



Ναξοσά

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Investigating the death of a Legend

Abstract

The untimely death of the New Zealand iconic figure John Mulgan shortly after leaving liberated Greece in 1945 has fuelled popular conjecture about his suicide. An analysis of the investigation archive is carried out to determine to what extent one could argue he did not take his own life but was a victim of a British conspiracy. The degree of ambiguity, a key variable in conspiracy theorising, in the extended investigations of Mulgan's death, is considered, as well as any possible motivation for a cover-up.

Introduction

This paper is an analysis of the primary archive material concerned with the investigation and subsequent hearings into the death of John Mulgan in 1945. This is something that has not been included in published studies on the New Zealander, a major figure in New Zealand literature², as well as a social critic, journalist and decorated soldier. As a member of British Special Operations Executive (SOE) he fought with left-wing Greek partisans during the Axis occupation and, following liberation, managed compensation to Greeks who had assisted SOE. His personal letters, semi-official correspondence and posthumously published *Report on Experience* show both a deep appreciation of the Greek people and a broad critical eye over wartime Anglo-Greek policy and Greek resistance forces. Found dead

on April 26 1945 at the Continental Hotel in Cairo, the 33 year old Mulgan was about to transfer from SOE to the New Zealand army. Dying just before his return and on ANZAC day adds to the mystique and romanticism of the Mulgan legend. As does scepticism about the official and received view in the literature that he committed suicide.

John Mulgan

John Alan Edward Mulgan was born in Christchurch on 31 December 1911 and died in Cairo on the night of 25/26 April 1945. After an investigation by the Special Investigation Branch (SIB) of the British military police and two sequential official British inquiries his death was deemed suicide. During his short life he undertook university education first in New Zealand and then at Oxford, leaving his home country in late 1933. He was never to return but academic and public interest in him is still evident. A 'reconstituted' edition of his last work *Report on Experience* was issued in 2010³ while 2011 was a major year in New Zealand for Mulgan centred activity. The government officially recognised the centenary of his birth, an edited volume of his letters appeared in the form of *A Good Mail: Letters of John Mulgan*⁴ and in September Victoria University of Wellington held an academic conference commemorating his life and work. Although the vast majority of delegates were from the field of literary studies, several historians also presented. This reflects the other significant thread of John Mulgan's life that generates discussion - his time as a soldier with SOE in Occupied Greece during the Second World War. The young New Zealander's ability in gaining the cooperation of the left wing partisans to carry out sabotage operations against the Axis, and the recognised military success he and his Greek companions achieved add to the stature of Mulgan in New Zealand. His humanity and horror at the cost of reprisals combine with his intellect, youth, sporting prowess and good looks to make for a heroic figure.

Mythology and Methodology

Although there has been no study on the mythology surrounding Mulgan, judging by feedback at New Zealand and Australian public and academic presentations I gave on Mulgan and the Greek-New Zealand wartime connection in general there continues to be a considerable feeling

of suspicion about what happened to the young New Zealander. My concern grows out of my earlier study⁵ on the political environment Mulgan operated in during his Greek war years and his father's urging the Wellington government to raise the possibility of assassination with the investigating British. His justification was his son's political writings at the time sent both to his family and confidentially to the New Zealand government just days before he was found dead. Mulgan was highly critical of both British policy and the Greek communists but was, to a degree, sympathetic to the left and republican elements in the resistance. The Wellington administration preferred at first to monitor at a distance, and then review the processes undertaken after the finding of suicide.⁶ That endorsement has not halted the march of social rumours and a legendary thread outside that of the man's considered greatness.

The following is anecdotal, i.e. from my own experiences, and is intended to show how fevered interest and discussion arises when the topic of Mulgan's death is raised in the public arena. It is a topic suitable for possible research by those who are concerned with rumour and legend as well as memory studies.⁷ Disagreement with the suicide version persists from New Zealanders who have had an extended time to ponder and arises from an immediate reflex by Greeks, Australians and Australian-Greeks at public presentations. For the New Zealanders Mulgan's association with New Zealand national identity undoubtedly fuels their feelings.⁸ During audience discussion of a conference paper I presented in Australia in 2011 one of the delegates shared some memories about Mulgan during their 1950's New Zealand school life. Nearly everyone ('99.9%') thought Mulgan was about 'to do something big' and the British had 'done him in'. For those with Greek heritage it is the fractious civil war that matters (when Mulgan entered occupied Greece in late 1943 fighting had broken out between the competing partisan forces). Left-wing Greeks' immediate response was that Mulgan was forced, or duped, to take his life by the British, who were supporting the right wing and the monarchy. Some stories are fantastical. According to an audience member at a Victoria University of Wellington seminar, his father told him Mulgan's self-inflicted death came about while he was walking down a gangplank of a ship. He took out a revolver and blew his brains out. An Auckland artist related a story from a friend who had served in the war that he (or a friend of his as it turned out) encountered

