

TASOS SAKELLAROPOULOS

Paddy, Michalis, Filedem

The Second World War completely changed the nature of conflict between the Great Powers. The main difference was the development of the phenomenon of resistance as the continuation of war away from the main frontlines. This was carried out by resistance organisations that, operating either in the form of wide-reaching forms of social mobilisation or as small bands, continued to fight either in secret or in the open behind the occupiers' lines.

The strategy of resistance was set up formally and supported by the British secret services as soon as the country's main forces had withdrawn from continental Europe in 1940. It had two aims. One was the cultivation of a state of insecurity, along with the greatest possible tying-down of Axis forces inside occupied territory, far from major military operations. A subsequent aim was the raising of morale and the cultivation of high levels of patriotism in conquered peoples.

The implementation of these plans at ground level in every occupied country was undertaken by young British service personnel who combined training in raiding techniques with knowledge of each country's peculiarities as well as, in some cases, experience of the specific cultures.

Patrick Leigh Fermor was one such case when he became involved in occupied Crete. Cosmopolitan and multilingual, he possessed a deep knowledge and, in particular, a heightened perception of both the underlying morale in Greece and the state of mind of the population. He threw himself into establishing intelligence networks as well as enabling the communication by wireless of military information to Allied headquarters in the Middle East. At the same time he ensured that the small number of British agents in Crete were bound in friendship with the local population, even though the fighting was continuous. He had the ability to achieve trust and respect, by displaying bravery as well as great appreciation of the social codes and values that were prevalent in the island's small mountain communities. Alpine life, the shades of night, the tiny chapels, the shepherds and their small round houses, and the tradition of bearing arms - all these constructed a world that was the backdrop to Allied action, both for Leigh Fermor and the Cretans who worked with him.

The defining moment that linked his individual activities with the Cretan resistance was the planning and execution of the kidnap of the military governor of the island, General Kreipe, in the spring of 1944. The prisoner and his escort, which consisted of Cretan partisans and British agents and soldiers, moved across the island for forty days from northern to southern coasts, eventually embarking from there to the Allied-occupied Middle East. The column's whereabouts remained unknown to the Germans, even though it often moved openly through villages. The mission required full cooperation between the various allies and sent out a strong message that had both practical and symbolic characteristics. On the one hand it substantially reduced the German army's authority, and on the other it proved that courage, mutual trust and patriotism are the root causes of wartime camaraderie.