UN ANNO IN TOSSIGNANO:
A MICRO-HISTORY OF THE SANTERNO VALLEY 1944-45

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Abstract

During the last year of the Second World War in Italy, the Allied forces assaulted the Wehrmacht’s last great line of defense in Italy—the Gothic line. *Un Anno in Tossignano* examines the effects of that passing warfront on the people of Tossignano and the surrounding villages in the Santerno Valley—an area on the south-eastern edge of the Apennine Mountains in the middle of the Gothic Line. This thesis is a chronological micro-history that tells the story of this small but old mountain village and the valley below during the almost-year long Allied assault on the Gothic line of defense. The specific nature of *this clash* of foreign military forces changed the social and political structures of the inhabitants of Tossignano and the Santerno Valley. This thesis analyzes the way the war transformed local and national identities as the villagers’ relationships with their occupiers, Italians—both collaborator and partisans, and their liberators also changed.
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Introduction

*Un anno in Tossignano* tells the story of Tossignano and the villages surrounding it in the Santerno Valley during the last year of the Second World War in Italy. From the summer of 1944 through to spring of 1945 the people of this valley, the Romagnoli,¹ lived through the passing of the war front. The passing front forever altered the Santerno Valley. Traditional facets of local identity were destroyed through bombings and German reprisals. The new infrastructure that represented the efforts to modernize were destroyed. Mass migrations and massacres changed the constituents of the area. These changes threatened local identity as well as Italian national identity.

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¹ Franco Poggi, *Sull’onda dei ricordi*, (Imola: A&G Fotografia, 2004), 100. Romagnoli is the name of the inhabitants of the Romagna region. Residents of Tossignano and the Santerno Valley are all considered Romagnoli. It is a generic term that refers to the people of the area though it is also the name of the dialect.
Un anno in Tossignano is a chronological thesis that weaves a story of the peculiar nature of the war in Italy and the way that war changed the locals in that last year of the Second World War in Italy. The first chapter begins with the history of Tossignano from earliest days through to the Fascist period. The story of Tossignano’s last year of the war begins in April 1944. Towards the Gothic Line ends with the beginning of the assault on the Gothic Line at the end of August 1944. The second chapter follows the Romagnoli of the Santerno Valley from the arrival of the Germans in September 1944 through the to the end of October 1944. The third chapter covers the winter months: November 1944 – March 1945. The front remains just south of
Borgo-Tossignano for the entirety of these 5 months. The final chapter begins with the Spring 1945 Offensive to the liberation of the Santerno Valley in April 1945.

The framework of Un anno in Tossignano—the eight month long Allied struggle to pass through the Gothic Line—has not been studied in English-language research to the same extent as it has been on the local side in Italian academic circles. The Gothic Line of defense was one of the later stages of the Italian Campaign, at a time when the fight to control Italy had been almost completely disregarded by both the German and Allied High Command as unimportant. Described as a sideshow or a forgotten war, it was still war and my study examines the particular reactions of these Romagnoli to the effects of the larger machine of war and how their decisions had ramifications on a much larger scale.

Victoria Belco’s War, Massacre, and Recovery in Central Italy 1943-1948 functions as both model and context for this specific kind of micro-history of regional Italy during the second World War. War, Massacre, and Recovery traces change and continuity in the Tuscan region from 1943 -1948; the period that Belco deems relevant for an examination of the change and continuity that existed in the war-torn Tuscan region. Through the use of local sources contrasted with later and more official accounts of the intricacies of daily life in war, Belco creates a picture of the realities of Tuscans during the war creating a new narrative that contradicts post-war revisionist ideas about partisans. Belco’s book presents a sample of how this kind of study can be undertaken. My work in this field complements Belco’s study of Tuscany by showing that there are distinct differences between Belco’s descriptions of the reactions of Italians in Tuscany and the Italians in Romagna that populate my study. Victoria Belco states that she covers the years between 1943-1948 because it comprises the war years. I only focus on the last year of the war because I believe that for the Romagnoli, it comprised the most transformative year of the war.
**Un Anno in Tossignano** is a story of one particular south-eastern edge of the Apennine Mountains and how the last year of World War II—the year planes flew overhead, bombs fell, and the Germans lived in their homes—affected these small mountain villages with long proud histories and lone proud people. It is a study that examines on the particular, how the passing of the war front through the Gothic Line of defense affected the inhabitants of the Santerno Valley. Though it focuses on the specifics of the passage, by necessity it must account for the way smaller actions like the individual Italian joining the partisans affect larger political or military decisions. Even more how broader considerations of war, like the secondary nature of the Italian Campaign for both the Axis and the Allies, affected the way the war was fought in Italy and the ramifications for all parties involved on the ground. This is then a story that tells not only of the ravages of war on a rural people but the way war forges and destroys relationships between groups of people and how that ultimately affects their identity. This thesis is concerned with the relationships Italian civilians had with their government, partisans, fascists, German soldiers, Allied forces, and finally each other. These interactions affected the identity of Italians on a regional scale but effected national changes. Examination of the causes of these changes sheds light on why societies in regions like Emilia-Romagna changed so dramatically during the war while other war-afflicted regions like Lazio, where Rome is located, did not change to the same degree. While war can be generalized to have certain effects on any population, it would ignore the way that war is always individualized by its combatants, terrain, and goals.

*The slow passing of the war front through the Santerno Valley due to the downgrading of the Italian Campaign resulted in consequences that altered the social and political structures of the townspeople and forever changed their local and national identities.*
as their relationships with their occupiers, Italians—both collaborators and partisans, and their liberators also changed.

The war fought in Italy was relegated to a secondary status after the Allied liberation of Rome. The shift towards France in June 1944 meant a shift in Allied priorities. Valuable and skilled troops were moved from Italy to more important fronts and German attention was diverted to these areas. The Italian Campaign was meant thereafter as a distraction for the Wehrmacht, while the Wehrmacht used Italy as a drain on Allied resources. For Field Marshall Kesselring, the Wehrmacht’s purpose wasn’t to stop the Allied invasion but to grind it to a halt and bleed the Allies of needed troops and weaponry. The Wehrmacht used Italian labor to construct defenses because German labor was needed elsewhere. The Allied forces were stymied by the lack of troop support in Italy, and the assault of the Gothic Line suffered prolonging the war and slowing the front. In Tossignano, the Germans chronically conscripted the locals into slave labor to shore up defenses. These same locals suffered through the fierce battle of the fall and then the long slow winter of a stalemate. The length of the assault on the Gothic Line meant prolonged bombing as well as prolonged occupation by fighting German forces. These two factors are the primary means of change in the fall and winter of 1944 and 1945.

The destruction of traditional seats of power changed the power structure of local regions. It assisted the change from geographic to economic power. Even before the Second World War began, there was a burgeoning move towards a greater emphasis on the economic power of towns over traditional or geographic power. In the Santerno Valley this meant that the towns in the valley along the river grew larger and larger during the Fascist period while towns like Tossignano began to stagnate. The limited size of Tossignano, which had before ensured an
elite status due to population control, became a hindrance as fascist Italy began to modernize. The war destroyed the products of Italian attempts to modernize but enabled the mechanism of modernization to work quicker after the war by destroying the traditional power hierarchy that had been threatened by the rise in the importance of economic power.

The war changed the nature of both regional and national identities and how they connected. Italy after the war was a divided nation. The vote in the Constitutional Referendum of 1946 showed that the country was split in two. One half of the country had forged a new national identity, no longer dependent on the old sense of Italian identity that had been formulated during the Risorgimento. During the war, the local identity of Italians in the north was fractured. In the Santerno Valley, the war divided the locals even from each other. Campanilismo spiked as their towns were threatened in September and by winter had faded with mass migrations. The stability of local identities had been the basis for the national Italian identity when Italy had been united 80 years previously in the Risorgimento.

This last year of the war changed the nature of relationships between Italians and the other groups active in the region. Though Italians hadn’t trusted the Germans even despite their growing political alliance through the 1930’s and ‘40s, the war changed the superiority complex that had developed after World War I. No longer could Italians consider themselves the mightier of the two, now they were victims of the Germans. The anti-fascist Italians considered strange or troubled before the war became the partisans that locals turned to as German abuses became too much to bear. The partisans were locals’ salvation from German soldiers but also from the culpability of their participation in the Axis.

Already feeling betrayed by Prime Minister Badoglio’s surrender in September 1943, life in German-occupied lands meant life under the exploitative Republic of Salò, nominally under Mussolini’s control. The Esercito Nazionale Repubblicano, the Salò Republic’s military,
conscripted the remaining Italian men and forced them to fight not solely against Allied forces but against their own people. Fascist soldiers were used to root out dissent in the small mountain villages and then lead Wehrmacht forces on cleansing campaigns. By the end of the war, locals rejected not just Mussolini or the king that supported him but fascism and the monarchical system that supported it.

When a country is threatened by war or other massive calamities, national identity is usually strengthened but Italy became increasingly bifurcated. In the 1946 election, all the regions of northern Italy voted in majority for the transformation of Italy into a republic while all the regions of southern Italy voted in majority for the continuance of the monarchy.\(^2\) Half of the country suffered through a bitter civil war while another war waged overhead that destroyed major facets of Italian identity and led to changes in the traditional power structure on a local scale.\(^3\)

A close examination of this time period offers an explanation for the disparity between northern and southern Italy’s vote in the 1946 referendum. War causes massive temporary population migrations but total war destroys the starting point of this migration. Italy became a nation in 1861, but the conception of Italian national identity was codified by intellectuals in the years preceding. Italians did not truly share a common language, with dialects so different as to be unintelligible, nor did they share a common history. Instead Italians share a common compulsion towards campanilismo. Italians are attached to their local identity above all and this universal connection became the basis for formations of Italian national identity and remained the basis all the way to World War 2. When the war threatened one aspect of this campanilismo

\(^2\)The vote was 54.3% in favor of transforming Italy into a republic
\(^3\)Giuseppe Maria Bacchi, *Tossignano: Storia di un Paese Distrutto* (Bologna: Sordomuti, 1946), 61-64. The shift in traditional power structure had been begun by the modernization put into effect by the fascist government. The shift had been mostly on an economic level though and with the destruction of the war, the economic became the most powerful level.
or local identity—the need to be able to return to one’s hometown—national identity suffered. The attachment to home was a universal facet of local identities and this commonality provided the grounds for Italians to form a national identity. With this facet threatened, it also affected the stability of national identity.

**Historical Background**

**Italian Campaign**

The Italian Campaign was the first joint military attack the Allies undertook during World War II. The campaign lasted 22 months long and began on the beaches of Sicily and ended on the slopes of the Alps. The Italian Campaign is one of the most controversial campaigns of World War II. The Allied Forces were constantly bickering, the Italian populace was caught between Allied bombs and the Wehrmacht’s exploitation and brutality, and the partisans were disorganized, ineffective, and dangerous to Allied forces, Wehrmacht, and civilian alike. By the end of the war, the Wehrmacht occupied more land in Italy than in Germany, the majority of the
Italian population was alleging allegiance to the partisan cause, north and central Italy lay in ruins, and General Mark Clark\(^4\) was a laughingstock in the military community.

Criticism and praise of the Italian campaign is muddled by the shifting and unclear motivations. After Allied forces were successful in Africa they faced the daunting task of attacking the European Axis Powers and diminishing their hold on central Europe. There are several common explanations for the invasion of Italy through its southern most border rather than the approach conventional military tactics suggested.\(^5\) Geographically, attacking Sicily made sense as the Allies had control of North Africa as well as the airspace in the Mediterranean. However this approach seemed laborious for many and General Marshall and the Joint Chiefs in Washington favored a direct attack to France in 1942, ignoring Italy. American generals were pushing for a decisive victory that would help signal the new course for the war. Military historian Eric Morris describes the British military command as more hesitant in *Circles of Hell*. The British were reluctant to engage in a military strategy that consigned them to the trenches that many had suffered through in World War I. President Eisenhower was also reluctant to engage German forces head on. To the East, the Russians were suffering from the German assault and requested that their Anglo-American allies divert German forces away from the Eastern front.

Underlying all these considerations though, was the consistent idea that Italy was weak. In large part the Italian Campaign was seen as a trial for joint military attack because it was the


\(^5\) Morris, *Circles*, 7-8. Military tactics relied heavily on historical precedent. For the invasion of Italy this precedent was Hannibal’s invasion of Italy through the Alps by way of Spain in 218 B.C.E.
‘soft underbelly of the Axis’. “The soft underbelly of the Axis” was seen as a good target due in large part to the flagging Italian support for Mussolini and the Anglo-American Allied Command’s incredibly biased view of the Italian military as weak.

