

AFTER THE BATTLE



IS PARIS BURNING?
THE BOMBING OF DUBLIN
A NIGHT AT THE ACROPOLIS

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On April 27, 1941, exactly three weeks after Germany had invaded Greece, troops of the 2. Panzer-Division reached and occupied Athens. They immediately proceeded to the Acropolis, the great outcrop of rock that towers over the inner city,

and raised the swastika flag there as a token of their conquest of Greece and its capital. The short ceremony was covered by several official Wehrmacht photographers, this shot being taken by PK Bauer from Propaganda-Kompanie 690.

A NIGHT AT THE ACROPOLIS

Symbolic acts of heroism or defiance can inspire, raise levels of consciousness and restore human dignity. When such acts resonate among entire populations they can influence and even transform the course of history. One such event occurred on the night of May 30/31, 1941 in Nazi-occupied Greece when two young patriots — Apostolos Santas and Manolis Glezos — took down and destroyed the German Imperial War Flag that the occupying Wehrmacht forces had raised on the Acropolis at Athens immediately after they had entered the city. It was an act of defiance to tyranny and oppression that roused the morale of all Greeks and inspired them to continue their fight against the Nazi regime.

THE REICH WAR FLAG

Upon his rise to power, Hitler was particularly interested in having a symbol that would uniquely identify his Nazi Party and what it stood for. He chose the swastika, a compelling ancient symbol commonly used by many cultures around the world, including China, Japan, India and southern Europe, as far back as 1000 BC. Thus, at the Salzburg Party Congress on August 7, 1920, the swastika became the official emblem of the Nazi Party. It was also used on the Partei-

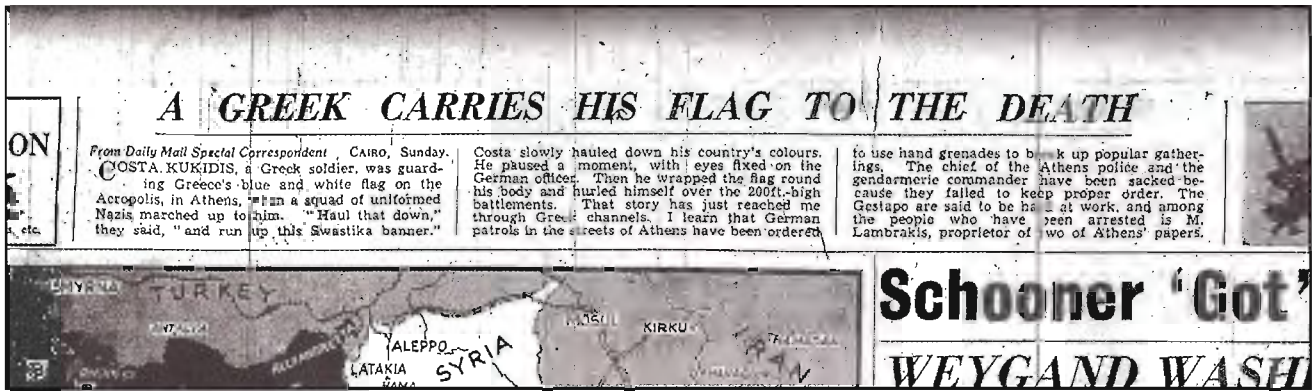
flagge (Party flag), which consisted of a red field with a white disk in the centre featuring a black swastika at a 45-degree angle. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler described the meaning behind the design, where 'the red repre-

By George Pararas-Carayannis

sented Socialism, the white Nationalism and the swastika victory for the Aryan race'. In 1933, with Hitler's coming to power, this banner also became Germany's Nationalflagge (National flag).



Right: The flag was raised at the mast that stands on the platform at the eastern tip of the Acropolis. The Parthenon, the central and most famous of the ancient temples on the rock, remains to pinpoint the comparison.



Ever since May 1941, a story has existed that a young Evzone soldier on guard duty at the flagpole that day, Kostantinos Koukidis, rather than surrender the Greek flag to the Germans, instead wrapped himself in it and jumped off the Acropolis to

his death. The story was first reported in the Press in the *Daily Mail* of June 9, 1941, having been submitted by its Cairo correspondent who stated that 'the story has just reached me through Greek channels'.

