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**Front Cover:** Fighting in Athens in December 1944. A Sherman tank from the 46th Royal Tank Regiment and paratroopers from the 6th Parachute Battalion pictured at the intersection of Athinas and Sofokleous Streets in the centre of Athens during a foray to clean out ELAS rebels on December 18. (IWM)

**Back Cover:** The Monument of National Reconciliation in Klafthomonos Square (Square of Grief) in central Athens. Sculpted by Vassilis Doropoulos, it was erected in 1989 to commemorate the 40 years from the end of the civil war. As such, it covers the wartime First and Second Rounds and also the post-war Third Round of the conflict.

**Acknowledgements:** The Editor would like to extend his special appreciation to Kostas Alexopoulos who over the course of several years supplied us with invaluable material on the December 1944 fighting in Athens and located and matched up the wartime pictures of that battle. He thanks Gail Parker for the additional comparison photography. For further help with the story he is thankful to Jiannis Gkenidis, Ilonka Weijenberg and Hans Houterman.

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A rare photo of a group of EDES and ELAS guerrillas posing in harmony.

The causes of the civil war that ravaged Greece between 1943 and 1949 trace back to the country's political, social and economic developments in the 19th and early 20th century. The events in Athens in December 1944, which are commonly labelled the 'Second Round' of that war, and which saw British troops pitted against an attempted Communist take-over of the country, had their immediate origin in developments during the preceding three years of Axis occupation of Greece.

**PRELUDE: THE FIRST ROUND OF THE GREEK CIVIL WAR (1943-44)**

In October 1940, Fascist Italy invaded Greece from Albania. To the general surprise, the Greek Royal Army held its own and threw the invaders back. However, the Greeks' right flank was turned in late April 1941 by German troops who poured down from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and defeated both the Greeks and the Anglo-ANZAC forces sent to support them. Remnants of the defeated armies withdrew to Crete where in May they were narrowly but decisively beaten by a German airborne invasion (see *After the Battle* No. 47). King George II, Prime Minister Emmanouil Tsouderos and several other important Greek politicians went into exile to Egypt, allowing the Germans to set up a collaborationist puppet government in Athens under General Georgios Tsolakoglou.

Opposition against the Axis occupation started spontaneously and grew quickly. Bands of Greek *andartes* (guerrillas) soon sprang up and began fighting a partisan war against the foreign oppressors. By 1942 Greek resistance had developed into several rival organisations. The most important of these were:

**EAM (Ethnikon Apeleftherotikon Metopon — National Liberation Front).** Set up by the Greek Communist Party, the KKE (Kommounistikon Komma Ellados), on September 27, 1941, EAM was nominally a coalition of the KKE and five other left-wing parties, calling upon all Greeks to rally in opposition against the occupiers. Adopting a programme of national independence, democratic liberties and opposition to the Axis, it purported to be a nationwide group struggling for a free Greece. However, in reality it was just a front for the secretive and generally unpopular KKE and firmly controlled by the Communists.

**ELAS (Ethnikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos — National Popular Liberation Army).** Set up by the EAM on April 10, 1942, as its military wing it was, like the EAM, completely Communist-controlled. Although ostensibly focused on fighting the Axis, its real and final aim was to seize power over the country and set up a Communist regime under the umbrella of the Soviet Union. From its very beginning, ELAS sought to absorb or eliminate the other resistance groups. Taking over many weaker guerrilla bands by persuasion or outright threat of annihilation, its fighting strength grew rapidly from a few hundred in 1942 to 5,000 in the spring of 1943 to 50,000 by October 1944. However, many of the ELAS's rank and file had been recruited against their will or joined the organisation without realising they were fighting for a Communist cause. Originally led by a man known as Aris Veloukhiotis (real name Athanasios Klaras; nom de guerre 'Aris'), an avowed Communist, by October 1944 command of ELAS had diverted to Colonel Stefanos Saraphis ('Saraphis'), a regular army officer, with Aris as his so-called 'Kapetanios'. (All ELAS units down to company level had three leaders: a military commander (usually a former regular officer or NCO); a kapetanios (commonly the leader who had originally formed the guerrilla band), and a political commissar (always an avowed Communist). The kapetanios and political commissar were often combined in one person. The kapetanios, appointed by EAM, was effectively the unit leader since any decision taken by the military leader had to be approved by him.)

**EDES (Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Syndesmos — National Democratic Greek League).** Formed in Athens on September 9, 1941, EDES was thoroughly republican, liberal and anti-monarchist in doctrine although it did attract a few monarchist and other right-wing followers. Many of its members were former regular soldiers of the pre-war Greek Army. Led by Colonel Napoleon Zervas, its guerrilla bands had their heartland in the mountains of Epirus in north-west Greece. Soon surfacing as the main rival of the left-wing ELAS, both the Greek Government-in-exile and Britain were well-disposed towards EDES, hoping it would provide some counterweight to ELAS. From a first nucleus of about 100, and with British support, it grew to a fighting strength of some 4,000 armed fighters in March 1943 to some 12,000 by October 1944.

In December 1944, the British liberation forces in Greece found themselves involuntarily and unhappily involved in the violence and hatred of the Greek Civil War. Having landed in Greece the previous October, believing their mission would be limited to supporting the legal Greek Government in setting up its administration and to helping in relief work, they became the target of the Communist-controlled guerrilla forces of EAM/ELAS, which endeavoured to take over the country by force of arms. The fighting was mostly limited to Attica — Athens and the port of Piraeus — the British units stationed in other parts of the country managing to maintain an uneasy peace with ELAS. The small British garrison in Athens initially had a very difficult time, being cut off and surrounded in a tight perimeter in the centre of the city, besieged by superior and well-armed rebel forces. It took five weeks of brutal and bitter street-fighting against an elusive opponent, and the arrival of considerable reinforcements from overseas, before the British were able to break the siege and drive the ELAS insurgents out of the city, a final truce coming into effect on January 15, 1945. One of the epitomising pictures to come out of the December fighting in Athens was this shot taken by Lieutenant Morris of the Army Film and Photo Unit (AFPU) of three paratroopers, most likely from the 5th Parachute Battalion, lying in position behind cover on a corner in the centre of Athens on December 6. Note the KKE (Greek Communist Party) slogan on the wall above their heads.



IWM NA20615

# ATHENS, DECEMBER 1944

Both ELAS and EDES were armed and trained by the Allies. In early October 1942, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) sent in its first sabotage team to 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 supplies 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.

In the autumn of 1943, in the mistaken belief that the collapse of Fascist Italy and the Allied landings in Sicily and southern Italy foreshadowed the early liberation of Greece, the Communists decided to attempt to seize power by force before it was too late. On October 12, 1943, the 8th (Epirus) Division and other ELAS elements struck against EDES units in the mountains of Thessaly, beginning what came to be called the 'First Round' of the Greek Civil War. With a four-to-one superiority in manpower and the additional advantage of having captured large amounts of Italian arms, ammunition and equipment after the capitulation of Italy just the previous month (see *After the Battle* No. 152), ELAS achieved a good deal of success against EDES, pushing its forces back into Epirus.

The British Military Mission (by now renamed Allied Military Mission), fearing a total victory of ELAS, increased its support to EDES. The influx of arms and money enabled Zervas to mount a counter-offensive

and by February 1944 he had regained much of his territory. At the insistence of the Allied Military Mission, representatives of ELAS and EDES met at the Plaka Bridge over the Arakhtos river in Epirus to discuss a truce. The resulting Plaka Bridge Agreement, signed on February 29, provided for the establishment of well-defined zones of operation for each group in the fight against the Germans, a vow by each group to refrain

By Karel Margry

from infringing on the other's assigned territory, and a further promise that all future efforts would be directed against the Germans rather than against each other. Although it looked good on paper, the Plaka peace would prove to have only a very limited tenability.



GAIL PARKER

It was taken on the corner of Panepistimiou (now known as Eleftheriou Venizelon) and Kriezotou Street, one block north of Syndagma (Constitution) Square. The old building has been replaced by a modern office block of the ATEbank (Agricultural Bank of Greece). Comparison photography in Athens today is not made easy due to the constant streams of traffic and parked cars.



**When planning the liberation of mainland Greece, the British intended first to occupy Athens and the port of Piraeus, then establish themselves in a few vital port towns — notably Patras in the Peloponnese and Salonika in Macedonia — and from there distribute themselves over the rest of the country to help in relief and reconstruction.**

As the war went on, the resistance movement lost much of its popularity with the Greek population. The brutal reprisal actions against innocent civilians taken by the Germans after partisan attacks; the internecine battles between the guerrilla movements, and the terror, confiscation and blackmail imposed by the *andartes* on the ordinary people in the mountains seriously discredited the Resistance, especially ELAS, with the Greek populace.

In late 1943 the German occupying forces set up the Greek Security Battalions (*Tagmata Asfalias*), an armed militia force whose main task was to hunt down and eliminate guerrillas. Due to the reign of terror instituted by ELAS in the mountains, and the food and pay provided for the new force, the Security Battalions gained a certain popularity in early 1944, leading to an influx of new recruits, and they grew to a strength of some 15,000. Soon, ELAS was spending more time fighting the Security Battalions than the Germans — which added a new dimension to the civil war. ELAS regarded all members of the Security Battalions as traitors and collaborators, and they would become a prime target of their hatred and vengeance after liberation.

In April 1944, the position of the Greek Government-in-exile in Cairo suffered badly when a wholesale mutiny broke out among the Greek troops in Egypt. It began among soldiers of the two Greek Army brigades encamped near Alexandria on the 8th and then spread to sailors on Greek Navy ships in

the ports of Alexandria and Port Said. The mutineers declared in favour of a republic and demanded the resignation of the existing government of Prime Minister Emmanouil Tsouderos. The rebellion came at a very unfortunate moment as the Greek units were eagerly awaited to reinforce the Allied front in Italy. The British authorities took a very strong line and British troops suppressed the troubles in the army brigades, while loyal Greek navy forces did the same on the ships, the final mutineers not surrendering until April 28. Ring-leaders were arrested and, in a subsequent screening of all personnel, every soldier suspected of anti-monarchist or EAM sympathies was rooted out and the remaining men were reformed into the 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade.

On April 13, as a direct consequence of the mutinies, Prime Minister Tsouderos resigned and on the 26th the King appointed Georgios Papandreou, a leading republican politician and leader of the Social Democratic Party, who had just evaded from occupied Greece, as the new Prime Minister. Despite being an anti-Monarchist and anti-Communist, Papandreou sought to form a representative government and he called all concerned parties to a national conference in the Lebanon, which was held on May 17-21. Representatives of most of the old political parties — including the KKE — and of the main resistance groups — EAM, ELAS and EDES — participated and after three days of stormy debate a document known as the Lebanon Charter was signed by all those present. It

provided for the reorganisation of the armed forces outside and inside Greece, the end of the reign of terror in the mountains, the relief of hunger and other needs, the restoration of order and liberty in collaboration with Allied Forces, the punishment of collaborators, and the post-war satisfaction of Greece's economic and territorial needs. Again, it looked good on paper and raised high expectations; but its implementation would not be as simple and undisputed, as later events were to prove.

On September 2, as a belated result of the conference, six prominent members of EAM joined Papandreou's Cabinet (five as Ministers and one as Under-Secretary), allowing the latter to transform it into a Government of National Unity. This was a major breakthrough because, with EAM Communists forming part of the legal government, there seemed less risk of them planning to overthrow it by use of force.

A serious problem remained on the constitutional side. Except for a strong and influential minority of monarchists, few in Greece wanted King George II to return from exile after the liberation. Even before the war, large segments of the Greek political spectrum — Republicans, Populists, Communists, etc — had doctrinally been opposed to the monarchy. His reinstatement to the throne by a disputed plebiscite in 1935; his association with the pre-war dictatorship of General Ioannis Metaxas (1936-41), and his flight from the country in 1941, had all seriously damaged the King's popularity with the Greek public, giving ample fuel to anti-royalist feelings. However, George II had family ties with the British Royal Family, and the British Government, particularly Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the Foreign Office, remained a firm supporter of the exiled King.

Nonetheless, the Greek Government-in-exile had from 1942 begun to put pressure on the King not to return to the country until after a plebiscite had been held showing that the majority of the people wanted him. Even though George II had on several occasions doggedly refused to agree to this request, on June 12 Papandreou publicly announced that the King would only return after a positive outcome of a referendum. It had long since been suggested that in the interim a Regency be set up, but there was still discussion about this. Archbishop Damaskinos of Athens was proposed as the Regent, but neither the King nor Papandreou was in favour of him.

In the early autumn of 1944, as an Axis withdrawal from Greece became more likely, the British sponsored a meeting of the principal Greek factions at Allied GHQ at Caserta in Italy to co-ordinate military activities and establish the ground rules for political activity in Greece when the liberation took place. Taking part were Saraphis for ELAS and Zervas for EDES (both now promoted to generals), as well as Papandreou and four of his cabinet ministers. In the resulting Caserta Agreement, signed on September 26 after much argument and with deep reservations on all sides, both EDES and ELAS, as well as the Greek Government-in-exile, agreed to place their forces under the command of Lieutenant-General Ronald Scobie, the British officer designated to represent the Allied High Command in Greece, for the purpose of driving the Axis forces out of Greece. ELAS and EDES also agreed to allow the landing of British forces in Greece, to refrain from any attempt to seize power on their own, and to support the return of the Greek Government of National Unity. They also accepted that the city of Athens was out of bounds for guerrillas and promised not to send any of them into the capital, leaving Greek command there in the hands of a separate military governor to be appointed by the Greek Government.



IWM CNA3182

The Allied liberation plan for Greece, known as Operation 'Manna', was hurriedly prepared after the Caserta conference. The designated landing force was small in size and had few heavy weapons, being more intended as a 'take-over' force than for driving out the Germans. It comprised two British brigades (the 2nd Parachute and the 23rd Armoured, both in an infantry role), a few commando and special forces units and two units of the Free Greek army (the Greek Mountain Brigade and the Greek Sacred Regiment), plus three aircraft squadrons (two RAF and one Greek). Assigned to help in the distribution of food, clothing and medicine to the starving and destitute population by the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency) and the Red Cross and in reconstruction work, it had a large non-combatant administrative complement.

General Scobie's instructions were to establish his GHQ in Athens, to maintain law and order, and to help the Papandreu Government set up its administration. He was not to interfere in local politics. However, it was considered vital that British troops occupy Athens as soon as possible after its evacuation by the Germans to prevent Greek guerrillas from establishing themselves in the city and thus in all probability provoking civil war. Put differently, he was to *prevent* a Communist coup d'état rather than *counter* it. Unfortunately but perhaps understandably, Greek Communists and anti-Royalists would come to regard the British presence in Greece as having as primary aim to bring back the monarchy and restore King George II to the throne.

The vast majority of the British soldiers who came to Greece as part of the British Liberation Force had no inkling of the intricacies of Greek politics or any idea that they were arriving in a country on the verge of civil war. They regarded the Greeks as friends and expected to be greeted as such. They loved the Greek people for their affability and generous hospitality, and admired the Greek partisans for their courageous struggle against the Axis. To most British soldiers it seemed inconceivable that large segments of Greek society would come to regard them as occupiers rather than liberators and that they would eventually end up fighting the Greeks in a brutal, nasty conflict.

**On October 12, 1944, the British 2nd Parachute Brigade landed in a strong wind on the airfield of Megara, 45 kilometres north-west of Athens, its mission being to advance to the capital and secure it as soon as possible. First to drop was C Company of the 4th Parachute Battalion, but due to the continued bad weather the rest of the brigade did not come in until later, the remainder of the 4th Battalion and the 6th Battalion landing on the 14th, the 5th Battalion on the 15th and the brigade's glider element only on the 16th. By then, the 4th and 6th Battalions had started on their way towards Athens.**

#### LIBERATION OF MAINLAND GREECE

In mid-September 1944, prompted by the Soviet Red Army advance into Bulgaria and towards Yugoslavia, Hitler decided to withdraw his troops from Greece, first from the Aegean islands and the Dodecanese and then from the mainland. The Peloponnese was the first part of the mainland to be evacuated and, with the spectre of EAM/ELAS seizing power in the vacuum created, the British were stirred to go into action there.

