roughly one hundred people in total) or French nationals (roughly seven hundred). Both communities suffered from waves and individual arrests throughout the Italian occupation. Nevertheless, the French bore the brunt of the repression disproportionately. The French numbered four times as many as the Italians in the general population, yet the numbers arrested were seven times that of Italians arrested.

Some arrests were brutally done. Suspects were normally picked up in the evening or in the middle of the night. They were seldom given time to dress, as the Italians reassured them and their family that they were not being arrested and would come back in, at most, half an hour. The suspects were then driven to Villa Lynwood, a house requisitioned in Nice from an English citizen, where members of the SIM and *Polizia Politica* interrogated their prisoners, resorting in some cases to physical and psychological torture.⁹⁰² One common technique described by Resisters in their memoirs was the *Giro* (Circle), a torture consisting of walking the detainee in chains for hours or even allegedly for days in a corridor until the unfortunate dropped exhausted or agreed to confess his misdeeds.⁹⁰³ In another example of physical and psychological abuse, one prisoner, accused by an Italian irredentist of having denounced him to the French authorities in June 1940, later complained of having been beaten by members of the Italian Political Police and by his neighbor. The Italians allegedly

⁹⁰¹ ADAM 166 W 9, Rapport n°2651 "Arrestations effectuées en Principauté de Monaco et dans mon secteur par les Autorités Militaires Italiennes," Commissariat de Beausoleil, 28 December 1942. In the 26 January sweep, ten Belgians were also arrested.

⁹⁰² ADAM 616 W 233, Rapport n°7008 "Personnalités fascistes, Commandant Valente, dit Salerno et Capitaine Tisani," 27 June 1945.

⁹⁰³ Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.231-232.

forced him to drink castor oil, and in the face of his refusal, beat him, causing him to faint. The suspect, however, was lucky. He was released shortly thereafter, not without having been first severely rebuked and warned to leave the Italian irredentist alone.⁹⁰⁴ Those who were deemed dangerous to Italian security were shipped to the various internment camps administered by the Regio Esercito.

The Italians used a variety of camps to hold their prisoners, depending on the reason for their arrests. Those who were only suspected of being part of Resistance groups or having anti-Italian feelings, but had not committed any actual offence against the Italian army, were transferred to the internment camp in the village of Sospel, a village north of Menton, situated near the border between the 1940 June occupied zone and the former Free Zone.⁹⁰⁵ At the end of May 1943, these prisoners were transferred to a new camp in Embrun (Basses-Alpes), a former French penal colony.⁹⁰⁶ In response to the sheer number of arrests following the spring 1943 escalation of violence in the departments occupied by the Italians, the Italian army created an internment camp in Modane (Savoy), this one reserved for Communist and Gaullist militants.⁹⁰⁷ Living conditions in all the camps were harsh. A detainee complained to

⁹⁰⁴ ADAM 318 W 31, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Guillaume P., Procès-verbal n°2176, déclaration de Mr. Vaizman, 2 December 1942.

⁹⁰⁵ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°1065 "I" di prot. "Repressione reati in danno delle truppe di occupazione," Comando Quarta Armata, Ufficio Informazioni, 30 January 1943; Rapporto n°1173/Inf. di prot. "Custodia di arrestati nel campo di Sospello," Comando I CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 13 February 1943. The orders were reiterated as, apparently, some prisoners with specific charges were still erroneously sent to the Sospel camp. See AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°1155/inf. "Custodia di arrestati nel campo di Sospello," Comando Divisione Legnano, Sezione Informazioni, 17 February 1943.

⁹⁰⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°4471/Inf. di prot. "Trasferimento campo di concentramento," Comando I CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 30 May 1943.

⁹⁰⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°3925/Inf. di prot. "Internati civili," Comando I CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 14 May 1943. The camp also hosted some non-Communist resisters, such as one branch of the Alsace-Lorraine Resistance network

his daughter that the prisoners were given only two hundred grams of bread a day, with just a meager bowl of soup for lunch and dinner.⁹⁰⁸ That being said, families could visit their relatives in the camp, a privilege not many detainees in Axis prisons enjoyed. In particular, according to letters intercepted by Vichy's *Contrôle Postal*, it seems that British and American citizens were treated fairly well.⁹⁰⁹ It is unclear how sincere was the attitude of the Italian commanders. Some historians have argued that the far-seeing Italians were already "playing it safe" with Allied citizens, understanding that the tide of war had turned and it behooved them to ingratiate themselves with the possible victors. That said, it is important to note that the special commission consisting of the head of Fourth Army *Carabinieri*, members of the Ufficio "I," of SIM and of the Political Police, which met periodically to review the prisoners' dossiers, freed people of all nationalities for humanitarian reasons.⁹¹⁰ For instance, fourteen French prisoners were freed from the Modane camp in July 1943 for health problems, which had made further detention dangerous for them.⁹¹¹

Sospel, Embrun and Modane, however, were reserved only for suspects who had not been arrested on specific charges. Those who had committed an actual offence against the Regio Esercito were referred to the military court of the Fourth Army, which operated in the small border village of Breil-sur-Roya. Given its exceptional nature, its sentences were never publicized and even its existence was unknown to all but the French intelligence service and

captured in Cannes on 25 May 1943. See ADAM 616 W 182 Liste "État nominatif des personnes résident (sic) à Cannes internées à Modane pour le motif figurant en face de chaque nom."

⁹⁰⁸ ADAM 104 W 4, O.D. n°517 "Doléances sur le sort des internés au camp de Sospel," 13 February 1943.

⁹⁰⁹ ADAM 104 W 4, W.I. n°330 "Libération prochaine des internés civils de Sospel," 10 March 1943.

⁹¹⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°6623 "I" di prot. "Internati civili ed assegnati a residenza forzata," Comando Quarta Armata, 28 April 1943.

⁹¹¹ ADAM 104 W 5, Bulletin d'Information n°239, Police Régionale de Nice, 15 July 1943.

the detained persons.⁹¹² Those awaiting their trials were generally detained either in Breil, Menton or occasionally in Turin. As in the other detention centers, conditions for the prisoners were harsh, but seldom unbearable. Acts of kindness were not uncommon; one prisoner stated to the French police upon his release that the Italians had even transferred him to a hospital to cure a temporary illness.⁹¹³ Some prisoners underlined the sympathetic attitude of the Italian gaolers who sometimes alleviated the imprisonment by giving them extra food and cigarettes.⁹¹⁴ Sentences were rather mild, and acquittals and suspended sentences were not rare, especially for minor offences such as alleged insults to Italian troops.⁹¹⁵ In fact, the Italian tribunal clearly understood that some of the accusations had been made in bad faith by individuals slandering their neighbors. General Trabucchi, the head of the Fourth Army Staff, warned the Italian commanders of the danger represented by members of the *Azione Nizzarda* who used the Italian soldiers to settle petty quarrels with neighbors.⁹¹⁶ If anything, the people prosecuted were surprised that trials were held with equity and with a real defense provided by military attorneys, and most considered the verdicts considered to be fair.⁹¹⁷

However, these arrests were frowned upon by local French authorities, as they clearly undermined the sovereignty of the French state. Indeed, local army commanders preferred to avoid any friction with Vichy officials. They had left regular administration to local

⁹¹² A summarized history of the Tribunal from the French perspective can be found in ADAM 618 W 162, Rapport n°343 "A/S de M. Blanc René," 21 June 1956.

⁹¹³ ADAM 616 W 261, Note "Renseignements fournis par M. Jean," no date.

⁹¹⁴ Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.224-225.

⁹¹⁵ ADAM 616 W 182 has a lot of individual records of arrests in the Italian occupation period.

⁹¹⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3131, Rapporto n°1085 "I" di prot. "Rapporti dei militari con l'Azione Nizzarda," Comando Quarta Armata, Ufficio Informazioni, 29 January 1943.

⁹¹⁷ Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.226.

authorities, preferring to focus on strategic and security matters. However, sometimes, confrontation was unavoidable. The Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes, Marcel Ribière, repeatedly protested the campaign of wanton arrests carried out by the Italians.⁹¹⁸ To add insult to injury, the Italians did not hesitate to arrest French civil servants. Ange B., a French citizen who, as a Monaco police auxiliary, participated in the arrests of Italian irredentists in June 1940 was himself arrested on 28 December 1942.⁹¹⁹ On 24 January 1943, it was the turn of Jacques Galli, the *Chef de division à la Préfecture*, one of the closest collaborators of the Alpes-Maritimes prefect, who was taken into custody by Italian police officers, notwithstanding the prefect's formal protest.⁹²⁰ As was the case with the Menton mayor Durandy, the Italians hoped to catch "the big fish" by first getting the "small fry." As mentioned before, Prefect Ribière had been at loggerheads with local Italian authorities since 1940 because of his hardline anti-Italian attitude. The occupation of November 1942 only worsened the conflict, as increased Italian infringements on Vichy's authority considerably hardened Ribière's stance. The Italian army's protection of the Jews in the department, in flagrant opposition to Vichy's Jewish policy in the German zone of herding French and foreign Jews into concentration camps, only worsened the institutional conflict in the Alpes-Maritimes.⁹²¹ Moreover, the Italians criticized the *Préfecture* for its ineptitude in thwarting

⁹¹⁸ ADAM 616 W 242 Fichier 24 Arrêstations civils français, Lettre au Commandant XV^{ème} Corps d'Armée Italienne, 11 December 1942; Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, p.173.

⁹¹⁹ ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 24 Arrêstations civils français, Rapport n°96/4 de la Gendarmerie Nationale, Brigade de Beausoleil, 20 December 1942.

⁹²⁰ ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 18, Rapport n°193 du Commissaire Eveno, 26 January 1943. The folder does not contain Ribière's letter of protest, but does include the official, icy reply from Vercellino in response to the prefect's query about his subordinate. Lettre n°1174 S "Fonctionnaire de la Préfecture: M. Galli," 26 January 1943.

⁹²¹ See Chapter 8. "You have to consider them as individuals living in concentration camps:" The Italian Jewish Policy

the wave of sabotages and attacks on the Italians. It was inevitable then that, pressured by the Italians, a frustrated Ribière submitted his resignation in late April 1943.⁹²²

A few other Alpes-Maritimes notables also came under attack. The Mayor of Nice, Jean Médecin, had already been blacklisted by the CIAF in November 1941 for speeches filled with nationalistic undertones.⁹²³ In a scathing report, Mazzolini, the Nice CIAF delegate until May 1942, summed up the story of the Nice administration in the first half of the twentieth century, focusing on the Médecin family who had allegedly misappropriated municipal funds originally assigned to repair the city's infrastructure.⁹²⁴ As in the case of Ribière, tensions worsened with the military occupation of November 1942. Italian authorities were certainly not impressed by a May 1943 report from the Mayor of Nice which denounced the brutal and massive intrusion of the Italian police into the daily life of Nice's inhabitants. The confidential report, written after a massive round-up on 6 May 1943, and which was supposed to be seen only by Vichy authorities, was leaked to the Italians.⁹²⁵ Médecin had done nothing to hide his contempt for the Italian's repressive policy and he expressed his solidarity with the arrested persons by greeting them, one by one, at the railway

⁹²² Dossiers for Ribière and Chaigneau can be found in ADAM 86 W 7. In truth, one should also recognize that the Alpes-Maritimes prefect apparently enjoyed little popularity among the local French population, for he was accused of not being able to stop the black-marketeering. Thus, his departure may have been demanded by higher civil servants in Vichy. In fact, the new prefect, Jean Chaigneau, proved to be more flexible in his relations with Italian authorities and more successful in the administration of food distribution within the department.

⁹²³ AUSSME, D7 18, Notiziario quindicinale n°24, 20 November 1941, p.24.

⁹²⁴ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 42, Telespresso n°597 R. "Amministrazione di Nizza," 19 March 1942.

⁹²⁵ Significantly the document has been found in an Italian archive, ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Mairie de Nice, Cabinet du Maire, Rapport établi le 15 Mai 1943.

station before their departure for the Embrun internment camp.⁹²⁶ It is plausible then that the occupation authorities pressured the mayor to quit. The *Nizzardo* stepped up its campaign against the Nice municipal administration.⁹²⁷ On 27 July 1943, Jean Médecin stepped down and Nice remained without a mayor until its liberation in August 1944.⁹²⁸

Yet, the Italians were not always successful in ousting hostile notables. For instance, Monseigneur Rémond, the nationalist Bishop of Nice, kept his position until the end of the war, to the dismay of local irredentists, who saw the unwillingness of Italian authorities to arrest him as a worrying sign of "weakness."⁹²⁹ In fact, rumors abounded that the cellar of his residence was stacked with weapons.⁹³⁰ It has to be noted that the new consul in Nice, Calisse, contrary to his predecessors, held the bishop in good esteem.⁹³¹ However, more probably, the Italian Fourth Army command did not dare detain the bishop for fear of incurring the Vatican's ire and because of the likely backlash it would spark in an army whose rank-and-file were mostly of Catholic faith. Thus, the Italians bothered only minor clerical figures, such as a Nice abbot who had allegedly railed against the Italian occupation during a marriage celebration.⁹³²

⁹²⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Notiziario n°30, Comando I CA, Ufficio "I," 6 June 1943.

⁹²⁷ The newspaper's issue could not be found by the author, but the attack was so virulent that even the Italian consulate in Nice complained the article was untimely. ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Telegramma n°20932 "Giornale il Nizzardo," Gino Augusto Spechel, 18 July 1943.

⁹²⁸ Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, p.178.

⁹²⁹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°2043/Inf. "Notiziario n°1," Comando I CA, Ufficio Informazioni, 18 March 1943.

⁹³⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°1047 di prot. sm/1 "Attività informativa," Comando EFTF, 8 February 1943.

⁹³¹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 59, Telespresso n°2326 R "Monsignor Rémond, vescovo di Nizza," 16 October 1942.

⁹³² ADAM 104 W 4, Rapport n°317 A.A. "s/s/ arrestations pratiquées à Cannes et région par les Autorités Italiennes," Intendance de Police de Nice, 10 February 1943.

On the other hand, if we are to believe a 1941 report from Consul Camerani, it appears that a fair share of the Côte d'Azur clergy was fiercely anti-Italian.⁹³³ In fact, the animosity towards the Italians was so intense that even Italian nuns had been allegedly ostracized by their French peers.⁹³⁴ This hostility towards the occupiers partially translated into organized opposition. The Resistance in the Côte d'Azur started in 1940 after the French defeat, but as everywhere else in France, its first steps were hesitant. The Resistance in the Alpes-Maritimes in the first months of the Vichy regime remained largely, in the words of the Alpes-Maritimes specialist, Jean-Louis Panicacci, "the deeds of a few individuals, ... their action often confined to debates, epistolary exchanges, listening to Radio-London."⁹³⁵ The shock of the defeat along with the widespread popularity of the Maréchal were probably key factors in explaining the slow start of the French Resistance. The situation did not improve in 1941-1942, notwithstanding the fact that Jean Moulin had gone underground at the beginning of 1941 following his sojourn in Nice. Initially, acts of resistance did not go beyond the occasional leaflets directed against Vichy and expressing fear of an Italian occupation, or school pupils' slurs directed against Pétain, which were probably more a result of youth rebelliousness than a true Resistance consciousness.⁹³⁶

If the French Resistance was reserved in its activities until the second half of 1942, the same could be said for Italian leftist expatriates. Southern France was known in the interwar years as a strong militant base for the *fuoriusciti*. In the Alpes-Maritimes alone, the

⁹³³ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 48, Rapporto n°1420 "Attegiamento del clero francese," 17 March 1941.

⁹³⁴ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 59, Rapporto n°654 R. "Religiosi italiani in case francesi," Consul Mazzolini, 22 March 1942.

⁹³⁵ Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, p.115.

⁹³⁶ Some examples of Gaullist leaflets can be found in ADAM 159 W 43. Some examples of youth rebelliousness, such as the scratching of Pétain's portrait, can be found in ADAM 616 W 306.

Unione Popolare Italiana (UPI), a movement created in 1937 from the merging of all Italian antifascist organizations, could boast more than 5,000 militants.⁹³⁷ However, the UPI was fatally weakened by internal conflict between the two major political factions, the Communists and the Socialists. That rift widened dramatically after the German-Soviet Pact in August 1939. Socialists, who strongly opposed the pact, left the UPI along with some Communists. This secession could not have happened at a worst moment: first, the Third Republic, and then the regime of Vichy cracked down on the Italian leftist network in southern France. As mentioned earlier, a few hundred *fuoriusciti* were put in internment camps or under house arrest and Vichy shrewdly traded Italian leftist leaders, such as Luigi Longo, for French citizens who had been jailed in Italy at the beginning of the hostilities.

If the Italian military occupation of the Côte d'Azur in November 1942 finally galvanized the local *fuoriusciti* and French Resistance, the local Resistance still needed a few months to become active. Jean Moulin succeeded in merging three of the most important Resistance groups (*Combat*, *Libération-Sud*, *Franc-Tireur*) into the MUR (*Mouvement Unis de la Résistance*). Its military branch, the *Armée Secrète*, was probably responsible for a wave of attacks meant to destabilize the Vichy regime. Several months before the Italian occupation, starting in the second half of 1942 and continuing in 1943, offices of collaborationist groups such as Jacques Doriot's *Parti Populaire Français* (PPF) and the *Parti Franciste*, and of Vichy organizations such as the *Légion Française des Combattants* (LFC), the *Service D'Ordre Légionnaire* (SOL) and the *Légion des Volontaires Français*

⁹³⁷ Jean-Louis Panicacci, "Les Communistes italiens dans les Alpes-Maritimes (1939-45)," *Annali della Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli*, XXIV, Milano, 1985, pp.155-180.

contre le bolchevisme (LVF) were bombed or set alight.⁹³⁸ Sometimes, the Resistance targeted the shops of known French collaborationists.⁹³⁹ Other businesses that were working for the Axis powers were also attacked: a movie theater in Nice that showed German propaganda movies was set on fire in October 1942.⁹⁴⁰ A newsstand owner was threatened with having his business burned if he kept on selling collaborationist and pro-German newspapers and magazines.⁹⁴¹ In May 1943, a bomb exploded in the *Préfecture* of the Alpes-Maritimes, although it caused only minimal damage.⁹⁴²

The *Action Secrète* strategy was concurrent to the campaign against the Italian occupation orchestrated by the Communist *fuoriusciti*, who were led by Emilio Sereni.⁹⁴³ Anti-Italian resistance fell into three categories: efforts to undermine of the Italian soldiers' morale; the sabotage of infrastructure essential to the Italian army, especially the railway network and the telephone lines; and lastly, as the occupation continued, direct attacks on Italian soldiers. The Resistance, particularly the *fuoriusciti*, wanted to weaken the Italian army from within by infiltrating its ranks with spies and *agents provocateurs*. To this end, they tried to approach lone soldiers either in cafés or in bistros to persuade them to desert, playing on their desire to return home. Italian officers complained that soldiers were even

⁹³⁸ ADAM 166 W 1, Rapport n°130/4 du Capitaine André sur des incidents à caractère anti-nationaux, 8 September 1942.

⁹³⁹ ADAM 166 W 1, Rapport n°124/4 du Capitaine André sur un incident à caractère communiste, 3 September 1942

⁹⁴⁰ ADAM 166 W 1, Rapport n°153/4 de l'Adjudant-Chef Tourre sur des attentats commis à Nice, 12 October 1942.

⁹⁴¹ ADAM 166 W 1, Rapport n°11.750/09 de l'Inspecteur Moschetti, 27 October 1942.

⁹⁴² ADAM 166 W 1, Rapport n°6.024/PS "Attentat par engin explosif à l'hôtel de la préfecture," Inspecteur de police Langlais, 5 May 1943.

⁹⁴³ Sereni became a leading figure of the PCI (*Partito Comunista Italiano*) in postwar Italy until his death in 1977. He was arrested in June 1943 by the Italian police, see note 184, Chapter 7. "The Italian occupation policy in France: the repressive forbearance of the Italian army."

invited by *fuoriusciti* to their homes for a glass of wine or to wash their clothes, where the conversation would turn to the news from other fronts.⁹⁴⁴ The Italian military authorities took this menace very seriously. General Olmi of the Legnano Division insisted that soldiers should be encouraged with the reward of extra leaves and money to report suspicious attitudes among civilians. Conversely, failure to do so could not only lead to a soldier's indictment, but also to collective sanctions against the soldier's unit.⁹⁴⁵ In light of this decision, it is not surprising that soldiers denounced Resistance recruiters to their commanders. In some cases, the soldier feigned interest in the offer, only to lure the recruiter to a meeting that ended in arrest and a hefty twenty-year sentence.⁹⁴⁶ Therefore, the *fuoriusciti* also pursued other more indirect and less risky ways to spread their propaganda. They published a newspaper, called *La Parola del Soldato (The Word of the Soldier)*, which was distributed by either dropping it furtively in front of Italian barracks during the night or simply leaving it on the sidewalk. The paper invited the Italian soldier to desert and join the ranks of the Resistance against the German army. By emphasizing the poor conditions of the average Italian rank-and-file, the paper not only endeavored to drive a wedge between the soldiers and their officers, but also between the Italians and the Germans. According to the newspaper, the Germans were sleeping in "cozy bunks" at first-class hotels that were heated

⁹⁴⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°3786/Inf. "Propaganda comunista presso i militari a Nizza," Comando I CA, 8 May 1943.

⁹⁴⁵ AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°1390/inf. di prot. "Contegno passivo di nostri militari di fronte alla subdola propaganda nemica," 25 February 1943.

⁹⁴⁶ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°3016 del processo, 26 May 1943.

by coal stoves while the Italians had to cope with beds made of "four wood boards on two rickety trestles" in shacks barely warmed by inadequate wood stoves.⁹⁴⁷

Of course, the views in the *Parola* were biased and tended to exaggerate the divide between the two armies. Yet, as mentioned before with regard to wages and living conditions, it is likely that this particular indictment held a kernel of truth. Besides, the newspaper's editors seems to be well-informed on the whereabouts of the Fourth Army, as an article mentioned that leaves to Sicily, Sardinia and to southern Italy more generally had been cancelled. It is difficult to gauge the extent of the anti-Axis presence in the ranks of the Italian army. However, it is probably enlightening that in August 1943 Italian commanders complained that the Italian Communists were infiltrating the ranks of the Fourth Army.⁹⁴⁸ Their worries were well-founded: in a trial of the Italian Communist organization in the Alpes-Maritimes in late August 1943, four of the thirty-four accused were soldiers from the Fourth Army.⁹⁴⁹ That a profound malaise permeated the army was clear when General Vercellino himself irately complained that soldiers were openly singing "rebellious songs" (*inni sovversivi*) in front of their officers.⁹⁵⁰ Of course, the *fuoriusciti* cleverly exploited the period of confusion following the ousting of the Duce in July 1943, but defeatist ideas apparently had seeped into the Italian army long before the fall of the Fascist regime.

