

EARLY BRITISH CONTACTS WITH THE GREEK RESISTANCE IN 1942

(The documents on which this article is partly based have been in my possession since 1950. Out of respect for the British government's thirty-year rule on official documents, I have hitherto withheld them from publication).

On 4 September 1942 a group of five men met in the headquarters of the Special Operations Executive in Cairo to plan the sabotage of the Athens-Salonika railway. The reason for the proposed operation was that "as a result of successful air operations from Malta, and submarine action off the west coast of Greece against Axis shipping, the Axis have been compelled to use the Balkan railway line of communications to the Greek ports Salonika and Piraeus," from which "Axis shipping sails *via* south of Antikithera to Tobruk and Benghazi."

It was agreed that the railway line was particularly vulnerable to sabotage south of Lamia. Three possible targets were considered: the Gorgopotamos bridge, the Asopos bridge, and the Papadia bridge. The minutes of the meeting record that "all three of these viaducts are within 15 kilometres of each other, on the stretch of railway north-east of Giona Mountains, where we have armed bands." No identification of these bands is contained in the minutes, but the operation orders subsequently issued show that they were thought to number two to three hundred and to be under the control of Alexander Sepheriadis an English-speaking Greek lawyer, brother of the poet and diplomatist, George Sepheriadis.

A plan was outlined at the meeting "to drop explosives on to Giona personnel and for them to carry out the operation." No more precise details are recorded in the minutes. But various other possibilities were canvassed. One was a landing by submarine on the coast east or north-east of Mount Olympus; but this was ruled out for various reasons, including the unsuitability of the coast for close approach by submarine, and the distance to the nearest stretch of vulnerable railway, which would be in the Tempe gorge. Another suggestion was that a "British expert" in explosives might be sent in. The question was

discussed whether this would be acceptable to "the people inside," and it was generally agreed that it would.

Other questions were discussed affecting the scale of the operation. It was believed that in addition to the men in Mount Giona, said to be controlled by Sepheriadis, there were also about 1200 men in Mount Tymphristos under the command of Colonel Napoleon Zervas. Assuming that a proportion of both forces could be combined, it was estimated that the total available for the operation might be between 500 and 1000. Against these it was estimated that the guard stationed on any one bridge might be up to one company, probably of Italians. The amount of explosive needed "to do a first-class job" was calculated to be about one ton, which could be carried in two or three aircraft.

On this basis it was decided to send a wireless message to an agent in Athens who was known as Prometheus, or 333, while also making enquiries for a suitable demolitions expert. The message to Prometheus had to be relayed by way of Istanbul. It read as follows, dated 4 September:

Please pass following to 333. Begins. British C-in-C considers it vital to destroy railway line between Salonica and Athens. Can your guerillas blow up Papadia bridge. We can drop the needed explosives money etcetera at Giona. Please inform me quickly if your agents can do the job. Ends.

Prometheus was the second to be so designated. He was a Greek naval officer, Captain Koutsogiannopoulos, who had recently succeeded the original Prometheus, Colonel Bakirdzis.¹ His contact with the mountains was necessarily only by courier, so his reply to the message unavoidably took more than two weeks. In the meantime it had been ascertained that the only British officer available in the Middle East who was trained both in the use of explosives and as a parachutist was Lieut. Colonel E.C.W. Myers. He was first approached on 20 September.

In the interval before Prometheus' reply, it is clear from what follows that two more messages were sent to him. The texts are not available, but one of them evidently broached the question of dropping British "experts" in the plural. The reply was despatched from Athens on 21 September and relayed from Istanbul, with a commentary, received in Cairo on the following day:

A. Following from 333 today begins.

Your signals 1, 6, and 9. For successful sabotage railway bridges

1. Bakirdzis left Greece clandestinely in the summer of 1942, stating his intention to "make contact with Moscow:" see K. Pyromaglou, *O Georgios Kartalis* (Athens 1965), p. 156 n.

following must be carried out exactly. We shall wait at Giona (from) night of Sept 28th rpt Sept 28th to October 3rd rpt October 3rd. You must drop about 10 rpt 10 parachutists of which 2 rpt 2 are experts. Also 20 rpt 20 complete German rpt German soldiers and petty officers uniforms and still more explosives. Parachutists carrying between them 1000 rpt 1000 sovereigns for job. Signals will be cross and flares. At the same time you must drop at MILSAESA for AH 118 (explosives) Italian rpt Italian uniforms weapons and one rpt one officer with 2 W/T stations to act as liaison officer between andartes and yourselves. AH 118 has his own operators. Ends. My immediately following telegram.