On the night of October 3/4, 58 parachutists of the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) dropped to seize Araxos airfield in the north-west Peloponnese as the vanguard of a 950-strong task force under Major Earl George Jellicoe — 'Bucketforce' — which further comprised a squadron of the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG), two infantry companies of Highland Light Infantry, a few Royal Marine commandos and No. 2908 Squadron of the RAF Regiment. They landed unopposed and received a terrific welcome from overjoyed Greek civilians. Following the parachute drop, the main force landed at Katakolon on the west coast of the Peloponnese. The vital port of Patras, 30 kilometres away, was still held by a German garrison of under 1,000 and some 1,600 men of the local Greek Security Battalion but entirely surrounded by ELAS guerrillas under Aris. By quickly switching his SBS patrols from one area to another, Jellicoe created the impression of much greater strength, as a result of which the Security Battalion, whose members feared that they would be murdered as traitors by the ELAS forces, keenly surrendered to him. Meanwhile, the majority of the Germans evacuated by the port and Patras was captured with the harbour still intact. However Aris' forces had already carried out horrifying massacres at nearby Kalamata and Pyrgos, butchering Royalists, bourgeois, Security Battalion men and anyone else suspected of being anti-Communist.

From the Peloponnese, liberation moved

first to Athens and then to the north. The Germans did not attempt to defend the capital, only holding the approaches to the city so that their evacuation could go as smoothly as possible. The small number of SBS, LRDG and commandos moving from the Peloponnese to Athens found that the hospitality of the Greeks slowed them down much more than German opposition.

On October 12, in Athens, the Swastika flag was taken down for the last time before the last German units withdrew from the city. A small group of ELAS fighters prevented the Germans from destroying the electric power station and the Marathon Dam on the outskirts of town just before they pulled out.

That evening (October 12), a company from the 2nd Parachute Brigade (Brigadier Charles Pritchard) was dispatched to seize the airfield at Megara, 45 kilometres north-west of Athens, thus to secure a landing zone for the rest of the brigade, prior to an advance on the capital. C Company of the 4th Parachute Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel Vic Coxen) took off from Brindisi in Italy and, after a very bumpy flight, dropped on the airfield. They landed in a very strong wind, which caused three men killed and 40 injured. The prevailing weather conditions forced the abandonment of further parachute operations and it was not until two days later (October 14) that the rest of the brigade (less the 5th Parachute Battalion) arrived. The Germans had blown up the road to Athens but every form of local transport was commandeered and the 4th and 6th Battalions entered the city on October 15, only to find that other British troops had beaten them to the goal: Lord Jellicoe and about 55 men from the SBS had already reached the capital and installed themselves in the best hotel, the Grande Bretagne overlooking Constitution Square; and 'Foxforce', comprising No. 9 Commando (Lieutenant-Colonel Ronnie Tod) with a detachment



IWM NA19429



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

*Left:* Commandeering every available form of transport, the two parachute battalions reached Athens on October 15, being welcomed by throngs of happy civilians. Here their column of vehicles is being drowned in jubilant crowds on Panepistimiou Street, one of Athens main thoroughfares entering the city from the north-west. *Above:* The picture was taken from an upstairs window of the building on the corner with Amerikis Street. Kostas Alexopoulos, who took most of the comparisons for this story, matched it up from ground level.

from the Greek Sacred Regiment attached, had landed at Piraeus on the 14th and, after seizing the adjacent airfield of Kalamaki, had made a ceremonial entry into Athens between cheering crowds. (The 5th Parachute Battalion jumped into Megara on the 15th and the brigade's glider-borne elements arrived on the 16th.)

The welcome given to the British troops was tumultuous. The Athenians came out in their thousands, laughing, cheering and crying with emotion. Jellicoe's men were carried on the shoulders of the rejoicing crowds. Lieutenant-Colonel Tod on his arrival was given the Freedom of the City by Archbishop Damaskinos. Brigadier Prichard was implored by the Chief of Police to stand on the balcony of his Police HQ building to be greeted by deafening cheers. However, there was also a feeling of unrest and it was obvious that sections of the crowds were antagonistic to one another. If anything, the sudden arrival of the British troops into Athens, on the heels of the retreating Germans, had prevented a massacre of collaborators and 'enemies of the state' by the revenge-seeking Communist guerrillas.



IWM CNA4010

*Centre:* More euphoric crowds have gathered in front of the Grande Bretagne Hotel. This prestigious hotel would quickly become the centre of Allied presence in Athens, providing residences for both Lieutenant-General Ronald Scobie, the commander of British forces in Greece, and his staff; for Greek Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou and his Cabinet ministers, and for scores of Allied war correspondents. The hotel had served the same purpose during the German occupation, being requisitioned to accommodate officers of the German Wehrmacht and administrative staffs from May 1941 to October 1944. *Right:* The Grande Bretagne — still one of Athens' top-class hotels — stands on the northern side of on Platia Syntagma (Syntagma Square, or Constitution Square), the capital's central venue where traditionally all important political meetings, official parades and mass demonstrations take place. It stands on the corner that forms the junction of Vasilissis Sofias Avenue, Vasilissis Amalias Avenue and Panepistimiou Street (see the town plan on page 15). This is the view looking into the latter.



GAIL PARKER

*Right:* Four days later, on October 18, General Scobie and his staff and Prime Minister Papandreou and his Cabinet landed at Piraeus and travelled by road to Athens. Papandreou's first official duty was to replace the national flag on the Acropolis. Here he ascends the steps on the venerated site together with General Scobie. On the right, with the white cap, is Angelos Evert, the chief of the Athens City Police.

**BUILD-UP OF BRITISH FORCES**

Having secured the capital, the British began to build up their strength in Greece. On October 15, a large convoy of landing ships and craft and Swedish relief ships, preceded by minesweepers, arrived off Faliron Bay in the Piraeus. The landing fleet was escorted by the Greek battleship *Averoff* (carrying Papandreou and his cabinet ministers), Royal Navy cruisers *Orion* (carrying General Scobie and his staff, plus the British Ambassador to the Greek government, Reginald Leeper, and the British political advisor in the Mediterranean, Harold Macmillan), *Aurora*, *Ajax* and *Black Prince* and four destroyers, but its entry into the bay was delayed by the need to clear new lanes through the unexpectedly wide minefield.

That done, on October 17 the 23rd Armoured Brigade (Brigadier Robert Arkwright) began disembarking in Faliron Bay. Although its title suggested otherwise, only a small part of the brigade was actually armoured. Back in August the three tank units of the brigade — the 40th, 46th and 50th Royal Tanks — had been temporarily dismounted and converted to infantry. The 46th RTR was split up, sending its B and C Squadrons to each of the other two units and retaining only RHQ and A Squadron equipped with armoured cars. The brigade's battalion of motorised infantry, the 11th King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC), retained its full complement of trucks, carriers, heavy machine and anti-tank guns and mortars.

Equally enthusiastically welcomed by the civilian population, the brigade joined up with the 2nd Parachute Brigade and No. 9

*Right:* Looking north-west towards the range of hills that surround Athens. The temple in the foreground is that of Hephaestus which stands on top of the Agoraios Kolonos hill, the site of the city's ancient shopping area.



IWM CNA4015



GAIL PARKER



IWM CNA4014



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

*Left:* Papandreou hoisting the Greek flag. Just six days previously, on the 12th, just before they evacuated Athens, the Germans had lowered the Swastika flag from the same flag-pole for the last time. *Above:* Much of the Acropolis is today off limits to visitors, the restrictions being enforced by the ever-present Archaeological Service wardens, and this is the best comparison Kostas could achieve.



IWM NA 18711

**Left: General Scobie set up his General Headquarters in the Metohiko Tamio Stratou building, a massive edifice located just behind the Grande Bretagne Hotel and filling the entire block delineated by Stadiou, Voukourestiou, Panepistimiou and Amerikis Streets (see the map on page 15). This same building had housed the German headquarters in Athens during the occupation.**



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

**ing the occupation. Captain Bob Tanner of the AFPU pictured Sergeant R. Gregory and Driver A. Hardman strolling past part of its long façade on Stadiou Street. Right: The building is occupied today by the upmarket Attica department store. The 'Welcome' banner of 1944 is now contrasted with a poster promoting a protest rally aimed primarily against neo-Nazis.**

Commando in Athens to begin the task of policing the city and guarding the more vital points. Control of these immediately became a matter of dispute with EAM/ELAS, long processions of which filled the streets throughout the day, making it difficult for the units to carry out their tasks. Rival columns of Communists and Royalists came to blows and instructions had to be issued forbidding further demonstrations.

That same day, October 17, a composite force known as 'Pompforce' and comprising the 4th Parachute Battalion, some attached engineers and half of No. 2908 Squadron RAF Regiment, together with armoured cars and a battery of 75mm guns — some 950 men in all — left Athens and moved up north under the command of Jellicoe. The intention was that they should harass the retreating Germans until they left Greece. Making good speed, despite extensive demolition of roads and bridges by the Germans, the force passed Lamia and Larissa and met up with

the enemy south of the town of Kozani, 300 kilometres north of the capital in the Pindus mountains. At dawn of October 26 the British launched a full-scale attack. After they had cleared the city, the ELAS bands, who had watched the battle from the sidelines, suddenly appeared on the scene to charge into the city and subsequently claim the victory as one of their own.

General Scobie, Ambassador Leeper and Papandreou and his cabinet ministers disembarked at Piraeus on October 18. After inspecting two Guards of Honour, one made up of platoons from the 23rd Armoured Brigade and the Greek Sacred Regiment and one of 'bearded and bandolier-clad guerrillas' from ELAS, the party proceeded into Athens along a road lined with wildly cheering crowds. Arriving in the city centre, Scobie set up his III Corps HQ in the Metochiko Tamio Stratou building on Panepistimiou Street, close to the Hotel Grande Bretagne on Constitution Square.

The only fighting troops available to him consisted of the 2nd Parachute and 23rd Armoured Brigades and a few hundred British commandos of the SBS and LRDG, with the 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade (from Italy) and the Greek Sacred Regiment (from the Aegean islands) scheduled to arrive later. He had no tanks, just a small number of armoured cars and little artillery. The smallness of the British liberation force — some 4,000 men — meant that detachments could only be stationed in Athens, Piraeus, Salonika, Patras and one or two other towns, so that the rest of Greece remained under the control of the existing guerrilla factions, with ELAS occupying the largest share.

On October 22, an SBS patrol of 40 men under Major Anders Lassen (a Dane, who six months later would win a posthumous Victoria Cross) arrived at Salonika, the principal port of Macedonia in north-eastern Greece, in the mistaken belief that the Germans had already evacuated the city. They



IWM NA 18440

**The main entrance of the GHQ on Panepistimiou Street.**



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

**The sentry has gone but the gateway remains unchanged.**



DMITRI KESSEL

**Left:** With the liberation of the capital, the Greek Communist Party was able to come out in the open, establishing its headquarters in a building on Othonos Street, which lines Constitution Square along its south side, and putting up large propaganda signs. This particular KKE sign, pictured by



GAIL PARKER

**Right:** The buildings left and right of it have been replaced by modern blocks but the former KKE headquarters remains as it was.

had arrived too early and were forced to hide up for five days while the Germans blew up the dock facilities. When they were finally able to emerge from hiding on the 27th, they were given a tremendous welcome by the civilians but also found that ELAS forces had taken up positions in and around the city but were making no move to attack the retreating Germans.

With the end of the German occupation of Greece, the various British units that had arrived in Athens were quickly dispersed all over the country to help in the restoration of order and assist in UNNRA and Red Cross reconstruction and relief. On November 4, No. 9 Commando and the 5th Parachute Battalion sailed for Salonika to reinforce the small SBS group there. The 6th Parachute Battalion went to Thebes, 60 kilometres north-west of Athens; the 11th KRRC went even further north, to Lamia, Trikala and Larissa; the 40th Royals Tanks west to the Peloponnese; the 2nd Highland Light Infantry (flown into Athens in late October) to Corinth. The 4th Parachute Battalion and Pomforce were still up north, close to the Albanian border.

Meanwhile, the Greek government was responsible for keeping law and order in the Athens area. Back in September General Panagiotis Spiiotopoulos had been appointed Greek Military Governor of Athens and Piraeus. However, on arrival in October he found that the ELAS units in his area were decidedly unwilling to obey his orders and that the only forces he could reliably count on were the City Police in Athens and Piraeus and the Greek Gendarmerie units stationed in Attica, plus an irregular militia known as the Organisation X (after the Greek letter *Khi*), an Athens-based, previously clandestine right-wing group of disciplined street-fighters, stoutly Royalist and aggressively anti-Communist, led by Colonel Georgios Grivas. (On October 25, Papandreou replaced Spiiotopoulos with Colonel Pausanias Katsotas, who was more acceptable to EAM.)

On November 9, the first of the regular

Greek Army units, the Greek Mountain Brigade (Brigadier Thrassivoulos Tsakalotos) landed in Piraeus from Italy, its march into Athens on the following day being cheered by ecstatic crowds. Some 2,800 strong, it had won laurels in the capture of Rimini in September (see *After the Battle* No. 137). The Greek Sacred Regiment, a 1,000-strong commando-type force under Colonel Christodoulos Tsigantes, arrived in the capital shortly after. Both units had been formed by the government-in-exile and were regarded as reliable and loyal to King and Government.

#### GROWING UNREST

During November, it became evident to the British that the Papandreou Government was weak and had no power outside Athens. With communications badly disrupted throughout the country, it was difficult to organise the relief work to help the starving population. With civil administration at the verge of collapse, and electoral rolls non-existent, it was impossible to organise the promised plebiscite about the return of the King, let alone the general elections that were to follow it. There was a resurgence of Royalist and right-wing groups and little attempt was made to root out and punish Greeks who had collaborated with the Axis occupation authorities. As a result, conflict between the monarchist Right and the republican/communist Left soon became severe. EAM power was growing daily by a deluge of aggressive propaganda. At the same time, a wave of arrests, executions and massacres carried out by two of EAM's agencies, the OPLA (Omades Prostatias Laikou Agonos — Units for the Protection of the People's Struggle, EAM's secret police) and the EP (Ethniki Politophilaki — National Civil Guard, EAM's militia police) seized the country in its grip. All through November the disorder increased and spread throughout the country.

The crucial issue dominating everything else was the demobilisation of existing Royalist and guerrilla forces and the formation of a

new Greek national army. It was expected, by ELAS at least, that in accordance with the Caserta Agreement the army units that had been set up outside Greece — notably the Greek Mountain Brigade and the Sacred Regiment — and all guerrilla forces that had formed inside the country would all be disbanded and that the new national army would be formed with equal representation of both. However, the Papandreou Government wished to retain the Mountain Brigade and Sacred Regiment intact: faced with the far-larger guerrilla army of uncertain political intent, Papandreou and the British wished to keep these units and make them the core of the new army. Disbanding them would mean that their members would become individual recruits in a possibly EAM-dominated people's army. In early November Papandreou declared his intention to demobilise and disarm all guerrilla groups on December 10 and for the rest of the month there was wary debate on this matter between Papandreou and Scobie on one side and the leaders of EAM/ELAS on the other.

Also in early November Papandreou announced his decision to form a Greek National Guard of some 22,000 men. Different from the new national army, this was to replace the old Gendarmerie and EAM's EP civil guard, and be tasked with policing and maintaining law and order. The EP would be dissolved on November 27 and the new force come into being on December 1. EAM/ELAS was fundamentally opposed to its creation because it would form a formidable weapon in the hands of the very government that they ultimately intended to overthrow. They obstructed its formation by accusing its recruiting officers of 'collaboration' and 'Fascism' and threatening recruits with retribution on their families.

Another bone of contention was the treatment of collaborators. EAM/ELAS protested, with some justification, that the Papandreou Government did not make any haste with arresting and prosecuting known collaborators, allowed many of them to retain their post, or even appointed some of them to





DMITRI KESSEL

important positions. Similarly, members of the hated Security Battalions were apparently permitted to join the new national armed forces, while former ELAS guerrillas were being rejected.

