The Australians in Greece and Crete : a study of an intimate wartime relationship

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THE AUSTRALIANS IN GREECE AND CRETE: A STUDY OF AN INTIMATE WARTIME RELATIONSHIP

Painting courtesy of the Greek sub-branch of the NSW RSL

PhD in History

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2008

ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which has been accepted for award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

…… ……..

SIGNATURE DATE

DEDICATION

To the memory of my mother

Emilia Moschidou Costadopoulos

1936-1979

one of the starving children of Athens during the war,

who sang the war songs of Sophia Vembo.[1]

Emilia Moschidou Athens circa 1950's

[1] Sophia Vembo was a famous Greek singer labelled the 'Singer for Victory' for her patriotic songs that praised Greek soldiers and ridiculed Mussolini, lifting Greek morale during World War Two.

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ABSTRACT

The Australians in Greece and Crete: a study of an intimate wartime relationship

Historians have largely ignored the importance of relationships in war, particularly at a grass roots level. Examining the past from a relational point of view provides a new perspective on war not accessible through other forms of analysis. A relational approach to a study of the campaigns in Greece and Crete helps to explain, amongst other issues, why so many Australian lives were saved.

Australians entered Greece with little background knowledge of the country and the people they were required to defend. There was no serious consultation with the Australian government apart from the cursory briefing of its Prime Minister. Although Britain had numerous intelligence officers operating on the ground in Greece prior and during the campaign, little information about the true political situation in the country had filtered through to the Australian high command. This placed the troops in a very vulnerable position on the Greek frontier and, later, on Crete.

Military interaction with the Greeks proved difficult, as key officers from the Greek General Staff and senior government ministers did not intend to fight the Germans. As a result, little coordination took place between the Australian and Greek forces hindering the development of a successful working relationship. Conversely, relations with the Greek people were very amicable with many Greeks risking their lives to help Australian troops.

The altruism of the Greeks was one of the most striking features of the Greek and Crete campaigns. Unlike Egypt, where the Australians felt alienated by the values and customs of the Egyptian people, in Greece they warmed to the behaviour of the Greeks. Although they did not speak the same language nor share a similar culture, they had many characteristics in common with the Greeks whose strong sense of loyalty to their allies really impressed the Australians. On their part, the Australians displayed respect for the values and customs of the Greek people.

Through their interaction during the war, the Greeks came to regard the Australians, not only as friends, but also as brothers, forging an intimate relationship that has been incorporated in the social memory of both countries.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AWM	Australian War Memorial
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NAB	National Archives of Britain
NLA	National Library of Australia
NZA	Archives New Zealand

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Greek	Phonetic Spelling	English translation
Αλβανικο	Alvaniko	Albanian
Μετωπο	metopo	Battle-front
Ανθρωπισμός	Anthropismos	Humanity/civility/culture
Αρχοντες	Archondes	Nobility/ruling classes
Γερμανόφιλοι	germanofili	German sympathizers
Γεροντοκόρη	Gerondokori	Spinster
Γλέντι	Glendi	Celebration/feast
Εγγλέζοι	Englesi	The English
Ζαχαροπλαστεία	Zaharoplastia	Patisseries
Θάρρος	Tharros	Audacity/impudence/cheek
Θράσος	Thrasos	Boldness/courage
Κέφι	kefi	Good humour
Λεβέντη	Levendi	Handsome and brave man, slender, nimble, manly built
Οχι	ohee	No
Ξένοι	xenoi	Strangers
Φιλοξενία	Philoxenia	Hospitality
Φιλότιμο	Philotimo	Sense of pride and honour
Παλικάρι	pallikari	Fearless warrior
Πολιτισμό	Politismo	Civilised behaviour
Σχολή Ευελπίδων	Scholee Evelpithon	Hellenic Military Academy
Τιμή	timi	Honour

Introduction

Nature of the Study

This is a study of the relationship that emerged between Australian soldiers and Greek people as a result of their shared wartime experience.[1] Roberta Gilbert in her study of relationships has stressed that 'it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of human relationships . . . . In the realm of the purely personal - after food, water and shelter – the quality of relationships most often determines the quality of life.'[2] Relationships between people at all levels of society do matter, affect not only each other but also their environment, and as such, merit consideration.[3] Berscheid and Peplau discovered that 'in international relations, personal diplomacy [and] . . . friendship between world leaders can change the course of history.'[4] Joseph Lash acknowledged this point in his study of Roosevelt and Churchill.[5] Jon Meacham from his examination of the friendship between Churchill and Roosevelt found that, 'like most friends, Churchill and Roosevelt were sometimes affectionate, sometimes cross, alternatively ready to die for or murder the other, but each helped make what the other did possible.'[6]

Michael Schluter has emphasized that insights that can be gained from viewing the world from a relational perspective cannot be supplied by economic and political analysis. [7] He explains that a 'relational view . . . will look . . . at the quality of communication, frequency of meetings, length of relationship, whether people know each other in multiple contexts and whether they have shared objectives'.[8] These factors determine what Schluter refers to as 'relational intimacy', a vital ingredient for the survival of Australian troops in occupied Greece, as it was the quality and closeness of the Australian soldiers' relationship with the Greek people that kept them alive behind enemy lines. According to Mashek and Aron, 'research on conceptions of intimacy has identified emotional expressiveness (eg. affection, compassion, caring), unconditional support, mutual appreciation, and mutual understanding as among the

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[1] This thesis deals exclusively with Australian troops and their relations with the Greeks. It does not seek to examine the relationship between New Zealand soldiers and Greek people during these campaigns. Such an inclusion would have made an already broad topic too large and unmanageable to pursue. This is not to suggest that the relationship that emerged between the Australians and Greeks was unique. Instead, this thesis seeks to explain why this relationship was forged, how it influenced these campaigns both militarily and personally, and why relationships between allies at all levels of society are important to consider in studies of war.

[2] Roberta M. Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking about Human Interaction*, John Wiley & Sons, Canada, 1992, p.3.

[3] For example see: Day, David, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986, reprinted 1993.

[4] Ellen Bercheid and Letitia Anne Peplau, "The Emerging Science of Relationships," in Kelley H. et.al., *Close Relationships*, W.H.Freeman and Company, New York, 1983, pp.2-3.

[5] Joseph P. Lash, *Roosevelt and Churchill 1939-1941: The Partnership That Saved the West*, W.W. Norton & Company Inc., New York, 1976.

[6] Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: A Portrait of an Epic Friendship*, Granata Books, London, 2004, pp.367-368.

[7] Michael Schluter & David Lee, *The R Factor*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1993.

[8] Michael Schluter, "Money, Power and Relationships," *The Smith Lecture 2005*, 25 August 2005, p.2.

important features of intimacy in friendship.'[9] These features characterized the friendships that evolved between Australians and Greeks during the Second World War.

Although relationships between opposing combatants have been examined by Mark Johnston, what has not been investigated is the relationship that developed between Australian soldiers and their allies at a grass roots level.[10] Michael McKernan discovered from his study of Australian writing on war that there 'has been little exploration . . . of the relationship between Australian and Allied forces.'[11] This is surprising, for as David Horner has pointed out, the 'experience of coalition warfare in the Second World War . . . became the most important influence in shaping Australian defence and foreign policy . . . for the next sixty years.'[12] Though some historians have examined Australia's alliances during the Second World War they have concentrated on relations between allied governments, not their forces. David Day, for example, focused his study on Australia's political relationship with Britain, while David Horner researched Australia's military relationship with the British. Roger Bell, on the other hand, investigated the inequities in Australia's relationship with its American ally during the Pacific war.[13]

In this study Australia's relationship with its smaller ally, Greece, is examined from numerous perspectives, thereby highlighting the pitfalls of wartime alliances and challenging, amongst others, the myth of allied cooperation. In 1941 Australia found itself caught in the middle of a politically driven campaign orchestrated by the British in Greece. Its soldiers were required to work with the British and the Greeks in a combined action against the Germans on the Greek mainland and later in Crete. The reality of the situation on the ground proved to be considerably different from what had been expected. Through an examination of Australian – Greek interaction during the war light will be shed on why Australia's coalition relationship with Greece failed at a military level while it succeeded on a personal level. Britain's role in the campaign will be discussed but only in so far as it affected Australia's military relationship with Greece.

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[9] Debra Mashek & Arthur Aron, *Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey, 2004, p.14.

[10] Mark Johnston, *Fighting the Enemy: Australian Soldiers and their adversaries in World War II*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000.

[11] Michael McKernan, "The People at War," in Borchardt, D. H. (ed.), *Australians: a guide to sources*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, Broadway N.S.W., 1987, p.385.

[12] David Horner, "Australia and Coalition Warfare in the Second World War," in Dennis, P. & Grey, J. (eds), *Entangling Alliances: Coalition Warfare in the Twentieth Century*, The Chief of Army's Military History Conference, 2005, Australian History Military Publications, Sydney, p.124.

[13] David Day, "Anzacs on the Run: the view from Whitehall," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 14, No.3, 1986, pp.187-202; David Day, *The Great Betrayal: Britain, Australia & the Onset of the Pacific War 1939-1942*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1988; D. F. Woodward, "Australian Diplomacy with Regard to the Greek Campaign February-March 1941," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1978, pp.218-226. David Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939 –1945*, George Allen & Unwin, Canberra, 1982; Roger Bell, *Unequal Allies: Australian-American Relations and the Pacific War*, Melbourne University Press, 1977.

Australian Historians and the Battle of Greece and Crete

Australian historians have largely overlooked the Battle for Greece and Crete. Viewed as a sideshow with little importance to the overall outcome of the war, its significance both domestically and internationally has not been acknowledged or fully understood. On a personal level alone 'of the 6203 Australians taken prisoner by the Germans and Italians in World War II, 83 per cent fell into enemy hands in Greece and Crete.'[14] From a political point of view, these campaigns damaged the career of the Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Menzies, and contributed to the eventual downfall of his government. On the British side, though not the direct cause, the Greek and Crete campaign led to the demise of General Archibald Wavell who was removed from his command and sidelined to the role of Viceroy of India. The Australian commander Sir Thomas Blamey also had his reputation tarnished by the Greek debacle as did General Bernard Freyberg, New Zealand's commander whose government seriously considered removing him from his post after the Crete campaign.[15] From an international perspective the Greek campaign shook imperial relations far more than scholars have previously thought. The fall of Singapore in 1942, while adversely affecting Australia's relations with Britain, was not the main impetus for a change in Australia's foreign policy from a strong defence alliance with Britain to America. In fact, Australia's involvement in the Greek campaign, combined with Cyrenaica and Cyprus, had far more influence on the future direction of Australian foreign policy than Singapore alone.[16]

The silence on the subject of Greece and Crete by Australian historians remains perplexing, given that Australia had committed a considerable number of its frontline troops to these campaigns. One reason for this omission was proffered by Keith Hooper, a veteran of the campaign, who stated that: '[i]t has always annoyed me that we never got an Australian medal for Greece and Crete or a European medal, but the New Zealanders got it but for fighting in Italy not for fighting in Greece . . . . I always felt you don't find much about Greece and Crete in many histories and I always felt that the British were a bit ashamed of that campaign'[17] The British government certainly tried to forget the Greek and Crete disasters and unlike Gallipoli,

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[14] Richard Reid, *A Great Risk in a Good Cause: Australians in Greece and Crete April-May 1941*, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Canberra, 2001, p.146.

[15] Most secret cipher from Prime Minister of New Zealand, P. Frazer to C.I.G.S., 28 August 1941: Personal Correspondence – Rt. Hon. P. Fraser, 1940-1944, WAII, Fraser, ANZ.

[16] In May 1941 the Australian 7th Division Cavalry Regiment was sent to Cyprus joining an allied force that was 'pathetically small, numbering no more than 1500 men, and the source of anxiety to Menzies at the time, who argued to Churchill on 4 June that " Cyprus must be abandoned or reinforced to the point at which it be held. Public opinion would be greatly strained by what would be regarded as a useless sacrifice of an in adequate force." Churchill, however was not to be swayed by these arguments,' Robert Merrillees, "Australia and Cyprus in the Second World War," *Defence Force Journal*, No. 43, November/December 1983, p.48.

[17] Interview: Keith Hooper, 2/6th Battalion, 15 July 2004.

the Australian government saw no advantage in drawing attention to a defeat.[18] Margaret Barter found that 'Anzac deeds in Greece were not to be the inspiration to Australian war mythology that the Gallipoli defeat had been a quarter of a century earlier. In fact, the great personal significance that the participants bestow on Greece is not reflected in the literature.'[19] Over the years some historians have attempted to attribute importance to the Greek campaign by claiming that it delayed Hitler's invasion of Russia. Although popular with participants, this justification for the tragedy of Greece has been discounted.[20] Others have maintained that the true significance of Greece, and in particular Crete, lay in its role in cutting the supply lines to Rommel's army in North Africa.[21]

Australian soldiers have produced a significant amount of literature on the subject of Greece and Crete, even though academic historians have largely ignored these campaigns. While not contributing to the historiography of the war such reminiscences have their place in studies of campaigns, for they can provide personal and intimate views of events.[22] Apart from the personal reflections of participants battalion associations have also compiled their own accounts of the campaign. Unit histories, often not footnoted and consisting predominately of oral accounts, provide useful commentary on matters other than operational. They offer valuable insights into the attitudes and reactions of the Australian troops to Greece and its people that are missing from official accounts of the campaign.[23]

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[18] It was only through the tireless lobbying of veterans such as Lieutenant Terry Fairburn of 2/1st Battalion amongst others, that the Australian government granted approval in 1994 for the wearing of the Greek medal during the Anzac Day commemorations.

[19] Margaret Barter, *Far Above Battle: the experience and memory of Australian soldiers in war 1939-1945*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1994, pp.80-81.

[20] Refer to Chapter 2 for details.

[21] George Paterakis, a resistance fighter on Crete, recalled how they sabotaged many tankers docked at Suda Bay destined to bring fuel and supplies to the Germans in North Africa.

[22] Lew Lind, *Escape from Crete*, Australasian Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1944; Ian Sabey, *Stalag Scrapbook*, F.W. Cheshire Pty. Ltd, Melbourne, 1947; Charles Robinson, *Journey to Captivity*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1991; Robert Vial, *The War I went to*, R. R.Vial publisher, Toorak Victoria, 1995; Charles, Jager, *Escape from Crete*, Floridale, Smithfield, 2004; Geoffrey Edwards, *The Road to Prevelly*, E.G. Edwards, Armadale, W.A., 1989; Bob "Hooker" Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape: The Trials and Tribulations of a Four Figure Man*, Streamlined Press, Brookvale, 1981; Henry ('Jo') Gullett, No*t as a Duty only – An Infantryman's War*, Carlton Victorian, Melbourne University Press, 1976; Geoffrey Household, *Against the Wind*, Michael Joseph, London, 1958; Leslie Le Souef, *To War without a Gun*, Artlook, Hay Street East, W.A., 1980; Michael Clarke, *My War 1939-1945*, Michael Clarke Press, Toorak, 1990; James K. Nelson, *The Mediterranean Diary, HMAS Perth in the Mediterranean Sea 24th December 1940 to 12th August 1941*, Murwillumbah NSW, Tweed Electronic Graphics, 2002; S. F. Rowell, *Full Circle*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1974; Arthur Fadden, *They called me Artie: The Memoirs of Sir Arthur Fadden*, Jacaranda Press, Melbourne, 1969.

[23] *The First At War: The Story of the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-45*, The City of Sydney Regiment, Macarthur Press, Parramatta, 1987; Stan Wick, *Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945*, 1977; Ken Clift, *War Dance: A Story of the 2/3 Australian Infantry Battalion A.I.F.*, P. M. Fowler, Kingsgrove, 1980; Unit History Editorial Committee (ed.), *White over Green: The 2/4th Battalion and reference to the 4th Battalion*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1963; S. Tregellis-Smith, *All the King's Enemies: A History of the 2/5th Australian Infantry Battalion*, 2/5 Battalion Association, Victoria, 1988; F. C. Folkand (ed.), The Fiery Phoenix: the story of the 2/7 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1946, 2/7 Battalion Association, Parkdale, Victoria, 2000.

Others sources on these campaigns that are yet to be fully explored and deserve further attention are the fictional accounts of the war written by returned soldiers and war correspondents.[24] The Australian soldiers who fought in the Greek campaign consider the novel, *Signed with their Honour*, by James Aldridge, as one of the most accurate accounts of their experiences in Greece.[25] Carl Parrott of 2/2nd Battalion felt that Aldridge's account of the retreat from Greece was so accurate that 'reading it felt like I was reliving it again.'[26]

Individual chapters on the Greek and Crete campaigns have also appeared in books over the past sixty years.[27] These publications ranged in quality from popular accounts of the war to serious studies of campaigns written by professional historians such as David Horner who has included chapters on the Greek and Crete campaigns in several of his books but has not devoted an entire volume to the subject. [28] Unlike Horner's books, the majority of these publications are not scholarly works, failing in most instances to acknowledge the sources of their information. A classic example of this genre is Peter Charlton's book on the men of the Sixth Australian Division that covers the campaigns in Greece and Crete. Regardless of its limitations, this type of book is useful because it deals with topics such as the indiscipline of Australian troops, not normally pursued by academic historians.[29] John Robertson and Jeffrey Grey, concluded from their literature review that the 'war experience of ordinary Australians has been a dominant theme in Australian military historiography, and the Second World War conforms to type, although much of the resultant literature is of little value as history.'[30] According to its authors, 'it is limited in scope to war experience at the level of the slit trench.'[31]

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[24] John Hetherington, "A Café in Athens," in Hungerford, T.A.G. (ed.) *Australian signpost: an anthology*, Canberra Fellowship of Australian Writers, F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1956, pp.85-93; David Walker, "The Getting of Manhood," in Spearritt, P. & Walker, D. (eds), *Australian Popular Culture*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1979, pp.121-144;

[25] James Aldridge, *Signed with their Honour*, Wyatts & Watts, London, 1943.

[26] Interview: Carl Parrott 2/2nd Battalion, 6 October 2004.

[27] John Barrett, *We Were There- Australian soldiers of World War II tell their Stories*, Viking Books, Ringwood Victoria, 1987; Lurline Stuart & Josie Arnold (eds), *Letters Home 1939-1945*, Collins, Sydney 1987; Harry Gordon, *The Embarrassing Australian: The Story of an Aboriginal Warrior*, Melbourne, Lansdowne Press, 1962; Wendy and Allan Scarfe, *No taste for carnage – Alex Sheppard: a portrait, 1913 –1997*, Henley Beach, S. A. Seaview Press, 1998; Olwyn Green, *The name's still Charlie*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1993; Judith Fitzhardinge, *Fighting for Life*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, Western Australia, 1996; Hyland House, South Melbourne, 1997.

[28] David Horner, *High Command*; David Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet, Directing Australia's War Effort 1939-45*, Allen & Unwin, 1996; David Horner, *General Vasey's War*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton Victoria, 1992.

[29] Peter Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, Macmillan, Crows Nest, 1981, Chapter 4: "Rough, Wild, Undisciplined," pp.57-67.

[30] John Robertson & Jeffrey Grey, "Australian and New Zealand Writing on the Second World War", in Rowher Jurgen (ed.), *New Research on the Second World War, Literature Surveys and Bibliographies*, Stuttgart, 1989, p.15.

[31] Ibid p.15.

Biographical accounts dealing with senior military leaders involved in the Greek and Crete campaigns have also been written.[32] They have certainly enhanced our understanding of these campaigns, but few, if any, tackle the elusive topic of 'relationships' with the exception of Stuart Braga's portrait of Major-General "Tubby" Allen. Braga provides a frank appraisal of the troubled relationship between Brigadier Edmund Herring and Brigadier Allen.[33] Although David Horner in his impressive biography acknowledged General Thomas Blamey's poor relations with his subordinates, he does not vigorously pursue the subject. This is surprising given the effect Blamey's behaviour had on his senior officers, some of whom refused to serve under him after the Greek campaign.[34] Commenting on Horner's biography of Blamey Carl Bridge was left with a nagging suspicion that there were 'remaining dark corners in Blamey's character and career that would reward further probing. Moreover, one still suspects,' he writes, 'that Blamey too often devoted too much of his considerable energies to outwitting imagined rivals at the expense of focussing (sic) on victory in the war.'[35] This aspect of Blamey's character deserves further investigation, but a study of relations between Australia's most senior officers during World War Two has yet to be undertaken by historians.[36]

Although numerous biographies, memoirs, and individual chapters of books mention the Greek and Crete campaigns, there has not been a comprehensive revision of these campaigns by an Australian author since the publication of the official history in 1953.[37] Australia's official history of the Second World War has remained largely unread. It did not

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[32] Ivan Chapman, *Iven G. Mackay Citizen and Soldier*, Melway Publishing Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1975; G. H. & Clift Fearnside, *Doughty: A great man among men*: *A Biography of Major General Sir Ivan Dougherty*, Alpha Books, Sydney, 1979; W. B. Russell, *There Goes A Man: the Biography of Sir Stanley G. Savige*, Longmans, Melbourne, 1959; Stuart Sayers, *Ned Herring: a life of Lieutenant-General the Honourable Sir Edmund Herring*, Hyland House in association with the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1980; John Hetherington, *Blamey: The Biography of Field-Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne; Norman D. Carlyon, *I Remember Blamey*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1980; David Horner, *General Vasey's War*; David Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1998.

[33] Stuart Braga, *Kokoda commander: a life of Major-General "Tubby" Allen*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2004. Braga admitted in conversation with the author that his pursuit of the true relationship between Herring and Allen was most unpopular with certain members of the military establishment in Australia and amongst some surviving members of the Sixth Division Association. Discussion of General Allen with any sympathy elicited a very hostile response, even though sixty years had elapsed since the events discussed in his study.

[34] Letter from S. Rowell to Gavin Long, 20 January 1947, AWM: 67 3/338 part 2.

[35] Carl Bridge, "David Horner Blamey Commander -in-Chief," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No.34, June 2001. Online publication: http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j34/bridgerev.htm

[36] Maybe this is not surprising given Braga's experience. Besmirching what others would perceive as a war hero's reputation for the sake of historical accuracy or exposing the flaws in the character of Australian soldiers is not always popular. Suzanne Brugger told the author that the academics responsible for assessing her PhD thesis refused at first to do so, arguing that her criticism of Australian troop behaviour in Egypt during World War I was not really the subject of historical research. More recently, Paul Ham admitted during a seminar presentation on the writing of his Kokoda book, that his desire to present the Japanese side of the story and Australian troops displaying emotions other than bravery, elicited hate mail with accusations of betrayal: Paul Ham, *Kokoda*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 2004.

[37] Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete, Syria*, Collins in association with the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1953.

achieve the popularity of Bean's First World War history, a surprising fact given that Gavin Long its general editor and author of some of the volumes was Bean's protégé. According to Jeffrey Grey and John Robertson, ' it lacks the authority of Bean's earlier history, and occupies a much less exalted place in the historiography of Australian military history.' [38] This is a rather harsh judgement of Long's work and a little unfair as there is ample evidence in Long's notebooks and correspondence to indicate that he made a valiant attempt to write a balanced account of the war at a time when editorial flexibility was limited.[39] Long's approach may have produced a less colourful narrative of Australia's role in the Second World War than Bean's First World War history, but unlike Bean's work, it has not been accused of myth making and lacking in objectivity.[40]

Working as a war correspondent in Greece, Long experienced first hand the conditions endured by Australian soldiers during the Greek campaign. This proved to be an advantage in his writing of the campaign for few official records survived the evacuation of Greece. He was forced to rely heavily on interviews he conducted with key participants who advised him not to blame the Greeks for the failings of their leaders. While Long spared the Greeks from the level of criticism he directed at the British for their mishandling of the campaign he failed to include a Greek perspective in the official history of the campaign. Sadly lacking was a genuine understanding of the Greek people and their ethnic differences and, in some instances, as in the case of the Cretans, knowledge of their separate development from mainland Greece. It was important information that would have helped explain the differing Greek responses to the Australian presence. This was relevant information as it was the first time during this war that Australian troops were fighting amidst the population they were defending, apart from their deployment to France in World War One. Furthermore, it was the first time Australian troops had to work with an ally who spoke a different language, in a 'foreign' country they knew little about and what they did know was not accurate. As A. J. Hill pointed out in his introduction to the Official histories of the Australian campaigns in the Sinai and Palestine 1914-1918,

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[38] Robertson & Grey, "Australian and New Zealand Writing on the Second World War", p.13.

[39] Duncan Waterson, "How to select a 'proper' official historian," *Labour History*, No. 83, 2002, pp.191-194; Directorate of Public Relations, *Standing Orders for Accredited War Correspondents and for Field Press Censors*, Commonwealth of Australia, Allied Land Forces H.Q. 25th May, 1942, Kenneth Slessor Papers, NLA, MS 3929/14/40-109.

[40] Robin Gerster, *Big-Noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing*, Carlton Victoria, Melbourne University Press, 1987; E. M. Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian relations during World War I*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1993. Much of the popularity of Bean's writing has more to do with the way politicians have used it and its promotion by the media, than its quality. The history curriculum in NSW for example, dictates that the Landing at Gallipoli and the Anzac Legend is taught to all secondary students. It does not ask for an evaluation of its origins or authenticity.

‘Australians seem to fight their wars in other people's countries, their relations with those people should be a matter of the highest interest to our armed services and to the nation.’[41]

International scholarship on the campaigns in Greece and Crete

A cursory glance at the literature on the Greek and Crete campaign might suggest that there is indeed a plethora of books written on the subject. Upon closer examination however it becomes clear that these publications, in the main, are not history books as such, as they have been written mainly by participants: politicians, soldiers, and a large host of sympathetic journalists, biographers, official historians and hagiographers. Often they reflect the vested interests of the authors concerned in securing a positive outlook of their role or their country’s performance in the campaigns.[42] Mark Mazower found ‘one characteristic of the historiography of the war in Greece has been the enormous and (compared with other areas of historical enquiry) disproportionate influence exerted upon our understanding of events by memoirs and autobiographical accounts. . . . Some eye-witnesses have turned into historians,’ he writes, ‘with variable results.’[43]

There is also a substantial body of work written by British Secret Service agents who were deployed in Greece and Crete during World War Two.[44] According to Mazower, ‘one would have to say that former intelligence operatives, . . . were without a doubt publishing more books on modern Greece than were academic historians.’[45] They were members of the British Military Mission, Special Operations Executive or Liaison officers to the Greek military. Although their accounts offer a behind-the-scenes perspective on Greek politics and people during the war they often reflect the opinions and political outlook of the British Foreign Office and do not concern themselves with allied relationships. Ole Smith’s analysis of reports by British liaison officers noted their ‘indisputable anticommunist attitude.’[46] Their lack of objectivity he believes derives from their failure to be briefed properly ‘about the country, the

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[41] A.J. Hill cited on the Australian War Memorial site: http//www.awm.gov.au/histories/ww1/intros/7.asp; A.J.Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1978, p.38.

[42] Winton Churchill’s six volume account of *The Second World War*, Cassell & Co, London, 1948; Maitland Wilson, *Eight Years Overseas*, Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, London, 1950; Francis De Guingand, *Operation Victory*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1947; Stanley Casson, *Greece Against the Axis*, Hamish and Hamilton, London, 1941; Compton Mackenzie, *Wind of Freedom: The History of the invasion of Greece by the Axis Powers 1940-1941*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1943.

[43] Mark Mazower, “Historians at war: Greece, 1940-1950,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1995, p.499.

[44] Nicholas Hammond, *Venture into Greece with the Guerrillas 1943-44*, William Kimber, London, 1983; Miles Reid, *Last on the List*, Leo Cooper, London, 1974; David Hunt, *A Don At War*, Frank Cass, London, 1966; Charles Mott-Radclyffe, *Foreign Body in the Eye: A Memoir of a Foreign Service Old and New*, Leo Cooper, London, 1975; E.C.W. Myers, *Greek Entanglement*, Alan Sutton, Gloucester, 1985; Michael Woodbine Parish, *Aegean Adventures 1940-43 and the end of Churchill’s dream*, The Book Guild Ltd., Sussex, 1993.

[45] Mark Mazower, “British Historians of Greece since the Second World War,” *Synthesis: Review of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol 1, No.2, 1996. p.16.

[46] Ole L. Smith, “The Memoirs and Reports of The British Liaison Officers in Greece, 1942-1944: Problems of Source Value, *The Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. XI, No. 3, 1984, p.9.

resistance movements, or the political situation.'[47] It is doubtful that knowledge of such matters would have changed their political opinion as most were members of the British establishment.

International scholarship on the campaigns has focused on the reasons for British intervention in Greece. Robin Higham's seminal work on the decision to send troops to Greece detailed British ineptitude in campaign preparations.[48] He maintained that Greece was not part of a grand strategy by the British but an example of poor planning. Rather than being well prepared for the campaign in Greece the British knew little about the country at the beginning of the war, unlike the Germans, who had strong business ties and extensive background knowledge of the country prior to the war. Martin Van Creveld in his study of the Greek campaign concentrated on Wavell's role in the proceedings. He has suggested that the Commander-in-Chief of the British operations in the Mediterranean conducted a grand deception to convince Prime Minister Churchill that aid was being sent to Greece while delaying in the hope that an imminent German assault would preclude the necessity of sacrificing British resources on such a suicidal mission.[49]

A shift in the preoccupation of international writings on Greece during the war years occurred with the publication in 1993 of British historian Mark Mazower's trail blazing book on the impact of the German 'occupation' on the Greek people.[50] Using diverse archival sources, Mazower described the experience of occupation from both the occupier's and occupied point of view. His book was well received in Greece for its portrayal of the Greek people as active participants in the liberation of their country. Around the same time, Hagen Feischer, a German historian published his two-volume history of Germany's occupation of Greece.[51] His aim was to produce a balanced account of the occupation. He hoped that his study would provide ' "a less emotional assessment" of the German occupation policy which in spite of the "often criminal way in which it was carried out" was less "black and white" than it is normally depicted.'[52] The evidence from Crete for example, certainly supports Fleischer's findings. Many Cretans interviewed for this study reported that while the Germans were vicious in their retribution if resisted, overall they were respectful of the Cretans unlike the Italians who stole,

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[47] Ibid p.11.

[48] Robin Higham, *Diary of a Disaster: British Aid to Greece 1940-1941*,University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 1986.

[49] Martin van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-41: the Balkan Clue*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973; Martin van Creveld, "Prelude to Disaster: The British Decision to Aid Greece 1940-41," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. IX, No. 3, 1974, pp.65-92.

[50] Mazower, Mark, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-44*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1993.

[51] H. Fleischer, *Crown and Swastika: Greece of the Occupation and the Resistance* (in Greek), Vol. I & II Papazissis, Athens 1995; German original: *Im Kreuzschatten der Mächte: Griechenland, 1941-1944*, Frankfurt-Bern-New York 1986.

[52] Lars Baerentzen, "Occupied Greece: Hagen Fleischer's Monumental History of the War Years," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 4, 1988, p.286.

robbed and assaulted Cretan women.[53] Their opinion was at odds with those expressed by the participants in Nicholas Doumanis' study of the Italian occupation of the Dodecannese.[54] Doumanis argued that although the nationalist rhetoric of Greece presented the Italians as widely disliked by the Greek people, he found that this was not the case on these islands.

Prior to Mazower, British writing on wartime Greece tended to be preoccupied with political matters with the experiences of the civilian population and their allies afforded scant attention. Instead historical interest was firmly fixed on Britain's involvement in the Greek Civil War.[55] Britain's official account of the Greek campaign exonerated the British from any responsibility for what befell Greece, arguing that the Commanders-in-Chief were unanimous in their support of British intervention in Greece. [56] Furthermore, it shed little light on relations between the Allies. If anything, it attempted to contain the damage wrought by the debacle upon dominion relations stating that after 'the campaign was over the Dominion Governments did not indulge in recriminations, but they both secured a firmer grip on the future use of their own forces.'[57] This was certainly not the case, as the Australian government and the press reacted very badly when news reached Australia that the Australian troops had been placed in a defenceless position on Greece and Crete. Editorials scathing of Britain's mishandling of the campaign were published with accusations of incompetent and poor leadership directed at both the British military leaders and the Australian government.[58]

American academics of Greek descent have also made a significant contribution to the scholarship on the war in Greece, providing a Greek angle on the campaigns missing in the official histories of most of the countries involved.[59] John Bitzes in his study of *Greece in World War II* has shown how Greece was duped by the British to serve their own military agenda, turning the country into a theatre of war, while refusing to supply it with arms that were being siphoned off to Turkey to lure it into the war.[60] John Hondros's impressive work on the war in Greece highlighted the strong connection between Greece and Germany prior to the Second World War.[61] Nevertheless, none of these studies have concerned themselves with interaction between the Greek people and their allies during the war. If allied soldiers are

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[53] Interview of Cretans: Elefteria Tripodaki and her sister Mrs Adonia Nicolau, 20 August 2005.
[54] Nicholas Doumanis, *Myth and Memory in the Mediterranean: Remembering Fascism's Empire*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1997.
[55] C. M. Woodhouse, *Apple of Discord: A Survey of Recent Greek Politics in their International Setting*, London, 1948; C. M., Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece 1941-1949*, Hurst & Company, London, 1976; Richard. Clogg, *A Short History of Modern Greece*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979.
[56] Major –General I.S.O. Playfair, *The War in the Middle East and Mediterranean*, Vol. II, United Kingdom Military Histories Series, H.M.S.O., 1956, p.150.
[57] Ibid p.15.
[58] See Chapter One for details.
[59] John Iatrides. (ed.), *Greece in the 1940s: A Nation in Crisis*, University Press of New England, London, 1981; Andre Gerolymatos. *Guerrilla Warfare and Espionage in Greece 1940-1944*, Pella Publishing Company, Inc, New York, 1992.
[60] John Bitzes, *Greece in World War II to April 1941*, Sunflower University Press, Kansas, 1989.
[61] John L. Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance: The Greek Agony 1941-44*, Pella Pub. Co, N.Y., 1983.

mentioned at all, it is only in their role as intelligence officers during the occupation and resistance.

Unlike the campaign on mainland Greece, the battle for Crete has generated greater interest amongst historians. In part, this is due to the fact that Greece was viewed as a retreat whereas Crete was considered a battle in which allied troops directly engaged the enemy, in fact a classic study of aerial warfare. Although Crete is often discussed as an extension of the Greek campaign, because a significant number of allied troops were evacuated there from Greece, it was an entirely separate campaign from the one conducted on mainland Greece. As early as November 1940 Crete had been selected by the British as their main refuelling base in the Mediterranean long before the support for Greece was even considered by the British Defence Committee. The strategic importance of Crete as a bastion against German incursions into North Africa had been well acknowledged by historians. Churchill issued instructions to Wavell to turn the island into a fortress. The Cretans themselves also view the battle for Crete as separate campaign from the one conducted on the mainland.[62]

The historical writing on Crete has centred on why the island was lost and who was to blame. The Cretans, if mentioned at all, form a backdrop to the events rather than major players in the proceedings. British author and ex military officer, Antony Beevor has suggested that the New Zealand Commander in charge of the campaign, Bernard Freyberg, was largely to blame for the loss of Crete because of his mismanagement of the campaign by refusing to heed the advice offered by top-secret Ultra transcripts.[63] One of his book's short comings, however, is that it relies heavily on the perspective of the officers from the British military mission deployed on Crete with little insight offered into the views of the ordinary soldiers or citizens. Regardless of this criticism many of the Greek people interviewed for this study still consider Beevor's book as the best source on the battle of Crete because of its perceived impartiality, unlike Greek writings that have a distinctively partisan flavour.[64] There are indeed copious amounts of self-published accounts of the battle by Greek and Cretan amateur historians that are mostly parochial with little knowledge or acknowledgment of allied involvement. The historical debate on Crete however, turned full circle with the recent publication of John Keegan's book on intelligence in war with a chapter devoted to the Crete campaign.[65] Keegan stresses the point made two decades earlier by Michael Handel that possession of superior intelligence is not an

[62] See Chapter 6 for details.
[63] Antony Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance*, John Murray, London, 1991.
[64] Based on anecdotal evidence collected by the author during research trip to Greece and Crete, October 2003.
[65] John Keegan, *Intelligence in war: knowledge of the enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda*, Hutchinson, London, 2003.

advantage in war if not used effectively, and is kinder than Beevor in his assessment of Freyberg.[66]

New Zealand's historians, unlike their Australian counterparts, have not neglected the battle for Greece and Crete.[67] It still commands interest and debate amongst New Zealand's scholars whose focus thus far has been Britain's mismanagement and bungling of the campaign.[68] A recent publication on New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War included a chapter on the decision-making process that lead to the deployment of Australian and New Zealand troops in such a risky venture.[69] New Zealand academic Ian Frazer with English colleague Sean Damer, have written a very timely book on the neglected subject of Australian and New Zealand soldiers trapped behind enemy lines on Crete.[70] Although it mentions the support offered to the soldiers on the run by the Cretans it does not analyse its importance in any depth.[71] Furthermore, New Zealand's official history of the Crete campaign, unlike the Australian version, has been far more popular with the Greek people because its author D. M. Davin was one of the few official historians to acknowledge the Greek contribution to the allied campaign.[72] Nevertheless, there is evidence that Australia's official historian asked for clarification on the Greek contribution before writing Australia's official history of the campaign. In a letter to Colonel Honner Gavin Long questioned the Australian version of events because 'the German account that we have just received makes much more of the work of the Greeks on the Perivolia-Retimo area than ours do.'[73]

Greek historiography on World War II

Greek historians on their part have concentrated their discussions of the Second World War on the Albanian front 'Αλβανικο μετωπο,' and the Italian invasion of Greece in 1940 thus making 28 October 1940 Greece's second most important National Day. According to the official Greek version, on this day Greek president General Metaxas replied with a "No" to

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[66] Michael I. Handel, "Intelligence and Military Operations," *Intelligence and National Security Journal*, Vol.5, No. 2, 1990, pp.38-95.
[67] Laurie Barber and John Tokin-Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander*, Hutchinson, London, 1990; Glyn Harper, *Kippenberger: An Inspired New Zealand Commander*, Harper Collins Publishers, Auckland, 1997; Matthew Wright, *The Battle for Crete: New Zealand's Near-Run Affair*, Reed, Auckland, 2003; Mathew Wright, *Freyberg's War: The Man, the Legend and Reality*, Penguin, New Zealand, 2005;
[68] Tony Simpson, *Operation Mercury: The Battle for Crete, 1941*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1981.
[69] Ian Wards, "The Balkan dilemma," in Crawford, J. (edited) *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, Oxford, Auckland, 2000, pp.20-35.
[70] Sean Damer and Ian Frazer, *On the Run: Anzac Escape and Evasion in Enemy –occupied Crete*, Penguin Books, New Zealand, 2006.
[71] Ibid chapter 10: Discussion pp.200-213.
[72] W. G. McClymont, *To Greece: Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45*, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1959; D. M Davin, *Crete: Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45*, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1953.
[73] Letter from Gavin Long to Lieut-Colonel R. Honner, 16 December 1947, AWM: 67 3/170 part 1.

Italy's request for surrender.[74] They do not regard the German invasion of Greece as a 'battle.' They readily acknowledge that Greece did not put up a strong defence against the Germans nor had the Greek General Staff ever intended to as they were aware that the Germans greatly outnumbered them. Instead, the Greeks quickly capitulated to the Germans with the signing of the unauthorised armistice by General Tsolakoglou, the commander of the Central Macedonia Army. Unlike the war against the Italians, the short interlude between March and April 1941, when the Australian forces had entered Greece under the British command codenamed 'Lustreforce,' only represents 'a blink' in the history of Greece. The Allies' involvement in Greece is not depicted in the War Museums of Thessaloniki in Northern Greece, or at the War Museum in Nafplion, one of the ports used for the evacuation of the allied troops from Greece. It is however, represented in the Naval Museum in Chania, Crete.[75]

"No" Flyer issued for 28 October commemorations, Rethymnon Crete 2003.

It is difficult to discuss the Second World War with any impartiality in Greece. Part of the problem rests with the reluctance of the Greek people to discuss the Second World War at all. Historians in recent years have been preoccupied with the 'silences' of history -- what has been left unsaid.[76] They have noted with interest what people have chosen to 'forget' and what they want to 'remember'.[77] This is certainly the case with the Greeks, whose silence on the Second World War is staggering.[78] They do not wish to write about it or discuss it. In every way

[74] The Greeks refer to the 28 October as 'Oxi' day or 'No' Day with flyers handed out in the street with the word 'No' printed on them. There is some debate amongst Greek revisionists as to whether it was General Metaxas who actually said 'No' or the Greek officers at the front, thereby forcing the Greek Dictator to take a stand against Italy that he would not have otherwise taken.
[75] Findings of author during field trip to Greece and Crete: October 2003.
[76] Richard S. Esbenshade, "Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe," *Representation*, Vol. 49, 1995, pp.72-96; Anna Collard, " Investigating 'Social Memory' in a Greek Context," in Tonkin, E., McDonald, M., & Chapman, M., History and Ethnicity, Routledge, London, 1989, pp.89-101.
[77] Luisa Passerini, "Oral memory of Fascism," in Forgacs, David (ed.), *Rethinking Italian Fascism: capitalism, populism and Culture*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1986, pp.185-195.
[78] Liana Theodoratous, " Writing Silences: Manolis Anagnostakis and the Greek Civil War, in Carabott P. & Sfikas T. (eds), *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences*, Ashgate, Hampshire, 2004, pp.239-253.

the Second World War is a taboo topic in Greece.[79] The Greek Civil War of 1945-1949 that resulted in widespread trauma and bloodshed, polarising a nation that was already suffering from deep regional divisions, is still part of Greece's living memory. It not surprising therefore that Greek people still view with suspicion anyone seeking information about the war years.[80] Unlike Australia, there are few monuments dedicated to the Second World in the Greece.

Post-war historical writings in Greece have tended to follow a Nationalistic agenda 'under the sway of the nationalist school established by the nineteenth-century historian Constantine Paparrigopoulos.'[81] The controversial nature of this period has meant that little revision of Greek writings on the war years has taken place. David Close found that while many regimes have suppressed and manipulated memories of the past, Greece has been the worst offender:

28 October 1940 National Day Celebrations, Rethymnon Crete 2003

> In no other country, perhaps, has manipulation of the past been more ruthless and ingenious than in Greece, where it has continued until quite recently. The-best known example perhaps is the attitude by the authorities before 1974 to the leftwing movements of the 1940s. Because the Left came to dominate the resistance to the Axis occupation, the whole subject of resistance was for many years censored, while the leftwing participants in the ensuring civil war were dismissed as 'bandits'. As is now known from opinion surveys conducted in 1980-86, which compared the views of different age

[79] The curator, Kostantinos E. Mamalakis of the Historical Museum of Crete was instructed to leave out any mention of war or guns in his exhibition on the Battle of Crete, telephone conversation with the author, Athens and Crete, October 2003.

[80] At the senior citizens club or K.A.P.I. in Nafplion, with the exception of one man, those present decided not to discuss the war with the author, suspicious of the motivation behind the request, even with proof of university sanction.

[81] Christos Hadziiosif, "The Historian: Nicos Svoronos and his Relationship to the Historiography of Modern Greece," *Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol 17, No.2, 1991, p.37.

> groups, the great majority of public before the 1970s sympathised with such official attitudes. Published documentation of leftwing atrocities, and of rightwing victories over the Left, flourished in this atmosphere.[82]

If the Second World War is discussed at all, the focus has been on the German occupation. 'For Greek historians, oppression and resistance are the only themes worth considering, the . . . Occupation must be remembered as a test of the resilience of the Greek people, their patriotism and moral worth.'[83] Countless tomes have been written by Greek citizens extolling their role in the resistance on both the mainland and on Crete. Few if any mention the involvement or contribution of the allies at this time. In fact, the Second World War is not regarded as a defining moment in the history of their country, unlike the 1821 uprising against the Turks that liberated Greece from four hundred years of Ottoman occupation.[84] Lustreforce - under the British commander General Maitland Wilson has been long forgotten and completely overshadowed by the events of the Greek civil war and Britain's role in it.

The inaccessibility of the Greek archives has also added to the difficulty of writing about the Second World War in Greece.[85] Although some of the archives on the war were opened after the collapse of the Military Junta in 1974, others such as the Greek Department of the Interior's police interrogation files still remain closed. Giorgios Antoniou and Nikos Marantzidis found in their study of the historiography of the Civil War in Greece that the Greek 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs systematically refuses access to its archives to people whose research' questions are considered to be too politically sensitive.[86] Greece's official account of war acknowledges few sources with the exception of the official history of the Crete campaign that is well footnoted.[87] Few operational reports appear to be listed on the database of the Greek

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[82] David Close, "The Road to Reconciliation? The Greek Civil War and the Politics of memory in the 1980s," in Carabott, P. & Sfikas, T. (eds) *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences*, p.258.

[83] Nicholas Doumanis, Occupiers and Occupied in the Dodecanese, 1912-1947, PhD Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1994, p.3.

[84] Most of the Greek high school students interviewed by Greek television stations in October 2003 regarding the 28 October 1941 National Day celebrations, thought they were commemorating 1821. Greek teaching in schools focuses on the 'glorious' 1821 revolution against the Turks, and little is taught about the Second World War.

[85] The Diplomatic and Historical Archives in Athens only allow three files to be requested per day. They restrict photocopying of archives to fifty pages in total and only allow one access per research study to their archives. Furthermore, most archival repositories in Greece are only opened for half of the day, compounding the above difficulties.

[86] Giorgios Antoniou and Nikos Marantzidis, "The Greek Civil War Historiography, 1945-2001: Toward a New Paradigm," *The Columbia Journal of Historiography*, Vol. 1, Fall 2003. Online publication: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/history/gha/cjh/2003_4.htm

[87] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and Greek-German War 1940-1941 (Land Operations*), The Army History Directorate Editions, Athens 1997; Lieutenant Colonel Chrestos Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, Hellenic Army General Staff Army History Directorate Publication, Athens, 1959, translated in English 2000.

Military archives.[88] Theoretically all documents have been scanned by the Army and placed online.

Using mainly British archives, Greek historian John Koliopoulos made a significant contribution to the scholarship of World War 2. Examining British involvement in Greece Koliopoulos argued that, far from being reluctant participants in Greece, the British were so determined to enter the country that if a pretext did not exist they would have manufactured one.[89] He also helped explain Greece's foreign policy and defence objectives. Koliopoulos went on to examine the influence of the deeply fragmented population of Greek Macedonia on the Greek civil war.[90] While questioning their loyalty to the Greek state, Koliopoulos failed to acknowledge the effect of Greece's pre-war nationalistic agenda on the Slavic-speaking people of Northern Greece. According to Mazower, Koliopoulos 'paints a basically unsympathetic and ultimately limited picture of their plight and actions.'[91] His sources, according to Mazower are 'very partisan . . . mostly cold war memoirs of fiercely anti-communist Greek nationalists and reports of Greek war crimes trials from the civil war period.'[92] A hostile attitude and deep distrust still exists in Greece towards 'Slavo-Macedonian' Greeks with the author being advised by a Greek veteran of the Albanian war not to take seriously the opinion of these people as they are a 'bastardised race.'[93]

What warrants further investigation is an examination of the impact that this section of the population had on the Greek war effort though Philip Minehan has conducted some research on this subject.[94] While British intelligence officers working on the ground amongst the Greek people became aware of these divisions they did not share this information with the Australian forces deployed to Greece. Had they done so, the Australians might have been better prepared in Greece. Like other nations at this time Greece was concerned with presenting a united front to the world. For 'Greece does not consider itself a multiethnic or multicultural society,' explained Roger Just. 'Within its borders there appear to be no minority groups struggling for recognition or independence under the banner of a different history, a different language, a different religion, a different culture – or at least none that commands public sympathy or support within

[88] Possibly many of the reports did not survive the war. Many may have been destroyed prior to Germany invasion of Greece, as was the case with the Allies who were busy burning papers before their evacuation from Greece.
[89] John Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection: 1935-1941*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977.
[90] John Koliopoulos, *Plundered Loyalties: Axis Occupation and Civil Strife in Greek West Macedonia, 1941-1949*, Hurst & Company, London, 1999.
[91] Mazower, "Historians at War: Greece, 1940-1950, p.502.
[92] Ibid, p.502.
[93] Conversation with Greek veteran of the Albanian war 1940, Officers' Club, Thessaloniki, Greece, 2003.
[94] Philip B. Minehan, "What was the Problem in Greece? A Comparative and Contextual View of the National Problems in the Spanish, Yugoslav and Greek Civil Wars of 1936-49," in Carabott, & Sfikas, (eds) *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences*, pp. 41-56. Minehan analyses the impact of the Slav Macedonian population on the pre-war and war years in Greece.

Greece.'[95] These divisions within its society were not to be tolerated and attempts had been made in the 1930s by the right wing Metaxas government of Greece to eradicate any outward signs of ethnic differences. This did not stop signs of dissention bubbling to the surface during Australia's brief campaign in Greece with rumours of Fifth Columnists and 'Germanophiles' spreading panic amongst Australian troops who were deployed there.

[95] Roger Just, "Triumph of Ethnos," in Tonkin, E., McDonald, M. & Chapman, M. (eds), *History and Ethnicity*, Routledge, London, 1989, p71.

Structure of the Thesis

This study does not concern itself with military strategy nor is its focus exclusively on what happened on the battlefield, but seeks to explore what was occurring between the allies before, during and after the battle, and behind enemy lines in Greece and Crete. Neither does it aim to evaluate how the allies should or should not have fought in Greece and on Crete. Many scholars have adequately covered this aspect of the campaign.[96] It is a cultural study of the campaign that examines the *'feelings, emotions and attachments'* that developed between two very different groups of people as a result of the war and how these attachments aided, amongst other things, the survival of Australian troops in a foreign land.[97] Joy Damousi in her study of the grief produced by war concluded that not only was 'emotional life' a legitimate subject for historical research but that it 'formed an important, and ever changing, part of our social and cultural history.'[98] Joanna Bourke found from her research that although "[e]motions may be nebulous, contradictory and complex, . . . they are the very stuff of human action and agency," and cannot be ignored.[99] Thomas J. Scheff writing about collective emotions in warfare noted that:

> Emotions are little favored (sic) in current explanations of the causes of war. If they are referred to at all, it is only indirectly and casually. Frequently used concepts such as prestige, honor (sic), and morale are directly linked to emotions, but this link is never investigated. . . . Most serious studies of warfare seem to presume that although emotions are present among the combatants, they are not a significant causal force.[100]

Although studies have been undertaken on the effects of battle on Australian soldiers, war has not been a popular subject of cultural research in Australia.[101] Nevertheless, a few historians have written about the feelings of trauma and grief experienced by war widows and those left behind as a result of the Second World War in Australia.[102] There has been no research,

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[96] Alan Clark, *The Fall of Crete*, Anthony Blond, London, 1962; I. McD., Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete 20 May – 1 June 1941*, Oxford University Press, London, 1966; Simpson, *Operation Mercury*; Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance*.

[97] Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (eds), *Cultural History in Australia*, UNSW, Sydney, 2003; Roger Cooter, Mark Harrison & Steve Sturdy (eds), *War, Medicine and Modernity*, Sutton, London, 1998.

[98] Joy Damousi, *Living with the Aftermath: Trauma, nostalgia and grief in post-war Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p.196.

[99] Joanna Bourke, "The emotions in war: fear and the British and American military, 1914-1945," *Historical Research*, Vol. 74, No. 185, 2001, p.315; Joanna Bourke "Fear and Anxiety: Writing About Emotion in Modern History," *History Workshop Journal*, No. 55, 2003, pp.149-60; Joanna Bourke, "Wandering Jews of Medicine," Shellshock and Australian Soldiers in the Great War," *Sabretache*, October 1995, pp.3-10; Joanna Bourke, " 'Swinging the Lead': Malingering, Australian Soldiers and the Great War," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No. 24 April 1995, pp.10-18.

[100] Thomas J. Scheff, "Collective Emotions in Warfare," in Kurtz, Lester (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*, Academic Press, San Diego, 1999, pp. 331-332.

[101] Barter, *Far Above Battle*; Mark Johnston, *At the Front Line: Experiences of Australian soldiers in World War II*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996; Peter Brune, *A Bastard of a Place: Australians in Papua*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 2004.

[102] Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996; Michael McKernan, *The War Never Ends: The pain of separation and return*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 2001.

however, on the interaction of Australian soldiers and civilian populations in distant lands during the Second World War. Suzanne Brugger's study of the Australians in Egypt is the one exception but her research centred on World War One.[103] Nothing thus far has been written about the shared wartime experience of Australian and Greek soldiers and civilians. Nor has there been an examination of the relationship to determine its nature, extent and impact on the conduct of the war and post-war relations with Greece.

This study will examine how Australian soldiers, who came from a predominately Anglo-Celtic background, were able to gain the trust, friendship and support of the Greek people. How did the Greek people react to soldiers from a culture so different from their own? Some of the Australian veterans who fought in Greece and Crete in 1941 continued their friendship and correspondence for over 50 years with the Greek people they befriended in a battle so long ago. What was it about this particular wartime experience that left such a lasting-impression on both the Australians and the Greeks? Or is this special connection a product of wartime propaganda?

It is a modern narrative account of the war that does not adhere to the strict chronology of the traditional narrative approach but digresses where necessary, to explain the events as they unfold. The story, where possible, is told directly through the sources left behind by those who lived through this period of history. An attempt has been made to include the Greek voice, often missing from most Australian accounts of the campaign. This has not been an easy task as Greek reaction to the Australian presence in Greece was rarely documented. Greek veterans of the campaign have been difficult to locate both in Australia and Greece. More often than not the Greek response was found in records left behind by Australian soldiers.

There is also a significant amount of visual evidence in the form of archival photographs that are included in this study, particularly the photography of Gavin Long. Visual artefacts form part of our material culture and as such have become increasingly important sources of evidence for historians. As Ivan Gaskell has pointed out, 'some historians have made valuable contributions to our understanding of the past by using visual material in a specifically historical manner,' and in his opinion 'no one profession has, or . . . should have, a monopoly over the interpretation of visual material.'[104] Greece, in fact, has few if any photographs in its archival repositories of the allied presence in Greece; it is as if the Allies were never there.[105]

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[103] Susan Brugger, *Australians and Egypt 1914-1919*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1980.
[104] Ivan Gaskell, "Visual History," in Burke, Peter (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.187 & p.214.
[105] The author searched the archives of the major repositories in Greece, from the north of the country to the southern tip of Greece, and on Crete. The military museums, newspaper archives, Diplomatic and Historical Archives, Military History Archives as well as the General Archives of Greece, all of which contained very few records both written and visual of the Allied presence in Greece. They were very interested however in obtaining copies of photographs from Australian institutions. If this could be arranged, it would be a very worthwhile endeavour.

The first chapter of the thesis seeks to illustrate the strained relationship that existed between Britain and Greece over the issue of allied intervention in Greece. It aims to highlight the distrust each government felt towards each other, fearing that the other might manipulate them into a situation not of their own making. In so doing, this chapter hopes to provide an understanding, not only of Britain's motivation in sending troops to Greece, but also of the Greek position, often missing from Australian studies of the campaign. It places Australia's exclusion from the negotiations over Greece in the broader context of British war aims, setting the stage for the events that follow.

Chapter two will examine Australia's military relationship with its smaller ally: Greece. Although it has often been referred to in the public arena as 'warm and close,' this relationship has never been scrutinized to establish its authenticity. This chapter will examine the nature of the relationship that developed between the Australian commanders and the Greek military, explaining in the process why Australia's military relationship with Greece failed. Britain's contribution to the breakdown of this relationship will also be investigated.

Chapter three will focus on personal relations between Australian soldiers and Greek citizens during the campaign on the Greek mainland. Aspects of Australian wartime experience such as recreational leave, contact with women, Fifth Column activity and troop indiscipline, not normally discussed in studies of the campaign, will be examined. It will also investigate how Australian soldiers were able to establish a rapport with the Greek people and evaluate its importance.

Chapter four will provide an historical context for the battle of Crete, explaining the reasons behind Britain's failure to adequately reinforce and defend Crete. Against this background, Australia's military relationship with the Greeks at a battalion level will be explored using the war diary of Lieutenant Colonel Ian Campbell, who commanded the Greek and Australian units at Rethymnon. The factors that hindered the development of a successful military relationship with the Greeks will also be discussed.

Chapter five will examine Australian soldiers' relations with the Cretan people. It will provide an understanding of the Cretan character and Crete's separate historical development and explain its impact on Allied relations on Crete. Using research provided by anthropologists on Greek society and culture it will explain why the Australians formed such a strong connection with the Cretan people.

Chapter six will discuss the lives of Australian soldiers caught behind enemy lines in Greece and Crete. This chapter seeks to identify 'the ingredient' that helped Australians survive during the occupation of Greece and Crete. In so doing it will explore the Australian soldiers involvement in the Greek resistance, and in M.I.9: an organization set up by the British behind enemy lines with the help of local Greeks to assist 'evaders' and 'escapers' leave occupied Greece. In the process it will describe the 'relational intimacy' that developed between the

Australians and their Greek compatriots. The 'social capital' or 'glue' that held Greek society together during the war and its implications for the survival of Australian soldiers in Greece and Crete is also investigated.

The campaigns on mainland Greece and Crete are an illuminating study of why people choose to behave in altruistic ways in situations that could lead to their death. Psychologists began researching 'prosocial' as opposed to 'antisocial' behaviour within the population in the 1970s.[106] They identified two separate concepts that describe the way people interact with each other, one they termed 'prosocial', which involves doing good deeds with the idea of future benefit and the other they refer to as 'altruism', helping others where there is no immediate gain and in some cases where there is immediate danger.[107] Apart from Greece, the only other study conducted where altruism was displayed on a large scale by one group of people towards another was by Samuel Onliner on the rescuers of Jewish people in Nazi occupied Europe.[108]

This thesis seeks to explore what triggered this altruistic response from the Greek population towards the Australian troops. Was it simply a case of societal expectations? Traditional societies are regarded as inclined towards altruism because of their collective cultures compared to modern societies that focus on individualism.[109] Alternatively, were there other factors that precipitated such a response from the people of Greece? Psychologists have identified 'empathy' as a vital component of altruism, if so, what encouraged empathetic feelings between such culturally diverse people?[110] The study of these campaigns suggests that the relationship that emerged between the Australians and Greeks was a product of a complex set of factors, both environmental and cultural, that had important implications for the well being, survival and rescue of Australian troops in Greece and Crete during World War Two.

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[106] D. Batson, "Altruism and Prosocial Behaviour," in Gilbert, D. Fiske, S. & Lindzey, G. (eds), *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. II, McGraw-Hill, 1998.
[107] Michael W. Eysenck, " Social Behaviour and Relationships," in *Psychology: An International Perspective*, Psychology Press, London, 2004, pp.667-717.
[108] Shepela et. al., " Courageous Resistance: A Special Case of Altruism," *Theory Psychology*, 1999, Vol. 9., pp.787-805; Samuel P. Onliner, *The Altruistic personality: rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*, McMillan, New York, 1988.
[109] R.D. McChesney, "Charity and Philanthropy in Islam: Institutionalizing the Call to do Good," *Essays on Philanthropy* 14, Center (sic) on Philanthropy at Indiana University, Indianapolis, 1995.
[110] M. Toi & C. D. Batson, "More evidence that empathy is a source of altruistic motivation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 43, 1971, pp.281-292.

Chapter One: Strategic Decision to send Australian Troops to Greece –
The Second Gallipoli: Diversion or Disaster?

Although relations between Australian soldiers and their Greek allies is the focus of the study, this chapter provides important background information on how the relationship that existed between the countries involved in the Greek campaign influenced what happened before and during the battle. It places Greek – Australian relations in the broader context of British and Greek war aims and provides an understanding of why the Australians were left out of the decision making loop. It helps to explain the distrustful nature of British - Greek relations during this time. For the Greeks were known for their 'cunning and shiftiness . . . and general tendency to cheat all officialdom if possible, so often attributed by philhellenes (and Greeks) to the brutalizing effects of Turkish rule.'[1] The British had a reputation for making promises they could not keep in a desperate bid to garnishee support on their side.[2] The Yugoslavs and Turks resisted their offer of assistance but the Greeks had little choice in the end, but to accept it. The campaign lasted approximately a month, losing the Allies much needed arms and equipment as well as men. With limited air cover the Allies were chased out of Greece under fierce and sustained German bombardment. Caught in the middle of these events were the Australians.

Deception figured greatly in the relationship that ensued between Australia, Britain and Greece at this time. Australia was deceived into believing that the proposed campaign was viable and had a reasonable chance of success. The Australian commander, Lieutenant General Thomas Blamey, was encouraged to believe that the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, was consulted over the decision and had agreed to the mission. Menzies was assured that Blamey had been advised of the proposed expedition and supported it. The Greeks were deceived into believing that the British were going to send more divisions to Greece than they had available to them. The British were deceived into believing the reassurances of the Greek Commander-in-Chief, General Alexandros Papagos, that the Greek troops guarding the Metaxas line along the Greek – Bulgarian border would be deployed along the Aliakmon line. In the end the Australian forces, with the New Zealanders, paid the price for this deception. They were faced with a similar scenario to Gallipoli. Once again they found themselves on the front line of a campaign that had little chance of success.

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[1] David Holden, *Greece without Columns: The making of Modern Greeks*, Faber and Faber, London, 1972, p.25.
[2] See footnote 38 for details.

The British decision to send troops to Greece has been described as either a 'diversion' by its apologists, part of a 'grand strategy' to delay Hitler's planned attack on Russia, or a military 'disaster' not dissimilar to Gallipoli by its detractors.[3] It was the first time the Anzacs, Australian and New Zealander troops, came together since World War One and, ironically, a similar fate was to befall them and apparently for similar reasons: another 'diversion'? As Australian historian Joan Beaumont has observed 'for Australia . . . [the Greek campaign] . . . was the second greatest single catastrophe of the war, surpassed only by the fall of Singapore in February 1942. Sixty per cent of Australians taken prisoner in the war against Germany and Italy were captured in this campaign.'[4] *The Bulletin* of 23 April 1941 placed the blame for the Greek debacle squarely at the feet of British politicians for involving themselves in operational matters that were none of their concern.[5] It questioned whether politicians had pressured military leaders into agreeing to such an unsound venture.

> The Canal and the oil supply are still primary objectives. To these must be added the need to keep a Mediterranean naval base at Alexandria; . . . the bulk of the army nearest to the facilities which our operations in the Middle East have been aimed at protecting was moved 400 miles across perilous waters to face a German army greater in numbers and mechanised strength and with immeasurably better communications. This, too, when the Germans were known to be gathering strength in North Africa. Did politicians decide the matter? Generals (and admirals) are notoriously tongue-tied in the presence of politicians who have set their hearts on particular military plans. This was the case before the Gallipoli campaign was launched.[6]

The parallel between Greece and Gallipoli should not be taken too far; however it is worth noting that the same key figure, Winston Churchill, was involved in both decisions. In a recent New Zealand study the analogy between the two campaigns was drawn by Ian Wards who made the following distinction between them: 'for while it is true that Winston Churchill was the prime mover in both and that the aims were the same – a coherent front and a shortened conflict – Gallipoli failed not because the concept was wrong but because its execution was inept. The campaign in Greece failed because there was no military chance of success from the very beginning.'[7]

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[3] A. C. Murray (Viscount Elibank), "The Tragic Greek Campaign of 1941: the Sowing and the Reaping," 100 page unpublished typescript manuscript discussing the disastrous consequences of sending troops to Greece; National Library of Scotland: MS 8819; Letter from Maj Gen Sir Francis de Guingand to General O'Connor, 10 Jun 1947, stating his opinion that intervention in Greece was a mistake and that Wavell was responsible in some part for the decision, Papers of Major General Sir Richard O'Connor: Liddell Hart Military Archives, Kings College London, 4/4/6. The governments of Britain, Australia & Greece on the other hand, officially attributed the Greek campaign with delaying Hitler's attack on Russia by diverted German resources and men from North Africa to Greece.

[4] Joan Beaumont, *Australia's War, 1939-45*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1996, pp.12-13.

[5] "Another and worse Gallipoli," *The Bulletin*, 23 April 1941, p.8.

[6] "Did Wavell Weaken?" *The Bulletin*, 16 April 1941, p.9.

[7] Ian Wards, "The Balkan dilemma," Crawford, J. (ed.) *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, NZ, 2000, p.20.

In 1941 Australia found itself embroiled in the Greek debacle as a result of its relationship with the mother country - Great Britain. Australia, a small power, had based its defence on what has been termed the 'Singapore Strategy.' This was 'the notion that in the event of a threat to British interest in the Far East a British fleet would sail out from European waters and, basing itself on the modern and efficient naval facilities at the "impregnable fortress" of Singapore, assume command of sea communication, thereby eliminating any danger to Anglo-Saxon civilization in the southern Pacific.'[8] Australia was preoccupied at this time with the danger posed by Japan.[9] Australia's size and geographical location placed it in a vulnerable position. The trade-off for accepting British protection was the supply of men and arms for the British war effort. 'The United Kingdom was becoming more anxious to secure the help of Australian land forces in the Western hemisphere. The War Office estimated that by the end of the next European spring the Germans would be able to field 170 divisions against a French total of 85 and a mere 10 British.'[10] In this respect Australia had a strong bargaining chip that it could have used to its advantage far more than it did. Thus it is surprising, given Britain's vulnerability, that Churchill was not prepared to give the Australian Prime Minister a firm commitment to protect Australia in the event of a Japanese attack.

Although present during the discussion of the Greek campaign Menzies' focus was Asia. Greece did not figure greatly on Australia's horizon. Australia did not have a relationship with Greece prior to World War Two, though Australian officers had been deployed to Macedonia in Northern Greece during World War One as part of British formations.[11] Between 1937 and 1940 there was some trade conducted between the two countries. Australia exported wheat and wool to Greece which 'amounted in 1938-39 to approximately 307,000 [Australian pounds] ' and 'imports from Greece amounted to approximately 15,000 [Australian pounds], the principal items of which were capers and olives, hides and skins, olive oil, sponges and magnesium oxide.'[12] Australia, however, knew little about the culture, history and domestic politics of modern Greece before the commencement of the campaign and did not make it a priority to find out. This is not surprising as Greeks amounted to only 10,260 of the 50,000

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[8] Ian Hamill, "An Expeditionary Force Mentality? The Despatch of Australian troops to the Middle East," *Australian Outlook*, Volume 31, No.2, 1977, p.319.

[9] The British War Cabinet report on the Dominions for March 1941 noted that the 'main event, which has done much to shake general complacency, has been the sudden increase of tension in the Pacific.' Reports for the Month of February 1941 for the Dominions, India, Burma and the Colonies, Protectorates and Mandated Territories, NAB: CAB 68/8/96.

[10] Hamill, "An Expeditionary Force Mentality? p.322.

[11] According to Hugh Gilchrist's research there had been 30 Australian officers in British units in the Salonika Campaign of 1915-18 as well as 303 Australian army nurses stationed there, letter from Hugh Gilchrist to the Director, National Army Museum London, 11 March 1976, Papers of Hugh Gilchrist, NLA: MS4931.

[12] Greece-Relations with Australia (1937-1940), NAA: AA1963/77 Item 137/B/I/B.

southern Europeans who came to Australia before World War Two.[13] According to James Jupp by 1947 there were 12,000 Greeks, a big increase from a 'mere 2000 in 1911.'[14]

The Australians relied heavily on the cablegrams received from London to brief them on the situation in the Balkans. These circulars reported Greece's stated position on the war but supplied little inside information on its divided allegiance, condition of its army or the proclivities of its members of parliament.[15] Such reports having been compiled by British intelligence officers working in Greece prior to the commencement of the Greek campaign were available, but there is no evidence that they were ever shared with the Australians.[16] Instead, the British supplied Australia with information they wanted it to know, so that one, and only one conclusion could be reached: that of supporting the British decision to send troops to Greece. 'This venture is not based on a commitment,' wrote Menzies in response to Fadden's concern about Britain's real motivation behind the deployment of Australian troops to Greece, '[i]f that were its only foundation we would have been prepared to overrule it. Its real foundation is the estimate made on the spot by our military advisers and the overwhelming moral and political repercussions of abandoning Greece.'[17]

The decision to send troops to Greece was a controversial decision and has generated considerable debate amongst historians. Martin van Creveld, Robin Higham, Sheila Lawlor and Monty Woodhouse conducted considerable research on the subject in the 1970s and 1980s.[18] The scholarship centred on a number of unresolved issues such as why did the British agree to go to Greece knowing that the odds were so heavily stacked against them? Why did the Greeks refuse to move their troops from the 'Metaxas line' guarding Salonika to the 'agreed to' 'Aliakmon Line' further south?[19] And did these decisions lead to the failure of the Greek campaign?

Valuable insights have been offered in response to the above questions but none have been totally satisfactory. This is partly because the research conducted was predominately from

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[13] Maria Costadopoulos, Images of the Greek Family in Australia: Continuities and Changes, BA Honours thesis, UNSW 1979, p.5.

[14] James Jupp, *The Australian People*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1988, p.391.

[15] Personal Papers of PM War 1939 [1941], NAA: CP290/9/1 Item 16.

[16] SOE activities in Greece 1940-1942 (chapter 1-6) by Major Ian Pirie 1945 NAB: HS 7/150; Personalities: 1941-1944 NAB: HS 5/747; Greek Army: background and outline of recent events 1941 Jan.-1945 Mar. NAB: WO 106/3187.

[17] Cablegram from Mr Menzies in London to Acting Prime Minister Mr Fadden M.27, 14 March 1941, NAA: CP290/0 item 13.

[18] Martin van Creveld, "Prelude to Disaster: The British Decision to Aid Greece 1940-41," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. IX, No. 3, 1974, pp.65-92; Robin Higham, "British Intervention Greece 1940-1941: The Anatomy of a Grand Deception," *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 23, No.1, 1982, pp.101-126; Sheila Lawlor, "Greece, March 1941: The Politics of British Military Intervention," *Historical Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1982, pp.933-946; Monty Woodhouse, "The Aliakmon Line: An Anglo-Greek Misunderstanding in 1941, *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 26, No.1, 1985, pp.159-193.

[19] The 'Metaxas line' ran along the frontier with Bulgaria. It consisted of a system of concrete pillboxes and field fortifications whose constructed was initiated General Metaxas in 1936. The 'Aliakmon line' named after the river which formed part of it - ran from the sea near Mount Olympus through the Veria Gap to Kajmakcalan on the Yugoslav frontier.

a British perspective with little consideration given to the Greek point of view. The other limiting factor was the lack of access to the Greek archives. Although many of the records have been opened, there is still a significant amount under lock and key, particularly regarding military and security matters.[20] A body of research now exists on the subject written in English by scholars of Greek descent such as John S. Koliopoulos, John L. Hondros, Andre Gerolymatos and Procopis Papastratis, to name some of the main authors.[21] This has allowed for a better understanding of the relationship that existed between Britain and Greece prior to the war and how this relationship influenced the military decision taken in 1941.

The official reasons given for embarking on the Greek campaign make little sense. It is simply impossible to understand the logic behind the deployment of troops to a battlefield where they would be clearly outnumbered according to the intelligence reports of the time. What is even more perplexing, is that all available evidence from the memoirs and autobiographies of the people involved indicates that the British government and high command were aware at the time that they would lose everything they put into Greece, both men and equipment, yet they still persevered with the campaign.[22] So what was the real reason for the intervention in Greece?

One of the most popular and persistent myths is that Greece was provided with military support because of the 'promise' Britain had made on 13 April 1939 to assist Greece (and also Rumania) in the event of a German attack and had to honour its commitment. Sixty years later, this reason is still voiced by the Australian veterans of the campaign.[23] The other myth promoted was the idea that the British were 'reluctant' to enter Greece but compelled to do so because of reasons of 'conscience' to support heroic little Greece's stand against the might of the Axis powers. Newspapers and magazines published images drawn by artists such as Norman Lindsay that propagated these myths.

However the reality was quite different. Far from being reluctant, the British government had been pressuring Greece, Yugoslavia and particularly Turkey over a number of months to enter the war on the Allies' side in the hope of creating a Balkan front. Elisabeth Barker has explained that, 'in 1941 the British bullied the Yugoslavs unmercifully to go to war. But they had also bullied the Turks, and they, being united on this, resisted without difficulty. It

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[20] Lieutenant General Dimitrios Katheniotes, History of the Military Operations, 1940-1941, 1,500-page report critical of the Greek General Staff, was not allowed to be published and it is still difficult to locate copies of this report.

[21] John S. Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection 1935-1941*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977; John L. Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance: The Greek Agony 1941-44*, Pella Pub. Co, N.Y., 1983; Andre Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare and Espionage in Greece, 1940-1944*, Pella Publishing, N.Y. 1992; Procopis Papastratis, *British policy towards Greece during the Second World War 1941-1944*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984.

[22] Report to Chief of Staff 16 February 1941 cited in John Kennedy, *The Business of War*, Hutchinson, London, 1957, p.83.

[23] Based on the author's interviews of Australian veterans of the Greek campaign 2002-2005

was the disunity of the Yugoslavs which gave British bullying an opening; and even then, it was the Serbian conspirators, not the British, who planned and carried out the coup of 27 March.'[24]

The Bulletin Wednesday 30 April 1941

GREEK TRAGEDY

'Thou art not conquered; beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and thy pale cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.'

Anthony Eden himself voiced another myth that was propagated to justify the Greek debacle, just five months after the campaign, stating that: 'Greece's brave defence upset the time-table of Hitler's plans and delayed the prearranged attack on Russia for at least six more important weeks.'[25] However there is little historical evidence to prove this assertion. In fact, the delay to the Russian campaign had more to do with the weather conditions in 1941 than

[24] Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, Macmillan Press, London, 1976, p.266. The British Minister in Belgrade, Roland Campbell, was congratulated in the British war cabinet minutes for encouraging the coup d'etat on the 27 March 1941 against the Pro-German government of Prince Paul who had two days earlier signed a Tripartite Pact with Germany.
[25] Speech by Anthony Eden given at Manchester, on the 23 October 1941 quoted in the Preface by Emanuel Tsouderos, Prime Minister of the Greek Government-in-Exile to *The Greek White Book: Diplomatic Documents relating to Italy's aggression against Greece*, Hutchinson & Co, London for the Royal Greek Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1942, p.1.

Germany's engagement in Greece.[26] The ten divisions deployed for 'Operation Marita' had never been earmarked for Russia and the German force involved in Greece was insignificant compared to the 150 divisions Hitler had at his disposal for the Russian campaign.[27] Vice-Admiral Kurt Assman wrote in an article entitled, 'The Battle for Moscow' in *Foreign Affairs:*

> "Marita" was limited originally to the occupation of Northern Greece, to support the bogged – down Italian offensive in Albania; and in accordance with the "Adolf Hitler" directive of March 17, the forces provided for it were not to be considered in the deployment against Russia. Moreover, the opening date for "Barbarossa" suffered no postponement when, on Hitler's order of March 22, the Balkan campaign was extended, as a result of the British landing in Greece to include all of Greece inclusive of the Peloponnesus. The widely accepted belief that the British intervention resulted in a postponement of the opening date of "Barbarossa" is not valid.[28]

These 'myths' circulated by the British government amounted to little more than 'damage control'. They were politically driven, generated for public consumption and bore little relation to the truth that lay buried deep beneath them. It was a case, as Martin Van Creveld stated, as 'so often happens, expediency was dressed up in high sounding principles.' [29]

The decision to send Allied troops to Greece was influenced by many factors at the time. The foremost was the relationship between the British government and the Greek monarchy because of the familial connection between King George II of Greece and the King of England, who were cousins. The British Foreign office exploited this connection because of their 'deep distrust of Greek politicians. King George's readiness to work in close co-operation with Britain made the Foreign Office see a useful friend in him. Britain needed a friendly and, if possible, a dependable Greece; and the presence of King George would guarantee both considerations, as far as the Foreign Office was concerned.' [30] The Greek King was first and foremost an anglophile. He spent much of his time after his exile from Greece in 1923 in Britain. He adopted British habits and manners, visited his royal relatives and hunted tigers in India. Koliopoulos explained that:

> King George seemed out of place in Greece, and often confided as much to close friends. According to Sir Robert Vansittart, [1936 British Minister to Greece] the King would always prefer a stay at Brown's Hotel in London to his "rickety eminence" as King of Greece. Exasperated by Greek politics, he confided to the British Minister in 1936: "There is only one real solution, and that is that Greece should be taken over by your civil service and run as a British colony." [31]

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[26] Francis De Guingand, *Operation Victory*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1947, p.78.
[27] 'Operation Marita' or *Unternehmen Marita* [in German], code-name for the German attack on Greece.
[28] Vice-Admiral Kurt Assman, The Battle for Moscow," in *Foreign Affairs*, cited in Lord Elibank's Letter to Sir Richard O'Connor January 26, 1955, North East Africa 1940-1941 Wavell and Greek Campaign, Australian Defence Force Academy Library: Special collection, M87 p.19.
[29] Martin Van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy 1940-1941 The Balkan Clue*, Cambridge Uni Press, London, 1973, p.179.
[30] Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection,* pp.24-25.
[31] Ibid p.8.

Procopis Papastratis has argued that the British saw the Greek king as a conduit for the promotion of British interests in Greece, explaining that in 'the four years which preceded the war, the cornerstone of British policy in Greece was the monarchy.'[32] By supporting the monarchy the British hoped to restore their political influence in that country.[33] King George II of Greece on his part did not fail to remind the British of their obligation towards him and in December 1944 wrote the following letter to Churchill.

> I did not stop to consider that Greek soldiers would die at the side of your own men in Macedonia and Crete in a military enterprise doomed in advance, nor that Greece would have to suffer the tragedy of occupation. And when, after the German attack, the political leaders faltered and none came forward to assume responsibility, I took that responsibility, acting as my own Prime Minster for some time.[34]

Britain's allegiance to the Greek monarchy influenced its relationship with Greece before, during and after the Second World War.

Andre Gerolymatos explained that there was a 'tradition' of British intervention in Greece dating back to 1821 when the British Navy assisted the liberation of the Greeks from the Turks. During the First World War this connection was exploited to its fullest by the Greek Prime Minister Venizelios who with the help of the British ousted the pro-German King Konstantine of Greece and was rewarded 'under the Treaty of Sevre, . . .[with] . . . the whole of Thrace, the Gallipoli Peninsula, . . . all the Aegean Islands, with the exception of the Italian-held Dodekanesos.' [35]

For a long time Greece saw itself as a nation in need of a strong protector. In this regard it was not dissimilar to Australia that also sought British support. In the 1930s the Greeks had as their objective to press for a formal alliance with Britain. The British however avoided this commitment for, although they required a 'friendly' Greece, they did not want a formal alliance that would tie up men and resources. They were in no position to hold Greece should the situation arise. The Chiefs of Staff Committee, in a briefing paper prepared in 1939, maintained that any attempt to support Greece would be unsustainable:

> it will be to our advantage for Greece to remain neutral as long as possible, even if Italy declares war against us. As a belligerent she will undoubtedly prove to be a liability and will tend to absorb allied resources which could be used elsewhere. . . . It is apparent that neither France nor ourselves are able to offer any great measure of assistance to Greece if she is attacked. . . . All we can say with certainty at present is that: . . . (b) We can spare no land or air forces to operate in Greece unless the neutrality of Italy is assured beyond doubt.[36]

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[32] Papastratis, *British policy towards Greece during the Second World War,* p.217.
[33] Ibid p.218.
[34] King George II letter to Churchill 12 December 1944, NAB: FO 371/43699 cited in Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War*, p.154.
[35] Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare and Espionage in Greece,* p.25.
[36] War Cabinet: Chiefs of Staff Committee, "Greek Co-Operation Report," 22 September 1939, NAB: FO 371/23782 R7921 cited in ibid pp.49-50.

The Greeks on their part, like the Turks, attempted to maintain a public position of neutrality during the Second World War while privately courting Britain. However Greece's condemnation of Italy over Abyssinia and its support of British sanctions against Italy in the League of Nations made its pretence of neutrality difficult to sustain.[37] Mussolini who claimed that 'Greece is to the Mediterranean what Norway was to the North Sea, and must not escape the same fate,' was determined to teach Greece a lesson.[38] On 28 October 1940 he ordered an attack on Greece through Albania. Although the causes of this war are not part of the study, what is important to know is that Italy's war with Greece made Germany very worried about the situation in the Balkans.

The Germans realised that the British were looking for a pretext to enter Greece and use Greek airfields and naval bases to attack the Rumanian oil fields, hoping to create a 'Balkan front' in the process. This plan had been on the drawing board since the beginning of the war and was a particular favourite of Churchill. The idea of making the northern Greek city of Thessaloniki, referred to as 'Salonika' during the war, as the base for such an attack had been avidly promoted at the beginning of the war by the French General Maxime Weygand, head of the French forces in the Middle East in 1939. He stressed ' "the importance of maintaining an Eastern Front" and said that some tangible evidence of Allied intention to help the Balkans, "such as the despatch of a force to Salonika or Istanbul," would have a very steadying effect." '[39] They had not consulted Greece over the matter until much later. According to John Bitzes when they were informed that

> [t]he Greeks and the Turks did not take the Weygand plan seriously after they found that the Allies had neither the men or the war material to open and sustain a front through Salonika. Prince Paul of Yugoslavia minced no words. He was infuriated by the French, who were reportedly discussing a Balkan front that would include the Yugoslavs. Yugoslavia, he said, was not to share the fate of Poland or Czechoslovakia for promises of aid that was not available.[40]

There is some conjecture that Hitler gave Mussolini tacit approval to attack Greece at their meeting in Brenner on the 4 October 1940 as Martin Van Creveld has suggested.[41] Conversely others have argued that Hitler was furious with Mussolini for his action. Hillgruber explained that ' "upon hearing the news [of Italy's invasion of Greece Hitler] was swearing and cursing" accusing the German staffs responsible for liaison with the Italians and attaches of

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[37] John Koliopoulos, "Anglo-Greek Relations during the Abyssinian Crisis of 1935-1936," *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 15, No.1, 1974, pp.99-106; James Barros, *Britain, Greece and the Politics of Sanctions: Ethiopia, 1935-36*, London 1982, p.67.
[38] Chiefs of Staff briefing paper 1939, DGFP, Series D, Vo. XI, No.199, p.34, cited in Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare and Espionage in Greece*, p.52.
[39] Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe*, p.14.
[40] John Bitzes, *Greece in World War II to April 1941*, Sunflower University Press, Kansas, 1982, p.51.
[41] Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy*, pp.34-35.

being "idlers but no spies." '[42] Joachim von Ribbentrop, the German Foreign Minister, in his memoirs, maintained that Germany did not want a war with Greece and wrote:

> After Mussolini's undesirable attack on Greece, which Hitler was unable to prevent, Yugoslavia's attitude became of vital importance to us. . . . German policy was dictated by the desire to prevent complications in the Balkans at all costs. I therefore tried to draw Yugoslavia towards the three-Power Pact and the Axis policy. But our moves to start negotiations were counteracted by Britain, which enjoyed U.S. support. In the winter of 1940-41, Colonel Donovan, a special representative of President Roosevelt, arrived in Belgrade to influence the Yugoslav Government against Germany. Despite all these attempts at meddling, I succeeded after long-drawn-out negotiations in prevailing upon Yugoslavia to adhere to the Three-Power Pact. [However] . . . the Government was overthrown, Prince Paul was deposed and his powers were transferred to King Peter II . . . News of this putsch, staged by Britain and supported by Moscow, arrived in Berlin together with intelligence reports that Britain was about to intervene in Greece. . . . In order to prevent a Balkan front, which had played such an important part in the First World War, the Fuhrer decided to occupy Greece and Yugoslavia, and on 27th March, 1941, gave the order that the necessary military preparations should be made immediately.[43]

Hitler wanted to avoid a Balkan entanglement, hoping initially that negotiation and diplomacy would achieve that end. Hence Germany made an offer to Greece in December 1940 to broker a peace deal between Greece and Italy. 'According to this proposal, the Greek forces would occupy the Albanian territory they had conquered, and a neutral zone between the opposing forces would be occupied by the Germans so as to prevent incidents. A condition would be the evacuation of British units stationed in Greek Territory.'[44] This was not a proposal Britain wanted Greece to accept and became a major impetus for British support to Greece to the extent that '[t]he Foreign Office seriously considered that Britain's object must be to get the Germans to "commit" an act of aggression against Greece, and this they were of course more likely to do if the British "established" themselves in Greece "well and truly." '[45] So high level visits to Greece began in earnest in January 1941, first by the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East, General Wavell, followed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Dill and Foreign Secretary Eden, to try and convince the Greeks to accept a British presence without Britain making too many concessions to the Greeks.

What is not often acknowledged is that the relationship between Greece and Britain was very strained. For a year before the Italian attack on Greece, that occurred on 28 October 1940, the Greeks had been asking the British for military support in the form of equipment and planes. But it was not forthcoming for a number of reasons. The British considered Turkey of far more strategic importance to them than Greece. Thus, ' nine days before the Italian attack, London

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[42] A. Hillgruber, *Hitler's Strategie*, Frankfurt am Main 1965, p.286 cited in Gerolymatos, *Guerrilla Warfare and Espionage in Greece*, p.52.
[43] Joachim von Ribbentrop, *The Ribbentrop Memoirs*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1954, pp.142-143.
[44] Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection*, p.189.
[45] Foreign Office Minutes, December 1940, Foreign Office 371/24922 cited in ibid p.191.

decided that Turkey would continue to be favoured over Greece in receiving British military assistance.' [46] Even as late as February 1941 when the German advance into Greece was imminent Anthony Eden was still stressing the importance of continued support to Turkey that had thus far made no contribution to the Allied war effort. 'In forming the force for Greece,' he stated, 'the needs of Turkey must be born in mind, and something must be kept in hand for the Turks.' [47]

Another reason for Britain's limited response to Greece's urgent pleas for help was that the supply of military equipment to Greece was used by the British as 'a lever' with which to 'bully' Greece into accepting a token force that they knew would commit Greece to a war with Germany sooner rather than later. After having told the Greeks that the thirty fighters they were promised could not be supplied because of engine failure, Air Chief Marshal Longmore was surprised to find that the Greek government had secured its own independent supply of planes from the U.S.A. However upon his return to Cairo, Longmore was able to exert diplomatic pressure on the Americans to rescind the order. According to Tony Simpson

> [t]he Greeks found themselves out-manoeuvred and were obliged to accept the wholly unsatisfactory outcome with [as much] good grace as they could muster. The net effect was to ensure that the Greeks were wholly dependent on British goodwill for any aircraft they might receive. . . . When Ambassador Palairet urged the supply of further aircraft in late January, on the perfectly valid grounds that they would be used to remove a threat to the Allies in the Balkans and allow the subsequent concentration on the situation in the Western Desert, he was rather sharply reminded by his government that he was stepping outside his province and that he should refrain from meddling in such matters.[48]

The British had the Greeks dangling on a piece of string and were determined to use every means at their disposal to keep them there. They were aware that they were playing a dangerous diplomatic game for if they exerted too much pressure on the Greeks they could push them into the enemy camp. The British knew, as did the Germans, that without adequate supplies, the Greeks would run out of ammunition by the end of February and were biding their time. In a memorandum, the Greek Government voiced their frustration at the situation they found themselves in April 1941.

> The Royal Hellenic Government have never ceased, on every possible opportunity, to draw the attention of His Britannic Majesty's Government to the importance which should be attached to the question of the supplies of ammunition for the Greek Forces. They had been informed, in reply, that it was advisable to await the passing of the Lease and Lend Bill before the necessary orders could be placed in the United States of America. After the passing of the Bill, the Greek Government requested their Authorities in the U.S.A. to see that the orders for Artillery Shells were immediately placed . . . The Greek Authorities in the U.S.A., however, have reported that they have unfortunately been unable to obtain on the matter the full assistance they hoped to find from the part of

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[46] Bitzes, *Greece in World War II*, p.71.
[47] Appendices to C.I.G.S.'s Diary of His Visit to the Mediterranean February-April 1941, Appendix 1 "Note on approach to Turkish, Greek and Yugoslav Governments," NZA: DA 491, 2/4/, Vol. I.
[48] Tony Simpson, *Operation Mercury: The Battle for Crete, 1941*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1981, pp.55-56.

> the British Supply Committee in New York. Precious time is being wasted in discussions, while little is being done towards finding a solution to this problem, which is for Greece a matter of the most pressing urgency.[49]

The British were very concerned that nothing jeopardise the passage by Congress in January 1941 of the very important Lend - Lease Bill that authorized President Roosevelt to sell or lease military equipment to any anti-Axis Countries. The Lend-Lease Bill also allowed for the shipment of cheese, lard and canned foods to the United Kingdom with no direct expected return except for certain post war trade concessions. The German blockade of the British Isles ordered by Hitler on 17 August 1940 had, by the beginning of 1941, severely restricted British food supplies. It has been suggested that the passing of the Lend-Lease Bill was a major impetus for the January 1941 talks with the Greeks as the British government was actively courting American public opinion at this time. It was very important therefore that they be seen 'to give' support to their allies, even limited and tokenistic though it was, so that they could request it from America for themselves.

First Round of Talks between General Wavell and General Metaxas, Athens January 1941

Other strategic and military factors coalesced at this time to influence the British War Cabinet to offer more support to Greece. By January Wavell's victories in North Africa meant that British reserve units could now be released for deployment in Greece. Thus on the 12 January 1941 the British War Cabinet instructed their Minister in Athens, Sir Michael Palairet, to inform General Ioannis Metaxas that they were now in the position to increase their offer of aid to Greece and that General Wavell was to be sent to discuss the details. Metaxas requested that Palairet inform the British government in advance that if this 'additional help' was to be an offer of land forces the Greek government would require: '(a) at least 10 divisions (b) which were NOT to arrive as piece meal which would only provoke the Germans.' [50] Concern over Germany's reaction led Metaxas to refuse Wavell's request to visit the 'Μετοπω' or 'front line,' preferring that the general confine himself to the talks in Athens.[51] The Greeks had asked that the meeting with the British be 'incognito' so as not to offend the Germans who still had their legation open in Athens. The Germans however were well aware of the arrival and departure of the British officials regardless of their attempts at camouflage by the wearing of civilian clothes.

Wavell arrived in Athens on 13 January 1941 accompanied by Air Chief Marshal Longmore and Air Vice-Marshal John Henry D'Albiac who was to become the commander of

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[49] Memorandum by Greek Hellenic Government, 5 April 1941, [Government in London], ΚΥΒΕΡΝΙΣΙ ΛΟΝΔΙΝΟ, Αριθ.2596/Στ/41,Greek Diplomatic and Historical Archives*:* Folder No. 7 1941. [In English]

[50] Talks between the President of the Council and the British Ambassador, 12 January 1941, ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ [Politics] 1940–41, No. 3 1940–41 Συνομιλιεσ Μεταξα και Αγγλου [Talks between Metaxas and the British] Greek Diplomatic and Historical Archives: Folder: 12 A' [In Greek]

[51] Ibid p.2.

the British squadrons in Greece. They attended a meeting on 14 January with General Alexandros Papagos, the Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Armed Forces and Colonial Kitrilakis from the Greek General Staff who recorded the Greek minutes of the meeting. General Heywood head of the British Military Mission in Athens was also in attendance. The meetings of the 14 and 15 January focused on the size of the force to be offered by Wavell on behalf of the British government. It comprised 'a few artillery and tank support units, but it was turned down by the Greek Prime Minister.'[52]

> Both Metaxas and Papagos argued that the arrival of an inadequate British force in Macedonia would merely provoke an immediate German attack based on Bulgaria. Wavell argued that a British presence would encourage the Yugoslavs and Turks to resist German pressure, but Metaxas replied that, on the contrary, when they observed its small size, they would be discouraged. He argued unexpectedly, . . . "the only obstacle to the Germans coming in today is Russia".[53]

Certainly Russian aspirations in the Balkans were of interest to the Germans as well as the British. Both countries were concerned to curb Russian territorial ambitions in the area.

During the meeting Metaxas was steadfast in his resolve not to allow British troops into Greece until the Germans crossed the Danube into Bulgaria and their intentions towards Greece were beyond any doubt. [54] He did not want to turn Greece into the new theatre of war between Germany and Britain with the devastation that would surely follow by accepting the most 'unbelievable, almost ridiculous, British offer,' particularly as there were, according to the Greeks, twelve German divisions stationed in Rumania.[55] Although Metaxas did make an effort to reassure the British that, 'in all honesty Greece would not negotiate a separate peace with Germany but would attack because Greece does not fight for victory but honour,' he kept the back door open to Germany.[56] After all, Metaxas was first of all a Greek. 'He kept his lines of communication to both Cairo and Berlin open. This was a necessity, for until the Germans actually attacked on 6 April 1941 the German embassy in Athens was that of a neutral.'[57] This pretence was kept up by the Greeks until the very day the Germans attacked even though: 'British troops were inspected by the German military attaché as they marched past the German Legation on their way to the station in Athens [and] General Wilson was kept in mufti in the

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[52] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian and Greek-German War 1940-1941 (Land Operations)*, Army History Directorate, Athens, 1997, p.171. [In English]

[53] Summary of the meeting on the 15 January 1941 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, between General Metaxas, Papagos, British Ambassador to Greece, General Wavell and Heywood ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ [Politics] 1940–41, No. 3 1940–41 Συνομιλιεσ Μεταξα και Ανγγλου [Talks between Metaxas and the British] Greek Diplomatic and Historical Archives, Folder: 12 A', pp.3-4, [in Greek]; Woodhouse, 'The Aliakmon Line," pp.163-4.

[54] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian and Greek-German War*, p.171.

[55] Bitzes, *Greece in World War II*, p.109.

