

DOWN IN GREECE

by

Bill Drake

TO LARRY,
A FELLOW MANCH U.
— DRAKE

Prologue

The story you are about to read is true. At the time of the precipitating incident, I was a bombardier-navigator in the 68th Tactical Reconnaissance Group, a National Guard Unit out of New Orleans, Louisiana which had been called to active duty some years before. I was a "transfer" from the 310th Bombardment Group to fill a "need".

The 68th TRG was a small part of the overall effort of the Office of Strategic Services to effectively promote behind-the-lines resistance to the German war machine by local populations and guerrillas of any persuasion. I went down in Greece April 6, 1944, on my forty-first combat mission and spent the next six months as an "evadee" in Thrace and Eastern Macedonia, Greece.

I have tried to put on paper a realistic and factual account of my experience. Memory dims after the passage of many years, but the stark reality of this escapade remains very vivid in my mind. Considering my inability to recall the high emotional peaks, as well as the depressing lows of the experience, I truly believe I have understated many of the incidents related.

That the writing was undertaken at all, can be credited to Annie Ray Poth, a friendly persuasive neighbor of mine, both of us residing at the USAA Towers in San Antonio, Texas, who kept saying, "You should write all of that down".

Any errors of commission or omission in the story itself are mine alone. I also take full responsibility for any grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors yet to be uncovered.



Bill Drake
San Antonio, Texas
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Chapter 1

As I dropped the rip cord, I saw my hat blow away. The parachute blossomed above me and at same time the landscape below suddenly lighted up. The B-25 I had just bailed out of plowed into the ground and burst into flame. With eyes glued on the burning aircraft below me, I wondered how I was going to avoid falling into the flames. It looked like I was headed straight for the fire below!

Thirty seconds ago I had been sitting in the nose compartment of the "Mitchell" patiently waiting to clear the heavy cloud cover we had entered while climbing for altitude---after successfully dropping a load of guns, ammo, clothing and the like to unknown Englishmen and Greek guerrillas on the ground---get a fix on a star, and plot a course home.

Twenty-five seconds ago the plane had started flopping about as if it were being over-controlled. At first, I gave it little thought, concentrating instead on my task as the Navigator. Clay was the pilot. We had flown some ten intruder missions together. He was a Senior Pilot. A star above the shield on his pilot's wing attested to that. But then?

Twenty seconds ago I had called Clay on the intercom to ask, "What the hell are you doing back there? I'm trying to get a fix for a course home and you can't even fly this bird straight and level!" No response.

Fifteen seconds ago I had crawled back to the navigator's compartment to see what was going on. As I emerged from the crawl way on my hands and knees and stood erect, I shook my head in disgust at Peacock, the other navigator just along for the ride, who was sitting on the navigator's table with the leg straps of his parachute unbuckled. I turned around and started to climb up to the pilot's seat to ask Clay what was going on when the co-pilot, a chap I had never flown with before, turned toward me, trying to get out of the right-hand seat while shouting, "Get out, get out, the plane is out of control!"

You cannot get out of either pilot seat in a B-25 without one seat "full forward"

and the other "all the way back" because the space between the armor plate of the seats is too narrow to permit the passage of a body.

Ten seconds ago, heeding the co-pilot's frantic cries and remembering what had happened before take-off---trouble with the "black light" which illuminates the panel instruments---I turned, stepped back down into the navigator's compartment, faced aft, snapped on my chest chute which had been stowed in its rack to my right, raised the floor cover of the escape hatch, squatted on the rungs of the ladder, and reached for the emergency hatch release underneath the navigator's table. No release!

Five seconds ago, realizing that I was in a modified B-25-C, I reached to my right and grasped the release. I pushed away the safety clip with my thumb and pulled. The hatch entrance and I fell out and away from the aircraft. The plane receded from sight in what appeared to be a slow glide, its popcorn exhaust stacks forming a ring of light around each engine.

Four seconds ago, as I dropped away from the aircraft and counted three, I pulled the rip cord of my chute. It blossomed above me. Below, the B-25 hit the ground and burst into flames.

Three seconds ago, as I swung crazily in the harness, the ground loomed up in the eerie light of the fire. It looked like I was going to land in some very large trees.

Two seconds ago, I'd hit the ground, totally unprepared for the landing. What appeared to be very large trees proved to be very small bushes.

One second ago, as I lay on the ground, I thought I was going to be shot by exploding ammunition from the burning plane.

Now, sitting on a hillside still harnessed to the collapsed parachute, above the burning

aircraft, I thought about this forty-first mission and what had just happened..

The weather had been as predicted, a line of thunderstorms and some overcast between takeoff and drop. On the way to the target zone we had encountered no bad weather. At the drop zone we had given and received the letter of the day, "M". Small fires also formed the letter "M" on the ground. Not more than ten minutes ago, we had descended to a very low altitude, had made two dropping runs at the target area, released the canisters from the bomb bay, and were climbing for altitude and an uneventful trip back to our home base in Manduria, Italy, when the plane started to "flop" about.

Clay and I had discussed aircraft emergency and evacuation procedures if we ever had to bail out. In the quiet atmosphere of a bar it was easy to agree that we would "ride her down" and take our chances with a controlled crash landing. While serving as a bombardier with the 310th Bomb Group, I had already "bellied in" at Palermo on a return flight from a bombing run on the Capua River bridges in Southern Italy. The landing had been uneventful; a smooth impact, a cloud of dust, bent props, and a very short landing run. Very satisfactory.

The most unsatisfactory incident of that landing had come later. Having successfully landed, and with the prospect of a few days off waiting for a gooney-bird to pick us up and return us to Souk el Arbra on Cape Bon in Tunisia, we decided to go into Palermo and "see the town". They wouldn't let us off the airdrome! We weren't dressed properly. We didn't have ties! General George Patton, who had liberated the place, had put out an order that all military personnel had to wear ties in town. No one that I knew had ever flown a combat mission wearing a tie.

I unbuckled my parachute harness, removed my Mae West, gathered up the parachute

canopy and continued to sit on that hillside for about half an hour waiting for the fire to die down and the ammunition to quit popping off. Meanwhile, I called out the names of the other six crew members---Clay and Peacock, the co-pilot, and the three gunners who had been in the rear of the aircraft---in the forlorn hope that someone else had gotten out of the plane alive. I knew in my mind and heart that I was the sole survivor of that crash.

What to do? Here I sat on a lonely hillside, in the dead of night, somewhere in the middle of Thrace with my escape kit and my high tops sitting on a desk in the Tech Supply Officer's Office in Manduria, Italy. And where was my watch?

Events of the past ten days came flooding back. Clay and I had not gone to Cairo for R & R, rest and recreation, having only ten more missions to go before reaching that magic number of fifty and a ticket home! Although it was now the dark phase of the moon and missions were harder to come by, we decided to stay home and fly out as many missions as possible. About a month earlier I had flown a mission with a Canadian crew in a British Halifax to observe how it was possible to fly night intruder missions with only starlight to illuminate the ground. That night intruder mission had been in support of Yugoslav guerrillas around Belgrade. "Night flight by starlight" was satisfactory and the American Office of Strategic Services, OSS for short, had started scheduling "moon-ess" flights by American night intruder crews.

During the ten days we would have been in Cairo, we thought we had a good chance to rack up at least one or two missions and it would be "home to the States" just that much sooner. Besides we would be "one up" on the rest of the crews who had decided to visit the pyramids. Cairo couldn't be that much different from Marrakech or Tunis and we'd been there and done that. And Algiers! What a mission that had been. Manduria to Algiers; Algiers to Bastia, Corsica; Bastia to the Po River valley; a "drop" to waiting Italian partisans; back to Algiers. And the Germans had even turned on the runway

lights for us at Milan! They probably thought we were friendly night fighters of the Reich Mach.

We didn't fly a single mission while the rest of the crews were in Cairo. In fact, this very night, they had returned, whooping and hollering it up as we had sat on the apron trying to fix the fluorescent lights of the plane we were scheduled to fly on the only mission we had been assigned while they were away.

And this mission had only been a "probable"! What with aircraft maintenance problems and an "on-again, off-again" weather forecast, this mission had been scrubbed and rescheduled two or three times since word had first come down from OSS early in the afternoon. As the Group Technical Supply Officer, I had issued and collected the escape kits a couple of times. I had changed my high top boots for oxfords a couple of times. I had made a couple of runs between our living quarters in an old country estate house and the airfield. When we finally took off, I didn't have my escape kit with me and I was wearing oxfords instead of high tops in my fleece-lined flying boots!

As the flames of the burning aircraft subsided, I began to think about what to do next. Briefings on escape methods sprang to mind.

If downed, and I was "down", one cardinal principle to follow was to destroy any evidence of your presence and leave the area of a crash site as soon as possible.

I unstrapped the parachute harness, took off my Mae West, gathered up the canopy of the parachute, and headed down the hill to the still burning plane. The ammunition had ceased exploding and the fire was growing smaller by the minute. I approached close enough to the burning wreck to throw the harness, the Mae West, and the parachute into the

flickering flames. That done, I walked off into the darkness surrounding me.

