

## POST SCRIPT

**Corporal (later Warrant Officer) Eric Kay, Royal Air Force, 221 AMES MRU**

### **Return to Greece, 1965**

Twenty years after the war ended Eric revisited Greece. He appears to have been based in Athens and evidently took several day coach trips to sites of historical and tourist interest which also took him to some of his old stamping grounds. This assumption comes from the grouping and labelling of the locations of some of the photographs in this set. Because we now know his movements in Greece 1940 and 1941 we can reproduce here those 1965 shots of particular relevance to his wartime experiences and in the correct sequence. Indeed some of the annotations on the 1965 photos confirm locations only surmised from the 1940-41 group. Sadly for Eric, on this occasion there didn't seem to be any day trip to Kalamata and so he was not given the opportunity to see again the place of his salvation and evacuation.



**The Parthenon, Athens**

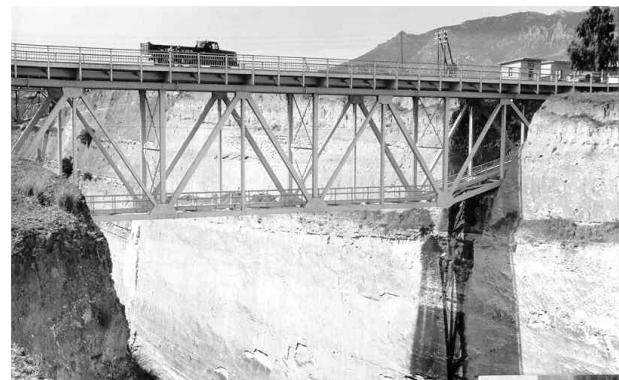


**Athens from the Acropolis**

What we do get from 1965 though, are pictures of the Corinth Canal:



**Eastern entrance to the Corinth Canal -  
the PoWs crossed the canal here  
in May 1941 over German pontoons en route  
to Stalags after the surrender at Kalamata**



**The bridges were partially blown up  
by the retreating British forces when German  
paratroops attacked and captured the canal on  
25<sup>th</sup> April 1941 (Eric had last crossed on 22<sup>nd</sup>)**



**Looking up the cut to the North-west**



**Nearly the same view, May 2009  
(Archivist's collection)**



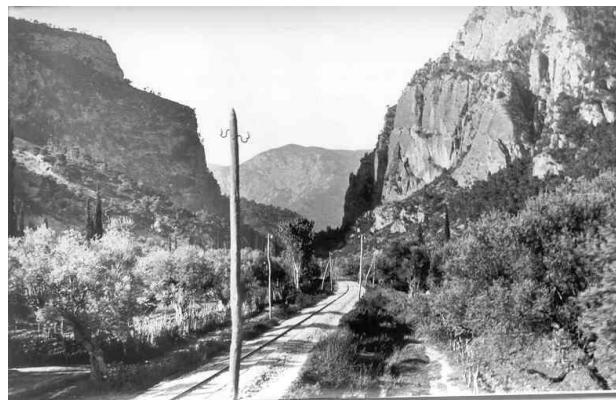
**Ancient Corinth**



**Nearly the same view, May 2009  
(Archivist's collection)**



**Gulf of Corinth coastline  
looking East**



**Narrow gauge line to the Kalavryta Gorge**



The Acropolis at Patras



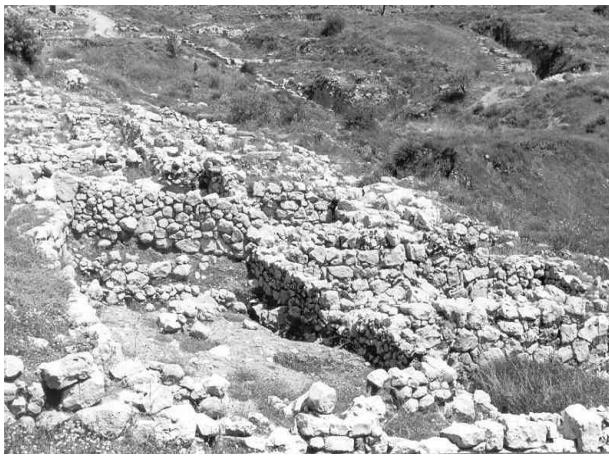
Main Street, Patras



The road (back from Corinth) towards Athens passing Megara (and Elefsis)



