

After Crete – Consistency and Contradiction in the use of the New Zealand Military in Greek Matters

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Extant diplomatic and military studies about Greek wartime politics vis a vis Britain and the dominions of Australia and New Zealand have been steadfastly fixed upon the campaigns of early 1941 and the events leading up to them. Missing is the ongoing involvement of New Zealand in Greek matters during the post-Crete period of the Second World War. This paper examines the dynamics, constraints and degree of solidarity of the New Zealand government and military leadership in Greek matters during the period 1942-1944. These contentious years have been much studied by scholars of Anglo-Greek relations¹, Greek Civil War, a politicised and recalcitrant Greek military², social and political impact of the armed resistance³, extent and definition of what constitutes collaboration⁴ and the horror of occupation.⁵ The war was a cruel catalyst that brought tragedy and destruction. It also brought forward aspirations for change from the old pre-war order, and lasting alteration to socio-political makeup of the country. The Pacific Dominion of New Zealand had a presence in this maelstrom.

Overview of New Zealand Interaction

The catastrophes of early 1941 dominate the New Zealand discourse about its involvement with Greece. Allocating culpability for the disastrous mainland venture

and loss of Crete is a particularly contentious issue in both the literature⁶ and the public arena.⁷ The degree of British deceit versus Dominion “innocence” and “victimhood”⁸, with the weaker and smaller dominions defending themselves against the imposition of imperial prerogatives⁹ and, in terms of New Zealand, its idealism¹⁰, are common themes.

Included in this discourse are the initial strains within the New Zealand national leadership. At its most acute, it might have seen the dismissal of General Bernard Freyberg as commander of the New Zealand forces by New Zealand Prime Minister, Peter Fraser. The latter thought the soldier had not guarded (by communicating his misgivings to Wellington) New Zealand interests

- 1 Procopis Papastratis, *British Policy towards Greece during the Second World War 1941-1944*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Panagiotis Dimitrakis, *Greece and the English – British Diplomacy and the Kings of Greece*, (London: Taurus, 2009).
- 2 Hagen Fleischer, “Anomalies in the Greek Middle East Forces”, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 5:3 (1978), pp. 5-36; David Syrett, “British and the Greek Naval Incident in Chatham, 1944”, *Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, 15:1-2 (1988), pp. 49-69; Evangelos Spyropoulos, *Greek Military (1909-1941) and the Greek mutinies in the Middle East (1941-1944)*, (New York: East European Monographs, 1993); Mark C. Jones, “Misunderstood and Forgotten: Greek Naval Mutiny of April 1944”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 20:2 (2002), pp. 367-97; Andre Gerolymatos, “Road to Authoritarianism: Greek Army in Politics 1935-1949”, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 35:1 (2009), pp. 7-25.
- 3 To cite a few examples, John Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance: Greek Agony 1941-44*, (New York: Pella, 1983); Andre Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare & Espionage in Greece 1940-1944*, (New York: Pella, 1992); Richard Clogg, *Greece, 1940-1949: Occupation, Resistance, Civil War: a Documentary History*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Andre Gerolymatos, *Red Acropolis, Black Terror: the Greek Civil War and the origins of Soviet-American rivalry, 1943-1949*, (New York: Basic Books, 2004).
- 4 Richter used extensive primary records to analyse collaboration involving British supported partisans: Heinz Richter, “Lanz, Zervas and the British Liaison Officers”, *South Slav Journal*, 12,1-2 (1989), pp. 38-65; Hondros looks at British policy and the Greek raised Security Battalions. Hondros, John Louis Hondros, “Too Weighty a Weapon: Britain and the Greek Security Battalions”, *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 15,1-2 (1988) 1943-1944”, pp. 33-47.
- 5 Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe and the Aftermath of World War II*, (London: Viking, 2012); Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: the Experience of Occupation, 1941-44*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

- 6 National pride has a discernible presence in the discussions over Crete. For example, Beevor made a pointed attack on the New Zealand commander on Crete, Freyberg, in: Anthony Beevor, *Crete: Battle and Resistance*, (London: John Murray, 2005). In a review that touched upon the original edition, New Zealand's state war historian, Ian McGibbon judged Beevor's argument as a “simplistic notion”: Ian McGibbon, “Review of Oxford Companion to Military History”, *New Zealand International Review*, XXVII (March/April 2002), p. 2. Two recent populist titles are David Filer, *Death from the Skies – New Zealand's Role in the loss of Crete*, (Auckland: David Bateman, 2010); Ron Palenski, *Men of Valour*, (Auckland: Hodder Moe, 2013). The former places the blame of inaction on New Zealand commanders under Freyberg. Palenski veers away from allotting blame and defends the major the two who have been held responsible in the New Zealand literature.
- 7 In New Zealand at the time of the 70th commemoration of the Battle of Crete, there were several items in the popular press. Veteran Sandy Thomas, whose memoirs *Dare to be Free* (London: Cassell, 2005) included Crete, publicly stated it was indeed the New Zealanders who were at fault. Tim Donoghue, “Officer breaks rank over the Battle of Crete”, *Dominion Post*, 14 May 2011. Matthew Wright dismissed discussing the issue, preferring to talk about the long term victory and that the New Zealanders had their revenge killing in Northern Italy against the German paratroopers. Matthew Wright, “Battle for Crete part of a slow-evolving Kiwi legacy”, *Dominion Post*, 24 May 2011.
- 8 Ian Wards, “Balkan Dilemma” in: John Crawford (ed.), *Kia kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000); Peter Ewer, *Forgotten ANZACs: Campaign in Greece 1941*, (Melbourne: Scribe, 2008). For more Australia centred studies see David Day, *Menzies & Churchill at War*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986); Graham Freudenberg, *Churchill and Australia*, (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2009).
- 9 Besides the ongoing interplay between Britain and the dominions, the mechanism of the charter given Australian and New Zealand commanders by their governments is often cited in this respect. W.E. Murphy, “Blamey's and Freyberg's ‘Charters’: a study in civil-military and Commonwealth relations”, *Political Science*, 16: 2 (1964), pp. 23-51; Forty-five years later, Hensley considers it as a key factor. Gerald Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield: New Zealand and its Allies, 1939-45*, (Auckland: Viking, 2009).
- 10 Wood's state history for example argues: “The emphasis on moral issues was characteristic of New Zealand policy, and it was one of the factors leading the Government to accept a really grave military risk”, F.L.W. Wood, *New Zealand people at war: political and external affairs*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1958), p. 186.

well enough over the mainland expedition. The ensuing loss of Crete, under his command, added to thoughts of replacing the General. However, in the New Zealand publication record, both the received¹¹ and revisionist¹² arguments accept this initial questioning as a result of still gestating civil/military relationship and that, for the remainder of the war, Prime Minister Peter Fraser and his military commander in the field, General Bernard Freyberg, enjoyed an exemplary working relationship. It is one that also included consideration for their common fighting soldiers. As shown later, this perspective is severely jolted when one examines their actions over the question of Greece in following 1941.

New Zealand Publication Record and Post-Crete

New Zealand had an ongoing presence in the years after 1941 when new forces emerged in occupied and non-occupied Greece to challenge the old order, and the operation of Anglo-Greek relations to the satisfaction of British. The extensive involvement is suggested by just a few telegrams in a published volume, isolated paragraphs and memoirs. These include provision of training and anticipated shared military operations in the North African and Middle East theatres¹³ during a time when the Greek military was experiencing internal factional fighting in the officer corps and the emergence of a mass-based left-wing soldiers' movement.¹⁴ Years later, in 1944, political agitation in another joint force was also raised.¹⁵ The remainder are very brief mentions in official campaign and unit histories.¹⁶

Individual New Zealand soldiers also operated within Occupied Greek territory as part of clandestine British organisations. New Zealand officers and soldiers were on loan from their country's major military unit, the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF) to SOE (Special Operations Executive).

In terms of this connection, there is a thin official volume on British Special Operations Executive (SOE) in Greece¹⁷ as well as autobiographical accounts by individual members.¹⁸

None of these publications provides a single narrative of the ongoing involvement of New Zealand in Greek affairs. There are fragments revealing that the interaction took place during contentious Anglo-Greek relations. Nowhere is there an assessment of the New Zealand leadership during this period.

Methodology

As suggested by the preceding text, the examination will pivot around the Freyberg-Fraser nexus. That is, I have not found anything to challenge the popular New Zealand view that, due to their dominant personalities and possibly the small size of the Dominion's civil-military infrastructure, these two individuals essentially steered the strategic direction of the military war effort.¹⁹

11 For example, see W.G. Stevens, *Freyberg the Man*, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1965), ch. 5. Stevens was one of Freyberg's most senior officers and, besides being on service in the field, had been seconded to the New Zealand Prime Minister's Dept. during the pre-war years. He writes a largely positive view of Freyberg. His specific criticism about his commander's approach to diplomatic management probably stems from this exposure to the government decision making process; "After some initial difficulties ... [Fraser] established a good working relationship with Freyberg", Ian McGibbon (ed.), *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 181; in their biography of Fraser Bassett and King state: "What Freyberg and Fraser had so far failed to convey was their apprehension about the Greek venture to each other. Subsequently, both deeply regretted this." Michael Bassett, Michael King, *Tomorrow Comes the Sun*, (Auckland/London: Penguin, 2000), p. 209.

12 Belich, the major revisionist New Zealand historian, implicitly accepts Freyberg and Fraser working in tandem: "In the end, both Freyberg and Fraser were seldom prepared to override the British high command, if it really insisted, over the use of New Zealand troops." James Belich, *Paradise Reforged A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, (Auckland: Penguin, 2001), p. 284.

13 *Documents Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-45: Volume II, Wellington*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1951). The communications are introduced throughout the paper. This monograph also includes telegrams concerning the Aegean disaster in late 1943 and the involvement of the New Zealand Squadron of the Long Range Desert Group. As will be shown later, this episode is discussed later but is tangential to the main thrust of this paper.

14 W.G. Stevens, *Problems of 2NZEF*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1958), pp. 135-136.

15 *Documents Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-45: Volume II*.

16 Robin Kay, N.C. Phillips, *Italy. Volume II. From Cassino to*

Trieste, (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1967), p. 215-216. The author states: "At the request of the Greek Government and with the approval of the New Zealand Government, the Greek Mountain Brigade was placed under the aegis of the New Zealand Division. The brigade was composed mainly of men whom war had made exiles; it had been recruited from the reliable elements of two brigades of the Greek Royal Army which had mutinied for political reasons while stationed in the Middle East."; D. Sinclair, *19 Battalion and Armoured Regiment*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1954), p. 251 notes the Greeks relieved the battalion in Syria; pp. 453-54 describes the Greek and New Zealand attack on Rimini. The Italian connection is also mentioned in J.F. Cody, *New Zealand Engineers, Middle East*, (Wellington: Dept of Internal Affairs, 1961); Jim Henderson, *22 Battalion*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1958); D.J.C. Pringle, W.A. Glue, *20 Battalion and Armoured Regiment* (Wellington: War History Branch, 1957); J.F. Cody, *28 (Maori) Battalion*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1956); T. Stout, M. Duncan, *New Zealand medical services in Middle East and Italy*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1956), p. 321 mentions the Syrian episode.

17 M.B. McGlynn, *Special Service in Greece*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1953).

18 The relevant monographs are Bill Jordan, *Conquest Without Victory*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969); Arthur Edmonds, *With Greek Guerrillas*; Putaruru: Author, c. 1998; John Mulgan, *Report on Experience*, (London: Frontline Books, 2010). Mulgan was actually a New Zealander who had joined the British Army at the outbreak of war. As such his inclusion in this study cannot be justified except as to provide contextual details. He died in early 1945 and his manuscript was subsequently published.

