GREEK ADVENTURE

(Six months in the life of a South African Officer in Occupied Greece)

By Jack Gage

FOREWORD

George Crabb, A.M., author of the Universal Technological Dictionary giving the exact real significance of the word "admiration" says:

"Admiration is wonder mixed with esteem or veneration; the admirer suspends his thoughts, not from the vacancy but the fullness of his mind; he is rivetted to an object which for a time absorbs his faculties; nothing but what is great and good excites admiration."

In reading "Greek Adventure" which is the diary of Major J. H. Gage, one of the gallant South African officers who fought in Greece during her occupation by the Axis armies, my mind was automatically driven to the above sentence.

Admiration is what I felt in reading this extremely interesting narrative of Major J. H. Gage, who in April 1943 parachuted into Western Greece, just opposite the Island of Corfu, where, with other comrades, he fought gallantly against the Germans, until they were driven out of the country, in October 1944.

Major J. H. Gage is not a professional writer, but can be proud of wielding his pen with the dexterity with which a painter uses his brush; each episode he describes, every fact or incident he mentions is as clear as a picture, giving to the reader an adequate and fascinating image of the physical and psychological factors involved.

The struggle in which he took such an active part is one of the most interesting features of the last war; he and the other members of the Allied missions who were sent into occupied Greece, were confronted with an extremely difficult task, i.e., fight the occupation armies and avoid friction with the ELAS "andartes" creatures of EAM, alias one of the branches of International Communism, adroitly disseminated, under different names, in the occupied countries.

Major J. H. Gage will allow me to admire especially his cute political and diplomatic sense.

Whereas other "born diplomats" did not foresee the real scope to which the EAM-ELAS were tending, he, as soon as he dealt with the two Greek resistance movements, at once understood that whereas ELAS, a national patriotic organization under the command of General Zervas, a regular Greek Army officer, was 100 per cent. pro-British, the EAM-ELAS was totally controlled by the Communists, and under the guise of fighting the Hun, were preparing to transform Greece into a satellite country.

In reading Major J. H. Gage's book, one has also to admire his amazing sense of foresight with which he forecasts the tragic peripeteia through which Greece was dragged after her evacuation by the German Armies (October 1944) and which ended in September 1949, when the "guerillas" were driven out of the Greek

territory by the Greek Army, after the victorious battle at Vitsi, on the Grammos Range.

The "Greek Adventure" is furthermore a valuable contribution to the historian, who will have to write the events covering that chapter of the Second World War.

As for the Greek people "Greek Adventure" will remind posterity of the "eternal gratitude" owed to Major J. H. Gage and his gallant comrades, few in number, for having, by running the gauntlet of fighting against a huge and powerful German Army, restored their liberty.

R. B. Rosetti,

Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary for Greece in the Union of South Africa.

Pretoria, March 20th, 1950.

CHAPTER 1

It was 9.30 on a cold, blustery morning early in May, 1944. I was walking along the sea front at Bari, in Italy, on my daily pilgrimage from the Officers' Mess – the Imperiale Hotel – to the Headquarters of Force "X". This walk was becoming a bit monotonous; I had done it every day for three weeks. Each morning I would get up at about 8.30, dawdle through breakfast, and pass the time as best I could until 10 a.m., when I was due to report to Force "X". Here I would be told whether or not the weather was favourable for a take-off that night to parachute into enemy-occupied Greece.

Twice we had set off on a false alarm – once on the 19th April, and once on the 25th. Each time we had gone through all the usual secret channels: drawing parachutes, golden sovereigns, special kit, plans, maps, etc. and each time we had actually taken off from Brindisi and flown over Greece. On both occasions thick cloud and mist had obscured our dropping area, and the pilot had been forced to return. I must admit that the first time when the pilot decided to turn back, I couldn't help feeling rather relieved, and planned a wild party in Bari to celebrate my unexpected return to civilisation. When this was repeated a second time, I was rather disappointed when we turned back. By now I was getting thoroughly "browned off" and was longing to get on with the job.

This particular morning the weather looked far from promising. I was chatting to Major Alec Higgins, in his office, when the phone suddenly rang. I heard him make the usual remarks about no "sorties" to various areas that night. Then I suddenly brightened up - I heard him say "So Boodle is on" - "Boodle" was the particular code name for my dropping ground. Just as I was about to rush off, Lt.-Colonel Tom Barnes, of New Zealand, complete with huge beard, walked into the office. He had been one of the original expedition to go into Greece over a year before, and had just got back on a Greek caique that morning. We only had time for a hurried word or two, in which he gave me a few valuable hints.

I had only a haversack pack so lost no time in hitch-hiking my way to regimental headquarters at Mola, where I met Major Alan Wilkins, our second-in-command. We had a slap-up lunch together, as I had done on each previous occasion, when I

had gone off on a false alarm. As this was the last I was likely to see of civilisation for many months, I felt I must make the most of it.

This time, however, we were lucky. The weather cleared in the afternoon, and by the time we got to Brindisi it was an almost perfect evening. We drew our parachutes amidst the usual chaff about gremlins, unlucky numbers, etc., about which all parachutists joke as they draw a parachute out of the packing shed. Although statistics and instructors always assure us that the chances of a parachute failing to open is one in ten thousand, one always wonders if the one allotted might not be the ten thousandth.

Amongst other special items, I was given ten sovereigns and a million drachmae. Although this sounds a lot, the rate of exchange for the drachma (375 to the £ before the war) was fluctuating daily. At this time it was about 10,000 drachma to the £, and in four months' time it was 300 million to the £.

We reported in to the official Force "X" flat, in Brindisi, at about 6.00 hours, and were greeted by that indefatigable worker Lieut. Penny who was busy getting the times at which the different sorties were to leave that night. Our plane was due to take off at 21.30 hours, so we had four hours to put in before leaving for the aerodrome.

This flat in Brindisi was quite one of the most depressing places in which I have ever stayed. There were, perforce, no set meal hours because with different plane loads setting off for destinations all over occupied Europe every night from 18.00 hours onwards, the cooking staff of two were always heating up old meals. When unsuccessful sorties returned with their passengers, as often happened, at about two or three in the morning, the nearest empty bed was grabbed, and the would-be parachutists would crawl between most uncomfortable, communal army blankets. The anti-climax of the return made everyone most depressed next morning, and it was with a sigh of relief that one would go chasing back to Bari for a couple more days of freedom.

Our plane load that night consisted of five passengers; three Polish officers, my own Sergeant Radage - a first class man whom I had chosen to go with me - and myself. We had our usual "hotted-up" meal just after dark, and moved down to the aerodrome in the secrecy of a covered-in army truck. The procedure was to back the truck up against a tent at the aerodrome, throw the parachutes and kit into the tent, and then have them harnessed on inside. Once the first plane started moving off, and it was pitch dark, we were allowed to sit outside the tent and watch the proceedings.

It was a thrilling sight to see huge transport planes taking off every two minutes to drop supplies of arms, ammunition, and clothing, to guerilla forces in Italy, Jugo-Slavia and Greece. The huge Lancasters would go roaring down the runway and only just clear the trees at the far end. The D.C.'s on the other hand would be in the air after taxi-ing only half the length of the aerodrome.

Our turn came at last, and we motored across to our plane, a D.C. piloted by an American officer, with an Australian sergeant as navigator. I said goodbye to Alan and Penny, telling them to expect us back at the regimental dance the following night. I felt quite certain we would return as the pilot appeared very doubtful about finding the position, never having been to this particular dropping ground before. The take-off was punctual to the dot. As we climbed over the aerodrome, however, we looked down to see that the Lancaster which had taken off

immediately in front of us had crashed and was burning furiously a few feet below. I often wondered but never found out what happened to the crew. It was not an auspicious start to our venture.

We circled over Brindisi for about 20 minutes, gaining height. The crew of two mechanics and loaders were busy tying parachutes on to our precious bundles of clothing, ammunition and food. It is never comfortable travelling in a plane with a parachute on one's back. Unlike the D.C.'s which are used on various shuttle services, these operational D.C.'s are stripped completely. There are not even the usual steel seats along the side, the passengers having to make themselves as comfortable as possible amongst the packages that have to be thrown out later. Of course every passenger is extremely careful not to let his parachute get fouled in any way.

We were across the Aegean Sea by 22.30 hours, and we picked out Corfu as we flew over it. The snow-capped peaks and the lights of the tiny Greek villages twinkling up from the valleys amongst the mountains, made a lovely picture in the moonlight. There was no black-out in the Greek-held villages of the interior, and this helped the air force, showing them that they were over friendly territory. As I dozed fitfully to the monotonous drone of the engines, my mind travelled back over the last few months.

CHAPTER 2

"Volunteers wanted for duties of a secret and hazardous nature for work inside Europe!" This was the paragraph which suddenly caught my eye one morning in October, 1943, when I was glancing through one of the many circulars which come into a Divisional Headquarters. It was a morning on which I happened to be feeling particularly frustrated. After a year at the Staff College in Pretoria, first as a student and later as one of the Directing staff, on staff duties courses, I had come up to join the 6th South African Armoured Division undergoing its training in armour at Katatba, in the Western Desert. I was filling the post of a G. liaison officer, but as the Division was chiefly undergoing tactical training at the time, there was little for me to do. I had been given the necessary but unwarlike job of sports officer to the Division, while we were static. This entailed the use of a sedan car and spending most of my time in Cairo, arranging sporting fixtures. Very pleasant for a time, but sooner or later the amenities of war-time Gezira began to pall. After about six weeks of this I was feeling very restless.

This call for volunteers, therefore, caught me just at the right moment and without hesitating I put in my application. Major-General Poole, the Divisional Commander, and Colonel Eugene Maggs, my immediate chief, the G. 1 of the Division, were both extremely kind, and realising my restlessness recommended my application. I might add here that the circular stated among other things, that parachuting might be necessary. In my application I distinctly stated that I only wished to parachute if absolutely necessary. This caused a certain amount of leg pulling amongst the divisional staff.

Knowing the ways of the army, I took care to take my application to General Headquarters, Cairo, personally, to make certain that it was not pigeon-holed away somewhere and forgotten. It was only a week before a reply came indicating that I was to go up for an interview. On arrival I was called into a small room on

the top of one of the many secret Government offices tucked away in various parts of Cairo. There I was interviewed by a very grim looking Brigadier, and a cheerful Lt.-Colonel. I was asked all sorts of questions, and amongst other things, as usually happens on these occasions, whether I played games. I said that I had played rugger for Ireland and South Africa - generally a great help when looking for a job for some reason or other. The Colonel pricked up his ears and said "When was this?" I told him I played for Ireland in 1925 and 1926. "But dammit," he replied, "I played for England at that time." As I hadn't the foggiest idea what the Colonel's name was and he hadn't caught mine, we immediately got down to comparing notes, and the interview became much more intimate and friendly.

The Colonel turned out to be Sir Thomas Devitt, Bart., and we had only failed to mark one another at Twickenham in 1926, because I was laid up with tonsillitis! He told me he was to be O.C. of the new regiment, the Raiding Support Regiment, which he was forming and for which volunteers had been called.

Beyond the fact that we were to go to Palestine for secret training for specialised duties inside Europe, I was given no further details.

As there were about 42 other applications to join the regiment from the division, I offered to run the Colonel and Major Harrington, Staff Officer to Raiding Forces, out to Katatba, to interview them there. On the way out I pressed the case very strongly for my old friend Bill Collins of Basutoland, Security officer to the division. Like me he felt he was due for more active participation in the war. It turned out that he had got his Blue at Cambridge at the same time as Tom Devitt, and I felt that our chances of selection were getting rosier every minute.

All went well, and after a week's nervous anticipation a signal came through to say that six of the original 42 applicants from the division had been selected. Max Phillips, who later won an M.C. with the regiment, was the only other officer besides Collins and myself to be chosen.

We were ordered to report at the South African base at Helwan, where we filled in our secondment papers and met several other South African officers from various non-divisional units, who had also been chosen. Amongst them were Bob Bluett, who was later captured within a couple of days of his arrival in Greece; Duke Wellington, and Dougie Rall, who later left the regiment and transferred to the parachute independent brigade. Speculation was rife as to where we were going and what our job was to be; nobody had a clue, although we had all sorts of theories about secret service agents, liaison officers, peace negotiators, and what-not.

After a couple of days' delay, suitably filled in at Gezira, orders came through for us to move to Azzib in Palestine. Nobody knew where Azzib was, not even the Movement Control in Cairo, except that it was north of Haifa. We were accordingly booked to the latter spot and told to make our own arrangements from there on. Anyone who has had the misfortune to make the rail journey from Cairo to Palestine will understand our feelings when we arrived at Haifa at midday, the day after leaving Cairo. There is no sleeping accommodation, and one is forced to sit bolt upright all night in a crowded compartment. There are no dining saloons or refinements of that sort, hard rations are the order of the day. We had one precious bottle of South African issue brandy, and when we found we had no corkscrew, one of the experts, who assured us that he knew all about how to bump

out the cork, only succeeded in smashing the bottle, resulting in an even more unpleasant journey than usual, owing to the brandy fumes in the compartment.

On arrival at Haifa, we were instructed to catch a local goods train which took a couple of hours to cover the twenty odd miles to Azzib. Arrived there we found no one to meet us; the locals had only heard a vague rumour of a new regiment being formed nearby, and it was about an hour before we eventually got through tot the Adjutant. We had another couple of hours' wait before a truck arrived to carry us and our kit to our new temporary home. What a desolate spot it seemed when we did arrive! A few tents scattered about, and one or two unfinished log buildings. The Adjutant, Jock Eggo of the Black Watch, however, seemed a cheery soul. He pointed out the different lines, and after fixing up the men, Collins, Phillips and I found a tent for ourselves.

The next couple of weeks were chaotic. The Colonel was away, interviewing more volunteers, and nobody seemed to have much idea of what was happening. The great cry was "get fit at all costs." We started P.T. in the morning at 06.30 hours, and went through without a break, except for breakfast, until 12.30 hours. In the afternoons, to our horror, we were expected to do a sharp trot of two miles down to the beach, where every volunteer had to qualify with a half mile swim. This was comparatively easy to some, but for others it meant very serious training. To make matters worse, our quarter-master was having great difficulty in getting our ration strength of food. As our numbers were growing daily with new volunteers pouring in, this was not surprising. It did mean, however, that we were living on quarter rations for the first couple of weeks. This on top of our very strenuous physical training was a first class test of the spirit and keenness of the men and officers. Naturally there was any amount of grumbling, but nothing serious. We had an amusing reminder of our trials of those early days when, later, the Colonel called for designs for a regimental badge. One of the wags in the privates' mess put in as his suggestion, a skeleton holding out a mess tin.

Colonel Devitt returned from his recruiting campaign about the 15th November, and that night called a meeting of his officers. Looking back, it is quite amazing to me to recall how very vague our whole organisation was at that stage. The Colonel took us all into his confidence about our general roles, and the weapons we were to use, but he did not give us any idea of where and how we were to use them. We were to be armed with Spandau and Vickers machine guns, Italian anti-tank guns, mortars, mountain guns, and Browning ack-ack guns. After prolonged discussions, it was decided that the best way to train the regiment, was to organise it into five batteries, for the five different types of weapons. The Colonel also told us that there was no option about parachuting, so that was that.

We were all new officers to the regiment, and except for the O.C., the Second in Command, and the Adjutant, had reverted to our war substantive ranks on volunteering. With only one or two exceptions we were all Lieutenants again. The Colonel told us that promotion would be on merit and suitability only. I was appointed a section commander in the machine gun battery (A).

CHAPTER 3

The first parachute course, consisting of 80 officers and men, was set down for the 29th November. There was great keenness to be selected for the first course;

we were all anxious to find out what parachuting was really like, once we knew it was inevitable. I was one of the lucky ones, and went off to Ramid David, near Nazareth, in some trepidation on 28th November.

Parachute training had been cut down from the original three weeks' course to one of nine days. The first four of these days were spent on ground training. The instructors, all members of the R.A.F.,. must have been chosen for their psychological intuition. They were, without exception, magnificent fellows, and they built up our confidence from the very beginning. The pilots too were a cheery crowd and I particularly remember Squadron Leader "Spud" Murphy, A.F.C., Captain of the Rugger side, but they were all most helpful and encouraging.

We spent four very strenuous days learning how to fall and how to jump from successively higher apparatus. On the fourth day we were taken up for air experience. Having flown from the Union I felt that I had a reasonable amount of air experience, but this was something quite different. To travel in an aircraft completely stripped of all its amenities, and with no door is an unnerving experience, especially when the instructor calls you along to sit on the little lavatory seat at the back and stick your hand out to "see what it feels like". The sensation to me, at all events, was perfectly horrible. The instructor chats away cheerfully, pointing out objects on the ground - "see those trees", he says, "well just after you have passed them, you run in over that reservoir and at about this point the red light will go on". You look out fearfully, and gingerly stick out your hand. It is immediately whipped back by the rush of the slip-stream, and you just about save yourself from falling out, or so you think. Actually it is perfectly safe as the instructor is standing by all the time.

The red light is the warning signal switched on by the pilot. It flashes on just next to the door from which you jump. There are generally about 5 to 10 seconds before the pilot switches on his green light, on which signal the first parachutist in the plane jumps, followed immediately by all the rest. During these few seconds the No. 1 crouches at the door, preparing to hurl himself out the moment the green shows. The instructor in these cases, assists by shouting "Action stations, go." If there is any hesitation on the part of the jumper, he gets a boot on his back to assist him on his way. In the excitement of the moment nobody ever feels this boot, and always hotly deny having been assisted.

It is necessary to make a determined effort in the jump to clear the plane. The force of the slip-stream whips the body away in a fraction of a second, and bumping against the plane must be avoided. In theory, as soon as the jumper is out of the plane, he must come to attention, otherwise his legs and arms are thrown all over the place and can foul the rigging lines of the parachute. There is no rip cord pulling to be done in this type of jump. The parachute is contained in a large bag, the outer cover of which is attached by static line to a long iron bar in the plane itself. On jumping out the static line, which is about 12 feet long, suddenly becomes taut, and tears the cover off the parachute. Small strings with which the parachute is attached to the cover, break at a certain pressure, and the parachute opens up.

We knew all this in theory, but had yet to see it work in practice. The night before the first parachute jump is a miserable one for ninety per cent. of the people who go through the course. The air experience we had had that day had not been encouraging; whilst watching the instructors doing a demonstration jump had not greatly added to our confidence. It is a strange psychological fact that it is not

the fear of the parachute failing to open, nor the thought of an accident on landing, but the dread that one will not be able to force oneself out of the door at the critical moment. There is no disgrace in refusing at the last minute. Cases of this nature do not happen very often because all parachutists are volunteers. Presumably they would not volunteer unless they thought they could jump. Nevertheless there are those who do not possess the necessary mental make-up to make the jump when the time comes. There are also cases where men pass-out in the plane. All such persons are immediately returned to their units as unsuitable for parachute jumping. It is just bad luck. Once a man has done five jumps, however, it is a court martial offence to refuse. In these circumstances it has been decided by the authorities that a man has proved he has the mental make-up necessary to jump. A refusal, thereafter, is disobedience of an order, and is treated as such.

We were awakened at 05.00 hours on the morning of our first jump. We dressed, and some of us shaved to boost our morale, before moving off to the dismal packing shed to draw our "chutes". These we carried very tenderly to our assembly points. A parachute weighs 36 lb. and at first there seem to be all sorts of strings and straps all over the place. We had learned what all these were meant for during our preliminary training, but dozens of extra bits and pieces seemed to have appeared that first morning. We handled the whole outfit most gingerly, in case of upsetting the works.

Our plane was the third to do the circuit, and we watched with envy the figures of our friends, in the very far distance, as their parachutes opened up over the dropping ground, and we knew that their first jumps were successfully over at last. We fitted on our harness, which attaches the parachute and bag to the person of the jumper. There was much adjusting of straps, with the instructor pulling our legs all the time. As a final test, he walked along the line of the ten men ready for the next plane load, hitting the quick release boxes in the middle of the harness. When turned one way these release boxes hold all the harness in position, and when given a half right turn this is immediately released, and the man drops free. Naturally one is extremely careful of this little box, and no one is allowed near it in case it should turn the wrong way.

Our plane, a Hudson, moved slowly up the run-way and stopped in front of us. We filed in, having drawn for the order in which we were to jump. I had drawn No. 10, the last in the plane, so I, therefore, went in first. The man who is to jump first goes in last. Our initial jump was to be in what is called "slow pairs", that is two men at a time to give each man the feeling of jumping independently. This meant that I had to sit in the aeroplane while we did four complete circuits over the dropping ground before my turn came. It gave me ample opportunity to study the reactions of my companions. Nobody seemed to be enjoying themselves. Most of the men were chewing gum grimly. Beads of perspiration would come out on their foreheads as their turn to jump drew nearer. I furtively wiped my brow, in case I was doing the same. One or two made feeble attempts at jokes, at which we all laughed heartily. The only man who was enjoying himself was the instructor, who kept up a flow of cheery conversation throughout. At last my turn came.

Sergeant Lusted of Durban was to jump just in front of me, and I was due to follow as soon as the instructor shouted "Go". We moved up towards the door as the couple before us leaped out. The instructor attached the static lines of our parachutes to the cord by which it is fastened to the plane, with a most frail

looking safety pin. There is no strain on the pin at all, but one of the standing jokes with the instructors is to produce a very rusty looking object saying they think it should be O.K. In your nervous condition you fail to see the joke, tell him to get on with the job, and fasten you up with a decent pin. The instructor succeeded in distracting our attention to such an extent, that before we knew what was happening the red light was on. He bellowed "Action stations", and Lusted immediately crouched down in front of me. A second later the green light was on, and Lusted had left the plane, leaving an awful looking hole in front of me. Before I had a chance to hesitate the green light was on again, and out I went.

My first sensation was a terrific jerk as the slip-stream knocked me flat. I remember trying to get my hands to my side and come attention. My next sensation was one of wonderful peace and quiet, after all the noise of the plane. Never in any of my jumps did I see the tail of the plane as it flashed past, nor did I ever have any particular feelings until I felt the gentle jerk of the harness as the parachute opened above me.

The moment the chute opens, it is necessary to look up and grab the rigging lines which connect the parachute itself with the harness. It often happens that the rigging lines may be fouled; a jumper's legs or arms may have caught in the lines, or one of the lines may have got thrown over the parachute itself. In any of these cases by shaking the rigging lines, the fault can be rectified. Once one has looked up and made all the necessary adjustments, the rest of parachuting is really delightful. The aeroplane, which has just been left, can be seen disappearing in the distance; there is perfect peace and quiet, and the courtyside looks most inviting.

Jumping is nearly always done in the early morning before the wind gets up. Wind is the parachutist's greatest enemy. Even when training with a parachute on the ground, the huge canopy of the shute can drag the pupil for hundreds of yards at a time. Beginners are, therefore, never taken up on a windy day.

The sense of quiet first experienced when the parachute opened, was rudely shattered after a few seconds by a bellow from one of the instructors on the ground below. "Keep your feet and knees together, No. 10," he shouted through a large megaphone. This was a rude awakening. I had thought I was doing everything in copybook style, but I soon discovered that nothing could be perfect in parachuting. Down to about 100 ft. off the ground, it is difficult to realise with what speed one is descending to the earth. During the last hundred feet of the drop, however, the earth suddenly seems to rush up towards the jumper. The natural reaction is to draw up the feet. This is fatal and on the first morning my battery commander broke his back from this very fault. It is essential to land on the feet, and roll over in whichever direction the wind is driving. I was lucky on this first morning, and had a very easy landing, much easier than hundreds of hard tackles I had experienced on the rugger field. Immediately on landing the quick release box is tapped, the harness removed, and the parachute rolled up. The orders were to report back to the truck with the parachute, and back we all went for a second jump within half an hour of the first.

Everyone was full of confidence, and felt as if there was nothing in parachuting after all. This new-born confidence soon dissipated when the list of injuries, mostly minor, began to filter through. There were also one or two "jibbers" (refusals), but we hadn't much time to worry and before long the second jump was a thing of the past, and we were sitting down to a good breakfast.

I think most parachutists will agree that the third jump is the worst. The chief course instructor calls everybody together on the morning after the first two jumps to tell the course just how bad they are, and how lucky any of them are to be alive. This soon knocks the dangerous self-confident attitude out of the students.

That night, having experienced the feeling of a jump, dreams are crowded with thousands of imaginary leaps, and by the morning most of the course is in a state of jitters. It is here that army discipline comes into its own, and we all went through with our next two jumps successfully despite our misgivings.

On this course we did six jumps by day and one by night. Strangely enough the night jump is the easiest and the most pleasant of all. There is not that awful sensation of stepping into nothing which is always there in daylight. The landing, too, is easier. Not knowing when to expect the ground, the body is far more perfectly relaxed than in daylight.

Training jumps done in cold blood in training are much harder than operational jumps done in the excitement of moment.

We went back to camp on the ninth day, a body of very happy and contented men. We must have seemed very up-stage to the rest of the regiment who had yet to do their jumps. What we told them about parachuting was enough to shake even the keenest. But there was a strange reaction noticeable after each course. Before starting we all promised ourselves the most tremendous party on our last night, but the parties never came off. We were all too mentally and physically exhausted. This happened without exception. Presumably parachuting must require the exercise of a considerable amount of will power.

CHAPTER 4

Through the loss of my battery commander, who had left the regiment after breaking his spine (he had his back in plaster for six months, but I met him in Athens nine months later, holding a staff job and almost fully recovered), I was now promoted to troop commander of a machine gun troop, consisting of three sections. My section commanders were: Lieut. Rall, of Dundee, South Africa; Lieut. Wellington, of Port Elizabeth; and Bill Scawin, an Englishman. There were two South African sergeants, but the remainder of the men were Englishmen from many different regiments. They were a great crowd, and were very keen on the job.

Our armament consisted of Vickers and Spandau machine guns, and there was keen rivalry between the sections. Our weapon training was considerably interfered with by the parachute courses which lasted until the end of January, but nevertheless we made steady progress. We spent a very pleasant fortnight in Lebanon getting used to working with mules in the mountains, while our marching, swimming, boating, tough tactics and sabotage training was intensive. We had a first class and unbeaten rugger side, chiefly because we were all so fit. Our greatest rivals were the L.R.D.G. (Long Range Desert Group), who were stationed near us.

I might explain here that raiding forces consisted of a Headquarters commanded by Brigadier Turnbull, L.R.D.G. commanded by Lt.-Col. Owen Lloyd, S.B.C. (Special Boating Squadron) commanded by Major Lord Jellicoe, the Greek Sacred Regiment,

and ourselves, the R.S.R. The S.A.S. (Special Air Services) had been transferred to Britain for training prior to dropping behind the lines before the invasion of France. Our general role was to harass the enemy in the Mediterranean and in the Adriatic. The Long Range Desert Group was to be used as in the desert, for offensive reconnaissance. The S.B.S. and G.S.R. were to use Greek caiques (or any other type of boats which were available) for raiding the Baltic coast line, Mediterranean islands and the Dodecanese. Our role was to support either of the other three forces with heavy weapons, to operate on our own, or to support guerilla forces.

