

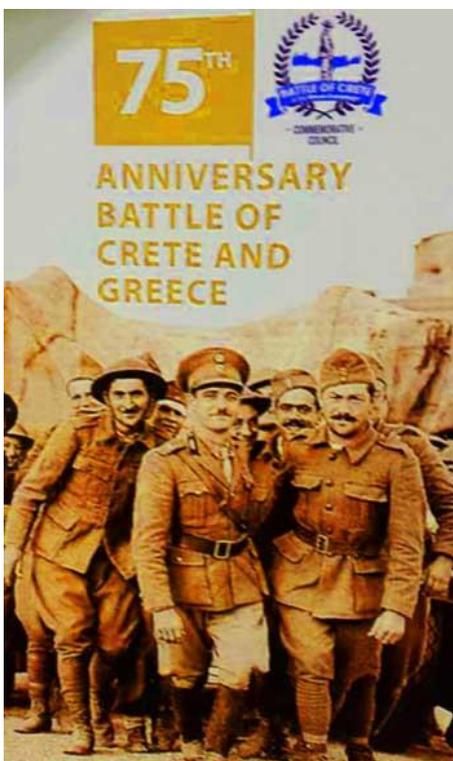
THE BRUNSWICK BOYS

Abalinx Peter Adamis 19 April 2016

In the early 1950s when I was just a young nipper living in Fitzroy and Carlton and then in Windsor/Prahran/St Kilda suburbs we would often see older men drinking mentholated spirits amongst other drinks in the alley ways and laneways that were found in the rear of the homes. When we visited our relatives in Brunswick we came across the same scenario of men shouting, fighting amongst themselves or holding each other up as they staggered presumably home. I could never understand why these men would be sleeping, drinking, arguing and even urinating in the open. I did not understand the horrors of war nor understood what post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) meant.

Suffice to say as the years went by and I grew up embracing Australian values and culture, the images of these men stayed with me for many years even long after I had left the Australian Defence Force, having served some 30 years continuously. I did find out later the effects on men and women of the horrors of war and how families became disjointed and broke.

How men and women becoming separated from what we commonly call a normal life into unreal world that was reminiscent of those who returned from WW1, WW2, Korea, subsequent active hostilities which we call a two way range, followed by the an unpopular and unsupported war if there ever was one in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was probably the first war that Australian servicemen and women felt alienated from the general population and if it was not for those who returned post-traumatic stress syndrome would never have been truly understood.



The title Brunswick Boys has a ring of hardship attached to it and yet it stands out as a symbol of the working man who despite his previous occupation whatever that may have been heard the cooee so to speak and answered his nations call to arms. Many of those from Brunswick were just lads, many in their teens eager to do the right thing, see the world at the government's expense; fight the good fight and return home.

Like their fathers before them, the original ANZACs from WW1, these young lads were all eager to demonstrate their willingness to fight an aggressor that was bringing destruction to a world that was unwilling to engage in a battle for supremacy and in doing so would be emulating the original ANZACS. The Brunswick Boys would have endured basic training at Puckapunyal and/or Broadmeadows before being shipped out to the Middle East and subsequently be involved in the Battle for Greece and Crete. It was a tough life and a difficult task in living up to the courage and valour of their fathers before them.

The battalions that served in Egypt and Libya had been created from suburbs such as Brunswick and as such a camaraderie of sorts would be built during the initial training and subsequent military manoeuvres in the Sahara desert of Libya and Egypt which hardened them for the horrors that they would eventually face in the mountainous regions of Greece and Crete. These blokes from Brunswick were no different to their brothers in arms from West Australia who also saw action during the Battle of Greece and Crete and in some cases found themselves languishing through no fault of their own in German Prisoner of War camps.

