

FIELD

Memo to Ambassador Riddleberger

21 March 1958

Mr. []

Possible Re-emergence of the Polk Case.

Complete background of case

An American newspaperman of allegedly possible leftist orientation, now being checked, arrived recently in Athens and has been reportedly actively investigating the George Polk murder case. The objectives of his investigation are not yet known. Since they may mean a new press expose of the case, possibly designed to serve Communist propaganda objectives, a short summary of some of the significant aspects of the case is forwarded herewith for your information.

Traces []

See at A+B

(b) (1)
(b) (3)

*(b)(1)
(b)(3)
5*

33

[]

21 March 1958

The George Polk Murder Case

George Polk, a CBS reporter and radio commentator in Athens, flew to Salonika on 8 May 1948 as a first step toward trying to visit the mountain headquarters of KKE guerrilla leader Markos Vafiades and interview the latter. He left his wife Rea, a Greek girl from Alexandria behind in Athens. Although Polk was anti-communist, in his writings he had been somewhat critical of the Greek government and its way of handling certain problems. About three days after Polk's arrival in Salonika, he disappeared. About four days later his identity card and membership card in the U.S. Naval Reserve were delivered by mail to Greek police headquarters in the city, without any note of explanation. Two days after this Polk's body was found floating in the sea near the U.S. Consulate area. He had been shot behind the left ear and his wrists and ankles had been bound together with lengths of coarse rope.

The KKE radio soon thereafter charged that Polk had been murdered by "agents of the Fascist government of Greece" because of his criticisms and as an object lesson to others. This charge somehow spread from the Communist press to many non-Communist publications, and became a major propaganda item in the West. By the end of May the Communists were also charging that the Greek government had acted at the behest of American Intelligence Officers in Greece.

Security Office of the U.S. Mission
 Frederick Ayer, meanwhile had received reports in early May, before the Polk murder, from an informant network that the KKE murder on 30 April 1948 of Minister of Justice Christos Ladas, responsibility would be followed soon by another high-level assassination. The KKE radio had boasted of KKE responsibility for the Ladas murder. The informants stated that this next one was to be handled differently propaganda-wise. Since the Ladas murder had backfired, the new Party line was to be that the next murder had been committed by rightist elements of the Greek government who would then try to blame it on the Communists.

U.S.
 Secretary of State George Marshall directed Ayer to act as over-all coordinator for the investigation. After this a Greek government order was issued making Salonika Gendarmerie Major Nicholas Mouschountis the top police officer responsible for the investigation. In the search for the contact man whom Polk would have had to meet to begin his journey to Markos, the police investigation led to an English-speaking Greek newspaperman in Salonika, Gregory Staktopoulos.

On the basis of Staktopoulos' admissions, he was brought to trial and

(b)(1)
 (b)(3)

(b)(1)
(b)(3) S

- 2 -

sentenced to a long prison term. The two KKE Central Committee members were tried and found guilty in absentia.

Neither Adam Kouzenidis nor Evangelos Vasvanas ever were imprisoned. Although the KKE radio falsely announced the former's death in an RCAF air raid in 1948, he reportedly remained an active KKE Central Committee member until December 1953. Vasvanas, s/o John and Mary, born 1914 in Tsaritsani, Ellassona, reportedly remained an active alternate KKE Central Committee member until December 1953. In 1955 he was reported as having been dropped from membership in the KKE and as working as a laborer in Rumania.

Ayer has written that he believes that Polk's close friend in Athens, Konstantinos HATZIARGYRIS, (Attachment A), who was in close contact with Polk prior to Polk's trip to Salonika, was the unidentified individual in Athens who had helped set the affair up for the KKE. (Hatzargyris is a leftist English-speaking correspondent). Both Ayer and Mouschoutis also strongly believed that Polk's wife, Bea, had not told all she knew.

- 3 -

[Mrs. Polk has been residing since July 1957 with her sister, Elena Vasdeki, at 51 Pavlou Mila Street, Kifissia.]

[Some other analysts have believed on the basis of possible contradictions in the evidence, that the decision to murder Polk was made after he was contacted by the KKE in Salonika, for a number of possible reasons, and that thereafter the KKE sought to achieve maximum propaganda advantage therefrom.]

The case has flared periodically into the limelight since then as new newspaper or other exposes are written and publicized in Greece and elsewhere. In April 1953, in one of these recurrent exposes, a series of 12 articles appeared in Apogevmatini written by Vassos Tsimbidares. These were noteworthy for attributing complicity in the case to Randall Coates, a Press Attache in the British Consulate in Salonika at the time of the Polk murder. The implication was made that the murder may have been designed to spoil Greek-American relations to the benefit of the British. It is also implied that Konstantine Hatzargyris, Polk's close friend in Athens, may have also been a British agent. A significance aspect of this implied British culpability in the case is that it received subsequent Communist propaganda play.

The Greek official who probably knew most about the case, Mouschountis, died earlier this month while holding the rank of Gendarmerie Colonel and the position of Chief of the Salonika Police Directorate.

(b)(1)
(b)(3)S

Attachment AKonstantinos HATZIARGYRIS(b)(1)
(b)(3) 5

1. - Konstantinos HATZIARGYRIS, s/o Nicholas and Loukia, born circa 1915, is the step-son of the late former Prime Minister Themistocles Sofoulis. His wife Eileen, is English. He speaks French, English and German. He has been characterized as brilliant, hard and arrogant.

2. - In July 1937 he was sentenced to two years imprisonment for communist activities, after which he studied economics in England. He then worked for 3½ years for the BBC and is accused of having slanted information to favor ELAS and the KKE. He joined the Greek Navy in September 1943. [

After internment in Egypt until 1945, and a short stay in England, he became a correspondent in Greece for the Christian Science Monitor. The latter job lasted until 1955. He has also been employed at various times by a number of Greek newspapers; including positions as editor of Eleftheros Logos and Athinaiki, and contributor on foreign affairs to Ellenika Chronika. He was fired from his position with the first two papers in 1953 because of his leftist orientation.

3. - In his connection with the Polk case, he has been accused of being a crypto-Communist. He has been very pro-Communist and anti-American in his views but has denied being a Communist. He has admitted only to having been a follower of EAM from 1943 to 1945.

4. - In 1946 he reportedly visited Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia.

5. - In early 1954 he reportedly tried to persuade George Kartalis, DKEL head, to cooperate with EDA on a permanent basis. In late January 1956 he was seen in Rotterdam in the company of Greek communist seamen who are active there. He is now in London as correspondent there of Ethnos.

Attachment BAdam MOUZENIDIS

Adam MOUZENIDIS, (aka Evripis, Sanpsarelos, and Christos Karpos), s/o John (or Joachim) and Chrysavgi, born in Pontos, arrived in Greece in 1924 at Salonika. He joined the KKE in 1926, was imprisoned from 1936 to 1943 for Communist activities. After his escape in 1943 he resumed his KKE activities, which culminated in his participation, while in Salonika, in the Folk murder.

All info on ed.

(b)(1)
(b)(3) S

[

]