

Pension payments for Greek Australians

The Australian Government understands that there have been delays with some Greek Australian pensioners between the granting and payment of the pension by the Greek Government.

Where there is a delay between the granting and payment of the Greek pension by the Greek Government, Centrelink can help affected pensioners.

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous

Affairs, Jenny Macklin, said she was aware of the concerns raised by Greek pensioners.

"I want to assure the Greek community that the payment of Australian pensions will continue unaffected until a Greek pension has been granted," Ms Macklin said.

"Concerned pensioners should contact Centrelink International Services on 13 1673 for advice from specialists on the Australia-Greece Social Security Agreement.

"I have also asked officials from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to meet with the Australian Hellenic Council this week to discuss the operation of the Australia-Greece Social Security Agreement.

"We will continue to do all we can to ensure the Greek Government meets its obligations under the Agreement.

"While some payments by the Greek Government have been made under the Agreement, others have been sub-

ject to processing delays."

Australia's Social Security Agreement with Greece commenced on 1 October 2008, providing improved access to age pensions from both countries for people who spent part of their adult lives working in Greece or living in Australia.

JENNY MACKLIN MP
Minister for Families, Housing,
Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs

Call's for national recognition of the Battle of Crete in Federal parliament

Federal MP for Calwell Maria Vamvakinou spoke about the need to get national recognition for the Battle of Crete in parliament on Monday night. Her speech is below. Federal MP for Hindmarsh Steve Georganas also spoke about the topic on the same night.

Battle of Crete, House of Representatives, Private Members Business
Tue - 25 May

Ms VAMVAKINO (Calwell) (7.26 pm)—I rise to congratulate the member for Hindmarsh on this very timely motion, which draws to the House's attention the recent 69th anniversary of the Battle of Crete. The anniversary commemorates the heroic efforts of the Australian Defence Force and the local Cretan community in defending the island from German invasion in this historical significant battle, which began on 20 May 1941. The battle took place three weeks after the Allies lost mainland Greece and consisted of Allied forces made up of three British battalions, two New Zealand brigades, eight Greek battalions and six Australian battalions. After one day of fighting, the Germans had suffered—as has been said—appalling casualties. The next day, events turned and the Maleme airfield in western Crete fell to the Germans, enabling them to fly in reinforcements and overwhelm the defenders.

The Battle of Crete is documented as an unprecedented battle in three respects. It was the first mainly airborne invasion, it was the first time that the Allies made significant use of intelligence from the deciphered German Enigma code and it was the first time that invading German troops encountered mass resistance from a civilian population. During the battle, the Greeks and Australians sacrificed much and suffered terribly in unison and side by side in their defence of the island.

The loss endured by the local population and the gallantry of the soldiers is something that has forged an eternal bond between our two countries.

Australian authors Dr Maria Hill

and Peter Thompson, in their respective books *Diggers and Greeks* and *Anzac Fury*, point to the terrible price the Greek people paid for their support of and sympathy with the soldiers. It is well documented that after the defeat thousands of Allied troops were scrambling to avoid being captured.

The Cretans risked all to hide, feed and look after the Australians left behind, particularly in the face of German reprisals. Perhaps it was the exposure to the horrors of the Nazi occupation or the unbreakable bond that can only be forged between people in times of war through which the relationship between Australia and Greece was tempered and strengthened. The courage shown by the Australians and Greeks is commemorated annually at many ceremonies around Australia, including my home state of Victoria.

In 2006, I was part of an Australian delegation that visited Crete, and I had the very special opportunity to meet a wonderful man, Mr Marcos Polioudakis, who, until his death a couple of years ago, was a tireless advocate of the need to elevate the Battle of Crete to an event of national significance. Marcos was more than an advocate for the cause that this motion speaks to. He dedicated his entire adult life to preserving and documenting every bit of information and memorabilia he could get his hands on that related to the local Cretans and to the Anzacs, producing a three-volume account of the Battle of Crete. The books are written in the Greek language. What a valuable addition to this nation's war history it would be if these significant firsthand accounts could be translated into the English language. It certainly Marcos's desire that this happen.

It was also Marcos's desire to see a

number of other things happen. I remember having lunch with him in Crete together with the member for Indi. We were both very much impressed by the energy and passion of this man, who was born in Rethymnon in 1928 and was just 13 years old on 20 May 1941, the day 'the Germans fell out of the sky', as he put it. Those dramatic days were a nightmare for young Marcos and they left a lasting mark on him. His father was executed on 1 June by the German paratroopers for having taken part in the Battle of Stavromenos and his grandmother was killed on 3 June during an altercation with a German paratrooper, as was his grandfather, who sought to intervene and help his wife.

Marcos is credited with being instrumental in developing the Greek-Australian relationship and friendship. He was president of the committee that oversaw the dedication of the memorial for Greek and Australian soldiers in Rethymno. Marcos made it his life's work to research and collect documents and material pertaining to the Battle of Crete. He felt that its importance, and the bravery and sacrifices of the locals, had been somewhat overlooked.

Marcos's activities brought him to Australia on two occasions, and he was awarded the Order of Australia for his efforts. He was immensely proud of this award, and he genuinely loved Australia. We are, as he said, forever bonded to each other because of those events in Crete in 1941. I certainly feel honoured to have met him.

I want to pay tribute to him this evening and to support the motion's call for the commemoration of the Battle of Crete to be an event of national significance here in Australia. I am sure Marcos would have wanted this and I am sure that this chamber would also want this.



Flood of frogs shuts down major Greek highway

Greek officials say a horde of frogs has forced the closure of a key northern highway for two hours. Thessaloniki traffic police chief Giorgos Thanoglou says "millions" of the amphibians covered the tarmac Wednesday near the town of Langadas, some 12 miles east of Thessaloniki.

"There was a carpet of frogs," he said.

Authorities closed the highway after three car drivers skidded off the road trying to dodge the frogs. No human injuries were reported. Thanoglou said the amphibians probably left a nearby lake to look for food.

Pan-Thracian Association of NSW "Demokritos"

The President, Ms Chrysoula Tsambazi, and the Committee of the Pan-Thracian Association of NSW "Demokritos" in cooperation with the Pontian Brotherhood of NSW "Pontoxeniteas" cordially invites you to attend

Georges Devine Treloar a special presentation on the work of the League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in eastern Macedonia and western Thrace between 1922 and 1926 by Prof. David Treloar (University of Western Australia) at the Cyprus Community Club, Stanmore Road, Stanmore on Sunday 30 May 2010, from 5pm
RSVP: Dr Panayiotis Diamadis (pdiamadis@sacs.nsw.edu.au)