

NATIONAL RESISTANCE **(1941 – 1944)**

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Organisation for National Resistance

Right after the Battle of Crete, the legitimate Hellenic Government of [Prime Minister] Emmanuel Tsouderos was transferred to Cairo of Egypt and made it seat of its agencies. It was from there that it supervised the Hellenic Army base camps of enlistment and the training centres in the Middle East and its afterwards involvement in the struggle of the Allies in Northern Africa. In parallel, it planned and coordinated operations, in concert with our Allies, against the occupational forces in mainland Greece.

National Resistance was organised in the interior of the [occupied] country with the massive participation of the Greek people, motivated to react against the occupational forces. Men, women, even children launched themselves in a voluntary fight, multidimensional, effective and astonishing in manifestations of heroism and self-sacrifice. The actions of the resistance organisations though entailed a high price to pay. Thousands of innocent civilians were slaughtered, under the pretext of retaliations by the occupational forces. A symbolic character was given to the destruction of the village of Kandanos in Crete Island, levelled on 3 June 1941. This criminal order signalled the opening of the gates for arbitrary acts and the beginning of the so-called retaliation policy of the occupational forces in mainland Greece.

National Resistance started on the very first days of enemy occupation. It gradually developed with the establishment of resistance organisations that initially acted as intelligence-sabotage organisations, mainly in the region of Athens. Later, armed groups emerged and partisan forces appeared with larger presence and broader action in the countryside.

Resistance took various forms and expanded to different fields. In an attempt to categorise them, the following actions could be mentioned:

* Strikes by students, civil servants and other workers – On 12 Apr 1942 civil servant launched a strike simultaneously in Athens, Piraeus and Thessalonica.

* Enormous demonstrations in the streets of towns and especially in Athens – On 5 Mar 1943, a huge demonstration took the streets of Athens.

- * Clandestine celebrations of [Hellenic] national anniversaries and slogans on the walls in towns – The most famous such demonstration took place in Athens, on 25 Mar 1943⁽¹⁾.
- * Printing and dissemination of clandestine press and hand-outs
- * Sabotages to vehicles, ships and railways, which resulted into the disruption of rail connections at periods of critical importance for the enemy
- * Blowing-up of factories, buildings and particularly bridges – The most famous such detonation was the destruction of Gorgopotamos [railway] bridge².
- * Destruction of mines, in particular of bauxite, and generalised obstruction of the transportation of raw materials destined to the German war industry
- * Gathering and transmission of important information / intelligence to the General Headquarters, Middle East Command
- * Sustainment and concealment of Allies, as well as preparation of their escape
- * Ambushes, skirmishes and battles (guerrilla warfare), mainly in the countryside
- * Conduct of major military operations, from 1943 and on – The most characteristic of those, were operations “Animals” and “Noah’s Arc”.

The most significant resistance organisations were:

- * EDES³ (National Republican Greek League) with its military branch EOEA (National Groups of Greek Guerrillas)
- * EAM (National Liberation Front) with its military branch ELAS⁴ (Greek People’s Liberation Army)
- * EKKA (National And Social Liberation) that re-established the 5 / 42 Regiment
- * ESEA⁵ (Greek Army of National Liberation) with armed groups

¹ 25 March is the anniversary of the beginning (1821) of the national liberation struggle

² 25 Nov 1942

³ Greek acronym ΕΔΕΣ

⁴ Greek acronym ΕΛΑΣ

⁵ Greek acronym ΕΣΕΑ

* PAO⁶ (Pan-Hellenic Liberation Organisation) also with armed groups

Alongside those resistance organisations with their armed branches, operated other sabotage-information organisations, such as "Boumboulina⁷", "Omios⁸", "Zeus", "Codrus⁹", "Triaina¹⁰", "RAN¹¹", "PEAN¹²" and many others. Apart from the Greek resistance organisations, also allied intelligence and sabotage organisations operated on Hellenic territory; indicatively "Force 133", "Midas" and other.

