

APPENDIX 'B' - EPIRUS ROAD HARRASSING OPERATION, GREECE 1943

MOST SECRET

Copy No. 2

ACCOUNT OF LITTON (EPIRUS) ROAD HARRASSING OPERATIONS - 29 Sep/4 Oct 43

INCLUSIVE, by Major J.N.W. GWYNNE, R.A. ✓

Ref. Map 1:100,000 - GREECE.

PART I. PRELIMINARY.

1. About two weeks previous to the Operation I had decided, with Lt.Col. BARNES' approval, to attempt to train a select party of about 20 Andartes to be available to assist me in carrying out specific raiding tasks such as this.

Both EDES' and ELAS' Commanders appeared enthusiastic and each agreed to provide 10 men. The ELAS representatives never turned up so EDES provided 20. I pointed out that my status did not permit me to issue any orders to this party, but Major AGORAS (EDES Commander) said it would be made abundantly clear to the Officer in command that my wishes were to be treated as orders.

2. My intention was to try and make the party proficient in field-craft and the use of light automatic weapons and explosives.
3. That fortnight's training was not a success. It was soon clear that some of the men were unsuitable and they had to be replaced. The Officer in command was not the right sort but it was difficult to tell Major AGORAS this - and it was impossible to get them to turn up for training regularly or punctually.
4. Consequently by 29 Sep. this party was not of much use, although they accompanied me during the first two days of the Operations.
5. On 27 Sep. Major AGORAS informed me he had received orders to carry out harrassing Operations along the ARTA-AGRINION road, that he was going to establish his H.Q. at PLATANORIMA (128989), moving there that day. At the same time ELAS were apparently receiving similar orders. My orders did not arrive from Col. BARNES till next day, the reason being that whereas the Andarte orders went to them direct from the Joint G.H.Q. at WORKROOM, mine had to come through Col. BARNES. When I went to WORKROOM after the conclusion of the Operations, I was able to take this up with Col. WOODHOUSE and the procedure was to be altered.
6. In the late afternoon of 28 Sep. came Major MARINOS, Second-in-Command to Colonel BARNES, with orders for me to organise road harrassing operations along the ARTA-AGRINION road between ARTA and the MAKRINAUROS hills (2078), the operation to consist of:-
 - i). Cutting down telephone poles and removing as much wire as possible.
 - ii). Sabotaging M.T. along the road if possible.

✓.

6. (Contd).

The operations were subsidiary to major operations by British Forces in the IONIAN ISLANDS, and were to continue till further notice; "And" he said in his somewhat broken English, "you can take some explosives and 'do something' yourself - you like, Yes?". "I like very much indeed" said I.

7. Preparations were immediately put in hand for moving off next morning, and I decided the party with stores etc. should be composed as follows:-

(a). Personnel.

Major GWYNNE, Lt. ANGELOPOULOS (interpreter) ^{Sgt} Capt. WILCOX, (Commando), L/Cpl. MORRIS (W/T operator), 2 muleteers, 1 Greek orderly.

(b). W/T Equipment.

W/T set and 2 batteries. The charging engine with petrol were considered too cumbersome to take on an operation of this sort.

(c). Transport.

3 mules. Everyone carried a rucksack.

(d). Food.

It was intended to "live off the land" and to take emergency rations only. Unfortunately no concentrated emergency rations had been supplied and we therefore took per man: M. & V. 1 tin; sardines 1 tin; processed cheese 1 tin; biscuits 1 packet; tea 2 ozs; condensed milk 1 tin; Note: powdered milk would have been less bulky; also a tin of condensed milk once opened cannot be carried away.

(e). Arms (per man).

1 automatic weapon with ammunition; 1 fighting knife; 2 Mills grenades.

(f). Explosives.

1 canister of H.E. 808 (about 50 lbs); assorted time pencils; detonators and primers; bickford fuses; orange line, prima cord; dual purpose 808 bombs 1 lb. with "all ways" percussion switch and time pencil; pull, pressure and quick release switches. Unfortunately no road mines of any sort had been provided and these would have been invaluable; so would a ready-made booby trap for M.T. on roads.

Note: In connection with the H.E.808 I would point out that the headache caused by handling this when making up charges is a serious handicap, especially when this has to be done just before the actual operation. The headache may be severe and last several hours. When P.E. is not available, could rubber gloves be provided?

