

## Holocaust of Kalavryta

<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday, 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2020
<b>Activity:</b>	Retell the events of the Kalavryta Holocaust.
<b>Time:</b>	90 min.

*Complete the tasks below (put a mark when completed).*

*Don't hesitate to ask the teacher if there is something you are not sure of.*

TASK	DONE?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Stay in your assigned teams.</li><li>2. Each team studies one of the following texts<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ General aspects</li><li>○ "Before the massacre"</li><li>○ "The day of the massacre – Inside the school"</li><li>○ "The day of the massacre – On the hill"</li><li>○ "After the massacre"</li></ul></li><li>3. Make a list of the events that took place.</li><li>4. Write keywords/key phrases on the moderation cards.</li><li>5. Re-tell the events in class.</li><li>6. Pin the moderation cards on the board.</li><li>7. Discussion &amp; Interviews of survivors.</li></ol>	

## DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY DESTROYED: FOCUS ON THE KALAVRYTA MASSACRE

### GENERAL ASPECTS:

#### ITALIAN AND GERMAN OCCUPATION OF THE PELOPONNESE AREA

After the **Italian attack on Greece in 1941**, followed by the invasion by German troops and the surrender of the Greek army, Hitler Germany **first left control** of the southern parts of Greece **with the Italians**. Therefore Italian troops occupied the Peloponnese peninsula by May 1941, making the small town of **Kalavryta** in the mountains their **headquarters**.

The Italians confiscated several houses for the soldiers and turned the **school** building into their prison/**concentration camp** for the Greek partisans that were very active to regain freedom from occupation. Conditions for the imprisoned 500 Greek partisan fighters were very bad, they were beaten, tortured, suffered from diseases and famine under Italian brutality. Greek partisans kept on fighting the occupant, several times beating the occupants, but also suffering losses.

After the **Italian surrender** to the allied forces in **summer 1943**, it was no longer a part of the axis-powers, so **Nazi troops** disarmed the Italians on **September 9, 1943** and **took over control** of all Greece. From July to early December 1943 the Greek people had to withstand air raids as well as destruction of villages, as the Nazis thought that the centre of Greek resistance against the occupation was the town of Kalavryta and its surrounding villages and the mountains.

In order to wipe out resistance against the occupation and because they thought that British troops planned a landing on the south coast of the Peloponnese peninsula, the Nazis planned "**Operation Kalavryta**": a huge military operation by Wehrmacht troops from different occupied towns heading for Kalavryta.

*(Doris Lax)*

## I BEFORE THE MASSACRE

Fighting the German troops at the town of Kerpini on October 16-18, 1943, the Greek partisans got hold of 83 German soldiers, 3 of them wounded, and imprisoned them in the school of Kalavryta. Negotiations for an exchange of the German soldiers with Greek partisans were without success but led to another German air raid on Greek villages that resulted in heavy destruction and the death of 13 civilians.

The German plans for “**Operation Kalavryta**” were worked out right away and put into action after the Greek partisans had killed their 83 German prisoners in the mountains on December 7, 1943.

On **December 9, 1943**, at 9 am, Wehrmacht troops arrived in town and all Kalavrytan men had to **gather on the central place** of the town. In a speech the German commander told the people that the Wehrmacht only tried to get hold of the partisans, find and free the German prisoners, and chase the partisans away, and therefore the civilians were safe and should not be afraid.

Still pretending that they wouldn't do anything to the people, the occupants asked for food as well as for livestock (sheep, goats, pigs, cattle) to **supply the troops**, and searched several houses in town in **search of partisans**. As no partisan could be found, order was given to burn down their houses after having taken out everything of worth. The town **hotel “Hermos” was also burned** down as the Germans said they had found hand granates there.

Although the German occupants stayed in town, the people of **Kalavryta remained calm** – hoping that nothing would happen to them if they didn't offend the Germans, even when on **Friday, December 10**, several important Kalavrytan **civilians were questioned**, people were not allowed to leave their houses after 4 pm, and German soldiers looted several houses and took everything that seemed of good use for them.

On **Saturday, December 11**, the local doctors had to conduct post-mortem examinations on three of the killed German prisoners (that had been found in a well close to Kalavryta), then the Germans got a funeral at Kalavryta cemetery. Although everything still seemed calm, the Nazis allowed more civilians from the surrounding villages into town but **let nobody leave** – meaning that the town of Kalavryta had become a sort of prison.

On **Sunday, December 12**, all live stock were gathered on a field, then killed and put on trucks that were sent to Patras. In the afternoon the German commander expressed his thanks for the food supply and told the mayor that **the troops would leave the next day**.

Actually, some German troops left Kalavryta in the morning of December 13. But something that the people of Kalavryta didn't know was that already on Friday, December 10, order had been given to shoot all male Kalavrytans aged 13 to 80.

*(Doris Lax)*

## II THE DAY OF THE MASSACRE – INSIDE THE SCHOOL

Instead of leaving Kalavryta in the morning of December 13, the occupants were divided into four groups each of which was given a different task in the horrors that were to come. The first group of armed German soldiers **forced all people in town to gather** in the town's central place and guarded them. The second group led the **male population to a hill**, threatened them with weapons and secured the surrounding area. The third group looted the houses and **set the town on fire**, while the fourth group made sure that the **women and children were set captive** in the town school and could not escape.

In the **early morning of December 13**, the Germans rang the church bells to make the people gather in town. When the people arrived, frightened, packed with blankets and some food, the first group of heavily armed German soldiers **forced them all to enter the school building**, while another group observed the surrounding area for partisans.

