

# Greek terrorist admits to murder of British attache

By STEVE HOGGAN

FOR ALMOST three decades its members evaded capture, watching as contemporaries such as the Red Brigades and the Baader-Meinhof gang bit the dust.

But last night, the days of Europe's most elusive terror group, November 17, appeared numbered after Greek police announced the capture of a professor said to be the brains behind the group, and a man confessed to the murder of Brigadier Stephen Saunders, the British military attaché.

Vassilis Xiros, 30, admitted killing the diplomat in 2000 as well as the 1997 murder of the Anglo-Greek businessman Constantinos Peralkos.

Detectives in Greece said they had rounded up a total of seven suspects, three of whom have confessed to dozens of murders, bombings and bank robberies.

The organisation, which is responsible for 23 political murders since the 1980s, is un-



Alexandros Giotopoulos: Arrested on island of Lipsi

dergoing an unexpected implosion following a bungled bombing attempt that provided the first clue to the identity of its members.

The news will provide welcome relief for Heather Saunders, the wife of the British attaché, who has campaigned for her husband's killers to be brought to justice.

Brigadier Saunders was gunned down by three men as he travelled to work in Athens.

The breakthrough for police came on 29 June when Savas Xiros, a 40-year-old icon painter, was seriously hurt as a bomb he was trying to plant exploded near the port of Piraeus in Athens.

This was the first opportunity the police had to question a November 17 suspect. A revolver found near by had been taken from a policeman killed during a 1984 robbery blamed on the terrorist group.

Within weeks, two hideouts were found stuffed with dozens of anti-tank rockets, assault rifles, documents and disguises. One of the guns found was a .45 calibre pistol that had been used to kill Brigadier Saunders.

Xiros's brother, Vassilis, admitted murdering Brigadier Saunders. Police Chief Fotis Nassiakas said two other men, another brother of Xiros, Christodoulos, 44, an instrument maker, and Dionissis Georgiakis, 26, had also been arrested.

On Wednesday night Greek special forces swooped on the



Christodoulos Xiros, right, accompanied by anti-terrorist police in Athens EPA

island of Lipsi and arrested 58-year-old Paris-born Alexandros Giotopoulos. He was caught as he tried to board a hydrofoil from the island.

Police said his fingerprints matched those found in one of the November 17 hideouts.

Mr Nassiakas said: "From various evidence in the investigation, we began to build a picture of the ideological in-

structor of the organisation and the writer of its proclamations."

Mr Giotopoulos had been living under the assumed name Michalis Economou. He is believed to have been active in the Paris-based student opposition to the military dictatorship which ruled Greece between 1967 and 1974. The November 17 group took its name from a

student uprising against the junta in 1973. He had been living in France and Greece with a Frenchwoman. He is the son of Dimitris Giotopoulos, a well-known 1930s Communist theoretician and follower of Leon Trotsky.

Greek politicians say that the involvement of detectives from Scotland Yard proved to be the group's nemesis.