By the end of February, 1944, our training was complete. The successful organisation of the regiment had been a triumph for the administrative staff, the Colonel, the Adjutant and the Quartermaster. Never before in the history of the British army had a regiment of this nature consisting of so many mixed weapons been formed. To organise, obtain a war establishment and complete the specialised equipment necessary in the short time available, was an amazing feat. All our guns, ammunition, spare parts, etc., had to be drawn from different parts of the Middle East. One item of our special equipment - Bergen rucksacks - is of interest. After experimenting with these for some time, it was found that we could carry 65 lb of kit on our backs, sufficient for four months' guerilla warfare. This Bergen load of 65 lb. was quite apart from our ordinary equipment such as Tommy guns, binoculars, small pack, etc. At the height of our training we were marching 15 miles a day, carrying 85 lb. of kit.

As it turned out later, we could never do this in practice. Personally I walked over 2,000 miles in Greece, in seven months, and only carried my Bergen once. The continual marching up and down the steep mountains of the Balkans for long stretches at a time made it quite impossible to carry more than a light pack.

One of our batteries, the Browning ack-ack, under the command of Major Bill Mansfield, was sent off on a secret mission. We learned later that they had gone to the island of Vis, in the Adriatic, just off the Jugo-Slavian coast. They were stationed there for three or four months, and staged many raids with commando troops from their island fortress.

During the time our guns and equipment were being collected, our second in command, Major Wilkins, and the battery commanders were putting a tremendous amount of work into the weapon and tactical training of the regiment.

By this time my second battery commander had fallen by the wayside, and I was now second in command of A. battery. I was a bit worried about my new appointment. There seemed no very definite role for a second in command in our organisation. However, as things turned out I could not have been more lucky.

By the end of March we were all getting very fidgety, wondering where we would be used and where we would go. Then, one momentous day the Colonel returned from a conference in Cairo, and called my battery commander, Major Douglas Unsworth of the Cheshire Regiment, Major Norman Astell (who was later killed in Athens during the Civil War) and myself into his office. He did not beat about the bush. "I have chosen you three officers," he said, "to go into Greece to reconnoitre three different areas, prior to the arrival of your troops. You Astell will be in charge of the Northern area, North of Salonica. You Unsworth will be in command of the central area in the vicinity of Mount Olympus. You Gage will go to Lamia. I do not know how you will arrive at your destination. You may go by submarine,

aeroplane or caique. Your orders are to reconnoitre the main roads and railways in your area. To ascertain the strength and morale of the enemy; to build up food supplies for your men when they arrive; and finally to check for suitability certain targets which have been chosen by British liaison officers who are already in Greece, for a final assault on the Germans when they withdraw. You will proceed to Cairo immediately for final orders and briefing. I wish I were coming with you."

It was a great moment and I was tremendously thrilled. The only fly in the ointment was that it meant the breaking up of the battery. My particular force was to consist of two sections of Spandaus, commanded by an old friend of mine, Vincent Hoey, and Dick Gammon. They were both splendid lads, and there was no one I would rather have chosen to be with me.

I had first met Hoey at the Staff College, Pretoria, when he had been one of my pupils. We were both Captains in those days. On the day of his wedding in Pretoria which I attended, I reverted to the rank of Lieut. On transfer to the 6th Division. We flew back to Egypt together, and when I decided to second to the British Army in October, Hoey was sorely tempted to do likewise, but decided to hang on for another couple of months. Eventually, like me, he couldn't resist the temptation to move off to what appeared to be more exciting work. On joining the R.S.R., Hoey reverted to Lieut., by which time I was once more a Captain. Later in Greece he got his Captaincy back, and I got ahead once again when I got my Majority. Vincent finished up on top, however, for on my return to the Union I reverted once more to the rank of Lieut. And he is still a Captain. As amateur soldiers we got a lot of amusement out of our various changes in seniority.

Dick Gammon was a great lad. He came to the Raiding Support Regiment from the Fourth Parachute Battalion, and was never tired of holding up this wonderful force to us as an example of what we should attempt to, but would never succeed in emulating. At times this used to bore us a little, but eventually it became a standing joke. As Gammon was one of the original British paratroopers, having joined them in 1941, fought with them and been wounded in Tunisia, and again fought with them and been wounded in Sicily, his loyalty was not surprising. Unluckily for him in the Sicily show his ear drums had burst, when he landed almost on top of an ack-ack gun, and the para. Battalion would not accept him back at the time. Our standards were not quite so strict, and he had been passed by our doctor. He is now back with his old formation, and is happy again at last. I am quite sure, knowing Dick, that he is holding up the R.S.R. as an example to his para. Battalion! He is well known to all paratroopers for the Gammon sticky bomb which carries his name. He and his fellow instructors invented this bomb early on in the war. It is carried by all paratroops in action. It is a special type of hand grenade, easily handled which will stick to metal, and is invaluable for close quarter work against tanks.

Finally the force was to be completed by the inclusion of one Mortar section, under command of Ossie Kingaby - one of the keenest of the younger officers in the regiment. He was an adept at wangling anything from a bottle of beer to a mountain gun, from whoever happened to possess such items. With him in the party, I was quite certain that we would never want for anything, provided it was obtainable.

At the time of our interview with the Colonel, we were not allowed to let any of the other officers or men know what was taking place. The whole plan was still

Top Secret. I did, however, manage to convey a hint to Vincent without breaking security.

Each of the three officers detailed to go into Greece, were to take one N.C.O. with them. I chose Sergeant Radage, one of the original members of my first section in the regiment. A first class N.C.O. and a man who fully justified his selection during the months to come.

We left for Cairo on the 31st March for final briefing. There we were met by Tom Kennedy of the Cheshires, our conducting officer. He was a most delightful person, and it came as a sad blow when I heard of his death during a raid on the island of Corfu, a few months later. We spent ten busy days absorbing the very latest intelligence reports from Greece; being lectured on the Greek political set-up; the Greek character; and generally what to expect when we arrived in the country. Finally, we were each specially briefed by an expert in our own particular area. By the time this was over, we knew pretty well all there was to know about modern Greece, the German dispositions, and the general features of the country to which we had each been assigned.

We were to live on the land, and our diet was to consist mainly of beans and black bread. Our medical supplies were very limited. We were to be given golden sovereigns - our only means of currency. We would, if necessary, purchase our own mules for transport purposes. We would walk or ride wherever we went in the country. Only on very rare occasions could we expect parachute drops of food. We were to be entirely self-sufficient. The British liaison officers already in the country would help us as much as possible. Until the last moment we did not know where we were going, and had, of course, no time to learn the language. We were to take the minimum of clothes, only as much as we could carry. We could expect to be cut off for at least six months.

It was a prospect which thrilled us all, for we would be able to fight the Hun just when and how it suited us. The only point we viewed with slight misgiving was how and when our troops would reach us. The original plan was for my detachment to be infiltrated along the East coast of Greece. But more of that later.

Our initial role was to harass the enemy to the greatest possible extent, disorganise his communications, blow up bridges, attack strong points, and generally keep him jumpy. All this we were to do in conjunction with the Greek guerillas, to whom we were, in theory, to lend moral and heavy weapon support. Finally on the signal "Noah's Ark" we were all three to attack three selected targets on a day when the High Command decided that the Germans had commenced their final withdrawal from Greece. We would be in constant wireless communication with the war station in Cairo, through the British liaison officers in the country.

Our mails, we were told, would be most irregular and we were not allowed to inform even our wives that we were doing anything out of the ordinary. Arrangements were made to send fortnightly telegrams from regimental headquarters, purporting to come from us, to the effect that we were safe and well. We could send letters out by caique when opportunity offered.

Eventually after several delays we flew to Bari on the 16th April. Here it was decided that the best way of getting us in to Greece, was by parachute. This brings us back to the beginning of the book. The other two parties were more fortunate than Radage and I, Unsworth and his N.C.O. had got in at the first attempt, Astell

and his N.C.O. at the second, and here was I actually on my third attempt. This thought brought my mind back to my present surroundings.

CHAPTER 5

I began to take more interest in our whereabouts, as I picked out the outline of Corfu below us. The three Poles were handing round a bottle of Vodka which always accompanied them, but which Radage and I refused. Taken out of a glass the stuff is strong enough, but out of the bottle it was a bit too much for us. The moon was in the first quarter and there were light, fleecy clouds here and there, which at times thickened up rather ominously.

The outline of the coast with the breakers beating on the shore could be seen as we flew over at about 10,000 feet, and there was still plenty of snow on the mountains although it was May. We could see an odd searchlight further up the coast, and presumed one of the other transport planes was attracting attention. We were due over our dropping ground about 20 minutes after crossing the coast, and as I was O.C. troops in the plane, I had decided to jump first when we eventually reached our area. The dropping ground was a very small one, an isolated valley surrounded by high peaks. The D.Z. (dropping zone) was so small that it was unsafe to jump in "sticks" of more than two, instead of the usual ten. We knew this because one of the Poles, an ex P.O.W. in German hands, who had escaped from Greece, had been there before. These Poles incidentally were going back to Greece to help several hundred of their countrymen to escape from the Germans who had conscripted them into the German army when Poland was overrun.

At 22.35 hours I went forward and chatted to the pilot. He was still doubtful, on account of the cloud which was about, whether or not he would be able to drop us. We decided that in case the weather thickened, we would throw out all our bundles first, and the personnel would be the last to leave the plane. If we couldn't follow, we could easily get a further issue of kit when we returned to Brindisi. If we went first, however, and our kit was lost, matters would be very awkward. At 22.50 hours exactly, we spotted flashes from the ground. Every night each dropping area in the Balkans had a different code sign in the shape of its bonfires, to guide planes to the correct spot. This code sign was generally in the shape of a letter. Once this was picked out, there was an additional recognition signal which was flashed by torch from ground to air, and back from air to ground. Great care was exercised by the pilots in making certain that they were over the correct dropping area. The Germans knew that supplies were being dropped into the Balkans, and had a nasty habit of lighting dummy fires in nearby valleys, in order to mislead the pilots. Flying at 10,000 feet and viewing these fires from different angles, it is quite easy to misread them. The Germans were also in the habit of sending intercepting craft out at night.

On one occasion, the pilot flying round the dropping area and dropping his load on each circuit, was surprised to see flashes from the ground after each run-in. He could not make this out at all, and only when he got back to base did he learn that a German bomber had been following him round bombing the dropping zone just behind him. Neither had been able to spot the other, but the Jerry had been bombing the fires.

On this particular night, all seemed to be well. We recognised the original fires, and the recognition signal was in order. The crew fastened themselves to the plane, put on bulky jackets, gauntlets, and fur-lined caps, until they looked like a couple of huge automatons. They unlashed and pulled in the door. The lights were switched on and everything was got ready. Suddenly there was a scare. The observer had spotted a strange aircraft as the light of the moon glinted on its wings. The lights were immediately switched off and we followed the stranger round and round. We knew none of our other aircraft were due over the same dropping ground that night. The stranger had evidently not seen us. It was an awkward position, especially as our transport plane was completely unarmed. The pilot was beginning to consider making off while the going was good, when we suddenly realised that the other plane was dropping bundles.

We were re-assured, it must be one of our own planes which had come to a wrong area in error. We waited until he had completed his drop, and we then began getting our equipment out. The pilot could not come down below 3,000 ft. on account of the mountains all round the valley, and the disconcerting banks of cloud which kept drifting over. It took five circuits round the area before all our kit was out. By this time the crew were sweating profusely. We, the passengers, had all kept crouched as far away from the door as possible during these proceedings.

As the last bundle left the plane, I went forward to thank the pilot and say cheerio. I told him to have a drink for me when he got back to his comfortable mess that night. It seemed extraordinary that he would be home in a couple of hours, and that we would be cut off from the outside world for at least six months. He asked me how long I wanted between the red and green lights, and I told him not more than five seconds. We had not jumped for nearly five months, and I did not like the thought of hanging about that door longer than absolutely necessary.

As it turned out, this was quite the most pleasant jump I had ever made. The big door in the D.C. compared with the tiny one in the Hudsons made the jump very much easier. Radage followed out right on my heels, and we were so close together in the air that we could talk to one another on the way down. During our training, jumps had varied from 1,000 to 400 ft. above the ground and we were quite amazed at the length of time it took us to come to earth from 3,000 ft. We seemed to be swinging about in the heavens for a very long time, before definite features began to take shape below.

As we dropped lower, we drifted apart, and lost touch with one another. I seemed to be making straight for the fires, and could see one or two tiny figures silhouetted against their glow. Compared with our specially prepared dropping zones in training, this was a most unlikely looking spot. I managed by pulling the rigging lines, to clear a stream and just miss a large tree in my final rush. My parachute caught in the tree but I landed on my back just next to it.

Before I could get out of my harness, willing hands were around me, all jabbering away in what I presumed to be Greek. Out of the confusion, a voice spoke to me in English. "Are you all right, Sir? You are with friends, and we are very happy to welcome you to Greece." It was a young Greek student from Athens who spoke to me. He was, the next day, to be appointed my interpreter. Under no circumstances could I have had a more charming, devoted and loyal friend that Dimitri, and it was a strange coincidence that he should have been the first person to whom I spoke on landing in his country.

I had arranged with the pilot of the aircraft that he was not to drop the rest of the party until he had received an O.K. by torch flashed by me from the ground. I did this immediately, and then began to take stock of my position. My parachute, a most valued possession, was well and truly caught in the thorny tree. I gave strict instructions to Dimitri to remain with it until the Greek Andartes - the name by which Greek guerillas are known - had disentangled it, and made him responsible for its return to me. I had heard many stories of how these precious parachutes had a habit of disappearing.

I made my way towards the fires and was greeted by Major John Ponder of the buffs, a New Zealander, and Capt. Blocks, Chief Signals officer in enemy Occupied Greece. They were busy organising the collection of the various bundles which had been dropped earlier. They were annoyed because the first plane had dropped its load at the wrong dropping ground. This meant that a mule train of about 40 mules would have to be organised next day to move all the bundles, a matter of two days march, to their correct destination. Also the drop being from such a height, the bundles had been scattered all over the countryside.

We watched anxiously to try to pick out the three Poles on their way down, but could not see them anywhere. Radage came across about 10 minutes after I had arrived, humping his parachute on his back. He appeared quite unconcerned, although he had landed in the middle of a tree, and had to climb down. Like me he was quite uninjured. The night was rather warm, and we discarded our thick, sidcut flying suits in which we had dropped. These padded flying suits helped a lot in saving minor bruises and injuries in a drop of this nature. We were beginning to get anxious about the Poles as there was no sign of them anywhere.

There was a sound of desultory small arms fire in the distance during all this time, but I was told on enquiry that this was just the Andartes on the surrounding hills, firing to keep the villagers to their houses, while the stores were being rounded up. It is difficult for those who have not experienced the privations of the Greeks, to realise the very great temptation it was for them to get hold of the food and clothing bundles which were dropping like manna from Heaven. But the fact remains that they could not always resist this temptation and parts of most drops were generally found to be missing.

The plane had flashed its farewell signal 30 minutes before. There was nothing we could do in the dark, so Major Ponder decided that we could move off to the local village headquarters and leave the Andartes to bring in the Poles.

We had been walking for about half an hour, when we suddenly came on a babel of voices. It appeared that the Poles had had a very bad landing in the ravine, through which we were now passing. Two of them had only been saved by their parachutes catching in trees. One had hung suspended over a precipice for nearly an hour before the Greeks had managed to throw out ropes and pull him in. The other had landed on the step side of a hill, where the shale had given way. He had been rolling towards a steep drop when his chute had caught in the scrub and his roll had been stopped in the nick of time. The third member of the Polish party had landed uneventfully nearby, in some bushes. With the whole party now re-united we moved off once more. It was a lovely night. I found it extremely hard to believe that we had really arrived in Greece at last.

As we walked through the ravine, the moon shone on the snow-capped tops of Mt. Tymphistros, and a nightingale serenaded us from the ravine below. An

auspicious welcome. Rounding a bend we were suddenly challenged by a Greek guard. This came as a surprise to me. John Ponder told me that every village in Greece had its guards posted at all the entrances to the village, every hour of the day and night, and no stranger was ever allowed to pass. The village at which we had arrived was the headquarters of the allied mission in Greece. Its name was Vinyani, and it was situated on the slopes of Tymphistros.

I was most intrigued as we climbed its narrow streets to note the complete disregard by the population of the fact that that night supplies of food and ammunition had been dropped into their area. I was to learn later that demonstrations of any sort were strictly discouraged by the guerilla leaders. Eventually we arrived at our destination, the headquarters of the mission. Here some hot coffee, black bread, and cheese awaited us.

By now the reaction had begun to set in, and we were feeling very tired. We were conducted to our various billets for the night. I was given a room in a house with a most comfortable double bed and linen sheets. I was past being surprised at anything by now, however, and just crawled into bed and immediately fell asleep.

My store of surprises was nto at an end, for, next morning, on leaving my room in search of water for a wash, I met an extremely attractive girl. During my stay in Italy I had learned about a hundred Greek words which I thought would be of use to me in Greece. I proceeded to ask the charming stranger in my best Greek where I could find water. She replied in almost perfect English: "Come with me, Sir, and I will show you." After all the hardships we had been led to expect during our briefing in Cairo, this unexpected comfort and luxury was most surprising. I remembered reading "For Whom the Bells Toll" and began to get all sorts of romantic ideas. As it turned out, however, my two nights' stay in Vinyani were quite the most comfortable of my entire sojourn in Greece. The headquarters personnel of the Allied mission very wisely made themselves extremely comfortable.

The girl to whom I spoke that morning was Dimitri's fiancee, Bertha. She had left Athens with Dimitri and two or three other Greek students about ten days before. They had travelled by train from Athens to Khardista, and had walked from there across the mountains to join the Greek guerillas. Both had one time served with the International Red Cross organisation in Athens. They had, however, aroused the suspicions of the Germans and had thought it wisest to get away while they still had the opportunity.

Most of the interpreters to the mission throughout Greece were drawn from the ranks of these Greek students. They all spoke excellent English, and in many cases had studied in Paris and London, as well as being students at the American college in Athens. In peacetime many of them had spent their holidays on mountain excursions, a favourite pastime amongst young Athenians. They were, therefore, eminently suited to the work for which they had volunteered. They had no military training, of course, but they were physically fit and tremendously keen. They also knew and understood the German mentality, having lived amongst them in Athens for a couple of years. How they hated them!

Vinyani was a most picturesquely situated village on a mountain top. I learned later, from bitter experience, that every village in Greece was perched on the top of a mountain. The end of a day's march inevitably meant scaling a precipitous 1,000 ft. track to the top of some stony crag for a night's shelter. There were

higher mountains towering all round Vinyani, all thickly wooded to the snow line. The village itself was built into the sides of the hill, with the quaintest little alleys, doors, and private stairways. There was a small balcony outside my room, as was common to most houses in mountainous Greece. Every morning all the multi-coloured blankets are hung out from these balconies for airing, and combined with the white walls and red tiles, make the village a most colourful sight.

I was surprised by the methods of washing in Greeec. Although there is unlimited water in the mountains, and the most elaborate wells and fountains have been built up, there is no running water "laid on" anywhere. The method is quite simple. The woman carry empty barrels on their backs to the spring, and bring them back filled for household use. This often involves a walk of one to two miles, which is repeated two or three times during the day. Perhaps in these circumstances it is not surprising that no one in the mountains in Greece ever appears to have a bath! One member of the household pours water from a jug, over the hands of the other member. This is sluiced over their faces and hair, and washing for the day is over. Once more the mission in Vinyani had excelled itself and acquired a bath which had been carried for days by mule over the mountains. Where it had originally come from is a mystery, but I suspect that some German had accepted British golden sovereigns in exchange for its loss.

I moved over to mission headquarters for breakfast, and there met Lt.-Col. Hammond, who in the absence of Colonel "Chris", was acting O.C. He was a most charming man and had been a Professor of Archaeology before the war. He had spent many years in Greece studying Greek Archaeology with his wife in pre-war days, and he knew the country and the people intimately. His continual good humour and general cheerfulness even when the Greek ELAS leaders were most difficult, was truly amazing.

CHAPTER 6

That first morning I learned a great deal about the general set-up of the Allied Military Mission in Greece in particular, and in the Balkans in general. The country was covered with a network of missions. Each of these missions consisted of a minimum of one British officer and a couple of wireless N.C.O.'s. Some of them were considerably larger and included two or three R.E.'s and surplus N.C.O.'s who had escaped from the Germans, and who had elected to remain in Greece to assist in sabotage work, rather than be evacuated when they had the opportunity.

The work these missions were doing was invaluable. They were continually collecting and sending out information to the war station in Cairo about the German formations in Greece. They were assisting in the organisation of the Greek guerillas, distributing food, clothing, arms and ammunition, as it arrived. They were always encouraging and assisting the Andartes in the prosecution of their underground war against the Germans, by organising road and railway bridge demolitions, etc. In fact they were doing all in their power to keep the smouldering fires of resistance against the German aggressors alight.

The internal Greek political situation was rather complicated. A short survey of the position as it stood in May, 1944, will make it easier to follow the content of my story:

When the British forces in the country were driven from Greece by the victorious German Army in April, 1941, there was an organised underground movement in the country, the EAM. This group had been working against the Greek government prior to the occupation of the country by the Germans.

It was a simple matter to transfer their political intrigues against the Greek government to a subversive movement against the hated Germans and Italians.

The main problem EAM had to face was lack of troops to carry out aggressive guerilla warfare against the enemy. They set about overcoming this difficulty in a most systematic way. At the time of the British withdrawal from Greece, the Germans by-passed many mountain villages and large areas of apparently barren mountain fastnesses. The remnants of the gallant Greek Army from Albania took refuge in the bypassed areas and gradually formed themselves into independent guerilla bands.

Their numbers grew from day to day as they were joined by peasants and young men from the towns.

EAM saw their chance. If they could amalgamate these guerilla bands under one leader, chosen by them, they would have the army they required. They began operations by infiltrating members of their organisation into key positions in the different bands.

At first they had little difficulty in persuading the smaller bands to join forces, but later it became evident that some leaders with more personality and ambition than others were not so keen to subordinate themselves to this central control.

In addition to these guerilla bands which were active against the Germans and Italians, there were bands of Greeks formed by the Germans to assist in policing and in garrison duties in the occupied areas.

These Security Battalions, as they were called, were recruited chiefly from young townsmen who had no means of support and in many cases only joined the Germans in order to get food and shelter in a starving country, and not necessarily because they were collaborationists. A good many of them also thought they might help the Greek cause in an underground way by joining this force.

Finally, there was a third group who tried to keep out of quarrels on either side. This group consisted of isolated villagers, whose only interest was to protect their own particular village from interference from either the Germans or the guerilla bands.

This, then, was the general set-up when the first British officers were dropped into Greece by parachute in September, 1942. These officers went in with a specific task to blow up a large bridge, the Gorgopotomus, on the main Salonika-Athens railway line, just prior to the battle of Alamein. For this work they succeeded in persuading the two largest guerilla forces - ELAS, commanded by General Serafis, and EDES, commanded by General Zervas, to work together.

Here I must explain that ELAS was the armed force which EAM had at their command.

The operation was a complete success, but was the only occasion when ELAS and EDES combined against the enemy throughout the war. The bridge was destroyed and Rommel did not receive vital supplies which he needed urgently during the battle of and retreat from Alamein.

Having completed their specific task, the British officers prepared to leave Greece, but before getting away they were asked to volunteer to remain in the country with a view to forming a permanent British Mission to assist the organisation of resistance against the Axis and the supply of arms and clothing to the guerilla forces.

Gradually the mission was enlarged and operations against the enemy garrison's outposts and lines of communication were intensified. The Axis in their turn realised what was happening and started their counter measures. These consisted of shooting hostages and burning villages as reprisals for acts of sabotage, and intensifying propaganda to sow seeds of distrust and hate between the main guerilla bands.

Their method was quite simple. They spread rumours among each band that the other bands were negotiating with them. This always worked. The Greek is a born intriguer and he always believed the Hun when he was told, for instance, that a rival band had just released some German prisoners in return for arms, or that the rival band was planning to desert to the Germans, etc., etc.

The British liaison officers did their best to smooth over these difficulties, but in November, 1943, open civil war broke out between the two main guerilla bands, ELAS and EDES. By that time these two groups had absorbed nearly all the smaller bands. Most of the British liaison officers in the ELAS area found themselves under close arrest and one officer was shot. At no time had EDES ever arrested British officers, and their general co-operation had been excellent.

Eventually, after a month's fighting both bands agreed to an armistice and an uneasy truce was arranged. In the subsequent negotiations it was agreed that each group should operate against the common enemy in its own specified area. As ELAS troops numbered between 40,000 and 50,000 men compared with EDES 10,000, the former controlled most of Greece and the latter were confined to operations in Epirus on the West coast.

During all this time the guerillas were keeping a large portion of Greece free and were a continual source of irritation to first the Italian and later the German garrisons. When the Italians capitulated the guerillas raced the Germans in taking over Italian garrisons and were able to augment their supplies of arms and ammunition considerably.

Shortage of heavy weapons was the chief problem, however, and it was to remedy this shortage that the R.S.R. were being sent to Greece.

Both bands were wholehearted in their hatred of the Germans, but each band distrusted the other and believed every bit of propaganda the Germans put out against its rival.

EDES supported the Allied High Command policy without question; ELAS on the other hand were obstructionists on many occasions, but at other times, particularly when they wanted fresh supplies of arms and ammunition, were prepared to co-operate. The rank and file of both bands were completely pro-British, but many of the political officers of ELAS, the EAM representatives, were very obstinate and were continually making difficulties unforgivable under operational conditions.

The mountain villagers and peasants were open in their admiration and love for Britain. Had they wished they could have betrayed the presence of the missions to the Germans at any time.

Their great hope was that Britain would bring in a large invasion army in order to avoid a civil war when the Germans left.

Unfortunately the relationship between the villagers and the guerillas were not always a happy one. There were faults on both sides. The guerillas were short of money and were often forced to requisition quarters and food from the villagers. Also for operational purposes it would be necessary to "freeze" all mules in certain villagers in case of a sudden drive by the Germans, when all animal transport would be required to move their arms and equipment in a hurry.

The heaviest fighting against the enemy generally took place during harvesting time when the villagers wanted their mules to move wheat into the mountains away from the Hun. Naturally each party thought their claim to the animals was the more important. As the guerillas were armed they always got their way and this did not add to their popularity.

In some areas the secret EAM representatives would go so far as to have villagers who had been particularly co-operative with British forces arrested on some minor pretext. This then was the general picture when Sergeant Radage and I arrived in Greece at the beginning of May, 1944.

CHAPTER 7

After my long talk with Colonel Hammond that first morning, May 5th, I went off with Dimitri to look for one of my bundles which was missing. We went back to the dropping ground, and I was amazed that we had all come to no harm when I saw its size in daylight. The area was criss-crossed with ditches, trees and rocks, and the entry into the field itself was approached on three sides by narrow ravines, and on the fourth by a river.

The drop had been scattered, and there was a lot of equipment missing. One of the Poles had lost all his kit, while each of the rest of us had lost at least one bundle. In the end I turned out to be the luckiest. I did recover all my bundles, but the missing one had been badly pilfered. Amongst other things which had been stolen were all my boot polish, a couple of bottles of Vicks, my soap, riding trousers, and most precious of all a pair of spare boots. All these items were quite irreplacable. I had been warned by Tom Barnes about this sort of thing. Now I had learned what to expect in future from personal experience.