Chapter 2

And it got darker and darker as I walked away. The fire receded behind me. As I left the scene of the crash, I noticed bobbing lights off in the distance. There was no way of knowing how close or how far away these lights were, but those bobbing lights hastened my departure. Could they be headlights of vehicles making their way toward me? It was hard to tell.

And it is difficult to tell time without a watch. Where was my watch? We had “dropped” to the Greek guerrillas about ten thirty. How long had I sat on the ground waiting for the flames to die down? There was no way of knowing. Guessing it must be about midnight, and dead certain that was the North Star in the heavens above me, I headed out in a northerly direction, believing that I was south of the dropping ground we had visited about an hour or so earlier.

I stumbled along in the dark falling over rocks and small bushes which were hard to distinguish from the general terrain. Some “moonlight” would have helped immeasurably. After a little while I found myself following what I thought to be a trail. Walking along a lot more confidently than before, I suddenly found myself flat on my face! Close examination of my immediate surroundings made me realize that what I had thought to be a trail was a dry stream bed. Looking up and back I realized that I had unknowingly stepped off a three or four foot vertical drop. Luckily the fall had been well cushioned by soft sand. I got up, brushed myself off, then realized one reason I was stumbling and bumbling along was I was walking in my flying boots. Flying boots are not designed for cross-country hiking. I sat down, took them off, tied the laces together, swung them over my shoulder, got up and continued on my way down the stream bed being very, very careful about any black areas which appeared beneath my feet.

Concentrating on where I was placing my feet, I was unaware of the very large circle looming out of the darkness in front of me until I was almost in it. That circle was the mouth of

a very large pipe. Further investigation found it to be one end of a concrete viaduct under a narrow dirt road. Being very tired, I decided to crawl into the pipe and try to get a little sleep before continuing. Laying down and using one of the flying boots for a pillow, I tried to go to sleep. Before I could doze off, I came full awake with a start! Was this what I should be doing? No. Escape procedures demanded that I put as much distance as possible between me and the crash site. I crawled out of the pipe, up a small embankment, and onto the road bed above.

Walking was much easier down this unpaved but level roadway.. The bobbing lights I had seen in the distance had long since disappeared. I felt very much alone in the dark of night with only the stars to light my way. I continued to amble along this road confident that I would see anyone else before they saw me. If I saw or heard anyone coming, I could jump into the bushes and small trees bordering the roadbed, conceal myself, and let "anyone" pass me by.

I didn't walk for very long or very far before I looked around and realized that I was surrounded by deep ditches and embankments on both sides of the road. I had ambled into what appeared to be a network of trenches and pillboxes. As an old infantryman, I recognized them as gun emplacements. I stopped. I abruptly turned around. And unbelievably, I slowly tiptoed back down the road with my flying boots in my outstretched hands!

After retracing my steps for a short distance, I stopped, lowered my flying boots and turned around again. Had I seen or heard a soul? No one had shouted "halt". Had I seen a gun? No guns had gone off. Slowly it dawned on me that I must have walked onto a military installation of some kind which was no longer in use or occupied.

Emboldened with this new knowledge, I stealthily returned and examined the area. Close inspection of the trenches and embankments found them lacking guns or soldiers. Relieved, but feeling very foolish, and again, remembering that I should be avoiding

viaducts, roads, bridges and the like, I left the dirt road and struck out cross-country, heading north. The going was just as difficult as it had been before and I was becoming one very, very tired hiker.

I continued to walk cross-country and up and down hill and across gullies and ravines and through rocks and small bushes for what seemed like hours. Finally the ground became more level and grass replaced the small bushes and rocks through which I had been traveling. I seemed to be in a small valley instead of on the side of a hill. Walking became much easier and instead of staring at the ground and concentrating where to put my next step, I could look around and take stock of my surroundings.

I stopped abruptly. A short distance away, I saw what appeared to be the side of a brush hut. A habitation? Out buildings of a farm? Warily approaching it, I found it to be one side of a pen containing a lot of goats and sheep. Weary of walking and so tired I felt like I could drop, I circled the enclosure, found the entrance, got on my hands and knees, crawled in, lay down and fell asleep with the goats and the sheep. Let them find me in the morning. I was just too tired to care or to continue on.

I awakened as first light brightened the sky. The stench in that pen was overpowering. I crawled out as I had crawled in, stood up, looked around and saw what appeared to be two bundles of cloth on the ground nearby. I approached one of the bundles and gently shook it. Shepherds! The "bundle" was a small boy and I had awakened him. He was startled to see me and immediately awakened the other "bundle", another small boy. Both sat up, rubbed their eyes, and stared at me. I stared back, speechless, not having a clue as to what to say or how to say it.

I knew not a word of Greek. Other than swear words in Italian and a few uncomplimentary German phrases, the only other language I knew was French, and I had failed Miss Wibley's high school French course.

I tried my "high school" French---"mon amies mort", "comprenez vous?", "moi tres bien", "anglesi allons", coupled with vigorous hand gestures---without success. In desperation, I tried Italian, my style, which is French with an "o" on the end of every French word. No visible response. I finally tried pure "sign" language which always seemed to work for John Wayne in "Westerns". Wide-eyed and seemingly very wary, they just continue to silently stare at me. After awhile, I asked them in a slow Texas drawl, what direction I should go to find the "Anglesi". Silence. I coupled hand signals with my words hoping for a response. The silence became deafening. They continued to stare at me as if I were some kind of spook or apparition.

The sun was now creeping up over the horizon. After my abject failure to communicate, with no other apparent alternative available, I left the silent shepherd boys and headed out "cross-country" with the rising sun on my right. Luckily sun still rose in the East.

Early morning found me working my way up a rock strewn incline on still another hillside. Stopping to rest and catch my breath, I thought I heard a dog barking. It was a dog barking! Turning toward the sound which was ahead and to my right, I could see the dog in the yard of a house by the side of a road about a half mile away. I hunkered down. Looking left I could see a very large pillbox about a half mile away. Feeling very exposed to prying eyes, I tried to disappear from anybody's view, including that barking dog, by hugging the ground more closely. The dog continued to bark in my direction and I just knew he was barking at me. I began to wish that somehow I could disappear into the ground on which I was lying.

After awhile, a man appeared in the open doorway of the house. He lazily stretched, scratched himself here and there, walked a few steps from the door, relieved himself and began to smoke. Another man came out and the whole process was repeated. The dog continued to bark. Two more men came out and did a duet. Meanwhile that dog continued to bark. I continued to lie as motionless as possible, as low as possible, afraid that any movement on my part would expose me to that dog or the men. The men went back in the

house. In a little while smoke began to curl from the chimney. But that damned dog continued to bark unremittingly. With four men in a house and a barking dog on my right, with a pillbox on my left just about the same distance away, what to do?

Paying some attention to the pillbox while keeping an eye on the house, I concluded that the pillbox was not occupied. Too many birds were flying about and one or two had landed in the apertures of the fortification. Insofar as the house was concerned, everybody seemed to be inside, except that damned barking dog. He continued to yap and yelp seemingly in my direction.

Estimating that I was about three or four hundred yards from the top of the hill I'd been hugging and thinking, if I could clear the top while those four men I had observed were probably inside eating breakfast, I would be out of their sight. Leaving my flying boots to fend for themselves, I laboriously crawled up and over that unnamed hill all the while with the bark of the dog ringing in my ears.

Down the other side and home free! Lightheaded, lighthearted and light loaded, the boots were heavier than I thought, I got to my feet and continued my cross-country hike giving some thought as to how I would seek help if I encountered any other person.

Escape and evasion techniques suggested that it was better to approach a single person, better to approach a person who appeared to be poor, better to approach a male rather than a female: a single person because you do not want to risk becoming a victim of an uncomprehending crowd, and "two" can be a crowd; a poor, single person because "poor" people have less to lose by helping you; a poor, single, male person because, in this part of the world, females were regarded as property.

After trudging along until the sun was high in the sky, I stumbled onto what appeared to be a small encampment. It was a tent-like affair with a fire burning in front of it and a large

woman and a small child squatting before the fire. They seemed unaware of my presence. I crouched down behind some bushes and watched and waited. The woman arose and went into the tent. While she was gone, the small child somehow tumbled into the fire! The child screamed. The woman came out of the tent about the same time I rose up and ran toward the child. The screaming child tried to get out of the embers and the ashes of the scattered fire. The woman yanked the child out of harm's way, brushed her off, examined her, and then started beating the living daylights out of the crying child! The youngster stopped crying. Action over, I came to an abrupt stop. The woman stopped beating the child and looked up. Both of us were speechless.

They looked like gypsies to me. The child was dressed like a miniature of the grown woman. Their dirty gray-brown garments were adorned with much dirty embroidery, there appeared to be strings of beads around their necks, their wrists were hung with more than a few bracelets, and the woman's fingers wore a number of rings.

The woman glanced up and behind me. Instinctively I turned. I was almost eye-to-eye with a very large man!

He was easily a head taller than myself, was heavily bearded and had a large mustache which seemed to stretch from ear to ear. He was dressed in loose fitting pants tucked into soft leather boots laced around his legs up to his knees. His upper body was garbed in a long-sleeved tunic over which was draped, crisscross fashion, bandoliers. He was belted at the waist from which hung a sizable knife in a sheaf. He was carrying a very long and large rifle.