In 1942, a "British Military Mission (BMM)" was established on Hellenic territory. Its mission was to organise resistance groups, as well as provide them with logistical support. From 1943 on, it was renamed to "Allied Military Mission (AMM)", since the USA was also involved. The influence of the British Military Mission on the developments in Greece was determining during the initial phases and less important as time went by. In essence, it had been declining since 1943. Indicative of the prevailing ambience is the frequent change of commanders.

At this point, it is worth mentioning the voluntary action of the Greek Diaspora. In 1943, the 122 US Infantry Battalion (Greek - American Independent) was established with the mission to come to Greece and fight. This battalion developed into the 2671 Special Reconnaissance Battalion. Company C' of 2671 Battalion operated in [occupied] Greece with 174 men, in the period 23 April to 20 Nov 1944.

The year 1942 saw the establishment of Greek resistance forces, of their broader presence and action in the countryside, as well as the development of resistance organisations and the eruption of the popular struggle in the towns. The years 1943 and 1944 saw a large-scale evolution of the National Resistance both in the countryside and in the towns, to the extent that vast national territory was freed.

Guerrilla tactics, employed by resistance groups, posed serious problems to the occupational forces. In fact, the terrain configuration of Greece favours guerrilla warfare. The Greek National Resistance has been successful and literally tied down 300.000 Axis troops.

Nevertheless, it heralded the first signs of the civil war to come. Stabilisation of the resistance groups, as well as the anticipated redeployment of the occupants created antagonism among the main resistance organisations for power sharing after the liberation. Different political

⁶ Greek acronym ΠΑΟ

⁷ A woman-hero of the war of independence

⁸ Homer, the ancient poet

⁹ Last king of ancient Athens, none deem worth to succeed him

¹⁰ It means "trident".

¹¹ Greek acronym PAN = Romulia, Valona, Islands (unredeemed areas inhabited by Greeks)

¹² Greek acronym ΠΕΑΝ = Pan-Hellenic Union of Fighting Youths

agendas of the various sides and the suspiciousness emerging thereof, initially led to small-scale civil strife mainly between EDES and ELAS. Spreading out of EAM / ELAS all over the country had as side effect the expansion of conflicts between ELAS and all the guerrilla groups that did not belong to broader EAM environment, and the prevailing of an intense internal polarisation that would lead to the civil war¹³.

Contribution of the National Resistance

The value of a resistance movement can only be measured by two different criteria, the internal and the external. The internal criterion evaluates the success in the protection of the national pride of the occupied nation and their determination to be free. The external criterion evaluates the success in contributing to the victory of the Alliance.

As regards the internal criterion, there has been a plethora of positive comments on behalf of the Allies, such as the opinions of the Chief of the Allied [Military] Mission in occupied Greece, Eddy Myers, as well as of his successor, Chris Woodhouse. More to that, German historian Heinz Richter noted: "The Greek Army showed to the world, in times that everybody thought that the dictators were invincible, that resistance from even a small country could be successful. The National Resistance against the occupants that followed evidenced once more how strong the will of the Greeks for freedom was".

The efficiency and the achievements of a resistance movement mainly depend on its popular support. This means that the struggle should be reflected in the broader popular masses, as well in the employment of this manpower. Greece, steeled by the courage and the bravery of its people and their steadfast faith to the victory, proved that the Axis was not invincible. The unceasing belief in freedom, the spirit of combating, and the revolutionary exaltation until the liberation shaped up and showed to the world that the National Resistance of the Greeks was an utmost act of national virtue and patriotic exertion.

As regards the external criterion, there were two contributing ways of the resistance movements to the strategy of the Allies. One of them was to pin down the largest possible numbers of enemy forces, and the other was to carry out special missions requested by the Allies, coordinated with and synchronised to their strategic plans.

