

AFTER THE BATTLE



BEHIND THE LINES

WITH THE OSS IN GREECE



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Front Cover: Bronze statue of an American soldier honouring the Greek-American Operational Groups. The work of California sculptor Andrew G. Saffas, it stands in the Hellenic Armed Forces Park in the grounds of the Greek Ministry of Defence at Goudi, Athens, where it was unveiled by the Greek Minister of Defence on May 26, 2005. A plaque on the base lists the names of all 224 members of the Operational Groups who served in Greece. (Robert E. Perdue, Jr.)

Back Cover: A memorial plaque on the banks of the Weser river beside the Stadt Hameln Hotel at Hameln in Germany reminds passers-by that this was once a prison and commemorates its victims during the Nazi era. Local historian Bernhard Gelderblom, seen here reading the inscription, was the driving force behind the memorial, which was unveiled in 2006. (Gisela Gelderblom.)

Acknowledgements: For their help with the OSS Behind the Lines in Greece story the Editor would like to thank Georgia Evans, Donald J. Evans, Lori Waters and Douglas M. Rule of the Fort Carson Public Affairs Office, George Saffas and Kostas Alexopoulos.

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USNA

The origin of the Greek Operational Groups lay in the 122th Infantry Battalion (Separate) — the 'Greek Battalion' — formed at the request of the Greek Government-in-Exile in January 1943. It was raised and trained at Camp Carson, an army facility near Colorado Springs, Colorado. Here the unit marches in review behind flags of the United States and Greece in August 1943. This event is reputed to be the only time an American unit marched under a foreign flag on US soil.

THE GREEK BATTALION

In January 1943, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an Executive Order forming the 122nd Infantry Battalion (Separate). Also known as the 'Greek Battalion', it was made up primarily of Greek-speaking Americans and recent Greek immigrants. Its creation came about as a result of a request by the Greek Government-in-Exile submitted to the US State Department in February 1942. The reason for this request is not evident but the Greek Government probably hoped this unit would participate in an invasion of Greece. Discussing the matter at his office on February 18, US Assistant Secretary of State Adolph Berle said he did not believe such a unit would serve any valuable military purpose but it might have political value, and so the State Department complied with the request and advised to organise a Greek battalion as an act of goodwill toward the Greek Government.

The 122nd Infantry Battalion was raised and trained at Camp Carson, Colorado, located just outside Colorado Springs. It was commanded by Major Peter D. Clainos, the first Greek-born West Point graduate. Practically all of the 30 officers were Greek-Americans, and the eight non-Greek ones

had in common that they had all studied classical Greek. The rank and file were all of Greek descent, divided evenly over Greek-Americans, new Greek immigrants and Greek sailors shipwrecked by German U-Boats. Many of the recruits were recent arrivals in the United States and could not speak English, so Major Clainos arranged to have teachers come to the camp two days a week to instruct them.

The rugged mountains outside Camp Carson were an ideal site for training soldiers destined to serve in the mountains of Greece. The troops hiked up 9,565-foot Cheyenne Mountain, up one side and down the other, a 35-mile round trip. While physical fitness was emphasised, the troops received the regular infantry weapon training.

In May 1943, President Roosevelt, accompanied by Army Chief-of-Staff General George C. Marshall, visited Camp Carson and the Greek Battalion passed in review, led by two flag-bearers, one with the Stars and Stripes, the second with the Greek flag. By August, the battalion had completed its training and was ready for deployment. However, two months later, the unit was disbanded. The reason for this lay in the creation of a new, very special Greek-language unit.



KATHERINE BLANAS

In the summer of 1944, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) sent eight so-called Operational Groups into Axis-occupied Greece. Operational Groups (OGs) were teams of uniformed American soldiers sent behind enemy lines to carry out sabotage actions in co-operation with the armed resistance of the country in which they were deployed. The eight operational groups sent to Greece were made up of Greek-speaking Americans. One of them was Operational Group II (OG II). Comprising 23 men under 1st Lieutenant John Giannaris, they were secretly landed in Greece in mid-June 1944 tasked with carrying out

ambush attacks on German troop trains and road convoys in the Roumeli region of central Greece. From their base in the mountain village of Papas they carried out a total of 14 operations, successfully destroying three locomotives, 31 boxcars, 7,400 yards of rail, a large culvert, 40 telegraph poles and six trucks, and killing or wounding an estimated 675 Germans against a loss of one enlisted man killed and one officer wounded. This group photo of OG II was taken in Papas in late September. There are only 18 men in the shot as five members of the group were by this time in sick bay suffering from malaria.

OSS BEHIND THE LINES IN GREECE

FORMATION OF OSS OPERATIONAL GROUPS

In July 1941, President Roosevelt had appointed Colonel William J. Donovan as the Coordinator of Information (COI), charged with setting up an intelligence service based on the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and the Special Operations Executive (SOE). The task of the new agency was to organise and carry out espionage and sabotage activities behind enemy lines for all branches of the armed services, conduct counter-espionage and organise 'black' propaganda. Out of this grew the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), officially established by Presidential decree on June 13, 1942. Working in close co-operation with its British counterparts, from late 1942 the OSS sent out spies and saboteurs into Axis-held territories in North Africa and Western Europe or to Japanese-controlled areas in the Pacific.

On December 23, 1942, the US Joint Chiefs-of-Staff authorised the OSS to set up so-called Operational Groups (OGs). These were teams of highly-trained, foreign-language soldiers, skilled in methods of sabotage and small arms, to be used in enemy-occupied territory, both as saboteurs and as organisers/arms instructors for partisans. The teams were to operate in US Army uniform (as opposed to OSS spies and saboteur agents who operated behind the lines in civilian disguise) and be trained to infiltrate behind enemy lines both by parachute and by sea. The basic unit was a platoon-size group composed of one or two officers and 20 to 30 enlisted men but in practice units could vary from a small liaison team of a few men to units slightly larger than the standard group.

By the late Robert E. Perdue, Jr.

The OG Branch of the OSS was officially established on May 13, 1943 and a recruiting programme was immediately undertaken, recruiting parties touring Army camps for volunteers. The men selected for the Operational Groups were assembled under a newly-created OSS unit, the 2677th Headquarters Company (Provisional) — with those for Italian operations being grouped in its First Contingent, those for France in Second Contingent and those for the Balkans in Third Contingent, with the latter sub-divided into a Unit A for Yugoslavia and Unit B for Greece.

In August 1943, an OSS recruiting board came to Camp Carson to solicit members of the Greek Battalion for the new unit. They forewarned the potential volunteers that, based on commando experience, half of the



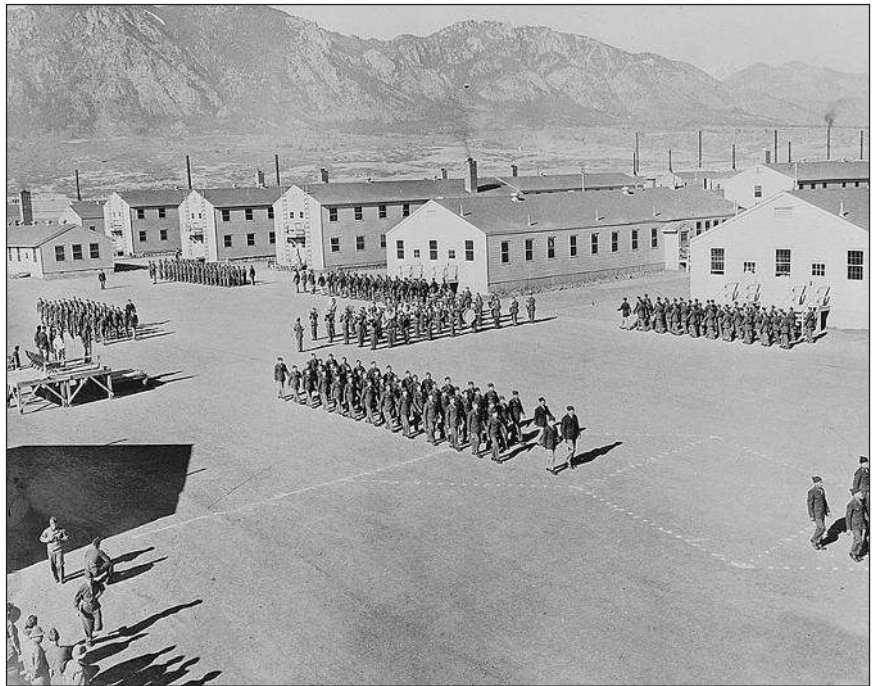
USNA

'Greeks of the 122nd Battalion vow to avenge the invasion of their native land', reads the wartime caption of this photo released by the Office of War Information.

volunteers would be killed. Nonetheless, so many men volunteered that the battalion commander, Major Clainos, decided to offer the entire unit. In the end, a total of 17 officers and 205 men were chosen and Army Ground Forces thereupon re-designated the 122nd Battalion as Unit B, Third Contingent, Operational Group. Excess personnel were transferred to other units and the newly designated unit was transferred to the OSS. Appointed commander of Unit B was Captain Robert F. Houlihan, who had been one of the eight non-Greek officers with the 122nd.

The 122nd Battalion was formally disbanded in October. The Greek Government-in-Exile had no objection so long as its successor retained the original idea of a Greek unit.

Right: In all, the US Army during the war created five infantry battalions (separate) made up of US citizens from specific ethnic groups: the 1st Filipino Battalion, the 99th Battalion (Norwegian), the 100th Battalion (Japanese) and the 101st Battalion (Austrian) in 1942 and the 122nd Battalion (Greek) in 1943. The 122nd Battalion was so designated in recognition of Greece's 122 years of independence from the Ottoman Empire, 1943 marking that many years since the start of the Greek War of Independence in 1821.



USNA



DOUGLAS M. RULE

OSS TRAINING AT AREA F AND AREA B

After a 30-day leave, the new OSS recruits were ordered to report to Building Q in Washington, DC, from which on October 8 they were trucked to Area F, the OSS special training school for Operational Groups. Area F was the Congressional Country Club in suburban Maryland, near Washington. Leased to the Government in March 1943, the property included a luxurious clubhouse, swimming pool and 18-hole golf course. The clubhouse was used as quarters, the ballroom became a large classroom, the main dining room served as mess hall, and the golf course's sand traps made excellent areas for demolition training. More than 100 Quonset huts were erected in the grounds. There was an obstacle course where machine guns fired live ammunition over the heads of crawling students, and across the road were sub-machine gun and pistol ranges.

Courses at Area F were designed to make all OGs proficient in demolitions, small arms (both American and foreign), scouting, patrolling and reconnaissance, first aid, unit security measures, living off the land, knife and hand-to-hand fighting, camouflage, map reading and compass, and methods of operation in airborne and seaborne raids. Many nights were spent on field manoeuvres in dense woods near the Club. Among the instructors were several that were on loan

from the SOE, among them Lieutenant-Colonel Dan Fairbairn and his assistant Hans Tofte, both experts in lethal self-defence, knife-fighting and 'silent killing'.

It was at Area F that the men were formed into the teams, the Operational Groups, with which they would train and go into action. In all, the Greek officers and men formed eight OGs, numbered I to VIII. One of them was Operational Group II. Comprising one officer and 22 men, its composition was a perfect reflection of the kind of background the men came from. Some were American citizens,

Left: Camp Carson is still an American Army establishment today but most of the wartime buildings have been pulled down. The only original structures still standing are in the old hospital area at the northern end of the complex, now in use as offices. This comparison was arranged for us by Lori Waters and taken by Douglas M. Rule, both of the Fort Carson Public Affairs Office.

Right: All the OSS Operational Groups, not just the Greek ones, were trained at Area F, which was one of the eight special OSS training schools. Area F was in fact the Congressional Country Club near Bethesda, Maryland, a few miles outside Washington, DC. The first to be based there were the Italian OGs, followed by the French, with the Greeks coming after that.

born of Greek immigrants. Most did not have US citizenship; some were illegal immigrants, who would earn citizenship by their serving with the OSS. Except for one, of Irish descent, all were fluent in Greek. Many could barely speak, much less write English. At least two had earlier served in the Greek army. Only one was a regular soldier in the US.

The group's leader, 1st Lieutenant John Giannaris, born 1922, originated from Chicago. A product of the pre-war Depression, he had joined the Army in November 1942 and graduated from Officer's Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, in July 1943, being assigned to the 122nd Battalion. A natural athlete and hard worker, fluent in English and Greek, he had already been interviewed twice by OSS representatives before he was commissioned. Although the OG's commander, at age 21, he was the youngest man in his group.

Of the group's seven sergeants, James Apostolopoulos was an American-born citizen, 32 years old, son of a naturalised father and a Greek mother. He had grade-school education and experience as a truck driver and maintenance man before he was drafted. Michael Kountouris was born on the Greek island of Patmos in 1914, had emigrated to the US in 1930, and was already a US citizen when he entered the Army from Jackson, Mississippi. Stephanos Philippides, born 1915, from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was unique in that he had attended not only three years of college in the US, but also the University of Peru and was fluent in Spanish. Peter Moshopoulos, born in 1919, originated from the island of Cephalonia. A seaman aboard a merchant vessel, he had jumped ship when in a US port and found work as a waiter in a New York restaurant. He had volunteered for military service in the hope of gaining US citizenship and, although he could not speak English, had been accepted by the Army. John Tsouderos was the son of Emmanuel Tsouderos, Prime Minister of Greece-in-Exile, then resident in Cairo. When Greece was invaded in 1941, young Tsouderos had



CARL LINDBERG



STELLA TINIAKOS

Here, the Greek OG men celebrate a party in what had been the club's dining room.