I wondered what to do but was too tired to do anything but stand my ground. Nothing happened. We all stared at each other. I found my voice and I worked up enough courage to say "Anglesi" and made motions with my hands trying to get him to indicate which way I should go. Unlike the shepherds, the word "Anglesi" seemed to ring a chord with him.

The word for "English" in Greek sounds like "Anglika". Using "Anglesi", a French/Italian derivative of my own making proved to be fortuitous and profitable.

He came up to me, turned me around, and led me over to the fire. Meanwhile, the woman and the child had disappeared into the tent. Now emboldened, I made motions with my hands as if I were eating a bowl of soup or oatmeal and then rubbed my stomach with a circular motion, just like a cowboy meeting an Indian in a western movie. Would sign language work? He turned toward the tent and shouted out some unintelligible words and phrases at the woman within.

A moment or two later, the woman came out of the tent carrying a blue enameled plate. On this plate was a big, chunky piece of dark bread which looked like pumpernickel to me and a pile of white stuff which looked like very large curd cottage cheese. She handed the plate to him and he, in turn, handed the plate to me. I took it, reached for the bread and started to eat it. After swallowing down a bite or two of the bread, without having touched the "white stuff", the man took the plate from my hands, whipped out a large spoon from his boot top and proceeded to dig in and eat a spoonful of that "white stuff". With the "white stuff" still dripping from his mustache, he handed the plate, its remaining contents and the spoon back to me. I managed to eat the rest of the bread, but under the circumstances of its introduction, I could not bring myself to eat the "white stuff" with that spoon. He soon produced and drank from a leather bottle by tipping it up and letting a stream of liquid fall into his mouth. He handed the bottle to me. I attempted to imitate him with little success. I got some of the water in my mouth, but more on my face.

Bread and drink finished, he took back the plate, pointed out a direction and indicated that was the way I should go while muttering something which I wished and wanted to sound like "Anglesi". I left his campsite with the view of many more ridges before me, with bread in my stomach, with thirst relatively slaked, and with a new hope that I would encounter the "Anglesi" in short order.

Chapter 3

After leaving that encampment at which I had obtained food, drink and directions, I continued my cross-country trek. The landscape was still hilly, but the scenery slowly changed. Instead of small trees and bushes growing amongst a rock-strewn terrain, the scenery became one increasingly filled with large trees.

The sun was now high in the sky. After walking cross-country for what I thought was another hour or two, the hope of encountering the "Angles" began to fade. About this time I ran across what could only be described as a footpath in the woods. It was well-worn and more than just an animal trail. Disregarding the "escape" advice to stay away from roads and such, I decided to follow this path in the woods. Footpaths must lead somewhere and somewhere was quickly becoming preferable to stumbling around cross-country. The path was more up hill than down dale. With the sun high overhead, I lost almost all sense of direction. I began to sit down and rest more often.

While sitting on a rock resting, I heard someone noisily walking toward me on the path I had just traversed. I jumped up and concealed myself in the bordering woods. Someone was coming! Around a turn in the path and traveling in the same direction I had been going, a young man came into sight. When he reached me, I jumped out of the woods and silently accosted him. He stopped momentarily, let out a maniacal yell, brushed me aside, barreled down the path and disappeared around the next turn. Discouraged by having lost my first single, poor, male catch, I followed.

I began to pass small cultivated plots of ground. The foot path widened and I found myself amongst a cluster of houses. Coming toward me was a sizable crowd of people. Two old men carrying rifles separated from the throng, grabbed me and led me to what appeared to be the center of town. They stood me up against the wall of a house. They emptied all my pockets and came up with a handkerchief and a pocket comb. The crowd grew larger. I tried to communicate to them that I was an American and pointed to the "stars

and stripes" patch on the shoulder of my A-2 jacket. I repeatedly asked about the "Anglesi". The jabber and the chatter of the crowd grew louder and seemingly more menacing. I made little headway with my "western movie" sign language. The crowd, egged on by the two armed men, seemed to grow angrier at me.

In desperation, I switched to high school French and bastard Italian with little or no success. About the time I began to believe that I was going to be shot, an older man, much better dressed than the rest, stepped forward and told me, in French no less, that he spoke French. I concentrated on my French. I tried to tell him in French and "sign" language that I was an "American airplane", accompanied by locked thumbs and flat palms waving left to right, who had "left hand smashing into right palm while touching the ground" last night, "noir" with a wave of an arm and hand behind me, whose "mes ami mort", go through the motions of digging a grave and making a sign of the cross, and was now looking for the "Anglesi", head moving right and left with eyes wide open, to whom I had delivered "noise like a tommy gun while spraying the crowd with an Al Capone" motion.

Never before or since have I ever been so fluent in French and "sign" language. He apparently got the message. He turned and chattered with the two armed men and the rest of the crowd. A big argument ensued between the French-speaking man and what was now my armed guards. During all the arm-waving and shouting, I gathered that they were discussing my nationality and my fate: the guards arguing that the "Hun" should be shot; the Greek/Frenchman saying wait.

The word "American" rings a bell worldwide. "The word airplane" in Greek sounds like "airplane". The phrase "mes ami mort" is passable French for "my friends are dead". The "sign" language is self-explanatory.

While the debate continued and I continued to sweat, from the back of the crowd appeared another armed man. He was younger and a head taller than the other three around me. He was heavily bearded and wore a large mustache. He was wearing a vest-

like tunic covered with bullets, a bandolier was strung over each shoulder, and he was carrying a very large rifle. After a few words with the two men guarding me and nodding to the "French" man, he grabbed me by the arm and led me through and away from the encircling crowd.

We walked out of the village and made our way uphill. He led the way and I trudged on behind. He walked tirelessly as I labored to keep up with him. We walked and walked and walked until dusk, stopping only to drink from the occasional spring we encountered along the trail. About sundown we walked into a camp and I finally got to sit down and rest. A number of other men armed to the teeth came to look at me. The rest was short lived. The next thing I knew I was told to mount a small donkey while six or eight heavily armed men did the same. We rode off into the gathering darkness.

We seemed to ride for hours before we stopped. They helped me dismount as I was unable to get off that donkey by myself. I was led into a very large house. Inside, a supper was laid on and we sat down at a table to eat. Other than eating a lot of bread, I don't remember what was served. I do remember the table was covered by a cloth and was set with tableware and napkins! The meal over, we went outside, mounted our donkeys and rode off. After another two or three hours in the wooden saddle, we entered a small village and again I had to be helped to dismount. I was led into a house and into a small room containing a board bed. Fully dressed, I fell on the bed, pulled up what looked like a quilt and went to sleep.

I woke up late the next morning, rubbed the sleep from my eyes, relieved myself through a hole in the floor, was provided with a wet and dry cloth, and after washing up, was brought a meal of bread and cheese by a woman who seemed to own the house. After eating, I was allowed outside by the heavily armed men who seemed to be all about, but I was not allowed to wander.

I could see that I was in a small village of about a dozen houses. With nothing to do and

unable to converse with anyone, I sat on a bench in the sun in front of the house most of the day. People came by in ones, twos and threes to see what had been brought to the village the night before: me! An old lady came up and gave me a jar of what looked like and turned out to be cherry jam. The sun dropped behind the encircling mountains. I was fed another meal of soup, bread, cheese and jam. Dusk faded into night. I was returned to the same room I had slept in the night before. Again, I lay down and fell asleep. I had been down in Greece three nights and two days.

In the dead of night, I was awakened by a gentle shaking motion. Half awake, I was asked, "Are you the American?" in a very clipped and proper English voice. Now fully awake, I blurted out my reply, "Boy, am I glad to hear you!" After nights and days of trying to communicate with strangers, it was with much relief and comfort to be able to talk to someone who understood English. The "Anglesi" had found me!

Chapter 4

The Englishman introduced himself as Colonel Kitkat. He had been on the dropping ground the night of the crash. By the mysterious way news travels in these hills, the English and the Greeks at the drop zone were told a story that a plane had gone down shortly after our drop. The English had sent a runner over to the alleged crash site to investigate the rumor.

Petrocus was the Greek runner Major Micklethwaite, the English Mission Commander, had sent to the scene of the alleged crash site to find out what had happened. He had made his inquiries and the round trip in two days. He reported that a plane had crashed. The Bulgars had driven and walked over to the crash site on the southern slopes of Mount Drama. These enemy soldiers had recovered six bodies which they buried on the spot. The Bulgars did not appear to know that anyone had survived the crash.

The next day, Colonel Kitkat, his French-speaking Greek aide, and two other Greeks made the walk over to this village to run down the rumor that someone, who claimed he was an "American" had survived the crash, but the "German" had been captured by local guerrilla fighters, and was under "house arrest" in this hamlet.

Colonel "Sailor" Kitkat was second-in-command of the English Mission. He had served as a Battalion Commander of an artillery unit with the Fourth India Division during the late North African Campaign. The successful conclusion of that part of the war found him sitting in the desert with little more than garrison duty to perform. He had the moniker "Sailor" because he had served as a midshipman in the Royal Navy early in his career. He had transferred to the Army, by way of Sandhurst, in order to ride horses.

