

# **AN**

## **INCREDIBLE ADVENTURE**

***The true story of my capture and escape  
from the Greek communist guerrillas***



***By Nicholas Hadjimarkos***

***This book never been published to be sold for the fear of reprisal by the evil fanatics of the communists guerrillas. I have edited a limited number of books typed with an ordinary typewriter only for relatives and friends. With the new technology my former classmate, countryman neighbor and best friend Tasos Kolokotronis who lives now in Melbourne Australia retyped it in electronic format and I am kindly express my gratitude to him.***

## **PREFACE**

*I was twelve years old in 1940 when the German army invaded Greece. With all the agitation, all schools had been closed. Education was interrupted for a couple of years. In that four-to five year occupation by the Germans I grew up to be an older boy than my age.*

*I saw people in misery. In 1941 the Greek people were generally starving, especially in the big cities. I witnessed many people dying daily. All the available food was taken to the front for the German army*

*In 1942, some schools had open. After two years of being absent, I started going back to school in Salonika City which was located four or five miles away from our village of Nea Magnesia (Now it is called Ionia). Every morning I took the small train which went through our village to go to school in Salonika, As I waited at the village station for the train to come, I witnessed execution of Greeks prisoners by the Germans a short distance away at the base of a hill at the edge of our village. This happened almost every other day.*

*These prisoners were captured from the resistance of the Popular Liberation of the Greek Army who had gone to the mountains to fight the Germans to try to liberate Greece someday. Inside these units the idea of communism took root. They knew each other very well and they organized their own units. They fought the Germans to liberate Greece, but their plan was to deliver Greece into Russian hands after the liberation. In the meantime, they were fighting side by side with the legitimate Greek army (even though they didn't like it)*

*So, when the Germans caught anyone from the resistance, they put them in prison and executed them from there. Two or three times a week I witnessed these kinds of executions. They brought them in truckloads, tied to each other by their hands and lined them up at the base of that hill. You heard the blast of the machineguns and then saw a big cloud of dust. After it cleared, no one was left standing. I had a clear view without any buildings or trees to hide the atrocities.*

*These pictures stayed in my mind until school hours were over. Then I would go home a confused sad boy. Those difficult years passed with many more of these kinds of tragedies. Such tragedies for me were a different kind of education. I had gone to high school for two years and I didn't remember what I was studying for.*

*When the Germans were gone, I thought the war was over, but how far I was from the truth. Now that the Germans were gone, the Liberation Army that was in the mountain for those four or five years fighting the Germans were fighting each other. Greek with Greek: In other words, The National Democratic Army with the communist left wing had started the civil war and it was the worst. The National Army had control of the big cities and the reorganized government. The communists stayed in the mountains to fight a guerrilla war against those who opposed their idea of communism*

*Many villages were on the slope of the mountains. They were under communist control. Many times they raided villages and cities and abducted civilians and took them to the mountains to teach them communism. As you can see this civil war was very serious and important to the future of Greece and it lasted from 1945 to 1951*

*When the Germans left, we heard the American Farm School was reopening and accepting applications mostly boys from villages in Greece. It was an agricultural school, but they taught almost everything, farming, plumbing, carpentry, electrical and mechanics so I was very interesting.*

*The school director Mr. House was an American. His father had founded the school in 1904. It was interrupted by the Second World War and now it was reopened in full gear and accepting forty to forty-five new students for the first year. I went with couple of friends of mine, Tasos and Fotis on the bus to the end of Salonika city. From there we walked five or six miles to the isolated institute which was on seven or eight hundred acres of land that belonged to the school. We were the first applicants after World War II. This was called the American Farm School from which I and others almost didn't graduate. In the next few pages you have the opportunity to read my true life adventure if you wish.*

*This small part of my life was one of the most dangerous. It was also the reason why I came to America*

*Destiny saved me and sent me far away from the troubled world across the sea to America. Then I met and married the loveliest girl in Michigan. For the anniversary of our forty happy years I am dedicating this story to my dear wife Stemma.*

*Nicholas Hadjimarkos*

*August 9 / 1995*



***The great kidnaping of 42 students from the American Farm School of Thessaloniki Greece by the communist guerrillas ELAS on Fr. January 28/1949***



*The American Farm School has developed from barren, 50 acre plot to land that housed and schooled 13 boys in one building to a 375 acre "model farm" that encompasses 50 buildings, a self-sufficient farm, a coed boarding school, and 79 years of progressive change. The basic philosophy of the School, though, has remained the same since John Henry House founded the School in 1904; to educate Greek youth through modern agricultural theory and practice, to teach the students to appreciate the dignity of manual labor, and to carry back to their villages the knowledge and skills acquired at the Farm School. The Farm School aims to develop an equal balance in the hearts, heads and hands of Greek high school youth-the desire ability and positive attitude to learn and develop modern agricultural techniques in Greece. In addition the Farm School provides continuing educational opportunities for Greek adults and sponsors two summer programs involving international students.*

*My name is Nicholas Hadjimarkos. The year is 1986 October 20<sup>th</sup> since I came in this country thirty years ago I have always had in my mind that I want to do this since I came to this country. First to learn the English language well enough and then translate my true adventure from Greek to English.... But after thirty years to be honest with myself, I don't think I accomplished that much in the language area but I translating it to English, I put it with my own voice on the tapes so I can hear myself how bad I sound to others. I realize that accent like that is rooted deep inside and no way I am going to lose it. So I was glad to put it in words, in writing this new piece of English literature and quite heavy foreign accent and plenty mistakes by reading it, perhaps you live some moments in the true adventure*

*This is a true story about me, a story that I lived during the difficult period when the communists raided entire villages and imprisoned all that they found in the path. Their purpose was to indoctrinate their fanatic beliefs, ideas and purposes to everyone possible. But for the Hellenists who have always been Hellenists, it was difficult to accept something like this in a civilization of 3000 years in a country for which thousands upon thousands had sacrificed their lives to inscribe the word "freedom". That's why I too wanted to be free. With danger of my life I fled from these clashes, but there were three things I assigned myself faith, patience, and courage if I had not employed these three graces, perhaps today you would not be hearing the following story.*

*Perhaps I will start everything from the beginning*

*I was a student of the American farm School, a senior in the fourth year of the school which was located four kilometers to the east of the city of Thessaloniki. These were difficult times for all, but especially for those that lived in the villages in the mountains. These mountains of Greece were well fortified by various communists band that would descend upon the villages and grab everything in their sight.*

*As students at the Farm School we were concerned with our lessons and in general with our work about the school. Day after day seemed to glide by peacefully for us, but that was until that fateful night that no one was expecting and that disturbed many.*

*The students were all from different villages and cities of Greece and they came to the school in order to learn proper methods of land cultivation. There were about 200 students, 50 in each class. Each class was assigned a separate section in the dormitory. As seniors our group has only five months left before graduation but it seems that fate had reserved a very unpleasant experience that we were to undergo that night Friday 28 January 1949.*

*For the benefit of the students, the school had arranged for us to visit our families on certain holidays and so it was near the Christmas holiday and we were given a vacation. We all went to our homes and had a wonderful time, of course. On our return, however, the administration office observed that one of the students did not return. The immediately notified his parents in the village of Souroti only to find that he had been abducted by the communist band. The news of this tragedy quickly spread to all students and the feeling was of common sympathy for the loss of an exceptional student.*

*One month had passed since this incident and everyone had just about forgotten about it, but it seems that fate again was promising a great surprise in a catastrophe for our school. It was Friday and that night it was announced that leave of absence would be given to all those that live in villages in the vicinity and so I was granted that weekend to*

*visit my parents. After I had completed all my duties that evening I retired to my room which was in the lower part of the dormitory and at 9.30 p.m. the lights were turned off. Barba Kyriakos, the supervisor, as we called him was in charge and was required that, it was to be absolutely quite, no talking and laughing after that time. If anyone did noise after the lights were out. Barba Kyriakos would take down the name and report him to the authorities and his contact would be recorded. That night before light out my best friend who had the bed next to mine seemed little depressed. "There you go again" he told me. You are really lucky to have home so close to the schools that every so often you get to go for the weekend, because the school is like an army place. You will be like a free bird tomorrow with the pass in your hand.*

*We dropped off to sleep, he in his bed I in mine, but a sleep that was destined not to last until morning. Our lights went out. Peacefulness fell over, not a sound was to be heard except, perhaps for the monotonous snoring of fellow classmate. There was complete tranquility and we were in deep paradise-like sleep and dreaming.*

*Suddenly a great commotion shattered my short sleep, strange noises, short abrupt talking and the lights burning. Half asleep, I turned on my side and peered at my neighbor only to find him was dressing fast. I hovered beneath my covers snugly and tried to find the sweetness of slumber again, not even making an attempt to find out what was going on.*

*"Comrade, get up. Come on, hurry up, get dressed" someone kicked at my feet. Still unable to find the meaning of this, I asked myself. "Who is this joker that calling me comrade in the middle of the night when we should be sleeping?"*

*Finally, I sat up and saw soldiers and plain clothes men, some wearing torn, saggy clothes and others wearing "charouhia" a kind of shoes made of pigskin rushing about giving orders. They were armed with machine guns and knives. Who were these men? Why they interrupt our sleep?. We never would believe that we were being invaded by the communists. I could not believe it.*

*"Hurry up Nick, get dressed. The communists have invaded us". The words choked his throat as he spoke bitterly. For the first time in our lives we were faced with the danger of weapons and the fear made us really like lambs, even though we went through the war with the Germans when we were young. We saw so many things, we saw many killings, but nobody took us this way to the civil war. Without a single disagreement we dressed ourselves mechanically.*

*There were forty of us in the dormitory and each of us was facing this tragedy different way. One was crying like a small child, another was cursing his life, another was thinking about his mother who was thinking about her only child and everybody was just disturbed and didn't know what to do or say. Such an occurrence could shatter a man with a conscience.*

*But let me continue with the course of events.*

*We were preparing ourselves for the long journey. We were told to supply ourselves with a blanket. I wore my work coat and a pair of heavy hiking boots because I knew only too well that the hike through the mountains would demand that. I also took a comb with me that my father had given me a few weeks before, at that time I had hair on my head. I proceeded to remove all my identifications and pictures that I had in my pocket. I didn't want to take them with me. I carried only a small calendar and a pencil. I joined the others in the hallway in the corner of the dormitory where a guard was watching us so nobody would escape. A guerrilla was stationed there with an automatic weapon to check anyone*

*who would go out of line. I was just about last in the line, so I could easily see the other guerrilla suspiciously checking the closet and bedrooms for anyone hiding out. They didn't want to leave any of the students behind. And so one by one after another we filed down the familiar hall that for the past three and of half years had served us unselfishly, the familiar hall running to the cafeteria where we ate many mornings and evenings.*

*As we proceeded down the stairs, one of the cooks appeared with a basket of bread from the kitchen. We were told to take a loaf. With bread under one arm and a blanket under the other arm we were ready for the unknown journey. At the foot of the stairs, two of the women from the kitchen, who had been awakened by by all the noise stood crying, realizing our danger and the adventure that we would have going through the mountains, they didn't know if we would be alive in a few months. Those women represented our mothers and each of us gave them a kiss good bye whether or not we would return was unknown. They cried out. "God bless you and God will protect you". So they were the last three people we saw.*

*Everything was finally arranged. As we began our journey, one followed the other like lamb. We were not allowed to talk, so the deadly silence was interrupted by the rhythmic pattern of the footsteps and occasionally the bark of a distance dog. We were walking through the new sown wheat field of our school dragging our feet with effort. In the beginning, a few thought it was something of a joke to have 42 boys grouped in such a fashion and walking through the field at midnight not knowing their destination. But after a while we could no longer see the school. As we went farther and farther a fear began to come inside us; we consoled ourselves by thinking, "whatever happens to others will happen to me" and we continued to walk our course like lamb.*

*A little bit farther was the airport that was close to Salonica. Before we had quite reached the airport, which is four miles from the Farm School, we heard loudspeakers warning of the possible approach of the communists. This was a surprise. They probably heard about the thing somehow, and now they were trying to warn everybody to put the big lights in the airport to see through the area.*

*Before our leader recognized that suggestion, the lights were directly upon us. We all froze in our footsteps. The communists, however, were right at our heels pointing at our sides with their guns, with loud rough voices they shouted at us to hit the ground or they were going to see us with those big bright search lights. We remained there for a moment until the lights passed and then repeated that routine several times until it passed over us and they could not see us with the light. We slid passed the houses of another Farm School located west of the airfield. Several of those airfield cities were deserted and no soul could be seen in any one of those homes.*

*We made such a fuss with our passing that it seemed strange that all of us could not disturbed someone. No one however was even aware of the drama of 42 persons, and our last remaining hope died.*

*We got to a little village and proceeded through it without giving any indication that we were there. Since there were no more dangers, they didn't bother us for a while, but they were walking right behind us and for every five students there was one of the guards watching so we could not escape. But now each of us was trying in our mint to find a way to escape. This was very difficult since we had never been in such a dangerous position.*

*A few hours before we had been free, we were sleeping soundly as students and had never faced such a difficult problem, not even in our classes.*



*Here, free and careless celebrating the 40th year of the founding of the American Farm School of Thessaloniki by John Henry House whose bust is displayed in front of two large banners showing how it was this place in 1904 and how was in 1947.*

*The teams of honor are: On the left, I am first with classmates in white overall and on right are my schoolmates and childhood friends Fotis and Tasso with other classmates.*

*Both discontinued their studies after the third term and joined the Military Engineering School in Athens for a 5 year term*

*Nick Hadjimarkos*



*Now as slaves of the enemy of our country, we were approaching the beginning foothills of the mountains whose secret paths and caves these guerrillas knew so well. That was the first act of our drama that was to follow.*

*In front of me, a classmate was marching and not holding my silence any longer. I whispered to him. "What is happening Frigadi" that was his name, he was from Polygyro. He told me. 'Did you see?. Did you see?*

*"Who"? I asked*

*"Tsiggidis Angelos "*

*He was the student that they abducted a few months earlier. You must wonder who this person was. He was a classmate, of course, like I said who was abducted from his home town a few months ago when he went home for Christmas vacation. I was so taken aback by this news that I hastily asked him, "where is he now"? "Where is he"? "I didn't see him"*

*Did you speak to him?*

*"No I just recognized him. He was with the guerrillas". He answered, "He is in back of us".*

*He said this because for every five or six people in the line, like I said; three was a guard to make sure no one went free. As we kept on marching constantly towards the unknown, I suddenly notice a guard next to me. He was then joined by another guard armed head to foot. They spoke for a while and then parted. The two guards were in close position, and I was trying to distinguish their characteristics when as we made a narrow turn at the pass, I was able to recognize one by the light of the moon, and it really was*

*Angelo, our former roommate who was now guarding us armed with a machinegun.*

*For a moment I forgot myself and talked out loud because I knew him from school. "How are you Angelo?" "What is all about, are you with them?"*

*Immediately, I knew my error in speaking out this way because I didn't know his temperament, but he answered very quickly in a tempered voice: "All right, all right, stop the talking and pay attention to your marching. We cannot talk now. Just keep walking".*

*These were the words he said to me. I knew he meant business so I just didn't say any more, but I couldn't believe my ears hearing his voice. I was no mistaken. It really was him who had lived for three years or four years sharing the same classrooms, the same dormitory, breathing the same air. He was such a good student, but what could I do?. It was quite evident that he was now someone else who had forgotten all his friends and classmates.*

*Possible these thieves told him their lies and he was changed that way. He betrayed us, then again I knew of something else. There might be a possibility that they were threatening his life. After that, I spoke no more and I continued walking with my head down. I prayed for the earth to swallow me up until this had all passed and then release me once again, but no such miracle could happen I knew..*

*A signal was given for a short rest, but ten minutes later we were off again marching and marching to the unknown. This was very tiring and we realized we were going farther. We were beginning to look like we were in a trance. Meanwhile, every now and then we would pass tiny streams, but the water was almost frozen from the cold weather. Many would break the ice to quench their thirst.*

*As we continued, the hills kept getting larger and the village was becoming more distance through the wild trees and shrubbery. It was impossible to walk now unless we remained on the path. The rebels who up to now were marching next to us were also*

*forced to march in the back of every five persons to guard us better and here was the end of the adventure for many. Those who were in the middle of the line having two classmates in the front of them and two in the back of them were able to dart either to the left or to the right at the turn of the path and were able to hide in the shrubbery until they had all marched away. They were then free and fled back to safety. Many succeeded in escaping this way.*

*I watched them, but it was impossible for me to do the same because immediately in back of me was a rebel. It was evident from this moment that I had more to experience in the days that followed. In this manner the first group of classmates was able to escape without notice. Here the fate of each person weighed heavily according to his position in line. This was kind of destiny or luck.*

*For a moment the space between us became quite distant so that it was impossible for them to guard us closely. I looked behind me and was amazed to find no one in back of me. In front of me was a classmate from my hometown names Isaak. As I held my blanket and a loaf of bread in my hand, I said to him. "Take this and do whatever you want with it. Say nothing to anyone. I am going to hide here"*

*As soon as I had made the decision to hide behind the bush, which was the only one to be found around there, I heard my classmate, not quite sober from the surprise I gave him saying to me. "Get out from there quick, here comes a rebel and he is armed with guns. He is going to get you in trouble. He saw you". I trembled with fear at this thought, and I hastily obeyed the words of my friend who didn't mean any harm but was just trying to protect me.*

*The rebel caught up with us but to our surprise a classmate of our had taken the gun so the guarding rebel could rest. I didn't know how they would trust him but they gave him the gun to carry figuring he might sympathize or else they didn't have any bullets in the gun.*

*Pretty soon the other rebels caught up with us and there were two rebels instead of one behind me and I was right in the middle. This was my torture, I guess, The dawn of a new day was beginning when I heard one rebel say to another. "As soon as the day breaks tell the others we are going to hide in the foothills of Katsika Mountains because we are in a dangerous location and the fascist may suspect us". This was the name of the Greek Army, the regular national army. They called them fascists. In villages they have the protection of the civilian guards and the call the MEA. Their conception of course was that everyone else was a fascist and only they were the justified in their extreme acts, one of which was being dramatized that night with us.*

*The other rebel answered him and I didn't understand. They cut their conversation sort when they realized that we were listening and we continued on. Finally, when we arrived at their designated spot it was quite light. We were then instructed to remain in our position and without disturbing our line and to rest on ease. I overheard someone say that this was their fifth night without rest on their mission. Naturally they were extremely tired. They told us talking was forbidden. I took this opportunity to observe how many had escaped during those hours that we were on the path and to my surprise and joy I found ten were missing*

*My next thought was. "Now, how much more difficult will it be for the remaining number to escape. The ten were free, but we are still captive. I lay down to think, and not to sleep of course. Three steps away a guard was sitting with an automatic rifle. It seems that we were going to spend the day like this. The rebels all*

were tired and they fell asleep quickly. Feeling the chill of the morning air; I covered myself with my blanket and as I lay thinking I became drowsy and dropped off to sleep. That was mistake but I got sleep.

Two or three hours later as I shifted my position because I had become numb from the cold, woke and looked around. To my surprise, my neighbor had vanished leaving his behind his blanket. I could not make out what happened and I sat up in an effort to find out. A quick glance was enough to tell me that many others had fled leaving their blankets behind. But how did this happen. Where did the go?. I kept asking myself.

Then I spotted the guard snoring soundly. His rifle and everything was quite plain. Now was the time for me to get out too. Why didn't these classmates even wake me up when they were leaving or something? Like a bolt of lightning the thought of their deception raced through my mind. After the guard had fallen asleep, those that were still awake took advantage of the situation and escaped.

"What am I sitting here? I might as well escape, too". But before I could put my thought into action the sleeping guard just happened to wake and began to count his prisoners. I watched him closely. He opened his blanket so I can see his face. He mumbled and was mad. I could not help thinking that the others could awakened us from our sleep to join them, but, no the burden of fate rested upon the sixteen who had remained. Only sixteen can you imagine?

Everything would be on us now. We were right in their pockets ready to perform their wishes. Why couldn't I have been awake with the others? But how could I know this would happen. From my position underneath the blanket I was mad at myself.

The guard proceeded to wake up a comrade to take his place. It was his turn to guard us, but it was also time to place the responsibility for the escape on his shoulder, too. I thought they didn't realize that a great many had escaped.