The growing opposition and obstruction shown by EAM and the general unrest in the country alarmed both the British and Papandreou, and two brigades of the 4th Indian Division (Major-General Alan Holworthy) were sent from Italy to Greece as reinforcements in case of trouble. The 7th Indian Brigade (Brigadier Osmond de T. Lovett) was sent to Salonika, disembarking there on November 11, together with Divisional Headquarters. Taking No. 9 Commando and the 5th Parachute Battalion under command, it sent out detachments to various towns and villages in eastern Macedonia, Thrace and Thessaly (Kozani, Kilkis, Polyoris and Drama being considered to be the most likely trouble spots) and endeavoured to maintain a precarious peace between the rival political factions.

The 11th Indian Brigade (Brigadier John Hunt) was given a vast area of responsibility in western Greece. Arriving at the port of Patras in the Peloponnese on November 22, where it established its HQ, the brigade sent detachments to many locations in its zone, from Pyrgos in the south to the troubled region north of the Gulf of Corinth and to the large islands of Zante, Cephalonia and Corfu (the latter island having already been occupied by No. 40 (Royal Marine) Commando since September). Brigadier Hunt had daily meetings with Colonel Spyros Tsiklitis, commander of the ELAS's 3rd (Peloponnese) Division and his political commissar, Kapetanios Akritis.

Although on the surface ELAS appeared to be friendly there was an underlying feeling of tension. Yet, it did not seem possible that British troops could become involved if conflict broke out.

However, worries that the struggle for power would be resolved by violence and bloodshed grew. Indeed, despite repeated protestations of loyalty made by EAM to the British throughout November, the KKE leadership had decided that the moment to

**The immediate trigger for the eruption of violence that became the Second Round of the Greek Civil War was the tragic shooting incident of December 3 on Constitution Square, when the explosion of a hand-grenade and a burst of automatic fire by unidentified hands led to the Greek police opening fire on a mass demonstration of KKE/EAM/ELAS supporters. Photographer Dmitri Kessel was out on the street during the scuffle and documented the decisive moments. This shot of rifle-armed policemen approaching the crowd was probably taken just seconds before firing erupted at about 10.45 a.m. The protesters came marching up Vasilissis Amalias Avenue and had just entered Constitution Square.**

strike had come. Realising that the British forces (by now some 15,000 strong) were thinly spread, organised for relief operations rather than a military occupation, and that the longer they waited, the more reinforcements the British might be able to send in, on or about November 28 the KKE Central Committee took a decision to take over the country by force. Like they had fought the rival guerrilla groups and the Security Battalions during the occupation, they would now take on the legal Government, hoping the British would stay off side.

Following the saying that 'whoever holds Athens holds Greece', the main battle would be fought at the capital. The action here would be the responsibility of two prominent members of the Central Committee, Georgios Siantos, the Party Secretary-General, and General Emmanuel Mandakas, who would be the military commander. Mandakas had three ELAS divisions under his command, grouped under I (Athens) Army Corps: the 2nd (Attica), 3rd (Peloponnese) and 13th (Roumeli) Divisions, a total fighting strength of some 18,000 men, plus an assortment of some 10,000 local ELAS 'reservists'.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the country, other ELAS divisions were moving to their battle stations. However, surprisingly, three of the ten divisions, under two of ELAS's top commanders, Saraphis and Aris, a total force of some 11,500 men, were to march against Zervas' EDES forces in north-west Greece rather than assist in besieging Athens. The political desire to once and for all wipe out the rival EDES was overriding all other considerations but it was a strategic mistake and one of the prime reasons for ELAS's subsequent defeat in the Second Round.

#### DECEMBER 3: START OF THE 'SECOND ROUND'

On December 1 — the date fixed for the dissolution of the EP — Papandreou signed an official decree that all guerrilla groups were to be disarmed and demobilised by December 10, and stipulating that any person unauthorised to carry arms after that date would be prosecuted. Leaflets carrying this message were dropped by the RAF all over the country. The order to disarm was clearly unacceptable to EAM/ELAS. They had a justifiable fear that, if they handed over all their weapons, members of the police, Security Battalions and Greek Mountain Brigade would wreak indiscriminate vengeance upon them. That same day, at midnight, the six EAM members in Papandreou's cabinet resigned in protest. This meant that open conflict now became inevitable.

Thereafter events moved quickly and tension grew rapidly. The EP openly refused to hand over their arms. The KKE Central Committee moved their headquarters away from the city. Overnight huge slogans painted in red supporting KKE, EAM and ELAS appeared everywhere. The Communist Press raged against General Scobie, accusing him of 'representing British imperialism' and 'preparing a dictatorship'. On December 2, EAM asked for permission to hold a demonstration in Athens on the 3rd. Papandreou yielded to their pressure and gave his approval. When, later in the day, he realised that the protest meeting was to be followed by a general strike on the 4th, he withdrew his permission. Nonetheless the demonstration went ahead, the Communist newspaper *Rizospastis* calling everyone to rally on Constitution Square at 11 a.m.



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This appears to be the moment the first shots rang out. The head of the column, carrying the Greek, American, Russian, British and KKE/EAM flags, has just reached the northern end of the square when the first participants seem to duck and veer back.



DMITRI KESSEL

Seconds later the same spot is almost empty as the crowds flee the rain of bullets, leaving behind the dead and wounded and discarded flagstaves. Note the KKE sign on the party headquarters behind the trees.

December 3 was a Sunday. That morning, thousands of demonstrators congregated in a long procession with marchers holding banners and shouting slogans. The crowd was in a highly emotional state, chanting and raising clenched fists. A small number of Greek police was present, while British troops had been told to keep a low profile. As the long procession reached Constitution Square, an explosion rang out followed by a burst of automatic fire. Accounts still differ on exactly what happened and eyewitnesses never agreed on who fired the first shot — some maintaining it was the police, others a Communist agent provocateur. The panic-stricken police decided to defend themselves and began firing on the unarmed crowd. A number of demonstrators (estimates range from seven to 50), including women and children, were killed and many others (between 100 and 250) wounded. Others were arrested by the police, who themselves also suffered casualties, several policemen being lynched by the crowds.

Desultory firing continued for nearly an hour. The square was cleared in the early afternoon by a company of British troops without the use of force. The following day, an angry mob paraded the martyrs of the Sunday fracas in their coffins across Constitution Square, surrounding the British embassy and shouting 'Death to Scobie!, Death to Scobie!' No British soldier had been involved in the shooting incident, yet all of the crowd's wrath and hostility was turned against the British. Within a few hours the tiny British force in Athens was under siege and struggling for survival.

The 'massacre on Constitution Square' was the signal for the Second Round of the Greek Civil War to begin. There seems little doubt that KKE/EAM/ELAS had made a definite decision to seize power by force. Controversy still exists over the question whether the December 3 demonstration was pre-planned to provide a pretext so that the war could begin, or whether they lurched into confrontation with the British by mistake.

*Right:* Kessel took his pictures from the corner of Vasilissis Amalias and Vasilissis Sofias Avenues. Exact numbers of casualties of the shooting incident have never been confirmed, figures varying between seven to 50 killed and 100 to 250 wounded (depending on the political affiliation of the source). However, the confrontation took place in full view of numerous Allied war correspondents based at the Grande Bretagne Hotel, leading to sensational and, in many cases, exaggerated reports in the British and American Press.



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A policeman remains crouching on his knees in the middle of the crossroads as smoke from rifles hovers over the street and the remainder of the crowd scatters.



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IWM NA20486



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Left: The following day, Monday, December 4, the coffins of some of the victims were paraded through the city. Lieutenant Morris pictured the procession crossing Constitution Square. Here an EAM activist gives voice to his feelings with a megaphone. Above: The same view today, looking towards the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the western end of the square.

**THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES**

After the affray of December 3, the violence was slow to escalate. ELAS sub-units, armed and in uniform, moved into the capital and openly appeared in the suburbs. They unleashed attacks against the Greek police but took care to avoid clashes with British forces and even with Greek troops of the Mountain Brigade, leaving them unmolested in the same locations. Scobie too acted with restraint. Both sides evidently wanted to avoid a collision and for a few days a 'phony war' atmosphere persisted for the British forces in Athens.

Meanwhile, Scobie was hurriedly reinforcing his positions. By December 3, the 2nd Parachute Brigade, its mission in Greece seemingly over, was preparing to return to Italy. The 5th Battalion had already sailed from Salonika en route for Italy and the other two battalions had been recalled to Athens and were about to move to their ships when the order came for the whole brigade to remain in Greece and concentrate in Athens as soon as possible. The 4th and 6th Parachute Battalions immediately took up positions securing the port of Piraeus and Faliron Bay, there to await the return of the 5th Battalion.

At the same time, new reinforcements were hastily being flown in, two battalions of the 139th Infantry Brigade (of the 46th Division) being transported by air to Greece in USAAF C-47 troop carriers from Bari in Italy. On December 3, the 16th Durham Light Infantry landed at Kalamaki airfield, just south of Athens, followed next day by the 2nd/5th Royal Leicestershires.

The Durhams were initially deployed near the Acropolis, but soon withdrawn from the city proper and sent to the seafront at Faliron Bay, east of Piraeus harbour, with orders to keep open Syngrou Avenue, the main highway from the coast to Athens (soon dubbed the 'Mad Mile' by all troops). The Leicesters were instructed to hold the Piraeus port area and await the arrival of the 5th Indian Brigade that was to further strengthen the coastal perimeter.

On December 4, ELAS launched a co-ordinated strike against the Greek police. A force of ELAS fighters seized the police headquarters in Piraeus and, as the day went on, units of the 2nd (Attica) and 3rd (Peloponnese) ELAS Divisions took hold of 20 out of 25 other police stations within Athens

Right: Since the war, the hotel has had an additional four floors added. The building next to it on the left is the King George II Hotel.



IWM NA20488

British soldiers escorted the procession on its way to the cemetery. In the background stands the Hotel Grande Bretagne.



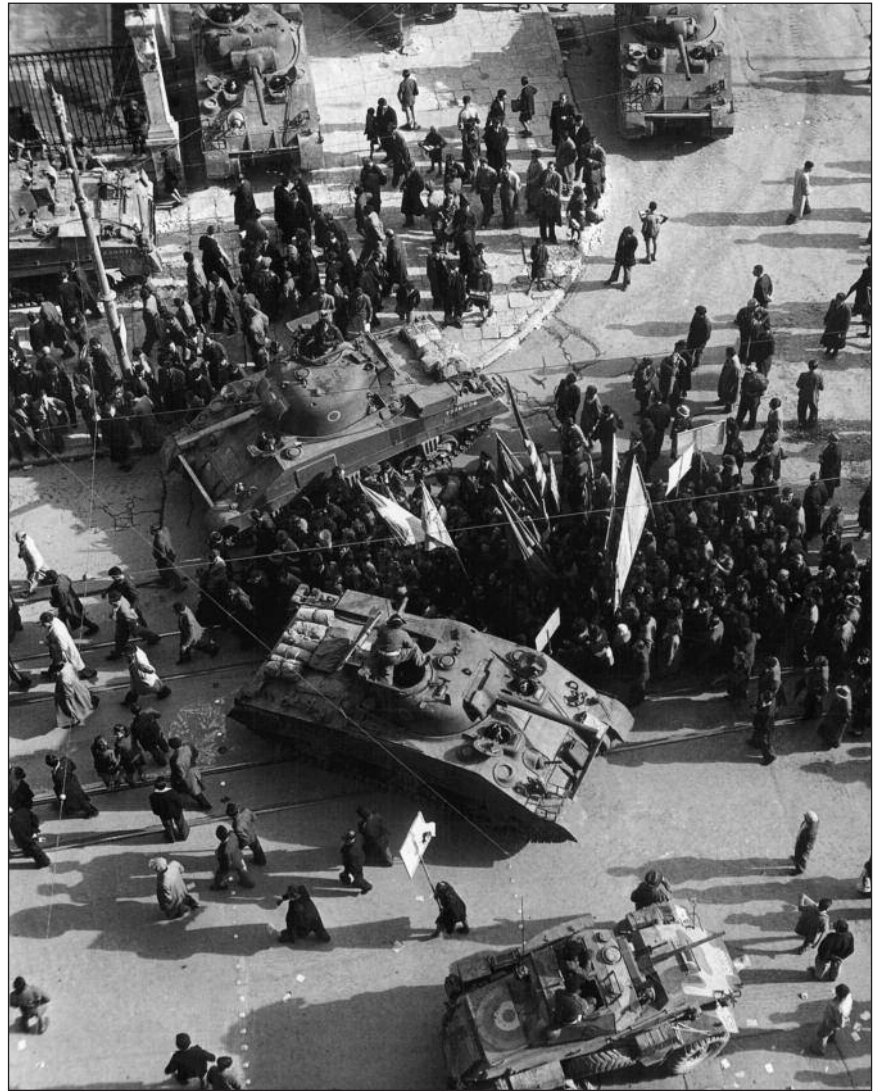
KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

*Right:* About the same time (note the long shadows, indicating the same mid-morning hour as the other pictures) some of the demonstrators headed for Panepistimiou (now called Polytechniou) Street, where it had been forbidden to hold a mass protest. Six Sherman tanks (from C Squadron of the 46th Royal Tank Regiment) and a few Humber armoured cars (from No. 2908 Field Squadron of the RAF Regiment) had taken up position at the beginning of the street, between the Grande Bretagne and the Police Headquarters across the street, to block entry from Constitution Square but the crowd easily filtered through as the crews were under orders not to open fire. Dmitri Kessel pictured the moment from an upstairs window of the Grande Bretagne. When it arrived in Greece in October, the 46th Royal Tanks had two of its squadrons dismantled and only one — A Squadron — equipped with armoured cars. However, by the time violence erupted in the capital in early December, C Squadron had been re-equipped with 19 Sherman tanks and these would see much action in the coming month, being employed in nearly every action within the city.

itself. Many of the captured policemen, regarded as collaborators by the rebels, were marched off to torture and summary execution. That same afternoon, ELAS troops attacked the Greek Naval College in the port, which served as the Combined Anglo-Greek Naval HQ, but were repulsed by British troops holding it. Faced with these obvious provocations, General Scobie ordered ELAS to back off, issuing an ultimatum for them to clear out of the Athens area by midnight of December 6.

At the same time, reports were coming in of large ELAS units outside Athens breaking up camp and marching on the capital. Scobie realised the chances of armed resistance to the British were increasing by the hour.

That night Scobie received a strong directive from Churchill charging him with responsibility 'for maintaining order in Athens and for neutralising or destroying all EAM/ELAS bands approaching the city. Do not hesitate to act as if you were in a conquered city where a local rebellion is in progress.' With this directive in hand, Scobie declared martial law and issued instructions to his three brigades. With only some 8,000 troops available in the Athens area, until substantial reinforcements arrived, his options were limited to holding on to what



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he could in Athens and Piraeus. The 23rd Armoured Brigade was ordered to clear central Athens, the 2nd Parachute Brigade was to take over the northern sector of the city, and the Greek Mountain Brigade was to establish itself in the south and attempt to clear the Piraeus area. The two battalions of the 139th Brigade in the Piraeus were to

recapture the main police station seized by the ELAS and occupy all other police stations in their zone. All troops were given specific instructions not to open fire until fire had been directed at them. Following the order, the 6th Parachute Battalion quickly moved from Piraeus into Athens and secured the western town exits.



NWM N/A 20474



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*Left:* There was a second blocking position by four Shermans a little further up the road, at the intersection of Panepistimiou and Omirou Streets, but again the demonstrators marched past it without a shot being fired, as shown in this picture by Lieutenant Morris. *Above:* The Catholic Cathedral of Saint Dionysios Areopagite, dedicated to the first bishop and patron saint of Athens, makes for an easy comparison. The building next door is the State Eye Hospital.