Too excited to go back to sleep, we talked for a little while, but weariness soon

overtook both of us. He left and I fell asleep. Early the next morning we set out for the return trip to the English Mission. The walk back was uneventful but very tiring. We seemed to be going uphill most of the time. My oxfords were much the worse for wear. Late that evening we arrived in another small village. I met the other five Englishmen in the Mission, was fed, provided a bed, lay down and fell asleep. I was now safely in the hands of the "Anglesi" I had dropped to three nights before and who I had been seeking since surviving the crash. With the invaluable help of local Greeks, I had evaded capture by the Bulgars!

More about Sailor. Learning that British Intelligence was looking for volunteers for "behind the lines" action, he, along with one of his Battery Commanders, Paul Pike, had signed up, been shipped to Haifa, undergone parachute training, rudimentary counter-intelligence training, and had jumped into Greece to join Major Micklethwaite and his radio operator. Sailor had been in Greece for about six months. This was just a "lark" to him. In his own words, "I got tired of the barren desert and jumped into Greece in order to sit under a tree".

Paul Pike was the son of a well-known English furniture manufacturer. He had all the grace and charm of a public school graduate. He had been called up during mobilization and wound up in the desert, commanding a battery. Paul, who had served with Sailor in the desert, like Sailor, had jumped into Greece "just for the hell of it" and the shade of a tree.

"Sandy", an explosives expert, was a Major in the Army and well into his late forties or early fifties when he jumped into Greece with Sailor and Paul. He had grown tired of his engineering duties and "Arabs" at a base outside of Cairo. He, like the others, jumped into Greece for want of something better to do after cessation of hostilities in North Africa.

The radio operator who parachuted in with the other three was a very, very, very taciturn young Sergeant. He was from Scotland.

At the time of their jump into Greece, the two British agents who had been on the ground to receive them were Major Micklethwaite and his radio operator.

Major Micklethwaite, a pseudonym if there ever was one, was in charge of the Mission. He had jumped "blind" into communist-held Greece some two and a half years ago. The few facts I was to learn about his past put him high in the class of "adventurers". He had climbed the Matterhorn and wooed a Hungarian princess! He was a large man with a flaming red beard. He spoke Greek like a Greek as well as French, Hungarian, German, and Lord knows what else.

Micklethwaite's radio operator was a Sergeant Major signaler in the Army. He had made the "blind" jump into communist-held Greece with "The Major". He was amazingly adept at operating the Teletype key. He could send and receive code at a dazzling rate of speed.

I turned the hand-cranked battery charger on a number of occasions while he transmitted messages by Morse code to British Intelligence in Cairo/Haifa using a crystal-operated suitcase radio which was rarely out of his sight or possession. It seems beyond belief that, after we would go off the air, he would continue to write down the code received; four, five, six, seven five-letter groups! In a way, Major Micklethwaite and his Sergeant Major Signaler were on a "second" tour" of duty "behind the lines".

Shortly before Sailor and his group jumped into Greece, Micklethwaite and his radio operator had barely escaped with their lives from communist guerrillas to the west of their present location. Relations between the English and the Greek communists had turned sour. The English wanted to tie down and fight the Germans occupying Greece. The Greek communists wanted to fight other Greeks. The incident which had precipitated their flight had been the

subject of a secret speech by Winston Churchill in the British House of Commons.

Micklethwaite had operated behind the lines with the man mentioned in Winston Churchill's speech. After relations soured, this British Officer had been put out on a mountainside without adequate food, clothing, or shelter and had been left to perish by his former communist allies. Micklethwaite and his radio operator, believing they were destined for a similar fate at the hands of these Communist guerrillas, had hurriedly made their way to this part of Greece controlled by Nationalist guerrillas.

These six Englishmen could not have survived, let alone carried out a mission behind the lines, without the skill, knowledge, and direct help of these Nationalist guerrillas and their cooperating countrymen. The Mission directly employed five or six Greeks as general handymen. Each Britisher had his own personal servant or batman, and there were usually two or three others about helping out as cooks, go-betweens, carriers, runners and "tea" servers. The English man will have his "tea" come Bulgar or high water!

Major Micklethwaite's batman was a Greek named Kostos. He had been with Micklethwaite since he, Micklethwaite, had jumped "blind" into Greece. Kostos had a price on his head by both the Communist Greeks and the Germans.

Sailor Kitcat's batman had come to him one day while he, Sailor, was resting on a trail. Sailor had been sitting down on the side of a trail when the bushes parted behind him and a quiet voice spoke to him in French. Since the day Sailor had parachuted into Greece, he had been handicapped by his inability to converse and communicate with the Greek guerrillas. He had taken a crash course in Greek, and since his arrival had been learning more, but it had been a difficult task. His fortuitous meeting with this young Greek who spoke French

was a Godsend.

Sailor spoke French very well and although this Greek was less fluent in the French language it was easier for Sailor to speak to him in French, have him speak to a Greek in Greek, have the Greek reply in Greek, and, in turn, have this French-speaking Greek reply to Sailor in French!

The only other Greek I got to know was Petrocus and he only fleetingly. Petrocus was a Greek from Crete and a renowned hunter. He was on mainland Greece rather than on his island home because there the Germans had put a price on his head. When the Germans had invaded Crete, it was Petrocus who had led the Greek king across Crete to a waiting British warship which evacuated the king, but not Petrocus. Now here he was, far away from his island home, still fighting the Germans, and still loyal to the Greek king. Petrocus was the runner Micklethwaite had sent over to the crash site.

The reason these six Englishmen were behind the lines was to lay low and await a signal from Cairo to cut the railway lines between Kavala and Salonika, Greece and Sophia, Bulgaria. A secondary task was to blow the nearby bridge across the Nestos River, a mountain torrent which flowed through this locale. I seem to remember the overall operation went by the code name "smash-up".

These missions could not have been carried out without the aid and support of the four local Greek guerrilla bands operating in the area. The English Mission kept these local guerrillas supplied with arms, ammunition and clothing which they otherwise could not have obtained. Without materiel and munitions, the locals would have been little more than a passing annoyance to the Bulgar forces occupying the area. As it was, these few Greek guerrillas kept two Bulgar divisions busy chasing them in the mountains.

The more mundane but equally important personal day-to-day task was to stay healthy

and alive. Guerrillas aside, this task would have been impossible without the aid and support of the local Greek populace. With the resources at hand becoming scarcer and scarcer, my arrival made day-to-day existence harder because there was now another unproductive mouth to feed.

I was soon to become a bigger problem to be solved. The Mission was told by Cairo to work out some way to get me out of Thrace.

Meanwhile, daily life went on and the Mission was preparing to receive another drop of weapons, ammunition and clothing for the "Andartes" and personal items, including the mail, food, whiskey and tea for the "Anglesi".

Chapter 5

In the three day interval between my arrival and the next scheduled airdrop, I learned a great deal about my first night and day in Greece. The plane had crashed on the side of Mount Drama away from the present location of the Mission. I had been correct in taking a circuitous route Northward around the mountain. The revetments and trenches I had chanced upon that night were abandoned Greek defensive positions designed to stop or delay any invasion of Thrace coming from Bulgaria to the north. The empty pillbox I had passed the next morning was part of these now-abandoned defensive positions.

The goat pen and shepherds were very easily explained. The countryside was dotted by small herds of sheep and goats tended by small boys. It was just "chance" that I had stumbled upon them. All agreed that goats, sheep and shepherds have a "healthy" smell.

The house by the side of the road was a guard house manned by local policemen or militia organized and directed by the Bulgars, who controlled the towns and roadways but not the more rural and mountainous areas. Such policemen or militia were reported to be very "trigger-happy" and inclined to shoot first and ask questions later. Rightly so, for they were the sworn enemies and targets of the local guerrillas who had taken to the hills to fight the enemy rather than become passive under the rule of the Bulgar Army.

If I had been apprehended by these men, in all probability, I would not have fared well in their hands. In spite of the American flag patch on the shoulder of my A-2 jacket, they would probably not have believed that I was an American. They were knowledgeable about the "English" in the area and might have believed that I was an Englishman. But the question would then have become one, not of nationality, but rather "why is an unarmed Englishman wandering around the countryside?" Not speaking a word of Greek, I would have been hard pressed and at a decided disadvantage trying to answer that question.

The family I had encountered were "pomaks", gypsy nomads of uncertain nationality and origin, who wandered the area between the Aegean Sea on the South, Bulgaria to the North, Macedonia to the West, and Turkey to the East. They pledged allegiance to anyone and no one. That this family had fed me and pointed out the way I should go after I had asked for the "Anglesi" came as no surprise to the English.

"Pomaks" in general, were despised by Bulgar, Turk, and Greek alike. Pomaks had so little to lose by helping someone, being so poor themselves, they would be more inclined to help rather than hinder anyone who chanced upon their home. To them, I did not resemble a Bulgar, a Turk or a Greek, and whether I was an American, an Englishman or a German was of little import. Never having heard of an "American" in the area and knowing that the English were much closer to them than the Germans in Kavala or Salonika, they were not averse to providing me with directions to the English in the hope that the English, unlike the Germans, might provide a pay-off in gold. The very remote possibility of obtaining some gold coin from the English was incentive enough to help me.

