

# THREE GOOD GREAT MEN



By Patrick Donelly  
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### **The Author**

Patrick Donelly was born in Colchester Essex England. He married in 1960 and has twin daughters. By the time he was 25 he had built his first house and went onto to build another two and he lived in both.

His business was as a plumber eventually becoming a director of a local firm

His skill is in lead work and he is noted for this

He had been a recognized Iron Man competing in various countries.

His organizing skills are such that he has been instrumental in organizing National newspaper sail boarding races

His love of Crete began in the late eighties and he ran a Sail Boarding School there for a number of years

He travels now mainly to Australia to visit much loved relatives there

He is now moving into retirement and lives in a seventeenth century cottage facing a ancient green and has a keen involvement in local caring issues.

## **THREE GOOD GREAT MEN**

### Prologue

How many war stories have been written? I don't know, thousands, maybe tens or hundreds of thousands. Some fact, some fiction. Some a bit of both! One thing is certain, the war stories of today are far removed from the stories written when I was a boy. Then the hero always had a square jaw, he always had a public school accent and he always called the heroin "Darling" and did the right thing.

Now things are different. Today the hero is not likely to be an officer or a gentleman. He won't shave on a regular basis. He will be born in south London. His girlfriend will have a child although they won't be married and the "heroin" in the story is likely to be something entirely different.

The writing changes but war is the same. Every single time. When it jumps out of its box, people are going to get killed, lots of them. Sad thing is, those that survive can sometimes look back on it and see it as an adventure. I've heard people say "I enjoyed my war". I suppose it's in the nature of man, a kind of prayer, "Thank you God for letting me survive".

None of us that read war stories or watch war films can claim to be innocent of enjoying our war, as I said, it's in the nature of man.

So how can I now write another war story and yet not be guilty of the glorification of the violence of war? Truth is, I don't think I can. I hope to entertain you. So, I'm guilty. Right from the start. Bang to rights Guv'. Of course, I could say that the war already happened. I'm not making it up. I didn't start it. I'm writing about history. But I won't say any of those things. This story is 99% true. Don't try to find the 1%, it's not worth it. It's never been told before and I think it should be, if only to give thanks to the men in the story who were prepared to give their lives so that we could be free.

I hope you enjoy it.

## **Acknowledgements**

In writing this short story I have been surprised at how much help one is required to seek out. The willingness with which this help is offered is like food to the writer, it provides energy at times when giving up would seem the best option.

The families of the three men in the following pages have been generous in both their time and the Information they have been prepared to give. The death of two of the men has been recent enough to still cause pain of loss and I hope they can find comfort in knowing that their Fathers stories are recorded here. I knew both of these men and would count myself as their friend and therefore share the Families sadness.

In this age of computers I find myself to a large extent, adrift and I would like to thank my friend Alan Haynes for throwing me a very welcome lifejacket. He has been my personal Repair Wizard. My daughter Sharon for her patience in turning the Fred Marlow interview into text and .....Sylki In Crete for her help in tracking down Georges photo's

## **Chapter 1**

Some time in the late 1980s I read a book called The Cretan Runner by George Psychoundakis. It was a time when I was having a love affair with Crete. Still am in a way but back then it wasn't unusual for me to spend as many as four or more holidays a year there. Couldn't get enough of the place. Made friends with the people, learnt to speak enough Greek to get by. Even bought a plot of land there, right down in the west of the island near Hania.

George Psychoundakis was a Greek, as you might have guessed by the name. He was the Cretan Runner. That was enough for me. Any thing Greek and I was a sucker for it. Well, I enjoyed the book, so much so that I read it again a few years later. It's about George's life as a runner for British Intelligence during the war. (We learn more about George later). The second time I read the book I marked every village he wrote about in the book with a highlighter pen. I also used a map of Crete so that I could get some idea of the journeys he undertook and I marked the villages on the map too. Having finished the book for the second time, I laid it down and looked at the map. Some of his journeys were truly impressive and the speed in which he made them was unbelievable. Slowly, this crazy idea started to creep into my head. I began to join some of the villages together. I was into mountain biking but no, forget it. It would be too tough.

This was some of the most inhospitable mountain terrain in Europe. People had died there, in fact I had experienced a close call with hypothermia a couple of years earlier whilst biking up to the top of Mount Omolos. Anyway, I convinced myself that it couldn't do any harm just to see how far it would be, you know how it is! How far was it? Two hundred and sixty miles not allowing for going up and coming down. Eighty percent off road. Like I said, forget it.



George Psythoundakis author of the Cretan Runner and author Patrick Donnelly together at Blue Beach, Stavros, Crete

Somehow Christmas that year saw me browsing through brochures of the latest thing in mountain bikes and planning my keep fit regime for the coming ride in the Cretan mountains. How did I talk myself into this?! I was pushing fifty so getting fit was a fairly important part of the plan. I was still competing in triathlon so I was already at a high peak of fitness for my age but I knew that this was going to be more than a few hours of organized sport; I was going to be in a very hostile environment for several days, on my own. I approached Kathy, one of the really good personal trainers at my gym, could she do anything for me? Kathy reminded me of the singer Bonnie Tyler, all hair and fit figure but don't let that fool you. She put together a fitness regime that was to raise my own fitness to new levels, eventually putting me at the fourth fittest person that had trained at the gym and that included the number one World Squash Champion and the World Windsurfer Speed Champion. I was as ready as I was ever going to be.

I hoped that some of the characters in the book would still be around and that maybe, just maybe, I could find them and talk to them. It would be as if I had been transported back in time and could talk with the Centurions. With this in mind I had written to a friend of mine, Chrissa Nanolakis. She lived in Crete and I had seen pictures of her as a young girl with a machine gun and bandoliers of bullets around her

chest. Now a sophisticated lady working in the tourist industry she was the one to ask if you wanted to know anything about the war years in Crete. I wrote to her and outlined my planned ride and asked if she knew anything of George Psychooundakis. Was he still alive? Did he still live in Asi Gonia? I told her that I planned to visit Asi Gonia and if possible would like to meet him. She wrote back to say she would see what she could do. Before I knew it I was back in Crete once more. I was busy re-assembling my bike outside the airport when Chrissa appeared.

“Patrick” she called.

I was pleased to see her and we had the usual hug.

“And this is Yorgo” she said as she introduced her companion using the Greek name.

I grabbed Yorgo’s hand and as I looked at the mans face the photo’ from The Cretan Runner of a young George Psychooundakis came back to me.

“Yorgo? You mean George? George Psychooundakis”? I stammered!

“Of course” said Chrissa. “You said that you wanted to meet him and we were together during the war. We are old friends so here he is”.

I couldn’t believe it. I was speechless. Here standing before me was my first Centurion. I resembled some star struck teenager. I couldn’t take my eyes off him!

Chrissa broke the spell. “Let’s go and get some food.” She said.

After the initial shock, I couldn’t stop talking. I had so much to ask him, so many questions. We had a wonderful lunch and George was happy to answer all my questions as we poured over my maps. At the end of a long Greek lunch we were all saying goodbye and I noticed Chrissa was to one side with her arm around Georges shoulder. I went over and George was wiping his eyes with a handkerchief. I asked Chrissa if everything was o.k. and she said that George had become a little emotional and had said that he has children of his own and it takes an Englishman to come and do this. (He should have been pleased that he had sensible children. Needless to say, George and I became great friends over the years). The next day I was off. Heading out to what was to become the bike ride of a lifetime.

This story isn't about my bike ride but without the bike ride I would never have discovered the three main characters of this story so perhaps it might be a good idea to give you some essence of how things happened, day to day on my trip. As I came to each village highlighted on the map, I would read my notes taken from the book and would therefore know exactly what had happened there.



Bike ride 1991. Forever up hill



Bike ride 1991. Looking back over a days work

For example: Late one evening a British plane crash landed on the flat land near Asprouliano. I believe the crew was somehow rescued. The plane however, was in very good shape apart from the problem that had caused the crash landing. The Germans knew that they could fix the problem and it was their intention to use the plane against the British. They placed a guard on the plane, awaiting it's collection. However, three young boys from the village of Kastelos had other ideas. They crept down to the plane at midday and set fire to it, completely destroying it.

The Germans were furious and threatened to execute ten people from the village every day until the boys gave themselves up. They gave the culprits twenty-four hours to consider their position. The boys did just that and to prevent the death of the villagers they bravely gave themselves up. They knew that the Germans would carry out their threat. One of the boys was only fourteen and the Germans (astonishingly) only gave him six months hard labour. The other two boys being nearly twenty, were sentenced to death.

The entire village of Archontiki was forced to witness the execution. The two boys were stood against a tree and a machine gunner and firing squad set up in front of them. A German officer asked if they had any last requests and one of the boys asked for a glass of wine. As the German officer was handing it to him, the boy pushed him and tripped him over and ran away. The machine gunner couldn't shoot for fear of hitting the officer and the other Germans were too slow. The boy escaped capture and was later able to join the R.A F. and become a pilot. When the fuss died down the other boy was once more placed before the tree and this time, wasting no further effort the order to fire was given. George, who was among the crowd watching, wrote that the boy was quite transformed and unrecognizable from the bursts of machine-gun fire. It was very emotional for me to stand in front of that tree and think that the bullets that had passed through the boy would still be embedded there.

Another village that became special for me was Vaphe. I arrived at the lower village in the heat of the day and as usual, checked my notes. It was one of several villages surrounded by the Germans following a tip off concerning a wireless hideout. The wireless was being operated by a man called Manolis in the house of Vangelis Vandoulakis. The tip off, by a "bad" Greek must have been accurate because the Germans made straight for Vangelis's house. Vangelis saw them coming, jumped over the garden wall and ran for his life. The Germans opened fire at once but he managed to get away. It was a close thing and a bullet tore the heel off his boot!

Manolis and about thirty other villagers were arrested. Vangelis' sister Elphida, managed to remove the wireless and other incriminating evidence from the house before the Germans returned. She then took every thing to a cave and watched over it for several days until the village men found her and took over. She was very brave. I managed to find her grave and picked some wild flowers to place at the foot of her Headstone.

I asked some village folk if they knew the house of Vangelis Vandoulakis and was surprised when they pointed to a small hamlet of houses further up the mountain. After a hard climb in the oppressive heat I

arrived at the houses. All was quiet and I guessed that it must be siesta time. I decided not to disturb anyone and started to creep away when a dog erupted out of a forty gallon drum doing his best to wake the entire village. There is absolutely no point in trying to get a Greek dog to stop barking so I just kept walking.

A voice behind me said “Ti thelete”. What do you want?

I turned to see an old man with white hair. “I’m looking for the house of Vangelis Vandoulakis” I told him.

He straightened his back, slapped his chest and declared “I am Vangelis Vandoulakis”.

