

HOW WE WON IN GREECE

Chancellor Fleming, President Harrington, Reverend Clergy, Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, faculty, students, ladies and gentlemen, and friends of Greece all.

As an Honorary citizen of Athens, I am very proud to be here tonight to help honor, in my small way, my beloved "other" country, Greece. The civilized world owes not only its culture, but its ideals of liberty and freedom, loyalty, and patriotism to the ancient Greeks. As for beauty, there has never been any architecture that equals the Parthenon, or any sculpture to equal the Venus of Milo.

It is a good and inspiring feeling to be on a University campus. I served for nine years on various campuses in command of ROTC units, and a good part of the time coaching football as an extra activity. I have often said this was my best education for high command. If you can handle a college ROTC unit and a football squad, you can command an army!

College Spirit is like battle morale, and Wisconsin has it in great measure. Your song, "ON WISCONSIN," portrays the WILL TO WIN. I like the Wisconsin spirit. It is like the Greek spirit, and I have noticed it in other visits to your beautiful state.

Let me say at the start that we Americans were privileged and honored to be associated with the people in Greece. It was our duty, and the Greeks made it easy. We saw two years of hard struggle. The Greeks, with British assistance, saved the country in 1945, 46 and 47. An enlarged, better-equipped, better-trained and better-led Greek Army took over in 1948 and 49, and saved Greece once again. I am confident that the Armed Forces of Greece will protect and keep safe that nation, now and forever, and that the United States of America will always be with them.

There exists between us a priceless friendship and respect for right. The Greek leaders possess and practice this respect for right and consideration for others that begins with the King and extends all the way down to the last peasant.

Many battlefields, such as Romeli-Agrafa-Central Greece-Peloponnese

- Vitsi - Grammos - Kaimakchalan, remind us that brave men have died in Greece in order to keep us free. Let us praise the Greek fighter. I have the greatest admiration for his generosity, independence, ruggedness, sportsmanship, courage, devotion to duty and sacrifice. When I am with these men or think of them, I gain in heart and soul, but should I forget them, a little more of me is gone.

I had been on duty in Frankfort, Germany, only a few weeks, when, on February first, 1948, secret orders directed that I report to General Eisenhower, the Chief of Staff, U. S. Army, in Washington. I was advised that I might be reassigned to an important position in a country farther east. In Washington, General Eisenhower told me to report to General George Marshall, then Secretary of State, who would make the decision on my new assignment. The liaison officer of the Pentagon accompanied me to the State Department.

General Marshall told me of the serious situation prevailing in Greece and stated that he had promised Queen Frederica of Greece to send to Greece a combat soldier. He had met Her Majesty in London, when they were both present for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip of Greece. It was during a very busy day when General Marshall was prevailed upon to give Her Majesty an appointment of some fifteen minutes. It didn't take long for Frederica to convince the General of the importance of the interview, and, as it turned out, General Marshall cancelled two hours of appointments to listen to the pleas of the Queen.

The Truman Doctrine had been in effect nearly a year, and only a few weapons and supplies had arrived in Athens and at a time when the Communist guerrilla action was growing in intensity and threatening to take the entire country. In the Queen's words, she wanted, at once, a combat general, not a supply sergeant!

General Marshall asked for my views. I replied that if the Greeks had this WILL TO WIN, and with our aid, Greece could be saved without the need of a single American rifleman. The General liked that answer, told me the job was mine, and I became a "General among Diplomats."

Turning to the Pentagon officer, he asked "What are the plans for Van Fleet in Washington," but when told there were a number of briefings set up that would probably take a month or six weeks, General Marshall interrupted by asking, "Have you arranged an armistice with Markos?" Markos as you will remember was the Moscow-trained leader of the Communist guerrillas.

I left the following day. My trip was arranged to arrive in Athens via London so that the British Imperial General Staff could look over this fellow, Van Fleet; and so it appeared that I came from both Washington and London. That arrangement really was very important, because the British had saved Greece on many previous occasions and there were then in Greece a British Military Mission and a British Police and Gendarmerie Mission, as well as the United States Military Mission. I have always said that the British were a great help and at the same time quite a problem. They had lost considerably prestige and influence in the Middle East, and now it was happening in the Eastern Mediterranean. Their aid money had run out and they had asked the United States to take over.

