Clarion Review

Autobiography & Memoir

I Was Trained to Be a Spy: Book II
Helias Doundoulakis
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Four Stars (out of Five)

The Greatest Generation is fading away, and there are very few among those left who had as adventurous an experience as Helias Doundoulakis.

Born in the United States to Greek immigrant parents, Doundoulakis grew up on the Greek island of Crete. There he watched the Nazi Fallschirmjager (the Wehrmacht elite paratroopers) invade the idyllic Mediterranean island. Doundoulakis and his older brother George soon joined the resistance against the Nazis.

Helias and George were active in the Crete resistance, but because they were conversant in both Greek, English, and bits of other languages, the brothers were soon recognized as valuable assets in the war against the Axis. The brothers aided Allied efforts on Crete, working with the Special Operations Executive (SOE) of the English Intelligence Service. That work was clandestine. If they had been discovered and captured, the brothers and their compatriots, friends, and family members would have likely been subjected to the inhuman cruelties of the Nazis.

The brothers were soon offered the opportunity to join the English Intelligence Service. However, Helias and George quickly learned they could join the United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS), “Wild Bill” Donovan’s behind-the-lines action group. In fact, because of their language skills and experience, they were enrolled directly into the OSS without undergoing US Army basic training.

After training at Cairo, Egypt, the author was inserted with a Greek naval intelligence officer to work on mainland Greece. Doundoulakis landed at night armed with a pistol, a few gold coins, and a radio secreted in a large can of olive oil. His job was to live undercover as a local trader and relay intelligence information gathered by partisans. After Allied nations invaded the European continent and transfers of large units of Axis troops began from rear areas

to the fronts, the information became vital. In one instance, through the Greek girlfriend of a German lieutenant, Doundoulakis relayed word that thousands of Nazis were being marshaled in a railroad yard. The resulting air strike was devastating. It was one time he saw the result of his spy craft, and it unsettled him.

"I said to them, 'If their estimates were right, my message cost the lives of three thousand people, soldiers and civilians! How can I be proud of that?'"

Doundoulakis offers his story in clear, concise prose, albeit with a few minor grammatical errors. The narrative is almost wholly exposition. That said, the understatement of the stark drama and danger make the straightforward storytelling all the more powerful. The author gives due credit to his fellow warriors and to the Allied officers who trained and led them. He is also clear regarding the sacrifices made by Greek citizens.

The author served with distinction and courage behind the lines. As the war wound down, he returned to the US, had a few boring assignments as the massive armed forces were demobilized, and then went on to earn university degrees and carry out a distinguished career as an engineer.

A spectacular tale of courage, enterprise, and stealth in a forgotten corner of the war against tyranny, *I Was Trained to Be a Spy* is a worthy addition to a twentieth-century history buff's library.

Gary Presley