

GIACOMO NOTARI (ITALY)

CLIP 01

My name is Giacomo Notari. I was born and still live in the mountains, in the town of Busana, in a tiny hamlet called Marmoreto. I have always lived here, even when I was working in Reggio, because the mountains are part of my soul.

I was born in a small hamlet of about 300 inhabitants. Most of the people were small farmers who survived on subsistence farming and didn't grow crops to sell on the market. It was the same for my family: we had some land, a few cows, chestnut groves and some woods. Actually, I have to say that except for a few days during the war I never suffered hunger. I had a brother who died as a partisan at 19, towards the end of the war. I also had an uncle, a brother of my mother, who didn't live with us but in Cervarezza, who died as a partisan after being confined to the Tremiti Islands by the fascists. On the other hand, my family was a traditional Christian and catholic family. My father used to sing in church. I have never served at Mass, although they had asked me, because I didn't like to dress up: they wore these white and red robes, so I never accepted to serve. But we used to go to Mass, at least on Sundays, catechism and so on. We had an elementary school up to the third grade, then we had to go to Busana for the fifth grade, by foot of course. There was no water in the houses, only a small fountain in a chestnut grove everyone drew water from. The school we attended was very crowded because at that time there were many kids in the villages: there were three classes together, and it was quite full. Naturally, our school had no toilet facilities, no running water and no electricity. There was a portrait of Mussolini, one of the king, and a crucifix. Our teacher actually made the ink herself with some black powders in a flask, and that continued until the third grade. I was always happy to go to school: actually, I longed for school.

My mother died when I was four and a half years old, my brother was almost six, so I suffered from this loss, too. I don't know about other kids, at times I even talked with them, but each has his own grief. I sort of overcame this when my daughters were born, but at times I still haven't come through. I still dream of this... Anyway.

CLIP 02

They took us to Busana as there was a radio there, and I remember that we listened to Mussolini's speech from Palazzo Venezia. Afterwards I saw it on TV over and over, that big head at the window, on that balcony in Palazzo Venezia... and everybody clapping below. *And what did you think?* I thought... I thought that the war had started. You didn't contemplate things too much at that age. *How old were you?* Well, that was June of 1940, I was thirteen and a half, so what can you be concerned about? Having had that sort of education.

These guys broke into the local headquarters of the fascist party and threw everything out of the windows, from the second floor, including the portrait of Mussolini, which had been respected so much until then. Seeing these things in the dirt of the street, because the streets weren't paved at the time, well that was the first turning point.

CLIP 03

Then there was this episode in La Bettola, and it was really a shocking event for our province. They had killed many people before, even elderly people, but always adults. This time however they made fun of those who were dead, and also killed some children, so everybody really started to become conscious that it was "time to get rid of them". And a really large group of people took up arms against them.

CLIP 04

After all these actions the Germans couldn't allow this to continue any longer. They couldn't let us go on like this. I guess at our headquarters they found out that there would have been a mop-up, which actually took place later. Patrelini came to us saying "we must find something to blow up the bridge", so that the trucks couldn't get through. So we went there with Carretti, a guy working for Edison, the

local electric company: they had a cave so they also had TNT, mines, gunpowder... We prepared the holes and then blew up a large arch of the bridge, a very big bridge in Cinque Cerri. Then we left for the mountains, and from that day I was in battle.

