

*A story told about a person from  
Zhelevo*

*A book about Risto Mavrovski*



Composed, prepared and commented by his son

**Spiro Mavrovski**

(Translated from Macedonian to English and edited by  
Risto Stefov)

A story told about a person from Zhelevo  
A book about Risto Mavrovski

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## Foreword

This book is not an attempt to convey historical facts; it is not an accurate historiography of the time, of events and of personalities. Why? Because the book was based on notes the Risto, Spiro's father left him which he wrote in the 1990's, more than 40 years after these events took place. The notes were handwritten in 3 separate notebooks. Some of the events described were repeated. The names of various personalities and the villages they originated from were given with no other information. So Spiro felt it was important to fix this, to sort things out and to provide the reader with a complete picture, particularly about Risto's family past and present. This was an opportunity for Spiro to tell his father's story and his understanding of life the way he experienced it, so that we today can continue his work and be proud that Spiro and his siblings had a great father who left them so many things. "We will continue, to the end of our lives, to be proud, to mention his name and to talk about his work. But I would be most grateful to the readers for reading this book and it would be very much appreciated for them to send me feedback and more information on the topics, if they possess such information", says Spiro.

In this book the reader will find basic information on the Mavrovski family from today, extending back many generations. The reader will also find historiographical, geographical, ethnological, cultural and other information on the village Zhelevo where Risto was born and lived through good times and bad, including through World War II, the Greek Civil War, his participation in DAG and his personal struggle of being wounded. The reader will find out about his trek to Poland and the activities he carried out with the Party, in military school, working in factories and participation in cultural and political organizations. The reader will learn about his arrival in the Republic of Macedonia, about life and events in Skopje and Bitola, about his work at the refrigerator plant, about his participation in society and family and ultimately about his participation in sports as an inevitable part of his life. In short this is what the reader will learn from reading this book, but of course there are also Spiro's and other people's thoughts and personal comments about him as a person, a family man, a father, a husband, a grandfather... In addition there will be photographs (in the Macedonian version only)

of personalities and events that were important to the Mavrovski family. The book contains a small number of historical facts which speak about the same events that Risto had described, which confirmed his view of these events, unfortunately Spiro could not find much information to confirm the other events he described. This is why Spiro needs the readers of this book to help help him out. Spiro owes it to him for all the things he did for him, for his family and for society in general.

This is Spiro's first book, his first attempt at writing and putting together his view on "Aegean Macedonia" (Greek occupied Macedonia); a complicated subject about which Spiro has spoken many times in the Macedonian Parliament, at many speeches at various Aegean Macedonian Association meetings and publicly during his tenure as a Member of Parliament. This is Spiro's first attempt, and he hopes not his last, of organizing and putting together what he had learned from the long talks he had with his father about the many things and the many misunderstandings that had taken place in Risto's past; the events, the personalities and the deeds. Spiro would like to present the reader with all sides of the story if that is possible.

Finally, if Spiro has written something personal, his thoughts of certain events, a little or a lot different from his father's, who after all was a direct participant in these events, it is because this was done in retrospect and things sometimes look different in hindsight.

### **A short autobiography of Risto Mavrovski**

Risto Mavrovski (or Hristos Mavrou as he was called in Greek), son of Mihail and Neda, was born in 1928 in the village Zhelevo, Lerin Region, Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia.

Risto completed primary school (grade 6) in Zhelevo and after that remained at home with his parents. A life changing day in Risto's life was October 28, 1940, the start of the Greek – Italian war. In 1941 Greece capitulated after which the Germans and Italians came to the village and remained there until Italy's capitulation on July 9, 1943. After that the Germans returned again and remained in the village until October 20, 1944. After the Germans left, ELAS

fighters came to the village and remained there until March 1945. All this time Risto remained in the village and worked in the family farm and in the background.

After ELAS left, the Monarcho-Fascist army arrived in the village and remained there until April-May 1947. The Greek Civil War began in the spring of 1946 and ended in late August 1949.

Risto joined the Partisan movement as a fighter in June 1947 and fought in the Greek Civil War to its end. He was wounded three times and was sent to Albania, Yugoslavia and Poland for treatment, during which time he was operated on four times. His injuries unfortunately left him permanently disabled (70%) to the end of his life. Risto had a family; a wife, two sons Spiro and Vasil, a daughter Neda, two daughter's-in-law Elena and Mariana, a son-in-law Zdravko and grandchildren Tsvetanka, Hristo, Vasko, Metodia and Marika and now he has great-grandchildren.

Risto has dedicated this short biography, which he wrote himself, to his family which he was happy to see grow and multiply in numbers. To let them know and assess for themselves what he did in his life and to leave them to continue his work and carry on his unfinished business.

With this Risto hopes to gain his family's consideration and, for whatever else in life he has not said, will remain forever written.

### **Family roots – Risto Mavrovski's great grandfather Risto Shkavrev**

Risto Mavrovski's great grandfather Risto Shkavrev and his wife had four children, three sons, Iote, Trpo and Iovan and a daughter named Mitra.

Iote, the first born son, was married to Stoina with whom he had three daughters and a son. The daughters were named Mara, Tasa, and Neda (Risto's mother) and the son was named Risto.

Mara married Giorgi Trendov and had two sons Pando and Tanas, and three daughters Dafina, Velika and Mitra.



Tasa married Giorgi Perelov and had four sons named File, Vangel, Pando and Ilo, and one daughter named Fania.

Risto married Vana, a bride from the village Ianoveni, Kostur Region, and had a son named Vasil. Unfortunately Risto died and Vana left their child in the care of Stoina and her daughter Neda. Vasil grew up with Risto Mavrovski and Neda's family. Vana remarried and took Krsto Iandrevski as her second husband.

Neda (Risto Mavrovski's mother) married Miaile (Mihail) and had four sons named Krsto, Spiro, Risto and Nikola and a daughter named Sofia.

This has been the family tree of Risto Shkavrev's first son Iote.

Risto Shkavrev's second son, Trpo, had three sons named Kote, Pavle and Vasil and one daughter named Dafina. Dafina and her husband Traiko and their family are living in Canada, about which Risto Mavrovski has no more information.

Risto Shkavrev's third son, Iovan, had one son named Lazo. Lazo has two sons named Tanas and Done and two daughters named Petra and Velika.

There was an unpleasant incident involving Iovan before he was married. One day, while he was out in the forest collecting firewood, Iovan was captured, tied and taken away by a number of Gheg (Albanian) bandits. While traveling on the road they came across a young boy who the bandits instructed to go back to the village and tell Risto Shkavrev, Iovan's father, to bring gold coins because if he didn't they would kill his son. Risto took his gold coins and caught up to the Ghegs at a place called "Bachorno orniche". Iovan was still tied up then so Risto figured that the Ghegs were up to something. Risto understood a bit of Albanian and from the conversation they were having he gathered that they also wanted to capture him and take them both to Albania. Risto offered the Ghegs a cigarette while he motioned to Iovan to move away and run as fast as he could. And while Iovan escaped Risto remained in the hands of the Ghegs who

then took him to the village Trnaa, beheaded him and took his head to Korcha. His body was buried in the fields in Trnaa.

A number of Vlachs from the village Psoderi recognized Risto Shkavrev's head and contacted the people in Zhelevo to let them know that he had been beheaded and that, according to his assailants, he was a great outlaw, which of course was not true.

Tanas married a woman from the Ginovtsi family, Done married a woman from the Trpchevi family, Petra married Iane Mandzhukov and Velika married Iovan Bekiarov.

Risto Shkavrev's daughter Mitra married Ilia who later became a reverend (priest). They had four sons named Nikola, Bogoa, Pando and Pavle and six daughters named Mara, Elena, Sofia, Tsveta, Kala and Arhonda. One of them married in the village German, another married in Armensko and the rest married in Zhelevo.

This is what Risto Mavrovski has left us about his great grandfather Risto Shkavrev's family.

### **Mihail Boikov's (Risto Mavrovski's father) family**

Risto Mavrovski's father Miaile (Mihail) and mother Neda had four sons named Krsto, who died at a very young age, Spiro, Risto and Nikola and a daughter named Sofia. Among the family members that grew up in that family, as mentioned earlier, was also Vasil Shkavrev, Risto Mavrovski's cousin. Risto's grandmother Stoia also lived with the family, which made them eight family members in total.

Risto Mavrovski's cousin Vasil was born in 1914, but after his father died he stayed with Risto's grandmother Stoina and mother Neda. Stoina died in 1936 but before that she went blind and the entire load of looking after everyone, including Vasil and Stoina, fell on Risto's mother Neda.

### **Risto's father Mihail Boikov (1903-1964)**

Risto's father Mihail, who married his mother Neda in Zhelevo, was born in the now Albanian town Bilishcha in 1903. He was Macedonian by origin and of the Orthodox religion. Mihail had three sisters, two of whom were married in the village Orevo in Prespa Region. Mara was married to the family Dzhabazovi, Sandra was married to Miaail of the family Mialovtsi and Ristana was married in the village Rabi to a man named Bozhin. Mihail's last name was Boikov, named after his father Boiko. After he married Neda in Zhelevo he took Neda's surname and became known as Mihail Shkavrev (later renamed by the Greek state to Mihalis Mavrou). But because Mihail was from an Albanian village, the people of Zhelevo referred to him as, or nicknamed him, Miaile the Arnaut, as was customary in those days to call newcomers to the village. Mihail was an experienced master builder of houses and other works and took care of the entire Skavrev family. Mihail spent a great deal of his time building homes, not only in Zhelevo but also in many surrounding villages, including Bouf where the entire village knew him as Mishe (Mihail) the master. In Bouf Mihail did a lot of work for many families of which Risto would like to mention a few. He worked for the Opashinov's, Popovtsi's, Iankula's, Eminagovi's, Chincevi's, Trgachovi's, Serbinovi's, Vasilevi's Gagachevi's, Beikovi's and many other families which Risto could not remember. Mihail left a big impression in the village Bouf. Other places where Mihail worked included the villages Armensko, Sveta Petka, Gorno and Dolno Kleshtina, Klondorabi, Lazheni, German, Rabi, Rudari, Shtrkoo, Papli, Orovnik and Lak in Prespa Region. He had also worked on the road to Prespa, on the watchtower at the Greek-Albanian border (telonioto) in the village Smrdesh, at the Greek-Bulgarian border in 1936 where he helped build the defensive line "Grami Metaxa" to defend Greece from Bulgarian attack. Many skilled builders worked there for an entire summer, among whom was Risto's father Mihail who built the defense wall that extended from Argirokastro to Kavala. The group of masters with whom Mihail worked included Trpo Popov, Kole Altano, Giro, Lambro Trkalov, Sterio Trkalov, Spiro Lasko, Kole Puchugov and Dane Chakov who later became a miller. These men were the older and best masters amongst whom were also younger helpers, including Risto's brother Spiro, Kole Karafilov, Risto Trkalov and Giorgi Gushev.

Mihail was always a very diligent and well-respected man in the village. He never owed anyone anything and never quarreled with anyone. He was always cheerful and liked to lead the dances in festivities, especially when dancing the “difficult” dance (teshkoto). Despite all the work he did he always found time for his children. He always taught them to be industrious, honest, appreciative of everyone, to not steal, to not lie, and he always said “If you work hard you will always have the things you need”.

In addition to being a great master builder, Mihail was also an educator and an organizer. He never turned down any work no matter how mundane and low paying it was. During the occupation years, 1941 to 1945, he always found time to clear land so that new fields could be created and planted with rye, barley, oats and potatoes so that the family could survive. From 1947 to 1949 Mihail was organized into the movement with hammer in hand and, even though he was an older man, took part in the ranks of DAG in Gramos, Vicho and Albania until the end of June 1949, when he was appointed civil guard (poliak) in the village until August 16, 1949, when he was captured by the Greek army stationed in Preval and as such he was unable to flee to Albania with the refugees. Afterwards he continued to live and work in the village in even more difficult conditions than before. He remained in the village with his daughter Sofia. His son Spiro died in June 1949 in Shestevska Buka. His son Risto was sent to Poland and youngest son Nikola was sent to Hungary. Mihail’s wife Neda died in April 1948 and he remained a widower at age 45. Later he married a woman named Stoia, from the village Oshchima, with whom he had a son named Giorgi Boikov. But because both Mihail and Stoia had children from previous marriages they put Giorgi up for adoption. He was adopted by a childless couple from the village Lazheni, Lerin Region.

### **Spiro Mavrovski’s view of his uncle Giorgi Boikov**

This was another encounter with a long lost relative, which unfortunately lasted less than a day. This was the first time Spiro Mavrovski (Risto’s son) met Giorgi Boikov, a man from his father’s family; Risto’s step-brother. Spiro felt fortunate to be part of that encounter. It was during the summer of 1978 when a young man with a sympathetic look on his face showed up at the Mavrovski

home, rang the apartment door bell and asked for Risto Mavrovski. Risto was at work at that time but, because the young man spoke Greek, Spiro asked his mother to speak with him. After speaking to him, Sofia (Spiro's mother) told Spiro that this young man was Risto's brother, which surprised Spiro because no one had ever told him that he had another uncle, let alone an uncle not much older than himself. Risto arrived after lunch and spent some time with Giorgi before they took him to visit Kole (Nikola), Risto's younger brother. When they arrived at Kole's home the first thing they did was ask Kole if he recognized the young man. Kole looked at him and, because of his young age, guessed that he was one of Spiro's friends. When they told Kole who Giorgi was, he burst into tears of joy for having met his brother he had never seen before. The saddest part about this pleasant encounter was that Giorgi had to return home immediately because he was leaving for Canada to be with his sister Sofia, who had made arrangements for him to move to Canada. After that Giorgi was gone from Spiro's life but did keep contact with Spiro by letters. Giorgi was one of the uncles who regularly sent Spiro and the family greetings during the important holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Giorgi got married in Canada and has children of his own. Spiro's wish is that he continues his relationship with Giorgi and his family and to not let Risto's death stop that. Giorgi is part of the Mavrovski family and will remain that way forever. "You are one of us Giorgi and we love you," says Spiro.

A couple of years after the Greek Civil War ended Mihal's daughter Sofia, who remained with him in Zhelevo, married Kole (Nikola) Filev (Stefou) a man from the village Oshchima, one of Zhelevo's neighbouring villages, who had just been released from the Greek Island concentration camps. Mihail was married to Stoia who was also from Oshchima and as such he spent his time working in both Zhelevo and Oshchima. Then, after Mihail's marriage to Stoia ended, he spent more time in Zhelevo until he became sick and moved back to Oshchima to live with Sofia so that she could look after him. Mihail died in Oshchima in September 1964. His desire to go and live with his sons in Bitola was unfulfilled. Before that he had recently visited Bitola, unfortunately for the last time. Sadly he fell ill after that and died.

And, as such, Mihail's story ended but his work continued through his surviving children Risto, Sofia, Kole and Giorgi Boikov. Mihail's grandchildren will always remember him, respect and love him because he was their grandfather. "May he rest in peace and may his fame be eternal!" wrote his son Risto Mavrovski.

### **Spiro Mavrovski's view of his grandfather Mihail Boikov**

It was most unfortunate that Spiro's grandfather Mihail happened to live on the other side of the "Iron Curtain" so close to Bitola yet so difficult to cross. But, despite that, Spiro feels fortunate to have met him. Spiro remembers the last time he met with his grandfather. This was the day when he got to sit and talk with his grandfather while watching his father Risto and Uncle Nikola busying themselves planning to build a house for their father so that the entire family could live together. Mihail, as a master builder himself, thought they would do that together so he brought a lot of money with him. But before he could settle in Bitola, Mihail said he had to return to Zhelevo and sell his properties. Unfortunately he never made it back to Bitola. None of his grandchildren in Bitola got to see their grandfather do the things he did best, including leading the difficult dance. The only things that remained for them were memories and the photographs the family had acquired over the years. "May he rest in peace!" says Spiro.

### **Risto's mother Neda Ioteva-Shkavreva (Mavrova) (1900-1948)**

Risto's mother Neda Ioteva-Shkavreva (Mavrova) was born in 1900 in the village Zhelevo. She was the daughter of Iote and Stoina (maiden name Bachkova) Shkavrevi. Neda was the youngest child in her family. She never had any formal schooling but was a very bright, beautiful and smart woman. All of Neda's older siblings were married and she married a man named Krsto Iandrovski with whom she had a child named Vasil. But after her father Iote died and later her brother Risto, her older sisters asked her to return home to look after the rest of the family. Neda had no choice but to return to her father's home and be with her mother. Her son Vasil was left in the care of his aunt and grandmother. After Neda returned to her father's house, Krsto Iandrovski left her. Her sisters found her a new husband in the village Bilishta who was willing to live with her at

her home. His name was Miaile (Mihail). There was a three year difference between Mihail and Neda. Neda was older. Even after she married Mihail, Neda continued to look after her father's family of whom, by then, only her mother and nephew remained at home. Mihail and Neda's first child Krsto was born in 1923, followed by their second child Spiro, born in 1925. As the family gradually grew in number there were new mouths to feed, which forced Neda to take on more work. She found a menial job working for her sisters and for other, richer peasants, in the village in order to make ends meet.

But, despite her meagre earnings, Neda still managed to send her nephew Vasil, born in 1914 and now of middle school age, to school in Lerin to be educated so that the villagers would not think that he had been abandoned. A little after that, in 1927, Neda experienced another great tragedy when her four year old son, Krsto, fell and died, running after a car. Neda was devastated, now left with one child, Spiro. A year later, in 1928, her third child was born, a boy, whom Mihail and Neda named Risto, after Neda's brother who had died earlier. A little after Risto was born, Neda's mother went blind. Some say because of grief for her son Risto and grandson Krsto and because of all the crying she did. This posed another problem for Neda; to look after her blind mother. Neda, however, never gave up. With the help of her husband Mihail and her sisters, working day and night, she managed to deal with life. Neda was very busy working at home and in the fields and, as such, time passed quickly for her. In 1932 Neda gave birth to a girl whom the family named Sofia. In 1935 Stoina, Neda's mother, died. In 1935 her nephew Vasil was drafted into the Greek army. After that Neda was left with only looking after her husband and her three children, which somewhat relieved her from having to work so hard. Her son Spiro too had grown up and was capable of looking after his brother and sister. Neda, however, continued to work for her sisters as well as on her own properties. It should be mentioned here that Stoina's property (Neda's mother) was divided by the sisters. They gave Vasil half her assets and the other half were given to Neda and the rest of her family. Around 1936 Vasil was discharged from the Greek army and came back home. He took on the job of the village's civil guard (poliak).

Then, in 1937, Neda and Mihail had another son who they named Kole (Nikola). Neda's family had now grown to seven (including Vasil) but this was until 1939 when Vasil married Elena Sandrina and things started to go downhill. Vasil and his new bride insisted on dividing up the property and assets, which left very little for Mihail and Neda, in spite of all the work they had done for that family. Discussions were followed by quarrels about what belonged to whom, so Mihail and Neda decided to build Vasil and Elena a new house, inside the same yard, so that the family would not split up. Mihail, Neda and their children stayed in the old house.

Unfortunately the Greek-Italian war started in the fall when Greece was attacked by Italy on October 28, 1940. At that time Greece closed all schools. Shortly after the attack numerous Greek columns of soldiers and military vehicles, day and night, traveled on the road from Lerin, passing through the village Zhelevo. The front was located about 24 kilometres away from the village. Three days later three Italian air force bombers bombed Zhelevo and wounded Kala Gligorovska who was left without a hand.

Several days later the village was evacuated. Neda took her children to the village Bouf and stayed with the Baikovski family. During that time the Greek military captured the airport in Korcha and there was no longer danger from bombing so the villagers from Zhelevo returned to their village. All this time Mihail stayed in Zhelevo and looked after the house and properties.

Vasil, Neda's nephew, and other young men from Zhelevo were drafted by the Greek army and sent to fight at the Albanian front. Mihail was not drafted because he had four children.

Life went on as the war continued until about Easter 1941, when Greece fell under German and Italian occupation and the Germans arrived in Zhelevo. Soon afterwards the Italians arrived. The border between the Italian and the German zone was set at Mount Bigla. The Germans controlled Zhelevo and Prespa Region and the Italians controlled Kostur Region. The occupation brought hunger and starvation in the village as the warehouses were emptied and reserves exhausted. Thousands of people died of starvation in Greece. Having money, or even gold, did not help the hungry.



Neda and Mihail tried not to allow anything bad to happen to their family. They hid their resources and used them sparingly. They ate very little food, mostly potatoes, beans and a little bit of flour. The entire village was fortunate that nothing bad happened during that time. Mihail continued to work hard for very little compensation, which amounted to a handful of grain for an entire day's work. He did not want his children to suffer.

During the spring of 1942 the villagers again began to work in their fields plowing, planting rye, barley, corn and other grains, in order to stave off starvation.

Just as life began to reach stability the Italians, in 1943, began to take the village livestock; sheep, goats, cows, oxen, calves, etc. This clever idea was thought of by a person named Marino from Gabresh who wanted to make a lot of money. So he persuaded the people of Kostur, who worked with animal skins, to get the Italians to order a collection of livestock from the villages. So anyone who owned sheep had to donate one for every ten they owned. If a family owned two oxen they took one. If a family owned a cow and a calf, they took the calf, etc. Neda and Mihail lost their calf. They had no sheep, only a cow, a calf and a donkey. At the same time Kalchev's (Bulgarian agent) armed hoods roamed the villages and robbed them. They particularly targeted Zhelevo because, according to them, it was a "Grkoman" village (Loyal to the Greek regime). The people of Zhelevo, however, sought help from the Italians who put an end to the plundering. They allowed Kalchev's bandits to eat in the village and then drove them off. Later the Italians gave the villagers guns so that they could defend themselves. At about the same time, in the village Armensko, grain was given to anyone who declared themselves Bulgarian. But this was a far fetched idea for Neda and Mihail and they did not want to get mixed up in it.

At about the same time the Italians began the confiscation of livestock, in the spring of 1943, a partisan movement began to develop, in which Spiro, Neda and Mihail's oldest living son, actively participated. Spiro believed that the people should be patient and endure for a little longer and that the occupation would crumble. And indeed Spiro was right; Italy capitulated on September

9, 1943. Unfortunately the Germans took their place. They came to Zhelevo the same day the Italians left and took up residence in Foto Sotirov's coffee shop, in Tanas Ianovski's house, at the Broda house and at the Nanovtsi house where they established their German headquarters for the village Zhelevo.

When the Italians left the village they abandoned a lot of their things. Neda and her children went around and collected whatever they could find, which included clothing, military uniforms, ammunition, etc. She took the ammunition and gave it to her nephew Pando Trendov, as her contribution to the partisan movement. Neda and Mihail did not approve of Spiro's activities with the partisans because what he was doing was very dangerous. Unfortunately, Spiro was stubborn and would not listen, so the best his parents could do was remind him to be cautious at all times.

One day in the summer of 1944, while Neda and Risto were heading home, returning from the Dolni Kup field with their donkey loaded with straw, the German SS service stopped them. This was at the entrance of the village near the coffee shop where the water ditch ran, which supplied water to the nearby mills. Here the Germans had dug a ditch, filled it with water and used it as a swimming pool. For some reason, unknown to Neda or Risto at the time, two German SS soldiers came over, grabbed Neda by her shoulders and threw her into the pool of water. They then released a dog and sent it after her. Neda, not knowing how to swim and fearing that the dog was going to tear her apart, was petrified and sank deep into the pool. The Germans thought it was funny and laughed as they watched. Some moments later they took her out of the water and tossed her on the grass in the meadow. She was unconscious. Risto quickly ran to Tanas's house and called on the Germans residing there to send a paramedic. Neda was still unconscious when the paramedic arrived. He gave her an injection but still she remained unconscious and lay on the grass for a long time. Later, more German soldiers came and took her home. From that moment on, Neda never felt the same. She never recovered from her ordeal. She was the kind of woman who had fought everything but from this she could not recover.

The family believes that Neda was thrown into the pool of water because she was fingered by some peasants for allegedly bringing

food to the partisans in the mountains. But the real reason for the fingering was because she had quarreled with some villagers about who had the right to use the water in Dolni Kup to water the fields. Neda eventually died because of this. It is most unfortunate that Neda never saw any of her grandchildren and they in turn never got to know their grandmother, except for the few pictures of her that were left behind.

Later, the same Germans who had tossed Neda into the pool were killed by the partisans near the villages Trnava and Rulia. The dead Germans, ironically, were buried near the same pool where they had tossed Neda, at the entrance to Zhelevo near the coffee shop. After the Germans were defeated in 1945, Neda became bed-ridden. That summer she was taken to the hospital in Lerin but there was nothing that could be done to help her. She returned home and lay in bed half dead. She was looked after by her young daughter Sofia.

In 1946, Mihail, with the help of his sons, took down the old part of their house and built a new house on top of it. Spiro, Neda and Mihail's older son, got married in 1946 to a young and beautiful woman from Zhelevo named Ristana Bekiarovska, Vasil Bekiarovski's daughter. Ristana was poor but made up for it with her beauty. Neda was very happy for her son. Unfortunately that lasted only a short time, as Spiro joined the partisans in early June 1947 and left for the mountains. Later in June of the same year, Risto, Neda and Mihail's second son, also left to join the partisans. Less than a year later, in the spring of 1947, Neda and Mihail's youngest son Nikola was enrolled in the "Save the children program" and sent outside of the country as a child refugee. Neda was left alone with Ristana, Spiro's wife, and her daughter Sofia. Unable to cope with all that was going on and with her own condition, Neda died at the end of April 1948. A little later during the struggle, Spiro became mortally wounded in the Bukata locality. He was taken to a field hospital in Trnaa where he died. Spiro was brought back to the village and buried in a grave near his mother. Spiro gave his life for freedom and for the Macedonian cause. He was a great Macedonian patriot.

Neda's children were brought up to be good people, to be patient, calm, courageous, honest and decent. Neda died before her time but

left a good impression in the hearts of her children Risto, Sofia and Nikola. May she rest in peace! Neda lived a difficult life from the day she was born to the day she died, but in spite of that she was always kind and generous to everyone. Neda may have been 48 years old when she died but her death began in 1944 when the German fascists entered her life.

Neda Ioteva-Shkavreva-Mavrova's story was written by her son Risto in Bitola in 1988, forty years after her death, so that she may never be forgotten.

### **Risto's brother Spiro Mihail Shkavrev (Mavrovski) (1925-1948)**

Spiro was born in 1925 in the village Zhelevo, Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia. He was Neda and Mihail's second child. Spiro was born to a poor working class family. After he finished grade six in the local Greek public school in 1938 he went to work. He had no opportunity to continue his education and as such went to work with his father Mihail and learn his father's trade as master builder. Spiro was an intelligent young man and could not agree with the exploitation that was committed against the Macedonian people and sought ways to become organized in the workers' struggle. Spiro decided to join the CPG's (Communist Party of Greece) youth organization in the village Zhelevo, whose chief organizer was Pando Trendov. Spiro worked for the Party organization from the start of the war (October 28, 1941) until the spring of 1941 when the German army arrived in the village and was quickly replaced by a detachment of Italian troops and a special police unit known as the "carabinieri".

The CPG leadership in Zhelevo consisted of Pando Trendov, Spiro Simovski, Ilija Markov, Tode Kirovski, and Kole Nikolov. Spiro along with other youths were responsible for gathering guns, various types of ammunition, military uniforms and whatever else they could find that belonged to the Greek army that withdrew from the region after Greece capitulated. All the materials that were collected were hidden in secure places. Later the same year, Spiro and the others were tasked with helping the poor and needy families in the village and beyond.

The EAM (National Liberation Front in Greece) was formed in September 1941. In addition to working for the EAM, Spiro also worked with his father and other family members on their own farm, fields and gardens. During the winter of 1942 Spiro and others from the Zhelevo Organization, in addition to doing organizational work, also volunteered for snow removal services and cleared the snow off the main road to Lerin.

The Italians were bringing guns to the village and arming a particular group of villagers. The Bulgarians, on the other hand, were handing out guns and corn to those who declared themselves Bulgarian. Spiro did not get mixed up in these affairs because he was organized in the CPG. The Italians raided the village and took a number of villagers to Kostur. A little later they did the same thing and took a second group of seven villagers. The first group was released and allowed to return home. From the second group only Pop Spiro was allowed to return, the rest were executed. Among those executed from Zhelevo were brothers Pando and Pavle Popovski, Pando Laskou Stergiou, Vasil Giamov and Ilo Iandrovski.

The first group of partisans appeared early in 1943. Included among them were Pando Markov, Giorgi Sideri, Giorgi Bogdanov, Kole Findako and Lazo Ioanovski Gligorov. And as such the struggle began against the occupiers. Then, in the summer of 1943, a new group of partisans joined the units. Spiro, as a member of the CPG, was among the group that remained in the village to carry out various courier and sabotage actions. This lasted until Italy's capitulation on September 9, 1943. During this time Spiro, under the leadership of the CPG, was responsible for supplying the Macedonian partisans, stationed in the village Bouf, with weapons. He also performed other acts such as cutting telephone lines and collecting food and clothing. During the Epiphany celebration when the cross was thrown into the freezing cold water, Spiro jumped in and retrieved it. All the proceeds from the cross, money and food that he collected in the village he donated to the partisans. Spiro was instrumental in the disarming of the villagers who had acquired guns from the Italians. He also helped those, including foreigners, who wanted to escape the Germans. Spiro surrendered them to the partisans.

After the German army left in the fall of 1944, ELAS units arrived in the village and, for the time being, there were no enemies from the outside. The people, however, needed help with the various problems they were facing in rebuilding their lives, which Spiro and other like-minded individuals voluntarily offered. A little earlier, in September 1944, a number of Macedonian units, led by Gotse, broke away from ELAS and crossed the border into Vardar (Republic of) Macedonia. This literally broke up the movement; some wanted to struggle with the Greeks and others didn't... but the war was not over.

In December 1944 the English invaded Athens. Many people were dying as Greece was slowly turning into an English colony. This is because ELAS, EAM, DAG..., had earlier signed some agreements with the British government and with the Greek Royalist government in exile in Egypt, to allow this to happen. It seems, even though the Greek partisan movement had 160,000 fighters (more like 25,000) at its disposal, it still could not win and become master of its own country.

At that time Spiro was in the village and struggled in accordance with Party directives. In the spring of 1945, the first units of the Greek Monarcho-Fascist army arrived in Zhelevo. Soon afterwards a British company arrived but did not stay long. And so, Zhelevo again found itself under a new occupation by another enemy. And as such, from that moment on, a new struggle begun, more brutal than the last.

From the moment the Greek Monarcho-Fascists arrived in the village they began: forced searches of houses that belonged to the partisans; beating partisans and members of their family in public in the village square; jailing partisans and those suspected of aiding them and performing other gruesome acts against them.

Spiro, at the time, was home with his father, building their new house. In 1946 Spiro married Ristana Bekiarovska, a poor but beautiful girl. Free elections in Greece were scheduled to take place in 1946 but the CPG ordered its supporters not to vote. As directed by the Party, Spiro was fully engaged in the agitation convincing people not to go and vote. But later Spiro understood the full effect

of the CPG supporters not having participated in the elections. The Greek government conducted a general mobilization and mobilized only those who were loyal to it. A large group from the village, including Spiro, was rejected because they were allegedly ill and could not join the Greek army.

The Greek Civil War started in the spring of 1946 and lasted until August 1949. Fearing persecution, imprisonment, or even death, because a lot of that was going on during that time, Spiro and a large group of young people fled Zhelevo and in the spring of 1947 joined the partisans on Mount Vicho. Spiro became a DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) fighter and as such began his sacrifices; isolation from his young bride, from his friends and from his beloved family. As a DAG fighter Spiro demonstrated great courage. He along with Leko Markov and other fighters were assigned to a special demolition unit responsible for placing mines, destroying tanks, demolishing bunkers, cutting down telephone poles, cutting communication cables and blowing up roads and bridges. The special demolition unit was stationed at the Vicho General Headquarters. In 1947 Spiro participated in the following battles: Rakovo, Neveska, Gorna and Dolna Kleshtina, Ovchareni, Dmbeni, Chetiroc and other places in Kostur Region. In the fall of 1947, Spiro was heavily wounded during a battle at the village Srebreno, Lerin Region, during which he lost an eye. Despite his wounds, Spiro stayed at his post and fought, not wanting to abandon his comrades. For the courage he showed, his name and deeds were announced over a radio broadcast (Free Greece). He was also awarded recognition of bravery and declared a national hero by DAG General Headquarters. When the battle was over, Spiro was sent for treatment to a camp called Sukt in Tirana, Albania.

When the offensive began in Gramos during the summer of 1948, despite of having lost an eye, Spiro volunteered for combat duty. He joined up with Tsvetko from Lerin and fought in several battles until he was wounded again. During an enemy aerial attack a bomb fell on his bunker and he was buried in the rubble. He was again sent to Albania for treatment, this time to Korcha. Spiro, unfortunately, could not stay put and again volunteered for combat duty. In the fall of 1948 he was again sent to fight, this time at the Mount Vicho front, but not for long. He again was wounded in battle in

Shestevska Buka. This time he was sent to Bulkesh, Yugoslavia for treatment. Because of the large damage done to his body, including the damaged eye, in January 1949 Spiro was transferred to Budapest, Hungary for treatment. He had large pieces of shrapnel stuck inside his head that needed looking after. But, at his own request, in the spring of 1949 Spiro asked to be returned to the front. Spiro returned to the “free territory” in Prespa through Albania where he was appointed political commissar of a unit stationed in Vrrro locality, near the village Pozdivishta, Kostur Region. Spiro remained at the Bukata locality until he was mortally wounded during a vicious battle on June 28, 1949; wounded for the fourth time. Many fighters lost their lives during that battle. Mortally wounded, Spiro was taken to a field hospital in Trnaa where he died. Spiro’s co-fighters Fana Simovska, Sevda Stanisheva, Tena Temovska and another fighter whose name Risto could not remember, took Spiro’s body to Zhelevo. His body was buried in a grave next to his mother’s. Risto Mavrovski and the entire Mavrovski family would like to thank all those who showed respect for Spiro as a fighter for DAG.

Spiro left behind his father Mihail, brother Risto, sister Sofia, brother Nikola and wife Ristana. Risto was a fighter fighting in the ranks of DAG and Nikola was in Hungary with the refugee children when Spiro died.

After Spiro’s death the struggle continued and was fought the way Spiro would have wanted, but unfortunately the partisans lost the war. But the things that will always be remembered are Spiro’s cheerful character, his spirit, his love for justice, and his patriotism. “Spiro, we will love you forever. We will never forget you and you will live in the memories of our children and grandchildren!” says his brother Risto.

Ristana, Spiro’s wife, left for Poland where she re-married. Spiro’s father Mihail remained in Zhelevo and briefly in Oshchima with his daughter Sofia, until his death in 1964. In 1966 Sofia left Oshchima and went Canada. Risto was sent to Poland. Kole was sent to Hungary. But eventually Risto and Kole returned to Bitola and made it their permanent home.



Risto named his first born son Spiro so that his older brother Spiro, his name, his character, his bravery and his honesty will never be forgotten and will remain alive in the memories of his brothers Risto and Nikola and his sister Sofia.

### **Risto's sister Sofia Shkavreva-Mavrova (Stefova)**

Sofia was born in 1932, in the village Zhelevo. She was Mihail and Neda's fourth and only female child, who was loved and spoiled by her parents and by her brothers. Sofia began her schooling in 1938, which abruptly ended in 1940 with the start of the Greek – Italian war when all the schools were closed. That was the extent of Sofia's education. During the occupation Sofia was very young and worked at home helping with chores. In 1945 Sofia remained with her mother Neda and looked after her in her hours of need when Neda was sick in bed. This continued until 1948. At the same time Spiro got married and brought a young bride home. In the spring of 1947 Spiro and Risto left to join the partisans and in the spring of 1948 Nikola was sent with the refugee children to one of the People's Republics. Sofia was left home alone without her brothers. In April 1948 Neda died, so only Sofia's father and Spiro's bride remained at home, but only for a short time. When the fighting began in Gramos, Mihail, Risto and Sofia joined the partisans and the entire family, some with rifles in hand, fought and worked for the war effort until August 1949.

Because Sofia had to take care of her mother, she was unable to leave with the refugee children during the 1948 exodus. As for her father, he was drafted by the Partisans for 11 months to work in Albania. Sofia was left alone at home to care for her ailing mother.

When the war was about to end many people fled their homes and went to Albania to save themselves from persecution by the Greek regime. Unfortunately Mihail, who had returned to Greece, never made it across the border. He was captured by the enemy on the Greek side before he could escape. As such, Mihail and Sofia were returned to the village Zhelevo where they were persecuted and humiliated by the pro-Greek villagers.

The years 1949 and 1950 were very difficult for Sofia because, on top of everything she had lost including her mother and brother whom she had had to personally bury, Mihail re-married and took a new wife, a widow with children of her own. But thanks to the guidance and help she received from her cousin Velika Trendova (Nikolova), Sofia managed to also weather that storm. Velika was also instrumental in urging Sofia to marry a young man named Nikola Stefov from the village Oshchima who had just been released from the Greek concentration camps on January 17, 1952. Nikola and Sofia were married on June 15, 1952. Sofia went to live in Oshchima, in Nikola's village where she had three children with him, Risto, Katina and Lazo. The Stefov family left Oshchima for Canada; Nikola in the fall of 1965, and Sofia with the children in the fall of 1966. Nikola left for Canada to be with his brothers and sisters. Sofia later brought her half-brother Giorgi to Canada to be with the family. Sofia has many cousins living in Canada.

Although the Mavrovski family had met Sofia back in 1965, the first time they met Nikola Stefov was in 1987 when Nikola and Sofia came to Bitola. Sofia and Nikola (who sadly died in 2010) had a difficult life and endured much hardship under the Greek regime while living in the village Oshchima. But now they are living in Canada and soon will be going on pension knowing that they did the right thing to leave Greece so that their children would have better opportunities for education and a better life in Canada. The following people are members of Sofia and Nikola's family: Risto, who is married to Laurie and has two children named Philip and David. Katina who was married to Daniel and had two children with him named Gordi and Laura. Katina is now living common law with Rick. Lazo who was married to Laura and had two children named Nikolis and Luke. Lazo is now married to Grace.

“This is my sister Sofia's family. which will continue our lineage in Canada,” says Risto Mavrovski who wrote this story (updated by Spiro Mavrovski and Risto Stefov).

“Unfortunately, despite my great desire to go to Canada and all the effort I made with my son Spiro, I still failed to visit Sofia and her family in Canada. Only because of Canada's strict rules regarding visitors from Eastern European countries,” says Risto Mavrovski.

## **Spiro's first encounter with his Aunt Sofia**

Spiro's first encounter with his Aunt Sofia Stefova was back in 1965 when she went to Bitola, Republic of Macedonia for the first time, to visit her brothers Risto and Nikola Mavrovski and their families. She had not seen them for 17 years, since 1948 when she was separated from her brothers by the war, when her little brother Nikola was sent to Hungary with the refugee children and when Risto joined the partisans. After that, while Risto was sent to Albania and then to a hospital in Poland, Sofia remained in the village with her father, divided by the iron curtain for 17 years. The first meeting between Sofia and her brothers was a happy occasion but very emotional. "I remember the meeting like it was a dream, with many tears, with so much to catch up on about the past and with great hope for the future," says Spiro Mavrovski, Risto's son.

Spiro however wanted more, he wanted to meet Sofia's family, his cousins, her husband, but that unfortunately did not happen until much later. Spiro, to this day, has not yet met the entire Stefov family. It was not until 1978 that Spiro got to meet his uncle Nikola for the first time, when Nikola and Sofia went from Canada to the Republic of Macedonia on vacation. At that time Spiro was a student studying engineering at the Electro-Technical Faculty in Skopje. Spiro remembers the exact moment he met them. It was the time when he had an uncomfortable conversation with his uncle about Macedonia.

This was Nikola's first visit to the Republic of Macedonia. He left Greece in 1965 and went to Canada. Nikola established himself in Toronto and a year later brought his family with him. From the conversation Spiro had with Nikola, Spiro learned that there was a Yugoslav Consul in Toronto who was originally from Zhelevo and who had told Nikola that the Macedonian Question would soon be addressed at the United Nations and that this would bring positive results for the Macedonian people everywhere. Spiro was young at the time but very much interested in politics. He was quite taken by this information and told his uncle that he had never heard of such a thing here in the Republic of Macedonia. There was no talk of such a thing in Macedonia and the church was quite distanced from the

state, let alone supporting it. Spiro boldly told his uncle this and got his face slapped. Nikola, however, insisted that he had personally heard this from the Consul himself and that, as far as he knew, this matter was a done deal. Nikola brought with him a number of Macedonian newspapers published in Toronto, Canada which contained many religious articles about church activities in Canada. But then, when Spiro showed him the Macedonian newspapers “Nova Makedonija” and “Vecher”, and proved to him that there were no such articles about the Macedonian Question, not even about religion, Nikola began to question the validity of what the Consul had told him.

During the conversation that Nikola had with Risto, Spiro’s father, about the past and about the war years, Spiro listened intently and learned a lot of things about his uncle Nikola’s life; his suffering in the Greek prisons in the dry islands, his difficulties while living in the village Oshchima in Greece and his decision to leave his homeland and take his entire family to Canada. From what Nikola was saying, it was a good decision to go to Canada and open up better opportunities for his children and for the entire family. In a separate conversation with Spiro, Nikola spoke about his own children. Nikola told Spiro that Risto, Nikola’s older son, had completed a four year course in Electrical Engineering at the University of Toronto and had acquired a degree in Applied Science in Electrical Engineering and that Katina had gone to college and Lazo was in high school.

Spiro’s second meeting with his aunt Sofia and uncle Nikola was some years later in 1986 when they stayed at the Hotel Molika and climbed Mount Pelister. Spiro remembers them being taken by their unforgettable experience with nature, with the beauty of the mountain and with the aroma and grandness of the fir and pine trees.

Once again Spiro was disappointed with not having met his cousins Risto, Katina and Lazo, that is until 2008 when his cousin Risto decided to go to the Republic of Macedonia to promote his book “History of the Macedonian people”, which Risto had written in the English language and had translated to Macedonian. Before that Risto had written a book, a monograph about his village Oshchima, illustrated with many pictures, which he had brought with him to

Macedonia. Spiro spent the entire night, the first night he met Risto, perusing the book. “I spent the entire night crying and cursing our fate, that it took me so long to meet one of my cousins and still to have more cousins and, to this day, not be able to see them or their children...” says Spiro. Spiro has not lost hope and believes that that time will one day come...