19 Peter Fraser's authoritarian style of leadership during the war was indicative of his leadership style and influence in general. One biography of him stated in 2000 that: "From 1940 to 1949 he was the New Zealand government and the Labour Party ... He dominated his colleagues in a manner that no Labour leader has done before or since", Bassett, King, *op cit.*, p. 10. Although after Crete, Freyberg is credited with being inclusive in operational decision making, Freyberg's approach to maintaining his diplomatic umbilical cord to Wellington dovetails with Fraser's authoritarian methods. In contrast to his consultative form of military

While the New Zealanders were interacting with both Greeks and the British, the machinations within these latter camps, and the interplay between each other, is given a secondary level of exposure. This is due to the New Zealand perspective taken, as well as the key focus – the interaction between the two leaders, even when what they were aware of some of the obvious risks in participating in Greek-related scenarios. That being said, an episode in Italy, during late 1944, does include more contextual sketching than does the treatment of previous years. This is a result of the New Zealand deliberation and action over Greek-related events being at its greatest then.

Research Question

Given the preceding, the formulated research question is: *How did the New Zealand leadership respond when its military was exposed to factious and often violent Greek wartime politics between 1942 and 1944?*

Sources

Any examination of New Zealand in the Second World War is hampered by the poor practice of its government in using and/or retaining written records. This even extended to non-recording of Cabinet meetings and certain sessions in the parliament. The former was addressed to an extent when a change in government in 1949 led to cabinet minutes being taken.²⁰ The latter gaps were never filled.²¹

In addition to the above is a related larger impediment to empirically based research. This is the widespread destruction of official documents in Cairo in response to Rommel's threatening offensive in mid-1942.²²

As this is a New Zealand perspective, archives and manuscript depositories in New Zealand and the United Kingdom provide nearly all the primary material. Although visits were made to Athens-based repositories, such as the Benaki Archives, General State

leadership with subordinates, Freyberg, according to one of his most senior officers, sometimes irritated his staff because: "throughout the war he kept this side of his duties, his relations with the Government, almost entirely under his personal control and did not often consult anybody." W.G. Stevens, *Freyberg the Man*, (Wellington; A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1965), p 106. See pp. 84-85 concerning Freyberg's management of officers. With Freyberg Fraser is depicted as being consultative but with everyone else he "pushed and shoved, bargained and coerced", Keith Eunson, *Mirrors on the Hill: Reflection on New Zealand's Political Leaders*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001), p. 17.

20 As a memorandum to the incoming Prime Minister indicated, "At the moment there is no minute of Cabinet discussion; the decision is only noted. In other Commonwealth countries, a procedure has been developed whereby brief minutes are taken." Memorandum for Prime Minister, *Cabinet-Review of Procedure*, September 1949, p. 3, MS-Papers-6759-050 Papers Relating to Foreign Affairs (A15) Alister McIntosh Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (ATL).

21 The New Zealand Parliamentary advises "that many sessions during the war were not reported, neither in Hansard nor in any newspaper, for security reasons". Email communication 7 February 2013.

22 Beaton's biography of Greek poet and diplomat George Seferis calls the vent the "big flap". Seferis witnessed the burning. Roderick Beaton, *George Seferis: Waiting for the Angel: a Biography*, (New Haven: Yale university Press, 2003).

Archives and Army History Directorate of the Hellenic General staff, constraints of time and language did not offer any material to greatly alter the perspective provided by the New Zealand and British depositories. Several Greek-language secondary sources were used. In respect of these, I would like to thank Dr. Anna Efsthadiadou-Adams, modern Greek language tutor and recent PhD graduate at the University of Queensland.

1942–1943 in the Middle East and Occupied Greece

In February 1942, eight months after the surrender on Crete, a New Zealand radio broadcast told of the role its soldiers had with the free Greek army now stationed in Palestine.²³ This was the New Zealand Training Team (NZTT), which formed part of the British Military Mission attached to the Greek Army. As described, the new chain of command and structure showed that the New Zealanders now had a less formal and less prominent part vis a vis the Greeks than what they had on Crete, where training/liason teams had joined the Greek regiments, and the whole island's defence was under Freyberg. The 30-minute broadcast incorporated a range of elements – messages from some of the New Zealanders (according to the senior officer, Major Samson, there were apparently 60-70 personnel on attachment altogether), background information from the British commander of the parent British Liaison Unit (or 210BLU), singing Greek soldiers and a message to New Zealand Greeks from the commander of the First Greek Brigade, which was receiving the training.

The historical development of the then current training is linked to the earlier Crete situation, with the names given of the officers then attached to the Greek Army and also those who died there. Following the evacuation from the island, subsequent liaison work was carried out by New Zealanders, and Freyberg recently (3 weeks beforehand) expanded the contingent to its new level by adding three officers and 20 other ranks.²⁴

If the numbers mentioned by Samson and the date of the Broadcast are correct, then the escalation of personnel may be a preliminary indication of the British-inspired Anglo-Greek Military Agreement, signed on 9 March 1942. The New Zealanders were now involved in revitalising an ailing Greek Army (Royal Hellenic Army of the Middle East or VESMA).

At this dark stage of the war, forming the Greek personnel into a fighting force suffered from half-heartedness by both British and Greek senior generals and a geographically, and psychologically, distant monarch in

23 NZ Troops with the Greek Army 1942, Radio New Zealand Sound Archives, Christchurch, UCDR312/2; UCDR341-1. Four months after previously mentioned radio broadcast a despatch from the official New Zealand war correspondent in the Middle East published in a provincial New Zealand newspaper, offered a darker picture of the training then being delivered to the Greeks. The lack of a common language was a major issue: "It takes time and unlimited patience to give a lecture". When verbal instructions are replaced by the printed variety, "ludicrous complications" arise. Part of the latter problem was the multiple languages used by the Greeks (many of the new recruits came from the various Greek communities in the Middle East). "Training Schools", *Ellesmere Guardian*, 2 June 1942.

24 NZ Troops with the Greek Army 1942.

exile and émigré Greek government.²⁵ Ongoing political divisions between republicans, royalists and Metaxists, with extensive cronyism in the officer corps, all contributed toward malaise.²⁶

New Zealand Enthusiasm and Awareness of Deeper Divisions

While he was not officially privy to the deliberations between the senior British military, Foreign Office apparatus and Greek decision makers about regeneration of Greek military forces (and exiting of senior Greek commanders), Freyberg had some idea of the wider political kinetics. Although not on the distribution list for a 29 January 1942 communication from Auchinleck, in charge of Middle East Forces, to the War Office in London, he had his own copy with the handwritten annotation “For General Bernard Freyberg (For Personal Use only)”.²⁷ Changes to the senior levels of the Greek military in the Middle East were “recommended by me [Auchinleck] in the interests of military efficiency but there are also political and security reasons”.²⁸ These he communicated separately to London. The opening paragraph of the communication suggests one of the contributing factors – “dissension in and unfitness for war of Greek forces”.²⁹

Incompetence of some senior officers was also interlaced with competing ideologically driven officer factions within the Greek forces. It was a shadowy interplay involving the monarch, his government, their British sponsors and the officer corps. One of Auchinleck’s follow-on communications, and one Freyberg never saw, provided “personality notes” of individual senior Greek officers in the Middle East. It contained assessments such as “Royalist”, “neutral politic”, “Venizelist”, “pro British”. The Greek officer Freyberg would have the most to do with, the soon-to-be appointed Pafsanos Katsotas, was thought to be “independent politically”.³⁰ This British practice of categorising the Greek military was never shared with the Dominion for the remainder of the war.

Freyberg turned a blind eye to the political manoeuvrings stated in what he had been given surreptitiously. In Wellington, nothing was received about the politically permeated Greek officer corps via the Dominions Office.

Freyberg was very positive about the potential of the Greeks. He jotted in one of his own files: “Material good”³¹ and wrote to one of his senior officers on 6 April 1942: “I am certain that from what everybody tells me the younger Greek officers and men are excellent material.”³² He was, however, sceptical of the abilities

of the senior Greek commanders. If they proved “not up to the mark”, then the Greek king and Greek commander in chief would be approached. He also stressed that: “It is most important, however, that the Greeks should not think we are reporting on their officers.” Freyberg was also confident that his new broom would do the job: “I had a further talk with the King [George II of the Hellenes] and I am certain that the policy as outlined, if pushed with the energy I hope it will, will be much more successful than the one in operation before we came into the picture.”³³

Considerable Investment

The General may have been energised, but being with the Greeks had low priority in the reporting that he sent from the Middle East to the New Zealand capital. Only a single paragraph made that journey, and even that was part of a longer general update about the war situation:

“In our new defensive position we shall have a brigade group of Greeks under command. These are men evacuated from Crete, as yet partially armed and not trained. After the evacuation from Greece we were asked by General Headquarters, Middle East, to train the Greeks. We have sent to the Royal Greek Army numbers of New Zealand officers and instructors to help them in the use of British weapons. Further, we have taken Greek officers and men into our training establishments at Maadi. Thus we have made our contribution to the general pool of instruction in the Middle East. I knew it would have your approval. The Greek Government bore all necessary expenses. The Greek Brigade Group will come up to Syria to complete their collective training under our guidance and will then come under our operational command.”³⁴

The training contribution from New Zealand was considerable. In addition to the previously mentioned NZTT, New Zealand’s School of Instruction was involved. Its internal history devotes an entire chapter to the Greek training, which began on 12 March 1942. Its prominence is not matched by other nations’ attendees. The courses included, but were not limited to, chemical warfare, weapons training, intelligence and transportation and maintenance.³⁵ The issue of language led to the courses being doubled in length and training material, standing orders etc. being translated. There was also an increase in the instructional staffing level at the School.³⁶ When the training was completed on 30 January 1943 (nearly 10 months after it started), 1,124 students had attended some 68 courses. If one adds to this the 830 Greeks who were either processed forward to other New Zealand units for training, then the total is nearly 2,000. It is indicative of the nature of desert warfare that courses related to transport collectively comprised the major course attendances (377 at the school with another “280 placed with depots for driving

25 Spyropoulos, *op. cit.* The author provides the most comprehensive study.

26 Fleischer, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

27 WAI 8 Part II T Freyberg Papers, Archives New Zealand (ANZ), The War Office copy can be found at in WO 193/48, The National Archives (TNA).

28 *Ibidem.*

29 *Ibidem.*

30 WO 32/17213 (TNA), 12 February 1942.

31 WAI 8 T Part II (ANZ).

32 WAI 8 T Part II Probably Freyberg to Stevens, 6 April 1942 (ANZ).

33 *Ibidem.*

34 Telegram 134, 21 March 1942, *Documents Relating to New Zealand’s Participation in the Second World War 1939-45: Volume II.*

35 WAI DA 164/15/1 (ANZ), GP Scott, *NZ School of Instruction – 2 NZEF Middle East Force.*

36 *Ibidem.*

instruction”).³⁷ The NZTT stayed with the Greeks longer than the School provided training; keeping a small number with them until late 1943.³⁸

It would seem it was the NZTT who experienced, or suffered, given the subsequent published tirade from one senior New Zealand commander, political agitation in the Greek army. In 1958, Bill Stevens, former Major General and responsible for all administration in the 2NZE (Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force)³⁹, wrote: “Greeks are by nature politically minded to a degree unheard of among British communities” and “The patience of the training team was strained almost to breaking point, for it was difficult to get any continuity, beginning with the Greek commander, who seemed to change every full moon.”⁴⁰ Stevens may be exaggerating in his counting of commanders, but the NZTT was still in place when the Greek military experienced its first popular-based protest in early 1943. Unlike the preceding machinations of officer corps factions, that were a factor in bringing about the Anglo Greek Agreement and increased New Zealand involvement in early 1942, the unrest in early 1943 was communicated to Wellington.

