

Admiral Panayotis Raditsas

Guardians of the Deep


Hellenic Navy (ret) V. Admiral Panagiotis Raditsas dedicated his entire service life to submarines, one of which commanded years ago. He gladly agreed to an interview not only about the history of submarines in his country, but also about the daily service of this type of army, somewhat exotic for us landlocked Czechs

They asked Charis Kartsios and Alena Flimelová

🚩 **Flagship**
Greek submarine
fleet *Papanikolis (S-120)*



HS PAPANIKOLIS (S-120)

Length:65.3 m	Max. speed:22 knots (41 km/h) Drive:	
Width:7.5 m	1× Permasyn 1 electric motor, 1×	
Height:7.9 m	battery, 2× MTU-2 engine,	
Displacement:1,900 t	2x Fuel Cell generator	
Crew:40 people	Equipment:16× torpedo	
	and/or the Sub-Harpoon cruise missile	

Panagiotis Raditsas(*1955)

Retired V. Admiral of the Hellenic Navy (Elliniko Polemiko Naftiko). He graduated from the Hellenic Naval Academy (Scholi Naftikon Dokimon), served on submarines *Papanikolis S-114*, *Nirefs S-111*, *Glaifkos S-110* and commanded *Protefs S-113*. He is the chairman of the Hellenic Submariners' Association (Syndesmos Ellinikon Ypovrichion), a multi-tasking organization that maintains the traditions and presents the history of the Greek submarine force.



Panagiotis Raditsas with the rank of Rear Admiral during his two years service at NATO HQ Norfolk (USA)

in HQ Allied Forces Transformation (HQ SACT)

First we would like to ask about the origin of the submarine weapon. When did these boats appear in the navy in Greece and what was their origin?

Our country began to show interest in this new and unconventional type of vessel in 1880. There is a mention that the Greek engineer Gryparis assembled an experimental submarine named *Gripara* in 1880 and that he even tested her in the waters of Faliro bay. But we have no evidence that he managed to build a really functional vessel that could properly be called a submarine. However, there is one image that captures a rough look; otherwise, any other resources are missing.

In 1885, the Englishman George William Garrett came up with a proposal for a submarine capable of launching torpedoes. She was built by the Swedish ship designer Thorsten Nordenfelt, after whom she was named

Well *Nordenfelt* and whose tests observers received an invitation from European navies

and Latin American countries. Although they were not very enthusiastic, the Greek government decided to buy the boat for 9,000 British pounds. The sailors tested the vessel in Faliro bay, but the results were not very satisfactory. The boat remained in service until 1901 without being operational. In September 1910, Greece ordered two "submersibles" (*katadyomeno*), as submarines were previously called in France.

On 1912, the country received the "submersible" *Dolphin* and next year *Xiphias* (swordfish). Four years later, the Submarines Station was established, which was in charge of Command and Control of submarines. In 1927, it was renamed as Supreme Submarine Command

So can we say that Greece was one of the first countries to be actively interested in submarines?

Exactly as you say, one of the first. I would also like to recall an event that is not mentioned in the world's professional and historical literature. During the Balkhan Wars (1912–1913) *HS Dolphin* carried out in combat conditions

where were the first submariners recruited from? They mostly came from islands or

coastal areas. This was more of a given, but it does not mean that the new type of weapon remained closed to the Greeks from the mainland. All submariners board voluntarily.

Forward against the Italians

When did Hellenic submarines first engage in combat? At the beginning of the Second World War, our country operated six units within the Royal Navy. Submarines *Katsonis* (Y-1) *Papanikolis* (Y-2) of the *SchneiderLaubeuf* type That were ordered

During the Balkan Wars *Dolphin* carried out the first "sharp" launch of a torpedo from a submerged vessel



The first firing of a torpedo from a submerged boat. It happened on December 9, 1912, the target was a Turkish cruiser *Mecidiye* near the island of Tenedos. It did not turn out successfully. The torpedo had a rudder malfunction that locked on the rudders to downward direction; so the attack was unsuccessful. Although it was the first ever worldwide submerged attack

V. Admiral (ret) Panagiotis Raditsas (center) in the 1990s when he served as C.O. on *PROTEFS S-113* in the rank of Lieutenant Commander (Greek plotarchis)





Experimental submersible *Griparra* it was created in 1880 and is said to have undergone trials in Faliro bay



Dolphin December 9, 1912, during the First Balkan War, she launched the first combat torpedo attack from a submerged vessel

of 1925, and *Protefs* (Y-3), *Nirefs* (Y-4), *Triton* (Y-5) and *Glafkos* (Y-6) of the Loire-Simonot type, requested two years later. All six came from France. The obsolescence of their concept and technology unfortunately caused many problems for the crews, but even this did not prevent the involvement of these submarines in the Greco-Italian war from the very first days. Their activity was written in golden letters in history; however, four of them were lost. He was the first to sink was *Proteus* (Y-3). During her third patrol following a successful attack on an Italian merchant ship, she was tracked down by the enemy and sunk with his entire crew of 48 men. It happened in the Adriatic Sea, west of Sason Island, on December 29, 1940.