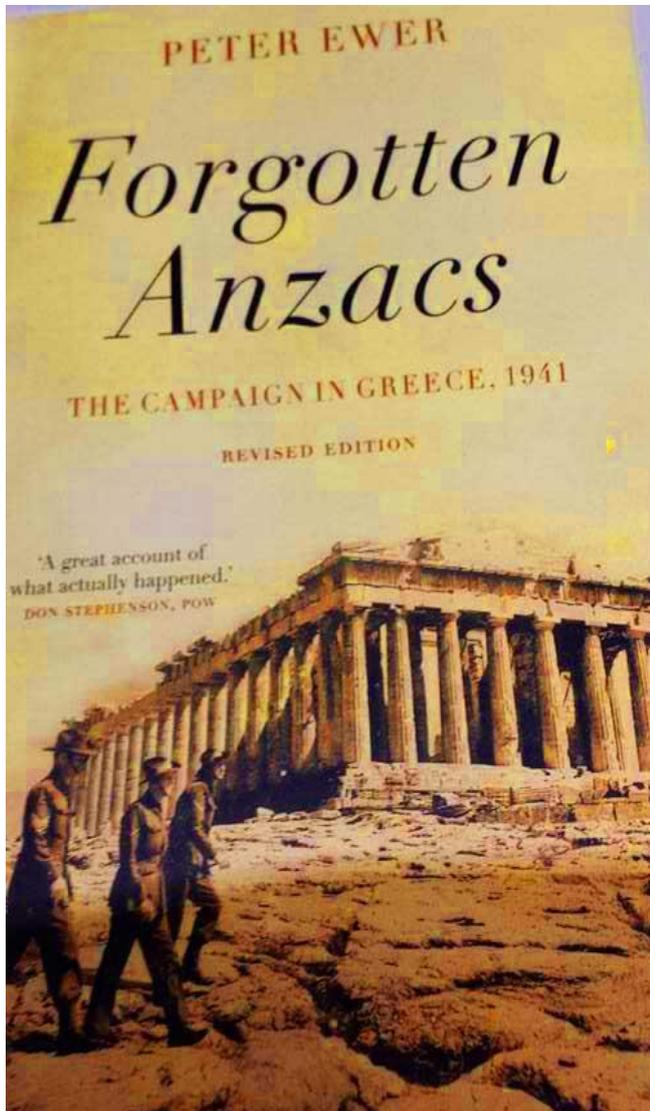
There are many stories that are yet untold and it is up to historians to unravel the myths that surround those who were kept in captivity and the psychological effects it had on their well-being and subsequent release. There are many war diaries that need to be retained and kept in order that they see the rays of light so that a grateful nation will truly understand the deprivations that these men withstood in order to survive.



One wonders how they must have left when they were released into the general population and they came across those who had escaped to fight another day. Did those who were kept in captivity feel that they had done their bit or were they shunned as not having done enough for the war effort? It is true though that those who kept in captivity by the forces of Imperial Japan have been recorded mainly because of the huge atrocities by the Japanese guards and their Korean allies. But why is that we have not read or have been exposed to the numerous stories of those who were captured on the southern shores of the Peloponnese in Greece or in the mountains of Crete after the German forces took the island after very heavy fighting and loss of life on both sides including civilian losses.

There are war diaries of the 2/11 Battalion, The Royal West Australian Regiment yet to be published, one of which is a must read is 'The road to Prevelly' by Geoffrey Edwards who saw action in Greece and Crete and was saved and looked after by the Greeks hiding from the Germans. A man who vowed that once he returned back to Australia he would build a church in honour of those Greeks who had saved him. True to his word Geoffrey Edwards returned and built a church in Margaret River in the south of Perth West Australia. I had the pleasure of visiting the church which is open to the public by obtaining the keys from the local merchant store next door.

Who in today's society overwhelmed by technological devices pay heed to men like Alex Sheppard who was responsible for the evacuation of the forgotten ANZACS in Kalamata and the Mani area in the southern Peloponnese? Who would know of Gavin Long's official history of the Battle of Greece and Crete and/or of Kenneth Slessor one of Australia's lesser known war correspondents who diligently recorded in his memoirs and war despatches of interviews and stories he had encountered during his time in Greece and Crete. They make fascinating reading which should be a must for any Australian interested in understanding the mindset of an Australian warrior in Battle.



Peter Ewer in his book *the forgotten ANZACS* is one of the few that has dared to take on the challenge and bring to light what occurred to those forgotten ANZACS who fought during the Battle for Greece and Crete. Peter has managed to gather the essence of what it was like and take the reader along with him onto a journey from the Northern mountains of Greece right down to the shores the Peloponnese and subsequently in to the mountains of Crete. Peter pulls no punches and must be congratulated for teasing out those minuscule actions that other historians would gloss over.

The treachery does not go unnoticed either by Peter or by Alex Sheppard who discuss the pros and cons of the treachery that was significant in exposing the Australians to strategically withdraw leaving behind a resolute, uncertain and courageous civilian population who in the words of Henry 'Jo' Gullet said 'The Greek always made it obvious that we (Australians) were one of their own'. Henry 'Jo' Gullet was an officer who was then serving during the Battle for Greece before returning to Australia to become Ambassador to Greece post WW2.