We went to the headquarters in Lama Golese, on the Cusna mountain. The headquarters were there, with Pasquale Marconi, a teacher from Castelnovo Monti, who was a Christian Democrat, or a catholic anyway. Then there were Eros, Miro, a Jewish doctor who was from Jugoslavia, I was told, and we spent a few days there. It was a sort of recruitment, but we didn't have enough weapons; we were waiting for Allied air drops that didn't take place, so they sent four of us back to Ligonchio. We went to Ligonchio and there really was a crowd of partisans there. Unfortunately, not all of them were armed. There were more partisans coming, more young men who wanted to fight, to enrol, than weapons dropped from the sky or taken during attacks to the German garrisons. I was luckier than others, since I was given an English machine gun, a Sten gun, which was quite short. That was also useful, you could disassemble it in three pieces and hide it, and put it together quickly and so on. And I also had a 9 mm Beretta and four hand grenades. I stayed there with the First Battalion and we used to go on road 63, where there were already German garrisons all over the place. Not long after, around July, there was the great mop-up. The Goering attacked, we fought back for a day and a half, two days, then there was a disbandment, because it's really hard to resist against an attack from a German division with armoured vehicles, artillery, small airplanes, special forces. Actually, thinking about it today, maybe it wasn't even right to fight back as we did, since guerrilla means attacking and withdrawing, coming back and so on. That time however it was decided to fight back jointly. We suffered many casualties in the end, some missing men. And then the Germans took away more than a thousand men: all those who were able to work, and I think also a few women, were sent to Germany. Around one thousand men were taken away. That time there was a disbandment, a complete disbandment.

After that, the Germans left, their division withdrew, but the garrisons on road 63 remained until the end of the war, as usual. We slowly recovered, difficultly, and I remember I stayed home around ten days because of this, helping my father planting wheat, while my brother had gone away with Frigio, Bedeschi, and they were faster in getting back together.

Sure, there were moments we were afraid, but actually, it was more about being irresponsible than afraid. When I think about it now, however, I realize that we could have done so much more without that much efforts and dangers. I've been afraid one night because I had never heard this German machine gun shoot, they called it "raganella" (tree frog): it could shoot so fast, so many bullets. That was really the only time my heart was pounding. Later I realized it was quite distant, but at the moment I thought it was there, a few steps away, this nasty sound in the silence of the night. I felt fear that night, at least for a short time.

CLIP 05

One night we went to Acqua Bona with Carretti and many partisans because we had to apprehend a German marshal who was taking milk away from the farmers, sending it out to the headquarters in Busana, to the outposts. The villages were full of people, the inhabitants had asked us to go take him, so we went there one night. Carretti ordered us to wrap up our shoes with some bags in order not to make noise, but it didn't work because the villages were full of shepherds and they had dogs. The dogs heard us, even if we were really quiet, and started barking. At that point the marshal came out with a soldier to see what was going on, why the dogs were still barking. We had put some mines on the road, so that if we had to fight, the soldiers who came down from Nismozza would walk into the mines. While the marshal was walking around to see what was happening, we solved the problem: he blew up on a mine. We were supposed to take him alive, but we got him dead, the marshal and the soldier as well. Then we had to back off of course.

CLIP 06

We were receiving reports of troops coming back from the front, from Garfagnana, on the road going through Fivizzano and the Cerreto pass and towards Castelnovo Monti. They were sending new troops to the front, by that time they had been there two or three months. So we received this order to

lay mines, but what was there for us to mine, there weren't any bridges left! There was only this small thing we used to call the "fognone" (big sewer). By that time we had a lot of TNT since they dropped it from the airplanes, and they were dropping many things. We walked up there. There was a wonderful moon this night, a very calm night, like in springtime. They had a machine gun nest not too far away, we took the necessary measures and put two groups, one on each side of the bridge, in order to work untroubled. And we did work untroubled, placing 45 kg of TNT, sort of like chewing gum you know? After that we set the fuse and set it on fire. We walked down a bit because rocks would be falling down and well, I went back to see after the war was over, not only did we blow up the arch, but also 2-3 meters of road on both sides, because 45 kg are a lot, you know? So when they arrived they had to do a horse-shoe, that's why it was important to stop them. Stopping them from getting to the front 24 hours earlier during the attack, and getting them to have to dig the mountain, build a horse-shoe in order to be able to get through: those things you had to do with hoes, there were no bulldozers then.

CLIP 07

Well, did I kill somebody... We did shoot, but then knowing if we killed them for sure is another story. That night, three Germans were shot dead there. They were buried in the colony of Busana. I can tell you that if I had killed a man while he was looking at me, I would be sorry even now, as killing somebody is never a nice thing. Personally, I'm against torture, even if it's necessary to obtain information, it's something that I can't cope with. However, I've always thought that when somebody deserves it, when someone has done some bad deeds, well, we must get rid of him.

