

Rodney Young's Other Career

BY SUSAN HEUCK ALLEN

Mussolini's invasion of Greece on October 28, 1940 prompted American archaeologists excavating there to act. Rodney Young, a recent Ph.D. who had been digging on a mountain slope overlooking Athens, drove an ambulance for the Greek Red Cross. He supplied first aid stations and picked up wounded soldiers from the Greek campaign, which had pushed the Italians back into Albania and scored the first land victory of the Allies in Europe in WWII.

Critically wounded during an air strike, Young survived thanks to a pair of women from the Greek Red Cross who, during the German invasion of Greece, drove him to Athens in his own ambulance. After the Nazis occupied Greece in the summer of 1941, Young returned to the U.S. as part of a protracted diplomatic exchange.

At that moment, Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan was

organizing the United States' first global intelligence operation, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), predecessor of the CIA. After Pearl Harbor and the USA's entry into WWII, the OSS had to work quickly. They needed people who had lived in the countries where they would serve and who knew the needed languages, self-



starters who could work together as a team. Archaeologists were ideal. Young was asked to analyze Greece's military potential and economic and political status. Impressed by his insider knowledge, the OSS recruited him to lead its Secret Intelligence Branch on Greece in 1942, and he, in turn, recruited fellow archaeologists.

None among Young's recruits had ever conducted espionage. After medical screening, they trained at "The Farm," a sprawling estate in horse country 20 miles southeast of Washington, DC. For weeks they lived in limbo, attending lectures from dawn to midnight, followed by parties where they were constantly

ABOVE: This well-known photograph of Rodney Young at Gordion excavation "uniform" of jodhpurs and high leather boots, 1953. UPM image #101533.

PORTRAIT



ABOVE: Necmettin Bektöre, age 12, and Dorothy H. Cox, architect of the expedition, washing an amphora that she had just excavated at Gordion, 1951. Gordion Archive image #45986. *Photograph by Robert Stevens.* RIGHT: Rodney Young managed the Greek desk at the OSS in Cairo. *Courtesy National Archives, Record Group 226.*

observed. Instead of writing articles, they learned to report intelligence, identify U.S. and German military equipment, interpret psychological and police reports, recruit and handle field agents, write with invisible inks, and install “bugs” or listening devices. Instead of studying for ancient Greek sight translation exams, they crammed codes, communications, counterintelligence, and covert warfare. Along with drawing and interpreting maps, the archaeologists composed letters embedded with encrypted messages, using ciphers that they memorized in verse so as to be paper-free should they be caught. They learned to shoot a gun and engage in close combat. Finally, they embarked on missions.



OSS psychologists rated the archaeologists' ability to perform under stress. They recommended Young and Dorothy Cox, the architect at the Troy excavations, wholeheartedly. Young had already recommended Cox himself. Like the best spies, Cox did not draw attention to herself. Loyal, cooperative, and reliable, her work compared "favorably" with that of the top men. They worked well with her, accepted her as an equal, and respected her position and judgment. Other archaeologists appeared problematic: one was too concerned about what to do or say if caught; another, excessively secretive, seemed to broadcast that he was a spook. Even so, all were hired.

Initially, they planned to employ archaeology as their cover, but soon learned that its overuse by the British Army—they famously commissioned T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia) in WWI—rendered it a ticket to the firing squad. So they scrambled for postings as visiting professors, relief workers, and military or commercial attachés in that hotbed of spies, neutral Turkey.

Months after Rommel's assault on Egypt, Young set up the hub for the Greek Desk in Cairo. There, in 1943, Young conjured covert missions, such as "Oracle," "Phalanx," and "Pericles." Fellow archaeologists fanned out to Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, and Egypt. Those from the University of Cincinnati excavations at Troy, such as Jerry Sperling, Jack Caskey, and Dorothy Cox worked in the Turkish cities of Istanbul and Izmir. John Franklin "Pete" Daniel III (see photo

on page 73), an archeologist at Penn's excavations at Kourion (Cyprus) initially managed Cyprus from the dig house of Main Line Philadelphian George McFadden, who ferried spies from Alexandria to Cyprus on his schooner, *Samothrace*. Archaeologists from the Agora excavations in Athens, such as Sterling Dow, Virginia Grace, Margaret Crosby, Lucy Talcott, Alison Frantz, and Jim Oliver worked in Washington, DC, Cairo, Alexandria (Egypt), Athens, Istanbul, and Bari (Italy).

Together they gathered military intelligence to guide US Army Air Force bombing raids on Hitler's oilfields in Romania. They reported political intelligence on left wing guerrillas, an important corrective since royalist British intelligence favored returning an unwanted king to Greece. Meanwhile, they collected economic intelligence to guide postwar reconstruction. They delighted in "Operation Honeymoon," one of their dishier missions (recounted in *Classical Spies*), but mostly they itched to get back to excavating in Greece.

After the war, in December 1948, Pete Daniel—Penn Assistant Professor and Curator of the Mediterranean Section at the Museum—and Rodney Young traveled to Turkey and decided to excavate the site of Gordion. Tragically, Daniels



George McFadden, shown here at work at the Penn Museum, transported archaeologist-spies on his schooner, *Samothrace*. UPM image #48049

died that same month (see "From the Archives" in this issue). Rodney Young succeeded him at Gordion and at Penn. By Young's side at Gordion and also in Afghanistan was none other than Dorothy Cox. ●

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