



OXI DAY – October 28 -we mark the anniversary of October 28, 1940, when Greece refused to be bullied and defended the homeland from Italian Fascist aggressors.

By 1940, the National Socialists ["Nazis"], led by Adolf Hitler, governed Germany, re-armed the German military, annexed Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia, occupied Belgium, crushed and occupied the western half of Poland, defeated and occupied France, and threatened to invade England. Also by 1940, Italian Fascists, led by Benito Mussolini, had occupied Albania, placing Italian armed forces at the northern border of Greece. World War II had begun and some Balkan nations submitted to the Berlin-Rome axis, such as Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Greece and Yugoslavia hoped to stay out of the war, but leaned toward their traditional allies – the embattled English and the defeated French.

Neutrality could not be maintained in the face of aggressive military plans hatched by the axis. Back in 1936, at the Council of Balkan Cooperation, held in Belgrade, Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas had declared, that in case of war between Italy and the British and French allies, Greece would side with the Western forces. Meanwhile, Italy's Mussolini linked his fortunes with Germany's Hitler, presenting a very dangerous and aggressive Nazi-Fascist partnership to other European nations. As they carried their intentions into reality, the aggressive axis partners could not leave a good part of the Balkans neutral and independent. The strategic location of Greece could not remain uncontrolled by the axis and possibly open to be used by the British Navy

On October 28, 1940, at three in the morning, the Italian ambassador to Greece, Count Emmanuelle Grazzi, arrived at the house of Prime Minister Metaxas, and asked that he be awakened. When the two met, in Metaxas's study, Grazzi handed the Greek PM a formal ultimatum, that in essence stated: *the Italian government asks the Greek government to grant the right to Italian armed forces to occupy strategic sites on Greek territory, to better conduct the military conflict between Italy and Britain. The Greek government is asked to immediately order its military forces not to resist this temporary occupation.* The impertinent tone of the ultimatum continued, *should the Greek government refuse to abide by this request, within three hours, the Italian army will move to achieve the occupation by force.* Ioannis Metaxas did not need three hours to consider the ultimatum – his answer was immediate and short – "OHI !" [NO !] - and he spoke on behalf of the whole nation

On the morning of October 28, the whole nation said "NO." The clamor to fight the Fascist bully filled the entire country; flags were hung on balconies and windows; Greeks of every age felt a surge of energy. The Italians attacked at dawn, but against heavy odds, and given only the briefest notice, outnumbered Greek soldiers fought valiantly and held back the enemy. In the following months, during the winter of 1940-1941, the quickly mobilized Greek armed forces, commanded by General Alexander Papagos, soundly beat the much better armed Italians. The Greek homeland remained free.

Early in WW II, Greeks had handed the first defeat to the mighty military machine of the Berlin-Rome axis, until then considered unbeatable. They also caused rage in Berlin; on April 6th 1941, the colossal German military, with its numberless tanks, Stuka planes, and superbly armed manpower, ferociously attacked and occupied both Greece and the Serbian part of Yugoslavia. It took four long years before the Greeks and allies managed to defeat the Nazi-Fascists, but in the annals of history, the Greek nation's "No", inspired by patriotism and high ideals, remains admirable and magnificent. .

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