DMITRI KESSEL

*Left:* With unrest in the capital growing by the hour, it was decided on December 3 to keep the 2nd Parachute Brigade in Greece and use it to defend Athens. Its 5th Battalion had actually already sailed for Italy from Salonika and had to be hurriedly recalled. Landing in Piraeus on the 5th, it quickly moved into Athens to form a tight perimeter around Constitution Square. Dmitri Kessel photographed three paratroopers taking



GAIL PARKER

cover behind one of the ornamental pedestals lining the steps leading to the higher level of the square. As for the graffiti on the marble block, although the hammer and sickle and KKE are clearly Communist, the slogan is not — it merely says: 'Support the collection for the Greek Red Cross'. *Right:* The view is west, past the ornamental fountain in the centre of the pedestrian area and into Ermou Street.



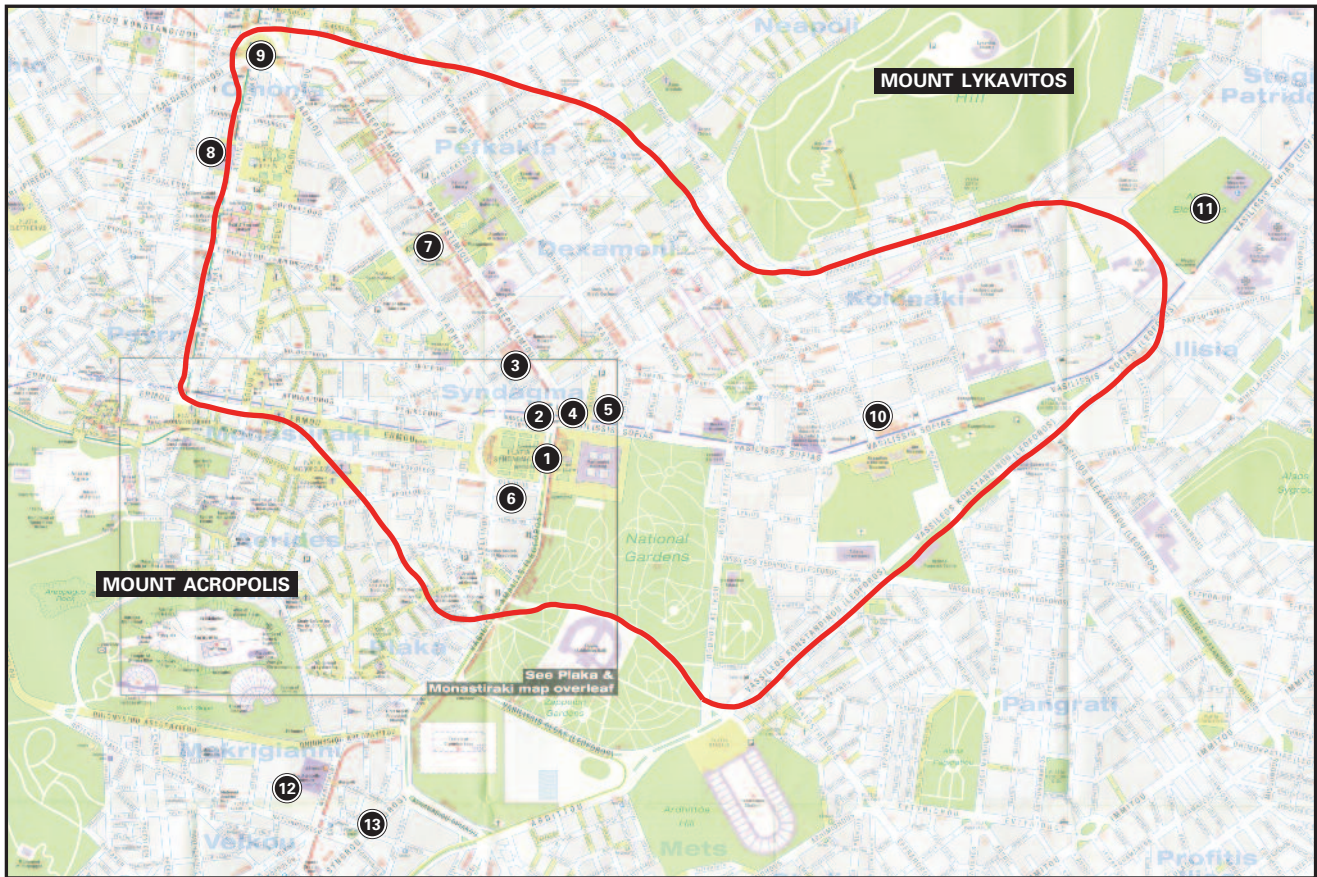
DMITRI KESSEL

*Left:* By December 6, confrontation between British forces and ELAS insurgent forces could no longer be avoided. Instead of heeding to Scobie's ultimatum to clear the city by midnight on the 6th, ELAS had used the night of the 5th/6th to infiltrate large numbers of their armed insurgents into the city, and these began attacking government buildings. That day, the British forces began moving northwards and southward from Constitution Square in an attempt to clear the rebels from the inner city. The northward sweep was undertaken by the 5th and 6th



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Parachute Battalions, the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the (dismounted) 50th Royal Tanks. Dmitri Kessel photographed three paratroopers, most likely of the 5th Battalion, taking cover on the corner of Panepistimiou and Kriezotou Street, one block north of Constitution Square. Note the KKE slogan. This is in fact the same trio as that pictured by Lieutenant Morris (see page 3) but Kessel's view was looking into Kriezotou Street. *Right:* Today an innocuous stretch of pavement but in December 1944 a dangerous area ripe with sniper fire.



The perimeter held by the British forces in Athens was centred on the main headquarters and government buildings around Constitution Square and encompassed just a few square kilometres between Mount Acropolis and Mount Lykavitos. [1] Constitution Square; [2] Hotel Grande Bretagne; [3] Metochiko Tamio Stratou

building (British GHQ); [4] Athens City Police HQ; [5] Greek Foreign Ministry; [6] KKE Headquarters; [7] EAM Headquarters on Korai Street; [8] Town Hall; [9] Omonia Square; [10] British Embassy; [11] Greek Infantry Barracks (23rd Armoured Brigade HQ); [12] Makrigianni Gendarmerie School; [13] Syngrou Avenue.

Things now quickly came to a head. Before sunrise on December 5 the 6th Parachute Battalion stopped a heavily armed ELAS formation of some 800 men under Colonel Nikiforas, who were moving towards Athens from Thebes, and for a moment it appeared as if the confrontation on the western approach road into the capital would become the first violent clash between Greeks and British. However, at the crucial moment Lieutenant-Colonel Vernon Barlow ordered his paratroopers to put a round in the breach of their rifles and fix bayonets and

within seconds the insurgents began surrendering their arms.

During the morning, the 2nd/5th Leicesters in Piraeus surrounded the main police station seized by the ELAS. After a parley, the some 30 armed rebels holding it consented to withdraw but, at a subsequent meeting between Lieutenant-Colonel John Cubbon, the Leicesters' commander, and Colonel Sotiris Kyvelos, the commander of the ELAS's 6th Piraeus Regiment, the latter refused to evacuate the station without orders from higher authority.

During the day the 5th Parachute Battalion landed at Piraeus and, quickly moving into Athens, formed a tight perimeter around Constitution Square. British troops on patrol in the city became increasingly involved in scuffles with infiltrating ELAS soldiers and fighting erupted around the British Embassy on Loukianou Street. As a result all the diplomatic staff's families were brought into the building, there to remain cooped up for five long weeks. ELAS snipers began firing at the building and this would continue for days thereafter.



IWM NA20516

Left: Shortly after, and four blocks further north, a party of paratroopers dashes across Stadiou Street. Their mission was to winkle out the ELAS troops from the EAM headquarters building on Korai Street, the short lane connecting Stadiou and



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Panepistimiou Streets, which lies just around the next corner. Right: Lieutenant Morris took his picture from the corner of Stadiou and Papanigopoulou Streets. The building across the road used to be the Apollon Cinema but is today the Astor.

**Right: Having reached Korai Street, a supporting Sherman from the 46th Royal Tanks charged the door of the EAM headquarters with machine guns blazing, after which paratroopers stormed the building. Lieutenant Morris photographed the action from the north-west corner of the street, looking towards Panepistimiou.**

But ELAS was increasing its strength too. During the night of December 5/6, a brigade of ELAS, 2,000 strong, was moved into the capital from the Peloponnese.

The following day (December 6), ELAS extended its attacks to government buildings. British units were in action throughout the day but still there was little real fighting, the ELAS forces melting away in front of the British and few shots being fired. Deploying from the Infantry Barracks along Vasilissis Sofias Avenue, the 2nd Highland Light Infantry (which just the day before had returned to Athens, having been recalled from security duties in Corinth) cleared the Kolonaki district at the foot of Mount Lykavitos, while the 50th Royal Tanks operated northwards up two main streets in the city centre — Akademias and Panepistimiou — and captured the EAM headquarters in Korai Street, the rebel presence here proving weaker than expected. The 6th Parachute Battalion, operating up the adjoining Stadiou Street, reached Omonia Square. The 5th Parachute Battalion spent the whole day forcing their way from Constitution Square southwards along the Faliron road towards the Acropolis, and were successful only after they rushed the KKE headquarters on the south side of the square. Not until night had fallen did B Company establish themselves upon the Acropolis, which they found unoccupied. The 4th Parachute Battalion held out in the district of the municipal gas works along the Pireaus road leading south-west from Omonia Square.

That night, Scobie officially declared war on ELAS, since they had refused to obey his orders to leave the area, and instructed the units in Athens to take full offensive action against them. He divided the forces in Attica into two formations. 'Arkforce', commanded by Brigadier Arkwright and comprising the latter's 23rd Armoured Brigade, the 2nd Parachute Brigade, the 2nd Highland Light

**Right: Korai Street is today a small pedestrian plaza but the historic building on its southern side remains unchanged — however without the three large capital letters on the façade that indicated its tenant of October-December 1944.**



IWM NA20518



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS



IWM NA20523

**Left: Prisoners with their hands in the air emerge from the building under escort. The EAM building was in peacetime the head office of the Ethniki insurance company. Built in the mid-1930s, it had an air raid shelter in the basement which had**



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**been used as an interrogation centre by the Italians and Germans during the occupation. Right: Although the shop names on the ground floor have changed, the building as such remains much as before.**



IWM NA20525

**Left: More prisoners being ushered away from the scene of the fighting. In all, some 30 EAM/ELAS prisoners were rounded up,**



KOSTAS ALEXOPLULOS

**some of them women. Right: Looking along the northern side of Korai Square today.**

Infantry, the 64th Airlanding Light Battery RA, the 463rd Light Battery of the 104th Royal Horse Artillery, and No. 1238 Field Company RE, was made responsible for the security of Athens and given orders to clear the centre of the city. 'Blockforce', under Brigadier Adam Block of the 139th Brigade and consisting of the 16th Durham Light Infantry, the 2nd/5th Leicestershires and Nos. 2926 LAA Squadron and 2908 Field Squadron (the latter having a flight equipped with armoured cars) of the RAF Regiment, was charged with the defence of Piraeus and Faliron.

Thus began a very difficult and anxious two weeks for the British. Scobie had underestimated ELAS's strength and found his meagre forces in a very precarious position. The ELAS formations held the upper hand and by now had surrounded and compressed the small British force in Attica into three tight perimeters — one inside Athens proper and two along the Piraeus seafront (the southern tip of Piraeus harbour and the Faliron-Kalamaki sector), with several outlying facilities holding out in the wider Athens area. The port installations at Piraeus were cut off and could not be used, and the main road from Athens to Piraeus was now completely in ELAS's hands and the British and Greek

Government forces were unable to use it. All supplies and reinforcements now had to be landed on an unimproved beach at Faliron and brought into Athens via Syngrou Avenue — the only supply route left open.

Surrounding the British positions were six ELAS regiments of the 2nd (Attica) and 3rd (Peloponnese) Divisions; besieging the port of Piraeus was the 6th Independent Piraeus Regiment; dominating the direct Piraeus-to-Athens road and the city's western districts was the 4th ELAS Regiment; controlling the northern part of the inner city was the 3rd Regiment, with the 5th Regiment in possession of the northern suburbs; holding the south-eastern districts was the 2nd Regiment and covering Syngrou Avenue was the 1st Regiment.

For the next fortnight, the British troops cut off inside Athens desperately held on, slowly clearing more elbow room and strengthening their positions by local attacks with tank support. It was a frustrating effort because as fast as British troops moved through the streets, ELAS troops gave way before them, only to reappear in their old positions when they had passed on. The armoured vehicles of the 46th Royal Tanks were worked at full stretch, fighting innumerable small actions and saving countless situations (by now its C Squadron had been equipped with Sherman tanks).

RAF Spitfires and Beaufighters supported the ground troops, strafing and machine-gunning ELAS positions. Inevitably, the air strikes produced much collateral damage and many civilian casualties.

The general plan was to hold a 'hard core' around Constitution Square and keep open the vital Syngrou Avenue by continuous patrolling with armoured vehicles. The normal drill was for armoured cars to patrol the road after dark, engage known ELAS posts and then, when all appeared quiet, guide a long column of vehicles through to their destination. The forces available were pitifully small: often only one troop of four armoured cars was escorted to as many as 300 vehicles into and out of Athens in a night. The FIX Brewery along the highway was an ELAS strong point and any vehicle passing it had to run the gauntlet of their weapons.

A welcome reinforcement arrived on the 10th when the 11th KRRC returned to Athens. The battalion had been recalled to the capital on the 8th with orders to concentrate on Constitution Square. However, with its companies spread out over a wide area of central Greece, it took them two days to do so, motoring long distances through enemy territory and having lost a whole platoon and several vehicles to ELAS ambushes on the way.



IWM NA20522

**Left: One ELAS man fired on the British troops after surrendering so he was promptly shot on the pavement in front of the EAM building. Here two paratroopers carry his body away.**



GAIL PARKER

**Note the abundance of KKE and ELAS slogans. Right: The building to the immediate right of the EAM headquarters has had its lower façade completely changed, but this is the same spot.**





IWM NA20631

Meanwhile, in Piraeus, the battle for the Combined Naval HQ in the besieged Greek Naval College continued. On December 7, it was only the timely arrival of a Royal Marine detachment from the cruiser HMS *Orion* that prevented the ELAS attackers from overrunning the defences. Finally, on December 9, the support company of the Leicesters, with two tanks and two armoured cars under command, set out to restore the situation. Finding the building surrounded by a large crowd interspersed with armed ELAS fighters, in a series of actions they systematically tracked down and destroyed the rebels' machine-gun posts that were firing from concealed positions, killing 21 of the enemy and wounding another 100, thus lifting the siege on the building.

That same day (December 9), inside the capital, ELAS made a determined attack on the 46th Royal Tanks in leaguer at the Greek Military Academy on Evelpidon Road, two kilometres north of Mount Lykavitos. The

attackers were beaten off, but it was decided to transfer the unit into the centre of the city, and this move was carried out during the next 48 hours under protection of Company A of the 11th KRRC with the aid of three Shermans and a Beaufighter. The British now held a tight perimeter amounting to less than three square kilometres of built-up area: from Omonia Square eastwards around the foot of Mount Lykavitos, then curving south-eastwards along Vasileos Konstantinou Avenue to the Acropolis and thence north along Athinas Street back to Omonia Square. The 6th Parachute Battalion and 50th Royal Tanks were holding the area around Omonia Square, the 11th KRRC and 2nd Highland Light Infantry the north-eastern and eastern sides of the perimeter and the 4th and 5th Parachute Battalions the southern and south-western sides, with the 46th Royal Tanks being held in reserve at the Infantry Barracks on Vasilissis Sofias Avenue at the perimeter's eastern tip.



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

*Left:* Also on December 6, the 5th Parachute Battalion began a southward sweep, from Constitution Square towards the northern end of Syngrou Avenue. First obstacle was the KKE party headquarters building on Othonos Street on the south side of Constitution Square. Lieutenant Morris photographed some of the prisoners taken there as they squatted under guard in front of the premises next door. *Above:* The building that stood adjacent to the KKE headquarters, which can just be seen on the right, has been demolished and replaced with a modern office block.