They didn't mention it to us or anything. You could see the bitterness of their eyes like they trying to get revenge something.

We continued to stay there until morning. A new thought kept racing in my mind now. Logically I knew that when they escaped they went to the small towns that were in the area. Undoubtedly they would inform the police and the army that a number of boys had been kidnapped. Before I could finish my thought, I heard a shot in the air, then a third. We did not know quite what to do, but immediately the leader of this mission ordered us to get up with a blanket and to continue marching near the guard that he assigned us. As we carried out the order the guard handed me an object that is called lira, an instrument that plays like mandolin. He wanted me to free him of it so he could use his rifle in emergency. Now the gunshots could be heard at close range in an increasing number. I knew for sure the students were in the small towns and told the police or the national army and they were trying to come and get us. But how could they recognize us from the guerrillas who wore almost the same cloths?. They were shooting whether anybody moved or not.

In front of me a younger classmate was marching. It occurred to me to get his attention, but the guard who was following me did not give me any moment of opportunity. He was right behind me with his pistol in his hand. When there was a turn on the path I saw my classmate and tried to whisper to him because he was in front of me where nobody could notice, "Escape, and escape". Without turning back he just darted out of the line and left me in the middle of two rebels. Now the shots could be hears louder and were closer.

*One of the guards behind me said. "Listen to what I am going to tell you" behind him were several classmates who were being guarded very closely now because only a few students remained. We finally reached a bare hill, the only obvious escape from those machineguns. We could continue marching and escape the police and army that were after them. But it was dangerous for us, too, because the bullets would not be able to single out the rebels from the prisoners. I quietly experience my instinct of fear that moment for the first time in my life. I hugged the ground.*

*"Listen to me", said the rebel. "When I tell you, it's your turn, you are going to pick up your things and go up the hill". We were exposed of course to all the guns and fire if we went to the other side of the hill. Suddenly I heard a shot that landed close to us and the rebel ran. I had had the lira in one hand and my blanket in the other, but I prepared to run up the dangerous hill. Then I heard another shot and a second and finally a third that came almost to my feet. It was a machinegun shot. I thought I was wounded and I slumped to the ground hitting my forehead on a small stone. As I lay there still it occurred to me to play dead and I laid without making the slightest movement, but those guys had experienced things like that. They can't swallow something like that.*

*The guy called back. "Get up and run to the other side". Naturally, I pretended that I felt nothing so that he would believe that I was wounded or dead. He knocked my foot with something and then said very angrily. "Get up, I tell you and forget your jokes, get up and run to the other side before I give you the mercy bullet". "Pretending you're dead won't get you any place". I could see that he meant business, and besides, what would it be for him to shoot me? Who knows how many people he had already killed?. And now surely he would not have mercy upon me.*

*I said. "All right, I did not hear you the first time, besides I was waiting for them to stop shooting, I cannot run with all these things holding me down" "Leave them here and get up and run" he said in an angry voice. We are their target now. They're just shooting at us. I darted out and ran to the other side followed by the others. We were safe now from the fire and for the moment we all breathing a sigh of relief for surviving of this. We continued marching and I suddenly I realized that I was limping. The hill of my boot had probably been shot off by the shot I felt near my feet. A little closer and I wouldn't have been so lucky.*

*We were now being hurried along the outside of the mountains. They took another count of the prisoners and they were surprised to found out that only seven remained out of the 42 taken in prisoners. We were the cowards, the unlucky ones, or even the shield, one can say, to remain while the others escaped. Our mothers and fathers would be waiting for us anxiously and there would be no sign of us. Yes seven of us remained. I was the oldest and tallest.*

*One of us was suffering from high fever. He could not march any longer because he was sick and he could not even stand on his feet. Another classmate and I caught ahold of him by the arms and were helping him to march. We kept pleading to the rebels to at least abandon him. He could be found by the others and take to his home. We kept asking them. "What are you going to gain by taking a sick man? He is not going to last if you want to take him to your destination?"*

*"That's our business". The answer was, "And you mind your business and march". Finally we convinced them to at least abandon him since the fever was burning him and it was bothersome for us because we could not march ourselves, it was a hardship for us. We put him in an easy spot so that he could be able to flee to a village where they could*

*find him easily. He did not know how to thank us because we were able to change the minds of these savage guerrillas.*

*They should have realized that he would be of no value to them. He would probably die on the way. He was crying with joy that we have saved him even though we were still prisoners and no one would save us. We could say nothing but a bitter good bye from where our road separated. He would soon be with his family safe and free but us.... God bless us.*

*“Good luck boys”. These were the last words we heard from him and he was a free man. Wrapped in his blanket, he watched us disappear in the distance.*

*Now there were six remaining and there was no way I would have even thought of escaping because there were so many guards and people around us. At a turn in the path we waved goodbye and lost him behind some shrubbery. I sigh with relief at the thought of helping someone gain his freedom, even though my own position was even worse now. The rebels had us where they wanted us. They never counted us or questioned us about the deception of the others. They would constantly stare at us with an evil eye hoping to dissolve their bitterness and that someone would make a mistake and they could shoot the rest of us right there. We were lucky once for the others, the lure or bait, so to speak. The other thirty six fled but then you could look at it another way; someone had to be in front or the rebels blocking their view so they could escape.*

*I glanced back out of curiosity to see where some of my other classmates were because we were marching in a group and were mixed in with the rebels. Another classmate darted out of the line but thinking it would be only momentary I did not consider myself.*

*It was only after we had come down the hill and were preparing to enter a glen, that the rebel, who obviously had counted us after leaving the sick one and was probably had seen him dart out in the woods, shouted up the hill, “Hey, you up there, hurry up and come down here” to our surprise we did not hear a response or any kind of noise from up there. Quickly I realized that my classmate hid himself someplace up there on the hill and he was planning to escape as soon as we left the area. But the guerrilla insisted that there was another one of us up there and as a matter of fact he saw him going through the woods. He started hollering with an angry loud voice this time. “You come down from up there because I’m going to come after you if you don’t come voluntarily from your hiding place, I will come and get you”*

*He was very angry and insisted that this person was up there and he was going up there to get him and flush him out and execute him up there on the spot. He said it was to set an example for those who would betray us. They weren’t worthy to live and he wanted to eliminate him now.*

*Realizing what could happen, we knew that the man was there, so all of us with one voice said to this guerrilla. “There is no one up there anymore except us right here in front of you”. Nevertheless, we knew for sure our schoolmates indeed were there on the hill hiding in the thick bushes. I saw him, he was walking in front of me and the guerrilla was behind me and he could not possibly see him for sure. But I saw him. He went into the bushes. And if he even saw him, he thought he would come after he took care of his personal need.*

*So all of us continued going down the hill and we saw nobody else coming. Now the angry guard with his high pitched voice turned to us and said. “You guys are looking for trouble, too. You are trying to make a fool out of me. If we were not in a hurry to catch up with the*

*other groups I would prove to you that I was right, and then all of you would you wish you had not been born". We insisted with a calm voice that it was really a waste of time and he should believe us that no one was there. Now he was fiercer, really mad. He said. "I counted you before and there were six, now there are five. I didn't go to school, but I know to count up to ten. You guys think that you are smart. You try to protect a traitor and save his miserable life. We didn't say anything at that moment, but a little farther was one of his friends who was tired and laying down with a submachine gun waiting for us. A couple of us went to him and tried to talk to him and convince him that we were the only ones.*

*We begged him to tell his comrade, the guerrilla that there was no one else up there. He looked us up and down knowing, of course, none of us volunteering for the mission and he knew we were lying and with that look of mistrust said to us. "You'd probably do the same thing as the others if you were given the right opportunity. So you want me to believe you? Don't lie to me now too. It's not going to be too long to be eliminated, where do you think they will go? To their villages, to their towns, to their farms we have agents in every corner of Greece, so in any case of escape, there is punishment by death. if you guys have anything planned in your scull, you might as well forget it if you want to see your relatives someday alive."*

*Hearing these cold words of that man kept us silent and now we were scared more yet. We didn't know what they were going to do with us since from forty schoolmates we were left to be the five unlucky ones, us. He got up from his sitting position. He turned forward to his friend, comrade, and hollered his code name or nickname and said. "We have to go right now if we don't want to be separated from the first group". They were ahead of us somewhere and they had captured some other people from other villages. They were the first group, so they were opening the path for the rest of us in those remote areas in the mountains. They knew every path so we wouldn't fall into the hands of the national army. finally, when we started moving out of the area, I knew that our schoolmate was almost free and pretty soon would be joined with the others someplace and go home to relatives and friends.*

*I was happy and sad at the same time, walking now and again in a single line with our heads down following them to the unknown, a dangerous adventure perhaps costing us our lives. In the chilly of the morning and with fear in our hearts, we followed them like dogs. When we joined with the others we were walking in a narrow goat path in a single line, each of us was now was behind a guerrilla who was watching so we didn't have any idea of escaping.*

*I was personally thinking now that since there were just five of the forty left their mission was failure right from the start. They did not have too much to loss by eliminating the rest of us if the preferred to, and they would tell their leaders they had totally failed. Now we must be extra careful of what we said and how we behaved so we didn't make matters worse. We must convince them now that we were with them and not to worry and not to worry about us. But as we were inexperienced young students they could see our frustration and the sadness in our faces so really we could not fool them and follow them. So we did.*

*We were walking nights and catnapping days in a thick forest which was on our way. Only they knew where we were going. We lost all directions, I didn't know whether we were going north, or south, east or west but we knew we were some place that was the hiding place of all the guerrillas in the mountains. Once in a while we heard them*

*saying that we were getting close to the destination. Two nights from now if they took shortcuts, we would be there.*

*The next day just before dawn one of my schoolmates was acting very strange. I thought maybe he was having some kind of nervous breakdown or something. And I tried to calm him because I didn't know what the matter with him was. After walking all night they told us to sit down for a rest because the next night we'd have to do these things again. Our friend, the student, started talking again with a louder voice and said. "All these things we suffer for their cause, why? We didn't want to volunteer. We didn't want this war, why did they take us by force?". He was having like a breakdown and he was saying. "We are just students", hollering and getting mad and trying to get their attention.*

*I was starting to get nervous because this was enough to make them mad at the rest of us. I was kicking him on one side trying to calm him down but, instead he was getting worse. He started cursing and swearing. This was very dangerous for our position. He forgot that he was not dealing with his father or brother but fanatic communists guerrillas who would not even hesitate to kill their own father or mother to accomplish their expedition. But he stubbornly kept saying things like; "Why don't you let us leave since most of us are gone? What are you going to say to your leader about where the other 35 students are?"*

*Now it was time for one of us to interfere to stop him from going farther with his big mouth. I had the feeling that if he said more, we might leave our bones somewhere in this mountain.*

*"Hey friend" I called. "Don't talk any more nonsense because we don't agree with what you say." That made him think a little bit, and for a while he went off by himself. Nobody brought him back out because we tried to save ourselves at this difficult time. I had to talk to him like that and I think he knew deep inside I would agree with him under different circumstances. But, here, I had to put on a mask and pretend he was wrong and they were right so they wouldn't go get really mad. But really the guerrillas didn't pay much attention to him. They probably marked him for later on when an opportunity would come and they could give it to him some other way, but they didn't say too much.*

*I went across to him and said. "Listen carefully to what I'm going about to say to you. If you care for your life together with the rest of us, please keep your mouth shut and don't say nonsense things. As you can see with your own eyes our lives are totally in their hands. And with an even lower voice I told him. "You never know, maybe a little later if we wait we may find the opportunity—with God's help—to escape. Somehow he calmed down and relaxed and he realized that he had made a mistake and he said. "I am sorry, I was frustrated"*

*Now of course, we were very hungry. We arrived at a little church high in the mountains that they called "Cacavo". In peace time at this church the villagers come down from the hills and celebrate every year with liturgies and other religious ceremonies. Now, because of the civil war the guerrillas occupied all the high areas and they were using this church as a shelter, for the communist guerrillas it was a shack, it was nothing else.*

*Before I continue my story I want to tell you something here that you would probably like to know. In the beginning, in 1941 when the Germans occupied Greece, there were guerrillas in the mountains. We called the liberating guerrillas who tried to liberate us from the Germans, but actually there were two kinds of guerrillas; the National Army guerrillas who fought the Germans and the communist guerrillas who fought the*

**Germans. They were looking for an opportunity, as soon as the Germans left the country to take over and make Greece a communist country. When the Germans left eventually the national army took the valleys and cities and tried to get rid of the guerrillas who were in the mountains. Now they weren't fighting the Germans any more but the democratic Greek government itself to establish a communist regime. So there was a civil war and they occupied all the high areas in the mountain in those years. From the they would hit the villages and different places and take ammunition, food, people—like us—and sometimes they took children. This bloody war lasted five or six years after the Germans left. They raided villages, farms and schools, dragging along to the mountains innocent people—women, men, children against their will of course and they made no exceptions**



**1948. Here is the class of 1945, the first class after the end of WW II in an excursion to the sea side town of Mihaniona accompanied by the Directors wife Mrs. Ann House (sixth from left standing) and the principal Mr. Theodore Litsas ( First under the flag). The shy and brilliant student next to Mr. Litsa in the background is Angelos Tsiggidis who willingly or by force lead the guerrillas to the School and under the threat of guns abducted the whole class of 43 students marching them to the hideouts in the mountains of Khalkidhiki with plans to train them to fight their own people or to send them to the iron curtain to make them party leaders.**

**Fortunately enough, one by one and lastly me, escaped from the communist tyranny to tell my story**

**Next to our principal Mr. Litsa is my friend Tasos wearing a tie, and I am the 5<sup>th</sup> from left in the back row wearing also a tie**

**Nick Hadjimarkos**



*As I said before, after four days and nights we arrived at the long deserted mountain church, hungry, miserable, depressed. For two days we didn't have anything to eat. They told us to sit down on the side of the outside wall which was protected from the wind because it was still daylight. It was very cold up there and we put down the blankets that we had brought from American Farm School. That's all we had. Our feet were all wet from different paths and water we had passed by and it was freezing, we had gone on this unknown journey.*

*After a while we were just sitting down and I saw this guerrilla with a fresh killed good size goat on his shoulder. As soon as he put the goat down, without any words the other guerrillas started to skin it and in a few minutes the skin was off and the already had a chunk of meat in their hands. A little farther there was a fire with meat on sticks. They were around the fire barbequing this dinner. I was so hungry I couldn't see strait. Nobody invited us. As I started smelling the cooed meat I was going out of my mind. We were all huddled on the side of the wall thinking, home, nice bed, good food, and free. But in this case a dream doesn't go anywhere. Here was fact and reality. How could we live to tell about it?*

*With this thought in my mind, I saw a guerrilla cut a big chunk of meat, walked near us, put it down on top of some branches we had near us and say, Go ahead and cook it yourself". Believe me I didn't need another invitation. I got up and cut it myself with a knife that the guerrilla had left on the meat. To my surprise, I didn't see any of my schoolmates make any move. But we had been together and they must have been hungry too. But why?. I know they were sad and depressed and miserable.*

*So was I. here I was. No mama or papa to take care of us. I told them. "then if you don't eat, you are going to be more hungry later on, and believe me, the way it looks those guys don't care if you starve to death or die from cold or anything else. Hey guys, wake up. Come here and get a piece of meat and stay alive as long as you can". One of them had the courage to tell me that he didn't have an appetite. I said "OK, look at me" I cut a small piece so I can put it on a stick and I told him it was shish kebab. I managed to cook it on the fire somehow. There was no salt, of course, but it smelled and tasted good just like any other shish kebab.*

*After I cooked it I walked close to my friends and as soon as they saw me they cracked a smile. After all we were like brothers at the American Farm School, eating, sleeping, and sharing together for three whole years. So I came close to the eating one piece of meat, making faces hoe delicious it was. At the same time I cut a piece and put it near the mouth of the one who did not have an appetite. As I did that I saw the faces of the others looking at me like little hungry little birds. I gave them each a piece to taste, but not any more than that. I said. "You go and do it yourself. Cook it yourself." I was not surprised that after a few seconds one by one they got up and took their share of the meat, cooked it and came back close to me to eat it.*

*Afterwards we discussed everything in a low voice. Somewhere there must be goats. We were pretty sure it was stolen from some poor farmer, a shepherd, because all the food there was stolen, they don't produce their own in a guerrilla war, of course, they come into the villages and take any food they want with a gun. Then they go back to the mountains. From this point on they said. "No fear" Because they were close to their*

destination, their camps. "Don't worry; we won't have any more trouble with the national army because they cannot find us here".

We were going to have to sleep at night and walk in the daytime. Take your blankets and come in the church to sleep for tonight and tomorrow early, we'll get going again.

We followed one of them into the church like inseparable sheep and sat in one of the corners. Constantly some of us, since we were Christians, made the sign of the cross when we entered the church. When the guerrillas saw this, they laughed at us like it was funny to believe in God. But they have their own religion, the religion of communism.

Now curled in a corner, we were watching them to see what else they would do. First they brought some wood from outside and started a fire right in the middle of the little church. After they brought some more heavy wood and started singing revolutionary songs. They tried to teach us the words and expected us to keep up with their singing. At the same time, they knew first that we were here against our will, and second, we were not educated in their communist war yet, as one of them put it. "You guys are going to be leaders of communism because you have education. It is not going to be too long before we get the rest of you and some day when we liberate Greece. You are going to appreciate this. We did you a big favor by taking out of the hands of the fascist government and don't forget this.

I almost say something but I stopped. In my thought I was saying. "Yes, but you didn't asked us if we wanted such favor to liberate us from the national democratic government and take us from the school and joint you with your Bolshevik ideas". But how could I dare to express my feelings or this thought inside me?" They would probably killed me right there.

In moments like this you have to watch and listen and listen and watch, but nobody can twist your mind unless you want them to. We watched all this theatrical exhibition from a distance in the corner. They ridiculed this little church and the Christian faith any way they could. One of them walked in the separate holy room where only the priests are allowed. When he came out he was wearing the frocks of the priest and started dancing around the fire like a wild man.

Since childhood, all of us had great respect for anything that was holy. Seeing this man going this theatrical play, I personally thought he was the devil himself right in front of us. We could not explain all these happenings. The other guerrillas of course were laughing with all their hearts at this performance, except for one guerrilla who later said to him. "That's enough, cut it out and don't do any more". We found out later that his father was a priest before he died, so we understood. He had some feelings after all. He was a leader of his mission and he wanted to have control all around.

Everybody now was watching the flames of the fire. As we saw their wild faces tire. Everyone was falling asleep. It was the first time in four days that we had a little sleep. Early in the morning they woke us up and told us to get ready quickly. We were leaving the place. It was no surprise that we could not open the door since, during the night we had 3-4 foot snowfall because we were high in the mountains. It was cold bitter snow. We were in the middle of the winter.