⁹⁴⁷ *La Parola del Soldato*, n°7, 15 May 1943. The issue can be found in ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, or in AUSSME, M3 476, Divisione Legnano (occupazione Francia), Rapporto n°1860 di prot. "Manifestino propaganda," Comando III Battaglione, 68° Reggimento Fanteria Legnano, 1 July 1943.

⁹⁴⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°1146/Inf. di prot "Segnalazione," Comando 223° Divisione costiera, 1 August 1943.

⁹⁴⁹ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, no number, 22 August 1943.

⁹⁵⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 261, IT 3077, Rapporto n°13805/S.P. "Procedura d'eccezione," 14 August 1943.

In addition to fostering the seeds of defeatism within Italian ranks, the local resistance endeavored to discourage the local population from helping the occupation army. Thus, they also widened their attacks to include the shops and houses of notorious Italian irredentists. People who displayed openly their support for the Italian troops or who brazenly demonstrated a pro-Fascist attitude received death threats or got their shops bombed. On 8 February 1943, in Antibes, several makeshift bombs were found in the premises of shops or houses of Italian Fascist militants who had been previously singled out as informers for the Italian army in a tract distributed in mailboxes throughout the city.⁹⁵¹ However, reprisals for collaborating with the Italian occupation army could be even more ruthless. On 5 June 1943, two individuals entered a cobbler's shop in Nice and shot the owner, Giuseppe Moraglia, and his wife, Serafina. The two murderers, later arrested by French police officers while fleeing the crime scene, were two Italian *fuoriusciti*, former members of the Italian Communist Party who had decided to punish the Moraglia couple as they had been responsible for the arrest of anti-Fascists in Nice.⁹⁵²

Infiltrating army ranks and intimidating the irredentist minority in the Alpes-Maritimes were only the first steps of a strategy to weaken the Italian war effort. The local Resistance also resorted to more direct means to oppose the Italian military occupation. No attacks were carried out by the Resistance until the end of 1942, as they were gauging the

⁹⁵¹ ADAM 166 W 1, Rapport n°3050/PS "Attentat par explosif contre divers commerçants Italiens d'Antibes," 24 February 1943. Four Italian antifascists were arrested by Italian troops shortly thereafter. At least one of the informers had been responsible for arrests on 4 January 1943 in Antibes. See ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Bulletin Journalier, 9 February 1943.

⁹⁵² ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°7768/PS "Assassinat des époux Moraglia. Affaire contre B. Césaire et G. Philippe," 5 June 1943. Moraglia's informer status was also by the Italian Consul in Nice Speichel, ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, Rapporto mensile per il mese di giugno 1943, 26 June 1943. The two resisters were later prosecuted by the Italian military court in August 1943 as part of the trial of the Italian Communist cell in the Alpes-Maritimes.

size of the Italian army and its occupation policy.⁹⁵³ This wait-and-see strategy ended at the beginning of 1943. The wave of arrests awoke the local resisters from their torpor and forced them change their strategy. Their new strategy followed two directions. First, they targeted railway and telephone lines. Railway lines were crucial for moving troops and goods, and the local Resistance was aware that the line between Genova and Marseille, which ran parallel to the coastline, was key to feeding the Italian units deployed along the Mediterranean shore. Therefore, beginning in January 1943, they unleashed a series of attacks on the railway line: boulders were hurled on the tracks and explosive devices were planted, targeting tunnels and bridges especially.⁹⁵⁴ To stop the wave of sabotage, the Italian units, which were already short on men, requested the assistance of local authorities. French police officers, border guards and even members of the newborn French Milice were commandeered to patrol the railway lines.⁹⁵⁵ This measure did not, however, stop the wrecking of the railway lines, which continued unabated throughout the occupation, as did the regular sabotage of telephone lines.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵³ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 80, Faldone 1 Attività comunista, Rapporto n°14836 "Movimento Comunista in Francia," CIAF Ufficio I, 8 January 1943.

⁹⁵⁴ For an example of boulder, ADAM 166 W 1, Rapport n°9/4 de l'Adjudant Diana, sur un attentat commis sur la voie ferrée dans la nuit de 7 au 8 mars 1943 entre les gares d'Èze et Cap-D'Ail; for an example of the sabotage of bridge, Procès-verbal n°114 "Dégâts par engin explosif à un poteau télégraphique sur le pont de l'avenue Saint-Laurent et découverte à ce même endroit d'un engin explosif non éclaté," 17 January 1943.

⁹⁵⁵ ADAM 616 W 114, Lettre du Sous-Préfet de Grasse à Monsieur le Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, 8 March 1943.

⁹⁵⁶ ADAM 166 W 1 contains several reports of incidents involving the destruction of railway lines before September 1943. For examples of sabotage of telephone lines, see ADAM 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, 1942-1943, Rapport n°443/2 du Chef d'escadron Soymie, 3 March 1943. Several reports of sabotage can also be found in 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes. Telephone lines were also wrecked in the Basses-Alpes, ADAHP, 43 W 83, Rapport n°28/2 du gendarme Combe sur un acte de sabotage commis à Mirabeau, sur la ligne téléphonique, 29 April 1943.

At the same time, the local Resistance fighters decided to step up their struggle by taking direct aim at Italian soldiers. It is unclear if the first attacks attributed to the Resistance were truly the deeds of resisters or were the result of the deep sense of insecurity pervading the Italian army in France. For instance, on 4 January 1943 in Cagnes-sur-Mer, the exhaust roar of Italian military motorcycles was apparently mistaken as rifle shots.⁹⁵⁷ A few days later, one Italian sentry posted near railway tracks was shot in the leg, allegedly fired from a passing train. However, further investigation uncovered a somewhat confusing picture in which the evidence did not corroborate the soldier's account. In fact, the police and the population suspected the soldier had voluntarily mutilated himself in order to be sent home.⁹⁵⁸

If nothing else, these incidents demonstrated the edginess of the Italian soldiers. Yet, until February, direct strikes on Italian troops were rare and not very effective. A bomb hurled near Italian barracks in Nice detonated, without causing much damage.⁹⁵⁹ In fact, the same report mentioned that explosive devices that had been used by the Resistance so far were of poor quality and failed to explode most of the time. In his February report, the same

⁹⁵⁷ ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°58 du Commissariat de Cagnes-sur-Mer "a/s de ratés de moteurs, explosions et coups de fusil entendus le 4.1.43," 5 January 1943.

⁹⁵⁸ ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Procès-Verbal n°17 du 11 Janvier 1943 "Affaire tentative meurtre Maggio," 13 January 1943. Notwithstanding the flimsy evidence, the local Italian Commander decided to arrest the notables of the village of St-Laurent-du-Var the day after the incident. ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 24 Arrestations civils français, Lettre du maire de St-Laurent du Var, 12 January 1942. The mayor stressed that the officer was courteous but firm, warning the notables that they would be held responsible for other incidents in the area. In fact, they were released shortly thereafter.

⁹⁵⁹ ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°3351/PS "Attentat par explosif contre les baraquements situés dans l'enceinte de la gare en bordure de l'avenue Thiers," Préfecture Régionale de Nice, 4 March 1943.

Vercellino downplayed the resistance's action as "a few attacks ... with caused no severe consequences."⁹⁶⁰

By March 1943, local resisters had grown bolder. A CIAF office (Border Control and Surveillance Delegation) in Cros-de-Cagnes had its telephone lines cut and was the target of a bomb.⁹⁶¹ Four bombs were thrown into the courtyard of the Caserne Dugommier, former barracks of the French Army in Nice, now occupied by Italian units. Even though only one of the four bombs detonated and it caused only minimal damage, the French report noted that the devices had a more "destructive power" than the other ones previously used by the Resistance.⁹⁶² This impression was confirmed on 10 April 1943, when a powerful detonation shook the night in Cannes. The door of a garage loaned to members of the local CIAF office was blown in by a bomb hung on its doorknob, causing some damage to the vehicles inside.⁹⁶³

The situation escalated at the end of April 1943. The Axis front on North Africa was collapsing as Allied troops advanced into Tunisia, the last African territory still in the hand of the Axis powers. With repeated acts of sabotage, the local Resistance was hoping to contribute to the prospective Allied invasion of the French Mediterranean shores by weakening the already shaky Italian distribution system. The Italian Army General Staff understandably was becoming increasingly worried that the internal situation was

⁹⁶⁰ AUSSME, DS 1127, n°4427 op. Rapporto situazione mensile per il periodo 20 gennaio-20 febbraio 1943, Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 64.

⁹⁶¹ ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°3.472/PS, Préfecture Régionale de Nice, 7 March 1943.

⁹⁶² ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°3029 "Explosion de bombe dans la caserne Dugommier," Commissariat de Police d'Antibes, 13 March 1943.

⁹⁶³ ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Rapport n°25/4 "sur l'explosion d'un pétard à la porte d'entrée du garage Burlando à Cannes," Gendarmerie de Cannes, 11 April 1943.

radicalizing. North Africa, Italian military leaders feared, would be a stepping-stone for the possible invasion of the most exposed Italian territories in the Mediterranean area, the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. The Army General Staff warned local army commanders that there were serious risks "in the short term (*brevissima scadenza*) of enemy operation against our coastline."⁹⁶⁴ Thus, Italian military leaders feared a possible Allied invasion of France in spring 1943. At a local level, the *Superesercito's* stern warning trickled down to the units quartered in France. Army Corps commanders warned that the Anglo-American offensive strike in Tunisia might trigger "turmoil and hostile acts" (*fermenti e atti ostili*) in France.⁹⁶⁵ In other words, the Italian's greatest fear of being caught between the hammer of an Anglo-American landing and the anvil of a French insurrection, was taking shape.

Units deployed on the coastline were reminded by a dispatch from the Italian General Staff that they should continue to strictly enforce the 10 January regulation which had divided Italian-occupied France into two zones, the Combat Zone (also named Zone A) and the Rear Zone (Zone B).⁹⁶⁶ It also ordered that a strict curfew from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. be enforced in the Combat Zone starting from 27 April.⁹⁶⁷ The Fourth Army Command communicated the new regulation to the Prefectures of the coastline departments, the Alpes-

⁹⁶⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 268, IT 3102, Rapporto n°10248 di prot. SEGRETO "Situazione mediterranea," Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito, 29 March 1943.

⁹⁶⁵ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3115, Rapporto n°3188/Op. from the Comando Divisione Legnano " Presumibile attività nemica sul litorale mediterranea," 26 March 1943.

⁹⁶⁶ See Map 2.

⁹⁶⁷ AUSSME, DS 1186, n°3229/Inf. "Sbarramento della zona costiera mediterranea, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 67. Safe-conducts were given to doctors, priests, members of the French police, and a few other limited categories.

Maritimes and the Var, which in turn relayed the information to all the major newspapers, and posters to that effect were placarded in every city and town.

27 April 1943 would not be remembered in the story of the Italian occupation just as the beginning of the curfew. That evening, three officers of the local Italian garrison were gunned down while waiting for the trolley in the center of Nice. One of the officers, Lieutenant Junior Giorgio Tobino, died a few hours later from a severe hemorrhage, the first Italian soldier to die in France during the occupation.⁹⁶⁸ No suspect was found. The local Italian military commander immediately blamed the French police of "guilty negligence, if not of outright complicity." The commander warned that if the culprits were not found by 5 May, the Italian army would ask for the dismissal of both the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes, Ribière, and the head of the Nice police, Duraffour.⁹⁶⁹ In the meantime, a longer curfew than originally planned was imposed in Nice, from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m., and all the theaters, cinemas and public halls were closed until further notice. Finally, the city of Nice was required to pay a hefty fine of three million francs by 29 April at noon.⁹⁷⁰ It is evident that the Italian military authorities were determined to punish the population as a whole. It is worth noting that no punishment was implemented by the Italians, even though wild rumors were spreading even

⁹⁶⁸ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 71, Rapporto n°678 "Attentato a Nizza," Ufficiale collegament Ministero Affari Esteri presso la Quarta Armata, Conte Bonarelli, 2 May 1943; ADAM 166 W 11 Fichier Attentats contre les troupes italiennes, Rapport "Attentats contre trois officiers de l'armée d'operation," Commissaire central de la police de Nice, 27 April 1943.

⁹⁶⁹ The Prefect Ribière was fired shortly after the attack. Duraffour, on the other hand, while identified as "hostile to the Axis" in a February 1943 report, apparently kept his position as the head of the Nice police. In May 1943, the Italian authorities did not feel his removal was necessary. ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°1047 di prot. sm/1 "Attivita' informativa," Comando Divisione Celere EFTF, 8 February 1943 and 616 W 125, Lettre du Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes au Secrétaire Général de la Police, 24 May 1943.

⁹⁷⁰ ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 8 Zone côtière attentat 27 avril, Lettre du Commandant de la place maritime de Nice au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes "Attentat du 27 avril 1943," undated.

before the attack that the Italians would be handing over the occupation to the German army, or even worse, to local irredentists who would use it to pursue personal vendettas.⁹⁷¹ On the contrary, the funeral of the Italian officer was uneventful in its somber ceremony and no major incident erupted in the following days.⁹⁷² Local military authorities were probably keeping the irredentists at bay. At first then, the Italian army reacted surprisingly passively to the death of its first soldier of the occupation. In addition, the military took measures to reduce the troops' exposure. Italian commanders advised their officers to avoid settling in isolated apartments or villas where their security could not be assured.⁹⁷³ Soldiers going to the movies were required to return to their barracks before nightfall.⁹⁷⁴ Furthermore, officers who had to leave their barracks after curfew were instructed that they should always be armed and always with other soldiers.⁹⁷⁵

The Fourth Army command was not idle, however. By 5 May, they were planning a major operation against the Resistance in Nice. On 1 May, the Fourth Army Command had issued a note to the entire coastline Army Corps detailing an upcoming round-up in Nice of "Communist" elements. The operation was to be headed by the highest officer of the Fourth Army military police, the *Carabinieri*. The local Italian garrison would be supported by a whole division, the *EFTF*, a reserve unit quartered further inland, along with a few hundred

⁹⁷¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Notiziario n°18, I CA Comando, 27 April 1943.

⁹⁷² *L'Éclaireur du Sud-Est*, 30 April 1943.

⁹⁷³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°3499/Inf. di prot. "Misure protettive da eventuali azione terroristiche," Comando I CA, 29 April 1943.

⁹⁷⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°3502/Inf. di prot. "Orario spettacoli cinematografici per le truppe," Comando I CA " 29 April 1943.

⁹⁷⁵ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°3091 di prot. sm/1 "Misure di sicurezza," Comando EFTF, 28 April 1943.

Carabinieri from other units and even two regiments of the elite unit Legnano. Everything was prepared in minute detail: all the major routes leading to Nice were closed starting from 10 p.m. on the 6 May. The arrests of suspects began shortly thereafter. The suspects were herded into the Nice racetrack where military doctors checked if the prisoner's health would be compatible with detention. Those who passed the physical were sent to the Modane internment camp. The operation took a full day, with the Italian army's supply services ordered to prepare more than one thousand meals for all the prisoners and their guards.⁹⁷⁶

In spite of being the largest round-up to date, and the expectation that it would catch hundreds, the result was underwhelming. Vercellino's short telegram to *Superesercito* on 8 May 1943 flatly stated that only 225 individuals had been arrested.⁹⁷⁷ Communist *fuoriusciti* in the Alpes-Maritimes, who had been responsible of several bombing attacks, including the one at the Caserne Dugommier, were only arrested a few months later, between June and July 1943.⁹⁷⁸ In fact, according to a French police report, most of those arrested were not even Communists, let alone *fuoriusciti*. Various notables, officials working in the Nice municipality, lawyers, engineers and a few retired policemen and army officers were among the victims of the raid.⁹⁷⁹ Some of the arrested had no links whatsoever with the Resistance,

⁹⁷⁶ AUSSME, DS 1320, Rapporto n°6824/I di prot. "Epurazione della città di Nizza," Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 7; ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°1244/Op. di prot. "Epurazione della città di Nizza," Comando 223° Divisione Costiera, 6 May 1943; AUSSME, DS 1320, Rapporto n°4833/Op. di prot. "Operazione di polizia, Campo provvisorio di Le Cais," Comando Divisione Legnano, Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 4, 2 May 1943.

⁹⁷⁷ AUSSME, DS 1320, Telescritto cifrato n°7125/I. di prot., Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 9c, 8 May 1943.

⁹⁷⁸ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, no number, 22 August 1943.

⁹⁷⁹ ADAM 104 W 5, Rapport n°69/4 "sur des arrestations opérées dans la ville de Nice par les troupes italiennes d'opérations dans la nuit du 6 au 7 mai 1943," Gendarmerie Nationale, Séction de Nice, 9 May 1943.

but were only guilty of having quarreled with their neighbors.⁹⁸⁰ Indeed, the raid was flawed from the start because the Italians' intelligence was based on unreliable sources such as local irredentists. The local commander may in fact have been encouraged to use irredentist informants by an order from General Vercellino that directed the head of the Nice stronghold, the commander of the I CA division, to use the GAN to spread Italian propaganda.⁹⁸¹ Something went wrong, as, according to a French informant who had leaked confidential information garnered at a GAN reunion a few days after the raid, the Italian authorities were furious with local informants who used the army to win petty rivalries with neighbors. In the future, they declared informants would be held responsible for their denunciations and would be punished for perjury if the denunciation proved to be groundless.⁹⁸²

In light of the unreliable intelligence, a few prisoners were freed within days.⁹⁸³ The uneasiness in the Fourth Army high echelons over the faulty operation could explain the surprisingly lenient occupation policy of the Italian army in the following days. On 8 May, the Italian army relaxed its grip by reducing the curfew to 11 p.m. - 4 a.m. and theaters were again opened until 9 p.m. This decision would have been logical if the Italians had the feeling that the situation was calming down after the sweep of the Communist organizations. However, one day before the curfew was reduced, on 7 May, the Italian army was attacked

⁹⁸⁰ See for example ADAM 318 W, Dossier Joseph C., Procès-Verbal n°3042 "Déclarations du sieur Veroni Adolphe," 5 October 1944.

⁹⁸¹ AUSSME, DS 1218, Rapporto n°3962 di prot. Op. "Piazza Militare di Nizza," Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 13, 28 February 1943.

⁹⁸² ADAM 104 W 5, Note de renseignements, 28 May 1943. The reunion was held on 10 May.

⁹⁸³ ACS, Ministero degli Interni, Direzione Generale P.S., Serie H2, Busta n°201, Anno 1943, Dossier n°168 "Attentati contro truppe d'occupazione in Francia, 1943," Appunto n°500 - 13403, Ispettore Barranco, 1 June 1943. The report mentions that eighteen persons were freed after a few weeks.

again. At noon, two men on bicycles threw two bombs inside the Hotel Francia, which had been requisitioned by the occupation army.⁹⁸⁴ The two bombs intended to inflict maximum damage as they were aimed at the officer's mess at a time where it would have been normally filled to its capacity. As fate would have it, lunch had been postponed that day and thus no one was injured. The attack also demonstrated the military's vulnerability. The mess not only was on the ground floor, but it also had two windows, both of which opened on a street.⁹⁸⁵

The attack on the officers' mess was the first of a wave of strikes against the Italian army in May 1943. On 11 May, an Italian motorcycle patrol was ambushed in Trinité-Victor, a hilly suburb north of Nice. Four suffered minor injuries.⁹⁸⁶ The day after, a bomb was thrown into an Italian military gas depot.⁹⁸⁷ On 14 May, a bomb exploded on the windowsill of a school in Marseille which housed Italian units in transit. Seven soldiers were injured and one of them died a few days later.⁹⁸⁸ On 16 May, another bomb exploded in Cannes near the barracks of a Fascist milice unit, injuring one.⁹⁸⁹ After every incident, Italian local authorities enforced strict curfews and carried out round-ups of citizens, choosing their targets from

⁹⁸⁴ ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, Rapport n°148/2 "sur un incident à l'égard des troupes italiennes," 8 May 1943.

⁹⁸⁵ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 71, Rapporto n°7124/l. "Attentati contro le truppe d'operazione," Comando Quarta Armata, 9 May 1943.

⁹⁸⁶ ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, Rapport n°74/4 "sur les répercussions de l'attentat commis à Laghet contre les troupes d'opérations italiennes," Gendarmerie Nationale, séction de Nice, 13 May 1943. The Italians retaliated by arresting ten individuals living in Trinité-Victor, included the mayor of the town. Some of the arrested were released a few days later.

⁹⁸⁷ ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, Rapport n°6643/PS "Attentat commis à Nice," Intendance de Police de Nice, 12 May 1943.

⁹⁸⁸ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 71, Telegramma n°3147 R. "Attentato contro soldati italiani," Ambasciata italiana a Parigi, 14 May 1943.

⁹⁸⁹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 71, Telespresso n°129/2 "Attentato terroristico contro truppe occupazione a Cannes," Delegato CIAF a Cannes, 17 May 1943.

informers' lists and from among passersby, without much success in finding the real culprits. Many of those arrested were released very quickly.⁹⁹⁰

June 1943 was less eventful compared to the previous months. Little sabotage was recorded and there were no direct attacks on Italian soldiers, apart from an officer in Nice who was found unconscious in an alley, having been beaten. However, the Italian army did not publicize to the incident, allegedly because the cause of the attack was a dispute over a woman.⁹⁹¹ July was a different scenario. Bombs detonated in front of both French collaborationists and Italian irredentists' stores, or on the threshold of Vichy organizations such as the *Légion*.⁹⁹² Sabotage of railway tracks were frequent even near Italian outposts.⁹⁹³ In fact, the Italians were so exasperated by the recurrent destruction of their lines of communication that at least in one instance they held hostages, threatening to detain them indefinitely if the perpetrators were not found.⁹⁹⁴ However, the severity of this sabotage was nothing compared to the bombing attack on the *Da Vico* restaurant in Nice. On 20 July, a man entered the restaurant at lunchtime, which was packed with Italian soldiers, and threw a bomb. The explosion left five people on the ground, three of them in critical condition. One of the wounded, an Italian private, later died at the hospital. The other two who were severely

⁹⁹⁰ For the latest Cannes attack, ADAM 28 W 75, Rapport n°1316 "Attentat par explosifs dans la cour d'un immeuble occupé par des services italiens à Cannes," Renseignements Généraux de Cannes, 17 May 1943; ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, Rapport n°223/SAP "Recherches des auteurs de l'attentat par explosifs commis à Cannes dans la soirée du 16 mai 1943," 21 May 1943.