ANDREW S. MOUSALIMAS

been studying sociology and economics at a US university. When he was drafted in 1943, he joined the Greek Battalion, assuming the alias of John Giannakopoulos as protection in case of capture. Bernard Brady from Paterson, New Jersey, was the only non-Greek in the group, being of Irish descent. Having been assigned to the Greek Battalion as training cadre, he stayed with them when they volunteered for the OGs.

The other enlisted men had an equally varied background. Michalis Tsirmulas, a 29-year-old Greek citizen, had worked as a waiter and dishwasher since he arrived in the

Left: When the Greek Battalion became the nucleus of the Greek-language Operational Groups, Captain Robert F. Houlihan, who had been one of the non-Greek officers in the battalion, was made commander of Greek OGs. These initially formed Unit B of the Third Contingent, Operational Group, later renamed Third Contingent of the 2677th HQ Company, then Contingent C of the 2677th Regiment OSS, and finally Company C of the 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate. Throughout all these name changes, Captain (later Major) Houlihan remained in command of the Greek sub-unit.

US. George Tiniakos, born 1914 into a poor family on Andros Island, had joined the Greek merchant marine at age 15, and travelled the world until he was called up for service in the Greek Army from October 1938 to January 1940. Returning to the merchant marine, he had left ship in Boston, when a US Army recruiter encouraged volunteers with the promise of US citizenship. He finally entered US military service in January 1943. Another who had earlier served in the Greek Army was Hercules Sembrakis. Theodore Markidis was the only regular soldier, all the others were draftees.

Of the group's two medics, Spiros Taflambas, born 1920, had left the Greek island of Ithaca in 1936 aboard a merchant vessel and jumped ship in Baltimore, joining two uncles in the East Bronx. He had worked first as a grocery delivery boy and later as a waiter until he was drafted in 1942, joining the Greek Battalion. The other medic, Angelo Kaleyias, was unique in that he was born in Albania. Born in 1919, he had entered the US at New York in 1933 on an Albanian passport with his father. He too had worked as a busboy or waiter until he was drafted. Having qualified as a medic in July 1942, he had served with the Field Artillery before he came to the OSS.



JOHN GIANNARIS

First Lieutenant John Giannaris, who commanded OG II until wounded in combat on September 8, 1944.

As many of the men were still 'illegal' immigrants, a significant number were put on a train to Canada, removed after the first station beyond the border, and returned on the next train south so there would be a record of their legal entry.

Their training at Area F complete, the Greek OGS were trucked to another OSS training school, Area B, located at Camp Greentop, in mountainous wooded terrain just east of Hagerstown in Maryland, about 60 miles north of Washington, for additional training. This site specialised in para-military training: hand-to-hand combat, infiltration training, marksmanship and setting charges. There was also a 'spook house' where trainees, armed with a pistol, would enter while Nazi cardboard cut-outs would suddenly pop up, requiring them to react fast.



LAUREN SPANIER

Sergeant James Apostolopoulos, whom Giannaris described as 'my right hand'. At 32, he was the oldest man in OG II.

ON TO EGYPT AND ITALY

On November 17, 1943, the Greek OGS — now numbering 18 officers and 172 enlisted men — departed Area B, travelling to Charleston, South Carolina, in preparation for embarkation to the Mediterranean. Transferring to Newport News, Virginia, they boarded the liberty ship *Pierre L'Enfant*, and on December 25 sailed for North Africa, joining a convoy of more than 60 vessels. The OGS were the only troops on the ship, the rest was freight with tanks and trucks anchored on deck. They cruised across the Atlantic to Gibraltar and thence through the Mediterranean to Egypt. Disembarking at Suez on January 22, 1944, they were trucked to Camp Russell B. Huckstep at Heliopolis, near Cairo, where training continued for several weeks.



USNA

Sergeant John Tsouderos was the son of Emmanuel Tsouderos, the Greek Prime Minister-in-Exile.

From Camp Huckstep, some of the men, including Tech/5s Steve Marthiakes and Demetrius Frangas from OG II, went to Haifa, Palestine, for jump training at the British Parachute School and were later flown to southern Italy. The others travelled to Italy by ship, sailing from Port Said aboard the British steam liner *Dilwara* on February 1 and arriving in Taranto, on the heel of southern Italy, on February 8. From there, the OGS were transported across to Bari on the Adriatic, which would become the headquarters for OG operations in Yugoslavia and Greece. Troops were quartered in the nearby Torre a Mare tent camp (later named Camp Kallitsis in honour of Corporal George Kallitsis, an OSS trooper killed in Yugoslavia). Rigorous training continued, including mountain climbing, night exercises



HOPE POULOS

Tech/4 James Zonas. Like most OG II men, he was inducted in the II Corps Area (New York, New Jersey and Delaware).



NICHOLAS SEMBRAKIS

Corporal Hercules Sembrakis had served in the Greek Army before emigrating to the US.



ADRIAN DANNHAUSER

Corporal Costas Theodorou. Like all of the members of OG II, he was a qualified paratrooper.



ADRIAN DANNHAUSER

Corporal Louis Lenares (seated) with Tech/5 Alekos Orkoulas (left) and Tech/5 Christ Skiriotis (right).

and jump training at the British parachute school at Brindisi.

Around this time, the OG parent unit, the 2677th Headquarters Company (Provisional), which had considerably expanded since its creation nine months earlier, was renamed the 2677th Regiment OSS (Provisional), and the various OG contingents within the regiment had their numbers changed to letter designations: Contingent A for the Italian OGs (see *After the Battle* No. 94), Contingent B for the French (see issue 174), and Contingent C for the Balkans, the latter still subdivided into a Unit A for the Yugoslav OGs and Unit B for the Greek ones. Appointed commander of the 2677th was Colonel Russell B. Livermore. Major Philip G. Lovell assumed command of Contingent C. Major Houlihan remained in command of Unit B.



KATHERINE FLATHMAN

Tec/5 Spiros Taflambas, the other medic in OG II. Born on the island of Ithaca, he had entered the US as a 16-year-old in 1936.

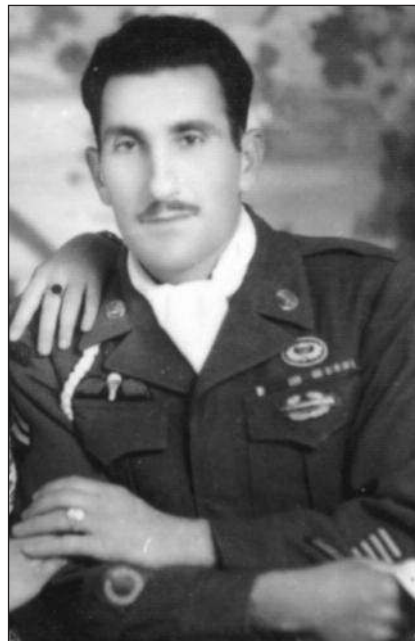


ADRIAN DANNHAUSER

Tech/5 Angelo Kaleyias came from Albania and was one of OG II's two medics. This is his OSS identification card.

Between April and September, all eight Greek Operational Groups would be infiltrated into German-occupied Greece, a total of 17 officers and 182 enlisted men. The first to leave was OG I on April 23; the last to arrive was OG IV on September 7.

On June 21, 1944 — while the Greek OGs were operating in Greece — the OSS Operational Groups were again re-organised, this time into an autonomous unit, the 2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate (Provisional), with an authorised allotment of 107 officers and 731 enlisted men. With this final change, the various national groups were re-designated companies: Company A for Italian OGs, B for French OGs and C for Greek OGs. Major Lovell, promoted to lieutenant colonel, was made battalion commander; Major Houlihan took over Company C.



STELLA TINIAKOS

Tech/5 George Tiniakos. An expert marksman, he too had served in the Greek Army before the war.



KATHERINE KIPP

Tech/5 Steve Marthiakos. Originally from Galaxidi, near Delphi, he had arrived in the US by jumping ship in a US port.

OPERATION 'NOAH'S ARK'

By 1942, Greek resistance by armed partisan fighters (Andartes) had developed into several rival organisations. The most important of these were the Communist-dominated EAM (Ethnikon Apeleftherotikon Metopon — National Liberation Front) with its military wing, the ELAS (Ethnikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos — National Popular Liberation Army), and the liberal, republican and anti-Royalist EDES (Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Syndesmos — National Democratic Greek League).

Both ELAS and EDES were armed and trained by the Allies. In early October 1942, SOE had sent its first sabotage team into Greece, which on the night of November 25/26 in a joint operation with ELAS and EDES guerrillas successfully blew up the important Gorgopotamos railway viaduct — a vital link in the German supply line to North Africa. The success of this operation prompted Britain to form a British Military Mission with the Greek guerrillas and to start sending in British Liaison Officers and dropping weapons and explosives to both ELAS and EDES, in order that they could fight the Germans.

However, soon and increasingly so in 1943, the two guerrilla organisations turned to fighting each other. After the fall of the Italians in September 1943, this developed into a near civil war when strong ELAS forces struck against EDES units in the mountains of Thessaly, pushing the latter back into Epirus in the extreme north-west of the country.

The Allied Military Mission (its name had changed when the OSS had sent in the first American Liaison Officers in September), fearing a total victory of ELAS, increased its support to EDES, which enabled it to regain much of its territory. At the insistence of the Allied Military Mission, representatives of ELAS and EDES then met at the Plaka Bridge over the Arakhtos river in Epirus to discuss a truce. The resulting Plaka Bridge Agreement, signed on February 29, 1944, provided for the establishment of well-defined zones of operation for each group, a vow by each group to refrain from infringing on the other's territory, and a promise that all future efforts would be directed against the Germans rather than against each other.



On the night of June 17/18, Operational Group II was landed by LCI on the western coast of Greece, coming ashore at Parga Cove in Epirus. From there, they hiked across country for 14 days to reach the small village of Papas in the

Roumeli region of central Greece, which would be their base for the next four months. For operational purposes, Greece had been divided into areas and their particular region was Area 3.

Hitler had long believed the Allied invasion of Europe would focus on the Balkans. His fear was reinforced by Operation 'Animals' in Greece in June-July 1943 when the partisans, with SOE guidance, greatly increased their activity. This all resulted in Germany placing additional divisions in Greece; by late 1943 there were seven. However, with the Western Allies moving steadily north in Italy and the Russian Red Army moving west, it was evident the Germans would sooner or later have to abandon Greece lest they be cut off. And it was critical for the Allies that the German divisions moving out of Greece would not be readily available to oppose the planned Allied invasion of Normandy and the German homeland.

Right: Area 3 was commanded by Major John Mulgan, one of the British Liaison Officers sent into Greece by the Special Operations Executive. Mulgan, a New Zealander, organised and supervised all of OG II's operations. He provided them with intelligence on German troop train movements, assigned subordinate Liaison Officers to lead missions, and coordinated the Group's actions with those of the mortar and machine-gun sections of the British Raiding Support Regiment and with supporting Andarte (Greek guerrilla) forces.



Thus was born Operation 'Noah's Ark' (subsequently renamed 'Smash'em'), planned and controlled by British SOE Middle East Headquarters in Cairo, also known as Force 133. Its objective was to so harass the withdrawal of German troops from Greece that these could not be used on other fronts and to destroy as many men and as much equipment as possible.

By this time, there was a substantial number of SOE and OSS agents in Greece tasked with many responsibilities, from supplying weapons and ammunition and training Andartes to operating hospitals and building secret airstrips. The country was divided into sectors with a senior British Liaison Officer, usually a major, in charge of SOE and OSS activities in each sector.

However, to assure success of 'Noah's Ark', more-heavily armed special forces would be brought into Greece: the American Operational Groups and elements of the British Raiding Support Regiment (RSR). The latter unit had been formed in mid-1943 to support guerrillas in the Balkans. Commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Devitt, it comprised five batteries, each with a different type of weapon: Vickers and captured Spandau machine guns, 3-inch heavy mortars, Browning light anti-aircraft guns, Italian anti-tank guns and 75mm pack mountain howitzers.



DONALD J. EVANS

On arrival at Papas, the Group took over the village school building.



KATHERINE BLANAS

The Americans used one of the classrooms as their mess hall.

The mission for the OGs and the RSR, in co-operation with the Andartes, was to delay the German retreat from Greece by blowing up railway lines and shooting up troop trains, mining roads and ambushing road convoys, and generally harassing the enemy.

Plans for 'Noah's Ark' were ready by March 1944 and the first infiltration of the additional Allied forces began in April. However, the actual launching of the operation depended on the start of a wholesale German withdrawal, which, as it finally turned out, did not begin until the first week of September.

