

ABDUCTING A GENERAL

By

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Map reference to War Office Map (1943)

1 : 250,000. GREECE. Sheet G. 19 CANEA

and Sheet G. 20 IRAKLION.

Note: for the first pages All references quoted are for the G20
IRAKLION sheet, unless otherwise stated

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GREECE

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By

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The sierras of occupied Crete, familiar from nearly two years of clandestine sojourn and hundreds of exacting marches, looked quite different through the aperture in the converted bomber's floor and the gaps in the clouds below: a chaos of snow-covered, aloof and enormous spikes glittering as white as a flakier in the February moonlight. There, suddenly, on a tiny plateau among the peaks, were the three signal fires twinkling. A few moments later they began expanding fast: freed at last from the noise inside the Liberator the parachute sailed gently down towards the heart of the triangle. Small figures were running in the firelight and in another few moments, snow muffled the impact of landing. There was a scrum of whiskery embracing, a score of Cretan voices, one English one. A perfect landing! The Katharo¹ plateau was too small for all four of the passengers to drop in a stick: each jump needed a fresh run-in. So, once safely down I was to signal the all clear with a torch. But the gap I had dripped through closed; our luck, for the moment, had run out. We took turns to signal towards the returning boom of the intermittently visible plane just the other side of the rushing clouds until the noise died away and we knew the plane had turned back to Brindisi. Our spirits sank. We were anxious lest the noise should have alerted the German garrison in Kritza²; dawn, too, might overtake us. Scattering the fires, whacking the unladen pack mules into action and hoping for a snowfall to muffle our tracks, we began the long scramble. Tauntingly a bright moon lit us all the way. At last we plunged wearily through the ilex and the arbutus

¹ Katharo C 5423

² Kritza C 5917

into the home-cave as the dawn of February 6th 1944 was breaking.

* * *

As it turned out, I stayed with Sandy Rendel³ in his cave for over a month. It was perched near a handy spring in the Lasithi mountains above the village of Tapais⁴ in Eastern Crete. Smoky, draughty and damp, but snug with strewn brushwood under the stalactites, it was typical of several lairs dotted about the island, each sheltering a signal sergeant, a small retinue of Cretan helpers and one each of a scattered handful of heavily disguised British Liaison Officers. None of these B.L.O.'s were regulars. The only thing they had in common was at least a smattering of Ancient Greek from school. They all had a strong feeling for Greece and Crete and were deeply involved not only in the military grandeurs and miseries of the island, but, as the occupation lengthened, in every aspect of its life: the evacuation of our own stragglers, and (for training and re-entry) of Resistance people on the run; in trying to help the bereaved, gathering information about the enemy, assisting commando raids and the dropping of arms and supplies, the organising of resistance and the composing of discord between leaders. We became, as it were, part of the family. Our cave-sojourns were often brief. They were a cruel danger to the villages that supplied us with food and look-outs and runners and we were often dislodged by enemy hunts in force. It was a game of hide-and-seek usually ending in a disorderly bunk to a new refuge in the next range. We could not have lasted a day without the islanders' passionate support: a sentiment which the terrible hardships of the occupation, the execution of the hostages, the razing and massacre of villages, only strengthened.

³ Captain (later Major) A. M. Rendel. Later a distinguished member of the staff of The Times.

⁴ Tapais C 5821

A time of bitter weather ensued: postponements, cancellations and false starts. Night after night Sandy and I set out with our party for the plateau; again and again we heard the plane circling over the clouds; always in vain. Sergt. Dilley was permanently crouched over his set, tapping out, or receiving messages from the S.O.E. Headquarters in Cairo. (How far away it seemed!) We filled our long leisure lying round the fire, singing and story-telling with the Cretans, keeping the cold out with raki and wine. There were endless paper-games and talk and plenty of time, it soon turned out, to grow one of the moustaches that all Cretan mountaineers wear, and to get back the feel of mountain clothes: breeches, high black boots, a twisted mulberry silk sash with an ivory hilted dagger in a long silver scabbard, black shirt, blue embroidered waistcoat and tight black fringed turban; augmented, when on the move, with a white hooded cloak of home-spun goat's hair, a tall twisted stick, a bandolier and a slung gun, the apt epitome of a long and reckless tradition of mountain feud, guerrilla, and armed revolt against the Turks. There was time, above all, to think about the scheme on hand.

* * *

The idea of capturing the German commander had begun to take shape the autumn before. At the time of the Italian Armistice, General Carta, commanding the Siena Division which occupied the easternmost of Crete's four provinces, hated and resented his Allies. It had not been hard, abetted by his counter-espionage chief, with whom I had long been in touch, to persuade him at a midnight meeting in his H.Q. at Neapolis⁵ to leave for Cairo with his A.D.C. and several staff officers and the plans of the defence of Eastern Crete. His conspicuously pennanted car was sent

⁵ Neapolis C 5728

north east and abandoned as a false scent while we set off on foot south west. (The Germans moved in next day). There had been a hue and cry, searches, observation planes, dropped leaflets offering rewards; but we had got them through and embarked them in a timely M.T.B. in a little creek near Soutsouro⁶. We were in Mersa Matruh next afternoon and Cairo next morning. (I had been in the island nearly two years.) I put forward to the powers in the S.O.E. the suggestion of kidnapping General Müller. He commanded the 22nd Bremen ("Sebastopol") Panzergrenadier division based on Heraklion. It was the sort of action we all needed in Crete, I urged. The General was universally hated and feared – even more perhaps, than General Brauer in Canea⁷ - for the appalling harshness of his rule: the dragooning of the population in labour-gangs for the aerodromes, mass shooting of hostages, reprisal destruction of villages and their populations, the tortures and the executions of the Gestapo. The moral damage to the German forces in Crete would be great; a severe blow to their self-confidence and prestige. It would have its affect on us, too: our correct but uninspiring task – trying to restrain random action in preparation for the mass uprising we all hoped for – was an arduous, rather thankless one. Above all, it would have a miraculously tonic effect among the Cretans; our spirits, after reverses in the Viannos⁸ mountains at the time of the Italian armistice, were low; and one important guerrilla band – that of Manoli Bandouvas – was in temporary dissolution. The deed would be a triumph for the resistance movement which had kept the island so effectively and improbably united; and it would be a setback for the emissaries of the mainland left wing movement who – fortunately too late – were trying to spread the same discord in Crete as that which

⁶ Soutsouro G 2798

⁷ both were executed as war criminals in 1946.

⁸ Viannos see map

was already tearing the mainland apart. The suggested action would be, above all, an Anglo-Cretan affair, a symbol and epitome of the bond which had been formed during the Battle and the thirty months which had followed. It could be done, I urged, with stealth and timing in such a way that both bloodshed, and thus reprisals, would be avoided. (I had only a vague idea how.) To my amazement, the idea was accepted.

* * *

There was no need to look for the first recruit. Manoli Paterakis from Koustoyérako in Selino in the far west had been my guide for over a year. A goat-herd and ex gendarme, he had fought fiercely against the parachutists during the Battle. A year or two older than me, tireless, unshakeable as granite, wiry as a Red Indian, a crack shot and as fast over the mountains as the ibexes he often hunted, he was (still is) the finest type of Cretan mountaineer; (there will be many such in this account.) Completely unselfish, he was in the mountains purely from patriotism, and his mixture of sense, conviviality, stoicism, irony and humour, linked with his other qualities, made him more valuable than ten ordinary mortals. We had been companions on hundreds of marches and in many scrapes; had even, last summer, made an abortive joint attempt to sink a German tanker with limpets in Heraklion harbour. Neither of us had meant to leave Crete with the Italians – Manoli had been present at all the recent doings at Italian G.H.Q. – but rough weather had hastened the vessel's departure, and, when we realized the anchor had been weighed, we were too far from shore to swim back in the dark. So, luckily, here he was in Cairo.

Finding another officer to take over during reconnaissances and to handle communications while I was away from our H.Q. – for lugging a wireless with

batteries and a charging engine was out of the question – was harder; but luck still held. Bill Stanley-Moss, who had joined S.O.E. from the third battalion of the Coldstream in the desert, was a worldly-wise and sophisticated twenty-three of great charm and looks; full of talents and high spirits and imagination' and a great friend and accomplice (with several other S.O.E. companions with whom we shared a house in Zamalek) in all the excesses which leave in Cairo excused or imposed. He jumped at the scheme and turned out to be an invaluable partner and perfect companion throughout.

Things began moving at once. I became a major and a third pip descended on Billy's shoulder; I found George Tyrakis who, though younger, was of the same stamp as Manoli; he had been evacuated from his village of Phourphoura in Amari for training a few months before, after long service, and attached himself to Billy. They got on at once, though at first they were mutually incommunicado except for grins and gestures. The rest of the party would be recruited in Crete. Preparations went forward with zest.

We planned to drop by parachute as near Heraklion as possible; Sandy Rendel, warned by wireless, found an ideal place for it. But, after training in Palestine and many delays, it was not till early January, after a tremendous Egyptian Christmas, that we flew to Tokra airfield near Bengazi. Here, with a score of people about to be dropped to Tito's partisans and the Greek mainland, we waited for days while the rain hammered on the tents; all in vain. Finally we were flown to Italy, arriving for the first night of the Barker of Seville in bomb-shattered Bari, now the swarming near-H.Q. of the Eighth Army. It was nice to be in a mainland European town again, but days of standing-by were hard to bear. But, at last, at half an hour's notice, we were

being driven south at breakneck speed through the conical villages of Apulia. A converted bomber waited on the runway at Brindisi, and we took off in dismal February twilight. Soon we were alone in the pitch dark except for the despatcher and the parachutes, four of them for us, the others for huge cylindrical containers. In these, and about our persons, were the gear for our operation: maps, pistols, bombs, commando daggers, coshes, knuckledusters, telescopic sights, silencers, a sheaf of Marlin sub-machine guns, ammunition, wire-cutters, sewn-in files for prison bars, magnetic escape devices, signal flares, disguises, gags, chloroform, rope-ladders, gold sovereigns, stealthy footwear, Bangalore torpedoes, every type of explosive from gelignite and gun-cotton to deceptive mule droppings which, they said, could blow a tank to smithereens; all the things indeed on which espionage writers dwell at such fond length; also Benzedrine, field dressings, morphine, knockout drops and suicide pills to bite under duress, if captured in the wrong clothes. I hoped we would use none of them, especially the last.

Much later on, shouting through the noise of the engine, the despatcher roused us from the torpor which is oddly usual at such times. There was moonlight all round and then the glittering crags of the White Mountains and Ida and a rush of cold wind from the hole the despatcher had opened in the floor. "Spiti mas" Manoli said, looking down: "Home". But it wasn't except for me.

* * *

The nightly circlings above the plateau were making the region too hot for us. The Kritza garrison was increased to a hundred – there were just under 50,000 enemy troops in the island – and the sweeps and ambushes, and occasional bursts of firing, (although, in the dark, the Germans only managed to wound each other) – were

getting perilously near. Just as we were about to signal Cairo suggesting an alternative sea borne rendezvous in the south, a message from them arrived proposing exactly this. (Billy and the others had left Italy for Cairo once more; finally they headed for Mersa Matruh). Helped by a sudden thick mist, Sandy and I shifted out just in time, scattering with plans to join up later on. March went by in travelling about in snowy and windy weather, gathering information, renewing contact and locating the whereabouts of old helpers that I would need. One item of news, late in March, came as a shock: General Müller was suddenly replaced by Kreipe, a general from the Russian front. All the delays seemed, retrospectively, more bitter. But, I consoled myself, the moral effect of the commander's capture would be just as great, whoever he might be. All I could learn was that he had commanded divisions on the Leningrad and Kuban sectors and was decorated with the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross. At last, at the beginning of April, Sandy, John Stanley – another old hand – and I, and a number of people for evacuation, were lying up in the mountainous prohibited zone above the south coast, not far from Soutsouro. We had a narrow shave a few miles inland, at the Monastery of the Holy Apostles: a heavily armed German foraging party arrived when we were in the middle of a feast. The Archimandrite Theophylaktos just had time to smuggle us into the cellar before they stamped in and insisted on a large meal. We crouched below listening to them among the Arabian Nights Oil-jars until, heavily plied with wine by the Archimandrite, the reeled off singing.

At last, on the night of April 4th, the sound of a ship's engine answered our third night of torch signals; soon a sailor in a rubber dinghy was sculling into the cove and throwing a rope ... In no time our evacuees were aboard, the ship vanished into the dark, and there, on the rocks, almost unbelievably after all our troubles, were Billy,

Manoli and George. We loaded the stuff on the mules, said goodbye to Vasili Knoios, our protector in the area, and headed inland for the long climb to comparative safety; settling at last in a high ravine full of oleanders, with sea shining far below. There was little sleep for the remainder of the night, or next day: too much to talk about. Raki and wine appeared, two sheep were slaughtered and roasted. Spring had suddenly burst over the island and the aromatic smell of herbs had hit the newcomers miles out in the Libyan Sea. As I hoped, Billy was amazed by the spectacular ranges all round, and becomingly impressed by the dash, hospitality, kindness, and humour of the Cretans.

* * *

Our unwieldy caravan could only move by night. We left at dusk, and a long trudge up and down deep ravines, halting now and then at a waterfall or a friendly sheepfold, brought us to Skoinia,⁹ where we lay up in Mihali's house. A day and a night were lost here, thanks to the visits of a string of our local leaders, including the huge Kapetan Athanasios Bourdzalis, who reappears later in these pages, and the arrival, in her mother's arms, of a little goddaughter of mine. All this gave rise to a banquet and songs, this time with well-placed sentries, from which we rose for an all-night march N.E. across half the width of the island and over the dangerous edge of the Messara¹⁰ plain; circling round garrisoned villages, and using the device, in unoccupied ones, of barking "Halt!" "Marsch!" or "Los!" in the streets and raucously singing Bomber über Engelland, Lili Marlene or the Horstwessellied, to spread ambiguity about the nature of our party. At one point light rain filled the lowlands with flickering lights: hundreds of village women were out gathering snails brought out by

⁹ Skoinia G 2826

¹⁰ Messara – see map

the shower. Before dawn we reached the lofty village of Kastamonitza¹¹ and the shelter of the family of Kimon Zographakir, who had been with us from the coast; a young man of great spirits and pluck and a former guide on commando raids. The generosity and warmth of all his family was double remarkable, as an elder brother had recently been captured and shot for his resistance work. We had to stay indoors by day, as there was a German hospital in the village: enemy voices and footsteps wounded below the windows. The upper chamber became a busy H.Q. of sorting maps and gear and sending and receiving runners; being hopelessly spoilt all the while by our hosts and their sons and daughters.

* * *

High in the mountains above Kastamonitza in a cyclopean cave among crags and ilex woods, overlooking the whole plain of Kastelli Pediada¹² lived Siphoyannis, an old goat-herd and a tried friend: the very place for the party to hide for a few days while I went to Heraklion to spy out the land. I reinforced the party with two additions here, both old friends¹³, older than the rest, tough, robust, cheerful and unshakable: Antoni Papaleonidas, originally from Asia Minor, who worked as a stevedore in Herakleion, and Grigori Chnarakis, a farmer from Thrapsano,¹⁴ just beneath us. The year before he had saved, in spectacular fashion, two British airmen who had baled out of a burning bomber¹⁵. The party – Billy, Manoli, George, Grigori and Antoni,

¹¹ Kastamonitza C 3422

¹² Kastelli Pediada C 3122

¹³ Both became God-brothers of mine later. Such a relationship – Synteknos in Crete, Koumbares in Greece – is important and binding. There are several in this story. One becomes a Synteknos by baptizing or by standing best man, to somebody's son or daughter.

¹⁴ Thrapsano C 2522

¹⁵ One of them, flt, Sergt. Jo Bradley, D.F.M., M.M., before he was evacuated, became my signaller for several months, after my former signaller, Apostolos Evangelou of Leros, had been captured and executed by the enemy.

with Kimon as liaison with the village, (and, by runner, with me in Herakleion), and with Siphoyannis' vigilance up in those goat-rocks, near a good spring with a whole flock to eat – would be as secure as eagles. Everyone had taken to Billy at once, and he to them. He had abandoned his battledress with shoulder tapes for breeches and a black shirt and the cover name of Dimitri.

Meanwhile another runner – they usually carried their messages in their boots or their turbans – had brought Micky Akoumianakis hot foot from Herakleion. He was about my age, intelligent and well educated – none of the rest of the party were great penmen – and the head of our information network in Herakleion. By great luck, he lived next door to the Villa Ariadne at Knossos,¹⁶ just outside Herakleion; the large house, that is, built by Sir Arthur Evans for the excavation and restoration of the great Minoan site,. Micky's father, now dead, had been Sir Arthur's overseer and henchman for many years. The villa was now the abode of General Kreipe.

My dress was readjusted by the family to look like a countryman's visiting the big city: bleached moustache and eyebrows were darkened with burnt cork. (During the year ended sometimes runs, striping one's face like a zebra's. There are many Cretans fairer than me, but Germans looked at them askance and often asked for their papers, thinking they might be British, New Zealand or Australian stragglers disguised. My documents were made out to Mihali Phrangidakis, 27, cultivator, of Nevs. Amari.) We said goodbye and set off, boarding the ramshackle bus from Kastelli; there were a few country people taking vegetables and poultry to market in Herakleion. The conductor was a friend. But my Greek though fast and adequate, was capable of terrible give-away blunders, so I feigned sleep. The only other

¹⁶ Knossos C 1728

vehicles were German trucks, cars and motorcycles. We were stopped at one of the many road-blocks approaching Herakleion and two Feldpolizei corporals asked for our papers. About dusk, we were safe in Mihali's house in Knossos, peering out of the window with his sister.

The fence began a few yards away, and there, in its decorative jungle of trees and shrubs, with the German flag flying from the roof, stood the Villa. Formidable barbed wire surrounded it. (I had been inside it once, during the Battle, when it was an improvised hospital full of Allied – and German – wounded and dying). We could see the striped barrier across the drive and the sentry boxes, where the steel-helmeted guard was being changed. Enemy traffic rumbled past, to Herakleion, three miles away. Due south rose the sharp crag of Mt Yukta; to west and south soared the tremendous snow-capped massif of Mount Ida, the birthplace of Zeus. North, beyond the dust of the city, lay the Aegean Sea and the small island of Dia. East of the road, on the flank of a chalk white valley dotted with vines, the bulbous blood-red pillars descended, the great staircase of the Palace and giant hewn ashlar, slotted for double-axes, of King Minos.