Sergeant Radage had lost his sleeping bag and various oddments which were wrapped up in it. This did not matter very much as our sleeping bag issue was in two parts and I was able to give him one half of mine. Later, experience taught us that we never carried our sleeping bags but left them at base.

Vinyani was three days march from the area in which my troops were to operate, and as John Ponder was to move across to another mission beyond my area, it was decided I should move off with him the following morning. Accordingly, Dimitri, Radage and I sorted out our kit into two mule loads and set off on our first march in Greece next morning. It was a ten hour journey over most precipitous paths. I was most struck by the similarity of the country to Basutoland in South Africa. The paths were almost identical to the Basutoland mountain paths, while it was most amusing to hear the same greetings made by travellers we passed on the road.

"Where are you going?" and "Where do you come from?" seems to be the universal greeting of all people who walk.

The weather at this time of year was perfect, cold at nights and beautifully warm during the day. Never a cloud in the sky, and the mountain air crisp and invigorating. Radage and I were out of training through our enforced idleness, first in Cairo and later in Bari, and we were extremely tired when we reached Fournas, our destination for the night. Fournas was the headquarters of the mission in my area, and was commanded by Major John Mulgen. We held a conference that night and Mulgen decided to move his headquarters nearer the main German lines of communication, and to leave Fournas as a rear base.

I had been most surprised the previous day at the way in which we were able to walk about the country in broad daylight, but I was to learn later that the Andartes had a very fine system of guard posts on the edge of all German occupied territory. Later in the year when the Germans raided Vinyani and razed it to the ground, the mission and ELAS headquarters had ample warning and everything, except their bath, was moved in time.

It took Mulgen a day to pack up his headquarters so my party had a day in which to recover before moving off again. On Sunday, May 7th, we made our way across the mountains to a small village, Paliokastra, where the local guerilla brigade headquarters was situated. Here we had a two days' conference with the Brigadier and his staff. This was my first contact with the guerilla leaders. This particular brigade was fortunate in possessing a Brigadier who knew his own mind and was prepared to assist us in every possible way. Unfortunately about a month later he was removed from office.

The country in which we had now arrived was very different from that where we first landed. The mountains were not so steep and the villages all bore the mark of Italian and German aggression. Paliokastra itself was rather off the beaten track and still had a few houses left standing. These had been requisitioned by the Brigade, but the villagers lived in patched-up hovels consisting of one or two habitable rooms in their original houses. I was surprised to find over a hundred Russians billeted and being fed by the Mission in this area. They were deserters from the German army, and like the Poles had been conscripted when the Hun overran parts of their homeland. The Mission was doing its best to arrange for the evacuation of these men. Meanwhile their feeding was proving a great strain on local food resources.

I had my first experience of bugs in Paliokastra and killed forty in one night. This was a lesson to me, and I had part of my parachute made into a flea bag. I carried this wherever I went in the future, and would crawl into it and tie it tightly around my neck before going to sleep. Borrowed blankets held no terrors for me during the rest of my stay in Greece. Dimitri was always a great favourite with fleas for some reason; even a flea bag could not keep them out.

The beds in Greece are all made of planks, not springs like our own, so it doesn't really make much difference whether one sleeps on the bed or on the floor. While the weather was fine we generally slept outside, a habit which our hosts could never quite understand.

Radage's and my beard, which we had started in Italy, were becoming quite presentable by this time and we did not feel such outsiders amongst all the bearded guerillas with whom we mixed. Radage's caused great admiration with its

brilliant red colour. Mine was developing a rather ominous streak of grey about my chin, caused by old rugger injuries. This became so marked later that I made Dimitri cut out the hairs one by one! Eventually Radage had one of the best beards in Greece, and it came as a sad blow when a signal came from Cairo just before our amalgamation with the army of liberation, ordering us to "remove all beards forthwith".

We spent a couple of days looking for suitable dropping areas round Paliokastra before moving on to one of Mulgen's outstations, Tsuka, where Major Pat Wingate of the R.E.'s was in command (Pat was no relation to the late General Wingate). The mission house in Tsuka was delightfully situated on the top of one of the foothills overlooking the plain of Lamia. Wingate was a most interest character. He had been in the country longer than almost any one at this period. He had covered nearly every inch of the railway from Lamia to Larissa, and had a detailed map of every bridge, road, crossing, and German pillbox on the line.

To look at Pat you would never imagine him as a soldier at all, much less as a sabateur, but he had a magnificent record behind him, and had probably been the cause of more damage to the German lines of communication than most people. He had a frail figure and I could never understand how he stood up to the rigours of the country. He always wore a huge Australian hat and his original barathea jacket with which he had arrived in the country over 18 months before. Naturally by now this was in a most bedraggled state with patches all over it. But even on the hottest days Pat would never leave his sanctuary for a trip down to the line without wearing his precious jacket.

He had a very fine telescope mounted on his verandah, through which he could study the hide-out of a fellow engineer, Major Tim Foley, whose house was similarly situated on a hill far across the valley, about ten miles walking distance away, but only about five as the crow flies. Further down the valley to the east it was possible to see the nearest German garrison town of Makri.

Pat gave us a warm welcome and we had a very pleasant evening. I tasted the local retsina wine for the first time and found it a great improvement on the more popular drink of ozo, a type of arack or absinthe. Radage took to ozo like a duck takes to water, but I became a confirmed wine drinker when it was available, which was not often unfortunately.

Two of Wingate's N.C.O.s, Sergeants John Mackay and Lou Northover, had had interesting careers. Originally with the L.R.D.G. in the Desert, Mackay had been one of the band to drop on Leros in that ill-fated expedition nearly a year before. He had been captured by the Germans, transhipped to Athens, and from there was on his way by train to Germany. The L.R.D.G. had trained their men to look after themselves in these sort of circumstances, so Mackay took it as a matter of course to escape from the train during his journey and made his way into the mountains. The Greek Andartes had eventually led him to the Mission, with whom he had elected to stay, rather than be repatriated.

The other N.C.O., Lou Northover, of New Zealand, had been left behind when the original evacuation of Greece, in 1941, took place. Northover had lived in Athens, hidden by loyal Greeks, for many months. Later he was assisted out of the city and made his way on foot and by truck into the mountainous parts of Greece. He, too, had contacted the Mission, and like Mackay had elected to remain in the country. These two men were typical examples of what many others had done.

They had come to admire the Greek resistance to such an extent that they felt they would be deserters if they accepted the offer of evacuation.

I was quartered for the night in a house at the extreme end of the village. After my discomfort of the two previous nights I was lucky enough to find a clean room, and slept well. At 5.30 in the morning I was awakened by the sound of a machine-gun and mortar fire in the distance. Not knowing the form and with no sign of any excitement in the village, I remained in bed, studying my Greek. At about 7 o'clock Pat's interpreter, Nick, came along to tell me that the Germans seemed to be starting a drive, but there was no immediate hurry. This was a typically Greek understatement of fact, but I had yet to learn that these young Greek students were in the habit of underrating anything done by the Germans.

I packed in a leisurely way and strolled up to the Mission for breakfast. To my amazement all the Mission stores had been packed up and the last mule was anxiously being held back for my kit. The village was otherwise deserted, and breakfast was off. I had had no idea that we were in very close touch with the Hun. Had I realised what the true position was I would have moved very much more quickly.

There was a fairly brisk action going on between the Andarte outposts and the Germans moving up from the plain below. The only usable track, for motor vehicles, up to the village was well mined and crated, so there was no chance of sudden rush by mechanised troops. While we were watching proceedings from the balcony of the Mission house we could see that little progress was being made by either side. The village below, however, about two miles distant, was burning furiously, and refugees from the neighbouring villages were pouring through, carrying what possessions they could.

It was a constant source of surprise to me to observe the way in which every villager always hung on to his one or two pigs, sometimes almost at the expense of his children. Why they valued these pigs so much I could not understand. In all my months in Greece I never once saw a Greek killing one of his pigs, although we did on occasion succeed in buying one for ourselves.

Dimitri was just as surprised as I was at some of the habits of his fellow countrymen. The lives of the townspeople in Greece and the lives of the peasantry were as different as chalk from cheese. Except for their common language they might have been of different races.

The Germans began putting a few shots into our village, and I saw my first civilian casualty in Greece. It was a child. A little girl of about ten, who had been playing in the fields where her parents had been busy working an hour before. The family procession passed below our balcony. They looked quite helpless and bewildered. Dimitri and I followed them to their house. We went to see if there was anything we could do, but there was nothing. The child had a bullet through her lung and was spitting and coughing blood. The look of hurt surprise and dumb bewilderment was pathetic. The mother was groaning away quietly. The child died while I was in the room.

Compared with the horrors of the concentration camps about which we read so much since, this appears a trifling incident, but it was my first experience of German callousness. One had long since got used to soldier casualties but somehow there had been no need for this death. The usual German practice when staging a drive of any sort, was to open fire indiscriminately on anyone they could see. By

these terror methods they drove the population away and hoped to intimidate the Andartes. They always succeeded in the former case, but the Andartes had become adepts at knowing just how long to hang on to their positions before withdrawing to others further back. Their delaying actions gave most of the population time to evacuate nearby villages before the Germans swept in and burned them to the ground.

This particular morning the Germans had evidently decided to limit the extent of their advance. They were making it into a tactical exercise for their troops, prior to what we found later was to be a very much more serious drive in the area. About midday, the Germans began to withdraw. Pat Wingate recalled his muleteers and their mules and took up residence once more. John Mulgen and I left with our party to reconnoitre another village where we intended, should it prove suitable, to open our forward headquarters.

CHAPTER 8

The village had an unpronouncable name, Palioyanetsou, and was one of the dirtiest and most unattractive hamlets I ever came across in Greece. However it suited our purpose tactically for it lay tucked away just behind a high ridge, lying about four miles from the main Athens-Salonika railway. All its approaches were over ground which could be covered comfortably by machinegun fire, and we could not be surprised by any sudden and unexpected German attack. The villagers were very helpful and we soon got ourselves fixed up. Mulgen and I shared a house with his two wireless operators, Frank and Arthur, and we had the wireless in working touch with Cairo by that evening.

Except for one or two scares when John thought it wisest to move the wireless further back, this station functioned for the next four months.

I was anxious to have a close-up view of the German patrolled railway line, and see just what we were up against. Accordingly next afternoon about 4 o'clock we left our mountain hide-out and, provided with a local guide, moved down towards the railway. There were five of us: Mulgen, Radage, the guide, Dimitri and myself. The going was quite easy for the first hour, at which stage we passed the forward Andarte control post. We were given the password for the day to use on our return, in case we came back during the night.

From this point onwards we were in a type of no-man's land. The Greek villagers were all busy working on their lands, despite the fact German and Andarte patrols had occasional clashes in the area. We made enquiries from each group of villagers as we passed about German activity in the area and on this, as on all other occasions, we were given the latest information of the Hun's movements. In this way we got to within a mile of the railway.

Here we came to a valley before finally climbing up on to a hill which overlooked the line itself. There was a small settlement of gypsies in this valley, living in bush and grass huts. They had been driven from the neighbouring village, Dereli, several months before, and had never returned because of the village's close proximity to the main railway line. We split our party here and taking advantage of what cover there was, moved up to the brow of the hill. Once we reached the top we could see about four miles of railway line stretching out below us.

At its nearest point the line was within about a quarter of a mile from where we hiding. We could see the Germans outside two pill boxes guarding a small viaduct about half a mile away, and in the distance Dereli station appeared quite busy. A couple of trains went past while we were watching, both of them moving South. They were loaded with field guns and vehicles, and we could not quite understand the significance of this. It was most tantalising to watch those trains going past and be able to do nothing about it. We made sketches of the position for further reference before moving back.

On our return to the gypsy encampment a Greek shepherd came running out of his temporary grass hut on the hillside, calling upon us to wait for him. When he caught us up we found that he had brought us an offering of sour milk and bread. He was anxious to know what we were doing. Not knowing whether or not he was in German pay we made vague replies, but before leaving he made us promise that if we intended doing any sabotage work in his area, that we would warn him first, in order that he might have a chance to move his family before the Germans took retaliatory measures.

He made one final request, "Please let me help you carry your explosives when you intend blowing up these trains, I want a chance to have a go at these... Germans." This was typical of the attitude of ninety per cent of the Greek population. Not only did they hate the Germans but they wanted to take an active part in any operation which would do damage to their oppressors. Their hospitality towards us too was generally most generous.

We were pretty tired by the time we got back to the gypsy encampment so we decided to spend the night there. The gypsies insisted on sharing some of their food with us, but we declined their very kind offers to put us up for the night in their shack, partly on account of hygiene and partly because we did not wish to risk being found there by a possible Hun patrol during the night. Accordingly we slept in the undergrowth, about a quarter of a mile away. During the night we could see occasional Hun Very lights going up along the railway line. It was quite clear that he was on his toes and ready for attacks on his lines of communication.

Next morning we moved behind the row of hills covering the railway line before going forward again to view the terrain from a different angle. I couldn't help thinking that the Germans were not very good guerilla tacticians. In the old Boer War days in South Africa, the Dutch would have lined all those hilltops with observation posts covering their lines of communication. Had the Germans done this we would have had the greatest difficulty in getting anywhere near the railway line on this reconnaisance missions. As it was we soon got to know how chary the Hun was of leaving the vicinity of his pill boxes, except in some force. This meant that we could usually move about in comparative comfort providing we had one range of hills between us.

We got back to Palioyanetsou, our headquarters, that evening, and I decided to have a bath at the village spring. This very nearly caused a diplomatic incident. Never in the long history of the village had anyone been known to take a bath. I had taken the precaution of getting Dimitri to warn the village elders of what I proposed to do. The only result was that practically the whole village turned out to see the show. I rigged up a couple of blankets for shelter around the area, and went ahead. Early next morning there was a deputation from the village which stated that the use of soap and the resultant slimy condition of the drain running

from the spring, would be most likely to cause an epidemic of typhus! I was asked never again to use the spring in this way. I was amazed.

The Greek peasant not only never washes, but never to my knowledge even undresses on going to bed. The practice in Palioyanetsou and all other villages partly destroyed by the Germans was for a whole family to sleep in a communal bed on the floor. Why they should suddenly decide that soap should cause a typhus epidemic was beyond me, but they were very sincere in their belief that it would. In future I cut my washing to a minimum and I might add was never any the worse for it.

Major Dickinson of the Grenadier Guards arrived in time for dinner that night. He was a very cheery soul, and believed in living on the fat of the land. Where he always succeeded in getting the fat from I could never quite find out, but the fact remained that wherever Dick had his headquarters his visitors received nothing but the very best of everything. Later in the month he invited me to visit him in his area at Karpenisia. Although this involved a thirteen hours march, Dimitri and I felt it would be worth while. I have never walked thirteen hours with a pack on my back for a week-end house party before, and although we spent only twenty-four hours at Karpenisia before our return journey of a further thirteen hours stroll, both Dimitri and I felt it had been well worth the trouble to see how well a British guardsman lived, even in the wilds of Greece. It was one of those week-ends which one will always remember.

In Greece distance is never measured by miles but in hours. Generally speaking during this narrative an hour's march can be considered to represent a distance of between 2½ to 3 miles. The going was almost invariably extremely heavy, either up or down very rough mountain paths. These paths were covered with sharp, jagged stones and rocks. The wear and tear on boots was formidable. Despite heavy studs and extra soles, I found that one pair of boots would only last distance of about six to seven hundred miles before becoming completely useless. My fourth pair of boots was well on its way to disaster by the time the campaign was over.

CHAPTER 9

John Mulgen and I decided that it would be a good idea for me to cross the railway and the main Salonika-Athens road to recce positions on the further side, while it was still comparatively easy to get across these obstacles. Accordingly John lent me his interpreter, Paul, who knew the ropes and we went off at 17.30 hours on Sunday evening, May 14th. Our route lay through Dereli village, which was exactly two and a half hours' march from Palioyanetsou. We arrived just before dark and enlisted the assistance of one of the local guides.

The system of protection adopted by all the villagers in close proximity to the Germans was quite simple. A roster of every able-bodied man was kept by the village headman, and these men took it in turns at night to guard the approaches to their villages. On the first sign of Hun approach they would give the alarm and the village would be evacuated by those hardy souls who still dared to sleep in their own dilapidated houses.

In addition, there was a small reserve of men who might be required to act as guides, either for the British Mission or for ELAS messengers who might wish to be conducted through the enemy lines. No one, British Mission or Andartes, was

allowed to move without a signed pass from the local ELAS brigade headquarters. On production of this pass, the village organisation would immediately provide a guide. Those men not on duty in the village at night would very seldom sleep at home; they much preferred to sleep in the hills, lest by some misfortune the Germans should slip past the guards. When this did happen, and it had on one or two occasions, all the men of the village had been deported to Germany as slave labourers.

We crossed the railway line without incident, and had a long tramp across an old swamp before finally crossing the road just before dawn. We were passed on from village to village and in all were provided with seven different guides during the night. I was most impressed with the efficiency of the organisation, and the willingness of everybody to help. In one case a guide who had only been married that day was ordered out in the middle of the night to take us to the next village. On hearing from Dimitri what the circumstances were, I interceded on his behalf, but the village committee were adamant and out he had to come.

It must be remembered that had these Greeks been caught assisting us by any of the German patrols they would have been shot out of hand. As it was, on this occasion, we did not even see or hear a patrol, and the guides appeared to have the position well taped. All the same, it gave us a big thrill to cross the railway line and road which were wholly German possessions. We kept straight on during the morning as the country round about us was very flat, and I was anxious to get into the hills again.

We arrived at Goura, the Mission headquarters for which we were making at 12.30 hours after seventeen hours' march. There I was met by John Ponder, who was O.C. of this area. After a much needed sleep that afternoon, we held a conference that night with the local guerilla leaders. It was decided that John Ponder and I should push off first thing next morning to recce the Noah's Ark target on the main road. (This target was the one chosen for the big attack on the Germans when they were withdrawing.)

After a five hours' march the next morning we reached the spot. I had never seen a more perfect machine-gun and mortar target. The road twisted and turned for hundreds of yards in what would be within comfortable range of both our types of weapons. The cover was excellent and we would be able to dig in among the rocks. Provided the Andartes supported us with infantry, I considered we should be able to hold the position almost indefinitely.

We could see the road where it came down from the direction of Thermopylae into the plain of Lamia about fifteen miles away. From there we could follow the progress of any vehicles coming into Lamia at the foot of the pass. Again we could watch them leaving Lamia and entering the far end of the valley. Our proposed positions were a good 2,000 feet above Lamia, and from time to time far below us we could see the road as it twisted and turned in its gradual climb. Finally the last mile of the road was well within range as it zig-zagged backwards and forwards in front of us. My only fear was that the Germans would be almost certain to take up these positions themselves, to protect their one and only escape route from Athens to the North, once they decided to pull out. However, the fact remained that up till then they had not done so.

We went on to the road itself and had a good look at the surrounding hills from the enemy point of view. And how ominous they looked. I would have hated to

have been a German driving up that pass with the feeling that there might be guerillas just thirsting for my blood on those rugged slopes. This thought was crossing my mind when I was suddenly brought back to earth with a bump as Ponder gave me a shove in the back, sending me sprawling into a ditch on the roadside. He had spotted a Gerry vehicle coming down the road only one corner away. It was evidently free-wheeling as we had not heard a sound. Uncertain whether or not we had been spotted we lay in the ditch until we heard the swish of the tyres going past. We were only armed with revolvers at the time and this taught me a lesson never to move about when in the vicinity of the Hun without my Tommy gun, however much trouble and inconvenience it might mean.

We decided to visit a village on the Gulf of Lamia called Stilis, which John considered might be a suitable target for an attack by my men when they arrived. It was reputed to be garrisoned by Italians. Towards evening we were approaching a small village on a hillside when we became aware that it appeared to be in the process of evacuation. There were people running in all directions. We presumed that there must be Germans approaching from the other side of the hill, and therefore altered course to miss the village, moving round the flank. To our surprise the direction of flight by the villagers altered in the opposite direction. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly we found ourselves surrounded by five angry Greeks armed with revolvers, Tommy guns, and hand grenades. For a moment the position looked ugly. I hadn't the foggiest idea what was happening, but John being able to speak the language fairly well, soon realised that we had been mistaken for Germans.

We produced our passes and with much hand shaking and words of goodwill we were allowed to proceed on our way. This incident proved to me once and for all how completely terrified the Greek peasantry were of their oppressors.

We lost our way that night and only found somewhere to sleep at about 20.00 hours. The village at which we arrived, was rather near the German lines, and nobody was very keen to put us up for the night. I was too tired, however, to go further after my long day and night's march across the road and railway the day before. Eventually a school teacher and his wife took pity on us and hid us in the straw in their loft. They need have had no fear, however, as nothing untoward happened during the night.

We left before daylight and got on to the hills above Stilis a couple of hours later. With the sun behind us we were able to move about quite freely and have a good look at the Italian positions. I did not like the look of the target, and decided against it unless we were stumped for anything better to shoot up later. We had a long nine hour march back to Goura that afternoon. By now I was getting into training, however, and didn't feel any the worse for the journey. Also I was most elated with the target area we had seen on the main road and looked forward to showing it off to my section commanders when they arrived.

John Ponder was a great believer in travelling light and during the three days' journey we had existed on bread, cheese and water. This taught me another valuable lesson. Dimitri and I on our many long marches in the future never moved without tea and sugar, even at the expense of clothing. Without exception tea is the most refreshing drink in the world when one is physically exhausted. It became so precious to us in the months to come that we even enjoyed tea

which was first brewed in the morning and was still being heated up for supper at night.

The following morning we held further conferences with the Andarte leaders in the area, at which we planned where we would make our hidden ammunition dumps, build up our food stores, etc. for the time my men arrived. I was anxious to see the road where we had crossed it on our way to Goura, in daylight, on our return. Accordingly Paul and I left Goura again at midday. When we reached the place we lay up near the road for some time, but did not see a single German vehicle, so we slipped across in daylight and made for the railway line.

I had been told of an English speaking Greek, who was the Manager of a Greek pumping station draining the marshy land over which we had passed on our way across the area four nights before. I decided to call on him on my way back to obtain any information which he might have.

Once more the village organisations were most helpful. They sent forward a recce party to the Manager's residence while we stood in the shadows just outside the compound, within three or four hundred yards of the nearest German sentries.

An emissary came back to say, the Manager would be pleased to see us. We slipped in under cover of the shadows and were taken through a darkened doorway into a well-lit and comfortable parlour. The Manager with his wife and two attractive looking daughters were sitting round the fire. It made a most homely scene and it was hard to realise that there were Germans almost on the doorstep. The Manager's first words were to the effect that if we were surprised we were to go down into the cellar.

We settled down to a pleasant hour's chat during which I was given the location of every German machine gun, sentry post and strong point in the area. We had tea and cakes, my first cakes for nearly a month. Being a non smoker I missed cakes and chocolates a great deal. The Manager had been to school in England and spoke excellent English. He was forced to work for the Hun, for a refusal would have meant a concentration camp. He asked that he should be warned if we decided to attack the station so that he could get his wife and family away beforehand. Later this man helped us to contact the German commander when we were trying to negotiate the surrender of the garrison.

The guides escorted us across the line between a couple of enemy patrols but the Germans at this time were not very alert, and we had no difficulty in getting safely across. We slept on the outskirts of Dereli village where we arrived at midnight, and got back to headquarters in time for breakfast next morning. I had covered about 120 miles on foot in 4.5 days and was extremely tired.

CHAPTER 10

I spent the next three or four days reconnoitring nearby villages in an effort to find a suitable place at which to billet my men on their arrival. Radage was also getting busy buying up supplies of wheat, beans, black market sugar, etc.

I might explain here that our agents would go into German occupied towns and buy minor luxuries for us. In this way we could obtain on occasions, sugar, cakes, ink, paper, etc. There was also a Greek market town nearby from which both we and the Germans were in the habit of buying farm produce.

While the Hun was able to do this openly, we did our buying through the Greek agents. It was a peculiar position, but one which always seemed to work. I have a note in my diary of the prices we were paying for various items at that time. Taking the golden sovereign as being worth £4 sterling, the following were the rough prices: sugar, 15/- a lb.; wheat 1/- a lb.; a loaf of bread working out at about 2/6d. Whenever possible we bought the wheat in bulk and then sent it to the local village mill for grinding before getting one of the village women to bake the bread. This was a roundabout way of getting a loaf of bread, but the trouble was that all the villagers were too poor to buy the wheat themselves, and sell us the bread direct.

Goat's meat when we could get it cost 2/6d. a lb.; eggs were reasonably cheap at threepence each; goat butter at 5/- a lb.; and beans at 9d. a lb.

After several days spent on recces we finally decided on a small village about an hour's march from Palioyanetsou, as being suitable. It's name was Rivolari. There was plenty of water and we hoped to lay on showers for the men, and even had an ambitious scheme for water borne sewerage! Radage and I decided that he should take up his residence in the village immediately and start building up our food reserves. We still had had no word as to when my men were due to arrive and I was beginning to get anxious.

We made arrangements to connect the village with area headquarters by phone. Telephone lines in this part of the world were most primitive. They were either made of barbed wire or wire stolen from the German Salonika-Athens main telephone line. As barbed wire was in short supply at this time we organised a small party to go down to the railway line to cut 5 miles of wire the following night. There had been a time when the Germans had resorted to hanging hostages from telegraph posts when the line was cut by the Andartes. But the line had not been touched for some time in this area, so we decided to take a chance. All went well, we cut our wire, carried it off on mules, and the Germans did not retaliate.

The 23rd May was a red letter day. We received our first mail, dropped by parachute the previous night near our rear base and brought forward on our mules. It was at this stage that I had my week-end trip to Karpenisi to visit Major Dickinson. Karpenisi was connected to Lamia by a road which the Italians had built early in their occupation of Greece. The Germans had staged a major offensive up this road during the Greek civil war of November, 1942, but had later withdrawn leaving a trail of devastation in their wake. The town had once been quite a busy mountain pleasure resort. Now every hotel had been completely smashed and there was not a single shop left standing. The destruction had been quite blatant and served no military purpose whatsoever.

On our way back from Karpenisi we visited the Greek market town of Spekiarthur where we spent the night with an old Greek colonel of the regular army. He wore an M.C. which he had won at Salonika fighting with the British

forces in the last war. The Germans had visited the village the previous day, but had left the same evening.

The next few days we spent doing further recces along the railway. We had a very pleasant swim at the Patistomen sulphur baths one day. In peace time this must have been a very pleasant holiday resort. It was situated at the foot of the Lamia hills, and besides the baths possessed what must once have been a luxury hotel. We learned from the villagers that the baths were often visited by the Germans, so that the day we were there, willing villagers kept a look out along the road to see that our ablutions were not interrupted by an unexpected Hun bathing party.

One item of news which gave us all a great deal of pleasure was the Greek agreement which had been arrived at during the Lebanon conference. We hoped that this might ease our relations with the ELAS guerilla leaders, which at times were rather strained.

There was a tragic accident at the Goura Mission during the week when Lt. Ken Walker and Sergeant Doug Phillips, a wireless operator, were blown up and killed when laying explosive charges on the railway line.

CHAPTER 11

On Monday, June 5th, I received a signal from Cairo, instructing me to report by the 16th June, to the West coast of Greece. I was to take with me 40 mules in order to conduct an American O.G. Commando group across to my area. As this involved first collecting the mules and then marching a distance of about 150 miles over country which I did not know, I had no time to waste.