INTO GREECE

OG II left Monopoli on the heel of Italy by LCI (Landing Craft, Infantry) at 8.30 p.m. on June 16, 1944. Also aboard were an RSR group and 90 tons of supplies. The ship crossed the Adriatic Sea and reached the west coast of Greece at a sheltered cove near Parga, east of the island of Paxi, just after midnight, June 17/18. The cove was an ideal spot for clandestine landings for it had a narrow entrance not more than 150 feet across, opening up to a small, sheltered, horseshoe-shaped bay, with a sandy beach and high overhanging cliffs. However, the approach was between Corfu and another small German-occupied island so, in order to get in and out unobserved, ships could not come in earlier than 2300 hours and had to be completely off-loaded and re-loaded by 0200 hours. Also, as on this night, landings were carried out during the dead-moon period.

When OG II arrived, there were already three other Groups (I, V and VII) in Greece. OG I, under Lieutenant George Verghis, had arrived at Parga Cove by LCI on April 23 and was based in the mountains at Romanon, about 18 miles inland from it. This group, with the assistance of Andartes, had the task of providing security for landing craft. When a ship was scheduled in, they set up road-blocks at Glyki at the north end of the Fanari Plain, their task being to block any threat from German troops based in the towns of Paramethia and Menina.

Right: The building is no longer in use as a school. With the ongoing depopulation of Greek mountain villages, Papas is today virtually deserted, most of the inhabitants having left to find work in the cities, and the school building is locked up. (Our comparisons in Papas were taken by Donald J. Evans, who travelled there especially with his wife Georgia, the widow of our author Robert E. Perdue, to match up the shots).



ADRIAN DANNHAUSER

Members of OG II posing with Greek Andartes and others in front of the school. Gian-naris is the one with the beard sitting in the middle of the second row, flanked by two Andarte officers. Immediately in front and holding Lucky, the group's mascot dog, is Sergeant James Apostolopoulos. To his right, with one hand on Lucky, is Reno, an Italian POW. Note the little boy standing second row left. The photo was taken by a Greek photographer who was traveling through the Pindus Mountains in the summer of 1944.

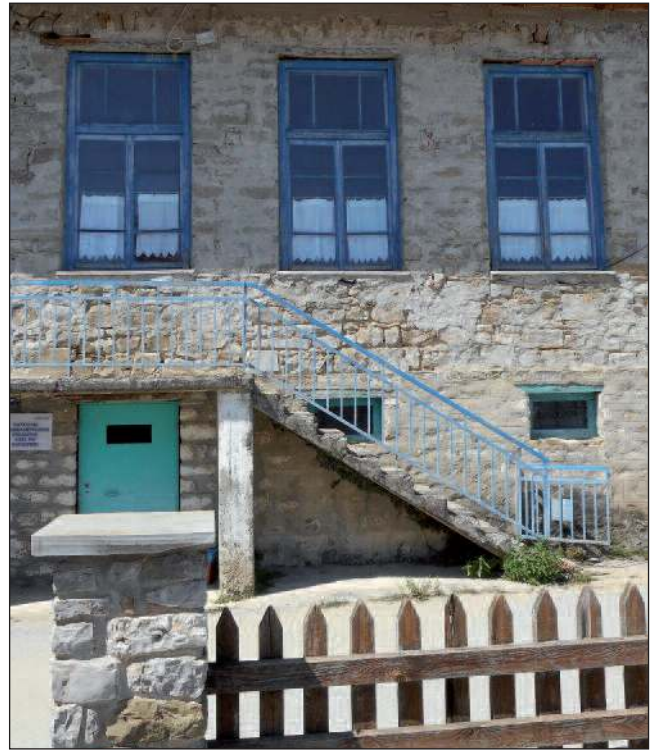


DONALD J. EVANS



JAMES CHIMBIDIS

Men of OG II peer out windows of the schoolhouse to observe the village blacksmith (left, with Thompson sub-machine gun)



DONALD J. EVANS

with a group of Andartes who were passing through the village. All are armed, including the young woman kneeling in the centre.

OG II was met at the cove by three Allied officers: British Lieutenant-Colonel Watt Torrance of the Allied Military Mission; American Captain Frank T. Blanas, who had parachuted into Epirus during the night of June 9/10 to take field command of all the OGs in Greece; and Captain Jack Gage, a South African, and the commander of an RSR detachment that was yet to enter Greece. He had parachuted into the country in early May to scout out the general vicinity of Lamia for potential targets but on June 5 had received a message from Cairo ordering him to report to the west coast, a trek of about 150 miles, with 40 mules to meet OG II and guide them and their equipment to the village of Papas, their proposed base in the mountains north-west of Lamia.

When the LCI arrived, a British naval officer in a row boat met it at the entrance to the cove and guided it in. Bonfires were lit and the LCI switched on her searchlights lighting up the scene. There were 200 mules on the beach along with 400 villagers to assist in unloading, 100 Russians who were to be evacuated and 600 parachutes to be loaded. The LCI's two gang-planks were lowered and the OGs and British RSR filed down one as the villagers moved up the other to unload the supplies.

The ship was unloaded in just an hour. The night was pitch black and so as not to become lost or leave the trail, each man held the tail of the mule ahead of him. The OG and RSR crossed the north-south coastal road and at dawn reached the foot of the mountains, six miles inland from the beach, and then a pre-selected camping area at mid-day. Here they remained all day on the 19th waiting for their supplies to reach them. The mules were unloaded and supplies re-sorted.

They now began a 14-day trek from the west coast to their proposed base in central Greece. Although the distance was no more than 90 miles as the crow flies, because of the mountains it added up to about 300 miles. On average, the men and the mule train did 25-35 miles per day, leaving at 4 a.m. and hiking about six hours before stopping at a village for the night.

After two days, they reached Romanon Monastery, the base of Lieutenant Verghis' OG I. It was here that one of the OG II's members, Sergeant John Tsouderos, the Greek Prime Minister's son, received an unpleasant surprise when a British officer, acting on a message from Bari Headquarters, ordered him out of Greece. Much to his chagrin, Tsouderos was forced to return to Parga Cove and board the next LCI back to Italy.

(Badgering his superiors for permission to return, he finally succeeded and returned to Romanon in early August, being assigned to OG I as a demolition man).

On the first few days of the trip, the food was inadequate and the OG men had to break into their dehydrated rations. Giannaris argued with Captain Gage, who always left about an hour ahead of the column with his guide, to have villagers at the next stop prepare hot meals for the men in the evening. About five days out, there was a first good hot meal, Gage having paid four sovereigns per meal, or 96 sovereigns (\$24,00) for the 24 men.

By June 24 the group had reached Paradatis where they remained all day awaiting darkness to cross the hazardous Preveza-Ionina main road. On the 25th, after a swim and bath in the Arathos river, they reached Zigos. The following day they entered Brianza, after crossing the Achellos river, and Viniani on the 27th. On the 29th they reached the village of Domiani, site of the clandestine Allied Military Mission hospital (code-named 'Fatalist') run by American doctor Robert E. Moyers, where they spent the night. (Moyers, a 23-year-old qualified dentist and veterinary surgeon, and an OSS lieutenant, had parachuted into Greece in December 1943 to set up the behind-the-line hospital).

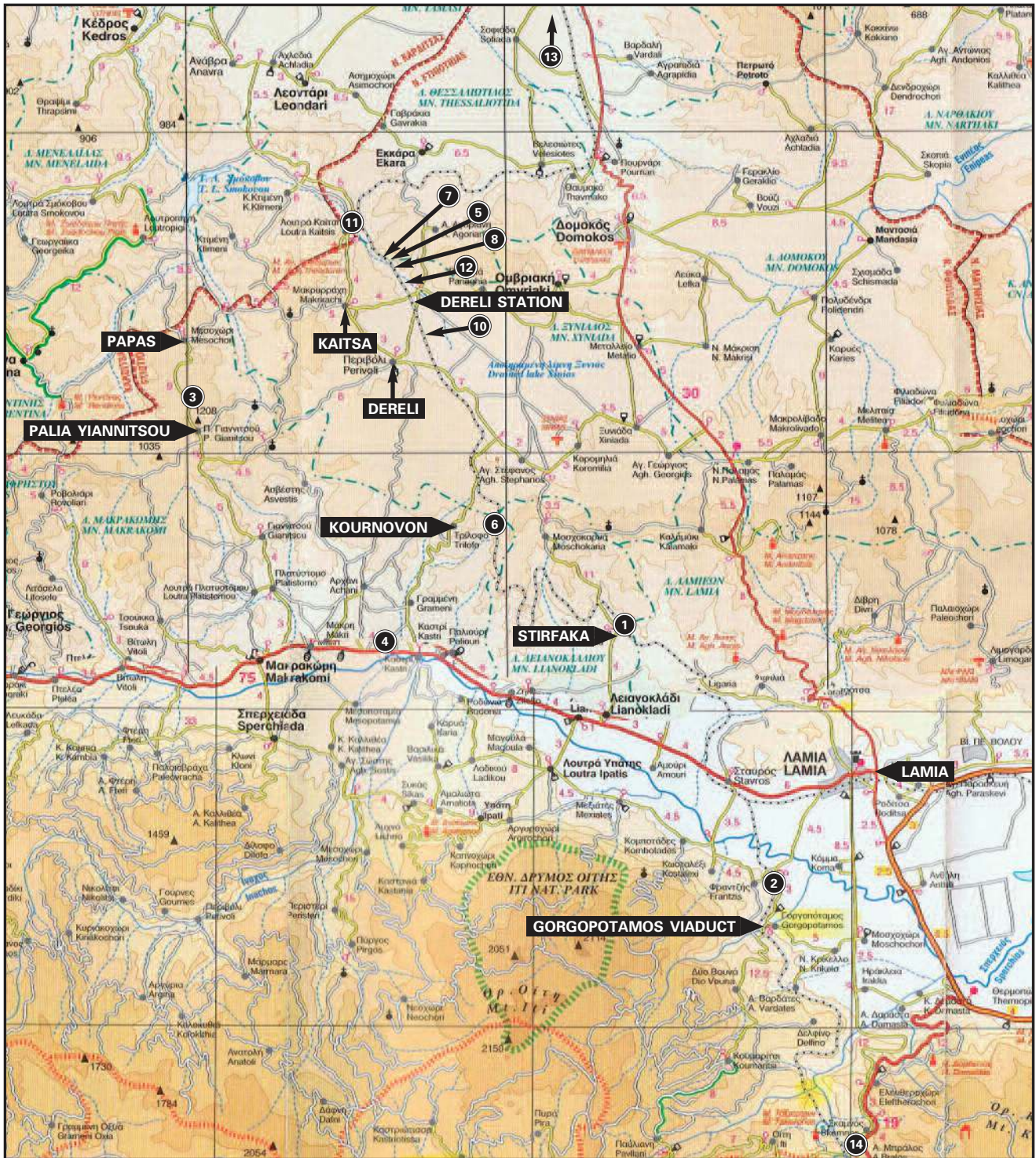
On July 1, OG II arrived at the village of Papas, which would be their base of operations for the duration of their time in Greece. A tiny village, built on the steeply shelving side of a hill, it consisted of about 30 stone houses. There was a church and a schoolhouse, separated by a little square, but no shop or coffee house. It was very poor; the people were hungry. There were no vegetable gardens and only a few animals — sheep, goats, mules — in or near the village.

The group occupied the school, using an empty classroom as mess and storeroom. They dug slit trenches and a garbage pit. The men slept outside in huts made from tree branches and protected by their mosquito nets. Malaria was their most serious health problem but the group had so much atabrine they shared it with the villagers. The nets offered protection from mosquitoes but not from the vermin — fleas and bedbugs — that inhabited many abodes.

**MEMBERS OF OPERATIONAL GROUP II
(Unit B, Contingent C) Company C,**

2671st Special Reconnaissance Battalion, Separate (Provisional), OSS

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1st Lt John G. Giannaris
<i>(WIA September 8, 1944)</i> | Cpl Costas A. Theodorou |
| 1st Lt Nicholas Pappas
<i>(from September 25, 1944)</i> | T/5 James K. Alexatos |
| T/Sgt James M. Apostolopoulos | T/5 Demetrius Frangas |
| T/Sgt Bernard F. Brady | T/5 Angelo H. Kaleyias |
| S/Sgt Michael G. Kountouris | T/5 Theodore N. Markidis |
| S/Sgt George C. Kypriotes | T/5 Steve P. Marthiakes |
| S/Sgt Stephanos J. Philippides | T/5 Alekos X. Orkoulas |
| Sgt Peter M. Moshopoulos | T/5 Gus L. Palans |
| Sgt John E. Tsouderos | T/5 Christ Skiriotes |
| T/4 James M. Zonas | T/5 Spiros T. Taflambas |
| Cpl Louis G. Lenares | T/5 George S. Tiniakos |
| Cpl Hercules J. Sembrakis | T/5 Michalis Tsirmulas
<i>(KIA September 8, 1944)</i> |



Map showing the main towns and villages that feature in this account and the locations of the 14 operations carried out by OG II. (Operation No. 9 is not marked as it was aborted halfway.) Greek villages often have two or even three names: the old classic Greek name, the Turkish one and the modern name. Papas, the

base of OG II, has since been named Mesochori (middle village) and as such appears on modern maps. Kaitsa is today Makrirachi, Dereli is Perivoli and Kournovon is now Trilofa. This part of Greece is very mountainous, with winding roads and steep gorges, the only flat terrain being the southern Thessaly Plain around Dereli.