I couldn’t believe it. Standing before me was my second centurion. Just to see the house would have made my day but to actually meet the man himself was beyond my wildest dreams. He invited me in and introduced me to his family. They were all very curious as to why I should be hunting their grandfather down! food and drink appeared as if by magic as it always does in any Greek house and the next couple of hours flew by as stories and photos and relics of the war were pulled out of cupboards. Just one more example of why this journey was so memorable for me.

## Chapter 2

Fate. That mysterious thing that pulls the world along. We don’t understand it. We can’t quite put our finger on it, but it’s there and it was fate that was to draw the three men in this story together. Their lives couldn’t have been further apart but gradually the magnet of fate drew them toward each other. They were from a time when “class” was part of life in England. Under normal circumstances their paths would never have crossed. One of them was from Crete, a country where “class” would mean nothing to him even if you could translate it. Another was “working class” and the third was, without doubt, “upper class”. The whole thing was termed The Class System. Did it work? God knows, but that’s the way it was!

So who were these men? Well, in spite of their different backgrounds, they were all ordinary men but one common thread ran through them all. They were all good men. Their destination in life would eventually make them great men too.

So who were these Three Good Great men?

Lets begin the story with Captain Thomas Victor Somerville, O.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. with Bar.



Captain Thomas Victor Somerville O.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. with Bar,

Also M.R.C.V.S. London

M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.

Chief Civil Surgeon Bagdad

It would be an injustice to you the reader if I started at Tom's date of birth. Tom wasn't a single event, he was the result of and part of a lineage stretching back through the centuries. A potted history of the Somerville's should give some idea of how Tom eventually arrived within our midst.

The family house 'The Drum' at Gilmerton, about two miles from Edinburgh, was built by William Adam

for the 12<sup>th</sup>. Lord Somerville, circa 1730. Originally built 1584 on property of the Somerville's from 1400--1800.

The family came to England with William the Conqueror. In 1174 Sir John was knighted by William the Lion shortly after his arrival in Scotland. He was given the Baronic of Linbourne in Roxburghshire for "killing a serpent or a monstrous worm, as we have traditionne from the vulgar, Three Scotts yards, thick as a man's leg and coloured like an adder". This 'worm' is in the family crest.

*Authors note:* Could this "serpent or worm" have been the father of the Loch Ness monster? I wonder!

The family originally settled in Lanarkshire at the castle of Cowthally near Carwarth. In the 14<sup>th</sup>. Century, Sir Walter married the second daughter of Sir John Herring and acquired half his property and so Gilmerton came into the Somerville's possessions.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Lord was known as the 'Restorer' having married two heiresses and thus revived the title. Somerville's were firm Hanoverians. The 14<sup>th</sup> Lord sold the 'Drum' in lots between 1800--1809 without ever seeing the property.

The 18<sup>th</sup> Lord died in 1870 unmarried and the title has since been in abeyance.



The Somerville boys    Front Tom then clockwise Andrew, David, Willie

In 1887 Thomas Somerville was born in Calcutta to the beautiful Elisabeth Jane and William Somerville, a Coffee and Tea Merchant who founded Wm. S & Co Colombo, Ceylon. Tom was sent off to be educated in England at Framlingham College in Suffolk. He did well at Framlingham which was just as well because he dreamed of becoming a vet. He eventually fulfilled his dream and then continued with his studies and qualified M.R.C.S. (The Royal College of Surgeons) from the London Hospital in 1914. Tom's intention was to work abroad and he completed a course at the London School of Tropical Medicine. With his double qualification as both vet and surgeon he was well prepared for his next move but things were not to go quite the way Tom expected. Something quite big happened. Very big actually. World War 1 reared it's ugly head and Tom didn't hesitate for one moment. He resigned his appointment at the Royal Sussex Hospital, Hastings joined the army and off he went to fight for King and Country. Not quite the job abroad that he had in mind and he was not alone in his shock at the horror of modern warfare. He found himself engaged in a war which would kill millions of men.

The wholesale slaughter of men and animals. The mud and madness that was to overtake the world for the next four years. Tom endured it all. Not only did he endure it, he found himself the reluctant hero. Never content to be in a field hospital far from the front, Tom constantly found himself on the front line, tending men where they fell, knowing that they stood the best chance of survival if they could get immediate attention. His selfless devotion to duty earned him the M.C. and bar (that is, two Military Crosses) and he was twice mentioned in dispatches. That he survived the carnage around him was a miracle but survive he did.



Medals of Captain Thomas Somerville

Eventually the war ended and Tom returned to civilian life and tried to forget. He settled down to life as a Doctor, married and raised a family. For a year he held the appointment of Civil Surgeon in Bagdad. Back in England he moved around the country setting up in general practice in Monkseaton and later in Bournemouth.

Life was good. The world was at peace.

But the serpent was not dead. When Tom was fifty two it raised its ugly head yet again. The “war to end all wars” was no such thing. Man, yet again, was to be asked to give the ultimate sacrifice. World War 11 was upon us.

Tom could have sat the war out. He’d had his war many years before. He was looking forward to retirement. But of course, this is Thomas Somerville that we are talking of and of course Tom joined up once again. The fact that Tom had seen the horror of war before was the very reason he joined up. He knew better than most that his skills would be in demand and that once again he might be given the chance to save lives.

Before long Tom found himself in Libya. Part of General Wavell’s war against the Italian and German forces. There was of course, plenty of work for a doctor and surgeon of Tom’s ability but Tom was always far from the front. He knew from previous experience that by the time he received the casualties it would be too late for many of them. Heat, flies and lack of skilled medical help would be the death of many soldiers before Tom even had the chance to help them. There had to be another way. Tom was attached to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hussars, a tank regiment. Fast, constantly on the move. He knew that to be on the front line with such a regiment he would need fast tough reliable transport, but that was where he had to be. Lives could be saved if treatment was available soon after the trauma of injury. Shock, a big killer, could be treated. Blood could be given quickly. Even life saving operations could be performed in the field if the right equipment was available.

The idea quickly formed in Tom’s mind. It seemed perfectly obvious to him. A transportable operating theatre, taking surgery to the front. Why not, after all, the equipment was all available just a few miles back, in tents or bombed out temporary hospitals. It was just a matter of fitting it all into the right vehicle and keeping up with the battles. However, Tom’s idea received little support from his senior officers.

Losing a highly skilled surgeon from the field hospitals was not on their agenda. However, Tom was not the sort of man to give up that easily and dogged persistence began to pay off. Gradually, the men at the top began to understand Tom's point of view. After weeks of persuasion, Tom was finally given a light hearted thumbs up to his idea. He needed no more than that, it was enough. To anyone that asked, Tom was on leave. His bosses were not quite ready to put their heads on the block on this one. He immediately set out to find a suitable vehicle and in typical Thomas Somerville style soon came up with a vehicle most people would have overlooked. The large captured Italian ambulance would do just fine. It was a big roomy truck and Tom was certain that it could be converted to his requirements. Armed with papers from very senior officers (Tom was not without friends in high places), he was soon busy in the field workshops, turning a once scruffy but tough vehicle into a highly equipped Medical Assistance Vehicle. (Later to be known to Tom as an M.A.V.) Much more than an ambulance, this vehicle would be a mobile Accident and Emergency Unit. Standard ambulances would take casualties back to the field hospitals after life saving treatment in the M.A.V.

Tom knew of course that he couldn't operate the vehicle alone. He would need the assistance of a driver and a nurse or better still a nurse who could drive. More than that, the man he was looking for would need qualities well above the ordinary. Driving skills, for sure. Navigation skills, essential. Signaling, yes. A high degree of nursing skills, definitely. Bravery, certainly and of course, maturity. Tom didn't care for the idea of travelling across thousands of miles of desert with some young whippersnapper! The more he thought about it, the more he realized how damned near impossible it was going to be to find this man. The choice had to be a careful one, much training would be required and a wrong choice would mean weeks of wasted time finding and retraining a new candidate. The first choice had to be the right choice.

The search proved every bit as difficult as Tom knew it would be. Remember, no computers. Not very good communication equipment and officers reluctant to let their best men go. Today of course, the

specialist regiments would be the first place to look but of course, most of those didn't yet exist. Tom began his search among the units closest to him. The Signals. The Infantry. The Artillery. He even tried among the few Commando units that came by but there was no chance that their senior officers would be letting any of their guys out of their sights! Tom, uncharacteristically, was beginning to become despondent. The more people he interviewed the more he wondered if he was setting his sights too high. He was lamenting his woes over dinner one night to one of his fellow officers, how time was running out, how this part of the plan was more difficult than finding the truck et cetera, et cetera; the officer patiently listened to Tom's tale of woe.

"Tell you what Tom". He said. "Why don't you talk to one of my ambulance drivers? I think he might be the Holy Grail you're looking for. He's army through and through and might have many of the skills you're looking for."

Tom doubted it. Not likely that the person he wanted would be found under his very nose, he thought.

Still, he was getting desperate, time was running out and the M.A.V. was nearing completion in the workshops. If things didn't start happening soon there was a risk that the whole idea would start to collapse. Tom had nothing to lose.

### **Chapter 3**

The soldier was called in from field duties and ordered to report to H.Q. So entered the second man in our story.

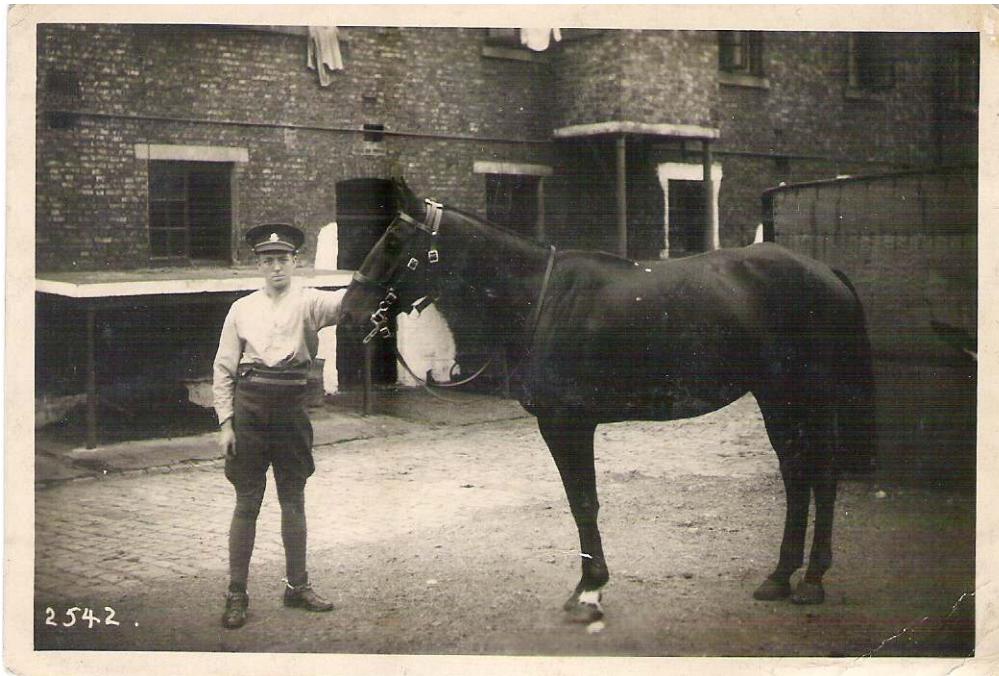
#### **Corporal Frederick Marlow.**

Medical Orderly (nurse), one tick. Experienced Driver in both tanks and ambulances, two ticks. Able to navigate across the desert, three ticks. Over thirty years old, four ticks. As Tom interviewed his latest candidate it seemed that the man standing before him might just be the answer to his prayers.

