

APPENDIX THE GREEK HOLOCAUST (1)

During the Battle for Greece approximately 20,000 enlisted Greek men were killed, and more than a 100,000 were wounded or frostbitten, one fifth of whom ended up amputees. About 4,000 civilians were killed in air raids, which also destroyed hundreds of buildings, including churches, hospitals and schools. But those numbers pale by comparison to the loss of human life experienced under the occupation .

Two executive orders issued at the highest levels of the Nazi hierarchy played an important role in the Greek Holocaust. The first, issued by Hitler himself, was the *torching directive* according to which, if there was a suspicion that a residence was used by members of the resistance, that building was a legitimate target for burning, regardless of the possibility that the majority of the inhabitants might be non-combatants. The second was the order authored by Marshal Wilhelm Keitel on 16 September 1941. That order specified that for every Nazi killed, a minimum of 100 hostages would be executed, and for every wounded one, 50 would die. This order proved problematic after about 2 years of its application. Logistically it was difficult to implement. Moreover, its application strengthened the resistance enormously. So in December of 1943, Lieutenant General August Winder, commander of Army Group E, called a two-day conference of German officers in Thessaloniki to discuss the effectiveness of reprisals. In that meeting Winder changed the 100 to 1 ratio from a minimum to a maximum and proposed that the Wehrmacht would have to settle for 50 to 1 ratio for killed Germans and 10 to 1 for wounded ones.

Although the first villages to be burned by an invading army were those on the eastern mountainsides of Pindus during the Italian invasion, the first mass executions took place in Crete immediately after, or even before the heroic island fell to the Germans. In 1945, under the auspices of the United Nations, a 4-member committee headed by Nikos Kazantzakis was given the task to investigate Axis atrocities in Crete.

The Kazantzakis report enumerates the destruction of more than 106 Cretan villages and innumerable massacres. The area around the Agias Prison in the Hania area was found hiding several mass graves. And probably the first mass murder was recorded in the village Galatas, near Hania, where the villagers had dared defend their birthplace from the invading Nazis. On 26 May 1941, while the battle was still raging, the Germans murdered old men and women who had stayed in their homes, looted and burned the village, and ordered the surrounding villages not to bury the fighters who had died defending Galatas. The prohibition of burials after a massacre became a policy that would be imposed throughout Greece.

One of the massacres the Kazantzakis committee did not report was the murder of all men in Kontomari. That particular massacre was recorded for posterity by a German officer by the name of Peter Weixler. His photographs graphically describe the execution.

An even worse fate befell on Kandanos, whose men and women had fought the Germans in order to allow hundreds of Allied troops to escape the paratroopers by reaching safely the south shore of Crete. In Kandanos all men and women were murdered. Among those executed was Kostas Archakis, aged 103 and two 80-year old women who were thrown into their burning homes where they endured horrible deaths.

The massacres following the Battle of Crete were only the beginning. On 20 October 1941 in Ano and Kato Kerdyllia in Macedonia, the Germans gathered 222 men ages 15 to 60, ordered them to excavate a mass tomb, executed them under the gaze of their families, and then burned the villages. On 24 October, in Mesovouno of Ptolemais, they executed 165 men and then burned the village. On 25 October 1941, in the area of Kilkis, they executed 96 men and then burned the villages Kleisto, Kydonia and Ampelofyto. Many of those massacres were unprovoked by any acts of violence against the German troops, and they were carried out in order to intimidate and subdue the population. They usually had the exact opposite effect: they incited resistance.

The massacres continued throughout 1942 and intensified in 1943, when the Greek Resistance, obeying orders from the Middle East Allied Headquarters, intensified their activities against the German occupation forces. That was part of the Allied strategy, aimed to convince the Nazis that a landing on the Greek shores was forthcoming, whereas their plan was to land on Sicily. Thus on 26 July 1943 the Nazis massacred the 154 people they found in Mousiotitsa of Epirus and of course burned the village to the ground.

On August 16, on the end of one the greatest holy days of the Eastern Orthodox church, the Dormition of Theotokos, the Mother of Jesus, the Germans, also in Epirus, destroyed the village Kommeno. There had been no incident to incite that massacre. Only a suspicion that there were guerrillas in its vicinity. This particular massacre has been studied by historians in some detail, because there were survivors who managed to escape by swimming the fast waters of Arahthos river on the south end of Epirus, or by hiding in the forested area bordering the village.

In Kommeno, the Germans murdered 145 men, 174 women and 97 children, 414 in all. Twenty families were completely wiped out and 17 people drowned trying to cross the rapid currents of Arahthos. Thomas Kontoyannis was the only survivor of his large family. Twenty nine people bearing the same surname, five of them under 13 years old, were murdered.

