

A saved soldier, a brave boy and a monument to the Battle of Crete

By LISA KEARNS

Fate can deal a strange, symmetrical hand. Lasting connections can be made across space and time. This, Father Nicholas Moutafis knows.

If it was not for an Australian soldier named Charlie Elphick, the Greek Orthodox priest from Oakleigh would probably have lived a very different life, on the Greek island of Crete.

If it was not for the eight-year-old Nicholas Moutafis, Charlie Elphick would probably have died a prisoner of war after the Germans invaded Crete on 20 May 1941.

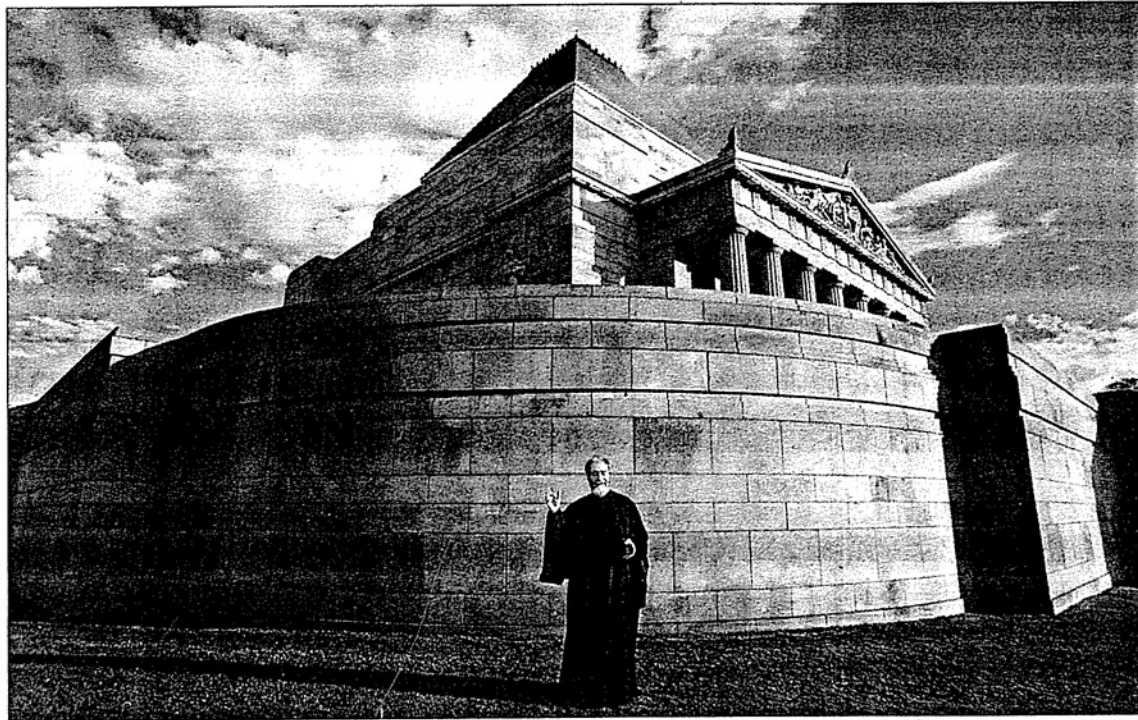
So, this morning, on the 58th anniversary of that terrible day, Father Nicholas Moutafis will address a congregation of Greek Australians and returned Australian soldiers, many from the 6th Division that along with New Zealanders, British and Greek soldiers, defended Crete.

At the Shrine of Remembrance, at a site on which it was announced yesterday a new monument will be built to commemorate the Battle of Crete, he will tell them that he and a younger brother scurried unnoticed to bring bread to the Australian soldier hiding in bushes on a river bank near his family home. One day, the soldier disappeared and until 1952, the Moutafis family did not know what happened to him.

In that year, Charlie Elphick wrote to Father Moutafis's parents and offered to sponsor them so the family could emigrate to Melbourne. He said he had left his hiding spot because he was worried the boys would be killed. In a way, that decision led to his return to Australia.

The temple-style monument, designed by Melbourne artist Evangelos Sakaris, is a gift symbolising gratitude from Melbourne's Greek community to the Australian people. Proposed in 1996 by the Australian Hellenic Memorial Foundation, it will be situated in Birdwood Avenue, opposite the Shrine's flagpoles.

The Federal Government will contribute \$5000 and the Greek Government \$11,000 towards the cost of the \$200,000 monument. The Foundation hopes to raise the remainder by next year's anniversary of the Battle of Crete.



Father Nicholas Moutafis, whose family was sponsored for migration by a soldier they had helped during the war.

Picture: MATT BOWIE