My immediately preceding telegram.

B. As our signal 6 asked Prometheus II to accept British experts all personnel parachuted should be British.

C. Regarding parachuting to AH 118 this should have Cuthbert's approval in view of his lack of confidence in AH 118 as expressed at last meeting with him at which I was present.

D. Latter operation is obviously less urgent and if decided on can be carried out later. In the meantime telegraph your reply for relaying to 333 to arrive here by night of Sept 22nd rpt Sept 22nd latest to be in time for next contact.

The following explanatory notes on the above are needed. AH 118 is clearly Zervas; Cuthbert is Panaghiotis Kanelopoulos, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for war in the Greek government in exile. The hand of a naval officer is betrayed by the use of the term "petty officers" instead of "Non-commissioned officers." British parachutists or Greek guerillas in German naval uniform would have been comically conspicuous in the mountains. and in fact no such disguises were ever adopted.

The main problem posed by Prometheus' signal was one of geography. It is noteworthy that although he repeated dates and numbers to avoid error, he did not do so with place-names; nor was any map held in common both in Athens and in Cairo, from which precise references could be given. It was obvious that MILSAESA was a corruption, for no such place could be identified. The cipher used by Prometheus was of the type known as "double transposition," which simply produced an elaborate anagram of the original text; and any single letter could easily be corrupted in transmission. All that was certain therefore was the exact number of letters in a corrupt name. In the text that survives, the word SAKARETSI has been written in pencil above MILS-

AESA. But that is clearly due to later knowledge (Sakaretsi, in Valtos, being in fact the place where Zervas was waiting): hardly a single letter in the two names corresponds, and they are not of the same length.

It is possible that a later message (not extant) came from Prometheus giving the name Sakaretsi; for one of the places where the British parachutists were instructed to look for signals was Pera Kapsi, and the corruption from SAKARETSI to PERAKAPSI is at least plausible.² Pera Kapsi is a village east of Karpenisi, a location consistent with the mistaken belief that Zervas' force was in Mount Tymphristos. Being very close to the motor-road between Karpenisi and Lamia, it might be thought a dangerous place to choose; but nevertheless one party of parachutists was eventually dropped in that vicinity, and in consequence narrowly escaped capture by the Italian garrison of Karpenisi.

Prometheus' reply was in any case considered adequate as a basis for planning the operation, which was given the code-name Harling. In addition to Myers, eight other officers and three wireless operators were recruited for the task. Of the officers two were New Zealanders (both engineers) and one was a Greek (Themistoklis Marinos), who wore British uniform in deference to the arrangements made with Prometheus. The following operation order was then drafted:

OPERATION HARLING

INFORMATION

Ref: 1:100,000 Maps
KARPENISION - LIDORIKION and
LAMIA - AMPHISSA, sheets TVI-VII

1. Enemy:

(a) As a result of successful air operations from MALTA and submarine action off the West Coast of GREECE against Axis shipping, the Axis have been compelled to use the Balkan railway L of C to the Greek ports SALONIKA and PIRAEUS. From these ports, Axis shipping sails via South of ANTIKITHERA to TOBRUK and BENGHAZI.

(b) The railway South to ATHENS is particularly vulnerable to sabotage immediately South of LAMIA. In this area, are three main bridges:

(i) GORGOPOTAMUS 270470

2. Denys Hamson, *We Fell Among Greeks* (London 1946), p. 19; E.C.W. Myers, *Greek Entanglement* (London 1955), pp. 19-20.

- (ii) ASOPOS VIADUCT 287391
- (iii) PAPADIA 297371

(c) These three bridges are all guarded by ITALIAN or GERMAN troops, strength unknown, and nearby hill features are picketed. It is probable that telephonic communication exists between troops on each bridge and North and South of this area to other garrisons.