John Mulgen was away at the time, and I had given Dimitri a couple of day's leave to visit his fiancée Bertha, who was doing secretarial work for the Mission in another area. The ELAS headquarters were not very helpful in collecting mules, so I decided to proceed direct to Colonel Hammond's headquarters where I hoped General Seraphis, Commander of all ELAS troops in Greece, would be more co-operative.

Just before leaving on Tuesday, June 6th, we heard on our radio from Germany that the invasion of France had started. It was most annoying not to be able to wait for British confirmation, but it gave us all a terrific thrill. Before leaving I took the precaution of sending a signal to Tom Kennedy writing him to send in a bottle of brandy, some sweets, and chocolates with the Americans.

Two days hard marching took me to Vinyani, and on the way I had my first meeting with Colonel "Chris" Woodhouse. Colonel "Chris" was a legendary figure in Greece. He knew more about the political set-up and intrigue of the Greek people than any other Englishman. He was only twenty-seven years of age, but was a born diplomat. The distances he covered in his early days in Greece were truly phenomenal, but the result of his early exertions were beginning to tell, and after nearly two years in the country he was being evacuated for conferences in Cairo on the Greek situation. I only had ten minutes conversation with him that first day, but I was most impressed and felt that

the Greek cause in Cairo would be in good hands. He was never known by his real name because of the price the Germans had set on his head.

Incidentally it is a remarkable fact that although at one time or another there must have been at least a hundred British Mission personnel in Greece over a period of two years, their exact location was never betrayed to the Germans in time for any one of them to be taken at his headquarters, although quite a number were captured during actual operations. As an instance our headquarters at Palioyanetsou, although within two-and-a-half hour's march to the nearest Germans, never received a single visit.

Colonel Hammond took me to interview General Seraphis on my arrival at his headquarters. I was most interested to meet the guerilla leader who controlled between fifty and sixty thousand ELAS Andartes. Although he could speak English fairly well, General Seraphis always spoke through an interpreter. We held our conference in his office, a room in one of the undemolished houses in his village headquarters, situated about an hour and a half's walk from Vinyani. I asked Nick Hammond why he didn't make his headquarters in the same village. He replied with a smile "that it was well worth three hour's march not to be continually on the doorstep of Greek political intrigue!"

General Seraphis was a Greek regular officer in the last war and had fought in Albania in the present one. He was a good soldier but was unlucky in having his hands considerably tied by the EAM political organisation. At our conference that afternoon, for instance, General Seraphis had as his adviser a senior EAM political representative, who took shorthand notes of our entire conversation. The General was most willing to assist in any way he could, despite objections continually being raised by his political adviser.

Eventually I was given an order instructing all ELAS bands to give me the fullest possible assistance with guides, mules and food, on my journey across Greece. General Seraphis also agreed to my suggestion that we should be allowed to recruit a small band of forty volunteers from the Andartes in our operational area, to be specially trained to work in close co-operation with my own troops when they arrived.

This order was later counter-manded by the political leaders who did not like the idea of losing control of troops whom they had been at such pains to get under their wing.

Armed with General Seraphis' order, Dimitri and I set off the following morning, June 9th. The weather was perfect for our long march, although extremely hot in the middle of the day. We decided to travel without mules for most of the way, and to collect the animals when nearer our destination. This meant carrying our own equipment for a month's journey on our backs.

We had by now got this matter of kit down to a fine art. All I carried in my own small pack was my parachute sleeping bag; a pair of parachute pyjamas (both these were made of silk and took up very little space, as well as being very light); one spare shirt; four pairs of socks; 1 lb. of sugar; a toothbrush; a hairbrush; and a nail file. Dimitri carried the same, only he substituted tea for sugar.

We averaged about eight hour's marching a day. For security reasons we could make no plans for the return journey when we would have the Americans

with us, but we made mental notes throughout the journey and sketched our plan for the return march. We found little difficulty in buying sufficient food for ourselves, and made very little use of guides, although they were willingly offered. Our general experience was that, except at night, we could march very much faster on our own than with a guide who was generally underfed, unshod, and in poor physical condition.

We spent several pleasant nights at different Missions on our way across. One was at Dominyini where an American, Dr. Moir, ran a small army hospital. This was to be the hospital base for my men when we commenced operations. Doc Moir and I agreed on a forward base where he would have a skeleton staff, once all my men were in the country. He made me promise to arrange for his countrymen to spend a night at the hospital on our return journey.

The following night we spent at Briantsa Mission commanded by Major Ramsayer. He had two of his sub-station commanders at the Mission, Major Thompson and Lt. Phillpotts. We had a really good party that night, as, on a recent raid, a lorry load of German beer had been captured and had only arrived on mules that afternoon. This was indeed a matter for full rejoicing. It was the first beer I had tasted since leaving Cairo in April.

The next three nights we spent in mountain villages where we were made very welcome. British personnel were seldom seen in the heart of the mountains like this, and the villagers were keen to shower their hospitality on us. They were amazed to hear that we were crossing into EDES territory and that we had permission from General Seraphis to do so. It was most distressing to us to see the mistrust of the simple mountain folk for their fellow countrymen across in EDES territory.

I still feel that Dimitri and I helped quite a lot to dispel some of this distrust. Although we would be very weary at the end of our day's march, we always felt it our duty to listen to and discuss the war situation with the elders of the village. They expressed the belief that General Zervas, commanding the EDES forces, would never allow us to return to ELAS territory with American troops and their arms and ammunition. It was certainly an eye-opener to them when we did, in fact, return a couple of weeks later.

This very fact did a considerable amount to dispel their mistrust of the EDES organisation. We found the identical mistrust in the EDES territory for the ELAS people. It was so palpably obvious to us, as outsiders, that most of the seeds of this mistrust had been sown by German propaganda, and we always did our best to try to impress this fact on the primitive mountain folk. It certainly gave them cause for thought if nothing else.

On June 14th, we crossed the main West coast road connecting the South of Greece to the North. This was German patrolled and I did not very much like the crossing. There was a deepish river to cross with only one rickety bridge within a couple of hundred yards of the road. Although it was quite easy for Dimitri, our guide and myself to cross this at night, I was a bit worried as to what would happen with forty fully loaded mules and the Americans on our return journey. I recced up and down the river, but could find no more suitable spot.

CHAPTER 12

We arrived at Devisiana, the headquarters of the Mission in EDES territory on the morning of the 15th. Here we were made most welcome by Colonel Hamish Torrence, acting during Tom Barnes' absence in Cairo. The Devisiana Mission was always a very cheery spot. I remember many of the personnel with delight. Peter Musson, Philip Hind, Denis Nichol, Fred Wright, Harry Evans, Alan le Brocq (whom I had last met in Durban just before the Madagascar show) and Geoff, amongst others.

Hamish held a conference that afternoon in which he gave out his orders for the handling of the L.C.I. (Landing Craft Infantry) which was to come in on the night of the 17th or 18th. I was delighted to hear that a detachment of the R.S.R. would be on board as well as my American group, though disappointed that they were not my own troops..

That evening I was taken round to meet General Zervas, leader of the EDES forces. He was a huge, cheerful man with about the largest beard I have ever seen. Unlike General Seraphis, he was not surrounded by a lot of political intrigue. He controlled his army of about 20,000 himself, and worked hand in glove with the British Mission in his area. A great deal of the happy atmosphere at Devisiana was, I am sure, due to the understanding and help which Zervas and his lieutenants so willingly gave the Mission in all operations against the Hun.

Later that night six senior EDES officers and their wives called at the Mission and we had a most hectic party which lasted well after midnight. They were delighted with the South African Zulu war cry which I tried to teach them, in return for some of their stirring Greek national songs.

Devisiana is situated about 20 miles from the West coast, and was surrounded on all sides by German garrisons. It was, therefore, necessary to guard the area surrounding the small cove where the L.C.I. was due to beach, with the greatest possible care. Zervas had collected over 1,200 mules in the area in order to move the ninety tons of stores which were reported to be arriving on the L.C.I. The distance from the beach head to the mountains was about six miles, and it was imperative that all the stores should be off the beach and into the mountains by daylight.

In order to protect the beach head General Zervas had deployed two divisions of his troops on either flank, at a distance of about four miles from the secret cove. These troops were only to take up their positions at midday on the 17th, and were to keep strictly hidden until after dark, when ranks would close up, and the position would be held at costs during the night. The organisation involved in all this was tremendous and the EDES Andartes put up a magnificent show.

We moved off early on the morning of the 17th and arrived at advanced headquarters above the plain at midday. Here we were met by a naval officer "Geoff", who had come into Greece some weeks before in order to find a suitable cove into which the Navy could bring their L.C.I.

From this advanced headquarters we could watch the plain below and see the sea in the distance. We had a minor scare at 15.00 hours when three Hun recce planes flew over the area, but the Andartes were so well hidden that the planes flew off without any untoward happenings. Just before dark,

the mule train left the mountains and made for the beach. A small advance party of us had gone ahead earlier, and we had a very pleasant swim after recceing the approaches to the beach. Geoff had also laid on a delicious meal of fresh fried fish which we ate in one of his fishing boats.

The L.C.I. was due in at 23.00 hours. Again there were prearranged recognition signals to be flashed by torch from the L.C.I. to the shore and from the shore to the L.C.I. We knew that Hun patrol boats were in the habit of steaming up and down the coast, on the look-out for Greek caiques, so a certain amount of care had to be exercised. The night of the 17th-18th had been specially chosen as it was the dead-moon period of the month.

The cove was an ideal spot with a narrow entrance not more than a hundred and fifty feet across, then opening up to a email, sheltered, horse shoe-shaped bay, with a sandy beach and high over-hanging cliffs. It was not possible for the L.C.I. to come in before 23.00 hours, because it was impossible to slip in unobserved between Corfu and another small German occupied island, in daylight. In the same way the L.C.I. had to be completely off-loaded and re-loaded with whatever we had by 02.00 hours, in order to slip through between the islands again before daylight.

The beach was pretty well crowded with 200 mules down below (the remaining 1,000 were hidden in the bushes on the cliffs above); 400 Greek villagers to assist in the off-loading; 100 Russians whom Colonel Torrence was hoping to evacuate; 600 parachutes waiting to be loaded, quite apart from the senior Andarte officers and ourselves. When the L.C.I. had beached itself, the plan was for the villagers to stream up one gang plank as the American and British troops ran down the other. The villagers would then work in a continual stream picking up loads as they got to the deck, carrying them down the other gang plank, dumping them at the mules, and then returning on board. A further gang of villagers would load the mules and move them off the beach and into the mountains making room for another 200 to take their places on the beach.

At 23.00 hours there was not a sign of the Navy. By midnight we were getting anxious. At a quarter to one Hamish decided to give the Navy another ten minutes before we all dispersed back to the mountains empty handed. We were most dispirited by now, partly from personal disappointment, but chiefly for the very adverse moral effect it would have on our Greek allies, who had organised their part of the show so magnificently.

Then suddenly in the stillness of the night, we heard the thud thud of an engine out at sea. Was it one of our own craft or an enemy? We hesitated to show lights as we felt it would be most unlikely that our own ship would arrive two hours late at its rendezvous. As the sound grew louder Hamish decided to take a chance and ordered the signallers to flash out the recognition signal while we all hid behind rocks in case of a burst of enemy fire. To our delight back came an answering signal, and in a couple of minutes Geoff who had been waiting at the entrance to the cove in a rowing boat, was on board, piloting the huge L.C.I. in. We learned later that the M.T.B. accompanying the L.C.I. had slipped up on her navigation and both boats had had a sticky couple of hours getting through a minefield.

Bonfires were lit and the L.C.I. switched on her searchlights showing up a scene which would have done credit to anything Hollywood could offer. Bearded Andartes, belts of ammunition draped all round them and carrying all sorts of assorted weapons, knives, etc.; mules milling about in the background; cheering villagers jumping up and down with joy; a band of Russians in one corner; and a small body of Britishers standing rather self-consciously to one side. The huge ship rushed up the beach and the gang planks were down in a twinkling. Off rushed the R.S.R. and the Americans. My particular job was to get the Americans and the R.S.R. personnel together with their personal arms, ammunition and kit off the beach and into the mountains in the quickest possible time.

On account of the lateness of the hour, everything had to be completed within sixty minutes. My party was away in thirty minutes with Dimitri as their guide. I remained behind for another ten minutes for a hurried conference with Alan Wilkins, our second in command, who had appeared dramatically out of the shadows on the beach while I was getting my party away. We held our conference in the Wardroom on board, to be out of the way of the crowd on the beach. It was a tremendous thrill even to have this fleeting touch with the outside world, and get news of all my friends from Alan. I appreciated a slice of white bread, fresh butter and marmalade much more than the precious tot of whisky which the Navy pressed on me.

When I left the beach the L.C.I. was preparing to move out. The Andartes had put up an excellent performance in offloading the full ninety tons of stores in just on the hour. The Russians had got on board but there was not sufficient time to load many parachutes and these had to be taken back to the mountains.

I chased after my party with rather a pang of homesickness as I heard the motor start up and the L.C.I. move off. It was quite remarkable how completely hidden the cove was when I got beyond the top of the cliff, even at a distance of a quarter of a mile, no sign of life or lights could be seen looking back at the scene I had just left.

The R.S.R. detachment and the Americans reached the foot of the mountains just as dawn was breaking. We pushed on until midday when we reached the camping area which had been selected earlier. Here we waited for the rest of the day while all the mule loads were off-loaded and re-sorted. It was great fun to meet my old R.S.R. companions, Jack Krogh of South Africa with Dick Furber and Harry Coxshead, two English mortar subalterns. Everybody was extremely kind to me and I made the most of their offers of chocolates and sweets.

The Americans were commanded by John Glanis, and appeared to be a keen crowd. We found that a certain amount of kit was missing, presumably lost somewhere in the rush and picked up by villagers. It was a busy day and by 23.00 hours that night I was really tired, having been on the go for forty one hours during which time I had covered about sixty miles.

I had a stroke of really bad luck that evening. On looking for my small pack which held my few precious possessions I found that it had been stolen. As my pack also contained 103 sovereigns this was a serious loss. I reported the loss

to the Andarte colonel in charge, and he promised to do his best to recover my kit.

No trace of it had been found when we left two days later, but on my return in a month's time, the thief had been found. He had sewn the money into his saddle flap, but had lost all my kit. Justice is hard in the mountains and the man was shot. The loss of my hairbrush, toothbrush, and nailfile was a bitter blow, and it was a month before I could replace them. I had another flea bag made out of parachute silk before leaving the area however, sleep being far too precious a thing to lose on account of fleas and bugs.

The following day we moved further into the mountains and got our forty mules separated from the general herd. Before we left Divisiona on the 22nd June, Hamish gave me the most important piece of news which Alan Wilkins in his excitement had forgotten to tell me. My own troops were due to come in at the same time the following month. For Dimitri and me this meant an immediate return to the West coast after leaving the Americans on the East coast, a further six weeks of solid walking lay ahead of us. I was so delighted to hear that my own men were coming at last, however, that this didn't worry me in the slightest.

As I had anticipated, we had rather a sticky time crossing the main West coast road on our second night out from Divisiona. We got across the road itself alright, after taking the precaution of posting machine gunners on both our flanks while the mules were hurried across, but the one ricketty bridge over the river caused a long hold-up, one particular mule flatly refusing to be driven or cajoled across the stream.

I sent the other 39 mules ahead and remained with Dimitri and the muleteer to deal with the position. Eventually, as daylight was breaking there was nothing for it but to undress and forcibly shove the mule into the river. By the time we had swum it across it was broad daylight. Fortunately the Germans were not moving early that day and we got away with it. I would have hated to have been caught by a Jerry patrol with no clothes on! As it was I was getting rather tired of always evading the Hun, and was looking forward to having a crack at him when my lads arrived.

The feeding of men and mules on the way across the mountains was extremely difficult. The procedure which we adopted was for Dimitri and I to set off at about 04.00 hours in the morning, and do about a six hour march before stopping at a convenient village. The mule train would follow at a leisurely pace generally arriving just before dark in the evening. By that time Dimitri and I, by dint of persistent arguments and pleas would have got the village organised into getting in sufficient food for an evening meal. We always paid and paid well for food in bulk, but the trouble was that there was very little food to be had.

Another great difficulty was the incapacity of the Greeks to hurry. Although we would arrive about ten in the morning, we could never hope to get anything started before about 16.00 hours in the afternoon, with the result that food was never ready until after dark. This delay used to infuriate me at first but I got used to it after a time and didn't worry unduly.

It was however, a very pleasant relief to reach the Mission at Briantsa on the 26th June. Although Major Ramsayer was away on a raid, Sergeant Frank,

who was acting in his stead, had everything prepared for us, and for once I had no catering trouble. Next day we got to Vinyani where we were surprised to find the village completely deserted and the Mission headquarters gone. The bath had been left behind however, and I took advantage of this to have my second bath in Greece.

There were rumours of a Hun drive so I hurried my party through. As it happened this drive did not materialise for some tune. We spent a very good evening with Doc Moir, as promised, on passing through his village. Here I helped the doctor in an operation, on one of his Andarte patients, who had a bullet in his leg, which the doctor was anxious to remove. My job was to give the anaesthetic. Fortunately my wife is an anaesthetist, so I had a rough idea of what to do. I was not very successful, however, as it turned out afterwards that the patient had drunk something like a quart of ozo the night before, and refused to go under despite all my efforts.

Fortunately for us the rivers were all running fairly low at this time of year, and we were able to get across by wading without much difficulty, although the mule loads did get rather wet at times. Eventually we arrived back at Palioyanetsou on the 1st July, three weeks after setting out. I had arranged to pay the muleteers at the rate of one fifth of a sovereign a day, so they went off very happily with the equivalent of between £15 and £20 sterling each.

CHAPTER 13

Knowing that I was to return almost immediately to Divisiona, I had been making my plans for raising 200 mules to accompany us during our return trip. I still had my letter from General Seraphis and I made full use of this with the local ELAS headquarters. This time they were very much more helpful. As I did not wish to walk across Greece by the same route a second time, chiefly for security reasons, I decided that Radage, who, during my absence had collected all the food stocks my men would require, should leave with the mules a couple of days after me. Dimitri and I would go ahead and recce a new route.

There was no time to spare and after one day's rest, reading letters which had come in during my absence, we set off on our second journey on the 3rd July. This time we were away from our headquarters for five weeks, during which time we covered 460 miles. I decided to make for Colonel Hammond's new headquarters as this would take me on a more northerly route across the country.

On the way we passed through Neohroi where John Cook guarded an air strip for Lysanders which came in occasionally to take out casualties, or bring in important Greek political leaders. Neohroi was an extraordinary station. Its chief purpose was to feed and house something like 1,000 Italian deserters. On the capitulation of Italy in September of the previous year, some of the Italians in Greece had joined the Germans; some had been conscripted by the Germans without being given a choice; while others had fled to the mountains to join the British Mission as ordered by their new government.

It was impossible for the Mission to look after all these Italians, but there was a base at Neohroi which catered for the odd 1,000. The balance were

allowed to live with Greek families who were paid for their upkeep at the rate of 1 golden sovereign per month, by the Mission. This suited the Greek peasants down to the ground, as they made full use of the Italian as a labourer who was well worthy of his keep from this point of view alone, and the sovereign was a very welcome extra to the household budget.

We reached Mezilou, the new Mission headquarters on July 5th. It was situated in quite the most mountainous part of Greece which I had visited, and that is saying a great deal. It was a lovely spot when one eventually did arrive, situated in a sheltered valley very high up in the mountains. In the winter it must have been extremely cold, but in midsummer it could not have been bettered. Cherry trees flourished in this valley, and we were given a delicious meal of stewed cherries and yeoti - a special type of sour goat's milk very popular with the Greeks, and a dish I thoroughly enjoyed.

By this time Dimitri and I were becoming extremely tired, chiefly from the utter monotony of the continual marching. The hot weather in the middle of the day was very trying, and we went off our food as well. We had a day's break at Mezilou while I took the opportunity of sending a runner back to Radage, giving him the direction of our march.

Quite unexpectedly I met a fellow South African at the Mission headquarters, Major Ed. Delaney, who I had last seen when we played rugger together in Pretoria about two years before. Delaney had come into Greece to recce the country from the point of view of the relief forces who were to take over and feed the population the moment Greece was liberated. Meanwhile he was being used by the Mission to do some relief work amongst the Greeks.

In certain areas in the mountains where the devastation caused by the Germans was particularly acute, the Mission officers would combine their duties of sabotage against the Germans, and sending information back to Cairo, with relief work amongst the starving villagers. It was a thankless task because 90 per cent. of the population were practically destitute anyway, and to have to try to choose the worst cases amongst so many was practically impossible. It was felt, however, that the money was at least distributed amongst the various villages, and in this way everybody benefited indirectly.

Dimitri and I, on this trip, were in the habit of starting, at first light and marching until about ten in the morning. We would then lie up, preferably at some mountain stream, until about three or four in the afternoon. The effort of getting up at that hour became greater as our journey wore on. Occasionally we could march on until midday, in order to give the villagers ample tune to cook a really decent meal for us. These meals always took at least three or four hours to prepare, so when we arrived late in the village, it generally meant that we satisfied ourselves with three or four cups of tea and some dry bread.

We had an interesting experience on this trip. While in EDES territory the trip before we had been given a letter to hand to the mother of one of the EDES Andartes, who lived in ELAS territory, should we pass through her village at any time. As it happened our return trip on this occasion carried us through the very village in which this man's mother lived.

Dimitri had told me of the possible difficulties in delivering this letter, because of the suspicious nature of the EAM politicians. I pulled his leg about

this and told him he was exaggerating the position. He insisted, however, on going about the delivery of the letter in a roundabout way. He approached the village priest about the matter, asking him if he would deliver the letter for us. To my amazement the priest was horrified at the very suggestion, and would have nothing to do with the matter.

As Dimitri had translated the contents of the letter to me some time before, I knew there was nothing in it except an ordinary letter from a son to his mother. I told the priest this but he would still have nothing to do with the matter and strongly advised us to tear the letter up for the sake of the woman.

I took the matter more seriously after this, and made various cautious enquiries without giving any names away. It appeared that on previous occasions letters had infiltrated from EDES into ELAS territory, but on practically every occasion the recipient had been arrested and put into gaol by the EAM element. We therefore tore up the letter.

It was quite remarkable what control these political leaders held over the ordinary Greek villager. There is no doubt at all that the villagers were terrified of the EAM representatives, and had it not been for the restraining influence of the Mission in Greece, there might have been considerably more lawlessness.

There was some difficulty about crossing the West coast road on this trip as the Germans had been very active since our last visit. General Zervas was experiencing great difficulty in collecting his mules. The road was being assidiously patrolled by the Germans, and it was impossible to pass large numbers of mules across in a body.

The night we decided to cross, our guides led us on a most roundabout circuit which carried us almost to the outskirts of the large German occupied town of Yaninao. Before crossing the road I made arrangements for the collection of six tons of barley, and nearly a ton of wheat to be laid in at a village on the Eastern side of the road, in case my mules got hung up. The mule problem on this journey had become acute, as my men were bringing in a lot of their ammunition with them. In order to move all their kit, guns and ammunition I would require 210 mules. To move a convoy of 200 mules, 200 muleteers and 50 British personnel, across a half starving and devastated enemy occupied country, was no easy undertaking, especially as I could not make definite preparations beforehand.

By the time we got to Devisiana on the 14th July, Dimitri and I were two very tired men, especially as our last all night march had been complicated by the fact that we were escorting 8,000 golden sovereigns on two mules, across the main road. We had, therefore, to take most careful precautions. I had no wish to be landed with the responsibility of explaining the disappearance of this amount of money!

Fortunately we had a full day's rest before my men were due in on the night of the 16th July. We both of us went down with attacks of malaria that first evening, but I, at least, was lucky and threw it off next day, and never had another attack in Greece. Dimitri was not so fortunate, and though he recovered that day he had several more attacks during the following months.

I was delighted by the fact that my 103 sovereigns, which I had lost the month before, had been recovered. We were also very cheered that day when we saw

four Typhoons flying towards some German target. This was the first time since I had been in Greece, that I had seen our own planes, and it gave me a big kick. All the usual crowd were collected at Divisiona for the arrival of the L.C.I. and Hamish's plans were exactly the same as on the previous occasion.

This time owing to the shortage of mules and the fact that the L.C.I. was due to make two trips, one on the night of the 16th-17th and the other on the night of the 19th-20th, it would be impossible to move all the stores off the beach before daylight.

It was, therefore, decided to get the personnel and as much of their equipment as possible away on the first night, and then leave the balance of the stores hidden near the beach under a strong guard, and pray that the Hun would not spot our activities. All went well and that night the L.C.I. on which my troops were coming in, arrived dead on time at 23.00 hours. It was wonderful seeing Hoey, Gammon and Kingaby with their men at last. They too were delighted to have arrived in Greece, after the last three months of uncertainty.

As before we got the men and material up into the mountains before daylight. This time they would have to remain in the vicinity for the next four or five days because all the mules were needed to bring up the stores deposited by the L.C.I. on its second visit, before we could move away.

It will always remain a mystery to me how the enemy failed to spot what was going on in the flat country from the beach-head to the mountains during the next three days as there were always small parties of mules moving to and from the beach. Fortunately there was a certain amount of undergrowth and the Andartes on the flank prevented any stray German patrols from penetrating the area. As it turned out later the enemy were busy preparing a major drive more to the South, and had practically no troops in this area at the time, which was very fortunate for us.

Colonel Tom Barnes dropped back into his area on the night of the 18th. He had removed his beard while in Cairo and hardly anyone recognised him on his arrival. I had a very easy job with the second L.C.I. as I only had eight liaison officers and their kit to get away from the beach-head. This gave me nearly an hour's spare time to spend in the ward room. The Navy, as usual, was most hospitable and when they heard how short of food we were they most generously completely denuded their larder of white bread and all sorts of luxuries for us to take with us. I personally conducted the two mule loads of food back to our advance headquarters on the edge of the mountains, and we had magnificent meals for the next twenty four hours.

CHAPTER 14

The mule question was becoming serious, partly because of the shortage of mules and the amount of work they were obliged to do, and partly because of the lack of fodder for the animals. I realised that I would have to try to get my own 200 mules across from the east side of the road to collect our stores, and not rely on the local supply. I sent a message with an EDES guide across to Radage and arranged with General Zervas to place a strong guard along the road for a couple of hours while my mules slipped across one night. This they succeeded in doing successfully.

We loaded all our stores, said cheerio to Tom, Hamish and the rest of the lads, and moved off on the morning of the 26th July. We were not to meet again until Greece was liberated and we were all in Athens, just before the December disturbances. When we were within two hours' march of the road, information came back that there was a strong German camp within a few hundred yards of where I had planned to get my column across.

This rather complicated matters as we did not want an engagement in this particular area. Towards dusk, however, the Germans began to pack up and moved off in a long column. I ordered our mules to be loaded once more, and crept down to the crossing. Just as we approached the road, I spotted a truck at the very point where the path crossed the main road. Dimitri and I cautiously approached the vehicle wondering if the Germans were mining the road. We lay in the bushes close by and listened to the conversation. It turned out to be one of the very rare Greek vehicles using the road! It had broken down and just as we were about to go up and speak to the Greeks, the engine suddenly came to life and the lorry moved off.