As for spies, I never really thought anything. I simply thought that they had to be killed, spotted and killed. It was also important to set apart those in good faith from those who were not. If this woman took some money from the Germans to get our comrades killed, it meant that there was really not too much good faith there. They didn't really have the fascist dogma, working for the regime. If he's a fascist to hurt people and is also paid for it, then it's a double offence.

There was this trail heading up, which turned around a bush, just like this. At a certain point I see a German walking down with a Tak-Poum (german mashine gun) on his shoulder. I had my machine gun and I pointed it at him, so after a couple of steps (the bush wasn't really very big) he got there and raised his hands. I took his rifle and he didn't want to give me his shotgun: I could have left it to him, keeping him in front of me, but it's always better to be careful. So I took the gun and I brought him home. I guess the Germans were really longing for some milk. Because my father used to make cheese at home, that type of cheese which is sought-after today while we hated it then because we had it all the time, and he drank a whole pot of milk. The pot was on the table in order to make cheese, and he drank it all. There were many people around by that time, and my father stared at him in an admiring way, he had been a prisoner too, but not one bad word against him... He was my age, maybe a few years older. After that I took him to Ligonchio, and a comrade from Busana told me afterwards that he guided him and two other Germans who were already there to Silano and through the front, with the Allies.

For the whole time we did not speak. We stopped at a well to have a drink, we where just like two boys, he was than already like a lamb, disarmed. Later, another partisan came with me, from Lingonchio on, a former Carabiniere who now is dead, Nello Coli, also from my village.

CLIP 08

An American colonel had crashed with his airplane and had to stay in Ligonchio for a while. There was little to eat, and he was fed even less than the others. So he told our captain: "If I manage to get to Florence I'll organize an air-drop and drop you a lot of good food". He kept his word. He crossed the front lines and got to Florence. There was communication from Ligonchio then, from Lama Golese to Florence; there were English officers with radios, it was just like talking with a telephone today. So he did this air-drop, on a Sunday morning, there were airplanes all over the sky and they were dropping all sorts of things, even gasoline tanks that looked like missiles. They even dropped two small Lambrettas, a light gun, a whole lot of stuff, things to eat, but quite a few parachutes fell on the other side of the river and were taken by the Germans. Later the Germans tried to go take some on our side too, and that's when a partisan died, poor man, his name was Nello Vergai, he was a sailor from

Caprile. He was shot and took cover wounded, but he hid so well that we didn't find him. The woodmen found him two or three months later, and you could see that he had bled to death. He had covered himself with leaves... It was a terrible tragedy.

CLIP 09

So the Germans decided to blow up the power plants in Ligonchio and headed up the mountains determined. The central headquarters, who were afraid we would not endure one last attack by the Germans, ordered the local commanding officer, Ramis, to mine the power plant: not the whole plant, only the roof, so that it would fall on the machinery and preserve them. Ramis refused and told them "Listen, there are 500 partisans over here". There was also an English officer, and we were really armed then. We had everything: a whole load of ammunition, machine guns, mortars... If we had to mine a power plant at that point... We fought back fiercely, even at night. They had made it to less than one km from the road to the Predale power plant, but they didn't manage to proceed any further, not one step further. The local people helped us out a lot there. Workers built the trenches while the women cooked. That was really a perfect battle, and then one morning the Germans were forced to retreat.

In order to retreat the Germans had to cross a slope: it was easy to shoot them with the machine gun over there. So they devised a plan: using smoke-bombs, they created a smoke-screen in the whole area to try and get through. Nevertheless, we kept firing the machine guns, in spite of the smoke-screen. But the Germans would always carry away their casualties. They probably had a hard time doing it, but they managed to take them away all the same. That was the last real battle in our area. After that there were only small attacks, to trucks and so on, but that was the last big battle. I remember there was also Carretti who was leading a detachment in Primaora, but that was the last battle.