Since 1867, the German armed forces had used a Kriegsflagge (War Flag). In subsequent years, through the Kaiser's empire, the First World War and the era of the Weimar Republic, it underwent several design transformations. By 1933, it was in its fifth version, which consisted of a large Maltese Cross centred on a flag of three horizontal bands coloured black, white and red. Then, on November 7, 1935, to mark the introduction of military conscription in Germany, a new version of the flag (its sixth) was introduced. Designed by Hitler personally and known as the Reichskriegsflagge (Reich War Flag), it brandished the swastika in a white circle on a red field crossed by two black and white bands, with a small Maltese Cross in the top left corner. This banner served the Heer (Army) and the Luftwaffe (Air Force) as their War Flag, and the Kriegsmarine (Navy) as its War Ensign.

During the Second World War, under this flag, the Nazis persecuted and murdered millions of people. As a result, the swastika flag became a hated symbol throughout occupied Europe. For the Greeks, the act of destroying such a symbol not only sent strong messages about their beliefs but also represented an indirect attack on Hitler himself.

REICH WAR FLAG ON THE ACROPOLIS

In July 1940, Hitler and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini entered into an agreement for Italy to align with Albania and Bulgaria and invade Greece. The occupation of Greece, code-named Operation 'Marita', had become vital to Hitler due to the need to secure the right flank of the planned German invasion of Russia. Also, Greece and its island of Crete could serve as strategic outposts to support the Italian drive against Libya, Egypt and the Suez Canal. Mussolini predicted an easy victory.

On October 28, 1940, three hours after declaration of war by Fascist Italy, Italian, Albanian and Bulgarian troops entered northern Greece. Although totally unprepared for war, Greece refused Mussolini's ultimatum and thus entered the Second World War against superior military armies. Battling against all odds in the mountains of Epirus, the poorly equipped Greek army resisted and finally expelled Mussolini's army, which retreated to Albania. Dismayed by this unexpected outcome, Hitler was forced to divert divisions to Greece which had been earmarked for the Russian front.

On April 6, 1941, German troops invaded northern Greece, pouring down from Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and in a series of battles defeated both the Greeks and the Anglo-ANZAC forces sent to support them. During the previous year, France, with its very strong army and help from the British, had collapsed within five weeks, Norway had fallen in 61 days, Poland in 30, Belgium in 18,

Holland in four and Denmark had surrendered without a fight. Greece, at the time, was the only country in Europe to confront the armies of four nations simultaneously. Fighting with outdated weapons and sheer courage, the under-supplied and poorly equipped Greek troops held out against the superior Axis forces for 219 days.

On April 27, having outflanked the last position before the Greek capital, the first German troops — the motorcycle battalion of the 2. Panzer-Division — forged into Athens. They drove straight to the Acropolis, the rocky outcrop on which the Parthenon stood, planning to raise the Nazi flag. According to the most popular account, a German officer ordered a young Evzone sol-

dier on guard duty, Kostantinos Koukidis, to surrender, give up the blue-and-white Greek flag and raise the swastika banner in its place. Instead, so the story goes, Koukidis hauled down the Greek flag, refused to hand it to the Germans, wrapped himself in it, and jumped off the Acropolis to his death. Whether the story was true or not, many Greeks believed it and viewed the soldier as a martyr. The tale was also widely reported in the Allied press. (In April 2000, the Greek Army Historical Department announced that there was no documentary evidence of either Koukidis or his deed, nor had any relatives ever come forward to substantiate the event indicating that the story was just a local legend.)



Although there is no evidence whatsoever to substantiate the exploit, and today it is regarded as legend, a monument standing on the flanks of the rock, unveiled as late as 2000, still recalls Koukidis' deed: '... refusing to surrender the flag, he fell from the sacred cliff wrapped in it, thus pioneering the resistance fight'.



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It appears that before they raised the large Reichskriegsflagge (Reich War Flag), the Germans first hoisted a flag of a different design, the Nationalflagge, albeit with an oversized swastika, for this is seen in several other photos taken on the same day. In all likelihood the first troops to arrive at the Acropolis only

had this flag with them which was then replaced when a war flag had been located. The Nationalflagge also appears in photos of the Acropolis taken at a later date, so maybe the German occupation troops alternated between the two flags. Note the three bracing cables anchoring the flagpole to the rock.

Whatever the exact circumstances, German troops ceremonially raised a large, three-by-five-metre Reichskriegsflagge on the site where the Greek flag had flown. That same day, a message went off to Berlin:

'My Führer,
'On April 27, 1941, at 8.10 a.m. we arrived in Athens . . . and at 8.45 a.m. we raised the German flag on the Acropolis.

