The recording of political, diplomatic and military events, moment by moment, the comparison of living and inanimate material, of difficulties due to weather or to ground conditions and the results of the consequences of the Greek-Italian conflict have been printed in a great number of publications. The remaining number of unpublished documents in the Greek, Italian and other archives is massive; one can also gather much data within the frame of the so-called "oral history".

The problem though, encountered in the sources available about the war of 1940-41 (e.g. memoirs-apologies, military orders, staff plans, memoranda of diverse content, distortion or simply concealment of facts and numbers, journals, letters by known and unknown persons, "authentic" or non-"authentic" narrations etc) have not as yet attracted the interest of strict scientific criticism and research.

Both on the Greek and on the Italian side, official sources (e.g. the Directorate of Army History of the Greek General Staff and the Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito-Ufficio Storico, or the office of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs which publishes the Documenti Diplomatici Italiani), or even individuals (such as Theophilaktos Papakonstantinos, Angelos Terzakis, Mario Cervi) have made systematic efforts towards a full portrayal of war events. Their contribution is commendable, not only because of its in-
formative character, but also because of the offered proof, sometimes invaluable, about the definition of problems whose dimensions remain obscure to this day.

In particular, I will refer here to a matter, which I consider vital: that is, the ideological armament of the enemy forces. A soldier, when he is not a mercenary, does not sacrifice the ultimate gift he possesses, his life, if he is not convinced for the value and the result of his sacrifice. This matter was approached by Greek bibliography with some improvisation perhaps justifiably so, or even intentionally.

To be precise, no reservations were presented, and very rightly so, about the moral stature of the Greek soldier. Justice was on his side and he did not need any special elucidation. Undoubtedly a solid anti-Italian sentimental substratum had developed among public opinion, despite the conventional propriety that the dictatorship of Metaxas was trying to maintain. Following the torpedoing of “Ελλή”, on 15th August 1940 at Tinos, on the nameday of the Virgin Mary, the sentimental charging, in combination with the injustice and the insult to the Orthodox religious tradition, reached its peak. That action by the Italian submarine contributed, as became obvious later, to the

12.11., 13.11., 14.11., 15.11. and 16.11.1990), opinions and estimations were stated about “The year ’40 without myths”, with documents and comments which deserve to attract the attention of specialists; cf. also the discussion between journalists and historians about “the 50 years of the historical “Ohi”” in Μεσημβρινή (Mesimvrini) of 22. and 23.11.1990. The publications and the special articles about the war of 1940-41 in the Greek daily press are numerous; I am pointing out those which might be of a more immediate use to the researcher: newspaper Μακεδονία (Makedonia) of 28.10.1990 and 27.10.1991 (photomechanical reproduction of the front pages of the same newspaper of 23.11., 7.12., 9.12., 24.12., 27.12.1940 and 11.1., 11.2., 15.3.1941); Το Βήμα (To Vima) of 30.10.1988 [Χαιρετισμός στην Ελλάδα. Πολιτική γελοιογραφία και σάτιρα από τον Βρετανικό Τύπο του ’40 (Salutation to Greece. Political cartoons and satire from the British Press of 1940)], of 28.10.1990 (with various contributions and interviews by Greek political leaders); Η Καθημερινή (Kathimerini) of 25.10.1992 (photomechanical reproduction of the front pages of various Athenian newspapers of 1940-41: a valuable contribution), of 28.10.1992 (quotes from articles by Greek journalists, literary men, artists, rare photographs from that time, G. A. Leontaritis’ Contribution about the causes of Metaxas’ death, extracts in Greek translation from the Diary of G. Bottai); Ταχυδρόμος (Tahidromos) of 28.10.1992 n° 44 (2007): Πόλεμος ’40-’41 με το χιούμορ των γελοιογράφων (The War of ’40-’41 seen through the humour of the cartoonists). Also in the special issue of Revue d’Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale et des conflits contemporains, 136-34e année (octobre 1984): La Grèce dans la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, interesting is the article by Alexandre I. Despotopoulos: “La guerre gréco-italienne et gréco-allemande (28 octobre 1940 - 31 mai 1941)”, pp. 3-47 (there are no bibliographical references).
formation of a powerful collective state of mind in the Greek army and the
Greek people, who had a vision of the Virgin Mary on the Albanian moun-
tains, the wounded one from Tinos, protecting and leading the Greek soldier
to Victory.

What could the Italian soldier set against this invincible moral armament?
Did he really have very few, if any, ideological aims? The official Greek pro-
paganda, which then firmly controlled all existing forms of mass media (radio
newspapers), built with comfort and general consent, immediately after the
hostilities, an unassailable moral edifice which soon reached exaggeration.
And that is because it created an enemy who was undoubtedly committing
a crime, but who was at the same time being presented as incompetent in
war, ridiculous, of diminished stamina and will, coward, compliant, defeatist,
ready to surrender. The cartoons and the various folk songs and others, the
ironical adjectives that were used and the disparaging insinuations, con-
solidated the characterizations just mentioned. Besides, official propaganda,
as well as the spontaneous reaction of the people created the optimism which
was necessary for the first difficult moments.

Still, inexorable questions are put forth to the historian: what is the
content, finally, of the “miracle” or of those glorious days of war in Albania,
if the Greek victors defeated an easy enemy, whose superiority in numbers
and arms seemed to play a completely unimportant role. Strong proof of that
optimistic over-simplification of probably the most serious factor, which has
to do with the justification or non-justification of a military conflict, has
survived up to date among the Greek public opinion: that is, that the
Italian “macaronis” took to their heels and the Greeks nearly threw them
into the sea.

Both these propositions have an element of truth. The historian though,
is called by posterity to interpret the internal contradictions and the dilemmas
posed by the afore-mentioned ascertainments and reality.

Did the Italians then fight so feebly, without ideological motives, without
enthusiasm, without the prospect of victory? The answer is unequivocally
negative. Evidence can be found both in Italian and Greek sources, some
of which remains unpublished.

I don’t think it is purposeful to go back to the time before 28 October

2. Tsirpanlis, art. cit., p. 33-34. About the torpedoing of “Elli”, see all that has been
collected, from Italian articles, by Manolis D. Papaioannou, Ρόδος και νεώτερα κείμενα.
4. Cesare Maria de Vecchi, Memorie [Rhodes and newer texts. 4. Cesare Maria de Vecchi,
Memorie], Rhodes 1992, pp. 75-119.
1940. On this date or rather on 10 June 1940, when Mussolini entered the Second World War on Germany's side, Fascist Italy had since 1922 systematized and enriched the ideological framework of its colonial policy, which Prime Minister Francesco Crispi had begun since the end of the 19th century.3

The Italian expansionism of the period between the wars was based mainly on four axes: the historical or messianic role of Rome in the Mediterranean; the demographic factor, so that the haemorrhage of emigration would stop and Italians would find an outlet in their own colonies; the economic factor, or the exploitation of the colonies' raw materials; national prestige or national pride, which quickly led to the feeling of racial superiority and racism.4

On 9 May 1936 the establishment of the Italian Imperium was announced, which after 7 April 1939 (date of the annexation of Albania) included: Libya, the so-called Africa Orientale Italiana (that is, Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia), the Dodecanese, Albania and a suburb of the Chinese town of Tien Tsin. In total, it covered an area of 3,515,700 sq.m. and had a population of 14,065,000 people.5

Let me remind you that the Italian army had not gone through any serious moral crisis caused by a defeat on the battlefield. Moreover, its alliance with the all-powerful Germany, then victorious throughout Europe, at a time when only England had not yielded,6 ensured the Italian soldier with solid resources of confidence; and these in combination with the distant and more recent honourable past of Roman Grandeur, helped form probably the highest morale which the enemy of the Greek soldier could possibly possess on 28 October 1940.

The above statements are reversed if one reads the memoirs of Italian officers who directly or indirectly participated in the conflict. From sources of this kind we can obtain valuable information, as long as we use them with particular attention. I hasten to point out that all memoirs — as is demanded by the logic of time, but also the personal safety of the writer — were published after the end of the war, that is, after the deplorable end of Mussolini and his regime.

5. Ibidem, p. 276 (according to the census of 1939-1940).

From the bibliographical sources mentioned above, it becomes obvious that the war which had ended in the Albanian mountains in April 1941, continued in 1945-46 (with small time prolongations) in Italian printinghouses, through written works. In these works, the Greek soldier is mentioned on a commendable scale, which begins with the proper recognition of the justice of his cause, his combativeness and bravery, and continues to the glorification of his intelligence, his excellent training, his self-denial and the ultimate sacrifice for his country.

