

## Who Pays the Ferryman? Monday 9.0 BBC2

BBC2's new drama series set in Crete stars Jack Hedley, who has been playing heroic officers and gentlemen on television for the last 15 years, and freely admits to being type-cast again as an ex-officer in the Greek resistance. Here he talks about his career and filming in Crete to **Sheridan Morley**, and on page 85 **Michael J. Bird**, creator of the series, fills in the dramatic real-life background

# Piece de Resistance

AGHIOS NIKOLAOS is a small coastal town and holiday resort, known somewhat ironically as the St Tropez of Crete and famous to viewers of BBCtv's *The Lotus Eaters* as the location of Shepherd's Bar. So much was done for the cause of Greek tourism in general and Cretan tourism in particular by that first series that this year (with artistic and financial assistance from the Greeks) a BBC crew has been back on the island for the best part of three months making a new eight-week cycle of plays by the same author, Michael J. Bird.

**C**alled *Who Pays the Ferryman?*, the new series concerns an ex-officer in the Greek resistance who abandons a boat-building business in England to return to Crete, only to discover on his arrival that an illegitimate daughter and a savage vendetta await him there. The plays are thus linked but self-contained, and, intriguingly, they come to a very decisive end, which suggests that Mr Bird is not this time planning to come up with any more sequels.

Peter Finch was, before his sad and sudden death, set to play the leading role, and later there was talk of Frank Finlay. But the part has, in fact, fallen to that most reliable of television's outdoor hero-figures, Jack Hedley, and, talking to him in Crete during a break in the shooting there this summer, it wasn't hard to see why:

'From *The World of Tim Frazer* across 15 years to *Colditz* I seem to have been playing heroic officers and gentlemen, usually only one step away from God. But I'm not complaining: the great thing is to know what you can do and stick to it. Vittorio de Sica once told me he was a *telefono bianco* actor: well, I'm a uniform or sports car actor, as far as most directors are concerned. Laurence Olivier is different: he let me play (in a recent Granada classic-play series) a drunk from the Deep South and a weaver from



Hedley and Betty Arvaniti join in the candlelit Easter celebration

Yorkshire. Other directors seem to cast more predictably.'

Born Jack Hawkins (a name he changed, for obvious reasons, to Hedley after a man who'd fought with his grandfather in the First World War) 48 years ago, he was a career officer in the Navy for eight years before being invalided out in 1954, after Malaya. Hedley never knew who his father was: his mother, however, set up a highly successful printing and duplicating business so she'd have the money to bring him up, and from the Navy he got into RADA in the generation of Glenda Jackson, but also of 130 other students who have thus far done rather less well.

Repertory in Glasgow and

Leatherhead followed, then one-shot television dramas of the late 50s, including first plays by Alun Owen, Penelope Mortimer and Clive Exton. But it was the thriller king Francis Durbridge who gave Hedley his first real break, at a time when the latter was playing a lot of 15-stone Australian drunks. Durbridge saw something special in him, and reckoned that if he could just lose three stone he'd be right for the suave Tim Frazer. Hedley did that series throughout 1960, and it led him to a movie career in the days when films were still sizable:

'I did *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Nine Hours to Rama* and *Of Human Bondage* and I suppose I was lucky to get in on

the very end of that era. Working for Zanuck, on *The Longest Day*, I had a scene with John Wayne for which they'd also lined up a whole lot of tanks, soldiers, airmen, bombs and a parachute regiment to provide what Zanuck called "background action". So there I was in the foreground, running up to Wayne after the director had called for action and saying, "Well, sir?" and Wayne said, "Well, I, er, aw hell, what do I say here?". And it took them just five hours to get all the tanks and the parachutists back to their starting positions.'

BBC television locations, even in Crete, tend, as a general rule, to be somewhat less lavishly spectacular:

'The Greeks? They're all right, really. But they're a noisy lot and although we have an interpreter here, if any of the extras have to be moved even ten feet over to the other side of the shot there's a 30-minute confrontation about it. Then at the weekends they all dash back to Athens to do television shows there: they none of them seem to rehearse much, just go into the studios and do it. They're also highly superstitious, you know: Crete is a home of the vendetta and once you start filming in the hills around here it's like going back 1,000 years. We took some Polaroid stills of a cottage to see how it would look on the screen and the woman who lived there spent the rest of the day crossing herself. And not long before we arrived here a man in one of these villages had killed his daughter for sitting on their porch showing too much of her leg. Still, it's a marvellous place to be working, so long as you can stay off the drink: I keep hoping if this series is a success locally they'll ask me back here to do the cigarette commercials.'