2. Friendly Troops:

(a) Guerilla bands, equipped with small arms and in possession of unknown quantities of explosives (but at least half a ton of plastic) exist in area:

- (i) Mt. GIONA 1020
- (ii) Mt. TYMPHRISTOS 8060

The former may number 200-300 and are probably controlled by SEFERIADES, (who speaks English), and the latter may number up to 1200 and are commanded by Colonel ZERVAS. Both Commanders are able GREEKS.

It is possible that the guerillas under SEFERIADES owe fealty to ZERVAS.

(b) Both bands have been asked by us to sabotage the railway bridges South of LAMIA and have agreed to carry out this operation, but have requested assistance by British personnel.

(c) Although no information covering their detailed plan is available, it is believed that the GIONA band and possibly a detachment from the TYMPHRISTOS band of guerillas, will be the troops available for sabotage operations.

INTENTION

3. To sever, as permanently as possible, the railway between LAMIA and ATHENS.

METHOD

5. Move to Greece:

Lt. Colonel MYERS, British, Dominion and other personnel will be transported by air as soon as possible to GREECE and parachuted as follows:

- (a) Lt. Col. MYERS, 5 officers (one of whom at least will be a trained demolitionist), and 2 W/T operators (with 2 W/T sets) will be dropped by parachute in the GIONA area.

(b) Major WOODHOUSE, one other officer (who will be a trained demolitionist) and one W/T operator (with 2 W/T sets) will be dropped by parachute in the TYMPHRISTOS area.

6. *Command:*

(a) The ideal will be if Lt. Col. MYERS can assume command of all Allied forces operating against the railway, but it must be remembered that Col. ZERVAS is a Colonel in the GREEK regular army, and has for some months commanded these guerillas. Major WOODHOUSE will attempt to negotiate with Col. ZERVAS over the question of Command. Should this fail, Lt. Col. MYERS should then offer his services as Senior Staff Officer to Colonel ZERVAS, in which capacity he should try to impose his will on Col. ZERVAS by preparing the detailed plans for the operation.

(b) Lt. Col. MYERS will be appointed local Colonel whilst in GREECE.

7. *Operation:*

(a) On arrival in GREECE, Lt. Col. MYERS will immediately attempt to stop all projected precipitate GREEK Sabotage operations in the LAMIA area. He will, after making the necessary liaison and security arrangements, make a personal reconnaissance of the 3 bridges, *bearing in mind that the best target is that bridge which when demolished will sever railway communication for the longest period.* From information available in Cairo it appears that the ASOPOS VIADUCT fulfils this requirement and from both military and demolition aspects, may be the easiest to destroy.

(b) The actual sabotage operation will be carried out as soon as possible after the arrival of British and other personnel without prejudicing success, but, it is appreciated that the operation will involve a military action to capture and hold any one bridge area whilst demolitions are carried out. Lt. Col. MYERS will therefore, after reconnaissance, re-organise the available forces so as best to suit his plan.

(c) An alternative plan will be made by Lt. Col. MYERS beforehand for a second attempt should the first attempt fail. The advantage of surprise will probably be gained by making such a second attempt

with only a short interval between it and the first attack, as it is thought that Axis troops will never appreciate that guerillas are so resilient.

8. *Withdrawal:*

(a) It is intended after the operation, to withdraw from GREECE all personnel sent in by parachute for this operation, with the exception of two British W/T operators and 2/Lt. MARINOS with the GIONA guerillas, and one British W/T operator and Major WOODHOUSE with Colonel ZERVAS. Lt. Col. MYERS will, however, judge whether it will be profitable also to leave a British officer (volunteer) at GIONA.

(b) Provisional plans for this withdrawal will be drawn up by S.O.E., H.Q. before the operation, but they will be subject to amendment according to subsequent events.

ADMINISTRATIVE

9. S.O.E. will arrange details with Lt. Col. MYERS.
10. British uniforms will be worn at all times by the party parachuted into GREECE.

COMMUNICATIONS

11. *During the operation:*

(a) Communication to CAIRO will be opened up by Major WOODHOUSE on arrival, and will be maintained on his link throughout the operation on schedules to be arranged by S.O.E., H.Q.

(b) Communication to CAIRO will also be opened up by Lt. Col. MYERS on arrival and will be maintained on his link throughout the operation on schedules to be arranged by S.O.E., H.Q.