* * *

after his first astonishment at the project, Micky was alive with excitement. At discreet intervals we explored all possibilities of ingress to the Villa in case we were reduced to burgling it, seizing the General, and whisking him away. It might have been possible; Micky had known the inside of the house since childhood. But the triple barriers of wire, one of which was said to be electrified, the size of the guard and the frequency of patrols offered too many changes for mishap. Besides, to avoid all excuse or pretext for reprisals on the Cretans, I was determined the

operation should be performed without bloodshed. The only thing was to waylay the General on the way home from his Div. H.Q. at Ano Archanes,¹⁷ five miles away, and, to gain time, plant his beflagged car as a false scent. Micky summoned Elias Athanassakis, a very bright and enterprising young student working in our town organisation, and we reconnoitred the route together. There was only one good place for an ambush: the point where the steeply banked minor road from the Archanes joined the main road from the south to Herakleion at an angle which obliged cars to slow down nearly to walking pace. Clearly, owing to the heavy traffic on the main road, the deed would have to be done after dark – and very fast – on one of the evenings when, as Elias learnt, the General stayed late at the Officer's Mess in Archanes before driving home to dinner. This meant finding a hideout for us to lie up in near the road junction. Micky found it: the little vineyard cottage of Pavlo Zographistos outside Skalani, only twenty minutes' walk from Ambush Point – "Point A". when we asked him, he agreed at once to hide us.

The plan was beginning to take shape: Billy and I would stop the car, dressed up as Feldpolizei corporals. Sometimes, but seldom, there was a motor cycle escort: sometimes, other cars would accompany him. All this, assuming the ambush was a success, would land us with an unwieldy mob of prisoners, unless the attack could be launched or scrubbed in accordance with last-minute information. There was also the danger of stopping the wrong car. To avoid these hazards, Elias undertook to learn all the details by heart – silhouette, black-out slits, etc. – until the flags could clinch the matter at close quarters; and better still, he planned to lay a wire from a point outside Archanes to the bank overlooking Point A – along which an observer – himself – could signal with a buzzer the moment the General got into his car. A

¹⁷ ano Archanes C 1535

colleague on the bank would then flash the information to us by torch, and we, and the rest of the party who would be hiding on either side of the road, would go into action the instant the car appeared. The risk from passing traffic still remained, possibly of trucks full of troops. Here we would have to trust to improvisation, luck, speed and darkness, and, if the worst happened, diversion by a party of guerrillas – un-lethal bursts of fire, flares all over the place, shoutings, mule carts and logs suddenly blocking the road to create confusion and cover our getaway with our prize. Still with reprisals in mind, we would only shoot to hurt as a last resort. It was vital for us to get into the mountains and among friends, away from the enemy-infested plain, and in the right direction for escape by sea, at high speed.

Micky and Elias were sorry to hear we couldn't evacuate our prisoners by air, in Skorzeny style: The Germans had put all the bit mountain plateaux out of action for long-range aircraft by forcing labour-gangs to litter them with cairns of stones; and the smaller ones, even had they been suitable for small planes, were far beyond their fuel range from the airfields of Italy or the Middle East. But they cheered up when I told them that the BBC had promised to broadcast, and the RAF to scatter leaflets all over Crete announcing our departure with the general, the moment we were safe in the mountains. This would call off some of the heat, and confusing phenomena – flares, fires, unexplained musketry in the opposite direction to our flight, cut telephone wires, whispering campaigns and contradictory rumours planted within informers' earshot – could further perplex the hue and cry. Should our distance from communications delay action by the BBC and the RAF, it would be all-important, in order to exonerate the Cretan population, somehow to convince the enemy that their Commander's disappearance was due to capture, not assassination, and by a force under British command.

Many gaps and problems remained. Sending letters back to our base to cheer up Billy and the rest of the party, I spent the next days inside Herakleion with Micky and Elias and our other old helpers, shifting from one friendly house to another, exploring the streets and entrances and exits of the great walled town between twilight and curfew. Vaguely, as yet, an unorthodox method of getaway was beginning to form ...

Between whiles, there were secret meetings, not directly connected with the operation, with the group who ran the Resistance and the information network in the city – doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, headmasters, reserve officers, artisans, functionaries and students of either sex, shopkeepers and the clergy, including the Metropolitan Eugenius himself – and visits to other cellars, reached through hidden doors and secret passages, where a devoted team reduplicated the BBC news¹⁸ for hand to hand distribution. After months in the mountains, there was something bracing about these descents into the lions' den: the swastika flags everywhere, German conversation in one's ears and the constant rubbing shoulders with enemy soldiers in the streets. The outside of Gestapo HP, particularly, which had meant the doom of many friends, held a baleful fascination.

Back at Knossos, Micky and I were talking to some friends of his in a 'safe' house when three German sergeants lurched in slightly tipsy from celebrating Easter. Wine was produced; Micky explained away the English cigarettes (brought in by Billy) which he had offered them by mistake, as black market loot from the battle in Dodecanese. A deluge of wine covered up this contretemps, followed by attempts, bearishly mimicked by our guests, to teach them to dance a Cretan peutozali in which we all joined.

¹⁸ Ownership of an ordinary wireless set was punished by death.

Before rejoining the others in the mountains, we were standing with a shepherd and his flock having last look at Point A when a large car came slowly round the corner. There were triangular flags on either mudguard, one tin one striped red white and black, the other field grey, framed in nickel and embroidered with the Wehrmacht eagle in gold wire. Inside, next to the chauffeur, unmistakable from the gold on his hat, the red tabs with the gold oak leaves, the many decorations and the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross round his neck on a riband – sat the General himself: a broad pale face with a jutting chin and blue eyes. I waved. Looking rather surprised at so un-accustomed a gesture from a wayside shepherd, the general gravely raised a gloved hand in acknowledgement and our eyes crossed. It was an odd moment, and, we thought as we watched the car disappearing, a good omen.

* * *

I got back to the hideout at last on April 16th, which was Orthodox Easter Sunday, the greatest feast of the Greek year. I had sent Billy warning before leaving, (on foot this time), that our Herakleion agents had heard that the Germans suspected that a large body of parachutists had been dropped in the Lasithi mountains; a rumour due, no doubt, to the noise of the plane night after night; so it was best to keep a look out. But really it was all to the good: if they made a sweep, the enemy would find nothing; the Katharo was only 12 miles from our eyrie as the crow flies; but, in mountains like these, the distance could be multiplied many times; also, when our operation happened, there was a chance the enemy might think it was the work of this ghost commando.

Everyone was in high spirits; all the arrangements had worked perfectly. The party had been eccentrically increased by the arrival, escorted by a shepherd, of two

Russian deserters who had been shanghaied into the German ancillary forces: a Ukranian and a Caucasian, rather amusing scarecrows with whom Billy, whose other was a White Russian, was able to converse. They could be incorporated into the guerrilla covering-and-diversionary force. For this, Bourdzalis's band, which was lying up only 24 hours' march away, was the obvious one. I sent Antoni – a great friend of the old giant and a fellow refugee from Asia Minor – to bring him and fifteen men as fast as possible. Their arrival would be the signal for our departure for the target area.

Meanwhile, there was a paschal lamb roasting whole and a demijohn of wine for us all to celebrate our reunion and Orthodox Easter with a feast and singing and dancing. Scores of hard-boiled eggs dyed red were clashed together like conkers with cries of "Christ is risen!" and "he is risen indeed." Those left over were propped up in a row and shot down for pistol practice. When all of them were smashed, after every toast, pistol magazine were joyfully emptied into the air in honour of the Resurrection. Through all the canyons sent the echoes ricocheting into the distance, the noise was quite safe in this dizzy wilderness. Anyway, Cretans are always blazing away. Siphoyanni had brought several neighbouring shepherds, and the dancing, to our songs underlined with clapping, was nimble, fast and elaborate. I was sorry nobody had a Lyra – the light 3 stringed Cretan viol, carved from beech and played on the knee with a semicircular bow – as George was an expert player.

Next day was given over to planning with Billy and Micky and Elias, who had both come with me for the purpose. (Apart from them, only Manoli and George, utterly discreet, had been told of our plan and sworn in; new initiates were only sworn in when it was necessary for each of us to know the parts we had to play. On each in

turn the news had the same electric effect.) We decided that the General's car should not only be used as a false scent, but a getaway device as well; it should whisk the general and some of his captors from the scene at high speed. Where? It would be tempting to drive due south across the Messara plain and embark at Soutsouro, or some other combe on the south coast. This obvious scheme had several drawbacks. Firstly, it would be obvious to the Germans too; they knew we used those waters; and the way back to the main party for our only driver, - Billy - after planting the car far enough away, would be too long and dangerous. Secondly, we would be on the run, and thus off the air to Cairo, for some time. Thirdly, should the enemy pick up our scent, those excellent roads could transport the large garrisons of the plain to the empty forbidden zone of low hills along the coast in a couple of hours; if necessary, they could fill the region with all the Germans in the Fortress of Crete. A cordon along the waterline and another inland could prevent any craft putting in, and, by intercepting our runners, cut us off from our distant wireless links with Cairo. Finally, with our backs to the sea in that region of sparse cover, they could run us to ground. Far better to let the car, like a magic carpet, deposit us close to high mountains, with friendly shepherds for guides and caves and ravines to hide in till the first furore should die down. Runners could move fast and freely there; we could pick up our broken links with Cairo, and, via S.O.E., with the BBC, the RAF and the Navy, and arrange an evacuation further west. Above all, even with a slow-moving General on our hands, we could move quicker than enemy troops. We would find a mule for him and, if the country grew too steep, put together a rough-and-ready palanquin; and there was always pick-a-back ... A glance at the map at once indicate the vast bulk of Mt. Ida, sprawling across a quarter of the island and climbing to over 8,000 feet; a familiar refuge to most of us, but, to the enemy, a

daunting and perilous labyrinth haunted by guerrilla bands and outlaws. Not even a garrison of 50,000 men could completely cordon that colossal massif; there would be gaps ...

A single road ran westwards along the north coast, to Retimo¹⁹ and Canea²⁰. South of this, the foothills climbed abruptly to the famous guerrilla village of Anoyeia²¹, above which the welcoming chaos soared. North of the road and a couple of miles further west, a footpath ran four miles down the heliana²² ravine to the sea. The point of junction would be the perfect place to leave the car. The place sprang to mind as, last year, I had waited three days there for Mike Stockbridge and John Stanley to land by submarine. We could indicate to the enemy that we had left with the general by similar means, and scatter the path with corroborative detail.

There was only one drawback to this – unless it was an advantage: the only road from Point A to this desirable region ran clean through the heart of Herakleion. The town had one way and one way out; there was a huge enemy garrison and numerous road blocks and checkpoints; Anoyeia was twenty miles the wrong side of the city. There was no way round.²³ But, we reasoned, after dark in the blackout, the occupants a=of the car would be dim figures; all that the people in the street could see, and then sentries and the patrols and the parties at the check-posts,

¹⁹ Retimo see map

²⁰ Canea see map

²¹ Anoyeia Sheet G 19. B 8932

²² Heliana Sheet G 19. B 8932

²³ There was a branch road, 8 miles west of Herakleion, which turned left and ran through Tilisso to Anoyeia, (and nowhere else), ending a mile short of the village. It was out of the question to take this; Anoyeia would have been hopelessly and glaringly compromised. Also, after the General and his escort had taken to the hills, the way back to the road fork and along the main road to the submarine path would be an extra twenty miles, too far for a non-driver (me). Something was sure to go wrong and wreck the whole scheme. Unfortunately I was the only one who knew the part to the submarine point; but I hoped I could get the car along a shorter distance without mishap.

would be the flats and two figures in German uniform in the front; and a shout of "Put that light out!" would stop them from peering closer. Point A was only four miles from the town; with any luck we would be through it and away within half an hour of the capture; even less. The car would be observed driving normally in the streets, then leaving Herakleion westwards. Why not? By the time his staff began to grow uneasy, or the car was discovered – when, I hoped, the story of our submarine flight would come into play – we would have a long start up the side of Mount Ida.

Micky and Elias and I had discussed these possibilities in Herakleion; Billy's thoughts, from poring over the map, had been heading in a similar direction; Manoli and George, when they were called in, leaped at the idea. Now that the scheme was decided, it seemed the only possible one. The results of a mishap in the town were too disastrous to contemplate; but a plunge straight into the enemy stronghold with their captured commander would be the last idea to occur to them. We were excited and hilarious at the prospect and Micky and Elias sped back to Herakleion.

* * *

Next day our wait was relieved by watching two squadrons of RAF bombers attacking Kastelli aerodrome. There was a lot of flak, but several large blazes and columns of smoke indicated heavy damage. Each explosion evoked delirious cheers and all the planes headed back for Africa intact. Next morning, after marching a day and a night non-stop, Bourdzalis arrived with his men. They were festooned with bandoliers and bristling with daggers "like lobsters", as they say, but some of their arms were poor. (We could help here). A few had been mustered in a hurry to complete the old giant's nucleus. The oldest were white haired and heavily whiskered, the youngest had scarcely begun shaving. They were all in the hills out

of pure patriotism quite free of politics, and they were bent on striking a blow, whatever it might be. They refused the idea of a day's rest. We had a meal under the leaves. Our own party, by slipping on battledress tops above their breeches and boots, and replacing their turbans with berets, assumed a semblance of uniform; each, beside his Cretan haversack, was slung with several Marlin guns. Billy and I made a similar change. We waited for dusk to conceal our little column, now twenty-five strong, and moved off down the glen. I wanted to get them all to Skalani in a single giant stride, but it was too far over those rocks in the pitch dark. One or two of the elder guerrillas fell out, rather understandably. We just managed to reach Kharasso²⁴ when the sky was growing pale; we hid all day in the lofts and cellars of two friendly houses, and set off again, wined and raven-fed, at nightfall; striking due west, over flatter and thus more dangerous country. We waded through streams noisy with frogs and passed through villages where the device of shouting in German again came to our help. Soon after midnight with the guerrillas, the Russians and some of our party were safely hidden in a cave with door containing an old wine-press. A little further down the dried-up river bed, Billy, Manoli, George and were soon under Pavlo's roof, only five miles from Herakleion and less than a mile from Point A.

* * *

Stealth was vital so close to a large enemy concentration: not a move in the open during daylight. Although no other houses were near, the vineyards were overlooked by footpaths on all sides.

Micky and Elias brought the news that the general habitually sat next to the driver;

²⁴ Kharasso C 2730

he often returned after dark; other officers sometimes sat in the back; his car was not always alone. Elias had elaborated – or simplified – the alarm system: by keeping a look out from a height in Archanes, he could watch the general as he left his HQ, or the Mess, for his car; then jumping on his bike, he could pedal like mad to a point where his end of the wire was concealed and send the information by buzzer along a much shorter length of line; a great improvement.

Micky produced German uniforms for Billy and me; they were their summer field grey; he had got some campaign ribbons and badges, lance corporals' stripes and caps; all quite convincing enough for the short time they would be seen. He even had a traffic policeman's stick with a red and white tin disc. We tried them on with our own Colt automatics on the webbing belts with their gott mit uns buckles; we wore commando daggers as side-arms. I had just shaved off my moustache and Micky was photographing us when Pavlo gave the alarm: four Germans approaching the house. We dashed upstairs and waited, listening, with drawn pistols, as they lounged in and talked to Pavlo and his sister Anna. They were only on the scrounge for chickens and eggs; but when they had gone, we all had a stiff drink.

The best way of convincing the enemy that the operation was an outside job under British command seemed to be to leave a letter prominently pinned up in the abandoned car. I accordingly wrote out the following, heading: To the German Authorities in Crete, April 23, 1944:-

"Gentlemen,

Your Divisional Commander, General Kreipe, was captured a short time ago by a BRITISH Raiding Force under our command. By the time you read this both he and

we will be on our way to Cairo.

We would like to point out most emphatically that this operation has been carried out without the help of CRETANS or CRETAN partisans and the only guides used were serving soldiers of HIS HELLENIC MAJESTY'S FORCES in the Middle East, who came with us.

Your General is an honourable prisoner of war and will be treated with all the consideration owing to his rank. Any reprisals against the local population will thus be wholly unwarranted and unjust.

Auf baldiges wiedersehen!

P. M. Leigh Fermor

Maj., O.C. Commando

C. W. Stanley Moss

Capt. 2/i.c.

P.S. We are very sorry to have to leave this beautiful motor car behind.

We put wax seals from our rings after the names, for fun, and because such emblems were unlikely to be worn by partisans; the more we piled it on, the more foreign it seemed, the better. I thought the message and the tone would be more convincing in English than in my German which is fluent but as full of faults as an equally imperfect Greek German-speaker's might be. The important looking envelope, fitted with a safety pin, was addressed in the three languages in bold characters and tucked in the side pocket of my new outfit.

There were gaps that needed filling in the ambush party. Two were filled at once, by

Niko Komis (like Grigori, from Thrapsano) and Mitzo Tzatzas of Episkopi, both of them steady, quiet mountain men who had been our guides for the last two days. The third, Stratis Saviolakis, was a uniformed policeman – invaluable in itself – from Annapolis in Sphakia. (All proved admirable.) About the fourth, Yanni, enrolled at the last moment as a guide for the Anoyeia area, little was known, but he seemed all right. We slept at last, hoping to act next day. Everything was ready.

* * *

But next day the General returned to Knossos early in the afternoon, so it was off for another twenty four hours. Anticlimax and slight deflation. Much worse, Stratis, returning from his soi-disant policeman's rounds, told us that a few of the guerrillas, suffering understandable claustrophobia in their wine press, had begun to stray into the open now and their; their presence had become widely known. There was nowhere else to hide them; so, alas, I would have to let them go; the risk was too great. I had meant to brief them on the impending action, and their dispositions and roles, at the last moment. Now, slinking to the wine press after dark, I told them that plans had been changed, thanked them for all their help and willingness, and gave them all our surplus Marlin guns. Bourdzalis and I exchanged hugs and then set off at once. He was a fine old man.²⁵

I was sorry to see them go; this sudden drop in manpower reduced our scope; we were more dependent on good luck. But our chances of going astray through over-elaboration were lessened too; our party had gained in lightness and flexibility.

Micky told me he had run across Antoni Zoïdakis in Herakleion. This was splendid news. Antoni, who was from the Amari, the other side of Mt. Ida, had been involved

²⁵ I never saw him again. He was killed in tragic circumstances later that year.

in our work for years, hiding and helping to evacuate stragglers and assisting us in a hundred ways. I sent word begging him to join us, and, in the small hours where was that familiar figure sitting on my bed in his old policeman's jacket, his lean, shrewd and cheerful face lit up by an oil dip as we talked and smoked till dawn.