Why should we slip away? There are 500 of us now, and we have all we need. There's also an English officer with us. What kind of impression would we make? So we stayed there, and in the end there was this great feeling of joy. It's truly a great memory.

CLIP 10

I didn't even manage to come to Reggio for the liberation because some German soldiers had hidden and we didn't know what they were going to do. We found out the following day: they had stayed there because they were tired of the war, because they didn't want to follow their troops, maybe they were afraid of drowning in the Po river... Two of them had girlfriends they got married with over here, their kids are here now.

CLIP 11

Now we might laugh about this, but when you talked about Russia then, about a country that carried out a revolution, where there was a king who was killed, where they were selling the land along with the farmers... It was an inspirational message for the youth, you know? Then we all know how the story went, but the communist principles, just like the Christian principles, are two sets of values that just can't fail. Mankind must head in this direction in order to survive, otherwise we will end up in the dust. Having said this, there's a message I've always told the priests too: communist and Catholic family, communist and Catholic family... If you had really applied Christianity we would have had no reason to join the communist party, you would have been the ones making justice. They can't understand how anyone coming from a Catholic family that goes to Mass, that has baptized its children, whose father sings in church, can join the communist Party. A family that has rebuilt the church of Santa Maria after the Germans had set it on fire, at its own expenses and efforts. Because there was this message of liberation, that's why. Otherwise who would have done it, nobody paid us for this... I worked for the communist party for 13 years and 6 months without social insurance contributions and without health insurance. If you count that, for 13 years and 6 months I had no pay, and that's fortunately because I was already rich, I had food on my table at home. Other comrades who were living the same life I was living had their wives working as maids, or on the rice-field, with

children at home. That's how we set up the communist Party, not with the treasure of Dongo, do you understand?

CLIP 12

The last memory I have of my brother was after the mop-up of 1944, with this song that went "The moon, the stars talked about love", "Oh what a pretty flower, oh what a pretty flower" and so on, it was hot then, they used to sing it on the radio. The refrain was: "The moon, the stars talked about love. Oh what a pretty flower, oh what a pretty flower". That was the last time we were singing together, because he died soon after in Ligonchio, near the house where I met my wife.

What did we do? Cleaned the guns, some helped fixing the meals, another one went to get water. Then at night we also talked, about the few things we knew. We had political commissioners we listened to, but after the war I realized that they didn't know much as well. Sure, they were called liked that, but I have to say that their knowledge, their political culture was quite limited.

I couldn't live my life anywhere else, I would really have a hard time. And that's how I felt during the war too. We even slept in beech-trees, on tree leaves, I could say it was a beautiful experience. Looking at today's consumerism, I also understood that men need only a few things to live. Today you have stores full of stuff, you don't know where to put things at home; at the time if you had a bottle of water, some bread and cheese, you were just as strong as today, maybe even more since you didn't need to go see the doctor after you ate too much. I learned so much from the resistance, and from the war too.

Real antifascism developed even after the war, along with awareness, as you understood that fascism wasn't only people with guns in their hands, as we found ourselves with the parties of Movimento Sociale and L'Uomo Qualunque in 1945-46 reorganizing fascist principles, do you know what I mean? That's when this feeling arises, that we must do something. Why am I still here at ANPI in Reggio? I'm here to resist. We must create a social fabric that won't allow fascism again. That's why I say that antifascism matured after the war more than during the war itself.

CLIP 13

I also want to add that what we did get our country to move forward in all these years, everyone can see it. Now I'm worried, I would be sad if this heritage were to be lost, if the country didn't preserve the values of our liberation struggle. Especially looking back to the 600 partisans we lost, who were killed during the liberation war, and not so much for us - we're old now and we're about to pass away - but for our youth. We need to pass on our memories to keep this alive, in order to move forward, that's what the country needs. Because after all we did, all our efforts, we still have subversive forces in Rome, we have Alessandra Mussolini, Fini, Berlusconi and Bossi, we don't support these reactionary people. That's why we want to tell our youth that in these times we must fight together, and as much as we can, although it will never be enough, we're here for them.

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