The head man of the guerrillas started walking in front of us. The five of us followed this man. We were opening the path for the rest of them to come. In a couple of hours we were soaking wet, chilled to the bone. We were falling off into ditches. We didn't know where to step. The snow was almost 4 feet. The sun came out and started melting

*the snow. All the snow in our shoes was melting. Our stockings were soaked and our feet were wet. We couldn't stand. We had to walk to keep warm. Also, it was very windy and this was making the situation worse.*

*From the slopes from this mountain we could see a small village way down in the ravine. They said to us, "e cannot stop any place right now because we are going by a very dangerous pass. There is one passage and it is possible by the national army or police. The police or the armies possibly were from that village way down below, so we couldn't waste any time. By the time we reached that point it was getting dark and the fear was there that may be we would fall into an ambush. I was feeling numb in my feet and by looking into the faces of my schoolmates I realized that they must be in the same condition, very blue lips and watery eyes. Now we were pretty close to that designated point where they expected to be ambushed—and of course, it was the only way to pass through to the other side. As I found later, the guerrillas used a clever technique to full the national army which was probably stationed in the village. They sent a guerrilla about four miles on the opposite side of the pass that we were ready to go through and told him to start a big fire and then come right back or find us some place on the other side.*

*During all this commotion I saw that this trick really worked successfully because we heard gunfire from the direction of the fire, and we passed through with no problem. We passed very close to that last free village. Our dream to escape diminished since we were in guerrilla territory now and by losing our sense of direction. We were at the point where nobody knew where we were. It was six days after the night we were abducted. We were walking. Following them with wet cloths, wet feet, hungry and miserably tired. Every once and while one of them would say; "OK you guys, in a few hours your ordeal is going to be over, so you guys be patient, in a few hours, dry cloths, good food and nice beds are waiting for you."*

*If we weren't so naïve we wouldn't have believe any of this nonsense, but in the condition we were in it sounded so good to our ears. But the truth was something else. How could they provide us with the luxuries they promised us up here in these mountain?. It wouldn't be too long before we would find out all those big lies they told us during those six days and nights.*

*It was evening when we arrived and met the first guard. After the right code name, the guard let us pass through. A few hundred yards farther we saw the first hut made of wood and branches from the tall trees from the surrounding thick forest. It was impossible to be seen from the air unless we started a fire. We started passing the first huts and we saw from the open said men and women staring at us as we went by. Some of theme said "Welcome to liberate Greece".*

*Later we saw a guerrilla jump out of his hut with an authoritarian voice he said loudly; like he knew who we were and all about us and his mission. "Hey, you guys, how come you did not bring the American director of the School with you for a vacation up here in the mountains? I know he is pretty old man, but I'm sure you could care for him or carry him on your backs. But never mind one day he will come here all by himself." We pretended his remarks were funny and gave him a fake smile. There were some more huts, all occupied and some smoke coming from the top of them. I figured out in my mind that inside one of them must be the nice dry cloths and beds waiting for me with a nice table with all kinds of food. After a while we stopped a few yards from one of them and saw one by one coming out and counted them. There were about 20 women and men inside that*

*little hut, and right away I came out of my day dream into the present reality. I would be very lucky if I had a piece of bread.*

*A little bit further we saw this big pot with something inside. The cook was putting it in the fire and boiling something. Probably this was the kitchen area.*

*The guerrilla that was with us said. "Stand by and pretty soon we are going to arrange to put each of you to those huts so you can go and get warm and dry your cloths.*

*The cook came close to us and said. "You guys probably are hungry; right now I don't have anything to give you, in a couple of hours you can have something, I've got an old cow on the stove, it's boiling in the pot.*



*This map shows the route we followed for eight days to reach the guerrilla camp on the mountain of Holomon in the county of Khalkidhiki. The walk was done only after dark all night to avoid detection and during the day we were hiding in thick bushes always with guns on our back in treacherous weather, without food, water and shelter.*

*We are standing with all total strangers. Suddenly we heard a loud voice from the higher distance where there were guards to watch for air raids. We heard him calling down. "Airplanes, airplanes" the cook didn't waste any time; he dumped two big buckets of water which he kept near the by for this occasion, I guess, on the fire. In two or three minutes you could hardly see any smoke from the area. I guess they must have done this many many times before. They were expert in this kind of defense.*

*We could see those two planes through the trees. They circled around couple of times and they took off. The cook guerrilla said. "Damn those bastards, they don't let you have any peace, even for an hour or two to cook your dinner."*

*After some more nasty remarks he tries to start the fire again and by that time it was getting dark.*

*While we stood there, one guerrilla said. "You and you come with me" he pointed to me and my classmate, the two of us. He took us and showed us one of those huts. He went in and after he came back he said to me and the other schoolmate. 'this is going to be momentarily your house, and when we liberate the country those lousy rich bastards are going to sleep here forever". I thought I had dreams but this guerrilla who was saying this was really out of his mind. I guess these things keep these guerrillas going, because probably their leaders keep promising those things were going to happen as soon as they liberate Greece: that they are going to divide all the sweat and all the property of others people and live very good after that.*

*When I looked into the opening of the entrance of that hut I saw a fire right in the middle and all around pale faces of people. At that time I could not decide who was suffering more, the women or the men. A little later I counted—there were 18 people in that little hut, 7 women and 11 boys and men.*

*When I entered, I bent my head and was standing there like a dummy. They told me. "Sit down because the higher you stand, the worse it is for your eyes because the smoke is hanging at the top of the hut".*

*Well since I belonged to this big family, I might as well join them and squeezed myself in someplace. My classmate did the same thing.*

*Nobody really paid too much attention to us as newcomers. The first thing I wanted to do was to take off my shoes so I could dry my socks. They were soaked.*

*I had had them on my feet for six days, but the last four days they were all wet from the snow. My schoolmate was the same way. Anthony was his name. he was 2-3 years younger than me and anything I was doing he was trying to do the same thing. As we were trying to warm our cold feet, one guerrilla with a hoarse voice said. "The smell we have in here is bad enough, now you guys with your wet feet make the place worse than a stable"*

*I did not know what to do and I was looking around for a sympathetic face when I saw this old man. With a little sympathy he said. "It's all right, never mind him, warm your feet".*

*So I did for a while*

*Because of the airplane raid the meal wasn't ready. Two or three hours later, I saw everyone in the hut tin cans in their hands ready to go for the meal. The leader of our hut was a young girl. From a little distance you really could not say if she was a woman or a man; you had to look really close to verify this. She told us. "Comrade you stay here, I will be back".*

*Now I and my friend Anthony were alone in the little rotten, smelly stink hut. We had a little time to carry on a conversation and we talked carefully, of course, about our future, what we were going to do, it was the only time we were alone, but still the mistress was there as we both knew the communist sister.*

*We both knew, to open your mouth and trust even a friend sometimes is difficult, but my schoolmate Anthony and I lived three whole years at the same American Farm School and we knew little of our political preferences. I could read his eyes and of course he did not look to me like a person who would betray me. He talked first, and he said. "Nick, I want to know if you have any plans for escape out of this place, I want you to tell me when, if you decide, and how? I want to know ahead so I can go with you".*

*I told him. "Be careful, very careful. Make no mistake, make them think that you are one of them and they can trust you and when the right time comes you are going to know,*

*but our escape to be separate, that's for sure". As we finished this conversation the leader walked in with two cans, gave them to us and told us to go out and get our meal. We were the last ones and the cook tried to find quite a bit left over in the bottom of the big pot.*

*There was a lot of water and some raw meat. It was not cooked but it was our first hot meal in six days and it was delicious. No salt.no nothing but it was tasty. We took it and we went right back in the hut with the others. When I started eating I made some small remarks, I said. "It needs a little bit of salt". Everybody looked at me like I said something that I should not have said. I understood fast that there was no salt and they hadn't salt for many months.*

*"Come on". The comrade girl leader told us. "What do you want up here, perhaps a servant to serve you? This is a struggle which we have been fighting for. Inside my mind I said. "Yes, this is a struggle to fight for you because you asked for it, don't count me". But I couldn't say something like that in the open, instead of arguing with her who would be doing no good for me, I smiled at her and said. "You are right comrade, you are right. One thing about her, she was well educated in the communist idea, and she had answers to everything. I found out she was our drill sergeant and she supposed to brainwash us.*

*That hour passed and after a while when I started talking I found out that of those 13 people that were in there only three were guerrillas, the others were all captured young boys and girls. They had up there for drilling and for teaching them now to fight a war against the national army and police.*

*Right after the meal they started asking us questions and telling us how wonderful our future was going to be, on an on, but really that first night after we started to get little warmer and tires of all those things, we could not keep our eyes open. She seemed to know this and let us close our eyes and sleep for that night.*

*This hut was built on a slope of this mountain on stony ground, it was very uncomfortable. To sleep flat it was impossible, of course. There were too many of us to do that, so I bundled myself in a sitting position and tried to close my eyes. A few hours later I woke up with some discomfort and itched all over my body, it did not take me too long to find out what was wrong with me; When I saw my friend Anthony scratching himself; too. I said". I said to him in a very loud voice. "I think we have been invaded by fleas, they probably waiting for new blood, there is nothing we can do about it"*

*The rest of the night was sleepless for me. With daylight you could see a parade of these bloodthirsty creatures all over our coats and pants. I could see that nothing bothered the others all around me. One of them saw me scratching myself like a stinky, dirty little dog and said. " don't worry in a few days you are going to get used to them so much that you cannot do without them, and I am telling you from my own experience ," and started telling me this story." A year ago I was in my village and hid for one month in the house of my relatives. They put powder all over me to get rid of the fleas. When I came back I felt normal again. So you see. It's what a person gets used to it". I knew he was pulling my leg, but I went along with his nonsense story.*

*As the day started, the drill sergeant started her interrogation again. What did we think about the rebel movements, and communism, and all that stuff. I I knew now was no time to complain about anything. I knew would have to trust them a little but not be too willing as an inexperienced new recruit. We had a lot to learn and we did not admit to knowing much about communism. Even though I had read Karl Marx a long time ago, I*

*pretended I did not know too much about it. Looking in our eyes, she said. "Comrade, that's why we are here, to tell you and explain to you all about it.*

*Every day now when the weather permitted we sat outside the hut and heard over and over again like a broken record the same thing: how they would save the world, about justice, how they would make it equal for everyone. After we listened to this propaganda again and again, how we would go and even kill our mothers and fathers, relatives friends, if necessary for their cause?. We would kill them to complete the mission. But after a while it was so boring because I knew deep inside nobody in this world could turn me against my will, especially against my loved ones.*

*While I was here playing this game my mind was someplace else. I was listening to her but my mind was flying someplace else. How could I get the hell out of here and save myself? How long would it be before I would be free from this hell?*

*As I was dreaming in my thoughts and wishes, the drill sergeant would turn to me and ask me what I thought about her speech. Sometimes she would catch me off guard and I gave her the wrong answer. She would say angrily, "Nick be a little more careful, OK"*

*After the theory, they had us do some combat practice, with an unloaded gun, of course. This was a group of about 19 people training 7 to 10 hours a day, depending on the air attacks. If there was no air attack, we stayed longer; there were air attacks every day.*

*One day we were sitting in the hut and during the brainwashing I asked permission to go to the bathroom outside in the bushes. I asked the leader where I should go. She said to me, "Fifty yards away from this hut anywhere you can find behind the bushes is OK but no farther than 100 yards because there are lot of mines and you don't know when you might step on one"*

*As soon as I went outside I was all by myself and I was thinking here was an opportunity to escape, but I didn't know if the mines were really there or if she told me that so I wouldn't get any idea about escaping. Even if I decided to go I didn't know where I was and they occupied all the villages around. There were guerrillas all around and if I were caught they would have the mountain law—firing squad with no jury or defense.*

*With all these thoughts in my mind I started to return. Half way back I met my schoolmate Anthony. We chatted very quickly; a few words telling him again, "don't do any crazy thing and be extra careful when you carry on a conversation with the others. Do not trust anyone inside because I have the feeling some of them are double agents pretending that they have been dragged from their villages by force so they can penetrate and find what you really have in your mind. So don't trust anybody.*

*I was afraid, but he was much more afraid, so he said "OK Nick" and he disappeared in the nearby bushes for his personal need. We were there about ten days and we heard from someone that there was going to be an execution that evening. All of us had to be present to witness it. My friend Anthony and I looked at each other with compassion. We wanted to know who it was and if it was somebody from the other huts because we knew our school mates were there too. So we worried more yet what was going to happen. We hadn't seen our other classmates for ten days. After a while a guerrilla told this traitor was a young boy who had been abducted from a nearby village three weeks ago, but he was stupid enough to have a plan to try to escape. "We waited and caught him during his attempt, so you know what's going to happen to him now." He finished with a sarcastic laugh. But it was not funny for us.*

*I heard from another guerrilla a little later how he caught him. He said he was trying to get some information from a two faced double agent asking him for direction and so on—trusting him. This guerrilla encouraged him and then turned him in and trapped him. They caught him and three guerrilla judges sentenced him to death by firing squad with no defense to show us how traitors are punished.*

*They were making the execution an example for the rest of us.*

*When we got to the location and were standing on the side to watch how somebody dies, I felt miserable all over. Not that I hadn't seen any executions before. I saw them many times during the German occupation. They would bring them in truckloads side by side, put them against the cliff and machinegun them; but they were Germans. Here we are all Greeks. I couldn't accept it and I was really feeling sad to see something like that. When they brought him he looked younger than they told us, about 15 or 16. They asked him if he wanted to say anything. They asked him if he wanted to be blindfolded; he refused.*

*Two guerrilla women were appointed for the execution. They took their position with submachineguns. The young boy was wearing a heavy winter coat and was standing there like a lug looking in our direction with his big eyes and searching to see someone in particular. He seemed to find the person he was looking for. Just before those two guerrillas women raised their guns the young boy with a loud voice said to the guerrilla who he trusted for his escape. "And you, I wish God will punish you for what you have done".*

*With those last words he curled up in a sitting position at the base of the tree. After the bullets ripped open his young chest, he was dead with his eyes open. He looked in our direction and for many years I could not get the picture of how he looked out of my mind—the expression on his pale face, the look in his eyes, his last words. I kept hearing them for a long time. I felt so sick, but that execution did not scare me at all. As a matter of fact it gave me more courage, more hope and determination that now I must leave this place—not dead, but alive—and tell about it.*

*I was just standing there with my schoolmate without exchanging words. Just looking at each other. We were so soaked, for a while we didn't know what was happening around us. I saw some of the guerrillas go close to the dead boy and start peeling off his cloths. It looked so terrible. It was not even one minutes after the execution took place. They even didn't close his eyes. Like vultures, they divided his cloths among themselves. I didn't want to see any more. After all the main performance to which they brought was finished. They let us go back to our huts. Speechless, we went back. One old man from our hut knew the young boy's family. He said his father died when he was only six years old and he was the only child his mother could depend on to work the farm. It was a really sad story about that young boy. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. That night I could not sleep thinking and seeing in the dark of the night the pale face and the dead eyes of that boy staring at us.*

*Early in the morning we got up with a voice ordering us to get out of the hut very fast. All this was because of a plane circling around. They did not have a chance to warn anybody to put out the fires. When they did it it was too late because by putting too little water on the fire creates more smoke and the pilots were directed to the area.*

*Pretty soon we were going to have a raid and they would bomb this place. Boy. They were so right this time. As soon as we ran a few hundred yards from our huts, we heard quite a number of planes hovering over our heads. We hid anywhere we could, behind big rocks or in caves. It was the first time for us to experience something like that.*



*This time it was real, and those planes could not separate the innocent from the guilty ones. As they were diving close to the treetops, they were machine gunning the area in which the huts were located. We were not too far away, so we could hear the bullets hitting around us. The only thing that could protect you a little in this case was to be in a regular dug-in shelter..*

*After they did a dozen dives, they started throwing rockets at us any way they could. I was sitting behind a stone. I could see a few of our huts, three of them blown up like nothing. When this was over we got up and started walking in the area where the rockets fell. There were five human casualties and one mule killed.*

*It was amazing that one of those five killed was the guerrilla that turned in that young boy the night before. I guess the young boy's curse and wish came true. I did not know why that moment but I had the desire to go and see how this guerrilla was killed. He was close to the hut leaning on the trunk of an oak tree. One bullet went through his skull and another was under his eyes. He was still breathing but motionless. As we were leaving and looking around at some more dead, the leader came where four of us were standing and he said to us. "Hey you guys the show is over, here pick up the shovel and start digging".*

*In the meantime, he left us with a guy, another guerrilla, who was responsible for doing the job right. This guy told us he was mad because he had to take this kind of responsibility all the time. He said to us. "Don't dig too deep, because the jackals and wolves will finish the tonight anyway".*

*Later that afternoon we finished the burial and went to our huts, we were the only hut where nobody got hurt and the only hut that had not been struck by the air raid.*

*After we had dishwater soup without bread, salt or anything, we went back to work, and now it seemed that everybody was busy. They separated us into different groups. Me and my classmate were assigned to bring logs which some other people were cutting from the forest. They were trying to make some new huts to replace the ones that were blown up.*

*That evening we worked up to the late night because we were bringing big logs and some others were digging trenches. We put the logs on top of the trenches and put dirt on top for shelter so in case the lanes raided us again, we would have someplace to hide. It seemed they were planning to stay there for a while. The cold and the snow were very bad. With empty stomach, because all we had was that lousy soup with just a little meat and no bread and no sleep we worked all through the night. They said they planned to build some more new huts and everybody had to work because the next day the planes would probably come to raid us again.*

*I don't remember ever having been so tired and exhausted in my entire life. When we went back in the hut, I threw myself back in the corner and got a couple hours sleep. We started doing the same thing the next afternoon, carrying logs. Almost every day we did something like that*

*In our new group I saw a new guy. He was willing to talk to me and by the look on his face, it seemed that I could trust him, but it was very difficult for me to trust anybody at that moment. He kept talking to me and telling me where his parents came from and where he was from originally. I figured if his parents came from Asia Minor he probably spoke another language besides Greek—Turkish. Of course we learned to speak Turkish because our grandmothers and grandfathers could not speak Greek, so to communicate, many times we'd translate even for the grown-ups. When he finished talking to me in*

*Greek, I told him something in Turkish. His eyes became wide open. He was so surprised, he wanted to shake my hand, like he found somebody he knew, some relative or something. I wanted to do the same thing but I was not naïve. I couldn't do it at that time with all those eyes watching me. I did not want to give anything away that I knew him or communicate something, and I didn't even trust him yet. I said to him. "it's nice to know another language, even Turkish" he smiled me. He was a little more careful now.*

*We became friends in a few days—I mean platonic friends without trusting each other. a few days later I told him that he was talking too much and he had better be careful. In a few days he trusted nobody else with his idea of how he could escape. Of course, it was the wrong guy and then it happened again. A few days before, they had killed a cow that was taken off his farm .Now it was his turn.*

*Not far from the camp they repeated the same executions with us as witnesses to see what happened to those who tried to escape. My blood was boiling more now and I was not afraid now any more. I had to escape somehow. That didn't even make me scare. I became braver and wanted to escape from there and tell all about those things. I wish I had not met this guy a few days before. Later I heard from the others that he had three children. They took him from his farm against his will, they killed the cow that I mentioned before, the only one that could plow his farm, and now executed him because he didn't agree with them. He wanted to go back to his family and support his children. These were the same people that were talking to us every day about liberty and justice. But really who were going to complain to in this mountain silence?. You needed patience there if you wanted to live through it.*

*It was the eighth day, I think. Every day we had air raids. That particular evening we were sitting around the fire inside of the hut. We saw tis guerrilla at the opening of the hut. He had in his hand some crude homemade news leaflets. He gave a couple of these sheets to the leader of our hut and he went to the other huts to spread this daily news. The leader of our hut was a girl, as I said before. She wanted us to quiet down so she could read the general news, she said to us. "And now comrades THE NEWS"*

*On top of the list was our news, about us, the students, she said."*

*"40 students from American Farm School voluntarily joined the democratic army to fight the imperialistic government," etc. when she finished this first part of the news, she looked to our direction to see our response to the big lie she just delivered. For a moment I was boiling inside and I was really to explode, but I waited so she could finish the rest of the lies they wrote. So she kept reading the rest of the news. My mind was someplace else.*

*There were five students left. The other three were separate. Only Anthony was with me, she kept reading all these lies that we had volunteered, etc. she had a lot of nerves to read all those lies right in our faces. When she finished she came close to me and my classmate. She said. "I understand and I have a feeling; you probably have questions. Where are the rest of those students?. Don't feel bad because in a few weeks they are going to join us voluntarily".*

*I could not stay quiet any longer because my nerves were so shot now, I couldn't stand it anymore—her stupidity, and that that they volunteer to join them etc. she thought we were stupid to take all these lies. With a careful manner I said to her, very politely and carefully. "of course, you know that you are incorrect about the news of the American Farm School boys, about the number and the volunteering. We were sleeping when they came to take us. We needed another year to graduate from this school and go*

*to our villages and our farms to help the farmers to do a better farming. And, of course we were not volunteering for anything but to finish the schooling”*

*She knew I was making sense and that I was not lying or denying anything. She said in a calm voice. “I understand your feeling, comrade, but today we don’t make any exceptions for anybody. We have a struggle in our hands and we must make a lot of sacrifices to finish it. By volunteering now, you are going to get used to it and you are going to thank us, your abductors.”*

*I almost say. “But comrade you are not giving me a free choice?. I almost say that, but I didn’t. Instead, I swallowed it and I didn’t say anything. I guess, since she was interrogator and capable of brainwashing she started working on me for many days. She thought she was just going to make my mind into something else, but I had made my mind long time ago, even before they abducted me. I read about communism and all their stories. I was very free democratic man and all my life, so were my parents and everybody else. So. I wasn’t influenced by anybody else, not the right, not the left, nobody.*