* * *

Pavlo and his sister were getting anxious about our presence in their house; not without reason. We all removed to the shelter of a clump of young plane trees in a deep dried up river bed a little way off, where he had to lie without moving all day. German sweeps of the region were rumoured. Worse still, Pavlo brought me a letter from the local E.A.M. leaver, mysteriously addressed to be by name - 'Mihali', that is. It held a strong hint that he knew what we were there for, (perhaps it was guess based on the closeness of the German H.Q.) followed by a threat of betraying us "to the authorities", to remove the danger of our presence from the area. I sent back a quieting and ambiguous answer, hoping the guerrillas' departure would lend colour to the words; hoping, above all, that action that night would get us out of the area. The odds against us were mounting up. Anxiety, though it left the old hands untouched, hung in the air. I was worried about Yanni the guide. It needed much outward cheerfulness and optimism to keep spirits from flagging. We passed the time talking and reading out loud. The afternoon wore on, and when Elias and Strati, who were watching the road, sent word that the General had not left the villa all day, things began to look black. The sun set after an interminable day of immobility; but now, at least, we could stand up and move about. I drew an outline of the car in the dust with a stick and we rehearsed the ambush by starlight until we all had our roles and our timing pat; then we lay about singing quietly till we fell asleep.

Anna, every more anxious than before, brought us all a basket of food at daybreak, and more disquieting rumours. We had a growing feeling of isolation. Between the acting of a dreadful thing and the first motion, all the interim is like a phantasma or a hideous dream. The dream became more hideous still when Yanni the guide was smitten by a seizure, brought on, perhaps, by the tension of waiting: frothing lips, meaningless articulation, moaning and strange contortions followed by semi-catalepsy, prone among the myrtle bushes. We had to leave him there – we never saw him again²⁶ - as rain drove us to a still remoter cache. Dodging singly in Indian file from cover to cover, we followed Pavlo up hill where we all huddled together in a damp and shallow cave, passing a bottle of tzikoudia from hand to hand. We were just in time; the sudden drizzle filled the landscape with snail gatherers. It was a bleak scene and the operation seemed to be receding further and further into improbability.

Yet, when word came from the road that the General had left for his H.Q. at the usual time, we suddenly realised that tonight was the night. Total calm descended on us all. It was though everything, now, were out of our hands. Le vin est tiré, il faut le boire: we all knew what we had to do.

As soon as twilight blurred the scene, Billy and I changed into our German uniform, the others slung guns and we followed Pavlo and Strati downhill and across the vineyards, making loud German noises whenever we passed a shadowy homing vine-tender. It was dark when we reached Point A. We took up our positions in the ditches a yard or two north of the join in the roads. Billy and I settled on the east side, furthest away, then Manoli, Grigori and Antoni Papaleonidas; George, Antoni

²⁶ He recovered and came to no harm.

Zoïdakis and Niko, in that order, on the west side. Further on, high on the bank, Mitzo was posted by the buzzer. Strati joined him. Once in place, we exchanged friendly whistles. Calm silence reigned. Out of sight, at the other end of the wire, we knew, Micky was waiting; and, at his vantage point at Archanes, Elias would be leaning nonchalantly on his bike. It was 8 p.m.

DIAGRAM

During the hour and a half of our vigil a few German cars and trucks drove past at intervals, and a motor bicycle and side car, very close to us, all coming from the south and heading for Herakleion, nothing from the minor Archanes side road. Nice and quiet; but time seemed to pass with exasperating slowness. It was getting late; had there been a mistake somewhere? ... Anxiety began to set in. On the tick of 9.30, Mitso's torch flashed clearly three times. "General's car." The signal meant. "Unescorted. Action." Manoli gave me a squeeze on the elbow.

The two corporals stood in the middle of the road facing the junction. Billy right and I left. In a new moments a car was slowly turning the corner. Billy waved his disc and I moved my red torch to and fro and shouted "Halt!" the car came to a stand-still and we stepped right and left out of the beams of the headlights, which, in spite of being partly blacked out, were very bright, and walked slowly, each to his appointed door. The two flags were there; but perhaps only the driver was inside ... Through the open window I could discern the gold braid and the Knight's Cross and a white face between. I saluted and said "Papier, bitte schön." The General, with an officer-to-man smile, reached for his breast pocket, and I opened the door with a jerk – (this was the cue for the rest of the party to break cover) – and the inside of the car was flooded with light. I then shouted "Hände hoch!" and with one hand thrust my

automatic against the general's chest – there was a gasp of surprise – flinging the other round his body, and pulling him out of the car. I felt a vigorous blow from his fist and a moment later he was lashing out in the arms of Manoli, and, as there were no passengers, of Antoni P. and Grigori as well. After a brief struggle, and a storm of protest and imprecation in German, the General was securely bound, Manoli's manacles were on his wrists and he was being hoisted bodily into the back. Manoli and George leapt in on either side; and Strati followed them. The doors were slammed shut and gun barrels were sticking out of the windows. I picked up the General's hat which had come off in the struggle, jumped into the general's empty seat, slammed the door and put his hat on. Billy was already calmly at the wheel, door shut and engine running.

Half a second after I had opened the right hand door, Billy had wrenched open the left. The driver, alarmed at the sudden chaos, reached for the Luger on his belt. Billy struck his hand over the head with a life preserver, George pulled him out of the car and Billy jumped in, glanced at the petrol gauge, checked the handbrake and found the engine still turned on. George and Antoni Z. carried the driver, temporarily knocked out and bleeding, to the cover of the ditch. (When the two Antonis, Crigopri and Niko set off with him – we were to meet on Mt Ida in two days – he was able to walk, but groggily). Micky and Mitzo had rushed from their stations and suddenly, except for Elias, the whole party was there, leaning into the car or already inside it. Micky was craning through a window, shaking his fist and passionately shouting "Long live freedom! Long live Greece! Long live England!" and, menacingly, at the General, "Down with Germany!" I begged him to stop, moved by our captive's look of alarm; there was already a daunting commando dagger at his throat. A delirious access of cheers, hugs, slaps on the back, shouts and laughter held us all in its grip

for a few seconds. I suddenly noticed the inside light was still on: our very odd group was lit up like a magic lantern; so, as there was no visible switch, I hit it with my pistol-butt; reassuring darkness hid us once more. Billy released the brake and we drove off, exchanging farewells with the two parties remaining on foot. (When the others had left, Micky and Elias would hide their gear, clear up any give-away clues, dust over all signs of strife, then head for Herakleion, and, when the news broke, set helpful rumours flying.) All these doings, which need time to record, had only taken, from the time we signalled to the car, seventy seconds. Everyone had been perfect.

Less than a minute later, from the opposite direction, a convoy was bearing down on us; two trucks full of soldiers sitting with their rifles between their knees, some in steel helmets, some in field caps, rumbled past. Our voices sank to a sober whisper; we had only been just in time. (Where were they heading for, I wondered later. I hoped it was to smoke out that phantom raiding force in the Lasithi mountains.) The General was still dazed. "Where is my hat?" he kept asking; I had to tell him where. In a few minutes we were driving through Knossos and as we approached the Villa Ariadne, the two sentries presented arms, a third, warned by a fourth, raised the striped barrier. They must have been surprised when we drove on; the sentries stamped back to the stand-at-ease. I knelt on the seat, leant over the back and said the words I had been rehearsing as slowly and earnestly as I could: "Herr General, I am a British major. Beside me is a British captain. The men beside you are Greek patriots. They are good men. I am in command of this unit and you are an honourable prisoner of war. We are taking you away from Crete to Egypt. For you the war is over. I am sorry we had to be so rough. Do everything I say and all will be well." This little speech had a strong effect. "Sind sie wirklich ein Britischer Major?"

"Ja, wirklich, Herr General. Sie haben gar nichts zu fürchten." He again bewailed the loss of his hat and I promised to return it "Danke, danke, Herr Major." He was still shaken, but improving. At this point Billy said: "Check point ahead." I sat down again. Two men – as it might have been us – were waving a red torch in the middle of the road, there was a cry of "Halt!" Billy slowed down slightly. When they saw the flags the two men jumped aside, stood to attention and saluted. I returned it, and Billy accelerated again, murmuring "this is marvellous". "Herr Major," came the voice from behind, "where are you taking me?" "To Cairo." "No, but now?" "To Herakleion." There was a pause, then, several keys higher in complete incredulity "TO HERAKLEION?" "Yes. You must understand that we must keep you out of sight. We will make you as comfortable as we can later on." By this time houses were becoming denser beside the road and pedestrians and animals frequent, and the glow of booths, taverns and cafés; and soon another red light, a narrowing of the road and a cry of "Halt!" then another. We passed them in the same style as the first, and those that followed. At Fortetza, there was a forbidding wooden barrier as well. Again, the flags sent it sailing respectfully into the air. Soon we were inside the great Venetian city wall; the main street swallowed us up. The Marlin guns, lowered now, were held ready behind the doors. The General had sunk below window level in a vice-like grip. George's dagger was still threateningly aimed and when German voices grew loud beside the car, hands were clamped over his mouth. We were held up by a number of manoeuvring and reversing trucks, and soon by a cheerful swarm of soldiers pouring out of the garrison cinema. (It was Saturday night). Billy calmly and methodically hooted his way through this mob; a swerving cyclist nearly fell off avoiding us. Creeping along, collecting many salutes as the soldiers cleared out of the way. We reached the turn by the Morosini fountain and headed left for the

Canea Gate. It was the only way out of the town.

If anything went wrong on the way through, the plan was to drive fast for the Canea Gate, and, if the barrier there was down, charge it and break through, and then, if pursued, fire long bursts out of the back window and the sides and hurl the Mills grenades with short fuses weighted down all our pockets. (We had plenty of spare magazines for our submachine guns and automatics.) Outside the Gate, we stood a chance of getting away. This powerful brand-new Opel must have been the fastest car in the island and Billy was a skilful and imaginative driver. With a long start we could make for the mountains at full speed, get out well before troops from Retimo, warned by telephone, could head us off from the west, send the car spinning down a precipice, and, after concealing the tracks, strike uphill. But, should there be determination en masse to stop us at the Canea Gate we would slew round fast and into the lanes – I had a good idea where, thanks to those wanderings with Micky after dark – leave the General tied and blindfold, - ("Remember, General, we have spared your life! No reprisals!") - block the way with the car and make a sash for it. There was a maze of alleyways, walls one could jump, drainpipes to climb, skylights, flat roofs leading from one to another, cellars and drains and culverts – as Manoli and I had discovered during our raid on the harbour – of which the Germans knew nothing. If cornered, we had plenty of grenades and spare ammunition and iron rations. Perhaps, by lying up, and with a bit of luck, there would have been a chance. The town was dotted with friends' houses and, after all, except for a handful of spies and traitors, the whole city was on our side.

There was a clear run down the narrow main street to the Canea Gate. But as we approached the great barbican, which the Germans had tightened into a bottleneck

with cement anti-tank blocks, there were not only the normal sentries and guards, but a large number of other soldiers in the gateway as well. The one wielding the red torch failed to budge; it looked as though they were going to stop us. Tension in the car rose several degrees. Billy slowed down – we had arranged for this eventuality – cocked his automatic and put it in his lap; mine was already handy; behind, we heard the bolts on the three Marlin guns click back. When we were nearly on top of them and one of the guard was approaching, I put down the window and shouted "Generals Wagen!"

The words "Generals Wagen!" passed peremptorily from mouth to mouth; the torch was lowered just in time. Billy stepped on the accelerator, the soldiers fell back and saluted, the sentries jumped to the present. All this was acknowledged with a gruff goodnight and we drove through. We sailed through the check points (the other inmates of the car counted twenty-two from start to finish) with great smoothness. We passed John Pendlebury's grave on the left of the road. At last the check points and the long ragged straggle of suburb, were all behind us and we were roaring up the road to Retimo with the headlights striking nothing but rocks and olive groves. Mr Ida soared on our left and sea, just discernable shone peacefully below. A mood of riotous jubilation broke out in the car; once more we were all talking, laughing, gesticulating and finally singing at the tops of our voices, and offering each other cigarettes, including the general. They made him as comfortable as they could. I handed his hat back and asked him if he would give his parole not to attempt to escape; to my relief he gave it. I then formally introduced Billy. He had no German and the General no English, so civilities were exchanged in French, not very expert on either side. I then presented Manoli, George and Strati by their Christian names and for a moment the four figures behind all seemed to be formally bowing to each

other. A bit later the general leant forward and said "Sagen Sie einmal, Herr Major, was fur ein Zweck hat dieser Husarenstuck?" ("Tell me, Major, what is the object of this hussar-stunt?") A very awkward question. (We were passing the solitary khan of Yeni Gave, near our first destination; only 20 miles from Herakleion, but, thanks to the bad road, it was already past 11 p.m.) I told the General I would explain it all tomorrow.

We now had no local guide but Strati had served in the area and Manoli and I knew it a bit. We drew up at the bottom of a goat-track which, after a few hours' climb, would end at Anoyeia. We all got out and Manoli unlocked the handcuffs. The general was perturbed when he saw that I was going on with George. ("you are going to leave me alone with these... people?") I told him the Hauptmann would be in command and that he was under Manoli's special care. This sounded ambiguous, but there was something in Manoli's bearing that inspired trust. The party were to lie up outside Anoyeia and wait for us; Manoli and Strati knew who to contact for food and runners, for messages to our nearest wireless stations. I saluted, the General did the same; (I was keen on setting this single note of punctilio in our rather bohemian unit). Billy and the General set off uphill, Strati leading, Manoli in the rear with his gun in the crook of his arm.

There was a certain amount of laughter from the slope when at last, after several stalls, the car wobbled off down the road in bottom; I just managed to get the think along the two miles which led to the beginning of the track that ran down past the hamlet of Heliana to the submarine bay and the tiny island of Peristeri²⁷. We left the car conspicuously well out in the road. The floor had been purposely covered with

²⁷ Peristeri (Sheet G.19) B 8546

fag-ends of Player's cigarettes; these clues were reinforced by a usurped Raiding Forces beret ("who dares, wins") and an Agatha Christie paperback. We kicked up the pathway, running down it to plant a round Player's tin, and, further on, a Cadbury's milk chocolate wrapper. (IF only we had had a sailor's cap ...) The letter to the German authorities was prominently pinned to the front seat. Then – we couldn't resist it – we broke off the flags which has served us so well. Their removal tore up the mudguard considerably; all to the good. The car was unmistakable anyway. George waved the, saying "Captured standards!" There was no path. It was only five or six miles to Anoyeia for a crow, but three times as far for us; all ravines, cliffs, boulders, undergrowth and thorns. Luckily there was a new moon. The only people we saw all night were two boys hunting for eels in a brook with pine torches. Hailed from afar they put us on the right track. Every hour or so we lay down for a smoke. The night was full of crickets and frogs and nightingales. The snow on Mount Ida glimmered in the sky, and neither of us could quite believe, in this peaceful and empty region, that the night's doings had really happened. The approach of dawn was announced by the tinkling goat bells of a score of folds waking up in the surrounding foothills and just above us we could see the white houses of Anoyeia spreading like a fortress along a tall blade of rock.

CAPTURING A GENERAL – PART 2

Anoyeia, the largest village in Crete, was too remote and isolated for a permanent garrison. High on the northern slope of Mount Ida, it is the key foothold for crossing the great mass. Famous for its independent spirit, its idiosyncrasy of dress and accent, and its tremendous local pride, it had always been a great hideout of ours.

The year before Mike Stockbridge and I had baptised the daughter of a brace and dashing man and local leader Stephanoyianni Dramduntanis. Our God brother had been killed – shot down while trying to make a break for it by jumping over a wall with his hands tied after a German encirclement of the village – but I knew we could find all the backing we needed from other god-relations and friends, and to spare.

There was no hint of it as we climbed those windy and dawn-lit cobbles. I was still wearing German uniform. For the first time I realised how an isolated German soldier in a Cretan mountain village was treated. All talk and laughter died at the washing troughs, women turned their backs and thumped their laundry with noisy vehemence; cloaked shepherds, in answer to greeting, gazed past us in silence; then stood and watched us out of sight. An old crone spat on the ground. The white-whiskered and bristling elders with jutting beards shorn under the chin were all seated outside the coffee shop; baggy trousered, high-booted, turbaned men leaning on their gnarled sticks. (I knew most of them). They stopped talking for a moment, then loudly resumed pointedly shifting their stools to offer their backs or their elbows in postures of studied hostility. Doors and windows slammed along the lane. In a moment we could hear women's voices wailing into the hills: "The black cattle have strayed into the wheat!" and "our in-laws have come!" island-wide warnings of enemy arrival. We were glad to plunge into a side alley and the friendly shelter of

Father Mauch's house. But Father Chairetis, one of the celebrants of the baptism and a great friend was out. The kind old priestess retreating down the corridor in alarm, refused to recognise me; it is amazing what a strange uniform and the removal of a moustache (or of the beards that we all grew at one time or another) would do. "It's me, Pappadia, Mihali!" "What Mihali? I don't know any Mihali".

Deadlock. Alerted by a neighbour, the priest arrived, and at last, amid amazement and then laughter, all was well. The village were told we were harmless scroungers; later, that we had left. The give-away garments were peeled off. My god-brother George Dromountouis was soon there, and other friends and helpers arrived discreetly. A runner was found in a moment who would carry our news to Sandy – nearly a hundred miles away to the south-east now, in the mountains above Males and Lerapetra and another for Tom Bunbabin, of whom more later, the other side of mount Ida. Raki and meze appeared under the great arch of the house and sitting on the cross beam of her loom plucking a chicken in a cloud of feathers the priestess was all smiles and teasing now. (Nobody had heard of the capture yet. What was happening at Knossos, Archanes, Herakleion? Had the car with the letter been discovered?) How were the others getting on?

Thank heavens for Strati's police uniform. He soon appeared. The ascent had been laborious – the general's leg had received a bang during the struggle at the car – but safe. They were now sheltering in a gulley a mile or two away. He and Manoli had found the two eager and nimble shepherd boys from a nearby fold; enjoined to speed and secrecy by their fathers they sped south and east with messages from Billy to the same destination as mine; two strings to each bow. It was a wise measure against the stormy days that we foresaw). A basket of food and drink was stealthily despatched and I was to join them after dark with a guide and a mule for

the General.