[56] Summary of the meeting on the 15 January 1941 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p5. [In Greek]

[57] Robin Higham, "A Case Study of Military-Diplomatic Command: 1940-1941 Graeco-German War," *Naval War College Review*, January 1985, p.90.

British Legation and not allowed to go to his headquarters in the Hotel Acropole, until shortly before the Germans attacked.'[58]

Though the behaviour of the Greek government can be viewed in hindsight as verging on the ridiculous in their attempts to keep the Germans on side, what must be understood is that Greece was extremely fearful, if not paranoid, of a possible German attack.[59] The Greeks employed every means at their disposal '[t]o reassure Berlin, . . . the Greek press withheld all polemics against Germany, and the Greek government made certain that German citizens in Greece were not molested. Indeed, the press looked to Germany for mediation of the conflict.'[60]

AWM: 041438 Athens, Greece January 1941. The Anglo-Greek War Council. Left to right: General H.D. Gambier-Parry MC, British General Staff; President Metaxas of Greece: His Majesty King George of Greece; Air Vice Marshal J. H. D'Albiac, CB DSO, Air Officer Commanding in Greece and General A. Papagos, Commander-in-Chief, Greek Army.

According to historian John Hondros members of the Greek government over a number of months had been secretly, through unofficial channels, asking Germany to intervene with Italy in the hope of fending off a German attack on Greece in support of its Axis partner - Italy.[61] Around Christmas Eve 1940 Alex Kyrou, the head of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, invited Major Clemm von Hohenber, the Germany military attaché in Athens, to his home along with other Greek officials to explain that Greece did not want to be dragged into a

[58] Ibid p.94.
[59] This is the main preoccupation of the Greeks as recorded in the Greek minutes of the Anglo Greek talks of 1941. They did not want to provoke a German attack on Greece by accepting a token gesture by the British.
[60] Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance*, p.41.
[61] Ibid p.46.

war with Germany. There were also rumours that the German cultural attaché to Athens, Professor Boehringer, had approached Constantine Maniadakes, the Greek Police Chief with a German offer of mediation.[62] There were further approaches for mediation from the Greek ambassador to Berlin, Alexander Rizo-Rangabe, to the German Secretary of State, Ernst von Weizaecker.

The British knew about these approaches and were very wary of the Greeks. The Greeks had their misgivings about the British, whom they suspected of wanting to force them into a war with Germany. The Turks and Yugoslavs were also concerned about the British. The Turks made it clear to the British that if they provoked a war in Greece they would not come to its aid, regardless of prior agreements. According to Martin van Creveld the January talks with the Greeks did not collapse because Britain was not able to supply enough forces, but because both parties did not trust each other. According to Creveld, the British 'checked on their allies through a third party, smelling rats everywhere. No wonder that the two delegations, after circling round each other for five days parted without having reached agreement.' [63]

Metaxas's firmness during this time is surprising considering how ill he was in January 1941 and the pressure under which the British placed him. Wavell repeatedly asked him to reconsider his country's position, pointing out that any further delay on the Greek side would mean that the British could not guarantee the arrival of their troops in time. In reality, Wavell was personally relieved that Metaxas had not changed his mind. He felt considerable respect for the Greek General 'who greatly impressed . . . [him] . . . as a wise and determined leader.'[64] Both Metaxas and Wavell had a realistic appreciation of the military situation facing them. 'The units I was to offer to the Greeks represented a large proportion of my meagre technical arms, and had the Greeks accepted the offer I should have had to stop my advance at Tobruk. I was, therefore, relieved when Metaxas refused the assistance,' wrote General Wavell.[65] Although both leaders were in agreement there is no evidence in the Greek minutes of the meetings to suggest that they colluded to prevent or delay the arrival of British troops to Greece.[66]

Metaxas's untimely death on 29 January 1941 generated rumours blaming Britain for his demise. Metaxas was considered a thorn in Britain's side for refusing its offer of aid. This fuelled suspicion that the British soldier who arrived at Metaxas' home on the day of his death with an oxygen cylinder to assist with his breathing was somehow responsible for his death.[67] According to Nana Foka, Metaxas' younger daughter, the Greek dictator had been seriously ill

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[62] Ibid p.44.
[63] Creveld, "Prelude to Disaster," pp.78-79.
[64] Field Marshal Archibald Wavell, "The British Expedition to Greece, 1941," *Army Quarterly*, January 1950, pp.178-185.
[65] Ibid, pp.178-185.
[66] Author's assessment from examination of the original documents [in Greek] at the Diplomatic and Historical Archives, Athens.
[67] P.J. Vatikiotis, *Popular Autocracy in Greece 1936-41: A Political Biography of General Ioannis Metaxas*, Frank Cass, London, 1998, p.214.

for over six months and 'died at the family home, the modest villa on Danglis Street Kifissia, at 5.30am . . . on the morning of Tuesday, 29 January 1941. Cause of death, as reported in the official death certificate and the official medical bulletin, was septicaemia after a streptococcus infection. 'Typically,' explains Vatikotis, 'his death was shrouded in mystery, including a myth of his assassination.'[68]

The Second Round of Talks with Greece at the Royal Palace at Tatoi

Upon Metaxas' death the Greek Government came under the direct influence of the King of Greece. Such were the close ties between King George II of Greece and the British government that the 'opposition in Greece ungraciously dubbed him the "British High Commissioner" in Greece.'[69] The British wanted him to rule Greece in the place of Metaxas but he refused. After much jostling and in fighting, Alexander Koryzis, former governor of the Bank of Greece, was appointed to the position. Koryzis was the compromise candidate after others were considered but rejected for political reasons. Though he was respected, Koryzis neither possessed the strength of character nor the military nous of Metaxas. An increase in the build up of German divisions in Rumania had him scurrying to the British in February 1941 for support. The British on their part were becoming increasingly concerned that desperation might push the Greeks into a separate peace with Germany. 'If we are unable to come effectively to the assistance of Greece,' wrote Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office, 'there is a real danger that she may be tempted . . . to make a separate peace if reasonable terms are offered to her, and this is no doubt what Germany is trying to bring about. If that occurred Greece would naturally be compelled to resume her previous strict neutrality, which would mean that she would have to insist upon our evacuating any naval and air bases which we had occupied on Greek territory.'[70]

The British War Cabinet regarded the situation in Greece seriously enough to dispatch Eden and Dill to attend the next round of talks held on 22 to 23 February 1941 in Athens. There is some conjecture as to what really transpired during the February meetings because of the subsequent disagreement over the line of defence that was to be jointly held by Allied and Greek troops. The purpose of these talks was to determine the size of the force to be offered by the British and its deployment. Although both Greek and English records of these meetings exist, they contradict each other on both minor and major points in the discussions.[71] The most significant disagreement was the one referring to the timing of the removal of Greek troops from North–eastern Macedonia to a position further south, on a line that has been subsequently referred to as the 'Aliakmon' line.

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[68] Ibid p.214.
[69] Koliopoulos, *Greece and the British Connection*, p. 9.
[70] Sargent memo, 'Assistance to Greece,' 7 January 1941, NAB: PRO, FO/371/29834/5761 cited in Creveld, "Prelude to Disaster," p.75.
[71] Woodhouse, 'The Aliakmon Line,"p.169.

Map of Greece showing the Metaxas and Aliakmon lines
Purnell's *History of the Second World War*, p.394.

The British had the creation of a Balkan front as the first item on their agenda for discussion at these meetings. 'The object is to make both the Turks and the Yugoslavs fight at the same time, or do the best they can. The best way of ensuring that both the Turks and the

Yugoslavs joined in would be the formation of a Salonika front and one of our first objects in Cairo should be to examine the possibilities of forming such a front.'[72] What is important to realise is that it was Turkey and not Greece that was Britain's main preoccupation at this time. The British were particularly concerned with how they could entice and cajole Turkey into the war. Eden's strong advice on this point was that, 'the best way of ensuring Turkey would fight would be to give effective help to the Greeks. If we failed in this, we should lose all hope of facing Germany with the Balkan front, we should probably lose our safe communications with Turkey, and we should lose Yugoslavia. . . . If we held back, and allowed the Greeks to be crushed, it was almost certain that the Turks would not fight.'[73]

The British therefore were adamant about keeping the Greeks fighting. 'We for our part have decided that it is essential to keep Greece in the war and that we must therefore send the help for which the Greeks themselves have asked. . . . The elimination of Greece would in fact be as deadly a blow to the Turks as to ourselves.'[74] Eden was determined to use any means at his disposal to make the Greeks agree to the British offer and instructed Francis De Guingand, a junior staff officer at the time, to ' "swell the figures" in terms of British support, "with what to my mind were doubtful values," ' wrote De Guingand, ' "I felt that this was hardly a fair do, and bordering upon dishonesty." '[75]

The Greeks for their part were very concerned that the British did not get cold feet and retract their offer of help. Even before the talks officially began, in a desperate gesture of solidarity, the Greek King instructed Prime Minster Koryzis to read a declaration to Eden stating that the Greeks were determined to fight the Germans regardless of whether or not they received support from Britain. The Greek King was anxious to dispel any suspicions that Eden and Dill might be harbouring that the Greeks were negotiating a separate peace with Germany. Part of the problem was that Cairo and Athens were awash with spies. Rumours were rife of Fifth Column activities amongst the Greek military and civil service and the Greek King was determined to quash them.[76] Koryzis' behaviour during these talks could be described as obsequious, fuelled as it was by his eagerness to reassure Britain that Greece appreciated its offer of assistance.

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[72] Appendices to C.I.G.S.'s Diary of His Visit to the Mediterranean February-April 1941, NZA: DA 491, 2/4/, Vol. I. To known hereafter as Appendices to C.I.G.S's Diary.
[73] Policy in the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean, War Cabinet Defence Committee (operations) Minutes, 10th February 1941, NAB: CAB 69/2/57.
[74] Appendices to C.I.G.S.'s Diary.
[75] De Guingand, *Operation Victory*, p.57.
[76] 'Fifth Column' refers to 'a secret subversive group that works against a country or organization from the inside. This term was invented by General Emilio Mola during the Spanish Civil War in a radio Broadcast on 16 October 1936 in which he said that he had "a Fifth Column" of sympathizers of General Franco among the Republicans holding the city of Madrid, and it would join his four columns of troops when they attacked.' Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992.

Although the British initially approached the discussions with the idea of creating a front at Salonika, they quickly realised that without Yugoslavia 's definite agreement this would not be possible. Instead they decided, in consultation with the Greeks, to deploy their troops along the line west of the Vardar, Olympus-Veria-Edessa- Kaimakcalan referred to as the 'Aliakmon line' sacrificing the port of Salonika. On 24 February Eden sent a telegram to Churchill confirming the details.

> [I]n view of the doubtful attitude of Yugoslavia the only line that could be held and would give time for withdrawal of troops form Albania would be the line west of the Vardar, Olympus-Veria-Edessa-Kaimakcalan. If we could be sure of Yugoslav moves it should be possible to hold a line farther north from the mouth of the Nestos to Beles, covering Salonika (Thessaloniki). It would be impossible, unless Yugoslavia came in, to hold a line covering Salonika in view of the exposure of Greek left flank to German attack.[77]

General Papagos maintained that five well-equipped divisions could hold this line and agreed to supply three divisions for this purpose by withdrawing troops from Western Thrace and Macedonia. The British would provide another three and a half divisions. At this stage it was also important to determine Yugoslavia and Turkey's position in the war against Germany. If Turkey entered the war Papagos was prepared to leave Greek forces in Western Thrace to support them. Therefore it was decided that Eden would approach both these countries to determine their position on the matter without divulging too much information about the Allied war plans for Greece.

Eden's approach to Turkey on 26 February 1941 was not successful. The Turks were not interested in getting involved in the war on behalf of the Greeks, arguing lack of resources and the risk of provoking Russia and Germany as the excuse. The British war cabinet was well aware of the Turkish position so Turkey's response would not have come as a surprise even if it annoyed them. For although the 'Turks were under an obligation to declare war if the Germans crossed the Greek border, . . . it was fairly certain that they would not advance outside their own country.'[78] The Turks were doing all in their power to keep all parties on side to avoid being drawn into the fracas in the Balkans. It is important to realise that like Greece, Yugoslavia and Turkey were also fearful of provoking a German attack. They all wanted to avoid a war with Germany but still keep the British on side just in case they needed their military support. The political agenda of the British was to induce them into the fray without appearing to do so. 'It is essential to avoid giving the Turks the impression that we are trying to involve them in the war against their will, . . . any attempt at "shock tactics" might merely have the result of driving

[77] Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War Volume III The Grand Alliance*, Cassell & Co. Ltd, London, 1950, p.68.
[78] Policy in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, War Cabinet Defence Committee (Operations) Minutes, 11th February 1941, NAB: CAB 69/2/62.

them into the German camp.'[79] The Yugoslav response to the British request for support was equally unsuccessful. Eden had no good news on their Balkan neighbours to report back to Greece.

AWM: 006866 Turkey 1941, Mr Eden and Gen. Sir John Dill's visit to turkey. General Sir John Dill with the Greek Military Attaché – Ankara.

The 'Aliakmon Misunderstanding': 2 to 4 March 1941- final talks with the Greeks

Eden returned to Athens ten days later, on 2 March, only to be informed that the British were faced with a crisis, as General Papagos had not moved the Greek troops from their forward position along the Bulgarian border to the Aliakmon line as agreed to in their previous meetings. Furthermore, the day before, 1 March, German troops had crossed from Rumania into Bulgaria and were now ensconced there. This changed the whole strategic situation in Greece making the removal of Greek troops from the frontier with Bulgaria and the proposed British expedition to Greece very dangerous. General Dill, stated upon arrival for his second visit to Athens, 'when he was made aware of Papagos' breach of faith, he felt that the plan had become definitely unsound, but we were then so deeply implicated that we could not withdraw.'[80] The predicament the British now faced in Greece made the subsequent meetings with the Greeks very difficult. John Koliopoulos describes the stalemate that had been reached between the two countries.

> The British labored (sic) to convince the Greeks to withdraw forces to the Aliakmon line, while the Greeks dug their feet in on the Albanian front and the Metaxas line. Eden was obliged to bring over Wavell, and mobilize the services of the king, whose intervention

[79] Appendices to C.I.G.S.'s Diary.
[80] Kennedy, *The Business of War*, p.101.

> with Papagos produced some agreement: the British forces would deploy on the Aliakmon line as they arrived, while the Greeks agreed to provide two divisions – one of them newly formed - for the same line. It was a rotten compromise, but all that Eden could carry home.[81]

Many theories have been put forward to explain why General Alexander Papagos did not immediately move the Greek units defending the frontier with Bulgaria and those deployed on the Albanian front to the line agreed to with the British. Monty Woodhouse, who was involved in these meetings as a junior staff officer at the British Military Mission, has suggested that the cause of the 'misunderstanding' between the British and the Greeks was the language barrier. He explained that although some of the participants could speak French, and or English, not one person from the senior British command could speak Modern Greek. The discussions therefore were conducted in French with the use of translators where needed. 'The King, Korizis, Papagos and Eden were all fluent in French. Heywood was bilingual being half-French by birth. . . . Wavell could probably manage in French.'[82] This explanation is not very convincing when one considers that most of the British Military Mission spoke Greek and 'enjoyed unusually close rapport with the Greek High Command including the King.'[83] The Greek Chief of Staff, General Papagos, regularly dined at the Grand Bretagne Hotel with General Heywood from the British Military Mission in Athens.

In a paper on the British Expedition to Greece given by General Wavell to the Anglo-Danish society in Copenhagen in October 1948, he maintained that the British did not misunderstand what Papagos had agreed to do. He explained that when

> [t]he British members left the conference at Tatoi we all understood that General Papagos was going to issue orders forthwith for the withdrawal of the three Greek divisions from Macedonia and one from Albania for their establishment on the Haliacmon [sic] line. He had himself in his able exposition of the situation emphasized the necessity for all possible speed. He has since maintained that no decision was to be taken until the attitude of Turkey and Yugoslavia were determined. That was certainly not the British understanding. It was admittedly a hard decision from the Greek political point of view to abandon western Thrace and Macedonia without a fight; and it may be that when the point came the decision proved too hard to take.[84]

Papagos, in his defence, insisted that he had not changed the position he adopted in the February meetings of 1941 with regard to the deployment of Greek troops. In his post war book he emphatically denied the claim that he had agreed to the immediate removal of Greek troops from the Bulgarian frontier to a line further south abandoning the Greek port of Salonika. He maintained that it was vital to determine the position of Yugoslavia before any movement of Greek troops could take place.

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[81] John S. Koliopoulos, "General Papagos and the Anglo-Greek Talks of February 1941," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. VIII, No. 3-4, 1980, p.45.
[82] Woodhouse, "The Aliakmon Line,"p.161.
[83] Higham, "A Case Study of Military-Diplomatic Command," footnote no.2, p.95.
[84] Wavell, "The British Expedition to Greece, 1941," p.181.

> I insisted, however, that before taking such a grave decision as would involve the evacuation of the whole region to the east of the Axios (Vardar) and the abandonment of this part of our national territory, the attitude of Yugoslavia should first be completely clarified, and I proposed that the Yugoslav Government should be informed of the decision we were prepared to take depending on the policy they intended to adopt. This suggestion of mine was accepted, and it was decided that the British Foreign Secretary should send an urgent code message to the British Minister in Belgrade. Depending on the nature of the reply the order for evacuation and withdrawal would be issued or not as the case might be.[85]

The Greeks, like the British, were aware of the importance to Yugoslavia of access to the seaport of Salonika. The Greeks viewed Salonika as an important bargaining chip. What else could induce Yugoslavia to form a Balkan front and risk a German attack? There had to be something in it for them.

Martin Van Creveld has argued that Papagos intentionally delayed the removal of the Greek troops in order to give his countrymen more time to negotiate a peace with Germany. 'Papagos, by deliberately juggling his figures in such a way as to persuade the British that their only chance was to stand back on the Aliakhmon, (sic) may have hoped to gain another week or two between the arrival of the Germans on the frontier and their first clash with the British on the Aliakhmon (sic) line, a time which might be used for negotiations.'[86] Creveld's conclusion however does not take into account Greek war aims and strategy that had little to do with peace negotiations with the Germans and more to do with Greece's traditional rivalry with Bulgaria. As a result of the 'Second Balkan War and the First World War, Greek-Bulgarian relations were determined by Bulgaria's wish to regain the lost territories. . . . One cause of tension between Bulgaria and Greece was the unsolved Thracian Question'[87] According to Greek historian John Koliopoulos Greece was caught totally unaware by the Italian attack because it was so fixated on fighting a static war against Bulgaria that it focused all its finances and strategy on building elaborate fortifications along the Greek – Bulgarian border.[88]

What Papagos wanted was not time to broker a peace deal with Germany, but to delay the German attack long enough to secure the Albanian front, hoping that this would release troops to be used in the war against Germany. He knew that Greece was not in a position to conduct a war on two fronts and under no circumstances would he have agreed to abandon the war against Italy in favour of fighting the Germans. 'By the time of the February round of talks, therefore, Greek appreciation of the situation was influenced by two priorities which, although they were never explicitly described to the British . . . were sacrosanct to the Greek General Staff: (a) to leave the Albanian front intact and not to jeopardize the position of the Greek army as the victor

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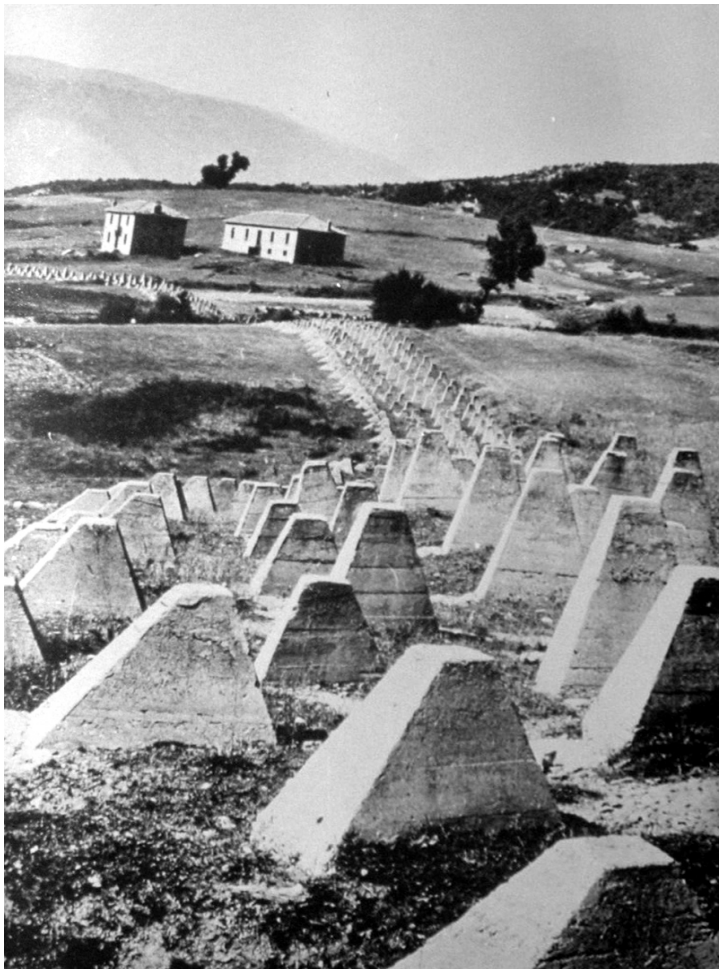
[85] Field Marshal Alexander Papagos, *The Battle of Greece 1940-1941*, Hellenic Publishing Company, 1949, p.323.
[86] Creveld, "Prelude to Disaster,"p.90.
[87] Hans-Joachim Hoppe, "Germany, Bulgaria, Greece: Their Relations and Bulgarian Policy in Occupied Greece," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. XI, No.3, Fall 1984, pp.41-43.
[88] Koliopoulos, "General Papagos and the Anglo-Greek Talks of February 1941," p.29.

against the Italians; and (b) to hold the Germans on the fortified line in eastern Macedonia – the hope of winning over Yugoslavia argued in favor (sic) of this line.'[89]



Metaxas Line
Courtesy War Museum, Nafplion, Greece.

Elisabeth Barker also does not believe that the Greeks were interested in negotiating a separate peace with Germany, for she explains that, 'The German White Book of 6 April 1941, recounting supposed German efforts to induce the Greeks to return to "genuine neutrality", said "the Greek government set at nought all these warnings. They also never . . . approached the German government with the object of discussing with them even the possibility of a return to neutrality." '[90] It is true, that the Greeks did not take up the German offers of peace, but they certainly took the German warnings about deployment of British troops in Northern Greece seriously. Basically the Greeks did not trust the Germans nor believe their offers of peace to be genuine. They were aware that the Germans had been trying to divide the Allied cause by casting aspersions on the motivation behind Britain's offer of help to Greece. Numerous

[89] Ibid p.40.
[90] *German White Book* 6.4.41 NAB: FO 371/29803 cited in Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe*, p.99.

German propaganda leaflets and posters had been circulated in Greece with that purpose in mind.

Greeks! For whom are you fighting?
Courtesy: War Museum Athens

Australia's role in the decision to send troops to Greece

While high-level negotiations that would ultimately involve the deployment of Australian troops to Greece were being conducted between Britain and Greece, there was no Australian representation at these meetings. There was never any question of involving the Dominions in the higher strategy of the war, nevertheless the British War Cabinet delayed as much as possible before informing the Dominion governments and their military leaders of the decision to support Greece. David Horner noted that 'although the British War Cabinet decided on 11 February 1941 to aid Greece and to send Eden and Dill to Cairo, it was not until 20 February that London saw fit to cable Australia that discussions were "proceeding with the Greek and Turkish Governments regarding their acceptance of assistance which is necessary they should

receive prior to [the] German attack." '[91] In the hope of absolving the Australian government of any responsibility over the Greek debacle, Percy Spender, the Australian Army Minister, stressed in his autobiography that it was not until the end of February that the government of Australia was formally told about the Greek expedition. Was Britain's delay intentional? Was it an attempt by the British to prevent Australia from vetoing a most controversial decision? It is clear that Churchill was concerned about a possible backlash from the Dominions over the Greek affair. In a cablegram to Cairo he demanded of Eden that:

> We must be able to tell the New Zealand and Australian Governments faithfully that this hazard from which they will not shrink, is undertaken not because of any commitment entered into by the Imperial General Staff, but because Dill, Wavell and other Commanders-in-Chief are convinced that there is a reasonable fighting chance . . . you have given us few facts or reasons on their authority which can be presented to these Dominions as justifying the operation on any grounds but *noblesse oblige*. A precise military appreciation is indispensable.[92]

Churchill had ordered Wavell to give priority to Greece over North Africa. Regardless of the dangers inherent in the Greek campaign, it had to go ahead for sound political if not military reasons. To do so, Wavell needed to ensure that the Australian General Officer Commanding, Thomas Blamey, did not have time to consider the operation too closely for fear he might boycott the mission. Thus Blamey was excluded from the meetings in Cairo between Wavell, Eden and Dill regarding the Greek campaign, although he 'was aware that Wavell's Joint Planning Staff was working on plans.'[93]

Considering that Australia's Army Minister also visited the Middle East in January 1941, it is even more surprising that it was not until 18 February that Wavell discussed the expedition to Greece with Blamey. General Wavell proposed to Blamey that the 6th and 7th Australian Divisions be used for the campaign in Greece. Furthermore Blamey maintained that Wavell did not ask him for his appreciation of the proposed campaign to Greece, but merely informed him of the decision. Blamey had been led to believe by General Wavell that the Australian Prime Minister had been briefed and had agreed to the campaign during his recent trip to the Middle East. Two weeks elapsed before Blamey placed on record his objections to the Greek campaign. In a letter to the Prime Minister, dated 5 March 1941, he described the Greek plan, 'as piecemeal despatch to Europe.' He was particularly critical of Britain's high handedness in appointing a British commander to a campaign comprised predominantly of Australian and New Zealand 'fighting troops' apart from one British armoured brigade who 'are practically all non-fighting troops . . . [the] . . . "British leaders have control of considerable bodies of first class dominion troops, while dominion commanders are excluded from all

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[91] David Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet: Directing Australia's War Effort 1939-45*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 1996, p.49.
[92] Churchill, *The Second Word War: Volume III*, pp.92-93.
[93] Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, p.51.

responsibility in control, planning and policy." '[94] By the time his letter had arrived in Australia it was too late to stop the expedition, for the '1st Armoured Brigade and advanced parties of 1 Australian Corps and of the New Zealand and 6th Australian Division had embarked for Greece in the cruisers *Gloucester*, *York* and *Bonaventure*.'[95]

AWM: 4867 Cairo January 1941 Australian Army Minister Mr. Percy Spender: General Sturdee & General Blamey talk things over with General Wavell.

Percy Spender has suggested: 'Was it possible because [Blamey] believed that the decision to send troops to Greece had been taken at the highest political level, both in England and Australia, [that] . . . he did not consider it appropriate to intervene? Or was the letter an attempt at 'fighting a rearguard action with history?' [96] Possibly it was Blamey's opportunity to place on record his point of view on the matter and in the process defends his reputation. But it is more likely, as Percy Spender had suspected, that Blamey felt constrained by the knowledge that the Australian Prime Minister had agreed to the mission and did not want to challenge his authority by taking the matter directly to the Australian government. It is far more likely that Dill's minute of the 6 March 1941, recording that Wavell had informed him 'that he had seen General Freyberg and General Blamey that afternoon and had told them both of the change in the situation and the greater risk involved. Both appeared to be prepared to face these risks and

[94] Letter from General Blamey to Prime Minister, 5 March 1941, Headquarters Middle East, NAA: Series MP729/7 Item 2/421/26.
[95] Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Collins in association with Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1986, p.23.
[96] Percy Spender, *Politics and a Man*, Collins, Sydney, 1972, p.131.

had shown no signs of wanting to back out,' was an attempt by Dill to protect the British from the criticisms that would surely flow from the Dominions, once the details of the Greek campaign were made public.[97] Blamey's recollection of the meeting on 6 March 1941 with Wavell was very different from Dill's account. In a letter to Spender, Blamey explained that during the 6 March meeting 'I ventured to remark that in my opinion the operations under consideration in Greece were "most hazardous" in view of our limited forces. Consequently it seemed incumbent on me to submit my views to you, and I sent a cable on the 8 March as follows - . . . "You will appreciate that as I am under operational direction of C in C Middle East I cannot do so without direction from you." '[98]

Blamey's delay in informing the Australian government of his reservations about the Greek campaign came under considerable fire in Australia. The issue particularly angered Spender who explained that:

> If Blamey had anything to say against the expedition, he took a long time to say it. Time was running out fast. Movement to embark the troops began on 5 March. . . . Early in the second week of March, I received a cable from Blamey asking permission to submit his views. Why he should have thought it necessary to seek my permission I will never know. He had unhindered communication with me, which he frequently used. If he had had earlier objections against the expedition it was not only his right, but his duty, to communicate them promptly to me as his Service Minister. On receipt of his signal I cabled him immediately to let me have his views.[99]

Not only Blamey's but also the Prime Minister of Australia, Robert Menzies's reputation was damaged by the Greek affair. The *Australian Worker* in its editorial of 11 June 1941 blamed Menzies for having 'too readily acquiesced in the ill-starred Greek campaign, of which the Cretan misadventure was the inevitable sequel.'[100] The deployment of predominantly Australian and New Zealand troops in the disastrous Greek campaign made the public both in Australia and New Zealand very angry. 'As a military adventure it was madness. As a political gesture it was stupid, because it was doomed to failure. What have been its fruits? – AIF in peril, Egypt endangered through weakening of forces there, and so suffered in prestige that a blow has been given to American aid.'[101]

To avoid culpability, those involved with the Greek debacle attempted to blame each other for supporting the British decision. Menzies maintains in his defence that Wavell had informed him that Blamey had been consulted and approved of the campaign. Pointing the finger at Blamey, Menzies insisted that 'Blamey knew his powers as GOC AIF and should not have hesitated to offer his views. Later Menzies said that "quite frankly . . . some pains had been

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[97] Appendices C.I.G.S.'s Diary.
[98] Letter from General Blamey to Minister for the Army, Percy Spender, 12 March 1941, NAA: Series MP 729/7, Item 2/421/2b.
[99] Spender, *Politics and a Man*, p.133.
[100] Editorial 11 June 1941, *The Australian Worker* in Australian involvement in the Greek Campaign: Sir Paul Hasluck Official Historian, p.8, AWM: 419/45/13.
[101] Ibid p.4.

taken to suppress the critical views of General Blamey".'[102] Gavin Long, in a private letter to Paul Hasluck refuted Menzies' explanation arguing, '[w]as it not as much [Menzies'] duty to obtain a full appreciation from Blamey as Blamey's to volunteer it?'[103] David Horner also maintained in his study of the controversial decision that 'Menzies might have made more effort to discuss the matter with Blamey or to seek his advice by cable.'[104] But what if Menzies did not want to do this? It makes more sense that the Prime Minister had intentionally avoided speaking to Blamey on the subject of Greece. By not speaking to his most senior military officer directly he could claim, with a clear conscience, that he had not been informed of the dangers involved in the Greek expedition. As a result however, the Australian government was ignorant of the real state of affairs in Europe.

AWM: 005866 Cairo February 1941 At the Dinner given in honour of Mr. Menzies. Left to right: Gen. Catroux; Air Vice Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore; His Excel, British Ambassador; Sir Thomas Blamey; the Hon. R. G. Menzies and Gen. A. Wavell.

This problem arose mainly because Australia was left out of the intelligence loop. Although the Australian government was given 'hints' of Greek disunity in the early cablegrams sent by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in February 1941, there was no full and frank discussion with Australia about Greece. In a 'most secret' circular z.139 sent on 21 April 1941 to the Prime Minister's Department, the Australian government was informed that the 'attempt by the King of Greece to restore confidence by appointment of Kotzias as Vice

[102] Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, p.59.
[103] Letter from Gavin Long to Paul Hasluck, 17 December 1948, p.2, AWM: 419/45/13/Item 109.
[104] Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, p.59.

President of the Council had had a bad effect. King therefore decided to form a strong military Government at once and in the afternoon of 19th April had practically decided to appoint General Mazarkis as Vice President instead of Kotzias . . . On 20th April however Mazarkis withdrew his acceptance of the post.'[105] Clearly there were problems in Greece but the Australian government appears not to have sought clarification from Britain on the matter.

Possibly this was because Australia was having difficulty accessing enough 'most secret' information.[106] Although the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs alerted Australian government as early as May 1940 that the Greek people 'are pro-ally, though with no very definite convictions, but the attitude of the Prime Minister is in some quarters considered doubtful,' overall very little intelligence was supplied by Britain to cause Australia concern about the proposed campaign to Greece.[107] The Australian government was in the unfortunate position of having very few channels for obtaining independent advice. David Horner has explained that:

> except for the High Commissioner in London, S. M. Bruce, Australia had no way of assessing the situation in the Balkans independently. All diplomatic information had to come from the Dominions Office, and was therefore a reflection and distillation of British reports. Bruce could attempt to assess the situation by contact with foreign embassies in London, and indeed he had some communication with the Turkish Ambassador, but there is no evidence that he was in close touch with the Greek or Yugoslav representatives.[108]

One would have to ask, why not, given that the Greek Ambassador to Britain, Charalambros Simopoulos, was briefing the British government and Foreign Office at regular intervals. Menzies accompanied by the Secretary of the Defence Department, Frederick Shedden, arrived in London on the 20 February 1941 to attend the British War Cabinet meeting at the time the Greek decision was being discussed. There was every opportunity for Menzies to refuse his consent to the campaign. Therefore, if he was genuinely worried, as he later professed, why did he not intervene with Churchill? There are only a few comments by the Prime Minister of Australia recorded in the Defence Committee meeting minutes of February to May 1941. This is perplexing, given the hazardous nature of the Greek campaign and its reliance on predominantly Australian and New Zealand troops. Menzies was to pay later for his silence on the matter, as complaints came from Australia that 'though on the spot in London, it appeared that he had done little to interfere or protest as one mistake followed another.'[109]

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[105] Circular Z.139 from Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London to Prime Minister's Department, Melbourne, 21 April 1941, Balkan Situation – Yugoslavia, Greece – Turkey 15 March 1941-1 May 1941, NAA: Series A816 Item 19/301/1061.
[106] David Horner, *High Command: Australia & Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1982, p.65
[107] Cablegram from Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Circular D. 198, 19 May 1940 to [Australian] Prime Minister, NAA: Series A1608 Item A41/1/3 Part 1.
[108] Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, p.49
[109] A.W. Martin & Patsy Hardy, *Dark and Hurrying Days: Menzies' 1941 Diary*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1993, Appendix 1 The Greek Campaign, p.150.

Could it be, as David Day has suggested, that Menzies did not want the Labor members of the Advisory War Council to be privy to the details of the Greek campaign? He was not popular amongst his cabinet colleagues in any case, and he did not want to give the Labor members, who were against Australian involvement in Europe, reasons to veto the Greek campaign. Day claimed that when the 'handicaps under which the Australian troops had operated' became known in Australia 'it all added up to political catastrophe for the governing United Australia Party and it was a situation largely the result of Menzies' original decision not to consult and involve the Labor Party in making the commitment of Australian forces to Greece.'[110] The only reasonable explanation for Menzies's silence on the subject of Greece was that although he was cognisant of the risks involved, he was prepared to accept them if it meant Britain would support Australia in the event of a Japanese attack. Churchill however refused to be tied down, advising Menzies that the Chiefs of Staff did not have time to examine a hypothetical scenario involving a possible attack on Australia by Japan. He insisted instead that: 'all efforts must be concentrated on winning the battle, and driving the Germans out of Libya.'[111]

The minutes of the Chiefs of Staff meeting of 7 March 1941 recorded that: 'Mr. Menzies, on whom a special burden rested, was full of courage.'[112] No doubt he would need lots of courage to explain to the Advisory War Council back home why he had agreed to the use of Australian troops in such a dangerous venture. The Defence Committee minutes of the 29 April 1941, noted that, 'MR. MENZIES said that he was quite willing not to have any written statement on the subject, and would welcome a discussion with the Chiefs of Staff, from which he could form a background for the discussions which he would have on his return to Australia.'[113] This was probably a very wise political decision on his part. At least without a written record he could feign ignorance of the consequences of any controversial decisions taken during his stay in London. It was only after the situation reports began arriving in London on Greece that Menzies started asking questions and demanding answers. As David Day concluded, '[f]rom London, Menzies looked on with horror at the result of his inaction. He desperately strove to minimise the political repercussions on Australia while at the same time maximising the dissatisfaction in London and firmly focussing it on Churchill.'[114] With the crisis unfolding in Greece Menzies felt it was his duty to extend his stay in London, explaining to Fadden that: 'I appear to be the only Minister outside the Prime Minister who will question

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[110] David Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986, reprinted 1993, p.142.
[111] Minutes of a Meeting held at 10, Downing Street, Tuesday, 29 April 1941, at 5pm of the Defence Committee (Operation) of the War Cabinet, NAB: CAB 69/2/135.
[112] Churchill, *The Second Word War: Volume III*, p.94.
[113] Minutes of the War Cabinet Defence Committee (Operations), 29 April 1941, Downing Street, NAB: CAB 69/2/135/139.
[114] Day, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, p.142.

any of his views or insist upon points being examined, and [given] Australia has so much at stake it would be most unwise for me [to leave].'[115]

Sensing the political ramifications that might follow Greece, Menzies took a far more active interest in the Greek campaign once it began than he had previously shown. He wrote to Fadden in April 1941 explaining that he had 'once more impressed upon Portal the matter of air reinforcement to cover the embarkation. Cabinet has also agreed that Wavell and Wilson are to be told that absolute priority of embarkation is to be given to men and not machines.'[116] By the end of April he was seeking reassurances from Dill and Wavell that, 'the Australian Liaison Officer was kept fully informed of the availability of equipment.'[117]

To his credit, Menzies did demand a greater say in the conduct of the war for the Dominions, insisting that Australia and New Zealand be consulted before an answer was given to Washington's suggestion that 'a considerable part of their Pacific Fleet [be moved] into the Atlantic.' Addressing the War Cabinet meeting he insisted that the 'issues raised were of first-class importance to both Dominions. He thought that it would be a profound error if this matter was communicated to Australia and New Zealand on the basis that a decision had already been taken by the United Kingdom without any prior consultation with them.'[118]

Regardless of Menzies' efforts to obtain a greater role in London for the Dominions, Australia's relationship with the mother country was badly affected by the campaign in Greece. It exacerbated imperial tensions, fuelling Australia's desire to exert direct control over the deployment of its troops. As John Gooch has stressed, 'Australia went to war in 1939 nursing a collective memory of the sacrifice she had made to British strategy and British generalship at Gallipoli and on the Western Front during the previous war which made her understandably wary of both. Within two years Australian confidence began to falter: even before the debacle in Malaya, the mishandling of the campaign in Greece and Crete in 1941 gave her reason to question London's implicit claims to strategic wisdom and operational competence.'[119] Britain's lack of genuine consultation with Australia over the Greek decision certainly upset Spender who recorded his displeasure at Britain's cavalier treatment in his memoirs.

> The absence of communication and consultation, at the critical time, between Governments of the United Kingdom and Australia, on a matter involving Australian forces, was extraordinary. No less extraordinary, it seems to me, was the apparent reluctance or delay by the G.O.C., A.I.F., to communicate his views to his Minister, or otherwise to the Australian Government, until so late in the day.[120]

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[115] Cablegram from Menzies to Fadden, 15 April 1941, NAA: Series CP290/9 item 13.
[116] Cablegram from Menzies to Fadden, 21 April 1941, ibid.
[117] Cablegram from Menzies to Fadden, 27 April 1941, ibid.
[118] Minutes of Meeting held in the House of Commons Annexe on Thursday, 1 May 1941 at 1pm, Defence Committee (Operation), War Cabinet, NAB: CAB69/2/147.
[119] John Gooch, "The Politics of Strategy: Great Britain, Australia and the War against Japan, 1939-1945, *War and Society*, Vol. 10, No.4, 2003, p.425.
[120] Spender, *Politics and a Man*, p.135.

'The whole episode of the Greek campaign,' says Woodward, 'again illustrated Britain's handling of the dominions as though they were "pawns" – readily available to be manipulated in the empire (that is, British) interest.'[121] Acting Prime Minister Arthur Fadden expressed his frustration at Britain's flagrant disregard of Australia's opinion on the matter. In a cablegram sent to Menzies in London on 31 March 1941 Fadden stated

> [m]y colleagues and I feel resentment that while some discussion appears to have taken place with the High Command, Blamey's views as General-Officer-Commanding of the force which apparently is to take the major part in the operations should not have been sought and that he was not asked to express any opinion. This not only deeply affects the question of Empire relationship but also places us in embarrassing situation with the Advisory War Council and with Parliament, particularly as I have there stressed the fact as stated in your cable that General Blamey had agreed to the operation.[122]

Rumours were circulating in the press that Australia had not been consulted over the Greek campaign. In response, Fadden issued a press statement on 9 April 1941 claiming that 'the Government is being kept fully informed and Australia's advice is being actively sought.'[123] This did not silence the critics however and on 20 April 1941 *The Sun* newspaper demanded to know

> [h]ad the Government ever had full information concerning the war in the Middle East? Without this knowledge it is obviously unable to judge whether any moves proposed are wise or unwise, and to protect Australian forces from what may prove costly or even disastrous errors of the politicians and military authorities of Great Britain. . . . The people having sons and brothers and husbands in the AIF, will hardly be satisfied with a Government which merely protests that it did not know.[124]

Arthur Fadden was angry with Menzies for implicating him in the Greek mess. Unfortunately the Australian cabinet was dependant on the Australian Prime Minister, now in London for advice on the matter. In a sense, Menzies misled both Fadden and the Australian parliament, citing Blamey's apparent approval of the campaign as the reason for his support of the venture.

The disastrous outcome of the Greek campaign had the politicians back home in Australia reeling from the shock and ducking for cover from the inevitable fall-out that would follow once the relatives of the soldiers had been informed. For once news of the outcome of the battle was known, various Labor members in the Australian Parliament 'accused the British of "cold-blooded murder" in despatching poorly-equipped troops to be "butchered" in Greece and Crete and urged that Australian soldiers "never again . . . be allowed to fight in such unfavourable

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[121] D. F. Woodward, "Australian Diplomacy with regard to the Greek Campaign February-March 1941," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1978, pp.225-226.
[122] Arthur Fadden, Cablegram, 31/3/1941 No. 0.3845, Prime Minister's Department, Series, NAA: .MP729/7 Item: 2/421/26.
[123] Press statement issued by Prime Minister's Department, 9 April 1941, NAA: A1608, Item A41/1/1 Part 20.
[124] *The Sun* 20 April 1941, Australian Involvement in the Greek Campaign, Paper of Sir Paul Hasluck Official Historian, AWM: 3DRL 8052.

circumstances." '[125] The British War Cabinet was furious that sensitive information about the campaign had been leaked to the press in Australia, resulting in virulent criticism of Britain's handling of the campaign. As *The Bulletin* stated

> "the country" – it might well have said the Empire – "will demand an explanation of the present deplorable strategical situation," and "will want to know how far Mr. Eden and Sir John Dill were allowed to overrule the judgment of Sir Archibald Wavell," . . . "travelling politicians have proved a nuisance in peace-time; in war-time they can become a national danger." Mr Eden is more distinguished for his emotional idealism than for judgment. We cannot imagine a worse counsellor on the hard, realistic facts of war.[126]

Menzies urged Fadden to treat with utmost secrecy any dispatches sent to him, 'as I am transmitting some of this information without consultation with Churchill. Should any leakage occur, the gravest results may follow.'[127] Fadden suspected that the leak was coming from the Department of Information that was responsible for press briefings.[128]

Fadden tried to silence the papers by threatening them with closure. The Bulletin's responded by printing a full-page cartoon of Artie Fadden with the caption, ' "HEIL ARTIE!" Mr Fadden intimated that the Government proposed to take action against a section of the Press. He described the editorial comment on the Greek campaign as "un-British, un-Australian, and unpatriotic." "I will name the papers in due course," he said. "All I will say is that a certain line of action has been taken." '[129] In the end Fadden could do nothing to quell the bad publicity generated by the Greek and Crete debacles. After his return from London Menzies received considerable criticism from members of his party resigning as Prime Minister on 28 August 1941. Fadden replaced Menzies but was superseded within a few months by John Curtin, the Labor party leader.

Conclusion

Without doubt the Greek campaign was a military disaster. It led to a loss of life, loss of equipment and for Australia, the imprisonment of many of its troops. It played little part in delaying Hitler's invasion of Russia but helped prevent supplies reaching the German army in North Africa. It was not part of a 'Grand Allied war strategy' but a political chess game being played out between Britain and Germany produced by the exigencies of the time. It was an attempt by the British to counter the diplomatic and political manoeuvrers of the Germans in the Balkans. Both countries were involved in a fierce propaganda campaign in the region to

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[125] David Day, "Anzacs on the Run: the View from Whitehall 1941-42," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 14, No. 3, p.189.
[126] *The Bulletin*, 23rd April 1941 p.8.
[127] Cablegram from Menzies in London 26 April 1941 to Acting Prime Minister Fadden, NAA: CP290/9 item 8,
[128] Cablegram from Acting Prime Minister Fadden to Menzies 28 April 1941, ibid.
[129] *The Bulletin*, 7 May 1941, p.7.

convince the Balkan states to support them against the other.[130] The decision to send troops to Greece was a knee-jerk reaction by the British to an increasingly threatening and volatile situation in the Mediterranean that seemed to change day by day.[131]

Robin Higham argued that the British had no real intention of assisting Greece.[132] They had no knowledge of the country, no maps, no understanding of the rail system built with technology supplied by the Germans who conversely had close trade relations with the Greeks; and they had no understanding of Greek weaponry which was mainly French and Bulgarian and not compatible with British ammunition. Sheila Lawlor also refuted the idea that the Battle for Greece was part of a 'Grand war strategy' by Britain but merged 'out of a series of conflicting and changing views, misunderstanding, personal interests . . . The views and interventions of all those involved differed, and continued to change (often daily and sometimes hourly).'[133]

Britain and her Allies have maintained the myth that they had to honour the obligation they made to Greece in 1939 and fight for 'a good cause at a great risk.' [134] This version of history generates warm fuzzy feelings in the reader and justifies, for the soldiers involved in the campaign, why their leaders placed them in such a hazardous situation. It is an attempt to give the Greek debacle a positive spin. The reality of course, was quite different. Britain did not have to go into Greece, losing a large amount of their troops and equipment. They had been offered numerous opportunities by the Greeks to back out of the arrangement, knowing the odds against them. Far from extricating themselves from the Greek entanglement the British from January to March 1941 tried everything in their power to convince the Greeks, against their better judgement, to accept the token force being offered. Francis De Guingand, a junior staff officer, who was present at the British meetings with the Greeks in Athens contended that, 'we misled [Greece] as to our ability to help. We led her to believe that this help would be effective. The grounds for arriving at this view appeared extremely scanty. And the result was that we lost many lives, all our valuable equipment, and jeopardised our whole position in the Middle East. We brought about disaster in the Western Desert and threw away a chance of clearing up as far as Tripoli.'[135]

Thus the altruistic interpretation of the decision to send troops to Greece bears very little relation to reality. British self-interest motivated the War Cabinet at every angle at the expense of Greece and its people. According to Robert Ovelmen, 'the decision to send a British force to

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[130] Yiannis D. Stefanidis, ' "Preaching to the Converted": The British Propaganda Campaign in Greece, 1939-1941,'*Proceeding of an International Conference: Greece and the War in the Balkans 1940-41*, 1992.
[131] Baker, *British Policy in South-East Europe*, pp.3-4.
[132] Robin Higham, *Diary of a Disaster: British Aid to Greece 1940-41*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 1986.
[133] Lawlor, "Greece, March 1941: The Politics of British Military Intervention,"pp.933-34.
[134] Reid, Richard, *A Great Risk in a Good Cause: Australians in Greece and Crete April-May 1941*, Department of Veteran Affairs, Canberra, 2001.
[135] De Guingand, *Operation Victory*, p.80.

Greece was taken for essentially political reasons. . . . The operation was based on unrealistic hopes, conflicting justifications, and implemented with inadequate resources. . . . It was offered and sent for reasons that involved primarily British interests, and only secondarily British obligations to Greece. It was a gamble that never, in the circumstances of early 1941, had a realistic chance to succeed.'[136] Eden's comment to American Ambassador, Lincoln MacVeagh on 3 March 1941 encapsulates the British position: 'even if the Germans occupy Greece it will be of no particular effect on the war, since Britain by that time will be "sitting pretty" in Africa. To fight her way to the domination of the whole Balkans will do Germany no good, since she will be enclosed in the circle of the British blockade, and as he put it "playing football in her own cabbage-patch." '[137]

In the end the British were forced into Greece, under progressively unfavourable conditions, hoist by their own petard. '[W]e had looked forward to taking part in a sound military plan to hold a strong solid line. Now we were faced with a plan which we did not like; a wide front thinly held in Macedonia; no reduction of the forces in Albania; and insufficient troops to hold the line on which it had been intended to give battle.'[138] By trying to checkmate the Greeks into accepting a British force, they had inadvertently placed themselves in March 1941 in a very vulnerable position from which they were unable to extricate themselves without openly criticising their Greek allies. Wavell explained their predicament. 'I think it may have been psychological and political considerations that tilted the balance in the end over the military dangers. To have withdrawn at this stage, on grounds which could not have been made public, would have been disastrous to our reputation in the U.S.A. and with other neutrals.'[139] Not to mention the Dominion governments who relied heavily for their advice about the war on the British. The Greeks clearly understood why the British finally had to enter Greece. In their official history of the campaign written by the Greek Army they state that: '[u]nder these circumstances it was agreed that a British Expeditionary Force be sent to Greece, for the prestige of the British with little hope of a successful outcome of the operation.'[140]

The fact that Australia was not properly consulted over the decision to send its troops to Greece indicates its limited power, position and prestige within the British Commonwealth. The Greek episode highlights Australia's junior status in its relationship with Britain, left out of the decision-making loop but nevertheless expected to acquiesce to British decisions and priorities during the war. Britain dominated and controlled all aspects of the Greek campaign and did not

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[136] Robert C Ovelmen, The British Decision to Send Troops to Greece: January-April 1941, PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame, Indiana, 1985, pp.388-389.
[137] John O. Iatrides, (ed.) *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports Greece, 1933-1947*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1980, pp.305-306.
[138] Dill speaking at the meeting held at the British Legation, Athens 3rd March 1941 in Appendices to C.I.G.S.'s Diary of His Visit to the Mediterranean February-April 1941, p.73.
[139] Wavell, "The British Expedition to Greece, 1941," p.182.
[140] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian and Greek German War*, p.174.

allow Australia access to the Greek talks. The exclusion of the Australian high command in the discussions and planning of the expedition meant that the Australian government and its officers were unaware of the real dangers involved in the operation until it was too late. Australia was left in ignorance of Greece's urgent supply problems and the desperate plight of its army. Greece's soldiers were worn out by the Italian campaign and were in no position to fight the Germans the following spring, even if they had the will to do so. Furthermore the Australians were not given the command of the expedition consisting predominantly of Australian troops.[141]

If the Australian Advisory War Council and its Chiefs of Staff had been privy to the real situation in Greece they may have been more strident in their opposition to the expedition. Blamey's letter, expressing his doubts about the Greek campaign, arrived too late to be of any use to the Australia government, though David Horner doubted if it would have changed their decision in the final analysis.[142] It might have done if they thought the backlash from the campaign would lose them the next election. The British War Cabinet report on the Dominions for April 1941 noted that the campaign in the Balkans had developed into 'a major domestic issue in Australia. . . . [C]ertain Sydney papers could not resist the temptation of making capital out of the alarming reports from Europe to secure either a change of Government in Australia or a coalition . . . . The crisis became most acute on the 23 and 24 April, when the Government were reported to be "badly rattled." '[143]

Britain was certainly guilty of deception by omission, for it denied Australia access to vital information about the campaign that could have informed its decision on whether or not to commit troops to Greece.[144] Australia's inability to access independent intelligence on Greece placed it in a position of being easily manipulated by Britain. In a letter to Paul Hasluck, Gavin Long, Australia's official historian, questioned whether there was 'a whole-hearted desire on the part of the British Government to confide in and in appropriate matters, consult the dominion governments – to obtain the same kind of relations as existed between "Churchill and Roosevelt." And was there a whole-hearted determination by the Australian Government to obtain full information and early and genuine consultation? My present opinion is that the answer is an emphatic No.'[145] The Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, certainly did not have the close and intimate relationship of the kind Winston Churchill enjoyed with Franklin

[141] Although there were 21,880 British army troops compared to 17, 125 Australians, they were mainly support troops involved in logistics not front line fighting troops. The British were only able to deploy one armoured Brigade to Greece that was led by Brigadier Charrington.
[142] Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, pp. 59-60.
[143] Reports for the Month of April 1941 for the Dominions, India, Burma and the Colonies, Protectorates and Mandated Territories, NAB: CAB 68/8/80.
[144] Ibid p.98
[145] Letter from Gavin Long to Paul Hasluck, 17 December 1948, p.2, AWM: 419/45/13/Item 109.

Roosevelt. Churchill had exchanged almost 2,000 letters and had spent one hundred and thirteen days during the war with Roosevelt including Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years.[146]

Menzies on the other hand found Churchill to be a bully and was very critical of his autocratic leadership style. 'The Cabinet is deplorable – dumb men most of who disagree with Winston but none of whom dare to say so,' he wrote in his diary of his 1941 visit to London. 'This state of affairs is most dangerous. The Chiefs of Staff are without exception yes Men, and a politician runs the services. Winston is a dictator; he cannot be overruled, and his colleagues fear him.'[147] David Day has gone so far as to suggest that Menzies had imperial ambitions and wanted to oust Churchill and take his place as the head of a United Kingdom War Cabinet that would include representatives from the Dominions.[148]

While the British have been blamed for their duplicitous conduct over the Greek affair, Menzies is also culpable for not being as diligent as he might otherwise have been. Menzies could have made an effort to establish a better working relationship with the British Prime Minister. Though it should be acknowledged that Menzies did attempt to gain more influence for the Dominions over the conduct of the war. According to Day however, 'Menzies refused to claim from Britain a greater allocation of shipping for Australia's primary products. Instead he accepted a 50 per cent cut in the value of exports for the following year.' [149] The Australian government could have negotiated concessions from Britain, as it possessed a strong bargaining chip in the form of its armed forces. John Robertson concluded from his study of Australia's relationship with Britain during World War II that

> [w]ithout the Australians the war in the Middle East in 1941 would have been very different, though in what way it is impossible to say, because this depends on the extent to which Britain would have been prepared to send [its] own divisions to the theatre. Possibly there would have been no Greece and Cretan campaign if there had been no Australians (and New Zealanders) in the area. By holding Tobruk in 1941 the Australians almost certainly saved the British position in the Middle East from complete collapse. The Australian 9th Division played a crucial role in the battle of El Alamein, the turning-point in the North African campaign. [150]

During the early part of the war 1939-1941, Dominion troops constituted the majority of the fighting forces in the Middle East. Britain had retained over ten divisions in the United Kingdom in readiness for a possible German invasion. It was only after Germany's invasion of Russia in June 1941 that British troops were release for military service elsewhere. Australia, in reality, had more political power than it chose to exercise without necessarily sacrificing its

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[146] Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship*, Random House, New York, 2003.
[147] Robert Menzies, Diary entry Monday April 14th 1941, in Martin & Hardy (eds.) *Dark and Hurrying Days: Menzies' 1941 Diary*, p.112.
[148] David, *Menzies and Churchill at War*, p.145.
[149] Ibid p.148.
[150] John Robertson, "Australian War Policy 1939-1945," *Historical Studies* [Australia], Vol. 17, No. 69, 1977, p.503.

alliance with Britain. Horner has suggested that the government in Australia 'made little effort to anticipate British strategy, or to influence the strategy in the formative stages' because with the exception of William Morris Hughes, who was ill, and Menzies who was overseas, they lacked experience.[151]

An examination of the strategic decision to send Australian troops to Greece indicates that Australia should have been proactive in its quest for the truth about the viability of the campaign and made it its business to find out more about the people and the country it had agreed to deploy its troops to. Britain's refusal to include Australia in the negotiations, preparations and leadership of the campaign placed Australian troops in a vulnerable position both on the mainland of Greece as well as in Crete, a situation that could have been avoided with joint planning and shared intelligence. Furthermore Britain's control of the negotiations with the Greeks denied Australia the opportunity to establish an effective military relationship with its Greek ally before the commencement of the campaign.

[151] Horner, *Inside the War Cabinet*, p.55.

Chapter Two

Greek–Australian military relations on mainland Greece

Relations between allies at a military level have been neglected in previous studies of the Greek campaign. Australian accounts have tended to discuss the campaign as if the Greeks were not present.[1] They have been written out of the narrative of the war as though their behaviour and performance had no bearing on what befell the Australians in Greece. Most studies of the campaign do not refer to the Greek Army's account, or the perceptions of the Greek Commander-in-Chief, General Alexandros Papagos, nor do they offer a glimpse of what the Greek commanders were thinking at the time of their surrender to the Germans. This chapter aims to address these omissions and in the process explain why the relationship between the Australian and Greek military on the Greek mainland failed.

The Australians, having been excluded from the negotiations with the Greeks prior to the commencement of the campaign, met their new ally for the first time on the battlefield. The relationship between the Australian and Greek military commanders did not commence in an auspicious way. The absence at the outset of the campaign of an adequate number of interpreters created major communication problems for the Australian officers, resulting in little co-ordination with their Greek ally. Furthermore the divided loyalties of some of the Greek General Staff, including key politicians, made the campaign in Greece far more difficult than it ought to have been. Greece's relationship with Germany prior to the war produced an abundance of Fifth Columnists in the country, creating a security nightmare for the Australians, who were required to maintain law and order on the roads leading south to the evacuation ports. It was a scenario that they had not anticipated, as they had not been privy to any intelligence about the Greeks. The British, who had a considerable number of agents operating in Greece prior to the campaign, had not included the Australians in the intelligence loop.[2]

Post war writings about the campaign have tended to gloss over some of the more unsavoury aspects of allied relations in Greece. This includes the writing of Australia's official historian, Gavin Long, who was advised by one of the brigade commanders in Greece not to blame the Greek soldiers for the behaviour of their commanding officers. 'We should take pains to be fair to the Greeks,' explained Brigadier Stanley Savige, 'I was convinced, as I still am, that the faults of the Greek Forces whom we contacted were with the Commanders and not with the Troops.'[3] Although Long alluded to the military problems between the Australians and Greeks on several occasions throughout his narrative he did not pursue the matter in the official

[1] See Introduction for details.
[2] SOE activities in Greece 1940-1942 (Chapter 1-6) by Major Ian Pirie 1945, NAB: HS 7/150.
[3] Letter from Lieutenant General S. G. Savige to Gavin Long 16 April 1951, Papers of Gavin Long, AWM: 67 3/348, part 2.

history.[4] It would not have been acceptable during the heightened Cold war era when Gavin Long was writing to be openly critical of Australia's allies.[5] Greece had joined NATO soon after the war – making it closely aligned to America and its friends.[6] Long, however, was not a puppet of the establishment. His correspondence with senior military officers clearly reflected his desire to secure the truth. Nevertheless he had to abide by government policy or suffer the same fate as Kenneth Slessor.[7]

Floyd Spencer, reviewing the literature on Greece observed that British official accounts of the war in Greece were circumspect about the Greeks and 'confined themselves to a bald narrative of events, not assigning blame to any Greek element. However, it is apparent between the lines that, while responsible British officers thought well of the heroism and competence of Greek soldiers and officers in the mass, they had little respect for the planning ability or military realism of the high Greek staff.'[8] Ian Sabey, an Australian intelligence officer in Greece, was infuriated by Britain's and Australia's attempt to conceal the true nature of allied relations in Greece explaining that

> [o]ne of the curious twists to the reports that have been permitted to dribble through to Britain and Australia regarding the Greek campaign was that the Greeks had remained loyal to their friends, the British. If rank, ripe, redolent fifth columnism (sic) is set down as loyalty, then the official version is accurate. If a vast network of spies in town, village and mountainside spells feverish anxiety to the British cause, then these southern Greeks were our warmest allies. Even the priests were in the pay of the Germans. So weak was the British position in Athens at the best of times that the German Ambassador and his twenty aides de camps walked the streets of our main city of operational movement, while we were taking up positions to stop the Germans. A fifth columnist (sic) harbour master wrecked Britain's only chance of remaining in Greece successfully by blowing up

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[4] Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete, Syria*, Collins in Association with the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1953.There are glimpses in Long's footnotes of what was really going on that are not openly discussed in the main body of the text.

[5] The 'Cold War' era refers to the period after the Second World War of intense rivalry between Communist countries led by the Soviet Union and non-Communist countries under the leadership of the United States.

[6] NATO or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was a military alliance formed between twelve nations on the 4 April 1949 to deter Soviet aggressive towards non-Soviet countries. The original twelve members were: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States, Greece and Turkey joined later in 1952 and West Germany in 1955. The member nations agreed to the principle that an attack on any member of the alliance would be considered as an attack on itself. In 1955 the Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe led by USSR formed their own military alliance in opposition to NATO called the Warsaw Pact. The original member states were: USSR, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungry, Poland and Romania. East Germany joined in 1956.

[7] Kenneth Slessor, who was the official correspondent in Greece, resigned from his position having been criticised by government and military officials for his outspokenness during the war, *The Argus*, "Official War Report's Resignation: Friction with Army Authorities," Melbourne, 24 February 1944, NLA: MS 3929/14/40-109. After the war, those tasked with writing the official history of Australian involvement in WWII were chosen using stringent selection criteria.

[8] Floyd A Spencer, *War and Postwar Greece: an Analysis based on Greek Writings*, Library of Congress, Washington, 1952, p.9.

half Piraeus Harbour and almost every ship in it. He was shot for his activity. But so were we.[9]

AWM: 134866 Piraeus, port of Athens 1941. Some of the damage sustained from German aircraft bombing.

The Greek campaign undoubtedly was one of the most frustrating experiences of the war for the Australian officers. Dropped in the middle of Greece's battle with Italy, facing the German menace with little knowledge of the country, the people, the odds against them or even the terrain or climatic conditions, the Australian officers were expecting to be involved in a joint defence line along the Aliakmon river, only to find that the Greek Commander-in-Chief, General Alexandros Papagos, had not moved his troops from the Metaxas line on Greece's northern border with Bulgaria.[10] This decision placed the Australians in a far more dangerous position in Greece than had been predicted.

Australian troops were feeling buoyant after their success in the Western Desert. This feeling did not last long when faced with the unpleasant realities of Greece. Shipped in early March 1941 to Greece without adequate equipment, and limited transport that was not suitable for mountain warfare to face a highly mechanised and well-equipped enemy with enormous

[9] Ian Sabey, *Stalag Scrapbook*, F.W. Cheshire Pty Ltd., London, 1947, p. 37. The commencement of the German attack of Greece began with a land attack through Bulgaria and an aerial attack on Greece's main port of Pireaus where the *Clan Fraser*, a munition ship had been docked and setting the entire port alight. This resulted in the main port of Greece being out of action for the remainder of the campaign.

[10] The Greek High Command felt it was too late to move the troops from the Bulgaria frontier as Germany had divisions amassed there in readiness for their attack on Greece. The Greeks were not prepared to give up North-eastern Greece and the port of Salonika without a fight. The Bulgarians had replaced the Turks as Greece's number one enemy while Turkey ironically, given its previous history with the Greeks, had been supplying the Greek army in Albania.

resources at their disposal the Australian troops found themselves in a very vulnerable position on the Greek frontier with Yugoslavia. The sheer weight of numbers of the German forces bearing down upon them puts an end to any speculation that the campaign could have been won.[11] According to Anzac Corps' operational report by the 'end of March, the Germans had 23 Divisions on the Southern Bulgarian Frontier, facing Greece and Yugoslavia. Of these, 6 Divisions faced Eastern Thrace, 7 Central Thrace, 6 Northern Macedonia and 5, the Eastern Frontier of Yugoslavia. During the operations under review, Anzac Corps came into contact with 7 Divisions.' [12]

The Anzacs were constantly 'on the run' and 'in retreat' for the entire operation. The British account of the battle refers to the Greek campaign as 'a withdrawal ' from start to finish.[13] Although it lasted approximately one month, it was a most traumatic experience for those involved. Most writers have avoided referring to the campaign in Greece as a 'rout' but that is exactly what it was as the German forces had the upper hand for the entire operation. They chased the Anzacs out of Greece at breakneck speed, aided and abetted by members of the Greek government and military command. The Australian officers knew little about what was happening in Greece for most of the campaign. They were lucky to have escaped with so many troops, given their ignorance of the political situation in the country. According to Brigadier Rowell, ' [the Germans] handled [their] air force in an incredibly stupid manner, otherwise I am convinced that not a single man would ever have got away.' [14]

Although a promise of help had been made to Greece as early as 1939 to come to their aid should a German attack take place, the British had done little to prepare for a campaign. 'They had never systematically collected information on the country.'[15] They had little knowledge of the terrain, rail and road system and weaponry used by the Greeks, and even their maps of the country were antiquated and out of date. 'The first troops to move forward . . . were the Armoured Brigade, who . . . referred to the larger scale War Office [maps] as "grossly inaccurate and operationally dangerous".' [16] The 'Greek Army and Air Force were equipped with French, Czech and Polish arms all entirely incompatible with British equipment.'[17] Greece was fast running out of ammunition for these weapons and was not in a position to buy or manufacture any. It would be left to Britain to rearm the Greeks with British weaponry and munitions if they wanted them to continue fighting. This was not likely to happen as Britain was

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[11] See Appendix A German Forces in Greece.
[12] Operations of the Anzac Corps in Greece- 1941, NAA: A2671, 373/1941.
[13] Major –General I.S.O. Playfair, *The War in the Middle East and Mediterranean*, Vol. II, United Kingdom Military Histories Series, H.M.S.O., 1956, p.83.
[14] Letter from Rowell to Morshead, 17 May 1941, AWM: 54 225/1/11.
[15] Robin Higham, "British Intervention in Greece 1940-1941: The Anatomy of a Grand Deception," *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1982, pp.101-102.
[16] Greece: paper on an investigation by Inter-Service Committee on a report by General Sir Maitland Wilson 1941 July, NAB: WO 106/3161.
[17] Higham, "British Intervention in Greece 1940-1941," p.101.

struggling to maintain its own army. They were even experiencing difficulties supplying Greece with coal for its railway. It was late February 1941 before Brigadier Brunskill arrived in Athens to take charge of the campaign logistics.[18] Understandably Britain's lack of knowledge of the country and poor planning added to the difficulties Australian commanders encountered in Greece.

The Germans, unlike the British, had done a considerable amount of forward planning for the campaign and 'as early as 13 July 1940 [they] were taking high altitude photographs of Athens and other parts of Greece.'[19] They had a very good knowledge of the country's topography and from February – March 1941 they had been moving men and equipment into Bulgaria. Dressed in mufti, German soldiers were engaged in building airstrips and bridges to ensure that their troops were ready to move quickly when ordered. They also had a strong economic relationship with Greece prior to the war. Germany had invested in many Greek infrastructure projects, including the building of the Greek railway system. Robert Vial, an Australian intelligence officer in Greece, recalled 'that it was said that the telephone exchange in Athens had been installed by a German company and approximately 50 Germans were still manning the exchanges. As most of the telephone communication to the Army went through the exchange, security was quite a problem.'[20] Many Greek businessmen had connections with German companies. According to Hondros, 'Germany accounted for 43 percent of Greece's exports and 31 percent of her imports. By the eve of the war, Germany had replaced Britain as Greece's dominant trading partner.'[21] Hence Germany's threat to cut economic ties with Greece prior to the commencement of the campaign would have been of serious concern to the Greek government, though they feigned indifference at the time.

Greece also had close political ties with Germany. General Ioannis Metaxas, the President of Greece who had come into power with a military coup referred to as the '4th August' plot supported by the Greek King in 1936, had been educated in Germany. Although a loyal Greek of aristocratic background he had pro-fascist leanings. Once in office he purged the Greek government of most of its republican or pro-democratic ministers leaving predominantly pro-German ministers in power. The Greek Army suffered a similar fate with a significant number of its Republican officers exiled to the island of Sykros. 'About 950 officers, representing one-quarter of the total officer strength were dismissed. A serious shortage of officers resulted and in 1939 the officer strength was under 3,000.'[22] So great was Metaxas' fear of these officers that even Greece's war against Italy in Albania could not induce him to

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[18] G. S. Brunskill, "The Administrative Aspect of the Campaign in Greece in 1941," *Army Quarterly*, 1937, pp.124-138. Brigadier Brunskill was General Maitland Wilson's administration officer.
[19] Higham, "British Intervention in Greece 1940-1941," p.106.
[20] Robert Vial, *The War I went to*, R. R. Vial publisher, Toorak Victoria, 1995, p.124.
[21] John Louis Hondros, *Occupation and Resistance: The Greek Agony 1941-1944*, Pella Pub. Co. N.Y., 1983, p.30.
[22] Greek Army: background and outline of recent events 1941 Jan –1945 March, NAB: WO 106/3187.

reinstate them. Despite protest from the Allies after Metaxas' death for the release of these officers to help fight the war against Germany, they were not returned to the regular Greek Army.[23] According to a British intelligence report, removal of the Republican or Venizelist officers meant that Greece lost 'the best higher commanders and staff officers to unemployment,' and those who were left commanded 'less authority than in any other army. This is an aspect of the Greek's love of argument which is reflected also in their chronic political intrigues.'[24] These changes to the Greek government and military had serious ramifications for the Australians fighting in Greece.

Largely because of Greece's close relationship with Germany British intelligence had its doubts about the loyalty of the Greeks from the onset of the campaign. They refrained, however, from informing the Australians of their concerns. Nicholas Hammond, a British officer serving with the Special Operations Executive in Greece, explained that

> [i]t was thought that Metaxas and his fellow – Generals, such as Papagos, having been trained as young officers in Germany, were likely not to resist Germany, with which of course their regime had something in common. As S.O.E was concerned not with initial resistance to the enemy, the decision had been taken to train only anti-Metaxas elements. These were of two kinds. The first consisted of senior Army officers and politicians of the Venizelist group, whom Metaxas had ousted at the time of his coup d'etat and had not seen fit to employ in senior positions . . . . The others were Communists who had been outlawed by Metaxas and were generally in hiding.[25]

Greece was a country with strong political divisions. 'Since 1916, Greece has been divided into Royalist and Republican parties which have alternated in power. There were frequent changes of regime and officers were promoted and retired on political rather than professional grounds.'[26] Britain was aware of these divisions, having had a long association with Greece as one of the three Protecting Powers that had guaranteed Greek independence in 1830. British intelligence knew as early as 1940 that there was little chance of holding Greece. In readiness for the German occupation of the country they trained a network of supporters in sabotage. 'We must cover in advance the contingency of having to work back into Greece after it has been occupied by the enemy. Some plans must, therefore, be laid now for keeping in contact with the local Greek members of our organization after we have left any particular district,' wrote Major Pirie regarding operations conducted by 'D' section in October 1940, a predecessor of SOE.[27]

The Australians, however, were not aware of the political divisions in the country until they came face to face with them in Greece. Many references to Fifth Column activities can be found in reports and letters of Australian commanders and their soldiers in Greece. Writing

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[23] Many of these men ended up leading resistance groups during the German occupation of Greece.
[24] Greek Army, NAB: WO 106/3187.
[25] N. Hammond, "Memories of a British Officer serving in Special Operations Executive in Greece, 1941," *Balkan Studies*, Vol.23, No. 1, 1982, p.128.
[26] Greek Army, NAB: WO 106/3187.
[27] SOE activities in Greece 1940-1942, NAB: HS 7/150.

home to his mother Lieutenant A. F. McRobbie exclaimed 'Greece is really a beautiful country, but reeking with fifth column activities.' [28] This situation would have caused considerable confusion and anxiety for the Australians, as the Greeks were supposed to be their allies. The sight of youth groups such as 'the Neolaia' giving them the Fascist salute must have unsettled many Australians troops who quickly taught them to use the 'thumbs up' salute. Ian Sabey observed that 'events transpiring in Greece demonstrated that only half the nation was pro-British, and the remainder including the majority of the Greek politicians and generals were decidedly pro-German.'[29] Thus the Australian commanders found themselves in the unenviable position of having to inform their troops not only about the prevalence of venereal disease but also of the predominance of Fifth Columnists in a country purportedly on their side.

Visit by Greek Official to a primary school, The Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive, Athens.

The political and economic circumstances of Greece certainly had an impact upon the Greek campaign, however, Australian studies of the battle have tended to discuss it in isolation with little reference to the events unfolding in the country at the time. In particular, there has been no examination of the role of Fifth Columnists or the pro- Fascist government and military of Greece on the conduct of the campaign. This part of Greek history seems to have been written out of the conflict, best forgotten by the allies. Greece and its people have been effectively left out of the history of the campaign.

What needs to be taken into account is that by the time the Australian soldiers had arrived in the country it was close to financial ruin. The starving children of Athens were a constant theme in the writing of Australian soldiers in Greece. The Greek government had

[28] Letter from Lieutenant A. F. McRobbie to his mother, 29 April 1941, on loan to the author from K. T. Johnson.
[29] Sabey, *Stalag Scrapbook*, p.28.

consumed most of the country's funds extending the fortifications along the Bulgarian-Greek border known as the 'Metaxas Line'. The Greeks were suffering from what has been referred to as a 'Maginot mentality' fuelled by their deep distrust of Bulgaria's revisionist aims for the province of Thrace in northeastern Greece.[30] The country's remaining funds were used to supply its army fighting the Italians on the Albanian border and were fast running out. Understanding the Greek mind set at this time helps explain in part the decisions taken by the Greek High Command during the conflict and their response to their allies.

By March 1941 the Greek soldiers were exhausted from the prolonged campaign against the Italians on the Albanian front. As General Papagos, explained, 'the Greek Army had to go on fighting unceasingly with the same formation. Throughout the entire Albanian campaign, that is during six whole months, most of the Greek divisions were not replaced even once.'[31] They were not in an ideal position to offer much assistance to the Australian troops fighting along side them in Greece, even if they were inclined to do so. Laird Archer noted in his journal of 6 April 1941 that it 'has been a hard, miserable winter of much suffering among the people and the troops – with 5,000 cases of frostbite, a third of which required amputation because the boys wouldn't stop fighting for treatment until too late.'[32] R. Clarence Lang, who worked as a volunteer for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in 1946 witnessed the devastation that the Italian invasion had wrought upon Greece:

> The fighting disrupted the fall planting, and created an acute shortage of farm workers as well as of horses, tractors, gasoline, and insecticides. Railroads, highways and roads were disrupted, bridges destroyed, and irrigation systems damaged. The fall of 1940 was exceedingly dry, the summer of 1941 very hot, and the winter of 1941-42 exceedingly cold. In the spring of 1941 the Germans and Bulgarians invaded Greece to support the faltering Italians. The result was more privation and more refugees as the Bulgarians occupied the rich agricultural area, while the Germans used Greece as a supply based for Rommel's army in North Africa.[33]

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[30] The 'Maginot Line' named after the French defence minister, Andre Maginot, was a line of fortifications and other obstacles built along France's border with Germany and Italy in stages, in response to W.W.I., costing three billion francs. The structure was based on a model of a static and defensive warfare designed to give the French army time to mobilise in the event of an attack. It is often used as a metaphor to describe the type of thinking that places undue reliance on something that does not deserve it.

[31] Field Marshal Alexander Papagos, *The Battle of Greece 1940-1941*, Alpha editions, Athens 1949, pp.389-390.

[32] Laird Archer, *Athens Journal 1940-1941: the Graeco-Italian and the Graeco-German Wars and the German Occupation*, MA/AH Publishing, Kansas, 1983. Archer was an American working for Greek War Relief Association, an American based charity to assist refugees. In April 1941, after the Germans closed down the American Consulate Laird was appointed to head a Repatriation Committee to evacuate the remaining Americans out of Greece.

[33] R. Clarence Lang, "Red Cross Humanitarianism in Greece, 1940-45," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.71-88.

Arrival of Lustreforce

Lieutenant General Henry (Jumbo) Maitland Wilson arrived in Greece on 1 March 1941 to take charge of the British Expeditionary Force codenamed 'Lustreforce.'[34] They were to be supported by three Greek divisions: the 12th (Dodecanese) Division from Western Thrace, 19th Greek Mechanised Division from Larissa and the 20th Division from Florina. The 19th Mechanised Greek Division instead of being deployed to the east coast of Greece under the command of General Freyberg to assist the New Zealanders guarding the area around Katerini, were sent further north by the Greek High Command into the Axion Valley to defend the Dorian Gap from possible German paratrooper attack. Gavin Long has stressed that '[w]eak though it was, the 19th Greek Division's departure entailed an appreciable loss to the force on the Aliakmon line, where the New Zealanders now became responsible for a front of 25,000 yards.'[35] The two Greek divisions that were left behind to assist the Australians did not prove to be a great asset because they had only recently been assembled and were poorly equipped and relied heavily on carts and pack animals for transport. They consisted of the 12th Greek Division, comprising six battalions and three mountain batteries with six motor vehicles – five trucks, and a car for the commander and the 20th Greek Division consisting of nine battalions and a few more field guns than the 12th Division. Brigadier Rowell referred to them as a ' "toy army." '[36] This was a far cry from the thirty-five Greek battalions of front line troops, not third line reservists, that had been originally promised by General Papagos for the defence of the Aliakmon line.[37]

AWM: 128425 Greece 1941. Left to right: Lieutenant General Sir Thomas Blamey, Lieutenant General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson and Major General Bernard C. Freyberg of New Zealand.

[34] See Appendix B for Command structure of Lustre Force.
[35] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.34.
[36] Letter Rowell to Long 20th January 1947, AWM: 67 3/338 Part 2.
[37] See Appendix C for Organisation of Greek Army During the German Invasion of Greece.

The Australians had little knowledge of the structure, training and preparedness of the Greek army for battle. Voicing his feelings of disappointment, if not outright betrayal, Brigadier Rowell wrote 'we knew little about the organization and efficiency of the Greek army. By her own efforts Greece had given the Italians a thrashing on her western frontier with Albania. Could she do the same against a first-class power like Germany? Not until we saw the soldiers on the ground was it realized that they would be of little value.'[38] No evidence exists that any Australian divisional, brigade or battalion commander had been briefed on the support they could expect from the Greek army. Nevertheless Brigadier Rowell felt that they had been misled about the fighting ability of the Greeks and Yugoslavs. 'Perhaps also undue emphasis was placed on the delaying power of the Greeks and Yugoslavs,' he wrote in his memoirs.[39] But why were the Australians left in the lurch when the British Military Mission had amassed considerable data on the Greeks? [40]

On 19 March 1941, Lieutenant General Thomas Blamey, the Australian commander of the 1st Australian Corps, arrived in Greece with Brigadier Rowell, his Chief of Staff. Upon arrival they commenced a reconnaissance mission to Northern Greece to meet with the Greek commanders. Rowell reported that General Blamey was not impressed with their attitude recording that on '23 March we went via the Servia Pass to Kozani in the far north, where we had lunch at an inn with the local Greek corps commander. His outlook was pretty depressing, and Blamey asked for his removal when we returned to Athens.'[41] Both Blamey and Rowell regarded 'the Greek senior officers whom [they] met were lacking in confidence and not well-informed.'[42] German propaganda had been very effective in the country. Even before the Germans had attacked Greece a defeatist attitude was evident amongst the Greek commanders.[43] The myth of German invincibility had affected Greek morale, as had their pro-Germans inclinations. In a letter to Gavin Long Rowell gave a blunt appraisal of the Greek General Staff: '[t]he senior officers were most unimpressive. They were "windy" and their views were sketchy. I thought plain common "funk" best described the state of mind of the man at Kozani.'[44] British intelligence had reached a similar conclusion about the Greeks but had not shared their findings with the Australians: 'This attitude – which in some aspects almost amounted to defeatism,' they wrote in their report, ' was most noticeable amongst some very

[38] Sydney Rowell, *Full Circle*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton Victoria, 1974, p.63.
[39] Ibid p.83.
[40] Greek Army, NAB: WO 106/3187.
[41] Rowell, *Full Circle*, p.66.
[42] Long, *Greece, Crete, Syria*, p.34.
[43] The defeatist attitude of the Greek military and government was also noted by one of Greece's famous poet, George Seferis, who was press spokesman for the Greek government throughout the war years. He provides an insider's perspective in his book: Χειρογραφο Σεπ. 41 [Manuscript Sept. '41] Icaros Press, Athens, 1972.
[44] Letter from Rowell to Long, 20 January 1947, AWM: 67 3/338 part 2.

senior commanders, and needless to say did much to accentuate the difficulties in dealing with our Allie (sic).'[45]

Of the three divisions that were to be deployed to Greece only the 6th Australian Division and the 2nd New Zealand Division actually arrived in time.[46] What exacerbated the situation in Greece for Lieutenant General Thomas Blamey was the advice he received on the morning of the German Twelfth Army attack on Greece that the 7th Australian Division as well as the Polish Brigade were no longer to be sent to assist them. They were being kept back by General Wavell to fight the German counter offensive in Cyrenaica. Only a third of the full complement of troops arrived in Greece and were in position before the German attack on 6 April 1941.[47] This was not what Blamey had been promised. The goalposts were being constantly shifted, further increasing the odds against the Australians in Greece.

AWM: 130482 Gerania Greece- fighting amidst the civilian population

Nevertheless Blamey established the headquarters of 1st Australian Corps in Gerania, south of Servia pass, responsible for the area from Verria Pass to the sea. Although the Greek countryside left a very favourable impression on the Australian soldiers and commanders alike, Gerania did not. 'The official history describes Gerania, just south of the Servia Pass, as a "poky village" which flatters it exceedingly. It was a collection of wretched hovels and its inhabitants had a bad record of malaria, which would have posed medical problems had the campaign lasted into summer. The houses were infested with vermin and the yards with savage dogs.'[48] Standards of sanitation, health and hygiene were very low in Greece during the war. British

[45] Greece: paper on an investigation by Inter-Service Committee, NAB, WO 106/3161.
[46] See Appendix D for Structure of 6th Australian Division.
[47] See Appendix E for the Arrival time of Australian Forces to Greece
[48] Rowell, *Full Circle*, p.68.

Naval intelligence report found that the 'prevalence of intestinal infections is high . . . . For the most part excreta disposal is primitive; unprotected water supplies are common; flies are very abundant.'[49] Malaria was rife particularly in Northern Greece where the Australians were deployed. The area was full of swamps and marshes and 'although malaria is much more prevalent close to large marshes, it is almost universal in its distribution.'[50]

The operational plan was to have one Australian brigade at Verria Pass, another brigade at Kozani with a third brigade at Servia. But by 5 April at the conference between General Blamey and General Mackay, commanding the 6th Australian Division, at Gerania, only the 16th Brigade had arrived and was in a forward position. The 19th was moving into position and the 17th had not yet sailed from Alexandria. On the same day the first recorded meeting took place at Kozani between the Greek commander General Kotulas and the Allied commander General Wilson. Also present at this meeting was Major Miles Reid, senior British Liaison officer whose role it was to communicate the proceedings to Kotulas. Reid later wrote of Kotulas 'I doubted whether his highly strung temperament would stand any severe test. I was not really surprised to hear that early in the operations he was replaced in his command,' a polite way of saying that he was not up to the job.[51]

At this meeting, 'General Kotulas described, with the aid of a Tracing . . . the present disposition of the Greek Central Macedonian Army. The question of the relief of 12th Div by 6 Aust Div was discussed. General Kotulas was very anxious for the 6 Division to commence taking over positions of the 12 Greek Division at once. He explained that the Greeks are very thin on the ground and have only minor reserves.'[52] General Wilson while acknowledging the Greek General's concern refused to move Australian troops to Verria Pass before the Commander of 6th Australian Division had arrived.

Wilson however readily agreed to a joint task between Australian sapper officers and Greek engineers to construct a road running north from Verria to Kozani behind the defensive position. He requested an excavating machine from the Greek General to complete the job and was offered civilian labour as well. There is some evidence from this meeting that General Kotulas was concerned with improving communications with Allied Headquarters, stating that he 'felt it desirable to have a Liaison Officer (Greek) stationed at his HQ and liaising with "W" Group H.Q. To this General Wilson agreed and General Kotulas said he would approach Colonel Fotilas with the view of the provision of such an officer.'[53] It is difficult to ascertain whether such an officer was ever appointed as General Kotulas was subsequently dismissed on

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[49] Naval Intelligence Division, *Greece*, Vol. 1, Her Majesty's Service, Geographical Handbook Series, March 1944, p.266.
[50] Ibid p.276.
[51] Miles Reid, *Last on the List*, Leo Cooper, London, 1974, p.142.
[52] Meeting between General Wilson and General Kotulas at 1230 hrs 5 April 1941, AWM: 54 534/2/23.
[53] Ibid .

General Wilson's instigation after having been informed by General Blamey of the Greek General's defeatist attitude. On 8 April 1941 Christos Karassos took over as Commander of the 20th Greek Division. It soon became apparent that communications between Australians and Greeks under the new commander were no more successful.

Map of Greece – from Gavin Long, *The Six Years War*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra 1973, p.69.

The relationship that ensued between the Australian and Greek commanders was very different from the one that developed between the Australian and Greek soldiers and civilians.

The Australian high command, brigade and battalion commanders were faced with the responsibility for the conduct of the campaign and the performance of their troops. Language difficulties meant that the Australian officers could not speak to their Greek counterparts in person without the aid of interpreters who were not always available. Often communications between the Greek and Australian military commanders had to be conducted in 'broken' French making communication between the Australians and their allies unclear or confused. Interactions between them were laborious and lengthy and delayed critical action in the field. It was fortuitous that a few Australian and British soldiers spoke Greek and were able to act as interpreters for their units. Gavin Long concluded that the 'record of consultations between British and Greek commanders is a sorry tale of misunderstanding, and the campaign opened in an atmosphere of mistrust.'[54]

AWM: PO2162.004 Greece 16 April 1941. Members of 2/6th Battalion, rugged up in winter overcoats as protection against the winter cold. [Donor M. Williams]

In this vital area the British let the Australians, down making it impossible for the necessary co-ordination to take place with the Greek Army. Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Chilton, commander of the 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, 6,000 feet above sea level in the hills around Verria voiced his frustration at the incompetence of those in charge of the campaign. 'After many delays, owning to lack of interpreters which it is felt could easily have been organised by higher formations of both armies, mules were borrowed for carrying gear up to mountain position. . . . Mountain warfare without pack 1st line transport is ludicrous.'[55] Chilton's anger at Britain's failure to supply interpreters and appropriate transport can be easily understood. Greece had experienced heavy rains and snowfalls in March and April 1941. The

[54] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.194.
[55] Diary 2/2 Infantry Battalion, Feb-March 1941, AWM: 52 8/3/2.

roads as a result were muddy and slippery and the narrow mountain paths impossible to transverse without donkeys and mules. Devoid of transport and communication the Australians were 'sitting ducks.' Fortuitously the bad weather at the beginning of the campaign delayed German bombing attacks.

Although the British had formed a new section known as the "Liaison Branch" as part of W. Force Headquarters 'responsible for liaison between W. Force H.Q. in the field and [their] Allies,' communication between the allies irrevocably broke down.[56] Its aim was to 'ensure that the liaison arrangements between Greek and British formation [were] carried out satisfactorily,' conveying battle information as quickly as possible, but the 'Liaison Branch' failed in its objective. [57] Why this occurred is difficult to comprehend, given the extensive staff the branch had at its disposal.[58] The British military blamed the breakdown in communications on the Greeks and their commanders whose 'general indecision, apathy and incompetence . . . when faced by the German Army, greatly increased the difficulties which are already present amongst Allies.' [59] Whereas British Liaison officer Miles Reid, Commander of 'A' Squadron General Headquarters Liaison Regiment, attributed the failure in co-ordination between the allied forces to the inexperience of the staff at 'Force Headquarters . . . in conducting liaison with a foreign army and the resulting organization creaked as it worked. . . . All this should have been thought out . . . but foresight had not been a strong suit.'[60]

The British deployed a few officers who spoke Greek to the lower formations such as Lieutenant -Colonel Barter who was attached to General Tsolakoglou, the Commander of the III Army Corps of Epirus. Unfortunately, the majority of the British Military Mission's officers who spoke Greek or French were congregated at the Mission's headquarters in Athens to liaise with the Greek Commander-in-Chief General Papagos. General Papagos kept his headquarters in Athens for the duration of the campaign and only occasionally ventured out of town to liaise with the British commander. There appear to have been no bi-lingual officers assigned to the Australian battalions to act as interpreters. Why this occurred is difficult to understand, given that the British had 4,670 Palestinians and Cypriots deployed to Greece. The Cypriots, who constituted 3,000 of these troops, spoke both Greek and English fluently and could have been assigned as interpreters instead of being used in labour units.

Fortunately for the Australian commanders, there were a few Australians soldiers who spoke Greek and were able to act as interpreters for their battalion. George 'Bull' Caling who was of Greek descent assisted Lieutenant Colonel Chilton commander of the 2/2nd Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Alex Sheppard, though not of Greek background, spoke Greek and acted as

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[56] British Military Mission to Greek Headquarters, NAB: WO 201/14.
[57] Ibid .
[58] See Appendix F for details of British Liaison with Greek Army.
[59] Greece: report on military, NAB: WO 201/72.
[60] Reid, *Last on the List*, p.140.

General Mackay's interpreter but there were not enough people to go around. There were probably more soldiers of Greek background in the Australian army than was generally known. The soldiers of Greek descent, however, would have been reluctant to have their background exposed as there was a certain stigma attached in Australia of the 1940s to being of non-British origin.[61] Frank Reid of the 2/3rd Infantry Battalion recalled one such Australian soldier in his reminiscences of the campaign.

> When we arrived at Port Pireaus – there was no one there to meet us, because we had not been expected until 22/3/41, with the convoy carrying the rest of the 16th Brigade. After a short delay, a call went out for anybody who could speak Greek, to accompany the 2 I/C (Major Abbott) on a search for Greek Army Hg. WO 2 Andrew Christie, rather reluctantly stepped out and admitted that he had been christened Andrew Christopoulos, and could speak the language of his ancestors, very well indeed. This was news to everybody – if ever there was a typical Australian Bushman of apparently Scottish descent, then Andrew Christie was that man.[62]

Apart from the language barrier between Greece and their allies there were also problems of command amongst the British forces in Greece. There was no central command for the Greek operation; instead the command headquarters was split amongst the British, Greeks and Australians. This is illustrated by the fact that British Air Vic-Marshal D'Albiac's small air force of eighty aircraft was under the command of the Greek Commander-in-Chief General Papagos, not the commander of the Allied force, General Wilson. This situation caused serious problems for the allies as the 1st British Armoured Brigade, under the command of General Wilson refused to follow orders issued by the Australian Commander Lieutenant General Blamey to go to the aid of 17th Brigade. The Allied headquarters, itself under the command of General Wilson, was also split between a rear headquarters at the Acropole Hotel in Athens and the village of Tsaritsani near Elasson on the main Larissa-Florina road in northern Thessaly, putting a strain on General Wilson's signals. 'He had, however an independent signal squadron equipped with the best available wireless sets. He allotted one of its stations to the Greek command at Salonika and another to Kotulas' headquarters, and held a third ready to join the Yugoslav Army.'[63] On 12 April 1941, in an effort to overcome some of the confusion created by the command structure, the 6th Australian Division and the New Zealand Division were placed under the command of General Blamey and renamed the Anzac Corps.

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[61] Maria Costadopoulos, Images of the Greek Family in Australia: Continuities and Changes, BA Honours thesis, UNSW 1979. The thesis examined three generations of the Greek family in Australia [1900s to 1970s] covering the period of the Second World War where discrimination against migrants of non-British background was a common occurrence. Most Greek families anglicised their names to fit in. Thus it is difficult to identify Australian soldiers of Greek descent from the nominal lists.

[62] F. J. M. Reid, *Recollections of Greece: March- April 1941, 1939 1946 2/3 Infantry Battalion A.I.F.*, designed by Terry Robinson, 1999, p.6.

[63] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.37.

The Campaign

It did not help matters that there was little genuine co-operation between the Greek military command and their Allies during the campaign. The Australian commanders in Greece had been led to believe that this was a 'joint operation'. The Australians had been sent to Greece as part of the Allied force to aid and assist the Greeks to hold the Aliakmon Line. According to the British, 'the Greek General Staff . . . would not retire to the Olympus [Aliakmon] Line which alone was short enough to be held against the German with the forces available. The Germans attacked on 6 April, overran Eastern Macedonia, and sent columns through the Vardar and Monastir gaps which penetrated between General Wilson's Anglo-Greek Army in the East and the Epirus Army facing the Italians in the West. The British had to be evacuated and the Epirus Army was threatened with encirclement.'[64]

From the commencement of the campaign the Greek Commander-in-Chief General Papagos stubbornly refused to abandon the defence of the Greek frontier with Bulgaria on the east, arguing that it was too late to move his forces south to reinforce the Vermion-Aliakmon line.[65]

> A discussion took place as to the advisability of the Greek Army continuing to hold Eastern Macedonia in positions which would inevitably be cut off. The alternative was to vacate the positions in Eastern Macedonia, and use the troops thus made available for strengthening either the line of the River Struma or Vermion Line. While purely military considerations were undoubtedly in favour of withdrawing from Eastern Macedonia, political considerations made the wisdom of such a course very doubtful.[66]

Instead he pushed the British forces into forward positions to guard three main passes into Greece, over-extending their meagre forces. Refusing to give up the northern Greek port of Salonika, hoping that this action would encourage Yugoslavia to resist the German attack, he asked General Wilson to move the 1st Armoured Brigade forward, closer to Salonika. They were to act as a delaying force between the Axios and Aliakmon rivers. This was a desperate measure on Papagos' part that had little hope of success and further thinned the Aliakmon defences. The Australian senior commanders were not in agreement with the Greek war strategy that placed undue faith in Yugoslavia's defensive capabilities. Brigadier Rowell explained in a letter to Gavin Long that 'we always had misgivings about the Florina Gap. We believed at the time, and I feel that we were right, that the line of the R. Aliakmon was the proper answer. But there were great political difficulties in getting the Greeks to surrender voluntarily any more territory, quite apart from their childish hopes that Jugo-Slavia (sic) would provide an adequate bastion on the North.'[67]

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[64] Greek Army, NAB: WO 106/3187.
[65] The Greek army relied on pack transport and as a consequence it was very slow to move into position. This issue caused the Allies much concern during the campaign in Greece.
[66] Greece: report on military, NAB: WO 201/72.
[67] Letter from Brigadier Rowell to Gavin Long, 20th January 1947, AWM: 67 3/338 part 2.