This view was supported by the failures of the Italian military over the last few years. Poor leadership, the lack of a strong economy and military industrial complex, inconsistent nationalism, and delusions of Roman grandeur plagued the Italian military. Even as the Allies considered attacking Italy, Italian forces were overextended and required the support of the Wehrmacht. A common German joke in the early years of the war when Italy was still part of the Axis derided Italy’s military power. “In two months we shall win the war against Russia, in four months against England, and in four days against Italy.” Even as the Italian military was disregarded by both their allies in the Axis and Allied powers, they were coveted like a lucky charm. “There is a very curious thing,” Hitler noted in 1942, “…in all of this…that the side on which Italy is, invariably wins!”

Once the Allied Forces invaded they were quick to find that Italy was not “the garden path” it had been envisioned to be. By December 1943, Aneurin Bevan, a British Labour Party politician declared, “The whole of this country wants to know what strategical conception behind the war put the British and American armies to fight their way right up the whole peninsula in the autumn and winter…Is that the ‘soft underbelly of the Axis’? We are climbing up the backbone.”

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10 Higgins, Soft Underbelly, 125.
After the fall of Rome and the shift in Allied Command’s focus to France, the Italian Campaign remained secondary for the rest of the war. Ostensibly the Italian Campaign was continued after the liberation of Rome to tie up German forces while ‘liberating’ Italy. It has still become one of the most contentious campaigns of the European front of World War II. Major-General JFC Fuller believed, “The War in Italy was strategically the most useless campaign of the whole war. It prolonged the war, wrecked Italy and wasted thousands of American and British lives.”\(^\text{11}\) Though some military strategists blame the Allied Command’s shift in focus after Rome for the tribulations of the rest of the Italian Campaign, General Marshall believed that continuing to focus on Italy would have been comparable to Germany’s mistake in North Africa. “But it was our purpose to avoid the creation in Italy of a vacuum into which the resources of the cross-Channel operation would be dissipated as the Germans had bled themselves in the North African campaign.”\(^\text{12}\) Perhaps, the British Empire’s General Sir Charles James Napier’s comment best summarizes the sentiments of those involved in the Italian Campaign, “Success in war, like charity in religion, covers a multitude of sins.”\(^\text{13}\)

By 1945 it was clear that Germany’s investment in the future of their ally in 1943, when they propped up the Italian Socialist Republic, had been for naught. Adolf Hitler believed, “It is, in fact, quite obvious that our Italian alliance has been of more service to our enemies than to ourselves.”\(^\text{14}\)

The period between the surrender of Italy in 1943 and the end of the war in 1945 has been described in numerous ways by Italian historians and politicians. Some view it as the German war, as if to divorce Italy from its participation. It is more aptly labeled a civil war.

Though the Italian partisans had been active throughout the entire Fascist period, after 1943, the Italian partisan membership swelled and they became an actual threat to Fascist Italians and the Wehrmacht. After Italy surrendered to the Allies, the Nazis set up the Italian Social Republic\(^\text{15}\) as a puppet state while the Wehrmacht occupied Italy. To the south, the Allies supported Pietro Badoglio as the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Italy. What remnants of the Italian military remained under the control of Badoglio’s government fought with the Allies. Throughout the war there were Fascist Italian troops supporting the Wehrmacht in its occupation of Italy and fight against the Allies. The Kingdom of Italy sent its remaining troops to fight with the Allies. Italian Jews were deported en masse to concentration camps without the protection of the Italian state.

The Italian Campaign was devastating for the infrastructure of central and northern Italy. More Italians died after the 1943 surrender than before. Entire towns were destroyed. Italy was transformed by the last two years of the war, in a way that even two decades of fascism could not do.

**World War II**

Italy entered World War II on June 10\(^{th}\), 1940. Mussolini rushed into war, concerned about losing out on the spoils. Despite being the ‘dictator’ of Italy, Mussolini sought and gained the backing of King Victor Emmanuel III. The King did not need much convincing and enthusiastically backed Italy’s entrance into the war despite the reluctance of Italian foreign diplomats and generals.

The Italian Campaign began July 10\(^{th}\), 1943 with the invasion of Sicily. By July 25\(^{th}\), Mussolini was removed from power. On September 8\(^{th}\), without warning, the Italian government

\(^{15}\) Also known as the Republic of Salò.
surrendered to the Allies, while the Prime Minister Badoglio and the King fled Rome to safety. The surrender was disastrous for Italians, civilian and soldier alike. Much of the Italian military was serving alongside the Wehrmacht and with the surrender they suddenly became something less than allies. Many Italian soldiers served out the rest of the war in POW camps if they weren’t killed in the months following the surrender. A little more than a month later, on October 13th the Badoglio-ruled Italian government declared war on Germany. The move was entirely political since more than half of Italy was controlled by Germany at the time and the remaining parts by the Allies. Pietro Badoglio was attempting to appease the Allied forces since an ally; even one that had been once been an enemy, would have some say in its future. Italian soldiers were now enemy combatants to the Wehrmacht. The shift in treatment of Italians by the Germans was predicated by years of mutual distrust. Mussolini himself had said during the First World War, “Everything which is treason, disgrace, deceit, is genuinely German.”

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Towards the Gothic Line

Tossignano

Figure 1.1: Map of Santerno Valley and Imola from *Gente di Sagre: Immagini e parole dalla Vallata del Santerno*, pg. 8, 2005. Drawn Map.

Tossignano has only been destroyed three times in its thousand years-long history.

Tossignano was first destroyed in 1198 during a struggle with the near-by community in Imola. It was destroyed the second time in 1799, as Napoleon’s forces swept through Europe. The last destruction of Tossignano was also the most transformative. During “la Guerra tedesca”\(^\text{17}\) Tossignano was destroyed when it was used as a battleground by the Allied Forces and the Wehrmacht.

\(^{17}\) Bacchi, *Tossignano*, 53. Less than a year after the war, Bacchi labels the World War II as the German war.
Tossignanesi trace the existence of Tossignano back to the 8th century. The neighboring town of Borgo\(^\text{18}\) was founded after the first destruction. Tossignanesi formed Borgo at the foot of mountain and forged a new identity as Borghigiani. Despite their common ancestry, Borghigiani and Tossignanesi have competing identities. Tossignanesi view Borgo as a lesser imitation of their beloved Tossignano. Everything from the shorter history to Borgo’s lack of any famous contributions to general Italian history is seen as evidence of Borgo’s lesser importance. From its creation in 1198 to World War II, Tossignano was always the more powerful of the two. Perched atop their mountain, Tossignanesi lived above Borgo, but then Tossignano has historically controlled the towns in the valley below it: Borgo, Fontanelice, Codrignano, Riviera, and Casalfiumanese.

On the highest peak of Tossignano lay the ruins of the castle of Tossignano. The castle dates back before 458 C.E. In 872, it became subject to the church of Imola. When the Tossignanesi rebelled, it was destroyed. Two hundred years later in 1005 it came under the protection of Florence but again in 1070, the church of Imola controlled the castle. Through its history it passed through many hands: the Maghinardo Pagani, the Alidosi of Castel del Rio, the Manfredi, Caterina Sforza, the Borgia and the Venetians. In 1814, the Holy See became the last external power to control the castle since they ordered its complete destruction. The

\(^{18}\) Translates literally from Italian as burgh.
The first destruction of Tossignano in the 12th century was the cause of the creation of Borgo. Of the first two destructions of Tossignano, this is the one that the Tossignanesi write bitterly about in historical books because it caused some Tossignanesi to renounce their identity by creating a new one. To renounce one’s identity implies that the identity doesn’t hold significant value. For rural villagers, the value of one’s identity came from the group maintaining it. The Borghigiani for the next millennia were a visual reminder of the fragility of the identity that Tossignanesi held onto so dearly. With the advent of the 20th century came unwelcome change. As Italy slowly modernized, Borgo grew until it eclipsed Tossignano. The new train
system as well as its location on the river allowed it to grow commercially while the Tossignanesi were restrained by the geographic limits of their mountaintop.

![Image of Borgo Tossignano](image)

**Figure 1.4:** Newly built railway running through Borgo from Autunno ‘44: Diario di Guerra nel 50th anniversario del passaggio del fronte sul Santerno, pg. 8, 2005. Photograph.

**Geography**

Tossignano rests atop a mountain at the southeastern edge of the Northern Apennine Mountain range. The Apennine mountain range represented a natural barrier and defensive line. While the snow-capped peaks of the Alps made it difficult to hide and disguise embattlements and troops, the Apennines are covered in dense forests, making it impossible for precision bombing. Historically the method to political and military control of areas in the Apennines was control of the mountaintops. While there are many towns situated in the valleys, power always governed from a height. The struggle to control these mountaintops led to war weary villagers resettling into less-powerful but more peaceful settlements in the valleys.
Tossignano is the final strategic defense point before Imola and the Via Emilia.\textsuperscript{19} Tossignano is a good strategic point, because from the top there is a line of sight almost several kilometers in every direction. A military force controlling Tossignano essentially controls the entire Santerno Valley. To the east of Tossignano is the Veno del Gesso, an impenetrable chalk range.\textsuperscript{20} To the west of Tossignano are a series of cliffs and mountains with incredibly difficult terrain. The only way to move north through the Santerno Valley towards Imola is to capture Tossignano. A small German force could control the path if they controlled the mountains since travel through the valleys without control of the mountaintops was tantamount to suicide.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figures.png}
\caption{Eastern view from La Rocca at the peak of Tossignano. The Vena del Gesso is visible. Photos by author.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{19} Prashad, \textit{Indian Armed Forces}, 52. Via Emilia is a road between Rimini and Bologna that has existed since the end of the Roman Empire. It provides a straight path through the valley plains to Bologna.

\textsuperscript{20} Chalk is difficult to climb because of its weak structure but impossible to bomb sufficiently for travel.
Fascism in Emilia-Romagna

Like the majority of Italy, Borgo-Tossignano was in disarray in 1922. After the war, Tossignanesi emphasized Tossignano’s autonomy over the centuries even from Fascist influence. Yet Tossignano’s economy was revived after Mussolini became the Prime Minister in 1922 and the fascist party came to power. By 1939, the municipality’s administration had even paid off its debts and turned a profit. Still Tossignanesi like Giuseppe Bacchi downplayed Fascist influence after the war. Bacchi wrote, “The fascist republic was in reality... a duchy, passing through the history of Tossignano without great effect.”

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21 Bacchi, *Tossignano*, 54. <<La republica fascist ache in realtà era un…ducato, passa attraverso la storia di Tossignano senza fatti di grande rilievo>>
Figure 1.9: Image of the military and fascist women in Imola during the Fascist Period from Uomini e Donne Imolesi tra fascismo e democrazia: persocraso attraverso i documenti e la testimonianze, pg. 8, 2009. Photograph.

The majority of the fascist hierarchy came from Emilia-Romagna region in Italy. Mussolini was born in Predappio, a small town an hour southeast of Tossignano also located in the Apennine Mountains. Dino Grandi, the president of the parliament from 1939 to 1943, came from Mordano—a town 24 kilometers north of Tossignano.

The Emilia-Romagna region is in a strange situation: it was the region most red [socialist] after the war but it was one of the most fascist regions during the Fascist period.22

Emilia-Romagna also had a strong socialist tradition in the early part of the 20th century. Andrea Costa, the father of Italian socialism, was born in Imola and founded the Partito dei Lavoratori Italiani in 1892. Emilia-Romagna was a region of political extremes.

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22 Gabriele Veronesi, Emilia Rossa, Cuore Nero. << L’Emilia-Romagna ha una strana situazione: è la regione più rossa del dopoguerra ma è una delle regioni più fasciste nel period del Ventennio.>>
There were some brawls between locals during the transition into fascism, but overall, “there seemed to be between the villagers a sort of treaty of mutual tolerance...” When Mussolini became Prime Minister, some villagers from the Santerno Valley left Italy forever. Their departures were remembered as motivated by personal concerns rather than fear of the newly fascist Italy. The most notable to leave was a mechanic from a nearby village, Baldassarri. Baldassarri had a little local fame because his son had ridden in the Tour de France during the 1930s. Baldassarri left for France where he changed his name first to Baldassari, and then eventually to Bartali. The remembrance of Baldassarri’s name change was just as important as his son’s accomplishments. For the villagers, those who left Italy and their village, also inevitably left behind their history and identity.