Spiro’s meeting with Risto was emotional. Risto had a great desire to see Macedonia; to visit its many cities, historical and cultural monuments, lakes and beautiful mountains. Spiro spared no effort to take Risto wherever he wanted to go, as Spiro marveled at Risto’s accent and Macedonian dialect, which reminded Spiro of how his father spoke. Spiro took Risto to visit Krusevo, Smilevo, Prilep, Ohrid, Kichevo, Tetovo, Gostivar, Struga, Vevchani, Sveti Naum, Otesevo, Resen and Pretor.

Spiro’s first encounter with Risto was in Skopje just after his arrival from Toronto, which coincided with the arrival of Liube Boskovski returning from The Hague. “I will never forget the conversation when, after the stories he told me about his family, I asked Risto whether he was hungry or not to which he replied ‘I am famished’. It was not that he said he was ‘famished’ but the fact that he used the exact word that my father Risto used all his life when he was very hungry, that I found fascinating...” says Spiro. Spiro took Risto to a nearby restaurant and asked him what he wanted to eat. Risto said: “Surprise me, this is my first time in Macedonia and I want to sample as much local cuisine as possible...” Spiro called the waiter and, unlike how things are done in Canada with a menu, Risto was surprised to see Spiro describe every detail of what foods Spiro wanted and how he wanted them prepared. There was no one else with Spiro and Risto when the waiter returned with a couple of huge platters full of food that looked like they could feed half a dozen people. Risto was surprised at the amount of food brought so he asked Spiro why so much food? “It is for you... eat!” said Spiro. “You first...!” replied Risto. The big surprise was when Spiro said he was fasting at the moment for “Petrovden”, a Macedonian tradition, and that he could not eat and that all that food was really for Risto. Risto ate as Spiro talked and the real great surprise was that Risto alone ate all that food while listening to Spiro talk... Risto was happy that Spiro had come all the way to Skopje from Bitola to

be with him and for providing him with an excellent and delicious meal.

It did not take long for Spiro and Risto to become acquainted and feel comfortable with each other as if they had known one another their entire lives. “This assured me that, it is true, that blood is thicker than water and that we are very close spiritually...” says Spiro. Spiro was sad that his father Risto passed on before he had a chance to meet Risto Stefov and get to know him. Spiro says he has much respect for the work that Risto is doing, carrying on in the family tradition, working for the Macedonian cause, even though he lives far from his country of birth. “Risto, my wish for you and for all of us is to be healthy and happy and, even though we live far apart, some day our families, our children and grandchildren will find a way to see each other or even be together...” says Spiro.

“My father-in-law Petar Stojkovski-Babets, as Santa Claus, along with my mother-in-law Militsa, parents of my wife Lenche, my son Vasko and daughter-in-law Juliana, as actors in the Bitola Theatre, had the opportunity to visit Canada and are filled with beautiful memories of the great hospitality they received in Canada,” says Spiro.

Another memorable moment for both Spiro and Risto was their second meeting in Macedonia in Nize Pole with Spiro’s life-long friends from his childhood. This was during Macedonia’s Independence Day celebration on September 8, which lasted the entire day. Risto felt at home that day and, even though he did not know those people, he felt close to them spiritually like he had known them all his life.

“Let us finish this story with much respect for a great fighter, a sufferer, a martyr, a man who left behind a large part of Macedonia for us, let it be an eternal glory for a great hero, my Uncle Nikola Stefov,” says Spiro Mavrovski.

**Risto’s youngest brother Nikola (Kole) Mihail Shkavrev Mavrovski (1937-2007)**

Nikola Mavrovski was born in 1937 in the village Zhelevo. He was the youngest son born to Mihail and Neda. Nikola, unfortunately, was born during the worst time in the region's recent history and, because of the wars, was unable to receive much schooling. In 1940, to avoid being killed by the bombing of the village, Neda took him to Bouf. For the most part, however, Nikola, while living in the village Zhelevo, spent most of his time with his friends while the people of Zhelevo were fighting for their survival. During this time Nikola had a couple of incidents. The first was when he bit and badly cut his tongue, which caused him much suffering, but with great care from his family, particularly from his mother, his tongue healed without permanent damage. The second incident was when he was playing with the children and became paralyzed. His father Mihail took him to Albania to a healer (Odzha) who gave him some sort of water that had healing powers, to wash with, and some other herbal medicines. That episode too passed without permanent consequences. Nikola stayed home until age ten and then in 1947 he was put to work looking after the cattle and helping with chores on the family farm. In the spring of 1948 Nikola, along with many children from Zhelevo and from the entire region, was collected and sent out of the country to be saved from the war. His journey started from Zhelevo and took him through Brailovo and Prilep and he eventually ended up in a dorm in Hungary where he began his education and remained there until the summer of 1955. While in Hungary, Nikola had requested to be moved to Poland so that he could be with his brother Risto. His wish was granted and Nikola was sent to the city Zgorzhelets, Poland. Risto then took him and moved him to Shvidnitsa, where Risto was living. Then, in August 1957 the two brothers left Poland and went to live in Macedonia. During his stay in Poland, Nikola studied the Polish language and carpentry.

On September 1, 1957 Nikola, Risto and Risto's family arrived in the People's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, first in Skopje and then, on September 9, 1957, they went to Bitola and established residency in the hotel "Solun". Nikola was still a bachelor when they arrived. His first job was at a construction company called "Vranie". A little later, in 1958, Nikola went to work as a carpenter at the refrigerator manufacturing company where Risto worked. The company then was initially called "Giorgi Naumov" and later was

renamed to “Rade Konchar”. In 1961 Nikola married his friend Vasilka Krste Chukleva from the village German. Vasilka was also in Poland before she came to Bitola. Nikola and Vasilka initially rented a house near the city clock tower but later, with help from one of Vasilka’s relatives, bought a house at Ul. “Sremska Mitrovitsa” no. 5 where they lived until the day they died. Nikola and Vasilka had a son named Mihail. Mihail married in 1987 and had two children, Nikola and Aleksandra.

Nikola’s story was written by his brother Risto so that Nikola will forever remain in the memory of future generations. “Kole (Nikola) was my weakness in life...” says his brother Risto, but does not elaborate as to why or how.

### **A few words from Spiro Mavrovski about his uncle Nikola**

“For him, I think I need to write an entire book, my only relative in Bitola, a man with a big heart, a man who looked up to my father and was forever connected with him. From the time I can remember I always wanted to be around him. As a child I used to sleep over at his house beside the city clock tower where he and my aunt lived. These were the best Sundays of my life. I remember the many outings and picnics by the river Dragor, be it at Topla Voda or in Dihovskiot del where we swam, ate lunch and played carefree... where life was full of happiness. My uncle loved sports, an activity we both shared and connected with. The three of us were always there and never missed an event. We usually met at the playground or at the Mladost sports hall, regardless of whether it was a practice game or real competition. We often visited him at Ul. “Sremska Mitrovitsa” no. 5, not too far from our house. We used to pick apricots and plums from the trees in his yard and sell them at the market. After my father died, my uncle mourned him, a painful mourn that he could not endure. Barely 6 months later my uncle also died. He smoked and drank a shot of rakia or two, but never did he ever overreact or discipline us, even though my father always scolded him and treated him like his own son. Unfortunately my uncle had heart problems but my father, be it in the hospital or at home, was always with him, trying to help him, to comfort him and reassure him that he was going to be fine. I have many memories of my uncle, but there is one that I would like to share with you; our



trip to Skopje and our meeting with the refugee children in Sarai. There were many tears of joy and sorrow that day. There were tears of joy for the survivors and sorrow for the missing, for those who died and for those who remain scattered all over the world. For them and in memory of my uncle I dedicate this beautiful poem written by Vasil Puiovski, a refugee child”, says Spiro.

### **THERE IS ONE DESTINY**

We were children, against who have we sinned?  
We were guilty but without guilt.  
Why have we been cursed so badly?  
To spend our life in exile around the world.

And cry, cry, the mountains are crying for us,  
The shadows under the olive trees,  
But within us, it hurts forever within us it hurts,  
A wound that burns, that will not heal...

And across the world, in us everywhere,  
Our hearts they have opened,  
Only there, there is no return.  
The gates for us have been forever closed.

And cry, cry, the mountains are crying for us,  
The shadows under the olive trees,  
But within us, it hurts forever within us it hurts,  
A wound that burns, that will not heal...

Oh, how heavy there the mountains are,  
Just as heavy is the bitterness,  
Of our cursed fate,  
The distance pains us just the same!

Wherever we are, we will never forget,  
Our childhood there, which we left...

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## **Risto Mavrovski's sister-in-law Ristana Vasil Bekiarova-Shkavreva**

Ristana Vasil Bekiarova-Shkavreva was born in 1928 in the village Zhelevo. She belonged to a poor family with many girls, with Risto, the last child born being the only boy. Ristana completed Grade 6 in the Greek language in the village. During the occupation Ristana stayed at home and helped around the house. Ristana knew Spiro Shkavrev, Risto's brother, from a very young age but as they grew up their relationship became more serious and eventually they married and thus at the end of 1946 she became a member of the Shkavrev family. Ristana stayed with the Shkavrev family, even after Spiro had left for the partisans in 1947, until the spring of 1948, when she too went to the mountains to join the ranks of DAG. This lasted until the end of August 1949, during which time she fled to Albania in the mass exodus. From there she was transferred to Poland where, in the summer of 1950, she remarried. She married a Greek man and had a family with him. "And as such," says Risto, Spiro's brother, "my brother Spiro left no offspring and Ristana ceased to be Mavrovska..." For the short time that Ristana was with the Shkavrev family she proved to be valuable and hard working. She made a few mistakes later in life, about which she knows, and will remember them when she reads this. Ristana (at the time this was written) lived in Skopje with her friend and children, where exactly, was unknown to Risto but he decided to write about Ristana so that she too would be remembered.

## **Spiro Mavrovski's (Risto's son) first encounter with Ristana**

Spiro met his aunt Ristana for the first time sometime in 1970, in Bitola at the "Aegean" building where Spiro was living. Spiro remembers it was after a world basketball championship tournament held in Ljubljana, when Yugoslavia became the champion. All the children and young men at the time were playing basketball everywhere, even on the steps in the yard at the entrance of their building. It was a Saturday, a beautiful spring day when a woman, a stranger with a big bag in her hand, came to the entrance and disturbed the game. Before entering the building the woman suddenly turned to Spiro and asked him if Risto Mavrovski, Spiro's father, lived in this building. But before Spiro had a chance to reply,

the strange woman suddenly grabbed him, gave him a great big hug and began to weep. She then asked him if he was Spiro, Risto Mavrovski's son. When Spiro said "yes" the woman squeezed him even harder and her weeping became even louder. She then took Spiro by the hand and asked him to take her to the third floor, to Risto's apartment. A little while later Risto arrived and they greeted each other with tears. They had not seen each other in 13 years, since they were in Poland. After that Risto and Ristana went to see Nikola, Risto's brother. Spiro remembers the gift Ristana brought them from Poland. It was a beautifully decorated glass fish. After that they had a few more meetings in Skopje. "And, as such, I remember her in a good light, and may her soul rest in peace. Her misfortune with my uncle Spiro darkened her entire life..." says Spiro Mavrovski.

### **Risto Mavrovski's cousin Vasil Risto Shkavrev Mavrovski (1914-1990)**

Vasil Risto Shkavrev Mavrovski was born in 1914 in the village Zhelevo. He was the son of Risto and Vana Shkavrev; may they both rest in peace. Vasil finished public school in Zhelevo and then continued his studies at a school for catering in Lerin. Vasil's father died when Vasil was just a small boy and his mother left him and married Krsto Iandrovski. Vasil was left with his grandmother Stoina and aunt Neda (Risto Mavrovski's mother). Vasil remained with Neda and became part of her family. When Vasil finished his schooling in Lerin in 1934, he was drafted into the Greek military where he served for 2 years. When he returned to the village he and Pavle Popovski were appointed civil guards (poliak). Vasil worked at that job until 1940 when again he was drafted by the Greek military and, on October 28, 1940, was sent to the front line at the Albanian front. Vasil fought in the ranks of Regiment 303 where he was wounded and again sent back to the front. After Greece capitulated, Vasil returned to Zhelevo and married Elena Sandrina with whom he had two girls, Iana and Tena, and later a son who they named Giorgi. Vasil at one point separated from his aunt Neda and lived on his own. During the occupation Vasil was inducted into the ELAS reserves and in 1947 he was drafted by DAG where he was wounded and sent to Katlanovska Bania in the Republic of Macedonia for treatment. From there he was transferred to Skopje

until 1956, when he was sent to prison for having desires to return to Greece, to his family in Zhelevo. After he served his prison sentence he was allowed to return to Zhelevo to be with his family, but life in Zhelevo was not what he expected so he left for Belgium where he worked in the mines. From there he moved to Toronto, Canada where he divorced Elena, married Katina Kochopoulou from Banitsa and moved in with her. He did not have any children with Katina. Vasil's children are married and live in Toronto.

The above story was written by Risto Mavrovski, Vasil's cousin. At one point in time, while Vasil was serving as civil guard, he beat Risto because the cow Risto was supposed to be watching did some damage to the crops in the fields which Vasil was guarding. Risto spent a lot of time with Vasil, which included drinking milk from the same cow and sleeping under the same covers in the fields. Risto wrote Vasil's story for future generations and so that Vasil will be remembered. Vasil died in 1990 in Toronto, Canada.

### **A brief story about the village Zhelevo, renamed by the Greeks to "Andartikon"**

The village Zhelevo is one of the larger villages in the region, along with the village German. Zhelevo now belongs in Lerin Region. Before it was part of Kostur Region but Risto Mavrovski, who wrote this story, does not remember such a thing. When Risto was born he was registered as being born in Lerin Region. The names of the villages in the entire area by then had been changed by the Greek state and Zhelevo was renamed to "Andartikon". But there are still old maps that show the name "Zhelevo".

The following story was written by Risto Mavrovski who lived in Zhelevo from 1928 to 1949. It includes memories of Risto's grandmother and mother.

"Our village is big and very nice. It is located in the heart of Mount Bigla and borders the village Psoderi, a Vlach village, to the northeast, German to the north, Rudari and Papli to the northwest, Orovnik and Bukovik to the west, Oshchima to the southeast and perhaps Besfina, I am not sure. These are the borders of our village which exists to this day. It is a large village in comparison to the

other villages and has a nice panoramic view when seen from the road that passes by the village and connects Lerin over Prespa with Korcha in Albania. From the other side it continues over Koreshtata to the city of Kostur.”

The distance from Zhelevo to the Greek-Albanian border is about 24 kilometres and so is the distance from Zhelevo to the villages Smrdesh and Vambel. The village Rabi is a bit closer. Hence the great strategic importance of Zhelevo, which has a rich history of major events that took place during the Greek - Italian war in October 1940, and later during the Second World War when many armies passed through it.

What follows is a description that Risto Mavrovski has given us of the various place names and rivers and tributaries that originate in and around Zhelevo, that make up the great historical Bistritsa River.

Even though the Greeks changed all the topographical names of the villages, the names of various places inside the headland of the village remained the same.

Towards the Vlach village Psoderi there are the places called: Pistoloi Steni, Rimna Plocha, Krstot, Kazeno, Dzhembra, Giogova glava and Sekot.

Towards the village German the places are called: Chрни kamenia, Kivantsa, Shiroki modzharki and Mrchkino dulo.

Towards the village Rudari we have: Kontski rid, Konski mocharki and Zhelevsko golniche.

Towards the village P'pli we have: Plati, Maznior, Kalugeritsa and Kofilo.

Towards the village Orovnik we have: Shumiakot, Seltse and Geraka.

Towards the village Oshchima we have: Asanova pladina, Skapetsot, Sreden rid, Tserot, Glavata, Topolata, Galik, Chukite,

Kamenova livada, Preol, Temnilak and Rendesh. All these landmarks border the village Oshchima.

The following is a detailed description of the places inside Zhelevo that border the right side of the river Bistritsa, that passes through the village. These are: Golema livada, Klapata, Vangoa livada, Slivata, Boronchki rid, Velovi mocharki, Temova stena, Ianovski mocharki, Borichki livadi, Borichki trap, Pelior, Furuglitsa, Lago, Rasadnitsi, Senkite, Rachneitsa, Popovo ormanche, Papravi ornitsi, Sreden dol (Srendol), Broda, Kasaritsa, Gorna Valevitsa, Perelova bafcha, bafcha na Kole shofero, Temovski livadi, Olnishcha and Dzholin trap.

On the left side of the river we have: Kopachkite, Povoli mocharki, Kuleto, Sperkoitsa, Keramitsata, Tashovi livadi, Manastrirska livada, Sredni reki, Ianovi padini, Sredno riche, Grobot na Vasil Temovski, Sredni mocharki, Nikoletsko riche, Nikoletsko padinche, Konchko trpo, Burleitsa, Konski padini, Nozete, Lozinata, Dudumov trap, Staro Zhelevo, Voinovski livadi, Beloets, Sredtsite, Dolni kup, Gorni kup, Glavchato, Dolna padishta, Gorna padishta, Chestakot, Tsvetkovi mocharki, Grobot, Beloi orevi, Putsungov trap, Dolovski dol, Bratindol, Kokoshka planina, Plochata, Bachovo ornicha, Chukite, Temnilak, Iankova livada, Tsrvenitsata, Pitachot, Losh trap, Stoikova Chesma and Murtovi padini.

## **Mountains**

The mountains in Zhelevo are forested with the following types of trees: beech, oak, maple, hazel and small quantities of acacia and juniper.

The village also has pine trees which were planted in 1930. Other parts of the mountains have remained treeless. There are poplar and willow trees growing along the rivers which look beautiful in all seasons of the year.

## **Fruit trees and plants**

There were a number of varieties of fruit trees that grew throughout the village including cherries, plums, apples, pears, peaches and walnuts. And let us not forget the vineyards.

In the mountains one could find wild pears, wild apples, wild chestnuts, acorns, a variety of mushrooms, wild strawberries, raspberries, bearberries, blueberries, blackberries and wild grapes.

There were also many varieties of plants that grew in the mountains, some of which have healing powers and were used for medicinal purposes. Included among these plants were the orchids, cowslips, geraniums, Turkish flowers, marigolds, basil, nettles, old man's beards, ferns, knot-grass, thorns and poisonous dandelions. There are also many other grasses that are abundant in the village but are of little use medicinally.

### **Bodies of water**

There were a number of tributaries originating in Zhelevo that contribute to the River Bistritsa.

Included in the tributaries that flow from the village Psoderi are Solakand and Sveti Ilia and passing through Zhelevo are Kosaa, Chamurov trap and Manastirski trap.

Sourced from Zhelevo are the brooks Chemvra, Boroiski trap, Dzholin trap and Srendol, near the Churches Sveta Nadela and Sveti Nikola. These were the middle brooks which started at the treeless mountain tops and flowed down into Iantsoi livage. They flowed from Maznior, Dudumov trap, Staro Zhelevo, over Beloiets, Srebsite to Vakovska valevitsa at Kupot, (Puchungov trap), and down from Preval towards the Oshchima border, and over Bachorni ornitsi.

All these tributaries were abundant with water and were used for irrigation; to water the fields and meadows. Some of these waters were also used to run a number of grain grinding mills to make flour.

1. The long ditch that ran from Keramitsata and Tashoi livadi was used to irrigate an area stretching from Beloets to Sredtsite and Kuleto.
2. Another ditch called Dudumov trap near Glavieto was used to irrigate an area from Gorni kup, Dolni kup, up to the bridge near the river.
3. The Puchungov ditch irrigated an area down to Beloi orevi.
4. Another ran from Voinovski vodentsi towards Iankovi livage.
5. Another ditch ran from Vakovska valeintsa over the Broda kafina, by Kasharnitsata to the mills owned by Dane Chakov and Pop Andon.
6. Yet another ditch ran from Olnishtata to the mills owned by the Nikolovtsi, Ianevtsi and Voinovtsi families.
7. A ditch called Iazot ran to the mill owned by Risto the teacher Dzhukela.
8. Another ditch called Iazot irrigated the pastures in Galik.
9. The largest and most necessary ditch for the village originated at Iantoi livage and Boroiski trap, ran through the Iandrovski mill, through Sitkite, Kileets, Adzhioi gradini, passed through the village square, passed by Dzholin trap, by Bundovtsi, Volcho Florov, Temovtsi, Kirovtsi, Voinovtsi, then entered the middle of the village where it split into two branches. One branch ran through the centre of the village and down by Markovtsi, Puchungovtsi, Ralevtsi, Paskovtsi, Barbalovtsi and entered the fields. The other branch continued by Naum Didov, Popovtsi, Dodevtsi and emptied into a small brook which then ran from Giamovtsi and Bundovtsi and by Sarevtsi and Mitinovtsi and emptied into Srendol trap.

This is how things were done by the villagers of Zhelevo; irrigating their fields and meadows and milling their grains to make flour.



Water for drinking and cooking was a different story. Drinking water in the Zhelevo neighbourhoods was brought from a mountain spring in Pelior. With financial help from the people of Zhelevo who worked in Canada and the United States, pipes were purchased and installed which delivered water to all the Zhelevo neighbourhoods. And as such, the village was supplied with an abundance of clean, mountain spring water.

### **Wild and domestic animals**

Through the Zhelevo mountains one can find all kinds of wild game including wolves, bears, foxes, wild boar and other less harmful animals for hunters who are interested in recreational sport. Even in the later years during the Greek Civil War one could find rabbits, martens, mink, badgers, mice, rats, moles, hedgehogs, various poisonous snakes including vipers, water snakes, boas, green lizards, frogs, beetles, wild wasps, etc. In terms of birds, Zhelevo has mountain vultures, swallows, hawks, ravens, magpies, crows, partridges, wild pigeons, blue jays, quail, sparrows, etc.

In terms of domesticated animals and birds, the people of Zhelevo had dogs and cats and raised pigs, horses, donkeys, cows, oxen, sheep, goats, chickens, ducks, geese, etc.

### **Development of the village**

The village Zhelevo has a long history which is associated mainly with the development of agriculture, livestock, crafts and other activities.

A very important moment in the history of Zhelevo was the purchase of the Seltsa locality, purchased from the Turks by 48 families at the cost of 4,000 gold coins (Napoleons). Members of those families were migrant workers who made their money working in the USA and Canada. The following the families that purchased lands in Seltsa:

1. Markovtsi 4 families
2. Ianovtsi 4 families
3. Papazovtsi 4 families

4. Gaduchovtsi 3 families
5. Todorovtsi 4 families
6. Florovtsi 4 families
7. Kirovtsi 4 families
8. Voinovtsi 3 families
9. Bundovtsi 4 families
10. Pachkovtsi 3 families
11. Luchkovtsi 2 families
12. Nikolovtsi 2 families
13. Temovtsi 2 families
14. Lumborovtsi 2 families
15. Mitanovtsi 2 families
16. Nolevtsi 1 family

After purchasing Seltsa, the villagers further developed their agriculture, hunting, livestock and sheep raising activities which allowed the village to prosper.

At that time the villagers had 5 grocery stores and other shops, three of which were owned by the Vlachs, Makio, Naki and Goga, from the village Psoderi. The Iandrovsi family owned a butcher shop which supplied the villagers with meat. There was also the store owned by Kuze and Petre Dogramov which had a truck and delivered goods. There was a local oven which baked goods and supplied the village with bread and pastries. The owners of the oven were Jews.

There were several cafés in which the villagers gathered. The one in Broda belonged to Temo Sotirov and Giorgi Trendov. The ones in the village square belonged to Petre Goliot Temelko and Kufelo Ilo Sandrin, where they made excellent pastries and sweets, another one was owned by Lazo Miloshev and a tiny booth was owned by Sotir Gulin.

Many craftsmen also worked in the village. Among the most famous were the blacksmiths Petko and File Kirov. Giorgi Trendov worked with sheet metal and made stoves and stove pipes, Sotir Makriata was the local painter. There were also barrel and saddle makers, mortar makers and barbers. The brothers Rade and Giorgi Marku worked in a barber shop. There was a large group of master masons

who worked in Zhelevo and in other villages. Included amongst them were Trpo Popov, Mihal Shkavrev Boikov, Kole Altano, Lambro Putsungo and Lambro and Sterio Trkalov.

There were a number of vehicles in the village. A horse drawn cart owned by Iane Mandzhukov supplied the villagers with firewood, stones, gravel and other supplies. Several families owned motorized trucks that drove to the cities and made deliveries. Included amongst the truck drivers were Kole Nikolov, Tanas Ianu, Boris and Petre Janu Mandzhukov and Kosta Balkovski.

The village also had a number of grain grinding mills for making flour. Included amongst them were:

1. The Gorna Valevitsa mill (no longer operational)
2. The Vakovskata Valevitsa mill operated by Fili Kirov (koachot)
3. The Iandrovski mill
4. The Tashovski mill
5. The Chakovski mill owned by Dane
6. The Popandon Petkov mill
7. The Filov mill
8. The Florov mill
9. The Nikolovski and Voinovski mill
10. The Markovski and Bundovski mill
11. The Bekiarov mill
12. The Risto Dzhukelov (Teacher in Galik) mill

There were a number of barns in the village where sheep and goats were kept. These were located and owned as follows:

There were a number of barns in the Beloets locality, four owned by Petre, Naum, Stilian and Giorgi Nikolovski, two owned by the Perelov (Ianov) family, one by Giorgi Trendov, one by the Lazarov family. The barns in the Giorgi Kupov locality were owned as follows; one was owned by File Kiru (koacho), one by the Stanishev family and one by Ioshe Balkov. The Selta locality had the largest number of barns where almost all the people of Zhelevo kept their livestock, with the exception of the following people who kept their sheep and goats at home: Todorka and Sofia Gaduchovi, Golanovci, Lambro Florov, Kosta Stanishev, the Bukurov family and others.

At that time there were thousands of sheep and goats as well as a good number of summer dairies which made feta cheese, butter, cottage cheese, sour milk and other dairy products. Most of the wool sheared from the sheep and goats was sold and some was used locally by the villagers.

Initially the village had only one school, but because of the large number of enrolled students the village built another one, a larger and more beautiful school. Unfortunately today there are very few young people left and the schools are sitting empty.

There are two beautiful churches in Zhelevo; Sveti Nikola and Sveti Atanas. The local cemetery is located near Sveti Atanas where Risto Mavrovski's ancestors are buried. May they eternally rest in peace!

### **The geography of Zhelevo by neighbourhoods**

Risto Mavrovski has made an attempt here, from what he remembers, to describe the village's various neighbourhoods.

Let us begin from Broda following the road that leads to the village, which also divides the village into two parts: the upper and lower part. Near the main road in Broda there were two cafés owned by Foto Temov Sotirov and by Giorgi Trendov. Underneath that was Tanas, the driver, Ianu's house. Deeper inside the Balkovtzi family had built a house in which Naum Perelov Ianu lived. Near here there was the Chekmeeto barn and the Bundovtzi fields. This was the old Broda. The new Broda had newly built houses that belonged to Iane Mandzhukov and to the Landzhakov family.

#### **The Toshevtsi Neighborhood**

From what Risto can remember, the following families lived in this neighbourhood:

1. The Stamovtzi – Stamu
2. The Balkovtzi – Balku
3. The Karafilovtzi – Karafilu
4. The Lazarovtzi – Lazaru

5. The Petkovtsi – Petku
6. The Patsovtsi – Paca
7. The Andonchini – Andoniu
8. The Ginovtsi – Ginu
9. The Nanovtsi – Nanu
10. The Sandrini – Sandras
11. The Dzholini – Andoniu
12. The Giakei – Andoniu
13. The Kirovtsi – Kiru
14. Spiro Lasko – Stergiu
15. The Florovtsi – Floru
16. The Milosovtsi – Mirtsu

There are a number of families with the same name in the above neighbourhood, which is why it appears to be small.

#### The Kileets Neighborhood

1. Nolevtsi – Nolis
2. Bodurovtsi – Boduris
3. Kochovtsi – Kotsu
4. Simovtsi – Simu
5. Dibranovtsi – Divranu
6. Bachkovtsi – Batsku
7. Kerchovtsi – Kertsu
8. Vangovtsi – Vangu
9. Papazovski – Papazis
10. Kachevtsi – Kaitsis
11. Karafilovtsi – Karanfilu

There are also a number of families with the same name in the above neighbourhood, which is why it too appears to be small.

#### The Golemata neighbourhood

1. Florovtsi – Floru
2. Chakovtsi – Tsaku
3. Shkavrevski, Mavrevtsi – Mavru
4. Bachkovi – Batsku
5. File Kovacho – Kiru

6. Temovtsi – Temu
7. Stanishovtsi – Stanisis
8. Gulini – Gulakis
9. Spiro Lazarov – Lazaru
10. Luchkovi – Lutsku
11. Goliot Petre - Papa Ilias
12. Kiumundzhiata – Goliu
13. Nikola Popovtski – Zega
14. File Mutufot – Theodoru
15. Todorovtsi – Theodoru
16. Mandzhukovtsi – Mandzukis
17. Risto Mandzhukov – Ianu
18. Tanas Markov – Marku
19. Kole Landzako – Landzakis
20. Sotirovtsi – Temu
21. Golanovtsi – Theodoru
22. Perelovtsi – Ianu
23. Todorka and Sofia - Theodoru (Luka Gadutsis)
24. Vasil Kroiachot – Temu
25. Lambro Bundov – Bundu
26. Volcho Florov – Floru
27. Lambro Stanishev – Stanisis
28. Ianaki Temov – Temu
29. Dudumovtsi – Dudumis
30. Liandzakoi – Landzakis
31. Trendovtsi – Trendu
32. Stilianovtsi – Nikolau
33. Vasil Nikolov – Nikolau
34. Nikola Nikolov - Nikolau (Kole the driver)
35. Voinovtsi – Voinu
36. Pando Nikolov – Nikolau
37. Petre, Naum, Risto, Giorgi, Iandro Nikolovi – Nikolau
38. Chachanovtsi – Tsatsanis
39. Lazo Miloshov – Mirtsu
- 40 Panaiot Mergelov – Mergelis

#### The Stred Selo neighbourhood

1. Naum Dido – Liandzaku
2. Chachani – Tsats inis

3. Kuzman Iovanovtsi – Ianu
4. Popovtsi – Papailias
5. Giro – Argiriu
6. Temelkov – Temelku
7. Iandrovtsi – Mirku
8. Markovtsi – Marku
9. Kufela – Kufelas
10. Todor vlaho –
11. Iankulovtsi – Giankulas
12. Damovtsi – Damu
13. Trkalovtsi – Trkalas
14. Dodovtsi – Dodu
25. Spiro Dogramov – Ianu
26. Sarovtsi – Saru
27. Charevi –
28. Eftimovtsi Muha – Eftimiu
29. Giamovtsi – Giamu
30. Forcho – Hadzikiru
31. Stepanovtsi – Stepanis
32. Skandzhovtsi – Skandzu
33. Rumiakovtsi – Rumiaki
34. Laskovtsi – Stergiu

There are a number of families with the same name in the above neighbourhood, which is why it appears to be smaller than it is.

#### The Dolna neighbourhood

1. Adzhiovtsi
2. Ralevtsi – Ralis
3. Puchungovtsi – Putsungas
4. Brbalovtsi – Brbalas
5. Pachkovi – Patsku
6. Markovtsi – Marku
7. Bekiarovtsi – Bekaris
8. Bukurovtsi – Bukuris
9. Plchakovtsi Gaduchovi – Gadutsis

#### The Gorna neighbourhood

1. Mitanovtsi – Mitanis
2. Nanovtsi – Nanu
3. Lumburovtsi – Lumburu
4. Kurdzhovtsi - Kurdzu
5. Markovtsi – Marku
6. Kirovtsi – Kiru
7. Bundovtsi – Bundas
8. Mito Trpche – Bodani
9. Shmugrevi
10. Sico – Siku
11. Bodanovtsi – Kiru
12. Loni Pirpiko – Pirpikis
13. Bogdanovti – Bogdanis
14. Lizganovts – Lizganis
15. Risto Dzhukela – Sideris
16. Trpcheloi – Trptselas
17. Roshkovi Ianovtsi – Ianu
18. Lulovtsi – Lulus
19. Nichevi – Nitsu
20. Gligorovtsi – Gianu
21. Gaduchovi – Gadutsis
22. Luchkovi – Lutsku

There are many houses and families in the village that have the same surnames. For example, the Bekiarovtsi, Puchugovtsi, Markovtsi, Ianovtsi, Kirovtsi, Balkovtsi, Trkalovtsi, Temovtsi, Florovtsi and the Nikolovtsi.

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What did a family in Zhelevo have?

### **A typical house**

Let us start with the storage room known as the “keral”. Located in the keral were; a great big wine barrel, a large granary cabinet divided into sections for various grains and flour, a number of upright barrels for storing pickled cabbages, pickled peppers, pickled tomatoes, feta cheese and salted meat. There was a loom and



all the necessary utensils for weaving cloth and making clothing, bed covers, rugs, carpets, etc.

Now let's have a look at where people slept and what they covered themselves with. In the early days there were no beds. People slept on woven straw mats which they called "rogozna". They were made of crushed wheat stalks and braided into long rolls that were then rolled and sewn into an oval shaped mat. The mat was rolled out on the floor at bedtime, slept on and rolled back and put away during the day. The "rogozna" was covered with a bedcover made of rags, towels and other clothing. Rags and other pieces of clothing were sewn together to make a bedcover to cover the rogozna. The covers used to cover the people were called "velentse". These were made of wool woven into a thick blanket. Everyone usually slept in the same room. Women sometimes slept in separate rooms.

People usually ate in the same room in which they slept. They gathered together around a low lying portable round table called a "sofra". People sat on the floor when they ate. There were also a few chairs or wooden benches for sitting but they were only used during special occasions, holidays, name days, or other celebrations.

Each household had the following items: a "Cherepna", a "saach" (semi-circular dome made of iron for baking in the fireplace), "noshfi" (cupboard), a "blud" (large circular board on which to knead bread and pastries), one or more "sito" (sieves for straining flour), one or more "vreteno" (spindles, rolling pins), a "sofra" (low lying portable round table), several "stolchinia" (chairs), a number of "kotel/kotli" (copper pot/pots and cauldrons for cooking and for boiling water for washing clothes), one or more "tigan" (pans for cooking and frying), etc. The copper objects were frequently sent to the local "kalaidzhia" (alchemist) and coated with "kalai" (silver solder) so they were always shiny and clean. There were also many pottery objects in each household including a "latvitsa" (large clay wide mouthed jug), "kiupovi" (clay pots), "grninia" (wide mouthed oval clay pots), "stomni" (large clay narrow mouthed jugs for storing water), "stomninia" (smaller clay narrow mouthed jugs for drinking water), etc. A chain was tied to the inside of the chimney to which a pot hung in which "kachamak" (maize porridge) was cooked. In terms of stoves and ovens, each household had a sheet metal "pechka" (oven), a metal "Katsia" (small shovel for scooping

coals and ash), a “masha” (metal tongs for picking up hot coals and burning wood), “pirustia” (metal tripod placed inside the fireplace for pots to sit on), etc. The families that had sheep had large tin “kolbi” (pot-like containers) for milking the sheep and tin “giumovi” or “tenekinia” (metal containers) for storing and transporting the milk.

Washing clothes was done at the river at several designated places. A large cauldron was placed on a tripod filled with water and a fire was lit under it until it boiled. The clothing and other items requiring washing were usually transported to the designated place by donkey, horse, or mule. They were then unloaded, boiled in the cauldron, rinsed in the river, placed on a flat and smooth rock plate and beaten with a wooden paddle called a “kopan” or with wooden sticks called “piralki”, which were especially made for doing laundry. After the clothes were washed they were spread out, dried and then taken home. The clothes were washed with ordinary soap but during the war years, 1941 to about 1944, there was no soap to purchase in the village so the women had to make their own soap. Here is the formula for making homemade soap: take some pork lard, lime and ash, mix them together and boil them. But before you do that, first melt the pork fat, add the ashes and then the lime, then mix the contents and boil them vigorously until they become a liquid. Then pour the liquid into soap bar size molds. When the liquid cools and dries you have your bars of soap. If no pork fat is available, use sheep or beef fat.

The homes in Zhelevo were usually lit with kerosene lamps, but when kerosene was not available people melted animal fat in a metal container, placed a wick in it, lit it and used it to see in the dark.

### **A typical “aur” (stable)**

Stables where the animals (a horse, donkey, mule, cow, a pair of oxen, etc.) were usually kept was on the lowest floor of the home or in a barn. Besides housing the animals, the “aur” was also used for storing hay, straw and other types of animal feed. Inside the “aur” special stalls were built to house the cow, calf, oxen, etc. The “aur” floor was covered with dry ferns or straw and cleaned regularly. The contents collected were stored in a “bunishte” (manure pile) and

taken to the fields and spread in early spring. During the winter the animals were fed regularly indoors with hay, straw, dry grass, dried beech tree leaves, dried oak tree leaves and various ground up grains such as corn and bran. During the spring, summer and fall the large animals were sent to grazing grounds in the mountains. The sheep and goats were kept and fed in special barns outside of the village, indoors in the winter and taken outdoors to graze the rest of the time. They were fenced in pens during the night. There were special pens for the lambs and kids and a guard house for the shepherd to sleep in.

Necessary tools commonly found in a household included large and small axes (“baltia and baltiche”), large and small sledge hammers (“varia”), various sizes of wedges (“kninovi”) for splitting wood, one or more scythes (“kosa”) for cutting grass, large and small metal and wooden pitchforks (“vila”) for collecting hay, rakes (“griblo”), scythes (“srp”) for harvesting grain, a couple of varieties of plows (“Ralo” and “plug”) for turning soil, etc.

### **Typical foods**

Bread was typically made from wheat, rye and corn. Everyday bread was made from corn or rye flour. Wheat bread was eaten during holidays and on special occasions. Baked goods for special occasions included “pogacha” (a large round loaf of bread), “Zelnik” (a flat pastry with vegetable filling), “maznik” (a flat pastry like a zelnik but made with butter and cheese but no vegetable filling), “pupalina” (tiny loafs of round bread the size of bread rolls), etc. Besides bread and bread products, cheese, etc., people also ate potatoes, beans, leeks, peppers, tomatoes, onions, peas, lentils, cordage, pumpkins, cabbage, sorrel, nettles, milkweed for salad, “boltur” (crushed wheat) in place of rice, kasha made of flour and a variety of macaroni.

From the cow and sheep milk, the people of the village made feta cheese, cottage cheese, buttermilk, butter, etc., enough to feed the entire family. One cow could feed four children and two adults. Each cow produced about 4 “oki” (about 6 liters) of milk a day. During late fall Vlach (Karakachan) merchants came to the village

and sold feta and cottage cheese which supplied the village through the whole winter and spring.

Most of the supply of meat for the winter came from the family pig which was slaughtered before Christmas and its meat and fat preserved in various ways to last to the end of the next spring. One pig yielded about 80 to 90 kilograms. A lamb or sheep was also slaughtered during holidays and special occasions. Those who had money were able to purchase their meat from the butchers. On rare occasions, usually at weddings, an ox was slaughtered and eaten. Chickens too were eaten on special occasions. Eggs were a regular in the diet as each family raised a dozen or so chickens.

The people of Zhelevo were very religious and followed all the rituals required of them by their religion. They fasted and abstained from eating meat and fatty products before Easter, Christmas and other important holidays as well as every Wednesday and Friday.

The population was generally poor because it had limited earning power. With the little money they earned families needed to purchase kerosene, oil, salt and sugar; they had no money to purchase anything more. Kerosene was an essential commodity necessary to illuminate the home during the dark. During the long nights children spent their time listening to the stories that their grandparents told them, mostly about beautiful things. Sometimes they told them stories about things that went bump in the night including stories about vampires, dragons, nymphs, ghosts, living saints, and about many other things. After such a story the children were afraid to go outside in the dark.

### **Clothes the villagers wore**

In those days men and boys wore inner clothing made of linen such as shirts and shorts and on top of those they wore knitted woolen sweaters and black woven vests. On the bottom they wore knee high, knitted woolen socks that were covered by white woven pants held by a wide sash. They had no shoes so they wore pig-skin slippers. Those who had shoes, even the kind made of rubber, wore them during special occasions, name days, weddings and holidays. The women and girls wore similar clothing but their clothes were

embroidered and more colourful. The women also wore a very colourful apron. Only those who had relatives abroad and who had money wore modern clothes.

### **Risto Mihail Shkavrev, Mavrovski (1928-2004)**

Risto Mihail Shkavrev, Mavrovski was born in 1928, in the village Zhelevo, Lerin Region, Greek occupied Macedonia. Risto's mother was Neda and his father was Mihail Boikov. Officially Risto was registered as being born in 1929 but, in reality, he was born towards the end of 1928. Risto was Mihail and Neda's third son but soon after his birth his oldest brother Krsto died. Risto comes from a poor rural working family; his father was a bricklayer by profession and provided for his family with hammer and trowel in hand, his mother had a small farm in the village to look after. But in addition to looking after the farm and her own family, Neda also had a blind mother and a nephew to look after. The political and economic situation at the time was poor but thanks to Risto's working parents, the family managed to stay afloat. Risto started attending Greek school in the village school in 1934 and after finishing grade six went to work as a cow herder and helped out on the farm. Risto's sister Sofia was born in 1932, the same year Risto took on responsibility for looking after the family cow, calf and donkey. That's when Risto's hard life began – looking after the cattle in the summer and going to school in the fall, winter and spring. Risto, only five years old at the time, looked after the cattle with much older boys. Included among them were: Giorgi Stanishev, Anastas Risto Nikolov, Tanas (Risto's aunt Mara Trendova's son) and Kole (File Kovachot's son). Risto was later joined by boys his age like Stavro (Giorgi Nikolov's son) Vangel and Pando (Risto's aunt's boys), Spiro (Pando Trendov's son), Tanas (Iane Boinov's son), Vangel (Kole Shoferot's son), Giorgi (Ristana Lazarova's son), Stoian (Vasil Stanishev's son) and others. The children that were mentioned above were called "bashkari" (working alone) because they grazed their cattle on their own. The village had a common village herdsman who grazed the village cattle. The village also had a separate common herdsman in Seltse.

