

## History of the cemetery

The significance of Maleme War Cemetery has evolved in the decades since it was established. The involvement of high-ranking members of the German military who had fought in Crete, their failure to incorporate the context of the Nazi war of aggression and denial of complicity in the occupiers' crimes were extremely troublesome. In 1947, General Kurt Student even took it upon himself to have General Bruno Bräuer reburied in Maleme. Bräuer had been executed in Athens for war crimes committed under his command in Crete, making his burial here an insult to the island's populace.

The culture of remembrance and commemoration in Germany has changed utterly in the past few decades. Research is currently ongoing to identify the perpetrators of Nazi war crimes. The Volksbund recognises that there are war criminals among those buried in many war cemeteries. As a result, such cemeteries can no longer be considered places of honourable commemoration. Accordingly, Maleme is increasingly viewed as a place of encounter and learning today.



## Address:

German War Cemetery, Germaniko Nekrotafio, Maleme,  
73100 Maleme/Chania-Crete/Greece

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SUMMER  
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## What happened here?

On 20 May 1941, the German armed forces launched a major joint airborne assault operation against Crete. By then, Nazi Germany and its Italian and Bulgarian allies had already occupied mainland Greece. Troops from Britain, New Zealand and Australia helped the Greeks defend the island, which was of great strategic importance for both sides. Once they had taken Crete in May 1941, German forces occupied the island until the war ended in May 1945. During this time, Wehrmacht (German Armed Forces) soldiers committed countless atrocities on Cretan civilians, murdering thousands of them. Over 3,000 German soldiers died during the invasion, and a further 1,000 were killed during the occupation. This war cemetery, home to 4,468 graves, is their last resting place. It was officially opened in 1974 and is managed by Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e. V. (the German War Graves Commission) on behalf of the German Federal Government.



## Exhibition

The war cemetery is a place of grieving and a reminder of the horrors of war. It also recalls the German occupying forces' regime of terror and the atrocities inflicted upon the Cretan population by members of the German army. The new permanent exhibition reflects these aspects by first and foremost documenting the occupiers' crimes, while also providing a description of the military operations.

It is estimated that several thousand Cretans fell victim to the Germans and more than 40 Cretan villages were destroyed. To break local resistance, the occupiers took increasingly drastic measures in the period leading up to 1944. At the same time, the andartes, as the Greek partisans were known, offered fierce resistance.

Many Cretan citizens were imprisoned or maltreated, or driven into forced labour either here or in Germany. The island's almost 300 Jews died on 9 June 1944 when a British submarine torpedoed and sank the *Tánaïs*, the converted cargo vessel used to deport them.



## People and their stories

The exhibition documents individual fortunes of war through eye-witness accounts, biographical notes, letters and photographs from their estates. It tells the stories of some of the German and Austrian soldiers laid to rest here, as well as their Allied enemies and Italian allies (until 1943). It also features Cretan fighters who died in the battle for the island, and highlights the role played by the women who joined the resistance or survived German concentration camps. The descriptions of their childhood wartime experiences by elderly Cretan women and men are a particularly poignant element of the exhibition.