⁹⁹¹ ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, Rapport n°3751, Renseignements Généraux à Nice, 12 June 1943.

⁹⁹² Railway sabotage and bombing attacks on French collaborationists and Vichy organizations can be found in ADAM 166 W 1.

⁹⁹³ ADAM 616 W 134, Rapport n°64/4 "sur un attentat commis sur la voie ferrée," Gendarmerie Nationale, Séction de Cannes, 21 July 1943.

⁹⁹⁴ ADAM 104 W 5, Rapport n°3866 "des arrestations opérées à Cagnes-sur-Mer par les troupes d'opérations le 21 courant," Commissariat de Police Cagnes-sur-Mer, 22 July 1943.

injured were Nino Lamboglia, a university professor who had openly espoused irredentist ideas, and his secretary, each of whom had one leg amputated by the blast.⁹⁹⁵ The true target of the attack had been the head of SIM in Nice, Major Valenti, who was having lunch with his collaborators.⁹⁹⁶ The attack was publicly rebuked by French local authorities. The Prefect released a statement which described the bombing attack as "loathsome and cowardly."⁹⁹⁷ The *Contrôle Postal* revealed that even the local French population opposed the resisters, not out of sympathy for the Italian occupation army, but more out of fear of Italian reprisals. If nothing else, it certainly shows that French civilians were as weary of the war as Italian soldiers.⁹⁹⁸

In all these crises, one could not help noticing that local commanders, while responding to the threat with swift determination, seldom overreacted. The relative moderation of the Italian military occupation in France was reflected in the low numbers of casualties directly tied to the occupation. Of the roughly thousand individuals detained in Italian prisons in the ten months of the occupation, it seems that only two persons, a 56 year-old American citizen, and the President of Nice Chamber of Commerce Francesco Becchi, died as a result of their detention.⁹⁹⁹ However, the two were not the only casualties tied to the

⁹⁹⁵ ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, Rapport n°66/V, Inspecteur Abraham, 20 July 1943.

⁹⁹⁶ Apparently no member of the SIM was hurt. ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Telegramma n°4687 R. "Attentato a Nizza," Console italiano a Nizza Speichel, 21 July 1943.

⁹⁹⁷ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Telegramma n°21564 P.R. "Attentato terroristico al ristorante Davico," Console italiano a Nizza Speichel, 23 July 1943.

⁹⁹⁸ ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, O.D. n°2188, 2178, 2732, 2735.

⁹⁹⁹ In the case of the American citizen who died in the Sospel camp, it is unclear if the death was linked to the living conditions within the camp. The report only states that the detainee died of "natural causes" without further details. ADAM 166 W 9, Rapport n°145 "Décès d'un américain interné au camp de concentration italien de Sospel," Commissaire de Breil, 16 January 1943. An Italian directive for the planning of the 6 May massive

Italian occupation period. In particular, two cases made the headlines. On the night of 9-10 January 1943, Giacomo D.C. of the *Cadore* Battalion escaped from his unit's prison, where he was being detained for having incited some comrades to desert, and fled in the night, taking with him a rifle and some hand grenades. His escape ended in tragedy a week later on the Savoy border. Driven by hunger, the soldier broke into a farm and killed its owner, a French border guard who had grown suspicious.¹⁰⁰⁰ In another unfortunate instance, a gendarme in Digne was murdered by three Italian soldiers who had been caught poaching. The incident sparked widespread indignation in the small department of the Basses-Alpes. Local Italian authorities promptly reacted to defuse the crisis, a fact acknowledged in French reports. They immediately investigated and located the culprits, who were prosecuted in a military trial held in Digne and sentenced to twenty-two years each. The population was not entirely satisfied with the verdict, as they had demanded the death penalty. Yet the local command made the trial public and the judgment was passed quickly as a token of goodwill. Moreover, the Italian army donated an important sum of money to the gendarme's widow as compensation for the loss of her husband.¹⁰⁰¹ If in the instances of the two prisoners a fair

round-up underlined that military doctors should check the health of the persons arrested to prevent anyone with a condition incompatible with incarceration from being detained. AUSSME, DS 1320, Rapporto n°6824/I di prot. "Epurazione della città di Nizza," Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 7. On the other hand, Becchi died shortly after being released from custody. ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Telegramma n°239 R "Sig. Francesco Becchi: morte," Console italiano a Nizza Calisse, 19 March 1943. Calisse seemed to criticize the SIM in his report, as he underlined the fact that Becchi was 77 years old and his health might have been incompatible with detention. Jean-Louis Panicacci also cites the case of a *fuoriuscito*, Luigi Rosso, who had been tortured and killed in the Dugommier barracks. However, no archival document, either French or Italian, has been found to corroborate the alleged murder and Panicacci's assumption is solely based on the oral testimony of another Resister, Louis Pietri. Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.233.

¹⁰⁰⁰ AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 82, n°3052 del processo, 13 February 1943. The culprit was sentenced to thirty years. He escaped the death penalty only because he had been previously decorated for heroic deeds.

¹⁰⁰¹ Reports on the incident can be found in ADAHP, 42 W 82.

share of responsibility for the death lay with the Italian army for its detention of individuals in frail health, in the latter two murder cases, the responsibility of the Italian army was not so obvious. The murders in fact were carried out by Italian soldiers who were disobeying orders and thus did not commit their crimes as soldiers of the Fourth Army. These crimes cannot be ascribed to Italian occupation policy. In fact, local Italian commanders incessantly warned sentinels to use their weapons only at as a last resort, even against railway saboteurs.¹⁰⁰² Of course, the official reasons to avoid firing needlessly were very pragmatic because the commanders considered a resister much more useful taken alive, so as to be interrogated. Nevertheless, it is plausible to think that army commanders also wanted to avoid having nervous sentinels shoot innocent passersby.¹⁰⁰³

The above examples were reflective of the Italian commanders' desire to smooth the tensions between their soldiers and the local population. The biggest fear of the Fourth Army Command was to further destabilize a situation which was already partially compromised by the inherent weakness of the Italian army's deployment in southeastern France. For an army that was already overstretched and suffering poor morale, the defense of the Mediterranean coastline would have been a daunting task in itself, let alone if they also had to deal with internal rebellion. Thus, the Italian commanders had to implement security measures which would disrupt the daily life of the local population as little as possible. Moreover, any

¹⁰⁰² AUSSME, DS 1100, Rapporto n°1348/Inf. di prot. "Intempestività di sentinelle o vedette nel fare uso delle armi," Diario Storico Divisione Legnano, Allegato 68, 20 February 1943; ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 269, IT 3105, Rapport n°640/Inf. "Sabotaggio linee telefoniche," Comando Divisione Legnano, 25 January 1943.

¹⁰⁰³ Unfortunately, in a few instances, edgy sentinels did fire on French bystanders who had been mistaken in the night for a resister. See ADAM 166 W 10, Fichier Incidents provoqués par les troupes italiennes, 1942-1943, Rapport "Coup de feu tiré par une sentinelle italienne sur Mme Mortier," 25 April 1943. The woman was immediately rushed to the hospital by Italian soldiers. To my knowledge, no one was killed in such incidents.

political rhetoric had to be set aside, as any annexationist propaganda would probably be the best way to rally the whole population behind the banner of French revanchism.

This relatively benign policy irritated local irredentists for they accused the army of being too soft with French nationalists, such as in the case of Monseigneur Rémond, who was never arrested despite his strong anti-Italian stance.¹⁰⁰⁴ The local CIAF personnel, too, were unimpressed by the occupation policy of the Fourth Army. The CIAF, along with the Foreign Ministry, had a more political approach to the occupation and thus held different objectives than the military. Their long-term goal, reaffirmed incessantly in their reports, was the political, cultural and economic integration of the Provence into the Italian nation. As early as 1941, the Italian Finance Minister Thaon de Revel had commissioned a study to investigate how the Italians could penetrate the local economy by investing in crucial sectors such as tourism and the gaming industry (casinos).¹⁰⁰⁵ Cultural integration was the task assigned to Nino Lamboglia, a university professor and curator of a local museum in Bordighera, an Italian village near Menton. Lamboglia, the author of several books underlining the Italian character of the County of Nice, had been watched carefully by the French police even before the occupation as he toured various Nice museums, taking pictures of documents and historic relics which could prove the Italian nature of the region.¹⁰⁰⁶ For these activities, Lamboglia was expelled from France in April 1941. In the wake of the

¹⁰⁰⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°2043/Inf. di prot. "Notiziario n°1," I CA Ufficio Informazioni, 18 March 1943.

¹⁰⁰⁵ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 55, "Studio preliminare per lo studio di un programma di penetrazione nella zona delle rivendicazioni italiane ed in quella limitrofa, in provincia di Nizza," 23 September 1941.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Information on Lamboglia can be gleaned in his *Dossier d'Étranger*, ADAM 123 W 12.

Italian invasion, he returned to the Alpes-Maritimes and continued to inventory relics in Provence museums.¹⁰⁰⁷

Lamboglia's mission was only one facet of a wider plan for cultural penetration espoused by the Italian Ministry of Culture, Giuseppe Bottai. A January 1943 memorandum from the Minister of Culture is especially revealing. The Minister approved a project proposed by Senator Mattia Moresco, the director of the *Istituto di Studi Liguri*, for the creation of a program of Provençal Studies.¹⁰⁰⁸ The program would involve experts in different fields such as archeology and art history, linguistics and history, who would travel to France for research. The fact that the *Istituto di Studi Liguri* was a cultural institute known as a major cultural hub for irredentist scholars was a good hint at the overarching goal of the program. In fact, the memorandum explicitly underscored "the advisability that the military occupation of Nice and the Provence should be followed by an immediate cultural campaign which could be carried out by transferring some of the activities of the Institute to Nice, especially a few courses and conferences." This campaign, the memorandum continued, would stress that Provence, "as a Ligure, Roman and Mediterranean land whose history and tradition ... could be easily integrated into the Italian culture." It should be noted that the Italians were merely following the example of the Germans who, in the wake of the German occupation, had allegedly brought to France "some scholars whose role was to underscore all the traits and documentation of the Germanic influx in France throughout the centuries." The Culture Minister concluded his memorandum by underlining the importance of this cultural

¹⁰⁰⁷ Archives Municipales de Nice (hereafter AMN), AM 3H 65, Lettre du conservateur du Musée Massena, 4 June 1943.

¹⁰⁰⁸ The memorandum can be found in ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 80, Lettera n°40 Div. II "Istituti di Studi Liguri - Programma di studi provenzali," Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale, 23 January 1943.

campaign, which could greatly benefit the activities of the Italian Foreign Ministry and reinforce Italy's future territorial claim. Thus, it is evident that civilian Italian authorities were already laying the groundwork for the political annexation of occupied France. In February, under the aegis of the Culture Ministry, Lamboglia published a book with the evocative title of *Nizza nella Storia*, (Nice in History), a monograph that explained the historical ties between Nice and Italy. Moreover, conferences were organized at the University of Nice to prove scientifically the cultural bonds between Provence and Italy.¹⁰⁰⁹

It was inevitable that these goals would clash with the moderate policies of the Italian army who had no immediate interest in annexing the newly occupied territory. The growing battle between the two agencies was ultimately won by the army, when the reorganization of the CIAF in March 1943 subordinated it to the Fourth Army. On 10 March, the Italian Supreme Command ordered a major overhaul of the Italian political network in France. This overhaul, which became effective on 1 April, integrated the three CIAF military bureaus (Army, Navy, Airforce) into the Fourth Army's administration. More importantly, the General Affairs Bureau in Turin was reduced to a liaison office linked to the Foreign Affairs Ministry and was now headed by Bonarelli di Castelbompiano, the Foreign Ministry's liaison officer at the Fourth Army headquarters and, in this way, subordinated to the military as well.¹⁰¹⁰

¹⁰⁰⁹ Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, p.336. See also the report of the conference "Il Trofeo della Turbia nella latinità" on the ramifications of the Roman Heritage in the Alpes-Maritimes organized by Lamboglia, *Il Nizzardo*, n°25, Year X, 27 June 1943, p.2.

¹⁰¹⁰ For the official order of the restructuring, AUSSME, DS 4A, Telegramma n°11390/op., Diario Storico Comando Supremo, 1218-15, 10 March 1943, for further details in the CIAF restructuring, ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 345, IT 4356, Telegramma n°16172/I, Turin, 15 April 1943.

The official rationale behind these changes was to smooth the negotiation process between local Italian military and French authorities. Indeed, previously any communication between the local army commander and the French civil servants had to be channeled through both chains of command, via CIAF, the French liaison bureau attached in Turin, and finally to Vichy. Now the Italian local commanders could talk directly to local notables and needed to report only the results to Vercellino. However, the real reason behind this reorganization was the desire of the Italian army command to remove the CIAF from any matter that could impinge on the occupation. Local commanders seized control over a number of key responsibilities that had been assigned to the CIAF, such as the oversight of French army depots. The army also created *Nuclei di Collegamento e Controllo* (Control and Liaison Units) which were attached to the French prefectures without informing the CIAF presidency. These were expected to replace the CIAF delegations. According to the CIAF President Vacca Maggiolini, these units were incapable of controlling the French paramilitary organizations now that the CIAF informant network had been dismantled.¹⁰¹¹

Indeed, one of the consequences of this reorganization was a severe disruption to the Italian informant network. Some officials who worked in France for CIAF undercommissions were dismissed from their jobs, causing a serious break in the stream of information.¹⁰¹² Thereafter, even the release of the CIAF fortnightly bulletin on the political and economic situation in the Italian occupation zone, which had been compiled by the various bureaus in

¹⁰¹¹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, Rapporto n°55751 "Rapporti della Commissione di Armistizio colla Francia col Comando 4° Armata," Turin, 20 May 1943.

¹⁰¹² See for instance the case of Captain Marzovilla, member of the Navy Undercommission in Nice, who lost his position due to "interference of informants working for different organizations." ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 345, IT 4356, Telegramma n°33 R.P. di prot., Sottocommissione per la Marina al presidente della CIAF, 7 April 1943, and the reply Telegramma n°883 /Ma di prot. Sottocommissione Forze Armate, Ufficio Marina, 19 June 1943.

France, became unreliable.¹⁰¹³ Vacca Maggiolini lamented the fact that the Fourth Army Command refused to send a fortnight report, choosing instead to send a skimpy monthly report that left the CIAF in the dark as to what was happening in France. The CIAF had been reduced to a dry husk by the reorganization.¹⁰¹⁴ The true hub of power in the occupied zone had shifted to the headquarters of the Fourth Army in Menton.

The brewing conflict between the CIAF, backed up by the Foreign Ministry, and the Fourth Army had ended in a clear victory for the military. Fourth Army commands had complete control over policy in occupied France, while the CIAF's power now rapidly dwindled. The CIAF was increasingly attacked over both in terms its legitimacy and its efficiency. In a memorandum issued on 16 July 1943, War Under-Secretary Antonio Sorice wrote to the head of the Army General Staff, General Ambrosio, openly accusing CIAF officials of holding their offices out of nepotism or favoritism (*raccomandati*). He also claimed that the CIAF personnel living in Turin was squandering the CIAF's budget on a life of luxury, inexcusable in a city which had repeatedly suffered from heavy Allied bombardments.¹⁰¹⁵ Sorice's indictment of CIAF officials echoed a deeper resentment on the part of the army quartered in France. According to an I CA report, the rank-and-file in the Fourth Army resented the special allowance given to CIAF members in France especially after March 1943, when they had far less duties and responsibilities.¹⁰¹⁶ CIAF personnel in

¹⁰¹³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 345, IT 4356, Telegramma n°16367/I "Attività' informativa," Vacca Maggiolini, Turin, 11 May 1943.

¹⁰¹⁴ Rainero suggests that Vacca Maggiolini emerged from the duel with Vercellino victorious. Rainero, *La Commissione italiana d'armistice avec la France*, pp.324-5. I concur with Schipsi's interpretation that the CIAF president came out as the underdog of the contest, Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, pp.289-291.

¹⁰¹⁵ Rainero, *La Commissione italiana d'armistice avec la France*, p.336.

¹⁰¹⁶ AUSSME, DS 1100, Rapporto n°451/SA., Comando I CA, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 51, 3 March 1943.

France were also suspected of using their office to pursue their own private interests, by using their travel privileges to establish black market networks.¹⁰¹⁷

Apart from the loss of prestige, it was evident, that by the summer of 1943, the CIAF was outliving its purpose. Its president, Vacca Maggiolini, threatened to resign several times and was only stopped by General Ambrosio's persuaviness.¹⁰¹⁸ However, Ambrosio's soothing words could not hide the stark truth: CIAF had been reduced to a secondary role, far from any decision-making process and was often bypassed by Fourth Army commanders. As an example, an Italian army convoy arrived at the Vernet internment camp in June 1943 to transfer most of its Italian prisoners further east without even informing the Italian consul in Toulouse, who had been working incessantly for two years to speed up the liberation process of the internees. In fact, the bewildered Consul only found out about the operation by chance the day after, when the commander in charge of the operation asked the Consulate to send a telegram to warn the Fourth Army Services of the incoming convoy. The Consul was furious as he felt that this had been discredited the Consulate at the eyes of local French and German authorities.¹⁰¹⁹

Not surprisingly, CIAF officials struck back, criticizing the Italian army's policy. The CIAF delegate in Nice, Speichel, attacked the Fourth Army Command after the attack at the Davico restaurant. Speichel, with the support of the Foreign Italian Ministry, severely

¹⁰¹⁷ For instance, three CIAF civilians were intercepted at the French-Italian border with wristwatches, jewelry and other expensive trinkets to be imported illegally into France. ACS, Tribunali militari di guerra e tribunali militari territoriali di guerra: Seconda Guerra Mondiale (1939-1945), Tribunale Militare XV Corpo D'Armata, Volume XIV, processo n°251, Gastone S., Giuseppe B. e Secondo L, 29 May 1943. The French were also aware of these shady activities. ADAM 166 W 26, Lettre "Membres des Commissions Etrangères d'Armistice," Prefet des Alpes-Maritimes au Ministre de l'Interieur, 4 March 1942.

¹⁰¹⁸ Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, p.337.

¹⁰¹⁹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 69, Rapporto n°5713/1140 "Campi di concentramento," Console Gloria, 23 July 1943.

criticized the 9 p.m. - 5 a.m. curfew imposed after the attack questioning the usefulness of a nightly curfew, acidly noting that the bombing attack had happened in broad daylight in a public place "supposedly guarded by the Italian police and soldiers." The curfew would not only restrict civilians from having access to entertainment events in the evening, but would also force "the population to shut themselves away in insalubrious and overcrowded neighborhoods." In fact, the Consul argued that strict regulations such as these that impinged indiscriminately on everyone's life would drive a wedge between the Italian army and the local population, thus advancing the Resistance's goal of breeding a climate of suspicion in the Alpes-Maritimes.¹⁰²⁰ The army's reply was venomous. General Vercellino belittled the CIAF delegate's argument as an example of "the simplistic mentality of an official, who, shortly after coming to Nice, already sees himself as the perfect judge of the situation." He went on to defend the Fourth Army's policy, affirming that the limited number of incidents was a clear demonstration that the Italian security policy was harsh enough to be a threat to possible resisters, but lenient enough not to stir a massive uprising.¹⁰²¹

Speichel's concern appears less the result of a genuine concern for the wellbeing of the local Italian and French community than the desire not to alienate the population, in anticipation of the future annexation of the County of Nice. His criticism however, was unusual, as officials in the Foreign Ministry tended to complain more about the laxity of the Italian military policy in France. At the end of May 1943, Foreign Minister Bastianini sent a reproachful report, General Ambrosio, deploring the complacent attitude of the army

¹⁰²⁰ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Telegramma n°23856 P.R., Ministro degli Esteri Guariglia al Ministero della Guerra e Stato Maggiore Esercito, 1 August 1943.

¹⁰²¹ AUSSME, D7, CIAF, Box 5, Rapporto n°14276 di prot. "Coprifuoco a Nizza," 11 August 1943. See also Rapporto n°16421/Op. "Coprifuoco a Nizza," 30 August 1943.

commanders, whose moderate and tolerant policy could be interpreted by the local Resistance as a sign of weakness. This situation was especially damaging to the Italian interests in regions targeted for future annexation, he thought. In fact, the Farnesina was explicit that the policy should ideally "protect and indirectly favor the local separatist and irredentist movements while preventing any opposition to the Italian political penetration from French authorities and police."¹⁰²² The Foreign Minister's doubts stemmed in fact from two venomous reports by the CIAF Delegate in Corsica Ugo Turcato on Italian military policy in Corsica. The Farnesina plenipotentiary made a jab at the local Italian commands by dismissing them as prone to "excessive tolerance and weakness" (*eccessiva tolleranza e debolezza*). He insisted that it would be necessary to shore up the Italian police, Blackshirts and military forces on the isle, while cracking down on any enemy radio propaganda. This hardline approach would require an "energetic and resolute Command." Moreover, the CIAF delegate had bitterly complained at being sidelined along with the irredentist movement in November 1942, while conversely Italian military commanders enjoyed a frank relationship with the Corsica Prefect Balley. The report concluded that a drastic change in occupation policy was necessary in light of the future annexation of the island.¹⁰²³

It is interesting to note that Turcato's harsh stance against Vichy authorities had not been always consistent. In June 1942, in another report to the Farnesina the Italian consul

¹⁰²² ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 9, IT 19, Rapporto n°1/2893 "Appunto per l'Eccellenza il Generale Ambrosio," 28 May 1943. See also AUSSME, DS 1218, Rapporto n°11119 di prot. "Situazione nei territori francesi occupati," Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 56, 12 June 1943.

¹⁰²³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 9, IT 19, Telegramma n°3532/R. R. Consolato Bastia, 2 June 1943. The second document is unsigned and has only a date and location (*Roma, li 28 Giugno XXI*), but someone scribbled at the end of the document "Autore = Turcato!" and it is plausible that the Italian CIAF Delegate in Bastia had the mind behind the report.

openly criticized the irredentist movement in Corsica and their "bungled actions" (*pasticci*). This time, the Italian diplomat recommended a moderate tone to the propaganda which would "avoid directly bashing France, its institutions, especially its army," as many Corsicans considered themselves Frenchmen as much as Corsicans.¹⁰²⁴ This surprising change of mind, which is akin to the evolution of the attitude towards the irredentist movement of the Nice CIAF delegation, can be indeed explained by the evolving political-military situation in southeastern France. Before November 1942, CIAF delegates were wary not of openly displaying annexationist ideas or supporting irredentist groups as the very existence of the CIAF delegations was still uncertain and contested by Vichy. After the Italian invasion, Italian CIAF delegates along with irredentist movements became bolder in their demands, probably in part because they felt more secure. However, it is plausible to also see the CIAF officials' attacks on the occupation policy of the Fourth Army as a battle within the Fascist state between the Army and the Italian foreign Ministry. CIAF delegates who dreamt of being nominated civil commissars with the same prerogatives as the ones in the Italian occupied zone were outraged at being cast aside by local commanders, and lashed back, complaining to their superiors about the alleged ineffectiveness of Italian units quartered in France.