Mulgan in the bar at the New Zealand Maadi camp just outside Cairo on the night he died. The story was later withdrawn once the artist pursued it, on my behalf, with his friend. These stories were never solicited but simply emerged when Mulgan was the topic of discussion. Permeating through all discussion about Mulgan's death is the conviction that it is ludicrous to suggest that such a talented, attractive, and physically brave young man would commit suicide. Although one can be dismissive of some of the more fanciful stories (e.g. the gang plank story) some may be worth factual historical research (e.g. the Maadi story was one I pursued as Mulgan's movements on his last night are not accounted for).

Conspiracies are often intertwined with events of historical significance and as such have attracted serious academic endeavour. In the applied sciences for example, the remains of Polish General Sikorski were exhumed for forensic analysis⁹ and the ubiquitous Kennedy assassination revisited by statistical analysis of bullet fragments.¹⁰ The proposition that Mulgan's death involved a conspiracy is the focus of this paper. It follows the historians' dictum to get as close as possible to original sources (i.e. in London and not what has been sent to New Zealand). It also utilises a framework provided by conspiracy and the related rumour theorising. Scepticism may be raised by purists in the historians' camp in such a strategy. Ideally, one should look for written statements from the time explicitly stating there was a conspiracy. Effort was expended in this direction but there were no discoveries. Rather this study looks for the extent and degree of ambiguity in the actions of actors (individual and agency) as evidenced in the archives. Ambiguity is a key variable associated with conspiracy theory (and the associated rumour activity¹¹).

This study is informed by Sunstein and Vermeule's who define a conspiracy theory: 'an effort to explain some event or practice by reference to the machinations of powerful people who attempt to conceal their role (at least until their aims are accomplished)'.¹² Given that the British authorities ran the investigation into the New Zealander's death they are the obvious 'powerful' party. This paper's main research question is therefore: 'To what extent does the British primary source material of the investigation into the death of John Mulgan support the official finding that he committed suicide as against a possible murder, or forced self-destruction conspiracy? To some the primary source base may seem too narrow. Other avenues were

pursued but with no resulting find.¹³ Having said that, by examining the official investigation record one has the opportunity to measure the rigour of officialdom in what is a pivotal event.

Suicide and Primary Sources

Biographies on Mulgan have allocated varying space and degrees of acceptance of suicide. The earliest study on Mulgan was written by academic Paul Day and published in 1968.¹⁴ He was committed to exploring his subject's death. While researching his book he wrote Julian Dolbey, Mulgan's commanding officer in SOE: 'John's death is a mystery that must be clarified'.¹⁵ Despite his best efforts, when his work appeared he exclaimed: 'Mulgan's suicide is an insoluble mystery'.¹⁶ Years later he changed his stance, joining others in the belief that Mulgan had been disintegrating internally because of his time in wartime Greece. He wrote in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*: 'Mulgan seems to have become increasingly disillusioned as he observed the chaos resulting from war and what seemed to him the failure of socialism'.¹⁷

Both O'Sullivan's and McNeish's later works accept the suicide version.¹⁸ As part of his research O'Sullivan obtained testimony from a senior New Zealand army legal officer sent to check on the investigation and legal processes that ensued¹⁹. He presents a dramatized version of Mulgan's last actions in the deceased's hotel room setting out a sequence of actions. These two later works cite/quote the British documents associated with the two inquests. The earlier Day study includes facts recorded at the time by the investigating authorities (e.g. events, observations and times provided by hotel staff) but does not directly cite them in text. It is reasonable to assume he had access to copies of the investigation report and findings eventually given to the Mulgan family in 1945 (especially so as Day married Mulgan's widow).

Depending on the period in which they were carrying out their work, researchers encountered different challenges. Day could interact with individuals who were involved with the events at the time.²⁰ Others coming decades after could not match this advantage although the ongoing release of official records, especially those of Special Operations Executive at The National Archives, Kew.

Typed copies of official documents relating to the Mulgan investigation case are in at least two New Zealand repositories – amongst papers at the Alexander Turnbull Library²¹ and Mulgan's personnel file at New Zealand Defence Force (NZDFA) archives²². For this paper, and part of a wider project, the original documents in London were sought, complete with handwriting and signatures of Mulgan, witnesses and others involved. Returning to the originals avoids some of the errors and possible flaws in reasoning if one limits research to the various copies. Nevertheless there is some dispersion and unavailability of the Mulgan material. The diary of the deceased Mulgan, reported by the police at the time but declared sensitive due to his SOE work was withheld from his family. It found its way into the private papers of Julian Dolbey, his Cairo based superior.²³ Official documents found in his room were not locatable. Most of the original key investigation and hearing documents, however, are together in one file at The National Archives, London.²⁴ It is the one from the final inquest. It is still not the ideal. The *signed off* (i.e. with signatures) police report, initial statements and medical material are missing. Considerable energy was invested in examining Military Police report series to locate these but to no avail.