I arrived in Athens 24 February, 1948, and was met by a large delegation of American, British and Greek military officials, and by a huge group of reporters. I was completely unprepared for such a reception and interview, but fortunately, in answer to a demanding press I stated that if I spend half my time in Athens, it would be too much. Well, that apparently made me the kind of General they were looking for, and in less than a week I was on my way to the scattered Greek National units in the mountains.

One look at the front is worth a thousand reports, and it didn't take long to understand the situation and the superb qualities of the Greek individual. It was here, in these impoverished and long-suffering mountainous areas, that I came to know and love the people and learned to respect them for their stubborn courage and inherent love of freedom. It was clear to me that Greece would never surrender to the Communist evil. I saw that the Greek soldier was superb — alert, intelligent, hardy and courageous. All that was needed was arms, training and leadership. I will always be thankful that this optimistic first view subsequently proved to be correct.

The Truman Doctrine is one of the subjects of this Symposium, and I know that it has been fully discussed and understood, but let me say briefly that President Truman, by his famous message to Congress laid down the foundations of our American foreign policy. This policy provides for military and economic assistance to those countries whose independence is threatened by armed minorities or outside pressures. Greece and Turkey were the first countries to receive such aid. The American Military Mission was in Greece also in complete accord with the principles of the United Nations. We were there at the invitation of the Greek government to assist the Greeks in preserving their sovereignty as a nation. We were there to administer the material assistance, and in an advisory capacity, only. We were unarmed. The decisions

and achievements were entirely Greek matters; however, America expected results commensurate with the aid provided. This was, and still is, the Truman Doctrine.

Before a successful counter-offensive can be lodged, some very important conditions must be fulfilled. Three critical ones are:

- 1) The country must be united behind a stable political head, generating a fierce love of freedom and a high morale among the civilians, as well as within the Armed Forces.

- 2) A national military force must be mobilized, equipped, trained and effectively commanded.

- 3) A dependable network of intelligence is imperative to provide accurate and timely information of enemy locations, movements and plans.

Well! This "Soldier Among Diplomats" had his problems, with the British and with the United States Ambassador, but not with the Greeks. They were as united a nation, as a race, in language and in religion, and, with it all, they had that fierce love of freedom.

We enlarged the Armed Forces. We armed loyal civilians and we evacuated threatened mountainous areas. We provided adequate security to the larger cities and critical installations. We carefully equipped and trained more and better units, and gradually, with ever increasing strength, changed from the defensive to the offensive.

We all well know that you don't win by sitting down, and with the WILL TO WIN that I had mentioned previously to General Marshall, this magnificent Greek Army, Navy, Air Force and Gendarmerie came alive and the international Communist gangsters began to run.

Our Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, emphasizes in a rule of thumb five essentials of combat: Find—Fend—Fix—Fight—and Finish, and the students do remember and apply these five "F's," Find, Fend, Fix, Fight and Finish, and that's exactly what the Greek Armed Forces did.

Two false and terribly misleading statements have been made about this war which I wish to emphatically deny. It has been referred to as a "civil" war. Believe me, I was there and there was nothing "civil" about it.

International communist aggression in Greece, as in Korea and now in Viet Nam, took years of planning, infiltration, training and building the framework within the country of propaganda, recruitment, intelligence, and logistics.

With an appropriate incident, the enemy strikes to take over under the guise of "civil" war. Local governments are caught unprepared and often without friends willing and able to accept the challenge. (Certainly, all of us are proud that our country has always answered the call)

Let me emphasize once again, it was *NOT* a "civil" war!

The other misleading view is that the defection of Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia ended the war. Such a claim is ridiculous. Tito had seen "the handwriting on the wall," and concluded that the Communist cause in Greece was lost. He stated he was closing the border. But he didn't and couldn't.

By way of statistics, from June 1946 to December 1949, guerrilla units made more than 2,000 separate attacks on towns and villages, and an additional 1,500 attacks against small Greek outposts. Thousands of harassing actions against civilians were effected with the ever-attendant pillaging, foraging and ambushing. Several thousand civilians, including priests, were executed. Hundreds of thousands of anti-personnel and anti-vehicular mines were planted in heavily populated areas which were traversed daily by women and children. Even anti-personnel mines and booby traps were placed in vineyards in order to wear down civilian resistance. The death toll was inhumanly heavy. Even after the war, in 1950, it was estimated that over 1,000,000 mines still existed in Greece, predominantly located in the northern sector. Of this total, approximately 100,000 were estimated to be anti-vehicular. Yes, everybody and everything was subject to attack in Greece.

