

# HellenicCulture

*The Official Newsletter of The Hellenic Cultural Center of the Southwest*

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## Dr. George Blytas Authors “The First Victory: Greece in the Second World War”

In the annals of human conflict, Greece has often played a critical role. Dr. George Blytas has written an important historic book about Greece during World War II. The book entitled “THE FIRST VICTORY” published by The Hellenic Literature Society and The American Hellenic Institute was released in January 2010.

This is a must read for all Hellenes and indeed for all serious scholars of WWII. The book is based on extensive research of the archives of the combatant nations but also includes personal accounts of the experiences of the people involved.

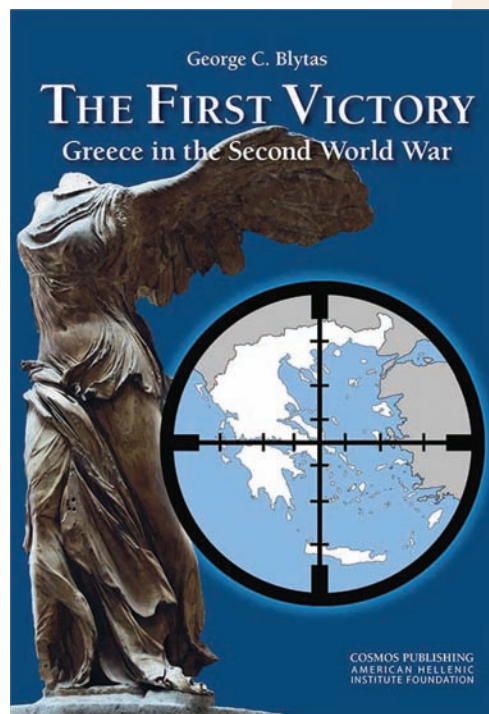
The author sets the stage for WW II by explaining the position of the various sovereign states conflicted in WWI and then WWII. He then takes us from “OXI” day [the day the Greek PM said NO to the Italian demand for surrender] through the victories in Epirus and Albania and as well in mainland Greece and Crete, to the occupation, the valiant resistance and eventual liberation.

The author explains the critical role the events that occurred in Greece had in the eventual outcome of WW II. The book has received many very positive reviews from experts in the field of history and specifically Military History. Some of these follow:

“...an evocative yet dispassionately written account that should appeal to readers interested not only in modern Greek history, but also the history of the Second World War as it evolved in Europe and the Mediterranean during a very critical period of that conflict.”

Alexander Kitroeff

*Associate Professor of History at Haverford College*



“...he has brought to this narrative a breadth, a depth, and a balance that is so often missing.”

Robin Higham

*Professor Emeritus of Military History  
Kansas State University*

“Seldom do authors take on the immense task of telling the story of an entire nation’s efforts to defend their territorial integrity, national sovereignty and democratic principles.”

Ron Milam

*Assistant Professor of Military History  
Texas Tech University*

The Hellenic Newsletter interviewed Dr. Blytas in an effort to gain further insight about “The First Victory” and its message:

**NL:** Dr. Blytas, please tell us why you decided to write “The First Victory” and why was it important to do so.

**Dr. Blytas:** I initially did not really plan to write a book. However, after the end of WWII and the Civil War that followed in Greece, I made a trip in 1951 to my father’s village in Greece near the Greek-Albanian border. There I found our ancestral home destroyed. It had been destroyed in a battle that occurred a few days after the Italian army invaded Greece through Albania. I felt the need to learn more about that battle, and began to talk to the villagers who had memory of the event.

This tweaked my interest even more and led me to seek information in Egypt, which was my residence at the time, and then in the USA when I moved to this country shortly thereafter. I continued my research *(continued on page 11)*

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

“Some men see things as they are and say, ‘Why?’ I dream things that never were, and say, ‘Why not?’ ~George Bernard Shaw

Fellow Hellenes and Philhellenes,

The quotation above is inscribed on the wall in the foyer of our present and modest headquarters at 3015 Richmond Avenue.

‘Why’ is meaningful only if we limit our dreams: ‘Why’ make the effort, make the commitment of time and of money in order to be able to forge ahead and to strive to bring the many culturally rich events these past three years to this region that represent our rich Hellenic Heritage: merely because the HCC-SW Board of Directors dream and say “Why not?”