Fred had joined the army as a boy soldier in 1924, and was placed in a regiment known as The Junior Leaders. He was a Londoner and working class right down to his boots, proud of it too. Never asked anyone for anything, not that there was anyone to ask. Life was tough in those days. No National health. No Benefit system to speak of. If you couldn't provide for yourself you could starve to death or end up in the workhouse. Fred was intelligent enough to know that the Army could provide everything he could need and so began twenty-eight years two hundred and ninety-seven days of army service. Fred spent time in Egypt and in 1927 was posted to India which he enjoyed immensely.



Young Frederick Marlow



Fred was with the Cavalry from horses to tanks

By the time World War 11 came along Fred was Army through and through but had still found time to get married and start a family.

Being a fully trained soldier, Fred soon found himself in North Africa in the deserts of the Middle East. Right now he found himself standing in front of an officer at headquarters being asked all sorts of strange questions, wondering just what all this was about!

Fred was frantically trying to remember if he'd done anything wrong lately but nothing out of the usual sprang to mind! Anyway, why did this officer want to know if he'd done a signalling course? He had of course, and as far as he could remember, he'd passed it with flying colours; surely he hadn't done anything wrong on that. Perhaps someone had nicked a radio set, stuff was always going missing! Now he was being asked about his navigation skills. Surely he wasn't going to get transferred to another regiment or moved to tank driving again. He'd done that and had done all the tank maintenance courses. Replacing the tracks on tanks was heavy dirty work and he didn't much fancy going back to that.

As Tom interviewed Fred he could hardly believe his luck. Fred was innocently providing almost all the right answers and looking at Fred's records, he had no doubt that Fred possessed a natural intelligence that would allow him to quickly absorb the extra training that would be required. There was only one problem. This would be a dangerous job. Two men roaming around the desert in a virtually unarmed vehicle literally looking for trouble. Tom knew that he couldn't order a man to commit himself to this task. Fred would have to volunteer. The interview ended and Fred was told to remain at H.Q. until further notice.

"Blimey" thought Fred. "What the 'ell's all this about"?

Tom on the other hand, knew exactly "What all this" was about. He knew too that time was running short. He couldn't afford to lose Fred. He decided to sleep on it and see if the morning would bring a solution. It didn't. He knew that the only way was to put the whole thing to Fred and ask him if he would volunteer. Of course, Fred would be crazy to volunteer. Why would he? He would be off like a shot, back to his ambulance and the search for a suitable candidate would have to begin all over again. The depressing thought dawned on Tom that this scenario was likely to repeat itself every time the interview reached this stage. His plan was looking bleak!

Later that day Tom decided that he couldn't put the inevitable off any longer. Fred was collected from his temporary billet by two Redcaps (Military Police) which frightened the life out of him. He was convinced now that he was for the high jump but for the life of him he couldn't think why! He was delivered once again to Captain Somerville's office. Tom had decided not to beat about the bush and immediately outlined his plan to Fred. Fred listened carefully to what Captain Somerville was saying. He understood what Somerville was asking him to do. All sorts of questions were rushing through his mind. "Why me" seemed to take pride of place but Fred would never interrupt an officer. He studied the officer in front of him now. Somerville looked too old to be in this war and he had the look of someone who had seen too much for his own good, as Fred's mum used to say. Fred had also been in the

army long enough to recognize what the row of medal ribbons on Somerville's chest stood for. Not many men received the Military Medal and still fewer earned a Bar to go with it, in effect, two Military Medals! The man standing in front of him was obviously a hero. He also knew that someone who could earn two Military Medals would have little concern for his own safety. "Bloody lunatic", thought Fred. "In the same boat" was another thought that kept popping into his head!

Somerville finished by explaining to Fred that he was looking for a volunteer, he wasn't going to issue Fred with orders.

"So Corporal Marlow, what do you think"?

"I think the whole idea sounds crazy", thought Fred. What he actually said was. "I'd like to think about it sir".

Somerville looked at Fred's face, tried to get some idea of how it was going, what Fred was thinking but there was nothing there. Like every other soldier, Fred was a past master at fixing his gaze on a spot in the distance, giving no clue to what was going through his mind.

"Of course Corporal, Dismiss"

Alone in his field office Tom scarcely dared to think any further. He had been sure that Fred would turn him down straight away, but he hadn't. He'd said he would think about it. Well, there was nothing else that he could do. He turned in for the night but sleep wouldn't come. He was so near yet everything hinged on Marlow.

Marlow turned in too and he too was denied sleep. He had been one of the men delivering the wounded to the field hospitals behind the lines. He was all too aware of the problems associated with soldiers dying from wounds on the journey. Fred wasn't a doctor, he wasn't a surgeon. He knew that if he was he could have saved many lives in his ambulance. He had often been saddened by seeing young men die in his ambulance because he didn't have the skills to save them. Fred had a family. Would it be fair on

them to put himself in more danger than necessary? Yet he was here to do a job anyway. He was often in danger. He knew he could be killed at any time, just like any other soldier in this Godforsaken war.

Morning was long arriving for both men. Breakfast, although always pretty good at H.Q. was a picky affair both in the Officers Mess for Captain Somerville and in the Ordinary Ranks Mess for Fred. By the time Fred reported to Captain Somerville's office he knew that his life was about to change; forever; no going back.

He had made his decision. Right or wrong. The meeting itself was short.

“Good morning Corporal Marlow. Have you reached a decision”?

“Yes sir”.

“And that is”?

“I've decided to volunteer sir”.

Tom could hardly contain himself but there was rank. There was “class”. Ever present, especially in the services. Nevertheless, Somerville walked around his makeshift desk and shook Fred warmly by the hand.

“Good man corporal. Training starts at 0.700 hours tomorrow. Meet me here”.

Fred marched out of the office in a daze. “Well I'm in it now and no mistake”. he muttered to himself

## **Chapter 4**

For the next three weeks, Fred was immersed in a training schedule the like of which he'd never known! Starting with surgery nursing in the nearby field hospital. Tank driving, machine gun practice, desert driving including getting themselves bogged down in mud and sand and digging themselves out. Signal operating and training with the latest equipment and much more and most of the training given by the sort of soldiers Fred hadn't come across before. "Strange scruffy blokes, Fred called them. What he didn't realize then was that most of them were from a new unit being put together by an officer friend of Somerville. They would later be known as the Special Air Service or the S.A.S. as we know them today. Somerville was impressed with Fred. He felt he could not have made a better choice. Fred never complained, never stopped working and soaked up all that was thrown at him. It was this level of respect for each other that was to lead to a friendship far beyond officer and orderly.

At the end of three weeks Somerville felt that Fred was ready to be introduced to his vehicle. Fred's new orders were to meet Somerville at the R.E.M.E. workshops first thing in the morning. Fred wondered what was in store for him now! For the last three weeks he'd been run around from pillar to post being trained in very strange techniques by very strange people and had not been told much beyond what he knew from Somerville's original briefing. Still, he'd enjoyed it. He just couldn't get the nagging feeling out of his head that he'd jumped into something much bigger than he'd originally thought. Somerville was waiting for him and took him straight into the workshops area. They stopped in front of what Fred barely recognized as an Italian ambulance. The vehicle was covered in "extras" and had a white horse painted on the side.

Fred thought to himself, "I'd like to get me 'ands on that beast".

"There she is corporal, what do you think? Do you think you could drive her"? Somerville asked. Fred's eyes popped out of his head! "Me sir"?

"Yes of course you corporal. She's all yours".

Tom took Fred inside the vehicle. Fred couldn't believe it. It was just like a hospital. Every thing was

laid out and fixed into its proper place. There was a huge light in the roof and the white walls were covered in equipment. Running down the centre was a gleaming operating table.

All Fred could say was, “Well I’ll be blowed”.

For the next week Fred and Somerville trained together and lived together in and out of the M.A.V. They collected minor to not too serious casualties and tested the medical facilities of the M.A.V. to as near to field conditions as they could. They took her out into the desert and got her well and truly stuck and then got her out again. They tested the light armourments, Two Bren guns, two 303 rifles and a mounted 303 Machine gun. Somerville was eventually satisfied that everything was as good as it was going to get! He was ready. They took a day to load her up and they were off! Simple as that. For the next few months Somerville and Fred not only followed trouble, they went out looking for it; and of course they found it. Their adventures were many and they inevitably became close friends. They overcame the “class” thing but whilst Somerville called Fred “Fred”, Fred never called Somerville-Tom. It was always – Captain Somerville. Their adventures were never officially documented as far as I know but I am able to relate one of them to you as told to me by Fred.

*“We laid up one night and I slept in the M.A.V. We weren’t supposed to in case we got attacked by Gerry planes but it was freezing so I did. Captain Somerville was in a tent with some other officers I think. Anyway, in the morning I cooked up some breakfast (Always Fred’s favourite part of the day) and before I finished, Captain Somerville came rushing down. “Get her going Fred, we’re on the move”. We dragged the camouflage nets off and the Captain gave me a map and a compass bearing and we were off. The Captain had got hold of a Dingo a couple of week’s earlier (small armoured four wheel drive Vehicle) and he took off in that and I followed in the M.A.V. It looked like the whole of the 3<sup>rd</sup> was on the move.*

*Anyway, we got down to a place called Buq Buq and all hell broke loose. The Captain told me where to lay up and get the truck ready and off he went in his Dingo, heading straight for the noise and all that.*

*Well, it wasn't long before he started to bring blokes back but he didn't stay. He just dumped them off. "Fix them up Fred", he' say, and then he was off again. He brought one bloke back and said he'd had to have his leg off. Then later he brought another bloke back, he was in a bad way. We cleared the table and the Captain got to work on him. He had to have his leg off too. When he finished he told me to radio up for an ambulance. Two turned up and they took most of the blokes away"*



*A Dingo similar to the one used by Captain Somerville*

The following was related to me by one of the casualties that Somerville operated on that day.