Most of all, it is Visconti Prasca who is not sparing his praise of the high morale of his enemies, while he does not hesitate to underestimate the "difficult and obscure", as he puts it, ideological aims of the Italian soldier. This praise from the enemy camp is, of course, welcome as it reflects reality to a great extent, but as it is awarded only after the end of the war, it leaves us with some reservations.

7. Visconti Prasca, *Io ho aggredito la Grecia*, pp. 66, 92-93. Though during the meeting of 15.10.1940 under Duce, Visconti Prasca had no laudative words for the morale of the Greeks. On the contrary, he praises the high morale of the Italian soldiers, and when questioned by Mussolini: "Do you know what the morale of the Greek soldiers is?", Prasca answers: "They are not people who would wish to fight"; see the minutes of the afore-mentioned meeting in: Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito - Ufficio Storico, *La campagna di Grecia*, vol. 2 (Documenti), Roma 1980, pp. 159-167 (especially pp. 161-162). Cf. here also, in the Appendix, doc. 1, Prasca's report, dated 31.10.1940, where the fury of the attackers is emphasized; there is no mention of the morale of the Greeks.
That is why I accept the above-mentioned memoirs as sources of limited importance as far as the subject in question is concerned. So, in order to render the spirit and the pulse of those critical days and to approach, with at least relative certainty, the fickle nature of the fighter's morale on both sides of the border, I believe it is wise to express my arguments on the basis of the following outline:

a) An examination of the Italian and Greek documents drawn up shortly before and after the 28.10.40, such as the well-known records from the Italian War Council of 15.10.40, Metaxas' reaction according to the description given by the unexpected night visitor, E. Grazzi, the defense plans of the Greek General Staff, the unpublished diaries of the first five days (28.10. - 1.11.1940) of the Italian Alpinist division *Julia*, the unpublished memoranda for the same period by Visconti Prasca, the testimony of the Italian soldiers, the lengthy announcements by Metaxas on 30.10.40.

b) A re-arrangement of the adversaries' disposition, when the roles on the field of operations are radically reversed; the attackers are thrown back and become the defenders; the defenders are transformed into attackers. The Greek counter-attack which began on 14.11.40 culminated with the capture of Kleisoura (10.1.1941). Until the beginning of March 1941 the opponents, as if by unintended agreement, keep their positions firmly, and raise between them a wall of men and rocks; attacks and counter-attacks, captures and re-captures of hills or strategic points, with not negligible losses do not seem to alter the topographic and psychographic evidence.

c) The so-called spring attack of the Italians (9.-16.3.1941), as well as the subsequent continued pressure on the Greek army until the middle of April 1941, that is after the German attack (6.4.41), caused and still causes a great deal of argument both to the military and historical analysts. That is because the preparation of the attacking soldier, as far as armament and morale were concerned, was faultless, his numerical superiority was undeniable, the imminent and later victorious very rapid advance into the Balkans by the German allies did not even allow time for suspended "meditation". Let me mention simply that the Germans entered Thessaloniki on 9.4.41 while the Greek army far in Albania, in the section Boubesi-Trebesina, was overturning, on 14.-15.4.41, the fiercest Italian attacks on the terrible hill 7318. Where should the historian base his effort to interpret this new failure

of the attacker, when everything concerning this third period, in both camps, has been recorded with the usual military scholasticism and discipline. All the weight of a somewhat acceptable interpretation of the events falls on the investigation of the views of the “unknown” soldier. Plain numbers are of course useful, but not sufficient.

Regarding three-fold aspects of problem just mentioned, I wish to reveal all the testimonies I have at my disposal.

*The arrogance of superiority*

The minutes of the meeting of 15.10.40 at Duce’s office in Palazzo Venezia are widely known as far as the text and the comments by third parties are concerned.

The participants were Mussolini, Galeazzo Ciano, Badoglio, Soddu, Jacomoni, Roatta and Visconti Prasca. Apart from Soddu, all the others have left us accounts or memoirs. It would be particularly valuable if, sometime, a comparison was made between what these people said at that meeting and what they wrote after the war. Here I shall limit myself to what was said about the psychological preparation for the attack.

According to Visconti Prasca, the morale of the Italian forces in Albania was extremely high (*spirito altissimo*), enthusiasm at its zenith; the only instances of disobedience by officers and soldiers occured because of their impatience to advance and go into battle; they could hardly be constrained from taking premature action.

According to Jacomoni, the morale of the Greek population was at a very low level. In addition, according to Visconti Prasca the Greek soldiers had no desire to fight (cf. *supra*).

Nowhere in the minutes of the meeting is there the slightest mention of a possible predetermined retreat or concessions to Italy on the part of the Greek leaders of that time. The reference in a Greek publication that the Mayor of Athens Konstantinos Kotzias, known for his pro-Italian sentiments, was willing, after the Italians had started the war, to organize a demonstration to stop the mobilization, turned out to be a major fallacy. This is supposedly

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affirmed by Mussolini and is written into the minutes of 15.10.40\textsuperscript{12}. It is a fictitious piece of information. It is true that there were widely spread rumours about pro-Italian factors and successful attempts by the Italian propaganda in Athens and in other Greek towns\textsuperscript{13}. The fact that they did not have a positive effect is not something that concerns us here.

The fact remains that on 28.10.1940, on the Greek-Albanian borders, the Italian military machine was ready for a “Blitzkrieg”, according to precise Staff plans which had been prepared by an able Italian general, and not on account of political and diplomatic pressure or negotiations. I especially point this out because it is not correct to underestimate the morale of the attacker.

The arrogance of superiority is also apparent in the \textit{ultimatum} that Grazzi handed Metaxas, at 3 a.m. on 28.10.40. After reading the text, the Greek dictator, in a sad and worried but steady voice, came to the conclusion: “\textit{Alors, c’est la guerre}”. Grazzi, who recounts the scene\textsuperscript{14}, hastened to explain that the Italian government wished that its armed forces crossed the border freely, taking over some strategic points along Greek territory temporarily (\textit{alcuni punti strategici}), but had no intention of challenging the sovereignty and independence of Greece\textsuperscript{15}. This obvious contradiction needs no comments. When Metaxas posed the perfectly logical question, which these strategic points might be, Grazzi had no idea, and of course they were not mentioned in the \textit{ultimatum}. Additionally, the time limit of three hours which was given to the Greek government so as to decide about peace or war, according to the above specifications, strangled out even the most humiliating disposition for compromise.

Metaxas’ ascertainment to Grazzi: “\textit{Vous voyez bien que c’est impossible}”,

\textsuperscript{12} Georgios Roussos, \textit{To “Όχι” χωρίς μύθους} (The “Ohi” without myths), newspaper \textit{To Βήμα της Κυριακής} (To Vima of Sunday) of 28.10.1979, p. 13. With such publications other myths are created. About Kotzias’ relations to fascist Italy see Zacharias N. Tsirpanlis, “Μορφωτική παρουσία και προπαγάνδα της Ιταλίας στη Θεσσαλονίκη. (Μεσοπόλεμος-Κατοχή, 1928-1943)” [Italian Cultural Presence and Propaganda in Thessaloniki. (Interwar period-Occupation, 1928-1943)], \textit{Dodoni} vol. 16, issue 1 (1987) 6 note 4 (references to archival material).

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. the activities of the Italian General Mario Seni and his contacts with Greek politicians: Tsirpanlis, \textit{art. cit.}, p. 99 note 4.

\textsuperscript{14} Em. Grazzi, \textit{Il principio della fine}, pp. 244-245.

\textsuperscript{15} See the content of the ultimatum to S.M.E., \textit{op. cit.}, vol. 2, pp. 184-185; Greek translation in Th. F. Papakonstantínos, \textit{Η μάχη της Ελλάδος. 1940-1941} [The Battle of Greece. 1940-1941], Athens 1966, pp. 349-350.
proves the extreme point to which the weak side was driven. The unobtrusive- 
ness and the fear for the strong adversary are concentrated in the final words 
of the Greek Prime Minister to the Italian ambassador: "Vous êtes les plus 
forts..."¹⁶. This was of course not meant as a compliment, because both ad-
versaries knew their capabilities.

I think the reality of those days, until the morning of 28.10.40, forces 
us to accept, on the one hand, that Italy and the Italian soldier steadfastly 
believed in their military superiority and their ideological visions; on the 
other hand, the highest Greek political and military circles, saw with despair 
and fear the conflict with a superior adversary.

