

CHAPTER XIX

ALBANIA. 1939-1945

A. GENERAL

1. On April 7, 1939, the Italians invaded Albania and were in complete occupation of it within a few days. The King of Italy was made the King of Albania who appointed a Governor-General (Luogotenente) to represent him. Although theoretically Albania remained an independent Kingdom in personal union with Italy, in practice the country was run by the Italians by means of Albanian Ministers with Italian "advisors" and through the Albanian Fascist Party.

2. A Quisling government was established first under the leadership of Shefqet Verlaci until December 1941 and then under Mustafa Meriika-Kruja. A number of collaborators entered into the government although there were many minor civil servants who remained in it not because of Fascist sympathy but because there was nothing else for them to do. The Italians absorbed the Albanian Army within theirs and superseded the Albanian Gendarmerie with the Italian Carabinieri.

3. On 28 October, 1940, Mussolini invaded Greece using Albania as his base of operations. Albanians participated in Italo-Greek war on both sides although it is difficult to distinguish which groups fought the other. It is known, however, that the Kosovars (part of the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia) willingly collaborated with the Italians on the promise of being liberated from Yugoslavia.

4. After the capitulation of Yugoslavia, Albania received the small part of Serbia (see Section I) which contained an Albanian minority. For example, it is undoubtedly true that the people living in the plain of Kosovo (Kosovo Polji) were of Albanian origin. In addition Albania received a small part of Greece bordering the Epirus region because of the Albanian minority there. It should be mentioned here that the investigations of a League of Nations Committee found that 23,000 Albanians formed a minority in Greece and approximately 20,000 Greeks (known as Grecophones) formed a minority in Albania.

B. WARTIME ACTIVITIES OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS

5. Resistance movements began in Albania as early as 1939 which developed into right and left wing movements as in Yugoslavia, with the difference that they did not fight amongst themselves until late in the war. The first resistance bands were the Nationalists and by 1942 a considerable number of Partisan bands had been formed. They met in 1942 and formed the National Liberation Movement (National Clirimtare) which included all active resistance elements. However, later the right wing nationalists unwilling to leave the direction of the resistance to the left wing formed its own union known as the National Front (Balli Kombetar). Although they preferred not to work with the Communists they co-operated in many actions and no fighting broke out between them, except sporadically in certain areas.

6. The Quisling government of Albania was composed mostly of persons who felt that they had not been adequately rewarded by King Zog prior to the occupation, Albanian fascists, Kosovars who attached more importance to the fact that the Italians had liberated them from the Yugoslavs and persons who remained in the government because they hoped to assist the resistance. A small number of prominent officials who refused to collaborate were shot or put into concentration camps in Albania or in Italy.

7. The Albanian Fascist Militia which was composed largely of volunteers who were members of the Fascist party, was inaugurated in September 1939 under Halit Alija and Selim Xhetani. It fought with the Italians against the resistance movements and units of it (including the First Albanian Blackshirt Assault Battalion) participated in the Greek campaign. Many of these units took part in the plundering of villages and committed many atrocities, especially in the village of Tragjas.

8. The numerative strength of the Albanian Fascist Party is not known. It was founded immediately after the occupation and was according to its charter "a voluntary civil militia". The members swore an oath of allegiance to Mussolini. After the inauguration of the regime all officials in Albania were required to become members. As a result many resigned and others became members in name only in order not to lose their jobs. The organization was modelled closely after the Italian one and some of its members over the age of 18 served in an armed force which was under an Italian General.

9. After 1942 bands of pro-Italian irregulars roved Albania, especially the Kacaci in Kosovo Metohija and Western Macedonia. This group composed mostly of Moslems, attacked all Christians of any nationalities and committed atrocities.

C. ELIGIBILITY STATUS OF ABOVE GROUPS

10. Albanian Quisling Government. The senior members of this government are certainly excluded from falling within the mandate of IRO. Junior officials who continued because they had nowhere else to go will be treated on their own individual merits. It will be remembered in this connection that all officials in the government had to become members of the Fascist Party.

11. Albanian Fascist Militia. This group was analogous to the Italian Blackshirts. Its senior officers are excluded from the assistance of IRO under the terms of paragraph 2 of Part II. Others serving in this unit will have to make it plausible that they were conscripted. It should be borne in mind, however, that some units of this organization took part in reprisals, atrocities and in the persecution of resistance groups.

12. Albanian Fascist Party. All members of this group are *prima facie* outside the mandate of IRO. This presumption may, however, be rebutted if it is made plausible that the individual joined under duress and was not active in the organization.