Risto's grandmother Stoina ("baba Ioteitsa") died in 1937, the same year his youngest brother Nikola was born. After his grandmother's

death, Risto's family continued to live in the same house. His father worked as a mason in the surrounding villages, mainly in the village Bouf where his older brother Spiro had joined him as a mason's apprentice. In 1939 Vasil got married and soon afterwards a new wing was added to the house to accommodate Vasil and his wife. All this took place before October 28, 1940, the start of World War II.

Risto Mavrovski's schooling was in the village and the following is a list of his classmates and peers with whom he attended school:

1. Elena Ianu
2. Alexandra Balku
3. Petrina Ginu
4. Nikola Nanu
5. Andoni Antoniou
6. Tomaki Lazarov
7. Zora Tsaku
8. Arhonda Batsku
9. Sofia Kiru
10. Giorgi Lazaru
11. Stoian Stanishev
12. Sevda Stanishev
13. Trendafila Gaduchis
14. Trendafila Bundoa
15. Sotir Theodoru
16. Atanas Voinu
17. Stavros Nikolaou
18. Vasili Puchunga
19. Nikola Puchunga
20. Sevda Marku
21. Arta Mirchea
22. Foti Kufela
23. Arhonda Trkalaa
24. Klanthi Popiliu
25. Fani Peiu
26. Eleni Stepani
27. Foti Stepani
28. Sevda Iankula
29. Ianula Giamu

30. Kire Marku
31. Aleko Mitani
32. Stavro Marku
33. Stavro Gaduchi
34. Traiko Pirpiko
35. Aleko Stergiu
36. Vangeli Mirchu
37. Risto Shkavrev Mavrovski

### **Children's games played in Zhelevo**

In those days there was no electricity in the village and very little light in late evening, especially during late fall, winter and early spring, so most games were played at school. During recess the boys played games such as: klendzha, pupa, trchanie (running), Skokanie (jumping), shooting with a wooden toy rifle, various athletic exercises and soccer with a ball made of rags. The girls stayed together in groups and sang songs, played girl's games, taught each other how to knit, how to wash clothing and how to cook so that they could assist their mothers at home. The village had a playground where the older children gathered, formed teams and played soccer. The playground was also used for tournaments against children's teams from other villages. During the occupation the children's teams played against the German soldiers. In early fall, during harvest time, children got together at the more affluent homes of those who had harvested corn and assisted in removing the corn kernels from the cob, a job that was done by hand. The hostess in the meantime made dinner for everyone, which included cooked corn. The winters in Zhelevo were beautiful. There was plenty of snow and many slopes on which to toboggan and ski. The children used homemade sleds, skis and toboggans made of simple boards to slide down the local slopes, especially in the Raicheitsa and Kasiritsa localities. The children also made their own snowshoes from dried beech tree branches and ran after each other on top of the snow, having snowball fights and throwing snowballs at the girls. In the spring and summer most children were sent out to work in the mountains, looking after the cattle. During the spring, usually on Sundays, the boys and girls took their horses and donkeys to graze in the forest while they gathered dry firewood and bouquets of flowers. They sang songs while returning to the village. Once in a

while the school organized field trips to the Raicheitsa locality where the children participated in planting evergreen trees. The village also had one of its roads paved spanning from the main highway over Broda to the beautiful Sveti Nikola Church. The paving was paid for with help from the villagers who worked in Canada and by volunteer labour donated by the people of Zhelevo. This was the first paved road in the entire area, an envy of every village. The promenade was in Broda which had several taps of running water, a few café's where the older men played cards and the younger men met their first love. But it was obligatory that everyone go to church on Sundays and all other holidays. The children who did not go to church were fined by the local police and later faced consequences in school. Such was the life of a child in Zhelevo.

### **Teachers who taught in the Zhelevo School**

Dimitrios Kiru (Taki Daskalot) Director of the Zhelevo School  
Georgis Hadzhiavgustidu, Greek (Asia Minor colonist)  
Sofia Kopanidu, Greek  
Fanitsa (surname unknown), Greek  
Sofia Despinis Chula

The first three teachers named above taught grades three to six. Fanitsa and Chula taught from preschool to second grade. The new school was large and beautiful. A school day was typically six hours long, three hours before noon and three after, with one hour for lunch. Children attended six days a week, excluding Sunday. Saturday was a half day that lasted until lunch time. Everything that was taught in school was in the Greek language, a difficult language to learn and everything was about Greece, alien to the Macedonian children who were not recognized as Macedonians and were not allowed to express themselves in Macedonian, punishable by lashes, scolding and humiliation. Children were taught the following subjects: Greek Language, Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography, Ancient Greek History, Religion, Topography, Nature, Modern Greek History, Housekeeping and Gymnastics.

There were no textbooks available in those days so each student had to write down everything that the teacher taught in a notebook and



study it later at home. Using the strap and disciplining children was one of the most important educational measures the teachers were required to undertake. If a child did not know the subject material they were beaten. If a child made a mistake in the subject matter, they were beaten. If a child spoke out of turn or misbehaved in any way, they were beaten. If a child was restless they were sent to the basement and locked up like in prison. This is how it was during the Metaxas dictatorship era from 1936 to 1940. The Greek regime, at that time, had also sent a government representative responsible for keeping order in the Lerin Region villages. His name was Tsaksiras and he would not allow anyone to get away with anything. Anyone caught speaking Macedonian, by accident or because they did not know the Greek language, was beaten and fined a hefty monetary fine. There were informers everywhere and no one was immune to punishment, not even young children. It was a very difficult time for everyone. The adults who were members of the Party were sent to prison and endured all sorts of punishment including beating, eating large amount of salted cod and drinking large quantities of castor oil. Every filthy method of punishment invented was used against the Macedonian people in those days. This is what the Metaxas's dictatorship and King George's reign brought to the people of Zhelevo.

### **Assets in the village Zhelevo**

Risto Mavrovski's family had one old house, most of which had deteriorated, and a new one that they later built, which two large rooms.

In terms of fields, the Mavrovski family had a field in Glavieto locality with a large oak tree growing at the edge which produced acorns to feed goats and sheep. They had fields in Gorni Kupert, Dolni Kupert, Olnishta and in Mankoa Livada localities. All these were small pieces of land which the family owned.

In terms of meadows, the family owned two meadows in Golema Livada locality, one meadow in the Klapata locality, one in Boreichki Trap along with a small field.

In terms of vineyards, the family owned two vineyards in the Grobo locality, one small and one larger. These belonged to the extended family that included Vasil and other Mavrevtsi family members.

In terms of gardens, the family owned a garden at the Sitkite locality, one at Paskoa kukia and another at Lazina locality where there was a grove of beech and oak trees used for firewood.

In terms of graves, the family plots were located at the Sveti Atanas cemetery together with all the other Shkavrevi graves. There was a cement cross erected with the names of the departed written on it in white paint. Neda, Spiro and later Mihail were added.

### **Human resources**

In comparative size, Zhelevo was a large village and had people working in various professions including teachers, priests, doctors, lawyers, military officers, etc.

Included among the teachers were Simo Tsarev, Risto Sideri, Taki Kiru (director of the Zhelevo school), Tanas Sideri (taught in Voden) and Tanas Nikolovski. There were also four Greeks who taught in Zhelevo until 1940.

Included among the priests were Pop Andon and Pop Ilia. After the two priests died Pop Spiro Balkov, a local priest, was appointed until 1949 when he left for Poland and died there in the town Mendzhe Guzhe.

Included among the doctors were Dr. Traiko Mirchev who worked in Lerin, Dr. Done Mircho who participated in the first struggle movement, but later lived and worked in Solun.

Included among the lawyers were Pavle Perelov Ianu, Pando Popilia, who worked in the village German, and Pando Stergiou.

Included among the officers were Ilia Marchu Miloshov and Tanas Balku. These were regular officers but there were also reserve officers.

Zhelevo had a local police station which was constantly manned by a police chief (a Greek) and a number of police officers. There was no army in Zhelevo. The army was stationed in Psodery, a neighbouring Vlach village.

In addition to the police there were also two village guards responsible for guarding property, including from mischief conducted by neighbouring villagers. Their primary responsibility was to guard the vineyards, fields, meadows, woods, grazing grounds, etc., particularly from the large flocks of sheep belonging to the Psoderi Karakachans. The guards had their hands full during the summer.

The village had mail service and telephone and telegraph services which were operated by Spiro and Anastas Simovski. The village also had a number of musicians including Vasil Pachko, Iovan Marko, Ilo and Vasil Kiru and Foto Temo who also played in other villages. Operating in Zhelevo were Ilo Timio's orchestra from the village Trnaa and one other orchestra from the village Oshchima.

The village had a football club called "Andartikon", using the village's Greek name, with exclusively Zhelevo membership.

### **Life in the village from 1928 to 1940**

At that time the village was managed under a feudal system. It lacked the necessary requirements for normal life. People worked from dawn to dusk for a slice of bread. There was no electricity, no proper lighting. Families used kerosene when it was available and affordable and candles and animal fat the rest of the time, including during long and dark winter nights. The soil people lived off was cultivated with wooden plows pulled by a pair of oxen. Everything was done by hand using shovels, hoes, picks, pitchforks, rakes, scythes, handsaws, axes, hammers and sledge hammers; all primitive tools. Threshing and removal of grains from the stems was done manually by use of oxen, horses, mules and donkeys on the threshing floor. There were no automated machines, no tractors, no combines or any other mechanized farm tools. This created a hard life for the village's growing population, which was forced to seek work elsewhere. Many young men, including family men, were

forced to leave the village and seek temporary work in Bulgaria, Serbia, Canada, America, Australia and France.

In Vardar Macedonia (Serbian occupied Macedonia), or Serbia as the people of Zhelevo called it for fear of being heard saying the word “Macedonia” which was a punishable offense at that time, people went to Bitola and to the village Porodin to seek work. Included among those who traveled to Bitola and Porodin were Stoian Markovski, the Simovski brothers, the Lumburovtsi, Bundovtsi, Temovtsi, Kurdzhoi and Sandrini. Included among the people of Zhelevo who went to Bulgaria were the Sarevtsi and Ianovtsi. Migration to Canada began as early as 1902 but a mass exodus took place from 1930 to 1940. An even more massive exodus took place after 1949, at the end of the Greek Civil War. Gradually most of the people of Zhelevo settled in Toronto, Canada where they are today.

Why were the people of Zhelevo forced to leave their village? After the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, when Macedonia was invaded, occupied and divided between the winners of those wars, i.e. between Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, Zhelevo fell under Greek occupation. Soon after the occupation, the Greek government began a policy of assimilation by intimidation and force. The Macedonian language was prohibited and no one was allowed to speak it, including those who spoke no other language. There was no transition period and heavy fines and punishment, including prison terms, were leveled against those caught speaking Macedonian. Nothing like that had ever happened to the Macedonian people before that so it was a shock to the entire population. Later, after the First World War and the Greek-Turkish war ended, i.e. after Greece was dealt a catastrophic defeat, the Greek government agreed to a population exchange with Turkey and began to import Turkish Christian colonists and settlers from Asia Minor and deposited them on Macedonian lands. The newly formed socialist USSR inspired some Greeks to begin a socialist movement inside Greece with the formation of the Communist Party of Greece (CPG) in 1926. Fearing this new development, to protect themselves, some leading Greeks created the Pangalos military dictatorship which gave birth to the dreaded Metaxas dictatorship in 1936 to 1940. This was the worst thing that could ever happen to the Macedonian people, which

resulted in drastic measures taken against them. In addition to having their language made illegal to speak, the Macedonian people endured fines, beatings, jailings and prison terms in the Greek island internment camps, as well as many other senseless penalties. The Macedonian people found it safer to remain silent and not to speak in public at all than to risk becoming victims. In addition to being taught to speak Greek and to despise their own language, the Macedonian children were encouraged to attend “party” schools where they were taught to spy and inform on their parents and friends. All organizations were declared illegal and all confirmed communists who belonged to the Communist Party, as well as all suspected of being communists or communist sympathizers were sent to the island internment camps and mercilessly tortured.

### **Zhelevo during the War years 1939 to 1945**

World War II began in September 1939, with Germany attacking Poland. After that England and France stood on Poland’s side and the world became polarized and divided itself into two camps. On one side stood the Axis forces consisting of Berlin-Rome-Tokyo, i.e. Germany, Italy, Japan, later joined by Bulgaria, Spain, Hungary and some others, and on the other side stood the Allied forces consisting of the United States of America, England, France and later the USSR. The War started on September 1, 1939 and ended on May 9, 1945, with the crushing defeat of the Axis powers and their capitulation. The war in Greece began on October 28, 1940 when fascist Italy attempted to invade Greece through Albania. Although Metaxas’s fascist regime was in power in Greece, the Greek state had close ties with England and France and refused to surrender to the Italians. Thus the war with Italy began on Monday October 28, 1940, along the Greek – Albanian border.

After the war started, the Greek army began to use Zhelevo as a place to gather the enlisted. All adult and able men were collected and involved in the front. The elderly, women and children all had to work in support of the front. Zhelevo was also a depot for bringing the wounded and served as the Headquarters for the 303 Regiment which fought bravely in Albania. The first Italian bombers arrived three days after the attempted invasion and bombed the village. This was done a few more times later. The first bombing

caused a few casualties, killing a number of soldiers and wounding Kala Gligorova of Zhelevo, who sadly lost her hand. The villagers found life difficult in Zhelevo and many fled and temporarily settled in other villages. Neda and her children fled to Bouf where she spent several weeks. After the Greek army captured the city Korcha and Korcha airport, the front was moved deeper into Albanian territory. This made Zhelevo a little safer and most of its people returned to their homes. Still, the people continued to have problems each day unable to sleep and having to feed the armies that marched on the road by the village on their way from Lerin to the front.

While Neda and the children were evacuated to Bouf and stayed with the Beikov family, Mihail, Risto's father, remained at home in Zhelevo and protected the property. About a month later most Zhelevo residents, including Neda and her children, returned to Zhelevo. After his return, Risto was hired by the Trendov family to work in their café. Risto's wages, for working day and night, were three meals a day. Risto did this until April 1941 when the Germans came to the village and the café closed.

The Greek – Italian war lasted until April 1941 when Germany invaded Yugoslavia, swept through Bulgaria and crossed the border into Greece. Zhelevo fell in German hands just before Easter 1941. The Macedonian soldiers fighting at the Albanian front were left to fend for themselves after Greece capitulated. They experienced a very difficult time. Included among the people of Zhelevo who became casualties while fleeing the Greek - Italian front were Andoni Luchkov, Risto Giamo (died in Albania) and Foti Timcho (died at the Bulgarian border). Besides those who died there were also many who were wounded and left permanently maimed.

Before and during the war, the Zhelevo Board was managed by a number of prominent Zhelevo residents. Included among them were the Mayor, a Secretary and a number of advisors including a teacher and a priest. Board members were always selected from the more respected families in the village, recognized for their ability to supposedly work for the benefit of the village along the line of Greek government interests. After Greece capitulated, the Italians came to the village and Zhelevo was placed under the Italian sphere of influence which remained active from 1941 to July 9, 1943, when

Fascist Italy capitulated. There were many problems experienced during those years, including a famine in 1941, but fortunately no one died of starvation, but the people had to work very hard and endure much hardship in order to survive. The Italian soldiers in Zhelevo were supplied with their food by the village which included meat, potatoes, beans, eggs, chicken and cheese. Whatever they needed they helped themselves to it without compensation. The worst thing the Italians did was take all the village cattle, sheep and goats. Another bad thing they did was arming a number of people with guns and placing them to guard the village in favour of the Italians but under Kalchev's pro-Bulgarian flag.

The German army passed by Zhelevo in the spring of 1941, on its way to Greece to put down a small English and Greek army still active in Greece. At about the same time there was much war material including guns, ammunition and medical supplies floating around in the village, which was secretly collected by certain people and turned in to members of the Party organization. Included in the group of people who belonged to the Party organization was Spiro Mavrovski, Risto's older brother. Spiro and his comrades were responsible for collecting all this material and securing it in secret places outside of the village. Everything that was done was managed by Pando Trendovski, Spiro Simovski, Ilia Markov, Tode Kirovski and some others. A little later the Italians came to the village and one of their units, called the Carabinieri, settled there. Its arrival, along with that of the Germans and Bulgarians, complicated matters and made life difficult for the villagers. As occupiers of the region the Germans, Italians and Bulgarians became the new masters and began to take all the wealth for themselves. By the fall and winter of 1941 there was nothing left for the people of Zhelevo as poverty set in. The region was poverty stricken and people everywhere began to die of hunger, especially in the larger cities. People began to fight over bread. Those starving were attacking those who had food. The Party had to step in and put an end to the fighting and help those who were starving. The program was successful and managed to save many people until the next harvest. The slogan that year was: "help feed the people to survive".

On September 27, 1941 EAM, the first Greek national liberation organization, was formed which came up with the slogan: "all

honest, decent and progressive people step forward, pick up guns and fight against our common enemy the fascist occupiers.” On June 22, 1941 Germany was attacked by the USSR and the war began to expand. The village Zhelevo was also involved in organizing in EAM but under very difficult conditions being constantly watched by the Italians.

Terror and intimidation continued to increase and by the beginning of 1942 Bulgarian propaganda began to filter into the village with the slogan “we are all Bulgarians”. To turn Macedonians into Bulgarians the village Armenovo was given corn. Then, in the spring of 1943, the Bulgarians sent armed bands from Kostur Region to Zhelevo, threatening the village with violence because they claimed it was a “Grekman” village (affiliated with the Greeks). They were threatening to plunder it and burn it down. That, fortunately, did not happen because a large number of the people from Zhelevo were armed and prepared to defend it. The Organization again stepped in and took control of the situation. This gave the Organization a chance and a reason to arm itself and to be one of the first villages to send its people to the mountains. The armed villagers from Kostur Region, led by Kalchev, a German spy, were prepared to fight against their fellow villagers in Zhelevo in the interest of Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. During this period of time, 1941 and 1942, Risto remained home with his father but was unhappy unless he was out there helping his older brother Spiro.

The Germans at that time did not have the same flare as those who had first come to the village. After experiencing their first defeat to Russia they seemed to be panicky and withdrawn. The battle at Stalingrad was a moral blow to them. They lost many of their elite fighters belonging to Field Marshal Powers. At the same time they were losing in Africa to the Anglo-American forces. The same was happening in the Balkans where the Italians and Bulgarians were suffering large losses to the growing partisan movement in Yugoslavia.

In 1942, Risto began to accompany his father and help him with his work. He needed to do this in order to keep the family afloat and from starving. During the winter of 1942 the Italians drafted the entire village and deployed the people to remove snow from the road



leading to Lerin. All able bodies in the Mavrovski family were involved in this. It was quite cold during that winter and a lot of snow had fallen. The region was also hit by typhoid. Risto's cousin Vasil (Tasa's son) died from it and Risto became very ill. He lay in bed, looking like a skeleton, for two months being unable to eat solid food for forty days. Mihail, Risto's father, asked a medic from the Italian core to see him and give him advice on how to treat him. A liquid diet of boiled cow's milk and boiled mountain tea was prescribed for forty days. After that Risto began to slowly get up and eat small amounts of solid food, consisting mainly of soup and boiled potatoes. It took Risto a long time to recover. He had lost all his hair but as he began to recover his hair started to grow back. As far as Risto knew, he had suffered no permanent damage from the typhoid. After his recovery, Risto joined the Youth Organization which was formed in February 1943 under the leadership of EAM and ELAS, which in turn were established by the CPG, by the Agrarian Party and by other progressive parties.

The first partisans from Zhelevo appeared at Mount Vicho in the spring of 1943 and with that safety measures and control in the village further strengthened. At the time of the dissolution of the Greek army and the arrival of German troops in the village, CPG members and supporters worked hard collecting arms, ammunition, clothes, medical supplies and other military materials. Everything that was acquired was hidden in secure places and with the appearance of the partisans it began to be used. The Italians capitulated on July 9, 1943 and the Germans took their place in the village until the war ended.

Several fighters from Zhelevo, in 1944, started to leave the village, crossed over the border into the Republic of Macedonia and remained in the ranks of Gotse's battalion (later a brigade) until the spring of 1945, at which time they returned home. Later in 1945, when the Greeks returned to the village, those fighters again fled to the Republic of Macedonia.

Soon after EAM was established, ELAS (National Liberation Army of Greece) was formed and the village organizations began to increase in members and activists. The Zhelevo organization worked hard to prepare the first village detachment, but poor weather

conditions did not allow it until March 1943. Included among the first group of fighters to come out of Zhelevo and join the struggle were Pando Markov, Nikola Fundako, Giorgi Gusho, Giorgi Bogdano and Spiro Mircho. More groups followed in the summer of 1943. These were all illegal groups and worked on various operational and courier activities. Spiro Mavrovski, Risto's older brother, was involved with these groups, which in May of 1943 were joined by Risto Mavrovski, Stoian Stanishev, Risto Trkalov, Vangel Bogdanov, Iani Iankula, Lambro Rumiako, Micho Gaducho, Naso (Dilo's son) and others who Risto does not remember. They were all divided into groups who did not know each other, for precaution if they were caught by the enemy. They experienced hard times under the Italian occupation.

By the end of 1943 the movement had gained a lot of momentum and was determined to form battalions. Zhelevo had already formed a unit under the command of "Daskalot" (the teacher) and so did Oshchima under the leadership of Mito Tupurka - Titan. Initially these units acted on their own and later joined the battalion under the command of Ilia Dimovski – Gotse (1909-1961), from the village Statitsa. Gotse, at the time, lived in Lerin and was one of the first people from Lerin Region to join the partisans. The units in Greek occupied Macedonia, at that time, were also joined by a unit from the Bitola – Prespa Regions, which had been driven out from the Republic of Macedonia by the Bulgarian occupier. This unit acted on Mount Vicho, Prespa and other surrounding places and was commanded by Kole Kaninski from the village Kanino, Bitola Region, who, along with Gotse, performed synchronized actions, but not for long. They had to separate because the Greek organizations EAM and ELAS were against a common struggle and would not allow it.

The Italians also acted. First they gathered a lot of cattle and sheep from the village and took them to Kostur. Then they twice took a group of people to the Kostur prison. The first group remained in prison for a short time. After the first group was released, a second group was immediately taken. The following people from the second group were executed: Bothers Pando and Pavle Popovski. Ilio Mircho, Ilio Sandrin, Vasil Giamov and Pando Steriu Lasko. Only Priest Spiro survived from this group and only because he was

a priest (reverend). By doing this and by executing people from other villages, the enemy showed its weakness; that it was indeed threatened by the people's armed movements.

The summer of 1943 became even more difficult for the enemy when Russia inflicted heavy casualties on the Germans and the Anglo-Americans on the Italians, resulting in Fascist Italy's capitulation on September 9, 1943. Italy capitulated after the Americans landed in Sicily. When Italy capitulated, the Italian soldiers stationed in Zhelevo abandoned their positions and left much of their military material behind. The Zhelevo organization took advantage of the situation and collected weapons, ammunition, clothes, sanitary materials and anything else that could be salvaged. This material was then taken to the mountains and given to the partisans. After Italy's capitulation, a large part of the Prespa territory became free. Unfortunately Zhelevo was retaken by the Germans who stayed there until the end of 1944.

The war continued against the Germans and Bulgarians with more and more fighters and activists joining the movement. Soon afterwards women began to join the struggle and the partisan units. The first woman from Zhelevo to join the partisans was the brave and beautiful Sofia Temu Sotirova. The struggle was also joined by former Greek officers, lawyers, teachers, etc., under great agitation from the organization. While the Germans were still there the organization grew, inducting young, brave and capable people who were more than willing to help the partisans with food, ammunition, information about enemy numbers and movements, etc. At that time there were also quisling groups who fought on the side of the enemy, like Zerva who fought for the king, Kalchev, the Albanian Balists, etc., and as such illegal activities were difficult to perform.

A lot of snow fell during the winter of 1943 – 1944, making movement and travel very difficult. At that time the Germans had taken black people as prisoners and had brought some to Zhelevo. The prisoners along with a number of people, young and old, from the village were taken to Bigla to provide free slow removal. Risto was among that group of people. For several weeks the road had to be cleaned regularly to keep traffic moving so that the German army could transport ammunition and other supplies to Kostur and

Albania. In the spring of 1944, the Germans, Bulgarians and the Albanian Balists began an offensive against the partisans. The offensive luckily lasted only several days. A Russian captive named Vasil had escaped the Germans and found himself in Zhelevo. After connecting with the partisan units he disappeared. The offensive was launched from Lerin and went along Trsie, Statitsa and Psoderi before reaching Zhelevo. The offensive units consisted mainly of Bulgarian soldiers but had Albanian Balisti and German soldiers as well. It was the first and only time that Bulgarian soldiers entered Zhelevo. The occupation lasted only two days but in those two days the Bulgarians helped themselves to everything the village had to offer without paying. They ate, sang and danced and then left for Prespa. The Germans recaptured Vasil the Russian in the village Besfina and seized Stavro, Nedelko's son, and a few others from Zhelevo.

Stavro and the others were sent to Germany while the Russian was executed in Lerin during a short stopover. When the Bulgarians arrived in the village German, Prespa Region, they found a few people from Lerin who they then took to the village Dupeni, forced them to dig a hole in the ground, killed them with pickaxes and buried them in a common grave, the same hole they had dug. It was one of the most savage murders ever witnessed in the area. The offensive ended with only Spiro Mircho, from the village Zhelevo, being killed. In the whole of the country the situation was different. There were great losses on both sides in some areas. After the offensive was over, the Germans brought Armenian soldiers to Zhelevo. They were captured on the eastern front. Soldiers from the same unit were also held at Mount Bigla and sought to escape and join the partisans. With help from the organizations, the Armenians were freed and joined the partisans. Spiro Mavrovski, Risto's brother, was instrumental in connecting the Armenians with the Partisans and making their escape possible. Spiro, who at the time was working with the village courier service, took the Armenians and surrendered them to Gotse's Battalion. At the same time the organization disarmed many of the villagers who had joined Kalchev's units. A small number of these armed people voluntarily joined Mito Tupurka Titan's unit.

After these developments in Zhelevo, the Germans brought soldiers to the village from a special SS division, who remained there until October 1944. These soldiers were housed at Fote Sotirov Temo's café located at the Lerin-Kostur-Prespa-Albania main road. The German officers were housed in Tanas Ianu Shoferot's (the driver) house in Broda locality in a good strategic position. The German local command was housed in the Nanovtzi house. The soldiers were located outside of the village, which created better conditions for freedom of movement, especially for the organization. In the summer of 1944 some of the German SS soldiers stopped Neda, Risto's mother, at the entrance of the village when she was coming home with Risto and their donkey loaded with hay. Risto believes some villagers had gone to the Germans and accused his mother of supplying the partisans with food. As a result, she was tossed into a large pool of water and they sent a dog, a German shepherd, after her. But despite Risto's crying and pleading with them to pull her out, they kept pushing her back and left her in the pool until she was unconscious. She was then pulled out and thrown on the grass where she remained unconscious for a long period of time. The soldiers who did this laughed it off like it was some sort of joke. Desperate, Risto ran into Tanas's house where the non SS Germans were stationed and got a medic to examine her. In spite his attempts to revive her, she still remained unconscious. The soldiers then took her home. Ever since then Neda was never the same. She remained in bed until the end of her life in April 1948. Two or three days later the same German soldiers did the same to Mitoitsa Ianovska, but she was a younger and stronger woman and was able to overcome her ordeal.

In July 1944 Risto was sent to the village Bouf to deliver a letter. Bouf was far from Zhelevo but, because his Father Mihail worked there, Risto knew the way and knew many of the Bouf residents. Risto left early in the morning on foot and got to Bouf before nightfall. After spending the night at the Iankula – Gagachev house, the next day Risto was on his way back to Zhelevo. The people in Bouf gave him some apples to take with him to eat on the road and sent him off. Unfortunately there was a German guard unit stationed at the locality Mala Bigla. Risto was allowed to travel because he had an "ausvais" (identification card) from the village but when he went towards the guard house, instead of being greeted by a guard

he was greeted with a machine gun pointing at him. The German guard gestured for him to raise his arms and lie face down in front of the gun barrel. Risto cannot remember how long he lay there but it seemed like it was for a long time. What Risto remembers is that while laying there, a number of motorized mechanized units followed by a column of trucks passed by him. They were coming from Lerin and headed to Albania. They were loaded with weapons. After that, the German guard went over to Risto and asked him where he was going. When he saw Risto's ID card he stopped one of the trucks which then took him to the village. When the truck pulled out Risto saw three poles with a couple of male bodies hanging from each pole. They were prisoners from Lerin. The German driver told Risto that "bandits" (partisans) had placed a landmine on the road which exploded and wounded a German officer. The Germans hung these people in revenge. The same driver who brought Risto to Zhelevo, says Risto, opened the truck door when they arrived and gave Risto a swift kick on the butt to remind him to stay home and not to travel in dangerous areas. But as soon as Risto came home, he went to the organization and reported what he had found out.

Soviet troops entered Bulgaria on September 9, 1944, causing it to capitulate. After that only Germany was left fighting in the war. The partisans had cut off the Kostur to Lerin road and the Germans were forced to march to the village Rulia to get their food and other supplies. When the partisans were notified of this they gave the Germans a good reception. Three German soldiers and their guard dog were killed during an ambush. The rest picked up their dead and returned to Zhelevo. After that the German units did not venture out of the village until the war was over.

At the same time the EAM and ELAS leadership made catastrophic mistakes, whose consequences were made obvious after the war ended. They made the mistake of placing the ELAS units under English command and agreeing to cooperate with the exiled Greek government in Egypt, which tried to disband the Macedonian units by sending them south into Greece because they were afraid of losing Greek occupied Macedonia. And thus from September 18 to 20, 1944, the leadership of ELAS ran into a number of disagreements which split ELAS in two. A large ELAS unit, consisting almost exclusively of Macedonians under Ilia Dimovski –

Gotse's command, fled Greek occupied Macedonia and crossed over into the Republic of Macedonia where it participated in the final battles for the liberation of the Republic of Macedonia. At that point in time it was unknown to the Macedonian fighters that the Greeks would declare them traitors and autonomists and that there would be consequences for leaving.

In October 1944, the German forces began to withdraw from Greece and Albania. The German soldiers headed for Lerin and Yugoslavia passed by Zhelevo's main road. Their aim was to avoid contact with the Soviet and Yugoslav forces but ultimately these same German units remained and fought in Yugoslavia until May 15, 1945 and well after Germany capitulated. After leaving Greece, the Germans concentrated their campaigns in Yugoslavia, mainly in Kosovo, Bosnia and Srem. Yugoslavia's Tito asked Russia's Stalin for help. The Red Army, with one corps from Bulgaria and one from Romania, entered Yugoslavia and participated in the Liberation of Belgrade. The fighting continued in Srem, Novi Sad, Subotitsa, Hungary, Austria, etc. The German army continued to fight and refused to surrender until it was destroyed.

During the last days of the war, a small ELAS unit sought help from the Zhelevo organization and acquired weapons to set an ambush at the border between Zhelevo and Psoderi. The unit cut the telephone wires and waited for the Germans to come and repair them. The Germans arrived on motorcycles from Zhelevo and a battle ensued. Two Germans were killed and one wounded. The partisans then wasted no time in robbing the dead Germans of their weapons and other possessions, neglecting the German who was wounded and who escaped to reach the village to inform command of what had happened. He told command that he and the others had been attacked by unshaven bandits who wore a certain type of coat, not representative of the village Zhelevo. This alone saved the village from severe repercussions, mass beatings, murders and burning of properties. The Zhelevo mayor, who spoke a bit of German, also helped by offering them free food, meat and whatever else they wanted. And as such no revenge was taken on the village. Soon afterwards the Germans left the village, leaving behind all kinds of weapons, ammunition and other equipment. They also left a cannon behind, which they threw into the river.

After the Germans left, the people of Zhelevo gathered together and celebrated through the streets by singing and dancing; happy to be finally free of the most current occupiers. One group of people built a wooden coffin and marched it through the village in Broda locality to mark the German departure. On October 18, 1944 the village put on a dance and invited everyone to join in and have a great time. A short time later Lerin was liberated by ELAS and a people's militia was established to serve as a police force. This was also done in Zhelevo. A few days later one of Koroveshi's units entered Zhelevo. This was an exclusively Macedonian unit. It remained in Zhelevo for only one day, during which time many fiery speeches were made encouraging the young people of Zhelevo to join it. After leaving Zhelevo the unit went to the village Breznitsa. Some time later the unit was attacked by ELAS killing Pero, one of its fighters. To avoid further conflict, the unit left and crossed over the border into the Republic of Macedonia. ELAS units remained in Zhelevo until April 1945. After that an English unit came to Zhelevo. This was the first time English soldiers had come to the village. They remained there until April 1946, when Papandreou's Monarcho-Fascist army was established in Greece. At about the same time ELAS was attacking Gotse's Macedonian battalion. This happened at the Lerin Pole flatlands. And as such, to avoid further conflict, Gotse's battalion also crossed over into the Republic of Macedonia where it participated in putting down remnants of German, Albanian Balist and other armed groups.

After the Germans left, Risto Mavrovski remained in the village and took on a job as a shepherd looking after Giorgi Trendov's sheep. Risto's safety at the time was guaranteed by Pando Trendov, a member of the Party. Unfortunately, one day while grazing the sheep at Broda locality with Fote Stepanov, the same place the Germans were stationed, Risto came upon a landmine that was uncovered by the sheep. Being young and curious about these things, and also unaware of the complete danger, the boys poked at the mine with a stick until it exploded. Fortunately the mine was buried deep in soil and they were far enough away to avoid its full effects. They only suffered minor cuts from the pebbles and soil that sprayed them. They were lucky they learned their lesson without lasting consequences, except for the fear and panic they acquired



which remained with them for a long time. The fear remained but with help from Kuzo Gligorov, his mother Neda and his aunts, Risto was able to quickly recover from the shock and go back to work. Risto remained on the job until Giurgiovden (St. George holiday) 1945.

### **The Greek Civil War, 1945 to 1949**

On December 3, 1944, Great Britain began its military intervention against ELAS in Athens, which lasted a long time and caused many casualties with great human losses. After that Greece became a British protectorate under occupation. This did not go unnoticed in Greek occupied Macedonia where people put their support behind ELAS with rallies and marches. Unfortunately a split inside EAM and ELAS began to appear regarding the formation of armed groups belonging to EDES which were in support of the king and the British. At the same time Macedonian organizations such as NOF, AFZH and NOMS began to appear, agitating and campaigning for the rights of the Macedonian people.

After the Greek government in exile, headed by Georgios Papandreou, returned to Greece from Egypt, assisted by the British, managed to persuade EAM and ELAS to disarm their fighters, hand over their weapons and participate in the formation of a government after parliamentary elections took place that would be conducted freely throughout Greece. This was part of the Varkiza Agreement as a condition for disarming. Some units however did not disarm. These were the units belonging to Zervas, Zvolo, Chirimoko and others, which fully joined the British and Greek government in the persecution of the free people initiating a new and even more severe terror against anyone who fought against the Germans, Italians, Bulgarians, or any other fascists. From this moment on the partisan fighters found themselves in a worse situation than they were in the previous four years while they fought against the occupiers. And so, Greece now found itself under a new occupation. The EAM and ELAS leaders began to go underground in order to avoid falling in the hands of the enemy. This lasted up until May 9, 1945, after Germany's capitulation.

Germany capitulated after the battle for Berlin was won by the Soviets and the Allies. Poland was freed by Gomulka, Czechoslovakia by Svoboda, Hungary by Rakosi, Romania by George Dezh, Bulgaria by Dimitrov, Yugoslavia by Tito, Albania by Enver Hoxha, and so on. All these republics came under the Soviet zone of influence. Their freedom should be credited to the Soviet Union headed by Joseph Stalin Visarionovich. Only Greece failed to move forward to a great victory and again remained trapped and oppressed, in spite of the many sacrifices ELAS made for Greece's freedom from the Fascists. The socialists in Greece had the support of the majority of the people but due to the will of the Great Powers, Greece was placed under Western influence. Sadly, on top of that, there were a number of errors made by some members the Socialist leadership such as Shantos, Partsalidis, Ioannidou and others, who betrayed the revolution and failed to make Greece a People's Republic.

A lot of people from Zhelevo left for Canada and the United States during 1945, 1946 and during the spring of 1947. Many of the Greeks who had come to Greek occupied Macedonia began to leave during the spring as the partisans reappeared at the start of the Greek Civil War.

As was stated above, the ELAS and EAM leadership had signed various Agreements with the British which brought them under British control. After the British crushed the riots in Athens, they made plans to bring the Greek government in exile, headed by Georgios Papandreou, from Egypt back to Greece. But ever since Germany's capitulation there was a fierce struggle for power between the various parties in Greece and as such the new government decided to proclaim all those who fought on the side of the Germans as its own fighters.

And as such, from the moment the ELAS units surrendered their arms, they became victims of terror. Many were detained and sent to prison camps on the dry Greek islands without being guilty of anything. The same happened to people who had previously worked behind the scenes. Despite the fact that the Varkiza Agreement recognized all parties, including EAM and CPG, as having the freedom to freely act, there was a great and unexpected twist. Great

unprecedented terror was unleashed in the summer of 1945, especially in Greek occupied Macedonia where men were tortured and jailed, women raped, livestock stolen, etc... many other disgraceful things were done to the people. At about the same time the Macedonian veterans from World War II, those who had previously fled and fought on the territory of Yugoslavia, were returning home. All this, everything that was happening, was a sure sign that yet another war was looming on the horizon.

At about this time Risto, his father Mihail, his brother Spiro and a friend named Dane were renovating the old Mavrovski house in Zhelevo, as well as building a new one. Risto's job was to mix the mortar (red clay) and do every other odd job that did not require much skill. After the construction was completed, Risto joined the local youth organization which, at that time, was operating under very difficult conditions. There was a Greek military force as well as a Greek police force stationed in Zhelevo, which made movement very difficult. In November Mihail found Risto a job to look after Mito Trpchela's sheep. The Trpchela family had a barn far from Zhelevo, closer to Oshchima and Besfina. This job gave Risto mobility and a reason to travel and as such was able to help the partisans. Risto worked at this job until May 1946. By then the partisan movement on Mount Vicho was well-established with the formation of the first Macedonian detachments. The fact that Macedonian detachments were forming in Vicho caused much alarm among the Greeks who ordered their army to step up its terror tactics against the Macedonian population, particularly in the remote villages. Zhelevo was not immune to this terror. A policeman, a Vlach (Karakachan), beat a number of innocent Macedonian people in the middle of Zhelevo square, in front of the entire village, for absolutely no reason, other than to frighten the population. Included among the villagers beaten were Tode Kirov (a blind man), Giorgi Markov and Done Mandzhukov.

In the spring of 1946, Greece implemented the first parliamentary elections to elect a new parliament. Here again the EAM party made another mistake by boycotting the elections. With the slogan "do not vote", it discouraged progressive supporters from going to the polls. The excuse this time was that the people in the villages were in danger due to the violence and unrest in the population. After the

elections, in the absence of EAM, a government was formed and all those who did not vote for it became “dangerous” for the new government. The newly formed government then conducted a mobilization but mobilized only those it trusted. All those whom it did not trust were found either “incompetent” or “sick” to serve and were sent home.

The armed struggle began on March 31, 1946, in a village called Lithohori located on Mount Olympus, and lasted until 1949. In the summer of 1946, Greek and Macedonian representatives gathered together at the village Bapchor and agreed to place their forces under a joint command, and thus DAG (Democratic Army of Greece) was formed. From that point on command was unified under the leadership of Markos Vafiadis, or the legendary General Markos as he was known at that time.

A special voluntary Monarcho-Fascist unit consisting of peasants from Zhelevo and from the surrounding villages was formed in the village Zhelevo. The unit called “pospazma” consisted of police officers whose duty was to go from village to village and cause mischief. Members of this unit raped, murdered and implemented curfews. The unit commander was a man named Tsironi from the village Psoderi. Included among the members from Zhelevo belonging to this unit were Petre Landzhako, Nikola Stergiou, Lasko and Stavro Trkala (Sterio’s son). There was a lot of violence and criminal activities taking place in Prespa and the wider Region at the time, particularly in the villages Papli and German. Many people were arrested and taken to prison to the Lerin jails and to other internment camps. Many residents from Zhelevo were also arrested and sent to jail. Many of those who were left behind were mobilized by the Greek army, especially those who were helping the local population. Included among those who were mobilized were Risto Trkala (Mihail’s son) and Risto Puchunga. Both served in the village Vatothori, Kostur Region.

Many of the Macedonian veterans who fought on Yugoslav territory during World War II, during the summer and autumn of 1946, were returning home to Greek occupied Macedonia but, because of the situation they found themselves in, they went straight to Mount Vicho and joined those who had fled there to avoid being

persecuted. As a result the units in Vicho were swelling up with volunteers but under very difficult conditions, because the Greek army had a battalion stationed in Prespa. The battalion was headed by Commander Chami from the village Psoderi, a former ELAS fighter now turned Monarcho-Fascist. Because of the “pospazma” that was located inside Zhelevo, it was difficult to leave the village and go to the mountains without raising suspicion and as such it was difficult to prepare and send new groups to the mountains. At about the same time DAG had adopted a bad policy of disarming and sending people home, especially those who had fled their village to avoid being persecuted. This was a mistake which DAG realized but by then it was too late. Many of these people sent home were either captured by the enemy, killed, sent to prison, or went into hiding. As a result many of the villages were emptied of their people.

In the summer of 1946 after Spiro Mavrovski, Risto’s older brother, got married, Risto, Spiro and their father Mihail went to work in the villages Kleshtina and Kladorabi.

In the spring of 1948 the partisans went from village to village and collected all the young children, ages 2 to 14, and sent them to the various people’s Republics including Yugoslavia, Romania, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It was one of the largest evictions in the history of the villages. After that all able-bodied men and women were sent to the front. The greatest battles in Gramos and Vicho were led during the summer of 1948. At the same time, a large part of the Zhelevo population fled to the Republic of Macedonia. Some fled to Lerin and Kostur to avoid being dragged into the conflict. This period was very difficult for the people of Zhelevo. Many people were killed as the Greeks bombed the village several times. The people, however, struggled to survive in these difficult times.

