

# THE HELLENIC VOICE

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**“I am going to give my life to defeat mercilessly the evil principles of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Franco. ... I have written my story thus far, and the remainder is for someone else to complete.”**

– Peter D. Lambros, age 17, in a high school English essay dated May 23, 1941

## MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

### A 1941 English essay reveals the heart of a Greek American hero

By **STEVE CROWE**  
*The Hellenic Voice*

Peter D. Lambros was the ultimate big brother, the oldest of five sons born to Greek immigrants Demetrios (Jim) and Panagoula Lambros of Ashtabula, Ohio.

He was the first to find his way through the maze of the public school system, speaking half-Greek, half-English, and the first to go off to war. All five brothers eventually served their country in the military, and four went on to have impressive careers.

In a high school English essay in May 1941 – six months before the bombing of Pearl Harbor – Peter told his life’s story with wit and candor, stories about his childhood foibles as well as his struggles to fit in socially at school.

From what he writes, it is clear that he is following news of the war in Europe, although he doesn’t speak about specific developments. In March the United States had enacted the Lend-Lease Act, promising to supply Britain with war material; on April 20 Greece had surrendered to Germany and by late May the Battle of Crete was under way. A family trip to Greece in 1934 had strengthened his ties to the country.

Although the United States would not enter World War II for six more months, Peter Lambros had no doubt where things were headed. At the end of the essay he expresses hope that he will one day be able to join the fight. “I am going to give my life to defeat mercilessly the evil principles of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Franco,” he writes. Then he adds a most prescient statement:

“I have written my story thus far, and the remainder is for someone else to complete.”

Peter Lambros died in a bombing mission over Austria on March 2, 1945, at the age of 21. For years, his cousin, Angelos Backus, who never even met Peter,



Airman Peter D. Lambros, above, fulfilled a dream of joining the war effort when he entered the Army Air Corps in 1943.

felt a burden to fulfill that request. Several weeks ago he sent a copy of the May 23, 1941, essay to The Hellenic Voice. It is printed here in its entirety, on next page...

But to merely print the essay would not have fulfilled Peter Lambros’ request, so, with Angelos Backus’ help we contacted his brothers Christ and Thomas to finish Peter’s story. With their help we hope we have accomplished just that task.

## The rest of the story

After graduating from high school in 1941, Peter entered Ohio State University as a pre-law student. He stayed there for two years and then left to join the Air Force in 1943. He was selected to go to navigator's school, but he feared he might miss the war, his brothers said, so instead he volunteered to be a tail gunner on a B24 bomber.

His first missions were out of England and then out of Venoza Air Base near Foggia, Italy.

With the Fifteenth Air Force, 485th bomb group, 829th squadron he flew on 30 missions, many over the Tyrolean Mountains in Austria, and was awarded five Air Medals and a Purple Heart.

He wrote often to his brother Alex, who was a combat infantryman with the Fifth Army. In one letter he wrote that he had flown over what looked like Alex's unit, his brother Christ related. "He said, 'Come over to my base and we'll get together and have some fun before we head for home.'"

Alex was able to get a three-day pass to visit his brother and arrived while Peter was still out on a mission. But the day was March 2, 1945, and Peter's plane never returned.

Thomas has researched what happened that day and this is what he found: Peter's plane was in a large formation of B24 bombers flying over the Tyrolean Mountains, about 80 miles northeast of Innsbruck, Austria, to attack the railway marshaling yards in the city of Linz, Austria. A plane in formation ahead of and above them lost a supercharger and drifted back to a position above and dangerously close to Lambros' plane, until the wings collided and both planes fell off to their right wing and tumbled to earth. The planes crashed. In all, 20 crewmen were killed; only the pilot of the other B24 managed to parachute to safety. Wreckage was found over a mile of terrain south of the villages of Walchsee and Kossen.

It is possible that Peter

parachuted, but he did not survive. Austrian citizens buried the bodies and the US Army later exhumed the remains and returned them to the United States. Peter's remains are buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. All four brothers and both parents were together for the ceremony in 1949.

