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MUTUAL SECURITY AGENCY
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WRAP-UP OF AMERICAN CIVITAN ASSISTANCE EFFORT IN GREECE SCOURGE HUNGER

GREECE — Following is the fourth in a series of weekly articles summing up American Aid achievements in Greece from World War II to the beginning of 1948. The series covers most of the sectors in which the United States has tried to assist Greece. This article concerns social welfare, housing and care of refugees.

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During the four years, and for nearly two years of the Marshall Plan thereafter, a major part of the American Aid effort was devoted to the basic problem of helping Greeks alike. At one time, about 85% of the U.S. aid funds to Greece were coming in the form of food, clothing and other necessities to sustain the population. Indeed, out of 4,850 million dollars spent in countermarch projects during this period, 3,050 billion, or nearly half, went into the care and housing of refugees.

The wheat, milk, clothing and other consumer items imported during this period have long since vanished down Greek throats or have been worn out on Greek backs. Of such things, little remains, and Americans and Greeks may tend to forget this period because of the tangible evidence’s survival. But thoughtful Greeks and Americans who shared the desperate days of civil war remember some heroic passages. And to the disarming eye, is plenty of evidence of wheat, milk, clothes and coal.

There is the solid and indelible fact that Greece, the intellectual, political, philosophical and artistic spine of Western civilization, is still with the West, although in 1947 the majority of western countries reluctantly approved the loan. There is the equally solid and indelible existence of the Greek armed forces as a number of U.S., with 150,000 men and well-trained mem standing ready for duty, and a total force of 500,000 battle-trained veterans able to take the field within a week.

In fact, Greek military manpower loads all the war nations in proportion to population, slightly in advance of the United States and well ahead of the rest of the countries in Europe. Here are the comparative figures on the number of men under arms in Greece, per thousand population, as compared with other NATO nations on June 30, 1948:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nation</th>
<th>Men under arms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands &amp; Norway</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-Europe average</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The foreigner who knows Greece can see other tangible signs that reflect the days when American Aid was wheat, milk, clothes and coal. He sees the bread grin of the Greek countryman as he tends his plough in a village which a few
years ago had been to the Balkans. In the small farming villages the children were scarce, and the work left behind the world another strong Greek child. Yet they smiled despite the hardships of the outdoor farming life with their sturdy, high-spirited, and half-starved children. They were strong, cheerful, with straight legs and straight sellors. The milk and wheat and olive oil they harvested had the clean, mild taste of honest health. They were beautiful.

Greece is still in parlous cases. In a per capita income of $215, the resources are insufficient for a nation's needs. Poverty is the rule rather than the exception. In many villages and in crowded working class neighborhoods in the cities, hunger is inevitable even yet. There is more illness than there should be. The margin of existence is sometimes very small, and in some cases there is actual hunger during the winter.

Admitting all these things, Greek and foreign alike, need only turn their thoughts back to the truly desperate days to realize the enormous changes that have been wrought in five years, and to see that the American Aid which went directly into the hands of the Greek people was the very margin of their survival. Here was the situation in 1947, when American Aid began to resume.

During, hundreds of villages had been destroyed during the occupation, either by military operation or in savage reprisals against resistance fighters. In fact, when Greek prisoners were freed after the liberation and learned the details of destruction and torture by the foreigner, they found they could not describe any specific village in the enemy and civil prisons; "the Ibiza of Greece." There were too many other villages which would have challenged the distortion.

But now, in 1947, the situation had become tremendously worse. External war had been succeeded by internal communist rebellion and the systematic destruction of even those villages which had survived the last occupation. Massacre, looting and destruction had driven more than a third of the population from their villages into "security centers"—the large cities which could be adequately protected by loyal troops. And there they were forced to endure starvation until the plantings of the war were harvested and they could go back home.

What was life like for these people? They knew that behind them their houses had been destroyed by the communists. They had little hope for the future. And the present was merely barely tolerable. A bread or flour ration of 10 ounces daily was their lot, and shelter left much to be desired. Lucky refugees found their families into hovels, shabby common shelters, or rooms which they shared with the homeless. Others lived as best they could in abandoned warehouses, requisitioned schoolhouses and other public structures, or in tents. As many as 100,000 persons were crowded into one sixth-room schoolhouse, with blankets as partitions between families. All slept on floors. Less fortunate families lived under ground in cellars, under bridges, or in hollow dug in the open fields.