On the Greek side, many studies have been published about the pre-
paration of the country for war against the impending Italian invasion. A 
leading place in relevant bibliography occupies the work of the then Com-
mander-in-Chief of the Greek armed forces, General Alexander Papagos, The 
Battle of Greece, 1940-41 (Athens 1945), and The Greek Army and Its Pre-
paration for War from August 1923 to October 1940 (Athens 1945). The 
Greek General Staff also published two interesting accounts¹⁷, as well as 
some Greek officers, whose views were critical of Papagos’ decisions¹⁸. These 
views are very delicate and demand careful examination.

What is of interest here is the reserved spirit, which is manifested in all 
the instructions and strategic plans of the General Staff against the superior 
enemy, to such a point that the abandonment of the central spine of Epirus 
is accepted, as is the retreat to a more easily defendable line to the south and 
the east¹⁹. Such a plan, which was characterized as defeatist and was over-
turned thanks to the organizational ability and the insistence of the Com-
mander of VIII Division of Epirus Haralambos Katsimitros²⁰, portrays the 
feeling of deficiency against the powerful enemy.

¹⁶. Grazzi, op. cit., p. 245.
¹⁷. Greek General Staff - Army History Division, Η προς πόλεμον προπαρασκευή 
tου Ελληνικού Στρατού, 1923-1940 [The preparation of the Greek Army for War, 1923-
1940], Athens 1969; Greek General Staff - Army History Division, Εφοδιασμός του Στρα-
tού εις υλικά οπλισμού και πυρομαχικών πυροβολικού και πεζικού κατά τον πόλεμον 
1940-41 [Supplying the Army with arms and ammunition for the artillery and infantry 
during the war of 1940-41], Athens 1982.
¹⁹. General Staff - Army History Division, Ο ελληνο-ιταλικός πόλεμος 1940-1941. Η 
ιταλική εισβολή [The Greek-Italian war 1940-1941. The Italian Invasion], Athens 1960, 
pp. 293-301.
²⁰. Details in Alexandros Tsoukanelis’ Χαράλαμπος Κατσιμήτρος, πρόμαχος της 
I also detect this feeling in all that was announced by Metaxas to the publishers and chief-editors of the Athenian press on 30.10.40. In the text that has been preserved, there is the steadfast belief that the Germans will not win, because there are too many obstacles; victory belongs to England. But now, after the Italian invasion, always according to Metaxas: "Greece is not fighting for victory. It is fighting for glory. And for its honour. ... A nation must be able to fight, if it wants to remain great, even with no hope of victory. Just because it has to."

These were words which caused various reactions. In my opinion, there is wide-spread optimism on a long-term and international basis in Metaxas' speech, but there is a depressing pessimism from the local and short-term point of view. It is obvious that the Greek rulers believed in the necessity of resistance, but not in victory.

The contradictions or doubts about the final result diminish the moral of the fighter. Metaxas and the officers of the General Staff in Athens probably felt like convicts with their back to the wall, without the slightest chance of escape. What Metaxas stated on 30.10.40 sounds to the historian fifty years later like a cry of despair in front of an impasse. Still it would be unjust today to accuse the then political and military leaders of Athens for lack of faith in victory. What has been stated above about the impressive material position and ideological beliefs of Italy, justifies, I believe, the timid prudence and the cautious unobtrusiveness of the country's leaders.

It could also be argued that the feelings of inferiority in Athens dictated, perhaps, the careful (and that is also debatable) preparation for war, the timely mobilization, the efficient training of soldiers and NCOs. I must add that the Italian troops had from 28. to 31.10.40 broken through the Greek-Albanian borders from the west to the north-east, and to a quite satisfactory depth. They had advanced (from the west) to just outside Vrisela, to Leptokarya, to Dolianna outside Kalpaki, to Mesovouni, while the Alpinists of Julia had moved with incredible force from Erseka to Samarina, Distrato, Vovousa and Metsovo. The situation of the Greek forces looked desperate.

From surviving Italians we have received evidence of actions showing intrepid self-sacrifice and superhuman activity from their officers; the invaders'

21. The text can be found in many publications; amongst others see General Staff, ΙΙ ιταλική εισβολή [The Italian Invasion], pp. 289-292; Papakonstantinos, op. cit., pp. 355-359.
22. Cf. Appendix, doc. 1; General Staff, op. cit., pp. 55-64, 122-139.
enthusiasm was beyond doubt. These testimonies do not come only from Italian sources, but from Greek ones too.

So until the beginning of November 1940 the high moral of the Italian soldier cannot be doubted. He is a fighter who does not hesitate to sacrifice his life; he possesses force, bravery, stamina; he is familiar with the difficulties of the enemy terraine; he is aware of the doubts in the minds of the enemy's leaders. The first successes strengthen his moral armour.

"And the river turned back"

The scepticism of the officials in Athens, which is not completely unjustified, and the élan Italian soldier were overturned within the first ten days of November. The scene changed, neither by magic, of course, nor without explanation.

The optimism of the Greek rank and file reinforced by his ignorance which "did not cause any hesitation"; the familiar smile of the soldier; his satisfactory training; the adequately organized mobilization; the strong feeling of justice which had been deceitfully and crudely offended by a coarse Italian propaganda; the capable NCOs and officers, from the rank of platoon leader to that of regiment or division commander who reacted adroitly and very quickly carried out successful decisions, whether they concerned artillery firing or mortar shots or the capture of strategic points; the biological superiority of mountain or rural population (especially people from Epirus, Roumeli, Macedonia, Thessaly), which made up the biggest mass of the infantry forces; the complete devotion of the non-combatant people (women, old people and children) living on the border line (of Epirus and Western Macedonia); the extremely unfavorable weather conditions, which hindered both sides equally, but which were more adverse for the attacker.

These are, I believe, the most important factors which made a joint contribution to a profound psychological transformation, which changed the defender into a ruthless attacker, regardless of any sacrifice, at any cost. Thus the reservedness of the Athenian leaders was washed away by a torrent

of unexpected optimism which derived from the rural and urban middle-class layers of the Greek society; an optimism which proved to be steadfast and realistic within quite a short period. And of course, both the government and the General Staff tried and managed to take advantage of these unforeseen developments.

When the terms of the military game were reversed and the Greek counter-attack began on 14.11.1940, the euphoria of success tended to underestimate the enemy. He actually suffered terrible damages and hastened to retreat into Albanian territory; his retreat in many cases became unrestrained panic. The unpublished and unknown up to now documents (memoranda, letters, plans) of Ubaldo Soddu (who did not write down his memoirs), Commander of the Italian forces in Albania from 10.11. to 30.12.1940, a critical period for the Italians, reveal the desperate efforts for control, the strict measures for unjustified retreats and abandonment of positions, the tragic appeal even for German help (on 24.11. and 17.12.1940)25.

The morale of the attacking Greek soldier must have reached unprecedented heights. I will remind you of the successive captures by the Greek army of towns in Northern Epirus, towns of a rich sentimental significance because of their historical past, such as Erseka and Borova (21.11.), Leskoviki and Korce (22.11.), Moschopolis (24.11.), Pogradec (30.11.), Premeti (4.12.), Fraseri (5.12.), Ayioi Saranda (6.12.), Delvino (7.12.), Aryirokastro and Dervitsani (8.12.), Himara (22.12.40) and Kleisoura (10.1.41)26.

Still, the retreating Italian army avoided total dissolution; it even collected the poor remains of the Julia force just in time at Konitsa, which, later, reinforced, continued the war; it did not give up key-points as easily as the Greek propaganda triumphantly declared (obviously for moral sup-


26. Greek General Staff - Army History Division, Η ελληνική αντεπίθεσις (14 Νοεμβρίου 1940 - 6 Ιανουαρίου 1941) [The Greek counter-attack (14th November 1940 - 6th January 1941)], Athens 1966 (with proven details); S.M.E., op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 242-627.
port of the home front). If one has the patience to look through Greek sources, and in fact the documented dissertations by the Greek General Staff, he will find, maybe surprisingly, that even during this retreat movements of the Italians, apart from the number of prisoners and deserters presented, every step, every metre gained was costly paid with Greek blood

In his reports, Soddu analyzes the Greek tactics for attack; he acknowledges the bravery and the moral strength of the enemy; he points out, however, that during this period (end of November-December) the Greeks neither apply any new method of military tactics, nor do they quickly take advantage of the land left back by the Italian retreat. Mussolini, after the capture of Himara by the Greeks, does not doubt the contribution of high morale to the victory of the enemy (24.12.40).

