

POST-GREECE

Ken Hardman, Royal Air Force, 221 AMES MRU

Eric Kay's Greek Odysseys, Para 2.5

By Noah Scott

Extract from RAF Air Defence Radar Museum Newsletter No 40, Aug 2004: -

MEANDERINGS OF A MECHANIC FROM 1940 TO 1946

By T K Hardman, Bexley, Kent

At the transit camp we were given a week's leave on board a Nile Steamer, anchored at Cairo and run by the Army but still retaining the luxuries associated with their peacetime function.



**This must be on leave aboard the
"Nile Steamer, anchored at Cairo"
(Eric Kay and beer-wallah)**



Sunset over the Nile

Back in Egypt and re-equipping, the next place we erected our gear was in the desert at Gebel Qatrani, south west of Cairo, still as 221 AMES.

Our next move in February 1942 was an exchange with 236 AMES, which then became "my" unit, a hutted station just south of Haifa, Palestine. Whilst there, we mechanics had a short exchange for about a month with those from the CHL (Chain Home Low detecting station) on top of Mount Carmel. Whilst at Haifa we were called by the Navy to see if we could help repair a radar set which I believe was a modified Air to Surface Vessel (ASV) set as used by the Navy in those days. We were intrigued to find that the destroyer was HMS HERO which had taken us off from Kalamata in Greece several months previously. I regret to say that I cannot remember whether we were able to help or not!

In October 1942 I responded to a call to join an experimental unit on the outskirts of Cairo. At this time the ASV equipment was being used in the Mediterranean area and was being jammed by a steady signal. Our task was to try and overcome this jamming. The Unit consisted of an approximately equal number of Air Force and Army Signals personnel, the latter were rather jealous of the secrecy under which we worked, but this was appreciated in about the middle of 1943 when the United States announced that we had RADAR.

A further use for the Air to Surface Vessel equipment by the RAF was to mount it on trucks and use it as forward Mobile Radar Units, as No. 600 AMES, during the desert campaigns. **(Archivist's Note: Eric Kay states in a letter to 'Heroes Return', 11 May 2004, that "after Greece he was with 204 AMES in The Western Desert")**. In fact, I believe that one of these ASV sets was mounted on top of one of the pyramids outside Cairo during a Tripartite Conference held close by at Giza.



Left-right: Chiang Kai-Shek (China), Franklin Roosevelt (USA) and Winston Churchill (British Empire) at the Cairo Conference 22 - 26 November 1943



Group of Tri-Service top brass apparently photographed by Eric Kay. They seem to be inspecting a highly fortified bunker or gun emplacement - Conference Military Advisers?

By the time I arrived home in December 1944 quite a number of CH mechanics had been drafted to the Continent so I found myself on a 'steam engine' conversion course at CH Poling (West Sussex). From there I was posted to the CH at Rye (East Sussex). While at Rye in the spring of 1945 we were issued with a searchlight and petrol driven generator, with instructions to "show the light" by swinging the beam vertically up and down so that it could be seen by a wandering 'lost aircraft' and then laid horizontally on an allocated bearing which would lead to a designated airfield to direct the aircraft to a landing. It was very satisfying to observe a lost aircraft suddenly making a beeline along the indicated bearing and, presumably, making a safe landing.

During my time at Rye I was sent on another course at Yatesbury (Wiltshire). With my new found knowledge I was then posted for my last few months of service to the Special Torpedo Unit, Titchfield, Hants where I joined a unit which was trying to apply radar techniques at ultrasonic frequencies to steer aerial launched torpedoes - but you can guess the effects on the innards of the valves and the armatures of relays when the torpedo hit the water!

The mother station for Titchfield was the Naval Shore Establishment at Gosport and the few nights spent there introduced me to some of the naval traditions, such as having to salute the Quarter Deck (the Guardroom) on passing, and naval ratings (not us RAF types) having to queue at the gate until a boat load had gathered before being let 'ashore'. I also remember a notice on the main gate to the effect that "ratings are forbidden to ride their bicycles up the gang plank" (that is, the stretch of path between the public road and the entrance gate).

So ended my service career after just a week short of six years, and looking back, I realise that I had a cushy time, suffering only a couple of minor accidents. I finished up as a sergeant, during which time I saw quite an interesting time, covering the spectrum from microwaves to ultrasonics.

Extract from RAF Air Defence Radar Museum Newsletter No 40, Aug 2004: -

Further to my article on "The Meanderings of a Mechanic from 1940 to 1946" in Newsletter No 40 may I enlarge on the Greek Army helping to haul our AMES Type 9 mast trailer up to our allocated site at Araxos. It would appear that only the metal bottom section of the mast was on the trailer as, no doubt, we had carried the four other much lighter wooden sections up by hand. In the photograph below, the twin track 'road' that we had to build up the uneven and rocky slope using broken stone can readily be seen. Thank goodness there was someone on the unit who knew just where to hit a boulder to cause it to break relatively easily - no, I don't think he had spent some time at Dartmoor!



“Greek soldiers assist in the donkey work!” This photo (presumably supplied by Ken for publication in the Newsletter) was almost certainly taken by Eric Kay, along with others at this event as shown in Ken’s Part 3 - Greek Campaign

The bell tents that were on issue to the unit leaked so much that we had to lay our anti-gas cloaks over our blankets at night and to be careful when we moved to ensure that any water went on the ground and not us. After much complaining to our CO and in our letters home, duly censored, the point was heeded and we were eventually issued with ridge tents complete with fly-sheets. When we took over our equipment it was painted desert yellow, and we had the job of using brown and green paint to change to the usual green camouflage.