Relations with the villagers were generally good. They helped and supported the Americans as much as they could. On arrival, Giannaris established rules and regulations, telling his men he expected good behaviour, especially with the young ladies. There were no problems.

K rations were the staple food. To achieve some variety, the men did a lot of hunting and stole chickens or whatever they could find. Later they were provided with British sovereigns with which they could purchase food locally. The food problem left Giannaris no choice but to deal with black marketers. Pasta

and other items, donated by the American Red Cross and intended for the populace of the cities, made their way into the mountains. Giannaris bought wheat, sent it to a local mill to be processed into flour which, in turn, was given to a village woman to make bread.

As time went on, the OG received regular parachute drops of food and equipment, mail and cigarettes. The parachute containers sometimes landed at points so distant that the Germans or local residents reached them first. Even though they were hungry, the villagers usually brought them over to the Americans.

In preparation for 'Noah's Ark', Greece had been divided into sectors and OG II's operations would play out in what was known as Area 3. This vital sector was commanded by SOE Major John Mulgan, a New Zealander, whose headquarters (code-named 'Kirkstone') was at Palia Yiannitsou a few miles down slope from Papas. Mulgan was one of the best Allied Liaison Officers in Greece. A bold and firm leader, he got on well with the regional ELAS commander, and Area 3 was in fact the only sector where there was complete co-operation between Greek guerrillas, British and Americans.



Left: The main target of attack for OG II was the Athens to Salonika (Thessaloniki) railway line, the only north-south rail line in the whole of Greece (see also the map on page 8). A vital point along the line was the Dereli Station, in the southern Thessaly Plain north of Lamia, which was of critical importance to the Germans because of a spur line that branched off from there to a Nazi-controlled chrome mine further east. The Germans therefore placed a strong garrison at the station,



entrenched in a defensive perimeter with pillboxes at either end, minefields, 20mm anti-aircraft guns, and an armoured train parked in the sidings, which daily patrolled up and down the line. No less than five of OG II's 14 operations were in the neighbourhood of this station. This is the view looking south towards the Othris Mountains. Right: Dereli Station (sometimes referred to as Kaisa Station or Kaliva Station in the wartime reports) is today known as Ageon Station.

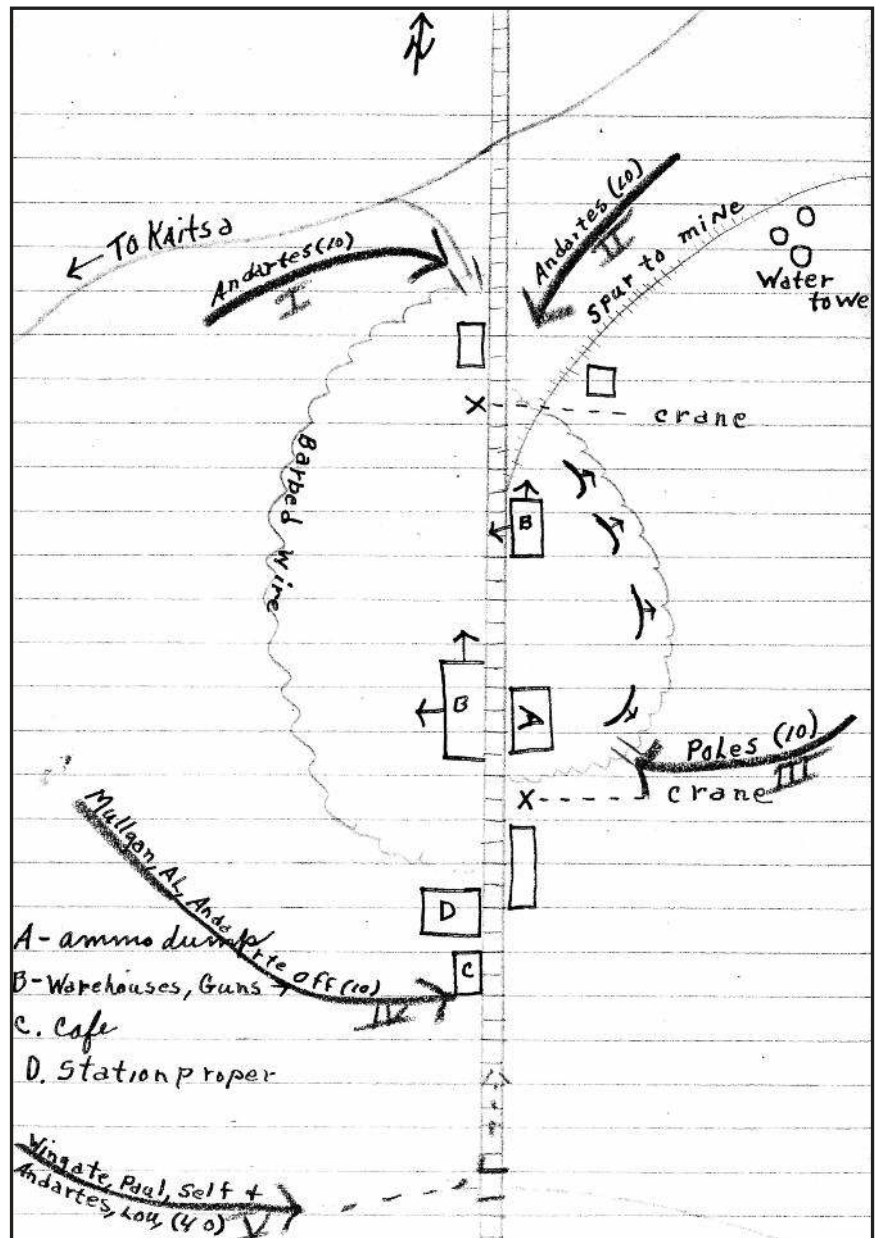
PREPARING FOR ACTION

After their arrival in Papas, OG II rested for a few days. Beginning on the 7th and continuing through the 21st, they reconnoitred the surrounding area to identify possible targets and determine the best routes of approach and withdrawal. They also noted possible routes of enemy attack on Papas and positions suitable for defence. The railway, their primary target, was observed during daylight and after dark to determine patterns of train movement.

There were just two feasible routes for the German retreat north: the main highway and the Athens-Thessaloniki railway line to the west of it. The single-track railway — the only north-south rail in Greece and a critical supply route for the Germans throughout the war — was especially vulnerable to attack. It traversed the mountains south of Lamia, crossed the Sperchios valley west of the city, wove along the lower southern slopes of the Othris Mountains, then extended almost due north, nearly straight as an arrow, for almost 20 miles across the southern section of the Thessaly Plain, past the villages of Kaisa and Dereli, before passing between two mountains, the 2,470-foot Koumaros and the 2,150-foot Xerobouni, to reach the Thessaly Plain below Domokos. The pass between the two mountains came to be known as the 'five-mile area', a strip of track that was ideally suited for sabotage actions.

An especially important target on the railway was the Dereli Station for it was the junction of the main line with a branch line that extended eastwards to a German-controlled chrome mine near Domokos. The station was equipped with a crane used to transfer ore from cars from the mine to

Right: On June 16, 1944 — a fortnight before OG II arrived in the area — Major Mulgan had attacked Dereli Station with a force of about 90 guerrillas (80 Andartes and ten Poles). This sketch of the action was drawn by American Lieutenant Robert Moyers, whose OSS medical detachment accompanied the attacking force. 'Self' above the lower arrow refers to Moyers, and 'Wingate' is British Major Pat Wingate, RE, one of the British Liaison Officers in Area 3. 'Al' above the next arrow refers to Sergeant Alfred Borgman, one of Moyers' assistants. The Germans warded off the attack but the event undoubtedly made them further strengthen this critical point.



Right: The Operational Group made extensive use of Greek mules. A string of 40 animals carried their equipment across Greece from the landing point at Parga Cove on the west coast to Papas. On operations, the mules carried explosives, rations and other supplies. The men walked.

freight trains carrying the material north for processing. Dereli station and village were both occupied by a large German garrison, which included an armoured train equipped with 81mm mortars, heavy machine guns and 20mm anti-aircraft guns, and soldiers to be used for attacks along lines. Always in readiness along a siding of the railway station, the Panzerzug regularly patrolled the railway through the mountains. The whole station area was surrounded by barbed wire and minefields and there were two bunkers. The nearby village of Dereli had been burned by the Italians in 1943 and the residents were subsisting in thatched kalivas (straw huts) nearby.

On June 16, 1944, two weeks before OG II's arrival, Mulgan had ordered an attack on Dereli Station with about 80 Andartes, ten Poles and a fellow British officer, with Moyers and his assistants providing medical assistance. However, the Germans were not caught by surprise and had repulsed the attack. This event undoubtedly encouraged the Germans to further strengthen this critical point.

OPERATIONS

Between July 22 and October 19, OG II participated in 14 operations, often in conjunction with the RSR and Andartes. Most were against the main railway between Lamia and Domokos. A train derailment resulted not just in loss of cargo or death or injury of passengers; there was also destruction of the rails, telephone lines and other installations and then the pressure on the Germans for replacement and or repairs. The attacks also forced the Germans to increase forces guarding important installations.

It was standard procedure to reconnoitre proposed targets before each operation. A route of approach and bivouac sites were selected for multi-day operations. Near the site of an attack an assembly area was designated from where they would move out and to which all would return (and where Lieutenant Giannaris and his men would celebrate their success with a potent shot of tsipouro, the locally distilled spirit). A typical plan called for the bazooka team to hit and disable the locomotive and then for the other men to open up on the passenger or freight cars, all of which were wooden and would be left in flames. Almost all attacks were made at night.

The Americans relied to a great extent on the British for target selection. Major Mulgan advised Giannaris as to expected train arrivals in his operational area. The British had good communications, both wireless and telephone, between their stations, which could directly observe train movements or obtain reports from Greek civilians and report them to Cairo to be relayed to Area 3 headquarters. For example, on August 30, 'Buckram' Station reported: 'Train movt 15 Aug to Athens six trains 148 wagons incl 106 material, 6 troops, 3 hay, 9 lorries, 10 petrol, 14 empty tks. To Salonika 2 trains 78 waggons incl 75 empty, 3 tps, 1 Hun leave train, 1 Greek passenger train.'

Right: All of the group's sabotage operations were at night so there are no action photos to illustrate these. Judging by the light load carried by the mules (note the bazooka on the one nearest to the camera), this picture was probably taken when the group was returning from an operation.



JAMES CHIMBIDIS

When a train was hit, German soldiers would often jump off shouting 'Kamerad, Kamerad'. Giannaris' men wanted to take prisoners but he knew he had too few men to guard and take care of them, so he told his men to shoot to wound, not to kill, as this would more burden the enemy structure, with wounded to be hospitalised and cared for.

The SOE and OSS men were acutely aware of the consequences their ambush actions could have for the local population. As a rule, the Germans reacted with brutal reprisal actions, executing civilians and burning down villages closest to the attack site. Many times, the OG men saw peasant women who, knowing the Americans were working there, were loading the family donkeys with what they thought might be saved from the wrath to come. To hopefully discourage reprisals, the OG would always leave behind one or more empty packages of American cigarettes at the site to let the Germans know the action had been by Americans and not Greeks.

Operation No. 1

OG II's first operation was an action against the railway near Stirfaka, approximately 40 miles south-east of Papas. Major Mulgan had asked Giannaris for a bazooka team and a security detail to assist British Major Grenville Dickinson of the SOE on this operation.

At 0900 hours on July 22, Giannaris and seven of his men (a bazooka team, Tommygunners and riflemen) with demolitions, accompanied by nine Greek guerrillas, left Papas and proceeded south-east to Dereli Kalivas arriving at 1300. Here they waited until 1800 and then marched east towards a point north of Dereli Station. The crossing was heavily guarded, with a pillbox 400 yards to the left and a force of about 150 Germans 500 yards to the right, both positions on the alert with flares and patrols. The group crossed the tracks under cover of darkness at 2300 and marched continuously through the night and next morning, arriving at a forward assembly area in the mountains north of Stirfaka at 1100 on the 23rd.



KATHERINE BLANAS



Left: Posing in front of the school with two of the pack mules are (L-R) Tech/5 George Tiniakos, Corporal Costas Theodorou, Tech/5 Michalis Tsirmulas and Corporal Hercules Sembrakis. Tsirmulas, astride the mule, would be killed during Operation No. 10 on September 8, the only member of OG II killed in

Here, Major Dickinson told Giannaris that the target was only a half hour away but an Andarte officer said it was still at least three hours and that it was impossible to move further forward during daylight. Surprised, Giannaris queried the major and it turned out he had not personally reconnoitred the target. So the group had no choice but to wait for nightfall.

While the main party rested, a reconnaissance party departed for a better view of the target. At 1600 the main party marched to the rendezvous area to form security in all directions. The railway line was heavily guarded with a manned pillbox on the left and Stirfaka, with its German garrison, on the right. Worse, because of an attack the previous night, the Germans were on the alert. Nonetheless, Dickinson went down to place demolitions and a train was derailed. Enemy flares immediately went up and the group became the target of German mortar, machine-gun, 20mm and small-arms fire from all directions, forcing them to retreat without opening fire on the train.

