CRETAN ASSOCIATION OF TASMANIA
85TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE OF CRETE
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HELLENIC HOUSE, NORTH HOBART, SUNDAY 31 MAY 2026

Good afternoon. Thank you for your invitation to this 85th anniversary of the Battle of Crete.

May I begin by acknowledging the Muwinina people upon whose land we gather. I acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as ongoing custodians of Country. I recognise their enduring culture and deep connection to land, sea, sky, and waters.

As always, the wreath laying ceremony earlier this afternoon was moving. May I now reflect on our Tasmania – Crete connections.

Several Tasmanian-born naval leaders were actively involved in the doomed Crete campaign, including Deloraine-born Captain John Collins (later Vice Admiral Sir John Collins) who commanded HMAS *Sydney*. He earned high praise and the Order of the Bath for his leadership in Mediterranean operations. This included sinking Italian cruiser *Bartolomeo Colleoni* at the Battle of Cape Spada off the north coast of Crete in 1940[1].

Many Tasmanians also served as reinforcements in the Australian Imperial Forces 6th Division in Crete. They defended alongside local Cretans against the world's first mass airborne invasion in 1941, codenamed "*Operation Mercury*". The defence was initially promising, but errors and overwhelming force lead to retreat. During the evacuation, the people of Crete famously sheltered and aided retreating Allied soldiers, on some occasions for up to a year.

The Cretans who cared for the Australians also formed a deep sense of understanding and compassion for them. They quickly realised the Australians and other Allied troops were not in Crete to take control, but to help defend

[1] Vice Admiral Sir John Collins, KBE, CB - Naval Historical Society of Australia

their island. Their kindness reflected the traditional Cretan value of hospitality, *philoxenia*, as well as a shared sense of purpose against a common enemy.[2]

One Tasmanian, Tom Dunbabin, had no role during the Battle of Crete but played a key role in Crete. Tom arrived during the third and final phase of Australian participation in Crete. This phase was to evacuate "stragglers", which then evolved into conducting special operations alongside the Cretan resistance.

Tom is said to have made the most enduring impact of an Australian on the wartime history of the island. His work was vital to enabling a transition from German occupation without bloodshed.

Sandy Renel, a fellow special operations officer, noted Tom Dunbabin, I quote, "had been all over Crete… many thousands of Cretans loved the man and very greatly respected him, including some of the toughest characters."

It was noted during a tour of Crete by a senior officer that Tom was, I quote, "known as 'Mr Tom' from one end of the Island to the other…"[3]. He was so loved that a song titled "Tom" was sung by Cretans for many years, and he was made an honorary citizen of Heraklion.

Connections between Crete and Tasmania continued to grow post-war. Migration significantly increased our Greek community, and many worked at hydroelectric power stations.[4]. The Greek Australian bond, forged during the Battle of Crete, still resonates today[5].

Today, may we honour the memory of all those who served or lost their lives in the Crete campaign.

[2] Monteath_Australians_P2019.pdf
[3] Monteath_Australians_P2019.pdf p 157
[4] https://www.greekcommunitytas.com.au/greeks-in-tasmania
[5] Battle commemorated with dance | Defence