Augusto, a Borghigiano and ardent Socialist, ran ustareja de Bastardaz, a socialist base that had once housed Andrea Costa 20 years before the rise of fascism. Augusto remained politically active throughout Italy’s fascist years. While recovering from a rally in Tossignano, Augusto was imprisoned in Calabria where he remained until the fall of Mussolini’s government. The greatest danger for those like Augusto was not in the small mountain villages but in the larger Imola. While in Imola, Augusto was surrounded by a group of black shirts that forced him to drink the usual castor oil. They did not allow him to leave and instead surrounded him in hopes of seeing the humiliating effects of castor oil first hand. When he began to squirm in pain, there were some in the crowd who had sympathy and allowed him to escape.

The struggle between fascism and anti-fascism was considerably more farcical in Tossignano. Giovanni Magnani remembers that one day a red flag promoting Communism

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23 Giovanni Magnani, Scampoli di Memoria: Amarcord Di Un Emigrato Numero Due (Imola: Nuova Grafica, 1995), 16. “...sembrava che tra i paesani fosse stato stipulato una specie di trattato di reciproca tolleranza...”
24 They just happened to coincide with Mussolini’s rise to power and the legitimization of Brigade Nere.
appeared at the top of a poplar tree on the banks of the Santerno River in Borgo. It gathered much attention and the leaders of the town were resolved to remove it. However the flag was too high up in the tree to be reached safely and unwilling to risk anyone’s health, the Borghigiani left it there. It even became a joke amongst the Borghigiani.

An integral part of fascism was the way it sought to remake Italy into a more modern nation in the fascist image. In Imola, large parts of the city were torn up in order to create large public spaces. Fascists sought to remake Italy in smaller ways as well. In Tossignano, the statue of Imoleso socialist, Andrea Costa, was ordered destroyed by the Prefect of Bologna; at least according to Giuseppe Bacchi, the then mayor of Tossignano. However Tossignanesi remember the tale differently—that it was Bacchi who made the final decision to hire the watchman who destroyed the thin concrete of the statue. The statue had survived more than ten years in Fascist Italy before its destruction.\footnote{Magnani, \textit{Scampoli}, 55.}
Despite the towns’ seeming ambivalence to fascism, several volunteers joined the Corps of Volunteer Troops and fought in Spain on the side of the nationalist fascist forces of Francisco Franco. Continuing to support these fascist aims may have been easier for the Borghigiani and Tossignanesi since Borgo-Tossignano suffered no losses in this war. In the “nearly bloodless” invasion of Albania of 1939, there was only one death from the Santerno Valley. War remained a distant specter for them.

Post-1943

After the surrender of Italy on September 8th 1943, Italian men were conscripted into the Salò Republic’s Fascist military forces, now organized by the Germans. As the Allied forces tramped their way up the peninsula, Kesselring ordered the construction of massive defensive

26 Magnani, Scampoli, 89. << Un caduto si ebbe nella quasi incruenta conquista dell’Albania.>>
lines crisscrossing Italy. The Gustav Line, the Hitler Line and the Gothic Line were all lines of defense built by the Todt Organization at the behest of the Wehrmacht. Under the new Salò Republic, Italian men and women were forced into the service of the Todt Organization. Borghigiani and Tossignanesi alike were forced to create the barriers and fortifications that allowed the Wehrmacht to slow the Allied advancement. Those men not sent to the Todt Organization were conscripted into military service.27

In September of 1943, Bruno Turrini—a Borghigiani—was only 19 when he was conscripted into military service and sent to Pesaro. In Pesaro, a group of Italian conscripts managed to escape—among them Turrini and three other Borghigiani. They were eventually recaptured by Fascists at San Donà di Piave where 4 of the escapees were killed as an example. The rest were imprisoned at Verona for the next eight and a half months with “20 men to one small room.”28 In mid-1944, Turrini was rescued from imprisonment by a group of partisans. He had no choice but to join the partisans.

Most often the family left behind didn’t know nor would they ever know what happened to their male relatives that were taken away by order of the Wehrmacht and escorted by Italian fascist officers. When Angelina Giovannini’s brother turned 17, he was ordered to Imola where he was held one night, then sent to Prati where he would be sent to Germany. Angelina walked from Montefune to Prati by foot in order to see him. She wasn’t allowed to see him and was sent away. She returned home frustrated and against her parent’s wished, joined the partisans with two other girls. She met resistance when she found them. They wanted her to play nursemaid, where she wanted to fight. She saw her will through and joined the fighting

troops. Even though Italian partisans recognized the sacrifices of women, they were usually relegated to secondary or tertiary positions. Women were asked to be nursemoads or housekeepers for the partisans. More strategically, they were used to carry messages to and from villages as German soldiers were less likely to search them or question their purpose in travelling. The majority of partisan groups were comprised of young unbridled men with guns roving the countryside with no accountability or direction. The Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN) attempted to organize and control these groups but the lack of communication, differing ideals, and uncertain aims stymied these efforts.

Paramilitary extremist guerilla groups of men, labelled partisans, had existed for years before the surrender in 1943 though their ranks were mostly filled with Communist extremists.

With the fall of Mussolini and the surrender of Italy, more and more Italians joined the partisans. The relationship between Italians and partisans was complicated. The choice was between collaboration with the Germans against their own people or partisanship. It was less a choice or even fear of German violence than a necessity. For Turrini, the partisans were his liberators from a certain kind of hell.

The British Special Operations Executive had supported the partisans and the general Italian resistance movement since the first Allied landing at Sicily. It was common practice to foster resistance movements in every German-occupied country. However the SOE’s support was more an attempt at control than genuine support. The SOE provided weaponry, but sparingly and inconsistently. They wanted the partisans to be a British-operated guerilla and spy force. The Allied Forces were generally unaware of the partisans until they reached Florence in August 1944. The guerilla attacks the partisans had participated in had been too small for the Allies to take much notice at first. Quartiero Ronchi remembered, “We did not do grand

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29 She later died alongside Andrea Gualandi
30 A prototypical MI6
Instead the partisans focused on small actions to disturb the German war effort. Ronchi remembered ruining the arming of landmines by removing the outward apparatus.

The Allied military commanders did not trust nor particularly like the partisans. They represented a rogue element. As often at odds with Italian civilians as with other partisan groups, the Italian resistance movement was not the grand force that Italian history makes it out to be. The partisans were disorganized, without clear loyalties, and lacked the order of a proper military force. Partisans robbed Italians, raped Italian women, and executed those against them ruthlessly. By 1944, the majority of the partisans were not Communist nor anti-fascist, merely anti-German. The Allied command was hesitant to arm them for fear of betrayal or misuse of weaponry. The partisans were very similar to the black shirts of the early 1920s. Roving bands of violent men who believed their cause just. Part of this unwillingness to collaborate with the partisans came from the partisans’ celebration of their renegade status. The partisans were unwilling to truly organize like the Polish had done. Still more and more Italians joined the partisans.

April 1944

In April, Quartiero Ronchi, only 19 years old, obtained a five-day pass from the fascist military service he’d been conscripted into 8 months previously in September 1943. When he’d originally faced conscription in September 1943, his only choice was to escape German control by joining the partisans in the mountains. When Quartiero Ronchi met with the partisans he was told “they didn’t have any arms nor clothes and that they wouldn’t be able to survive the winter in the mountains like this.”

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31 Marchetti and Orazi, *Prima*, 20. <<…non abbiamo fatto grandi cose…>>
32 Marchetti and Orazi, *Prima*, 20. <<…non c’erano né armi e né vestiti, in quelle condizioni nonsaremmo riusciti a passare l’inverno.>>
was still interested. Once he joined them in April, he realized they were disorganized and only performed small actions of minimal importance.

The partisans in the valley did not organize until April because the lacked impetus. Motivation was found after a peaceful demonstration turned violent. On April 29th, different groups for the defense of women came together for a peaceful demonstration demanding more food and the end of the war in Imola. To prevent the demonstrators from gaining access to the town hall, fascist guards shot into the crowd of 500 women filling piazza Matteotti. Maria Zanotti died that day while Livia Venturini, mortally wounded, died a week later. The Imolesi reacted strongly.

Traders lowered the blinds, closed the shops, the workers left the factories and striked spontaneously.33

The deaths of these two women spurred the organization of partisans in the mountains by Imola. That it was women; that it was in broad daylight violated even the basest of Italian instincts. Violence had been used by the fascist state to gain power and then to keep it but women like Maria Zanotti and Livia Venturini, one a mother the other a dutiful sister represented the model Italian women. The deaths of these two women affected the men of the area more so than other previous abuses and became a turning point for the population. It was Italian fascists shooting into the crowd not Germans that led to the organization of partisans in the area. The organization of the partisans in the valley wasn’t a reaction to Germans then but to other Italians. The reality of these partisans’ organizations is that they were formed in reaction to the actions of other Italians. Perhaps this was this changed the relationship between the partisans and the population. In Tuscany, civilians were at odds with partisans more often

33 CIDRA, Uomini e donne imolesi, 23. <<< I commercianti abbassano le serrande, chiudono i negozi, gli operai escono dalle fabbriche e scioperano spontaneamente.>>>
than not because partisans were not of the people, merely another paramilitary group that took food from the people at the point of the gun.

Figure 1.12: Image of the funeral procession for Livia Venturini in June 1944 from Uomini e Donne Imalesi tra fascismo e democrazia: persocroso attraverso I documenti e la testimonianze, pg. 24, 2009. Photograph.

**June 1944**

Giugno, la falce in pugno.
June, the scythe in hand.\(^{34}\)

Once the Allies liberated Rome in 1944 there were massive tactical changes made to the Allied plan of attack in Italy. Rome was liberated June 5\(^{th}\), 1944 and a day later Operation Neptune was put into action and the Allied invasion of Normandy began. With the beginning of Operation Neptune, the Allied Command refocused their attention on the southern beaches of France with the aim of gaining land access to Germany through France.

Three U.S. Divisions and four French divisions were removed. To compensate, one African-American U.S. division and one Brazilian Division was assigned to the 5\(^{th}\) Army. From Rome, General Alexander and then Lieutenant General Mark Clark looked towards Florence as the next big conquest.

\(^{34}\) Poggi, *Sull’onda*, 104. Romagnolo Proverb
Allied tactics changed after the liberation of Rome, as a result of the tactical failures at Monte Cassino. The air forces were released from their traditional front line role and instead were used on an ‘interdictory programme’\textsuperscript{35}. Instead of focusing on the immediate targets that the ground forces were battling, the Allied Air Forces made “German supply lines, ports, shipping etc., the main objective.”\textsuperscript{36} Tossignano felt the impact of this tactical change. In late June the train stop at Ponticelli, a town nine kilometers to the north, was destroyed.

**July 1944**

A few weeks after the bombing at Ponticelli, an Allied fighter-bomber destroyed the train station at Riviera. The train through the Santerno Valley was closed down permanently. It had only been inaugurated 28 years before. The train represented the growing modernization of Italy and the growing importance of economic power. The train connected the cities in the valley with Imola making them centers for transportation and thus growing their commercial power. Modernization—and by extent the burgeoning economic potential of the valley towns—was impeded.

In Fontanelice, the partisans of the 36\textsuperscript{th} Garibaldi Brigade came to thresh the grain. With all able-bodied Italian men conscripted into either the Esercito Repubblicana Nazionale or the Todt Organization after September 1943, those that remained behind had difficulties reaping the harvest. When the partisans were done threshing, they also helped to distribute the grain. The partisans had a deep loyalty to this area and some of the partisans fighting in the 36\textsuperscript{th} Garibaldi Brigade were Fontanesi. In these early months, the partisans worked to assist locals forging a relationship of mutual support.

\textsuperscript{35} Prashad, *Indian Armed Forces*, 43.
\textsuperscript{36} Prashad, *Indian Armed Forces*, 43.
Their help had three effects. First, it stymied German efforts to obtain the grain for themselves. The Germans would take the grain and send it back to Germany. Second, it improved relations with the villagers who now had a direct reason to support the partisans. Third, it allowed the partisans much needed access to food without alienating the local population which hid them from the German and fascist forces.