? How did the situation develop after the fall of Greece?
 After the collapse of the Greek front in April 1941, our fleet sailed to Alexandria and immediately joined the Allied forces. However, when the British saw the outdated submarines, they did not want to declare them combat-capable at all at first. However, they encountered the determination of the Greek Navy command, which insisted on active duty. And so our fighting friends allowed the remaining five U-boats to join the patrols. The situation was aptly summed up by the then commander of the Greek Navy, Admiral Alexandros Sakellariu: "Only the Greek Navy and its determined crews could maintain the appetite and will for action. In any other state they had been decommissioned."

Submarine *Glafkos* (Y-6) sank two enemy ships during two patrols. While in port in Malta, she fell victim to German bombing on 27 February 1942 and again on 4 April. Two crew members were killed. *Triton* (Y-5) conducted 15 patrols, during which he sent six enemy vessels to the bottom. On the last mission, however, she was fatally hit by a German corvette in the Kafirea Strait on November 16, 1942. 24 men killed. The remaining thirty men were captured by the enemy, two managed to escape. *Katsonis* (Y-1) completed seven patrols during which he destroyed six enemy ships.

on the last mission on November 14, 1943, she was sunk by a German corvette north of the island of Skiathos, with the loss of 32 crew members; while 17 men fell into enemy hands, three others escaped. But also *Papanikolis* (Y-2) which carried out 14 patrols during which the ship sank 16 enemy vessels, lost one of her C.Os. Lieutenant Commander Nikolaos Russen was killed

during the riots in the Hellenic fleet in Alexandria, in April 1944, when mutineers tried to take over ships loyal to the crown (a rebellion by a part of the exiled army that demanded the recognition of the rebel government in Greece as legitimate, while the exiled cabinet refused, editor's note). Her sail after the war, was placed at the entrance to the Greek Maritime Museum in Piraeus.

? How did the Greek submarine fleet continue to function after such extensive damage?

On December 5, 1942, the British handed over to the Hellenic Navy, due to the loss in action of three of its submarines, a captured Italian

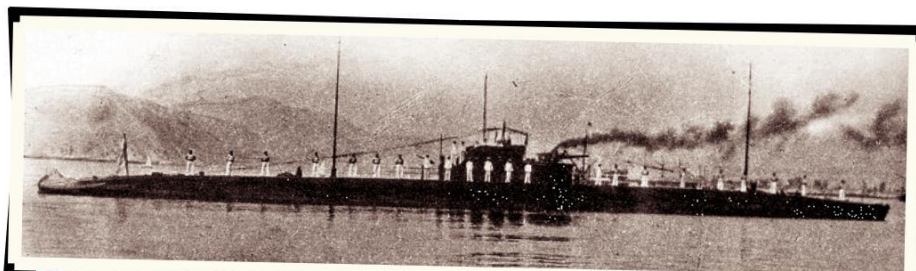
In the consciousness of the Greeks, the words "submarine" and "Papanikolis" they still mean the same thing today

Submarine *Pearl*, renamed to *Matrozos* (Y-7) and subsequently participated in four missions. On 13 October 1943 after losing *Katsonis* (Y-1) the British proposed to the Greeks that they would lend them *HMS Veldt* (P-71); received the name *Pipinos* (Y-8), carried out seven patrols and destroyed one ship.

Searching for returns

? You mentioned Papanikolis, who represents a true legend. Why that one?

This is the submarine that recorded her first success at sea during the Greco-Italian War. She sank the Italian ship *Florence* with a load of weapons, escaping in parallel from her hunters. This happened on December 24, 1940. The Italians experienced a shock; they didn't expect anyone in their "Mare Nostrum".