"He was only 21 when he died," Thomas, now 79, said recently. "But he never really left us. After all these years he's still very much a part of us."

### The Family

Peter Lambros' four brothers all went on to have impressive careers:

**Alex Lambros** is a retired police captain of the Ashtabula, Ohio, Police Department. With the Fifth Army he fought at Anzio Beach and Monte Casino and was awarded a Purple Heart and four Bronze Stars.

**Gus Lambros** was in the Coast Guard patrolling for German U-boats during World War II and then transferred to the Navy. After law school he received a JAG commission in the Army and rose to the rank of major general in the Army Reserve. In his highest profile case, he successfully defended the National Guardsmen in the criminal trial related to the Kent State University shootings. (He was not involved in the civil trial.) He later went into private practice. He died in 1990.

**Christ Lambros** is a retired public school teacher and assistant principal in Erie,



Peter D. Lambros, left, he poses in his Ashtabula, Ohio, High School band uniform, and right, Sgt. Lambros poses in full uniform.



### Mystery Ring

Could this ring belong to Peter D. Lambros of Ashtabula, Ohio? The 14 karat gold ring was found in Walchsee, Austria, where the B24 bomber he was on crashed on March 2, 1945. The date on the side of the ring is "1941," the same year Lambros graduated from Ashtabula High School. Inside is an inscription, "HJ ULTRA," indicating it was manufactured by the Herf Jones Co., but Herf Jones has no records from before World War II. The 485th Bomb Group is trying to locate the family of crewman who owned the ring. Anyone with information can contact the 485th Bomb Group historian at [Info@485BG.org](mailto:Info@485BG.org).

Pa. He coached basketball for 40 years at Woodrow Wilson High School and today the basketball team's annual Most Valuable Player award is named in his honor. He served in the Army Reserve during the Korean War.

**Thomas Lambros** is a retired chief judge of the US District Court for the Northern District of Ohio (Cleveland, Toledo, Akron and Youngstown). Appointed by President Johnson in 1967, he was the first Greek American federal judge and at the time the youngest, at age 37. The federal building and courthouse in Youngstown, Ohio, is named after him in appreciation for his efforts to obtain congressional approval and funding. He was training as an artilleryman at Fort Sill, Okla., when World War II ended. He was assigned to the JAG Corps during the

Korean War.

Cousin **Angelos Backus** is the owner of a heating, ventilation and air conditioning equipment company in Maryland. He grew up in Vasta (Basta), Greece, hearing all about his American cousins, whose father came from his village. He was not yet born when the Lambros family visited the village. He immigrated to the United States at the age of 15. Years later he took a basketball team from St. Sophia Cathedral in Washington, D.C., to a Greek American tournament in Erie. While walking along a sidewalk he struck up a conversation with the tournament director, who happened to be Christ Lambros. The two men quickly discovered they were cousins.

# Sword of Democracy

By PETER DEMETRIOS  
LAMBROS

Ashtabula High School  
May 23, 1941



Peter  
Demetrios  
Lambros

On the side of a cypress dotted mountain in the Greek state of Arcadia lies the Peloponnesian village of Basta. Here my father was born. My mother came from a village, Geva, on the outskirts of Tripoli's in Tegea, 20 or 30 miles northeast of Basta. My father's race was a sturdy stock of tall and husky shepherds and warriors from the mountains. My grandfather fought in two wars against the Turks, 1870 and 1892. My father later fought the Turks during the Balkan War of 1912-1913. My Uncles Tom (Athanasios) and Christ (Christos) also fought the Germans and Italians in the present war. My Uncle Christ was a captain in the Medical Corps, and then was promoted to major of a machine gun battalion just before the German invasion, and Uncle Tom is a major in the King's Royal Guards. I am proud of my family's military record and I want to do my share in upholding honors.