Regardless of the motivations, Turcato's criticism was tersely rebuffed by the army. Ambrosio immediately replied to Bastianini, politely but firmly rejecting that the Italian

¹⁰²⁴ ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare (1922-1945), b.14, Rapporto 126, sottofascicolo 2, "Il R. Console d'Italia in Corsica Ugo Turcato al Ministero degli Affari Esteri," Ajaccio, 6 June 1942, cited by Marco Cuzzi, "La rivendicazione fascista della Corsica (1938-1943)," *Recherches Regionales - Alpes-Maritimes et contrées limitrophes*, 187 (juillet - septembre 2007): p. 68.

army's policy was softening, giving as an example the decisions recently taken in Nice.¹⁰²⁵ Army officials were less diplomatic regarding Turcato. The CIAF delegate's report was dismissed as a view "looking only at the dark side of things (*a tinte esageratamente fosche*)."¹⁰²⁶ Moreover, in a telltale sign of the problematic relations between army and CIAF officials in France, the General Staff icily pointed out that Turcato signed his reports as "R. Consolato - Bastia" (Royal Consulate Bastia), but he was in fact only an official of the *Delegazione assistenza e rimpatrio* which was, in fact, completely subordinated to the local Command (the VII CA). The document insisted, that until the war was over, no consulates could exist in an enemy territory and thus "the only authority was the military."¹⁰²⁶ Because the CIAF delegate was subordinated to the military chain of command, his report should have been sent to the local Army command, not to the Italian Foreign Ministry. In another slashing report on 5 July, the General Staff noted that Generale Magli, the military head of the Corsican army, had the full support of General Roatta, the head of the Army General Staff, who had just returned from an inspection tour on the island. The report subsequently lambasted Turcato who had failed his responsibilities both in form (no report to the VII CA Command) and in content (alarmistic tones), and thus strongly advised he be dismissed from his post.¹⁰²⁷

¹⁰²⁵ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 9, IT 19, n°136, Comando Supremo a Bastianini, 6 June 1943. Here, Ambrosio is alluding to the massive round-up in Nice on 6 May carried out by the Italian police and army.

¹⁰²⁶ These last words were added handwritten to the typed document. ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 9, IT 19, Comando Supremo, Ufficio Operazioni Esercito Scacchiere Occidentale "Situazione in Corsica," 14 June 1943. It has been noted that Army officials were wrong here, CIAF delegations were upgraded to Italian consulates as of 1 January 1943.

¹⁰²⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 9, IT 19, Comando Supremo, Ufficio Operazioni Esercito Scacchiere Occidentale "Rapporti del Comm. Turcato sulla Corsica," 5 July 1943.

The friction between the Italian civilian and military authorities was not confined to Corsica. In an addendum written in the afternoon, the same 5 July document, was even more explicit as to who were the supreme authorities in France. In dismissing Turcato, the Regio Esercito would effectively demonstrate that "a beneficial example on the authority in charge in France and in Corsica was the military one." The report protested that the Fourth Army command was being deligitimized "by an analogous campaign, however more prudent in its form, from Minister Bonarelli and the other Delegates for the Assistance and Repatations [in mainland France]."¹⁰²⁸ A report by C. de Constantin, an Italian *Farnesina* official, written to Minister Guariglia, was especially damning of the military. The memorandum began by rehashing the arguments made by irredentist groups about the Italian character of the County of Nice. He denied any beneficial effect of a soft policy, which made the Italians appear as dupes (*minchioni*) whose gullibility (*dabbenagine*) was mocked by the local population. Instead, he advocated a policy of force (*regime di forza*) that would legitimize the prospective annexation of the County of Nice. In other words, Italians were to act as victors, because the French population was irremediably hostile to the Italian cause. The Prefect and the Mayor had to be ousted and replaced by an Italian Civil Commissar, and part of the population evacuated by force to make room for Italian colonists.¹⁰²⁹ In his arguments, De Constantin was merely reiterating the opinions of the irredentist circles, who wanted to repeat the experiment of Menton in the County of Nice, notwithstanding its poor results.

¹⁰²⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 9, IT 19, Comando Supremo, Ufficio Operazioni Esercito Scacchiere Occidentale "Rapporti del Comm. Turcato sulla Corsica," 5 July 1943.

¹⁰²⁹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Lettera C. De Constantin a Guariglia, untitled, 14 August 1943.

De Constantin was also furious that Fourth Army commanders had not only frequently turned down offers of collaboration by GAN members, but also severely hindered their actions. It is undeniable that the Italian occupation army regarded the GAN with a mixture of skepticism and hostility.¹⁰³⁰ In a controversial decision, the Italian commander of the Nice garrison, General Andreoli, had disarmed GAN members after the assassination of the irredentist informers, the Moraglia couple, in June 1943. This preventive measure had been further reinforced by increasing curfew hours, but only for GAN members. It is obvious that the Italian military commander feared that the GAN's desire for revenge would escalate the spiral of violence in the Alpes-Maritimes and full-fledged civil war was the last thing the Italian commanders wanted when they needed to concentrate their meager resources on repelling a forthcoming invasion.¹⁰³¹ On the other hand, local witnesses confirmed that it was local irredentists who had broken into the shops of Frenchmen imprisoned in the May round-up, ransacking them, and they had also seen the same irredentists leaving the CIAF building. The link seemed to be clear.¹⁰³²

In light of the sympathy of the CIAF personnel for irredentist ideas, it is not surprising that many outspoken irredentists were frequent visitors to Italian delegations or *Case d'Italia*. In his trial, Jean C. admitted to having denounced Italian antifascists in

¹⁰³⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, Rapporto n°2205/Inf. "Notiziario n°3," Comando I CA, 22 March 1943.

¹⁰³¹ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 71, Rapporto n°619 "Rapporto mensile per il mese di giugno 1943," Console italiano a Nizza Speichel, 26 June 1943. ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, Rapport n°1629 "Evénements et incidents survenus au cour de la journée du 5.6.1943," Commissariat central de Nice, 6 June 1943.

¹⁰³² ADAM 166 W 11, Fichier Attentat contre troupes italiennes janvier-juillet 1943, Rapport n°1629 "Evénements et incidents survenus au cour de la journée du 5.6.1943," Commissariat central de Nice, 6 June 1943.

Beausoleil to the Italian consulate in Monaco.¹⁰³³ Other irredentists who were *habitués* of the parties at the Consulate were identified as informers in the round-ups carried out by the Italian police.¹⁰³⁴ Irredentists helped the CIAF delegations in other ways such as mounting guard over the CIAF delegation in Nice.¹⁰³⁵ Two individuals accepted positions as ushers at the Italian consulate in Monaco, one of whom was nicknamed "the Death Messenger" (*Messaggero della Morte*) for his enthusiastic distribution of postcards calling on to young Italians in Monaco to enlist.¹⁰³⁶ A few individuals were even more useful, such as the building contractor who agreed to repair the *Casa d'Italia* of Nice free of charge.¹⁰³⁷ The close relations between the local irredentist movement and CIAF delegations should not imply that irredentists had no ties with members of the occupation army. One of the most rabid Fascists in Nice, Guillaume Paolini, was a regular guest at the CIAF Delegation, but also he had strong ties with the Fourth Army commanders because he rented his garage to Italian officers. That explains why Paolini, after being arrested by the French police for denouncing two neighbors, was released by an Italian military squad led by an angry officer who threatened to retaliate accordingly if the French police ever bothered Paolini again.¹⁰³⁸

It is important not to overestimate the importance of the irredentist movement. During the postwar trials, any individual who had had any relation whatsoever with either the CIAF or the Italian occupation army was indicted for *intelligence avec l'ennemi*, as both

¹⁰³³ ADAM 318 W 21, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Jean C.

¹⁰³⁴ ADAM 318 W 39, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Marius F.

¹⁰³⁵ ADAM 318 W 28, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Avelino F.

¹⁰³⁶ ADAM 318 W 85, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Louis T.; ADAM 318 W 32, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Leopold B.

¹⁰³⁷ ADAM 318 W 51, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Ambroise A.

¹⁰³⁸ ADAM 318 W 31, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Guillaume Paolini. Most of these irredentists were sentenced to twenty years, but most were trialed in absentia, as they fled France as soon as they understood their cause was lost.

organizations had been formally part of an enemy nation. However, the first thing that the French prosecutors tried to assess was whether the accused had subscribed to either the GAN, the *Marcia Su Nizza* (March on Nice) or the Italian Fascist Party. To help them in the matter, the French police had found a list of the GAN and PNF adherents carelessly left behind by hurried Italian officials when fleeing the Italian consulate of Nice in the summer of 1944.¹⁰³⁹ It would be tempting to view the members of the GAN and the PNF as part of the irredentist movement *in toto*. Nevertheless, considerable evidence proves this link simplistic. Almost all the accused admitted being part of the some Fascist organizations, but many argued that they had been forced, swindled or bribed to sign the paper. It also appears that irredentist recruiters inflated their numbers. One individual, whose name was found on the GAN member list, was in fact a French police informer who had been tricked into signing a donation for the poor children of Italian emigrants in Nice that in truth was a member form for the GAN.¹⁰⁴⁰ Sometimes, an emigrant was forced to subscribe; one resident in Beausoleil joined to the PNF to spare his father, a well-known Communist in the region, any trouble with Italian authorities.¹⁰⁴¹ In other cases, the threat was more explicit: one irredentist recruiter warned a hesitant Italian that he could be shot and his parents living in Italy arrested if he did not embrace the irredentist cause.¹⁰⁴² Conversely, some Italian emigrants chose to ally with local Italian authorities because of the very tangible benefits that could come with it. One doctor joined the PNF as early as the 1930s in order to get a passport to facilitate

¹⁰³⁹ A copy of the list can be found in ADAM 618 W 165.

¹⁰⁴⁰ ADAM 318 W 24, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Flaminio C.

¹⁰⁴¹ ADAM 318 W 110, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Juste P.

¹⁰⁴² ADAM 318 W 110, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Vincent R.

visits to Italy in order to look after his businesses there.¹⁰⁴³ An Italian father registered his sons in the GILE, the Fascist youth group, so they could participate in holiday camps in Monaco.¹⁰⁴⁴ Later, many joined to avoid being conscripted into the *Service du Travail Obligatoire*.¹⁰⁴⁵

It is dubious whether we can include these cases as truly part of the irredentist movement inasmuch as their relationship with the CIAF was mostly motivated by non-political reasons. Some individuals are even more problematic to place into the irredentist category. The case of Joseph Caffiero is indeed emblematic. This sixty-eight-year-old Italian, sixty years of which had been spent in France, was an entrepreneur with an established business in typewriters and cinema projectors. Recipient of the *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur*, a honor recognizing his participation in the First World War as part of the famous *Garibaldiens de l'Argonne*, Caffiero was arrested in June 1940 and sent to an internment camp. The French accused him of having strong ties with the local *Casa d'Italia* even though it appears his trips were not politically motivated. He was a prominent fundraiser for the indigent in the Italian community. During his detention, Caffiero witnessed a Nice gendarme, Inspector Bagarre, brutally attack an Italian irredentist, Cardone. The victim later denounced Bagarre and Caffiero agreed to testify. Bagarre was ultimately sentenced to fifteen days in prison and was temporarily dismissed from his job. After the war, Bagarre, having been reinstated to his office, arrested Caffiero. Notwithstanding the fact that three of his sons were Resisters, and that several Jews testified in his favor, the Italian

¹⁰⁴³ ADAM 318 W 51, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Joseph T.

¹⁰⁴⁴ ADAM 318 W 86, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Cesare G.

¹⁰⁴⁵ ADAM 318 W 34, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Jean F.

entrepreneur was sentenced to two years for having had a business relationship with the CIAF and the Italian army. One could speculate as to how much Bagarre's influence, as well as the general climate of hatred of the Italians in postwar France, shaped on the judgment.¹⁰⁴⁶ In another controversial instance, an Italian entrepreneur who had business relations with the Italian army started receiving death threats in the form of small coffins sent in packages to his mailbox. The businessperson was so scared that he complained to Italian officers. Fearing for his life and expecting the Resisters to come to get him, he never mistook German and Italian police officers for the Resistance and shot them through the door, severely injuring one. The Italian was clearly on the brink of paranoia. Later, two Frenchmen who had allegedly sent the coffins were arrested by the Italians.¹⁰⁴⁷ Given the fact that at least the anxious entrepreneur was right when he accused one of those arrested, who admitted in the entrepreneur's postwar trial of having sent the threats, one could wonder whether the Italian entrepreneur was really to blame. He was genuinely scared and probably did not fully acknowledge the gravity of denouncing neighbors to an occupation army that could imprison them in internment camps for months before getting a trial.

Both men were sentenced for *intelligence avec l'ennemi* and were cast in French reports as "dangerous irredentists" who had striven to corrupt French society from within. In fact, their cases were not unusual. Postwar Nice courts acquitted several individuals who had been wrongly accused of misdeeds against the French nation by neighbors seeking revenge

¹⁰⁴⁶ ADAM 318 W 34, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Joseph Caffiero. It is interesting to note that in order to further compromise Caffiero's position, Bagarre mentioned his alleged affair with his secretary.

¹⁰⁴⁷ ADAM 318 W 54, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Albert O. Some additional documents, a letter of the Mayor of Saint-Laurent-du-Var and a letter by one of the prisoners' wives to Italian local authorities can be found in ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099.

or to personal vendettas. In some cases, it was evident that jealousy of a successful business could lead envious competitors to defame individuals.¹⁰⁴⁸ French prosecutors ultimately decided that merely serving Italian soldiers as regular clients was not on its own sufficient to qualify as *intelligence avec l'ennemi*.¹⁰⁴⁹ In some rare cases, the *Tribunal de Grande Instance* dismissed the charges, even if the accused had been found to have been an admirer of Mussolini until 1940, provided he could prove that he not supported the irredentist goal of the annexation of the County of Nice.¹⁰⁵⁰

Arguably, some testimonies can be dismissed as unreliable because it was in the interest of the accused to downplay their Fascist sentiments. However, even if the number of Italian persons indicted and sentenced by the new French Republic courts is counted, it is evident that the irredentist movement was very marginal even in the County of Nice, the territory which was at the heart of irredentist plans. An unofficial list compiled by the French police totalled 540 individuals in the Alpes-Maritimes, 330 of whom lived in Nice and had signed up for the March to Nice, acted as informers, or espoused annexationist ideas.¹⁰⁵¹ The list of Italian Fascists found in the *Casa d'Italia* had 1,200 names, but it included anyone who had been even remotely associated with the Italian state from as early as the 1920s.¹⁰⁵² Even if it is assumed that all the people in the list were irredentists, it is clear that the Fascist and

¹⁰⁴⁸ That was the case, for instance, of several Italians who owned flower stalls in the Boulevard Thiers market, one of the most important in Nice. See ADAM 318 W 54, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Joseph F. and Dossier Lucie G. and ADAM 318 W 30, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Menardo/Barberis.

¹⁰⁴⁹ ADAM 318 W 24, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Jean G.

¹⁰⁵⁰ ADAM 318 W 39, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Edouard, Rose et Marie P.

¹⁰⁵¹ The list can be found in ADAM 104 W 17. The other irredentist hubs apart from Nice were Monaco (50) and Antibes (28).

¹⁰⁵² ADAM 618 W 165. The list is sorted by alphabetical order. Each entry was classified into different categories: 17/37 (old militants), MSVN (Fascist Milice), AN (GAN adherents), MN (March to Nice), FFR (Fascist Republican Party), W.SS (Waffen SS). The list is a catch-all in that it also included people who were later acquitted of any ties.

irredentist organizations represented only a small minority of the 150,000 Italians living in the department of the Alpes-Maritimes. Of course, this minority was extremely vocal, especially after the invasion of November 1942, and this explains the fear on the part of the French population of an Italianization led by irredentist leaders, as well as the targeting of individual pro-Fascist individuals by Resisters. These irredentists, many of whom had emigrated in the 1930s and had integrated very poorly into the French social fabric, had been celebrating since June 1940 in anticipation of *Nizza Italiana*. "Nice is ours!" was the rallying cry in many irredentist circles.

However, the irredentists who had been waving to Italian columns and hugging the marching soldiers in November 1942 did not understand that annexing the occupied territories was not an immediate priority for Italian military leaders. Fourth Army leaders were primarily interested in securing the shoreline in southeastern France from a possible Allied invasion while keeping a watchful eye for any local rebellion. In other words, Fourth Army commanders were ordered to crack down on any sign of an uprising or Resistance organizations, but without blindly retaliating against the whole population. They, of course, feared that a heavy-handed approach would only spark a full-fledged rebellion by a population who was already hostile. Moreover, Italian commanders were concerned by the poor quality of the Italian ranks, and recognized the fact that their soldiers would not be capable of handling an Allied invasion along with an internal uprising, especially if the population shared common cultural roots with them. This explains why the Fourth Army commanders espoused a policy of moderation throughout the occupation, and only took mild collective measures when forced to do so. Their point in those instances was more to reaffirm

their authority than punish the population. Thus, they never went as far as the German commanders who, in Marseille in January, retaliated against a series of Resistance attacks against the local garrison by demolishing the neighborhood of the Vieux Port and arresting 2,000 persons, most of them Jews, who were then sent to concentration camps.¹⁰⁵³

Of course, the fact that the irredentist movement was quite marginal even within the Italian community in France made it simpler for local commanders to keep these outcasts at arm's length. As early as June 1941, an army directive had barred Italian soldiers from belonging to the GAN organization, even though GAN members never really represented a serious threat to the Italian army due to their lack of political leverage.¹⁰⁵⁴ The Italian army was also wary not to support any French collaborationist parties, even though it appears they occasionally used their informers.¹⁰⁵⁵ In fact, both the PPF and the *Parti Franciste* vied for official endorsement as the Fascist party in France, but the Italians dismissed their claims, especially in light of their marked unpopularity among the French population.¹⁰⁵⁶

In hindsight, the Italian occupation of France was tempered and its impact relatively light. Few casualties were directly the result of the occupation and neither massacres nor

¹⁰⁵³ For more on the destruction of the Old Port of Marseille, see Simon Kitson "French Police, German Troops, and the Destruction of the Old District of Marseille, 1943," in Louis A. Knalfa (ed.), *Policing and War in Europe*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002, pp.133-144.

¹⁰⁵⁴ ACS, CIAF, Commissariato civile di Mentone ed Ufficio informazioni (1940-1943), Box 1, Rapporto n°3428 T.O. "Iscrizioni delle appartenenti delle Forze Armate ai gruppi di Azione Nizzarda," Prefetto CIAF Vittorelli, 14 June 1941.

¹⁰⁵⁵ For the case of the Cannes PPF secretary who spontaneously gave a list with alleged anti-Axis militants to the local Italian commander, see ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 269, IT 3105, Rapporto n°886/Inf. di prot. All.2 "Segnalazione persone pericolose," Comando 67° Reggimento Fanteria "Legnano," 3 April 1943.

¹⁰⁵⁶ For a report on the PPF, see ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°5235/Inf. di prot. "Collaborazione del P.P.F.," Comando I CA, 19 June 1943. For a report on the Parti Franciste, see ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, n°4647/Inf. di prot. "Notiziario n°28," Comando I CA, 1 June 1943.

executions were meted out. The Italian army suffered from only a few serious attacks, none of which seriously undermined their strategy. Sabotage was more a nuisance than a serious threat to their logistical network. This can be explained in part by the inchoate growth of the Resistance in southeastern France, whose organizations did not really take off before the end of 1943 after the Italian occupation ended.¹⁰⁵⁷ Even in the Savoy region, where the Italians were confronted by groups of Maquis, the situation did not escalate tremendously.¹⁰⁵⁸ Yet, the absence of a widespread internal front was also the consequence of Italian army's forbearance in France, and an occupation policy that was, most of the time, carefully calibrated to the gravity of the situation. Instead of embracing the irredentist discourse, the army favored a much more lenient approach, conscious that a hardline policy could easily provoke a violent confrontation with the local population. Therefore, army commanders were asked by the Italian General Staff to douse the fire of irredentism. Arguably, their task was made simpler not only by the marginality of the irredentist movement, but also the closed integration of the Italian community into the French social fabric. An Antibes police report in April 1943 emphasized that the absence of incidents in the town was due to the "great

¹⁰⁵⁷ This was not lost on the Italian Commanders, who often argued in their reports that the sabotage was more than just individual acts by isolated persons, but was a concerted strategy by organization. See for instance, AUSSME, DS 1186, Rapporto n°3125/Op. "Situazione Mensile 21 Marzo - 20 Aprile," Comando I CA, Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 71, 24 April 1943. It is undeniable, though, that the Resistance still privileged the more indirect approach of infiltrating army ranks to sap the morale with defeatist propaganda in the summer of 1943. See ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, Rapporto n°4687/Inf. di prot. "Direttive delle forze sovversive in Francia," Comando I CA, 3 June 1943.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Christian Villermet, *A Noi Savoia, Histoire de l'occupation italienne en Savoie, novembre 1942 - septembre 1943*, Les Marches: La Fontaine de Siloé, 1991, see especially Part Three, "Les Réactions des Savoyards." The Savoy was the only French region, aside from Corsica, where a resister, Henri Lanier, was executed for having participated in a deadly ambush against Italian troops in Grenoble, see Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.226-227.

number of Italian citizens or people with Italian heritage."¹⁰⁵⁹ Yet, local irredentists were always eager to flex their muscles and to escalate confrontations with the French community and those Italians who were naturalized French, seen as traitors who had given up their Italian soul for a slice of bread. Thus, the army remained vigilant.

The relative moderation of the Italian policy should not cause us forget that we are still talking of a military occupation of an enemy country. In the Second World War, military occupations by the Axis were always seen by the local populace as a traumatic intrusion in their everyday life and an attack on the nation's sovereignty. The intrusion was incessant as occupiers and occupied had to live side by side during a difficult period. The Italian occupation heavily impinged on everyday life with its curfews, evacuations and expropriations. The population was greatly angered by the wave of thefts committed by Italian soldiers at a time of great need. Waves of arrests which targeted people not tied to the Resistance were also a reminder that no one was safe.

