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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

TRANSLATION VII/141

KESSELRING'S PLAN FOR THE
INVASION OF MALTA

TRANSLATED BY
AIR MINISTRY, A.H.B.6
MAY, 1955

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Operations Division I a,
C.-in-C. South

31 May 1942

To: Comando Supremo
His Excellency General Count Cavallero.

I enclose herewith a plan for Operation C 3 ("Hercules") and ask you to regard it as a suggestion for the general outline of the invasion.

For convenience I have had a special "C 3" Staff formed on my Staff to deal with further questions arising from the enclosed memorandum, in particular questions of logistics and communications. For the special tasks in connection with the operations of German paratroops I have proposed that officers of Fliegerkorps XI be attached to this special staff.

Signed: Kesselring
Field Marshal

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Plans for Preparation and Execution of Operation C 3 ("Hercules")

- I. 8 - 14 days after the end of the fighting in North Africa the German-Italian air offensive against Malta to be resumed.

(See Appendix 1: General Timetable).

During this interval the air forces are to move to their new bases for rest and refitting.

- II. During the same interval German air force units to be reorganized as follows:

- (1) II Fliegerkorps (see Appendix 2)

The main body of X Fliegerkorps and of Fliegerführer Afrika to join II Fliegerkorps in Sicily, leaving those forces shown in Appendix 2 at the disposal of X Fliegerkorps and Fliegerführer Afrika from X - 1 Day onwards for reconnaissance and bombing. A further two bomber Gruppen and possibly one fighter Gruppe are expected to follow.

- (2) XI Fliegerkorps

(a) The XI Fliegerkorps formations shown in Appendix 3 comprising three paratroop regiments and division and corps personnel to be transferred to the new operational bases by rail, commencing about X - 30 Day in France, so that they are ready by X - 2 Day. This mass railway movement can be camouflaged to some extent by the spreading of rumours about drafts to the Russian front or suchlike.

For security reasons special measures to be taken in southern Italy and Sicily, e.g. some troops to be sent by sea to Sicily.

- (b) Transport Gruppen will be made available as follows:

1 transport Gruppe from the forces under C.-in-C. South (60 aircraft);

6 - 8 transport Gruppen each of 53 aircraft, either Ju 52 or He 111, from the forces under C.-in-C. Luftwaffe.

These transport Gruppen are being fitted out for their special operations. They have yet to be trained and exercised with the airborne and paratroop units.

The essential part of this training is expected to be completed in the 7th Flieger Division area - France. On no account must any training take place in or near Sicily.

Air transport units will not be transferred from Apulia to Sicily until the very last minute on X-Day.

Fliegerführer 7 will be in command of all the air transport forces.

- III The following tasks to be carried out before the preliminary operations commence:

- (1) Intensified reconnaissance so that no defence works escape notice;

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- (2) Horizontal and oblique photography of the coastline at the proposed beachheads;
- (3) Both German and Italian forces to interfere with enemy air activity by raiding bases and engaging aircraft in the air;
- (4) Interference with reconstruction work or the building of new installations of special military importance.

IV. The preliminary operations, which are calculated to cover a period of 20 days, to be carried out on the German side by II Fliegerkorps:

- (1) The first essential to regain command of the air by all-out bomber and fighter effort. The battle to go on day and night until this end is achieved. In this kind of battle it is assumed that the heavy bombers can be defeated simultaneously with the enemy fighters.

Should the enemy fighter and bomber forces be reinforced, first priority again to be given to maintaining absolute command of the air.

- (2) In the course of these operations a final accurate low-level reconnaissance to be made of defence installations, for use during the second stage of the battle. Aircraft making the reconnaissance should endeavour to attack the installations with bombs and machine-gun fire.

- (3) At the end of the first week of preliminary operations systematic attacks on all defence installations to commence. These attacks to be planned in such a way that the enemy is unable to deduce the landing points in advance. With extreme meticulousness all A.A. gun emplacements to be singled out and eliminated by dive bombing and low-level attacks. The main weight of these attacks to be directed against A.A. defences on and around airfields. Total destruction of the A.A. defences in the invasion area can, and indeed must, be achieved.

During the same period tentative attacks to be made with diverse forces to ascertain how far coastal batteries and forts can be put out of action. Targets to be chosen entirely on the north or east side of the island.

