

**WORLD WARS: Law of
War and Priorities of a Just
War - XII MOSCOW
INNOVATIVE LEGAL
FORUM "LEGAL
PRIORITIES OF THE
FUTURE" - Kutafin
Moscow State Law
University (MSAL), 27th
March 2025**



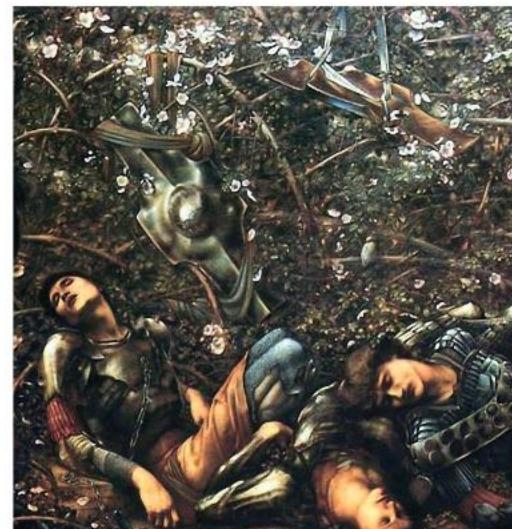
МИРОВЫЕ ВОЙНЫ:

ПРАВО ВОЙНЫ И ПРИОРИТЕТЫ
СПРАВЕДЛИВОЙ ВОЙНЫ

27

марта

2025





Gianluigi Segalerba
IEF – Institute for Philosophical Studies
University of Coimbra
Portugal
27th March 2025

The Italian Resistance Movement (1943 – 1945)

I thank you very much for your interest!

gianluigisegalerba@gmail.com

Working Premise

Everything is at disposal.

gianluigisegalerba@gmail.com



Introduction

In my contribution, I shall describe some main points of the Italian Resistance and of the life of Nuto Revelli, an author who participated in the Resistance.

Resistance

The Italian Resistance is mainly active in northern Italy, which is occupied by the German army and by the Italian fascists until the end of April 1945.

Armistice 8th September 1943

- After the armistice with the allied army on 8th September 1943, the king abandons Rome.
- There is no government.
- The country precipitates in chaos. There is no more a chain of command.
- The German army easily occupies at the beginning nearly the whole of Italy.
- Step after step the allies conquer Italy, but the northern part of Italy will remain occupied by the German army until the end of April 1945.

Chronicle

When the armistice was ratified on 8th September 1943, the Italian army was taken by surprise and left disbanded by the flight of the king and the generals, while the Germans occupied the parts of the country that had not yet been liberated by the Allies (mainly Sicily).

Chronicle

Resistance developed with time in those areas that were under German control and administered by Mussolini, reinstated as the head of the Italian Social Republic.

The first partisans were disbanded soldiers who had managed to avoid being captured and sent to concentration camps after the armistice.

This first group of partisans was soon joined by all the young men who refused to be enlisted in the fascist army.

The CLN - National Liberation Committee, representing all national antifascist groups, was at the head of the Resistance. Partisan groups gradually grew in strength and expertise regardless of the harsh repression carried out by the Germans and the fascists, who did not hesitate to harm civilians in order to put an end to their support to the partisans.

Chronicle

They carried out retaliation massacres everywhere (Fosse Ardeatine, Monte Sole, S. Anna Stazzema, Marzabotto, Boves, Benedicta...), leading to more than 14,000 victims.

However, this did not prevent the development of close cooperation between civilians and Resistance fighters.

Women in particular had a very important role, not only as fighters, but also with regard to assistance, support and exchange of information.

Support by civilians and the Allies allowed the Resistance movement to spread from the mountains to the lowlands and in the cities too.

Chronicle

The Resistance movement welcomed fighters of all political background. Although Communist involvement was very high, particularly in the »Garibaldi« Brigades, there were also units that were predominantly Catholic (»Fiamme Verdi«), Socialist (»Matteotti«) or liberal-socialist (»Giustizia e Libertà«). In the autumn of 1944, when the advance of the Allied forces was forced to a stop on the Gothic line, which ran across the Appennini mountains, partisan units had to endure a very challenging winter, waiting until April for the Allies to advance further. In April, finally, partisan units were the first ones to set the most important cities in Northern Italy free, establishing the first democratic local governments.

Chronicle

At the end of the war, among all those involved in the Resistance, more than 185,000 were officially acknowledged as partisan fighters, 35,000 of whom were women.

The Resistance movement suffered nearly 29,000 casualties, including 683 women.

