

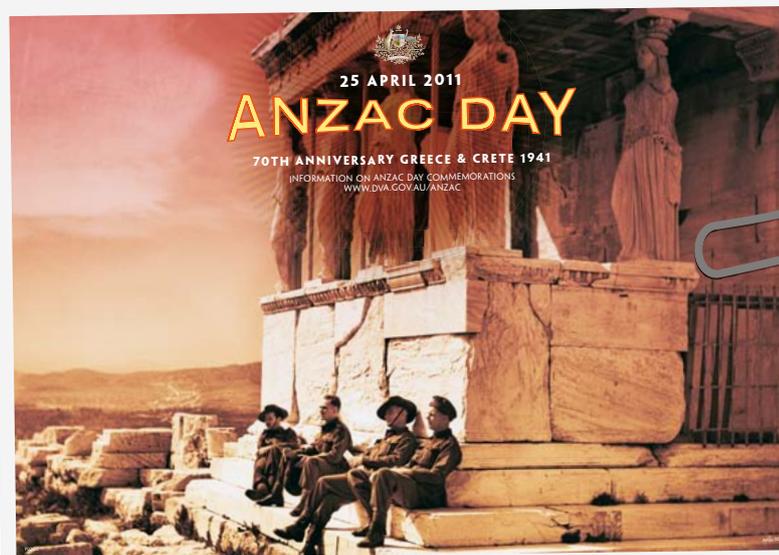
## WARTIME SNAPSHOTS

### 70th Anniversary of the Battles for Greece and Crete



The poster features an image of four Australian soldiers at the Acropolis while on leave in Athens. The soldiers arrived in Greece in time to see some of the sights before joining the people of Greece and Crete in the fight for their country.

Australian War Memorial 006797



## Facts, Figures and Background

The Greek campaign, in which Australian, British and New Zealand troops supported Greek forces against a German invasion, was ill-planned, disastrous and short.

Greece entered the Second World War on 28 October 1940, when the Italian army invaded from Albania. The Greek army proved much tougher than expected and the Italians were expelled from Greece and driven back to Albania. Germany, led by Hitler, was forced to send its own forces to overcome Greece, and on 6 April 1941 German forces attacked Greece and Yugoslavia simultaneously. The Allied forces, vastly outnumbered, were evacuated to Crete and to Egypt after conducting a fighting withdrawal from northern Greece to the southern part of the country.

The Germans then attacked Crete on 20 May 1941 in their largest airborne assault of the Second World War.

Britain was unable to commit more troops to the island due to the pressure of operations in North Africa, leaving the Allied forces in Crete ill-equipped and facing considerable difficulties in defending the island. Most of the Allied force had arrived exhausted from the failed Greek campaign with little equipment and too few weapons. However, while tired, they were not demoralised and by the end of the battle's first day, the Germans had not had the success they expected and had suffered far greater losses than anticipated. Only at the western end of Máleme airfield did German paratroops manage to set up a viable base. At first a German victory was uncertain and the campaign could have gone either way as Australian, British, New Zealand and Greek soldiers fought the Germans in a savage battle for possession of the island. However, with Máleme airfield in German hands, supplies and reinforcements poured in and the campaign swung against the Allies. The result was another evacuation by sea of defeated Allied soldiers.

## Websites and References

### Publications

- *A Great Risk in a good cause: Australians in Greece and Crete April–May 1941*, DVA, Canberra, 2001.
- Maria Hill, *Diggers and Greeks: The Australian campaigns in Greece and Crete*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2010.
- Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria, Australia in the war of 1939–1945*, Vol. II, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1953.

## Websites

### Department of Veterans' Affairs

- *Australia's War 1939–1945*: [www.ww2australia.gov.au/greatrisk](http://www.ww2australia.gov.au/greatrisk)
- *Key dates and data*:  
[www.dva.gov.au/commems\\_oawg/commemorations/history\\_research/key\\_dates/Pages/1941.aspx](http://www.dva.gov.au/commems_oawg/commemorations/history_research/key_dates/Pages/1941.aspx)
- *Australians at War Film Archive search for Second World War/Prisoners of War*:  
[www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au](http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au)

### Australian War Memorial

- *Background information*: [www.awm.gov.au/atwar/crete.asp](http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/crete.asp)
- *Art Exhibition by Michael Winters*: [www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/lookingback/index.asp](http://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/lookingback/index.asp)

## Teaching Activities

Use the websites and references above to research the background to the answers to the following questions.

1. Who said that the defence of Greece was a “great risk in a good cause”? Do you agree with them? Why or why not? Take into account the location of Greece and Crete, the alliance of countries and the intent of the enemy in your answer.
2. Print a map of Greece and Crete. Mark on the map some of the key places, including the Sea of Crete, the Kaso Strait, the Aegean Sea and the Ionian Sea. Also include the towns of Maleme, Chania, Heraklion and Rethymno.
3. From your reading about the battles draw up a timeline of events from April to June 1941. Include the German invasion, the battle for Greece, the evacuation from the mainland, the ‘Creforce’ troops on the island of Crete, the battle for Crete and the final evacuation.
4. List the problems that were encountered by the Australians in assisting the Greeks and the Cretans to defend themselves against the invading German army.
5. Look at the pen and ink drawings of Michael Winters in the Australian War Memorial online exhibition *Looking Back*. Describe the scene and the events of the invasion of the German paratroopers. Describe what it would have been like for the paratroopers and for the Australian soldiers defending Crete.
6. Some 2030 Australian Prisoners of War (POWs) were taken from Greece and 3079 POWs from Crete. Use the *Australians at War Film Archive* website to read about some of the stories of their battle experiences and capture. Describe the experiences of the POWs held in German camps for the remaining four years of the war.
7. Read about the story of Horrie the Wog Dog on the Australia’s War 1939–1945 website. How important was Horrie to the men who found him and what did they do with him when they left?
8. Ian Rhodes (1912–1967), a sheep farmer from Victoria, became a naval officer and won the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal for his actions on the HMS *Kashmir* on 23 May 1941. Write a paragraph as the officer writing up the citation describing his actions and bravery. What is significant about his award?
9. On the 70th anniversary, design a new memorial to honour those who died in the Battles for Greece and Crete. Create a concept for the memorial including the wording, images and messages you wish to present. Where in Australia or internationally would it be best to build your memorial? Is it important to commemorate their sacrifice? Justify all your decisions and statements with reasons.