

PRESS RELEASE

ECA MISSION TO GREECE



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Distributed through facilities of the UNITED STATES INFORMATION SERVICE, American Mission, ATHENS

No. 1203

8 March 1952
(For Sunday Press)

SUMMARY OF AMERICAN ASSISTANCE TO PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM IN GREECE

ATHENS -- Following is the second in a series of weekly articles summing up achievements of American Aid in various spheres of the national recovery effort in Greece. The series will cover most of the fields in which the United States has tried to assist Greece toward national self-sufficiency, from the end of World War II to the beginning of 1952. This article concerning the field of public health.

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The strong ties of friendship between average Americans and the people of Greece are particularly evident in the field of public health. For this is a phase of the Greek recovery effort where organized Marshall Plan assistance is by no means the whole story. Much of the help given to Greek public health represents the spontaneous sympathy of hundreds of thousands of individual Americans who gave what they could to ease the plight of the Greek people, on a direct and personal basis entirely apart from the taxes they paid to help general European recovery.

Americans were stirred in 1940 by the Greeks' spirited defense against the Italian attack, and were delighted when the smaller Greek forces hurled Mussolini's legions back into Albania. Public campaigns began simultaneously in all parts of the U.S., to collect food, clothing, medicines and money to aid the Greeks. No other nation, except perhaps the Finns, provoked such direct and overwhelming response among the ordinary people of the United States. The reason, of course, was simple. Both Greece and Finland, small but valiant, had hurled a courageous "NO" to the demands of a powerful and contemptuous neighbor, and then had beaten the bigger power to a standstill.

It was with a sickening sense of loss, therefore, that Americans reacted to the Nazi conquest of Greece. Assistance became impossible except through International Red Cross parcels which were sent by many Americans throughout the war, and which often were the margin of sheer existence for whole communities. A door slammed shut on American aid to Greece, and not even news came out, except delayed and incomplete reports of some of the worst atrocities.

But when Greece was liberated finally, in 1944, a great pent-up tide of sympathy was liberated also, across the length and breadth of the U.S. This personal emotional response found outlet in many ways. There was general public acceptance and support of UNRRA relief work, with the U.S. assuming more than 70 per cent of the costs. There was increased backing for such long-established agencies as YMCA and YWCA. And there was Greek War Relief.

The main motive force and leadership for this organization came naturally from Greek-Americans, and the various philhellenic lodges and associations such as AHEPA, which traced ancestral ties to Greece. But the response and

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membership was general, among Americans of all creeds and circumstances and national origins. Businessmen badgered their associates for contributions. Housewives held parties to raise funds. And in the schools across the nation, millions of American children clutched pennies they had intended to spend for candy, and solemnly marched up to deposit the money in milk bottles labeled "Greek War Relief."

A large share of this money went for food and clothing to keep Greeks alive. But most of it went into public health. Throughout Greece today, in large cities and small towns, there are gleaming big hospitals and small neat clinics built with Greek War Relief funds, which are permanent monuments to a spontaneous outpouring of sympathy by millions of individual Americans to the people of Greece.

These achievements are important in several ways. In size, because they are substantial. In results, because hundreds of Greeks are alive today who might have died without the care these hospitals and clinics provide. As symbol, because they are eloquent of American good-will and because the Greeks have never forgotten this manifestation of friendship in the darkest hours.

And yet these accomplishments of private American help to Greece, substantial and important as they are, constitute only a fraction of the total public health achievements of American Aid. The basic job was accomplished under the Marshall Plan, with public funds administered by the American Mission and the Greek Government, according to principles evolved in two centuries of U.S. public health activities, but modified by the realities of the Greek environment.

THE SITUATION. The situation of public health organization in Greece at the end of World War II was devastatingly simple. It was non-existent. War and occupation had smashed flat the previous facilities for dealing with public health problems. The state apparatus, already primitive in terms of western public health machinery, had been decimated of personnel. Medical men in every country seem to be stubborn nationalists, a situation unpleasing to occupation authorities and to Quisling regimes. So the doctors suffered unduly in the drives for hostages and "unreliable elements."

Public health administration was in chaos. Desperate Greeks, near death from various maladies, paid enormous black market prices for medicines which in some parts of the country were choking warehouses. No one knew about, or could lay hands on, drugs or equipment which in many cases were surplus to Greek needs. In other cases, not one gram existed in the entire country of basic drugs required by all. And everywhere Greeks suffered from diseases which western science had long ago defeated.