Co-ordination between the Australian and Greek forces failed. Though the Australian officers attempted to liaise with the Central Macedonian Army for most of the campaign they had no idea where the Greek divisions were located or what they were doing, let alone receive support from them.[68] They had difficulty finding out where the enemy was in the rugged Greek terrain that could only be negotiated by foot by liaison officers trudging in waist high snow. Lieutenant Colonel Lamb of the 2/3rd Battalion wrote in the unit diary: 'The Germans, who were on the Bulgarian Border, had started their push south, but information regarding their exact movements was hard to get. Rumours were rife.'[69] Rumours propagated either by the allies to encourage their troops, or the enemy, to intimidate the allies were often the only source of information. Australian war correspondent Gavin Long who was at the Greek frontier recalled that rumours abounded. '[W]e heard . . . that Yugoslavia had capitulated, that Turkey was in, that an English force had landed on the French coast.'[70]

In the absence of adequate communication between the allied units liaison officers acted as 'runners' to establish the position of the enemy, as trucks could not negotiate Greek mountain paths. Major Edgar of 2/1st Battalion explained that the 'means of communication available in a battalion at present are insufficient for warfare in which the battalion has to cover large fronts such as were occupied by this battalion at Verria Pass 6000 X. Battalion Headquarters was out of touch with 3 forward companies for over 5 hours due to denseness of scrub and topography making it extremely difficult to lay lines. Runners took 2 hours to reach two of the forward companies.'[71] Although slow, liaison officers proved to be 'invaluable' in such a terrain and having more than one liaison officer per unit would have been of great assistance in Greece. They needed, however, to be 'young, fit and capable of considerable physical effort', given the strain imposed by the rugged Greek landscape.[72]

Following the German attack on Greece from Bulgaria on 6 April General Iven Mackay, commander of the 6th Australian Division, had serious problems to contend with on the Greek frontier. An imminent German thrust into Greece was expected through Yugoslavia via Monastir on 8 April. According to reports that reached Lincoln MacVeagh, the American ambassador in Athens, the Germans had 'cleared a road to Monastir, Florina, and Koritza! . . . The Germans are doing just what they did in France,' wrote MacVeagh in his diary, 'striking

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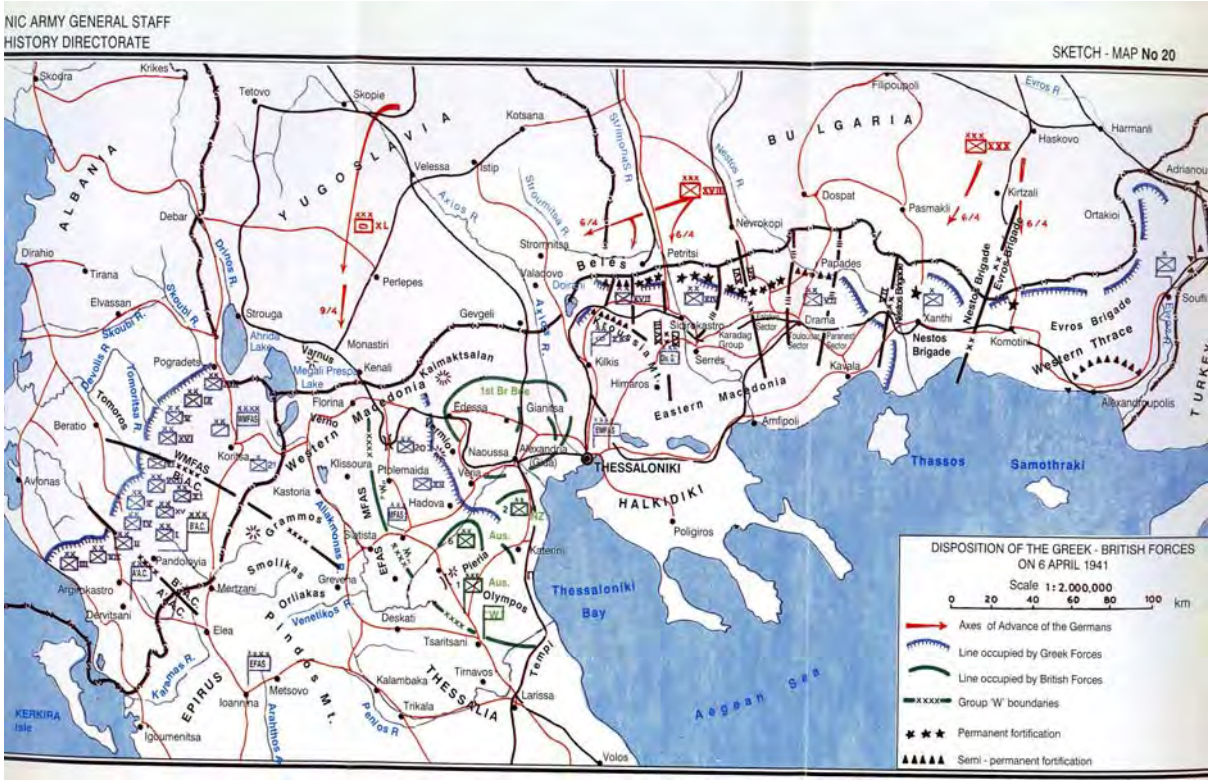
[68] Interview: Sir Frederick Chilton, commanding officer of 2/2nd Battalion, 2 August 2004.
[69] Diary 2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalion, AWM: 52 8/3/3.
[70] Gavin Long, Bardia to Suda Bay: The 6th Australian Division in Action, unpublished manuscript, AWM: PR88/72 (6) p.123.
[71] Report by Major Edgar, Adm Comd, 2/1st Aust Infantry Battalion, "Lessons – Campaign in Greece," 29 June 1941, Papers of Major Gen Allen, AWM: 3DRL 4/42.
[72] Headquarters 16th Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations in Greece, July 1941, AWM: 54/5/18.

around the end of a fortified line at a point where three allies (Greeks, British and Yugoslavs this time, not French, British and Belgians) fail to coordinate.'[73]



Disposition of Greek-British Forces on 6 April 1941, Hellenic Army General Staff, *Abridged History of the Greek-Italian and Greek-German War*, p. 164.

The collapse of Yugoslavian resistance after only 48 hours meant that the Florina Gap was now unprotected. So Mackay was forced to send the 19th Brigade under Brigadier George Vasey, minus one battalion, forward near the border with Yugoslavia to defend the Florina – Veve (sic) area. MacVeagh had been informed by the British Minister in Athens that the situation was 'pretty bad on account of the failure of the Yugoslavs to concentrate southwards, as the British have urged all along that they do.'[74]

The road through the Florina Gap was to be held by the Rangers while the 2/8th Australian Battalion was on their right and 2/4th Australian Battalion on their left.[75] The role of the Greek troops was to protect both flanks. Considerable controversy surrounds the

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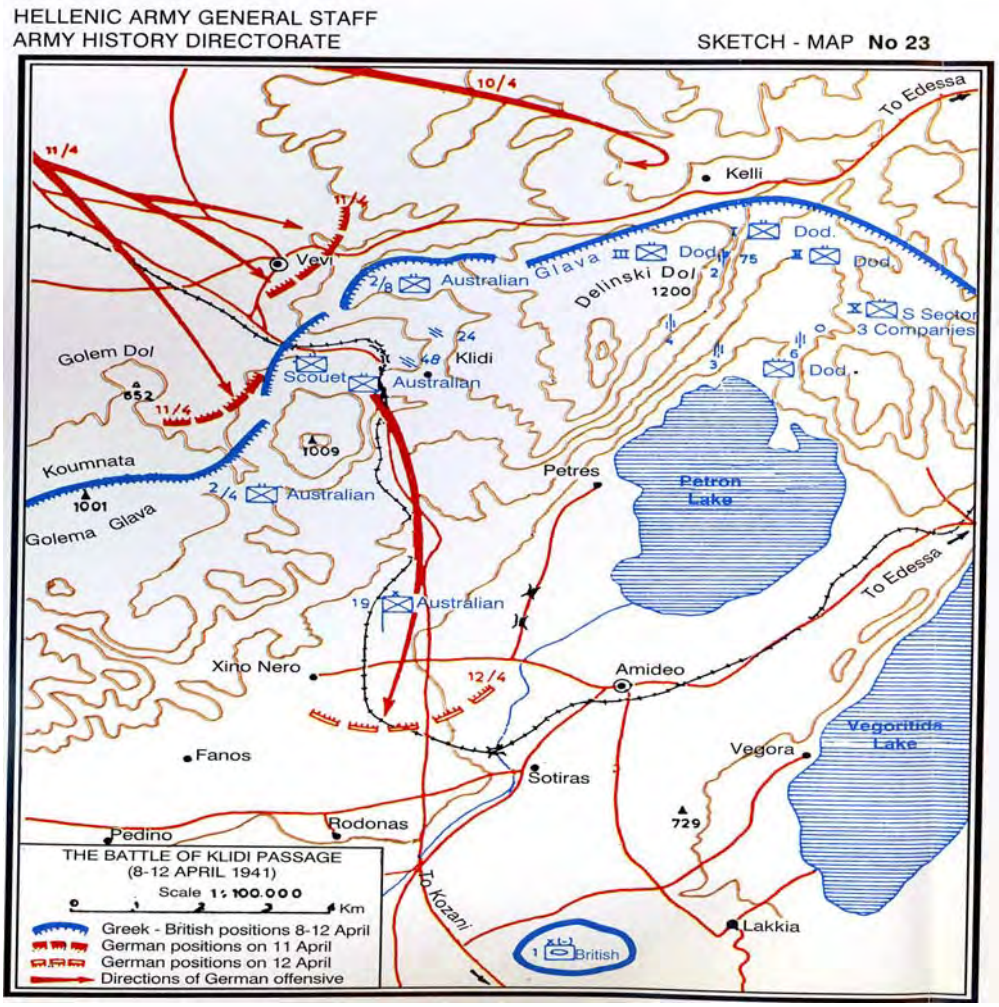
[73] John O. Iatrides (ed.) *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports: Greece, 1933-1947*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1980, pp.330-331.

[74] Iatrides (ed), *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p.331.

[75] The King's Royal Rifle Corps (1/The Rangers) formed part of the1st Armoured Brigade under the command of Brigadier Charrington. The brigade was 'reduced almost to impotence. Its armoured regiment had been depleted, chiefly by mechanical breakdowns, to one weak squadron. Its infantry battalion had lost half its men; its anti-tank regiment had lost six guns. There was no possibility of replacing the tanks. In two sharp actions they had delayed the Germans' approach to the main British defence line and had knocked out a number of tanks, but the cost was the virtual disappearance of the one small armoured force the Allied army in Greece possessed.' *Long, Greece, Crete and Syria*, p69.

performance of the Australian troops, particularly the 2/8th Battalion. There is evidence to suggest that they panicked and in their haste to withdraw 'a relatively large number of men abandoned their arms.' [76] Lieutenant-Colonel R.P. Waller who was there with the 1st Armoured Brigade describes the defence of the Florian Gap as a 'rout' with Greek and Australian troops 'swarming down the Amyntaon fork [as] . . .The Boche had broken through the Rangers and 2/8 Australians, and the Dodecanese Div had just gone.'[77] Nicholas Hammond, a Special Operations Executive officer who arrived in Florina at this time said that with the German attack imminent the 'Greek H.Q. at Florina was in turmoil. The Greek Colonel in command told me he was moving his unit south to Amyntaion behind our front line, but in fact, as I learnt later, he himself with his staff set off for Koritsa in Albania, leaving his troops to fall back to Amyntaion in confusion.'[78]



Map of the defence of Florina Pass referred to as 'Battle of Klidi Passage,' Hellenic Army General Staff, *Abridged History of the Greek-Italian and Greek-German War*, p196.

[76] Narrative on the Campaign in Greece, AWM: 54 534/5/14.
[77] Lieutenant-Colonel R. P. Waller, "With the Ist Armoured Brigade in Greece," *Journal of the Royal Artillery*, Vol3, No. 3, July 1945, p.167.
[78] Hammond, "Memories of a British Officer Serving in Special Operations Executive," p.129.

At the same time this was occurring the Australian 16th Brigade arrived in Greece on 22 March 1941 under the command of Brigadier 'Tubby' Allen and was sent to Servia near the village of Lava to await deployment to Verria Pass. In preparation for the move it was decided to do a reconnaissance of the Verria – Vevi Pass area and liase with the Greek units. The Greeks at 12th Greek Division Headquarters at Sofular, a village sixteen kilometres north east of Kozani, gave the brigade reconnaissance party a tour of the Greek positions. Colonel Georgios Karambatos their commander provided the Australians with a detailed knowledge of this defensive position. [79] It came as a surprise when the 16th Brigade arrived at Verria Pass to relieve the 12th Greek Division that little preparation had been done by the Greek troops for the German invasion.

> C.O., I.O., Capt. Hendry and Capt. Caldwell left on morning of 1 April, to recee [reconnoitre] the Verria Pass position which we believed to be our probable defensive role. Their party met Col Dimitrakareas Commander of the local Greek Regiment at the village of Kastanie. They were given ponies and shown around the left sector by the C.O. and Adjutant of the Greek Battalion in that area during 5 and 6 Apr. The Battalion was extended over a very wide front in the roughest type of country. Some work had been done in making and improving mule tracks to give access to the position. Practically no work had however, been done in preparing defences, and there appeared little organization for defences. The troops in the area were reservist of higher age groups, and did not appear well equipped. All transport was mule pack.[80]

AWM: 007633 - Approaching the village of Kasani or Kastanie, negative by G. Silk.

By 7 April the 2/2nd Battalion was in the process of taking over the Greek positions, but they were forced to abandon them because of their unsuitability. According to their unit diary the 'Greek battalion occupying position when [they] arrived, stayed 24 hours to assist . . . and show [them] their position – latter however not considered sound tactically and virtually had to

[79] Headquarters 16th Australian Infantry Brigade Report on Operations in Greece, July 1941, AWM: 54 534/8/18.
[80] Diary- 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, Feb-March 1941, AWM: 52 8/3/2.

recce, and occupy completely new position.'[81] The Australian commanders felt little confidence in the performance of Greek forces. They avoided situations where their soldiers were dependant on Greek troops for support. As Brigadier Rowell explained, we 'never had any faith in the capacity of 12 and 20 Greek Divisions to withdraw to their allotted area North of 19 Infantry Brigade.'[82] According to Angelos Terzakis, a Greek soldier at the front line who wrote an account of the campaign, it was the Allied soldiers at Vermio who let them down by not assisting the Yugoslav army, not the other way around. He explained that the 'officer who had been dispatched by the Army of Eastern Macedonia to liaise with the Yugoslav High Command returned with the news that the Yugoslavs had been defeated at Kumanovo and the Germans were advancing towards Sopje. The English encamped at Vermio, had not moved to assist them.' [83] Given how thinly stretched the Allied forces were in Greece, it is very doubtful that they could have come to the assistance of the Yugoslavs.

On the Eastern front the Eastern Macedonian Army performed very well. The American ambassador in Athens noted in his diary of 9 April that in 'Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, isolated Greek forts on the Metaxas Line still put up a gallant and suicidal resistance. The Greek fighting along this front appears to have been some of the finest in history, - but to what end?'[84] Voicing what he perceived to be the futility of the military situation in Greece, he explained that the 'Germans have broken through the line in several places, chiefly in Thrace, where there were practically no defenders, and they are now moving west against Kavalla in the rear of the main Metaxas fortifications. According to the Greek General Staff there have been only one division, plus fortress troops in all this region – 15,000!' [85] The Greek soldiers managed to hold these forts for 36 hours with only 150 men, dying to the last.[86] The strongest resistance was offered at Fort Rupel.

The Eastern Macedonian Army 'contained better troops than the Central Macedonian Army, whose Commander, as other Senior Greek Generals, had already begun to suffer from defeatism.'[87] They also had the added incentive of protecting their own homes. Their commander, Lieutenant General Konstantinos Bakopoulos made a valiant attempt to resist the Germans before surrendering to the Commander of the 2nd German Armoured Brigade, signing the protocol of capitulation on 9 April 1941 at the German Consulate in Salonika. Angelos Terzakis explained that Bakopoulos was left with little choice as the

> Army of Eastern Macedonia now faced the threat of its entire forces being captured. Its commander (Major-General Bakopoulos) decided to order a withdrawal to the ports of

[81] Ibid.
[82] Brigadier Sydney Rowell to Gavin Long, Records of Gavin Long, AWM: 67 3/338 Part 2.
[83] Angelos Terzakis, *The Greek Epic 1940-1941*, Greek Army Press, Athens, 1990, p.161.
[84] Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p.332.
[85] Ibid p.332.
[86] Ibid p.330.
[87] Greece: report on military, NAB: WO 201/72.

> Eastern Macedonia and Chalkidiki, though embarkation from there would not be easy as there were too few boats. Nor were there any reserves to cover the embarkation, or any protection from the air. Thus it was that, faced with the tragic impasse, the commander of the Army of Eastern Macedonia decided on the evening of 8th April to seek capitulation.[88]

The collapse of Yugoslavia without a fight on 8 April 1941 aggravated an already difficult strategic situation. According to Greece's official history of the campaign the 'rapid development of the situation in Yugoslavia posed new serious problems for the General Headquarters, since by that time a danger situation had arisen, threatening the front of Central Macedonia and the eastern flank of the Greek Army in Albania. The German advance southwards via Monastiri would outflank from the left the 'W' Force troops in the Vermio area and threaten the rear of the Greek forces in Albania.'[89]

On 9 April 1941 General Mackay, commander of the Australian 6th Division, attended a meeting at Perdika with General Karassos. General Mackay recorded his frustration at the lack of adequate and suitable interpreters to conduct liaison with the Greek army. He explained that the 'conference lasted three hours and except for the personal contact gained with the Commander, was not of any real value. Difficulties of interchanging views through interpreters and Liaison Officers added to the time required to arrive at any decision. I agreed at this conference to establishing my HQ at Perdika in order to maintain closer liaison with Gk CMA, but the difficulties were considerable and aggravated by the lack of suitable officer-type interpreters.'[90]

AWM: 30366 - view of the village of Perdika looking south-west, by V.J. Kauth.

[88] Terzakis, *The Greek Epic*, p.161.
[89] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and Greek-German War 1940-1941 (Land Operations*), The Army History Directorate Editions, Athens 1997, p.203.
[90] Report on Operations of 6th Australian Division in Greece by Major General I.G. Mackay Commander 6th Australian Division, AWM54: 534/2/34.

By 10 April the Germans had taken the Greek town of Florina near the border with Yugoslavia. Greek resistance had collapsed and their forces were in disarray. Mackay attended a further meeting attended by General Wilson at Perdika with the Greek General. At the conclusion of this meeting it was agreed that the 12th and 20th Greek Divisions were to withdraw from their present location at Verria Pass on the immediate right of the Australians to a position that extended from Kleissoura to the left of the Australians. The 6th Australian Division would cover their move and then retire from Vermion-Veria area where they had been guarding the passes into Greece to the Aliakmon line.[91]

The following day on 11 April at 6th Australian Division headquarters in Perdika Mackay insisted on taking charge of the withdrawal of the Greek troops, explaining that he 'pressed for this in view of the exposed position of 2/8 Bn if the Dodecanese Regt who were protected on their right flank by lakes should withdraw before schedule.'[92] The Greek troops instead of following Mackay's orders to withdraw slowly over three days, disappeared overnight. Mackay wrote

> at this hour, the Dodecanese who had been ordered to start thinning out, merely disappeared completely from the line. Their withdrawal from the line allowed the enemy to turn the right flank of the 2/8 Bn thereby compromising the whole line. The 2/8 Bn was upset by the sudden appearance of the enemy in that position; accordingly they withdrew ahead of schedule.[93]

Although theoretically under Wilson's command, in practice the Central Macedonian Army ignored the orders of 'W' Force. According to the British from the 'outset, in spite of every possible effort being made to avoid misunderstanding, the Greek Central Macedonian Army failed in every way to carry out its role in the withdrawal.'[94]

A major ruction occurred in Greek-Australian relations over this issue leading General Papagos to accuse the Australians after the war of abandoning the Greek troops. Papagos explains that

> [a]t 6p.m. on April 12th, though the damage and the losses sustained by the forces defending the Keidi position in no way justified such a hasty move, Group W ordered its forces, who were fighting in this area, to withdraw . . . . The order of withdrawal from Kleidi position was given by Group W without taking into consideration that immediately west of Lake Vegoritis there were still forces of the XX Infantry Division, that the XII Infantry Division was still east of the highway Servia-Kozani-Ptolemais and that Group W had been instructed to hold the Kleidi position until the forces of the XII and XX Greek Divisions, which came under its orders, had completed their movements to the west. . . . The XXI Infantry Brigade posted at the right wing of the Cavalry Division, after its flank had been exposed by the withdrawal of the British forces in the Kleidi pass, was subjected to a surprise attack by superior enemy forces.[95]

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[91] Ibid p.3.
[92] Ibid p.4.
[93] Lieutenant General Sir Iven Mackay, AWM: 3DRL 6850, Items 105-197.
[94] Greece: report on military, NAB: WO 201/72.
[95] Papagos, *The Battle of Greece 1940-1941*, p.372.

Gavin Long writing the official history of the campaign asked Brigadier Rowell 'what happened to the Greek Div after 10 April? (Very few Force [operational] orders or instructions are among our records)' [96] In response to his question Rowell explained that

> 20 Gk Div were to pull out of the Florina position and move West to cover the pass known generally as the Kleisoura pass. 12 Gk Div were to move west to cover from Kozani to Grevena. I doubt if either ever got into position. It is certain that stragglers from both these Divs moved back along the road to Athens even after we had occupied the Thermopylae line. Unless the Greeks can produce any evidence to the contrary, I think it correct to assume that these Divs disintegrated. . . . What is certain is that, after about 14 Apr we ceased to take into account any support from the Greeks. This was one of the major reasons for establishing Savige in the Kalabaka area.[97]

The situation in Greece was deteriorating so rapidly that on 11 April Papagos met with Wilson at Pharsala a town on the main route out of Greece. The plan was for Greek troops to be released from the Albania front to reinforce the Central Macedonian Army and to fill the line to the North. But even at this desperate stage of the campaign against the Germans Papagos was still not prepared to co-operate with the Allies.

> At a meeting held with General Wilson at Pharsala on 11th April, General Papagos had given the impression that considerable forces would be withdrawn from ALBANIA, but little of this promised plan ever materialised, although General Wilson had previously as at this meeting, insisted that withdrawal from Albania was vital if the war with Germany was to be successfully waged. The Greek C. in C. though fully aware of the soundness of the advice, could never really bring himself to give up his successful campaign against the Italians.[98]

By 13 April it was too late to implement such an action even if Papagos had been willing as General Wilson had received intelligence reports that the Greek forces on his left to the West had disintegrated and could not be relied upon. The Albanian front had collapsed. The Greek official account explained that, from 'the moment the withdrawal of the Greek Army began from Albania, threatened by the double danger of encirclement by the Italians and the Germans, . . . serious cases of insubordination and dispersion were recorded. Men abandoned their troops on their own or in small groups, armed or unarmed, and hastened to their homes.'[99] To compound matters further news had reached Wilson on 14 April that the 2nd Yugoslav Army was suing for peace.

From around 14 April onwards the commander of the Greek Army of Epirus began pressuring the Greek King and Greek High command to capitulate to the Germans as soon as possible. Papagos acknowledged that 'German propaganda conducted at the time . . . was able to influence a section of the officers of the Greek Army and of the Commanders of its formation, who considered the continuation of the struggle as useless and harmful. . . . In reply,

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[96] Gavin Long to Rowell, Records of Gavin Long AWM: 67 3/338 part 2.
[97] Rowell to Long, 20th January 1947, ibid.
[98] Report on Military Operations in Greece, May 1941, NAB: WO 201/72.
[99] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and Greek-German War*, p. 230.

the King, the Government and the High Command had given orders for the fight to go on.'[100] Greek morale continued to decline at an alarming rate.[101] In response to this crisis the Commander of the Army of Epirus, Lieutenant General Ioannis Pitsikas called a meeting of the Commanders of A and B Army Corps, sending a report on 16 April to the Greek Commander-in-Chief Papagos that stressed the urgency of the situation. It stated that

(a) The situation of the Army from the aspect of morale and discipline is extremely crucial. It is getting worse every moment.
(b) The corps leaders painfully foresee that we shall not reach the final area in time. The Army would have been disintegrated.
(c) The causes of this situation are the fatigue, the occupation of Greek territories and the fear of being captured by the Italians.
(d) We believe that any further resistance is impossible. An eventual dispersion of the Army will create internal disorder and brigand bands with indescribable disasters for the country.[102]

Papagos informed General Wilson, at an emergency meeting on 16 April outside Lamia, that the Greek Army at Klissoura Pass has been lost and the Western Macedonian divisions that had taken to the mountains were likely to turn up at Kalambaka. Thus it was decided that the British forces would withdraw on the night of 16 to 17 April to Thermopylae. Wilson was concerned by reports from his intelligence officers that the Greek units were in disarray and had already ordered the withdrawal of the 19th Australian Brigade to a line which 'Imperial troops could hold without reliance on Allied support.'[103] The official Greek history is critical of this decision saying that by doing so he presented the Greek Commander-in-Chief with a 'fait accompli' and his order to withdraw was 'premature since the ANZAC Corps had not yet made contact with the Germans in any part of the Aliakmonas river area, and the Greek forces that were situated on the mountains, west of the Florina and Kozani high plateaux, also retained their positions.'[104]

In the meantime, Brigadier Savige had landed in Greece on 12 April with the 2/5th and 2/6th Battalions of the 17th Brigade. Brigadier George Vasey's 2/11th Battalion had still had not arrived in Greece. Wilson was anxious for the safety of the retreating forces as 'Greek G.H.Q. rapidly lost control, and it was apparent that the Greek army could no longer be relied on as a fighting force.'[105] After much debate between Blamey and Wilson, Savige was asked to take charge of operations at Kalambaka to cover the left flank of the withdrawing allied forces. He was aware of the collapse of the Greek Army in Epirus, faced as he was with a continual stream of Greek soldiers blocking the main road out of Greece and 'cluttering' his forward area. Three

[100] Papagos, *The Battle of Greece 1940-1941*, pp.381-382.
[101] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and Greek –German War*, p.222.
[102] Ibid p.222.
[103] Report on Military Operations in Greece, May 1941, NAB: WO 201/72.
[104] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and Greek –German War*, p. 224 and p.209.
[105] Greece: report on military, NAB: WO 201/72.

thousand Greek soldiers had arrived in Kalambaka. His intelligence officers interviewed them and translated what they said for Brigadier Savige. Apparently they 'had been ordered to vacate their positions, leave their weapons and make for Trikkala, where they would be refitted and rearmed . . . Investigation of my "Q" personal in Trikkala discovered no arms or clothing to equip these people,' wrote Brigadier Savige.[106]

Late on the afternoon of 15 April Brigadier Savige was visited by one of the British liaison officers posted to General Tsolakoglou's Headquarters in a village near Kalambaka.[107] A meeting was organised with the Greek General the next day, 16 April 1941, at his headquarters. 'General Tsolakoglou was quartered in a two storey stone house in the village. . . . The house faced the village square in which there were numerous splendidly-uniformed Greek officers, mainly in small groups, without apparently anything to do.'[108] At the meeting Brigadier Savige requested urgent assistance from General Tsolakoglou to clear his command area of the Greek troops. The General told Savige to ' "Machine-gun them. They are all deserters." '[109] Barter who spoke fluent Greek acted as the interpreter at this meeting. Savige later wrote in the 17th Brigade report that

> [d]espite a vast retinue of Staff Officers, little appeared to be in hand for either the control of refugee soldiers or action on the front. The General informed me he was re-arranging the armies of Macedonia and was taking up a line to the WEST through the Pendus (sic) Mts. I informed him I was liable to be attacked from dawn next day, onwards, and I required his help to evacuate his refugee soldiers. I discussed the blowing of the Tunnel on the Western Highway. He demanded the right to control this, most vigorously, as his Tps occupied the area. . . . I agreed with reluctance, as I had little faith in the Greeks doing so.[110]

After the meeting with Tsolakoglou, Savige was convinced that he 'deliberately disintegrated his Force by ordering them to leave their equipment, vacate their positions, and make for Trikkala on the pretence that there they would be re-equipped.'[111] In a more detailed report on his meeting with Tsolakoglou written from memory in 1951, Savige discussed his suspicions about the loyalty of the Greek General more openly, explaining that: 'his generally unhelpful attitude, raised a feeling in my mind that he did not intend to fight. . . . I felt that the general was doubling-crossing.'[112]

The next day Savige, upon reaching the main Kalambaka-Pindus Road to attend his second meeting with Tsolakoglou, was advised by Lieutenant - Colonel R. King of the 2/5th Battalion covering the road, that there was trouble. Greek soldiers had been flooding into Kalambaka from the Pindus Mountains. His troops were forced to use fixed bayonets to hold

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[106] Stan Savige notes to Gavin Long, AWM: 67 3/348 part 3.
[107] General Georgious Tsolakoglou was the commander of the III Army Corp of Epirus.
[108] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.91.
[109] Ibid p.91.
[110] Report on Campaign in Greece and Crete - 17 Australian Infantry Brigade, AWM: 54 534/2/35.
[111] Stan Savige 'Notes on Chapter 16' to Gavin Long, AWM: 67 3/348 part 3, p.15.
[112] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.92.

‘angry Greek soldiers at each end of the bridge, and literally forcing them to move into, or back into the mountains.’[113] As this was taking place Brigadier Savige saw ‘a convoy of magnificent cars and charabancs, filled with Greek officers, [drive] past to cross the bridge. In the second or third car was General Tsolakoglou who leant out the window and waved farewell to me with a broad smile on his face.’[114] It appears that the Brigadier’s suspicions were correct, for soon after the Greek General’s departure Kalambaka was captured by the Germans.

Withdrawal of the Greek Army from Pindus Mountains April 1941 courtesy Greek Military Archives, Athens.

While the discussions were taking place on 16 April 1941 between Tsolakoglou and Savige the Greek Ministry of Army and General Headquarters were ordering two-months leave for their soldiers.[115] Laird Archer in Athens wrote in his diary that ‘a deep-dyed Fifth Column plot in the cabinet,’ emerged from rumours that

> Minister of War Papapdimos is now suspected of manipulating an order granting two months Easter pay and signed by King and Korizis, by adding the Greek words for “and leave” and the latter applying only to those troops in the left center (sic) held by the Greeks. This was apparently scattered to avoid seeming to move whole regiments but still sufficiently effective to weaken that part of the front. It was intended evidently to “open the gates” for a German drive to separate the Greek and British forces.[116]

Ian Sabey, an intelligence officer in Greece at the time noted that the ‘Greeks became demoralised when the news flashed through Greece that the whole Albanian Army had been granted indefinite leave. Fifth column seeds, sown by the Germans in the previous two years

[113] Ibid p.92.
[114] Ibid p.92.
[115] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and Greek-German War*, p.230.
[116] Archer, *Athens Journal*, p.27.

sprang to life. . . . Resistance by the Allies was severe in many cases, . . . However, the Germans were swiftly led, by another traitor, to Larissa, where the British Forces were nearly cut in half.'[117]

Rear guard at Pinios Gorge

At the same time the 16th Brigade had come to the aid of the 21st New Zealand Battalion at Pinios Gorge in the Vale of Tempe. They had been tasked with 'holding the crossing over the Pinios River just where the railway line passed through a tunnel and the road went through a very narrow gorge, with the 2/3 Bn. in reserve. It was really an ideal defensive position, because the enemy had to take the crossing before they could get any of their heavy armament across.'[118] German tanks, however, managed to break through encircling the 2/2nd Battalion and Lieutenant Colonel Chilton the commanding officer barely got away with his life.[119]

Map of Tempe Pass from Sketch Map No.25, Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and German-Greek War*, p.212.

[117] Sabey, *Stalag Scrapbook*, p.30.
[118] Report by Lieutenant C. Norman Swinton - Liaison Officer 16th Brigade Headquarters, Papers of Major Gen. A. S. Allen, AWM: 3DRL 4/42.
[119] Lieutenant Colonel Chilton made his way to Turkey with aid of Greek people.

He managed to send word back to the Brigade headquarters that the 'the New Zealanders had started to retire, without giving him prior notice they intended to do so. 'D'Coy. of the 2/2 Bn. were being strongly attacked by the Germans who were trying to cross the Pinios River.'[120] By all accounts the commander of the New Zealand battalion had been in a state of panic, paralysed by fear and unable to issue an order, but refused to allow the Australian battalion commander to take over.[121] Swinton was ordered to 'forcibly hold [the New Zealand Artillery] if necessary, and make them take up a defensive position.'[122] This was of course not a popular description of the events, producing a heated debate between Howard Kippenberger, the official New Zealand historian, and Gavin Long.[123].

The battle of Pinios Gorge caused Brigadier 'Tubby' Allen considerable problems. He was strongly criticised for 'the dispositions of Allen Force in the Pinios Gorge' while he and his battalion commanders pointed out that the New Zealand battalion they had been sent to support had disappeared, leaving them to tackle four German divisions on their own.[124] Lieutenant Norman Swinton the Liaison Officer attached to the 16th Brigade headquarters described the encirclement of the Australian troops in his report. He wrote of 'alarming reports' from the forward units that

> – the enemy had made contact with our forces the previous night and unfortunately the New Zealanders had withdrawn from their commanding position covering the railway tunnel and the road through the gorge, and what was worse, they had failed to blow the tunnel or block the road sufficiently. It appeared that the enemy were in considerable strength – it was estimated one armoured division, one mountain division and two infantry divisions – and they immediately began to use their mountain troops to try and encircle our positions.[125]

What is remarkable is that, given the odds against them, that the 2/2nd and 2/3rd Battalions were able to hold the Germans at bay for as long as they did, thereby facilitating the withdrawal of the Allied troops through Larissa before it was captured by the Germans.

While the battle at Pinios gorge was in progress a meeting was taking place on 18 April 1941 at the Royal Palace in Athens between the King of Greece, Prime Minister Koryzis, General Papagos, General Wilson and Britain's ambassador to Greece, Michael Palairet. Even though the Greek General was prepared to concede that the British forces were 'in good fighting condition,' he insisted that they 'could not hold their ground at Thermopilae (sic) for a sufficient length of time.'[126] Wilson disagreed with this assessment, insisting that 'they were capable of

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[120] Report by Lieutenant C. Norman. Swinton, AWM: 3DRL 4/42.
[121] Letter from General Allen to Gavin Long, May 1954, ibid.
[122] Report by Lieutenant C. Norman. Swinton, ibid.
[123] Letter from General Allen to Gavin Long, 8th May1954, ibid.
[124] Letter from Gavin Long to General Allen, 18th February 1954, ibid.
[125] Report by Lieutenant C. Norman. Swinton, ibid.
[126] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and German-Greek War*, p.227.

holding their ground at Thermopilae (sic) until May 6, provided that the Greek troops would continue to fight in Epirus.'[127] However it was far too late for such a demand to be met by the Greek government for on that very day Prime Minister Koryzis had been contacted by the Commander of the Epirus Army Ioannis Pitsikas and given the following report: 'The situation has reached its limit. The XVII [Division] troops are abandoning Legaritsa which covers the left flank of the Division Group. The A' Army Corps similarly reports a military leak of the VIII Division. The XI Division, which covers Metsovo is leaking away. In the name of God, save the Army from the Italians. Pitsikas.'[128] The Greek commander in a phone conversation with the Prime Minister stressed that the situation had now reached such a critical point that it had to be resolved the same day 'because it was impossible to restrain the men any longer.'[129] Pitsikas was in a state of panic, under extreme pressure from his Commanders and the interference of the Archbishop of Ioannina Sprydon who had been lobbying the government for an armistice with the Germans since February 1941.

Koryzis had a crisis of immense proportions on his hands. Not only was he under extreme pressure from the Commander of the Army of Western Macedonia to directly intervene in military matters and agree to the immediate surrender of the Greek forces against the wishes of the Greek King and the Commander-in-Chief, but he was also faced with treachery and insubordination within the cabinet. Without the government's authority the Greek Minister of Finance granted 'two more months pay in addition to the two months Easter pay to the civil list and a further bonus of 3,000 drachmas per employe (sic) to give the impression that the government was liquidating.' [130] The Minister of War had issued leave to the troops in the middle of a campaign. According to Laird Archer, the King was 'in a rage . . . held Korizis (sic) responsible for not controlling his minister of war and demanded the immediate rescinding of the famous order and the return of the men to the front. Korizis (sic) summoned the council of ministers, ordered the change.'[131]

After the meeting with the King and the Allies, Koryzis went home and committed suicide that night. A most secret cablegram arrived the next day for Acting Prime Minister Arthur Fadden from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs explaining that: 'Greek President of the Council (Korisis) committed suicide yesterday evening after telling the King that he felt that he had failed the King in the task entrusted to him. . . . [H]is action was not due to any immediate deterioration in the military situation. The King has decided to take over the

[127] Ibid p.227.
[128] Ibid p.230.
[129] Ibid pp.230-231.
[130] Archer, *Athens Journal 1940-194*, p.27.
[131] Ibid p.27.

Government himself.'[132] The SOE report on Greece however maintained that Koryzis took his life because the King refused to allow the Greek forces to surrender. Whatever the cause for the Greek President's suicide, the Australian government was still being kept in the dark about the real situation in Greece.

At a subsequent meeting at the Greek General Headquarters attended this time by General Wavell, on 19 April 1941, the day after Koryzis' death, it was decided by the Greek Government that the best course of action was for the British Expeditionary Force to evacuate its forces from Greece. It was agreed that the 'Greek forces in Epirus would continue to fight until the retirement of the British was secured.'[133] Although the Greek King and his government agreed to keep the Greek troops fighting until the Allied forces left Greece he had little control over the behaviour of the commanders in Epirus, who ignored his order.[134] Instead,

> the Commanders of the A', B; and C' Army Corps as well as the Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop of Ioannina, Spyridon pressed the Commander [Ioannis Pitsikas] to the initiative to call a truce with the enemy at once. After the decisive refusal of the latter to take such an initiative, the Commanders of the Army Corps with the active participation of Spyridon, decided to put him aside and offer the initiative to their senior Lieutenant General Tsolakoglou, Commander of the C' Army Corps.'[135]

Pitsikas refused to disobey the King's and the Commander-in-Chief's direct order to continue fighting, and was ousted from his position. Instead General Tsolakoglou took over the negotiations with the Germans, signing an unauthorised armistice with Liebstandarte Dietrich, Commander of the Adolf Hitler SS Bodyguard Division at Votonosi village on 20 April 1941 at Metsovo. By 20 April the Germans had captured Trikkala and Larissa. They had been successful in convincing the Greek commanders that their quarrel was with the British forces, not the Greeks. German propaganda maintained that the Greeks had fought valiantly and would not be taken prisoners of war but be allowed to return home to their villages. The treatment of the Greeks during the occupation belied this claim.

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[132] Cablegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Prime Minister's Department, 19 April 1941, NAA: A1608, War 1941 April 1 to 30.

[133] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and German-Greek War*, p.228.

[134] The Greek King was neither popular with his troops nor his people. According to a British military intelligence report: 'He is shy and in public often appears bored. He has made no attempt to visit the front and this has been a subject of adverse comment in Army circles.' SOE activities in Greece 1940-1942, NAB, HS 7/150.

[135] Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and German-Greek War*, p.231.

General Tsolakoglou April 1941, Greek Literary and Historical Archives Athens.

Some Greeks have argued that Tsolakoglou's defection was an act of patriotism not betrayal.[136] They do not regard him as a Fascist collaborator but a Greek nationalist concerned with the fate of his soldiers. To keep fighting as the Greek King and Commander-in-Chief had ordered would have meant the sacrifice of the entire Greek army. One such Greek was Costas Stassinopoulos, who was arrested during the German occupation of Greece for publishing an underground newspaper and taken to a prison camp in Germany. He kept a diary of the events of the time explaining that

> Tsolakoglou's departure from the directives set by Athens – his haste, his concession, the final signature of capitulation with terms of unconditional surrender – was at the time considered an act of treason. This label was verified when, a few days later, he formed a government in Athens with the blessings of the Germans. . . . Nevertheless, a study of the fact, given perspective by time, does not entirely justify such an appellation. . . . His actions in the matter of the capitulation were motivated by the tragic circumstances in which the Greek army found itself. Tsolakoglou was only being humane.[137]

Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, who became the deputy premier and war minister in the Greek government-in-exile was in Ioannina at this time of the capitulation. He also supports the claim that Tsolakoglou was not a German collaborator. ' "I could see," he wrote, "the unbending will of Pitsikas and his aides to continue the fight. But," he added, "Tsolakoglou too, until April 16,

[136] author's conversation with military staff at the Greek Directorate of Military History, Athens October 2003.
[137] Costas Stassinopoulos, *Modern Greeks: Greece in World War II*, American Hellenic Institute Foundation, Washington, 1997, pp.100-101.

was the 'unbending General' who had embraced the spirit of sacrifice in the war against the Germans, and only when he saw the evidence of the collapse did he change his mind." '[138]

Major – General Stefanos Sarafis, a republican resistance leader at the time has insisted that

> [r]esponsibility for what happened . . . does not lie with the generals who capitulated but with the whole government and Commander-in-Chief who not only failed to take measures to avert the surrender, but by their general attitude indicated that surrender was inevitable. . . . [T]hey should have reinforced the front-line forces, hastened to the front themselves, organized successive lines of resistance, encouraged the troops and avoided the premature capitulation and the betrayal of our Allies. Instead they gave the signal for disbandment on 15 April by handing out indefinite home leave (at naval and air bases in Eastern Macedonia, etc) and by making preparations for their own departure abroad at the same time as they were talking about a fight to the finish.[139]

In part Sarafis was correct. The Greek King and his court had been lobbying the British government to assist their early departure from Greece, but the British war cabinet insisted that they stay as they were concerned that their removal would send the wrong message to the Greek people. The Greek Navy refused to convey the Royal family and government to Crete, seeing their departure as a betrayal of the Greek people. Evangelos Spyropoulos' research revealed that

> [t]he princes and princesses, several cabinet ministers and their families brought whole households with them for transportation to Crete or to the Middle East. "The view of these things irked the officers and crew of the warship *Olga*; they mutinied and did not allow anyone to embark." The same instances occurred on other ships. The indignation of the navy officers and crew were justified psychologically. They thought – while the nation was fighting for its life – the court, the ministers as well as their retinue, all they cared about was to save their skin and riches. Similar incidents also were repeated on Crete. With great difficulty a warship was finally found to transport government and baggage to Crete. The king and the prime minister were flown to Crete on a British aircraft.[140]

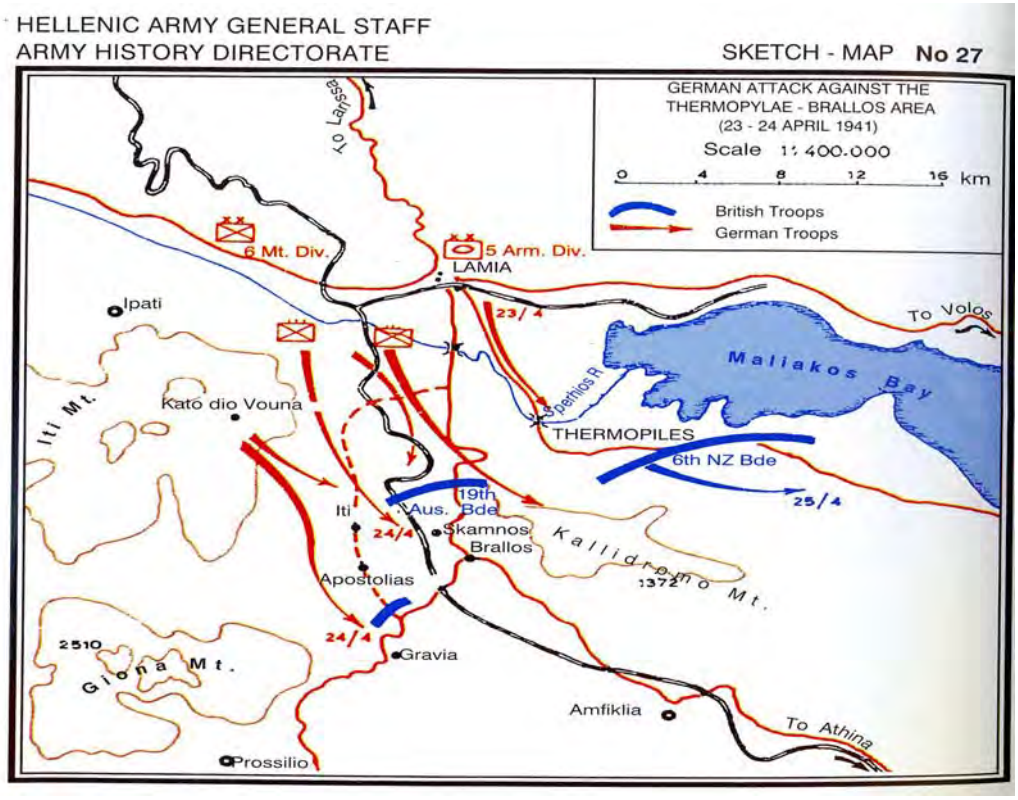
Thermopylae

While the Greek commander in Northern Epirus was signing an armistice with the Germans the Australian troops were in the process of withdrawing south to the Thermopylae pass. The 'pass itself has only a narrow road running through, which in places is cut from the cliff face, and it was cramed (sic) with transport of all descriptions: if the Germans had sent their bombers over they would have been able to knock out pretty nearly all of it, because at times there were long halts whilst the jam of vehicles in front was straightened out.'[141] In preparation for taking up their defensive position Brigadier Allen and his Liaison officer Lieutenant Swinton did a reconnaissance of the area. Swinton explained that the

> Brigadier wished to make contact with the Greek forces on our left and we therefore followed the road on until we reached the Greek H.Q. There appeared to be plenty of high

[138] Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, cited in ibid p.101.
[139] Major General Stefanos Sarafis, *ELAS: Greek Resistance Army*, Humanities Press, New Jersey, English translation 1980, p.27 & p.26.
[140] Evangelos Spyropoulos, *The Greek Military (1909-1941) and the Greek Mutinies in the Middle East (1941-1944)*, East European Monographs, Boulder, 1993, p. 67.
[141] Report by Lieutenant C. Norman Swinton, AWM: 3DRL 4/42.

Greek officers about but very few troops: on making enquiries concerning the Greek positions we learnt that actually there were no troops holding the area at all, they were simply depending on the nature of the country to hold the Germans! This was very disturbing news because it meant that the whole basis of the defence plan of the Thermopylae Pass area was at fault, and could very easily be overcome if the Germans once got around the left flank.'[142]



Map of Thermopylae –Braillos Pass Sketch – Map 27, Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and German-Greek War*, p.228.

Given this situation it was decided on 20 April that Brigadier Allen's forces would take up a position guarding the western approach to Thermopylae to protect 19th Brigade's left flank. Brigadier Brunskill explained that the 'Greeks failed to rally on the Thermopylae position with the remnants of the British force. This latter was by now reduced to the New Zealand Division, less one battalion lost, the 6th Australian Division, reduced to little more than two Brigade groups, and an armoured brigade without any armour. There were no aircraft at all.'[143]

With the absence of the Greek troops it was decided that it was impossible to hold this position with the forces they had available to them. 'What a picture,' wrote the American Ambassador in his diary after being informed of the situation, 'it would never have come true if the British had seven divisions the Department told me they were planning to. Two divisions

[142] Ibid.
[143] Brunskill, "The Administrative Aspect of the Campaign in Greece in 1941," p.134.

and a half! There will be a grand rumpus now in Parliament, and what will Australia and New Zealand say?'[144]

The capitulation of the Greek army on 20 April meant that evacuation was now imminent. On the morning of 21 April General Blamey told Brigadier Rowell that 'the Greeks in the Epirus had packed up without reference to their GHQ and that the Greek government had said, if we were to get out, we had better be quick about it.'[145] This left the Allies with very little time to get their troops out of Greece. Major General Stefanos Sarafis, a jailed Republican officer who was to become the leader of ELAS, the Greek Resistance Army during the occupation of Greece, was highly critical of the behaviour of the Greek Government during the German invasion stating that

> [o]ur British allies were left to continue the struggle alone and unsupported. Thus it came about that at Thermopylae, . . . we were treated to the unprecedented sight of British soldiers giving battle while the Greeks were absent from the field. We were fighting an Allied war. We should have put up a defence until the last moment to give our allies time to take the necessary measures. We should have formed a rear-guard and facilitated the withdrawal of the British, and as far as possible of Greek troops so that they could be used in Crete and on another front.'[146]

Sarafis did not blame the Greek people or troops for this action, but the behaviour of those in the Greek military who continued to negotiate with the Germans for an armistice whilst the Australians were fighting on their behalf in Greece. Deputy Minister for War, Georgios Papaddemas had issued orders disbanding units such as the Cretan V Division and giving the Greek army in Albania indefinite leave, while the Australians were fighting at Thermopylae. Floyd Spencer from his analysis of Greek writing about the war maintained that it was

> Common knowledge that King George II's war minister, Pappademas, at the most crucial stage of the April campaign had deliberately given leave to key officers in various sections of action and all branches of the Greek Armed Forces. The suicide of Premier Alexandros Koryzes, during Easter Week 1941, was construed, as an open admission that in the very highest places there had been treachery to the Greek cause. The least that could be said was that the Greek General Staff had failed to cooperate with the British in producing a workable defence plan.[147]

Braillos Pass

The 19th Brigade had taken up position on the Braillos pass on 19 April and was awaiting the German arrival. The Commander, Brigadier George Vasey, had no knowledge of the capitulation of the Greeks further north nor that the evacuation of British forces from Greece was now imminent. Told by General Iven Mackay that there would be no more withdrawals, Vasey deployed the 2/1st and 2/4th Battalions at the top of Braillos pass issuing the now famous

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[144] Iatrides, *Ambassador MacVeagh Reports*, p.345.
[145] Letter from Syd Rowell to Gavin Long, 20 January 1947, AWM: 67 3/338 part 2, p.11.
[146] Sarafis, *Elas: Greek Resistance Army*, pp.26-27.
[147] Spencer, *War and Postwar Greece*, p.14.

order 'here we bloody well are and here we bloody well stay.'[148] With the arrival of the 2/11th Battalion on 21 April he was able to relieve the 2/5th that had been placed on the 'extreme right to link with the left of the New Zealand Division.'[149] The 2/11th Battalion performed very well holding off the enemy until the evening of 24 April but suffered heavy casualties. A fact not generally known, explained Gavin Long, because 'the corps report on Greece was written long before the return of some officers of 2/11th Battalion from Greece. It contained no reference to the final engagement round Brailos – fact best not known in W.A.; the 2/11th Battalion suffered the heaviest losses in killed and wounded of any Australian battalion in Greece, most of them at Brailos (sic).'[150] Nor does there appear to have been a 19th Brigade report written on the campaign in Greece, making it difficult to gauge Vasey's response to the dangerous situation his brigade was ensconced in at Braillos.

Meanwhile arrangements were being made for the withdrawal of the Allied forces from Greece beginning the night of 22 April 1941. 'Major Edgar was sent ahead to reconnoitre the road and post M.Ps. as guides in the towns we had to pass through on the way: this proved a wise precaution because Fifth Columnists were active throughout Greece and it would have been an easy matter to divert the convoy off the road it was supposed to take and thereby cause terrific confusion.'[151] At this time the Germans were dropping leaflets from their planes urging the Australians to surrender.[152]

Evacuation

The evacuation from Greece placed considerable strain on the Australian high command. Wilson left Blamey to take charge of the evacuation as he was engaged in Athens 'patch[ing] up a crumbling political organisation.'[153] On 22 April Blamey called a meeting with Mackay, Rowell and Henry Wells, his senior liaison officer, to discuss the arrangements. According to Rowell, Blamey was 'physically and mentally broken.'[154] In a letter written in 1947 to Gavin Long, Rowell described Blamey as, 'almost in tears and gave Mackay, who was always a model of calm, such a garbled Order that I was forced tactfully to intervene and get him straight. After it was all over, I took Mackay, Sutherland and Prior out on to the side of the hill and we went through the whole thing again in proper sequence.'[155] John Hetherington offered a more sympathetic interpretation of Blamey's behaviour, explaining that 'Blamey's enemies were to assail him later for having "run out of Greece." The charge would have been ludicrous if it had not been less offensive. Blamey left Greece in obedience to an order from his superior officer.

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[148] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.143.
[149] Ibid p.140.
[150] Letter from Gavin Long to General Allen, 8 August 1952, AWM: 3DR 4/42.
[151] Report by Swinton, ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Narrative on the Campaign in Greece, AWM54 534/5/14, p.12.
[154] Letter from Sydney Rowell to Gavin Long, 20 January 1947, AWM: 67 3/338 part 2.
[155] Ibid.

He was not offered the choice of whether he should go or remain.'[156] Apparently Wavell's order was predicated on the belief that Britain's prestige would suffer if more its Generals were captured.[157]

The level of stress that the situation in Greece presented for the Australian commander was immense but it need not have been so severe had intelligence on the Greek army been shared with Blamey during the campaign. The Australians might not have been so unprepared for the sudden capitulation of the Greek forces on the Albanian front had General Wilson kept them properly informed. Wilson claimed that he had been caught off guard by the Greek defection, blaming the British Military Mission for failing to properly brief him. In reality General Wilson had no time for the Military Mission whose officers had been assigned to his headquarters and had arrogantly dismissed their advice. The Inter-Services report on the campaign was highly critical of Wilson's command concluding that

> [u]pon their arrival in Athens, the most senior officers on "W" Force Headquarters, appear to have allowed their judgment and reason to be so warped by a clash of personalities that the existing machinery for liaison was deliberately and wantonly sabotaged. Failure on the part of "W" Force Headquarters to maintain intimate touch with events on the Albanian front must in part be attributed to disregard of advice given by the British Military Mission. The latter had advised and indeed arranged for the permanent location of a British Liaison Officer, together with a wireless set at Jannina, the Headquarters of the Greek army in Albania.[158]

Wilson would have preferred the Mission be disbanded and recommended such an action to his superiors. The inter-services committee was of a different opinion insisting that 'liaison with a foreign army is best conducted by an accredited Mission.'[159] This could explain why the British did not use Cypriot troops as interpreters in Greece as they had not been trained for the job. Wilson's failure to utilise the advice offered by the British Military Mission jeopardized the safety of the Australian forces in Greece.

On Anzac Day 1941 Blamey departed from Greece with, amongst others, his son and his Chief of Staff Brigadier Sydney Rowell who was ordered to return with him to Alexandria.[160] Rowell felt it was his duty to stay and supervise the evacuation but he had no choice but to depart with Blamey.[161] On the same day the British Ministry of Information issued

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[156] John Hetherington, *Blamey: The biography of Field-Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1954, p.107.
[157] Ibid p.107.
[158] Greece: paper on an investigation by Inter-Services Committee, NAB: WO 106/3161.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Blamey was to be 'bitterly criticised publicly as well as privately, for the rest of the war, and even after the war ended,' for taking his own son out of Greece, Hetherington, *Blamey*, p. 108.
[161] Rowell and Blamey fell out in Greece with Rowell subsequently stating that he never wanted to serve under him again. Their relationship disintegrated completely during the New Guinea campaign with Rowell's removal from command. Possibly this influenced what he had to say about Blamey's performance in Greece.

the following message to reassure a troubled public back home in Australia, Britain and New Zealand that all was going well with the evacuation of the Allied troops from Greece. '(1) Excellent collaboration and harmonious relations between British and Greek people. (2) Admiration for Greece which her heroic resistance has evoked on the part of the British public.'[162] They had to ensure, given the cost of the Greek campaign in terms of men and equipment, that there was no doubt about the loyalty of the Greek Allies in the minds of the general public. Certainly there was little doubt about the loyalty and appreciation of the Greek people as they bade a warm farewell to the Allied soldiers offering them food and drink where they could and shelter to those who were left behind until they were able to escape from Greece. Some villagers even engaged in widening the roads in the middle of the night so that the convoys taking the soldiers could pass through to the embarkation points.[163] The Australian soldiers have fond memories of the help they received from the Greek people along the embarkation beaches. Colonel Alex Sheppard explained that 'it is hard to restrain a tear when I think of it, I remember the Greek peasants, taking boots off their own feet to give to Australian soldiers.'[164]

The journey to reach the embarkation beaches has been described as one of the most harrowing experiences by the Australian soldiers. Lieutenant A. F. McRobbie writing to his mother described 'the Greek campaign [as] a nightmare . . . . I thought I was finished. My nerves were gone to pieces and I just shook like a leaf.'[165] The Allied soldiers were chased out of Greece with incredible speed by the Luftwaffe, whose unceasing bombing aimed at destroying the soldiers' morale led to some undignified behaviour during the withdrawal. The Provost Marshal war diary recorded that the 'discipline of the units of the 6 Aust. Div . . . deteriorated considerably when enemy aircraft was active. Drivers and passengers of vehicles became "panicky" when aeroplanes were observed and left their conveyances standing, often in the centre of the road while they took cover . . . and remained there for unnecessary long periods.'[166]

The Allied soldiers embarked from a number of beaches and ports around Athens and further south in the Peloponesse. The situation on the embarkation beaches was chaotic as hundreds of Australian, British, Palestinian, Cypriot, Yugoslav and Greek soldiers tried to board the ships. Even though the Greek soldiers wanted to continue the fight against the Germans in Crete priority was given to the evacuation of the Allied troops from Greece. The sheer weight of

[162] Cablegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to Prime Minister's Department, 25 April 1941, NAA: A1608 A41/1/1 Part 20: War 1941 April 1 to 30.
[163] The Imperial Campaign in Greece 1941, Sheppard Papers, NLA: MS8029 Folder 8.
[164] "The Trouble in Greece," ibid Folder 4.
[165] Letter from Lieutenant A.F. McRobbie 2/11th Battalion to his mother 29th April 1941.
[166] Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal 6th Division, January to October 1941, AWM: 52 18/1/5.

numbers trying to embark caused Lieutenant Colonel Alex Sheppard, who was in charge of operations on 'D' Beach at Porto Rafti, considerable problems. He explains that

> [s]warms of Greek soldiers were beguiling, pleading and storming to be allowed to embark too, but there simply was not room for them. In any case there was the risk that they might be enemy agents. Ever since their move through Athens troops were forced to be on guard against fifth column interference. Provosts had not been available for the convoy on the night of 27/28 April and had to rely on signposts for warnings of detours and road-turnings. It was found that between Athens and the coast practically every sign-post had been turned in the wrong direction. On other occasions genuine Greek soldiers had been ordered by their officers to give our troops wrong road directions. One Greek officer approached us with the tale that he had 200 of his men he wanted to get away. On being searched he was found to have three pistols and a huge sum of money concealed on him and he was promptly sent to headquarters for interrogation. On 29th April a Greek civilian paid a visit with the request that be allowed aboard a kayak when the troops embarked. He too was searched and found to be carrying a large quantity of ammenol (a kind of TNT ten times stronger than gelignite) – "enough to blow up half the fleet," said Sheppard. He paused a moment, then added, "We didn't see him after this. He had an unfortunate accident."[167]

After holding off the German 6th Mountain Division at Braillos Pass for three days to facilitate the withdraw of the Allied troops, the 19th Brigade departed from Megara beach on the night of the 25April. The next day, 26 April, the Germans dropped 800 parachutists at the Corinth Canal to cut off the evacuation of the British forces from the beaches further south in the Peloponesse. The 17th Brigade detached the 2/6th Battalion to assist the 4th Hussars at the canal. This enabled the 16th and 17th Australian Infantry Brigades to embark that evening from Kalamatta on the southern most tip of Greece. Nonetheless, 10,000 soldiers were left behind in Kalamatta. 8,000 of these soldiers were British and Australian and 2,000 were Yugoslav, Palestinian and Cypriot. On the 29 April 1941 the Germans captured 7,000 of these men while 3,000 managed to escape into the hills.

Conclusion

The capture of the 7,000 Allied soldiers in Greece can be attributed amongst other considerations to the lack of Allied air support during the campaign.[168] Certainly Brigadier Rowell felt that this was an important factor in determining the outcome of the campaign in Greece.[169] What has not been acknowledged, however, is the impact that the behaviour of the senior Greek Commanders and key members of the Greek government had upon allied relations in Greece. The British chose to use the word 'defeatism' rather than 'collaboration' to describe

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[167] "Interview with Major Sheppard by Kenneth Slessor," Cairo 8 May 1941, Sheppard Papers, NLA: MS8029, Folder 3.

[168] 'We were driven out of Greece by superior land and air forces. Our left flank was continually turned: we had no aircraft left: our maintenance was becoming impossible.' Brunskill, "The Administrative Aspect of the Campaign in Greece in 1941," p.135. See Appendix G for Allied Strength and Casualties in Greece.

[169] 'The Campaign in Greece and Crete has merely emphasised one great fundamental lesson … namely that the R.A.F. must come closer to the battlefield if we are to have a chance of competing with the German Army on reasonably equal terms.' Letter from Rowell to Blamey, 11 June 1941, AWM: 54 225/1/11.

the behaviour of the Greek Commanders. However it was 'collaboration' with the Germans, not 'defeatism', that determined the actions of the Greek military and government at this point in the war.[170] The most senior Greek commanders obstructed the allied campaign in Greece through misinformation and passive resistance, if not outright betrayal. The Australians unfortunately were the unwitting recipients of this lack of military cooperation. Yet none of the studies of the Greek campaign have discussed this issue nor brought it to light. Nevertheless it had a strong bearing on the conduct of the campaign.

By the time the Australians had entered Greece to help fight the Germans the national unity of the Greeks was splintering. According to an Australian campaign report the 'political and military structure of Greece was cracking; indeed, the breakdown of organization and resistance seemed imminent, and the shadow of "fifth Column" activity grew darker in Athens and elsewhere behind the front.'[171] The Greek authorities were willing to accept British arms and munitions to fight the Italians, but they desperately wanted to avert a war with Germany. Once it was inevitable, they begrudgingly accepted the meagre help offered to them by the British, knowing that they had little choice. Major Ian Pirie, an intelligence officer with SOE explained that the ' "main difficulty [in Greece] . . . is that, whereas the British are trying to make it clear that they are fighting Fascism and not Italians, the regime here is trying to point out they are fighting Italians and not Fascism." '[172] The British found themselves in a very difficult situation in Greece. They were forced, because of the exigencies of war, to form an alliance with a predominantly Fascist state run by a dictator and government that had strong political and economic ties with Germany. The military of Greece was divided in its loyalty between republicans and monarchists. Most of the current-serving officers, however, were pro-Fascist, as the republicans had been purged from the army. They wanted the British out of Greece as soon as possible in order to facilitate a truce with Germany. Thus there were no serious attempts on the part of the III Army of Epirus under the command of General Tsolakoglou or the Central Macedonia Army under the command, initially, of General Kotulas followed by General Karassos to engage the Germans. It is true that the Greek army on the Albanian front held their position until faced with encirclement by the Germans, but they had failed to rally further south at the Thermopylae line to assist the British evacuation of Greece. Instead the senior commanders ordered the disbanding of their units and sent their soldiers home. Some officers were so perplexed by these orders that they sent a delegation to Athens to

[170] The term 'collaboration' means traitorous cooperation with the enemy and dates from 1940 when it was used to describe the cooperation of the Vichy regime in France with the Nazis. A 'collaborationist' is one who cooperates with enemy forces occupying one's own country whether directly or indirectly by hindering the progress or failing to assist the forces defending one's country from the enemy.
[171] Narrative on the Campaign in Greece, AWM: 54 534/5/14.
[172] SOE activities in Greece 1940-1942, NAB: HS 7/150.

find out the truth of the matter.[173] The Australians concluded that although 'individually gallant, the Greeks on this front were not well equipped and led.'[174]

C.N. Hadjipateras & M.S. Fafalios, Eyewitnessed Greece 1940-41, Efstradthiadis Group, Athens, 1996, p.233.

Though General Bakopoulos, Pitsikas and Papagos did make an effort to resist the Germans, General Papagos and the King of Greece were not totally blameless for the disaster that befell the allies in Greece. Lieutenant General Dimitris Katheniotes, who conducted a study of the war using the reports of the field commanders, was particularly critical of the leadership of General Papagos. 'According to Katheniotes, the Metaxas regime and the Greek High Command were so dominated by a passive, defensive mentality and by timid, unimaginative strategy that they hardly issued one truly offensive order during the whole course of the Greek war against the Axis.'[175] The King of Greece was also culpable for the events that transpired in Greece for not using the opportunity offered to him by the death of Metaxas to purge the Greek government of Fascist elements. Instead of removing the Minister of Internal Security Constantine Maniadakis, referred to as the 'Himmler of Greece', to facilitate the appointment of pro-democratic ministers he chose to retain his services.

The fact, however, that General Tsolakoglou and his fellow senior officers were prepared to disregard a direct order from their Commander-in-Chief, General Papagos and their King to keep fighting, at least until the Allies were safely out of the country, indicates that the Greek High Command had lost control of the Armed forces of the country. The Greek army, even

[173] Archer, *Athens Journal*, p.27.
[174] Narrative on the Campaign in Greece, AWM: 54 534/5/14.
[175] Spencer, *War and Postwar Greece* p.9.

given the odds against Greece, could have prolonged their resistance to the Germans had the appropriate orders been issued by the Greek General Staff. Instead the Greek Commander of the Western and Central Macedonian Army chose not to cooperate with the Allied forces. A British inter-Services investigation of the campaign found that during the withdrawal the

(a) Greek Central Macedonian Army was ordered to establish its H.Q. adjacent to H.Q. Amyntaion Detachment, in order to make use of British communications. This order was not obeyed.
(b) Greek units and formations passed starting points from 8 to 10 hours behind time in disorganised groups which became indescribably jumbled.
(c) Amyntaion Detachment . . . provided 100 Motor Transports to lift Greek troops. The Greeks, however, arrived in all cases many hours late, and misdirected the Motor Transports.
(d) 12 and 20 Divisions made no arrangement to ensure that troops were sent to the required destination, and a large portion made off southwards, and were diverted towards Grevena by Force Road Control party at Kozani.
(e) Only those portions of the 12 Greek Division which were under virtual control of 16 Australian Infantry Brigade actually moved to time, in the right direction, in some slight semblance of military discipline.
(f) Greek 12 and 20 Divisions never regained control after their withdrawal from the Vermion positions, but continued to disintegrate in a disorganised rabble whose main object was to reach Athens.[176]

Under the prevailing circumstances the Australian officers found it difficult to conduct a military alliance with the Greeks. The failure of Australia's military relationship with the Greek General Staff was not caused primarily by language difficulties, though it was a serious problem, but by the decision taken by the senior Greek commanders not to fight the Germans. All types of excuses can be manufactured to explain why Australia's military relationship with the Greeks collapsed, such as poor transport, communication, roads, deficiencies in munitions, and fatigue of the Greek soldiers as a result of the Italian campaign. While these factors had a bearing on what happened, they do not satisfactory explain the behaviour of the senior Greek Commanders during the German attack on Greece. Although rarely discussed in the literature because of Cold War loyalties it was the Fifth Column activities of the Greek authorities that led to the breakdown of cooperation between the Allied forces in Greece.

How could the Australians form a successful partnership with a military leadership that could not be trusted? It is not surprising the Australian senior officers had a strained and difficult relationship with their Greek counterparts. Nevertheless the British were also responsible for the disintegration of allied relations in Greece through their poor planning and refusal to share their intelligence on the country with the Australians. Both the British and Greeks deceived the Australians. The Australian officers, however, did not blame their difficulties in Greece on the Greek soldiers and civilians. They were quick to establish who was at fault for the situation they were faced with in Greece. Brigadier Savige observed that 'the

[176] Greece: report on military, NAB: WO 201/72.

valour of the Greek troops against the German would have been . . . good, but I believe that German political tactics created a different outlook in the minds of some senior Greek Officers, and possibly politicians too, towards a war against Germany. This brought about failure, not on the part of the troops, but on the part of some of their leaders who hastened, by any means, to terminate the war. The natural courage, long suffering, and kindliness of the Greek people in those days of adversity reached the highest level of human endeavour, which won the admiration of our Troops, who they inspired.'[177]

[177] Brigadier Savige to Gavin Long, Records of Gavin Long, "The Campaign in Greece," Number 4, Notes on Chapter 19, AWM: 673/348 part 3.

Chapter Three: Australian soldiers in Greece: 'The Grecian Greyhounds'

Personal relations with the people of Greece have often been overlooked and considered irrelevant in studies of the campaign. During the later part of the war, however, the British and Americans considered allied interaction important enough to provide guides on the subject for their soldiers. They produced booklets instructing them on how to negotiate everyday life in Germany, Britain and Australia.[1] These publications offered advice on a diverse range of topics such as national character, language, food, recreation, women and even details about less savoury aspects of the society such as tuberculosis, venereal disease and malnutrition. Their aim was to ensure that their soldiers' behaviour did not alienate local populations. This chapter covers similar subjects that are not normally pursued in traditional narratives of the campaign in an effort to explain why Australians formed such an intimate relationship with their Greek allies during World War Two.

Although the Australian officers experienced difficulties relating with their Greek counterparts on the battlefield, their soldiers encountered few problems in their relations with the Greek people and their troops. This is surprising given that Australian troops did not spend a great deal of time in Greece. Most were only in Greece for a month, and some battalions such as the 2/11th for as little as two weeks, before they were ordered to evacuate.[2] They were in and out of the country so quickly that the German propagandist Lord Haw-Haw nicknamed them 'the Grecian Greyhounds' because of the speed of their departure from the country.[3] The soldiers who were deployed to Greece, however, were left with a lasting impression of the Greeks as a most generous, hospitable and brave people. 'The new arrivals soon discovered,' wrote Gavin Long, 'that Greeks and Italians whom at home they had regarded as rather similar people, were in reality very different.'[4]

The Greek people's response to Australian soldiers was in stark contrast to the behaviour of their senior military leaders and government. Instead of colluding with the enemy the Greek civilians responded with enthusiasm to the arrival of the Australian troops, though there were certainly Fifth Columnists amidst the general population. 'People swarmed around the dock area. They were thrilled at the sight of Australian troops. "Thumbs up" signs and greetings in strange words made the boys feel they were truly welcome,' recorded the 2/4th

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[1] *Instructions for British Servicemen in Germany, 1944* and *Instructions for British Servicemen in France 1944*, Foreign Office publication, reproduced by Bodleian Library, London, 2007; *Instructions for American Servicemen in Australia 1942*,War Department, Washington, D.C. reproduced by Penguin, Camberwell Victoria, 2007.
[2] See Appendix E for a list of the arrival dates of the Australian forces to Greece.
[3] Interview: John Gemmell, 2/5th Battalion, 21 April 2002.
[4] Gavin Long, Bardia to Suda Bay: The 6th Australian Division in Action, unpublished manuscript, AWM: PR88/72 (6).

Battalion history.[5] Unlike the Greek authorities and sections of the middle classes who shared common political and economic interests with Germany, the Greek peasantry had strong republican tendencies. According to George Kourvetaris Greece was controlled by an 'oligarchy of notable families [that] hindered the rapid economic and political development' of the country.[6] In general, the Greek peasants neither condoned nor supported the actions of the Fascist members of the ruling Greek government. The authoritarian regime in place at the time of the Australians' arrival in Greece had not been democratically elected. 'The new regime developed no popular roots and its future depended largely on external factors,' explained John Iatrides.[7]

The egalitarian tendencies of the Australian soldiers earned them the respect of the Greek people who inhabited a highly stratified society where little interaction took place between the classes.[8] Greek society had been dominated by 'the political aristocracy of "Old Greece." '[9] Family dynasties represented by such names as Zaimis, Rallis and Trikoupis ruled Greece for most of the nineteenth century.[10] According to Ken Clift the Australian and New Zealand soldiers lacked the 'class consciousness of the British.'[11] They were happy to socialise with people from all walks of life and their friendliness towards people of lower rank annoyed the British, who came from a society with a rigid class structure.

Greece was a totally different experience from Egypt for the Australian soldiers. The landscape was breathtakingly beautiful, a big change from the deserts of Egypt and North Africa. Bob Holt recalled that: 'After our stay in the hot and dusty Western Desert and in Egypt, the green grass and dust-free air was really something and thoroughly appreciated.'[12] The Greek countryside had a powerful effect on the soldiers. 'Just imagine, one day dust, heat and smelly niggers and dirty Alexandria; two days later waking up in beautiful woods in fresh clean air,

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[5] Unit History Editorial Committee (ed.), *White over Green: The 2/4th Battalion*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney 1963, p. 104.

[6] George Kourvetaris, *Studies on Modern Greek Society and Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, p.10.

[7] John Iatrides, *Greece in the 1940s: A Nation in Crisis*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1981, p.xiv.

[8] Egalitarianism was often associated with Australian soldiers' refusal to follow orders or salute. According to Robson, 'Egalitarianism is most clearly marked in the men's attitude to military hierarchy, army procedures and customs.' L.L. Robson, " The Australian Soldier: Formation of a Stereotype," in McKernan, M. & Browne, M. (eds), *Australia Two Centuries of War & Peace*, AWM in association with Allen & Unwin Australia, Canberra, 1988, p. 319.

[9] Iatrides, *Greece in the 1940s*, p.xiii.

[10] Charilaous Trikoupis a liberal politician, served as Prime Minister of Greece seven times from 1875-1895. Thrasivoulos Zaimis who led the conservatives was Prime Minister of Greece twice; his son Alexandros Zaimis was Prime Minister four times before his death in 1936.The Rallis family also had a long association with Greek politics. Dimitrios Rallis was Prime Minister of Greece five times, his son Ioannis Rallis was Prime Minister during the German occupation of Greece and died in jail for his collaboration with the Nazis and his grandson, George Rallis was Prime Minister of Greece from 1980-1981.

[11]Ken Clift cited in Charlton, Peter, *The Thirty-Niners*, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1981, p.62.

7. Bob "Hooker" Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape: The Trials and Tribulations of a Four Figure Man*, Streamlined Press, Brookvale, 1981, p.87.

hills all around us and nothing but grass and little cottages among the woods. You can easily imagine the effect it had on us,' wrote Ken Cliff of his wartime experience in Greece.[13] The fragrances of Greece remained with the soldiers long after the campaign had ended, rekindling memories of the sights and scents of Athens in springtime. 'As we reached the hills,' wrote Brigadier John Rogers in his memoirs, 'wild flowers appeared in glorious patches of colour on all sides. These were not like our wild flowers but rather the flowers of our gardens at home – ranunculus, anemone, hyacinth, pansies, carnations, roses, irises and more poppies.'[14] Smell can have a strong evocative effect on people's emotions and memory, triggering long forgotten experiences and events.[15] Alain Corbin discovered from his research that the 'sense of smell was viewed as capable of shaking a man's inner life more profoundly than were the senses of hearing or of sight.'[16]

The Australians were not only dazzled by the Greek countryside but also by its people. They warmed to the Greek people and they to them. 'We saw civilians,' wrote Ken Clift, 'dressed as we used to dress before the war, civilians whom you felt you could trust.'[17] 'Trust' was an important component of their relationship with the Greek populace. This was unusual, as Greeks generally did not trust anyone outside their own families. According to George Kourvetaris 'in Greek society and culture, the most important primary group is the family and, by extension, kinship and relationships . . . . These are the in-groups to which the Greek gives his or her loyalty.'[18] The Australians, however, were overwhelmed by the hospitality bestowed upon them by the Greeks. Jo Gullet of 2/5th Battalion explains what made their relationship with the Greeks so special.

> Quite a lot of people gathered on the route to welcome us, giving us cakes and sweets and oranges. We noticed that what they had to give us was very little but the point was they were giving, not trying to sell the stuff. This was the whole difference between our relationship with the people of Greece as compared with the people of any other country we had served in. . . . To the Arabs and Egyptians we were outsiders. . . .The Greeks always made it obvious that we were their people and they treated us like their own.[19]

The Australian soldiers experienced what is generally referred to in Greece as 'φιλότιμο' [philotimo], defined as 'a sense of pride and honour.' In practice it meant amongst others behaving 'in an honourable way' towards ones friends by being generous and hospitable

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[13] Ken Clift, *War Dance: A story of the 2/3 Aust. Inf. Battalion A.I.F.*, Streamlined Press, Brookvale, N.S.W.1980, p.116.
[14] John David Rogers, A Digger Remembers, unpublished memoirs, Papers of Brigadier Rogers, AWM: PRO3244.
[15] Trygg Engen, *Odor Sensation and Memory*, Praeger Publisher, New York, 1991, p.2.
[16] Alain Corbin, *The Foul and The Fragrant; Odour and the Social Imagination*, Picador, London, 1994, p.8.
[17] Clift, *War Dance*, p120.
[18] Kourvetaris, *Studies on Modern Greek Society and Politics*, p.6.
[19] Henry ('Jo') Gullet, *Not as a Duty Only: An Infantryman's war*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton Vic, 1976, p.44.

in acknowledgement of their loyalty and support.[20] This is a core Greek value and a major determinant of the Greek national character. According to Dorothy Lee's study of Greece 'the greater the intensity of Greek *philotimo* the greater the degree of one's Greekness.'[21] To the Greeks, to display 'philotimo' to ones friends is a sign of 'πολιτισμό' [politismo] or civilised, cultured and refined behaviour. [22] Not to do so is considered an abuse of friendship.

The comparison between the Greeks and the Egyptians was constantly on the minds of the Australian soldiers as they landed in Greece. The Egyptians were referred to in a derogatory fashion as 'wogs' and 'Gyppos.' They were thought to be untrustworthy and out to 'rip off' the Australians to 'make a quick buck.' Chester Wilmot, working for the ABC Field unit in Greece declared in his radio broadcast that:

> It was grand to be in a place where you're welcome and where troops coming to fight against an invader aren't greeted with surly looks and regarded as fair game for a fat profit. . . . We're in a country where you can walk round the streets for hours without being besieged by touts or seedy youths selling dirty post-cards.[23]

The Australian censor, however, never allowed these remarks to hit the airways and a thick line appeared across any comment that might offend the Egyptians. This type of information is still visible through the pencil line of the military censor in the dispatches and radio transcripts of the war correspondents. Location of troops and negative comments about the allies of the British Empire, critiques of Australian soldiers or Allied leadership and strategy were not allowed and usually edited out, but occasionally mild criticism did get past the censor's eye. Of course this is rather a one-sided picture of Australian-Egyptian relations during the Second World War and remains to be examined.[24]

The war in Greece generated considerable propaganda for Australian consumption. The Australian government sent a large contingent of press and film personnel to report on the campaign. Australian poet, Kenneth Slessor, was appointed Australia's official war correspondent in Greece while the Sydney Morning Herald sent reporter Gavin Long to Greece. The Department of Communication also sent a film unit to Greece with a young photographer by the name of George Silk. It was a rather controversial appointment as Silk, who was born in New Zealand, was only 23 years of age. *The Journalist* of May 1940 suggested that he had been selected because he was young and impressionable enough to produce the type of photographs

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[20] Greek-English Dictionary, Volume B, Michigan Press, Athens, 1971.
[21] Dorothy Lee, "Greece" in Mead M. (ed.) *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change*, UNESCO, Paris, 1953 cited in Kourvetaris, G., *Studies on Modern Greece Society and Politics*, p.13.
[22] Greek-English Dictionary, Volume A.
[23] Chester Wilmot, 'A Letter from Greece,' 7 April 1941, transcript, A.B.C's Field Unit with the A.I.F., NLA: MS8436 Series 1 Folder 34.
[24] Robson concluded that, '[t]o the stereotypic Australian soldier the Egyptians were all 'wogs' or 'Gyppos'. . . . The typical Australian soldier was a racist of impressive depth with the most acute sense of smell in the world. He was preoccupied with cleanliness, and observed nearly everyone else, including the British, as being amazingly dirty.' Robson, " The Australian Soldier: Formation of a Stereotype," p. 324.

and film footage that the Australian authorities wanted him to create.[25] Although young, Silk was a very talented photographer. His photographs of the Australian soldiers in Greece were brilliant propaganda pieces. Silhouetted against the ancient ruins of Athens, the Australian soldier with his distinctive slouch hat encompassed all the virtues of the 1st A.I.F: nobility, courage and mateship.

AWM: 006838 (negative by George Silk)

Other photographs by Silk contrasted the Australian soldiers with their Greek allies, the noble Greek militia -- old men from Greek villages. They were photographed by Silk standing side by side with their Australian allies, united as 'brothers' in the war against the 'Hun'. These were evocative images that conveyed a strong message to the Australian public that here was a people worth fighting for, regardless of the odds the Australian soldiers had against them.[26] These photographs misled the Australian public into believing that the Greeks were far better prepared for the war than they were. In reality 'these simple loyal peasants' only had a 'mixture of small arms which must have come out of the Ark, a few ancient trucks, a conglomeration of bandoliers, different sized ammunition, some mules and Christ only knew who fed them.'[27] Ken Clift observed, however, that 'they had unbounded faith in Greece and optimism for their future and their ability to drive off the aggressors. God help them, we thought, the poor misguided bastards!'[28]

[25] *The Journalist*, May 1940, p. 8, NAA: MP 729/7, item 72/421/9.
[26] These images are rather ironic if one considers the lack of cooperation between the Greek authorities and Australian military during the war in Greece.
[27] Ken Clift, *The Saga of a Sig: The Wartime Memories of Six Years of Service in the Second A.I.F.*, D.C.D. Publications, Randwick, 1972, p.54.
[28] Ibid p.54.

AWM: 007759 (negative by George Silk)

The grim reality of the situation, however, never reached the Australian public's eyes as George Silk's photographs supplied ample material for government propaganda.[29] He produced numerous, now famous, images of Greek and Australian soldiers sharing ouzo at taverns in Athens. These photographs were intended to highlight the camaraderie that had developed between the Australian and Greek soldiers during the campaign in Greece. Chester Wilmot transmitted similar messages in his radio broadcasts to Australia:

AWM: 006809: 1941 Athens. (Negative by George Silk).

> already there's an extremely friendly spirit between the Greeks and Australians. One afternoon we were waiting for the road to be blown up in a mountain pass leading from Salonike (sic). A steady stream of Greeks - soldiers and civilians - were passing

[29] The 2/1st, 2/2nd and 2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalions were given one week's leave in Athens.

> withdrawing to stronger, safer positions over the mountains. . . . It was raining and we had run out of cigarettes and quite casually I said to one of our engineers . . . "Gee, I wish we had some cigarettes" . . . and the next moment like one of Alladin's ghins (sic) a Greek soldier who was passing came over to me and said. . . . "Please, have a cigarette of mine" . . . He took a packet from his pocket . . . he had only two left. . . . This kindliness is typical of the camaraderie, which has grown up spontaneously between the Greeks, and their Allies.[30]

The soldiers warmly recalled the 'conniving between [themselves] and the Greek Royal Guard in Athens.'[31] The 2/4th unit history noted that ' "the Aussies" were intrigued with the Evzones, the "Royal Guardsmen" of the Greek Army. With their white "flared" skirts and the big red pompoms on their shoes they gave an air of feminine splendour. But they were far from that. They were fighters of the highest order -- the very cream of the Greek Army.'[32] Bill Jenkins laughingly remembered that 'one bloke put his hand up the skirt - we soon found out you don't muck about with Evzones!'[33] There was clearly a warmth and respect felt by the troops for their Greek allies.

Courtesy of the Greek Military History Photographic Archives, Athens, number 243

In reality the majority of Australian troops had limited interaction with the Greek troops, the majority of whom were engaged in fighting the Italians in Albania. Silk's photographs were at variance with the observations made by many Australian soldiers in Athens who noted 'the absence of young men in civilian clothes . . . every man of serviceable age was away in the forces. . . . Many of the older folk wore black armbands as evidence of sons lost in

[30] Chester Wilmot, "The Greek Soldier" transcript 16 April 1941,Chester Wilmot Collection, NLA: MS 8436, Folder 34.
[31] Interview: Lieutenant Bill Jenkins, 2/3rd Battalion, 31 March 2003.
[32] Unit History Editorial Committee (ed.), *White over Green*, p. 105.
[33] Interview: Bill Jenkins, 31 March 2003.

their gallant fight against the Italians.'[34] The Greek soldiers pictured in Silk's photographs were on leave from the front. In contrast to Long's images of well dressed Greek soldiers happily interacting with Australian troops Ken Clift found the Greek conscripts to be 'so forlorn and abject and to quote Doug Maddocks of 6 Div. Sigs., "One sand-shoe and one golosher job." They never had a chance right from the jump despite the excellence of some of their units like the Evzones who, smartly dressed, proudly did credit to Greece.'[35]

AWM 006822: Athens 1941. Greek soldiers on leave show diggers the sights. (George Silk)

Silk's photographs reflected the Australian government's concern to present a positive impression of the Allied presence in Greece to the people back home. The British authorities went to great lengths to stress that they had been invited in by the Greeks and did not force Greece against their will into a war with Germany. Certainly German propaganda strongly promoted the idea that the Greeks were being used by the British to fight a war on their behalf. There were those in the Greek Government who felt very strongly that Britain had dragged Greece into the fray.[36]

But how 'real' were these images? Did the war forge a close bond between the Australians and Greeks? Or were these images 'constructs,' produced for digestion by the general public back home in Australia to justify the involvement of Australian troops in such a hazardous venture? Certainly there was a very strained and difficult relationship between the Australian and Greek senior command, but was this the experience of the Australian soldier?

[34] Unit History Editorial Committee (ed.), *White over Green*, p. 105.
[35] Clift, *The Saga of a Sig*, p.54.
[36] The Germans circulated numerous pamphlets in Greek highlighting British exploitation of the Greek nation. Most of these pamphlets are on exhibition at the War Museum in Thessaloniki, Greece. For an example see Chapter One.

What was the nature of the interaction between the Australian soldier and the Greek soldier and civilian? How did the Australian soldiers relate with people whose language and culture was so different from their own? How were the Australian troops received by the locals in Greece?

AWM: photograph number: 006795,

Arrival in Athens

There is no doubt that the Australians were accorded a hero's welcome in Athens: 'right through we were greeted with shouts of "Austrooloos, kali Nikta (good night), kali Mera (good morning) and niki (victory),' wrote Sergeant Robertson of 1 Australian Corps Headquarters. [37] The Greek people lined the streets of Athens throwing flowers cheering "Zeeto ee Australia" (Long live Australia).[38] With the arrival of the Allied troops into Greece 'the enthusiasm for Britain reached tremendous heights,' recorded Clare Hollingworth who was in Athens at the time, 'everywhere outside shops and restaurants one saw the legend "English Spoken" and a Union Jack displayed. Inside the restaurant the menus had frequently been translated into English often of the quaintest and most pidgin variety. One proudly announced itself as "The Best Place for Good Eats". Another confidently offered "Baconized Eggs" to its patrons.'[39] 'At every flower-stall,' Australian signalman Geoffrey Ballard recalled 'the owner would insist on presenting us with a carnation or a rose!'[40]

[37] Letter by Sergeant Robert Robertson, AWM: 2DRL/1304.
[38] Stan Wick, *Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945*, 1977, p.90.
[39] Clare Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1942, pp.22-223.
[40] Geoffrey St. Vincent Ballard, *On Ultra Active Service*, Spectrum Publications, Victoria, 1991, p.40.

Upon arrival at Piraeus harbour the troops were quickly marched out of Athens to Daphne, a camp 10 miles away from the capital. Ken Clift noted that '[o]fficially we weren't allowed to enter the civilians' homes but many chaps were guests at various homes. I managed to get a hot bath from an old couple who lived nearby.' [41] Private Ashfold of the 2/11th Battalion Bren Carrier section recalled the wonderful treatment they received. He explained that 'the Greek women, when returning our beautiful laundered shorts and shirts, would first remove the little springs of lavender from between the fold. This indeed was the Paradise of Ancient Greeks.'[42] The transit camp at Daphne was situated 'in delightful surroundings in the midst of an orchard, very bushy trees, fresh looking houses. . . . The morning was spent in erecting tents in the afternoon a Battalion parade was held, in which the C.O. addressed the troops on the Greek situation, security matters and stressed the importance of being friendly with the people.'[43] The Australian soldiers followed the directive of their commander and befriended the Greek troops camped alongside them at Daphne. From their short stay at Daphne the Australians acquired a smattering of Greek: 'we could exchange greetings in Greek quite well and the Greeks could manage our salutations in English. We would say "Kalimara" and the Greeks would reply "Good morning". Our popular name was Australian "cowboys" on account of our hats.'[44]

AWM: 006837 Daphne 26 March 1941. Australian and Greek soldiers mounting guard over the camp area at Daphne. The Australians are R. Stiles of Manly, NSW and L. Graig of Mosman, NSW both of the 2/1st Battalion (negative by D. Parer).

[41] Clift, *War Dance*, p.117.
[42] *The 2/11th (City of Perth) Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-45*, John Burridge Military Antiques, Swanbourne, 1972, p.87.
[43] 2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalion Diary, AWM: 52 8/3/3.
[44] Cliff, *War Dance*, p.117.

Indiscipline of Australian Troops

Regardless of the welcome the Australians received in Greece there is evidence to suggest that they did not always behave impeccably in the country.[45] Although the Greek King 'spoke cordially of the conduct of troops who had arrived . . . there had unfortunately already been complaints of behaviour of Australians.'[46] Brigadier G. S. Brunskill, in charge of logistics for the Greek campaign, sent a memo to the Australian and New Zealand commanders voicing similar concerns. He explained that: 'indications to date from incidents, which have occurred, show that the following policy must be implemented as soon as possible. (a) Troops must not be accommodated in an area close alongside or in and around civilians' houses.'[47] General Blamey, the Australian Commander, in an attempt to pre-empt any misconduct in Greece declared that:

> In Australia we had a very wrong impression of this valiant nation. I am sure that, as you get to know the Greeks, the magnificent courage of their resistance will impress you more and more . . . . Before you are long in Greece you will realise that every Greek man and woman and every pound of Greek money is being put into the effort to win the war, and that they are undergoing great privations and willingly making great sacrifices to do so. . . . I am sure that this will lead every Australian worthy of his race and country to regard every Greek man and woman with friendly eyes and to treat their institutions, customs, and manners with respect. We come to them as deliverers and they welcome us as such . . . let each of us therefore so conduct himself as to ensure that we shall hold their respect and friendly goodwill as long as we shall remain in their country, that we may fight side by side with complete confidence in one another.[48]

Unit histories have given Blamey's address a positive spin, interpreting it as an inspirational speech. Others have viewed it as an embarrassing faux pax on the part of the Australian commander highlighting Australians' uncomplimentary view of Greeks. Blamey's underlying reason for delivering such a speech, however, was to make it clear to the troops that he did not want a repeat of the behaviour reported to General Iven Mackay when his division had been in Libya:

> That alleged serious acts of indiscipline have been committed by Australian troops in Derna. Apart from looting your troops are accused of desecrating the Mosque and interfering with Moslem women. Will you please investigate this matter at the earliest possible moment as such acts may well raise the Moslem world against us. I consider if the accusations are true the situation is most serious and I shall hold you personally responsible for taking drastic and immediate action to ensure maintenance of discipline.[49]

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[45] Australian troops had a reputation going back to First World War of rowdy behaviour, drunkenness and refusal to follow orders. See Suzanne Brugger, *Australians and Egypt 1914-1919*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1980.

[46] Appendices to C.I.G.S.'s Diary of His Visit to the Mediterranean February-April 1941, Appendix XXII (b) *"Telegram No. 535 to Foreign Office, London despatched March 28th 1941,"* NZA: DA 491.2/4/Vol.I.

[47] Brigadier Brunskill, 80 Base Sub Area, 'Discipline in Athens,' 1 Aust. Corps, Jan-July 1941, AWM: 52 1/4/2.

[48] General Sir Thomas Blamey, "Special Order of the Day," 4 April, 1941, cited in *The Second Eighth: A History of the 2/8 Australian Infantry Battalion*, 2/8th Battalion Association, Melbourne, 1984, p.50.

[49] Copies of correspondence regarding indiscipline by Australian Troops, February 1941, Signal from General O'Connor to General Mackay, O'Connor Papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College, London: 4/2/47.

General Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East, was so concerned about the behaviour of Australian troops, based on a reputation they had acquired during the First World War, that he greeted them upon their arrival in Egypt with the following advice: 'I look to you to show [the Egyptians] that their notions of Australians as rough, wild undisciplined people given to strong drink is incorrect.'[50]

Information on the behaviour of Australian troops in Greece is difficult to locate.[51] Participants in this study did not want their comments placed on the public record for fear of tarnishing the reputation of Australian soldiers.[52] Many felt that they were speaking on behalf of their unit rather than as individuals and were very careful about what they said on tape.[53] There were, however, some veterans who were prepared to mention the more unsavoury side of Australian soldiers' behaviour in Greece, but they were the exception rather than the rule. Bob Holt's candid account of the conduct of Australian soldiers in Greece sheds some light on the paucity of records:

> Two battalion identities, Tommy Graham and Max Tussup were under the influence of drink when they fell foul of the English Military Police. Both Tommy and Max were rugged big men and they could fight. However they were eventually overpowered and lodged in separate cells in the police barracks. . . . The two Wollongong men were returned to camp under close arrest and as usual the long list of serious charges from the Provosts came with them. There was no Court Martial. . . . Strange to say someone in the Battalion HQ lost the papers and nothing more was ever heard of the charges of either of the two men.[54]

The lack of information on this subject can also be explained in part by the fact that there were simply not enough military police in Greece to do the job, and those that were there were urgently needed for traffic control.[55] Their role in directing the convoys of trucks taking troops out of Greece during the withdrawal was vital and pre-empted many of the sabotage activities of Fifth Columnists who changed road signs and directed troops down dead-end paths. In his study of Australian military police Glenn Wahlert discussed the indiscipline of Australian troops but only in relation to the evacuation of the Australian troops from Greece.[56] Wahlert explained that the

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[50] Charlton, *The Thirty-Niners*, p.59.
[51] There is documentation available on the indiscipline of Australian troops in North Africa and Palestine: Disturbances in Tel Aviv between 2/16 Australian Infantry Battalion personnel and Australian Military Police, 2 April 1941, AWM: 63 70/500/66; Indiscipline of Australian Troops, NAA: MP508/1.
[52] Author's interview with a Greek soldier who was part of the Greek military police in Athens at the time the Australians were on recreational leave in Athens in 1941.
[53] They often used pronouns such as 'we' rather than 'I' in their accounts of the war in Greece.
[54] Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, pp.88-89.
[55] Brigadier Brunskill, "Shortage of Provost Personnel," Headquarters British Forces in Greece, 21 March 1941, AWM: 52 1/4/2, January-July 1941.
[56] Glenn Wahlert, *The Other Enemy? Australian soldiers and the Military Police*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1999, pp.107-112.

> withdrawal of the AIF from Greece was not a particularly proud moment in our military history in terms of the performance and behaviour of the troops – an aspect generally overlooked by Gavin Long. For much of the withdrawal the force was close to panic: vehicles failed to pull over when they stopped, thereby blocking the route; a number of officers abandoned their men as they attempted to escape the advancing enemy; some men deserted and others threw away their arms; discipline broke down, and "the whole operation came close to being a rout – a headlong rush to get out – rather than a controlled move." [57]

Mark Johnston, discussing the behaviour of Australian soldiers in World War II claimed that the impression that 'the vast majority of Australian soldiers did nothing more against their army than grizzle timidly is borne out by statistical evidence, . . . indiscipline, theft and drunkenness do not appear to have been so much more prevalent in the Australian army than in other armies as to render those crimes typical of the Australian and atypical of the others.'[58]

Although limited information exists in Australian sources on the indiscipline of troops reports by British intelligence officers do refer to the subject. Major Miles Reid, British Liaison officer to General Kotulas the Greek Commander of the Central Macedonian Army, complained that his time had been taken up in Kozani dealing with the indiscipline of Australian soldiers in the area. According to Reid, these troops had imbibed too much drink and were causing havoc:

> Australian troops were in the district and they regarded Kozani as a place to which they could come in the evenings and behave exactly as their passions dictated. As drink seemed to attract them with an irresistible pull I was not surprised that one of my first interviews with General Kotoulas (sic) dealt with the complaints arising out of Australian night life in Kozani. . . . I could not spare any of my squadron for picket duty at night in Kozani and appealed to Force Headquarters to let me have some military police to keep order in the town. I think my request was a modest one for I only asked for four or five red caps to look after the place. I was told that my request could not possibly be met; there was a shortage of military police, 'the nearest available being in Cairo'. This was depressing news as my problems of drunkenness had been increased by news of a row the preceding night in the local 'maison toleree' where an Australian, dissatisfied with what he had or had not obtained, had done all kinds of violent and unpleasant things. [59]

The abundance of cheap alcohol in Greece caused considerable problems for the Australian officers in terms of troop control. According to Ken Clift, every 'second house at Daphne seemed to be a café. They look the same as an ordinary house and in you toddle and have a drink of wine or beer.'[60] Every Greek appeared to be a wine merchant according to the Australian soldiers. What surprised Bob Holt in Larissa was the fact that wine 'was sold in all sorts of outlandish establishments. I can recall drinking Retzina in a butcher's shop whilst alongside of us gallons of oozo (sic) was being strained through a large cone-shaped canvas. The dripping of this fiery liquid into a bucket right beside us was enough to make us fuzzy in

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[57] Ibid p.107.
[58] Mark Johnston, *At the Front Line: Experiences of Australian Soldiers in World War II*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p.154.
[59] Miles Reid, *Last on the List*, Leo Cooper, London, 1974, pp.142-143.
[60] Clift, *War Dance*, p117.

the head.'[61] The making and selling of alcohol was the easiest and cheapest way for Greek people to make some money during the war but excessive drinking amongst the Allied forces led to, 'proclamations posted in Athenian cafes stat[ing] that the sale of Ouzo was forbidded (sic) to members of His Britannic Majesty's Forces.'[62]

Although Australian soldiers drank large quantities of alcohol in Greece, not all of them liked it. Lieutenant Colonel Fletcher described 'the Vin Ordinaire of the Greeks . . . , known as "Retsina"; [as] a cheap wine, shot through and through with Pine-pitch. The medical qualities are stated to be unchallengeable, but to my palate, it is a most dreadful and awful insult. Anyhow I drank it, as the water in Greece is rather upsetting to the uninitiated quite frequently.'[63] On the ship over to Athens, Jo Gullet of the 2/6th Battalion was informed 'that the Greeks put turpentine in their wine because they liked it that way and they drank stuff like arrack, which they called ouzo. This was best left alone. They made beer of a sort too. Watery stuff . . . like that horse piss from New South Wales.'[64]

Bad behaviour was not always caused by excessive alcohol consumption. Sometimes disagreements arose with the locals as a result of language difficulties. Usually they were produced by a lack of understanding on the part of Australian troops of local customs, culture and business practices. Bob Holt described a typical misunderstanding that occurred between Australians and Greeks in a cafe in Athens:

> We went to a café and ordered a steak, the cost of which was astronomical. After a bottle or two of beer, we called for the account and an argument ensured. We thought we were being touched and were all set to perform violently. We were lucky in that the café proprietor spoke English and explained that the staff were not paid wages, but took a 10% charge, which was added to the account. The same argument was on all over the city and quite a few altercations erupted as the A.I.F. men could not understand the extra charge and there was usually no one with enough English to explain the discrepancy in the accounts rendered.[65]

Even though there were minor altercations between the allies what should not be ignored is how well the Australian troops, who possessed a different cultural background and language, mixed with the people of Greece. John Gemmell of the 2/5th Battalion explained that the 'Australian soldiers were friendly and got on very well with the Greek people.'[66] This was not the case, however, in Egypt. Susan Brugger's study of the Australians in Egypt during World War One found that the Australian troops had brought with them racial attitudes that, coupled with their ignorance of Egyptian culture, influenced their treatment of the Egyptian people. She explained that although Australians did not have 'any specific preconceptions about native Egyptians

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[61] Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, pp.92-93.
[62] Letter by Sergeant Robert Robertson, AWM: 2DRL/1304.
[63] Lieutenant Colonel Fletcher, 'Personal account of the experience of evacuation from Greece,' AWM: 3DRL/6269.
[64] Gullet, *Not as a Duty Only*, p.42.
[65] Report of activities of 2/7th Australian Infantry Battalion, AWM: 54 534/2/35.
[66] Interview: John Gemmell, 21 April 2002.

before they met them in Egypt, . . . there were, however, certain stereotyped images of "Asiatics" or "coloureds" in general, which were current and widely accepted throughout Australian society.'[67] Pierre Hutton, Australia's ambassador to Egypt in the 1970s found that Australian attitudes had changed little since World War One: 'Egypt and the local people were regarded with an intense contempt' by the First A.I.F, who established 'the image of the "Gyppos" and the "Wogs" . . . in our nations folklore,' and this had not altered with time.[68] He explained that Australia's politicians like Hughes and Menzies had not helped matters with their prejudicial views of Egyptians. At the 1921 Imperial Conference in London Hughes referred to the Egyptians as a 'corrupt people' while Menzies described them in his 1941 diary as "wretched creatures . . . these Gyppos are a dangerous lot of backward adolescents . . . full of self importance and basic ignorance." '[69]

Fifth Columnists

The Australian soldiers by and large had positive relations with the Greek people in comparison to the people of Egypt but they also had their criticisms of the Greeks. When interviewed about their war experience in Greece, however, they did not initially want any negative comments to be recorded on tape.[70] Fifth Column activity was a constant theme in the Australian soldiers accounts of the Greek campaign. John Gemmell of the 2/5th Battalion explained that what stood out in the campaign was 'the number of Fifth Column' in Greece.[71] 'They used to shine lights from hill to hill all night. They'd followed our progress. . . . They knew where we were going and what we were doing before we knew.'[72] The soldiers interviewed were aware that not all Greeks had been loyal to the Allied cause but it was not something they wanted to dwell on. Sergeant Robertson at headquarters 1st Australian Corps in Greece remarked in a letter that, 'Athens was delightful and the Greeks were anxious to do everything they could for and against us. The place abounded with German agents.'[73] Carl Parrott recalled being asked by some shopkeepers in Athens not to make any comments about Germans: 'The Greek shopkeepers would serve you quite civilly but if you were to mention Germans in any way they were very concerned and "shushed" you up apparently concerned that other Greeks would hear the discussion and they did not want to be involved.'[74]

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[67] Brugger, *Australians and Egypt 1914-1919*, p.31.
[68] Pierre Hutton, *The Legacy of Suez: An Australian Diplomat in the Middle East*, Macquarie University Middle East Centre, Sydney, 1996, p. 43 & p.44.
[69] Ibid pp.44-45.
[70] Interviews: John Gemmell,21 April 2002; Terry Fairbairn 2/1st Battalion, 28 April 2002; Bill Jenkins 2/3rd Battalion,31 March 2003; Bill Travers 2/1st Battalion, 28 March 2003; Hal Herriott 2/11th Battalion,15 May 2003; Keith Hooper 2/6th Battalion, 15 July 2004.
[71] Interview: John Gemmell, 21 April 2002.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Letter by Sergeant Robert Robertson, AWM: 2DRL/1304.
[74] Interview: Carl Parrott 2/2nd Battalion, 6 October 2004.

The reaction of the Greeks was understandable, given the ruthlessness of the Greek Secret police under the direction of the Chief of Police, Constantine Maniadakis, who was a well-known German sympathiser. Kenneth Slessor recorded in his diary that fellow war correspondent Ronald Monson told him 'that the secret police are very active in Athens. All conversations are overheard, and dossiers kept of the Greeks themselves. The lounge of the King George [Hotel] is forbidden to Greeks - "foreigners" (i.e. British, American or allies) only are allowed there. [James] Aldridge said that if we stay at our hotel, our papers and baggage are sure to be searched by the police.'[75] Although predominantly residing in cities, Fifth Columnists were also to be found in the Greek countryside. Parrott explained that while the 'village people were quite helpful and friendly, the property-owners did not like you near their property for fear of its destruction by German Aircraft.'[76]

Nevertheless there were enough people amongst the civilian population of Greece in support of the Allies to negate the behaviour of the German sympathisers. Christos Marnitsas, whose father owned a café in Larissa, fondly remembered the Australians soldiers who would offer chocolates and lollies to the Greek children passing by the taverna on their way to school.[77] The Greek people responded to what Christos Marnitsas described as the Australian soldiers' 'ανθρωπισμός' [anthropismos] or 'humanity'. The warmth and kindness displayed by the soldiers to the children of Greece really impressed him.[78] 'The kids were starving,' explained Hal Herriott of 2/11th Battalion, 'we used to give them all our tucker.'[79]

Recreational Leave

Athens of 1941 was full of brothels, clubs, cabarets and allied soldiers. Gavin Long noted that although the '[b]ars and cabarets closed at midnight. Greek soldiers never appeared at the few cabarets the city possessed. A cup of coffee at a café table in the sun seemed to be the only relaxation the Greek officer allowed himself.'[80] The British on the other hand had their Officers' Club across the road from the Grand Bretagne Hotel in Syntagma or Constitution Square where the British and Greek military headquarters were located. A British liaison officer Miles Reid explained that:

> a huge English cocktail bar was set up in the ground floor of the Grande Bretagne, in full view of the comings and goings of the Greek staff. The bar was chock-a-block before lunch and dinner daily, packed to overflowing with RAF officers . . . and with members of the [British Military] Mission. The impression caused by this cocktail bar was lamentable and it should never for one moment have been tolerated. The British Club was

[75] Clement Semmler (ed.) *The War Diaries of Kenneth Slessor*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, p. 222.
[76] Interview: Carl Parrott, 6 October 2004.
[77] Interview: Christos Marnitsas, Greek Resistance Fighter, 9 November 2004.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Interview: Hal Herriott, 15 May 2003.
[80] Long, Bardia to Suda Bay, AWM: PR88/72 (6).

> a few minutes away across the road from the Grande Bretagne and, like all British clubs abroad, was adequately designed for bulk consumption of drinks of all kinds.[81]

The cocktail bar and decadent behaviour exhibited by allied officers at a time when most of Greece was experiencing severe deprivation and austerity would not have impressed the locals. Excessive alcohol consumption for pleasure was not part of Greek culture. Peter Allen's study of Greek drinking practices concluded that 'one of the most striking aspects of alcohol consumption in Greece . . . is the degree of moderation shown by most Greeks. Although alcohol is pervasive in Greek society, drinking is very rarely engaged in for the specific purpose of getting drunk.'[82]

Apart from the clubs that were for officers only, there were many other venues that the Australian troops could frequent in Athens. The British in particular liked to maintain distinctions of rank even during recreational leave in Greece as they did in Egypt. The Australian soldiers had a generous amount of money to spend at this time as £1 sterling was equivalent to 540 drachmas. Australian Petty Officer James Nelson described the entertainment on offer in Athens when his ship, HMAS *Perth*, docked at Piraeus harbour:

> Pireaus (sic) is a typical dockside type of city with whitewashed buildings and a smattering of tavernas and brothels. It has a very large Train Terminal where we boarded and journeyed through to Athens a distance of 12 miles inland. We alighted at a city terminal of Omonia Square. It was on this trip that I had my first glimpse of the Acropolis. A short acclimatisation reconnaissance jaunt around Athens found us in the London Bar for a champagne and cognac party, then on to the Kit Kat nightclub and finally the Alexandria Café. . . . Champagne and cognac were very cheap by our standards. Buying 7 star cognac through the locals was two shillings and sixpence sterling for a one gallon demijohn![83]

The Kit-Kat Cabaret, located in the vicinity of the Hotel Grand Bretagne, was a popular nightspot amongst Allied soldiers and naval personnel, though the entertainment was often interrupted by the war:

> Jack and I went ashore to a favourite haunt of ours, The KIT KAT CABARET at 12 Bucharest Street Athens. We are friendly with Lydia and Nadia the two resident singers and entertainers. Very nice girls, we do enjoy their company. We were sitting at a table having a drink of Ouzo with the girls when an urgent recall to all ship complements was announced. An air raid alarm had been posted with planes attacking Pireaus (sic). We escorted Lydia and Nadia to an air raid shelter and finally, amidst all the panic, managed to get transport down to Pireaus (sic).[84]

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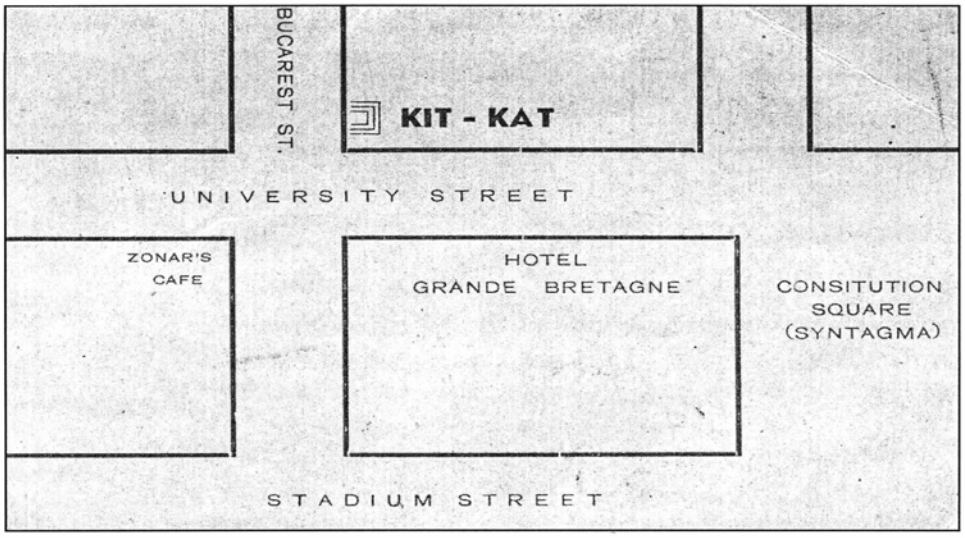
[81] Reid, *Last on the List*, p.111.
[82] Peter Allen, "Apollo and Dionysius: Alcohol Use in Modern Greece," *East European Quarterly*, Vol 18, No. 4, 1985, p.468.
[83] James K. Nelson, *The Mediterranean Diary: HMAS Perth in the Mediterranean Sea 24th December 1940 to 12th August 1941*, Tweed Electronic Graphics, Murwillumbah NSW, 2002, p.5.
[84] Nelson, *The Mediterranean Diary*, p.43.

Site of the Kit Kat Club: 12 Bucharest Street, Athens, 2007.
Photograph courtesy of Nectarios Costadopoulos

Parrott recalled his visit to the cabaret. 'It surprised me as being rather modern for the Athens of 1941. The place was overcrowded with Australian and British servicemen and there were a few civilian women. The proprietor was alleged to be an Englishman (Johny Jones). "Johny" (sic) would take charge of the show every few minutes and hand out bottles of champagne to the so-called winners of little events. It was a very rowdy night but somewhat enjoyable. But in retrospect I think it was probably a place of 5th Column activity (espionage).'[85] Parrott explained that what made him suspicious about the place was its impeccable presentation, new fittings, up to date lighting and toilets, well ahead of its time. The over-friendly host, Johnnie Jones, was just 'too gushing' to be believable and overly generous with the supply of champagne to the Allied Servicemen. Parrott felt that the place had been set up with the object of 'pulling - in servicemen' and plying them with alcohol to loosen their tongues, although he did not have any evidence to support this observation.[86]

[85] Interview: Carl Parrott, 6 October 2004.
[86] Ibid.

The Kit Kat Club.



The Kit Kat Club location map.

Nelson, *The Mediterranean Diary*, p.5.

Other Australian soldiers favoured less raucous entertainment. Captain John Blamey, of the 2/2nd Battalion, nephew of General Thomas Blamey, was a practising solicitor before the war. He preferred to visit the 'better class cabarets and saw floor shows the equal of anything to date. I must say,' he writes, 'there was a cleaner and fresher air about them than the cabarets of Cairo and Alex and for that reason we enjoyed them even more. Gordon studied Greek at school and could remember bits of it and mixed with a smattering of French we could make ourselves understood.'[87] Classical Greek was studied at many schools in Australia in the years before and following the war, along with Latin. Ballard wrote that he was 'thankful' for his Greek studies for 'as we drove along, Dudley and I found that we could read most of the advertisements,

[87] Letter from Jack Blamey to mother and father, 5 May 41, Fully Fledged: Letters to home April 1940 – November 1942 Jack Blamey, unpublished manuscript held by Jack Blamey's family.

traffic notices and bus destinations and although we had to feel our way at times, it was fun!' [88] Knowledge of classical Greek, however, would not have assisted the Australian soldiers in conversing with the people of Athens, as most would have spoken 'Demotic' Greek which had little in common with the classical Greek language.[89] In any case, knowledge of the language did not seem to be an issue, at least amongst the soldiers, as many of the soldiers found they could communicate well enough using hand gestures. 'Language was a slight barrier: but by signs and words, which the troops soon picked up - this little problem was quickly overcome. The eyes and the hands of the Greek people often told more than words.'[90] What surprised the Australian soldiers in Greece was that there were so many Greeks who could speak either English or French or who had at one time or another lived in an English speaking country.

Zonars Café, Athens

The most famous cake shops or patisseries, landmarks of Athens at the time, were Zonars and Floccas. They were called 'ζαχαροπλαστεία' [zaharoplastia] in Greek and were located in the centre of Athens near the Grand Bretagne Hotel. They were high-class establishments well known for their delicious confectionaries, attracting the type of clientele that appealed to Captain Blamey. He described his visit to Zonars in his letter back home: 'At

[88] Ballard, *On Ultra Active Service*, p.39.
[89] During the Second World War the educated classes in Greece spoke a form of Greek known as 'Katharevousa.' It was the language of government and the military. It denoted class. The general population spoke a dialect called 'Demotic.' Katharevousa originated after the Greek War of Independence (1821-27) that liberated Greece from 400 years of Turkish rule. With independence came a desire for a unified language. Greece's new ruling class adopted this archaic form of Greek to bolster its new identity making Katharevousa the official language of the state. Demotic eventually became the national dialect of Greece.
[90] Unit History Editorial Committee (ed.), *White over Green*, p.104.

Zonars, all the nice people of Athens seemed to have congregated and we enjoyed just sitting there sipping coffee and eating cream cakes and watching the folks. They were all out parading the city that day, for it was Sunday. Later we returned to the other side of Zonars, which contained a bar. Here we sat on high stools and munched lettuce and celery and chicken wings and drank a couple of glasses of Greece's most excellent draft beer. It was the first draft beer I'd tasted since leaving Australia and we did enjoy it.'[91] It would be difficult to detect from his letter home that he was in a war zone. The pay afforded Australian troops in Greece meant that they were not subject to the food rationing experienced by the locals.

Sunday in Greece, even during the war, was a time to promenade along the streets with one's family and friends and have coffee and sweets at the sidewalk cafes or patisseries. What is surprising however, given the acute food shortages in the country, is that establishments such as Zonars were able to procure sugar. Clare Hollingworth in Athens at the time commented that 'the sugar ration was small, and it was strange that the big cafes like Zonar and Floca were permitted to sell a profusion of cream cakes to the very last. This contrasted rather painfully with the long food queues, which one could not fail to see in the poorer parts of Athens at any time during the winter. Those well enough off fared adequately.'[92] Coffee was often not obtainable and made from acorns. Meat was non-existent. 'We are troubled with local kids here, they all seem to be meat hungry' wrote Sergeant Archibald Fletcher of the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion.[93] The Australian troops were clearly shocked by the level of hunger they witnessed in Greece. At the camp at Daphne outside Athens the Australian soldiers were amazed to see 'hordes of respectable-looking old women wandering along, stooping and picking up the broken biscuits we had thrown away.'[94] Their sympathy for the plight of the Greek people was evident in letters, diary accounts and unit histories of the campaign. The empathy they exhibited for the people of Greece was one of the reasons for the strong bond of friendship that developed between them.

Contact with women

Although vehemently denying that they had any time to mix with girls in Greece, this did not stop Corporal Robert Moran from looking as soon as he stepped ashore in Athens, recording in his diary of 1941 that he 'didn't see too many good – lookers . . . nothing beautiful and out of the box.' [95] Bill Smith of the 2/8th Battalion recalled that during their stay in Athens: 'Rus Ermonde and Tommy Barns true to form, were blowing kisses to the girls and doing their

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[91] Letter from Jack Blamey to mother and father, 5 May 1941.
[92] Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, p.244.
[93] Sergeant Archibald Fletcher, 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion, 23 March 1941 in Lurline S. and Arnold J. (ed.), *Letters Home 1939-1945*, Collins, Sydney 1987, p.128.
[94] Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, p.88.
[95] Interview: Major Robert Moran 2/3rd Battalion, 20 January 2004.

best to make a rendezvous - what hope from a moving truck. Everyone loves a trier.'[96] Corporal 'Bull' Caling of the 2/2nd Battalion, who spoke Greek and acted as the battalion's interpreter, developed a reputation with the girls in Athens. 'The virile "Bull" gave the Battalion invaluable service, and had many romantic adventures,' wrote Charlie Green of the 2/2nd Battalion, though 'Bull' did try to deny one particular story. [97] After the luxury of a 'hot bath and a shave' in Athens which made Corporal Moran 'feel grand,' he and his mate 'went to the pictures and saw *Thunder Afloat.'* [98] He explained that 'half way through the theatre we were sprayed with a scent, beautiful and clears the air because everyone smokes and you couldn't see anything after a while . . . so they come around with a spray. We found that the usherettes were very interested in us and kept shining the torch on us and because we were all wearing shorts and the Greeks don't wear shorts. They were having a good look [we caused] quite a stir with shorts in town everyone seemed amused.'[99] The Australian troops' appearance must have shocked Greek women in a country where strict dress codes prevailed. At times their behaviour must have challenged local customs, but the soldiers were viewed more as a curiosity rather than a threat.

Mixing with the local girls in Greece proved very difficult. Brigadier John Rogers explained in his unpublished memoirs that in 'Athens itself, the people were surprised that we would dance with foreign girls in their cabarets, for no Athenian girl would dance until the war was over and the Nazi and Fascists defeated.'[100] German propaganda aimed at convincing Greek soldiers that, while they were fighting and dying in Albania, their women were dancing with Allied troops in Athens. To stop the circulation of such rumours the Greek Chief of Police issued an order that 'no Greek girl might associate with British soldiers or airmen, and any who did were liable to arrest and cross-examination.'[101] Kenneth Slessor was enjoying dinner at Maxim's restaurant in Athens 'where an excellent floorshow [and] a good grilled steak,' was provided, recorded in his diary that there was 'no dancing - this was by order of the British Army.'[102] It is clear that both the Greek and British governments were very concerned to reassure the Greek soldiers at the front that the virtue of their women was intact.[103] This response was not unique to Greek servicemen as Kay Saunders found that the ' hostility,

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[96] Smith, *The Second Eight*, p.347.
[97] Major C. H. Green, "Grecian Disaster," in Marshall, A. J. (ed.), *Nulli Secundus Log*, 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion, A.I.F., 1946, p.34.
[98] Interview: Major Robert Moran, 20 January 2004.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Rogers, A Digger Remembers, AWM: PRO3244.
[101] Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, p.243.
[102] Diary entry 27 March 1941 cited in Semmler (ed.), *The War Diaries of Kenneth Slessor*, p.222.
[103] John Costello found from his research on changes in sexual values during the Second World War that 'the constancy of wives and sweethearts became a preoccupation for all servicemen and a gnawing anxiety for front –line soldiers in World War II anxiously awaiting every letter from home,' *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45*, Pan Book, London, 1985, p.31.

jealousy and suspicion, with which Australian men received any social interaction between American servicemen and Australian women was magnified when the American was Black.'[104]

In any case, Greek families of the 1940s were very strict about the morality and the behaviour of their daughters. Bruce Vary, caught behind enemy lines in Greece, learnt very quickly not to carry on a conversation alone with a woman. He explained that:

> Although women do most of the work, including what we would term manual, their men are very particular about their morals. When in the presence of strange men, no woman would sit near, even though her husband would be in the same room. She would retire into the farthest corner, no matter if it were the depth of winter, and the men would be left to sit by the fire. Also a man would not carry on any kind of conversation alone with a girl.[105]

Greek girls were not allowed to go out on dates with men unless they were engaged to be married and often were chaperoned by their brothers or other elderly family members. 'We learnt,' explained Hal Herriott of the 2/11th Battalion, 'that you cannot treat Greek girls the way you do an Australian girl. The Greeks and Cretans are very touchy about their women folk. . . . The Greek soldiers fraternised with us but the women didn't.'[106] Consequently Australian soldiers usually only came into contact with women who worked in the nightclubs, cabarets and brothels of Athens. The Australian soldiers, however, were aware of the grinding poverty of Greece and did not hold this against them. 'We had a look at some of the cafes and houses of ill fame in Athens and it appeared to me that a lot of girls were not really whores, but were working in the brothels to get enough to eat.'[107] Brigadier John Rogers recorded that:

> in these villages all food was short, but particularly meat and even bully beef had a trading value far exceeding its intrinsic worth. This digger found a girl who was amorously inclined and successfully pleaded his cause. Before he left her, he felt it would be a nice thing to show his appreciation, but was at a loss to know how to do it. Then he remembered the tin of bully in his haversack and this he coyly presented to his amorata. She was overwhelmed and showed him by signs that she wished him to wait; she dashed inside and returned with two eggs – his change.[108]

Corporal Moran explained that Greece was a poor country and 'farmers daughters come into this game. I don't say they were sold to the place . . . but from what I understood from the lady we talk to in there . . . many of them were in debt not indentured I suppose that's the word. They'd work for so long . . . and therefore they had sufficient [funds] for a dowry and the family would receive something.'[109] Daughters were a financial burden because, without a dowry for a

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[104] Kay Saunders & Helen Taylor, "The Reception of Black American Servicemen in Australia during World War II: the resilience of 'White Australia,' " *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1995, p.344.
[105] Bruce Vary cited in Turton, E., *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, The Book Depot, Melbourne, 1945, p.34.
[106] Interview: Hal Herriott, 15 May 2003.
[107] Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, p.89.
[108] Rogers, A Digger Remembers, AWM: PRO3244.
[109] Interview: Robert Moran, 20 January 2004.

prospective groom, they would remain unmarried and a drain on family resources.[110] To remain a 'γεροντοκορη' [gerondokori] or spinster was degrading. Borrowing money to buy a house is only a recent phenomenon in Greece.

AWM: MEA2161 Athens, Greece - Portrait of Flying Officer Wray Kirk with two Greek girls outside the Acropolis in Athens

Details of intimate contact between the Australian soldiers and the local population are understandably absent from the literature of the campaign and the private papers of the participants. Veterans of the Greek campaign were also reluctant to discuss on or off tape the more intimate details of their interaction with the Greek population, though intimate contact there must have been with the abundance of brothels and the predominance of venereal disease in the country. 'Generous leave' was issued to members of the 2/2nd Battalion that arrived in Greece on 22 March 1941 but 'all ranks warned of the extreme prevalence of V.D. (especially Syphilis) Blue light packets and condoms provided.'[111] There were regular 'short-arm' parades of the troops conducted by the Australian medical staff. According to the war diary of the 2/2nd Battalion lectures were given to the companies on 'Malaria, Cholera, Typhus, Lice, Sores, and V.D.- diseases extremely prevalent in Greece.'[112] Michael Clarke of the 2/3rd Field Regiment, disembarking at Piraeus, had enough of what he described as Percy Cherry's 'nauseating V.D.

[110] A dowry was a custom-practiced in Greece whereby women handed to their prospective husband a sum of money, or house and/or land, as part of the marriage arrangement/settlement. The task of raising the dowry fell to fathers and brothers, and the financial strain on poor families could be unbearable, especially in times of widespread economic hardship. If the family was poor, the only way of increasing a daughter's worth in marriage was by ensuring her continued chastity, hence Greek girls were married at a young age. Jane Lambiri-Dimaki, "Dowry in Modern Greece: An Institution at the Crossroads between Persistence and Decline," in Safilios Rothschild, C. (ed.), *Towards a Sociology of Women*, Xerox College Publishing Company, Wisconsin, 1972, pp.79-80.
[111] 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion Unit Diary, AWM: 52 8/3/2.
[112] Ibid.

lectures.'[113] After listening to 'stern warning against the beautifully healthy Greek girls,' he recalled the troops reproaching Cherry with: ' "these ain't no Gypo bints, Doc," and "you shouldn't insult our Allies, Sir".'[114].

Nevertheless Clarke was 'struck' by how 'exceedingly forward' the girls were, noting in his diary that, 'I hoped that we were well stocked with French letters.'[115] Indeed, the first place Australian NCOs or 'non commissioned officers' looked for any soldiers 'absent without leave' [AWL] was in the local brothels. Moran remembered finding a missing Australian soldier in one of the brothels of Volos. He explained that the soldier had 'moved in, and was living with this girl . . . in her room. She didn't serve anybody else. [It was an] eye –opener [for me] – a lot of people don't talk about it.'[116] Corporal Moran was one of the few Australian soldiers prepared to discuss this aspect of the soldier's life in Greece. What impressed him was the way the brothels were run in Greece. He explained that, '– it was well set up – they had their own individual room – it was like a boarding house right - extremely well run . . . no-one could go in if they were on the liquor. I shouldn't say this [but] they [the girls] all had their photographs on the wall. If the photograph was turned to [facing] the wall she was booked, not like the ordinary thing here, one [man] after the other.'[117]

Bob Holt of the 2/3rd Battalion provided a more lurid account of the behaviour of some Australian soldiers in Greece. He recalled the amorous adventures of a fellow soldier while their battalion was encamped outside Larissa. Although intending to be humorous, his portrayal is probably a more realistic account of the behaviour of troops in wartime:

> Jack White was interfering with a lady of easy virtue in Larissa when the screaming of the air raid sirens disturbed the young lady. She slid out from underneath Jack, stuck her head out of the window and pointed to the high flying plane. "Bomba, bomba" she cried excitedly. "I'll give you a bomba," said Jack, as he jammed the window down on the lady's head. There she was trapped with her bare bottom stuck up in the air. This was too much for the Pride of West Wyalong and he carried on with his interrupted business. The sirens were screaming, the ack-ack guns were thumping; there was general commotion and a bundle of noise, but not really as much noise as the bucking, kicking, squealing, swearing girl made right inside the bedroom.[118]

The Australian troops were no saints and did behave badly at times. The war had eroded moral values with 'soldiers . . . claim[ing] fear of death on the battlefield as the excuse for sexual

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[113] Michael Clarke, *My War 1939-1945*, Michael Clarke Press, Toorak Victoria, 1990, p.332 & p.334.
[114] Ibid p.334.
[115] Ibid p.335.
[116] Interview: Robert Moran, 20 January 2004.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape:* p.92.

licence.'[119] According to John Costello, ' "War aphrodisia", as it had been called, had been traditionally ascribed to men in battle.'[120]

Deployment to Northern Greece

After departing from the No. 2 transit camp at Daphne outside Athens the Australian soldiers were taken in cattle trucks to Larissa, a rail centre and staging camp for the Allied troops before deployment to their northern positions. However 'the town of Larissa did little to inspire the men: it had been wrecked by an earthquake and had suffered several air raids.'[121] They camped at a place called Tempe just outside Larissa. The Greek police in Larissa were not well liked by the Australians. According to Holt:

> The police in their well-cut uniforms and long ankle-length grey overcoats were armed with sword and rifle and were a class apart from the Greek people. They were very arrogant and very unpopular. The first we knew of a curfew being in force was when the police fired at a team of our fellows for being on the street after 10pm. When their shots were reciprocated they took a back seat and did not bother us again.[122]

It is clear from the writing of a number of Australian soldiers that they were not impressed by the self-important behaviour displayed by the Greek police and the military officers who were dressed impeccably while their troops were bedraggled and their people starving. The disparity of wealth in Greece clearly offended the Australian troops' sense of egalitarianism and fair play. As far as the Australians were concerned a person's authority had to be earned. They were not automatically shown respect because of their rank.

AWM: P00129.001 Greece 1941 – a group of Australian and Greek soldiers possibly from the Bren gun carriers unit of 2/11th Battalion beside their tent lines. Donated by E. Edwards.

[119] 'For many people, especially soldiers in the front line, the fear of imminent death intensified the yearning for emotional relationships that might give some transient reassurance in an uncertain future, 'John Costello, *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values 1939-45*, Pan Books, London, 1985, p.25 & p.23.
[120] Ibid p.10.
[121] Bentley, *The Second Eight*, p.48.
[122] Holt, *From Ingleburn to Aitape*, p.91.

From the camp at Tempe, near Larissa, the 2/4th and 2/8th Battalions were deployed to a village called Vevi near the large town of Florina to guard, in conjunction with the Greek 12th Division, the Monastir Gap that ran through Yugoslavia into Greece. On their way to the front the Australian troops saw Greeks using primitive implements to fix roads to enable transport trucks to reach the frontline. The sight of 'very ancient men and women of all ages including kids,' repairing the road greatly moved Lieutenant Terry Fairbairn of 2/1st Battalion.[123] His men

> in particular were horrified to find that there wasn't a toilet available for any one of those men or women. And we had spare food in our trucks, spare Bully Beef and biscuits and so on. A lot of that was taken down by our soldiers and cooked for them. But we had nothing that we could build a toilet for instance. The only support any of those people had at all – was a bush if they could find it and the bush might have been covered in snow anyway. And that gave us a tremendous appreciation of the type of people the Greek people were.[124]

The sanitary conditions of Greece really shocked the Australian soldiers. They had expected Greece to be more like Australia and were surprised by the low standard of hygiene in the country. Greece suffered from 'serious epidemics of smallpox, plague, typhus and relapsing fever [including leprosy],' diseases no longer found in central and northern Europe.[125]

AWM: 008180 Greece April 1941 women mending the road offered biscuits from Australian army transport.

Occasionally Australian troops made contact with Greek soldiers, usually from reconnaissance parties. Fairbairn was struck by how 'shockingly equipped the Greeks were –

[123] Interview: Terry Fairbairn 2/1st Battalion, 28 April 2002.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Naval Intelligence Division, *Greece*, Vol. 1, Her Majesty's Service, Geographical Handbook Series, March 1944, p.271.

ancient weapons and ancient uniforms. They had no chance really.'[126] Conversations with Greek soldiers and civilians were mostly conducted using sign language. Often it was a lengthy process, particularly with poor villagers desperate to make some money. The batman and the cook for the Australian correspondents in Greece were given the onerous duty of haggling with Greek peasants in an effort to some buy eggs, which were regarded as a precious commodity in a country where there was little meat. Kenneth Slessor explained that: 'the funny old fellow in native kilt . . . came round to our camp every day with eggs - This is Murray, My batman-driver, bargaining with him – it used to take about ½ an hour's talk per egg. Murray has a Greek-English phrasebook in his hand. Camp near Lakoudi, April '41. '[127] The soldiers liked the taste of the freshly baked black bread that was the staple diet of the people of Greece. 'What beautiful bread these women cooked. Whenever we could, we waited outside the house at the oven for a hot loaf or two, willingly exchanging tinned fruit or chocolate or tinned sausages for this excellent bread, which, incidentally, constituted the major portion of the food of these peasant families. Bully beef again had excellent trade value, ' wrote John Rodgers. [128] However they were not impressed with the vicious dogs the Greek villagers kept to guard their sheep:

National Library of Australia photograph number MS 53020/14/425 Slessor Collection

> In the villages near Olympus, the nightly walks between billets and offices were made rather too interesting by the large dogs, which the peasants kept for protecting their sheep and goats from wolves. They worked in bands and were masters of the art of

[126] Interview: Terry Fairbairn, 28 April 2002.
[127] Notes written by Kenneth Slessor on the back of the photograph in the Slessor Collection, NLA: MS 53020/14/425.
[128] Rogers, A Digger Remembers, AWM: PRO3244.

> encirclement. The nights were dark and it was rather a fearsome business to realise that you were being stalked. . . . They became so ferocious that we eventually had to threaten the farmers that unless the dogs were kept on chains, they would be shot.[129]

Generally, negotiations with the Greek villagers over supplies were amicable. There were occasions, however, when disagreements did arise. One such incident involved the commandeering of a donkey by some Australian soldiers. Ken Clift explained that:

> After crossing the River Jimmy Hyland and I picked up "Troubles" Whitely who was lying exhausted in the mud by the side of the track. We eventually put "Troubles" aboard a Greek army mule we had thieved, but we relaxed our concentration and in turn some thieving Greek soldiers stole the mule from us. "Troubles" was making hard going of it when we met up with "Snow" McBain and some of his Battalion Pioneers in Velvendos. "Snow" McBain went to the front of a poor sort of a house and offered to beg or buy food. The Greek householder had been in the U.S.A. in his youth and spoke English of sorts. . . .While all the talk was going on around the front of the house Jimmy Hyland and I liberated a donkey we saw in a shed in the backyard. We loaded "Troubles" onto the donkey. . . .We had only gone a hundred yards or so when we heard a great commotion behind us. . . . The wife rushed to the donkey . . . knelt in front of it, put her arms around its neck and started to wail like a banshee. The English-speaking Greek stood alongside his wife in front of the donkey and complained bitterly and loudly: "I have given you all the food we have and this is how you repay me. You are bandits and Brigands." He tore his shirt open and cried: "Shoota me, killa me, but please, no steala the donk." While this tirade was going on the old sheila was still screaming. . . . Our collective conscience wasn't all that clear so we hauled "Troubles" off the donkey.[130]

AWM: 006713 (negative by George Silk.)

The Greek peasants considered mules and donkeys, used for transport and hoeing the fields, to be their most treasured possession. Therefore any attempts by Allied soldiers to borrow them

[129] Ibid p.21.
[130] Clift, *War Dance*, pp.129-131.

without permission caused great distress and hardship. The British army had sent over one consignment of mules, but the boat with the other shipment had been sunk, and the troops were left with few means to transport equipment and food up steep mountain paths that were often little more than dirt tracks that turned to mud when it rained. Bill Jenkins recalled going down 'with the transport officer and . . . bargaining with the Greeks to rent or buy their donkeys. So we got a few of them and the Greeks were showing them what to do. You go 'oush' to make them go.'[131]

Jenkins was also involved in assisting 'Troubles' and recalled the help he received from an unexpected quarter in Greece:

> Troubles was struggling alone – he couldn't move - I said, "You can't stay here," I was trying to help him along. . . . Suddenly behind us we look around and we see this fellow on a horse and behind him were others with the Greek Cavalry mob. This fellow came down and "Kaleenihta" I said, I knew that much Greek. And Troubles was winging, he said, "what's the matter here"? in good English. "Oh you speak English do you"? He said, "I'm Australian." He put Troubles up on top of his horse and all my load as well and he told me he came from Junee and his father had a fish shop there. . . . His father sent him to Greece just before the war, he said, "You must go over to our homeland and see it." And while he was there he was called up. . . . I never found out this fellow's name.[132]

It was the last place Bill Jenkins expected to meet a Greek boy from Junee and the incident remained vividly in his mind many years after the war.

AWM: PO1166020 – Greek soldiers on horseback retreating. Donor: T. Edwards.

The 2/1st, 2/2nd, and 2/3rd Battalions were to hold a position around Verria and guard the pass. Verria Pass was nicknamed 'Panic Mountain' by the troops. The Australian troops had to

[131] Interview: Bill Jenkins.
[132] Ibid.

fight in freezing temperatures without adequate clothing and effective means of communication, as the radio equipment they possessed was not suitable to the mountainous terrain of Greece thus producing considerable distress amongst the troops. 'At dusk we start again and so does the snow,' wrote Lieutenant Reginald Blain of the 2/2nd Battalion, '[t]he track becomes a nightmare. The men are exhausted from insufficient food and sleep, our sweat soaked clothing freezes on our bodies when we stop and rest.'[133] Poor visibility meant that most of the time the Australian units did not know where the enemy was: 'it was believed we were being outflanked' explained Carl Parrott, 'and possibly surrounded. We were told to abandon a lot of gear and destroy even blankets, . . . we were to move but that was delayed and then it was on again we did move (on foot through the snow) on the long march moving only after dark to gain the comparative safety of the south side of the Aliakmon River.'[134]

AWM: 130386 Greece Summit of Verria Pass.

The British conducted 'whispering campaigns' aimed at unsettling the Germans, but sometimes they misled their own troops. Whether they were intentionally circulated to raise troop morale is difficult to ascertain, nevertheless Parrott recalled that:

> From the very first day of enlistment there were 'phurphys' (sic) going around amongst us (rumours in other words) . . . But one that sticks in my mind was the one I [heard in] Greece – as we very naïve young soldiers gradually realised that we may have been somewhat 'out on a limb' as the saying goes – where the talk was that some 40,000 Canadians had been landed at Salonika! Whether this was deliberately organized by our Army Headquarters or by nervous nuts among us, I'll never know. It could have been used as some sort of moral booster that was supposed to give you assurance that we were part of a much stronger force. In retrospect how in the hell would they have got to

[133] Papers of Lieutenant Reginald Blain, AWM: PR 3134.
[134] Interview: Carl Parrott, 6 October 2004.

> Salonika . . . .The British Army and Navy were (sic) flat out getting us to Port Piraeus. So where in the hell would they have come from? At that time? (Sic) [135]

Panic-stricken Greek peasants often spread rumours about German troop movements. 'When I was in the Verria Pass near Salonike (sic),' wrote Chester Wilmot, 'in the early days of the campaign, one night an Australian battalion was moved to another sector of the front. By next morning the Greek townspeople near us and even our own troops were spreading the story that the Germans had broken through behind us in the Monastir Gap and that we were retreating. At that time the Germans hadn't even been in contact with our troops there. . . . Before the Germans had even made an impression on our positions near Servia, rumour in Athens had them capturing Larissa fifty miles south.'[136]

Rumours of Greeks acting as Fifth Columnists or German spies also added to the general feeling of distrust in Greece at this time. Hapless Greek citizens were dragged before Australian intelligence and liaison officers accused of spying for the Germans: 'Two Greek civilians were brought to me as it was alleged that they were 5th Columnist,' wrote Robert Vial, 'and were accused of signalling to the bombers with the shiny side of a shovel held before their faces. Neither on this nor on any other occasion did I find Greeks guilty of 5th column activities; although at times our telephone wires were undoubtedly cut and pieces removed, and the Greek LO [Liaison Officer] at Monistair (sic) raised our suspicions.'[137] Vial recounted how the rumours about their Greek allies and the Germans led Australian troops to become overly suspicious and distrustful: 'Several times a shepherd drove a mob of sheep close to our forward positions, then moved away along to another forward position. As each position was shelled shortly after the sheep moved away the troops were convinced the shepherd was spotting our positions for the enemy, so a sniper shot him.'[138] The 'Vlachs' or 'Οι Βλαχοι' who were the goat herders or shepherds of Greece were generally believed to be German sympathizers by the Greek people.[139] According to a Greek resistance fighter, the Vlachs had been promised a state of their own by Mussolini after the war was won.[140] The Australian soldiers, however, found the Vlach people of the Pindus Mountains and those in the villages near Mount Olympus most hospitable and supportive of the allies. The women in particular with their fair skin and violet eyes captured the hearts of many Australian soldiers who remembered them long after the war had concluded. Lieutenant George Frederick Smith recalled the 'Walachian (sic) maids of deep

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[135] Carl Parrott, unpublished memoirs, on loan to the author; Colonel Alex Sheppard, "The Imperial Campaign in Greece 1941," Sheppard Papers, NLA: MS 8029, Folder 8.
[136] Wilmot, 'Rumour' 7 April 1941, (?censored) (sic), NLA: MS 8436.
[137] R.R. Vial, *The War I Went to*, publisher R. Vial, Toorak, Vic, 1995, p.143.
[138] Ibid p.130.
[139] These people were ethnically different to the Greeks and were viewed with distain by the Greeks. To call a Greek a 'Vlach' or a 'βλαχο'[Vlaho] is still considered a term of abuse.
[140] Interview: Christos Marnitsas, 9 November 2004.

violet eyes, flawless skin and a figure more like the aussie beach beauty queens than the heavy, stone types gazing over Athens from the Parthenon.'[141]

Sketch by Lieutenant George Frederick Smith 2/6th Battalion, AWM: PR85/223.

On Thursday 10 April 1941 the Germans engaged the Australians at the Greek village of Vevi near Florina, entering Greece from the Monastir Gap through Yugoslavia. What made the military situation more difficult for the Australians and raised suspicions about their Greek allies was that the situation report they received from their 'Greek liaison officer was very vague and inaccurate, and there were numerous reports which proved false. This may only have been due to panic reports from their troops, but many officers on our HQ [Headquarters] suspected (without any proof) that the inaccuracies were intentional.' [142]

AWM: 128423- Vevi, Greece April 1941. Lieutenant Colonel I.N. Dougherty (right), standing in the snow with the Greek Commanding Officer of the Flanking Battalion on Good Friday.

[141] 'War History: Greece- Crete – Syria,' papers of Lieutenant Colonel George Frederick Smith, 2/6th Battalion, AWM PR85/223.
[142] Vial, *The War I Went to*, p.129.

By all accounts the rumours spread by the Germans or German sympathizers in Greece had been effective. Athens was awash with alarmist reports of German Fifth Columnist operating amidst the population. Kenneth Slessor describes the temper of the Greek crowd in Athens pursuing a Greek citizen accused of being a German spy. He wrote in his diary: 'watched street-scene from hotel window . . . a great noise of shouting outside, and a crowd came rushing past the hotel, pursuing a large plump man in civilian clothes, evidently a suspected Fifth Columnist. Two British soldiers attempted to escort him, but the mob had began pushing him and hitting him on the back of the head outside the hotel.'[143]

Australian correspondent Chester Wilmot, working for the ABC Film unit in Greece tried to put a stop to the "rumour mill" through his despatches. The censor, however, would not permit his broadcast to be transmitted as public criticism of their Greek allies was not allowed. Wilmot had declared that in 'their war against the Greeks the Germans are trying to use the same tactics which helped them to white-ant civilian resistance in each of the countries they have overrun or absorbed. . . . The chief of these tactics is rumour – wild exaggeration or straight out lie -- started by a fifth columnist (sic) and spread by people who speak without thinking and unwittingly become enemy agents. For some days the Greek people and our own troops weren't on their guard against these rumour mongers and as stories sped from tongue to tongue they became more alarming.'[144]

AWM: 130332: Entrance to the village of Vevi, Greece, photographed by V. J. Krauth.

These rumours succeeded in panicking the 2/8th Battalion during their encounter with the Germans at Vevi.[145] The men in their haste to depart left most of their arms and equipment behind to escape the German onslaught. The behaviour of the battalion angered their Brigade

[143] Semmler (ed.), *The War Diaries of Kenneth Slessor*, p.248.
[144] Wilmot, 'Rumour' NLA: MS 8436.
[145] "All the Way Back", Chapter 1, Sheppard Papers, NLA: MS 8029, Folder 7.

commander George Vasey. Germans pretending to be Tommies with perfect English accents capitalised on the jitteriness of the Australian troops on the high mountain passes of northern Greece, capturing many unsuspecting soldiers: 'one of the sections was addressed in a cultured voice in English with the command "Put down that gun!" "Put down that gun I tell you." '[146] Given the exhaustion and lack of visibility in the Greek mountains it is not surprising that soldiers fell for the ruse. Many soldiers reported that there had been Germans dressed in Allied uniforms. 'The enemy patrols varied in strength up to twenty men or more; some were reported to be wearing Australian uniforms,' according to the 2/7th unit diary.[147] Bill Jenkins recalled, 'Germans dressed up as our military police . . . the British caught up with these spies and shot them.'[148] De Jong found that Germany had sent secret agents into Greece to conduct sabotage activities. Their most successful operation was the bombing of Pireaus Harbour on 7 April 1941.

> The *Abwehr* [German Secret Service] had an organization [in Greece] for placing explosives in Allied vessels calling at Greek ports. Moreover, in 1940 two *Abwehr* officers were sent to Greece, "who disguised as business-men, spent several weeks in a leading Athens hotel. Their task was to gather such information as they would and to make contact with potential agents." Three days before the German offensive started, three sabotage detachments of the *Abwehr*, numbering sixteen men in all, were smuggled into Greece from Bulgaria. They were to commit arson in the frontier area and destroy telegraph communications.[149]

The refugee crisis also fuelled the paranoia engulfing Greece at this time as hundreds of Yugoslav soldiers streamed through the borders into Greece to join the mass of Greek people fleeing their villages before the arrival of the Germans. These scenes deeply moved many Australian soldiers: 'I will never forget,' wrote Ken Clift, 'the most pitiful sight I have ever seen was a young woman with no shoes or hat carrying her baby, running up the ten-mile pass as though hell itself were behind her.' [150] This situation was of great concern to the Australian soldiers for 'it was feared that the enemy would infiltrate 5th Column amongst refugees, [thus] orders were issued by Advanced Divisional Headquarters that they were to be diverted from the main road . . . there was a general instruction to cut the harness of horse-drawn vehicles and turn them off the road. The misery this caused to cartloads of Greeks sitting on top of their few possessions, with nowhere to go or means to get there was not easy to watch,' wrote Robert Vial. [151]

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[146] Bentley, *The Second Eight*, p.56.
[147] Ibid p.54.
[148] Interview: Lieutenant Bill Jenkins, 31 March 2003.
[149] Louis De Jong, *The German Fifth Column in the Second World War*, Howard Fertig, New York, 1956, p.234.
[150] Clift, War *Dance*, p.127.
[151] Vial, *The War I Went to*, p.128.

AWM: 007618 Servia Greece April 1941. Villagers congregated in Servia, hoping to obtain transport to the South and for protection from German bombs and machine gunning.

The Greek refugees were choking the main north–south roads, making troop movements either way very difficult. Lieutenant Ken Hill-Griffith was ordered by Brigadier Allen to ensure that 'at all costs' Greek civilians did not block Verria pass. This placed him in the unenviable position of having to use force, if necessary, against women and children to clear the road through the pass. The Mayor of Verria refused to accept the Lieutenant's directive not to proceed through the pass, fearing the 'murder, rape, and destruction [of the people] if they remained in the town. He finally left saying that he was coming through with his refugees, despite anything our troops might do, and virtually daring them to obstruct the refugee column.'[152] Lieutenant Hill-Griffith was faced with a terrible dilemma. How was he to comply with his orders and simultaneously meet the needs of the Greek people for whom he felt great sympathy? He had 'visited the villages and farmlets further south and had a good understanding of the alarm, damage and distress these kindly people were being subjected to.'[153] He recorded that it 'was quite painful to have to impede them in their efforts to get away from battle zones.'[154] He instructed the troops to call the Mayor's bluff by appearing to 'look exceedingly fierce and business-like' rifles ready to shoot at the officer's command.

> The Mayor persisted, and turned to wave his people forward. Then the bluff was started with many silent prayers that it would work. On a succession of very noisy commands, and with the greatest possible flourish, the riflemen lined across the road, fixed their bayonets, loaded their rifles, came to the high port, and then doubled half to each side into standing firing position, thereby exposing the four Bren guns. . . . The commander then moved forward of the troops, and told the Mayor once again that he would give the order

[152] Battalion History, *The First at War: The Story of the 2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-45*, The City of Sydney Regiment, Macarthur Press, Parramatta, 1987, pp142-143.
[153] Ibid p.142.
[154] ibid p.142.

> to fire if any of the people attempted to cross the crater. . . . There were no more commands – no more discussion – just a quite dreadful silent half minute. Then the Greek Mayor raised his hat to the force commander, dropped his head and burst into tears before waving his people back. No shot was fired, nobody was hurt, except perhaps the very gallant Greek Mayor and to some extent, myself, whose whitening hair today is no doubt partly due to the agonising half minute before the bluff finally worked.[155]

Overall the Australian officers behaved with benevolence towards the Greek people during the war. They were concerned that their treatment of Greek refugees could be taken out of context after the war and portrayed in a negative light.

Withdrawal

The speed of their withdrawal from Greece surprised the Australian troops. Many expressed frustration at not being allowed to stay and fight the Hun: 'we would all have preferred to stay there to end the shame - . . . Air Force or no Air Force, we were determined to stand. But it was not to be.'[156] Chester Wilmot announced in his broadcast that 'the Australians are particularly keen to have a crack at the real enemy – the Nazis.'[157] While Corporal Moran explains that on Verria Pass 'we'd dig in and everyone was getting jack of the business because we reckoned we were in good positions, we hadn't been fired upon, although we were wet and everything else we could hold [our position]. . . . Our battalion never really got a go at the Jerries . . . because once he [the Jerry] come round the back . . . you were cut off that was the finish.'[158]

It was during the time the Australian forces were withdrawing from Northern Greece to a more defendable shorter line further south at Thermopylae that the Australian soldiers came into closer contact with Greek troops who were returning in their thousands from the Albanian front. They felt sorry for the pitiful condition of the Greeks, marching home with no shoes, ragged clothing and starving. Lieutenant A. F. McRobbie of the 2/11th Battalion expressed his admiration for the Greek soldiers in a letter to his mother:

> Personally I would have been proud to be killed in an attempt to stand by these Greek soldiers and save their country from the hun (sic). Some of them have been four and five days without food, and during that time they had covered any-thing up to 150 miles after they had been cut off by a German push. They were footsore, hungry and weary, some even without boots and hardly able to walk, and yet when they heard they were needed they turned round and went back the way they had come, to stand side by side with us and try and hold the onrushing German mass. If that isn't guts I've never seen it. . . . Admittedly their collapse left us in a very unsound position, but that was not the fault of these men who have fought against terrific odds, not for money but for love of country.[159]

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[155] Battalion History, *The First at War*, p.143.
[156] Rogers, A Digger Remembers, AWM: PRO3244.
[157] Wilmot, "Australians in Greece" 8 April 1941, transcript NLA: MS 8436.
[158] Interview: Major Robert Moran, 20 January 2004.
[159] Letter from Lieutenant A. F. McRobbie to his mother, 29 April 1941, loaned to author by Col. Ken T. Johnson.

Surprisingly the Australian soldiers did not blame the Greek troops for the signing, on 20 April 1941, of the unauthorised armistice with the Germans by General Tsolakoglou. They had the highest opinion of the bravery and courage of the Greek soldiers. It was not bravery they lacked, according to the Australian officers, but equipment, training and good leadership. Many Australian soldiers felt that it was people higher up in the Greek government and military who had betrayed both the Australian and Greek troops.

This, however, did not stop the Australian soldiers from feeling great respect for Greece and its people. They were impressed by the unrelenting spirit of the Greeks peasants who refused to bow down their heads in the face of the unceasing German bombardment of their villages. Signalman Reginald Tresise of the 1 Australian Corps had a lot of respect for Greece as the only nation in Europe helping the Allies fight for democracy. Withdrawing from Florina in northern Greece on a 'cold wet' night on April 13 1941 Reg Tresise sheltered in a schoolroom in the town of Kozani. In the corner of the bombed out classroom he noticed, standing amongst the rubble, the flag of Greece and placed it in his haversack. Many years later in a moving letter to the Mayor of Kozani he describes the feelings that motivated him to rescue the flag of Greece:

> Amidst all the dust, & rubble standing in a corner of this room attached to a pole about 7 feet long stood the flag of Greece made of silk and surrounded with gilt corded edging. To me this flag look proud, & defiant and didn't topple over in the dust & disorder caused by war. So I took it from its pole and placed it in my haversack. (The Germans were only a matter of hours away from Kozani by this time) with the main idea of denying such a brave emblem to the Huns. . . . Finally I embarked at Monemvasia on a British Destroyer at 3 o'clock in the morning 28th April and went to Crete. . . . I lost everything I had . . . but I still hung onto the Greek flag, wrapping it around my body to keep me warm. The only thing I came out of Crete with was my life and the flag. . . .This Greek flag was my emblem of good luck and I carried it in my kit bag though out the pacific campaign. Now after all these years, whilst looking through things gathered over the years I find the Flag of Greece safely preserved, as proud & defiant as ever, and an Australian soldier, who has faith in Greece as a staunch Ally of the Western democracies and especially of our British Commonwealth, wishes to return this proud flag to its old school for scores of men & women who were children in these fateful days must have known this particular flag.[160]

Greatly touched by the sentiments expressed in Tresise's letter, Vassilios Matiakis, the Mayor of Kozani replied that 'your letter . . . has deeply moved me and I read its contents with particular attention and great interest. . . . your (sic) care and affection with which you kept the Flag of our Gymnasium, a special official ceremony will be organised for the restoration of this flag which will again wave proudly as ever before the war, and honours, thanks and gratitude will be expressed to you who had the kindness to preserve and send it back to the Demos of Kozani.'[161] Upon receipt of the Mayor's reply Tresise promptly posted back the flag. Reporter Vivian Morris, writing about Tresise's quest to return the Kozani flag to its rightful owners,

[160] Letter from Reginald Tresise to Mayor of Kozani, 14 April 1959, Papers of William J. Cuthill, AWM: PROO879.
[161] Letter from the Mayor of Kozani, Vassilios Matiakis to Reginald Tresise, 14 June 1959, ibid.

commented that 'we often talk of relations or the bonds between Greeks and Australians who fought side by side- but here we have solid proof of the bond.'[162] Reginald Tresise was one of many Australian soldiers fighting in Greece who strongly believed that they were there to defend Democracy against Fascism.

Greek flag in its original packaging addressed to the Mayor of Kozani: the Library at Kozani.Photograph courtesy of Nectarios Costadopoulos.

Rear guard

On 13 April 1941 Brigadier Savige, commander of the 17th Brigade, found himself in the town of Kalabaka, which is set against the backdrop of the towering Meteora, consisting of imposing pillars of stones rising thousand of metres above the ground and on whose peaks Greek monks resided. After much discussion and argument between General Wilson and Blamey it had been decided to send Savige to Kalabaka to assist with the withdrawal of Australian troops by providing a rearguard action. Heavy German bombardments had led to a break down of law and order in the town creating a multitude of problems for Stan Savige, including what to do with the 3,000 Greek soldiers who had flooded into the town from the Albanian front and were blocking the roads in and out of the area. He described the situation he was faced with:

> Kalabata (sic) was in turmoil during the night. Straggling Greek soldiers were looting shops and houses, and civilians were stealing food, kerosene, rifles . . . from Greek depots. Indiscriminative rifle fire continued throughout the night and what appeared to be light signals were seen in the vicinity of monasteries perched on the cliffs over-looking the Town. The lights were extinguished by Bren gun fire, but my forces were insufficient to undertake police duties.[163]

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[162] Vivian Morris, "The Greek Flag- Something Sacred For an Australian Soldier of 1941," *Neos Kosmos*, Monday 22 March, 1993, ibid.
[163] Brigadier Stanley Savige, Report on Campaign in Greece and Crete –17 Australian Infantry Brigade, AWM 54 534/2/35.

AWM: 044635: Kalabaka Greece 1941 - a view of the town in the foothills west of Trikkala (Donor R. McNicoll)

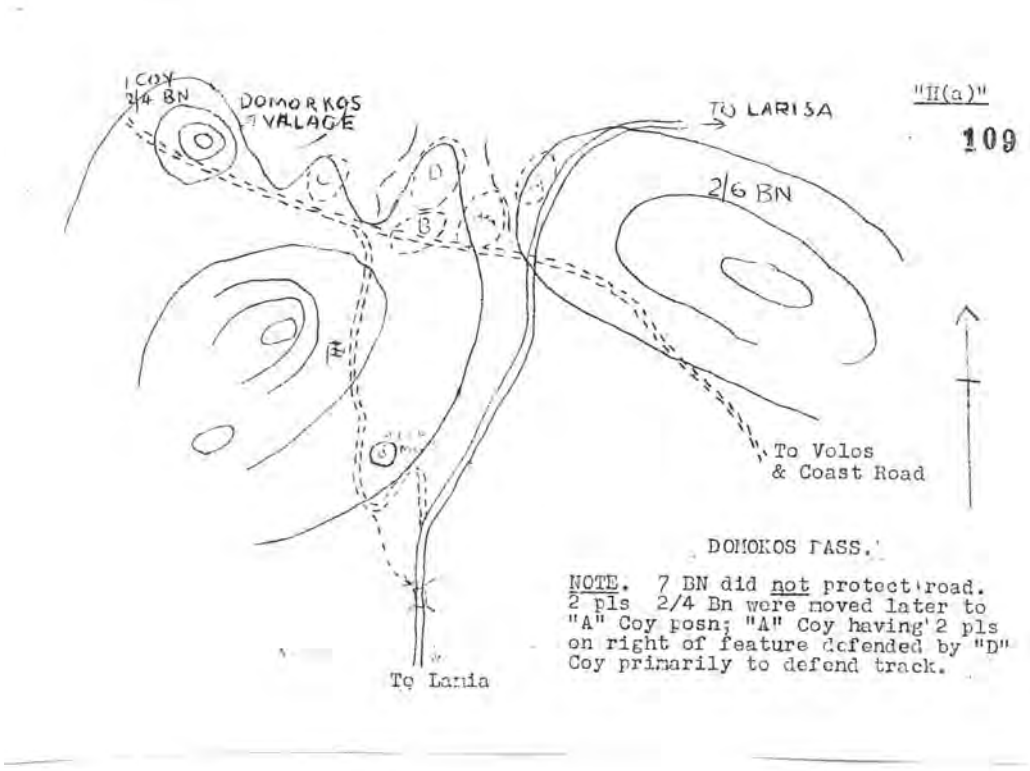
The light signals from the monasteries would not have surprised intelligence officer Ian Sabey who insisted that 'one of the strongest elements working against the British was the priests, who had been paid handsomely to preach against the Allies, and who helped increase the panic.'[164] It was clearly not an easy situation for Savige to deal with since he did not have the resources to take over the duties of the police force in the town. Also the local Greek commander, General Tsolakogou, proved of little assistance, departing quickly from the area and leaving Savige to deal with the situation alone.

AWM: 007945 1941 Greek forces retreating from the front.

[164] Ian Sabey, *Stalag Scrapbook*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1947, p.31.

The 2/5th, 2/6th and 2/7th Battalions arrived in Greece on 12 April 1941 and were ordered by General Wilson south to the Domokos area to guard the rear of the departing Allied troops. Major Guinn of the 2/5th Battalion was to take up a defensive position at Domokos Pass. However, the execution of this order proved to be very difficult, as Greek soldiers and civilians, retreating from the front crowded into the trains that were needed to move the Australian troops into position. The 2/5th Battalion report explained that:

> Difficulty arose owning to all available [railway] trucks being filled with Greek soldiers who refused to leave the trucks even when appealed to by interpreters, who explained to them the necessity of our move back. . . . At this juncture an engine driver endeavoured to take the train laden with Greek soldiers out; he was warned that he would be shot if he did so. This had the desired cooling effect. . . . A number of Greek soldiers were forcibly ejected. At 1630 hrs [hours] the train moved to Domokos arriving at 1735 hrs.[165]



Map of Domokos Pass
Source: Report on Campaign in Greece and Crete 17 Australian Infantry Brigade, AWM 54: 534/2/35.

German bombing had been successful in spreading panic not only amongst the Greeks but also amidst the Australian troops. 'Never have I seen so many planes and never again do I want to,' wrote Sergeant Robert Robertson, ' the road churned into thick, gluey mud and embellished on both sides with burning and tipped-over transport artillery put out of action, dead horses, mules, sheep and cows. . . . Thebes was badly plastered, Larissa was a pancake and Lamia in

[165] Report of Activities of 2/5th Australian Infantry Detachment, AWM: 54 534/2/35.

shambles.'[166] At one stage an Australian soldier remarked that the German pilots were dropping toilet paper on Australian troops. 'Half – way to Kalamatta [at] Megara . . . at the end of a raid - a particularly bad raid, a German plane came down towards us very low - I thought he was throwing out pamphlets – we found they were toilet rolls, we thought "well he has a sense of humour," ' remarked Bill Jenkins.[167] German propagandist, Lord Haw-Haw, took great pleasure in describing in his radio broadcasts what would happen to the Australians once the Germans caught up with them. It was all part of the intimidation process aimed at breaking Australian morale. Certainly the strafing by the German planes with the 'screamers' attached to their aircraft that imitated the sound of bombs dropping had a severe impact on the nerves of the Australian soldiers in Greece. Robert Moran described the psychological games German pilots played with the Allied troops in Greece: '[a] Stuka bomber . . . one that has a screamer on it comes straight down and turns the screamer on: 'Errrr'! Gets louder and louder and makes the same sound like a bomb coming down. . . . You'd swear the sound was coming to the middle of your back but he doesn't drop a bomb; . . . not the first time . . . then another one comes and this is the one he does [drop].'[168]

AWM: 128427: Greece 1941- Larissa during an air raid.

[166] Letter by Sergeant Robert Robertson , AWM: 2DRL/1304.
[167] Interview: Bill Jenkins.
[168] Interview: Major Robert Moran.

The chaos and fear produced by the constant bombings resulted in a break down of the transport and communications systems of the country as frightened railway workers abandoned their posts. No–one was left to drive the trains. Greek train drivers at Pharsala refused to venture north to Larissa, having been told that the Germans had bombed the railway track. Lieutenant Colonel George Smith explained how Nick Stewart of the 2/6th Battalion dealt with the deteriorating situation in Greece:

> On the night 14/15 April, 2/6 Battalion were halted at Pharsala, when the Greek train crew refused to face the German Air force on the flat wheat plains of Thessaly. 2/5 Battalion had de-trained and were resting around the railway station. The carriages were halted blocking the railway crossing. . . . The engine still had steam up when Lieut Nick Stewart decided to do something about it. With a pistol in one arm, he found Major Smith with his other. They searched for the word for "back," "reverse," in classical, Biblical and fish-shop Greek, to no avail. No levers they pulled went one way or the other, no arm directions worked. At last Stewart lost patience. "Shoot the bastard, pull him away from the works & we'll get places." The driver grinned, and in good American replied, "Ok Buddy, why don't you guys speak plain English." '[169]

What is surprising about this incident is that the Australian troops and the Greek civilians were able to retain a sense of humour and cope so well under such adverse circumstances.[170] The Australian soldiers displayed remarkable resilience in the face of all the obstacles that they had to overcome to complete their mission in Greece. What is also amazing, under the circumstances, is that the Australians did not hold any grudges against the Greek people even though their behaviour at times thwarted the campaign in Greece. Nor did they take their actions personally, displaying an understanding of the very real fear the Greeks felt for the German army.

The breakdown of law and order in Kalabaka, Domokos and Pharsala was repeated all over Greece when the news filtered through that the Greek King and his government had departed from Athens on 23 April 1941. This information caused wide spread distress amongst the population who felt abandoned by their monarch and Government in their darkest hour, the reaction the British government had tried to avoid by refusing to facilitate the early removal of the Greek King from the Greek mainland. A Greek resistance fighter recalled that his village near Tripoli in southern Greece only found out about the King's departure through a British radio broadcast with the aid of a local interpreter. The effect on morale in the country was immediate. With the absence of any governmental authority some of the Greek soldiers who had returned from the Albanian front engaged in looting and pillaging, while other returned officers of Republican background set up resistance networks in the mountains to fight the Germans. Athens also was in disarray, as there were no government ministers left to take over the running

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[169] Lieutenant Colonel George Frederick Smith, 2/6th Australian Infantry Battalion, AWM: PR85/223.
[170] Carmel Moran & Margaret Massam, "A 'Trace of History'" Cartoons from the Australian Books of the Second World War," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No.39, 2003: http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j39/cartoons.htm

of the country.[171] Gloom had beset the city and the streets had emptied with the Germans expected any day in Athens. Notices were plastered over billboards that had once welcomed the British. 'All the portraits of the Greek king, displayed for so long in every second shop-window, had been removed.'[172]

Members of the 2/6th Australian General Hospital were very upset by the behaviour of the Greek citizens of Volos who had pillaged the hospital supplies that had been sent there. The 2/6th Hospital had only 'functioned as a hospital for little over 24 hours' in Volos before they were ordered to withdraw. Their report noted 'that instead of protecting and guarding the equipment of their Allies, the local inhabitants appear to have committed gross acts of hostility and vandalism as well as robbery, which would almost amount to Fifth Column activities.'[173] They insisted that the supplies be returned. So a party of volunteers led by Captain A. J. Kennedy returned to Volos and, with the help of the local police, inspected the houses in the town to salvage what they could.[174] The Australian response was understandable given the shortage of medical supplies and equipment during the war, but so was the behaviour of the Greeks who were faced with severe deprivations and were looking for resources wherever they could find them.

AWM: 006833 Setting up camp at Volos (Negative D. Parer).

[171] Interview: Nicholas Bournazos, Greek resistance Fighter, 4 November 2004.
[172] "Interview with Major Alex Sheppard," Cairo 8 May 1941, Sheppard Papers, NLA: MS 8029, Folder 3.
[173] "Report on the Evacuation of 6th. Aus. Gen. Hospital Site At Agria – (Near Volos) on the loss of Equipment there form 14 Apr. 41 –18 Apr.41," AWM: 52 11/2/6.
[174] Ibid.

The British were determined to destroy any supply dumps and material that might assist the German war effort before they left Greece. The Greeks on the other hand were equally concerned to retain all supplies for their own use. The people were starving in a country with shortages of food and other raw materials even before German occupation and this led to a severe altercation over the blowing up of the fuel dump in Athens. The British had ordered their sappers to blow up the dump. When the Greeks heard about it they were determined to stop them by any means possible, but the prospect of a shoot out between Greek and British troops made General Heywood rescind his order.[175] The supply dumps, however, did not benefit the Greeks. Ian Sabey explained that:

> When the Germans entered Athens and Piraeus they found a great supply of food which had been purchased for the Greek Army, and which had been rotting in these warehouses. Instead of throwing the stores open to the hungry people at the last moment, the Greek Ministers, true to their profession, helped themselves to all they needed and then kept the contents intact for their new masters.[176]

Evacuation

What astounded the Australian soldiers in Greece was the kindness that was bestowed upon them by the Greek people at the time of their evacuation from Greece. Many were unhappy at leaving these poor people to fend for themselves though they had no alternative but to embark, while others were clearly relieved to be able to escape Greece with their lives. They were surprised by the generosity of spirit of Greeks, particularly the Greek peasants in the villages they passed through on their way to the embarkation beaches in southern Greece. The old women of the village were out in the streets offering them trays of ouzo and cakes. 'She offered these to each of the soldiers as they passed by, an act which touched us deeply. We could not understand what she was saying as she tearfully proffered her gifts, but her meaning was clear and we all said things like, "Never mind, Ma: we'll be back and make up for all of this." '[177] No resentment was shown towards the Australian troops for their quick departure from the country. Brigadier Rogers vividly remembered the day:

> Hundreds, probably thousands, cheered and cheered and rushed us to shake hands. I blush to admit how many times we were kissed. They shouted "Good Luck" – "Come Back"- "Down with Hitler"- a spontaneous and inspiring demonstration that we will long remember. There was one girl, . . . who I hope will one day read this. As we drove along, she came near the car and threw to us a card which I still have at home. On one side was her photograph and on the other side some writing in Greek. Later, I was able to have this translated. It read, "My name is . . . and I live at . . . street. I hate the enemies of my country. You will always be able to find me at the above address. Anything that you can ask me to do now or in the future to help the Allies will be an honour and I shall perform it no matter what it may be.[178]

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[175] Charles Mott-Radclyffe, *Foreign Body in the Eye: A Memoir of the Foreign Service Old and New*, Leo Cooper, London, 1975, p. 80.
[176] Sabey, *Stalag Scrapbook*, p.31.
[177] Clift, *War Dance*, p.151.
[178] Rogers, A Digger Remembers, AWM: PRO3244.

The Greek people displayed their 'philotimo', or appreciation of the Australian soldiers' efforts, to protect their country from the 'Hun' and did not hold any grudges against the departing troops.

While there was certainly help offered to the departing Australian troops there was also hindrance. The 2/7th Battalion report notes that during the withdrawal from Greece: 'Fifth Columnists rounded up by Battalion during day. 12 captured. Two were found breaking bottles on road, and carrying sticks of gelignite.'[179] There were some port workers and boat owners who simply refused to tow or sail any of the vessels out of the harbour for fear of being bombed or because of their pro-German leanings. The 2/6th Battalion report recorded that 'as the Naval L.O. [Liaison Officer] and code had been captured earlier great difficulty was experienced in gaining communication, fifth columnist (sic) being very active giving false and misleading information to the navy up to the moment a party landed.'[180] Some Greeks also pretended not to understand the hand-gestures of the Australian troops asking for assistance to reach the British Naval vessels anchored off shore. Their response, more often than not, was motivated by fear rather than treachery.

Conclusion

The relationship that emerged between the Australian soldiers and civilians during the war was warm, sincere and enduring. Some Australian soldiers corresponded for years with the people they befriended in Greece, even meeting up with them after the war.[181] 'I got to know one fellow and we use to correspond,' recalled Bill Jenkins, 'when I went back there in 1979 he took me to the mountains behind Volos - a great skiing place in winter.'[182] Such was the level of affection felt for Greek people by Australian troops that many veterans chose to return to Greece with their families, not just once, but many times after the war, camping at the very sites where they had been deployed as soldiers.[183]

This relationship that was captured by the photographs of George Silk was not simply a product of wartime propaganda. It was exploited, however, during and after the war by the governments of the countries involved in the campaign for their own strategic, political and commercial purposes.[184] This strong connection was well documented in the writings of the soldiers, in the letters they sent back home, in the few personal diaries that remain of the

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[179] Report of activities of 2/7th Australian Infantry Battalion - 1April - 4 Jun 41, AWM: 54 534/2/35.
[180] Report on Campaign in Greece and Crete- 17 Australian Infantry Brigade, AWM: 54 534/2/35.
[181] Interview: Bill Jenkins, 31 March 2003.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Interview: Robert Moran, 20 January 2004.
[184] 'These bonds have not just tied the men and women who experienced them directly. They have involved the two nations. . . .I believe it is indisputable that the shared experience of battle and its aftermath in Greece and Crete marks an important and enduring change in the relationship between Greece and Australia.' Speech by Petro Georgiou "Hellenism in the 21st Century," *Second International Conference of Research Institutes for Hellenism*, 2nd August 1997.

campaign that were not lost during the evacuation; in the unit histories, in the operational reports of the campaign and in their oral history accounts.

John Gemmell and mate riding a donkey on the island of Hydra during a visit to Greece for the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Greece and Crete 1981, photograph courtesy of John Gemmell.

Though the behaviour of Fifth Column elements in the population was recorded and commented upon, it never overshadowed in the minds of the Australian soldiers the enormous support, help and camaraderie offered to them by the Greek people. It was clear to the Australian troops that there were deep political divisions in the country. According to the Australian campaign narrative Greece suffered from: 'Fascist cliques in the ruling classes, poor communications and a primitive technique of war.'[185] Greece was a predominantly agrarian country in the 1940s 'with sixty percent of the population employed in agriculture, contributing 50 percent of the gross national product.'[186] However there were strong political divisions between the rural peasants and their government, mainly due to neglect, as many villages lacked basic services until the mid 1970s.[187] According to Kourvetaris the Greeks 'simply did not trust the state to help them prosper.'[188] Factionalism, bickering and suspicion of authority were part

[185] Narrative on the Campaign in Greece, AWM: 54 534/5/14.
[186] Svoronos, "Greek History, 1940-1950" in Iatrides (ed.) *Greece in the 1940*, p.5.
[187] Ibid p.5.
[188] Kourvetaris, *Studies on Modern Greek Society and Politics*, p.7. According to Kourvetaris the 'political elites of Greece . . . failed to modernise [and] failed to decentralize the capital and improve the infrastructures of the countryside.' pp.3-4.

of Greek life. Divisions also existed within the ruling classes of Greece between the politically conservative traditional old families or (archondes) and the more progressive middle classes over support for the Allies.[189] Svoronos explained that it 'is well known that the [pro-fascist] political-social "establishment" strove to ensure the neutrality of Greece,' while the Venizelists or republican officers publicly supported the allies.[190] There were certainly sections of the Greek population who were German sympathisers or 'Γερμανόφιλοι' [Germanophiles] who hindered the Allied evacuation of Greece while others could not do enough to assist the allies, even at risk to their own lives.

The political divisions within Greece had implications for the Australian soldiers fighting there. It placed them in the dangerous position of having to withdraw from the country under fierce and sustained German bombardment without any support from their own air force or the Greek army. 'Sixty German squadrons continued this attack day after day. Only at night-time did we get any peace. It was undoubtedly a terrifying experience,' recorded John Rogers in his memoirs.[191] Nevertheless this did not prevent the Australian soldiers from developing a deep regard for the Greek people.

Close friendships emerged with the people of Greece. Psychologists have 'established that friendships are an important source of intimacy in people's lives. Less is known, however, about the process by which people come to regard a friendship as intimate.'[192] According to the latest research on the subject, intimacy is developed in friendship by the expectations one has of the other and the quality of their interaction.[193] In the case of Greece, the Australian soldiers had come to expect, through their contact with the Greek people, unstinting support and loyalty in the face of grave danger and, in general, they were not disappointed. There were occasions when hunger overtook altruism with Greeks selling their meagre food supplies to Australian soldiers.[194]

The Australian troops found the friendliness of the Greeks and their value system something they could relate to, regardless of the absence of a common language. Compared to the people of Egypt the generosity of spirit of the Greeks was refreshing. Here were a people who offered help and were willing to share their meagre resources freely without expecting anything in return in a country consisting of magnificent antiquities and beautiful scenery. The work of Lewin in 1948 found that an individual's behaviour is influenced 'not only by the characteristics of the individual but also by the interaction between the individual and the

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[189] Ibid p.9.
[190] Ibid p.8.
[191] Rogers, A Digger Remembers, AWM: PRO3244.
[192] Debra Mashek & Arthur Aron, *Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey, 2004, pp. 9-10.
[193] Ibid p.23.
[194] Charles Robinson, *Journey to Captivity*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1991, p.79.

environment.'[195] 'We loved Greece at first sight,' wrote Tregellis-Smith. 'The hard, clear light, the scrub-covered hills reminded us so much of Australia. The friendly people were a contrast to those we had met so far in the ME [Middle East] where everyone, almost without exception, had tried to cheat us.'[196] What impressed the Australians the most about the Greeks was their strong sense of honour or 'τιμη' [timi] referred to as ' "a subjective awareness of integrity and independence, of not being touched or humiliated before others through particular kinds of failure." '[197] Regardless of the abject poverty they found themselves in, the Greeks were a proud people who dealt with the Australians in a honourable way. It was this quality that set them apart from other people in the Middle East.

John Gemmell planting a gum tree at a ceremony in Kozani to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Battle of Greece and Crete, 1981, photograph courtesy of John Gemmell.

Although the Australian soldiers did not always behave well in Greece, drinking excessively, womanising and brawling in the tavernas and brothels of the country, they did not

[195] Lewin cited in Kelley, Harold & Bercheid, Ellen et. al., *Close Relationships*, W.H. Feeeman and Company, New York, 1983, p.10.
[196] S. Tregellis-Smith, *All the King's Enemies: A History of the 2/5th Australian Infantry Battalion*, 2/5 Battalion Association, Victoria, 1988, p.86.
[197] John Campbell cited in Kourvetaris, *Studies on Modern Greek Society and Politics*, p.13.

lose the support of the Greek people who found their kindness and the empathy they had shown for the plight of the Greeks a sign of their 'ανθρωπισμός' [anthropismos] or humanity. In return the Greek people displayed 'φιλότιμο' [philotimo] or appreciation of the Australian cowboys, with their distinctive slouch hats, who had travelled great distances to defend their land. They bestowed upon them a warm welcome and generous hospitality throughout the campaign, even as they departed from the country, leaving the Greek people to face the enemy alone. Although the Australians found the grinding poverty of Greece very confronting they could not help but admire the Greek people for their generosity under such dire circumstances. 'How wonderful was the spirit of the Greek people who helped us so much,' wrote Charles Downing of the 2/7th Battalion, 'I do not think any others would have taken such risks, especially when to be caught meant certain death. They gave us food I am certain they could ill afford and yet, to them, we must have just been foreigners from a far away land.'[198] The altruism of the Greeks was truly striking. Psychologists have been preoccupied for many years with the question of what produces such a response within the population?[199] Was it the cultural values of the Greeks, part of their national character and ethos?

In part this was the case but not entirely, though research confirms that collective cultures behave more altruistically than individualistic cultures.[200] And while the Greeks had compelling cultural reasons to assist the Australians, they still thought 'primarily in local terms and view[ed] outsiders as out-groups or strangers [xenoi].'[201] Given the prevailing attitude, it is surprising that they came to regard the Australians as their own people. Bill Fatouros recalled his mother telling an Australian soldier in Kalamatta, who offered her money for bandaging his injured arm: 'my boy I don't take money. I regard you as I would my own child.'[202] So strong was the connection that was made with the Australian troops that many Greek families enquired after the war about the well being of the soldiers they had helped.[203]

Accusations of betrayal of the British by the premature capitulation of the Greeks were made in some quarters, but this was not the general opinion of the Australian troops.[204] They left Greece with a great admiration and regard for the Greeks as a brave and courageous people who had given the 'Ities a thrashing' but had been out numbered and encircled by the German army and could fight no more.[205] 'The Greek soldier had won victories by his own courage, frugality

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[198] F.C. Folkand (ed.), *The Fiery Phoenix: the story of the 2/7 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1946*, 2/7 Battalion Association, Victoria, p.76.
[199] Samuel P. & Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe*, the Free Press, London, 1988.
[200] Michael W. Eysenck, "Social Behaviour and Relationships," in *Psychology: An International Perspective*, Psychology Press, London, 2004, p.673.
[201] Campbell & Scott McNall cited in Kourvetaris, *Studies on Modern Greek Society and Politics*, p.7.
[202] Interview: Bill Fatouros, Kalamatta, Greece, 17 October 2003.
[203] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley nee Papadopoulos, 3 October 2005.
[204] Sabey, *Stalag Scrapbook*, p.31.
[205] Rogers, A Digger Remembers, AWM: PRO3244.

and fortitude. Now he was threatened with encirclement, and had only the poorest arms with which to oppose the world's most efficient fighting machine,' recorded the Australian campaign report.[206] The Australians respected Greece for being the only nation in Europe helping the Allies fight for Democracy. Although many myths were produced by the Greek campaign, the warm and intimate relationship that developed between the Australian soldiers and Greek people and the lasting bond of friendship that was created by their shared wartime experience; was not one of them.

[206] Narrative on the Campaign in Greece, AWM: 54 534/5/14.

Chapter Four: Crete – Strategic and Operational Deployment: 'Australian - Greek Military interaction'

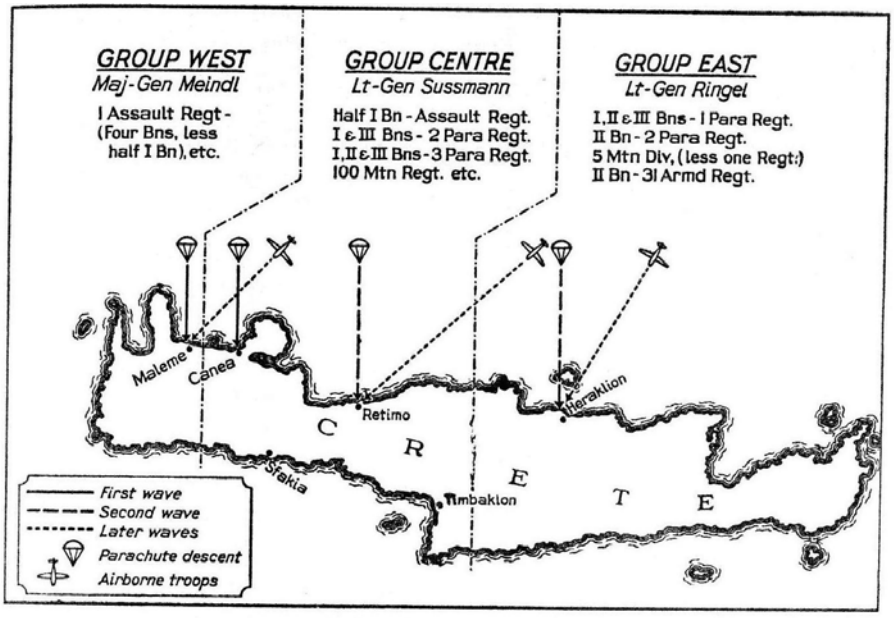
The military relationship between the Australians and Greeks did not improve on Crete. Many of the senior Greek officers on the mainland lacked any real desire to fight the Germans while the Greek soldiers deployed to Crete were deficient in the training and experience necessary to fight a modern war.[1] Apart from the original garrison of 5,300 troops stationed on Crete, the 25,300 Greek troops sent to the island were mainly reservists and raw recruits.[2] The elite Cretan forces had been mobilized earlier in the war to fight the Italians on the Albanian front. Aside from the Cretan police, only women, children and the elderly were left on Crete to take up arms against the Germans. The Australian units that arrived on the island were incomplete and thinly spread on the ground, with the main Australian fighting force at Rethymnon under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Ian Campbell.[3] Rethymnon was a significant battle for the Australians, not only because a large number of Australian soldiers were captured there, but also because it illustrates, more than any other encounter, why the military relationship between the Australian and Greek forces on Crete failed. Indeed it is through Campbell's detailed report that insight is gained into Greek –Australian military relations on the island. Although the focus of this chapter will be the defence of Rethymnon, military operations in other parts of Crete will be discussed in an effort to place allied relations on the island in a broader context.

Greek- Australian War Memorial at Rethymnon, Crete 2003, author's photograph.

[1] Though crossed out in his report Brigadier Salisbury-Jones had written: 'No Greek Battalion could have been considered fit to take the field against a modern European Army.' Brigadier Salisbury -Jones, Part Played by the Greek Forces in the Defence of Crete, NAB: WO210/119, Appendix D, hereafter to be referred to as the Salisbury-Jones Report on the Greeks.
[2] Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Collins, Canberra, reprinted 1986, p.213.
[3] See Appendix H Australian forces sent to Crete May/June 1941.

On Crete the Australian soldiers found themselves once again at the frontline of a campaign without any input into the defence plan of the island. Yet again they were placed in the vulnerable position of having to fight, without adequate equipment, ammunition and air cover, an enemy that had significant resources at their disposal, resulting in the capture of most of the Australians at Rethymnon. When the Allied commander on the island, General Freyberg, complained to General Wavell that what was expected of the troops on Crete was not possible given the scale of the German attack, he was told that the German threat 'had possibly been exaggerated, [and] that he was confident that the troops would be equal to their task.'[4]

Not only the Australians, but also the Greek soldiers and civilians were left in a defenceless position on Crete. All were victims of British deception. The British led the Greeks to believe that adequate defences would be constructed in readiness for a German attack, but few preparations had taken place before the invasion. Nevertheless, the Allied soldiers and Cretan people put up a fierce resistance to the attack that began on 20 May 1941.[5] By then, however, it was far too late for the Allies to put into place the defence and operational structures needed to make the campaign in Crete a success.[6]



The German plan

Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.229.

The campaign was short, lasting approximately ten days. It involved 17,000 British troops, 6,500 New Zealanders and 7,700 Australians: a total of 31,200 allied soldiers in addition

[4] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, pp.208-9.
[5] Salisbury-Jones Report on the Greeks.
[6] Lessons from Operations in Crete, NAB: WO 201/2663.

to the Greek garrison.[7] The Germans on the other hand, had deployed approximately 23,000 soldiers to Crete, having underestimated the strength of the allied force on the island.[8] Their plan was to attack the three airfields, using predominantly glider and parachute troopers thereby opening the way for an amphibious landing of their forces. Although the invasion of the island was a success, the German death toll was very high in comparison to those of the allied forces.[9]

Crete proved to be a greater military disaster for the British than the campaign on the Greek mainland. The loss of continental Greece could be excused in terms of the superiority of German forces, but Crete was an entirely different matter. As Chester Wilmot stated in his radio broadcast to Australia: 'it's not enough to explain away this latest reverse with placid apologies about our lack of equipment and aircraft. There was more to it than that . . . there was a lack of foresight – a lack of planning and preparation.'[10] An Inter-Service committee, convened shortly after the Battle for Crete to evaluate what went wrong and what lessons could be learnt from the campaign, reached a similar conclusion. Nothing in the report could excuse the British government and senior military leadership for their incompetence in the handling of Crete. It barely disguises the frustration felt by its authors with regard to the conduct of the campaign, for they state:

> 1 The Committee are of the opinion that until the eleventh hour no Service gave due weight to the preponderating factor affecting this problem, which was the overwhelming superiority of the German Air Force.
> 2. The campaigns in Norway, France and Greece had produced a wealth of lessons; they had been ill-digested. Committees also have sat, but their labours appear to have been in vain.[11]

The committee members felt that the mistakes made in Crete could have been avoided with careful planning and the execution of a defence plan, but little had been learnt from their previous campaigns.

Everything that had to be done in preparation for an imminent German attack was left undone, even though the Allies had a six month 'window of opportunity' to prepare for the German invasion. The Inter-Services committee complained that:

> Six months of comparative peace were marked by inertia. . . . If the ultimate result of the fighting could not have been altered in the absence of air support, the difficulties of the enemy could at least have been multiplied if full advantage had been taken of this period to convert the island into a fortress. If engineer resources were lacking, the island had a

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[7] See Appendix I for Deployment of Allied Troops on Crete.
[8] The official Greek history of the campaign explains that although troop numbers on Crete appeared 'impressive. Their means of firepower, however, was well below any acceptable ratio to the number of men. This held true for all kinds of weaponry, form simple rifles to antiaircraft artillery.' Lieutenant Colonel Chrestos Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, Hellenic Army General Staff Army History Directorate Publication, Athens, 1959, translated in English 2000, p37.
[9] See Appendix J for German Strengths and Casualties on Crete.
[10] Chester Wilmot, Critique on Crete, transcript of radiophone broadcast, 2 June 1941, ABC Field Unit with the A.I.F, Chester Wilmot Collection, NLA: MS 8436.
[11] Crete: Inter-Services Report on Operations, NAB: WO 201/99 4/4/47, hereafter to be referred to as Inter-Services Report on Crete.