The New Zealand versions do not contain the original farewell notes left by Mulgan (See Figures 1, 2 and 3). Such a difference has led at least to one study erroneously stating he typed farewell notes to two women - Zoe Tsiminaki and Christine Atherton.²⁵ In fact he hand wrote them, as the *original* primary sources in London show. Viewing the handwritten notes (as well as signatures, something again missing in the New Zealand repositories) enables comparison with other material written by Mulgan. Reliance on such typed copies is again shown to be less than ideal when one examines the NZDF archive copy of the British military police report into Mulgan's death. At some stage someone has highlighted a contradiction in recorded times (i.e. military police called to the scene of death *after* they arrived). However, the British copies show manual corrections to the error.

C

Dear Christine,

I am sorry not to have said good bye to you
but there are some things a man must do by himself.
You were very nice to me, & I perhaps not to you.
Make Bill look after you, or some one equally good.

My love,
John Halden.

Figure 1: Note to Christine Atherton (Exhibit C)

Source: TNA FO841/524 Published with permission of The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London

From Lieut Col John Murgon
 Force 183
 25/4/45: G.H.R. M.E.

B

Dearest Joe,
 (Zim' pov?)

I didn't have a chance - or you didn't give me a chance - to say goodbye to you properly before I left. You were becoming logical and I was becoming rational, as I had always felt I had to be with you. You were very nice to me and I liked you very much. If I did not say more to you than this at any time, it was not because I did not sometimes wish to. If such a thing had been possible, I would like to have taken you to New Zealand with me. I always enjoyed your company & wanted more of it than I had. I hope you have a good and happy time with some one now - not necessarily whoever is in charge of the office - as you desire.

My love,
 John Murgon.

Figure 2: Note to Zoe Tsiminaki (Exhibit B)

Source: TNA FO841/524 Published with permission of The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London

A

My dear Dolbey,

I am sorry to leave this particular problem of liquidation on your hands. The fact is that when I came out from Greece last November, I found I was suffering from cancer of the throat - (I had been warned of this some years ago and gave up smoking and drinking for a long time without any effect except a diminution in the pleasures of life). As you know, this is an unpleasant disease and not very curable. Nor have I any desire to prolong my life for a few months or a year or two as an invalid. I have enjoyed life too much to want it in a reduced or a second-rate form. You'll forgive my quoting the classics to you on this occasion but Seneca remarked, dealing with this subject, that he was prepared to face pain but not a life which pain robbed of its full value.

If the war had gone on, I would have kept quiet and continued with it, but the fighting has almost ended and there is a need now for normal and well-balanced men with a sense of continuity and a belief in their own future ~~xxx~~ as well as in the future of the world. I've got a good belief - more than yourself I suspect - in this letter ~~xxxxxx~~ project, but little for myself and would soon become a drag on those who have, as it is, plenty of work in front of them.

I don't know whether it will be possible, but would greatly appreciate it if you could present some 'cover story' to my wife and family. Tell them I died suddenly of a fever or took an overdose of morphine by mistake. I have a small son whom I've barely seen as a baby but who is now five years old and would prefer him to grow up without any shadow from his father to perplex him. It's partly for this reason that I don't want to go home to die slowly as an invalid. There isn't any question of my wanting an army ~~xxxxxx~~ pension, since I'm adequately insured and my wife and son will be all right, but if you could unofficially do this for me I would be very grateful.

I would have got killed more decently in war or manufactured for myself an accident in Greece but felt in the first place that officers who go around trying to get themselves killed are an unnecessary liability to their men, and secondly that Greece has enough troubles of its own without my own suicide on top of it all.

I've jotted down a few notes on the points we left outstanding to-day, I don't think there's much of importance. There are a lot of untidy ends that I'd like to have settled for you before I left Greece but the general outline is all right. In a short and not very productive life, I remember with fleeting pride that I managed to live in friendship with a lot of different and differing Greeks and hope a little of this won't have been entirely wasted.