- (4) During the second week attacks to continue on fortifications as targets of opportunity. Persistent A.A. opposition to be subjected to concentrated attack. In the third week systematic elimination of all defence installations near airfields and landing sectors to take prime consideration.

These latter attacks to follow a plan specially devised to conceal their real purpose. Depots and barracks believed to be in use by the enemy in this sector to be destroyed. Special attention to be given to all targets which could serve for the accommodation, repair or movement of tanks, vehicles etc.

- (5) The final objective of these preliminary operations is that Malta shall be put out of action as an air base on X - 1 day and that the air, ground and coastal defences in the advanced landing area be reduced to a minimum.

- (6) For the stationing of German forces during the preliminary operations see Appendix 4.

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V. X-DAY

(See Timetable for X-Day, Appendix 5)

(1) Because of the many preparations being made by all three services in Sicily and Southern Italy, it would be absolutely impossible for us to achieve strategic surprise for many reasons.

All measures should be directed towards gaining a tactical surprise in selecting the time and place of the initial landing. For the same reasons separate plans and preparations must be made for the movement of supplies into Sicily for transport by air and also for bringing up the second and subsequent waves of airborne troops. Consideration must be given to the capacity of the railways in Italy and Sicily and use will have to be made of shipping transport.

(2) In the early morning of X-Day, as on previous days nuisance raids to be carried out against targets over the entire island and in particular against defence installations which continue to offer opposition to our raiders. Such defences to be obliterated directly afterwards in pinpoint attacks.

(a) Between 0800 and 0900 a full-scale attack by all German forces against

(i) defence installations in the landing areas

(ii) anti-invasion measures which could frustrate the airborne operation

(iii) airfields.

(b) At the take-off of the bomber formations, all German troops to commence disembarkation in the prearranged Sicilian ports.

(c) German and Italian troop transports to take off for the first landings to be effected at 1330 (Zero Hour).

Operational Orders: low level flight;

T/E fighter escort;

accurate location of landing grounds, careful plotting of the positions to be captured first, any A.A. emplacements in the vicinity of the latter to be attacked and put out of action immediately.

Wave after wave of attack to be made against defences in the landing area and its environs until the first Ju's etc. become visible over the south coast, and at the time of the actual landings all emplacements in the vicinity to be pinned down by continuous attacks. Principal targets to be those actively opposing the airborne troops.

(d) At the time when the Ju 52's take off, Senior Signals Officer, C.-in-C. South will initiate special measures to jam all radar and fighter R/T on the island.

(e) In addition to the straight escort for the Ju formations, patrols in strength to keep a close watch on enemy airfields and pounce on any aircraft trying to take off.

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(3) Italian Air Force Operations on X-Day

Consideration has been given to Italian Air Force operations only to the following extent:

- (a) At zero hour the Italian Paratroop Regiment to land simultaneously with the German forces.

A second wave of paratroops and the first supplies for paratroops may be dropped on the same day.

- (b) During the preliminary operations, Italian fighter, bomber and ground attack aircraft have been counted on for 2 - 3 operations a day, and on X-Day and after for 5 - 6 a day.

- (c) A mutual agreement to be reached as to whether on X-Day and the following days the main body of the Italian forces included in the German operations should operate simultaneously in different target areas or at different times in the same area. (Appendix 5 is based on the latter plan.)

In addition Italian forces to take part in the attack on the Benghaisa and Delimara forts.

In the same way agreement to be reached on operations during the night of X to X + 1 Day.

- (4) By dusk further waves of paratroop battalions, as well as the first supplies and requisite heavy armament, to be dropped. Further to that mentioned in V(2) above, bombers to maintain a continuous patrol over the entire area and attack any enemy reserves attempting to come up. Special attention to be given to destroying tanks. Bombers to act as close range artillery in capturing strongholds which the paratroops need to consolidate the bridgehead. Bomber formations therefore to be allocated to individual regiments dropped, for close support.

- (5) The airborne troops (gliders) to land in the territory between Calafra and Fort Benghaisa at dusk, capture the fort and the coastline and establish a defence line towards the west along the road from Fort Benghaisa to Calafra Bay or immediately to the west of the coastline.