Street fighting was both trying and costly for the British. They were handicapped by a lack of local knowledge whereas their opponents knew every street and alley in the city. The ELAS units rarely launched assaults in force, but made constant and skilful use of infiltration tactics. Their attacks were usually carried out by night; by day they resorted only to harassing fire and sniping, slipping from one building to another under cover. British troops found fighting in the narrow streets and lanes under constant exposure to short-range fire nerve-wrecking. There was frequently no front line, platoons and companies being cut off for hours and sometimes days. It was difficult to tell friend from foe. The ELAS fighters often wore no uniform and were of both sexes and all ages. To add to the grimness, many in the ELAS ranks did not respect accepted conventions of warfare: they ignored Red Cross and white flags; they did not hesitate to disguise themselves as women, or wear British battledress or police



IWM NA20647

By the end of the day, B Company of the 5th Battalion had taken Mount Acropolis and established themselves among the ruins of the Parthenon which stands on the summit. Lieutenant Morris visited and photographed them there on the 10th, picturing Private L. Blacknell waiting to snipe at ELAS troops as they evacuate a burning building.



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

Since the war, archaeological work and restorations on the Acropolis have considerably changed the outline and appearance of many points on the rock. However, Kostas feels pretty sure this comparison is as accurate as possible. He has identified the burning building in the wartime photo as one standing in the flea market neighbourhood of Monastiraki to the north of the hill.

**Right:** An important episode of the Dekemvriana (as the December events are known in Greece) from the point of view of the Greek forces loyal to the government, was the heroic defence of the Gendarmerie School in the Makrigianni district. Located in a densely built-up area between Mount Acropolis and Syngrou Avenue, and cut off from the main British perimeter (see the map on page 15), the barracks was defended by a force of some 520 gendarmes against repeated assaults from all sides by vastly superior ELAS forces for six long days, December 6-12. ELAS bombarded the position with mortar fire from nearby Filopappou Hill (seen at rear), causing the roof of the main building to collapse, and blew a gap in the barrack's southern wall with dynamite, but the gendarmes held their ground until relieved.

uniforms; they used women and children to carry arms and ammunition; and they had no scruples about advancing behind a shield of women and children.

An embarrassment to the British troops were the Americans in the city. Officially, the United States were not at war with ELAS. Ostentatiously neutral, taking no part except in relief operations, the Americans freely cruised the capital and crossed the opposing front lines. Their presence in the battle area, as relief workers or war correspondents, was an inevitable source of discomfort to the British troops.

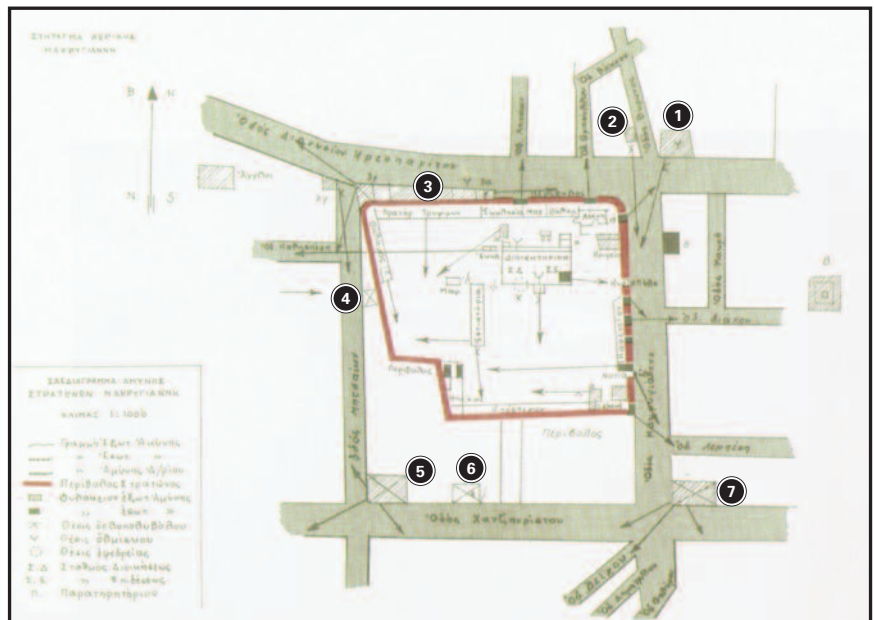
Meanwhile, the Greek Army units loyal to the government were fighting stiff battles of their own. The Mountain Brigade, in league around the Army Barracks at Goudi in north-eastern Athens, came under threat from units of the 7th and 34th ELAS Regiments on December 5. (The 34th Regiment was from the 13th (Roumeli) Division, which was joining the battle for Athens.) During the next two days, the brigade launched several counter-strikes against ELAS units closing in from all sides and sent its battalions to the south and south-east to form a wider perimeter from which it hoped to withstand enemy formations marching on the city. Real fighting broke out on the 7th. Elsewhere in the city, the Greek Sacred Regiment similarly fought off numerous ELAS attacks.

A heroic battle was being fought by the Makrigianni Gendarmerie Regiment under Colonel Georgios Samouel. Isolated in the Gendarmerie School at Makrigianni just south-east of the Acropolis, some 520 of its men fiercely defended themselves against repeated assaults by units from the 1st, 2nd and 6th ELAS Regiments for six long days, from December 6-12. The gendarmes had set up seven outposts on roofs of buildings in surrounding streets, but four of these already fell on the first day. Of the 38 gendarmes manning them, only 12 got back, the rest were killed or captured and summarily shot. That first day alone, 55 of the garrison were killed and 33 wounded. During the second night, December 7/8, the attackers managed to blow a gap in the barracks' southern wall but in bloody hand-to-hand fighting the gendarmes held the position. Although the roof of the main building had collapsed from mortar fire, they counter-attacked from there and from Guard Post 3 and recaptured Guard Post 4, taking 50 ELAS prisoner and capturing large amounts of arms and ammunition. The survivors stubbornly stood firm for another four days until relieved by British troops and pulled back into the Government-controlled perimeter on the 12th.

**Right:** Today only the main building of the barracks remains, the other outbuildings and the surrounding wall having been pulled down since the war. Part of the site is now occupied by the new Acropolis Museum which opened in 2009.



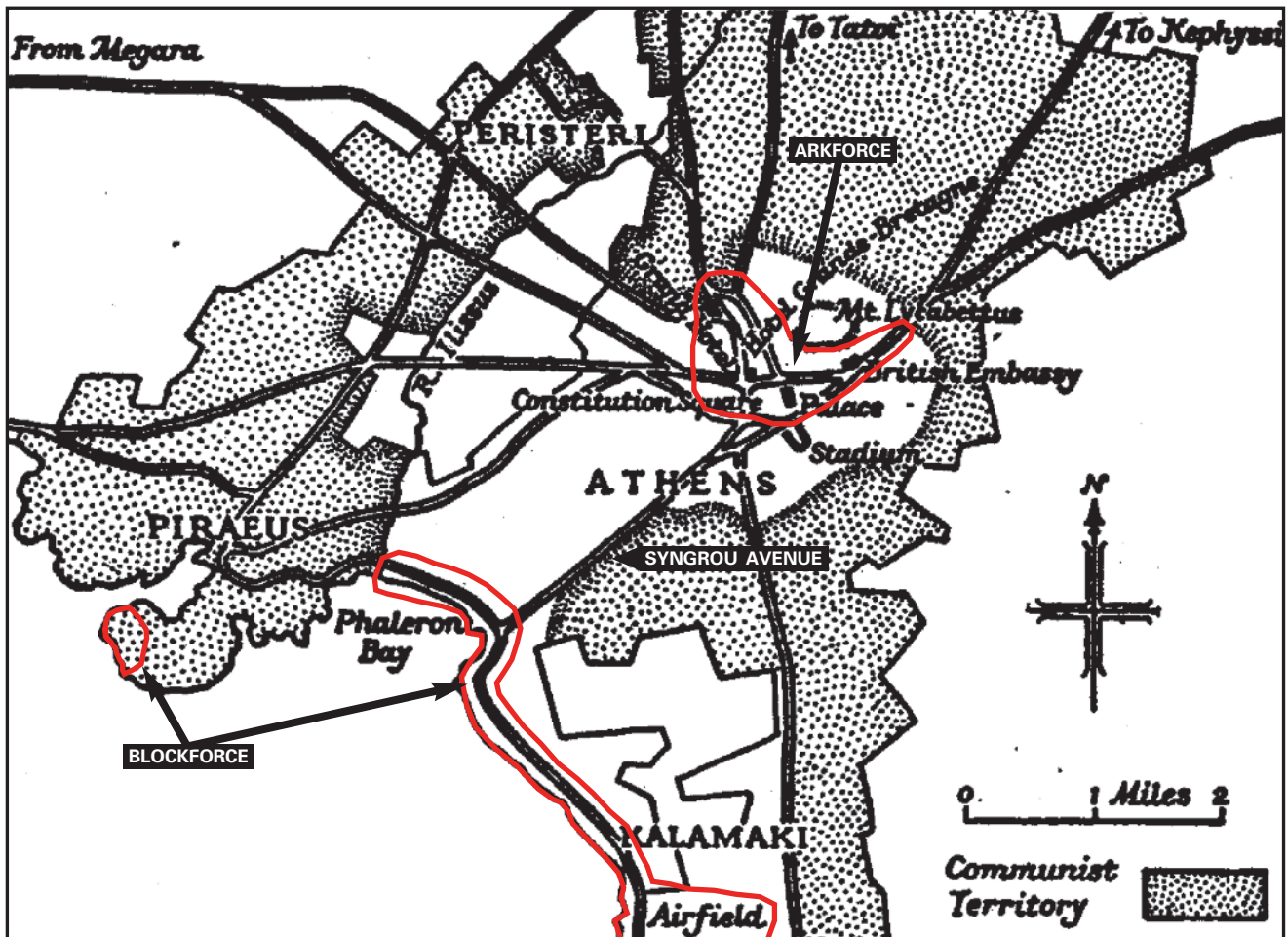
MEGALOECONOMIDOU



**Plan of the barracks showing the seven outposts set up on rooftops around it and the main lines of defensive fire from the complex.**



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS



After the ELAS forces moved into Athens in strength in the first week of December, the British position in Attica was first compressed into a tighter zone and then fragmented into three separate perimeters. The main one in the inner city was held by 'Arkforce' and the two on the coast — one at the southern tip of Piraeus harbour, the other along the Faliron Bay seafont — were both held by 'Blockforce'. A five-kilometre-long boulevard, Syngrou Avenue, connected the inner city with the coast and for the first two weeks the survival of 'Arkforce' depended on this single and tenuous lifeline.

Another Royalist stronghold resisting all ELAS attacks was that around the Temple of Hephaestus north-west of the Acropolis, which was held by Organisation X under Colonel Grivas. After suffering heavy casualties, they joined up with the 143rd National Guard Battalion, and helped in the relief of the Makrigianni Gendarmerie.

Several of the newly formed National Guard battalions were stationed in Athens, and more were formed as the month went on. Mostly undependable troops of low morale, many of them former members of the Security Battalions, and some of criminal reputation, they proved of little value in the fighting. The 6th, 42nd, 141st and 142nd Battalions fought alongside the Mountain Brigade in Goudi, others were put under command of British units. Scobie prudently decided that in no circumstances should they be used to assail ELAS. They were mostly confined to patrolling and guard duties, but as such they were vulnerable to attack and execution if captured.

Meanwhile, trouble was also brewing for the British troops deployed in other parts of Greece. On December 4, ELAS forces in Salonika in the north-east attempted a coup, taking over administrative buildings and throwing out Government officials. They organised anti-British demonstrations and propaganda but fighting did not break out, mainly due to Brigadier Lovett of the 7th Indian Brigade maintaining relatively good relations with the ELAS corps commander, General Euripidis Bakirdzis, and his political

commissar, Markos Vaphiadis, and to the well-disciplined restraint of the British troops. In due course it was decided to concentrate all the British forces in Salonika in a perimeter, bounded on two sides by the sea.

A similar situation developed with the 11th Indian Brigade in the Peloponnese. On the night of December 3/4, ELAS troops in Patras in a surprise move surrounded 900 defenceless men of the Greek National Guard and herded 750 of them away to captivity in the mountains. Brigadier Hunt of the 11th Indian Brigade wanted to retaliate and disarm the ELAS fighters but Scobie ordered him not to attempt this 'as we are not in a position to enforce this at the moment'. One of the brigade's battalions, the 3rd/12th Royal Frontier Force Regiment, suffered heavy losses when within the space of three days two of their landing craft were blown up by mines laid by ELAS in the port of Missolonghi in Epirus. Seventy men were killed and over 40 wounded and some 200 vehicles and other battalion equipment were lost. On December 16 the battalion and attached troops were evacuated by Royal Navy ships to Patras. By Christmas, the whole of the 11th Indian Brigade had been concentrated within that port, where it maintained defensive positions, surrounded on all sides by their ELAS opponents, vastly superior in numbers and weapons.

Thereafter it became a battle of nerves, of awaiting the outcome of events in Athens. All eyes were on the capital, where it was clear that the fate of Greece would be settled.

#### ARRIVAL OF THE 5th INDIAN BRIGADE

On the night of December 9/10, the 1st/4th Essex disembarked in Piraeus — the first unit of the 5th Indian Brigade (Brigadier John Saunders-Jacob) to arrive in Greece — and took up positions on the left flank of the Leicesters in its shallow perimeter at the southern tip of the port peninsula. The brigade had originally been earmarked to deploy in the Aegean islands but had been diverted to help in the task of ejecting ELAS from the port area. Next morning (December 10), the Essex passed through the Leicesters and, supported by some tanks and the fire of a Royal Navy corvette, began to clear up and seal an area of the peninsula big enough to enable the rest of the 5th Brigade (the 3rd/10th Baluch Regiment, the 1st/9th Gurkhas, and the attached 1st Field Regiment RA) to land.

#### FIELD-MARSHAL ALEXANDER TAKES CONTROL

On the morning of December 11, at the height of the crisis, Field-Marshal Sir Harold Alexander, about to succeed General Maitland Wilson as Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, unexpectedly flew into Athens, landing at the RAF-held airfield at Kalamaki. He had come to Athens with Harold Macmillan, his political advisor, at Churchill's request to take control of the situation and re-establish the British position. Seated in the gunner's seat of two Staghound armoured cars, they ran the gauntlet of ELAS snipers along the 'Mad Mile' to arrive at III Corps headquarters near the Hotel Grande Bretagne, an experience that immediately brought home to them the besieged position that the British forces were in. After conferring with Scobie, and visiting Ambassador Leeper in his besieged embassy, Alexander aptly summed up the position thus: 'You are in a grave situation. Your sea-



IWM NA20654

**Left:** On December 11, a week into the fighting and at the height of the crisis for the British troops besieged in Athens, Field-Marshal Sir Harold Alexander flew into Athens to consult with General Scobie on how to deal with the worrying military situation. He landed at Kalamaki airport and made his way into the city aboard a Staghound armoured car. Lieutenant Morris



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

**Right:** The building with the balconies seen in the background stands at the corner of Kriezotou and Panepistimiou Streets. This was on the opposite side of the road from the Metochiko Tamio Stratou building that housed Scobie's HQ.

port is cut off, your airport can only be reached by tank or armoured car, you are outnumbered, your dumps are surrounded and you have three days ammunition. I can put that right in time, but it may take a fortnight. It will need two fighting divisions to come from Italy. The heavy stuff will have to be landed on the open beaches of Faliron and December is not the best month for that.'

Alexander issued orders for the British 4th Infantry Division to be transferred to Greece immediately, its heavy equipment to be landed on the Faliron beaches. He instructed Scobie to hold on to what he had, to ensure that Kalamaki airfield remained securely held and, when sufficient reinforcements had arrived, to regain control of the port, link up with the airport and then institute operations to clear the whole of Athens and Piraeus. After this moral-boosting visit, Alexander flew back to Italy on the 12th.

To relieve Scobie of his many burdens, he ordered Lieutenant-General John Hawkes-

worth, the commander of British X Corps in Italy, to fly to Athens with his corps HQ to take over as military commander in Athens-Piraeus. (Opinions are still divided over this action by Alexander, the question being whether he was dissatisfied with Scobie and therefore sacked him as military commander or whether he just wanted to appoint a battle-experienced commander to lead the growing fighting force in Greece, while Scobie continued to be responsible for the British Military Mission as well as the overall political situation in Greece.)

