

THE AUSSIE CONNECTION FOR THE BATTLES OF GREECE AND CRETE

Abalinx – Peter Adamis 21 April 2016



It should not come as a surprise to students of history to note that despite distance, language and cultural differences between two nations; the bonds between Greeks and Australians is forever eternal. Neither should it be a surprise to the general Australian public that consecutive generations continue to develop and sustain those bonds forged in battle many years ago.

Australians servicemen and women like the ANZACS of the Great War (WW1) are a resilient and resourceful race of warriors who have effectively and decisively proven to be the equal of those ancient warriors, the Spartans.

Disciplined, fierce, skilled in the art of warfare, not afraid to close with and kill the enemy under any terrain and weather and at the same time surprisingly compassionate to a fallen or wounded enemy. These were the men who faced Hitler's overwhelming odds in Greece and subsequently after their strategic withdrawal to Crete for control of Hellas.

The Battles for Greece and Crete despite the huge cost to the Australians in manpower, materials and war resources, unfortunately wreaked havoc and brought about a misery on the civilian population in Greece by the Nazi invaders and their allies. Reprisals of every sort were carried out against the civilian population for resistance, providing food and shelter to Australians soldiers who had made the decision to carry on the fighting until they were killed and captured.

It is up to historians to bring to light the myriad of untold stories that are probably hiding in some shoe box, tin trunk or in the garage of an old soldier who had served during those battles in 1941 in Greece and Crete. Then and only then will Australians truly understand what they went through to fulfill the promises made to the Greek people. Peter Ewer in his book "The forgotten ANZACS" describes a number of battles and their aftermath as well shedding light on the strategic fighting withdrawal, the anguish, the heroism, atrocities, deprivations and support by the Greeks that followed those battles.

In the past 75 years the Battles of Greece and Crete have always been commemorated by Australians of Hellenic (Greek) heritage to honour the brave and to pay their respects to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. It is not a surprise to find Australian Hellenic War memorials to Australians who fought during the Great War and the subsequent WW2. The main memorials may be found in Canberra and the other in Melbourne along with numerous other memorials dotted around the Australian landscape. This the Australian Hellenic way of expressing their deepest gratitude for those that paid the ultimate sacrifice for freedom.

I am pleased to be alive today to witness the 75th Anniversary after representing Australia at the 50th Anniversary in 1991. Around about the same time back in 1991 a force of 120 members of the Australian Army congregated in Sydney in preparation to travel to Greece and Crete to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Greece and Crete. Many of those selected were as a result of a relative who had served during the Battles of Greece and Crete. The contingent involved civilians and media along to record the Anniversary, The politicians and high ranking members of the Australian Defence were also present at the major commemorative presentations where speeches on both sides were made including those of Germany, United Kingdom and New Zealand.

Of that contingent there were approximately four Australians of Greek heritage that accompanied them. One was a Major, a Warrant Officer, Staff Sergeant and a digger. They all know who they are and each has a different tale to tell of their experiences from their perspective. Suffice to say these stories will be eventually told someday. They all had been handpicked and each had a different but overlapping roles in providing advice and support to the non-Greek speaking contingent. The force was named "Telamon" after a hero of Homers period and I must say Telamon Force carried out their assigned tasks admirably. But that's another story for another time.

Each Year the Hellenic Government sends overseas to its traditional allies a small contingent of the palace guards, the tall, silent and imposing Ezvones selected for their skills, knowledge, commitment and skills. These Ezvones are normally accompanied by a serving officer equivalent to the rank of Captain and whose role is to ensure that all presentations are conducted in the time honoured manner. The UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia may be found to have these Ezvones visiting their shores during the commemoration of the Battles of Greece and Crete and a reminder that despite the war being over, the bonds are still great between Hellas and their countries named above.

As ANZAC Day approaches, it will not be surprising to see the Hellas contingent parading in the streets of Melbourne as they have been found to be parading recently in Sydney NSW. Notwithstanding and not denigrating the sacrifices of the other Australian states contribution whose soldiers were also involved, it is in Melbourne Victoria where the majority of Australians of Greek (Hellenic) origins reside. It is in Melbourne where the major commemorations and presentations take place involving a number of organisations. The Battle of Greece and Crete Commemorative Council is made up of a new vibrant, enthusiastic and committed, generation intent on maintaining those bonds between Australia and Greece.

If any of the readers or public is offered the opportunity to attend any of the presentations, it is always a worthwhile event to attend as it will enable those that do to obtain a clear understanding what the emotional bonds between these two nations mean. It is also a good reminder to those who take life and freedom for granted that we do not live in this country we call home, Australia without not knowing the reasons for its existence.

As always, I apologise for the poor grammar and punctuation, but make no apologies for the content as it's a personal view based on my knowledge of the subject material.



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