Upon entering the building, all men and boys over 13 were forced into two classrooms (on the right) while the **younger children and their mothers** along with the old people were pushed into two rooms on the left side and **locked in there**. As the people were horrified, panicking in fear over what would happen, mothers tried to hold back their elder sons, while fathers – already suspecting the worst – told their younger boys to take care of the families.

As the two rooms crowded with horrified women and crying children were not big enough to imprison all of them, the men were forced outside again through the backdoors onto the school yard.

The remaining women and children were then also pushed into the building – guarded by Germans armed with pistols, machine guns and hand grenades. **Taking the families hostage** this way was done to keep the men from putting up resistance, fighting or trying to escape.

The women and children, **crowded for hours inside the classrooms**, panicked as they didn't know what happened to their husbands, fathers and sons and feared that the German guards would shoot at any time. So they at least tried to **look out of the windows** to see what was going on. As they couldn't see what happened to the men, but heard trains whistling, they thought the men were taken away to some concentration camp. What they saw, however, were German **soldiers looting their homes**, taking everything of worth and value, and then **setting fire** to all the houses.

When the fire raged and destroyed the town under the terrible noise of bursting and collapsing houses, the soldiers guarding the school withdrew, leaving the doors unlocked. Realizing that the fire came ever closer to the school, with **smoke and heat creeping into the building**, the locked-in **people tried to escape** at any price. But as the doors opened to the inside and there were so many people in the building, some women **smashed the windows and threw out their children** to give them a chance to survive. Only after some time they **managed to open the doors and escape** just in time, pushing each other in panic to get out as the flames had already reached the building and thick, hot smoke filled the rooms.

The Germans, still in town to watch the scene, didn't do anything to help but laughed at the horrors and panic of the people.

*(Doris Lax)*

### III THE DAY OF THE MASSACRE – ON THE HILL

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As the two rooms crowded with horrified women and crying children were not big enough to imprison all of them, the **men were forced outside** again through

the backdoors onto the school yard. They had to align two by two and, guarded by heavily armed Germans, forcing them on to a narrow path leading up to a hill above the town. As the long rows of men were pushed forward, fearing for the captive families, they obeyed the German orders, though no longer believing in the German commander's promise that nobody would be executed.

When all the men had reached the hill, chosen by the occupants because of its position which made it virtually **impossible to escape unseen**, they realized a group of Germans positioned at **large machine guns** and observing the surrounding mountains for partisan activities.

The men – pushed together, some sitting, some standing – got ever more **nervous and fearful** as they asked themselves why they had been separated from their families, **what would happen to their families** and why they themselves had been forced up the hill and were **threatened with machine guns**. Then there was the noise of shots in downtown Kalavryta, quickly followed by thick clouds of smoke as the **shots had set fire to all the buildings**, except for the school. Seeing this, the men quickly, yet silently agreed to **try to escape to rescue their families**. But before they could even fully react a green signal rocket was fired upon which the **Germans turned their machine guns towards the crowd of men**. When a second red signal rocket went up, the German soldiers **fired endless bursts to kill all the men** gathered on the hill.

Whoever could, tried to escape or hide among the dead bodies. But when the machine guns stopped, the **Germans kept on firing** at all the men who were still moving or breathing to fulfil the order of killing all

Kalavrytan men. Only **13 of the more than 700 men survived** because they were able to hide underneath dead bodies and dared not to move for a long time even after the murderers had withdrawn.

*(Doris Lax)*

## IV AFTER THE MASSACRE

While the Germans still were in town but no longer blocked the school doors, the women and children managed to **break out into the open**, only to see their town burning. Desperately trying to save their own and their children's lives, they **fled in all directions**, seeking shelter from the raging fire and the threat of being shot by the Germans. As some of the women and children **escaped to the fields or managed to hide** in the few houses that were not burning, the desperate overall outcry was: "**What happened to our men? Where are the men?**" Only a few women headed for the hill on which the Germans had committed the massacre.

Before retreating from the hill, the Germans had not only shot the Kalavrytan men with endless bursts of machine gun fire, but afterwards had also looked for and **killed those who had survived the machine gun shots**. Only **a few men survived** because they could hide somewhere. For a long time after the murderers had left, none of the wounded survivors dared to move, paralysed, struck with fear, beside their minds.

Scenes beyond expression took place when first a few, then ever more women came up the hill to discover **heaps of the dead bodies** of their beloved ones while the sun, covered in the black smoke from the burning houses settled. Still, some women, after desperately having looked for survivors began to pull out the men's bodies from the heaps, and – finding them dead – slowly began **pulling and carrying them on their shoulders down to the cemetery**,

where they stayed, themselves more dead than alive, together with the few wounded surviving men for the night.

The next morning, ever more women and children who had fled to the fields returned to the burnt down town, found their way up the hill to experience the same horrible shock of finding their beloved fathers, brothers, husbands and sons murdered.

Without any of the town's doctors alive to help the wounded, without the town's priest to hold a ceremony, without any spades or other tools for digging the graves, the women and small children were left in **utter desperation, mourning, without hope** and almost without anything to keep their children and themselves alive. They **dug graves with their bare hands**, some up on the hill, most of them on the cemetery, and **stayed with the dead**.

Unable to think of anything, mourning the dead and left with nothing, the Kalavrytan women had to somehow **keep their surviving children alive**. Somehow they managed to turn to **organising the days**: They collected blankets and other daily things that had withstood the fire, found and repaired houses and sheds that could still be used to give them shelter. And as people from neighbouring villages brought food and tools, the **Kalavrytan women formed a committee** to organise life, distribute food and goods and thus **slowly began to rebuild their town**.

*(Doris Lax)*