These dedicated HCC-SW Board of Directors are committed to continue to bring various but meaningful lectures, exhibits, movies and other events that announce to Houstonians accomplishments of contemporary and ancient Hellenes.

Since you received this Fourth Edition of our Newsletter, you are interested in what we bring to you but we need you to tell us your DREAMS so that we can answer your ‘Why not?’

Support as many of the events as you can with your presence and YES, with your financial support. We can do so much more if only we had financial strength.

Our ‘Why not?’ is to have our own truly Hellenic Cultural Center. To this endeavor we will continue to strive to enrich Houstonians of our Hellenic Culture. We are committed!

Respectfully,

**Anthony D. Kouzounis**  
President

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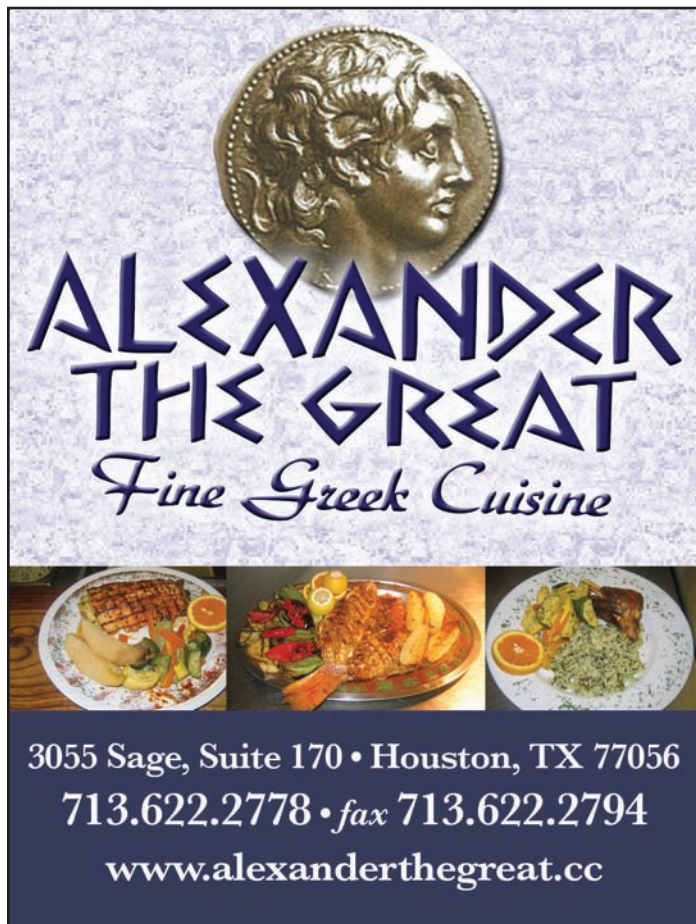
## Welcome Fr. Jordan

The Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation welcomed its new Proistamenos, Father Jordan Brown, on September 1, 2009. He and his Presvytera Marika and four children came from Austin, Texas where he had served the Transfiguration parish for twelve years.

Father Jordan was born in San Antonio, Texas but moved to Colorado when he was five years old. His parents were born and married in Greece and came to America in 1962. Fr. Jordan graduated from the University of Colorado, Metropolitan State College, in Denver with a degree in Political Science and Business Management. In 1993 he earned a Master of Divinity degree from Holy Cross Seminary.

After ordination, he served as an assistant priest in Dallas, Texas for four years before becoming the Proistamenos in Austin. Father Jordan especially enjoys serving the youth and young adults in the parish and the various ministries in these areas at the Cathedral which keep him quite busy.

The Hellenic Cultural Center of the Southwest adds its welcome to Father Jordan and looks forward to a warm relationship in areas of mutual interest.



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# Build It and They Will Come!

by NICK CHECKLES, MD, *Editor*

It is incredible how fast time goes by. The Hellenic Cultural Center of the Southwest is now in its fourth year as a 501(c)3 organization. The Center has made good progress since its inception and looks forward to a bright future.

Our "Center" is now settled into its leased space at 3015 Richmond Ave. These offices should meet the Center's needs for the near term, but the long term goal is for the Center to eventually have a building of its own. Some may say that this is a dream, and I agree. It is a dream. It is OUR dream. We must be patient, but we must persevere. A wise man once said---"By believing passionately in something that still does not exist, we create it." ---Nikos Kazantzakis.