⚡ *Protefs* (Y-3) entered service in 1929, during the Greco-Italian war she was sunk by the enemy in late 1940 near Avlona

» *Nirefs* (Y-4) destroyed five enemy vessels during 19 patrols during the Second World War



» Wreck of *Katsonis* (Y-1),

Since then, the boat has also recorded other successes in the Adriatic Sea and earned a reputation as a hunter. As he returned to port from that first successful patrol, he was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd, who then enthusiastically celebrated his crew. In the minds of the Greeks, the words "submarine" and "Papanikolis" still mean one and the same thing.



The absence of this device, which supplied air to the diesel engines and batteries through a mast with a tube, forced the submarines to surface, where they were vulnerable. Today's submarines can normally use a snorkel to supply air to the interior of the boat at periscope depth and thus remain below the surface for longer. And this also applies to all other technological changes and improvements that have caused many changes in tactics. Additionally, there are now new weapons as sub- missiles and smart torpedoes, that affect the submarine tactics.

? At this point it is appropriate to add that you also served on *Papanikolis*
 Yes, it was the second *Papanikolis* (S-114) of the Balao class, {previously *USS Hardhead* (SS-365)}. I served four years in total. Our Navy operated her from July 26, 1972 to April 5, 1993. *Papanikolis* (Y-2) operated from 1927–1945 and now we have in active duty the new *Papanikolis* (S-120) built in Germany and been in serving since 2010.

? Four of your country's six submarines were sunk by the enemy. We know that the Hellenic Submariners' Association which you chair, has participated in many commemorations for the fallen, has involved in building and maintaining memorials, and was also instrumental in finding the wreck of *Katsonis* (Y-1) in 2018 north of Skiathos. Are you looking for the other three subs?

Of course. We are getting close to locate the wreck of *Triton* (Y-5), which was sank by a German corvette in the Kafirea Strait on November 16, 1942 after an unsuccessful attack to a German convoy. We believe that these activities will also receive support of the navy. We are also making an effort, to find the wreck of *Proteus* (Y-3), which sank near the Albanian port of Avlona, on December 29, 1940 during an attack on an Italian convoy. She had already sank the Italian merchant ship *SARDEGNA*, which was transferring

military material in support of the Italian forces in Albania.

? Could you describe the size of the current Greek submarine fleet? Would the Navy welcome more vessels?
 In total, there are ten submarines, all originally from Germany. Five of them are the most modern that exist within the given category. They offer amazing options, more advanced capabilities complete silence and their heavy torpedoes guarantee more accuracy hitting the target at even greater distances.
 The question of whether or not, is a sufficient number,
The answer is: we do our "work" with ten pieces and we do it well. Of course, if we had more, it would be even better, but the ones we have are sufficient.



? Have submarine tactics changed in any way since WWII?
 Very much so, because the submarine design has also undergone a change. For example, those of the species did not have a snorkel, with some exceptions. The Germans began to introduce it only in the last year of the conflict.

Pride of the Army

? Does a person have to possess any special qualities or have a special education to become a submariner?
 Candidates for service with this branch of the army are Officers and N.C.O.s (non-commissioned officers). They go through medical, psychological, physical and absence of klistophobic syndrome tests, even before the necessary studies and training begin. If they are found fit and suitable, they will then study at the respective schools. Officers and non-commissioned officers receive thorough assessment throughout the tenure on special courses and those who do not comply are followed by dismissal. Candidates go through a school, the so-called Y1, in order to descend into the bowels of submarines. Officers have to go through three schools – the first for regular supervisory service (YA), the second to became Executive Officer (YY) and the third in order to be assessed capable for commanding a submarine (YK). So there are four levels of training. In these courses, which lasts at least four months each, the candidates are educated in all possible respective areas of their duties.

? Do sailors also work on submarines?
 Sailors served on submarines until the early 1990s. Since, only Officers and N.C.Os.

» emblem of the association for Greek submarines

Contemporary Greek submarines

class	Displacement	speed	units	Equipment
type 214	1,900 t	22 knots/41 km/h	Papanikolis, Pipinos, Matrozos, Katsonis	8× torpedo launcher for a total of 16 SUT/SST-4 torpedoes or Sub-Harpoon missiles (UGM-84)*
type 212	1,700 t	20 knots/37 km/h	Okeanos (upgraded)	6x torpedo launcher for a total of 14 SUT/SST-4 torpedoes or Sub-Harpoon missiles (UGM-84)
type 212	1,300 t	22 knots/41 km/h	Poseidon, Amphitrite, Pontos	6x torpedo launcher for a total of 14 SUT/SST-4 torpedoes or Sub-Harpoon missiles (UGM-84)
class 212	1,200 t	22 knots/41 km/h	Nirefs, Triton	6x torpedo launcher for a total of 14 SUT/SST-4 torpedoes or Sub-Harpoon missiles (UGM-84)

» Submarine *Papanikolis I (Y-2)* represents a legend because it was the first to sink an enemy vessel during the war with Italy, which completely shocked the opponent. Here the crew during the maintenance of the cannon. Beirut, autumn 1942

? We have heard from several quarters that the submarine force is perceived by society as very prestigious. Is this really "pride of the army"?