The basic equipment of any national public health program was lacking. Hospitals had been looted or destroyed. Equipment had been stolen or misused. The medical schools were in pathetic shape, lacking equipment, staff, and students. Greek medical libraries had been combed by enemy "specialists" who had calmly appropriated everything of value. Surgeons were undertaking critical operations with instruments which were the best available, but which a self-respecting carpenter would have disdained.

The staff of the public health division in the American Mission, when confronted with this situation, commented that at least they were starting with a clean slate. And then they rolled up their sleeves and plunged into a complicated and taxing endeavor. They scoured the nation to find Greek colleagues who would help them in a situation which everyone admitted was virtually hopeless. They found many men and women who worked night and day to restore Greek public health. They found some colleagues whose sense of humor extended to cynicism, but whose cynicism was skin-deep. As the work advanced, these "cynics" were often to be found working longer hours than the avowed optimists. And balancing both extremes were the rank and file of the Greek General Directorate of Hygiene, who worked full hours, without illusions as to overnight successes, often mildly surprised at the amount of progress made.

The public health activities of American Aid eventually affected almost every phase of Greek life. The major divisions embraced construction, sanitary engineering, public health nursing, tuberculosis control, straightening out the medical supply situation, training of medical personnel, health education among the people, and an extensive program of preventive medicine.

The American Mission public health division included, at its peak in 1950, seven foreign service persons on the Marshall Plan payroll, and 15 commissioned officers of the U.S. Public Health Service, loaned to the Mission under a technical assistance agreement whereby their salaries and living expenses were reimbursed to the U.S.P.H.S. These Americans worked with the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Greek Government agency responsible for the medical care of 3,000,000 persons legally classed as "indigent" (nearly half the population of Greece), and for carrying on preventive health measures for the entire population.

PREVENTIVE MEDICINE. One of the major battles in public health had already been launched by the World Health Organization of the United Nations before the Marshall Plan's inception. This was a fight to the death against malaria, traditionally the great scourge of Mediterranean countries, and especially prevalent in Greece. Malaria has now been reduced to where it no longer is considered a major public health problem.

Marshall Plan sanitary engineers advised the Greek General Directorate for Hygiene in the campaign. Squads of men with spraying machines visited thousands of Greek homes annually to drench them with DDT solutions. Greeks rejoiced because not only malarial mosquitoes were wiped out, but also many types of household pests which, in addition to being nuisances, also carried other diseases. The sanitary engineers also went to the source of trouble by spraying thousands of acres of swamps which had provided breeding grounds for malarial mosquitoes. Much of this work was accomplished by hand, but in addition great expenses were covered by airplanes which sprayed DDT on areas that men on foot could never have reached.

SANITATION. A major assault was made simultaneously on other diseases endemic in Greece, through \$2,100,000 worth of sanitation equipment including chlorinators, pipe, pumps and well-drilling machinery imported with Marshall Plan aid. In hundreds of villages, poor water supplies had resulted in typhoid fever. This sanitation campaign achieved results out of all proportion to the money costs, since the villagers contributed free labor to install the pipes and pumps. Out of 735 communities scheduled to receive such equipment, 180 had completed their projects in 1951, and 110 others were in various stages of construction as the year ended. The projects ranged from minor

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repairs in existing water or sewage systems, to projects which brought water as much as three miles (five kilometers).

REHABILITATION. After a decade of warfare, in which frost-bite was a normal winter hazard for thousands of men, and land-mines took their toll among both soldiers and civilians, the number of amputees in Greece is estimated now at about 18,000. The two State artificial limb factories were unable to cope with the need of these victims. Under the Marshall Plan thousands of semi-finished limbs, accessories and manufacturing equipment have been imported. Four Greek technicians were sent abroad for training in production of artificial limbs, and British experts were brought to Greece for consultation and advice.

Disabled war veterans and crippled children also were aided through a rehabilitation and vocational training program sponsored by the Marshall Plan. Three foreign physiotherapists were brought to Greece to help. A foreign orthopedic surgeon spent a year in Greece as consultant.