(c) Internal communication will be arranged by Lt. Col. MYERS as best suits his plans, but schedules should be worked out between him and Major WOODHOUSE.

12. *After the Operation:*

Direct W/T communication will be maintained between Major WOODHOUSE and CAIRO and GIONA guerillas and CAIRO, on schedules to be arranged by S.O.E., H.Q.

13. Both during and after the operation, communication is available to CAIRO

by courier or the 333 wireless relay link which can be contacted either through Colonel ZERVAS or the GIONA group.

(C.M. Keble)

CAIRO, 25 Sep 42

Colonel

The first impression created by these orders is of the ignorance which they display of the state of affairs in the Greek mountains. The location and numbers of the armed guerillas were wholly wrong. Zervas was in Valtos, not Tymphristos, and it is doubtful if he had as many as 150 men under arms. There were no guerillas in Giona, except for half a dozen hardened brigands under a man called Karalivanos. The name of Karalivanos was given orally to the British parachutists as that of a guerilla leader associated with Sepheriadis; but Karalivanos would no more have accepted orders from Sepheriadis than Sepheriadis would have "owed fealty" to Zervas. That curiously mediaeval expression was evidence of the air of romantic fantasy in which the whole operation was enwrapped.

It is hardly surprising that everything went wrong from the start. The British party of parachutists flew in three aircraft to their supposed targets on the night of 28/29 September, but of course found no signals in either place. In the meantime Zervas was putting out signals at Sakaretsi, and Sepheriadis, proceeding to Giona, was arrested on the way by the Italians. On the night of 30 September/1 October the British party tried again, and eight of the twelve men from two aircraft parachuted, as they had agreed in advance to do, without finding the signals. The third group parachuted a month later. It was not until mid-November that all three groups were re-united, and only on the night of 25/26 November were they able to attack the target which was finally chosen, the Gorgopotamos bridge. The undertaking to evacuate the majority of the party was never carried out.

The delays in carrying out the operation were almost wholly due to faulty intelligence in the first place. The lack of adequate knowledge in Cairo of the state of Greek resistance in the mountains is extraordinary, for reasons which will appear. Perhaps the most extraordinary aspect of it is the absence from the briefing of the British party of any reference to such names as EAM (the National Liberation Front), ELAS (the National Popular Liberation Army), the KKE (Communist Party of Greece), or even Aris Veloukhiotis (the *nom de guerre* of the Communist Athanasios Klaras). One member of the British party later recalled that the name of "a certain Major Aris" was mentioned at the last minute in the briefing, but that is contradicted by Myers, whose account

implies that his name was first heard of some time after arrival in Greece.³ My own recollection accords with that of Myers.

The absence of any mention of the KKE as a factor in Greece was particularly striking. I had already encountered the KKE personally in Crete during an operation at the beginning of 1942, when I was introduced to a Communist who was a cousin of the celebrated *kapetanios*, Emmanuel Bandouvas; and I also had contact with General Mandakas, whose brother-in-law was a Communist, though he was not himself. During the briefing before Operation Harling, I expressly asked to meet Kanellopoulos, then Minister for War, who had come out of Greece less than six months earlier and had taken the initiative in setting up the Anglo-Greek Committee which supervised clandestine operations into Greece. My recollection is quite clear that neither he nor anyone else ever mentioned the KKE as an active force in the Greek resistance.

How surprising it was that so little seemed to be accurately known about resistance in the mountains, and that little so misinterpreted, can be seen from a brief chronology of earlier events.⁴ It is pointless to argue when and by whom resistance was first started, since in reality it never ceased from the day Athens was occupied, 27 April 1941. No single Greek organisation can claim primacy for what followed, out of the many that were formed within a few months. (The records name half a dozen at least, in Epirus, Macedonia, Thessaly and the Peloponnese, by the midsummer of 1941, though not yet under arms in the field.)⁵ Still less can any British organisation, such as SOE, claim primacy. The first overt act of resistance is rightly held to be the removal of the Nazi flag from the Acropolis on the last night of May 1941 by two young Greeks, one of whom later became a member of the KKE. In July the first British officer who voluntarily returned to Greece landed in Crete: this was Commander Poole, of the Royal Naval Reserve, who was later one of the five officers who planned Operation Harling. At that time, and for many months afterwards, the chief purpose of such missions to Crete was to round up and evacuate the hundreds of British, Australian and New Zealand troops who were roaming the island; but intelligence on the enemy was an additional function from a very early date.