Again with apologies,

Yours ever,

John Melzer

Figure 3: Typed note to Dolbey (Exhibit A)

Source: TNA FO841/524 Published with permission of The National Archives (TNA), Kew, London

Investigations and Hearings

The Special Investigation Branch (SIB) of the British Military Police investigated the death of John Mulgan. Its report informed in part the first of two inquiries. The first was a court of inquiry run by SOE's Force 133 (cover name for Cairo SOE headquarters) and the British military. Given Force 133 personnel were named as the authority by which some of the evidence and medical opinion gathered, it would seem SOE had a major role in the process.²⁶ When agreement could not be reached in the inquiry hearing, a coronial inquest by the British Consulate General in Egypt, itself part of the Foreign Office, was held.

In Mulgan's hotel room the police found three farewell notes, various unspecified official documents, a diary, kit, and various receptacles. They took statements from SOE colleagues, his fellow long term hotel guest and female acquaintance Christine Atherton, and hotel staff. A post mortem and medical tests were requested. Eventually morphine overdose was attributed as cause of death. The two handwritten farewell notes were to Atherton and Zoe Tsiminaki, an administrator in the Athens SOE office. Dolbey got a single typed page. Mulgan never communicated any farewell to his wife or family. His last letter to his wife was dated April 17, just 9 days before he was found dead and holds no indication of intended suicide.²⁷

Although the official SIB report was written on May 6 just 10 days after the body was found, the ongoing police investigation and court of inquiry lasted months. This first phase of the Mulgan investigation can be said to have ended in late August with the disagreement between the senior officers involved with the hearing. On the 18th of that month the dissenting voice, Dolbey, wrote a memorandum arguing the findings were inconclusive. Conflicting final opinion was handwritten on his communication by Major General Hayman Joyce, senior commander of troops in Egypt: 'In my opinion Lt Col Mulgan committed suicide'.²⁸

Dolbey's August memorandum of protest stretched to just over a page. His argument was bound to the logic applied in the police report and lack of supporting evidence. It looked for motive and cause of death. Dolbey could not concur with investigating police sergeant Murray's argument that Mulgan 'was very much attached to his female friends, and preferred suicide rather than sever his associations with them'.²⁹ He wrote that he did not think Mulgan's affection (albeit it even to two women) was so motivating.

He was aware his subordinate had 'carried out flirtations with at least four ladies at the time of his death' and that he had the opportunity if he wanted to stay in Greece, where he would be in close proximity to them. Although he verified that the signature on Mulgan's last note to him was genuine, he pointed out the blatant contradiction concerning Mulgan's claim that he had throat cancer – there was no medical evidence of this whatsoever.³⁰ Unless he had not been shown the medical report (unlikely) he falters when he states: 'No traces of either poison or morphia were found in the glasses, tubes, boxes or other receptacles found in the deceased's room.'³¹ The earlier report from the Egyptian forensic medical authorities stated tracings of morphine were found in a 'small empty tube' and a piece of cotton found in a bottle.³²

Such a blatant misjudgement may be attributed to Dolbey acceding to his dead subordinate trying to obfuscate the suicide. Mulgan had asked as much in his letter to him. If so, it was a doomed enterprise from the start. Despite Mulgan's note being in an envelope (as shown in the London documents) and addressed to Dolbey, the police had opened it when they arrived at the hotel room. Their report actually mentions Mulgan's request: 'I do not know whether it will be possible, but would greatly appreciate it if you could present some 'cover story' to my wife and family.'³³ The known request and Dolbey's objection add a sense of the surreal to the proceedings. It is also sowing uncertainty which leads to thoughts of conspiracy.

While Dolbey dissected and analysed, he omitted, as did the police and the two enquiries, an examination of the official documents found in the dead man's room. In fact they were never submitted as evidence. The police report reads: 'Several official papers were found, but these were inspected by Lt. Col. Dolbey, who asked that he might retain these papers as they were relevant to a question which the deceased and he had been discussing on the 25th April, 1945.'³⁴ Several months later the author of the police report told the Coroner: 'I also found a memorandum relating to military matters regarding which certain annotations had been made in pencil.'³⁵ Although all the notes to the two women and the letter to Dolbey were retained as exhibits and their content related in the SIB report, this SOE material was not. An obvious unwritten understanding amongst the military and legal authorities that Mulgan was working with a clandestine organisation like

SOE (using 'Force 133' as a cover name) precluded any inclusion of the items. By the time of the coronial inquest i.e. the second enquiry, Dolbey brought down the official curtain on the documents: 'The matters set out in this memorandum (which I am not authorised to produce) and which we discussed could not have afforded any reason why Lt Col Mulgan should take his own life.'³⁶ In this assessment he had joined the earlier assessment of the investigating military policeman: 'In my opinion they contain no reference which could throw any light on the cause of Lt Col Mulgan's death.'³⁷

In fact, from the outset SOE was alert to security issues. Major Angus of Cairo SOE had joined the military police at the scene of death and ensured they had collected all the documents. In his statement for the Court of Inquiry he wrote: 'in case there were any security papers left about which should not have been.'³⁸

Dolbey also seemed determined to keep Mulgan's wider SOE work away from consideration. He ended his dissenting memorandum over the finding from the first inquiry thus: 'I find that his death is due to causes not yet ascertained, that he was not on duty at the time of his death, and that he is to blame for the circumstances which immediately preceded his death.'³⁹ Mulgan not on duty meant SOE work was out of the deliberations.

