



In 1940 Italy's dictator, Mussolini, tried in several ways to fight against Greece. On August 15th 1940, an important Greek Orthodox holiday (*Hmera tis Megalocharis tis Tinou*), an Italian submarine shot a torpedo inside the island's harbour, hitting one of the Greek ships. The governing body of Prime Minister Ioannou Metaxa, only just recently elected, deceived their country, claiming that they could not identify the attackers in order to avoid any form of battle. As the Italians continued their attacks, war seemed more and more inevitable. Even so, Greece did not move its forces any farther along its borders, but as the Italians would soon find out, for good reason. Mussolini though, was determined and wanted to take over Greece. On the night of the 28th of October, the Italian ambassador to Athens, Gratsi, went to the home of the president I. Metaxa woke him up and asked for free entrance of the Italian forces on to Greece. He immediately refused the request, and with him the Hellenic people answered "Oxi". The war began. Sirens sounded as enemy planes flew over the skies of Greece, signifying that the Italian army had invaded Greek territory.

The Greco-Italian War (*Greek: Ελληνοϊταλικός Πόλεμος or Πόλεμος του Σαράντα, "War of '40"*), or the Battle of Greece as it has also been called, lasted from October 28, 1940 to April 23, 1941. It marked the beginning of the Balkans Campaign of World War II. Due to the expansionist policies of Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime in Italy, by mid-1940, Mussolini had grown jealous of Hitler's conquests and wanted to prove to his Axis partner that he could lead Italy to similar military successes. Italy had occupied Albania in spring 1939 and several British strongholds in Africa (mainly with the Italian conquest of British Somaliland in summer 1940), but could not boast victories on the same scale as Nazi Germany. At the same time, Mussolini also wanted to reassert Italy's interests in the Balkans, threatened by Germany and secure bases from which British eastern Mediterranean outposts could be attacked. Unlike other countries however, the people of Greece were able to fight back against the Italians and maintain their freedom. The Hellenic Army counter-attacked and forced the Italians to retreat. By mid-December the Greeks occupied nearly a quarter of Albania, tying down 530,000 Italian troops.

The Greek victory over the initial Italian offensive of October 1940 was the first Allied land victory of the Second World War, and helped raise morale in occupied Europe. Some historians argue that it may have influenced the course of the entire war by forcing Germany to postpone the invasion of the Soviet Union in order to assist Italy against Greece. This led to a delayed attack and subjected the German forces to the conditions of the harsh Russian winter, leading to their defeat at the Battle of Moscow. Thus, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1940, should be proudly recognized not only as a day which is important to the history of Greece, but also that of the entire world.

\*Written with aid by <http://grundnig-vassilis.blogspot.com>