The young man I had accosted on the woodland trail was, unfortunately, the local village idiot. When I arrived at the edge of town, the villagers were waiting for me because he had cried out to one and all that "The Germans were coming!" Never having heard or seen an "American" in this part of the country, they concluded that I, with blondish hair, was a "German". The fact that I spoke a little French and, by sheer luck, one of the villagers spoke and understood French, probably saved me from being shot on the spot.

This was guerilla-held country and the local village populace had very little use or sympathy for Bulgars, Turks, Germans or turncoat Greeks, having suffered or heard of suffering at the hands of any and all of them at one time or another, especially the Bulgars after Germany conquered Greece. Since the German/Italian invasion of Greece in 1939, the Bulgars had been carrying out

their 40's form of what today is known as "ethnic cleansing". Bulgaria wanted a "window on the Aegean" and, as allies of the Germans, the Bulgars seized the opportunity to cleanse Thrace and nearby Eastern Macedonia of its population and replace the disposed people with Bulgarians.

The armed man who had led me away from the village was an "andarte", a local guerrilla fighter who just "happened" to be in the village at the time. He had taken me to his "capitano", the local brigand leader and smuggler. That night, under cover of darkness, we had moved around to the northern slopes of Mount Drama. The supper I had eaten had been at the home of a relatively well-to-do Greek. From there they had sent a runner over to the English Mission to let them know they had someone claiming to be an "American" under close supervision. Sailor had arrived a couple of nights later and returned to the Mission with me in tow.

Chapter 6

Three nights after I arrived at the Mission, I, along with Sailor, Paul, Sandy and the young radio operator, accompanied by about thirty andartes, were on the very dropping ground that I had flown over and dropped to some six nights earlier! Around ten o'clock that evening the drone of an aircraft was heard and the signal fires were lighted. After the letter of the day was exchanged, the aircraft descended, made a wide turn, and headed up-wind across the dropping ground. This was role-reversal if there ever was one. Before I'd been in the air. Now I'm on the ground.

It was not a B-25. It was a "gooney-bird", the C-47 workhorse of the Army Air Corps. The cargo door was open and I could see the cargo master in the doorway. Disappointed that the aircraft wasn't from my outfit, the 68th Tactical Reconnaissance Group, and, as I was only there as an interested observer, I lay on the ground looking up at the whole operation. The C-47 zoomed over the field and the cargo master kicked out a number of parcels, some "free-falls", others with parachutes attached. The gooney-bird came round to make a second pass.

God be my witness, but for some reason I got up from my prone position and walked a few yards from where I had been lying. On the second pass, I had no sooner left that place when a box of detonators smashed into the very spot where I had been lying! All shook up, I ran for cover and spent the rest of the time, while the drop was in progress, huddled under the biggest fallen tree I could find, wondering if the fickle finger of fate was still trying to do me in. The gooney-bird made another run or two. I couldn't have cared less. On the final run it waggled its wings and flew away. After the parachuted and free-fall parcels and packages had been plucked out of trees or picked up from the ground, we returned to the small village which was sheltering the Mission. I was happy just to crawl into bed and fall asleep.

Bright and early the next morning, the village was over-run with andartes. This had been

a "big" drop with lots of guns, ammunition, and clothing. I was an interested on-looker to the disposition of what had been dropped and recovered the night before. Major Micklethwaite and four andarte capitanos were in heated discussion and argument as to how to divide the "loot". This hot conversation went on for some time accompanied by much shouting and arm-waving. Suddenly all grew quiet. A bottle and what looked like shot glasses came into view. One after another, the capitanos stood up and gave what can only be described as "toasts" with a word that sounded like "symphony" occurring over and over again, while all heads seemed to move in what I can only describe as a one-sided "no" nod.

That bottle contained "ouzo", a potent alcoholic beverage. I was to learn later that the word "symphony", which has no English equivalent, meant complete and utter agreement in both thought, word, and deed. The "one-sided no" nod, swinging the head to one side repeatedly, was actually "yes" to a Greek!

As soon as the guns, ammunition, clothing, shoes and the like had been apportioned in accordance with the verbal agreement, the andartes disappeared as quickly as they had arrived. Shortly after, the English Mission prepared to leave the village. I was told that we had to pack up and leave because the Bulgars were headed our way and were about three hours away. The "big" drop the night before had attracted their unwanted attention.

During the Winter months, with drops small, few and far between, the Bulgars hadn't bothered to come up into the mountains. After this "big" drop, the English Mission no longer took up residence in a village. We camped out on the mountainside. While I was part of the Mission, this routine became standard: a drop, disposition, departure, and incoming Bulgars.

My oxfords had given out. I needed some new shoes. The drop had a lot of clothing and shoes in it, but nothing that came close to fitting my feet, size 12B's. The morning after the drop when we were preparing to depart the village in the face of the advancing Bulgars,

the only footwear available to me was a pair of knee-high rubber boots. After less than an hour on the trail, my feet heated up and were about to become badly blistered. I had to abandon the boots and continue on in my stocking feet. The socks wore out in short order and I continued the walk in my bare feet. Each step of the way became increasingly torturous. The next morning I was presented with a pair of newly fashioned foot wear, "sharuks", by one of the andartes. After retreating farther into the mountains, the Mission made camp outside but within easy walking distance of another small village.

A "sharuk" is a mocassin-like foot covering made from goat skin with the hair on the outside. The "sharuks" were cut to have the hair facing to the rear. This surprisingly, provides a great deal of traction going uphill. I had already found out that walking around in Greece was always "uphill".

The problem of suitable footwear was finally solved. We got a drop which contained, by special request, shoes large enough to fit me. I discarded the "sharuks" which I had been walking in for a pair of sturdy hiking boots. Unfortunately, these new boots were not worn for long. A few weeks after getting them, they were stolen, and in their place the thief left his own well-worn miserable old shoes. I went back to wearing "sharuks" until a new pair of boots was dropped some weeks later.

Now with Spring on hand and Summer fast approaching, the Bulgars, after a relatively quiet winter, became more active. After that first "big" drop and following every drop thereafter, the Bulgars would march up into the mountains to try to catch the English and the local nationalist andartes. Sometimes the time between a drop and the arrival of the Bulgars was very short and the Bulgars recovered much of the dropped materiel which had to be abandoned or buried on the dropping ground.

It seems incredible, but the six Englishmen and, at most, three or four hundred andartes had kept about two divisions of Bulgar troops tied down and busy contending with them for almost a year. The Bulgars were stationed in Drama and came up into the mountains on forays initiated by a drop or

intercepted radio transmissions. Sheer weight of numbers mattered little. The mountainous area where we were had only one very poor roadway. This road led to the bridge across the Nestos River and on north to Bulgaria. The road, little used, petered out before it got to Bulgaria. The rest of the country consisted of very small villages perched on steep hillsides and connected to each other by footpaths and trails. The andartes knew the mountains and the web of trails like the back of their hands.

The local nationalist andartes consisted of four bands, each led by a much smaller cadre of Greeks commanded by a capitano. In peacetime, these smaller cadres were the brigands and smugglers of the area. It had been an easy task to shift from evading the Greek authorities to evading the Bulgarian intruders. Each band of andartes varied in size from fifty to two hundred. Although I heard a lot of small arms fire, I never witnessed any fighting between the andartes and the Bulgars. Any time the Bulgars came too close, the andartes, along with the Mission, cut and ran, fading further into the Rhodope Mountains.

Aside from trying to capture the English and wipe out the local guerrilla effort, the primary objective of the Bulgars was to cleanse the area of any and all Greeks, especially those from any village known to have aided the Mission or the guerrillas. The Bulgars would surround a village and any house which could not account for their male members was burned or destroyed and the women and the boys carted off to labor camps. So as to not endanger a village more than necessary, the Mission established camps out in the mountainous countryside.

The Bulgars looted and destroyed villages, carted off the women and children, hung around the area for a day or two, and then retreated to Drama, their principle base and staging area for this part of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. During the past winter, the English Mission had been sheltered in homes in the village of Lividitis. For helping the English, the Bulgars had plucked out the eyes of a small boy in one of those homes. In spite of such

atrocities, the local villagers continued to support the English Mission and the andartes.

Although the Mission seemed to do little more than just run around in the mountains, their very presence provided a lot of background support and muscle for the local guerrilla effort which, in turn, tied down a lot of enemy troops. The Mission received its orders and instructions from British Military Intelligence, located in Cairo.

Contact with Cairo was maintained on a fairly regular schedule using the suitcase radio. The first task to put the radio in operation was to hang the antenna in the trees with the wire parallel to a line between, say Kavala and Haifa, or Kavala and Cairo. Next the generator would be connected to the suitcase, and after selection of the proper crystal, someone, myself at times, would crank the generator. The radio operator would ditty-da-dit the coded message and shut down.

The longer the radio was on the air, the more likely the location of the transmission would be subject to discovery by the Bulgars in Drama or the Germans in Kavala or Salonika. The Mission would find out that its location was known when word got back to them that the Bulgars were on the way up the mountains.

This radio was used to inform my sister that I was in friendly hands somewhere in Greece.