Giannaris was not at all pleased with this first action. Because of what he considered bad preparation, he had refused to accompany Dickinson with his group down to the railway. Although the latter claimed there had been an explosion, the Americans had heard none; and by 0730 the next morning trains were moving freely.

The OG marched back to Papas, a three-day hike during which they encountered several enemy patrols searching for them, and they finally returned to base at 1000 on July 26.

Operation No. 2

OG II's second operation began five days later. The target was a German supply train and the place of attack a spot 3,000 yards north of the Gorgopotamos viaduct, which was strongly garrisoned by the Germans, and 700 yards south of a pillbox and guardhouse. On July 31, Giannaris left Papas with 12 of his men (two bazooka teams, a BAR team, Tommy-gunners and riflemen) and eight Andartes. They moved down across the



action. Buried by the Germans, his grave was never found and he is today commemorated on a Tablet of the Missing in the Florence American Cemetery in Italy. Right: The road to Palia [Old] Giannitsou, the nearest village down slope, is off to the left.

Sperchios valley to beyond Ipati where they bivouacked for the night. The following morning, August 1, they moved to a forward position and then after dark into positions near the tracks, with the bazookas positioned 15 yards from them. When the train arrived, the locomotive was hit with five bazooka rockets and armour-piercing ammunition. Other cars were hit by the bazookas too and the train was fired upon by all the attackers until all aboard were killed, including the guards in the forward and rear cars, and the wooden cars were in flames. The group returned to Papas on August 3.

Two days later, on August 5, Jack Gage's RSR detachment arrived in Area 3 to reinforce the attacks. It consisted of two sections of Spandau machine guns and a mortar section. Initially, the mortar section and one machine-gun section remained near Mulgan's headquarters at Palia Yiannitsou and with OG II concentrated on the railway, and the other machine-gun section moved east of the highway on the mountains north of Lamia to focus on Germans moving north by road. Subsequently, both machine-gun sections were used against highway traffic.

Operation No. 3

OG II's next operation was not a sabotage action but a defensive stand. On Saturday, August 5, the Germans began Operation 'Kreuzotter' (Viper), designed to crush ELAS and EDES partisan activity in the area. Kampfgruppe Schlätel of the 4. SS-Polizei-Panzergrenadier-Division began moving west up the Sperchios valley from Lamia; other task forces drove north-east from Agrinion, all intending to meet at Karpenision and entrap a large force of guerrillas.

The size of the enemy force was estimated at 15,000 troops and, while the main force was moving along the road on the valley floor, it appeared their flank security units might overrun the OG II base. The Americans were alerted and on August 7 were summoned to help prevent the Germans from overrunning Papas and nearby villages. OG II moved to Palia Yiannitsou, site of Mulgan's headquarters, which had already packed and was ready to move. As they took up positions in clear view of a German unit that was attempting to gain the heights, they could see several villages that had already been overrun and set aflame by the Germans.



Andartes loading a mule in preparation for a mission.

Right: On August 5, the Germans launched Operation 'Kreuzotter', one of the large counter-guerrilla offensives that were so typical of the war in the Balkans. A joint effort by the XXII. Gebirgs-Korps and the LXVIII. Armeekorps, it fielded units from three divisions in a simultaneous drive from east and west with the intent of converging at Karpenision, the object being to trap and destroy the partisan formations caught in between. As part of 'Kreuzotter', Kampfgruppe Schlätel of the 4. SS-Polizei-Panzer Grenadier-Division advanced westwards from Lamia up the Sperchios valley. With the ELAS units evaporating in front of them, they found little else but deserted farmsteads and villages, dozens of which were set to the torch. The men of OG II helped to defend Papas and Palia Giannitsou against the German drive, while also making a night attack on the enemy troops on the valley road.

When the Germans realised they were heavily opposed and that a further advance would be costly, they retreated to better positions. However, when attacking parties of Andartes, the RSR and the OG continued to harass their supply and communication lines, they made another attempt to gain the heights. This was also frustrated and the Germans fell back again. However, their patrols continued to roam the valley day and night, continuously lighting the sky with flares after sunset.

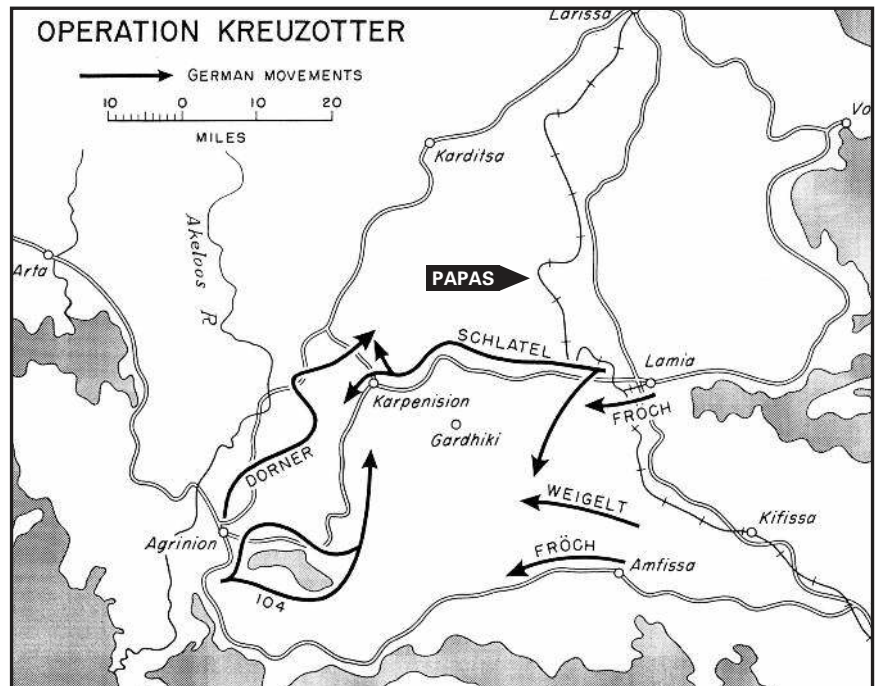
Operation No. 4

During the night of August 12/13 — while the German offensive was still in full swing — Giannaris and 11 of his men set out to infiltrate the enemy lines and attack their supply line. The party left its defence position at Palia Yiannitsou and travelled south along the heights, then east, and descended to the enemy positions, where mortar and machine-gun emplacements covered all approaches. The Germans were equipped with spotlights and the sky was illuminated with flares. After more than four hours of creeping and crawling the Americans approached the road between Makri and Kastri, passing close enough to one German emplacement to hear voices of enemy soldiers at their guns.

As they neared the road, Giannaris, in the lead, heard a strange rustling noise behind him and tapped his rifle butt one time to signal all to freeze in position. He inched his way to the rear to find Tech/5 Theodore Markidis, on his knees, plucking grapes from a vine. It was pitch dark and Giannaris did not know just how distant they were from the road. As he began to move forward again, two Germans just 15 yards ahead struck a match to light cigarettes. The delay caused by Markidis and his grapes saved the OG from stumbling into a group of Germans who soon jumped in a truck and drove off. Now they knew exactly where the road was. Two of the men began digging holes for placement of mines while the others crowded around to muffle the sound and screen from view any sparks that might appear.

After laying the mines they moved away 200-300 yards to await and attack a truck convoy; but a full moon rose and enemy activity was observed uncomfortably close.

Right: To escape the German onslaught, thousands of people fled into the mountains and several hundred reached Papas where they were fed and sheltered by the men of OG II. These two boys were among the refugees. Operation "Kreuzotter" ran for two weeks but the results were marginal. Large quantities of weapons, ammunition and demolitions were captured or destroyed and 298 guerrillas were killed and 260 captured. German losses totalled 20 dead and 112 wounded.



so Giannaris withdrew his men to the heights. When the first vehicle of a convoy was demolished by a mine, the entire area was lit up like daylight. The Americans were discovered and their position was strafed by machine guns and mortared, but by then they were well up in the hills and suffered no losses. Andarte artillery on a mountain top opened fire and destroyed more trucks and caused more German casualties.

The OG returned to Palia Yiannitsou early next morning and re-assumed its defence positions, moving to a more-forward location at Nea Yiannitsou. The 'Kreuzotter' offensive was still underway and the Germans again attempted to ascend toward the two villages. Artillery salvos, fired all day and during the night, forced the Americans and their Andarte allies to withdraw to higher positions. The following day, the Germans reached Nea Yiannitsou and started burning the houses, but Andarte artillery answered from a mountain three miles away and the exposed Germans suffered many casualties. The Andarte guns also fired on a large German convoy, destroying several trucks and causing more losses. The Germans retreated toward Lamia and made no further attempt to molest this particular area.



Operation 'Kreuzotter' raged for 13 days, until August 18, when the last of the German forces completed their withdrawal back into the cities. The destruction in the areas overrun by them was enormous. Many civilians were murdered — tortured, burned, shot, bayoneted — and more than 40 villages were left in ruins. Thousands of civilians fled to the hills. Several hundred came to Papas where the Americans fed and sheltered them for five days. Food supplies were meagre but scant provisions were obtained from other areas.

Dr Robert Moyers, the chief of the AMM hospital, was assigned by Major Mulgan to coordinate relief for the entire area devastated by the German drive. This meant clothing, feeding and housing some 100,000 people and trying to control the inevitable epidemics that would follow. The challenge he faced involved medical problems, water supply, waste disposal, constructing latrines and a thousand other problems.

Operation No. 5

Soon after 'Kreuzotter', Giannaris received a message from Mulgan asking him to come to the latter's headquarters at Palia Yiannitsou. Upon arrival he was told: 'I have news from your people. They are questioning reports about all these successful missions with no casualties. An American colonel will be visiting you.' Giannaris was stunned that they would question him, and angry. The visitor was Colonel Paul E. West, until a short time before Operations Officer at OSS Middle East Headquarters in Cairo, and recently appointed Chief American Liaison Officer in Greece. He came accompanied by Captain Blanas, the commander of all OGs in Greece. West read Giannaris off: 'Your men look sloppy, unshaven, beards, long hair. All these missions. No one wounded, no one killed. How do we know you performed as reported?' Giannaris, incensed inside, invited West to go on a mission to see for himself.

Giannaris consulted Mulgan and learned a train was expected. Accompanied by Sergeants Bernard Brady and Stephanos Philippides, he headed out on a reconnaissance east of Papas. The proposed target was the railway line two miles north of Dereli Station in the 'five-mile area'. Upon his return he briefed his men and West and Blanas.

At noon on August 20, accompanied by West and Blanas, the group moved out and arrived at Kaitsa Kalivas at 3.30 p.m. An advance party moved out to check on German

In mid-August, OG II received an inspection visit by Colonel Paul E. West, the Chief American Liaison Officer in Greece, pictured here (right) with his Andarte guide. West was puzzled by the fact that Giannaris' group had accomplished four operations without suffering any casualties, and wanted to see for himself, so he accompanied the group on its next mission. West had previously been head of Special Operations at OSS Middle East Headquarters in Cairo, had only recently parachuted into Greece and had little real experience in guerrilla warfare, so Giannaris made sure that he himself stayed in command of the operation. (The Chief American Liaison Officer was also the deputy head of the Allied Military Mission, and West was the third American holding this position after Captain Winston Ehgott (September-December 1943) and Major Gerald K. Wines (December 1943-June 1944). The head of the AMM was always a British officer.)



SPIRO MELETZIS



KATHERINE BLANAS

movements that might interfere with the operation and was later joined at the final assembly area by the main group. The OG moved into attack position, 15 yards from the railway tracks, one hour before midnight. A demolition party placed charges and then moved back to join the bazooka and BAR teams.

Shortly after, a train approached from the south loaded with supplies and soldiers. As the engine detonated the charges, the bazooka men fired their rockets into the boiler of the locomotive and tremendous explosions rocked the earth. This was the signal for the entire party, including West and Blanas, to open fire. German soldiers returned fire from cars just behind the engine but were silenced by the bazookas, BAR and other weapons. The train had been brought to a halt; five boxcars were destroyed and at least six others derailed and overturned over an embankment. After about 15 minutes of intense firing, the OG departed with the train in flames. At the rendezvous point, as he did after every action, Giannaris pulled out a bottle of the local 'white lightning' and each man had a drink. When it came his turn, West offered a toast to a mission well planned and well executed.

The action of August 20 had an aftermath that later raised quite a few eyebrows among the members of OG II: both Colonel West and Captain Blanas received medals for their participation in this action, West a Bronze

Star and Blanas a Silver Star. The recommendation for West's medal claimed he did 'personally lead the four or five men of his party in an attack on the train and the enemy defending it. Colonel West was intent upon wiping out every part of the enemy resistance and with this thought in mind he and his men charged the train. Unfortunately none of our other attacking parties were able to move ahead at the same time so he and his men were forced to do the job alone.'

Strangely enough, West's recommendation, dated November 10, 1944 (almost three months after the event), was signed by Robert Moyers, the AMM hospital commander, who had not been present at the action but nonetheless claimed he had witnessed it in person. It was endorsed by Colonel Harry Aldrich, Chief of OSS/Cairo, with a recommendation that West be awarded the Silver Star. The draft citation stated that West 'gave orders to a bazooka team to disable the locomotive when it reached an exposed point' and that 'none of the other American troops were in a position to accompany Colonel West's party when they went forward'. However, none of these actions convinced superior officers that West merited the Silver Star and he was awarded the Bronze Star instead.