My mother's ancestors were short and quiet people, given to the peaceful plains of Tegea and their rolling wheat farms. Greece is the land of my ancestors. I hope that someday I shall find that some great hero was my relative.

My father came to America early in the 1900s at the age of 15 in search of success in this land of opportunity. He worked as a waiter in many hotels from St. Paul to New York and settled down in Ashtabula, Ohio. Here he met and married my mother, who came to the United States in 1921.

It was a little before noon on Wednesday, October 23, 1923, as the city of Ashtabula was suffering the icy blast of the winter's first snowfall, when

another catastrophe struck the town. Petros Demetrios Lambros was born. I was later to be known as Peter Demetrios Lambros. I myself do not remember the event during the first few years of my life. However, I know (by what I have been told) that I was very destructive for my size. I cut my teeth on a new piano's keys – maybe that is the reason I like to brag about the strength of my teeth.

I also ruined a set of my father's new law books, and today I curse myself because there are only two volumes remaining. Another event of which my brother, Alex, and I are very proud is our falling out of the back of the porch swing and striking severe blows to the cement sidewalk with our heads. My mother also told me that I once fell with a milk bottle in my mouth, breaking my upper jaw. As I recall these events, I also consider myself strong enough to stop, barehanded, a German "Panzer" division.

I was four or five years old when I almost set fire to our house. It was about noon that day, and Alex and I had just finished cluttering up the living room floor with paper. My brother and I were ordered to clean up the floor and to put the paper in a few waste baskets which our mother had brought to us. This we did. As I went to the kitchen where we were to leave the baskets, I couldn't resist the blue flames in the gas stove. I took a piece of paper from the basket, ignited it and thrust it back into the basket with shrieks of delight. All of the baskets soon burst into flames, and as my startled mother, came rushing into the kitchen, the flames were licking the cupboard and the wallpaper. She quickly extinguished the arson with a few containers full of water. Alex and I were put to bed with a severe scolding and slapping.

This and other happenings are among my memories of preschool days. Ernest and Everett Ware, twins, who taught us how to thumb noses, threw

grasshoppers from their front porch to ours. Our neighbors to the east, the Russell's, once had a pile of red bricks, in their backyard with which my brother and I enjoyed building castles, bridges, with their daughter Elizabeth. I also remember the funny looking train on the tracks that run north and south about 50 yards from our house – an engine had exploded that afternoon, killing the engineer.

It was about a month before the stock market "crash" in 1929 that I started school in September at Chestnut Street School. To my first grade teacher, Miss Latimer, I spoke with a half-Greek, half-English accent. My parents had always spoken Greek at home, which accounts for my learning to speak Greek before knowing a word of English.

My school days at Chestnut Street are too insignificant to describe. However, I will mention that I was very quarrelsome with all of my classmates. When I got to the fifth grade, the boys had organized a "gang" led by Robert Nemitz, which consisted of Algie McEndee, Donald Gochneur, Floyd Allen, Edward Wood, and others. This "gang" was willfully and joyfully assisted by Bill Corbitt and "But Smith." They would mess up my "purty waves," as they called them, chase me all over the school grounds, and finally when I organized my "gang" by winning some of them over to my side and adding others, such as Cecil Debold and Thomas Johnson, the affair grew into a riot.

In the sixth grade, I lost all my friends to the other side. Miss Pollock, the principal and sixth grade teacher, appointed me "policeman." My job was to write on the blackboard the names of students who would talk or whisper while she was out of the room. Here I dealt my revenge, and the slightest word or noise from any student resulted in my writing his name on the blackboard. Truly, I was a strict disciplinarian. Students or parents would often wonder why,

during that month of my "regime," their children would come home an hour late.

However, on the day of school before Christmas vacation came the "great chase." Practically all of the sixth grade of Chestnut Street, boys and girls (nor was I lenient with girls), chased me all the way home, and I don't know to this day how I eluded them.

## Trip to Greece

In the spring of 1934, my mother often talked about a vacation. My brothers and I awaited anxiously for the developments. On Sunday, May 27, 1934, our house was a seething mass of trunks and suitcases.