**August 1944**

On the first day of August, the 92\textsuperscript{nd} U.S. Infantry Division arrived in Italy. The division was the only African-American division that saw combat in Europe during World War II. The arrival of the troops was an accomplishment for black politicians back on the home front. Fighting in World War II was to be one step in establishing black Americans as U.S. citizens.

However, the arrival of the 92\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division solidified the unimportant nature of the Italian campaign. General Alexander was getting the troops no one wanted. In total 23 different nationalities fought in Italy during the Italian campaign. The presence of non-white
troops on European soil was the embodiment of the fear of most colonial powers for the past centuries—non-white troops fighting on European soil and winning.

Their arrival was also accompanied by fascist Italian propaganda that combined both the racist colonial ideology that had become commonplace in Italy after the colonization of Ethiopia with anti-American sentiment.

Figures 1.14 & 1.15: Fascist propaganda posters disseminated in northern Italy after 1943 from Alle Spalle dell Linea Gotica. Photographs.

The primary means of propaganda in Italy post-1943 was in the presence of posters that told Italians that not only were the Allied troops not white, but they were accompanied by men with the intention of changing Italy for good.

The propaganda used racist and eugenicist imagery in order to inspire hatred for the liberators. It was true that the ‘liberators’ didn’t respect Italian nationalism. For the British, the Italians were little better than the colonies in the rest of the world since Italians were incapable of reaching statehood without the intervention of foreign powers.
Three weeks later, on the 24th of August, Borgo and Tossignano traditionally celebrate their patron saint, Saint Bartholomew. The festival of Saint Bartholomew had already existed by the mid-1800s. The day was less of a religious observance than an economic commercialized festival. Farmers from the entire valley would gather with their best cattle on the outskirts of Borgo.

From the first light of dawn, the best specimens were brought to the exhibition and were subjected to the harsh judgment of experts and merchants interested in purchasing [the bovine].

By summer 1944, no one was celebrating any of the traditional festivals. The festival of Saint Bartholomew celebrated the saint that would keep Borgo-Tossignano safe and prosperous for another year. It was only fitting that it was not celebrated in 1944.

On the 25th of August, the first aerial bombardment of Borgo-Tossignano began as the Tossignanesi were sitting down to their Friday lunch. This late in August, the heat of the day was unbearable and most lunches would have been light. In years past it might have included the rabbit or pork sold the day before at the festival. This first bombardment took the most lives of any for the rest of the war. In total they found six dead—three in the house of the Nuns on Viale Marconi and another three in the house of the Tonellis.

The next day, the Allies began battle at the Gothic Line of defense. Allied morale was high even though the fortifications of the Gothic Line had been in preparation since the invasion of Italy and the Germans were entrenched into the Italian countryside.

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Poggi, Sull’onda, 62. <<Fin dale prime luci dell’alba gli esemplari migliori venivano condotti all’esposizione per essere sottoposti al severo giudizio degli esperti e dei mercanti interessati all’acquisto.>>
Figure 1.16: Map of the Gothic Line of defense (August 1944 –March 1945). Created by author.
Fall 1944

The Approaching Front

The approaching front forced Italian civilians in the cities and countryside both into making difficult decisions. German soldier, Josef Fossinger, remembers hearing of two Italian families, one from Rome and the other from Florence, who fled from the fighting in their own cities to the Tuscan countryside only to find themselves caught in the fighting on the Green Line of defense. Italians could run further north in the hopes that when the war eventually came it would not be as terrible or they could endure the passing of the front where they were. Others like Cesare Zavoli traveled towards the front hoping to assist family through this dangerous transition. The only certainty was that the front would eventually come.

Unable to see the larger picture, fear of the coming front meant Italians were making decisions based off a combination of faulty information and hearsay. They worried for the immediate dangers of direct combat and in their shortsightedness were herded into other dangerous situations. In Tuscany Italians, having heard of the brutalities committed by the Germans during the fighting, ran for the hills and mountains. However the worst German atrocities would happen in these mountains. Cut off from help, Italians were at the mercy of whoever came through these remote towns. The hill village of Sant’anna di Stazzema in Tuscany had become a refuge for Tuscans running from the front. On the 12th of August, the German murdered 560 villagers and refugees as part of the scorched earth policy of the Waffen-SS.

The lack of foresight by Italians is even more evident at the Gothic Line. The quick progress after Rome led Italians to believe that the Allies would continue to sweep up the peninsula even though the construction of the Gothic Line of defense had been in progress for
at least two years. They believed liberation was around the corner and the front would pass over them quickly. They prepared themselves for a terrible but short barrage.

The Gothic Line

The Gothic Line of defense ran from Pisa through to Rimini and though the Allied forces were able to breach it many times after August 1944, they were unable to move far past this line in the sand until spring.

For the small towns that border the winding Santerno River as it flows out of the Apennine Mountains towards Imola, the front arrived in September. The arrival of the front was faced with both fear and mistaken hope. There were many like Elio Gollini, a partisan fighting in the Santerno Valley, that thought the arrival of the front meant the war was going to be over soon. The Allied forces had moved quickly after Rome. Their progress must have seemed unstoppable to the Italians who did not have access to the same information that guided the military tactics of Kesselring and Alexander. The Germans did not inform the Italians of the true nature of the coming assault. Instead information was passed between Italians like rumors on the wind. Sometimes a young boy would be chosen to run the information over the mountains and other times only the sounds of artillery or tattered bodies that remained could tell the tale.

Cut off from larger communities like Imola or Bologna, the small villages along the Santerno River and high in the mountains were at the mercy of the Allied bombs and the Wehrmacht’s decisions. The priority of forced conscription of soldiers shifted into the forced conscription of workers. With over 15,000 forced laborers the Germans were able to build the last major line of defense across Italy—the Gothic line.

As the Allies approached the Gothic Line of defense, they shifted tactics. The Eight Army was switched again from a northeastern advance to a western push from the Adriatic Sea and the beaches of Rimini. The intent was to create a pincer movement with the 5th Army fighting
through the Apennines, while the Eighth Army fought from Italy’s western shore so they could meet at the Via Emilia and head northwards to Bologna.

The Fifth Army moved rapidly northeast along the Santerno River toward Imola. As the Fifth Army conquered Firenzuolo and moved further into the Apennines, they had crossed out of Tuscany into Romagna. The Italian any Allied translators learned was derived from the Tuscan, more specifically the Fiorentini dialect. The Romagnolo dialect is audibly different.

The town of Castel del Rio was the last important tactical point along the Santerno River before Tossignano. Fifteen kilometers to the south of Tossignano, Castel del Rio’s history is tied into the Alidosi who ruled the area for much of the preceding millennium. The Alidosi built both a castle as well as the Ponte Alidosi. Much like the Tossignanesi, Alidosiani held themselves apart from the surrounding villages due to the status afforded them by the magnificent Ponte Alidosi and castle.

**September 1944**

Agosto vuol maturare, Settembre vuol vendemmiare. Ripen in August, reap in September.  

On a Saturday evening, midway through September, the Wehrmacht arrived in Castel del Rio. Allied bombs also began on the same day. The Germans occupied Castel del Rio while the Allies bombed it—the front had reached the Alidosiani.

Most of the able-bodied men had been forced to leave the village in 1943 and Alidosiani women like Elide Biagi and Norma Poli were left behind alone with infants.

My husband was called to war when our son was just 20 days old, I never saw him again. For me it’s very hard to remember these moments.

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38 Poggi, *Sull’onda*, 105. Romagnola Proverb
When the fighting began, Elide Biagi was driven into the woods with a baby of just 40 days in her arms. Living in the woods proved too dangerous and she and another woman returned home and hid in the barn with the cows. That night the Germans arrived at her home. One German soldier threatened her with a grenade but let them leave unharmed. Women were vulnerable all along the Gothic Line. With a crumbling society, the traditional protections of a patriarchal society were denied them. If Italian women were raped or forced into prostitution, they were condemned by other locals just as harshly as they would have been before the war as having participated in extramarital sexual intercourse.

The danger these women were put in meant that the social order had decayed even if the moral code of Italians remained stable. Sex outside of marriage was still rounds for social exclusion and abandonment by husbands or fathers. The loss of social order that provided women protection from sexual assault meant that women had to preserve their own virtue. Elide Biagi hid with another woman but even that did little to protect her from just one German soldier. The constant threat to their social value led Italian women to abandon their homes and join seek refuge with the partisans.

A German soldier arrived at the door of Giovanna Amaducci one day, demanding that she clean potatoes for him back at the German camp. Giovanna Amaducci had already lost her husband to forced conscription in ’43 and her brother was separated from her by the war front. This was a common ruse along the Gothic Line to lure Italian women from the safety of presented by other Italians to German camps where they would be raped and forced into wartime prostitution. She told him to clean the potatoes himself. When the soldier responded, “Tu kaputt,” she realized he’d understood her reply. He kicked her even though she held a baby

39 Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 28. << Mio marito venne chiamato in guerra che nostro figlio aveva appena 20 giorni, non lo vidi mai più. Per me è molto duro ricordare quei momenti. >>
in her arms. After he left, she loaded all her belongings into a wheelbarrow, and with her daughter went to the refugee camp run by partisans along the river for safety.

The partisans were safety from the abuses of the German soldiers but they demanded service. For safety, Giovanna Amaducci was expected to run messages back and forth the countryside because her status as a woman protected her from suspicions about her intentions. Resorting to partisan protection was an attempt then to protect their social value even in a decayed social fabric.

The soldiers ransacked the houses as much to instill fear in the local populace as it was for need. Both partisan and German soldier alike came to the houses in search of food. Even as early as the end of August, Norma Poli recalls seeing German soldiers marching off to Firenzuola hungry. A German soldier was found dead with his pockets stuffed full of the wild hazelnuts that grew in the mountains. The villagers knew the taking of food and supplies was not merely an imposition of German power but of need. It became a desperate game for Italians to hide the food needed for their own survival from increasingly desperate soldiers. The fight over supplies super ceded politics. Fascist or not, food could be taken for German need. The need for essentials helped unite Italians against the others that were forcibly taking it from them. Food put distance between Italians and their previous politics. Fascists were supposed to support the Germans but the nature of war, specifically the scarcity of resources changed the political reality and fascism lost footing. Fascism was no use in the face of hunger in the mountains.

On the 12\textsuperscript{th} of September, partisans took over Tossignano and declared it a partisan republic. Confident of the strides the Allied had made in the past 3 weeks, the partisans had taken over Tossignano expecting to be greeting by Allied liberators any day. The decision was shortsighted but for another 12 days they declared Tossignano as separate from the Republic of Salò.
These partisans were confident that they wouldn’t be facing the German forces though and settled into wait for Allied troops to arrive. Partisans created ‘partisan republics’ all over northern Italy throughout the German occupation; though even the most successful only lasted a few months. The creation of these republics meant that not only could partisans be considered anti-German, but also not pro-Badoglio. The presence of these republics didn’t correspond with any growing public support for a republic state, instead these republics were extensions of the power of a local place and resembled the city-states in existence before the unification of Italy. They were a regression from the monarchical and fascist united Italy. They solidified local identity by rejecting Italy as a whole and returning to regional identities pre-Risorgimento.

These short-lived partisan republics often incited German reprisals in the short-term. They also influenced Allied perception of the partisan movement. The existence of partisan republics scared the Allied Command because the resurgence of local identity meant that the Allies might have to wage war against the Italian populace for control of Italy. In this last year of the war, with fear of the recognized Communist threat, the Anglo-American Command was invested not only in controlling Italy but leaving behind an intact Italy to provide a buffer against the building Soviet Eastern Europe. It was in the best interest then for the Allied Armies moving through Italy not to empower the partisans.

For the Alidosiani, “life was difficult, very much so.”⁴⁰ Even with the fighting away from the village, the occupation meant that the Alidosiani were caught between the Italian fascists with the support of the Wehrmacht and partisans. Though partisan membership in northern Italy was already 80,000 strong in September 1944, it was incredibly dangerous to help the

⁴⁰ Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 28. << …la vita era difficile, molto. >>
partisans. In Castel del Rio there were more Alidosiani collaborators than anti-German
Alidosiani. According to Dina Galeotti, “It was necessary, however, to be careful to whom you
spoke.”41 The further away from city center, the stronger the anti-German sentiment. Up the
mountain on the winding Via Montefune there were more that assisted the partisans than not.

