

# **GREECE 1941 to 1945**

## **CRETAN RESISTANCE**

Cretan resistance to the German occupation began soon after the Battle of Crete had finished and brought together many disparate groups and community leaders under the banner of the Patriotic Front of Crete (PMK) later the name was changed to the National Liberation Front (EAM) mirroring the mainly communist led opposition on the mainland. Initially the primary objective of the movement was to support the population in any way possible together with limited sabotage operations against the occupying Germans.

Contact with the British in Egypt was established fairly quickly after the fall of Crete as stragglers from the British and Dominion Forces who had managed to evade capture were evacuated by Caique's, the traditional Greek fishing boat, and supplies and operatives from the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) taken back to Crete to organise and support the resistance. The SOE agents tended to run their own cells and the Cretans involved with them tended to have no major involvement with the main Cretan resistance organisations.

SOE was instrumental in helping the establishment of the National Organisation of Crete (EOK) in June 1943 which was to provide a balance against the pro-communist EAM. Although both resistance organisations were, ideologically speaking, from the opposite sides of the political spectrum they tended to cooperate. There were clashes between these opposing forces, particularly in early 1945, but they did not mirror those on the mainland, so Crete was largely unaffected by the civil war that tore mainland Greece apart between 1946 and 1949.

By 1944 the Cretan resistance was well organised, trained and armed and began to exact a significant toll on the occupying forces who responded by burning villages and killing hostages. Inevitably the pressure exerted by the resistance coupled with the withdrawal of their forces from mainland Greece in September 1944 left the Germans

occupying Crete isolated and trapped around the town of Canae. Refusing to surrender to the resistance besieging their positions the Germans waited for the British to arrive and surrendered to them on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 1945.

Cretans had a long history of insurrection against occupying forces the second forces around Canea, the Germans remained trapped until the end of the war, refusing to surrender to the Greek army, for fear of retaliation. They eventually surrendered to the British on 23 May 1945.

Cretans had a long history in insurrection against an occupying power. The second world war was just one more chapter.