PRESS RELEASE

MUTUAL SECURITY AGENCY
Special Mission to Greece for Economic Cooperation

Advisory - Following is the third in a series of weekly articles summarizing the achievements of American aid in various sectors of the national recovery effort in Greece from World War II to the beginning of 1952. The series covers most of the fields in which the United States has tried to assist Greece toward national self-sufficiency. This article concerns reconstruction of highways and railroads.

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

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

Planes and the other main Greek ports were a shambles, with breakwaters and harbor structures, piers, docks, causeways, and warehouses destroyed. The Corinth canal was blocked. Ships were sunk in blockages of channels. Almost all bridges and tunnels were blown up on the rail lines, and German efficiency produced an ingenious railway car which automatically dropped dynamite charges against every sound rail along hundreds of miles of track as the last train withdrew. Highway bridges were destroyed, and the smallest culverts were blasted. From the road surfaces were gone, after the pounding of military traffic, five years of weather, and utter lack of maintenance.

The situation was made even worse for guerrilla warfare. The guerrilla war drove little communication and almost no mobility, and the supply problem was a major difficulty. Communist bands, which had little use for roads anyway, could slip across mountain ridges at limited compass or any distance, and ride back into the mountains before troops could be brought against them.

The U.S. engineering, working with American contractors, restored their efforts to the fields of equal military priority. One was the reconstruction of major ports 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 hit and killed or literally devoured by the communist forces. Roads led to be swept daily for mines, and there was widespread sabotage on new projects, with sowing by machine construction equipment and rolling stones.

Thus 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 major sectors in which construction has been focused on these highways, railroads, ports, civil aviation, electric power, telecommunications, aerial mapping, and water supply projects in cities of more than 5,000 population.

RESULTS. The main Greek highway system is now nearly complete, with 5,400 kilometers of road having been reconstructed and paved with some sort of asphalt surface. Only a few small sections remain to be completed on the greater north-south road running from Alexandria to Athens on the Turkish border, through Kavala, Salonika, and Athens down to Kalamata 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 coast of Lakhia. In western Greece, paved highway now links Patras with Arkos and Timios. One of the most important roads in a mountainous country with few east-west connections, the broad, tallowy highway that runs over the Pindus range from Psalmis to Trikala, is now complete except for a small section in the Trikala area, highest in Greece.

Equally as important as the main highway network, in both an economic and a military sense, is the more extensive road system, and able to move better than ever before. These roads are dual-laned for the most part, and with proper maintenance by modern roadbuilding equipment, can be kept open the year round, except in mountainous country where they sometimes become impassable in winter. Many hundreds of kilometers of not road have been built, especially to provide easy access to the countryside and small cities which are the main attraction for tourism in Greece.

Great progress has been achieved, particularly during 1951, in the other categories of roads. One group consists of military cause roads built by or for the Greek armed forces, which not only to large areas of mountain country formerly inaccessible except by foot or muleback. In self-explanatory project, and its rough border areas which were border strongholds during the guerrilla war, Greek troops now can move in full fighting kit at instant notice. The other road category in which much has been done is that of self-help roads, with whole communities contributing thousands of man-days of free labor to build roads to connect their isolated villages with the outside world. Both types of road have received assistance from American aid funds.

As a result of the increased use of transportation, the Greek road program has been increased. One indication of the work done is that some 500 highway bridges have been completely rebuilt, along with all the new, relatively retaining walls and other embankment work required. But equally as important is the administrative reorganization which made the progress possible.

The Greek-Public Roads Administration has been completely reorganized. American experts 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 a staff of experts for each function as administration, engineering, construction, and maintenance. This recognition is still in progress. Standard plans, specifications, contract documents and instructions to this model on authority established by the American Association of State Highway Officials, have been developed by the Engineering Department of the Ministry. Uniformity in design leads for bridges, roads and airfields also has 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 fields. Highway contractors are required to carry public liability, property damage and collision insurance. Uniform traffic signs, conforming with International usage, have been designed and erected throughout the country. A highway striping system, reported from the USA, has painted center lines and warning stripes on most truck highways.

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

Railroads. In 1835 began, every one in line in Greece was operating. This left quite a lot 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 the cars consist of loading and unloading of goods and passengers. Another point was that many bridges were precarious. Rails included every length from two meters to full size. Trains ran daily and continued along in and out of trains, and on some branch lines passengers never quite succeeded in anticipating the hurdle.

But all the same, there was a major advance. For when the new ended there was no railroad system in Greece. Out of 673 kilometers of track in Greece, all but 190 kilometers was destroyed. The locomotive, passenger cars, and freight cars were either destroyed or maimed, with only 107 serviceable units of rolling stock left in Greece. Many had been pulled across into Balkans where they still remain. Others were blown up, or burned into deep canyons or into the Strymonos Canal, Slightly a bridge or tunnel on the major lines but had been destroyed. The bridges were blown up and the tunnels blown out.