After posting a small machine gun block on each side of the crossing, we hustled the mules over with all possible speed. It is surprising how long it seems to take for 200 mules to get across a road on a thick black night, when you are expecting bullets to fly at any moment. The din sounds enormous, but actually in this hilly country the sound is deadened by the twists in the hills, and the noise does not carry far. The whole column was across just before midnight.

I heaved a sigh of relief as I pulled in the machine gunners, and sent them after the tail of the mule train. Dimitri and I stayed behind for a spell to see if any traffic would come along and spot the marks of our crossing, but all was quiet and we followed the column about half an hour later.

On passing through a small village a couple of miles further on, we heard sounds of revelry proceeding from the village schoolroom next to the church. We went along to investigate. A Greek wedding had just taken place and the happy couple were holding their reception. We were greeted with cries of delight when we appeared, and nothing would satisfy the bride and bridegroom but that we should drink their health. This we did and in a short speech I told them how happy we were to have dropped in at that particular moment. I suggested that they should call their eldest son George after our English king, who had sent us to help Greece in all her troubles. We parted in a very friendly atmosphere after kissing the bride, and perhaps one more small link had been forged in the chain of Anglo-Greek friendship!

The incident illustrates very clearly how, no matter what general conditions may be like, it is impossible to interrupt the course of normal human relations. These people lived almost within a stone's throw of German patrols. Had a patrol come through the village that night, the bridegroom and other able-bodied men probably would have been deported to a slave labour camp. Of course the village protection patrol was particularly active that night, and had been kept pretty busy checking our column as it went through.

We arrived at Ploessa, where I had arranged to collect my barley and wheat, by midday next day. Here we reorganised once more. The muleteers,

most of them old men of between sixty and eighty, with a few elderly women amongst them, badly shod, ill-fed, and riddled with malaria, were becoming very tired after their long march from the East coast and all the excitement of the last couple of days.

We had an EDES escort as far as the Akaeloos river, the border between EDES and ELAS territory. From here we were to be provided with an ELAS guard. The night before there had been a frontier incident, as so often happened, between the EDES and ELAS troops, at the old Turkish bridge spanning the river. When Dimitri and I arrived at the bridge early next morning, there was an unpleasant atmosphere of tension on both sides. The machine guns were all being manned, and it only needed an imagined move from either side for them to start blazing away.

I interviewed the EDES commander on the West bank and then went across and met the ELAS commander on the East bank, telling them it was of vital importance that they should cease their political quarrels and let my column through. This they agreed to do on condition that the EDES escort did not come down to the river. The delay caused us a considerable amount of inconvenience but eventually we were all safely across the bridge and the last obstacle on the way to our own area had been overcome.

These old Turkish bridges, one of which we had just crossed, were very interesting. They had been built by the Turks, when they overran Greece and were only designed for foot and animal transport. They were made in one span of stone and concrete and generally took the form of a series of steps up one side and down the other. They were very narrow but served their purpose admirably as several of the larger rivers in Greece would have been impassable for most of the year without them.

There followed a week of monotonous marching over the mountains. Our muleteers became weaker and weaker and more and more disgruntled. It is no easy matter to offload over two hundred mules every evening when there is seldom a level spot within miles. We finally evolved a technique by which we could be offloaded, sentries posted, and bedded down for the night in about ninety minutes. It took about the same time to get started again in the morning. Food was in short supply, mules began to die, but in the end we arrived without any major incident, having lost only six mules, and one or two muleteers. The loss of the mules did not mean the loss of kit, because the fodder which they were eating en route lessened the loads each day.

July 30th was Vincent Hoey's wedding anniversary, and he recalled the day a year ago when he and his wife had left on their honeymoon from Pretoria. Never in our wildest dreams had either of us imagined that we would be celebrating it together with a glass of tea high up in the Greek mountains!

On arrival at Mezilou on the 1st August, we found that a small Russian mission had arrived unexpectedly in the country. Nick Hammond had been away from his headquarters at the time and the British officer in charge of the station received the surprise of his life when an unexpected planeload of Russians landed on the strip at Neohori one night. With true British diplomacy he sent a signal to Cairo immediately, asking for instructions and stating that he was entertaining the visitors to tea. Back came the reply instructing him to continue entertaining them to tea or anything else he

possessed, until further details could be obtained! The position was cleared up within a couple of days when it was found that the Russians had come in via Jugo-Slavia with the full knowledge of the British authorities. There had been some slip-up in communications and the message warning the British Mission of their arrival had not been received in time. I met three members of the Russian mission, one of whom spoke excellent English. They were most charming people.

I will always have one grievance against my friend Dimitri. He imagined he had a wonderful bump of locality, and invariably when we had an argument about the shortest way between two villages, he would take me the longest, when I gave in to his ideas. On this return trip I at last taught him a sharp lesson.

On leaving Mezilou, Dimitri told me he had heard of a good short cut, and like a fool, despite previous bitter experience, I believed him. All went well for the first couple of hours when I began to suspect that we were miles out of our way. Eventually after a heated argument, we decided to part, I going my way and Dimitri his.

Needless to say I went flat out to ensure arriving first and justify my opinion of the correct route. As it was it took me seven hours to do a journey which on the outward trip had only taken four. I must confess to a great delight when Dimitri only arrived four hours later. I was most solicitous for his welfare which only added gall to his wounded pride. Dimitri was a wonderful companion on these long walks of ours. He had a very keen sense of humour and even when we were most tired and fed up we usually managed to see something amusing in the position. I could never have kept going without his cheerful companionship. It was towards the end of this trip that he began to get more frequent attacks of malaria, chiefly owing to his extreme tiredness.

We arrived back at our previously chosen headquarters, Rivolari, on August 5th, after what, for Dimitri and I, had been two months of continual marching. We found that an Andarte regiment had also made its headquarters in the same village. I felt that this was a good thing as we would be able to fraternise. I have an interesting note in my diary to the effect that the trip across cost 1,200 sovereigns, i.e. about £5,000. This figure included mule hire and all our food.

CHAPTER 15

I was determined to have three or four days' rest before starting on any active operations against the Germans. Unfortunately the Hun had other ideas. We spent a very busy twelve hours the day after our arrival fixing up quarters for the men, building showers, unpacking and sorting our kit, and getting ourselves generally fixed up. We had spent a day on the way across, testing out our weapons and I was delighted with the way the men had kept up their efficiency on their guns. There was thus no need to do any firing, but we got the weapons cleaned and ready for action that first day.

John Mulgen and I had previously decided to send one machine gun section, under command of Dick Gammon, across the railway and road on to the Goura side to operate against any road traffic which might appear, while we held

the remaining machine gun section and mortar section on the West side of the line, for operations on the railway. Gammon had left the main party the day before our arrival at Rivolari, in order to branch off to his own area.

By Sunday night, August 6th, we had settled in to our camp very comfortably. But next morning came a rude shock. The Germans had started to move forward from their advance base at Kastri, about eight miles away. Reports kept coming in all morning which indicated that the enemy appeared to be moving in some force. By 14.00 hours it was clear that the Hun were staging a major push. I never discovered if they had learnt that British troops had arrived in this area, or if our arrival just happened to coincide with their push. At all events it was clear that we would have to do something about it. I raised some mules from the villagers, no easy task, as everybody was packing their belongings on what mules they had, and trekking out of the area. By dint of steady ferrying we got all our ammunition dispersed in the thickly wooded kloofs around the area. We had little time to move much of our kit, but what we could, we carried with us up on to the hills overlooking the village. Here we got into position and spent a most uncomfortable night. It was most inconsiderate of the Hun to do this sort of thing, just when we had settled in and I was hoping for a good rest.

The Andarte information service during the night was very poor. I remained below in the village, which I had linked by phone to my guns on the hill, in order to keep in touch with the Andarte battalion headquarters. The Andarte line went dead after 03.00 hours, but I didn't think much about it at the time, as our rather "Heath Robinson" telephone system quite often broke down.

Next morning I was furious when I finally established contact once more with what had been the Andarte headquarters, to find that the whole battalion had moved out in the night without informing us, only leaving their telephone operator behind. By now Dimitri and I together with a few stray dogs and cats and the Andarte telephonist across the valley, were the only living things left in the village.

This withdrawal of the Andartes left our one flank completely exposed. However, we were well dug in in very strong positions by now, and I was not unduly worried. We still had an excellent line of withdrawal behind us should this become necessary. Tuesday was a day of conflicting rumours, but it was quite clear that the Germans were advancing steadily along the main road to Karpenisi on our right flank. There were villages burning steadily all along their line of advance. This line came to within a mile of Rivolari, and the village just across the hill from us went up in a blaze of flame and smoke just before dusk. There was nothing we could do about this as we had no mules on which to move our guns and ammunition, and I was determined to stick as close to my hidden ammunition as possible.

The Andartes, I must explain, were pursuing the correct guerilla tactics in the circumstances. They were completely out-gunned and out-ranged by the Germans, and could not stand up to the superior weapons of the enemy. The liaison and information left a lot to be desired, however, and I was left completely in the dark as to their general plan of campaign. My men were furious at their enforced idleness just standing by their guns and being

unable to do anything to help defend the villages. Not that there was anybody to help really, as the entire population had wisely disappeared.

By Wednesday evening reports coming from Cairo giving details of Hun drives in various other parts of Greece made it reasonably clear that the object of the enemy was to drive the Andartes away from the main Athens-Salonika road and railway. As our job was to harry the Germans on this road and railway it was obvious that we would have to alter our original plans. There was nothing for it but to abandon all our accumulated food stocks, a good deal of our kit, and the comfortable operational headquarters planned so far ahead, and made so comparatively liveable.

By dint of exerting extreme pressure I requisitioned sufficient mules to move all our ammunition and guns during Wednesday night. After a conference with John Mulgen at Palioyanetsou, which so far had escaped the drive, we decided to leave the mortar and machine gun sections with him, while I crossed the road and railway on a recce to see if it was still possible to get Hoey's machine gun section across as well. We decided that the Mission with their engineers and the mortars would be sufficient to block the railway by sabotage.

It was not so easy to bar the main road, however, and we felt that the machine guns would do more damage on that side. During the first two days of the drive, John had managed to blow the railway line twice, which must have infuriated the Hun at this stage. The night Dimitri and I were to cross, the American O.G. group were due to have a crack at a railway engine with a Bazooka, as well as blowing up the line.

Dimitri and I slipped down to Derili in the afternoon, but when we arrived at the village, the committee refused to give us a guide across the line. They told us that ten hostages had dug their own graves and been shot into them only an hour before, presumably as a reprisal for the sabotage jobs which had been carried out just before. They also stated that the Germans had placed machine gun posts covering the entire strip of line where we usually crossed. Finally they said there was constant patrolling going on along the line. This was indeed a serious matter if it were all true, but knowing the Greek penchant for overstating the facts, I felt I had better investigate the position myself.

Unfortunately the villagers refused to give us permission to move forward on our own, but eventually after a long argument Dimitri managed to persuade one of them to take us a short way into the fields towards the railway, where he said he wished to spend the night, rather than in the village. To make this seem more realistic we borrowed two blankets from the villagers. By now it was nearly 22.00 hours and I was anxious to get near the line before the American shooting party, which was to take place about a mile south, began. I hoped to be able to slip across during the confusion caused by their diversion.

Having got into the fields with our reluctant guide, we laid down our blankets and prepared for rest. I whispered to Dimitri to tell the guide that we were going to relieve ourselves before bedding down for the night and that we would be back in a moment. I have never seen the guide since!

We moved off quietly towards the line proceeding with great caution. Sometimes the Greek stories about patrols were correct, and it was always necessary to take full precautions just in case they were. Tonight although their story about the hostages turned out to be true, they had somewhat exaggerated their tale of the patrols.

When we were within about 100 yards of the line, and I was contemplating making a dash for it, we suddenly heard the tinkling of many bells; a shepherd was moving with his flock. We hurried towards the sound and just as the first sheep were moving across the line, we crept amongst them and slipped across in their midst. We could hear a German patrol challenge the shepherd but he was allowed to proceed after some delay.

This was indeed a stroke of luck, but our troubles were not yet over. The marshy ground in front of us was extremely difficult to negotiate without a guide. We got ourselves completely bogged many times. At one stage we were almost up to our waists in quicksand, before we managed to struggle back on to firm ground. Another time we got tangled up in ten feet high reeds for at least an hour.

It was while we were in these reeds that we heard the explosion that we had been expecting for some time on the main line. We had been listening for a couple of minutes to the puffing of a train, the sound of which carried long distances on the plains. Suddenly there was a flash followed a few seconds later by a roar. We waited anxiously for the sound to die down to hear whether or not the engine was still puffing away, but the only sound to be heard was the characteristic hissing of a boiler which has been damaged. We got to know the sound of a damaged engine very well during our stay in Greece, and it never failed to give us a thrill.

Greatly encouraged we battled on. Dimitri was beginning to develop one of his malarial attacks and I was not happy about our position. By three in the morning we were still some way from the main road. It was essential we should cross before daylight, with the general Hun activity going on in the area. At last our luck turned again. We ran into some shepherds tending their flocks on the edge of the marsh. Explaining our position, Dimitri persuaded one of them to lead us to the nearest point on the main road.

As we came over a low ridge which had hidden the road from our view all night, we saw the headlights of a few straggling vehicles proceeding along it in a northerly direction. There was a large German-occupied chromium mine near the main road which I was very anxious to avoid by a wide margin, as it was well garrisoned. Our guide gave us its approximate position and then left us to return to his sheep, just before we slipped across the road between the scattered column of vehicles.

By now Dimitri was very weary indeed, what with the marsh, the excitement and his malaria. Just as dawn was breaking we saw we were on the outskirts of a village. It was only about a mile from the road so we approached with great caution in case of German occupation. We were peering round a couple of haystacks when we got a nasty scare: a steam whistle suddenly blared forth. I was convinced we had walked into the chrome mine where we knew there was a small steam train.

Cautiously I edged round the haystack. To my relief, I realised that the whistle was proceeding from a huge steam threshing machine which was evidently summoning the villagers to work for the day! On approaching the driver of this vehicle he told us it was most unsafe to stay in the village. The morning was hardly light as yet, so we slipped through the village to the furthest house. Here we knocked on the door and Dimitri told them that he was too exhausted to continue without a couple of hours' sleep.

The inhabitants were extremely kind and compromised by saying we could sleep in a huge wooden double bed they had in the corner of the room for an hour, but that we would have to leave then as the Germans generally had patrols round the area after their morning meal. Our heads hardly seemed to have touched the hard boards when we were awakened and told we must be on our way. The young son of the house guided us down a gulley which kept us well hidden from sight until we were clear of the area.

Dimitri was too ill to walk by now so we were kindly provided with a donkey. Dimitri on a donkey always caused me an enormous amount of amusement. The general habit in Greece when riding these pack animals is not to sit astride, but to ride side-saddle. The donkey provided that morning was a very small animal and Dimitri's feet almost touched the ground. He made a sorry figure drooping on his back, and with his beard, looked all the world like the pictures one sees of the apostles. However, it was no time for laughter and we were hustled out of the village with all speed.

After two hours' marching I decided to leave Dimitri in another village where he could get a good sleep before he came on. I went ahead and reached Goura about midday.

CHAPTER 16

I was relieved to find that Dick Gammon and his men had settled in, tested their guns, and were ready for a show. We now struck a new snag, however. The local Andarte commander was one of those obstructionists and I am afraid I was extremely rude. A wilful obstructionist has that effect on most people, besides which I was very tired after my long march. As it turned out the high-handed line I took about demanding his co-operation and what I would do if I didn't get it proved to be the right one, and by next morning things had started to move slowly.

John Ponder, Dick and I agreed that Goura was too far back from the road to use as an active base. We, therefore, decided to move the section forward to a small valley high in the hills, near our Noah's Ark target area. To do this we needed mules of our own which we decided to buy. We also needed a body of Andarte troops to assist in sentry duty and flank guards.

It was on these two points that the Andarte leader said it was quite impossible to assist us. Eventually after two days of infuriating delay, we got cracking. Meanwhile I had sent a signal to John Mulgen saying I considered it unsafe for Hoey's section to cross the line at Dereli, where Dimitri and I had crossed, but suggested that they should go further north and cross somewhere on the plain of Thessaly. John replied that he was

using the section for one rail job, but would dispatch them within the next two or three days.

Dimitri had recovered by now and on the morning of the 14th August Dick and I went ahead to recce our advanced camping site. A small valley I remembered from my previous journey to the road with John Ponder two months before, turned out to be ideal. (I might mention here that as I had anticipated, the Germans had occupied the top of the pass which had looked such an ideal target originally. It would, therefore, be necessary for us to do some scouting round, to find an alternative Noah's Ark position, unless we could drive the Hun out of the one he had taken up.)

We picked out a very pleasant camp site in this valley which formed part of a plateau on the very top of the mountains, and was within a mile of the main road. It was sheltered from the wind, and had thick scrub cover in parts. There was a small spring in a deep gulley so we decided to camp in the scrub, and make our kitchen in the gulley itself, adjacent to the spring. After unloading all our kit, ammunition and stores, we drove the mules down the valley, keeping only three of them tethered in the scrub. We had posted a sentry just above the camp and the view from here precluded any surprise approach by the enemy.

We were highly satisfied with our hide-out and provided it didn't rain it was ideal. The nearest village, Dramala, was about 90 minutes' march away, while the valley itself was well off the beaten track, so there was little chance of careless gossip betraying our position to the enemy. We planned a defensive scheme for the camp, dug in our guns, and by that night were fairly ship-shape.

We had made an arrangement with the headman of the village below, by which he would supply us with melons, tomatoes, beans, etc., every third day. We also stored a considerable amount of wheat in the village, and contracted with a woman to make bread for us. In order to keep our position secret, we always approached our camp by a different route, and sent the pack mules to replenish the larder with one of our own men. We allowed no one to approach our hide-out except our own band of Andartes.

The ELAS commander at Goura, thanks to the letter of authority General Serafis had given me some time before, had placed a small band of twenty Andartes at our disposal. This band was commanded by a very keen young Greek soldier, Vangelis. He was only 19 years of age, but had already completed a cadet course at the Greek mountain warfare school which, even during the occupation, continued its courses in the heart of the mountains. He had the reputation of being one of the most daring of the younger leaders. As it turned out this reputation was fully justified. Vangelis never let us down and even at the most critical moments rallied his troops and stuck with us whatever the other Andartes might be doing.

The next couple of days were spent by Dick, Vangelis and I recceing the enemy positions on the hills near our camp. We learned from a shepherd that a German patrol had been through our own particular valley only two days before. We decided that should this happen again we would not disclose our positions by opening fire unless it was absolutely necessary. It was the only means of approach we had to the main road at this particular spot, and

we did not want to lose it. We also decided on one or two alternative ambush positions on the road where we could not be seen by the German garrison above. On the 16th August, we received information about an oil dump near Lamia which might prove a good target for us. Before leaving camp to recce this dump I gave strict instructions to Sergeant Lusted, whom I left in command of the detachment, that he was only to fire on enemy patrols at the last possible moment, when it was impossible to do anything else.

It was just as well that I had left these orders. On our return we were told that the Germans had actually come up to within 200 yards of our guns without spotting our positions. The men had been first class in withholding their fire from a very easy target. Had they disclosed our positions, all our plans for the next three weeks would have been upset.

It was a long march to the oil dump, and I was not keen on the target when I saw it. Most of the oil barrels were dug in below ground level and we could only get within about 1,700 yards of the target, which was an extreme range to hope to set petrol alight with incendiary bullets. That evening we heard from rear headquarters about the landing in Southern France, which cheered us all considerably. We also had a message to say that the mortar and machine gun section had been engaged on the railway the night before.

Early the next morning we laid our first ambush within about fifty yards of the road. I walked along the road myself to see what the position looked like and was satisfied that it was completely hidden. As we only had two Bren guns and two Andarte riflemen to spare from our main camp, I decided to limit the scope of attack by the ambush, to either one lorry or two staff cars. The main object of the ambush was to get reliable information about enemy troop movements. We were not yet ready to give away our positions by risking discovery by a large convoy. The approach to this ambush was down a very well hidden gulley, by which the men could move in daylight except for the last couple of hundred yards. We therefore decided to change the ambush personnel once every 24 hours.

On the 17th August, after a conference with the Andartes and Major Ian Neville, who had taken over from John Ponder, I agreed to using my machine guns to attack the petrol dump after all. The reason for this change was that the Andartes had promised to get one of the Greeks working in the dump to place several time pencil explosive and incendiary charges in the dump in the early morning. Once the petrol was alight, the machine guns could do a considerable amount of damage to any personnel attempting to put out the fire, and with any luck we hoped we would be able to prevent the fire from being got under control.

It was a long eight hour march to our position above the oil dump, but we were all very cheerful at the thought of having a good crack at the Germans at last. We arrived at about midnight only to be most disappointed. The Greek who was to have laid the charges had been taken ill, or so we were told, and he had been unable to find anyone to carry out his side of the job. As the Andartes promised to get someone else to do it, five days later, we decided to go home again without firing a shot.

Ian and I also decided that it was well worth trying to get the R.A.F. to co-operate. We considered that the dump held at least half a million

gallons of petrol, and was worth a bomber attack. We sent an urgent message to Cairo, describing the target and asking for R.A.F. support. I was feeling extremely run down and tired at this stage, having been on the go almost without a rest for over three months, so decided to go back with Ian to Goura for a couple of days' rest, while we awaited the R.A.F.'s reply.

Although our road ambush had been in position for four days by now, not a single Hun vehicle of any description had passed up or down the road. There had been several alerts when old Greek trucks came trundling up and down the road. We knew that in all probability these trucks were carrying German goods or they would not have had any petrol, but we did not wish to interfere with the Greeks.

This lack of traffic sounds incredible, especially when one recalls the amount of military traffic which is always to be seen anywhere where British troops are stationed, but it was nevertheless a fact. However, from the look-out on our hill above Lamia we could see a certain amount of traffic moving between Lamia and the south.

The men on the ambush position were beginning to get a bit impatient, and on the evening of August 21st, Dick rang me up with bad news. Our ambush had been surrounded and captured by the Germans. I gathered later that the story was something like this: There was tremendous keenness among the men to be the first to have a crack at the Jerries. On this particular morning for the first time four enemy trucks went down the road. The corporal in charge allowed them to pass as instructed, but later when one of them returned, despite the fact that it was loaded with about twenty Huns, and had ten more marching on either side of it on the road, he could not resist the temptation to have a go. An Andarte who had witnessed the affair and got away stated that about six Germans had been killed and seven or eight wounded in the first burst.

Unfortunately the ambush position must have been given away by some disloyal Greek in the area as it appeared that the lorry proceeding up the road was in the nature of a decoy, and that the personnel who had been in the other three lorries had debussed below and climbed along the hills above the ambush position.

As soon as the firing started and the ambush disclosed itself, the enemy closed in from behind and captured the position. The loss of the two men was a sad blow to our small party. Fortunately the men had only been slightly wounded as we got a report from Lamia, to which town they had been taken, to the effect that they had been seen, one walking with his arm in a sling and one with a crutch. These men were both set free by the Jugo-Slavs about four months later, and were repatriated to the regiment in Italy.

CHAPTER 17

This betrayal by disloyal Greeks had rather an unsettling effect. I decided to move our advance base about half an hour's march back, where our line of withdrawal, should we be surprised, was more secure. Here we were able to make use of a disused monastery which also gave us a certain amount of shelter from the weather.

Vincent Hoey's party arrived across from Palioyanetsou by midday on the 23rd August, after an all night march across the plain of Thessaly. We had received no confirmation from the R.A.F. to our request to bomb the Lamia petrol dump on the morning of the 24th in conjunction with our land attack, but we decided it was worth while getting into position in case the bombers came over. This was hard on Vincent's men who could only be spared three hours' rest before another all night march prior to going into action. But the spirit of all these men was simply tremendous. We were doomed to endless tiring and fruitless marches during the next couple of months, but never once did I have any sort of trouble or complaint from the men. No soldier in the world can equal the British Tommy as a fighting man.

There were forty of us together in our party in Greece. During the five months we were there not one single case was brought before me for disciplinary action. We all lived together, had our meals together (there was no such thing as an officers' mess), slept together and fought together continuously. We had to rely on ourselves and our loyalty to one another for any success we might achieve. We observed strict discipline in regard to the giving and receiving of orders, kept our kit as clean and in as soldierly condition as possible, and whenever in the presence of the Andartes always saluted. But our weapons were our main concern, and these were always kept in first class condition, no matter what the circumstances. Our clothing, towards the end, was in a dreadful state, but this we could not help, although we did make an effort to freshen up before the army of liberation reached our stronghold.

We left Goura with Vincent's party at 16.00 hours, and had supper at Dick's new camp. I managed to raise some mules for Vincent's men to ride part of the way as they really were very weary. We reached our positions above the petrol dump at 03.00 hours, and the men were able to get in another ninety minutes' sleep. The night was extremely dark, and for the first time since I had been in Greece, there were clouds overhead. We had all been wonderfully cheered when, at midnight, passing through a small village, a message came over the telephone from Goura to say that a signal had been received from the R.A.F. to the effect that the Baltic Air Force would be sending bombers over at 08.00 hours, on the morning of the 24th, to have a go at the target.

This would be the first occasion in Greece in which the air and ground forces would co-operate, and I was delighted. We were in position by 05.00 hours, in order not to attract attention at the dump by moving about the hills in daylight. By now the weather was causing me grave concern. The ceiling was about 2,000 feet but in parts there were clear patches, and we could only pray that it would clear over the target area when the R.A.F. arrived.

We had a few nasty minutes at 06.00 hours, when we observed the enemy pulling about a dozen field guns on to the road next to the dump. At first I had the awful thought that again we had been betrayed, and waited anxiously to see what was going to happen, but after ten minutes they moved off towards Lamia. We decided that a couple of field batteries were carrying out manoeuvres, and were heartily glad to see them disappear round the shoulder of the hill.

By 07.30 hours a heavy storm which had been approaching for some time closed in on us. The rain came down in torrents and we could only just discern

our target area. I realised that even if the R.A.F. did come over, they could not possibly find the target. I was determined that we were not going to walk back after another fruitless errand without firing at least a few rounds. The Andarte commander who was with me disagreed, and would not consent to his men taking part in any action. I gave the order to open fire to my men. The troops were delighted, and it gave us a kick to see our incendiary and explosive bullets striking all round the drums.

The Spandaus worked beautifully for the first five or six minutes, but then all of them began to have ominous stoppages. This was caused by the rain. We had na covers for the feeds and the bullets, getting wet as they went into the chambers, were causing hard extractions. We had at least had the satisfaction, however, of pumping about 8,000 rounds into the Jerries' camp. The enemy reaction was extremely slow, chiefly, I imagine, because we were using his own weapons, and he confused our firing with some of his own machine guns which had been having target practice earlier in the morning.

At 07.55 I decided to break off the action as it was serving no useful purpose by now, and our guns were causing a great deal of trouble. We withdrew just as the first Hun retaliation began to take place. At 08.00 hours on the dot we heard the R.A.F. overhead. We all shouted with delight, although we knew there was nothing they could do. The very feeling of having our fellow countrymen who had come in reply to our urgent call, close at hand was most satisfactory after all our disappointments. The bombers circled above for about ten minutes, but there was no break in the weather, and we heard them moving off as we started our long and dreary march back to our headquarters.