However, the situation never spiraled out of control due in part to the self-restraint of the occupation policy, in part to the disorganization in the French Resistance, and in part due to the cultural proximity of the Italian army with the local population. Yet, it should be emphasized that the primary motive underlying the Italian forbearance was pragmatic, for the Italian military leaders recognized it would have been unrealistic to try to both repel a prospective Allied invasion while also clamping down on an internal uprising of the population led by Resistance fighters using an army of demoralized, ill-equipped and ill-trained soldiers who were only looking forward to returning home. The Fourth Army

¹⁰⁵⁹ ADAM 616 W 135, Rapport bi-mensuel n°6095/SP, Commissariat de police d'Antibes, 14 April 1943.

command, helped by the Italian Political Police, seemed to be in control of the situation. The Italian policy was a conscious decision on the part of the command, not a mere expedient to counter a difficult strategic situation. In fact, Rainero's view that local Italian commanders were largely oblivious to the Resistance's whereabouts in France seems misplaced.¹⁰⁶⁰ After all, the Italians had dismantled the two most important Resistance organizations in the Alpes-Maritimes, the Italian Communist Resistance and the French *Armée Secrète* in the summer of 1943.¹⁰⁶¹

Thus, for very calculated reasons, the Italian army refused to implement an Italianization policy such as the one carried out in Menton. No Italian civilian authority equivalent to the Civil Commissars was ever established in the former Free Zone, even though the Italians could have easily exploited the power vacuum after the dismissal of key Vichy officials, such as the mayor of Nice or the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes. They were not oblivious *per se* to Fascist imperialistic propaganda, as the army had fully supported Mussolini's dreams of conquest. However, they frowned upon any policy, be it Italianization, colonization or any other political disruptive policy, which could fuel the fire of French nationalism and thus lead to a showdown with the local population and Resistance.

This pragmatic approach to the occupation did not please either the CIAF or the local irredentists. The CIAF had been planning for immediate annexation since its inception. In

¹⁰⁶⁰ Rainero, *La Commission italienne d'armistice avec la France*, p.331.

¹⁰⁶¹ For the Italian communist organization, see AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, no number, 22 August 1943. For the *Armée Secrète*, AUSSME, Giustizia militare. Sentenze, carteggio, F19 84, n°1548 del processo, 15 July 1943. The smashing of the *Armée Secrète* was an extremely hard blow for the local Resistance movement, as it was an umbrella organization for important Resistance movements such as *Combat*, *Libération* and *Franc-Tireur*. A document found in the Alpes-Maritimes confirms the arrest in June 1943 of its main leaders André Comboul, Jean Allègre and Albert Bardi de Fortour, see ADAM 169 W 3, "Organisation officielle des Mouvements de Résistance dans les Alpes-Maritimes et la Zone Sud en 1942/1943," no date.

1941, it had laid out a project for the final incorporation of *Zone Libre* in the Italian state, anticipating that an Italian military occupation would spark French military resistance or compel the government to flee abroad. Both conditions *de facto* would have broken the terms of the Armistice and thus legitimized the establishment of an Italian authority in France headed by the CIAF.¹⁰⁶² CIAF officials were thus probably disappointed that the invasion of November 1942 did not engender any widespread rebellion in France, as Vichy gave the order to its officials and to the French Armistice Army to remain passive. What is more, Italian army cadres incessantly stressed that the resulting Italian occupation was not political. Local French authorities were to remain in power, unless they hindered the Italian military policy. On 23 March 1943, the Army General Staff had issued a directive that ordered Fourth Army commanders to "safeguard in appearance (*nella forma*) the French sovereignty and the prestige of the legal government," "willing autolimitation" (underlined in original) as it was described.¹⁰⁶³ The occupation was even more disappointing for local Fascists. Irredentists in Provence had greeted the army as their saviors, expecting in turn that the army would be their weapon against their hated French neighbors who had discriminated against them for years. Their leaders thought that they would be placed at the helm of a new Italian region, soon annexed to the realm of Italy. None of this happened.

It is indeed ironic that, for years, Fascist propaganda had banged on the irredentist drum, especially with regards to the County of Nice, and now that the Italians had finally occupied the whole Côte d'Azur, they were not at all interested in annexing it. It would be too

¹⁰⁶² Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi (1940-1943)*, p.388.

¹⁰⁶³ AUSSME, DS 1218, Direttiva n°4957 di prot. "Rapporti con la Francia - Direttive di Massima," Diario Storico Quarta Armata, Allegato 29, 23 March 1943.

simplistic to cast the army as a moderate faction within the Italian state and CIAF as the extremist one. Both organizations shared the same overarching goal, but they had different short-term objectives and both aimed to be in charge of the new province. As the Fourth Army command got the upper hand, it became evident that the Italian policy in southeastern France would be far more based on pragmatism and moderation than on Fascist ideals and an iron grip. Indeed, more than the structural problems of the Italian army, it was the careful planning of Fourth Army cadres that was the main reason why the tension never erupted into a full-fledged confrontation.

Chapter 9

"You have to consider them as individuals living in concentration camps:" The Italian Jewish Policy

If CIAF officials and Army commanders locked horns quite consistently in light of their different perspectives about the occupation, they agreed on at least one issue: the defense of the Jewish refugees in southern France. This aspect of the Italian occupation has been, without a doubt the most carefully examined by modern historiography since the end of the Second World War. As early as 1946, Léon Poliakov, one of the founders of the *Centre de documentation juive contemporaine* published a book, *La condition des Juifs en France sous l'occupation italienne*, which first delineated how astonishingly effectively Italian authorities in France had managed to shield the Jews in their occupation zone.¹⁰⁶⁴ Later monographs later have reinforced this paradigm, although some works more recently had questioned the extent of the Italian rescue.¹⁰⁶⁵ It is however important to examine the Jewish question again, as it sheds some light on the overall Italian occupation policy in southeastern France. The real debate in fact lies on understanding the reasons for this surprising and lenient attitude. Yet, only by setting the question in its historical context can one be able to fully understand the motivations of the Italians.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Léon Poliakov, *La condition des Juifs en France sous l'occupation italienne*, Paris: CDJC, 1946. Later, the CDJC published an English version, Léon Poliakov and Jacques Sabille, *Jews under the Italian Occupation*, New York: Howard Fertig, 1983.

¹⁰⁶⁵ For books following Poliakov's footsteps, see Steinberg, Jonathan, *All or Nothing, the Axis and the Holocaust, 1941-1943*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2002.; Daniel Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler, The Jews and the Italian authorities in France and Tunisia*, Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1994. This view has been partially criticized by Rodolfo Rodogno, especially in Rodolfo Rodogno, "La politique des occupants italiens à l'égard des Juifs en France métropolitaine, Humanisme ou pragmatisme?," *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'histoire*, 93/1 (2007): pp.63-77. For more on the historiography on the Jewish question, see pp.356-359.

The Italian Jewish policy could not be studied without first focusing on Vichy's, as the former was a direct response to the latter. Arguably though, Vichy's virulent hatred for the Jews was not borne out of the blue. In fact, French anti-Semitism had deep roots, beginning in the late nineteenth century with a surge of radical nationalism and conservative Catholicism. The nationalists considered the Jews a foreign body, insisting on their potential harmful influence on French society. Extremists in the Catholic movement insisted on the deicide nature of the Jews and their inherently destructive behavior. Indeed, the downfall of a Catholic banking house, the *Union Générale*, was blamed on speculations by the Jewish finance. All the anti-Semitic factions coalesced in France in the infamous Dreyfus Affair at the end of the century. Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish artillery captain in the French army, was accused in 1894 of having smuggled military intelligence to the Germans. Subsequent trials revealed that many documents had been forged. However, the general consensus held that Dreyfus was guilty: eighty percent of the press in France condemned him. Even if Dreyfus was ultimately vindicated, the trial revealed the underlying anti-Semitism of the time. A product of this brooding sentiment, *l'Action Française*, a nationalist movement with staunch anti-Semitic undertones, was born shortly after the end of the trial.¹⁰⁶⁶ The First World War coincided with an ebb of anti-Jewish hatred in France, as Jewish-French soldiers fought as valiantly as their non-Jewish fellows on the various fronts of the war. The economic crisis of the 1930s saw a resurgence of a rabid hatred of the Jews, a part of the wave of xenophobia spreading over Europe. The arrival in the 1930s of foreign Jews from all over Europe exacerbated this sentiment, to the point that even French Jews resented this intrusion, for fear

¹⁰⁶⁶ For more on the roots of anti-Semitism in France, see Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*, New York: Basic Publishers, 1981.

that a rush of new alien Jews could harm their long and painful process of assimilation into the French society.¹⁰⁶⁷

Indeed, indigenous anti-Semitism was heightened after June 1940 by the need to find scapegoats for one of the most egregious humiliations in the history of France. It is not much of a truism that Vichy's anti-semitic policy begun even before the Germans demanded the implementation of discriminatory measures. As a matter of fact, given the fact that most of the Vichy officials came from the conservative right, if not the extreme right, the Vichy regime from its inception begun its own programme of anti-Semitic discrimination, itself part of a wider xenophobic trend. Out of the 15,000 individuals who were stripped of their French nationality following the 22 July 1940 denaturalization law, more than 6,000 were Jews. Racist activists in the traditionalist right-wing groups such as *L'Action Française* of Charles Maurras and in pro-collaboration newspapers such as *Je suis partout* and *Au pilori*, were given free rein to spew their anti-Semitic rhetoric. Jews were unremittingly flagged as a foreign body in the fabric of French society. The 3 October 1940 Jewish Statute, which forbade Jews to hold high-ranking public offices or comparable positions in media or teaching, officially launched *l'antisémitisme d'État*.¹⁰⁶⁸

Vichy did not just content itself with ostracizing Jews from civilian society, it actively sought to expel them from the Free Zone. It has been widely demonstrated that Vichy was instrumental in the pursuit of the Jews. It is important to note here that Vichy's and the Nazi anti-semitic policies differed, at least at the beginning, in one important aspect. Whereas the Germans wanted to deport any Jew found in France regardless of the nationality, Vichy

¹⁰⁶⁷ André Kaspi, *Les Juifs pendant l'Occupation*, Paris: Seuil, 1997, pp.38-40.

¹⁰⁶⁸ For more on the anti-Semitic campaign, see Jackson, *France, The Dark Years*, pp.354-367.

sought at first to protect its nationals, both because of reasons of prestige and because there were veterans of the First World War among the French Jews. In a cynical example of *Realpolitik*, they bartered the lives of foreign Jews for the safety, albeit in the end only temporarily, of French Jews.

On 4 July 1942, the head of the German police in France, SS Carl Oberg, and the Secretary-General in charge of the French police, René Bousquet, struck a deal to dispose of the foreign Jewish population on French soil.¹⁰⁶⁹ In the infamous *Rafle du Vel d'Hiver* (Vel d'Hiver Round-Up) on 16 July 1942, thousands of French policemen rounded up more than 12,000 Jews, who were later sent to extermination camps in Eastern Europe. Of course, not all Vichy officials were fiercely anti-Semitic. Prime Minister Pierre Laval, for instance, was not so much anti-Semitic as he was a pragmatist. He used the Jews, especially foreign ones, as a bargaining chip in his endless negotiations with the Germans. But many Vichy civil servants, such as the heads of the *Vichy's Commissariat General aux Questions Juives* (Office for Jewish Affairs or CGQJ), Xavier Vallat, and his successor, Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, never hid their fierce hatred of the Jews and, along with pro-Nazi collaborationists, were always eager to use them as scapegoats for the woes of France.

This is nowhere as evident as in the Alpes-Maritimes. After the occupation of the northern half of France, Jews started flocking to the French Riviera in great numbers.¹⁰⁷⁰ This concentration of Jews ignited anti-Semitic propaganda in the region, which blamed the “rich

¹⁰⁶⁹ For a summary of the literature on the round-ups of the summer of 1942, see Jackson, *France, the Dark Years*, pp.217-219.

¹⁰⁷⁰ It is difficult to estimate the total number of Jews in the Alpes-Maritimes. In August 1941, 5,554 Jews were officially recorded, but the number of Jews increased threefold in the subsequent months, especially after November 1942. See Jean Kleinmann, “Pérégrinations des Juifs étrangers dans les Alpes-Maritimes (1938-1944),” in Jean-William Dereyemez (ed.), *Le Refuge et le Piège: Les Juifs et les Alpes (1938-1945)*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008, p.200.

Jews” for driving up food prices. The *Nez Crochus* (or Hooked Noses, as in anti-Semitic propaganda Jews were often portrayed as villainous individuals with hooked noses, full lips and frizzy hair) were often accused of running black market operations, either by buying or selling illicit goods.¹⁰⁷¹ Racial hatred directed against the Jews erupted in violence on 16 June 1942 when PPF thugs pillaged the synagogue of Rue Deloye in Nice. The moment seemed ripe to tighten the noose around the Jews. The Bousquet-Oberg agreement paved the way for the round up of approximately 500 Jews in Nice on 26 August 1942, mainly expatriates from Eastern Europe, Germany, Austria and Russia, who were arrested and sent to the Drancy camp.¹⁰⁷² Prefect Ribière, who, along with the Nice Police Intendant Duraffour, supervised the round up, congratulated the police for “the way the [round-up] operations [of Jews] were carried out.”¹⁰⁷³ However, the greater part of the Nice population disapproved of the operation, so much so that the objects of their earlier scorn were now looked upon with pity.¹⁰⁷⁴ French Catholic prelates openly expressed their disapproval of Vichy’s policy for the first time.¹⁰⁷⁵ The Bishop of Montauban (Tarn-et-Garonne) voiced his outrage in an open letter which was read in all the churches of his diocese during the 30

¹⁰⁷¹ Scores of anti-Semitic letters can be found in ADAM 616 W 188.

¹⁰⁷² Kleinmann, “Pérégrinations des Juifs étrangers dans les Alpes-Maritimes (1938-1944),” in Dereymez (ed.), *Le Refuge et le Piège: Les Juifs et les Alpes (1938-1945)*, pp.207-208.

¹⁰⁷³ ADAM, 166 W 16, Lettre n°3258, Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes au Commissaire divisionnaire, Chef du service Régional aux Renseignements Généraux, 1 September 1942. In theory children less than 18 years old were not targeted unless their parents chose to bring the children with them. Other categories were excluded, such as individuals older than sixty years, the seriously ill and pregnant women. In fact, these exceptions were rarely applied.

¹⁰⁷⁴ ADAM, 166 W 16, Rapport n°3874 “Compte rendu d'ensemble des opérations effectuées le 26 Août 1942,” Commissaire divisionnaire, Chef du service Régional aux Renseignements Généraux au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes, Nice, 27 August 1942, p.3. Out of thirty-three conversations taped by the Contrôles Techniques on 27 August, nineteen disapproved of the measures, nine approved and five were neutral. See also the R.G. Daily Report of the 27 August 1942 (*Bulletin Journalier*).

¹⁰⁷⁵ For more on the evolution of the attitude of the Catholic Church with regard to the Jewish population in France, see W.D. Halls, *Politics, Society and Christianity in Vichy France*, Oxford: Berg, 1995. “Part III, The Scapegoats.”

August mass. Without ambiguity, the letter declared that “the current anti-Semitic measures are disrespectful of human dignity; the violation of the most sacred rights of the individual and of the family.”¹⁰⁷⁶ A few days later, one of the most prominent figures of French Catholicism, Cardinal Pierre-Marie Gerlier, echoed the Bishop of Montauban’s indignation in an open letter that stated that “we are witnessing a cruel scattering of families where nothing is spared, neither the aged, nor the frail or the ill.”¹⁰⁷⁷

This opposition did not stop the government from pursuing its Jewish policy. Prodded by the German administration in France which was already deporting Jews from the Occupied Zone to the East with the help of the French police, Vichy strove to send Jews from the *Zone Libre* to the Occupied one, starting with foreign Jews. Vichy police, helped by the *Sections d'Enquête et Contrôle*, the security force of the CGQJ, unwaveringly hunted down Jews. The situation radicalized with the occupation of southern France in November 1942. On 10 December 1942, orders issued from Berlin demanded the immediate arrest and deportation of all Jews in France. One day later, Laval signed a decree that required Jews to report to the nearest *Gendarmerie* to have the word "Jew" stamped on their identity and rations cards.¹⁰⁷⁸ This discriminatory measure was issued along with two other measures: Jews aged eighteen to fifty-five of neutral or enemy nations were to be immediately

¹⁰⁷⁶ ADAM 166 W 16, Lettre de l'évêque de Montauban sur le respect de la personne humaine, 26 August 1942.

¹⁰⁷⁷ ADAM 166 W 16, Communiqué de son Eminence le Cardinal Gerlier, à lire en Chaire, 6 September 1942.

¹⁰⁷⁸ ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 17, Mesure Israélites et étrangers, Extrait du Journal Officiel 12 Décembre 1942, Loi n°1077 du 11 Décembre 1942.

incorporated into the *Groupements de Travailleurs Étrangers*, while Jews in coastline departments were to be transferred inland in the departments of Drôme and Ardèche.¹⁰⁷⁹

These later decisions sparked a flurry of reactions from both civilian and military Italian authorities, who felt Vichy authorities were interfering with the Italian occupation. The Italian CIAF delegate in Nice, Calisse, immediately pointed out to the Prefect that Italian Jewish citizens were not subject to Vichy decrees.¹⁰⁸⁰ The head of the Fourth Army General Staff, General Trabucchi, issued a directive to all commanders on 30 December expressly pointing out that no Jew in the Italian occupation zone should be interned by Vichy authorities.¹⁰⁸¹ The opposition to any French action against the Jews was further confirmed by Inspector Barranco, the head of the Political Police in Nice on 6 January 1943.¹⁰⁸² Barranco in fact delineated the future Jewish policy of the Italian authorities in France. Jews were to be sent into forced residence in small villages in the Alpes-Maritimes and in the Basses-Alpes, preferably to hotels that could host the thousands of Jews of the Alpes-Maritimes without splitting up the families. Small Regio Esercito units would supervise and guard these Jewish refugees. In the opinion of Barranco, this policy would "answer a standard of justice and humanity" (*criterio di giustizia ed umanità*).

¹⁰⁷⁹ ADAM 30 W 101, Correspondance Express n°18743 Ministère de l'Intérieur aux Préfets Régionaux, 6 December 1942; 1,400 Jews in the Alpes-Maritimes were officially singled out to be deported inland, ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 17 Mesure Israélites et étrangers, Lettre du Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes au Préfet régional du Rhône, 18 December 1942.

¹⁰⁸⁰ ADAM 616 W 242, Fichier 17, Mesure Israélites et étrangers, Lettre n°2522 secret, 14 December 1942; Télégramme n°499, 11 January 1943, Lettre au Préfet, 12 January 1943.

¹⁰⁸¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3095, n°4849/l. di prot. "Provvedimenti a carico di personale di razza ebraica nei territori occupati dalle forze armate italiane," 30 December 1942. (the original document put a "?" instead of the date, but it appears that was due to a transcription error, see Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, pp.277-278, footnote 24.)

¹⁰⁸² ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 80, Lettera n°027 al Console Calisse, 6 January 1943.

Not surprisingly, rumors of the Italians' benign attitude in the Alpes-Maritimes were already spreading like wildfire throughout France. Jews flocked by the hundreds, if not thousands, to Nice, where they were received by a Jewish welfare organization, the *Comité d'Aide aux Réfugiés* (Refugees' Aid Committee, later known as the *Comité Dubouchage*, due to its location on Rue Dubouchage). The Committee was informally recognized by the Italian authorities and its importance should not be underestimated.¹⁰⁸³ Aside from material aid, the Committee issued temporary "identity cards," an important tool regularizing the positions of persons permanently living on margin of society. These cards *de facto* shielded the Jewish refugees from wanton deportation by the French authorities, as these refugees were selected by the Italians to be sent to forced residences.¹⁰⁸⁴

The rescue operations were organized by Angelo Mordechai Donati, a well-to-do Italian Jewish banker who had acquired an important position in France during the interwar years as President of the *Chambre de Commerce Italo-Française* (Franco-Italian Chamber of Commerce). Donati had settled in Nice after the French military defeat in June 1940 and continued his banking activities there, helped by the fact that he was extremely influential in Italian political circles, especially in the Italian Foreign Ministry. If the first CIAF delegate in Nice Camerani in his visceral anti-Semitism despised Donati, his successors' attitude was the exact opposite.¹⁰⁸⁵ Count Mazzolini was an old friend, and their relationship dated back to their frontline experiences in the First World War, and even his successor Consul Calisse

¹⁰⁸³ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 68, Telegramma n°159 R "Assegnazione a residenza forzata," Console Italiano a Nizza Calisse, 23 February 1943.

¹⁰⁸⁴ More information on the Committee and on Angelo Donati can be found in Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, pp.94-97.

¹⁰⁸⁵ For Camerani's views, ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, n°1628 SEGRETO Nice, 29 March 1941.

favored Donati's activities.¹⁰⁸⁶ It is still a debate in academic literature whether Donati really had enough influence to soften Italian policy.¹⁰⁸⁷ One thing is certain: his whereabouts were carefully scrutinized by the French. A police report in April 1943 mentioned his involvement in the rescue operations of the Jews flocking in Nice.¹⁰⁸⁸ Moreover, an anonymous anti-Semitic report from June 1943, probably written by a militant member of a collaborationist group in Nice, denounced the nefarious influence of the "Jewish Pope" (*Pape des Juifs*) as the Côte d'Azur quickly became the "Jewish Paradise" (*Paradis des Juifs*). In fact, Donati was not only hated by French anti-Semitic militants, but also feared: he was allegedly an intimate friend of the Duce himself and that explained, from the twisted perspective of the French pro-Nazis, why whoever opposed him eventually ended up in an Italian concentration camp.¹⁰⁸⁹

In fact, the author of the virulent pamphlet was flabbergasted by the protection enjoyed by the Jewish community in southeastern France, a policy in glaring opposition not only to the German one, but also to Vichy's. For this reason, on 14 January 1943, Prime

¹⁰⁸⁶ For a more detailed view on Donati, see Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, pp.97-98. Carpi had access, via the French Shoah specialist Serge Klarsfeld, to the Donati documents, a collection of Donati's memoirs, along with his interview in 1944. Mazzolini's personal friendship with Donati could explain why Mazzolini was already favorable in February 1942 to the idea of taking the Jews under the CIAF delegation's wing, ASMAE, Serie Armistizio Pace 08, Lettera n°333 R, Delegato CIAF Mazzolini alla Sottocommissione Affari Giuridici CIAF, 21 February 1942.