'Heil my Führer.'
The raising of the flag on this particular spot must have had an added symbolism for Hitler since he regarded the Acropolis as the epitome of human culture. It must have given him the feeling that he was already the ruler of the world.

The following morning all Athenians despaired to see the huge Nazi flag with its hated swastika flying over the Acropolis, the cradle of democracy, liberty and western civilisation. So two young, idealistic and strong-spirited students resolved to do something about it.

PLANNING THE ACTION

Apostolos Santas, commonly known as Lakis Santas, was born on February 22, 1922 in the city of Patras in the northern Peloponnese. His family roots were from the Ionian island of Lefkada. In 1934, when young Lakis was still a teenager, his family moved to Athens. In 1940, having completed his secondary education there, he entered the law school at the University of Athens.

His close friend, Manolis Glezos, was born on September 9, 1922 in the village of Apiranthos on the Aegean island of Naxos. His family had moved to Athens in 1935. Glezos became politically active at an early age. In 1939, while still a high school student, he had participated in the creation of an anti-fascist youth group against the Italian occupation of the Dodecanese and the dictatorship of Ioannis Metaxas. In 1940 he was admitted to the Higher School of Economic and Commercial Studies. At the onset of war in October of that year he asked to join the Greek army in the Albanian front against Italy but he was rejected because he was still under age. Instead, he worked as a volunteer for the Hellenic Ministry of Economics.

As their conviction to remove the swastika flag from the Acropolis took hold, the two friends prudently made their plans. They were fully aware of the dangers involved and

that it would require extreme courage and a willingness to die for what they believed in. If anything, it seemed an impossible mission. The Acropolis was heavily guarded, surrounded by steep cliffs and there was only one authorised way to the flag site, through the Propylaia — the official monumental gateway to the rock.

Santas and Glezos realised that they had to find a way to climb to the top of the Acropolis. They went to the library of the Benaki Museum on the corner of Koumbari Street and Vasilissis Sofias Avenue and checked the *Pyrros Encyclopaedia*. From this they learned that on the northern side of the hill, close to the Erechtheion temple, there was the so-called Cave of Aglauros and located underneath it was a dry well, the Xeropigado. This was where, according to ancient mythology, the sacred guardian snake of the Acropolis resided and where once a month the priestesses of Athena Polias would throw down honey-cakes for his

sustenance. The big 'crack' in the limestone that connected the cave with the dry well in fact constituted a shaft of about 35 metres that started from the foot of the hill at street level and reached the top of the Acropolis. It appeared to Santos and Glezos that this was the best way to reach the flag-pole and tear down the Nazi flag.

As they were making their plans, events unfolding in other parts of Greece heightened the commitment of the two young men. Although the Greek mainland had fallen, the island of Crete was still in Allied hands. Guarded by Greek, British and New Zealand troops, it was the last bastion of free Greece. However, on May 20, German airborne troops invaded the island and the battle of Crete began (see *After the Battle* No. 47). In spite of very heavy initial casualties, on the second day the Germans managed to capture Maleme airfield, which enabled them to fly in reinforcements and overwhelm the island's defenders. News of the pending loss



Four weeks into the German occupation, two young students, Manolis Glezos (left) and Lakis Santas (right), decided to do something about the swastika banner, planning to climb the Acropolis at night and take down the flag and destroy it as a symbolic act of defiance. This picture of them was taken in 1945.

Right: To reach the top of the Acropolis, Glezos and Santas used the natural shaft that rises from street level up to the so-called Cave of Aglauros which is located on the northern side of the rock, inside its rampart walls, near the Erechtheion temple. Once there, they split up to silently scout out the area, Glezos going around one side of the Parthenon and Santas around the other. Having established that all the German sentries were at the Propylaia gateway, unconcernedly brawling among themselves and well away from the flag area, the two Greeks rejoined at the flagpole, which was at the Belvedere at the other end of the rock. (What was still known as the Cave of Aglauros back in 1941, has since been re-identified by scholars as in fact being the Cave of Herse, another daughter of Cecrops, the legendary king of Athens. Aglauros was in fact worshipped in a big cave found on the east slope of the rock. We have indicated both.)

of Crete brought even greater despair to the Greeks. Learning about it, Santas and Glezos felt compelled to speed up their action.

One afternoon in late May, having concluded their research at the library, they began to look around the base of the Acropolis. Scouting out an area where French archaeologists had carried out some excavations in previous years, they spotted an old wooden door and concluded that this must give access to the alleged dry well and the fissure described in the encyclopaedia.