From our point of view, we are obliged to examine jointly some indisputable events:

a) That the Greek army stopped, for various reasons, at a distance from Valona; it did not throw the enemy into the sea as it wanted to, nor, of course, did it cut off the enemy’s sea and land supplies.

b) That the Italian army went through terrible moments of moral crisis; the exhaustion, the fatigue, the doubts, after the abrupt drop of its spiritual

27. See e.g. Greek General Staff, op. cit., pp. 193, 197, 200-201, 203; ΕΣ, Χειμερινοί επιχειρήματα και ιταλική επίθεσις Μαρτίου (7 Ιανουαρίου - 26 Μαρτίου 1941) [Greek General Staff, Winter Operations and the Italian attack in March (7th January - 26th March 1941)], Athens 1966, pp. 17, 61, 64, 156-157.

28. The Nat. Arch. U.S.A. - Ibidem, T821, Roll 127, Soddu “Alle Eccellenze Comandanti di Armata, Alle Eccellenze Comandanti di C.A., All’Intendente Superiore, e per conoscenza: Al Sottocapo di S.M. dell’Esercito” (27.11.1940): ...La guerra con la Grecia è stata iniziata con la convinzione, diffusa in tutti, che il nemico non possedesse serie qualità militari: questa atmosfera di “passeggiata militare” portò ad un conseguente smarrimento, non appena ci si accorse che l’avversario, abbastanza ben organizzato e superiore di numero, opponeva una reazione che non era stata prevista. Allora subentrò l’errore opposto: dall’eccessivo deprezzamento dell’esercito greco si cadde nella sua supervalutazione. Si dissero meraviglie dell’artiglieria nemica e della tattica d’infiltrazione greca. Nulla di tutto questo. - Le qualità dell’esercito greco non debbano essere esagerate: dall’attento esame delle operazioni svoltesi finora si nota facilmente che i successi dell’avversario sono stati dovuti soltanto allo sfruttamento, per altro non decisivo né veramente integrale, degli errori di un nostro infelice schieramento iniziale. La tattichetta d’infiltrazione greca è stata resa possibile dagli enormi vuoti esistenti fra nostri reparti proiettati in territorio nemico con diretrici spesso divergenti e con compito quasi sempre vago. Di fronte a questa azione dell’avversario, c’è da lamentare una eccessiva passività da parte nostra...

29. Appendix, doc. 4: Mussolini to Cavallero; the urgent need to be reversed the situation for the sake of morale is noted.
euphoria due to successive defeats, tipped off the corrosion of the extreme nationalist feeling of “Roman Grandeur”; moreover, no army with enthusiastic ideological visions, like the Italian, can stand on its feet, when it sees its ideals buried within 10 to 15 days, not with verbal counter-arguments, but in the snow, the mud, under piles of putrified bodies. Still, this army after so much suffering managed to hold together and to organize a line of resistance, which in effect it will maintain with a great number of losses for three months, from the middle of January to the middle of April 1941.

C) After the end of the war, Italian writers (such as Grazzi, C. Baudino, Cervi and others) noticed, very rightly so, that due to the Greek success Italian public opinion slowly turned against the Fascist regime, marking the beginning of the end for Mussolini30. I accept this statement only partly. And that is because, as far as I know, the Italian army in Albania did not organize after the Greek advance any movement or any sort of coup against the central government. Feelings of indignation and dissatisfaction did exist. Irony and caustic anecdotes against the Fascists were spreading around. We know of individual cases of insubordination and unwillingness31. A group of hapless Alpinists will refuse to sing the Fascist hymn “Giovinezza, Giovinezza”, when reviewed by Mussolini in March 194132. No unit though turned its weapons against the representatives of the Italian government. The road to captivity or to desertion is an expression of protest, which does not however involve much risk. It is not armed resistance. And such a resistance by non-Fascist Italians did not occur on the Albanian mountains during the five months of the Greek-Italian conflict. I am not making a reproach. I merely state the fact and try to interpret it.

Besides, testimonies, which seem well founded, lead me to opposite conclusions. To be precise, the Chief of the Air Staff Francesco Pricolo, who writes with ease after the war and criticizes the errors of Fascism, mentions an unprepared, sudden visit by Mussolini in Albania on 2 March 194133. He was accompanied by Pricolo himself. Duce’s objective was to acquire a first-hand picture of the morale of the Italian soldier; he even expected to witness unpleasant acts of defiance. The straightforward behaviour of the majority of the soldiers surprised him. He managed to move rapidly and without warning amongst the moving troops, so as to avoid any ordered

33. Pricolo, Ignavia contro eroismo, pp. 115-123.
applauses. This surprise tactic justified his decision. Apart from few cases of reaction, which are described in hilarious detail by Pricolo, there was no doubt that the feelings of friendliness and esteem he received were spontaneous and beyond any expectation. The usual propaganda did not intervene.

"I was really astounded", Air Chief Pricolo continues, "and asked myself how it was possible, that these same men, who had gone through so much because of an ill-prepared war and had suffered the humiliation of such terrible failures, could forget everything for a moment and surround with such enthusiasm him who was the leader of all and whom they should consider responsible for their misfortunes and misery. I did not expect them to receive the head of the government with apparent hostility and insults of course, although they would have been totally justified if they did; I expected at least a coldness on their behalf, though, or even that terrible apathetic indifference, which says more than any sign of disapproval. On the contrary, it seemed to me as if they ran to applaud and escort their Victorious Leader with glory, as if he had led them to the most glorious military victories. I did not manage to find any explanation but the good faith and the simplicity of those brave young men. They obviously had not reached the point of accusing Mussolini for being the cause for all their misfortunes; the powerful propaganda had intoxicated and influenced them for a long time with the idea that Mussolini was always right. And that is why they saw a saviour in his face, the one who did not know the real situation up to now, who could finally be able to personally comprehend their needs, all their privations, all the errors of which they had been the victims; and he would be able, by miracle, to heal the weaknesses of the military commanders. Their enthusiastic approval was probably nothing more than an expression of unlimited gratitude for his intervention and a latent impatience for a rematch which would heal them from their pain, their humiliations, the shame of defeat. The soul of the young men, even after many disappointments, does not lose its nobility."34 35. The soldiers even reached the point of shouting to Mussolini: "We want to attack! Give us the order!"

The impressive assertions of Pricolo, which I believe are reliable, show and justify the strength of a defeated army, who is fighting not to lose its dignity and the moral cause of its existence. There are also other revealing sources which help us to determine the state of mind of the fighter during this difficult period of defeat of the Italian army.

In a report from Tirana, on 22.2.1941, Piero Parini, an inspector of the Fascist part for Albania, points out with sagacity that large and small units were hit by an infectious depressing self-pity and submission, which increased as they approached the front line. This psychological situation was due to the roughness of the surrounding environment, the depressing conditions of winter, the incessant rain, the flooded torrents and the unfordable overflown

34. *Ibidem*, pp. 119-120.
rivers, the incalculable mud, the deserted streets, the almost non-existent dwelling-places, the barely tolerable living conditions, the primitive population. Under the burden of isolation and depression, Parini believed, the Italian soldier engaged himself into fighting hard against an enemy overcome by a sort of religious frenzy, ready to die without the slightest hesitation. The prospects somewhat brightened during the last weeks of February with the arrival of new units of infantry and artillery, with a more complete organization of logistics, with the continuous presence of the airforce. “The feeling of duty is high and the tranquillity is remarkable against the continued unbearable sacrifice; at the same time the army’s fury against the Greeks is increasing giving them a hard lesson”.

This essential optimism of the Fascists, which co-exists with the recognition of the existing difficulties, forms the atmosphere of expectation. It seems that such a message, which, answered to common logic, was easily understood even by the least educated soldier and had a great effect.

Still it does not cease to be a theory which in the end is belied by practice on the battlefield. Camillo Mercalli, Commanding General of the 4th Army Corps, two days after Parini’s report, sets, without hesitation, the crucial question of the confrontation between the material and moral armament (24.2.1941). What he writes has not lost its value, as evidence which interprets what is the most difficult problem for a historian: the deciphering of the heartbeat and the soul of a fighter facing his enemy.