¹⁰⁸⁷ For instance, in his book on the Jewish refuge of St-Martin de Vésubie, Alberto Cavaglion, credits Donati not only for the financing the stay of destitute Jews in the Alpine resorts, but also for lobbying for a policy of protection against the Jews. See Alberto Cavaglion, *Les Juifs de Saint-Martin-Vésubie, Septembre-Novembre 1943*, Nice: Serre, 1995, pp.22-27. The same argument is found in André Kaspi, *Les Juifs pendant l'Occupation*, Paris: Seuil, édition révisée, 1997, pp.294-295. Daniel Carpi, on the other hand, thinks that Donati's importance had been widely exaggerated, as even one man as rich and influential as Donati could not have much weight to change the Italian state's policy on such an important matter. See Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, p.98.

¹⁰⁸⁸ ADAM 166 W 10, Fichier Assignations à résidence, Note 6 Avril 1943, unsigned.

¹⁰⁸⁹ One copy of the unsigned document written in June 1943 and titled "Note sur les effets de la protection accordée par l'Italie aux Juifs de Nice," can be found in 318 W 79, Cours de Justice des Alpes-Maritimes, Dossier Antoine Gabriel D.

Minister Laval complained to the Italian ambassador in Vichy Avarna di Gualtieri, that the Italians were not only protecting the Italian Jews, but also the foreign jews. As rightly asserted by Jonathan Steinberg, this later point was problematic for Vichy: the rescue of foreign Jews from deportation and even from French labor camps at a time when French Jews were being rounded up and sent to German extermination camps was badly damaging to Vichy's prestige.¹⁰⁹⁰ Indeed, the Jewish issue needs to be placed in the wider context of relations between Vichy and the Axis nations. The French brought this problem to their talks with the Germans. In a January meeting with the commander of the SS police in France SS-Brigadeführer Oberg, René Bousquet, the Secretary-General for the Police in the Vichy Ministry, bitterly complained about Italian CIAF authorities who were hindering the search for Jews in southeastern France.¹⁰⁹¹ Vichy authorities recognized that this was an issue they could use to drive a wedge between the two Axis partners while in the meantime showing the Germans that they were willing to fully collaborate with them in their racial policy. German officials in France, upon hearing about the situation in the Italian occupation zone, vented their frustration to Berlin. High-ranking Nazi officials approached their Italian counterparts in late January and early February to inquire as to the reasons for the Italian leniency. The German protestations eventually paid off. On 16 February, the Fourth Army command communicated to the *Oberbefehlshaber West* (German Army Command in the West) that "dangerous Jewish elements" would be forcibly concentrated in places far from the coastline.¹⁰⁹² The tone of this document was harsh enough to reassure the Germans of the

¹⁰⁹⁰ Steinberg, *All or Nothing*, p.109.

¹⁰⁹¹ Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, pp.102-103.

¹⁰⁹² Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, p.112.

unity between Italian and German policy on this delicate aspect of the occupation. However, the directive of the General Staff delivered to Italian local commanders, which established the forced residence of Jews and citizens of enemy states took a much more neutral, if not actually sympathetic tone towards the Jews. Jews were given a reasonable amount of time (five days) to reach their destinations, and, both individuals older than sixty and women living alone were exempted from the directive.¹⁰⁹³

This directive appeased the Germans, but did little to reassure the French who were still dispossessed of their prerogatives in settling the Jewish question. It was only a matter of time before Italian Jewish policy would clash with Vichy's anti-Semitic campaign. At the end of February, the prefects of the Savoy departments, under precise directives from their government who was seeking to meet German quotas for deportees to the East, organized round-ups of foreign Jews. Italian military and CIAF authorities in the Savoy region instantly opposed, in many cases successfully, the deportations to the Occupied Zone. This position was confirmed in a telegram from the Italian General Staff to the Fourth Army Command on 1 March, which reiterated that French prefects did not have authority over any Jews, regardless of the Jews' nationality. Therefore, local commanders were required to prevent any action of Vichy authorities, if necessary by resorting to the arrest of any prefect tampering with the Italian policy.¹⁰⁹⁴

¹⁰⁹³ AUSSME, DS 1100, Rapporto n°1165/Inf. "Assegnazione a residenza forzata," Diario Storico I CA, Allegato 39, 14 February 1943.

¹⁰⁹⁴ AUSSME, DS 1218, Rapporto n°1772/02 Telegramma 81/135, Diario Storico Comando Quarta Armata, Allegato 3, 1 March 1943; see also ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 80, Lettera n°306/C. di prot. "Arresto degli Ebrei da parte delle autorità francesi, Conte Bonarelli, 5 March 1943.

The Germans were certainly not impressed with the Italian army's opposition to the deportations. On 9 March, Von Ribbentrop wrote a memorandum to the German ambassador in Rome, Von Mackensen, asking him to raise with the Duce that it was his opinion that the task of rounding up Jews should be given either to the French police, to the SS, or to the Italian police, as Regio Esercito cadres had proven unreliable. In fact, the Germans openly favored the third solution as they thought the *Polizia Politica* would be as ruthless as the Gestapo in hunting down the Jews.¹⁰⁹⁵

At first, it seems indeed that the Italians would finally abide by the German Jewish policy of massive deportations to the East. The Fourth Army was told to refrain from intervening in the Jewish issue, and was furthermore instructed to hand over to Vichy or German authorities any Jew who had come to the Italian occupation zone after 26 March 1943.¹⁰⁹⁶ Mussolini personally handpicked Guido Lospinoso as the new General Police Inspector to resolve the Jewish issue. The fact that Lospinoso was a police official who had worked in the Italian Consulate in Nice in the 1930s tracking the *fuoriusciti*'s activities in the Côte d'Azur was not reassuring to many Jews, who were worried that his nomination bore grim tidings. In fact, the Italians had no intention whatsoever in changing their Jewish policy. Lospinoso procrastinated, delaying his arrival in Nice until the beginning of May and refusing to meet with any German official for several weeks, sparking anger among SS clerks

¹⁰⁹⁵ Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, pp.125-126.

¹⁰⁹⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3095, n°5550 di prot. "Ebrei dimoranti in territori francesi occupati dalle forze armate italiane," Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito al Comando della 4° Armata, 30 April 1940. In fact, it seems the document was a confirmation of a directive already sent on 26 March (n°4514 "I"). See also n°2528/Inf. di prot. "Afflusso di ebrei nel dipartimento delle Alpi Marittime," Comando I CA, 1 April 1943.

in France, who accused the new Italian official of having fallen under Donati's influence.¹⁰⁹⁷ Indeed, in his recollections of the Nice period, Lospinoso mentions the crucial role of the omnipresent Jewish banker as the link between local Italian authorities and the Jewish community.¹⁰⁹⁸ Moreover, Lospinoso, in a postwar interview to an Italian newspaper, boasted about his role in saving the Jews.¹⁰⁹⁹ However, Italian Jewish policy in France seems to have been an admirable concerto orchestrated between different musicians, perhaps coordinated by Lospinoso as director, than the work of a soloist. Neither the Italian police, nor CIAF officials were willing to hand over the Jews to their German counterparts, and they both gladly supported the work of the Dubouchage Committee, which provided financial support for the rescue operation. The Italian army moreover provided the logistical support needed to move the thousands of Jews from the coastline to the inland villages and the personnel to guard the Jews once there.

The "forced residences" were in fact a godsend for cornered refugees who had nowhere to go. The Italians were willing to let the Jews live as they saw fit, provided they stayed within the village and registered with the local Italian garrison twice a day. The Jewish refugees thus were able to recreate an authentic Jewish colony in the alpine villages. For instance, in Saint-Martin-Vésubie, a local committee, elected by the whole community, was implemented, to act as the vehicle for communicating any eventual issues or requests to the Italian military authorities, Jewish schools and synagogues were actually created, in what

¹⁰⁹⁷ The CIAF officially communicated the nomination of Lospinoso only at the end of May, see ADAM 171 W 3, N°7302/02 "Opérations d'internements de Juifs," Délégation militaire de contrôle pour le dispositif alpin, 20 May 1943.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.201-203.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, pp.135-136.

was probably a unique situation in Axis-occupied Europe.¹¹⁰⁰ In the words of a German Jew, "I saw some scenes I had not seen in a long time: Jews calmly strolling through the streets or sitting at tables outside cafés, chatting in English, German, and some in Yiddish."¹¹⁰¹ Vichy *Contrôle Postal* confirmed that the Jews were ecstatic in their new residences: Italian soldiers were "kind-hearted" (*cœur d'or*) and treated the Jews "in a very humane way." Indeed, the Jews were "extremely happy to be under the Italian army's protection."¹¹⁰² In fact, the Italian army was not only permitting the refugees to live a normal life, barring the fact that they were forbidden to work, but were also shielding them from Vichy's eager grasp. For instance, on 6 April, French gendarmes tried to arrest two Jewish women who had escaped a Vichy forced labor camp. However, the women not only refused to leave the village but also went to complain to the local Italian commander. Shortly thereafter, the local *Carabiniere* commander chastised the two gendarmes by pointing out that the Jewish population in the village fell under Italian jurisdiction, and therefore, the French police were not allowed to have any contact with them. In fact, and it is impossible not to hear some irony in the Italian commander's words, "Notwithstanding the freedom they enjoy, you have to consider them as individuals living in a concentration camp surrounded by barbed wire, militarily guarded and which you should not come near."¹¹⁰³

The Italians stayed true to their commitment to defend the Jews until the end of the occupation. Jews in increasingly great numbers flocked to the Italian occupation zone as

¹¹⁰⁰ Alberto Cavaglion, *Les Juifs de Saint-Martin-Vésubie, Septembre-Novembre 1943*, Nice: Serres Éditeur, p.40.

¹¹⁰¹ Cavaglion, *Les Juifs de Saint-Martin-Vésubie*, p.44.

¹¹⁰² ADAM 166 W 10, Fichier Assignations à résidence, Contrôle Postal XH n°127, 13 April 1943; Contrôle Postal WI n°524, 8 April 1943.

¹¹⁰³ ADAM 166 W 10, Fichier Assignations à résidence, Rapport n°2/4 de la Brigade de Saint-Martin-Vésubie, 7 April 1943.

rumors spread that the Italian zone was a safe haven for the Jewish population.¹¹⁰⁴ In July, a Nice police report stressed the powerlessness of the French to stop the escape of Jews from Vichy labor camps to Italian army officials, who then redirected them to forced residence villages.¹¹⁰⁵ Following the ousting of Mussolini on 25 July 1943 and the subsequent rumors of an imminent disengagement of the Italian army from the French front, Jews protected by the Italians stormed the Italian consulate in Nice to plead with the Italian authorities to send them to Italy. Even a harsh life in Italian concentration camps, they desperately cried, was a more preferable fate than fall again into German clutches.¹¹⁰⁶ The urgency of the situation in occupied France was acknowledged by the Italian Foreign Ministry who authorized its officials in France to give safe-conduct to Italian Jews requesting repatriation, even without the previous screening of the Italian Interior Ministry usually required.¹¹⁰⁷ Moreover, up to the last days of August, when it was evident that the Italians would be leaving France soon, Italian authorities were still protecting the Jews from being drafted to the STO or to forced labor camps. This resolute stance triggered formal protests from Prime Minister Laval, who feared the prestige of the Vichy regime would be seriously compromised if the Jews were exempted from the STO at a time when entire classes of young Frenchmen were forcefully sent in Germany.¹¹⁰⁸

¹¹⁰⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3095, n°4276/Inf. "Afflusso ebrei," Comando I CA, 24 May 1943.

¹¹⁰⁵ ADAM 616 W 51, Note de renseignements pour le rapport du 25 juillet 1943, Mesures administratives prises à l'encontre des français et étrangers.

¹¹⁰⁶ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 80, Telegramma n°5000 R. "Comunicazione per Ministro Vidau," Console italiano a Nizza Speichel, 31 July 1943.

¹¹⁰⁷ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 80, Telegramma n°25012/P.R. from Vidau, 2 August 1943; Telegramma n°24335/C. from Vidau, 6 August 1943.

¹¹⁰⁸ ASMAE, Affari Politici 1931-1945, Francia, Box 80, Telegramma n°24348/P.R. "Ebrei nella zona di occupazione italiana: lavoro obbligatorio," Ambasciata Italiana a Parigi, 28 August 1943.

The last days of the Italian occupation were even more frantic. In early September, the Italian army, under Lospinoso's directive, moved Jewish refugees who had been housed in inland villages closer to the Italian border, in anticipation of a precipitous flight across the border.¹¹⁰⁹ In fact, a few days before the 9 September Armistice, many Jews were transferred to Nice.¹¹¹⁰ Donati was in fact working on persuading the Italian Navy to lend some of their ships so as to bring the Jews to Italy. The operation however fizzled due to the utter panic that followed the announcement of the Armistice, and Nice would in fact become a grim trap for thousands of foreign Jews, where the Germans could hunt them down easily.¹¹¹¹ If the Italian authorities failed to organize a comprehensive plan to move the Jews to Italy, some local commanders took the initiative to bring their protégés with them when they withdrew to Italy.¹¹¹² That was the case in the alpine village of Saint-Martin-Vésubie. The local commander, Lieutenant Strobino, upon hearing of the Armistice, immediately phoned the commander of the garrison of Cuneo, the city on the other side of the border to inquire about a structure which could house hundreds of Jewish refugees. Upon receiving an affirmative response, with the help of local Jewish leaders, Strobino set in motion the evacuation of the Jews in the village. Long columns of Jews, escorted by Italian soldiers fled the village to cross the border through the Col des Fenêtres. The biblical exodus was a difficult trek, as the trail peaked at more than 2,000 meters and was more than fifteen kilometers long. This trip,

¹¹⁰⁹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3095, n°7967/Inf. "Trasferimento ebrei in residenza forzata," Comando I CA, 3 September 1943; Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, pp.278-280.

¹¹¹⁰ ADAM 616 W 233, Note from the Légion Française des Combattants, Alpes-Maritimes "Juifs indésirables," 8 September 1943.

¹¹¹¹ Panicacci, *Les Alpes-Maritimes, 1939-1945*, pp.198-201; Kaspi *Les Juifs pendant l'Occupation*, pp.296-298.

¹¹¹² For more on the hasty Italian withdrawal, see Chapter 9. Easy Come Easy Go: the end of the Italian occupation.

which would require quite an effort even for experienced hikers, was an excruciating experience for individuals heavily loaded with luggage, some of whom were either too young or too old to walk at more than a slow walking pace. The worst part, however, was probably the terror of the doom quickly approaching from behind, a nightmare cornered Jews knew well enough. However, it was not only this grave danger of being captured by the Germans which ultimately motivated frightened Jews to run for their life over a difficult mountain trail. In a generous gesture, Italian soldiers set up supply points in chalets along the trail to aid the Jews on the journey across the border. Hundreds of Jews made it to Italy, but unfortunately, the Germans, anticipating the flight across the Alps, had already occupied the Italian side and arrested most of the Jewish refugees, along with their Italian guides.¹¹¹³

The grim outcome of the Jewish odyssey does not belittle the significance of Italian soldiers risking their lives to save Jewish civilians at a time of stressful political turmoil on the Italian peninsula. The exodus of St-Martin-Vésubie was the logical culmination of the Italian's benign attitude in France. If the historians agree that the Italian Jewish policy in France was in flagrant opposition to those of Vichy and the Germans, the academic community is much more divided on the reasons behind this choice. Poliakov and Hannah Arendt argue that the traditional humanism of the Italian people explained their generosity towards the Jews.¹¹¹⁴ This paradigm has been refined by modern authors. Jonathan Steinberg, for instance, contrasts the modern German nation, where anti-Semitism grassroots

¹¹¹³ Almost all of the arrested Jews were deported to the east to extermination camps. The exodus has been admirably recounted in vivid detail by Alberto Cavaglioni, *Les Juifs de St-Martin-Vésubie, Septembre - Novembre 1943*, Nice: Serre Editeur, 1995.

¹¹¹⁴ Poliakov and Sabille, *Jews under the Italian Occupation*; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York, Viking Press, 1963.

was rampant, to the modern Italian nation, where Jews accounted for only a tiny part of the population and were well-integrated in the Italian social fabric. As a matter of fact, anti-Semitism, especially in its biological form, was foreign to the Italian tradition. Moreover, while German officers were trapped in their tradition of blind obedience and martial efficacy, their Italian counterparts were more traditional in their beliefs, which emphasized both the Catholic piety and the enlightened values of the *civiltà italiana*.¹¹¹⁵ Daniel Carpi on the other hand, emphasizes the absence of anti-Semitism in Italian army cadres and civil officials, and he attributes it to the failure of the Fascist regime to change the minds of its citizens.¹¹¹⁶ Steinberg and Carpi also stress that Italian humanism was not the only factor explaining the benevolent policy of the Italians in southeastern France. Political calculations were also involved in the Italian decision to save the Jews. Italian army leaders considered it their right to carry out any policy they deemed fit in southeastern France, while on the other hand, CIAF officials were also interested in delegitimizing the Vichy regime in order to prepare for the future incorporation of the irredentist lands into Italy. Therefore, their behavior was part of a strategy to assert Italy's sovereignty on the Free Zone. Moreover, the Italians endeavored to demarcate their policy from the German one, in order to stress the fact that they were capable of coming up with an independent policy, reinforcing their position that Italy should be treated on an equal footing with Vichy in the Axis negotiations.

This pragmatist perspective on the Italian Jewish policy in southeastern France has been strongly argued by both Jean-Louis Panicacci and Davide Rodogno. Panicacci insists on the fact that Italian benevolence was also the product of their far-sightedness. Financial

¹¹¹⁵ Steinberg, *All or Nothing*, pp.220-241.

¹¹¹⁶ Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, pp.248-249.

holdings of the Italian royal family, Vatican prelates and even of Fascist high-ranking officials were deposited in American banks. Thus, the Italians did everything to endear the United States whose Congress allegedly had a powerful Jewish lobby, in order to avoid having their assets frozen.¹¹¹⁷ Furthermore, both Panicacci and Rodogno note that the Jews were merely pawns in the complex relations between the Fascist, Nazi and Vichy regimes. In fact, the Jewish question was often used by local Italian authorities to challenge any interference from Vichy and the Germans in what Italians saw as their zone of influence. Rodogno, however, goes further, minimizing the Italian efforts, insisting that there was no overarching policy to save the Jewish refugees, but only localized cases of bribed soldiers, whose slackness allowed the escape of cornered Jews.¹¹¹⁸

While it is much of a truism that the lack of discipline in the Italy army and the Italian desire to affirm their sovereignty played a strong role in shaping the Italian policy, these two factors do not themselves explain the soft Italian policy with regards to the Jewish question in France. Indeed, if it was only a question of asserting one's authority in the newly occupied territory, the Italians could have herded the Jews in concentration camps, and then eventually dispatched them to the Germans without going through Vichy's security agents. In this case, they could have maintained their sovereignty in the newly occupied zone without annoying their senior partner. Rodogno rightly asserts that the Jews were never a high priority for Italian commanders, and indeed, it is odd then that they did not get rid of the Jewish refugees in the first months of the occupation. If nothing else, this cold pragmatic policy would have

¹¹¹⁷ This idea was exposed in a Vichy police report. See ADAM 166 W 10, RG Note 6 April 1943.

¹¹¹⁸ Rodolfo Rodogno, "La politique des occupants italiens à l'égard des Juifs en France métropolitaine, Humanisme ou pragmatisme?," *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'histoire*, 93/1 (2007): p.66-67.

had the double advantage of not having to use human and logistical resources to guard them later, while in the meantime discouraging any Jewish refugee living in the occupied zone to travel to the Italian one. Thus, it is difficult to dismiss the Italian approach as coldly pragmatic. In fact, the absence of anti-Semitism among both Italian army cadres and *Farnesina* officials is glaring and has been noted by all historians.¹¹¹⁹ Italian officials were aware of the atrocities perpetrated by the Germans in eastern Europe and of the fate awaiting the Jewish population in Europe. The Italian ambassador in Berlin, Dino Alfieri, for instance, sent a poignant memorandum to the *Farnesina*, denouncing in shocking details the harrowing conditions of German concentration camps.¹¹²⁰ Other officials had been probably first-hand witnesses of German atrocities, like the Italian CIAF delegate in Nice, Calisse, who served as Italian Consul in Sarajevo during the war. Moreover, it is unthinkable that a Jewish man such as Donati, regardless of his real influence with Italian local and national authorities, could have otherwise enjoyed any leeway in the Nazi inner circles.

The Italian policy of shielding Jews was effective until September 1943 because it was one of the only aspects of the Italian occupation on which army and CIAF officials wholeheartedly agreed. There is not hint to any dissension from Italian documents regarding this generous stance, and all Italian officials collaborated in it without exception. In fact, even the irredentist movement failed to show any anti-Semitic signs. Of course, that does not mean that anti-Semitic people did not exist in the Italian state, but at least in France they

¹¹¹⁹ As an example, only one Army document, of the thousands perused for this work was tainted by a dose of anti-Semitism. Colonel Ulisse Bonfigli, head of the Comandoo Settore Cannes, complained in one of his reports of "a terrorist cell in Cannes financed by the enemy propaganda and by international Judaism (*giudaismo internazionale*)." ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 269, IT 3105, n°1324/Inf. di prot. "Atto terroristico," Comando Divisione Fanteria "Legnano," 17 May 1943.

¹¹²⁰ Carpi, *Between Mussolini and Hitler*, pp.106-107.

were certainly kept at bay. The Jews were certainly favored by the fact that they did not represent a threat to the security of the Italian army or to the ambitions of Italian expansionists. In that regard, the Italian Jewish policy could be seen as a pragmatic one, careful enough not to stir up conflicts or create problems that were not directly tied to security matters. However, the Italians did not passively ignore the Jews, but actively assisted them and bettered their lives. Only the unfortunate events following the Armistice meant that fewer Jews could be saved. It was clear that, at least in the terms of the Jewish policy, the Italians in France were indeed "brava gente."

Chapter 10

Easy Come Easy Go: the end of the Italian occupation

The end of the Italian occupation of southeastern France was much more dramatic than its beginning. The disorganization of the Italian army, along with the sudden announcement of the Armistice, changed what should have been a gradual disengagement from southeastern France to a complete rout back into Italy. This dramatic collapse made manifest both the weaknesses of the Italian army in the frailty of its logistic network and the poor morale of its soldiers, but also its strengths, in the form of a moderate policy which was not seriously questioned even in the last frenetic moments of the occupation.