For those looking for conspiracy, pulling the veil over Mulgan's work and excluding evidence found in his room undoubtedly fuels speculation about a possible cover-up.

While intelligence matters were ignored or avoided, there is one extraordinary fact not pursued in the whole investigative process. This is the anonymous individual who was with Christine Atherton and Mulgan on the night of 25 April, the last one of his life. Except for requests to hotel staff and their visual sightings of him, this is the last known extended human encounter Mulgan had. Three days after Mulgan's body was discovered, Atherton made a statement to the military police in which she said she and the New Zealander had been joined by 'another friend of mine' and 'The three of us conversed for some time until 2115 hrs. [9:15 pm], when he [Mulgan] left to go to his own room.' And 'that was the last time I saw him alive'.

⁴⁰ For some inexplicable reason no-one thought it necessary to ask and/or record the name of this person or interview them. Considering the extent of the testimony capture the omission is even more pronounced. Hotel staff such as managers, waiters and a maid, were interviewed and statements ob-

tained. It was the same with the British (SOE and medical) and the Egyptian medical specialist who were subsequently involved.⁴¹ Within the gathered evidence Atherton's statement about Mulgan telling the anonymous friend to "Look after her"⁴² correlates with a statement in his note: "Make Bill look after you".⁴³ Whether they are the same person is not evident in the official investigations.

While this lapse in initial identification may be attributed to poor policing, the anonymous individual remains just that even through the subsequent two enquiries. Uncertainty, which feeds conspiracy theory, is heightened.

Atherton also made a subtle change to her recollection of the meeting's location. She had told police that Mulgan and she had gone to her room and there the other friend had joined them.⁴⁴ To the coroner, several months later she said: 'a mutual friend came in [i.e. Atherton's room] and we all went to his room, though Lt Col Mulgan said he was in a hurry and could not stay. We had one drink there and then Lt Col Mulgan said he must go and left the room.'⁴⁵ This person stays anonymous and either Atherton was merely expanding and clarifying on her original summary of events or the location of the discussion has been deliberately altered.

The above does not mean that both the official enquiries were without a critical eye. Besides Dolbey's protest, the inquiry asked questions but did not carry out any cross referencing between statements. The second did but it was solely focussed on the cause of death and involved the British and Egyptian medical representatives. In short, the investigations were configured around the death of a British officer and not a murder.

In response to the inquiry's questions asked of him Sergeant Murray, the investigating policeman, throw up either more questionable policing or, if one is looking for a conspiracy, further suggestion of just that. In the report where he stated a medico-legal report was still forthcoming, Murray also asserted: 'a small haversack which was found to contain several bottles and containers of drugs and poisons. These articles were carefully packed and confiscated for further examination and analysis.'⁴⁶ Asked how he knew what they contained, he responded: 'Each bottle was labelled with its contents.' But he could only remember those labelled with 'morphine'.⁴⁷ Similar vagueness hangs over the response to the question concerning Mulgan's kit. When asked if any kit other than that found at Mulgan's room had been 'discovered', Murray tersely commented 'I cannot say'.⁴⁸ Although there is

no indication other kit was found outside the room, test results would state there was morphine but no poisons found at the death scene.

At the second and final enquiry, Coroner Harold Cateaux, did not query aspects of the death except for the medical findings but took fresh statements from those involved – i.e. Atherton, SOE and hotel staff etc. He obviously did not want to examine the reasons why Mulgan might take his life. At least he was in a better position to consider the medical aspect as he had the authors of the relevant reports with him. His process was to listen to testimony from Mohamed Hassan Maarouf of the Egyptian medico-legal laboratory but at certain points confer with a British medical officer.

It had been a tortuous path to try and get a definitive answer over the cause of death. One of the issues had been the use of the word ‘entrails’. Clarification was made but the Egyptian chemist could not state the amount of morphine that had been taken and ‘whether a normal treatment dose or an excessive amount’.⁴⁹ It was the same case at the Coroner’s hearing. He reiterated that: ‘It is not possible to ascertain, by chemical tests, whether Morphia found in the tissues was taken by an addict or was taken as a fatal dose. Although the tests made revealed traces of Morphia I am unable to say whether the does taken was fatal or not.’⁵⁰ The rub is that the dose was fatal if Mulgan had not been using morphine on a regular basis. Hence a chemical test could not answer the question; it came down to knowledge about Mulgan’s use of morphine. It seems no-one came forward to say he had been a regular user.

