

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. FOSSELLA. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

HONORING THE 61st ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF CRETE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the 61st anniversary of the Battle of Crete. This is a historic event with direct significance to the allies' victory of World War II.

On May 20, 1941, thousands of German paratroopers and gliders began landing on the island of Crete. Both the allies and Nazis wanted Crete because of its strategic location. At the time the British controlled the island. It was a very strong point on the lifeline to India and protected both Palestine and Egypt. The Nazi invasion force included the elite German paratroopers and glider troops. Hitler felt that this would be an easy victory. Yet he is quoted to have said shortly after the invasion, "France fell in 8 days. Why is Crete free?"

The invasion of Crete lasted 11 days. It resulted in more than 6,000 German troopers listed as killed, wounded or missing in action. The losses to the elite 7th parachute division were felt so hard by the German military, it signified the end of large scale airborne operations. They did not have another parachute division invasion in the rest of the war. This valiant fight by the Cretan people began in the first hour of the Nazi airborne invasion, in contrast to the European underground movements that took a year or more after being invaded to activate. Young boys, old men and women displayed breathtaking bravery in defending their Crete. German soldiers never got used to Cretan women fighting against them. They would tear the dress from the shoulder of suspected women to find bruises from the recoil of the rifle. The penalty was death.

The London Times of July 28, 1941 reported, and I quote, that "500 Cretan women have been deported to Germany for taking part in the defense of their native island."

Another surprise for the German soldiers who invaded Crete was the heroic

resistance of the clergy. A priest leading his parishioners into battle was not what the Germans anticipated. At Paleochora, Father Stylianos Frantzeskis, hearing of the German airborne invasion, rushed to his church, sounded the bell, took his rifle and marched his volunteers toward Maleme to write history. This struggle became an example for all Europe to follow in defying German occupation and aggression.

The price paid by the Cretans for their valiant resistance to Nazi forces was extremely high. Thousands of civilians died from random executions, starvation and imprisonment.

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Entire communities were burned and destroyed by the Germans as punishment for the Cretan resistance movement. Yet this resistance lasted for 4 years.

The Battle of Crete was to change the final outcome of World War II. The Battle of Crete significantly contributed in delaying Hitler's plan to invade Russia. The invasion was delayed from April to June of 1941. The 2-month delay in the invasion made Hitler's forces face the harsh Russian winter. The Russian snow storms and the sub-zero temperatures eventually stalled the Nazi invasion before they could take Moscow or Leningrad. This was the beginning of the downfall of the Nazi reign of terror.

This significant battle and the heroic drive of the Cretan people must always be remembered and honored. Democracy came from Greece, and the Cretan heroes exemplify the courage that it takes to preserve it.

Today, the courage of the Cretan people is seen in the Members of the Pancretan Association of America and the Cretan Association "Omonoia" which is located in Astoria-Queens, which I have the honor of representing.

The Pancretan Association officers are Theodore Panagiotakis, president; Michael Papoutsakis, vice president; John Stavroulakis, secretary; and Emmanuel Kavrakis, treasurer. They are assisted by outstanding board members George Bassias, George Bombolakis, Nikos Chartzoulakis, George Fradelakis, George Kokonas, George Malandrakis, and Vassilis Manrangoudakis.

The Cretan people fought a seen enemy. Today we need the courage they displayed to fight the unseen enemy that struck on 9-11 and that continues to threaten our freedom and democracy.

I request my colleagues to join me in honoring the Cretans in the United States, Greece and the Diaspora.

THE SIXTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE HEROIC BATTLE OF CRETE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. FLAKE). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida

(Mr. BILIRAKIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I too rise proudly to celebrate the 61st anniversary of the Battle of Crete, a World War II event that had a profound impact on the ultimate result of the war.

Amidst the cataclysm that had engulfed the countries of Europe at the time, it seems now preposterous that a small island dared to stand up to such a powerful enemy. For the benefit of future generations, I will share a brief account of these events as they unfolded.

In early April 1941, Greece was invaded by the German Army rushing to the aid of their defeated and humiliated ally, Italy. Following a valiant struggle against overwhelmingly superior German forces in and among the mountains to the north, Greek forces had been pushed entirely off the continent and were forced to take refuge on the Island of Crete.

The German Army then looked across the sea to Crete because of the British airfields on the island, which could be used by the allies for air strikes against the oil fields of Romania, thereby denying this vital war commodity to Hitler's forces. If captured, it would also provide air and sea bases from which the Nazis could dominate the eastern Mediterranean and launch air attacks against Allied forces in northern Africa. In fact, the Nazi high command envisioned the capture of Crete to be the first of a series of assaults leading to the Suez Canal.