Here is an extract from Mercalli’s document: “...the Army Corps is preparing for the attack possessing in total:

— 14 battalions;
— 96 guns;
all liaison and services and all the troops have received supplies and are organized to do their best against the following enemy forces:
— 10 battalions;
— 43 guns;
the organization of [the enemy’s] logistics, by the way, is probably inferior or at the very least equal to ours. Why then should there always smoulder in the depth of our soldiers’ soul this feeling of disbelief, inferiority, doubt, of fear so that they begin their advance with their “left” foot; a starting that loses its force, its enthusiasm, its faith and consequently its vigour; a starting

which always carries the seeds of defeay. Why?" 37.

Within this contradictory framework of optimism and despair, the Italian army will try in March 1941 to recapture its offensive vigour which it had lost since the beginning of November 1940.

The overcoming of terror

The numerical comparisons between Greeks and Italians during the famous “Spring Attack” are familiar. They are only of interest as far as their contribution to the development of the attacker’s and the defender’s morale is concerned. I remind you briefly of the human resources: by the end of February 1941 the Italian army on the Albanian front consisted of 400,000 men38; on 22.3.41 it had increased to 550,00039. The Greek army amounted approximately to 350,000 men40.

As for the military resources, they surpassed the human proportions by far and this was definitely in favour of the Italians41. Mussolini’s presence at the battle front and the psychological rousing of the Italian nation in favour of its children fighting in Albania, the proclaimed huge mobilization, the initiative and the ample time for the preparation and planning of the attack, were indisputable advantages as far as the increase in morale and confidence is concerned.

The question is, why the positive advantages in favour of the attacker did not crush the defending Greek soldier for a second time? To find a clear and convincing answer I turned mainly on Italian sources.

In one of his reports dated 14.3.1941, the above-mentioned General Mercalli, notes the following: “On the 9th and 10th of this month (March) I saw units — even whole battalions — for hours and hours, even for days,

38. Tsirpanlis, art. cit., p. 77.
40. Cf. General Staff - Η ιταλική εισβολή [The Italian Invasion], p. 247. Accurate statistical elements about the total number of Greek fighters at the Albanian front chronologically do not exist. Usually the number of military units is mentioned, while it is almost always avoided to mention the exact number of soldiers: General Staff - Χειμερινά επι-χειρήσεις [Winter operations], pp. 111-112.
despite the most violent and heavy continuous shooting by our artillery and infantry, advance only a few metres forward and then pin themselves to the ground. One infantry regiment preferred to remain all day under the deadly fire of the enemy’s mortars and suffer great losses, rather than make that step forward which not only would have ensured the occupation of its objective, but would also have saved it from such painful and unnecessary sacrifices. One tends to think that there is no will there, or even worse, no heart! I cannot believe it! I do not want to believe it!"42.

I have rarely come across such an outburst of self-criticism and honesty. Shattering were then again the questions posed by Mussolini to his generals, after the meeting of 20.3.1941, that is after the failure: “The attack on the 9th (March) was a surprise to me. I had no illusions that we would have strategic successes; I did not exclude though success of tactics. The plan was really well thought out; the shooting by the artillery was well organized; the Commissariat was accurately organized. How come then and the divisions had such a poor result in advancing? This problem must be examined by you. What really happened? I exclude a complete collapse of morale. I saw a great number of infantry forces on the move; I saw divisions marching to the front line: impeccable. Something happened therefore which you the experts must determine..."43.

It seems that it was difficult for them to comprehend at that moment the stubbornness with which the Greek soldier was fighting. From the minutes of the meeting of the supreme military command on 15.3.1941, where Duce was also present, I will extract a brief testimony with dense meaning. To be precise, one of the officers participating in the meeting supported the view that the Greeks seem not to care about the Bulgarian front and concentrate all their forces against the Italians. And he adds: “This statement by a Greek officer (obviously a prisoner) is enough proof: we are sure that we will lose the war, but we will give you the spanking you need”. (Siamo sicuri di perdere la guerra, ma la legnata ve la vogliamo dare)44.

Systematic efforts were made to discover the reasons which caused the failure of the Spring Attack. In a detailed account on 26.3.1941 by the office of operations of the Italian command of Armed Forces in Albania, a special

42. S.M.E., op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 854-855 n° 301.
paragraph is dedicated to Morale. I believe the relative indications are not so far from reality and that is why I have included them unaltered: “Overestimation of the enemy’s defense organization; a tendency to consider our attack unnecessary, because there is the belief that the German forces and the Greek defeat would bring an end to the fighting”45. Mussolini, upon his return to Rome from Albania on 21.3.41, wrote and submitted to King Vittorio Emanuele III a report about what he saw and observed at a close distance. His version also has some noteworthy points:

He remarks that the Italian soldier advanced to the battlefield with enthusiasm and determination; Mussolini did not visit any units on the front line; he is nevertheless sure about the high morale of the divisions which had not yet confronted the enemy. Mussolini cannot vouch with certainty for the morale of the Greek army; to do this he would have needed testimonies from prisoners. No prisoners were taken, except for about ten, two of whom were wounded. During his stay there, a daily, very slow, outflow of deserters was also observed46, about a hundred in all. But nearly all of these were “Macedoni” (Slav-speakers) and rarely Greeks. “The conclusion”, according to Duce, “that one may reach is as follows: the morale of the Greek army is being gradually but slowly dropping; it will be crushed completely when it will be subjected to a great defeat”47.

Once more Fascist optimism will go up in smoke. In reality there was no dropping of the Greek morale, nor was any victory on the Italian side. The deadly clashes between the two gladiators continued until the middle of April 1941, with no important territorial gains on either side. The retreat of the Greeks began only when they felt the German arms on their backs48.

I will not expand into quoting other Italian sources I have found. Suffice to mention the official view of the Italian General Staff, which with frankness, I believe, summarizes the weaknesses and the advantages of the adversaries during the critical moment of the attack. Here is the relevant extract:

“As the shots by our artillery slowly receded and the response from the enemy’s fire began, the infantry, instead of deploying, advancing and exploiting all the possibilities of its weapons, retreated into itself and went

46. The subject of Greek deserters or prisoners during the Greek-Italian war remains uninvestigated (about the relevant numbers see below).
47. See the text in “L’archivio segreto di Cavallero”, art. cit., p. 13; Greek translation cf. in General Staff - Χειμερινά επιχειρήσεις [Winter operations], pp. 213-215.
through an extremely dangerous psychosis; that is the mentality of fatalism, weakness and mass submission. On the contrary, the Greek soldier, aggressive, courageous, persistent, strong in his own ideology and certainly not richer in means than ourselves, very quickly raised himself in our esteem, which unfortunately, on occasion, turned to fear."49.

**Human losses**

I consider it unnecessary to add comments or observations to these very clear declarations. I would not nevertheless like to overlook the maybe thorny comparative analysis of the mutual losses. The interpretation of the relative numbers has concerned me for some time. The problem is directly connected to the verification of the morale and the way the fighter acted. What was the cost from his attitude against death? The official Italian and Greek sources50 converge towards the following evidence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Italians</strong></th>
<th><strong>Greeks</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dead:</td>
<td>13,755</td>
<td>13,408 or 14,42051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounded:</td>
<td>50,874</td>
<td>42,485 or 61,60052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from frostbite:</td>
<td>12,368</td>
<td>10,000 or about 25,00053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing:</td>
<td>25,067</td>
<td>4,253 or 1,237 soldiers54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(most of them killed in action)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitalized:</td>
<td>52,108</td>
<td>[no exact numbers]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners:</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>2,39256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Greek testimony)55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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50. *Ibidem*, p. 943 (it is reported that information about the Greek losses was taken from documents of the Greek Ministry of Defense, which were used during the Italian-German Occupation).

51. According to the General Staff - *Επίτομη ιστορία του ελληνο-ιταλικού και ελληνο-γερμανικού πολέμου 1940-1941* (επιχειρήσεις στρατού ξηράς) [Abridged history of the Greek-Italian and Greek-German war 1940-1941 (operations by the land forces)], Athens 1985, p. 265, the dead — officers and soldiers — amounted to 13,325 (including the ones killed during the Greek-German war).

52. This second number must be viewed with some reservedness. According to the General Staff, *op. cit.*, p. 265, among the 62,663 wounded (from both fronts, the Italian and the German) about 25,000 men suffering from frostbite are included.

53. See previous note.


55. Papakonstantinos, *Η μάχη της Ελλάδος* [The battle of Greece], p. 216.

56. 87 officers and 2,305 soldiers: General Staff, *op. cit.*, p. 265.
It is easy to conclude, I believe, based on the first three categories that the combatants' losses were almost equally high. What does this mean? That in essence the losses in Greek lives were comparatively much costlier, as the Greeks possessed a less numerous army and from a demographic point of view were far behind the Italians. The horrifying numbers also point out at some other important facts: that, in the final analysis, the Greeks confronted and defeated an enemy who also knew how to fight, how to retreat but also how to cause death. It was not such an easy victory as the Greek propaganda had presented, and as maybe many believe even until today.