Just as all those serving in the Hellenic Armed Forces are respected by the Greeks, submariners are also very popular. But the "mystery" that surrounds submarines, the fact that they operate below the surface, the admission from all other branches that we are more "professionals", the successes in every allied exercise, the fact that during the heightened tension of the summer of 2020 with Turkey, Turkish helicopters, warships and planes did not manage to detect a single submarine, and last but not least, the famous history and tradition, all this brings a special pride and prestige.

? Soviet submariners are said to have drunk seawater as part of a kind of initiation ritual. Is there any such tradition in your country?

There are no such traditions within Greek submarines. Our motto is : *All for one and one for all*. So the "new" receive a warm welcome. Strong and close friendships are formed between the crew members, while it is not unusual - because of this special friendship - that family ties are also formed between them, such as marriages with the sisters or daughters of submariners or godparents (the godfather has an important position in Greek society and is perceived almost as a member of the family, note ed.).

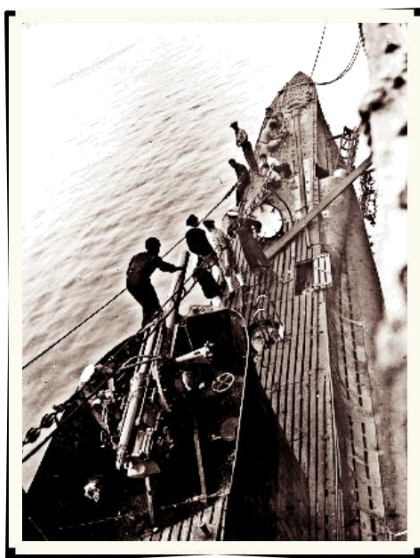
? The fact that there are very close relations between members of a submarine crew can of course also be traced among members of the special forces. Could we also say that a little more relaxed rules can be encountered in places?

Not in any case. These strong relationships are based on mutual respect. However, this does not diminish the respect for the given hierarchy. Whether you are junior or senior, you never forget where your place is. Respect is always present, everywhere.

The whole moon under the surface

? Women can also serve in Greek submarines. In what numbers would we find them among the crews?

In very low. However, it is verified that they do not have the slightest problem with adapting to life "underwater". And there is



100% respect from men for the female part of the crew. At first, there was concern in the Navy about whether women could be successfully integrated into the service. But with the first arrivals on board, these doubts disappeared.

? What tasks do submarine perform during patrols? And how long does one patrol last?

Each submarine that sails for patrol, has clearly defined tasks. If the objective of the mission is to gather information, the framework will be wider, if they were an "offensive patrol", that is, to control the movement of enemy ships, the tasks are more specific. Pending the mission submarines can reach any place as the situation demands.

We were drenched in icy sweat. The rope really came loose and it was moving near the propeller

Exercises usually last 3-12 days, missions last much longer. There are also NATO exercises during which submarines remain submerged for 25 days at a time. Likewise, there are special "national exercises" that can last more than a month

the submarines are divided into "own" and "enemy" playing certain roles according to the given scenario.

? What reputation did they get with the allies?

I think very good. There is no NATO naval exercise where ours does not appear in the first pair of submarines.

Keep a clear head

? Could you tell us about a situation where your country's submarines received special recognition from NATO?

For example, during NATO's largest anti-mine exercise "Dogfish" in 2003, Greek submarines had the best performance. And I would also like to remind you that our type 214 vessels, which often played an ambush role, are practically invisible to the enemy, but at the same time they have excellent features and equipment that will allow them to track down the enemy. We can safely say that in this role they are the best allied NATO submarines.

? Nowadays, excellent cooks serve on the decks, and therefore food is no longer a "necessary evil" as it was at the beginning of the history of submarines. They are also said to be the most popular crew members. So what do sailors usually eat during patrols?

The submarine presents certain limitations for the cook. On a surface ship he can cook practically anything, whereas on a submarine fried foods and generally anything that might degrade the quality of the air are not allowed.

