

MACEDONIA'S HEROIC STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

System of Operation Adopted by the Revolutionary Bands.

Turkish Soldiers Fear Them and Avoid Engagements—Women Fighters as Brave as the Men.

The insurgent bands in Macedonia are in organization and method of operation developed from the system used in Bulgaria before Bulgaria became free. At that time the bands were formed in Roumania and used Roumania as their base. The traditions of the leaders of those old Bulgarian bands are celebrated in song and story, and many of the chiefs after Bulgaria became free occupied important posts in the administration of the new country.

The life of an insurgent is one of the greatest hardship. He often goes days without food, seldom spends the night twice in the same place, and, of course, is in perpetual danger. Before joining a band the insurgent takes oath never to surrender. The conduct and the membership of the bands are practically entirely in the hands of young men. There are, however, several known women among them. The most celebrated is Ekaterina Arnaudova. She is said to be one of the best shots in the Balkans, and there are many stories of her prowess. There are also many former schoolmasters among the insurgents. While I was in Bulgaria a former schoolmaster and his fiancée were both killed while fighting with one of the bands.

The Macedonians were nearly freed from the Turk at the end of the Russo-Turkish war in '78. Knowing this, and seeing the great prosperity of their kinsmen in Bulgaria, they have never ceased their struggle to obtain the same position. The movement began to be particularly strong in the early part of the nineties, and received a great impetus in 1895, owing to the interest that Prince Ferdinand then took in their affairs. At that time Bulgarian officers, Sarafoff among the number, first seriously attempted to raise an insurrection. This, however, was easily stifled by the Turkish soldiers.

However, the revolutionary propaganda made great headway among the younger generation in Macedonia, who became greatly interested in the work for future freedom. Rifles were obtained and military exercises started in the villages. But for some time a central organization was not worked out, or rather there were several conflicting small organizations. In a few years, however, one current became dominant, the one having for leaders Delcheff, (since killed,) Grooyeff, now chief of the Mraastir staff; Gyorcho Petroff, and Tatarcheff, the foreign representative. They took for their motto the words of Gladstone, "Macedonia for the Macedonians." They differentiated themselves from the Bulgarians and the Macedonians living in Bulgaria, who formed the old committees with headquarters at Sofia.

After some struggle the Bulgarian committees were obliged to take the secondary rôle of gathering money and representing the movement before Europe. At the same time the internal committee of the Macedonians had to contend with discordant elements, but finally came into entire control. It then began to perfect its organization and to systematize the levying of taxes, finally monopolizing the cause of liberation of Macedonia.

Meanwhile the committee at Sofia, very moderate in tone, was gradually losing its influence, and was at last obliged to give way to a new and more radical policy. Sarafoff took the lead, and the committee assented to his policy of terroristic activity by the internal organization. But this, of course, soon made the official existence of the Sofia committee impossible. Sarafoff's course was too severe, and he was obliged to give up the Presidency. The power fell into the hands of Gen. Tsoncheff, whose movements were supposed to be inspired by Prince Ferdinand. Sarafoff went to Macedonia, where he has since taken an active part as leader of one of the bands.

Gen. Tsoncheff began propaganda for an immediate revolution in Macedonia. That started a new and bitter strife not only between the internal committees and the Sofia committees, but among the insurrectionists themselves, and many of the most important and influential leaders inside Macedonia fell into the hands of the Turks. Gen. Tsoncheff, however, decided to force the situation, and, although the results showed that the organization was not in shape to proceed on the best lines, it also showed that the elements were too many and too powerful to be stopped after the movement had once gotten under way.

Then the internal organization after some hesitation decided to co-operate with Tsoncheff, and he on the other hand agreed to acknowledge the leadership of the internal committee. The whole region of insurrection had already been divided into circuits, and the members of the internal committee who survived divided among themselves the leadership of these circuits. To preserve unity of operation they held monthly meetings where the whole movement was discussed and the programme adopted by a majority vote. Communication among the bands in action was also well established. Their headquarters in the mountains are practically inaccessible to Turkish troops, and at the present time they are well equipped with arms and ammunition.

The Turkish army holds the insurrectionists in great awe, and never seriously seeks an engagement with them. The whole force of the Askar, or regular Turkish soldiers, as well as that of the Bashi-Bazouks, or irregulars, is thrown on the defenseless population of the villages.

Something of the spirit which animates these people can be shown by the following incident, which occurred after I had left Bulgaria. In the same compartment with me was traveling a young man, possibly twenty-five or twenty-six years old. We engaged in conversation, and when he learned that I was interested in the Macedonian movement, he told his own story in the calmest kind of a way. He said:

"I am a Macedonian engineer. My father, mother, two brothers, and two sisters were killed by the Turkish soldiers, and so that all there is left for me to do is to fight as long as I can stand up. I have seven wounds, which I have not had time to have attended to. One in my knee is very serious and bothers me a great deal. I am out of Macedonia to get cartridges and dynamite for the band, but I am anxious to get back and begin fighting again as soon as I can. I may have a chance to have a surgeon examine the wound in my knee, but I have no time to give to it, as I want to return to the fighting as soon as possible."

This is only one story of countless that I heard when down there, but it is quite a typical one. The demands of the insurrectionists are, however, very moderate. They offer no programme, but say that they will lay down their arms as soon as a method is found for protecting life and property in Macedonia. But it must be a real method, and no paper reform will answer. They

are going to keep right on fighting until this is obtained beyond all question.

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