



THE GRECO-ITALIAN WAR

DATE: OCTOBER 28 1940 – APRIL 23 1941

Belligerents	
 Italy	 Greece
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> United Kingdom (air and material support)

During the cold winter of 1940-41, the Greek Army defeated an Italian army much larger in size in a military conflict which is now only a footnote in many history books, but one that had a dramatic effect on the course of the Second World War.

The underlying cause of the conflict was Mussolini's plans to create a 'New Rome' – an Italian-controlled Empire in the Mediterranean. The Duce's plans included incorporating Greece, or at least a part of it, as a protectorate as he had already done with Croatia's Dalmatian coast and Albania.

The hostilities began when the Italian ambassador in Athens, following previous Italian provocations that had gone uncontested by Greece (including the torpedo sinking of a Greek ship off a Greek island), delivered an ultimatum to Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas. The letter requested him to allow Italian troops to occupy strategic locations on Greek soil. These spots, Mussolini claimed, would ensure Italy's safety against any British incursion. If this request was refused, Italy would attack Greece.



Prime Minister Metaxas' resounding answer to the ultimatum was worthy of the response the Spartan King Leonidas had given the Persians nearly 2,500 years earlier when prompted to give up his weapons: 'MOLON LAVE!' – 'COME AND TAKE THEM!' It was also worthy of the reply Constantine XI, the last emperor of the Greek - Byzantine Empire, had given the Ottoman invaders in the late Middle Ages when asked to surrender Constantinople: 'COME AND TAKE HER'.

Metaxas' simple and straightforward response was 'OHI' – 'NO'.

A few hours later, on a speech broadcast to the nation via radio, Metaxas called upon Greeks to take up arms with these words: 'Greeks, the time has come for Greece to fight for her independence. Greeks, we now must prove worthy of our ancestors and the freedom they gave us. Fight for the Fatherland, for your wives, for your children and for the sacred traditions. Now, above all, FIGHT!'

On the same day, October 28 1940, Italian forces attacked Greece. Most observers expected an easy and smooth Italian victory over the far smaller and less-prepared Greek army. However, the Greeks fought the invading Italians in an epic struggle, the outcome of which can only be called miraculous.

The Greco-Italian war was waged in the remote, scarcely inhabited snow-covered mountainous region of Epirus on the Greek-Albanian frontier. To make things worse, December 1940 brought one of Greece's coldest recorded winters, which held its grip until the following March. In the mountains temperatures dropped to -20° C. The blizzards were ravaging, and mist covered the mountains almost permanently. Frostbite was commonplace among the armies of both sides which led to a great number of amputations, and over half of the Greek army's animals perished due to hypothermia.

The Italians were not prepared for war in such extreme conditions. Early on in the campaign, military leaders considered withdrawing units comprised of soldiers from Italy's warmer southern regions, and replacing them with units manned by soldiers from the colder northern parts of the country who would be better prepared for the harsh winter weather.

The Greeks proved themselves better at adapting to this environment. They demonstrated their superiority over the Italians in mountain warfare, constantly outmaneuvering and outflanking their enemy. At one stage during the conflict, 27 Italian divisions were held back by 16 Greek divisions. By the end of 1940, the Greeks had pushed the Italians thirty miles back inside Albania.



At the time, Greece and Great Britain were the two only European countries waging active war against the Axis, making the outcome of the Greek front critical. For most of the campaign the Greek army fought on its own without any substantial Allied aid against a much larger Italian army. Even so, and despite many repeated attempts, the Italians failed to seize any considerable amount of Greek territory. These failures were crowned by the resounding collapse of the so-called 'Spring Offensive' in March 1941. This final offensive was supervised and coordinated by Mussolini himself, who traveled to the front for this specific purpose. The Spring Offensive turned out to be nothing short of a military fiasco, and Mussolini returned to Rome beaten and humiliated.

Not only was Greece victorious in her struggle against Italy, but the Greek Army, in its incursion into Albanian territory also liberated Northern Epirus, the historically Hellenic territory which was home to an ethnic Greek population. The Greek Army was received with joy in this long-oppressed region and its liberation sparked celebrations all across Greece.