Putting aside the simplistic idealizations or the metaphysic elevations, the glorious days of war or the miracle of Albania, as it has passed into Greek and world history, was realized with much blood, disfigured from frostbite cut-off human limbs, mud, hunger, extirpated families, thousands of graves and traumatic experiences which have not healed yet.

Because of this great price they had to pay, may the memory and the honour from the younger generations always be alive.

*University of Ioannina*

*Department of History*
APPENDIX OF DOCUMENTS

I

Albania, 31 October 1940
(Supreme Command of Italian forces)

Visconti Prasca to Francesco Jacomoni (Tirana). The offensive operations of the Italian army in the Greek-Albanian border from the morning of 28th October to the morning of 31st October 1940 are reported here. The high morale of the attacking forces is underlined, as well as successful advances into the Greek territory.


Copia
P.M. 202 bis, 31 Ottobre 1940-XIX
Comando Superiore Truppe Albania
Il Comandante
Cara Eccellenza,

Ti invio un riassunto delle operazioni più comprensibile delle comunicazioni radio che richiedono troppo tempo per la decifrazione e, in causa dei nomi greci, riescono spesso incomprensibili.

Il maltempo è alleato dei greci. I fiumiciattoli dell’oltre frontiera sono diventati torrenti impetuosi e occorre costruire dei ponti per passare le artiglierie e i carri.

L’operazione si svolge a ritmo accelerato con una serie di manovre di avvolgimento che hanno fatto cadere una dopo l’altra tutte le posizioni fortificate greche fino a Kalibaki¹. Le truppe sono dotate di uno slancio irrefrenabile. Si gettano letteralmente sulle posizioni minacciando di tagliare continuamente la strada al nemico.

La resistenza più forte si delinea oggi attorno alla conca di Kalibaki da dove si sbocca nella parte centrale dell’Epiro. L’interruzione del ponte di Borgo Tellini (Kakavia) e del ponte sul Gormos² (7 km. a ovest di Kalibaki) non mi ha permesso di portare avanti le artiglierie pesanti.

Poiché le artiglierie pesanti ad est di Kalibaki (quota 1090) ostacolano la nostra avanzata, con procedimento nuovo nella tattica, esse vengono attaccate con la fanteria e cavalleria eseguendo una marcia concentrica su di esse, per obbligarle a sgombrare || [p. 2] o a lasciarsi catturare. La manovra è in corso.

Questa azioni di avvolgimento hanno costretto le truppe a itinerari serpeggianti, molto lunghi, perfino di 55 km. al giorno sotto l’acqua scrosciante.

F/to Generale Visconti Prasca

All’Eccellenza
Jacomoni Nobile di San Savino Gr. Cr. Francesco
R. Luogotenente Generale di S.M. il Re Imperatore
Tirana

1. He is referring to Kalpaki (Elea).
2. Gormos river.
COMANDO SUPERIORE TRUPPE ALBANIA
Ufficio Stato Maggiore

№ di prot. P.M. Ottobre 1940 XIX
OGGETTO: Sintesi sulle operazioni svoltesi nei giorni 28-29-30 e mattino 31.

SINTESI SULLE OPERAZIONI SVOLTESI NEI GIORNI 28-29-30
E MATTINO 31

La manovra per la conquista di Kalibaki che comanda la direttrice Janina-Arta è ultimata oggi 31 ottobre con l’occupazione di quel trivio stradale. Attualmente si sta combattendo per la conquista delle colline della conca di Kalibaki per allargare l’occupazione della zona ove convergono tutte le colonne per la successiva marcia in avanti su Janina.

La fase operativa di questi primi quattro giorni aveva per scopo:
1°) - la conquista dell’importante nodo di Kalibaki da effettuarsi dal Corpo Armata “Ciamuria” con le forze operanti dalle valli Vojussa-Dhrino e Suhes;
2°) - iniziare con le operazioni attraverso il Pindo, compiute dalla divisione alp. “Julia”, e con quelle lungo il litorale affidate al raggruppamento celere l’ampia manovra di avvolgimento per la conquista dell’Epiro.

Riassumo in appresso le operazioni tendenti a tali scopi:

GIORNO 28
Alle prime luci dell’alba del 28 ottobre tutte le Grandi Unità dipendenti, schierate nel settore Epiro, scattano dalle rispettive ba - [[p. 2] si di partenza verso gli obiettivi prestabiliti. Nonostante le condizioni atmosferiche decisamente avverse e il conseguente mancato concorso dell’aviazione ed il limitatissimo appoggio delle artiglierie, fanti e cavalieri partono all’offensiva con uno spirito che non esito a definire superbo.

— Divisione Alpina “Julia”: muovendo dalla zona di Erseke-Leskoviku oltrepassava la linea di confine e raggiungeva la sua sinistra i passi settentrionali del Pindo e con le rimanenti forze attestava all’allineamento Detzko1-Restania.

Due giovani ufficiali caduti eroicamente all’assalto di posizioni organizzate avversarie segnano la prima gloria tappa degli alpini della Julia.

— Corpo Armata “Ciamuria”: la divisione “Ferrara” rinforzata dal I° gruppo cavalleggeri “Guide” e sostenuta dalla divisione corazzata “Centauro”, in condizioni atmosferiche e tattiche analoghe, muovendo con entusiasmo ammirato dalle valli della Vojussa, di Suhes e del Dhrino, raggiungeva nella giornata del 28 obiettivi di particolare importanza, e cioè:

— con i reparti della val Vojussa-Colonna Solinas (bersaglieri - CC.NN.ª - volontari albanesi) conquistato con ardito colpo di mano il Ponte di Perati, oltrepassata la Vojussa in piena a guado e con mezzi di fortuna e vinte vivaci resistenze avversarie, raggiunge il ponte di Burazani;

1. Obviously: Doutsiko.
2. Camicie Nere (blackshirts).
avversarie di confine e muovendo in terreno particolarmente aspro, raggiunge la 
fronte Stravoskiadi-Kokalaikon1;
— con la massa operante della val Dhrino e direzioni sussidiarie laterali si affaccia 
alla fronte Delvinaki-Krionero.

Ardue e brillanti in questo settore sono particolarmente la marcia del 48° ftr. dalla 
Panadia a Krionero, e quella del 1° gruppo "Guide" dal Fitoki in piena (attraversato a guado) 
alla regione Pogonion-Bezane2.

Particolarmente ostacolata l'avanzata sulla Perati-Kalibaki e sulla Kakavia (borgo 
Tellini) - Delvinaki dalle successive interruzioni stradali e specialmente da quelle attuate 
ai ponti della Vojussa e del Fitoki.

— La divisione "Siena" muovendo dall'alta Pavla3 e dalla regione di Verva vincendo 
la natura e il nemico raggiunge la sera del 28 a nord la regione di Libohovo ed a sud quella 
di Filiates.

Due morti e 12 feriti attestano le vivaci reazioni avversarie di fronte al C.A. “Ciamuria” 
nella 1a giornata.

Raggruppamento Litorale: granatieri e cavalieri di Aosta e di Milano su tre colonne, 
muovendo dalla zona di Kosnipoli4, con brillante e rapido movimento dopo 
vinte resistenze avversarie avanzate at-||[p. 4] testano al Kalamas reso inguadabile 
e particolarmente minaccioso dalla piena.

In sintesi i risultati di questa prima giornata, in relazione alle condizioni atmosferiche 
ed agli ostacoli frapposti dalle numerose interruzioni create dal nemico su tutti gli itinerari 
attestanti alla frontiera albanese, possono considerarsi superiori ad ogni aspettativa se si 
tiene conto specialmente che alcuni reparti per aggirare le difese e le interruzioni di fondo 
valle hanno dovuto compiere percorsi sotto pioggie torrenziali dai 40 ai 45 km.

GIORNO 29

Sempre ostacolati dall'imperversare del mal tempo, dalle interruzioni stradali, e dalle 
vivaci reazioni avversarie e senza sperare nel concorso dell'aviazione [e] nell'ausilio efficace 
dai propri artiglierie, fanti e cavalieri anche in questa seconda giornata muovono 
all'avanzata con il consueto entusiasmo e con spirito di sacrificio non comune.