*I had to listen, of course, to her so I could stay out of trouble because I didn’t want to speak too much about my ideas. She was telling me how we would continue our studies here and become leaders since we had little education.*

*After a few days when we became friendlier, I gave the impression of being more plastic. She became softer and softer but behind innocent that face you could see a cold blooded person, I could not see her as a woman.*

*One sunny day I took my dishwasher dinner in a can and I sat on a stone not far from the hut. She came and sat on the stone next to me. She was always carrying her submachinegun. The other guerrillas must have known her from other things and were not calling her comrade, but they were calling her captain. I guess she was promoted to captain. I had the impression that she didn’t have the qualifications to be captain. She read very poorly and knew a few lines of the theory of Karl Marx, which she repeated like a broken record without accepting any argument to it. .*

*Hearing that they call her captain, I was curious to ask some questions since I was getting along with her right now. I said to her. “You don’t mind if I ask you a personal question, do you?”.*

*She said “Go ahead”*

*“I heard the comrade calling you captain, how you became a captain?”*

*She was so enthusiastic about my question she couldn’t wait for me to finish. “Well”, she said, “One year ago they sent me on a solo mission into a village, my mission was to go at night, find a particular house in that village, kill the whole family, burn the house, and sneak out of the national army lines”.*

*I could not believe what I was shearing! Such cold blooded murder: “I finished the mission and they called me lieutenant”.*

*“Yes”, I said, “But they calling you captain”*



*As I was talking to this "Captain" my thought went to our Girls School of Quakers who studied home economics and how to become good citizens and proud wives instead of carrying guns to kill innocent people. Here is a scene performing ancient Greek dancing related to Goddess Dimitra who protected the farmers*

*'A few months later we were in combat with the army and the police, we captured two army boys, they left me behind to guard them, we usually kill them, but we wanted them for interrogation to give us some information. When we were alone, I told one of them to take his belt and tie his buddy's hands. As soon as he tied his hands he tried to escape, but I shot him in the legs and broke them. I finished him off with a bullet of my gun: in the meantime the other one with his half tied hands started running to get away, I shot him down also. But to be sure he was dead, I went there. He was bleeding with his guts out. I gave him two good kicks on the head with my boots that finished him too. So, when our general heard the story he promoted me to captain for my courage and bravery.'*

*At this point I didn't want to hear any more. It made me sick to think that beside me was a human being, a woman, with no feelings left in her whole body and soul.*

*All of us were cruel somehow during this war, we saw many things happen. But in a civil war for one Greek to do to another those things that she just describes in detail was horrible.*

*She knew I was not any more interested in any more of her personal life. I heard enough. She said to me. "Education means nothing up here, you have to prove your talent in action and only then you get the stars\*\*\*\*\*"*

*As she was explaining all her bravery and all her stories, she saw in my face the sadness and the disgust and she looked up and said to me. 'Is anything bothering you comrade?.' I looked at her and said. "No, no" . I wanted to end that conversation; I never asked her any more questions how they got their promotions. I learned my lesson, at this point I almost puked.*

*We started again to dig more trenches, because they did not trust us yet. There were always a few guerrillas around with submachineguns in their hands when I was digging in*

*the trench. I met another abducted man who was in his mid-thirties; he said he has been a soldier in the national army. After 36 months of service he had been discharged from the army and went back to his village to work on his farm and support his family of five children. Like many others, the guerrillas abducted him one night and said to him.*

*“You fought against us for 36 months in the national army, now is the time to fight for us and stay with us.”*

*I guess he knew our story, too, that we were students, and he trusted me a little, but he never trusted me too much. I was very careful, too, in the beginning, so I wouldn’t fall in trap that they specialized in. We became friends and started knowing each other a little better.*

*Two days later they transferred him into our hut and we were going to meals and work together every time. We had a chance to talk about our personal life, with caution of course. We were not doing it now. It was difficult to talk about plans or anything else. He trusted me a little more and he said. “Nick, I have been in the army 36 months and I have been in a lot of combat, but I don’t think I’m going to get out of here this time. My village is not too far away. I know these mountains very well. I can escape any time I want to, but where am I going to go? The same village where my house is, my farm, my family, my livelihood?”*

*They told me already ahead of time, so I wouldn’t do anything foolish. They said. “Forget about your family, your house; they’ll all be killed and burned down, if you are going some other place we have all over Greece and we’ll find you”*

*Now you know why I am disgusted. Sometimes I want to put an end to the whole thing, grab one of their machineguns and kill as many as I can before they finish me. But what will my wife and five young ones back home do? They probably would go there and abduct them, too, as they do in so many villages. They take the young ones and send them to a communist bloc country for brainwashing, education and how and how to hate their country” I knew he was carried away expressing his feeling to me.*

*I said. “Hey, Jim slow down, please, because if someone else hears this conversation it could be the end for both of us.*

*He said. “You are right Nick. I won’t talk any more about this subject”*

*As soon as he finished talking, a guerrilla was standing right above our heads telling us to get up and follow him. For a moment I thought he overheard the whole conversation and was taking us to the judge to the trial, and execution. You know how it is, I got my breath back to normal when I heard him say.*

*“You go in the hat and ask for axes and some shovels and some other tools”. It was a relief for both of us to know that he didn’t hear this conversation.*

*I knew now we were going a little distance from camp to cut wood because we were not allowed to cut wood around this camp. They wanted the forest to be thick around the camp to camouflage it from the planes. When we returned with the axes I saw a smile on my buddy’s face. We were so close to be accused that it was hard to believe it because we thought this guy had everything and he was going to turn us in. In my mind I had already put the words, “Don’t trust anybody in this place including this friend Jim.”*

*I heard him saying to me. “Hey Nick, how come you don’t tell me your side of the story?”*

*But I always avoided anything that could convict me.*

*He said. “What’s the matter with you, don’t you trust me?”*

*Mechanically I said. “Sure Jim” and I were trying to change the subject. He got mad sometimes and said to me. “I am not afraid Nick, I’m not. I’ve seen so much, I’ve had*

*enough. I am not afraid of those bastards, I am not afraid of what they are going to do more than to take my life. Those sonofabitches, they know they're not going to win this war but still they are trying to make those who don't believe in them miserable. But what do you expect from those who kill their own mothers for an idea that cannot work especially in the country where freedom was born 3000 years ago".*

*So I said. "Cut it out Jim, do not talk if you are going to be my friend".*

*The very next day we were sitting on a couple of stones under the tree and he started the same routine. Then he looked at me and started crying like a little boy. "I missed my father Nick and my wife and children. First in the army for three years and now this" Tears were coming down from his cheeks.*

*Now I realized that this man who was older than me was crying with real feelings and I was feeling very guilty that all those days I didn't trust him.*

*Suddenly I changed my mind, I said "OK, Jim, I understand you and I am with you all the way, if you have any plans let me know. But this guy would not live another two days to carry out any plans.*

*A couple days later at moon time the sky was very clear, an ideal time for an air raid. We heard somebody saying loudly. "Chow time again" we had to go down the hill on a narrow steep path full of snow and ice to get that dishwater soup, our meal for the day, and of course there was no bread or salt. Ninety five per cent of us had diarrhea and we were miserable. On top of it there were all those fleas and lice sucking our blood without us being able to do anything about it.*



*Every day when they gave us that dishwater soup for lunch and dinner, who all suffered from acute diarrhea, I remembered our school and the exhalent food we had there.*

*Here the class of 1945 in a picnic at the seaside village of Michaniona with Mrs. House on the left. Pericles, Tasso and I enjoying our lunch in luxury:*

*When I got my portion I started to climb back up the hill to go back in the hut. But halfway I heard voices telling everybody to put out the fire. Airplanes were coming and an air raid was going to happen. Everybody who was out in the open was trying to take cover. In the snow and the open area any movement was very visible and we could hear the guerrillas shout in our direction. "Hey, you, take cover, don't move"*

*He was telling me not to move, just to stay still, and not to run like a little lamb. I didn't hear the guerrilla calling me. The soup in the can I had spilled all over because I had fallen three or four times, but I still didn't know where to go to hide. I heard another guerrilla hiding close by threaten to shoot me if I kept moving around. By this time the planes were over our heads, and then I thought I would hide at the base of the big tree trunk and stay there immobilized. This tree trunk was hollow and to my surprise in this hollow tree was my friend Jim. He whispered to me. "Well, nick this is it. This time I think the airplanes have pinpointed this area before it got dark. We have a lot of day ahead, so my guess is they are going to finish us for good.*

*I told him. 'Shut up. Don't talk like that. You have three years in the army. You have courage and you shouldn't talk like that'. Just a little bit farther there was a guerrilla hiding behind a bush. The first plane took a dive right above our heads. I put my head between my knees and heard a blast of machinegun which ripped off bushes and branches from the tree. They were falling on top of our heads. I saw bullets falling on the ground all over and making all kind of noises.*

*You wonder after there is a dive if you been hit, many you don't even know if you've been hit, you can be wounded without knowing it. The second plane did the same thing and started diving. I closed my eyes and heard these bullets ripping off all around very close.*

*I was in a knee position for three or four hours because the first group of planes came, finished their job, and before even they left, another group of planes came, finished their job, and before they even left, another group of planes came and machine-gunned us again.*

*Later that afternoon when everything was quiet, after so many raids, I tried to straighten myself up. My legs were all numb from sitting in that position in the cold weather. It seemed strange though in those hours after the raid was over my friend didn't say anything or even move. I told him the raids were over and he and he could get up now. But I still didn't see any movement. At first I thought he didn't hear me with all those blasts all around. I couldn't hear very well myself for many days. I pushed him a little and knew right away there was something wrong with him. I took his arm and dragged him out of the tree and laid him down in the cold snow. I saw a single hole in his forehead and that made me sick. His eyes were still open like he was looking at me. I could not believe this man who had become my friend a few days ago was not going to see his family anymore. I got very emotional and tears started coming to my eyes. As I was kneeling in the snow close to his body, a guerrilla came over and told me.*

*"What are you waiting for? Come on take his boots and his coat". He had a look of hate on his face.*

*I knew I could not do something like that to my friend, and I started walking away. Then he said "OK, you are the loser. I am going to take them".*

*I walked away thinking that I couldn't take the cloths from my friend after he had just been killed? But these people are so cruel they did not have any feelings about that. As soon as somebody dies they take off his cloths and his boots and they bury him a little, and*

*in the night the jackals and the wolves finish the person. I had the shivers in my blood and I could feel my teeth cracking, it was really unbelievable.*

*I was down the path to the hut with some other survivors and I saw that our hut was not there anymore. It had been blown out. There was another hut the same way. So we had to build another hut that very night, of course, with free labor, us and some other abductees from other villages. I looked around to find out if my classmate was OK. He was in a daze. I said to him. "Boy, you really look pale".*

*Then he said. "I wish I had a mirror to give you to see how you look". I probably looked worse. I told him.*

*"We lost our friend, the sergeant; he got a bullet right in his forehead". He said.*

*Now I understand why you look like that" On top of that, I said to Anthony.*

*"A bastard guerrilla wanted me to strip his cloths and boots right there"*

*After a while he was so disappointed in himself, he said to me. "Nick, we have to escape, to get out of here, today was his turn, tomorrow probably ours, who knows?" "it's going to happen someday, sometime".*

*I said to him. Of course, you are right, but how? Do we have any logical plan to leave from here, from their nest? We don't know where we are.*

*"Yeah" he said to me. I thought you had some plans yourself and you'd tell me about it".*

*In the meantime while we were having this conversation I saw the guerrillas coming and I cut the conversation short.*

*When he came close he said to us. "Come on you guys, get up and go in the woods and bring some more wood, you are going to build your own huts back"*

*I was really mad because not only was the hut gone but I lost my blanket, the only possession I had and I didn't know what I was going to do in the cold, cold weather.*

*So we were working there and we went back and forth many times until finally this this guy came and told us he would put us in some other huts so we could rest a little. Then tomorrow we would come right back.*

*When he sent me to this hut, I walked in and it was very dark. There was this fire, mostly smoke. I stepped on some people, there were so many they were packed in like sardines inside. I went in between two people, I couldn't tell who they were. When I saw them in the morning, I saw they were two fanatic guerrillas. They were the guards and the interrogators in the hut. I could not sleep that night, anyway. I was just there to stay out of the cold weather.*

*As soon as one of the guerrillas woke up and saw me in there he said, he said. "Who are you and where did you come from"?*

*I believe I'm one of your neighbors. Our hut has been blown up and the put me temporarily in here until we build our new one.*

*The other guerrillas woke up and asked me a few questions. I answered them, and after a while I just listened to a conversation they were having in very low voices. One guerrilla was asking the other one why they were building new huts if he knew that in eight days we were going to leave this place and get out of there. The other guerrilla put his hands to his mouth and said, "Quit. Don't say anything. That's supposed to be top secret." It looked to me like they were well informed and trusting of the communist guerrillas but naturally they liked to gossip and started talking again.*

*One said. "I hope we go to the other side of the border." The other one said. "I heard in a meeting the general himself said we can't fight the army and police out here, but if we go to the other side of the border we can fight them. It is a little far from here but as soon as*



*we get the order we'll evacuate this area for good and when the fascist army gets here they are not going to find anything, nothing, everything will be burned.*

*The conversation I was listening to secretly was very important news for my friends, because I found out that in ten days or two weeks they would be leaving this area, and they planned to drag u with them to the communist countries. Now I had to act fast and get a plan for escape. When I got out of that hut I went to find the others to finish the project that we were doing.*

*I saw them starting to build the hut. I found my classmate Anthony and at the first opportunity I told him the news, which could be good or bad, he asked me what we were going to do.*

*I said, "One thing with me, Tony. I don't care how dangerous tis plan is bud I am not going to Bulgaria or to another communist country"*

*He said. 'I am not either, but how are we going to do it?'*

*I said. "Listen and be careful, don't be anxious, don't be fool and start doing something stupid. We survived almost thirty days, I believe we have ten days or maybe two weeks to think about it, but each of us has to act separately, I will tell you my plans in the next few days".*

*For the next few days my classmate was all around me. I told him. "Act normally, like before , these bastards don't trust us, the know we have two faces and believe me, I have the feeling we have been watched, so don't be so anxious and talk when somebody's listening or we are in trouble. Be careful now because the day is coming that we're going to leave from here". He was unusually nervous, of course. I didn't like it, but I had to tell my plans somehow so he would be quiet and think about it. I always told him that we had to escape separately so we didn't both fail and get hurt.*

*Two days after the raid we had another one. I believe this one was the biggest. We heard we might have a raid later that afternoon, because early in the morning an observation plane was circling the area, and after he saw where the smoke was he probably warned the fighter planes to come and bomb and rocket the area.*

*This particular day, we went a little farther from the camp to some other training area where they tried to brainwash us. From the beginning our other three classmates were someplace in different group and training just like us. Suddenly that noon we heard the planes coming again. They put out the fires but the smoke was all over. All of us were running for the trenches. I was the first one to jump into the trench. We did have cover and I could see what was going on around us. Some tried to take positions behind the rocks, some behind the trunks of the trees. One guerrilla had a machine gun in his arm and was sitting on the other side of the trench so he could fire on the plane. With the first dive of the airplane this stupid guy started shooting continuously.*

*He was firing nonstop and obviously he gave way to the position he was firing from, so the planes started diving over us. I said to myself. "In a minute it's going to be over. Sooner or later a rocket or a machinegun it's going to take us".*

*Sometimes it looked like I was watching a war movie, but I knew this was the real think and I was in it. It would not help to be scared. There was no other way but to wait there like a sitting duck. If you were lucky, you'd survive.*

*This guerrilla was not more than 20 feet from where I was hiding in the trench, and he kept firing like he was saying to the pilot of the Spitfire plane. "Here we are".*

*It was the third dive, I believe, when I heard this big explosion right in front of me, a big flash of light and debris and mud and stone all over our heads.*

*When I opened my eyes to look in the direction of the machinegun, he was not there anymore. The rocket must have fallen right on top of him. Later they found him a few yards away with half of his body missing. The machinegun was hanging high up in the tree.*

*They had us there for three or four hours with many casualties. When we got out of the trenches I was covered from head to toe with mud. I looked around and saw that some of the huts in that section of the camp were blown out. By coincidence, I saw one of my classmates from whom I had separated 29 days ago. We hadn't seen each other since then. His face was covered, like mine with mud, and he was happy to see me again. I said "What happened to the other two classmates?" he said he didn't have any idea. He was alone at the camp. There must have been some other camp.*

*He said. "Nick, come here I want to show you a phenomenon". I told him, he looked like a phenomenon with all that mud on his face. He said. "Never mind that, come on and see this". We walked a little bit farther where his hut had been a few hours ago. He said to me. "Stop, I'll show you something. Look at that well folded blanket on the top of the rock, that blanket was mine and I had it folded just like that in the hut. Now it's 20 yards away intact: and another thing, look up in the tree high up over your head, that's our stove, intact and smoking"*

*I said to him. "You guys are more progressive here. Just think, you even have a stove in your hut".*

*We didn't know whether to laugh or to cry, but we laughed for a moment and I said. "we are still lucky we didn't get blown up there ourselves"*

*A guerrilla came close to us and said. "OK you guys, you go with your group and you come with me. We didn't see each other again for a month after our escape.*

*Next day early in the morning we were leaving the camps and going four or five miles away to avoid casualties in case there was an air raid. They were training us again with guns and hand to hand combat, but I could see their disappointment when most of us who had been educated did nothing right, we were acting like we were dumb and couldn't do anything..*

*To pass the time they gave us one rifle, with no ammunition of course. Just so we could hold it and anytime it needed to be used it was handy for them. By giving us this empty gun in our hands, they were doing two things: one, they were relieving themselves from carrying so they wouldn't be tired when the real fighting came, and second: I figured out later that when you carry a gun, the national army can't tell whether you are a guerrilla or you are being abducted. So it was serving two purposes.*

*One time I said to them. "What is the purpose of a gun without bullets?" like I was willing to fight for them, but certainly not with an empty gun. They could not figure me out, by my words. I was daring to give them as much trust as possible, but it looked like they were smiling like they thought I had something in mind. They just kept looking at me, so I said. "How about some bullets for this gun, how are we going to fight for the liberation?"*

*The guerrilla said. "Oh, you guys are not ready yet to have a gun with ammunition. You got to be trained first. For now just carry the gun, and when the time comes. You'll have your chance.*

*I said to myself. "When the time comes I'm going to have my chance to get the hell out of here "*

*The next day we went to the same area again and the captain said. "Each of you guys is going to take a turn as observation guard in the lookout position for airplanes and any*

*other movement you see on the ground. When you see something you report immediately”.*

*For days now we had been hearing distant thunder but I knew the season for thunder wasn't here. Today we heard the thunder again but closer and closer. I asked the captain what it was. She said. "Never mind, those sounds are our troops just chasing off the fascists army and government.*

*As the day went by, we were hearing cannons and airplanes in the same area very high above our heads. They were circling around and throwing proclamations by the thousands. But they didn't let us take one and read it even though there were plenty all around. After a while they knew it was impossible to hide them all, so the captain picked one and with a sarcastic smile started reading it.*

*"Greeks, give up your guns and come back to Mother Greece". Another guerrilla interrupted her and said. "These papers that fell from the sky are very good for rolling tobacco." The rest of them laughed.*



*As I was given to carry an empty gun and a machinegun, I thought! How beautiful would have been if I; and the other people who have been drugged by force on the mountains were carrying farming tools to work and earn a decently living. Here all these boys and some more have been kidnaped under the threat of guns and knives to follow the communists' guerrillas in their camps on the mountain of Holomon in Khalkidhiki and be trained to kill our own people.*

*I had the feeling something was going wrong on and I started to put things together in my mind—the conversation of the two guerrillas in the hut, the thunder that was coming closer and closer. Later I heard this guerrilla say that the army tried to take over this district. I thought we were moving out pretty quick. When I saw couple of mules all loaded with all the guns and ammunitions and everything, I had no doubt if not today, tomorrow night we were leaving this place.*

*To my surprise, when they told us that we are taking turns guarding the hill, one guerrilla gave five bullets and told said, “Go up there and take your turn for the first watch”. I followed his orders like I was an old timer and I went up the hill to look out. From there I could see a far distance. The hill was on the side f a big mountain and I could see far away. We had meals twice a day, but it was the same old soup with some meat, if you were lucky, no bread. I don’t remember how many times we went in the bush for diarrhea. Since we were far from the camp we didn’t even have the water soup. We were hungry.*

