

Axis occupation of Greece

The occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers began in April 1941 after Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany invaded Greece, and lasted until Germany and its satellite Bulgaria withdrew from mainland Greece in October 1944. German garrisons remained in control of Crete and other Aegean islands until after the end of World War II, surrendering to the Allies in May and June 1945.



The occupation brought about terrible hardships for the Greek civilian population. Over 40,000 civilians died in Athens alone from starvation, tens of thousands more died because of reprisals by Nazis and collaborators, and the country's economy was ruined. At the same time the Greek Resistance, one of the most effective resistance movements in Occupied Europe was formed.

The occupation of Greece was divided between Germany, Italy and Bulgaria.



Greece suffered greatly during the occupation. The country's economy had already been devastated from the 6-month long war, and to it was added the relentless economic exploitation by the Nazis. Raw materials and food were



requisitioned, and the collaborationist government was forced to pay the cost of the occupation, giving rise to inflation. This was further exacerbated by

a "war loan" which Greece was forced to grant to the German Reich. This "loan" was never paid back and severely devalued the drachma.

The occupying powers' requisitions and outright plunder, the drop in agricultural production from wartime disruption, the breakdown of the country's distribution networks due to a combination damage to infrastructure, the collapse of the central government and the fragmentation of the country at the hands of the Axis, coupled with hoarding by farmers, led to a severe shortage of food in the major urban centres in the winter of 1941–42. During the "Great Famine", only in the greater Athens–Piraeus area alone, some 40,000 people died of starvation, and by the end of the

Occupation "it was estimated that the total population of Greece was 300,000 less than it should have been because of famine or malnutrition".



The rise of the armed Resistance resulted in major anti-partisan campaigns across the countryside by the Axis, which led to the wholesale burning of villages, destruction of fields, or mass executions as reprisals for guerrilla attacks. The German sweeps "turned producing areas into burned fields and pillaged villages, and the wealthy provincial towns into refugee settlements".

Increasing attacks by partisans in the latter years of the occupation resulted in a number of executions and wholesale slaughter of civilians in reprisal. In total, the Germans executed some 21,000 Greeks, the Bulgarians executed some 40,000 and the Italians executed some 9,000. By June 1944, between them the Axis powers had "raided 1,339 towns, boroughs and villages, of which 879, or two-thirds, were completely wiped out, leaving more than a million people homeless" in the course of their anti-partisan sweeps.



The most infamous examples in the German zone are those of the village of Kommeno on 16 August 1943, where 317 inhabitants were executed and the village torched, the "Holocaust of Viannos" on 14–16 September 1943, in which over 500 civilians from several villages in the region of Viannos and Ierapetra in Crete were executed, the "Massacre of Kalavryta" on 13 December 1943, in which Wehrmacht troops carried out the extermination of the entire male population and the subsequent total destruction of the town and many more. At the same time, in the course of the concerted anti-guerrilla campaign, hundreds of villages were systematically torched and almost 1,000,000 Greeks left homeless.



Two other notable acts of brutality were the massacres of Italian troops at the islands of Cephallonia and Kos in September 1943, during the German takeover of the Italian occupation areas.