

## **YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 38**

### **TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



*Welcome to 2021 The series will be continuing to present interesting features from the collection and their background stories.*

*The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open three days per week, Wednesday through Friday. Recruiting of new volunteers and roster planning is underway to hopefully re-establish a 5-day open schedule in February*

#### **WX976 GEORGE JAMES GREENWAY, 2/11 BATTALION AIF**

The Archives and Exhibitions of the Army Museum hold many individual stories of service. All artefacts and records are accorded equal respect regardless of corps, rank or nature of service but it is possible to occasionally highlight an individual because of a unique service circumstance or anniversary. George James Greenway who was awarded the Military Cross for distinguished service between November 1941 and April 1942 is one such example.

On 1 June 1941 after organised resistance had ceased in Crete, Lt. Greenway made his way to the South coast with two other officers and twelve soldiers, in the hope of finding craft to leave the island. A Blenheim flew over them and though their signals were answered, and rations dropped, it was the last British plane they saw and they spent the next two months avoiding German patrols in the hills and signalling out to sea whenever they could get on to a beach to do so. On the night of 28/29 August one of H.M. submarines approaching the shore saw their signals and after small parties of escapers had been collected from the district; they swam out to her and were taken to Alexandria which they reached on 1 August 1941.



“A” Force, part of M.I.9, was a cover for secret work on deception of enemy high command and in charge of the training of fighting men in evasion and escape and of organising help for them. Soldiers, who, had escaped, used their experience to help evacuate other soldiers from occupied countries. They were co-opted into M.I.9 as a result of their ‘outstanding escapes’, using their local knowledge and language skills they had acquired whilst on the run. Although mentioned in M.I.9 records, their involvement was considered ‘unofficial.’ According to M.I.9 records the ‘difficulty lay in regularising the posting of these volunteers and obtaining their attachment in some official basis to “A” Force. While the ‘co-operation of the New Zealand and Australian Army Authorities was outstanding, allowing the British army] to have the valuable service of the New Zealand and Australian officers on unofficial attachments; to carry out vital and urgent work of rescuing those left behind, there appears to be no record of these soldier’s involvement in their Australian army records.

Undaunted by his hardships when GHQ ME called for a volunteer to go back to Crete in November to evacuate escapers Lt. Greenway at once offered his services and finding this scheme had been abandoned agreed without hesitation to go to the Greek mainland instead as part of MI9 for the same purpose. From the 15 December 1941. when he reached Cyprus till his return on the 27 March 1942, Lieutenant Greenway did courageous work as a member of the small team of volunteers who made a series of trips through the Greek islands in order to establish a line of communication between the islands and Turkey. They established seven bases including dumps of food and fuel en-route, made contact with local resistance groups and collected much useful intelligence.

Lt. Greenway's final task of evacuating Greek refugees from Turkey was highly praised by his commander, Capt. Parish who paid the following tribute:

*"For the entire period, half of which was spent in enemy waters he carried out every command I gave him with efficiency and his practical knowledge of seafaring was of great assistance. He lived*

*abroad H.M.S. Evangelistria a small Greek caique of seven tons; for over seventy days without once applying to come ashore, which I think in itself deserves considerable praise. Finally, I placed him in command of H.M.S. Agian Demetrius a Greek fishing trawler of some twenty tons with orders to proceed from Chesme, a small port in North West Turkey, to Cyprus, carrying seventy-seven Greek refugees making in all with his crew eighty-three men on board. This he successfully accomplished and thereby saved these Greeks from starvation and possibly death from the Germans had they been shipped back to their islands, and also what is perhaps of more importance from the point of the war effort he produced seventy-seven soldiers for the Allied armies. Lt Greenway not only showed spirit and initiative in volunteering to return to Greece, but carried out his task bravely and efficiently".*

Lieutenant Greenway was part of a group of three Australian soldiers together with, Sergeants Frank Brewer of the 2/1st Field Regiment and Bill Bazeley of the 2/5th Battalion who were involved in M.I.9 Caique operations in the Aegean. Assisting them on their missions was Emmanuel Vernicos, a Greek merchant seaman who had fed and aided the escape of many allied soldiers from Crete. The indomitable Vernicos was quite a character. A wiry, clever man, he wanted to start a revolution on Crete. Many Australian soldiers remembered the help given to them by Vernicos on Crete

Under the command of Captain Michael Parish, Brewer, Greenway and Bazeley, whom Parish described as 'three excellent Australians,' participated in Caique plan No.3. They were to proceed to Cyprus to hire or buy two caiques and a fast motor-boat and rendezvous off the Turkish coast with Mr Noel Rees to co-ordinate their escape plan with him. 'One of the caiques was a '7 tonner to be used to operate among the islands with Capt. Parrish and myself the larger caique (sic) an island trader of about 100 tons with Lieut. Greenway and Bill Bazeley to act as a ferry.'

The boats were not only used to evacuate British soldiers but saved many Greek lives as well. Greenway was initially placed in charge of a Greek caique HMS Evangelistria but later took command of HMS Agios Demetrios, a Greek fishing trawler of some twenty tons that returned to Cyprus with 77 Greek refugees. 'This was an outstanding load on a caique normally built to carry ten people. Parish praised Greenway's work explaining: 'he saved these Greeks from starvation and possibly death from the Germans had they been shipped back to their islands, and also what is perhaps of more importance from the point of view of the war effort, he produced seventy-seven soldiers for the Allied armies.'

In May 1942, the Australian military authorities recalled Greenway, Brewer and Bazeley for repatriation to Australia. Greenway explained in a letter to Gilchrist that they were 'asked if we were prepared to stay on in the caiques for further duty in the island, but as Japan had come into the war and our units were fighting up in New Guinea I asked to be released for passage back to Australia.

The Australians had done 'invaluable work since joining MI9 in September 1941 and carried out numerous expeditions. Lieutenant Greenway subsequently received the Military Cross for his service and Sergeants Bazley and Brewer each received the Military Medal These awards took into consideration their original escapes.' Their

operations would not have succeeded without the support and co-operation of the Greek people. Greenway noted during his many trips through the islands that the Greeks 'were very helpful and on no occasion were we at all worried that they would alert the Italians or the Germans in Crete of our whereabouts.

George Greenway subsequently served across the South West Pacific Theatre. He died on 4 October 1980 at age 77

<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6461333>

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/R1535485>

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