The military situation grew even worse during the very harsh winter of 1948-49, with the ending and destruction of sub-major population centers on Euboea, Euboea, and Evritania. The slavery and insecurity of the population increased until an all-time high was reached at the beginning of 1949, when 97,528 persons had been placed in the security sector, entirely dependent on foreign aid on the Greek State and American Aid. Added to these were 40,000 more persons who were living in their demoralized villages rather than live in the security sector, but who were also almost entirely dependent on charity for the necessities of life. And this was still only part of the problem, for there were all
the other persons throughout Greece who needed help in various ways, the blind, the dependent children, the pensioners, the urban poor. Including everyone, about 1,600,000 persons, a third of the population, were partly or wholly dependent on state aid. The drain on the Greek Treasury was enormous, with about 360,000,000, or 32 per cent of the total civil costs of government, being spent annually to assist these people. Most of this money came from American aid counterpart funds. The remainder also came indirectly from American assistance because while part of the regular Greek budget, it created a heavy annual deficit which the American funds made good.

According, even the ones helping the Greeks in this situation, had a difficult time comprehending its magnitude. They tried to put it into American terms. They reasoned that at the depths of the depression, in the bad winter of 1931-32, about 25,000,000 Americans had been on relief rolls, receiving state aid. But the situation in Greece was equivalent to 250,000,000 Americans on relief, of whom 15,000,000 would not even possess shelter but would be huddled in concert hoops.

REFUGEE AID. The tide of war turned early in 1949. The reorganized Greek army, equipped and trained by Americans, invaded hardy strongholds and cleared more and more territory from the communist menace. About 18,000 refugees drifted home that summer. In October, the loyal forces wiped out rebellion in Greece by driving the last remnants of the guerrilla force across the Albanian border after the heavy battles of Grennada and Vital. And so, next spring, began an exodus which has never been adequately described, a population migration with few parallels, in three-quarters of a million people went back to the land.

The entire resources of the nation were mobilized to bring these people back to their villages. The various Greek ministries vied with each other to provide help. The army supplied trucks, and the Greek navy turned over its landing ships so that whole coastal villages could be repopulated. A significant part of each movement was a group of villagers carrying guns, the local unit of KKE or the National Defense Corps, charged with pursuing their villages against any communist resurgence, even to early prisoner villages in the American West were expected to provide their own defense against the Indians.

The usual method of refugees, heading home finally after months or years in the security centers, returned in a town that had been burned to the ground. Fields lay fallow, farmhouses empty, milk or fruit trees had been chopped up for communist bonfires. The few of shop, goats and other animals had wandered down and still chickens or pigs had been driven across the borders. Even draft animals, the donkeys, horses and cattle that meant livelihood, had been worked to death or eaten by guerrilla forces. The returning farmers carried only the clothes on their backs, such furniture as they had managed to salvage or buy or borrow from relatives, a stringy supply of potatoes, and a pitiful assortment of personal belongings.

State assistance, backed by American funds, was able to provide some necessities. The daily Ioannina flour ration was continued. Each returning refugee was allotted 60,000 drachmas ($4) in cash for a two month period, supplemented by a family resettlement allowance of 200,000 drachmas ($13.33) for families of three to five persons, or 50,000 drachmas ($3.33) for larger families. In the foreign the same sums may seem inadequate, but they were all the Greek Government could afford considering the enormity of the problem, and to the desperate and ragged Greek refugees they represented the difference between starvation and survival.

WORK RELIEF. Various other forms of help were concentrated in the refugees' villages to help the people rebuild their lives. For instance, these villages received first priority in a number of programs carried on by the Ministry of
Agriculture, such as in the allocation of imported seeds, ploughs and other farm tools, seeds and fertilizers. But one of the most effective means of helping them was a nation-wide work relief program in which the State, faced with the necessity of providing cash assistance agency, also reaped benefits in terms of useful projects constructed.

The program had already begun during the time the refugees were in security centers, to keep them occupied, to bolster their morale, to provide for their wants, and to construct or repair urgently needed public works. It was continued in the villages. By the end of 1960, 1,148 projects had been approved, of which 520 had been completed in the previous six months, and the average number of workers employed was about 28,000. In all, more than 1,000 communities had benefited under this program through 1963.

In most cases, the projects began on local initiatives. Once they are approved, the people themselves go ahead with the work, furnishing their own tools and local materials wherever possible. These works include airports, docks, sewage and water systems, irrigation and drainage works, and many new streets and roads. In many areas, the small daily wage paid on such projects represent the only cash income earned by many families who consume or barter the produce of their fields and fields.