As a first quick reinforcement, the 2nd King's Liverpool Regiment (of the 28th Brigade of the 4th Division) was flown to Kalamaki on the 12th. The battalion was immediately moved into Athens to reinforce the perimeter there.

That same day (December 12), ELAS representatives secretly called upon General Scobie and asked for cease-fire terms for a truce. The insurgents knew that Alexander

was in Athens (actually he had already left) and the offer was probably just designed to lure the British into thinking that it was unnecessary to order up very large reinforcements. Scobie replied that ELAS must cease fire and evacuate Attica. There was no immediate reply and when one came, on the 16th, it was with their own set of terms: ELAS would only withdraw from Athens if the Mountain Brigade did the same, if all gendarmerie be disarmed and if British troops did not interfere in Greek internal affairs. This was clearly unacceptable as it would have left ELAS in complete control of Athens, so Scobie rejected it out of hand.

Although Alexander's decisions and orders promised well, it would be sometime before the whole of the 4th Division would be in place and turn the scale in favour of the British. Before that happened, it was inevitable that the meagre forces holding on in Athens and Piraeus would suffer further setbacks.



IWM NA20652

**Alexander leaving the Grande Bretagne via the main entrance on Constitution Square.**



GAIL PARKER

**The hotel remains unchanged yet more traffic problems led Gail Parker to be knocked over on the pavement by a motorcycle!**



IWM NA204904

A vital position in central Athens for both sides was Omonia Square, a large plaza that has six large thoroughfares leading into it. Although the 6th Parachute Battalion secured it early in the fighting, by sheer persistence and weight of numbers ELAS continually infiltrated at night into positions commanding the square,

and the British forces had to send almost daily forays to drive away the rebel snipers. AFPU Lieutenant Noel Powell-Davies photographed the embattled expanse on December 16 from the corner of Panepistimiou and Patission Streets. In the foreground lies the wreckage of a British vehicle destroyed by ELAS.

On December 12, the insurgents captured the Town Hall after some stiff fighting, thus further compressing the British-held centre of the city.

Then, on the night of December 12/13, ELAS troops scored a major victory when they attacked and captured the Infantry Barracks which housed the 23rd Armoured Brigade's rear headquarters and signal squadron as well as the main supply depot for Athens, the 11th KRRC's mortar positions and the only battery of 25-pounders in Athens. Located along Vasilissis Sofias Avenue, the barracks lay just east of the main British perimeter. After an initial heavy mortar barrage, the attackers managed to blow a large hole in the barrack wall, through which about 1,000 partisans, many of them wearing British battledress and helmets, streamed in. In the confused fighting that followed, they destroyed the telephone exchange, killed 18 defenders and wounded 48 others before withdrawing with 106 British prisoners. However, they failed to locate the field guns, which were their main objective. During the morning, the newly arrived 2nd King's recaptured the barracks in a brief action, suffering 14 casualties. The ELAS attackers had lost over 30 killed, with another 40 taken prisoner, but their temporary capture of the barracks was a bold scoop that left the British very shaken.

That same night, back at the coast, ELAS launched a full-scale attack on the 16th Durham Light Infantry positions in Faliron. The battalion headquarters building was assailed before sunrise, the attackers using sticks of dynamite to demolish the walls of buildings. Although one Durham platoon was overrun, the battalion held its ground.

All through next day (December 13)

ELAS troops were on the offensive, assaulting barricades and buildings held by British and Government troops. During the fighting they used tram-cars, filled with explosives, which they propelled against British tanks on the main streets.

These were gloomy days for the British troops cooped up in the city. Wherever they attacked they were successful but their numbers were steadily decreasing and they could never put down sufficient men to hold their gains. Units were so widespread that it was easy for the enemy to infiltrate. The situation

was grave. ELAS had cut off their water as well as their electricity. Bread was scarce. The tanks were reduced to five rounds a day and mortars to 25 bombs each day. All command posts in the concentrated area were subject to mortar attacks.

By now, the civilian population of Athens was in danger of starvation as the food distribution had come to a complete standstill. The 2nd Parachute Brigade, in addition to its other worries, had the problem of opening soup kitchens, which fed over 20,000 civilians daily.



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

The view is looking south-west and the buildings on the left, marking the entry into Athinas Street, remain to pinpoint the comparison.

**REGAINING THE PORT OF PIRAEUS**

However, with new reinforcements now arriving daily, the end of the crisis was in sight. The first task was to regain control of the port of Piraeus and to restore a line of communication between there and the capital. By the evening of December 11, the whole of the 5th Indian Brigade had landed in Piraeus and the 3rd/10th Baluch Regiment and 1st/9th Gurkhas began to winkle out all ELAS pockets in the Kallipolis Peninsula, the tongue of land embracing the port area from the south. The methodical clearance street by street and block by block was met with fanatical opposition, supported by machine-gun and mortar fire, and cost the battalions several casualties but the task was largely completed by nightfall of the 13th. During the 14th and 15th the 1st/4th Essex battled their way north-eastward along the Kallipolis waterfront in the face of stiff resistance, eventually linking up with the 16th Durhams in their positions along Faliron Bay, and thus opening the coast road for armoured vehicles during the day-time.

Finally, during the night of December 15/16, the 1st/9th Gurkhas began a steady approach towards Kastella Hill, a 100-metre-high fortified pimple at the northern end of Piraeus and overlooking the harbour. It formed the last ELAS stronghold on the peninsula. Fire contact was made at 0140 hours but the narrow streets and German-built concrete emplacements on the steep slopes made progress difficult and slow, so that it was not until 1000 hours that the summit was taken. It was an important gain, because from the hill the southern suburbs of Athens came under direct observation.

By the end of December 16 the 5th Indian Brigade had cleared the whole of the peninsula and established a line of communication, albeit a tenuous one, from the port of Piraeus to Faliron Bay and hence via the Mad Mile to Athens.

As the ELAS forces were driven from the Piraeus area, the British troops noted a marked change in the attitude of the Greek inhabitants. Overnight their sullenness disappeared and, no longer afraid of ELAS retaliation, they adopted an undisguised friendliness and hospitality towards the British troops. This same phenomenon was to occur later in every area freed of ELAS domination and gave stark evidence of the fear that the Communists had instilled on the common citizen.



IWM NA26805

**A Sherman from C Squadron of the 46th Royal Tanks drives down the south side of the square on a mission to counter the enemy snipers.**



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

**None of the buildings on the north side of the square remain, all having since been superseded by high-rise blocks.**



DMITRI KESSEL



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

**Left: Dmitri Kessel photographed three British soldiers sprinting across Stadiou Street close to where it emerges onto Omonia Square, which can be seen in the background. Above: The concertina wire blocked off Stadiou Street at its junction with Aioulou Street. The buildings on the far side are a fusion of old and new.**



MEGALO ECONOMIDOU

On December 18, ELAS scored a major success when they assaulted Averoff Prison in northern Athens, hoping to get their hands on ex-Prime Ministers Georgios Tsolakoglou and Ioannis Rallis and other collaborators and war criminals detained there. Attacking with over 1,000 men, the prison walls were breached

with dynamite and the building set on fire. Fierce fighting broke out, during which many prisoners escaped and others were burnt to death or butchered by the rebels in a frenzy of hate. British troops from the 64th Airlanding Light Battery, RA, and men from the Greek Brigade grimly held on to part of the complex.

#### ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH 4th DIVISION

With much of the Piraeus thus cleared, on December 15, the British 4th Division (Major-General Dudley Ward) began landing there and assembling for the relief of Athens. First to come ashore was the 12th Infantry Brigade, with the 2nd Royal Fusiliers, 6th Black Watch and 1st Royal West Kents. That same day (December 15), the 40th Royal Tanks landed in Faliron, having been recalled to Athens by HQ 23rd Armoured Brigade late on the 6th. Leaving one squadron there to be assigned to the 4th Division, the remainder made their way into Athens along the Mad Mile, joining the other two Royal Tank Regiment units in the inner-city perimeter. Strangely enough, ELAS units along the route made little attempt to stop or harass them.

Meanwhile, the RAF was being reinforced too. By December 17, their strength had increased from four to eight squadrons, mostly Wellingtons, Beaufighters and Spitfires. Royal Greek Air Force presence had grown from one to four squadrons but, respecting a request from Papandreu, they were not deployed against the insurgents.

However, before the offensive to relieve Athens got underway, the British forces suffered two costly setbacks. On December 18, at dusk, ELAS scored a major success when they stormed Averoff Prison in northern Athens. Located along Alexandras Avenue north of Mount Lykavitos, the jail complex lay outside the British perimeter. ELAS planned the action in order to get their hands on two former collaborationist Prime Ministers, General Georgios Tsolakoglou (April 1941-December 1942) and Ioannis Rallis

(April 1943-October 1944), and others awaiting trial for alleged collaboration or war crimes. The prison, which held some 640 inmates, was guarded by gunners from the 64th Light Battery RA and about 150 men from the Greek Brigade. While one part of the 1,000-strong attacking force kept the building under a heavy barrage of small-arms fire and grenades, another set the west block of the prison alight. With the flames threatening to engulf the prisoners in their cells, the British commander had no option but to open the cells and order the inmates to rendezvous at a point outside the prison walls. In the chaos and confusion, less than half of the prisoners made it. Many others were slaughtered by the frenzied mob and several of the British soldiers were murdered as well. Other prisoners escaped and in the end only 235 of the 640 were re-detained.



DMITRI KESSEL

On January 5, three weeks after the night-time battle for the prison, Dmitri Kessel pictured sappers of the 7th Field Company, RE, passing the bodies of some of the prisoners who perished while trying to make good their escape. Their bodies were left lying in a dirt lane near the jail.



IWM NA21800

The debris from the dynamite explosions was still evident at the prison's main gate when the Trades Union Congress delegation led by Sir Walter Citrine visited Athens in late January 1945. Averoff Prison, which was located along Alexandras Avenue, was torn down in 1971, precluding any meaningful comparison.



IWM NA20907

**Left: On December 17, Lieutenant Powell-Davies accompanied a company from the 6th Parachute Battalion cleaning out the gridlock of streets to the south of Omonia Square. They were supported by two Sherman tanks and assisted by Greek City**



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

**Police troops. Here the paratroopers move into Eupolidhos Street from Aioulou Street ([A] on the map on page 28). Right: Eupolidhos Street lines the northern side of what was then Loudhonikou Square and is today named Kotzia Square.**

That same day (December 18), ELAS launched a strong attack on the RAF Air Headquarters Greece in the northern suburb of Kifissia, some 10 kilometres distant from the inner-city perimeter. In the early hours a force of about 1,000 surrounded the establishment — which comprised an airstrip and two hotels used as quarters for the some 600 troops, the Pentelikon and the Cecil — and attacked with mortars, machine guns and Italian 75mm guns. The facility, defended by just two platoons of RAF infantry, plus nine Bofors 40mm and four Hispano 20mm AA guns all from No. 2923 LAA Squadron, RAF Regiment, was soon under severe pressure but no intrusions were made, the garrison under Air Commodore Geoffrey Tuttle and Wing Commander John Simpson repulsing all initial attacks. Several times the attackers called out demands of surrender but these were all turned down. During the day, Spitfires and Beaufighters strafed the ELAS groups. However, an attempt by Wellingtons to drop much-needed ammunition and supplies to the garrison failed when a changing wind caused the parachute containers to fall into the rebels' hands. An armoured relief column was sent out from the city centre to evacuate the besieged force but it was delayed by road-blocks and unable to reach them. Fighting resumed after dark, with ELAS infiltrating at several points. Both at the Pentelikon and the Cecil, they managed to blow a hole in the wall with dynamite and then poured in, some of them driving captured RAF prisoners ahead of them as a shield. With their ammo expended, the RAF men had no option but to sound a cease-fire at about 0530 hours on the 19th. It was a humiliating defeat for the British. For the first time in the history of the RAF an entire headquarters had been captured. About 500 officers and airmen surrendered. ELAS marched them away into the mountains north-west of Athens, start of a grim three-week-long odyssey that would take them as far north as Lamia and Volos. The tank column sent out from the city centre reached Kifissia shortly after, engaged those ELAS who had remained and inflicted considerable casualties, but managed to rescue only around 100 of the prisoners.

Although ELAS had thus scored two major victories, they were losing the war. In desperation they began to take increasing numbers of hostages. Some 20,000 Greek civilians —

**Right: The tram lines have been lifted but the building on the north-west corner of the crossroads remains recognisable.**



IWM NA20908

**A few blocks further south, other paratroops with one of the 46th RTR tanks advance westwards into Evripidou Street ([B] on page 28). They move warily as they are under constant sniper fire. The Sherman has trained its gun northwards into Aioulou Street**



GAIL PARKER





IWM NA20920

**Above:** Having pushed down the length of Evripidou Street, the force has reached Eleftherias Square [C] at its western end. Powell-Davies pictured a runner coming back to Company HQ from the forward platoon in the square.

men, women and children — mostly from middle-class families accused of being collaborators or having lived too well under the Nazi occupation, were abducted and marched off into the rough countryside in freezing weather, many who could not keep up being shot or stabbed to death. As in all civil wars, the hatred between opposing factions led to a wave of atrocities on both sides.

EAM/ELAS propaganda continued to rage against the British, calling General Scobie 'the Black Fascist' and singling out the Gurkha troops as savage mercenaries, which led to fiery debates in the House of Commons in London. However, as full reports of the cruelties inflicted by the ELAS forces became known, any doubts as to the respective merits of both sides were quickly dispelled.

**Right:** Their mission accomplished, the patrol withdraws from the square, moving back down Evripidou Street. As Powell-Davies noted in his dope sheet: 'Speed is the main thing in getting away. The men must try to beat the snipers by getting away quickly. ELAS troops had already enfiladed every side street with machine-gun fire, and much use was made of the cover of tanks to cross the gaps'



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

**Peace** has returned to the square and pedestrians can stroll across at leisure without any danger from snipers.



IWM NA20922



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

## LIFTING THE SIEGE OF ATHENS

By December 18, all of the 4th Division had landed (by now, British strength in Greece had reached 50,000) and the time had come to go over to the offensive to clear ELAS out of Athens. The first task was to open Syngrou Avenue and firmly link up the two perimeters. The 4th Division had deployed with its 28th Brigade to the left of the road, 12th Brigade to the right of it and 10th Brigade echeloned to the right rear. Attacking in the early morning, all brigades made steady advances on the 18th and 19th. Using armour and rocket-firing Beaufighters to blast a way down the road, opposition was brushed aside. At other places, ELAS resistance was more formidable, with machine guns firing on fixed lines. Meanwhile, the 5th Parachute Battalion and 2nd King's Regiment were attacking southwards out of the city along Syngrou Avenue and the parallel Faliron Street. On the 20th they and the lead

**Left:** Almost as a relic from days long gone, the house at the intersection with Epikourou Street [D] has survived all redevelopment.



IWM NA20862

On December 18, Lieutenant Morris accompanied a party from the 6th Parachute Battalion as they again moved out northwards to clear the streets south of Omonia Square, again with armoured support from the 46th Royal Tanks. Advancing up Athinas Street, this Sherman has reached the intersection with Sofokleous Street (IE) on page 28).

units of the 28th Brigade (the 2nd King's parental formation) met up in the area of the FIX Brewery, thus restoring a firm and secure line of communication between Athens and the coast and finally putting an end to the state of siege endured by the British forces in Athens for over a fortnight.

While the 4th Division advanced astride Syngrou Avenue, Blockforce set out to clear the rest of the Piraeus from the enemy. The 16th Durhams, on the right and covering the 4th Division's left flank, advanced with armoured support to clear the piece of land between the coastal road and the Piraeus-to-Athens railway line. The 2nd/5th Leicesters, on the left, prepared to push up the direct road to Athens.

