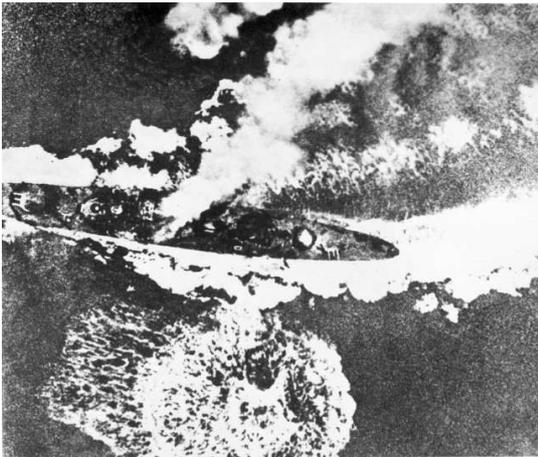


An Eyewitness Account of the Sinking of the HMS Gloucester in May 1941



In May 1941 just as the Battle of Crete was under way a ferocious air and naval battle was being played out in the straits between Kythera and Antikythera. Superior Nazi forces, led by the fearsome Stuka dive bombers, overwhelmed the British flotilla and sank the HMS Gloucester which had fought valiantly to the end, until it had literally run out of ammunition.

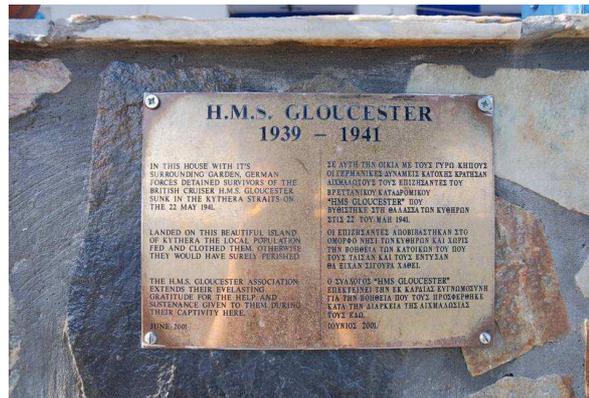
Almost 70 years later former Kytherian Brotherhood President **John Prineas** strode over the hillside near Paliokastro on Kythera to recount what he saw that day as a little boy. In the company of the island's resident archaeologist, Aris Tsaravopoulos, John can be seen on a Youtube clip posted by John Fardoulis at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5z1QI4-xSI>.



John Prineas recalls seeing 4 or 5 ships together sailing under a smokescreen. The Stukas were attacking in formation from the direction of Aghios Georgios and dive bombing the ships. John remembers seeing the Gloucester hit a number of times and starting to lean over. He also remembers an air duel between German and British planes, something that was like out of a war movie. It was an incredible spectacle for the young Prineas in 1941 that he has never forgotten.

The sinking of the Gloucester has also brought back memories for another Kytherian stalwart, Spyro Calokerinos, who was one of the young boys who spirited food into a house in Kapsali where the British sailors who had survived the sinking were taken and kept by the German guards before being shipped off to Germany.

As you enter Kapsali from the road leading from Hora, you will come across the house (since refurbished) with a plaque which was presented by the last living survivors some years ago in appreciation of the locals' heroic efforts.



As an interesting aside, Maria Hill in her recently published work *Diggers and Greeks* draws on the wartime reminiscences and writings of an Australian officer and prisoner of war, Ian Sabey, in his book *Stalag Scrapbook*. As Sabey, who was captured in Greece, was being shipped off to the prisoner of war camps in Germany he wrote of the hot and dry conditions in June 1941 and made a chance observation:

"One thing stands out very clearly in my mind. It was on top of the Brailos Pass (near Thermopylae). The survivors of HMS Gloucester, about 30 sailors, trudged barefoot along the road in the garments they had been rescued in. A German officer stopped his vehicle at the sight of a bearded sailor whose feet were blood-stained and blistered. "Get in" he said in English. "No fear" replied the sailor, "I don't ride with any bloody Jerry" and he plodded on. That was the spirit that day. We expected nothing and asked nothing."

The sinking of the Gloucester is now well and truly part of Kytherian history and folklore.

George Vardas