> population of 400,000 inhabitants, the majority of whom were determined, as was shown in the event, to defend their homes. A hive of industry should have been created.[12]

The lack of forward planning and unwillingness, or inability, to harness the potential of the local population cost the British the island. This was an unjustifiable outcome given the superior intelligence they had at their disposal as a result of the ULTRA decrypts. Churchill himself admitted that 'at no moment in the war was our Intelligence so truly and precisely informed. . . . All pointed to an impending attack on Crete both by air and sea. In no operation did I take more personal pains to study and weigh the evidence or to make sure that the magnitude of the impending onslaught was impressed upon the Commanders-in-Chief and imparted to the general on the actual scene.'[13] Michael Handel explained that 'Bletchley Park deciphered the Luftwaffe's codes on a daily basis and supplied the commanders in the field with advance warning of the forthcoming German attack as well as with astonishingly accurate information on the German order of battle every evening, the odds were such that the final outcome of the campaign could never have been in doubt.'[14] Instead of using the intelligence information to their advantage the defence of the island was undertaken in an ad hoc fashion.

Strategic deployment: 'We never had a chance'!

A British brigade was posted to the island as early as the 1 November 1940 under the command of Brigadier O.H. Tidbury with orders to 'defend the Royal Naval refuelling base at Suda Bay and, in co-operation with local Greek forces, to prevent and defeat any attempt by a hostile force to gain a foothold in the island.'[15] Tidbury attempted to implement some defensive measures by initiating a 'digging programme with a view to strengthening the defences of the island.'[16] But the rapid change of British commanders on the island hindered the development of an effective defence plan.

By April 1941Crete's strategic importance had changed as a result of the German take over of the Bulgarian airfields from a refuelling depot for the Royal Navy to a major naval and air base. As a consequence, 'the island was to be reinforced by the antiaircraft artillery component and other formations of the MNBDO (Mobile Naval Base Defence Organization).'[17] Its commander Major General E. C. Weston arrived on the island on 29 March 1941, but only 2,300 of the 8,000 troops in the unit reached the island before the German attack. The role of the mobile unit, amongst its many duties, was to construct bridges and airfields, but no building

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[12] Ibid.
[13] W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War*: *The Grand Alliance*, Vol. III, Cassell & Co., London, 1950, p. 240.
[14] Michael I. Handel, "Intelligence in Military Operations,' *Intelligence and National Security Journal*, Vol.5, No.2, 1990, p.40.
[15] Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p18.

took place. The Germans on the other hand had been actively building aerodromes and other facilities on the Dodecanese Islands in readiness for their attack on Crete.

According to Churchill, Middle East Command was negligent for not making 'a more careful study of the conditions under which Crete might have been defended from air or sea attack. The need for providing, if not a harbour, at least landing facilities on the southern side of the island at Sphakia or Timbaki, and the making of a road there from to Suda Bay and the airfields by which Western Crete could have been reinforced from Egypt was not foreseen. The responsibility for the defective study of the problem and for the feeble execution of the directions given must be shared between Cairo and Whitehall.'[18]

Wavell however did not lack foresight. He was well informed about what was needed to defend Crete but did not act on this information. This is rather perplexing given that Churchill had clearly signalled the Defence Committee's priorities to Wavell: 'Crete must be held in force, and you should provide for this in the redistribution of your forces. . . . We shall aid and maintain defence of Crete to the utmost.'[19] His orders appear to have been largely ignored by Wavell, as little action was taken to supply the Crete garrison with the necessary arms, artillery and planes. It has been argued in Wavell's defence that he was concerned that the defence and maintenance of Crete would stretch Allied resources in the Middle East to their limit and would drain any reserves he had to deal with the impending crisis in Syria and Iraq with which he was preoccupied. He did not have any more men, equipment and planes at his disposal to commit to Crete. Nevertheless, sending entrenchment tools at the very least would have improved the situation. As it was 'the troops had to resort to using their helmets as shovels, to dig trenches and foxholes' because digging tools along with other equipment promised by the British had not arrived.[20]

With the conquest of Greece however, Crete was no longer a great strategic prize, as Suda Bay, the naval base in Crete used by the British in the early part of the war for refuelling of their ships, was vulnerable to German air attack from bases in the Peloponnese and the Dodecannese islands, now under Axis control. Chester Wilmot reached a similar conclusion in 1941 but was not allowed to voice it to the Australian public: 'It is difficult to understand,' he wrote 'why it was ever decided to defend Crete. It's true there was a good naval base at Suda Bay, but after the Germans got control of Greece and the surrounding island there was no hope of using it as a really effective base. It was in a worse position than Malta, but Malta has got strong defences. There was some point in denying it to the Italians and Germans but as they have the Dodecanese and the Greek Islands and Greece itself, the possession of Crete wouldn't have improved our position very much and it could only have been held at severe cost in any

[18] Churchill, *The Second World War*, p. 239.
[19] Telegram from Prime Minister to General Wavell 17 April 1941, cited in Churchill, *The Second World War*, p. 200.
[20] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.26.

case.'[21] It is not surprising that Wilmot's comment was censored, as such an observation would have weakened the confidence of the Australian public in Allied leadership.

In Wavell's mind, Crete presented the same defence and supply problems as Greece and with similarly few gains. In many ways, Wavell reacted the same way he did to directives from Whitehall about Greece: he simply ignored them and appeased the Prime Minister by supplying the minimum amount of forces and equipment he was prepared to lose. In the end he made up his own mind on how best to deploy the resources at his command. He visited Crete and made a personal assessment of the situation. Like General Wilson, he decided that the defence of Crete was too expensive when the pipeline to Haifa via Iraq supplying oil to the British forces was at risk.[22] Churchill, although not a great supporter of Wavell, was prepared to concede that Wavell's organization was 'overloaded and under-sustained.'[23] He explained that 'Wavell tried his best; but the handling machine at his disposal was too weak to enable him to cope with the vast mass of business which four or five simultaneous campaigns imposed upon him.'[24]

As a result of the conflicting demands place upon him Wavell did not appear to act decisively over Crete, claiming that it was a ruse by the Germans to shift the focus from their real target, Cyprus, or more importantly, Malta. The Greek government was aware of Wavell's vacillations noting that, 'the actions of the Middle East Headquarters were characterized by a number of contradictory and ambivalent thoughts and decisions with regard to the island, despite the awareness that the fall of Greece was something to be taken into account in which case Crete ought to be saved.'[25] Britain's inconsistent behaviour did not go unnoticed by the Australian war correspondent, Chester Wilmot, who highlighted the discrepancy in his radio broadcast of June 1941: 'If Crete were so valuable to us that it was worthwhile putting more than 20,000 troops there it is strange that in seven months that we held it more was not done to make it defensible or that in the three weeks between the evacuation of Greece and the attack on Crete more equipment and armament was not sent over so that the troops might have had at least a sporting chance.'[26]

If Wavell displayed a lack of leadership over Crete it was not surprising given the confusing and often contradictory instructions emanating from Whitehall. On 18 April 1941, only a day after he was told by the Prime Minister to 'aid Crete to the utmost,' the Chiefs of Staff issued him with the following directive: 'victory in Libya counts first, evacuation of troops from Greece second. . . . Iraq can be ignored and Crete be worked up later.'[27] In any case,

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[21] Wilmot, Critique on Crete, NLA: MS 8436.
[22] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.198.
[23] Churchill, *The Second World War*, p. 239.
[24] Ibid p.239.
[25] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.26.
[26] Wilmot, Critique on Crete, NLA: MS 8436.
[27] Churchill, *The Second World War*, p.201.

Britain could not and would not hold Crete; its usefulness lay in another direction.[28] As Churchill's message of the 23 May 1941 explained: 'Even if enemy secure good lodgements fighting must be maintained indefinitely in the island, thus keeping enemy main striking force tied down to the task. This will at least give you time to mobilise Tiger Clubs and dominate the situation Western Desert. While it lasts, it also protects Cyprus.'[29] Churchill failed to mention this consideration to the Greek government and Cretans, who understandably might have objected at being placed in the same predicament they found themselves in Greece. Is it any wonder that relations between the British and the Greeks cooled considerably during the course of the campaign?

Relations between the Greeks and their coalition partners

The Greeks had left the defence of the island in British hands and were badly let down. On 4 November 1940, due to the deteriorating situation in Albania, they requested the dispatch of the V Cretan Division to the mainland on the understanding that the British would take over the defence of the island. The Greek government was aware that their troops on the island amounted to 'eleven ill-equipped infantry battalions, comprising about 1,000 reservists, 7,000 new recruits and 2,500 gendarmes', and sensibly requested that the 'Greek and British troops on the island . . . be reorganized and re-equipped with the required material as soon as possible and be placed under a unified British command.'[30] They had hoped that the British would train them, but this did not take place. They were allocated to the various defence sectors and it was up to the British, New Zealand or Australian commanders, with the help of the British liaison officers attached to the Greeks, to coordinate their efforts.[31] This must have caused considerable concern to the Allied leadership on Crete as the Greeks were mostly, 'reservists and partly fit men, . . . with anything from one week to one month's training. These troops were equipped with no less than five different types of rifle and, on an average, thirty rounds of ammunition per rifle only were available . . . hardly in a position to face a modern European army.'[32]

In December 1940 General Headquarters in Greece began the formation of militia units on the island. Their role was to ensure 'the security of installations and sensitive points in general against any possible actions of paratroops or amphibious forces.'[33] Identified by their blue side-caps and armbands, the militia were organised into four battalions: one in Chania with 564 officers and men, a unit in Rethymnon with 265 men, one in Heraklion consisting of 484 men and a unit in Lasithi comprised of 243. They were placed under the command of the

[28] This would explain why Wavell was reluctant to commit additional resources to Crete and why the few serviceable British planes on Crete were removed to Cairo the day before the attack.
[29] Churchill, *The Second World War*, p. 260.
[30] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.15. & p.16.
[31] See Appendix K for list of Greek forces on Crete.
[32] Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[33] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.11.

Gendarmerie, which was required to train them.[34] General Headquarters Greece also reinforced the Gendarmerie in Crete with the arrival from the Greek mainland of fifteen officers and nine hundred enlisted men. But little use could be made of men without arms. According to Greece's official history of the Crete campaign, the 'British had promised right from the beginning that they would provide weapons for the Cretan militia. This promise, however, did not materialize up until the day of the German air assault against the island.'[35]

By 28 April 1941 the Germans had occupied most of Greece and 45, 000 Allied troops, along with Greek soldiers, had been evacuated to Crete. 'With the evacuation of Greece, Crete at once became an active operational base.'[36] Even at this late stage little had been done by the British to adequately prepare Crete for what was believed to be an imminent German attack, making the Greek government, now resident in Crete, very nervous. Greek Prime Minister Emmanuel Tsouderos voiced their concerns, explaining that 'the impression of the Greek government is that the present defensive preparedness of the island is nowhere near satisfactory.'[37]

In response the government of Greece convened an urgent meeting with the British at Chania chaired by Tsouderos with Generals Wilson, Weston, Skoulas, Air Marshal D'Albiac, Rear Admiral Turle and Group Captain Beamish in attendance.[38] There were no Australian or New Zealand commanders present, a serious oversight given the role Dominion troops were to play on the island. The Greeks tried to impress upon the British high command the need for swift actions over Crete. The following day Tsouderos issued a memorandum to the British ambassador 'stressing the need to raise the number of aircraft and increase air force activity in general, in its defensive as well as its counter attacking mode.'[39]

The British insisted that they were doing their best; however Tsouderos saw no evidence of this, demanding that Weston, the Commander of Creforce, make some pretence at air cover even if it did not exist. 'I am harping on this subject' explained Tsouderos, 'because I know the effect that it can have on the civil population. We must put up a show otherwise the populace will be disheartened. Couldn't planes from Egypt, when not otherwise engaged, fly over the island so as to impress the Cretans, and to show that we have planes. The Cretans are a determined people and intend to defend this island but they require some encouragement.' [40]Weston pointed out that they had sixty planes at Heraklion to patrol the air but this was not a

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[34] Ibid p.12.
[35] Ibid p.12.
[36] Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[37] Emmanuel Tsouderos, *Diplomatika paraskenia 1941-1945,* [Diplomatic backstage 1941 –45,] Athens, 1950, p.79.
[38] This meeting took place on 28 April 1941 in Chania, Crete.
[39] Tsouderos, *Diplomatika paraskenia*, p.79.
[40] "Summaries of Conversation between Mr Tsouderos, Prime Minister of Greece and Major General Weston, G.O C. Creforce," 24/4/1941, Diplomatic and Historical Archives, Athens, Government-in-Exile, Cairo, Folder 9.

satisfactory response for the Greek Prime Minister for he insisted that 'these planes at Heraklion are not apparent to civilians.'[41] Instead suggesting that 'the R.A.F. should employ some Greek personnel so as to show collaboration – the greek (sic) personnel can then tell their friends what the British are doing.'[42]

Operational Deployment

On 29 April General Bernard Freyberg, the New Zealand commander, arrived for a short visit on the island on his way to Egypt, but was told that he was to command the campaign. Freyberg neither wanted nor sought the position. It was a poisoned chalice and in retrospect he displayed great wisdom in refusing it. Although he voiced his opposition to the appointment it had little impact on General Wavell who instructed him that it was his duty to accept the command. The reason for Freyberg 's selection to the post has been the subject of much conjecture. The publicly stated reason for the appointment was Churchill's admiration for Freyberg's World War I exploits whereas the most likely reason was Britain's desire to mollify Australia and New Zealand over the disastrous Greek campaign. Ironically, Crete landed them with a greater military disaster than Greece.

Crete's topography presented the Allies with a defence nightmare. The island possessed only three flat areas, at Maleme, Rethymnon and Heraklion, where airfields were located. Unfortunately for the Allies these airfields were situated on the north side of the island, facing the Greek mainland, making them vulnerable to German air attack from the Peloponnese and the Dodecannese islands areas under Italian control. Furthermore, Crete was divided in half by a continuous range of mountains accessed only by

> a single road running along the north coast upon which were strung all the vulnerable points of the island. Each of these had to be self-supporting. There could be no central reserve free to move to a threatened point once this road was cut and firmly held by the enemy. Only tracks unfit for motor transport ran from south coast to north from Sphakia and Timbaki.[43]

The road to Sphakia, the Allied evacuation point was in fact nothing more than a goat track. What made the defence of the island even more difficult was that Suda Bay was the only deep-water jetty, a fact that was not over looked by the German Air Force that subjected it to sustained bombing. The geography of Crete aggravated communication between the Allied units; Brigadier George Vasey noted that '[t]hroughout the whole period on the island intercommunication was very difficult.'[44]

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Churchill, *The Second World War*, p. 246.
[44] 19th Australian Infantry Brigade, Account of Operations in Crete, AWM: 54 535/2/25.

Suda Bay, Crete 2003, author's photograph.

Upon assuming command on 30 April 1941 General Freyberg had no choice but to persevere with what he considered a most hazardous campaign. He had attempted to stop the campaign by sending a strongly worded telegram to the New Zealand government outlining the dangers of the situation and urging them to use all their influence to overturn the decision. 'Recommended you bring pressure to bear on highest plane in London either to supply us with sufficient means to defend island or to review decision Crete must be held.'[45] He knew, given the dismal array of troops he had at his disposal, that he was not in a position to hold Crete. Most of the troops on the island had been recently evacuated from Greece and were in a terrible condition. Apart from exhaustion many were suffering from shell shock and were without weapons, equipment or food.[46] He knew that without adequate resources and a fresh supply of troops, the campaign was doomed to failure.

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[45] Freyberg's Report cited in Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.209.

[46] See Chapter 5 for details. General Weston complained that the nerves of soldiers from Greece were in such a bad state that they 'over reacted' to the sound of German planes, severely hindering military operations on Crete. It was the subject of extensive discussion in the British report on the campaign entitled 'Lessons from Crete'. Researching shell shock, Wendy Holden noted that 'one particular stress which was found was the dive-bombing by the German Stukas in surprise attacks, which made matters very worse. And then the normal stresses of being away from home for a year or two. All these were factors in producing a breakdown.' Wendy Holden, *Shell Shock: The Psychological Impact of War*, Macmillan, London, 1984, pp.97-98; It is difficult to document the exact number of troops suffering from 'shell shock' or 'war neurosis' as it was known in WWII, later referred to as PTSD, as Australian military psychiatrists tended to under diagnose it. Preferring instead to attribute soldiers' mental breakdown to a weak constitution or lack of character or cowardice. Clinical psychologist, John Raftery found in his 10 year study of 65 Australian veterans of the Kokoda campaign that they did exhibit symptoms of PSTD: *Marks of War: Neurosis and the Legacy of Kokoda*, Lythrum, Press, 2003; Similar findings were noted by Peter Hobbins, who investigated Australian veterans of the Malaya- Singapore Campaign, 1941-42, *Health and History*, 9.1, 2007, published online: http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/hah/9.1/hobbins.html

As he could do nothing further to alter the situation in which he found himself, Freyberg appeared to acquiesce with the decision. Reversing his previously pessimistic outlook, he reported to Wavell that everything was under control. He organised the island's defence into four self-contained sectors: Heraklion under the command of Brigadier Chappel; Rethymnon where he deployed mainly Australian troops, under their most senior officer - Brigadier Vasey; Suda Bay with mostly British troops under Major General Weston; and Maleme under the command of Brigadier Puttick and the New Zealand forces.

Dissatisfaction over Maleme

Although the defence of the airstrip at Maleme, on the western side of the island facing the Greek mainland, rested primarily in the hands of the New Zealanders, it had serious implications for the Australians deployed further east along the coast at Rethymnon. The holding of the three airfields on Crete, particularly Maleme, west of the port city of Chania or Canea as it was referred to by the allies, was critical to the overall defence of the island, yet Freyberg appeared not to have acted decisively regarding this matter. Brigadier Puttick, who was acting Divisional commander of the New Zealand forces on Crete, had one New Zealand brigade available to him to deploy three miles west of Chania and another New Zealand brigade in the area around Maleme, including three Greek Battalions as well as the 28th Maori Battalion to be used in a counter attack to prevent an enemy advance towards Chania.

Freyberg chose to deploy his forces in readiness for an amphibious attack that did not eventuate. He dispersed his troops thinly on the ground, against Brigadier Puttick's advice, and thus neglected to place adequate reserve forces around the airstrip. This was a perplexing decision given that Freyberg was privy to top-level intelligence information that indicated that an air, not a sea attack was imminent.[47] Furthermore, rather than following up the attack on the first day with a night raid, he allowed the Germans time to regroup and retain their hold of the airfield. Even though this study is not concerned with Freyberg's leadership of the campaign as such, it nevertheless had serious ramifications for the Greeks and Australians fighting together on Crete and needs to be acknowledged. Many Cretans felt disappointed over Freyberg's refusal to arm the militia and his failure to heed local advice, particularly with regard the defence of the airstrip at Maleme.[48]

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[47] Ronald Lewin maintained that like Wavell, Freyberg got 'the message' but not 'the meaning' of the Ultra transcripts. He explained that the 'Ultra intelligence warned specifically, accurately and in detail about both an airborne and a seaborne landing. But because Freyberg failed to perceive what Student knew (that unless 7 Air Division could seize an airfield the vital follow-up troops and supplies could not be flown in . . . Because of [Freyberg's] failure to grasp the essential point Maleme airfield was lost: because Student captured Maleme Crete was lost.' *Ultra Goes to War: The Secret Story*, Penguin, London, 1978, p158.

[48] Interview: Markos Polioudakis, Rethymnon , Crete, 27 October 2003.

Subsequently the capture of the airfield at Maleme became the subject of heated debate, damaging the reputations of Freyberg and Puttick. Freyberg in particular was strongly criticised not only immediately after the campaign but also years later, for not heeding the advice supplied by signals intelligence [ULTRA transcripts] that were released to the public in the 1980s.[49] There has been some suggestion that he misread or misinterpreted the intelligence information he was given to the detriment of the Allied forces and Greek civilians who suffered greatly under German occupation.[50] Bernard Freyberg's son, defending his father's reputation, claimed that Freyberg's main objective in not concentrating his forces on the airfield was to protect the ULTRA secret.[51] The most recent reinterpretation of the campaign by Antony Beevor was unforgiving of Freyberg's performance in Crete, arguing that it was the product of incompetence rather than desire to protect the secrecy of ULTRA.[52] There is strong evidence to suggest that there was dissatisfaction with Freyberg's handling of the campaign amongst the allied officers on Crete. A number of New Zealand commanders voiced their concern about Freyberg's leadership. Brigadier Inglis reported to Churchill that Freyberg failed to provide a sizable reserve.[53] According to Laurie Barber this was 'an unjust criticism' produced by a 'trouble making report of a disloyal brigadier.'[54] Kippenberger, who became the editor of New Zealand's official history of World War Two, was also scathing of Freyberg and the New Zealand divisions' performance on Crete. Brigadier Vasey and Lieutenant Colonel Cremor, the Australian officers on Crete also believed that Freyberg had 'bungled his task.'[55] The Prime Minister of New Zealand took these complaints seriously enough to canvas the removal of Freyberg from his post, writing both to Middle East Command and to Wavell in India for their appreciations.[56]

Contact between the Australian and Greek soldiers

There was limited Australian involvement in the Maleme /Suda Bay area as the bulk of the Australian force was deployed at Rethymnon. Brigadier George Vasey, who was to take

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[49]The Enigma machine transmitted the German code informing the army, navy, air force and U-Boats of their destination and target. The code was changed regularly and was difficult to break - there were 3 billion possible combinations. The Ultra secret refers to the breaking of the German enigma code. The resulting intelligence was distributed to a very limited group of people under a classification termed Ultra. Churchill referred to the Ultra transcripts as the 'Golden eggs' and staff at Station X at Bletchley Park in England who deciphered them as 'the geese'.

[50] Antony Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p.51.

[51] Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg, VC: Soldier of Two Nations*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1991. p.4.

[52] Beevor, *Crete*, p.99.

[53] W. S. Churchill, Most Secret Minute to the Chiefs of Staff Committee, 14 June 1941, NAB: PRO PREM 3/109 D 186/1.

[54] Laurie Barber, "Freyberg and Crete: The Australasian Perspective," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Volume LXXII, Number 292, Winter 1994, p.250.

[55] David Horner, *High Command: Australia & Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p.108.

[56] Most secret cipher from Prime Minister of New Zealand, P. Frazer to C.I.G.S., 28 August 1941: Personal Correspondence – Rt. Hon. P. Fraser, 1940-1944, WAII, Fraser, NZA.

charge of the Australian troops on the island, was ordered by General Freyberg to move his headquarters to Georgioupolis – situated on the coastal strip between Suda Bay and Rethymnon. He was to prevent a seaborne landing at Georgioupolis Bay with the 2/7th and a weak 2/8th Battalion.[57] This was a strange order given that the majority of Vasey's force was to be deployed some twenty miles away at Rethymnon - too far away to receive support from Brigade headquarters at Georgioupolis. As a result Vasey placed Lieutenant Colonel Ian Campbell in charge of the fighting at Rethymnon and Lieutenant Colonel W. Cremor, the commanding officer of the 2/2nd Field Regiment, in charge of the remaining Australian troops at Suda. 'By accepting Georgioupolis as the preferred HQ 19 Brigade location,' explained Lieutenant Johnson of 2/11th Battalion, 'Brigadier Vasey largely ignored Retimo Force. As Vasey was aware that he had little control over the Force Reserve, ie 2/7th and 2/8th Battalions . . . with him at Georgioupolis, one may well consider the delegation of command of the majority of his Brigade to Campbell, was wrong.'[58]

AWM: 130933 Neo Khorion Crete Brigadier Vasey's headquarters.

In fact, Vasey's 19th Brigade remained out of action for a few days as Freyberg ordered, on 21 May, the 2/7th Battalion, a detachment of the 2/3rd Field Regiment and the 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion to relieve the 20th New Zealand Battalion situated west of Chania. He wanted to free the New Zealanders so he could use them in a counter attack on the aerodrome at

[57] 19th Brigade headquarters consisted of 60 men, 2/7th Battalion had 600, the 2/8th had 380 and the 2/8th Field Engineers had 130. David Horner, *General Vasey's War*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1992, p.120.
[58] Letter from K. T. Johnson to David Horner, 23 July 1997, on loan from the author.

Maleme.[59] Consequently Brigadier Vasey was left with few troops under his command at Georgioupolis, apart from the 2/7th Field Ambulance and the detachment of the 2/8th Field Company. Vasey insisted to Freyberg that his Headquarters 'were capable of controlling a sector of the battle front and that [he] would be glad to be given an area in which [he] might concentrate and employ the 7 and 8 Battalions.'[60] Eventually Freyberg agreed to his request and Vasey moved his headquarters to Neo Khorion south east of Suda Bay. But one has to ask why Brigadier Vasey did not insist on moving his brigade headquarters closer to Rethymnon as Campbell had radioed in on the previous day asking for support at Rethymnon? [61] Campbell recorded receiving a wireless transmission message in response from Force headquarters at 2400 hours on the 20 May stating: "Unable send help, Hold on, Know you will, Good Luck."[62] As Lieutenant Ken Johnston, a platoon commander of 2/11th Battalion on Crete pointed out: ' [i]t would . . . have relieved Lieutenant Colonel Campbell of the dual task of commanding his own battalion and also commanding the Force at Retimo, with no additional staff other than a British liaison officer to the Greek unit.'[63]

Brigadier Vasey and the Greek Battalions

AWM: Suda Bay, Crete 1941 member of 6th Division Signals stands in front of a ruined building destroyed in air raid.

[59] David Horner commented that 'Freyberg's plan to counter-attack with the 10th Battalion after it had been relieved by the 2/7th Battalion imposed an unnecessary and crucial delay on the attack.' *General Vasey's War*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton Victoria, 1992,p.117.
[60] 19th Australian Infantry Brigade: Account of Operations in Crete, AWM: 54 435/2/25.
[61] Horner has suggested that 'by this time it was clear that Campbell had contained the German force at Retimo.' *General Vasey's War*, p.117.
[62] Campbell Report.
[63] Letter from K. T. Johnson to David Horner, 23 July 1997.

On 22 May Vasey was instructed to take charge of the 2/8th Battalion and the 2nd Greek Battalion located south west of Chania and under the operational command of Major General Weston. Vasey visited the Greek Battalion and instructed them 'to continue to carry out harassing tactics against the Germans on Castle Knoll, but not to carry out a direct attack.'[64] The Greeks held their position but asked for additional fire support as the 'lack of food and especially ammunition made [their] ability to withstand the anticipated German attack questionable.'[65] 'Vasey advised them that he did not want their advance to develop into a major battle.'[66] Although Vasey's front was not under pressure, the battle taking place in the Chania-Suda Bay area was not developing well and by 25 May 'the Greek Higher Military Command of Crete based at Chania had lost all contact with the Greek units because of the continuous bombardment and strafing had severed all communication. By the evening of the 25 the city had been almost destroyed and fires raged in its neighbourhoods.'[67]

On the 26 May the New Zealanders came under heavy attack and Vasey suggested to the New Zealand commanders, Puttick and Hargest, that 'in view of the physical condition of the NZ's, as well as the weakness occasioned by having 2 Greek Bn on [his] left,' that they withdraw to a shorter line east of Suda Bay.[68] On the same day Freyberg received a report from the Commander of the Greek forces on Crete, Major General Skoulas, explaining that 'because of a complete lack of munitions, food and medical supplies and their constant engagement in battle, the condition of the Greek troops was critical, while in many places units were disintegrating.'[69] Vasey informed the Greek battalion of the decision to withdraw. He subsequently received an order from Freyberg to hold his position but could not do so.[70] He wrote in his brigade report that: 'with the Greeks dispersed on my left flank and the NZ's withdrawn from my right flank would only result in 7 and 8 Bn being captured. Hence I decided to continue my withdrawal to the SUDA BAY areas as previously arranged.'[71] It was noted in the official Greek history of the campaign that '[m]any troops of the 2nd Greek Infantry Regiment,' that were under Vasey's command, 'retired in stages . . . after exhausting their meagre supplies of ammunition.'[72]

There was little confidence amongst the Dominion commanders in the ability of the Greek soldiers to hold their position. Whether this view was as a result of their exposure to Greek troops on the mainland or produced by the desperate situation the Greek troops found

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[64] Horner, *General Vasey's War*, p.118.
[65] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.127.
[66] Ibid p.120.
[67] Ibid p.128.
[68] 19th Australian Infantry Brigade: Account of Operations in Crete, AWM: 54 435/2/25.
[69] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.128.
[70] The decision to withdraw came under intense scrutiny as a result of the fate that befell the Welch who ended up being encircled by the Germans. David Horner, *General Vasey's War*, p.123.
[71] 19th Australian Infantry Brigade: Account of Operations in Crete.
[72] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.132.

themselves in on Crete is hard to determine. Freyberg commenting on the Greek forces on Crete to Major-General Arthur Smith, Wavell's chief of staff, said: " I am impressed with the Greek rank and file but a great deal of dead wood must go, especially officers'[73] British Brigadier Salisbury-Jones, liaison officer to the Greek soldiers on Crete, reported that the Greek battalions in the Suda Bay sector gave a good account of themselves. In his report he declared that:

> Although parachutists descended among the 2nd, 6th and 8th [Greek] Battalions, in the area GALATAS – PERIVOLLIA- MOURNIOS, the hardest fighting fell to the 6th and 8th [Greek] Battalions. They killed many parachutists on the first day of landing, but more landed in the area on the second day and when they were exhausted, many of the 6th and 8th [Greek] Battalions having suffered heavily, disintegrated in the hills to the South. The Commanding officer of the 8th [Greek] Battalion was killed.[74]

Salisbury-Jones' report was an attempt to reassure the Greek government, concerned by Britain's apparent reluctance to brief them, that they were not withholding information.[75] Guy Salisbury-Jones, code-named 'Guido' who was known to have 'a mind of his own and was not afraid to speak it,' in this instance remained silent about the poor performance of some of the Greek troops on Crete. [76] Given that the report was written in June 1941, at a time when tempers were high and accusations flying regarding the loss of Crete, it is not surprisingly that the report was written in a conciliatory tone. It emphasized the bravery of the Greeks stating that the 'measure of their gallantry will be the more readily appreciated when it is realised that the bulk of these forces had received only a few weeks training and that their arms and equipments were, in most cases, primitive and inadequate.'[77]

While Brigadier Vasey made little mention in the Brigade report of the behaviour of Greek troops in his sector he did refer to those under Campbell's command, noting that the Commander of the 4th Greek Battalion threatened to withdraw on 21 May 'unless he received more ammunition. A number of German rifles & ammunition were handed over to them. The men who had very little training were jubilant. The officers were very unimpressive.'[78] Lieutenant Colonel Campbell commented extensively on the performances of the 4th and 5th Greek Battalions at Rethymnon in his narrative, but Salisbury-Jones did not receive the information, noting in his report that 'details of the part played by the 4th and 5th Battalions are still lacking.'[79] This was probably because Campbell had been taken prisoner at the time the report was being compiled, however, Vasey's account would have been available. The Greeks,

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[73] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.213.
[74] Salisbury-Jones Report on the Greeks.
[75] 'Unless there are very strong reasons for with-holding information from the Greek, it is considered that, in view of the part they took in this Battle, they should be given the information they are anxious to get,' 23 August 1941, Lessons from Operations in Crete, NAB: WO 201/2663.
[76] Salisbury-Jones Report on the Greeks.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Account of Operation of AIF in Crete, AWM: 54 535/2/25.
[79] Ibid.

on the other hand, did comment on their allies, noting that when the New Zealand liaison officer to 2nd Greek Battalion was sent to

> Freyberg's headquarters in order to request food and ammunition . . . , [he reported to Freyberg] that because of a lack of such commodities the regiment was at the threshold of disintegration. General Freyberg promised to supply the regiment, but this promise was never fulfilled. From the general's stance the liaison officer concluded that Freyberg had decided on an evacuation from Crete in order to save his troops.[80]

Although not a flattering interpretation of Freyberg's motives, it does offer an insight into the nature of the relationship that had developed between General Freyberg and the Greek military on Crete. There appears to be little understanding in allied reports on Crete of the position of the Greek troops, that is, without ammunition and food they could not continue fighting, though many continued to harass the Germans as members of guerrilla forces on Crete. The Greeks were, on many occasions, left out of the intelligence loop by their allies and communication between the allies was not very successful.

Relations between the Australians and Greeks at Rethymnon

AWM: P04067.006 The village of Rethymnon or Retimo, Crete.

The great tragedy of the Crete campaign, from the Australian point of view, was the capture of so many Australian soldiers at Rethymnon, referred to as Retimo by the Australians.[81] This is still a matter of conjecture amongst the surviving members of the 2/1st

[80] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, pp.127-128.
[81] A total of 1260 soldiers were either wounded and/or were taken prisoners at Rethymnon: '2/1st Battalion: 510, 2/11th: 550; 2/1st Machine Gun: 32; 2/3rd Field Regiment: 66; 2/8th Field Company: 24 and 2/7th Field Ambulance: 38.' Margaret Barter, Besiegers and Besieged: The Defenders of Retimo & Tobruk, unpublished manuscript, on loan from the author, p.3.

Battalion.[82] There was no withdrawal from Rethymnon, though some soldiers did escape into the hills with the commander of the 2/11th Battalion, Major Ray Sandover. The other frustrating aspect of the battle at Rethymnon was the behaviour of the Greek battalions, whose lack of training and inability to follow orders caused Lieutenant Colonel Ian Campbell considerable problems, unlike the civilians and the Cretan police, who proved an asset in battle.[83]

Brigadier Vasey, aware that once the campaign began communications between the units would be disrupted, gave Lieutenant Colonel Ian Campbell the overall command of the forces at Rethymnon. Campbell was placed in charge of defending a '1400 yard long airstrip [that] ran parallel to and about 100 yards south of the coastline, which ran straight for three miles east and west of the airstrip.'[84] After the battle of Greece the 6th Division of the 2nd AIF had been decimated. Campbell only had two complete battalions at his disposal: the 2/1st and the 2/11th while the other two battalions, the 2/7th and a weak 2/8th were deployed with Brigadier Vasey further west along the coast between Rethymnon and Suda Bay at Georgiopolis.[85] There were also some composite Australian battalions comprised of men from all the units who had served in Greece allocated to Major General Weston in the Suda Base area.

Campbell decided to place what remained of the 2/1st Battalion on Hill A covered by a vineyard. This important area 'was situated east of the eastern end of the airstrip which jutted out from the main east west ridge and almost to the sea.' [86] The 2/11th Battalion was placed in charge of Hill B. Both areas overlooked the aerodrome at Rethymnon. The Greek 4th Battalion was deployed in the area between the 2/11th and 2/1st Battalions and 5th Greek Battalion was kept in reserve south in a valley between the villages of Pigi and Adhele.

Throughout the campaign Campbell encountered numerous problems with the two Greek battalions. He recorded in his campaign report that the Greeks 'had very little confidence in their ability to stop any attack, and, not having fired their weapons, had no confidence in their own marksmanship. In defence they withdrew if threatened, in attack they were very unreliable as the narrative will indicate.'[87] William Travers, company commander, felt that the Greeks were a liability in battle: 'a large proportion had received but little training, but allowing for

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[82]The surrender of Campbell's forces at Rethymnon remains a contentious issue. Lieutenant Fairbairn insisted that 'the order to withdraw' was never sent to Campbell resulting in the capture of most of the 2/1st Battalion. According to the interviews conducted by Margaret Barter, 'surviving 2/1st Battalion officers believe that Campbell was very much left in the lurch at Retimo, with Vasey visiting Retimo East Group sector on just two occasions,' Besiegers and Besieged, Chapter III, p.9; Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.278; Interview: Lieutenant Terry Fairbairn 2/1st Battalion, 28 April 2002.

[83] There is some confusion as to how many Greek battalions were at Rethymnon. This is because the Greeks referred to the four Greek Battalions at Rethymnon as the 4th and 5th Infantry Regiments.

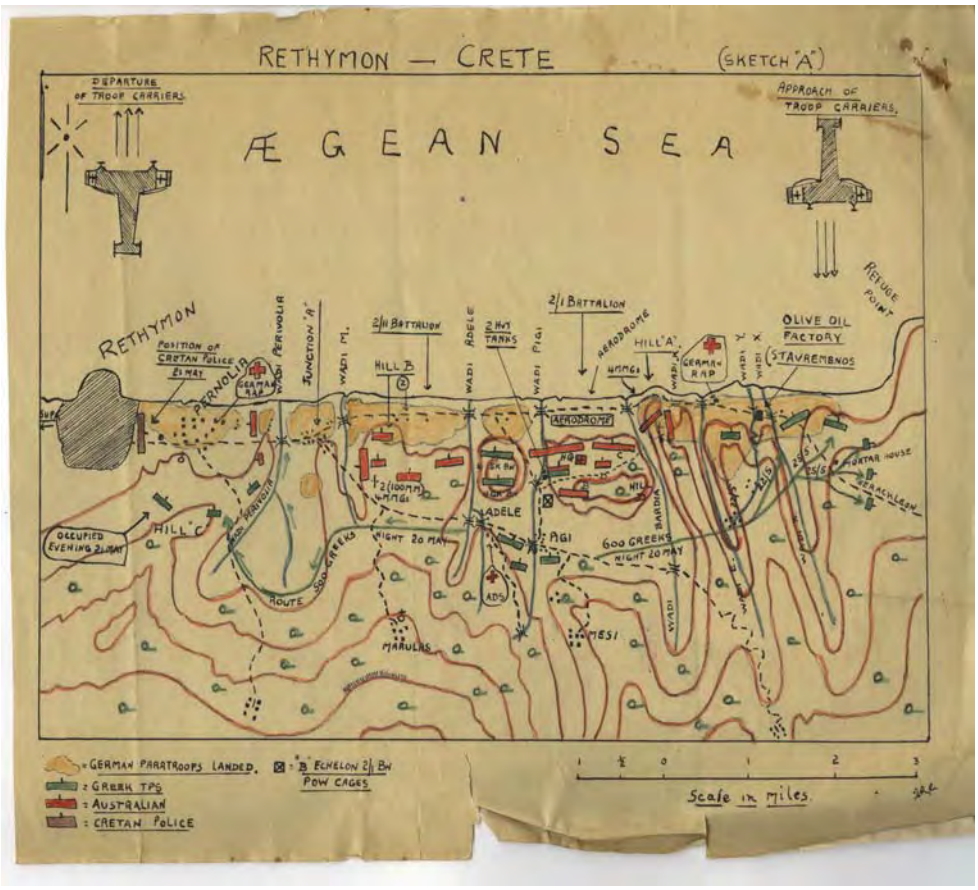
[84] Ian Campbell, The Memoirs of Major General Ian Ross Campbell C.B.E., unpublished manuscript on loan from Mrs Mary Newlinds, p.95. Hereafter to be referred to as the Campbell Memoirs.

[85] See Appendix K for strength of units at Rethymnon.

[86] Campbell Memoirs, p.95.

[87] Brigadier T. R. Campbell DSO (AIF), "Report on the Battle for the Defence of the Retimo Aerodrome, Crete From 20 – 30 May 1941", on loan from the Joint Committee for the Commemoration of the Battle of Greece and Crete. Hereafter to be referred to as the Campbell Report.

this, they were a source of danger to us. . . . Several NCOs had to run over and stop a general exodus from the front line during the preliminary bombardment. On four occasions they failed to stay in a defensive position, even when the enemy was obviously on the defensive.' [88]



AWM MEB0021: Hand drawn map of troop dispositions at Rethymnon.

Campbell arrived at the airstrip at Rethymnon to find that the Greek battalions, whom he described as 'enthusiastic and likable Greeks,' had dug entrenchments in a way that made them very visible from the air.[89] They had no training in armaments, let alone tactics or on the importance of camouflage. Bill Travers recalled that the '[Greek] officer of the Company whom we relieved showed me, with some pride, a trench system he had dug. The site was excellently chosen but the trench he dug was such a give away to air recce that I moved our troops 100 yards away from it. As later events turned out this was a wise move because the enemy had the position securely taped for blitzing.'[90]

[88] Travers, William, H. The Battle for the Retimo Landing Strip May 1941, unpublished manuscript on loan from the author written while he was a German prisoner of war.
[89] Campbell Memoirs, p.86.
[90] Travers, The Battle for the Retimo Landing Strip.

AWM: PO3489.005 Australian soldiers taking shelter in a slit trench on Crete 28 April 1941. Some of these soldiers were on the staff of the Counter Battery Unit recently evacuated from Greece. Left to right: Lieutenant (Lt) Keogh, Lt Durrant both wearing steel helmets, Major Cleland and an unknown sergeant.

Command of the Greek units proved to be an operational nightmare for Campbell who recorded that: 'the forward troops of 4 Greek Battalion, as a result of bomb attack (not on their Battalion at all) had fallen back.'[91] This action by the Greeks left the Australians exposed. Fortunately for his troops, Campbell was able to fill the gap in the line. Although the performance of the Greek troops must have frustrated the Australian officers there is evidence to suggest there were attempts made to support and train them. Campbell noted in the unit diary that:

> Lt Cooke, 2/1 Battalion, . . . sent over some N.C.Os to rally the Greeks . . . 2/11 Battalion took similar action . . . the Australian N.C.Os had rallied the discomforted Greeks, who were now back to their original front line. . . . These Australian N.C.Os remained for the next 10 days with the Greeks, who showed great faith in them and later that same afternoon followed them out into the open coastal plain to clear up some German snipers in the vineyards.[92]

It is clear from Campbell's note that the Australians managed to establish a rapport with the Greeks thus enabling them to lead their soldiers into battle. It is important to bear in mind that although there were significant tactical problems, the relationship with the Greek military on Crete was not a total failure. There were occasions when the two allies worked well together. But the difficulty for the Australians was that they did not have the time, once the German attack commenced, to train and support Greek troops. They needed them to perform as ordered, which they failed to do.

Local Cretan historian, Markos Polioudakis, defending the behaviour of Greek troops at Rethymnon, explained that:

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[91] Campbell Report.
[92] Ibid.

> The Greek battalion between the Australians did not have weapons at this time. At 2.30 they were being issued with food. It was at this time that this battalion was withdrawing to the hill to join their main force, that the German parachutists began dropping. This was what Campbell had observed from his post and sent a group of Australian troops to bring them back. Not only did they come back but also they conducted a general attack towards the sea and took 28 German prisoners. . . . [Campbell] used this battalion continuously on the attacks at Stravromenos, I know this for a fact, because this is where my family was, my uncles and I were there, and I heard first hand what was happening each day.[93]

In all fairness, why would the Greeks with so few weapons and limited ammunition between them place themselves in the enemy's path? According to Campbell they had been equipped 'only with a few old type rifles and a few ancient machine guns for which they had very little ammunition.'[94] The official Greek history of the campaign does not mention the withdrawal of the 4th Greek battalion.[95] It does, however, record that the Gendarmerie companies rushed forward and

> pinned down the attackers on the eastern edge of [Perevolia]. . . . [T]he Second Lieutenant of the Gendarmerie Chempogiannes and thirty-five gendarmes were killed while two officers and sixty gendarmes were wounded. The citizens of Rethymno (sic) and the surrounding villages rushed to the defense (sic) of the town bravely aiding the combat troops. Not even the elderly were absent. Thus, the first day of fighting, 20 May, ended with victory for the Greek troops defending the town against an enemy armed with modern weapons artillery and plentiful ammunition.'[96]

Under cover of darkness the Germans occupied Hill A at the aerodrome. But with an aggressive counter attack conducted by Captain Moriarty of "B" Company accompanied by Lieutenant T. Fairbairn's Pioneer platoon, Hill A was captured. 'Moriarty did splendid work here,' wrote Campbell.[97] The Germans, however, were able to occupy the Olive Oil factory - the main building in the village of Stavromenos situated only 1,000 yards east of Hill "A" on the eastern end of the airfield. Campbell decided to take Lieutenants Mann and Herron and the 2nd I/C of the Greek battalion to reconnoitre the factory and approaches. With the assistance of the Greeks, and his own troops and the support of artillery and mortar and close machine gun and rifle fire, Campbell concluded that he could capture the factory. In planning the attack, he had considered their inexperience but found that they were still unreliable.

Campbell recorded in his diary that 'the Greek officer (Battalion 2 i/c), who was to conduct the Greek attack . . . agreed with the plan to attack.'[98] It was clear from Campbell's record of the event that the Greek battalion was not confused about its role in the proceedings. His description of the attack is remarkably restrained, given the anger he must have felt at the

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[93] Interview: Markos Polioudakis, Rethymnon Crete, 27 October 2003.
[94] Campbell Memoirs, p.86.
[95] In the official Greek history they are referred to as the 4th and 5th Greek Infantry Regiments not Battalions.
[96] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.151.
[97] Campbell Report.
[98] Ibid.

lack of leadership exhibited by the Greek officer and more importantly by the loss of Australian lives that resulted. Campbell wrote in his report that:

> At 1300 hrs, I issued my verbal orders for an attack at 1800 hrs in order to give the inadequately trained Greeks ample time for preparation. They were to attack with 200 men and Lieut Mann with 40 Australians, the remainder of the Greek and Australian troops to cover the attack with small arms fire . . . . Our guns and the mortar opened fire on the Factory with what appeared considerable effect . . . . The 40 Australians gallantly led by Lieut Mann, rush forward with a yell . . . but the Greeks did not move. The Australians lost heavily and took cover, behind a low bank about 30 to 40 yds from the Factory. Knowing that, without the assistance of the 200 Greeks, they would be overwhelmed in the Factory, I called down to Lieut Mann to stay where he was until the Greeks attacked. . . . [T]he Greeks started shouting, but appeared to make no attempt to attack. I waited for about 30 minutes, but as it was obvious the Greeks had no intention of attacking, I called down to my corporal to stay where he was until darkness and then retired.[99]

This was a case of serious misconduct by the Greeks, whose failure to attack put Australian lives in jeopardy.

The behaviour of the Greek units, at least in the Rethymnon area, did not engender confidence in the Australians, but few if any of their post war accounts discuss this aspect of the campaign. Historians have also overlooked the part played by the Greek forces in the campaign on Crete. Margaret Barter in her 1993 study noted the presence of Greek troops at Rethymnon but did not comment on their behaviour or performance.[100] Although Gavin Long mentioned the Greeks in his official history he failed to highlight the serious repercussions of their lack of cooperation. Nor did he acknowledge the contribution of the Cretan people to the campaign. It is ironic that writings about a campaign that took place on Greek soil and involved Greek soldiers and Cretan civilians contain little, if any, information on their performance. This is a sore point with the Greeks who claim that only D. M. Davin, New Zealand's official historian of the Crete campaign, publicly acknowledged their contribution in New Zealand's history of the campaign.[101] According to Patrick Leigh Fermor, a British secret agent in Crete at the time, Churchill's omission of the Cretan peoples in his history of the Second World War 'caused pain and disappointment.'[102]

Neither have the difficulties between the two allies been alluded to in the official Greek history of the campaign. The official Greek account of the attack on the Olive Oil factory does not mention the failure of their soldiers to attack as planned. This is not surprising, however, given that the Greek version was written in 1959 when the memory of Greece's bloody civil war was still vividly in people's minds. The Greek government under the circumstances would

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[99] Campbell Report.
[100] Barter, Besiegers and Besieged.
[101] George Psychoundakis, *The Cretan Runner: His story of German Occupation*, John Murray, London, 1955, p.9. Dan Davin had first hand knowledge of the battle and the Greek contribution having served as an intelligence officer under General Freyberg before being wounded and evacuated to Egypt.
[102] Ibid p.9.

have assiduously avoided passing any judgement on the untrained soldiers they had placed into active service. Instead the Greek history stated that:

> At 1000 of 22 May, to the right (east) of the airfield group, the 2/1st Battalion moved two companies in order to capture the Olive Oil Factory in Stauromenos (sic). Support would be provided by the 2nd Company of the 5th Greek Regiment, from position on the height north of Chamaleuri, and by artillery fire from Hill A. However, while the two Australian companies were advancing, one of the company commanders was killed and the only other officer of that company was wounded. On account of this the attack did not take place at this time, and the battalion commander rescheduled it for 1800. The new attempt, however, also failed due to lack of coordination between Greeks and Australians: the Australians could not take advantage of the Greek covering fire.[103]

The only explanation offered for the refusal of the Greek troops to follow Campbell's orders in Greece's official account of the campaign was a lack of coordination between the Greek and Australian forces. Gavin Long, in the official Australian history of the campaign, also suggested that coordination problems caused the failure of the combined Greek - Australian attack aimed at routing the Germans from the township of Perivolia. 'In retrospect,' he wrote, 'it seems that the afternoon and night of the 21st were critical. If on that day more coordinated use had been made of the valiant but ill-organised Greeks and the attack had been pressed, not frontally along the open road but along the foothills, the small force of Germans in Perivolia would probably have been overcome.'[104]

The failure of the Australian and Greek units to work effectively was not a result of Campbell's inability to coordinate the forces under his command but due to the Greeks' refusal to follow orders. Captain William Travers, who was under Campbell's command at Rethymnon, reported that the 'Greeks, not the Cretans, were un-cooperative on all occasions and responsible for many casualties among our ranks for their failure to attack as planned, at the right time and place. They were all young and inexperienced; some had not even fired a rifle.'[105] They lacked the discipline and training of a professional army in the field and when under attack, as Campbell himself acknowledged, they panicked and fled or froze into immobility. Trigger-happy at times, they fired when asked specifically not to, often compromising operations against the Germans on the island. After the Olive Oil factory incident Campbell ordered the Greeks to creep out after dark and capture the German parachute supplies. This order was fortuitously followed resulting in Campbell having in his possession the German ground strip code. With this information he was able to trick the German air force into dropping much needed ammunition and supplies.

Campbell subsequently decided to starve the Germans out of the Olive Oil factory, instructing the Greek soldiers deployed there to prevent any Germans leaving the factory. The Greeks however ignored this order. Campbell explained:

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[103] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.155.
[104] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.278.
[105] Travers, The Battle for the Retimo Landing Strip.

> the Greeks did not carry out my orders correctly, as 30 minutes after they had relieved my Australians on the spurs overlooking the factory, they decided to withdraw their forward line 400 yards back up . . . with the result that, when on 25 May I returned to their area, I discovered . . . Germans . . . walking about unconcernedly in the yard of the factory . . . . I doubt if the Greeks ever fully obeyed my orders to reoccupy the points of the spurs . . . . They were also unwilling to move down to the beach to the east of the factory to prevent the enemy from escaping eastward at night.[106]

His relationship with the Greek battalions did not improve during the course of the battle as the Greek soldiers continued to disregard his orders, compounding an already difficult situation for Campbell.

In all fairness, the Greek forces on Crete were not all incompetent and unreliable. Though Brigadier Vasey did claim in his campaign report that the Greek Police from the college at Rethymnon had said they were willing to fight but had done nothing in preparation. Their 'senior Greek Officer was quite useless but his assistant was an excellent man. Until the actual landing the police,' wrote Vassey, 'appear to have done nothing but they shot down a seaplane on the evening of May 20th. Their Vickers Machine Guns were in action continually, and they seem to have rounded up or chased out the few Germans who landed in Retimo itself.'[107] Campbell confirms that on the first day of fighting at Rethymnon, ' about 250 of the Germans, who landed west of the aerodrome, had landed around Perevolia (sic) and had tried to occupy Retimo, but were stubbornly engaged by a force of Cretan Police in Retimo and forced back by the latter into Perevolia village.'[108] The Cretan police proved to be a real asset during the campaign. Gavin Long noted that the 800 strong Cretan police were 'well-disciplined'.[109] Campbell described them in his memoirs as a 'strong, well trained and a reasonably equipped' battalion who 'fought very well and suffered severe casualties,' unlike the Greek soldiers, who handicapped his operations.[110] 'By evening 21 May the Cretan Police in Retimo had cleared the town of paratroops. . . . Of the two Greek battalions which I had sent out to the flanks, one, had occupied by nightfall 21 May the ridge south of Perevolia (sic), whilst the other had cleared a few Germans out of the villages south of the Olive Oil Factory, but by nightfall 21 May had not reached the crest from which they could directly threaten Germans on the coastal plain below.'[111].

In an attempt to restore the severed communication between Rethymnon and Chania, Creforce headquarters sent the 1st Rangers along with an artillery platoon to Rethymnon. They arrived during the evening of the 23 May and 'an attack against the Germans holding out in Saint George took place after coordination between the commander of these troops with the

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[106] Campbell Report.
[107] Account of the Operation of the AIF in Crete, AWM: 54 535/2/25.
[108] Campbell Report.
[109] Long, *Greece, Crete, Syria*, p.256.
[110] Campbell Memoirs, p.88.
[111] Campbell Report.

airfield group.'[112] However, this 'attack failed because of a lack of coordination between the Greeks and Australians, and between the Greeks themselves as well.'[113] According to the Greek account, Rethymnon was under the control of the Rethymo group by nightfall and the Germans were tightly besieged at Saint George with the Greeks holding onto the 'western edge of Perivolia with the whole force of the Gendarmerie and groups of armed civilians.'[114]

AWM: l 131071: St George's Church on Hill C above town of Perivolia

Campbell noted in his report that the Rangers 'attacked through the Cretan police against probably 250-300 Germans in Perevolia (sic). The Germans promptly counter-attacked and drove back the Rangers who embussed and returned to Canea.'[115] By 25 May Lieutenant Colonel Campbell and his men had taken 500 Germans and their Commander prisoners and were finding that their food supply was rapidly dwindling. Campbell sent his Quartermaster Lergessner to Headquarters for further instructions. He arrived back that evening from Chania and informed Campbell 'that there was no thought of evacuation and that reinforcements were arriving on the island.'[116] Campbell continued to pressure the German positions ordering the two Heavy tanks to support 2/11th Battalion in an offensive on the evening of the 27 May, however the Greeks let him down yet again. Campbell wrote that:

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[112] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, p.156.
[113] Ibid p.156.
[114] Ibid p.156.
[115] Campbell report.
[116] Ibid.

> [a]fter again reconnoitring Perevolia (sic) from Hill "C", I ordered 2/11 Bn to attack the village from the south during that night, 27/28 May, and ordered the Greek troops not on any account to fire during the attack. . . . [2/11 Battalion] responded gallantly and, despite the fact that the Greeks disobeyed orders and opened fire as 2/11 Bn moved down the slopes towards the villages, their two Coys fought their way through the village, bombing the Germans with the grenades we had captured earlier in the fighting. Unfortunately, the Coy Comdr of one of the two attacking Coys was killed.[117]

The 2/11th performed impressively under intense German fire, finally withdrawing on the night of 28 May. Campbell decided that he could not make any more attempts to capture the village of Perivolia from the enemy. His food and ammunition supplies were low and the Greek troops at his disposal were ineffective. Describing his predicament, he wrote: 'I had insufficient troops with which to risk any further attacks so far from the vital aerodrome and during 28 May, whilst 2/11 Battalion evacuated their wounded, I waited anxiously to see what would happen to their Company isolated in Perevolia (sic). The enemy's location in Perevolia (sic) so far from the aerodrome made their capture almost a separate operation, which, without any effective support from Canea [Chania] devolved on my small force of Australians and the almost completely untrained Greeks, which latter were little more than long range snipers.'[118]

AWM: 131082: Perivolia, Crete. Villagers looking north towards St. George's church.

On the night of 29 May Major Hooper who was with the Greeks phoned Campbell from the Olive oil factory area to tell him that the 'Greeks reported about 1000 Germans coming in on right flank and right rear and that the Greeks were very uneasy. Having previously, during the battle, received several very exaggerated reports of enemy movements from the Greeks.'[119] Campbell recorded that: 'I discounted the strength and movements of these Germans and told

[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

Major Hooper to try and hold the Greeks. . . . He was unsuccessful and, as of 2300 hrs all four Greek Battalions had withdrawn from the defences, I ordered 2/11 Battalion to move east and take over the 4 Greek Battalions area.'[120] As it happened, motorised German troops and motorcyclists were moving towards Perivolia and would be in a position to attack a company of the 2/11th. But by that stage Campbell had lost confidence in the Greeks; and considered any advice supplied by them as unreliable.

It is important to realise that while Campbell had problems with the Greek battalions he had an amicable and successful working relationship with the Cretan people who assisted and supported his endeavours. Campbell made a genuine effort to ensure that his troops' behaviour did not alienate the local population. He explained in his report that:

> Retimo and the neighbouring villages were put "Out of Bounds" to all troops, as a few men early on proved their inability to appreciate the potency of the Greek and Cretan wines, and it was obviously essential to maintain the most cordial relations with the inhabitants. Provost personnel were established in all nearby villages and Retimo, and I called on the Mayors of Retimo and Pigi, both of whom were full of praise for our troops behaviour, and promised to let me know at once if there were any cases of annoyance from our troops. During our four weeks location in the area no complaints were ever made by them and their whole hearted support for us later was amazing.'[121]

The Cretan civilians organised themselves in bands often with leaders from the Cretan police or Gendarmerie whose training school was at Rethymnon. Though the extent of their contribution to the battle is not mentioned in the Australian official history, Campbell noted in his memoirs that 'when the German paratroops landed many of these wonderful Cretan civilians joined in the fight on our side, despite the risk they ran if the Germans should capture the island.'[122] After the surrender the German commander Colonel Sturm complained to Campbell that he had not done enough to 'stop [the local inhabitants] being hostile. I replied, [wrote Campbell,] that I had enough to do fighting his paratroops without getting into trouble trying to stop the Cretans killing his men.'[123] Although pleased with the Cretans' support Campbell did not encourage them to take up arms for fear of German retaliation. William Travers noted that: '20 took up arms these [civilians] fought much harder than their troops, even though the CO kept constantly warning them that this was illegal. The Germans extracted [a] heavy toll from them later and shot about 70 men, women and children in Pegi, Adele and Marulas.'[124] Nevertheless the Cretan people continued to assist the Australians, not only during the battle but also afterwards during the German occupation, sheltering and feeding those who could not be evacuated.

Regardless of the problems Campbell encountered with the Greek troops, his defence of the airfield at Rethymnon would have to count as one of the most impressive battles of the Crete

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[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Campbell Memoirs, p.88.
[123] Ibid p.110.
[124] Travers, The Battle for the Retimo Landing Strip.

campaign, along with performance of the 2/11th Battalion at Perivolia. Yet the importance of holding the airstrip at Rethymnon has not been recognized as far as the veterans of the campaign are concerned. For one particular member of the 2/1st Battalion, Lieutenant Terry Fairbairn, the campaign in Crete has never ended. According to Fairbairn the significance of the battle at the airfield at Rethymnon has not been accurately recorded and properly acknowledged so that future generations of Australians can comprehend its significance and importance. He was not alone in this perception, William Travers, another member of the 2/1st Battalion involved in the battle wrote that, 'the battle of Retimo was a significant victory for the Australian Forces. . . . This victory has never received the recognition it so properly deserves, neither from the Army, nor from the community generally.'[125] Margaret Barter in her 1993 study of Retimo and Tobruk concluded that the 'Retimo operation has not received the attention it deserves while being regarded as "a classic in aggressive defence." '[126] The Cretans conversely have recognised the battle and accorded the Australian soldiers the acknowledgement they deserved.

Although captured by the enemy, Fairbairn insisted that Campbell's men were 'not beaten' but simply ran out of ammunition and food, leaving them little choice but to surrender to the German forces. The British account of the battle officially recognised that 'the aerodrome never fell into enemy hands. Although it is understood that the Greek battalion which had been placed between the two Australian battalions was overwhelmed, the Australians successfully kept the enemy at bay.'[127] Campbell also viewed his defence of the airfield as 'a victory'. In his personal memoirs he explained that given the strength of the German forces opposing them he was reluctant to risk his men's lives further by ordering them to flee into the hills as it 'seemed unfair after the brilliant victory my men had won against the cream of the German army. In view of the above . . . I decided that the right thing to do was to surrender.'[128] He was also very concerned not to burden the Cretans with the responsibility of harbouring such a large number of allied soldiers.

Conspiracy theories abound as to why some units received the order to withdraw while others did not. What needs to be acknowledged here is that the officers of the 2/1st Battalion were not privy to the communications problems faced by Freyberg on Crete. Communication between the units was one of the most serious problems of the Cretan campaign and was the most likely reason why the retreat order failed to reach Campbell, forcing him to surrender on the airstrip at Rethymnon. It was years after the campaign that Bill Travers found out that the order to evacuate had been sent but had not reached Campbell in time:

> [t]he general feeling among the officers of the unit was one of wasted endeavour, and that the force at Retimo had been left to its fate. It would not have been so hard had we known

[125] Ibid.
[126] Barter, (1993) Besiegers and Besieged, p.6.
[127] Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[128] Campbell Memoirs, p.112.

> that it was impossible for us to be rescued and that we were to be prisoners in order that the others of the force might be evacuated. No doubt this was the case. Looking at things in a saner and unprejudiced light now, I am sure that, if at all possible we would have been evacuated. At the time we considered ourselves deserted. What mental agonies we suffered during those few days of prisoner existence! Learnt three years later from Harold Sealy, our Sig. Officer, that a message was received about two hours before the CO surrendered, from Malta, the only place with whom we had wireless contact at the time, to the effect that we would be evacuated that night (ie Night 30/31 May). The CO has made no mention of this message in his report.[129]

The Inter Services report on Crete noted that Freyberg was anxious to get the order to withdraw through to Campbell at Rethymnon and ordered Headquarters in Cairo to drop the message by plane. This was a perplexing request given that Campbell's radio was still operational. Given the seriousness of the order, it seems a very precarious method of delivery with no guarantee of success. Campbell writing about the issue forty years later had this to say:

> It was on the night of this final attack on Perevolia (27/28 May) that a small naval lighter under lieutenant Haig, RN arrived from Suda Bay with two days rations for us, but not the eagerly expected message from General Fryberg (sic) as to our future. I learnt years later that a message was sent to me, but something went wrong at Suda Bay and General Fryberg's (sic) staff officer with the message for me was late and just missed Lieutenant Haig when the latter set out for us from Suda Bay. . . . I was naturally very disappointed that Lieutenant Haig had no orders for me but naturally decided that General Fryberg (sic) intended that I continue to hold my position at Rethymon.[130]

AWM: 101185 - Capture of the Australian soldiers on the Airfield at Retimo (sic) June 1941.

[129] Travers, The Battle for the Retimo Landing Strip.
[130] Campbell Memoirs, p.109.

Nevertheless, it is understandable why Lieutenant Fairbairn implied that advice to withdraw was never issued to Campbell, regardless of what has been written in Australia's official history of the campaign.[131] In the 2/1st war diary, Campbell recorded that he had sent his Quartermaster, Captain Lergessner, to headquarters for advice on 23 May and he returned on 26 May with no mention of a possible evacuation. Lieutenant Haig also arrived on the night of 27/28 May with two days food supply and no message while perplexingly he was instructed to proceed to Sphakia. There were many opportunities, it would seem, to inform Campbell of the decision to withdraw. Campbell noted 'feeling bitter about why my force had been abandoned to its fate when they could easily have sent a message by Lieutenant Haig on the night of 28 May.'[132]

Heraklion: Atrocities against the Germans

There was only one Australian battalion deployed at Heraklion. Brigadier Vasey who had arrived in Crete on the 26 April 1941 received orders two days later to send a battalion to Heraklion by sea. The 2/4th Battalion was selected for this duty and was to depart from Suda point at midnight. The battalion was incorporated into the 14th Infantry Brigade under the command of Brigadier Chappel and, apart from one visit; Brigadier Vasey did not see them again. It was one of six battalions defending Heraklion that included three Greek Battalions. In a letter to Vasey, Chappel described their performance as 'excellent, and once the show started was outstanding. Docketty was a first class C.O. who always had his battalion well in hand, and who was always cheerful,' wrote Chapel, 'I was particularly struck by the excellent intelligence reports forwarded by the battalion, their unceasing hunt for intelligence about the enemy, and their aggressive spirit.'[133]

The Australians were sent to Heraklion to 'hold the aerodrome at all costs and not give the Germans any opportunity to land aeroplanes or gliders on it.'[134] The 2/4th Battalion were to defend the perimeter of the airfield, with the Black Watch to the east, the Leicesters to the west and 14th Brigade headquarters with 7th Medium Regiment to be situated in a position northwest of the airfield. The 2/7th Australian Light Ack-Ack, with some Royal Marines and Engineers, was scattered throughout the perimeter but it 'was mainly the Greek troops who were responsible for the defence of the town.'[135] Chappel had decided that in 'view of the lack of training of the majority of the Greek personnel, the inefficiency of their weapons and the shortage of ammunition, . . . NOT to include those units in the perimeter enclosing the

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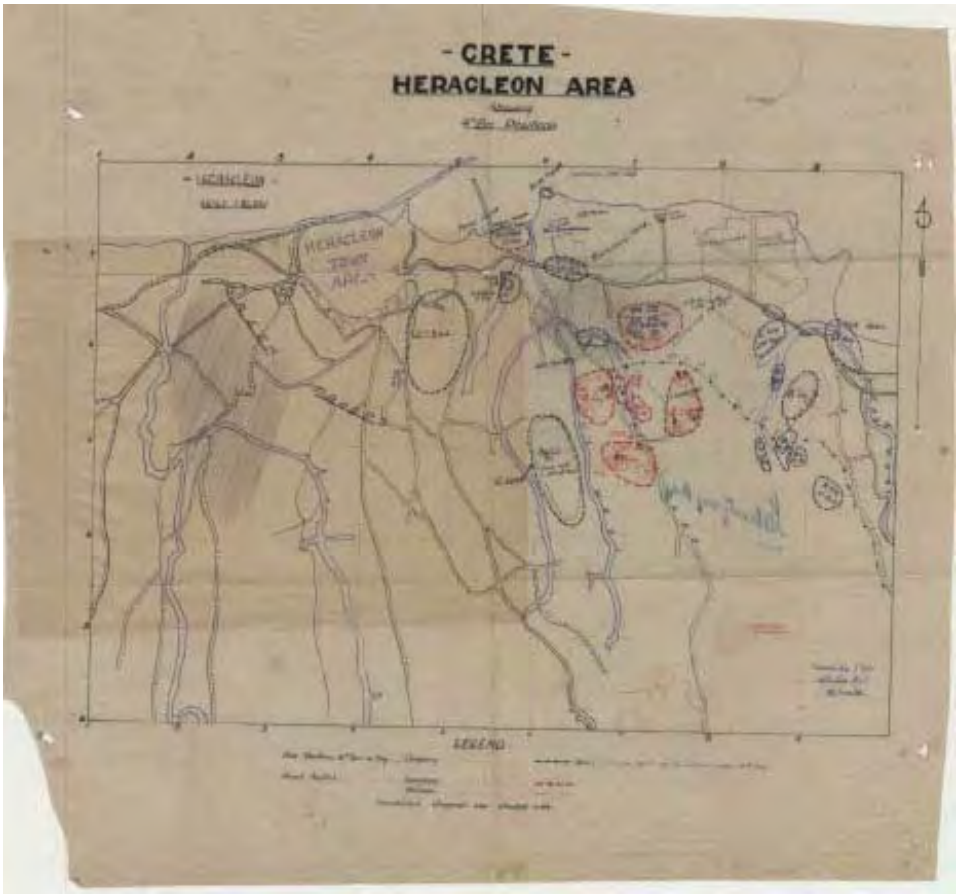
[131] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.272.
[132] Campbell Memoirs, p.114.
[133] Letter from Brigadier Chappel to Brigadier Vasey, 3 June, 1941, 2/4th Australian Infantry War Diary, AWM: 52 8/3/4.
[134] United History Editorial Committee (ed.) *White over Green: The 2/4th Battalion*, Angus and Robertson, 1963, p.154.
[135] Ibid p.150.

aerodrome.'[136] The 3rd and 7th Greek Battalions at Heraklion put up a strong resistance to the Germans, as did the villagers.[137] 'For 'three days these battalions fought and killed many parachutists, ' recorded Salisbury-Jones, '[o]nly when their ammunition was exhausted, were they forced to withdraw. The Militia then took up the struggle. . . . [They] played a conspicuous part during the first few days' fighting, and were largely responsible for clearing up enemy nests in Heraclion (sic) and in the outskirts.'[138] He also praised the Area Commander Colonel Papastavathopoulos and the Battalion Commanders, Colonels Betinakis and Cassimatis, for their 'gallantry and powers of leadership' [139]



War Diary 2/4th Infantry Battalion May-June 1941, AWM: 8/3/4.

[136] Report on Operations by the Greek Army, HERAKLEON (sic) Sector, May 1 to May 28 1941, WO 201/2663.
[137] 3rd Infantry Regiment (of Crete) was established from one battalion of the Tripolis Training centre and transported to Crete at the end of April 1941. Initiated as a training battalion, it was upgraded to a regiment, consisting of 56 officers and 600 enlisted men, 500 Steyer rifles with 15 rounds each and 10 Saint-Etienne machine guns; The 7th Infantry Regiment (of Crete) was established from one battalion at the Nauplion Training Centre and was transported to Crete in April 1941 and upgraded to a regiment. It consisted mainly of Pomaks [Muslim Bulgarians residing in Greece] with diminished morale, who had been called to arms in April with 27 officer and 870 enlisted men, 850 Steyer rifles with 15 rounds each and 5 Saint-Etienne machines guns with no ammunition, Gion (ed.), *The Battle of Crete*, p.189 & 190.
[138] Salisbury-Jones Report on the Greeks.
[139] Ibid.

The Australians were surprised by the age of some of the Greek soldiers: 'Several times we made contact with Greek patrols made up of Greek and Cretan soldiers and civilians and even boys aged from 12 to 15 years,' recorded the 2/4th Unit History.[140] Some Australian officer had been placed in charge of the Greeks and they worked well together at Heraklion. The Greeks, however, were not impressed with Brigadier Chappell's 'continuous defensive stance limiting his efforts to maintaining possession of the airfield and the port of Herakleion, (sic) despite initially having more numerous forces than the enemy'.[141] Chappel's first priority, however, was the defence of the airstrip until he was ordered to evacuate by Freyberg.

AWM: PO2333.007 Heraklion Crete 1941 Smoke
and dust rise into the air after German bombing.

Though young and brave, there were reports that the Greeks had been mutilating German dead, causing the German Supreme Command to drop leaflets in Greek and English, warning of reprisals:[142] The Australians were not impressed with the sentiments expressed in the German leaflets. Some soldiers 'tried them as a substitute for cigarette papers, a very scare commodity at the time, but the paper was porous and too thick. Others found a more obvious use for them and for which purpose they were found to be admirable. And others merely folded them and put them in their wallets as souvenirs. Whichever purpose they served, it was not the one intended by the German High Command.'[143] They considered that the Germans, given their own behaviour, were not in a position to adopt the moral high ground.[144] Nor did the Australians

[140] United History Editorial Committee (ed.) *White over Green: The 2/4th Battalion*, p.166.
[141] Gion, *The Battle of Crete*, p.179.
[142] United History Editorial Committee (ed.) *White over Green: The 2/4th Battalion*, p.163.
[143] Ibid p.163.
[144] In response to German claims of alleged atrocities 'General Freyberg [laid] grave charges of cruelty and disregard for ordinary rules of war against Germans,' citing the following verifiable incident, one of many to Wavell: that 'on 20 May Germans ordered Major Plimmer O.C. 6 Field Ambulance and another

condemn the Cretans for their actions against the Germans. They displayed a remarkable understanding of their Greek ally explaining that, while it was '[t]rue, the Cretan women and youth did attack and kill German soldiers and it is not unlikely that they did to death many German wounded. But German conduct towards civilians was not unblemished either.'[145]

> TO THE POPULATION AND MILITARY FORCES ON CRETE
>
> It has been brought to the notice of the German Supreme Command that German soldiers who fell into the hands of the enemy on the island of Crete have been ill treated and even mutilated in a most infamous and inhuman manner.
> As a punishment and reprisal therefore it is announced as follow:
> (1) Whosoever commits such crimes against international laws on German prisoners of war will be punished in the manner of his own cruel action, no matter he or she be a man or a woman.
> (2) Localities near which such crimes have been perpetrated will be burned down. The population will be held responsible.
> (3) Beyond these measures further and sharper reprisals will be held in store.
>
> THE GERMAN SUPREME COMMAND

According to the official Greek history of the campaign, women and children were used as shields by the Germans to enter the city, forcing the Greek commander of the garrison at Heraklion, Major Tsangarakes, to approach the 'German lines and demand of the German commander the release of the women and children, otherwise, reprisals would be dealt against the prisoners.'[146] Although some Greek troops have been accused of not co-operating with their allies at Rethymnon, the Greek officers on Crete also felt let down by their coalition partners. Major General Linardakes, commander of the 2nd Military Command received 'no reinforcements' to his request for tank and artillery support from Brigadier Chappel to stamp out the German practice of using civilians as cover.[147] This would have been very upsetting for the Greeks who would have expected more support from their allies.

The Evacuation: a disaster!

Although the Greeks have avoided post-war criticism of their allies, it is clear in their official history that some bitterness was felt towards the British, particularly the commander of the Heraklion sector, for not informing them of his order to evacuate. Lieutenant Colonel Chrestos Gion noted that on 'the morning of 28 May, in a meeting of unit commanders (except

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medical officer to come out of slit trench in which they were sheltering from air attack. On doing so, unarmed and with their hands up, a German deliberately killed Major Plimmer with sub machine-gun remarking they could not be bothered with prisoners.' Secret Cipher Telegram from C. in C. Middle East to the War Office, 7 April 1941, NAB: FO 954/15.

[145]United History Editorial Committee (ed.) *White over Green: The 2/4th Battalion*, pp.163-4.

[146] Army History Directorate [AHD] Archives F. 674/ /I, and F. 674/A/L cited in Gion, *The Battle of Crete*, p.174.

[147] Ibid AHD Archives F. 674/O/I p.173.

for the Greeks, who remained uninformed to the end), Brigadier Chappel made known his orders concerning the evacuation through the port of Herakleion (sic).'[148] In his report Chappel maintained that it 'was a matter of extreme regret that touch [contact with the Greeks] could not be obtained on May 28 to enable volunteers to withdraw to Egypt.'[149] Whether intentional or not, it is surprising that Gavin Long attempted to justify the treatment of the Greeks in Australia's official history of the campaign. He explained that:

> The Greeks were not informed of the embarkation on the grounds that the activity of the Germans in the area made it impossible for the orders to be safely conveyed to them and in any event the ships could not carry many more troops. The decision may seem callous when examined from a distance, but it can hardly be disputed that to have attempted to organise the embarkation of the semi-trained Greeks might have endangered the whole delicate operation. It was one task to withdraw to the harbour a force of disciplined troops . . . another to assemble and march back two Greek battalions which had for some days been operating as a guerrilla force.[150]

The decision not to inform the Greeks could not be justified, at least not for the reasons supplied by Long, given the fiasco that occurred during the allied evacuation of the island, although this was not the case with the embarkation of the troops at Heraklion. The evacuation from Sphakia, however, was a shambles according to Dr Clive Selby of the 2/7th Field Ambulance unit who 'tried to go down to the embarkation point [at Sphakia Bay] but was threatened with a pistol by a British Naval officer. It would be impossible to worship the Royal Navy more than I do,' wrote Selby, 'but the evacuation of Crete from the shore organization point of view was a disaster.'[151]

AWM: PO4067.003- View of Sphakia Cove, site of the Allied withdrawal over

[148] Gion, *The Battle for Crete*, p.179.
[149] Report on Operations by the Greek Army, Herakleon (sic) Sector, May 1 to May 28 1941, WO 201/2663.
[150] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.291.
[151] Lieutenant Colonel Clive Herbert Selby, "Some consideration of the Philosophy of Defence and Possible Lessons from reminiscences of the Cretan Campaign 1941, SLNSW: MLDOC 2429, p.9.

four nights beginning on 28 May 1941.

Panic ensued everywhere as word got out that the Allies were withdrawing to Sphakia. Soldiers engaged in 'lorry jumping' all the way down to the evacuation beach, abandoning trucks on hairpin bends and blocking the only exit route off the island. The withdrawal was certainly a route with little control in place to organise the troops. The British review of the campaign was very critical of the break down of law and order during the evacuation of Crete noting that: 'It is to be regretted that many of the more ill-disciplined troops in their anxiety to reach the beaches had jumped lorries and cars, which they had in many cases been abandoned in the middle of the hairpin portion of the road. These vehicles, apart from precluding any possibility of hiding our intentions from the enemy, became the object of continuous attacks from enemy aircraft. Soon the road was littered with burning vehicles and became blocked.'[152]

Many Australians soldiers recalled Greeks being pushed aside and left off the evacuation ships, some even brutally thrown off. The justification for their exclusion was that they were poorly trained and disciplined and lacked battle readiness. Yet the report by the Australian officer in charge of training a Greek battalion in Egypt was very impressed by their enthusiasm, dedication and willingness to learn, writing a glowing report of their preparedness for combat.[153] According to Captain Williams, the Greek officers 'appear to get on well and are all keen to get into action and do their part to help finish the war,' and the men were, 'very keen to learn and the NCOs appear to be a very hardworking lot.'[154] Given the abandonment of Greeks soldiers to their fate at the hands of the Germans it is surprising that the official Greek history of the campaign contains little invective about their allies.

Conclusion

Crete could have been held, but at too great a cost to the Allies. Wavell allocated some resources to the campaign but not enough to win it, effectively placing Crete on the 'back burner'. This was not surprising given that the strategic importance of the island had diminished after the occupation of Greece, a fact that the Greek Government-in-Exile on Crete failed to realise, insisting that the Allies adequately reinforce Crete. Subsequent writers have argued about the disposition of troops on Crete, but in reality with little ammunition, guns and artillery and with no planes to challenge the German supremacy of the skies, it was nearly impossible for the Allies to retain control of the island. Thus the Australians found themselves once again placed at the frontline and asked to make an impossible situation work for good political reasons, and were rewarded with their capture.

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[152] Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[153] Report by Capt. B. Williams (Liaison Officer) HQ 20th Australian Infantry Brigade, on the period of his attachment to 1st Greek Independent Brigade Group 1942, AWM: 54 423/9/9.
[154] Ibid.

It needs to be acknowledged that by the time the Australians had arrived on the island it was too late to improve the defences and virtually impossible to receive further equipment and supplies with the targeting of Allied shipping by the German air force. Clearly preparations had been inadequate and the troops landed on Crete had to suffer the consequences. Furthermore, the British had neglected to establish sufficient communication channels on the island, even though they had the time to do so, leading to the capture of the Australian soldiers at Rethymnon. Lack of imaginative leadership by British commanders of the island did not help the situation either.

The suffering of the Cretans must also be placed squarely at the feet of the Commander-in-Chief General Wavell, who had been given the opportunity through the provision of superior military intelligence to hold the island but failed to put the necessary defence structures and equipment into place. Instead he vacillated over the reinforcement of Crete, playing a deceptive game of 'smoke and mirrors', not only with Churchill and Freyberg, but also with the Greek government who had placed their trust for the defence of the island in British hands. General Freyberg, by not acting on the high level intelligence at his disposal to adequately protect the airfield at Maleme, also must accept some share of the blame for what befell the Cretan people and the Allied soldiers. Night raids that could have assisted the campaign were not engaged in; even though utilising local knowledge would have given the Allies a significant advantage over the Germans. David Horner commenting on Freyberg's delay in Maleme, explained that, 'by night the Germans had secured a tenuous hold on the airfield. A prompt counter-attack was needed, but the opportunity that night was missed.'[155]

Markos Polioudakis, a local Cretan historian who has made the study of the battle of Crete his life long passion, insisted that the mistake lay with the commanders in Maleme and Chania who refused to heed the advice of the Cretan people, thus losing control of the airfield at Maleme. [156] He blamed Freyberg in particular for not using the local population to destroy the airfields. Gavin Long argued that 'General Freyberg wished to mine all airfields, but was not allowed to because it was intended that fighters should return as soon as possible.'[157] But this was not the case. The British Inter-Services report on Crete stated clearly that the 'decision as to whether aerodromes should be permanently obstructed or not had been left to General Freyburg (sic). He decided against permanent obstruction as he hoped to defend them.'[158] Once the Germans had control of the airfield at Maleme the campaign in Crete was over. As Margaret Barter pointed out, '[w]hatever the achievement of Retimo force in holding the vital ground of Hill A, the loss of Maleme airfield decided Crete's fate.'[159]

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[155] Horner, *General Vasey's War*, p.116.
[156] Interview: Markos Polioudakis, Rethymnon Crete, 27 October 2003.
[157] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.220.
[158] Inter-Services report on Crete.
[159] Barter, Besiegers and Besieged, p.34.

In the final analysis it is fair to say that both the Greeks and the Australians on the island were victims of the British mismanagement and mishandling of the campaign. Commenting on the campaign, Brigadier Cremor explained that 'the 'attitude of the staff on Crete became completely incomprehensible to those officers who were dealing with them. Although the G.O.C. had warned the troops that an air invasion was imminent, this staff carried on as it had been accustomed to do in the halcyon days of peace in Egypt. From 1300 hours to 1730 hours a siesta or rest period was indulged in by all officers and neither administration nor the issue of stores was done during this period.'[160]

Though the Greek troops on Crete were ill equipped and ill trained, most were willing to fight, though some were too frightened to do so. A telegram that was sent by Vasey on the second day of fighting at Rethymnon declaring that: 'Greeks fighting magnificently. Our chaps are proud to fight with them.'[161] Brigadier Salisbury-Jones, responsible for compiling the report on the Greek forces on Crete commented that: 'the local Greek Gendarmerie put up a great fight' including '100 Cadets from the Military School in Greece. They had escaped from Greece with their colours, and on the first day of the fighting in Crete they were cut off. They fought their way through to Sphakia.'[162] The young Greeks cadets came from the 'Σχολή Ευελπίδων' [Scholee Evelpithon] famed for producing officers of a high calibre.

The Cretan civilians, old men, women and even young children stood their ground, prepared to fight with anything at their disposal, in the defence of their island. 'The civil population were clamouring for arms,' wrote Salisbury Jones, 'and it was decided to form a militia. '[163] William Travers supports this observation in his reminiscences of the campaign recalling that:

> [t]he Cretean (sic) civilians certainly conducted themselves better than the Greek soldiers. It was not uncommon to see old men with beards to their chests stalking through the olive groves, like Daniel Boon stalking red Indians. These fellows armed themselves with captured German rifles and bandoliers of ammunition in their belts were draped around their middle And over their shoulder. Small boys were seen carrying rifles as big as themselves and one, carrying an old muzzle loader shot gun, was heard to exclaim loudly that he had shot four Germans. The Creteans (sic) were born fighters, and for centuries have defended their island from foreign invaders.[164]

They certainly could not be accused of lacking courage. The resistance the Germans encountered from the civilian population of the island shocked them. 'The German intelligence corps had told their invading troops that as soon as they landed on Crete the local inhabitants

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[160] Brigadier W. Cremor, *Action Front: The History of the 2/2nd Australian Field Regiment Royal Australian Artillery*, A.I.F., 2/2nd Field Regiment Association, Melbourne, 1961, p.125.
[161] Salisbury –Jones Report on the Greeks.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Travers, The Battle for the Retimo Landing Strip.

would welcome them as friends. How wide of the mark they were.'[165] 'The full part played . . . by this Militia may never be known, but their action was sufficiently effective to cause the Germans to drop leaflets threatening dire reprisals.'[166] The Greek official history, however, gives a detailed account of the their contribution to the battle, explaining that:

> At the time of the German attack there were numerous armed bands of civilians, which began to be formed as the battle progressed. Some of them were organized directly by the British, most by the Greek Gendarmerie authorities and a few on their own initiative, as armed peasants began to assemble where there was action or where they saw paratroops landing. Such bands were organized: at Katelli Kissamou by local inhabitants, armed with their own weapons and under the command of local band leaders . . . A number of bands were organised in the area of Estauromenos [Stavromenos], from peasants of nearby villages, under the leadership of the 60-year-old abbott of Arkadi Monastery. These fought alongside Greek regular units of that sector, to the end. In Heraklion area a band of locals, 300-strong, was organized under a British officer in the ancient ruins of Knossos.[167]

Street named: 'Australian Fighters' Rethymnon, Greece, author's photograph.

The Australians and the Cretans fought well together. William Travers who fought at Rethymnon explained that the reason for this was that 'we had behaved well to the Greek civilians in our areas.'[168] In particular Lieutenant Colonel Campbell treated the Cretan with respect, heeding their advice and using their local knowledge to defend Rethymnon. This earned him the lasting gratitude of the citizens of the town but little official acknowledgement from the government of Australia. In Rethymnon, if not in his own country, Ian Campbell and his men are considered the heroes of Crete. There are streets in Rethymnon named after Campbell and the Australian fighters who defended the town against the Germans in May 1941.

In 1975, the Mayor of Rethymnon made Campbell an honorary citizen in recognition of his contribution to the defence of the town. Campbell is so highly regarded on Crete that Markos Polioudakis, prime instigator behind the erection of the Greek-Australian memorial at

[165] Campbell Memoirs, p.88.
[166] Salisbury-Jones Report on the Greeks.
[167] Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, pp.32-33.
[168] Travers, The Battle for the Retimo Landing Strip.

Stavromenos near Rethymnon, was sent to attend his funeral in Sydney in 1997. Polioudakis proudly walked second in line after Terry Fairbairn in Campbell's funeral cortege, bringing with him a Grecian urn filled with Cretan soil, a token of the Cretan people's regard for the Australian officer who lead such a brilliant defence of Rethymnon. Polioudakis gave the eulogy at Major General Campbell's funeral describing him as a

> brave soldier who captured the hearts of the Cretans. . . . I bring the very last farewell along with the permanent love and recognition of the people of Rethimnon (sic) to the heroic and tireless Commander of the Allied forces in Battle of Rethimnon (sic) in May 1941. The struggle that you commanded over in Rethimnon (sic) has been efficient and spirited therefore characterised by historians as a classical example of confrontation with air borne forces.[169]

Military funeral of Major General Ian Ross Campbell 1997: photograph courtesy of Markos Polioudakis.

It is worth noting here that, sixty years after the battle, not only the Cretans, but also Campbell's own men; still speak of him with the greatest respect and admiration. He must have been an exceptional leader to engender such loyalty amongst his men. They feel bitter that he did not receive the public recognition from the Australian government that he deserved for his defence of Rethymnon, instead, a publication by Department of Veteran Affairs singled out

[169] Markos Polioudakis, Translation of eulogy given at the funeral of Major General Ian Ross Campbell, 11 November 1997, Sydney, on loan to the author.

Captain Weidermann of the 2/11th Battalion for special mention.[170] In a lecture to the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales on Leadership, Terry Fairbairn made the following comment: 'Britain gave Campbell a Distinguished Service Order but nowhere will you find, from the Australian Government of those days, a kind remark about Campbell or an Australian award to the Australian Imperial Force Officer who led Australian Soldiers to defeat . . . a well trained, well equipped, elite, German Army force. Ian Campbell's soldiers, however honoured him and still honour him.'[171]

Clearly there is a lesson to be learnt from Campbell's leadership in Crete. Brigadier George Vasey being the most senior Australian officer on the island was given the command of the Australian troops however his performance did not elicit the level of admiration from the local people that Campbell's command of Retimo Force did.[172] Though a reserved man, Campbell displayed strong leadership that enabled him to utilise the potential of the Cretan people. Although dissatisfied with the performance of Greek battalions at Rethymnon he did not take their behaviour personally or judge them too harshly, understanding the limitations of their training and experience. He, along with his officers and soldiers, displayed remarkable stoicism in the face of very difficult circumstances.

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[170] The booklet produced by the Commonwealth Department of Veteran Affairs to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the campaign in Greece and Crete maintained that although 'Campbell's men had denied the paratroopers the airfield, [the] main battle at Rethymno . . . developed not at the airfield but further to the west at Perivolia. Here the 2/11th faced a strong group of paratroopers under Captain Weidermann.' Richard Reid, *A Great Risk in a Good Cause- Australians in Greece And Crete April-May 1941*, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Canberra, May 2001, p.129 & p.126; This comment elicited an angry response from some of the surviving members of the 2/1st Battalion as it appeared to place more importance on the fighting in the township than the airstrip. Local Cretan historian Markos Polioudakis who at the age of 13 witnessed the battle for Rethymnon, concluded in his three volume history of the campaign at Rethymnon that: 'the most significant battle if we take into account the outcome of the battle was without a doubt the battle at the airstrip at Stavromenos [Rethymnon]. Why? The Germans the first night had occupied half the aerodrome . . . and Hill A . . . and the force that holds Hill A controls the airfield. The attack of Campbell's 2/1st battalion the first night removed the Germans from the half of the aerodrome and Hill A restricted them to the areas around Stavromeno. After 4 days of continuous attacks he routed the Germans from Stavromeno . . . Without a doubt this was the most significant battle both from the point of its outcome and purpose. The purpose of German plan . . . was to take capture the aerodrome in order to fly in more forces to attack the British from behind Suda**.** The last two last attacks conducted [at Perivolia] by the Australians on 28 & 29 May were fierce battles with pressure from the German air force. For this reason the Australians of the 2/11th battalion suffered many casualties but it was not as significant as the battle at the aerodrome - the capture of the town of Rethymnon had already taken place on the first night – the 20 May,' interview: Markos Polioudakis, 27 October 2003.

[171] Terry Fairbairn, "The 1941 Defensive Battles of Retimo & Tobruk," transcript of Operational History Seminar for The Royal United Institute of New South Wales and Headquarters Training Command in Sydney, 12 November 1996, Whittle Papers, on loan from the Joint Committee for the Commemoration of the Battle of Greece and Crete. In 1946 Campbell was awarded a bar to his DSO for his defence of Retimo.

[172] It is difficult to accept David Horner's conclusion that the 'outstandingly successful defence by Campbell with the 2/1st and 2/11th Battalions at Retimo reflects the policies and attitudes of aggression and swift counter-attack instilled by Vasey,' who had little if any contact with Campbell during the defence of Rethymnon. Horner, *General Vasey's War*, p.131.

Major – General Ian Campbell: courtesy of his niece Mrs Mary Newlands

While Gavin Long criticism of Greeks was less strident than his critique of the British, he did blame the 'the political disunity of Greece and the weakness of the leadership,' for 'plac[ing] immense difficulties in the way of rapid and effective organization of the Greek army on the lines pictured by Freyberg.'[173] Although the political situation in Greece did result in operational problems between the Greek and Australian soldiers on Crete, they were symptomatic of a poorly planned campaign. The Australian soldiers, alongside the Greek troops and Cretan civilians, were victims of British ineptitude. Brigadier Cremor's observation on Churchill encapsulates the sentiment of those who fought on Crete stating that:

> Winston Churchill has certainly been the saviour of the British Empire but it is very unfortunate for the southern Dominions that on two occasions during his tenure of ministerial office he has organised an attack on the southern part of Europe. Anzac in 1915 was a tragedy, and Greece and Crete were even greater tragedies because the Allies should never have gone there. Because of this adventure, the grand Greek people were subjected for years to every devilment of torture and starvation of which the barbarous German could think.'[174]

[173] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.213.
[174] Cremor, *Action Front*, p.150.

Australian War Graves, Suda Bay Crete 2003, author's photograph.

Greece and Crete suffered enormously for their participation in the Allied war effort but the absence of the British on Crete would not have prevented the Cretans from resisting the Germans.[175] Examining the impact of the war on Greece, Athanasios Lykogiannis estimated that 'approximately 450,000 people perished, with many people dying of malnutrition and disease while several tens of thousands were killed in battle or executed in reprisals by the occupation forces for acts of resistance. The value of property damaged or lost was extensive and total war loses were estimated at several billion pre-war dollars.'[176]

George Harokopos found that, the 'Cretan population paid a heavy tribute for its epic resistance during the Battle of Crete and afterwards during the years of occupation. Approximately 6,000 men were killed or executed all these years by the occupation forces. The majority of the Cretan cities were destroyed from the heavy bombing during the invasion in 1941 and tens of its best villages turned down to blackened stones and smouldering ashes in reprisal action by the occupation forces.'[177] Allbaugh discovered from his 1948 field research in Crete that 'as a result of the war destruction, about 200 families were still living in caves in the outskirts of Iraklion (sic) and still others were scattered in various communities,' with the damage to buildings reaching $10 million.[178] The Australians also suffered, with nearly 40% of

[175] Greece suffered from strong regional differences. A Greek's loyalty to their region and locality came before their loyalty to the state with Crete being a particular case in point. See Chapter 5 for details.
[176] Athanasios Lykogiannis, "The early Post-War Greek Economy: from Liberation to the Truman Doctrine," *Journal of European Economic History*, Vol 23, 1994, p.347.
[177] George Harokopos, *The Fortress Crete: the Secret War 1941-1944*, B. Giannnikos & Co, translated into English by Spiloos Menounos, Athens, 1993, p.282.
[178] Leland G. Allbaugh, *Crete: A Case study of an Underdeveloped Area*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1953, p.68.

those deployed to the island being taken prisoner while others experienced illness and starvation whilst hiding in enemy occupied Crete.[179]

Memorial to the Cretans fallen in battle against the Germans, author's photograph.

[179] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, pp.315-316.

Chapter Five: Australian soldiers on Crete: Civilian interaction

The people of Crete had a reputation throughout Greece for their clannishness, feuding and tendency towards vendetta.[1] A suspicion of strangers and a wariness of authority made it more difficult to gain their acceptance than most other Greeks. The Australians, on the other hand had an intolerance of races other than British.[2] According to Kay Saunders there was strong institutionalised 'anti-foreigners' sentiment in Australia during the Second World War that 'reflect[ed] deep-seated and enduring seams of racism that girded both the Anglo-Australian individual psyche and collective consciousness.'[3] Yet, despite the prevailing attitudes on both sides, a strong rapport developed between the Australian soldiers and their civilian hosts. During the German assault countless soldiers witnessed first hand the bravery and kindness of the locals. The Cretans had a strong sense of honour that did not allow them to betray the foreign troops who had come to defend their island. It was this unstinting loyalty to their allies that left the most powerful impression on the Australian forces. This chapter examines the factors that coalesced at this time to create such a robust connection between two quite diverse groups of people.