That evening they sat at a nearby café waiting for night to fall. As soon as it got dark they went through the barbed wire that closed off the area and reached the wooden door. Breaking its old rusty lock, once inside they saw the large deep cleft in the rock. Since they had no flashlight and the place was full of bats, they decided to leave and return the following evening. They were fortunate to get home in time before the curfew which lasted from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m.

The following night, they returned with a flashlight, and saw that on the right-hand side of the shaft there was a flat area with rocks and soil and, further down, a big hole, which they concluded must be the Xeropigado — the dry well. They also saw wooden planks leading upward, apparently some kind of scaffolding left by the archaeologists. They tested the old planks and found that they could support their weight.

Three days later, on a Sunday, they went up to the Acropolis pretending to be normal visitors. When no one was looking they approached the Erechtheion temple to check the flight of steps leading down to where the scaffolding began which confirmed that they could use the shaft to get to the top. Approaching the area where the German flag was flying, they saw that there was an old wooden guardhouse where the guard could shelter during bad weather. Finally, they noted that the German sentries guarding the area were all at the Propylaia — the official gateway to the Acropolis.

NIGHT ON THE ACROPOLIS

Crete fell on May 29. The bad news only steeled the resolve of Santas and Glezos and they decided to carry out their plan immediately.

On the evening of May 30, armed with only a torch and a pocketknife, they returned to the base of the Acropolis. A quarter moon was up, its light basking the great rock in a faint glow. Entering the opening, they

The flag on the left in the wartime photo was that of the Kingdom of Greece, whereas the present-day one (right) is that of the Greek Republic which replaced all other national flags in 1978.



The swastika flag flying from the main flagpole at the Belvedere as seen from the steps of the Parthenon. It took Glezos and Santas several hours to get the flag down, their main problem being to get it past the point where the bracing wires were fixed. Note the Greek flag flying from a shorter mast further to the left. The German occupation authorities allowed this to be flown but due to the fact that it was at a lower height and positioned further away from the Acropolis walls, it could not be seen from all over the city like the German one.





climbed up the scaffolding. Once at the top, they decided to separate and first check out the area. Santas went along one side of the Parthenon and Glezos along the other. There were no German guards in the immediate area, but they could hear their jovial voices, laughing and most probably celebrating their triumph in Crete.

Reaching the flagpole they found to their dismay that it was 15 metres high, with the swastika banner firmly tethered to the top. They cut the rope but the flag caught up where three bracing cables secured the pole to the rock. They tried climbing up the flagpole to reach the flag but the pole was slippery and they could get no grip. Finally, they managed to reach the wire juncture, separate the anchor cables and free the flag which suddenly fell down on top of them. It had taken them three hours to achieve their goal.

Rejoicing at their success, the two Greeks quickly cut two small pieces from the flag, stuffing the trophies inside their shirts, then pondered what to do with the remainder. As it was too large to carry, they decided to put it down the Xeropigado, joking that it would be guarded by the mythical snake. They threw some rocks and soil in after it to cover it up. Before they left, they decided to deliberately leave their fingerprints on the flagpole, lest innocent people be punished for what they had done. Then, exhausted but elated, the two men quickly made their descent. Once clear of the shaft and back at street level they were stopped by a Greek police officer but he fortunately let them proceed to their homes.

The next morning the Athenians looked up at the Acropolis and saw that the hated Nazi flag was gone. A feeling of euphoria permeated the city as the news of the flag's desecration spread like wildfire from Athens throughout Greece, countering the bad news of the loss of Crete. When the Germans realised the flag had gone, they were infuriated. The Gestapo immediately announced that the perpetrators would be executed if caught and launched a manhunt. However, they never identified the culprits although they were sentenced to death in absentia.

The exploit of Santas and Glezos was one of the very first resistance acts in Greece. Though symbolic, it gave inspiration to subsequent resistance movements. Their act would have remained unknown to the wider Greek populace had not the tightly-censored Athenian press given the event extensive front-page coverage under strongly-worded editorials 'condemning' the perpetrators. Though it was not known at the time who was responsible, they became immediate folk heroes, the first emblematic personalities of Greek resistance against the Nazis.



The Germans never found out who was responsible for the removal of the flag although both Glezos and Santas were later arrested for other acts of resistance. Released in late 1942, Santas joined the ranks of the ELAS partisans and spent the rest of the war in guerrilla fights with the Germans. Here he poses (left) with three fellow *andartes* in the mountains near Amfissa in central Greece in December 1943.