Chronicle

The Italian Resistance, or simply La Resistenza, consisted of all the Italian resistance groups who fought the occupying forces of Nazi Germany and the fascist collaborationists of the Italian Social Republic during the Second World War in Italy from 1943 to 1945.

As a diverse anti-fascist and anti-Nazi movement and organisation, the Resistenza opposed Nazi Germany and its Fascist puppet state regime, the Italian Social Republic, which the Germans created following the Nazi German invasion and military occupation of Italy by the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS from 8 September 1943 until 25 April 1945.

Chronicle

Italian opposition to the Fascist Italian government existed even before World War II, but open and armed resistance followed the German invasion of Italy on 8 September 1943: in Nazi-occupied Italy, the Italian Resistance fighters, known as the partigiani (partisans), fought a guerra di liberazione nazionale ('national liberation war') against the invading German forces; in this context, the anti-fascist partigiani of the Italian Resistance also simultaneously participated in the Italian Civil War, fighting against the Italian Fascists of the collaborationist Italian Social Republic.

Chronicle

The Resistance was a diverse coalition of various Italian political parties, independent resistance fighters and soldiers, and partisan brigades and militias.

The modern Italian Republic was declared to be founded on the struggle of the Resistance: the Constituent Assembly was mostly composed of representatives of the parties that had given life to the Italian Resistance's National Liberation Committee.

These former Italian Resistance fighters wrote the Constitution of Italy at the end of the war based on a compromissory synthesis of their Resistance parties' respective principles of democracy and anti-fascism.

Chronicle

The Italian Resistance has its roots in anti-fascism, which progressively developed in the period from the mid-1920s, when weak forms of opposition to the fascist regime already existed, until the beginning of World War II. Furthermore, in the memory of the partisan fighters, especially those of communist and socialist inspiration, the memory of the Biennio Rosso and of the violent struggles against the fascist squads in the period 1919–1922, considered by some exponents of the left-wing parties (among which Palmiro Togliatti himself) a true "civil war" in defence of the popular classes against the reactionary forces.

Chronicle

In the first major act of resistance following the German occupation, Italian partisans and local resistance fighters liberated the city of Naples through a chaotic popular rebellion. Naples was the first of the major European cities to rise up against the German occupation, and successfully at that. The people of Naples revolted and held strong against Nazi occupiers in the last days of September 1943.

Chronicle

The popular mass uprising and resistance in Naples against the occupying Nazi German forces, known as the Four days of Naples, consisted of four days of continuous open warfare and guerrilla actions by locals against the Nazi Germans. The spontaneous uprising of Neapolitan and Italian Resistance against German occupying forces (despite limited armament, organization, or planning) nevertheless successfully disrupted German plans to deport Neapolitans en masse, destroy the city, and prevent Allied forces from gaining a strategic foothold.

Chronicle

Elsewhere, the nascent movement began as independently operating groups were organized and led by previously outlawed political parties or by former officers of the Royal Italian Army.

Many partisan formations were initially founded by soldiers from disbanded units of the Royal Italian Army that had evaded capture in Operation Achse, and were led by junior Army officers who had decided to resist the German occupation; they were subsequently joined and re-organized by Anti-Fascists, and became thus increasingly politicized.

Chronicle

Later the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (Committee of National Liberation, or CLN), created by the Italian Communist Party, the Italian Socialist Party, the Partito d'Azione (a republican liberal socialist party), Democrazia Cristiana and other minor parties, largely took control of the movement in accordance with King Victor Emmanuel III's ministers and the Allies.

The CLN was set up by partisans behind German lines and had the support of most groups in the region.

Chronicle

The main CLN formations included three politically varied groups: the communist Brigate Garibaldi (Garibaldi Brigades), the Giustizia e Libertà (Justice and Freedom) Brigades related to the Partito d'Azione, and the socialist Brigate Matteotti (Matteotti Brigades). Smaller groups included Christian democrats and, outside the CLN, monarchists such as the Brigate Fiamme Verdi (Green Flame Brigades) and Fronte Militare Clandestino (Clandestine Military Front) headed by Colonel Montezemolo. Another sizeable partisan group, particularly strong in Piedmont (where the Fourth Army had disintegrated in September 1943), were the "autonomous" (autonomi) partisans, largely composed of former soldiers with no substantial alignment to any anti-Fascist party; an example was the 1° Gruppo Divisioni Alpine led by Enrico Martini.

