

"OXI" (NO) DAY

On the 28th of October 1940 at 7 in the morning the alarm sirens sounded in Athens.

2 hours earlier, at 5, the Italian ambassador had surrendered to the then prime minister John Metaxas an ultimatum of Italy's minister of the exterior count Galeazzo Ciano (Mussolini's son-in-law - he had married his daughter Eda) who, after reading it, answered with the historic NO, or "OXI" in Greek.

An hour later, the Italian Army entered Greek soil and advanced south up to Kalamas river where it met the first serious resistance..

On the 15th of August of the same year, an Italian submarine, the "Delfino" had perpetrated a provocation, torpedoing and sinking the Greek navy cruiser "Elli" in the port of Tinos during the religious celebrations of the 15th of August. Thus the Italians created a precedent for Pearl Harbor, starting hostilities without a declaration of war.

The little Italian dictator Mussolini who fantasized himself being a new Julius Caesar and dreamed of resurrecting the Roman Empire, conquering Greece and other lands around the Mediterranean sea, the "Mare Nostrum", "our Sea" as he called it.

However, he had grossly underestimated his "host", in this case being Greece and the Greek army who repelled the invader and forced him to retreat to the Albanian mountains in the cold and snowstorms. The Greek soldiers shouted "Aera", the Greek battle cry, attacking with their bayonets and the Italians ran in panic.

The Italian people at the time loved Mussolini and the fascists very much. Life was so beautiful with the parades, music, marches and flags!

They believed that life would go on in this theatrical atmosphere but "il Duce" Mussolini had other plans with his 8 million parading bayonets glistening in the sun; to help his friend and ally Adolf Hitler so that they could conquer the world together!

Benito however was about to learn that the tanks and the canons are not ...macaroni!

Thus the Italians, the "fratelli" (the brothers) or the "macaronis", as they called them, unleashed their attack against Greece.

Of the military units participating in the battles, let us mention the "bersaglieri" with their cock

feathers on their helmets, the "wolves of Tuscany" and the "carabinieri", a kind of gendarmery.

In April of 1939, Mussolini's Italians had landed in Albania and occupied her without fighting. There they amassed their arms, their materiel and their soldiers and awaited the order to attack Greece.

The order came on 28 October.

Following the commencement of hostilities and after the Italian armies invaded the Greek soil, General Headquarters published the following laconic bulletin:

"As of 5:30 a.m. today, the Italian forces are attacking our advanced units of the Greek-Albanian frontier. Our forces are defending our native soil".

On the first days of the war, Headquarters was busy with reorganization.

The mobilization lasted about 15 days and on the 14th of November the general counterattack started throughout the entire Albanian front with first target the repulsion of the enemy and its expulsion to the Albanian soil. When this was achieved, successive attacks of the Greeks on the Albanian mountains began, aiming to push the Italians towards the Adriatic sea, to vacate Albania and the survivors to return home unsuccessful..

Despite the hardships, lack of supplies and munitions, the bitter cold and frost that caused many injuries and deaths, the counterattack was effective.

The Italian positions fell one after another. Starting with Koritsa, the church bells announcing the successive victories never ceased tolling; Pogradec, Premeti, Hagioi Saranta (Santi Quaranta), Argyrokastro, Chimara, Klisoura...

Hitler and the Germans followed with great anxiety the war developments in Albania which their friend and ally Benito Mussolini undertook and who was forced to continuously change the commanders of the Italian army in Albania. Incompetent general succeeds incompetent general! They decide to interfere on the 6th of April 1941; but this is another story.

The war in Albania delayed the German attack against the Soviet Union, the operation "Barbarossa" about two months, because Hitler was forced to hasten to Mussolini's aid in the operation "Maritsa", conquering Greece and driving her British allies from the Greek soil. The heavy winter that followed forced the German army to stop before reaching Moscow without completing the conquest and submission of the Soviet Union and to turn with all its means against the western allies, including the United States of America.

Then came Stalingrad, which changed the course of the war...

[(Wrote:) Diogenes]