**M**arried for 14 years to a production girl he met on *Of Human Bondage*, and father of two sons, Hedley lives opposite Enoch Powell in Belgravia and wonders ➤➤➤

← occasionally if he ought to be leading the life of a more classical actor:

'I was asked to go to Stratford once, to play Orlando, but I get nervous about dressing up in all those ridiculous tights: also I really can't take the back-biting that goes on in any permanent company, and there's nothing worse than getting into a successful stage play and knowing you'll have to go on saying the same lines night after night, week after week, at exactly the same moment for maybe a year—it rots your mind. Then, if you're in a stage failure, it's even worse—looking across the footlights and seeing rows and rows of hairdressers who've got in for nothing so they'll tell their clients. Do you know that to fill a West End theatre for a year would only require one per cent of the population of London, not counting tourists? Yet periodically you end up playing to a couple of coach parties from Manchester and five ladies from Nebraska and that's your lot. Who says London is such a great theatre-going town?'

**S**o, since the virtual collapse of the film industry, it's been television for Mr Hedley: 'Colditz, of course: that series increased the attendance at the Imperial War Museum by 75 per cent. It's amazing what television can do: before that I was in a series called *Kate* for about six months, until I cracked and had to be allowed to escape. "Donald's gone to America," they said, and carried on for another whole series without me. It didn't seem to make very much difference.'

Surrounded by a 40-strong English crew, a few glamorous Greek actresses plus such distinguished guest stars as Patrick Magee and Patience Collier, Hedley was evidently enjoying himself:

'Paperbacks cost over two quid each here and the wine is nasty, though cheap. But at least we're away from the rain and the rates bill and the telephone for a while. I've given up any claim to a serious life: I get dressed up and make a fool of myself in front of cameras to entertain people who aren't lucky enough to be working in Crete. I think maybe I'm one of the last of those old hero-types: I started out with hell-raisers like O'Toole, who would ➤



Jack Hedley and Betty Arvaniti, with (from left) Takis Emmanuel, Nikos Verlekis and Maria Sokali



← ring a bell on the set of *Goodbye Mr Chips* to indicate that it was champagne time. When I did *Of Human Bondage* the director tried to replace Kim Novak with Elizabeth Taylor and Novak heard about this and got a pole and smashed in all the windows of his new car. I think that's why I took up acting: you meet such enjoyable people, and there's not too much to worry about, except where the hell you're going to find another job when this one comes to an end.' ●

## Island of the warm welcome

THE GERMAN attack on Crete began at first light on 20 May 1941. The invasion was expected. Greece had fallen and the capture of the largest of the Greek islands was the next logical step in Hitler's plan to establish total control of the Mediterranean. After Crete, the target was Cyprus, followed by a strike at Egypt from the east.

But, though Crete fell to the invaders within less than two weeks, the rest of Hitler's plan was never put into effect, due to the heavy casualties inflicted on the German paratroops and glider detachments which spearheaded the attack. The British and Commonwealth forces defending the island, despite being ineptly led and ill-equipped, killed 5,000 of the 22,750 crack airborne soldiers sent in against them and wounded 15,000.

In some of the fiercest and most savage hand-to-hand fighting of the Second World War, the Australians, New Zealanders, British and Greek defenders were supported by just about the entire civilian population — men, women and children. These Cretan irregulars, armed with shotguns, knives, axes, scythes and even sticks and stones, fell on the German paratroopers and hacked them to pieces or beat them to death, often within seconds of their feet touching the ground.

So heavy were the German losses that Hitler never again dared to mount any large-scale airborne attacks. As General Student, who commanded the invasion, was later to admit: 'Crete was the grave of the German paratroopers.'