In the presence of the German forces, Italians turned on each other. Some Italian
collaborators would pretend to be partisans and go from house to house hoping to unmask
partisan sympathizers and gain information on partisan activity. It culminated in the final weeks
of September when the Germans set fire to the houses of those Alidosiani that were suspected
of having connections with the partisans. The German soldiers were led to those houses by
Italian fascists. September was the first full month of the assault on the Gothic Line and with the
Germans occupying Castel Del Rio, tension ran high and Italians turned against Italians. For
importantly locals turned against locals because of national politics. The civil war in Italy may
have happened on a local scale but it was caused by national politics. It was in many ways a
battle between local identity and national identity. The partisans and anti-German locals were
concerned with the way the Germans had destroyed the local society through forced
conscription. Those locals who sided with the Germans, who wearing the insignia of the fascists
led the Germans in their reprisals, were branded thereafter not by their birthplace but as
Italians. Siding with the Germans meant denying and rejecting local identity, which led to social
exclusion.42

41 Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 18. << Bisognava però stare attenti a parlare.>>
42 After the war, it meant that anyone in power during the fascist period would show their
rejection of fascism by overly embracing their local identity. I.E. Giuseppe Maria Bacchi and
Tossignano
For those locals that were anti-German, their trust remained with other locals. Berto, a young partisan who live on Via Montefune a few houses down from Dina Galeotti, was in danger of capture after the arrival of the Germans.

There was a Signore, Giorgetto: he came with us to Montefune but lived at Montanara. He took with him Berto, that lived in the house nearby ours, to safely bring him to his house [in Montanara].

Giorgetto intended to take Berto with him to Montanara, south of Borgo, to hide him from the bands of SS and fascists set on cleaning the partisan menace from Castel del Rio. On September 19th, they set out from Via Montefune.

The situation though in the forest was very dangerous because of the presence of the Germans: then he [Giorgetto] saw a massive rock with a hole underneath and said to Berto, “Now go down there. Tonight, I will come and bring you food.” He was there for one day, he was there for two days, the boy stayed there for 8 days, curled up, without water and without food. In fact the area was full of Germans and Giorgetto was not able to reach him. Berto told us afterwards: “I always heard sounds of men passing by, of weapons. I was afraid, I pulled further under the boulder.” Finally, with the arrival of the Americans, Giorgetto returned to the boulder and said: “Berto, are you still there?” And Berto was there still. He [Giorgetto] brought Berto home safe and sound. It was hard.

At six in the morning, Saturday September 23rd, the first Germans arrived in Tossignano and the partisans left in a hail of bullets. The Germans immediately began to treat the Tossignanesi as beasts of burden. There and then, they demonstrated their contempt for Italians—officially their allies. Even the secretary of the local fascist office had to “wade through

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the mud from the cemetery to the front lines to carry material...”

He was rewarded with the theft of his watch. When he voiced an admittedly subdued protest to the Germans that had taken it from him, they labeled him a thief. The Germans occupying these local villages ignored the socio-political structure of local Italian societies. They even ignore the power of their own allies thereby robbing them of their power. The occupation restructured local Italian society. Neither the mayor nor the secretary of the fascist office had any power under German occupation. By ignoring these Italian power structures, the Germans further crumbled the social fabric of the Santerno Valley.

When Giorgio Tonni, a Casaleso from the smaller fraction of Sassoleone, joined the 62nd Garibaldi Brigade, he was only 18 years old. The other 80 members of the brigade were also young. Life as a partisan, even amongst the hills and mountains he’d known his whole life was hard. They were under armed, “…we launched assaults with ridiculous equipment while the Germans had terrible weapons.” The brigade was closely aligned to the Casalesi. For these partisans, their local identities played a large part in guiding their actions as partisans. They would sometimes split a cow between the brigade and the population.

Pippo was the butcher of the 62nd Brigade and Giorgio Tonni was his helper. September 23rd, the same day they killed and distributed the meat of a cow; orders came to move the brigade out of the countryside because of the increasing German presence. As the brigade moved out, one partisan could not find Pippo. The group decided the only answer was that he’d been taken by the Germans. A platoon was sent down into the valley and it attacked a German truck in revenge. Three German soldiers died.

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45 Bacchi, Tossignano, 56. << ...sgambettare nel fango dal cimitero alle prime linee per trasportare materliali...>>
46 Casalesi are from Casalfiumanese, a small town five kilometers to the north of Borgo-Tossignano
47 Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 23. << “...noi lanciavamo assalti con un equipaggiamento ridicolo mentre I tedeschi avevano delle armi terribili >>
The next day, Sunday September 24th, the Germans destroyed Sassoleone in reprisal. They set fire to the whole fraction. In the end, they shot and killed 28 Casalesi, “...children, elderly, women...they destroyed the best part of the village...”\(^{48}\) The Germans were not satisfied and their destruction continued. They destroyed the ancient bell tower. A few days later they also destroyed the church. The reprisal had the desired effect: the 62nd Garibaldi brigade dissolved. Giorgio Tonni returned to Sassoleone. Both of his parents had been killed in the massacre. He was the only one left to take care of his two younger brothers.

The cause and effect of partisan action and German reprisal meant that local identity was often threatened by any noticeable partisan activity. Reprisals for partisan activity were Wehrmacht policy. It is unclear if the Germans actually took Pippo because this one detail is left

\(^{48}\) Marchetti and Orazi, \textit{Prima}, 23. <<<...bambini, vecchi, donne...hanno distrutto la parte migliore del paese...>>
out of accounts of the massacre, but once the partisans killed the German soldiers, the initial reason lost meaning. The Germans sought revenge and had it.

In Tuscany, the Germans were able to separate the partisans from local support through reprisals. In War, Massacre, and Recovery in Central Italy, Victoria Belco shows that in Tuscany these reprisals caused Italian civilians to turn their backs on partisans. In Romagna they were unable to repeat this and the only solution was complete destruction of local support. Minor reprisals meant to inspire fear were no threat to the strength of local identity; only complete destruction could destabilize partisan brigades.

The worst German massacre in Italy was on Monte Sole, a mountain only an hour north of Casalfiumanese. The Marzobotto massacre began only 5 days after the massacre in Sassoleone. It’s estimated around 1830 Italians were killed for the successes of the Brigata Partigiana Stella Rossa against the Wehrmacht. Previous reprisals hadn’t dissuaded the brigade or the locals from supporting the brigade. The sheer scope of the Marzobotto Massacre was meant to permanently destroy the area and send a message to the rest of Romagnoli. To this effect, the SS wouldn’t allow the burial of any of the murdered Italians.

Two days later, German soldiers sacked Borgo. House by house they looted with intent. From Cesare Zavoli’s house they took a sewing machine and a radio. They commandeered parcels from the post office for soldiers stationed in Germany. They took a bicycle from the delivery office. They left destruction as they looted these possessions, but by then most of the Borghigiani had fled their houses for the safety of the mountains and as night came even more left for the safety outside the town’s borders.

Much earlier in September, a British battalion containing Reginald Collins was sent in advance to the scout the area surrounding Tossignano. With German troops incoming as the
Wehrmacht began to establish their presence in the area, the mission was incredibly dangerous but essential for gathering intelligence and establishing a foothold into the region. They stayed in a peasant’s house for several weeks. Finally near the end of September; the order came to attack the German forces. Two other battalions were sent to join Collins’ for the attack. The planned attack was tri-pronged but the Allies had underestimated how well the Germans controlled the area. Only Collins’ battalion was able to get to their intended attack position. Once there, they found that instead of the few troops that the Command had told them would be their enemy, there was an entire German division. Most of the battalion was killed. Reginald Collins was with a few remaining men on a narrow back street in Tossignano when the group decided they were safe enough to attempt communication with any other surviving members of the battalion. They had just launched a signal into the air to advise other British troops that they were safe and sound when they were overwhelmed by mayhem. The Germans lobbed grenades at them while spraying the area with bullets.

I [Reginald Collins] remember very well that I was sheltered under the door of a house and when a grenade fell nearby, I was thrown through the door to the other side of the room. I was only able to see flames and I couldn’t hear anything. I thought, “Oh god, I am dead.”\footnote{Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 21. << Ricordo molto bene di essermi riparato sotto la porta di una casa e quando una granata è caduta vicino, sono stato scaraventato attraverso la porta dall'altra parte della stanza. Potevo vedere solo fiamme e non udivo nulla. Ho pensato "Oddio sono morto".>>}

Collins was able to rejoin the remnants of the patrol and they began to fight house to house. They sought refuge in a large building in the piazza. No Allied troops were able to reach them and without reinforcements they began to starve. After three days the sixty Allied soldiers ran out of ammunition and the Germans attacked the building in force—they exploded the entire back wall.

\footnote{Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 21. << Ricordo molto bene di essermi riparato sotto la porta di una casa e quando una granata è caduta vicino, sono stato scaraventato attraverso la porta dall'altra parte della stanza. Potevo vedere solo fiamme e non udivo nulla. Ho pensato "Oddio sono morto".>>}
At the moment of the explosion, I was on the first floor and suddenly I realized that behind me there was nothing. The official commander told us, “There is nothing more to do, we surrender: disassemble the machine guns.” From that moment we became prisoners.  

As the British soldiers were led outside they began to realize the true magnitude of their predicament.

We were interrogated and, by the tanks and by the weapons that we saw around us, we realized the impossibility of the task that was given to us.  

The myopia in war wasn’t limited to Italians. Many soldiers on both sides only followed commands, their choices dependent on farsightedness of those in command.

In the dark early Wednesday morning of September 27th Cesare Zavoli with his wife and two children huddled in a casetto, a small hut, in the middle of a vineyard on the edge of Borgo. British grenades rained down on the area as Reginald Collins’ British battalion, undermanned and with bad intelligence fought against the Germans for control of Tossignano above them. After a few hours, Zavoli and his family left the casetto searching for refuge elsewhere in their own hometown. They ended up at a small hut at Poggio Fornarola. After a few hours they left Poggio Fornarola for Le Longhine, a house where another 60 Borghigiani were already holed up. There was no place safe for these Borghigiani except that there was some reassurance in numbers. For Borghigiani, their identity has always come from the strength of their connections with each other. In war-time they fell upon this resource: families were split up to facilitate movement. Borghigiani trusted other Borghigiani with their families. By falling upon the basis of their local identity, locals were able to preserve some form of working society. Cesare Zavoli left

Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 21. << Nell'attimo dell'esplosione io mi trovavo al primo piano e ad un tratto mi sono accorto che dietro di me non c'era più nulla. L'ufficiale comandante ci disse "Non c'è più nulla da fare, ci arrendiamo: smontate le mitragliatrici": da quel momento siamo diventati prigionieri.>>

Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 21. << Fummo interrogati e, dai carri armati e dalle armi che vedevamo intorno a noi, ci rendemmo conto del compito impossibile che ci avevano dato.>>
his daughter with the Signora of Le Longhine and her daughter. Not only did the daughter of the Signora provide his daughter Laura with entertainment, but it allowed him to leave his daughter in a socially acceptable place preserving the concept of his daughter’s virtue while the men spent the day building and shoring up shelters when not forced to labor for the German soldiers.

Figure 2.2: Image of Le Longhine from Autunno ‘44: Diario di Guerra nel 50th anniversario del passaggio del fronte sul Santerno, pg. 33, 1995. Photograph.

At Longhine, the Stradas were weeping silently for their daughter. Paola Strada, the daughter of Fontanelice’s printer, had gone to the river south of the town to collect water that morning. She had surprised a group of German soldiers as she emerged from the greenery edging the river.

She had her legs torn by a flurry of explosive bullets. She lost too much blood and it was not possible to save her. The parents cry silently.  

Her death was a casualty of war, but the grief of her parents did more to turn the

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Borghigiani against the Germans than the ransacking and looting. The crying Stradas presented an image of the family—the smallest unit in Italian society—destroyed by the Germans.

Overhead the war waged on. The sound of the German batteries was interspersed with the Allies’ answering fire. Whatever differences the Borghigiani and the Tossignanesi may have had in the previous centuries, in this moment, they were both part of a pummeled wall between two juggernaut forces. At the bottom of the valley as the bombing and fighting continued a lone trumpeter played, “O Sole Mio.” As the warbled notes of the cheerful Neapolitan song rose above the sounds of missiles whistling in the air and explosions, it reminded all that Italians were still present in the ruined landscape. In the middle of battle, one Borghigiano was asserting his national identity.

