

Levallois Medal

Citation for George Veis

By

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George Veis

The Committee consisting of all (living) IAG Past Presidents unanimously recommended to award at this General Assembly the Levallois Medal to George Veis. I have the honour (unfortunately not in person) to present the citation.

George was born in Athens in 1929. In 1951 he graduated in Surveying Engineering from the National Technical University of Athens (NTUA). In 1955 he was the recipient of a Greek state fellowship for advanced studies in Paris at the Sorbonne and the Ecole Nationale des Sciences Geographiques. He spent some time also at the Observatoire de Paris and at the Bureau Gravimetrique International. Starting in 1957 he continued his post-graduate studies at the Ohio State University where he was awarded with his PhD in 1958, after defending his famous dissertation on the "Geodetic Applications of Observations of the Moon, Artificial Satellites and Rockets".

I arrived at OSU on January 1, 1959, just missing him, when he left for the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory (SAO, later the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics). to arrive on the scene of satellite geodesy at its birth. The SAO had designed, built and deployed a global network of Baker Nunn Satellite Tracking Cameras. Though there were concerns about even being able to track satellites, there were plans to use satellite tracking for geodetic, and other scientific research.

George made the leap between those early hopes and their realisation. During 21 years as SAO's principal scientific consultant, he became the guiding hand of the program as it evolved from satellite surveillance to a satellite geodesy program. His contributions included the early idea of the Differential Orbit Improvement Program, which evolved over the years into the main analysis tool for satellite tracking, geopotential, station coordinate determination, and satellite drag research. He defined the fundamental reference system used for many years, which in fact now forms the basis of modern models of earth rotation, precession, and nutation. Seeing the need and feasibility he initiated the SAO Star Catalogue project, which provided a uniform all sky catalogue for precision camera observations, and was used for many years all over the world.

In the early sixties George Veis returned to the National Technical University of Athens where he was elected Professor of Surveying (renamed later Higher Geodesy and Cartography) to develop satellite geodesy in Greece. In 1969 he established the tracking station at Dionysos, installed a Baker-Nunn camera there, and began developing a laser ranging system. He had the vision of a complete geophysical observatory with, of course, satellite tracking, a meteorological observatory, earth tide monitoring, strain gauges, etc. He also developed surveys based on Transit Doppler measurements and GPS when the equipment became available. Dionysos contributed to the MERIT, MEDLAS, WEGENER and other programs. Between 1965 and 1984 George also organised the famous series of international symposia, in Lagonissi and Athens, on the "Use of Artificial Satellites for Geodesy and Geodynamics". The five volumes of the proceedings of these symposia document a great part of 20 years of geodetic history.

George Veis's career as a science-administrator is also rich. As a member of the NTUA's senate and the Dean of the Faculty of Surveying Engineering, he suffered a short but painful imprisonment by the military dictatorship at that time in Greece, because of his proper academic comportment during students protest which caused the furious reaction of the regime. He was the Secretary General of the Hellenic Committee for Geodesy and Geophysics, its President from 1982 to 1990 and he is now a regular member of this Committee. He was President of the Board of the Athens National Observatory and the

President of the Observatory's Scientific Council. He was the President of the Cadastre and Mapping Organization of Greece and the President of the National Consultative Council for Research. He also presided over several IAG/IUGG and COSPAR organizations.

George retired from the NTUA in 1997. The ETH of Zurich honored him with an Honorary Doctor's degree. He still is active, in fact in a key position as the President of the important Supreme Council for Personnel Selection, a state authority responsible for the selection of personnel for the public administration in Greece. George Veis is an endlessly creative, engaging, seducing, elegant, modern and forever young scientist, who shares his ideas with enthusiasm, and has helped everyone he has had contact with.

I have the great pleasure and honour to hand over (in spirit) the Levallois Medal in recognition of his distinguished service to the science of geodesy to my old friend and colleague George Veis.