

PRESS RELEASE



**MUTUAL SECURITY AGENCY
Special Mission to Greece for Economic Cooperation**

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NEARLY HALF OF AMERICAN COUNTERPART AID WENT INTO GREEK SOCIAL WELFARE

ATHENS -- 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 1952. 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 guerilla war, 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 keeping Greeks alive. 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 4,550 billion drachmas spent in counterpart funds on recovery projects within Greece up to 1952, 2,076 billions, 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 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 esthetic origin 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 forces as a member of NATO, with 160,000 keen and well-trained men 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 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 NATO nations on June 30, 1951.

Greece - - - - -	21.6
United States - - -	21.2
France - - - - -	17.8
United Kingdom - - -	15.7
Netherlands & Norway	9.7
All-Europe average	12.6

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 broad grin of the Greek countryman as he tonds his plough in a village which a few

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years ago was a burped-out bulk. He sees smiles from village women who obviously are about to bring into the world another strong Greek child. He sees the children themselves, the real hope of the nation. The four years ago were tiny wailing babies in the squalor of refugee camps. They are strong, cheerful, with straight legs and straight smiles. The milk and wheat and clothing have vanished but the children remain as testimonials. They have been saved.

Greece is still no paradise, of course. In per capita income and in natural resources it is the poorest of the Marshall Plan family of nations. Poverty is the rule rather than the exception. In many villages and in crowded working class neighborhoods in the cities, housing is inadequate even yet. There is far more illness than there should be. The margin of existence is sometimes very small, and in some areas there is actual hunger during the winter.

Acknowledging all these things, Greek and foreigner 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 social welfare of the Greek people was the very margin of their survival. Here was the situation in 1947, when American Aid began:

REFUGEES. Hundreds of villages had been destroyed during the occupation, either in military operations or in savage reprisals against resistance fighters. In 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 vivid phrase: "the Lidice of Greece." There were too many other villages who would have challenged the distinction.

But now, in 1947, the situation had become immeasurably worse. External war had been succeeded by internal communist rebellion, and the systematic destruction of even those villages which had survived the Nazi occupation. Massacre, looting and destruction had driven more than a tenth of the population from their villages into "security centers" -- the larger cities which could be adequately protected by loyal troops. And there they were forced to endure existence until the bandit war was finished and they could go back home.

What was life like for these people? They knew that behind them their homes had been destroyed by the communists. They had little hope for the future. And the present was scarcely bearable. A bread or flour ration of 10 ounces daily was their lot, and shelter left much to be desired. Lucky refugees crammed their families into barracks, draughty one-room shelters, or rooms which they shared with the townsfolk. Others lived as best they could, in abandoned warehouses, requisitioned schoolrooms and other public structures, or in tents. As many as 500 persons were crammed into one six-room schoolhouse, with blankets as partitions between families. All slept on floors. Less fortunate families lived winter and summer in culverts, under bridges, or in holes dug in the open fields.

The military situation grew even worse during the very harsh winter of 1948-49, with the sacking and destruction of such major population centers as Naoussa, Karditsa and Karpenissi. The misery and insecurity of the population increased steadily until an all-time high was reached at the beginning of 1949, when 674,828 persons huddled in the security centers, entirely dependent for existence on the Greek State and American Aid. Added to these were 60,000 more persons who clung to their devastated villages rather than live in the security centers, 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 2,500,000 persons, a third of the population, were partly or wholly dependent on state aid. The drain on the Greek Treasury was enormous, with about \$50,000,000, or 22 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 into American terms. They remembered that at the depths of the depression, in the bad winter of 1933-34, about 20,000,000 Americans had been on relief rolls, receiving State aid. But the situation in Greece was equivalent to 50,000,000 Americans on relief, of whom 15,000,000 would not even possess shelter but would be huddled in central camps.

HOME COMING. The tide of war turned early in 1949. The reorganized Greek army, equipped and advised by Americans, invaded bandit 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 guerilla forces across the Albanian border after the heavy battles of Grammos and Vitsi. And so, next spring, began an epic 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 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 repatriated. A significant part of each movement was a group of villagers carrying guns, the local unit of MEA or the National Defense Corps, charged with guarding their village against any communist resurgence, even as early pioneer villages in the American West were expected to provide their own 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. Precious olive, nut or fruit trees had been chopped up for communist bonfires. The flocks of sheep, goats and other animals had vanished down communist gullets or had been driven across the border. Even draft animals, the donkeys, horses and cattle that meant livelihood, had been worked to death or eaten by guerilla 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 skimpy supply of rations, and a pitiful assortment of personal belongings.

State assistance, backed by American funds, was able to provide some necessities. The daily 10-ounce 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 300,000 drachmas (\$20) for larger families. To the foreigner such sums may seem inadequate, but they were all the Greek Government could afford considering the enormity of the problem, and to the durable and frugal 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 allocation of imported mules, 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 anyway, 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 1950, 1,146 projects had been approved, of which 286 had been completed in the previous six months, and the average number of workers employed was about 25,000. In all, more than 1,000 communities had benefited under this program through 1951.

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 wherever possible. These works include airfields, docks, sewage and water systems, irrigation and drainage works, and many new streets and roads. In many areas, the small daily wages paid on such projects represent the only cash income earned by many families who consume or barter the produce of their flocks and fields.

HOUSING. But the most pressing problem of repatriation, more immediate even than getting the fallow fields back into production, 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 1950, 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 en masse on the overcrowded 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 shattered houses. But the estimates 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. This answer was far from satisfactory because Balkan peoples, unlike nations further west, have never cultivated the tradition that each farmer is a "jack of all trades" knowing the rudiments of such crafts as carpentry, cement work, plumbing, electrical installation and mechanics. In most Greek villages only the local carpenter or mason knows anything about building. The American Mission had started programs, during the long idle 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 1950, virtually every returned villager of Greece was under some kind of shelter. Some families occupied single rooms. The work often left much 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 contracting apart from the "self-shelter" plan. With substantial financial assistance from American Aid funds, 15,090 housing units already had been produced in 300 villages during the period of the Truman Doctrine. In the first year of the Marshall Plan, housing was built or restored for 24,000 more Greek families at an average cost of \$660 per unit.

New "nucleus" housing units, averaging a room and a half, and designed so they could be expanded later, were built in many parts of Greece. By 1952, more than 33,000 of these units had been completed and nearly 12,000 were still under construction. In addition, about 134,000 damaged houses had been repaired in rural areas, with another 26,000 under repair. In urban areas, nearly 2,000 dwellings were complete and 372 more were under construction, and about 20,000 damaged homes were repaired, with 6,000 more still in process.

An important phase of the village reconstruction program was the rebuilding of schools, which the average Greek feels is nearly as important to his family welfare as shelter itself. With American aid, 956 new school rooms were completed or under construction, more than 3,800 others were repaired, and 135,000 school desks were built, many of them by vocational schools.

WELFARE ADMINISTRATION. During most of the period prior to 1952, the American Mission conducted and coordinated all its relief, housing and welfare efforts through a division of social welfare, which at its height included six American 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 orphans, 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, conservative program of assistance to needy people in their own homes, whereby small grants of cash replaced wholesale issues of free flour. The only people affected were those in the direst need, since a monthly income of 450,000 drachmas (\$30) for a family of four would make them ineligible for help. But persons in really desperate condition benefited from the program, and a beginning has been made in a social welfare program which eventually may compare favorably to the most progressive legislation of the West.

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 general budget. 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 economies 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. 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 western countries, certain parts of the social welfare program which have strong

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emotional appeal, such as aid to children, are favored at the expense of other needs which may not be so 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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