

PETER THOMPSON

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *PACIFIC FURY*

# ANZAC FURY

THE BLOODY BATTLE OF CRETE 1941







Born in Melbourne and educated in Brisbane, Peter Thompson now lives in London after a successful career as a journalist in the UK. His most recent books are *Pacific Fury*, *The Battle for Singapore* and with Robert Macklin, *The Big Fella: The Rise and Rise of BHP Billiton*, which won the Blake Dawson Prize for Business Literature in 2010.

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# ANZAC FURY

THE BLOODY BATTLE  
OF CRETE 1941

PETER THOMPSON



WILLIAM HEINEMANN, AUSTRALIA



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Cover photographs: Front: Infantry attack in the swirling sands of the Western Desert: Libya, World War II. (National Library of Australia)

Back: German soldiers take aim with their light weapons against the enemy artillery in Crete. (Australian War Memorial Negative Number 106490)

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Michael Clarke, Anzac hero

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*Dedicated to Michael Clarke, John Peck and Keith Hooper  
– and to the Anzac spirit of sacrifice, mateship, courage  
and endurance that sustained them and thousands of their  
Australian and New Zealand comrades during the darkest  
days of World War II*



John Peck, Anzac hero



Keith Hooper, Anzac hero



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Anzac Fury* – a companion volume to *Pacific Fury*, published in 2008 – commemorates the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe when thousands of Anzac prisoners of war captured in Greece and Crete were released from captivity. It is 70 years since the 2nd AIF arrived in the Middle East to begin their extraordinary adventures in battles against the German and Italian armies in North Africa, mainland Greece and Crete prior to the outbreak of the Pacific War.

The immense contribution made by the New Zealand Division to the new Anzac Corps gives the book an exciting added dimension. Wherever possible, I have combined the personal memories of Anzac combatants with combat action. I have also returned to the original sources of many existing works on the battles of Bardia, Tobruk, Greece and Crete, including the war diaries and histories of units involved in those encounters, the official reports of commanding officers and the memoirs and/or biographies of the main participants.

I am enormously grateful to Louise Morris, Lieutenant Michael Clarke's daughter, for her recollections about her father and for permission to quote from diaries and letters in his extensive archive at her home in Tallarook, Victoria, and from his self-published memoir, *My War*.

I am similarly grateful to Barbara Daniels, daughter of Lieutenant John Peck, an Anzac soldier who joined the Special Operations Executive (SOE) while on the run from the Germans and assisted the escape of hundreds of Allied prisoners of war from Italy. In 1950, John Peck wrote an account of 'the strictly personal experiences of a young man caught up in unusual circumstances of war after being in action as an infantryman in Libya, Greece and the Battle of Crete'. It was, he explained, 'almost a diary which could not be written at the time and reflects the immediacy of the events and impressions without the benefits of hindsight, explanations or literary merit'. It is a fascinating and insightful document and I have quoted extracts from it in this work.

Special thanks go to Dr Sally Vickery of Brisbane for permission to quote from family records concerning her mother, Sister Mabel Johnson, and Mabel's cousin, Sir Charles Spry, Australia's post-war spymaster and keeper of the nation's secrets.

I would like to thank the following people for interviews: Joan Bright Astley, Les Cook, Miriam Dillon, Keith Horton Hooper, Watty McEwan, Anthony Madden, Arthur Midwood, Desmond Morris, Ann Robertson, Bill Rudd, Norman Simper, Harry Spencer and Katrina Swift. The Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, London, provided audio interviews with the following: Admiral Desmond McCarthy (HMS *Ajax*), Leo Brown (HMS *Ajax*), Herbert Rawlings (HMS *Barham*), Albert Pitman (HMS *Barham*), Adrian Holloway (HMAS *Nizam*), Frederick Winterbotham (Ultra), Ken Taylor (HMS *Formidable*), Major-General Michael Forrester (Queen's Royal Regiment), Denis Vellacott (RAF), Lord (John) Harding (General O'Connor's chief of staff), General Sir Richard O'Connor, Richard Green (HMS *Hasty*), Frederick De Fries (HMS *Formidable*) and Peter Wilkinson (SOE).

*Anzac Fury* also commemorates the outstanding service of Royal Australian Navy ships attached to the Mediterranean Fleet, particularly those involved in the Battles of Cape Spada and Matapan, and to the heroic crews of all ships that took part in the extremely hazardous and sometimes fatal evacuations of the Anzac Corps from mainland Greece and Crete. In all naval matters, I have consulted Lieutenant-Commander Mackenzie Gregory, RAN (retired) and am most grateful for his guidance.