P A R T 2. DIARY of EVENTS

29 Sep. All preparations having been completed the previous evening, it was intended to move off at 0800 hrs. The mules, however, arrived one hour late, unfed, and consequently we did not get away till 0845 hrs. Lt. ANGHELATOS, who had just arrived, was left in charge of H.Q. during my absence. There was a W/T "sked" due at 1300 hrs and it was important to find a suitable place to set up the W/T set by that time.

By 1200 hrs we were still in a long valley, running EAST-WEST, just the wrong direction, but fortunately by 1230 hrs we came to a gap with some trees handy and were able to establish the station. Transmission was poor, but we managed to get through and receive two messages. After a fairly brief lunch of bread and cheese we resumed our march and reached PLATANORIMA by 1800 hrs, where I found the EDES HQ.

The situation briefly was as follows:-

Wire-cutting operations had been successfully carried out the previous night on the ARTA-AGRINION road. German strong points with heavy M.Gs and mortars were reported about every 2-3 miles along the road. ELAS were believed to have been operating further SOUTH than EDES, but no definite areas or boundaries had been agreed. I pointed out that this and a proper liaison with ELAS were essential, as otherwise great confusion, or even worse would arise, and as it was clear that neither party was prepared to take the initiative, I said I would go over to ELAS HQ next day and see what could be done.

Supper then taken, consisted of soup, bread, cheese and dried figs.

W/T station established: slept in the open.

30 Sep. Rose at 0630: breakfasted on bread, dried figs and tea, and set out for ELAS HQ at LEVITSKOU (1897) reaching there at 1030 hrs and was well received. Began with a "straight from the shoulder" talk, saying it was impossible for me to study their interests if they always failed to turn up at meetings, and that close liaison was essential. They took this well, and the upshot was they agreed:-

- i). To send their officer i/c road harrasing operations to meet the EDES counterpart at a ruined village near the road at 1800 hrs that evening in order to agree boundaries and co-ordinate their plans.
- ii). To attend a conference at 1700 hrs the next day at EDES' HQ to settle future policy.

Returned to EDES HQ., reaching there at 1400 hrs. Eggs for lunch. At 1530 hrs left with EDES party for r.v. with ELAS, and thereafter operations on road. I took WILCOX and "ANGELO" with me - also as much SOS as we could carry.

At 1745 hrs it seemed we were going straight to the road and not to the r.v. I asked the officer i/c and he said he did not think it worth going to the r.v. as he was sure ELAS would not turn up! I insisted, and we arrived 30 minutes late to find ELAS there. A most successful conference ensued and all outstanding points were agreed. The village was /

was deserted and in ruins, having been burnt down by the Axis a few weeks previously; no food procurable so we ate M. & V. ration for supper before proceeding to the road with EDES party. Discipline on march there very bad, with loud talking and laughter. Reached road about 2100 hrs and started operations with covering party left on high ground. The ground for several hundred yards each side of road was quite flat.

The Andartes worked hard, hewing down many posts and removing large quantities of wire. We went some distance further on and laid several charges of 2 sticks of 808 against the posts, bound on with adhesive tape and two-hour time pencils. Finally, when the order to withdraw was given we sent off a charge with Bickford and had the satisfaction of seeing the post come toppling down. During the withdrawal we heard the other charges going off. We reached EDES HQ on

1 Oct. at 0300 hrs and slept till 0800 hrs. I had originally intended this day to start for MAKRINAUROS where the ground was suitable for ambushing vehicles, but in view of the conference arranged for 1700 hrs I of course could not do so. During the day, at Major AGORAS' urgent request, we mined a small bridge on the road between his HQ and ARTA, as he feared a German attack with M.T. along this road. I left my special party of Andartes to guard the bridge and touch-off the charge. Major AGORAS accepted full responsibility for their fixing the charge at the wrong moment or not fixing it at all! This left us with little explosive.

During the day a runner came in from Major MARINOS saying he was being chased by the Germans several miles to the WEST. I sent him a note giving him my Sitrep. An important message was received over the W/T - that if the Germans attempted reprisals for road harrasing operations the Andartes were to engage them and not necessarily avoid battle.