Greece's victory over Italy was the first victory for the Allies in the Second World War, and it showed that Axis defeat was indeed a possibility. The Greco-Italian War is viewed as a triumph in Greece and is often referred to as "the Epic of 40" and October 28, the day Metaxas rejected the Italian ultimatum, is a national holiday known as Ohi Day.

THE AFTERMATH

Total combat losses for the Greeks were close to 59,000, including more than 13,000 killed, 42,500 wounded and 1,500 captured. A further 25,000 were affected by frostbite.

Italian losses totaled almost 90,000, including 13,700 killed, almost 51,000 wounded, 3,900 missing and more than 21,000 captured. Cases of frostbite exceeded 13,000.

Coming to the aid of their Italian ally, Nazi Germany invaded Greece in April 1941. Hitler blamed Mussolini's 'Greek fiasco' for his failed campaign in Russia. Hitler noted that, in the 'pointless campaign in Greece', Germany was not notified in advance of the impending attack, which 'compelled us, contrary to all our plans, to intervene in the Balkans, and that in its turn led to a catastrophic delay in the launching of our attack on Russia'. Mainland Greece would remain occupied by the Germans until the much later in the war when the Allied advance forced them to withdraw in October 1944.

MEMOIR '44

M'44 SCENARIOS FOR THE GRECO-ITALIAN WAR

The Greco-Italian campaign includes 9 standard scenarios, 1 Breakthrough (BT) scenario and 1 Overlord (OL) map. These scenarios chronicle the major engagements of the Greco-Italian campaign, and include only the best available in the Scenarios from the Front (SFTF) files section on the DoW website.

The first 2 scenarios, Battle of Durres and Resistance in Durres, represent the Italian annexation of Albania by Italy prior to the commencement of hostilities on the Greek frontier. The 11th and final scenario, Leskoviku, represents Albanian resistance against the Italian occupation later in the war. In this way, all M'44 scenarios available for Albania are included in this campaign booklet.

No campaign rules are included; not all M'44 players have access to the Campaign books. Instead, simply tally up the number of medals won in each scenario after playing both sides. A medal tally table for all scenarios is included below.

Almost every scenario includes the Greek army. Although optional, it is suggested that you use the unofficial Battle of Nations rules when playing the Greek side.



THE GRECO-ITALIAN WAR

[1. APR 07: Battle of Durres](#)

[2. APR 07: Resistance in Durres](#)

[3. OCT 28: Perati Bridge](#)

[4. OCT 28: Battle of Pindus](#)

[5. OCT 28 – NOV 16: Mars vs. Ares BT **](#)

[6. NOV 02 – NOV 08: Battle of Elaia-Kalamas](#)

[7. NOV 17: Koritsa **](#)

[8. DEC 13 – DEC 22: Battle of Himara](#)

[9. JAN 06 – JAN 11: Klisura Pass OL](#)

[10. MAR 09: Desnizza **](#)

[11. MAY 17 1943: Leskoviku](#)

** Scenario notes: these 3 scenarios all have Sudden Death win conditions. If you win by Sudden Death, score the maximum number of medals for the scenario.



MEDAL TALLY TABLE

There are a total of 146 medals if all 11 scenarios are played, 122 medals without the Overlord map, and 98 medals if only the standard scenarios are played.

SCENARIO (+ total medal count)	P1	P2
1. Battle of Durres (12)		
2. Resistance in Durres (12)		
3. Perati Bridge (10)		
4. Battle of Pindus (12)		
5. Mars vs. Ares (BT) (24)		
6. Battle of Elaia-Kalamas (10)		
7. Koritsa (12)		
8. Battle of Himara (12)		
9. Klisura Pass (OL) (24)		
10. Desnizza (8)		
11. Leskoviku (12)		
TOTAL MEDAL TALLY		

Acknowledgments to the authors of the scenarios that make up this Greco-Italian War compilation:

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This Greco-Italian War booklet was compiled by [Semba](#)