In Athens there was much discussion of what could be done, and some tentative organisation, but little direct action during 1941. Republican-minded

3. Hamson, p. 20; Myers, pp. 19, 62.

4. The principal sources for events prior to the arrival of the British mission are listed at the end of this article. References to them are given by the author's name only.

5. Kedros, p. 90.

officers like Bakirdzis, Psaros, Saraphis and Zervas were in touch with each other, and the KKE was in touch with some of them.⁶ The KKE was also in touch with non-Communist political figures like Kanellopoulos and Papan-dreou.⁷ Kanellopoulos in turn was in touch with the older politicians, like Sophoulis and Kaphandaris, as well as with Sepheriadis, who was to figure in the operation of September 1942.⁸ An important development was the success of Bakirdzis, in his role as Prometheus, in establishing wireless contact with the British in October 1941.⁹

During this period a number of subversive organisations were formed in the capital. Probably the first of importance was EEAM (the Workers' National Liberation Front, 16 July 1941), which preceded the more general EAM (National Liberation Front, 27 September) by some weeks.¹⁰ In between was founded EDES (the National Republican Greek League, 9 September), which was originally a political rather than a resistance organisation, but later became the vehicle for supporting Zervas' armed forces in the mountains.¹¹

The initials of EAM were first seen on leaflets in October, and on 28 October, the anniversary of Greece's entry into the war, they were seen in letters of fire on Mount Hymettus.¹² On 16 February 1942 it was announced that EAM was "taking up arms." The formation of its armed force, ELAS, was proclaimed on 10 April, but some weeks had still to pass before armed men were in the field.¹³

Up to this point the organisations had played comparatively little part in promoting armed resistance in the field, which was largely spontaneous. (The SOE record suggests that there were ELAS guerillas active in Mount Olympus in the late summer of 1941, but this must be a mistake for 1942.) German records show that the first acts of sabotage, followed by reprisals, took place in villages near Drama and Salonika in late September and early October 1941; but these tragic incidents scarcely belong to the history of resistance, having been deliberately provoked by the Bulgarian occupation.¹⁴ The first leader of consequence in the field was Major Kostopoulos in Thessaly,

6. Saraphis, pp. 2-7.

7. Kanellopoulos, p. 36.

8. Kanellopoulos, p. 38.

9. Sweet-Escott, p. 38.

10. Kedros, 107.

11. Gardner, p. 21.

12. Gatopoulos, p. 233.

13. Loverdo, p. 76; Gatopoulos, p. 645.

14. Gardner, p. 58; Loverdo, pp. 57-9; Kedros, p. 94; Khrysokhoou, pp. 21-2, 28-31.

during February 1942.¹⁵ He became associated with ELAS, left it again, and was ultimately attacked and put out of action by ELAS. Exactly the same fate overtook another independent leader, who called himself Athos Roumeliotis, at this early date. A rather different character whom the same succession of events befell was Karalivanos, a professional brigand, who had the unexpected distinction of being the first guerilla leader to meet the British parachutists at the end of September 1942, and took part in the attack on the Gorgopotamos bridge.

Other small forces took the field at various dates in the same period: one in April 1942 in Mount Geraneia, between Corinth and Megara (surprisingly near to Athens); and another during May in the Peloponnese.¹⁶ These were short-lived ventures, and they had grim consequences. Executions for subversive activities had begun in March 1942; there were more in June, and a German proclamation was issued on the taking of hostages.¹⁷ What constituted subversion was ill-defined, but there was much passive resistance that was deliberately provocative: a patriotic speech at the University by Constantine Tsatsos on 28 October 1941; a student demonstration on Independence Day, 25 March 1942; and several strikes during the following summer.¹⁸ Clandestine newspapers of all political complexions were also numerous from an early date. The Communist paper, *Rizospastis*, had the advantage of having been illegally produced for years; the right-wing *Éllinikon Aima* and the left-centre *Eleftheria* appeared during 1942.

