

History of the Battle of Crete

Quick Reference



Suda Bay Cemetery - Crete

Battle of Crete

Forces Involved –

The Allied forces, who fought in the Battle of Crete, included troops from Australia, United Kingdom, and New Zealand. These forces were assisted by Greek troops, police and civilians.

Location of the Conflict:

Crete, Greece

Duration of the Conflict:

20 May 1941 to 1 June 1941 (13 days)

Date at Which the Second World War Ended in Europe:

On 8 May 1945, the war in Europe ended and the German garrison on Crete surrendered.

Leaders and Commanders	
Allies	Axis Forces
Lieutenant-General Bernard C. Freyberg (New Zealand) Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell (Australian) Major Sandover (Australian)	General Kurt Student-(German) Major Walter Koch – (German) Commander Francesco Mimbelli (Italian)

Forces and Troops Involved on Crete	
United Kingdom: 18,047 Greece: 10,258 – 11,451 New Zealand: 7,702 Australia: 6,540 Total Troops: 42,547	Germany: 22,000 paratroopers and mountain troops 280 bombers 150 dive bombers 180 fighters 500 transports 80 troop gliders Italy: 2,700 Total troops 24700

Lustre Force in Greece

Some 62,600 British Commonwealth servicemen and women went to Greece with Lustre Force, including 17,125 Australians and 16,720 New Zealanders.

Over 900 were killed.

Nearly 14,000 were captured and became prisoners of war.

The British Royal Navy, assisted by ships of the RAN and the Merchant Navy, evacuated over 50,000 British, Australian, New Zealand and Greek troops, as well as a number of British civilians.

Battle of Crete

Over 8,500 Cretan civilians died because of the German invasion and occupation. Approximately 4,500 had been executed.

Over 1,750 members were killed and 1737 wounded from the British Commonwealth ground and air forces whilst defending Crete or during their evacuation. Of these, 274 were Australians who were killed, 507 wounded and over 3100 taken as prisoners of war. New Zealand casualties included 671 killed and 967 wounded..

During the Battle of Crete in May 1941, the British Royal Navy suffered significant losses. They lost several ships, including three cruisers (HM ships *Gloucester*, *Fiji*, and *Calcutta*) and six destroyers (HM Ships *Kelly*, *Greyhound*, *Kashmir*, *Hereward*, *Imperial*, and *Juno*). Additionally, many other ships were damaged, and there were heavy casualties among the crews due to intense air attacks by German forces. Over 1,800 personnel were lost.

On 30 May 1941, HMAS *Perth* was in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, participating in operations related to the evacuation of Crete. It was during this time that it was attacked by German aircraft. Despite being bombed, *Perth* managed to escape without being sunk, although it did sustain some damage. Four Royal Australian Navy personnel were lost as a result of the attack.

In all, 12,254 Allied personnel were taken prisoner, most enduring over four years of captivity.

Over 500 Greek soldiers and Cretan police died defending Crete. – Many of them executed.

Axis strength (German and Italian) at the start of the Battle approximately 24700.

Approximately 5,500 German troops lost their lives denying Cretans their freedom.

Suda Bay Cemetery - Crete

Approximately 1500 Allied Soldiers are buried at Suda Bay Cemetery. Of these 197 are Australians.

Maleme Cemetery Crete

4,465 Germans who died during the Battle of Crete are buried in *the German Military Cemetery of Maleme (Deutschen Soldadfriedhof in Maleme)*. It is one of the two German military cemeteries of Greece, as there is another one in *Dionysos, Attica*.

The 2/11th - The First Western Australian Battalion.

The 2/11th was the first Western Australian battalion raised for service overseas during the Second World War. Its formation began with the appointment of its first commanding officer on 13 October 1939 and by 7 November it was assembling at the newly built Northam Camp to begin training. The first commander of the 2/11th Battalion was Lieutenant- Colonel Tom Louch.

The battalion began embarking at Fremantle for service overseas on 20 April 1940.

Indigenous Men of the 2/11th Battalion

Of the eight Indigenous men of the 2/11th Battalion who had fought, one was killed during the evacuation from Greece when the transport ship *Slamart* was struck by dive bombers. On Crete, another was killed in action on 21 May 1941 and the remaining six were captured when the island fell.

Note: Understanding the Complexity of Confirming World War II Casualties

Determining the exact number of casualties from World War II remains a complex and

challenging task. Numerous factors contribute to the difficulty in confirming these figures. The chaos and destruction of war led to incomplete or lost records, while differing methodologies and definitions of what constitutes a casualty further complicate the process. Additionally, the vast scale of the conflict, involving multiple nations and fronts, adds layers of complexity to achieving a precise count. As a result, estimates vary widely, and while historians strive for accuracy, it is important to acknowledge the inherent challenges in reaching definitive numbers.