MEDICAL SUPPLIES. When UNRRA came to Greece after the war, the medical supply situation was chaotic. There were serious shortages in some essential medicines. But large stocks of other drugs were scattered throughout the nation in inaccessible places. There was virtually no central inventory control.

The American advisors first assisted the Greek Ministry in assessing requirements, and placed orders for more than \$2,000,000 worth of drugs and equipment from other countries. Meanwhile, countrywide inspections disclosed unsuspected stocks of other equipment, which was promptly allocated to medical institutions that could use them. At the same time, the Mission public health division worked with the Greek Foreign Trade Administration in screening 5,500 applications by private commercial importers of medical supplies, which eventually amounted to about \$8,000,000.

After the Marshall Plan began, the public health division helped procure another \$2,086,000 worth of medical supplies during the first year, and approved commercial import of an additional \$8,500,000 worth of medical equipment and supplies. Since then, about \$4,400,000 worth of additional drugs and equipment have been imported by the Greek Government under similar arrangements. The quantity of essential medical supplies in Greece is not only sufficient now to cover current needs, but also provides a comfortable margin of essential medical supplies for a long period in event of emergencies. In some categories, in fact, such as the field of antibiotic medicines (penicillin, etc.), the Mission believes Greece may be over-stocked. Additional supplies are being purchased, although not to the extent requested by the Ministry.

One of the main factors in efficient distribution of medical supplies to state institutions has been the establishment in 1950 of a central warehouse in Athens. And in 1951, the supply problem was further eased by intensive inspection of all medical storerooms throughout Greece, by teams of investigators from the Mission public health division, the Mission controller's office, and a committee specially designated by the Prime Minister. This program put about \$1,000,000 worth of medical supplies into

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active use by prompt issuance to medical institutions, by recapture of surplus supplies, and by closing out excess depots.

NURSING. American nursing specialists have worked closely with the nursing section of the Greek General Directorate of Hygiene. With American urging, a Nurse Practise Act was adopted by Parliament in 1950, and the Hellenic Nurses' Association was revived the same year. Both actions have helped stabilize the nursing profession, enhance its prestige, and increase its usefulness to the nation.

When American Aid began, the needs of nurse training were dictated by the realities of the guerilla war. First priority accordingly went to in-service training of practical nurses already serving in hospitals. When the program was completed in 1950, a total of 1,293 practical nurses and 74 hospital corpsmen had attended training courses of six to eight weeks in 45 institutions.

Second in priority of time but probably more important in long range terms was the training of graduate nurses, who in every nation constitute the professional core of public health work. This training has progressed rapidly, assisted by more than \$10,000 worth of special teaching aids imported for three nursing schools in Athens and Salonika. In Athens, a new addition to the nursing school and home was dedicated at the Greek Red Cross hospital late in November, 1951. This building is one of the most modern in Europe, providing facilities for 50 additional students. Similarly a new nursing school and home was built with American assistance at Salonika, and is scheduled to enroll its first class early in 1952. A standard curriculum of studies was approved by the Nursing Council and is now followed by all schools of professional nursing.

A third major category was that of public health nurses. As 1952 began, the entire emphasis of the public health program was swinging more and more toward programs to improve health in the rural areas of Greece which traditionally have lacked medical attention. The key figure in such a program was the public health nurse who would make her rounds among the country people, teaching hygiene practices, assisting in routine ailments, inoculating children against common diseases, and referring serious cases to appropriate doctors.

As 1951 ended, the eleven Greek War Relief health centers in rural Greece finally had their full complement of public health nurses, also 300 public health nursing bags, purchased through the Marshall Plan, had arrived in Greece for distribution. A public health nursing supervisor, who completed a year of post graduate training in the United States under the technical assistance program, was added to the nursing staff of the Directorate of Hygiene. Three other nurses who completed their studies abroad in 1951 also had reassumed their posts in the Ministry.

CONSTRUCTION. The most spectacular and easily measurable public health achievements of American Aid have been in the field of construction, with more than 10 million dollars allocated in Marshall Plan funds to build and equip hospitals and other large-scale health institutions. Here are some of these projects which are already completed: two nurses' schools in Athens which provided additional teaching and living facilities for students at the Greek Red Cross school and the State School for Nurses and Visiting Nurses;

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a central medical supply warehouse in Athens; a 120-bed tuberculosis sanatorium in Sparta; one health center, St. Nicholas in the Peloponnosus; and extensive repairs and renovation in the School of Hygiene in Athens.

