

THE BAREFOOT BATTALION



The Barefoot Battalion refers to a group of approximately 160 children who resisted the German rule in the city of Thessaloniki during the Second World War and Nazi occupation in Greece.

The German army took over the city of Thessaloniki in Northern Greece, the second largest Greek city, on April 8th 1941. One of the first actions of the occupants was to seize all government buildings to be used to house their administration services and detention premises. In this light, all the orphanages in the area were cleared of their children and suddenly hundreds of children were found homeless with no family, housing, clothes or food.

Therefore, in an effort to survive, the orphans organised themselves in a resistance group of their own, whose main purpose was to steal food and supplies from Germans and their black market associates and which became known as the Barefoot Battalion due to its members' lack of shoes and clothing.

The Barefoot Battalion had a strict hierarchy and organisation and missions were carefully planned and executed. Their main method of stealing supplies was for one group to follow trucks and vehicles that carried food and another causing a distraction so as to slow them down. Then, the first group of children would climb onto the moving trucks and unload as many supplies as possible before the vehicle would pick up speed again.

Supplies were not only shared among the orphans of the group but were also shared with many Thessaloniki citizens that would suffer from hunger and hardship. These young 'Robin Hoods' also stole weapons to give to the guerrilla fighters of the area and sometimes hid resistance fighters on the run.



Once their activities had become increasingly detrimental to the local occupation forces, many orphans lost their lives during their missions, since German soldiers had received orders to shoot on sight.

However, the Barefoot Battalion continued its resistance activities until the end of Nazi occupation in Greece in 1944.

Sources:

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Story on the Barefoot Battalion

composed and performed by student team 5

Fooling the Germans to get food

A German truck has stopped in front of a large warehouse full of food supplies for the Nazi soldiers, very early in the morning. Only a few people are on the street, walking by without taking notice of the truck. Only two German soldiers, fully armed, stay outside to secure the truck while a few others go inside to get the food in big boxes.

A group of children, all in rags and without shoes, approach the scene. They speak Greek and point at the Germans, laughing and shouting words at them that they don't understand.

The Germans get nervous because they know that children try to steal food. As the children come closer to the truck, the two soldiers shout at them: "Halt! Stop! Leave or we will fire at you!" They are preparing their guns to defend the truck ...

Meanwhile three other German soldiers bring boxes with bread and fruit to the truck. They are observed by a second group of children who hide behind a corner. One of the Germans asks the others something but they only shout back "Everything okay! See that you get the stuff as quickly as possible!" So the three lift the boxes into the truck and return to the warehouse.

While the other children in front of the truck distract the guarding soldiers, two of the other group quickly run to and jump up into the truck. The others form a line, knowing that they have to be quick and able to run as fast as they can if someone sees them or the other soldiers come back.

The two in the truck grab whatever they can get and throw it out of the truck. The children in line fetch the food and pass it on to the others ...

Suddenly there are gun shots ... fortunately the soldiers first fire into the air. The children in front of the truck run away and one of the soldiers chases them to the next corner.

Alarmed by the shooting, two other soldiers come out of the warehouse, only to see that one little boy runs away with an orange in his hand. All the others already disappeared ... leaving the food boxes half empty.