The following air tactics to be observed:

- (a) Fort Benghaisa and Fort Delimara to be bombed out of action;
- (b) All known defence installations to be attacked until just before the landing takes place;
- (c) A smoke screen to be laid across the territory in question from the east or the west, according to the prevailing wind.
- (d) From the beginning of this black-out nuisance raids to be made against the coastline in the Bay of Marsa Scirocco, from where anti-invasion operations could be launched.

Just before dark, dummies to be dropped by parachute during these raids as a feint.

- (6) Appendix 6 contains a plan for accommodating the forces under C.-in-C. South for X-Day.

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VI The invasion convoy to sail not later than the time when the Ju 52's take off: Operational orders:

(a) The battle groups due to land in the south-west sector of the island of Malta to start going ashore not later than 2400 (Beachhead to be secured previously by the XI Fliegerkorps forces already landed).

(b) The landings to be so arranged that the assault parties go ashore first, followed by the tanks, guns etc., and finally by the infantry and supplies of arms and ammunition.

(c) The assault parties for Gozo and for diversionary attacks to sail in time to land during the morning.

(d) Arrival of the seaborne landing party for Calafra to take place at night and to be carefully timed so that

(i) a smoke screen is laid by naval units 15 minutes before the landing is carried out;

(ii) the Siebel ferries with 8.8 cm. guns sail into the eastern and northern part of the Bay of Marsa Scirocco immediately after the smoke screen is laid;

(iii) the midget craft (including swimming troops) go ashore during the night to join up with the airborne forces landed during the evening and mop up the landing area.

The landing forces will then go ashore north of Calafra. It is desired that the major landing near Calafra should be carried out by the naval force under Admiral Weichold.

From dawn on X + 1 Day on this beachhead German and Italian air forces will co-operate with Italian naval units in destroying enemy coastal batteries, particularly those which might shell Marsa Scirocco.

VII (a) Further activity of the German Air Force will depend upon existing tactical circumstances.

During the night of X + 1 Day (new moon) air operations will have to be confined to such targets as are clearly distinguishable and in no way affect our own troops (e.g. the entrances to Valetta, attacking searchlights). Liberal use of flares and delayed action bombs.

(b) Duties of the airborne troops for X Day and X + 1 night will be to gain the positions as ordered and maintain them against all attack, and to mop up the beachheads and support the seaborne landing.

(c) On X + 1 Day ⁺ the territory between Calafra and Zurriek to be captured and the airfields at Hal Far and Krendi to be prepared for airborne landings. May be necessary for covering parties to advance towards Gzira and a line Kirkop - Imkabba. Further objective mopping up and securing entire Bay of Marsa Scirocco so that further landings from the sea can be made without danger.

VIII From X + 1 Day the Fleet will be drawn up broadly to the south-west of Malta.

/Possible

Tr.N.: ⁺ Pencil note reads: " ? Seems doubtful. Depends on the quality of the landing places encountered."

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Possible targets for the Fleet to assist in the invasion operations would be:-

- (1) The camps on the west coast and in Mellieha Bay, to support feint landings and diversionary attacks north of the Victoria Lines.
- (2) Valetta to be cut off by encirclement, shore batteries on the east coast to be pinned down by bombardment.
- (3) Troops in the Victoria Line to be pinned down.

IX

It is desired that the German and Italian paratroop and airborne troops should work in the closest co-operation.

I am therefore in complete agreement with the Comando Supremo's proposal that the tactical command of these forces should be taken over by the H.Q. of German XI Fliegerkorps.

The area suggested for the first landing to establish a bridgehead corresponds with the views I have expressed in earlier discussion.

(Signed) Kesselring
Field Marshal.

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ON OF GERMAN AND ITALIAN INVASION OF MALTA