We were going to Greece. The next morning, May 28, as other students were going to school, our family "piled" into a taxi which took us to New York Central Station. We took the 9:45 eastbound train for New York, and at 9:30 that night, we emerged from Grand Central Station into the world's greatest metropolis, New York City. I could write a 500-page book about the events which occurred between May 28 and October 7th of that year. Those were the four most exciting, interesting and pleasant months of my life.

During the week in New York City, we witnessed an immense Memorial Day Parade in which marched veterans of New York's 42<sup>nd</sup> "Rainbow Division," and that afternoon President Roosevelt reviewed the U.S. Navy's Atlantic battle fleet. That night we crowded down to the curb on famous Broadway to see the president drive by, waving his summer hat. Another delight was the spaghetti served in a Greek restaurant on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, which accounted for our long walk from the Penn Post Hotel every afternoon.

On Saturday, June 2, after considerable delay with passports and baggage, the Lambros caravan totaling seven in number, boarded the S.S. Vulcania, the Cosulich Line's ship from Trieste. About noon, the

Valcania, backed out from her pier and with horns blasting, steamed out of New York Harbor past the Statue of Liberty. I looked back at the towering skyline of New York and for the first time in my life, my heart yearned for my country. However, my hunger overpowered my patriotism and into the dining room we went for dinner.

As I awoke the next morning, I noticed no rick of the ship. Going out on deck, I looked out upon the city of Boston and the first thing for which I looked and found was the Old North Church of Boston, the story of which is told in Longfellow's "The



Ride of Paul Revere." At noon the Vulcania turned her bow about and headed for the open sea.

Eight days later, after beating east across the cool and refreshing waves of the Atlantic, we passed three miles north of the romantic and sunny Isles of the Azores. The tropical orchards bloomed in the sunshine as we admired the splendor of this Isle surrounded by the blue Atlantic. Two days later, we sighted the Spanish coast, and to the south of the bleak Tangiers. With elaborate flags flying the Vulcania floated into the harbor of Gibraltar between two lines of the British Royal Navy's Mediterranean battle fleet, whose Union Jacks fluttered majestically in the breeze. Twelve hours we lay at anchor as farm equipment and automobiles were taken ashore and fruit was lowered into the hold. We looked with awe at the British warships and submarines, and also at the fortifications of the Rock of Gibraltar.

The next stop was Algiers, the



**The author of this essay, Peter Lambros, was the oldest of five boys, shown above with their mother, Panagoula Lambros of Ashtabula, Ohio, and below with their various musical instruments. The brothers are, from oldest, Peter, Alex, Gus, Christ, and Thomas.**

capital of Algeria, the land of the famed French Foreign Legion. Here in a square, I saw the statue of Napoleon, whom I idolize only for his military strategy. Two days later, we visited Naples, where Mt. Vesuvius and a flotilla of black and red Italian submarines fascinated me. The ancient city of Palermo, Sicily, was the next stop of our Mediterranean cruise, and finally on the 16th of June, I saw for the first time the land of which I had read and dreamed – the land of my ancestors – Greece.

Before me lay Patras, the seaport of Greece' west coast; beyond lay Athens, Basta and Tripolis. At last, I was going to see Greece, the Athens of Pericles, the splendor of the Acropolis, and the home of my fathers. After a day at Patras, we boarded a train for Basta.

I won't write any further about

the trip, but it was one eventful train ride after another. We stayed at different cities and villages about two weeks at a time. During that time we saw the ancient ruins of the Acropolis, the ruins of Olympia, which was the home of Zeus, and we also spent two weeks at the sulphur springs of Loutra Gelini so that Dad might cure his asthma.

On September 23rd, we again went aboard of the Vulcania and had the same trip back to New York, except that instead of Algiers we docked at Almeria, Spain, for a boatload of grapes. (That was the same Almeria which German and Italian bombers laid to shambles as Franco set Spain aflame.) On the foggy morning of October 5, the Vulcania arrived at New York Harbor as the "Great City" awoke from its slumber. I looked at "Miss Liberty" and felt glad to be

home again.