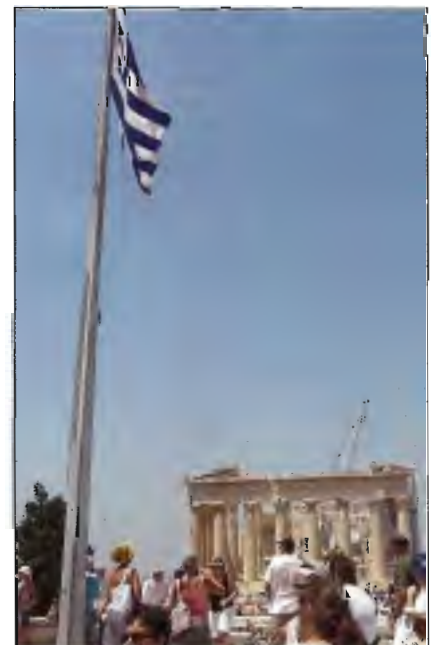
CONTINUED FIGHT AGAINST THE NAZIS

For Santas en Glezos the war did not end in May 1941. Both continued to engage in underground resistance activities. In February 1942, having decided to fight the Nazis by going to Haifa in Palestine and joining the Free Greek armed forces there, they managed to smuggle themselves into a Swedish ship, the *Randmaso*. However, as it happened, the British bombed the port of Piraeus that night and the ship could not leave, forcing them to stay hidden for three days without food or water in the ship's hold. A Greek stevedore betrayed them and they were arrested and imprisoned but luckily the Germans failed to make the connection with the theft of the Acropolis flag. The Nazis searched their houses but found nothing, Santas's father having burned the piece of the flag that his son had brought home, and Glezos's mother having done the same with

the other piece together with some diary notes he had made.

After he was set free under an amnesty in late 1942, Santas joined the fledgling EAM (National Liberation Front), and a year later the communist guerrilla force ELAS, with which he participated in several battles with the Axis troops throughout Central Greece, being wounded in the chest during one such fight.

After his arrest by the Germans on March 24, 1942, Glezos was subjected to imprisonment and torture (which left him gravely affected by tuberculosis). He was arrested again on April 21, 1943, this time by the Italian occupation forces and spent three months in jail. On February 7, 1944, he was arrested again, this time by Greek Nazi collaborators, and spent another seven and a half months in detention, until he finally escaped in September that year.



The end of the war saw the flagpole at the Belvedere snapped at the base. Hence the ceremonial first raising of the Greek flag after Athens' liberation by the returned Prime Minister Georgios Papandreu on October 18, 1944, was done at a wooden mast provisionally erected just beside the Belvedere (see *After the Battle* No. 155).

Right: Although the fact that they were the ones responsible for the removal of the German flag in 1941 had already become known in 1945, it would be another 30 years before Santas and Glezos could acknowledge their celebrity status that came with this legendary act of resistance. The intervening years — through the Greek Civil War, the Cold War and the Regime of the Colonels — were fraught with persecution and long years of imprisonment and hardship for both men. It was only after the return of democracy to Greece in 1974 that the two men could freely enjoy the fame and recognition they deserved. This picture of them posing at the foot of the Acropolis was taken in 1985.

POST-WAR

Throughout the German occupation, the truth of how the flag had been removed from the Acropolis in 1941 remained a mystery. The details only became known after the war when the police officer who had stopped the boys at the foot of the Acropolis spoke about his encounter. This brought Santas and Glezos a brief period of celebrity.

The end of the Second World War, however, did not mean the end of their plight. Because of their political beliefs, both Santas and Glezos were to spend much of the next 30 years — through the Greek Civil War (1946-49), the Cold War and the Regime of the Colonels (1967-74) — under persecution, being arrested, tried and given death sentences and living under great hardships in government concentration camps.

After the liberation of Greece in October 1944 and the flare-up of civil war fighting in Athens in December 1944 (see *After the Battle* No. 154), Santas initially managed to complete his law studies. Then, in July 1947, in the midst of the civil war, he was arrested, accused of being a communist, tried and sent to 'internal exile' on the island of Ikaria where he stayed for a year. In 1948 he was arrested again, sentenced to death and shipped off to the naval prison on Psyttaleia, a tiny island close to Athens, from where in 1949 he was transferred to Makronisos prison island, being finally released after two years following a public protest and international criticism.