Having said all of the above does not make me an expert on the subject other than to say that I have a personal interest in the Battles of Greece and Crete, having served with the battalions who were involved. Battalions served were the 2nd Battalion, the 5/6 th Battalion, 8/7 th Battalion, The Royal Victoria Regiments and the 11 Independent Company, The Royal West Australian Company; all of which are the modern day battalions associated with them.

The other interests that I have is because of my Hellenic origins and being a member of the Telamon Force that went as company strong (120 men and women) to represent Australia in 1991 for the 50th Anniversary Battle of Greece and Crete. (But that's another story.

Although I was recovering from cancer, I gave my word to attend the Brunswick Boys event that was being held at the Brunswick Town hall, organised by Paul Sougleris, a leading light in the Australian Hellenic Community and supported by the Battle of Greece and Crete Commemorative Council for the 75th Anniversary and in-kind support by the Pallaconian Brotherhood 'Leonidas'. I was not to be disappointed. I estimated that there were in excess of 200 members of the public in attendance not including the officials.

I had great pleasure in meeting with two of the old soldiers who had participated in those battles and it was of interest to note that they still had that gleam and youthful look in their eyes despite their advanced ages. I was thrilled to meet with Phil Cleary whom I had admired from afar given his gutsy upbringing and not taking no for an answer as well as standing up for the common working man and a pillar of society in demonstrating that the local bloke can still be a member of parliament should he put his mind to it.



Phil Cleary blew my mind with his very expressive use of the English language to describe in what I would classify as men who had suffered from what we now know to be called post-traumatic stress syndrome. (PTSD). He gave similar examples of local men who had lived not far from the Brunswick Town hall, working men whose occupations today would not even be catalogued as they belonged to an industrial long gone, but that still they had answered their nations call to arms.

Phil Cleary stitched for me at least the past with the present and filled in the gaps of my childhood of men and sometimes women falling over themselves drinking and cursing in the laneways and side streets of my youth. It goes to show that no matter what your station in life is, when a nation is confronted with a peril, it is always the man and woman in the street that will answer the call to ensure the freedom and securities we enjoy this day.

The future for Australia is yet unclear when taking into account the current geopolitical climate around the world. We as a nation are currently shielded by the tyranny of distance but that gap is slowly being eroded by technological advances and alliances of a trade or defence relationship. Having said that, does not mean that we need to be complacent and forget the ultimate sacrifices and hardships faced like the Brunswick Boys to be forgotten. As Phil Cleary said, that there is a very strong bond between the Australians and the Greeks and that we as a nation need to foster and develop that bond for the sake of this nation and its people in order to survive and meet the challenges that are yet to come.

In conclusion, I remember a story my old man once told me when he was a young man working in Melbourne dad would have been in his late twenties when this incident occurred. Dad had gone into the local pub after work to have a quiet beer and catch up with some mates. When he went in he could see it was full of Australians drinking and having a merry old time. Somehow a punchup or brawl occurred between a group of Greeks and the locals, where a few punches were thrown amongst the shouts of grievous bodily harm, threats and name calling.

During the melee, one Aussie bloke stood up on the bar and boomed out in a loud voice to stop the fighting. He then went onto say that he like others like himself had served alongside the Greeks in WW2 and that may Greeks had helped Australians against the Nazi aggressor. He then said that it was not right for us to be fighting the new comers the Greeks as they were with us and not against us during the war. This stand by one bloke stopped the fight, hands shakes were exchanged and apologies were made to each other. Soon after it was not long before the pub became a natural watering hole and meeting place for Greeks arriving in Australia.



This form of interaction and exchange would be emulated throughout Australia in one format or another with positive outcomes that assisted the new arrivals to embrace and strengthen the fabric of Australian society. Life was tough in place like Brunswick and elsewhere in Australia but the new arrivals demonstrated that they too had the guts and determination to make Australia home and contribute to its economic security and longevity.

The Brunswick Boys are an example of what can be achieved when called upon to serve the nation. May their memories live long after we have gone and be recorded in the annals of Australian history!

As always, I apologise for the poor grammar and punctuation, but make no apologies for the content as it's a personal view as I see life developing and unfolding for the better.



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