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GLOBE STAFF

# A run for his life

## To help impoverished Greece, Stylianos Kyriakides vowed to win the 1946 Boston Marathon - or die trying

Kyriakides and his wife were walking one night in 1943, pushing a carriage containing their daughter, Eleni, as the patrol approached. They stiffened as they were ordered to stop by an angry officer. A German soldier in the area had been killed by the resistance forces.

Iphigenia was ordered to take the baby and leave. Kyriakides would be held, along with scores of other men, and questioned. He was afraid. Greeks were routinely shot during the war, after perfunctory questioning, part of the reprisals that didn't seem to stop the resistance.

The men were rousted, their pockets emptied and clothes taken away. A German officer looked closely through Kyriakides' pockets and saw a piece of paper.

It was Kyriakides' credentials for the Berlin Olympics.

"Were you there?" the officer asked.

"Yes," said Kyriakides, a slim man made even thinner by the war.

"What did you do?" the German asked.

"The marathon," Kyriakides said proudly.

"An athlete. Why didn't you tell me that? Take your clothes and go," the German said, according to a story retold by Winthrop author Tom Derderian in his history of the Boston Marathon. Kyriakides was spared. And three years later, he said he knew the reason. It was the

Boston Marathon.

Kyriakides had come to Boston April 8, on the first TWA plane out of Athens. The utility company for which he'd worked as a bill collector had helped pay for food and training expenses for Boston, considered the world's most important marathon.

He was still gaunt when he arrived. The American doctors did not want him to run. He was too thin, too weak, they said, and they were afraid he would die on the arduous course from Hopkinton to Boston, which included the grueling section known as Heartbreak Hill, which had broken the

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As he sat in his room at the Hotel Minerva a few hours before the 1946 Boston Marathon, a race he said he had to win to bring the world's attention to the plight of starving Greeks in his homeland, Stylianos Kyriakides took a last look at a letter from his wife, who was in Athens with their two children.

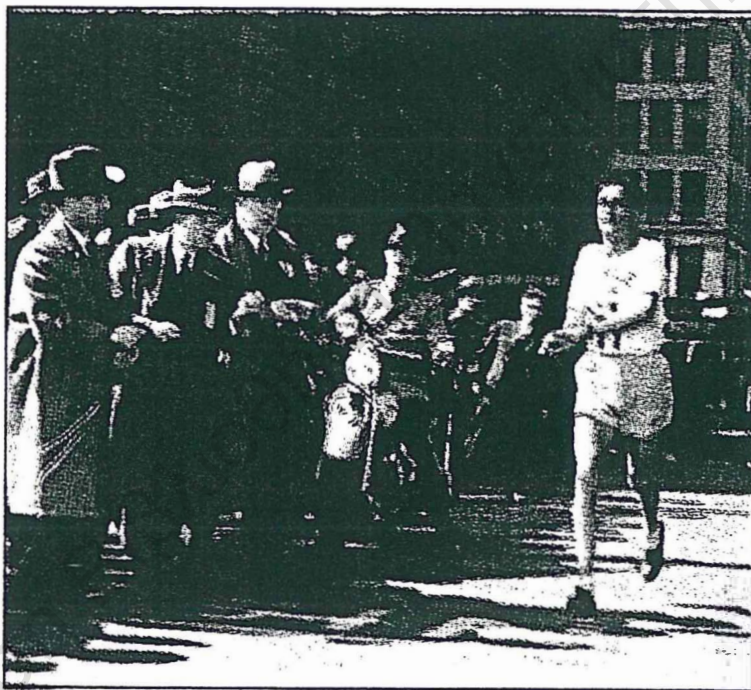
"My Dear Love," she wrote, "I wake up every day and I see you in front of me. I pray to God He will help you win and see your dream fulfilled for Hellas. The day you will run, I will go to church and light a candle and pray to God that you come back with a victory for our Greece. You have the love from within my heart . . . Your wife, Iphigenia."

Kyriakides, born in Cyprus under British occupation before moving to mainland Greece as a young man, was confident he could win, although the ravages of World War II and Nazi occupation and a raging civil war in Greece had left many of the country's population of 7 million with little or nothing to eat. He'd had to sell off his possessions, and his house, for food.

Thousands of refugees had fled to Athens, but even there the dead littered the streets until men in horse-drawn carts would pick them up, their families reluctant to identify the dead for fear they would lose food rations.

He was his country's best runner, with 80 medals, the champion of the Balkans before the war and an 11th-place finisher in the Berlin Olympics in 1936 in 2 hours 43 minutes, running in front of Adolf Hitler.

In 1938, Kyriakides ran Boston, but the hard streets and poor shoes combined to force him to drop out with blisters. "Someday, someday, maybe come back and I win your marathon," he said. But then came World War II, which he almost did not survive when confronted as a soldier by a German patrol.



GLOBE FILE PHOTO

After blisters forced him to drop out in 1938, Stylianos Kyriakides made a smashing return to Boston in 1946 (above).

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Thousands coming to Boston, but where will they all stay? Story, Page 9.