Giannaris thought the matter both laughable and infuriating. After his evacuation from Greece, while hospitalised at Bari, a visiting officer asked him to clarify the confusion about the mission with West because

Also going on this operation was Captain Frank T. Blanas, the officer in command of all the Operational Groups inside Greece. He had already met with OG II when they first landed at Parga Cove on the night of June 17/18.

they had three conflicting reports about the leadership of the operation. In one, he (Giannaris) had led the operation; in another West, and in a third Blanas. According to Giannaris, the matter was clear: after his reconnaissance, he had briefed his men and West and asked the latter: 'Are you going to accompany us as a fighting man, an observer or as the commander?' 'A fighting man', answered West. Giannaris told him: 'You will take orders from me, and I will give you your assignment on this mission.'

Captain Blanas was awarded the Silver Star on January 15, 1946, the citation stating that he 'and another officer advanced and killed the locomotive crew with small-arms fire' and had been 'the last to withdraw from this operation'. However, his award rankled less with the members of OG II because it was not just for the action of August 20 but also for Blanas' overall leadership of the eight Operational Groups in Greece. He was behind enemy lines a total of 137 days, made many extremely arduous trips on foot through the rugged mountains, and in addition to the action with OG II participated in another operation with OG VI.



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

To guard and protect the vital railway line, the Germans built numerous bunkers and pillboxes along its entire stretch. This one still stands in the area south of the Gorgopotamos Viaduct, the area where OG II carried out two of its operations, Nos. 2 and 14.



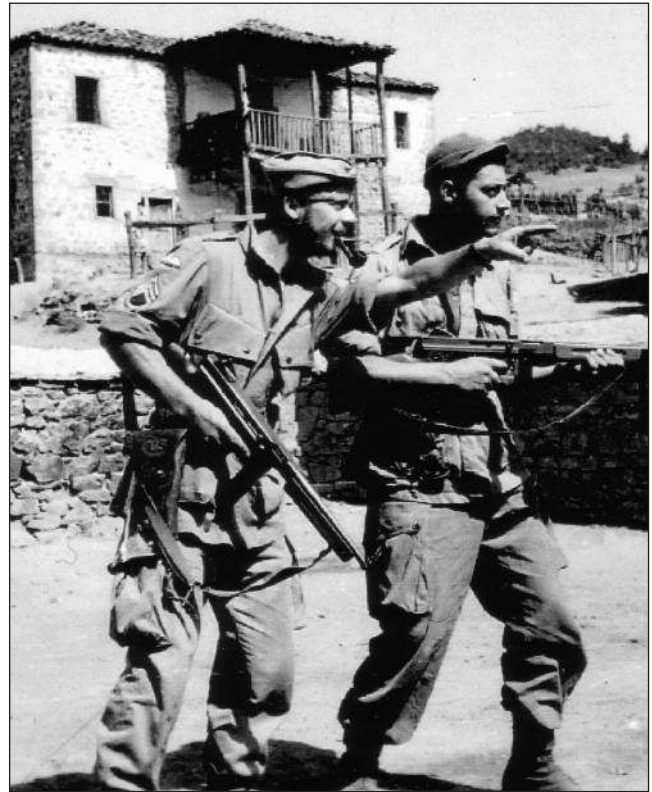
ROBERT E. PERDUE

This one, based on an old Turkish fortification, survives near Loutra Kaitzas, at the northern end of the so-called 'five-mile area', where the line turns from almost due north to almost due east. This is the area where Operation No. 11 took place.



JAMES CHIMBIDIS

Left: Most of the pictures of OG II were taken on or near the Papas village square. During a leisure moment, three of the OG II Tommy-gunners pose with Papas children (L-R): Corporal Hercules Sembrakis, Tech/5 George Tiniakos and Tech/5 Alekos Orkoulas. *Right:* The same photographer then snapshot Staff



JAMES CHIMBIDIS

Sergeant George Kypriotis and Sergeant Peter Moshopoulos taking up an action pose with their Thompsons. All OG personnel wore US paratrooper's combat uniforms — the 1942-pattern khaki jacket with the typical sloping breast pockets and trousers with expandable thigh pockets — and jump boots.

Operation No. 6

The next mission was planned for a site along the railway near Kournovon, about 20 miles south-east of Papas and due south of Dereli. A four-man reconnaissance party checked out the area on August 25 and returned to Papas the following day. The target was a German-garrisoned strongpoint protected by a 105mm howitzer, several mortars and heavy machine guns. The surrounding area was heavily patrolled. The mission was set up and commanded by British Major

Pat Wingate, RE, one of the British Liaison Officers in Area 3 (he had parachuted into Greece in May 1943).

On August 27, Wingate set out with five Americans under Staff Sergeant Michael Kountouris, an RSR mortar crew and a supporting group of Andartes. They moved into position and dug in on the heights overlooking the target 600 to 800 yards away. Just before dusk a German troop train came into view and the party held fire until it was within range. Then, all the OG, the RSR unit

and the Andartes opened fire with all weapons, including more than 140 rounds of 3-inch mortar shells, along the length of the train. The Germans were caught completely off guard and abandoned the train for cover before they returned fire. As the attackers withdrew, the Germans opened up with all weapons at their disposal, including the howitzer, and sent a large patrol up the heights in an attempt to drive the attacking party from their positions. The latter got away without casualties.



KATHERINE BLANAS

Left: Here Giannaris sits on one of the mules surrounded by his men. Note that he is wearing the British parachute wing above his right-hand breast pocket, evidence that he has been to a British parachute school, either the one at Haifa in



DONALD J. EVANS

Palestine or Brindisi in Italy. *Right:* The house with the balcony veranda stood on the slope just to the right of the village school. Today a more-modern replacement stands on the site.

Right: Nine members of OG II posing for a group shot on the village square at Papas. Standing (L-R): a Greek Andarte, George Tiniakos, Gus Palans, Theodore Markidis, Peter Moshopoulos and Hercules Sembrakis. Front row: James Apostolopoulos, Michael Kountouris, Bernard Brady, Christ Skiriotis and Alex Orkoulas. Skiriotis would be awarded the Bronze Star for his action during Operation No. 13 on the night of October 6/7, when he moved forward and silenced the automatic weapons of an enemy patrol with a long burst from his Thompson sub-machine gun.



JAMES CHIMBIDIS

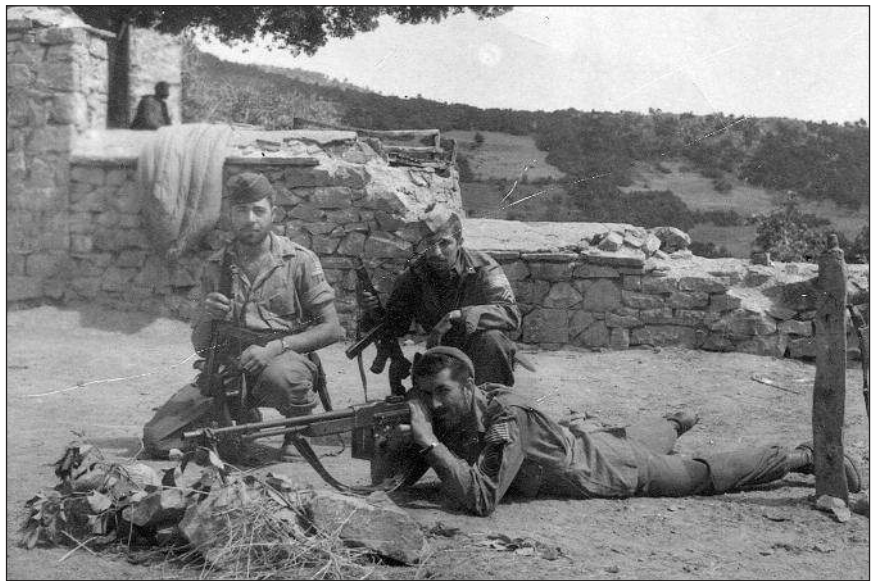
Operation No. 7

On August 30-31, the target was the railway about two miles north of Dereli Station. The assaulting party included all of OG II and the RSR mortar crew. But this time, the goal was not to just destroy a stretch of track but to fire from dug-in positions on the slopes above on the repair crew that would show up the following day. During this attack explosives placed at intervals along the railway destroyed 2,000 yards of track. The repair train arrived the next morning at 9 a.m. and 25 mortar shells were lobbed on the workers as they began mending the damage.

The assaulting team drew fire from a German pillbox 1,000 yards from their dug-in positions, which they returned with 40 mortar rounds. Next on the scene was the German armoured train from Dereli Station which opened fire with an 88mm gun, a mortar and a heavy machine gun, and dispatched patrols to clear the heights. The OG and RSR withdrew and returned to base. The line was shut down for 62 hours.

Operation No. 8

During the night of September 2/3, OG II with 12 RSR men again hit the railway north of Dereli Station in the 'five-mile area'. This raid too had been organised by Major Wingate. With left and right flank security teams in place, demolition teams placed 400 pounds of explosives along a 2,000-yard stretch of track. The tracks were completely destroyed along with several telegraph poles. This large demolition necessitated the movement of workmen from other areas, removing rails from other lines to repair the tracks, and also large concentrations of troops to protect the repair party, who worked continuously. The attack closed the line for several days because attacks from 'Borealis', another SOE circuit further north, held up the repair train. RSR mortars stood by to shoot up the repair party when it finally showed up.



KATHERINE BLANAS

Technical Sergeant Brady, an Irish-American and the only non-Greek speaker in OG II, demonstrates the use of the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), of which the group had two, with Tech/5s Markidis and Palans brandishing their Thompsons in a protective role. Note the sleeping bag on the terrace wall behind.

Operation No. 9

In early September OG II was joined by Captain Robert Ford, a Cavalry officer with OSS Special Operations. He had arrived in Greece in September 1943, assigned to work with the Andarte cavalry, then equipped with about 30 small Greek ponies. After a failed effort to sabotage the Larissa airfield, he had been sent with Major Mulgan to Mount Othris to organise another band of cavalry. After three months, Ford was convinced these Andartes were not inclined to do any fighting, and after several other adventures, he came to Area 3 and joined OG II. Being superior in rank to Giannaris, he would command OG II and the RSR section during its next two operations.

Operation 'Noah's Ark' began officially on September 4 (other sources say September 8) with OG II and the RSR mortar section concentrating on the railway and the two RSR machine-gun sections concentrating on the Lamia-Domokos highway. Prior to this time, there had been little if any action by the Allies against the Germans between Athens and Lamia and they had been relatively free to move along the railway and highway. However, with the Germans having begun a wholesale withdrawal, there was



ROBERT E. PERDUE

After the war, the low stone balustrade lining the village square with its small coffee-house terrace at its eastern end was redeveloped and modernised. However, the large tree remains.



Left: From the village square the men of OG II could look down into the Sperchios river valley. The Athens to Thessaloniki railway, the target of most of their attacks, runs



Right: Tech/5 Tiniakos posing with his Tommy gun. Note the American flag on his left shoulder.

now a large concentration of their troops and vehicles in and near Lamia and their first serious challenge would be their retreat through the Sperchios valley and over the mountains immediately north of the city. This was a challenge for OG II for, with this concentration of force near Lamia, the Germans now also had more troops to man posts and conduct patrols through the mountains and respond aggressively when attacked.

At mid-day on September 6, four members of OG II under Staff Sergeant George Kypriotis moved out to the railway intent on placing explosives under the rails at two points. After dark the men arrived at the designated areas and began placing demolitions but were discovered by a German patrol and had no choice but to abandon the operation. While the mission was not accomplished, it succeeded in focusing German attention on this area for the remainder of the night, enabling Allied sabotage efforts elsewhere along the railway to proceed without interference.

By this time, OG II had completed nine operations without casualties. One day after lunch in the Papas schoolhouse and in the presence of all members of the Group, Sergeant Brady asked, 'Permission to speak to the Commanding Officer?' Giannaris responded, 'Permission granted Sergeant.' Brady stood up: 'I have been selected by the men to tell you that when we were in training you were elected the officer to be shot in the back in combat. But, now that we are here and have gone on all these missions — no one wounded, no one killed — we want to thank you for the way you conducted operations.' Giannaris later commented: 'That compliment was the best medal for me.'

One morning, much to Giannaris' surprise, a stranger appeared in Papas and asked for his son. He was the father of Tech/5 Marthiakes, then on his back in the schoolhouse suffering from malaria. Marthiakes originated from Galaxidi, near Delphi, and his father had walked three days to reach him. Marthiakes Jr. must have somehow got word to his father of his whereabouts in Greece and most likely had provided a document or password that enabled him to pass the many Andarte checkpoints along the way.

Operation No. 10

Early morning, September 8, Captain Ford and Tech/5 Angelo Kaleyias (one of the medics) left Papas to reconnoitre the target for the day, a heavily guarded part of the rail line two miles south of Dereli. Giannaris, accompanied by his men, followed at 11 a.m. Their objective was to blow the rails and distract the Germans from another attack north of this point by Andartes who would



Sergeant Brady on a mule with a belt of ammunition draped like a necklace.



The distinctive shape of the mountain plateau on the left forms the link between then and now.