In respect to the engagement of enemy troops, it should be stressed that initially the Germans underestimated the value of the National Resistance of the Greeks and deployed only their 12th Division in the territory of Greece. Effective 1943, the 12th Division was replaced by Army Group E' under the command of Air Force General Lher. The total figure of occupational forces in Greece, according to both Allied and German sources, is estimated at 300.000 men.

¹³ 1944 and 1946-49

Concerning the special operations requested by the Allies, in coordination and synchronisation with their strategic plans, it is worth noting the opinion of a British, Chris Woodhouse, chief of the British Military Mission in Greece, who succeeded Eddy Myers. Chris Woodhouse, in his speech to an audience in Greece on 31 Oct 1984 on the historic role of the National Resistance, examined three major operations, evidencing the contribution of the National Resistance [of the Greeks] in the whole allied effort.

The first refers to the detonation of the Gorgopotamos¹⁴ [railway] bridge in November 1942, known to the Allied Headquarters in Cairo as "Operation Hurling". The second was indeed a series of operations in summer 1943, in support of the allied debarkation in Italy, aiming at deceiving the Germans about the true location of the allied debarkation, known under the code name "Animals". The third was an operation of harassment against the German withdrawal out of Greece in September 1944, known under the code name "Noah's Ark" or simply "Ark".

It certainly does not go without saying that beyond these major operations, a variety of other smaller-scale operations was conducted by resistance organisations, directly or indirectly serving the allied cause. At this point, it should be underlined that, further to the action of armed groups, of major importance also was the action of intelligence organisations. Information gathering and transmitted by intelligence organisations greatly assisted the Allied Headquarters' operational planning.

Detonation of the Gorgopotamos Bridge was conducted on 25 Nov 1942, by common action of ELAS and EDES in collaboration with the British [Military] Mission, under Colonel Eddy Myers. The participants were 120 ELAS partisans under Ares Velouchiotis and 65 EDES partisans under Napoleon Zervas.

Planning of the operation, as well as its execution, was performed in the most suitable way. In the night of 25 November, Greek partisans caught by surprise and neutralised the Italian guard, thus giving to specialised British saboteurs the opportunity to detonate the bridge.

Axis troops applied again their brutal retaliation policy to this case. Two days after the detonation of the bridge, Italians transferred 19 Greeks, detained in the prison of Lamia, and executed them in front of the destroyed pillars of the bridge.

From the strategic point of view, in regard to the development of the operations on the [North] African Front, the detonation of Gorgopotamos Bridge (which put it out of service for at least 6 weeks) perhaps did not play the important role expected by the Allied Headquarters in Cairo, when planning "Operation Hurling", as the Battle of El Alamein had already taken place. This did not, however, mean that the detonation did

¹⁴ River in the mountains of Central Greece, near Lamia

not serve the allied operations in the African Continent, as retreating Rommel had enormous needs in supplies and reinforcements. In addition, the success of the operation in Gorgopotamos put in severe question the substantiality of the occupation of Greece by the enemy forces. It was the first important sabotage in Europe, and its reputation particularly bolstered the morale of the allied peoples.

Operations in June and July 1943, integrated in "Operation Animals", aimed at deceiving the Germans, in order to perceive that the allied debarkation would be conducted in Greece, Therefore, the role of the resistance of the Greeks was to attack the German communications system all over Greece, exactly as if the allied debarkation were to take place there. The respective plan of the Allied Headquarters in Cairo provided not only for pinning down German forces, but also for dictating their reinforcement, which would entail a weakening of the German forces deployed in Italy.

This particular operation had been very successful. Its achievements are evidenced by the staff reports of the German Army Group E'. The conclusions of the said reports show the deception of the German staff in regard to the exact location of the allied debarkation.

The third and ultimate operation in 1944, known as "Noah's Ark" aimed at harassing the German withdrawal from Greece. According to Chris Woodhouse, "Noah's Ark" was once more an operation of deception. It was included in the plans for deceiving the Germans on the debarkation at hand in France in June 1944; more specifically on the invasion in southern France from the territory of Italy scheduled for August, two months after the debarkation in northern France. Germans were once more deceived, in anticipation of a large-scale invasion in Greece. Hitler, as late as September 1944, still ordered projection of reinforcements in southern Greece, while his generals were already planning their withdrawal from the country.