In the AMP days, the American railroad men and their Greek counterparts took stock of an almost hopeless situation and began setting it right. First came the job of salvaging the rails and it was a major engineering job. Greek sorrows took lengths of rails that were badly cut by uncontrolled explosions, and counted themselves lucky if they salvaged two or three meters of usable track that could be straightened and laid anew.

Bridge work, too, was rebuilt. Another the bridge below, a long span that would be a major engineering achievement in any land, was considered by all Greeks as a symbol. Near lands on the main line from Athens to Salonika, it took months to rebuild. It was ready finally at the height of the garrison war. King Paul and Greek Government dignitaries participated in its dedication. And the ceremony ended on a high note as a burning point. If the Samsa 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 afterwards ever really shook their confidence.

But the spread of war which the Greeks had to rehabilitate the Greek rail lines in this period did so at heavy cost. It was a tremendous task. The 2,000 Greek workers and American technical personnel working in the railhead section, rebuilding the tunnels and seven large bridges, were joined by 1,500 soldiers of the Greek army. For several months the Greek army had been working on necessary repair, anti-personnel mines were planted outside the mine, and the people who suffered from the war farmland was allowed to the occupied army.

Despite the strong resistance, the Communist threat was ever present. The Greek government's propaganda on anti-communism and anti-communist threats to all the men who worked for the Greek railroad. The Greek workers did much in the railroad. The railroad was used to create a labor movement with branches and automatic weapons, which was used by the Greek government. In 1944, the Greek workers destroyed the locomotive, derailed the train, and killed several people. In 1945, the Greek workers destroyed the locomotive, derailed the train, and killed several people. The incident was typical.

A year later in the same area, a major rail strike across the Bulgarian frontier dealt a large bridge. Two workers were killed and three were wounded slightly in the attack. The Greek workers kept up their work under continual shelling and repaired the bridge.

Late in 1944, with the railroad in full operation, the first train in six years made its way from Athens to Salonika. Soon, in sequence only, its main activity, was an account of the railroad construction. It required rebuilding 148 bridges. Five tunnels, some of which had been blasted, were opened up, and 50 kilometers of track were replaced. The work also required the construction of 50 kilometers of telecommunication, 22 signal points, 27 water stations and 17 other buildings of various types. That is in addition to the Greek railroad's accomplishments of halting the advance, providing rails and train executives, and unloading the coal for the trains. It all came out of the account the Greeks felt, or the daily worries of the men who made it possible.

Meanwhile, the railroad men of Greece had begun the heavy task of rebuilding and repairing Greek rolling stock. Burned-out shells of freight cars were hauled to salvage yards in Athens and Salonika. What all that could be salvaged was an axle and a pair of wheels, rusted from long stagnation in the sea. It was at least a startling sight. In sequence, postwar rail yards and railroad shells of roundhouses, which were working on repairing the Greek workers put together new cars from the pieces of the old. Sixteen rail yards from three or four locomotives were required to put together one coal motor.

Italian war reparations, and trade agreements with Greece, played a large part in rehabilitating Greek rolling stock. From Italian factories came freight and passenger cars, locomotives, engines and passenger cars. 

Greece's secretaries were rebuilt, and the Greek Government gathered up 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 republication agreement that Greece would furnish the steel and Italy
would fabricate it into usable equipment.

By 1937, the main job had been accomplished. With opening of the last branch
line from Saldino to Piza in northwest Crete, and with exception of the
nation’s most famous rail asset, the Electric Orient express from Athens to Paris,
the rail network was back in operating condition. Then came the second job,
rebuilding these parts of the lines that had been temporarily torn apart as a
matter of national emergency.

In 1942 began, track crews were busy throughout all Greece, taking up old
patchwork rails and replacing them with bright new steel rails and rails from
Belgium and other European nations, purchased through Marshall Plan agreements
within the European Recovery Plan. Roadbeds were being re-engineered, and signal
systems were being modernized. Tunnels that had been reopened to 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 two
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 EKE, running from Athens north the 399P, south
through the Peloponnese, and the Macedonian Railways in Thessaly, still
operated on a de facto basis, and this fact forced Americans and Greeks alike as
1946 began. The deficit was shrinking as business returned, but operating costs
also were increasing to rise. It was in this field of administrative operation
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 heavier 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 targets for train
crews to shoot at, 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 at the railroad business, its main task accomplished. The
Military and Transportation division took over the next big task, that of helping
the Greek Government to operate its road lines on a self-supporting basis.