The HCC-SW Newsletter is now beginning its second year. I hope you, our readers, have enjoyed it as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

Is the NL what you want it to be? We need some feedback from you the readers. Is the NL well balanced? Is it too short or too long? Is the NL informative?

Do you want more Hellenic Cultural articles?—more current Hellenic news? Is the content what you want to read? We would like more local community news. If you have an item of news send it to us so we can include it in the next issue.

In the last two issues of the Newsletter, first this editor, then the Greek Consul, Alexandra Theodoropoulou, began a dialogue about Hellenism in America and specifically in Houston. Please join in this dialogue. Send a "Letter to the Editor" or if you prefer send an e-mail. (see the masthead for e-mail address)

Finally, we must all thank our sponsors and advertisers. Without their financial support this Newsletter would not be possible. All members of The Hellenic Cultural Center of the Southwest help support the NL as well. Join the HCC-SW and help us bring Hellenism to the Houston area. Embrace your heritage.



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# Dr. Louis Markos Addresses U.S. Congress

Those of us that have heard Dr. Markos speak have all admired his enthusiasm, intellect and ability to energize an audience. Recently he addressed a group of congressmen and dignitaries in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. and by all accounts “WOWED” them. Your Hellenic Cultural Center Newsletter asked Dr. Markos to tell us about his trip to Washington and what he told congress and why the message was important. His response was as follows:

“During the noon hour of October 21, 2009, I had the great privilege of addressing a distinguished group of dignitaries and guests in one of the conference rooms of the Cannon House Office Building (U. S. House of Representatives) in Washington, D. C. My talk, “The Heirs of Athens,” was part of the “Contemporary World through Classic Eyes Lecture Series” and was sponsored by the Congressional Hellenic Caucus, the National Hellenic Society, the American Hellenic Institute Foundation, and Odyssey Magazine.

Congressman Gus Bilirakis, Co-Chairman of the Hellenic Caucus, introduced me to an enthusiastic audience that included representatives from the offices of Shelley Berkley, Ron Paul, E.B. Johnson, Dina Titus, Zack Space, John Sarbanes, Library of Congress, Voice of America, American Hellenic Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center, Public Benefit Guarantee Corporation, and Helsinki Commission. Also in attendance were the Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus, and Greece’s Defense Attaché, Military Attaché, and Press Officer.

I began my address by making what should be an obvious point, but which is too often overlooked today: that the roots of Western civilization are Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman, and that there would be no West if the Jews and Greeks had not existed. The Hebrews and Hellenes were the first people groups to have a full sense of their own identity and calling.

As the Jews bequeathed to the world an ennobled image of man as made in God’s image, so the Athenians of the Golden Age (Fifth Century B. C.) gave birth to a political system (democracy) that allowed man’s innate dignity to be realized. In my talk, I surveyed the historical, cultural, and intellectual forces that first shaped Athenian democracy and then led to its demise. My purpose in doing so was to enable and empower modern legislators to learn from the triumphs and errors of the past in hopes that we might imitate the former and avoid the latter.

I was happy to find that the audience was very receptive both to learning about and learning from the past, and was

eager to gain a fuller, holistic understanding of how democracy was born and passed on, to clear up historical misconceptions, and to commit themselves to making the kinds of decisions necessary to prevent our own democracy from suffering the fate of Athens.

Among the triumphs of Athenian democracy that I highlighted were its ability to balance the pursuit of excellence with equality of opportunity, its success at avoiding both an anti-immigrant and a multicultural ethos, and its commitment to making the law, rather than the will of a single ruler, the supreme judge and authority. Among the errors I highlighted were its increasing paranoia and xenophobia that caused it to close its doors and to substitute political expediency for justice, and its surrender to an irresponsible egalitarianism that crushed excellence and promoted envy and partisan strife”.

Dr. Louis Markos

## “Scholar in Residence” at Houston Baptist University

Louis Markos ([www.Loumarkos.com](http://www.Loumarkos.com)), Professor in English and Scholar in Residence at Houston Baptist University, holds the Robert H. Ray Chair in Humanities. He also teaches ancient Greece and Rome for HBU’s new Honors College, and is the author of *From Achilles to Christ: Why Christians should Read the Pagan Classics*.