In 1949, during the winter, the partisans attacked the city Lerin but without success. DAG suffered many casualties and now again Zhelevo and every other village became targets for the Greek air force. As a result many people became victims of these bombings. Once again another wave of people from Zhelevo fled for the Republic of Macedonia. Those who fell into the hands of DAG patrols were executed, intimidating the population not to flee. On

August 10, 1949 the Greek government launched its great military offensive against the partisans in Vicho. After a great struggle Vicho, on August 14, 1949, fell into government hands. Zhelevo also fell into government hands. By now the village was totally abandoned with the old, sick and frail remaining. All those capable of mobility were collected by the partisans and led to Albania. Then a great battle took place in Gramos which ended on August 28, 1949. After that all surviving fighters gathered in Albania, marking the end of the Greek Civil War.

The people of Zhelevo who at the time were serving in the ranks of DAG and who were healthy were gathered in one place in Camp Bureli in Albania. The others, the elderly, the children and the wounded soldiers were sent to Poland by ship. The DAG veterans were sent to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and the USSR where Foto Ianovski from Zhelevo decided to remain for good. Done Markov's grandfather made Moscow his permanent home.

### **Consequences of the Wars for the people of Zhelevo**

Following is a list of people from Zhelevo who died during World War II and during the Greek Civil War

Kala Sider died in Negosh (Naoussa)

Mito Ianovski died in Statitsa

Sofia Ianovska died in Zhelevo bombed by aircraft \*

Sofia Ianovska died in Zhelevo killed by the Greek "burandari" (Monarcho-Fascists) \*

Stavre Ianovski died in Berik, Kostur Region \*

Ioshe Kirovski (Lenka's son) died in Gramos

Stefana Gaduchi died in Zhelevo bombed by aircraft \*

Traiko Pirpiko died in Gramos, Nestimo

Risto Lulov died in Rupishta

Pando Lulov died in Gramos, Grevena

Vasil Mitan died in Besvina village Breznitsa

Angelina Packova died in Faltsta

Paul Kirovski (Spiro's son) died in Lerin, Kopanche Nestram

Mara Kirova (Vasil's daughter) died in Gramos in Densko

Arhonda Markovska died in Lerin Kamenik

Anastas Iankulovski died in Siniachko

Konda Dimova died in Vicho, Sveta Nedela  
 Lazo Stepanov died in Gramos, Mladentsa  
 Foto Stepanov died in Faltsta  
 Sotir Ianovski died in Gramos  
 Ilio Lanzako died in Siniachko  
 Fani Lanzako died in Gramos  
 Naso Lanzako died in Zhelevo \*  
 Vangel N. Nikolovski died in Grevena  
 Stavro Nikolovski died in Onaria over Langa  
 Tanas Trkalovski died in Malimadi  
 Risto Putsunga died in Grevena  
 Vangel Brbalov died in Vicho, in Bukata over Kostur  
 Nasie Nikolovski died in Gramos  
 Pando Perelov died in Gramos in Alevitsa  
 Iordan Markovski died in Gramos  
 Done Chachanov died in Prespa (killed by the partisans) \*  
 Spiro Manev died in Lerin  
 Done Nikolovski died in Grevena  
 Trena Andonchina died in Lerin  
 Naum Perelov died in Gramos  
 Lazo Lazarov died in Sorovich  
 Spiro Kirov Donevski died in Vicho  
 Tanas Nolevski died in Gramos  
 Lazo Papazov died in Gramos  
 Spiro Miloshev died in Smrdesh  
 Iana Milosheva died in Zhelevo bombed by aircraft \*  
 Stoian Temovski died in Kolomnati  
 Sofia Temovska died in Vicho in Lagen  
 Spiro Mavrski (Shkavrev) wounded in Bukata, Kostur Region, died  
 in Trnaa  
 Nikola Markovski died in Grevena  
 Anastasia Simoska died in Grevena  
 Stavre Puchunga died in Grevena  
 Risto Stanishev died in Grevena  
 Done Luchkov died in Albania at the front \*  
 Risto Giamovski was killed by the Germans \*  
 Foto Kirovsk killed was by the Germans at the Bulgarian front \*  
 Neda Mavrovaska died in Zhelevo as a result of being tormented by  
 the Germans \*  
 Ilio Iandrevski killed by the Italians in Kostur \*

Pando Laskov killed by the Italians in Kostur \*  
Pando Papailia killed by the Italians in Kostur \*  
Pavle Papailia killed by the Italians in Kostur \*  
Vasil Giamovski killed by the Italians in Kostur \*  
Ilio Sandrin killed by the Italians in Kostur \*

(\*) – People of Zhelevo who were NOT killed during the Greek Civil War

## **People of Zhelevo displaced after the Greek Civil War**

### **Poland**

During the fall of 1949 many of the Zhelevo refugees, along with old men, women, children and wounded soldiers, were transferred by a Romanian ship from Albania to the city Gdunia on the Baltic Sea. There the wounded fighters, about 250 of them, were separated, placed in train cars and transported to a hospital. The rest were taken to the city Mendzhe Guzhe. In the spring of 1950 the Poles gathered them all at Zgorzelec. The 250 fighters, who were wounded, once they healed, were also sent to Zgorzelec. Eventually all the refugees and political immigrants who had entered Poland were gathered in this city. Some, like the refugee children, even arrived from other socialist countries. Two orphanages were set up to house the children; one was called Lazo Trpovski and the other Nikos Zahariadis. In the summer of 1950 most of the refugees from Zhelevo were sent to a town called Bogatinia, located on the triangle between Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland. They were sent there to work at the “Sofhoz” farms. Some worked in factories. And as such the people of Zhelevo who were sent to Poland were split in two cities, Bogatinia and Zgorzelec.

### **Albania**

All the refugees who left Zhelevo in 1949 passed through Albania. In fact almost the entire village was emptied during this mass exodus with very few, mostly the old, remaining behind. From there they were transferred to other people’s republics. Only one woman remained in Albania. She was prosecuted for crimes committed by her husband.



## Yugoslavia

Most of the refugees from Zhelevo fleeing the Monarcho-Fascists ended up in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Among these people were fighters, political refugees and refugee children who were taken out of Greek occupied Macedonia in the spring of 1949. The refugees from Zhelevo were separated and placed in various locations and cities. Some were sent to Voivodina to the villages Giakova and Krushlevo. The wounded fighters were sent to Bulkesh. There were children sent to dorms in Bela Tsrkva and Tsrvenitsa. In the Republic of Macedonia they were sent to Skopje, Tetovo, Bitola, Prilep and Struga.

## Skopje

Skopje had the largest group of people from Zhelevo and later those returning from the other Socialist Republics and from the USSR were added. Later many left Skopje for Toronto, Canada. It should be noted that in the period from 1950 to 1954 many children returned to their homes in Greek occupied Macedonia and from there went to Canada. There were still many Zhelevo families that remained in Skopje. Here is a list of families compiled by Risto Mavrovski, from what he remembers:

1. Stamovtsi
2. Balkovtsi.
3. Simovtsi
4. Dibranovtsi
5. Florovtsi
6. Bundovtsi
7. Stanishevtsi
8. Temovtsi
9. Ianovtsi
10. Nikolovtsi
11. Popspirovtsi
12. Markovtsi
13. Bekiarovtsi
14. Temelkovtsi
15. Stepanovtsi

16. Rumiakovtsi
17. Iankulovtsi
18. Damovts
19. Dodevtsi
20. Dogramovtsi (Ianovtsi)
21. Mitanovtsi (Chonevtsi)
22. Lumburovtsi
23. Markovtsi (Koleichini)
24. Gaduchevtsi
25. Gligorovtsi
26. Lulevtsi
27. Kirovtsi
28. Bodanovtsi
29. Gulini
30. Pachovtsi

There were a number of families with the same last names so the actual number is much higher. Included in the list of families with same last names are the Ianovtsi, the Bekiarovtsi, the Markovtsi, the Stanishevtsi and the Florovtsi.

Many of the people from Zhelevo left their lives in this city. Risto has provided a list of those who he remembered were buried at the cemetery in Butel.

1. Ioan, File, Traiko and Kole Bekiarov
2. Lambro Florov and his wife
3. Traiko Dodevski
4. Foti Temov Sotirov and his wife)
5. Bozhin Ianov Mandzhukov
6. Sofia Popspirova Balkova
7. Micho and Sofia Gaduchi
8. Pop Simovski and his son Tomislav
9. Malina Markova
10. Ristoitsa, Stefo and their son Tode Bodanovtski
11. Tase Mitanov and his wife
12. Kole Gligorov
13. Kole Pachov
14. Ristoitsa Lumburova
15. Giurgtsa Gligurova

16. Krste Stepanov
17. Tanas Iane Voinovski
18. Petre and Elena Pirpikov
19. Ilio Markovski and his wife
20. Leko Markovski and his son Spiro
21. Done Iankulovski and many others who Risto does not know or remember.

## Tetovo

There were several families in Tetovo including:

1. Lambro Mitanov
2. Leko Gligorov
3. Dafina Petkova Trendova and her children
4. Arhonda Gakeia with her daughter Vasilka and her children
5. Sevda Stanisheva with her children
- 6 Fana Kurchova

Included among the people who died in Tetovo were Lambro Mitanov, Arhonda Popova Gakeia and Leko Gligorov Popioanov.

## Struga

The only family from Zhelevo living in Struga is Lambro Trkalov's family. Lambro and his family came to Struga from Tashkent.

## Prilep

Only Konda Mazonko from Zhelevo lives in Prilep.

## Bitola

People from Zhelevo have been coming to Bitola since 1924. A large number of them arrived during the period from 1944 to 45, in 1948 and during and after the Greek Civil War.

Included among the families who came to Bitola, in the period from 1924 to 1928, were the Simovtsi brothers, the Petrevtsi (Stoian) and Markovtsi families and Pando Lumburov of Porodin.

Arriving in Bitola in 1944 and 1945 were the Nikola Nikolovski (Shofero) and the Kosta Stanishov families.

The Vasil Luchkov family arrived in 1950. Before that the family was separated, some members lived in Tashkent and others in Poland.

Arriving in 1957 were Micho Florov, the brothers Risto and Kole Mavrovski Shkavrevtsi with their families coming from Poland, Tanas Markovski and his daughter Ristana, and later his son Vasil and his family who came from Tashkent, Petre Brbalov from Canada and his wife from Zhelevo, Ianetsa Miovska and Ianaki Luchkov. And thus, after Skopje, Bitola has the second largest concentration of people from Zhelevo in all of Macedonia.

The following families were located in Porodin during the period from 1924 to 1928:

Lumburotsi, Bundovtsi, Temovtsi and Kurzovtsi. Now they are no longer in Porodin. They have been displaced. The only one remaining in Porodin is Vasil Temo Sotirov. Sotir Rumbakov was in Ergi where he died.

People from Zhelevo who died in Bitola:

Kosta Stanushev and his wife, Kole (Shoferot) Nikolovtski and his wife, Petre Brbalov and his wife, Tase Simovski and his wife, Nate pop Simovski, Ianaki and Vasil Luchkovski and their nephew, Janeitsa Miovska, Pando Lumburovski and his wife, Tanas and Ristana Markovski, Risto and Kole Mavrovski Shkavrevi and many others.

Bulgaria

The following families/people from Zhelevo lived in Sofia:

1. Stavro and Todor Markov
2. Hari Simovski
3. Giorgi Brbalov

4. Ianovtsi
5. Vasil Bogdanov (who died here).

The following families/people lived in Gara Elin Pelin:

1. Traiko Kirov,
2. Spiro Kirov (who died there)
3. Lambro Rumbiakov

Lena Bogdanova lived in the town Stara Zagora.

Leko Mitanov and Lena Bundova lived in the town Tolbuhin.

The following families/people lived in Sandanski:

1. The Dine Chakov family
2. George Chakov and wife Sofia Florovska with her children.
3. Tena Ianevska Florovska with his son Pavle
4. Giorgi and Nasa Markovski and family
5. Pavle Florov and Dane Chakov where they both died.  
Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia

Many of the children evacuated from Greek occupied Macedonia in 1948 were taken to Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Some ended up in Tulgesh, Kalimaneshi in homes in Hungary but most moved and went to the Republic of Macedonia, with few returning to Greece. Many of the wounded fighters ended up in Hungary where they received treatment in Budapest. Later many left. Lena Stepanova died in Hungary. She was a mother and a teacher who looked after the children from Zhelevo.

The following families/people remained in Hungary:

1. Anastasia Kotsu, chemical engineer
2. Vasili Simu, Professor of Philology
3. Giorgi Bakiarov, electrical engineer
4. Sevda Iankula, professor
5. Fani Kurdzhu, architect
6. Spiro Floru (Gliptis), artist painter
7. Iani Paskov mechanical engineer

8. Mihali Paskov, veterinarian

9. Dola Liulu pensioner

All those who decided to remain in Hungary are now retired except for Mihali Paskov who still works as a veterinarian.

The following people from Zhelevo have remained in Budapest, Hungary permanently:

Antigoni Lasko, Agliki Marku, Deodota Ioannou, Pando Pasko and Malakamba.

Poland

As I said earlier, all the healthy people from Zhelevo were placed in the city Bogatinia to work at the “Sofhoz” farms. The 250 wounded fighters, the very old and very young were placed in the town Zgorzelets. From 1950 to 1953 many of the people from Zhelevo were moved to work for “Sofhoz” farms in other cities such as Vaubzhih, Nemcha, Shvidnitsa Vrotslav, Politse and others. Later they began to leave Poland and went to Canada, the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria. Some returned to Greece. Tanas Pachov decided to remain there because he had married a Polish woman.

Included among the other families/people from Zhelevo who decided to remain in Poland were Pop Spiro Balko (Mendzheguze), Tanas’s Maria, Marko Petrov (Zgorzelets), Ilio’s Micho Puchungov.

USSR – Tashkent

The healthy and experienced fighters who fought in DAG were sent, after DAG’s defeat, through Albania to Tashkent, Uzbekistan. When the people were allowed to bring their families together, many wives, husbands and children moved to Tashkent, while some fighters left the USSR and went to other countries such as Canada, the Republic of Macedonia and some made an effort to return to Greece. Very few of the people from Zhelevo remain in the USSR. Included among those who remained were Stoian Guzhov and Stoian Trpchelov, both of whom had taken Russian wives. Ilia Ianu had also married a Russian woman and remained in Voronezh. She

was a Doctor of Historical Sciences at the University of Voronezh. Included among the rest of the people of Zhelevo who remained in the USSR were Foto Ianovski who remained in Moscow and Done Markovski's son.

All those who died were buried in the various republics, something never heard of before. May they rest in peace away from their place of birth!

### **Risto Mavrovski's participation in the partisan movement in 1947**

By joining the ranks of DAG in the spring of 1947, Risto Mavrovski began a new and dangerous page in his life. His responsibilities as a DAG fighter included attacking military posts and police stations. During his missions he participated in attacks on the villages Lak and Papli and on outposts on Bigla Mountain. While this was going on there was a mass movement developing in Kostur Region, which rose against the Monarcho-Fascists forcing them to leave Prespa and other rural areas and concentrate in the city Lerin. This allowed DAG to expand its influence and have a larger free territory in which to operate and recruit new fighters. During the spring of 1947, many people from the villages came out and joined DAG. Included among them was Spiro, Risto's brother, who left Zhelevo to join DAG while the Monarcho-Fascist army was still in control of the area. A couple of months later Risto also left Zhelevo and joined DAG as a regular fighter. Mihail, Risto's father, stayed home with Neda (Risto's mother) who at the time was bedridden and had been that way since 1944. Other family members who remained at home were Spiro's wife, Risto's sister Sofia and brother Nikola.

After Risto took to the mountains with a group of others, he arrived at the village Kolomnati. A couple of days later the entire group was sent to Mount Kajmakchalan, to a village called Papadia located at the Yugoslav border. A few days later Risto, along with Kole Koacho (File's son), Micho Chachanov (Lekoitsa's son), Traiko Pirpiko (Loni's son) and Stavro Nikolov (Giorgi's son), all from Zhelevo, was sent to Mount Vicho where they all joined a partisan unit headed by Iani Akrita from the village Ofchareni, Lerin Region. There they took position on top of the village Armensko in the Trsie

barns overlooking the city Lerin. Risto at the time was led by Apostoli Dimakopoulos from the village Neohoraki, Lerin Region. He was a Prosfiga (Asia Minor Turkish Christian colonist) but a good man. Risto's corporal was Kole Kiru from Zhelevo. Because members of the unit had little experience with the use of weapons, they trained and practiced every day with different guns and ammunition. After they completed their training at the village Turie, they were sent on their first mission to the village Nevolieni, which was very close to Lerin. Here, for the first time, they shot at the opponent and the opponent shot back at them. A short battle took place after which the partisans retreated to the village Nered where they had lunch and supper and returned to their original position during the dark of night. After this battle the unit was sent to do battle in the village Armensko, on top of the Trsie barns, in the Lerin valley and at Bigla. During the month of July many fighters were gathered together in the village Prekopana, on the slopes of Mount Vicho, where units were combined to create several battalions.

The following people were appointed battalion commanders: Pando Shiperkov from the village Smrdesh, Mihali Graniti from the village Krchishta and Pando Vainata from the village Srebreno. Two other units were formed called "Dilohia", which were led by Garefi from the village Kosinets. All the commanders were Macedonians.

At the same time several headquarters were created to manage the units and Aminda, an Albanian from the village Lehovo, was put in charge to oversee them. After the new formations were completed, Risto Mavrovski ended up in Mihali Graniti's battalion number 588. His unit commander was Lefter from the village Banitsa and Risto was led by platoon leader Apostoli from Neohori. There were other Macedonians in Risto's unit, some from the Lerin Field, from Prespa and from Kostur Region. Accompanying Risto from Zhelevo were Kole Kiru, Micho Chachani, Traiko Pirpiko, and Stavro Nikolov (Girorgi's son). Other co-fighters whom Risto remembered included Aleksandro Chaldari, Toli, Gramo Spase from the village Ofchareni, Micho from the village Setina, Aleko, Nase, Chane and Tanas from the village Kolomnati. There was also the cook Alekso from the village Lak and German from the village German who was slightly deaf. Included among the women, who were partisans in the unit with Risto, were Vasilka Rusi from the village German, Tomaia



Michopoulo from the village Papli, Tsveta from the village Mokreni, Polikseni from the village Nestram and Andromahi Kochopoulo from the village Paprechko, Kostur Region.

In the beginning Risto was just an ordinary soldier. Later, after he came under Apostoli's platoon, he was appointed platoon courier. This lasted only a short time before Risto was appointed courier for the platoon, unit and command headquarters. Each unit was made up of four platoons, each platoon was made up of four tenths, and each tenth was made up of ten fighters, meaning the units were quite large.

After these large units were created there was need for a larger front, so the unit in which Risto was serving was sent over Bigla to the Lerin Field towards Bouf. When the unit arrived in Mala Bigla, over the village Armensko, it experienced its first desertion from the entire ranks of DAG. Two individuals from Zhelevo, Kole Kiru and Micho Chachani, were seen slipping away and heading down to Lerin where they surrendered to the Greeks. The entire unit found out about this betrayal even before it had reached Bouf. The unit remained in Bouf until the evening and then attacked the villages Dolna and Gorna Keshchina during the night. Spiro, Risto's older brother, also took part in this battle. He was a member of the special unit called the "saboteus" responsible for destroying bunkers and other objects by use of mines, bazookas and other explosives.

After these battles, and others which took place in the higher villages and in the village Sveta Petka, the unit went to the village Rakovo where it remained for a little while before heading for Zhelevo over Bigla. After a brief rest in Zhelevo the unit set out for Kostur Region where it fought battles in the villages Dmbeni and Chetirok. These battles took place during the months of July and August 1947.

During that period of time the Greek Monarcho-Fascist army began its offensive in Gramos. At that time the partisan units were led by the Gramos Headquarters (Arhigio Voiu Gramu), headed by commander Gianoulis. A request for assistance was sent to Vicho from where two battalions departed. Pando Shiperkov's battalion reached Gramos by traveling along the Albanian border. The

battalion headed by Graniti, in which Risto served, reached the village Labanitsa at which point it was ordered to turn and take a different route. On its way the battalion spent the night in the village Blatse and the next day marched over the village Zagoricheni and arrived in Siniachko near the village Germia where it spent the day. The march resumed in the evening over a trail through the village Bogachiko near the River Bistritsa, located near the city Rupishta (Argos).

After crossing the river, the unit headed in the direction of the villages Nestimo, Kalohori, Lokamata, Damashkinia, Dafin, Polikastano and over the mountains Orle and Ondria over the Macedonian villages Ezerets and Petro (Pulaki). All these villages belonged to Grevena and Kozheni Regions except for Ezerets which belonged to Kostur Region. This was the route taken before the battalion reached Gramos.

After a few days of rest a new battalion commander was appointed. His name was Ahileas Papaioanou from the village Kalivrisi. He was a Macedonian but only spoke Greek. A new way of life and struggle was created for the Macedonian fighters here because a large number of the villagers in this region considered themselves to be of pure Greek ethnic composition who despised the Macedonians. But there was still the need to mobilize fighters and obtain food and other provisions for the units in the mountains where there were no villages. Most of the mobilization was done in the villages Nestimo, Kastanofito, Avgerino, Damashkinia and Dafni. The biggest obstacle facing the mobilization came from the residents who served the Monarcho-Fascists. The Greeks in this region had gathered together in the larger villages in safe centres such as Rupishta, Nestram, Chotili (Pedalofa) and other towns around the cities Kostur, Grevena, Kailari, Kozheni and others. The Battalion commanded by Ahileas and Graniti had to defend a very large territory with a small number of soldiers.

The unit in which Risto served with Lefter, from Banitsa, as its commander was responsible for defending the space close to Rupishta up to Chotili where the road to Grevena and Kozheni passed. During the day the unit was accompanied by various people

who spied for the Monarcho-Fascists, giving them positions and exposing the partisans to bombardment by aircraft and artillery.

The fall of 1947 was a very difficult time for Risto and the unit he served in because of the constant non-stop fighting on all sides. One morning the entire unit was attacked and one of its platoons was captured and taken to a nearby village where all the fighters were executed. Killed among them was Traiko Pirpiko from Zhelevo. The other platoons fought bravely and escaped the ambush but paid a heavy price with many wounded. It was an unequal struggle and because of the heavy losses on the partisan side, including the death of Bukovala, the Gramos Headquarters commander who was killed at Mount Orle in the fall of 1947, unit commander Lefter was sacked and replaced by Spiro, a Greek by nationality, who was then replaced by Vangel Chapas, a Macedonian from the village Maniak. Apostoli, Risto's platoon commander, was sent to the School for translators at DAG General Headquarters. Risto was sent to the village Langa on a three week course for non-commissioned officers. When Risto came back he was promoted to corporal, a commander of ten. This was Risto's first command where he was responsible for older men and for people of other nationalities.

At this point Risto was placed in Kosta Kizaki's platoon. This platoon was well-equipped with good fighters who belonged to Vangel Chapala's unit and who were assigned to protect the unit headquarters. The platoon went on various sabotage missions in the villages Zelim, Melanthi, etc., up to the town Rupishsta. It conducted its strikes during the night and returned before daybreak. It was a difficult time for the battalions, especially for Pando Shiperkov's battalion which operated in the Kopanche, Portite, Paliokremi up to the Gorusha locality where all the strategic locations were held by the enemy and which needed to be attacked and taken before the winter. The two battalions also participated in joint missions at Kopanche, Portite and Gorusha, which were quite successful, and at Poliokremidi with a lot of dead and wounded. Included among the wounded was Vangel Bogdanov who was taken to Albania where his legs were cutoff.

To avoid being completely destroyed, Shiperkov gave the order to retreat. At that time Pando Markov (Malina's son) was with him.

Pando was in command of the heavy weapons detachment. Risto was there too and accompanied by the old fighters Borche, Giorgi, and Beiko from Bapchor, now commander of one of Shiperko's units, Giorgi Lavdako from the village Besfina, commander of a platoon, Lagoto from the village Statitsa, also a platoon commander, Vane Zhalev from the village Chereshnitsa, Ilia Sklifov from the village Zagorichani and many others. At that time many of these fighters found themselves in close proximity and during their leisure time sang songs and, when there was no fighting, participated in sports games battalion against battalion. The fighting was very difficult for all the battalions but they had some successes especially during the struggle for Poliokremini, which was won by the partisans giving them a better strategic position against the enemy in further struggles.

During the fall of 1949 Naum Pachko, from the village D'mbeni, Kostur Region, was appointed political commissar of the unit in which Spiro, Risto's older brother, was serving. Naum was a good person, a communist, a fighter and a teacher who was well respected by the men in his unit. Because of his influence, Risto decided to join the CPG. Up until then Risto had only been a trainee. The partisans had much success in the struggle at that time but not without many casualties. A new mobilization had taken place for new fighters caught, among whom were also many traitors of whom one was a priest. All of them were taken to a place called Voio in Gramos.

At that time the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade (taksimarhia) was created which consisted of the battalions commanded by Pando Shiperko, Ahileas and Graniti and other units that were in that territory. Giorgiadis was appointed commander of the brigade.

From what he remembers, Risto made a list of the people in command of the battalion he served in:

1. Commander of the battalion – Ahilea Papaioanou
2. Political commissar - Mihali Apostolski Graniti
3. Responsible for the military – Spartako from the village Kleshtina
4. Stratologos - Micho Shkandzho from the village Pozdivishta
5. Food proprietor, epimelitis and couriers.

Unit commanders:

1. Lefter Olef from the village Banitsa, Lerin Region
2. Iani Akreta from the village Ofchareni, Lerin Region
3. Petrombei from the village Maala, Lerin Region

These were the commanders from the beginning until the fall of 1947 when the battalion arrived in Gramos.

Platoon commanders:

1. Rusko from the village Kleshtina
2. Kosta from the village Kleshtina
3. Toli Chakrev from the village Krushoradi
4. Apostoli Dimakopoulos from the village Neohoraki
5. Kosta Kizaki from the village Kolomnati and others whose names Risto does not remember.

In Voio Gramos, Risto's unit experienced many changes in personnel. After Lefter was ousted he was replaced with a man named Spiro and later Spiro was replaced with another man named Vangel Chapala, from the village Maniak. Vangel was then replaced by Naum Pachkov from D'mbeni as a political commissar of the unit.

The following is a list of names that Risto has compiled from memory of some of the fighters who fought in his unit:

- Corporal Vasili Papanestoras from the village Krchishta, Kostur Region
- Corporal Aleksandar Lule from the village Kolomnati, Kostur Region
- Machine gunner Spase Kachora, from the village Ofchareni, Lerin Region
- Aleksandar Chaldari from the village Sredno Selo, Lerin Region
- Unit Chief from the village Lak, Prespa Region
- Cook German from the village German
- Old Partisan Vasiliki Ruseva from the village German
- Old Partisan Andromahi Michopoulo from the village Papresko

- Tomaia Kochopoulo from the village Papli, Prespa Region
- Polikseni (Tsena) from the village Nestram
- DAG officer and national hero Katina Kuzmanova (Tsveta) from the village Mokreni killed in 1949
- Pavle Shapkov from the village German died on Mount Orle
- Stavro Nikolov from the village Zhelevo killed on Mount Ondre
- Traiko Pirpiko from the village Zhelevo killed in the village Nestimo, Grevena Region
- Pero from the village Zagorichani killed in the village Damaskinia
- Giorgi Rapcho from the village Kosinets killed in Gramos
- Micho from the village Setina perished in the village Nestimo
- Tanasi Kalogiani from the village Nestram perished in Kopanche
- Naso Loro from the village Konomlati died in Kichevo
- Leftera Apostolska, Graniti's sister
- Iani Misev from the village Kotori
- Iani Lago from the village Statitsa
- Tanas from the village Kolomnati, he was a tailor

After the formation of the large DAG units, a new interim democratic government was established. Appointed as the President of the new government and as Supreme Commander of the military was General Markos Vafiadis. Nikos Zahariadis was General Secretary. At the same time a radio station called the "Voice of free Greece" was established. With all that was going on, many people were under the impression that soon Greece would be freed and would become a fully democratic state. But unfortunately that did not happen. Why things did not go according to plan are still not fully understood. Even then things started to go wrong but there is not enough information to find out why. But one thing was certain; no partisans were coming out of the cities. The Monarcho-Fascists tortured everyone they caught assisting the partisans and charged them under Article 509 of the criminal act. Anyone suspected of or caught assisting the partisans was imprisoned or speedily killed.

There was heavy fighting on the partisan side which caused big human and material losses, particularly in the battles for Grevena, Konitsa and Mechovo. After these lost battles, the situation on the ground changed for the worst for the partisans. After the fall of 1947 and during the winter of 1947 and 1948, morale was very low. New

problems began to appear in the ranks of DAG, including lice, hunger, lack of warm clothing, etc.

But, in spite of all that, the partisans were led to believe they had to be patient and that things would turn around for them. Risto spent a year in this hell, which may seem like a short time to most, but a year in hell was an eternity for Risto who had not seen or made contact with his family. There was no mail service or any other means available to him to make contact while he was in the front line to communicate with his family, so he had no idea if everyone was well or not. This lasted until the spring of 1948 when Risto was wounded by an exploding grenade. While being on a mission near the area Klepso, in the hill above the villages Polikastano and Dafni, a grenade exploded and wounded Risto's feet. This was the first time he was wounded. After he was wounded Risto was transferred to the village Kotili and after that to the village Monopilo, where he got an attack of appendicitis. But after a day or so of traveling Risto was taken to the village Nivitsi, Prespa Region. The next destination was the village V'mbel and from there to Tirana, Albania. And thus ended Risto's participation in the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and in his unit in battalion 588.

Spiro Mavrovski's (Risto's son) impression of his father's involvement with the partisan movement

Risto, over the years, told his son Spiro many stories of his experience as a partisan. Many of these stories, unfortunately, Risto did not write down. So Spiro feels the need and would like to take the opportunity to write some of them down as he remembered them.

During the time the greatest battles were taking place in Chotili, in the villages Dafni and Damashkinia, the entire time partisan positions were being bombed by the Greek aviation with good precision. This seemed very odd and raised suspicion among the partisans who wanted to know how that was possible. They concluded that someone was spying for the Monarcho-Fascists and they were determined to find out who it was. So the partisans set up night patrols which secretly watched the villages in the dead of night to see what was happening. The second night the patrols were out,

one of them heard strange noises coming out from inside one of the barns. As the patrol got closer, the partisans could hear someone typing on a typewriter. Upon entering the barn they discovered a person standing over a machine and sending radio signals. To their great surprise the man who was doing that was the local priest, who regularly reported partisan activities to the Monarchico-Fascists. The priest was taken back to unit headquarters where he confessed that he was indeed spying and revealed all the others who were involved in the conspiracy. From there the priest was taken to DAG General Headquarters and beyond that Risto did not know what happened to him. One can only assume the worst because the partisans acquired a great number of casualties as a result of his spying.

Another story that Risto had told Spiro was about the time the partisans tried to capture a person from the ranks in the enemy camp, in order to obtain strategic information about the enemy. After managing to do that there was a surprise for the person they captured. He was surprised that the partisans spoke Greek. Once the partisans began to question him he told them that, according to the information he was given during his training, he would be fighting a foreign enemy, a dirty and filthy unshaven enemy with long hair and with a single eye like a Cyclops. He was told that this enemy was cruel and the only quality it had for its survival was to kill. After questioning him they found the young soldier was only 19 years old and he himself had realized that those who recruited him had lied to him about who the enemy was. After that the young man wanted to join the Democratic Army of Greece (DAG) and fight for better and greater rights for his family. He was accepted to serve in Risto's platoon where he demonstrated great stamina, resilience and heroism. He was wounded while fighting in one of the major battles in Gramos and was taken to Albania. Times and events were changing quickly then, so Risto lost sight of the young man even though they fought many battles together. Some things however that happen in life are remembered like a story being viewed in a film. One day while Risto was attending some Party activities in Bogatinia, he saw a young man on crutches without a foot. Before the meeting started the young man approached Risto, embraced him and cried because he could not stand up and salute. Risto did not remember who this handsome young man was until he spoke to him.



There in front of Risto stood a man who Risto had forgotten, a man who voluntarily joined DAG and was prepared to sacrifice his life. This is another true story of good versus evil, where good wins but unfortunately with lasting consequences for this young man.

### **The hospital in Tirana – Risto’s first wounding**

After he was wounded Risto was taken to Tirana, Albania and admitted to a civilian hospital, where wounded fighters like Risto were told to say that they were Albanian Greeks and not partisans from Greece. The ruse unfortunately lasted only a few days until one of the partisans accidentally slipped up and revealed that they were DAG fighters. In addition to having Risto’s wounds looked after, Risto, at the same time, was also operated on for appendicitis. After that the wounded partisans were transferred to a camp in Sukt and placed in barracks. This was yet another new page in Risto’s life. The person responsible for the camp was a one-legged disabled man called Voio. Life in the camp was miserable and full of cruelty, especially dished out by the administration. No interaction between patients was allowed, not even visits with friends. Everyone able to move was sent to work in the fields. Everyone was told to remain anonymous and was given a pseudonym. Risto’s pseudonym was Commander Giorgiadis. The camp administration offered courses in Marxism and Political Science. Risto was responsible for teaching the patients in Cabin 3, who were mostly young. Risto did not remain in the camp for long, his health had deteriorated and he was transferred back to Tirana, this time to a military hospital, to be treated for abdominal problems. Risto was treated by an Italian doctor, a specialist, who was able to cure him. Risto was again sent to Sukt and settled near Lake Skadar where he remained for a short time. All this took place from May to July 1948. While Risto was away in Albania, the first Informburo letter of condemnation against Yugoslavia was made public which, from what Risto saw in Albania, called for removing Tito’s picture from public places and the withdrawal of Yugoslav brigades from the Dures –Tirana rail line.

### **Risto’s return to the fighting in Gramos in 1948**

The problems between the Informburo and Yugoslavia created an opportunity for the Monarcho-Fascists in Greece to raise a major offensive in Gramos. As a result, all able bodies on the partisan side, including Risto, were trucked in and sent directly to the Gramos front. Risto was assigned to the 107<sup>th</sup> Brigade, to Malechko's battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Unit commanded by Giorgo, 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon. And as such, Risto and his co-fighters fought at the first lines in the Gramos front. Almost all the fighters in Risto's unit were Greeks from Piraeus but that did not bother Risto. He fought many battles with them. After Gramos they returned to Vicho and had great successes in the fighting in Malimadi where they destroyed a large Monarcho-Fascist unit and liberated a very important place for the partisans, as well as captured a lot of military equipment. After these successful struggles in Vicho the unit was allowed to rest for a while, but not for long. It was early October 1948 when the unit was ordered to descend through Bouf to the Lerin Field. But after exiting Bouf and heading for Kleshtina, the unit collided with a larger enemy unit. The battle, which escalated towards Mount Mechka, lasted almost the entire day. There were heavy casualties on both sides. Risto was again wounded, this time on his head from an exploding shell. His companions took him to the Zhelevo Sveta Troitsa Monastery near the village Psoderi. This was the second time that Risto was separated from his DAG unit. At this time Risto was honoured with the Order of Gramos and Vicho and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

While the fiercest fighting was still raging on, General Markos was deposed and replaced with Dimitri Partsalidis, president of the interim government, and Zahariadis, responsible for everything. A short time after DAG withdrew from Gramos, Gianulis, chief commander of Voio Gramos, was prosecuted and executed. It was the beginning of the end for the DAG military. The fighting in Gramos lasted for about 70 days, during which time the enemy was helped by the Western world, led by the United States of America. The partisans, especially the Macedonian people, were the first victims after the Second World War, but proved to be a tough nut to crack. They proved to be true fighters for freedom, democracy and independence.

A short digression...

## **Spiro Mavrovski – An impression of his father’s meeting with one of his co-fighters**

While himself serving in the Yugoslav Army in 1985, Spiro Mavrovski had the opportunity, nearly forty years later, to learn about one of his father’s DAG co-fighters from the Greek Civil War. It was before the 1985 elections in Greece, before the Easter celebrations, when the Greek authorities, out of the goodness of their hearts, decided to open the borders and, for a short time, allowed people to enter Greece without any special documents. Risto and Sofia (Spiro’s father and mother) decided that they wanted to go and visit their places of birth, their native homes which they had abandoned 40 years earlier and had not been allowed to return to since then. When they returned they had little to say about what they saw. They did not find what they expected. Instead they found their places of birth in ruins, their former homes a depressing place. It was a picture full of sorrow about which they did not want to talk. Their homes were empty, their houses destroyed. It was a difficult visit and God saw to it that it was made even more difficult by making it rain continuously for five consecutive days while they were visiting. Despite the heavy rain, they made sure to visit the cemeteries and graves of their dead relatives. They also frequented the cafés and met with the locals.

When Risto and Sofia arrived in the village Pozdivishcha, as they did in other places, many of the local people came over to see them. They were curious as to who these people were from the Republic of Macedonia? When they found out that they were originally from there, they began to share various stories about what happened to them, good and bad stories of survival in the concentration camps and during the wars. At one point Risto asked about a friend of his from a neighbouring village, a co-fighter and how he was doing. He was told that the man Risto was looking for was a recluse. He had separated himself from society and did not want to make contact with anyone. He lived in the barns, Risto was told, with his sheep and he rarely encountered people. Risto then asked how he could make contact with this man and was told that the only contact this man had was the grocer from whom he purchased his food. The person who gave Risto this information also told him that he had the

grocer's telephone number. While Risto and Sofia were still in the café, someone phoned the grocer and left a message for the man that "Risto Mavrovski from the village Zhelevo was here looking for him". It was raining hard that day and word came back that the man was not going to come. Risto, however, did not believe that. Normally it was a 40 minute walk from the café of this village to the next village but the man, who supposedly was not coming, made it there in 30 minutes. Risto was not surprised. When the man saw Risto, he hugged him and cried without saying a word. He cried a long time without being able to say a word. At one point in his young life during the war, Risto had saved this man's life which he had not forgotten and thought that it was a miracle for them to have been brought together again after so many years of being apart. After the war this man was sent to the Greek prison camps where he served a five year jail sentence before he was released. Upon his release he remained in his village. The villagers had thought that he was far from what was normal. But his struggle with society, with everything around him had left his mind clean of the corruption around him. What a normal person experiences in life and survives he will never forget. May the glory be eternal for the two great heroes of DAG! Life always writes the most beautiful novels about such people.

Forgive the digression, and now back to Risto's story.

### **Risto's second wounding – Bulkesh, October 1948**

After a short stay in a local hospital until about mid October 1948, Risto and other wounded partisans were transported through Prespa to the Republic of Macedonia to the Skopje Katlanovo Spa. Risto remained at the Spa until the end of November 1948, at which point in time he and seven others were trucked to the Skopje Railway Station, loaded on freight cars, covered with dry grass and straw and shipped as cargo to Belgrade. Risto was put in charge and was responsible for acquiring food and medical supplies for them when they arrived in Belgrade. They were expected. A person was waiting for them at the railway station. Risto remembers being approached by a stranger and called to the side and directed to the supplies. Risto and his group remained at the station until the evening. When the train started pulling out of the station Risto was told that

someone would be waiting for them at a designated place. The trip from Belgrade to their final destination was not long so they were told to be ready to get off the train at a moment's notice.

When the train arrived at the train station in Bulkesh, the car Risto and the others were in was disconnected from the composition and was left on the platform. There were people with village carts waiting for them. They took them to a designated quarantine area in a cinema hall where they spent the night. The next morning a doctor came and examined them. There was also another person who came with the doctor and who informed them of what they would be doing and where they would be working.

This was Bulkesh, a state within a state. Here Risto met up with people from Zhelevo including Aleko Balko, Aleko Ioannou, Petre Zega, Lambro Marko, Anastas Flora, Lazo Altano, Tanas Luchko, Vasil Luchko and Vangel Bogdanov. A little later, in December 1948, Spiro Mavrovski, Risto's brother, also arrived in Bulkesh but stayed only a short time. He was soon transferred to Hungary.

Bulkesh was a large village of about 7,000 people, long inhabited by a German and pro-German population, which was helping the occupier throughout the war. After the war was over, the survivors fled to Germany and the village was transformed into a political refugee centre for Greece. This was done under contract between the CPY and the CPG and became a haven for partisan training, manufacturing, material warehousing and other activities. The nearest village to Bulkesh was Giakova, which was close to the town Bachki Petrovats. Bulkesh was an industrial area where hemp and hemp products were processed. Four wheel village carts and saddles were also built there. Leather goods were processed. Shoes, agricultural and farming equipment were manufactured. Many cows, sheep, ducks and chickens were raised. There was also a hospital where wounded from the war in Greece were treated. Many Macedonians and Greeks worked in these factories. The village had many restaurants, a mill, a movie theater, a church and a football stadium. The place was run by CPG Greek officials and had its own special currency, the dinar, exclusive to Bulkesh. Because this was considered a state within a state, there were no Yugoslav authorities present inside Bulkesh. Outside the village, the border, was guarded

by a Yugoslav militia which checked travel passes and made sure no one escaped. Travel was not allowed without special permission. There were two very important slogans to remember in Bulkesh: “Those who do not work cannot eat” and the second and more important slogan was: “Everything produced will be sent to the front in Greece in support of the DAG units.” That briefly was Bulkesh.

Risto remained in Bulkesh until the end of March 1949, during which time he worked at the hemp processing plant which ran three shifts. There he attended political school where he was taught Marxism, political science and military skills. The population there was different, mostly mixed with many Greeks from Evro and less Macedonians, most of who were from Voden and Karadzhoza Regions. After the Greek Civil War ended Bulkesh was disbanded. Rumours were circulating that many bad things had taken place there involving the work and the CPG leadership.

### **Risto Mavrovski - Back to the front in April 1949**

Early in April 1949 Risto, along with six other men and a Greek woman named Doksa, were put on a train and sent back to Greece via Belgrade, Skopje and Bitola. From there they traveled to Liuboino and arrived in the village Rabi, Prespa Region. From Rabi they were escorted to the village German and from there to the village Rula, to the Headquarters of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division. As soon as they arrived Risto found himself back on the front. Luckily Risto ran into Vasilko, one of his former commanders from 1947 who was now political commissar of the division. He personally received Risto into his division and ordered food and clothing for him and set him up in a bunker in the area around Lisets. So once again, even before his wounds had a chance to heal, Risto was about to enter a new page in his military life.