Nevertheless, the island fell. The battered remnants of the Commonwealth and Greek forces retreated south to Sfakia,



German troops armed with flame-throwers played a major role in the invasion — and the savage reprisals that followed each partisan raid

where thousands were evacuated by the Royal Navy. But many were left behind and most of these were taken prisoner.

A few of them, though, took to the mountains where, even as the Germans mopped up the last of the valiant commando rearguard, the men of Crete were forming themselves into armed bands. The Cretan Andartes were born.

There were Andarte groups throughout Greece during the occupation, but none were more feared by the Axis forces than those on Crete. And with good reason. To a Cretan, liberty is the one ideal worth struggling for, the one reality for which he will fight. Under the old rallying cry of 'Freedom or Death', the Cretans struggled and fought for 700 years — first against the Venetians and then the Turks — until, in 1898, they finally achieved independence and, 15 years later, union with Greece. In 1941 they were not going to sit back and submit meekly when they saw their country once more overrun and occupied by foreigners.

Before the invasion, the Germans, in their arrogance, believed that the islanders would actually welcome them. But now the Cretans banded together and fought on.

The Andartes of Crete had many successes, among them the raid on the heavily defended aerodrome at Kastelli Pedhiadhos. There, led by British liaison officers and with the support of units of the Special Boats Service, the partisans destroyed more than a dozen German aircraft.

But even more spectacular, perhaps, was the mission undertaken by the Andartes of the island when, again commanded by British officers, they

kidnapped the German commandant, Major-General Kreipe, and hid him in a cave until he could be moved to the coast, from where he was taken to Egypt aboard a submarine.

But the Cretan people paid a heavy price for these missions and for the countless other raids and audacious acts carried out by the Andartes. The Germans conducted a campaign of vicious reprisals against the population. The rule was that for every German killed by the partisans, ten Cretans were shot. Town and village squares became the sites for mass executions and whole communities were wiped out, the houses dynamited or gutted by German flame-throwers.

Despite this savage retaliation though, the people of Crete continued to resist the common enemy. But as the war continued, the resistance split into opposing political factions. A bitter feud developed within the Andartes, among those with royalist, republican or communist sympathies. This struggle was to continue long after the liberation of the island in 1944, and finally erupted into civil war.

In 1946 one of the legendary leaders of the Andartes, a man who had fought with the British liaison officers at Kastelli Pedhiadhos, surrounded the camp of a group of communist partisans led by an old enemy of his. The communist leader, when he saw that he could not escape, shot himself. The next day, his head was paraded in triumph around the streets of Heraklion, the island's capital.

It was not until February 1975, eight months after the return of democracy following the fall of the colonels, that the last of the communist

guerrillas came down from the mountains: two men, one aged 55, the other 59. They had been living in hiding, from the Germans and then from their fellow countrymen, for 33 years.

Crete today is suffering another invasion, but gladly this time, for these new invaders have brought prosperity with them and the tourists who flood the northern coast of the island every year come as friends. The true Cretan, however outwardly sophisticated, still believes that, as in ancient times, all strangers who come to him in peace come from God and must be treated accordingly. Along with their ferocity as fighters and their loyalty as friends, the people of this magic island are renowned for their hospitality.

On one of my early visits to Crete, to find locations for *The Lotus Eaters*, a Cretan friend took me to a little village high in the mountains. It was a hot day and as we sat under the shade of a tree, an old man approached us from his house nearby with a jug of wine and a plate of bread, *feta* cheese, cucumber and tomatoes freshly picked from his garden. We were strangers, and his guests, and he apologised for not being able to offer us anything better.