In August 1944, when the Allies had completely engaged in both northern and southern France, it became obvious that there would be no large-scale invasion in Greece. Guidance by the Allied Headquarters in the Middle East to the Allied Military Mission and the resistance organisations provided for the harassment of the withdrawal of Germans out of Greece. This guidance took the form of many and repeated operations of the National Resistance against the German troops, in order to strain and wear them down.

"Plan Ark" viewed to the weakening of the combat effectiveness of the German troops deployed in Greece, in order to obstruct their employment in other vital areas. In fact, it provided for impeding the Germans to move their heavy equipment and for upsetting them in a way that they would have to reorganise themselves, before any operational deployment in any other front. On the basis of this parameter, series of obstructing

and sabotaging operations were planned to be executed by Greek partisan forces.

“Operation Noah’s Ark” was not crowned with absolute success, as the bulk of German forces disengaged from Greece rather effortlessly. At this point, two more parameters should be co-examined: first that the Greeks wanted the fastest possible withdrawal of the Germans from their territory; and second that the civil war between EDES and ELAS had already begun.

Therefore, when examining the three aforementioned operations, it is proved that the contribution of the National Resistance of the Greeks to the strategic objectives of the Allies is more than manifest. In fact, National Resistance also exerted positive influence on the morale of allied nations, as the news regarding the achievements of the Resistance fighters reached them. On the other hand, the sabotage of National Resistance partisans impeded the exportation to Germany of metals valuable for the German war industrial effort (nickel, chromium, bauxite, and other). Moreover, the massive reaction of the Greek people contributed to the cancellation of the civil mobilisation, achieving that no Greek workers were sent to Germany, thus depriving German factories of thousands of working hands.

Losses during the Occupation

Naturally, it would be historic inconsistency not to mention the terrible human casualties and the heavy material losses, suffered by Greece as result of its resistance against the Axis, during the Occupation. Figures vary according to sources of origin and fluctuate from 390.000 to 500.000 people. Moreover, reasons of such losses also vary. During the triple occupation, there were losses due to famine; the atrocities of Germans, Italians and Bulgarians; war operations; the implementation of the retaliations policy; and air bombardments. Hostages deported to Germany, Italy and Bulgaria should also be added to these figures. As regards the population of Greece, these losses are considered as one of the highest in Europe, compared to respective losses of other occupied peoples. Greek losses reached almost 7% of the total population.

Physical destructions to buildings, rolling stock, commercial ships, ports, and the road and rail networks were estimated at 17.870.764.100 US Dollars. This sum includes expenses paid by the Greek people for the sustainment of occupational forces. Damages to the agricultural, animal-breeding and shipping sectors were also enormous. Inflation demeaned the national currency, provoking a colossal financial catastrophe. National income from 62.867 billion Greek Drachmas (GRD) in 1939, fell to GRD 46 billion in 1941 and to GRD 21 billion in 1942.

All the above losses in both human lives and material damages had been the price, paid by the Greeks in order to remain loyal to their duty

and the allied cause. The years of the Occupation were a true inferno for the Greek people and the country in general. But, the Greek people have never lost their morale neither stopped fighting by the side of the Allies until the final victory.

From a purely military point of view, the contribution of the National Resistance of the Greeks to the allied front in the Mediterranean Sea was particularly significant. It tied down big military units of the Axis and systematically harassed their land and sea transportations during the critical period of the struggle in Northern Africa. The action of the Greek resistance organisations against the occupational forces was so intense that the German Staff considered it as diversion and the prelude of an allied debarkation. Three German Armour Divisions were rerouted to Greece instead of Sicily, where the debarkation took finally place. Thus, the National Resistance contributed in this way, alongside the resistance movements in Europe, to the accelerating the termination of the war and the victory of the Allies.

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