

Westford Eagle

WESTFORD, MASS. • VOL. 40, NO. 14

THURSDAY, MAY 7, 2009

INSIDE



WWII spies

Westford author Peter Lucas' new book is novel of intrigue.

Page 7

luke1825@aol.com

978 692 3546

www.balkancaesar.com

QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH: PETER LUCAS

Spies, intrigue in World War II Albania

By Peter Costa

Staff Writer

Q. What does the novel-based-on-fact format provide you as new opportunities to tell this story?

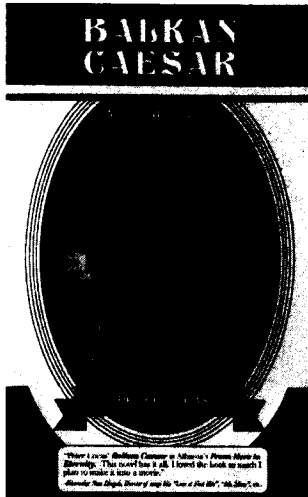
A. I'm reminded of a story a seasoned old newspaperman told me when, as a still wet behind the ears young reporter, I was assigned to help him cover a murder trial. It was my first. He said, "Kid, you've got to separate the facts from the truth. Look at the witness there. He says he didn't kill his wife. That's his testimony. It's a fact that he said he didn't do it. That's what we report, the facts. But I know he killed her, the cops know he killed her, and he knows he killed her. That's the truth." I feel that the novel allowed me to go beyond the facts of the story, as they were told in my book *The OSS in World War II Albania*, to get to a new level of truth, as I think I did in *Balkan Caesar*. There are facts and there is truth. Sometimes they are the same thing; sometimes they are not.

Q. Were you constrained in any way developing the characters in the novel when you know the real-life ones?

A. I tried to put distance between real life people and the characters in the book, especially the American characters. I was not comfortable in putting words and dialogue in the mouths of real people. That is why I changed their names. This allowed me more freedom to create dramatic situations.

Q. Albania has been a land of intrigue for decades. Did this help in scene setting?

A. I remember calling Stan Dragoti, the film director, from southern Albania last June and telling him how staggering and dramatic the countryside was—rugged moun-



Westford journalist and author Peter Lucas has published a new book, *Balkan Caesar*. It is a story about American soldiers of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) who fought the Nazis behind enemy lines.

tains, rocky roads, streams bouncing down the mountains, ancient olive trees, ruined castles, goat trails, shepherds, woods, pastures... It was as though the landscape begged to be filmed. The setting is there. The story is there. All you need are the actors, the cameras and the film director.

Q. Has there been any Albanian reaction to the novel or is it too soon?

A. *Balkan Caesar* was published April 24. It is currently being translated into Albanian and will be published in Albania at the Tirana Book Festival in November.

Q. How was your nonfiction book received in Albania?

A. I can only describe the reaction to the Albanian version of *The OSS in World War II Albania*, my non-fiction study of the U.S. secret wartime role there helping the communist partisans, as sensational. When I got there last June there were television cameras and reporters waiting for me at the airport. I appeared on eight different television interview and news shows. I lost count of how many radio and newspaper interviews I did. It may be a small country but there are twenty daily newspapers in Tirana. I am thinking that *Balkan Caesar* is going to cause an even bigger stir. You have to keep in mind that most Albanians have no idea what went on in their country during the war. Enver Hoxha, the communist dictator, destroyed all documents and evidence that did not benefit him or the Communist Party. He brainwashed his country and his countrymen into believing a long list of communist lies.

Q. What is the hardest thing you had to do to be a novelist?

A. I found it easier to write the novel *Balkan Caesar* than the documented and footnoted OSS book. That's because all the research had been done before I even began the novel. The hard work was behind me. All I had to do was go back and reread the vast cache of historical documents I accumulated as well as go over all of the interviews I had conducted. Writing the novel was a joy and it swept me along.

Q. Do you plan to write other novels?

A. I am already one hundred pages into my next novel. But I've had to take a time out because I have become involved in promoting *Balkan Caesar*. I have come to find out that writing a book is only half the job. The other half is getting



Courtesy photo

Westford author Peter Lucas sails off the Karaburun Peninsula on the coast of Albania.

it published, and then marketing, promoting and selling it. This means book signing parties, media interviews and so on. (I love doing it.)

Q. Which actors should play the key roles in a film based on *Balkan Caesar*?

A. Stan Dragoti, who has directed such successful films as *Love at First Bite*, *Mr. Mom*, *Necessary Roughness*, *The Man with One Red Shoe*, and so on, believes that he needs a European actor to play the role of Enver Hoxha. It is a key role in the film. Although Hoxha turned out to be a paranoid and diabolical dictator, he was, in his younger days, a charming and charismatic leader. Dragoti has said, wistfully, several times that the role would have gone to a young Orson Welles, if he were still alive. The other key role is that of the young American OSS officer Tom Stevens. Dragoti has suggested actors such as Jake Gyllenhaal and James Franco. There are two

important female roles but he has not come up with any names yet.

Q. Give us an update of where the film project stands.

A. Stan Dragoti and I have written the screenplay. Stan currently is in the process of raising money and negotiating with media executives and media officials in Tirana. His plan is to show the film first in the Balkans before bringing it to Europe and the U.S. Since there are only a limited number of movie theaters in Albania and the Balkans, his plan is to make it into a three or five part television production (everybody has a television set) and then turn it into a movie for distribution in movie theaters in western Europe and the U.S. He hopes to begin filming in the fall, but we'll see.

(Peter Lucas' novel *Balkan Caesar* is published by Aberdeen Bay and is available at amazon.com and area bookstores.)