

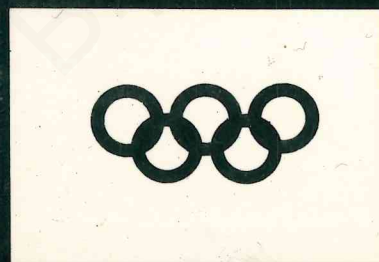
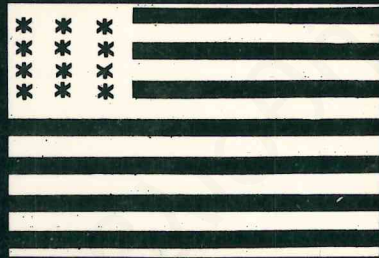
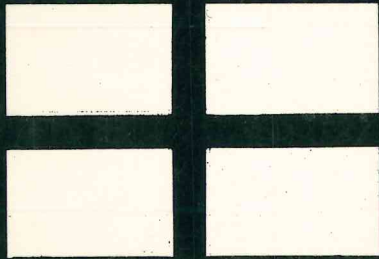
To Greeks, there are only two types of heroes: philosophers ...and marathon champions.

S.K. SUNDAY

A true story by Robert W. Morgan, WLA



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"Stelios Kyriakides is what the Olympics are supposed to mean. And if you tell his story to the world, perhaps the true spirit of the Olympics will live again!"

*Apostolos Nicholiades
President, Greek Athletic Association
December, 1979*

Island of Cyprus, January, 1932



...so the pretty girl at the cafe table laughed at the 22-year-old Greek waiter's hasty vow to become the marathon champion of all Cyprus within the year; after all, he was only another skinny, ill-educated farm boy, one of thousands who annually troop down from the island's hills with coveted hopes, fantasies and dreams tucked into their libidos. Thus scorned, and taunted by his brother because "...you might bring shame to our family if you lose!" young Stelios Kyriakides determinedly trains alone and uncoached in a dark, deserted stadium late each night. His worn hat rests top down at the finish line to catch the pebble he tosses, one for each lap painfully run in patched street clothes and shoes, for he can afford no others.

At the end of one year he is Marathon Champion of Cyprus.

"There are two kinds of runners, Stelios. There are gifted ones, and there are those who are persistent." Szymmitzek added, "You'd better be persistent."

*Otto Szymmitzek
Greek Olympic Team Coach
Nicosia, Cyprus 1933*

*But there is no bitterness...only a hint of promise...when
S.K. turns to wave goodbye to Jerry Nason. "Some day,
maybe some day I'll come back. Maybe I'll win your
marathon!"*

*Jerry Nason, Boston Globe
Boston, Mass. 1938*

Athens, Greece, June 1939

Neither man knew that a four hundred million dollar prophecy had been spoken.

Would his next major race, the 1939 Balkan Game twenty-six "original marathon" from picturesque Marathon village to the Athenium stadium, be another loss for the strong-willed young runner? His teammates soundly defeated in all other events, he remains the sole hope for glory.