Projects under way or nearing completion as 1952 began included three general hospitals in Piraeus, Yannina and Samos, with an aggregate capacity of 350 beds; three tuberculosis sanatoria in Salonika, Yannina and Lemia, with total capacity of 850 beds; a 200-bed maternity hospital in Athens; and a health center at Komotini in eastern Thrace. Also making good progress was construction work on a public health center at Volos, and the Venizelion Pan-Cretan sanatorium at Herakleion in Crete.

In two teaching hospitals in Athens, extensive repairs and additions were underway to improve existing facilities and increase capacity by 240 beds, and at Athens Mental hospital, a 500-bed pavilion also had been repaired and opened for use.

Then there were the Greek War Relief Association enterprises which included 11 modern health centers throughout rural Greece, two new hospitals which are perhaps the most modern in all Europe, a completely remodeled hospital, and a 500-bed pavilion added to another hospital. The dollar costs, by far the largest portion, were shouldered by Greek War Relief, but the American Mission furnished more than \$2,000,000 in drachma counterpart funds to pay local costs for labor and construction.

EQUIPMENT. Nearly all the public hospitals and medical schools of Greece have benefited from the Marshall Plan in terms of modern equipment, imported from western nations with American Aid. The list of such items covers the entire range of medical catalogs. Laundry and kitchen machinery was provided for many hospitals. Athens University dental school received dental chair units, and instruments. The medical schools of both Salonika and Athens universities received such items as X-ray equipment and laboratory apparatus. Teaching aids were imported. Special equipment was brought in for research institutions.

ADMINISTRATION. As in nearly all fields of American Aid to Greece, one of the most pressing and important aspects of the work of the Marshall Plan public health division was that of administration and proper organization. When the program began, public health was administered by the Greek Ministry of Hygiene. The Ministry later was eliminated during an administrative reorganization designed to streamline the Greek Government to efficient proportions, and eventually became a directorate within the Ministry of Social Welfare. Meanwhile many other changes in structure came about.

Throughout these shifts, the American public health advisers concentrated on scientific planning for the future. Courses in hospital administration and maintenance were organized, using the experience gained by a number of medical trainees who were sent to the U.S. or to western Europe under the technical assistance program. A British expert helped reorganize the Athens School of Hygiene. An exhaustive study of medical care facilities was completed, and findings were tabulated on 161 hospitals, 320 private clinics and 14 health centers. This survey is now being used by the Greek Government to plan future programs.

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PRESENT TRENDS. Public health work in Greece was undergoing a radical shift in emphasis as 1952 began. The main facilities, such as hospitals and medical schools, had been restored and expanded with American Aid. Meanwhile the direction of American assistance had changed. The Mutual Security Agency, successor to the ECA was channeling aid funds into projects of direct defense importance. Funds available for public health projects became restricted for the most part to finishing hospitals and other large construction projects which were near completion.

Aside from construction, the limited American Aid funds for public health were going into two main fields, advanced training of Greek public health specialists under the technical assistance program, and projects aimed directly at combating specific diseases and at bringing public health benefits to rural areas. During the life of the Marshall Plan, 22 physicians, nine nurses, and 10 other public health technicians in various fields had received advanced training in the United States or in western Europe. This program, potentially of enormous value to public health in Greece, continued.

A concerted campaign was begun to wipe out leprosy, venereal disease and trachoma, principally by use of newly developed antibiotic drugs and also by the hiring of six Greek physicians to devote full time to these objectives. Three other physicians were engaged to aid in the improvement of laboratory training and facilities, and 42 laboratory technicians were receiving special training under American Aid auspices. At the same time, training of X-ray technicians was undertaken.

But the main American effort was being directed toward improving health conditions in the areas which most needed it, the rural parts of Greece. Basically such a campaign was one of education and gradual improvement in water supply, sanitation practices, home health measures, inoculation, and simple principles of diet. The key figures in the program were the sanitary enquirer and public health nurse who would visit the villages. But also essential was an adequate supply of patriotic young doctors who might be induced to defer the building up of a lucrative practise in the larger cities for two or three years in order to devote themselves to the country people. The problem was far from simple and far from solved, but the American Mission public health advisers were working hard at it as 1952 began.

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