*I was all by myself for the first time with a loaded gun in my hand; it looked like it was very peaceful. I sat down on one of the stones and I was looking away from the top of the hill for someplace in the distance. It was my freedom.*

*Farther yet, some place was my village, my house my mother, father, brothers and sisters and my relatives and neighbors and friends. All of them must be there safe and probably wondering where I was, if I was alive, what I was doing.*

*Surely they must have all those questions. if I know my mother, she must been in the village church praying for me. Praying and probably crying most of the time waiting for some good news, my father, of course, would never give up till the end looking, searching, and asking to find out the answers. How comes so many students escape and his son was not one of them. I was day dreaming all this and tried to give myself an answer. I could not give the answers, and sadness came over me. I thought for a moment I was my faith and my courage to survive.*

*I was disgusted as I had my chin resting on the barrel of the loaded gun. I said to myself one click and it would be over. But suddenly a series of loud cannon thunder in the distance woke me up from the stupid thought. So I said. “I am not about to give up my life that easily” I had lots of hope. After all in another month my name day was coming. It was not possible to miss celebrating St Nicolas Day, so that gave me some strength and I was optimistic again for my survival.*

*I thought that tonight I would have to talk to my classmate and tell him all about my plans again, but we have to act separately. Even though I had this gun with the bullets in my hand it was useless. I couldn’t leave my post and run, but where?. I had to be a little surer that I was in a friendly territory because they occupied all the villages around thre, and I didn’t want to fall into another trap.*

*Before I made any move like that I had to be sure.*

*I heard those big guns coming closer and closer and I knew for sure they were vacating the area. So I said to myself. ‘I’ll attempt to stay here behind until the last moment when they are not going to have too much time to look for me. Later I hope the national army comes*

*through here, and I'll come out of my hiding place and surrender until they found out who I am.*

*The plan was all right in my head, but would it work? That was the big question. And that remained to be seen. In the meantime, they told us many times that the army doesn't take prisoners. Even if I was a friend, even before they found out who I was, and that was really scaring me, too. For days they tried to brainwash us and I don't know if they were telling the truth, but I wouldn't believe them anyway. I had that in my mind for sure.*

*When I came down from my post, because somebody else replaced me, the guerrilla who gave me the five bullets told me to empty my gun and give the five bullets to the next man who was going to go to guard the post. I know they were short of ammunitions, but five bullets was ridiculous.*

*The main reason they let carry empty guns because they didn't trust us. We were carrying those guns and heavy things on our backs like mules. We were getting weaker and weaker because we were hungry most of the time. Now it was starting to get dark and they told us very quietly we were going back to the camp, not to sleep but to join the others and wait for new orders.*

*I knew right away that we were going to leave. We would meet there all together and start the long unknown trip. We didn't know where they were taking us, but I knew they were taking us out of the country. Before we left this area to go back to the camp, the captain came and said to me and another guy who they abducted from another village a couple months ago. "You two get the big gasoline can and follow that guerrilla". He had guns and we were going to follow him. "He is going to show the path and you bring us some food, after we'll meet in the camp again".*

*But the guerrilla that took the order from the captain started objecting to his superior and said. "I know our kitchen in the camp has been blown out. The last raid was so terrific that there's nothing left, why should we go and do that again?"*

*The captain listened to this guerrilla complaining and she said in a loud voice. "24, we are fighting for ideas of liberation and you are talking about sacrifice, you must go, this is an order".*

*We started to follow behind him in the direction where all the thunder and bombing were coming from. We had a long stick going through the handle of the big bucket and started running behind him like two dogs. I told him at least we should leave our empty guns, because beside this can we were carrying empty guns for no reason. "No, no, you must carry your guns all the time no matter what". He was mad as hell about that stupid order his leader gave to him.*

*As we were going into that area where all the aircraft was, we heard bombs falling close to us. I couldn't hide my fear so I said to the other guy. "Boy this bomb was very close".*

*The guerrilla said. "You didn't see anything yet, wait till you see the path we're going to take later so we can get that meal, and then you'll know very close to heel.*

*I said. "You mean you have been through this before?"*

*"Just yesterday, of course, I know the area, they sent me here before to get food for another group and that's why I'm going with you guys."*

*The closer we went to the area that used to be the kitchen, the closer the machineguns and bombings were.*

*When we arrived there, there was nobody in the open the fire was out and the meal was all by itself, so we just helped ourselves and filled up the big bucket.*

*Everybody was hiding from this raid. One of the guerrillas saw us and said. "You guys are crazy". Some others hollered. "Take cover you stupid guys, can't you see airplanes are hovering over our heads?" but our guerrilla said. "Come on guys, let's make it quick and get out of here, they will bury this place if we stay here.*

*Now we started running back again in different direction. He said he knew a short cut that was more dangerous, but it was worth it because it was shorter to go to the other camp.*

*As we held this big bucket hanging from this long stick resting on our shoulders, we lost our balance many times and slipped and fell. The first hundred yards we slipped and half of the soup was gone. Now we had less weight, and we could run well.*

*The guerrilla who was 20 yards ahead of us was hollering. "Come on, come on", but all of sudden I heard this horrible whistling noise coming in our direction, I knew it was an anti-aircraft shell.*

*With that fear in my mind, I called. "Fall down and let go of the stick". So all of us fell face down in the snow and left the bucket there. With this terrific sound in our ears it passed over us. The compressed air sounded like dynamite. Another shell fell there and all the pieces sprayed all over the area. For a moment it was very quiet and I thought I had been hit. I didn't move because I heard some more shelling.*

*Ten or twenty minutes later, I don't remember, I felt someone kicking me on my foot as I was lying face down on the snow. It was the guerrilla with his arm bleeding real bad. He said. 'In my left pocket I have a rag, cut a piece and tie it on my arm to stop the bleeding a little.' I was all shocked up. I didn't know what I was going to do. I tied his arm, but there was no sign of my partner who was helping me carry the soup. He had been on the other side of the stick, and I thought maybe he was close by someplace hiding in the snow.*

*I asked the guerrilla where he was and if he was OK. He looked at me and said> "You should know you were together". But from his voice I knew that he got killed a few steps away when this big shell fell between him and the guerrilla.*

*They happened to be down and got some fragments of the shell. Both of us started looking for him. We knew he was just there hiding behind the bush, but I guess the pressure of the shell threw him about 15 yards from where he was standing, when I went close to him I saw something that got my stomach sicker. Half his shoulder was missing and there were lots of small wounds all over his body. His eyes were still half open and he was breathing very deeply and slowly with blood gushing out of the big opening. I knew he would last just a few seconds more.*

*When he saw me he opened his eyes a little wider but could not say anything. He was just staring*

*As I stayed there with the guerrilla we heard his continuous groan but we were not able to do anything for him because the wound was tremendously big, we just stayed there watching him bleed and die.*

*The guerrilla said to me. "Pick up your gun and let's go, it's getting pretty dark".*

*"What you mean, let's go" I said to him. "How about him"?*

*"What about him? He said "Can't you see, in a little while your body won't have a drop of blood in his body, so let's go"*

*"But" I said. "We can't leave him here like that, he is not dead yet"*

*And angrily he said, "Look here young fellow, I am in charge here. Listen to what I'm saying to you. He's dead in my book and that's finished, OK? If he is not dead by midnight the wolves and the jackals will finish him by morning.*

*Believe me boy; I've seen many things in my life. During the German time when one of my buddies was wounded like that he asked me to shoot him, so I did, but this guy is done. He doesn't have the strength to ask for anything. A bullet would be a waste for him. So come on, don't feel bad. He would do the same thing if he was in your place. Take his gun and let's go. Let's move on because it's going to be too late for us too,*

*I was thinking how cruel this man is. Without blinking his eyes, he talked like this. How life can be so cheap? He could care less about somebody else's feelings.*

*When I went to pick up his gun which was strapped over his shoulder, I felt a chill go through my body thinking that he could be doing this right now to me if fate was the other way. For many years, the picture of that moment came to my eyes. Even now, after so many years when I sit down and think about this adventure, this picture is still in my mind. I don't think it will ever go away.*

*So we left him there to die. I didn't have any choice. I couldn't do anything differently. I started running behind him again with two empty guns on my back this time. When we arrived there everybody was up. They were loading the mules with guns and other belongings. Some of the guerrillas were in the huts but nobody was sleeping. When they saw there were only two of us coming and no meal, because we left the bucket behind, the leader who sent us said. 'Well at least you guys have tried'. It was so pathetic.*

## **THE GREAT ESCAPE FOR FREEDOM OR DEATH**

*I explained later to my classmate what had happened. I told him my plan that night when everybody left, I was going to stay and when the army came, I was going to surrender. He said. "It sounds very good Nick, but it's daring. You remember what they told us, the army doesn't take prisoners. They might just shoot you thinking you are a guerrilla".*

*"I know". I said, "I know, but I will take my chance. I don't want you to involve, that's why each of us has to act by ourselves, and if you have any other plans, you can tell me or do it by yourself, but I'm telling you what I have planned for tonight".*

*With these last words, I said to him 'Well be careful now because if they smell something, they're not even going to have a trial, they'll just execute you right on the spot'. With these last words we separated.*

*Now I had finally made my mind up.*

*Somebody at the last moment brought a half cooked meal and gave it to us. We were so happy. We could eat anything. I sat down at the end of the hut and started biting the meat. It was so burned, it wasn't any good. But the guerrillas came close to me and gave me a little salt. All that time I had never had salt. I opened my eyes in surprise that after so many days I was about to taste salt again. I showed him my appreciation but I couldn't figure out who this guerrilla was. I never saw him before. I saw him for the first time, but he knew all about me and my classmate. He was different from the other guerrillas, but nevertheless he was one of them. I thanked him again, suspiciously for the salt. After that I didn't see him again. I did not see him again until a year later in the national army, but this is another story that I cannot tell here.*

*It was midnight and everyone was on the move picking up things, loading up mules and getting ready to leave this place for good. Somebody came in front of our hut and asked two of our group to help load the mules from the other hut. one of them was my*

*classmate. He looked at me like he was saying. "What do you want me to do? For sure he could not refuse it, and I didn't want to separate from him at the last minute. It might be an advantage to leave together. So Anthony looked at me at the last moment and left with the guerrilla.*

*Now I knew there was lots of confusion all over. Nobody really knew who belonged to what group, because people from one group were going to the other, but they wanted to get the hell out of there because first thing in the morning they would be attacked by the national army which was advancing every moment but not in the night, they probably loafing until morning.*

*Now I heard the leader saying to everybody. "Stay in a single line and no talking, no sound from anybody. We have to cross their lines in some places. It will be difficult and dangerous ".i was a little far away from my group which all assembled outside the hut.*

*That night was cloudy and you couldn't see very well.*

*I made up my mind now to attempt to go through with my plan. I had to find a hiding place and stay behind. The only familiar place I knew was around our hut.*

*Right behind our hut was a small ditch and the snow was kind of melted around there because of the heat coming from the hut. The fire of the hut was out long ago and that created ice in the ditch. I couldn't see any better place to hide. With one backwards step I disappeared from the line, from their view. I was behind the hut in that little ditch which did not even cover me completely. I still had the empty guns in my hand.*

*As I lay down on my side with the guns between my legs, that thin ice that was created in the ditch broke and there was ice water right beneath. I was soaked and I thought. "How am I going to stand this all night long with this cold winter weather? As I was laying there my right arm started getting numb from that freezing water. I was soaked on one side and I could not possibly move from there because they would see me and know what I was up to. I heard some footsteps coming in my direction, but I guessed right away that whoever was coming had one thing in mind, to urinate. Many times I had used this location for a lavatory myself. I guessed right because in minutes I was getting soaked on my legs. It's a good thing the bush was hiding me a little bit. It was a laughing situation, but I was freezing with fear that he might discover me. I stayed trapped and motionless until he finished his business. He was gone and I was relieved, but I was more soaked on my legs, my feet especially.*

*I heard them moving. The path they were going on was not far from my position. I could see them but they could not see me because it was cloudy night. I could hear them talking and as I was lying down behind the hut where I slept many of nights I said to myself. "Now everybody is going to leave from this area and I'll be all by myself. I'll get up from this position and wait for the national army to come and free me.*

*As I was lying down in the soaking water, I saw many mules and many people pass by because all the camps were going by my hut on the path that was very close to it. The last was a mule loaded with ammunition and a guy was wounded, but he had passed away and I heard this guerrilla leader say to another guerrilla. "What are you waiting for, take him down and just dump him in the ditch.*

*When I heard them coming over to my position I knew they were going to throw him on top of me. Before they threw him they took his shoes and everything else. They dumped him on my feet, and I was staying there like a dead man myself, because I didn't want them to discover me. They would probably put me to death too. I thought that was the*



*last mule, and I didn't see anybody else. To make sure I laid there a little while more in case there was some late one going by.*

*As I laid there with my head in the bottom of the ditch, I could hear some noises coming from the hut. Somebody must still be there. I hadn't heard them before. It didn't know who it could possibly be. That scared me because I thought everyone was gone. It was pretty quiet now and I heard this noise. So I thought someone must still be inside. If I tried to move a little, the dried branches I was leaning on could make noise and I tried to avoid that. But how long could I lay still all wet like that? I could feel the numbness of my body and the dead person over my feet didn't bother me very much. I could hear that there were two in the hut. What they were waiting for? I could see through the walls of the hut to identify who they were. All these questions were in my mind. Meanwhile, time was passed and I was getting numb. If I stayed like that any longer I would be paralyzed and freeze there.*

*I was thinking that my plan worked up to now. Now I must think of something else. How I was going to get out of there? I was freezing and I couldn't stand it anymore. What was I going to use for an excuse about being away from my group? I had to think fast because I couldn't take staying in that position any longer. I stood up, quickly got out of there with my gun in my hand and walked toward the opening of the hut. Before I was there with my gun in my hand and walked toward the opening of the hut, before I was even close, a well-trained, vicious-looking guerrilla jumped out right in front of me with a machinegun ready to shoot. I said to him, "Hold it comrade, and hold it." And I started holding my belly, giving him the impression that I had stomach problem, because stomach problems and diarrhea was a good excuse. It was nothing unusual around there.*

*He said. "What's the matter with you? I see you have a problem. But your group left a long time ago.*

*I said. "I know, but I was down in the ditch taking care of my needs and I couldn't make it in time". This guerrilla had never seen me before and now he saw me with a gun in my hand. Of course, it had no bullets, he thought for sure I was one of them and he said. "Come inside comrade. We'll put on a fire to warm you up, in a half an hour my company is coming and then we will go together to find the rest of them on the road.*

*When I went inside the hut it was a little dark and he started a fire. I knew there was another person. by the light of the fire I could clearly see the face of another person. he was not more than 14 years old. His face was pale and I could see the fear in his eyes. His hands were tied in front of him with some kind of wire and the end of the wire was tied up on a pole of the hut.*

*Now I sat close to him by the fire and I could see his face better. He was looking at me like he wanted to tell me something, but how could I do that? I was holding a gun in my hands and as far as he was concerned I was one of the guerrillas. If it was possible to read my mind, I sure would like to have told him that I was imprisoned like him with no difference except that my hands were not tied up. The real guerrilla beside me asked. "How come I didn't see you before?"*

*I said. "We come from different camp", I didn't want to tell him I was captured. He could find out later on.*

*We were sitting there silently for a while until the guerrilla gave a signal to follow him outside. He said to me in a low voice to explain why this boy was tied up. "Fellow combatant, you probably want to know why this boy is all tied up" I said "Yes I'd like to know why"*

*"I'll tell you, comrade. A few months ago we raided their village, beside food and cloths we took some men and women to train them to fight the war with the fascist government. This was for their own good, to free them from the imperialistic regime. One of those we took was his older brother. In one week, he escaped from our camp. When we made another raid in the same village a little later we couldn't find him so we took his younger brother. He's in deep trouble. Somebody has to pay the bill. There is nothing better than to have someone in his own family"*

*"Yes but comrade, that's not fair, if you want equality, this young boy did not do anything"*

*"You're right, but we have to be very strict and sometimes innocent people are hurt, we don't care about that. It will teach the other a lesson."*

*I said. "Now what are you going to do with him?"*

*"I am sure our captain will think of something. He always does, very quickly".*

*I didn't ask him more because I knew exactly what the answer would be. We went back close to him and sat down around the fire. I couldn't help looking at this poor young boy. I saw a couple tears coming out of his eyes and it made me choke, but I had to keep cool and I didn't give any suspicion that I was captured not long ago. It was unknown to him at that moment.*

*We heard steps outside and again the guerrilla jumped out with submachinegun and said, "Halt", with a short exchange of words he understood that they were the friends he was waiting for. "So let's go hit the road"*

*When his friend walked in the hut, he pointed in my direction and said. "Who is he? Because he thought there was only him and the boy.*

*"Oh comrade, there is one from the other group. He had a problem with his stomach and that's why he couldn't make it with the others. His group left a long time ago, so he is going with us until he finds his group. He looked at the young boy with his hands tied up. He knew who it was and whispered something in the ear of his comrade. I had the feeling right then that the decision had been made for the fate of that innocent boy.*

*"OK" he said. "Untie him and let's go because soon it will be daylight and the national army will be all over here." When he untied the young boy, he took the wire completely off his hands and told us to get going; they would catch up with us. In other words the new guerrilla and I would go and the other guerrilla would stay behind with the boy. I knew that blood-thirsty bastard had something in mind, probably an order from his higher up.*

*So me and the other guerrilla started walking. He was in front of me and I was following him with the empty gun in my hand. He didn't know it was empty, I was following him on those narrow paths, and I could not help thinking about why that guerrilla stayed behind with the prisoner.*

*We must have been two or three miles away from the camp when we heard a shot from that direction, coming from a long distance away. Obviously that bastard had killed him. After two miles, we stopped against this big tree. This was the place where we were supposed to meet him. When he came he was alone. He told us the biggest lie there is. His comrade knew very well what happened, but I guess it was not necessary for me to know the true story.*

*Trying to catch his breath he said. "Stupid kid, I warned him three times, but he kept running to escape so I let him have it"*

*Now; I was not a newborn. This sonofabitch probably after he raped him killed him right in the same spot. But who am I to question this bastard since I did not know what would*

*happen to me when I met my group. I was practicing in my mind what believable lie to tell them about how I disappeared. But I had good news because I was this guerrilla who was my witness, he would probably help justify my absence and nobody would know I had in my mind to escape. I didn't have any more patience to stay here. If we had stayed there longer, I would have escaped. That was my first unsuccessful attempt to escape, but by coming back. It would create more trust, because they would have thought I could have escaped but I didn't.*

*After two hours walk we came to an area between the two mountains where we found all the groups and regiments resting and assembling for the long-long road through the valleys and the mountains. It was dangerous to go on those paths between the mountains and close to the villages which the national armies and police always took positions and ambushed the guerrillas, but we had to pass these valleys to get through the northern part of Greece and enter the communist countries like Yugoslavia, Albania or Bulgaria.*

*That was their plan but we didn't know exactly where we were going. We just followed orders and walked, always in front of them. When I arrived there I tried to find my group with this guerrilla as a witness to where I have been. He didn't know it, but he was my witness to verify that I lost the group because of my stomach problem.*

*When my leader saw me she was happy and mad at the same time. She said to me. "Nick we thought for a while that you were one of them. But I'm glad you are back and OK".*

*In the meantime, when things cooled off a little my classmate Anthony sat down beside me. He couldn't figure out the story. He said. "What in the hell did you come back for?"*

*In a very low voice "I thought you had gone and the adventure was all over for you. I thought you escaped"*

*I said to him. "Yes, I did escape, but it didn't work. Let's say this was just a practice escape, a rehearsal. But the next time will be the real one. I give my word and I'll do it.*

*He said to me. "Let me know, OK?"*

*I said. "Every one of them is going to know, too, so like I said to you long ago. I cannot take your life on my neck. It's fifty-fifty. I might get caught and you know what that means. So each of us has to escape separately own way"*

*He said. "Sooner or later we're going to get killed anyway with these ambushes and all these things going on around us, we as well take a chance"*

*"OK" I said. "I'll tel you just a few hours before my attempt, but we're going to escape separately.*