*Right: Squatting in the same spot as the paratroopers, Kostas Alexopoulos made this perfect comparison. The building on the north-east corner of the crossroads remains unchanged.*



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IWM NA20865

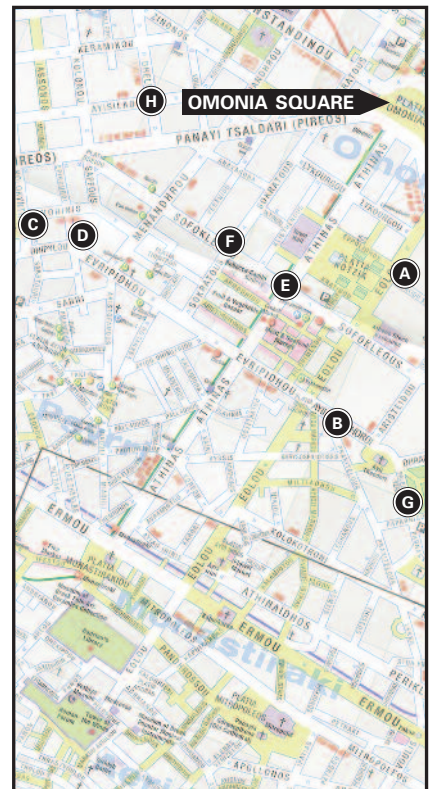
One block further west, another Sherman with another party of paratroopers has reached the intersection of Sofokleous and

Sokratous Street [F], giving cover to paratroopers as they probe the ruins of a dynamited house for hidden mines.



GAIL PARKER

Gail Parker found the same crossroads largely unchanged over 65 years later.





IWM NA21030

*Left:* Two Sherman tanks, passing over rubble from wrecked buildings on Evripidou Street, had their tracks blown off by mines laid by ELAS troops. Lieutenant Morris pictured one of the vehicles being prepared for towing away. According to his



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*Right:* Astonishingly after over six decades, the war damage to the house at the junction with Epikourou Street [D] is still clearly visible today.



IWM NA21035

A Scammell heavy breakdown vehicle has towed the disabled tank back to Klafthomonos Square [G]. The black trail marks

are caused by the oil that was poured into the tank's idler wheels to help it turn more easily without its caterpillar tracks.



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The same view today, looking east up Dragatsaniou Street with the square on the right.



IWM NA20928

Six-pounder anti-tank guns parked in front of the National Library on Panepistimiou Street, pictured by Powell-Davies on the 17th.



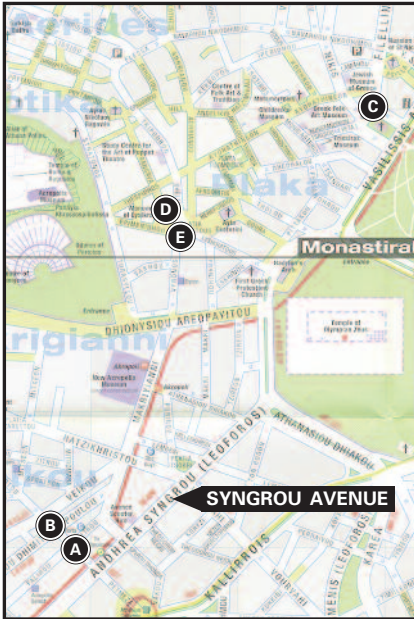
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Looking northwards up Panepistimiou in the direction of Omonia Square today.

*Right:* Following his visit to Athens, Field-Marshal Alexander gave orders for the entire 4th British Infantry Division to be transferred to Greece and on December 15 it began landing in Faliron Bay. By December 18, everything was ready for the offensive to lift the siege of Athens. While the 4th Division attacked northwards up Syngrou Avenue, the 5th Parachute Battalion and the 2nd King's Regiment struck southwards to link up with them. Lieutenant Powell-Davies went along with the paratrooper company that was advancing down Falirou Street, as always supported by armour from C Squadron of the 46th Royal Tanks. 'Tail-end Charley', the rifleman guarding the tank commander against snipers from the rear, is not a paratrooper, so more likely a member of the 2nd King's.



IWM NA20934



*Right:* Looking south down Falirou Street at its crossing with Petmeza Street ([A] on the plan) today. If it were not for the street name sign in the wartime picture it would have been difficult to establish the correct location as all the buildings around the crossroads have made way for new developments.



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IWM NA20937

*Left:* One road further to the right — Nikolaou Dimitrakopoulou Street — the paratroopers have spotted some ELAS troops trying to work their way round to the rear of the neighbouring 2nd King's. Halting at the intersection with Petmeza Street [B] they engage the enemy with automatic



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and tank fire. Note the two Greek policemen on the left. The one who is standing up is wearing a German helmet, the other kneeling next to the paratroopers, an old Greek Army helmet. *Right:* Virtually all the buildings in this street, even the church on the right, have changed since the war.



IWM NA20845

*Left:* The total bag for the day for the 5th Battalion was 21 rebels killed, 15 wounded and 55 taken prisoner. The latter were temporarily held in a building under the south bluff of the Acropolis. ELAS troops attacked to try to release them but



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were beaten back. This mortar section helped to break up the assault. *Right:* It was set up at the junction of Filellinon and Simonidou Streets [C]. The church in the background is the Anglican Episcopal Church of Saint Paul.



IWM NA20869

*Left:* The following day, December 19, Lieutenant Powell-Davies photographed troops from one of the Greek National Guard battalions moving up to consolidate ground won by the British troops and relieve the latter for other operations. The National Guard, formed by the Papandreou Government on December 1 to replace the old Gendarmerie and EAM's civil guard force, was to consist of 22,000 men, organised into 36 battalions of about 630 men each, and be tasked with

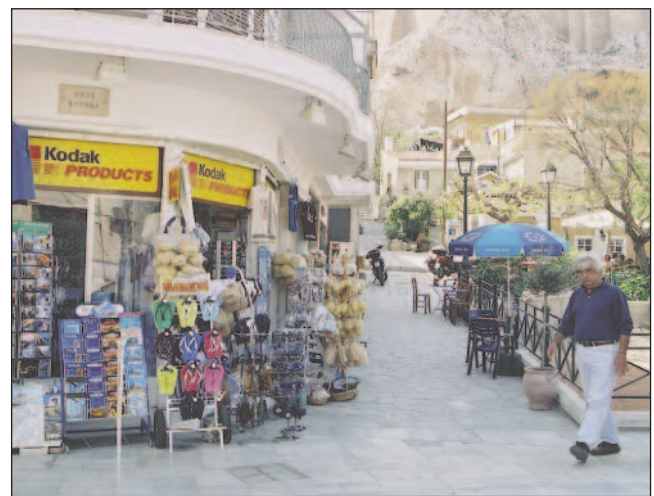


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maintaining law and order. On November 24, the class of recruits born in 1915 was called up and by the time this picture was taken, some 4,800 Greeks had responded to the call to join the new force. Despite its hasty formation, at least one battalion was to prove itself in action. These troops were pictured on the corner of Lysikratous and Shelly Streets [D], at the foot of Mount Acropolis in the Plaka district. *Right:* Fortunately, the leaves were off the trees when Kostas took his comparison.



IWM NA20870



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*Left:* A little further on, at the junction of Epimenidou and Vyronos Streets [E], troops from the same battalion halt to receive further instructions. Note the assortment of headgear and the blue-and-white-striped armbands identifying them as Government troops. *Above:* The street name sign and the close proximity of the Acropolis made this an easy match.



IWM NA21151

Lieutenant Morris pictured more Guardsmen on December 21 by which time the force numbered 5,000 in nine battalions. Regarded

as too green for combat, the men were mostly relegated to occupying ground already won and guarding prisoners.



GAIL PARKER

The name plate identified the location as Marasli Street and Gail Parker found the correct junction with Karneadhou Street.

This shows that the troops were moving into the area that lies at the southern foot of Mount Lykavitos.





IWM NA21063



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

Kostas found the spot on the corner of Ierofanton and Voutadon Streets, on the northern side of the old gas works. The facility has long since been taken out of use but the old gas-holders remain, albeit scaled to a lower height.

On Christmas Eve, the 4th Parachute Battalion began a push on the municipal gas works, which lay along Peiraios Avenue, the important main street that leads south-west from Omonia Square and connects Athens with the port of Piraeus. The facility had not been working since ELAS occupied it in early December, leaving the entire city without a supply for heating and cooking for the duration of the fighting. Lieutenant Powell-Davies pictured two paratroopers peering cautiously around a corner at the approach to the complex.

Back in Piraeus harbour, on the night of December 21/22, all three battalions of the 5th Indian Brigade launched a small amphibious operation across the harbour to land on the north side of it and clear that part of the Piraeus of insurgent units. The landing achieved tactical surprise but within 48 hours ELAS reacted with vigorous counter-attacks, supported by mortars and machine guns. However, once these were staved off, the brigade began to move forward and by Christmas Day its units were closing in on the final ELAS strongholds. That afternoon, C Company of the 1st/4th Essex, supported by tanks, stormed the Papastratos Cigarette Factory, a very large building forming a last strong point at the north-east corner of the harbour. After half an hour's bombardment by tanks, mortars and machine guns, they forced the position, taking 300 prisoners. To their amazement, the company found 800 women and children seeking refuge in the factory cellars, necessitating the quick organisation of a soup kitchen to feed them. In all, before the battle was over the 5th Indian Brigade would be serving 22,000 meals a day to over 10,000 hungry civilians.

Meanwhile in Athens, with supplies and ammunition for the British troops pouring in and British casualties being evacuated out, the offensive continued. On December 22, the 5th Parachute Battalion, supported by two squadrons of tanks and a troop of armoured cars, cleared more of the city centre, taking nearly 400 prisoners and killing at least 50 ELAS.

That same day, ELAS again put out tentative feelers for a cease-fire, expressing a desire for peace and a willingness to pull out of Athens. However, again the conditions proposed were such that it was impossible for Scobie to accept. The new offer was never formally rejected, because it was overtaken by a major breakthrough in the politics



IWM NA21063

Paratroopers advancing down Voutadon Street.



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The site of the former gas works was redeveloped into a cultural centre in the 1980s, but Voutadon Street remains much as it was, only the handcarts having been replaced by modern vans.



DMITRI KESSEL

*Left:* On Christmas day, faced with a political stalemate on the question of the Greek King George II, Prime Minister Winston Churchill made a dramatic surprise visit to Athens, his main intention being to personally size up Archbishop Damaskinos who was being proposed as the Regent to replace the King. Damaskinos was a strong character, fearless and incorruptible, who had refused to knuckle under the German occupation, and was much respected by all Greeks, but Churchill distrusted him. Field-Marshal Alexander was present at their first encounter and described it in his memoirs: 'Winston, slumped on the sofa, looked bored and obviously dubious about the prospects of the meeting. Then a magnificent figure of a man appeared in the doorway — strong, virile, well over six feet, with his black beard [sic] and his great head-dress which made him look like a giant. Churchill rose in

of the conflict.

By late December, Churchill had become greatly worried by the developments in Greece. These were exacerbated by growing hostility of public opinion at home and in the United States towards what the British were doing in that country. For the past three weeks there had been much clamour in the

British Press — notably in *The Times*, the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian* — and there had been a second critical debate in the House of Commons on December 20, Churchill being roughly handled by Labour MP Aneurin Bevan and others of the Left.

The key problem was the question of the



BRITISH EMBASSY ATHENS

astonishment, obviously immensely impressed by the appearance of his guest. They sat down together and started a discussion which had to be interpreted. I recollect that the Prime Minister said something to which the Archbishop objected, and from that moment it was never in doubt that His Beatitude had very strong views of his own. Winston, in short, had found his man.' Dmitri Kessel pictured Churchill, wearing the uniform of an Air Commodore, with Damaskinos at the British Embassy in Loukianou Street on December 25. *Right:* The picture was taken at the rear of the building as they entered the garden. Today No. 2 Loukianou Street is the British Ambassador's residence, the Embassy offices having moved in the 1960s to new premises at No. 1 Ploutarchou Street, one block further east. We thank the Embassy staff for taking this comparison for us.

Greek monarchy. From all quarters, starting with Ambassador Leeper on December 10 followed by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan and even US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, came advice once more to establish a Regency under Archbishop Damaskinos. Churchill however was not convinced that His Beatitude would



IWM NA21050

*Left:* Apart from taking the measure of Archbishop Damaskinos, Churchill called for a conference of all the parties concerned in the Greek conflict, including EAM/ELAS. This was convened at the Greek Foreign Ministry in Vasilissis Sofias Avenue on December 26. Here General Scobie waits on the



GAIL PARKER

steps for the arrival of the Prime Minister and other participants. *Right:* The building, only a short walk from the Grande Bretagne Hotel, is today known as the Old Foreign Ministry, a new ministry building having been erected almost next door to it, on the corner opposite the hotel.

be a strong, impartial regent and feared he could quite conceivably make himself a dictator supported by the left wing. On Christmas eve, with dramatic suddenness, Churchill resolved to go and see for himself, taking Eden with him.

They arrived at heavily guarded Kalamaki airport in the afternoon of December 25, where they were joined by Macmillan and Field-Marshal Alexander from Italy. For security reasons neither Scobie nor Leeper nor the Greek Government had received prior notice of the impending visit. Making their way to the British Embassy, escorted by armoured cars of the 1st King's Dragoon Guards, Churchill at once summoned a conference, which met on December 26-28 at the Greek Foreign Ministry. Present were all the chief personalities in Athens, among them Archbishop Damaskinos (who presided throughout), Papandreou, the leaders of KKE, EAM and ELAS (Siantos, Dimitrios Partsalidis and General Mandakas) and those of the Greek Liberal, Progressive and Popular Parties. The Allied delegation included all the principal British figures plus three observers from the other Allied nations: the US Ambassador, Lincoln MacVeagh; the French Minister, and the leader of the Soviet Military Mission in Greece, Colonel Grigori Popov. After addressing the opening meeting, Churchill and the other allies withdrew, leaving the Greeks to settle their own problems.

No conclusions emerged from the conference but Churchill, who left Athens on the 28th, came away convinced that a Regency must be established and that Damaskinos was, after all, the right man for it. Back in London, in a series of stormy discussions, he put the Greek King under supreme coercion until the latter finally succumbed and appointed the Archbishop as Regent on December 30, having refused to do so at least four times earlier in the month. The following day, the Regent accepted Papandreou's resignation and on January 3 he charged another Venizelist republican leader, General Nikolaos Plastiras, who had been the titular head of EDES during the occupation, with forming a new government.

None of these political events affected the course of the fighting, although the insurgents came close to striking a crippling blow to the British during the conference. On the night of December 25/26, a party of KKE



Because ELAS had cut the city's electricity, the conference was held in the dim light of hurricane lamps. Seated around the oval table are (L-R) British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Churchill, Archbishop Damaskinos (in the chair), Field-Marshal Alexander, his political advisor Harold Macmillan, General Scobie and British Ambassador Rex Leeper. Across the table from them were Greek Prime Minister Papandreou and representatives of the main Greek political parties: Themistocles Sophoulis and Georgios Kaphandaris of the Liberal Party, General Nikolaos Plastiras, staunchly Republican and titular head of EDES during the occupation, and Dimitrios Maximos of the Popular Party; at one long end were the three observers for the Soviet Union, United States and France; and at the other end — arriving five minutes after the start of the conference and wearing British battledress — the three representatives of EAM/ELAS: Georgios Siantos, Secretary-General of the KKE; Dimitrios Partsalidis, Secretary of the EAM and head of the EAM-controlled Provisional Democratic Government, and General Emmanouel Mandakas, military commander of ELAS in the Athens region. After the opening speeches, the British and Allied representatives left the meeting, leaving the Greeks to talk among themselves. The conference, which lasted for three days, December 26-28, failed to bring about a cease-fire although there was reluctant agreement to accept the Archbishop as Regent.

members attempted to blow up the Hotel Grande Bretagne by putting nearly a ton of dynamite in the sewers beneath the building. The attempt was foiled by the vigilance of three British sappers who spent part of their Christmas patrolling the sewers. These patrols began after two ELAS men, who

had lost their way, popped out of a manhole within the perimeter into the arms of two paratroopers. Churchill was not staying in the hotel, but Scobie and many of his staff were (as were many of the Allied war correspondents in the city) and the explosion, had it gone off, would have caused serious



Left: Churchill having returned to London and persuaded King George II to finally agree to the Archbishop becoming Regent, on December 31 Damaskinos was installed in his new position following a short ceremony held at the Greek Foreign Ministry. The procedure lasted only five minutes and was conducted by



ten bishops who stood in a half circle around the archbishop while one of them read out the proclamation. Afterwards, Damaskinos inspected a guard of honour of Evzones in the front yard of the Ministry. Right: The same courtyard on the corner of Vasilissis Sofias Avenue and Zalokosta Street.