Here Risto met and befriended a man named Thesaliothis, an officer in the Information Division who made Risto’s life and work easier for a while. At this point Risto got to see and study forensic and other intelligence materials.

Some time later, Risto and thirteen others from the various brigades, all officers, were selected, combined as a unit and deployed in the

partisan free territory. In the beginning Apostoli was appointed commander and Risto Mavrovski was appointed political commissar of the new unit. This unit's role was to move among all the other units and sometimes operate behind enemy lines. From April to June 1949 Risto worked at the 11<sup>th</sup> Division Headquarters. Risto's direct commander was Pando Vainata and his political commissar was Vasilko. Risto was given the task of safely transferring units and mail from one place to another through enemy patrolled areas. One time Risto transferred Commander Pando Vainata and one of his units from Radusha locality located under Neveska to Mount Vicho. When the task was successfully completed and the unit safely arrived at the village Kolomnati, Risto was asked to report to division headquarters where he was told to go to the interim government office to receive his Medal of Honour. Risto, however, declined because he had another task, a more important task to carry out. His task was to guide Commander Pando Vainata's unit on a long trek through Radozh, Siniachko to Voio in order to get to Gramos. On the first day, the unit was discovered by the enemy in Radusha and a battle ensued which lasted all day. Fana Dimova Misheva from the village Oshchima, a second cousin of Risto's, was killed in that battle. In the evening the column continued on its way and arrived in Siniachko, over the village Empore, where it spent the day. The next evening it continued its trek through the village Kotoradzhe, crossed the Bistritsa River and arrived in the villages Sklalohori, Nestimo and Lakomata in Grevena Region. There, the unit was attacked from all sides during the day. It was also bombed by aircraft taking off from Rupishta. Most of the fighting was hand to hand combat and many were killed and wounded. Falling bombs killed many of the unit's horses. After dark the commander ordered the unit to collect all the dead and bury them. All the wounded able to walk were taken with the unit. The badly wounded were hidden and command was notified to send medics to care for them. The unit was ordered to turn back, but was again spotted by the enemy and attacked while crossing the river at Bogachigo. And as such an all-day tough battle ensued under the gorge in Siniachko. Again many were killed and wounded. During the evening the unit climbed Vrbitsa Mountain above the villages Mokrenim, Zagorichani, Lehovo and Srebreno. The next day the unit was again attacked and experienced an even more severe battle with heavy losses on both sides. At this point Commander Pando Vainata ordered the unit to

disband into smaller groups and meet at Mount Vicho at a later time. This was Risto's last joint action with Commander Pando Vainata as an expedition leader and as main courier. Risto was given this job because he was familiar with the terrain.

Upon Risto's return to Mount Lisets, the 105<sup>th</sup> Brigade was formed. Skotila was appointed commander, under whose request Risto Mavrovski and Iani Tanopoulos from the village Srebreno were appointed staff officers, Risto as a platoon commander and Iani as platoon political commissar. Risto remained at this position until Vicho fell in August 1949.

### **Risto's third wounding – Lisets, August 12, 1949**

On August 11, 1949, the Monarcho-Fascists began a major offensive on the entire partisan held territory. Risto, at that time, was in Liset's and unfortunately was heavily wounded in battle. The right side of his shoulder was badly torn up, but thanks to the help he received from Sofianoto and his unit, with which Risto was fighting side by side, his life was saved. Sofianoto ordered his fighters to carry Risto to the first aid station. From there he was taken down the road to the village Trnaa, put on a truck and transported to the village Orovnik, Prespa Region. The next day, August 12, 1949, Risto was re-banded and injected with an antiseptic drug. This was done by Sevda Stanisheva, a woman from Zhelevo, Risto's village. From there Risto was taken to Lak, put on a fishing boat and transported over the lake to the village Drobitishta. There he was secured in a cave and on August 16, 1949 Risto ended his sufferings on the Greek held Macedonian territory.

### **Spiro's own findings about his father's Lisets episode from talks with people from Zhelevo**

From talking to people from Zhelevo who had lived through the war, Spiro (Risto's son) had heard a different story about what happened to his father at Lisets. During the fierce battle Risto was badly wounded and was unconscious when he was discovered by his co-fighters who took him as being dead and tossed him in the pile of dead bodies to be buried later. But as luck would have it, one of Risto's cousins, a woman, and an older man from Zhelevo, who



were passing by, recognized Risto and wanted to take him home and bury him in the Zhelevo cemetery. The older man, not being convinced that Risto was actually dead, took Risto's shoes off, lit a newspaper on fire and placed it under his bare feet. Risto reacted to the burning flame and as such they realized that he was not dead. From there the two carried him to the road and hailed the next truck heading for Prespa. Risto was loaded with the other wounded, taken to Prespa and from there to a hospital in Albania where many surgeries were performed on his arm and shoulder and as such Risto was rescued from having his arm amputated.

### **The trip to Poland and to the Hospital “250”**

From the cave, as Risto remembers, he was taken to a hospital in Korcha, Albania, along with many wounded who were fighting in the Vicho and Gramos fronts. He remained in Korcha until October 1, 1949. Risto received excellent care in the hospital from the many doctors who had come from Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, other parts of Albania as well as from Greece. After that Risto was transferred to Elbasan, to a hospital where many wounded Macedonians were sent. Risto spent fifteen days in Elbasan. After that, on October 15, 1949, he and the other wounded were taken by truck to the port city Durasi in the Mediterranean Sea, loaded on a Romanian ship and sent off onto a voyage towards the Atlantic Ocean. Besides the wounded there were also civilians on that ship. And as such Risto's stay in Albania ended.

The ship sailed towards Italy, passed by Sicily and through Gibraltar where it entered the Atlantic Ocean. Then, after what seemed like a long voyage, the ship entered the Baltic Sea in Polish territorial waters and offloaded its passengers at the port city Gdynia. The trip lasted eleven days and nights. The Poles were expecting the ship and prepared a special composition of train cars. The wounded separated from the civilians and transported to the city Mendzheguzhe.

### **Spiro's version of hospital “250”**

All the conversations that Spiro had with his father and the mystery surrounding Risto's experience, led Spiro to do some of his own research, particularly about the Macedonian experience during the

war years in Greek occupied Macedonia. This led him to some interesting information, especially about hospital “250” and his father’s way to it.

Spiro was able to find the information he was looking for thanks to Mr. Petre Nakovski and his latest book “On the road of Time”, published in 2010. The reader can find more information about the refugees taken to Poland in the book “The Greek Hospital on the island Volin,” whose author was the organizer and chief surgeon of the special military hospital, code named “250”, then Major, later Brigadier General, Dr. Vladislav Barchikovski. Among his valuable and worthy recorded testimony the reader will also find the following information:

“As can be seen from the story told by General Leszek Kshemjenj, then deputy commander of the Shlesk Military District for political and educational issues, in the beginning of the summer of 1949 he asked to see Boleslav Bjerut, the first secretary of the Central Committee of PORP. Considering the complicated international situation, he brought to his attention the plight of the Partisans from the Greek Civil War. He was particularly touched by the fate of the wounded and sick, especially the children, women and elders. He was shaken by the prospect of their destruction as a result of the defeat of the Democratic Army of Greece. Boleslav Bjerut strongly emphasized the importance of Proletariat Internationalism as a basic ideological principle of communism and stressed that, as we were helped by other countries in our struggle comrades, it is now our turn to help and provide humanitarian aid...

The military, which was equipped with the best organizational readiness, could take care of the evacuation, transportation, treatment and rehabilitation. The civilian authorities could then take care of accommodation and adjustments to life. He said he was personally interested in giving those unlucky people, not only material assistance but also friendship from the heart. As a member of the military leadership in the territory where the new immigrants were to be accommodated in the future, General Kshemjenj ordered that he be regularly informed about their situation. General Kshemjenj began to work on this project immediately but only for a short time. He was replaced by General Vaclav Komar, chief

organizer and implementer of the immigrants from the Greek Civil War case in Poland.

A group of doctors, under the leadership of Dr. Bohdan Bednarski, later Minister of Health, was dispatched from Poland to Albania towards the end of the Greek Civil War. The doctors provided the Partisans with professional medical help. There was another group of doctors who worked inside the ships that transported refugees from the shores of Albania to a place near the Polish port Shvinoujshche. These doctors provided assistance and emergency surgery as required. The wounded Partisans offloaded in Shvinoujshche were transported by public health vehicles to hospital '250' on Volin Island. Later ships began to arrive in Gdansk where the wounded were offloaded and taken to Szczecin and from there were loaded on buses and taken to the hospital. Basically there were four periods during which refugees were transported. The first was at the end of July 1949, the second in the middle of September and part of October, the third in November and the fourth in December. The latter ones were sporadic and very few refugees were transported.

The first batch of refugees transported from Albania took place on July 13, 1949. The ship, with a crew of 50, that took them was called 'Koshchushko' and carried 750 wounded. They were in bad shape and needed specialist help and fast. The partly healed patients were housed at the bottom of the ship and those who needed immediate attention and dressings changed were placed in the cabins. Each patient was issued a number written on a card which hung from their neck. They were supposed to memorize the number.

While they were still in Albania, before they were loaded on the ship, rumours began to circulate among them that they would be loaded onto a Polish ship, which meant that they would most likely be taken to Poland. Some had met Polish doctors in Albania. Many remembered being treated by a female Polish doctor in Sukt but they did not know her last name. She was constantly with them and cared for them, especially for women. The Greek nurses and health personnel were subordinate to her.

The wounded were not allowed to leave their bunks while passing through Gibraltar or during the short stay in Copenhagen. But the ship found itself in a terrible fog while traveling through the English Channel. The sirens blew for long periods of time and the trip lasted twelve days before it docked in Shvinoujshche Harbour on July 25.

Ochinjets and Fedina were a bit surprised when, the previous morning, they received a call from Colonel Kavinjski ordering them to prepare several hundred blankets, drinks in milk cans and many pots. Everything was then loaded onto trucks and ready to go. Among the column of trucks were also the public health vehicles ready to pick up the wounded. The column of trucks sat idle for many hours waiting for orders to depart. Everyone thought the alarm had been sounded a bit too early. Then in the evening a jeep appeared from the command building and signaled the column to move. Everyone was relieved when the column left. By then everyone was also tired of waiting. The Column of trucks passed by the Mjendzivodzhe guardhouse and then it was off on its way to the port to pick up the refugees.

While traveling on its way the column was diverted into a densely wooded grove. A dark looking older man with a large moustache, wearing an officer's uniform, came out of the woods. It was Colonel Stanek. There were many people in uniforms and in civilian clothes hiding in the woods, along with many medical vehicles. At night the entire truck column moved out and drove into the harbour where it was met by a huge ship. They began unloading the ship at dawn while it was still dark. It was cold that day. The severely wounded were placed in special baskets and offloaded from the ship by cranes. The wounded had to endure the cold and inconvenience while being offloaded but the process was quick and soon they were set on land. While this was going on, a number of people in uniform appeared. They carefully covered the wounded with blankets, placed them on stretchers, loaded them onto the public health vehicles and drove them away.

When they were subsequently asked, all the patients said that their first impression of Poland was very pleasant. After the period of uncertainty that they had experienced before that, they found the Poles very caring and compassionate. They felt as if they were in

good hands. The lightly wounded got off the ship on their own and after stepping off the ship each was issued a blanket by the soldiers standing by the bridge. After that they were escorted to the trucks and to a small number of buses. There they were given hot drinks. The wounded who had amputated legs were carried onto the vehicles by hand. One of the men cried, not because he was in pain but because of the attention he was receiving, being carried by hand. Some, to express their gratitude, petted the metal eagles on the hats of the Polish soldiers who carried them.

The strange newcomers were dressed in half-civilian, half-military clothing, wearing American looking hats. They were dirty, thin-faced, neglected and sorrowful. They kept silent and to themselves. They left the impression that they were strange and unsure of themselves. They curiously watched the Polish soldiers standing at the seashore. Some newcomers wanted to touch their military medals, signs and symbols. All the heavily wounded were bandaged in dirty and bloody cloths and rags and under the bandages the wounds were leaking pus. It looked like there was no means to look after them on the ship or perhaps those providing the assistance were inexperienced? Some of the wounded had deformed limbs and did not want them seen by the soldiers, but once in a while the soldiers took a peek and showed their compassion by bowing and making hand gestures. When the entire operation was completed the trucks left Shvenoujashte in a hurry. They passed the empty Mjenzivodzhe without noticing those who were there on vacation.

The first transport was a great experience for the hospital staff. They had been preparing for this for a long time. They were nervous due to the responsibility entrusted to them. Would everything go right? Would they be able to receive all the wounded and sick during the night and the next day? All these issues were causing them stress. They walked from corner to corner, checking whether something should be done, if something needed to be prepared or fixed. The wait was long and caused them much stress. Then the moment they saw the public health vehicles arriving and stopping in front of their building, they all came alive with excitement and laughter. Their anxiety was gone. They wanted to show the newcomers that they cared not only professionally but enthusiastically with all their hearts. They felt that the newcomers deserved all their attention.

It was obvious, generally speaking, that these poor people had survived the horrors of war. They arrived tired, weakened, sick and generally exhausted from the prolonged suffering they had had to endure. Their limbs were sore and caused them much pain with any movement. Many had high temperatures. Some of the heavily wounded were very ill and were unable to rejoice in their arrival at their destination. Generally speaking everyone tried to express some enthusiasm with only a few showing mistrust saying, “Don’t touch me; I don’t know who you are.” That’s how it seemed to some of the staff when they heard the wounded newcomers muttering words at them.

Some even refused to surrender their weapons, although it was explained to them that the weapons would be placed in storage, they still did not want to give them up. They were attached to their pistols and makeshift Partisan guns made of cut pipes. Only a few refused to eat, the majority extended their hands and helped themselves to the sandwiches especially provided for them. They pointed at the bread and gestured if they could have more; looking for approval from their hosts. Later they said they could not believe that there was so much fresh bread. The partisans often dreamed of eating a lot of bread but here there was no limit to how much they could have. “You want more? There is plenty!” was the usual response from the hostesses who were more than happy to fulfill their wishes. And this is what the newcomers remembered the most and would never forget for the rest of their lives.

The patients lay on beds lined up on both sides of the huge hall. They were astonished to see so many clean bowls for washing, water containers, piles of pyjamas, robes and slippers, milk cans and drinks. Some took extra food and hid it under their pillows because they were not sure what might happen next. They were afraid that the food might run out as it often had during their Partisan days. But from what they saw happening all around them, they could tell that Poland was a country a lot richer than the countries in which they had stayed before. A lot of them had stayed in Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, which were nothing in comparison to Poland. Many were also amazed at how much better organized Poland was than the other countries to which they had been.

The wounded were quickly registered, undressed from their dirty clothing and cleaned up. They were washed, shaven and had their dirty bandages, rags and towels removed and burned. Those who needed new bandages and dressings were left on the beds. The others were given brand new pyjamas, put on stretchers and transferred to their quarters. Those who could walk were given the block number and sent off to their blocks where they were subdivided into groups and then transferred to suitable quarters. Only the severely wounded and sick stayed in the beds and remained under observation until they were better. Any of the clothing that was worth saving was sent for disinfection and then placed in storage.

Later transports were handled in a similar fashion but none could compare to the first. The number of patients in the later transports was significantly smaller and there was more personnel in the hospital staff. By now they had become more experienced in handling refugee patients and had much larger supplies of medical equipment and resources. The first transport of patients arrived in Dzhivnuv in September. Among the first patients to reach the compound were 29 civilians with amputated arms and legs. Then more than 150 Partisans arrived on October 8<sup>th</sup> along with about 2,500 who were transported to Shvinoujshche on the ship “Koshchushko”. The ship sailed from Albania during the night of September 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, 1949 and arrived in Poland eleven days later. From what we were told, among the Greek crew there were also three Greeks translators.

The third transport (the one on which Risto was traveling) arrived in Gdansk on October 26<sup>th</sup>, most likely on the Romanian ship Transylvania (some however argued that it was the ship Carolina). The Transylvania was a luxury ship which, before the war, was intended for the personal use of the Romanian king. This ship reportedly left the Albanian coast in the middle of October and carried 2 to 3 thousand passengers. The crew was Romanian, among whom were also some Polish nurses and doctors. This ship was followed by an English warship all the way to Gibraltar until the Romanian captain convinced the warship captain that he was carrying tourists.

During the trip the hungry and starving passengers were given as much food as they wanted to eat. Unfortunately the consequences from this were dire which, in addition to the seasickness, had caused many to vomit violently and have bad diarrhea. As a result more than 500 became very ill and suffered from exhaustion, especially after they were put on trains and transferred from Gdansk to Szczecin. After eating too much and being sick, the patients then refused to eat or drink at all despite pleas from the nurses to do so. To add insult to their pain, when they arrived in Dzhivnuv instead of being issued pyjamas, because the hospital had none, they were issued long white nightgowns. This was too much for the men as they refused to wear the funny white women's dresses. Finally, after much pleading, they were convinced that this was only temporary and that they would soon be issued proper pyjamas and they would look like men again. Later they all forgot those small, initial misunderstandings.

The last transport to arrive was in December. It did not carry many wounded but because the hospital was almost full to capacity it was only able to take 50 patients. When the patients from the first transport were all healed and began to leave more vacancies were created and a group of 30 was admitted. Then in early 1950 very small groups of Greeks arrived from other Eastern European popular democracies. In May of the same year, 50 people from Budapest arrived and were admitted. They had been treated in the Hungarian hospitals but many had unhealed wounds despite their previous treatments. This hospital had a good reputation so that is why it was highly recommended, mostly by word of mouth, among the Greeks.

They took their time treating patients in this hospital and used multiple procedures. Inflammation of bones unfortunately complicated surgeries and rehabilitation procedures. Of the 1,175 patients admitted, 215 had fractured bones. The Macedonians also played a special role towards mutual understanding between the Poles and the patients. The Macedonians spoke a Slavic language. They lived in Greece as a national minority but their mother tongue was Macedonian, a language they were not allowed to speak, a language that they said was prohibited from being spoken in nationalist Greece.



During the struggle, on the communist side, hostilities between the Macedonians and Greeks had weakened but were still active. The Macedonians had a strong sense of national identity and had not forgotten that Alexander the Great was one of them. Because of that and because they were mistreated by the Greeks they did not feel good being among the Greeks. The Macedonians had their own national ambitions and in confidence would say that all Macedonians must unite. The Macedonians living in Greece felt that they too should have their autonomy like those living in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. In talks with Greeks, the Greeks also admitted that the Macedonian problem had not been solved and agreed that it should be solved.

The entire refugee population, be it wounded fighters, civilians, or children, was accepted in Poland as Greek. But many Poles quickly realized that among the newcomers there were differences in language, customs, songs and dances. These differences were not only appreciated but were supported by the Poles.”

Spiro is grateful to Petre Nakovski for making this information available and would like to wholeheartedly thank Brigadier General, Dr. Vladislav Barchikovski, a noble man who proved to be much greater than all of us, for his contribution, all the doctors and medical personnel, all the workers and all the Polish people for helping our people far away from their homes. Poland will always remain in Spiro, not only because he was born and lived there for 100 days, but because of all it did for us all. “Poles are beautiful people and I love them all!” says Spiro.

According to what Risto left for us in his notes, the wounded were taken directly to the hospital designated “250”. The hospital had fourteen large blocks converted to a medical centre by the Poles after the war. During the war these blocks were barracks which the German army occupied. The patients were placed in quarantine after they were brought to the hospital. Everything that they brought with them, clothing, bags, etc., was taken and placed in storage and later returned to them. The hospital was located in Volin, a peninsula in the Baltic Sea, close to the town Shchechin. The hospital was a quiet place fully equipped with surgical equipment and the best staff,

specialists and doctors available. Each block was equipped with specially trained personnel and specialists for certain types of wounds and injuries to different parts of the body. Even before Risto's group arrived, there were many Macedonian patients in the hospital. Besides treating its patients, the hospital also provided living quarters for those who were healed and a school to attend in order to prepare them for life in Poland. There were around two to three thousand wounded brought to this hospital and who were going through various phases of treatment. This hospital healed many wounded and brought them back to life, but the good part was that, in addition to healing from their wounds, these patients were made to feel welcome so far away from home. Therapy was very painful, difficult and long-lasting for the badly injured but with help from the medical staff, the patients managed to turn their lives around. Risto stayed at the hospital until May 1950.

### **People from Zhelevo at hospital "250"**

1. Micho Gaduchi
2. Micho Iankula
3. Andoni Iankula
4. Petro Kurzo
5. Atanas Trendov
6. Atanas Voinov
7. Dafina Vrantsidu Trendo
8. Micho Puchunga
9. Sotir Stepanov
10. Forcho
11. Stavro Bogdanov
12. Kicho Mazenko
13. Micho Flora
14. Lambro Rumiakov
15. Gligori Stamou Govedor
16. Filip Bekiari
17. Risto Mavrovski

### **Zgorzelets**

Those patients who successfully completed their treatment began to migrate to the town Zgorzelets during the months of March, April

and May 1950. Very few patients remained at the hospital after May. The hospital closed in June 1950. The staff was moved and hospital “250” vanished.

At the beginning of 1950, Polish authorities allowed the immigrant population to move to many cities in Poland. Many moved to Mendzhe, Guzhe and a large part moved to Zgorzelets. Zgorzelets was divided in two parts. The larger part of the city belonged to the Democratic Republic of Germany. Only a small part was located on Polish territory. In 1950 the city was empty. Greek refugees were allowed to move there after an agreement was made with the CPG. After that, those who had gone to Mendzhe, Guzhe, the wounded fighters from hospital “250”, etc., all gathered in Zgorzelets where schools were opened to teach both Greek and Macedonian. CPG political parties were also started, the “Nikos Veloanis” for all the Greeks in Poland and “Ilinden” for all the Macedonians. The CPG Secretary was Timio for the Greeks and Maki for the Macedonians. The vice president of “Nikos Veloanis” was Barba Traiko from Voden Region, and for “Ilinden” was Lambro Moskov from the village Dmbeni, Kostur Region. Included among the people living in Zgorzelets, wounded, children and fighters, were the following people from Zhelevo.

### **People from Zhelevo living in Zgorzelets**

1. Pop Spiro with his wife Sofia Balkou. Spiro died in 1950 Mendzhe Guzhe
2. Nikola Pachata, his son Atanas and his daughter Velika
3. Dane Chaku with his wife
4. Sotir Kiru Makria
5. Petre Barbalov
6. Gligor Stamo
7. Sandrina Traikovska
8. Tena Florova
9. Vasilitsa Keru
10. Giorgi Markou and his wife Nasa and their children
11. Krsto Stepanov and his wife and sons Sotir and Micho
12. Giorgi Trendov and his daughter Dafina and son Tanas
13. Tanas Petreski Markou, wife Mara (died in 1951 in Zgorzelets) and daughter Ristana

14. Tanas Mavrou Shkavrev
15. Iani Sideri Dudumo
16. Hristina Nikolova, wife of Kole Shoferot
17. Tanas Voinove and Krstoitsa Voinovska
18. Tase Markov
19. Micho Puchunga, died in 1951 in Zgorzelets
20. Spiro Iankula and his son and daughter
21. Done Iankula
22. Sofia Damovski (Foto's)
23. Foteitsa Ianovski (Fote's)
24. File Todorov Muto
25. Forcho
26. Lambro Rumiakov
27. Stavro Mazemko Kicho
28. Micho Gaduchi
29. Petre Kurzov
30. Malina Markou
31. Veselina Luchkova
32. Spiro Kirovski
33. Stefo Kirovski with his wife and son Micho
34. Tode Kirov with his mother Ristoitsa
35. Petre Pirpiko with his wife Elena
36. Hristo Sideri Daskalot
37. Lambro Florov and his son Micho
38. Hristina Mavrou Bekiarova
39. Micho Iankula
40. File Bekiarov
41. Tena and daughter Kotovtsi
42. Hristina Bukuri and her brothers
43. Krstoitsa Iandrovska
44. Risto Mavrovski

In due time more people from Zhelevo, living in other places, came to live in Zgorzelets. Included among them were Ristana Georgievski Luchkova, a family from Tashkent, Menela Florov (Lambro's son) and his brother, and Kole Mavrovski (Risto's brother). Most of the people from Zhelevo were given jobs in the cities Bogatinia and Zgorzelets. Bogatinia had an agricultural cooperative farm that was divided into two parts, one located in Markochite and the other in the city Bogatinia. These places made a

triangle between Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Bogatinia had a school which was attended by the following people:

Leftera Purova from the village Vmbel, Leftera Lulu from the village Vmbel, Tsotsa from the village Vmbel, Hristina, Ermionina and Nina were Greeks and Athena from the Kostur Region villages.

There were also children attending the same school. One child was Macedonian from the village Aitos, Lerin Region, and the rest were Greeks. The people of Zhelevo began to arrive here in the spring of 1950 and continued to arrive until 1952 when they began to move away, mostly to Canada. Some took on jobs in other farms outside of these cities while others remained in Zgorzelets. The most popular destinations for the people of Zhelevo were Brotslav, Shvidnitsa, Nemcha and Vaubzhih. Those who came later, from the other people's republics, remained there until 1956-57 when mass evictions began with people heading for Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Greece and Bulgaria, to be closer to home. After that very few people from Zhelevo remained in Poland. The one person, who Risto remembers, was Tanas Pacha, a man who took a Polish wife and decided to remain in Zgorzelets. While living in Zgorzelets, Risto was separated from the people of Zhelevo and that was one reason why he wanted to move away and live someplace else.

In May 1950 Risto was transferred from the hospital "250" to the city Zgorzelets and placed in a home for adult children, in which 18 males and females were living. Along with Risto there was Tanas Voinu and Micho Iankula from the village Zhelevo. Risto, a member of the CPG and a bit more educated than the others, was appointed assistant to the teacher teaching the children. Here they were located in Varshavska number 49, but not for long. They were soon moved to Bogatinia, an industrial city with many textile factories. This was beneficial for the children because, in addition to being taught the theory of textiles, they were given a chance to experience practical lessons in these factories. Risto, along with his fellow villagers who were badly wounded, was unable to stay long in the city where a lot of DAG fighters, now just ordinary workers, found work. There was a Party organization in the city headed by Dzhuma, a Greek. One day a member of the CPG "Nikos Veloianis" Central Committee decided to hold a grand Party conference in the city, during which

time Risto asked him to release him from his current job and allow him to return to Zgorzelets, which he did.

The man did as promised and ordered the organization to release Risto. Risto in turn packed his bags and took a bus the next day to Zgorzelets. Upon his arrival he, and the others who went with him, were placed on Dasinchego street number 39. Here they parted company. Tanas had found his aunt, Malina Markou, and took on a job at the Delta cooperative, after that he got married. Micho left immediately and went to the city Nemcha where he found a job and got married. Risto found himself alone and free, but soon afterwards the Party sent him on a course to learn the Polish language.

Risto was enrolled in the faculty at Vrotslav and was to start his course in the fall of 1950 but unfortunately Risto was bypassed by a Greek who was sent in his place. Later Risto was told that the Committee had enrolled him in a different school and not to the one in Vrtslav. And as such, in the beginning of September 1950, the first regular Party school for the whole territory of Poland began its operation under the direction of the CPG. There were 70 participants who attended classes, which lasted about nine months until May and June 1951. The subjects taught were very difficult and were followed by written and oral exams after which diplomas were handed out in the presence of CPG General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis. Upon completion of this course, certain students were then selected for further study in a different school, a military school. Thus Risto was transferred from a Party school to a military school.

### **Party School “500”**

Risto and the other students were sent by train from Zgorzelets and, after a long journey, arrived at the old place where hospital “250” had been, except now the former hospital had been converted to a school and renamed “500”. It was a military school which housed about 450 students. The students were all DAG and CPG officers and former fighters of the Greek Civil War. Included among those who were with Risto in the First Unit were Done Iankula from Zhelevo, Tane Paskov from Ofchareni, Tashko Botsev of Ksinonero and Naum Chakalo from Operino, the rest were Greeks. The Staff

and officers in the school were Poles. The students were classified as being part of the Headquarters of the Polish Ministry of National Defense. The students were divided into three units. Risto was part of the first unit. The course was designed to last one year but it only went from June 1951 to January 1952, at which point it was closed. The program was difficult, with much theoretical and practical material and exams were taken every three months. Risto did well in two sets of exams and was recognized by Command. Much discipline was expected from the students because the courses were designed for senior CPG officers, which were completed without any problems. The courses taken in this school were also helpful in private life because the students were expected to learn the Polish language as well as how to behave in Polish society. When Zahariadis came to the school he gave a fiery speech after which it was decided to close down the school. The reason given was because the Greek government had protested to the UN for having such a school and as such the Poles decided to close it down. After the school was closed, the students were loaded on a train and sent to Lizbark, a place near the city Olshin. The Germans used to have bases at this place. The terrain had natural beauty with many mountains and lakes. Unfortunately this place was isolated and the students had no contact with the local population. The school had to be isolated because classes were being held illegally. And as such the students went through two schools before they were disbanded and sent to various cities to work, including Vritslav, Poznian and Zgorzelets. From there some left and went to various other towns.

As was mentioned earlier, Risto returned to Zgorzelets in 1952 after attending military school. The situation there had changed and the city was not the same as Risto remembered it from 1950. There were no jobs available, the school was not working and there were no factories where one could find work. Risto remained in Zgorzelets where he was examined by a medical military commission and found to be permanently disabled. He was housed on Dasichengo street number 45 and was given coupons for food and cigarettes, but no money. The fighters who were capable of working, on the other hand, were given jobs in factories and their salaries were paid with money. Risto was a young man and in need of money but incapable of earning it, so he decided that he wanted to leave Zgorzelets and go out on his own. But he needed permission from those who looked

after his affairs and his health. He first went to Barba Traiko but was unable to convince him to allow him to leave. Later he went to Maki and Barba Lambro who gave him permission to move to Shvidnitsa provided he gave up everything he had in Zgorzelets, including his bed, blankets and sheets. After he agreed, Risto was given formal permission and a paid train ticket from Zgorzelets to Shvidnitsa. This was in February 1952.

### **Party School in Vrotslav**

In August 1956, Risto was sent to the Party school in Vrotslav by the PORP Party Committee. Risto left his wife, brother and cousin in Shvidnitsa while he and a number of others went to Vrotslav. There they were placed in a well-equipped boarding school, which was supposed to last for a year. Many subjects were taught including mathematics, geography, history, biology, physics, the Polish language, Greek history, Marxism, political economics, etc., fourteen subjects in all. In the beginning the subjects were very difficult but the students had good teaching staff who worked full time with them so no one was left alone to struggle on their own. Risto remained in this school until March 1957 when the school again closed by order of Warsaw. All such schools that existed throughout Poland were closed. The only one that remained open was the one in the centre of Warsaw. A decision to close down these schools was made by Vladislav Gomulka, head of PORP, in September 1956. Vladislav and his comrades Spihalski, Klishko and others decided that this kind of education not only cost Polish society too much money but was unnecessary for the state. They closed down all the “sovkhozes” and “kolkhozes” and divided the land amongst the peasants. This all started after Russian troops left Poland and as a result of political demands to issue work permits to private businesses. This was also the time when nationalism was on the rise and there were demands made for the Jews, Germans and foreigners to leave the country, which of course led to no good. Now, for the first time, Poles were afraid in their own country. In the spring of 1957 General Rokosovski left Poland. At the same time Jews began to leave for Israel. Many Macedonians also sought permission to leave permanently and move to Yugoslavia and Greece.



## Shvidnitsa

As luck would have it, Risto ran into Nikola Giorgievski, a friend of his and former co-fighter who lived in Shvidnitsa. Nikola promised Risto he would find him an apartment and work there. Soon afterwards Risto left for Shvidnitsa. Nikola Giorgievski and Nikola Michkovski were at the railway station waiting for him when Risto arrived. Together they took him to the wagon manufacturing factory where he was well received by his comrades who gave him a place to stay in the barracks and supplied him with coupons for food and money. In the barracks, beside his bed were linen, towels and basic hygiene products. So after years of strife in hospitals and schools, Risto finally arrived in a factory with large machines. This was a new day and the beginning of a new life for Risto in Poland.

After Risto established himself in the factory, met up with people he knew as well as with people he had just met in this beautiful industrial city, he returned to Zgorzelets to get Party recommendation to join the organization in Shvidnitsa, which he obtained without any problems.

As soon as Risto registered with the Party in Shvidnitsa, he began to look around and was happy with what he saw. The industrial city was well-developed with many factories, including factories for making cars such as M-9, ZVAP, SVUP, SHARPALNIJA, Rankoviche, etc. There were factories for processing sugar, gas storage facilities, thermal power plants and many smaller enterprises in which the former DAG fighters were working. The city was a great trading centre with about 70,000 inhabitants. There were many schools, a sports stadium, a swimming pool, a large park, an artificial lake, a railway and roads that linked it with nearby cities like Vałbzhuh, Belava, Shchegom, Iavozina and others. Shvidnitsa also had military barracks that housed Russian troops, an airport, a beautiful movie theater and many bars and restaurants. This was a place where everything was moving very slowly and had everything that a young man could wish for in those days after World War II.

The immigrants were well-accepted by the local residents, which made them feel very welcome. Before the war this place had been under German occupation just as Macedonia had been under Turkish

slavery. The capital of the entire Dolni Slonsk Region was Vrotslav, a large landscape with many channels of water running through it. The capital of Gorni Slonsk was Katovitse, a well-developed coal mining town that provided coal for the industry. Poland received these lands in 1945 after World War II, when Poland fell under the influence of the USSR. These territories were very rich but were destroyed during the war. After receiving these territories, Poland became a developed industrial country. In late 1949 many Greeks and Macedonians, many of the refugees from the Greek Civil War who had fled to Albania, were taken to Poland.

After Risto arrived in Shvidnitsa he took up residence at the factory barracks with his friends Nikola Giorgievski, who later married Risto's friend Hristina from the village Rula, who Risto knew from the partisan days, and Nikola Michikovski, his wife, grandmother, child, and Barba Micho, who had arrived in the city before Risto. After Risto's arrival more people came to the city. Among them were Micho Shkordov and his wife, Tashko Chapkanov, Vasil and Sotir Trpovski, who later got married, Micho Vangelov, and Micho from Seres Region. All these people came from the Vrotslav city schools as KV workers. So, besides those people mentioned above, there were also many other workers, including Greeks, who had worked and lived together, first in the barracks and then in common buildings. In the spring and early summer in 1952, Risto worked as a general labourer and at the same time studied to become a welder. But this did not last long as Risto became ill and was sent to an eye clinic in Vrotslav. He had developed eye problems from the bright welding light.

Risto remained in the eye clinic until he healed and at the same time was informed that he could not weld or do any heavy work. And that was that. Later Risto was visited by the authorities and placed in the ward where upholsteries were handled and where a number of older people worked. These people accepted Risto like he was their own son. They were involved in repairing old office furniture, belts for machines, gloves, aprons, wooden shoes and everything else that was needed in the factory. Risto had to study theory and practice as well as pass a test in order to become a KV worker. Unfortunately this too did not last long, as Risto was requested to change jobs. The authorities recommended that he take on a job operating the factory

cranes, which Risto accepted. This was complicated work for which Risto had to again study and pass a test in order to qualify to be a KV crane operator. Risto did not like this job because he had to work in three shifts which took him away from his social activities. In order to qualify for a better job, Risto enrolled in a course for technical drawing, which he successfully completed and passed the exam just in time, just before the factory began to develop a new type of narrow passenger wagon. Risto applied for a job and got it. His new responsibilities included working in a department as a KV locksmith where he spent a long time working. This, more or less, was Risto's resume of the jobs he did in the factory for making wagons in town Shvidnitsa, for the period from 1952 to August 1957.

Risto's work in the social and political life in Shvidnitsa from the winter of 1952, after he joined the people at the factory for manufacturing wagons, connected him with all the organizations such as the CPG Party organization in Poland, the "Nikos Veloianis" organization for the Greek refugees and the "Ilinden" organization for the Macedonian refugees.

\* At the "Ilinden" Macedonian Organization for the Aegean Macedonians, Presidency meeting, an organization created under Zahariadis's initiative, held on June 4, 1956, Colonel Pando Vaina, head of the organization, in his speech about the persecution of the Macedonian people by the CPG, among other things, said: "...During the Greek Civil War and even after DAG was defeated, Zahariadis had implemented policies to vilify and persecute a large number of Macedonian cadres and popular fighters. Labeling Macedonian fighters and political figures 'enemy agents' and other derogatory terms. This was very easy for Zahariadis to do but these charges, however, were completely unfounded... But because of these false accusations made by Zahariadis, many Macedonians were arrested and some were executed during 1948, 1949 and later." (Am F-21/1600).

Risto was involved in all these organizations as a member and activist. Risto was the only one who was educated in such matters and, as such, was quickly accepted in the Municipal City Committee. The main slogan of the Party was: "competitions and

more work”. Then Risto, together with Sotir Asencharov, established the presidency of “Ilinden” as follows:

- President: Sotir Asencharov from the village German, Prespa Region
- Secretary: Risto Mavrovski responsible for education
- Treasurer: Manoli Begovski from Voden Region
- Macedonian Language Teacher: Tsveta Sklifova
- Supervisor and Inspector: Tasho Chapkanov
- Music and Dancing: Ilia Sklifov
- Youth Organizer: Kole from the village Bapchor

This was the Board and Council for the 1952 period. Later staff changes were made. In addition to the Board, the organization had subcommittees responsible for organizing sports activities, arts, correspondence, etc. The goal of the organization was to bring everyone together and keep them informed about what was happening. This organization closely cooperated with the organization “Nikos Veloianis” and some of the people were members of both organizations. The Board in which Risto participated was made up of members from all the factories.

The following people participated:

- Vango, President, a Greek
- Lotsos, member, a Greek
- Risto Mavrovski, responsible for the Macedonians
- Apostolis Dimakopoulos, Secretary, a Greek
- Vasilis Zogas, Party chores and tasks
- Zirinchev, member, a Macedonian
- Sotir Asancharov, member, a Macedonian
- Tanas Trendov, member, a Macedonian

This was the presidency of the organization “Nikos Veloianis” in Shvidnitsa in 1952. Many changes were made later in both the membership and work done by that Committee, which was later renamed to Board.

From 1952 to half way into 1957, the immigrant people (both Greeks and Macedonians) working in Shvidnitsa were employed in the various factories as follows:

#### The Wagon Manufacturing Factory

- Nikola Michikovski, wife Alexandra, son Sotir and his wife's mother
- Nikola Giorgievski, wife Hristina, daughters Kiratsa and Elena, and a child that died
- Aleko Liangovski and his mother
- Micho Shkordov, wife Leftera, son Ilia and daughter Aleksandra
- Sotir Trpovski, wife Tsana and son Vane
- Vasil Trpovski and his woman
- Trpo Gichevski and wife Tsila
- Micho Angelov from Seres Region
- Tashko Chapkanov from Voden Region
- Dedo Micho from Voden Region
- Done from the village Rula
- Pando Manchev from the village Zagorichani
- Vasilka Purovska with her children Micho and Lina
- Risto Mavrovski

There were 34 people in total in this factory. The factory Board consisted of the following people:

- Nikola Giorgievski, President of "Ilinden"
- Micho Shkordov, Secretary
- Tashko Chapkanov, Treasurer
- Nikola Michikovski, Member
- Vasil Trpovski, Member

#### Factory M – 9

- Ilia Sklifov and his wife Tsveta
- Sotir Asencharov, wife Iana, daughter Mira and his father Iose
- Mitra Adzievska, mother-in-law and children Mitra, Tsena, Sandra, Dora and Vangel
- Aleko Ilievski, wife Sofia and their son
- Stavre Gruiovski, wife Stanka and two daughters

- George and his wife with four children from the village Zagorichani
- Georgi Kostadinov from the village Zelenichevo

The factory Board consisted of the following people:

- Ilia Sklifov, President of “Ilinden”
- Aleko Ilievski, Secretary
- Georgi Kostadinov, Treasurer
- Tsena Sklifova, Macedonian language teacher

Factory – ZVAP

The people working in this factory were predominantly young people who came from the various schools and this was their first job. Among them were some older people who are listed below:

- Risto Kotsmanov
- Metodija Dafov and wife and son
- Pando Zirinchev (a much older person)
- Hristina Mladinka from the village Lak
- Mara from the village Shestevo
- Chana from the village Lagen
- Kole from the village Bapchor
- Kuzo Sklifov from the village Zagorichani
- Olga Dzhatева from the village Pozdivishta, came a little later
- Todor Giakovski from the village German
- Lambro and Mara from Voden Region

The factory Board consisted of the following people:

- Risto Kotsmanov, President of “Ilinden”
- Pando Zirinchev, Secretary
- Kole from the village Bapchor, Treasurer and responsible for the youth

The following people were responsible for the disabled who worked in the Spudzhelnia Cooperative:

- Manoli Benovski, wife Aleksandra and daughter

- Angel Dramov
- Todor Stamkov
- Kosta Begalov worked in the garden

Manoli Benovski was in charge.

Factory – SVUP

- Tanas Trendov

Factory - Leather accessories (Renkavitse)

- Lina Purovska
- Sofia Rosi Mavrovska

Apparel Cooperative

- Micho Purovski

Wood working Cooperative

- Nikola Mavrovski

City Hospital

- Aleksandra Kirova (had a daughter)
- Visha Popovska
- Antigona Pandovska and her children

Working in the town Schegom

- Giorgi Tasevski, wife Kostadina and children. There were other Macedonians as well whose names Risto did not remember.

There were Macedonians working in the city Iavozhina Svonska who were members of the “Ilinden” organization, 104 in total.

Included among those who died and were buried in the city cemetery were:

- Vasilka from the village German
- Aleksandra Michikovska from the village Rabi
- Kole and Hristina Giorgievski's son (a young child)

Listed below are some of the tasks carried out by the CPG Party through the Organizations "Ilinden", "Nikos Velloianis" and the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party).

The main tasks and slogans were:

- "ALL TO WORK"
- "ALL TO LEARN A CRAFT AND RETURN TO THE MOTHERLAND PREPARED"
- "MORE WORK, BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE THAT EXCEEDS THE NORM"
- "COMPETITION BETWEEN PLANTS AND FACTORIES"
- "EDUCATION, BROTHERHOOD AND POLITICAL UNITY AMONG THE IMMIGRANTS, GREEKS AND MACEDONIANS"
- "HELP BUILD POLAND WITH ALL OUR MIGHT TO MAKE IT BETTER"

These slogans were a motivating factor in the lives of the Macedonian people in Poland.