The messages sent were coded. I do not remember how this coding was accomplished except to say that when I first arrived, I think the coding was done by writing the message to be transmitted, letter by letter, underneath the text of a book already in the hands of both sender and receiver. The first five letter group would inform the receiver what page and what sentence on that page was being used to form the two letter groups. I believe that the last

five-letter group of a message contained the same information as the first.

In early May, The Mission was informed, by radio, that a drop of agents and their equipment could be expected. The day, the time, the letter code of the day was provided. The night of this drop went without incident. On this drop, a gooney-bird again, the Mission received new "one-time-use" code sheets along with Mission supplies, personal mail and other requests. We also got four Americans agents who parachuted in with their equipment. Lingering only long enough on the dropping ground to inform Micklethwaite that they were headed for Bulgaria proper, they gathered up their equipment and departed. They seemed very sure of themselves.

Unlike the English who used gold sovereigns as their "medium of exchange", this American Mission had brought in paper money. Backed by long experience dealing with indigenous people around the world, the English were of the opinion, that this American Mission would have a difficult time using "paper money" in Bulgaria. Native populations in this part of the world, whether Greek or Bulgar, were partial to and readily recognized "hard cash".

After the American Mission left the dropping ground that night, they were not heard from again. While I was "down in Greece" no one in this English Mission had a clue as to the success or failure of this daring, but inexperienced American Mission which had gone into Bulgaria "blind".

Chapter 7

After the American/Bulgarian Mission had dropped in and departed, the English Mission asked Cairo for information and instructions as to how to get the American airman off their hands. Major Micklethwaite suggested that a Lysander be sent in to take him out.

A Lysander was a small single-engined English aircraft which could operate from very small fields. Many successful evacuations had been made via Lysander in Yugoslavia, Northern Italy and Southern France. The trouble with a pickup by Lysander in Thrace was we didn't have a field, and if we had had one it would have been out of range for such an aircraft operating from Italy. Evacuation by Lysander from Thrace was ruled out by Cairo.

Cairo suggested that I be moved to western Macedonia or, better yet, western Greece. There I would be within the operating range of a Lysander. Major Micklethwaite was strongly opposed to this idea.

To get to western Macedonia or western Greece from Thrace meant crossing a lot of territory controlled by communist guerrillas, the sworn enemy of the Nationalist andartes who were helping the English in Thrace. Micklethwaite, well-experienced in the ways of the communist Greeks, believed that if I tried to cross this communist controlled territory, I would be captured and used to their advantage. He finally convinced the authorities in Cairo that "going west" was possible, but not safe for the American airman now in his care.

With the Germans controlling the shoreline to the south and Bulgaria, an "axis" ally to the north, the only way left to go was east to Turkey. Thrace, between where we were and the Turkish border, was nominally in the hands of nationalist guerrillas. Their active cooperation could be gained with "airdrops" into their territory or the exchange of "gold" for services rendered.

Getting to the border was the easy part. Getting across the Turkish border was a relatively easy task too. The leadership of the Thracian andartes was in the hands of peacetime smugglers and brigands. They could get almost anything, even an American airman, across the Turkish border. Trouble began in Turkey. One had to get at least thirty miles within Turkey proper to be relatively safe. Without trustworthy, reliable guides, getting caught in this thirty-mile zone was almost a certainty. Getting caught meant being sold to the highest bidder. The Germans would bid high for a prize like an American airman. Such a purchase would be more than worth his weight in propaganda.

In late May, after much haggling, Cairo authorized and Micklethwaite reluctantly agreed, that Turkey was the way to go. Contacts were made with the andartes to our east and one day a couple of swarthy individuals showed up as my prospective escorts out of Thrace. I was elated that I would soon be on my way. Micklethwaite and the rest of the Englishmen were less than enthusiastic. I was briefed to expect a lot of hard, exhausting walking, provided a side arm, one hundred gold sovereigns to be given to my "escorts" when I was delivered to Turkish authorities, and some food for the journey. When the day came to depart, Micklethwaite stopped the operation. He didn't believe I would ever reach Turkey.

If allowed to go, Micklethwaite truly believed that I might survive a day or two on the march but, somewhere along the way, I would meet with an "unfortunate accident" such as being captured and shot by the Bulgars; or going to sleep one night while being "escorted" and found the next morning with my throat cut and the gold sovereigns missing; or being sold to the highest bidder, Germans, before I even got out of Thrace!

Again, Cairo yielded to the wisdom of Micklethwaite's decision. I agreed that I was as safe as I could be in the capable hands of this Mission. Cairo then agreed that if a field could be found on which a "gooney-bird" could land and takeoff again, they would send one in. The only field in the area capable of handling a C-47 was just outside Drama.

The fact that this field was in the hands of the Bulgar army, didn't deter Micklethwaite. He came up with a difficult but brilliant scheme of escape.. He knew there were German aircraft on the airfield outside of Drama. He asked me if they, Micklethwaite and some andartes, arranged for the "capture" of an airplane could I fly it out? I never doubted that Micklethwaite had the capacity to commandeer an aircraft even under just about any circumstances. I was the weak link in this chain of actions. Even with Micklethwaite's tutoring, I would never learn to read German well enough to get the plane off the ground. And what would I do if the instructions and labeling were in Bulgarian? The scheme died aborning.

The only way to get out came down to finding another field on which a gooney-bird could land and takeoff again.

The Mission had on hand large scale topographical contour charts. On these maps one inch equals about two miles. It would only take about a third of an inch to land a C-47. Hopefully searching every inch of these charts, we found a couple of areas which looked promising. These favorable areas were a six to eight hour walk away, and all uphill. Unfortunately, the areas under consideration had another big handicap. They were all in Bulgaria!

Micklethwaite interrogated a number of andartes who said they were familiar with the areas under scrutiny. These andartes, probably never having seen an automobile driven fast over level ground, agreed that a car could be driven over the ground at sixty miles an hour. They also agreed that trees on this level land were few and far between.

A trek to the most promising area was undertaken in early June. Escorted by about eight of these "knowledgeable" andartes, I walked up and over the border to Bulgaria. The only indication of a border was a pillar of concrete along the side of the trail. After we all relieved ourselves on Bulgarian soil, we walked a little longer and the "possible" airfield

came into sight.

The andartes were right! An automobile could be driven at sixty miles an hour over the ground! The andartes were right! The trees were few and far between!

All andartes seemed have a propensity to please. Ask andartes the distance to the next village and they, knowing you would like to walk a short distance rather than a long way, will tell you it is not very far, two rather than ten kilometers. The trouble is they are telling you the distance you want to hear, the distance the crow flies, not the distance you will have to travel up hill and down dale. Again, how deep is the water? Waist deep. When you are in over your head, you must have stepped into a submerged hole.

But the ground was rolling and nowhere did the trees allow a landing strip of three thousand feet to be laid out. This trek turned out to be just another long walk to see a blanket of grass covering rolling ground with too many trees to make landing a C-47 possible. Disappointed and very, very tired after a twelve hour hike, I returned empty-handed to the Mission. Having exhausted all viable options, I was now stuck in Thrace for the foreseeable future. But I was still alive and free!

Chapter 8

As summertime set in, the Bulgars became increasingly active. Moving out of and into a new camp site became a weekly routine. The Bulgars could be expected to initiate a foray as soon as a drop took place; the dropped materiel was divided quickly and the campsite abandoned. Small donkeys and old women often served as "pack animals" carrying large loads on their backs behind a much younger man walking along with little more than his rifle or Bren gun and lots of ammunition.

When on the dropping ground it helped to know a little Greek. I soon learned that "ella edo" meant "come here" and "heidi grigora" meant "in a hurry". Combined "ella edo, heidi grigora" meant "come here in a hurry". The Greeks are great on greetings and "kalee mara" which is "good morning", "kalee sphaera" which is "good afternoon" and "kalee nickta" which is "good night" became part of my working vocabulary which also included "parakalo" and "efkaristo", the Greek words for "please" and "thank you". One of the more delightful words in Greek is "etsi ketsi". Like the word "symphony" there is no English word or words which quite convey its exact meaning. "Etsi ketsi" accompanied by different shoulder shrugs can mean "so so" or "okay" or "all right, but it was nothing". I also learned how to say "aga moot" which, to an American would be the same as calling someone's mother a female dog. "Aga moot" translated means that "you are dirt in your mother's milk".

The Bulgars weren't the only hazard to life and limb. The Nestos River was a dangerous adversary, too. Crossing this fast-moving mountain stream was a real obstacle to overcome. The andartes knew the best places to ford the river, but the icy cold water and the inability to swim took a toll. During the three trips I made crossing this raging torrent, one or two andartes were lost, drowned because they couldn't swim or negotiate the fording while wearing three or four layers of clothing.

The Mission often had to decamp and just hide in the woods to escape the upcoming

Bulgars. The Bulgars, in control of the trails, would lob mortar shells and fire small arms and machine guns indiscriminately into the surrounding woodland hoping to flush us out.

Under such circumstances, hand signals were the safest means of communication between members of the Mission. Such signals can be confusing. An American, wishing for someone to come to him, will wave his arm and hand, palm facing the body with a "toward" motion. A Greek, to have someone approach him, uses what an American would interpret as a "go away" signal, that is the arm is extended and with the hand upraised, back of the hand toward the body, the hand is waved in a "goodbye" motion.