When Politics Became Obvious

On 8 March 1943, albeit nearly a year after Freyberg informed Fraser about him having the Greeks, Wellington learnt that the political left in the Greek armed forces had made their first open challenge to the Greco-British decision making in the Middle-East. The Dominions Office cabled: “Serious political disturbances have broken out in two brigades of the Greek army stationed in Syria.”⁴¹ Although it mentioned mass resignations of rightist officers, reporting on the actions and demands of the un-named and leftist semi-secret Anti-Fascist Military Organisation (ASO) comprised most of the communication. In this short communication, the New Zealand administration learnt about the “underground agitation” of the left against “reputedly Fascist Greek elements in authority”.⁴² Also that “soldiers committees” that were “consisting of N.C.O.s and junior officers” had usurped the military chain of command. The demands of the soldiers were primarily around pursuing the war effort more vigorously. To that end, they wanted a new government formed, removal of officers who displayed lack of interest in fighting and “expressed themselves in favour of dictatorship or said that German discipline was best for the Greek Army.”⁴³

Changes demanded by the recalcitrant soldiers were implemented, but the core of Anglo-Greek policy remained unchanged. A revamped government was one thing, but on 26 March, Wellington was told that London provided “Full support to the King and present Greek Government” and “maintenance and strengthening of the King’s personal authority [with] the Greek armed forces”.⁴⁴ In addition to these points, the telegram also stated – “Approval of recent declarations by the King and Prime Minister to the effect that the Government are not exercising dictatorial authority and intend to leave it to Greek people to determine their future political conditions” and there was “Encouragement to efforts to broaden the basis of the present Government”.⁴⁵ Britain was still committed to the cornerstone of its Greek policy – support for King George II, an Anglophile. He was also a monarch who had allowed the dictator Metaxas to assume dictatorial power before the war.

As Freyberg had done to him the previous year, Fraser refrained from communicating anything about the situation in the Greek forces to his General. In a way, the lack of coordinated effort and communication in the leadership that was evident in the 1941 misadventures seemed to be repeating itself. The degree of risk and consequences were greatly different. But the two leaders had not discussed anything about the Greeks. This was true not only as concerns the political dynamics in the Greek army but also anything about the proposed joint force. Partly, this lack of communication may be explained by the rapidly changing conditions of 1942. In June, Freyberg and his Division urgently moved from Syria when Rommel made his thrust into Egypt.⁴⁶ They left just as the bulk of Greeks arrived for the joint exercises that Fraser had been informed about a few months before. Only a small group of Greek officers had preceded them and spent over a week observing the New Zealand 6 Brigade conduct its own exercises.⁴⁷ They would also be involved with the Dominion’s forces in constructing defensive fortifications for a possible German advance if the Wehrmacht broke through at Stalingrad.⁴⁸ It was a crisis, and given British views on Greeks serving with New Zealanders, described later, it is not surprising that the matter of the Greeks was not pursued. Fraser was also faced with the Japanese drive into the Pacific.

37 *Ibidem*.

38 HQ 2NZDIV from GHQ ME, 6 Nov. 1942, WO 201/134 (TNA), W.G. Stevens, *Problems of 2 NZEF*, (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1958).

39 Essentially the New Zealanders had a fighting arm, the Second New Zealand Division 2NZDIV and a large training and administration component 2NZE. While the former was deployed in North Africa, Middle East and Italy, NZEF had as its main infrastructure at the Maadi Camp on the outskirts of Cairo.

40 Stevens, *Problems of 2NZE*, pp. 134-35.

41 Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Prime Minister Wellington, 8 March 1943, AAEG 950 132e 345/4/1 1b (ANZ). Hereafter the Secretary is referred to as SECDOM.

42 *Ibidem*.

43 *Ibidem*.

44 AAEG 950 132e 345/4/1 1b (ANZ) Greece political affairs 1940-1943, SECDOM to Prime Minister Wellington, 25 March 1943.

45 *Ibidem*.

46 For a concise description of the urgent move see J.L. Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt: the summer of 1942*, (Wellington: War History Branch, 1955).

47 Katsotas to Freyberg, 1 June 1942, WAI 8 Part II Royal Greek Army (ANZ).

48 Besides the exercises, the Greeks just as the New Zealanders had been doing for months beforehand, were involved in building fortifications for “The plan of defence of Syria and Palestine from the North and North-East involves the preparation of tank proof fortresses sited to deny the enemy the use of all main arteries of communications in southern Syria, Palestine and Transjordan.” The specific Greek/New Zealand fortress was Djedeide. *New Zealand Divisional Instruction No. 8*, 3 June 1942. *Headquarters 4 New Zealand Infantry Brigade – War Diary, 1 May-31 May 1942*, WAI 1 1639 DA 46/1/29 Pt 2 (ANZ). Despite the title of this file, the June instruction can be found there.

New Zealand Ambivalence

Following the crisis of June, Freyberg's force had only brief encounters with the Greeks who had been sent to the El Alamein front, thanks to the efforts of Greek Minister Panayotis Kanellopoulos. Following that, except for the small NZTT, the link was virtually severed. The 2NZDIV pursued Rommel westwards, and the Greeks returned to their camps.

The separation was not welcomed by the Greek Brigade commander, Katsotas. Before the March 1943 events and aftermath led to his dismissal, he continually sought to join the New Zealanders in the fight.⁴⁹ The response was polite, but unhelpful. In contrast to his earlier enthusiasm, Freyberg's behaviour shifted to ambivalence. When the Greek told the General he needed transport for his troops so as to join the 2NZDIV at El Alamein, Freyberg directed his staff to provide a polite response but made no commitment. Deception was applied: "you can depend on me to do all I can do".⁵⁰ On the Katsotas note he wrote "No Further Action"⁵¹. This was in contrast to his own semi-private notes, where earlier he showed a genuine appreciation of the equipment issue and sought to remedy it.⁵² Besides this, he still had an interest in the wellbeing of the Greeks. When he fleetingly encountered the newly arrived Greek Brigade, for example, after the first battle of El Alamein, he told one of his senior commanders "I am glad we were there just long enough to see the latter go in."⁵³ He also appreciated the Greeks who came to visit him when he was recuperating from a serious wound received in Egypt: "I have quite a stream of visitors including a large quota from the Royal Greek Army who are most attentive and bring me great bouquets of flowers."⁵⁴

While the direct communication between the Greeks and New Zealanders over a planned joint force ended with Freyberg's reluctance in September, by December they were appearing together in British dictated operations. In December the 2NZDIV was told by British command that the former would supply officers and "organize...moves" by the Greek Brigade as part of Operation Guillotine.⁵⁵ This plan never coalesced into anything real.

Besides this officially dictated, but never implemented, operation, Freyberg's diary shows fleeting encounters between the New Zealanders and Greeks during the months following the exit from Syria in June.⁵⁶ The

entry for 2 December is telling of the current attitude: "Brigadier Katsotas (Gk Bde) called – he is delighted to be with us again (but not for long!).⁵⁷ Two days later the Greek commander said goodbye. Although it is not recorded, the Greek regular army were leaving an operational role in the campaign.

The reason for Freyberg's contradictory behaviour and change in attitude lies not in the emergence of the politicised ASO (despite Stevens' later outburst, there is no evidence of any discussion within the New Zealand senior command about any political problem and, as discussed earlier, there was Fraser's silence). It was really with the British. Freyberg's desire for a joint force was his alone. On 13 May, less than two months after he sent his one and only telegram to Fraser, the Greek King George II was told as much, during an inspection the Greek troops on 13 May: "The C-in-C [Auchinleck] made it clear that he had no intention of incorporating the Greek troops in the N.Z. Division to whom they had been affiliated for training purpose only, and the Greek Brigade Group was formed as a self-contained Independent Group in order that they could retain its identity."⁵⁸ The British intention for non-integration of the New Zealand and Greek forces is further demonstrated by a directive given Freyberg, nearly a month after the Wellington telegram. On 15 April, the British Middle East Forces High command told him that they intended an Indian brigade, rather than the Greeks, to join any prospective Turkish venture should entering that country be necessitated by a German breakthrough at Stalingrad.⁵⁹

Freyberg simply did not hold the authority to help the Greeks. The Dominion's military leader, with the seeming acquiescence of the Prime Minister, had an interest in fighting alongside the Greeks, but could not influence ultimate British authority. New Zealand was going down a path characterised by non-recognition of the vicissitudes of the forces within the Greek camp and how Britain would respond to them. It had not brought disaster, but in the ensuing years, the risks were escalating as New Zealanders found themselves in precarious situations that were, to an extent, ignored by their own leaders and also caused them to pursue outcomes the New Zealand leadership was trying to avoid. The first involved clandestine British operations in occupied Greece.

Special Operations Executive

Not only was 1942 the time when the idea of an affiliated Greco-New Zealand force was pursued by Freyberg, it was also the year when individual New Zealanders serving with the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF) entered into another type of wartime relationship with Greece. Two sapper officers, Tom Barnes and Arthur Edmonds, were placed on special service with Special Operations Executive

49 The first was in June, the last in September Katsotas to Headquarters New Zealand Division 15 June 1942, WAI 8/19 PPP Part 2 (ANZ); Katsotas to Freyberg, 17 September, 1942 WAI 8 T Part II (ANZ).

50 Freyberg to Katsotas, 21 September 1942, WAI 8 T Part II (ANZ).

51 Notation on Katsotas letter by Freyberg.

52 WAI 8/13 V.

53 WAI 8/13 V Freyberg to Inglis, 14 September 1942 (ANZ).

54 Copy of letter from Freyberg to unknown recipient, 11 July 1942, WAI 8 PPP part 3 (ANZ).

55 *Guillotine Notes No 1 Main HQ 30 Corps*, 2 Dec. 1942, HQ 2NZDIV General Staff War Diary 1-30 December 1942, WAI 1 1633 DA 21.1/1/36 (ANZ).

56 8 September Katsotas and "a group of Greek officers arrived". The following day Freyberg visited the Greek Brigade and also saw Prince Peter, who stayed with the New Zealanders

overnight. He observed the Greeks, who had arrived in an unorganised state at the front had "been located and brought in out of the dust". GOC Diary WAI 8 44 & 45 (ANZ).

57 *Ibidem*.

58 *Report No 3 on the Royal Greek Army in the Middle East for the month of May 1942*. K51 Tsouderos Papers General State Archives (GAK), Athens.

59 WAI 8 Box 3 23 MidEast to NZ Division, 15 April 1942.

(SOE). They were part of Operation Harling that blew up the Gorgopotamos Viaduct in November of that year. Staying on in Occupied Greece, they rose to senior positions with the British Military Mission (BMM) there. It was a precarious existence, with the need to balance military activity against the Anglo-Greek political landscape. As shown later, for one of their fellow countrymen, it would prove fatal.

Other New Zealanders followed these two. Estimates are uncertain: "At least ten New Zealanders served for periods with the military mission in Greece between 1942 and the end of the German occupation in late 1944".⁶⁰ This is against a total of 383 allied liaison officers quoted in a study on the wartime Greek resistance.⁶¹ However, by holding senior positions in the BMM and through individual officers' actions, they had an involvement in both military and political matters greater than their small numbers suggested. Barnes and Edmonds were attached to EDES and ELAS headquarters respectively. Right-wing EDES (Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Syndesmos or National Republican Greek League) became pro-royalist after a change in allegiance, and so received British endorsement and material support. It was headed by Napoleon Zervas. Left-wing ELAS (Ellinikós Laikós Apeleftherotikós Stratós, or Greek People's Liberation Army) was the military arm of a united front of leftist parties, EAM (National Liberation Front or Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo). EAM/ELAS was a major threat to strategic British interests, but the immediate military exigencies of defeating the Axis led to them being tolerated for the duration of the occupation. New Zealanders were now operating with opposing forces in what was essentially developing into a civil war, with the added complexity of British involvement.