In the late afternoon the noise of an aircraft flying low over the roofs brought us all to our feet. Running up the ladder to the flat roof, we saw a single-winged Fieseler-Storck reconnaissance plane circling above the roofs mouthing a steady snowfall of leaflets. It wheeled round several times, then whirred its way up and down the foothills, and vanished westwards still trailing its white cloud, then turned back towards Herakleion. Several leaflets landed on the roof. We took them downstairs. *"To all Cretans", the text went in smudged type still damp from the press. "Last night the German General Kreipe was abducted by bandits. He is now being concealed in the Cretan mountains and his whereabouts cannot be unknown to the inhabitants. If the General is not returned within three days all rebel villages in the Herakleion district will be razed to the ground and the severest reprisals exacted on the civilian population."*

The room was convulsed by incredulity, then excitement and finally by an access of triumphant hilarity. We could hear running feet in the streets, and shouts and laughter. "Just think, they've stolen their General!" "The horn-wearers won't dare to look us in the eyes!" "They came here for wool and we'll send them away shorn! How had it happened? Where? Who had done it?"

The priest, who was in the know, and god-brother George, Strati and I lowered our eyes innocently. I told them it was the work of an Anglo-Cretan commando; mostly Cretan; "And you'll see! Those three days will go by and there won't be any villages burnt or even shooting!" (I hoped this was true. I seemed to be the only one in the room undisturbed by the German threat and I prayed that urgency would lend wings to the messengers' heels and scatter our counter leaflets and the BBC News of the

General's departure from the island. Had the Germans found the car yet, and followed our paper chase of clues down to the submarine beach?) "Eh!" One old man said, "They'll burn them all down one day. And what then? My house was burnt down four times by the Turks; let the Germans burn it down for a fifth! And they killed scores of my family, scores of them, my child. Yet here I am! We're at war, and war has all these things. Yu can't have a wedding feast without meat. Fill up the glasses, Pappadia."

* * *

An hour after sunset our two parties now rejoined, we were winding up a steep and scarcely discernable goat path. On a mule in the centre, muffled against the cold, in Strati's green gendarme's greatcoat, with Manoli by his side, rode the General, or rather, Theophilos: the words "Kreipe" or "Strategos" had been forbidden even as far back as Kastamonitza. Billy told me they had had a German alarm during the day and had moved their hideout: Could it have been George and me? They'd even managed to get some sleep. The General, they all said, had been reasonable and co-operative; his most immediate worry which he repeated to me during our first rest for a smoke among the rocks – was the loss of his Knight's Cross. I said it had probably come off in the struggle; perhaps it had been picked up during the clean-up in which case I would see it was returned, and he thanked me. A propos of the leaflets, which I translated, he said: Well, you surely didn't expect my colleague Braüer to remain inactive when he learnt of – my rape?" (Mein Raub).

"No, but the Germans won't catch us" (I touched a handy ilex trunk here) "The Cretans are all on our side, you know." "Yes, I see they are. And, of course, you've always got me." "Yes, General, we've always got you." At another of these halts, he

said, after a sign and almost to himself "Post coitum triste". I was astonished at this comment, and had told him that only a few minutes before, and far out of earshot, Billy and I had decided that this phrase exactly suited the brief mood of deflation that had followed the capture. "It's all right for you, Major," the General said, "military glory, I suppose. But my whole career has come to bits. (Meine ganze Karriere ist kaput gegangen) The war is over for me, as you said. To think that my promotion from Generalmajor to Generalleutnant has just come through!" His heavy face, - had a massive jutting chin, grey straight hair cropped at the sides but long enough to fall over his forehead, and blue eyes – looked morose and sad. "I wish I'd never come to this accursed island." He laughed mirthlessly. "It was supposed to be a nice change after the Russian front ..." We both laughed. It was all rather extraordinary. He was a thickset, massively built man, but not fat. He was wearing, unfortunately for the journey ahead, the same lightweight field grey as we were, with the loose ski trousers of mountain troops, and, thank heavens, thick mountain boots. There were many ribbons over the left breast pocket, the Wehrmacht eagle over the right, the Iron Cross First Class – won at the battle of Verdun, low on the breast, but no shield on the left arm with the map of the Crimea like the rest of the Sebastopol division he had commanded till a few hours ago. The red tabs and the gold oak leaves blazed with newness. No eye-glass, no Mensur scars. He was the thirteenth son of a Lutheran pastor in Hanover and professional soldier to the backbone. He must have had, in surroundings where there was more scope for it, a solid and commanding presence.

In the small hours, we climbed off the track and curled up on the bracken floor of an old shepherd's hut; the fire in the middle lit up a conical stone igloo, cobwebbed and sooty and lined with tiers of cheeses like minor millstones and dripping bags of whey.

George and I, except for an hour interrupted by comings and goings on the divan running round the priest's living room hadn't slept since Skalani. We all rose again in the dark and continued our journey. As dawn broke, we were hailed from an overhanging ledge: it was one of Mihali Xylouris's lookouts, sitting with a gun across his knees. In a moment he was bounding down the hill, he threw his gun aside with a yell and flung his arms round me, Billy, Manoli, and George, only stopping just in time at the astounded General. It was one of my honorary god-brothers, Kosta Kephaloyannis, about 19, as lithe and wild looking, with bronze complexion huge green eyes and flashing teeth, as a young panther. Other lookouts had joined us from their spurs and soon we were in Xylouris's cave, surrounded by welcoming guerrillas. Mihali was the Kapetan, or leader of the Anoyeians; in succession to Stephanoyannis, and all the Anoyeian names – Dramoundanis, Kephaloyannis, Chairetis, Sbokos, Skoulas, Manouras, Bredzos, Kallergi and many others – were represented there, and all armed to the teeth. Mihali, with his clear eyes, snowy hair and moustache and white goatskin cape, was one of the best and most reliable leaders in Crete. There were formal introductions, and the cat, as far as the General's whereabouts and the identity of his captors went, was out of the bag.

Here, too taking refuge under Mihali's wing, were a cheerful trio of English colleagues. John Houseman, a young subaltern in the Bays, John Lewis, heavily booted and bearded, and, miraculously, Tom Dunbabin's wireless operator and his set. Informed, like all the other stations in the island, via Cairo, of our messages I'd sent to Sandy, Tom had sent his wireless station on to Mount Ida to help us. As tough by a miracle, our communications problem was suddenly solved. I joyfully wrote out a signal, breaking the news, urging the BBC and RAF action and asking for a boat in any cove the Navy found convenient south of Mount Ida. Fortunately a

time schedule to Cairo was just coming up; we could wait here, arrange things at our ease, cross Ida, slip down to the sea, and away. With any luck the BBC announcement and the RAF leaflets would have convinced the enemy that we'd left and reduce their opposition to a token show of force or even none at all.

It was a day of meetings: four figures were spotted through binoculars coming from the east: the two Anthonys, Grigor and Nko; but no driver. I was filled with misgiving. We all – the reconstituted abduction party that is - went aside among the boulders. "It was no good, Kyrie Mihali". Antoni Zoidakis explained, handing me a German paybook and some faded family snaps. He was very upset. Hans, the driver, had been still half stunned, poor devil. He could only walk at the rate of a tortoise. They'd almost carried him across the plain to the eastern foothills; then, during the afternoon, the hung was up: motorised infantry had detrucked in all the villages round the eastern flanks of the mountains and begun to advance in open order up the hillside. There was nothing for it, if they left the driver behind for the Germans to overtake, the whole plan, and the fiction of non-local participation, was exploded; the entire region would be laid waste with flame and massacre; if they stayed with him, they themselves would have been captured. There was only one thing for it; the enemy were too close to risk a gun's report: how then? Antoni leant forward urgently, put one hand on the branching ivory hilt of his silver scabbarded dagger and, with the side of the other hand, made a violent slash through the air. "By surprise. In one second." "he didn't know a thing." One of the other said. There was a deep crevasse handy and lots of stones; he would never be found. "It was a pity, he seemed quite a nice chap, even if he was a German."

It was shattering news; the silence of malefactors hung over us, broken at last by

Manoli. "Don't fret about it! We did our best. Just remember what those horn wearers have done to Crete, Greece, Europe, England!" Predictably, he repeated the proverb about the wedding feast. We all stood up. I told them they'd acted in the only possible way and it was true.

After an hour trying to get the coded message away, the operator discovered that some vital part of the set had gone dud; apart, moreover, irreplaceable in Crete; it was a lack only to be remedied by sea – like our own problem – or by parachute. Both these, of course, could only be arranged by wireless contact. The circle was hopeless.

At this point, our first runner to Tom arrived back with the news that nobody in the south knew where he was; he'd sent us his wireless, and vanished into thin air. There were two other stations in the province of Retimo far away in the north-west; but Tom was our only link with them. Anyway in the present commotion, they would almost certainly be on the move. The messenger also brought news of troop movements at Timbaki, Melabes, Spyli and Armenoi, columns of dust were heading towards Mount Ida, from the heavily garrisoned Bad Lands of the Messara; observation planes were scattering leaflets over the southern foothills. A runner from Anoyeia brought reports of identical enemy doings in the north: lorried infantry disgorging in all the foothills as far west as the great monastery of Arhadi, (a notorious haunt of all of ours, until it was blown), where the German troops had bombarded the pro-abbot Dionysios and his monks with the same question that they were asking everywhere: Where is General Kreips? But so far, and most untrue to form, there had been little violence, few arrests, no shooting. There was a glimmer of hope.

* * *

Otherwise, the scene was beginning to cloud. Mihali Xylouris and god-brother George picked out an escort for the next stage of our journey; our god-brother would accompany us. "Whatever happens," Mihali said, "We'll block the way for the Germans. We know all the passes. We can blow them to bits; and if they get on to your tacks, we'll shoot into the gristle!" - i.e. to kill. I begged him not to fire a single shot, just to keep cover, watch where the enemy was and let us know if they got anywhere near. (The Germans nearly always stuck to the main paths; when they wandered away from them, they usually got lost; all guides commandeered locally would lead them to the foot of unscaleable cliffs and over landslides and up and down steep torrent beds of shank-smashing boulders.) Everything ahead was a looming wilderness of peaks and canyons, and in the rougher bits it would be impossible for a large party to keep formation, or even contact, except at a slow crawl which could be heard and seen for miles; by the mountain's denizens; there would be plenty of warning. The whole massif was riddled with clefts and grottoes to hide in. We must all vanish into thin air and let the enemy draw a total blank. I explained why and asked him to speak the commando rumour and keep mum about us (a tall order). The General remounted and we left after fond and grateful farewells. The Andartes and the three Anglo-Cretans waved their crooks and their guns in valediction till the track hoisted us out of sight.

* * *

For the General, breaking bread with Mihali and his men and us must have seemed rather odd: the many signs of the cross before falling to and then the glasses clashed together with the usual Resistance toasts: "Victory!" "Freedom!", "Blessed

Virgin stand close to us!", "May she scour the rust from our guns!" and "May we die without shame." Mihali and his band were scrupulously polite;; but they found it hard to wrench their glance from our strange prize. The shaggiest and most unlettered Cretan mountaineers often possess a charm and grace of manner, even if the supper is only goat's mild and rock hard, twice-baked shepherds' bread, amounting to a very high style, which, after the handful of petit bourgeois collaborators in Herakleion which can have been his only social experience of Greeks must have come as a surprise to the General. It was thought wiser tonight to do without a fire: drinking a lot of raki to keep warm we sang for a while: the old Cretan insurrectionary song "When will skies clear?", elaborate rhyming couplets, a rizitika – a foothill songs (My swift little swallow) And An eagle was sitting in the minor mode, and Phileden a song with a Turkish tune that I was so fond of that it had become a nickname.

Through lack of covering, Billy, the General and I ended up, not for the last time, by all three sleeping in the wireless cave under the blanket, with Manoli and George on either side, nursing their Marlin guns and taking it in turns to sleep. Verminous as such places always were, it was a greater torment to my bedfellows than to me, already coarsened by nearly two years of onslaught.

A curious moment, dawn, streaming in the cave's mouth, which framed the white crease of Mount Ida. We were all three lying smoking in silence, when the General, half to himself, slowly said:

"Vides ut alta stet nive candidum Soracte"

The opening line and a bit of one of the few odes of Horace I know by heart. I was in luck.

" ... *Nec jam sustineant onus*" I went on

"silvae laborantes geluque

Flumina constiterint acuto"

And continued through the other stanzas to the end of the ode. After a few seconds, the General said: "well remembered." For five minutes the war had evaporated without a trace.

* * *

A few hours climb brought us within hail of Kapetan Petrakoyeorgi's outposts, high on the shoulders of Ida. We were soon in the toils of a welcome even more triumphant and demonstrative than Mihali's. Petrakoyeorgi – tall booted, bandoliered, robust, warm-hearted, voluble and, with his sparkling eyes and twirling moustache and beard, full of charm – was one of the three original guerrilla captains of the Occupation; taking to the hills at the invasion, that had all suffered many hardships. The other two were Captain Stan of Krussona: he was evacuated early on, with the Abbot of Preveli, to Cairo because of ill health, where, alas, he died. The other was Manoli Bandouvas at present in Cairo too, where we had evacuated him after his disastrous attack on the Germans in the Vianno mountains. He returned later and remustered a large force. Heavy and buffalo-moustached he was brave and ruthless, a sort of Tamarlane; I always liked him in spite of his glaring faults, of which the most glaring was a headstrong instability of temperament which made him prone to rash acts: doings which in a moment could bring down in smithereens a year's careful preparation by the rest of the Resistance Movement. I think the General was rather impressed by his grand air and hospital and expansive

manner: also, perhaps, by the large quality of the arms of the men who swarmed the rocks in large numbers, with many familiar and friendly faces among them; the gun-running trips and parachute drops were beginning to bear fruit. Petrokoyeorgi have us a new guide and Antoni Z, who came from the Amari, on Ida's southern flank, left in advance with two more to end back as runners to a rendezvous the other side of the watershed. We'd worked out a system of bonfires to indicate the route if he could find any cunning way between the German concentrations. All said that large numbers were gathering round the southern slopes. If no way existed for the moment, he would send us word to go to ground and stay put.

* * *

We were hardly out of earshot of the Andartes' goodbyes before troubles began. The steepness and irregularity of the track were too much for the mule; back it had to go and the General, to his despair and ours, had to continue on foot up a slippery and collapsing staircase of loose boulders and shale and scree. We took it in turns to help and he did his best; the pace grew slower, the halts more frequent; soon we were far above the Ilex belt. The last stunted mountain cedar vanished, leaving us in a stricken world where nothing grew and a freezing wind threatened to blow us off our feet. Then deep snow turned every step into torment. As we crossed the steep watershed between the plateaux of Nida and Zomithos and the ultimate summit of Holy Cross, over 8,000 ft. high, mist surrounded us and rain began to fall. We stumbled on, bent almost double against the blast; no breath or energy was left even for objurgation: still less for anyone to say that not far off was the Idaean cave which had sheltered the childhood of Zeus. (From the summit, on a clear spring or autumn day, the whole island from the westernmost peaks of the White Mountains to the

eastern massif of Sitea, lies extended like a chart. To the south the Libyan Sea rises like a curtain which is bare except for the Pamidadia islands and Gavdos with its satellite islet, where the wind called Euroclydon nearly wrecked St Paul; to the north-west hover the Taygtus mountains of the Peloponnese, to the north-east Santorin and the outer Cyclades; due east, a sprinkling of the Dodecanese, the faraway peaks of Rhodes, and, bold travellers have climbed the Taurus range in Asia Minor.) Now, in the approaching dusk, all was rain and wind, and obliterating cloud. We couldn't even take advantage of the last of the daylight without the first of Antoni's go-ahead beacons on the first ridge to the south. We huddled with chattering teeth in the ruined shards of a hut. The rain stopped and the sky grew clearer. We spotted the first fire, a faint star of light far down the mountainside. As we made our way down the hill through the darkness it was soon masked by an intervening spur. At least the snow furnished a pale glimmer underfoot. When it stopped, all was dark, Masking our torches, we were crawling and sliding down avalanches of stone. When this came to an end, we were swallowed up in the tree belt which surrounds the bald summit like a tonsure: ragged cedars at first topiaried by the wind nearly flush with the rocks; then a thick tangle of ilex and mountain holly and thorns. The mountain steepened to the tilt of a ladder. It was channelled and slippery with rain and each foot fall unloosed a landslide of shifting stones. We were descending, hand over hand, though what seemed, in the dark and the wind, to be a jungle of hindering branches, spiked leaves, and vindictive twigs. It was appalling going for everyone; for the General, in spite of our help, it must have been an excruciation. There was not a glimmer of Antoni's guiding fires in the dark void below. One of Petrakoyeori's men said he knew of a sheep fold on a hidden ledge. We divined its whereabouts in the small hours by the sudden tinkle of a flock awakened by our crashing. After

wolfing down some of the shepherd's bread and cheese, we all fell asleep by his fire; then, before daybreak, staggered on like sleepwalkers to a cave mouth and crawled through the bushes into a subterranean grotto to hide there till next nightfall.

It was a measureless natural cavern that warrened and forked deep into the rocks, and then dropped, storey after storey to lightless and nearly airless stallectic dungeons littered with the horned skeletons of beasts which had fallen there and starved to death in past centuries: a dismal den, floored with millennia of goats pellets, dank as a tomb, cob-webbed and gleaming, in the twilight to which the overhang reduced the cloudy day above, with snails' tracks and damp; but thanks to the ilexes that masked the entrance we could light fires of wet wood which were just worth the aching eyes and the choking smoke under which we slept or moved about like ghosts. The day before we had been reduced to hunting for wild herbs. Today the water the shepherd had given us was soon finished. Cretan mountaineers are as expert in finding a spring or a trickle in the most unpromising landscapes as doctors at locating a pulse: but each one in turn came back with a pitcher still empty.

A photograph²⁸ from Billy's records of this journey shows the General, hardly discernable in the penumbra, lying reading. Under Strati's green gendarme's greatcoat with its white corporal's stripes on the cuff I could just see the General's field grey tunic with its' General's red tabs. These were now augmented by my khaki battle-dress blouse with parachute wings over the breast (eagerly unstitched from the right arm and re-sewn there the day after dropping) which I had put round his shoulders. (I had wriggled back into my thin German tunic.) It struck me that things were really getting confused. I must have laughed for the General asked me why. I

²⁸ In the picture, he is reading a book; by a process of elimination, I think it must have been either Les Fleurs du Mal or the Anatasis, the only non-English books we had

pointed to our outfits and said “I was only thinking that they’d have to shoot both of us now.” The General responded to this bad taste joke with one of his wintry smiles and shifted closed to the flames. It was the only flicker of levity in a day of great stress.