### **Correspondent of the newspaper "Dimokratis"**

The newspaper "Dimokratis", published in Vrotslav, was printed in both Greek and Macedonian. This newspaper was included with the daily workers' newspaper called the "Gazeta", which was very popular among all immigrants, Greeks and Macedonians. This newspaper had correspondents in all the cities that sent daily reports describing life and work in those cities. The main correspondent for the Macedonian language edition in Shvidnitsa was Risto Mavrovski. The Greek correspondents were Demakopoulos and Zogas. For his work Risto was praised and rewarded several times by the editorial board and was sent on a three month course in Vrotslav to learn more about journalism. Risto successfully completed the course and continued to work in Shvidnitsa as a correspondent and contributor to the newspaper. Later Risto



engaged his brother Nikola to investigate and report on the activities and work of the young people in Shvidnitsa.

A major political event that took place at that time was Joseph Stalin Visarionovich's death in March 1953, about which many correspondents had written. There was material written about his glory days, his death and his burial, marked by the sounding of sirens, standing ovations and some tears here and there. A little earlier, Boleslav Bierut, Secretary of the Polish Party PZPR had died. The new Secretary appointed was Edward Ohab. This was also the time when a decision was made to automatically include all CPG members living in Poland into the PZPR. From then on Risto had become a member of the factory and the city committee. During this period, as was said earlier, the following slogans became very important:

- "WORK MORE"
- "BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE"
- "PEACE IN THE WORLD"

And for the immigrants:

- "HELP OUR COMRADES WHO WERE IN PRISON IN THE DRY GREEK ISLANDS, MAKRONISOS AND GIURA"

From employee contributions, aid packages were put together and given to the Red Cross to deliver.

The organization had its own kitchens in Shvidnitsa, where Pando Shiperkov's mother and father and Dedo Kole's daughter worked.

### **Cultural and artistic life in Shvidnitsa**

Besides the kitchen, the organization had a large room used as a club. It was given to them by the Polish authorities to use for personal business, gatherings, dances and other ceremonial performances. To improve the living standards of the immigrants, the following cultural associations were formed in Shvidnitsa:

- A Choir and an Orchestra

The following people were included in the choir and orchestra:

- Ilia Sklifov, conductor and first violin
- Georgi Kostadinov, mandolin and guitar
- Vangel Dramov, mandolin
- Nikola Mavrovski, drums (Risto's brother)
- Kuzo Sklifov, guitar, (Ilia's younger brother)
- Todor Giakovski, guitar and drums

The group of singers and dancers consisted of the following people:

- Nikola from Bapchor (in charge of the group)
- Iana Trpovska
- Micho Purovski
- Lina Purovska
- Tashko Chapkanov (responsible for the entire Board)

This was a very large mixed group comprised of Greeks and Macedonians, young and old. It was very capable and was praised for its many competitions. This group competed in Vrotslav against similar groups from Zgorzelets, Legnitsa, Ielenia Gura, etc. The group won and took first place for which it was awarded a prized cup and a set of costumes. The group performed every Saturday in Shvidnitsa. It also performed regularly in neighbouring cities such as Nemcha, Belava, Dzhordzhonov and others. Basically every holiday, including Ilinden, was celebrated with various performances. Both Macedonians and Greeks participated freely and there were no misunderstandings or problems between them.

In the fall of 1952, in Shvidnitsa, Risto was given a place to live on 24 Panska Street, together with his friends Vasil Zogas, a Greek, Sokratis Krlingichi, a Greek and Dedo Micho from Voden Region. This building belonged to the factory and all who lived in it worked at the plant for manufacturing wagons. Risto liked this place because it was located downtown, close to the people he wanted to be with and who worked and lived near the other factories in the city. As mentioned earlier, the plant for making wagons was at the end of town but its management decided to build apartments for its employees and a dormitory for the young people downtown. All

employees were given apartments according to the number of family members. All single people were given residence in the dormitory. This was during the summer of 1952 when everything was done for a better quality of life.

### **The Political School at the Wagon factory**

In early 1953 Risto Kotsmanov, who earlier worked in the ZVAR factory, was sent to the Agricultural Engineering School in Warsaw to further his education. In September 1953 the wagon manufacturing factory, which at the time was working two shifts, morning and afternoon, started a political party school to educate its own factory activists, which lasted for the next nine months. Risto participated in the educational program and studied the following subjects:

- International struggle of the working class
- Marxism
- Political Economics
- Struggle of the Polish Communist Party
- New technology and the construction of the Peoples' Republic of Poland
- History of the USSR Communist Party
- Various other side items and themes

The subjects offered at the wagon factory were taught by well-educated personalities. At the completion of the course, students were given tests to assess their theoretical and practical knowledge. The information learned subsequently proved to be very useful in future work. Apart from taking courses at the wagon factory school, Risto continued to write for the newspaper "Dimokratis", serve on the Board, assist in the Macedonian language school, help the folk group, participate in plant activities, help the sick and elderly, and perform other important activities. He did everything he could in the interest of his people.

In the summer of 1954, a new group of young people began to arrive from Romania. Included in the group were Micho and Lina Purovski, a brother and sister, who immediately became involved in all activities. In September 1954 Sotir Asencharov, who resided in

Shvidnica, was sent on a course to the party school in Lodz, which lasted nine months. With his departure the 1954 Board needed to be re-structured. The new composition was as follows:

- Risto Mavrovski, President
- Manoli Benovski, Secretary
- Tashko Chapkanov, Treasurer
- Todor Stamkov, member
- Ilia Sklifov, member
- Metodija Dafov, member
- Aleko Ilievski, member
- Kole Giorgievski, member
- Micho Purovski, member

### **Dating and marrying Sofia Rosi**

Sofia Rosi arrived in Shvidnitsa from Legnitsa sometime in November 1954 and settled at Tsveta Sklifova's (her sister's) place. Risto knew Sofia from before. She often came to visit her sister and attended many of the local functions with Risto. But now that she had moved much closer their relationship became more serious, which later ended in marriage. Risto found true love in Sofia Rosi and, almost three months later during the 1955 New Year celebration, they got married. The wedding was attended by Vasil (kum), Tashko Chapkanov (pobratim), Ilia and Tsveta Sklifov (Sofia's brother-in-law and sister), and many friends. From that day forward that small group of people had grown into a community and became part of Risto's family who, after that, was an "officially" married man with family and extended family obligations. Up to that time Tanas Trendov, Risto's cousin, lived with Risto. When Risto moved he gave Tanas his old apartment. Risto, for a brief time, moved in with Tsveta and Ilia Sklifov and later settled in his own apartment on Tribunalska Street 1/1, a much larger apartment. After that Risto invited his cousin Tanas to move in with them. Some time later there were four people living together as a family; Risto, Sofia, brother Nikola and cousin Tanas. They were all looked after by Sofia. Risto's younger brother Nikola Mavrovski had arrived in Poland from Hungary in the spring of 1955. Initially Nikola lived in Zgorzelets but later Risto brought him to Shvidnitsa.

## **Spiro, Risto and Sofia's first born son**

Risto continued to work at the wagon manufacturing factory until one day, on April 4, 1957, he received some good news. His wife Sofia had given birth to a healthy baby boy. This brought joy into Risto's life and made him a proud father. A short time later the baby was baptized and given the name Spiro, named after Risto's older brother, a national hero who died in June 1947 while fighting for DAG.

From the moment Spiro was born, however, Risto and Sofia had concerns about the boy's health. The climate in Poland was quite variable and humid. Risto and Sofia consulted with Dr. Zhelinski, who informed them that Spiro had problems dealing with the climate in Poland and urged them to leave Poland and move to a more moderate climate, if they wanted to save their child. Risto did not want to go back to Greece, if Greece even wanted him back. Greece, at the time, was not a good place to bring up children, so the family decided to look into Yugoslavia as an alternative place to move. Risto, Sofia, Nikola, Tsveta and Ilia sent their applications to the Yugoslav embassy in Warsaw. A short time later a questionnaire arrived which they filled out and, with photographs, sent to Belgrade. A short time later a positive response came and they left Poland and went to the People's Republic of Macedonia. The permission they received, unfortunately, was good for only six months and it was necessary for them to do a lot more work and produce many more documents, including the kind of work they did, the Party they were members of, the union and city councils they had joined, etc. Even though these were formalities they were necessary.

As was stated earlier, Risto strived to get a better and higher paying job to support his family, that is why he enrolled and completed a course in technical drawing, worked as a KV locksmith in the new plant, where new wagons were manufactured, and worked as a foreman in a work brigade. At that time Risto was elected secretary of the PORP organization in the wagon assembly plant and worked alongside Tadeusz Kowalski, who was organizing secretary. They were required to increase production, maintain schedules and fulfill monthly plans. This was required of all plants across the country in

order to accelerate construction of housing, schools, hospitals, factories and to increase production of agricultural yields. The slogans “PEACE AND REPATRIATION”, however, were still valid for the immigrants. All groups worked according to plan and often had rallies, dances, parties, concerts, etc. All these events were successfully done and 1955 passed relatively peacefully for the immigrants in Poland.

Unfortunately Risto cannot say the same for 1956, during which time there was much unrest and upheaval in the daily life of Polish society. Among the many problems experienced there were also massive strikes in the “Stalin” factory for manufacturing wagons in the city Poznan. Strikes began to grow larger in Warsaw, Vrslav, Krakov and even in Shvidnitsa, but these were less intense. People were getting hurt during these deadly strikes. At the same time riots were taking place in Hungary where a counter-revolution was brewing, led by Imre Nagi. These riots, however, were quickly suffocated by the Soviet army. Unfortunately the incident left many human victims and a lot of material damage.

After Stalin died, Nikola Sergeievich Khrushchev was appointed Party Secretary-General of the Soviet Communist Party. During the Twentieth Party Congress, for the first time Khrushchev spoke about Comrade Stalin’s personality cult. He spoke about the mistakes Stalin had made since Lenin’s death and told the world about the millions of honest communists that Stalin had destroyed in the USSR and around the world. Now, as the chief executive and the right-hand of these executions, much was said about Beria who was sentenced to death and executed. These kinds of atrocities were also popular in other Socialist Republics such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Albania, etc., where many people were convicted and killed.

It is worth while, at this point, to mention something about the Informburo issue with Yugoslavia, when Yugoslavia was expelled from being a member. Yugoslavia was expelled because it was considered a “revisionist state” and needed to be taught a lesson and, as such, an anti-Yugoslav campaign was started. Yugoslavia, in turn, started its own anti-Informburo campaign which caused many problems between Yugoslavia and the people’s republics. As a

result, Bulgaria sentenced and killed Traiche Kostov, Hungary sentenced and executed Laios, etc. This was absent in Poland except for the removal of Vladislav Gomulka from his position as Secretary General of PORP. After that he was free without any danger of losing his life. In the period from 1948 to 1955 a person had only two choices, either to be a Stalinist or Informburo supporter of a Titoist, with the first group being a majority and the latter being a minority.

### **Risto's move to Macedonia**

The Mavrovski family permanently left Shvidnitsa and Poland on August 28, 1957. The following families left Shvidnitsa during the months of June and July, 1957:

- The Sotir Asencharov family moved to Bitola where Sotir's mother and daughter lived
- Mitra Adzievska (and her children) moved to Bitola to be with her husband
- Stavre Gruev moved to Skopje
- Aleko Ilievski moved to Skopje
- Tashko Chapkanov moved to Skopje to be with his mother, brothers and sisters
- Pando Zaridzhev moved to Skopje
- Sotir Popovski moved to Bitola and then left for Australia
- Nikola Giorgievski moved to Bitola
- Aleko Liangovski moved to Skopje
- Manoli Benovski moved to Tetovo
- Lambro and Mara moved to Titov Veles to be with their mother
- Trpo Gichevski and his family moved to Skopje

Risto and his family, his brother Nikola, Micho Shkordov and his family, and Vasilka Purovska and her family picked up their things, got on a train and left for Bitola. Their trip lasted from August 28, to September 1, 1957. The train took them through Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Subotitsa and Belgrade before they arrived in Skopje. The next group of families to leave Shvidnitsa were the Sklifovs, Todor Giakovski, and Pando Manchev. They left in 1958 and also went to the Republic of Macedonia. Included among the families that left for Greece to join their relatives were Giorgi Popkonstandinov and

Tanas Trendov. Gelo Dramov left for Romania, Vasil Trpovski and his family and Micho Angelov left for Bulgaria. Remaining in Shvidnitsa were Aleksandra Kirova's family from the village Pozdivishta, and Todor Stamkov. Later Aleksandra and her family left for Canada and Todor Stamkov returned to Greece. The last family to remain in Shvidnitsa was Metodi Dafov's family. That was because Metodi had married a Polish woman. And as such the community that Risto and the others had worked so hard to build, in Shvidnitsa, broke apart and so did the happy and sad times they experienced in the most difficult period of their lives. What remained after that were only memories, good and bad.

### **Risto's family arrives at the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, People's Republic of Macedonia on September 1, 1957**

After the families arrived in Skopje they were taken to the barracks of the Idrizovo Prison, which at the time served as the centre for the arrival of displaced Macedonians. They were housed here temporarily until their past was investigated; their involvement in the Greek Civil War, in DAG, where they went after they left Greece and what they did in those countries. The authorities were also interested to know if any of these people were involved in the slandering of Yugoslavia when they were living in the other People's Republics and in the Soviet Union. This was the time when the struggle between the Informburo and Yugoslavia was still active. By then several families from Shvidnitsa had already arrived in the Republic of Macedonia and had given the authorities detailed information about Risto; where he was from, what he had done in the ranks of DAG, what work he had done in Poland, that he had worked for a Polish political party, etc. There was no secret that the authorities did not know. Unfortunately there were also lies among the truth, which Risto had to adamantly reject. The names of those who slandered him were not disclosed and, as such, Risto never did find out who had done this to him. Perhaps it was better that way.

After their stay at the prison barracks, Risto was given an offer to stay in Skopje but only if he had someone with whom to stay. Unfortunately at that time Risto's closest friends were Iovan and Vasilka Bekiarovski but they had no space for them. There was also Leko Balko but he did not want anything to do with Risto. Finally



Ilo and Leko Markovski took them, but for only three days, for a short visit. After that Risto and his family went back to the Idrizovo prison barracks where Risto decided that he did not want to stay in Skopje and picked Bitola as his final destination.

### **Hotel “Solun”**

So, on September 9, 1957, for the first time in their lives, Risto and his family found themselves at the train station in Bitola. They arrived at night and reported to the local police station where the authorities ordered a coach to take the family to a hotel and not charge them a fare. The coachman took them from hotel to hotel but they were all full; that is after finding out who their perspective customers would be and where they had come from. When they arrived at the last hotel, hotel “Solun”, Risto personally went to the hotel clerk and asked him to rent him a room for three people, for one night only, and offered to pay for it. The clerk agreed and Risto paid him 560 denars. Risto remembered that Done Fermanov, from the village Bouf, was a porter at this hotel. But that night Done showed himself to be, let’s say, a little less than human. There were many people who had taken residence in the hotel, mostly new arrivals from the various People’s Republics, including some from Shvidnitsa. Risto did not sleep at all that night. All night he was concerned about what he was going to do with a wife and a five-month-old baby. He went out and walked the streets all night long. On his walk he accidentally ran into a police station. He walked in to find the duty officer surprised to see him walking the streets so early in the morning. Risto explained his situation and why he was feeling so anxious. To Risto’s surprise, the police officer telephoned the hotel “Solun” and told the manager to house the family for as long as it takes to clear up the situation. So in the morning, as instructed, Risto reported to the committee responsible for the new arrivals and met with a man named Lazo, a local from Bitola. The man was in charge of all the new arrivals who were coming from the various People’s Republic and called the hotel to negotiate the hotel fee which his committee was going to pay. He also gave Risto some coins, a small sack of powdered milk, some melted cheese, some beef fat and some butter. This was great help for Risto. He also told Risto to ask the hotel for his money back. Risto did ask but never got his money back. Let bygones be bygones...

The hotel room had two beds and nothing more. It was very dirty and heavily soiled with mice droppings and lice stains. The hotel had no other rooms available. Most of the bed covers and drapery had been destroyed by the mice. Several days later Risto's baggage, which he had sent from Poland, arrived but there was a problem, there was no space in the hotel room to store it. Risto, at the time, had made contact with a woman from Zhelevo named Atina who lived in Bitola. Atina had remarried; she was now married to a man named Stamko from the village Rabi. He was a good man. Atina offered to store Risto's luggage at her place until Risto found a place of his own. Risto will never forget this gesture of kindness and the endless hospitality Atina and Stamko offered the Mavrovski family. At that time Nikola, Risto's brother, was still with Risto but resided in a different room, much worse than the one Risto was in. The room was in the attic and was loaded with lice. Risto complained to the Committee and Nikola was moved to a cleaner room. All these things happened in Bitola in September 1957.

### **Discovering Bitola in 1957**

Bitola was a typical Balkan city, a remnant of Ottoman times, with narrow cobblestone alleys and no paved roads. Every road was narrow, wide enough for horses and donkeys but not for modern vehicles. Only once in a while one would see a government car squeezing by very slowly. The drainage and sewage system was also a remnant of Ottoman times. There were no tall multi-story buildings, only a few old-style short ones. The city had two rivers passing through it, Dragor and Kurderes. Kurderes was very dirty and polluted for the entire length that passed through the city.

People often traveled by train, a few old passenger rail cars pulled by a coal-powered locomotive. There were also a few old buses and the odd old truck here and there. Taking a trip out of town was long and hard. Inside the city people traveled on horse drawn carriages. The number of private cars in existence at that time could be counted on the fingers of one's hands.

The factories in existence at that time were Monopol, Tekstil, Blazhe Rogozinar Furniture, Gorgi Naumov Refrigerators and

Kozhara. All these factories were small and operated with outdated technology. There were also smaller cooperatives. Almost all agriculture was in private hands except for a co-operative in the village Porodin, which had next to no mechanization.

In terms of schooling, the following primary schools existed in Bitola at that time: “Dame Gruev”, “Todor Angelevski”, “Kiril i Metodi”, “Gotse Delchev” and a “Turkish and Albanian” school. More schools were built later including “Giorgi Sugarev”, “Kole Kaninski”, “Elpida Karamandi” and “Trifun Panovski”. In terms of secondary and high schools, there was the “Josip Broz” Gymnasium which later became the lower gymnasium, a secondary agricultural and commercial high school for apprenticeships. More schools were built later including the technical school “Diuro Salai”, a school for studying medicine and a school for studying economics. Later the “Rabotnichki” university was built, which offered various courses including night school and foreign language education. At that time there were no canteens or child care services in the factories. There was only one kindergarten in existence and that was part of the home for orphans who were under social care.

Bitola at that time had dense forests, clean air, beautiful clear and clean mountain water and a great desire for a better tomorrow. Each passing day was better than the previous one for every person in Bitola. Bitola was a beautiful and growing city praised by many songs.

Bitola had an arcade, a large indoor market, which had operated since Ottoman times, many mosques and a tall clock tower. There were many bridges connecting roads over the Dragor River including the “Tsrn Most”, the “Lenski Most”, the bridge at Sali, the wooden bridge and the railway bridge. The famous “Kamen Most” connected one of the roads running over the Kurderes River. Bitola was divided into many neighbourhoods including the Ieni neighbourhood, the Bairo neighbourhood (a gypsy neighbourhood), the Smilevski neighbourhood, the Arnaut neighbourhood, the Chinaro neighbourhood, the Vleshko neighbourhood and the Gradsko neighbourhood. There were also many natural springs of running water including the Kazam Chesma, the Sharena Chesma

and the Bairska Chesma. Bitola had two parks, the city promenade and the Tumbе Kafe hill.

Most developed were the small businesses located in the “Stara Chershia” district with many stores and various workshops. Included among the hotels in Bitola were hotel “Solun”, the hotel “Makedonija” and the hotel “Trudbenik”. There were also inns such as the “Kichevo”, the “Debar” and the “Ingiliski”. These were all purely feudal remnants from old Yugoslavia. There were also many churches including Sveti Dimitria, Sveta Bogoriditsa, Sveta Petka, Sveti Naum, Sveti Arangel, Sveta Troitsa and Sveta Nedela. There was also a Russian church and a building that housed the Metropolitan. For the many people who had died and were buried in Bitola, as a result of the wars, there were several cemeteries including the “Sveto Nedeski”, the “Bikovski”, the “Vlashki” (Vlach), the “Katoliski” (Catholic), the “Evreiski” (Jewish), the “Srpski” (Serbian), the “Germanski” (German) and the “Fransuski” (French). Included among the markets and bazaars in Bitola were the “At-Pazar”, the “Stochin Pazar”, the “Mas Pazar”, the “Drven Pazar” and the “Madzhun Pazar”. The markets were always open on Tuesday and Friday and were frequented by young people looking for love and to find a mate for marriage, according to old customs. The trade in Bitola was almost nonexistent and items sold in the shops were very expensive.

Following the years 1957 and 1958, new buildings, with a new look, began to appear in Bitola to house the influx of Macedonians coming from the Socialist Republics.

A large number of people were relocated in the period from 1956 to 1958. Many Turks left Yugoslavia (the Republic of Macedonia) permanently and went to Turkey and were replaced by the so-called “Aegean” Macedonians (Greek Civil War refugees driven out of Greek occupied Macedonia by the Greek regime). At that time state borders were closed tightly, which forced people looking for their relatives or for a better life to cross them illegally. As a result, many of those who crossed the Greek borders illegally ended up in the Island prison camps in “Lavrion”. Some, who went the other way, ended up in Italy, Trieste and Austria. Earnings were very meager and survival was difficult.

## **The “Aegean” Building**

All this time, up until June 1958, Risto and his family remained at the “Solun” hotel. Around mid-June 1958 Risto received word that an apartment was available on Ivan Milutinovich Street in building number 13/12 in Bitola. The apartment was 33 square metres. It was a new apartment located on the third floor on the south side and had a large balcony. This building was built for returnees from the People’s Republics. All the people in this building were from the Aegean (Greek occupied) part of Macedonia. This building in Bitola was known as the “Aegean building”. Risto’s neighbours on the third floor were Tane Paskov from the village Ofchareni, Nestor Kostov from the village Bouf, and Nikola Damianovski from Bitola, who had married a woman named Fula from Voden Region.

From what Risto remembers, the following tenants lived in the “first” entrance of number 13 on Ivan Milutinovich Street in the so-called “Aegean” building:

- Niko and Hristina Giorgievski with their daughters Maria and Elena. Niko was from Katerini and Elena from Zhelevo.
  
- Nikola and Ristana Giorgievski with their daughters Kiratsa and Lena and son Vasil. Nikola was from the village Korfula, Kostur Region and Ristana was from the village Rula, Lerin Region.
  
- Mihali and Elpiniki with their son Pando and their daughter. Mihali was from the village Sveta Petka, Lerin Region and Elpiniki was from the village Lakomata, Kostur Region.
  
- Giorgi and Marika Skefovski with their son Tanasi and daughter Slavitsa.
  
- Micho and Viktoria Dzhalev with their sons Petre and Pavle. Micho was from the village Blacha and Marika from the village Shistevo, Kostur Region.

- Damian and Domna Malkov with their sons Kosta and Pero. Damian was from the village Zhelenichevo, Kaliar Region and Domna was from the village Lakomata, Kostur Region.
- Todor and Hristina Anastasov with their sons Lambro and Vasil and daughter Rina from the village Polikastano, Grevena Region.
- Alekso and Mara Sivakovi and their sons Vangel, Micho and Traiko from the village German, Prespa Region.
- Nikola and Fula Damianovski and their sons Kire and Itse and daughter Mira. Nikola was from Bitola and Fula was from Voden Region.
- Nestor and Tsola Kostov and their daughters Menka and Olga and son Niche from the village Bouf, Lerin Region.
- Tane and Marika Paskov with their sons Kiche and Gecho from the village Ofchareni.
- Risto and Sofia Mavrovski with brother Kole, sons Spiro and Vasil and daughter Neda. Risto was from Zhelevo and Sofia from Pozdivishta.
- Aristi and Hrisanthi Gatsov with sons Petre and Tome. Aristi was from the village Setoma, Kostur Region and Hrisanthi was from the village Drenovo, Prespa Region.
- Pande and Mara Gulevski with sons Mile and Petse from the village Setina, Lerin Region.
- Kosta and Maria Nedelkov with their daughters and with Nedelko and Nedelkovitsa from the villages Armensko, Lerin Region and Orovo, Prespa Region.
- Boris and Krsta Ristevski and their son Vasil from the village Trnovo, Prespa Region.
- Vangel and Vangelitsa from the village Korfura, Kostur Region.

Just as many families lived in the “second” entrance of the building and only twelve lived in the “third” entrance. The “third” entrance had only one level. Major changes took place a little later and, of all the tenants who lived there, only two families remained.

Spiro, Risto’s son, however, has a lot more to say about this building (later) and about the youth that he grew up with.

Risto’s brother Nikola went with Risto when Risto moved out of the hotel and lived with Risto’s family until he was married. After Nikola left Risto’s family, he rented for a while in a house near the clock tower. Later, with help from his uncle Spiro in America, Nikola bought his own house where he lived with his wife Vasilka. And, as such, everyone’s housing problems were solved.

### **Sofia Rosi Mavrovska’s story - summarized by her son Spiro**

Sofia Rosi Mavrovska was born in 1935, in the village Pozdivishta, Kostur Region, Greek occupied Macedonia. Her mother’s name was Elena and her father’s name was Metodija Rosi. Elena was born in 1903 and died in 1977 in Gara Elin Pelin, Bulgaria. Elena’s father’s name was Stavro Giumarov and her mother’s name was Iovanka. Elena has a brother named Lipo and a sister named Slava who immigrated to Australia. Elena also had a first cousin who Sofia had met in the village Novo Konomlati in Bulgaria near the Greek border. Sofia’s father Metodija Rosi was born in 1905 in the village Aposkep and died in 1989 in the village Pozdivishta. Metodija’s father’s name was Gligor Rosi. Metodija also had a brother but Sofia did not remember his name. The brother had a son named Hristo Evangelov. His son settled in Skopje after returning from Czechoslovakia. Sofia’s father had a house in the village Aposkep, located under the “izvori”, but his brother took him to America in the worst crisis in 1929 and he was reluctant to tell his story. During the war years 1941-1944, Sofia’s father acquired a rifle and served in Bitola. He was always loyal to VMRO.

There were four children in the Rosi family, three daughters and a son named Vasil. The oldest of the daughters was Aleksandra (Letsa), born in 1925, then Vasil, born in 1930, followed by Tsveta, born in 1932 and Sofia born in 1935. The family faced much

hardship. After the Greek Civil War ended, the three sisters found themselves in exile. Lena ended up in Tashkent and Tsveta and Sofia ended up first in Romania then in Poland and eventually in Yugoslavia. When they arrived in the Republic of Macedonia, Sofia went to Bitola and Tsveta first went to Shtip then to Tetovo, after that to Gara Elin Pelin, Bulgaria where, after 1965, Sofia's son Vasil went to live with her. Sadly Sofia's brother Vasil lost his life in Gramos during the Greek Civil War. He was 17 years old. His mother was never told that he had died and went on believing, until her death, that he was still alive, living somewhere in Czechoslovakia. Lena remained with the partisans and fought until the war ended. She was part of the last partisan units to withdraw from Greek occupied Macedonia to Albania. From there she was sent by ship to Tashkent where she married Giorgi and had a family. Sadly Sofia never saw her sister after the Greek Civil War or her family. Lena's son Mihail was killed in a car accident at age 27 and was buried in Tashkent along with his mother and father, all alone, with no one to light a candle on their graves.

Back in the village, the Rosi family had property that included gardens at the Shiroki eli near the river and at the Siviak field under the cemetery. Between the ditches near the rivers was a field surrounded by walnut trees where the family grew the most delicious beans. The family owned a vineyard located under the Sveti Ilija Church on which there was a guardhouse that could house two guards. The family also owned fields in the village Drenoveni, which belonged to Sofia's grandmother Iovanka who was originally from that village. The Rosi family had a large house with stables, a bathroom, a basement, a cellar, a well and a pigeon loft. And since Sofia's father was a bricklayer, the house was in good repair and was regularly whitewashed. Unfortunately the house no longer exists, it was destroyed. As for the Rosi property, a neighbour took possession of everything, sold it and pocketed the money. God however is grand, as most Rosi family members survived the war and were able to rebuild again.

Before his property was taken, Sofia's father was relocated to a new village called Pentohori. This was done by the Greek government with aims at taking his property and erasing everything that was his. Two months after he was forced to move, he went back to his



original village but the shock was too much for him and he passed on. God rest his soul. In terms of property, before the war the Rosi family owned 4-5 cows, 50-60 sheep, pigs, chickens, etc. During the holidays they always slaughtered a lamb and pig for Christmas. While living there, the land owned by the Rosi family was looked after by Sofia's mother with help from her two older children Lena and Vasil. When Sofia's father did not tend to the fields, being a mountain man from the village Aposkep, he worked as a builder in the surrounding villages. As a child Sofia remembers going to the village Kolomnati, to her mother's cousin Trpo who had three children, Tome, Petre and Traianka. They later moved to Australia. Sofia had the opportunity to see them again during one of their visits to Bitola.

The school in Sofia's village was located right in front of their house. The teachers who taught there at that time were Sotir and Iani. Unfortunately, because of the war, Sofia did not get to attend school but her brother and sisters did. The village also had a priest, a local man. When the war started everything changed. It became dangerous to live in the village especially after the Greeks began to bomb the villages. In the spring of 1948, the partisans organized a collection program to collect all the children ages one to fourteen and take them far away from their homes. And now here they are, roaming the socialist countries with no hope of ever returning home. Sofia and the other children were taken away on foot. They walked all day and arrived in Zhelevo where they spent the first night. The next day they left and by nightfall arrived at the village Liuboino, in the then free Yugoslavia. They stayed there for seven days before they were loaded onto trucks and taken to the Bitola train station from where they were transported to Skopje. In Skopje they were greeted by Romanian authorities who took over 1000 children with them to the city Kalimanesti. The children stayed there for about nine months. Sofia was then with Dana Kolicheva, Liopa Lazeva and Aleksandra Kirova from her village. The person in charge (mother) of that group of children was Sofia's sister Tsveta. Tsveta was in charge of 35 children. The older children helped the younger ones. Sofia was 13 years old at that time. Sofia has only praise for the poor children that were taken away, confident and under the impression that they would be returned to their homes and to their parents in a few weeks, or a month, or two at most.

In Romania, every day, nonstop, the children were fed cornmeal. Sofia became sick of it and to this day refuses to eat it. Sofia's clothes were taken away and she was issued pajamas which she had to wear every day, day and night. Nine months later the children were sent to Poland to Londeg Zdrui where they spent a short time. It was different there, the children were welcomed and given a variety of foods to eat including meat, chocolate, and candy; things that were unthinkable in Romania. In the beginning the children were housed in children's homes, then in a shelter where they were schooled for three hours in Greek, one hour in Macedonian and the rest of the school day in Polish. From here the children were sent to Zgorzelets. Nine children, including Sofia, were sent to Legnitsa. In Legnitsa they sang in a choir. For a short time they were sent to Vrotslav. Everything was well organized in Poland.

Sofia was enrolled in a four year program to study textiles after which she worked for two years before her sister Tsveta took her to Shvidnitsa. In Shvidnitsa Sofia met her future husband Risto Mavrovski, who at that time was President of the "Ilinden" organization responsible for organizing dances and other social events. Risto was a handsome young man with a lot of energy and was easy to fall in love with, which was crowned by Sofia's marriage to him in the New Year in 1955. Their wedding was attended by Tashko Chapkanov (dever), a Greek partisan friend of Risto's (nunko), Sofia's sister Tsveta and her husband Ilia Sklifov, Ilia's brother Kuzo Sklifov and wife Olga, and Micho and Leftera Purovski. Before Risto and Sofia were married, Tsveta used to always say to Risto that Sofia does not know how to cook and that she is not one of those typical homemakers, but Risto persisted and they learned how to cook together.

After their wedding Risto and Sofia lived in Shvidnitsa for two and a half years until August 1957, when they left for Macedonia and spent seven days in Idrizovo prison in Skopje before arriving in Bitola where they are to this day. The family first moved to "Ivan Milutinovich" street number 13/12 where their second son Vasil was born on July 31, 1959, and their daughter Neda was born on February 17, 1962. In 1978 the family moved to "Mirka Ginova" street number 13/42 where Sofia lives to this day.

Sofia recalls an incident taking place in 1976 when she received news that her mother was very ill and being hospitalized in Kostur. Sofia, in a hurry, arrived at the Greek border where she was issued a visa for only twelve days. She later extended the visa at the village and was able to stay in Greece a total of forty days. She spent ten days at the hospital beside her mother and another thirty days in the village. After that Sofia convinced her mother to go to Bitola with her and she did, but only for three months before she returned back to the village. One year later she left for Bulgaria and stayed with Tsveta, Sofia's sister, until she died in 1977. Sofia's mother was a kind woman. Every time she came for a visit to Bitola she visited everyone and brought gifts for everyone; for her, for Risto and for all the children. She was a wise and fair woman and will be missed by all.

Sofia lived a wonderful life with Risto who was always ready to help at home. Risto always gave Sofia his money because she was a responsible money manager, especially when it came to shopping and family economics. "Risto was simply a wonderful man," says Sofia, "a good family man with whom I spent many memorable years, especially during the most difficult times in my life."

### **Spiro's view about his mother's family**

Spiro met his grandmother Elena (Sofia's mother) for the first time at the Kremenitsa railway station. Risto took Spiro and Vasil with him, boarded a two coach train at the Bitola train station and took a trip through the various villages to Kremenitsa. It was like in the movies, says Spiro, with wooden seats and baggage on the side. These were probably the same coaches he saw in the old Macedonian films. The coaches looked like they had been out of order for the last thirty years; and so was the railway. Here Spiro was talking about the late sixties when these wagons were still in use. Some 40 minutes later they arrived at the Greek border crossing. There, Spiro remembers seeing a water spring bubbling carbonated water, spewing jets of water at regular intervals and causing excitement among the children. This was as far as the trains went. From this point on they had to turn back. On the other side of the border, on the Greek side, the coaches came up to the border and

also had to turn back. Risto, Spiro and Vasil arrived at the border first and anxiously waited for Elena to arrive. Their excitement began to rise when the next train arrived on the Greek side, but they were disappointed to see only one elderly man descend from the train. Risto and the boys quickly rushed to ask the man if anyone else was on the train. The man said that there was an elderly woman on board but there was a problem with her.

Time passed by quickly but still no one came off the train. They watched people go through customs and still no Elena, the long awaited grandmother that Spiro had heard so much about from his mother. By now Risto and the boys began to suspect that something had happened to Elena. About an hour later they saw an old woman with two bags in her hands come out of the train and move towards them. It was Spiro's grandmother Elena, Spiro remembered her from the pictures he had seen of her. She was very excited to see them as tears ran down her cheeks. This was the first time she had met her son-in-law and the family of her youngest daughter.

Elena looked a bit distressed when she asked Risto to quickly board the train for Bitola. The train had sat at the platform all that time waiting for Elena. She was the only passenger, besides Risto and the boys, to board the train. Because they were the only people in the coach, Elena decided to tell Risto and the boys what had happened to her while they were waiting for her. This was Elena's first time out from the Greek border. She had a Greek passport which she had acquired especially for this trip. But when the Greek customs officer asked her some questions in Greek, a language she did not understand, she was unable to answer. The Greek officer was preparing to turn her back but luckily an officer who spoke Macedonian spoke to her and understood why she did not answer the questions. Elena said to the officer: "My dear boy I have never been to school and not many people in my village speak Greek, even our priest does not speak Greek. It is not that I don't want to answer the man, I simply do not understand what he is asking me."

It seems Elena handled the situation very well because most Greeks do not tolerate Macedonians not speaking Greek and speaking only Macedonian and would have done something about it. Elena was a smart woman, as she said, who simply had not learned the Greek

language. Speaking Greek in Pozdivishcha, where everyone spoke Macedonian, would have been a waste of time. She managed to quickly put her ordeal with the customs officer behind her and was very happy to meet and enjoy the company of the entire family.

Spiro remembers his grandmother having a cross over her nose. That was the first time he had seen such a thing. He had seen a cross tattooed on a woman's forehead, which was put there to protect her from the Muslims, but this was during Ottoman times. Perhaps this cross had a similar function since the Ottomans were still there when she was a child. Spiro never did ask what the cross was for.

Spiro met his grandmother numerous times but unfortunately it was always in Bitola. The last time he met her was in Elin Pelin Bulgaria in 1977, just before she died. May she rest in peace away from her birthplace Posdivishcha. At least there she will always be with her daughter Tsveta and son in law Ilia. "May they rest in peace and forever be in our hearts," says Spiro.

Spiro also had the occasion to meeting his aunt Aleksanda (Letsa) who lived even further away, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, the former USSR. That meeting also took place on a train but this time it was totally unexpected, surprising, one may say even shocking. Every summer the Mavrovski family went to Gara Elin Pelin to visit Tsveta and Ilia Sklifov. The year 1973 was no exception. This time, however, Risto stayed in Bitola because he had to work at the refrigerator factory. After arriving at the Sklifovs in Gara Elin Pelin, Sofia received a telegram informing her that her sister Aleksandra was coming to Bitola for a visit and that the family should return to Bitola immediately.

The quickest way to Gara Elin Pelin was by bus but because the roads were very bad and Sofia had difficulty traveling long distances on buses, the family traveled from Bitola to Gara Elin Pelin by train. The trip was a journey which usually started with taking the "shinobus" train in Bitola at 2:30 am and, after stopping at every intermediate train station, arriving in Skopje by morning. In Skopje the people traveling to Sofia were transferred to a designated coach and transported by train to Belgrade, arriving there at about 9 o'clock. After its arrival, the designated coach was transferred to a

Red Cross side track at the Nish railway station to wait for the Orient Express train coming from Paris, heading for Istanbul via Sofia. After lunch, when the Orient Express train arrived, the designated wagon was attached and pulled through Pirot, Dimitrovgrad and down to Sofia where the Sofia passengers got off; sometimes before midnight and sometimes after midnight. The last train that took them to Gara Elin Pelin was the “pianski” train. Passengers were loaded on a livestock wagon with wooden benches for seats and set off towards Gara Elin Pelin at 2 o’clock in the morning. The trip took about half an hour. This is how the Mavrovski family traveled in the early days. Later, railway transport was improved which made travel a little easier and visits with the relatives a lot more pleasant.

After receiving the telegram from Risto, the Mavrovski family left Gara Elin Pelin and followed the same path back to Nish where the coach they were in was disconnected and placed on a side track to await the arrival of the Belgrade to Solun train. After a long wait the train finally arrived and started its trek for Skopje. Sometime later Sofia heard some people in their coach speaking Greek. She asked one of them where they were from. There was silence. A couple of them said from Tashkent. There was silence again when Sofia asked if there were any more of them on this train. One of them said yes, there were three families traveling together. Sofia grabbed the kids and off she went searching for them from coach to coach. About ten minutes later they found themselves in front of the cabin where they were told the last family from Tashkent was seated. There was silence after the door was opened. Sofia rushed in hugging the people and crying nonstop in silence for the next five minutes. A person with a weak heart would not have been able to survive those five long minutes. The two sisters who had not seen each other for twenty-five years had finally met on a train in the territory of Serbia. This was a complete surprise to everyone. “It is a picture stuck in my mind that I will never forget as long as I live,” says Spiro. Now Spiro knows exactly how the surviving Jews, he had seen on television, felt after returning to Israel, after being separated for 20 to 30 years. The difference between the Jews and us Macedonians is that the Jews were able to return to Israel, their homeland, but Greece still does not want us Macedonians back.

There was another shock for the Mavrovski family back in Bitola. At about the same time the family arrived in Bitola, a taxi stopped in front of the building where the Mavrovski family was living and out came Metodia, Spiro's grandfather, on his mother's side. This too was unexpected but also disappointing because Elena, Spiro's grandmother, was not with him. Elena very much wanted to see her oldest daughter and Aleksandra also wanted to see her mother, at least one last time, but unfortunately it was not meant to be. And as such, both mother and daughter died with wishes unfulfilled. They both died in different parts of the world, far away from their native hearth. Aleksandra was left to rest in peace in Tashkent along with her husband Giorgi and their son Mihail, who died in a car accident very young, at age 27. The last thing the Mavrovski family heard about Aleksandra in Tashkent was from Petar Stoikovski-Babets, Lena's (Spiro's wife) father when he and the "Bitola Theater" toured Tashkent. Aleksandra went to visit Petar and told him that she had applied to return to Greece and was waiting for a response. She wanted to return to Pozdivishcha and be with her father Metodia.

Spiro remembers the stories his grandfather Metodia told him about the living conditions in Greece and how terribly Macedonians were treated, yet this did not detract the old man from loving his homeland and place of birth or turn him into a hard man. He was a wise, warm old man full of memories, had a big heart and soul and a great desire to learn about the Republic of Macedonia, Spiro's homeland.

During a meeting with actor Iosif Iosifovski who was part of the theater, but also part of the commission in Brailovo in 1948 responsible for disbursing the Macedonian refugee children to the various socialist republics, Iosif confessed to Spiro's grandfather that, if he had the strength and courage at this point in his life, he would take his own life for what he had done in 1948, because now, 35 years later, he sees the results of his actions and what he had done to our people. This meeting had taken place sometime in the beginning of the 1980's. There is nothing more to say!

The documents Aleksandra was waiting for never arrived in Tashkent, and as such Spiro's aunt who lived alone, died alone. The only connection with them in the Tashkent cemetery was a

wonderful man named Aleksander Mirzamamedov, a handball player who, a long time ago, played with Pelister. Spiro begged him once in a while to light a candle on the graves of Spiro's dear aunt, uncle and cousin. May they rest in peace!

### **Vasil - Risto and Sofia's second born son**

Vasil, Risto and Sofia's second son was born on July 31, 1959. He was named Vasil after Sofia's brother Vasil who died at age 17 fighting for DAG. With Vasil's birth the Mavrovski family grew to four members. After Vasil was born Sofia quit her job and stayed home to look after her children. There was no one else, no grandparents to look after them.