At the 1700 hrs conference I began by passing on this message. AGORAS was pleased at the idea, but ELAS demurred: they said they disapproved of the operations general as they would lead to reprisals. I said it was really not for us to think about that as we had all received definite orders from Joint GHQ and it only remained for us to carry out these orders. ELAS were quite clearly thinking first and foremost politically of their popularity with the civilian population. Then we went on to discuss general policy. After endless arguments and recriminations from both sides, which sorely tried one's patience, the following points were settled:-

- i). Road harrasing to continue till further notice.
- ii). Liaison officers to be exchanged.
- iii). In future as soon as operations should become imminent or orders from above received, Commanders of both Parties should meet at a village midway between their respective HQs under the "Chairmanship" of the B.L.O. to co-ordinate their plans and ensure proper liaison.

The above represented, on paper, a diplomatic triumph, but I doubted very much whether in practice much would come of it. After the meeting I arranged with ELAS to visit them next day and attend their night operations.

MORRIS reported (1) a W/T message to say CORFU "has fallen", but to which side was not clear (we wrongly assumed to us): (2) that batteries were running down and reception was worse.

2 Oct. Left for ELAS HQ at LEVITZKOU (1897) at 0800 hrs, leaving MORRIS and W/T set under AGORAS' "protection", took remainder of explosives and reached there at 1200 hrs. Thence we were sent on to a Company HQ at KHOSIANA (190892) which we reached 1 hour before sunset, having eaten a lunch of fried chicken and bread en route.

As soon as we arrived I was taken to an eminence about one mile away, from which a magnificent panorama of the whole stretch of road from ARTA to MAKRINAVROS, with the sea beyond, was obtained, and the German strong points were shown to us. Then supper of bread, cheese and sardines, and one hour's rest. WILCOX had not been feeling well, and ANGELO was dead beat, so I told him not to come on the operations and I went alone with the ELAS party. Their advance to the road, which took two hours, was carried out quietly and efficiently and the road was reached at 2145 hrs. The operation lasted about two hours during which I laid some charges as before. ELAS were not nearly so energetic as EDES had been and appeared scared. "Very" lights were fired from a German strong point about 1500 yards distant, with occasional bursts of machine-gun fire in our direction, but all that happened was an occasional bullet whistled overhead. There was also intermittent artillery fire from the direction of ARTA. The withdrawal was well carried out, and we reached HQ on

3 Oct. at 0230 hrs. I felt less tired than when I had arrived in the evening. Slept well on the "village green". After a light breakfast we set out at 0930 hrs for EDES HQ which we reached at 1600 hrs. There I found:-

- i). The previous afternoon EDES had fought an engagement with the Germans who had gone to the village of PETA for further reprisals, resulting in 15 Germans killed or wounded. EDES casualties 1 officer - unfortunately one of their best-killed.
- ii). MORRIS said the batteries would last only 24 hrs more.
- iii). Our explosives were exhausted.

I therefore decided to return to VOUGARELLI (my HQ) to replenish and come back in 2 days if operations still continuing. We started off at 1700 hrs and stopped for the night at a village 2 hrs distant. There we had a magnificent repast of eggs, potatoes, bread, cheese and ersatz coffee. Soon afterwards I received a note from Major MARINOS saying he had reached EDES HQ 2 hrs after we left and he wanted to see me urgently next morning.

Went to sleep in the open: mosquitoes bad.

4 Oct. 0200 hrs: woken by terrific thunderstorm: rushed into "caf6" full of refugees, bugs, fleas and lice. Slept on benches till 0600 hrs. Left for EDES HQ 0630 after eating bread and figs. Reached there at 0730 hrs and conferred with MARINOS for one hour. Returned to village, where we had slept and left our kit and reached it by 1000 hrs. Breakfast of bread, eggs and "coffee".

The journey back to VOUGARELLI, which we reached at 1830 hrs, was uneventful. A wash and change of clothes after continuous wear, were welcome; so was a large supper and so would a good night's sleep have been, but at 2100 hrs I received a signal to say I must leave for PERTOULI, two days distant, early next morning!

P A R T III. A NOTE ON THE TYPE OF GROUND COVERED.

The going is always boulder-strewn and very rough. There are of course no roads - as a rule only rough tracks. Seldom does one walk along the level, and downhill going is often more trying than uphill. The gradient is often very steep, but the tracks wind around which reduces it. In the hot weather one gets very thirsty, but this thirst can be slaked, as a rule, about every two hours at fountains of the purest water.

On 2 Oct. I reckon 28 miles were walked: this was the best day; although on two others I think we did 20.

(Signed). J.N.W. GWYNNE,

Major, R.A.

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