



## The Amazing Greeks

By Hanson W. Baldwin

The Greeks themselves have a word for it, and the word is “amazing.” For in no other way can the repeated and continuous Greek successes against Italian Alpini and other first-line divisions of Premier Mussolini be described. Even Greek observers in this country confess themselves as surprised at the successful invasion of Albania, which the Hellenic armies are now conducting, and other military observers, most of whom had expected a fairly rapid Italian conquest, are rubbing their eyes.

The Greek successes are the more unexpected because the Greek army known to have been extremely deficient in modern arms, in aircraft and in ammunition; its officer personnel was not considered to be well-trained and its fighting forces were far outnumbered by Italy. The Italian defeats must also be considered against the background of the Somaliland and Egyptian campaigns.

In the former campaign, a single British brigade, badly equipped and under-armed, faced two well-equipped Italian divisions strengthened by attached tanks, artillery, aircraft and native levies. The Italian superiority was perhaps three or four to one in men, greater in equipment. Nevertheless, Somaliland is a country of difficult terrain; the British troops that opposed the Italians were as well armed as the Greeks, or better armed; yet the Italians used their superiority well; they showed courage and determination, according to British sources, and speedily drove the British out of Somaliland.

### Graziani's Campaign Cited

And in Egypt Marshal Rodolfo Graziani's army did a workmanlike job of its advance along the coastal road from Libya to Sidi Barrani, a limited operation, it is true, but one that was complicated by the heat, the desert, the scarcity of water, the long and tenuous supply lines of the Italians and the exposure of Marshal Graziani's flank to attack from the sea by the British fleet.

Thus, the success of the Greeks in turning back the Italian thrust toward Yanina, Salonika and Athens, followed by their invasion of Albania, was all the more unexpected.

As events have made quite clear, that success has been made possible by many causes: Italian expectation that a show of force would be sufficient to cause Greece to fall like a ripe plum into Signor Mussolini's hands; the consequent use of insufficient force and of the wrong kind of force (the attempt, for instance, to utilize tanks and armored vehicles in one of the most rugged regions of Europe); the hard fighting qualities of the Greek Evzone; the important naval and air (and very limited land) aid of the British, and the lack of heart for the fight of many of the Italian troops.

One observer of the Greek campaign has said that “you cannot change the soul of a people.” Signor Mussolini has tried to put iron into the Italian blood, but perhaps it is too soon to say – despite the Italian reverses – that he has failed. And it certainly seems altogether too soon to count Italy out of the war. Italy, it is true, has always been the Achilles heel of the Axis, but it is doubtful if she is ripe for revolution or ready for surrender; much more blood will have to be spilled and far more decisive defeats inflicted – defeated perhaps comparable to Caporetto – before she cries “Hold—enough.”

Moreover, there is danger of overestimating the Greek successes. There is no doubt that they have driven deep into Albania; they have captured or seem about to capture all the main Italian bases in the south, including one of Albania's three principal seaports – Porto Edda – and they are still driving northward.

### Defensive Line Seen as Aim

But we have been hearing accounts chiefly from the Greek side; only bare communiqués telling of bitter struggle from the Italians. In the north General Ubaldo Soddu, Italian commander, is apparently trying to establish a defensive line that will hold along the Shkumbi River between Lake Ochrida and Elbasan – a naturally strong line; while in the south Italian troops seemingly are trying to extricate themselves from a Greek encircling drive around Argyrokastron and to build up a new line between Tepeleni and Khimara, covering the two roads that lead to the seaport of Valona.

Obviously General Soddu's great objective now is to bring in enough reinforcements, not only to half the impetus of the Greek advance, but to hurl it back and initiate an Italian offensive. Moreover, there now well may be method in the Italian retreat. The Italians are still retreating, but they are fighting harder, and though they yield ground, their retreat does not appear to be that of disorganized individual units.

It may yet turn into that. If the Greeks can force the line of the Shkumbi and sweep westward to the sea they might well cut off the large Italian forces in Southern Albania. On the other hand, it is also quite possible that the Italians – steadily reinforcing their troops through the ports of Durazzo and San Giovanni di Medua – may be reserving the full force of a counter blow that seems unlikely to come until the Italians in Albania are in great strength and until, in Italian opinion, the Greek armies – constantly pushing deeper into difficult country – have overextended their lines of communication.

The Albanian campaign – which commenced forty days ago as the “Greek campaign” – has not yet, therefore, reached a decisive stage – though it may quickly do so.