

LEONIDAS IS NOT AN ETHNIC STATUE



Left to right, Peter Adamis, George Giorgakakis, Jim Bakis, Con Karavitis, Peter Roumpos, Chris Paikopoulos and Kostas Glekas.

Australians and Greeks, this was their finest hour. 2012 is the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of the Kokoda Track (Trail) by Australians in Papua New Guinea. It is also the 2420th Anniversary of the Battle of Thermopylae. Although separated by 2420 years, Ralph Honner the Australian Commanding Officer of the Victorian 39th Battalion and King Leonidas the Hellene leader of the 300 Spartans shared something in common. Both were leaders of men destined to face overwhelming odds. Both men delayed an aggressor determined to enslave a nation. Both men led comrades that died fighting for their country, families, relatives and friends. .

It will be of interest to note that in both cases Hellenes fought in both battles. At Thermopylae it was a band of Greeks that comprised the force that delayed the Persians long enough to bring together the remainder of Greece to defeat the Persian aggressor. At the Kokoda track, it was a small band of Australians that delayed a determined Japanese force long enough for reinforcements to be brought in to stop the Japanese. Amongst the reinforcements were elements of Australians with Hellenic (Greek) origins. Some whom have been depicted in Steve Kyritsis book on Australians of Greek Heritage who served in Australian Defence Forces since the Boer War.

This year on Sunday the 4 November 2012, a small band of Australians of Hellenic origins gathered at the statue of King Leonidas in Sparta Place, Brunswick within the Greater City of Moreland to pay their respects and to honour the men who paid the ultimate sacrifice in their battle against a determined foe. Headed by the President of the Pallaconian Brotherhood, Chris Paikopoulos, and assisted by members of the Australian Hellenic Victorian Laconian community, conducted a small ceremony to honour those who gave it their all at Thermopylae and Kokoda track.



Lt Col Ralph Honner:
Photo Courtesy Australian War Memorial

This small group representing the Pallaconian Brotherhood, Australians and Greeks of the old world lay 'twigs of Olive' (taken from one of the two trees that may be found at the Pallaconian Brotherhood community Centre). The significance of the olive was to bridge the gap of centuries between the Hellenic warriors with their brother in Arms the Australians. This simple gesture of the olive twig is personal representation by the bearer and another means of expressing gratitude for those who gave their life unselfishly in order that we live who in freedom have the opportunity pay them those respects. The laying of wreaths is left to members of the public and dignitaries that represent organisations and governments

The ceremony opened by the President, Chris Paikopoulos who spoke about the statue representing ancient Thermopylae and the Kokoda track of Australia and the bonds between the Hellenic people and that of their brother in arms, the Australians. Kostas Glekas an ex Australian serviceman spoke on behalf of Australian Hellenic veterans saying that it is incumbent upon us to ensure that future generations no matter where they come from respect what the statue represents. it represent but one word. that word is: Freedom



Kokoda Village 1942: Photo Courtesy Australian War Memorial

Con Karavitis the Public Relations Officer closed the ceremony with a reading from Laurence Binyon's poem "For the Fallen", (First published in UK 'The Times' in September 1914 and universally known as The "Ode of Remembrance".

"They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We will remember them. lest we forget"

The brief ceremony was followed by refreshments at the Pallaconian Brotherhood community which coincided with the Laconians Annual General Meeting.



The ceremony was the brain child of Peter Adamis, an Australian veteran of Hellenic Heritage who had served in the Australian military forces for 30 years. He felt that it was important that Australians no matter what their origins or cultural heritage were, truly understood what the statue of King Leonidas meant. Peter Adamis said that "IT IS NOT AN ETHNIC STATUE " and took umbrage at those individuals who have been misrepresenting its significance in Sparta Place for personal political reasons. As the statue represents all Australians, Peter hopes that the ceremony becomes an annual tribute to fallen comrades.

The battles at Thermopylae and Kokoda Track are synonymous with each other despite the 2420 years of separation. Peter Adamis is seeking to place a simple bronze plaque on the foundations of the stature to remind 'Passer Bys' and strangers to the greater City of Moreland that the statue of Leonidas is a statue representing freedom for all mankind. That when Passer Bys' and strangers stroll past the memorial be reminded of that ancient Poet Simonides who wrote: *"Stranger, go tell the Spartans. that we, who lie here, did as we were ordered"*

Post Script - December 2013: Con Karavitis deceased was a huge supporter of the statue being placed at Sparta Place off Sydney road and well knew its significance as a war memorial thus representing Australia and Greece. Con Karavitis passed away in full knowledge that within time the Leonidas statue would be recognised as an Australian war memorial linking two countries he loved so much Greece and Australia. **Peter Adamis**



King Leonidas statue in Sparta Greece