The fighting in Greece and Crete exposed the Australian soldiers to values and attitudes that were new to them. On Crete, the troops had time to interact more closely with the locals. Although problems did arise between the two allies at a military level, personal relations with the civilians proved to be amicable and while the Australians did not necessarily agree with all Cretan practices, they nevertheless respected them. The Australian troops were not beyond reproach themselves, and at times behaved in a manner that was unacceptable to the Cretans, but, regardless of the indiscipline of some Australian soldiers, they were able to gain the trust of the Cretan people. This was no small feat, as trust was usually accorded only to family members. Leland Allbaugh found in his study of Crete that the 'Cretans place a very high value on family ties; the family is probably the strongest influence in their culture.'[4]

The Cretan Character

The Australians soldiers recognised that the Cretan people were different from their compatriots on the Greek mainland.[5] Australian troops who fought both on the mainland and

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[1] Leland G. Allbaugh, *Crete: A Case Study of an Underdeveloped Area*, Princeton University Press, 1953, p.75.

[2] This was exemplified by their behaviour towards the Egyptians during World War One: Suzanne Brugger, *Australians and Egypt 1914-1919*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1980. The American instruction booklet for their soldiers explained that 'the Australians are nearly 100 per cent Anglo-Saxon stock – English, Irish, Scotch and Welsh … And they 're proud too of their British heritage and to be a member of the British Commonwealth.' *Instructions for American Servicemen in Australia 1942*, War and Navy departments, Washington, D. C., Reproduced by Penguin, Victoria, 2006, p.15.

[3] Kay Saunders, "The dark shadow of white Australia: racial anxieties in Australia in World War II," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 17, No.2, April 1994 p.326.

[4] Allbaugh, Crete, p.74.

[5] Interviews: Lieutenant Terry Fairbairn , 28 April 2002; John Gemmell , 21 April 2002.

Crete drew comparisons between the fighting spirit of the civilians on Crete and those on the mainland.[6] Many soldiers described the Cretans as fearless warriors who defended their land using any means at their disposal. Geoffrey Edwards of the 2/11th Battalion noted that some used 'ancient long barrelled rifles that had probably been used against the Turks many years before.' [7] Brigadier Salisbury-Jones reporting on the Greek forces on Crete wrote that it 'was an inspiring sight . . . to see peasants of all ages begging for rifles. The spirit of these Cretans was indeed beyond praise.'[8] According to Antony Beevor, '[t]heir marksmanship, of which they were inordinately proud, was reputed to be the best in the Greek army.'[9]

Battle of Crete Commemorations 1995, courtesy George Katelanos, Chania, Crete.

[6] Some veterans however did not want this made public as it could offend the Greek mainlanders, whom they admired.
[7] Geoffrey Edwards, *The Road to Prevelly*, E. G. Edwards, Armadale, 1989, p33.
[8] Brigadier Salisbury- Jones, "Part Played by the Greek Forces in the Defence of Crete," June 1941 NAB: WO210/119, Appendix D.
[9] Antony Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p.17.

Mainland Greeks feel slightly uneasy around Cretans who are well known for their fierce fighting ability. 'Ferocious in combat, unforgiving to an enemy or traitor, he is a swashbuckler – and one better beside you than before you. A loyal friend and a bitter enemy,' wrote Charles Jager of the Cretan character.[10] Greek soldiers who fought with the Cretan division on the Albanian front recalled that the Cretans had caused them some concern because of their insistence on taking no prisoners.[11] On the island itself, the Geneva Convention, if known at all, held little sway with the civilians who dealt ruthlessly with the Germans. Jager observed, while hiding on Crete, that there were no rules on the island when it came to fighting the enemy.[12] Edwards, also caught behind enemy lines, discovered that the Cretans were a 'strong, stubborn, independent people [who] have a motto that is handed down from generation to generation. It is like the Cretans themselves in times of national danger, unyielding and uncompromising – Death or Freedom.'[13]

The Cretans' response to the invasion of their island was very different from the one exhibited by the mainland Greeks, who fled their villages in droves to avoid German capture.[14] Although some Cretans did try to escape from the coastal towns that were under direct bombardment from German planes into the mountains, most stood their ground. John Pendlebury, who worked closely with the Cretans, reassured Brigadier Whiteley of the Special Operations Executive or SOE that 'they will continue fighting in the hills and harassing . . . even if the Greeks on the mainland have given up the struggle and the Army locally has laid down its arms.'[15]

This differing response between Greek mainlanders and Cretans can partly be explained by the composition of the populace. Crete possessed a more homogeneous population compared to continental Greece where, during the Ottoman period, the Turks had forced the settlement of Balkan peoples to hinder the development of a Greek national movement. 'The Albanians,' wrote Sweet- Escott, 'are scattered all over the country and are mostly descended from the Albanians who were encouraged by the Turks for political reasons to settle in Greece during the eighteenth century. . . . The most important racial minorities are the Macedo-Slav, of mixed Greek and Slav descent.'[16] Greece had a large Macedonian-Greek community in 1941, though the government did not officially recognise their existence. Instead the Greek authorities

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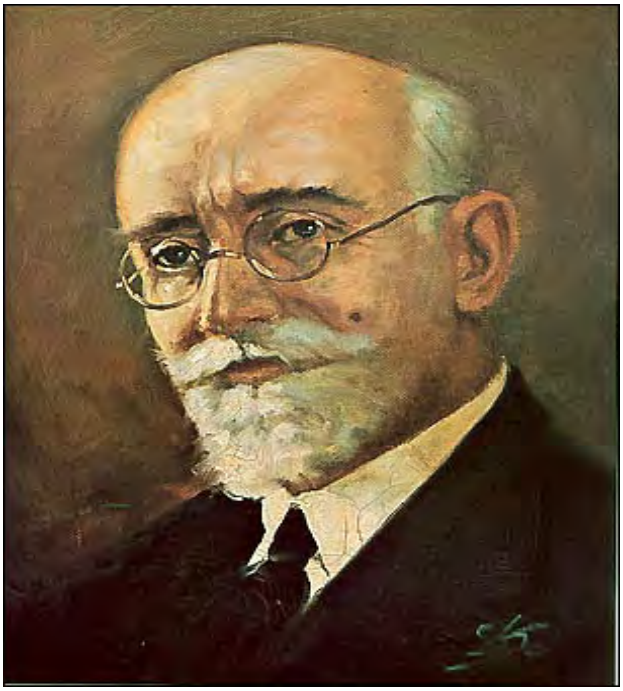
[10] Charles Jager, *Escape from Crete*, Floradale Production, Smithfield, 2004, p.97. He was in the 2/2nd Australian Field Regiments on Crete, trapped behind enemy lines.
[11] Interview: Andreas Tsaparopoulos, Greek veteran of the Albanian campaign, Verria Greece, October 2003.
[12] Jager, *Escape from Crete*, p.66-67.
[13] Edwards, *The Road to Prevelly*, p32. This expression was not peculiar to the Cretans. The Greeks used the phrase during War of independence against the Turks in 1821.
[14] It should be noted here that while mainland Greeks left their homes to evade capture they put up a fierce resistance to the German during the occupation of their country.
[15] SOE activities in Greece 1940-1942 (chapter 1-6) by Major Ian Pirie 1945, NAB: HS 7/150, p.114.
[16] Bickham Sweet-Escott, *Greece: A Political and Economic Survey 1939-1953*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1954, p.3.

subjected them to Draconian laws with the forced 'Hellenization' of their surnames and the names of their villages. Andrew Rossos explained that this 'campaign reached its most tragic dimension in the second half of the 1930s, during the dictatorship of General Metaxas, when use of the Macedonian language was prohibited, even in the privacy of the home, to a people who knew Greek scarcely or not at all, and in fact could not communicate properly in any other language but their own.'[17] Needless to say, these actions did neither endear the government of Greece to these people nor encourage their support of Greece's war aims.[18] Nevertheless, many Greeks of Macedonian decent defended their villages from the Italians on the Albanian front, though many were not prepared to fight in other regions.[19]



Elefterios Venizelos (1864-1936)

Consequently the Greek mainland was more politically divided and ethnically diverse than Crete. Furthermore, unlike continental Greece, the left wing did not have strong support amongst the Cretan population. The two political factions 'EAM and ELAS never were able to control whatever resistance appeared in Crete.'[20] Thus Crete was spared the bloodshed that the

[17] Andrew Rossos, "The Macedonians of Aegean Macedonia: A British Officer's Report, 1944," *Slavonic and Eastern European Review*, No. 69, Vol. 2, 1991, pp.285-286.
[18] Interview: Christos Mangos, a Macedonian-Greek resistance fighter confirmed that Macedonian Greeks were beaten and threatened with incarceration if caught speaking Macedonian regardless of never having had the opportunity to learn Greek because of the absence of Greek schools in the area.
[19] Ibid.
[20] John Koliopoulos cited in Holton, David (ed.) *The Battle of Crete 1941: A symposium to mark the 50th Anniversary*, University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.43.

mainland experienced during the civil war of 1944.[21] S.O.E. officer Tom Dunbabin noted that 'Communism is a plant ill suited for Cretan soil, except among the dock-workers of Heraklion where there was always a small cell.'[22] In his report for SOE William Mackenzie observed that 'the Cretans posed fewer political problems than did the mainland of Greece.'[23] Crete, maintained intelligence officer Patrick Leigh Fermor, is 'by tradition united in one political allegiance, which happens to be the Republican Liberalism of their great fellow-islander Eleftherios Venizelos.'[24] Cretan Resistance fighter George Paterakis was convinced that it was British funding and equipping of the Cretan partisans that made them far too strong to be challenged by left-wing elements from the mainland.[25]

Floyd Spencer discovered, from his survey of Greek writings about the war, that the Cretans were 'proud to the point of feeling that they are different from the Greeks and perhaps ought to have a separate government.'[26] Operating behind enemy lines in Crete Australian officer Tom Dunbabin also identified 'a certain amount of separatist feeling which hankers after an independent Cretan republic closely allied with Great Britain.'[27] Given the prevalence of such sentiments it is not surprising that the Cretans viewed, not only themselves, but also the battle for Crete as a separate campaign specifically waged to protect their island.[28] This feeling of 'separateness' from the mainland largely stemmed from the fact that 'for much of its past Crete has followed an independent course from that of mainland Greece.'[29] It was a Venetian colony from 1204 to 1669 and under Ottoman rule from 1669 to 1897. Under the auspices of the 'Great Powers (primarily Britain, France and Russia) [Crete became] an autonomous . . . State from 1898 to 1913 headed by a high commissioner. Only two high commissioners were appointed (covering 1898 –1908) before the post was dissolved and the process of union with Greece began.'[30] Prince George of Greece, second son of King George of Greece, was the first high commissioner of Crete, its first head of State, but was soon ousted in 1905 by a rebellion-aimed at union with Greece. It was only on 17 May 1913, under the terms of the Treaty of

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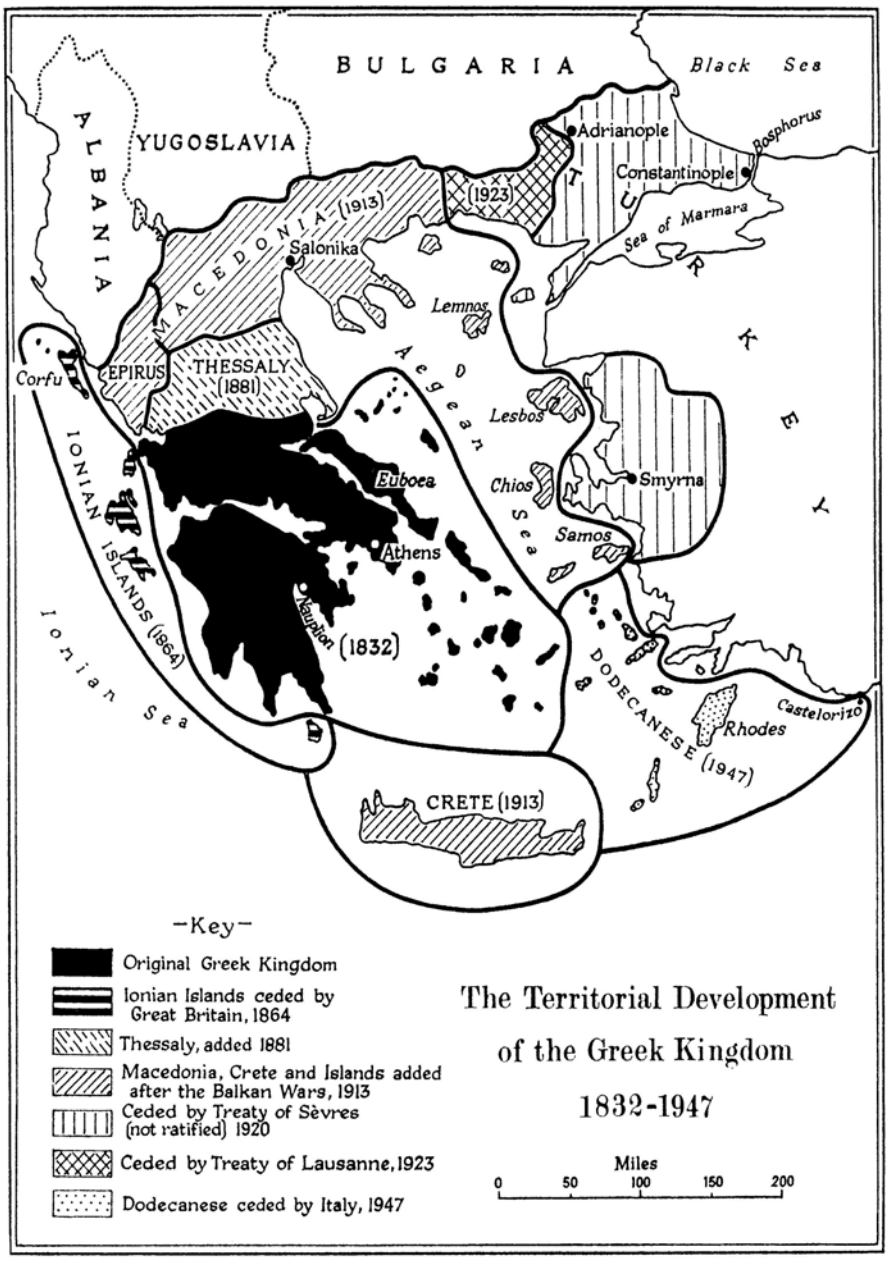
[21] For a description of the political divisions within Greece see the official British report by W. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE 1940-1945*, St. Ermin Press, London, 2000, pp.136-138.
[22] Lt Colonel T J Dunbabin, Crete, Part 1 1942-1944, NAB: HS 5/723.
[23] Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE*, p.447.
[24] George Psychoundakis, *The Cretan Runner: His story of German Occupation*, John Murray, London, 1955, p.12.
[25] Interview: George Paterakis – Cretan resistance fighter, 2 October 2005.
[26] Floyd A. Spencer, *War and Postwar Greece: An Analysis Based on Greek Writings*, The Library of Congress, Washington 1952, p.19.
[27] Dunbabin; Crete, NAB: HS 5/723.
[28] Currently there is a small movement in Crete and amongst a small group of prominent Cretans living in Melbourne Australia, advocating the independence of Crete from Greece and promoting the Battle of Crete as a national day for a new Cretan state.
[29] Adrian, Edwards, *Crete*, World Bibliographical Series, Volume 215, ABC- Clio Press Ltd, Oxford, 1998, p.xvi.
[30] Ibid p.xxxvii.

London, that Crete was included in the new Greek State through the leadership of the Cretan Prime Minister of Greece Eleftherios Venizelos - a staunch Republican.[31]



John Campbell & Philip Sherrard, *Modern Greece*, Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1968.

Crete also had a strong tradition of resistance to invasion, against not only foreign powers but also the government of mainland Greece. 'During the mid-17th century each of the island's principal cities fell to Ottoman forces, culminating with the Siege of Candia [Chania]

[31] The Treaty of London supported by the Allies (Britain and France) was signed in London on 3 December 1912 and ended the First Balkan War between Greece and the Ottoman Empire. At the second meeting in May 1913 the Sultan of Turkey formally ceded Crete to the Balkan allies, renouncing all sovereignty over the territory.

which - lasting from 1648 to 1669 - was one of the longest in European history.'[32] Greek poet Proestopoulos captured the Cretan spirit of resistance in his poem:

You've been always
The victim and the lose[r]
The bitter one of your invader
They've laid down your destruction
But there you stood
Behind every olive tree
Hitting back for your Honour[33]

The poem reflected what the 'Andartes' or resistance fighters on Crete maintained: the Germans can kill every man, woman and child on the island but they would never defeat them. Crete rebelled against the Greek monarchy in 1935 and again in 1938, this time in protest against the fascist policies of General Metaxas, who subsequently placed the island under martial law. As a result of the uprising on Crete the inhabitants of the island were disarmed and not issued with arms by the Allies for fear they might use them against their own government after liberation. The official British response to this claim was that they did not have enough arms to supply the Cretan population. The Greek history of the Crete campaign, while stopping short of calling the British liars, recorded that from 'among the urban population of the cities of Chania, Herakleion and Rethymnon . . . armed [militia] bands formed [who] armed themselves with any firearms available, including weapons looted from British supply depots in Chania, Herakleion and elsewhere, where they were being kept unused.'[34] Furthermore the 'Cretans believed that, considering they had been disarmed by Metaxas for their revolt against him in 1938, they more than proved their military competence, courage, and patriotism in the battle of Crete, as well as in the early stage of the war in Albania, where Cretan fighters paved the way for Italy's quick defeat.'[35]

There was considerable distrust between the central government of Greece and the Cretan population. The Cretans are still bitter, sixty years after the war, at having the V Cretan Division removed from Crete by the Greek government and deployed on the Albanian front.[36] It was widely believed by the Greeks that, had the Cretan division been in Crete, the Germans would not have been able to occupy the island.[37] However, instead of being sent back to Crete after the collapse of the Greek front, they were disbanded. This is still a very sore point with the Cretans who have viewed this decision as an act of treachery by elements who supported the Germans

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[32] Edwards, *Crete*, p.xx.
[33] N. Proestopoulos cited in Harokopos, G., *The Fortress Crete: the Secret War 1941-1944*, B. Giannnikos & Co, translated into English by Spiloos Menounos, Athens, 1993, p.283.
[34] Chrestos Gion, *The Battle of Crete May 1941*, Hellenic Army General Staff Army History Directorate, Athens, 1959, p.33.
[35] Spencer, *War and Postwar Greece*, p.19.
[36] Interview: Markos Polioudakis, 2003, Rethymnon Crete, 27 October 2003; Antony Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance*, Penguin Books, London, 1991, p.11.
[37] Psychoundakis, *The Cretan Runner*, pp.9-10.

within the Greek government. Although official sources suggested that the V Cretan Division was disbanded, Greek resistance fighters who were interviewed remember seeing the Cretan Division encamped near Larissa on mainland Greece after the Greek capitulation to the Germans.[38] The Cretans do not easily forgive betrayal. The Commander of V Cretan Division was shot dead upon his arrival in Crete for returning home without his troops.

The Australian troops who were evacuated from Greece to Suda Bay in Crete had no knowledge of Crete's separate historical and political development and expected the Cretan people to behave in the same way as their compatriots on the mainland. The Australians felt let down by the lack of support exhibited by the Greek Army and government whom they expected to be wholly behind the war effort, but found to their detriment that many were not. Although sympathetic to the plight of the Greek people, the Australian soldiers experienced first hand the behaviour of Fifth Columnists who sabotaged their campaign on continental Greece. They were also disappointed with the Allied air force that was not in evidence over Greece or Crete and the British leadership of the campaign.[39] They felt demoralised and disaffected, voicing their concerns openly on Crete. Nicholas Hammond working with the SOE in Crete commented that 'some of the Australians were without arms, and some without discipline, drinking hard and talking much of fifth column.'[40] This angered the British commanders on the island such as Major General Weston who complained that the 'experiences of the troops in Greece and later in Crete had engendered a ludicrous anxiety regarding the powers of aircraft and all areas were infested with self-appointed critics.'[41]

Deployment of Troops

Australian troops began arriving on Crete from 23 April onwards. As a result of the shortage in shipping it was decided on 17 April to evacuate the majority of the troops from mainland Greece to Crete as part of 'Operation Demon,' making for a much shorter trip.[42] Only 25,000 of the 50,000 troops evacuated from Greece remained in Crete. Unlike Greece, the Australians did not have the largest contingent of Allied troops on the island. On Crete, the New Zealanders had a greater number of front line troops. Nevertheless, the Crete campaign left a lasting impression on the Australian soldiers who fought there, as many were captured during this campaign and spent the remainder of the war in German prison camps. 'Of all the battles of

[38] Interview: Christos Marnitsas – Greek resistance fighter, 9 November 2004.
[39] Serious brawling occurred between the returning soldiers and air –crew in Alexandria over the absence of air support in Greece and Crete that was covered up by British military authorities. 'General Freyberg tells me' wrote Sir Miles Lampson, the British High Commissioner in Egypt,'(and I have heard it from other sources) that airmen are now being booed by other troops and the navy in the bars at Alexandria. Please keep the above to yourself: I do not want to get Freyberg into trouble,' Cipher from Cairo to the Foreign Office, 4 June 1941, NAB: FO 954/15.
[40] Nicholas Hammond, "Memories of A British Officer Serving in Special Operations Executive in Greece, 1941," *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1982, p.142.
[41] Despatch by Major-General E.D. Weston, commanding Suda Sector covering Operation in Crete period 22 April-31 May, 1941, Lessons from Operations in Crete, NAB: WO 210/2663.
[42] Gion, *The Battle of Crete*, p.21

World War II none made a more lasting impression on those who participated in it than the Battle of Crete. Half a century later,' wrote Lew Lind, 'I remember vividly the cauldron of fire and explosive. I have forgotten neither the battle nor the months which followed it.'[43] There were also soldiers who escaped into the hills and joined the partisan movement in Crete until they were rescued either by members of Force 133, part of the Special Operations Executive or M.I.9, a clandestine organization specifically tasked with the return of Allied soldiers stranded behind enemy lines in Greece and Crete and other occupied countries.

AWM: 007613 Suda Bay, Crete April 1941:Arrival of Australian and N.Z. Hospital

The Allied troops who arrived on Crete from Greece were in terrible condition and not fit for active service.[44] Many were suffering from shock after experiencing the constant bombardment and strafing of German planes in Greece.[45] The impact on the troops of the air attacks has not been readily discussed in the literature on the war, but Brigadier Rogers who took part in the campaign on the Greek mainland maintained that

> without any doubt [these air attacks] did affect our troops, partly I believe, because we had no air force to oppose them, and partly because it was a fearsome business to our men travelling in closed trucks on narrow roads. We had only two north and south roads which had to carry hundreds of motor vehicles with troops, guns, ammunition and supplies. Often they were narrow and passed through precipitous mountain defiles or over country where a deep ditch on both sides made it impossible to leave the road. What perfect

[43] Lew Lind, *Flowers of Rethymnon*, Sydney, Kangaroo Press, 1991, p.9.
[44] Despatch by Weston, Lessons from Operations in Crete, NAB: WO210/2663.
[45] 'Danger from air attacks was continuous; reliefs were impossible, . . . Under these conditions it is not to be wondered, that men's nerves were affected,' wrote General Weston ibid.

> targets we were. It is still a nightmare to remember those days and nights in laborious convoys.[46]

Brigadier Rowell reported, in a letter to Major-General Morshead that, the '2/2, 2/3, 2/4 and 2/8 battalions were fairly badly mauled' in Greece and they 'were hoping to get them back in the course of the next week or so.'[47]

AWM: 007623 Suda Bay, Crete, April 1941 Arrival of troops on Crete from Greece

The troops arrived at Suda Bay with only the clothes on their backs and their Bren guns. No organization was in place to house or feed them, leading many to fend for themselves and sleep amongst the olives trees without a senior commander attached. 'Tentage and bedding were very scarce, and camp accommodation stores non-existent,' wrote Paul Cullen who was present.[48] They were forced to drink tea out of bully beef cans and share blankets, as there was little equipment available on the island. 'Battalions were battalions in name only. They were weak in numbers; they had little signal equipment, little or no transport, few tools, no cooking utensils.'[49] The supply problem of the island was immense, for apart from the requirements of the Allied soldiers there were also 14,000 Italian prisoners of war and a Cretan population of 400,000 that needed imported grain to survive.[50] The Australians troops found their morale flagging in response to the poor reception they were given on Crete. Captain Goslett of the 2/2nd

[46] Brigadier John Rogers, A Digger Remembers, Papers of Brigadier John Rogers AWM: PRO3244.
[47] Letter from Brigadier Rowell to Major General Morshead, 17 May 1941, AWM: 54 225/1/11.
[48] Paul Cullen, Notes on 6th Composite Brigade During Crete Campaign May 1941, AWM: 67 3/88.
[49] Crete: Inter-Services Report on Operations, NAB: WO 201/99 4/4/47 hereafter to be referred to as the Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[50] Long, *Crete Greece & Syria*, p.207.

Battalion recorded that 'after a week or so of being mucked about by experts it began to wear very thin. Nobody wanted them, nobody loved them, nobody apparently even wanted to feed them. Things were crook and looked like getting worse.'[51]

What exacerbated matters further on Crete was that there was little in place in terms of troop welfare with 'shortages of main essentials such as cigarettes, whisky and beer,' and 'no English literature in the island except the Force H.Q. newspaper.'[52] In a letter to Brigadier Rowell, Brigadier Vasey explained the difficulty he faced maintaining troop morale under such circumstances: 'not a letter have we seen during the 14 days on the island. . . . I hope it will be forthcoming for those units which are wholly here but even if it does our postal arrangements are inadequate. . . . I can assure you that every time I go round and see any of the tps [troops] the first question I am asked is "When is the mail coming?" There is also a shortage of stamps for posting outward mail.'[53] On the 12 May it was recorded that, 'a feeling of disquiet was growing. Troops had received no mail since Amiriya.'[54]

Troop behaviour

The situation on the island did not lend itself to good discipline and order. Some soldiers even took it upon themselves to obtain what they needed by force if necessary. The 19th Brigade report recorded that: 'difficulties . . . were presented . . . by the landing during this period of 1500 personnel who survived the sinking of the 'COSTA RICA' and so arrived without arms or equipment of any description.'[55] John Gemmell who was on the *Costa Rica* recalled:

> one of the funny things I will never forget is the boat was slowly sinking and a British destroyer pulled in along side and the captain had a megaphone said in a very loud voice: " I say old chap is there anything wrong?" One of the Australians said, leaning against the rail, "No we're right mate, we've just run out of petrol." At any rate they did get most of the fellers off . . . the units were not complete as some were on different boats . . . it was a bit of a shambles . . . and when the Costa Rica sank, all they had were their clothes.[56]

Prince Peter, nephew of King George of Greece who was the Chief liaison officer between the Greeks and Creforce, witnessed an incident involving 'three Australian with drawn revolvers [who] appeared to be threatening a number of Greek officials including a senior member of the Royal Household who had backed against a wall with his hands up'. Survivors of the *Costa Rica* wanted to ' "shoot that bastard admiral – he's in the hotel somewhere. And the second thing is to get ourselves a bed and then sleep. We've marched all the way up Greece and all the way back, and we're bloody tired." '[57] Prince Peter contacted the British military police only to

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[51] Stan Wick, *Purple Over Green: The History of the 2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1945*, 1977, p.128.
[52] Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[53] Letter from Brigadier Vasey to Brigadier Rowell, AWM: 54 225/1/11.
[54] F. C. Folkand, (ed.), *The Fiery Phoenix: the story of the 2/7 Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-1946*, 2/7 Battalion Association, Parkdale, Victoria, p.84.
[55] 19th Australian Infantry Brigade: Account of Operations in Crete, AWM: 54 435/2/25.
[56] Interview: John Gemmell 2/5th Battalion, 21 April 2002.
[57] John Hall Spencer, *Battle For Crete*, White Lion Publishers, London, 1962, p.78.

be told that they were not in charge of Australian soldiers. Nevertheless, they assisted. 'When he learned of this, the Australian ringleader announced that he was going to shoot a .38 bullet into the Royal stomach. The Prince dived, a fight ensured, a light was shot out, MP's arrived, and the Australians were finally led away.'[58]

British senior officers found it very difficult to assert discipline over Dominion troops. Theodore Stephanides, a British doctor of Greek descent, remembered seeing in Chania 'numbers of soldiers about the place, mostly Australians and New Zealanders, but also some from the United Kingdom. The majority of them looked rather dishevelled, and occasionally one met some who were more or less drunk and who were bawling sentimental – and other – ditties at the tops of their voices. Apparently proper discipline had not yet been quite restored.'[59] There was much insubordination noted particularly on the part of Australian soldiers. Brigadier Brunskill, commenting on troop behaviour on Crete, stated that 'a large proportion of men . . . especially Australian find saluting an embarrassment. This, I think, is because it is approached the wrong way. . . . In my opinion the Australians have not had as much help and guidance as they needed and there has been too great a tendency to let them train as well as administer themselves.'[60] The Australians were not the only soldiers criticised for unbecoming conduct on Crete and the New Zealand forces were also accused of exhibiting unacceptable behaviour. Geoffrey Cox, a New Zealand intelligence officer, recalled 'one evening . . . a man rushed into the operations room, where I was duty officer, saying, "Officer, a woman is shot." . . . We put my field dressing on the woman's wound. She had been shot by a bullet fired through the ceiling from the floor below by a drunken young New Zealand private who had been firing his rifle by mistake.'[61]

The plentiful supply of alcohol on the island did not assist the establishment of law and order. Nicholas Hammond, a member of the Special Operations Executive in Crete, recalled that the 'wine-shops were the great attraction. Before the day was out, I was called in twice by wine-shop owners who knew I spoke Greek. On the first occasion I turned out some Aussies who were breaking the shop up, but on the second occasion I was thrown out by the Aussies.'[62] The over indulgence of alcohol was a problem in both the Greek and Crete campaigns. C. A. Kelly of 2/7th Battalion recorded in his diary that at Georgioupolis 'some of the boys get tanked on wine on the road and are queer sights as they straggle in.'[63] The Australian troops however had

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[58] Harry Gordon, *The Embarrassing Australian*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1962, p.71.
[59] Theodore Stephanides, *Climax in Crete*, Faber and Faber limited, London, 1946, p.36.
[60] Brigadier Brunskill, Suggested Administrative Lessons from Greece and Crete, 9/6/41, Lessons from the Operations in Crete, NAB: WO 210/2663.
[61] Geoffrey Cox, *A Tale of Two Battles: A Personal Memoir of Crete and the Western Desert 1941*, William Kimber, London, 1987, p.60.
[62] Hammond, "Memories of a British Officer serving in Special Operations Executive in Greece, 1941," *Balkan Studies*, p.140.
[63] Diary of C.A. Kelly VX11861 2/7th Infantry Battalion 9th April 1941-4th August 1941, AWM: PRO2043.

little choice. The prevalence of disease on the island meant that wine and spirits were the only safe liquids to drink. On May 7 1941 an order was issued to the troops to cease drinking fresh cow and goat's milk because 'TB was pronounced to be present in the herds of both these animals in Crete.'[64] Adonios Fiotakis, who was nineteen years old at the time, explained that while Australian troops drank heavily before the German occupation of Crete, those left behind on the island rarely overindulged nor misbehaved with regard to the Cretan women.[65]

According to the report written to evaluate the campaign the 'problem of bringing all loose elements under control however, was much more difficult, largely owing to the impossibility of giving the military police any transport for rounding up. A curfew for troops at 1800hrs daily was introduced in the SUDA-CANEA area, and it was promulgated that all men not in formed unit or camp control would be treated as deserters.'[66] The unit diary of the 6th Australian Division Provost Company recorded that they 'collected further stragglers – [but were] greatly hampered by lack of transport.'[67] Crete suffered badly from a lack of equipment as the campaign in Greece had resulted in the loss of '104 tanks, 40 anti-aircraft guns, 192 field guns, 164 anti-tank guns, 1,812 machine guns, about 8,000 transport vehicles, most of the signal equipment, inestimable quantities of stores and 209 aircraft – of which 72 were lost in combat, 55 on the ground and 82 destroyed on evacuation.'[68]

Not only the lack of transport but also the absence of sufficient military police was strongly felt throughout the campaign. Brigadier Brunskill stressed that it 'is the greatest mistake to economice (sic) in Provost Services. Even if things are going well, it is essential to have large numbers of Provost personnel, adequately mobile, for discipline in the towns and for traffic control along the L. of C. When things go badly, they are all the more necessary and in Crete the need for mobile police was acute.'[69] During the withdrawal in particular 'at the assembly area north of the beaches, the need for adequate traffic control and provost organisation was felt.'[70] The committee reviewing the campaign commented that all ' Provost personnel must be adequately mobile. In this particular withdrawal it was considered that something stronger than Straggler's Posts was required to reorganise many of the troops who were withdrawing.'[71]

Antony Beevor, however, does not believe that the problem of troop indiscipline lay with the size of the Provost contingent or its mobility. He explained that the

> discipline of any army, as I certainly found in the case of the Red Army's savage onslaught on Berlin - depends on the quality and initiative of NCOs. The British Army

[64] Folkand, *The Fiery Phoenix*, p.84.
[65] Interview: Andonis Fiotakis, Sydney, 31 July 2005.
[66] Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[67] 6 Australian Provost Company, January to August 1941, AWM: 5218/2/19.
[68] Beevor, *Crete*, p.54.
[69] Brunskill, Suggested Administrative Lessons from Greece and Crete, NAB: WO 210/2663.
[70] Inter-Services Report on Crete.
[71] Ibid.

> system, as the First World War showed, is much tighter in its control. Helke Sander, who did the most detailed research into rape in Germany, is convinced that the British Army was the best controlled of all the allied forces. That had nothing, as I say, to do with the size or energy of Provost detachments. You only have to look at the French sack of Stuttgart and the rapes carried out by French colonial troops, almost on a Red Army scale.[72]

After the Cretan campaign accusations flew back and forth as to who was responsible for the behaviour of the troops. Responding to remarks made by General Weston on operations in Crete, General Freyberg maintained that the responsibility for the behaviour of the troops lay with the officer in command. Nevertheless, Freyberg was confident that proper training of troops would have prevented the behaviour witnessed on Crete and sent a strongly worded letter to Lieutenant Colonel W. Leggatt at Training section General Headquarters Middle East containing the following message:

> well disciplined and well led troops do not panic, scuttle for cover unnecessarily, shoot at the lights of their own motor cars, and shout "put out that light". These things happened in the Base Area in Crete. They did not happen in the areas held by formed and disciplined units. Evidently General Weston did not know this. He was in command of the Suda Bay Sector which included the Base Area and unfortunately but unavoidably contained all the "odds and ends" and stragglers from Greece.[73]

According to Major-General Weston's report, troop indiscipline on the island was 'a serious matter' but very few books about the campaign have explored it.[74] Evidence on the indiscipline of Allied troops on Crete is not readily found in the official records of the campaign in Australia, New Zealand or Britain.[75] Although the Australian Provost records noted that there was indiscipline on the island few details are provided. Instead the statement '[d]uties with 19th Bdge [brigade] as usual,' appears repeatedly in the unit diary.[76] The official Australian history of the campaign does not supply much commentary on the subject either, apart from the inclusion of an urgent message from Freyberg to Wavell requesting that 'about 10,000 men who were without arms "and with little or no employment other than getting into trouble with the civil population: should be evacuated." '[77] Antony Beevor, however, did obtain details about troop behaviour from 'eyewitnesses, including Sir Harold Caccia, some civilian refugees, including Lawrence Durrell, and most of the British officers who had been around Canea.

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[72] Email from Antony Beevor to Maria Hill, 25 January 2005.
[73] Letter from General Freyberg to Lieutenant-Colonel Leggatt, 10 July 1941, Lessons from Operations in Crete, NAB: WO210/2663.
[74] Despatch by Weston, ibid.
[75] There is one mention of indiscipline in Dan Davin's official New Zealand history of the Crete campaign on page 383 where he quotes Freyberg's description of the evacuation from Crete via Sfakia and another in Howard Keppenberger's memoirs, *Infantry Brigadier* on page 72 referring to the indiscipline of New Zealand troops during their evacuation from Crete. I also commissioned in 2005an extensive search of Archives New Zealand for any mention of indiscipline of Australian troops and no record was found in the Divisional records of the Provost or war diaries of Brigade headquarters.
[76] 6 Division Provost Company, January to August 1941, AWM: 52 18/2/19.
[77] Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p.210.

Drunkenness, minor looting, conspicuous insubordination (probably increased from a feeling that the British were responsible for the fiasco in Greece) and indiscriminate firing. I am pretty sure,' wrote Beevor, 'that Sandover, whom I interviewed at the time, also talked about the serious problems of indiscipline at Rethymnon until the battle started, when they fought well. Australian soldiers certainly had a reputation for using weapons to scare off any British officer who tried to bring them to order.'[78] Beevor described one such incident in his book where a 'British officer, seeing an Australian filling his pockets with fruit from an old woman's stall and refusing to pay, remonstrated with him, only to find the muzzle of a looted German pistol thrust into his face.'[79]

Although Beevor raised the issue of the indiscipline of Australian troops on Crete he did not explore its impact on the campaign.[80] Its effect, however, was felt by Major- General Weston who explained that

> movement became extremely difficult by day owing to the constant presence of enemy aircraft and even greater difficulty was experienced by night owing to lack of discipline of the troops. . . . Shouts of "sit down" enforced by discharge of rifles greeted any movement by day if an aircraft could be detected anywhere in the sky. By night, lights could not be used as shouts of "put that light out" followed by rifle shots greeted any attempt to use sidelights. In consequence, the movement of D.Rs and recce parties, etc. by day and M.T. by night were most seriously prejudiced. In view of the difficulty of movement and of organization in CRETE, little could be done to abate this nuisance, but it is considered of the first importance that in any future operations the severist (sic) disciplinary action be taken to stamp out the self-appointed critic before the practice has time to take root.[81]

The ramifications of this type of behaviour on relations with the civilian population of Crete has been difficult to ascertain as little appears on the topic in Cretan writings of the campaign.[82] There is certainly reluctance on the part of the Cretans to criticise their allies. Interviews with Cretan civilians sixty years after the campaign revealed only admiration for the Australian and Allied troops.[83] In general Cretans tended to view drunkenness as high spirits rather than bad behaviour. Nevertheless, given the strict code of conduct on the island such behaviour must have influenced relations with the citizens of Crete, particularly the owners of tavern and cafes frequented by Australian troops. Walker, the commander of the 2/7th Battalion, noticed that 'the Australians' rapport with civilians was not unblemished. This may have been caused by the

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[78] Email from Antony Beevor to Maria Hill 4 January 2005.
[79] Beevor, *Crete*, p.65.
[80] Ibid pp.65-66.
[81] Despatch by Weston, Lessons from Operations in Crete, NAB: WO 210/2663.
[82] Markos Polioudakis, *Η Μαχη της Κρητης στο Ρεθυμνο* [The Battle of Crete at Rethymnon] 3 volumes [in Greek]: Vol. 1 1983, Vol. 2 1993, Vol. 3 1997, Markos Polioudakis Publisher, Rethymnon, Crete.
[83] According to Polioudakis, many of the Australians soldiers were accorded honorary Cretan status by the locals with the suffix 'akis', characteristic of Cretan surnames, added to their name. Thus Markos Polioudakis referred to Steve McDougal of 2/3rd Field Regiment who served in Greece and Crete and was taken prisoner in Rethymnon, affectionately as 'McDougalakis' during his return visit to Crete.

heady effect of the local wine, (restina) on the Diggers who were mainly used to beer, and not much at that.'[84]

There is also some evidence in the war diaries of the units sent to Crete that troop behaviour did adversely affect the reputation of the Australian forces on Crete. The three weeks interlude, from the end of April to 20 May 1941, before the German attack on Crete, afforded the troops the opportunity not only for relaxation but also for mischief. According to the Brigade report the 'weather was mild and swimming was available for the majority of the troops. . . . The health and morale of the troops improved greatly during this period.'[85] The 6th

AWM: 069904 Suda Bay Crete, Captain F. A. Farrer, 2/3rd Field Regiment, doing his laundry in the stream near the unit Bivouac area.

Australian Division Provost Company also recorded that on 4 May 1941 'a roundup of stragglers was carried out for men who were making no attempt to join their units and were making nuisances of themselves in the villages.'[86] Two days later, on 6 May 1941, Lieutenant Howard Goodwin, Adjutant of 2/7th Australian Infantry Battalion, had received complaints about the behaviour of Australian soldiers on Crete and issued the strictest warning to all companies:

1. During the short period that this Force has been in NEON KHORION Area 19 cases of crime by A.I.F. personnel have been reported to this H.Q. by civilian authorities. These all involved injury to civilians or damage to their property and include such serious allegations as murder, assault & robbery; breaking and entering.
2. The number of soldiers in our ranks responsible for these offences is fortunately very small but the ill repute which they bring to the A.I.F. as a whole is out of all proportion to their number. Accordingly I am to say that it is the duty of all ranks to remain at all times constantly alert to see that the good name of the A.I.F. is maintained and NOT to hesitate to assume the role of Police men should circumstances require.

[84] Folkand, *The Fiery Phoenix*, p.83.
[85] 19th Australian Infantry Brigade: Account of Operations in Crete, AWM: 54 435/2/25.
[86] 6 Division Provost Company January to August 1941, AWM: 52 18/2/19.

3. In the meantime action by higher authorities is necessary and accordingly all villages are placed out of bounds until further notice except for authorised personnel who will be issued with a written pass under unit arrangements.[87]

As early as 1 May 1941, a detachment of the 6 Australian Division Provost Company had been posted 'on Main Road eastern side of Suda Bay to prevent troops entering the village,' to pre-empt any problems with the civilian population of the island.[88]

Brigadier George Vasey, the commander of the Australian forces on Crete, was also concerned about the behaviour of the Australian troops, particularly at the beginning of the campaign when so many arrived tired, disgruntled and hungry from Greece and were roaming the countryside with weapons in hand in search of food. The 6th Australian Division Provost Company war diary recorded that on the 2 May 1941 that they 'commenced rounding up stragglers who were living in the hills and villages. . . . Collected 8 men and sent them to the 19 Aust. Inf. Bde. Field Punishment Centre.'[89] Vasey also mentioned in his report that there were 'a number of instances involving AIF personnel and local inhabitants. To ensure that offenders were retained in custody [he] found it necessary to erect two barb wire cages, in which convicted personnel as well as those awaiting trial were detained.'[90] Maintaining cordial relations with the local people was important and Vasey took their complaints seriously and acted upon them.

In an attempt to alleviate the situation in the Suda Base area, where personnel representing some forty-five different units such as Corps Headquarters and 6th Australian General Hospital were assembled, Freyberg cabled the Middle East with an urgent request 'to arrange soonest possible evacuation from here of W Force troops surplus to operational requirements. Total number approximately 14000. These troops have no equipment and are in danger of demoralisation and diseases living under the most primitive bivouac conditions.'[91] Although Vasey maintained that discipline amongst the unarmed troops was fair, his report indicated that their behaviour on Crete was serious enough to warrant him conducting court-martials. He wrote that there 'have been a few major incidents including an alleged murder, but so far we have always been able to apprehend the culprits. I have taken to myself the power to convene FGCMs [field general court martials] and cases are proceeding apace. . . . I hope the Legal Staff Officer will review proceedings of the court martials with a kindly eye.'[92] Middle East Headquarters in Cairo, however, overturned his sentences because it was deemed that he had overstepped his jurisdiction in that regard. Vasey was also required to expend a considerable sum of money as 'compensation for damage done by unidentified Australians (but

[87] Diary 2/7th Australian Infantry Battalion April –July 1941, AWM: 52 8/3/7.
[88] Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal 6 Division January to October 1941, AWM: 52 18/1/5.
[89] Ibid.
[90] 19th Australian Infantry Brigade: Account of Operations in Crete, AWM: 54 435/2/25.
[91] Letter from General Freyberg to Lieutenant-Colonel Leggatt, 10 July 1941, NAB: WO210/2663.
[92] Letter from Brigadier Vasey to Brigadier Rowell, 18 May 1941, AWM: 54 225/1/11.

only when we are sure that it was done by an Australian).'[93] Vasey's concern to rectify any damage done to the locals earned the Australians the respect of the Cretans.

Relations with Civilians

Even though the behaviour of some troops did impact on relations with the Cretans before the commencement of the German attack, it did not seem to have had any long-term detrimental effect on the relationship as Cretan support of the Allies remained staunch, even under threat of severe German reprisals. The 2/4th Battalion deployed in the Heraklion area recorded that relations with the villagers were cordial and fraternisation 'with the local population became common. Women and children wandered at will through the battalion hawking fruit and eggs and other foodstuffs and canvassing for laundry.'[94] Some soldiers suffered a loss of dignity however when locals caught them without their pants during a German air raid. Apparently a 'rather comical sight at this time was Bill Andrews shooting at the Germans without his pants. The men of his section had been in the practice of borrowing his pants to go into Heraklion to buy some extras to supplement their rations, his pants being the only respectable pair in the section.'[95]

At Georgioupolis, before the German attack, Australians interacted with Greeks at cafés or 'kafenia' and tavernas. C.A. Kelly noted that 'some of the Greeks who live nearby are very sociable, and one in particular whose name is Manuli Foundalakis, whom I will not forget soon. . . . I spend most of the time learning a few stock phrases in Greek off my little friend Manuli.'[96] Lieutenant Colonel Walker of 2/7th Battalion in the Suda Bay area observed that the 'troops were on good terms with the locals who were poor and tough, and pressed on with their agricultural way of life while preparations for warfare were going on around them.'[97]Sometimes the Australian troops were their only means of finding out about the progress of the war. Frank Atkins recalled that the villagers were desperate for news:

> We were allowed to draw money from our pay book to buy food. This was at Georgioupolis. . . . I saw a little village – little church so I set across this road when I got near this village – the people came out a bit worried looking to see what was going on – bare (sic) in mind they knew nothing of what was going on either - I was escorted into the village where the village priest appeared – he's the centre of life in the Greek village and he could speak English – good English. I explained to him I was an Australian soldier. He'd had never seen one, of course. I was an Australian soldier and I'd just come from Greece, looking to buy some food and what did they have to sell. He said, "first you must come and talk to us." So I sat down at the village and was fed little cups of Greek coffee with a little peppermint. They sucked everything they could out of me about what had

[93] Ibid.
[94] Unit History Editorial Committee (ed.), *White over Green: The 2/4th Battalion and reference to the 4th Battalion*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1963, p.147.
[95] Ibid p.159.
[96] Diary Pte C.A. Kelly, AWM: PRO02043.
[97] Folkand, *The Fiery Phoenix*, p.83.

> happened on the mainland. They knew literally nothing. People did not have radios in those days in those villages.[98]

The soldiers interacted with the local café owners buying eggs and chips or ordering an omelette. 'We had a good relationship with the proprietor and the locals who used to meet there,' wrote Ken Clift in the 2/3rd Battalion history.[99] Some Australians, camped near the village of Kalives on the western headland of Suda Bay, even taught the 'Cretans to play two – up, our national game, which they approved of most enthusiastically, calling "Kroner" heads and "Grammata" tails, as the coins fell in the village centre. "Chook" Fowler and Lionel Baker were the ringleaders of the game. As we went broke we would borrow from the Cretans and they would do likewise from us.'[100] Clift noted that, as 'a public relations exercise it was a great success.'[101]

AWM: 069830 – Greece 1941 a group of soldiers playing Two-up.

The Greeks on their part introduced the Australians soldiers to a new cuisine – food that they had never experienced in Australia. Frank Atkins of the 2/11th Battalion fondly recalled the cheese made from sheep and goat's milk on Crete – so very different from the cheddar he had been used to in Australia and the stone baked crusty bread - a delicacy on the island as flour was rationed. He found himself so hungry that he attempted to dabble in some Cretan cooking himself, explaining that:

> in this village they offered us snails. We tried these snails and thought, 'geez they're not bad, they're cooked properly.' Anyhow a few days later we were getting pretty hungry –

[98] Interview: Frank Atkins 2/11th Battalion, 20 January 2005.
[99] Ken Clift, *War Dance: A Story of the 2/3 Australian Infantry Battalion A.I.F.*, P. M. Fowler, Kingsgrove, 1980, p.164.
[100] Ibid p.161.
[101] Ibid p.161.

> so we just up off the grass where we slept and the place was swarming with great big brown snails. And I said, being young and silly, " why don't we boil some snails?" "What are we going to boil them in?" Took off my helmet, the lining to your helmet was fastened by a screw. I screwed the lining off my helmet . . . and that was a boiler and threw some of these snails into the water. You got a filthy green scrum came up to the surface and they were - absolutely dreadful - you couldn't eat them. We didn't know about feeding them pullet or bran or flour to get the green pigment out from the vegetation they lived on and of course we had no garlic or white wine to put with it.[102]

Snails were one of the few sources of food left on the island. It was not uncommon to see entire hillsides alight at night with lanterns carried by desperate women searching for them. Len Frazer, hiding in Crete for over a year, observed that 'women gather weeds by day and snails by night.'[103] George Psychoundakis, who helped many allied soldiers escape Crete, experienced the hunger that beset Crete in 1942. In his memoirs of the war he vividly recalled that:

> Everyone suffered from hunger during the Occupation, but 1942 was the worst, especially the winter, when we nearly starved. It was then that the snail kingdom suffered the fiercest inroads. Every night, armed with oil dips and torches, the villages would set out in hundreds in search of the priceless treasure which was the most luxurious fare to be found in house or inn.'[104]

Charles Hunter of the 2/3rd Battalion was so enamoured with the Cretan diet that he introduced aspects of it to his family back home in Australia. His daughter, Colleen Donahue, recalled watching her father make fresh yoghurt at home, cook in oil and eat olives. She grew up believing this was normal Australian fare.[105]

AWM: PO2053.007 Members of the 6th Division Signals relaxing on the side of street Canea (Chania), Crete 29 April 1941. All the men are holding loaves of bread.

[102] Interview: Corporal Frank Atkins, 2/11th Battalion, 20 January 2005.
[103] Diary of Lieutenant Len Frazer 2/8th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers, Thursday 5 March 1942 & Monday 2 March 1942, on loan from his son Dr Ian Frazer.
[104] George Psychoundakis, *The Cretan Runner*, Penguin Books, London, 1998, p.86.
[105] Interview: Colleen Donahue, daughter of Charles Hunter – 2/3rd Battalion, 24 July 2005.

What strengthened the relationship between the Australian soldiers and the locals was the fact that the Australian troops did not stand on ceremony and were prepared to help where needed.[106] The Australians lacked the class-consciousness and snobbery of the British. Eric Hewitt of the 2/2nd Battalion recorded in his diary that at the village of Kalives they found that 'a queue [was] already forming outside the village bakery. [So a] Victorian soldier hops into the bakehouse to give the baker a hand. Soon there is a batch in the oven and the smell of hot bread assails the nostrils. After the regulars have been served each man receives a loaf of good wholemeal bread. Great stuff this Greek bread (psomi) for it has body and is very filling.'[107] While Australians generally had good relations with the locals, some of their behaviour did shock the Cretans. In particular, the sight of six naked soldiers running away from the beach where they had spotted a German plane and ran 'straight through the open doors of the local priest's house and onto our positions without a pause,' did cause some concern.[108]

AWM: PO2053.008 A group of naked members of 6th Division Signals near Suda Bay.

Contact with women

Although soldiers readily interacted with the local shop-keepers, their contact with the female population of the island was limited, apart from visits to Chania's thirty-seven brothels where "thirty-six of them [were] owner-driven".'[109] There were also the girls, evacuated from the nightclubs of Athens and smuggled into Crete by British officers, who provided companionship and entertainment. However a strict moral code operated on the island, as a

[106] Christos Manitsas- a resistance fighter in Greece interviewed for this study recalled with some animosity the British officer who had used the scarce drinking water that they had painstakingly carried up the mountain, to shave.
[107] Wick, *Purple Over Green*, p.126.
[108] Clift, *War Dance*, p.162.
[109] Cox, *A Tale of Two Battles*, p.60.

woman's chastity was linked to her family's honour, giving rise to the expression: 'harder to get near than a Greek Sheila,' used by some Australian troops on Crete. [110] This of course did not deter young soldiers from trying 'their luck' with the Cretan girls. Charles Jager, who took a liking to a 'wood nymph with blue-black hair' on Crete, was warned off by her father Yorgo Dimitrakis, the mayor of Skines. He explained to the young Australian that: ' "Our bride must be virgin. Hanky-panky – you find blade stuck unner you fif rib," and he rests his palm on the hilt of a murderous knife, sheathed in a finely chastened silver scabbard in his cummerbund.'[111] Charles Jager explained that the 'mayor has warned us; you may look. You many not touch. Love, on Crete, goes with marriage and virginity is a quality not only cherished but fiercely guarded. '[112] Anthropologist John Campbell, in his study of Greece found that 'only in a legitimate marriage, which is the foundation of family and the symbol of its honour, is sexual activity possible. . . . There is no more direct, but also dishonouring, attack on a family than to sully or question the sexual honour of one of its women.'[113] Eleftheria Tripodakis, who was a girl of twenty in 1941, recalled that at her village Spilia, twenty kilometres outside Chania, a father killed his daughter for falling pregnant to a German soldier.[114] The Australians soon learned not to interfere with Greek women if they valued their life.

Given the strict moral code of behaviour expected of the female population on the island, it was not surprising that 'the women [kept] carefully shy and apart from the soldiers who prowled the streets, eyeing the dark-haired girls.'[115] Not all Cretan women were so coy, as Lieutenant Len Frazer of 2/8th Field Company discovered while hiding in occupied Crete. He found himself fending off the amorous advances of a married woman recording in his diary that:

> Had a two hours fight with woman (Markos's wife). She wanted to more than kiss me. I annoyed her with my knees very much. She is ignorant and ugly, no brains. . . . His wife even had the cheek to ask me if I had another friend. Called her hippopotamus (not realizing that the Greek word is very similar).[116]

At a wedding on Crete in 1941 Dr Stephanides noticed that there had been some easing of the strict codes of conduct governing the behaviour of men and women on the island. Commenting on the 'Pentozali', the Cretan national dance, he explained that 'the women generally make up a separate circle of their own. This was formerly a strict rule, but customs are not quite so rigid nowadays, and men and women were dancing together at this particular festival.'[117] There is little evidence of marriages having taken place between Australian soldiers and Cretan women

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[110] Jager, *Escape from Crete*, p.103.
[111] Ibid p.73.
[112] Ibid p.73.
[113] John Campbell & Philip Sherrard, *Modern Greece*, Ernest Benn Limited, London, 1968, p.45.
[114] Interview: Eleftheria Tripodaki,, Sydney, 20 August 2005.
[115] Cox, *A Tale of Two Battles*, pp.57-58.
[116] Diary of Lieutenant Len Frazer 2/8th Field Company, Sunday 1 February 1942, on loan from his son Dr Ian Frazer.
[117] Stephanides, *Climax in Crete*, p.42.

during the war, though many soldiers were offered brides, particularly if they mentioned possessing large tracts of land back home in Australia. The New Zealand troops, however, who were behind enemy lines in greater number, did marry Cretan women, taking brides back home to New Zealand. [118]

'Pentozali' or Cretan War Dance with Daggers[119]
Nikos Vasilatos, *The Cretan Dagger*, Classic Editions.
Source: http://www.explorecrete.com/traditions/cretan-dagger-3.htm

A lack of understanding of Greek culture did get some young Australians into trouble on Crete. Frank Atkins recalled stopping at a village where

> a young woman came out and started winding up the pump on the village well and of course immediately, these were the days you stood up on a bus even for a school girl, a man stood up, and woman wasn't allowed to draw water and chop wood. So Bobby Taylor went over and took over the pumping and immediately the Greek males sitting round the place got very agitated indeed. And finally, quite a nasty situation, anyhow common sense prevailed, we got the message from the Greeks, no, you mustn't do that. In Greece, the women's job is to pull the water out of the wells. You mustn't interfere at all.[120]

There was a strict delineation between the roles of men and women on Crete. Men's and woman's work was clearly defined on the island, contrasting sharply with what was considered gentlemanly behaviour in Australia of the 1940s. According to the customs and practices of Crete it was acceptable for men to frequent coffee shops and play cards while women worked hard attending their families. This involved cooking, cleaning, washing, weaving and making

[118] Interview: Adonis Fiotakis, 31 July 2005.
[119] This was traditionally a male war dance originating from the village of Rethymnon. It begins slowly and calmly and then erupts into full-scale battle. The dancers hold each other by the shoulders and perform both small intricate steps and large sweeping kicks.
[120] Interview: Francis Atkins, 2/11th Battalion, 20 January 2005.

clothes and some farming activities. Allbaugh observed that at 'meals, traditionally, the men are served by the women, who eat afterwards.'[121] Australian soldier, Len Frazer, was surprised at the treatment of women on Crete compared to Australia: 'as usual the men eat while the women watch and serve.'[122] What shocked him the most however, was the difference in age between Cretan men and their wives, noting that 'the marriage age difference between Manoli and his wife is 27 years. Have one daughter 12. She was poor and had no choice but to marry a man who would take her for nothing.'[123] A girl without a dowry on Crete was a liability to her family and with only age and/or beauty on her side she had to accept whatever proposal came her way. Marrying for love was a foreign concept to Greek people. Traversing the two cultures must have been quite a hazardous task for the Australians. Nevertheless they came to understand the Cretan culture well.

Crete was a male-dominated society and John Gemmell of 2/5th Battalion fondly recalled frequenting coffee shops on Crete before the German invasion began and 'joining [the Cretan men] some evenings, talking to them and drinking with them.'[124] At Georgioupolis situated along the coast between Suda and Rethymnon, he regularly visited 'a little place there . . . every night. The BBC news would be broadcasting and we could listen to Lord Haw Haw and he'd tell us how we were going and what was happening. There was quite a bit of interest, the Australians enjoyed it. They thought it was good fun listening to him, they didn't take any notice of him, naturally.'[125] Nicknamed 'Menzies' million dollar cowboys' by Lord Haw Haw, accused of being constantly on the run, the Australian troops on Crete found his commentary on their exploits very diverting. 'His broadcasts were heard in Greek villages and on signals wireless sets and caused many a laugh despite the desperate situation,' explained Jack Huston.[126] On the night the 2/4th Battalion reached the camp site near the village of Neon Khorion, Lord Haw Haw came on air describing Crete as the 'island of doomed men and sunken ships,' warning the Australians that they might have 'got away from Greece but they will never leave Crete.'[127] Kelly of the 2/7th Battalion remembered sitting at the café in Georgioupolis and listening to Lord Haw Haw proclaim that 'all Australian troops, who were playing Babes in the Wood under the olive trees, . . . would be taken to Germany and marched through Berlin in chains.'[128]

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[121] Allbaugh, *Crete: A case Study of An Underdeveloped Area*, pp 76-77.
[122] Diary of Lieutenant Len Frazer 2/8th Field Company.
[123] Ibid, Wednesday 7 January 1942. Throughout his diary he continuously refered to the age difference between the Cretan couples he encountered.
[124] Interview: John Gemmell, 2/5th Battalion, 21 April 2002.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Unit History Editorial Committee (ed.), *White over Green*, p.145.
[127] Ibid p.145. Lord Haw Haw, a British Fascist by the name of William Joyce was part of the German propaganda machine operating from Berlin.
[128] Diary of C.A. Kelly, AWM: PRO2043.

Although German propaganda succeeded in frightening Greek mainlanders into submission well before their invasion of the country, the Cretans were not so easily intimidated. Cretan civilians displayed little mercy towards the German paratroopers attacking their island. Cretan women engaged in the practice of mutilating German dead by removing their genitals.[129] The Germans responded to such acts by killing '200 men at Kastelli –some for what their wives'd done.'[130] Not only the Cretans, but also the Maori contingent was known to cut off the ears of dead German soldiers as trophies. Although the Australian soldiers may not have approved of this behaviour they understood the Cretan position. Claude Peck from the 2/7th Infantry Battalion left behind during the evacuation of Crete explained to his fellow escapees that the 'bastards were not invited here [to Crete] . . . and if they drop on England do you think the Poms'll fight them with kid gloves?' "They'll jab 'em with pitch forks," [Ben] Travers says in an aside.'[131] Charles Jager observed that the 'Turks and Cretans know how to fight. Give no quarter, ask no quarter. Cretan women fight with their men and the men of Kastelli paid for the ferocity of their wives with their lives.'[132]

Cultural attitudes

The Australian soldiers exhibited a more accepting and less condescending attitude towards the Cretan people when compared to some troops of British background such as St. John-Wilson, or 'Zouch' as the Australians on Crete called him.[133] Zouch advised the Australians that they had to 'keep our end up in front of these wogs! You two must stop skylarking and behave with dignity, like white men!'[134] The Australians did not regard the Cretans as wogs, unlike the Egyptians whose values they could not identify with and whom they disliked. John Gemmell, who fought on Crete, explained that 'before the war you would have just about classed the Greeks and Italians and all that type of person as one of the same but afterwards we realised there was a big difference.'[135] In Australia *Smith's Weekly* had branded the Italians as 'No.1 target, it wasn't too keen on the Greeks either; it tended to pin on them the "Dirty Dago" badge, rarely giving them the benefit of any doubt.'[136]

The Cretans on their part 'received [the Australians] with their arms open wide and they loved them and they loved the Cretans. That's why they fought like a "pallikari." They fought for ideology but they also fought for the people – all together,' explained George Paterakis,

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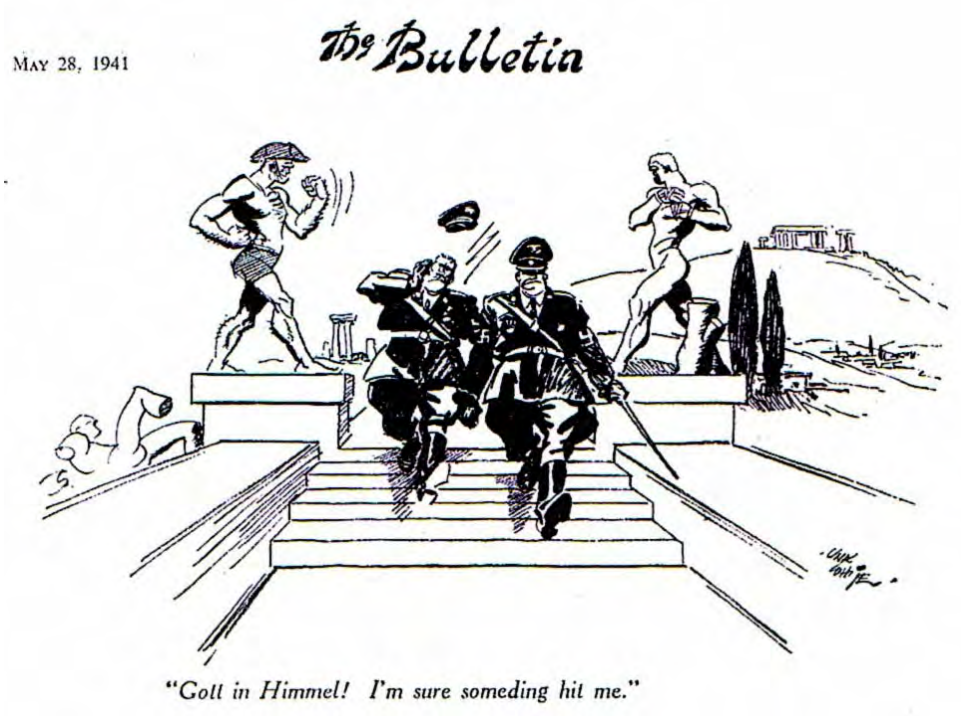
[129] Jager, *Escape from Crete*, p.66.
[130] Ibid p.66.
[131] Ibid p.67.
[132] Ibid p.77.
[133] While the British foot soldiers may have exhibited condescension towards the Greeks, the British officers in the intelligence services, working behind enemy lines formed very closed and permanent bonds with the Greek people, some even marrying local women and residing in Greece after the war.
[134] Charles Jager, *Escape from Crete*, p.75.
[135] Interview: John Gemmell, 2/5th Battalion, 21 April 2002.
[136] George Blaikie, *Remember Smith's Weekly*, Rigby Limited, Adelaide, 1966, p.229.

whose family sheltered Australians soldiers during the war.[137] George Kouvetaris, researching Greek culture, explained that the term 'pallikari'

> reflects the heroic image as embodied in military virtues, such as *leventis*, *pallikar*, and *philotimo*. The concept of *pallikar* is part of the Greek legend carried over from Byzantine frontier days to the present. It portrays the heroic image of a Greek who fights for a cause or an ideal such as liberty or social justice. One's incentive to fight does not derive from material gain but from an inner compulsion and moral imperative that transcends the self.[138]

A mutual respect had grown between the two groups of people as a result of their shared wartime experience with many Cretans referring to the Australians as 'leventes' – a compliment not often afforded to foreigners. '*Leventia* [was] a quality derived by Greek culture and is a product of character training and includes both a moral and an existential component such as self-reliance, pride, self-sacrifice, honour, and inner strength and self-direction.'[139] In everyday Greek parlance a 'levendi' was usually a tall well built male exhibiting heroic and magnanimous qualities not unlike the image of the 'sun-bronzed' Anzac encapsulated in Charles Bean's First World War history and depicted in cartoons published by *The Bulletin* in 1941.[140]



[137] Interview: George Paterakis, Melbourne, 2 October 2005.
[138] George Kourvetaris, *Studies on Modern Greek Society and Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York , 1999, p.12.
[139] Ibid pp.12-13.
[140] 'The stereotypic Australian soldier was very tall, and sinewy and hatchet faced. . . . In March 1915 it was reported that men over six feet (183 centimetres) abounded in the ranks of every Australian unit – long-legged, broad-shouldered and deep-chested, they carried no superfluous flesh and moved lithely and rapidly.' L.L. Robson, " The Australian Soldier: Formation of a Stereotype," in McKernan, M. & Browne, M. (eds), *Australia Two Centuries of War & Peace*, AWM in association with Allen & Unwin Australia, Canberra, 1988, p.323.

Indeed there were many aspects of the Australian character that appealed to the Cretan people. 'We had lots of characteristics in common [with the Australians], ' explained Paterakis, 'we Cretans have the same mentality as the Australians: 'timi' [honour] they did not touch the women. I remember when we had the four soldiers at our home, I remember everything, - they didn't steal anything except the Englishman stole the chicken and the eggs. We regarded them as brothers, as one family.'[141] Personal honour or 'timi' was an important guiding principle of the Greek family. Anthropologist John Campbell explained that

> the notion of *time* (sic) is perhaps inadequately expressed by the English word honour. Subjectively it is a sense of integrity, of not being touched, or humiliated before others, or oneself, through particular kinds of failure. Outwardly *time* (sic) is the recognition of social worth, which is conceded grudgingly by the community. Two sentiments closely related to it: that of *philotimo* which is the 'love of honour' that encourages a man to act rightly and therefore is particularly sensitive to any suggestion that he has not done so; and *drope*, shame, which is the fear of failure that prevents wrong actions, or a sense of acute discomfort which follows after them.[142]

The Australian soldiers' respect for Greek values endeared them to the people of Crete and gained them access to the protection and support of the Greek family. This was no small feat as considerable trust had to be established between the two parties before this could take place. The family in Greece was more than a domestic arrangement based on blood and kinship ties. It was considered a 'divine institution and the figures of God the Father, the Mother of Christ, and Christ are in some sense the holy archetype family of which earthly families are an imperfect reflection.'[143] The Australians were accorded with what social scientists refer to as 'in-group' membership - regarded as 'brothers' with access to all the benefit that entailed.[144]

Understandably there were Australian soldiers who were not enamoured of Cretan values, customs or behaviour and found it difficult to accept. Len Frazer was one of the few Australian soldiers who documented his daily frustrations with the Cretans in a diary he kept behind enemy lines. A number of aspects of Cretan behaviour annoyed him: their loud talking, noisy eating and their predilection for asking very personal questions. 'I am very irritable with these people. Brains of mice. They ask why for everything that you do. The lady by her loud mouth spoilt my good home. I decide to leave,' he wrote.[145] Crete was an underdeveloped country when the Australians were deployed there. The local people endured primitive living conditions compared to the people of Australia, with no sanitation and often only one knife, spoon, cup and plate and

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[141] Interview: George Paterakis, 2 October 2005.
[142] Campbell & Sherrard, *Modern Greece*, p.44.
[143] Ibid p.44.
[144] Vasso and George Vassiliou, "The Implicative Meaning of the Greek Concept of Philotimo," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1973, p.336.
[145] Diary of Lieutenant Len Frazer, saturday 17 January 1942.

bed in a household that could include stray soldiers.[146] Angry at the circumstances he found himself in, Frazer vented his frustration in his diary:

> What a life: no newspaper, no wireless, no loved ones and the sea is now too rough for a little boat. . . . When I go home I shall spit on the floor, wash in the dining room, hands and face, never my body, shit under the house, do not work except a little walking, eat only with a fork from a common dish, live in a household in which we all drink from one glass or mug, sleep in my clothes, hide from everybody. I have become a professional beggar of food and bed.[147]

AWM: REL35482- Spoon carved from wood of a mandarin tree by Sergeant William Kieft who fought in Greece and Crete.

Although there were significant cultural differences between the Australians and the Greeks they possessed similar values when it came to fighting the enemy, and loyalty to ones' friends. The Cretans exhibited a sense of mateship that appealed to the Australians.[148] Adam Hopkins found in his study of Crete that 'where genuine contact is made and loyalties exchanged, no friend is likely to prove more long-lasting than a Cretan. Full of notions of *levandi*, the *palikare's* attitude of gallantry, Cretans do not call friendship into question once it has been given.'[149]

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[146] Allbaugh found in his 1948 study of Crete that most rural communities had no sewage. Crete also had one of highest rates of leprosy as well as Malaria in Greece. Very few houses on Crete had electricity or running water and consisted of a one-story structure with two or three rooms and dirt floors. Families used open fireplaces for cooking, as there were no private ovens, public ovens were available in all cities. There was almost no refrigeration in Crete. The island had limited land suitable for cultivation with archaic farming practises. The most commonly used tools for growing crops were ploughs, siecles and hoes pulled by a donkey, ox or work cow with a harness. Access to education was also limited with 30 per cent of the population in 1948 being illiterate. *Crete: A Caste Study of an Underdeveloped Area,* pp.15-167.

[147] Ibid Wednesday 29 October and 1941 - Thursday 30 October 1941.

[148] According to Jim Page 'mateship is beginning to take on the status of a national ideology that is . . . a defining characteristic. Mateship has often been identified as one of the traditional qualities of the Australian bushman, in supporting others in time of adversity.' "Is Mateship a Virtue?" *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 37, 2002, p193.

[149] Adam Hopkins, *Crete: Its Past, Present and People*, Faber and Faber Limited, London, 1977, p.199.

Photograph of a Cretan freedom fighter and Australian soldier: capturing the strong bond of friendship between the two allies. Rethymnon, Crete 1981, courtesy of John Gemmell 2/5th Battalion.

Furthermore, the Cretans' high spiritedness and ability to enjoy life under the most adverse circumstances was not dissimilar to the 'larrikinism' displayed by some Australian troops on Crete.[150] The Australian soldiers, like the Cretans, possessed a sense of humour that came to the forefront in the direst circumstances. Terry Fairbairn of the 2/1st Battalion recalled such an incident involving Sergeant Johnny Fitzgerald during the Australian surrender at Rethymnon:

> A German major stuck his nose in Johnny's face and said in perfect English: "Where is the Royal Air force?" And Fitzgerald was a very amusing character and looked over his left shoulder and looked over his right, and said: "If I tell you will you make sure that my so called friends don't know what I told you?" He said, "Yes, where was the Royal Air Force?" And Johnny Fitzgerald said, "over in Henley in England at the Royal pageant." And he got bashed of course. But they're in the middle of a horrible capture. The horrible thing of becoming a prisoner, there was Australian humour. Humour is an extraordinary thing.[151]

The gameness of the Cretans or 'tharros' also appealed to the Australians who exhibited quite a bit of audacity themselves in dealing with the Germans. Stories of Australian soldiers masquerading as Cretans at weddings and other festivities, dancing and frequenting tavernas,

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[150] 'Larrikinism' refers to behaviour that is irreverent, mocks authority and disregards rigid norms of propriety. Its origin is believed to lie in the "Black Country" dialect found in the area near Birmingham, United Kingdom, where 'larrikin' originally meant 'tongue', thus someone who was outspoken or 'mouthy.' The word 'larrikin' came into use in Australia during the late the 19th century. It was recorded in the *English Dialect Dictionary* edited by. J. Wright, 1898-1905 to mean 'a mischievous or frolicsome youth.'

[151] Interview: Lieutenant Terry Fairbairn, 2/1st Battalion, 28 April 2002.

where Germans sat at nearby tables, abound amongst veterans of the campaign.[152] Cretans openly flaunted their weapons during celebrations, usually in mountain villages such as Koustoyeroko. 'We had a lot of 'Glendi' [celebrations] in our village. . . . In our village we would slaughter a beast and eat firing our guns in celebration. . . . [The Australians] sang songs- they had learnt the language. They ate olives. In the village there was not hunger. . . . [We ate] little meat, mostly vegetables [lahanika]. Goat and sheep milk, yoghurt, a lot of lentils and beans and oil,' recalled Paterakis.[153] Both the Australians and Cretans enjoyed outwitting the Germans. The Australians displayed considerable gall and cunning when dealing with the enemy and had much in common with the Cretans who possessed 'a tradition of mountain lawlessness [involving] the use of force and recourse to arms and certainly insubordination to authority!'[154]

AWM: 006325 March 1941 In the rocky tombs and catacombs of the Ancient Greeks, men of the AIF tune their instruments before performing a classic Greek dance with hands held high.

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[152] According to Private Murray McLagan of NZ 5th Field Regiment two friends of his were 'indulging in some heavy drinking in town on Crete when in walked a German soldier, also a little under the weather. He asked if he might join the two 'Greeks', Aussies in reality, and sat down with them. As the party became merrier so the Aussies became bolder and soon we were singing 'Roll Out the Barrel', "There'll always be an England', 'Tipperary' and other soldiers' songs. Jerry highly approved and suggested that Greek songs were similar to German and English ones.' McLagan Manuscript p.12, cited in Sean Damer & Ian Frazer, *On the Run: Anzac Escape and Evasion in Enemy-occupied Crete*, Penguin Books, Albany, 2006, p.209.

[153] Interview: George Paterakis, 2 October 2005. '*Glendia* are performed on formal occasions such as saint's day celebrations, life cycle rituals, religious holidays or informal occasions,' similar to parties and involve, 'singing (often old, nostalgic songs), exchanging jokes, as well as an increasing sense of camaraderie and abandonment to a state of mirth and heightened emotion called *kefi,'* Anna Caraveli, "The Symbolic Village: Community born in Performance," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 98, No.389, 1985, p.262.

[154] John Koliopoulos cited in Holton, David (ed.) *The Battle of Crete 1941: A symposium to mark the 50th Anniversary*, University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.43.

British attitudes

These attributes, however, did not endear the Australians to their other alliance partner the British. There was a definite strain in the relations between Australian soldiers and British officers on Crete, who tended to view the Australians as rowdy and undisciplined. Their disdain was obvious. British agent Xan Fielding, operating behind enemy lines in Crete, described his reaction to accidentally stumbling upon a group of Australians on his way to meet fellow agent Monty Woodhouse at the village of Akendria in south western Crete:

> For a moment I felt as though we had entered an Anzac encampment. The chorus of Waltzing Matilda filled the dusk as loudly as a wireless switched on at full blast . . . through the open door of the village coffee-shop I saw a horde of frenzied giants in tattered khaki and slouch hats. All these men had hoped to be evacuated from Three Churches two days before and were now, understandably enough, drowning their disappointment – an easy feat in Crete, where wine and raki were both more plentiful than food. The sight of them reminded me of the last time I had to deal with drunken Australians: in Tel Aviv, a few weeks after I had been commissioned. Six of them were celebrating the end of twenty-four hours' leave by looting a Jewish house and beating up the inmates. I happened to be passing down the street when a terrified woman leant out of the window, screamed for help and begged me as an officer to intervene. But the Australians were not so impressed as she was by my obviously new Sam Browne belt and the star on my shoulders. As I went inside one of them simply picked me up by the scruff of the neck and demanded: "Whose side are you on, Galahad?" I did not wish a similar scene to be enacted in the coffee-shop of Akendria, so I discreetly quickened my pace until I reached the house where Monty was waiting.[155]

British disapproval of the behaviour of Dominion troops contrasted sharply with the Cretans' admiration of the Australians and New Zealanders for their fearlessness in the face of the enemy. According to the diaries of some Australian soldiers, 'fearlessness' was not a quality commonly displayed by British troops. C.A. Kelly of 2/7th Battalion recorded in his diary of Monday 26 May 1941 that the 'Germans have caught up with us again. I enquire what those English Commandos have been doing, but we discovered they broke and ran, leaving all their arms.'[156] The next day, according to Kelly's diary, the 'Colonel breaks the sad news that as the English troops had cleared out and left us, we had to go back into the pass and hold the enemy for another 48 hours. Imagine our feeling toward those Pommies.'[157] During the evacuation Lieutenant Colonel Theo Walker and his men protecting the rear-guard were left behind standing on the beach at Sphakia while non-combatant troops, who had raced towards the evacuation beach without orders, scrambled abroad the ships that were to take soldiers back to Alexandria.

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[155] Xan Fielding, *Hide and Seek*, George Mann, Maidstone, Kent, 1973, pp.43-44.
[156] Diary Pte C.A. Kelly, AWM: PRO2043.
[157] Ibid.

Conclusion

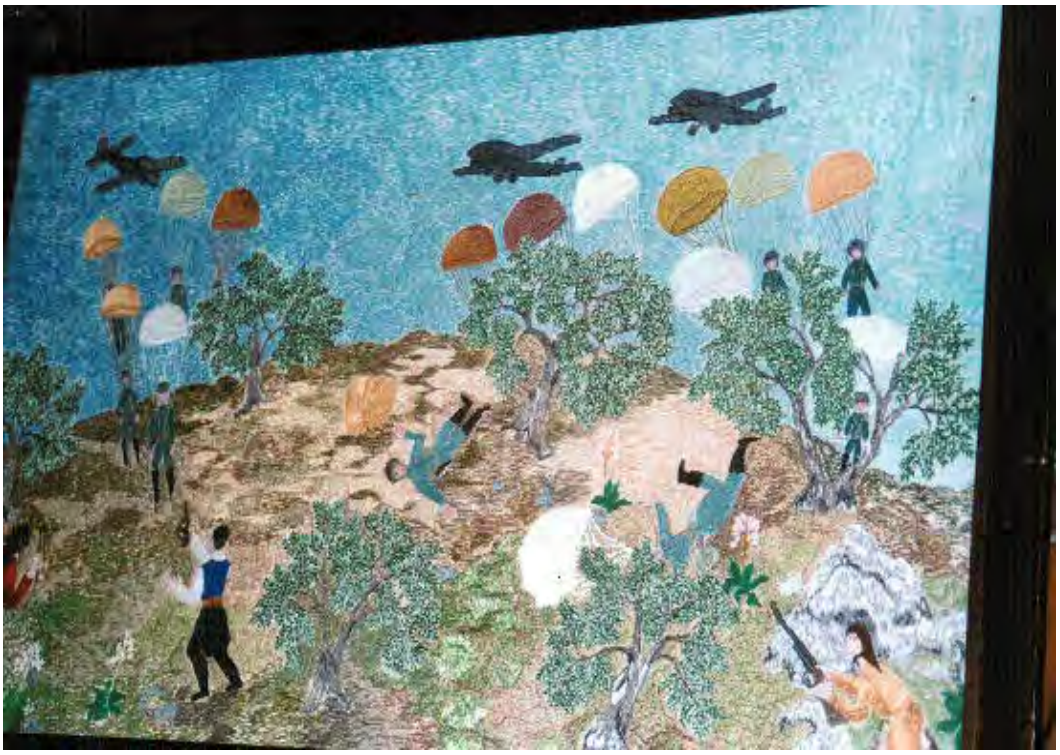
Crete was a totally different experience for the Australian soldiers. Unlike the Greek mainland where they were constantly on the run, here they faced and defeated the enemy at Rethymnon until they were forced to surrender and had the opportunity to interact more closely with the Greek people. Though initially the Australian troops knew nothing of the Cretan character except what they had observed on the Greek mainland, they came to understand the Cretan mentality. Their sojourn in Crete made them aware of the type of people they were dealing with.

Battle of Crete commemorations, Suda Bay Cemetery Crete, 1995 photograph courtesy of George Katelanos, Chania Crete.

The battle of Crete was, and is, an important event in the Cretan calendar. Hal Herriott, who attended for the past thirteen years the commemorations on Crete, explained that 'in Crete they still celebrate the Battle of Crete every May. The War on [mainland] Greece is not even commemorated and we fought all the way to the Albanian border and back again.'[158] Like most other nations Greece has chosen not to celebrate a defeat. Instead the stand against the Italians on the Albanian frontier on the 28 October 1940 is commemorated. It is designated as one of the two most important national days in Greece rather than the country's capitulation to the Germans in April 1941. According to the Greeks there was never a battle with the Germans over Greece, just occupation, whereas it is a matter of national pride that they defeated the Italians. The Cretans on their part feel very proud that they defended their island against such a powerful

[158] Interview: Hatl Herriott, 2/11th Battalion, 15 May 2003.

enemy as the Germans, even though they paid bitterly for their resistance during the occupation of Crete. It is a matter of honour to the people of Crete that they rose 'as one' to defeat yet another invader of their island.[159]



Embroidery circa 1941 depicting Cretan civilians defending their island, photograph courtesy General Archives of Greece, Chania Crete.

The Australians and the Cretans, though culturally different, had many qualities in common. The Australians, like the Cretans, had a tradition of social banditry. In Crete there was a code of conduct amongst thieves that allows for the stealing of sheep for survival not unlike the adventures of Australian bushranger Ned Kelly whom it was claimed robbed from the rich to give to the poor.[160] The Australians admired the Cretan character for its steadfastness and loyalty to friends, bravery in the face of danger and fearlessness in dealing with the enemy. The Cretans on their part developed great respect for the Australian soldiers who exhibited immense cheek/gameness or 'tharros' in the face of danger and 'thrassos' or courage in their encounters with the Germans and who most importantly, respected the values and traditions of their island. When Colleen Donahue inquired if her father, Charles Hunter, had formed any romantic attachments on the island, having been there for nearly twenty three months, she was told by

[159] Ibid.

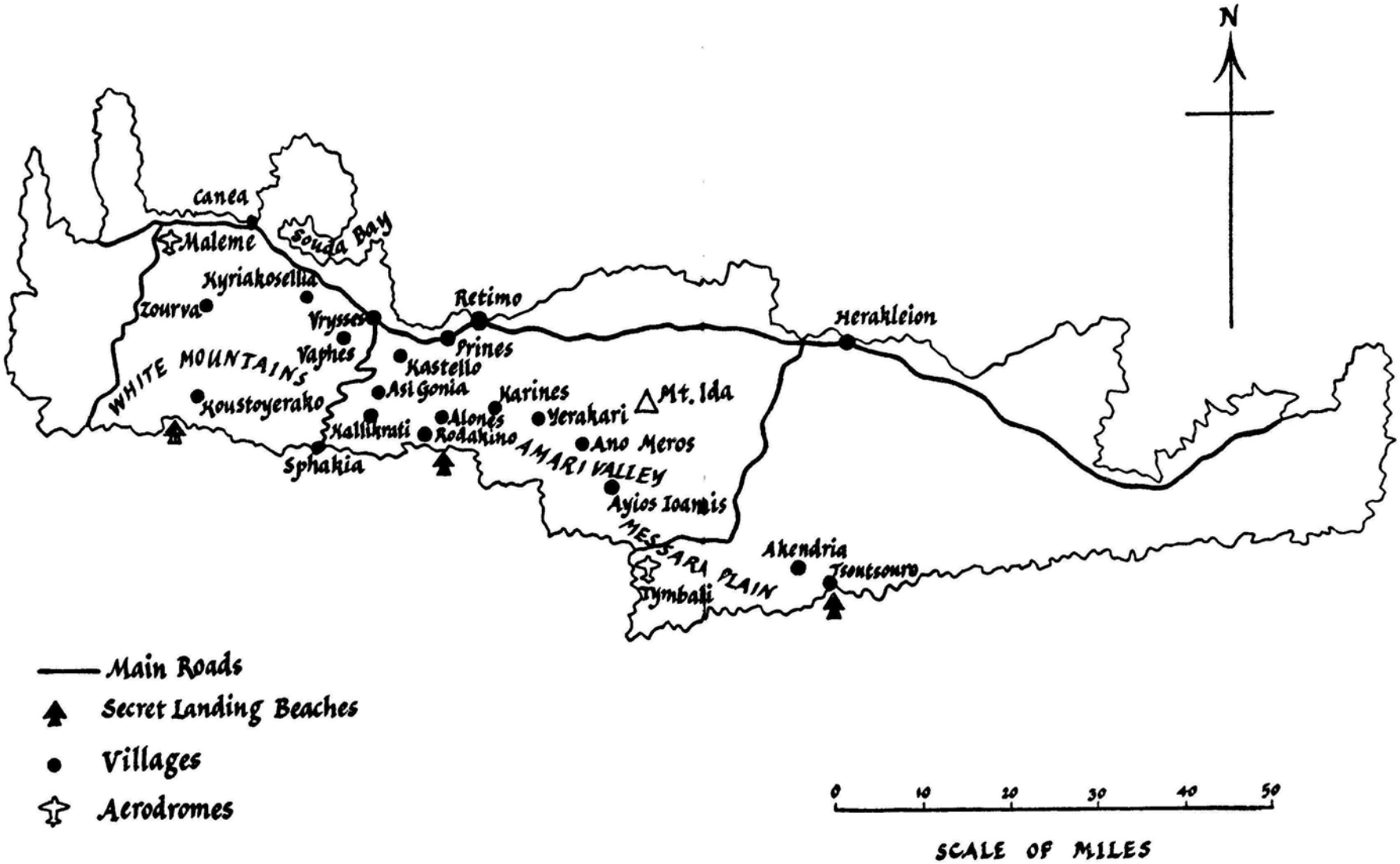
[160] The pamphlet issued to American troops during World War Two explained that, '[i]f an Australian ever says to you that you are "game as Ned Kelly", you should feel honored (sic). It's one of the best things he can say about you. It means that you have the sort of guts he admires, and that there's something about you that reminds him of Ned Kelly.' War Department, *Instructions for American Servicemen in Australia 1942*, p.17; Maria Hill, "Ned Kelly: Man and Myth," MA History paper UNSW, 1985.

Adonios Paterakis, the leader of the resistance at Koustoyerako, that her father had too much respect for the Cretan people to dishonour their customs and traditions, as Cretan women were forbidden to have liaisons with men before marriage.[161]

This is not to suggest that the Australian troops behaved like saints on the island. In fact, many drank to excess, brawled and sometimes engaged in fights, not only between themselves but also with the locals. There was certainly indiscipline amongst the Australian forces on Crete, particularly prior to the German invasion, and it did create problems with the local population. However the Australian officers dealt with these complaints in a way that displayed respect for the people of Crete. When crimes were committed and property damaged by Australian soldiers the Australian commander, Brigadier Vasey, made sure that Field Martial Courts were convened and justice was seen to be done by the local population, as well as paying compensation for damage to local property. The response of the Australians maintained cordial relations and ensured the co-operation of the local population that greatly assisted the survival and eventual escape of the Australian and Allied soldiers from Crete. The respect they exhibited towards the people of Crete and the kindness and generosity bestowed upon the Australians by the Cretans facilitated the development of a close and intimate relationship between the two groups of people that has lasted for over 60 years.

Entrance to Commonwealth War Cemetery Suda Bay Crete, author's photograph.

[161] Interview: Colleen Donahue nee Hunter, 24 July 2005.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SCALE OF MILES

Chapter Six: Greek-Australian relations behind enemy lines

There is limited information available on the experience of Australian soldiers caught behind enemy lines on mainland Greece and Crete.[1] A recent publication by Ian Frazer and Sean Damer has attempted to give an overview of Anzac lives in enemy-occupied Crete. This book has focused on the characteristics needed for survival.[2] Their conclusion is not dissimilar to the one reached by Australia's official World War I historian Charles Bean that the rugged Australian soldier brought up on the land was better able to cope than his British counterpart with the exigencies of war.[3] What their study lacks, however, is an examination of the relationship that developed between the Australian troops and the Greek people and its role in the survival of Australian troops in occupied Greece and Crete. Survival in enemy territory is reliant on many factors including the availability of support networks within the local population. Joop de Jong found in a study of war and trauma that 'social networks' were a significant protective factor for ensuring mental well being in conflict situations.[4]

Although the Army recorded many soldiers' accounts of their escape from either mainland Greece or from Crete these narratives provide little detail of the interaction between Australian troops and their Greek helpers.[5] The soldiers discussed in this chapter were primarily selected because most of the Greek families who assisted them could be located, thus suppling the missing link – the Greek side of the story. Their accounts provide an insight into the Greek response to the Australian presence. A discussion of soldiers' post-war contact with the Greek families who helped them has also been included to illustrate the strength of the relationship that emerged between two quite diverse groups of people. The aim of this chapter is not to document every Australian escape from Greece and Crete nor to list every Greek who assisted them, but to

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[1] A few soldiers have written about their time behind enemy lines: Charles Jager, *Escape from Crete*, Floridale, Smithfield, 2004; Elizabeth Turtin, *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, The Book Depot, Melbourne, 1945, John Ponder, *Patriots and Scoundrels: Behind Enemy Lines in Wartime Greece 1943-44*, Hyland House, South Melbourne, 1997.There are also many unpublished memoirs usually only privy to family members: Frederick Chilton, A Life in the Twentieth Century, unpublished memoir, 1997 or manuscripts that have been written but never published: John Desmond Peck, Captive in Crete, unpublished manuscript, AWM: PRO3098, Wallet 6 Series 2/2.

[2] Sean Damer and Ian Frazer, *On the Run: Anzac Escape and Evasion in Enemy –occupied Crete*, Penguin Books, New Zealand, 2006. Their book was largely inspired by the very detailed diary kept by Ian Frazer's father, Lieutenant Len Frazer during his years on the run in enemy occupied Crete, p.221.

[3] They identify a particular frame of mind needed for survival in wartime Crete. Ian Frazer explained in the book that his father Len, 'did not have the tough country background possessed by most of the men on the run. He was a city boy, a white-collar worker and was physically and psychologically ill-equipped for a life of basic survival in extremely demanding terrain,' ibid p.220.

[4] Joop De Jong, *Trauma, War and Violence: Public Mental Health in Socio-Cultural Context*, Kluwer Academic, New York, 2002, p.7.

[5] This was because they feared exposing the Greeks to danger. Private Walker of the 2/3rd Battalion wrote that: 'Although perhaps it is unwise to mention the Cretans feeding us, it is obvious we could not have existed for one day without their help and to them alone we owe our existence on the island for five months.' Statement by NZ12875 Pte G.H. Walker B Coy 2/3 Battalion, taken prisoner in Crete June 1941who escaped, AWM: 54 534/5/22.

determine the importance of the friendship that emerged between the Australians and the Greeks.[6] The soldiers' involvement in intelligence, resistance or rescue work on Greece and/or Crete is mentioned only in so far as it informs our understanding of Greek-Australian relations at this time.

The Australians entered Greece in 1941 with an arrogance born out of a sense of superiority of culture and race that had not changed significantly since the First World War.[7] Charles Jager, a gunner in 2/2nd Field Regiment, articulated the prevailing sentiments:

> Being Australians in that era we felt very much superior – like in Egypt - that was a kingdom it wasn't a British possession, but we could kick 'gyppos' up the behind. We were very arrogant Australians. . . . We didn't have this respect for [the Greeks] till we were among them – and beggars – and then it woke us up to what fine people they were. We didn't know it before we went among them, or before we were prisoners, or before we became escaped prisoners.[8]

It was during this period, at their most vulnerable and desperate, that the Australian soldiers came to understand the true character of their Greek allies. Their survival rested on the willingness of the Greek people to help them.

The extraordinary circumstances of war resulted in intimate contact being made with the Greek people. A strong bond of friendship was created that traversed decades and continents. Alan Gilbert and Ann-Marie Jordens in their study of the war maintain that 'war brings out the best and worst in human beings by placing individuals and societies under stress. Truth, at one level, may be its first casualty, but at another level warfare confronts people with acute choices about what they believe and where their primary loyalties lie.'[9] According to Tom Dunbabin, an Australian intelligence officer in Crete, war brought out the best in the Greeks. He explained that:

> To live with the Greeks during these years was an unforgettable experience. We saw people stripped of the complexities of everyday life and directed by a few simple ideas [that] commonly remain deep in the background of our lives. If one can generalise about a people, the Greeks are basically people with strong simple ideas, respect for old-fashioned virtues and capable of great loyalty to an individual or an ideal. Those of us who served as liaison officers with the Greek guerrilla forces, or in other capacities in liberated Greece, had the satisfaction of knowing that we had helped with our Greek comrades to draw closer the bonds that have united our two countries since the War of

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[6] Numerous transcripts exists of accounts of wartime escapes from Greece in Crete: Escapes from Greece and Crete: NAA: Series MP729/7, Item 35/421/43; Narratives of officers, N.C.O.s and men who escaped from Greece 1941, AWM: 54 534/6/2; Report on the escape of four Australian soldiers from Greece April/August 1941, AWM: 54 634/5/3; Account of the escape from Greece of a number of men from 17 Australian Infantry Brigade by Captain P. J. Woodhill 1941, AWM: 54 534/6/1.