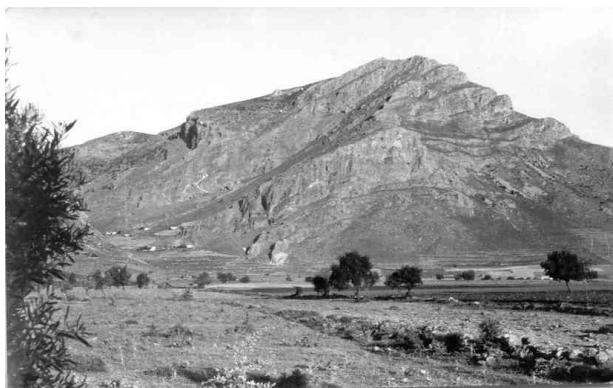
Elefsis - steel works (now towering over fields and olive groves - the airfield still survives, though, used by the Greek Air Force)



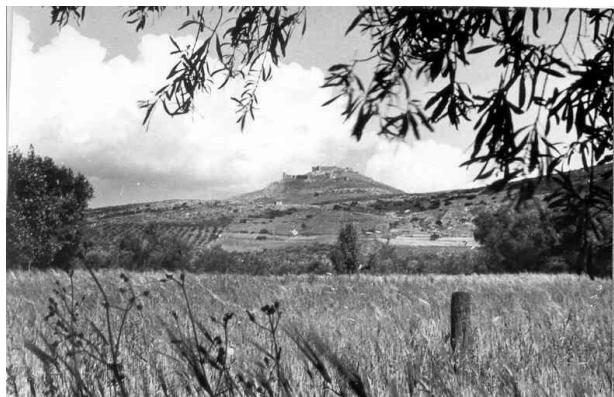
Ancient Mycenae on the way to Argos  
“House Foundations”



Royal Tomb foundations at Mycenae, May 2009  
(Archivist's collection)



**Settlement above the Argos Plain**



**Castle at Argos**



**Ancient “Vaulted gallery at Tyrins”  
(near Navplion)**



**Medieval walls at (the port of) Navplion**



**The Cathedral in Tripolis**



**Central Square, Tripolis - the closest Eric  
got to Kalamata in 1965 (about 50 miles by road)**

## Return to Kalamata, 2004 & 2005

Eric finally made it back to Kalamata in May 2004, sixty-three years after his previous departure, as a member of the Brotherhood of Veterans of the Greek Campaigns to attend the annual Remembrance Service and accompanying ceremonies. Below is a small selection of his photographs of that occasion, taken by his daughter Bridget. He went again in 2005 accompanied by another of his daughters, Judith.



The troops assemble



The crowd gathers



The Service begins



The band plays and the guard salutes



Eric poses with his comrades . . .