The end of the Italian military occupation in France started with Duce's dismissal by the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele III on 25 July 1943 and his subsequent arrest by the Italian Carabinieri. This decision was, first and foremost, a clear repudiation of the imperialist and aggressive policy of the Fascist regime. It was evident to many soldiers of the Fourth Army that the new government would soon order a withdrawal from the former Zone Libre. The news of the King's decision and the hope of rapid repatriation sparked scenes of euphoria in soldiers and officers alike. According to a report by the Prefect of the Hautes-Alpes, later confirmed by postwar interviews with former soldiers of the Fourth Army, Italians troops cheered the news of Mussolini's demise to the point that officers "were celebrating with champagne" (*sabler avec le champagne*).¹¹²¹ Italian commanders were certainly happy that the Duce had been replaced by Marshall Badoglio, a former Army

¹¹²¹ Archives Nationales, F1, cIII 1137, rapport périodique du 3 août 1943, N°126 C.B., cited by Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.252. The same page contains other examples and testimonies of the Italian state of mind at the end of July 1943.

General who was loyal to the monarchy, but their joy was also tempered by the fear of a collapse of the already poor discipline in the Fourth Army. For this reason, on 27 July, Vercellino urgently sent a telegram to all units complaining about "the jubilation with debauchery and sustained squalls" (*esultanza con gozzoviglie e schiamazzi prolungati*) especially on the part of some Fourth Army officers. Vercellino tried to bolster morale by reminding the men that the waning of the Fascist regime was not the prelude to the end of the war and that the Allies were still fighting for "unconditional surrender" by Italy.¹¹²² Another directive from him reminded soldiers and officers that the Allied airforce was "cynically destroying cities and tormenting populations [in Italy] with its terrorist bombings."¹¹²³ Finally, another directive on 1 August urged the commanders to avoid using the word "peace" at all cost.¹¹²⁴ Concurrent with this campaign to shore up morale in the Italian army, the new government was trying to demarcate itself from the former regime. Italian soldiers were invited to refrain from any political activity or manifestation, and it was particularly meaningful that the order came from the new MSVN (Blackshirts) national commander, General Quirino Armellini.¹¹²⁵ Moreover, all outward Fascist symbols were being expunged. On 29 July, the Roman salute, along with Fascist symbols such as the Littorio as well as

¹¹²² ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 338, IT 4296, n°12620 di prot. S.P. "Contegno," 27 July 1943.

¹¹²³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 338, IT 4296, "Ordine del giorno dell'Armata," 27 July 1943.

¹¹²⁴ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 267, IT 3100, n°211210 di prot. "Commento alla truppa sulla situazione attuale," 1 August 1943.

¹¹²⁵ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 338, IT 4296, n°2075/C.I/Ris. di prot. "Astensione dei militari da qualsiasi attività politica," Comando Generale MSVN, 28 July 1943.

Fascist mottos, were officially abolished.¹¹²⁶ Of course, asking soldiers who had been indoctrinated for years of Fascist propaganda to now instantly abandon the doctrine would have been, at minimum very upsetting for many soldiers. The younger generation of soldiers especially, who had been schooled in Fascist principles and rhetoric their entire lives, was completely at a loss, now that its absolute ruler had been removed like a common politician.

In fact, notwithstanding the continuous calls to order by the Fourth Army command, evidence that the end of the war was approaching led to the disintegration of army morale and discipline. Endemic issues of the entire Italian occupation, such as soldiers and officers openly familiarizing with local girls became widespread, to the point that it happened even "in smaller villages and even in the countryside, at every hour during the day and night, even in spite of curfews."¹¹²⁷ In fact, Italian commanders noted alarmingly that security around Italian garrisons and barracks was inadequate as civilians, including women, wandered in and out unchecked by the sentinels.¹¹²⁸ Indeed, Vercellino insisted that the death of an Italian border guard gunned down on 2 August near the Swiss border was more the result of the poor enforcement of security measures than the partisans' prowess.¹¹²⁹ More importantly,

¹¹²⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 338, IT 4296, n°9477/T. "Abolizione del saluto romano e cancellazione di emblemi," 29 July 1943. These changes were not limited to the Italian army, but also touched the other services. The air force, for instance, asked its officers to remove the Fascio on their uniforms. ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 261, IT 3077, n°324/O "Variante al regolamento sull'Uniforme," 15 August 1943.

¹¹²⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3124, n°758/P.D. "Contegno dei militari in rapporto alle relazioni femminili," 12 August 1943, see also ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 261, IT 3077, n°E/53/R.P. "Contegno degli ufficiali in rapporto alle relazioni femminili," Comando Aeronautica della Provenza, 6 September 1943.

¹¹²⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 267, IT 3100, n°5876/2 di prot. "Sorveglianza alle caserme ed agli accontonamenti," Comando I CA, 9 August 1943.

¹¹²⁹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 267, IT 3100, n°14068/Op. di prot. "Incapacità di comando," 8 August 1943.

soldiers were found singing "subversive songs," probably Communist hymns such as *Bandiera Rossa* (Red Flag).¹¹³⁰ Yet, these songs were much more than just symptoms of a profound malaise within the Italian army. They were also evidence that the Resistance was actively recruiting, and with a certain degree of success. Indeed, the downfall of the Fascist regime had been a boon for the *fuoriusciti* recruiters. The Italian General Staff sent an alarming report to the Fourth Army Command that the *fuoriusciti* were intensifying their efforts to infiltrate the Fourth Army with propaganda and to expatriate in Italy, taking advantage of the confusion at the porous Italian-French border.¹¹³¹ Moreover, in some regions such as the Savoy and Corsica, the Resistance radicalized, by killing and wounding Italian civilians and soldiers in ambushes and bombing attacks.¹¹³²

Italian army cadres blamed these acts of violence on the French police's inability to thwart Resistance attacks, even accusing them of outright complicity with the Resisters. For this reason, the Fourth Army Command imposed draconian rules on the population.¹¹³³ The *Bando Vercellino* (Vercellino Proclamation), published by French newspapers in the Italian-occupied zone on 17 August 1943, ordered the death penalty for a wide variety of crimes, ranging from the sabotage of military and communication infrastructure to armed insurrection to harming Italian soldiers and organizing into "subversive" groups. Even simply articulating Leftist ideas (defined as "forwarding the violent implementation of a dictatorship

¹¹³⁰ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 261, IT 3077, n°13805/S.P "Procedura d'eccezione," Comando Quarta Armata, 14 August 1943.

¹¹³¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 266, IT 3099, n°27279/SIM/R. di prot. "Italiani fuoriusciti e sovversivi in Francia," 14 August 1943; See also n°1351/Inf. di prot. "Trasmissione manifestini propaganda sovversiva," Comando 223° Divisione Costiera, 21 August 1943.

¹¹³² For more details, Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.262-263.

¹¹³³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 265, IT 3099, n°7217/Inf. di prot. "Competenza in fatto di reati e contravvenzioni ai nostri danni da parte di cittadini francesi," Comando I CA, 12 August 1943.

of one social class, or the extermination of one social class, or the subversion of economical, political and social structures") could lead to a sentence of two to eight years in prison.¹¹³⁴ In reality, the punishments were seldom carried out, except in Corsica and Haute-Savoie, two regions which had been unruly since the beginning of the Italian occupation.¹¹³⁵ On the contrary, the Fourth Army Command asked local newspapers all over the occupied zone to publish a subsequent proclamation which granted amnesty to all those who chose, by the end of August, to surrender their weapons.¹¹³⁶ In all probability, this clemency was dictated by the fact that the Italians wanted to avoid an escalation of an internal rebellion they would have difficulty suppressing anyway and by their inability to enforce any oppressive regulation. This inherent weakness was evidenced by the fact that the Italian army was still unable to evacuate the coastline zone (*Zona Combattimento*) in mid August 1943, although it had been ordered as early as 22 April.¹¹³⁷ On the other hand, Italian commanders were ruthless with their own soldiers in an effort to curtail any slackness within the Fourth Army. For instance, four soldiers who had failed "to march in formation to reach the location assigned to their unit" got an exemplary sentence of twenty to twenty-two years.¹¹³⁸

It is important to understand that the loss of discipline within the Italian army was the product of the widespread feeling that the war was drawing to an end. Indeed, starting late July 1943, the Italians set in motion their gradual disengagement from southeastern France.

¹¹³⁴ *L'Éclaireur de Nice et du Sud-Est*, 17 August 1943.

¹¹³⁵ Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.264-265.

¹¹³⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 267, IT 3099, n°76/12/Inf. di prot. "Consegna armi da parte di civili," Comando I CA, 22 August 1943.

¹¹³⁷ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3115, n°7283 di prot. Comando militare Italiano Grasse ai prefetti del dipartimento delle Alpi Marittime e del Varo, 14 August 1943.

¹¹³⁸ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 268, IT 3102, n°6312/2 di prot. "Condanne di militari," Comando I CA, 21 August 1943.

The first to go was the flagship division of the Fourth Army, the Legnano Division, which left France at the beginning of August, followed in early September by the EFTF and part of the Lupi Division.¹¹³⁹ In fact, all units with the exception of the two Coastal Divisions (223° and 224°) were supposed to return to Italy by midnight of 9 September. Officially, the Italians were moving their troops from France in order to shore up Italy's defenses as they feared the Allies would soon attempt to invade the peninsula after their successful landing in Sicily in mid-July (Operation Husky). In hindsight, one could not help but think that the Italians were also moving their troops out of the various theaters of war in preparation for an incoming reversal of alliance. It appears that the Germans suspected this. The Germans had been already very suspicious of their erstwhile ally long before the ousting of Mussolini. Their masterplan to disarm and subdue Italian units in France, codenamed "Operation Alaric" had been drawn up as early as May 1943.¹¹⁴⁰ Undeniably, the General Staff's hurried decision to withdraw important units from Provence, starting with the elite Legnano, did little to quell German suspicion. CIAF officials noted that "German officials are still polite, but any sentiment of camaraderie has vanished from their side."¹¹⁴¹ An Italian army report, based on CIAF information, underlined that in SS circles the disengagement from France "was seen as a betrayal, and further heightened the feeling of antipathy against Italy, which had lain dormant until now."¹¹⁴² At a meeting in Casalecchio between Italian and German military leaders on 15 August 1943, General Jodl, the Chief of the Operations Staff of the German

¹¹³⁹ Schipsi, *L'Occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi*, pp.466-470.

¹¹⁴⁰ Schipsi, *L'Occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi*, p.454.

¹¹⁴¹ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 249, IT 2295, n°16973/l. di prot. "Notizie dalla Francia," Presidenza CIAF, 15 August 1943

¹¹⁴² ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 354, IT 4527, Promemoria Comando Supremo, I Reparto Ufficio Operazioni Esercito, Scacchiere Occidentale, per il sottocapo di S.M Generale "Notizie dalla Francia," 19 August 1943.

Armed Forces High Command, ironically asked the head of the Italian Army's General Staff, General Roatta, if the units withdrawn from France "would be deployed in southern Italy or near the Resia and Brenner Pass [across the Italian-German border]." ¹¹⁴³

The Germans shrewdly played on the Italian need for extra units to bolster the peninsula's coastal defense to send some Wehrmacht units to Italy. ¹¹⁴⁴ Of course, the real motivation behind the deployment of German units in Italy was to intimidate Italian local commanders and, if needed, to intervene in case of an Italian betrayal. More than anything, at the beginning, the movement of a substantial number of troops into the Italian occupation zone en route to the Italian territory unnerved the Italian soldiers. Friction between Italian and German soldiers became widespread. Local Italian commanders bitterly complained that these German soldiers and officers were arrogant and completely disregarded all Italian decrees, whether pertaining to traffic, the purchase of goods or even regulation of private property. ¹¹⁴⁵ Wehrmacht personnel were especially inclined to break Italian curfews, giving false permits to French bistrot owners allowing them to keep their establishments open. Italian patrols were flabbergasted by the lack of discipline on the part of the noisy and boisterous Germans who kept reveling all night long. In a few cases, the officers offered the weak excuse that they did not know about the curfews, but in most cases, they simply offered

¹¹⁴³ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 249, IT 2295, Trascrizione dell'incontro a Villa Federzoni (Bologna), 15 August 1943, p.1.

¹¹⁴⁴ One Army German Army Corps, the 87^o, was deployed in mid-August 1943 in Liguria, just across the French-Italian border, not without meeting some hostile reactions from local Italian Commanders, see Schipsi, *L'Occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi*, pp.471-476.

¹¹⁴⁵ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 261, IT 3077, Rapporto n°14289/S.P. "Incidenti con militari germanici," Comando Quarta Armata, 20 Agosto 1943.

no excuses.¹¹⁴⁶ More importantly, German units in transit settled near Italian quarters "behaving like masters of the house, carrying out artillery barrages, marches and drills with the intent to intimidate (*a scopo intimidatorio*)."¹¹⁴⁷ It was glaringly clear that the fall of the Fascist regime had definitely strained relations between the Axis partners at all levels. Germans and Italians warily watched each other, each expecting the other to make the fatal move that would shatter the coalition.

The Forty-five days between the Duce's dismissal and the Armistice were tense in the Côte d'Azur, but did nothing to prepare for the massive drama that unfolded in 8 September 1943, the date of the most terrible military disaster in the history of Italy. On 3 September 1943, the Fourth Army Command received a directive called "Memoria 44" from the Italian General Staff Army which outlined to the Fourth Army the plan which should be carried out in the event of a German attack. Italian units in France were to be deployed to protect the main axes of communication and the passes at the border to counter any German invasion of Italy from France. In addition, the Italians were directed to attempt to outflank and attack any German troops either while on the move or while resting after marching. However, it is important to note that the directive gave absolutely no hint of the Italian-Allied negotiations which were ongoing at that time.¹¹⁴⁸

In retrospect, this directive was no more than wishful thinking and for more than one reason. First of all, the Italian units were extremely demoralized, as most of the soldiers

¹¹⁴⁶ ARC, Collection of Italian Military Records 1935-1943, National Archives Microfilm T-821, Roll 270, IT 3115, Rapporto n°1868/prot. "Coprifuoco a Golfe Juan," Comando 167° Reggimento Alpino Costiero, 16 August 1943.

¹¹⁴⁷ Schipisi, *L'Occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitani francesi*, p.474.

¹¹⁴⁸ Generale Mario Torsiello, *Le Operazioni delle unità italiane nel settembre-ottobre 1943*, Roma: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico, 1975, pp.146-147.

could not wait to see the end of the war and to be repatriated. Their sense of loss was heightened by their poor armament, and the comparison with the highly efficient motorized German units replete with tanks and armored cars was unforgiving. The nail in the coffin of the Italian hopes to stop the German army was dealt by the 8 September Armistice. Much ink has been spilled on the Armistice between the Italians and the Allied powers.¹¹⁴⁹ All authors however agree on the fact the Italian army higher echelons were not left completely in the dark regarding the negotiations with the Allies, but that they were also not given any timetable for the imminent reversal of alliance. Of course, the confusion had originated from the botched negotiations between the two sides, which led to the Armistice being signed on 3 September, but only announced by the Allies on 8 September 1943 at 6.30 p.m., and then, still only unilaterally. This in turn forced the Italian King, Vittorio Emanuele, and the head of the government, General Badoglio, to make the Armistice public on Italian radio one hour later. As incredible as it seems, the Armistice declaration caught the entire Italian army off guard, as no warnings had been previously sent to Army commands.

This inexcusable mistake proved even graver for Italian units quartered outside the peninsula. Military leaders of the Fourth Army Command were shocked to hear of the Armistice. General Trabucchi, the head of the Fourth Army General Staff, immediately phoned the General Staff Army, only to be told that even General Roatta, the head of General Staff Army, had only found about the Armistice through the Allied radio broadcast and that

¹¹⁴⁹ Among the wide literature on the 1943 Armistice, Elena Aga-Rossi, *Una nazione allo sbando. L'armistizio italiano del settembre 1943 e le sue conseguenze*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2003, stands out as one of the best books.

the Fourth Army Command was now on its own.¹¹⁵⁰ The appalling lack of directive from Rome doomed the Fourth Army. Each commander or soldier reacted with frantic panic in an atmosphere of "every man for himself." Soldiers were still scattered haphazardly all over the Mediterranean coastline, from Toulon to La Spezia, as some divisions were still in the process of transferring part of their units to Italy. This situation led to some grotesque scenes, such as in the case of the head of the Pusteria division, General Magliano, who was arrested, along with his General Staff, while dining with the commander of the local German garrison.¹¹⁵¹ In most cases, due to the complete disarray of Italian troops who were left to fend for themselves, the Germans had little difficulty in disarming and arresting their former allies. German commanders surrounded the headquarters of the local Italian unit with tanks, artillery guns and heavy machineguns, ordering the Italians to surrender. Disoriented members of the Regio Esercito, who had been ordered up until a few days earlier, to fraternize with their Wehrmacht colleagues, surrendered en masse, feeling abandoned by Rome. Remarkably, in some cases, the Italians fought back tooth and nail. In Albertville, a city in Savoy, members of the Val Toce and Val d'Orco regiments fought through the night, cornered inside their barracks, killing four German soldiers and surrendering only at dawn. The city of Grenoble, the capital of the Isère department, saw a full-fledged confrontation which allegedly resulted in hundreds of casualties on both sides. In Nice, the small Italian

¹¹⁵⁰ Torsiello, *Le Operazioni delle unità italiane nel settembre-ottobre 1943*, pp.151-152.

¹¹⁵¹ Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.287.

garrison in the Nice railway station refused to surrender and fought hand to hand with the Germans in a "last ditch-stand."¹¹⁵²

In fact, when the Italians were well led by resolute officers and were not confronted with overwhelming odds, they managed to counterattack with surprising efficaciousness, given the circumstances. A few units managed to slow down the German advance by blowing up crucial bridges and tunnels leading to Italy.¹¹⁵³ In the end though, these *barouds d'honneur* did little to minimize the epic military disaster. Of course, the Italians had already lost when the government failed to inform the army of the armistice, and then fled from Rome, with the King, to southeastern Italy. Vercellino, who had managed to retreat with part of the Fourth Army Command to Cuneo, a city across the Italian border, was forced to sign a directive officially disbanding the Fourth Army on 12 September 1943.¹¹⁵⁴ Thus ended, rather disgracefully, the Italian occupation of France, three years of occupation of a foreign soil which had gained only minimal resources for the Italian war machine and less prestige for the Italian state in exchange for continuous political, strategic and military trouble.

In fact, the end of the occupation eerily matched its beginning in June 1940 and September 1942, both in its strategic failure and its utter disorganization. The local population was extremely surprised to see the Italian troops pick up and leave so precipitously, in an incredible din which turned into a complete rout. A French truck driver in Saorge was forcefully recruited at gunpoint by an Italian officer to drive his vehicle instantly

¹¹⁵² Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.291-292; Torsiello, *Le Operazioni delle unità italiane nel settembre-ottobre 1943*, pp.162-164.

¹¹⁵³ See for instance ADAM 616 W 215 Fichier 9 Capitulation Italienne, Rapport n°832/2, Gendarmerie Roquebrune/Cap-Martin sur les évènements consécutifs à l'occupation allemande, 12 September 1943.

¹¹⁵⁴ The directive can be found in Torsiello, *Le Operazioni delle unità italiane nel settembre-ottobre 1943*, p.170. For having given the order to disband, Vercellino was prosecuted in the aftermath of the war for desertion, but was later acquitted.

loaded with Italian soldiers, to the Italian border.¹¹⁵⁵ In Breil, soldiers sold their remaining Italian military stocks of food to the local population.¹¹⁵⁶ In one instance, in compensation for the occupation, generous officers willingly left military materiel such as trucks and gas tanks for the use of the local population.¹¹⁵⁷ In most cases though, Italian troops hurriedly fled to the border, carrying with them a minimal amount of food or their personal weapons, while leaving behind their ammunition and food depots to be plundered by the local population.¹¹⁵⁸ Soldiers threw away their weapons and ammunition in the bushes, unfortunately resulting in a few incidents of children naively detonating Italian grenades left behind by hurried soldiers.¹¹⁵⁹

It is difficult to estimate how many soldiers of the Fourth Army were captured by the Germans in the days following the Armistice. Scholars seem to agree that at least 62,000 soldiers of the Fourth Army, 37,000 of whom were formerly stationed in France, ended up in German prison camps.¹¹⁶⁰ In some cases, Wehrmacht commanders anticipated the moves of Italian units trying to escape their stranglehold in southeastern France. For instance, German soldiers intercepted an Italian truck convoy in Barcelonnette that had departed from Digne

¹¹⁵⁵ ADAM 616 W 215 Fichier 9 Capitulation Italienne, Rapport n°14/4, sur un incident crée par un Lieutenant des troupes italiennes de passage, Brigade de Saorge, 10 September 1943.

¹¹⁵⁶ ADAM 616 W 215 Fichier 9 Capitulation Italienne, Rapport 29A, Gendarmerie de Breil-sur-Roya, 11 September 1943.

¹¹⁵⁷ ADAM 616 W 215 Fichier 6, Rapport n°472/2, sur un incident à l'occasion d'un enlèvement de matériel abandonné par les troupes italiennes à St-Vallier de Thiez, Gendarmerie de Grasse, 12 September 1943.

¹¹⁵⁸ See for instance ADAM 616 W 114, Rapport Bureau de liaison 994, Gendarmerie de campagne, Lieutenant Commandant Scheieler, 16 October 1943.

¹¹⁵⁹ ADAM 616 W 114, Rapport n°262/2 Brigade de Lantosque, 24 December 1943; ADAHP 42 W 82, Rapport n°6380 "Accident occasioné par l'éclatement de grenade," RG Basses-Alpes, 11 September 1943 and ADAM 616 W 215 Fichier 6, Lettre du maire de Trinité-Victor au Préfet des Alpes-Maritimes "Explosion ayant entraîné blessures à des enfants," 25 September 1943.