The finding of the coroner into John Mulgan’s death was: ‘That the cause of death was poisoning by an overdose of morphia taken intentionally by the deceased while the balance of his mind was disturbed’.⁵¹ While it might seem like all the effort had only brought things back to full circle – it was suicide, examining the primary resources has raised some aspects of a possible conspiracy.

Fragments of Conspiracy

Deliberate actions by actors following Mulgan’s death prevent transparency of what was known at the time. There are also a plethora of minor points and assumptions not considered then but in retrospect add ambiguity.

In terms of evidence found and testimony it is the claim of cancer and the missing third person that stand out. As with his request to Dolbey,

Mulgan may have been layering over his self-destruction. Either that or he actually did think he had cancer and, in line with conspiracy theory, someone put the thought there. The missing third person's anonymity cannot be explained by security level issues (not at least at the level of SOE). It appears as the most incongruous fact.

One can add to this a range of lesser recorded items which could be explained away if the more blatant ambivalence described above were not evident. One is the supposed appointment with an unknown person Mulgan told Atherton about (was it real or not?). There was also an initial denial from his hotel that he was staying there when his SOE colleagues were seeking him on the night he was discovered dead. Many might also see a more sinister reason for Mulgan's arms being tied loosely together when examined in the post mortem than that given by the pathologist: 'presumably done after death to prevent the arms sticking out sideways'. There was also an unnecessary bandage around the right wrist.⁵² There is also the issue of missing documents.

Conspiracy Refutation

The need to maintain security does not necessarily mean SOE business had anything to do with Mulgan's end. Security was a key element in their day to day work. The dead man himself demonstrates as much. Just over two weeks before he was found dead, Mulgan discussed a security problem with Dolbey. This was over articles appearing in Greek newspapers. His various strategies had included approaching a British organisation to stop the printing because they 'are in a position to blackmail Greek newspapers effectively since they allot newsprint and transport facilities.'⁵³ Mulgan, Dolbey and their colleagues were surrounded by a habit of confidentiality whether it had been against the Axis or after liberation in Greece when civil war once more erupted. This does not mean the missing papers should be dismissed. However, no efforts by myself to date have been able to find them (using the date and from witness statements tell-tale pencil notations made by Mulgan).

Further weakening of the conspiracy explanation is brought about (except for the cancer claim) by focusing on that which was left by John Mulgan himself. His handwriting and signature is clearly recognisable. They are in Figures 1, 2 and 3. The Dolbey letter is the one that points to suicide.

The others do not. The extensive letter to Dolbey contains a familiarity of language demonstrating the shared responsibilities of the two – i.e. ‘liquidation’ was what they were doing in Greece. It also shows a literary style in line with a writer of Mulgan’s power. The closing sentence matches one of the strongest themes in his *Report on Experience* and his private correspondence. This is the tragedy, and his love for the Greeks he had fought and lived with: ‘In a short and not very productive life, I remember with fleeting pride that I managed to live in friendship with a lot of different and differing Greeks and hope a little of this won’t have been entirely wasted.’⁵⁴ The Dolbey note, can only be taken as coming from a man intent on taking his life. The other two may be read as farewell letters.

Residual Ambiguity

Residual ambiguity might be best approached by a lens of motivation and the thrust of this paper – *did the British conceal the fact that John Mulgan’s death was not a suicide?* Defining what constitutes the ‘British’ throws up a span of institutions which slants against any agreed hidden agenda. To say that SOE, the Royal Army Medical Corps, Military Police, the regular British Army and the Foreign Office’s Consulate Service who ran the coronial inquest were all working together is unlikely. Dolbey’s protest would show that at least he was out of any joint concerted effort. British motivation to present a suicide would be linked to some official aim rather than a personal one (the latter is another matter altogether). In this, Mulgan’s SOE work is an obvious factor for consideration. Although he was effective in working with left wing partisans in occupied Greece, his latter duties in Athens involved him and Dolbey dispensing considerable amounts of money to Greeks the two considered should be compensated. Bitterness would obviously ensue from refusal to compensate. But Cairo is a long way from Athens. It would take resources and money to get there. If it was politically motivated then one has the left and right to consider. If it was the left, then the British would only benefit from exposing it. On the other hand, their predilection for the right might support a Greek assassination from that direction.

