

HISTORICAL BRANCH

SECRET

TRANSLATION NO. VII/24.

THE INVASION

OF

CRETE

A report issued by Luftflotte 4  
and dated 28th November, 1941.

**RESTRICTED**

TRANSLATED BY: -

A. H. B. 6.  
Air Ministry.

30.4.1947.

TOP SECRET

Luftflotte 4.

H.Q. 23th November, 1941.

THE INVASION OF CRETE

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(A) PREPARATIONS

1. The significance of Crete (See Chart 1.) caused Luftflotte 4 to consider the occupation of the island as a sequel to the operations in Greece.

As the result of several conferences between the Chief of General Staff, the Chief of Staff of Luftflotte 4, the Chief of Staff Fliegerkorps XI and the Commander of Flieger division 7, the plan to conquer Crete by employing Fliegerkorps XI was first proposed to the Reichsmarschall by the C. in C. Luftflotte 4 on the 15th April, 1941.

While the operations in Greece were still in progress, the Commanding General of Fliegerkorps XI was summoned to a conference with the Reichsmarschall and the Chief of General Staff of the Luftwaffe on the 20th April, 1941. The plan was approved by the Fuehrer and Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht on the 21st May, and Luftflotte 4 was given command of the necessary Army and Navy detachments.

II. In the preparation for and execution of, the operations in Crete however, the utmost difficulty was encountered; these difficulties had to be overcome in the shortest possible time and with very limited means, and improvisations of all kinds were necessary.

1. The conquest of the island had to take place between the conclusion of operations in Greece and the start of a new campaign.

2. The bringing up of our flying units was dependant on the already existing, and inadequate Ground organisation. In consequence, our units had to operate as shown in Chart 2.

As all available units under the command of Ob.d.L. and Luftflotte 4 were engaged on preparations for the new campaign, only limited improvements of the Ground organisation in Greece were possible, (P.O.W. labour etc.)

3. Supplies had to be carried by sea, as the railways could not be repaired within the short space of time. For transport however, not only sufficient tonnage, but also the necessary protection along the routes and suitable harbours were lacking. In spite of this, the Admiral Commanding the South Eastern Area overcame these difficulties and succeeded in building up and maintaining the sea route as the main channel of supply. The greatest difficulty proved to be the supply of aircraft fuel, due to the shortage of tankers.

The supply column proved inadequate to transport the supplies from the harbours to the Airfields until reinforced by the 12th Army. Air transport also failed to provide any relief, as all Ju.52's available were being held by the Fliegerkorps for troop carrying in the actual attack.

4. With our limited resources, the many difficulties in Signals transmissions could never quite be overcome in these large countries recently overrun by war and where everything had to be started anew.

The Signal Detachment of the Navy had already been transferred to another battlefield and could thus afford us no assistance in this task.

5. For Ground Duties only 3 operational Airfield Commands of Fliegerkorps VIII were available and thus only half an Airfield Servicing Company could be spared for each Transport Gruppe.

6. The different Staffs being all quartered in Athens, it was easy for them to remain in personal touch; written orders could therefore quickly be implemented by verbal ones as the ever changing situation demanded.

The preparations for the campaign itself were further facilitated by the presence of the Chief of General Staff of the Luftwaffe at the H.Q. of Luftflotte and; decisions on any aspect of the campaign were thus obtainable within the shortest possible space of time.

(B) PREPARATORY MEASURES  
PRIOR TO THE ATTACK (20TH MAY, 1941)

- I. Fliegerkorps VIII, in addition to restoring its operational readiness and taking part in the actual attack, also carried out the following tasks during this period.
- (1) Protection of our supply ships against submarines, and reconaissance of the entire sea area against enemy surface craft.
  - (2) Constant observation of the sea around Crete and attacks on enemy troopships and warships.
  - (3) Preparatory attacks against Crete itself.
    - (a) On ships in Suda Bay, particularly warships, to reduce their defensive strength against our airborne landings.
    - (b) Attacks on the Ground organization to destroy the Air Forces based on the island.
    - (c) Attacks on anti-aircraft positions to weaken the defences.

Fliegerkorps VIII was very successful in all these tasks. During this preparatory period, 27 ships were damaged or sunk, 34 aircraft shot down or destroyed on the ground, and 20 other aircraft were badly damaged.