Such resistance was in the air the people breathed. It owed little or nothing to external stimulus. British activities, through SOE, had little to their credit so far. British officers continued to move in and out of Crete; weapons were smuggled into the island by submarine in January 1942, and on the night of 6/7 January the first air-drop anywhere on Greek territory, according to SOE records, took place over the Messara plain; but the formation of regular armed bands did not take place until the following year. An intelligence network based on the island of Antiparos was set up in November 1941, but broken up and captured by the Italians on 6 January 1942. An attempt by SOE to re-constitute it in March had disastrous consequences.¹⁹ A British officer landed carrying a list of Greek names to be contacted, among them that of Kanellopoulos,

15. Khoutas, p. 84.

16. Gatopoulos, p. 642.

17. Gatopoulos, pp. 257, 745-8.

18. Kanellopoulos, p. 35; O'Ballance, p. 50.

19. Khoutas, p. 242; Kanellopoulos, pp. 41, 44.

who was obliged to flee for his life. On arrival in the Middle East in April, he was appointed a member of the government in exile, and immediately insisted on the formation of the Anglo-Greek Committee to supervise clandestine operations; but its control was never complete, and it lapsed after Kanellopoulos' resignation at the end of February 1943. In Athens Kanellopoulos was in contact with a group known as the Six Colonels, headed by Spiliotopoulos; but their potential usefulness likewise ended with his resignation.²⁰

At the beginning of 1942, SOE claimed, according to its records, to be in touch with two resistance groups in Athens through clandestine wireless communication. One was called the "Popular Front" — no doubt EAM. The other was a group of republicans, no doubt including the officers round Bakirdzis. These men — particularly Psaros, Saraphis and Zervas — talked often of forming armed bands in the mountains, but seemed to be unable to reach the point of decision. The hopes of SOE were particularly fastened on Zervas, who received considerable sums of money from SOE to induce him to take the field, but for a long time without result. SOE eventually prevailed upon Zervas to leave Athens for the mountains, by a combination of financial inducement and other pressures which were unworthy of the cause of national resistance. Their methods were better rewarded than they deserved.

In the summer of 1942 events began to take a more active turn. On 12 May Aris Veloukhiotis marched into the village of Domnitsa, in Evrytania, at the head of an armed band.²¹ On 12 June Dr. Stylianos Khoutas left Amphilokhia for Valtos to form a band.²² A few weeks later he put himself under the command of Zervas, who left Athens with four companions on 23 July for Epirus.²³ On 1 August Major John Tsigantes landed in Attica with a multiple mission authorised by the Anglo-Greek Committee: to sabotage the Corinth Canal, to encourage a national resistance movement, and to form a committee of political leaders in Athens.²⁴ Saraphis, who was one of the officers Tsigantes intended to contact, was touring Thessaly at the time, trying to decide on a course of action. While there he met Kostopoulos, and learned of the existence of ELAS guerillas in Roumeli and Mount Olympus. He also heard that Zervas had taken to the mountains, that Tsigantes had arrived, and that Bakirdzis had escaped to the Middle East.²⁵ It was clearly a time for decision.

20. Kanellopoulos, pp. 75-77.

21. Lagdas, II p. 490; Loverdo, pp. 82-83.

22. Khoutas, p. 57.

23. Gatopoulos, p. 649.

24. Kousoulas, pp. 155, 162; Loverdo, p. 100.

25. Saraphis, pp. 10-11.

The new guerilla bands had still not yet taken any aggressive action against the enemy. In part the reason was that they were inadequately armed: the first air-drop of supplies did not come until 27 August, in Valtos.²⁶ The first armed clashes were not deliberately planned, but simply opportunities seized as they presented themselves. Aris, accompanied by Karalivanos, attacked an Italian patrol on 9 September at Rika, and took prisoners.²⁷ On 23 October Zervas successfully ambushed an Italian force in Valtos.²⁸ By that date the British parachutists were already in Greece. Zervas was too far off to know it, but their presence was certainly known to Aris, since Karalivanos had actually met them. It was also known to Tsigantes in Athens, since an officer of his, Lieut. Katsimbas, had happened by accident to be present at the spot where one group of the British parachutists landed. He had been putting out signals in the hope of a drop of weapons and explosives; and it was on his signals that the parachutists had dropped.