• SALERNO

• MATERO

TARANTO

GROTTAGLIE

BRINDISI

MANDURIA

LECCE

SEA

LAND

36

12

18

6

36

6

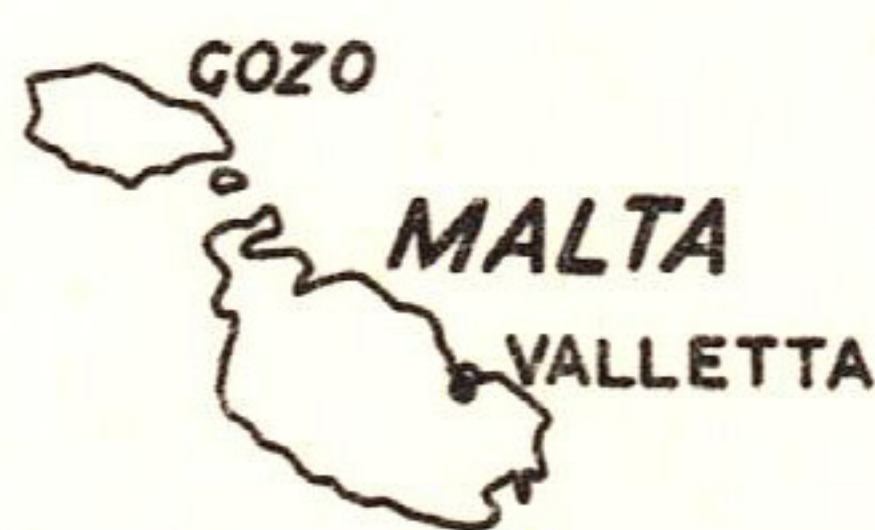
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	ITALIAN	GERMAN
BOMBERS	270	216
FIGHTERS	222	189
TORPEDO BOMBERS	36	
GROUND ATTACK	168	27
TRANSPORT	170	216
AIR-SEA RESCUE	24	18
GLIDERS		(27)
TOTAL (1506)	890	666