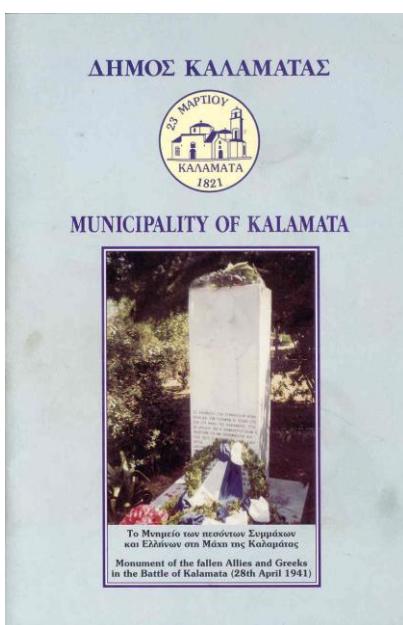
. . . and with his daughter Bridget



... and with Cyril Symons



... and alone with his thoughts and memories

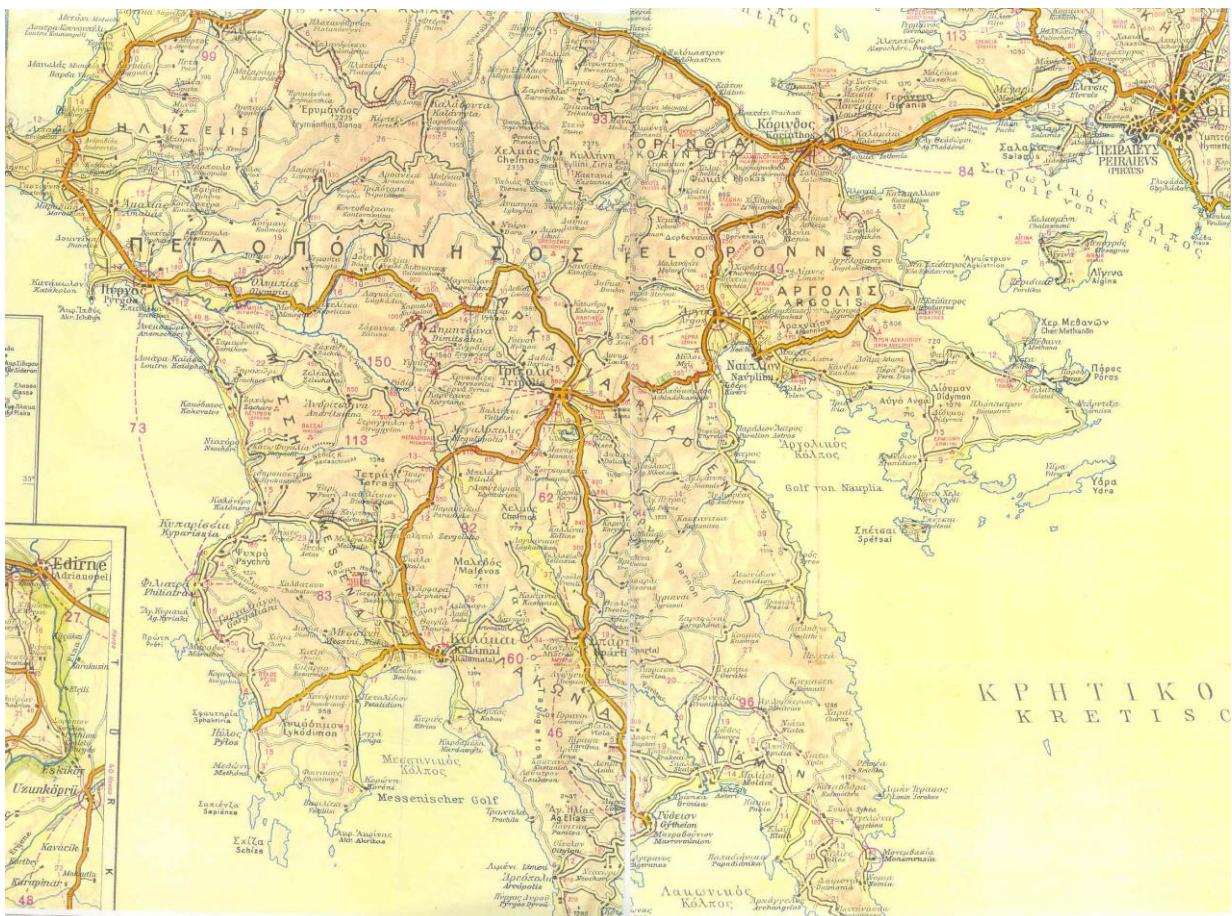


### His prized Official invitation from the Mayor and Council of Kalamata



ΚΑΛΑΜΑΤΑ. Πλατεία Λαϊκής Σχολής 1918

His souvenir picture postcard of a street scene in Kalamata as it was in 1918



**Somehow he found this early pre-1965 bi-lingual German road-map of Greece which he thought could have been used by the invading forces**

#### Report in The Cornish Guardian, July 2004

From his occasional correspondence with the Brotherhood (which included several voluntary donations), Eric seems to have been contemplating joining the annual Kalamata reunion trips from about the year 2000 onwards, but for one reason or another didn't get round to making it until 2004. He was accompanied by his daughter Bridget and a fellow Veteran from Cornwall, Cyril Symons. This is their moment of glory as reported in the Cornish Guardian, 15 July 2004.