I am also grateful for the assistance of Bill Richards, Australian National Maritime Museum,

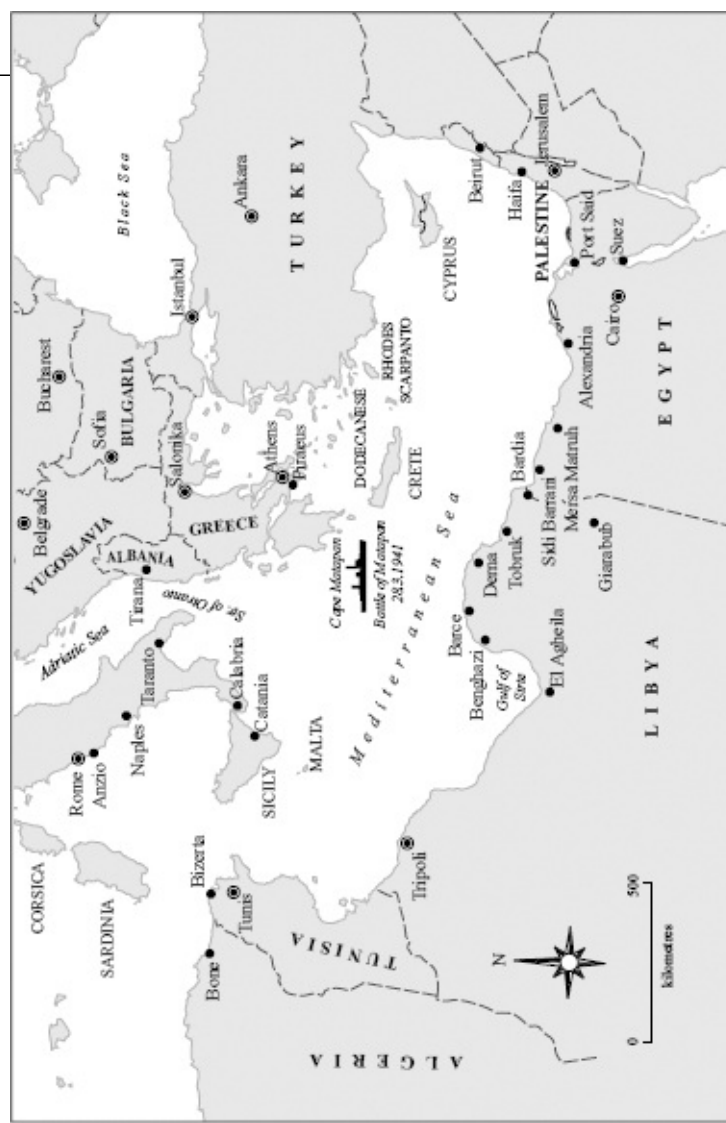
Sydney; Peter Johnson, Australian Government Department of Defence; the Research Centre of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra; the National Archives, formerly the Public Record Office, Kew; the Reading Room at the Imperial War Museum, London; the British Library, London; the Mitchell Library and State Library of New South Wales, Sydney; the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne; the Oxley Library and State Library of Queensland, Brisbane; and the Library of the Reform Club, London. Robert Macklin, my frequent co-author in Canberra, and Rod O'Loan in Melbourne were incredibly helpful with comments and advice on the work-in-progress.

Nikki Christer, my publisher at Random House Australia, was a tower of strength throughout the publishing process, while Patrick Mangan and Mark Evans are to be congratulated on their excellent editing and production work. Finally, my thanks go to my agent Andrew Lownie for encouraging me to write this book in the first place.