As a result of these attacks, as was proved later, the enemy was forced to withdraw his Air Force units from Crete immediately prior to the 20th May, except for a very few aircraft.

- II. Fliegerkorps XI deployed its forces for the Crete campaign as follows:-

- (1) The bulk of the 7th Division was brought from the Reich by railway as far as Arad and the Craiova area, and thence by road via Sofia and Salonika to the Attika area, where they joined up with the other units of the Division stationed near Corinth.
- (2) The proposed transfer of the 22nd Infantry Division from Bucarest to Attika had to be abandoned in view of the general transport situation. The 5th Mountain Division was therefore reinforced and detailed for the airborne landings under the command of Fliegerkorps XI.
- (3) Most of the transport units attached to Fliegerkorps XI were engaged on carrying supplies during the Yugoslav and Greek campaigns and were therefore badly in need of overhaul. Nevertheless, during the short time between the 2nd and 12th May, this work was carried out, thanks to the ceaseless efforts of workshops in the Reich and the co-operation of the Chief of Works Department.

The assembly of Fliegerkorps XI was completed on the 14th May.

### III. Admiral Commanding South-Eastern Area

The Navy, in addition to bearing the responsibility of provisioning existing shipping, had also to provide sufficient ships to carry heavy arms and other supplies to Crete. For this purpose, the following craft were assembled:-

(1) 2 Motor-sailing flotillas formed from the very few ships left in Greek waters, to carry across to Crete the first heavy arms and supplies.

(2) 2 Steamer flotillas, to carry across to Crete further heavy arms, anti-aircraft guns, and tanks, and to keep open the sea supply route to the island.

(3) German and Italian minesweepers to sweep the sea around Crete, the landing points of our ships and Suda Bay.

### IV. Deployment of Anti-Aircraft Batteries.

1. Our available batteries had to defend:-

- (a) The Ground organisation on the Greek mainland.
- (b) The harbours of Piraeus and Patras,
- (c) The Corinth Canal,
- (d) Ships going across to Crete,
- (e) Newly captured bases in Crete.

2. The following units were placed at the disposal of Fliiegerkorps XI for the defence of shipping and of newly captured positions on Crete:-

- (a) Flak (Lehr) Regiment II, self propelled, for mobile operations on Crete.
- (b) Light Anti Aircraft Unit 73 of the 5th Mountain Division to defend the landing points.
- (c) Anti Aircraft M.G. Unit 609
- (d) 2 heavy, 1 light A.A. battery of the 201st Flak Regiment to defend Suda Bay.

3. The defence of other localities to be protected on the Greek mainland is shown in attached Chart No.3.

V. The following strategically important islands were occupied by 12th Army or the Luftwaffe:-

- Kythira; Antikythera, as Anti Aircraft bases.
- Melos, for supply shipping and Air Sea Rescue.
- Skarpante, as a base for fighter air Stukas.

VI. The enemy, prior to his departure from Greece, had organised an efficient system of intelligence, and with the help of this, and of reconnaissance, were well informed about the operational strength on Greek airfields and movements of ships. Nightly bombing attacks on our preparations however, produced little tangible effect.

(c) SUGGESTED METHODS OF ATTACK

I. There were three possible ways in which the campaign could be executed.

(a) Proposal by Luftflotte 4

Occupation of the Western parts of Crete (Maleme to Canea) thus conquering the islands by the advance of both Divisions from West to East.

Advantage: Heavy concentration and thus quick and absolute supremacy in one place even if the enemy were stronger there than is anticipated. Full protection of paratroop landings by Fliegerkorps VIII.

Disadvantage: Difficult and possibly long drawn out battles in the mountains which would give the enemy an opportunity to make use of his airfields in the East, - at least to a certain degree.

(b) Proposal by Fliegerkorps XI

Simultaneous occupation by landings at approximately seven of the most important points on the island, including Maleme, Canea, Retimo and Candia.

Advantage: The important points on the island would immediately be in our possession and the island would be quickly conquered.

Disadvantage: The detachments to land at each of these points would be weak, support by Fliegerkorps VIII not possible at all points. Success doubtful in the face of a stronger enemy.

(c) Decision by the High Command of the Luftwaffe

Conquest of the island by occupying the four most important points at intervals, so as to enable Fliegerkorps VIII to provide the maximum protection. In the morning the Western part (Maleme and Canea), is to be occupied and consolidated; in the afternoon the Eastern part (Retimo and Candia).