La sera del 29 le G.U.6 dipendenti avevano raggiunto le posizioni seguenti:
— Divisione alp. "Julia": con la colonna di sinistra (8° alpini e btr. 3° art. alp.) l'alta 
Sarandaporos, particolarmente ostacolata dalle asperità del terreno rese più 
gravi dalle intemperie e dalle reazioni nemiche notevoli;
— con la colonna di destra (9° alpini e btr. 3° art. alp.) oltrepassato a guado il Saran­
daporos in piena, portava i suoi battaglioni sulla fronte Messaria q. 1206 (mas­

1. Stavroskiadi-Kokolaki.
2. He means the area Pogoniani - Vissani.
3. Povla area.
5. Grandi Unità (Great Units).
L’eroica morte alla testa della sua compagnia del Capitano Scala del battaglione Cividale è un segno tangibile delle resistenze avversarie e dello slancio dei nostri giovani ufficiali.

— Corpo Armata “Ciamuria”: La divisione “Ferrara” con i suoi mezzi di rinforzo prosegue l’avanzata verso i suoi obiettivi sempre con ammirevole entusiasmo. Nel tardo pomeriggio le colonne raggiungono i seguenti obiettivi:

— Colonna Solinas: dopo ripetuti tentativi per gittamenti di ponti sulla Vojussa resi vani dalla rapidità della corrente, a nuoto ed a traghetto un battaglione bersaglieri ed un battaglione CC. NN. raggiunge Ostanica e punta su Giroplananos.


— Colonna Sapienza: Con largo aggiramento e marcia faticosa in terreno vario raggiunge la zona di Sitearia spingendo elementi verso il Kalamas.

— Divisione “Siena”: Sempre vivacemente ostacolata dall’avversario, per itinerari resi particolarmente faticosi dal maltempo, raggiunge con la sinistra la regione nord di Keramitsa e con la sua destra oltrepassa l’abitato di Filiates. Le difficoltà di carattere logistico superate da questa divisione che muove in terreno completamente fuori di vie di comunicazioni sono veramente notevoli.

Alla testa del 32° Reggimento di Fanteria cadeva eroicamente il Colonnello Gianani.

Raggruppamento Litorale:

La piena del Kalamas che ha portato l’ampiezza del corso d’acqua da 20 a 60 metri e la profondità del filone a 3 metri circa, uniti all’efficace reazione degli elementi avversari sulla riva sinistra del fiume, impediscono alla colonna del Litorale il proseguire dell’avanzata verso la quale tendono con spiccato entusiasmo cavalieri e granatieri.

Nonostante tali condizioni pressoché proibitive, uno squadrone dell’Aosta (preceduto da una pattuglia di nuotatori) comandato dal tenente Avati, riesce ad oltrepassare il Kalamas ed a costituire una testa di ponte sul basso corso del fiume.

La fine eroica del tenente Avati dimostra di quale ardore sono animati i cavalieri del Litorale.

Sono in corso operazioni per il gittamento di un ponte.

1. About the death of this captain see Bedeschi, *Fronte greco-albanese*, p. 13.
2. Geroplatanos.
3. He probably means Kerasovo.
5. About this colonel see interesting testimonies by his soldiers: Bedeschi, *op. cit.*, pp. 361, 386.
6. Details about the bold actions of the lieutenant Riccardo Avati see in Visconti Prasca, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-225.
GIORNO 30

Anche in questa terza giornata di operazioni le fanterie delle G. U. dipendenti riprendevano l'avanzata senza poter contare sull'appoggio dell'aviazione e dell'artiglieria, impossibilitate ad intervenire per le proibitive condizioni di visibilità e per l'impossibilità; specie per l'artiglieria auto e ippotrainata a seguire da presso i movimenti del battaglione di 1° scaglione.


Corpo Armata “Ciamuria”: con il consueto entusiasmo le truppe del C. A. riprendono, nelle prime ore del 30, il movimento in avanti ostacolato da successive interruzioni stradali in corrispondenza dell’itinerario rotabile, e la vivace reazione avversaria.

La sera del giorno 30 la situazione delle diverse colonne è la seguente:
— colonna Solinas: superando notevoli difficoltà e riportando in scontri con l’avversario perdite non ancor precisate, giunge con un battaglione bersaglieri e un battaglione CC. NN. a circa 8 km. a nord di Kalibaki, prendendo contatto con la colonna Trizio proveniente dalla val di Suches;
— la colonna Trizio oltrepassato Alizoti punta su quota 1090 a nord di Kalibaki ove vengono individuati notevoli apprestamenti avversari, e forte schieramento d’artiglieria;
— la colonna Centrale, dopo aver oltrepassato con reparti di fanteria a guado il torrente Kormos, per l’interruzione particolarmente grave del ponte sulla rotabile, raggiunge la zona di Doliana;
— la colonna Sapienza (48° ftr.) attesta al Kalamas in regione Polozona mentre reparti del gruppo Guide riescono ad occupare il ponte sul Kalamas, a sud di detta località, ancora efficiente.

Nel tardo pomeriggio questa colonna viene sottoposta ad intensa azione da parte dell’artiglieria avversaria di piccolo e medio calibro schierata nelle posizioni ad est di Kalibaki, e riporta sensibili perdite non ancora precisate. Nella notte la colonna del centro riesce ad impadronirsi del trivio stradale ad est di Kalibaki vincendo la resistenza avversaria.

||[p. 8] Divisione “Siena”: completa il suo attestamento al Kalamas in attesa di poter oltrepassarlo non appena le condizioni della corrente consentano il gittamento di un ponte di equipaggio.

Raggruppamento Litorale:

In condizioni analoghe attende di poter oltrepassare lo stesso fiume nel suo basso corso.

Le perdite di questo terzo giorno assommano a 50 feriti.

GIORNO 31

Tale azione si sviluppa secondo le seguenti linee di manovra:
— colonna Solinas e colonna Trizio premono da nord verso la zona di q. 1090;
— colonna Centrale muove da Dogliana verso est per attaccare frontalmente le posizioni avversarie;
— colonna Sapienza di ftr. preceduta da reparti del gruppo Guide avvolge da sud la difesa di Kalibaki per il ponte a sud di Paliokastro.
L’azione è tuttora in corso.
Le perdite nostre segnalate finora nel settore offensivo Epiro ammontano a 5 ufficiali e 4 soldati caduti - 200 feriti.
Le perdite avversarie non sono note ma debbono ritenersi piuttosto rilevanti - prigionieri segnalati a tutt’oggi trentacinque.
La battaglia iniziata il giorno 28 e tutt’ora in pieno sviluppo può definirsi la battaglia della fanteria che ha trovato un’intima cooperazione solo nei cavalieri e nelle varie specialità del genio che operano silenziose e instancabili, cercando di renderle più spedito il passo senza lesinare sacrifici.
Settore difensivo del Korçano:
Le nostre perdite in tale settore sono a tutt’oggi le seguenti:
— Un ufficiale e 17 militari di truppa feriti;
— un soldato di fanteria morto;
Le perdite avversarie non sono note ma debbono ritenersi sensibili. - Prigionieri in questo settore: due.

IL GENERALE COMANDANTE
S. Visconti Prasca

NOTA

All’ospedale di Giorgjucat nei giorni 30 e 31 ottobre 1940 sono stati ricoverati 51 feriti tra soldati del 47º fanteria e CC. NN. Albanesi.
Il morale e lo spirito di tutti i feriti è elevatissimo anche nei feriti gravi.
Cito alcuni tratti dei feriti albanesi:
Il vice capo squadra Osman Ali, al quale era stato pochi minuti prima amputato il braccio destro, ripeteva le stesse frasi pronunciate poco prima al capitano medico che lo aveva operato. Dopo avere ringraziato il capitano affermò di essere orgoglioso di avere offerto il suo braccio al DUCE.
La camicia nera Jashar Rusteni ferito gravemente da una scheggia di granata in cavità nel polmone e in pericolo di vita era spiacente di avere dovuto lasciare il combattimento e inneggiava al DUCE ed alla Patria.
La camicia nera Azis Huder interrogato sulla sua ferita asseriva che non gliene importava nulla ed esclamava “Noi morire anche tutti purché il DUCE passi”.
In tutti i feriti viene riscontrato un vivissimo desiderio di guaire in breve tempo per poter ritornare al combattimento con i compagni.
Tirana, 7 November 1940

From the colonel Cigliana to the Army Deputy Chief of Staff General Roatta. The somewhat critical situation in the area of Koritsa is described. The Italian forces are suffering great hardships from the Greek attacks. The morale of the Italian soldier still remains high.