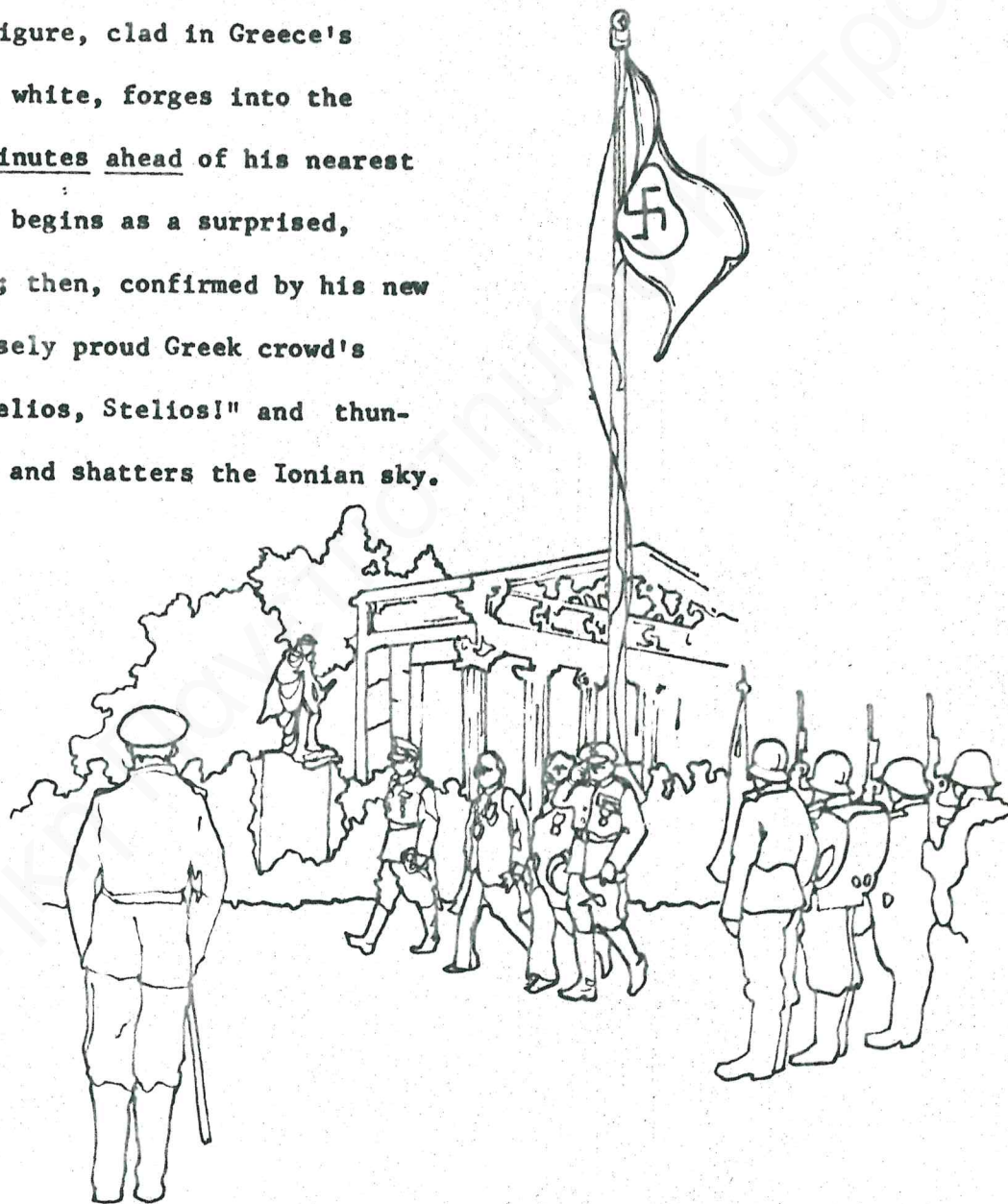
Early in the race, the crowded stadium's hushed, subdued sports fans stoically accept the announcer's cool report that S.K. trails the field of marathoners at the halfway point. Murmured disappointment ripples throughout the gathered crowd, especially embarrassing one particular family seated in the audience: S.K.'s new wife Genny, and her critical parents. Shamed, they too await the expected pronouncement of Greece's total defeat.



(continues)

But S.K. never races other men; he races Time, running a precise, clocked pace, eye ever on his stopwatch, allowing competitors their early, meaningless leads easily lost to his relentless pursuit. They may be talented, but he has become indeed persistent.

So when the slender figure, clad in Greece's Aegean-blue and stark white, forges into the marble stadium four minutes ahead of his nearest competitor, the chant begins as a surprised, whispered exclamation; then, confirmed by his new wife's cry, the intensely proud Greek crowd's rhythmic "Stelios, Stelios, Stelios!" and thunderous applause fills and shatters the Ionian sky.



Their cadenced cries of victory are soon replaced by the grinding crunch of invader's boots. Nazi troops march into a defeated Greece Easter Sunday, 1940, bringing bitter tears to Greek eyes glaring at the Nazi banner unfurled atop their beloved Acropolis.

Athens, Greece 1940-45

S.K. and Genny, and then their little Helen, learn in the occupation years what it is to slowly starve; somehow, they survive under the tyrant's heel. And instead of his daily regimen of training after his bill collection for the local utility, S.K. aids the local underground and his hapless Jewish

neighbors by passing information gleaned from Allied broadcasts on his illegal radio. Falsely arrested on suspicion of sabotage, only his Olympic athletic card saves him from a fate