AIRFIELDS

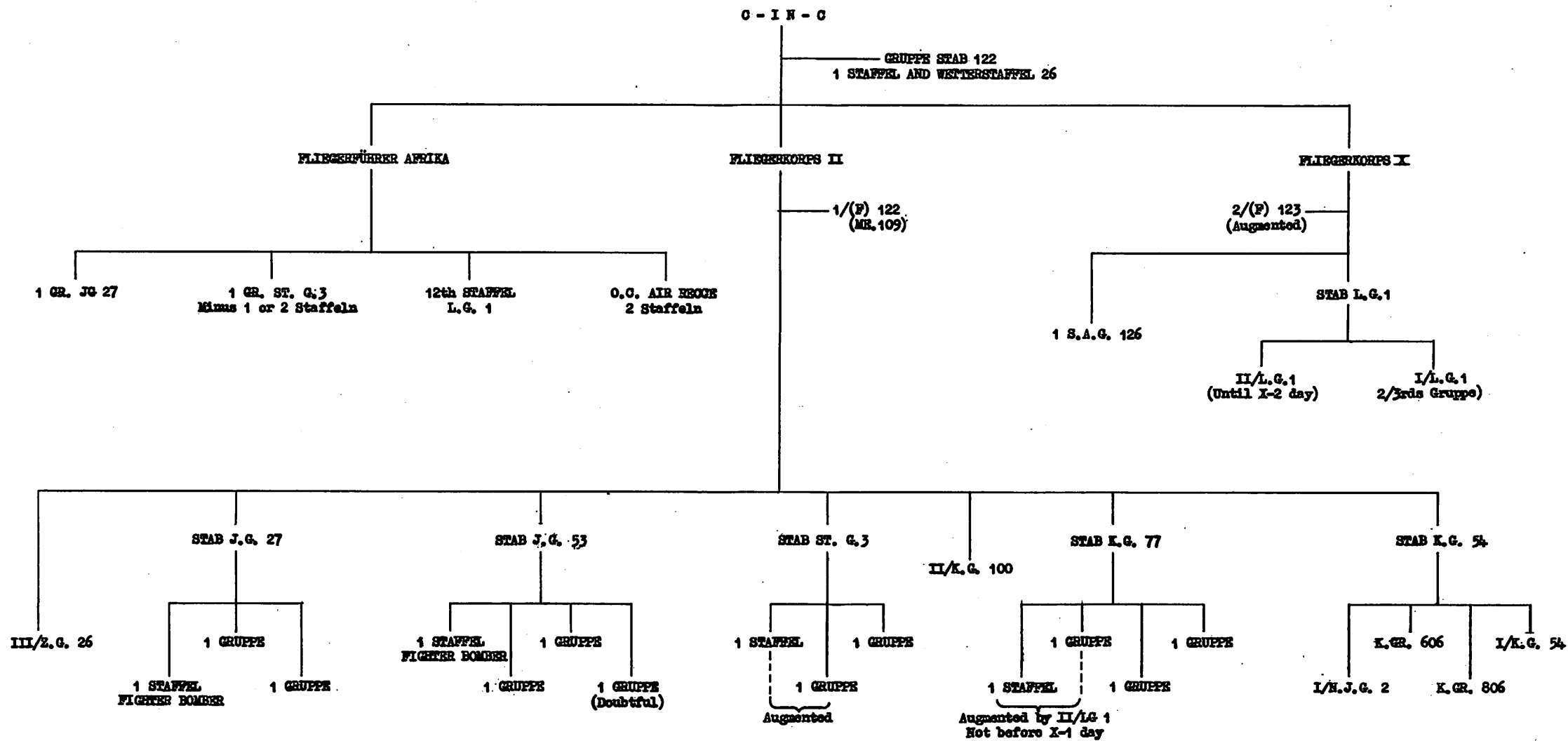


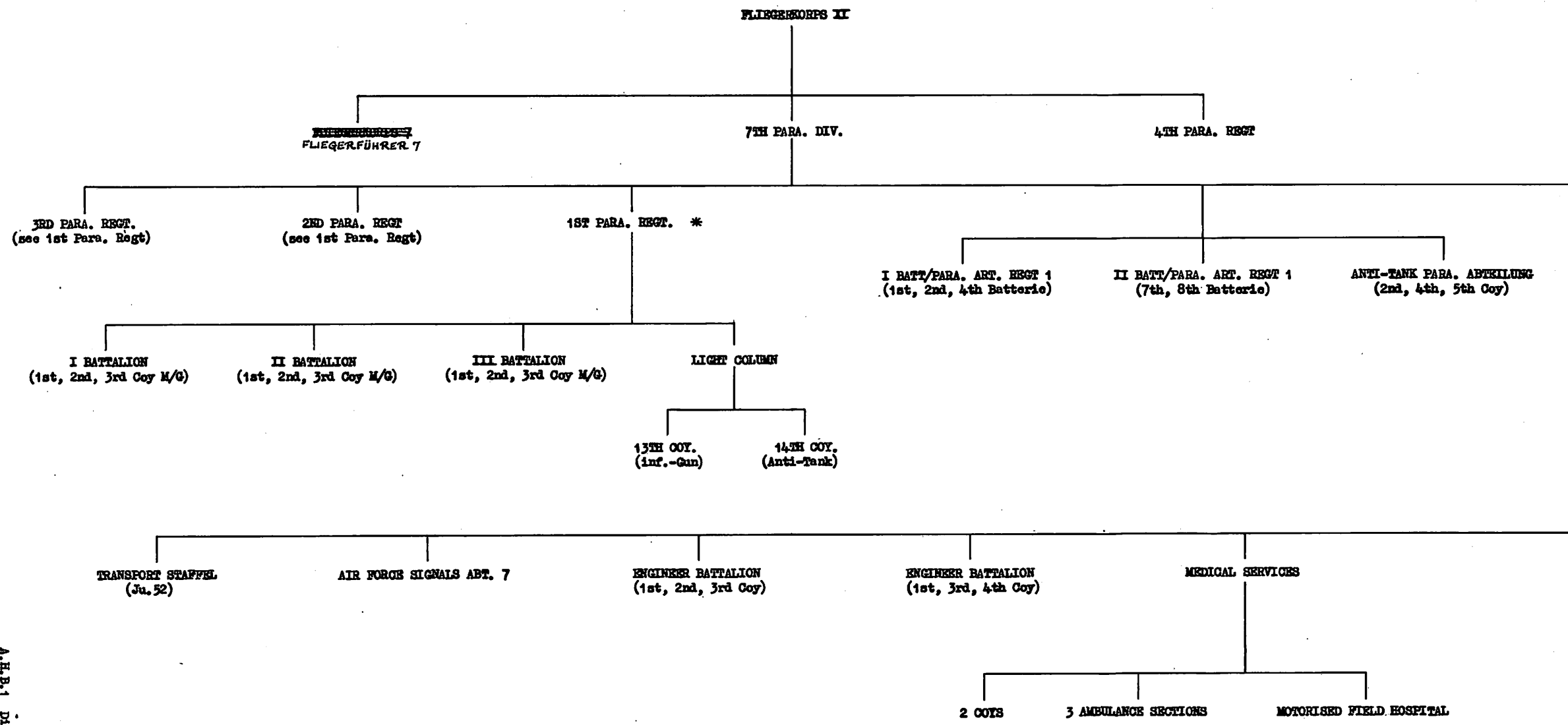
General Timetable

<u>Day</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Operation</u>
X - 31 Day	15 - 18 June ⁽¹⁾	<u>End of "Theseus"</u>
X - 30 to X - 21 Day	19 - 28 June ⁽²⁾	<u>Interval</u> Movement of units to new bases, rest and refitting. During this interval: renewed reconnaissance of Malta, engagement of enemy air force on small scale, interference with reconstruction work.
X - 20 to X - 1 Day	29 June - 17 July ⁽³⁾	<u>Preliminary Operations:</u> (a) all-out assault of enemy air force and air defences (b) destruction of enemy installations (c) destruction of enemy installations in and near the future landing zone.
X Day	18 July	<u>Invasion of Malta</u>

- (1) Altered in pencil to "17 June"
(2) Altered in pencil to "18 - 27 June"
(3) Altered in pencil to "28 June"

ORDER OF BATTLE OF C-IN-C SOUTH'S FORCES ON X-1 DAY





* GERMAN REGIMENT IS APPROXIMATELY EQUIVALENT TO BRITISH BRIGADE.

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Appendix 4

GERMAN FORCES DURING PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS

Italy

VIBO
REGGIO

1 Transport Gruppe
2 Transport Gruppe

Sicily

CATANIA

1 Gruppe 606
1 Gruppe 806
Stab and I/KG54
I/NJG2

GERBINI

Stab KG77 and 2 Gruppen
1 Staffel and 1 Gruppe LG/1

GELA

Stab JG27 and 2 Gruppen
2 Staffeln fighter bombers

COMISO

Stab JG53 and 3 Gruppen
III/ZG26

PACHINO

Stab St.G.3 and 2 Gruppen
(8 Staffeln)

TRAPANI

Stab and Gruppe 122
1 Wetterstaffel

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APPENDIX 5

TIMETABLE FOR X-DAY

H - 7 to H - 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours	After the night raids - Nuisance raids and T/E fighter attacks (St.G.3 / JG 27)
H - 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ to H - 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours	Large scale attacks against (a) defence installations (b) air defences (c) airfields
