PRESS RELEASE

MUTUAL SECURITY AGENCY
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NEW BALANCE AMERICAN CIVILIAN AID WENT INTO GREEK SOCIAL WELFARE

AMERICA — Following is the fourth in a series of weekly articles summarizing American Aid achievements in Greece since 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 war, and for nearly two years of the Marshall Plan thereafter, a major part of the European Aid effort was devoted to the basic problem of keeping Greeks alive. At one time, about 80% 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 European Aid Funds on recovery projects within Greece up to 1948, 2,395 millions, 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 from Greek shores or have been turned out on Greek beaches. Of such things, little remains, and Americans and Greeks may tend to forget this period because so few tangible evidences survive. But thoughtful Greeks and Americans who shared the desperate days of civil war remember some heroic passages. And to the discerning eye, there is plenty of evidence of wheat, milk, clothes and coal.

There is the solid and indisputable fact that Greece, the intellectual, political, philosophical and artistic center of Western civilization, is still with the West, although in 1947 the majority of western commentators reluctantly conceded her loss. There is the equally solid and indisputable existence of the Greek armed force as a number of 51,000, with 100,000 men and well-trained women standing ready for duty, and a total force of 800,000 battle-trained veterans able to take the field within a week.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Men Under Arms per Thousand Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands &amp; Norway</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Europe average</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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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 countryside as he tods his plough in a village which a few
years ago had a temporary break. Its 2,000 miles of shoreline were open to the world's many strong small ships. But they were not able to load or unload efficiently. They were often crowded, with crowded and crowded neighborhoods. The only safe place was a small harbor. They were not:\n\n"Secret is still on parade, of course. In year of income and in natural resources, it is the portrait of the Marshall Plan family of nations.\n\n"The story is the rule rather than the exception. In many villages and in crowded working class neighborhoods in the cities, housing is inadequate even yet.\n\nThere is no more work than there should be. The margin of existence is sometimes very small, and in some cases there is actual hunger during the winter.\n\n"Now, all these things, Greek and foreign alike, need only turn their thoughts back to the truly desperate days to realize the increase change that has been brought in five years, and to see that the American Aid which went directly into the social welfare of the Greek people was the very margin of their survival.\n\n"But in 1947, when American Aid began, hundreds of villages had been destroyed during the occupation, either in military operations or in savage reprisals against resistance fighters.\n\nIn fact, when foreign pressmen came to Greece after the liberation and learned the details of destruction and tried to write the story, they found they could not describe any specific village in the easy and civil phrase 'the village of Greece.' There were too many other villages who could have challenged the distinction.\n\n"But now, in 1947, the situation had become unnecessarily worse. External war had been succeeded by internal communist rebellion, and the apparent destruction of even those villages which had survived the first occupation.\n\nMassacres, lootings 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 winters until the harvest was harvested and they could go back home.\n\n"What was life like for these people? They knew that behind their homes had been destroyed by the communists. They had little hope for the future. And the present was equally harrowing. A broad or fringe portion of 10 acres daily was their lot, and shelter left much to be desired. Lucky refugees rounded up their families into huts, hovels or shacks which they shared with the peasant. Others lived as best they could, in abandoned warehouses, requisitioned schoolhouses and other public structures, or in tents. As many as 100 persons were crowded into one small schoolhouse, with blankets as partitions between families. All slept on floors. Less fortunate families lived winter and summer in cobwebs, under bridges, or in hollow dug in the open fields.\n\n"The military situation grew even worse during the very harsh winter of 1946-47, with the constant and destruction of vital major population centers as Volos, Larissa and Veria and Thessaloniki. The shanty and insecurity of the population continued steadily until an all-time high was reached at the beginning of 1949, when 67,156 persons identified in the security sector, entirely dependent on American Aid. Added to these were 60,000 more persons who clung to their demolished villages rather than live in the security sector, but who were also 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 2,600,000 persons, a third of the population, were partly or wholly dependent on state aid. The drain on the Greek Treasury was enormous, with about 600,000,000, or 18 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.

Americans, even the ones helping the Greeks in this situation, had a difficult time comprehending its magnitude. They tried to put it in American terms. They considered that at the depths of the depression, in the bad winter of 1932-33, about 26,000,000 Americans had been on relief rolls, receiving state aid. But the situation in Greece was equivalent to about 60,000,000 Americans on relief, of whom 16,000,000 would not even possess shelter but would be housed in constant camps.

The tide was turned early in 1948. The reorganized Greek army, equipped and trained by Americans, invaded the strongholds and cleared more and more territory from the communist encroachment. About 10,000 refugees drifted home that summer. In October, the legal forces waded out rebellion in Greece by driving the last remnants of the guerrilla forces across the Albanian border after the heavy battles of Grenno and Vital, and so, next spring, began an era which has never been adequately described, a population migration with few parallels, as 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 worked with each other to provide the army-occupied slopes and the Greek navy turned over its landing ships so that whole coastal villages could be repatriated. A significant part of this movement was a group of villagers carrying goods, the local unit of NRA or the National Defense Corps, charged with pursuing their villages against any communist resistance, even to daily planer villages in the American West to provide their arm defense against the Indians.