Several of us had, at one time or another, lived in scores of caves on Mount Ida, shifting from one to another as rumour pinpointed our whereabouts or enemy searches made it wiser to change lodgings: strange winter sojourns cowering away from the monsoon-like downpours outside or falls of snow whose only advantage was the ease of tracking and catching hares: caverns, sometimes, whose windings magnified the thunder of autumn storms to such volume that the mountain seemed to be splitting all round us. There were nights of talk and song, or of listening, while some hoary shepherd incapable of signing his name, intoned by heart as many of the epic ten thousand lines or the Erotocritos as he could fit in between sunset and dawn ... For the Cretans, veneration and gratitude halo the mountain. It is the island’s crown and the impartial sanctuary of everyone in flight from justice or injustice and its mythological aura is deepened by the Himalayan remoteness and by the awe that hovers over Mount Sinai on Cretan icons. All my sojourns have been strange; none, though, as strange as these, huddling with the General and volume of Baudelaire or Xenophon between is in the mountain’s heart, while below us in a ring his army prowled like the troops of Midinn. Antoni’s hastily scribbled note when it arrived and his runner confirmed the gloomy rumours we had heard on the way up. Troops were assembled in force in all the villages and preparing next day to link up in what sounded like a human daisy chain to intercept all descent from the mountain and then advance up hill in a general comb out. In God’s name come tonight: Antoni urged in his letter: it sounded as if the operation were due tomorrow morning. A

mule for the General would be waiting at a certain meeting place.

As soon as it was dark enough, we emerged and clambered down through the dripping woods. Soon, on a tufted ledge, a friendly figure was waiting with a fine beast; it's howdah of a saddle was padded with coloured blankets. We were heading roughly in the direction of Nithavri, the highest Amari village on the southern slope of Ida. As soon as we had joined Antoni, we were to slip between Nithavri and Aporoulou or between Nithavri and Kouroutes – all staunch landmarks bit now, presumably, full of the enemy; and head across the Amari valley and hide somewhere near Antoni's own little village of Ay. Yanni and Aya Paraskevi. We reached the tryst – a trough for flocks made out of a tree trunk scooped hollow in a clump of holm oaks – early; but there was no Antoni; George and Manoli ranged the hillsides with soft whistles and calls, but drew blank. We waited two hours with growing misgivings. Had he run into trouble? There was nothing for it but to push on down. Gradually the slopes grey milder; there were less loose stones under foot. The moon and the stars were hidden by cloud and not a light showed in the pitch dark. But, by an occasional dog barking, the bray of a donkey, an untimely cock crow or a random voice on the hillside we could feel the presence of villages. We were able to move with more silence and circumspection now. (When setting out Manoli had muffled the bell which was slung round the mule's neck on a string of blue beads against the Evil Eye). Rain came swishing down: "Marvellous for the olives", Manoli murmured. We waded through a stream and began to climb again. The rain turned to sleet. At last the village of Aya Pareskevi was only half an hour away. The Germans would have sentries out, perhaps patrols; better to stop there. We piled into a ditch mercifully overgrown with cistus, thyme and myrtle; protection from view, but not from the rain.

Antoni's failure to arrive was an enigma full of anxiety. In his letter, which Manoli and I had read in the cavern, his injunctions had been so urgent and precise. With our heads hooded in a jacked we read it through again, out loud, by shaded torchlight: "in God's Name come tonight!" Wait! There was something else after the 'name' the fold in the paper came here; friction, rain or sweat, soaking through the runner's turban, had all but obliterated two letters: hu!; that is, "Don't"; I translated it to Billy. All of us, except the General, gazed at each other in amazement and conjecture in which, despite the water which was beginning to rise above our ankles, a very faint hope began to glimmer.

Next morning, George went to the village to find out what was happening. Two hours later we could see him strolling unconcernedly back with Antoni, who was carrying a big basked. When they reached us they jumped into the ditch and Antoni said with a wide grin: "What are you doing here boys?" You ought all to be dead!" He had been unable to believe George at first when he had told him that we had arrived. "How did you get through? The whole place was full of them. Hundreds, especially where you came down. You must have walked clean through the middle." He made the sign of the cross several times. "God exists! You ought all to build churches. What, churches? Cathedrals!" The real rendezvous had been for that night. Where were the Germans now? "All gone up Mount Ida, after you and the General. A shepherd who had made a bolt for it down hill a couple of hours before had said that a party of fifty of them had crashed past his hiding place, "shouting – " here Antoni dropped his voice to be out of our prisoner's earshot " – Ge-ne-ral Krei-pe, Ge-ne-ral Krei-pe," at the top of their voices! But you could have been quite all right in that cave. As it is, you are lucky to be here my children." Gregori said, "what have you got in that basked?" Antoni unpacked bread, cheese, onions, a dish of

fried potatoes, some lamb and a napkin full of “kaltzouia!” crescent shaped fritters full of soft white cheese and chopped mint. Then a big bottle of mulberry raki came out and a handful of little tumblers; this will warm you up,” he said filling them: “White flannel vests all round.” He splashed politely over to our guest with the first one, saying “stratege mou” then to the rest of us. They went down our throats like wonderful liquid flame. “And here,” he said pulling out a gallon dark amber wine, “red overcoats for all.”

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Local feeling Crete is passionate and competitive. Many villages are as justly proud of their fame as were the ancient city states, and in questions of distinction during the resistance there is a human and excusable tendency among the inhabitants of some of them to claim a monopoly of courage and sacrifice. So it is rather a surprise that not even the haughtiest of them would dream of denying the special position of the Amari – perhaps they are disarmed by the fact that the Amari is a whole galaxy of villages not an isolated rival; it is a position, moreover, which the Amari, out of modesty and distrust of rhetoric – or is it because there is no need? Would never dream of revindicating. A union of geography, the events of the war, and the temper of the inhabitants singled out the Amari for its especial role. It is the only eparchy²⁹ in the island with no coast, a deep wide valley running North West to South East airily slung like a hammock high above sea level between the south side of Mount Ida and the north side of Mound Kedros, a magnificent spreading crag, worthy satellite to Psiloriti, whose southern slopes drop nearly sheer and to tremendous depths, into the Libyan sea. The little farmstead of Sata, in the South

²⁹ an eparchy is a county, the administrative sub division of a nome, or province.

East overlooks the whole of the Messara plain, the aerodrome of Timbaki, inland from its tremendous bay and all the bad lands down to the Kophino mountains on the far south, at the other end of which, at Soutzouro, the party had landed so long ago. Yerakari, on the southern flank of the pass as the North western end of the Amari, is the highest village in Crete. The valley is only about twenty miles long; and at its widest under ten miles broad. It seems much more, a huge and complex Highland glen with cherry orchards on its flanks and springs gushing down the mountainside, olive groves, a few vineyards, even some pale green patches of wheat sprinkled with poppies, shady ravines and tufted with walnuts, fig trees, plane trees and mulberries. There are old Turkish bridges and derelict water mills and, along the stream beds at the bottom a flutter of poplars. A succession of beautiful white-walled villages is strung along the sides of the valley from end to end. To all of us, after months in the wild mountain tops, it seemed like Canaan. Ever since the Battle the Amari had been a hideout from the enemy; hundreds of British and Commonwealth stragglers left behind at Sphakia or broken out of POW cages had been clothed and sheltered and fed here; it was a sort of transit camp on the way to secret evacuation at a dozen points on the rock southern coast; Guerrilla bands, harried from their native ranges, came here to lick their wounds; the place was a general haven and there was hardly a goat fold or ledge of rock or cave or olive grove or orchard on the mountainside that had not been the hideout of a B.L.O. with his signaller, W/T, guards and runners. All this was due to the spirit of the villagers and the harmony and the trust that prevailed between them. The place was notorious to the enemy; countless searches had been unable to find anything or to deter the Amariots. It is not so much the Cretan guerrilla tradition that flourishes here: there is all the courage, high spirits, hospitality, charm, humour and kindness, which, throughout the

Cretan mountains, accompany their fiercer traits; the thoughtful literary, rather poetical strain which, in proverbs, marks the home of Retimo seems to hover almost palpably in the air here. They were just as determined to win the way as anyone in the mountains with a gun and their losses by the end, were terrible; but the particular task of the region, as vital and as difficult as attack, was one of preservation, rescue and sanctuary.

* * *

There were some immediate reasons for restrained rejoicing. All round us were the tried bulwarks of the Amari; we had leapt the enormous hurdle of mount Ida; and the Germans were hunting for us in the wrong direction. Talking the matter over some of us felt that the Germans had got on to our scent on Mount Ida; I didn't think this. As far as Antoni could make out, there had only been about a thousand troops in the Amari villages; and these figures are always doubtful and usually exaggerated. We had heard of considerable concentrations on the other slopes of the mountain – 5,000 for the whole of Mount Ida, at the very outside. But there were also reports of serious searches North of the Herakleion-Retimo coast road – could they be prompted by our letter? and in the Kophino mountains. We soon learned too, that a strong force had thrashed through the Lasithi and Vianno. There were in fact, chaotic troop movements everywhere and searches through all the most likely mountains within range of the General's capture. But specific information would have meant a far stronger local concentration.

Some rumours said that the Germans feared a general uprising planned, perhaps to coincide with an invasion of the island. General Braüer, in command of the West of Festung Kreta at Canea, had strengthened the guard round his H.Q. and moved

nowhere without escort. We heard that the BBC had announced the capture of the General, but with their passion for the truth, and most unfortunately for us, they had said he “was leaving the island”, instead of using the past tense; hence the island-wide search. No RAF leaflets so far. But all this meant, at least, that one of our runners must have got through to Sandy and we would be hearing from him soon. (if only Tom’s wireless had been working! If only we could find him and, through him, the other stations in the North West!) We were now an appalling distance from our only link with Cairo. But there was one piece of marvellous news: six days had passed since the dropping of the leaflets threatening reprisals within three days; and, in spite of all the enemy activity and questioning and threats, no villages had been attacked and no hostages taken; nobody shot. This again pointed to our letter being taken seriously (Perhaps, too, this unwanted clemency, after so unambiguous a threat, was prompted by the fear among the enemy of counter reprisals on their vanished Commander.) Colour was added to this hypothesis next day. We had just moved to a better shelter in a clump of blackberry bushes, when an aeroplane flew down the valley and away towards the Messara – with black crosses on the wings, alas, not RAF roundels, shedding some leaflets. It had now been ascertained, we read, that the kidnapping was the work of ‘hired tools of the treacherous British and the Bolsheviks. Those responsible would be mercilessly hunted down and destroyed.” By implication, this very tame communiqué lifted the blame from the Cretans in general. Our relief was enormous. We have been living in dread.

The reaction to the capture all over Crete was, it seems, one of unbridled hilarity and jubilation. Antoni retailed all the rumours and talk of the villages: what a smack in the face for General Muller and the whole German garrison. And – a wonderful example of Cretocentric theory of the universe among the simpler of the islanders –

how furious Hitler must be. (None of the party had thought as far afield as this; presumably the remote event had been mentioned in the morning's reports; could there have been a brief outburst in the Wolf's Hole?) It was the same in Canea and Retimo and – we learnt from Micky and Elias who suddenly arrived, after walking from the bus halt at Retimo and wisely heading for Antoni's village – in Herakleion too; nothing but grins and innuendos in the street; almost overt rejoicing in fact; and, a little surprisingly, intrigued amusement, here and there, among the lower ranks of the Germans themselves; utter fury and bewilderment higher up. Micky, after the General had been introduced to the missing two of his captors, told him, through me, that all the guards of the villa were under arrest and his ADC was in prison, on suspicion of complicity. The General's blue eyes opened wide with disbelief, then laughed delightedly. He couldn't bear him, the General told us. The man was a complete dunce.

These tidings were music to us, but everything else was very bad indeed. The immediate threat from the enemy was momentarily less than it had been. The nearest Germans were a long-established platoon at Krya Vryssi, three miles way to the South West, round the shoulder of Mount Kedros. But everything else was in a disturbed and fluid state and full of conflicting movements and rumours. The garrisons of the Messarra and Retimo could close the Amari at a moment's notice; and we would get warning: there were always the mountains and the caves; but our little circle in the blackberry clump seemed very vulnerable. (There were reasons for not seeking a recondite lair.) Our biggest trouble was the breakdown of Tom's wireless set on Mount Ida. Had it been working, all our problems would have been solved. On top of this, the failure to contact Tom himself was perplexing in the extreme; he was the only Open Sesame to the other two stations, (what had

happened, it later emerged, was this: having nobly sacrificed his set to us for fixing up the evacuation, he had been stricken down with malaria and had just managed, alone except for one companion, to creep to the North West of the Amari and wrestle with it there in a remote cave. Then, as he was incapable of moving, he had so covered his tracks as to be, even to the innermost circle of Amari initiates, beyond finding. There were no means of his learning about the breakdown and thus no knowledge of our whereabouts or of our need to make contact with him.

In all my signals to Cairo sent by runner to Sandy I had asked them, apart from announcing the news via the RAF and the BBC, to get the Naval section to send a boat near Saktouria on the night of May 2nd and, shore-signals failing, on the four following nights; to send us the two letters of the Morse alphabet we were to flash with our torches when we should hear the engines in the dark; and to signal all this information to all stations in Crete. This programme allowed us six days to cross Mount Ida and reach the appointed rendezvous on the first night. We had arrived in perfect time, for Saktouria – and this is why we were hiding in our present lair – was only a few hours' march away. Through the second visit of the ship would have been less of a scramble than the first. It also allowed two days each way for the runners and two days for sending and receiving a message which would have been ample in normal times – and I knew that Sandy and the others if our runners had found them, would move heaven and earth. But times were nor normal. Perhaps our runners, or Sandy's' had been stopped – shot even, by falling into a patrol or an ambush or by being picked off by one of the many German rifles with which the mountains now bristled. Perhaps Sandy's set had broken down – the evil possibilities were many and they proliferated in our thoughts as time passed.

Thus the night of the 2nd of May was hard to endure. There we were, only a few miles from the lonely shore, where, if all had gone well, we should have been stumbling along, for the last time, down those steep crags running down to the sea, hearing the purr of the engine out to sea, flashing our signals, watching for the sailors' white uniform materialising across the dark of the cove as the creak of the rowlocks grew louder; answering muted hails over the water; then sneaking aboard with our captive and our confederates. (Should the General be piped aboard? After all, we had done our best to maintain standards under trying circumstances ...)

Would Billy's captain, the bluff and bearded Brian Coleman, be greeting us from the wheel? Soon, as the ship turned about, we would be waving to our dwindling comrades on the rocks as we headed for Africa before the moon got up; then, down to the soft lights of the wardroom, the glow of mahogany and polished brass, the clink of ice. (Pink Gin? Whisky, Brandy? Champagne perhaps... ? The great silhouette of the island, with the icy watershed of Ida and the White Mountain flashing in the moonlight, would grow smaller through the porthole ... Red Tabs to greet us the next day at Mersa Matrouh, then the flight to Cairo, pointing out to the General the wreckage of all the battles of Montgomery's advance in the desert below, perhaps persuading the pilot to fly in a loop which would embrace El Alamein, landing at Heliopolis; presented arms, goodbye to the General; then, returning in glory to Clusium's royal home with all the delights of Cairo waiting.

This rough was the talk in English and Greek which accompanied the consoling circuits of the Raki bottle among the brambles. Tomorrow night perhaps.

* * *

Next day everything got much worse. No runner came, and suddenly it would have

made no difference if he had. For two hundred of the enemy moved into Saktouria. Our way of escape from the island was blocked. We had to begin all over again.

The southern Messara was stiff with troops; they had moved into Saktouria. Were they going to advance further west and garrison every possible getaway beach?

There was only one remedy: for me to leave Billy in charge of the party and head further west, but not beyond touch; to locate our other stations, and if possible, lay hands on one of the sets; and get up-to-date intelligence about the chances from new escape routes. I knew that Billy would be all right with Manoli and Antoni and the rest. The moment I had managed to fix things up, they would make their way westward and join me. The thing was to find a place where a ship could drop anchor and get away in it fast before the Germans moved in; otherwise we might find that all our earths had been stopped. Never has divisibility into three been more longed for: the ability to stay with the party' to sit huddled over a wireless set in touch with Cairo; and to peer down through the rocks at a beach where no Germans were.