In 1956, Santas, now married and with two daughters, travelled to Italy, and was eventually granted political asylum in Canada. He lived there for six years but in 1963, judging that the political situation in Greece had improved, decided to return. However, four years later, when the military junta led by George Papadopoulos seized power, he was arrested and again imprisoned.

Glezos's post-war fate was at least as grim. On March 3, 1948, at the height of the civil war, he was put to trial for his political convictions and sentenced to death by the right-wing government. However, because of the international public outcry, his penalty was reduced to a life sentence in 1950. Even though he was still in prison, in 1951 Glezos was elected Member of Parliament for the EDA (United Democratic Left). He immediately went on a hunger strike demanding the release of fellow EDA MPs who were imprisoned or exiled in the Greek islands. His action succeeded in getting seven MPs freed, while he himself was released from prison on July 6, 1954.

On December 5, 1958 he was again arrested and convicted for 'espionage', a common pretext for persecution of leftist supporters during the Cold War. During his imprisonment, he was re-elected MP with EDA in 1961. His release on December 15, 1962 was a result of the public outcry across Greece and abroad in his support, including his award of the Lenin Peace Prize.

At the right-wing coup d'état by the Greek Colonels of April 21, 1967, Glezos was



In 1982 a bronze plaque was unveiled at the Belvedere honouring their exploit: 'On the night of May 30, 1941, the patriots Manolis Glezos and Apostolos Santas tore down the flag of the Nazi occupiers from the sacred rock of the Acropolis.'



Now generally acknowledged as pioneer heroes of the Resistance, the two men have become household names, known throughout Greece, and no commemoration or celebration connected with the war could be held without their presence. This picture was taken at the Monument of the Unknown Soldier on Platia Syntagma (Constitution Square) in the centre of Athens when they attended the World War II Victory Day commemorations on May 9, 2004.



Lakis Santas passed away on April 30, 2011. His funeral on May 5 was a national event broadcast on nationwide television.

among those immediately arrested, together with the rest of the political leaders, and suffered yet another four years' imprisonment and exile until his release in 1971. His political persecution — through the Second World War, the Greek Civil War and the Colonels' Regime — added up to 11 years and four months of imprisonment and four and a half years of exile.

With Greece restored as a democracy, life for Santas and Glezos became more peaceful but they both remained politically active. A prolific journalist, writer and politician, Glezos served as a Member of Parliament until 1986, and in 1984 was elected a member of the European Parliament under a PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) ticket. He was President of EDA from 1985 until 1989 and long headed the National Council for the Reclamation of German Debt.

Both Glezos and Santas received ample recognition for their heroism during the Second World War, receiving numerous awards from various institutions in Greece and other Allied countries. On November 11, 2008, the Greek Parliament passed a special act to honour their heroic exploit in 1941. Both became members of the Lela Carayannis-Bouboulina organisation, the heir of the wartime resistance group of the same name (see *After the Battle* No. 146), Santas serving in its governing council.

Lakis Santas died on April 30, 2011, aged 89. At his funeral on May 5, Glezos, still going strong in spite of what he went through and his advanced age, gave a beautiful eulogy at the church of the First Cemetery of Athens where Santas was buried. The funeral was attended by Prime Minister Georgios Papandreou and ex-Prime Ministers, members of current and past administrations, leaders of the armed forces as well as representatives of the Lela Carayannis-Bouboulina organisation. Flags flew at half-mast on the Acropolis and at all public and administrative buildings throughout Athens. As a token of the times, right outside the church there were thousands of angry demonstrators, protesting against Papandreou's economic policy.

Manolis Glezos is still a fighting protester today. At 89, in the midst of Greece's worst crisis in modern times, he is as militant as ever. As a proponent of direct democracy and a popular icon, there is a great demand for him to be on the front-line at demonstrations against the austerity measures meted out to Greek society to rein in the country's runaway debt. In March 2010 pictures of the wiry, white-haired activist being tear-gassed by a riot policeman outside the Greek parliament made the national headlines. He puts his present activism in clear words: 'Not since the German occupation have we been in such a difficult and dangerous situation'.



The Greek flag on the Acropolis flying at half-mast in Santas's honour on the day of his funeral.



His life-long friend and companion, Manolis Glezos, remains a staunch political activist to this day. Despite his advanced age, he is still in the forefront of many a mass demonstration against the government's strict economic policies. This picture of him being seized by riot police during a mass protest in front of the parliament building on Constitution Square was taken on March 5, 2010. Tear-gassed by the police, 87-year-old Glezos was evacuated in an ambulance with severe respiratory problems, an incident that caused a national uproar.



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