HOUSING. But the most pressing problem of resettlement, was housing. To even begin the long process of reconstruction, was the elementary need of shelter. The stakes were enormous and so was the problem. Of about 10,000 inhabited villages throughout the nation, nearly half had suffered damage, and in many the destruction was nearly complete. The inhabitants had returned to most of these villages during 1960, but unless they had roofs over their heads before winter, it was obvious that great numbers would be forced to return to the refugee centers, or descend on masses on the overcrowded cities.

The quickest and probably most efficient method of housing these villagers was for the State to assume entire responsibility and to employ contractors to rebuild the destroyed houses. But the estimate submitted by private contractors added up to enormous cost, far beyond the total capacity of the Greek budget. Materials for such a program also were in short supply throughout the world and especially in Greece. And all the housing contractors in Greece could not have completed the task in time.

The answer was a "self-shelter" program whereby the villagers were furnished minimum building materials, such as lumber, cement and plaster, small sums of cash, and were left to their own devices. The answer was far from satisfactory because hellenic people, unlike nations further west, have never yet been able to accept the traditional solution of such farms as a lack of skill, and so the inhabitants of such farms were not able to construct the buildings they needed. Greece had a large number of people who were able to do the work, but the materials were not available. They helped considerably, but the real answer was provided by these same villagers themselves by using whatever they could get and by learning to build their own houses. The results were not ideal, but the Greeks returned to the center, however poor their accommodations, they could stick it out until spring.
Much of the work, of course, was the product of systematic government planning and execution, apart from the "self-help" plan. With substantial financial assistance from American aid funds, 37,000 housing units already had been produced in 600 villages during the period of the Truman Doctrine. In 1952, over 29,000 of these units had been completed and nearly 12,000 were still under construction. In addition, about 184,000 damaged houses had been repaired in rural areas, with another 54,000 under repair. In urban areas, nearly 24,000 dwellings were complete and 374,000 were under construction, and about 20,000 damaged homes were repaired, with 4,600 more still in process.

An important phase of the village reconstruction program was the rebuilding of schools, which the average Greek family is nearly as important to his family welfare as shelter itself. With intensive aid, 966 new school rooms were completed or under construction, more than 2,000 others were repaired, and 156,000 school desks were built, many of them by vocational schools.

RELIEF ADMINISTRATION. During most of the period prior to 1952, the American mission administered and coordinated all its relief, housing and welfare efforts through a division of social welfare, which at its height included six regional specialists and a Greek staff. This division was responsible for helping the Greeks to plan programs of refuge care, rehabilitation, and such regular social welfare responsibilities as orphanage, dependent children, and other underprivileged persons, such as the ill, aged, physically handicapped, or abandoned.

The mission welfare specialists also advised the Greek Government on organizational and administrative techniques, training of staff, and civil and military pension procedures and also on the work relief program.

Another field in which the Greek Government was making a start in 1951, at recommendation of the mission, was a balanced, comprehensive program of assistance to needy people in their own homes, whereby small grants of cash replaced welfare issues of food, clothing, and other necessary items to families, often for a period of one to two years. The results of this program were encouraging, and the mission concurrently began examining the feasibility of a comprehensive social welfare program with the objective of eventually extending and improving it to service the entire nation.

GREEK SOCIAL SECURITY IN 1952. With the advent of the Social Security Agency program under which American aid funds were channelled into projects having directly on the joint defense effort, the social welfare division of the American mission went out of existence. The entire program, financing as well as administrative direction and planning, rested entirely on the Greek Government and the General Social Fund. The amount of American funds that could be devoted to housing and general welfare projects was limited, and the only prospect of increasing welfare funds would be through greater efficiency and economy in other sectors of the budget.

Much work to be done. Many more new or repaired dwelling units still are needed to provide decent minimum housing standards, particularly in the rural areas. An administrative reorganization of Greek agencies is still not complete, and drastic revision in housing finance policy should be accomplished. Institutional care, although given with great kindness and good will, still falls short of modern standards. As in the United States and other modern countries, certain parts of the social welfare program which here strength
emotional appeal, such as aid to children, are favored at the expense of other
needs which may not be as dramatic but are just as important.

The list of social welfare needs still to be met is an impressive one,
but it cannot obscure the tremendous achievements already accomplished.
To Greeks and Americans alike who remember the difficult days of civil war,
the story of wheat, milk, clothing and coal, and of the untiring efforts to aid
the rural people of Greece, still constitute one of the most dramatic and
important chapters in the history of American aid to the Free World.

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