If the British are suspect then one must consider the New Zealand endorsement of the whole investigative process (police and two hearings) as being erroneous. New Zealand’s officials *eventually* had copies of the police

report, Dolbey's protest and the coroner's hearing. Given the energy expended by the Wellington administration in pressing the British authorities (clearly shown in New Zealand government and military communications⁵⁵) it would seem they wanted a thorough investigation. What they eventually got was, it would seem, less than ideal. Determining the extent of New Zealand culpability of an inadequate investigation is difficult to judge. With no documentary record of that process one is left with the statement given to biographer O'Sullivan decades after the event by an officer, then deputy Judge Advocate General with the New Zealand army and subsequently overseer of numerous royal commissions and President of the Court of Appeal. It would seem the New Zealanders thought the British processes were all in order and thus their intentions genuine.

Conclusion

Although this paper has provided a degree of empirical analysis not previously undertaken, it still ends with a degree of ambiguity over John Mulgan's death. The major inconsistencies of a missing person and a probable false claim of cancer in a multi-agency extended investigation stands out. While the latter can be explained by a disintegrating man, the former remains enigmatic. Taking a wider perspective, there is a plethora of minor ambivalences and minor assumptions that heap fuel onto the conspiracy pyre. I believe these elements together with the persona of a highly intelligent, young creative man will ensure the persistence of those who accept the conspiracy explanation of John Mulgan's untimely death. And so Mulgan's legend and iconic status will continue to fascinate for the foreseeable future.

Notes

- 1 London based research for this paper was supported by the World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE) Oceania & Far East and the Queensland Chapter of the Australasian Hellenic Educational Progressive Association.
- 2 For example, the introduction of a 2011 publication asserts that the name of John Mulgan has 'a looming presence' and 'he casts a surprisingly long shadow over the literature of New Zealand...an author raised after his death to a heroic status he would have found embarrassing.' John Mulgan, [Peter Whiteford ed.] *Good Mail: Letters of John Mulgan*, Wellington, 2011. ix.
- 3 John Mulgan, [Peter Whiteford ed.] *Report on Experience*, Wellington, 2010.

- 4 John Mulgan, [Peter Whiteford ed.] *A Good Mail: Letters of John Mulgan*.
- 5 Martyn Brown 'Political Context of John Mulgan's Greek Wartime Life and Death', *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, NS 10 2011, 89-113
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 See for example, Gary Alan Fine, Veronique Campion-Vincent and Chip Heath eds., *Social Impact of Rumor and Legend*, Somerset, c2005. My own academic endeavours with rumour and knowledge sharing provided some of the contextual background for this paper. Martyn Brown and Andrea Napier 'Knowledge Transfer and Rumour – Have we missed something?' *Proceedings of Fifth European Conference on Organizational Knowledge Learning and Capabilities*, Innsbruck, 2-3 April 2004; M. Brown & A Cater-Steel 'Do Rumours contribute to Knowledge Management - and will we ever know?' *Proceedings of 4th Mediterranean Conference on Information Systems*, 25-27 Sept 2009, Athens, Greece
- 8 See for example, Sean Damer "Book Reviews: A Life Searching for the New Zealand Man" *New Zealand Herald* April 4, 2012.
- 9 Tomasz Konopka, Adam Gross, Krzysztof Wozniak, Malgorzata Klys, 'Forensic medical examination of the corpse of General Władysław Sikorski, a putative victim of assassination in 1943', *Forensic Science International*, 202 (2010), pp. e29-e33.
- 10 Cliff Spiegelman, William A. Tobin, William D. James, Simon J. Sheather, Stuart Wexler, D. Max Roundhill, 'Chemical and Forensic Analysis of JFK Assassination Bullet Lots: Is a Second Shooter Possible?' *The Annals of Applied Statistics*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Dec., 2007), pp. 287-301.
- 11 The seminal work of Allport and Postman provided an algebraic expression with ambiguity as one variable. G.W. Allport, L. Postman *Psychology of Rumour*, New York: 1947.
- 12 Cass R. Sunstein & Adrian Vermeule, 'Conspiracy Theories: Causes and Cures' *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 17, 2, (2009), pp. 202-227. p. 205.
- 13 For example, the Communist Party of Greece, Royal Military Police Museum, Egyptian National Library and Archives, SOE and Foreign Office records at The National Archives, Kew, private papers of SOE personnel at Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, London, and the Benaki Archives, Athens. Letters were also sent to the addresses of personalities listed in the official investigation. Finally a journalist writing about the fate of the hotel where Mulgan's body was found.
- 14 Paul Day, *John Mulgan*, New York, c1968. The later edition does not vary from this earlier one. Paul Day *John Mulgan*, Wellington, 1977. I use the earlier one as it was in the context of still living participants.
- 15 Dolbey's recorded questions and responses to Day. Dobrski Papers File 34, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College London(LHCMA)
- 16 Day, p. 73.
- 17 Paul Day. 'Mulgan, John Alan Edward', from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30-Oct-2012 URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m68/mulgan-john-alan-edward>
- 18 Vincent O'Sullivan, *Long Journey to the Border: a Life of John Mulgan*, 2nd ed., Wellington, 2011; James McNeish, *Dance of the Peacocks: New Zealanders in exile in the time of Hitler and Mao Tse-tung*, Auckland, 2003. O'Sullivan states in his Author's Note that 'For the second edition in 2011, only minor stylistic amendments have been made.' The only changes of content related to a pre-war incident.
- 19 O'Sullivan, *Postscript*. At the 2011 Stout Research Centre Conference on Mulgan. O'Sullivan also stated he obtained the information via an interview with the officer concerned.
- 20 MS-Papers-7906-42 Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL)
- 21 At least Papers relating to the death of John Mulgan ATL. MS-papers-7906-40.