? Hellenic subs participate in NATO exercises. How often?

Very often. There are exercises lasting three to four, sometimes more than 20 days. Many submarines from NATO countries participate in them, along with ships, airplanes and helicopters. During them, a number of different scenarios are simulated. During exercise

? Do crews have enough time to rest between missions? how often are the shifts during the patrol?

Of course, time to rest is very important because one needs to keep a clear head while serving. Our shifts are therefore laid out in such a way that members have enough free time for themselves and for a sufficient sleep.

» The entrance area of the Greek Maritime Museum in Athens is decorated with a boat tower Papanikolis I

Services usually alternate every four hours, and if the situation requires it, they can last even six hours.

Commander on Proteus S-113

? Can you tell us what was the main reason that led you to serve on submarines?

It was a combination of many factors: I was impressed by the cohesiveness of the crew, which I had heard about, and also the sense of danger. In addition, the fact that from the very beginning a young officer has a lot of responsibilities, as well as the opportunity to learn a lot of new things that you simply can not on surface ships.

? Have you ever been in a really dangerous situation? Yes. It was Spring of 1990, northwest of Kythera (an island in the Ionian archipelago, editor's note). I was commanding Officer of *HS Protefs S-113*. We were returning to the base after the year's NATO exercise DOG FISH and were at a depth of 50 m. A slight swaying suddenly told us that something was happening on the surface. When the submarine notices something like a tickle at this depth, it means that the surface is very rough. But we just had to charge the batteries and thus, ascend to the periscope depth regardless of the rough sea.

So we started ascending, feeling more and more the waves force. With waves reaching four to five meters according to the Sea State scale, the operation of the snorkel is a huge test for everyone, but especially for the steemen who have to maintain the correct depth. We also had to avoid frequent activation of the safety valve located on the snorkel mast. It closes when the vent is wetted with water to prevent it from entering the vessel.

After twenty minutes fight with the huge waves, we managed to secure snorkel. Everything was fine, but suddenly the engineer said that he hear a strange "metallic" noise in the space just above him. After thinking about it for a while, we came to the conclusion that the flap of the stern rope compartment had come loose, and its metallic cover flapping and rattling like this. And what if the cover flipped out completely? That way the rope would get out, so it could get tangled in the ship's propeller, and in that case... in this weather condition..... we'd have to surface immediately.



So we surfaced and the submarine began to behave like a fragile frigate. I got on the bridge with a crew member. The pitch-black darkness and the waves whipped us unkindly. As we could see nothing, I ordered a searchlight to be brought to the bridge. We were both strapped in with safety belts to hold the spotlight which we aimed at the stern. We were drenched in icy sweat. The rope had indeed come loose and was moving toward the ship's screw. We had to fix it immediately. *"Stop the engines! Boatswain and one mechanic with life jackets, safety belts and appropriate tools, to the bridge"* I commanded.

? What happened after that?

As soon as they both got there, I immediately explained them what was going on. They quickly understood what they had to do. There are dangerous situations in a submarine, but this, where you order two of your crew members to get off the bridge, go down the stairs, then walk the deck, which is 15 cm wide and six meters long, to get to the stern (which forms a triangle o dimensions 80 x 150 cm), to pull the rope back into that storage space and secured the hatch and return, acting against the constant pounding of the waves on a sea state 10, It is a situation where the C.O. loses several years of his life and see his hair to turn white.

After half an hour, with anxiety at its height, everything went as it should, we finally decent to a safe and calm depth of 50 m. That was one of cases onboard MY HS PROTEFS S113 and her great crew, that I will remember forever. May everyone be healthy and well.

In conclusion, we would like to ask, what do you think the future of the Greek submarine fleet has in front of it?

The current high level of combat capability is not only related to the types of submarines or weapons we have at our disposal, but mainly to how we use them. This applies to weapon systems, whether on submarines, surface vessels or aircraft. And we have proven that in the field of submarines we are one of the best both in handling weapons and in the way they are used. ✖

Thanks for the interview.

(Thanks to Aloise B lot for consulting on Czech naval terminology.)

Handling of stern ropes



Papanikolis (S-120)



Pipinos (S-121)



Matrozos (S-122)



Katsonis (S-123)



Poseidon (S-116)



Amphitrite (S-117)



Pontos (S-119)



Nirefs (S-111)



Triton (S-112)

» Okeanos (S-118) individual characters submarines operated in Greek. their names even the emblems come out from ancient mythology and from the names of the heroes of the anti-Ottoman uprising