



Media Release

The Hon Alan Griffin MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

VA076

Tuesday, 1 September 2009

70TH ANNIVERSARY – OUTBREAK OF SECOND WORLD WAR: POLAND

Minister for Veterans' Affairs Alan Griffin will today join former allies and enemies in an historic ceremony in Poland to mark the 70th anniversary of the start of the Second World War.

Paying tribute to some one million Australians who served in the Second World War, Mr Griffin said it was important to recognise Australia's contribution to the conflict and commemorate the men and women who lost their lives.

"I am honoured to be in Poland to mark this important date in our wartime history. Around 200,000 Australians served in Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa during the Second World War and today we pay tribute to the service and sacrifice of all Australians who fought," Mr Griffin said.

"Today's ceremony is historic as it brings together the heads of government of the two nations that invaded and occupied Poland at the start of the largest clash of arms yet endured by humanity – German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, as well as representatives of Poland and its Allies."

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and in response, France, Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations declared war on Germany. On 17 September 1939, Russia invaded eastern Poland and by October 1939, Poland was divided between German and Soviet occupation forces. A small area of Poland fell under Lithuanian administration while Slovakia, which had joined the German invasion, annexed some Polish territory. Poland never officially surrendered and resistance continued until the war's end. Her people experienced unspeakable suffering during the war.

"Seventy years after the invasion of Poland, I join the national representatives in remembering the events of the past and honouring the memory of those lost, both civilian and military," Mr Griffin said.

Representing the Australian Government, Minister Griffin participated in a ceremonial service at the Westerplatte Defender's Cemetery, laying a burning candle in memory of the dead.

During the Second World War, Australians fought in sea, land and air campaigns against Germany and Italy in Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa, and against Japan in south-east Asia and the Pacific. Australia suffered some 39,000 fatalities including some 9,500 battle deaths in Europe and 17,500 in the Pacific. More than 22,000 Australians were taken as prisoners of war of the Japanese, many of whom lost their lives while in captivity, while around 8,100 Australians were prisoners in Europe.

For more information on Australia's involvement in the Second World War visit ww2australia.gov.au.

Media inquiries: Belinda Cole 0437 863 109

The VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service can be contacted 24 hours a day, seven days a week on **1800 011 046**.

To receive the Minister's media releases automatically by **email** subscribe at minister.dva.gov.au/subscribe.htm