Finally, as a result of the battle, Hitler's master plan to invade Russia before the coming of winter had to be postponed, thus directly resulting in the deaths of many of their troops as a consequence of not being properly prepared to survive the harsh Russian winter.

On May 20, 1941, Crete became the theater of the largest German airborne operation of the war, code named Operation Mercury. On that day, more than 8,000 paratroopers were dropped on the island. They were met with ferocious resistance by the Allied troops waiting for them and by the Cretan population.

Cretans fought bravely with whatever was at hand during the invasion. Even though the Allied forces had decided not to arm them, old men, women and children used whatever makeshift weapons they could find. They pointed their rusty guns at the descending German paratroopers. They used sticks, sickles and even their bare hands to fight those soldiers already on the ground. Most of them were illiterate villagers, but their intuition led them to fight with courage and bravery. "Aim for the legs and you will get them in the heart" was the popular motto that summarized their hastily acquired battle experience.

Although a tactical victory for the Germans, the Battle of Crete proved to be rather costly to them in terms of casualties and loss of aircraft. Of the 8,100 paratroopers involved in this operation, close to 4,000 were killed and

1,600 were wounded. So injured were the German units in fact that they never again, never again, attempted an airborne assault of the magnitude of that launched at Crete.

In retaliation for the losses they incurred, the Nazis spread punishment, terror and death on the innocent civilians of the island. More than 2,000 Cretans were executed during the first month alone, and thousands more the following 4 years. Despite these atrocities, the people of Crete put up a courageous guerrilla resistance.

Mr. Speaker, there are historical reasons why we Americans are very appreciative of the sacrifices of the Cretan people in defending their island during the Battle of Crete. We have a history replete with similar heroic events, starting with our popular revolt that led to the birth of our Nation more than 2 centuries ago.

We must always remember that as long as there are people willing to sacrifice their lives for the just cause of defending the integrity and freedom of their country, there is always hope for a better tomorrow. May we take inspiration from the shining example of the people of Crete in ensuring that this is indeed the case.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I come to the House floor this evening to commemorate the 61st anniversary of one of the most critical battles of the World War II—the Battle of Crete. I want to thank Congressman BILIRAKIS, co-chairman of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, for organizing today's recognition of the resilience of the Cretan people in May 1941—a resilience that lasted long after the battle ended, and played an instrumental role in the downfall of Hitler and his Nazi regime.

In October of 1940, Mussolini's Italy invaded Greece. Shortly thereafter, the British rushed to Greece's aid and quickly sent army and Royal Air Force units to the island of Crete. With Italian troops bogged down in Greece and delaying his brutal campaign of world domination, Hitler sent German troops into Greece and directed the Nazi war machine take control of Crete.

On the morning of May 20, 1941 the Nazis began executing Hitler's directive and launched an airborne invasion on a scale unprecedented in history. The Germans dropped some 20,000 troops on the island by air. In addition, the Germans and Italians launched a land invasion, sending troops by sea from the Greek mainland, which had fallen to the Nazis a few weeks earlier.

The ensuing battle put up by the people of Crete and other allied forces against the superior Nazi war machine was one of the most significant of World War II. And though the Germans won the battle and took the island, they did so at the highest possible cost. Karl Student, the Nazi General in charge of the invasion, called the battle "the fiercest struggle any German formation had ever had to face." The German High Command would never again attempt an operation of its size again, and because of the loss of nearly 6,000 paratroopers, the Germans never used the parachute arm of their force again in large scale operations.

The unanticipated heroism and ferocity with which the people of Crete fought delayed Hit-

ler's planned invasion of Russia for three months. There were heavy losses on both sides. Strengthened by the knowledge that they were defending a concept—democracy—that had originated from their homeland, Cretan civilians, including women, children and the elderly, joined in the battle against the Nazis, wielding pitchforks and fashioning homemade weapons. By the Battle's end, the Cretans and the Royal Air Force had inflicted so much damage on Hitler's elite 7th Air Division that it was rendered useless to the Nazi effort to conquer the Middle East.

The battle, moreover, continued long after the 11 days it took Hitler to finally take the Greek Island. The Cretans organized a resistance movement, which for the remaining four years of the war zealously fought the occupying Nazi force. They suffered horrendously for their resistance; the Germans executed thousands of civilians and randomly decimated entire towns, villages and communities. They did not, however, suffer in vain.

