PRESS RELEASE

MUTUAL SECURITY AGENCY

Special Mission to Greece for Economic Cooperation

WASHINGTON - Following is the third in a series of weekly articles covering
achievements of American aid in various sectors of the national recovery
program in Greece from World War II to the beginning of 1949. The series
covers one of the fields in which the United States has tried to assist Greece
in reaching national self-sufficiency. This article concerns reconstruction
of highways and railroads.


Many observers consider the heavy construction work accomplished in Greece
with American aid to be the most spectacular single accomplishment in the recovery
program. It is certainly the most visible, and it is changing -- or rather
restoring -- the face of the nation in the fields of transportation and
communications.

Greece lay paralyzed when the Axis aid began. The Greek Directorate of the
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the various Greek Government agencies,
assumed the task of rebuilding virtually every major channel of communication
throughout the country. For the retreating Axis forces, determined both to
delay pursuit and to render the country useless to the Allied forces, had
systematically destroyed nearly all port facilities, highways, railroads and
telecommunications.

Piraeus and the other main Greek ports were a shambles, with breakwaters
and wharves dismantled, cranes smashed, arms and munitions destroyed. The
 Corinth canal was blocked. Ships were sunk to block strategic channels.
Almost all bridges and tunnels were blown up or rendered useless, and German
officers ordered an ingenious railway car in which automatically slipped and
detonated dynamite charges against every second rail along hundreds of miles
of track as the last train withdrew. Highway bridges were destroyed, and
the smallest culverts were blasted. Even the road surfaces were gone, after
the pounding of military traffic, five years of weather, and utter lack of
maintenance.

The situation was made worse for guerrilla warfare. The loyalist Greek
forces had little ammunition and almost no mobility, and the supply problem
was a major difficulty. Communist bands, which had little use for roads anyway,
could slip across country, strike at isolated communities or army detachments,
and melt back into the mountains before troops could be brought against them.

The A.M.S. engineers, working with American contractors, scored their
efforts on two types of military priority. One was the reconstruction
of major roads so that the American aid supplies could flow into the nation.
The other was the job of rebuilding major roads, and constructing and expanding
airfields.
Many road areas, deep in disputed territory, could work only under the protection of large detachments of troops. Troops were killed. Others were blitzed and forcibly induced into the communist forces. Roads had to be swept daily for mines, and there was widespread sabotage on road projects, with stealing of machinery and destruction of construction equipment and rolling stock.

Then the Marshall Plan began, its Construction Division took over the program of the Corps of Engineers and expanded work into other fields. Since then, the newer sectors to which construction has been focused on these highways, railroads, ports, civil aviation, electric power, telecommunications, aerial roping, and water supply projects in cities of more than 5,000 population.

RESULTS. The main thoroughfares net is now nearly complete, with 1,000 billion feet of road having been reconstructed and paved with some sort of asphalt surface. Only a few small sections remain to be completed on the great north-south road running from Alexandria, on the Turkish border, through Heliopolis, Saugus and Athens down to Alexandria on the southeast tip of the Peloponnesus. In the northern part of the Peloponnesus, the road from Athens to Corinth and Patras has been virtually completed down the west coast as far as the port of Patras. In eastern Greece, paved highway now links Patras with banks and Taranto. One of the most important roads in a mountainous country with few east-west connections, the broad-tailed highway that runs over the Piriacos range from Patras to Thessaly, is now complete except for a small section in the Peloponnesus, between Lefkada.

Equally as important as the main highway network, so much an economic and a military need, is the improved road system, and this we have better than ever before. Today we are at ease about the most part, and with proper maintenance by modern roadbuilding equipment, we can keep it open the year round, except in snow country where they sometimes become impassable in winter. Many hundreds of kilometers of new roads have been built, especially to provide easy access to the mountains and isolated areas which are the main attraction for tourism in Greece.

Great progress has been achieved, particularly during 1961, in the other category of roads, the green highways of military nature roads built by us for the Greek armed forces, which now link the large areas of mountain country formerly inaccessible except on foot or by muleback. In all greater region, and its rough mountain areas which were hotbed strongholds during the guerrilla war, Greek troops now can move in full fighting kit at instant notice. The other need met in which much has been done is that of self-help roads, with whole communities contributing thousands of men-days of free labor to build roads to eliminate roads to connect their isolated villages with the outside world. Much of this labor has received assistance from American aid funds.