Tirana, 7 novembre 1940 XIX°

A SUPERESERCITO = Per Eccellenza Roatta.

N. 1

-Ricognizione nel Korciano

I -Ho raggiunto Korcia solo la sera del 5 ed il giorno 6 sono stato chiamato a Tirana dall’Eccellenza Soddu in modo che non mi è stato possibile completare le ricognizioni come da programma. Quanto ho potuto vedere è stato però sufficiente a darmi un’idea della situazione.

Unisco un lucido con lo schieramento del giorno 6°.

Il frammischiamento di battaglioni che si nota nella difesa è dovuto al fatto che l’intero settore era tenuto inizialmente dalla Divisione Parma ed il Comando di C.A. è stato costretto ad impiegare i battaglioni della Venezia, di mano in mano che arrivavano, per tamponare qualche falla nello schieramento (sempre però nella linea di sicurezza), e di fronte alla pressione sempre crescente dell’avversario.

Ci sono stati combattimenti aspri, azioni di contrattacco, col risultato di trattenere e logorare per vari giorni un nemico molto più forte numericamente sulle posizioni più avanzate.

La situazione presente del Korciano, pur non essendo preoccupante, è però delicata. L’avversario dispone di molte forze (tre divisioni ternarie in prima schiera) e di un largo schieramento di artiglieria, e se riuscisse ad arrivare alla stretta di Cangoi1 toglierebbe fuori l’intera nostra linea difensiva.

Il Comando del C. A. ha avvicinato: alla stretta il 4° Fanteria Piemonte, un battaglione del quale è già stato inviato in linea per poter ritirare i reparti più provati della Venezia. È stato anche disposto di accelerare l’autotrasporto dell’Arezzo e sono stati avviati nel Korciano il 1° ed il 2° Bersaglieri. Dopo l’arrivo di tali forze la situazione potrà essere considerata con tranquillità.

IMPRESSIONI:


1. I do not consider it useful to attach the transparent diagram picturing the order of the military forces on 6.11.40.
2. He is referring to the Tsagoni pass.
Solo in corrispondenza della stretta di Cangoi vi è una siepe triangolare di reticolato. La posizione suddetta è stata scelta lungo al margine pedemontano dell’alta dorsale del Morové. L’accesso è facile dal davanti della linea (vi è anche una carrareccia che la costeggia per lungo tratto) ma è difficile e lunghissimo da tergo, per la necessità di scavalcare il Morove.

Quando l’avversario sarà giunto con i grossi al Devoli ed avrà spostato in avanti le artiglierie, l’accesso alla posizione dal davanti non sarà più possibile. I rifornimenti diventeranno così difficoltosi ed i mezzi su ruote resteranno bloccati (compreso il gruppo da 105 e quelli da 100). I difensori, cioè di fronte ad un attacco, verranno a trovarsi come con le spalle ad un muro, senza possibilità di ripiegamento a meno di non abbandonare gran parte delle artiglierie e dei materiali.

Ho riferito quanto sopra al C. A., al Comando Superiore ed anche al costituendo Comando Gruppo Armate perchè sia data maggiore consistenza alla posizione di resistenza e venga modificato finchè si è intempo lo schieramento attuale dell’artiglieria da 100 e 105 in modo da averle più vicine alle rotabili di afflusso.

— Morale: nell’insieme buono ed elevato, nonostante i disagi cui sono stati sottoposti i reparti. Il fante è rimasto un po’ impressionato dall’intensità e precisione del fuoco avversario.

— Perdite: non si hanno ancora dati precisi, ma nell’insieme non sono state molto elevate.

Le maggiori perdite si sono avute nel combattimento del giorno 5 (qualche centinaio tra morti e feriti).

— Organizzazione logistica: non è risultata adeguata alle necessità operative, nè era stata messa a punto in previsione dell’inizio delle operazioni. La scarsità dei mezzi di trasporto e la urgenza di autotrasportare i reparti aumentano la crisi dei rifornimenti.

L’avversario, come ho già accennato, è numeroso e dotato di molte artiglierie ed armi automatiche. Materiale ottimo e preciso; addestramento molto curato. Negli attacchi la truppa dimostra anche buono spirito combattivo.

Molto effetto ha avuto nel combattimento di Bilisti, giorno 5, l’impiego da parte greca di compagnie mortai da 81 che battevano con tiro preciso le nostre posizioni.

L’avversario, cioè, si è dimostrato per ora saldo ed agguerrito. I reggimenti hanno continuato ad avanzare ed ad attaccare per più giorni consecutivi senza sostituzioni, con poco vitto (spesso il solo pane) e non ostante le perdite che devono essere piuttosto sensibili.

Relativamente pochi i disertori; pochissimi i prigionieri.

II— Altro settore che è diventato delicato è quello di Erseke, da dove è uscita la divisione Julia.

La marcia lunga ed ad ampio raggio fatta da questa G. U. che disponeva di soli 5 battaglioni, mentre ha esposto le salmerie ed alcune azioni di sorpresa non ha consentito di assicurare il possesso dei passi e dei nodi di comunicazione attraversati dalle colonne. In

1. The Morová mountain.
2. He is referring to the successful Greek attack on 5.11.40 for the capture of the hills 1154, 1165 and 1137 in the area Biglista-Betinska: ΠΕΣ - Ιταλική ινβοϊο [Greek General Staff - The Italian Invasion], p. 222.
tutte le località dove sono passati gli alpini sono poi tornati i Greci, mettendo anche in una situazione un po' difficile la stessa divisione per le difficoltà di rifornirla.

Anche Dunciko è stato rioccupato dai Greci ed il giorno 5 c'è stato un combattimento da parte di una nostra banda poco oltre il confine in corrispondenza di Erseke.

Data la scarsa forza disponibile in tale presidio (poco più di 150 uomini) il Comando Superiore ha disposto di inviarvi reparti della Divisione Bari, la quale verrà a trovarsi così frazionata in varie località, avendo già dovuto mandare distaccamenti di battaglioni a Konica, Stracani e a Leskociku^1.

F/to Col. Cigliana

3

[Tirana], 28 November 1940

Ub. Soddu to the general Carlo Geloso (commander of the 11th Army Corps): “We are continuing to withdraw and the Greeks are coming after us and they are pursuing us”. All the (Italian) front is in continuous retreat; the damages are successive. They can barely hold on to the positions they occupy; the line must be maintained because it covers the ports; this is necessary because of political reasons and chiefly moral ones.


Alleg. 3^a

IL COMANDANTE SUPERIORE
FORZE ARMATE DELL'ALBANIA

28 Novembre 1940. XIX

Caro Geloso,

mi rendo conto della tua situazione, però ti prego di considerare che continuiamo a ripiegare *portandoci dietro i greci alle calcagna*.

Data ormai la costatazione che purtroppo molte nostre unità, di fronte a successive incrinature, attuano senz'altro successivi ripiegiamenti di intere fronti, è evidente che pur dopo aver assunta la fronte da te prescelta, anche questa tale eventualità andrà a rischio di subire la stessa sorte, mentre tu sai che *su questa linea dovremo morire tutti perché è quella che copre i porti*.

C'è da domandarsi se sia errato cominciare fin da questo momento a *differdere con i denti le posizioni che abbiamo in mano*, valorizzando i rinforzi ormai in arrivo e soprattutto il fatto che anche i greci non possono durare in eterno, come già si è dimostrato con la 9ª Armata.

Ti prego perciò vagliare ancora la situazione con quella fede che ci anima, e tenendo

1. Stratsani and Leskoviki.

2. Document attached to Soddu’s report, dated 28.11.1940, to the Army Deputy Chief of Staff General M. Roatta (The Nat. Arch. U.S.A. - Ibidem). Geloso’s letter to Soddu (27.11.1940) is also attached to the same report, to which the latter replies with the document published here.
anche conto dei fattori politici e soprattutto morali fatalmente legati alla decisione ora in corso.

Ho grande fiducia nel tuo cuore e nella tua volontà validamente sostenuti dal tuo ingegno.

F/to. Soddu.

Rome, 24 December 1940

A telegram from Mussolini to Cavallero: The crushing of the Siena division brought the Greeks to Himara. Mussolini wants to know who is responsible. Greece was beflagged for three days because of the capture of Himara. The morale of the Greek people and the Greek army has been raised anew. The situation must be reversed urgently, chiefly for the sake of morale (Italian morale)\(^1\).