I well remember a three-day stint under such conditions. With Bulgar troops less than a hundred yards from where we were hiding, we huddled down among boulders and trees. The small puppy which one of the andartes had given to Micklethwaite's radio operator had to go. We could not afford to have him bark and give away our position. Someone cut his throat. For the next three days we watched the Bulgars pace the trail below us and routinely fire into the woods. No fires, no food except a rapidly dwindling supply of local bread and canned foodstuffs from the latest drop. Hiding under trees all day and all night can become depressing and, under these conditions, extremely so. One sits and waits, hoping that small arms fire or a mortar shell doesn't find you.

Inevitably, I caught the "andarte affliction". A couple of days after sleeping on empty grain sacks in a small hut for a few hours while fleeing Bulgars, I found myself scratching here and there and everywhere. Such an affliction is endemic to anyone living as we were existing. Bathing was only a temporary cure and baths were few and far between. I had become "lousy". The lousy Bulgars hadn't caught me, but the lice had become my fellow travelers.

Scheduled drops were aborted as it had become too dangerous to work a dropping area. The higher we went into the mountains the less likely a successful drop could be carried out because clear areas were much smaller and the parachutes got caught in the

trees. It is very difficult to untangle a chute with its attached canister when they hang fifty feet in the air. And the time interval between a drop and the arrival of the Bulgars became less and less as summer wore on. Drops meant mail, supplies and food. Local supplies of bread, cheese and meat became increasingly scarce. Food was now at a premium.

Lack of food can make for strange actions. I witnessed a Greek beat a donkey to death with a piece of timber resembling a two-by-four. The other andartes stood around literally laughing and joking about the slaughter of an innocent animal. Were they that hungry? Yes. It was "his" ass not their own. There was "meat on the table" at the evening meal.

One of my "dropping ground" tasks was to look for and find the "red" canisters which contained food meant for the Mission. On one occasion, I found a "red" canister in the process of being looted by an andarte. I leveled the Italian carbine I carried with every intent of shooting him. As hunger had become a constant companion, I will never know what stayed my trigger finger. Rather than shooting him, I kicked him in the seat of his pants and sent him on his way. I reported the incident to Sailor, but he did not say anything to Micklethwaite, who in turn, might have raised the matter with this andarte's capitano. To do so would have probably meant his capitano would have had him shot as an example for the other andartes under his command.

He would have been shot, not so much for stealing, but for being caught in the act of stealing. Such is the code of the smuggler or brigand. Years later, at night on my farm in Wells, Vermont, I held two men under a gun. They had been caught stealing corn from my field. The state police were called. The troopers were long in coming. After awhile the men decided that I wasn't about to shoot them and wandered off. My son Tom, age eleven, who witnessed this incident, asked me, after the men had walked away, "Dad, why didn't you shoot them?" I told him about what had happened in Greece under much more compelling circumstances. Even at his young age, I think he,

like me, understood that a man's life is worth more than a few ears of corn or a can of cheese, even if you are starving.

Bread in this country is "the staff of life". Unlike the American loaf which you can hardly lean on, a man can last a long time on Greek bread. The bread we were able to obtain was made from grain reserves which seemed to had been buried in the ground. Dirt and sand was an integral part of the loaf. That "white stuff", yogurt, rejected early on, now became a delicacy to look forward to, if available. Like sourdough, a sample of yogurt is carried about awaiting a culture in which to grow. The more mature the sample the better the yogurt. We were not eating great yogurt if at all. My clothes began to hang on a wasted frame. I was to lose some thirty-six pounds while behind-the-lines.

Lack of calories was not the only cause for loss of weight. Food eaten often went through my digestive tract like a hot knife through butter. Diarrhea often became an ordeal to be borne while fleeing the Bulgars. Squatting every hundred yards or so makes it difficult to keep up with the pace of the run.

All of our spare time was not spent fleeing the Bulgars. While in camp, the Mission prepared for the day we would be told to cut the railway lines between Kavala and Salonika, Greece and Sophia, Bulgaria. On orders from Cairo, I, as an American, was not to be permitted to take part in this operation. That did not prevent me from wrapping plastic with explosive cord in preparation for the day the Mission would take out the railroads. Plans were also underway to wire the Nestos River bridge for demolition.

Sandy, Sailor's sapper and I walked down to the bridge to examine it. I remember the bridge as a one or two archer of massive stone construction. To me, it looked like a difficult bridge on which to set charges. Sandy explained how he would go about doing the job and we returned to camp. Charges were never installed.

The Bulgars became increasingly intrusive. Running became almost a continuous affair. The Mission retaliated by burning haystacks. Torching haystacks and grain storage facilities

on the plains and in the valleys south of the mountains became routine.

To burn a haystack or a grain storage facility short, pencil-like tubes were used. One end of the pencil was crushed and inserted into the haystack or a grain bag. In a short period of time a chemical reaction took place within the tube and it would burn with a red hot flame.

On one such nightly excursion, Paul and a few andartes tarried too long on the flatlands and, as dawn was breaking, came face to face with the local militia while rounding a turn in a road. A fire fight ensued and Paul was shot in the knee and captured. He wound up in the local hospital in Drama.

Sailor agonized over the incident, blaming himself for Paul's disaster. With Micklethwaite's blessing, Sailor made his way down to the outskirts of Drama and learned that Paul was being attended by a Bulgarian doctor who, as good fortune would have it, had been raised for part of his youth in London. His father had been a diplomat to England before the war. He spoke passable English. With the help of this "Bulgar" doctor, Sailor made arrangements for Paul's escape. A few weeks later, Paul was released from the hospital and brought back to the Mission on a stretcher. No doubt, gold coin changed hands. The doctor could also have known that "the handwriting was on the wall."

In late August and early September, the ranks of the guerrillas swelled as former Greek Army officers, who had been reporting to the Germans in Salonika and Kavala, fled to the hills. Sensing that events would soon turn in favor of the Greeks who had been fighting the Bulgars in the mountains, these military men started to appear, one by one, in the mountainous areas under the control of the nationalist guerrillas.

These late comers were welcomed by the English but resented by the local andartes.

The locals, although relatively few in number had, even before the arrival of Micklethwaite, kept the Bulgars busy ever since the Italian/German invasion of Greece some five years earlier. To the local mountain Greeks these city Greeks had lived a life of relative luxury while they, the local andartes, had sacrificed their families, their homes, their farms, and struggled on, refusing to give in to the occupation forces.

Their steadfastness and fortitude in the face of overwhelming force, attests to their courage. The Bulgars, with premeditated intent, had tried to chase any and all Greek claimants of property in Thrace out of the area. They had plundered and burned many a small village after small village. They had raped and ravished women and girls. They had carried young children and youths off to labor camps. They, in the latest buzz word, tried to "ethnically cleanse" Thrace and Eastern Macedonia. They had failed because of the steadfastness and fighting qualities of the mountain Greek.

I am a dyed-in-the-wool admirer of these mountain men. I owe my life to many an unknown Greek. Without apology, I am also an "Anglophile".

Chapter 9

In late September, twenty-two Greek-Americans, a contingent of the American Army, parachuted into our area. I did not witness the drop, but they were a welcome sight to one and all, the English, the Greek andartes, and this American airman. They were reportedly supposed to be the vanguard of a much larger force. The reoccupation of the "soft underbelly" of Europe seemed about to happen. In any case, food and its preparation took a decided turn for the better. These Greek-Americans were very much a self-contained unit. They jumped in overloaded with guns, ammunition, and, best of all, food.

The Bulgars suddenly grew quiescent. Negotiations were in the works for their departure from the field of active participation in the war on the side of the Germans. Micklethwaite now openly traveled to and from Salonika from time to time. He also was able to go into Drama and circulate as a Greek. The day he brought back a half loaf of white bread is well remembered. White bread tasted like cake.

Finally, in that mysterious way news travels in the hills, word was received that the Bulgars were packing it in. I suppose Cairo confirmed the news hours or days later. No matter. The Mission was going to Drama!

We traipsed down to Drama and "settled in", in the very building formerly occupied by the German contingent overseeing the activities of the Bulgarian Army. What luxury! It was nice to have a roof over our heads again. A "shared" bedroom, not the bare ground with only the moon and the stars overhead. Decent, well cooked food!

Looking out the windows we could see the same Bulgar soldiers who had been chasing us in the mountains sauntering down the street, each with a little red tab on their uniform announcing to the world that they were now "good" communists rather than "bad" fascists. The civilian population of Drama? They too, seemed to look and act like a new millennium was about to

blossom. Under communism there would be no more hard work. Each looked at the other with the expression "you'll be doing the work from now on". Such are the twists and turns of war.

On another day, as I watched the streets of Drama from the balcony of our new abode, a lone plane flew over. Suddenly a couple of objects dropped from the plane and I, without a moment's hesitation, dived for the bedroom floor. I knew a bombing run when I saw one.

I was to learn later that it was a Bulgar aircraft dispatched from Sophia to bomb Bulgar Headquarters in Drama. The bombs fell and exploded about five hundred yards from where I had been standing. They missed the Bulgar Headquarters building too.

