

MOVIES

For Sacramento brothers, making '11th Day: Crete 1941' was personal

By Dixie Reid
BEE STAFF WRITER

In May 1941, more than 8,000 elite Nazi paratroopers descended on the Greek island of Crete in the largest airborne attack ever attempted by the German army. Crete fell in 10 days, but its determined people never surrendered.

On the 11th day of the German occupation, the Cretans began fighting back – with hoes, scythes, sticks, whatever they could fashion into a weapon – in a courageous act of civilian insurgency that lasted until near the end of World War II.

Their story of espionage and sabotage against the Nazis is detailed in "The 11th Day: Crete 1941," an independent documentary made by Sacramento brothers Christos and Michael Epperson, whose family members were among the insurgents. It will have one screening in Sacramento, on Saturday at the Crest Theatre.

"It's our history," says director Christos Epperson, 33, who notes that the Cretan civilian resistance movement has long been overshadowed by the French and Dutch resistances. "It's been passed over for so long, and now the torch has been passed to the next generation, to document it and carry it forward."

The brothers interviewed 35 elderly veterans of the insurgent fighting, including former British intelligence officer Leigh Fermor, who instigated the capture of the Nazi commanding general and hadn't spoken of it publicly for more than 50 years. Fermor, at first reluctant, went on to recall the gutsy abduction in detail.

Filming for "The 11th Day" took place on location in Crete and at a ranch in Wheatland, 30 miles north of Sacramento, where creek beds and stone walls are reminiscent of sites on the Greek isle. The brothers employed 400 extras, some of whom portrayed their own ancestors in dramatic re-enactments, often paying them with food, drink and gas money. In addition to re-enactments, they also used vintage photographs and footage.



Christos Epperson directs the World War II Greek resistance documentary "The 11th Day: Crete 1941."

Michael Epperson, 37, the film's writer, had an urge nearly 20 years ago to turn his family's story into a novel. But by the time he began his research, all of the great-aunts and great-uncles who lived through the Battle of Crete and its aftermath had died.

So, following Christos' vision and longtime dream of making a movie, they began work on "The 11th Day," which was built on the memories of veterans of the resistance fighting.

Michael Epperson, who

teaches philosophy at California State University, Sacramento, may still someday write about their great-aunt Eleuthera Xirouhakis, a heroine of the resistance. A statue of her stands on the grounds of a church in Aroni, Crete. Her story does not factor into "The 11th Day," but the brothers dedicated their film to her.

"She was 21, 22 at the time," says Michael Epperson. "She was a spy for the British (which had a small force of intelligence officers on the island), working for the Germans at a radio-transmission facility. She pretended to be a collaborator but copied down German communiques to give to the British."

Eleuthera, whose name means "freedom" in English, had been engaged to marry a young man from another village, something arranged by their parents. But in an act of

The 11th Day: Crete 1941

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Crest Theatre, 1013 K St

HOW MUCH: \$10

INFORMATION:
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www.crete1941.com

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'Crete'

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