While Barnes and Edmonds were operating at senior levels, their fellow countrymen were carrying out sabotage operations. All were involved in the political dimension. Don Stott was to become the most controversial. In an episode not communicated to Wellington at the time, Stott met with quislings and Nazi representatives in Athens. This was possibly to discuss a separate peace over Greece between Britain and the Germans but, according to Stott, his intention was to gather intelligence. The episode has attracted considerable attention in the literature.⁶² At the time, it was discussed by British, American and Greek parties. Tsouderos, still Greek premier, showed the US Ambassador to his government one of Stott's reports.⁶³ The American intelli-

gence service, Office of Strategic Services (OSS), let it be known to Salas, the head of the left-wing Greek army mutineers who had earlier staged their first revolt in the desert.⁶⁴

New Zealand authorities were unaware of such detailed events. Personnel from 2NZEF were on "special service", as their New Zealand army records and the sparse post-war official history described them.⁶⁵ They were seemingly in a secret black box, with only brief and infrequent contact confined to administrative matters, and away from their home army. Despite this, New Zealand leadership twice had the opportunity to involve itself in their fate. The first was coincidental, driven by other events, and came to nothing.

Selectivity in Recalling New Zealanders

Responding to a November 1943 request from SOE to promote Bob Morton (again with no details), Don Stott's companion during the controversial Athens events, Freyberg told his own staff that he would not because "We are withdrawing all our detached personnel". He added a somewhat intriguing provision: "Morton should be recalled unless he is essential from our point of view".⁶⁶ Nearly four weeks later, he had actually decided that Morton should be recalled.⁶⁷ In fact, Morton did not return to the New Zealanders. Having worked with Don Stott in Athens, he and Stott went on to the Far East with SOE. Stott disappeared there, presumably drowned.

The return of the New Zealand personnel that Freyberg alluded to had nothing to do with SOE. This was the New Zealand response to the fate of the New Zealand Squadron of the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG). Fraser, his emotions enflamed by the initial reports that the force of New Zealanders had been annihilated in the failed Aegean campaign of late 1943⁶⁸, pursued the issue over several months. The crux of the matter was that New Zealand troops had been used in a new theatre of war without the agreement of the New Zealand government. His efforts involved Freyberg, the senior British military commander, Dominions Office and the New Zealand High Commissioner in London. The official war history shows that no less than nineteen telegrams were sent between the parties during the time. The final outcome was Fraser's insistence that the New Zealander contingent return to the 2NZEF.⁶⁹ The episode was still scathingly referred to by Fraser at the Prime Minister's conference in the following year.⁷⁰

Freyberg was initially unaware of the involvement of the New Zealand contingent. When he found out, he alerted Wellington and attributed the lack of consulta-

60 Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Second World War: People, Battles and Legacy*, (Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett, 2004), p. 116.

61 John Louis Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance: Greek Agony 1941-44*, (New York: Pella, 1983), p. 228.

62 Clogg offers the latest treatment. Richard Clogg, "Negotiations of a Complicated Character: Don Stott's 'adventures' in Athens October – November 1943", in: Mark Seaman (ed.), *Special Operations Executive: a New Instrument of War*, (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 148-156. See also "Don Stott Affair: Overtures for an Anglo-German Local Peace in Greece", in: M. Sarafis (ed.), *Greece: From Resistance to Civil War*, (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1980), pp. 91-107.

63 John O. Latrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece 1933-1947*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980),

pp. 430-31.

64 Fleischer, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

65 McGlynn, *op. cit.*

66 Freyberg to i/c Adm., 10 November, 1943. WAI 8 II Freyberg Papers 2 NZEF Misc 1943 (ANZ).

67 *Ibidem*.

68 Anthony Rogers, *Churchill's Folly: Leros and the Aegean*, (London: Cassell, 2003).

69 *Documents Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-45: Volume II*, Telegrams 339 to 357.

70 F.L.W. Wood, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

tion to a misunderstanding from an earlier agreement with the British.⁷¹ Taking the thrust of this study, the Aegean fiasco was similar to the campaigns of 1941 and the VESMA episode in North Africa/Middle East and SOE in Greece. It held a familiar behaviour pattern by the New Zealand leadership – one of unco-ordination. On the other hand, Fraser had *acted* over the LRDG, unlike VESMA and SOE in Greece. In some ways it was restricted thinking. The political dimension was not transmitted to the New Zealand leadership. This involved the threatened resignation of Tsouderos and dismissal of local ELAS.⁷² The New Zealand LRDG probably had no exposure to this. It had been assigned an island distant from these happenings. That could not be said of the New Zealanders with SOE. An event involving one of the officers was reported to Wellington during the same time as Wellington and Freyberg were pursuing the LRDG issue with the British. The Dominion response was in stark contrast to the Aegean debacle.

Death of Arthur Hubbard

The second incident involved Lieutenant Arthur Hubbard. On 18 October 1943, the Commonwealth Dominions were informed by London of a New Zealand officer's death in occupied Greece. He had been killed by ELAS, the left-wing partisan movement. British authorities were sending an "ultimatum to ELAS commander, Colonel Sarafis, demanding immediate execution of those guilty of [the] murder of [the] Liaison officer."⁷³ Although Hubbard was again not named, another communication sent directly to only Wellington, one day later, again made it clear it was a New Zealand officer who had died.⁷⁴ The incident took place during the fighting between EDES and ELAS often called the first round of the Greek Civil War. The outcome of a British-Greek investigation was a finding of accidental death.⁷⁵ Neither in the a existing publication storehouse nor in the New Zealand primary sources is there any evidence that Wellington, Freyberg or even the post-war New Zealand military⁷⁶ showed any interest in Hub-

bard's death or the subsequent investigation. This was in contrast to the reactions of the British SOE⁷⁷ political leadership⁷⁸ or, as discussed later, his fellow SOE New Zealander, Bill Jordan.

1943 then closed with New Zealanders serving in Occupied Greece with SOE and its army fighting in Italy. Anger came with the failed Aegean venture, silence over the death of a New Zealand operative. The New Year would see a degree of change in the Dominion leadership over its attitude toward its military serving in Greek matters.

1944 – Year of Liberation

The year of Greek liberation began with Bernard Freyberg maintaining his enthusiasm for the Greek military. From 27 January to 20 February, Prince Peter of the Hellenes, and senior Greek liaison officer to the British army intermittently visited and stayed with the 2NZEF, now embroiled in the fight for Cassino in Italy. Freyberg's semi-official diary noted that he was there on "attachment" and how, on the day the Prince left, he "seemed to have enjoyed his visit". The diary entry continued: "He wants to bring over the Greek Brigade" and was off to talk about it to General Maitland Wilson.⁷⁹

This brief entry belies the extent of the senior New Zealander's interest in helping the Prince's cause. The official Greek record (one and a half pages long) reveals a much more extensive discussion than Freyberg's diary suggests. According to the Prince, on 2 February, Freyberg raised the notion that the Greek Brigade join the New Zealanders "as he was informed, the brigade was about to be deployed to the Italian front". The Prince then visited Field Marshall Harold Alexander, who, hearing of Freyberg's offer, said "he was very pleased from the request of Major General Freyberg, which he completely approved, adding that this would facilitate greatly the proper use of the Greek forces". Freyberg was then informed of the successful visit. It would seem that, to give the proposition the best chance of success, Freyberg then asked the Greek Prince to raise it with Field Marshall Wilson, Supreme Commander Mediterranean. The Prince did just that, six days after leaving Freyberg's command. Like Alexander, Wilson was supportive. Apparently, the prince's arguments about the strong bond between Greece and New Zealand helped to overturn a plan to place the Greeks with the Free French forces and keep them far from the front. Freyberg had planned that the Greeks would join the New Zealand brigade commanded by Brigadier Howard Kippenberger (spelt as "Kippenbeyer" in the Greek document).⁸⁰

71 *Documents Relating to New Zealand's participation in the Second World War 1939-45: Volume II*, Cable 339 Freyberg to Minister of Defence, 19 September 1943.

72 Philip John Carabott, "British Military Occupation, under a British Military Governor, but without a British military Administration: the case of Samos, 8 September to 18 November 1943", *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol 7 (2), (1989), pp. 287-319.

73 SECDOM to governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, 18 October 1943. DO 35/1545 (PRO).

74 SECDOM Office to Peter Fraser, 19 October 1943. AAEG 950 177a 345/4/8 Pt 1 1943-46. (ANZ).

75 PREM 3/211/8 (TNA) Anthony Eden made the point to Churchill. The latter had used the word "murder" in the House of Commons.

76 A memorandum from New Zealand Military Headquarters, London (essentially a liaison posting) nearly a year after the death speaks of the British "War Office have requested that no publicity be given the matter." Even the manner of his death should only be communicated to his mother "as a matter of strictest secrecy.", Memorandum 1 Sept. 1944 from DAAG, HQ 2 NZEF to Army Headquarters, Wellington, 1 September 1944. Lieutenant Wilfred Arthur Hubbard PF 20475, New Zealand Defence Force Personnel Archives, Trentham.

77 See for example, Cables in HS 5/223, HS 5/224; HS 9/755/6 (TNA).

78 Churchill raised the death in the House of Commons. Eden cautioned him on the accuracy of what he said, pointing to the outcome of the official joint enquiry. PREM 3/211/8 (TNA).

79 WAI 8 46 Part IV *GOC Diary* (ANZ).

80 Emmanouel I Tsouderos, *Historiko Archeio 1941-1944*, vol. 4, (Athena: Phylakēs, 1990), p. 1130-1131. Kippenberger, who would eventually be the general editor of the huge official war history project and President of the New Zealand Returned Services Association (RSA).

Freyberg's offer seemed to have overcome the British general's initial reluctance to have the Greeks in Italy. The British had even considered sending the Greeks to Britain.⁸¹ In the issue of having the Greeks in Italy, he was in conflict with Churchill's persistent drive to have them there.⁸²

It would be another six months before the intended joint Dominion-Greek force finally eventuated. In between, there had been some critical developments in the Greek armed forces as regarded Anglo-Greek relations. These would finally generate some conscious and shared communication amongst the Zealand leadership about Greek matters and where they stood in them. It was, however, not a policy that was comprehensive, nor one attracting fidelity.

May-July 1944 – New Zealand takes a Stance but does not Pursue a Cohesive Policy

By February 1944, internecine fighting between the partisans had largely dissipated with the signing of the Plaka Agreement. Another explosive event would occur in April, with the widespread mutiny in the Greek armed forces. It spread throughout the Mediterranean⁸³ to as far as Britain.⁸⁴

The New Zealand administration received a stream of telegrams from London about the convulsions that engulfed the Greek émigré government and Greek armed forces during this period as well as the mutinous Greek armed forces itself.⁸⁵ Greek premier Emmanuel Tsouderos fell first and was quickly followed by Sofoklis Venizelos. Fraser was also privy to some of the British intrigue in stabilizing the Greek émigré government by protecting the latest Greek Prime minister, George Papandreou, over the arrests of public figures during the aftermath. The New Zealand Prime Minister was told "arrests were carried out with the knowledge of Papandreou but this fact is not to be disclosed as it is most undesirable that the latter should be associated in any way with the arrests."⁸⁶

The decision to use force if necessary to quell the mutiny was communicated to Wellington on 14 April.⁸⁷ The mutineers were defeated, and the question of punishment arose. It was over this that Prime Minister Peter Fraser would break the largely one-way telegraphic traffic from London in July to state "a personal opinion" that clemency should be given to the mutineers

sentenced to death. Even though he did not say he was expressing a formal government view, he had not been asked to offer any opinion. He formed his view after meeting with Papandreou and "other leaders" during his trip to London (including some time in Cairo) for the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference held in early May.⁸⁸ According to the New Zealand press, these unnamed personalities were the Greek King and Prince Peter. Fraser had met them and Papandreou in the Egyptian capital.⁸⁹ On the same trip, he visited Freyberg and the troops in Italy. The cablegram contained a message within a message. Non-recognition in the communication was a symptom that the Greek royal family was anathema to Fraser. That would be illustrated in a December cablegram. That, as shown later, would be amidst a public and highly controversial backdrop.