The resistance the people of Crete mounted against the invasion forced the Germans to attempt to invade Russia during the oppressive Russian winter—a task that proved to be too much for the Nazis.

We here in Congress should do our best to ensure Americans never forget the role the citizens of Crete played in defeating fascism.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to participate in the remembrance of a historical event as important as the Battle of Crete. As the sacrifices the Cretans made 55 years ago demonstrate, we are indebted to Greece not only for giving the world the system upon which our country was founded, but for shedding the blood of their sons and daughters to protect that system as well. I strongly encourage all Americans to join me in honoring Greek-Americans of Cretan descent, and our friends in Greece and Crete, for their contribution to one of the most important battles of the 20th Century.

Mr. DIAZ-BALART. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about the famed Battle of Crete which occurred at the beginning of World War II. I would like to thank my colleague from Florida, Mr. BILIRAKIS for helping to keep alive the memory of this important battle.

Following the Allied loss of Greece, on May 20th, 1941, the Battle of Crete began in earnest. German forces were far better equipped than the Allied forces left on the island. Described by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill as "A head-on collision with the very spearhead of the German lance" the Battle of Crete displayed the early valiant efforts of Allied forces to stem the tide of the Nazi onslaught.

The majority of the resistance fighters on Crete were natives of the island as well as forces from New Zealand, Australian, and British forces. Having fallen back from defeat in Greece, many of the soldiers came ready to defend the island with little more than small arms.

As is now known, through the monitoring and decoding of German Enigma traffic, the British forces were well aware of the German intentions against Crete, and thus how to wreak havoc against the overwhelming number of paratroopers. Superior intelligence combated superior force numbers and provisions. Initially the Allied defenders had great success against the Nazi war machine—delaying the Axis foothold on the island.

Despite the eventual loss of Crete to the Nazis due to the overwhelming number of op-

pressor soldiers and supplies streaming to the island, the nearly 4000 killed and missing German paratroopers from the assault served as a significant blow to the myth of German invincibility. After Crete the German parachute arm was never used again in large scale airborne operations.

Aside from its military importance, the main reason we rise today to commemorate the Battle of Crete is to herald the brave stand that the many brave fighters from Crete and Allied forces made in the face of the Nazi onslaught. Rather than capitulate to Nazi tyrannical will, the defenders of Crete fought not only for their land and for their liberty, but for the world's freedom as well. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to join my colleagues today in rendering a salute to the heroic men and women who fought tirelessly for the sake of freedom 61 years ago at the Battle of Crete.

As we come upon this anniversary which marks an incredible turning point in what would become the Allied victory of World War II, we are once again reminded of the current and unabated commitment of our Greek allies to the defense of freedom, especially today as we wage a global campaign against terrorism.

Sixty-one years ago, over a 10 day period, Nazi Germany committed a grave error: it underestimated the might and will to resist repression amongst the people of this quiet island nestled in the Mediterranean waters.

Lured to Crete by its strategic amidst three continents, the Axis Powers believed this island, the temporary station of retreating Allied units and home to an unarmed local community, would be an easy victory. That was not the case.

The battle Hitler thought would take a few hours took many days. Nazi Germany launched its first and most substantial airborne attack during the WWII at Crete.

The outcome was a disastrous and shameful loss of strength for the Germans. Over 4,000 Axis Powers troops died.

This loss rendered the German airborne division a faint tool in the War, never again to be used with the same intensity.

The great blow suffered by the Germans at Crete prevent the Axis Powers ability to penetrate the Middle East, but most importantly delayed their invasion of Russia—a determining moment in the victorious end of WWII.

Mr. Speaker, what makes the Battle of Crete such a remarkable moment in the history of our modern time, is that it epitomized the resilience of people when left with no other choice but to fight against repression.

The people of Crete took on the fight for their homeland. Faced with a weak Allied presence and the mounting invasion of the Germans, the people of Crete—men and women, farmers, local police, townspeople—armed with mere pistols pitchforks, hand grenades, knives their bare hands created a resistance against the Germans that began the Battle of Crete and lasted until the end of German occupation of Crete in 1945.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, it is with solemn honor and respect that I stand here today to render this tribute to a people who fought with every bit of might and kept the spirit of freedom alive through their resistance.

Their unwavering struggle represented to a world engaged in war hope in the face of despair and the promise of a more peaceful existence.