I remember well one of the many terrible raids conducted by these international gangsters. The little town of Naousa in Central Macedonia on the edge of the Large Kaimakchalan Mountain which extends into Yugoslavia is, or was a peaceful little textile town. It was constantly in danger of guerrilla raids from the mountains and from across the border where the raiders could withdraw to safety when pursued.

Naousa had resisted attempts by the guerrillas to capture it many times. I visited the town to congratulate the people on their spirit of resistance. They gave me a tremendous welcome in the village square and the Mayor made a speech of thanks and appreciation on their behalf for the aid which America had sent as a result of the Truman Doctrine.

Two days after this ceremony, a band of two thousand guerrillas swept down from the Yugoslavia border, captured the town, looted it of its supplies, burned all of its buildings including the textile mill, the community hospital with twenty bed-ridden patients, killed hundreds of Greek Nationalists and kidnapped nine hundred able-bodied men, boys and girls.

The mayor, who had greeted me so warmly, was told that his life would cost him 200 gold sovereigns, — about \$ 5,000. He was able to raise this sum from among his many loyal friends. But when he produced the gold he was dragged to the village square, to the same where he had greeted me two days earlier, and was told by the Communists: “We understand you have been making speeches here of late.”

“Well,” he replied, “it was my duty as Mayor.”

With that, the Communists struck him with their gun butts until he was dead. This is Communism at work.

Another example of an outright atrocity perpetrated by these international gangsters was the death of an American Lieutenant Colonel, U. S. Air Force. The American officer had been aboard a small reconnaissance plane, piloted by a Greek Air Force lieutenant, as an unarmed observer performing duties as a member of the American Mission. While flying over Central Greece, the plane was shot down by guerrilla anti-aircraft fire, making a forced landing in the midst of a Communist base. Stepping out of the plane, dazed but otherwise uninjured, the American was taken prisoner and slowly tortured to death through various indignities committed against his body. Eye witnesses and subsequent post-mortem of the body confirmed this depravity. The guerrillas had let it be known throughout the entire campaign that any American captured by them would suffer a thousand deaths.

HOW WE WON IN GREECE has been my subject. I have not covered the purely military campaigns and battles. These are of record in greatest detail, now resting in the archives of the Defense Department. Rather than relate boring descriptions, with statistics and the like, I have endeavored to give you only the *means* by which WE won.

In summary, it was done by “WE” — a big and significant expression. From the day I arrived in Greece until the final shot and final surrender, some two and a half years later, it was “WE, the TEAM” that made victory possible.

On that varsity team, Coach Van Fleet was sent with the military aid provided by the Truman Doctrine and a directive embodying *real authority* and *grave responsibility*. Also on that team, a squad of many offensive and defensive platoons, with tremendous spirit of Liberty and Freedom and WILL to WIN. The team included a united, stable government of Prime Minister Themistocles Sofoulis, a distinguished liberal, 86 years old, who returned to power to support his King, and War Minister Kanellopoulos, and effective leadership of Quarterback Field Marshall Alexander Papagos calling the plays

to be executed by aggressive Generals like Grigoropoulos, *and superb soldiers.*

In support of all of us were the people of Greece, in the cities, in the villages and in the mountains united and inspired throughout the land by the untiring visits of their beloved King Paul and Queen Frederica. Indeed, they furnished the unity and morale, or in football talk the *pep* and *spirit* that *fights* on to victory.

Coach Van Fleet never suggested a decision unless it was researched thoroughly by a competent staff of loyal and highly qualified Greek, British and American staff officers and presented by me for approval to Marshall Papagos and His Majesty King Paul.

This is my story of HOW WE WON IN GREECE. The WE of it was mostly the Greeks themselves. As I have said, they did the fighting without a single American rifleman. The title of my talk could well be "GREECE - THE PATTERN." The Greeks are quick to express heartfelt appreciation for the guns and ammunition, and to give full credit for our advice and encouragement.

And so once again came peace and happiness all over the land, as this beautiful poem reminds me:

A shepherd's crook, a coat of fleece,
A grazing flock, a sense of peace,
That long sweet silence
This is Greece!

JAMES A. VAN FLEET