The sympathetic stance on the mutineers in the July communication was in contrast to Churchill and Papandreou, who wanted the ringleaders executed. It was not a blatant protest at British policy, but it was more specific than the New Zealand Prime Minister's earlier outburst at the Prime Ministers Conference in London during May. There, as the minutes record, he made a broad-ranging cynical statement. It was in the context of geopolitics and the location of the second front. Jan Smuts, Premier of South Africa, wanted more attention to the Balkans and raised the spectre of Russian occupation there. Fraser, after arguing for the priority of Overlord, saw: "the Balkans as a seething mass of factions, who would turn to whoever would give them the most support or hold out to them most hope for the future."⁹⁰ Just who exactly he meant (émigré governments, monarchs or resistance groups) is not clear. What is evident is that Fraser did not understand how to mesh the military and strategic political together. During the same meeting, he said "that political matters should not be brought in to the discussion of the military courses of action... Military policy could be in no way subordinated to political considerations."⁹¹ In this, he was showing a naivety, not even learning from the geopolitical dimension of the Operation Lustre in 1941 (i.e. British hopes of creating a Balkan front composed of Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey), but also as to the place of Greece in a British post-war world. Still, something had been said to the British, and as later events were to show, the meeting in Italy with Freyberg had apparently included further discussions about Greek politics.

Occupied Greece

Inside occupied Greece, Fraser's soldiers were carrying out actions or making recommendations that conflicted with their Prime Minister's newly emerged line. Less than two weeks before the London session where Fraser argued against resources going into Balkan adventures, Bill Jordan, still serving with SOE, foretold the intro-

81 WO 201/1767 Scobie to Chief Liaison Officer, 15 October 1943 (TNA).

82 See for example, Churchill to Eisenhower and Wilson, repeated Alexander, 29 December 1943. His reasoning was premised "on political grounds". WO 214/44 (TNA).

83 Spyropoulos, *op. cit.*

84 David Syrett, *op. cit.*; Jones, *op. cit.*

85 AAE 950 140g 345/4/1/pt. 2, Political Affairs Greece 1944-1945; See also the originating agency to ensure a more confident store of data DO35/1547 (TNA) Correspondence with Dominion Governments, including correspondence between Field Marshal Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa, and Mr Winston Churchill, on formation of new Greek government.

86 AAE 950 140 g 345/4/1 pt 2 (ANZ) SECDOM to Minister of External Affairs Wellington, 17 May 1944.

87 SECDOM to Minister of External Affairs, 14 April, 1944.

88 AAE 950 140 g 345/4/1 pt 2 (ANZ) Political Affairs Greece 1944 – 1945, Fraser to SECDOM, 22 July 1944.

89 "Visit to Rome", *Evening Post*, 10 June 1944.

90 PMM (44) 4th meeting, 3 May 1944, 4, EA 1 153/20/6, pt.1, ANZ. The Wood study quotes the same.

91 *Ibidem.*

duction of allied special forces troops during the months immediately before liberation and Churchill's own demand of his generals for speed of entry into Greece i.e. his MANNA plan to prevent EAM/ELAS from assuming dominance in post-liberated Greece. Jordan wrote in his official tour of duty report: "If Greece has any post-war importance for us, and I suspect it has, it is essential Allied troops be employed in sufficient numbers ... It is better to bring in troops before the liberation then to bring them in afterwards."⁹² By "us", he could not mean New Zealand but Britain.

His colleague, Tom Barnes, was also in a situation directly in conflict with Fraser's predilection about the mutineers. Nine days after the Prime Minister's message seeking clemency, Barnes was directed to report on the effect of the possible execution of mutineers on steering the left resistance towards adherence to British lines. The veiled threat, it was stated in the wireless communication, had come from Anthony Eden in a House of Commons speech and was in the context of forming a pliant new national government under Papandreou: "hinting broadly if unity can thereby be achieved concessions could be made to EAM in matter of execution of mutineers"⁹³.

That a disjuncture was developing between the New Zealand leadership and demands placed on members of its military serving in Greece is apparent. Pressure placed upon SOE British Liaison Officers (BLOs) in 1944 was also becoming more acute as the political stakes increased with the looming liberation. While Fraser had met Papandreou, who had wanted the death penalty, and disassociated himself from the Greek's line of action, the BLOs serving in Greece had been ordered to promote the same Papandreou government. This, as one SOE memorandum stated, had caused "bad blood" between ELAS and the BLOs.⁹⁴ Against this was a broader consideration in higher policy circles at "violent" denunciation of EAM and withdrawal of the BLOs from EAM/ELAS-controlled areas.⁹⁵ The possible consequences to the safety of those liaison officers could be disastrous. Anger at Hubbard's death from the previous year also still lingered. On 1 June, Bill Jordan, who was with him when he died and whose report on the incident reached senior levels of the British establishment, basically repudiated the findings of the court of inquiry and stated: "I do not feel disposed to let the matter rest"⁹⁶. He continued with his intention after the war, producing at least one booklet in 1946⁹⁷, a feature newspaper story on the 20th anniversary of the killing⁹⁸ and a monograph in 1969.⁹⁹

92 *NZ Officer Major Jordan Report on Tour of Duty in Greece, 22 April 1944*, HS9/812/3, (TNA).

93 Force 133 to London, 31 July 1944, HS 5/224, (TNA).

94 Memorandum, 14 June 1944, HS 5/224, TNA.

95 Memorandum, 21 July 1944, HS 5/224, (TNA).

96 *Comment on Evidence and Findings of Mixed Court of Enquiry into Shooting of Lieut. W.A. Hubbard, 2NZEF by ELAS Andartes on 13 Oct. 43*, HS 9/755/6, (TNA).

97 Bill Jordan, *Truth about Greece*, (Melbourne: Araluen, 1946).

98 Bill Jordan, "Story of the Death of Wilfred A. Hubbard at the Hands of Greek Communists 12 October 1943", *New Zealand Herald*, 12 October 1963.

99 Bill Jordan, *Conquest Without Victory*.

Hubbard still resonated with other BLOs as well. Nicholas Hammond, a senior member of SOE in Greece, wrote to Edmonds in June referring to "malicious propaganda such as EAM used at the time of Hubbard's death which was attributed to drunkenness."¹⁰⁰ This last quote comes from a report over 6 months after Wellington first heard about Hubbard. Wellington had, and would, remain quiet. Incongruously, the Prime Minister would shortly make his confidential statement about the sentenced mutineers. This reinforces the glaring lack of interest in the New Zealand SOE personnel during the occupation – both in their safety and in what they were doing in terms of British policy toward Greece. This even held true for those who had left Greece and returned home. Don Stott, who met with collaborators and Nazi representatives in Athens, returned to New Zealand at the beginning of May 1944 and left on 19 July. There was apparently no process or policy to debrief him. This may have been because he was still a member of SOE and would shortly leave for Far East operations, where he would disappear, presumed drowned, in a seaborne sabotage mission. Time was spent on clarifying administrative issues with the local army bodies. Freyberg's military secretary sent the barest of information (basically dates of major movements such as secondment and promotion) to Army Headquarters in Wellington about Stott's history in Middle East.¹⁰¹ It could do little more, as the officer was within the realms of British. In contrast, events in the latter half of the year would show a willingness of New Zealand to discuss and act when it came to dangers that its army might face. These would be in the Italian theatre and shortly later, over the question of returning to free mainland Greece.

Italy – New Zealand and Greek Military

The New Zealand and Greek armies finally went into battle as an affiliated formation during September 1944 in Italy. The Greeks comprised infantry (the 3rd Greek Brigade, comprised of approximately 3,000 infantry) artillery, logistical support and a hospital. The units had been distilled from mutinous army units. This did not allay Churchill's suspicion that the remaining Greeks might derail his operation MANNA for a rapid entry into soon to be liberated Athens and deny EAM/ELAS control of the country. In both the situation in Italy and Churchill's overall designs for Greece, Freyberg and Fraser were entering a period that would test their commitment to pursue a separate New Zealand line over Greece at an operational level with their frontline army. It would show they could be as deft at deception as the British, protective of their frontline men (as against those with SOE), and willing to utilize a direct operational Wellington-2NZEF chain of command, if necessary bypassing the British. Ironically, it would also show disunity in the New Zealand politico-military leadership.

100 Hammond to Edmonds, 20 June 1944, Prentice/Wickstead 5/5, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archive (LHCMA).

101 Military Secretary 2NZEF to Army Headquarters, Wellington. Captain Donald John Stott PF 20681. New Zealand Defence Force Personnel Archives, Trentham New Zealand (NZDF).

Welcome and Alarm

The lead up to the Greeks joining the New Zealanders again showed Freyberg welcoming the possibility. On 8 August, he informed the government in Wellington that he had been asked to take the Greek Brigade under his command. The general emphasized the benefit they would bring to his hard-pressed Division. In the latter part of 1944, it was facing diminishing morale and effectiveness.¹⁰² Having the Greeks would alleviate the situation: "It would mean an extra infantry brigade and consequent spreading of casualties."¹⁰³ Wellington replied four days later, agreeing to the Greeks joining Freyberg. It was a short reply: "Your telegram of 8 August. War Cabinet concur in your advising the Commander-in-Chief that you are prepared to have the Greek Brigade under your command."¹⁰⁴ The massive disruption with the Greek armed forces earlier that year did not generate any discussion at this point.

The general, however, then proceeded to send a second communication 5 days later i.e. on 13 August which outlined the risks in soldiering with the Greeks and included a draft response for the Cabinet to send to him. The required return communication was politically saturated:

"War Cabinet agree provisionally that you should help train the Greek Brigade and also take them under your command, but in view of the history of this force in the last twelve months with political difficulties and the military mutiny, you are to keep us informed of the situation, and if there is any recurrence of political difficulty you are to report it here and act on our instructions. Will you convey our good wishes to the Commander-in-Chief with this message."¹⁰⁵

The government had complied with the request. On considering the need for and contents of Freyberg's second telegram, the general's actions seem either crude negotiating tactics or a lack of elementary political foresight. The former would seem to be highly unlikely, as it is simply too obtuse. The lack of a rebuke from Wellington reinforces the argument that the New Zealand leadership seemed willing to fall in with certain Greek scenarios without any discussion.

A likely explanation for the second communication lies in the briefing Freyberg received from British Brigadier Hennessy, Head of the Allied Liaison Section, Middle East Forces, after the first telegram had been sent. Hennessy visited Freyberg on 9 August.¹⁰⁶ He also provided a written directive concerning the Greeks. It contained a "warning" to expect future difficulties with the Greek government in exile and its general staff over a British refusal to their request to send a Greek headquarters to Italy with the Brigade. He added: "any efforts by Greek Politicians to visit Greek units should be most strenuously resisted since it only upsets them, and serves no useful purpose". George II may be permitted

to visit them, but only *for* "the purpose of presenting colours." Even this would be "the subject of a high level decision in due course".¹⁰⁷ Freyberg must have seen the unsavoury possibilities unfolding before him. Hence, the second telegram with "provisional" acceptance of the Greeks as well as the caveat that he would be acting on directions from Wellington rather than London if political difficulties occurred. The Italian scenario also showed that Fraser was leaving no latitude for British influence on what might happen if trouble arose. Getting down to such an operational level of direction shows the New Zealand political leadership had come to a point where it would, if necessary, assert its overriding authority over its own forces. For the General, there were clearly identified risks. What is more, the anticipated military benefits must have diminished considerably when the visiting liaison officer passed on the news that the Third Brigade had only "existed in its present form for a few weeks and cannot, therefore, be compared to a formation which has been together as a whole for several months."¹⁰⁸ The ranks of the infantry even included "a certain percentage" of former gunners who were included "on their reputation of reliability rather than on their military qualifications."¹⁰⁹

Having said the above, there was still a lack of discussion. Freyberg may have been embarrassed by what had happened on this occasion – Hennessy arrived later than expected to meet with the General at his Italian Headquarters to give the briefing. Subsequent behaviour, however, would show the senior military leader's behaviour extend to ignoring agreed policy.