What a beautiful thing is a sunny day!
The air is serene after a storm,
The air is so fresh that it already feels like a celebration.
What a beautiful thing is a sunny day!"53

_O Sole Mio_ by the 1940s had become a song that communicated a national Italianness despite its southern origins. At the same time, the song is still sung in its original dialect across Italy. The regional dialect wasn’t changed even as it reached national importance because the song’s tie to a specific region was what made it universally Italian. Italian national identity was comprised of this same universal acceptance of regional ties. If the song lost its regional dialect it would also lose its attachment to the national identity.

Fifteen kilometers to the south, the Allies liberated Castel del Rio.

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53 Zavoli, _Autunno_, 16.
The Allies reached Castel del Rio only to find that the Germans had destroyed the bridge over the Santerno River. Only the Ponte Alidosi survived and for the remaining days of September they were forced to cross, only a few at a time, along the narrow and crumbling bridge.

![Ponte Alidosi traversing the Santerno River. Photo by author.](image)

Figure 2.3: Ponte Alidosi traversing the Santerno River. Photo by author.

It rained all through the night; Thursday dawned grey and dreary. Wehrmacht batteries shot from the Santerno River, from Campola, from the top of the chalk cliffs to the east. The families huddled in Longhine knew little of the front—only that they were at the mercy of the barrage. Time passed slowly even under a curtain of fear. Cesare Zavoli whiled away the hours reminiscing with Domenico Baruzzi, Zerlèn, about a good year—1913. There had been a good festival that Zavoli had attended with his father at Nola. To pass those dark hours, the Borghigiani thought not of the future, but a past before even fascism.

But amongst the refugees was a counterpoint to their reminiscing; Camaggi Domenico, an invalid of the First World War, had been crippled by a piece of shrapnel to his side. He was a reminder not just of the dangers of war but also the permanence of war damage. Camaggi
Domenico had been forever altered by war and his presence informed the refugees that that would be their fate as well. At the end of the day, Laura Zavoli remarked to her father that she needed to be a long way away from the thoughts of the old like Camaggi Domenico. The cannons though, did not disturb her at all.

Rumors came that the Germans were retreating along the Senio Valley to the southeast and the Americans had reached Monte Battaglia.

That night some of the Allied barrage had flown over the heads of Borghigiani, the piercing whistle of the missiles as they flew past to their targets kept many from sleep. During the night, the Allies destroyed the German batteries and finally there was silence.

The silence lasted all morning and news came to Borgo that the English were at Monte Battaglia. During the silence, the Germans shortened the barrel of the cannon placed by the Santerno River at the southern start of the Santerno Valley, which signaled to the Italians that the Allied forces were getting nearer. The Germans made another round through the houses. This time they took the essentials: “butter, bread, cigarettes...” They destroyed even more as they ransacked drawers and cabinets. As food ran scarce, the intensity of the raids increased. The correlation between the worsening of the German’s treatment and the worsening of the war was not ignored by the Italians but unable to do anything, they could only suffer as the Germans robbed them again and again. The only solution was to treat the Germans as another enemy and the struggle for supplies became one of deception and violence. The Borghigiani and Tossignanesi were forced to hide as much of their food as they could. One Borghigiani buried a cured hunk of pork.

The Germans in Tossignano spent the day organizing work crews of Tossignanesi to set up a fully armed observatory. In Borgo, Giulio Galloni organized the Borghigiani for the

54 Zavoli, Autunno, 18. <<…burro, pane, sigarette…>>
construction of a shelter in anticipation of the advancing front. As Cesare Zavoli and Lisetta, the madam of Longhine, smoked cigarettes during one of their breaks, they found two bloody shoes in the yard. They were the only remainders of Paola Strada.

By late afternoon, weapons fire had begun anew. Through the evening the firing of the German artillery became more and more frequent as it responded to the Allied volleys. German soldiers straggled past Borgo-Tossignano retreating from defeat at Castel del Rio.

There were many dead. The Americans, that advanced, brought the bodies of their dead comrades killed, but the Germans, in retreat, abandoned them."55

Elide Biagi had gone on a trip up the mountainside looking for cooking coal when she’d seen something white. She peered closer and closer only to realize it was a skull. Biagi had found the remains of a German soldier. Further up the path she found the tattered pieces of a German military jacket and “suspended from a bush [ahead] was something that glistened.”56 She sat and could only think, “That mother that awaits that son...”57

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56 Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 17. << ...sospeso ad un cespuglio qualcosa che luccica.>>

57 Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 17. << Quella mamma che aspetta quel figlio ...>>
Figure 2.4: Map of the Allied 5\textsuperscript{th} Army’s front at the end of September 1944. Created by author.

**October 1944**

Chissà come sarà ridotto il mio paese.  
Who knows how my village will be destroyed.\textsuperscript{58}

Late in the afternoon on the first of October, half an hour past five, aerial bombardment almost completely destroyed Tossignano’s municipal building. The destruction of Tossignano’s municipal building would have a transformative effect on the future of Tossignano. In the short term the destruction of Tossignano’s municipal building influence a group of Tossignanesi already assembling a history of the Santerno Valley. Giuseppe Maria Bacchi and a few other Tossignanesi had begun to research and write a history of the area before Mussolini was deposed and Italy surrendered to the Allies in 1943. However with the destruction of the municipal building and the archives of Tossignano the scope of the book was significantly curtailed. Initially the intention was to make a local history of the entire Santerno Valley,

including the histories of Borgo, Tossignano, Codrignano, Campiuno, and Rocchetta. As the war waged on, the book became about a diminishing section of the Santerno Valley until in the end it was only about Tossignano. As the historical record of Tossignano was destroyed, one of the cornerstones of the Tossignanesi’s local identity, the Tossignanesi scrambled to preserve some sense of its importance. The Tossignanesi’s superiority complex towards the valley towns is part of their identity and with the evidence of their superiority being destroyed by the mechanisms of war, Tossignano clings even more strongly to it.

Down the mountain, in the village, the Borghigiani also suffered. At Pratelletto, Paola Coralli was injured by an English grenade. Coralli was transported to the hospital in Imola by German ambulance. That night as the rain dragged down the spirits of the Borghigiani, the old Zerlèn announced to the other refugees at Longhine that the east wind, serenaro, would bring good weather. The next day, the skies over the valley were clear of both rain and missiles.

Late on the night of October 3rd, two German soldiers established a telephone post at the house of Leo Manaresi. By morning though, both soldiers were gone. The absence of the soldiers gave the villagers hope. If the Germans lost hope in holding Borgo-Tossignano and retreated, the front would finally pass them. Unfortunately only a few hours after their hopes were raised, a group of German soldiers set up camp in the piazza with a radio. By the end of the next day, the chalk cliffs to the east of the village were a heap of ruins from the constant bombardment.

On Friday October 6th, Leo Manaresi and his family attempted to leave the village and head north towards Imola to escape the terrors of the front. However by nightfall they had returned to Borgo because of the difficulty of travel. The efforts of the Manaresis to escape the front predicted the inevitable migration out of the area. The risks of travel forced them to stay in the valley. Relocation was necessitated by the dangers of war. The seeming impossibility of
continuing life in Borgo had overcome the most basic Italian attachment to the hometown. The Manaresis were one of the first to make the choice.

Even though the Borghigiani were distrustful of the Germans, they could still see that the German troops were flagging under the war effort as well. Heading in the other direction, German soldiers marched towards the front. “The soldiers pass, directly in line: they are tired, depressed, discouraged.”

The interactions between locals and Germans were not always entirely negative. A German military doctor arrived at Longhine on Saturday to treat the Italians. He assisted the sick and injured civilians. They learned that the day before he’d assisted a woman give birth at Fontanelice. The Borghigiani treated him with good will even though he was also part of the Wehrmacht. Interactions like these were the exception not the rule; the doctor was “a little bit of good amongst all the bad.”

Despite the good fortune of the doctor, the nature of life in war robbed Zavoli of hope. He construed the war, as a kind of punishment for the Italians grave defects but not necessarily as an absolution. He wanted the war to be lesson for Italians in their faults but he doesn’t believe they will learn from it.

God knows if we will be saved from this difficult situation. We think, more than the things and the homes lost, to overcome the moment in which the front passes over us and the future duels of artillery.

If our thoughts, in moments of respite, face the problem of tomorrow, they become afraid. I think that not even this war will correct our grave defects and therefore we won’t know how to gain the liberty that we expect. Maybe our freedom is ended forever. Socially we are nothing: we have also lost the meaning of country hood; the only bond that unites us is that of the family. We do not go beyond. With such social inability what political reconstruction will be possible? And what economic reconstruction?

60 Zavoli, Autunno, 25. << …un po’ di bene tra tanto male!>>
In this journal entry from Sunday, October 8th shows that only a month into the assault on the Gothic Line, the war front had essentially destroyed the national identity of the locals in the Santerno Valley. When Zavoli looked towards the future he only saw the impossibility of reconstruction without some form of unifying national ties. For him the only reality was that of the family—not even the identity of the Borghigiani continued. Zavoli believed that the lack of a cohesive social fabric meant that political reconstruction was impossible and then Italy would never be free; merely belong to the victors of the war. He doesn’t even mention the Republic of Salò as a political entity nor of the fascist society still be enforced by German guns. For him with the destruction of local identity equaled the destruction of national identity.

Despite the German medical assistance, life in Borgo had never deviated from the status quo ante. On Monday, Umberto Calamelli arrived at Longhine with a cracked skull. A week before, as a German soldier had sacked his home, Umberto Calamelli had attempted to fight back. He’d grabbed the soldier and flung him down the stairs. Other German soldiers had arrived and beat Calamelli until he was severely injured. Calamelli had narrowly escaped a worse fate when an honest German officer had spoken up to the truth of the situation at a military tribunal in Bologna. Calamelli was allowed to return home escaping more serious and more permanent consequences from his rebellious actions.

che alla roba perduta e alle nostre case colpite, a superare il momento in cui il fronte passerà sopra di noi e i futuri duelli delle artiglierie.
Se il nostro pensiero, nei momenti di tregua, si affaccia a guardare al problema del domani, se ne ritrae spaventato. Credo che neanche questa guerra correggerà i nostri gravi difetti e che perciò non sapremo guadagnarci la libertà che attendiamo. Forse la nostra libertà è finita per sempre. Socialmente noi siamo nulla: abbiamo perduto anche il senso della patria, l'unico legame che ci unisce è quello della famiglia. Non andiamo oltre. Con una tale incapacità sociale quale ricostruzione politica sarà possibile? E quale ricostruzione economica? >>
That night, as the temperature dropped, two German soldiers came by the house that Cesare Zavoli was staying in. On the stairs, the draft from the door chilled Zavoli’s feet and he found himself staring at the first German soldier’s shoes. Meanwhile, the other soldier stalked around the house searching for his prey—shoes. Zavoli tried to divert the attention of the first soldier by engaging him in a conversation. The soldier was only twenty years. In Zavoli’s eyes, youth was no guarantee of tenderness. Even if Zavoli could see in the boy’s face that he was a good son to his mother, his mother was waiting for him a long way away in East Prussia. The boy had no attachment to these Italians. Far from the eyes of his mother, he existed without the cultural compass that the Prussian mother represented.

Unable to find anything worth taking, the soldiers departed, but not before they had stolen a watch off the arm of a young girl.

Even surrounded by the war, many Italians knew very little of what was going on.

Voices: the British in Faenza, the Germans again in Monte Battaglia. But none of it will be true. Nothing of what is happening on the front is understood. That what we see is certainly connected to other actions and situations of the battle line; but to consider them in the limits of these areas seems illogical, dispersive, confusing.62

Their decisions were short-sighted because they were unable to understand enough about the war to make informed long-term decisions. The locals knew very little of what happened outside of their realm. They constantly heard reports that were wrong or confusing when they were right. The Allied troops wouldn’t reach Faenza for another month. Monte Battaglia was indeed in the hands of the Germans but only until it was snatched by Allied troops.

62 Zavoli, Autunno, 27. ///< Voci: gli inglesi a Faenza, i tedeschi di nuovo a Monte Battaglia. Ma non sarà vero niente. Non si capisce nulla di quello che accade sul fronte. Quello che vediamo si collega certo ad altre azioni e situazioni della linea di battaglia; ma a considerarle nel limite di queste zone sembrano illogiche, dispersive, confuse.>>
As Tuesday dawned, the Tossignanesi found themselves subject to the same treatment as the Borghigiani as their houses were rummaged through and then destroyed by German orders. Their power over the valley had not meaning, only the geographic location and defenses held value for the Germans. The Tossignanesi’s’ treatment by the Germans continued to destroy their social power in the valley.

