

MORE ON THE PATHS OF MEMORY THROUGH THE TERRITORY OF
BASSA VAL DI CECINA (recalling the Guardistallo massacre of 29 June 1944)

26 – From Le Tegole to Guardistallo – 13 km – 465 m uphill, then 360 m downhill (hunting area)

Over the years, together with Giuseppe Verani who, in addition to being a dear friend, is a passionate historian and a profound connoisseur of the events related to the Nazi-fascist massacre of Guardistallo, we have tried to reconstruct the path taken by a group of partisans the night preceding the massacre.

It was not easy, especially because, over the course of more than 70 years, the territory has changed considerably and, perhaps, we find the forest where there was previously cultivated land or vice versa. So even paths and passages once in use may have been moved. So we went forward by successive approximations, each time approaching (at least it seems to us) always a little closer to the path actually taken at the time. But we certainly cannot guarantee that the one described here is also completely relevant.

But why are we trying to reconstruct this path?

I try to summarize those events briefly.

On the night between 28 and 29 June 1944, the "Otello Gattoli" detachment of the *Brigata Garibaldi* moved from its quarter in the woods surrounding the current farmhouse "Le Tegole" (Riparbella) to cross the front, to reach and free Casale Marittimo.

The Germans are in fact withdrawing and the National Liberation Committee intends to have the allied army find an anti-fascist administration already established.

The detachment is made up of about one hundred men (boys), many of whom are from Guardistallo.

Left in the early afternoon, they manage to cross via Salaiola not without difficulty and time, due to the continuous passage of German military vehicles. The group is also slowed down by the transport of a heavy machine gun and a German prisoner, captured the day before. After having considered for a long time whether it would be better to kill the prisoner or to free him, the second hypothesis prevails in the course of the night.

The group does not encounter any problems crossing the Cecina river or even the built-up area of Montescudaio.

Before dawn, the partisans are in sight of the road that connects Guardistallo with Cecina.

A first group manages to cross, but, in the meantime, a column of German vehicles arrives.

The partisans, hidden behind the sheaves of freshly harvested wheat, are discovered and the firefight arises, in which a German soldier dies.

Among the partisans, however, the first to fall will be the political commissioner of the detachment, as well as the oldest member: Sante Fantozzi, known as Primola, aged 30.

Immediately, by the German military, the hunt for the partisans in the nearest farms begins: in the first all those present, including two women, will be slaughtered.

The roundup continues in two directions, towards the SS. Annunziata and via Migliarina on one side and towards via delle Cerretelle on the other.

In the first case the action is stopped by the parish priest Don Mazzetto Rafanelli, who succeeds, after a long negotiation, in obtaining the release of thirty men, while on via delle Cerretelle all the men are rounded up and subsequently slaughtered near the Bacii farm, in the locality La Bucaccia, where a monument commemorates the massacre. 11 partisans and 48 civilians were killed.

Being a linear route, we will take care to leave a car in Guardistallo to be able to accompany the drivers back to the starting point. By other means, we will then reach the parking lot of the Le Tegole farmhouse.

As far as it was possible to reconstruct, in fact, the men of the Gattoli detachment were quartered in the surrounding woods.

Our walking route then begins, first on the driveway to the farmhouse, and then we move right onto a small road that leads to the roundabout on state road 68 (via Salaiola).

We cannot reconstruct the precise point of crossing, which however could be further downstream, at or immediately after Melatine.

We reach and pass this point along the state road, being very careful, until we find, immediately after the Melatina on our left, two houses. In the middle of these starts a small road that crosses the Cecina - Saline di Volterra railway with an unguarded passage (be careful here too!).

After crossing the railway, the little road becomes a faint track, but you can't go wrong because, proceeding in a straight line, we see in front of us, at the end of the field, a footbridge that crosses the Cecina river.

Obviously the partisans did not use it, because it was built after the war (in the 1950s) To allow the SALES workers who lived in Montescudaio to reach their workplace more quickly (on foot). Immediately downstream of the walkway, it is still possible to ford the river in lean periods, and the end of June 1944 was certainly one of these.

If, on the other hand, we have to cross when the water level is higher, we should use the walkway.

To access it you have to climb an iron ladder, while on the opposite side the level of the bridge coincides with that of the path.

We then take the path on our left and we soon find ourselves on the path of the Badia ring (16) with the plaque commemorating the children killed by the bomb, the shrine commemorating the dead American soldiers and, further on, the excavations. of the Abbey of Santa Maria.

Once in Montescudaio it will be time for a snack and, therefore, it may be convenient to take advantage of the square in front of the church, which offers a splendid view both towards the sea and towards the Cecina valley as far as Volterra. Back at the entrance to the town, we will turn left into via Teresa Mattei. I don't know if the sign with the street name has been restored, because, in the last few times I've been there, it had been removed.

Teresa Mattei (1921 - 2013), was an Italian partisan, politician and educator. She was a fighter in the Garibaldi group of Youth Front (with the qualification of company commander), she took part in the organization of the killing of the philosopher Giovanni Gentile, of which she had been a student. She was also the youngest she was elected to the Constituent Assembly, where she assumed the post of secretary of the bureau.

National director of the Italian Women's Union, she was, together with Teresa Noce and Rita Montagnana, the inventor of the use of mimosa for March 8th.

In the last years of her life, she devoted herself particularly to the protection of children's rights and the transmission of memory to the younger generations.

After crossing the provincial road i Tre Comuni, we find a local road which, through the locality of La Serra, leads us to via delle Cerretelle.

Here we turn right for a short distance, to stop at Debbio del Prete, the last farm affected by the round-up of the Germans on this side of the valley.

Retracing our steps, we will instead continue beyond the point where we turned into via delle Cerretelle and, having reached a building (Villa La Serena) that deviates from the architecture of the place and surrounded by maritime pines, we will turn right to descend in the valley below.

We walked this same stretch of path (but uphill) for the Rio dei Trogoli ring (route 15).

At the bottom of the descent we will already be in sight of the cypresses that flank the driveway and the Bucaccia clearing. Crossing the cultivated area by paths, we will take the driveway and reach the place of the massacre. In addition to the monument, we will also find the signs that summarize part of the story (others are positioned on the overlying via del Poggetto, where we will go shortly).

After a stop dedicated to memory, we will return to the beginning of the driveway and, turning left, we will find the path that leads to Rio dei Trogoli (always pay attention to the barbed wire!). After about 500 meters, on our left, after the traces of a spring, we will find a path that goes up the side of the valley and takes us to the provincial road: we are right in front of the memorial stone that remembers Primola, the first partisan killed in the clash with the Germans.

From here we go up towards Guardistallo along the asphalted road, until we reach the Diceppato farm (today Villa Blick), where the first civilians were killed.

A little further on we will find the Il Brucia farm (another theater of roundups), from whose farmyard, taking to the right, we will find a path that leads us to the farm of the SS. Annunziata, which we have already crossed with the itinerary of the lake and the Linaglia mills (route 14).

From here, near the aqueduct buildings, we find the path that leads us up via di Cavina and the last stretch of via del Migliarino. We thus reach via dei Mulini, where we should have left a car.