I stayed behind for a short time to see what effect our little party had had on the German garrison. Here I got a certain amount of satisfaction. As the weather began to clear, I could see armoured cars rushing up and down the road, in rather an aimless manner. The enemy machine guns had at last got started, but it was obvious that they were firing quite blindly and peppering the hills indiscriminately, while the mortars were pooping off at a spot at least 500 yards away.

A small fire had also been started in the dump, but was soon under control. Satisfied that we had at least given the Hun food for thought, and that we could have done no more had we stayed longer, I too left for home. Later we learnt that there had been several casualties and a certain amount of petrol had been lost through peppered drums.

By the time we got back to camp that afternoon we were a very weary party, soaked to the skin, and very hungry. But there was good news awaiting us. Our main ammunition supply had arrived by caique on the east coast and should be with us in a week. Also there was a message to say Roumania had surrendered and Paris had fallen. It was only here in Greece we felt that things were not going so well.

We spent the next day cleaning our weapons and getting ourselves re-sorted. It was still pouring with rain and we were thankful for the shelter of the monastery ruins for the next couple of days. All telephone wires were down owing to the storm and we could get no information about the enemy. Ian Neville decided to send letters to the garrison commander at Lamia and Dhomokos, calling on them

to surrender or threatening to attack them. This was aiming high as both garrisons consisted of at least 1,000 troops, but he felt it was worth trying!

A few Italian deserters were brought in on the 27th, and after a long interrogation it was decided that Petramagoula railway station might prove worth an attack. Dimitri was not too fit, so I borrowed Ian's interpreter and moved down to have a look at the station on the 28th August. Our Greek guide took us to a spot where we could safely view the position in daylight.

It was a busy little station with trains shunting backwards and forwards, gangs of workmen working in quarries round about, and parties of Germans out helping themselves to grapes amongst the vineyards. After dark we moved down closer and helped ourselves from the same grape vines.

We had a good prowl round the station, and gained a lot of useful information. The Greeks in a nearby village told me that there were several Germans who wished to desert from a concentration battalion which was stationed there. I suggested that they should capture one of these would-be deserters when they were working in the quarries next day. They agreed that there would be no difficulty about this, and promised to send a German back to Goura within the next couple of days.

I got back to our headquarters by midday, and after a good sleep in the afternoon, went down with both sections on a night ambush on the road. Ian Neville and his mission engineers laid a couple of large mines across the road while we covered the road approaches. Then we waited all night in the hopes of a German convoy appearing, but not a thing came along. We passed the time by cutting down a considerable amount of telephone wire which we needed badly.

We pulled back most disappointed to our forward base at first light, leaving a look-out to see what happened to the mines. The ambush position was quite untenable in daylight, as it was right on the open plain. Our only cover for getting away at night was the darkness. By the time I got back to Goura at midday. I had covered 72 miles in 48 hours and was dead beat. A 'phone message that evening to say a Hun truck had gone up on the mine, cheered us up. The Greeks also brought in a German prisoner as they had promised - a good show. Ian and I decided after interviewing the German that we could stage an attack on the station in two or three days' time.

Unfortunately, however, the following day the Andartes came along with a major plan of their own. The Andartes so seldom had a plan of any sort that we were delighted to hear of something constructive, and I immediately agreed to the part which they had allotted to my machine guns in their plan. Vincent rang up to say that he had had a good patrol on the road during daylight, and had commandeered a Greek truck to drive him back! It was typical of Vincent, but I had to choke him off as he might easily have run into a German convoy, and I certainly could not afford to lose an officer.

The entry in my diary on the 1st September reads: "The sixth year of the war starts today, but what wonderful news, Amiens, Verdun, Bucharest, Narbonne, all captured." There were all sorts of rumours about Huns moving up from the South. Also a signal from Cairo telling us to stand by for Noah's Ark.

CHAPTER 18

The 2nd and 3rd September were busy days. I left Goura at 5 a.m. and joined Vincent and Dick at midday. The Andarte plan was to attack a small railway junction, Demerle, and a town, Farsala, on the main road about five miles north of Petramagoula. Our role in the affair was to prevent reinforcements arriving to assist the garrisons of these towns from the south. The nearest German garrison to the north of these targets was over 20 miles away, but on the southerly flank Dhomokos was within five miles, and part of the garrison there was certain to be sent up as reinforcements.

Charges were to be laid on the road and railway to prevent trains or trucks getting through. Our task was to open fire on any train or truck which blew up on the mines. This sounded simple enough, but having learned what the Andarte form was like on these occasions, I suggested that I should go forward before dark with their engineers to see just where they were placing the charges. I was told that we couldn't do this in daylight.

By the time we arrived on the scene just after dark, the engineers had already gone off to place their charges. However the Andarte commander pointed out the approximate position of the mined areas as near as could be judged in the dark. He told me where he wanted my machine guns placed, and showed me where the Andarte positions would be.

Vincent, Dick and I were most unhappy about this as we couldn't possibly tell exactly where the demolitions were likely to take place. However, there was nothing we could do about it but hope for the best. Zero hour was midnight, and sure enough about five minutes after the hour we heard the sound of very heavy firing from the north. The Hun did not take long to react in our area. We knew that they had an armoured train in the vicinity, and within fifteen minutes of the opening of the action along came a train.

It is always a most thrilling experience listening to a train puffing along at night and waiting for the explosion, even when you know where the charges are laid. When you don't know where to expect the charges, it is even more exciting as each yard may be the last. We could see the engine silhouetted by the fire in its firebox and the gunners were sitting with their trigger fingers just itching for the right moment. The train slowly drew abreast of us, then to our horror moved past our positions. I was livid, but all was not completely lost. The engine had just disappeared round the shoulder of the hill when there was a loud explosion, and up went the train. We could see the flash and hear the cries and shouts of the Germans, but the shoulder of the hill was between us and the enemy. There was nothing for it but to dismantle our guns and manhandle them and our ammunition up to the top of the hill until the enemy came into view. This was no easy job on a pitch black night.

We knew that the Germans could make no repairs to the line without using flares and providing they didn't do this, there was no chance of reinforcements getting through. I decided to wait till first light before engaging them as I did not want to give our positions away by firing blindly at something we could not see. We were settled in on the top of the hill with all our ammunition within two hours.

Meanwhile the battle to the north appeared to be as fierce as ever. We had a very good view from our new positions and could see tracer bullets chasing all

over the place. It was impossible to tell how matters were progressing and we waited anxiously for news which never came. The Andarte commander was in a flat spin by now. The German armoured train showed no signs of fight whatever, and he did not know what to do. He was very anxious to capture whatever weapons might be on the train, and accordingly sent down a patrol to see what they could do about it. About thirty minutes after the patrol had left, a sudden burst of firing from below showed that some of the Germans at least were still alive and kicking, and like all Jerries, still full of fight.

By 04.30 hours dawn was beginning to break, but it was 05.00 hours before we could discern a possible target. By this time the main battle appeared to have come to an end. All firing had ceased. We still had not the vaguest idea whether or not the attack had been successful, or whether the Andartes had withdrawn. Fortunately for us the sun was right behind us and our positions were almost invisible from below.

As the day grew brighter, I took stock of our position. It was not a pleasant one. The hill on which we found ourselves was practically bare of scrub, and the only cover we could obtain was amongst the rocks. Our orders were to remain in position until instructions to withdraw were received from the Andarte commander of the main attack. This would be quite alright as long as the sun was behind us and afforded us some protection; but once it had moved overhead, our position would be quite untenable and our withdrawal would be a most hazardous affair.

However that was not the immediate problem. We could see that the railway engine had been badly damaged, and the first truck was lying on its side. There was no sign of life on the train itself, but we could see that the Hun had dismantled his guns and taken up positions in a wheat field about a thousand yards from where we were concealed, and just across the main road from us.

Having received no orders from the Andarte commander to open fire by 05.30 hours, I went over and asked him what he proposed doing. He had no idea at all. I suggested that as my men had spotted several of the German positions, that we should open up and that his gunners should co-operate. He was very much against this, but I was extremely nervous lest reinforcements should come along to see what had happened to the train, and was anxious to finish off whatever Germans were down below, before such reinforcements arrived.

After some argument through Dimitri, I told the Andartes that I was going to proceed whether he liked it or not. Everything was in our favour and we had a very successful half-hour's shoot, by which time all the German guns were out of action, and we were receiving no reply to our fire. During this half hour only one Andarte machine gun had fired a couple of hundred rounds.

Just as we were cleaning our guns and preparing for anything else which might eventuate, along came a repair train on the railway, and two troop carriers on the road. I ordered Dick and Vincent to train their guns on the spot where the Andarte commander had told me the mines had been laid on the road the previous night. Again we waited anxiously for the trucks to go

up. But damme, the same thing happened again and the vehicles went sailing past the point where I had been told the mines had been laid.

I shouted "fire" and away went the guns. The trucks screamed to a halt and about twenty Germans poured out of them, and were into the ditches at the side of the road with their guns, in a twinkling. The battle was now joined in earnest, with extra machine guns on the repair train joining In. It was now about 09.30 and the advantage we had earlier enjoyed by virtue of the sun's rays being directly into the eyes of our enemies was disappearing.

Suddenly Dick shouted to me that one of his guns had run out of ammunition. What with my arguments with the Andarte commander and other worries, I hadn't realised we had been firing at such a rate. I contacted the Andarte commander and asked him how long he proposed to stay in position, as things would go from bad to worse.

He then told me a sorry story. He had sent off a runner at about 04.00 hours in the morning to the O.C. of the main force, asking if we could have permission to withdraw at first light. His messenger had only returned a few minutes before to say that he had been arrested in a village through which he had to pass to reach the chief Andarte commander, and had never delivered his message.

This was a pretty state of affairs. I told him it was no good my guns sitting there with no ammunition, and we had better do something about getting out. After a lot of fruitless argument he agreed. I suggested he had better pull his Andartes out first, and that I should withdraw my guns one by one. He agreed. It took us about thirty minutes to disengage by which time we were almost completely out of ammunition. I had sent a runner back to bring the mules forward to a position just behind the hill. Dick Gammon pulled his men out first and I saw him load up and move off. By now the Germans were beginning to get on top. By the time Vincent's last gun had disengaged, bullets were pinging around us thick and fast. We could also see about a couple of companies of Huns deploying near the railway in an encircling movement. Just as we were clearing the crest of the hill, Vincent had his trousers holed by a bullet, but only had his leg grazed.

Our withdrawal was in full view of the repair train, where a large gang was working busily on the line. We could see them for at least half an hour, but for some extraordinarily lucky reason they never spotted us. We loaded our guns and tripods on the mules within 1,500 yards of the enemy, and they still did not see us.

By this time the Andartes had pulled out, and the position had been completely evacuated. Just in time, too, as the Germans had brought up their mortars and were plastering our old positions pretty thoroughly. On the whole I was fairly satisfied with our morning's work. We had done our job and must have inflicted quite heavy casualties on the enemy. Except for Vincent's grazed leg our casualties were nil.

There was no time for dawdling, however, with the Germans moving inland to try to cut off our line of retreat. We could not return by the way we had come, and our alternate route kept us in full view of the main road to the north, for a mile. But again our luck held, and no Germans appeared on the road. We kept going until midday, by which tune I felt we were fairly safe

and called a halt. We had been on the go since 06.00 hours the morning before, and had no meal for very many hours. The Andartes had also halted at the same place, where they kept a small garrison outpost. I agreed with the Andarte commander that the position was reasonably safe, and decided to leave my men there for the night. I moved back to Goura with Dimitri, to tie up further plans with the Andartes and learn what had happened to the main attack. I also wanted to find out if further instructions had come through from Cairo about Noah's Ark.

We arrived at 21.30 that night to learn there was a signal telling us to move into positions near our Noah's Ark target, as we could expect the word "go" at any moment. I was also told that the main attack had been quite successful. A quantity of German war material had been destroyed and captured, but unfortunately the main railway bridge had not been blown up owing to the failure of the explosives to arrive in time, after the Andartes had succeeded in capturing and holding the crossing for over an hour.

CHAPTER 19

On September 4th Dick, Vincent and I all went off on separate recces to check Hun positions and movements. To my surprise and delight, I found that the Germans had evacuated the chromium mine and the Dhomokos garrison. This would give us an excellent alternative position when things got too hot on our first ambush. Also the Andartes brought in rumours of a huge mule convoy coming from Athens. What a change for the mighty Wehrmacht to be moving on mules!

On the 5th we moved back into our original forward position, and that night dug in on the forward slopes of a hill which we intended holding for as long as possible, once Noah's Ark began. We had a long conference with the Andartes that night, and it was arranged that the Greeks should be responsible for blowing the road at the foot of the pass as near Lamia as possible. They would cover this demolition themselves, while we, with a battalion of Andartes, would be responsible for the northern end of the pass. In this way we hoped to cause the maximum amount of confusion to any German transport which went through.

The wireless news reported that the 2nd Army had swept across Belgium in two days. Great going. We were flooded with messages from Cairo and were busy decoding them until 23.00 hours, when we got to sleep. I was awakened most dramatically about an hour later by a very senior Andarte leader telling Dimitri that the garrison commander at Lamia wished to negotiate surrender terms. Ian Neville, the Mission O.C. in the area, was away conferring with another German commander for the surrender of Khaitsa. As the German commander at Lamia refused to negotiate unless a British officer was present, there was no alternative but for me to accompany the Andarte delegation.

We had a long moonlight ride on mules over the mountains, and I must confess that I rather fancied myself as a peace delegate! We arrived at a small village above Lamia at 07.00 hours. Here we hung about most of the day while messengers came and went between the Lamia commander and

ourselves, fixing our meeting arrangements. Each side was most suspicious of the other, and neither wanted to walk into a trap.

The nearest telephone was an hour's march away, and twice I went across to ring up Goura to hear if further orders had come from Cairo. But there was no news. Eventually, by 22.00 hours that night, final arrangements for meeting the Hun commander had been made, and we were busy drafting our conditions of surrender. Just as we had finished these, an urgent message came for me to proceed to the telephone. I was not amused, as I was really needing some sleep by now. I was still less amused when I did get to the 'phone. A signal had just been received from Cairo stating that in no circumstances were we to accept the surrender of any formation less than a division. As the Lamia garrison only consisted of between one and two thousand troops, that was that.

Ours was not to reason why, etc., but I must confess to a feeling of sympathy with the Andarte commander when I returned and told him that I had no alternative but to withdraw from the negotiations. He was extremely angry and did not hesitate to say what he thought. He knew perfectly well that the Germans would not negotiate with him without a British officer being present. The Huns were far too scared that the Andartes would slit all their throats once they got them in their power.

Rather drearily Dimitri and I mounted our mules just after midnight and plodded our way home arriving at 06.00 hours. We bedded down for three hours and after hurried conferences with Ian, who had returned disappointed from Khaitsa, Dimitri and I got away at 10.00 hours and moved across to join the machine gun section. Dick had done a first class recce the day and night before. He had spent most of the day within a couple of hundred yards of the German position at the top of the pass. That night he had caused a considerable amount of confusion and disruption to a small German mixed mule and lorry column, by pelting them with hand grenades.

From his report it was quite clear that it was hopeless for us to attempt to attack the German positions without being a hundred per cent. certain of the Andarte support. Our previous experience did not lead us to have any great confidence in that direction.

I must digress here for a moment, to explain the Andarte mentality at this stage of the war. These men were first class guerilla fighters, but it was hardly fair to expect them to measure up to the standard of my men who had been fully trained for the work and who were well fed, clothed, and tremendously keen. The main strength of the Andartes lay in their knowledge of the country and their undoubted skill in knowing just when to nip in, sting the Germans and nip out again, causing the maximum amount of damage at a minimum cost.

Most of the officers, and a good many of the men, had fought that magnificent fight in Albania, at which all the world wondered. But when it came to holding position against heavy enemy fire and superior forces, they were not, at first, all we had hoped for. For three and a half years they had been underfed, badly clothed, and outgunned by the Germans. They had an exaggerated idea of the invincibility of the German army, and looked on all Germans as supermen. It was only when they realised that the Hun could be

stood up to, providing there were reasonable weapons available, that they began to improve in this semi-static war.

Most of the officers, N.C.O.s and men who operated with us, with proper training, weapons and food, would have made excellent troops. Unfortunately the Greek officer commanding one of the battalions operating with us, was not up to the standard of his men, and was continually letting us down. Finally it must be remembered that the Germans had been in Greece for three and a half years. Now at last it appeared that they were withdrawing. To the Greek mind, the allied High Command orders that their departure was to be delayed and harried by every means at our disposal, did not make much sense.

"These Germans are going at last, why should we try to stop them." The only reply we could give was that it was the Allied strategy, and that they must try to take the long view. All very well in theory, but not so sound in practice when your wives, brothers, children, and homes are endangered by every day's delay.

CHAPTER 20

On September 8th, we received news that the following day was D Day for us. Everything was bustle that night and by first light Dick had taken up his position overlooking the road 1,500 yards distant. These positions were ideally situated. As we held them for three weeks I shall describe them in some detail.

The German-held summit of the pass was only about half a mile away, but between us and them was a slightly higher feature which hid the German garrison from us, and us from the German garrison. As far as we were concerned this was ideal. We didn't particularly want to see the Germans, and we certainly did not want them to see us. The gun pits were secluded by trees and bush and protected by natural rock.

There was just sufficient clearance to give the gunners a full view of the target area which stretched for a distance of approximately 200 yards. Behind the gun position was a small plateau where all the men not on duty could rest, sleep and eat. Our line of approach was completely concealed from the Hun, and we could bring our mules right up to this small plateau. This was lucky as our nearest water supply was over a mile away.

Behind our position the ground rose steeply and we had a magnificent look-out post from where we could see well beyond Lamia to the south and almost as far as Dhomokos to the north. In front of us the approaches were extremely steep, and it would be an almost impossible task for the Germans to take our position by a frontal attack. Our main danger lay to our southern flank where troops could approach our positions more easily. But even from this direction it would not be an easy task, and provided the Andarte troops stood firm on that flank, our positions were almost impregnable.

The Andartes had machine guns and mortars so placed as to be able to fire on the road when convoys moved down. On the first day, we had decided

to split the sections, and Vincent's machine guns were down on the plain, north of Dick's positions. It was not a good site, and we could not hope to hold it, but we did expect that on the first day the effect of its surprise on the Germans would be such as to allow the section to withdraw down a dry river bed, and get away. The orders were that no troops in the pass were to open fire until Vincent had put in his opening rounds which we hoped would stop the convoy, and give those further up a chance to slash into them.

All did not go according to plan, however. The Andartes in the pass became over-excited and opened up long before the leading trucks of the first German convoy had even emerged from the pass into the plain. There was a considerable amount of firing going on in the pass and the Hun convoy disappeared out of view of our guns.

The Huns debussed and began searching the hills with fire. This was quite satisfactory to us as they hadn't spotted our positions. It was not so pleasant when, tiring of firing away without any reply, the Germans began to move into the hills between Vincent's section on the plain and Dick's up in the hills. By midday Vincent's position was becoming serious, and I had no alternative but to pull him back, a sad waste of what would have been a good position. However, we had stopped the convoy, and I decided to get the two sections together on the mountain.

That evening we were amused to hear over the B.B.C. that there were 150,000 Germans cut off in Greece. We thought they might have added that there were also 200 British and American troops cut off with them! We felt the odds against us were rather heavy. We also heard that the peace negotiations with Lamia had completely broken down as we expected. One final item of news that evening which gave us food for thought was a signal from Cairo asking if a secret aerodrome which we controlled in our area, would accommodate sixteen troop-carrying planes for a short time. If we were to get reinforcements of this nature, we felt we could hold our present positions indefinitely.

The following day the Germans once more attempted to pass their convoy through the valley, but again they had no great success, although about six trucks ran the gauntlet successfully and did get through. The Andarte morale was improving considerably. Having seen the Germans halt and turn back the first day, they were now getting their tails up. Vanghelis and his men had great faith in Dick Gammon's section to whom they had been attached for some time, and set a fine example to their fellow Andartes.

It was rather a cat-and-mouse game in the pass. The Hun convoy would come up from Lamia and we would watch its progress up the twisting road from our look-out above the guns. It would assemble out of sight and under cover of the German garrison on top of the mountain. The first part of its journey down on the north side of the pass was hidden from our view. Then, just before the trucks came on to our target area, we would see them again.

The first truck would make a dash for it, and the gunners would open up with incendiaries, the Andartes joining in. If the first truck had got past successfully, there would be a pause while the Hun thought the matter

over. Generally he would send forward a party of troops on foot supported by machine gun and mortar fire. As he hadn't the foggiest idea where we were and we were well dug in, his fire did not affect us much, especially as he was well wide of the mark, and nearly always firing well behind our positions.

His infantry were obviously nervous, and did not enjoy their role of moving forward on the foothills. My orders were that under no circumstances were the guns to open fire at this infantry. Our main role was to delay the convoys as long as possible, and I had no wish to give our positions away for the sake of killing one or two odd Germans.

Having put out the tempting bait of the infantry and failed to draw our fire, the Germans would think that the barrage they had put down on the hill, had driven the opposition away. Back would go the infantry to the hidden trucks, and embus once more. The same thing would happen all over again, with the enemy showing remarkably little initiative in altering his tactics. This performance continued for two days. During this time we could see trucks pouring into Lamia from the south by the hundred, and could imagine some fun brewing up when all these tried to get through.

The Andartes were becoming enthusiastic by now, and were sending up reinforcements to assist in the battle. By the third day we had about four hundred troops scattered round the pass. For some reason the Germans made no attempt to get through that day.

Our feeding problem was becoming acute. Where ordinary army units are fed by the R.A.S.C., and only have their fighting problems to contend with, we, in our position, had to find all our own food for ourselves. This was bad enough when we weren't actively engaged with the enemy, but when it meant sending back to a village three hours away for food, together with long arguments with Greek traders, the difficulties can be imagined. Quite the most tiring and worrying job in Greece was trying to keep the men supplied with food. Another problem which had to be dealt with was how to shift 170 mule loads of ammunition from the East coast on fifty mules, with unwilling muleteers. Eventually the Greeks managed this for us by themselves, but it took them nearly three weeks to ferry this quantity a distance of only three days' march.

The 13th September was a busy day. The Germans tried new tactics. They rushed their convoy through in groups of five vehicles at a time. This proved more successful from their point of view and that day nearly forty vehicles must have got past our ambush. This was serious, and we had to do something constructive about it. Accordingly that night Ian Neville and his engineers moved down to the road and laid some mines while Vincent's section lay in ambush all night, but again it was a negative ambush and nothing passed.

It was characteristic of the Germans not to move at night. They were terrified of the Andartes in the dark. This was natural. The Greeks knew every inch of the country, and the area was strange to the Germans, all the troops coming from either Athens or the Dodocanese Islands.

I decided that now the Andarte morale had improved, that I could afford to move Vincent's section over to the hills near Dhomokos, about five

miles further north. In this way we could lay two ambushes. After the Germans had run the gauntlet of Dick's ambush, they would have Vincent's to deal with further on. Dick could signal to Vincent by heliograph, if necessary, but any way, the sound of firing could be heard between the two positions, so Vincent's section would always have time to be prepared long before the Germans arrived in his area.

The Germans must have suffered more damage to their trucks than we realised on the 13th, as they did not repeat the experiment the following day. Instead they tried very hard to locate Dick's and the Andarte's positions. They went so far as to send a small recce party on to the hill between our positions and their own permanent positions at the top of the pass. We could see this recce group trying to spot us through their field glasses only about 400 yards distant. Again they tried moving their infantry about on the hill top hoping to draw our fire. They were a tempting target, but we resisted it.

The Hun was now altering his tactics by sending over mortar bombs at irregular intervals. These were beginning to fall in our camping area just behind the gun positions. However, Dick was a great believer in digging in, and by this time everyone was more or less living well below ground level.

That night Ian and I decided to put a really decent amount of explosives into the road in front of our new positions at Dhomokos. The men were very tired after continual spells of duty, so I took an Andarte machine gun team forward with me to cover the digging operations on the road, and give the men some rest. Unfortunately Vanghelis' men were still with Dick, and I had to take strangers with me. We found a good position for Ian to dig a trench across the road in which he intended placing 250 lb. of explosives. The road was very narrow at this point, and he hoped that the explosion would bring down the cliff. We had obtained the services of twenty villagers to do the digging. I moved about a mile south with my machine gun team, where we took up a position on the road to fire at anything which might approach in order to warn the digging party. We had no intention of holding up a convoy for long, and were only there to give the digging party warning of approaching danger.

All was quiet for a couple of hours, and on going back to visit Ian I found the job was about half finished, but then things began to happen. The lights of a truck came round a curve in the road, about 1,000 yards from the corner where I had the Andarte gun. Before I realised what had happened the Andarte machine gunner had jumped up and had started to make off with his gun. I gave him a shove and he tripped and fell.

Not knowing the mechanism of this particular Italian weapon very well, I could not fire it myself in the dark, but I stood over him and ordered him to do so. He recovered his nerve, and put in a burst at the truck. The lights immediately went out and all was quiet. The rest of the machine gun section had disappeared, so the gunner and I having only one more belt of ammunition with us, made a hurried and rather undignified withdrawal to the next bend. I waited anxiously to see what was going to happen next. I knew that the digging party would have been warned by the sound of the firing. After about ten minutes, Ian appeared out of the dark to tell me that all

his villagers had beaten it the moment the firing had started, and he had been quite unable to stop them. The whole business was a dismal failure.

We had, however, one other card up our sleeves. This was a sack containing ten dummy stones and lumps of cow dung which we had brought with us. These little gadgets had been sent from Cairo. They were made of plaster of paris and contained sufficient explosive to blow off the wheel of a truck, and possibly break the axle. All that was needed was for us to screw in a small detonator, and place the stones on the road. After that anything passing over or treading on the stone would detonate it. We decided to dismiss the Andartes machine gun team who had got together by now, and move to a different part of the road to try out our stones and cow dung.

We carried out this plan without taking any particular precautions, but got a nasty jolt while we were on the road when a green Very light went up just round a corner from us and about 150 yards distant. We presumed it was in reply to a red one which had gone up a minute or two before from Petramagoula on the plain below. We had thought that the road was deserted, and just had time to put down our last stone when we heard the sound of a truck. We beat it hurriedly and waited about 200 yards away to see what would happen. To our great disappointment the truck went passed unscathed.

We made a lot of rude remarks about the inefficiency of base wallahs in Cairo, and started to move for home. We hadn't gone more than another three or four hundred yards, when a second truck came round the bend. We stopped to watch and were delighted when we saw the flash followed by a bang as one of our stones went off. We withdrew all our remarks about the Cairo base wallahs, and sat down to watch the fun.

Contrary to their usual practice the Germans were passing a convoy through at night. I could not make out how they had slipped past Dick's positions, as we had heard no firing from the south. We had a most enjoyable half hour watching all our stones and cow dung going up in turn. Some of the trucks would get through unscathed, but every third or fourth truck would catch a stone. Although the loss of a tyre sounds a small matter, it was very serious to the Germans. Their tyre position was even more acute than ours in the British army. This damage would mean the certain loss of at least six or seven badly-needed trucks. The tragedy of the whole affair was that it was the only night on which I had not had a machine gun section forward. We could have added considerably to the damage and confusion, had we had the guns to fire on the damaged trucks. But it was one of our unlucky nights.