Chronicle

Partisan unit sizes varied, depending on logistics (such as the ability to arm, clothe and feed members) and the amount of local support.

The basic unit was the squadra (squad), with three or more squads (usually five) forming a distaccamento (detachment).

Three or more detachments made a brigata (brigade), of which two or more made a divisione (division).

In some places, several divisions formed a gruppo divisione (divisional group). These divisional groups were responsible for a zona d'operazione (operational group).

Chronicle

The worst conditions and fighting took place in mountainous regions. Resources were scarce and living conditions were terrible.

Due to limited supplies, the resistance adopted guerrilla warfare. This involved groups of 40–50 fighters ambushing and harassing the Nazis and their allies. The size of the brigades was reflective of the resources available to the partisans. Resource limits could not support large groups in one area.

Mobility was key to their success. Their terrain knowledge enabled narrow escapes in small groups when nearly surrounded by the Germans.

The partisans had no permanent headquarters or bases, making them difficult to destroy.

Chronicle

In their attempts to suppress the resistance, German and Italian Fascist forces (especially the SS, Gestapo, and paramilitary militias such as X^a MAS and Black Brigades) committed war crimes, including summary executions and systematic reprisals against the civilian population. Resistance captives and suspects were often tortured and raped. Some of the most notorious mass atrocities included the Ardeatine massacre (335 Jewish civilians and political prisoners executed without a trial in a reprisal operation after a resistance bomb attack in Rome), the Sant'Anna di Stazzema massacre (about 560 random villagers brutally killed in an anti-partisan operation in the central mountains), the Marzabotto massacre (about 770 civilians killed in similar circumstances), the Ossola massacre (24 partisans murdered during their retreat from Croveo to Switzerland) and the Salussola massacre (20 partisans murdered after being tortured, as a reprisal). In all, an estimated 15,000 Italian civilians were deliberately killed, including many women and children.

Chronicle

On 19 April 1945, the CLN called for an insurrection (the 25 April uprising). In Bologna, the occupying Nazi German forces and their few remaining Italian Fascist allies were openly attacked by Italian partisans on 19 April, and by 21 April, the city of Bologna was liberated by the partisans, the Italian Co-Belligerent Army, and the Polish II Corps under Allied command; Parma and Reggio Emilia were later freed on 24 April by the Italian Resistance and then the advancing Allied forces. Turin and Milan were liberated on 25 April through a popular revolt and Italian Resistance insurrection following a general strike that commenced two days earlier; over 14,000 German and Fascist troops were captured in Genoa on 26–27 April, when General Günther Meinhold surrendered to the CLN. The forces of German occupation in Italy officially capitulated on 2 May. Fascists attempted to continue fighting, but were quickly suppressed by the partisans and the Allied forces.

Chronicle

The April insurrection brought to the fore issues between the resistance and the Allies. Given the revolutionary dimension of the insurrection in the industrial centres of Turin, Milan, and Genoa, where concerted factory occupations by armed workers had occurred, the Allied commanders sought to impose control as soon as they took the place of the retreating Germans. While the Kingdom of Italy was the de facto ruler of the south, the National Liberation Committee, still embedded in German territory, existed as an organization which posed a threat to the monarchy and property owners in post-war Italy.

However the PCI, under directives from Moscow, enabled the Allies to carry out their program of disarming the partisans and discouraged any revolutionary attempt at changing the social system. Instead, the PCI emphasized national unity and "progressive democracy" in order to stake their claim in the post-war political situation. Despite the pressing need to resolve social issues which persisted after the fall of fascism, the resistance movement was subordinated to the interests of Allied leaders in order to maintain the status quo.

Nuto Revelli

Benvenuto "Nuto" Revelli (21 July 1919, Cuneo, Piedmont – 5 February 2004) was an Italian author, historian and partisan. A Second World War veteran who survived Italy's disastrous foray into Russian territory and its subsequent retreat, Revelli became well known for his book *Mai Tardi* about the ordeal. For his book *Il mondo dei vinti* (The World of the Defeated), he collected oral history accounts of 85 country dwellers around Cuneo in northwestern Italy.

Nuto Revelli

Revelli was a freshly commissioned second lieutenant when, on 21 July 1942, he left Italy on one of the two hundred troop trains sent to the Eastern Front by Mussolini as the Italian Army in Russia (ARMIR). On 19 September 1942 Revelli was wounded in an action which earned him a Silver Medal of Military Valor and a promotion to lieutenant, returning to the frontline after recovering in the hospital of Dnepropetrovsk.