*All that day we rested with no food to eat and we were so hungry we could eat anything.*

*We were sitting there waiting for it to get a little darker, I guess, that was the only way to get out of that place where we were trapped. It was between the mountain and the key position that was occupied by the national army. When darkness came we started moving on another long unknown journey. We walked single line, one behind the other and went through the snow.*

*After coming down the side of the mountain we had to pass a flat area at the foot. From the guerrilla's conversation that I overheard, I knew this was a very dangerous area. In the past many times they had fallen into an ambush of the army or the police force. In two hours we were going this deadly route.*

*In our group there were fifteen prisoners and two guerrillas. Almost all of the rest were abducted. We had two mules to load ammunition and some heavy guns. As we were walking in single line, I was the fourth from the leader.*

*Now I knew something was going to happen. As we walked we were passing well-armed guerrillas sitting on the side of the path. I didn't know the purpose of that. We were just passing them. But I understood the plan a little later on. As soon as we passed them all, (I was the fourth one) we arrived at a certain point. They told us in a very low voice. "Now listen here, it is one or two miles, don't talk, don't cough, don't sneeze, don't smoke, don't breathe, and be careful of stones or branches with every step.*

*Now we are almost down in the flat area where there was very little snow. The night was dark, no moon. When I heard this word from the captain that we must be very quiet and when we passed all those well-armed guerrillas, I figured we must be right in front of the regiment, in other words, we must be the bait for this ambush if it was coming. They'd rather lose us than their own guerrillas---very clever but unfair, because we were holding guns without ammunition.*

*In an ambush, regardless of who you are, if you walk in the front and are the first one you get it first. We heard this before during the war with Germany. In an ambush 99% die instantly, so putting all things in my mind, I said. "This is it, we are first and we're going to get it tonight". My heart was pounding faster and faster. I had fear which I had never experienced before. I'll never forget those terrible moments even today. You're never know when the ambush will happen, what's going to happen, or how it's going to happen. I'd rather see somebody shooting at me with my eyes and get it over with, but that suspense, that fearful thing that any moment it's going to happen, when they put you in front with some other innocent people and no way out but forward. I tell you that itself kills you many times psychologically.*

*So I was walking very slowly right behind this guy. At that moment all your life and your loved ones pass through your mind like a film. Suddenly you leave your life in the hands of the Almighty God, you say. "If I survive it's got to be some miracle"*

*Sometimes before that you never exercise your religion too much, but at that moment you surrender the only hope for your soul and then you feel yourself calm and peaceful.*

*I blanked everything from my mind and constantly said a pray which I don't even remember.*

*And suddenly the ambush happened. For a long time that moment was a nightmare for me. Between those two small hills was flat land—no ditches or trees to hide in. From those two hills came machinegun bullets, and saw the guy in front of me fall on his face. The guy behind me; also. There were bullets all around me. I saw a mule falling down. I fell down myself. I just looked around to hide behind something. But how was it possible to hide behind those little bushes to protect you from those machinegun bullets which were coming by the thousands? Two more guys right behind me were lying down on the ground, possibly dead. Suddenly after not even one minute everything stopped. You could not hear a single shot.*

*Now I was lying down flat away from the walking path. I heard the moaning of some who were wounded. I could not explain why I was alive. Suddenly those machine guns had stopped with no explanation. They could have wiped us out with no problem if they continued to fire another five minutes. None of us would have been alive since there was no place around to hide. I will explain later why they stopped. Meantime, all in that panic I lost my hat and blanket and I were holding an empty rifle face down waiting for more gunfire. After a while I could hear voices in low tone here and there. The captain was trying to reorganize the men who survived. He did not even bother with the wounded.*

*Crawling he found me, too. He tapped my leg with a pistol and said. "Come on and follow me, we're going back behind this little hill so we can reorganize."*

*Of course there was no use for me to pretend I was dead or badly wounded. He could finish me right there with one shot. So I followed him with another young boy who was thirteen. This boy was hit in the head and later on I bandaged him with some rags we had. They didn't have any first aid there. If they had they would only have taken care of the important guerrillas.*

*Going back to the hill I counted nine or ten bodies and two mules, they were all dead. I just wondered what happen to my classmate Tony, because I hadn't seen him for a while. a little later I was looking between the people and I saw him. He said. "Boy, Nick we are lucky again, but how many times we will be lucky? Going over the borders we are going to have many ambushes like that and there is no way we can survive all of them"*

*"We must do something and fast" I told him. "We survived this but we're going to be first in line again and when it happens we'll be right there again"*

*"Yes but, Tony, if those bastards don't care about our lives we must are right now and this is important. Hold on to yourself and don't give any reason for suspicion until the time comes. Never give up"*

*And jokingly I told him. "in another week it's going to be my name day. I can't miss that, I have to be there because I don't want to miss the lokoumades that my mother always makes every year."*

*"You are crazy Nick. Here we are in a trap like little mice, we almost got killed like animals, and you're talking about lokoumades and name day"*

*"Hey Tony" I said to him. I was fourth in line. Look I came out in one piece. That means our time hasn't come yet. Faith my boy, faith and hope"*

*"Nick", he said "I want to be close to you this time when we hit the road"*

*I said. "Do you want to walk behind me or in front of me? It doesn't matter you'll be close."*

*Then the leader of the group told us to get up and walk. "You guys are going to go through that pass again, and quiet this time, no talking and smoking."*

*They didn't want to stay and trapped when daylight came. So they had to go through that line in that dangerous area again.*

*We passed all the dead people and the two dead mules. For a moment he came close to me and said. "Here carry this machine gun, you got to carry that too beside the empty gun, and this time no talking".*

*I put that machine gun on my shoulder, it was heavy and I was so hungry, tired and weak, my knees were buckling, somehow I managed to hold up.*

*Tony said to me. "I will be behind you".*

*I said. "It does not matter tony, 99% of the bullets in an ambush come from the side, so if your name is on one of them, it will find you" now we were approaching that area again. I knew exactly the spot. After we passed those bodies and the dead mules everybody was walking very carefully again and ready to duck. Each step forward was very difficult. This time I was third in the line. A guerilla with a sub machine gun (he probably pulled the short straw) was in the front and I was following him like a lamb to slaughter. Tony was so close to me I could fell his breath on my neck. We started to pass the spot where we got hit the first time. Nothing happened. Another ten yards, nothing happened. My heart was pounding fast and I had this feeling that maybe we would see daylight.*

*The clouds were now clearing from the sky and we saw the breaking daylight. As soon as we passed the ambush area, we started climbing the side of another mountain. We were now more relaxed and far away from that deadly place.*

*On the road I could I could not have any conversation with Tony. From the slope of this mountain you could see a long distance to a village and seaport. It was the first time we had seen the sea. At that point I did not know where we were. But with sun coming up we could see the sea. We must be some place the other side (East) of Khalkidhiki peninsula, but still I didn't know exactly where we were, but I needed to find out somehow from some big mouth guerrilla. After we walked three or four hours up the slope of the mountain we sat down to rest. We could see a small village. My classmate who was beside me said*

*"Oh, Nick, I wish I was in that village" and I said*

*"I wish I had a piece of bread"*

*"Hey, my wish is better than yours, because if I was in that village I would have had a piece of bread from someone.*

*"O yeah' I said. "if that village is deserted, like usually they usually are in these mountains, you'll have your village but no bread. Stay here and I will find out where we are.*

*"What are you going to do" he said.*

*"Stay here, watch me but don't follow me"*

*I walked a little bit farther and sat near one of those guerrillas. By his looks I could see he has been in these mountains for many years and he probably knew every inch of this area. I said. "Boy I am tired; I wish I was in that village in a nice dry bed to sleep a couple of days."*

*"It's all right my comrade, if you want to sleep alone there's nobody in that village since the Germans lost the war. We passed by here many times. The fascist government evacuated this village three years ago. Believe me it's a ghost town."*

*I said. "I believe you but Stavros, (the big city that I knew before) the seaport, is not far from that village, as you can see in the distance",*

*He gave me a sarcastic laugh that I was expecting and told me. "My boy you have your geography all mixed up. That small seaport is Stratoniki. (Another seaport) and Stavros is fifty miles away from here. What talking about?"*

*"And Salonica. Must be north of us"*

*"Bravo" he said "Finally you are right about one thing.*

*It was surprising he was telling all these things. If his superiors heard this conversation he would probably be in trouble. So I cut the conversation short and didn't say any more. I got the information I wanted and I changed the conversation. After a while I just got up and left him. I went back to my classmate and told him his wish was worthless. That village was not occupied. There was nobody there.*

*But the reality of the ordeal was there right that moment. Our feet were wet and swollen and we were hungry from passing through some of those rough areas. We were trying to dry our feet in the fire that some of the guerrillas build, but before even came our turn to dry out, an order came to move on.*

*I picked up the machine gun and that lousy empty gun they gave me from the beginning and started to walk again. Now, at least I knew a little where we were and for sure I knew where we were going. We were going north and that meant one of those communist countries on the north border of Greece. My classmate started begging me again with a*

*dangerous question as he started walking by me softly whistling, but he could be heard, "What are your plans, where are we going?."*

*I finally told him. "Shut up, I have plans and I will explain them to you later"*

*We were walking downhill until we reached the lower hill where there was no snow. As we were walking we passed these thick bushes and some other places where there was water where the snow had melted, as we went to the other side of the hill we saw another village which was close to the seashore and a little bit farther in the sea a navy destroyer was anchored. I said to myself. "That must be a navy port. To be that close to the village, there must be some army or police force in that village". All these things went through my mind and I started building a plan. We were walking away from that village and it had almost disappeared. We were at the other side of the hill but that village was in my mind, something was telling me that something was going to happen.*

*Two hours later, exhausted we arrived in the lower flat area but there was still forest all around. They told us we were going to camp there and get some rest and maybe go again later on, not until night. It was 12 or 1 o'clock, very clear and sunny. At least we started to get a little heat from the sun to dry us out.*

*As we sat down in the heat of the sun, we heard that they would give us some food. soon they gave us one slice of bread. It was black and hard, I never figured out what it was made of, but for me it was like Sander's cake. It was the first time we had bread in a month. That meat soup had nothing to hold you. That's why we had stomach problems. After we ate, they gave us some kind of cabbage, anything consumable. We cobbled it down. If you have a really empty stomach, you eat anything they give you.*

*Close by was a creek. The clear river water was going by, and so we had some water to drink. I sat down on the dry grass to think. This time I had something in mind which I was not about to back out of. I decided I was not going through another night like the one before. It was a big chance, but I had to take it sooner or later I had to do it.*

*With all those thoughts in my mind: I saw my classmate Tony sitting beside me. Especially today, I did not want him to give even any small suspicion to the group leader. I said to him, "In two minutes I am telling you my plan. I am going to get up from here and sit someplace else. After I sit there, you come and I'll tell you".*

*As soon as I sat down he came over and I started telling him. I said to him.*

*Before the day is over, before it gets dark I'm leaving the place".*

*He started to object to my plans because I was going to escape in broad daylight, he said. "Don't do it now Nick".*

*I said. "I'm going to do it now or never, now you listen, I've made my mind and after I disappear you do the same thing. While they are looking for me, you get out of here too because this is a good opportunity for you. Do you remember that last village we passed for hours ago? We saw it was in the distance, not the one we found out no one was living, the closest one to the sea, the second one"*

*He said with a pessimistic tone. "How do you know that village you were talking about has anybody in it. And if they do it might be guerrillas, and you know what will happen if they catch you".*

*I said. "You are quite right Tony, that's why I am going to take a chance. I am not forcing you, so you have to act by yourself.*

*"How are you going to find that village "he said?*

*"We are three or four hours away in this thick forest with the hills and the creeks, but I wish you good luck".*

*My last words were. "Tony, in case something happens you know my folks in the village. If you have the opportunities go south. Walk the opposite way from me, looking a couple times in my direction. Now I was ready psychologically. I made my mind up and no fear could change my direction. I left that machine gun which I was responsible for. I had only the empty rifle in my hands. The leader of our group had made a little circle around him and was doing some more brainwashing and teaching and teaching the communistic things. When he saw me he said sarcastically. "Hey, Nick, come here and join us, or maybe you know everything about communism".*

*Without losing my nerve I said to him. Comrade, having you as our group leader for a while now, I learned fast and plenty. Don't worry about me" I sat down outside the circle. I guess he liked the compliment and started his speech more enthusiastically. I started waiting now. The sun was going to leave us for now and I knew that village was two or three hours away.*

*Every time we camped, they had guerrillas all around to guard the position and spot the enemy's location and to look for incoming enemy and to guard the abductees.*

*I spotted where they were sitting and watched them.*

*As I was deciding at the last moment; I stood up with my gun in my hand and asked the leader who was speaking if I could be excused to go to the rest room (behind the bushes) Of course the rest room was the whole forest. He said. "Certainly go ahead"*

*There was no way he could read what I had in my mind. I had enough trust now for this particular moment. All needed was fifteen or twenty minutes to be left alone, and this happened*

## **RUNNING FOR MY LIFE**

*I took the gun and started walking in the direction of the creek. With all those bushes surrounding no one could see me. When I was few yards from that really wide creek, I stopped and looked around to see if anyone following me. I put the empty gun down to see how I could jump this wide creek without injuring myself. When I went back a little bit to get a running start, I saw my gun there. I figured I shouldn't let them know which way I went. I took the gun and I threw it in the creek. Then I went about ten yards back and started running to get up some speed to jump. I ended up right in the creek up to my knees in mud. I thought I would panic, and I tried to pull up one foot but lost the other in the thick mud. I tried to grab some exposed roots from a tall tree close to the creek, and that really helped me get out of that mess. Now I was gone, I was panicked; I realized that I was all alone responsible for my action and with no other thought than to save my life.*

*This was the first and last time that I remember running for my live. Running and running. I was temporarily free, but where?.*

*I knew where I was going by the direction of the sun. the other side of the creek was a steep hill with plenty of rocks and small trees. To run uphill was very exhausting and every ten or twenty yards I had to stop to get my breath. My heart was beating fast. I was weak, and now i was afraid what would happen. I would think if I would go bust. I figured that any minute now I would hear gun shots because I was late getting back to the group. I knew I was not far from them because running uphill didn't get me any distance.*

*Suddenly I heard the first shot and machine gun fire followed. I guess they figured out I could hear their loud voices but no way could I see the camp and again machine gun fired. i was in the bushes and going in an unknown direction. I was panicky.*



*They didn't know where I was and they machine gunned everywhere in every direction. After the machine guns stopped I heard a very loud voice coming from the direction of the camp, calling me names and swearing and telling me, "Fascist, you are eating the American bread, we are going to catch you. Wherever you go we will catch you again."*

*I heard this and I got a chill all over my body. I heard these voices and I thought in no time they were going to capture me because they knew this area very well. I knew what they would do with me—probably another example for the others, the firing squad. With the thought of that young boy still in my mind from a month ago when those two women killed him, I said to myself, "You bastards, , you'll have to capture me to do that, but not alive"*

*I started running up hill again. When I got to the top I saw that there was another hill on the other side, much higher than this one. Now I must go down and up again. I was a little farther away from them, but I didn't know where to go. I couldn't see the village yet and I figured it must be on the other side. But going through the forest with no clear path is very difficult, especially knowing they are after you, I was watching the sun and in a half hour at the most it would go down.*

*Going down the hill was little easier, but my pants and coat were in ribbons. I had lots of scratches and cuts all over from thorns. I started going up again. The shadow of the trees was cutting the sunlight, and I was afraid it would be dark soon. What would I do without protection from the wildlife?. I heard there were a lot of wild pigs in the area, wolves and so many other wild animals.*

*I knew I was a little farther than them, but I didn't know if they were still after me. My fear was there.*

*Exhausted and tired I was half way up that big hill. I decided that pretty soon it would be dark and suddenly I came to a big hollow tree. I got inside and put some branches in front of the opening. I said to myself. "I will stay here for the night and early in the morning I will find the village."*

*I was all sweaty and my feet were wet and in five minutes I felt a chill. My heart of course was still pounding with fear. Suddenly I heard something like steps. I must have lost five years off my life that particular moment. It was a woodpecker. It scared the daylight out of me. My feet were like machine gun fire. Now I was getting cold all over. There was no way I could stay there overnight. I would probably freeze. To be frank, I was impatient all my life. I must get out of this trap and find that village, my only hope. I had to find it quickly before sundown. In half an hour the sun would disappear. I heard from the class when I was free that anybody who came to surrender, innocent or guerrilla after sundown, first they shoot you and ask questions after.*

*So, I must put all my power and run harder to beat that deadline.*

*I got out of that tree and started up the hill again. I got a little rest, of course and I was running a little better, but it was up hill again. Every so many feet I fell down because I was hungry and tired, as soon as I was close to the top of the hill I saw there were no trees on the top and only a few branches. When I looked ahead about fifty yards, I saw three guerrillas armed to the teeth walking in my direction. At that moment I thought somebody dunked my head in boiling water. I fell mechanically down on my face behind that little bush with three-quarters of my butt exposed.*

*Fortunately for me , right from the beginning these guerrillas were having conversation as they were walking and they were looking at each other. They never saw me, but now how close they pass by> I was practically frozen I didn't know if I was breathing. I closed my*

*eyes and I was hearing my heart and their voices louder than this tape—loud. They were approaching in a matter of seconds I'd be caught like a lamb with nothing to defend myself. I could pretend to be dead but with a good kick I'd be dead for sure. I do believe they passed only a few yards away. They never looked around. There was no way they could miss me. But when they came that closes and did not spot me that was a miracle. It was like I laid motionless for days and months. It was actually only three or four minutes. I wanted to be sure that I did not hear any more steps, and then I started breathing again like I had new life. I said to myself with a little confidence. "My time did not come yet". But before I go farther in my story I want to emphasize something about these types of guerrillas. There are independent group of guerrillas from two to five people and they are specialized and trained to interrogate the prisoners, you die slowly in their hands. I thought of this, and if by coincidence they had changed direction just a little they would step on me. That would mean interrogation and possibly they would take me back to my group. Probably by now they had made up their minds what they would do with me if they caught me. Now I had to be optimistic, and I didn't want thoughts like that to go through my mind. I got up and started to run.*

*The small flat top of the mountain was hope. In a few minutes I knew I would see that village. We had passed it just a few hours ago. Now I could see the sea from the distance, but I could not see the village yet. I walked a little bit farther. As soon as I came to the end of that flat top I spotted the village.*

*From way up on the mountainside I saw this village. It looked like a plate down below. I needed to go down there very fast. There was couple of small hills on the way. If anyone was in the village, I hope they were friendly and not against me. If it was guerrillas, I'd be in trouble. I said to myself. "I have no choice but to walk down. I could see that the anchored destroyer was still close to the shore and I figured there must be some friendly people around for it to be that close. I had to run to get down the hill before sundown. Sometimes I was practically rolling down, getting up, falling again, my pants were torn to ribbons and I had cuts and bruises all over my body.*

*In a few minutes I was down the first hill, and a little while later the next one and I didn't have too much forest going down to the bottom so I could run a little better. Before I got to the village I walked over a half-broken bridge.*

*Now I was scared who was going to be the first person I saw. If there was one:*

*The sun was almost down and as the village was located way down, the mountains made it get darker. I saw that the first house on outskirts of that village were all ruined from bullet holes and fires, I walked a little more into the village and I saw a building that looked like a school, it was all bullet holes, and there was not a soul. I didn't see anybody. It made me worried. "I must not panic" I said to myself. "Now prepare to face anything".*

*I didn't have a choice but to walk forward and I looked until I saw a cat. "Boy" I said, good omen or bad omen. I knew back home people believed this kind of omen, and if you see a black cat like I just saw it would be bad luck. But, really I never believed this nonsense. Yet, hearing these things all your life you start feeling it might be true, especially when you are in this situation. You believe almost anything, but that cat gave me a little confidence that maybe some people were living in the ghost town.*

*So with those thoughts of mine I kept walking with my hands in my heavy coat pockets. Every other house was burned. It was a bad situation. There must have been a war here not long ago. I wonder what kind of fighting went on in that village. I walked about 300 or 400 yards then I turned to the right. To my surprise I saw this little old lady about seventy*

*or eighty sitting by the corner stone of her little house which was half burned and very young boy, six or seven years old, playing with a pile of stones.*