Dr. Markos’ talk was well received by all in attendance. He has received many rave reviews and comments. The editor of ODYSSEY magazine, Art Dimopoulos, stated: “---he really connects the dots and makes Hellenism relevant” and “---If we clad him in a toga---Plato is alive and well!”

The Voice of America, in its Greek version, did a complete write-up of the conference. They stated that congressman Gus Bilirakis thanked Dr. Markos for giving them insight into how they can learn from ancient Athens. Mr. Tim Maniatis, Director of The National Hellenic Society expressed his joy in hearing such an inspiring and relevant presentation.

We are fortunate, indeed, to have Dr. Markos here in Houston. He will certainly be part of our Hellenic Cultural Center’s lecture series on Hellenism in America. We may even ask him to repeat his Congressional Presentation to us.

# “Ancient Legends Vindicated The Delphic Oracle”

Once again HCC-SW is teaming up with the Archeological Institute of America and The Honors College at HBU to present “Ancient Legends Vindicated the Delphic Oracle” by Dr. John Hale.

So great was the influence of the Delphic Oracle that scarcely a colony was founded or a war undertaken in the ancient Greek world without the priestess’s sanction. Greek and Roman authors tell of a sweet-smelling vapor emerging from a fissure at the temple of Apollo at Delphi that triggered a seemingly miraculous prophetic trance.

For years, many have been skeptical of the traditions at Delphi. Now you can learn about the work of an interdisciplinary team of archaeologists, geologists, chemists, and toxicologists that is vindicating ancient legends at oracle sites throughout the Aegean and Asia Minor.

Dr. John Hale, professor at the University of Louisville, will discuss the team’s findings on Thursday, April 22, 2010 at 7 pm at the Mabee Teaching Theater on the HBU campus, 7502 Fondren. Admission is free.

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# Music As a National Identity Medium

By Yona Stamatis, PhD Candidate, Ethnomusicology, U. Michigan. Reprinted from 'Greek Ethos' Vol.III Issue 9 / Autumn 2009

Musical nationalism is a most striking and oft-ignored phenomenon of modern Greek culture. Yet throughout modern Greek history, a diverse assortment of music has been used to promote varying ideals for the Greek national identity: Composer Nikolaos Mantzaros of the Ionian island of Kerkyra wrote the music for the Greek national anthem 'Ode to Liberty' poetry written in 1823 by Solomos of Zakynthos in the style of contemporary Italian opera: Nineteenth-century foreign and Greek folklorists collected and "corrected" rural folksongs in an effort to illustrate the cultural continuity of modern Greece with its ancient past: and during the late 1930's the Metaxas dictatorship censored the Greek urban popular song genre 'Rebetika' for purportedly obstructing the Westernization of the Greek nation. In the 1950's the sound and function of the music changed drastically and a new Westernized style of 'Rebetika' became popular in Greece.

Despite numerous attempts to express the Greek nation through music, no consensus has been reached as to which music best serves this role. Today, opinions about what is and is not Greek music continue to be as numerous as they are diverse. Some believe that folk music is the purest representation of Greek culture while others find ideal 'Greekness' in the the compositions of Mikis Theodorakis who blended elements of Greek folk music and classical compositional technique into a new Greek high-art music. Still others identify the Greek nation with contemporary pop songs such as "This is Our Night" with which acrobatic singer Sakis Rouvas represented Greece in the 2009 Eurovision Song Contest. This same Sakis Rouvas currently serves as the ambassador for Greek tourism.

In the heart of the capital city Athens, one Greek musician performs a different Greece. At the end of Ippokratous Street in Neapolis, sandwiched between apartment blocks and convenience stores is "Rebetiki Istoría" the oldest Rebetika tavern in Athens. In 1981, musician Pavlos Vasileiou opened "Rebetiki Istoría" in order to promote Rebetika, claiming it to be "first true Greek urban popular song that had been pushed aside by other less-worthy and less-Greek popular music".

Rebetika is a popular song genre that formed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the major cities of Greece, Asia Minor, and the United States. The basic instrumentation of Rebetika includes the bouzouki (a six-stringed lute), baglama (a miniature bouzouki), guitar, and voice. Its lyrics are generally intensely sad as they express the hardships of

everyday life of the urban proletariat.