Right: It was on the night of September 8/9, during Operation No. 10, that OG II suffered its first and only casualties, when Tech/5 Michalis Tsirmulas was killed by a burst from a German machine gun and Lieutenant Giannaris was severely wounded by a land mine as he crawled to Tsirmulas' aid. Corporal Louis Lenares (here pictured at Papas) silenced the machine gun that had killed Tsirmulas with his Thompson, enabling the group to escape. However, Giannaris was left behind and was only recovered 36 hours later, seriously weakened from loss of blood and a near-fatal wound in his buttocks.

also blow a substantial length of rail line. The point of attack was near the Dereli Station, with its heavily defended perimeter. There was a pillbox 250 yards to the left and a German barracks 250 yards to the right.

After Ford and Kaleyias had scouted out the target, they joined the main group at a pre-arranged assembly site from which they would move in on the tracks after dark. As the full OG began moving downhill toward the target, an enemy machine gun opened fire and hit Tech/5 Michalis Tsirmulas with a full burst. Up went flares and other German machine guns opened up. Giannaris ordered withdrawal and then crept forward to check on Tsirmulas. He was dead. As Giannaris moved a few feet, he set off a land mine that gravely wounded him in his legs, buttocks and left arm.

The rest of the group was pinned down by a machine gun to their immediate front. Corporal Louis Lenares stood up and, fully exposed, opened fire and silenced the gun, permitting the team to withdraw to safer positions and then to Papas. They all thought Giannaris had been killed or captured, so did not send anyone out to look for him.

However, the lieutenant was still alive. Bleeding profusely, Giannaris dragged himself behind a large boulder to take cover from the hail of bullets. From his handkerchief and undershirt he made tourniquets for both his legs and left arm. When it was quiet, he crawled slowly all night to the crest of the hill where after daylight (September 9) he observed a German patrol, which fortunately turned away when about 50 yards distant. He continued struggling down the other side of the hill until he found a small grass kaliva and crawled in. Weak and exhausted from the hot sun, he was afraid of falling asleep, so he removed the infantry symbol attached to his collar and began pricking his skin to keep awake. Late that day he was discovered, nearly unconscious, by two young shepherd girls who formed a makeshift stretcher and carried him to the hamlet of Pteri where he was briefly attended to by a Greek doctor. A message to Papas brought two of his men, Corporal Hercules Sembrakis and Tech/5 George Tiniakos, who carried him to Palia Yiannitsou, where he arrived in the evening of the 10th. Tech/5 Spiros Taflambas, one of the OG II medics, cleaned Giannaris' wounds with green soap and sprinkled them with sulfa powder.

News of the lieutenant's discovery had preceded his arrival and early on the 9th, Doctor Moyers, then at his AMM hospital at Domiani, was advised by telephone of Giannaris' injuries and told he was needed immediately at Palia Yiannitsou. Mounting their horses, Moyers and his assistant, Technical Sergeant Robert C. DeWeese, immediately set out and after an eight-hour ride, arrived there at 2200 hours. When Giannaris was finally brought in, they found he had severe multiple splinter wounds in both legs and the gluteal regions plus a single tunnel wound of the left forearm. The most severe situation was a large wound which had completely obliterated his anus. All of the wounds were grossly contaminated.



KATHERINE BLANAS

Moyers and DeWeese gave him plasma and cleaned up the wounds under morphia and local anaesthetic but they doubted whether he would survive either an operation or transport to the Mission's airstrip for evacuation. They sent urgent messages to Cairo explaining the situation and asking for a special aircraft if the lieutenant lived for a day or two. Meanwhile, they took both the day and night in shifts beside the patient.

A clandestine airfield existed at Neraida, a summer resort about 25 miles north-west of Palia Yiannitsou. Situated about 4,100 feet above sea level, it overlooked a vast plateau half a mile wide and a mile and a half long. The plateau had already served as a parachute dropping area for supplies and personnel, but in July 1943, at the request of Cairo HQ, it was turned into an airstrip. Work began on July 8, Captain Denys Hamson, one of the senior British Liaison Officers, enlisting a force of 700 locals to fill in streams and ditches and remove trees and shrubs and other obstructions, and the strip, camouflaged against observation from the air by clumps of young fir trees set into the earth,

was ready on August 4. Code-named 'Featherbed', it received its first aircraft, an RAF Dakota, a week later.

On September 12, Moyers received word that a special aircraft would fly in to Neraida on the 15th. That afternoon, all of the OG came to Palia Yiannitsou to see their wounded lieutenant. Moyers found them completely demoralised at the loss of their commanding officer and the death of a comrade and, quite disgusted with their attitude, felt forced to read them the riot act to restore order and discipline. Giannaris himself, unaware of his critical situation, remained in good spirits.

The following morning, September 13, practically the entire male population of Papas turned up to help the OG transport Giannaris in a four-hour trek to a road junction outside Leondari, at the edge of the Thessaly Plain, the patient being carried on a litter under the medical care of DeWeese and Taflambas. From there, a truck made available by Andarte HQ brought him and the two sergeant medics to the Neraida airstrip, where they arrived on the 15th. Giannaris was put on his stretcher in a round tent of parachute to await his evacuation by air.

However, rain began to fall which continued all through the next day, preventing any aircraft from coming in. Moyers, DeWeese and Taflambas took turns caring for the patient in their heavily leaking shelter, seriously worried over his steadily worsening condition. By early morning, September 17, Giannaris was getting delirious, alternating fervent prayers in Greek with equally fervent oaths against the Germans. A few hours later, he developed a severe haemorrhage in his rectum, which Moyers, in desperation, could only stop by running a sponge completely up the rectum and holding it there. Giannaris lost consciousness, but a heart stimulant revived him. For lack of transfusion apparatus, they restored his blood volume by feeding him cups of tea every ten minutes. Moyers sent a message saying the patient could only last 12 hours and an aircraft must come at once.



SPYRO MELETZIS

It was Dr Robert Moyers, chief of the Allied Military Mission hospital at Domiani, who saved Giannaris' life, keeping him alive for ten days until he could be evacuated out of Greece.

Right: Brought to the secret airfield at Neraida, 25 miles north-west of Papas, Giannaris was finally flown out of Greece by Flight Officer Norman Attenborrow of the Special Duties Squadron from Brindisi in Italy. Most flights into Neraida were at night, but Attenborrow, who had volunteered for the mission, flew in during daylight in order to rescue Giannaris who was judged to have no more than 12 hours to live without better medical attention. The Neraida airstrip was code-named 'Featherbed' and flights to it were known as 'Feather' missions, Attenborrow's flight being 'Feather 30'. This picture of a Fairchild Argus at Neraida was taken during another mission.

They waited throughout the night and following morning. Finally, at 1530 hours on the 18th, a Lysander flown by British Flight Officer Norman Attenborrow (who had volunteered for the mission) descended through a small opening in the rainstorm clouds and circled in for a perfect landing. Giannaris was loaded aboard, with DeWeese squeezing beneath him to support him with one hand while controlling the haemorrhage with the other, and the aircraft took off again, returning to Italy escorted by three Spitfires. It was ten days since Giannaris had been wounded and it was a miracle that Moyers and his medics had managed to keep him alive all that time.

Upon landing at Brindisi, the Lysander was met by an ambulance and medical crew. Giannaris was taken first to a British field ambulance in town and three days later to the US 26th Army General Hospital in Bari from where he was subsequently evacuated to the United States. (For his role in saving Giannaris' life, Sergeant DeWeese was awarded the Bronze Star).



CHRIS JECCHINIS

Operation No. 11

With Giannaris gone, and Captain Ford departed elsewhere, Sergeant Brady assumed temporary command of OG II. Though he did not speak Greek, he was very highly thought of by the men. For the next two operations, the reconnaissance was carried out by Major Mulgan and Sergeants Brady and Philippides.

On September 10, the group moved to Dranista, eight miles north of Papas, where they were met by the RSR mortar section. Late in the day the combined force moved to a point on the heights overlooking the railway where they bedded down for the night. At 4 a.m. on the 11th they moved to forward positions and dug in directly above a railway station where all trains stopped. German troops were barracked there and there was a large pillbox.

The day was quiet, but patience was rewarded when at 6 p.m. a German supply and troop train arrived and stopped. More than 100 mortar shells were lobbed over the length of the train until all the cars were in flames. At least 100 Germans were killed or wounded. The OG and RSR unit began their retreat under intense enemy fire from machine guns, mortars, and 20mm guns, and soon more than 400 Germans were swarming the heights firing at the retreating force.

Despite their several attacks since the start of Operation 'Noah's Ark' (now 'Smash'em'), the Allies were unable to keep the railway line completely closed. It was open for a few hours on September 10 until late afternoon the following day, with two German troop trains passing north on each day. The attack of the 11th again blocked the line until late on the 15th. Three German trains were able to move north before the line was blown again at three places during the night of September 16/17 (by groups other than OG II) and there was no traffic on the 17th. By now, the Allies had switched to a policy of damaging the line only to the extent it would be effective in slowing the German withdrawal but with no major demolitions that might hinder the Allies' future use of the railway.

As for the main road, Mulgan estimated 150 enemy trucks had been damaged with mines and machine-gun fire during the first week of Operation 'Smash'em' in addition to damage from air raids. There were no convoys on the road on the 14th or 15th.

Operation No. 12

On September 18, a combined force of OG II, RSR men and Andartes set out to destroy a length of railway track near Kaitsa in broad daylight. They divided into three groups, one for security on each flank, and a demolition party that set more than 400 pounds of explosives along a mile of track. The security parties remained in place until all demoli-

tions exploded. Major Mulgan, assisted by Tech/5 Gus Palans, also destroyed a large culvert passing underneath the tracks. The Allies returned to Papas the following morning. (Palans was awarded the Silver Star for this action).

After Giannaris was wounded, Colonel West ordered Lieutenant Nicholas Pappas to take over command of OG II. He had been second-in-command of OG III at Deskati (code-named 'Lapworth'), about 35 miles north-west of Larissa and came to Papas on foot where he arrived on September 25. By this time, the entire group was totally exhausted, men were sick and rundown, and had to be withdrawn for ten days. By October 1, arrangements had been made to evacuate five sick men by air.



JAMES CHIMBIDIS

Some OG II members accompanied Giannaris part of the way to Neraida and they were pictured at Karditsa, 20 miles north-west of Papas, probably on the return trip. Top row (L-R) Corporal Sembrakis and Tech/5 Skiriotis standing between two Andarte fighters. Front row: Staff Sergeant Kypriotis and Sergeant Moshopoulos. The inscription on the wall under the KKE (Greek Communist Party) symbol reads: 'A woman should have equal rights next to her man. Support the People's Democracy'.



NICHOLAS PAPPAS

With Giannaris gone, 1st Lieutenant Nick Pappas was ordered to take over command of OG II. Pappas was at that moment serving as second-in-command of OG III at Deskati, some 70 miles to the north-west, and it took him 16 days to reach Papas. Arriving on September 25, he would command the group's final two operations. (Note that Pappas has British parachute wings above his right pocket and the American jump wings with ribbons above his left pocket.)



Left: More snapshots taken on the village square. The heavy beards grown by the men make identification difficult. These are George Kypriotis, Steve Marthiakes, unidentified, and Gus Palans.



Right: Kountouris, Brady and Markidis. The narrow faces and slender stature of Kountouris and Brady are tell-tale signs of the group's exhausting missions with less than an ideal ration supply.

More in general, the German wholesale retreat, with movements in large formations, made it increasingly difficult for liaison officers, OGs and RSR to perform any substantial sabotage, and withdrawal of the OGs was under discussion with the British. Colonel Livermore, commander of the 2677th Regiment OSS, was also pressing AFHQ to force a speedy withdrawal of the OGs from Greece after the German evacuation.

Shortly after Lieutenant Pappas assumed command, two surprise visitors came to Papas from Macedonia: the father and 17-year-old sister of one of the members of OG II. The girl was introduced to all the men and it seems the father was looking for a husband for his daughter. He even made a pitch to Pappas.

Operation No. 13

In early October, accompanied by Colonel West as observer, a British SOE major and a team of Andarte demolition experts, OG II set out to attack the German armoured train that dropped patrols along the railway line at dusk. (According to Pappas, because of West's lack of experience, it was agreed he would be just one of the troops and Pappas would be in command.)

The target area was on the Thessaly Plain about 1,000 yards north of Neo Monastirion — flat and open countryside without any cover or concealment. German pillboxes were to the left and right, 500 yards on one flank and 1,000 yards on the other. The Andartes were divided into two groups, each with 200 pounds of explosives, to be laid along the track at 2,000-yard intervals. OG II was to approach the track at a different position and set additional charges. When the explosives under the train were blown, all weapons would be fired and the other demolition groups would blow the rails.

The OG assault party moved out in ox-drawn farmer's carts at 1 p.m. on October 6 from Leondari, about ten miles from Neo Monastirion, where it had bivouacked. Each cart carried several men (one including Colonel West) covered with straw and guided by a Greek peasant. The carts separated at 6.30 p.m. as they neared the forward assembly area at Neo Monastirion, moving into positions selected by the reconnaissance party 200 yards from the tracks after dark. A BAR team was positioned on each flank.