The usual group of villagers, heading home finally after months or years in the security centers, returned to a town that had been burned to the ground. Fields lay fallow, peasants olive, fruit or fruit trees had been chopped up for communist bonfires. The floods of sheep, goats and other animals had washed downNomadis gullies or had been driven across the borders. Even draft animals, the donkeys, horses and mules 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 steepy supply of potatoes, and a pitiful assortment of personal belongings.

State assistance, backed by American funds, was able to provide some necessities. The daily 12-kilo 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 or fewer persons, or 50,000 drachmas ($3.33) for larger families. To the foreigners such sums may seem inadequate, but they were all the Greek Government could afford considering the enormity of the problem, and to the demoralized and ragged Greek villagers they represented the difference between starvation and survival.

Work Relief. Various other forms of help were concentrated in the refugee 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 the selection of imported olive, grapes 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 needs, and to construct or repair urgently needed public works. It was continued in the villages. By the end of 1966, 1,186 projects had been approved, of which 200 had been completed in the previous six months, and the average number of workers employed was about 26,000. In all, more than 1,000 committees had benefited under this program through 1963.

In most cases, the projects begin on local initiative. Once they are approved, the people themselves go ahead with the work, furnishing their own tools and local materials whenever possible. These works include streets, docks, sewage and water systems, irrigation and drainage works, and many new stores and schools. In many cases, the small daily wages paid on such projects represent the only cash income earned by many families who consume or forfeit the produce of their fields and fields.

HOUSING. But the most pressing problem of resettlement, more immediate even than finding the fellow refugees back into productive work, 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 1963, 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 crowded cities.

The quickest and probably most efficient method of rehousing 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 costs, 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-housing" program whereby the villages were furnished minimum building materials, such as lumber, cement and plaster, small sums of cash, and were left as their own desire. The answer was far from satisfactory because Balkan peoples, unlike nations further west, have never understood the tradition that there is no "hate of all work" among the inhabitants of such crafts as carpentry, cement work, plumbing, electrical installation and masonry. In most Greek villages only the local carpenter or mason knew anything about building. The American Mission had started programs, during the long dry months in the refugee camps, which taught many villagers something of these crafts, and these programs were continued. They helped considerably, but the real answer was provided by these same village carpenters and masons who did the best they could and who tried to instruct their fellow-villagers in helping them with the rough work, while they themselves concentrated on the finer points of skill.

The results exceeded the most optimistic estimates of either Greek or American authorities. By winter of 1965, virtually every returned village of Greece was under some kind of shelter. Even families occupied single rooms, the space left small to be desired, but almost none of the refugees returned to the centers. 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 implementing. A good part of this plan was to develop the "solar-hut" plan. With substantial financial assistance from American aid funds, 35,000 housing units already had been produced in 500 villages during the period of the Truman Doctrine. By 1951, more than 25,000 of these units had been completed and nearly 12,000 were still under construction. In addition, about 151,000 damaged houses had been repaired in rural areas, with another 15,000 under repairs. In urban areas, nearly 2,000 dwellings were completed and 2,700 were under construction, and about 35,000 damaged homes were repaired, with 4,000 more still in progress.

An important phase of the village reconstruction program was the rebuilding of schools, which often were Greek schools in the area. With financial aid, 5,900 new school rooms were completed or under construction, more than 1,000 others were repaired, and 180,000 school desks were built, many of them by vocational schools.

HEALTH AND WELFARE. During most of the period prior to 1952, the American mission administered and maintained all the relief, housing and welfare efforts through a division of social welfare, which included six mission specialists and a Greek staff. This division was responsible for helping the Greeks to plan programs of refugee care, rehousing, and such regular social welfare responsibilities as orphan, 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 voluntary issues of food and clothing. The only people affected were those in the least need, since a monthly income of 400,000 drachmas ($200) for a family of four would make them ineligible for relief. But persons in really desperate condition benefited from the program, and a backlog has been noted in a social welfare program which currently may increase favorably to the next progressive legislation of the Greek Parliament.

GREEK SOCIAL WELFARE IN 1952. With the advent of the Mutual Security Agency program under which American aid funds were channeled into projects bearing 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 almost entirely on the Greek Government and the central budget. To meet 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 remains to be done. Many more new or repaired dwelling units still are needed to provide decent minimum housing standards, particularly in the rural areas, and an administrative organization of Greek agencies is still not complete, and drastic revision to housing finance policy should be accomplished. Industrial care, although given with great kindness and good will, still falls short of modern standards. As in the United States and other Western countries, certain parts of the social welfare program which have strong...
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 uniring 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.