The Greek Brigade was in Italy a few days short of 3 months, leaving for Greece on 7 November. During this time, except for a temporary change of operational command to the Canadians, it briefly trained with and fought alongside the 2NZDIV. Its commander was Colonel Thrasylvoulos Tsakalotos, who would eventually be head of government forces during the Greek civil war conflicts of 1946-1949. Tsakalotos appreciated being with 2NZDIV and told the commander of the Greek army so.¹¹⁰ By the end of his Brigade's time with Freyberg's command, Tsakalotos would recommend decorations for Freyberg and fifteen of his officers.¹¹¹

The Brigade was also accompanied by the 210 British Liaison Unit (BLU) which comprised 8 officers and 230 enlisted men. Freyberg was directed that "all orders and instructions should be transmitted to the Greeks through the BLU, or at least in the presence of one of its officers."¹¹² This directive assumes a particu-

102 John McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986), pp. 77-78, 132-36.

103 *Documents relating to New Zealand's participation in the Second World War 1939-45 Vol II.*, Telegram 423.

104 *Ibidem*, Telegram 424.

105 *Ibidem.*, Telegram 425 and note, p. 397.

106 *GOC Diary*, 9 Aug. 1944, WAI 8/46, (ANZ).

107 *Extract from Notes on the Royal Greek Army issued by Allied Liaison Section, Middle East Forces – Dated 10th August 44.* WAI 8/76 (ANZ). This document is taken from a longer internal British version: *Notes on the Royal Greek Army*, WO 204/5584 (TNA). In keeping with standard practice the personality notes on individual Greek officers was not included in the version given Freyberg.

108 *Ibidem*.

109 *Ibidem*.

110 Tsakalotos to Ventiris, 8 October 1944. WAI 8/76, (ANZ).

111 Freyberg to Tsakalotos, 13 October 1944, WAI 8/76, (ANZ).

112 *Op. cit.*; *Extract from Notes on the Royal Greek Army issued by Allied Liaison Section, Middle East Forces – Dated 10th August 44.*

lar significance when one considers the political intelligence role the BLU played. Events were to show that the BLU intelligence gathering would provide senior British personalities such as Churchill, and his senior generals Alexander and Wilson, with information that would both affect their decision making and give rise to alarm. In Italy, the New Zealanders (either Freyberg or his temporary replacement during September while the General was in hospital recovering from a plane crash) facilitated the appointment of a new 2NZDIV officer, Lt. Col. Ted Aked, to command the BLU. The placement would bring considerable political baggage.

Operations OLIVE and MANNA

Like the other allied forces in Italy, the Greeks, New Zealanders and Canadians were to take part in operation OLIVE, a grand scheme to break the German Gothic Line. The schedule for OLIVE was one of two being driven by the British. The other was a political one concerning MANNA. Sometimes they touched, as with the Greek Brigade and New Zealanders in Italy. Although officially integrated with the 2NZDIV, who had already undertaken limited exercises with the Greeks since their arrival, the Brigade was pulled away and put into battle with the Canadians. The New Zealanders initially stayed in reserve. The separation order came from Oliver Leese, the commander of the British 8th Army who wanted the Greeks “to gain battle experience.”¹¹³ The early use of the Greeks is clearly dictated by the political needs of MANNA. Churchill had been asking for updates about the Brigade since 5 September.¹¹⁴ General Wilson had told him that he wanted them to be “blooded” first and that “If they do well I anticipate that it would be wise and practicable to pull them out and send them to Greece.”¹¹⁵ That is, following the mutiny, there was a need to gain military credibility to strengthen the claim of the returning and British-supported Papandreou government that, just like the left-dominated armed resistance, they had been fighting Germans.

The Brigade went through its first action and suffered heavy casualties. Aked called in New Zealand support. The Greeks continued with the New Zealanders in their victory against the Germans at Rimini. On 21 September, the mayor of the town presented a surrender document written in English, Greek and Italian.¹¹⁶ In the aftermath: “The Greeks were jubilant and signalled their success by hoisting flags at various points in the city.”¹¹⁷

Rimini satisfied political British designs. A recently victorious Greek army was much more attractive than a mutinous one. Churchill told Wilson that “On political grounds there seem to be great advantages in having a contingent of Greek troops” for MANNA.¹¹⁸ In contrast, Freyberg thought the use of the Greeks premature, and

it was something he would later privately criticize to a British general: “I had no intention of allowing them to be used offensively until they had had some further training.”¹¹⁹ Obviously, he was not within the British arena of political trust and only saw poor military management, not political desirability. Whether Freyberg could, or would, have influenced things is also a moot point. He was injured in an aircraft accident and subsequently hospitalised during the critical time when the Greeks went into battle. His temporary replacement, Steve Weir, noted that the Greeks in Italy considered their New Zealand comrades would be joining them in the return to Greece: “Greek Brigade to be under command NZ Div and march past King George Hotel Athens.”¹²⁰ There were indeed moves in higher circles to involve a unit of New Zealanders in MANNA. In the end, it would be Aked who would accompany the Brigade. Subsequently, he would be embroiled in conspiratorial Greek politics and widely condemned British actions in Athens shortly following liberation. How he was put in that position, when New Zealand policy dictated otherwise, is discussed later. The following developments preceded the appointment.

Towards liberation – Britain courts New Zealand

Besides the Greeks, the British were looking for other troops to support MANNA. General Maitland Wilson drafted a request to Freyberg for a contingent of up to 300 New Zealand troops to join the British upon their return. The small number was not of consequence: “I consider the popularity of New Zealand forces with [the] Greek civil population would have [an] advantageous political effect out of proportion to the numbers sent.”¹²¹ When the cable was eventually communicated in late September, it was lacking the political point.¹²² Wilson had refrained from sharing with Freyberg the motivation for the request. Again, Britain had not confided in the Dominion. Discussion between Churchill and his senior military commanders during the months of August and September when the Greeks were with the New Zealand Division in Italy also shows they were preoccupied with secrecy over MANNA. On 6 August Churchill reminded his senior planners: “The utmost secrecy must enwrap this project.”¹²³ Later in the same month Alan Brook, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, suggested: “The necessity of sending troops in to take the German surrender would provide a better cloak to cover our action.”¹²⁴

In terms of the Wilson request, Freyberg told his Prime Minister that: “As you know, there are several

113 G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadians in Italy 1943-1945*, (Ottawa: Ministry of National Defence, 1956), p. 538.

114 Churchill to Wilson, 5 Sept. 1944, CHAR 20/171/46, Churchill Papers, Churchill College, Cambridge.(CP).

115 Wilson to Churchill, 7 Sept. 1944, CHAR 20/171/84 (CP).

116 Kay and Phillips, *op. cit.*, ch. V. For the most detailed account see *op. cit.*, Henderson, and Sinclair.

117 Kay and Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

118 Churchill to Wilson, 29 Sept. 1944, CHAR 20/172, (CP).

119 Freyberg to Beaumont Nesbitt, 28 Oct. 1944, WAI 8/76, (ANZ).

120 WAI 8 Item 56 (ANZ). Entry for 20 September, 1944.

121 Draft Cable Wilson to Freyberg no date, WO204/1338 (TNA).

122 *Documents relating to New Zealand's participation in the Second World War 1939-1945 Volume II, Telegram 427*. 24 September 1944. I assume Freyberg conveyed the exact wording of the Wilson request. To date the originals of the Wilson-Freyberg communication has not been found. See also Footnote p. 400.

123 Prime Minister's Minute, 6 Aug. 1944, FO 954/11 (TNA).

124 War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee Future Operations – Discussions in Rome, 25 Aug. 1944, point 3, PREM 3/210, (TNA).

factions in Greece, all of which we are on friendly terms, and if we were to involve ourselves at this stage in support of one or other of the parties we might prejudice our very friendly relations with the rest of the Greek people.” Fraser introduced the spectre of armed intervention. There was: “the possibility of strife breaking out between various Greek factions, which might involve our interference.”¹²⁵ Freyberg suggested, and the New Zealand War Cabinet subsequently concurred, that they decline the offer using not the political reason but the manpower constraint. Specifically, that New Zealand did not have the troops to spare and that there were “very few” of the original Greek campaign veterans available.¹²⁶ The British offer was declined. From the wording in the cablegrams, it is obvious that the General and politician had discussed the Greek situation during Fraser’s visit to Italy earlier in the year.

Indeed the New Zealanders had earlier indications of the growing probability that they would be asked to make a contribution to a Greek venture. Four weeks before the Wilson request was received and three before he had initially directed his own staff to analyse a possible contingent from New Zealand¹²⁷, Freyberg alerted Wellington to the possibility. On 21 August he cabled that he had an informal discussion with Harold Alexander on 6 August and that, “it had been suggested the NZ Division might be sent to garrison Greece for a short time and then go home.” He recommended to Fraser: “As there are many sides to the Greek question I feel careful consideration should be given before this proposal is agreed to” and that he wanted to know if “you wish me to keep you in touch unofficially with these embryo plans and if you wish me to give you my personal views on definite proposals if and when they are made.”¹²⁸ Fraser responded welcoming his future input and any updates.¹²⁹ By the end of the month, in a wider discussion, Fraser also told Freyberg that his Division would not be providing garrison troops “anywhere after the armistice” but they still wanted to be kept informed of any plans placed before the General.¹³⁰ Such a general policy may have been decided but it was Greece that had prompted Freyberg to contact Wellington i.e. Austria had also been suggested by Alexander in their early August encounter. Greece was where the perceived danger lay.

There would appear to be no single incident that caused Freyberg to raise Alexander’s proposal 15 days after the event. The main political player in the Greek planning, Churchill, was in Italy and also visited Freyberg and his officers whilst there. He never went near the Greeks. The visit fell amongst the MANNA planning

meetings¹³¹ but only after¹³² Freyberg told Wellington about the informal approach by Alexander. It is possible that Freyberg, now having the Greeks under his command and being in the senior military command structure, realized the time of liberation was drawing closer.

Just as they had done with the attachment of the Greek Brigade, the New Zealand leadership had demonstrated an awareness of the dangers of Anglo-Greek dynamics. It was one of implicit neutrality. Having said that, further actions of Freyberg, show that what was implemented was not necessarily what had been agreed to.

New Zealand sends a Military Adviser to Greece

When Freyberg learnt the Greek Brigade was returning home, he approached the British with the notion that Aked remain with the unit. He did this indirectly and verbally through Aked. Beaumont Nesbitt, of the Liaison Section at Allied Forces Headquarters, met with Aked on 28 October. This was a month after the Freyberg-Fraser exchanges about avoiding returning to Greece. According to the Briton, despite the New Zealand policy, Aked “tells me that you wish him to remain with the Brigade for a further period- at least that you are prepared to let him remain-until their future is more certain.”¹³³ Beaumont Nesbitt’s plan was to send Aked to Greece for “two to three weeks at the outside.”¹³⁴ In effect, Aked stayed with the Brigade for months including right through the street fighting of the Dekemvriana.

Freyberg argued the continuation was necessary to the British because: “Aked has really been Chief of Staff to Tsakalotos and as such has saved them hundreds of casualties”.¹³⁵ In Freyberg’s estimation, the British officers attached to the 210BLU were not competent enough in military leadership. However, given what had been transpired between him and the New Zealand Prime Minister the previous month, it is a questionable act. The General never shared his actions concerning Aked with Wellington. With Freyberg’s step a fissure had appeared in the New Zealand leadership over Greece.

The Greek Brigade boarded ship for liberated Greece on 6 November. The New Zealand army stayed in Italy.

As indicated earlier, Ted Aked was in the December fighting. Before that erupted he was involved with one of the seminal moments in Greek post-war history – the emergence of a new form of the far right in the Greek officer corps.