By the end of October 1942 it would have been fair to say that the British party in Greece knew less about the Greeks they were supposed to co-operate with than the Greeks, and even the enemy, knew about them. Their presence and purpose in the mountains were widely known. Aris Veloukhiotis, who systematically avoided them until mid-November, later said that he had been warned by the EAM leaders in Lamia not to co-operate because "our intention was known and it would be madness to attack the bridge."²⁹ This was not altogether surprising, since the Italians had captured much of the equipment of the last party of parachutists to drop — near Karpenisi, on 30 October — including maps of the target area. They had also sent at least two large forces into the mountains to locate and capture the parachutists, though without success.

The British party, on the other hand, were sadly ignorant of the state of affairs in the mountains. Of the three names that were included in their briefing — Zervas, Sepheriadis, and Karalivanos—they had encountered only the third; and him they would have been better off without. It was clear that Karalivanos had no influence over Aris Veloukhiotis, even if he was in contact with him (which he probably was). Other contacts were even more remote and uncertain. It seemed possible through Lieut. Katsimbas to convey messages to Prometheus and Tsigantes in Athens; and this was done. A more unexpected

26. Khoutas, p. 58.

27. Gatopoulos, p. 662; Loverdo, pp. 102, 161.

28. Gardner, pp. 61-64; Khoutas, pp. 69-70.

29. Hamson, pp. 91, 100. He also spoke of "standing instructions of his superiors in Athens not to attack formed bodies of the enemy:" Myers, p. 72.

contact turned up in Amphissa, where I made a clandestine visit between 4 and 8 October: this was Karvounis, a Communist journalist on the editorial staff of *Rizospastis*. He proved of no direct use, though undoubtedly the KKE and EAM were apprised of the British presence in the mountains as a result.

Results came at last from the couriers sent to Athens. According to my diary, one arrived from Prometheus on 19 October, another from Tsigantes on 22 October, and another (or possibly the same one again) from Prometheus on 31 October. It was only the last who carried definite news of the location of Zervas' force in Valtos. Accordingly I set out to find him on 2 November, on foot across the Pindus mountains. On 7 November, passing through the village of Velota, I learned from the priest, Spyridon Papakonstantinou, that Aris Veloukhiotis was in the vicinity and that he had with him four British parachutists. This was the third group, including Themistoklis Marinos, which had landed in the outskirts of Karpenisi a week earlier. I wrote a letter to Aris telling him where the rest of the British party was to be found in Giona. The priest, who undertook to have the letter delivered, wrote on the envelope the initials ELAS. That was the first time I ever saw them, and they proved effective. The letter was delivered and Aris sent the British party to join their colleagues, accompanied by Lieut. Dimitriou (Nikiphoros), a cadet from the *Skholi Evelpidon* who was one of the first regular officers to join ELAS.³⁰ But Aris would still not join the British party himself.

Proceeding on my way, I found Zervas on 10 November at Argyrion in Valtos, and persuaded him to accompany me back to Giona. He left part of his force behind to safeguard his rear. On the way back across Pindus, we were intercepted at Viniani on 14 November by Aris Veloukhiotis, who had evidently decided that since the operation against the railway line was now certain to take place, he could not afford to stand aloof from it. He and Zervas met for the first time in my presence, and agreed to co-operate. The joint force arrived at Mavrolithari in Giona on 17 November to join the British party under Myers. All the threads of the operation were at last united. The Gorgopotamos bridge, which had been chosen by Myers as the best target after a personal reconnaissance, was attacked on the night of 25 November and destroyed early on the following morning.

Some controversy still surrounds the share of the credit for the operation. In my opinion it would never have taken place without Zervas and never have succeeded without Aris, who intervened decisively at a critical moment in the battle. The numbers engaged have been much disputed. Various estimates put

30. Myers saw these initials for the first time in Nikiphoros' cap-badge: Myers, p. 65.

the ELAS contingent at anything between 90 and 150, and Zervas' contingent between 45 and 60. Nikiphoros gives the higher figure for both forces.³¹ Characteristically Saraphis (who always had a grudge against Zervas) gives the lowest figure for the latter; but as he also estimates the British party at "three or four" (instead of twelve), he is clearly unreliable.³² Zervas himself, who never attempted to belittle Aris' contribution, gave the figures as 100 and 65 respectively.³³ Myers put Aris' force at 100 and Zervas' force at 150 originally, reduced to 50 by his dispositions *en route*.³⁴ Thus, making due allowance for the fact that Zervas had left behind a rearguard in Valtos and another small force to cover the Italian garrison in Karpenisi, it may be thought that honour is satisfied on both sides by figures of that order of magnitude. The whole combined force was essential to the capture of the Gorgopotamos bridge. Equally the British party, especially the engineers, were essential for its demolition.