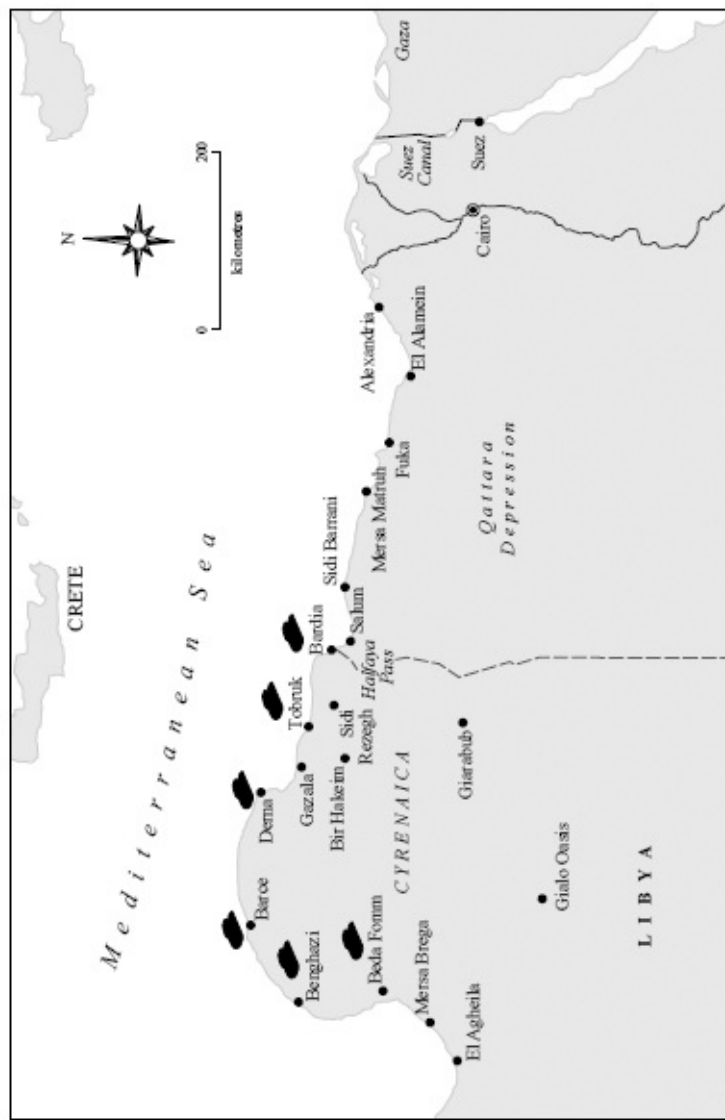
Regarding style, I have taken the liberty of using the present tense – for example, ‘he says’ or ‘she recalls’ – when a specific recollection may in fact have taken place years earlier. All interviews are clearly flagged in the References and notes section. The ranks of many service personnel changed during the course of World War II. While I have kept track of some promotions in this work, more usually I refer to the rank at the time of a particular incident. In several instances, I have retained the offensive terms ‘Dago’, ‘Jerries’, ‘Huns’ and ‘blacks’ in direct quotations taken from memoirs or official histories. I sometimes refer to ‘Greece and Crete’ as meaning ‘mainland or continental Greece and Crete’. Please see Appendix C for the spelling of place names in mainland Greece and Crete used in this book.

Peter Thompson  
February 2010



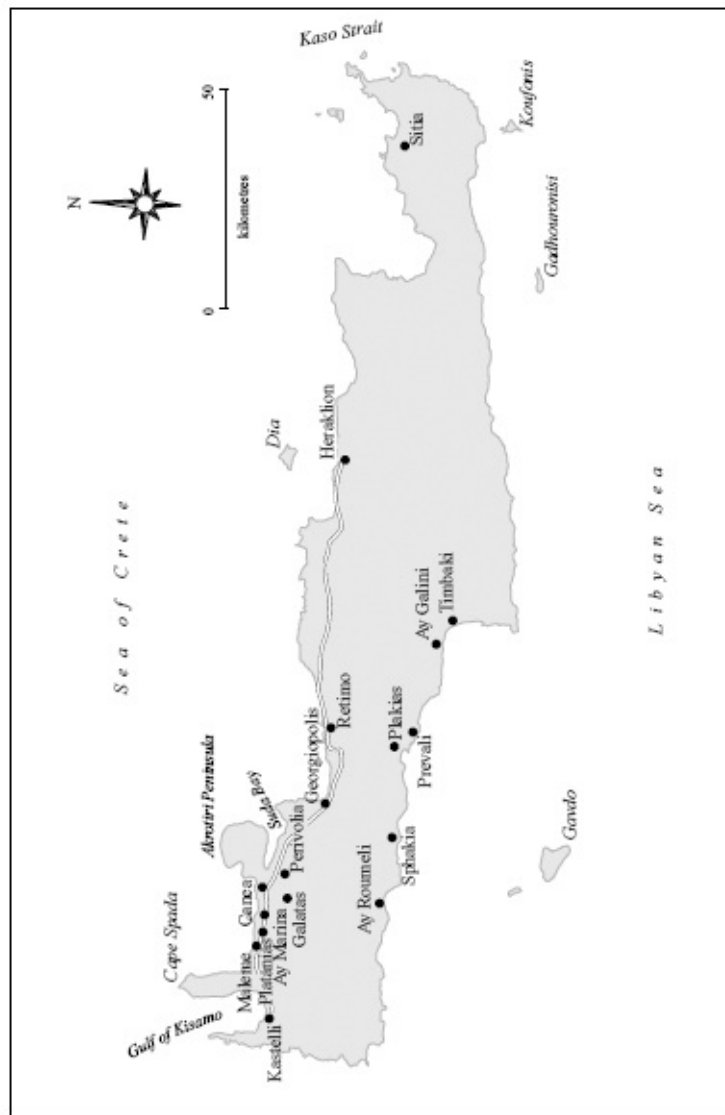


The eastern Mediterranean as it was in 1941, highlighting the battlefields of North Africa and the Battle of Matapan



The North African battlefields showing the AIF victories of January/February 1941





The island of Crete as it was in May 1941



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