Throughout the 20th century, Rebetika fueled great controversy: many scorned the music for its so-called "low-life" associations, its references to drug use and for the perceived 'Eastern sound' of its music. Others believed that in contrast to the extant Europeanized popular music of Greek cities, Rebetika was a true expression of the Greek people.

In "Rebetika Istoría", Rebetika has become synonymous with Vasileiou's desired national identity for Greece. Vasileiou believes that Rebetika represents a better Greece that resists "the corruptive forces of Europeanization, capitalization and globalization that have caused Greeks to lose sense of their true cultural and national identity". Yet the music can only portray a more ideal Greekness if played strictly in the style of its early performers. This style that dominated until the mid 20th century is characterized by subtlety in phrasing and ornamentation, sparse instrumentation and the characteristic vocal timbres. Playing Rebetika in its modified post-war style with its new sounds, instrumentation and function, promotes an impure Greek culture and a superficial Greek national identity that panders to foreign influences.

Other "Rebetika Istoría" performers disagree with Vasileiou, preferring to adapt elements of hybridized post-1955 rebetiko style into their performances, which include Western scales, ornamentation styles and instruments, and altered lyrics. These musicians welcome these recent adaptations to the music and to Greek society. The nightly musical debates spawn disagreements over the Greekness of the music and over contemporary Greek national identity. The musicians argue their positions with words and with musical notes, making pointed melodic and harmonic choices that support their views. As a result, their rebetika performances become an aural landscape of their national identity debate. "Rebetika Istoría" serves as a reminder that music is never free from ideological baggage: rather, every piece of music we hear shapes and reflects our understandings of personal and collective identities. As stated by musicologist Thomas Clifton, "Music is not a fact or a thing in the world, but a meaning constituted by human beings".

AS SUCH, EVERY TIME WE LABEL A PARTICULAR MUSIC AS GREEK, WE NOT ONLY SHAPE AND REFLECT PERCEPTIONS OF GREEK MUSIC BUT ALSO OF GREEK NATIONAL IDENTITY.

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# 2010 HCC-SW Events Include An Evening with Olympia Dukakis

HCC-SW has created a stunning line up of events for 2010 and we're looking to add more events as the year progresses.

Our coup this year is attracting the one-woman-show in December by Olympia Dukakis. We're finalizing the date and selecting an appropriate venue for this amazing woman when she visits Houston. Perry Mavrelis has worked diligently, and with much patience, to secure a commitment from her to close out our year in supreme Greek Style.

2009 was an exciting year for us and many of you attended and supported our events – and we thank you for that. They were successful because of you. These performances, past and future, are all exciting, interesting and worthy events and, as members of HCC-SW, you get a preferred rate.

To join HCC-SW or to renew your membership, go to [www.hcc-sw.org](http://www.hcc-sw.org). You can also mail your membership information to: P.O. Box 66431, Houston, TX 77266-6431.

The membership levels are:

Parent Organizations	\$ 500.00
Patrons	\$ 500.00
Sustaining Members	\$ 200.00
Family Membership	\$ 75.00
Individual Membership	\$ 50.00

## 2010 HCC-SW EVENTS

### Ancient Legends Vindicated - The Delphi Oracle

April 22, 2010 - 7 pm at HBU - Admission is free.

Sponsors: AIA, HBU, HCC-SW

### Lecture Series 2010:

**Cypriot Ambassador - 'Destruction of a Culture  
Following the Turkish Invasion'**

**Gene Rossides, Founder of American Hellenic Institute  
'Hellenism in America'**

**Dr. Frank Holt - 'Alexander the Great's  
Influence on Today's World'**

### "Oresteia" – Trilogy by Aeschylus

Leonidas Loizides Theatrical Company

October 15, 2010 - Dunham Theater, HBU

### Greek Film Festival - Museum of Fine Arts - October 2010

### Olympia Dukakis – A One Woman Show

December 2010

Stay tuned to our newsletter and/or go to our website for more information on all of our events.



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The child in the photo is Anthony Vossos, son of Pete and Angie Vossos.