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As a major physical accomplishment in construction and engineering, the Greek road program has been immense. One indication of the work done is that some 800 highway bridges have been completely rebuilt, along with all other bridges, with new retaining walls and other scientific work required. But equally so important in the administrative reorganization which made the progress possible.

The Greek Public Roads Administration has been completely remodeled. American doctors placed particular emphasis on reconstruction, operation, maintenance, traffic safety, accounting, and testing and controlling materials. Greek personnel received training through lectures, conferences, special courses, and the use of motion picture training films.
Within the Greek Ministry of Public Works, a separate and independent Highway Department has been organized with directors and sub-directors to carry out such functions as administration, engineering, construction, and inspection. This recognition is still in progress. Standard plans, specifications, contracts documents and instructions to the contractors, etc., have been established by the Greek Association of State Highways Officials, and have been developed and approved by the Minister. Definitive designs for bridges, roads and airfields also have been established along with a "unit price" system of bidding.

The Construction Department, for the first time in history, is now receiving reasonably accurate and timely progress reports from the men who supervise contract construction work in the fields. Maintenance men are permanently stationed in highway districts throughout Greece, and safety inspectors are constantly in the field. Highway contractors are required to carry public liability, property damage and employee insurance. Uniform traffic signs, conforming with international usage, have been designed and erected throughout the country. A highway streetlight network, reported from the field, has painted center lines and warning signs on most Greek highways.

All these things are improvements with the general changes in administrative machinery in the Ministry, such reforms are considered by American advisors as being very important to the future of the Greek highway system than even the physical construction accomplished with American money, machines and technical advice.

In 1912, every one of all lines in Greece was operating. This left needs things to be desired. One point that struck both Greeks and Americans, but which was to be blamed on the various nations who had participated in building the original Greek railway system, was that there were three different gauges of track, and three different types of equipment, and in consequence consisted of leading and loading of goods and passengers. Another point was the unsatisfactory one that many methods were prototypical. Rails included every length from the meter to full size. Trains beaped and grated and shuddered along in bed, unseamed, and on some branches lines passengers never quite succeeded in anticipating the holes.

But all the same, there was a major advance. For the 1,878 kilometers of tracks in Greece, all but 173 kilometers were double. The locomotives, passenger cars, and freight cars were either destroyed or existing, with only 107 survivable units of rolling stock left in Greece. Many had been pulled across into refreshers where they still rustle. Others were blown up, or thrown off into steep canyons or into the Sanchin Canal. Serendipity a bridge or tunnel on the major lines but had been destroyed. The bridges were blown up and the tunnels blew up.

In the 1920s, the American railroad men and their Greek counterparts took pride in an almost hopeless situation and began making it right. First came the problem of redecorating the lines and it was a major engineering job. Greek narcotics took lengths of rails that were looked like sections by transverse explosions, and replaced themselves. Only if they salvaged two or three sections of usable track that could be straightened and laid down.

Bridges were rebuilt. Smashed the Rainelle bridge, a long span that would have been a major engineering achievement in any land, or considered by all Greeks as a symbol. Near Landes on the main line from Athens to Salonika, it took months to rebuild. It was nearly finished at the height of the guerrilla war. King Paul and Greek Government dignitaries participated in its dedication. And that evening ended up with a burning point. If the Rainelle bridge was
back in operation, the war was as good as won, reconstruction was well started, and Greece as a nation had survived. That was what the Greek people felt. Nothing that happened afterward ever really shook their confidence.

But the devoted men who worked to rehabilitate the Greek rail lines in this period did so at heavy cost. It was front-line war. The 2,000 Greek workers and American technical personnel working in the frigid mountains, rebuilding the tunnels and the large bridges, were joined by 1,000 soldiers of the Greek Army. French and American engineers surrounded the four work gangs in the area. Anti-personnel mines were planted outside the tunnels. No man was allowed to leave the compound after dark.

Despite these strong presumptions, the Communist threat was ever present. Guerrilla snipers kidnapped Americans and broadcast constant threats to kill the men who worked for the "Provisional Greek Government" and the "Liberation Army." Workers heard threats against the lives of their families, and the work area had to be searched daily for mines. Despite this harrowing which lasted for 18 months, the Greek workers stayed on the job and there was never any shortage of labor.