After sunset on the 4th May George and I changed our appearance to that of peaceful rustics, climbed out of our prickly home and set off along the Amari. We dosed down for the night with George's family at Phourphoura. Next morning we followed the more northern of the two Amari ravines; they are separated by the hill of Samitos, bristling with old windmills. To the south, all the pretty villages we had haunted for years – Ay Yanni, Aya Pareskevi, Khordaki, Anomeros, Dryes, Vrysses, Karidaki, Gourgoughi, Smiles and Yerakari flashed along the foothills of Mount Kedros, Ida soared on our right. The transparent spring weather and the buoyant air, the corn, poppies, anemones, asphodels, woods, brooks the millions of birds all this, and the opening of a new phase after the staid anxiety of waiting, and above all,

being able to move fast and freely by daylight, made everything full of open promise. At least we were moving again. About midday, there was noise like far off thunder from the south-east away beyond our hideout; it sounded like a naval battle. We only learnt what it was that evening. The Germans were first bombing and then blowing-up with dynamite, house by house in their methodical fashion, the villages of Saktouria, Margarikari, Lokria and Kamares; nobody executed, as far as we could discover: owing to the disturbed situation, most of the inhabitants were outside their villages, especially at night. The German reasons for this onslaught were that these villages were all hotbeds of bandits, the haunts of the British, hiding places of terrorists, refuges for commandoes attacking aerodromes and supply dumps, the hiding places for unnumbered weapons, and the supply point for hundreds of bad men. In Lodria, it said in the official bulletin next day there had been no less than ten British officers on the 3rd March: double the numbers of B.L.O.s in the island. Margarikari, the village of 'The archbandi Petrakayeorgi', had been destroyed because he had celebrated Easter there with 35 of his brigands and all the villagers 'had shown their sympathy with the outlaws', moreover, when he and his men had descended to the village for the funeral of the arch-bandit's mother the whole village had flocked to the church and five priests had sung the requiem. Saktouria was utterly wiped out, the German government said for the part it had played in the infiltration of arms. (A gun-running trip had landed thirty mule loads of rifles a month before, which had then fanned out all over Crete). The article ended with another diatribe about the captors of the General: "Cretans, beware! The edge of the German sword will strike down everyone of the guilty men and all the bandits and all the henchmen and hirelings of the English" The reading out loud next day of this communiqué and leading article in the Paratiritis, the official German Greek

language newspaper produced the usual reaction of rage and stoicism. So many villages had been burn, and so many people shot, that these tragedies had, in the end, blotted out all emotions but the thirst for revenge. They had no deterrent effect. Each hecatomb sent a swarm of recruits into the mountains. They were illogical and haphazard, and the shelter of an outlaw on the run or a handful of British stragglers called down the same thunderbolts as the destruction of a squadron of Messerschmidts by sabotage. So, even had the Cretans been disposed to conform lesser and greater misdeeds were equally dangerous, so, apart from elementary care it was as well to be killed for a sheep as a lamb. Some harmless villages, on the same principle as the reprisal shooting of random hostages picked up in the street were destroyed, but on the whole it was the rebellious villages of the mountains, famous or notorious for years, which bore the brunt; when the time came, any excuse was used. Four months after the end of this story the enemy attacked and destroyed Anoyeia and the Amari villages and as many of the inhabitants as they could capture. The official reason given was that the villages had hidden the General and his captors instead of betraying them. I learnt the news in hospital in Cairo. Apart from the shattering nature of the event it was, as one can imagine, deeply upsetting that, in spite of all our insistence in keeping clear of villages and avoiding incriminating the inhabitants, this tragedy should be associated rightly or wrongly, with the operation. Certainly, the villagers, luckily for us, had helped us up the hilt with food, runners, escort, protection and every kind of moral support, as if we had passed through them in procession. It is typical of how the general Cretan attitude to their friends that when I got back to the island soon after they were at pains to play down any reasons for distress. After all, they said, the stricken villages had been deep in resistance from the start, consciously running the risk of German

revenge a hundred times over; something was bound to happen some time. The attack on the villages, they went on, - the last of a long list of scores of such acts – were the final ones of the German occupation of Crete. They were used as a show of force and terrorism to jar the population into leaving their withdrawal unharried before all the garrisons of the fortress of Crete, which they no longer considered internally defensible, streamed westwards. There, contained by the entire guerrilla strength of the island they fortified themselves inside the twenty mile “Iron Ring” around Canea. The destroyed villages lay in the hinterland along the flank of this line of withdrawal and dominated the ravines through which troops heading westwards would have to pass. Bearing in mind the long time lag between the operation and its putative aftermath, which was without any precedent in the occupation, these friends thought that the Germans had accepted the line put forward in our letter; all, on principle, would have gone as we had hoped. But, in the months after our departure, by which time our route must have become widely known, details of the operation must have travelled from mouth to mouth until a garbled version reached the wrong ears, and finally those of the enemy. So, when the Germans felt it tactically expedient to strike at some of the villages they considered of particular danger, what pretext – there always had to be one – could be handier than the part these villages had played in spirited away their General? These were consoling words; never a syllable of blame was uttered. I listened to

them eagerly then, and set them down eagerly now.³⁰

Among the Cypresses of Pantasan George and I ran into a hitch at once. The Hieronymakis family we knew, were in touch with at least one of our wireless stations. By ill luck it was about the only village in the region where neither of us had ever been. The Hieronymakis knew all about us, we knew all about them, but we had never met and there was no one to vouch for us. The old men were adamant: “ you say you are Mihali, Mihali who? And who are Sipi (Mike Stockbridge) and Pavlo (Dick Barnes)? Never heard of them. Tk. Tk. Tk! Englishmen? but, boys, all the English left Crete three years ago ...? The white whiskered faces turned to each other for corroboration, beating brown brows raised in puzzlement, blank glances exchanged. They went on calmly fingering their amber beads, politely offering coffee. It was no good raging up and down gesticulating under the onions and paprika pods hanging from the beams: every attempt to break through was met by identical backwards tilts of the head and the closed eyelids and the placidly dismissive tongue click of the Greek negative. They wouldn't give an inch until they knew (as they say) what tobacco we smoked. We could, after all, be agents provocateurs. (There had been rumours in the past of Germans pretending to be English stragglers and a few rare cases of Greek spies, usually recruited by scouring the civilian gaols, who wandered the hills pretending to be resistance people on the run in order to find out and reveal to the enemy for money where guerrillas or arms

³⁰ Others are equally determined to stress the link between the reprisals on their villages with the operation; not, however, in any spirit of criticism, but rather because some odd or outlandish aspects of these doings have lodged them in people's memory with a prominence far beyond their real importance. In Crete, singular or untoward events especially those connected with wars are often elaborated by hearsay then in semi-legend and finally in songs into versions that differ widely from the events that engendered them. This operation is no exception. Some versions stick roughly to the facts, names and places; others feel no such trammels. Mr James Notopoulos, of Cambridge University U.S.A. has written (in Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies Vol. III, 1960, the genesis of an oral heroic poem) an interesting pamphlet based on a long metrical sung account of the General's capture recorded in Sphaka, where the names are roughly preserved, but many strange figures occur including a beautiful heroine and a protagonist on horseback. It is an operation in which, as time passes, more and more people, whether they took part in it or not, seem glad to have participated.

were hidden. When captured they were shot like vermin. I hoped they didn't think we were such a couple.) They were vague, smiling and inflexible. This impressive but exasperating wall of security was only broken at last, after two precious hours of deadlock, by the entry – I think it was him – of Uncle Stavro Zourbakis from Karines, a friend of us all. Everything dissolved at once. In greetings, recognition, laughter, Raki, a crackle of thorns and sizzling in the hearth and the immediate summoning and despatch of runners to the two sets in the North West.

They had just left when a messenger arrived hot foot from the Amari with a sheaf of letters: one from Billy, saying Sandy's runner had got through at last, dog tired after his hazardous days of travel; and one from Dick Barnes. Sandy's letter had been sent off on the 1st of May. It was now the 5th; our messages to him had left Anoyeia on the 27th; so our two-way traffic with Cairo had taken eight days. His letter, which I have just discovered rummaging through old papers, tattered and nearly illegible, began on the 30th. After kind words about the success of the capture he went on: "We got your messages off at 2.30 today and are waiting for an answer now (7.00 p.m.), when I will send off Drake (code name for one of Sandy's runners). By one route and the leader of my other Manolis by another to confirm. I hope that the boat is on the way. The messages may both get to you in time, but possibly not I fear. As you know, Huns are very thick on the ground. In any case, the message has got there, and I assume you act if it had. I hope you fixed signals beforehand. I sent an additional wire as follows: If not rpt not fixed with Paddy already send sigs and timing for his boat all stations. Runner from here may not repeat not reach Paddy before boat due to pse confirm boat will come four following nights as well. The above is probably superfluous but in case you don't get this message and don't go to the spot and the boat comes that night, it still gives everyone a good chance I hope.

My second messenger will try and find Tom's haunts and thence you – but I doubt if he can make it. Everyone as you know is being stopped a good deal. Later 1.5.44 we have only just got the answer (2.30 hours); signal. Boat to Cape Melissa³¹ B. 605111 repeat 605111 third, fourth and four following nights. Contact Paddy urgently. All informed. Excellent work. All send congratulations. Acting on instructions your 1/7. Our 1/7 message about leaflets broadcast etc. Best of luck for rest of trip and love from all here. Sandy.” In spite of the thought that the ship would be coming that night and in vain, for the third time – unless one of the other stations had warned them of the new garrison at Saktouria – Sandy's letter was a great boost, a reestablishment of contact and a proof that Cairo was going all out to help. The news in Dick's letter was out of date too – pre-Saktouria that is, but it contained the signals to be flashed to the boat on what ever night and near whatever shore it should appear MK (Monkey King) every ten minutes from 2100 GMT.

The next phase of this story seems ever more confused in retrospect than it did at the time. George and I trudged on to the village of Yeni, five miles beyond Pantanassa, a point roughly equi-distant from the areas vital to us. We had just learnt that the recent chaos had driven the two stations to new hide-outs not far from each other, in the neighbourhood of Kato Vasamonero South West of Retino, North West of us. The coast from which I hoped we would soon be slipping away lay over the mountains due south; and the party with the General would be advancing to Yerakari – South East – and hovering in the goat-rocks above that village until the time, the place, and the loved one could all come together at last. The fifteen odd miles that separates me from each of these regions sounds very little. The whole of Crete is only a fifth the size of Switzerland; but distances, compared to those in

³¹ 2 miles from Saktouria

Norfolk or the Gobi desert, are nearly as meaningless and these three points all seemed a long way off at the other end of risky labyrinths.

* * *

The goat-fold of Zourbobasili, at Yeni, lay in rolling biblical hills. There was a round threshing floor nearby, where George and I could sleep on brushwood with a great circular sweep of vision. This place was to become, during the next three days, the centre of all going and coming of messengers as plans changed and options elapsed. But now, after the scrum of the last few days it seemed preternaturally quiet in the brilliant moonlight. Ida towered east of us now, Kedros due South: The White Mountains, which had come nearer to us during the day, loomed shining in the West. How empty and still after our huddled mountain life, was this empty silver plateau! A perfect place to watch the moon moving across the sky and chain smoke through the night pondering on the fix we were in and how to get out of it. (How were Billy and the General? Would the Germans move further West along the coast? Was the boat coming, failing a signal flash from teeming Saktouria, at that very moment turning wearily back to Africa for the third time – or the fourth? ... 'Now read on ... How I wished I could) There was not a sound except a little owl in a wood close by and an occasional clank from Vassilis flock.

* * *

A letter from Roger Stockbridge at last! No chance of our joining forces alas. He was acting as his own operator, his charging engine had gone wrong too, batteries constantly running flat, the people in the area were windy and the caravan that would be needed for the movement of a charging engine and a suitcase wireless, in the low country where he was hiding, far too exposed and full of troops at the moment, was

not to be contemplated. I had feared as much. (How well I knew all those hazards!) It sounded as if he was heading for Priné, an old refuge of ours blown a year ago but perhaps safe again now; these things went in cycles (here there would be the staunch backing of Colonel Tziphakis, the defender of Retino when the parachutists dropped and now the regional head of the resistance movement; and of Uncle George Robola our protector for years, a tall, white-bearded, and fearless old prophet, smoking his hookas and uttering wise saws among his beehives). In more leisurely times, when the Germans were safely ensconced before El Alemain and we were marooned beyond the range of all but an occasional submarine, Mike would write letters to his colleagues, and elicit answers, in sonnet form. No time for that sort of rot now: 'Already sent you two urgent messages with answers to your two previous letters with news and Cairo instructions. I suppose you never got them. Anyway the burning of Sakouria cancels their news. Whether our signals reached Cairo in time to stop boat last night, 5/6 heaven knows but I doubt it. Cairo say they broadcast capture of General and that he had reached Cairo, on the 30th and the 2^{ts} and last news also published in the press. Leaflets printed at once but not dropped at once because of bad flying weather. Presumably dropped by now". I wasn't sure whether Ralph meant the leaflets or, metaphorically, the scheme. I hoped, now, the latter, as the less attention drawn at this late hour, the better. "So sorry can't come and meet you." Here follow the reasons I mentioned – "what I suggest is this: Saktouria and Rodakino³² are blown. Dick had a boarding party there" – and intended evacuation – "eight days ago and his signals were answered by M.G. fire from the sea. They have burnt the place down and lots of Huns have been snooping round there. But, at Asi Gonia is Denis rpt. Denis." (Captain Denis Ciclitiras). He has a set and an operator

³² a beach further west

with him and not much to do and is leaving by next boat which is due I think in about a week in the Preveli area. I suggest you send him a runner then join him and use his set for fixing up boats etc. I will let Dick know too. This is better than runners charging about all over the place with out of date news. I told Cairo all about your situation then my batteries went flat. Damn! I have been up all night charging them. I will also get your signal off about leaving the Amari and striking w., and tell them to keep me, Dick and Denis informed of all possibilities and changes and to do their damnest to get something in, even a destroyer. The signals by the way are M.K. (Monkey King). Obviously you must have a set with you. Denis is the obvious man. I have go to shift now – these bloody people are scared stiff, so write care of Joe. If you stay where you are do let Denis know. I will keep in touch. I will also let Dick know. You may want him to join you. If so, could you send a message by mid-day tomorrow. I have already sent you two lots of cigarettes. Here are some more and a map. Love from us all. Mike.”

All this was a bit puzzling but, except for the awful idea of waiting another week before getting away, it could have been worse. Immediately after Mike’s message came another – Costa or Dimitro Koutellidakis with letters from Billy and Manoli. Just before sunset a strong force of Germans had swarmed into the S.E. end of the Amari, advanced up the valley beyond Aya Paraskevi, Khordaki and Ay Yani, exactly where our party was hidden, in fact; then moved in open order down the valley again. It was not clear what they were up to but the whole thing was very fishy. Guided by Andoni and Michaeli Pattakos – an old friend, always a mass of contradictions and recalcitrance when things were calm and always perfect in times of danger – and the schoolmaster of Koxaré, whose name escapes me. They had managed to get up the side of Mount Kedros in the nick of time, without being seen

by the enemy in the falling dusk and without Theophilus catching any tantalising glimpse of his countrymen below)he had been rather hurt all these days that as far as he could see, General Muller had done so little about rescuing him. If only he had knows). They had scrambled all through the night, making a welcome halt by a hut where they were distilling Raki among the streams and the plane trees of Gourgouthi. (It must have been the Generali and Katsendoni families, the only inhabitants of the tiny hamlet, probably helped by jovial Sotiro Monahoyios from Karieaki, seldom absent from such doings. During the heroic and hungry Albanian campaign Sotiri had heard a calf lowing behind the Italian lines, crept through the snow, threw it over his shoulders and dashed back to his own trench under a volley of bullets), and had got to a goat fold above Yerakari, the highest village on the island, while it was still dark. The General had borne up well. At the time of writing, they were both sitting in the sun, hunting their clothes for fleas, Billy said. The night's work had brought the party a big jump closed, and, thanks to the Germans, earlier than we had planned

Yourbovasili, who had been milking his goats came over with a foaming cauldron and a huge loaf and we squatted round it with spoons. When he heard about the German thrash through the Amari, he stopped hammering rock salt with a stone and said "Eh! General Muller is cross!" Then he sprinkled the salt over the milk and began shaking with silent laughter. "He had better look out or we will capture him too."

* * *

Dick Barnes' messenger, when he arrived, turned out to be George Paychoundakis, who had first been Xan Fielding's guide and runner for a long time, then mine when I

had taken over Xan's area in the west for several months. This youthful Kim-like figure was a great favourite of everyone's, for his humour, high-spirits, pluck and imagination and above all the tireless zest with which he threw himself into his task. If anybody could put a girdle round Crete in forty minutes, he could. George, who was a shepherd boy from the great village of Asi Gonia, later wrote a remarkable book about the whole of the occupation, and the resistance movement. I translated it from his manuscript and it was published, under the title "The Cretan Runner" (John Murray, London) with great success. It is a wonderful book, which I hotly recommend to anyone interested in these things. His account of those particular days is very lively and funny.

This extraordinary boy not only brought a letter from Dick – but, by speeding over the whole of Retimo and setting a swarm of lesser runners in motion, he helped many of our problems on their way to solution. He found Levethri, Papayanakis from the village of Akhtounda, just inland from the stretch of coast due south of us from which I hoped we could find a German free beach to get away from. A garrison had long been established at Preveli Monastery; but what about the little cove of Karamé, on the steep southern slope of Mount Kedros? Levethri was to spy out the land and report. Next George found and brought Yanni Katsias, for whom I had been searching, a great tough, free-booting giant like a Kazantzakis hero who knew every stone, spring, hole and foot path of the southern Region mountain. Up to the neck for years in the old feuding and raiding life of these ranges he was a perfect man to guide us over old flock-rustling tracks and keep us out of sight and away from harm. He came loping over the hills to join us with his wary and wolf-like gait. Extremely good-looking, and armed at all points, a heavily fringed turban, redundantly shaded a face already by no means open; and his size and strength was such that the rifle

which was never out of his hand, carried loosely at the point of balance, seemed reduced to the size and weight of a twig. A better friend than foe; luckily we had always been very fond of each other.

away to the NW again, to the crevace at Dryade where their wireless set was again he returned next morning with Dick Barnes himself, an utterly convincing Cretan in boots, kerchief and shaggy cape. I feared the same difficulties about transport, while everything was still upside down prevented his set from coming any closer; he would have had to goof the air for a day, too, just when we needed it most. Much better to leave it in suit with the Changebug flying to and fro like Ariel, should no beach be suitable due south he was in favour, unlike Ralph, of fixing up something in the Roadkin area about three days march westwards. The situation over there sounded confused. During recent months, the guerrilla bands had been expanding like a crop of dragon's teeth. A week earlier, Dick's signals out to sea had been answered by machine gun bursts and actual mortar bombs from a German coastal craft. Then a party of Germans had marched into Rodakino and started burning the village. The Rodakino bands opened fire on them, and then waylaid a reinforcement which was going to join them, and then waiting till they were at very close range, wiped out the lot, except for two prisoners. The other Germans fled from the half burnt village leaving the place, for the moment at any rate, free of the enemy. If only it were a bit closer! I was getting very anxious lest our whereabouts became too widely known as the days passed, but if we couldn't get away due south, the west began to beckon with a steadily increasing glow. Everything depended on the results of Leftheri's reconnaissance. This reunion with Dick – like many occasions in occupied Crete when one wasn't actually dodging the enemy – became the excuse for a mild blind. "Mr Pavlo and I set off to Yeni, writes the Changebug in his book, "where we found

Mr Mihali (me) and Uncle Yanni Katsias. We sat there till the evening and the sun set Yanni took us to the east side of the village where they brought us some food and first rate wine and our Keph (well-being) was great. The four of us were soon singing. Mr Mihali sang a sheep-stealing couplet to the tune of Pentezali, which went:

Ah, Godbrother, the night was dark
For lamb and goat and dam, Sir,
But when we saw the branding mark,
We only stole the ram, Sir.