*To my surprise, she wasn't even excited when she saw me in that condition. I said to myself. "There must be more people but where?" and who are they? As I walked close to her and the child, she stopped knitting for a moment and she looked at me with sympathy. I hadn't even said anything to her. She spoke first saying to me, "Do you want to surrender, my son?". I could not believe to my ears here was a place to surrender.*

*I didn't believe it. At first I didn't want to say anything and like a wild animal raised my voice with my hands in my pocket like I had a gun and said to her. "Never mind that grandma, is there any police or national army around here?.. she was more confident that I was coming for this reason.*

*"Yeas my son, don't afraid. There is a police station 4-5 hundred yards from here. Don't worry, many who escape surrender here". I did not believe her, but I was trying not to give the impression that I wanted to surrender. I had this mistrust, I don't know why.*

*Without lowering my voice, I said "You just show me this place from distance and I will take care of the rest." So, the little old lady twisted the child's shoulder and told him to get up and point the way to the police station to his uncle. In Greece, regardless of who you are, you are an uncle for all the young children.*

*So, the little kid with a scared look on his face pulled on my ragged pants and started pulling me in that direction. He did not know I was more scared than him.*

*With those torn cloths and whiskers and the wild look on my face, I must have looked awful to him. When I reached the corner of the street he stopped and pointed at the location and ran away from me.*

*Now I was alone again. Was it real or some kind of a trap, that old lady on the corner with that child? I grew up in that war so many years ago, and I saw so many things. You cannot trust your own brother sometimes. But destiny brought me here. I was not about to turn back. I had to take this last chance and it was almost dark. I had to do it very quickly. So I started walking forward toward those buildings.*

*From a distance they looked like a big tall wall with very small windows, but when I came close they were big thick stone walls to protect those who were inside and there were small openings for defense purposes. I was coming close and I was walking with my hands out of my pockets. I did not want to give the impression that I had any weapons.*

*When I came close I saw a big sign on the building saying. "NATIONAL POLICE STATION OF STRATONI" and "NATIONAL ARMY" I couldn't believe my eyes. Was it real or an illusion?*

*Right in front of the building were trenches in which were police and army guards pointing their machine guns with their finger on the trigger. They were as surprised as I was to see me like that late in the evening. I had not moved within 30 feet when one of them said to me "Stop there" with an angry voice he said. "Who are you?" I told him with no hesitation that I was one of the students from the American Farm School.*

*A month had passed since the abduction from the School and everyone had heard the news about the forty students from the American Farm School who had been abducted in the mountains. So when they heard that I was one of the students the tone of his voice changed and they welcomed me with no delay. "My boy said the captain".*

*"If you were another fifteen minutes later, you wouldn't be able to come close, not even within 200 yards. Usually after sundown we have a curfew around her and we don't talk, we only shoot. Your mother has probably been praying for you. But now you are temporarily safe"*

*I did not know why he said temporarily.*

*"You must be hungry, but before you sit anywhere or touch anything, we have to get rid of those fleas and lice and all the mud which I believe you've been carrying for some time now". With those words he ordered one person to bring a big box of flea dust. He unbuttoned my dirty shirt and poured the dust on my neck and kept pouring until it came down through my pants and my shoes.*

*When the captain saw me said; "That's what is a good job, you might look like flour mill men but in a few minutes you're going to feel better; I know you must be very hungry, nobody comes here with a full stomach".*

*They gave a quarter loaf of bread and a chunk of cheese and told me. "Eat and after you can tell us where you came from, where you are going, and how we didn't see any movement up in the hills" But now I was so busy devouring that bread, I could not say anything. After I ate they gave me a little wine to drink and they were interested in my story.*

*I told them. "Early in the morning we were passing through the high hills"*

*"The hills, you say. Those hills my boy are not hills, are mountains. How is possible to see anybody there?"*

*"Yes I saw this village and I was wondering if anybody was here. The night before; we saw another village away from here but as we were walking carefully through dangerous area, we fell into an ambush. I thought that night was the last last night of my life, especially because the students and other abductees were right in the front, and we were first. But somehow some of us survived".*

*The captain looked at me and with a smile on his face said. "Well my boy, you and the rest who survived that night are very lucky. Maybe it's a miracle. We and the army sent a long distance patrol of twenty men to ambush that particular area. They had with them two machine gun and other small arms. When you guys waked into the trap they fired those two machine guns and whatever other things they had, but this did not take long, as you know; otherwise you would have been wiped out in a minute. The two machine guns jammed simultaneously and they had to pullout very fast because they could not defend their position. So, as you can see you are alive today because of that miracle, because the machine guns lammed. Maybe because all of you in the front were innocent people, maybe it happened just because of that now you are temporary safe"*

*When I heard temporarily I was puzzled and I said to him. "What do you mean temporarily captain?"*

*He got out of his chair, came over and put his arm around my shoulders and said. "In theory you are safe and free from the hands of the communists, but not quite. As you can see we are isolated from the main the branches of the army defense. We have raids from guerrillas almost every night. They come at night and they try to get anything the find in the village. Of course we may be small in numbers, but we are well-equipped with arms, so we don't let them come close. Don't worry, in a week or two we'll transfer you to a larger town and from there you'll go home".*

*Boy, that's sound good, but hearing about those raids did not do me any good, and I said to him, "Don't tell me that tonight is one of those nights?"*

*"We never know, but when it happens you'll know it. You'll maybe take part since we're shorthanded"*

*At least I was free with some patriots in the village named STRATONI a small village in Khalkidhiki.*

*Suddenly we heard some other voices outside; somebody said that another guerrilla had just surrendered. "After dark, don't take any chances" the captain said to them. "Only shoot" But one of these men trying to justify his action said. "Well, he was just coming around the wall and suddenly he came and surrendered".*

*"OK" the captain said "he is another lucky one" As soon as they brought him inside and we saw each other we recognized each other. He ran forward and gave me a big hug.*

*"Oh Nick, I am glad to see you here. You won't believe it but all of us were taken by the guerrillas to look for you. They were mad, really mad when they found that you escaped. They said. "Where is going to go we're going to find him and he's going to regret it. For almost an hour they were like mad dogs. When I isolated myself to one side, I ran and ran and ran. I knew the location of the village from when we were on the mountain"*

*He was another one who had been abducted, so they treated him just as well as he had me. Now my thought went back again thinking about my classmate Tony and what would happen to him if he could not escape with this opportunity. They knew we had been hanging out together and I hope they didn't get mad at him when I escaped. As for the other three classmates, they were isolated from us in another group which we never saw; we didn't know where they were and what they were doing. But I was worrying for Tony now. I asked him if he saw Tony, he said, "Yes, I saw him all worried he was very scared, he thought they may catch you, but then I didn't see him anymore"*

*I talked to the captain again and I said, "Can we send a wire to my folks. They're probably worried and don't know whether I'm alive. Tell them that I'm alive and safe here in your hands"*

*"Yes, we already sent it in secret code and it's very possible they are notifying your parents this very moment" with that in mind I relaxed a little bit.*

*It was very dark and late at night. The guards were in their positions around the fort with the deadly machine guns. My friend, who escaped and I were given the second floor room of that fortress to rest for the night. The feeling was so good to be sleeping under a roof after so many days in the open wet and cold and hungry. We lay down on those wooden beds provided for us with some blankets. Our tired bodies just went to sleep. Suddenly we heard isolated gunfire and some and some more and some more. I got up and said, "What happened? What's going on? At the same time there were two guys who walked through that door with machine guns in their hands and took separate places in the small opening of this room. Me and my friend were shocked. We didn't know what to do. One police man told us. 'Come on you guys, get up and get a position in that opening" I said. "Position what? He said. "Can't you see? Guerrillas are raiding us again, for sure we are not going to let them come close, and so do not stay there like two dummies; get that machine gun from the corner and take a position and start shooting or you'll be captured again"*

*"Oh boy" I said to my friend. "Did you fire a machine gun before?" he looked at me like I was speaking another language.*

*He said, "NO, I don't have any experience with gun"*

*I said to him. "I cannot find myself a better time to learn" well I took the machine gun and leaned it on the opening. I told my friend to keep loading the cartridges with the bullets and give them to me when I asked.*

*He said. "I told you I don't know either, but if I pull this trigger, something might happen." So now for the first time I was holding a machine gun and pulled the trigger, in a few moments I got the shake of my life. One police man who saw me working the machine gun hollered. "Hey take it easy, haven't you ever seen a gun before?."*

*I said. "I've seen a gun, but I've never fired a gun before. This is my first time"*

*He said. "Oh boy, you sure picked a good day to learn" he came close and demonstrated how to load and how to hold it, and after he said. "Who you're going to shoot is unimportant. Just shoot straight and hold that gun before it gets away and takes you with it" now I was more confident and with one single pull on that trigger the machine gun threw countless bullets so that the barrel became almost red after a while from the continuous firing. Again the police man came over and said. "Hey boy, stop for a while and let your barrel to cool off a little, because you're giving them a good target with that red barrel".*

*Every so often the firing stopped and you could hear them wearing and cussing with the loud voices, and after that, the machine gun again. My friend said to me. "And I thought our adventure finished and was over."*

*I cut him very short and said. "Keep loading because if those bastards take this place our adventure is going to finish right here for sure."*

*And he knew what I meant.*

*Once in a while the police man who his eyes on me had suggested. "Don't shoot in the same direction, shoot in different directions" but I never remember putting my head in that hole to look where I was shooting, I was just making lots of noise with the machine gun and my friend who was loading the cartridges was looking at me as a hero.*

*One time he said. "Boy you are fast" I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry, but I figured out, I was doing something right for them to let me use the machine gun.*

*Early in the morning finally everything was quiet. I was glad this night was over, but we didn't have any sleep. Who cared? We were safe. I was curious to see where all my bullets went and for the first time I looked out that window that I was shooting.*

*I was shocked but not surprised. Directly across from our building there was once this beautiful little whitewashed house, but not anymore. I practically destroyed that through the night. There was not a single unbroken tile on the roof. The walls were all shattered and it was unrecognizable condition. "Oh boy" I said to myself, "I hope no one was inside.*

*My friend said to me. "Nick if anybody was inside friend or enemy. It's too late now. He's gone. Let's go downstairs. Somebody's hollering at us to go".*

*As we were coming down from the second floor we came face to face with this very pathetic old lady. She was standing beside the captain shaking her hands and hollering and complaining about the horrible night when her house was destroyed.*

*The captain asked which of us was shooting from that direction. I said. "It was me" just before I finish explaining, the poor old lady with a very slow and polite voice said to me. "But my son, why did all those bullets hit my house, just a few yards farther was another house and nothing happened to it. It's good thing me and my husband went down in the cellar".*

*I had to find some excuse to justify myself. After all, the fact was, I was scared to look out in a second the idea that the guerrillas were coming to close and might even take this place if they capture me sent chills up my spine. So I said to the old lady. "Yeah, yeah do you know a war is going on? I saw enemy fire from that direction and I am very sorry for your house..*

*The captain gave me a side look with a smile and said to the old lady. "I understand that young man. He's right. And you are right. And two rights in my book never make a wrong. So; I will personally take care of your property. I'll sign your papers so the government will*

*give you indemnity for the value of your house". Her face brightened a little and with a smile she thanked the captain and left the building.*

*With that, the captain said to us. You guys, if you're involved in a fight again, shoot with a rifle, never with a machine gun. It cost too much money for the government.*

*The sun was coming and we could see a beautiful sunrise. They called us for breakfast, but we were tired from that sleepless night. Some of them went right to bed after. Some went down to eat something. As we started eating breakfast, we heard from the other side of the house some commotion on the left side of the building.*

*I could not believe my eyes. Yes, it was my classmate Tony. He was exhausted, talking to the guard right in in the front explaining his story. When he finished there he ran and we hugged each other like we hadn't seen each other for a long time.*

*"Nick" he said. "I cannot believe it, what a night I had in the woods, cold and wild animals all around me. I was sitting there in the thick woods with an empty gun in my hand waiting for the morning. When you escaped, of course, every available person was after you. I was scared at the beginning but after an hour I knew you were far away and said to myself.*

*"If I have to make any move I must make right now because ten or twenty minutes they are going to regroup and guard people more closely and maybe worse thing will happen" So I walked no more than 100 yards from the place I was standing into this big bush and sat there motionless. To my advantage it was getting dark and they couldn't know who was there in the group and who was not. In the meantime, they had orders to move because it was dark and they had to move through that area at night. Boy, I was glad when I heard them leaving. That continued until morning and I couldn't understand what was going on. I got up very early and I remembered what you told me about this village. Boy, I am glad I found you here".*

*"OK" the captain said. "Give him the same treatment you got last night" Tony looked at me with some question. I said. "Don't worry. You are just getting dusted to get rid of those little animas.*

*He was so naïve, he said to me. "Hey Nick, what kind of animals are you talking about?"*

*"Come on, don't be stupid. You know the lice that you have been complaining about all the time".*

*"Oh yes" he said. After he ate almost half a loaf of bread, I told him about all the gun fire he heard last night was right from here. "And you are looking at the most vicious finger"*

*"No kidding" he said with some surprise.*

*He wanted to know some more, but the captain overheard us and cut the conversation short. He said. "You did very well, boy. You stayed in the forest last night. Otherwise it would probably cost the government another house". When I took him to see the old lady's house later on, he understood the words of the captain and he was trying not to smile.*

*He said to me. "Nick, the captain is so right. I would probably do worse. I know what fear means". We talked some more and now we considered ourselves safe. Of course, the two of us started dreaming again about when we could go home, what we would eat when we got there, and what we will drink and how we would tell about our adventure.*

*It was about noon when an order came for evacuation. They said to us. "Get your things ready. In half an hour we are moving you and your classmate and some other". We didn't have belongings, but we didn't know where we were going to move us. I thought they were to use a boat to take us to a safer place. But I heard somebody say are going to*

*another village deeper in the mountains where we would stay for a few days and then we would come back to this village again to take the boat from the seaport.*

*The captain spoke to all of us and told us the army was in the village where we were going and we will well protect. "we don't want you to be around here another night. It's very dangerous", it sounded very good to us to be going to a safe place. They didn't want us to fall into the hands of the guerrilla again, so about fifteen of us lined up behind each other and started walking.*

*As soon as we got out of the village the commander stopped us and said. "Now you guys, I want you to listen. To reach that village is about four or five hours walk. We have to pass certain narrow areas, and we must be very careful. The guerrillas can ambush us the same way we ambush them. No matter what, stay close. Do not separate. We cannot protect you if you are far from us.*

*There were eight civilians and the other eight were in the army. "Boy". I said to my friend Tony, that doesn't look too good. How many times we are going to be lucky. Sometimes our luck will run out. I hope it's not here"*

*So we started walking again. We had one advantage. At least it was daylight and we could see, but when you fall in an ambush and there is little chance to survive. I don't care if it is night or broad daylight. We are now close to one of the suspected areas.*

*Tension started to build up, and I don't know how to explain it to you unless you've lived through such a horrible experience. You are like a robot. You must walk and for that moment you have the feeling you are walking out of your life.*

*Everything passes through your mind very fast and suddenly you become peacefully calm expecting your destiny, and you want to get it over with. Because you are in this situation and it cannot be worse than it is, you get a new unexpected courage to fight for your life thinking that it is your very last chance to survive and fight.*

*It is really complicated human nature when it comes to this kind of situation. In the beginning few seconds your knees buckle from fear and a few minutes later you are entirely different person. toy get strength and try to survive.*

*Now we were in this narrow pass again. Each step had to be very careful. They told us not to worry. You never hear the bullet that hits you. If you hear it that means you are alive. Then duck and crawl on the ground. All these things I had in my mind like this experienced commander. This was nothing for the rest of us. It was real life and death. We were now passed the middle of that passage and nothing had happened. We were almost out of the top and started breathing again.*

*One of the commanders in front of me said. "I can't believe it. Ninety-nine percent of the time we have trouble here". So we walked out of there and now we were very lucky. But all the way on the foot paths was dangerous. I stopped for a moment to tie my shoe lace, but the group kept going and after a few moments I found myself close to the back of the single line of people. I don't know why but my classmate stayed behind too.*

*All of a sudden we heard an explosion in front of us. The explosion was in the front of the line. And before we know it we all were down on the ground. We didn't know what happened. We heard moaning and the commander behind me knew right away what happened.*

*He said. "Those bastards put mines on the pathway". We got up and run to see those guys in front. It was the kind of mines that when you step on them the mechanism makes it jump in the air and then explode to do the maximum damage all around. But the commander who stepped on the mine knew would die. So he covered I as much as possible*



*with his body to minimize the damage. When we saw them, I got sick in my stomach because the commander's guts were all hanging out of his body. His eyes were open and he was mumbling a few words. Trying to say something; Blood came from his mouth. He suddenly lay motionless with his eyes open and died.*

*Another commander closed his eyes and started crying like a kid. He said. "We were like brothers. We grew up and went into the army together. I've known him since we were ten years old". Beside him were two more dead; they were following him on the path and they have been hit in the head. I was feeling very, very sorry for the three people who got killed.*

*I realized in a few hours that I could have been one of those killed. I was second following this commander on the pathway. What made me stay behind at that particular moment to tie my shoelace I don't know, it was untied all morning and it hadn't bothered me. But that moment I just stayed behind for some reason. Sometimes strange things happen in your life and you cannot explain them. Who knows when it would be my end? But sure enough, someone loses his life and you live to tell about it. What else could it be but a miracle for you. This is your destiny. It is not written. Only God knows when. I don't care if a person has plans to live 500 years. it is temporary wish til his time comes, and nothing can save his life. At moments like that you are closer to God than anything else. We put all three of them in a shallow ditch and covered them with some dirt mixed with snow. The leader had in mind to send a crew I later to take them and bury them in a regular cemetery.*

*Half an hour later we were on our way again. Now we had two kind of fears: the ambush and mines on the pathway. The commanders now had more experienced men in the front to clear the path. For sure I didn't want his job. He was walking twenty or thirty yards ahead of us. After two hour of walking we came to another dangerous area for ambush. Now everybody was extra careful not only for an ambush for big earth mines. Just before we entered this narrow path, the in front of me made a sign that discovered a mine, and he said he put a snowball there to mark it. We all went around it. Boy, that was a relief and no ambush.*

*Now it was only another half hour to reach the village. We were walking more relaxed now. We didn't have to worry that much for the rest of the trip. We were walking in a lower area, and you could see the pathway far ahead of you. A little way away we saw some army and civilians, men and women, coming our way on the same path.*

*When we met, I didn't know where they were going, but I saw this girl. I couldn't believe my eyes. We stopped for a moment, and the commander was explaining things to their leader about the mines in the road. I was looking at the girl and she looked like she knew me, but she didn't seem to have the courage to talk to me or ask me anything. I was very sure that here in the middle of nowhere I was face to face with this beautiful girl who I knew and admired very much a long time ago in my village. I saw her before but I did 'not know her personally. She knew I recognized her, but she still was not sure who I was in the condition I was in with those old ragged cloths and a beard.*

*She came close and looked into my eyes with those beautiful eyes and said with that nice soft voice. "Aren't you Nick Hadjimarkos?"*

*I said "Yeah"*

*She said. "You know me, don't you?"*

*"Of course" I said with a smile. "I always wanted to meet you and talk to you, but I never dreamed I'd meet you on this mountain under these circumstances. Believe me. I'm very glad to see you".*

*"Oh Nick. You are safe, and nobody in the village knows what happened to you yet. all this time your parents have been living in agony. I still cannot believe that you are here in front of us"*

*As I remember, back in our the village we had seen each other many times, but we have never talked and that's as far it went. She was a very good looking girl and like a young man, I was jst looking. For the first time we were talking and I had a strange feeling; she came close to me and she wanted to tach me like I was not real or something.*

*Now she enthusiastically said to me. "Nick, in ten or fifteen minutes you are going to my village, Stratonoki. When you go there, find my parents and tell them who you are. They are going to take care of you. They know all about the students that were taken from the school.*

*She described where the house was located and said that in a day or two she was going to my village. She asked me what she should tell to my parents. Her name was Ismini.*

*I told her. "Tell them I'm all right and in a few days I'll see them. They are going to be very happy when they hear the news from a beautiful girl like you. The probably won't believe how you met me on this mountain under these circumstances"*

*She said. "I'll be very happy to tell this wonderful news, Nick. I will probably see you there" Then we shook hands and separated.*