## Veterans' visit in memory of lost comrades



ABOVE: Eric Kay today, in his garden at Pont Bodinnick, and left, Eric towards the end of his time in the RAF in 1945, aged 24,



ABOVE: This picture of the prisoners of war was taken by a German guard in Czechoslovakia.



RIGHT: Cyril Symons as he was in Egypt in 1941 as a despatch rider, and above, Cyril today at 84 years of age.





ABOVE: Cyril Symons, left, and Eric Kay at the memorial to allied soldiers and airmen at Kalamata where many of them died on April 29, 1941.

#### Pictures in the Cornish Times, 15 July 2004

The accompanying text, by Marjorie Barrie, reads as follows:

*"Two 84-year-old Second World War veterans of the 1940-41 Greek Campaign recently visited Kalamata for a ceremony at the Monument of the Fallen Allies and Greeks in the Battle of Kalamata. Eric Milner Kay of Pont Lanteglos-by-Fowey, who took part in the battle on April 28, 1941, was joined on the trip by Cyril Symons of Menyraeet, near Liskeard.*

*Eric, who was accompanied by his daughter, Brigid Brett of Highway, Lanteglos-by-Fowey, saw wartime service in the RAF as a specialist radar operator and Cyril as a despatch rider with the RAOC, both men having joined the forces when barely out of their teens.*

*Although his job was in ground radar, when it came to defending the radar unit and its crew in the Battle of Kalamata Eric, in typical British fashion, was put in charge of an old First World War Lewis machine gun "simply", he says, "because I'd been in the OTC at school!" Although he had never fired a machine gun in his life, as a teenager Eric had done a lot of pigeon shooting on his father's farm on the Isle of Wight where he became good at estimating the birds' speed as he took aim. This experience stood him in good stead.*

*Being confronted by a Stuka bomber screaming towards his unit in a speed dive, he estimated the aircraft's speed before letting fly. "To my surprise," he says, "I scored a direct hit on its under-belly and it crashed nearby. Some soldiers pulled the German pilot, who'd been hit in the leg, from the wreckage and he was led away shaking his fist at me and screaming 'You English swine; I will kill you!'*

*The trip to Kalamata was underwritten by Heroes Return, part of a special Lottery-funded Veterans Agency programme.*

*Although Cyril had been back to Greece several times since the war on trips arranged by the Brotherhood of Greek Veterans, the visit to Kalamata was Eric's first since the events of 1941. "For more than 60 years I had pushed it all so far back in my mind that it was difficult at first to relate the rebuilt Kalamata to the embattled town I last saw all those years ago, says Eric.*

*"It was not until we walked into the old part of the town and visited the Greek Orthodox Church, where we lit four candles, and after we'd been down to the docks, that I felt the connection to the past.*

*Both Eric and Cyril were evacuated from Greece by the Royal Navy in what Eric describes as "a kind of mini Dunkirk". Eric, after dumping the most secret parts of British RADAR in the harbour to keep it out of German hands, was taken off from Kalamata itself.*

### **Attack**

*Despite being subjected to continual attack by German bombers, Eric's ship reached Egypt safely, whilst others in the convoy were sunk. Cyril, however, found himself being landed at Suda Bay in Crete where his unit was to wait to be taken on to Egypt.*

*"Raids on Suda Bay were continuous," says Cyril, "and with our equipment abandoned in Greece we cowered in the trenches for most of the day. Then, on May 20, I heard the sound of German planes. I glanced up and saw thousands of German paratroopers floating down."*