### **Vasil's story from his own point of view**

Even though Vasil, or Vasko as he is known to the family and friends, was born to Risto and Sofia, he is now known as Vasil Iliev Sklifov the adopted son of Ilia and Tsveta Sklifov. Vasil and his family currently live in Sofia, Bulgaria. His wife's name is Mariana Sklifova Busheva, originally from Macedonia. Her grandfather on her mother's side was from Krushevo. He was one of the first refugees to flee after the Ilinden Uprising. Vasil has two children named Tsvetanka and Risto. Tsvetanka is on her second marriage, married to a man named Petar Giorgiev Goleshov, originally from Kukush Region, Greek occupied Macedonia. Tsvetanka has two children named Biliiana and Veselin who now live in Gara Elin Pelin. Vasil's son Risto lives in Sofia together with his second wife named Stela Vilmosh originally from Ruse, Northern Bulgaria. They have a daughter named Vesilena. Risto also has a 13 year old son named Mario from his first marriage.

Vasil remembers his father Risto as a great man who will forever remain that way in his memory. He was the type of father who made his children think. His motto was: "peace of mind is more valuable than amassing wealth", "never rush, measure five times and cut once", "never make one spindle from nine beech trees" (never be wasteful). This applied to Vasil, as he puts it, because he got married at age 17 and that is why he remembers the things Risto taught him.



Vasil remembers a few things from his life in Bitola. He remembers his father going out to work in various places in Yugoslavia as a tradesman. One time Vasil remembers Risto leaving for either Slovenia or Croatia to fix a large compressor of a refrigeration unit, which he repaired in a record time. The company director rewarded him with a can of horse meat. Horse meat in Poland, as Risto remembered, was a specialty meat. Risto and others like him were rewarded not only because they knew how to do their job but also for their care and honesty.

Almost every week in the summer, as a child, Vasil remembers going down to the Dragor River, usually to the “Topla Voda” locality, with his uncle Nikola and cooking stew, catching fish with fishing rods, blocking the river’s water flow to make large pools and swimming with him.

There was one event that Vasil cannot forget. As he did many times before, Vasil wanted to go out to the playground and play. This time however there was a sports game at the city stadium, which Vasil’s father Risto, his uncle Nikola and his brother Spiro, who were all great fans of FK (football club) Pelister, wanted to see. The stadium was some distance away from “Ivan Milutinovich” Street and Vasil was not that much interested in going. Besides, he wanted to go to the washroom and there were no toilets in the stadium. Vasil decided to go to the playground on his own and when he noticed there was not much going on, he left and went home. Sofia, his mother, asked him why he was not with the others. Vasil told her that he felt a bit sick after which he had something to eat and went to bed. Thinking that Vasil was with them, the three (Risto, Nikola and Spiro) looked for him everywhere but were unable to find him. Spiro was blamed for this because, for some reason, they felt he was responsible for losing his brother. Being unable to find him, the three eventually came home very concerned. The moment they walked in Sofia asked them: “Risto where is your child?” She then scolded him with the words: “You should never again leave him alone to return from the playground!” This took place when Vasil was only five years old.

After Vasil was sent to Bulgaria to live with his adopted parents Tsveta (Sofia’s sister) and Ilia, there was no summer spent without

his brother Spiro and sister Neda. As mentioned earlier, the Mavrovski family visited Vasil in Gara Elin Pelin every summer for two to three weeks at a time. Spiro visited for longer periods up to 3 months. When Vasil was a little older he drove his relatives through Pirin Macedonia; Blagoevgrad, Petrich, Sandanski and Zlatarevo. They often stopped at various places on the way. One day they stopped in the Kresnovska gorge along the Struma River to dine on fish. Because of the many customers they had that day, the service staff, instead of bringing them three fish like they ordered, brought them only two. Sofia did not eat when she traveled to avoid motion sickness. Risto was curious as to how his order was mixed up but divided the two fish among the three of them without causing any fuss. Vasil never took them to that place again.

These were good times that Vasil will always remember. Macedonia is a beautiful place and he now understands why his parents were so willing to sacrifice their lives for it when they were so young.

Vasil's memories of Bitola, which he speaks of here, were from 1959 to 1966 before he left Bitola and went to Bulgaria. Most of these memories are inextricably linked with the children who lived on "Ivan Milutinovick" street number 13/15 and on "Sveti Naum" street number 1. Vasil remembers playing football, hide and seek and other outdoors games with them. He remembers seizing a bean sandwich from Atsko Baiovski, a neighbour kid. Vasil tried to take a bite from Atsko's sandwich but he would not let him, so he told the kid to turn around to see the bird that was falling from the sky. When Atsko did Vasil grabbed his entire sandwich and ran off. Then, when he came home, his mother and father forced him to go back and apologize to Atsko and take an entire pot full of beans and give it to his mother. This was an embarrassing lesson for Vasil, one he will never forget. Now he jokes about it because he was only a child then.

Vasil's best friend, in the days he lived in Bitola, was Pero Malkov with whom he was able to play all day, everyday and not get bored. He ran with Pero and even fought and chased other kids with him. They went to the market together and spent a long time enjoying each other's company. Vasil lost contact with Pero and, for a long time, did not know where he was. More recently he found out that

Pero had joined the Yugoslav military and became a high ranking officer. He may even have fought in the 1993 War. After that he returned with the last JNA units to Bitola, to his family. Vasil believes he now lives in Bitola and wishes him and his family all the best.

In 1970 when Vasil was 11 years old, he and his family went to visit his oldest aunt Aleksanda (Letsa) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital city in the USSR. They traveled from Sofia to Moscow for two days and three nights and from Moscow station to Tashkent for three days and three nights. His aunt lived in the Greek neighbourhood; that's what it was called then. It was also known as the 13<sup>th</sup> town. This was the first time Vasil saw his uncle Giorgi who seemed like a good man; but his aunt was even nicer. Vasil also met his cousins Elena and Mihail with whom he spent every day swimming in the lake located in the city centre in a huge park. Vasil thought the city was a beautiful place with many fruit trees growing and everything was green and lush. Until then he had not seen a place like this. The watermelons were particularly grand; the large ones were long and very sweet weighing between 20 and 25 kilograms.

Vasil met with his cousin Lena a couple more times, the second time in Bitola. The last time Vasil saw his cousin Mihail was in Bitola. Later, Mihail was involved in an unfortunate car crash and died from it in Tashkent at age 27. Vasil also met Lena in Gara Elin Pelin in 1982. This was when she had come to Bulgaria with her husband Giorgi and their two children. Now they live in Atalanti, 90 kilometres outside of Athens, Greece, where Vasil's brother (Spiro) took his parents for a visit in 2003. Vasil hopes next year, after lengthy negotiations with the Greek authorities, he will finally be able to go and visit with her.

About his father Risto, Vasil once again says, "He was a great man and may he rest in peace."

During this time there were also the visits that took place between Risto and Sofia, and Sofia's parents. These were touching encounters that took place after ten to twelve years of separation. When Risto and Sofia left their places of birth they were children

themselves. Now they were adults with children of their own. These encounters were happy and sad; painful moments for all the people involved, not only because of the long separation, but also because most Macedonians who left Greek occupied Macedonia during and after the wars were not allowed to return to their homes.

In 1958 Ilia and Tsveta (Sofia's sister) Sklifovski came to the Republic of Macedonia, but because they could not find a place to live in Bitola they moved to Shtip. But when Kuzo Sklifov, Ilia's brother arrived, they all moved to Tetovo.

Risto and Sofia were not Yugoslav citizens until the summer of 1961, when they first submitted their application for citizenship to the Yugoslav authorities. At that time they had already decided to remain in Bitola. Until then they were political immigrants. After receiving their citizenship, Risto and Sofia also received identity cards, passports, etc. After that Risto was again sent for a medical evaluation and was classified as a "disabled war veteran" with all rights and privileges due to him.

### **Neda, Risto and Sofia's daughter and youngest child**

A year after Risto and Sofia became Yugoslav citizens, their third child Neda was born. Neda, named after Risto's beloved mother, was born on February 17, 1962. Even with the birth of another child, the Mavrovski family continued to live in the same apartment. Sofia stayed home to look after the children as Risto went to work to support them. As the children grew they were enrolled in primary school, then in secondary school and eventually Spiro went to university. It was not until the spring of 1978 that the Mavrovski family was issued a new apartment. This one was larger, about 55 square metres, located on Mirka Ginova Street number 13/42, close to the new hospital. Spiro, Risto and Sofia's oldest son completed his education at the Electro Technical Faculty. Neda had difficulty learning and did not complete high school. She took typing and sewing courses and was hired by the Elpida Karamandi factory but later was laid off due to downsizing.

### **The period from 1958 to 1978**

## Refrigerators

About a month after the Mavrovski family arrived in Bitola, Done Mandzhukov from Zlelevo came to Bitola. He was a good friend of Petre Novachev from the village Oshchima. Petre was a fighter and a leader during the war who was later appointed director of the Bitola Community. Done was a great friend of Risto's father and a neighbour back in Zhelevo. Done's relationship with Petre helped Risto get his job and later his new apartment. When Done saw how Risto and his family were living in the hotel, under terrible conditions, and that no one was interested in helping them, he took Risto directly to Petre and introduced him as his nephew, after which he explained Risto's situation. Done asked Petre to do something for Risto. He specifically asked Petre to find Risto a job. Risto informed Petre of the kind of work he had done in Poland and his qualifications. Petre then sent Risto to Pando, Director of the Employment Agency. When Pando saw Risto, Risto gave him a letter from Petre, after which Pando promised to contact him soon and that he would have a job for him. Risto was contacted on October 26, 1957, at which time Risto was told to report for probationary work at the foundry in then "Giorgi Naumov" refrigerator manufacturing factory in Bitola. Much thanks to Done for his help, Risto now had a job which he started on October 28, 1957. Risto was given the job and was already working even before his certificates were translated from Polish to Macedonian.

In November 1957 Risto enrolled in a course to learn the Macedonian language as well as to upgrade the qualifications that he had built up in Poland, including recognition of his diploma. The course lasted nine months which Risto finished, but there were problems with the translation of the documents from Polish to Macedonian and as such validation of his certification took a little longer than Risto expected. Risto's documents were sent to the Ministry of Education which verified them and certified Risto as a KV locksmith. But Risto did not remain there for too long.

Risto worked in the foundry until March 1958. He did various jobs there but then was transferred to a new department called the Investment and Development Department. Risto was there until May 1958, after which he was moved to a new department called the

Department of Commercial Services. By this point in time the factory had begun to produce new window model refrigerators, box freezers and cooling systems for commercial use to freeze meat and to keep cakes cool in shops, etc.

At this point in time Risto worked as a KV locksmith fitter. His assistants were Franz and Tome and his boss was Igor Klochko. Risto remained in this department until it was dissolved in 1961. From then on, until the spring of 1962, Risto worked at the plant for household appliances. In March 1962 he was moved to the industrial machinery and compressor plant. Risto worked at the Tsevera plant for industrial grade compressing and other equipment with the following officials: Branko Bordanovski, Tode (Kaleshko) Hristovski, Nevrus Amedov, Mito Matevski, Ivan Adziev, Risto Grozdanov, Hristian Grozdanov, Tsane Traikovski, Vlado Dimitrov, Blagoi Kiprovski and others. The work that was done there was not only inside the plant but included visits to the field. Anything that appeared defective, required repairs, or was not working properly had to be examined by one or more of these people. This was done throughout all of Yugoslavia.

Places where field work was done included “Mesopromet” in Belgrade, the horse slaughterhouse in Batainitsa, “Mitros” in Sremska Mitrovitsa, Velika Plana, Smederevo, Kralievo, Chachak, Bosanska Gradiska, Kosovo Polje, Urosevats, Kladovo “Gerdap”, Skopje, Shtip, Tetovo, Gevgelia, Prilep, Veles, Struga, Ohrid, Resen and in Bitola at “Porodin”, “Lozar”, Kisela voda, Konservna, Mlekarna (dairy), Klanitsa (slaughterhouse), Pivara (brewery) and the cooler in Dovledzik. Risto personally visited most of these facilities and personally carried out the repairs. The Bitola plant, during this period of time, produced many generations of apprentices who learned their trade there. Included among them were:

First generation: Tsane Proeski, Vlade Dimitrov, Krste Krstevski (Krtsulo), Ivan Adziev and others.

Second generation: Risto Grozdanov, Hristian Grozdanov, Blagoi Kiprovski, Mite Nikolovski, Petraki Miloshevski, Mite Tashevski and others.

Third generation: Blagoi (Dzhombe), Vasko, Borche, Blagoi (Babusho) and others.

The third generation was all young people who Risto personally encouraged to complete their education then learn the craft and become excellent workers and people. They were Risto's greatest pride and, to the last day that Risto worked, they showed him and his family great respect.

Many Macedonians from Greek occupied Macedonia who lived in the same building with Risto also worked alongside him. He knew many from the time they had fought together in DAG. Some he knew from Poland. So that they are not forgotten, Risto took the opportunity to mention most of them here. Included among Risto's co-workers were Kole Giorgievski, Tashko Botsev, Aristidi Gatsov, Niko Giorgievski, Sotir Asencharov, Pavle Gulevski, Done Panovski, Vasko Ristevski and Vangel Paskov.

A course for VKV locksmiths and installers was set up in the factory which Risto attended for nine months, as mentioned earlier. He passed all subjects both in theory and practice. This qualified him to do the work he was doing. Later a special school was established in the electrical technical centre "Diuro Salai" Bitola. Risto applied to that school as well and did his practical work at the plant. After successfully passing all tests he became a VKV fitter for industrial compressors. So now Risto also had a diploma from a Macedonian institution. Risto wanted to further advance his education in the technical sciences but a major hurdle in his way was his family and the need to take care of his wife and children.

Risto stayed at this factory until he retired on February 28, 1978.

In addition to working all this time, Risto was also actively involved in other activities at the plant, such as:

- Many times he was elected member of the work council
- Member of various committees

- Trade union activist
- Member elected by the collective grouping “Rade Konchar” Zagreb and rewarded a silver plaque for its successful operation
- After the football club was formed, Risto joined its management and performed various functions

From what Risto remembers, included among the general directors who served in the factory from 1957 to 1978, were Lale, Vele rusiot, Giush, Geraka, Mito Markovski, Gotse, Zhivko Popovski and Kire Altiparmak. Risto did not write the names of the technical directors and other managers because their number was very large. Included among the plethora of skilled workers in the factory were engineers, economists, lawyers and other experts.

Risto’s entire engagement at the factory was for the workers, he never asked for anything for himself personally.

### **Risto’s social life**

Risto had always been active in all the communities where he lived and involvement in the local communities in “Todor Angelevski” and later in “Estreia Ovadia Mara” was no exception. When he was employed Risto always made free time to actively participate in the various Boards and Committees of the two communities. Included with Risto at both communities were Risto Filovski, Blazhe Trpenovski and another Blazhe. When Risto moved to his new apartment he first joined the “Kole Lacheto” community and later the “Gorgi Naumov” community. In “Gorgi Naumov” he became involved in various committees and was appointed commander of a special platoon for Territorial Defense, until it was disbanded. The local community then appointed Risto to the municipal board of fighters in Bitola and the region, which lasted four years. Risto was also a delegate, mandated many times, of the “War Invalids of Bitola”. He was part of the presidency and board of the club “Fourth of July” the day of the fighter, in various committees and participated in many activities for which he was awarded certificates, awards and prizes by the organization. Risto continued



these activities past retirement age and was active until the day he died.

## **Sports in Bitola**

Sports were valued activities in Bitola, which slowly developed with the birth of various football (soccer) teams like “Rabotnik”, “Pelister”, “Bitola”, “Pelagonia”, “Transkop” and “Metalets”, handball clubs like “Rabotnik”, “Pelister” and “Pelagonia, basketball clubs like “Rabotnik” and “Pelister”, athletics club “Olimpia”, cycling club “Partisan”, and boxing club “Rabotnik”. Skiing and hiking was done on Mount Pelister. Less often, trips were taken to Lake Ohrid and Lake Prespa for water activities, but at that time the facilities were not yet quite developed. Risto personally was a big fan of all sports, not just when he was in Bitola but throughout his entire life. He played sports when he was in Zhelevo, when he was a partisan, in the hospitals where he was treated and in the factories where he worked. He always participated in sports, especially in Bogatina when a football club was formed in which Risto played together with Micho Iankula and Tanas Voinov. It was during this time that Risto also fell in love with boxing.

Boxing in Poland was a high quality and much valued sport. Boxers were trained in the party schools, in the military academies, in the wagon factory and almost everywhere in Shvidnitsa. They had a boxing club in the wagon factory where Risto worked, along with a football club named “Stal”. Here, Risto actively participated in the boxing club and trained for two things, skill and personal development. The skills Risto acquired from the various sports he participated in remained with him during his entire life. He was particularly fond of football, boxing, handball and basketball. They were his first choices followed by athletics, motor racing, ice hockey and horse racing. At a later time when he was involved with the disabled veterans he began to play darts, chess and archery. Risto was responsible for these disciplines and actively participated in dart tournaments where he won several times, was crowned champion and given many awards.

Risto continued to hold on to his love of sports even at an older age and together with his brother Nikola and Son Spiro, manages to

attend every sport competition that took place in Bitola; be it football, handball, basketball, boxing... it had become a family tradition.

### **Spiro's view on sports**

“Sport has been something of a cult which filled much of my father's life,” says Spiro.

According to Spiro, Risto brought the sport with him from distant Poland which, in those days, was much more valued and of higher quality than the sport they play nowadays. When the Mavrovski family arrived in Bitola in 1958-1959, one of the first things Risto did was take his son Spiro to the Bitola City Stadium, which at the time was still under construction. Spiro has the photographs to prove it. So, from those early days Risto instilled the love of sport in Spiro which has not changed to this day. Risto carried the same spirit to the day he died. Spiro has no words to express what he saw, did and experienced with his father in the last fifty years. It was very simple, every Saturday and Sunday from early in the morning, from about 10 am to about 3 pm, they were in the stadium. After that they came home for something to eat and were out again, this time to the park to watch or participate in handball or basketball tournaments. Later, after the sports hall “Mladost” was constructed they went to the hall. It was a great experience. During the 70's and 80's the hall became very popular where great games were played, like nowhere else in Macedonia.

Handball was a hit in all of Macedonia from the moment it was introduced in the first Yugoslav league in 1975. The handball league was a continuation of the Bitola handball club which had three teams that represented Macedonia in various competitions. The three teams were “Rabotnik”, “Bitola” and “Pelagonia”. All three teams had great players who contributed to the development of sport in Bitola. Spiro can still remember the first games played under the floodlights in the city handball court of the second Yugoslav league. He remembers the ground being paved, the first grandstand on the city promenade being built and enclosed from the side so that the physical fitness and training centre could become a part of it from

where the fans could watch the handball qualifications and later the matches in the first division.

Spiro, at this point, would like to mention the names of the long-time players who played in the Bitola handball teams, and would also like to apologize to those he neglected to mention. Included among the trainers and coaches was Liubo Hristovski Barbako who left for Skopje and led the “Rabotnik” team, the goalkeepers Bone Traikovski, Kitsa and Guli, the players Vangel Simev - Ovtsata, Atanas Nashoku - Sako, Risto Kostadinov – Chatle, Stoian Damianovski - Chotata, Stamato, Laze Baeovski, Petse Tsrniot, Belkata, Petse Dimitrov one of the best handball players playing for “Bitola” who also played for “Pelister” but not a lot, Paio, Rusmir, Karabegovich and Zhuiovich. Spiro would also like to mention some of the younger players including Nikola Hristovski – Kaleshot, Stevche Stefanovski – Tsrevoto, Dane Bachevski, Tsane Krstevski – Tsaurot and Abdula Iusufovski.

When “Pelister” was in the first league and was one of the better teams, close to being sacred, at that time when “Metaloplastika” was a multiple European champion, it was led by Silian Mitsevski – Tsile and it had well-known and well-recognized coaches and even better handball players like Munitich, Kostelich, Kamenitsa, Roganovich, Magdinchev, Krste Andonovski, as well as Borko Iovichich, Festich, Vancho Iovanovski, Zechevich, Savevski, Shuman, Shandor, Hodik first in Bitola, Pepi Manaskov legend in Bitola and in the Macedonian sport and Vilarov.

Included among those who still contribute to the sport are Stevche Alushovski, Ive Markovski, Kire Popovski, Boro Churlevski, Itse Damianovski, Zvonko Shundovski, Dragan Marinkovich, Atse Stankovski, Igor Nikolovski most grateful player Spiro knows, Zlatko Dimitrovski, Aleksandar Zarkov, Kire Lazarov, Naumche and Zlatko Moisoovski, Vlatko Temelkov, Petar Angelov – Divi, Vlatko Mitkov, Atso Ionovski, Sashe Iankulovski, Makalovski, Petar Misovski, Toskovski and many others who, since 1999 until 2008, were represented by Spiro who then was President of the club. To Spiro and Risto’s delight, as well as to the delight of all of Bitola, in 2001 this team got to play for the “Challenger Cup” at the

European finals. At the same time the female team “Kometal Giorche Petrov” was also a European first.

These Macedonian teams continue to play and represent Macedonia to this day and have won games against “Kazan” (Russian team), “Paris en Zhermen” (French team), “Kilkis” (Greek team), “Frederisberg” (Copenhagen) and lost in the finals against “Skeri” (Denmark). Included amongst the players in the “Pelister” team were: Petar Angelov, Gorbah, Toskovski, Zlatko Dimitrovski, Makalovski, Vladimir Temelkov, Zlatko Moisoovski, Naumche Moisoovski, Atso Ionovski, Igor Nikolovski, Vladimir Mitkov, Risto Kalaidzhievski and Zvonko Shindovski. Team coach Bogdan Makovei, assistant coaches Stivche Stefanovski and Zoran Atanasovski also trainer of the goalies. Spiro Mavrovski was president of the club. Included in the Board were Petar Gatsov, Atso Delov, Stevo Peikovski, Mite Krstevski, Kole and Tsanche.

### **Events in Risto’s life**

1928 – Risto’s birth

1932 – Risto’s sister Sofia is born (Risto’s only sister)

1933 – Risto is sent to nursery school in the village. Hitler comes to power in Germany  
1934 – Risto goes to first grade in the village school

1935 – Risto goes to second grade and starts work looking after the cattle

1936 – Risto goes to third grade. Metaxas’s military dictatorship takes power in Greece

1937 – Risto goes to fourth grade. His youngest brother Nikola is born

1938 – As punishment the teacher fails the entire class, to repeat the same grade

1939 – Risto continued with fifth grade. World War II starts

1940 – Risto goes to sixth grade. Italy attacks Greece

1941 – Greece occupied by Germany, Italy and Bulgaria. The Italians come to Zhelevo and hunger and death takes hold in the major cities in Greece

1942 – Risto works on farm to grow food and to prepare for uprising

1943 – The first partisans appear and so do Kalchev’s armed hoods. People from Zhelevo are killed in Kostur. Italy capitulates on September 9, 1943

1944 – Neda, Risto’s mother is dropped in a pool of water by the Germans until she almost drowns. Later the Germans leave and the partisans arrive. The English occupy Athens in the fall

1945 – The Royal government arrives in Greece. Greece experiences 2<sup>nd</sup> occupation. Second World War ends

1946 - Spiro, Risto’s older brother gets married. The Mavrovski men renovate the house. A new armed struggle begins

1947 – Partisans begin to drift towards the mountains. Spiro joins the armed conflict, followed soon by Risto

1948 – Risto’s mother Neda dies. Risto’s brother Nikola is taken to Hungary with the refugee children. Spiro and Risto are fighting for the partisans. Mihail, Risto’s father, is captured in Albania

1949 – Spiro, Risto’s brother gets killed in June. Risto gets wounded on August 28 and was taken to Albania. Mihail and Risto’s sister Sofia remained in the village

1950 – Risto attends Party school in Zgorzelets

1951 – Risto attends military school at school “500”

1952 – Risto is in Shvidnitsa working in the train wagon manufacturing factory

1953 – Risto is in Shvidnitsa working and studying at the wagon manufacturing factory. Stalin dies

1955 – Risto marries Sofia Rosi from the village Pozdivishta. Risto’s brother Nikola arrives in Poland from Hungary

1956 – Risto attends Party school in Vroslav. Sofia stays with Nikola and Tanas (Risto’s brother and cousin). A revolution takes place in Hungary

1957 – Spiro, Risto’s first son, is born on April 9. The Mavrovski family leaves Poland for Macedonia on August 28 and arrives in Bitola on September 9. The family takes residence in hotel “Solun”.

1958 – Risto gets a job at the refrigerator manufacturing plant “Gorgi Naumov”, moves to a new apartment on “Ivan Milutinovic” street number 13/12, attends Macedonian language courses and is visited by Sofia’s parents from Greece

1959 – Risto’s second son Vasil is born on July 31

1960 – Risto receives visitors from Greece, his father Mihail and his father-in-law Metodi and mother-in-law Elena. Risto is also visited by his sister-in-law Tsveta and her husband Ilia Sklifov.

1961 – Risto’s brother Nikola gets married. Tsveta and Ilia Sklifov move first to Shtip then to Tetovo

1962 – Risto’s daughter and third child is born on February 17. She is named Neda after Risto’s mother

1963 – Spiro, Risto’s son starts school. Tsveta and Ilia Sklifov leave for Bulgaria. A strong earthquake hits Skopje on July 26

1964 – Mihail, Risto’s father, dies at age 61. The Mavrovski family for the first time takes a seaside vacation in Bulgaria while visiting Tsveta and Ilia Sklifov

1965 – Risto’s sister Sofia comes for a visit to Bitola. Risto sees his sister for the first time since 1947

1966 – Vasil (Vasko), Risto’s son leaves for Bulgaria. Risto’s sister Sofia and family leave permanently for Canada

1967 – Risto goes to Trieste, Italy in the spring to a trade show

1968 – Risto goes to the USSR for the first time to visit his cousin Ilia Ianu in Voronezh, and Sofia’s sister Aleksandra in Tashkent. Intervention in Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact in August

1969 – Risto attends courses and receives VKV diploma

1970 – 1978, Risto is employed at the “Gorgi Naumov” refrigerator plant

1976 – Spiro, Risto’s son, begins his studies at the Electro Technical Faculty in Skopje. Risto’s younger son marries Mariana Vusheva in Sofia

1977 – Elena, Sofia’s mother (Risto’s mother-in-law), dies in Gara Elin Pelin, Bulgaria

1978 – Risto retires from his job on March 1 and the family moves to a larger apartment further away from downtown. Initially the street was called REMO 2 street “Partizanka” and later was renamed to “Mirka Ginova” number 13/42. Vasil’s first child, Tsvetanka is born

1979 – Risto and Sofia roam the mountainside collecting herbs in order to sell them and help their children. Vasil’s second child, Risto, is born

1981 – Spiro, Risto’s older son, marries Elena Stoikovska Babets. The marriage takes place on May 10. Spiro’s son Vasko was born the same year on September 10

1983 – Neda, Risto’s daughter starts high school

1984 – Spiro is drafted into the Yugoslav army on November 4. First sent to Nish and later to Vranie

1985 – Neda, Risto’s daughter, gets married to Zdrave

1986 – Spiro starts work at REK Bitola as an electrical engineer

1987 – Mail (Mihail), Nikola's son, gets married. Risto's sister Sofia comes from Canada to Bitola for a visit  
1991 – Neda gives birth to her daughter Mare  
1998 – Vasko, Spiro's son, becomes director of production in REK Bitola 1998-2002  
1999 – Vasko, Spiro's son, becomes member of NATFIZ - Academy of Artists in Sofia  
2002 – Spiro, Risto's son, is elected Member of Parliament in the Macedonian Parliament from 2002 to 2006.  
2003 – Vasko, Spiro's son, finishes Academy in Sofia. Spiro takes Risto to Greece for a ten day vacation, to visit Spiro's cousin Elena in Atalanti, Athens, the Peloponnesus and all of Greece

### **Spiro's view of his father Risto Mavrovski**

Following are some of Spiro's personal thoughts about events in his own life connected with his father's exodus, Risto's life in Bitola and the sports and other events Risto participated in which he discussed with Spiro. Risto advised Spiro on many things and informed him of events that are now deeply engraved in Spiro's memory and will remain there for the rest of his life.

Spiro's relationship with his father was very intense, in a good way. They got along well all the time. Risto felt that Spiro had been deprived of his grandparents (Risto's parents) and as such Risto tried to fill in for them. Spiro met his grandfather Mihail for a brief time when he was very young (three years old) and that was only for a few days. Spiro visited with his grandfather Metodija and grandmother Elena, on his mother's side, many times but he did not grow up with them and the visits were short. While growing up, Spiro and his siblings spent a great deal of time with their parents which brought them very close together. Risto was not only Spiro's father but also his grandfather, his brother and his best friend. His advice to Spiro always was; work hard, be honest, be sincere and try to love everyone. Risto's advice and criticisms were valued by Spiro and Risto continued to advise him even when Spiro was a parliamentarian in the Macedonian Parliament. Spiro, on the other hand, respected his father's criticisms, suggestions and advice, they were very important to him. Spiro believes his life has been well shaped by the influence of his father. Spiro misses him very much.

Spiro believes that Risto will be with us spiritually as long as we continue to remember him and we will all do well following his advice especially during times of crisis.

Spiro will never forget the memorable times he had walking up and down the city promenade with his family, all five walking together while pushing a beautiful stroller that Risto brought from Poland. During the summers it was obligatory that the family go bathing in the Dragor River, which they did every Saturday and Sunday. “Topla Voda” was the place to go for a nice swim. Spiro and Risto also went to other “swimming places” such as “Slavia”, “Kitash” and “Paitonche”, which now no longer exist. As was mentioned many times before, Risto was originally from the village Zhelevo, a mountainous village and as such Risto always loved the mountains and would never pass up an opportunity to go hiking. He welcomed company but if no one was available he climbed the mountains alone. He loved to visit “Neolitsa” where, unfortunately, his life ended. Risto liked to climb up “Snegovo” in the spring, “Tumbe Kafe” at all times of the year and “Pelister” all the way up to the glacier lakes during the summer. He visited the mountain huts at “Begova Cheshma” and “Kopanki”. After Risto retired from his job, both he and Sofia climbed up the mountains looking to collect herbs and other gifts of nature such as mushrooms, blueberries, blackberries, junipers, etc. At that time Spiro was in Skopje studying at the university.

Spiro remembers the time his sister was born when his mother had to go to the hospital in the city centre. He was only five years old then and, when his father went to the hospital for a visit, he had to look after his brother Vasil who then was only three. Risto used to take the boys with him, but because children were not allowed in the hospital they had to remain outside on the street from where they called their mother to come to the window so they could see her. For being good boys their father rewarded them with sweets and pastries including “burek” which they ate for breakfast.

Spiro was a good student with natural learning skills. He was one of the top students in his class and in his grade. At the end of the school year, especially when he was attending elementary school at the “Damian Gruev” school, he always came home with top grades



(five out of five in all subjects). And, of course, his father was very happy about that and rewarded him by treating him to a full plate of “kebabs” at the café near the wooden bridge. Spiro’s performance in school continued to be excellent until his third year in university when he was involved in a car accident and misunderstood a presumed injustice perpetrated against him by Professor Katerina Chundeva. At that point he was ready to leave school and return to Bitola but his parents insisted that he remain in school and finish the term. His father never asked him whether or not he passed the tests, all 54 in total, but always encouraged him to continue his education. Spiro believes one of the most joyful moments in Risto’s life was when Spiro was chosen to do diplomatic work at the Electro Technical Engineering section with Professor Vlastimir Glamochanin. Risto and Tashko Chapkanov, who was also there, were so proud that they left the hall in tears. Spiro received his master’s degree from the Technical Faculty in Bitola in 2011. His master’s degree was in Industrial Management, something which posthumously Spiro would like to dedicate to his father and to his wonderful grandchildren.

After Spiro finished his education he was drafted into the Yugoslav (JNA) army and sent to Nish in Serbia. Spiro’s parents and his wife Elena were present at Spiro’s oath taking ceremony.

As stated earlier, Spiro married Elena Stoikovska, daughter of Petar and Malina Stoikovski. Elena’s father, nicknamed “Babets”, was a famous actor, a great actor not only of the Bitola Theater but in the whole of Macedonia. Spiro remembered Petar from when he was in second grade and had watched Petar perform in the children’s play “Heidi”. Petar, who directed and acted in the play, was the grandfather in that story. Since that time Spiro never missed a single performance in Bitola put on by the Babets. Spiro also attended Drama Theatre and National Theatre performances put on by the Babets in Skopje when Spiro was a student there.

Before Spiro married Elena he ran into a few problems. The two were still students but thanks to Risto, Spiro’s father, these problems were resolved in time and the wedding took place as planned. Spiro and Elena’s wedding was attended by Spiro’s sister Neda, his uncle Nikola, his aunt Vasilka (Nikola’s wife), his first cousin Mial

(Mihail, Nikola's son), and his aunt Tsveta and uncle Ilia Sklifov. Sadly his brother Vasil could not make it, he was serving in the army and was not allowed to leave. Spiro's godparents Tashko and Neda Chapkanov and their children Marina and Mile, with wife Efimia, were also at the wedding. They later became godparents to Spiro's son Vasko. Their sons Dimitri and Tashko, in turn, become godparents to Vasko's children. The wedding was held in the village Bistritsa, in one of the then most representative restaurants in the region called the "Kai Kubura" This was in 1981. Twenty-four years later Vasko, Spiro's son, married his sweetheart actress Iuliana Mirchevska in the same place. Spiro's wedding was attended by all of Spiro's friends from the "Aegean building" including Peter Gatsov – Talentot with his current wife Liupka, Vasko Giorgievski - Tohari with his sister Elena, Borche Tashkov - Trumanot, Traiche Sivakov - Papata, Aleko Petkov - Taliata, both from Australia, Vasko Filipovski - Buliata, Giorgi Steriovski - Dzhonsono, Nikola Mamakis, Liupcho Iovanovski – Pantero, Kire Kukulukovski - Koskata, Stevo Elkov – Bebek, now in Canada, and Vasil Sivakov - Tsiketsot. Some of Spiro's friends from his school days also attended his wedding, including Veselin Taleski, his brother-in-law, may he rest in peace, Tomche Traikovski - Kiemata, and Risto Cholakov – Chukalo, now a doctor in America.

Spiro's brother Vasil's wedding took place in Sofia, Bulgaria back in 1976, while Spiro was attending first year university in Skopje. It was during the Olympic Games held in Montreal Canada, at which time Spiro had attended a student war game exercise. The next day, after he completed the drill, he and his parents and sister took a bus and went to Sofia. There were two orchestras at the wedding, playing wonderful Macedonian songs. Vasil was only 17 years old at the time but it was his decision to get married and that is exactly what he did. Vasil became a grandfather at age 35. His daughter Tvetanka also married young, to Petar Goleshov. And as such, history repeated itself and Vasil's family multiplied successfully being protected by God.

Neda's wedding was also a wonderful experience. It was attended by many relatives, aunts and uncles, including Neda's aunt Sofia (Risto's sister) and her husband Nikola from Canada. Neda married Zdrave. The wedding was also attended by Dafina and Mitra,

relatives from Tetovo. Neda and Zdrave have two children Metodija and Marika. Metodija married a wonderful young lady named Elena. Both of Neda's children are educated and successful adults who Spiro loves very much, like they were his own.

Spiro's trips with his family to his aunt's in Tetovo, when he was young, were very memorable. And so were the bus and train trips to Gara Elin Pelin and Sofia. These were beautiful moments in Spiro's life which he will never forget. Later when Spiro owned a car, he used to drive the family to visit his brother, aunt and uncle. Spiro had also driven to Sofia to visit his own son Vasko while Vasko attended the Sofia National Academy of Arts taking acting lessons. Vasko was one of the best students in his class. Spiro and the family also attended many of Vasko's plays and graduation performances. The family was there when Vasko was handed his diploma. Spiro is a happy and proud father.

One of the trips which Spiro took that was unforgettable, but unfortunately proved to be the last one, was a trip to Greece in 2003 together with his father and mother. The purpose of the trip was to visit his cousin Elena who lived in Atalanti, a town about 90 kilometres outside of Athens, Greece. The trip was in late May or early June when, around 5:30 in the morning, they left home to get there early. Unfortunately the family ran into problems at the border crossing. The Greek border guards "claimed" they displaced Spiro's "documents" and were looking for them everywhere. They even opened a gift from Spiro's aunt Tsveta he was expected to deliver to Elena. When they had finished looking, Spiro asked them to put everything back the way they found it. Spiro at the time had a diplomat's passport because he was a member of the Assembly of the Republic Macedonia. Because he was a diplomat, the Greeks had no right to search his baggage. But they wanted to search it anyway, to see what was inside the wrapped gift package and so they found a way by claiming that they "may have left his documents inside his suitcase..." Anyway, after a brief altercation, everything fell into place. Having personal experience with Greeks, Spiro's mother and father were begging him not to cause problems.

At around eleven o'clock, after a short stop for breakfast under Mount Olympus, they arrived in Atalanti and were able to quickly

find Elena's home. Their arrival brought joy and happiness to everyone. On the third day after their arrival, they went for a visit to the Delphi archaeological site, located at a very high altitude. They drove their Lada 110 on a road with many curves and hills. There was a large museum, an amphitheater and many tourists at Delphi. From there they took a downhill road towards the Gulf of Corinth to a place called Galaxidi, which had a huge amusement park and ate lunch in a village called Kiri. The water was warm and beautiful that time of year so they stopped along the seashore and went for a long swim. In the evening they returned to Atalanti and the very next day they were back in the sea at a place called Skala, not far from Atalanti. The water there was wonderful.

The next day they left for Athens and got to the outskirts in about an hour, but it was a different story inside Athens. It took them about 2 hours to move 10 to 15 kilometres; traffic was that bad. But this was before the 2004 Olympics when many streets were undergoing repairs; buildings were being renovated, etc. The city was in chaos but somehow Spiro managed to get to the Acropolis. There were many cranes in operation and dust was flying everywhere, covering the many tourists lingering around. Also among the tourists was a group from Poland, which delighted Risto and gave him a chance to mingle with the people and speak to them in their language.

Risto was not impressed by what he saw at the Acropolis. His only comment was, "It's all stone and nothing else". The next day they left for Solun where they had lunch and then continued to Kallithea where they slept. The following day they took a tour of the place, took advantage of the beautiful weather and went for a swim in the sea. Two days later they left for the village Pozharsko (Aridea) where they spent the night. The next day they had lunch at the waterfalls in Voden. After that they stopped several times to take in the view, with which they were very pleased. They then took the road through Kostur to Pozdivishta and from there to Zhelevo. They had been to Zhelevo several times before and each time it was just as exciting as the last. The first time they came to Zhelevo Risto was very touched; to have returned to a place, where years ago, it had been full of life, and now to find it desolate and absent of life. Risto, Sofia and Spiro stayed at cousin Tanasitsa's cafe and inn in Broda. They also took advantage of the visit to see the local cemetery

where many of the Mavrovski ancestors were buried. Risto always found these visits difficult to endure. They reminded him of the past, of his days in DAG, of his wounds and the hospitals. Each visit left him sad and emotionally drained.

Spiro was able to witness the greatness in his father in the way Risto treated his father and mother-in-law, whom he respected as if they were his own parents. Risto also had an excellent and special relationship with his brother Nikola, not only as his brother and friend but also as his guardian. Parentless, the brothers faced joy and sorrow, sickness and health together. They were best friends until Risto passed on, a tragedy that devastated Nikola. Five months later Nikola died too. The two brothers and their families were inseparable. Spiro too had a special relationship with his uncle Nikola from the time he was very young. Nikola and his aunt Vasilka were the two other people, outside of his parents, with whom Spiro enjoyed spending time. His other relatives were never that close but Spiro cannot forget their kindness and generosity over the years. Spiro was able to witness their kindness and patience when his aunt Aleksandra, uncle Ilia, their two children Elena and Mihail Ianu who came from Voronesh Russia to Bitola and stayed together with his aunt Tsveta, uncle Ilia and his brother Vasil Sklifov, all together at Risto's house. Eleven people in total staying in a 33 square metre apartment and putting up with each other for days at a time. It was mission impossible during which Spiro had to sleep out on the balcony and eat on the floor. But, in spite of all that, those were memorable moments that Spiro remembers and relishes to this day. Spiro's uncle, Ilia Ianu, was a doctor of historical sciences at the University of Voronesh, also the man to first build links between the university in Russia and the university of Kirl and Metodi in Skopje.

One of the topics that Risto had not written anything about in his diary was his sons Vasil's departure to Bulgaria and why Vasil was with Spiro's aunt Tsveta and uncle Ilia. Why was Vasil given to Tsveta and Ilia as if he was their own child and why did Vasil and his family live in Bulgaria? Risto did not want to speak about this at all but one time when Risto and Spiro were returning from Bulgaria Spiro asked his father about it. Risto's reply was, "because the family made this agreement when they were all still in Poland." The

family had agreed that the next child born to Risto and Sofia would be living with Tsveta and Ilia. But when Spiro pushed the issue, insisting to know why, Risto told him because Tsveta and Ilia could not have children of their own. When the agreement was made, however, it was decided that the two families would always live close to one another in Macedonia. But after the families settled, Ilia was put in jail for something stupid, for allegedly writing “Down with Tito’s revisionism” on the wall of the “Tetek’s” factory for which he was sentenced to jail. Some time after he was released, the Sklifov and six other families left Macedonia and went to Bulgaria. There they were given jobs, houses and other benefits. Vasil resumed his education in Bulgaria. He left Bitola when he was in public school. As the younger of the two, Vasil always followed Spiro wherever Spiro went. Spiro missed that very much after his brother left.

This was the first and last time Spiro had this conversation with his father because Spiro realized that it was difficult for Risto to talk about. Risto and Sofia’s decision to give up Vasil to the Sklifov’s was never challenged or questioned by either Spiro or Neda. Risto and Sofia’s decision, although it brought them sadness, was always respected.

