

WHAT MAKES A PERSON DEVOTE EIGHT YEARS OF THEIR LIFE TO WRITE A BOOK?

Inside the mind of a historian: Dr Maria Hill

Dr Maria Hill is a military historian and an expert on the Greek and Crete campaigns. She has an Honours, Masters and PhD in History from the University of New South Wales. Her PhD study was undertaken at the Australian Defence Force Academy @ UNSW in Canberra. Maria is the first Australian historian of Greek descent to write about these campaigns, which has ensured that a Greek perspective has been included in a narrative that often ignores Australia's Greek allies.



My engagement [1978]



Mum and Dad



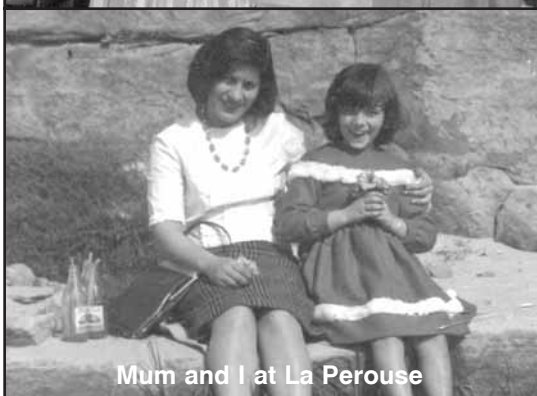
Christmas 1963



Mum's shop: 85 Darley St., Newtown



Greek School Dance, Paddington Town Hall, 1969. With mum and my friend Helen



Mum and I at La Perouse

INTERVIEW: ANNA ARSENIS

Where were you born?

I was born in Athens, in Greece in the 1950's.

At what age did you come to Australia?

I was three years old when I arrived in Sydney and have no memory of Greece.

Where did your parents come from?

My mother was born in Athens and my father came from Pyrgo, Ilias. My mother's family came from Smyrna.

I am very passionate about the Greek and Crete campaign because it is an important part of Australia's history and deserves not to be ignored. With *Diggers and Greeks* I have put Greece back on the agenda in Australia.

My father came from a wealthy family who sent him to university, where he graduated as an Industrial Chemist. His family hid an Italian soldier during the War whom his sister married, so I have Italian relatives as well.

Have you been to Greece?

Yes. Many times. The first time I went to Greece was after I completed higher school and spent a gap year in Athens, working at the Australian Embassy. While at university I participated in a six-week tour of Greece in 1976 that was sponsored by the Greek Government for university students of Greek heritage in Australia. It was a fabulous experience. I returned to Greece again in 1979 when my mother was dying. She had only been in Greece for five years when she developed cancer and died within six weeks at the age of 43, that is why *Diggers and Greeks* is dedicat-

ed to her. For the rest of that year I taught English at a Frontisterio in Athens. In 1987 my father was sick so I returned to Greece again. He died of cancer that year.

My last trip to Greece took place in 2003 when I was awarded an Army History Grant to do field research for my PhD study at the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra. My brother Nectarios Costadopoulos accompanied me and photographed all the archival material. We traveled throughout mainland Greece and

Crete, visiting the sites where the Australian soldiers fought, interviewing veterans and examining the military and diplomatic and historical archives in Athens.

What motivated you to devote eight whole years of your life to write this book?

I felt it was a very important topic to discuss and bring to everyone's attention. Enough has not been done to remind Australia of the Greek-Alliance in W.W.II. The Turkish community, on the other hand, have done a good job, to the point where a monument of Ataturk now stands at the beginning of Anzac Parade in Canberra where memorials are built to the fallen. Australia's preoccupation with Gallipoli has played a part in this but so has Greek inaction. It is up to the Greek community in Australia to raise public awareness of the Greek and Crete campaigns that bind our two countries so closely together. We haven't done a good job of this and it's up to us to ensure that we get the story told. I hope my book goes some way in achieving this aim.

How can we expect the State Government of NSW to support the retention of Modern Greek in high schools and at university, if we are viewed as just another ethnic group in this country? We need to highlight the fact that we were there for them when they needed us. We were their Allies after all, a point often forgotten and rarely remembered by the media during Anzac Day commemorations.

Why history?

I am fascinated by the past – it intrigues me. I want to understand how



Taken at the 'famous' James Studio (opposite Agia Sophia)