*"We were in the leading group of tanks and cut around the side to get to their flank but the ground wouldn't take the weight of the tanks and we got stuck. We were in a mess, no mistake. As soon as the Ities[sic.] tanks realized we couldn't get out they let us have it. Our tank took a hit to the tracks and I saw a couple of the lads get out the side. I was trying to get out of the turret when we got hit again. The tank was on fire. I couldn't get out 'cause my foot or leg was caught up. I thought I was going to die there. Suddenly this officer appeared from nowhere. I didn't know who he was. He tried to pull me out but he couldn't. High explosive shells were coming in at a terrific rate. I told him to get away before we*

*got hit again but he just dived into the turret head first, just his backside and legs sticking out. He came out and pulled at me again. This time I popped out and he dragged me down the side of the tank onto the ground. I was nearly passing out but he sat me up and told me I was going to lose my leg but I could make it if I could hang on. Next thing I know I was in some sort of vehicle with a lot of other wounded blokes. I didn't know much about it but I learned after that he was Captain Somerville and he took my leg off in that vehicle and saved my life".*

## Chapter 5

We now move forward some time. Fred and Somerville are ordered to Crete.

Crete had been considered strategically fairly important to the British but intelligence reports led Churchill to believe that the Germans had much more important targets and that they might bypass Crete altogether. The word was that Hitler was quite happy to leave Greece and Crete to the Italians. Crete had therefore become a bit of a “Rest and Recreation” posting for the British and Commonwealth troops there. However, intelligence was wrong. Hitler in fact suddenly turned his attention to Crete. He saw that he could control the entire Mediterranean from there. Also, Libya and the whole of North Africa would be within easy reach if Crete was his. So, without much warning, he attacked Crete. He was confident of an early and easy victory because German Intelligence had led him to believe that there were far fewer British and Commonwealth forces on the island than there actually were.

In the nick of time, British Intelligence came good and provided the correct information concerning a German attack. Unfortunately the intelligence was too little too late and although preparations took place, some of the British Generals on Crete remained unconvinced that an attack was imminent. Many mistakes were made and when the attack took place the British and Commonwealth troops were ill prepared. To confound the problems, the main Greek Army was busy fighting the Italians in Albania.

So, the attack was unleashed. It is hard to believe, but one of the most basic defense methods was not put in place. It was known by the British that a large part of the attack would come from the air yet one of the few airfields, Malene, on the island was left in an operational condition. All that needed to be done was the placement of concrete tank traps on the runway. This would have prevented the German supply planes and the gliders carrying troops from landing. Instead the Generals ordered that some light artillery pieces are placed around the hills overlooking the airfield manned by a detachment of Kiwis. (New Zealand troops). Wave after wave of German planes came in, spewing paratroops and towing

gliders full of infantry. The Kiwis fought gallantly and the local Greeks, using any sort of weapon they could lay their hands on, killed many Germans but soon, the huge numbers of aircraft and gliders landing on the unobstructed airfield overwhelmed the defenders. The Kiwis were ordered to retreat and the fate of the airfield, and to a large extent, of Crete itself was sealed.

## Chapter 6

In 1995, I interviewed Fred at his home in Croydon. I asked him how he arrived in Crete and the following is a transcription of that recording. Anyone interested in the history of events at that time will find a gold mine here!

*How did you arrive in Crete Fred?*

*"Well you see, after the desert in Libya, we were cut off. We were cut off at a place called Dernar. We had a big Italian ambulance there which was converted and all this that and the other and we had to be towed up to the pass at Dernar, right up to the top. Whilst we were up there the Germans were waiting for us and we fled across the airfield and they put two shells through the ambulance.* (This is typical Fred. Master of the understatement. You would think that he was describing something that happened on the way to the NAFFI to get a cup of tea. The gunner that hit them must have been pretty good considering they were travelling pretty fast to get away and it was nighttime. My theory is that these shells were meant to punch a hole through tanks. The rear of the ambulance would have been lightweight steel or even aluminium. The shells would have gone straight through and carried most of the high explosive with them. Most of the explosion would have occurred the other side of the ambulance. However, the blast was enough to knock the ambulance over and fortunately Fred and Tom managed to escape relatively unscathed). *After we laid there, nobody was hurt, for three days see. We were told we had to disperse.*

*We had got the Captain Somerville, the Brigade Major, a Corporal and myself and somebody else on a Fordson car, a pickup, and we cut right across the road during the night and we was with three more pickups belonging to the Tower Hamlets Regiment, the Tower Hamlets. We continued on and then finally we got through the wire on the Egyptian boundary you see. There we got pulled up, there was a big car in front of us full of Nubians and they got a big gun trained on us. The Brigade Major got out and he walked across to them. There was a very great big Sgt Major came out of this Nubians truck and when*

he met the Brigade Major, he went down on his knees and kissed him and the Brigade Major brought him over to us and he said, this was my Sgt when I was in the Camel Corps. Many a time I have had to reprimand him because he had his water bags full of whisky!

Anyway, we got through there and we came down the Hellfire Pass, down to the coast and there we had a good brew up. From then on we went through to Alexandra. Alexandra we spent three days there where we had a clean up. Then back to Cairo. After we were in Cairo we went to a place called Abaseea.

I suppose we were there for about a fortnight to three weeks. We were told that there was several of us going over to Crete and the doctor was going over with us. So, we then picked up some South African trucks and we drove right through to Alexandra where we were put on a boat. I went on a boat called the Dalesman and that was commanded by the Captain by the name of Horn, we always called him trader Horn. He was always dishing out Seager Sea Cigarettes. Any rate, we got into Suda Bay where we got attacked by the Germans and they brought it down. Then, in the morning, we got this air raid and our boat was hit and it sank. It only just rested on the bottom and the top part was more or less above the water.

They came out with a motor torpedo and asked us if we got any guns on us. (This was in fact a Lieutenant Farran and you can read a good deal about this brave soldier in the book *With Pennants Flying* by David Masters if you can find one, they are becoming rather rare!) We were armed with Hoskins that is what we had there. We gave these sailors our guns and then the Australians came out and started to unload us because we had all lorries on the boat and the top deck was...inaudible.....That was just before the invasion. Just before you see. But they had been bombing you see.

Any rate, after we lay at Suda, my squadron at Suda, we split up and some were sent further to the other end of the island, a place called Iraklion. Around that way and I remained up at Suda. After about four days we pushed up and away from Suda where the airport was; Melame. There we had about five tanks and those tanks were almost useless because they had been brought from the desert, they had no proper

*wireless communication or anything like that there. All they were armed with was a .303 and a .5. That is where we were attacked. They landed by gliders and bombers on Maleme. Yes that is where they dropped the parachutists there and amongst their parachutists was an ex heavyweight boxer Max Schmeling.*



*Joe Louis and Max Schmeling at a photo session prior to their heavyweight World Championship bout in 1938*

Fred said there was a rumour that Max Shmelling was among the German Paratroopers. I have read many books on the battle of Crete and I have never read this. However, a little research on the internet soon revealed that the rumour had been true. Max Shmelling was dropped onto Crete. He was wounded and taken prisoner. What I find fascinating about this is the fact, that in the middle of one of the most ferocious battles of the war, a corporal, retreating from the enemy, across mountainous terrain, without the benefit of decent communications, could hear of such an odd fact. The RUMOUR system in H.M.Forces remains one of the most efficient in the World!

*He was there, I never saw him but we were told he was there. Anyway, we started withdrawing because we had nothing to fight with against them and we were withdrawing all the time and then they got down and they said there was going to be boats going in to a place called Spakia and we were to make our way there. Well, we made our way so far and then the doctor said, "Look, there has been a lot of wounded*

walking past us “He said “I’m going to stop and set up a first aid station”. He gave the car away to one of our officers and they went off and there was myself, the Captain, one or two wounded fellas I didn’t know and we stopped in this part there on the road.

After everything got quietened down we just pushed off and we stopped in a little village, I couldn’t tell you the name of it. (It was Galatos and again these events are well supported in the excellent book, *With Pennants Flying* by David Masters). The Germans got complete control of us. We never got down to Spakia the Captain and me. Then we decided and there was a fella who came up to us, he was an RMAC. He had a tin with him full of meat and we had not had any proper food for about two or three days. We sat in this field and he went across to a house and he borrowed a what you call a saculee, a dish, and he boiled all this meat up and he got some stuff like split peas, they call it farkey I think they call it and we had a brew up on there and the doctor said it was the finest meal he had tasted and then this fella turned round and told us that the meat was donkey.

Anyway, after that we walked up the road and the Germans came up. A German Officer came up and said. “What are you doing here”? The Captain says. “Look, I am an old man and I am on my way to Suda”, he said, “but I have to go very slowly”. So the German said “It is important that you get there as soon as possible”. The doctor said, “Alright but we will take our time”. Away he went and the doctor said, “Right, we go up there”. It was just the doctor, myself and this fella from the RMAC. We pushed up a little side track and walked so far and sitting there, along came a Greek on a donkey. “Good morning boys” he said. We got quite excited, here is somebody speaking English. So we said “You sit here”. He came back and he told us his name was Johnny and he had been to America and that is where he learnt to speak a little bit of English.

Anyway, he took us down to this little village called Imbrosnero and from there they took us to a little café, a couple of wines or something like that and there we met this lady who said she was English and was a school teacher. She said it was unwise for you to stay here. You will have to go further afield.

*Johnny took us further up into the hills where his actual house was and we slept in a place round where a well was. We were there quite a while and the doctor used to walk out as he had a few pills and bandages. He used to walk out and see the people and speak to them all and this and the other and they used to come round with a cigarette and sugar and then they said, no we can't stop here.*

(Fred once told me a funny story of his time in this village. It goes something like this. Every evening the local girls would come to the well for their water. One particularly pretty girl would point to the moon and say to Fred, "What is that Fred?" Fred would answer "That's the moon" at which point all the girls would fall about laughing. Fred didn't get it so he asked one of the local men why the girls found it so funny when he said it was the moon. The local man said "Fred my friend, moon is slang for a woman's private parts. They just like to hear you say it! Fred said he tried his best to learn Greek after that.) *They were giving us food and all this that and the other and they brought out hard bread that you used to dip in water and we went up further, up into a vineyard and we were up there.*

*One day a man came down and he told us that he was a Greek Lawyer. He said "Is there anything I can do?" The doctor said, "Look, I want to get a boat away from here." So he said, "Look I will do what I can but I can only give you two places on it." That was a Jewish Officer and the Captain, he said "I want three because I am not going without my batman." I said "Don't worry about me, I am younger than you." He said, "No, I am not going." He said to this Greek, "Well you can post a letter for me." He took a letter and it got through to a Brigadier Davey who was in Cairo, the War Office there. The result of that letter, it got through to Captain Somerville's wife and also to my wife to say up until that date which was August 1941, that we were alive and well but that we were in enemy territory and they were on no account to tell anybody and that was from the War Office. Captain Somerville's wife then came down to visit my wife and showed my wife the D.S.O.*

*Well after a while they said you can't stop here no longer and that is when they appeared with the donkey to put the doctor on. He was taken over the hills and he was wearing my army greatcoat. They*

