The Battle of Thermopylae during World War II occurred in 1941 following the retreat from the Olympus and Servia passes. British Commonwealth forces began to set up defensive position at the pass at Thermopylae, famous for the Battle of Thermopylae in 480BC, when 300 Spartans and 700 Thespians under the command of King Leonidas fought to the death against a gigantic Persian army. General Bernard Freyberg was given the task of defending the coastal pass with Mackay defending the village of Brallos.

In the New Zealand sector, the 5th Brigade was deployed along the coastal road, the foothills south of Lamia, and the Spercheios River. The 4th Brigade was on the right where it had established coast-watching patrols, and the 6th was in reserve. In the Australian sector, the 19th Brigade, comprising the 2/4th and 2/8th Battalions, defended Brallos. On 19 April, the 2/1st and 2/5th Battalions were placed under the command of Maj Gen George Vasey, and that day and during the early hours of the next, 2/11th Battalion rejoined the brigade.

Generals Freyberg and Mackay had been informing their subordinates that there would be no more withdrawals, both unaware of the higher level discussions on the evacuation. After the battle, Mackay was quoted as saying.[1]

“I thought that we'd hang on for about a fortnight and be beaten by weight of numbers[1]”

When the order to retreat was received on the morning of the 23rd, it was decided that each of the two positions was to be held by one brigade each. These brigades, the Australian 19th and 6th New Zealand were to hold the passes as long as possible, allowing the other units to withdraw. General Vasey, commander of the 19th Brigade said:

“Here we bloody well are and here we bloody well stay[1]”

This was interpreted by his brigade major as the “Brigade will hold its present defensive positions come what may”. The Germans attacked on 24 April, met fierce resistance, lost 15 tanks and sustained considerable casualties. The Australians and New Zealanders held out the entire day.
With the delaying action accomplished, they retreated in the direction of the evacuation beaches and set up another rearguard at Thebes.[2]

**Date** 24–25 April 1941.  **Location** Thermopylae, Greece.  **Result** German victory

**Belligerents.** 🇳🇿 New Zealand  🇦🇺 Australia  🇩🇪 Germany

**Commanders.** 🇳🇿 Bernard Freyberg  🇦🇺 George Vasey  🇩🇪 Ferdinand Schorner

**Casualties and losses** about 100 killed and wounded

**References**


J.E. Brooks wrote a poem about this battle entitled "Thermopylae 1941".

**Greece during World War II**

**World War II**

**Categories:**

Conflicts in 1941

1941 in Greece

Battles and operations of World War II involving Greece

Battles and operations of World War II involving New Zealand

Battles of World War II involving Australia

Battle of Greece

Battles of World War II involving Germany


Wikipedia page last modified on 15 February 2012