The ram – the head of the flock – meant the General. It was a couplet he'd made up in the style of the old Cretan *mantinada* which runs;

“Ah Godbrother, we couldn't see, the night was black and dirty, but when we saw the branding mark, we only rustled thirty.” (It is a satirical couplet about a sheep thief, suddenly finding out that the animals he plans to lift belong to his Godbrother. But seeing his Godbrother's earmark he takes only thirty instead of the whole flock)” It's all a bit obtuse and sounds rather boastful. Yanni had snort an enormous hare in the afternoon, which he had cooked with oil and onions. He had come to be very fond of the Changebug as he had rescued his two small children from a village fired by the Germans a few months earlier, by running across a whole mountain range with them piggy-back. We sat late in the moonlight, emptying the demijohn, it was just what we all needed to forget the stress and anxiety of the situation. George got back with news that all was going well with the other party. I slept properly for the first time for many nights, still vaguely thinking about the problematical arrival of the boat, but,

thanks to that first rate wine, at one remove. (it's my delight on a shiny night and the signals are monkey king.) Dick and George Psychoundakis returned to their den next day. Excellent communications had now been established. On the night of the 7th, the party with the General moved by an easy night march to Patsos, which was only two or three hours away from me. They were being fed and guarded by George Marcopos and his family, (George, a thoughtful and well read boy, later to become a gifted journalist, was the son of a very poor, but very brave and kind family, all of whom had been great benefactors to the wandering British). All was going according to plan. If only the news from the coast turned out well!

The news, when it came through at last, was bad. Leftheri had had a terribly bad time clambering about both chasms and cliffs; not only had the garrison at Preveli been doubled, but a strong German contingent had been landed by sea, presumably from Timbaki, at Keramé the very place from which I had hoped we might escape. There were still one or two beaches which might just be used, but there was a lot of going and coming of Germans all along the coast. It was very sinister. This activity in a region so remote and desolate where they had never before set foot, coupled with the German sweep down the Amari valley, had an ominous look. Leftheri had left a man down there to keep his eye on things and send warnings of anything new. A tiny cove called Limni seemed the only likely place still left. Off went a runner to Dick with the sad tidings, and I sent Yanni Katsias to the west to see what was happening at Rhodakino.

* * *

Jack Smith-Hughes, in charge of the Cretan section of Force 133 (S.O.E.) in Cairo must have been having an anxious time. It was only since we had regained contact

that I fully realised how well we were being backed up; these goat folds and threshing floors seemed so remote from Rustum buildings and the traffic of the Sharia Kasr el Ani!

A runner from Dick suddenly arrived with an exciting and disturbing signal: George Jellico and a strong contingent of S.B.S. Raiding Forces were landing at Limni beach on the night of the 9th/10th with orders to contact us by hook or by crook. They were bringing their own wireless kit and fighting their way if necessary to organise the evacuation as soon as possible in collusion with me, from some other beach. No signals were included in the message, so it looked as if they were landing blind, in order not to jeopardise things by trying to combine this crash landing in Crete with the more delicate business of transporting and guarding the General.

This was terrific, George Jellicoe was – still is – a resilient, unconventional and infectious compendium of energy intelligence and humour, and gifted with a great flair for attack and unrattled inventiveness in trouble. Better still, he had raided Crete two years earlier, having landed with three French officers and a commando force. They'd blown up a vast quantity of German planes and fuel, but, uniquely in Crete, a traitor had given them away to the Germans and loss and capture had bedevilled their almost miraculous withdrawal; So he knew just how dangerous these things could be. Since then he and his unit had been wreaking havoc behind enemy lines all over the place. I was just beginning to revel in the thought of this magical ending to our troubles when a message came from Leftheri's man at the coast: "Germans just moved into Limni. Keep away!"

George was due to arrive next evening, so they must already be at sea. I sent off a runner to Dick urging him to bombard Cairo with warnings to be transmitted to the

ship; if there was a breakdown, as there very often was, George and his boys would be landing in the middle of a reception committee. The only solution was to rejoin Billy and the General at once, send them on further west with a strong escort in the hope of evacuation later near Rodakino, then to collect a dozen men with guns – there was no dearth of these, luckily – and dash down to the sea, and then, after dark, split into two parties and hang about in the rocks as close as we could to the Germans. When we heard the ship approaching we would start a diversion in the opposite direction which would either warn George and his raiders not to land, or, with a bit of luck and shouts across the water, guide them onto a part of the shore from which the enemy had been lured. Then, before the Germans could realise what on earth was going on, we could all hare over the mountain, hide in a cave for the next day, then at night, discreetly join the sedater western progress of the General. (It is amazing how much confusion a few people can cause in the dark.) Once the idea had taken root, I was quite sure whether I wanted to get through. Judging by George's reaction when I outlined the scheme to him, I foresaw great difficulty in getting anyone to remain with the General at all. Manoli wouldn't like it; nor would Billy, nor would the Antonies, nor would Gregori ... George said we might draw lots for one person to stay with the General tomorrow night ... this chat accompanied our moonlight march over the hills to Petsos. George's final solution was to put the General in a comfortable cave, then roll a huge boulder into the entrance for one night while we al streamed south to guide o Lordos Tzelliko and his amphibian thugs ashore.

* * *

I need hardly say that this brief project came to nothing. The warning message got

through alright and just as Billy and I were arranging the details, a message arrived saying the operation was postponed for several days. Rhodakino sounded a likelier solution every moment. We would go west that night. Of course it was better so, but a bit of an anti-climax all the same.

The party, when I would them, were star-scattered about a tumble-down stone hut shaded by a clump of tall plane trees and a beetling rock with a waterfall and a deep pool. George Harocopos and his old father and his pretty little sister were looking after them in this Daphnis and Chloe décor. Billy records that, as the party had been there two days and there were many mouths to fill and also a chance that George, the mainstay of the household might leave us I tried to force some sovereigns on Uncle Evthymios, his father. This was a scene that often happened. Two years before, I had sent five sovereigns with a covering letter saying 'Herewith for cigarettes', to Aleko Kokonas, the schoolmaster of Yerakeri, who had been ruining himself and his friends in support of British stragglers. The coins came back next day with a note 'Thanks Mihali, but I'm a non-smoker.' It was nearly always the same story. We just managed to pay our headquarters expenses, but little else, except occasionally helping people left in the lurch from sudden death or disaster. The same applied to all this lor??? Talk on every page about sending runners off all over the land. They like everyone else in this story, were unpaid volunteers who worked as they did because they felt honour bound to do so. We were allies and there was no more to be said. That is why all the references to "Hirelings of the English" in German communiqués were so ludicrously wide of the mark. They were as mistaken as their references, in the context of guerrilla activity to "Communists" and "Bolsheviks". The only Communist contributions to the Cretan Resistance were their attempts – for which, fortunately, they were too late in the field; all that was

worthwhile in the island had been absorbed years before by the non-political E.O.K. movement – to disrupt the Resistance for post-war political ends as they managed to do with great skill in the rest of Europe.

"Good morning, General. How are you?" "Ah, Good morning, Major. We missed you." We might have been in a drawing room. Billy told me that the General's mood had been alternating between morose depression and comparative cheerfulness. They had had a slight tiff, now made up, at the time of the village burnings. I think they were kept at a further distance from each other than they would normally have been by the Potsdam – Carthusian French which was their only medium; it was too rickety bridge for all but the most tentative exchanges. The General had become very fond of Manoli; and Manoli had the impression that he might try to escape; he was keeping a sharper lookout, especially at night. For some reason George filled him with misgiving; rather strangely for George had a very kind nature; I think the memory of the closeness of George's dagger during our ride through Herakleion had left a deep trace. As a German, the General had at first been an object of horror to all of our party; as a human being, in the huddled-piggled proximity of recent days, their feelings were guarded but favourable on the whole. My tentative feelings of sympathy had started, I think with the ode to Thaliarcus, on Mount Kedros, looking towards Mount Ida, and I have an idea that it was returned, though we neither referred to it for the same reason. At any rate, we all thanked our stars, that, as things had turned out, that our prisoner was not General Muller and a notorious war criminal: life would have become insupportable. It was easy to gather that the General was far from being an eager nazi or admirer of Hitler. I asked him about war crimes; he said he knew that there had been terrible deeds in the Ukraine and that elsewhere "many things had happened which ought not to have happened." In my

queer role of half captor, half host, I felt rather loath to press him on awkward themes; after all, we weren't interrogation officers. He was amazed by our close relationship with the Cretans. I explained about the feelings prevailing between England and Greece since the Albanian campaign, and even long before, and I told him, as well as I could, and as far as discretion allowed, the reasons for the present Husarenstück; he nodded slowly and pensively and through there might be something in it. I asked him about Germany's allies on the Russian front and was very surprised by the answer. By far the best, he said, were the Romanians, who fought like demons – wie Tenfel (not, perhaps, it occurred to me, so much for ideological reasons, as from ancient and atavistic fears, all too justified, about the fate of Bessarabia. Next came the Italians, who had been, to his great astonishment, very good indeed. As for the ?????, it was, he said, as though they had no heart in it. The Russian campaign sounded a nightmare. He reminisced a lot about the Great War; then the conversation ranged over many things.

Our sudden change of plan had produced a momentary lull. Once more, there was a great feeling of strangeness about these recumbent hours of smoking and talk beside the shady waterfall. I had an inkling of that, even in more cheerful times for him, the General had rather a solitary nature through which ran a dash of melancholy; though there were plenty of reasons at the moment for the deep sighs which recurred both in his talk and in moments of silence.

* * *

Our way westward over the plateau of Yious was our familiar east to west route over the narrowest part of western Crete. "Our sin is rising", George had said as we set off at moonrise. It was a favourite saying in these nocturnal journeys. "Off we go,"

Manoli said, "Anthropoi tou Skotous." This phrase "men of Darkness!" was a cliché that often cropped up in German propaganda when referring to people like us, and we had eagerly adopted it. Minions of the moon, we were off, I hoped, on the last lap of our journey.

Among the rocks and Arbutus clumps there was an ice-cold spring which is said to bestow the gift of immortality. We all lay on our faces and lapped up as much as we could hold. I told the General about the property of the water. He leant down from the saddle of his mule and asked urgently for a second mug. Among the trees outside the hamlet of Karines, a bit further on, Uncle Stavros Zourbakis, forewarned to make sure the coast was clear, was waiting with Kiria Eleni, his high-spirited wife (a crack shot with a rifle) and their daughter Popi – our hosts and guardian angels on scores of journeys – with a tray of raki glasses and peeled walnuts. We swigged them down and went on our way munching. Then the plateau sank into a deep valley, a danger point, as the only north-south motor road ran along the bottom between the big garrisons of Spili in the south and Armenoi and Retimo in the north. (A few months after this, Antoni Zoidakis, escorting Tom, fell badly wounded in a gun fight with a German patrol at exactly this point. They tied him by the feet to the back of a truck and drove full speed to Armenoi, four miles to the north, and left poor Antoni's body beside the road, as a warning to the guerrillas, mangled and stone-dead.)

Men with guns whistled from the rocks and when we answered ran down to meet us and shepherd the party across the perilous highway. Others joined us out of the moonlight as we climbed into the conical hills where Fotinou is perched. Suddenly there was an alarm of a German patrol approaching directly ahead. Our party, by

now quite large, fanned out along a ridge and lay waiting. Billy and Manoli and I seized the General from his saddle and flung him and ourselves down among the heather, and peered down at the approaching figures. Billy reports that I said "If it comes to a scrap we've got them taped." Luckily it was only another contingent of our growing escort. There was relief and laughter. By the time we got to the grove of Scholari outside Photinou, we were very numerous indeed. Most of the troop was composed of old Uncle Stavro Peros and his eighteen sons and their descendents with several members of the Tzangarakis and Alevizakis families as well. Andrea, the youngest of the Peros brothers had just contracted a dynastic match with the daughter of a family with whom the Peros tribe had been locked in a blood feud for generations; so an atmosphere of concord and rejoicing reigned in the hills. Very sadly, we lost Grigor Chnarhakis from the party. Some more of the Russian deserters, like those of Kastanonitza – had fetched up in Fotinou – Billy had formed the idea of returning and organising them into a guerrilla group. So, as Grigori was not planning to leave with us for Egypt, he was going to guide them back to the east to join the others. We were all sorry to see him go (one of the Russians, Piotr, much older than the rest, was too ill to walk. We found a mule for him in the hopes of getting him to Egypt.)

The General was an object of wonder to all our companions. They couldn't feast their eyes on him enough. The atmosphere was rather that of the sheriff of Nottingham brought captive to Sherwood Forest.

* * *

All through the following night the country changed gradually from the gently airy plateau, south of the Retimo, which divides the Aegean from the Libyan Sea and

links the two great massifs of Crete, into steeper slopes, more precipitous ravines, a world which grows wilder and shaggier with every advancing mile. Mount Ida, far far away now, in the east gleamed remotely under the rising moon while ahead of us the watersheds that divide the Nomes of Retimo and Chanea rumbled across the middle distance like the warning notes of the huge thunderstorms of the White Mountains which ran wild into the sky beyond them: a flashing pandemonium of pallor and shadow which rages away westwards in spikes and landslides and rotting cliffs that overhang gorges flashing and zigzagging like forked lightning across the planetary chaos, echoing ravines, as narrow as corridors, dropped into the darkness to soar once more to the great summits of Sphakia and away westwards again to the ultimate, ibex-haunted wilderness of Selino. The Turks never held the region incomplete subjection; vendettas, in which whole villages could be embroiled, still raged between families; and the rustling and counter-rustling of flocks filled many of those ranges with perils that had nothing to do with the end of the War. The outskirts of this tremendous region now swallowed us up.

At a hut near Alones Yanni Katsias was waiting, with two very wild looking boys whose appearance aptly epitomised the mood of the approaching mountains, and our old escort turned back to Fotinou. We were joined too – he suddenly materialised out of the trees further on, as though instinct had summoned him there, by Llaevizakis, son of Father John, the brave and saint-like priest of Alones. (Father John, in spite of the capture and execution of one of his sons, had sheltered and befriended many of us for years. It was with great difficulty that after endless raids on his village that we had persuaded this tall bearded and spectacled figure, one of the most outstanding of the Resistance, to go to Cairo at least till things had blown over a bit.) A mishap occurred on this long night's march: the girth of the General's

mule broke and sent his rider tumbling down a steep precipice. We chased after him; we thought at first that one of his shoulder blades was damaged; we arranged a sling and after a while the pain seemed to go. But his right arm remained in a sling for the rest of the journey. It was an anxious moment. Outside the little village of Vilandredo we were met by kind and enthusiastic Stathi Loukakis and his brother, yet another Stavro. (We were back in the god-brother network. I had spent my first Cretan months and Xan Fielding and I had christened Stathi's little daughter, another Anglia; which was why we had headed for Villandredo.) He led us all, dog-tired and woe-begone, to a built up cave that clung to the mountainside like a martin's nest. It was only to be reached by the clambering ascent of a steep ladder of roots and rocks up which our disabled captive could only be hoisted up it by many hands and slow stages. But, once we were inside, everything took a really promising turn: a booted and turbaned and heavily bearded figure with his goatskin cloak about lay fast asleep in the corner of the cave. It was our colleague Dennis, no less. His wireless set, we had learnt from god-brother Stathi, was only just up the valley at Asiğonia. Yanni Katsias, when he had told me, at our rendezvous near Alones, through teeth clinched like a portcullis in the s.w. Retimo and Sphakian way – it turns all their Ls into Rs, one of the many odd characteristics of the local accent – that he and his two chaps had explored the Rodakino beach: there was not a single German there. I hardly dared to think of it, but as we all tucked the general up as snugly as possible I couldn't help feeling that things must have right at last.

* * *

At first things really did look promising. S it turned out, however, new contingencies churned everything up in a tangle which takes a little unravelling.

Dennis, who had come to Villandredo to help us, set off for Asi Gonia (this village – George Psychoundakis' home – is a great stronghold the other side of a wide valley running north, a place with an old guerrilla tradition and now the centre of an important and well-disciplined band under Kapitan Petraka Papadopetrakis (codename "Beowolf", from his fair whiskers and general bearing), an old friend. Dennis would do all he could to hasten the ship's advent and keep in touch. Rumours of a German descent on the region had prompted Stathi to conceal us in such a cramped and precarious eyrie the night before; next morning all seemed serene: we climbed up to a commodious and beautiful ledge of rock where the General was consoled for the agonies of the ascent by the coloured blankets and the cushions spread there under the leaves by my god-brother and Stavro (an old drinking companion of mine) and by the marvellous banquet of roast sucking pig and kaltzounias, and the wicker demi-john of magnificent old wine which was waiting. Stathi, was a great bon viveur and a paragon of kindness and generosity. His eager blue eyes kindled with delight to see us demolishing his feast. He hoped, (and so did we) that we could lie up here in luxury until we slipped off over the hill to the boat. There was rushing stream hard by and sweet smelling herbs all round us and the trees were full of nightingales. We banqueted and slept and talked and sang. The sun set through the surrounding peaks and as we lolled exulting on the soft rugs under the moon and the stars, for ever plied with fresh marvels by the two brothers, who sped to and from the village like kindly djins, this sudden change in our affairs seemed to all of us as magical as the sudden transportation to paradise for beggars in a Persian story.

But next morning, 200 Germans detrucked in Argyroupolis, the road terminus less than an hour away.

We clambered back to our first cave. After dark, my god-brothers leading us to a still safer hideout when with a crashing of branches and a shout the General – a dim silhouette now in the midst of our party – lost his balance and fell into the void below: a painful drop of several yards through the undergrowth. Climbing down, we prised him laboriously back on to the footpath again. Utter depression succeeded the fury unleashed by this new mishap.

But the heaviest cross we had to bear during the troubles of the next 24 hours was Piotr the Russian. With great difficulty we'd found him a mule for the March from Fotinou, and, whenever possible we supplied him with comforts and attention – Stathi brought him special soups and covering and we all did what we could to help him. Not only was there never a murmur of thanks but the only syllables he uttered were sneering words of scorn and hatred about both the English and the Greeks. He was a middle-aged man of repulsive ugliness and filthy habits; how unlike the two jolly Russian deserters who had celebrated Easter with us: the Cretans had never clapped eyes on a creature so bestial; nor had we. Slowly, the pity we all felt for an ally in distress turned to disgust and loathing. There was something darkly comic about the total abjection of our new companion. I think it was Manoli who first nicknamed him Pendamorphi, the Five Times Lovely One, who was the beautiful princess in Greek fairy tales. This inspiration made things a bit better but it was Pendamorphi who now slowed up and endangered our progress, not the long-suffering General. I detected an occasional look of reproach in the glances of my companions; they were quite right. His adoption was an act of true folly which deserved to bring the whole operation to distaste. We changed our hideout several times in accordance with the German movements. One party had headed to Asi Gonia; another plunged along the valley to Villandreda itself.

It was one of those times of hide and seek which after hiding in the branches of a clump of cedars a year before while an enemy battalion thrashed through the tree trunks below, Xan and I called oakapple Days, on the analogy of Charles 2s flight after the Battle of Worcester.