*said to him, you are supposed to be an old lady, dressed up as an old lady. We are taking you to see a Doctor and all that. They said to me, look you mustn't speak, don't speak at all, because I was more or less in Greek clothes see. Don't speak otherwise you will let the game away. So we pushed on to a place called Yerrakelly with the...inaudible.....There was this Kosta there. I knew Kosta came from a village not far from Alikampo. Any rate, after we were there for a while they decided to move us. I think there was a bit of a roadway at Yerrakelly and the Germans were coming on this road by auto. Anyway we pushed off again and we got down to Anamaris. (I was astounded to hear Fred describing this part of the journey with such accurate recall given that he was 90yrs old. It was just as I had read in George Psychooundakis's book The Cretan Runner.)*

*There we was in the local clergyman's house, I think his name was Papa Kutrodonas. Anyway there is one particular thing which always stands out in my mind there. They were giving us a bit of breakfast and that and there was this little girl there and the wife and as we were having our breakfast they crossed themselves, so I thought to myself, if they are crossing themselves I must do the same. They went from right to left, when I crossed myself I went from left to right. The little girl straight away said to her father, why did he cross himself that way? Well I had no excuse really, I had done it and I had never done anything like that before, so I just said, I went straight for the heart and that cured that.*

*Then after leaving Anamaris, we went down to Agia Peraskivi and we were put into a little house there with just one room and we laid there and when I was in another place they used to come. (This was the house that Captain Somerville was to eventually die in.)*



*The house in Agia Peraskivi Crete in which Captain Somerville died (See *The Cretan Runner*)*



*Fred Marlow at the (now deserted) house of Manoli just outside Agia Peraskivi from where he would go to pick the olives*

*The house where I was in a place of a man called Manoli, That is all I knew it as, Manoli and the mother in there. I used to go out during the day and help pick the olives and that. We used to carry them down to what they called the fabricator or something, where they made the olive oil. We used to make this olive oil and crush the olives. The Captain got so very bad there and he said to me that he wouldn't live much longer. He did die there. He survived about three weeks at the most and he told me he was going to die. He gave me a letter. He gave me a letter which was sent to his wife. I got his watch, his pipe and his*

tobacco pouch. I brought his watch home to his wife and she had it repaired and that and gave it to me. It was stolen when my house was broken into.

But she got the letter and when the Doctor was buried, there were a lot of men, soldiers living about in the hills and they all come to his funeral. There were three priests, there was the pastor of Preveli, which in their country was equivalent more or less to our Arch Bishop of Canterbury. There was a Captain Donas and there was another man. Now this Pastor of Preveli which was a big monastery there, the Germans had put so many thousand drachmas there because they had sent previous to this into Preveli, they had taken a load of gold away. The Captain was buried in a little Greek cemetery and he lay between a Greek soldier and a Greek woman. That is all I know of the cemetery you see.

It was then decided that we should push off. Everybody knew, all the Greeks knew what was going to happen. They said you go and come with us. Finally they gathered together about thirty odd men and they always had a saying there, they used to say, avrio, metavrio, siga siga. Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, slowly, slowly. Esos Alexandra. That is what they used to say to us. They gathered us together and we pushed off, travelling night and day whenever we could and we finally got right down to the coast. We got to a place called Treis Ekklesies Three Churches I think. We got down there living in huts which I suppose was about eighty or ninety men by now. There was two doctors down there, one was an Australian and a Jewish doctor and I believe that that Jewish doctor finished up in Birmingham hospital which, I think is a very big accident hospital. Anyway, whilst we were there hanging about, the women used to come down and bring beans and things like that and one fella was taken very ill there and they decided that he had got a mastoid. So how they got it I don't know but they got some chloroform and one or two implements and they operated on that fella and they finished that by stuffing his head with bandages and cotton wool and bits of clean shirts and that sort of thing and also another fella came along and he was in a terrible state. For three days he had walked along the mountains, he got an abscess on his penis. Poor devil, he was in a terrible state. Anyway they operated on him and relieved him of all that.

Well, there was a man walking around there in full uniform by the name of Captain Monty. Now originally I understand that he was a school teacher out at Banstead in Surrey. He was making all the arrangements. There is a boat coming in here, he said, there is a boat coming in here and all I can tell you is that it is a small boat and it is going to be heavily armed, he said. And he said, I want you fellas to agree with what I say. The wounded or these two invalids and that will go off first. He said to me, You will go as well as you are going to look after them as Medical Orderly and all that kind of business. He said to the other fellas what is left behind will be heavily armed. He said, you will be armed, food, ammunition and everything. Any rate, it was getting near Christmas time and he said the boat would be putting in there any day. Of course we were very excited about this. But the water was so rough that it couldn't come in. By New Years day he said, I am sorry but the boat was put out three times, so he said, you will have to disperse.

Anyway the fella who had the abscess in went in the Greek hospital and finally finished up in the prison camp. You see, well we dispersed and that and finished up and I was walking along with two other fellas and we met a couple of Greeks coming towards us and this Greek said were are you going? We said we are going down to a man who was supposed to be in charge of all the intelligence there and I can tell you this much, he was a very big man and he had a very big, he always carried a very big knife down by the side of him. When they used to drop parachutes, there were blankets and all this that and the other dropped down and clothes and they all went to that mans house. Colonel Paradatis was his name or something like that. He had this beautiful knife hanging down there. More like a Gurkas knife, a silver knife. I will always remember that. These two Greeks said, where are you going, we said, we are going to see whether we could get some clothes off him. So one fella turned round and he said, you look as though you could do with a pair of boots. He spoke perfect English. One of the fellas who was with me said, what do you mean by that? He looked and he was one of his own, he was an Australian and he got away and then came back again. There were these Secret Service fellas walking about all the time, you never knew who they were.

*Then there was a submarine put in there several times because you could see these fellas smoking cigarettes. There were tins of ham floating round, you know, pressed ham and that. Then we got down to a place I met up with an English fella whose plane had crashed and he was in the Air Force. Eddie Sealey his name was. We managed to find a boat, a little rowing boat, about twelve foot it was. We managed to get some dried bread, because it was all they had, we finally set off. We were going to try to get somewhere in the Dodakenes Islands I think. (Fred, master of the understatement again!) But there was Eddie Sealey, Stan Harland a New Zealander, a Greek boy by the name of Thodee and myself in this boat. The Greek boy had been with us for quite a while. He was getting us food and all that kind of business and we pushed off and we had a sail, a blanket and one pair of oars. We had three days out but the water came up so bad that it pushed us right back to the other end of the island. We get to the other end of the island. We manage to get to shore there. We could hardly stand. We got into a little hut there and it was an orange grove. We just had a bit of dry bread and we had some of these oranges, tangerines and citrus fruits. We were there a couple of days and a Greek fella came along and he belonged to what they called the Agrophilopus; he was a land warden or something. He came along and got talking and he said, look, you want to move from here he said, the Germans have lookout posts. He said, stop here and I will bring some food and that down. Away he went and we stopped there. The next day he came back with three Greek police. They was very good to us. They explained that if we had any Greek photos with us, if so get rid of them. They took us into a little village. We went over the mountains and that and they took us in a Greek village and I said to this Eddie Sealy, are you going to try to get away? And he said yes. I said, well look, let Stan Harland get out in front and I asked him if he would. There were two Greek policemen with us, they were both armed. I said to Stan, you strike matches and it might put them off shooting perhaps it might and Eddie and I will go. The next thing, Eddie is gone and leaves me and didn't say a thing. He got away. The Greek policeman got hold of me and held me down with a revolver pointing at me. He said; call him back, so there is Stan Harland shouting at him, keep going Eddie, keep going Eddie.*

Finally they put us into a little Greek place which was a little Greek jail and there was another fella there. They kept us there all night. In the morning they handed us over to the German convoy which came through with ack ack guns and all this that and the other and they took us to Heraklion. There they interrogated me in some Greek office and all that. I was given cigarettes and all that. They were asking us all different things and all that. I said I didn't know nothing and didn't know nobody. Finally they took us into the prison in there and then they took us out of the prison and put us in another lockup which was in like a cellar. The German officer came down and by then there was three of us there. The officer came down and he said, "Will you wash my car down?" "Yes if you give us a packet of cigarettes". And we washed his car which was an English car. We did that two days running then he ran out of cigarettes so we wouldn't wash his car anymore. (Fred laughing)

They then took us from Heraklion right back to Suda where they put us in the local jail there for about three days and then we were taken down to the docks and taken on a boat to Greece. I can't remember the name of the place there. By Athens it is the local docks at Athens. Piraeus. Then they marched us into another cellar and there was quite a crowd there. They looked well fed and all this that and the other. There was a British Red Cross man come down. There was a Swiss man came down and he gave me tins of cod liver oil and that done me a real world of good that. We were there I suppose for a fortnight or so and then we had to march down to the docks again and they took us round near Salonika. At Salonika we were there for a fortnight or so and we were put on the train and taken right through to Poland. To a place called Landgarth. Well after being in Landgarth for quite a while they shifted us from there and they turned the fellas out to march from there but I had been employed in the hospital. So they marched the men from the hospital down to the station and we finished up in a place called Menneygam. We were in Menneygam for quite a while and then they bombed the place terrific there. There were several of us who were picking the dead off the street and shortly afterwards along came the Americans and released us you see. Then we lay in that camp I suppose for about a fortnight to three weeks after the Americans had released us and then we had to march down to the airport where I was put on a Dakota and flew over to France. In France I spent a couple of nights there and then came back to

England.

Pd. When did the Germans stop bothering to ask you about where you had been kept in Crete?

F. Oh they asked me several times and they knew everything about the doctor.

Pd. Why do you think they knew everything about him?

F. They first off; they said to me when I was interrogated, they said, did you take part in this submarine chase? You were down at the Three Churches. How many men were down there? I said, lets see, about thirty to forty. He said, if you say about one hundred and twenty it would more likely. He said, you helped with three operations didn't you? I said, no I didn't. He said, someone is telling lies. I said, it's not me. He said, you helped with three operations. I said, I didn't. I said I helped with only two. Alright then, he said. Where is this other officer who was with you? I said, I don't know. He said, there was another officer with you, a Lieutenant wasn't there. Where is he now? I said, I don't know. He said, are you sure? Alright, I'll tell you where he is, he is back in England. Oh, I said. He said, now tell me more about the doctor, where is he? He said, he was a very brave man wasn't he? I said, yes. He said, he got decorated didn't he? I said, yes. He said, he got the D.S.O. too didn't he? Yes. Where is he buried? I said, I am not telling you that. He said, why? I said, look, if I tell you where he is buried, I said, you will go down and start bumping off the people down there for showing sympathy and goodness for the soldiers. He said, we don't do that. I said, oh yes you do. He said, we don't. I said, I have seen it done. I said, I have seen them shoot people at a place called Debatee. I have seen it done.