*After hiding in a gully for days, Cyril's unit walked 60 miles across the mountains to get to Sfakia on the south coast. For Cyril, who had succeeded in escaping from both France and Greece, it was not to be a case of third time-lucky. He says: "When we reached Sfakia we took shelter in a big cave on the beach. One group got away on the first night, but when the next night came there were no more boats.*

*"The next morning the CO called us all together and told us that the island had surrendered to the Germans and that we'd have to consider ourselves prisoners of war. I remember that my first thought was 'we will get some food at last', and my second thought was 'thank God there would be no more bombs or machine-gun fire'.*

*Cyril's second thought proved premature as the Germans rained down mortars. "As we dived for cover I felt something hit me in the stomach. I found that a piece of shrapnel, about three inches long, had hit my webbing belt and cut it in two. Had it not it would have penetrated my stomach."*

*Cyril and his unit were told by their captors that they would have to retrace their steps across the mountains and return to Suda Bay where they were eventually put on board an Italian ship and taken to an old Greek army barracks at Salonika.*

*"The month we spent there was the worst we had to endure," says Cyril. "The food was not plentiful and we were pestered with lice. We were very weak and many PoWs died there, mainly through malnutrition." When they finally arrived at one of the big Stalags in Germany Cyril's weight had plummeted.*

*Some of the ranks were often sent to work in quarries and factories, under less strict supervision, and Cyril spent most of his time doing this kind of work. His first destination was a granite quarry in a village in Northern Czechoslovakia where he was one of 25 British PoWs put to work there. He has some unique black and white photographs of himself and his colleagues taken by one of their German guards.*

*The camp commandant, nick-named 'Shorty' by the prisoners, realised how weak the men were and managed to produce some Red Cross parcels and extra food and clothes. "We had a lot to thank Shorty for," says Cyril. "On our first Christmas he let us have a small Christmas tree and a large jug of beer, plus a special Christmas parcel. "He was alone on duty on Christmas evening and he came down and joined us, and one thing I always remember was his playing Silent Night on his harmonica -it made the evening."*

*Compared to the PoW camps, the regime was relaxed - Shorty arranged for a team of French PoWs to play them at football. "Shorty was the referee", says Cyril, "and we lost 7-0, but they had more than 100 men to choose from and we only had 25."*

*After about a year they were told the quarry was closing down and they were sent to work at a food factory. "Shorty said good-bye to us and we hoped that he would survive the war," says Cyril. On May 7, 1945, the news came that the war was over and they were free at last.*

### **Abandoned**

*Their German guards abandoned them to return to their units and Cyril travelled to Brussels by train, lorry and on foot, passing through war-ravaged Europe in the chaos which followed the end of hostilities. After seven weeks he finally made it and was flown back to England on June 26.*

*Eric's next posting after the Western Desert was the Middle East and, finally, St Mawgan in Cornwall. After demobilisation he studied at Oxford and Southampton universities and became a senior member of the academic staff at Southampton.*

*Eric was mentioned In dispatches for his part in the Greek Campaign and awarded the Balkans Medal by the Greek government. Cyril, whose war memories are lodged in the Imperial War Museum in London, received a Greek Campaign 1941 medal from the Greek government."*

(Note that the Cornish press (and/or Eric) got carried away a little and attribute Eric's shooting down of the Stuka to the Battle of Kalamata when the shooting actually took place at Elefsis, probably on the 20<sup>th</sup> April; Eric left Kalamata on the night of 26/27<sup>th</sup> and the Battle didn't take place till the night of 28/29<sup>th</sup>. But it all makes exciting reading for the parochial Cornish public.

Eric went out again to the Kalamata ceremonies the following year with his daughter Judith this time as accompanying carer, as provided for by the Heroes Return organisation. We don't have any archive photographs from this trip - but there was an order form for an RAF wreath that Eric ordered and presumably Judith laid in her capacity of Flight Lieutenant in the RAF Volunteer Reserve.