New Zealand involvement in further Greek military intrigue

While the Greeks were fighting alongside the New Zealanders at Rimini, elsewhere the British were contemplating the future use, and fidelity, of the two armies

125 *Documents relating to New Zealand’s participation in the Second World War*. Prime Minister Fraser to General Freyberg, 26 Sept. 1944, Telegram 428.

126 *Ibidem*, Telegram 429.

127 Provision of New Zealand Detachment for the Occupation of Greece, WO 204/1338, (TNA).

128 *Documents Relating to New Zealand’s Participation in the Second World War 1939 – 45: Volume II*, General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence, 21 Aug. 1944, Telegram 387.

129 *Ibidem*, Telegram 388.

130 *Ibidem*, Telegrams 388 and 389.

131 Dixon, *Double Diploma – the Life of Sir Pierson Dixon Don and Diplomat*, (London: Hutchinson, 1968), ch. 6.

132 *Documents Relating to New Zealand’s Participation in the Second World War 1939 – 45: Volume II*, Telegram 388, 25 August 1944.

133 Beaumont Nesbitt to Freyberg, 21 October 1944. WAI 8/76 (ANZ).

134 *Ibidem*.

135 Freyberg to Beaumont Nesbitt, 28 Oct. 1944, WAI 8/76 (ANZ).

when Greece was liberated. While New Zealand has been discussed above, the following focuses on the Greek Brigade.

Communications between Churchill, Wilson and Alexander show a continued hesitancy about the loyalty of the Brigade to their sponsored Greek government. Following the success of the brigade at Rimini, Wilson, at Churchill's prompting again, ordered that the BLU (i.e. he did not mention Freyberg thus again showing the limits of British-dictated involvement but one can reasonably assume Aked knew as he was in charge)¹³⁶ to verify the loyalty of the Brigade to the Papandreou government.¹³⁷ As a result, at a conference on 2 October Alexander told Wilson the Brigade's loyalty was "satisfactory".¹³⁸ In their caution, the British obviously shared Freyberg's earlier assessment to Wellington that political turmoil was still a possibility. Though not directly discussing the common risk, the two camps – Dominion and imperial centre – were looking out for their own interests.

New Threat from the Far Right

The renewed confidence was short-lived. Before the end of October, the 210BLU reported that officers from the brigade had been meeting with "friends and political associates" posted at the Greek Mediterranean Base and Training Centre (GMB&TC) in Italy and were openly criticising the Papandreou government, especially its inclusion of EAM representatives in its administration. Furthermore "plans for the overthrow of the present Greek Government have been openly discussed – the intention being to set up some form of Government excluding all parties save that of the extreme Right."¹³⁹ While he was genuine (showing a number of undercurrents were at play) or simply using a ruse, the GMB&TC's Greek commanding officer, also requested an extraordinary amount of ammunition (1 million rounds) to fight EAM and protect the Greek government.¹⁴⁰

Wilson also let Churchill know that by 4 November the Brigade's reliability had diminished to that of being "generally trustworthy" and that general Ronald Scobie, then implementing MANNA in newly liberated Greece, together with the "Greek Government [would screen] untrustworthy individuals as necessary on arrival in Greece."¹⁴¹ Scobie also sent two officers from Greece to investigate the conspiracy in Italy. One was Ted Aked, Freyberg's appointee. He was accompanied by Colonel Laios of the Free Greek Army¹⁴². In this episode the New Zealander had a lesser role than Laios. In Italy interrogations were conducted and declarations were made by the visitors about the stability of the Papandreou government, the irrelevance of EAM, EDES "or political groups of that nature" in administer-

ing the country and that unity was necessary for the benefit of Greece. The result was: "any hopes of effective action by Greek Officers on reaching Greece [had] been completely dispelled" and the officers "look very chastened and are at least beginning to realize that there is no room at present in Greece for political nonsense".¹⁴³

Genesis of IDEA

The right-wing coup attempt against Papandreou did not materialize; but Laios and Aked may have unwittingly witnessed a moment in the gestation of the extreme Greek right-wing army group IDEA (Ieros Desmos Ellinon Axiomatikon). This was one point in a major historical development that no individual party at the time involved could have realised.

IDEA would evolve into a force that would affect Greek politics and society for decades after the war.¹⁴⁴ In Italy, as part of the Aked-Laios investigation, the British reported that Major Karayannis of the Greek Brigade was "probably the leader of [the] present conspiracies" and was removed from the Greek camp.¹⁴⁵ Karayannis would indeed eventually write about his experiences in IDEA, and his memoirs would provide historians with some material for their studies of the society.¹⁴⁶ By early 1946, the secret organisation was "well established within the officer corps", and two members were ensconced in the Ministry of Defence. There, they promoted the ambitions of the organisation.¹⁴⁷ In the same year, it enabled former collaborators to enter the Greek army.¹⁴⁸ Twenty years after the reported plot against George Papandreou, he and his son fell victim to forces partially composed of figures from IDEA.¹⁴⁹

Aked tried to meet Freyberg during his inspection with Laios but the latter was in Cairo at the time.¹⁵⁰ He did, however, send a number of letters from Athens.

143 *Ibidem*.

144 During its gestation IDEA spanned groups situated in Italy, Greece and the Middle East. Spyropoulos, *op. cit.*, p. 400, explicitly states that it was in Italy that planning for the notion of IDEA first took place. Gerolymatos writes that it was during autumn of 1944 that the sect was established. This would match the events involving Aked. Andre Gerolymatos, "Security Battalions and the Civil War", *Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, 12,3 (1985), pp. 17-27, p. 26. The analysis by Veremis & Gerolymatos identifies some discrepancy in the actual date i.e. 25 October 1944 or later in January in Athens. Thanos Veremis, André Gerolymatos, "Military as a sociopolitical force in Greece", *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 17,1 (1999), pp. 103-129, p. 125. See also André Gerolymatos, "Road to Authoritarianism: Greek Army in Politics 1935-1949", *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 35,1 (2009), pp. 7-26.

145 *Political Activities Greek Medn Base & Trg Centre R.G.A., 28 Oct. 1944*, Appendix A, WO 170/3812 (TNA).

146 Authors who cite the memoirs of Karayannis include Nicos Mouzelis, "Capitalism and Dictatorship in Post-war Greece", *New Left Review* 1/96 (March-April 1976), pp. 57-80; Spyropoulos, *op. cit.*, Veremis & Gerolymatos, *op. cit.*.

147 Veremis & Gerolymatos, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

148 Gerolymatos, "The Security Battalions and the Civil War", p. 26.

149 Andreas Papandreou, *Democracy at Gunpoint: the Greek Front*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), pp. 146, 156 and 220; Peter Murtagh, *Rape of Greece: the King, the Colonels and the Resistance*, (London: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 57-59, 78 & 92.

150 Aked to Freyberg, 16 November 1944, WAI 8/76 (ANZ).

136 Wilson to Alexander, 28 Sept. 1944, WO 214/44 (TNA).

137 Churchill to Wilson, 27 Sept. 1944, CHAR 20/172 (CP).

138 *Notes on Conference held in A.A.I. HQ, 2 October 1944*, WO 214/44 (TNA).

139 *Political Activities Greek Medn Base & Trg Centre R.G.A., 28 Oct. 1944*, WO 170/3812 (TNA).

140 *Ibidem*.

141 Wilson to Churchill, 6 Nov. 1944, CHAR 20/174 (CP).

142 *Appendix A to letter of 7.11.44 Political Activities Greek Medn Base & Trg Centre*, RGA, WO 170/3812 (TNA).

SOE Prepares

External to the vision of the New Zealand leadership, their soldiers serving as BLOs were contributing towards British intervention in Greece and engaging in inter-partisan politics. The earlier-mentioned recommendation from Bill Jordan was concerned with planning for entry of Britain and Greek national forces (i.e. eventually the Greek Brigade). Implementation was now at hand. As the day of liberation drew closer, supplies and additional special forces troops were infiltrated into still-enemy-occupied Greece. Events there again highlighted the divergence between what the New Zealand leadership was saying and what their soldiers were doing with SOE.

As liberation approached, and Freyberg and Fraser spoke of Greek factions and how they wanted to avoid being involved in any potential conflict, SOE operatives were going down a different path. Tom Barnes related what happened when a local ELAS group “molested convoys” transporting some of these supplies through EDES territory: “their [ELAS] liquidation became necessary and was effected in four days”.¹⁵¹ After the war, Arthur Edmonds would write that, when the German withdrawal did eventuate: “As was expected, the greatest trouble-spots during the withdrawal were along the Zervas/ELAS boundary”.¹⁵² So damning of ELAS was the reporting of one of the New Zealand SOE contingent that SOE responded with discussion of possible assassination. The intended target was Ares Velouchiotis, the chief of the ELAS partisans: “It would almost seem that the most drastic SOE methods should be undertaken to remove him from the scene of action.”¹⁵³ New Zealand officers were planning and working toward a post-liberated Greece without EAM/ELAS domination or even presence, while their own Prime Minister did not want any regular military involvement from the Dominion in any conflict between the “factions” of Greece.

Athens and Dekemvriana

The Greek Brigade marched through Athens on 9 November to a tumultuous reception. Aked wrote to Freyberg, saying “[Colonel] Tsacolotos and personnel of the Brigade were obviously nervous, all wondering in what manner the people of the city would receive them. Immediately the march commenced, all doubts vanished. It was obvious that the arrival home was welcomed by the greater percentage of the people. Streets, pavements and buildings were crowded and it was almost impossible even to hear the band.” The entry overshadowed what he called the “Local Red Party”.¹⁵⁴ Writing more excitedly, Brigadier Tom King, a New Zealander serving with the Military Liaison in Greece, wrote to Freyberg “I only wish you could have been here; I am sure you would have been proud and thrilled. To my mind it was

a truly incredible performance.”¹⁵⁵ The official British communiqué to Wellington echoed the two New Zealanders’ assessment of the Brigade’s popular arrival and that “EAM and Communist banners were noticeably absent.”¹⁵⁶ Arthur Edmonds, one of the New Zealand SOE officers, witnessed the unfolding events against the broader political tension in the city. He considered the cheering crowds to be “not of the EAM-ELAS camp” and that “Many breathed easier in Athens that night feeling more secure from ELAS.”¹⁵⁷ Subsequent events were to show that this was a deceptive impression and that his initial observation – “on entering Athens I felt that the place was a powder magazine which was likely to explode at any time”¹⁵⁸ – was much more accurate.

The Brigade was both a bargaining point and a military asset during the ensuing months. EAM/ELAS saw its disarmament, as well as that of EDES, as a necessary precondition for their own disarmament. Churchill, even before fighting broke out in early December, however, did not appear to be pursuing his public statements about avoiding civil war through unilateral disarmament of non-government units. He told Wilson, and through him, Scobie, that their plan “to disarm the rightist organisations as well as ELAS is no doubt all right in principle, ... but make sure that you do not deprive yourselves of the support of Zervas’s people in a practical sense.” He added that they and the Greek Brigade should be confined to their camp/barracks, the Brigade being an “effective reserve” and that “It would be much nicer to win all by ourselves, but we have got to win anyway.”¹⁵⁹ The requirement for disarmament was an implementation of the Caserta Agreement signed in September, before liberation began, by the Greek government and the partisan groups. EAM vacillated over the terms of the disarmament provisions as the December 10th deadline approached.

The Explosion

The situation had become deadlocked. On 1 December ELAS partisans and the EAM police were still armed. Six EAM ministers resigned from the Papandreou government. Relations deteriorated. A crowd of EAM demonstrators were fired upon in Constitution Square on the 3rd by the government police. This event was the catalyst for fighting to break out between ELAS and their Greek political enemies (initially the police, and then spreading to include, amongst others, the Greek Brigade). At first, the British were not targeted by ELAS (Aked pointed out as much to Freyberg in a letter written on 12 December¹⁶⁰), but the situation soon escalated. ELAS’s strength, their increasing encroachment and isolation of their opponents’ positions in Athens and lack of ammunition and supplies

151 Tom Barnes, *Final Report on Greece: Written after final evacuation from Greece*, WAI 1, DA 491.2/12 (ANZ), p. 18. Barnes gave a copy of his report to the Official War Project after the war.