Pd. What did you think of the way we tried to defend Crete?

F. Lousy. They didn't, they sent our tanks over there and they were light tanks. What I have seen of Crete there were very few roads there. If you got off the road you were right down in the dip or up in the hills. What they gave them were very old maps, I think they were 1907 and revised and there wasn't sufficient. No. Our tanks as I say were only 303's. Which is an ordinary rifle bullet as you know and a 0.5, but the drivers, they used to have communication with the Commander and all this

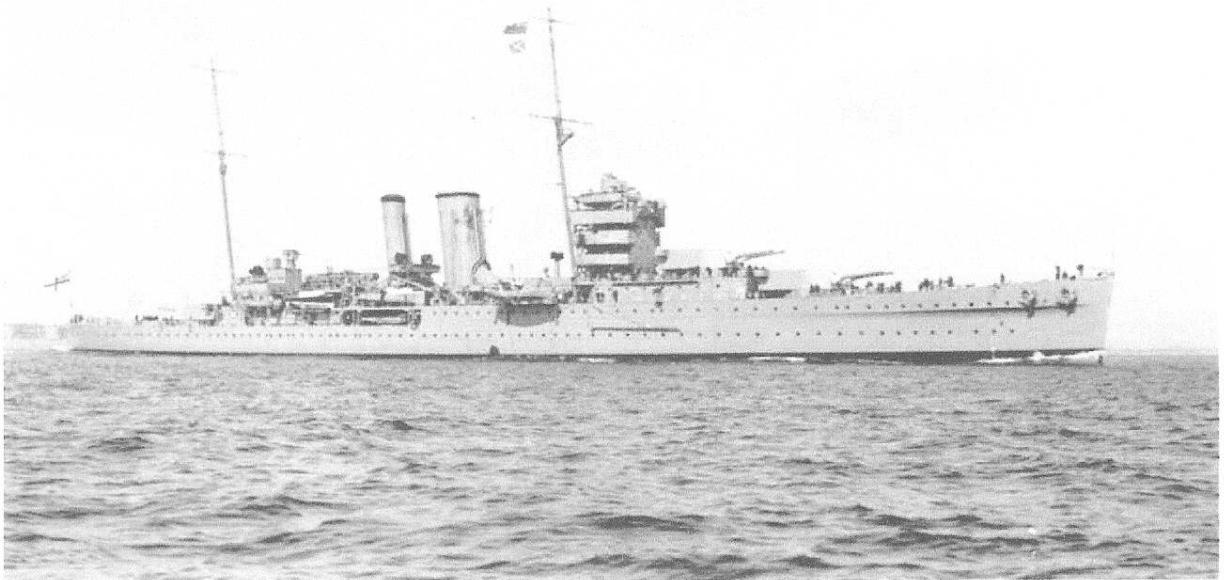
*that and the other. The Commander used to speak through to them and tell them to go left, right or wherever they wanted to go. But they had none of those working and those men was driving their tanks and they had string tied around their arms pulling them left or right. Now up at Malemi the airport was left just as it was. They could have put heaps of stones or old carts or anything up there to stop those gliders landing but they didn't, nothing like that.*

*Pd. Did you see any of the Greeks fighting?*

*F. Very few*

*Pd. You were too busy getting away?*

*F More or less. I saw very few Greek soldiers because the Greek soldiers were held up. The majority of them were in Greece (mainland) weren't they. They couldn't get back. The majority of the fighting was done by, well there was Australians, New Zealanders and us out there. A lot of them had got no proper equipment because a lot of them had been brought over from Greece. You see they had been brought over there and just dropped in Crete and then the boats got away. The boat I was on that day, in that Suda Bay there was a boat, The York, the cruiser The York. Now that was sank there.*



The Heavy Cruiser HMS York, destroyed 26<sup>th</sup> March 1941 and dismantled in Italy 1952

*That had been hit in Greece, in the evacuation of Greece and they came into Suda and Suda bay was guarded. The entrance of Suda was guarded by a picket boat but evidently what happened, this picket boat had opened up and two Italian boats had come in that had torpedoes in the front of them and directly they had got their target they released them. That is, The York actually sank. They managed to get the guns off the York and the Marines were using them at Suda. Every day they used to come over and bomb it, they used to come over the mountains and come straight down like that.*

*Pd. The plane that they shot down, you said earlier that they shot a plane down.*

*F. Oh the majority of them I did see them getaway with it but I did see one go straight into the drink, it went into the water.*

*Pd. It didn't land on the beach?*

*F. No, it went straight into the water, it crashed, yes. But otherwise you see, the majority of the planes, after that they did a lot of bombing. They came over with those gliders and the parachutists and we didn't see much more in the way of air activity.*

*Pd. There were huge battles weren't there?*

*F. Yes, they was driving us left right and centre. They were coming over the hills and all that.*

*There were some good troops there.*

*Pd. A lot of Germans were killed as well?*

*F. Oh yes. Some of them were killed because they was going to bring a lot of troops over from Greece on the Greek boats that they got. Caichs. They brought a lot of them over but got so far off Crete when the English navy came along and went straight into them smashing their boats up as they went as they were only more or less sailing boats. Little fishing boats. Yes, they killed a lot of them there like that you see and a place called Georgiopolis was put out of bounds for all the Greeks because evidently it comes in a bay there and the German dead from the boats were being washed up in terrific numbers there.*

*Pd. I didn't know that.*

*End of interview with Fred Marlow*

When I asked Fred how he had arrived in Crete, I expected him to reply with “on a troopship” or some other short answer. What I didn’t expect was the wonderfully told story that I got! His recall of events and the accuracy with which he presented them was staggering.

**Chapter 7**

Perhaps now would be a good time to explain just how I came to be sitting in front of this ninety year old Ex-soldier in his home in Croydon near London. As you already know, I undertook a bike ride in Crete, following the routes of George Psychoundakis the Cretan Runner. George wrote about taking a very ill English doctor across the mountains on a donkey. The doctor was disguised as an old Cretan woman and the doctors “servant” was Fred. The village they were heading for was Agia Peraskivi down in the South of the island. It was late in the day when I reached the hills above the village and after about fifty miles on the saddle on a particularly hot day I was ready to be persuaded that maybe this was one village on my Itinerary that I could miss. It looked a long way down and I knew that I would have to come all the way back to reach this road again. I pulled out my notes on Agia Peraskivi and as I read them I knew that to miss it would be impossible. So, down I went, freewheeling all the way. The first sign of life as I entered the village were two old men sitting outside a small taverna. I stopped and asked if I could sit with them. I understood the look they gave me. After a day in the saddle I was not a pretty sight. Covered in sun cream, dust and sweat I wasn’t exactly the sort of person you’d want sitting with you! Maybe it was the Union Jack flying from my handlebars that did it, they invited me to sit.

One of the old men was deaf as a post and the other had difficulty understanding my Greek (no surprise

there). However, help was on the way as another man headed toward our table. He asked if he could be of any help. It turned out that he was born in the village but was now living in Canada and had a business there as a travel agent. He was back in Crete on a six week holiday. He said his name was Dimitrious Tzekakis. What a piece of luck! I asked him if he knew the house that the British medical officer lived in during the war. "Yes of course I do". He said. "He lived in our house for forty days." Dimitrious told me that one of the old men at the table was his brother and he was the owner of the taverna, his name is Yanni and they have another brother named Manolis. (I wonder if that is the same Manolis that Fred spoke of) The deaf mans name is Alekos.K.Patakos and Dimitrious said that he was very brave during the war as he owned a farm and hid troops there and also provided much of the food required to feed the large numbers of escaping troops passing through the village.



Apologies for the out of focus in this picture but it was too important to miss out

Left to right Yanni Tzekakis, Alekos.K.Patakos and Dimitrious Tzekakis at Agia Periskivi

Dimitrious told me that the Medical Corps officer's name was Major Thomas Somerville and that when George Psycoundakis brought him into the village he was wounded and in a very bad way. Dimitrious'

family tended him as best they could and after a while the Major Thomas would take a little walk down to the taverna every evening. However he never recovered from his wounds and because there were no medical aids or drugs he eventually died. Before he died, Dimitrious said, another officer passed through on the escape route and would say to Major Thomas "You must hang on Tom, They'll get you away soon." Major Somerville must have feared the worst though because he wrote a letter and gave it to his Batman. (Fred). (I don't know why they knew Somerville as Major and I'm not sure that Somerville was wounded. Fred never mentioned it.)

Dimitrious asked me if I knew anything of Major Somerville's batman. I didn't of course so he proceeded to tell me all about Fred Marlow and what had happened to him after he was taken from the village. It was a fascinating story. I asked him how he knew so much about Fred Marlow and he said that Fred had written to him some years ago. Dimitrious took me to see the house in which Tom Somerville had lived. It was just as Fred described to me many years later. Just a single room, and the iron bed that Somerville had eventually died on was still there. It was a very moving experience. I decided that when I got back to England I would try to find this Fred Marlow although I knew that there would be little chance of finding him still alive, he was after all, thirty six years old when he was in Agia Periskivi.

## **Chapter 8**

It took me four years to find Fred. My search led me as far afield as Australia, Germany, France and finally, would you believe, Croydon London. He was ninety years old when I found him. Sharp as a pin and a memory like an elephant. I asked him if he had ever been back to Crete and he said that he never had. I told him to get his doctor to check him out and if he passed I would take him back to Crete for the Fifty Years Anniversary of The Battle of Crete. Well, he did pass, and thanks to Graham Simpson of Simply Crete Travel he spent a wonderful time visiting many of the places he remembered and attending parades and dinners given in honour of the veterans of that theatre of war. I don't know how he did it but he was up every morning at the crack of dawn, shoes polished, white shirt, regimental tie and black Tank Regiment beret and then he was off. You couldn't stop him! My memory of him at the British War Graves in Suda, standing before the grave of Captain Somerville, saluting a long lost friend with tears running down his face will remain with me forever. My only regret is that it was never my intention to write about any of this. Although Fred would sit in the evenings with a beer in his hand and tell me story after story, I know now that there was so much more that I would have wanted to know.