*Left:* While the conference was in session, on December 27 Alexander took time to visit the 127th Parachute Field Ambulance which had set up its surgical centre in the Old University building on Panepistimiou, next-door to the National Library. Here he leaves the hospital accompanied by Brigadier Charles Pritchard, the commander of the 2nd Parachute Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel John Parkinson, commanding the field ambulance, and other senior officers. The 127th had moved into the building from Rouf Barracks in north-west Athens (where it had assembled on December 5) on the 14th and, until the lifting of the siege on the 20th, was the only unit capable of effecting major surgery in the beleaguered city. By the end of its stay in Athens on January 22, 1945, it had had admitted 628 cases and performed 214 surgical operations.



IWM NA21080

losses.

Churchill's visit to Greece had a remarkable effect on the morale of both British soldiers and the civilian population of Athens, instilling a new air of confidence and optimism. By the time he left, the situation in certain parts of the city had improved but the industrial area west of Constitution Square continued to be stubbornly defended by ELAS and the Athens-Piraeus road still had to be cleared and opened. Arkforce and the 4th Division were redeployed to do this.

On Boxing Day and the day after, the 5th Parachute Battalion, supported by Sherman tanks of the 46th Royal Tanks, attacked the heart of the ELAS resistance and presently reached the top of the Piraeus road, there joining the 6th Battalion, with the 4th Battalion close at hand. Further down the same artery, the 6th Black Watch and 2nd Royal Fusiliers (12th Brigade) and the 2nd Somersets (28th Brigade) battled to break ELAS's grip on it.

On December 29, large-scale operations were started to clear the southern part of the city, east of Syngrou Avenue. At 0700 the 10th Brigade (2nd Bedfordshire & Herefordshires, 2nd Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and 1st/6th East Surreys) attacked from the suburb of Nea Smirni across the heavily urbanised hills of Daphni towards Imitos. Simultaneously, the Greek Mountain Brigade and two National Guard battalions, together with the 11th KRRC, the 2nd King's and half a squadron of the 40th Royal Tanks



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

The same steps and Doric columns of the university entrance over six decades later.



IWM NA21087

*Left:* Later in the day, Alexander, accompanied by Lord Moran, Churchill's personal physician, toured the Acropolis. They were guided around by Mr. A. R. Burns of the British embassy, an expert on Greek antiquities. Here Alexander looks down at enemy movement taking place in the burning area of Athens.



GAIL PARKER

Mount Lykavitos — marking the eastern end of the British perimeter — rises in the background. The soldier manning the machine gun is Sergeant S. R. Anderson. *Right:* The field-marshal's observation post was in the 'tower' at the east end of the great rock — still a popular viewpoint for tourists today.

**Right:** By January 31, the British were slowly pushing ELAS forces away from the Piraeus road and regaining control of this direct artery to the port. Here a Daimler Dingo passes a knocked-out Italian Fiat Spa Autoblinda 41 which had once belonged to a rebel unit. ELAS had captured a large quantity of Italian arms and equipment, especially in October 1943 when the entire Italian Pinerolo Division, which had changed sides after the Italian capitulation of the previous month, was disarmed by them.



IWM NA21422

(fighting as infantry), all units being supported by armour from the 46th Royal Tanks, began a fierce offensive in the area west and south-west of the Great Stadium. The Greeks were fighting in the suburb of Kaisariani, which ELAS had christened 'Little Stalingrad'. Bitter fighting ensued, with many rebels putting up fanatical opposition, even when they were facing tanks with nothing more than rifles and pistols. The headquarters of the 13th (Roumeli) Division was battered and overrun, and the strategically important Ardhittos Hill, the last ELAS stronghold in southern Athens, was finally captured by the 11th KRRC after a furious battle.

Having now cleared all of southern Athens, the combined forces turned about to deal with the northern part of the city. The 2nd Highland Light Infantry, 50th Royal Tanks and two National Guard battalions moved into the congested built-up area, with the 11th KRRC joining the battle later. Two squadrons of tanks and a squadron of armoured cars gave support. The fighting went on for four days and was fierce and incessant. Several tanks were damaged by mines or anti-tank weapons.

On New Year's Day, while ELAS was conducting a stubborn retreat, a small delegation from EAM led by Ioannis Zevgos, a senior member of the KKE Central Committee



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**Right:** The armoured car had been disabled at the junction of the Piraeus road (today named Panagi Tsaldari Avenue) with Iera Odos Street, just north-east of the gas works. As part of the redevelopment of the area, the high wall around the gas works was reduced to a lower height and topped with a decorative iron railing.



IWM NA21425

**A Red Cross vehicle destroyed on the road leading to Piraeus. According to the official caption, it had come to grief on an ELAS mine.**



GAIL PARKER

**Gail found the picture had been taken at the intersection with Kolonou Street. Only the centre building remains among the new and higher office and apartment blocks.**



IWM NA21427

**Left: On New Year's Eve, the 5th Parachute Battalion began a drive to clear the myriad of streets in the Metaxourghio district north of the road to Piraeus. Here two paratroopers have removed a wire barricade at the crossroads of Agisilaou and Deligiorgi Streets ([H] on page 28) to allow a supporting**



GAIL PARKER

**Humber armoured car to pass through. Another Humber and a carrier have already passed through and can be seen further up the street. Right: No barricades blocking Deligiorgi today but still closed to traffic coming from this side as it is a one-way street.**

(and a former minister in Papandreou's cabinet), visited Scobie to once more discuss cease-fire terms. Again, Scobie insisted on the same conditions as before, without qualifications, so nothing came of it.

By January 4, General Hawkesworth was ready to begin his final offensive to clear what remained of Athens and break away from the city. That day, the 12th Infantry and 2nd Parachute Brigades, supported by tanks and armoured cars and with Spitfires giving close support, launched a full-scale attack into the western districts of Kolokyntos and Peristeri. Opposition was fierce and the leading 6th Parachute Battalion had five officer casualties within 30 minutes. The 5th Battalion had difficulty clearing the enemy because the supporting armour was held up by barricades and demolitions blocking the narrow streets. Fighting from house to house, the paratroopers slowly battled their way forward. About noon, armoured cars from A Squadron of the 1st King's Dragoon Guards captured the bridge over the Kifisos river on Lenorman Avenue — the ELAS escape

route — forcing the insurgents to stand and fight while looking for another way out. As the British paras and armour dashed into Peristeri, the ELAS soldiers broke and fled to the hills, chased by strafing Spitfires. By evening, 170 ELAS dead and 70 wounded were discovered; 520 were taken prisoner.

While this was happening, a column composed of the King's Dragoon Guards, C Company of the 11th KRRC, one battery of 25-pounders and 15 tanks of the 46th Royal Tanks moved out of the city and into open country with the object of blocking ELAS escape routes further to the west and north-west. Few prisoners were taken, but a large quantity of arms, ammunition and explosives was captured.

The British actions on the 4th had broken the spirit of the rebel movement in Athens. Their morale was cracked and resistance began gradually to die away. During the night, the ELAS formations in northern Athens started to withdraw on a large scale. The following day (January 5), having received civilian reports of these movements,

the 11th KRRC set out in three columns due north up Patission Street with the object of preventing further withdrawals from the northern approaches to the city. They found the northern suburbs clear of the enemy. By the end of the day all ELAS formations had quit the city.

They had taken to the hills and mountains. General Hawkesworth sent several mobile columns in pursuit. On January 6, the same task force of the King's Dragoon Guards, 11th KRRC and 46th Royal Tanks, now reinforced with the 2nd Bedfords, moved out westwards on the Thebes road. The Greek Mountain Brigade joined in the chase on the 7th. A battle was fought at the Dryoschephalae Pass south of Thebes, which itself was entered on the 8th to a tumultuous welcome.

Meanwhile, the British units squeezed out of battle in Athens were quickly transferred to other parts of the country, where ELAS was also still active. On the 7th, the battalions of the 139th Brigade sailed from Piraeus to Patras to reinforce the position there. Those of the 5th Indian Brigade went to



IWM NA21431

**Left: A group of ELAS prisoners carrying off one of their own wounded at the same crossroads. During the house-to-house clearing of Metaxourghio, the British came under strong mortar fire from ELAS. One of the casualties was Lieutenant Powell-**



GAIL PARKER

**Davies, the AFPU photographer covering the action, who was wounded by shrapnel shortly after he had taken this picture. Right: Another perfect comparison by Gail Parker, looking south-west down Agisilaou Street today.**



IWM NA21444

Left: Newly recruited soldiers from one of the National Guard battalions moving through the city to occupy positions with the British forces. Right: They were coming down Georgiou Stavrou Street and turning south into Aioulou Street. Although



GAIL PARKER

the picture does not show it they were in fact emerging onto Loudhonikou Square, today named Kotzia Square, which we earlier saw being cleaned out by the paratroopers and armour on December 17 (see page 25).



IWM NA21446

The same troops passing the Town Hall. ELAS troops had captured this building on December 12, after some stiff fighting, and its façade clearly shows signs of battle damage.



KOSTAS ALEXOPOULOS

Repaired shortly after the war and with a new refurbishment completed in 1995, the old Town Hall now stands restored to its former glory.

Volos on the east coast.

**ARMISTICE**

By now it was a forlorn battle for ELAS and just a question of time before they asked for an armistice. On January 6, at Macmillan's advice, Scobie had withdrawn the truce terms that he had previously offered, partly because of ELAS's wholesale abduction of hostages, partly because these terms — evacuation by ELAS from Attica and their surrender of arms in Athens — had been overtaken by events. On December 9, the EAM/ELAS command sent in Partsalidis and Zevgos to sue for an armistice. Two days later, on December 11, four representatives (Partsalidis, Zevgos and Majors Theodore Makridis and Athanasios Athinellis) were sent to Scobie to accept his terms and an armistice was signed, to take effect one minute after midnight on the night of January 14/15. The insurrection was at an end. The Communists had lost the Second Round of the civil war.

Overall British casualties for the period December 3-January 6 were 237 killed, 2,101 wounded and some 1,000 captured. The three RTR battalions of the 23rd Armoured Brigade had suffered 126 casualties: 16 killed, 105 wounded and five missing. The 11th KRRC alone had 17 killed, 45 wounded and 84 missing. The 2nd Parachute Brigade had incurred some 370 casualties: the 4th Battalion lost 156 men; the 5th over 100 and the 6th 123. The 2nd Highland Light Infantry had three killed and 30 wounded. The 5th Indian Brigade had suffered 166 casualties all ranks, the 1/4th Essex taking some 25 killed and wounded and the 3rd/10th Baluch and 1st/9th Gurkhas about 70 each. The 1,000 troops taken prisoner by ELAS, most of whom had been marched over the mountains to miserable and filthy POW camps near Marathon, were exchanged at Volos under the terms of the armistice at the end of January.

ELAS casualties are unknown but are estimated at some 12,000, of which some 4,000 were killed and wounded and the remaining 8,000 taken prisoner.

Throughout the December battles, the British troops in Greece had been much annoyed by reports in sections of the English Press that they were not fighting Germans but taking on freedom fighters who had bravely fought the Germans and had recovered Greece or, put more sensationally, that they had been employed in butchering innocent workers for the benefit of the rich Athenian businessmen. Public opinion in the West, skilfully nurtured by Communist propaganda, was sympathetic to all Resistance movements, particularly those with left-wing

*Right:* By the second week of January 1945, the British had driven ELAS out of Athens and were pursuing the rebel forces in open country outside the capital. It was clear to all that the insurgents were losing the war and on January 9 representatives from EAM/ELAS contacted the British command to start negotiating a cease-fire. Two days later, at 2230 hours on January 11, the truce was signed at General Scobie's headquarters, to come into effect at 00.01 hours on the 15th. The EAM delegation consisted of Ioannis Zevgos, senior member of the KKE Central Committee; Dimitrios Partsalidis, political leader of EAM, and ELAS Majors Theodore Makridis and Athanasios Athinellis. Here Scobie signs the agreement on behalf of the British. Looking on, on extreme left, are Athinellis and Partsalidis. Also present are Brigadier Hugh Mainwaring, Scobie's Chief-of Staff (whom Alexander had sent after his December 11 visit to bolster up Scobie's staff), and Major Alistair Mathews, who acted as interpreter.

affiliations. However, as revelations of ELAS's atrocities and abductions became known in January (the most-publicised being the discovery of mass graves full of mutilated corpses in the suburb of Peristeri after its capture), so much of the foreign sympathy that EAM had enjoyed, particularly in Britain, dissipated.

As it happened the British Trades Union Congress played a decisive part in this. Asked by members of the General Confederation of Greek Workers to mediate in a dispute with their Communist rival EEAM (Éthnikon Ergatikon Apeleftherotikon Metopon — National Workers' Liberation Front), the TUC sent its Secretary-General, Sir Walter Citrine, at the head of a delegation to discover the truth. He and four of his colleagues arrived in Athens on January 22 and in a round-table conference managed to settle the trade union dispute. However, they also used their time to conduct a thorough inquiry into the stories of atrocities. They talked to British troops, meeting amongst others with some 700 paratroopers in an Athens theatre and asking them to speak out freely. On their return to England on February 3, they made a press statement and published a report, titled *What we saw in Greece*, upholding all that the troops had done and were doing in Greece, and the criticism stopped.

A month passed before the truce could be converted into a permanent settlement. Negotiations began on February 2 in a villa at the seaside resort of Varkiza and lasted ten days. The resulting Varkiza Peace Agreement, signed on February 12, was a mixture of rulings both stern and generous to the defeated EAM. Apart from the complete demobilisation of ELAS and the surrendering of all weapons by them, it provided for free expression of opinion of all citizens; trade union liberties; the raising of martial law (although the right of arrest without warrant remained in force outside Attica until all of ELAS had demobilised); an amnesty for ELAS fighters (except for common-law crimes against life and property, unless they were judged 'absolutely necessary' for the political aim for which they were committed); release of all civilian hostages by EAM/ELAS; establishment of a non-political National Army, from which ELAS members were not to be excluded; the purging of the civil service and security services, and finally a plebiscite on the constitution followed by parliamentary elections within the current year.

As regards its complete disarmament, in the following days and weeks ELAS actually surrendered 100 artillery pieces, 219 mortars, 419 heavy and 1,412 light machine guns, 713 light automatics, 48,953 rifles and pistols and 57 anti-tank rifles. Although that was more



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than promised, many more weapons were in fact retained and hidden for future use.

#### ÉPILOGUE: THE THIRD ROUND (1946-49)

The events of December 1944-January 1945 did not mean the end of the Greek Civil War. After an uneasy interlude of 14 months the war began its third and final round in March 1946 when the KKE, backed up by Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, again tried to seize power by force. Tragically, that same month saw peaceful elections (boycotted by the Communists), followed by a referendum and the return of the King the subsequent September. Repeating the errors of the Second Round, the Communists

sought to build up a conventional army capable of beating the National Greek Army in open battle. By now the Cold War was on and in May 1947 the United States stepped in to take over from Britain. The training and equipment supplied by the British and Americans in succession made the Communist struggle a hopeless endeavour. A final blow came when Yugoslavia closed its borders to the Communist Democratic Army in July 1949, and disbanded its camps inside Yugoslavia. Three years of bloody and costly fighting ended in the final defeat of the Democratic Army, a cease-fire being announced on October 16, 1949. This marked the final end of the Greek Civil War.



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The EAM delegation pictured by Lieutenant Morris after the signing ceremony (L-R): Athinellis, Partsalidis, Zevgos and Makridis.