¹¹⁶⁰ For an overview of the data, Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.306-307.

and was heading for the border.¹¹⁶¹ Other Italian soldiers were even less lucky. An Italian soldier who, in an act of desperation, had clung to the back of a departing truck was mortally wounded by incoming German troops in Mont Agel.¹¹⁶² Another one was found drowned in the river Tinée one week after the Armistice.¹¹⁶³ Not all the Italians were captured by the Germans, however. Some found refuge in the mountains or were hidden by the local population. The Germans of course tried to dissuade the population from assisting the fugitives, by posting bilingual posters which grimly reminded anyone that helping any Italian straggler or taking Italian weapons were considered crimes punishable by death.¹¹⁶⁴ Yet, part of the local population, even the French segment, was quite sympathetic to the Italian soldiers' pleas of being stranded in a hostile territory controlled by an army who regarded them as traitors. A report from the Var prefect made clear how "many people were moved by the [Italian soldiers'] condition, and in a surprising shift of opinion, the very persons who had railed against them before suddenly expressed sympathy for them."¹¹⁶⁵ Italian POWs in Toulon were helped by the local population, especially women, with food packages to ameliorate their meager rations in the German prison camps.¹¹⁶⁶ Especially in places where

¹¹⁶¹ ADAM 616 W 215 Fichier 9 Capitulation Italienne, Rapport n°12011 CAB, Préfet des Basses-Alpes, 9 September 1943.

¹¹⁶² ADAM 616 W 215 Fichier 9 Capitulation Italienne, Procès-verbal n°152/4 sur la découverte d'un cadavre de militaire italien au Mont-Agel, Brigade de la Turbie, 10 September 1943.

¹¹⁶³ ADAM 159 W 49, Procès-verbal n°4/74 Brigade de Isola, 15 September 1943.

¹¹⁶⁴ ADAM 616 W 215 Fichier Nice Communications émanant du Commandement allemand, Verbindungsstab 994 Abt. Ic, Az. 63 a, tgb 2317/43, Asile aux soldats italiens, 16 September 1943.

¹¹⁶⁵ AN, F1, cIII 11194, rapport périodique du 1^{er} octobre 1943, cited by Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.311. It is interesting to note that the report underlined that the sympathy was stronger "on the coastline, where the population was heavily mixed [between Italians and French]."

¹¹⁶⁶ Emmanuel Volpi, *L'Occupation italienne dans le département du Var (Novembre 1942 -Septembre 1943)*, Master 2 d'Histoire préparé sous la direction de Jean-Louis Panicacci, UFR LASH, Nice, 2007, pp.99-100, cited by Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.312-313.

the Italians had fought back, such as Grenoble, the populace could not hide their admiration of their dogged resistance in the face of overwhelming odds.¹¹⁶⁷

That is not to say that the French population was sad to see the Italian army leave. On the contrary, there were the scenes of jubilation across southeastern France, especially in the part of the zone which had been occupied by the Italian army since June 1940. If nothing else, the departure of Italian troops meant that the irredentist territories would not be annexed by the Fascist state. In Fontan, a French flag was hoisted on the roof of the Mairie and French inhabitants decorated the streets with flags.¹¹⁶⁸ The Prefect of the Alpes-Maritime, Chaigneau, mentioned in his monthly report that he had been greeted by an ecstatic throng during his visit to reinstate the French administration on 12 September 1943.¹¹⁶⁹ However, this joy did not last very long as the German occupation established itself. The German police carried out massive sweeps of Jews in Nice and these manhunts threw the whole department into an "atmosphere of true terror" (*atmosphère de véritable terreur*). In fact, the prefect's report for November-December 1943 emphasized that the situation in the Alpes-Maritimes had considerably worsened because of the incessant waves of arrests by the Germans on one hand, and deadly Resistance attacks on both collaborationist organizations and the Germans on the other.¹¹⁷⁰ The former Italian occupied zone soon plummeted into violent confrontation. The Germans and their French allies did not hesitate to torture, execute or deport anyone opposing their policy, catching in their net a number of innocent victims.

¹¹⁶⁷ Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.312.

¹¹⁶⁸ ADAM 169 W 7, réponse de la Ville de Fontan au questionnaire du CHOL sur l'occupation et la Libération, cited by Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.310.

¹¹⁶⁹ ADAM 616 W 97, Rapport d'information sur les mois de septembre et octobre 1943, pp.6bis-8.

¹¹⁷⁰ ADAM 616 W 97, Rapport d'information sur les mois de novembre et décembre 1943, 10 January 1943.

Resistance fighters, emboldened by the Allied advance and the population's growing hostility towards both the Vichy regime and the occupation troops, ramped up their sabotage and the number of direct attacks against their enemies.

Chapter 11

Conclusion

How can we explain and characterize the nature of the Italian occupation of France? Arguably, it is a difficult task for the historian to give definition to a military occupation in the Second World War, given the sheer variety of different perspectives and experiences it entailed. The easiest way to evaluate the Italian occupation is to compare it with the successive German one, as both occupations roughly lasted the same amount of time. A report filed by the *Mairie* of Nice in 1949 for the *Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* made a point of the fact that the Germans had executed (*fusillés*) fifty people in the Commune of Nice and had deliberately pursued a scorched earth policy, while the Italians had not.¹¹⁷¹ If one examines the raw statistics for the overall occupation of France, the differences become even more glaring. The Germans killed three times more people in the Alpes-Maritimes department alone than the Italians did in their entire occupation zone.¹¹⁷² Moreover, most of the casualties suffered by the civilian population under the Italian occupation happened in Corsica, where the local Resistance movement stepped up its opposition to the occupation in early 1943, ambushing and targeting Italian soldiers and policemen with surprising success.¹¹⁷³

¹¹⁷¹ ADAM 169 W 3, "Occupation et Libération de la Commune de Nice, Guerre 1939-1945," Mairie de Nice, 7 May 1949.

¹¹⁷² Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, p.327. The Italians in total killed 40 civilians, the Germans 159 only in the Alpes-Maritimes. In total, the Germans executed more than one thousand people in southeastern France, and deported 4,000 Resisters and more than 3,000 Jews, most of whom did not return alive.

¹¹⁷³ For more on the liberation of Corsica, see Panicacci, *L'Occupation Italienne*, pp.314-323. It should be noted that the Germans did not occupy Corsica, as the island would be freed in September by a surprising alliance between Italian units quartered on the island and the local Resistance movement. The Italians lost more than 600 men fighting the Germans.

It is true that the Germans occupied southeastern France at the end of 1943, at the moment when the conflict in France inexorably downgraded into a civil war without quarter between pro-Nazi collaborationist movements like the Milice Française and a more structured and efficient Resistance movement, whose ranks had swelled with *réfractaires* from the STO. But even if taking into account the brutalization of the Second World War in 1944, one can not help but notice a qualitative difference between the Italian occupation and the German one which goes beyond the mere numbers of casualties. Unlike the Germans, who unremittingly crushed any form of opposition to their power, no matter how harmless, and deliberately targeted people who did not pose any threat to their occupation, such as the Jews, the Italians tried to balance carefully the need for tight security measures in a situation where they faced the real possibility of a joint effort between the local French Resistance and an Allied landing on the one hand, and the need for a temperate policy to placate the local population on the other.

Comparing the Italian occupation of France and that of the Balkans is even more enlightening. The question is whether if the occupations of France and of the Balkans were two sides of the same coin, both reflecting the ambitions of the Italian Duce to create an Italian empire where the new Italian *stirpe* (noble lineage) will dominate. After all, the attitude of the occupiers was very different in the two regions. In the Balkans, the Italians behaved as colonizers, prone to wanton violence, including razing entire villages, executing bystanders and deporting even the most vulnerable such as children and women. In short, they committed war crimes. In France, none of this happened. The occupation was certainly

not easy and seriously impacted on the population, but it never derailed into harsh repression or, worse, into a civil war.

What can explain such different outcomes? For one, it is possible that the political chaos of former Yugoslavia amid widespread atrocities inured local Italian units to violence, enticing them to implement a ruthless policy.¹¹⁷⁴ It is a truism that the Balkans were ripe with atavistic ethnic conflicts which erupted in astonishing violence and widespread atrocities under the extraordinary circumstances of occupation during Second World War. No side is exempt from blame, as Serb Četniks, Croatian Ustaša, Communist partisans and Germans killed each other with a savagery rarely seen in the Second World War outside of the Eastern Front. The Italians, confronted with such deep ancestral hatreds and aggressive partisan actions retaliated, sometimes with brutality. The Italians' policy, seldom reached the same level of systematic ferocity as that of the occupiers or the Resistance, it is important to note, but it appears to have still employed a significant amount of violence. One thing is clear, the Italians acted more harshly in the Balkans than in France because they felt little sympathy for the Slavic populations. Unlike southeastern France, the Italian rank-and-file did not identify at all with the local populace, who they described in their memoirs as "feral beasts" whose lust for blood was as evident as their absence of hygiene. Not surprisingly, Italian commanders had fewer qualms in carrying out reprisals and inflicting a brutal occupation policy on individuals whom they considered "an inferior race."¹¹⁷⁵

¹¹⁷⁴ The similar process could have occurred on the Eastern Front with the Wehrmacht. Indeed, some historians posit that both the harsh environment of partisan attacks and peer pressure might explain how ordinary men became perpetrators of vicious atrocities, see Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

¹¹⁷⁵ Gobetti, *L'occupazione allegra*, pp.180-181.

On the contrary, in French territory, the situation was almost the opposite. It does not appear that the Italian soldiers were hated as much as they had anticipated. At first, the reaction of the population to the invasion was one of deep hostility, as everyone feared that the occupation would be a prelude to the annexation of the contested territories. However, after the dust had settled, it became evident not only that the Italian army had no interest in advancing an irredentist agenda, but that the Italian soldiers, in their shabby attire and with their weary expressions, deserved compassion more than scorn. Initially, then, the soldiers had been despised for what they represented – the Fascist annexationist propaganda so vitriolically spewed by their irredentists. However, soon as it became clear that they did not represent any danger to the integrity of French sovereignty, most of the population became neutral, if not actually helpful. Moved by pity, in the end, as the Germans moved into the territory, the locals helped the Italian soldiers escape, and in some cases, even gave them asylum in their houses, at a time when helping an Italian soldier did not bear any advantage, but in fact could get oneself in serious trouble with the German authorities. This was, perhaps, the most revealing insight into the true nature of the relationship between the Italian occupying forces and those living under the occupation.

This *entente* was facilitated by the moderate occupation policy of the Fourth Army Command in the Italian-occupied zone. In order to pacify the region, Vercellino had two options: either to implement a harsh policy along the lines of the German occupation of northern France and the Italian occupation of the Balkans, or to try a more moderate one to ease the population into accepting their presence. CIAF officials, along with irredentist militants, pushed for the first option, as they were already looking ahead to the future

annexation of the Côte d'Azur to Italy. Their goals, both in the short term and in the longer period, were strictly political. While CIAF officials and the irredentists had a difficult start to their relationship, it seems that they reached an accommodation, tangibly demonstrated by the ease with which notorious separatists moved in and out of CIAF offices. CIAF officials, after the disappointment of being sidelined as early as November 1942 by commanders of Fourth Army units deployed to the former *Zone Libre*, understood that their only allies would be the local irredentist movement. They thus endeavored to carve out their own sphere of influence although without much success, as command units became the sole hubs of power in occupied France after the CIAF reorganization in March 1943 which wrested away most CIAF officials' prerogatives. Italian civilian functionaries understandably grew bitter and complained vociferously to their superiors in Rome, but these *cahiers de doléances* bore little result.

Thus one of the major themes of the Italian occupation of southeastern France is certainly the internecine fight between Italian army commanders and CIAF functionaries. Interestingly the rivalry between civil bureaucrats and army officers was not specific to France. Luca Pietromarchi, the head of the GABAP (*Gabinetto Armistizio Pace*, a bureau in the Farnesina supervising the occupation in the Balkans), delivered a scathing report on the Second Army in June 1943, accusing it of having “undermined the basis of our policy of alliance, collaboration, and guarantees with the Croatian state,” not only because of an alliance with the Serbs, but also because the Italians had put some Croatian Ustaša on trial and even executed a few.¹¹⁷⁶ The report, of course, glossed over the fact that the Croatians

¹¹⁷⁶ Pietromarchi Papers and Diary, Turin, 8 June 1943, cited by Burgwyn, *Empire on the Adriatic*, p.305.

condemned by the Italian military tribunals had probably committed atrocities against Serb civilians. Moreover, it appears that the weakening position of the Axis powers in Yugoslavia was as much of Italian commanders' responsibility the Croat nationalists', who refused to accept the incorporation of Greater Croatia into the Italian state.

Thus, in both countries the military commanders Roatta and Vercellino were severely reprimanded by Fascist civil servants. However while Italian units in Yugoslavia ultimately had to withdraw as they had been unable to pacify the territory they had occupied in 1941, in France, Vercellino was able to keep CIAF officials and irredentists at arm's length with the success of his moderate policy and the relatively calm in the region. The Fourth Italian Army's command understood that harsh measures would only further alienate a population that was already bitter about the *coup de poignard dans le dos*. Italian military leaders were worried that the scorn felt by the French population towards an army which was occupying France, but which had not defeated the French army, could easily radicalize into a full-fledged rebellion. Thus, their short-term goal of pacifying the region was considered more vital than the future annexation of southeastern France. Moreover, the Regio Esercito had abysmal morale owing due to the global failure of its war effort. It was dubious whether the demoralized and poorly trained soldiers could have enforced harsh regulations on a population with whom they could so easily relate.

In fact, not only the rank-and-file's lack of combat spirit, but also the Italian commanders' choice to privilege pragmatism over ideology suggests that the Italian army, unlike its German counterpart, was far from being fascistized, even at the higher echelons. Hardline Fascists would have never allied with the Četnicks, a move that flagrantly

contradicted the directives of their supreme leader, the Duce. Moreover, few Fascists would have sealed pacts, however flimsy and temporary, with the Serbs, who ranked low in the Fascists' racial hierarchy. An ideological army would have sought an alliance with the Italian irredentist movement in France, no matter the questionable reputation of its local members. However, the Fourth Army command believed, and rightly so, that sanctioning a separatist movement in Provence would only worsen the already precarious situation by stirring the ire of the local population, who driving them into the ranks of the French Resistance, and this without really gaining any tactical advantage. On the other hand, Četnicks may have been racially inferior and not fully honest in their intentions, but they had two big advantages: they were as desperate for help as were the local Italian units and secondly, they also had military training and a degree of discipline, as opposed to the Italian irredentists who lacked both.

Yet, the Italian occupation policy in France there was more than mere pragmatism or, as some authors have asserted, expediency in a difficult situation. Neither explanation fully explains why the Italians helped the Jews, regardless of their nationality. Sheer pragmatism would have suggested getting rid of them as expeditiously as possible, by rounding the Jews up and handing them directly to German authorities. This process would have enabled the Italians to solve the Jewish issue simply, while depriving Vichy's administration of its prerogatives. There would not have been the hassle of creating Jewish colonies in Alpine resorts, nor of posting units to guard them at a time where every single soldier was dearly needed to guard the under-manned bunkers of the Mediterranean coastline. Rodogno insists that handing over the Jews damaged the prestige of the Italian army in the eyes of the local population. While this may have been the result in the Balkans where many of the Jews were

indigenous, it is dubious that the French population would have opposed the arrest of foreign Jews, who had been scapegoats since the beginning of their arrival in the Côte d'Azur, blamed for the endemic plague of black-marketeering and illicit profiteering. Thus, the Italians' benevolent policy appears not to have originated solely from strategic constraints or a vested interest in asserting its sovereignty in the new occupied zone, but also from a different approach to the occupation of enemy countries in the Second World War. The two Axis partners did not have just parallel strategies of war, they operated in parallel moral universes. Atrocities which were acceptable to the racist Nazi mindset, such as the extermination of Jews and the deportations of entire populations, were alien to the Italian strategy of war. To be sure, the Italians established concentration camps and the Italian occupation occasionally degraded into massacres in the Balkans; but the Italian army did not engage in mass extermination or mass deportations. While the Germans sought to deport huge numbers of the conquered population to make room for German colonists while, in the meantime, milking as efficiently as possible the conquered territories for their resources, the Italians endeavored to colonize through the Italianization of the local population, using both force and persuasion to enlist the newly conquered population into the service of the future master race. This paternalistic attitude was nowhere so evident as in southeastern France, owing to the strong Italian minority of the region and the resulting cultural affinity. In Menton, for instance, the Italians wanted to bring in Italian colonists, but they were just as keen to have the city's French citizens return to the *Cité des Citrons*.

Therefore, we can safely assert that the Italian occupation of France was not in the German style, only lower key and less efficient. The Italians had their own independent

policy. The peculiarity of its Jewish policy perhaps best exemplifies the difference between the two, notwithstanding the pragmatism and reasons of prestige underlying it. Even the repression, if compared to the other Italian and German occupations in Europe, was less brutal and was generally commensurate with the true gravity of the threat.¹¹⁷⁷ And it appears, at least as far as France goes, that the measures implemented by local commanders were not simply a practical expedient to compensate for the Italian army's inherent weaknesses, but part of a comprehensive strategy to avoid an all-out violent confrontation with the local population. To this end, the Fourth Army command not only found itself on a collision course with its German counterparts and Vichy officials, but also battling the political ambitions of CIAF officials and local irredentists.

Hopefully, this study has shed some light on Italian occupation, but there is much more to explore. While the reasons behind the different Axis policies in France had been examined, the comparison of the occupations in France and in the Balkans (an exercise beyond the scope of this work) would be revealing. The difference in policy may have been attributable to the ruggedness of the Yugoslav partisans, against whom Italian commanders adopted a scorched earth policy, compared with the aloofness of the French Resistance in the Italian zone. Or perhaps a certain inferiority complex or sense of fraternity stopped the Italians from implementing a ruthless policy in France, whereas in the Balkans, as in Africa,

¹¹⁷⁷ In his chapter on the repression carried out by the Italian army in the occupied territories in Europe, Rodogno writes little about the French occupation, only mentioning the 6 May sweep in Nice. He fails to realize that this sweep was an exceptional event, never repeated. The author however admits he lacks the documentation to further analyze the repressive policy in France, as he did not consult the local archives. Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire*, p.347.

they had fewer qualms about ruling with an iron fist. This study may take us some ways towards an understanding of this, by fleshing out the French story.

I have scarcely touched on the occupation of Corsica, which deserves a study of its own, because of the island's peculiar history and its strong separatist movement. The story of the Savoy region, where the occupation was harsher due to a more organized Maquis movement hiding in the mountains, deserves exploration. Moreover, some archives, such as the proceedings of the Fourth Army military tribunal, war crimes dossiers and the censored letters from the soldiers, are still unavailable to the scholar, either due to archival regulations or to the lack of cataloguing.¹¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, my dissertation intends to be a point of departure in the examination of the Italian occupation of France, on the life of the Italian soldiers in World War Two and on the power struggles between the civilian and military authorities with regards to the occupation policy in France. The latter point in particular seemed to nuance significantly the idea that the Fascist regime was monolithic, as it has been depicted by some scholars.

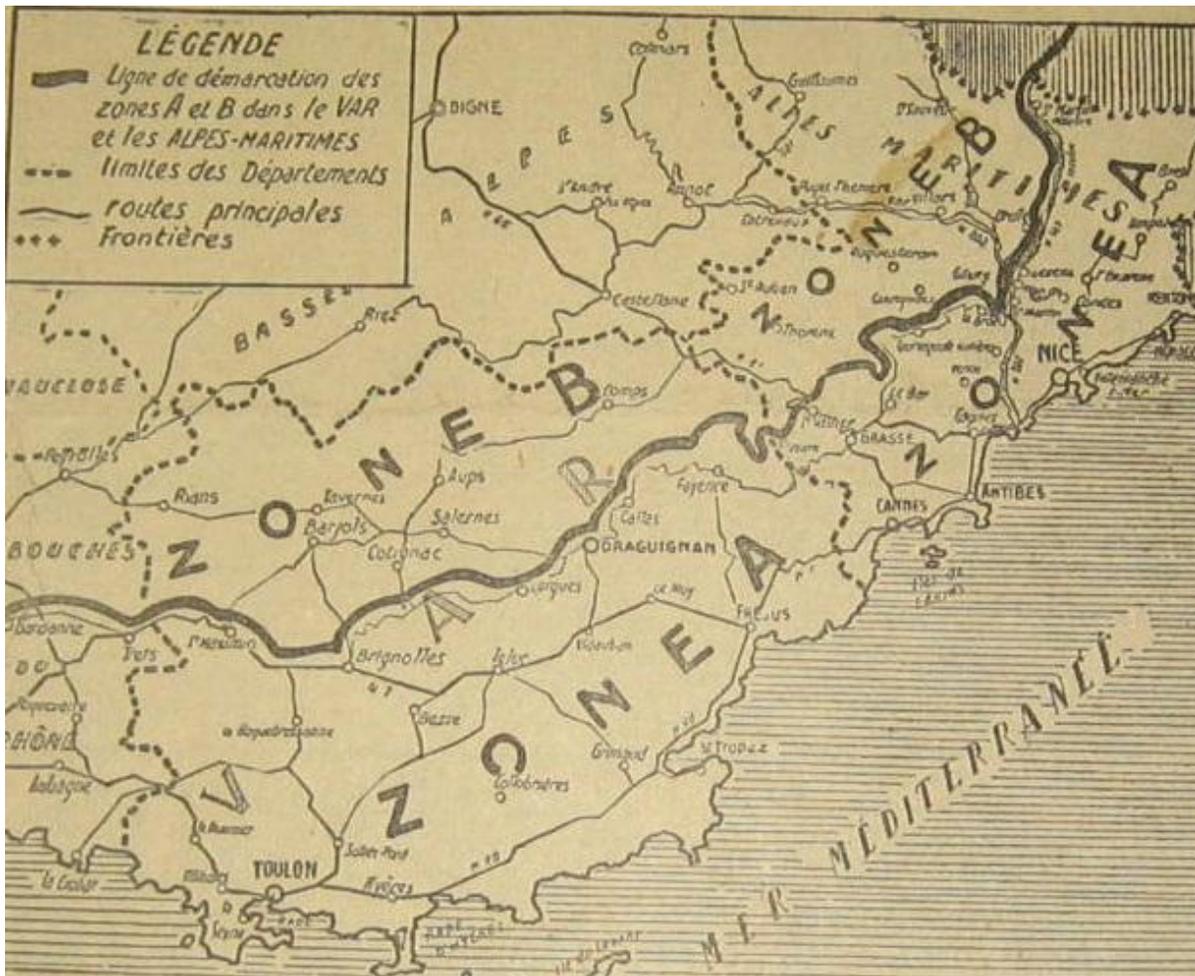
¹¹⁷⁸ It is rather sad to see dozens and dozens of boxes of the proceedings of military tribunals of the Second World War stacked haphazardly in a depot outside the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*, and being out of reach of the academic community, as the Italian state lacks funds to classify them.

Appendix A

Maps



Map 1 Occupied France, 1940-1943



Map 2 Combat Zone (Zone A) and Rear Zone (Zone B), April 1943 (source: Le Petit Niçois, 30 April 1943)

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