[7] See Suzanne Brugger, *The Australians in Egypt1914-1919*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1980.

[8] Interview: Charles Jager, 2/2nd Field Regiment,Melbourne, 2 October 2005.

[9] Alan D. Gilbert and Ann-Mari Jordens, "Traditions of dissent," in Mackernan M. & Browne M. (eds.) *Australia Two Centuries of War & Peace*, Australian War Memorial in association with Allen & Unwin, 1988, p.338.

> Independence. But above all, and transcending even the highest military and political interest, we had the privilege of sharing the life of such a people as I described.[10]

Establishing friendships with Greek people was a significant achievement. Lillian Rubin found from her research that 'friendship in our society is strictly a private affair. There are no social rituals, no public ceremonies to honour or celebrate friendships of any kind, from the closest to the most distant – not even a linguistic form that distinguishes the formal, impersonal relationship from the informal and personal one.'[11] This was not the case with the Greeks who were fastidious in their treatment of friends, guests and strangers, with customs governing interaction in most social situations.[12] The Greeks knew what was expected of them and what they could expect in return.

Evasion and Escape

Australia sent 17,125 troops to Greece, 2,030 of whom were taken prisoner, and 814 were either killed or wounded.[13] In total, approximately 10,000 allied troops were taken prisoner in Greece: members of the British Commonwealth, including Palestinians and Cypriots and 1,000 Serbians.[14] Of the forces left behind in 1941 it is estimated that around one thousand allied soldiers escaped into the hills of Greece with Australians constituting several hundred of these troops.[15] A few of the soldiers merged so well into the Greek landscape that they married and remained in the country, never to return to Australia.[16]

The British army categorized the soldiers trapped in occupied countries as either 'evaders' or 'escapers'. The 'evaders' were the soldiers who did not surrender to the Germans but attempted to escape into the surrounding countryside while the 'escapers' were the troops who were captured by the Germans and became prisoners of war or POWs but who managed to

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[10] Tom Dunbabin's Cretan diary [transcribed from photocopy of original manuscript on loan to Hugh Gilchrist by Dilys Powell], Gilchrist Papers, NLA: AC 05/19, hereafter to be referred to as the Dunbabin Diary.

[11] Lillian B. Rubin, *Just Friends: The Role of Friendship in our Lives*, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1985, p.4.

[12] Lieutenant Len Frazer 2/8th Field Company, Royal Australian Engineers, recorded in his diary on Crete that to celebrate the return of a son from the Albanian front the 'lady of the house then brings out ouzou, (sic) white bread and almonds for all men, women and children who partake and drink [to the] health of new arrival. A good custom.' On loan to author courtesy of his son, Dr. Ian Frazer.

[13] 'There were also 1,614 New Zealanders, 6,480 British and 3,806 Palestinian and Cypriot prisoners of war.' Gavin Long, *Greece Crete and Syria*, Collins in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1986, pp.182-183. See Appendix G for Allied strength and casualties in Greece.

[14] Report of Prisoner of War by W.O.II I.A.M. Boulter who escaped from a P.W. Camp in Greece, AWM: 54 781/3/2.

[15] According to the file prepared by L. Parker at Central Army Records Office for use by the official war historian there were 447 Australian prisoner of war escapees from the European Zone. This number included those who escaped from POW camps in Italy. This figure does not include the Australian soldiers who evaded German capture in Greece and/or Crete, AWM: 54 781/6/6 hereafter referred to as the Parker File.

[16] John Laffin, *Middle East Journey*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1958, pp.108-114. There is little documentary evidence on these troops, though sightings by officers working in post-war Greece were made.

escape and, in many cases, make their way back to their units in Alexandria or Palestine.[17] In official documents the men who were left behind enemy lines were generally referred to as 'stragglers.' This was not always an apt description, as it did not differentiate between the soldiers trapped behind enemy lines and those co-opted in the field by British intelligence organizations involved in sabotage and subversion in occupied Greece and Crete. It is difficult to ascertain how many Australians worked for these organizations as the records of soldiers recruited on the ground are not available, either because they were destroyed or never recorded. A British intelligence officer in Greece, Monty Woodhouse, explained that his 'nominal role of officers & other ranks of Force 133 . . . [did] not include escaped prisoners etc, unless they were specifically embodied into SOE.'[18]

There was also a significant number of the men hidden by the Greeks who fought with the Greek resistance or partisan /guerrilla groups, but their army service record for the period only records: 'missing in action.' In many cases this was because the German occupying forces had not recorded their names before they escaped from the prison camp.[19] Bill Rudd, a member of 2/7th Field Regiment, found from his research of Australians caught behind enemy lines that it was not 'easy to separate those who were genuine "freedom fighters" [from] those who thought their best chance of survival was to melt into the countryside in which they found local citizens support and protection.'[20]

The rural poor of Greece assisted the men left behind at great personal risk as the Germans made it a capital punishment to harbour allied soldiers. Undeterred, they escorted the Australian stragglers to a series of 'safe houses' providing them with food and shelter.[21] Some wealthier Greeks offered Australian stragglers money to buy Greek boats or 'caiques' to sail to

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[17] M.R.D. Foot & J.M. Langley, *MI9: The British secret service that fostered escape and evasion 1939-1945 and its American counterpart*, The Bodley Head, London, 1979, p.13.

[18] Letter from C. M. (Monty) Woodhouse, House of Commons London to Hugh Gilchrist, 5 June 1972, Gilchrist Papers, NLA: MS 4931 Box 4 Folder 30. Force 133 was a British clandestine unit assisting Greek partisans to harass the German occupation forces where possible it recruited Australians and other allied soldiers stranded in occupied Greece.

[19] Private Charles Hunter of Headquarters 6th Division was recorded as 'missing in action' in Greece. There is no mention of his military service on Crete or his subsequent internment by the Germans in his army service record. Only his return to his unit is noted. Bill Rudd found that the casualty figures listed by Gavin Long for the Greek and Crete campaigns differed slightly from the POW figures provided in 'Table B of the Parker Report. And both differ slightly from the records maintained by the unit themselves.' He explained that the problem arose because what had not been included in the Australian statistics were the 'men [who] evacuated themselves from Greece or escaped from German prison camps, [e]ither [by] reaching Crete or else finding their way directly into neutral Turkey. . . . When they rejoined their unit in Palestine, CARO simply altered their status from "Missing" to "Rejoined Unit" despite the fact that some had been captured by the Axis enemy, held in a prison camp but had escaped from captivity, before joined Allied Lines.' Rudd, *AIF in Switzerland*, self-published manuscript, 2000, copy lodged at Australian War Memorial.

[20] Fax from Bill Rudd to Hugh Gilchrist, 24 April 2002, Gilchrist Papers, NLA: MS 4/188 1.11.

[21] 'Safe houses' refer to houses of local people - part of an underground network that hid allied soldiers until they were able to escape enemy occupied territory.

Egypt or Turkey. Apart from the use of 'caiques,' some soldiers escaped on barges left behind by the British Navy after the evacuation of Allied troops. The barges were

> re-commissioned by enterprising "left behinds" [evaders and escapers], provisioned but seldom with fuel, and consequently had to sail most of the way back to Allied Lines in North Africa. One took off from Heraklion- the "Fitzhardinghe" Barge, and the other three from Spafkia, the "Day," "Garrett," and "Richards" Barges. No British Intelligence activity aided them. Yet in all they brought well over 300 allied soldiers back safely. . . . The barges were named after their commanders irrespective of unit or rank.'[22]

This period was the 'first stage, that of large-scale escapers arrivals, often unaided by MI9 [and] ended early in 1942.[23]

Those who were not able to make it back on their own were helped to return by secret Allied organizations operating in the Mediterranean such as the Special Operations Executive or SOE Middle East later named 'Force 133,' M.I.9 also known as 'A Force' and the Inter-services Liaison Department or ISLD, the code name for M.I.6. Though only one of these organizations was tasked with the rescue of Allied troops, the rescue of stranded soldiers did constitute a part of their missions in the Aegean. Many returned soldiers were interrogated by M.I.9: a clandestine British organization formed shortly after the fall of France by the British war cabinet to assist with the removal of allied troops from occupied countries and prisoner of war camps.[24]

The secrecy surrounding such organizations meant that the Australians working for them were not allowed to discuss their military service nor was it recorded in their Army Service record.[25] Airey Neave, a British escaper from Colditz and later a director of M.I.9, explained in 1969 that, '[o]fficial reticence may be exasperating to those who assert that the secrets of the last war need no longer be kept. But in 1953, it was obvious that the nature of the system in London by which the escape lines were operated should not be disclosed. . . . [A]ll documents and many particulars of M.I.9, the War Office branch concerned with Allied prisoner-of-war, remain subject to the Official Secrets Act.'[26] In many cases the only evidence of Australian soldiers' activities behind enemy lines was a 'Mention in Dispatches.'[27] A description of the

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[22] Email from Bill Rudd to Maria Hill, 15 November 2005.
[23] Summary of MI9 activities in Eastern Mediterranean 1931-1945, NAB: WO 208/3253, hereafter to be referred to as the M.I.9 Report.
[24] According to the M.I.9 report not all returning soldiers were interrogated as M.I.9 had limited staff available; however they did manage to record approximately 3,000 reports 2,000 of which were retained by 1945.
[25] Both Charles Hunter and John Corbould never discussed their activities behind enemy lines in Crete with their families, even though they had been 'missing in action' for approximately twenty-one months.
[26] Airey Neave, *Saturday at M.I.9*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1969, p.16. [It was not until 2005 that the British government released most of the M.I.9 papers for examination by the general public].
[27] Soldiers were 'Mentioned in Dispatches' for 'Gallant and Distinguished Services.' This included participating in daring escapes from prison camps. They were awarded an oak leaf that was sown onto their campaign medal ribbon.

action that earned them the mention however, was usually not made public, making accurate record keeping very difficult.[28]

By the KING'S Order the name of
Private C. Hunter,
Australian Military Forces,
was published in the London Gazette on
6 April, 1944,
as mentioned in a Despatch for distinguished service.
I am charged to record
His Majesty's high appreciation.

Secretary of State for War

Charles Hunter's 'Mention in a Despatch for distinguished service,' courtesy of his daughter Colleen Donahue.

Debriefing of returned soldiers was done under very tight security for fear of enemy leaks. Corporal Alan Hackshaw of the 2/11th Battalion recalled, upon his return to Alexandria from Crete, that 'we had military police all round us. They would let no one close talk to us. We had already been told that we were to keep our form of rescue and all connected with it a secret, because other attempts were to be made to pick up others. . . . Police were with us in each truck and at the station we had a special carriage at the end of the train with police back and front.'[29] It was important for M.I.9 to secure the information provided, not only to plan for underground escape lines but also to protect the identity of the people who helped the soldiers. In a letter home Bill Horsington of 2/1st Field Ambulance explained to his wife: '[a]s you can understand the method of our escape from the island of Crete must remain secret.'[30] Although considerable literature exists on the Allied Escape routes through North-Western Europe, little has been written about the routes used by Allied soldiers to escape from Greece and Crete either overland

[28] The citation for the award of the D.C.M. to VX.6693 Gunner D. Lang for his escape from Germany held by the War office in London was withheld for 'security reasons,' Parker File.
[29] Private papers of Corporal Alan Hackshaw, AWM: 3DRL/6398.
[30] Letter from William Cornelius Horsington of 2/1st Field Ambulance to his wife Jean, on loan to author courtesy of Mrs Jean Horsington.

through Greece or via the Aegean islands to Turkey.[31] Overall M.I.9 brought back over 4,000 Allied servicemen during World War Two.[32]

AWM: 139174 Sergeant C. Ruddick, an escapee from Crete being officially interviewed by an Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) clerk at Army headquarters.

Escape from Greece

The earliest group of Australian evaders to escape from Greece were members of the 2/2nd Battalion who were cut off at Pinios Gorge during an engagement with the Germans on 18 April 1941, ten days before the Australian forces were evacuated from Greece. The last time anyone had seen the commanding officer of the 2/2nd Battalion, Fred Chilton, he was running up an embankment to avoid a German tank. Chilton, like many members of his battalion, escaped into the nearby hills to evade German capture. Sergeant Smith, Lance Corporal Brown and Corporal Hiddens joined him there. Chilton wrote in his memoirs that it was 'an inglorious end to our battle! However, as we were to learn much later our action at Penios (sic) achieved its critical role of delaying the German thrust on Larisa (sic) long enough to allow the main allied withdrawal. I believe the German account of the action records substantial casualties – greatly exceeding ours.'[33] Chilton 's group made their way to the east coast of Greece hoping to find a boat to 'island hop' from Athens to Crete. They were advised by English speaking Greeks to proceed to the large island of Euboia or [Evia] and were taken across by a Greek fisherman. They could only travel at night due to German Motor Cycle patrols. Local knowledge provided

[31] Neave, *Saturday at M.I.9*; Helen Long, *Safe Houses are Dangerous*, William Kimber, London, 1985.
[32] Apart from the authoritative work by Foot and Langely and individual accounts by participants, there is still much to be written about the work of this organization.
[33] Sir Frederick Oliver Chilton, A Life in the Twentieth Century, unpublished memoirs, 1997,on loan to the author by Sir Frederick Chilton.

them with the information that the islands situated between Athens and Crete were occupied by the Germans, so they chose instead to cross the Aegean Sea to neutral Turkey.

Enlarged map of Evia with a map of Greece displayed in the bottom left hand corner indicating the position of Evia in relation to the mainland. The village of Pili or Pilio is a situated opposite the town of Chalkida on the eastern side of the island facing the Aegean Sea.
Source: http://www.gtp.gr/LocPage.asp?id=4918

They found their way to the small village of Pili or Pilio situated on the east coast of Euboia [Evia]. The village of Pili was located in a heavily wooden area inaccessible by road, thus not easily patrolled by the Germans and making it a suitable evacuation point for Australian soldiers. The long island adjacent to the mainland, one hour's drive from Athens, became a useful rallying point for the resistance movement in Greece with allied soldiers regularly embarking or arriving from Turkey or from Middle East Headquarters in Cairo. Chilton described the people who gave him assistance there as 'two fine Greeks – Moraitis, the manager of a local magnesite mine and John Mourtzakis the foreman. The former was an educated man who spoke French, John was a rugged local who spoke a little English – the mine was owned by British interests. Through their efforts, and courage, we were hidden and cared for, and eventually began our escape to Turkey.'[34]

At Pili Chilton met other members of his battalion: Charlie Green, Adrian Buckley, Bruce Bosgard and Cedric Brock.[35] It was an anxious time for them, hiding in Moraitis' home during the day and in the caves overlooking the village at night. Moraitis and John Mourtzakis assisted them to find a boat. Much pleading was required to procure a boat as most Greeks relied on their boats for their livelihood and were not prepared to risk losing them. Chilton wrote: 'eventually one man, after much haggling, payment of what little money we had between us and

[34] Ibid p.37.
[35] Olwyn Green, *The name's still Charlie*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1993. Gives an account of Charlie Green's escape from Greece.

generous promises of reward from the British Consul when we got to Turkey, agreed to take us all in his small "Varka" [boat]. I had to negotiate in French as Moraitis and his friends spoke no English – a long and involved process!'[36]

AWM: 134872 - Colonel Frederick Chilton in the centre of a group of officers and men of the 2/2nd Battalion, near the village of Pili on the island of Euboia, [Evia] the night before their departure from Greece.

The Greek Underground

During the evacuation of the allied forces on 28 April 1941 from the beach at Kalamatta on the southern most tip of Greece Australian Sergeant John Phillips, along with eight thousand allied soldiers, was captured.[37] He was taken to a German prison camp at Corinth where he was required to maintain British trucks captured by the Germans. On 14 June 1941 after going to the toilet for the fourteenth time to avoid work he heard that they were being shipped off the next day to Germany so he and a mate decided to escape. 'After contacting the Greek Undergound at a taverna, we were hidden in a number of places before being taken to Volos.'[38] The girl sent to guide Phillips to safety married him after the war.

The Greek Underground began operating shortly before the German occupation of Greece. It was concerned predominantly with conducting sabotage operations against the Germans but also participated in the rescue of allied soldiers trapped behind enemy lines. Its members formed escape organizations to help both Greek soldiers and allied troops reach Cairo

[36] Chilton, A Life in the Twentieth Century, p.38.
[37] Around a further two thousand Allied soldiers were captured at Nafplion/Greece in April 1941 during the evacuation. In an interview with the local historical society of Nafplion the author was told no records exist in their archives of such an event.
[38] Delamore McNicoll, " Greek 'Angel' and Aussie she saved win big Contest," *Sunday Telegraph*, July 16, 1978, p.34.

or Smyrna on the Turkish coast to continue the fighting in the Middle East. They provided 'safe houses' in Athens and in other parts of the country where soldiers could hide from German detection. According to a report written by Australian Captain Embrey in 1941, in 'Piraeus and Athens British are living with Greek families and are passing as Greeks.'[39] Private Stapleton of the 2/8th Battalion confirmed that Greeks in Athens had hidden him and seven others until 4 September 1941, when the Germans had surrounded the house and took him into captivity: '[d]uring my stay in Athens the assistance and help I received from the Greek families was exceptionally good, unfortunately I cannot remember any of the names.'[40]

AWM: P03257.006 Greece April/May 1941 group portrait of a Greek family, taken outside their home along the south-east coat of Greece that offered food and shelter to Australian and New Zealand soldiers evading capture in Greece. Identified far right is probably Lieutenant 'Skip' Flavelle, 21 Battalion New Zealand Army.

In Salonika, Madam Maria Lappas and Madam Kouila, the leaders of the Greek Underground, were arrested for aiding Australian soldiers. Tom Fenton, a warrant officer who had been assisted by them explained that:

> Twenty one (21) members of my Bn [battalion] jumped, one Fred Smith hit a kilometre post and was killed, the rest split up into parties of four and went in different directions. Our four: John Dyer, Peter Terey, Reg Stacey and myself, reached a village. . . . An English speaking Greek, Kosta Kouvoukianos, came and took us to another village where he organised civilian clothes – very old – and a horse and wagon which took us to Salonika. After a few days Kosta brought the leaders of an organization, Madam Maria Lappas and a Madam Kouila both of Harilo [Ηαριλαου/Harilaou] who placed us in Greek homes. I went to a Mr and Mrs Dimitrios Savoulidis who lived in Ano Toumba and now

[39] Events during campaign in Greece –Crete: Escape – A report by Captain F. J. Embrey 2/1 Australian Battalion 1941, AWM: 54 534/2/38, hereafter to be referred to as the Embrey Report.
[40] Statement by VX13062 Private J. P. Stapleton, AWM: 54 534/6/3.

> living somewhere in Athens. I stayed with them on and off for over 12 months. At one time the organization arranged for a small ship to take us to Turkey.[41]

Unfortunately a German patrol boat intercepted the boat taking them to Turkey and seized members of the Greek crew who were attempting to row away in a dinghy. From the information obtained, the Germans were able to jail the Greeks who had helped them.[42]

There were at least four Greek escape organizations operating from Athens: Captain Alexander Nelas' organization, Mr Trepanis' organization, Captain Levides' organization and the "HOMER" organization. There were three prominent Greek helpers: Alexander Pallis - an Athenian Banker, G. Monoliden - a Greek businessman and Mr Zarmas - head of the Greek Red Cross; who did not directly control escape organizations but greatly assisted them.[43] However M.I.9 had not been able to establish contact with these organizations until November 1941 when Lieutenant Macaskie left for Athens to open up an escape route from Athens to Smyrna.[44] 'He contacted all the bands of the voluntary escape organizations in Athens and laid a good foundation for future escape routes and in particular put the voluntary organizations in the picture as to what was being done both from Cairo and Smyrna.'[45]

John Phillips was fortunate enough to have been offered their assistance to escape from Corinth. His hair was dyed and he was dressed in peasant clothes before being escorted north to Volos, situated on the eastern coast of Greece. At Volos he was offered the protection of the Konidous family who had, as he recalled later,

> helped over 100 Allies escape and sheltered them despite much mental anguish and many agonising searches of their havens of refuge by the Germans. The daughter Rouli (Helen), then 16 was known as "The Angel of Volos" for her heroic and courageous exploits in leading escapees to safety, a jump ahead of the nazis. The father was taken by the Germans as a reprisal for his known resistance and never seen again. The mother died with grief at the loss of her husband. "The Angel of Volos" and I have been married for 26 years and Greece holds a great depth of memory for both of us.[46]

John Phillips's wife, Rouli, displayed incredible daring in her encounters with German patrols. Fearless in her approach, Rouli Konidou directed John Phillips and his mate to

> "sing . . . sing Greek songs." . . . The Australian dredged some ancient chants he had learned at school - and he sang. Rouli Konidou bellowed at the Germans at the top of her voice arrogantly waved aside their question and the three, with their arms linked, staggered through the line of soldiers. It was a magnificent bluff, straight from the mind

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[41] Letter from Tom Fenton 21st Battalion to Hugh Gilchrist 22 April 1970, Gilchrist Papers, NLA: MS 4931 Folder 27.
[42] In an effort to publicly acknowledge the assistance he was given by the Greek Underground in Salonika, John Dyer resolved in 1970 to bring Kosta Kouvoukianos to Australia for Anzac Day.
[43] M.I.9 Report.
[44] Lieutenant Macaskie worked for M.I.9 – attached to "A" Force. After assisting with escape operations in Smyrna he came up with several plans for returning to Athens finally leaving Piraeus for Smyrna in January 1942 with on a caique full of escapers and evaders he had collected. M.I.9 Report.
[45] M.I.9 Report.
[46] McNicoll, " Greek 'Angel' and Aussie she saved win big Contest," *Sydney Morning Herald*, p.33.

> of a child but it worked. John Phillips, 68 said, "It was the bravest thing I have ever seen. She had absolutely no fear she was a totally brash, brazen-faced hussy." [47]

Phillips made many attempts to escape Greece including stealing a plane and hiding inside an ore carrier. He found the Greek police very helpful with police captain Basil Bardis offering to obtain petrol for him if he could find a boat. A philanthropic offer of money by a wealthy Greek cigarette manufacturer, Tassos Papastratos, enabled Phillips to buy a small boat. He, along with four other allied soldiers sailed from Greece on 1 September 1941 with Greeks hidden in the hold. Two weeks later with no food and water, three hundred miles north of Alexandria his boat encountered a British destroyer.

Australian soldiers in the Greek Resistance

Some of the Australians left behind fought with the Greek guerrillas until they were able to find a means of escape. Others, due to their strong allegiance to the Greek people, chose to remain behind and fight in the Greek resistance. One such Australian soldier, who chose to remain and fight with the Greeks, was Sergeant Richard Turner who was eventually co-opted into Force 133 in Greece.[48]

Richard Turner, a cab driver from the Sydney suburb of Newtown, was 23 years old when he joined the army, serving in 6 Division Supply Column Australian Army Service Corps during the campaign in Greece. He was marooned at Corinth after the evacuation of the allied troops from Greece and was captured at Megara a few months later, in June 1941, and sent to a prison camp. Put on a northbound train to Germany, he and another soldier managed to escape, finding their way to a Greek village occupied by the Germans. Ignoring the risks involved, the villagers provided the men with food, shelter and civilian clothing. Turner and his mate were forced to leave when the Italian occupying forces arrived and 'made a determined effort to round up Allied soldiers, of which hundreds were still at large. Large rewards were offered for information leading to the capture of escapees, and anyone caught sheltering one was shot.'[49] Roaming the hills of Thessaly, he was on the run for most of the following winter living mainly in caves and tree hollows for six weeks. Suffering from malnutrition he contemplated giving himself up, his companion having been captured, until he met a Greek named Ioannis Kallinikas. President of the village of Livanades above Atlandi on the Euboean Gulf, Kallinikas cared for and sheltered Turner for a year and a half. According to M.I.9 'considerable numbers of troops were forced into towns during the winter of 1941-1942, as a result of the lack of food, shelter and clothing and were subsequently captured.'[50]

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[47] Ibid p.33.
[48] According to W.J.M. Mackenzie in *The Secret History of SOE: The Special Operations Executive 1940-1945*, St Ermin's Press, London, 2000, 'Force 133' was a clandestine unit tasked with sabotage and subversion as well as supplying arms and funding to the Greek resistance, p.473.
[49] Papers of Major F. Debenham, AWM: 3DRL/6178 [part 1& 2]
[50] M.I.9 Report.

In 1943 Richard Turner joined the Greek resistance fighters or 'Andartes' of ELAS and became the leader of a band of fifty 'andartes.' It was at this time he met Major Dickinson, the first British officer of 'Force 133'in the Lokris region. Major Dickinson informed Middle East Headquarters that Turner was alive, and Turner joined Dickinson's unit. Known as 'Colonel Dick' to thousands of Greeks and 'that Damned Australian' to the Germans, Turner conducted a series of dangerous reconnaissance missions in civilian clothes through German controlled areas.[51] George Gravas who was with Major Dickinson's party remembered his first meeting with Turner:

> a tall slim fellow appeared to our place (sic) trying to make himself understood in very confused English and in very broken Greek he had learned. The fact that Turner did not speak any English for over two years made him confused in his own language with the few Greek [words] he [had] managed to learn during this time. This, of course, did not last long. In two days he was already conversing in fluent English. Dick joined our party and acted as a kind of staff sergeant. He was always happy and cheerful and when he was advised that he was entitled to return home for some time he refused to leave before seeing Greece liberated. At all times we had to move from village to village for safety reasons, Dick was always the last to leave after having collected all our supplies and loaded them on the mules back.[52]

Upon being asked by Major Dillon, who had replaced Dickson, if he wished to leave Greece Turner replied: 'I shall stay on as long as I can be useful to the Greeks; they need all their friends. I like the Greeks; I have eaten frogs and tortoises with them, and starved with them; and I can tell you that you don't know the Greeks if you judge them by their leaders.'[53] His response reflected the deep attachment Dick Turner felt for his Greek compatriots. His involvement with the guerrilla movement was motivated by a genuine concern for the Greek people who had helped him. Unfortunately Richard Turner never returned home, having been killed in 1944 on his way back to the airport by a sniper during the civil war that was unfolding in Athens. His loyalty to the Greeks cost him his life.

Herbert 'Slim' Wrigley was another Australian who volunteered to fight with the Greek guerrillas in central Greece and like Turner was recruited into Force 133. Bert Wrigley had served at Headquarters 1st Australian Corps A.I.F. and was later transferred into the 2/11th Battalion during his time in Greece. He was recorded as 'missing in action' on 9 June 1941.Wrigley, having injured his foot when his truck overturned near Mount Olympus, never managed to leave Greece. He was convalescing in a hospital in Athens when the order to withdraw was given. He managed to board the little hospital ship HMS *Hellas* in Piraeus (donated for the duration of the war by a wealthy American). However the Germans bombed the

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[51] *The Daily Mirror*, "Death of a Hero," Wednesday December 1944; Award of Military Citation, AWM54: 781/6/6.
[52] Letter from George C. GRAVAS, Athens to Hugh Gilchrist, 27 January 1973, Gilchrist Papers NLA: MS 2931 Box 4 Folder 3.
[53] Papers of Major F. Debenham, AWM: 3DRL/6178 [part 1& 2].

ship while in port leaving 'only 205 souls alive from a complement of 1400.'[54] He was fortunate to have survived the bombing even though it resulted in his capture. In September 1941 he managed to escaped from Dulag 183, a prison farm near Salonika by 'walking away from a working party across a ploughed field to freedom,' making his way west to the coastal town of Katerini.[55]

Wrigley hid in the home of a wealthy family of Greek Lutheran bakers in Katerini who had been to America and knew a little English. It was at their house he was told of the existence of another Australian soldier, Bruce Vary, who had also taken refuge in Katerini. Bruce Vary was a member of the Australian Army Service Corps who, out numbered and out gunned, were forced to surrender to the Germans at Megara when the evacuation ship had not arrived. He eventually escaped with others through a ventilation hatch on the roof of a carriage taking him north to Germany. After suffering much hardship he found his way, with the help of a Greek shepherd, to Katerini.[56] Vary, however, was very wary about meeting Wrigley, fearing that it was a trap by the 'Gestapedes' or German sympathizers as they were called by the Greeks to root out the Allied soldiers hiding in the town.

He described his first meeting with Slim to Elizabeth Turtin: 'when I saw him I couldn't help smiling to myself. Over six feet, and incredibly thin, with a typically Australian face and shock of fair hair, he must have had considerable difficulty in concealing his person. Not even drunk could anyone imagine he bore the remotest relation to a Greek, or indeed any continental race. From that time we became cobbers.'[57] According to Xanthoula Papadopoulos, who was 15 years old at the time, every time Vary and Wrigley walked down the main street of Katerini 'Bruce would say as a joke "it was like walking around with the Union Jack – holding the British Flag up!" '[58] Bruce was short and darker skinned and could be mistaken for a Greek but Slim Wrigley was very tall and looked out of place in the Greek town.

Bruce Vary had every reason to be concerned about Wrigley's conspicuous appearance in Katerini because the town was 'lousy with Germans. They were suspicious of the village, and they had good cause to be . . . In peacetime the village carried a population of roughly twenty-five thousand, by Christmas 1942 it had increased to forty thousand.'[59] Apart from being a haven for British evaders and escapers the town had many refugees mainly from Turkey. The British had identified Katerini alongside Mount Taygetus and Mount Olympus as areas

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[54] Eye-witness account by Ron Hartman of Brigade HQ 1 Aust Corps, The Bombing of the Hospital Ship *HELLAS* in Athens, 1941, on loan to author courtesy of Ron Hartman.
[55] Hugh Gilchrist, *Australians and Greeks, Vol. III: The Later Years*, Halstead Press, Sydney, 2004, p.67.
[56] For details of what Vary had to endure see Turton, E., *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, The Book Depot, Melbourne, 1945.
[57] Ibid p.64.
[58] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley, wife of Herbert Wrigley, 3 October 2005.
[59] Turton, *I Lived with the Greek Guerrillas*, p.58.

harbouring large numbers of escapers and evaders and on the 3 November 1941 air dropped, '1,500 rations, clothes and boots.'[60]

Corporal Bruce Vary and Sergeant Herbert 'Slim' Wrigley
Village of Veneton, Mount Pelion, 23 December 1943
Photograph courtesy of Xanthoula Wrigley.

Regardless of the possible risk involved, Vary was thrilled to find another person with whom he could at last 'speak his lingo.' Having spent four lonely and boring months living in a room at the back of a butcher shop he had not learnt to speak Greek as quickly and as fluently as had Wrigley. Fearing detection, he never left his room except at night for short walks. It was through Wrigley that Vary eventually joined Force 133 in Greece, after spending time fighting with the guerrillas in Greece beside him.

After four months in Katerini Wrigley and Vary found themselves the object of a German drive to locate the British stragglers hidden in the town. Vary explained to Elizabeth Turtin in 1945 how they evaded German capture: 'the thirteen of us had to keep on the move from house to house.[61] Friendly and trusted Greeks acted as scouts, would tell us which houses the Germans had searched, and warn us when they were coming to the house into which we had moved. In this way we moved in and out of houses all over Katerine (sic), but always our original families were responsible for our food, never failing to get it to us.'[62]

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[60] M.I.9 Report.
[61] The thirteen soldiers in hiding consisted of: four Australians, six New Zealanders, one Englishman and two Arabs [Palestinians].
[62] Turton, *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, p.65.

After seven months in Katerini both men moved on, feeling that their respective Greek families had been exposed long enough to considerable danger. Wrigley found himself being taken by a shepherd to the home of Ioannis Papadopoulos, a schoolteacher at the village of Ritini, twenty-five kilometres outside Katerini. Wrigley frequently returned to this family for food and shelter, perhaps staying for a night, never too long for fear of placing them in danger. During one of his visits however, he was forced to remain longer because his feet were in such bad condition. Xanthoula Papadopoulos who married Wrigley after the war, vividly remembered the night:

> one night, my husband came, Slim, and he didn't have shoes – they were entirely ruined. His feet were full of blisters. His feet were frozen terribly. I remember he stayed a few days then. I was in the village because it was holidays. And my mother sent my youngest sister [Valentini] to go and find 'Pagos' cactus, as it was believed if you peel the skin [off the cactus it] healed the blisters they say. . . . My grandfather gave him his best Sunday boots- that he wore to church because the poor thing didn't have any.[63]

A deep regard had developed between the Papadopoulos family and Herbert Wrigley, whom they looked after as though he were their own son. Xanthoula Wrigley's mother, Glykeria used to say: 'if it was my son in a strange country, . . . I'd like to think there would be someone to help him there.'[64]

The Greek family in Ritini helped many Allied servicemen during the occupation of Greece. Ioannis Papadopoulos was a remarkable man who not only supported the allied soldiers but provided for his wife, his father-in-law and four children of his own: three girls and a boy. It must have been very difficult to feed so many people with the scarcity of food at this time. Because of hunger, his eldest daughter Eleni had to discontinue her university studies in Salonika and return to the village. She would often give her food rations to people she saw dying of hunger in the street. Bruce Vary witnessed the wretchedness that had befallen the Greeks describing 'the winter of 1942 [as] a shocking one for all concerned. In Katerine (sic) itself hundreds died of starvation. In Athens people collapsed in the street, swelled and went black all over their bodies. German trucks went round several times a day collecting the dead.'[65] The Allied blockade of Greece as well as the action of the German army precipitated a severe famine in the country. Boulter, a member of Corps Cipher Section, reported that 'the Germans have taken 60% of the wheat crop. Where [troops] are stationed they take all available eggs and supplies of meat. The whole of the petrol and leather in the country has been taken to Germany. In Athens all the gold rings, except wedding rings, have been taken from the women. A number of church bells have also been sent to Germany.'[66]

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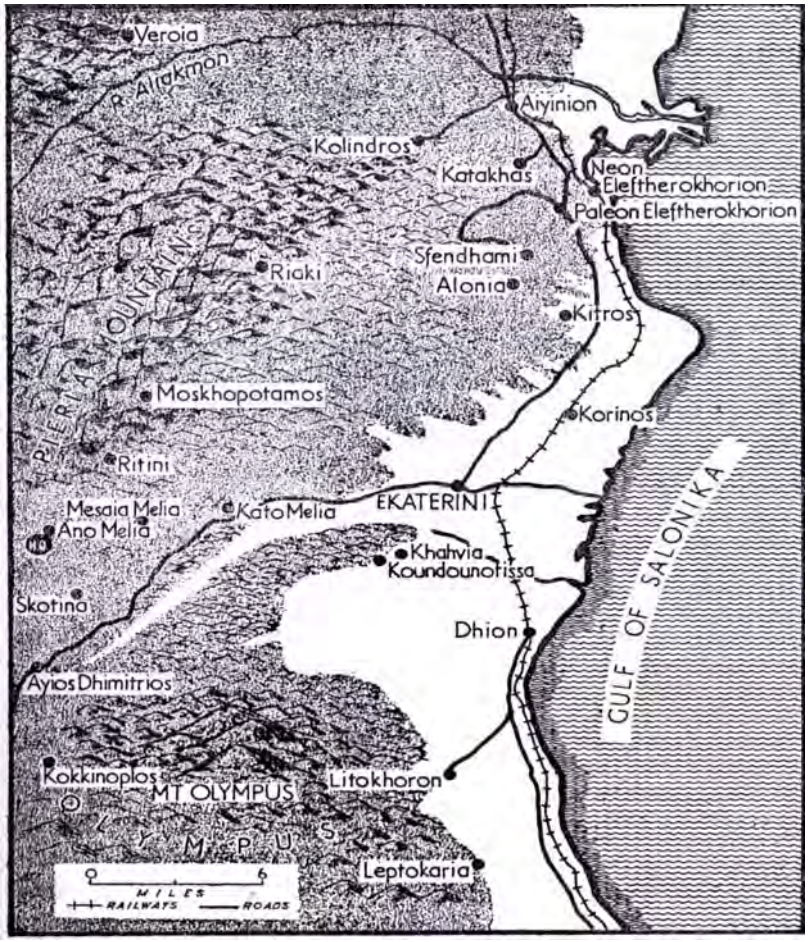
[63] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley, 3 October 2005.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Turton, *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, p.73.
[66] Report of Prisoner of War by W.O II T.A. M. Boulter who escaped from a P.O.W. Camp in Greece, AWM54 781/3/2.



Map of Katerini prefecture with the village of Ritini shown
Chris Jecchinis, *Beyond Olympus*, George G. Harrap & Co, London, 1960, p.69.

Papadopoulos was a very brave man and a strong upholder of democracy. His daughter Xanthoula, a teenager at this time, recalled that her father 'did not stop speaking freely. During the 25 March National Day celebrations at the church he spoke to the villagers to give them hope. He told them that: "the Germans are now here but Greece will be liberated. Don't lose your courage." '[67] His outspokenness, particularly his support of the allied soldiers, cost him his life. On a visit to the dentist in Katerini he was betrayed, imprisoned and later executed by the Germans.

Two more Australians were to be brought to the home of Ioannis Papadopoulos. They were Staff Sergeant Bill Gamble and Ted Bryant who were serving in the 2/5th Australian General Hospital and who had escaped from a German prison camp in Salonika. Bill Gamble explained that there 'was no escape committee, we were too small a unit. I was the acting RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] and there were three doctors, so we got permission from them to

[67] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley nee Papadopoulos, 3 October 2005.

attempt escape.'[68] Allied prisoners of war were encouraged by M.I.9 to form an escape committee once taken into captivity, with the senior officer in charge providing money, food if possible and an escape map, either drawn up by one of the men or obtained by other means.[69]

Xanthoula Wrigley remembered the two men who slept in her father's house for a night, believing them to be two Australian doctors.[70] A shepherd had brought them to the mountains where 'Slim' Wrigley met them.[71] With the Australians hiding in the mountains was a German deserter. Wrigley explained: 'I shot a German deserter. . . . he wasn't a bad sort of chap but he was an army deserter. When I got to Pteri and he was with them and I wasn't happy with this - because if he had been captured he would have given over all our details and the two doctors were supposed to bury him but all they did was cover him over with leaves.'[72] Later Wrigley found he was a wanted man, on the run from the Germans:

> the next thing I knew- everywhere I went the village people told me I had to go I couldn't stay because the Germans had been looking for me. They were asking for the tall Australian, 'Slim,' where is he? We're going to hang him when we find him. It rather seems to me that these two doctors didn't take the German's identity discs from the body. The people in Mourna knew all about it because the doctor from Mourna, I found out later, went and found the body. The Germans were notified and they found out what happened and who shot him and everything. So that's why they were looking for me.[73]

The two Australian were eventually captured in Katerini, having fallen for a trap set by the Germans with the help of Greek collaborators. The version of events relating to their capture given by Patsy Adam-Smith differs from the one told by Bruce Vary and Xanthoula and Herbert Wrigley who were present at the time.[74] According to Xanthoula Wrigley a message had reached the soldiers that Red Cross parcels had arrived for them in Katerini and they were to collect them from a 'safe' house in the town. Slim Wrigley and Bruce Vary had not gone to this meeting but the others had and were subsequently captured by the Germans.[75] Vary was very upset by the treachery, 'feeling pretty sick. All those months of starvation faced, difficulties surmounted, and then that rotten trick.'[76] Wrigley was also deeply affected by the men's capture. Feeling dispirited, he considered giving himself up to the Germans. Xanthoula Wrigley nee Papadopoulos was present the night Wrigley returned to her parents' home after hearing the bad news:

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[68] Patsy Adam-Smith, *Prisoners of War from Gallipoli to Korea*, Ken Fin Books, Collingwood Victoria, 1998, p.160.
[69] M.R.D. Foot & J. M. Langley, *MI9*, p.23. & p.30.
[70] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley, 3 October 2005.
[71] Adam-Smith, Prisoners of War from Gallipoli to Korea, p.160.
[72] Interview: Herbert 'Slim' Wrigley, conducted by his sister-in-law Valentini Papadopulos in 1994.
[73] Ibid
[74] Adam-Smith, *Prisoners of War from Gallipoli to Korea*, p.160-161.
[74] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley, 3 October 2005.
[75] Turton, *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, p.70.
[76] Ibid p.70.

> He was very upset and the next day he was getting ready to give himself up. The partisans hadn't been formed as yet – it was still 1941. . . . he didn't know what to do. My father wasn't there unfortunately. He took up his sack ready to leave. I remember my mother and grandfather holding him against his will. She told him, "No Slim you are not going anywhere. Yiannis [John] will be here tonight and he will know what to do." . . . Of course I was a 15 years old girl but I remember this tall boy, lost, not knowing what to do. My father came that night and the next day he took him to a monastery outside the village where there was one monk, very old, probably no longer exists. He stayed there a few weeks.[77]

Wrigley could not stay long at the monastery as the monk had no income and was fast running out food, relying heavily on food supplies from the local people. The Greek family was so concerned for Slim Wrigley's welfare that they sent their youngest son Stephanos, who was thirteen years old at the time, to keep him company. Towards the end of 1942 Wrigley had 'gone up to Pouliana and joined up with this (sic) Guerrilla band: 'Omada O Yanis Orlandos (sic).'[78] They were part of the resistance movement that had formed on mainland Greece called ELAS. According to Wrigley he 'just wanted to go - I asked to go.' [79] Xanthoula Wrigley explained that joining the partisans seemed to be his best chance of survival. It was 'a lifeline for [Slim] he couldn't rely on the Greek people forever. Anyway they felt they had to fight and there was an opportunity to fight the enemy . . . they didn't know how they were going to get out of Greece.'[80]

To Bruce Vary fighting with the partisans seemed to be a case of ' joining a political fight for the purpose of keeping one's stomach full.'[81] He was not convinced that fighting with the Greeks would get them out of the country. He attributed Wrigley's enthusiasm for joining the partisans to youth and a desire for action. Vary on the other hand felt out of place with the guerrillas, finding their treatment of suspected traitors in particular difficult to fathom.[82] He explained that he had

> lived as I had never lived before – among a mixture of men it might be impossible to collect together under one flag anywhere else on earth. There were men of all races including Vlaki [Vlachs], who themselves knew nothing of their own origin or country which they could call their own. The ones who had inter-married with Rumanians were treacherous and dangerous. There were men who had been just plain starving, and had joined the guerrillas for the sole purpose of eating; men who had an insatiable love of adventure, men who had barbaric natures and by joining the guerrillas had a chance of exploiting those natures; men who genuinely wanted to clear the Germans out of the country and who were loyal and trustworthy; men who could not face life in the ordinary sense; men who were wanted by the law.[83]

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[77] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley, 3 October 2005.
[78] Interview: Herbert 'Slim' Wrigley, 1994.
[79] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley., 3 October 2005.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Turton, *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, p.78.
[82] According to Vary one technique to make traitors talk was to place a stick of dynamite between their legs and light the fuse.
[83] Turton, *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, p.83.

Like the Australian soldiers who had joined them, the guerrilla bands were made up of a cross-section of society, not all whom were motivated by lofty idealism. Greece had a long history of Brigandism, particularly during the Greek War of Independence fought in 1821 against the Turks.[84]

The guerrilla strong hold was at Pouliana or Kryovrisi. It was a small settlement on the mountainside of Olympus at an altitude of 1050 metres - located twenty-seven kilometres from Larissa. 'There was only a track up to it used by goats, sheep and mules, and now by men. A track that led in and out of rocks and scrubs; no trees grew in that wild, ravine country. No wagons could get up to the plateau, which had just the little village with its stone houses. All supplies were brought up by pack mules, and at the base of the track that led upwards to this eyrie, guarding and watchful, the guerrillas were camped.'[85] Wrigley and Vary assisted the guerrillas in a number of engagements against the Germans and on some occasions against the Italians as well.[86] However the life they led with the partisans, constantly moving, on the run, only staying a night, wore Vary down while Slim was 'perfectly happy sharing the wild, untrammelled life of the guerrillas.'[87]

Pouliana or Kryovrisi sited in Community Karyas:
http://www.koinotita-karias.gr/community.asp?id=82&lg=EN

It was at Pouliana that the British Colonel made his headquarters, supplying and directing the guerrilla movement. Wrigley recalled that he met in Pouliana 'the British colonel whose code name was "Hill." His real name was Sheppard, Rupert [Rufus] Sheppard. Anyway he tried

[84] John Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a Cause: Brigandage and Irredentism in Modern Greece, 1821-1912*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987.
[85] Turton, *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, p.81.
[86] One village Charitoni, situated in a rich grape-growing area south of Olympus under Italian control, requested the guerrillas assistance 'as the Italians were bleeding them of both the grapes and the wheat,' ibid p.92.
[87] Ibid p.97.

to get our people notified in Cairo – as to who we were – that we were still alive.'[88] Eventually Colonel Sheppard deployed the two Australian escapers in Force 133. Initially they were required to assist the radio operator deciphering code messages. Wrigley recalled that he 'wasn't over happy about it because I didn't like being closed in. I had to learn the codes for the radio to assist the radio operator where required. In other words I was just helpful with my knowledge of the language.'[89]

The two men were placed into separate groups. Wrigley was assigned to Paul Harker, a British officer to conduct sabotage operations, while Vary was sent with Major H. R. Lake to decipher code messages from Cairo. Wrigley spent two weeks with Harker blowing up bridges before being sent to Kalambaka to collect intelligence on German movements and radio the information back to Cairo. The whole of Greece had been divided into a grid by British intelligence with each area under the command of an officer. It was during this operation that Wrigley became very ill and experienced traditional Greek medical practices at the hands of a Greek guerrilla doctor: 'I got pneumonia. I didn't know at the time till I finally collapsed. The guerrilla group had a Greek doctor who checked me and said I had been sick for some days: "ene meres arostos." And he cut me back with a razor blade and put the cups on me [vendouzes]. I survived that.'[90]

Wrigley never fully recovered from his bout of pneumonia and needed further treatment, while Vary became very ill, losing control of his feet. Harker insisted it was time for Wrigley to be sent home. He had been working for British intelligence behind enemy lines in Greece for a year and had spent the previous year with the guerrillas. The toll was starting to show on both men. It was Christmas 1943 when Herbert Wrigley met

> Chris and Eddie. Eddie was the Brigadier in charge of the British mission in Greece. [Myers] [and] Chris Woodhouse.[91] . . . Well Paul Harker thought that it was better that I leave Greece. Chris wasn't too happy about this and he came to see me [and] said: "It's up to you. What do you want to do? Will you go or stay?" I thought I had enough of Greece at that time and I said: "I'd go because I couldn't get proper treatment."[92]

Wrigley and Vary were escorted by the guerrillas to Volos and moved to Mount Pelion to await the arrival of transport to take them out of Greece. Wrigley explained that 'when we got to Pelion we were joined there by a group of American pilots - these were Mitchell bombers who

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[88] Interview: Herbert Wrigley, 1994.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid. 'Vendouzes', or 'Cupping' was practiced throughout Greece and required the heating of cups to act as vacuums upon the skin, forcing the blood to the surface and thereby reducing any fever, sometimes the patient was bleed to hasten the process.
[91] Colonel Edward Myers, a regular engineer with SOE was air dropped into Greece on 1 October 1942 with seven other companions. He was to lead a team to demolish the single rail line that ran through central Greece to the southern ports of Peloponnese in order to disrupt the supply of Rommel's army in the Western Dessert. Assisting Myers was Chris Woodhouse, a classics scholar fluent in Greek, already in Greece.
[92] Interview: Herbert Wrigley, 1994.

went over to bomb Polesti – that's a big oil field in Rumania. These fellers had crashed in Greece on the way back. Their plane had been hit. There were about six of them. There was a group of us that went over to Turkey.'[93]

Hebert Wrigley, Bruce Vary and American Pilots at Mount Pelion 1943
Photograph courtesy of Xanthoula Wrigley.

There were many other Australian soldiers who fought with the Greek resistance and who eventually found themselves working for British intelligence behind enemy lines in Greece, but unfortunately the details of their activities have not survived.[94] According to the archives of the Foreign and Commonwealth office in London 'an extensive search for details of Sergeant Wrigley has proved fruitless. Unfortunately Lt. Colonel Sheppard cannot be consulted as he was blown up by a mine in Athens on 30 December during the 1944 civil war.'[95] Though the list of Australian soldiers who worked for British intelligence in occupied Europe is not complete, battalion histories have provided the names of some of the soldiers involved.[96] Hugh

[93] Ibid.
[94] Captain Irving McKerrow of 2/1st Machine Gun Battalion, Sergeant Bill Legerwood of 2/7th Battalion and Lance Corporal Ron Nethercote 2/3rd Battalion.
[95] Letter from Colonel Boxshall Foreign and Commonwealth Office London to Hugh Gilchrist Ambassador to Greece, 3 June 1971, Gilchrist Papers, NLA: MS 4931 Box 4 Folder 29.
[96] According to 2/7th Battalion history, Sergeant Bill Ledgerwood stayed behind enemy lines in Crete and worked with British intelligence but no records can be found of his service with that organization. Lance Corporal Ron Nethercote also was recorded in 2/3rd Battalion history as having worked behind enemy lines in Greece or Crete but there are no details available about his activities.

Gilchrist, in his third volume on Australians and Greeks, also provides information on Australian soldiers who worked as British agents in occupied Greece.[97]

Bill Rudd, an ex-POW, was able to locate information on some of the Australian soldiers who joined Partisan movements in Europe. One of these soldiers was Sergeant John Sachs of the 2/1st Field Regiment, who was last seen as a bloodied lifeless body at the back of a German truck after an encounter with the Germans during the evacuation of Greece.[98] According to Lynette Ramsey Silver, who knew the Sachs family well, noted that 'his skill with firearms had been put to good use in April 1941 during the last desperate hours in the fighting in the debacle known as the Greek Campaign [at Kalamatta] when he single-handedly wiped out a machine gun nest, captured and rendered a large gun useless, rounded up a score of prisoners and accounted for deaths of an untold number of the enemy. Shot three times and knowing, with huge enemy re-enforcements due, that surrender was inevitable, Sachs had then allowed himself the luxury of lying down in the back of a truck and passing out.'[99] After his wounds healed Sachs escaped from the Germans. Dressed as a Cypriot peasant, he spent five months working with the Greek Resistance before finally escaping back to Cairo in a Greek fishing boat with other allied prisoners of war.[100] Australian soldiers who could not speak Greek could be passed off to the Germans as members of one of the many racial/ethnic groups in Greece that spoke their own dialect. Bruce Vary had noted that: 'Greece . . . is in many ways a land of refugees. I was to come across villages founded by Turks, Russians, Vlaki [Vlachs], Armenians, and in those villages no tongue other than the national one was spoken, hardly a word of Greek was known.'[101]

Australians working for M.I.9

Apart from the Australians who fought with the guerrillas on mainland Greece there were soldiers, who, having escaped, used their experience to help evacuate other soldiers from occupied countries. They were co-opted into M.I.9 as a result of their 'outstanding escapes', using their local knowledge and language skills they had acquired whilst on the run. Although mentioned in M.I.9 records, their involvement was considered 'unofficial.' According to M.I.9 records the 'difficulty lay in regularising the posting of these volunteers and obtaining their attachment in some official basis to "A" Force.'[102] While the 'co-operation of the New Zealand and Australian Army Authorities was outstanding. [Allowing the British army] to have the

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[97] Gilchrist, *Australians and Greeks Volume III*, pp.68-92.
[98] Fax from Bill Rudd to Hugh Gilchrist 12 February 2003, Gilchrist Papers, NLA: MS 4931 1/12/04.
[99] Lynette Ramsey Silver, T*he Heroes of Rimau*: *Unravelling the mystery of one of World War II's most daring raids*, Sally Milner Publishing, Birchgrove, 1990, p.190**.**
[100] On 26 March 1942 he was awarded a Military Medal for his 'courage, fortitude and tenacity in escaping from a POW camp,' and returning to Greece to help with the returned of British stragglers, AWM: PRO3819.003.
[101] Turton, *I Lived with Greek Guerrillas*, p.34.
[102] "A" Force, part of M.I.9, was a cover for secret work on deception of enemy high command and in charge of the training of fighting men in evasion and escape and of organising help for them.

valuable service of the New Zealand and Australian officers . . . on unofficial attachments; to carry out vital and urgent work of rescuing those left behind,' there appears to be no record of these soldiers involvement in their Australian army records.[103]

Seated front left to right: Captain Embrey, Commander Vernicos and Captain Michael Parish before their escape from Crete. Photograph courtesy Sherwood Rangers

A group of three Australian soldiers: Sergeants Frank Brewer of the 2/1st Field Regiment and Bill Bazeley of the 2/5th Battalion and Lieutenant George Greenway of the 2/11th Battalion were involved in M.I.9 Caique operations in the Aegean. Assisting them on their missions was Emmanuel Vernicos, a Greek merchant seaman who had fed and aided the escape of many allied soldiers from Crete, including Lieutenants Parish and Hildyard, Corporal R.E. Murfet and Australian Captain Embrey. The indomitable Vernicos was quite a character: a wiry, clever man, he told Embrey, amongst others, that he wanted to start a revolution on Crete. Many Australians soldiers remembered the help given to them by Vernicos on Crete.[104]

Sergeant Bill Bazeley, a member of the M.I.9 caique crew, was temporarily attached to 17th Brigade headquarters when he found himself left behind during the evacuation at Kalamatta. Described as 'outstandingly cheerful, resourceful and with great initiative,' he, along

[103] M.I.9 Report.
[104] Escape from Crete, Statement by Pt. G.S. Hosking 2/11th Battalion, AWM: 54 535/4/2.

with twelve other soldiers, escaped into the surrounding hills.[105] Splitting up from the main group to avoid detection, he and Captain Lawrence went off together. They managed to survive through the 'food and shelter' provided to them by friendly Greeks.[106] Buying a boat near Scoutari for 7,000 drachmas they filled it with provisions aiming to sail directly to Egypt. They had only sailed past Cape Malea before they realised that this was not possible and changed route crossing the Aegean via Melos to Smyrna. One of the amazing aspects of their escape was their ability to convince the German patrol boats that they were Greek fishermen, thereby safely reaching Turkey.

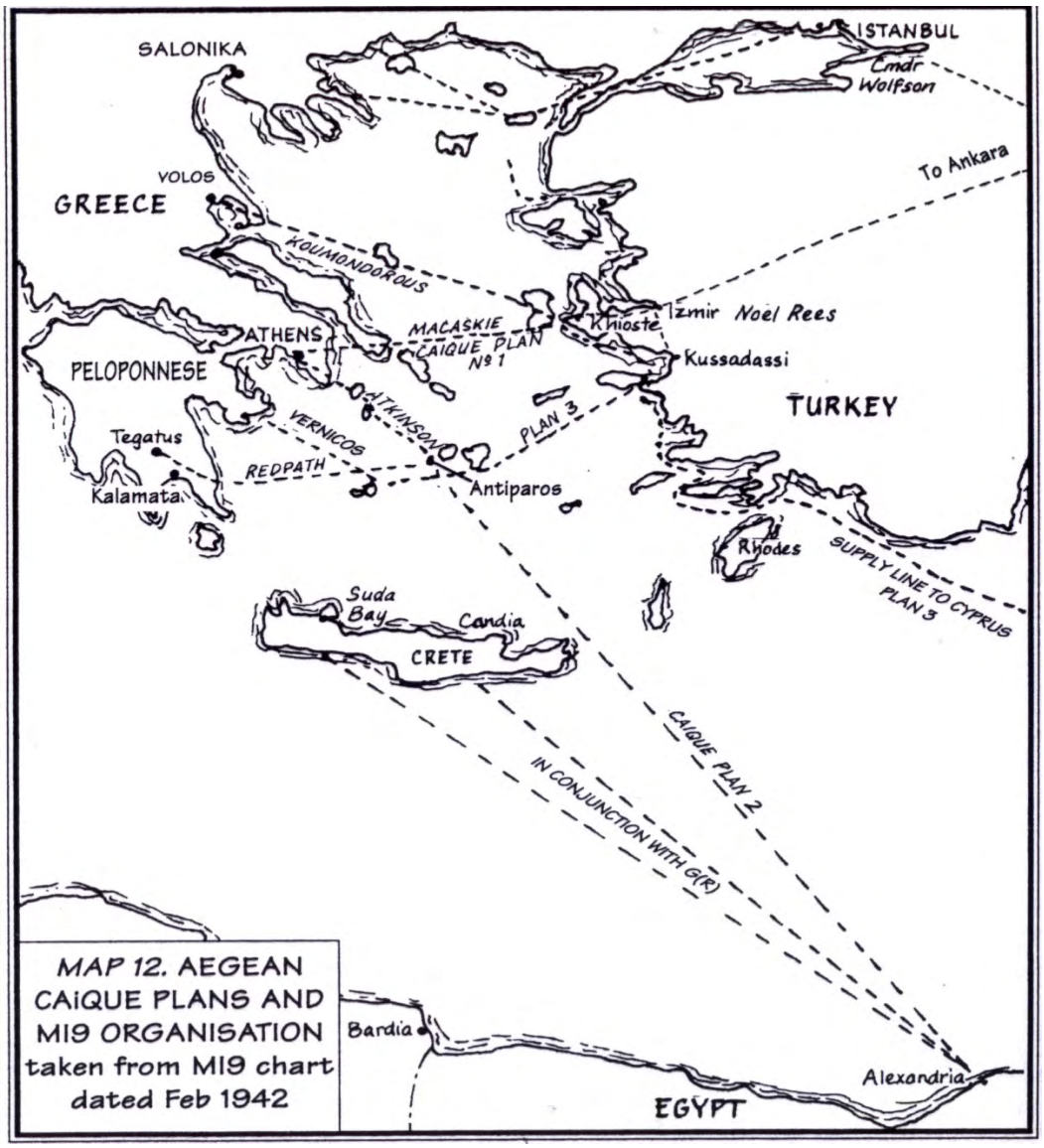
Frank Brewer, the other Australian involved in M.I.9 operations in the Aegean, like John Phillips, was captured in Kalamatta and found himself at the prison camp at Corinth alongside fellow gunner Johnnie Sachs. He was moved to Salonika where Brewer made his escape with his brother making 'useful contacts and collect[ed] information on the enemy of great value.'[107] They survived with the help of Greek families who bathed, clothed and fed them with black bread and eggs. He recalled being 'rushed into hiding by frantic Greeks who told us that the patrols were on the look-out for us.'[108] They advised them not to go through North – Eastern Greece to Turkey as the Bulgarians occupied the area. Instead, Brewer and his brother headed south, finding refuge for ten days in the village of Olympiada where he cut mangrove timber to make charcoal, an important industry in the village. He continued through Greece with support from some rather progressive monks at the various monasteries, some of whom had spent time in America and spoke English. At the monastery of Iverion near Mt. Athos, the head monk was 'very friendly and very eager to help' and lent them a small rowing boat to reach Turkey.

During his seven months of travel through Greece Brewer learnt to speak the language, a skill he put to good use working for M.I.9. According to Ken Kell who was in 2/1st Field Regiment with Brewer: 'he was a smart bugger and kept a diary with details of tactical importance. Names of German units, location of ammunition dumps, effectiveness of Allied bombing etc. So when he was debriefed by Army HQ's in Cairo he was able to provide some very vital information.'[109] Upon his return to Cairo in October 1941 Brewer volunteered to return to Greece to help stranded soldiers escape. He was promoted to sergeant and told to report to Brigadier Dudley who[110]

> introduced me to Col. Simmonds who was to be my new C.O. and that I was the first member of 'N' section 'A' force to report in. Still to come was Capt. Parrish of the

[105] Award of the Military Medal Citation of William Maynard Bazeley, AWM: 54 781/6/6.
[106] Report on the interrogation of Escaped Soldiers: 21 Aug/ 41, AWM63 175/500/54.
[107] Award of the Military Medal Citation of Francis Neil Tudor Brewer, AWM: 54 781/6/6.
[108] Frank Brewer, "Reluctant Guests," *Kibbles Post*, October 1996, p.14.
[109] Ken Kell, The Early Years, unpublished manuscript, p.70, on loan to the author courtesy of Ken Kell.
[110] Brigadier Dudley [Clarke] CBE code name 'Galveston' was placed in command of "A" Force and Lieutenant Colonel Tony Simmonds OBE who previously worked for SOE was placed in charge of evasions and escapes.

Sherwood Foresters who was to be our 'O.C.' [Commanding Officer] Lieut. George Greenway 2/11 Bn. A.I.F. to be our 2 I/C [in charge] Sgt. Bill Bazeley of the 2/5th Bn. And a Greek naval Officer Comd. Vernicos whose major task was to organise the underground through Greece and on to Germany. Our priorities were to get the Comd. to wherever he wanted to be next then to make supply dumps throughout the islands and to bring back any allied troops we could find.[111]



Ian Dear, *Escape and Evasion*, Arms and Armour, London, 1997, p.150.

Under the command of Captain Michael Parish, Brewer, Greenway and Bazeley, whom Parish described as 'three excellent Australians,' participated in Caique plan No.3.[112] They were to proceed to Cyprus to hire or buy two caiques and a fast motor-boat and rendezvous off the

[111] Frank Brewer, Aegean Doc, unpublished manuscript, sent to the author on 6 April 2003, p.4. "A" Force was the code name for M.I.9 and "N" section of M.I.9 dealt with the Eastern Mediterranean that included Greece and Crete.

[112] Parish, Michael Woodbine, *Aegean Adventures 1940-43 and the end of Churchill's dream*, The Book Guild Ltd., Sussex, 1993, p.157.

Turkish coast with Mr Noel Rees to co-ordinate their escape plan with him.[113] 'Mr Vernicos was despatched to Athens to build up an escape organization in the town and to evacuate escapers and evaders to selected Island points in the Aegean Islands.'[114] Captain Greenway recalled that 'Commander Vernicas (sic) was put ashore at Eubea (sic) on the Greek mainland and we had no further contact with him personally as his duties were connected with gathering Intelligence.'[115] Unfortunately Vernicos was subsequently betrayed 'through an agent of Captain McNabb's of Force 133, who broke down under interrogation.' [116]

Using his old diary and linen escape map, Greenway confirmed that 'plans [had been] drawn up which showed that the original intention had changed somewhat and the idea of a small expedition to try and collect army personnel still at large had taken a very definite intelligence and espionage aspect.'[117] One of the caiques was a '7 toner to be used to operate among the islands with Capt. Parrish and myself the larger caique (sic) an island trader of about 100 tons with Lieut. Greenway and Bill Bazeley to act as a ferry.'[118] The boats were not only used to evacuate British soldiers but saved many Greek lives as well. Greenway was initially placed in charge of a Greek caique HMS *Evangelistria* but later took command of HMS *Agios Demetrios*, a Greek fishing trawler of some twenty tons that returned to Cyprus with 77 Greek refugees. 'This was an outstanding load on a caique normally built to carry ten people.'[119] Parish praised Greenway's work explaining: 'he saved these Greeks from starvation and possibly death from the Germans had they been shipped back to their islands, and also what is perhaps of more importance from the point of view of the war effort, he produced seventy-seven soldiers for the Allied armies.'[120]

In May 1942 the Australian military authorities recalled Greenway, Brewer and Bazeley for repatriation to Australia. Greenway explained in a letter to Gilchrist that they were 'asked if we were prepared to stay on in the caiques for further duty in the island, but as Japan had come into the war and our units were fighting up in New Guinea I asked to be released for passage back to Australia.'[121] Brewer on the other hand was disappointed at being withdrawn from

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[113] Lieutenant –Commander Noel Rees was British Consul in Izmir (Smyrna) and along with Commander Wolfson British Consul in Istanbul, was in charge of the evasion lines across the Aegean to the West coast of Turkey. He developed a clandestine naval base near Cesme opposite Chios for "N" section caiques to operate.
[114] M.I.9 Report.
[115] Letter from George Greenway to Hugh Gilchrist, Nov. 10 1971, Gilchrist Papers NLA: MS 4931 Box 4 Folder 29.
[116] M.I.9 Report.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Brewer, Aegean Doc, p.4.
[119] M.I.9 Report.
[120] The 2/11th (City of Perth) Australian Infantry Battalion 1939-45, John Burridge Military Antiques, Swanbourne, 1972, p.119.
[121] Letter from George Greenway to Hugh Gilchrist, Gilchrist Papers NLA: MS 4931 Box 4 Folder 29.

Greece stating that 'it was with some regret that I had to go as my Greek was passable and I had visions of setting up a wireless telegraphy station on the heights of Antipolynos.'[122]

The Australians had done 'invaluable work since joining MI9 in September 1941 and carried out numerous expeditions. Lieutenant Greenway subsequently received the MBE for his service and Sergeants Beazley (sic) and Brewer each received the MM. [Military Medal] These awards took into consideration their original escapes.' [123] Their operations would not have succeeded without the support and co-operation of the Greek people. Greenway noted during his many trips through the islands that the Greeks 'were very helpful and on no occasion were we at all worried that they would alert the Italians or the Germans in Crete of our whereabouts.'[124]

M.I.9 had the services of 'large numbers of gallant Greeks who volunteered to carry out escape and rescue for them.'[125] Airey Neave explained that until 'the end of the war, there were few trained agents of M.I.9 in the field. The organization depended on several thousand volunteers to contact the men and hide them till they could be brought to safety. . . . M.I. 9 estimated that there were over 12,000 survivors of this movement.'[126] Many Greeks involved suffered imprisonment and were treated far more harshly by the Germans than British internees. 'If detected, they could expect no mercy, and received little. They would be tried by a military court; acquittals were unknown. The sentence [in Europe] was invariably deportation to Germany, or death at once; a great many of those deported did not come back. It posed an extra problem for an escaper or evader, if he had to have help to get away: was this the sort of danger he could reasonably ask someone else's family to run?'[127]

Australians on the run in Crete

After the final evacuation of Crete on 30 May 1941, many Australian soldiers were marooned on the island. Some 7, 700 Australians were sent to Crete of which 274 were killed, 507 were wounded and 3,967 were taken prisoners. Although 5,315 British troops were captured, they were mostly from base units not front line troops. Australia suffered the heaviest losses in the fighting units.[128] Captain J.A. Embrey of the 2/1st Battalion estimated that of the troops left behind, there were 'about 600 Australians and about 400 New Zealanders . . . living in the villages in Western CRETE.'[129] Taking the whole of Crete into account, the total number of Australian soldiers left behind enemy lines would have been closer to 800.[130] According to Captain Embrey's report there were at least three to five soldiers in every village in Crete:

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[122] Brewer, Aegean Doc, p.7.
[123] M.I.9 Report.
[124] Letter from George Greenway to Hugh Gilchrist, Gilchrist Papers, NLA.
[125] M.I.9 Report.
[126] Neave, *Saturday at M.I.9*, p.16-17.
[127] Foot & Langley, *MI9*, p.20.
[128] See Appendix L for Allied Strengths and Casualties on Crete.
[129] Embrey Report.
[130] Reginald Saunders who spent time behind enemy lines suggested the figure of Australian troops was around 800, Interview of Reg Saunders, 2/7th Battalion by Peter Read, AWM: S0520.

‘Practically every village I went to in CRETE had some British hidden. Generally villages on a motor rd [road] were liable to a visit at any time and therefore refused to hide British escapees but few refused food. Villages off motor [roads] gave food and hid British in gullies.’[131]

Although Crete fared better than mainland Greece, there was still hunger on the island. Alan Hackshaw hiding in occupied Crete recorded in his diary that ‘[f]ood wasn’t very plentiful. We were always a bit hungry. ’[132] Embrey noted that although ‘these men are being fed well [the] increasing food shortage and the severe winter may force them to give themselves up.’[133] Tom Dunbabin reported that the ‘first winter of occupation - that of 1941-42 was one of starvation, in which thousands died in the streets of Athens, until the Allies agreed to raise the blockade for the Red Cross food ships.’[134] The British air force dropped gold sovereigns and munitions to rebel leaders both on mainland Greece and Crete to aid stragglers and support the Greek resistance. Paper money had lost its value due to the inflation. Whether this money reached its destination is difficult to ascertain. Greek villagers proudly asserted that they were never given money to feed allied soldiers, a fact confirmed by the allied soldiers hiding among them.[135] The Germans however, minted their own sovereigns to counter Britain’s efforts.

Australian soldiers in the Cretan Resistance

Some soldiers spent over three years on Crete fighting in the Cretan resistance movement and eventually working for British intelligence on the island operating wireless transmitters or assisting in the evacuation of allied soldiers. Others remained hidden amongst the local population working in the fields, sowing crops and participating in the harvest of olives and other foodstuffs, until an opportunity to escape arose. Some had ‘gone native’ as the British referred to the practice of dressing as shepherds, leading a nomadic life until they became indistinguishable from the local population.[136] The Australians referred to this behaviour as ‘lying doggo’ or going ‘underground’ amongst the local population to avoid detection.[137] According to Tom Dunbabin:

> at first [the stragglers] lived in the villages, sharing the scanty fare of their Greek friends, or in the monasteries. They moved down to the beaches in companies of a hundred strong, under their officers and NCOs [non-commissioned officers], a ragged and footsore army, for few boots stood up for long to the stony Cretan hillsides. These easy conditions did not survive the first winter, for the Germans soon heard of the arrival of submarines (magnified and multiplied by popular rumour) and sent out patrols and posts to the coast and mountains. They made it a capital offence to harbour stragglers, and those who remained had to move out of the houses and cafes into caves and holes. A few of them were picked up by accident or treachery, two or three died and

[131] Embrey Report.
[132] Transcript copy of the diary of Corporal Alan Hackshaw, AWM 3DRL/6398.
[133] Embrey Report.
[134] Dunbabin Diary.
[135] According to the Georgiakakis family who sheltered him, Australian soldier Charles Hunter, would leave half the food on his plate so that the children could be fed.
[136] T.M. Lindsay, *Sherwood Rangers*, Burrup, Mathieson & Co., Ltd, 1952, p.21.
[137] Rudd, A.I.F. in Switzerland.

> were decently buried. . . . For all these hardships and privations, lack of news (and the news was bad, anyway) these men kept up their spirits wonderfully, and their robust refusal to consider defeat had a great effect on keeping up Greek confidence. Their Greek helpers too were splendid, and most of our supporters came from these men, who had picked themselves by their readiness to feed and guide the stragglers, at any risk, and had formed an organization which spread over half the island. [138]

AWM: PRO3098: George Psychoudakis 1941, Peck Papers.

One such helper was George Psychoudakis, a shepherd from Asi Gona, an inland village situated between Rethymnon and Sphakia. Psychoudakis worked as a runner for British intelligence officers on Crete. When Australian Lieutenant John Desmond Peck of the 2/7th Battalion met Psychoudakis again Peck was on his last legs. 'I met John Peck at Vrysses, tired, sick with high fever and very weak. He had to go to Sfakia and then take the boat for Egypt,' recalled Psychoudakis.[139]

John Peck expressed his relief upon realising that it was Psychoudakis, whom he knew from their 'sub hunts' along the coast, who was to be his guide through the mountains. Described as 'always cheerful' he raised Peck's spirits even when he felt he could no longer continue the arduous trek to the coast. Peck wrote:

> [f]or most of the way I was only semi-conscious but every time I dropped with fatigue George hoistered me to my feet and dragged me on. Near dawn we reached a village which had been forcibly evacuated by the Germans because of its anti-German behaviour and its proximity to the 'escapers coast'. George said we were now inside the forbidden

[138] Dunbabin Diary.
[139] George Psychoudakis, *Chania News*, May 18, 1990. Papers of John Peck , AWM PRO 3098.

> zone and could therefore relax. . . . all I wanted to do was to lay myself down and die, but George was determined to save me even if the attempt killed me! . . . For many hours the next day I stumbled on in a complete daze. Besides encouraging me with witticisms and outrageous stories, George made sure I did not fall flat on my face or stumble down the steep sides of the mountains. At the same time he had to keep a wary eye out for enemy activity. Sometimes I felt really sorry for him having taken such a no-hoper in my condition. Without him I knew I should have been dead by now.[140]

With Psychoudakis' help Peck was able to reach the evacuation point; however the boat to convey him and the other stragglers to safety did not arrive. After much hardship, having escaped seven times from captivity, roaming the hills of Crete for twelve months, Peck was caught and sent to a prison camp in Italy.[141] He eventually escaped making his way to Switzerland where he worked for SOE.[142] Psychoudakis and Peck meet again forty-nine years later during the commemorations for the Battle of Crete. Psychoudakis recounted how Peck turned around to him and said ' "you are the man that save my life 49 years ago." He said, "George give me that egg." And I did, and he said, "this is the egg you gave me 49 years ago and I couldn't eat." '[143] Peck had been too ill to swallow much food behind enemy lines, and in a symbolic gesture, acknowledging the help given to him by George Psychoudakis, Peck now accepted the sustenance that he had refused so many years ago.

AWM: PRO3098 - Reunion of George Psychoudakis [seated on the left] and John Peck [on the right] Crete 1991, Peck Papers.

[140] John Desmond Peck, Captive in Crete, unpublished manuscript, AWM: PRO3098, Wallet 6 Series 2/2.
[141] For his daring escapes John Peck was coined the modern count of Monte Cristo and awarded in 1956 a DCM.
[142] Peck conducted intelligence work behind enemy lines in Italy, Yugoslavia, Austria, Greece and France, organised partisan groups and was responsible for the safe arrival of 1,500 Australians POWs to Switzerland.
[143] Interview: George Psychoudakis, Chania Crete, 30 October 2003.

By the time Australian officer Tom Dunbabin, working for British intelligence, was sent in the spring of 1942 behind enemy lines to south-eastern Crete to organise the return of allied soldiers, he noted that: 'most of the stragglers had already left before I arrived, collected by my predecessors and their Greek helpers, and picked up by the Royal Navy. The Germans had been slow in occupying the mountainous southern parts of the island, where there were well over a thousand men left behind in our evacuation or escaped from German prison-camps.'[144] British Naval officer, Lieutenant Commander Lane Poole who established his headquarters near the monastery at Preveli, assisted many of the early stragglers including Tom Birch with four other Australian soldiers off the island. '[Poole] was the first to land on Crete after the island had been taken over by the Germans, sent by the Middle East Headquarters.'[145] Described of stout appearance he spoke Greek fluently, having lived on the island for several years before the war and working for Imperial Airways.

Tom Birch of the 2/1st Field Ambulance was captured at Sphakia and forced to march eighty miles to the German POW camp at Skines where the Australian soldiers were being held.[146] After spending eight weeks at the camp Birch gained permission and money from his senior officer to escape. 'Early in July, Private Horsington and Private Birch asked permission from me, as their Senior Officer, to be allowed to escape,' wrote Dr Gunter, '[a]s we had ample Medical Orderlies to look after the sick and wounded, I considered it was their duty as P.O.W.' s to escape. I supplied them with 10,000 drachmas, the only money I had, and wished them on their way.'[147]

Having learnt that the prisoners were due to be sent to Germany in July 1941, Birch along with Bill Horsington and three other soldiers cut their way through the 'barb wire cage' and fled into the nearby hills: 'we escaped on my birthday about dusk, just before they doubled the guard around the wire. . . . We decided instead of the five of us going through together we would go in twos with Tom Birch and myself leading. Then came the worst 20 minutes of my life.'[148] On the run for over six months, they survived through the generosity and kindness of the Cretan people, in particular a family from the village of Mescalas who befriended Birch, sharing with him their meagre food and clothing supplies. 'The Greek women,' wrote Tom Birch's wife Maisie, 'were so wonderful in helping them, they made them sleeveless singlets out of Goats's hair, I think it was.'[149]

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[144] Dunbabin's Diary.
[145] George Harokopos, *The Fortress Crete*, B. Giannikos & Co., Athens, 1993, p.45.
[146] The Australian were housed predominantly at the POW camp at Skines and the New Zealanders at Galatas.
[147] Letter from Dr. W. W. Gunter, 18 July 1975, on loan to author courtesy of Jean Horsington.
[148] Letter from Bill Horsington to his wife Jean on loan to author courtesy of Jean Horsington.
[149] Letter to the committee organising the Commemoration of 63rd Battle of Crete from Maisie Birch, 3 March 2003, on loan to author courtesy of Mrs Maisie Birch.

AWM: RELAWM31975 - Goat's wool vest knitted for Tom Birch by the daughter of a family from the village of Mescalas on Crete.

Tom was also given a knife, the most prized possession of a Cretan, as there was only one knife in a household and that was usually only used by the man of the family. Bill Hosington recalled 'the people were simply marvellous they couldn't do enough for us. The women would bring us food (we were living in a cave outside the village) they would burst into tears and say words of sympathy in Greek.'[150] Birch and Horsington eventually joined the partisans assisting Commander Poole with the evacuation of servicemen from the island. He explained that: 'when I escaped from POW cage I found that there was Commander Lane-Poole in the mountains and my mate and I became attached to his force.'[151] Both men returned to their unit in Alexandria at the end of 1941 on a caique supplied by Poole. On a return visit to Crete in 1981 for the commemoration of the battle of Crete, Tom Birch was disappointed to find that 'some of the Greeks I fought with in the underground against the German invaders were not included in my visit.'[152]

AWM: RELAWM31976 - Small sheath knife and scabbard given to Tom Birch by the father of the family who helped him on Crete.

[150] Letter from Bill Horsington to his wife Jean on loan to author courtesy of Jean Horsington.
[151] Letter from Tom Birch to Commonwealth Minister of [Veteran Affairs], 21 April 1995, on loan courtesy of Maisie Birch.
[152] Ibid.

The White Mountains

The resistance in western Crete centred on the White Mountains, part of the mountain ranges that divided the northern coastal planes of Crete from the rugged southern shores. It was a dangerous terrain and needed to be traversed in order to reach the southern ports of Crete to escape. This could only be done by negotiating 'a series of hairpin bends which lead abruptly down from a height of about 2,000 feet to the plain below. The lower half of the road, being unfinished, was covered with rough stones and came to an abrupt end about 500 feet above sea level. The plain below was of the roughest scrub and covered with loose boulders, & was crossed only by a few ill defined tracks.'[153] These mountains proved to be an ideal place for the escaped Allied soldiers to hide.

AWM: PO2038.118 - Crete June 1941 soldiers sheltering in narrow entrance.

In the first year of occupation German patrols rarely ventured into the mountains, although aware that British soldiers were hiding there. Corporal Alan Hackshaw of the 2/11th Battalion noted in his diary that the 'Germans kept sending us messages, for days they had been asking us to surrender. The said it would be an honourable surrender, because the rest of the island had either fallen or was about to fall.'[154] Soldiers found roaming the hills of Crete dressed in civilian clothes were shot as spies and not accorded the rights of prisoners of war. Sergeant John Corbould of 2/7th Battalion had the Australian army emblem tattooed onto his arm to ensure that he would not be accused of being a spy.[155] Australian army tattoos, however, could be disadvantageous as some

[153] Report by the Inter-Services Committee, NAB: WO 201/99 4/4/47.
[154] Transcript copy of the diary of Corporal Alan Hackshaw, AWM: 3DRL/6398.
[155] Interview: Hal Corbould, son of Sergeant John Corbould 2/7th Battalion, 2 September 2005.

Australian soldiers disguised as Cretans could be identified. The Greeks assisted the stragglers as much as possible by supplying them with fake identity papers, as did the British secret service operating behind enemy lines.

BRITISH SOLDIERS!

A whole year you are wondering on mountains and in the caves of Crete living a life of misery.

The Greek inhabitants don't give you any more food [for] they are afraid [of] being shot for favouring the enemy [and] are right to do so.

Your hope your countrymen will come and fetch you from this island has vanished by the success of the German and Italian forces in Africa.

You told the greek (sic) that you are going to be shot [by] surrendering to the german (sic) authorities or being captured [but] that's not right according to the Hague convention you [are] treated as prisoners of war and interned.

Don't be afraid! It's to your own advantage [to] announce yourself to the german (sic), Italian and greek (sic) authorities!

THE COMMANDER OF FORTRESS CRETE

Fake identification papers supplied to John Corbould under the alias of 'John Petrakis'.

It was shortly after the island fell to the Germans that British intelligence officer Xan Fielding was sent to Crete. He worked for S.O.E./Force 133 whose main objective, apart from espionage work, was to coordinate Cretan resistance and supply the guerrillas with arms and money.[156] Though primarily the concern of M.I.9, his other task was to gather the remaining British troops hidden amongst the towns in Crete for collection by British submarines off the southern coast of Crete. Fielding, whose code name was 'Aleko,' facilitated the rescue of many Australian soldiers aboard the submarines HMS *Torbay* and *Thrasher*. Amongst the Australians he assisted were Charles Hunter, a driver with Headquarters 6 Division; Lance-Corporal Charles Francis Ezzy and Lance-Corporal John Clulow Simcoe. Fielding first encountered the trio on a return trip to Crete with members of I.S.L.D in 1942 during a particularly bad storm when his dinghy had overturned.[157]

> [o]ur spirits were slightly raised by the arrival of three Australian stragglers, who had been living with these shepherds ever since the German invasion. . . . Like most of their compatriots, they were all three expert swimmers, and when they heard of the loss of our kit they at once volunteered to see how much of it they could recover. . . . They spent the rest of the morning plunging in and out, and only rarely came up empty-handed; until almost all the kit, which I thought we had lost for ever, was miraculously landed high and, though not dry, at least undamaged.[158]

Charlie Hunter, after escaping from the prison camp at Skines, had found his way to the village of Koustoyerako at the top of the White Mountains where he, along with other Australians, had spent twenty-one months awaiting rescue. The village was ' the centre of the resistance in Selino. . . . There was no road to Koustoyerako, just a mule trail. . . . Its forty whitewashed houses wedge[d] into the hill slopes. . . . The track to Koustoyerako, about 750 metres above the fertile Souyia valley, winds upwards for seven kilometres and passes through another village, Livadas. . . . It is an area of deep ravines and craggy ridges.'[159] Until 1943 the Germans had ignored the area but increasing reports of British agents stationed in that area organising sabotage operations with Cretan guerrillas and harbouring British stragglers had filtered through to them, resulting in the deployment of German patrols to Kouteyerako. The village was the home of the six Paterakis brothers**:** Vasilis, Adonis, Costis, Manolis, Vardis and George**,** leaders of the Greek resistance in the Selino region. A message reached the village through the local priest that they would be punished for harbouring stragglers. Hunter and the other two Australians with him seriously considered giving themselves up to save the village

[156] Fielding explained that the organization he worked for was never mentioned by name or even by its initials as S.O.E. It was called 'the firm' by those who worked for it and towards the end of the war: 'Force 133,' having evolved into a more paramilitary than clandestine organisation.
[157] 'Inter-Services Liaison Department' – or I.S.L.D. was a cover name for the clandestine Intelligence service that operated independently of S.O.E.
[158] Xan Fielding, *Hide and Seek*, Maidstone [Eng], George Mann, Second edition, 1973, pp.115-116.
[159] Murray Elliott, *Vasili: The Lion of Crete*, Century Hutchinson, Auckland, p1987, p.108.

from German retribution; however the Georgiakakis and Paterakis families refused to allow them to do so.

Adonis Paterakis showing Charlie Hunter's daughter the rug that was hung over the village wall to warn allied soldiers that Germans were present. Photograph courtesy Colleen Donague nee Hunter.

At Koustoyerako Hunter had found support and sustenance in the home of Gregori Georgiakakis whom he assisted with his agrarian tasks. Part of his work involved the chopping and transporting of mangrove timber for the making of charcoal to Souyia on the coast. Upon the capture of New Zealand Sergeant Tom Moir, apart from helping the family, he took over the job of wireless operator. While working for M.I.9 organising the rescue of British stragglers on Crete, Moir was betrayed and captured. Hunter took over the organization of the evacuation of up to 70 soldiers insisting that a large enough vessel be sent to Crete to accommodate all of them. New Zealander Jim McDevitt, a member of the escape committee formed by Moir and that included amongst others Australian Sergeant John Coubould, recalled Moir announcing 'his appointment of Charlie Hunter to act as our leader and welfare officer during his absence.'[160] Fielding, who had been recalled from another part of the island after Moir's capture to complete his work, was surprised to find that Hunter and his companions had organized not only the evacuation but had managed to maintain the morale of the troops awaiting evacuation:

> [f]or their unusual discipline . . . I had to thank the trio of Australians who had first helped us by recovering the kit we had lost in our shipwreck the previous winter. As soon as the New Zealander responsible for organizing the evacuation had been captured, these three had spontaneously taken over his duties. Not only had they helped to assemble their comrades from other areas; having done so, they had themselves reconnoitred a suitable landing–beach, notified its position to Headquarters through the I.S.L.D. station and

[160] Jim McDevitt, *My Escape from Crete*, J. T. McDevitt, Auckland, 2002, p.244.

> arranged for the boat to come in and fetch them that very night. All we had to do now was to wait till it was dark before moving down the coast.[161]

Even during his last few hours on the island, Hunter displayed a strong concern for the well being of the Cretans, insisting that all boots be left behind for the villagers.[162]

Charles Jager, a gunner in the 2/2nd Field Regiment left behind in Crete after the evacuation, had been sent to the prison camp near the village of Skines while the New Zealanders were taken to Galatos. He managed to escape along with another Australian soldier. He explained that 'Travis and I got out. I remember I was in a bad way physically – I had diarrhoea. I flopped down amongst some staked tomato plants. And in the morning a group of children woke us up. One ran off and brought a jug of milk and a girl came and that was Evangelia [Dimitrakis] and we were taken to an olive tree and we found another three.'[163] Evangelia's father Yorgo Dimitrakis, the Mayor of the town, at great risk to himself, convinced the local doctor to attend Jager, who was seriously ill. His children Evangelia, Manolis and his youngest son Eftihi, would visit Jager and the other soldiers daily, bringing them food prepared by the local families.

After a week or two in Skines, he and the other soldiers hidden amongst the olive groves were forced to move on, having been told by Dimitrakis that the village was about to be raided by the Germans

> who had found out that they had lost a good many prisoners and considered that they must have received assistance from these village people. At about this time the village of Fornai (sic) which had about 300 inhabitants, was also destroyed. A German dressed in filthy rags, and speaking excellent English, called at this place and the people being deceived by his disguise, took him in and tendered him the same kindness as they did to all the British. After he had eaten and rested he was conducted to a spot where 40 Australians were in hiding. He stayed with them for a couple of hours and then left the village. What he really did, was to return to the German HQ, and led 400 of his soldiers to Fornai, and laid waste to the village killing 30 and taking 60 prisoners.'[164]

Reg Saunders of the 2/7th Battalion who had been hiding for many months in Crete distrusted anyone who approached him alleging to be an allied soldier or a Greek as many Germans used this ploy to rout out allied soldiers hidden in the hills and villages of Crete.[165] Jager was fortunate to have escaped with his life but the Mayor of Skines had not been so lucky. He was killed during the German siege of the town. Jager eventually left Crete by boat reaching the coast of Peloponesse where he was assisted to escape from Greece by a New Zealander captain, John Redpath working for M.I.9.

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[161] Fielding, *Hide and Seek*, p.163.
[162] Interview: Colleen Donahue daughter of Charlie Hunter, 24 July 2005.
[163] Interview: Charles Jager 2/2nd Field Regiment, 2 October 2005. He also published an account of his time behind enemy lines entitled: *Escape from Crete*, Floridale, Smithfield, 2004.
[164] Diary of Pte C.A. Kelly VX11861, 2/7 Infantry Battalion, 9 April 1941 – 4 August 1942, AWM: PRO2043.
[165] Gordon, Harry. *The Embarrassing Australian: The Story of an Aboriginal Warrior*, Melbourne, Lansdowne Press, 1962, pp.97-98.

Post-war relations

After the war Fred Chilton heard of the fate that had befallen his friends back at Pili.[166] He had never forgotten their help and sought to repay their kindness and hospitality by agreeing to assist members of their respective families to migrate to Australia. Chilton wrote: ' I have the fondest memories of Pili and our wonderful friends. After the War I got in touch with Mrs Moraitis (then a widow living in Athens) and with John Mourtzakis at Pili; later, I arranged for John's son Christos and family to migrate to Australia. Many years later in the 1970s my sister Kathleen and I paid a visit to the little village.'[167]

The support he received at Pili left a lasting impression on Chilton, forging a bond that was never to be broken between himself and the Greek people who helped him. He not only met the son of John Mourtzakis upon his arrival to Australia but also organised for another Greek, John Apostolas, who came from the same island, to welcome him in his own language. His sensitive concern for the well being of those he had sponsored was very evident in his treatment of Christos Mourtzakis. Upon his arrival, Chilton had organised employment for him at the Melbourne Tramway. Once Mourtzakis was established, having brought out his wife and children from Pili, Chilton became a regular and most welcomed visitor to their home. Mourtazakis' youngest son Nick vividly recalled these visits. **'**He showed incredible respect to my parents. . . . He would always bring us presents at Christmas – books and during the year, particularly on Saturdays, he would come and pick us up and take my brothers and I for drives and to the beach and the gardens**.'**[168]

Chilton went out of his way to maintain the Greek connection, clearly enjoying the Greek family's company. Nick Mourtzakis recollected the respectful way Sir Frederick Chilton treated his parents, not as 'wogs' and 'New Australians' but as valued members of the Australian Community: 'their friendship with Frederick Chilton was an affirmation of their worth and their place in Australian society that was very difficult to find in their experience as migrants. '[169] Frederick Chilton's treatment of the Mourtzakis family was very different to the one that young Nick Mourtzakis had experienced in the streets of Collingwood after the war. Donald Horne stressed in his discussion of Australia in 1940s that it was 'a country which had always hated its immigrants.'[170] Mourtzkis explained that: 'through that contact with Frederick Chilton - I was introduced to an acceptance that wasn't accessible in the streets in Collingwood.'[171] Australia of

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[166] 'I learnt of the tragedies that had befallen [Mourtzakis] during the German occupation and more especially during the Communist uprising soon afterwards – his wife and a son had been killed and his house burnt. He asked if I could arrange for his surviving son Christos to migrate to Australia.' Chilton, A Life in the Twentieth Century, p. 71.
[167] Ibid p.38.
[168] Interview: Nick Mourtzakis, grandson of John Mourtzakis, Melbourne, 3 October 2005.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Donald Horne, *The Australian People: Biography of a Nation*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1972, p. 224.
[171] Interview: Nick Mourtzakis, Melbourne, 3 October 2005.

the 1950s was a very racist, xenophobic society and migrants, particularly dark swarthy types from southern Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Greece, were not welcomed in the country. The reaction of Australian soldiers who fought in Greece and Crete to Greek migrants, however, was very different from the one exhibited by the general population. Some soldiers even chose to work in migrant related occupations after the war in order to help the people who assisted them.[172]

The friendship that began between the Mourtzakis family and Frederick Chilton in 1941 continued because as young Mourtzakis explained: 'there was an emotional bond and that was very clear to me . . . an emotional recognition. Frederick Chilton always seemed to express a deep emotional empathy with my parents. They would speak about individuals in the village, they always spoke in hushed tones, there was a sense of reverence about what they'd been through.'[173] There was clearly a strong affection between Chilton and Christos Mourtzakis, a Greek soldier in his twenties who along with his father assisted Chilton's group to escape. His son Nick observed that Fred Chilton 'would shake my father's hand and there was always a sense of them looking each other straight in the eye and having an understanding - a shared experience.'[174]

The Papadopoulos family had not forgotten Herbert Wrigley either, and five years after the war they wrote to him. Glykeria Papadopoulos entreated her daughter Xanthoula to ' "write and lets see if that boy [survived]." We heard the ones that were captured in Katerini they were sent to Germany on a train and they were in a prison camp but we didn't know about Slim.'[175] Wrigley replied to the letter immediately, sending parcels of food and other supplies in appreciation of the help they had given him. Xanthoula Papadopoulos, who had been learning English, corresponded with Bert Wrigley for over a year before he proposed to her explaining: ' "Well look Xanthoula I'm still single, you're not obligated, I can nominate you, you can come to Australia, if you like, we can get married. I wasn't really tied down to anything. " '[176]

Life was tough in Greece in 1951. The Papadopoulos family had suffered reprisals from the Greek government and bureaucracy for their support of the Greek partisans or ELAS guerrillas. Accused of being Communists they were excluded from any government jobs. Xanthoula's eldest sister Eleni was jailed for seven months for selling coupons for the guerrillas during the occupation to help the resistance. She was saved from execution by the production of the certificate given to her father posthumously by the British for his protection of Allied servicemen during the war. Xanthoula Papadopoulos though trained, was not allowed to work as

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[172] Lieutenant Terry Fairbairn of 2/1st Battalion worked for Good Neighbour Council that assisted with new arrivals to Australia.
[173] Interview: Nick Mourtzakis, Melbourne, 3 October 2005.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Interview: Xanthoula Wrigley nee Papadopoulos, Melbourne, 3 October 2005.
[176] Ibid.

a teacher in Greece because of her family's support of the guerrilla movement. She explained that

> when the liberation came the ELAS guerrillas put their arms down. They thought they were going to have elections and Greece would become a democratic country. What happened, they brought the King back, they imposed him, and . . . all the collaborators took all the posts and people who fought during the occupation were persecuted. We didn't know anything about Communism. We came from my grandfather's generation, he was Venizelos follower and my father was a great believer of democracy. We were brought up that way. They were our beliefs and that's what we fought for. . . . everyone had a file- by the secret police: everybody who fought against the occupation. If you weren't a very right, right wing collaborator – you were a traitor.[177]

Herbert 'Slim' Wrigley and Xanthoula Papadopoulos 1951
Photograph courtesy of Xanthoula Wrigley.