Ordered  
21/02/05



Type K - £21.00  
17" diameter  
Wreath Roundel  
in red, white and blue Carnations  
with badge of choice

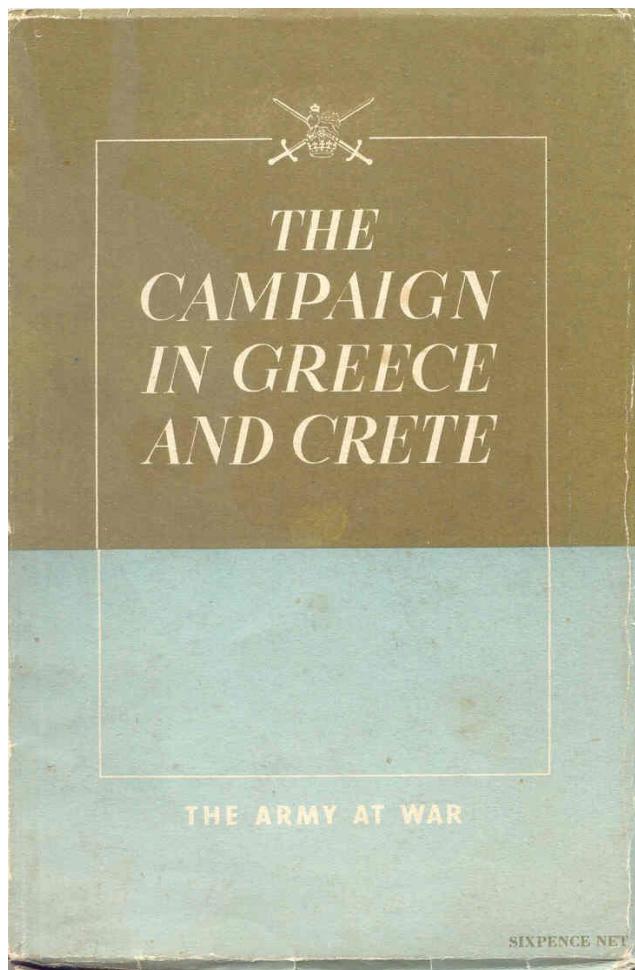
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**Eric's RAF wreath order for the 2005 trip**

His souvenirs also include a small booklet familiar to some - an understandably rather propagandist and somewhat over-optimistic brief summary published by the Ministry of Information in 1942. It boldly claims:

*"The campaign described in this book will occupy a proud place in the story of the British and Imperial armies' exploits in this war. The introductory chapter explains on what grounds - of national honour as well as long-term strategy - the decision to support the Greeks was taken, and the remaining chapters describe in detail the heroic rearguard action, first down the length of the Greek peninsula and then across the mountains of Crete, in which the campaign for the most part consisted. The book is a tribute to the fighting qualities of the Imperial and Greek armies and their toughness in the face of overwhelming difficulties. It covers all the military operations between the arrival of the Imperial Expeditionary Force in February, 1941, and the evacuation from Crete in June, 1941. It is illustrated by six line maps, two showing the general setting of the campaigns in Greece and Crete, and four more which detail the most crucial of the actual operations."*

*"Here were a people who not only had the right to help but who also deserved help... every consideration of honour dictated the maximum possible help to Greece. But it would be misleading to suppose that there were not equally strong military reasons for the adventure. As Mr. Churchill stated in his review of the campaign, the military authorities considered that there was a line which, given certain circumstances, could be successfully defended. The Greek campaign was not undertaken as a hopeless or suicidal operation. It turned out to be a rearguard action only, though even so it was not without a salutary influence on the enemy's strategy in the Near East.... Enemy losses were at least 6,000 killed or drowned and 11,000 wounded; and these were all crack troops. He also used in his attack between 1,400 and 1,500 aircraft of all types; and used up many of them with their crews. That was the scale of forces diverted from the other campaigns which he was then planning --- notably the assault on Russia."*



It's all in the book