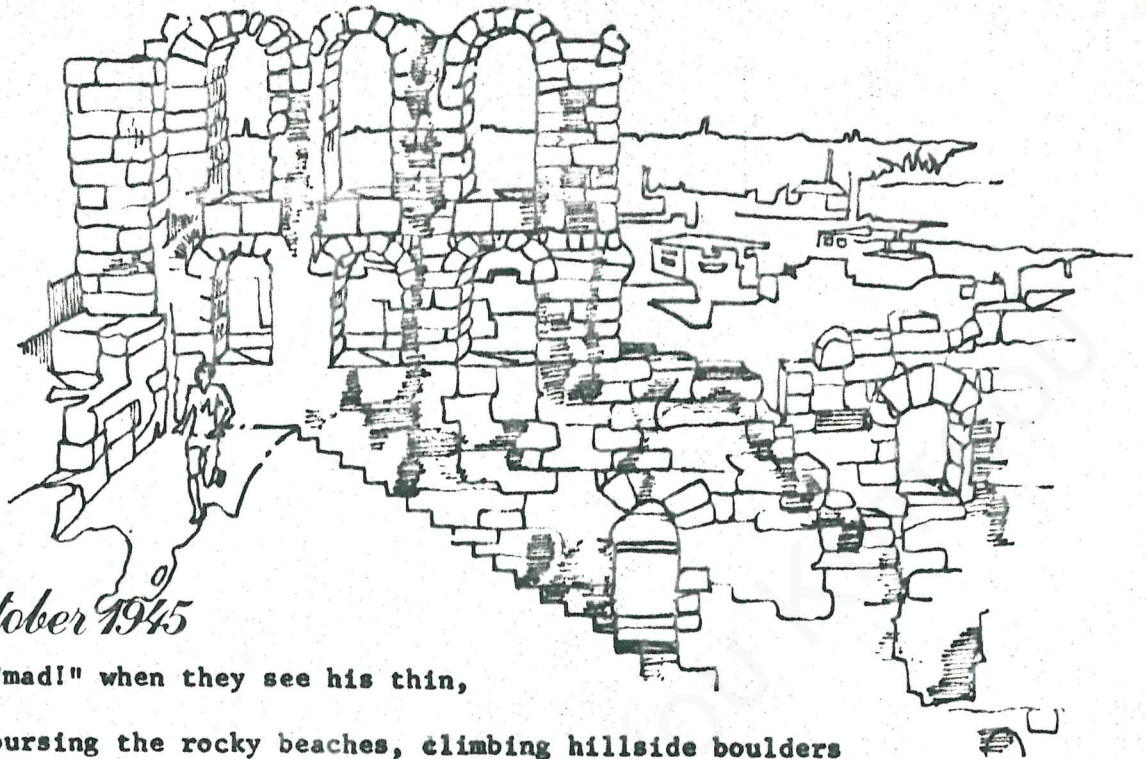


forty others do not escape. They are hung from a row of village evergreens like grotesque Christmas ornament dolls; and time and again he sees his teammates, once strong, valiant men, die from starvation, alcoholism or before revenging German machinegun fire.

Then, as suddenly as they came, the Germans are gone, leaving behind collapsed, suffering Greece, a tiny country ignored by a world busy licking its own wounds. One night after the Allied victory, an emaciated S.K. walks rubble-lined streets free of fatal curfews but not its starving peoples, and winds his heart-wrenching way to the deserted stadium. There, he realizes what he must do; alone, by fulfilling a prophecy he made years ago, he must bring saving aid to his country.

"Carts would come down the streets picking up the bodies left at curbs. I knew these naked corpses were once proud men and women of my country and my heart wanted to stop beating. Sitting in the stadium all alone, I knew what I must do. I must run for my country."

*Stelios Kyriakides
Athens, Greece 1979*



Athens, October 1945

Most label him "mad!" when they see his thin, starving body coursing the rocky beaches, climbing hillside boulders and training in icy rain, always shod in Army boots. No other but loyal Otto have time for "games" just now: now, the former fans are fighting to survive until tomorrow, then until another, hoping that one of these tomorrows the world will remember. But S.K. sweats and strains, goal sealed silently in his mind. Then, ears ringing with Genny's fearful arguments, he weaves his way through post-war red tape, begging, borrowing, selling all he can, cajoling and finally pleading a hop-sotch ticket to Boston for the 1946 marathon. When he departs for the U.S. for the second time in his life, he has only Otto's and his benefactor-employer Kemp's tentative, almost dubious support, but his own determination never wavers.

Yet in Boston, the AAU doctor refuses his entry! "This man is in no condition to run this race. He's starving!" Pressure from local Greeks and friend Jerry Nason prevails, however, and against impossible odds, S.K. Sunday pounds out a historic, awe-inspiring marathon run, trading leads six times with America's finest, the legendary Johnny Kelly.

When I neared the last two-mile checkpoint, a proud little Greek-American shouted, "Good second place, Greek!" My heart jumped inside me. Why second?

*Stelios Kyriakides
Athens, Greece 1979*