### Junior High Days

As I entered junior high school, I began to think more seriously about what I wanted to be. With John Calhoun, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt as incentives, I chose law as the profession I was to follow. I wanted an occupation that could put me before the public eye as another example of a successful man.

During my junior high days, I studied hard trying to make A+'s instead of the A's and B+'s which I usually had. It was at the time that Mussolini was conquering Ethiopia and Hitler was purging his enemies. It was at that time I became interested seriously in international affairs. Little did I ever think that the Gibraltar, Algiers, Almeria, Naples, Palermo, Patras and Athens which I visited in 1934 would all become bases and targets in today's war.

Before the war, I was an ardent baseball fan. My team was the Cleveland Indians, and my pitching idol was Johnny Allen. I made scrapbooks of baseball teams, I collected pictures and autographs and I also saw a few games at League Park in Cleveland.

This brings me up to my high school days, and before I go any further I'll study my character. My classmates seem to consider me as "just a conceited Greek" who doesn't go out on dates and who doesn't belong to that upper class of "stuffed shirts" or "snobs" as I call them. I know that I'm not wanted, because for six years I tried to get into the Student Council, the Senate, and the Hi-Y and for six years I have failed.

I feel slighted sometimes and I have the urge to do violence, but for some reason or another, instead of hating them as enemies as I should, I love them as friends. I truthfully believe that what my classmates interpret as conceit is my joy and satisfaction of a job well done. I think I'm no better than the other fellow; if he tries he can do the job as well, if not better, as I have done. Out of life I seek only adventure, satisfaction and happiness. I wouldn't be set on studying law

or joining the army if I wanted to get rich.

This fall I plan to go to Ohio State University to study law, although my heart does crave for battle, as should the heart of every normal youth. The Honorable ex-Senator Vic Donahey last winter appointed me second alternate toward an existing vacancy in West Point. One week I spent at Fort Hayes in Columbus taking my physical and mental exams. I passed my physical very satisfactorily, and I did well on my English exam, but I have my doubts as to my mathematics examination, for I had not studied advanced algebra and was weak in my binomial theorem. Regardless, I had no chance because the principal candidate was exempted from both regular examinations. All he

has to do is pass a physical and he will enter West Point and earn his Gold Bars in four years.

I've had dreams about becoming a commissioned officer of the Army and leading men into battle against the Germans. As it is, I will probably see action as a noncom unless my ROTC training at Ohio State is worthy of a commission.

I use to rave to George Sintetos, my 21-year-old godfather, about the 145 Infantry Regiment. For days after his induction into the Army, I received a postal card from Camp Shelby, Mississippi, Company F, 145th Infantry. George's brother Nick is training in Canada and expects to leave for England with the next contingent of Royal Canadian Air Force pilots who will be in action against the

German Luftwaffe by December.

I would like, after two years of college work, and if the war is still raging with such intensity, that I would have a chance to fight, after entering the Air Corps. Imagine, banking and diving and twisting an American pursuit plane in a battle against a German Messerschmitt or Heinkel. After that I would like to settle down to practice law until my country needed me once again, whether it be in politics or in battle.

Whatever I have tried to do, and whatever I am going to do, I did for the benefit of America and the nations which stand for what America stands for. I want to devote my life to the preservation and progress of democracy, Christianity and civilization. With Prime Minister

Churchill, President Roosevelt, and Gen. Ironsides, Gort, Wavello, Papagos and Marshall and others as idols, I am going to give my life to defeat mercilessly the evil principles of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Franco.

I have written my story thus far, and the remainder is for someone else to complete. I have given as a questionable title, "Sword of Democracy" over the top. ... There is a battle to be won! Not for imperialism, but for your women and children and their women and children. Yes, there is a battle to be won for freedom, liberty, justice. For mankind.

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