II. 1. To obtain information about the enemy the following measures were taken immediately on conclusion of operations on the Greek mainland.

(a) Air Reconnaissance

Two reconnaissance units of Fliegerkorps VIII were detailed to maintain a continuous watch on movements of shipping around Crete, to ascertain the shipping in Crete harbours and the location of enemy Air Force Units.

One reconnaissance unit of Fliegerkorps XI was detailed to ascertain the airfields, fortifications, artillery positions and troop garrisons on Crete.

(b) The Intelligence Organisation of Admiral Canaris tried to get a clear picture of the situation in Crete, the number of troops as well as British defence preparations, by sending and interrogating reliable agents.

(c) The systematic interrogation of prisoners captured by the 12th Army.

2. The information thus obtained gave the following picture of the enemy dispositions:-

(a) The strategically most important harbour on Crete, Suda Bay, is weakly protected by warships, but is used by a large and fluctuating number of merchant ships. Apart from this, only limited landing possibilities at Retimo, Candia, Gulf of Mirabella, and the Bay of Mesara.

(b) There are serviceable airfields, with runways, at Maleme and Candia as well as one landing ground at Retimo. The average strength on these airfields is altogether 25 to 40 aircraft, mainly fighters, with a few bombers.

(c) A.A. defences are strong around Canea, Suda Bay, and at Maleme airfield, Retimo and Candia.

(d) According to reports from agents and prisoners, the estimated strength on the island is one Division plus troops which managed to escape from Greece.

The constant watch on sea traffic to and from Crete gave no clear indication whether these movements were in connection with evacuation or landing, or were simply for supply purposes. It was impossible to maintain an accurate watch on convoys in waters in and around Crete, as all incoming and outgoing traffic in Suda Bay, like all sea traffic around Crete, always took place at night.

(e) The attitude of Crete's population was uncertain but it was considered possible that in order to receive better treatment they would as the Greek population did, sympathise with the Axis powers, or at least remain completely neutral.

(f) Extensive photographic reconnaissance failed to identify any important fortifications. All that was known from the reports by our agents was that there were natural caves in existence which could be used for supply dumps.

(g) The nature of the terrain on the island limited the execution of the parachute and airborne landings to the three places along the North coast where airfields existed. Here again, these being the key points to the island, a strong defence had to be reckoned with.

The reason why the estimates of the enemy's strength did not quite coincide with the actual position, was that the English had started their strong defensive preparations on the island very early on, in fact long before the commencement of German operations in S.E. Europe, and also because they had succeeded in camouflaging all fortifications particularly well. Some of the A.A. sites identified on photographs were found to be decoys whilst the real site had not been located.

The reports from agents, which were usually contradictory, could not give a clear picture of the situation in the short space of time available.

The British were determined to defend Crete and to hold it; during the operations they fought extremely tenaciously and did not spare the use of their naval forces.

The British realised that the attack on Crete could only be carried out as an airborne operation and thus their defence was prepared for it. Around the airfields and all other points which could have been used for landing purposes, strong defensive bases were set up, special attention being paid to the possible effect of heavy bombardment of the airfields.

The effective strength of the island was considerably greater than had been previously estimated. It was afterwards found that the approximate strength was as follows:-

22,000 men  
 24 combat Battalions  
 1 Artillery regiment.  
 40 Tanks.

In addition, the civil population of Crete sided with the British and participated actively in the battles, especially in the West of the island.

(D) ORDER OF BATTLE AND OPENING OF OPERATIONS

I. Order of Battle.

At the end of all preparations on the 19th May, 1941 the following units were in a state of operational readiness:-

(1) Fliegerkorps XI

- (a) 1 Reconnaissance Staffel.
- (b) Fliegerkorps XI with 10 bomber Gruppen (special duties)
- (c) 7th Fliegerdivision with 3 Parachute Regts.
- (d) 1 Assault Regt., Parachute Engineer Battalion, Parachute M.G. Battalion, Parachute Medical Unit.
- (e) Parachute M.G. A.A. Battalion.
- (f) Reinforced 5th Mountain Division with three Mountain Rifle Regts. (one from the 6th Mountain Division).
- (g) Motor-cycle Battalion 55.
- (h) II/Panzer Regiment 31.
- (i) II/A.A. Lehr Regt. and eight A.A. Detachment 84.
- (j) Part of the 6th Mountain Division (Still attached to 12th army) in reserve.