I slipped across to Dick first thing next morning to find out what had happened in the night. He was amazed to hear that a convoy had got through, and we could only imagine that the Germans must have freewheeled down the pass without lights, at a walking pace. Our look-outs had been on duty all night, and had spotted nothing. We decided that if the Germans were going to do this sort of thing, we would take a party on to the road that night, and try to demolish a small culvert which was just in our target area.

I received a signal that day, September 15th, from John Mulgen to say that he found that the Mission and Andarte engineers could demolish different parts of the railway almost every night. As most of the north-bound traffic appeared to be on the roads, he was sending the mortar section across as soon as opportunity offered.

CHAPTER 21

The weather, which had been remarkably kind to us since the bad spell about the beginning of the month, now changed. This was unfortunate, as both sections were living in the open, and had no shelter of any sort except what we could rig up by making bush huts. There had been certain food difficulties at the village near Vincent's headquarters, so I returned to his section that evening, leaving Dick to carry out his demolition job on the road. I got to know this eight-mile track between the two sections rather well during the next ten days. Although the distance by road was only about five miles, in order to keep concealed it was necessary to follow gulleys and river beds and other indentations in the ground when moving between the ambush camps.

When I arrived back I found that the village had gone on strike and refused to supply the food I had ordered. This was extremely awkward as I did not wish to ask the Andartes to force the villagers to supply us with food. Before doing anything drastic about it, I decided to try another small village nearby. Here I met the friendliest co-operation and all our needs were supplied, at a price.

Next morning, September 16th, Dick sent a runner over to say that his demolition party had run into a Hun patrol the night before, and had failed in their attempt to mine the road. He suggested that, if I approved, he should attempt to do the demolition in daylight. I was not very keen on this and sent a reply telling him to wait until I got over to his camp that night for a conference.

We had been signalling for R.A.F. support almost continually for the past week, but so far nothing had appeared. This was particularly irritating as we kept on hearing on the B.B.C. news how the Baltic Air Force was strafing German transport columns in Jugo-Slavia. This was not much comfort to us and we longed to see some of our own planes having a crack at the convoys which were piling up nose to tail on the road from Lamia to the top of the pass. They formed an ideal target for the air force, and also, for that matter, to any ground attack. The only snag here being that the German positions at the top of the pass completely covered the road to the South from our side, and we couldn't get anywhere near the trucks, unless we moved down almost to Lamia itself.

After my conference with Dick that evening I agreed that he should make an attempt in daylight next day to carry out his demolitions, providing there was no sign of convoy movement up from Lamia in the early morning. We knew from experience that we had at least six clear hours from the time a convoy left Lamia before it attempted to get past our target area. That night a convoy again attempted to pass through but this time was spotted, and there was a

fairly brisk action. Next morning we learned that about fifty or sixty trucks had got through.

These trucks must have suffered damage and casualties because the convoy had halted for the remainder of the night at the chromium mine, half-way to Dhomokos. This meant that Vincent's section would be able to have a crack at them when they decided to proceed. This they did on the morning of the 16th. They were obviously not expecting trouble again, and they ran right into Vincent's ambush. Vincent had a twelve hour, long range scrap with the Germans, causing considerable damage before all the convoy got through just after dark.

The range from Vincent's guns to the target area was about 1,800 yards. We had no intention of holding this position indefinitely as it was far too exposed, but it had a useful nuisance value against the enemy, providing we took care to see that they did not outflank us.

It may be wondered why the Hun didn't deploy and just push us off our position, but it must be remembered that these German convoys had strict orders to push North at all possible speed. This was all happening at the time when the Russians were pushing towards Belgrade, and the Germans were requiring all the reinforcements they could get from the South. In these circumstances troops coming from the Dodecanese and the South had most of their kit and equipment packed for the journey North. Their commanders were, therefore, extremely reluctant to deploy these troops all over the countryside. Their experience in the 150-mile run from Athens to Lamia had been trouble free. When they first bumped our opposition in the pass above Lamia, they had no idea as to how serious or how light it was likely to be. Accordingly they did their best to slip through with as few casualties as possible, without halting their entire outfit, and staging a major deploying action to drive us out of our fortifications.

By the end of the first week, we were fairly satisfied with the position. About three convoys had got through, each of them having suffered losses in trucks and personnel which they could not replace, while they had been delayed by at least four or five days. What was more important, the carefully laid German staff plans for the withdrawal of all their forces from the South, had been materially upset. Ours was the first area where they had struck any trouble. We knew they still had two more detachments of R.S.R. troops in the country to pass before they could get into Jugo-Slavia. We were confident that these troops were preparing a hot reception in their areas.

I left the sections on the 17th to return to Goura, as I was getting anxious about the mortar section of whom there was no sign. On my way back, a huge formation of R.A.F. bombers passed overhead. It was an inspiring sight, and gave me a tremendous thrill. We heard later, over the air, that these planes had bombed German transport planes gathered in Athens to take off important senior German officials. It was reported that 72 German planes had been destroyed. This was great news. It also meant that the road and railway became still more important for the Germans.

I could hear Dick's guns firing away during the morning which meant that Vincent would probably have an action later in the day. The Andarte information service told us that there were eight trains all held up at Petramagoula, and

about a thousand Germans camped there. This was only about two miles from Vincent's positions and I was not very happy about it. I had managed to get a phone laid on from the village behind Vincent's section back to Goura. He phoned me just after lunch to say he had taken advantage of the heavy mist to lay mines on the road, during the morning.

Dick rang me early on the morning of the 18th to say he had been unable to get on to the road during daylight owing to the convoy engagement, but during the night he had succeeded in blowing a five by eight foot gap right across his target area, with which he was delighted and quite rightly so. The convoy which had passed Dick the morning before had spent the day and night at the chromium mine. As there was still no word of the mortar section I decided to return to Vincent to see if we couldn't have a really successful night action when this convoy decided to proceed.

Amongst its other explosive equipment, the mission possessed an electric plunger which I was very anxious to use. I could remember in the days of my youth watching wild west films in which the villain had one of these plunging mechanisms with which he sat safely, far away from the target, and by pressing down a handle blew up a bridge in the distance. I knew of an ideal night ambush site with a small bridge very near Vincent's daylight position, which would suit admirably for this purpose, and I persuaded Ian to lend me his plunger.

I arrived at the forward positions just before dark. We held a short order group with the Andarte company commander who was attached to us. Everybody was enthusiastic and off we set just after 19.00 hours. We were in position by 22.00 hours with our grenadiers only 20 yards from the road on a steep piece of rock from which they could lob their hand grenades down onto passing trucks with ease. Our own and the Andarte machine guns were all within 300 yards of the road, while an Andarte mortar section was ready to put down their mortar bombs should the column catch alight. Meanwhile we had placed the 250 lbs. of explosive which we had failed to use on the previous occasion a few nights before, under the bridge. This we connected by a 300 ft. electric cable, with the plunger.

Dimitri and I were to blow this plunger immediately the head of the column was on the bridge. The machine gunners, grenadiers and mortars were then to do the rest.

But once more the Hun foxed us. Nothing had arrived by 05.00 hours, so there was no alternative but to withdraw the troops, as the positions were quite untenable in daylight. Dimitri and I remained on the plunger position until midday, when we were relieved by two of the others. Meanwhile the Germans were still licking their wounds at the chrome mine and all was quiet.

The mortar section arrived safely that afternoon, and were heartily welcomed by all of us. Ossie had had a hard time crossing the line. The Germans were extremely active, owing to the number of demolitions which were going on nightly along the railway line. Although Kingaby's section had made a long detour, they had bumped into a packet of trouble. Half the convoy was across the line when a hidden German ambush suddenly opened fire. The mules fled in all directions, but the men had kept their heads, and the

half which had got across continued on their way under command of Sergeant Venter, while the balance who had not yet reached the railway line, turned back with Ossie. How nobody had been hit was a miracle. The whole section got away unscathed.

During the remainder of the night, they had collected all their mules except one, which we learned later the Germans had captured. The following night Ossie had tried again without success, but on the third night he had managed to slip across.

The mortar section had been in several successful actions on the West side of the line, but had now completely run out of ammunition. Fortunately our supplies had arrived from the East coast, and had been brought forward. It is an amusing sidelight that the captured mule carried all the mortar section's cooking and eating utensils. We managed to buy all these back from the Germans through our Greek agents! I doubt if the Hun knew for whom they were intended, however.

There was still no sign of movement from the Germans at the mine, and Dick reported no movements out of Lamia. The weather was still very wet and cold, and the men were beginning to suffer from malaria, boils and colds. We had had no sun for a week and all our kit was soaking wet. However, we kept ourselves busy by digging alternative positions and looking for new ambush spots to use when we got driven out of our present ones.

This lull continued until the 21st September, when Dick had a heavy engagement on his mountain. The Germans had brought up a couple of 88 mm. guns, and were also using two long-range howitzers from the vicinity of Lamia, to make the positions on the pass extremely unpleasant. All this time we still had our plunger in position, with different men taking it in turns to stand by, day and night. I felt sure that after the determined effort by the Germans to get more trucks through to the mine, during the day of the 21st, they were almost certain to move on that night. Accordingly I laid our night ambush on the road once more. But again, nothing doing and back I had to send the men at 05.00 hours.

Just after first light signs of enemy movements appeared on the hills opposite. I sent a Greek runner back to Vincent and Ossie to tell them to take up their daylight positions immediately. It had been a miserable, wet night, but the sun began breaking through the clouds at 06.30. Dimitri and I were comfortably sunning ourselves and thawing out when we heard machine guns opening up on the hills just opposite and across the road from us. We watched with interest the very thorough way in which the Germans cleared the hill with fire before going up on foot. We could see them swarming over the hill and were glad that we were not on that side. As it was there was a deep gulley between the enemy and ourselves, but as the crow flies they were not more than five or six hundred yards away.

We were well concealed amongst the rocks, however, and I was still hoping that we would have the opportunity of pressing the plunger and seeing a German truck going sky high. At 07.00 hours, we spotted a second patrol, but this time it was on our side of the road, and obviously making for the hill on which we were hidden. There was nothing for it but to blow the plunger while the going was good. This I did with a great deal of pleasure. I hadn't

expected quite such a large explosion. Before we knew where we were, bits of stone and lumps of wood and earth were falling about our ears. This unexpected diversion on the road served to draw the Germans' attention away from us and we made a bee-line for the shelter of the valley about half a mile away, carrying Ian's precious plunger with us.

Before leaving the position, we had observed the German convoy in the distance, consisting of trucks, mules, and horse-drawn carts. We were interested to see when these would succeed in getting past the demolition. It did not take the foot-soldiers long. By 10.30 the first of these appeared on Vincent's target area and were engaged. From then on it was a steady all day fight. The horse and mule-drawn vehicles, which must have circumvented the demolition on the road somehow, put in an appearance on the target area about 13.00 hours. When mortar shells began falling amongst them there was considerable confusion and the whole convoy was help up once more.

The Germans had brought forward their 88 mm. guns again and were very much more aggressive than usual. Fortunately for us they were again firing well over our heads, causing a certain amount of damage to some shepherds' flocks on the hills behind us.

We were all extremely hungry by now as we had had no food since the night before, and we had been through rather a strenuous time. Sergeant Radage sent forward a message to say that he had bought a very nice pig and that if we could manage to knock off for the day at about 18.00 hours, he could assure us of a first-class meal. I had intended to disengage at 17.00 hours anyway. By then the sun was right in our eyes and we couldn't see what the enemy was up to. I didn't altogether like the position as the Hun were obviously determined to get this convoy through and was becoming more and more annoyed at the delay.

We withdrew "according to plan," and were just preparing to enjoy our meal when the Andarte look-outs, whom we had left above, came tearing down the hill shouting "Germani, Germani," and were away before we could get any further information out of them. There was nothing for it but to abandon pig and move out from the valley, where we had our kitchen, on to the hills amongst the thick cover between our camp and the Germans. We told our Italian cooks to look after the food until we came back. We hurriedly hid the mortars in the bushes as they were too heavy to lug about. Vincent took one party up one side of the valley, and I went up the other with the rest.

We couldn't make out where the Germans were exactly, although there was a lot of lead flying about the place. It was semi-dark by now, and being anxious to establish just where the Andartes were, and where the Germans were, I was scouting forward cautiously when I suddenly drew a burst of fire, from what had been an Andarte-held position when I had last been there an hour before. How the Germans missed me I cannot understand, as I was only about twenty yards away from them. They must have got rather a fright too as they began to withdraw immediately into the scrub.

All this time we were being careful to keep ourselves between the Germans and our pig. I knew Vincent would be doing the same. It was a strange game of hide and seek, which was not very enjoyable. However, by 20.00 hours the Germans had had enough and started sending up Very light signals. It was obvious that they were withdrawing.

We made our way cautiously back to our kitchen, but our pig had gone! The Italians had temporarily deserted, and left the kitchen unattended. Stray shepherd dogs from the flock which had been dispersed by the German fire earlier in the day, had got in amongst our food, and finished it off.

It was most unsafe to stay where we were, so we packed up in the dark, and moved back to a village about two miles away. Every now and again somebody would trip over a billycan, or a pile of tin plates would go crashing about the rocks. These noises were magnified a hundred times in the confines of our valley. Fortunately they disturbed nobody except ourselves. Finally we got back to the village a very weary and dispirited party by 01.00 hours. We had been on the go for two nights and a day without any food, and had a rather strenuous engagement.

If only there had been some sort of comfort and organisation when we got out of these scraps things would have been much easier, but as it was there was always this business of finding food and accommodation for ourselves, when there was practically no food available. Not that we really minded. We would not willingly have changed places with any other soldiers anywhere. We stood to our guns at 04.30 hours in case the enemy had ideas about a dawn attack, but the Hun had decided to leave us alone. We sent out patrols who came back later in the day with reports that the Germans had withdrawn.

CHAPTER 22

I decided not to move Vincent forward again, as a telephone message came from Dick in the afternoon to say that he had at last managed to carry out his daylight demolition in the pass, under the noses of the German garrison. I learned later that he had taken down a small party, blown two culverts, chopped down a number of trees, and put down several booby traps, all under considerable enemy fire. Fortunately the enemy could not see the actual strip of road on which Dick's party was working, and could only hear the explosions. By the time the Germans had sent down a patrol Dick had got his party away.

Dick's success on his demolition job made me decide to send the mortars across to join him, as I felt we ought to be able to delay repairs on this bit of road for a couple of days. By now we had eight men back at Goura on the sick list, with various ailments. The continual action, poor food and exposure were beginning to tell on the troops. We could not complain, however, as we had still suffered no casualties except for our two prisoners captured earlier.

Just before leaving Vincent's area on the morning of the 24th, we had the pleasure of seeing an R.A.F. plane flying over Petramagoula, and hitting two railway engines with rockets. This was a pleasant sight to us.

Vincent sent me a message later to say that the Germans had taken up their old garrison positions at Dhomokos once more. This was annoying from one point of view as it meant we could not have further ambushes in that area, as Dhomokos overlooked all our old gun pits, but it was gratifying to realise that we had caused the Hun to delay a whole battalion in order to take up once more a position which he had considered it safe to relinquish ten days earlier.

Dick was doing a grand job with his machine guns preventing the enemy from repairing his demolitions. Ossie's mortars also joined in here and for two days the Germans made little or no progress. On the 26th I ordered Vincent to report at Dick's position. I had decided to try a hit-and-run attack on any convoy that came out of Lamia, by placing the machine guns within a couple of miles of the town. There was an excellent covered approach down the mountain, which would give us good time to get the guns into position during the night.

The following morning, the 27th, the Germans began moving quite their biggest convoy to date up the mountain. At first light Vincent realised that the Hun had picketed all the high points covering the road, and that his two guns, once they opened fire, would be in full view of the enemy pickets. He decided, however, that after his long march down to the position, it was worth while getting in at least a few bursts. This he did, killing off a few Germans in a huge lorry that was loaded to capacity. He got away with it alright, and late in the afternoon reported back to the hill-top. This minor diversion had caused the entire convoy to halt for a couple of hours, while the Germans, suspecting a bigger ambush, had cautiously plastered the whole area with fire, and then sent out patrols.

We realised that our time on the hilltop was drawing to an end. During the whole of the 27th, troops came pouring up from Lamia. By the evening of that day the road from Lamia to the top of the pass was just one mass of vehicles. How we prayed for the R.A.F., but despite all our signals not an aeroplane arrived. The Andartes were beginning to get a bit fidgety at this show of force, especially as the Germans were now shelling our positions steadily all day.

They had succeeded in repairing the demolitions which Dick had carried out four days before by digging in machine guns and an 88 mm. gun almost on our target area. One direct hit from the 88 mm. gun had landed right in front of the parapet round one of the machine guns. The gun team, apart from a shaking and a few bruises from flying stones, were miraculously unhurt.

The Germans were also becoming more aggressive on the hill between our positions and theirs. We had been forced to fire on them there at last, as their observation post was sending back too much information to their howitzers, judging by the improving accuracy of their fire. The shelling was becoming so regular round Dick's positions that I didn't want to crowd the place too much so decided to move Vincent's section down to its original spot on the plain, just to the north.

Trucks were in the habit of reassembling here, after passing Dick's target area before moving on to the mine. I thought Vincent might be able to have a crack at them. On the night of the 27th Dick again managed to blow a small crater down on the road despite the German patrols. It took the Germans the whole of the 28th to repair this, which they were forced to do under our fire.

The 29th September was our final day on the pass. I had continually warned the Andarte commander that our southern flank facing Lamia was the weak spot in our defence, but he consistently refused to place more troops in that area, and I had no men with which to assist him. After a heavy bombardment early in

the morning, it was clear that the Germans were determined to clear this pass once and for all. Large numbers of troops were deploying up the mountain from Lamia. Unfortunately the Andartes on that flank did not inform me that they could not hold their positions, and were withdrawing. As it was, we very nearly lost the whole of Dick's section, and it was only through a magnificent rearguard action by Sergeant Lusted, for which he was later awarded the M.M., and his gun team, which allowed the mortars and the rest of the machine gun section to get away in daylight.

Lusted himself disengaged when the enemy were less than 300 yards from his gun. Luck was with him at this point, as a mist suddenly came down and he got away suffering only one casualty, Private Wood, who received a severe head wound, and was later evacuated by plane. Eventually they all got back to Heliado by 20.00 hours that night.

I had given Dick his orders to withdraw at 13.00 hours, and as I could not get in touch with Vincent by any other means I went forward to put him in the picture. We remained on the plain until 16.00 hours by which time no trucks had appeared from the pass. It was clear that our positions above were being so heavily engaged that there was no point in one section staying out in the plain under the noses of the Germans, so I sent Vincent back to Heliado, much against his will. Dimitri and I waited under a tree until dark to see when the convoy would appear, but nothing had come through by the time darkness fell. We got back to Heliado after losing our way a couple of times at 23.00 hours.

It was sad to see Hun Very lights going up from our old positions, where we had lived for three weeks. We later heard that the final action had held up a full division, the 22nd Division from Crete, for five days. The troops had been in almost daily action for three weeks, during most of which time the weather had been miserable, food had been very precarious, and shelter had been almost non-existent. I never heard a word of complaint. The men had been wonderful, but I felt they had reached the end of their tether for the moment. Since their arrival in Greece, on the 17th July, they had not had a single day's rest.

After a conference with Ian we decided that they must be given a three days' pause before we undertook anything further. Accordingly we got them all back to Goura where they had their first change of clothing for over a month. An entry in my diary reads: "On working out my hours of walking this month I appear to have covered 516 miles, and my third pair of boots are completely worn out."

Reports from the Andartes coming in during the next two days showed that the Germans had occupied all our old positions. We had been forced to abandon a few items of personal kit and a small amount of food. Fortunately our ammunition dump was placed further back, and this was not affected. While we were gratified that the Germans were thus forced to hold back a second battalion from proceeding north with the rest of their withdrawing troops, we were greatly handicapped in our efforts to get at the road, which was now being strongly patrolled from Lamia to Dhomokos, a distance of ten miles.

CHAPTER 23

I was not quite certain in my own mind whether all these Andarte reports were true. Accordingly while the men were resting, I went off to have a look for myself on the 2nd October. After three days' recce I realised that the Andarte reports were substantially correct. I decided that there was only one other possible place where we could stage an ambush. This was a spot on the road about two miles north of the position where we had had our original action with the Andartes long before. I therefore sent a runner back to Vincent to bring forward the M.G. sections to meet me on the 5th October. It was no good dragging the mortars down as we would only be able to carry out a hit-and-run raid.

Strangely enough there was not very much traffic on the road during this tune. The balance of the enemy troops still in the country were marching slowly from Athens with horse and mule-drawn transport. Vehicles had been in very short supply, and most of the available transport had been used to get through the 22nd Division from Crete together with the other units which had passed. We estimated that there were still about 50,000 Germans to come. We had also learned from Cairo that after the air raid on Athens and the delay along the road and railway, that the Germans had diverted considerable numbers of troops and sent them in small caiques up the east coast to Volos and Salonika, thus by-passing our area.

The Andartes were extremely loath, at this stage, to engage in any further action. Their main reason was that they had run out of ammunition. They used this excuse, which we knew to be untrue, as a bribe before agreeing to any more plans which we proposed. A favourite argument with the ELAS political leaders was always: "Well, if you will give us so many rounds of ammunition and so many guns, we are prepared to play." The members of the British mission had heard this story so often during the past year that it had no affect on them, although they did occasionally produce a little more ammunition when they particularly wanted Andarte support.

In all my criticism of the Andartes in this book I want to make it clear that it is not the ordinary Andarte soldier or the Greek villager who qualifies for these remarks. Our chief obstacle throughout these operations was the EAM political agents behind the ELAS officers and men. I repeat that were these troops properly trained and armed, and had their officers not been under the influence of a powerful political organisation, they would have been first class troops. As it was, the Mission, particularly, fully realised that these political leaders were preparing to seize power in Greece when the time of liberation came. They were secretly hoarding ammunition, and refused to allow the officers to expend anything like the amount allotted to them for various jobs.

Fortunately we of the R.S.R. had our own supplies of ammunition and always kept these under our own direct control. During our three weeks' action on the pass we expended something in the vicinity of 160,000 rounds, while the Andartes during the same period, at an outside estimate, fired no more than 120,000 rounds amongst at least 12 machine guns and 400 troops.

The mortar position was very much the same. Here we expended over 800 rounds while the Andartes fired 200 to 300 rounds amongst three times the number of weapons. The Andarte soldiers were just as annoyed as we were at this refusal by their political leaders to allow them to fire such a totally inadequate amount in these actions. Their mortar gun teams were first class, and were always willing and eager to learn anything new about their weapons. Their machine gunners too, while knowing little about indirect fire methods, were excellent marksmen and keen on their job.

When the risings eventually took place in Athens in December, these men were to a large extent the dupes of their political controllers. These ambitious politicians used the ignorant and rather ill-disciplined troops at their disposal in a most unscrupulous way. Ninety per cent. of the Greeks were tremendously pro-British, and appreciated that Britain had done all in her power to help them during the war. But I digress.

Ian Neville joined me on the 5th October with another large batch of mines, dummy pebbles and cow dung which we planned to lay on the road, prior to the arrival of the troops. We found on arrival at our intended positions at midday that a small Andarte band had already mined the road, and had a mortar and two machine guns in position. As we could see the road clearly for about two miles to the south, Ian and I decided to place our pebbles and cow dung down on the road. The view to the north was more limited, so before taking our mule load down to the road, we decided that I should go ahead to the next corner to see that all was clear.

This I proceeded to do. There was little danger of being surprised, as the block across the road would stop any Germans from surprising me from the south, while the chances of anything coming from the north were extremely remote. Twenty minutes' fast walking took me to a small hill just above the corner. There was nothing in view, and as the lie of the country roundabout looked rather favourable for an ambush, I continued for about half a mile along the road.

It was now about 16.00 hours, and I decided to turn back and see what was happening on the road. I was approaching the original corner when I was rather worried to see a German convoy nearing the mine block. Fearing that Ian might be on the road with his mule, I doubled round the corner to give him warning. He was nowhere in sight, so I presumed he too had seen the convoy and had got his mule safely away.

As it turned out later, they had never reached the road, but had seen the convoy before starting. I was in what I thought to be a safe position, so waited to see the first truck going up on the mine. But I should have known better, the convoy sailed gaily past the spot where we had been told the mines were laid!

I wonder how often mines were laid by the Andartes which never went off! The chief trouble was the fact that many of the mines which had been captured from the enemy, were old and needed very delicate adjustment. The Andarte engineers did their best but did not fully understand the mechanisms of these various types of mine. At all events my situation had rapidly deteriorated and I made for the hills with all possible speed. I was relieved when I heard the Andarte machine guns and mortars open up. The convoy halted, and a brisk action began. Unfortunately

for me, however, the leading scout car of the convoy kept straight on, and was making for the corner where I was legging it as hard as I could go up the hill.

There was no cover whatsoever, and I had a most unpleasant half hour's run, dodging about the hillside with four Germans, who debussed from the scout car, with their tommy guns, after me. I was in an unpleasant position with the battle in front of me and the Germans behind. A Greek shepherd wearing a white shirt was on the same hill, and made matters worse by doing his best to attach himself to me. I kept on shouting at him to go in a different direction, but he seemed to think that I might help to protect him. This was a very false impression on his part! I was doing my best to take advantage of what little cover there was higher up the hill, to get away, and his white shirt was a continual guide to the Germans. Eventually we reached a large gulley, where we dodged up and down and threw off our pursuers.

By 18.00 hours the convoy battle was over, and the convoy on its way once more. I couldn't make out why my troops had not arrived in time to give a hand, but I learned later that their guide had lost his way and that they only heard the firing from three or four miles away. By the time they got anywhere near the Andarte position it was dark, and the Andartes themselves had withdrawn. I was still in a nasty predicament, I was on my own (Dimitri was back in Goura, ill), and the Greek villagers were in a highly nervous state after the action. More than once I was held up as a suspected German. My Greek was not very fluent, but each time I managed to convince them that I was not a German spy, but one of their allies.

It was midnight before I at last joined up with Vincent and Ian. They had given me up and thought that I had either been shot or captured. It was my narrowest escape in Greece. I had thought I was far too tired to run half a mile, but I must have covered at least two or three miles in pretty good time that afternoon, carrying my tommy gun and general equipment.

The following morning we were informed by the Greeks that the Germans had burned down a small village near the previous day's ambush, had shot 15 villagers as a reprisal, and were holding 20 more as hostages who would be shot immediately there was any further action on our part in that particular area.

CHAPTER 24

This threat rather upset any idea we had of continuing operations round this particular target. Accordingly I withdrew everybody to Goura with the idea of having another crack at the Hun on the Stilis-Lamia road. That night, the 6th October, we had great news from the B.B.C.: British troops had landed in the Pelopenese. This meant that the army of liberation was arriving at last. We had a tremendous party. I felt that another fortnight should see us in touch with the advance party of the invading army.