Suda British and Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery: Fred's first visit to Captain Somerville's grave

The visitor standing with him is unknown



Fred pays his respects in the company of two German Paratroopers, when he first met them at the cemetery he remarked “I don’t like Germans” but they soon became friends

## **Chapter 9**



The Third Man George Psychooundakis

When you read about George here you may wonder how he earns his place among such men as Tom and Fred. There is so little of him in this tale. To learn about George we have to go outside this tale back to his village. Asi Gonia, High in the Lefka Ori or White Mountains of Crete. George spent his early years tending the family sheep and living the simple but hard life of every other mountain dweller. Uneducated beyond the age of ten he would probably have spent the rest of his life doing just that except for one thing. The Germans invaded his beloved Crete. Crete of course has been invaded many times before. Moors, Venetians, Turks, all had left their indelible marks on Crete. This has left the Cretans with a fierce sense of independence and George was no different. He wanted to do anything he could to rid his Island of this latest scourge. He joined the Cretan resistance. He was assigned the job of “runner”. His job was to run messages across the mountains from one resistance group to another, an extremely



Scenery typical of the areas where George Psychoundakis would have worked

dangerous task and many of his fellow runners were caught and executed by the Germans. Later, British Intelligence set up bases in the mountains and proceeded to frustrate the Germans and help co-ordinate The Cretan Resistance. One of these officers was the travel writer and author Patrick Leigh Fermor. He was later to play a leading part in the kidnap and eventual removal from Crete of the German Commander General Kreipe, so well documented in the book and later the film “Ill Met by Moonlight”

Fermor soon recruited George who then spent the rest of the war working for British Intelligence. After the war, George was awarded the British Empire Medal for his outstanding bravery and dedication to the service. However, the Greek government didn’t see it that way and he was imprisoned for skipping out of his army service. (Crazy)! When he was released from prison after three years his sheep had all been stolen so he found work on the new road being built from Iraklion to Hania. In order to save money George lived in caves along the route. In some ways the caves were more comfortable than his prison

cell had been and the company, goats and sheep were in many ways better than the majority of his fellow prisoners! Whilst living in these sparse conditions George wrote down his experiences from the war. Without the benefit of education beyond the age of ten, I don't know where or when George learned to write but he once showed me the original school exercise books that he'd used. The writing was the neatest that I have ever seen and came near to typing quality! Staggering when one considers that it was all done by candlelight. In 1951, Patrick Leigh Fermor decided to revisit Crete and see if he could find some of his old friends. He did find many of them including his dear friend, George. George showed him his exercise books and Fermor immediately saw the potential for a book. Of course, being an author himself he was able to help George produce a book. That book, *The Cretan Runner* is still in print today and I can recommend it to you.



George Psychoundakis at his happiest



From left to right George Psychoundakis, his wife Sophia and Fred Marlow at Georges house

Fred Marlow was awarded a medal and a citation by the Greek government in May 2000 for his part in The battle of Crete. On his return to Agia Periskivi the Mayor and people of the village paid homage to him for saving the village and the people in it by refusing to tell the Germans who had looked after him.



Photo courtesy of The Croydon Advertiser Group

The author presenting Fred Marlow with the medal and citation awarded to him by the Greek Government

He was never promoted beyond the rank of corporal and never awarded any outstanding medals by the British Army. He died in February 2003 in Croydon aged 98. His funeral was attended by members of Captain Somerville's family.

George Psychoundakis died in 2006 aged 88 in Crete. He was buried in his home village of Asi Gonia. His headstone bears the inscription THE CRETAN RUNNER.

Captain Thomas Victor Somerville is buried in the British and Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery in Suda bay, Crete.

# Interesting Documents

I WAS A STRANGER AND YOU TOOK ME IN

With smiling faces and gracious manner they offer  
their simple gifts.

Warm welcome shines in their eyes while their whole expression gives an illuminating insight into the character of these people, and shows the innate goodness of their hearts. For they are deeply religious carrying the precepts of their religion into their daily lives. Maybe living simple, almost primitive lives, they touch depths of nature which others miss, and live nearer God.

Their innate courtesy and unstinted generosity in their cottage homes confer a privilege and experience which will remain a life long memory in the day dreams of pleasant recollections.

---

This was written on the back of a photo a few days before he died & was brought back to England by Marlow his Batman who was so devoted to him.



GRANDMOTHER'S HANDWRITING.

This was written on the back of a photo a few days before he died and was brought back to England by Marlow his Batman who was so devoted to him  
N.B. "Grandmother" would be Captain Somerville's wife

Dear Mrs. Somerville,

Your husband, Victor Thomas, who was looked after in the house of Zacharias Tzenakis by the Directors of the local branch of the Cretan Revolutionary Organisation, (consisting of Kyriakos Pattakos, Emmanuel Tzenakis, Michael Pattakos, Idomeneas Karakakia and Nikolaos M. Maliaros, who live at Aghia Paraskeve in Amario, Crete), and was treated by Dr. Katsandonis of Ano Meros and Dr. Georgio Papadakis of Melambes, died in our village at 2.30 p.m. on Sunday, November 23rd. We knew him only a short time, but we greatly respected him. He was a man of splendid character and a man of distinction. You should be proud of him.

We made every effort that lay in our power to avert his death but nothing could prevail against the will of the Almighty. From the moment he entered our small but hospitable community, we treated him with all the care with which we would treat a brother, in the home of Yerakari of Alexandros Kokonas, the schoolmaster of Ano Meros and Aghia Paraskeve. We tried by every means to lessen the bitterness of his exile and to give him some consolation for being far from you and his children. His thoughts were always turned towards you up to his last moments. All who knew him were deeply moved at the news of his death, and the priests, Greek officers, men of learning, workmen and farmers of the neighbourhood gathered at Aghia Paraskeve. He was given a public funeral, which was attended by all the inhabitants. The funeral service was conducted by His Grace the Bishop and Abbot of Preveli Monastery, Agathangelos Logovardos, by the priest of Ano Meros, Kyriakakis Katsandonis and by the priest of Nithavrea, Athanarios Ponlakakis, the son of Stephanos, he was laid out by the Cretan Revolutionary Organisation and carried to the grave by the local Revolutionary Committee of the neighbourhood of Aghia Paraskeve. The grave was covered with flowers carried by the girls and women of Crete.

who shed tears over the friend of Greece who died for us. Our gratitude to him, Madam, was expressed in appropriate words by the Bishop, Agathangelos Logovardos, by the lawyer Kyriakakis Leonidis, who lives at Neo Amario, on behalf of the Cretan Revolutionary Organisation, by Elias Kostakos, an officer of the Greek Army and by many others. Our gratitude to your late husband, and to all the sons of the British Empire who died for Greece, will never die. Their memory will live forever, and we shall preserve our gratitude and love for ever. The splendid conduct of your husband's servant, Frederick Marlow, deserves special praise. He followed him everywhere and treated more lovingly than a mother. Also Helen Tzenakis of Aghia Parakeve never left his bedside for one moment during his stay here until his last rest.

Yours respectfully,

The members of the Cretan and Local

Revolutionary Organisation

Logovardos (Bishop)

Katsandonis and Pontakis (Priests)

Copy of translation sent by the War Office re the late Capt. T.V.

*D50*  
Somerville, O.B.E., M.C., R.A.M.C.

War Office Reference: P/106130/2 (AMDI) dated 6th September, 1945.  
Telephone: KEN 8131/444.

Buried at Scudia Bay Plot 13 Row E Grave 1.

**CAPTAIN THOMAS VICTOR SOMERVILLE OBE DSO MC WITH BAR (1896-1904)**

He was born on 18 March 1887 in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and after leaving the College went to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and got his MRCVS. He then went to the London Hospital and achieved both his MRCS and LRCP.

During WW1 and immediately following, the details of his service are as follows :-



<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
10 August 1914	Commissioned into the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) as Temporary Lieutenant
19 August 1914	France No 6 Casualty Clearing Hospital
?? 1914	32 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade RFA 4 <sup>th</sup> Division
By 15 October 1915	Promoted Temporary Captain
1 January 1916	Mentioned in dispatches in London Gazette for action on 5 October 1915
14 January 1916	Awarded Military Cross "For distinguished service in the field" near Ypres
2 December 1916	Returned to UK, sick
1 February 1917	To France – 13 <sup>th</sup> General Hospital
20 March 1917	2 <sup>nd</sup> Bn Highland Light Infantry, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Division
9 July 1917	Returns to UK
1 November 1917	To France – 129 <sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance
24 November 1917	6 <sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance
26 July 1918	Awarded bar to Military Cross for action on 24 March 1918 "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. When his battalion was about to withdraw and the wounded could not be brought to his aid post in time, he went up to the firing line and stayed there attending to the wounded till all the troops had withdrawn. His gallant conduct saved many lives."
August 1918	Wounded in action at Bapaume (south of Arras, France)
1 March 1919	Served in North Russia
12 October 1919	Returned to the UK
28 October 1919	Demobilised
By 11 November 1919	Promoted Acting Major
3 February 1920	Mentioned in dispatches in London Gazette for action on 11 November 1919
3 February 1920	Awarded OBE for services rendered in North Russia

He then became a civilian surgeon in Baghdad, followed by a medial practice in Monkseaton, Northumberland, followed in 1927 with another practice in Bournemouth.

During WW2, the details of his service are as follows :-

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
18 October 1939	Granted emergency commission as Lt RAMC. Army Number 106130
18 October 1939	Joined 3 <sup>rd</sup> Bn The Kings Own Hussars
15 March 1940	Promoted Acting Captain
19 August 1940	Embarked for service in Middle East
Nov 1940 - 1941	Served with 3 <sup>rd</sup> Kings Own Hussars, 7 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade, 7 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Division
9 May 1941	Mentioned in Dispatches
9 May 1941	Awarded DSO for actions on 11 December 1940. The recommendation from his Brigadier was that he be awarded the Victoria Cross, but this was changed by General Wavell to a DSO. The London Gazette states the DSO was awarded "In recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the Middle East", but see below for details of the original recommendation and Wavell's decision.
?? 1941	Posted to Crete
June 1941	Reported missing
23 November 1941	Subsequently reported to have died on this date at Agia Paraskevi Amariou Rethimno, Crete.

He was also awarded the 1914 Star, 1914-18 War Medal, 1914-18 Victory Medal, 1939-45 Star, Africa Star (8<sup>th</sup> Army clasp) and the 1939-45 War Medal.

He is buried in Suda Bay War Cemetery in Crete and you can see a picture of the grave here  
<http://www.thewargravesproject.org.uk/information.php?id=996186>

For some account of his exploits see "With Pennants Flying. The Immortal Deeds of the Royal Armoured Corps" by David Masters.

Also the book "The Fortress Crete, 1941-44" by George Harokopos includes mention of Somerville, and includes a picture of his funeral (see below). This book tells the story of the secret war in Crete, between the Intelligence service and the secret organisations on the side of the Allies and the German counter-espionage on the other side.

I'm indebted to **Peter Gasgoyne-Lockwood (R57-64)** for most of the above detailed information and for providing copies of the following documents supporting the above.



This is a copy of the document officially confirming his death on 23 November 1941 :-

CAPT. THOMAS VICTOR SOMERVILLE

ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS.

D.S.O. Royal Army Medical Corps. M. 3rd Hussars.

This is to certify that Capt. Thomas Victor Somerville  
died at Agua Prieta, America,  
Paraguayan front.

BORN 1897

AGED 41.

DEAD AT AGUA PRIETA, AMERICA.

RETIRING  
CRETE.

DECEASED NOVEMBER 23RD, 1941.