152 Edmonds, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

153 Memorandum to AD/H from D/HT, 20 June 1944. HS 5/224 (TNA).

154 WAI 8 Freyberg Papers File 76 Greek Mountain Brigade (ANZ) Aked to Freyberg, 16 November 1944.

155 WAI 8 Freyberg Papers File 76 Greek Mountain Brigade (ANZ) King to Freyberg, 21 November 1944.

156 EA1 201/2/82 pt 2b (ANZ) Office, SECDOM to Minister of External Affairs, Wellington, 14 Nov. 1944 (ANZ).

157 Edmonds, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

158 *Ibidem* p. 239.

159 CHAR 20/176 Churchill to Wilson, 2 December 1944 (CP).

160 WAI 8 Freyberg Papers File 76 Greek Mountain Brigade (ANZ) Aked to Freyberg, 12 December 1944 (ANZ).

led Alexander to conclude that Britain and her allies were facing “a first class disaster”¹⁶¹. It is ironic that Alexander, who had first raised the possibility, albeit unofficially, of Freyberg providing a garrison force, had to enter Athens to make his-scene assessment in an armoured car, which was also fired upon. Such was the precarious situation. The Greek Brigade had been kept as a reserve, only joining battle when, as Aked reported to Freyberg on 12 December, “the situation was completely out of control.”¹⁶² As Papandreou had not managed at that point to establish a new national army that would follow his orders, the Greek Brigade played a key role in the conflict. In Alexander’s opinion, the Greek Brigade men were the “only effective Greek government troops” available.¹⁶³ With them, in a senior leadership role, was a New Zealand officer.

Reactions in Italy and New Zealand

When fighting broke out in Athens, Freyberg, according to his own semi-official diary, “congratulated himself on not being in Greece”¹⁶⁴. Later, at a conference of his officers, where Greece was one of the two “main subjects on the agenda”, he read out cables relating to invitations to go there. These were undoubtedly the ones he and Fraser had discussed. Aked, was now apparently to be recalled. He never, in fact, did return, and he remained in the fighting. Months afterwards, he told the New Zealand press that “I would prefer anything I have experienced in this war to that type of civil war.” He added: “I have never seen anything to equal it for viciousness. The small arms fire was terrific ... I was with the Greek Mountain Brigade and they [ELAS] concentrated their fire against our barracks.”¹⁶⁵

For some unknown reason, the return of Aked in late 1944, just like other detached personnel like Morton (and implicitly the SOE operatives) in 1943, was never pursued with any vigour by Freyberg’s administration.

Protests in New Zealand

In New Zealand, Fraser was contending with major outcry over British actions. Many incoming protest telegrams excluded the Dominion from complicity but

wanted it to make representations to Britain. Almost exclusively, the uproar came from the government’s constituency i.e. Labour Party branches and trade unions. Fraser would eventually tell London about these. He also received a petition of protest from his own soldiers based at Burnham Military Camp (endorsing a statement by 2nd Lieutenant J. Denver DCM, Soviet Medal for Valour), which he did not tell London about.¹⁶⁶ Civilian protest was one thing, military quite another. The communication about the crisis also pervaded the administration’s unofficial diplomatic communication. Alister McIntosh, Head of External Affairs, received a personal letter (thought more appropriate than an official report) from Carl Berendsen, New Zealand representative in Washington. The Washington-based diplomat said that, because of British actions in Greece and Italy¹⁶⁷: “The British Commonwealth is getting an extremely bad press here at the moment... . And on top of that came the Greek business, which seems to me to be about as bad as bad can be.”¹⁶⁸

Fraser’s Protest

The perception that events in Greece were being driven by the Commonwealth as a whole rather than by Britain, and Churchill’s statement in the House of Commons indicating the same¹⁶⁹, led Fraser to send a letter of protest to London. On December 20th he cabled London that he wanted to make the position of New Zealand clear. He placed his main criticism in supportive imperialist rhetoric, but it was in effect a direct challenge to the key underpinning of British policy: “There is a feeling that the British Government is fighting to place the King of Greece safely back on his throne, regardless of the wishes of the Greek people, a cause which in the general opinion of New Zealanders, and an opinion which I fully share, is not worth the loss of the valuable life of one British soldier.”¹⁷⁰ Fraser did not mention any of the Greek parties (EAM, EDES etc) but focused on the entity of “Greece” and touched upon the monarchies in Yugoslavia and Italy. He reminded the British that “In May last [that is, when he attended the Prime Ministers’ Conference] during a discussion with Mr Eden in London, I expressed my considered view that any policy to bolster up or restore the monarchies in Greece, Yugoslavia or Italy, or which has the appearance of doing so, would be a mistake of the first magnitude.”¹⁷¹ Churchill responded to Fraser two days

161 *Report by the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 12 December 1944 – 9 May 1945*, (London HMSO 1949), p. 9. Alexander was accompanied by Harold Macmillan who later wrote “The rebels hold four-fifths of Athens and Piraeus. They hold all the hills around. They hold the harbours; they have captured one airfield, and threaten another. We had dumps of food and ammunition in the town, but the majority of these we have lost. We have about five day’s ammunition and about 8 day’s food at present rates.” Harold Macmillan, *War Diaries: Politics and War in the Mediterranean January 1943 – May 1945*, (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 602. Entry for 11 December 1944. Churchill states that, in Alexander’s cable of the same day, the figures were 3 days of ammunition and six days of rations. Winston Churchill, *Tide of Victory*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 260.

162 WAI 8 Freyberg Papers File 76 Greek Mountain Brigade (ANZ) Aked to Freyberg, 12 December 1944.

163 *Report by the Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean*, p. 8.

164 WAI 8 *GOC Diary* 6 and 7 December 1944 (ANZ).

165 “Greek fighting Colonels Story” *Auckland Star*, 23 April 1945.

166 See EA1 201/2/82 pt. 2B (ANZ).

167 The latter probably because of its attitude toward the resistance groups there and the left dominated quasi government bodies they had set up.

168 Berendsen, Carl. Letter, 12 December 1944, in: McIntosh, Alister Donald (Sir), *Papers*, MS-Papers-6759-229 (ATL).

169 Martyn Brown, “Political Context of John Mulgan’s Greek wartime Life and Death”, *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, NS 10, 2011, pp. 89-113. Wellington had to ask for a copy of the relevant question and answer made on 14 December. It was not included in the voluminous telegrams sent from London. Office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom Wellington, NZ to McIntosh Dept. of External Affairs, 16 Dec. 1944, EA1 201/2/82 pt. 2B (ANZ).

170 EA1 201/2/82 pt. 2B Fraser to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, 20 Dec. 1944, p. 2 (ANZ).

171 *Ibidem*.

later. He did not answer the essential question of the monarchy (not even the possibility of a plebiscite was considered) but related developments around the issue of appointing a Regent¹⁷², the improving military situation and the need to disarm the guerrilla forces. He stressed that the Greek Brigade and the special forces Sacred Squadron should not be disarmed but might have to be “removed elsewhere as part of a general settlement.”¹⁷³

The rift between New Zealand and Britain was the result of the outbreak of unpopular armed conflict, combined with the possibility of defeat (to the British and their allies) and the specifics of the monarchy question. The Fraser government’s protest was not one voiced publicly. Fraser had in fact prevented discussion of the Greek situation in the New Zealand Parliament. His statement on that day did not even include any reference to Greece or to any other country liberated. The complexities of post-war political settlements, he said, were to be resolved peacefully through the mechanism of the United Nations. For the moment, the over-riding concern was to win the war “Whatever difficult situations arise in other countries, we have to reserve our opinions.”¹⁷⁴ Fraser, unlike Churchill, who faced a no confidence vote in the House of Commons over the Greek situation, had a compliant political arena in Wellington. The only public disclosure about New Zealand’s stance on Greek affairs was an announcement about the “no troops” for Greece decision made months previously.¹⁷⁵ It was a deceptive announcement. Fraser’s claim that “There are no New Zealand troops in Greece”¹⁷⁶ was not true. Aked was there and, taking a broader view, the New Zealand SOE operatives had been involved in contentious Greek affairs for years.

In the days following the surge of domestic protests, Fraser’s administration now animated by what happened, used its own informal connections to gather intelligence about the turmoil in newly liberated Greece.¹⁷⁷

Hostilities in Greece were temporarily halted by the Varkiza agreement of February 1945. Two years later, civil war broke out again. Tsakaotos would rise to a senior position in the government army. In 1947, Tsakaotos told Aked, who had returned to New Zealand some years before, that he had “to continue the struggle against the criminals of our country.”¹⁷⁸ Freyberg and Aked maintained some communication with him up until at least 1952.¹⁷⁹

172 Archbishop Damaskinos became Regent as a result of the Athens conference. His appointment was a solution to the impasse over the question of the King.

173 Churchill to Fraser, 22 Dec. 1944, AAEG 950 345/4/1 pt. 2 (ANZ).

174 *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, Vol 267, October 12 to 15 December 1944, Wellington, p. 826.

175 “No Dominion Troops” *Auckland Star*, 14 December 1944.

176 *Ibidem*.

177 Martyn Brown, *op. cit.*

178 Tsakalotos to Aked, 3 April 1947. Letter in the possession of the author.

179 Tsakalotos to Aked, 31 October 1952. Letter in the possession of the author. In the same letter Tsakalotos mentions he receives letters from Freyberg.

Summary

The ongoing New Zealand military involvement with Greece was both at a major unit and an individual level. The nature of the latter’s work and senior placement in a clandestine organisation counters any argument that the numbers involved were insignificant as against the backdrop of Dominion casualties in failed ventures such as Lustre, Mercury in 1941 and the Aegean in 1943.

One can say that, at least in terms of protecting Dominion interests, i.e. safeguarding the 2NZDIV, Fraser and Freyberg had worked along the same path. Similarly, they were in unison with the plight of their soldiers fighting as BLOs in occupied Greece. The leadership was disinterested. Both could be well pleased with themselves as their prediction of fighting in liberated Greece had in essence proven to be correct. They had also been lucky in that political intrigues within the Greek forces in Italy had appeared after they had left the 2NZDIV. However, the politician and general had both said one thing to each other (i.e. the neutral stance) but done another when it came to any sense of neutrality (Freyberg with Aked’s ongoing appointment, Fraser with his attacking the Greek monarch). At the least, it is an example of a civil-military relationship out of sync. Speaking bluntly, Freyberg’s action in Italy over Aked is an example of a military commander ignoring government policy. The general’s reaction over the outbreak of fighting in Athens shows that he was taken by surprise. This is at first difficult to reconcile with his previous statement to Fraser about fighting likely to break out. But their discussion revolved around “factions” (i.e. probably Greek, given there had already been one previous outbreak in fighting between EAM/ELAS and EDES). What had not been foreseen was the escalation and involvement of British forces.

In contrast to New Zealand, the British were far more integrated in pursuing a common goal. Decisions and statements by British generals could be seen to come from “politicians in uniform” without too much effort (e.g. Wilson and his “bleeding” strategy), as they engaged in open discussion about what they wanted to achieve. British cohesion versus Dominion variability could be explained in part by the long-established and resourced British politico-military structures versus a small diplomatic capability and still evolving maturity in diplomacy. However, despite this, Fraser and Freyberg possessed enough raw data about the risks and predicament of their military to inform intelligent discussion and decision-making. That they only did this for their largest unit – i.e. 2NZDIV – is their limitation and cannot be attributed to the machinations of London; nor could their inability to work in unison. Perhaps the best that can be said is that Fraser and Freyberg eventually engaged in communication over Greek matters, albeit it was a deceptive and highly selective process.