

## GREEK CAMPAIGN

### Lance Corporal William Dexter, Corps of Military Police

From the “war-experience.org” website, partly as related in Noah Scott’s “Dad - Military Policeman”, Para 5.12

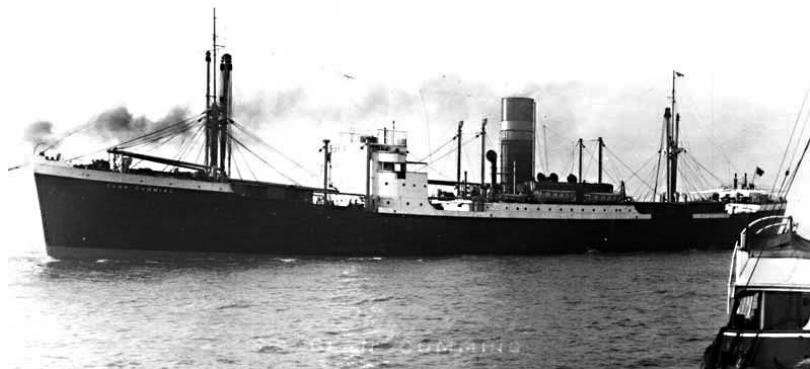
#### Over to Greece

In December of that year (1940) I was sent to Greece, together with about twenty other Military Police, as Italy had invaded from Albania. We were sent to police the Port of Piraeus and Athens to control the few troops and air force personnel there. There I became friendly with Lady Palliser, wife of Sir Michael Palliser, British Ambassador to Greece. She and her daughter helped at the YMCA. One day when I visited, Lady Palliser's daughter pointed out to me a young lady helping and said she was Princess Alexandra of Greece. In March 1941 Lady Palliser arranged for me to meet Anthony Eden and General Dill. Then in late March and early April British, Australian and New Zealand troops began arriving.

One night during this period two large cargo ships arrived at the Port of Piraeus. One was the SS Clan Cummings and the other SS Clan Fraser. Both were loaded with arms and explosives. The Clan Fraser unloaded its cargo of arms and moved to the outer part of the harbour to unload its explosives. While the Clan Cummings unloaded its supply of arms some of the crew went to Athens and got drunk. I had to arrest two of them and take them back to their ship. The Captain took me to his cabin and we had a drink of whisky together. I stayed for about half an hour, then I returned to Athens. About two hours later German bombers came over and bombed the harbour. The Clan Fraser was struck and damaged, but did not blow up. The Clan Cummings however, was hit and blew up, wrecking the harbour installations and part of the Port ([Archivist's Note: Clan Fraser did explode 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> April \(see below\) - Clan Cumming was damaged by this explosion, only to strike a mine on her way out of Pireaus on 15<sup>th</sup> April after repair.](#))



Clan Fraser  
burning after  
explosion 6/7 April



Clan Cumming in  
happier days

Later I was attached to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Brigade, which I convoyed to the front. Sometime around the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1941 the British forces started to evacuate Greece. I was placed on a road junction at Elefsis, directing troops coming from the north via Larissa. I sent the troops to Corinth. They came through at night to avoid air attacks. On the night of the 25<sup>th</sup> April a Tank Corps Major came to me and told me that his convoy was the last to come through, with the exception of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade New Zealanders, who were blowing up the road and would not be long before they came. I was to follow on behind them.

I waited until about 5pm on the 26<sup>th</sup> April. During this time all roads around me were bombed and strafed and but they left me alone at the junction, unharmed. Of course, unknown to me, German Paratroops had dropped at Corinth, Athens and to the north of me. They had me completely cut off. Later I learned that the New Zealanders had cut across the east coast because the junction had been cut off. At 5pm I saw a small convoy of British trucks coming towards me and as it got nearer I went to meet it. When I was only a few yards away I noticed the leading truck carried German Parachute troops and a tommy gun was pointing at me. I had only a .38 revolver, so I didn't see any point in arguing with the sergeant when he said "For you the war is over".

After being disarmed, I jumped into the truck. One of the Germans took my motor cycle and we left towards Corinth. On our way we collected a few British stragglers. The Germans began to starve us to weaken us. We had only one small meal of lentils a day, and some days not even that."

### **Prisoner of War**

From the "War Experience" website, as related in Noah Scott's "Dad - Prisoner of War", Para 1.7

### **Captivity in Greece**

"On the 20<sup>th</sup> May, still at Corinth, I saw hundreds of German planes pulling gliders passing over towards Crete. The invasion of Crete had begun.

At Corinth I was kept prisoner in an old Greek Barracks and a few days later we were joined by other prisoners of war captured at Kalamata. We stayed for about six weeks and then we had to march from Corinth to Larissa, which is about 120 miles as the crow flies, and mountainous. It was hard for the German soldiers escorting us and they had not been starved like us. It was on this march that I met Bert Williams, an Australian and I am sorry to say that an event took place that has stuck in my mind ever since. We had not been given food for this march; we were weak and hungry and many collapsed, including some of the German guards. The Greek folks were handing us crusts of bread as we passed their dwellings. I received a crust of bread and ate it myself. Later Bert Williams received a piece of bread and straight away he split it in half and gave me one half; I had let down my Coldstream Guards training and Christian upbringing, and at that moment of receiving the bread I felt ashamed of myself.

When we arrived at Larissa we were taken to some railway sidings, where we got a shower under the overhead railway water pump used for filling the railway engines. We were then given some raw salted fish, raw molasses and a few Greek Army biscuits. Most of us gave our raw salted fish to some Greek Cypriots who were with us, as there was no chance of cooking it and they seemed to like eating it raw. After about two hours we were placed in railway trucks - 65 to a truck - and the doors closed and locked. We then set off for Salonika. On arrival we were taken to a large barbed-wire camp where we stayed for about six weeks. It was there that I had my first contact with lice. I saw other prisoners searching through their clothes and thought I was clear, until I took a look through mine and found scores.