



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Battle of Crete**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 24 May 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 24 May 2010  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Georganas, Steve, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (7.15 pm)—I rise to draw to the attention of the House the importance of acknowledging the contributions of Australian, New Zealand, British and Greek soldiers and Greek civilians in the defence of Crete against the 20 May 1941 invasion in World War II. Only a few days ago the commemoration of that particular date was celebrated in Greece, and it will be celebrated this weekend here in Canberra. Also in this motion I call for an annual commemoration of the Battle of Crete within Australia as an event of national significance and to encourage reflection on the shared experiences of Australian diggers and Greeks through the Battle of Crete, the bond that was forged between our two nations in a time of war and the evolution of remarkable Australian-Greek relations after the war and continuing to this day.

I know, Deputy Speaker Scott, you were Minister for Veterans' Affairs and visited Crete for the commemoration of these celebrations at the Rethymnon war memorial for the Australian diggers who lost their lives in Crete. While Gallipoli is an extremely important part of our national heritage and we all acknowledge the emphasis placed on it, especially on national days of commemoration, it can sometimes eclipse equally significant though lesser-known battles where the Anzac spirit shone no less brightly. I feel the time is right for some of those other stories to share the limelight. The story of the Battle of Crete, in which Australian soldiers, Greek civilians and allied troops fought shoulder to shoulder against the Nazi invasion, is one such story that deserves our remembrance on an annual basis in Australia as an event of national significance.

The extraordinary story of the Battle of Crete begins on 20 May 1941. Three weeks after the Nazi forces had captured mainland Greece, Crete was the last frontier for the German forces in Greece and they spared no expense in launching the biggest German airborne operation of the war. As more than 8,000 Nazi troops parachuted out of the sky, 4,000 were killed or wounded as a result of the allied effort. But over time the Nazis increased their stronghold in the west and the balance of the war tipped towards a less certain victory for the allied troops.

The battle was significant on a number of fronts, but the civil resistance by the local Greek population was in itself highly significant in the spirit of resistance to the Nazi domination and in the bond that was forged between the peoples of Greece and Australia. Local men and women and even children became involved in the battle proper, but when the allied withdrawal commenced and the many thousands of troops were scrambling to evade capture the local population put itself at extreme risk by assisting allied forces and Australian soldiers who were left behind. It is my belief that through this period of adversity a bond was formed between the peoples of Greece and Australia.

Many Australian soldiers were left behind and they were harboured by the local villagers. For every Australian soldier who was caught by the Nazis, whole Greek villages were executed in response, to send the message that this was not on for the Nazis. But this did not stop the local Greek community. They continued to harbour Australians and others from the allied forces to ensure their safety and that resistance continued. We know that a bond was forged between the peoples of Greece and Australia through a shared desire to prevail against an invading Nazi force that proved to be a disaster for the local population. Today in Australia, with thousands of Greeks and Cretans still remembering the battle at home and abroad, they and their relatives, together with all Australians, can be proud of what they together fought for and against.

I am pleased to see that today we have bipartisan support for this motion from the member for Cowan and the member for New England. I think that shows the breadth of support in the wider community for substantial recognition of the contributions of all those involved—all those Aussie diggers and Greek resistance fighters in the Battle of Crete. I also acknowledge the member for Calwell's support for the motion, as I said, and I know that as a person with close ties to Cretan Australians she is very much aware of the need for proper recognition of the unique relationship we share with Greeks in Australia. I hope that, along with all of them, all Australians continue to acknowledge the important contribution of the Australian defence forces, the Greek soldiers and the Greek civilians in the defence of Crete against the 20 May 1941 German invasion. I hope we also continue the annual commemoration of the Battle of Crete within Australia as an event of national significance and encourage the reflection of the shared experiences of Australians and Greek nationals through the Battle of Crete, the bond

forged between our two nations in a time of war and the evolution of Australian-Greek relations in the post-war period. (*Time expired*)