

Grigoris Afxentiou: A True Greek-Cypriot Hero



Grigoris Afxentiou is a national hero in Cyprus, as he was one of the most prominent fighters in the 1955-1959 EOKA struggle to liberate the island from British colonial rule and unite Cyprus with Greece.

EOKA began the fight for liberation from the British on April 1, 1955, a day that is still celebrated in Cyprus as a national holiday.

Grigoris Afxentiou was one of the leaders of the revolutionary group, and his death served as a reminder of Cyprus' painful struggle for freedom.

It was March 3, 1957 when emblematic Cypriot hero Grigoris Afxentiou was burned alive by the ruling British troops during the four-year war for the liberation of Cyprus from British rule.

His death, after holding out against surrounding British soldiers for 10 hours all by himself, in the Battle of Machairas, has become an illustrious and tragic page in Cypriot history.

The life of EOKA fighter Grigoris Afxentiou

Afxentiou was born in the village of Lysi, in the Famagusta district, which is now under Turkish occupation, on February 22, 1928. In 1948 he went to Athens to study literature at the University of Athens.

However, he could not afford the cost of living and went to serve in the army reserves as lieutenant on the Greek-Bulgarian border.

In 1952, Afxentiou returned to Cyprus where he worked with his father in the fields and then as a taxi driver.

When the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) was formed in 1955, his military background, boldness, and charisma brought him next to leader Giorgos Grivas, who made him his second in command.

Afxentiou led many attacks on British troops

Afxentiou led attacks on crucial British facilities on the island, such as the power company and the broadcasting corporation, and was responsible for training EOKA recruits in using arms, bomb making techniques, and guerrilla warfare.

The British soon put a £5,000 bounty on his head.

Constantly on the move, often disguised, Afxentiou continued to direct and conduct operations from hideouts in the Troodos mountains, and in March 1957 found himself holed up near Machairas monastery, south of Nicosia.

On March 3, 1957 British troops, acting on a tip-off, surrounded Afxentiou and his four comrades in their hideout, and called for the men to surrender.

Afxentiou ordered his men to leave to fight another day but insisted that he had to stay. "I will fight and die," he told them. "I have to die," he said emphatically, repeating the phrase four times.

After his comrades left, Afxentiou had to hold off the British alone. The occupation troops stormed the hideout, but Afxentiou held them at bay.

They tried to kill him by throwing hand grenades into the shelter, but the wounded Afxentiou wouldn't give up and continued to fight.

The iconic fighter was burned alive at 29

The British sent in one of Afxentiou's comrades, Avgoustinos Efstathiou, to persuade Afxentiou to surrender, but Efstathiou decided to stay and fight with his leader.

Eventually, after Afxentiou put up a resistance that lasted 10 hours, and all conventional methods had failed, the British poured petrol into the hideout to burn out the EOKA men.

They threw explosives and blasted the hideout, burning the men alive.

The intensity of the fire that ensued made it impossible for the British soldiers to approach the hideout and it wasn't until the following morning that they were able to get inside.

There they found Afxentiou's burnt body, and next to it a sub-machine gun, revolvers, grenades and a copy of Nikos Kazantzakis' "Christ Recrucified", given to Afxentiou by the Abbot of Machairas.

Afxentiou wanted to see Cyprus liberated from British rule and unite with Greece. "I will fight and fall like a Greek", he wrote to his wife Vassiliki once. And indeed he did.

greekreporter.com

Saint Joseph the Hesychast