- 22 New Zealand Defence Force Archives, Trentham (NZDFA) Personnel File PF 91369 John Mulgan.
- 23 Dobrski Papers, File 20 (LHCMA). Dolbey used an Anglicized version of his name during the war.
- 24 The National Archives, Kew. (TNA) FO/841/524.
- 25 McNeish, p. 258.
- 26 TNA FO/841/524 Dolbey, Mulgan's commanding officer and Angus, one of the New Zealander's colleagues, are named as the authority used in two forms at least.
- 27 John Mulgan, [Peter Whiteford ed.] *A Good Mail* pp.299-300.
- 28 TNA FO/841/524 Additional note signed H.J. Harman Joyce 27 August 1945.
- 29 TNA FO/841/524 *Report on Death of J.A.E. Mulgan, OX and Bucks Light Infantry. Att. Force 133, GHQ, MEF on the 26th April 1945.* [6 May 1945]
- 30 TNA FO/841/524 Dolbey Memorandum Court of Inquiry – Death of Lt Col J.A.E. Mulgan 18 August 1945.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 TNA FO/841/524 Report by Mohamed Hassan Maarouf 20 June 1945.
- 33 TNA FO/841/524 Letter typed by John Mulgan to Dolbey and found in his hotel room.
- 34 TNA FO 841/524 *Report on Death of J.A.E. Mulgan* .
- 35 TNA FO/841/524 Statement by Sergeant G. Murray to H.A. Cateaux, Coroner 14 September 1945.
- 36 TNA FO/841/524 Statement by Lt Col J Dolbey to H.A. Cateaux, Coroner 13 September 1945.
- 37 TNA FO/841/524 Answer by Murray to Question , Court of Inquiry.7 August 1945
- 38 TNA FO 841/524 Statement by Major W.G. Angus Court of Inquiry [undated]
- 39 TNA FO/841/524 Memorandum Court of Inquiry – Death of Lt Col J.A.E. Mulgan 18 August 1945.
- 40 TNA FO/841/524 Statement of Mrs Christine Atherton, residing at Continental Hotel, Cairo. 29 April 1945.
- 41 TNA FO/841/524 *Report: Death of No. 91369, Lt. Col. J.A.E. Mulgan*. The one exception was the medical officer called to the scene. He was subsequently named.
- 42 TNA FO/841/524 Statement from Atherton 29 April 1945
- 43 TNA FO/841/524 Mulgan note to Atherton
- 44 TNA FO/841/524. Statement to Lieut B. Camp 29 April 1945.
- 45 TNA FO/841/524 Statement to H.A. Cateaux, Coroner, 13th September 1945.
- 46 TNA FO/841/524 *Report on Death of J.A.E. Mulgan* .
- 47 TNA FO/841/524 Answer by Sergeant Murray to question. Court of Inquiry
- 48 TNA FO/841/524 Answer by Sergeant Murray to question Court of Inquiry
- 49 TNA FO/841/524 4 July 1945 Sergeant E. Berry to Assistant Provost Marshall.
- 50 TNA FO/841/524 Statement of Mohamed Hassan Maarouf to H.A. Cateaux, Coroner 26 September 1945.
- 51 TNA FO/841/524 Coronal Inquest Finding 26 September 1945.
- 52 TNA FO/841/524. *Post Mortem Report*.
- 53 Mulgan to Dolbey 10 April 1945. Dobrski Papers 34. (LHMCA)
- 54 TNA FO/841/524 Letter written by John Mulgan to Dolbey and found in his hotel room.
- 55 New Zealand Defence Force Archives, Trentham (NZDFA) Personnel File PF 91369 John Mulgan.