In all, the Communist bands murdered and wounded hundreds of Greek workers. The toll eventually included 268 men killed, 663 wounded, and 400 missing and four others who simply disappeared without a trace. Such casualties could be associated with a full division in active combat. Most of these casualties were sustained in central and northern Greece, but many also occurred in the Peloponnese.

Due to the northeast, the Greek workmen near Alexandroupoli, heavy military operations took place against the railroads. The bandits attacked passenger trains with hand grenades and automatic weapons. In one such encounter, in mid-1948, the Communists destroyed a locomotive, derailed the train with gasoline, and gutted it. An entire, a work force, two soldiers and several passengers were killed. The incident was typical.

A year later, in the same area, artillery fire from across the Bulgarian frontier destroyed a large bridge. Two workers were killed and three wounded seriously in the attack. The two personnel kept up their work under continual shelling and repaired the bridge.

Into 1949, with the guerrilla war just finished, the first train in six years made its run from Athens to Salonica. Here, in general only, is an account of what the accomplishments meant. It required rebuilding 248 bridges, five tunnels, some of which had to be relocated, were opened up, and 863 kilometers of track were replaced. This work also required replacement of 110 kilometers of telecommunication, 22 signal points, 27 switch stations, and 17 other buildings of various types. That is one indication of the Greek railroad crews accomplishment.

It falls to include the many subways, rifle and smoke and incendiary engineering tech work was required. And it leaves out of the accounting the lives it cost, or the daily horrors of the men who made it possible.

Meanwhile, the railroad men of Greece had begun the heavy task of renovating and replacing Greek rolling stock. Burned-out shells of freight cars were hauled to Athens to become and locomotives. Those all that could be salvaged was an axle and a pair of wheels, meant from long browning in the sea. It was at least a startling point. Inheriting in tattered rail yard and reeking shells of roundhouses, which other workers were trying to rebuild, Greek workers put together new cars from the pieces of the old. Together salvaged parts from three or four locomotives were required to put together one that worked.

In late 1947, a committee of Greek Industry started work on the rehabilitation of Greek rolling stock, new Italian factories were built. Freight and passenger cars, locomotive engines and other essential equipment which had been handed over along the rehabilitation, was delivered. Under the Greek Government gathered the scrap metal along the right-of-way, and shipped it off.
to the Italian factories that were making the new equipment. It was part of the Greek-Italian operating agreement that Greece would furnish the gage and Italy would fabricate it into usable equipment.

By 1951, the main job had been accomplished. With opening of the last branch line from Salonika to Elefsis in northeast Greece, and with exception of the nation's most famous rail asset, the Simplex-Gefera express from Athens to Paris, the rail network was back in operating condition. Then came the second job, rebuilding these parts of the line that had been hurriedly thrown together as a matter of national emergency.

In 1952 began, track crews were busy throughout all Greece, taking up old patchwork rails and replacing them with bright new steel rails and ties from Belgium and other European nations, purchased through Marshall Plan agreements within the European Payments Union. Roadbeds were being re-engineered, and signal systems were being upgraded. Tunnels that had been reopened in emergency were finally getting new linings of concrete and stone. Bridges and culverts were being strengthened and patched out, and the rail crews who had built them ten years before were finally getting around to installing proud ornamental plaques on the structures, relating their achievements. Throughout the nation, rail movement of goods and passengers was approaching pre-war levels, and wheat, rice, tobacco and other basic commodities were moving on schedule among the major cities.

The Greek railroads, including the Greek, running from Athens north to Thessaly, still operated on a deficit basis, and this fact inclined Americans and Greeks alike to 1952 began. The deficit was shrinking as business returned, but operating costs also were increasing to rise. It was in this field of administrative operations of the railroads that Americans felt the most big reconstruction battle lay in the field of transportation. As in other countries, bus and truck operation was taking a larger and larger share of passenger and freight traffic. Labor costs had risen, along with the costs of fuel and equipment.

But the rebuilding task was largely accomplished, except for replacement of rolling stock. Operating schedules, previously only vague prospects for trains to show up, were being met more and more often by Greek trains. Even freight trains arrived within reason. The Construction Division in the American Mission was vitally concerned and the railroad business, its main task accomplished. The Industry and Transportation division took over the next big task, that of helping the Greek government to operate its rail lines on a self-sustaining basis.