Kurt Waldheim, who reported the massacre of Kommeno, reported only the 145 men who were killed, making no mention of the women and children, and falsified facts by citing explosions of large quantities of munitions, which never took place. Eventually Kurt Weidheim became Secretary General of the United Nations and President of Austria.

The massacres continued. More than 80 holocausts have taken place in Greece, in which the majority of the inhabitants were murdered, and a total of between 1,700 and 1,800 villages were burned, many of them totally. The Germans had developed the act of destruction to the level of a fine art: they spread the condemned structures with incendiary powders, which under fire from a gun or a pistol exploded into flames.

They also developed the military vocabulary to match their unparalleled ingenuity of destruction: the elimination of a population, as in Kommeno, was a Clean-Up Operation Undertaking: Weidheim talks about *Sauberungsunternehmungen Kommeno*, for example.

The troops charged and ordered to supervise the systematic looting of Greek households and farms were also given a name: *Aufraumtruppen* were the troops specialized in systematically stealing Greek property of value under direct orders from the highest command of the Wehrmacht.

The story of the Greek Holocaust would not be complete without mentioning some of the most notorious massacres. Those of Kalavryta, Distomo, Hortiati and Agios Georgios.

In Kalavryta, 1,100 men 12 to 90 years old were executed on a gently sloping corn field outside the town, while the women of the village were held in the school house, which was set afire. The women broke the doors and escaped death, but the male population was killed in the largest one-day atrocity in a non-Slavic land. The date was 13 December 1943.

That massacre did take place as a revenge for the killing of German prisoners of war by the ELAS *andartes*. But the Kalavrytan population was certainly not responsible for that act and in fact they had tried hard to safeguard the well-being of German prisoners that the *andartes* had kept in their city.

All the villages in the vicinity of Kalaryta suffered enormously at that time. Their inhabitants were massacred if apprehended, and their villages were destroyed. The monks at the Mega Spilaio, famous historic monastery, as well as the monks in Agia Lavra, where the Greek revolution of 1821 was first declared, were also murdered. Even a young child who was living with the monks did not escape death. And the Germans also killed systematically anyone they run across as they moved from one village to the other in search of victims.

The historical Archives at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Athens are replete with accounts of massacres perpetrated throughout Greece.

Atrocities in which the eager Nazis exceeded the directive of 100 Greeks killed per German death abound. On 2 September 1944, at the village Hortiati, 20 kilometers east of Thessaloniki, the Germans executed 149 civilians of both sexes and all ages for the death of one German who was killed in a skirmish with ELAS. On 15 June, 1944, two German soldiers were wounded in a battle with ELAS near the village Ayios Georgios on the road from Levadia to Thebes. After the *andartes* left, the Nazis rounded up 26 men women and children from that village, ushered the men into a small house and killed them with machine gun fire while the women, older men and children watched. Then they executed the rest of the group, threw their corpses in the same small house, doused them all with gasoline and set them afire. An infant who had survived was thrown into the pyre alive.

The massacre that took place on 10 June 1944 in Distomo surpasses in sadism virtually all massacres. On that day, the Germans gathered the residents of Distomo in the school building

and slaughtered them in the most horrific ways. Two hundred and thirty two men women and children were tortured and killed in ways which we shall not detail here, out of respect for the reader.

The Greek Jews participated in WWII in all its aspects: in battle, the highest ranking officer of the Greek army to die in battle was the heroic Cavalry Colonel Mardocheus Frizis, who was killed on December 5, 1940, shortly after the battle of Premeti. During the occupation about 61,000 Jews were deported to the concentration camps, the largest number of them from Thessaloniki and Ioannina.

The Greek resistance played a defining role in keeping many Greek Jews safe after the Germans managed to transfer the Jews of the northern cities to Germany and Poland. The resistance did that by removing the Grand Rabbis from Athens and other cities to the mountains, sometimes without their consent, and thus giving the signal to the rest of the Jewish population that the time for a new exodus had come. Many Jewish men and women joined the resistance and fought alongside their Christian compatriots against the Nazis.

The Chief of the Police, Miltiadis Evert issue new identity cards to many Jews, concealing their religion, and several clerics also helped. The Metropolitan of Zakynthos refused to release the addresses of the Jewish people in his island to the German authorities, and scattered them in various villages, while many Jewish children were taken in and protected by Christian families. *The punishment for concealing Jewish people was severe: sending to the concentration camps.*

Refernces

1. [George C. Blytas, *The First Victory, Greece in the Second World War*](#) ,

Chapter 21, *Holocaust is a Greek Word*. Publishers: COSMOS and The

American Hellenic Institute Foundation.