



Media Release

The Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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68 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP FORGED IN BATTLE

The long friendship between Australia and Greece, strengthened by shared adversity during the Second World War, was honoured today at a ceremony at the Australian Hellenic Memorial on Anzac Parade in Canberra.

Speaking at a service marking the 68th anniversary of the Battle of Crete in 1941, Minister for Veterans Affairs, Alan Griffin, said the comradeship forged during the war marked the beginning of a friendship that created an enduring bond between the two nations.

"While the Battles of Greece and Crete in April-May 1941 involved more than 17,000 Australians, of whom some 600 died, 1000 were wounded and more than 5100 were taken prisoner," Mr Griffin said.

When the German army invaded Greece in April 1941, it quickly pushed the Allied forces south, eventually forcing a withdrawal to Crete.

On Crete, the Australians from the 6th Division and other Allies faced one of the first large-scale airborne invasions in the history of warfare. They fought valiantly to defend the airfields at Maleme, Rethymno and Heraklion, as well as many other sites. After 12 days of fighting the Germans prevailed on Crete, taking prisoner many soldiers who had not had time to evacuate.

Some 6500 Australians were involved in the Battle of Crete and communities on Crete suffered enormous losses during the fighting and in the subsequent occupation of their homeland.

Mr Griffin said Australian soldiers who were unable to be evacuated from Crete but who had avoided capture escaped into the hills from where many helped with resistance against the Germans, some for the remainder of the war. They were fed and sheltered by the Cretan people whose support often came at great cost.

"Some 25,000 Greeks were executed for guerrilla activities or in reprisal for partisan attacks during the four years of German occupation of Crete and the mainland," Mr Griffin said.

"Today, we pay tribute to Australians and Greeks who served and died during the Second World War. We honour their memory at memorials such as the one on Anzac Parade in Canberra, at Rethymno in Crete and the Australian-Hellenic Memorial in Melbourne."

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