The following day I sent Vincent and his section off to forage for themselves near Stilis. Andarte information had told us that the Germans were bringing troops by sea to Stilis from which point they were marching to Lamia, and so on to the main Athens-Salonika road. Dick, Ossie and I moved down towards a little village called Lefka, just south of Dhomokos. From here I hoped we might stage a small

ambush on any unwary convoys, provided the patrols on the road were not too thick.

We recced the road on the night of the 7th, and found that the Germans had posted machine guns covering each straight stretch of road, while they had listening posts every 200 yards. We decided that it was impossible to do any digging or mine laying, but we did think we might try to lay a few of our dummy stones and cow dung the following night.

Accordingly we held a conference with the Andartes on the 8th, asking if they would be prepared to assist us in an ambush at first light the following day, the 9th. The Andartes refused to play. They had heard the news of the allied landings, and were just waiting for the Germans to be gone. I can't say I blamed them, but I felt that we ought at least to try. That night just before Ossie and I went down to the road to lay our stones, we heard a B.B.C. commentator give a ten minutes' talk on the British Mission in Greece, and the work of the R.S.R. Greece was certainly coming into the news. The talk sounded good, but we felt on the whole that we had not done nearly all we had hoped to do when we first came in.

Guerilla warfare is made up of a series of disappointments with an occasional success. We planned so many different ambushes but nearly always some small hitch would occur which upset everything.

We got down to the road safely, and lay quietly listening for the German posts. It is a strange fact but a German never seems to be able to keep quiet for long without talking. After about a quarter of an hour's quiet stalking we located one patrol. We then moved down the edge of the road about 100 yards, and very cautiously pushed out our stones and cow dung, with pieces of long stick. I could not help contrasting the caution it was necessary to exercise now, compared with our early days when we quite gaily and generally safely, strolled about at will.

The road that particular night reminded me of Noyes' poem, "The Highwayman". It was indeed "a ribbon of moonlight", and anybody stepping on to it would have been a certain target for the hidden machine guns. Some time afterwards a couple of trucks went up on our pebbles.

At first light next morning the mortars and machine guns were in position, and had a short shoot when a convoy came along. It was not very successful, however, and with no support on either flank, we were forced to withdraw when the Germans from positions higher up on the hills spotted where we were, and brought heavy fire to bear. It was always a very unpleasant feeling when there was no flank support, and never knowing when the enemy might sweep round behind us.

Dimitri was far from well at this stage, and he was laid up at Goura. I was worried about him, but our doctor was on the far side of the railway line, and Dimitri was not well enough to move across to see him.

Incidentally, I should have mentioned the Americans before this. They had had three or four shows on the other side of the railway line, in support of the Mission. But they had been very unlucky early on when they were caught in a Hun ambush. Their officer, John Glanis, was very severely wounded. He put up a magnificent show in crawling over a mile with a broken hip and covered in shrapnel hits. After this he had to be transported by stretcher for two

days to the doctor's advanced base. Here he was patched up and moved a further two days' march to an air strip, from where he was evacuated. The last news I had of him stated that he was well on the way to recovery. The Americans suffered two or three other casualties in this ambush, and thereafter assisted the Mission in railway demolition jobs, and never came over to our side of the road.

All this time we had never heard a word as to what was happening to the other two R.S.R. detachments in the north. Our own little war was a very isolated one. We kept in touch with the general war picture through the B.B.C. news, but we had no idea what was happening in other parts of Greece.

For the next three or four days we staged hit-and-run attacks with the machine guns, but it was unsatisfactory and I was far from happy. I think, looking back, that we were all thoroughly overtired at this stage, and with the Andartes unwilling to help, we were longing to rejoin our fellow countrymen. On the 14th the news came through that the Allies had occupied Athens. The B.B.C. made it clear that there were no enemy troops in the city, when the independent para brigade dropped just outside. The brigade was extremely unlucky, as it landed in a heavy wind, and suffered severe casualties. These casualties were quite unnecessary, as the Andartes, and elements of our sister regiment, the S.B.S., were holding the aerodrome and the planes could have landed.

It was most distressing to us in the hinterland to learn of these operations always occurring after the Germans had left. If only sixteen plane loads of paratroopers had been landed on our aerodrome, even at this stage, we could have caused the Germans any amount of harm, and quite possibly stopped any further withdrawal. As it was, there was no battle for the liberation of Greece by the allies. The Germans left, and the Allied invasion forces followed them.

On the 17th we received orders from Cairo to get as near Lamia as possible in order to enter the town the moment the Germans had left. We concentrated at the small village of Divri, which commanded an excellent view of the town. Because of this view the Germans had at one time been in the practice of shelling the village intermittently to keep observers away. The village was completely wrecked, but the villagers used to creep back in the evenings to collect eggs, vegetables, etc., from their gardens.

I had not seen Vincent for nearly a week, and was glad to hear that he had had several shoots on the Stilis-Lamia road. The night before he and one of his men had been on patrol into the outskirts of Lamia itself. Here they had found a German billet and had thrown in a couple of hand grenades, causing great consternation and alarm. Later he had shot a sentry getting away. As Vincent never exaggerates, but rather minimises anything he does, it must have been quite a party.

On the 18th we could see the Germans thick on the road. They were proceeding in horse-drawn carts, riding on bicycles and horses, and some of them were even pushing handcarts. It was a sorry spectacle, but unfortunately, from our point of view, guarding all this rabble, were still the pickets on the heights with their heavy weapons. Without support we could get nowhere near the road. We signalled for the R.A.F., but nothing came.

Some time previously I had signalled Colonel Devitt asking him urgently for reinforcements. It was ironical that I should receive a reply on the night of the 18th to say that reinforcements were standing by, and would be sent at the first opportunity. We were in Lamia the next day.

The 19th October was a great day. In the early morning we realised that the tail of the German army had arrived at last, and what a sting it was carrying! Behind the rabble we had seen the day before, came a rearguard consisting of armoured cars and four 150 mm. guns with machine guns and mortars in support. The tail of this column got stuck at the bottom of the hill out of Lamia, owing to the first R.A.F. raid we had seen on the road. There were only two planes, but they must have done some damage higher up which we could not see.

One of the planes was shot down by the enemy ack-ack defences. Later in the day the pilot, a Canadian, walked into Lamia and became our first Empire guest. Had he been shot down the day before, or had his plane crash-landed two miles further north, he would have spent the rest of the war in Germany. It was his lucky day.

Vincent was most eager to have a last crack at the Germans, but I felt the sting in their tail was too much for us to engage. Besides which the Germans had actually left Lamia and I feared they might return and cause very much greater damage than they appeared to have done, for as far as we could see from the hillside, the town was undamaged.

By 14.00 hours the convoy began to move. Ian Neville, who had joined us, and I decided to go down into the town. I took a runner with me to send back for the troops if all was clear. Eventually at 15.00 hours the three of us were the first British troops to enter Lamia since the evacuation in April, 1941. We found the place almost deserted, but the townspeople were beginning to return as we went in. On interrogating one of these, we were told that they had been ordered by the Germans to leave the previous night lest they get into trouble.

The Andartes were now in the town, and immediately took over the citadel which commanded the main road to the north. Here they wisely took up defensive positions in case the Germans returned. I sent my runner back for my troops to come forward. By 17.00 hours the rain was coming down in torrents, and I welcomed a very bedraggled detachment of British troops leading mules into the first town of any size they had entered for over four months. By this time the Germans were well on their way, and we were able to relax.

Lamia in peacetime is a town of about thirty to forty thousand inhabitants. It possesses four or five impressive squares, many modern buildings, including blocks of flats and hotels. We took over one hotel for the night. The Germans had not destroyed the electric power system, and had done little damage to the water supply. We were told that the reason for this was that several of the senior officers in the town had become friendly with senior municipal officials who had pleaded with them not to destroy the essential services. We were also told senior German officers had occupied our hotel until 03.00 hours that morning. It was nearly midnight before we could get any food cooked. Not that any of us cared. At last it was only a matter of days before we would join forces with our own troops.

It was an extraordinary feeling to be in a proper building after nearly seven months in the wilds. There was electric light, a comfortable bed and a water basin, but unfortunately no running water either in the basin or in the bathroom next door. We were really too tired that night for a party, but how good it was to climb into a comfortable bed. Later in the night I found this bed to be a snare and a delusion, it was full of bugs, and I crept into my sleeping bag on the floor! It was quite like old times.

We had expected the town to be heavily booby trapped, and at first approached the hotel with great caution. Actually the Germans had not left a single booby trap in the whole of Lamia.

Incidentally we had received a signal about a week before, ordering us to remove our beards. This was a tragedy. We had hoped to return to the regiment fully bearded. We had such a wonderful variety, that they had to be seen to be believed. Fortunately I have a photographic record of mine, but not all the men were as lucky.

The first arrival from the South on the morning of the 20th, was Colonel Chris. He had travelled with the advance units of the British invasion army from Athens but had been halted 20 miles South by a major demolition. Walking was nothing to Colonel Chris. He had left the army to battle its way across the obstruction, and had just strolled the remaining twenty miles into Lamia. He thought it would be another two or three days before the recce groups arrived in their jeeps.

We spent a busy day looking for new quarters. The town was beginning to fill up rapidly, and we wanted a house for ourselves. We were successful towards evening, but had great difficulty in finding chairs, tables and beds. Although the Germans had not damaged the buildings in the town to any great extent, they had looted all movable property they could transport. However we managed to fix ourselves up fairly comfortably.

Food was our main problem. With Andartes and surrounding villagers pouring into the town, and no means of food supply being apparent, the position threatened to become serious. Fortunately the Germans had left quite large stocks of food behind them and these the Andartes had taken over immediately. Money was a difficult problem. Our only solution was to sign for everything, hair cuts, shoe shining, food, etc., and then pay when the account reached the equivalent of a sovereign, for the drachmae had dropped to billions to the sovereign.

The civilians in the town were trying hard to get things back to normal, but after three and a half years of German occupation, they were still numbed by the sudden change. An entry in my diary on the 20th amuses me. It reads: "I had my first hot bath to-night after nearly six months." Another entry the next day is interesting. "We have a flat roof to this two-storied house, and looking out from it to-day, I was astonished to see how flat everything looks." We had looked down on Lamia for so many months from the mountains, it seemed most strange to see everything on a flat perspective.

Thank heavens our marching days were over for a spell, I had covered over 2,000 miles in seven months. We wondered if we would be sent back to Athens or join up with the force chasing the Hun. Our kit and general equipment was in poor shape, but we felt our experience in the country might be of some assistance to the fresh troops, if they wanted us.

We were surprised that afternoon when the first patrol of the paratroop battalion and the S.B.S. arrived in the town in jeeps at 16.00 hours. They were astonished to find us already In possession. We had always imagined that when we did link up with regular troops we would be the ones to be looked after and fed, but how different things work out in practice! The advance guard had had a gruelling journey from Athens and we were the first British troops they had met. They seemed to think that all they had to do was to press a button and everything would be provided for them. We did not want to disappoint them, and did our best to make the flow of troops which arrived almost continuously until 03.00 hours next morning, as comfortable as possible.

At that hour Colonel George Jellicoe arrived with Lt. Colonel Coxon, O.C. of the Para Battalion. Colonel Jellicoe was in command of this pursuit force. It appeared from conferences late that night, that my detachment was to be attached to Colonel Jellicoe's force in the race after the Huns.

Next morning, the 22nd, we thought that the invading army were rather an ill-tempered lot. They made and changed plans all morning without consulting either the Mission or ourselves who knew the form better than anybody, but hesitated to thrust our apparently unwanted opinions on to these regular troops. However, by that evening we had got to know one another better and we began to work together. It was probably all our fault anyway. Having been cut off for so long we were rather out of touch with army procedure.

CHAPTER 25

By the morning of the 23rd, Colonel Jellicoe had made his plans. He had decided to split his force into two. The chief reason for this was the fact that rations and petrol were in very short supply, and so was transport. It was, therefore, impossible to move the whole force. I was appointed Staff Officer to Major Ian Paterson, O.C. of Pat Force who were to lead in the chase.

This force consisted of a company of Colonel Coxon's para battalion, my two machine gun sections, a detachment of the S.B.S. engineers, four 75 mm. guns, and an ambulance detachment. It was remarkably pleasant to be amongst regular troops again, and see all the units functioning in their own specialised branches, instead of trying to improvise everything on our own.

Transport was the main problem, and lack of this prevented the mortars from being attached as well. They were to wait in Lamia, until further transport could be provided to move them. We packed up that night, and loaded what little kit we possessed with our guns and ammunition, on two three tonners. We thought what fun it would be to travel by M.T. after months of foot slogging. Later, next day we weren't quite so sure, as travelling by three tonners over bad roads is a miserable performance at the best of times, but when the road is perfectly frightful through deviations caused by demolitions, it is unpleasant in the extreme.

Ian Paterson, had put up a very fine performance at Patras, about two weeks before, when he had bluffed a German garrison into surrendering to his very small advance party. He was dead keen to get after the Hun. The column was to leave at first light next morning, the 24th. It was most interesting to my detachment to drive up the road from Lamia towards the summit of the pass. It

was good to see the enormous amount of ammunition which the Germans had used in shelling our positions. We had never imagined we had caused them quite so much trouble. There were also numbers of trucks scattered about which had been tipped off the road down into the valley below, which we had not been able to see from our old positions. We were all very disappointed at not being able to take Dimitri with us on this final trip. We had got him down to Lamia where a Greek doctor insisted that he should proceed immediately to Athens for proper treatment.

We kept along the main road for a distance of about thirty miles before coming to the first German demolition, where we deviated through a river. On the whole the Germans had done very little damage to the road until we reached Larissa, scene of a magnificent rearguard action by the Australians and New Zealanders in 1941. The Germans had mined the aerodrome and all the approaches, but the advance party had recced a route through the town, and we were not held up.

North of Larissa, the Germans had mined and blown up several large bridges. To attempt to repair these or make deviations round them would delay us to such an extent that the Hun would get clean away. The advance parties had recced a route to the West which they thought might be O.K. although they had not got right through on it as yet.

Ian decided to take a chance and we branched off on some dreadful side roads and long deviations before arriving at Trikkala at 20.00 hours that night. Here we decided, on account of the petrol shortage, to leave part of the force behind, until further supplies came up. The petrol position was acute, chiefly owing to the fact that very few vehicles had been landed in Athens, by the time the force had left.

In order to have any chance of catching the Germans at all, it had been necessary to send Colonel Jellicoe's force away at the earliest possible moment. The demolitions in the harbour at Piraeus had been so severe, that the off-loading programme was far behind its schedule. This meant that the column had set off with insufficient vehicles to carry its full petrol supplies, with the promise that further supplies would follow immediately the vehicles were available. We fed on army rations that night for the first time in months, and how good they seemed.

The following morning, the 25th October, Ian, Jimmy Gourlay, O.C. the Para company, and I went ahead in one of the jeeps in case we should bump into the tail of the Hun column. Again we struck heavily demolished roads, but by 13.00 hours we arrived at the village of Siatista, where there was a strong British Mission. Our long deviations had taken us some way from the main road. The Mission had only been in possession of Siatista since the Germans evacuated the town a short time before.

We were told that the Germans were still passing through Kozane, a town on the main road about ten miles distant. We went forward on a recce, and saw the same old columns moving through. Ian Paterson was all for attacking this army that same night. I had had a considerable amount of experience with these Germans by now, however, and urged that it would be wiser to try to negotiate the withdrawal of a Greek garrison of 600 troops in the town, who were working with the Germans as security battalions, before we attacked.

Ian eventually agreed. The Mission infiltrated agents into Kozane, and that night we held a conference with delegates from the Security battalion who promised that these Greek troops would withdraw, unknown to the Germans, the following night.

I had an accident in my jeep at 04.00 hours, while taking the delegation back towards Kozane. There had been great competition amongst them to travel in a jeep, and eventually two elderly gentlemen had been allotted to my vehicle. I must have been more tired than I realised, for I fell asleep at the wheel. The next thing I knew was that the jeep had upset with us underneath. We had not had the hood up, and I was relieved to hear my two Greeks at least making some sort of noise from the back. We crawled out none the worse except for a few scratches. The Greeks helped me push the car back on to its wheels, but politely refused any further lift, saying that they could quite easily walk the remaining distance to the rendezvous!

The approaches to the position which we intended to take up when attacking Kozane, were fully exposed to a German outpost on the hill above the town. We had, therefore, got all our troops forward during that first night, 25th October, and hid them in a small, deserted village below a large hill which concealed them from the enemy view. They spent the day of the 26th there.

Colonel Jellicoe arrived that afternoon, and he approved of Ian's plan for the attack at dawn next day, though he obviously wished that he had more troops at his disposal. Our strength totalled one company of paratroopers, a small detachment of the S.B.S., four 75 mm. guns and my two machine gun sections, about 250 troops in all. The strength of the enemy at Kozane was reported to be in the vicinity of 1,000 troops, 600 of whom we hoped would desert that night. In addition to this there were continual columns passing through.

Our plan was for the para company under Jimmy Gourlay, to seize a strategic hill held by the Germans just north of the town. The capture of this hill would ensure the control of the road to the North. As long as this hill was in our possession, no traffic could move Northwards. The S.B.S. detachment was to seize a small feature just East of the village where we were camped. The four 75 mm. guns and my machine guns were to give supporting fire as required.

The morning of the 27th was dull and misty. We had spent an uncomfortable day and night well within range of German mortars, had they discovered our positions. It was a relief when the time came for the troops to move off on their different tasks. By 08.00 hours we, at the command post, had still not heard a shot fired, or received any signal as to what was happening.

We could see nothing on account of the mist and there had been no call for support fire from the advance troops. Even if there had been, the gunner observation post would not have been able to direct any fire, as we could see nothing. At last at 08.30 hours the mist began to rise, and we got a message through on our wireless from Gourlay, to say that he had captured his objective at 06.30. Presumably we had not heard the firing on account of the mist blanketing the noise.

A runner also came back from the S.B.S., and my own machine gunners to say that as the mist rose, they found themselves almost under the nozzles of the guns of strongly held enemy positions. Having captured the main objective, Ian decided to concentrate on holding it, and sent the machine gun sections off to join the para company on its hill. The S.B.S. were told to hang on where they were.

By 10.00 hours the Germans were reacting strongly to this threat to their line of withdrawal. Firing all round our positions became extremely heavy. Ian ordered the S.B.S. to withdraw, deciding to move them round across country in their jeeps, mounted with .5 Brownings to assist Gourlay's men. By now we were getting signals from him to say he was being very heavily counter-attacked and did not think he could hold his position. He was loath to abandon it before dark, however, on account of his wounded. The inter-comm was so bad that we decided that I should go round to join Jimmy on the hill, give him the picture, and if possible evacuate his company.

It was quite clear by now that the Germans were full of fight and no mere show of force on our part would persuade them into surrendering. The 600 Greeks had not deserted the night before as we had hoped, and the convoy was massing up in the town. It was only a matter of time before the Huns, through sheer force of numbers, would steam-roller their way back on to the position which the Para company had so gallantly assaulted earlier in the morning.

By the time I arrived, at the foot of the position which was held by Jimmy's men, it was 15.00 hours. It was still raining intermittently and mist was coming and going off the top of the hill. I started to climb the mountain, but by the time I was half way up I met the first party of paratroops withdrawing. They were having a difficult job in getting their wounded down the almost sheer face of the cliff.

Eventually I met Jimmy near the top of the hill, bringing up the rearguard, with my machine guns putting in a final burst at the enemy before withdrawing. We were in a very unpleasant position. Should the enemy rush the top of the hill, they would find that it was completely deserted, and there was nothing to stop them coming to our side of the summit and shooting up the whole of the Para company in their withdrawal.

But our luck was again almost unbelievable. The final burst of firing from the machine guns just delayed the enemy long enough. They decided to give the hill another plastering before rushing it. By the time they had done this a light mist covered the top of the hill, and gave us another fifteen minutes grace. It was an extremely uncomfortable hour before all the wounded had been carried down to where we had managed to get the jeeps.

I was really pleased with my men, who had not only got on to the position in broad daylight, but had done so carrying their guns and ammunition on mules. It went to show that our mountain warfare during the last four months had not been in vain, and that our specialised training had certainly taught us how to move about the country without attracting enemy attention. The paratroops had suffered heavy casualties in comparison to their numbers, six killed and eleven wounded. Amongst the killed were three of the officers, while Gourlay himself was wounded. The only officer to come out unscathed was Dougie Rall. They were wonderful troops with whom to fight.

By 18.00 hours the mist had lifted but it was too late for the enemy to do us any harm. The S.B.S. jeeps with their .5 Brownings had arrived just before this and kept the enemy penned down, and only inaccurate and sporadic mortar fire came from the hilltop. We were back at Siatista by midnight.

The action had only delayed the Germans for a few hours, but had given them a surprise as they had obviously not expected British troops in the areas for some considerable time. The result of this surprise was the hustling up of the enemy departure, and the burning of a considerable amount of stores in order to hasten his withdrawal. By midday the following day reports from the Andartes indicated that the town was clear. The Andartes themselves put in a good show that morning when they pressed into Kozani on the tail of the Germans, causing the enemy further casualties and hastening his retreat.

The rain which had fallen since our arrival had completely cut off our communications with the South. We had been lucky to get through on comparatively dry roads, but for the next three days nothing came through, and the column was forced to buy food locally. The tanks of the vehicles were completely dry, so nothing further could be done about chasing the Germans. By the 28th it was obvious that the force was unlikely to overtake the enemy in Greek territory. However a couple of lorry loads of petrol did come in that day, and a small column moved North in what turned out to be a fruitless attempt to catch the retreating Germans.

The only action, therefore, which the British army fought against the enemy in Greece was at Kozane where they took a hiding. It was certainly not the fault of the officers and men concerned in the expedition itself. It was purely owing to the enterprise and initiative of Colonel Jellicoe and his staff that the German column was caught at all. If the high command had had sufficient troops available to drop straight into strategic points in Greece to link up with the Mission and R.S.R. troops already in the country, a great deal more damage could have been inflicted on the enemy.

It was obvious to Colonel Jellicoe and Colonel Chris, who had joined the force some days before, that there was no point in sending my small detachment off on a wild goose chase. The men were tired out, our clothing was in a dreadful state, and our equipment almost non-existent. I received orders, therefore, to return to Athens in the empty vehicles that had brought up the petrol. There was great rejoicing amongst my small party. During the past three months we had fought thirty two engagements, quite apart from innumerable unsuccessful night ambushes, futile marches, etc. We felt that a short break was what we needed. We had learned a great deal that would be of use to us in Jugoslavia where we imagined we would be sent after a short leave.

It took us five days to get to Athens where we arrived on the 2nd November. Colonel Devitt was there to meet us, and it was good to hear all the regimental news. There had been a tremendous welcome for British troops when they first arrived in Athens, three weeks before. All the best accommodation had been taken up by the local administration which had followed in the wake of the army. My men, who had been in Greece for so long, were billeted in a transit camp on the outskirts of the town. Such is life in the army! But there were no complaints provided they could be got to Italy soon.

Athens in the early days of November was a delightful city. The weather was perfect, the people were tremendously pro-British, and were most hospitable. Only the subdued rumbling of the threatened ELAS rising could be heard. Everybody was so pleased with the relief of Athens after three and a half years of German occupation, that they could not believe that the ELAS forces would go to extremes.

The Allied command, however, were fully aware of the position, and would not allow any troop movements out of the country. Colonel Devitt pleaded the cause of my detachment successfully, however, and they left Athens by sea on the 8th November. There were the rest of the R.S.R. in Greece to be collected, however, and the Colonel decided to take me with him to Salonika where the balance of our troops were ordered to concentrate.

We had a very pleasant trip up by sea on H.M.S. *Sirius*, a cruiser, and sister ship of the *Orion.* This was a real holiday cruise for me. Usually the trip takes a matter of twelve hours, but for various reasons the journey took us four days. Two of these were spent at the island of Skaithos, swimming and sun bathing in beautiful surroundings. The Navy was hospitality itself. Their gin and whisky tasted extremely good after the ozo we had consumed in Greece.

On arrival with the first wave of British troops to land in Salonika on the 10 November, we found that most of the remaining R.S.R. had already assembled. The atmosphere in Salonika was nothing like as cheerful as that in Athens. It was quite obvious here that the machinations of the EAM politicians were very much more active at this early stage, than they were in Athens, and the population obviously dreaded a rising. The arrival of such a small British force was a great disappointment to them.

The common people throughout Greece had hoped for a large British army of occupation which would have held EAM in check. As it turned out, however, it was probably better that the rising should have taken place as it did in December, and been a failure, than to have continued festering underground indefinitely.

It was good to meet all my old friends from the early Azzib training days. Bill Collins was amongst the troops and so was Norman Astell, who was later tragically shot by ELAS troops in Athens on Christmas Eve.

The R.S.R. troops in the central sector had had a most unfortunate experience. They had been caught in a German drive very soon after their arrival, and had not been as lucky as we had been in the South. Most of their heavy weapons had been found by the Germans, where the detachment had hidden them when forced to beat a hasty retreat. They had however, managed to do a certain amount of demolition work on the road and railway. The detachment in the North under the command of Hennie Cronje, had evidently put up a first class show. They earned high praise from both the Mission personnel and the Greeks.

Sea transport was in very short supply so it was arranged that the majority of troops were to be flown back to Athens as aeroplanes became available. I flew down on the morning of the 12th November, and started to arrange evacuation for the balance of the troops from there. Eventually the remaining troops of the R.S.R. who had been in Greece, were assembled by the 15th November.

Dimitri was out of hospital by now and had quite recovered. He got fixed up with a job with the Allied Military Liaison, and went off to Salonika just before I left Athens for Bari by plane on the 18th November.

All sorts of complications cropped up in the following few days, and I was back in Athens by the 21st. The situation in the city had deteriorated considerably in the past few days. The allied command refused to evacuate further detachments of R.S.R. troops. The city was being paraded daily by EAM terrorists, and one or two people had been shot. As my troops had all left the country, however, the Colonel ordered me to return to Italy. I was fortunate enough to miss the subsequent rising and street fighting in which the R.S.R. suffered casualties inflicted by Greek ELAS troops, who had once been our allies.

Finally there appeared to be great doubt as to the future role of the regiment, and as it was obvious there would be nothing doing for some time, Collins and I applied for and were granted leave to return to South Africa. General Theron, G.O.A. for South African forces in the Mediterranean was extremely kind to us in Rome, and after hearing our story about Greece, arranged for us to have an interview with Field Marshal Smuts on our return to South Africa.

This interview took place in the Prime Minister's office in Union Buildings, Pretoria, on the 19th December. I had never seen the Field Marshal in person before. When we were shown into his study, he greeted us both very warmly, and we immediately had the impression that he really did look upon all South African soldiers as his own particular boys.

His profound knowledge of the Greek political set-up was a revelation to us. The questions he put to us, and his comments on our story made it quite clear that he knew the full implications of the Greek position, and had foreseen the rising long before it took place. The Field Marshal's general vitality was tremendous despite all his cares of state, and it was amazing to see with what zest and keenness he approached these foreign problems.

His sense of humour and the twinkle in his eye showed that in spite of the burden which he had borne during the last six years, his optimistic vision of the future happiness of mankind, for which he has since worked so hard at San Francisco, was not affected.

Bill and I left the Prime Minister's study with the feeling that there was still hope for the survival of mankind with men like Field Marshal Smuts working out our salvation.

Durban, 1945.