Risto was a great Macedonian patriot. His national sentiment and pride in being Macedonian was expressed a thousand times, enough times to implant it deep into the souls of his children. Spiro remembers the many conversations that Risto had with his uncle Ilia Sklifov who originally was from the village Zagorichani, a patriotic Macedonian village located in Greek occupied Macedonia which had seen many battles. Ilia Sklifov was a great patriot and never missed a chance to express his love for Macedonia, even when he lived in Bulgaria. Spiro remembers a conversation taking place in the 1970’s in Iambul, Bulgaria where Spiro and Risto spent the night. The conversation was about the Greek Civil War and was taking place between Risto, who was almost missing an arm, a friend and co-fighter of Risto’s named Iani, who was missing a leg, and Spiro’s uncle who was shot in the head. They were having a philosophical discussion as to what went wrong and who was to blame for starting the war. The discussion ended in a draw because they could not agree on anything. The only thing that united them

and kept them from yelling at each other was their love for Macedonia. The conversation was difficult for Spiro to listen to but he learned many things which he would otherwise not have known. And now that he is given the chance, Spiro will write about them.

The first time Spiro was witness to his father's feelings about "these matters" was at the Bitola centre when, for the first time, Risto saw a soldier wearing a military uniform belonging to the free and independent Republic of Macedonia. Risto could not hold back so he grabbed hold of the young man and hugged and kissed him. Risto was speechless and unable to hold back his tears. Although surprised, the young soldier looked happy and satisfied. Risto continued to cry for a long time.

Risto was personally active in many things but, from his own life experience, he rarely dealt in politics and almost never in public but he did support Spiro's candidacy for Member of Parliament in 2002. Risto took part in all the rallies and constantly advised Spiro. At that time Spiro did not understand everything that his father told him but he understands things better now and more than ever is grateful to Risto for his advice. Risto was engaged in several organizations like the union of fighters and sports clubs and when something needed to be done he was always there and ready to help. He helped Vangel Chaldarov, Todor Atanasovski, Nikola Stefanovski, Aleksandar Popovski in Skopje, Tashko Chapkanov and others. Risto was always ready to help the sports clubs because his soul was into sports. He even practiced throwing darts on his own balcony because he had no space anywhere else in the house. His practice paid off, resulting in many trophies and awards. The Association of Macedonians from the Aegean part of Macedonia was another place where Risto, together with Aleksandar Popovski, spent a long time. Risto was always glad to help the Association and was one of the first people to organize a meeting in the village Trnovo. The people from the Association in turn respected Risto and would not start the meeting without the presence of the Mavrovski family. The same people later began to visit Spiro at his villa.

Of course there were problems. Every time one gets involved in something they are bound to run into problems. But because of his sociability and desire to communicate and socialize, Risto was able

to resolve most problems. Spiro remembers when he was a child a circus coming to town with performers from Poland whom Risto invited to his home. The family had a wonderful time being with these people but sadly for only a few days. A police inspector from the Ministry of the Interior arrived at Risto's house first inquiring about why these people were there and then warning Risto that they had "ulterior motives" for being there. Risto was astonished at the stupidity of some people and could not believe what was happening. The next time Risto ran into problems was when his father-in-law Methodi came to Bitola. A police inspector came over to the house asking the 70 year old man bizarre questions which Spiro, to this day, has difficulty understanding why. Spiro remembers his grandfather being very excited and upset. When Risto returned home from work he went straight to the Interior Ministry and demanded an explanation and an apology. Unfortunately he did not get an explanation and no one came to the house to apologize to the old man.

Spiro would like to start with one of his first images of Bitola where, for two years, his father took him on a bicycle in front of the western gate of the city stadium under Tumba Kafe hill. These were memorable moments in Spiro's life which left a good impression on him, so much so that he never intentionally missed a game since he was 5 or 6 years old. Spiro attended as many games as possible in every sport, even practice games. Spiro continued to be involved in sports in Skopje when he was attending university.

Almost every game that Spiro attended in Bitola he did with his father and his uncle Nikola. His father was a member of the football club administration. The football club was sponsored by the refrigerator factory "Gorgi Naumov" where Risto worked. The factory had its own bus so, in addition to attending local games, Risto, Nikola and Spiro traveled around and attended regional matches. Later when Spiro got his own car, he traveled everywhere, even to rural matches in the villages Novatsi, Logovardi, Kravari, Dobrusevo, Kukurechani and many other places. As the sport began to further develop, its fans took to the road and traveled to all the towns throughout Macedonia. Spiro and his father regularly went to Prilep, especially when "Pobeda" played in the third league and



“Pelister” was in the second league. “Pobeda” played in Prilep on Saturdays and “Pelister” on Sundays.

As mentioned earlier, Spiro later became president of the Handball Club Pelister and every Saturday, together with his father and uncle, they were always the first to show up at the stadium and watch all the games. The first matches were played by the younger players and later from 4 to 8 pm they watched the older players. Risto was especially interested in boxing and was sure to attend every match. Mite, one of the boxers, was one of Risto’s students. Mite was among the first generation of boxers from the Aegean (Greek occupied) part of Macedonia. Included among the other boxers from Greek occupied Macedonia were Laze Giakovski, one of the best technicians, the brothers Robev, Tashko, Trifun who had a professional career in Canada and Kocho Steriov. Included among others who joined later were Lalicho, Ilche Beldzhigerov, Sead Amedovski, Pupucho, Sedat Kerimov, the brothers Rustemov, Sherif, Sedat, Dilaber Iusufov, Osmani, Salihu and Dragan Kostich, then professional European champion, Ile Buchko, Bebio and, Macedonia coach, Hristo Dimitrovski. Spiro is aware that he may not have mentioned everyone and apologizes for that.

There were also others who practiced sports. Included among them were Vasil Anastasovski - Tsile, who played football for “Pelister”, “Ovche Pole” and many years in Canada, and Kocho Malkov who played football for “Pelister”. Involved in judo with a good deal of success were Mile and Petse Gulevski, Tomche Gatsov and Ice and Kire Damianovski were involved in handball in “Pelister”. The first Macedonian champion in karate and the first to work with “nunchaks” was Pande Petkov, may rest in peace, he died young. Among the first body builders in Bitola were Stase Ralev, Traiche Sivakov, Laze Bebiot, Mishako and many others. Motocross tournaments were also held in Bitola during the 1960’s and 1970’s in the meadows of the villages Bukovo and Bratindol where it was continued year after year to this day. There are also auto races held around the River Dragor in Bitola. Sports were an important segment of life in Macedonia.

Spiro feels obliged to say something more about his father. Whenever they talked Risto never forgot to say that he was grateful

to God for keeping him alive, especially after he was badly wounded and tossed with the dead to be buried. The entire family is grateful to Risto's cousin Sevda Stanisheva and to the older man who was with her who recognized and saved Risto. As mentioned earlier, the old man took out a newspaper, lit it and placed the flame under Risto's bare feet. Risto flinched and was sent to a hospital, on the first available truck, instead of a grave. After many operations and surgeries that lasted nine hours, performed in Albania by a Bulgarian Red Cross doctor, Risto's arm was saved from amputation but left him disabled for life. Any change in the weather caused him great pain.

Very often, even 30 years after being wounded on the head, very small pieces of shrapnel came out of Risto's face when he shaved. This, Risto interpreted as a sign from God who wanted him to live and to continue the work he started before he was wounded. And when someone asked him where he wanted to die, Risto would say "on the mountains". Unfortunately his wish to die on a mountain came true on July 17, 2005. He died all alone after climbing Mount Neolitsa. People who were there later told Spiro that after Risto climbed to the top of the mountain he became ill but soon felt better and then went on his own to gather tea plants. That's when he died. Whether this was his choice to die on the mountain or whether God heard him and granted him his wish, Spiro does not know. That day Risto left his physical world but his spirit will forever remain here, with us, as the great man that he was, as long as we remember him. We are proud to be his descendents.

"I love and miss my father very much!!!" says Spiro.

## **Risto's view of World War II**

Following is a summary of the start of World War II and things that Risto learned about the war in school, which he would like to share with us.

A great event took place at the end of the Great War (First World War 1914 to 1918) which changed the course of world history. Initiated by the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks and led by Vladimir Ilich Lenin, the October Revolution took place in Tsarist Russia.

After that Russia was the first socialist state in the world to successfully change its political system. The socialists ended all imperial pursuits and began to build the Soviet Union. The establishment of socialist Russia sparked the development of communist parties all throughout the Western world in the period from 1918 to 1920. In response to this, many states in the Western world began to act aggressively towards the Soviet Union endlessly supporting actions against it and expecting to bring Russia back to its old system. But after four years of trying war and internal aggression, Russia's enemies were defeated and the Soviet Union became an even stronger country. Unfortunately Lenin received a wound in 1922 and died prematurely in 1924. His body was embalmed, for the first time in recent history, and placed on display for people to see. Risto was one of the people who went to see Lenin's body. After Lenin died Iosif Visarionovich Stalin came to power and held power until 1953, when he died.

Included in the forces that were defeated during the Great War were the countries Germany, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and Italy. Included in the forces that were victorious during the Great War were the countries England (Britain), France, Poland, Serbia, Russia and many other smaller countries. After that the victors, along with the United States, teamed up and bore force against the "Bear from the East" (Soviet Union) in an attempt to master it, but failed. In 1929 and 1930, the Western world experienced a major economic crisis while holding an economic blockade against the Soviet Union. The blockade, and all other attempts by the West to subdue the Soviet Union, failed miserably. The only thing they succeeded in doing was causing problems for themselves by invoking the progressive elements in their own countries to demand rights. But the West has not subsided in seeking ways to overthrow the Soviet Union (and now to destroy Russia).

In 1933 the National Socialist Party, led by Adolph Hitler, won the elections in Germany. The Fascist Party, led by Duce Mussolini, took power in Italy. Military dictatorships began to appear in the Balkan countries, taking power in Yugoslavia and Greece. The military dictatorship in Greece was headed by Metaxas. And as such, all this was a precursor to a new division in the world which quickly began to take shape. In 1937 Hitler annexed Austria-

Hungary. In 1936 Italy attacked Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia) and conquered it. Parliamentary elections took place in Spain in 1936 where the Socialists won and wanted to put a people's government in power. Hitler and Mussolini however would not support such a government so they helped General Franco's Royal Army start a civil war. The Spanish Civil War lasted almost three years. Many volunteers from the various labour forces in Europe came to assist the socialists but unfortunately were unable to stem the tide and the dictator Franco took power in Spain. Shortly afterwards Germany annexed Czechoslovakia and in 1939 Italy appropriated Albania. Britain and the United States remain neutral during these developments but were secretly working against the socialists, particularly against the Soviets, and were economically supporting the fascists. In Asia, Japan attacked China and on September 1, 1939, unprovoked and without warning Germany attacks Poland. This time Britain and France came to Poland's aid and as such the Second World War began in Europe, Asia and Africa.

On one side were the Axis Powers, Rome – Berlin –Tokyo, which were later joined by Tsar Boris's Bulgaria, the quisling governments in Romania, Yugoslavia, France, Ukraine and some others. In 1940 Germany began to occupy Western Europe including the Scandinavian countries and France. The only country that remained unoccupied, but was under attack, was Britain. At the same time a non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union was concluded, allowing the Soviets to declare war on Finland and recover former lost territories. On October 28, 1940, Italy declared war on Greece through Albania. At this point in time the only country that remained free was Yugoslavia. On April 6, 1941 Yugoslavia was attacked and conquered within a week. The Axis powers then attacked Greece which immediately surrendered. The only country that remained neutral in the Balkans was Turkey, but it leaned more towards the German side. The only countries that remained un-conquered in May 1941 were Britain and the Soviet Union. Although Hitler was looking towards Britain, he was thinking of when and how to attack the Soviet Union, from where his biggest threat came. Hitler had started the war with the Soviet Union internally, much earlier, through the means of a fifth column which did much damage to its councils and sent many innocent

people to exile in Siberia or to the executioner. While this was going on, Hitler worked on plans to invade the Soviet Union and on June 22, 1941 he did that through the operation codenamed “Barbarossa”. This started one of the greatest battles in history. So now the fate of the war was transferred into the hands of the Soviet people, the Red Army and the whole international movement. By doing so Hitler made his biggest mistake and from that day forward he began to lose his position in Europe and elsewhere. The first major defeat the Germans suffered was at the outskirts of Moscow when they were pushed back 240 kilometres. Until then the Germans had appeared to be invincible. The Soviet victory caused an avalanche of guerrilla movements in Yugoslavia with Tito, Greece, Albania, France, Scandinavia and in other parts of Europe. The next great victory for the Soviets and for the world came at the battle for Stalingrad when the most elite German units were defeated. The Anglo-American forces inflicted heavy losses on the Germans in Africa. At about the same time (December 1941) Japan attacked the United States at Pearl Harbour forcing the Americans to join the war. The course of the war began to change around 1942/43 and the Rome - Berlin - Tokyo axis began to crack.

On the other side were all “the allies”, all those who fought against the axis powers. The first meeting between the “big three leaders” Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt, was held in Tehran in 1943. The meeting was called by Churchill during which Stalin asked that a second front be opened, but unfortunately this took place much later. It took the Western allies from July to September 1943 to disembark in Sicily where, on September 9, 1943, they forced Italy to capitulate. By that time there were all sorts of guerrilla movements everywhere and the Red Army was nearing the borders of Poland, Hungary and Romania. Then, in the summer of 1944, the Soviet army entered Polish territory and continued towards Germany. Another Soviet army entered Romania.

On September 9, 1944 Bulgaria capitulated. When the Red Army reached the Greek border it was diverted. Tito asked for its assistance to conclude the final battles in Yugoslavia. Dimitrov from Bulgaria offered the Bulgarian Patriotic Army to assist in those struggles and as such its units participated in the fighting in Yugoslavia from Macedonia to Croatia.

In the fall of 1944, the Anglo-Americans, French and Canadian forces invaded Normandy and opened a second front. The reason for this front was fear of Stalin, their new enemy; because the Soviet Red Army was deep inside Europe, entering Germany, and there would be no one to stop it from overrunning Europe. The “big three leaders” met again, this time in Yalta, where they sat in front of a large map of the world and decided to divide the world; to decide who was going to have influence over whom after the axis powers were defeated.

In the spring of 1945 the Red Army entered German territory. By then it had freed Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and much of Austria. Towards the end of April 1945, the Soviets invaded Berlin, the last stronghold of the Nazis. Hitler had committed suicide and Goebbels, the great Nazi propagandist, first killed his family and then himself to avoid capture. And as such, after unconditionally surrendering on July 9, 1945, German command capitulated and the war in Europe ended. The last city to be freed was Zagreb, Yugoslavia. This city was freed on May 15, 1945. This was the worst war ever experienced in recent human history with many casualties, wounded, huge human and material losses and a disruption of interethnic relations which lasted for several decades.

The war continued in the Far East, in Japan where the United States of America dropped two atomic bombs, first on Hiroshima and then on Nagasaki, forcing the Japanese to surrender unconditionally. This demonstrated that mankind is capable of being more brutal than ever before where many thousands of innocent people, mostly civilians, lost their lives.

The biggest burden of this war fell on the Soviet Union which lost somewhere around 20 million people. Besides the dead there were many thousands of wounded and maimed. There was also a heavy incalculable material loss due to the battles that took place on Soviet territory. Poland lost 7 million people, nearly all Jews from the Polish ghettos, and suffered 90% devastation in material goods. Yugoslavia lost 1.7 million people with thousands of wounded and mutilated. The worst damages were inflicted in Bosnia, Serbia and

Croatia. Britain and France, which had participated in the war since it first started, also suffered human and material losses, mainly from the bombardments. Human losses, however, were small. The United States suffered mostly military losses, weapons and soldiers, with no material damage on its territory. In addition to Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania also suffered losses in the Balkans.

Germany suffered the greatest losses on the side of the axis powers, followed by Japan and Italy. Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Spain suffered much material damage due to being bombed, but little human loss in comparison. This, in short, was what happened in Europe during the war years 1939 to 1945.

What did the allies accomplish as a result of this war? First, they divided Germany into four zones of influence, American, English, French and Soviet. Austria was divided into three parts; American, English and Soviet. Japan was given to the United States with a small part in the north put under Soviet influence. North Korea, China, Mongolia, North Vietnam etc., became socialist states. Ethiopia, Libya, Angola, Congo, Yemen, Cuba etc., became third world countries. The world was divided into two spheres of influence, socialist and capitalist.

New People's Republics were born in Europe after the war. These were Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. Only Greece remained under Western influence, first under British which brought back the King, and later under American. The people in Greece who fought against the Germans, Italians and Bulgarians and who participated in the various deadly battles and fronts to bring democracy to Greece gained nothing and were again forced to fight in a Civil War which brought them nothing but misery.

Risto wrote the above in the 1990's during which time unexpected things had happened like the fall of communism and the destruction of the Berlin wall. Risto was witness to the dismantling of the socialist countries, the Warsaw Pact and all the repercussions in Yugoslavia. It was hard for him to believe that a civil war had taken place in Yugoslavia involving Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and later in Macedonia.

It was a pleasant surprise for Risto, after all the struggling our people have been through, to finally see the formation of a free and independent Macedonian state in 1990. More impressive for him were the parliamentary elections, the Macedonian army and police, democratic elections and the various parties competing for power in a pluralistic society. This was a new capitalism for him with human rights and freedoms. His biggest fear in this changing world, however, was that history would again repeat itself and we would again have high unemployment, a weak economy and the forthcoming big wars that we would again have to fight for our survival and economic development.

### **Risto's view of DAG's defeat in the Greek Civil War**

In the period after Vicho fell, the Greek government moved its forces to Gramos where, after many vicious and bloody battles, everything ended on August 26, 1949 with the withdrawal of DAG units to Albania. As such, the Greek Civil War that raged on from 1945 to 1949 finally ended with a Monarcho-Fascist victory. The DAG units that survived with their many sick and wounded fighters ended up in Albanian territories in the camps Sukt, Elbasan, Bureli and other places.

Risto has spoken about DAG's disastrous defeat on several occasions and has made his point of view very clear. This was a defeat with many consequences which left behind many dead, wounded, captured and imprisoned. Many lives were destroyed. Homes and entire villages were also destroyed. When the partisans were leaving they could not take everything with them so much of the heavy weaponry, ammunition and other military material was left behind. The struggle was unequal. The Monarcho-Fascists were not only a larger force and more numerous than the partisans but they were also better trained, better prepared and armed with the latest and most modern weapons. Knowing all this, in the winter of 1949, DAG Headquarters took the offensive and tried to surprise the enemy. In Karpenisi it had little success. In Sobotsko, Aradea and Vodesko, DAG was utterly defeated. In Negush it was devastatingly defeated with many losses. The biggest mistake it ever made was in Lerin when it tried to attack the city in February 1949, turning it into



a place of massacre for the young and freshly recruited and inexperienced Macedonian fighters.

By taking this path, DAG Headquarters proved itself to be incompetent when it came to conducting military campaigns. DAG went on the offensive against a more powerful, well-armed and well-prepared enemy, especially in urban areas, and by doing so it managed to destroy its entire 114 Brigade. The responsibility for this devastating loss was pinned on Commander Georgiadis who was then convicted and executed. And this is how DAG General Headquarters managed to hide its own incompetence. There were rumours circulating at the time, in the circles of fighters, that Georgiadis was executed so that he could not be a witness against the Minister of the Military and against those in charge at the top who were responsible for starting and conducting these battles. Those in charge, however, insisted that the losses were due to treachery and betrayals from the many partisan fighters who abandoned their posts and fled to the ranks of the Monarcho-Fascists. So, instead of investigating and finding the real reasons for the failures, it was easier to blame someone else, someone who was dead and could not talk. This was a big mistake and a turning point for the war.

But that was not all. Another big error the CPG made was before the war (Greek Civil War) had even begun when arrangements were made, between EAM and ELAS on one side and the English on the other, for ELAS (the partisans) to surrender its weapons, which it did obediently. The CPG was promised a place in governing the country through free elections but that did not happen. Before the elections took place “white terror” was introduced in Greece by the Greek Right, supported by the English and unleashed against all CPG supporters, especially in Greek occupied Macedonia, which not only filled the prisons with people loyal to the CPG but also with many innocent Macedonians. The next mistake the CPG made was to boycott the elections and let the Right form a government without it. After that the CPG hesitated and, while unprepared, called for renewing the armed struggle. It did this before it made arrangements to raise the “proletariat” in the cities and large towns. The agitators and recruiters were insufficiently prepared and ill advised about these CPG plans and were unable to “create” the necessary striking

force to fight back. As a result, the CPG strictly relied on the Macedonian village population to carry the entire weight of the war on its back. In the beginning there were no reserves, and no large unit formations, so the enemy was able to conduct clean up operations all throughout 1948. Clean up began in Crete, the Peloponnesus, Old Greece up to Epirus, Gramos, Vicho, Pireis and Kaimakchalan. In 1949 the Monarcho-Fascists managed to drive out the partisans from Vermo, Epirus and Kaimakchalan leaving only Vicho and a small part of Gramos free. The latest Greek Monarcho-Fascist offensive was carried out with the most modern weapons and with support from the United States. The offensive was started and ended in August 1949 with a Monarcho-Fascist victory. All DAG units were expelled to Albania.

### **Risto's view of US aid and the end of the Greek Civil War**

Hundreds of prisoners were taken by the Greek government to Drepano Region, near the city Kozheni, during the first half of May, where they worked around the clock under tight guard, building bunkers. The bunkers built were of the same size, durability and strength as those built in Gramos the year before and later in Mali Madi, Bela Voda, Lundzer, Iamata, Baro, Roto, Lisets, Polemata and other hills in the Vicho sector. As soon as the bunkers were constructed, the government forces began intensive training in which units of the II, IX, XI and XV Division and units I, VIII and X of the officers' Division participated. These units were training in martial arts and in the use of new weapons such as bazookas and 75 mm cannons, which had recently arrived in Greece from the United States. The troops were training as if they were in active combat, fighting under day and night conditions in order to prepare for all conditions of warfare. They were preparing to meet a strong opponent while establishing strongholds in conjunction with tanks, artillery and aviation.

The aviation provided the government forces the opportunity to use new bombs and missiles and to rehearse the destruction of entrenched positions such as bunkers, command posts and observation posts... The newly built bunkers were bombed in order to discover their weak and breaking points. After the structures were bombed from the air the artillery was deployed and eventually the

infantry. The exercises lasted almost a month. These exercises, conducted with highly advanced military aircraft, such as the Dakota, the Harvard and the Spitfire, took place under the watchful eye of American and British military experts and instructors who were directly commanded by US General Van Fleet. Two days after the training exercises were completed all the battalion, brigade, regiment and division commanders, as well as all air force officers, were called to attend a meeting in the city council chambers, converted into a military operational headquarters. The meeting was led by Commander Marshal Alexandros Papagos, Chief of General Staff Kosmas and the commanders of I, II, III Corps - Tsakalotos, Manidakis and Grigoropoulos. General Van Fleet sat with his collaborators in the first row. General Kosmas, with a trembling voice, expressed his gratitude to the highly respected General Van Fleet and his associates for helping Greece prepare the secret operational plan known as “ΙΤΥΡΣΟΣ” (torch).

\*\* The following is an excerpt from Major General D. Zafeiropoulos’s book entitled “The Anti-Bandit War 1945 – 1949” which describes DAG’s catastrophic defeat and the unforeseen consequences for the Macedonian people.

Gentlemen let’s begin with the plan. Our main goal is Vicho. However, in order to achieve a strategic surprise, we will take two steps. The first step will be to send Division XI to clean the Kaimakchalan area where, according to our information, there are about 800 active communist bandits. By taking this step, the opponent’s ability to switch from Vicho to Kaimakchalan will be taken away. Combat activities in this area, according to our operational plan, will begin on July 4 and end on July 8. Immediately afterwards, the main XI Division forces are to be made available to the Second Corps to participate in the fighting in Vicho Region. The second step has greater significance; to force the opponent to think where our main attack would be directed in Gramos. From here we will dispatch our First Corps forces, specifically the First and Eighth Division, with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, the 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment, in conjunction with artillery and aviation, to deliver a blow to the opponent’s established strongholds and to pin him down at his current positions and thus prevent him from transferring to Vicho when we begin our main offensive.

According to our information, the opponent is defending northern Grammos with 4,900 men and women and has 16 guns, two 120 mm mortars and a large number of anti-tank and anti-aircraft pipes but hardly any grenades. This operation will start during the night between August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> and must end on August 9<sup>th</sup>. This area is hilly and mountainous and has many places that are covered with forests. But, compared to Gramos, there are no high stone peaks, deep gorges and numerous goat paths. The main mountains are Bela Voda to the north, Vicho to the east, Mali Madi to the south and Chuka and Lisets to the west. The river Bistritsa, with its source under the village Psoderi, flows south dividing the mountain Verba from Prespa and the lake, Prespa. It then turns southeast near the village Breznitsa dividing Mali Mudi to the south, from Iamata, Boro, Roto and Polenata further up. One important thing about this area is the intersection of two very important roads. One of the roads begins in Kostur and leads through the village Aposkep, along the Bistritsa River which, north of the village Breznitsa, intersects with the road leading from Kostur through Maniak, Tikveni, Chetirok, Sveta Nedela, Kosinets, Smrdes, Breznitsa, Zhelevo, Psoderi where it descends down Mount Bigla ending in Lerin. From the map we can see that it also forks just before Zhelevo and continues to Prespa. The road sections connecting Smrdes with the Greek-Albanian border, Psoderi with Bigla, and Zhelevo with Prespa are invaluable routes for our opponent. These are road sections that are utilized for the overall supply of weapons and food delivered by trucks from Albania and Yugoslavia to warehouses dug near the road. A rapid breakthrough with our tanks along these roads will curtail the opponent's supply. Closure of these roads will cut off the opponent's escape route to Albania and Yugoslavia.

With what will our opponent resist? His bunkers are exactly the same as those we constructed in Drepano. His entire defensive line is a minefield, barbed wire and other obstacles. The enemy will defend the area in Vicho with the following forces: X Division with its 18<sup>th</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. More specifically enemy forces are deployed as follows: On the northern part of the front line Bela Voda - Bigla - Lundzer – Kulkuturi there are 4 infantry battalions, 8 mountain, 5 valley and 5 anti-tank cannons; a total of 1,450 fighters of whom thirty percent are women. On the central part of the front line Polenata – Plati – Kula – Roto there are 3 infantry battalions, 12

mountain, 4 valley and 10 anti-tank cannons; a total of 1,250 fighters. On the second line Baro - Iamata - Lisets - Moro – Chuka there are 3 infantry battalions, 6 mountain and 6 anti-tank cannons; a total of 1,060 fighters. On the southern part of the front line in Mali Madi there are 3 infantry battalions, 6 mountain, 3 valley and 6 anti-tank cannons; a total of 1,250 fighters. In the reserve Brigade 105 there are 1,000 fighters located in the region near the village Smrdesh. In the officer's school there are 500 fighters located in the region near the villages Breznitsa and Trnaa. The enemy also has an auxiliary force of about 1,500 people.

Basically, the enemy is organized along two defensive lines consisting of trenches, bunkers and minefields. The first line runs along Bigla - Lundzer linking the hills Iorgova Glava – Golinata – Chuka – Lisets – Baro - Iamata. Behind the defensive line is the road that connects Smrdesh – Breznitsa – Zhelevo - Psoderi. The second defense line, to the north, runs along Bela Voda, drops down south and runs along Prevalot and Verba and ends in the valley at Smrdesh. The next defensive stronghold is in Prespa connecting the hills between the villages Shtrkovo - Rabi and then runs along the peninsula connecting the villages Nivitsi – Vineni – Orovo - Grazhdeno. Our research and analysis has confirmed that enemy morale is high. This is mainly due to the successes it had in last year's fighting at Gramos and Vicho, in the battle for Mali Madi and other successful battles it won including the re-taking of Gramos. The enemy, during the winter, also carried out a reorganization of its units and has improved its supply of clothing and food. This situation has given the senior leadership the prerogative to think that it will have a complete victory in 1949; hence the morale of our opponents is quite high.

What is our enemy's goal? Their goal is to preserve this last "free space" by firmly defending the mountains Bela Voda - Vicho – Mali Madi. Their aim is to actively defend this territory during our offensive, pin us down in defensive positions and, when conditions are right, change the situation with a counter-offensive and destroy our national forces.

With what forces will we attack? We have Infantry Divisions II, IX, X, XI, a total of eleven teams, crack Division III and two infantry

brigades, a light infantry regiment and six National Guard battalions in a combat ready situation. In terms of artillery we have 4 units of field cannons, 3 units of medium cannons, 5 units of mountain cannons, almost half of the available tanks and military vehicles are combat ready and we have 90 aircraft. In terms of reserves, belonging to the supreme commander, we have Division XV in Rupishta and brigade 32 in Derven. The main and most important task of the Second Corps is to overcome enemy positions and destroy all opposing forces. The offensive in Vicho Region will take place in four phases:

The first phase will take place on August 10, 1949 during the day at 10:00 am, after all aviation bombing and artillery preparations are completed. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade will depart in the Derven - Kulkuturia - Polenata direction and arrive at hill 1685, with aims at overcoming the positions in Polenata, elevation 1685, located behind the first defensive line. The Brigade's task will be to create suitable conditions and a base from which to prepare attacks and penetrate the defensive line in the village Statitsa. The Brigade is to surprise the enemy and overcome the hills Chuka and Lisets.

The second phase will take place during the night of August 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> with synchronized attacks. Infantry Division X will depart from Bukovik with aims at overcoming enemy positions in the Iamata – Baro line elevation 1709. Infantry Division XI will depart from Derven - Kulkuturia and continue to attack the Chuka – Lisets line. At the same time crack Division III is to proceed towards the Bigla – Lundser – Gogova Glava line and attack Mali Madi. The 21<sup>st</sup> Brigade is to depart from the extreme north, from the village Dolna Kleshtina, through Bouf to German with aims at closing a possible escape route to Yugoslavia. Then, after taking the village Rabi in Prespa, to close the transitional road called Kula located between the two Prespa Lakes. The attack is to commence at 20:00 hours on August 10<sup>th</sup>.

The third phase will take place on August 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> with the transfer of our forces on the Vrba – Preval – Korbech line to infiltrate Prespa valley in order to prevent the enemy from escaping to Albania and Yugoslavia.

The fourth phase will take place from August 14 to August 16, with aims at cleaning up the peninsula beyond the lakes and the entire area of Vicho. Two powerful artillery groups will be made available to provide support to the infantry. The northern group will support Lerin and the southern group will support Kostur with all kinds of cannons. Similarly, support will also be provided by the mechanized units, consisting mainly of tanks.

The start of the offensive will belong to our glorious Aviation which will commence its attacks in the morning. Its aims will be to destroy established enemy positions including artillery and mortar nests; to carry out reconnaissance flights and inform the ground of enemy movements; and to photograph the current situation at the front. In total, ninety fighter planes will participate.

The interaction between the aviation, artillery, infantry and mechanized units, in the beginning of the offensive, must be preserved at any cost. This is especially important during the time crack Division III is attacking Polenata on hill 1685, and the Divisions IX, X and XI are tasked to cut off the enemy escape route to Albania...

Gentlemen !!! The Greek army has never before been exposed to so much combat power, people, combat equipment and combat techniques as it has today. Thanks to our friends and allies the United States, whose officers and professional team are commanded by our dear and respected General Van Fleet, we are now widely prepared to crush our enemy. We are interested in one thing: victory! There will be no negotiations. Only our weapons will speak. There will be no capitulation. There will only be defeat from which the enemy will never survive! Gentlemen, I am honoured to announce that the offensive will start on August 10<sup>th</sup>, at 5am. Cheers from all sides.

General Van Fleet got up, stood in front of the map and, in a loud voice, addressed the audience as follows: “Here, generals, this is the only space you need to master. Two handfuls! Two handfuls of space”, pointing at the map, “and nothing more. We dressed and fed your army well, and supplied it with the best weapons we have. Now you have everything! Aircraft - the newest. New cannons and

mortars, bazookas and napalm bombs!” Van Fleet paused while staring at length at the audience in front of him and then shouted: “Having such weapons should muster a lot of courage for you and in just five days, gentlemen, in just five days you can put an end to this war. Here,” he pointed at the map, “this place will be crushed by 90 aircraft dropping bombs and napalm... beaten down with hundreds of thundering artillery tubes and just as many missiles... then almost 80 thousand soldiers will rush in, backed by over two hundred tanks and military vehicles... No more, just five days! You have five days to remove the communists from the trenches and bunkers. They will remain there, but they will all be dead ... I said five days... in these five days if you do not destroy the enemy, adios amigos, we are gone... The US taxpayer wasted a lot of money for you and for this war.”

\*\* End of excerpt.

What happened to the Macedonian population during this war? The “Macedonian Question” was handled in accordance with the situation at the front. When the Macedonian people were needed to support and fight in the war, they were promised rights; schools in the Macedonian language, self-determination up to secession, Macedonian military units, etc. This however was very brief and took place in March 1948 which, by the way, was coincidental with the gathering of the children who were then taken to the People’s Republics. Then in 1949 everyone, young and old, civilian and military, was given their marching orders to leave for Albania, presumably to save themselves. This was also the time when the CPG and DAG made another big mistake; they did not secure the return of the civilians so that they could go back to their homes. And as such, the Greeks were able to realize all their goals, including the complete extermination of all those who felt Macedonian. This was an unprecedented exodus which had never before been experienced in that part of the region.

The most important CPG slogans in 1949 were: “The enemy will never set foot on Vicho”, and “Gramos will be ours forever.” Sadly, despite all the weapons available to the partisans, they did not have enough fighters to preserve the “free territories”. The war took its toll on the male population and the remnant DAG units were



composed mostly of women and much smaller units. Overall, after the children were taken out of the country in 1948, the entire able population in the “free territories” became engaged in the war. Even so, even with the entire population being involved, still it was not enough to defend the free territories. Many fighters from the ranks of DAG fled to Yugoslavia and yet others surrendered to the Monarcho-Fascists. Great damage was also done to these people due to the 1949 Informburo Resolution which forced the closing of the Yugoslav border. This unfortunately caused much confusion and additional unnecessary casualties on the side of the partisans.

The Monarcho-Fascists received much aid and assistance from all the Western countries. They got everything they needed. Also, the international situation was in support of the Monarcho-Fascists. And while the Cold War was active, the Soviet Union lagged behind in its support for the partisans in Greece, unlike the American side which openly supported the Monarcho-Fascists with much of the public being on its side.

After DAG’s defeat, the CPG leadership turned against the Macedonian leaders and commanders in the ranks of DAG, blaming them for the defeat because they were supposedly on the side of Yugoslavia and against DAG, which of course was a great lie and very slanderous to the Macedonian people. Later, when more things came to light, it was proven that these allegations were not only false, but just the opposite. That CPG leadership was directly responsible for DAG’s defeat; specifically Nikos Zahariadis, Mihalis Parkalidis, Vlandas, Gusias, Markos and others, they were the direct culprits that caused DAG’s defeat.

### **Risto’s view of the DAG leadership**

Who were CPG General Secretary Nikos Zahariadis and General Markos Vafiadis?

The two most influential men, Asia Minor Christian Turk colonists and settlers deposited in Greek occupied Macedonia in the 1920’s, who led the Greek Civil War with the lure of the CPY/CPM (NOF and AFZH) and who promised to create a new awareness for us (the Macedonian people), were Nikos Zahariadis and Markos Vafiadis.

Nikos Zahariadis was born on April 27, 1903 in Edirne, Eastern Thrace. His father was employed as a clerk at “Razim”, a commercial French tobacco company based in Constantinople. From 1911 to 1912 Nikos Zahariadis lived and attended school in the “Ibin Paiko” settlement in Skopje where his father worked as a representative of the “Razim” Company. In 1913 he moved to Solun. In 1922 and 1923 he worked as a sailor, a job which took him to the Soviet Union where he became a member of the Communist Party. In 1924, with the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece, Zahariadis’s family was moved to Greece. In 1924 he visited the famous Communist University of Eastern European nations KUTVE in Moscow. Nikos Zahariadis was leader of the Greek communist movement and secretary general of the CPG from 1936 to 1956. Zahariadis treated the CPG like a cult and had absolute confidence in Stalin and his Communist Party, which he believed to be infallible. He himself admitted to this. Zahariadis committed suicide in 1973 while serving a prison sentence in Sorgun, Siberia.

Markos Vafiadis was born in 1906 in the village Tosie in Asia Minor. He graduated from fourth grade in public school before he was exiled by the Turkish authorities and brought to Greek occupied Macedonia as a colonist by the Greek authorities. During the Greek Civil War (1945-1949) Zahariadis chose Markos and made him General and Supreme Commander of the army and then appointed him President of the interim government (in the mountains) for one day. He did this in August 1948. General Markos Vafiadis was known for his position (strategy and tactics) that the armed struggle should be developed and carried out by small and effective partisan groups and not by fighting at a front. Zahariadis declared him sick, suspended him and sent him to exile in the city Penza, USSR. Zahariadis replaced Markos with himself and took overall command of the partisans, striving to create DAG armed units for frontal combat and tactics against the national army of Greece, which was 10 times larger and assisted by the US and Britain.

During the war these two individuals were responsible for building the “new world” and cruelly trampled on the dignity of the

Macedonian people, slandering their national feelings and persistently denying their Macedonian national identity.

### **Prologue \***

The images of the people in the photographs seem to float, to come alive, to reflect on the life which now appears to me only in spirit and in shadows. Through the photographs I was able to see the people with their joy, sorrow and pain of what once was. What once was is now gone. Everything is gone. Only the ghosts and the shadows of the ghosts remain...

I look at the images in the photographs and imagine the people leaving, taking the road to banishment.

To what country did they go?  
To what unknown latitudes of the world did time take them?  
When did they leave?  
Under what circumstances did they leave?  
Did they travel one behind the other?  
Did they leave quickly, en masse?  
Time... What is time and what are people in time?  
Time kills.  
Time wounds.  
Time heals.  
Time forgets.  
Time leaves no footprints.  
Time destroys.  
Time is a killer.  
Is time a witness?  
Time passes.  
Time brings concerns.  
Time remembers.  
Time tells.  
Time verifies.  
Time accepts and rejects.  
It is said at this and this time.  
During the time of great upheaval.  
During the time of war.  
During the time of so and so plagues.

We are here.

At the empty, naked, scarred place.

Time has passed, it has expired.

And here, now, at this time, today, at this moment in time, we are in a moment of time.

We are at the time divided between now and yesterday.

Time... Whose and what kind of time?...

We are here in time past, time without people and without homes; we are here in time present without life, only empty fields and flocks of crows.

Time.

Whose time?

What kind of time?

Time for what?

Time measured with what?

Time marked with what and how?

Time lost.

Time brings.

Time brings what?

Time of happiness.

Time of hunger.

Time of fear. For victims, lies and curses.

Time for cursing, lies and betrayals.

Time for cursing and waiting.

Time compressed between times.

What kind?

Time for remembering. Remembering what?

Time for existence, time for endurance, time for safeguarding time.

Here time was measured with time for digging foundations, for carving stones, for building walls, for laying roof tiles, for plowing and sowing, for living, for reaping crops, for celebrations, for holidays, for growing and aging, for happiness and sadness, for life...

After that time came time for war.

It was a time of bad times, a time of great promises and many lies.

It was time to separate the children from their mothers, it was time for eradication.

It was a time of silence of the church bells.

It was a time without faith in God.

Where did time stop?

Now there is only time for recollection of time past so that time past is not forgotten.

Here now there is only now.

Will it last only that much, as long as we remain bowed over the burned out places and foundation remains of our homes?

Time remains in us forever preserved and baked in our memory.

Time over which the fog and dust of forgetfulness whirls and glides.

It is time for the fog to lift.

It is time for the dust that rests in time to be blown off.

It is time for ripening.

It is time to change time.

\* Petre Nakovski, "On the Road of Time", Skopje, 2010

## **Epilogue**

Risto was a big fan of nature, of the mountains, and every time he found free time he and his wife Sofia went to Neolitsa, or to the surrounding mountains to drink the cool spring water and to capture some beautiful and peaceful moments. The mountains reminded Risto of his youth.

The most beautiful moments in Risto's life, while living in Bitola, were the times he spent with his beloved wife and friend Sofia. She was a housewife, an economist and an educator who raised their children and looked after him. Sofia always found the time and the means to help Risto at his work and in private life. They had harmony and mutual understanding and even though they were poor they always managed to take care of everything. They managed to put Spiro through school and helped Neda as much as possible. Their children grew up, got married and had children of their own. They became grandparents and loved their grandchildren. Now everyone has a family and is responsible for themselves.

In his entire life Risto never drank alcoholic drinks, never smoked cigarettes and was not a fan of sweets. He rarely went to shows or plays mainly due to economic reasons but also because he did not

want to sit indoors for long periods of time. For some time now (when he wrote this) Risto had been busy looking after Mende, his grandchild, his daughter's son, and having a great time with him.

Risto was not disappointed with any of the things he accomplished in his lifetime, on the job and at home. He did things honestly, first for his family and then for himself. He did not rely on or accept charity, not even from the factory where he worked, but he did volunteer a lot of his time to help others. He also donated as much as he could to the reconstruction of Skopje after the earthquake, even though he was left without an apartment and no car. It was the right thing to do to keep his soul pure and free. Risto's greatest asset was his precious family for which he lived and strived to help.

### **Acronyms**

AFZH - Women's Anti-Fascist Front  
ASNOM – Anti-Fascist Assembly of National Liberation of Macedonia  
BRP(k) – Communist Party of Bulgaria  
CPG - Communist Party of Greece  
CPM - Communist Party of Macedonia  
CPY - Communist Party of Yugoslavia  
CVG - Greek Civil War  
DAG – Democratic Army of Greece  
EAM – National Liberation Front  
ELAS – National Liberation Army of Greece  
EON – National Youth Organization  
EPON – All Greek National Youth Organization  
KOEM – Communist Organization of Aegean Macedonia  
KOS - Counter-intelligence Sector of JAN  
NKVD – People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs  
NOBG - Peoples Liberation Struggle in Greece  
NOBM - Peoples Liberation Struggle in Macedonia  
NOF - Peoples' Liberation Front  
NOMS - Peoples' Liberation Youth Organization  
OKNE - Communist Youth Organization of Greece  
ONOO – Local People's Liberation Council  
OZNA – People's Defense Division  
PAO - Pan-Hellenic Liberation Organization

PDEG – Pan-Greek Democratic Union of Women  
PDOG – International Federation of Democratic Women  
POJ - Partisan Units of Yugoslavia  
SID - Information Services of the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
SNOF - Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front  
SKP(b) – Communist Party of the Soviet Union  
UDBA - Directorate of State Security  
USSR – United Soviet Socialist Republics

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