Given the political circumstances that prevailed in Greece at the time she decided to accept Wrigley's offer of marriage and come to Australia. Bert Wrigley's family could not have been more welcoming. Although Australian society at large was not embracing of foreigners, the families of soldiers who had contact with the Greeks could not do enough for them. The Wrigley family were not wealthy but Bert Wrigley's mother had put some money aside for Xanthoula's wedding dress. The Greek community of Melbourne rallied round Xanthoula Papadopoulos having heard that she did not have any family in Australia. They filled the Greek Church to capacity on the day of her wedding to support the young bride from Greece.

Wrigley's support of the Greek family who had helped him during the war did not end with his marriage to Xanthoula. He also sponsored the migration of Xathoula's younger sister Valentini to Australia. This act of kindness by Wrigley lifted the burden of care from

[177] Ibid.

Xanthoula's brother Stephanos Papadopoulos, who, after the execution of his father became responsible for the care of his mother and grandfather in Salonika. Bert Wrigley was also very well known amongst the Greek community of Melbourne for his support of Greek people. His wife explained that, he 'loved Greece and the Greeks. He had a bond there. [And] here in his job, my husband was a Commonwealth Policeman. [He] helped the Greeks a great deal, particularly those who were illegal migrants. He helped them with preparation of their papers. They knew him well: "Slim Wrigley." His reputation spread from mouth to mouth. He had a lot of Greek friends in Australia. And because he spoke Greek [he was able to offer assistance] and didn't forget them.'[178]

John Phillips never forgot the helped he received from the Greeks and in 1945 he raised $50,000 in Adelaide for medical supplies for Greece. A chance encounter in 1951 with Rouli Konidou in Paris ended with Phillips marrying her and bringing her to Australia. The connection with the Greek family who protected him was never severed.

John Phillips and wife Rouli Konidou: 'The Angel of Volos.'
Photograph*: Sunday telegraph*, July 16, 1978.

George Psychoundakis was not the only Greek to have come into contact with John Peck on Crete. After the war numerous Greek people who had assisted Peck in his wanderings throughout Greece and Crete wrote to him and included photographs of their families in their letters. Reflected in their writing was the deep affection they felt for the Australian soldier.[179] The language used suggested they were writing to someone they regarded as a member of their

[178] Ibid.
[179] Numerous letters in both Greek and English found in the Peck Papers, AWM: PRO3098.

family.[180] Many asked Peck for clothes for the children and included their measurements in the letter, while others wanted him to help them migrate to Australia.

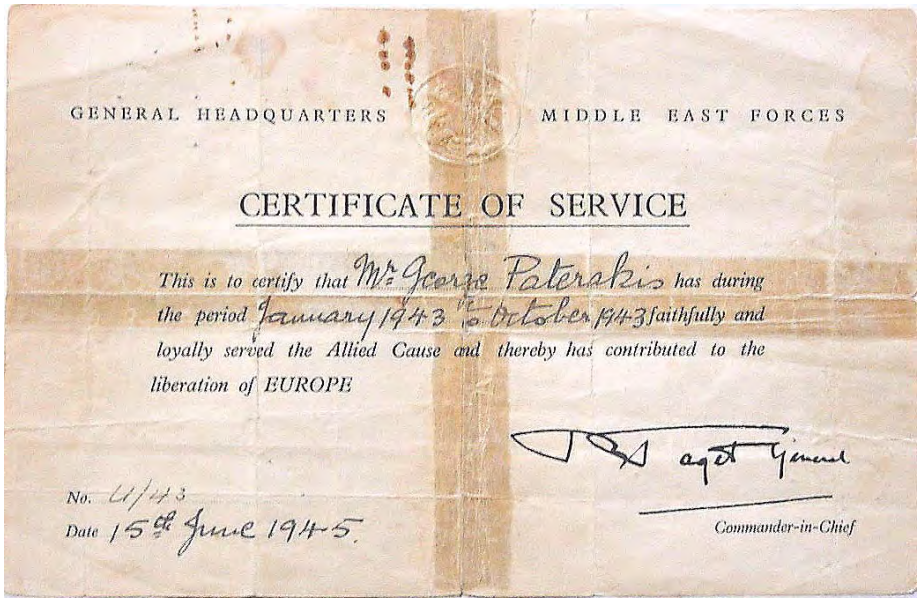
During his time in the village Charlie Hunter also made a strong connection with the Cretan people. After the war he wrote a moving letter of thanks to the Georgiakakis family who had housed and looked after him, ensuring that it was published in the papers both in Crete and in Australia:

> I wish to publish my appreciation of the help and shelter given to many British soldiers and myself in particular by Gregory Georgiakakis and Petros Georgiakakis of Kostajeriko (sic) during the German Occupation of Crete. From the time of my arrival in the village of Kostajeriko (sic) until my departure for Egypt ONE YEAR AND NINE MONTHS later I was fed and clothed by Gregory Georgiakakis who impoverished himself assisting Australian, New Zealand and English soldiers at various times in addition to keeping me continuously. During the darkest and most dangerous times before I left Crete these friends continued to assist us as staunchly as ever even to the extent of incurring opposition from a number of their own countrymen in the village, who although loyal to Britain, were not desirous of running the risk of having British soldiers in the village. I would like to stress the point that apart from their outstanding courage, their unselfish devotion in sharing their very limited food which necessitated themselves and their families going hungry for long periods was truly heroic. Although there were many Cretans in that district that gave food and assistance to the British at various times, I wish to thank Gregory Georgiakakis and Petros Georgiakakis in particular who were outstanding in their loyalty and I most heartily commend these two men and their families to the consideration of all UNITED NATIONS REPRESENTATIVES as I am sorry to say I have recently learned that a few unworthy persons are falsely claiming to be the people who helped the British in their time of need.
>
> Signed: 'Μιχαλις'[Michael] Hunter [181]

He felt that the families who had helped the Allies did not receive the credit that was due to them. British compensation was available to Greek families who had harboured allied soldiers so it was important that their part in aiding their allies be publicised. No doubt many desperate people presented bogus claims to the British government as Crete in particular had suffered badly during the war. The leaders of the Greek resistance in western Crete, the Paterakis family of Koustoyerako, prided themselves in not having accepted any money from Britain for their support of the Allies nor as George Paterakis proudly asserted, did they pilfer any of the money sent by the British for resistance work on Crete: 'if we wanted to, we Paterakis', could be the very wealthiest people on Crete –because the gold pounds dropped by the planes and the submarines that brought – in was in the hands of my uncle Adonis who was in charge of all of it. But they did not take one gold pound [for themselves.] They are all poor and I do not even know if they receive a pension but they fought for their country, for ideals!'[182] There were also political reasons as to why some families' contribution to the war effort was acknowledged

[180] Ibid.
[181] Letter to the *Hellenic Herald*, Sydney, 14 March 1946 from Charles Hunter, on loan to the author from Charles Hunter's daughter: Mrs Colleen Donahue.
[182] Interview: George Paterakis, nephew of resistance leader Adonis Paterakis, Melbourne, 2 October 2005.

while that of others, was not. The Georgiakakis' family who were on the left side of politics found their assistance to the allied soldiers overlooked.



GENERAL HEADQUARTERS MIDDLE EAST FORCES

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

This is to certify that Mr George Paterakis *has during the period* January 1943 to October 1943 *faithfully and loyally served the Allied Cause and thereby has contributed to the liberation of EUROPE*

No. 41/43

Date 15th June 1945.

Commander-in-Chief

Certificate of Service to Allied Cause -courtesy: George Paterakis.

Hunter's long sojourn in Crete not only influenced his eating habits and choice of diet, surviving only because of the availability of olive oil, but produced a deep regard for the Greek people. Returning to Australia, he went out of his way to assist local Greek families who settled in the area with a regular supply of food until they were able to support themselves. He frequented the two Greek cafés in Boorowa and with his fluent Greek was able to participate in conversation. The Greek patrons on their part sought Charles Hunter out to help explain the intricacies of the Australian way of life. Many Greeks were overwhelmed by the cultural differences between Australia and Greece, particularly with regard to child rearing practices. They were concerned that their teenage children were adopting practices that were not traditionally Greek. Hunter through his understanding of Greek culture was able to reassure and help them to understand the difference in values between the two countries.[183]

After the war Charlie Jager's father made a list of all the families who had helped his son and in gratitude sent them parcels of clothing, boots and other necessities. He explained that:

> my father was a very fine man in retrospect - he behaved a lot better than I did. After the war he got the names of people who helped me and he sent them food and clothing and boots. Of course he sent them to the villages of Skines and the Dimitrakis family and a lot of others. And then Manoli wrote to me and asked if I would sponsor him to come out here. I think that I paid his fare but Manoli got a job here and he brought his younger brother Eftihi out.[184]

[183] Interview: Colleen Donahue nee Hunter, 24 July 2005.
[184] Interview: Charles Jager, 2 October 2005.

Jager also provided Manoli Dimitraki with accommodation and board in his own home until he was able to afford a place of his own. Manoli Dimitrakis became an engineer and brought out his younger brother Eftihi. Until he moved overseas for work, Manoli Dimitrakis was a regular visitor to Jager's home. Eftihi Dimitrakis fondly remembered the warmth and genuine affection exhibited by Jager's family towards them: 'his father would come and he had brothers. His father loved us he understood that we supported his son, . . . that we'd laid down our life for him.'[185] Jager himself was clearly moved by his visits to the Greek family who saved his life during the war. Eftihi's wife, Joanna Dimitrakis, recalled that he ' would look at all the photographs – some of my sister-in-law [Vagelio] and he would cry and cry. He had gone back to Crete many times . . . but [his wife] didn't understand what he had lived through, even though she saw him hug me and cry, she couldn't understand his pain.'[186] His close attachment to the Greek family who had helped him was unmistakably visible to Joanna Dimitrakis.

Conclusion

The Australian soldiers greatly valued the aid so freely and generously given to them by the Greeks at their moment of greatest need. It produced not only a deep affection but also a great respect for the Greek people, resulting in many food parcels, clothing and money being sent to Greece after the war by returned soldiers and their families.[187] Lieutenant Irving McKerrow's letter to those who assisted him encapsulates the strong attachment felt by Australian troops for the Greek people: 'I have told my people at home all about you and Pool (sic) and the abbot and the rest of the people of Crete and they join with me in thanking you and the Cretans for your kindness and hospitality and all that you did for us. I shall be indebted to your people all my life and if I can repay the people of Crete in any way whatsoever I shall only be too pleased to do it.'[188]

Australian soldiers felt it was their sacred duty to show their appreciation to the Cretans for their support and aid in evading German capture. They felt they had a 'special' obligation – to the Greeks as a result of the 'special' friendship between them.[189] The Australians were surprised that people so culturally different from their own could put their lives at risk to assist them. It was a debt of gratitude that none of them forgot. 'I felt very deeply for the Greeks who had been so kind to us for so long,' wrote Private C. A. Kelly who was attached to the

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[185] Interview: Eftihis Dimitrakis, Melbourne, 2 October 2005.
[186] Interview: Joanna Dimitrakis, wife of Eftihi, 2 October 2005.
[187] After the war Lew Lind 'initiated through my regimental association a Clothing for Crete Appeal. Hundreds of garments for all ages and an equal number of shoes and accessories were collected, dry-cleaned and packed carefully into a large create. Funds were raised by raffles and donations to met the cost of shipment and distribution,' *The Flowers of Rethymnon - Escape from Crete*, Kangaroo Press, 1994, p.9.
[188] Letter from Lieutenant Irving McKerrow, 2/1 Machine Gunners Battalion 26 September 1942 to Stavros Kaffatos cited in Harokopos, G., *The Fortress Crete 1941-1944*, pp.77-79.
[189] Diane Jeske, " Special Relationships and the Problem of Political Obligations," *Social Theory and Practice*, Vol. 27, No. 1, Jan 2001, p.21.

intelligence section of the 2/7th Battalion, 'my thoughts were with those many big-hearted people who had given to us so generously from their poverty, and I resolved that never in my life would I forget them for a day, and although I was now leaving, and enjoying the precarious security of a submarine . . . I hope my prayer would reveal itself to them in their dreams, so they could in some measure, realise how one Australian soldier felt about a generosity that he never before knew existed on this earth.'[190]

St John's monastery, Prevelly Park, Western Australia
Photograph courtesy of Brad Manera.

As a way of publicly acknowledging their appreciation a Scholarship Trust administered by Returned Servicemen's League was established that gave financial support to a Cretan student each year to further their studies. It was named after the Abbot of Prevelly Monastery Agathangelos Lagouvardos. A moving tribute to the Cretans was also erected by Geoff Edwards of the 2/11th battalion in his home state of Western Australia where he set up an estate which he named 'Prevelly Park' in honour of the monks from the Monastery at Prevelly in Southern Crete who had assisted so many Australian soldiers to escape. A fully functioning Cretan church now rests on this site as a constant reminder to the people in Australia of what was done for their soldiers on Crete during the Second World War. 'It would be a memorial to those who fell. It would honour those brave Cretans, the men and women who risked their own lives in helping us during our hour of need.' explained Geoff Edwards.[191] The title deeds to the chapel and its land were presented to the Greek Orthodox Church of Australia during the

[190] Diary of Pte C.A. Kelly, AWM: PRO2043.
[191] Geoffrey Edwards, *The Road to Prevelly*, E.G. Edwards, Armadale, W.A., 1989, p.125.

opening ceremony 'as a token of gratitude to the Prevelly Monastery and surrounding villages on Crete.'[192]

The Cretans on their part erected a monument on the outskirts of the monastery with the unusual image of a Cretan monk armed with a rifle and an Allied soldier standing side by side. Given their role in the defence of Crete, the image of an armed monk is not as incongruous as it sounds. Bill Travers who fought in the Cretan campaign recalled that: 'the quaintest sight was a party of 20 priests, their cassocks tucked up their stove pipe hats on their heads, bandoliers of ammunition hung all over the body, and rifles in their hand, who were seen stalking through the groves and along the sunken tracks. The enemy had occupied and destroyed their monastery, and they were out for revenge.'[193]

Memorial honouring the Allied resistance to the Germans, situated on the road to Prevelli Monastery, author's photograph.

The Cretan people have never forgotten the part played by the Allied and Australian soldiers in the defence of their island. It has become so embedded in the social memory of the island that even though the Cretans who had personal contact with the Australians may no longer be alive, visitors to the island who mention that they are Australian veterans or relatives of veterans, are treated with courtesy and honour.[194] Colleen Donahue, whose father had fought in the Cretan campaign met the 'grandson of [her] father's friend Petros Georgiakakis . . . [and

[192] Ibid p.129.
[193] William H. Travers, The Battle for the Retimo Landing Strip May 1941, unpublished manuscript on loan to the author courtesy of Bill Travers.
[194] The warm welcome and hospitality Ian Frazer received when he unexpectedly arrived at the home of Spiro Makrakis, the son of the man who sheltered his father during the war, showed Frazer 'quite vividly that the bonds that were established during those life-threatening days of occupation are still as strong as they were.' Damer & Frazer, *On the Run*, p.222.

was told] that he heard all about my father from his grandfather, when he was a little boy sitting on his grandfather's knee." '[195] Many visiting Australian veterans or 'Veterani' as the Greeks in Australia call them, have found their café bill paid for by the locals in memory of their defence of Crete. Colleen Donahue experienced this first hand upon her visit to the island to meet the people who helped her father. Stopping on route at a tavern she was surprised to find that her bill had been paid by people sitting at another table. She exclaimed to her Cretan hosts: ' "but they're not even part of this party or part of our group, why are they paying for it? Because they know your father was a soldier." '[196] John Gemmell who spent six months behind enemy lines in Crete found upon his return visit to the island in 1981 that 'if you were involved in the Greek and Crete fighting you were more than welcomed. They would be very kind to you. You'd be invited out to dinner by people who didn't know you and all this type of thing, more so, than a lot of the Australian people would here!'[197]

Plaque presented posthumously to Charlie Hunter by the village of Koutoyerako containing the following inscription: 'To Charlie Hunter alias 'Μιχαλι' friend of Koustoyerako and fighter in Second World War against Fascism.,' photograph courtesy Colleen Donahue.

A strong emotional bond that did not die with them but was passed on from one generation to the next had developed between the people of Greece and the Australian soldiers because of their shared wartime experience. Many veterans and their families undertook regular pilgrimages to Greece to honour the Greek people who had helped their relatives. Sixty years later, the debt to the Greeks was still remembered by Charlie Hunter's daughter, Colleen Donahue who with her husband Neil made the pilgrimage back to the village of Koustoyerako on the island of Crete to present a plaque expressing the Hunter family's gratitude to the town

[195] Interview: Colleen Donahue nee Hunter, 24 July 2005.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Interview: William John Gemmell 2/5th Batttalion, 21 April 2002.

for the help they had given her father and other servicemen during the war. Hunter's daughter explained that what had made a lasting impression on her as a child was 'the way [my father] spoke about the people from the village of Koustoyerako – [I thought] I would like to meet them and thank them for saving his life and being generous. . . . I thought these people must have been wonderful.'[198]

Colleen Donahue nee Hunter presenting plaque to village of Koustoyerako, with Eleftheria Georgiakakis, the daughter of her father's friend Gregory Georgiakakis seated on her left, and the grandson of Petros Georgiakakis, standing on her right, photography Neil Donahue.

The Australian people, who had relatives fighting in Greece and later on Crete felt a strong affinity with the Greek nation, as witnessed in the letter sent by Eileen Cooney to the Greek Consul General in June 1941:

> I am not ashamed to admit, my tears fell fast, as my Mother and I had lived through every hour of the battle and together we knelt and prayed for the Greek nation, . . . if [my brother] too, has paid the supreme sacrifice, our hearts will know the greatest sorrow . . . but such a sacrifice will be crowned with honour and doubly honoured if he has fallen in a land we love and with a people who have also fought and died in glory. This humble Australian home, waits, and prays but does not look on the battles of Greece and Crete as "delaying actions" but delayed victories, that will yet be won.[199]

There was no evidence however of the existence of a special relationship between the Australian Government and Greece as a result of their wartime involvement. The government could not perceive any political advantage in exploiting the Greek connection. In fact, Prime Minister Menzies, on the advice of Stanley Melbourne Bruce, Australia's High Commissioner in London, rebuffed Greece's request in 1941 for diplomatic representation in Australia.[200] In a

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[198] Interview: Colleen Donahue nee Hunter, 24 July 2005.
[199] Letter from Eileen Cooney, 36 George Street Hornsby to the Emil Vrisakis, Consul General for Greece, Sydney, 5 June 1941, ibid.
[200] Letter from Legation of the Royal Kingdom of Greece to High Commission for the Commonwealth of Australia, 24 June 1941, NAA, Item no: 177617,Series A981/4.

cablegram to the Prime Minister Menzies, Bruce stated: 'I agree entirely with your view that an exchange of Ministers would have no advantages for us. . . . Of all European countries Greece probably has the strongest claim, for reasons of sentiments, to exchange missions but any discrimination in favour of Greece would lead to similar demands from all the others and raise endless difficulties. . . . In my view we should refuse the Greek suggestion.'[201] At this time Australia did not have many embassies in other countries apart from Britain, America and Canada nor did it allow representation from other nations in Australia.

Nevertheless, Greek migrants living in Australia during the war felt insulted and complained to the Honorary Consul of Greece in Sydney, Emil Vrisakis, that they were being treated in the same manner as the enemies of Australia. Vrisakis wrote to the Australian government asking for an explanation as to why 'Greek citizens, although belonging to an allied nation and moreover united by bonds of blood to Australia, are compelled to serve in labour camps with enemy aliens such as Italians, Germans and Bulgarians.'[202] The Bulgarians in particular had replaced the Turks as the most hated enemies of Greece and the Greeks in Australia would have regarded it as offensive to be placed in their company.

Although differences existed between the attitude of the Australian government and that of its soldiers towards the Greek people, it does not detract from the fact that the Australians' survival behind enemy lines rested primarily in the hands of their Greek helpers. The support they received was largely a result of the intimate relationship they established with the Greeks, who came to regard them not as 'xeni' or strangers, but as brothers, treating them with the same care and consideration they accorded members of their own family. What triggered this response from the Greek population is a complex question to answer. Multiple factors influence people to offer assistance to others.[203] Research on the subject suggests that parental values play a strong role in the decision to help other people as does modelling other people's behaviour. It encourages what psychologists have termed 'prosocial behaviour' that is assistance motivated by the idea of reaping reward to 'altruism' or helping others without any personal gain.[204] Altruism is believed to be influenced by cultural rather than personal values.[205]

For many of the Australians soldiers the altruism of the Greeks was one of the most memorable aspects of the campaign. This Greek response to the Australians was indeed

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[201] Cablegram from High Commission, London to Prime Minister, 10 August 1941, ibid.

[202] ΦΑΚΕΛΟ 13 ΚΨΒΕΠΝΗΣΗ ΛΟΝΔΙΝΟ Α/8 [Folder 13: Greek Government in Exile London] Σηζηυτηματα των Ομογενων Αυστραλιασ,[Discussions regarding Greek citizens in Australia], Memo, 13 March 1941, Diplomatic and Historical Archives, Athens, A/8. Vrisakis was a thorn in the Australian government's side and Stanley Melbourne Bruce was keen to have him replaced by the Greeks but Menzies would not hear of it because of Vrisakis' popularity amidst the Greeks in Australia.

[203] Feshbach, Norma D., "Empathy training and prosocial behaviour," in Groebel J. (ed.), *Aggression and War: Their biological and Social Basis*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp.101-111.

[204] Batson, C. D., " Altruism and Prosocial Behaviour," in Gilbert, D, Fiske S. & Lindzey, G. (eds), *Handbook of Social Psychology*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1998, pp.282-316.

[205] Eysenck, Michael W., "Social Behaviour and Relationships," in *Psychology: An International Perspective*, Psychology Press, London, 2004, p.673.

extraordinary. It was unusual because the Australians and Greeks were so culturally different from each other. The Australian reaction to the Greeks was also surprising given their ignorance of Greek culture and history prior to the campaign. They knew little about modern Greece. Yet it was one of the few countries where Australians fought during the Second World War that they voluntarily chose to return, not just once, but many times, after the war. The empathy and humanity exhibited by the Australian soldiers for the Greek people was at odds with the prevailing attitudes towards southern Europeans in Australian society at this time. The 'Smith's Weekly, a popular newspaper in Australia during the war, referred 'to the few Italian migrants as "that greasy flood of Mediterranean scum that seeks to defile and debase Australia." and regularly referred to "Dirty Dago Pests".'[206] Australian attitudes towards foreigners had not changed greatly since the First World War. Racism was still rife in Australia proceeding and following the Second World War. According to Kay Saunders, 'Australians were fighting for and safeguarding a white, British-derived Australia,' and Italians and Greeks did not fit that mould.[207]

The simple explanation for the robust wartime connection between Australians and Greeks is that strong emotions were engaged on both sides.[208] How could it be otherwise when Australians witnessed first hand the suffering countlessGreeks endured on their behalf? Terry Fairbairn of 2/1st Battalion, captured on Crete and transported to Salonika, remembered with tears in his eyes the

> young Greek girls, twelve, thirteen, fourteen were sitting on a wall beside us . . . throwing us cigarettes. There were plenty of German soldiers around. One girl was down on a street, the German soldier, by the way he wore long legged boots and across the bridge of the boot here was a great iron bar; and this German soldier kicked that girl right in the crotch and we heard her bones break and she of course screamed as she fell. Whether she lived or died I frankly don't know. I would think she died.[209]

He recalled the anguish he felt not knowing what happened to that girl. Numerous files exist in the British archives on the imprisonment and torture of Greeks who offered assistance to allied soldiers.[210] People do not forget such sacrifice.

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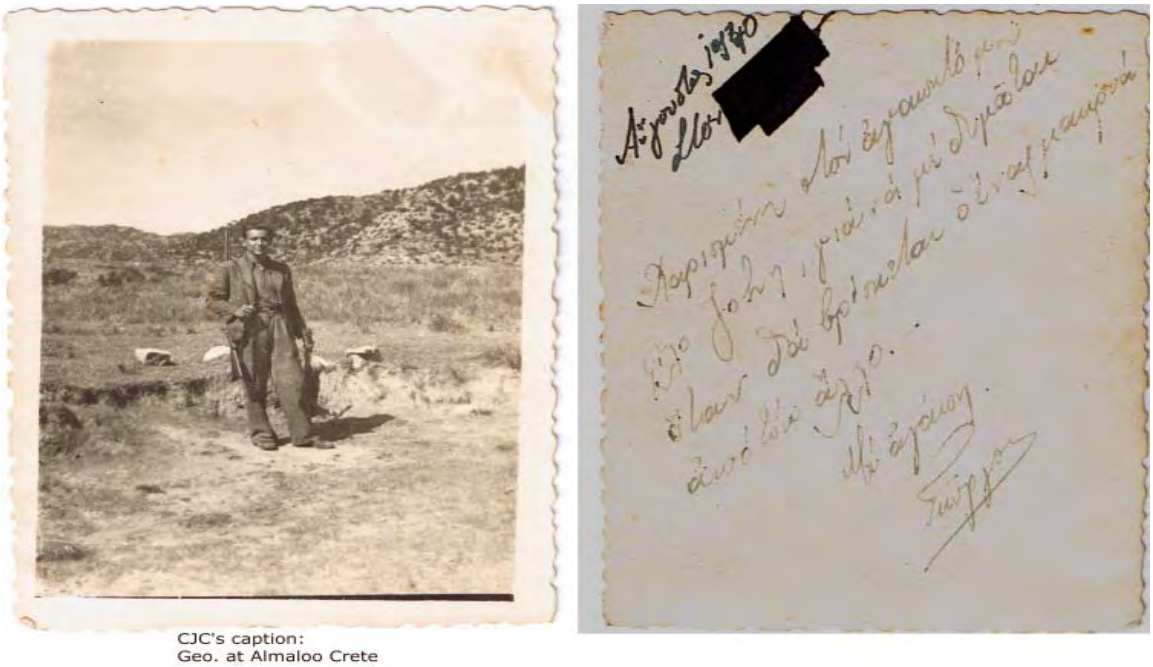
[206] Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981, p.141.
[207] Kay Saunders, "The dark shadow of white Australia: racial anxieties in Australia in World War II," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 17, No.2, April 1994, p.338.
[208] 'Several poignant stories are told of the affection which Greek men formed for Australians and how they piloted them to places of safety at the risk of their own lives. Tears streamed down the face of one as he waved farewell to a party which he had steered through the most perilous part of their journey.' Narrative of Officers, NCO's and Men who escaped from Greece, 1941, AWM 54 534/6/2.
[209] Interview: Terry Fairbairn, 28 April 2002.
[210] Special Interrogation Reports on Allied [Greek] prisoners of war. Greece 1 October 1941 to 30 September 1944, NAB: WO208/5584; Aid to British stragglers in Greece; arrest of Alexander Pallis 1941-1942, NAB: HS 5/460; A A Pallis; Archbishop Damaskinos; awards and assistance to people who helped British escapees and others who worked for Allies, 1944-1945, NAB: HS 5/302.



Greek inscription reads: ‘Dedicate to my dear friend John, so that you can remember me when one of us is far from the other. With love George.’ Photograph courtesy of Hal Corbould the son of Sergeant John Corbould 2/7th Battalion.[211]

While historians have investigated the impact of negative emotions upon soldiers involved in combat, the part played by ‘friendship’, ‘affection’, ‘attachment’ in war and survival, has yet to be fully explored.[212] More research is needed to establish the role of positive emotions during wartime. Certainly, the importance of maintaining troop and civilian morale is well understood but not the full significance of establishing good relations with local communities and developing friendships in countries where Australians are fighting. Ray Pahl has described ‘friendship’ as the modern glue that holds society together.[213] It is only recently that sociologists and psychologist have begun to understand the significance of close relationships such as friendships in society.[214]

The limited research in this area is understandable as the emotional life of a soldier caught behind enemy lines is difficult to reconstruct. Emotions are nebulous, constantly changing and very much tied to a specific time and place, making them difficult to measure and quantify. Lucien Febvre acknowledged that ‘any attempt to reconstitute the emotional life of a given period is a task that is at one and the same time extremely attractive and frightfully difficult. But

[211] Sergeant John Corbould of the 2/7th Battalion was trapped in occupied Crete for over two years and survived with the help of Greek people such as George who presented Corbould with a photograph of himself as a symbol of his deep affection for the Australian soldier.
[212] Joanna Bourke, “ The emotions in war: fear and the British and American military, 1914-45,” *Historical Research*, Vol. 74, No. 185, August 2001, pp.314-330.
[213] Ray Pahl, “ Friendship: the Social Glue of Contemporary Society?” Franklin J. (ed.), *The Politics of Risk Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp.99-119.
[214] M. R. Parks & K. Floyd, “Meanings of closeness and intimacy in friendship,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, Vo. 13, 1996, pp.85-95.

so what? The historian has no right to desert,' for emotions are at the very heart of human endeavour.[215] Research into overcoming the trauma of war suggests that survival is intimately linked to the emotional responsiveness of the immediate environment. Although maintaining a positive frame of mind does help in overcoming adversity under extreme circumstances, strength of character alone does not suffice. Many soldiers reported that occasions arose, during their long and lonely months trapped behind enemy lines on mainland Greece and Crete, when they had seriously considered surrendering to the Germans. It was the only the intervention of their Greek helpers and their families that prevented them from doing so.

AWM: 131012 Neo Khorion, Crete. The Lagonikakis family who helped the Australian and British troops during the German occupation.

[215] Lucien Febvre, " Sensibility and history: how to reconstitute the emotional life of the past," in Burke, P. (ed.), *A New Kind of History: from the writings of Febvre*, translated by K. Folca, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1973, p.19.

Conclusion

Relationships in war, forged under fire and threat of death, are some of the most intense and enduring. According to psychologists, 'relationships often arise from situations in which individuals are brought together on the basis of some shared, ongoing activity.'[1] In the case of the Australian soldiers, their friendship with the Greek people was facilitated by a cataclysmic event – the war in Greece and on Crete and as such, could not help but leave a lasting legacy. Sarah Cole concluded from her study that 'friendships associated with combat become important because they humanise and temper the terrible ferocity of war, injecting into mass warfare a hint of the culture's values: loyalty, love community, sacrifice, valor.'[2]

Chris Hedges reporting from the world's trouble spots observed that war, '[d]ominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it.'[3] It destroys the very fabric of social, economic and cultural life, generating feelings of extreme vulnerability as well as severe distress among combatants and civilians alike. Often the only antidote for such traumatic events is the social relationships that people form with each other. R. S. Weiss identified six psychological needs that relationships fulfil: 'attachment' that provides security; 'social integration' or shared activities that generate feelings of inclusion; 'nurturing' that involves looking after the well being of another; 'reassurance of worth' or validation; 'alliance' or shared goals guaranteeing assistance; 'guidance' or the provision of emotional support under stress.[4] Initially, the military units met many of these needs but as the war progressed, with significant numbers of soldiers captured or trapped behind enemy lines, this role was increasingly taken over by the Greek people.

Although short in duration the Greek and Crete campaigns had a powerful impact on the participants, creating a strong bond of friendship between people who had known each other for a relatively short time. In some ways this is not surprising, given the vulnerable position the Australians found themselves in Greece, bereft of their family and friends in Australia. This connection however was not simply a product of the exigencies of the war, though the war did play a large part, but facilitated, to a great degree, by the understanding and respect shown by Australian soldiers for the cultural values of their Greek allies and by the extraordinary physical and emotional support offered to them by the people of Greece. The altruism of the Greeks was

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[1] Gordon J. Chelune, Joan T. Robison & Martin J. Kommor, "A Cognitive Interactional Model of Intimate Relationships," in Derlega, Valerian J. (ed.), *Communication, Intimacy and Close Relationships*, Academic Press, Orlando Florida, 1984, p.43.
[2] Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.138. Certainly Anzac Day Commemorations support Cole's findings.
[3] Chris Hedges, *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*, Public Affairs, Oxford, 2002, p.3.
[4] R.W. Weiss, "The provisions of social relationships," in Rubin, Z. (ed.), *Doing unto others*, Englewood Cliffs, 1974, cited in Derlega, *Communication, Intimacy and Close Relationship*, pp.139-140.

undeniably one of the most striking aspects of these campaigns.[5] Indeed, Harold Schulweis has maintained that, to 'reveal the unrecorded altruistic acts of anonymous men and women and to interpret their meaning are not only projects of historical integrity but significant contributions to the morale of humankind.'[6] In a study of war and mental health, Derek Summerfield found, that 'unquestionably, the major protective factor [was] the presence of a community able to provide mutual support.'[7]

The Australian soldiers' contact with the Greek community changed their attitude towards the Greek people. Prior to the war, they regarded Greeks and Italians as similar, but their perceptions changed as the war continued and they experienced first hand, the extraordinary kindness of the Greeks.[8] At first, the Greek people could not distinguish between British and Australian troops, they thought of them all as 'Εγγλέζοι' or English; however through their dealings with the Australians, they discovered that they were indeed, quite different people. The Australians did not stand on ceremony, they pitched in where necessary, and there were no class distinctions reflected in their friendships with the Greeks.

As well as highlighting the differences between allied forces on the ground, the Greek and Crete campaigns exposed the weaknesses in relations between their governments. These campaigns placed considerable strain on Britain's relationship with Australia and New Zealand, losing them the confidence of the dominion governments.[9] 'It might be argued,' suggested Jeffrey Grey, 'that with the Greek campaign Churchill sacrificed the confidence of Australian (and New Zealand) politicians and soldiers for a very short-term advantage.'[10] Far more than has been previously acknowledged, what happened during these campaigns significantly influenced the decisions and actions of the Australian high command and their government in the latter part of the Second World War. According to David Horner the Greek campaign of 1941 had an impact on Australia's strategic decision making in the following year and 'brought

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[5] Altruism is a complex concept. The word comes from the Latin 'alter' that means other. According to Webster's *Third New International Dictionary,* it refers to 'uncalculated, consideration of, regard for, or devotion to other's interests' with no immediate gain for oneself.

[6] Harold M. Schulweis in the Forward to Samuel & Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe, Macmillan*, New York, 1988, p.xiii.

[7] Derek Summerfield, "Conflict and health, War and mental health: an overview," *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 321, 2000, p.233.

[8] There exists a significant body of research to suggests that people's behaviour, their beliefs, attitudes and values, in fact their ability to behave in selfless or altruistic ways, is shaped by their culture. Robert Boyd & Peter Richerson, " Culture and Cooperation," in Mansbridge Jane J. (ed.), *Beyond Self-Interest*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, p.113; Maureen Guirdham, in " How Cultures Differ," in *Communicating Across Cultures*, Macmillan, London, 1999, p.48.

[9] Reports for the month of April 1941 for the Dominions, India, Burma and the Colonies, Protectorates and Mandated Territories, Commonwealth of Australia: General Position, NAB: CAB 68/8/180.

[10] Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p.157.

together for the first time in the Second World War, the wide range of problems, faced by a small country such as Australia, in a military alliance.'[11]

No longer was the Australian Commander, General Thomas Blamey, prepared to stand aside and allow the British Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East to deploy Australian troops at will without genuine Australian consultation. No longer would the Australian Commander bow to the authority and wisdom of the British high command. No longer would the Australian government readily acquiesce to the deployment of their troops without serious scrutiny and consideration of Australia's defence requirements. 'Future clashes between British military assessments and Australian military advice, such as over the withdrawal of the 9th Division from Tobruk or the diversion of Australian troops to Burma, would be decided in favour of the Australian commander-in-chief.'[12]

As early as 1940 Blamey was insisting that Australian forces would not be deployed in a piecemeal fashion, demanding that they fight as a formation. General Sir Archibald Wavell nevertheless coerced him into agreeing, against his better judgement, to their deployment in Greece. Told by Wavell that the Australian Prime Minister had consented to the decision, there seemed nothing further for him to do but to comply. Blamey has been criticised for his reticence in communicating his doubts directly to the Australian Government. In reality, Blamey had been out-manoeuvred by Wavell, who gave him little time to consider the operation for fear that he might derail the mission by raising concerns in London and Cairo. The British government and high command had neither the time nor inclination to pander to the sensibilities of the dominion governments and their military representatives; but for diplomatic reasons they needed to appear to consult them. The British displayed arrogance and condescension with regard to the deployment of dominion troops. They failed to acknowledge Australia's independent status as an ally of Britain with sovereign rights over its defence forces. Instead, the Australian forces were viewed as an extension of the British. The Australian air force and navy were subsumed into the British forces to the point where they were no longer recognisable as Australian. Due to Blamey's intransigence they were not able to achieve the same success with the Australian army. The Australians were not alone in their desire to preserve the integrity of their land forces. The Canadians also refused Britain's request to have their army dissected and deployed as part of British units under British command.[13]

Menzies has been much maligned for not being more resolute over the deployment of Australian troops to Greece during his visit to Britain in 1941. According to Grey, he was

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[11] David Horner *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, George Allen & Unwin, Canberra, 1982, p.65.
[12] Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p.157.
[13] J. L. Granastein, "Canada as an Ally: Always Difficult, Always Divided," in Dennis, P. & Grey, J. (eds), *Entangling Alliances: Coalition Warfare in the Twentieth Century*, The Chief of Army's Military History Conference, Australian History Military Publications, Sydney, 2005, p.257.

‘hoodwinked by the British over the Greek campaign, but then so was Blamey, who should have known better.’[14] Possibly this was the case, but it is more likely that Menzies agreed to Greece, knowing the hopelessness of the situation, to ensure British support against Japan. Perhaps his mistake was being too quick to trade the safety of Australian troops for the ‘possibility’ of British support.[15] To his credit however he did try to remedy the situation in the future by insisting that dominion governments be given a voice in the British War Cabinet. Though this suggestion was not well received by the British cabinet, this did not deter him from lobbying for the appointment of an Australian commander to a senior leadership position. In a most secret cable Menzies sent to Fadden, he explained: ‘I have gone further and indicated that Blamey should be promptly considered for some important command such as the Western Desert or Egypt and that we should feel much happier because we could then feel that we have an effective voice in decisions on the spot. Have also stressed that a suitable Australian officer should be posted to Wavell’s staff for similar reasons.’[16] To appease the Australian Prime Minister Blamey was appointed Deputy Chief of the Middle East under General Archibald Wavell, the Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East. Although this was a senior position it did not command great power and influence. According to John Hetherington, ‘it was an office created for him and signifying nothing, though it bore a resounding title. Nobody was better aware than Blamey himself that this was glory without power.’[17] Regardless of the situation he found himself in Blamey took his appointment very seriously. For all the criticisms of Blamey’s performance in Greece and his personal behaviour during the war, it has to be recognised that he did his best to defend and uphold the sovereignty of Australian forces in the Middle East, to the point where Auchinleck, who replaced Wavell as Commander-in Chief Middle East, found him to be a real thorn in his side and asked for his immediate removal. In a top secret cipher to the Foreign Office the British Minister of State to the Middle East, Lyttelton, implored Anthony Eden to remove Blamey:

> Blamey is becoming impossible, and I hope very much you can persuade the Australian Government to replace him. Difficulty is that he will not take orders from Auchinleck and continually raises objections . . . He is now asking to be a member of the Middle East War Council and Defence Committee. I could not agree to him in either capacity because firstly it would mean that other Dominion Commanders would have to be given similar representation on Middle East War Council. . . . He is now very short of being insufferable.[18]

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[14] Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, p.163.

[15] He also failed to establish a successful working relationship with Churchill similar to the one that existed between Roosevelt and Churchill. See Joseph P. Lash, *Roosevelt and Churchill 1939-1941: The Partnership That Saved the West*, W.W. Norton & Company Inc, New York, 1976.

[16] Cablegram from Rt. Hon. R. G Menzies, London to Acting Prime Minister, Mr Fadden, 19 April 1941, NAA: CP290/9, item 13.

[17] John Hetherington, *Blamey: The Biography of Field-Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1954, p.112.

[18] Top secret cipher from Minister of State Middle East to Secretary of State [Eden] NAB FO 954/15.

Blamey had learnt a big lesson from the Greek campaign and was not going to fall into the same trap again, nor was he going to allow himself to be intimidated by British authority. He certainly was not going to leave Australian troops in the same position again.[19] In a letter to the Minister of the Army Spender, on 8 September 1941, he intimated as much: ' I feel quite sure that the Australian Government would not care to have another Greece and Crete experience.'[20] Recalled for duties in Australia he instructed his successor, General Leslie Morshead, to protect Australia's interests.[21]

Australia's junior status in its alliance with Britain placed it in a vulnerable position from the beginning to the end of the Greek campaign. Australians were excluded from any discussions between the Greeks and the British regarding the viability of a campaign they were expected to implement. As David Horner has maintained, 'Australian participation in the planning for the campaign was non-existent.'[22] Effective interaction with the Greeks on a tactical level was stymied by the lack of adequate British planning and organisation. A glaring example of this was the British high command's failure to use the 3,000 bi-lingual Cypriot base troops deployed in Greece as interpreters. This failure, amongst others, resulted in poor communications between the Australian forces and their Greek allies, making co-ordination between them very difficult, if not impossible. The campaign in Crete in particular highlights the level of British incompetence. Instead of developing a working relationship with the Cretan people that utilised their local knowledge and manpower, the respective British commanders on the island ignored them.

A further reminder of Australia's lack of influence and power was the appointment of the British General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson as the commander of the Greek campaign that consisted predominantly of Australian and New Zealand troops with only one British armoured brigade.[23] What made matters worse was that Wilson's command was not successful, having divided his headquarters between Athens and a remote village in Central Greece. This led to confused lines of communication until Blamey formed the Anzac Corps on 6 April 1941 uniting the Australian and New Zealand forces under one command. Exacerbating matters further, Wilson chose to ignore the advice of the British military mission in Greece. Intelligence information that could have been shared with the Australian commanders in the field to inform their operations in Greece was never passed on. Although Wilson has been credited with

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[19] See Hetherington, *Blamey*, pp.119-124 for a discussion of the serious altercation that took place between Blamey and Auchinleck over relieving the 9th Division at Tobruk.
[20] Ibid p.122.
[21] David Horner, "Australia and Coalition Warfare in the Second World War," Dennis, P. & Grey, J. (eds.) *Entangling Alliances: Coalition Warfare in the Twentieth Century*, p.117.
[22] Horner, *High Command*, p.66.
[23] According to David Horner, 'No Australians were appointed to senior command or staff appointments,' by the British, "Australia and Coalition Warfare in the Second World War," Dennis, P. & Grey, J. (eds.) *Entangling Alliances: Coalition Warfare in the Twentieth Century*, p.118.

conducting a successful withdrawal from Greece, this had more to do with Ultra advice that placed him one step ahead of the Germans.

Australia possessed limited knowledge about Greece before its troops entered the country. They knew little about the country's domestic politics, demography or geography. The Australian government was not aware of the divisions that existed between the government of Greece and sections of its military regarding support for the Allies and fighting Germany. Whilst most of the Greek military were prepared to engage the Italians, they were reluctant to take on the might of the German army. As a consequence, the Australian forces entered Greece with unrealistic expectations of their Greek allies. They arrived expecting co-operation and support but found that this was not the case on the ground. By the time the Australians had reached the Greek frontier the Greek army had downed arms and was retiring, placing the Australians in a very precarious situation in northern Greece. Furthermore, they were surprised by the extent of Fifth Column activity in Greece. Trying to negotiate difficult terrain with an ally that did not speak the same language and in some cases was not always sympathetic to their cause, made the task they had undertaken even more burdensome. Their lack of knowledge about their coalition partners seriously hindered the development of a successful working relationship with the Greek military.

The problem for the Australians was that they were heavily dependant on the British for intelligence, which was not always forth coming. This was a perplexing situation given that Britain had an abundance of intelligence operatives in Greece and Crete witnessed by the prolific publication of their post-war memoirs.[24] Australia however did not have an independent intelligence service reporting directly to their high command, although they did have an effective signals intelligence unit as well as liaison officers assigned to each battalion. Their role involved gathering intelligence on their enemy not their ally. They did not have a military mission in Greece before the campaign commenced and there was no opportunity for Australia to develop any personal relations with its Greek ally nor gather information that would have assisted the military to understand the real situation in Greece and act accordingly.

Before the war Australia's foreign and defence policy was directed and controlled by Britain. It had no diplomatic representation in other countries until 1940 when Australia saw it as important to establish diplomatic missions in United States, Canada, Japan and China. Before the commencement of the Greek campaign the Australian government naively assumed that British and Australian interests were aligned and accepted Churchill's 'Beat Hitler First' strategy, believing that its security lay safely in British hands. This meant that the British were in the powerful position to convey to the Australians only what they wanted them to know and deny them access to information that conflicted with British war aims and strategy.

[24] See 'Introduction' for details.

This is not to suggest, that had the Australians been given the required intelligence on Greece, the outcome of the campaign would have been any different. It might have enabled them to be better prepared for what they were to encounter in Greece and Crete. Instead, they were deployed to Greece without training for mountain warfare, without adequate clothing for the changed weather conditions, without transport such as donkeys and mules that could negotiate hair-pin bends situated at altitudes of 6,000 feet above sea level, with outdated communications equipment that proved useless in the mountainous terrain of Greece, and most importantly, with little means of communication with their ally who spoke a different language. The circumstances they found in Greece made for very strained relations between the Australian commanders and their Greek counterparts, who had adopted a defeatist attitude even before German hostilities had begun. On Crete, relations with the Greek military forces were no better, since many of the Greeks were raw recruits with little battle experience or discipline.

While the Australians' relationship with the Greek military, both on the mainland and in Crete, was fraught with problems, their personal interactions with the Greek people were very successful. This greatly assisted the survival of Australian troops in Greece, particularly those soldiers left behind enemy lines after the evacuation of the Allied forces. The Greeks helped the troops, at great personal risk to themselves, providing them with food and shelter. They established escape committees soon after the arrival of the Germans that supplied Australian troops with boats and in some cases money and knowledge of escape routes out of Greece. Crete, in particular, suffered for its support of the allied forces. The Cretans were severely punished for their defiance of German orders not to harbour British stragglers, with the burning of entire villages to the ground.[25]

The reaction of the Australian soldiers to the people in Greece was very dissimilar from their response to the Egyptians, both during the First and Second World War. In Greece, the warm welcome of the people and their open admiration of the Australian troops meant that initial contact with their Greek allies was very positive. Their presence in Egypt had not been welcomed and to some extent the Egyptians had cause for concern in terms of the behaviour of some Australian soldiers in North Africa. There were reports of Australian soldiers looting in Derna and interfering with Arab women that had been passed on to General Iven Mackay, commander of the 6th Division in an angry memo from the British General, Sir Richard O'Connor.[26] One explanation for the Australians' reaction to the Arabs in general and the Egyptians in particular, offered by Susan Brugger's study, was their lack of knowledge and

[25] The interrogation files of the Greeks who collaborated with the British record the cruel treatment metered out by the Germans with the gouging of prisoner's eyes amongst other acts of terror, Special Interrogation Reports on Allied [Greek] prisoners of war, Greece 1 October 1941 to 30 September 1944, NAB: WO208/5584.

[26] Copies of correspondence regarding indiscipline by Australian Troops, February 1941, Signal from General O'Connor to General Mackay, O'Connor Papers 4/2/47 Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, Kings College, London.

ignorance of Egyptian history and culture.[27] While this is true, it does not fully explain their positive response to the Greeks, initially whom, they knew little about.

There are many reasons for the success of the relations between the Australians and Greek civilians. The Australians' warm response to the Greeks can be explained to a certain extent by their common heritage – being part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Furthermore classics education and ancient Greek history had been part of the school curriculum before the war. And most soldiers felt enthusiastic at the prospect of visiting the places they had read so much about at school and viewing first hand the archaeological wonders of the Greek world. The climate and beauty of Greece in spring- time, after the dry hot conditions of the Western dessert, was a welcomed relief to the Australian soldiers, making them more positively disposed towards the country. They also found the Greeks more akin to themselves in terms of values and attitudes. Their sense of loyalty was not dissimilar to the Australian soldiers' sense of 'mateship,' as most soldiers felt they could trust a Greek with their lives. They admired their cleanliness in the face of extreme poverty and hunger.[28] They found their hospitality, given freely and with no obvious financial gain, both surprising and overwhelming. Their altruism was remarkable given the exigencies of the war and was in stark contrast to what they perceived to be the Egyptians' mercenary behaviour. But beyond that, they shared the common goal with the Greeks of fighting Fascism. Many Australian soldiers admired Greece's courage – a small nation bravely fighting the Italians and now faced with the German onslaught.

What existed in abundance in Greece is what social scientists refer to as 'social capital.' It is defined as social relationships or networks that provide support, help and resources.[29] It was the glue that held Greek society together at a time of war - a resource that the Australians were able to utilise. Ian Winter maintains that 'there is now mounting international evidence that social relations of a particular quality . . . characterised by high degrees of mutual trust and reciprocity . . . enable people to act collectively.'[30] 'Trust' is a vital component of social capital and it was the trust that developed between the Australian soldiers and the Greek citizens that provided them with the help they needed to survive. How the Australian soldiers, so culturally different from the Greeks, were able to gain the trust of their allies is one of the key questions addressed by this study.

What this research has revealed is that the Australians were able to harness the goodwill of the Greek people by the respect they had shown for their values and customs, an ingredient that was missing in their relations with the Egyptians. They displayed a sense of humanity

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[27] Suzanne Brugger, *Australians and Egypt 1914-1919*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1980.
[28] The Greeks smelt differently from the Egyptians. The Australians found that the Greeks' personal hygiene was more akin to European standards. A common expression used by returned Australian soldiers was 'smellier than an Arab's armpit.' Sergeant Douglas Colin Hill, 7th Division A.I.F.
[29] Ian Winter, "Towards a theoretical understanding of family life and social capital," *Australian Institute of Family Studies*, Working Paper No.21, April 2000, pp.1-2.
[30] Ibid p.1.

towards the locals, particularly the children that moved many Greek citizens. Although they did not agree with the treatment of women in Greece, they did not intervene, having learnt through first hand experience, particularly on Crete, that to do so risked alienating their allies. Greece was a traditional society that operated on close familial and kinship ties. There was strict governance controlling the behaviour of women, particularly in relation to male-female contact. A woman's virtue was her most prized possession and linked to her family's honour. Thus the Australian soldiers kept a respectful distance from the women of Greece.

AWM: 006839 - Athens 1941 Child peddling sweets to Australian soldiers

The Greeks admired the Australians for their audacity or 'θάρρος' [tharros] and courage or 'θράσος' [thrassos] in the face of the German threat. The Australians earned the title on Crete of 'ραλικάρια' [palikaria] or brave warriors, a description not readily bestowed upon foreigners. The Greeks were conscious of the fact that these men had come far and risked their lives to protect Greece. What impressed them the most was the fact that the Australian soldiers were volunteers not conscripts. They welcomed them into their own homes. They washed, cleaned and fed them, looked after their wounds and literally gave them the food from their own children's plate. To a certain extent this was part of the Greek culture and ethos of hospitality, referred to as 'φιλοξενία' and the Greek concept of 'φιλότιμο' [philotimo] or respect for one's friends, but not entirely.

Abbot Spitadakis, Bishop Irineos, self, Father Basil and Beryl.

Geoff Edwards of 2/11th Battalion and his wife Beryl at the dedication of the water fountain at the Monastery at Preveli, in memory of the help offered to the Australian soldiers by the Cretan people.

What developed from this shared danger and hardship was a personal and very intimate relationship with their Greek allies that went well beyond the bounds of normal friendship. Described as 'relational proximity' or intimacy by Michael Schluter, it was produced by the quality of interaction between the Australian soldiers and Greek people.[31] This strong

[31] Michael Schluter & David Lee, *The R Factor*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1993, pp.68-92.

attachment was forged at a time of war when social norms and inhibitions had been discarded, as survival was paramount on people's minds. Neither has this connection been forgotten or diminished by age. The Greeks regarded the Australians as more than friends, as brothers, part of their family with whom they shared the trials and tribulations of living in occupied Greece. This was very much the case on Crete where some Australians had lived with the same family for up to three years, fighting in the Greek resistance and assisting the villagers with their daily chores. Many of these families corresponded with the Australian soldiers after the war, using familial terms and endearments normally restricted to close family members in their letters.[32]

The Australian veterans on their part returned to Greece and Crete many times after the war to visit their Greek friends and show their wives and children where they fought. Some referred to their return to Greece as 'going home,' such was the bond that was created with the Greek families who rescued them during the war. They attempted, in every way they could to repay the kindness and hospitality bestowed upon them by the Greeks. Numerous Greek families had been assisted and sponsored to migrate to Australia by the soldiers whom they had harboured. Another veteran chose to erect a plaque at Preveli monastery on Crete to publicly thank the monks for the sacrifices they had made on the Australian soldiers' behalf. A Cretan church was also built in Western Australia by an Australian soldier who fought on Crete as a constant reminder to the Australian people of the help given to their soldiers by their Greek allies during the war. The Returned Servicemen's League of Australia established a scholarship fund for Cretans students to assist with their tertiary education as a way of repaying some of the assistance given to Australian troops during these campaigns. Returned soldiers also played an important role in helping Greek migrants adjust to a new country.

Plaque presented to the Preveli monastery, author's photograph.

[32] Papers of John Desmond Peck AWM: PRO3098.

While many myths have arisen about the Greek and Crete campaigns, the claim that an intimate relationship developed between the Australians soldiers and the Greek people as a result of their shared wartime experience, is not one of them. An examination of Greek-Australian interaction during the war has shown that this belief does have a strong basis in reality. Far from being a piece of propaganda voiced at commemoration ceremonies, it reflects the true nature of the relations between Australians and Greeks during and after the war. Furthermore, this relationship did not cease with the death of the veterans and Greeks involved in these campaigns but has become part of the social memory of both countries, to the point where children of veterans are welcomed in Greece and Crete as warmly as the veterans were themselves. The children of veterans have also sought to re-establish and revitalise the links with the Greek people that were forged in battle over sixty years ago.

The government of Australia, unlike its soldiers however, did not develop a special relationship with Greece as a result of their wartime alliance.[33] Instead they refused to grant Greece's numerous requests for diplomatic representation in Australia. Greece was not perceived as economically or politically important to Australia and the government saw no advantage in establishing diplomatic ties with the country. Although it did concede in December 1941 to the entry of one thousand Greek migrants into the country, in recognition of Australia's wartime relationship with Greece: 'cabinet to-day decided, as a gesture in recognition of the gallant service rendered by the Greek nation to the Allied cause, to approve of the existing policy relating to alien immigration into Australia being modified to permit of the entry of Greek nationals whose admission has been sponsored by the Greek War Relief Fund committee.'[34] It was Dr Evatt's support of Greek territorial claims in the United Nations that opened the way for closer ties with Greece. In 1945 Norman Makin, the Acting Minister for External Affairs 'received a cable from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Athens, paying a high tribute and expressing the deep gratitude of the Greek people to Dr. H.V. Evatt, who, as a worthy spokesman of Australia in London, supported the rights of Greece.'[35] Evatt's support was also instrumental to Greek claims over the island of Kastellorizo, part of the Dodecanese islands situated in the Aegean that had been under Italian control.[36] Australia also supported Greece's request for a larger reparation payment from Italy for damage inflicted upon it during the war. Australia's participation in the Red Cross Mission in 1945 and the UNSCOB delegation to Greece in 1948 began the process whereby diplomatic recognition of Greece was

[33] See conclusion of Chapter 6 for details.
[34] Press statement by the Prime Minister, "Greek Migrants," Canberra, 16 December 1941, NAA: A5954, item 253/13.
[35] Letter from E.C. Vrisakis, Consul General of Greece, to N.J.O. Makin, Acting Minister for External Affairs, 19 October 1945, NAA: A1066 item E45/16/11.
[36] Dr Evatt had been a strong advocate at the peace conference of the 21 Allied nations held in Paris in 1945 of the smaller states such as Greece, that had supported the Allies during war, insisting that their opinions be taken into account in framing the peace settlements.

considered and formally granted in 1953. Writing to the Australian Prime Minister Ben Chifley in 1946, the regent of Greece declared that the 'links that were forged between Greeks and Australians, during the hard struggle in 1941 against our common enemy, have been strengthened by the philanthropic work of the Australian Red Cross Mission.'[37] According to Hugh Gilchrist the Australian Red Cross team in Greece,

> saved thousand of Greeks from starvation and hundreds more from death from disease. To the impoverished people of western Macedonia it brought basic commodities with which to rebuild their war-shattered lives. It instructed many village women in the rudiments of nursing and hygiene. Most importantly, through its efforts, not one case of typhus entered Greece from among the ten thousand refugees who struggled in across the nation's north-west borders.[38]

Although adequate attention has been given to the strategic and political dimension of the Greek campaigns in the literature, what has been overlooked is the fundamental importance of human relationships during a time of war, when society is fragmenting. Research suggests that with the breakdown of governmental controls and civil institutions during the war in Greece, the Greek family and its network of community relationships helped both the Greek people and Australian soldiers survive. While military historians have examined the impact of strategy, politics and economics, they have not taken into account the relational dimension of war. Relationship analysis has been used as an effective method for informing public policy. It can provide answers as to why some government policies fail while others succeed.[39] But it has been ignored as a methodological tool for the study of war. Examining the war in Greece from a relational perspective offers new insights into what happened on the ground and provides an understanding of the effects of command decisions on the individual soldiers as well as the campaign itself.

Personal interactions between governments of countries and people involved in battle do influence what happens on the ground, and cannot and should not be ignored. Relationship analysis integrated with political and strategic considerations, can be a powerful tool for decision-making at a time of war when human endurance is tested to its limits. It can provide

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[37] Letter from His Excellency Archbishop Damaskinos, Regent of Greece to Mr. J. P. Chifley, Prime Minister of Australia, 25 April 1946, A1066 item E45/16/11, NAA In September of 1944 the Australian Red Cross Society (ARCS) had amassed huge supplies for Greece under the control of William Smithett, who travelled throughout Greece reporting to the authorities back home on the dire situation in the country. The Australian Red Cross relief team consisting of medical officers and nurses, drivers and interpreters and a Refuge Relief Unit under the leadership of Lieutenant E. S. Purbrick, left Australia for Greece in April 1945 under the command of Colonel Alex Sheppard. They were appalled at the level of poverty, hunger and disease they encountered in Greece with many people suffering from scabies due to a lack of soap. They worked in western Macedonia between the towns of Florina near the border with Albania and Kozani. Their task was to care for refugees in transit camps and to distribute food, clothes and medical supplies to the Greek people that had suffered badly in that region.

[38] Hugh Gilchrist, *Australians and Greeks: The Later years*, Vol. III, Halstead Press, 2004, p.142.

[39] The Relationships Foundation based in the UK concluded that 'UK housing authorities take no account of the proximity of close family members when allocating housing for single parents. Given the critical importance of extended family support for most single parents, this approach is difficult to understand,' Lindsay Tanner, "Decision makers forget the people," *The Australian*, 17 August, 1999.

the high command with the opportunity of examining a campaign from a totally new angle. Although it is difficult to measure the impact of positive relationships during battle, a conservative estimate of the Greek and Crete campaign suggests that such relationships saved the lives of at least one thousand Australian soldiers trapped behind enemy lines.

This study has shown that it is vital to develop an effective working relationship with one's allies in campaigns where Australian troops are fighting on foreign soil. Part of this involves briefing the troops in the culture, history and domestic politics of that country so that effective communication channels can be created thus avoiding misunderstanding caused by ignorance. With an understanding of other people's culture and values comes respect that in turn produces trust and cooperation between allies. To achieve this, an independent military intelligence unit reporting directly to the Australian high command is needed so that intelligence about one's enemy as well as one's ally, is not filtered through the lenses of another country. The Third Royal Commission on Intelligence and Security also reached a similar conclusion:

> Australia's intelligence interests do not, and cannot, coincide with those of any other country. Therefore, although we can and should benefit from exchange of information and views with friends and allies, we need our own intelligence collection and assessment capabilities. We also need constantly to reassess the benefits to Australia from intelligence relationship with other countries against the costs.[40]

Furthermore, the fostering of key relationships between the commanders of the countries concerned would significantly improve the outcome for soldiers on the ground. A vital component of successful relationships is: 'relational proximity' achieved through 'personal contact,' 'regular meetings,' 'parity between allies,' so that power does not rest totally in the hand of one partner in the alliance and a 'commonality of interests.'[41]

Although the Greek and Crete campaigns have not received the attention of Gallipoli and more recently Kokoda, they deserve far closer scrutiny than ever before with Australia's involvement in Iraq and its alliance with America, particularly in relation to intelligence advice. The 'experience of the Second World War suggests that a more independent, dedicated effort in electronic intelligence can only be of benefit to Australian security planning and operations.'[42] If the Greek campaign is mentioned at all, importance is often placed on the successful withdrawal of the allied forces from Greece, but it is not the most enduring aspect of the campaign. Sometimes referred to as the 'Second Dunkirk', the withdrawal from Greece had more to do with knowledge of Ultra transcripts than brilliant strategy on the part of the British

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[40] Mr Justice Hope, *Third Report of the Royal Commission on Intelligence and Security: Abridged Findings and Recommendations,* Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1977, p.17 cited in Ball, Desmond J., "Allied Intelligence Cooperation Involving Australia During World War II," *Australian Outlook,* 1978, p.309.

[41] Michael Schluter, "Summary sheet of Relational Proximity", *Relationships Foundation: Building relationships in Public & Private Life,* www.relationshipsfoundation.org

[42] Ball, "Allied Intelligence Cooperation Involving Australia During World War II," *Australian Outlook,* p.309.

commander.[43] Similarly, enthusiasts of aerial warfare might find an examination of the Crete campaign fascinating, but in terms of the Greek people, who died in the thousands defending their island and the Australian troops who assisted them, the relationship that developed between them on the ground was of far greater significance. Indeed, the importance of these campaigns lies not in what they tell us about the conduct of battles, but in what they reveal about the role of relationships in war, not only amongst soldiers and civilians, but also between their governments and military leaders.

Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery, Pharleron Athens, Greece. Photograph courtesy of Nectarios Costadopoulos.

Most importantly, a study of the Greek and Crete campaigns has proven that it is possible to develop successful relations with people of a completely different culture; and that such relationships are important, and should be nurtured as they are vital for the psychological well being of all those involved.[44] The importance of preserving relationships in wartime was acknowledged by British psychologist Major Wilfred Bion who developed a technique in 1940s to select officers who had a 'capacity for maintaining personal relationships in a situation of strain that tempted him to disregard the interests of his fellows for the sake of his own.'[45] Research on human psychology has confirmed that, 'relationships with others are a major aspect

[43] Monty Woodhouse, a British intelligence officer in Greece was amazed at 'the precision of the information passing through his hands as a staff officer at the Expeditionary Force's headquarters. ' "Astoundingly accurate," he wrote to [Ronald Lewin]. "We had the German Order of Battle every evening."' Ronald Lewin, *Ultra Goes to War: The Secret Story*, Penguin, London, 1978, p.156.
[44] Wendy Holden, *Shell Shock: The Psychological Impact of War*, Macmillan, London, 1984.
[45] Ibid p.93.

of human experience.'[46] Not only are human relations important in business and commerce, but also in war because they build resilience and help people cope with traumatic situations.[47] Therefore they should not be overlooked, but factored into studies of conflict situations.

AWM: ART21264 - Ivor Hele's 1941 study of Australian troops disembarking after their evacuation from Greece depicting John Dowie, captures the hardship endured by the soldiers, at odds with the official rhetoric. See footnote 49.

Wars are fought for a variety of reasons and not always sound military ones.[48] Greece was a campaign that had little chance of success. The British knew this but persevered for good political reasons. The Greek military also knew this and did not want to sacrifice their forces in

[46] S. T. Margulis, V. J. Derlega, B. A. Winstead, "Implications of Social Psychological Concepts for a Theory of Loneliness," in Derlega, (ed.), *Communication, Intimacy and Close Relationships*, p.140.
[47] Psychologist Margaret Lindorff suspected from her study of Australian Second World War veterans that 'there were large amounts of "social support" (otherwise known as mateship) 'and this was what helped soldiers cope in the jungles of New Guinea, email from Margaret Lindorff to Maria Hill, 12 February 2008.
[48] General Blamey commenting on the Greek campaign stated on 7 August 1941 that the 'outstanding lesson of the Greek Campaign is that no reasons whatever should outweigh military considerations when it is proposed to embark on a campaign, otherwise failure and defeat are courted, cited in Cullens, Major Jamie, " A Slight Misunderstanding- Politicians, Commanders and Greece, 1941," *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No. 88 May/June 1991, p.51.

a futile gesture regardless of what their government had promised the British. Had the Australian War Cabinet been told the truth they would not have agreed to send Australian troops to Greece. This thesis concludes that had the Australian forces been adequately briefed on the real situation in Greece and included in the organisation of the campaigns they could have dealt with the exigencies they faced far better than they did. More importantly, they would also have been in a better position to establish an effective working relationship with the Greek military. Though never fully acknowledged in the literature, the level of trauma and grief these campaigns caused was immense.[49] Thus, had it not been for the warm, close relationship that developed between Australian soldiers and Greek people and the strong friendships that resulted, many Australians would not have survived nor cope as well as they did.[50]

AWM: 139178 Melbourne 26 June 1943, Private Vernon Howard, an escapee from Crete, receives an enthusiastic welcome from his family on his arrival in Australia.

[49]Margaret Lindorff was surprised to discover from her study of the mental health of Australian soldiers that 'little [was] known about the psychological effects of war service on Australian World War II veterans . . . many [veterans] commented that they had never talked to anyone about their war experiences, or the effects of these experiences.' Lindorff found that the veterans were suffering from symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD such as nightmares, sleeplessness, 'flashbacks', irritability and generalised anxiety. "After the War is over . . . PTSD symptoms in World War II Veterans," *The Australian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies*, Vol. 2, 2002, published online: http://www.massey.ac.nz/~trauma/issues/2002-2/lindorff.htm

[50] The official British response to the Greek debacle was: 'In spite of heavy fighting they have been through and trying experiences of re-embarkation under such conditions, the troops that have returned from Greece are entirely unperturbed by their struggle against such odds, and are convinced of their superiority over the Germans both as individuals and as unit and formations. The successful withdrawal of so large a proportion of these invaluable troops is a noteworthy achievement. The troops have all retained their fighting equipments as well as their fighting spirit, and the heavy equipment that has been lost will soon be replaced.' From the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs 1 May 1941 to Prime Minister, Balkan situation: Yugoslavia Greece – Turkey 15 March 1941 – 1May 194, NAA: Series A816 item 19/301/106. Ivor Hele's portrait however tells another story.

APPENDIX A

GERMAN FORCES IN GREECE

At the beginning of April 1941 the German Army consisted of 153 divisions. The German High Command had allocated twenty of the divisions to Operation 'MARITA' for the conquest of Greece. Later this number was reduced to 10 divisions under Field Marshal List the commander of the Twelfth Army**.** They consisted of:

40th (Motorised) Corps (General Stumme)
- 9th Armoured Division
- 73rd Infantry Division
- S.S. Leibstandarte "Adolf Hitler Bodyguards"

XVIII (Mountain) Corps (General Boehme)
- 2nd Armoured Division
- 5th Mountain Division
- 6th Mountain Division
- 72nd Division
- 125th Infantry Regiment

XXXC Corps (General Hartmann, Later General Ott)
- 50th Division
- 164th Division

AIRFORCE:
VIII Airforce Corps under the command of Air chief Marshal Richtoven assigned to the 12th Field Army consisting of:
650 aircraft (280 bombers, 150 vertical assault 'Stukas,' 90 single –engine fighters, 90 double-engine fighters and bombers and 40 reconnaissance.)

4th Airforce Fleet:
744 aircraft of various types

TOTAL number of German front-line aircraft = 1,000
(including close air support unit that had been assigned to Larger Units)

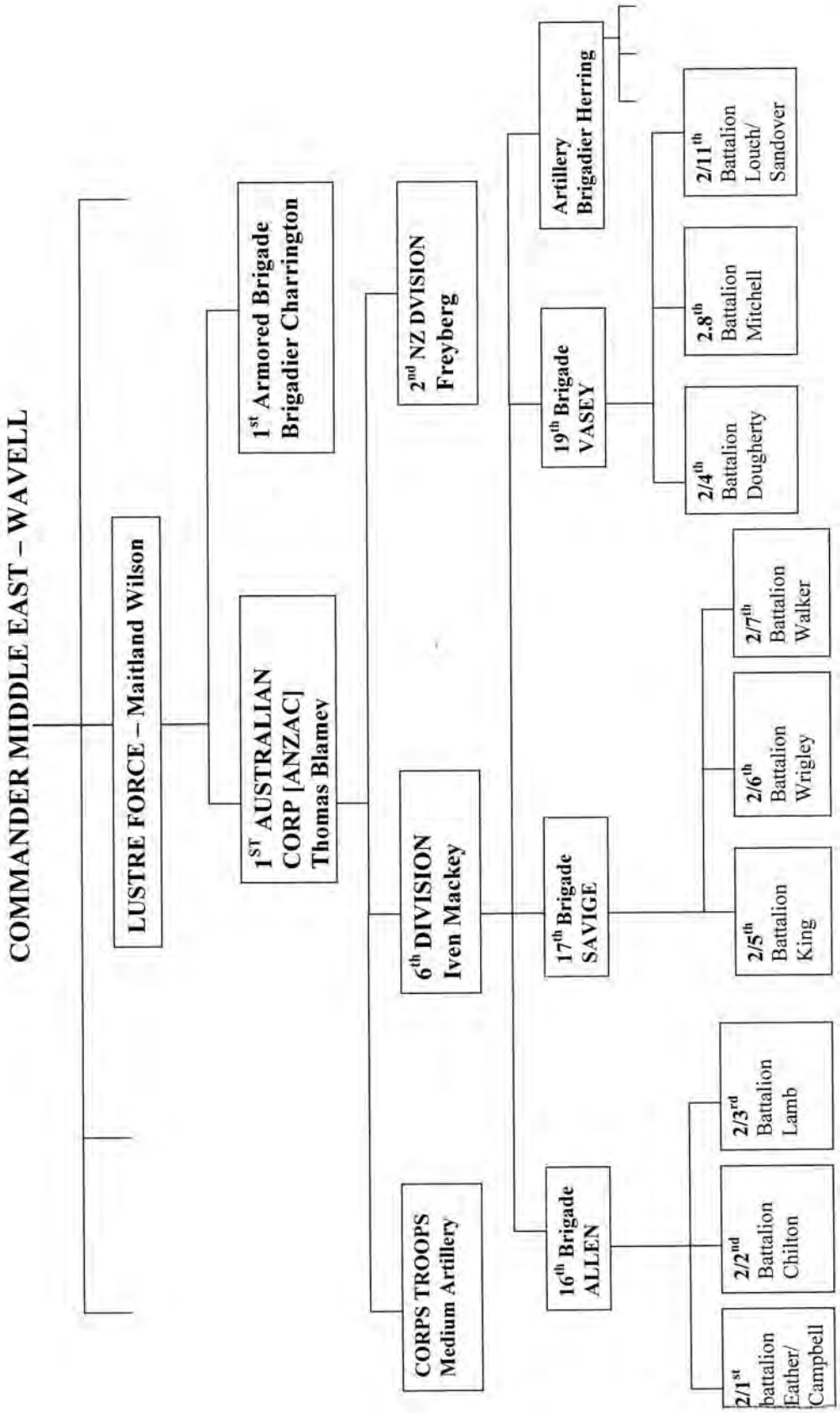
CASUALTIES

Killed	Wounded	Missing
1,160	3,755	345
TOTAL		5,270

Source: Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Collins in association with the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1953, p.50 & p.18.
Hellenic Army General Staff, *Abridged History of the Greek-Italian and Greek-German War 1940-1941*, Army History Directorate, Athens, 1984, pp.181-182.

APPENDIX B

LUSTREFORCE COMMAND STRUCTURE



APPENDIX C

ORGANISATION OF THE GREEK ARMY DURING THE GERMAN INVASION OF GREECE

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS

Commander in Chief	LtGen Alexandros Papagos
Chief of general HQ	Maj Gen Paraschos Melissinos
A' Deputy Chief of Gen. HQ	Maj Gen Ioannis Striber
B' Deputy Chief of Gen. HQ	Maj Gen Christos Karassos until 11-2-41

Headquarters: Athens

The GREEK military Forces were organised into three armies:

(i) The **Western MACEDONIAN Army**, conducting the ALBANIAN campaign (which included the Epirus Field Army)

Commander: Lt. Gen Ioannis Pitsikas-
Headquarters as of 17-4-41 was Votonossi (6kms W of Metsovo)
* On 17-4-41 was renamed as C' Army Corps

(ii) The **Eastern MACEDONIAN Army**, covering the BULGARIAN frontier and SALONIKA

Commander: Lt Gen Konstantinos Bakopoulos
Headquarters: Thessaloniki

(iii) The **Central MACEDONIAN Army**. This was formed early in March with a view to holding reserve positions in the MOUNT OLYMPUS – MOUNT VERMION Line: consisting of three divisions **(12, 19 (mechanised and 20)** of ad hoc formations, made up of third line troops with no modern equipment or transport

Commander: Lt Gen. Of the Reserve Ioannis Kotoulas until 8-4-41
Maj Gen Christos Karassos

Headquarters: Perdikas (33kms SE of Florina till 9-4-41
Ioannina till 16-4-41
Metsovo 18-4-41
* It began its establishment on 6-4-41

12th DIVISION:
Commander Col. Georgios Karambatos
Headquarters: Sofular (15kms NE of Kozani)
* Dodecanese Regiment?

19th MECHANISED DIVISION:
Commander: MajGen Nikolaos Liobas
Headquarters: 29—3-41 Kilkis
* It began to be established in the area of Athens on 24-1-41

20th DIVISION:
Commander: MajGen Christos Karassos until 8-4-31
Col Militiadis Papakonstantinou
Headquarters: 21-04-41 Ardomitsa (7kms E of Ioannina)
*It began to be established in the area of Florina on 12-2-41

EPIRUS FIELD ARMY SECTION COMMAND

Commander: Lt. Gen Ioannis Pitsikas until 20-4-41
Headquarters: Ioannina
* Established on 12-2-41

A' ARMY CORPS

Commander: Lt. Gen Panagiotis Demestihas
Headquarters: Elea (Kalpaki) 22-04-41

B' ARMY CORPS

Commander: MajGen Georgios Bakos
Headquarters: Protopappas (12kms W of Moschopolis) as of 19-04-41

C' ARMY CORPS

Commander: LtGen Georgios Tsolakoglou
Headquarters: Votonosi (6kms of Metsovo) as of 17-04-41

Greek Army in World War II

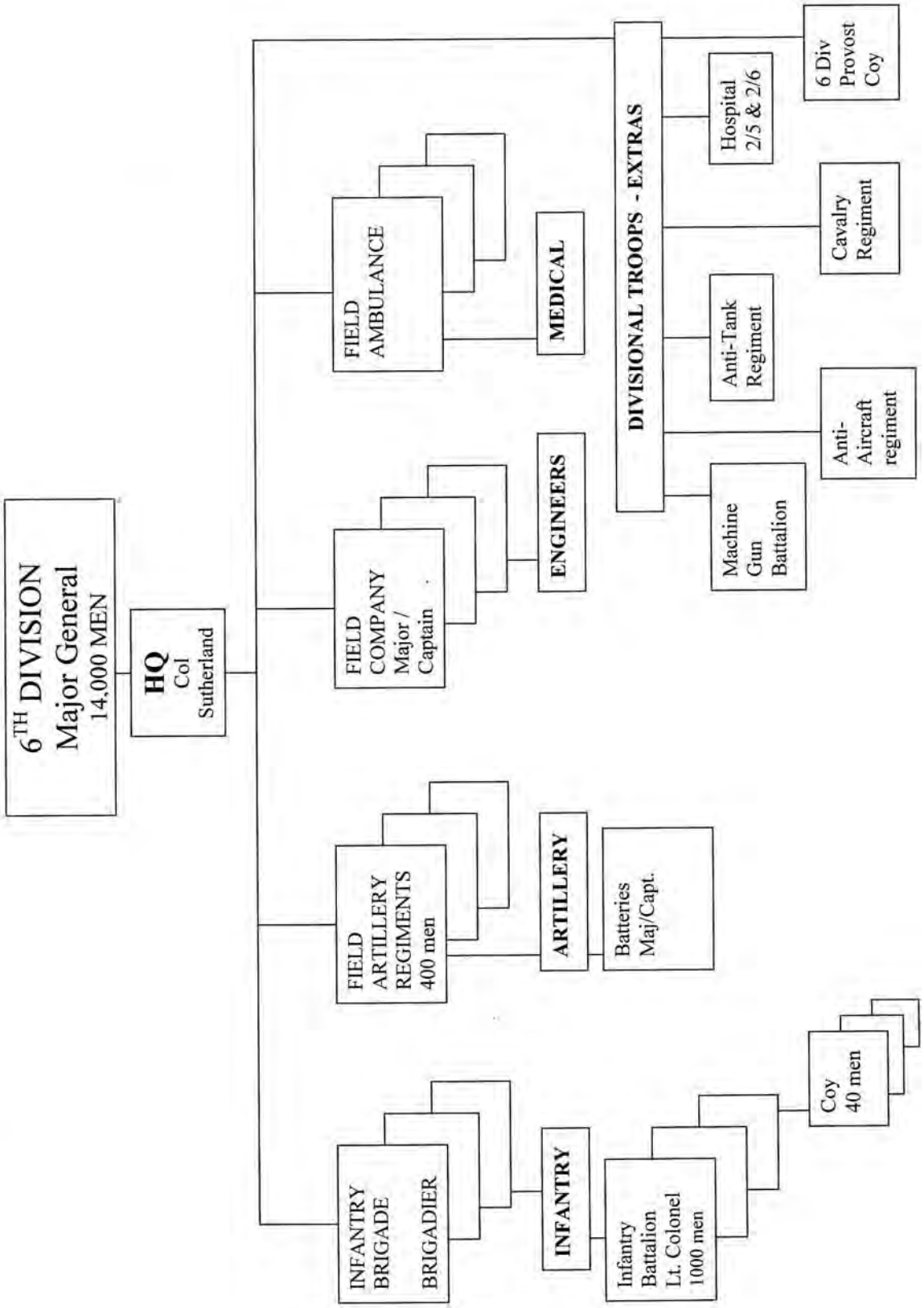
The Greek Army was not a modern army. It used pack transport, some carts and very few lorries. It had few weapons dating back to the First World War. It had little or no modern equipment and lacked tanks, anti-tank, anti-air and modern transport equipment. In 1939 its Navy consisted of the 10,000-ton *Averoff* and the 2,400-ton *Helle*, 10 destroyers, 13 torpedo boats 8 minelayers, 6 submarines and 143 aircraft from W.W.I. It had 300,000 troops mobilised out of a population of 7,500,000 making up 16 divisions. It deployed six in the forward areas in Albania with no reserves, six on the Bulgarian border and 4 located in various parts of the country. Its ration was little more than black bread. There was no meat and flour was short with little food for the pack animals. Its army that was suitable for mountain warfare only and its maintenance was laborious. 'Out of the mountains, its mobility except by rail was that of a snail.' In 1941 the Greek Army was using its railways almost to maximum capacity and had taken control of all animals and motor vehicles and small ships. There was nothing left for the British to use. They had to order in all supplies included mules from Egypt.

Sources:

(1) Report on Military Operations in Greece May 1941, National Archives of Britain: WO201/72.
(2) Hellenic Army General Staff, *An Abridged History of the Greek-Italian War and Greek-German War 1940-1941 (Land Operations*), The Army History Directorate Editions, Athens 1997.
(3) G. S. Brunskill, "The Administrative Aspect of the Campaign in Greece in 1941," *Army Quarterly*, 1937, pp. 124-138.

APPENDIX D

SIXTH DIVISION COMMAND STRUCTURE



APPENDIX E

ARRIVAL OF AUSTRALIAN FORCES TO GREECE

16TH Brigade **Brigadier 'Tubby' Allen**	**Embarked from Egypt**	**Arrival in Greece**
2/1st Australian Infantry Battalion	18th March 1941 on the 'BANKURA' & 'IONIC'	22nd March 1941 PORT PIREAUS
2/2nd Australian Infantry Battalion	18th March 1941 on 'BANKURA'	22nd March 1941 PORT PIREAUS
2/3rd Australian Infantry Battalion	17th March 1941 on cruiser 'H. M. S. GLOUCESTER' with General Blamey & his staff	20th March 1941- Athens PORT PIREAUS

19TH Brigade **Brigadier George Vassey**	**Embarked from Egypt**	**Arrival in Greece**
2/4th Australian Infantry Battalion	1st April 1941 on the S.S. 'PENNLAND'	3rd April 1941 –Athens – PORT PIREAUS
2/8th Australian Infantry Battalion	1st April 1941 on the 'PENNLAND'	3rd April 1941 – Athens PORT PIREAUS
2/11th Australian Infantry Battalion	10th April 1941 on S.S. 'PENNLAND'	12TH April 1941 – Athens landed at PHALERON BAY as PORT PIREAUS had been bombed earlier

17TH Brigade **Brigadier Stanley Savige**	**Embarked from Egypt**	**Arrival in Greece**
2/5th Australian Infantry Battalion	9th April on the 'CAMERONIA'	12TH April 1941 -Athens
2/6th Australian Infantry Battalion	9th April 1941 on 'CAMERONIA'	12th April 1941 – Athens
2/7th Australian Infantry Battalion	9th April 1941 on 'CAMERONIA'	12TH April 1941 – Athens landed at PHALERON BAY

APPENDIX F

BRITISH LIAISON WITH GREEK H.Q.

The liaison between the British and Allied Armies will be organised on the following basis: -

1. BRITISH LIAISON WITH GREEK G.H.Q

(a) An officer will represent the British C. in C. and will be responsible for all questions of liaison at Greek G.H.Q.

(b) Personnel:
Col. SALISBURY JONES……..Liaison Officer
Captain W. FORRESTER, G.S.O.3
2 Clerks
British W. T. & Cypher Personnel.

2. BRITISH LLIAISON WITH ALLIED ARMIES IN THE FIELD

(a) A Branch of W. Force H.Q. has been formed and will be known as the "Liaison Branch".

(b) It forms part of the General Staff

(c) It will be responsible for liaison between W. Force H.Q. in the field and our Allies.

(d) Personnel:

Lt. Co. P. L. SMITH-DORRIEN ……Chief Liaison Officer

Captain R. M. HAMER……L.B.L.O. permanently at W. Force H.Q.

Captain McGREGOR…….. L.B.L.O. based on Force H.Q. with roving commission.

Captain MOTT RADCLIFFE……..Asst. L.B.L.O. with H.Q. Central Macedonian Army (KOZANI)

Lt. Col. A. R. BARTER……...L.B.L.O. with H.Q. Eastern Macedonian Army (SALONIKA)

Major B. H. TATCHELL…….Assist. L.B.L.O (SALONIKA)

Colonel ROSS…… L.O. with 3rd Yugoslav Army

(e) The Liaison Branch W. Force H.Q. will ensure that the liaison arrangements Between Greek and British formations are carried out satisfactorily as laid down in para (4) of "Notes on Liaison between British and Greek Armies".

3. GREEK LIAISON WITH W. FORCE H.Q.

(a) A Greek Officer will represent the Greek C. in C. at H.Q. W. Force. Major Miles Reid will act temporarily as senior L.O. to the H.Q. of the Central Macedonian Army and Captain Mott Ratcliffe will be his Assistant.

(b) Personnel:

Lt. Col. FOTILAS……Chief Greek L.O.

" " PAPACHELOS……..Assistant L.O.

Lieutenant KYPRIADES

Sergeant KAFTANZOGLOU

4 Clerks

5 Drivers

3 Batmen

(c) Signals & Cypher Personnel:

Warrant Officer DROUSSIOTIS

" " KATSALIS

4. G.HQ. LIAISON SQUADRON.

The functions of the above unit will be as follows:

(a) It will be under the direct orders of H.Q. Br. Tps in Greece.

(b) Its primary task will be to provide battle information by the quickest means available.

(c) It will maintain the closes possible co-operation with the L.B. and will, on all occasions, afford them every assistance and the fullest use of their communication facilities.

7. ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations will be adopted forthwith:

Liaison Branch……..L.B.

Liaison Branch Liaison Officer……L.B.L.O.

Force Liaison Officer……F.L.O.

Chief Liaison Officer……C.L.O.

Chief Greek Liaison Officer…….C.G.L.O.

SOURCE: British Mission to Greek GHQ, National Archives of Britain: WO210/14.

APPENDIX G

ALLIED STRENGTH AND CASUALTIES IN GREECE

British Army	21,880
R.A.F.	2,217
Australian	17,125
New Zealand	16,720
Palestinians and Cypriots	4,670
TOTAL	62,532

British Air force in Greece was organised in two wings:
4 bomber squadrons
4 fighter squadrons
1 air ground liaison squadron

TOTAL	80 aircraft

CASUALTIES IN GREECE

	Killed	Wounded	Prisoners
British	146	87	6,480
R.A.F.	110	45	28
Australian	320	494	2,030
New Zealand	291	599	1,614
Palestinian and Cypriot	36	25	3,806
TOTAL	900	1,250	13,958

Equipment lost: 290 aircraft, 8,000 vehicles, 54 heavy and 444 light guns, 431 mortars and infantry escort guns, 39 anti-tank guns, 151,950 rifles, 134 armoured vehicles, 2,710 motor vehicles and approximately 600 other wheeled vehicles as well as large quantities of supplies.

Source: Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Collins in association with the Australian War Memorial,1953, pp182-183.
Hellenic Army General Staff, *Abridged History of the Greek-Italian and Greek-German War 1940-1941*, Army History Directorate, Athens, 1984, p.240.

APPENDIX H

AUSTRALIAN FORCES IN CRETE – MAY JUNE 1941

a. RAN	HMAS	*Perth*
	HMAS	*Napier*
	HMAS	*Nizam*
	HMAS	*Stuart*
	HMAS	*Vampire*
	HMAS	*Vendetta*
	HMAS	*Voyager*
	HMAS	*Waterhen*

b. AIF

19th Brigade (2/1st, 2/7th, 2/8th, 2/11th Battalions)
16th Brigade Composite Battalion (2/2nd & 2/3rd Battalions)
17th Brigade Composite Battalion (2/5th & 2/6th Battalion)
2/4th Battalion
2/1st Machine-Gun Battalion
2/2nd Field Regiment
2/3rd Field Regiment
7th Light Anti-Aircraft Battery
2/8th Field Company
2/7th Field Ambulance

SOURCE: A Chronology of Australian Armed Forces at War 1939-1945.

APPENDIX I

DEPLOYMENT OF ALLIED TROOPS ON CRETE

HERAKLION

Commander – Brigadier CHAPPELL,
Commanding 14th Infantry Brigade

2nd Black Watch
2nd Yorks and Lancs.
300 of 1 Australian Battalion. [the 2/4th]
250 of 7 Medium Regiment R.A. armed as infantry
Three Greek battalions

RETIMO.

Commander - Brigadier VASEY,
Commanding 19th Australian Brigade

Two Australian and three Greek battalions holding the aerodrome. [2/1st & 2/11th battalions]
Two battalions at GEORGOPOULIS. [2/7th & 2/8th]
One battalion area STYLOS.
Some Greek troops and police at RETIMO

SUDA BAY

Commander – Major General WESTON,
Commanding SUDA BAY Sector.

Northumberland Hussars (100 rifles).
106 R.H.A. (improved rifle battalion).
1st Rangers (400 rifles)
700 rifles PERIVOLIA Transit Camp.
Known as "Royal Perivolians" composed of details of various British units)
16 and 17 Infantry Brigades (very weak). [remnants of Australian troops from the Greek campaign]
Two Greek battalions.
Personnel of base installations, etc.

MALEME

Commander – Brigadier PUTTICK,
Commanding New Zealand Division

4 New Zealand Brigade in area 3 miles west of CANEA
5 New Zealand Brigade in area MALEME
Three Greek battalions.

SOURCE: - Crete: Inter-service report on operations, National Archives of Britain, WO 201/99.

APPENDIX J

GERMAN STRENGTHS AND CASUALTIES ON CRETE

"Operation Merkur (Mercury) under General Lohr"

1. Staff of Fourth Air Fleet
2. XI Air Corps under General Student:
    a. 7th Parachute Division [General Sussman]
    b. three paratroop regiments
    c. other divisional units and formations

3. The Air Transport elements of XI Air Corps under General Conrad
4. The 5th Mountain Division whose commander was Major General Ringel reinforced by units from the 6th Mountain Division also under Student's command.
5. The VIII Air Corps under Richthofen [a purely air formation]
6. The naval forces under Rear Admiral Schuster, Naval Commander Southeast.

These forces totalled:	22,750 men 1,370 aircraft 70 transport vessels
Air Assault:	750 troops flown in by glider 10,000 parachutists.
After capturing the airfields and landing coasts another:	
	5,000 troops transported by aircraft 7,000 troops transported by sea
TOTAL:	60 reconnaissance airplanes 280 bombers 150 Stuka dive bombers 180 fighters of which 90 were long-range 100 wind gliders 600 transports [troop carrying aircraft]

Source: Chrestos Gion, *The Battle of Crete*, Army History Directorate Publication, Eng. Trans., Athens, 2000, p.39.

GERMAN LOSSES:

	Killed or Missing	Wounded
Fourth Air Fleet:	3,986	2,594
German Aircraft destroyed	220	

Source: Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Collins in association with the Australian War Memorial, 2nd Edition Canberra, 1986, p.316.

APPENDIX K

GREEK FORCES ON CRETE

Each Greek battalion was about 1000 strong. They were stationed as under and immediately placed under British and Imperial Commanders as shown:-

Garrison battalion:

HERACLEON (sic) -	Under command of Brigadier CHAPPEL, D.S.O. Command HERACLEON Sector.
RETIMO - (very weak)	Under command of Brigadier VASEY, D.S.O. Command RETIMO Sector.
CANEA -	Under command of Major-General WESTON. Command SUDA Sector.

Greek Recruit battalions:

3 Bn) 7 Bn) HERACLEON - 4 Bn)	Under command Brigadier CHAPPEL.
5 Bn) RETIMO -	Under command Brigadier VASEY/CAMPBELL
2 Bn CANEA -	Under command Major-General WESTON
6 Bn) GALATAS) 8 Bn) 1 Bn) KASTELLI)	Under the command Brig. PUTTICK, D.S.O.

Reorganisation

Operationally, the whole force was placed under the command of Major-General Freyberg. It was intended that at the earliest possible moment, the Greeks should provide their own administrative machinery. For this purpose, the Island was organised into Commands and Areas as under: -

Commander-in-Chief Greek Forces in CRETE.
General SCOULAS – Headquarters CANEA.

Eastern Command. Commander	Headquarters HERACLEON. General LINADAKIS.
Western Command Commander	Headquarters CANEA. General GARGAROS.
No. 1 Area Commander	Headquarters CANEA.
No. 2 Area Commander	Headquarters RETIMO. POTHOULAKIS
No. 3 Area Commander	Headquarters HERACLEON General PAPATHANASOPOULOS.
No. 4 Area Commander	Headquarters NEAPOLIS General MILIARAS

Source: WO 201/119 Appendix D: "Report on the Part Played by Greek Forces in the Defence of Crete."

APPENDIX L

STRENGTH OF UNITS AT RETHYMNON

2/1 Battalion	620 Officers and men, adequately equipped with rifles, Bren light machine-guns and anti-tank rifles. The headquarters company was organised as a rifle company. There were two 3-inch mortars, two carriers.
2/11 Battalion	650 officers and men, fully equipped with rifles, Brens, anti-tank rifles and sub-machine guns and anti-tank rifles. The headquarters company was organised as a rifle company. There were two 3 – inch mortars but without base plates and two carriers.
Four improvised Greek Battalions: Referred to as 4th and 5th Infantry Regiments by the Greek Army & two other battalions	Consisting of 2,300 men in all, equipped with 800 American Springfield rifles, and 1,500 Greek rifles, with about ten rounds of ammunition a rifle and some old French machine-guns. [mainly Greek raw recruits as Cretan V Division deployed to the Albania front]
Cretan Police or Gendarmerie	800 well-disciplined troops
6 Battery, 2/3 Field Regiment	About 90 men, equipped with four 100 mm Italian guns, four 75 mm American guns with no sights (they were sighted through the barrel).
Two Platoons, 2/ 1 Machine Gun Battalion	
One Section, 2/8 Field Company	Without explosives and with practically no equipment
One company (augmented), 2/7 Field Ambulance	
Detachment, 7 Royal Tank Regiment	With two Matilda tanks
Detachments of AASC, Signals and a naval and air force signals detachment	

SOURCE: Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Collins, Canberra, 1953, pp. 256-257.

APPENDIX M

ALLIED STRENGTHS AND CASUALTIES IN CRETE

ALLIED FORCES ON CRETE AS OF 20TH MAY 1941:

British	17,000
Australian	7,700
New Zealand	6,500
TOTAL	31,200
Embarked:	16,500

CASUALTIES IN CRETE

	Killed	Wounded	Prisoners
British Army	612	224	5,315
Royal Marines	114	30	1,035
Australian	274	507	3,102
New Zealand	671	1,455	1,692
Royal Air Force	71	9	226
TOTAL	1,742	2,225	11,370

SUMMARY:	Cost to hold Crete	Killed or Wounded
	15, 335	3,967

British soldiers captured were mostly from base units who were not front line troops.
The heaviest losses in the fighting units came from the Australians: three infantry battalions as well other fighting units.

Source: Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Collins in association with the Australian War Memorial, 2nd edition 1986, pp.315-316.

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DRL: Donated Papers

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