H - 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours	Transport Gruppen to be brought up
H - 4 to H - 2	Italian fighter and bomber operations
H - 2 to H - $\frac{1}{2}$	7 German Transport Gruppen take off plus glider units and escort (III/ZG 26, JG 53)
H - $\frac{1}{2}$ to H	Neutralisation of landing area (KG 54, part of JG 53)
H to H + 10 min.	First wave of paratroops (inc. Italian units) to be dropped. Strength about 2 German, 1 Italian Rgt. = 9 Battalions and heavy weapons)
H + 10 min. to H + 70 min.	Neutralisation of vicinity of landing area and support for paratroops (St. G.3 and fighter-bombers). Patrol over airfields (part of JG 27)
Until H + about 2	Support of paratroops (2 bomber Gruppen and part of JG 53)
H + 2 to H + 3 $\frac{1}{2}$	Italian fighter and bomber operations to neutralise defences in vicinity of landing area
H + 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ to H + 6	Waves of German bomber attacks to maintain uninterrupted support of paratroops
H + 4 $\frac{1}{4}$	Landing of first half of second wave (3 Transport Gruppen Comiso) 2 German battalions plus first supplies of ammunition
H + 5 $\frac{1}{2}$	Landing of second half of second wave (4 Gruppen from Gerbini and Reggio with supplies of arms and ammunition)
H + 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ to H + 5 $\frac{3}{4}$	Attack on Fort Benghaisa and Fort Delimara (Main body of Stuka 3 and Italian forces)
also	Pinning down of defence installations (III/ZG 26, part of I/NJG 2, JG 27 and Italian forces)
from H + 5 hr.50 min	Dropping of dummies, smoke screen to be laid (II/KG 100)
H + 6	Paratroop and glider landings at Benghaisa
then	Commencement of dusk and night raids on the entrances to Valetta etc.

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