

VICTORIA COLLEGE

ALEXANDRIA

MV1 1956

CLASS REUNION ON THE ISLAND OF CRETE

2nd to 6th JULY 2012

The internet is great. Thanks to e-mails and SKYPE the MV1 (Middle Five One) class of 1956 were able to contact each other. Well at least fifteen of us were. We were about thirty something boys in class. Unfortunately a few of us are no longer on this earth and others we could not locate.

I (John Bassili) had been in contact with Gerry Nacamuli and Ronnie McCulloch and thanks to Lino Banoun I got his brother Harry's contact details. Harry and I SKYPED quite often and during one of our chats, one of us suggested that it would be nice to meet up again and before we knew it a reunion was being talked about. Harry contacted Nicholas Zaracoudis who contacted someone and just like Chinese whispers somehow we became a group.

First we had to decide on a date. That was not easy but we managed to agree on a period where we would all be available.

Then we had to decide on the length of the reunion. It was agreed that it should only last four days. Less would not be worth the effort and more might be too long if we found that we could not stand each other's company after fifty six years.

Next we had to decide on a venue. This led to several suggestions and several rejections. The only way to solve this dilemma was to put down some parameters. We did not want a capital city as we would not all be in the same place and transport would be a problem. So a resort was suggested and accepted. Vassili Efstathiou suggested the Island of Crete as he knew it well and we all agreed.

Nick Zaracoudis was the only one actually living in Greece so he volunteered to organise it and a great job he did too.

The date of the reunion was set for the 2nd July at the Royal Mare Aldemar Hotel in Crete.

There were eleven of us boys with eight wives.

In Alphabetical order we were:

Henry (Harry or Riri) and Rachel Banoun – from Israel
John (Johnny) and Maureen Bassili – from New Zealand
Vassilis Efstathiou (Efta) – from Canada
Mohamed (Mike) and Nahla Hammad – from Egypt
Mohamed Sherif Aly (Hamada) Ibrahim – from Egypt
Mohamed Ishac – from Egypt
Ronald (Ronnie) and Jill McCulloch – from England
Gerald (Gerry or Zazou) and Pauline Nacamuli – from the USA
Adnan and Nadia Spahi – from Italy
Alexander (Alec or Socks) and Susan Tsoucatos – from Egypt
Nicholas (Nick or Zara) and Louise Zaracoudis – from Greece

Sadly, George Awad, Fouad Gazzar, Wagih Louka and Billy Talkhan we knew had died.

Tony Darmanin, Mahmoud Kuwatly and Taryk Roushdy could not join us for one reason or another. Maybe next reunion, Inshallah.

Some of us arrived in Greece a few days earlier and so on the 30th June we were all invited to Nick and Louise Zaracoudis' beautiful house for a wonderful dinner. It was great to see one another again and some of us (me included) got quite emotional at hugging our old friends again. We were all introduced to our bemused wives and by the end of the evening it was as if the 56 years had not existed.

The evening was full of surprises. Nick and Louise presented each of us with a white "T" shirt with the VC logo and crest tastefully printed on the left breast. Miraculously we each got our correct size.

Then Efta presented us each with an album of photos he had collected from all of us. Each album cover was blue and individually painted with the VC prefect's pocket crest and three brass buttons. They were truly works of art. (see picture of the front cover below)

On the 2nd July we met again at Athens Airport and boarded the same plane to Crete. At Heraklion airport we were met by a mini bus organised by Nick and we drove to our resort hotel the "Royal Mare – Aldemar Hotel".

While checking in we met Mohamed Ishac and Hamada Ibrahim who had flown in from Egypt earlier. There were emotional scenes as lots of hugging and kissing took place.

After checking in we all met again at the poolside restaurant for some food and there we met up with Adnan and Nadia Spahi. More emotional hugs kisses and wife introductions. We all wondered how the wives would react especially as Rachel Banoun could speak only Hebrew and Nadia Spahi could speak only Italian. The rest communicated in English. We need not have worried as by the end of the reunion all the wives were great friends and communication was not a problem at all.

Our first dinner together was a rather raucous affair with everyone trying to speak at the same time and everyone photographing everyone else. It was a good thing that the hotel had given us a private dining room where we could be as noisy as we liked especially as Harry had his laptop set up so we could Skype Tony Darmanin in the UK.