*As I was walking on the path I thought to myself that, living was worth it. This meeting was very important because it gave me more confidence. All my feelings woke up and because I was a normal person I could not explain those moments. Here, in the middle of nowhere I met a person who I always wanted to meet and talk to. I never did fearing rejection. That was in the village way back in the years I was going to school. And now, so easily, we talked and expressed our feelings like we knew each other for a long time. The reason she was not staying in her village was because very often guerrillas raided the village and took the young ones to the mountain.*

*For years she had been staying with her aunt in our village waiting for the war to be over. When we went to the village, her parents met us and provided us with some cooking. I had my classmate with me. He was still in shock about the whole thing. He said to me. "Nick, I am depending on you since I'm positive I'll never meet anybody that I know". He was from the island of Rode's far away from this area.*

*We didn't stay to long too long at Isminis parent's house. We had to go back and stay with the army and police. Their fort was dug in the ground with many machine guns all around, they had raids too.*

*When we went back I had another surprise. The local marshal, the leader of the police force read the list of the names that our captain gave to him. When he came to my name, he sent for me. When I went there I was afraid I was in trouble because we went to Isminis house with no permission. He looked at me and said. "You are Nicholas Hadjimarkos?".*

*I said. "Yes"*

*"Athanasios's son"?*

*"Yes"*

*"Do you recognize me at all?"*

*I said "No Sir"*

*"When you were very young, me and your father were very, very good friends for many years. When I was marshal in your village, your father was Mayor for at least eighteen years. Sit down in the chair and relax."*

*I couldn't believe this was true. He said to me. "Once I carried you in my arms. Your father will be shocked when he hears this. "he was a father-like man. And he said. "Here's some money. First go get a shave and haircut and don't go too far from here. I don't want to lose you. Your father wouldn't forgive me. Your father was one of the most respected citizens in the village. They drafted him as Mayor all those years. he did not even to be a Mayor. He supported me many times, he helped me many times and I owe him too much.. For the few days that you guys are going to stay here, you are my guests." I said to him. "I cannot do that, sir, because I have a friend and classmate with me". He said. "He is my guest too".*

*So, I and Tony went for a haircut. He couldn't figure out how in the hell I was so popular meeting all those people here in the middle of nowhere. I said to him. "Shut up. I can't believe all things are happening myself either. Enjoy it now because who knows what will happen tomorrow".*

*Close to the fort was a barber shop where we went to get our hair cut after we cleaned ourselves up a little to somehow look like humans again. When we got back I asked the marshal if it was possible to send a message to get in touch with my parents.*

*"Nick" he said. I'm sorry, but all the telephone lines are cut or broken. We communicate with a telegraph. I'll send a message to them and tell them you are here with us and at the most you will be on the way home in three days". I said " It sounded OK and thanked him for everything.*

*The first night we slept peacefully and quiet. It was the first time in so long we didn't hear gunfire. But the second night was another story.. It was midnight when we heard our machine guns in the fort starts firing. There was a lot of police and army. I guess they didn't need us this time for any extra help. I was especially happy because I didn't want to demolish another house and make a fool out of myself. But I told Tony if he wanted to volunteer it was OK with me. He said. "Are you kidding? After I saw the mess you made with the old lady's house. You know I never fired a gun in my life". "Neither did I, until last time, but, here is the opportunity to learn" "No thanks Nick".*

*As we were talking back and forth a soldier came close to us and placed a large bag to Tony and said. "You guys come close to me. There is a tremendous fight on outside". As we started following him he complained saying. "Boy this is very heavy". I said. "Let me see what's inside". Sure enough, hand grenades. I said to him." Whatever you do don't touch them".*

*When were in fighting position, this soldier told my friend and me, "Now let's see how far you guys can throw those things". I never really thought about how to throw a grenade, but I had some idea. First you pull the pin and then you throw it and duck. The soldier told us. "every one or two minutes throw one as far as you can because we don't want those bastards to come close enough here to do the same thing" It was pretty dark outside and the moon was just in and out. I took a grenade first, pulled the pin, and threw it as far as I could. After the explosion the soldier told me. "Bravo you are doing good job". After a couple minutes I told Tony. "Come on, It's your turn now". After a moment he threw one but we didn't hear any explosion. I thought there was a*

*defect in that grenade he threw. I picked up another grenade and threw it. There was a big explosion. I said to him. "Try again".*

*This time the soldier intervened and said to him. "This time, be sure to pull out the pin before you throw it.*

*Tony said. "What pin?"*

*I couldn't help laughing and I said to him. "You stupid, if this supposed to explode without pulling the pin, we'd all be dead by now with all these grenades in our bag".*

*"Boy". He said "I thought they explode when they hit the ground".*

*I am not a ballistic expert, but that much I knew. We emptied the bag in no time and the soldier told us to take it easy. Well. I was glad that night was over.*

*In the morning the marshal called us in for breakfast. He said with a smile. "I heard you guys were heroes last night. Today after lunch I am sending you back with a patrol to Stratoni to take the navy boat for the city of Stavros. From there it will be easy with army trucks to go home to Salonica.*

*Boy. That sound so good but we were still here away in the mountains. We were worried*

*He said. "Don't worry; these fellows who I'm sending with you won't have any problem".*

*I wish I could believe him, but the picture of those three dead men was still fresh in my mind.*

*I said. "Thank you for everything you did for us, sir. My dad is going to be thrilled to hear about this".*

*"Give my regards to him"*

*With these words we separated. I didn't see him anymore that day.*

*Our departure had been all arranged and after lunch we started our journey back with patrol. But, this time it seemed we were going on a different path and difficult to walk but less dangerous we have been told. There were no mines and ambushes. It was a short cut too because in less time we were back in the village. The navy boat was still there and I believed, and I believe that was where we were supposed to go.*

*The sun was going down and I was worried. I didn't want to spent another night in the village where I fought indiscriminately and destroyed that house. It was a dangerous place to spend another night. And I didn't have a good reputation as a fighter, either.*

*The leader of the group said to us. "Don't worry. My orders are to deliver you to that boat. You are not going to stay another night here".*

*That made me relaxes a little more. We came down the hill in a hurry to go on the boat. We had just arrived here, and we wanted to get out of that territory. We were almost 200 yards from the boat when someone from the back hollered to stop. He said. "Stop and don't go farther"*

*The blood rushed into my head and I said. "What now?"*

*"OK everybody" he said, "back to the village and that castle where we were a few days ago. They have information that a big division of guerrillas is heading this way, maybe passing through, and for support we want that boat with the heavy guns to be around here in case we need it".*

*"That's OK if we go inside it?"*

*"But you are more valuable here to throw grenades or fire machine guns. They have orders to postpone the departure of that boat for tonight at least."*

*I looked at my friend Tony with some disappointment and said. "I guess our ordeal in not over yet".*

*When we went back in the building, the captain said with a smile, "Welcome back my boys. How could this fort put a fight without you? Be careful this time and aim at some different targets and leave those houses alone".*

*I don't care about jokes and being teased. I really didn't want to spend another night in this area. We didn't have any other choice, of course.*

*I faked a smile to the captain and said. "What do you expect from us, better fighters? 'Everybody is needed here" he said. "We need all the hands we can get".*

*It got dark very quickly. It was almost 11.30 and nobody went to bed yet. I knew the fighting rooms and the beds were upstairs, so I took my classmate Tony and the guy who had been with me that night loading the cartridges. We lay down on those wooden beds with our eyes open thinking and talking. An hour or two passed and I had fallen asleep. I hadn't heard anything when my friend Tony started shaking me. He was excited. "Nick, get up, they are here, and they are coming"*

*I said "Who, who is coming?" I was half asleep. I thought I was dreaming or something. I woke up and saw two guys walking through that door with machine guns in their hands. My heart almost busted. I was half asleep and I thought they were guerrillas. I calmed down when I saw them taking their positions in the narrow opening of those windows and start shooting.*

*I thought I was dreaming. Seeing this situation; one of them said. "Hey, you guys, what are you waiting for a special invitation? this time I'm afraid there are plenty of guerrillas out there, and if they decide for one reason or another to take this place, it's like cake for them. The information we had from spies earlier is that there are probably about 300 of them, maybe more. We don't stand a chance with 25 guys who are here to hold that place. We hope they have a different destination and different plans and are only passing by".*

*This time I took a different window. My classmate was loading, and I was shooting. We had plenty of ammunitions. Besides the ammunition we had four or five big buckets of grenades, and because we now had a little experience about how to throw them from the previous night, we volunteered for it. There was one big open area from which we could throw the grenades more easily. One of the guys said. "Now watch out with those grenades, OK? Do not throw them out of the window because our men are underneath. So throw them as far as you can".*

*We didn't know what was happening downstairs where most of the men were. We heard loud voices and swearing and they ordered us to come down to give them some help. They had some wounded, and I did not find out until morning that we had two dead men in the yard..*

*Boy I was glad that night was over. I hope that they would finally decide to evacuate us from that hornet's nest, that non they gave us the OK to board the ship. This was a battleship with two big guns and two machineguns. It was not sailing too far from the shore like it was looking for trouble. In case it went by the hills where the guerrillas were, it was always alert for retaliation. The trip was close to two hours. With no trouble, we arrived at the port of the big town named Stavros. We knew we would be safe here. Imagine, in no time we would be back home.*

*I can't even explain those wonderful feelings which we had those last few days. It seemed like we had been separated from our families for so many years. And it was only a couple of months. But what months-through; in and out of hell:*

*Since the town was big and they did not want to lose us, they put us in houses of some well-trusted people because even though we were in big city, there were still many well-dressed guerrillas on the loose in the towns spying, collaborating and even abducting people in front of the very eyes of the police and army.*

*They told us to have our eyes wide open and be careful with whom we talked and associated. "Be extra careful if you guys don't want to find yourselves on the mountain again; they have many spies in the town"*

*Here I thought for a while we would have some peace of mind but we have to be suspicious of everybody. Since one Greek looks just like another, how do you know who they are? As I said previously; in a civil war in many instances, brother was against brother, so we could not trust anybody. It would not be easy; here we had to deal with enemy all around us. I started thinking that all that was true. There were a lot of spies around, and I wouldn't be safe any place in Greece*

*I remember when I was home for a month I could not sleep half the night thinking that somebody was just around the corner all the time.*

*The host of the house where we went for that night was really a nice old couple. They lost one son just at the beginning of the German war and they lost a second son in the civil war, he was serving in the air force. I and my friend were sitting at the dining room table for dinner when the old lady started crying and saying. "I wish my sons were here now, please go home and make your parents happy".*

*"Yeas" we said. "We intend to do that as soon as possible".*

*After two days the order came. They put us on one of the big trucks and with a convoy, a lot of army trucks started to move north. The destination was the city of Salonica that would be our last stop.*

*After a little interrogation we would be free to go home, or for our folks to pick us up. Now we had another problem. From this town to Salonica was a four-five hour drive and we had to pass many dangerous areas. The worst problem was mines on the roads. Since the road was mostly gravel and dirt, it was easy to put mines in them. They had a mine detector, but because they wanted to go fast they were just looking for whatever the driver could see with his eyes—fresh—dug—dirt but they were hardly ever using the detector. The worst part was that our truck was the first to follow the truck that was looking for the mines. I realized that we were well guarded in the truck, but the reason was that half of the people in it were real communists' guerrillas who had been captured. Now I understand why our truck was first. There was an easy explanation. In case there was a mine on the road, we would be blown to smithereens. In other words, it was the same case as when the guerrillas put us in the front the ambush.*

*As far as they knew we were all guerrillas. I guess they even didn't know we were abducted innocents. The fact was that we were all mixed up in the truck. I was standing and watching ahead. I saw them slow down. This little truck right in front of us suddenly stopped, so our truck stopped also, a distance of more than 30 feet behind it. I guess they saw a mine in the ground and one of them tried to put a mark so our driver would see it and go around it. He told his driver to pull ahead a little more, and then there was this big explosion. The little truck thrown away from the road; the driver and two other were killed and the guy who was out to put the mark for the first mine was badly injured. I didn't know what was next.*

*The captain was all nervous and got in the jeep behind us and drove by to see the situation. they loaded the dead o the jeep and right away gave orders to our truck driver to start moving on.*

*I'll tell you. For the rest of the trip me and Tony had our eyes closed because we knew we were the first truck and there was nobody in the front to clear anything. The driver of our truck must have had lots of guts. He was just an enlisted man in the army and now he became bait, too. But someone had to drive the truck.*

*When we arrived outside of Salonica, I couldn't believe we made it. It was afternoon when we entered the city, I knew every street, every park, every building in the city since I was a little kid. I had come here many times from my village. Later on I came for the theater, for shows for dates and entertainment. Now everything was familiar. I could recognize almost every building. I tried to explain enthusiastically to my friend and classmate because he was not from that area and he didn't know too much about the city. He jokingly told me. "I hope Nick you know somebody around here"*

*I said to him. "Don't worry my friend, you made it; I have the nicest feeling our ordeal is over".*

*"Yes but I heard this story before". He said to me.*

*I said to him. "Now have confidence, trust me, in mater of hours you are going to think it was a dream".*

*When we were in the center of the town, I was looking from the truck and I could see the same people watching us, booing and some were sympathetic. I was looking into the crowd thinking maybe I would recognize someone; many people came there from my village because it is close by.*

*We arrived at the headquarters of this big police station. As we were coming down off the truck guards were all around us, in other words we were prisoners, too together with the ones they captured.*

*In the beginning of the interrogation they put us in a big prisonlike room. It did not take long before I shouted to see some official. When the official came with some madness in his eyes he asked me what I wanted.*

*With a sharp voice I said to him. "I and my classmate were locked with others in this big cell.*

*The policeman looked at me surprised and said. "Who are you?" "we are two of the students who were abducted from the American Farm School a couple of months ago".*

*He said "Wait" and rushed upstairs to see his superior. A few minutes later both came back with some other police officers and started cussing out the officer responsible for putting us in with the others by mistake.*

*"Get them out of here" he said and they transferred us upstairs to a better room; but we were not yet free. There was some paperwork had to be done and some questions to be asked and all that.*

*The superior officer called our American Farm School director Mr. House right away.*

*In half an hour both the director and his wife Anna were there. As soon as the saw us they embraced us and tears came to their eyes. Even though both were Americans they could speak very good Greek and they told us they had a lot of hope that we would come back safe someday. "Our prayers were with you all the time". They said. They had been like father and mother to us for four years because we lived in the school and we were very close like a family,*

*They came with their jeep and another student. They brought us a big box full of sweets we shared with the others. "Don't worry, tonight you're going home. We will bring your parents from the village".*

*My village was only four miles from Salonica. For Tony who was from the island of Rhodes, it was difficult at that moment, he would have to wait and see his folks later. He was going back to the American Farm School to stay for a while.*

*Only my dad could come that afternoon because of space in the Jeep.*

*I never saw my dad in tears before; even when he lost his mother. He could not put two words together. Emotions choked him up. He said he ordered a catered dinner from the best restaurant and in a few minutes it would be delivered to us. "If you guys want anything else, tell me, in a couple hours I'll be back with a car or taxi to pick you up. In the meantime you enjoy your dinner."*

*Ten minutes had not passed and there was a special delivery of all that gourmet food with the trimmings and dessert. They set up a table for us. Now I and my friend Tony were left in this room alone with all this gourmet food. He looked at me and he did not know what to say. I said to him. "What are you waiting for?. Let's dive in!."*

*He said. "How do you start eating this kind of food? I forgot"*

*I said. "Start from the beginning of the table and be sure not to miss anything and don't talk until we finish, my dad will be disappointed if there are leftovers"*

*"You got to be kidding. How are we going to eat so much food?"*

*"Here's brother, you eat yours and I'll eat mine. Don't expect any help".*

*When we finished we leaned back on the chairs, stuffed. I didn't finish mine and I didn't ask him to either. We were trying to digest all the food.*

*That day was almost over. After of couple of hours the called us down to the office to make a report about what happened and how come we could not escape sooner with the others and all the details, they asked us questions like they wanted to find some errors in our story or something. In later years this very report that they made about me affected my army career, but that's another story.*

*Now we were free to go home. An official came from the school to pick up Tony. At the same time my dad came with a friend's car to pick me up. It was dark when we went through the city and we could see all the lights and the open stores on the way back to my village.*

*My dad told me that for two or three weeks they were looking for me like crazy. We looked in all those hills and villages that you had to cross when they abducted you. We couldn't find any evidence of where you were. We didn't know if you were dead or alive, I saw many students and your friends that escaped. From the beginning I said to myself. "He will probably escape with the others".*

*Your mother and sisters and brothers and all your friends and uncles were asking me how come you didn't escape and they were sad about it. But somehow all of us had hope. We did not want to believe that something might have happened to you". He stopped talking again and hid his emotions. We entered the village and my heart was beating faster. My dad said, "Everybody you know is at our house. They are waiting for you.*

*As soon as I walked into the living room I saw two rooms packed full of relatives and close friends. First came my mother with a big hug and tears in her eyes. She could hardly say anything. Words would not come out from her mouth. My sisters and brothers embraced each other in a big bundle. I was still wearing that big army coat which I had*



*from the beginning of my adventure. My mother said. "Take that coat off, it stinks, we have a big pot of water boiling already and Maritz is ready to take over."*

*This woman was an old neighbor lady and if I remember from my younger years she was the one who was a specialist in scrubbing accumulated dirt. And if you weren't washing yourself good your mother would say. "I'm going to call Maritz to come to wash you". When she washed you, you thought your skin was coming off.*

*But my mother was teasing me as she knew that I was a pretty dirty boy after all those days with the guerrillas. I sat for a while so everybody had a chance to look at me. Some friends were trying to tease me saying that they heard the good news from a beautiful girl. My mother said the same thing, and they were laughing and trying to convince my mother and dad not to let go that girl. They said it was destiny for that girl to bump into their son in the mountains and personally bring them the good news that he was alive and safe.*

*I let them talk and went to the other room where the tub was with plenty of hot water. I jumped in and relaxed for the rest of the night. Peacefully resting on the couch the next day in the warmth of the very house in the very room where I was born.*

*I explained my adventures to visitors, relatives and friends. They wanted to know everything in detail. I repeated my story so many times.*

*Then one day while everything was still fresh in my mind, I decided to write this true adventure. But my story is really small compared to the thousands of Greeks who lost their lives for freedom. So the sadness, the grief and the agony were gone from the house. Joy and serenity were again present. How many parents are still waiting for their loved ones to come home safely and never give up because they have hope? Wouldn't it be something if a person knew what was at the very end? He'd probably write himself.*

*After all those hardships and adventures when I found my strength again I returned to my school to join all my classmates and teachers to finish my studies in agriculture and to graduate a few months later in 1949.*



*1949. After the graduation I traveled to Athens to meet my good friends Foti (left and Tasso (right) who were serving in the Engineering School of National Army to tell them my story and adventure with the guerrillas. Here on the Hill of Likavitos with thy Olympic stadium on the background*



*1948. Here at the Schools cemetery the student of American Farm School and the Girls School of Quakers in a memorial service for the founder of the School John Henry House. In the middle: the directors of American Farm School Mrs. Anne House and husband Charlie House and on left the directors of the Girls School Mrs. Joyce Loch (Australian) and right Mr. Sidney Loch (Scotch). All these magnificent people spent most of their years in Greece helping young boys and girls to establish a better life in their villages Mrs. Loch died on Thursday October 7, 1982 in Ouranoupoli of Khalkidhiki at the age of 94*



*Graduation day Dec. 1949: Despite the ordeal and adventures of our abduction by the communists guerrillas, all students here with the directors Mr. & Mrs. Charlie and Anne House and dedicating teacher celebrating this great event. I am third from left in the middle row*

*Having no English education or background I tried to translate my story and express my feeling the best I could. Many words lose their meaning in the translation. After thirty years in America, I still miss the place where I was born. By translating this story I relived those good years but also the bitter years of the war which I will never forget. With my own eyes I saw the misery o human faces in those ten years of war..*

*Thirty years ago I discovered America and in it my wife. I became a citizen and gave my oath to defend the freedom and peace of this country. I taught my children their roots and heritage and most of all to love and appreciate America.*

*I hope I have done just that in my life*

*For thousands of years the human race has been fighting wars. The survivors write the history, and the following generation starts the wars again. War or peace for you is in what part of the world you are living at a given time.*

**THE END**