

The forgotten battle: local author to launch WWII book in Warwick

BY: ELIZABETH VONEIFF

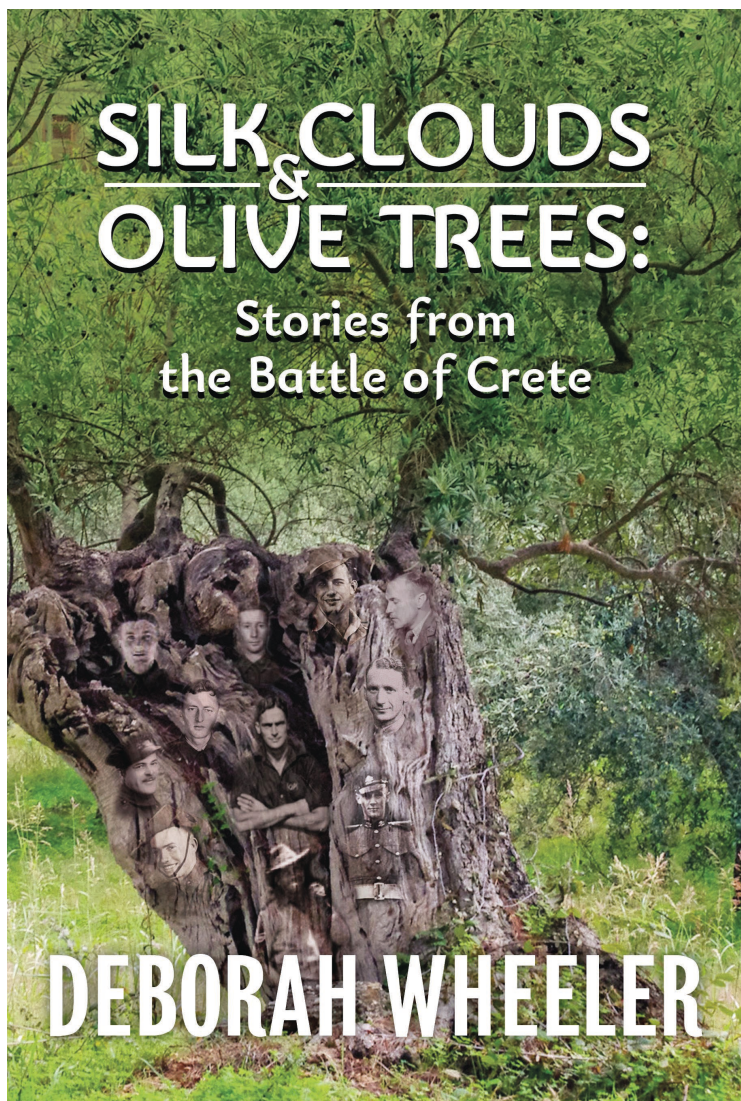
editor@thedailyjournal.ink

The Battle of Crete is one of the least researched episodes in World War II history but, thanks to research done by Southern Downs author, Deborah Wheeler, the story will be told in her new book launching in Warwick this month.

Just in time for ANZAC day, Ms Wheeler's book, *Silk Clouds and Olive Trees: stories from the Battle of Crete*, will have a pre-launch on Saturday 24 April. The event is open to the public, and admission is free, but those interested must book a space to comply with COVID regulations.

Ms. Wheeler, who has written and contributed a number of works on the military history of the Southern Downs, particularly Amiens, told *The Daily Journal* that her latest book resulted from locals getting in touch to describe their families' involvement in the Battle of Crete.

It started when Deborah met Andreas Leonakas who walks from Brisbane to Wallangarra annually in honour of his father, who was 16 during the Battle and fought in the resistance. As Andreas passed through the Southern Downs, locals shared their stories with him which allowed a collaboration to write a book.



This year is Leonakas' fifth walk to the NSW border and he will be a featured speaker at the event on the 24th.

"We've become good friends," said Deborah.

"Once I heard the story from the Battle of Crete, I wanted to honour some of the men who fought in it." Because Australia lost the battle, it has attracted very little research, and "nothing really about the men who were in it."

"One of the men is still alive, he'll be 104 this month."

Most of the ten men that are portrayed in Wheeler's book either came from the Southern Downs or had a connection with the area. Two of the men died in Crete.

The story of how Greece was overrun by Hitler and the Australian forces that

thus the title of the book.

The Battle for Crete lasted 10 days before surviving Ally troops were evacuated to the Middle East.

While it was considered a sharp loss, the people of Crete and the Greek soldiers fought ferociously. Ms Read is certain that not only did their resistance take Hitler by surprise, but it also delayed his entry into Russia until winter, with devastating consequences for the Nazis.

"They had never encountered resistance from civilians, but the Cretans, even the old ladies and the girls, killed the paratroopers. Hitler lost 4,000 paratroopers in one day."

Hitler saw his manpower weaken in the Battle and furthermore, his plan to leave only 5,000 troops to occupy the island were dashed. At one point nearly 50,000 troops were deployed to quell Greek resistance. It was this unexpected development that delayed Hitler's entry into Russia, said Ms Wheeler.

The courage of the defenders was legendary. Churchill later made the famous statement that "henceforth we shall not say that Greeks fight like Heroes, rather that Heroes fight like Greeks."

Also speaking at the launch of *Silk Clouds and Olive Trees* is Susan Chuck, mother of the late Private Benjamin Chuck who lost his life in Afghanistan. Ms Chuck will discuss the 42 for 42 organisation which represents Australian soldiers who have taken the path of suicide after returning home.

The launch of *Silk Clouds and Olive Trees* will be held at the Auditorium and the Churches of Christ, Dragon Street Warwick, from 2-4 pm on Saturday 24 April. Please contact Deborah on 0414 852 492 to book a seat. Tea, coffee, and Anzac biscuits will be served.

evacuated to Crete is forcefully told in Wheeler's book. The Australian battalion sent to Greece was outnumbered something like 100 to 1 by German forces, and within two weeks, Greece was fully occupied.

"The might of the Germans was overwhelming," said Ms Wheeler.

As the remnants of the Greek army and the Australians evacuated to Crete, the real battle occurred. Hitler, as a completely novel approach, ordered 10,000 paratroopers onto the Island.

"When they jumped out of the planes they were like black dots, but then they opened into all different colours – all the colours mean different things, officers, ammunition, medicine."

It was a sky full of silk clouds,

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