The success of the operation naturally gave a considerable stimulus to resistance in Greece. But it was a stimulus to something which already existed, and was developing independently. Even at the time of the operation, other initiatives were already being taken or planned. In Athens EKKa (meaning National and Social Liberation), which was later to support Psaros in the field, had been founded in the late summer, and had engaged in abortive talks on military co-operation with EDES.³⁵ In September an attack was mounted on the headquarters of the Greek Fascist Party in Athens by an organisation called PEAN (Patriotic Union of Fighting Youth).³⁶ In November Saraphis, having refused an invitation to join EAM, formed his own organisation known as AAA, with Papandreou, General Grigoriadis and others.³⁷ Soon afterwards he was discussing with Tsigantes how he might launch an armed force in Thessaly, with the support of Kostopoulos. In the same month a Macedonian organisation called originally YVE (the Defenders of Northern Greece) and later PAO (the Panhellenic Liberation Organisation) made contact with the Greek government in exile through clandestine channels in Salonika.³⁸ All these initiatives took place before, and therefore independently of, Operation Harling. Similarly the Panhellenic Conference of the KKE, held in Thessaly in Decem-

31. Dimitriou - Nikiphoros, II p. 19.

32. Saraphis, p. 14.

33. Gatopoulos, p. 651.

34. Myers, pp. 67-8.

35. Gatopoulos, p. 647; Kédros, p. 114.

36. O'Ballance, p. 51.

37. Saraphis, p. 12.

38. Khoutas, p. 85.

ber, must have been planned before the success at the Gorgopotamos bridge, though naturally that event had an influence on the course of the conference.³⁹

All these indications tend to show that the emergence of armed resistance in Greece was indigenous and spontaneous, owing little to external stimulation. If the British had simply ignored Greece throughout the Occupation, there would still have been a resistance movement, though its scale and character would have been different. It can be seen to be probable in that event, without any British presence, that the resistance would have become more completely dominated by the Communist Party; and that for two reasons.

In the first place, senior officers of nationalist or non-Communist persuasion were slow to take the field. The committee of six Colonels as such never sent an officer to the mountains at all. Psaros and Saraphis hesitated until it was too late to act independently. The one exception was Zervas, who was also the only officer deliberately urged into a decision by SOE. But for him, resistance in the mountains would have been virtually a monopoly of the KKE. That more and more officers took the field later was principally due to the known presence of the British.

In the second place, without the British participation in the resistance movement, it is doubtful when, if ever, it would have been generally appreciated abroad that EAM was a creation and instrument of the KKE. Even as late as 1944 a good many British and American journalists and politicians failed or refused to recognise this fact. The British mission in the mountains, however, became aware of it at an early date. Myers recorded that by January 1943 it was already clear to him and myself "that EAM had a close connection with the Greek Communist Party, KKE, even if it was not under its actual dominion."⁴⁰ The conclusive moment of truth came on 2 February 1943, when I met a number of members of the Central Committee of EAM in Athens, including Siantos, Tzimas, Petros Roussos and Tsirimokos. Earlier on that same day Prometheus II (Koutsogiannopoulos) had been captured by enemy secret police; and nearly three weeks earlier, on 14 January, Tsigantes had been trapped and killed by them.⁴¹ One of the EAM leaders commented to me on these events: "Your agents have no conspiratorial experience (*synomotiki peira*), whereas we have been outlaws (*paranomoi*) for years." The only one present who demurred at this description was Tsirimokos. The others accepted an expression which could only apply to members of the KKE.

39. Kousoulas, pp. 139, 153-8.

40. Myers, p. 102.

41. Gatopoulos, pp. 349-50.

That episode completed the briefing which had been so inadequately begun in Cairo four months earlier. The nature of the problem confronting the British authorities in their dealings with the Greek resistance was at last fully apparent.

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C. M. WOODHOUSE

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