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# Dr. Nick Checkles, President 2010 HCC-SW Officers Elected

It's a new year and that brings a new slate of officers for 2010. At our executive board meeting February 2, the annual election was held and the officers for this year are:

President - Dr. Nick Checkles  
Vice President - Perry Mavrelis  
Secretary - Vangie Barrow  
Treasurer - Peter H. Vossos

Each year we do more, learn more and offer more because we learn from every thing we have done and each event we have sponsored. Our officers are always on the front line with our committee chairmen promoting, selling and doing for HCC-SW and our events.

We are looking for a few good Greeks – *and those who want to be Greeks* – who would like to provide their expertise and knowledge to enhance our organization and programs. Please feel free to contact any officer or member to “volunteer” to help in any or all events.



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# Name the HCC-SW Newsletter

*Final vote...or forever hold your peace!*

Since the inception of the "Hellenic Culture" newsletter, we have been searching for an appropriate name. The suggestions are in and are listed below for your perusal. Check your one choice for the HCC-SW Newsletter and send it to: HCC-SW, P.O. Box 66431, Houston, TX 77266-6431 or email your choice to one of the editors listed on page 4.

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**Dr. George Blytas Authors “The First Victory”**

*continued from page 1*

when I lived in Holland briefly and in Austria and even Italy through my travels. The more I learned the more I wanted to know, so I could fully understand what happened and why.

I discovered that, in general, the contribution of Greece in the Second World War was very superficially documented in any language other than Greek. Even in the Greek historiography some of the ramifications and consequences of the Greek resistance have never been fully documented or understood. This dearth of information in English, from both English and American authors, compelled me to do extensive research.

**NL:** How long did it take you complete the research and did you have any problems accessing records?

**Dr. Blytas:** I began my research in 1992 and completed it in 2006. At the beginning I was employed full time in my profession, so time spent was intermittent and in short periods of time. After my retirement I had much more time to devote to completing my research. I did not have many problems accessing records, but one does have to go through the necessary governmental processes and red tape to access official records and this can take much time.

There were also, of course, many books by other authors that I read and PhD theses that had been written that were relevant. Most important, there are more than ten volumes of military historical data compiled by superior officers of the Hellenic Army General Staff for the History Directors of the Greek Defense Department. I reviewed Mussolini’s son-in-law’s diary and also some personal notes by Hitler. British and American texts do not explain what happened fully and why. Why did it take five months fighting the Italians and two more months after German forces were added for Greece to fall? The larger nations of Europe fell to the Germans in 40 days or less.

**NL:** In your research, did you have any surprises or unexpected findings?

**Dr. Blytas:** Yes, many surprises. Full appreciation of the effect that the Greek resistance had on Hitler’s timetable has not been adequately documented or well understood. I am able to show how the unexpected Greek resistance, both during the seven-month Battle of Greece and during the Occupation, helped determine the outcome not only on the Russian front, but also the results in the Middle East and North Africa.

**NL:** What message do you hope that people reading your book will take away with them?

**Dr. Blytas:** All readers will gain the necessary background to understand the origins of WWII. They will also learn that even though a small country, Greece had an important role to play in fighting tyranny and the Axis powers. A poorly equipped Greek army defeated a well-equipped modern Italian army that required German assistance to prevail. Also, even after Greece fell the Axis had to keep an army of 200,000 to 300,000 occupation troops in Greece to protect their southern flank. I hope that Greeks reading the book will gain pride in their “Greekness.” I hope that everyone who reads the book will gain a better understanding of the flow of historical events in The Second World War and an appreciation of Greece’s contribution to the eventual Allied victory.

**NL:** Thank you Dr. Blytas.

The book “The First Victory” is available through Amazon.com at this time. It is also available from Cosmos Publishing Co. and Greece in Print.

*Dr. George Blytas is a retired research scientist/engineer and long time resident of Houston, TX. For more information please visit his website at [www.georgeblytas.com](http://www.georgeblytas.com)*



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**Ioannis M. Skaribas, MD**

Diplomate in Anesthesiology and Pain Medicine by the American Board of Anesthesiology

Dr Skaribas was born in Itea Fokidos, Greece. He is a graduate of the Medical School of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki in Greece. Dr. Skaribas trained at Baylor College of Medicine, where he completed a residency in anesthesiology, and a fellowship in pain medicine. He is board certified in both anesthesiology and pain medicine by the American Board of Anesthesiology.

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