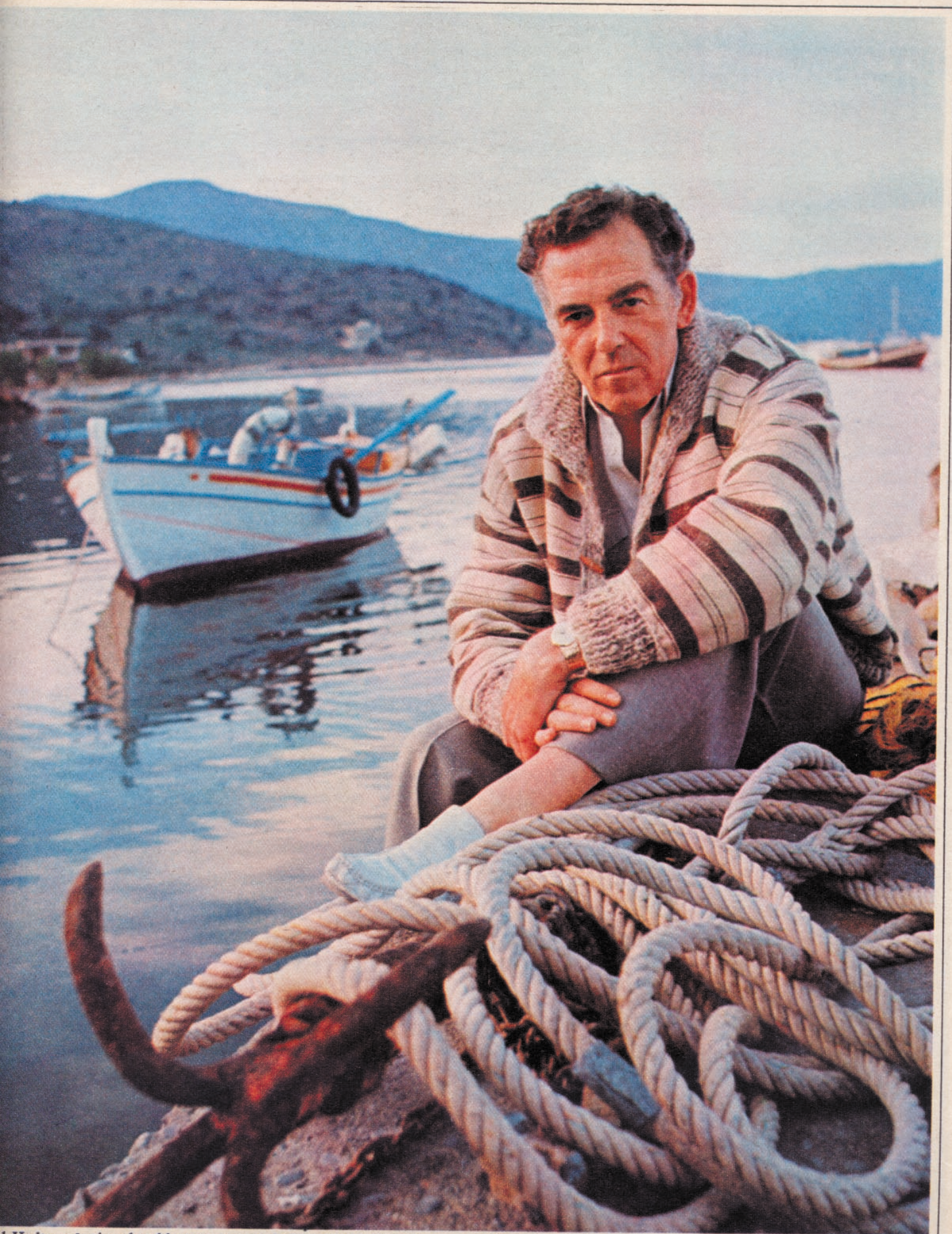
As we sat and ate together, I complimented the old man on his delicious tomatoes. He thanked me and asked what we were doing in the mountains. My friend told him and added that if we found in his village the location I was looking for, then, once the television series was shown, he could expect many visitors from England. He frowned. 'How many?' he asked. 'Well,' replied my friend, 'if the *kyrie's* programme is a success I think it will bring very many tourists to Crete.'

'How many?' persisted our host. 'A hundred?' My friend laughed and shook his head. 'More likely thousands,' he said. The old man's worried frown deepened. 'They will come here?' My friend nodded. The old man sighed and shook his head. 'But I do not have enough tomatoes,' he said sadly.

Earlier in our conversation he had told us proudly that he had been with the Andartes. And he had boasted of the many men he had killed, fighting for the thing most precious to him: freedom.

That's Crete. And those are Cretan values. Long may they both survive. ●





Mark Hedley, playing the old-style, romantic hero again: 'Crete's a marvellous place to be working, so long as you can stay off the drink'