



## GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS <sup>OF</sup> ATLANTA

### ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΤΛΑΝΤΑΣ



My Beloved Ones,

**Χριστὸς ἀνέστη! Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη!**  
Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

This coming Monday, our country will once more honor those brave men and women who fell in defense of our freedoms. While Memorial Day is also seen as the unofficial beginning of summer (with pools opening & family picnics), I would like to take the opportunity to share a special story about a Greek immigrant who fought for America during World War 2—and became famous without realizing it.

Evangelos Klonis was born into a poor family on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1916, in Kefalonia. The second of eight children, Evangelos did not have much education, and he moved to Athens for work. Eventually though, at age 16, he snuck aboard a ship that was sailing for America. From Los Angeles, he moved to Denver, where he worked as a hot dog vendor, before moving to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The world changed after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, and so did Evangelos's life. As our country entered the war, it promised all immigrants citizenship for military service. Evangelos was not yet a citizen, and so, in 1942, he changed his name to Angelo, and enlisted in boot camp for the Army. Evangelos proved to be such a capable soldier, that the Army requested he train as a Marine. Evangelos expected to serve in the war in the Pacific, but when he was informed that all his family were murdered by the Nazis in Kefalonia, he requested to be sent to Europe, where served with honor in France, Germany, Austria, and Poland, receiving many medals.

After the war, Evangelos learned that report of his family's death was untrue, and eventually traveled to Greece to be reunited with them. During this trip, he met his future wife, Angeliki, with whom he would raise three children, working at a restaurant in Santa Fe. When the restaurant was lost, Evangelos and his wife decided to raise their family in Greece. Evangelos built the family home out of bamboo and other island elements, which made his family think of the Pacific Islands where he had wished to fight. The Klonis family lived in Greece for 10 years, returning to Santa Fe in 1969. In 1971, Evangelos purchased a bar, named it Evangelo's, and decorated it in a Southern Island style.

In 1972, Evangelos's son Nick, a promising soccer player, told his father that he was to be photographed for a sports magazine. Evangelos mentioned that he had once been photographed as a young soldier by a cameraman from LIFE magazine. This was the first time Nick Klonis had heard this story, and though he searched every issue of LIFE, he failed to find a cover photograph which matched his father's description.

In fact, the photo had never been used on a magazine cover, and so it was not until 1991 that Nick found the photo in a book to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of America's entry into World War Two. The photo of Evangelos, dressed for battle, smoking a cigarette, was called, *Alert Soldier, Saipan*, which proved that Evangelos had in fact fought on the Southern Pacific islands. However, Evangelos was unable to enjoy this moment of public recognition, having fallen asleep in the Lord two years before, in 1989.

Though Evangelos died peacefully, like all those we see shall honor this coming Memorial Day 2021, there is much we can learn from his example. Evangelos did not intentionally seek the fame that the photograph brought him; instead, he served out of a love for his family, and for the country that he had come to call home. He was a hero because he was willing to risk his very life for his fellow soldiers, and for a country that had welcomed him as an immigrant to its shores.

When we look at the photo of this young soldier (he could not have been more than 26 years old at the time), we see a serious face (one that has already experienced loss) and a person who knows what is required of him in this fight for freedom. This Memorial day, as we take time to enjoy our day of rest with our families and friends, may we use Evangelos's story to remember, even for only a moment, all those fallen soldiers who were called to make the ultimate sacrifice for the United States of America, and who answered that call.

God bless them, and God bless America!

**+ALEXIOS**

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