By Friday the German soldiers were confiding in the Italians that they were also tired of war, “Six years of war in order to be kaputt.” Kaputt was the word the Italians heard most frequently in those days. “Everyone and everything kaputt.”

The next day, after the Germans made another round conscripting men into labor, Zavoli happened on a man sitting on the front steps of the house. “Here’s how they’ve destroyed Italy, the fascists,” the man told Zavoli angrily. The German abuses of the population were connected in the minds of Italians with the fascists. The fascists had been the ones to make an alliance with Germany despite the centuries long Italian antipathy against the Germanic people.

Cesare Zavoli wrote in his diary that it didn’t matter who was at fault in that moment. Then, on the front line of war, Italians could only live like soldiers: with only the thought of returning home safely. The questions of their ruin and their responsibility were too big and could only be attended to after survival had been got. “The rest came after.” It had only been 6 days since he’d written about the impossibility of Italy’s future. Italy’s guilt was another matter though and his avoidance of consideration spoke to a sense that their culpability, while not absolved by the war, was rendered inconsequential by the utter destruction.

63 Zavoli, Autunno, 29. << Sei anni di guerra per fare kaput.>>
64 Zavoli, Autunno, 29. << Tutti e tutto kaput.>>
Yet the next day, Zavoli can only curse, “Germans again and always...”67 after they took Giulio Galloni’s hidden pork on the third Sunday of October, the festival of Borgo. “Before they leave, they suck the blood from us. The oppression, the shame, the spite are so great that they make me go crazy.”68 Despite the abuses, he didn’t want to leave Borgo. “I do not want to get away from my torn land, from my despondent brothers, from these mountains which overlook liberation.”69 The local identity that he’d dismissed as utterly destroyed a week before still informs his decisions. He doesn’t want to leave because Borgo is an essential part of his identity. To leave Borgo at that moment seemed as if he was leaving it for good. Though before the war he’d been living in Bologna, with his nation destroyed, he sought to stay in his hometown. It was his only remaining connection to some sort of group identity.

The next day, at half past 8, the Germans departed from Borgo.

They greet us, they thank us, they give us stolen objects, they accept food and drink, then they load the sick, the old and the cripple with their belongings and go with them to the end of the provincial road.70

The Germans returned midday on Tuesday for the 5 geese that the villagers had been herding at Longhine. Cesare Zavoli was ordered at gunpoint to help them move the geese into the cart. For the villagers there was something similar between the fattened geese and the Germans. “Someone had compared them to the Fascist hierarchy: fattened by the Italians to

67 Zavoli, Autunno, 30. << Tedeschi ancora e sempre…>>
68 Zavoli, Autunno, 31. << Prima di andarsene ci succhiano il sangue. L’oppressione, la vergogna, il dispetto sono così grandi che mi pare d’impazzire >>
70 Zavoli, Autunno, 31. << Salutano, ringraziano, donano oggetti saccheggiati, accettano da mangiare e da bere, poi caricano malati, vecchi e storpi con le loro robe e li fanno andare con loro fino alla strada provinciale.>>
make broth for the Germans.” The Italians had let their Fascist leaders grow wealthy and indolent, only for them to be used by the Germans. With nothing left, the locals saw their actions as Italians, their acceptance and support of the Fascist regime as effort exploited by the Germans.

That night, Zavoli shared a bed with the grieving parents of Paola Strada.

The husband curses and sighs; the wife says: You have always said that the best revenge is forgiveness. I listened to the prayers and tears at length and before sleep I asked them: Even forgive the Germans? Yes! Grant them eternal rest, O Lord.

Zavoli’s prayer for the Germans, originally conveyed in Latin, represent a more violent reaction to the Germans. He wanted not peace nor apologies but a divinely delivered death.

A week and a half later on Thursday October 26th, Borgo flooded. As the conditions and weather steadily worsened, German soldiers took over more and more Italian houses for their comfort. Thirty soldiers stopped at the old man Natale’s house that night and demanded lodgings. Unfortunately Rosina, a Borghigiana, was already there to spend the night. That night she slept beside them. One of them reached out a hand and touched her head as they lay in the dark. Unable to react, she shrank away from the touch.

Natale could provide refuge for Borghigiani women without imperiling their ‘virtue’ because, Old and widowed, he represented in pre-war Italian village society, a safe and desexualized male entity. Rosina survived the night with her virtue intact but when she retuned

71 Zavoli, Autunno, 32. << Qualcuno le ha paragonate ai gerachi fascisti: ingrassati dagli italiani, fanno brood per I tedeschi.>>
72 Zavoli, Autunno, 16. << Il marito maledice e sospira; la moglie dice: anche tu hai sempre detto che la miglior vendetta è il perdono. L’ascolto pregare e piangere a lungo e prima di dormire le chiedo: Perdonare anche ai tedeschi? Sì! Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine.>>
to Longhine and told this story, it was clear that it was dangerous to remain in the small villages as more German soldiers arrived to hold the front.

Figure 2.5: Image of the casetto of Natale from Autunno ‘44: Diario di Guerra nel 50th anniversario del passaggio del fronte sul Santerno, pg. 35, 1995. Photograph.

Two days later, with a sick son and under an almost constant curtain of rain, Zavoli left for Imola with his family. The old man Natale chose to stay in Borgo. He wanted to die in his house—the house he’d raised his seven children in with his loved wife. Signore Strada also stayed in Borgo. The road to Imola was dangerous and many of the older villagers were left behind, most likely to their death. As the villagers parted, knowing the passing of the front would probably forever separate them, they said their goodbyes. The Borghigiani left Borgo.

To the south, in the Allied controlled Castel del Rio, an old man accompanied by a young girl had just finished the arduous journey from Borgo San Lorenzo more than 50 kilometers away. The pair had traveled on the back of an American truck, crossed the Ponte Alidosi on foot
and walked down the destroyed roads of Castel del Rio “...in order to see their house.” Their house, that British soldier Edward Wike-Smith had thought was a beautiful house when he set up base there with his platoon at the end of September had been destroyed by the war. The roof was scored from grenades, the walls were weakened by the shelling and the rooms were full of weapons and soldiers. For these Alidosiani, distance from home hadn’t destroyed their ties to their home. Their local identity had been threatened by the war, but still drew them the long way home.

As Sunday dawned in Tossignano so came the SS. The Tossignanesi were only given a few minutes to clear the village, hounded by the SS’s threats to shoot any villager who was too slow. In their desperation, many of the Tossignanesi left home with only a sack over their shoulder. The Tossignanesi dutifully made their way to the church to say goodbye to the Madonna and then slowly began the trek down the mountain. Most went to directly to Imola though a few stayed in in farmhouses in the valley. The Tossignanesi had left Tossignano.

\[73\] Marchetti and Orazi, Prima, 22. << ...per vedere la loro casa. >>
Winter 1944-45

By mid-October it had become clear to Harold Alexander and Mark Clark that unless the 5th Army made significant gains in land soon, the coming winter would cause a stalemate in the Apennine Mountains. The Wehrmacht’s well-placed artillery stymied the 5th Army at every turn though.

November 1944

For the displaced Italians the start of November brought memories of a better time to the forefront. Shuttled around the country by the Germans who had through need and desire, stolen possessions, separated families, and destroyed communities, November 4th passed for Italians with great irony.

There is no sign that you remember the significance of this date. Is it not true that 26 years ago, us, Italians, defeated the Germans? Yes, it’s true and we remember in the bitter secrecy of the heart. 74

For Italians, the remembrance that they had been on the winning side of the First World War only added salt to the wound that was German abuse.

As winter came, the 5th Army was unable to advance even as the 8th Army moved up the Via Emilia capturing Forlì, ‘la citta del Duce’, on November 9th.

Most partisans that were caught in the Valley were taken to La Rocca, the castle in Imola, for interrogation and execution. On November 20th Vittoriano Zaccherini, a 16 year old partisan, was captured by fascist forces and taken to Imola. Encarcerated in la Rocca, he was interrogated, tortured, and sent first to Bologna and then to the sorting camp in Bolzano. His

74 Zavoli, Autunno, 48. << Nessun segno che ricordi il significato di questa data. Non è forse vero che 26 anni fa, noi, italiani, abbiamo battuto i tedeschi? Sì, è vero e ce ne ricordiamo nella segreta malinconia del cuore. >>
final destination was the Mauthausen extermination camp in Austria.  

**Winter ’44 – ‘45**


Along the Gothic Line of defense in the Apennine Mountains, the Allied forces were getting more and more desperate to advance before the bitter Italian winter descended. They were hindered by the Wehrmacht’s control of strategically important locations. For the next five months the front remained just south of Borgo-Tossignano.

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75 He survived 4 months in the extermination camp until liberation on May 5th, 1945. When he was released he weighed exactly 28 kilos—48 less than he weighed when he arrived.
While many of the Borghigiani and Tossignanesi had moved away from Borgo-Tossignano by the beginning of November, the villages on the road to Imola were fraught with the same danger they had originally hoped to endure in their homes. Zerlèn, who had relocated by German order to Casalfiumanese, was killed by an Allied bombing raid on the morning of December 10th, in the cellar of the church together with his wife, two children, two daughter-in-laws and three granddaughters. Another 20 people also died in the cellar with them.
On December 12th 1944, General Alexander was promoted from Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in Italy to Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean. Lieutenant General Mark Clark took his position as Commander.\textsuperscript{76} The advance of the 8th Army slowed down with the winter. From Forli, it took the 8th Army a month to battle the 15 kilometers to Faenza. On December 16th, they liberated Faenza with the help of the partisans.

\textbf{Winter Deliberations}

The Anglo-American High Command gathered at Malta en route to Yalta and one last great conference was held in the Mediterranean at the end of January. Since the Russian advance had lost momentum on the Polish-German border, Roosevelt, Churchill and their military chiefs decided to focus the Anglo-American effort on the western front. The campaign in Italy was considered of little importance. The meeting at Malta was far from calm and the Combined Chiefs argued heatedly over the strategy for Western Europe. General Marshall was forced to agree to ask for only five divisions, none of them American, for the fight in France from the 15th Army Group, the Allied Armies in Italy. With this agreement, Churchill and Alexander managed to preserve the 15th Army Group’s ability to attempt a limited offensive in the coming spring.

Alexander was given one last chance to make progress on the peninsula. He had till the beginning of April to launch an offensive and then succeed in defeating the Germans in the Po Valley.\textsuperscript{77} If he was unable to accomplish both these tasks then the entirety of the Fifth Army and a significant portion of the air forces would be transferred to another theater of war. The fight in Italy would essentially be abandoned.

\textsuperscript{76} He was promoted to full General in March 1945.
\textsuperscript{77} The valley is north of Bologna and comprises of Modena, Parma, Piacenza, Mantova
Alexander used the high membership of the partisans as evidence for the continuation of the Italian Campaign even though neither he nor General Clark particularly trusted nor made extensive use of the partisans throughout the war. Of the 100,000 partisans that he claimed would support the advance of the Allied forces, less than 10,000 actually “carried the war to the enemy as true guerrillas.”78 The commanders also feared that the CLN would try to set itself up in opposition to Badoglio’s government, splitting Italy, just as the need for a buffer state as the framework for the Soviet bloc became apparent. General Alexander’s use of the partisan gave them mythic status that he needed to maintain in order to continue the fight in Italy. The myth of the partisans then was propagated and promoted by non-Italians before the end of the war.

Spring 1945

Spring 1945 Offensive

General Alexander used his new position as Supreme Commander and during the winter reinforcements and supplies flowed to the 5th and 8th Army. At the beginning of April, the Fifteenth Army Group had 600,000 troops. Alexander also counted another 100,000 Italian partisans behind enemy lines.

There were organizational changes on the German side. Kesselring was appointed command of the Wehrmacht in the West, while General Von Vietinghoff was given command of Army Group C. The Wehrmacht in Italy was in a bad position. The feared Panzer Grenadier Division had been dramatically reduced and a standard battalion was fortunate if it had 200 men. Even despite the state of the Wehrmacht in Italy, Hitler ordered Von Vietinghoff to hold the line. The tactic made little sense to Von Vietinghoff who wanted to continue Kesselring’s policy of a fighting retreat.

General Mark Clark planned the Spring 1945 offensive as three continuous phases.