A five-man demolition party moved forward with two Tommy-gunners as protection. As the party reached the track, an enemy patrol opened fire from 20 yards away

and flares lit up the sky. The BARs returned fire and, in turn, drew fire from the German pillboxes all along the OG front. The demolition party was pinned down and was able to withdraw only when Tech/5 Christ Skiriotis crept to within ten yards of the enemy patrol and silenced them with a long burst from his Thompson. The fight lasted 30 minutes, but Skiriotis' action permitted the remainder of his party to withdraw safely (he was awarded the Bronze Star).

The entire OG withdrew safely, walked all night, and reached the rear assembly area at dawn on the 7th. Although the operation did not succeed as planned, the effort distracted the Germans from the actions of the Andarte demolition parties elsewhere, which were successful.

Operation No. 14

On October 10, OG II left Papas for an area south of the Sperchios valley where the Germans were in the final stage of evacuation. They were to help Andarte units harass the German rearguard, hasten their departure, and prevent their destruction of bridges, railway tracks and other communications. During a two-day march, the OG passed within 300 yards of enemy defence positions. They arrived at Iposti after an all-



Left: The men used a pool created by a mountain spring near the village to wash and bathe. **Right:** The well is still there.





LORNA TUCK COLBERT

With the last of the German troops having fled from Greece and British forces having landed in the south, Operation 'Noah's Ark' came to an end. Their mission accomplished, OG II came out of the mountains and made their way to the city of Lamia where this last group shot was taken on October 24. By then, six of the 22 remaining men had been incapacitated by malaria and evacuated, hence there are only 16

in the shot. Rear row (L-R): Spiros Taflambas, Costas Theodorou, James Zonas, Lieutenant Nick Pappas, a British war correspondent, Bernard Brady, Gus Palans, and George Tiniakos. Front row (kneeling, L-R): Peter Moshopoulos, George Kypriotes, unidentified, Theodore Markidis, Stephanos Philippides, Louis Lenares, Hercules Sembrakis, Michael Kontouris and Christ Skiriotis.

day trek to find the Germans had shelled the town. Although near exhaustion, they continued on for 90 minutes to a secure spot in the mountains — a fortunate move as German troops occupied the town early the following morning.

The group marched all through another day and reached Paviliani where they overnited. They then moved to Kournaritsi, less than 3,000 yards from the railway line, a town the Germans were expected to

shell and occupy at any time. They observed enemy movements and consulted the local Andartes who agreed to concentrate on Germans moving on the road, while the OG attacked the railway.

The following day Lieutenant Pappas with a recon party located a suitable position to set up for an attack, while the Andartes and other members of the OG occupied defensive positions from where they could observe German artillery protecting the road and railway. The OG saw Allied aircraft bombing and strafing in the vicinity and then two B-24s bombed two bridges just 4,000 yards from their position.

There was little more the OG could accomplish as the Germans were now destroying all railway facilities between Athens and Lamia. They personally witnessed three of the largest railway bridges in Greece — the Gorgopotamos, Asopos and Papadia viaducts — being blown up before their eyes. OG II returned to Pappas on October 20.

They had come to the end of their stay in Greece. British troops had already landed in the Peloponnese during the night of October 3/4 and by October 18, Lieutenant-General Ronald Scobie, the British commander, had set up his headquarters in Athens (see *After the Battle* No. 155).

On October 21, the day after they returned from their last mission, the men of OG II took leave of Pappas and moved with their supplies, first to Platistomo and then to Lamia on the 22nd. Along the road, through blackened villages, people came out to offer them drinks and sweet cakes and hang flowers on their mule saddles. People were happy and Greece was free. On the 26th, after four days of rest and preparing for evacuation, they moved south to Levadhia by motor transport.

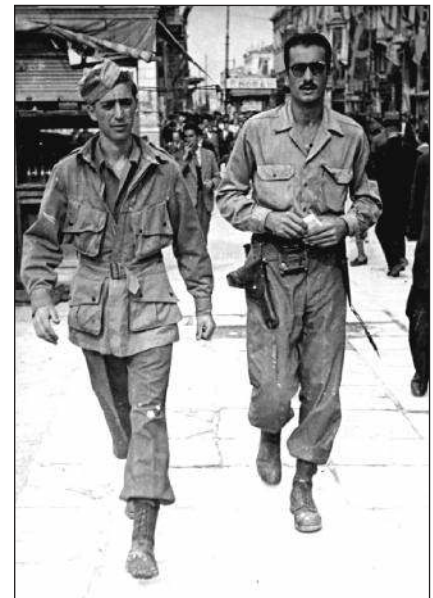
The following evening they arrived at the Excelsior Hotel in Athens, and then on the 28th moved to a transit camp on the outskirts. They spent the 29th sight-seeing the

city, visiting the Acropolis and taking in the night clubs. However, bullets were already flying between the British and the EAM/ELAS communists and the British wanted the Americans out in a hurry. At 12.30 p.m. on October 30, Operational Group II departed from Kalamaka Airport for Bari in Italy. On arrival, they were transported to nearby Camp Kallitsas where they were joined by members of the other OGs evacuated from Greece.



JAMES CHIMBIDIS

Time to say farewell to fellow warriors. Lenares (standing at left) and Sembrakis and Theodorou (seated on the curb) with Greek Andartes under the KKE emblem, probably in Lamia.



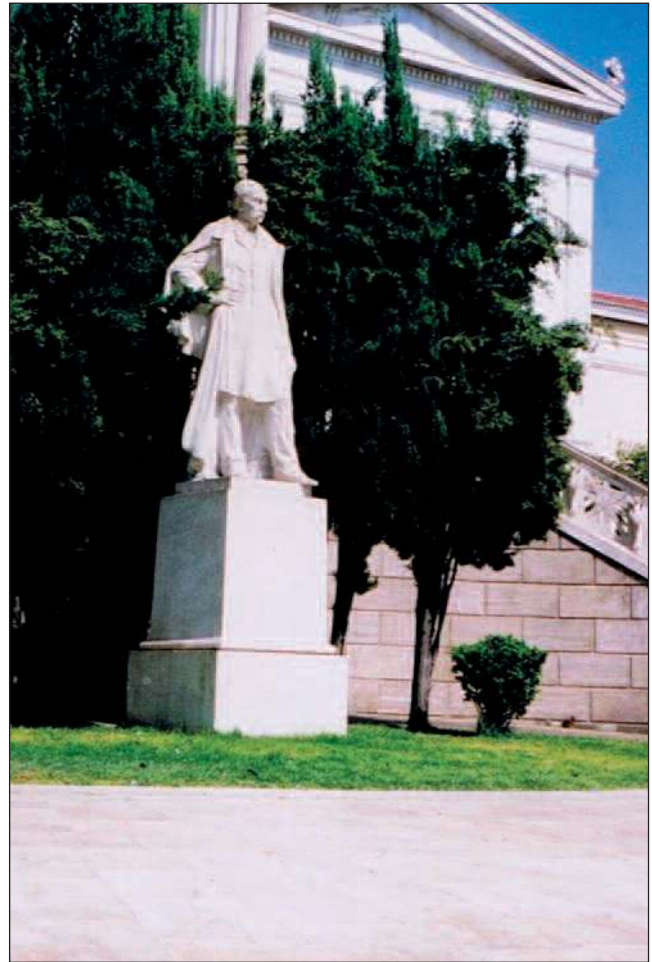
FREDA PALANS-ANDREW

From Lamia, the group made their way south to Athens, where they arrived on October 28. Here, Tech/5 Palans (left) and Staff Sergeant Philippides walk the streets of the Greek capital.



JAMES CHIMBIDIS

Left: Sergeants Philippides, Brady and Kontouris pose in front of the National Library on Panapimistiou Street. OG II was the only group to reach Athens from which they were promptly



ROBERT E. PERDUE

flown out to Italy. Right: The men are gone but the statue of Panagis Vallianos, the 'father of modern Greek shipping' (1814-1902) stands unaltered.

During their 134 days in Greece and 14 operations, the group had done remarkably well. They were credited with attacking five trains and destroying three locomotives, 31 boxcars, 7,400 yards of rail, a 20-foot culvert, 40 telegraph poles and six trucks, and the killing or wounding of 675 Germans against a loss of one enlisted man killed and one officer wounded. In addition to this devastation, their actions had created bottlenecks behind which German troops and equipment backed up, making ideal targets for tactical aircraft which took a heavy toll.

In part, their effectiveness was due to their location in a 'hot spot', the first point where German troops attempting to evacuate Greece met any serious resistance. They owed much of their success to Major John Mulgan whose leadership of Area 3 was outstanding. During most of their operations they had been assisted by Andartes as fighters, guides or muleteers. During seven operations they had had the assistance of an RSR section.

AFTER GREECE

Immediately after they arrived in Bari, all the Greek OGs were disbanded. While still there, the men were evaluated to determine if they were still needed by the OSS or

Right: After Greece, ten members of the OGs, including five from OG II, volunteered for a mission to Norway with a Special Operational Group of Norwegian-Americans in Scotland under Lieutenant Roger Hall. Here the so-called 'Norgreeks' take a break during training in the highlands of Scotland. The tall soldier is 1st Sergeant Theophanes Strimenos who had been with OG VI.

should be 'returned to the Army' and assigned to other units. All were qualified paratroopers and most were assigned to airborne divisions. They were first moved to the 24th Replacement Depot at De Sopra, between Rome and Florence, where they arrived on Christmas Eve, and stayed for several weeks. From Italy they were moved by ship to Marseille in southern France and then by truck to Auxerre, where many joined

the 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 13th Airborne Division.

Some men went to other airborne units. Nicholas Pappas joined the 507th Parachute Infantry of the 17th Airborne Division, and jumped as a company commander in Operation 'Varsity', the airborne operation across the Rhine near Wesel in March 1945. Peter Moshopoulos, John Tsouderos and George Tiniakos joined the 82nd Airborne Division.



ROGER HALL



FREDA PALANS-ANDREW



FREDA PALANS-ANDREW

Left: General William J. Donovan, head of the OSS, awards the Silver Star to Corporal Gus Palans for his role in the destruction of a railway culvert during Operation No. 12 on the

night of September 18/19, 1944. The ceremony was held in Washington, DC, on August 24, 1945. Right: Palans after the award ceremony.

While the men were at Auxerre, an OSS Jedburgh officer, Major John Olmsted, visited the camp, seeking volunteers for a mission in Norway. Among the ten who volunteered were five former OG II members: Bernard Brady, Demetrius Frangas, Michael Kountouris, Steve Marthiakes and Gus Palans. After parachute training jumps at Ringway airfield near Manchester, they were transported to Dalnaglar Castle outside the village of Blairgowrie, near Perth in the Scottish highlands, where they teamed up with a Norwegian OG, originally ski troops from Colorado, under Lieutenant Roger W. Hall. Unofficially christened the Norgreek Group, the force trained hard but the war in Europe ended before they could be deployed.

However, not all former OGs went to the airborne divisions. Captains Frank Blanas, formerly CO of all OGs in Greece, and George Verghis, who had commanded OG I, joined Company D of the 2677th Regiment OSS, operating with the US Fifth Army in Italy. With them went the two OG II medics, Spiros Taflambas and Angelo Kaleyias. One man, Stephanos Philippides, who spoke good English, was selected for service with the OSS in China, being assigned to Kunming where he served from March to December



ANDREW SOBOCINSKI

It took place in the yard of the OSS Headquarters complex at No. 2430 East Street on Navy Hill. This was also the headquarters of the OSS successor organisation, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), until that moved to a new headquarters at Langley, Virginia, in the early 1960s. The facade seen in the background is that of the South Building. Currently the complex is described as being in use by the State Department.

1945. John Giannaris never returned to active duty. After a lengthy hospitalisation, he retired as a Captain with full disability on January 20, 1947.

In March 1998, feeling that the bravery of the Greek OGs had not been adequately acknowledged, John Giannaris — who had himself been awarded the Silver Star in 1945 — recommended to the US Army's Military Awards Branch (MAB) that each of his men receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. They had been told they would be on a near-suicide mission with at least 50 per cent casualties; that there would be no communication with units outside Greece, no supplies, no tactical support, no medical aid other than that provided by the medics, and no possibility of withdrawal, so Giannaris judged they well merited this decoration. The MAB showed itself willing to award a medal to five of OG II's men and asked Giannaris that he select them, but he replied he could not single out five and leave the others behind. Then in October 1998, the Army agreed to award each member of OG II the Bronze Star medal with 'V' Device (for special valour), sending the medals and associated certificates to Giannaris for distribution. He and Robert Perdue, the author of this article, made a lengthy effort to trace as many of the recipients, or their descendants, as could be found, and on May 18, 2008, at a ceremony in the hall of the Federation of Hellenic Societies of Greater New York at Astoria, Queens, New York, Giannaris, by then 86-year-old, presented Bronze Stars to the families of Alex Orkoulas, Peter Moshopoulos, Gus Palans, Spiros Taflambas, James Alexatos, Steve Marthiakes and George Tiniakos. Families who could not attend the ceremony received their medals through US Mail. The great and frustrating challenge had been Bernard Brady, the elusive Irishman and only non-Greek in OG II. John Giannaris (pictured left in 2009) passed away in Chicago on February 6, 2015 and is buried in Elmwood Cemetery in River Grove, Illinois.



ROBERT E. PERDUE