

Grandad and the Great Coffin Escape Plan

During those quiet moments when contemplating many of life's blessings, one of mine was spending almost all school holidays with my larger than life Southern Irish Grandfather, usually sea fishing. My earliest and most vivid memory of him was as he dug out what seemed to me to be a huge splinter out of my foot with his Great War medical kit. I remember him saying to me, "stop blubbing boy, act like a soldier!" My Mother tells me I replied, "but Granddad I'm only six".



'Sandy' Thomas, also severely wounded, captured when the island fell, and shipped to Greece as a prisoner of war. He made several escape attempts, finally succeeding against all the odds by evading capture for over a year to reach freedom in Turkey and surviving to write about his many experiences. Thomas first met my Grandfather as an older member of a group of officers all bent on escape in a military hospital near Athens where he too was recovering from his injuries.

So Many Battles

Like many of his generation he did not talk about the many life-changing experiences he must have endured during his long life. I knew he had been at the Battle of Loos, he had been awarded a Military Medal for bravery as a medic during the Battle of the Somme and he was in Murmansk in 1919 as part of the ill-conceived Anglo-American expedition to Northern Russia.

As a civilian in Palestine in the inter-war years, he had rallied a British Army patrol during an ambush when their own very young officer lost the plot. I also knew he had been very badly wounded and captured during the Battle for Crete in 1941. You can imagine my delight when I found out more about Granddad over 40 years since his death in a book ⁽¹⁾ that my Mother had recently sent to me by a young New Zealand officer, W.B.

The Perfect Plan

One evening my Grandfather cornered Sandy saying, "I've the perfect escape route! It's absolutely foolproof; it's a certainty if there ever was one." Sandy was bemused, my Grandfather continued the fun, "that's just the trouble with you youngsters, you bully us old stagers into giving you the perfect plan, think man, use your grey matter, who in the funeral today did not give a parole ⁽²⁾". Sandy was at a loss, Granddad replied, "What about 'W' in his coffin!" Sandy immediately saw the potential giving him an excited hug. "Old man, dear old Methuselah, you have hit on an idea in a million," volunteering to be first. Unfortunately the plan came to naught as Sandy snorted and burst into a fit of giggles under his shroud, with the German medical staff first startled then seeing the humour, in fits of laughter, and taking no punitive action.

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When I need to get dressed up and break out my regimental tie for some official military duty, I always carry my Grandfather's Military Cross, awarded for

bravery on Crete, hidden in my breast pocket in memory of him and the many shared happy times now long past.

Tom Shannon

1. *W.B. Thomas, Dare to be Free, Cassell Military Classics, Orion Books Ltd, London 2005 (3rd Printing).*
2. *Agree not to attempt to escape when outside the prison camp such as during the funeral of comrades.*

An Old Fashioned Girl

Despite being a teenager in the 'swinging sixties' I am still quite old fashioned when it comes to walking into a pub on my own. My recent birthday fell on a WI evening, so I arranged to meet Gordon and my son Ian for a drink after the meeting. Walking into the bar I was horrified to find that I was there before both of them and, looking around, realised that the place was almost full of men. I had unwittingly walked into the middle of the dominoes team playing a league match against a team from the Royal British Legion, Stow branch.

I had no idea that such a team existed but they meet in the Shaven Crown to play their home matches on a Thursday evening. Everyone (even women!) is

welcome to come along and watch when there is a match. There are usually a few people in the bar who will happily play and teach newcomers the game. I am told that the form of dominoes played is 'Fives and Threes', which can be very tactical but is easy to learn.

This is obviously one of the 'village traditions' that needs to be preserved, so if you feel inclined, go along and find out what it is all about. And if dominoes is not your game there is always crib being played on a Monday evening. The season for both games runs from September/October to April. The small fee to enter the leagues is paid by the Shaven Crown.

Christine Halliday

Wychwood Pre-School

In January we all woke up to lots of snow on the ground. The children who managed to get in had great fun. They made a snowman and a snow-dog. I think the staff had just as much fun!

Since half-term we have had a burst of children wanting to join the pre-school. This is fantastic news, as nearly all the spare places have been taken. All the children are settling in well and are getting to know their key-workers, and the pre-school way of life.

After the roaring success of our spooky craft activity morning we are planning a **Spring/Easter** one in the Easter holidays on **Wednesday 3rd April**. So please bring your children along and join us.

We are just having our website updated so if you have any queries please contact us on: 07905 632623 or email us at info@wychwoodpreschool.org Spaces are limited now.

Ros Hoare