The next day, 3rd July, Harry and Rachel Banoun very generously presented us all, husbands and wives with a VC cap. This was an excellent idea as it not only made us look smart but was a very practical idea considering the hot sun on Crete. We then all boarded our Mini bus after breakfast and headed off to Chania with a visit to the Arcadi monastery on the way. Our guide Maria was excellent and throughout the trip kept us informed about what we were seeing and told us about the history of the island of Crete, the monastery and Chania. In Chania we all had a wonderful lunch in a restaurant by the sea after which we wandered around. Harry took some of us to visit the only Synagogue on the island which was a very interesting and moving experience as one of the members of the local Jewish community told us of the history of the Synagogue and the Cretan Jews.

That evening we all went to a special Cretan dinner with band and Cretan dancers organised by the hotel. The music and the show were great but the rest of the hotel patrons had seen nothing yet.

After the Greek dancers performed their traditional dances the Old Victorian Zorbas got up and demonstrated to one and all exactly how it should be done – yes with every one of us out of step.

During dinner we convinced the band to give the microphone to Adnan Spahi, who must be the only Moslem to sing in a Catholic Church choir back in Italy where he lives.

Adnan has a great voice and his renditions of “Strangers in the night” and Elvis’ classic “It’s now or never” brought the house down.

Katerina one of the waitresses who was herself a dancer, somehow convinced Adnan to get up on a table to dance with her. After Adnan fell off the table Efta got up and performed to great applause. When the other patrons learnt that “The rowdy group” were a bunch of seventy year old men who had not seen each other since they were fifteen they all came by and shook our hands in disbelief.

Actually the years did not affect us at all. Maybe some of us had lost a few strands of hair and some of us had put on a few kilos but we behaved like fifteen year olds teasing each other, recounting stories that had happened at school. Strange how everyone remembered the incidents mentioned except for the subject of the story who vehemently denied he had ever done that.

On the 4th July, we wished our American residents a happy 4th July and sadly said good bye to Mohamed Ishac who had to return to Egypt early. We then boarded then mini bus to Elounda and took a ferry boat to Spinalonga an old leper colony with a very colourful history. We had a delightful lunch at a restaurant that was half on the water and on the way back we visited an old olive oil press.

On the fourth day 5th July, we had a free day at the beach and by the pool after lunch. It was supposed to be a bonding day except that we had already bonded from day one. We had a Ping-Pong competition Unfortunately Lias and Alderson house lost to a very dubious Barker house serve. Accusations of cheating and “not fair” were flying about all in good humour. Then we had a swimming race to settle the argument. This was won by yours truly Johnny (Lias) closely followed by Zara (Alderson). The third swimmer, Gerry (The only Barker representative) accused us of cheating as we ran and he swam. We pointed out that swimming involved using the feet too and that he never told us we could not run on the bottom. I must add at this point that the wives present and watching us were shaking their heads in utter disbelief. Some of them had never seen their otherwise very respectable husbands behaving like rowdy school boys and enjoying it so much.

We all had a farewell cocktail dinner that evening, the wives all dressed up and as was the stated hotel rules all the men had to wear long trousers and collared shirt. It was a strange evening, joyous and sad at the same time. We all realised that this was the last evening together.

The 6th July came by too quickly and after breakfast most of us clambered onto our mini bus for the last time and headed for the Airport and Athens where we all gave each other one more hug and an “Au revoir”.

Time had flown by so quickly and we would all have gladly stayed on Crete for a few more days but who was to say it would be such a success and if it were to be longer we might have got on each other’s nerves and spoilt four perfect days. As it is we are all suffering from PCS (Post Crete Syndrome) and we are busy planning our next reunion for 2014. It will probably be somewhere in the UK so Anthony Darmanin (Darma) can join us. Any Suggestion?



CRETE'S VC FIRST ELEVEN



From left to right: Hamada Ibrahim; Mohamed Hammad; Alec Tsoucatos; Johnny Bassili; Nick Zaracoudis; Gerry Nacamuli; Harry Banoun; Adnan Spahi; Mohamed Ishac; Vassilis Efstathiou, Ronnie McCulloch



Standing from left to right: Hamada Ibrahim; Mohamed Hammad; Alec Tsoucatos; Johnny Bassili; Gerry Nacamuli; Harry Banoun; Adnan Spahi; Mohamed Ishac; Vassilis Efstathiou, Ronnie McCulloch

Sitting crossed legged: Nick Zaracoudis

FINALISTS IN MR UNIVERSE COMPETITION



From Left to Right: Gerry; Efta; Socks; Zara; Mike; Johnny

THE LOVELY WIVES



From left to right Standing: Louise Zaracoudis; Jill McCulloch

From left to right Seated: Rachel Banoun; Maureen Bassili, Susan Tsoucatos; Pauline Nacamuli; Nadia Spahi and Nahla Hammad