At one point in this agitated interlude a boy got through from Asi Gonia with a message about an impending boat at Rodakino; the time, place and signals were to be confirmed later. This buoyed us up in our troubles which began to multiply. Apart from the General's accidents and Piotr's distemper, all our footgear was disintegrating; the torn shoes of Miki and Elias had almost ceased to exist; poor Antoni Rapaleonidas was stricken down by terrible pains in the back, sometimes he had to drop behind, but he always caught us up again with apologetic smiles. A mysterious cramp seemed to have settled semi-permanently in my right forearm.

At one dark crevasse – our third cache – we were skulking and shuddering waiting for Stathi and Stavro to come. They arrived, several hours they had planned, with baleful news that 100 Germans had surrounded the village so that nobody had been able to get out or in. They were asking, Stathi told us in a whisper, looking towards the huddled figure of our prisoner, for General Kreipe. Then they left.

* * *

"Well, Herr major, how are the plans for our departure progressing?" By now the General had become as solicitous for the success of our departure, as we were.

"Wunderbar, Herr General! We're leaving!"

It was true, the order of release or the promise of it, had come through. The German drive through the Asi Gonia mountains had driven Dennis to earth and put his set

momentarily off the air. But messages from Cairo were beamed now to all stations and when the great news came through, Dick himself, hearing of our local troubles, and making a dash clean across the Nome of Retimo, reached our cheerless grotto long after dark. The boat would put in at a beach near Rodakino at 22 hours on the night of the 14th 15th May. – "10 o'clock tomorrow night!" It was in exactly a day from now. We would only just be able to manage it.

* * *

the thing was to get the main party to the coast under cover of darkness. I sent Billy off with George and the others and Yanni Katsias and his two wild boys by a short route which would bring them by daybreak to a place where they could wait for us. The General, Manoli and I would go by a much longer and safer way, where the mountains were so steep and deserted that, with a cloud of scouts out, we could move by day without much danger. Unfortunately it was too steep and uneven for a mule so the General would have to go on foot. But the sky was clear and there would be a bright moon and starlight. Yanni would warn the Rodakino bands that we were heading for their mountains and ask some of them to come and meet us. The Kryoneritis mountains which we were to cross are not one of the highest ranges of Crete, but they are among the steepest and are certainly the worst going. They are bare and, except for an occasional thistle or thornbush or sea squill, as empty of vegetation as a bone yard; the place is ringed with craters and fractured into a jigsaw of deep crevasses; worst of all there is not a path or even a flat square foot in the whole of this wilderness. The region is a never-ending upside-down harrow armed with millions of limestone sickles and daggers and yatagans.

Sustained perhaps by the thought of an end to his ordeal, the general, tackled this

via crisis with scarcely a groan. Helped by Manoli and me when he stumbled and then by the guerrillas that shimmered like ghosts out of the vacancy, he moved across the landscape in a sort of trance. But, tormenting as our journey was, the dazzle of the moon, and, when it set, of a blaze of stars that was nearly as bright, undermined this commotion of rock and the, by a planetary device in collusion with the optical tricks of which, at some moments, Crete seems to be composed – involving manipulated reflection and focus, levitation, geometrical shifts and a dissolving of solids balanced by a solidification of shadow – filled the hollow, then porous and finally transparent island under foot with lunar and stellar properties and, while hoisting it several leagues in the air, simultaneously, with moves as quiet as an opening gambit followed by those advances of knights and bishops, fast and stealthy as grandmother's steps, which lead to penultimate castling and a sudden luminous checkmate, regrouped all the mountain tops of Crete within touching distance. The valleys and foothills had dropped away from this floe of triangles; they drifted in the windless cold starlight with the pallor, varying with their distance, of ice or ivory.

How did the Five Times Lovely One get across this beautiful inferno? I can't remember, but I know that I saw him later on the ship sitting among the tackle with lack lustre eyes and unadjusted dress. He was beyond walking. Perhaps some burly, unsqueamish Samaritan took him on his back; or he might have travelled slung from a pole between the shoulders of two guerrillas. Meanwhile my right arm felt stranger and stranger; it was quite painless, but I found I could neither straighten it

nor raise it above my shoulder. Perhaps it was just as well we were going away³³. The sun rose behind Mount Ida and by the time it was up about 20 guerrillas were padding along beside us. They were all from the Rodakiniot band of the Kapitan Yanna, Kotsiphis and Khombitis. Like a number of their men, these were old friends from my time in their region, but I hadn't seen most of them for a year and a half. A studied but dashing nonchalance marks the way people dress on the Retimo Chania border and in spite of patched boots and torn clothing of mountain life, most of them were dressed in black shirts, their fringed turbans were rakishly looped and their cartridge clips buckled tightly round their mulberry sashed middles. The looks are splendid hereabouts. There was a surprising lot of fair hair and grey eyes, there is also an aquiline, rather hispano-mauresque fineness in many of the features which may spring from the Saracenic Occupation, especially along this southern shore, a thousand years ago; eyebrows like pen strokes, and eyes that blaze out like lamps. A mixture of relaxed ease and bohemianism – coupled with reckless alacrity and high spirits, stamps their bearing. They are ready for anything. At the moment an infectious feeling of elation filled them; it was caused by the rout of the Germans a fortnight earlier. The situation in these hills was an odd one: the Germans had burnt down Rodakino; several months before after the bands of Manoli Bandouvas and Manoli Yanna, with Tom and Xan, had come into headlong collision with a strong body of the enemy and driven them off with loss, the Germans had blown up Kalisikya, the next biggest village in the area, with the result that the Germans had

³³ This curious ailment got worse. Two days after landing my right leg was attacked by the same trouble. Within a week I was in hospital stiff as a plank. It went on for three months; then gradually unclenched and vanished as mysteriously as it had come. It was at first thought to be infantile paralysis, then 'rheumatic infection of the joints', incurred by sleeping out for years in wet clothes. Another doctor diagnosed the thing as psychosomatic. He thought that, at times like the successive postponements and frustrations and dangers of the last days, one is more anxious than one realises and somehow, when the subconscious anxiety relaxes a bit, nature steps in indignantly. I don't know. I was back in Crete in the autumn, completely alright and, touch wood, there's never been a hint of a return. I only mention this because of its oddity: A Cretan friend said "You must have been Eyed".

no sanctions left and the guerrillas moved about the forbidden zones of the coast, in full sight and range of the German garrison below, completely unmolested. There was no more to lose.

A few hours later we were gazing down at the point where these Germans, fortunately about two miles from our intended point of exit, lived in a strongly defended barbed wire perimeter. (Our march, till the reunion with Billy's party in the middle of the morning, had taken thirteen hours. It was considered a great feat.) Billy and the others had arrived at our tryst – a jut of the mountains commanding the entire coast, - just before dawn. There was a great feeling of excitement in the air. The main body of the enemy were a mile further west. We watched the outpost directly beneath us as they moved about their pen at normal garrison tasks. Suddenly they all seemed to be bounding across an open space in an extending line which began to shrink at the other end. I asked Manoli for the binoculars. He looked through them, laughed and handed them to me. Billy adjusted his and when we saw they were only playing leapfrog, songs burst simultaneously from our lips. The General looked down a long time and handed back the glasses with one of his deep sighs. I don't think he was thinking of rescue. It was too late now, and, with all those black clad guerrillas lying smoking and quietly talking among the rocks with their guns beside them, too remote a contingency, I think the sigh, and the resigned smile and the shrug that followed meant that those minute figures below were the last of the German army he would see until the war was over. He said, not sarcastically; "You must be feeling pleased."

* * *

But I wasn't, not all together. Billy and I both felt that all would go well this time. The

Rodakino captains had done us proud: long before the ship was due, there would be 80 or 100 well armed men in the mountains to shut up the pass inland and to swoop down the mountain side, should there be trouble at the last moment; they could those Thermopylean warriors between the sea and the mountains against a whole regiment. But Crete is always difficult to leave; it was especially so now. The coast retreated east and west in a score of towering folds and each succeeding cape, in the clarity of this lens-light air, was as precise in detail as the rocks where we lay; they only dimmed as they sank under the surface. Visible there for many fathoms, they plunged headlong into those peacock-blue soundings to depths of the Libyan sea as far from the water line as the great tangled watersheds behind us. Only the island of Gavlos broke the glitter of the expanding sea beyond. The cliffs below were a descending jungle of thyme, rockrose, heather, myrtle, arbutus and verbena, oleanders marked the pebble and boulder strewn torrent beds and the air was loaded with the smell of herbs. Who would exchange all this, and nightingales and the sounds of goatfolds and herdsmen calling across the gulfs of air, and the echo of shots along empty gorges, for tram bells, jacarandas, carrion crows and muezzins? And the Cretans? There has been more than a hint in these pages of their kindness and generosity and of that aspect of Cretan life which suddenly gives the phrase "Brotherhood in arms", such meaning; there were many things to make one sorry to leave, even for so short an absence as I hoped mine would be, from the struggle that was afoot; not through indispensability, far from it; but because some infectious property of the contest and many links of friendship had involved us in it during the last years, to a point where difference of race meant little. We were up to the neck in a singular phenomenon with most unusual beginnings.

When the Germans invaded Crete, their armies had just defeated the whole of

Europe, except – thanks, perhaps, to the fluke of the Channel's existence – England. Peace had been signed on the mainland where the whole Cretan division was now marooned. Logically the civilian population could have been expected to remain inactive while the professionals – the British, Commonwealth and a small number of Greek troops – fought it out with the invaders. But, to the great astonishment of both sides, all over the island bodies of Cretans – villagers, shepherds, old men, boys, monks and priests and even women, - without any collusion between them or master plan or arms or guidance from the official combatants – rose up at once and threw themselves on the invaders with as little hesitation as if the German war machine were a Basha's primitive expedition of janissaries armed with long guns and scimitars. They had not had a second's doubt about what they should do. This atavistic reaction to the violation of their island was comparable, in spirit, and on a smaller scale to the vigour of Greece's automatic reaction to the Italian invasion when they flung the invaders back into Albania and nearly into the sea – was reinforced by another instinct; the compulsion to lend a hand to a friend in the lurch; ("Listen to that!, our allies, who have come a long way over the sea are fighting the enemy in our mountains. Come on!") this phenomenal response to a challenge may have had little tactical or strategic result; how could it, when the official defenders were themselves driven out? But the psychological and moral results were enormous. (Crete differs from the rest of the world at many points and critics who try to evaluate cause and effect there, especially in military matters, are soon astray). The German revenge for the Cretan's share in the battle was an immediate holocaust of burning and shooting. From that moment there was no looking back and the skull and crossbones was run up the mast. The Resistance Movement had come into being as the first parachutist touched ground.

During the next year, it grew in strength, cohered and ramified all over the island through the organising of the shelter and the guidance to safety of allied stragglers, and soon in working with emissaries sent in from the free world outside to help them. This spontaneous growth, rooted in fighting the enemy and in works of mercy to their friends involved all that was good in the island, all the natural leaders, all that was courageous, unselfish and wise. Political differences were sunk; there was no struggle for power; apart from the determination to help win the war, there was no dogma; nothing artificial or doctrinaire, no hidden motives or post war aims kept discreetly secret. As for the English scattered among them, they trusted us. They knew that what we and they were up to was the same. If we ever let them down, they blamed the hard circumstances of war, and better still forgave all their mistakes. It make people rub their eyes in amazement that this proverbial home of individuality, lawlessness and revolt should unite, when the need came, in this durable harmony; but so it was.

All this, and wondering what the next phase would be, overcast leaving time. But it was another side of the Cretans of which there has been no room as all in this narrative which one knew one would miss most : the flair for friendship, company, talk, fun and music; originality and inventiveness in conversation and an explosive vitality that seem to recharge itself from the high voltage of the air; it was to the air, too, that they gave the credit for their capacity cross several mountain ranges at the same lightening speed on an empty stomach as after swallowing enough raki and wine to lame other mortals for a week. Their glance and their speech were equally unguarded; there was something both patrician and bohemian in their attitude to life and their sense of the comic drew a thread of humour through everything; not frivolously; out of stoicism rather if things were going badly and to wipe away

anything maudlin or rhetorical from matters that were too serious to be blurred by either. Recalcitrant to official dragooning, they would let themselves be cut to bits for the abstract ideas round which their lives turned. In a way, of course, they were ready for all that was happening. They were brought up on powder and shot and on traditions of fighting against occupation; they knew all about the cost of a wedding feast. Even if the whole place went up in smoke, they knew they would win in the end; if not this time, then the next. When eating and drinking in sheepfolds and caves it was to take anything stagey out of the utterance that they adopted a mock-heroic and almost ribald tone when they clashed glasses together and said "Let us die without shame!"; but they meant it, and did.

* * *

But in the end excitement at the thought of getting the General off the island and being free at last from the disaster of failure (and, less creditably, from the brutta figura,) had us all in its grip. Anyway, this time, the whole party, except for Grigori had Antoni Zoidakis, were coming too; for it was them I had been thinking about and would miss most. They'd been utterly beyond praise, and all the participators, before and after the capture, who had passed us on from hand to hand like an explosive and incendiary baton in two relay races across a dozen mountain ranges and lasting for 27 and then 17 days – their help had been instantaneous, enthusiastic and total with never a flicker of hesitation or doubt.

Manoli, Andrea, Kotsiphis and I climbed down from the rocks and the roots in the afternoon to see what the Germans were up to.. All was quiet. Andrea went up the cliff again and we lay and smoked behind a rock until the others should come.

Manoli reckoned we must have been about 400 people since the capture. Knowing

Crete, he went on with a wry smile, many hundreds more must have a pretty good idea of our whereabouts by now; yet here we were.

To avoid the look of a too large a procession the others came down in two parties and we all lay up till nightfall on a ledge in a deep hollow of the cliffs where an icy spring trickled down the rocks. An old Rodakiniot had walled it in with sea boulders to make a little grotto like a hermitage, deeply shaded by fig trees and oleanders. We soaked Stathi's hard bread and munched it with the old man's onions and lettuces and radishes and sat talking until long after dark. When we crossed the short distance to the little cove we hoped to leave from. It seemed to us all, with its walls of rock on either side and the sand and the pebbles, the lapping of the water and the stars a quiet place for our adventure to end. As we stood about, talking in whispers at first, though there was no one to be afraid of, Andartes climbed down the rocks in two and threes to join us. There were the Rodakino Kapitans Khombitis and Manoli Yanã and Andrea Kotsiphis, and there too, suddenly, with the great fair moustache that had made us christen him Beowulf, was Petraka³⁴, the kapitan of the Asi Gonia band and one of our oldest friends on the island. He had brought a contingent of Goniots to join the other Andartes in guarding our departure and also to say goodbye. The place was filling up like a drawing room: groups were lounging about in the rocks or strolling with slung guns quietly conversing; somewhere, led here for evacuation and discreetly tucked away at the back to avoid embarrassing the General, were the two Germans taken prisoner in the fight in Rodakino.

Somewhere, too, the Five Times Lovely One must have been lurking. Quietly

³⁴ Petraka had had a remarkable career. He had been a guerrilla in Macedonia fighting against the Turks and the Bulgarian Comitadais before the Balkan wars; he had also been Venizelos's bodyguard. A few months after the time we are dealing with, he was shot clean through the chest, in one side and out the other in a fight with the Germans; but by some extraordinary fluke the bullet touched nothing vital and he was in command of his

composed with his sling neatly retied by Manoli the General sat on a rock by the water's edge. I said it would be nice for him to be in a bunk with sheets after all our ups and downs; Billy told him we would all soon be eating lobster sandwiches; the Captain of the ship was famous for them. The General smiled – "Danke. Herr Major. Merci mon Capitaine" – as much at the intention as the prospect of these delights. He had had a rotten time, and he knew we were trying to be nice.

Signalling was to begin at 10 o'clock – (not Monkey King after all, but S.B. Sugar Baker) once every five minutes. To our consternation we realised that neither of us knew what B was in more code; only S from SOS. Billy flashed the three short dots, then a sort of s something; in the hopes that Brian Coleman, the captain, would make allowances for our not being regular soldiers. At last we all thought we could hear the ship's engine and a wave of excitement ran along the beach. Then, after a series of faster signals, the sound grew fainter and seemed to die away and mood of dismay assailed us all. These awful moments often occurred on beaches at times like these. Perhaps it was because one's ears, after straining out to sea, played tricks; but today there was a real reason for concern. This agony was suddenly resolved by the arrival of Dennis, who was also due to leave. Fortunately, he knew the Morse code and we started desperately flashing with the correct signal; and last, faint at first, then gradually louder, the sound of the ship came to us and a great sigh of relief rose from the waterline. (It occurs to me now that we ought to have asked the General. He must have been as eager to go now as we were. Did we not think of it, or was it shame at our amateur status?) There was a slight coil of mist over the sea so it was not till she was quite close that we saw the ship. We could hear the rattle of the anchor going down; then two boats were lowered; they headed for the shore full of dark shapes. We had forgotten all about George Jellicoe's raiding

forces. We could soon see that the boats were manned by figures in berets and jerkins all bristling with submachine guns. When the keels touched the pebbles, they leapt into the shallow water and rushed ashore full tilt; I hear someone shout my name. They thought we might have had to retreat fighting to the rendezvous. When they saw that we were unsoiled, I think they were all a bit downcast, especially the Commander, who was not Jellicoe, but Bob Bury, whom I hadn't seen for three years. I introduced him to all the party and to the guerrilla leaders who were crowding about us in a state of great jubilation, and to the General. He bowed stiffly, shook hands and said: "Sehr gefällig, Herr General" in a perfect accent.

The moment had come, Bob Bury and his commandoes emptied their rucksacks of all their stores and cigarettes and handed them over to those of our companions who were remaining. We all pulled off our boots to leave behind; this was always done; even in rags they came in useful. Soon we were saying goodbye to Petraka and the Rodakino kapitans and Yanni Katsias and the guerrillas and lastly to Antoni Zoidakis. We all embraced like grizzly bears. I tried to persuade Antoni to come with us; he wavered a moment and then decided against it. I wish he had. A sailor said "Excuse me Sir, but we ought to get a move on."

As we neared the ship, the figures waving along the shore had begun to grow indistinct among the shadows and, very fast, it was hard to single out the cove from the tremendous mountain mass that soared from the sea to the Milky Way. The ship grew larger, her pom-poms and Bofors A.A. guns shining in the starlight. When we drew alongside sailors in spotless white were reaching down into the bulwarks to guide the General up the rope ladder ("That's right Sir! Easy does it!") while we – Billy, Manoli and George and I helped from below. A moment late we were on the

deck in our bare feet and it was all over.

THE END