Between mid-December 1942 and mid-January 1943, the Red Army broke through the Italian lines on the Don in Operation Little Saturn, encircling the Alpine Army Corps of which Revelli's 2nd Alpine Division "Tridentina" was part. During the subsequent retreat, tens of thousands of men fell in combat to break out of the pocket, succumbed to frostbite and exhaustion, or were captured and died in Soviet captivity.

Nuto Revelli

For Revelli, who survived the winter retreat and returned to Italy in the spring of 1943, the experience was a formative one.

In it he claimed to have lost what he called his ignorance of the nature of the regime he was serving, of the iniquity of the German ally, and of the extent to which his own youth, coinciding nearly exactly with the twenty years of fascism, had been shaped by fascism.

From very shortly after 8 September 1943—the date on which the Italian armistice with the Allies was announced—to the end of the war, Revelli was a partisan commander, first in the Alpine valleys west of Cuneo, Italy, then across the border in southeastern France.

Nuto Revelli

Revelli's first book, among the first accounts of the retreat from Russia, was *Mai tardi*.

La strada del davai collects the wartime memories of some forty veterans of the Eastern Front.

Many of Revelli's other books—oral histories—explore the effects of post-war industrialization on the rural economies of the province of Cuneo.

Despite the great importance of his literary and historical work, Revelli was never an academic or a professional historian; by training, as he often said, he was a surveyor. He was also an iron products dealer.

The memories of World War II and of the Partisan war

- The book is Difficult to follow since it is in the form of a diary.
- Anyway, a strategy of interpretation can be found.
- Progressive awareness of the criminality of fascism.
- Progressive awareness of the false education received.
- Progressive awareness of the Fascists propaganda.
- Progressive awareness of all the failures of the Italian army.
- Progressive awareness of the criminality of fascism.

Propaganda

A thread of liberation from fascism propaganda

26th July 1943

- Fall of Fascism

8th September 1943

The Armistice of Cassibile (Italian: Armistizio di Cassibile) was an armistice that was signed on 3 September 1943 by Italy and the Allies, marking the end of hostilities between Italy and the Allies during World War II. It was made public five days later.

It was signed on September 3rd by Major-General Walter Bedell Smith for the Allies and Brigade-General Giuseppe Castellano for Italy. The armistice's signing took place at a summit in an Allied military camp at Cassibile, Sicily, which had recently been occupied by the Allies. The armistice was approved by both Victor Emmanuel III and Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who was serving as Prime Minister of Italy at the time. The signing of the armistice was kept secret on that day, and was announced to the media on September 8th.

8th September 1943

Nazi Germany responded by attacking Italian forces in Italy, southern France and the Balkans, and freeing Benito Mussolini on 12 September. The Italian forces were forcefully disbanded in the north and centre of the country, with most of Italy being occupied by the Germans, who established a puppet state, the Italian Social Republic led by Mussolini. The king, the Italian government and most of the Navy fled to southern Italy under the protection of the Allies. An Italian resistance movement emerged in German-occupied Italy.

Abandonment from the authorities

- The book of Nuto Revelli well describes the condition of complete abandonment following the 8th September.
- Soldiers are left without orders.
- Commanders are left without orders.
- The army is in chaos.
- The army is demobilised without order of demobilisation.
- The army is completely dispersed.
- Italian people is completely disoriented.
- For the German army is rather easy to occupy a great part of the Italian territory.
- Soldiers captured by Germans are deported to Germany.

No trust in the military forces

- From this experience, Nuto Revelli understands that there can be no trust in the former commanders of the Italian army.

Italian People is guilty

- The author is clear as regards guiltiness or innocence of the Italian people. Italians are guilty because of the different criminal actions which were perpetrated during Fascism. Revelli quotes for instance three cases.
 - Albania
 - Africa
 - Russia

People believed in the propaganda of Italy's imperial destiny, which was many time diffused by Fascism.

Refusal of monarchy

- The memories of Nuto Revelli express many times a complete refusal of the monarchy and of the whole royal family. He criticises the royal family for its connections with Fascism, for its complicity with Fascism, for the war and for having abandoned the army in a condition of complete disorganisation.

Referendum 2nd June 1946

- Within the Italian resistance the opposition to the monarchy due to his connection and complicity with Fascism become stronger and stronger.
- This will then lead, after the end of the World War II, to the referendum of 2nd June 1946, to the victory of the Republic as form of the new state and to the corresponding defeat of the monarchy.

Thank you very much!

- gianluigisegalerba@gmail.com