Sunday, November 23rd, 1941.

Signed  
Sgt. M. J. Morley  
3rd Bn. R.C. Hussars.

Recorded at time of death.  
1942. W. J. Pack, Sgt.  
2nd Bn. R.C. Hussars.

John  
John Pack  
2nd Bn. R.C. Hussars.

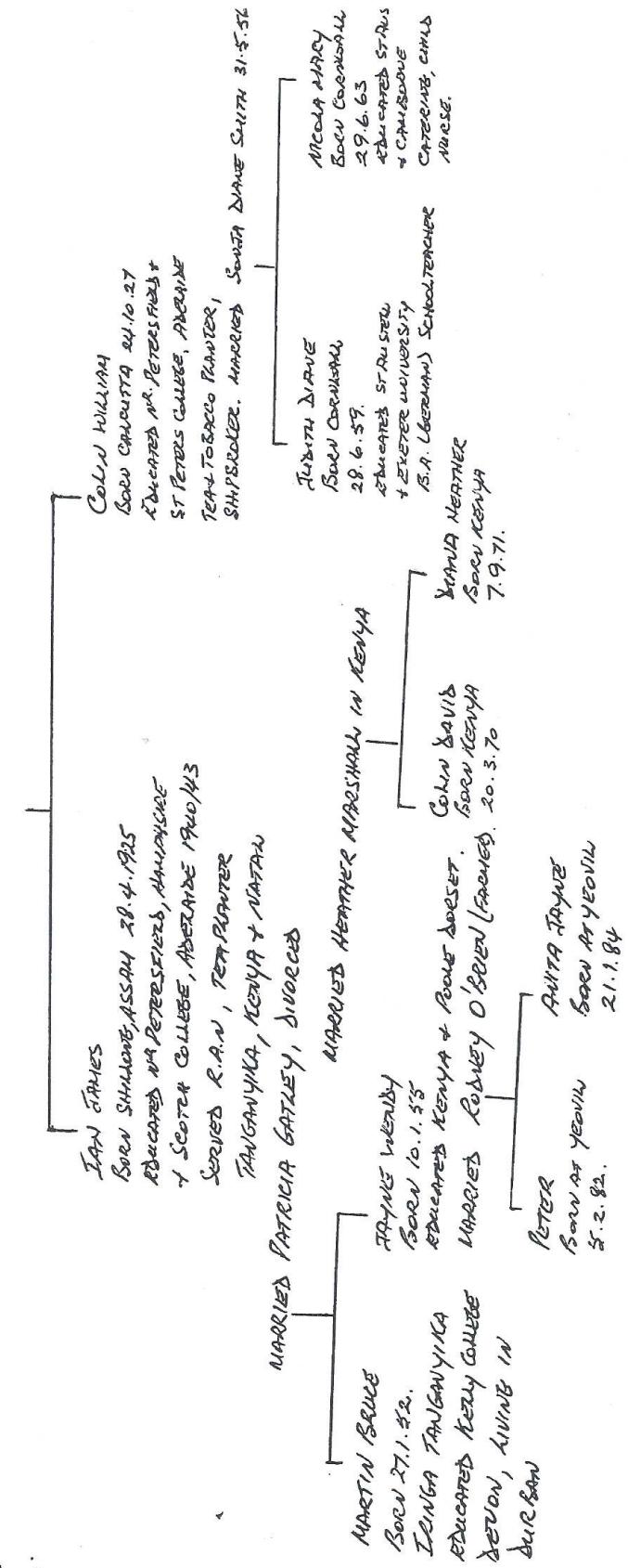
Old The Society of  
Framlinghamians

[www.oldframlinghamian.com](http://www.oldframlinghamian.com)

This is a copy of the original recommendation for the Victoria Cross, subsequently changed to a DSO :-

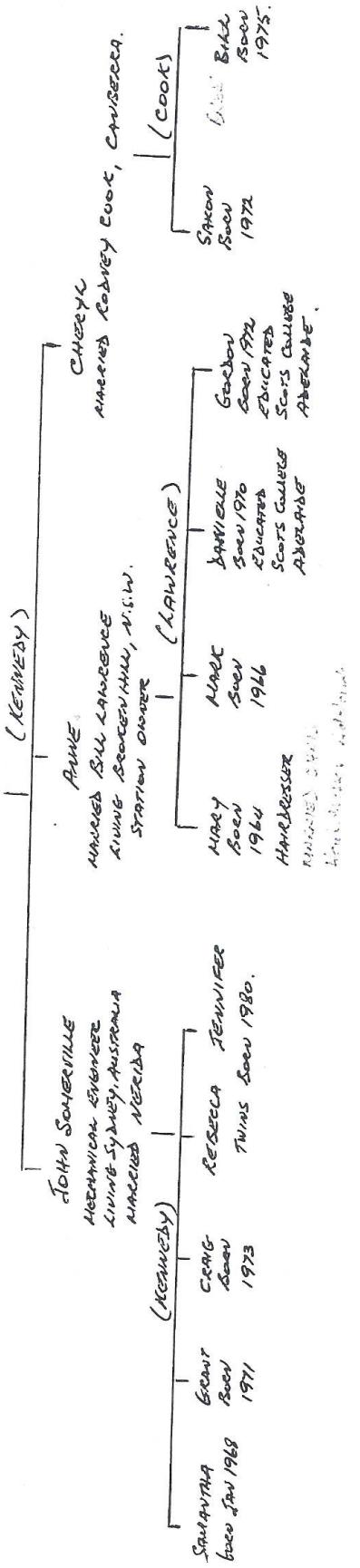
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DAVID SAWERWILLE - HARPER EDITION (1866-1871)



III.

ELIZABETH (BETTY) LAMARRE  
BORN 10 SEPT 1905 LIVED IN U.S.W. MONTANA.



### THE CAMPAIGN IN CRETE 1941.

The Allied force in Crete numbered about 32,000 British, Australian and New Zealand troops of whom about 21,000 had been evacuated from Greece in late April 1941, with little but the equipment they carried, and 11,000 lightly armed Greek troops. They were organised in five widely separated defence areas along the North Coast - around three airfields at Heraklion Rethymo and Maleme and at Suda Bay and the port and capital of Carnea. The bombing of the airfields from the Greek Mainland made it impossible for fighter aircraft to be retained on the island and the consequent German domination of the air prevented any troop movements by day. Although the Royal Navy prevented any seaborne landings the German attack by airbourne troops began on the 20th May and the airfield at Maleme was quickly captured and used for landing German reinforcements. On the 23rd. May the remainder of the Maleme position had to be given up and its defenders retired on Carnea. On the 26th. the Allied line west of Carnea was broken, and Suda Bay becoming indefensible, the troops from these two positions with the remainder of the Maleme garrison withdrew, under constant harassment but in good order, across the island to Sphakia on the South Coast, where on the nights of the 28th. to 31st. the Navy evacuated large numbers. The Heraklion and Rethymo positions were also attacked by airbourne troops on 20th. May but both attacks were repulsed. Heraklion was defended successfully until the night of 28/29th. when the garrison was evacuated by sea. It was planned that, at the same time, the Rethymo garrison should fight its way southward for evacuation by sea but, due to communications being cut, orders to that effect never reached it and it was overwhelmed on 31st. May.

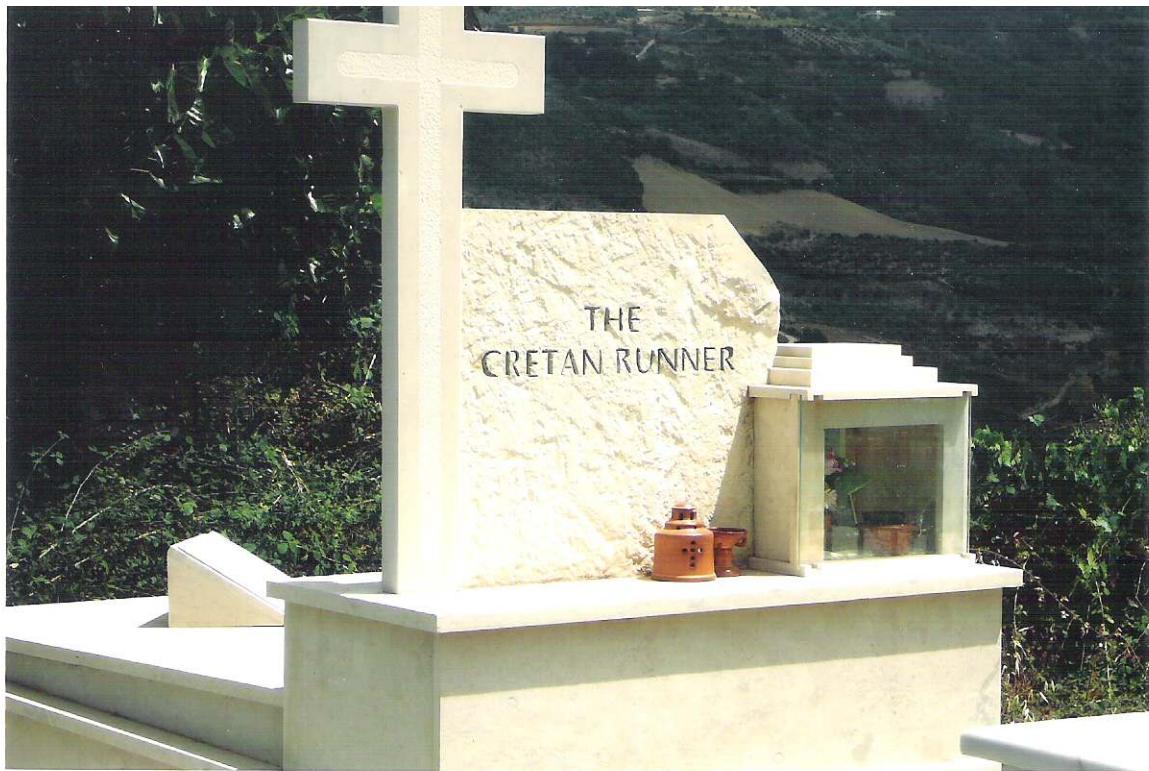
Of the total Commonwealth force in Crete of 32,000 men, 18,000 were evacuated, 12,000 taken prisoner and 2,000 killed.

### SUDA BAY WAR CEMETARY, CRETE.

The Cemetery, within the 1941 Suda Bay defensive position, was made after the war to contain the graves of all Commonwealth soldiers who died in Crete. Those whose graves are unidentified are commemorated on the memorial in Phaleron War Cemetery, Athens. The burials in the cemetery are

United Kingdom	862
Canada	5
Australia	197
New Zealand	446
South Africa	9
India	1
Others	7
Total	1527

The Cemetery  
was built and is maintained by the  
Commonwealth War Grave Commission.



George Psychoundakis rests in the Church yard of his village in Asi Gonia