



When at the end of World War II the Germans and Italians left Greece, the communists immediately asserted power. This photo was taken in December 1944, two weeks before the Greek Civil War began. (AFP via Getty Images)

BOOKS

Book Review: ‘The Wild and Twisted Branch’

Surviving communism through courage and kindness

BY [GEORGE E. KONTIS](#) TIME [SEPTEMBER 20, 2020](#) [PRINT](#)

“The Wild and Twisted Branch” is a factual account of Stavros Metropoulos, a farmer and businessman who endured the German and Italian occupation of Greece in World War II followed by the Greek Civil War against indigenous communists. The author is the only son of Metropoulos.

From the time he was a youngster, Metropoulos was wise beyond his years, arguing with his father until he was permitted to attend high school. As one of the few in his village who were educated, he operated two successful businesses that supplemented the income of the family farm. Greek farmers were enjoying newfound prosperity under Gen. Ioannis Metaxas—a dictator who received support from the reigning King George. Metaxas decreed that farmers would now receive world prices for their crops. He also dealt with a rising political and economic threat by imprisoning leaders of the communist party, KKE.

In 1941, everything changed when the Germans and Italians invaded. Travel was restricted, and food became scarce. Respected as a village leader, Metropoulos was approached to join a resistance movement. He recruited new members and attended several meetings until resistance leaders explained that the group must now refer to each other as “comrade” and that soon the word “king” would be removed from the dictionary. Metropoulos recognized the use of the word “comrade” and abhorrence of the king as actions only the communists would promote. Metropoulos was overheard voicing concerns that the organization, National Liberation Front (EAM, for the Greek acronym), was being taken over by the communists. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to resign.

The communists took advantage of the German and Italian occupation and became firmly entrenched in every village with their own police, judges, courts, and detention camps, silencing dissent with beatings and executions. The Germans and Italians were so preoccupied with fighting the Allies that they turned a blind eye to communist activities unless they themselves were threatened.

Following his eviction from EAM, Metropoulos made every attempt to find common ground with the communists, but it would always end in betrayal. Metropoulos tells us, “Never trust the word of a communist.”

After learning he would soon be tried by their courts and face certain execution, he became a fugitive. At first he sought refuge on a barren mountain, using hunting and survival skills, at which he excelled. He had no money or travel papers but moved about with the help of friends, who provided food and shelter. He always carried at least two German hand grenades, one for the enemy and one for himself.

Practically every survival skill he had learned, every kindness, and each good deed or fair dealing he had done in life would daily play a significant role in keeping him alive.

When the Germans and Italians left abruptly, the political vacuum was quickly filled by the communists. A civil war began between the communists and those loyal Greeks seeking the return of the king. The communist indoctrination was so powerful; family members were pitted against each other in deadly struggles without regard to family ties, logic, reason, or civility.

Still on the run, Metropoulos tried to hide in Athens but the communists were in hot pursuit. Standing on a street corner, with no food or a place to stay, he was at a loss for what to do next when someone called out to him. It was a doctor who had taken refuge in his home during the 1941 famine.

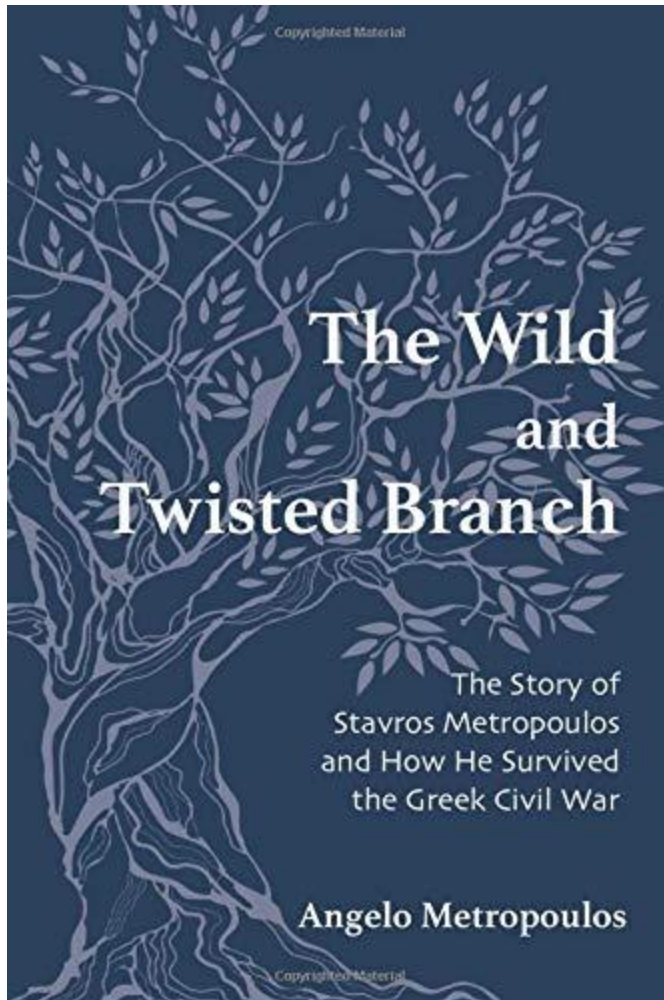
The doctor invited Metropoulos to stay with him, but Metropoulos refused: “If they find me, they will kill me and they will kill you too, and your family.”

The doctor answered: “You once saved my life. ... You are coming with me. Whatever happens to you will happen to me.”

In later years, Metropoulos explained: “You see, when you do someone a kindness, at some point in your life you will find that kindness returned.” Through it all, Metropoulos never lost his faith, believing a greater power guided his good fortune.

The author, Angelo Metropoulos, used his father’s memoirs and interviews to get an accurate accounting of incidents and made several trips to Greece to authenticate facts. He relates the story from Metropoulos’s viewpoint, taking it on a straight chronological path from the time just before the Italian and German occupation in World War II through the Greek Civil War until he and his family immigrated to America.

This book is an exciting, action-packed account that many reviewers agree would make a great movie. It is a must-read for history buffs and those who might see these events as a chilling insight into today’s world. You will likely stumble over the lengthy Greek names, but by the end of the book, you’ll wish you’d had Metropoulos as a best friend and be firmly convinced the author found the perfect title in “The Wild and Twisted Branch.”



“The Wild and Twisted Branch” by Angelo

Metropoulos.

[‘The Wild and Twisted Branch’](#)

Angelo Metropoulos

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George E. Kontis held engineering and senior management positions in companies supporting the defense industry. He was awarded the George M. Chinn award for his contributions to the field of small arms and currently works as a consultant and freelance author.