While I lolled around in the former German Headquarters, Major Micklethwaite was holding conferences with the Bulgar general who commanded the Bulgar troops in the area. It was reported that Micklethwaite would pound the table and make demands backed up by the military force at his command back in the mountains---a few hundred andartes and twenty-two Greek-American paratroopers. He also made a number of trips to Sophia negotiating with the Bulgars. All this came to me second-hand as I was busy preparing to lay out a runway on the local airfield so a gooney-bird could land and take Paul, still on a stretcher, Kosta, with a price on his head, and myself to Italy.

To carry out the pickup, Bulgar soldiers and Bulgar trucks would have to be used. The trucks were needed to carry us to the airfield. The Bulgar soldiers were needed to douse sand-filled cans with gasoline and fire them to outline the runway the C-47 would use. Many a morning word was received that the pickup was go". In late afternoon, word would be received, without explanation, that this pickup sortie had been canceled and would be rescheduled. We suffered through a number of these false alarms.

On another day who should show up at the headquarters but a well-dressed soldier who claimed to be a Russian colonel. He looked and acted like a Russian colonel! He had landed at the Drama airfield in a small single-engined aircraft and demanded to see the Commander of the English forces in the area. At the time, Micklethwaite was on one of his trips to Sophia. In fact, only the Commander of the paratroopers and myself were at the former German headquarters. This Russian made his inquiries in English, but refused to talk to us. He looked around, stomped around, hurrumphed a few times, returned to the airfield, took off, and to the best of my knowledge, never returned.

Finally, Cairo got everything straightened out and organized. The long expected gooney-bird was due in tonight. Preparations were made to get Paul, Kosta and myself to the airfield. After sundown, we boarded Bulgar trucks, accompanied by Bulgar soldiers, for the trip to the "Bulgar" airfield. We were only a short distance out of Drama, when from the dark recesses of the woods bordering the roadway came the shout "alt"! The trucks ground to a stop.

As far as I know, one word that sounds the same and means the same thing in any language of the world is the word "halt"!

The next command, again in Greek, was to dismount. We dismounted. The next command, in Greek, was to gather together in the headlights of the stopped trucks. We, about thirty-five Bulgar soldiers and the three evacuees, gathered in the headlights of the stopped trucks. The next command, in Greek, was to march slowly forward, trucks following. We marched slowly forward, trucks following..

As we walked I remember making a mental note of the ditch bordering the roadway. Ditches in this country are usually open sewers and this one was no exception. I also made a more menacing mental note. I was walking down a dark road in the glare of headlights with a bunch of Bulgarian soldiers who, just a few short days ago had been chasing the "voices" they were now obeying. At the first sound of a shot, I was in that ditch!

Those commands came from the throats of the local andartes who had seen these self-same Bulgars pillage and burn their villages, rape their women, kill and maim their children and carry some away to labor camps. These commands came from local andartes who were now well armed with bren guns, automatic rifles, mortars, machine guns and ammunition thanks to the efforts of the English and night intruder sorties. These Greeks must have had itchy trigger fingers. That ditch was so inviting. Never was silence so golden.

After walking about a half mile we were ordered back into the trucks and the trucks were allowed to continue to the airfield. At the airfield a Bulgar soldier was posted at each sand-filled can, the cans drenched with gasoline and we awaited the arrival of the C-47.

The drone of an airplane was heard. The letter of the day was flashed, received and returned as if we were on a dropping field. The flare path was lighted and the gooney-bird came in low over our heads at the downwind end of the makeshift runway. The gooney-bird landed, braked to a rapid stop, wheeled around, taxied back, wheeled around again, came to a stop, and cut the left engine. We, Paul, Kosta and myself, were waiting on the left side of the approach end of the runway. The cargo door was already open and Paul was literally thrown aboard, Kosta followed and I scrambled aboard. The left engine was restarted, the plane roared down the runway and soared into the dark of night. I was on my way back to Italy!

The flight home was uneventful. I remember standing just inside the open cargo door and looking out over the same terrain I had traversed some six months before. It looked the same. Thoughts of dropping grounds came back and the observation that, if it had been possible, I could have been snatched off a dropping ground and into a similar aircraft on more than a few occasions. So near and yet so far. The distance of a few hundred yards or less had finally closed and I was on my way home.

Arrival in Italy was anti-climactic. I was just another pain in the butt to the debriefers and

interrogators. Most of the American air crewmen from the B-24 Ploesti oil field air raids had just been processed after their release from POW camps. The authorities decided to "process me in the shortest time possible and send me home". I readily agreed.

As a former evadee, I was useless in this Theater of Operations. I was not returned to the 68th Tactical Recon Group in Manduria. I was sent to Naples to await ship transport home. The Red Cross detachment in Naples-Caserta made the transition to a normal existence very easy. I boarded the Santa Rosa with fifty dollars in my pocket, all the back pay I was allowed to draw. The Santa Rosa was not on a Caribbean cruise. It was loaded with many combat infantrymen of the Texas National Guard . They had been at Anzio and they were on their way home too.

The reason I was only allowed fifty dollars until I reached the States was soon apparent. I had never seen nor will I ever see twenty dollar bills stacked chin high at a poker table. Twenties were used like one-cent pieces in a penny ante poker game. Had I been flush, I would have lost my shirt in such a game. And the crap shoots were just as wild. Fifty dollars wouldn't have lasted one roll.

I read and slept and ate my way across the Atlantic in that converted cruise liner. We docked in New York City. The Red Cross was there to greet us with doughnuts and coffee. I got off the ship and literally kissed the ground.

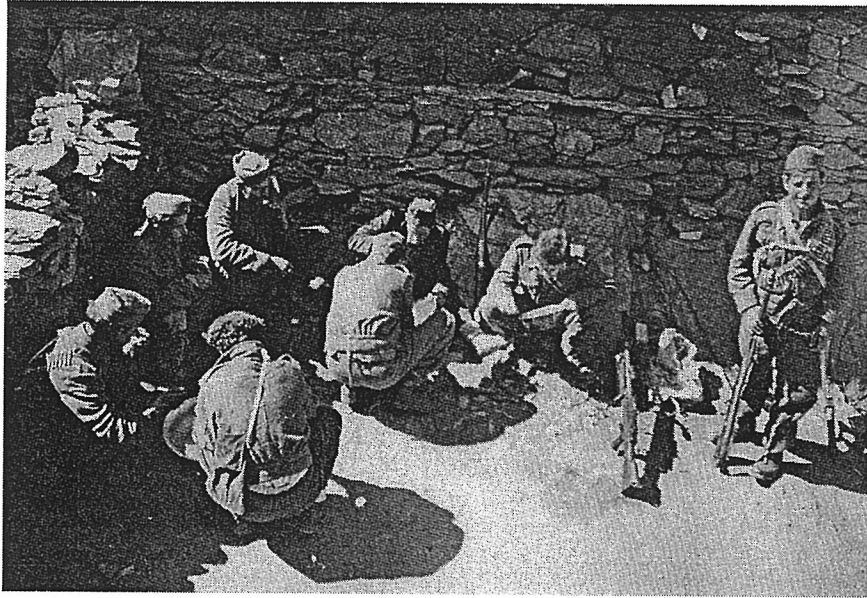
I was once again back in the good old US of A!

— Down in Greece —



Bridge over the Nestos.

— Down in Greece —



Andartes eating one bowl, one spoon!

— Down in Greece —



Female Andarte.

— Down in Greece —



The Nestos.



An encampment.

— Down in Greece —



Myself on the run again with the Greco-American paratroopers.

— Down in Greece —



Crowd outside old German headquarters in Drama after the Bulgars opt out of the war.

Epilogue

It is a very ill-wind that doesn't blow somebody some good. In October 1947, while being interviewed for a regular commission in the Air Force, the only topic discussed with the three generals doing the interview was my experience behind the lines and how I viewed the civil war then raging in Greece between the Nationalists and the Communists. This savage civil war ended in a communist defeat. I received a regular commission.

Some fourteen years after getting out of Greece, while serving as an Exchange Officer with the Royal Air Force, I tried to locate Sailor Kitcat in England. With the help of the US Embassy, I traced him down to his club in Pall Mall, London, but failed to make contact. At that time he was still "behind the lines" somewhere in the Caucasus Mountains, on yet another intelligence mission!

While engaged in a casual conversation with a lady in the Special Orders section of the American Post Exchange at Mildenhall, she mentioned that her husband had served in the Army. I mentioned that I knew some British Army Officers whom I'd met in Greece. I mentioned Paul Pike and she paled. She had been raised by Paul Pike's father! This led to a search for Paul.

I was to meet Paul again while flying Valiants with Three Group. I learned that he was stationed at Feltwell, England as an artillery spotter, a stone's throw from Mildenhall. I drove over to Feltwell and remember our meeting well. It was in the middle of a large hanger. As we approached each other I could see he walked with a limp, a reminder of our days together in Greece. We got together on a number of occasions after that, the most memorable being the Beagle Ball in Chichester. A few months after what can only be described as a one-of-a-kind, once-in-a-lifetime evening, Paul was killed while serving in the Fourteenth Field Artillery in Lebanon.

I am planning to return to Thrace, Greece in the very near future.