Phase One was a bludgeon; a massive blunt instrument of air power and artillery with infantry behind to force a way through the German defenses out of the Apennines and into the Po Valley. There was also a deception plan to convince Von Vietinghoff that the Allies were planning another amphibious operation in the Adriatic aimed at outflanking his mountain positions.

The offensive was to begin with a commando assault, riding the fantails across Lake Comacchio. This was to be followed by Eight Army attacking on a broad front across the Senio River. Once German reserves had been drawn into the Adriatic sector, Truscott’s Fifth Army would fight its way out of the Apennines.

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79 Again. General Von Vietinghoff had had this command from October 25th 1944 through January 1945 because Kesselring was injured while traveling along the Gothic Line by an artillery piece on October 25th.
80 Standard battalions are comprised of 400 to 1000 men.
Phase Two provided for an encircling breakthrough by either or both armies to bring the enemy to battle south of the River Po. The plains of Lombardy were to provide the venue for the killing ground of Army Group C. Here it was envisaged that the Allies’ enormous superiority in armor and air power, some 3,000 tanks and 2,000 aircraft, properly coordinated, would be the ruination of Von Vietinghoff’s forces.

Phase Three was a pursuit across the Po which would take the Allies at least as far as Verona.

The Spring Offensive began on the 6th of April and on the 11th Borgo-Tossignano was liberated and in the hands of the Allied forces.

The Partisan Myth

Across the ocean, on the same day of the liberation of Borgo-Tossignano, Americans were using the partisan legacy in order to salvage Italy’s future.

The existence of the partisans were used as proof in Hearings before the United States Congress that Italy should be recognized as an ally. The recognition of Italy as an ally would mean the extension of lend-lease aid, greatly aiding the needed reconstruction post-war. The Slovak Workers Society wrote to Congress on April 6th, 1945:

It was proved that the Italian people as a whole were not supporters of the vile, Fascist Mussolini regime of hate and division. In fact, Italian guerrillas are still fighting against our common enemy, the Nazis and Italian Fascists, in northern Italy.

Mrs Estelle Farmer, the Vice Chairman of the Connecticut State Italian-American Democratic Federation wrote:

In the withdrawal of Italy from the war the Italian people proved to the world that they wanted no part of this war and that they were forced into it by Mussolini and his henchmen.

The Italian people and their organized underground movements consisting of all truly representative groups and political parties performed this gigantic task at great

81 Morris, Circles of Hell, 422-23.
82 Hearings, 70.
costs in sacrifices, in the lives of their heroic sons and the destruction of her cities and towns. These sacrifices and deeds are known to the whole world.\textsuperscript{83}

Submitted by the Order of Brotherly Love of Philadelphia:

The tragedy of the Italian people under 20 years of Fascist oppression is well known to the world.\textsuperscript{84}

These testimonies were submitted to the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives as part of a joint resolution requesting the president recognize Italy as an ally and extend lend-lease aid. Two common themes emerge from the assortment of statements: Mussolini and fascism were imposed upon Italians and Italian partisans were Italy’s proof that Italians were anti-Axis. Even though the Regio Esercito Italiano still operated under the Badoglio’s government in the south and actively fought alongside the Allied forces, it was the partisans that were used as proof for the Hearing.

General Alexander of the Allied Armies in Italy may not have been able to continue the Allied campaign in Italy without over exaggerating the usefulness and guerilla actions of the partisans. He used the large numbers of partisans behind enemy lines and the evidence of their fight against the Germans to argue to the Allied High Command so it was possible to continue the Italian Campaign even with reduced Allied troops in spring 1945 because partisans could be counted on for support.

The idea of partisans was used in these two circumstances outside of Italy to make arguments about Italy’s future. The myth of partisans wasn’t born out of Italian post-war revisionism but was also actively constructed by non-Italians during the war.

\textsuperscript{83} Hearings, 72.  
\textsuperscript{84} Hearings, 92.
Liberation

The next day posters signed by Captain Theodore Cawthorn of the Civil Affairs Office of the Allied Military Government were posted around what survived of Borgo-Tossignano.

Liberation by the Allied came with its own rules.

By April 1945, the looming threat for the Anglo-American Allies was Russia. The Nazis had even tried to take advantage of this to negotiate a change in loyalties in January. In Italy this
meant the Allied military needed to stabilize the parts of Italy that it occupied. The Allied Military Government sought to provide stability by setting up laws even as Italian partisans became a danger to that order. In February 1945 was concerned the CLN, the organizational body for the partisans could cause them trouble after liberation.

Figure 4.2: Allied Poster put up in Borgo-Tossignano on the 12 April 1945, from Borgo Library Archives.
Destruction of War

Figure 4.3: Photograph of the Piazza of Tossignano after April 1945, from Borgo Library Archives.

Giuseppe Maria Bacchi’s Tossignano: Un Paese Distrutto ended with a series of pictures showing the difference between Tossignano pre and post-destruction.
At the end of the war, the question posed by the destruction was, “Will Tossignano rise again?”

The destruction of the town hall in Tossignano accomplished what the previous two destructions of Tossignano had been unable to do. The seat of power was shifted from up high on the mountaintop to the valley down below.

One question that has maintained the divide between Borgo and Tossignano is that of the seat of the commune, since Borgo has had a population first equal and then double that of Tossignano, that is from the end of the first half, is an issue that seems resolved by the war.

The war had effectively destroyed Tossignano’s ability to continue as the political center of the Santerno Valley. With the municipality destroyed, power was temporarily repositioned in Borgo. The Tossignanesi knew that the temporary relocation was anything but, and that their day as Italians resting metaphorically atop the Santerno Valley had come to an end.

Tossignano represented a traditional way of life, as the cramped mountain town couldn’t support the industrialization that had swept across the nation nor the modernization that begun in the Fascist years.

Borgo has been favored in modern life by its location, placed as it is on a well-traveled road and on the banks of a river; some lime and gypsum industry, lots of transportation, the constant passage of vehicles, the railways station, the vitality and industriousness of its population, in truth for the major part, comprised of immigrants, has made it the major center of the Santerno Valley.

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85 Bacchi, *Tossignano*, 58. <<Risorgerà Tossignano?>>
86 Bacchi, *Tossignano*, 59. <<Una questione che ha mantenuto il dissidio tra il Borgo e Tossignano è quella della sede del capoluogo, sorta da quando il Borgo ha avuto la sua popolazione prima uguale e poi doppia di quella di Tossignano, cioè dalla fine della prima metà, questione che pare risolta dalla guerra.>>
87 Bacchi, *Tossignano*, 59. <<Il Borgo è stato favorito nella vita moderna dalla sua ubicazione, posto come è su una via di grande comunicazione e sulle rive di un fiume: alcune industrie di calce e di gesso, molte di trasporti, il passaggio costante di automezzi, la stazione ferroviaria, la...>>
Where before power was wielded from defensible position. Power now came from economic growth and Tossignano, walled away as it was high up in the mountain, removed from the roads and the river wasn’t able to access that. The modernization that had begun in the 20th century in Borgo, that made it suited to be the new communal power. The process that had been begun by modernization, the shift in traditional power structures, was accelerated by the war. The modernization also came with the arrival of immigrants as Bacchi so carefully notes. Campanilismo was still an essential part of Italian identity, but with the fabric of Italian society frayed by the changes presented by the 20th century, leaving home for good became accepted. However these newcomers weren’t fully welcomed even though they were also Italian. Instead Italy was become a land filled with strangers far away from their true home.

vivacità ed operosità della sua popolazione, in verità per la maggior parte immigrata, ne hanno fatto il maggior centro della vallata del Santerno.>>
Bacchi continues, “We have the hope that, even as it has been reduced, this history will be accepted by Tossignanesi exiles from this destroyed place, as a glorious document…”

The Homeland

Only eight months after the front has passed through Tossignano, Bacchi has already concluded that the majority of these Tossignanesi exiles will never return to Tossignano because Tossignano is no longer as glorious as it was before. “...As so many families disperse else where, they will be able to hand down to their descendants the honor of having originated in a place of
great importance and with special characteristics,” Bacchi writes. Giuseppe Bacchi’s obsession with the importance of being from a place of great importance comes from the very basis of Italian identity. In the early 19th century as Italians struggled to formulate a national identity even as their motherland was occupied by foreign forces. Writers like Alessandro Manzoni created a narrative in which Italians could find commonalities despite the diversity present on the peninsula. In his epic, I Promessi Sposi, the star-crossed beloveds—Renzo and Lucia—are forced to leave their home village for larger cities. The narrator’s musings on this leaving became symbolic for the attachment all Italians have to their own homestead.

How sad the step of he, who, grown among your beauty [the beauty of the land], now leaves! In the earliest days of Italian nationalism, the attachment to the homestead, the campanilismo was projected to be part of the national identity. To be Italian is to be attached to one’s own particular home above all and above Italy. Italians didn’t fight to create Italy for all, but for the place they grew up. To abandon, to acknowledge a permanent abandonment of home is to acknowledge a wide spread shift in Italian identity. For Manzoni, leaving was only bearable if there was a return. Leaving only had value and gained worth if the traveller returns back to their home village with wealth or wisdom.

“...and he would have turned back then, if he did not think that, one day, he would return...”

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88 Bacchi, Tossignano, preface. “...se tante famiglie dovranno disperdersi altrove, esse tramanderanno ai loro discendenti l’onor d’avuto origine in un paese di tanta rilevanza e di caratteristiche così particolari.”

89 Manzoni, I Promessi Sposi, 149-150. “Quanto è tristo il passo di chi, cresciuto tra voi, se ne allontana!”

90 Manzoni, I Promessi Sposi, 150. “…e tornerrebbe allora indietro, se non pensasse che, un giorno, tornerà....”
Conclusion

While the war was a source of constant peril for Romagnoli in larger cities like Imola or Bologna, those in smaller mountain towns suffered strangely. For large parts of the war, the Germans had no significant presence in their area. However when the front accelerated after the fall of Rome, the Wehrmacht moved in.

The Italian Campaign is marked by its own departure from the traditional path of conquest of the Italian peninsula. It marked the first time in known history that a group attempted and succeeded at fighting from the southern edge up. The choice to fight from the southernmost border is a reflection of the new kind of war that World War 2 represented. The presence of colonial and non-white troops signaled the newness of this kind of war. Italy was never the target in this war. Disregarded by all, the Italian Campaign that destroyed the country and saw it through its own civil war was only ever a distraction for the Allies and Nazis. For the Italians that came from the Santerno Valley, the Italian Campaign changed the way they related to each other and their identities.

On the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of June 1946, the choice of post-war government was put into the hands of Italians. By a narrow margin, the monarchy was abolished. The country was split evenly in the vote with all regions from Tuscany north voting in the majority for the republic. The regions crossed by the Gothic Line of defense had the highest percentages of the population voting for the creation of a republic.\footnote{Trentino was the only northern region not situated along the Gothic line that had more than 70\% of its population vote in favor of a republic.} In Romagna, which includes both Predappio, the birthplace of Mussolini, and Monte Sole, the site of the Marzabotto massacre, 80.5\% of the population voted for the creation of a republic. It was not merely the length of the German occupation that explains the republican slant of regions like Romagna. Regions even further north did not have...
such strong support for the republic. There is a direct correlation between the areas that suffered during the assault on the Gothic line during the last year of the Italian Campaign and the support of the republic.

The slowing of the war front as it reached the Gothic Line was in part caused by how the Allied High Command that had sidelined the Italian Campaign after the liberation of Rome. As these areas suffered from the front, their social and political structures were ignored, devalued, and destroyed under German occupation even as the fighting between the Allies and the Wehrmacht destroyed the physical landscape and killed populations. The stresses of war—of this specific front—changed how Italians related not only to their occupiers and liberators but also to other Italians. Tacit support for Italian fascists became outright disdain as these fascists led Germans on partisan witch-hunts and betrayed their own neighbors to not just non-locals but non-Italians. The rejection of fascism became intertwined with a rejection of the system that had supported the fascist hierarchy—the monarchy. As the German occupation and wartime destruction weakened the facets of their local identity, Italians like Cesare Zavoli found it also weakened their national identity. With a fractured sense of both local and national identity, the local social fabric ripped asunder. With traditional (i.e. geographic) places of power physically destroyed as the Allied and Wehrmacht battled for control, Romagnoli had mostly lost their ties to the status quo ante. Without the ties to the old order and outright antipathy for the Germans and fascists, they were ready to vote in a new regime.
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*Unnamed Images of Tossignano.* Borgo Library Archives.

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