(2) Fliegerkorps VIII

- (a) K.G.2. with 3 Bomber Gruppen (Do.17).
- (b) L.G.1. with 2 Bomber Gruppen (Ju.88).  
 (with additional Bomber Gruppen.)  
 One Bomber Gruppe of H.E.III of Fliegerkorps X was also available.

/ (c)

- (c) St. G.2. with 3 Stuka Gruppen.
  - (d) J.G. 77 with 3 Fighter Gruppen.
  - (e) Z.G. 26 with 3 Fighter-bomber Gruppen.
  - (f) 2 Reconnaissance Staffeln.
- (3). II/K.G.4. - for mine-laying operations in the Suez Canal.
- (4) Sea Reconnaissance Gruppe 126 with 2 Staffeln.
- (5) 7th Air Sea Rescue Staffel, reinforced by aircraft of Luftflotte 4.
- (6) Admiral Commanding South-Eastern Area formed the following:
- 2 Motor sailing flotillas No.1 and 2 consisting of 63 ships.
  - 2 Steamer flotillas consisting of 7 merchant ships.

The following was loaded on the Motor sailing ships.

1 Battalion of the 6th Mountain Division.  
 Personnel and materials of all kinds for the 7th Flieger Division, excluding those dropped or loaded by air transport.  
 Carrier animals and materials for the 5th Mountain Division excluding those landed by air transport.  
 Ammunition and supplies.

The following was loaded on the Steamers.

A.A. guns.  
 Heavy guns.  
 Tanks,  
 Heavy equipment of Fliegerkorps XI and 5th Mountain Division.  
 Ammunition.  
 Supplies.

Naval protection was to be provided by the following Italian units, under the command of Captain Count Pecori-Giraldi:-

- 2 Destroyers.
- 12 Torpedo-boats.
- Speed-boats.
- Minesweepers.

## II. Operational orders.

The plan is to be carried out in accordance with instructions from the High Command of the Luftwaffe, as follows:-

Fliegerkorps XI had to occupy with the first wave on the morning of the first day, the airfield at Maleme and the enemy's positions around Canea and Suda Bay, whilst the second wave, in the afternoon of the first day, was detailed to occupy the airfields at Retimo and Candia in order to proceed with the airborne landings of the mountain rifle troops at Maleme and Candia the following day.

/ Fliegerkorps

Fliegerkorps VIII was detailed to carry out preparatory attacks early in the morning of the first day, to destroy the British Air Force Units remaining on Crete and to neutralise the ground defences. Furthermore, to provide protection for the landings of the 1st and 2nd wave of Fliegerkorps XI and to support them in their battles on the island. Also to protect their own ships and to destroy any enemy naval forces as soon as they appeared in Cretan waters.

Admiral Commanding South-Eastern Area was requested to arrange the approach of minesweepers and the motor sailing flotillas in such a way that the landing of the first Group would take place at Canea in the evening of the second day, and the landing of the second Group at Candia in the evening of the third day. The steamer Flotilia was to be ready to put to sea as soon as Suda Bay was reported to be clear of mines and of enemy forces.

### III. First Day of attack. 20th May. 1941.

#### 1. Preliminary attacks by Fliegerkorps VIII

At daybreak, Fliegerkorps VIII started their attack to destroy enemy defences as well as any of their remaining aircraft. These attacks were directed at the Maleme airfields, Candia and A.A. positions in the sector Maleme - Canea - Candia. Both these attacks were completely successful. During the subsequent landings of Fliegerkorps XI not a single enemy fighter was encountered in the air. Further preliminary attacks by Fliegerkorps VIII were cancelled at the express orders of the G.O.C. Fliegerkorps XI in order to avoid giving premature warning to the island.

Thus the only task left for Fliegerkorps VIII was the reconnaissance of the Cretan waters, and all forces necessary to fight off any approaching warships were held in readiness at Attika and Skarpanto.

#### 2. Landing of the first wave of Fliegerkorps XI with Fliegerkorps VIII in support.

(I) During the approach of A.A. Fliegerkorps XI according to plan, all A.A. sites and troop points were attacked by Fliegerkorps VIII in direct support of the landings, in order to neutralise the defences as far as possible and to deal the enemy a decisive blow at the very outset. The following operations were carried out in accordance with the plan, arrived at between the VIII and XI Fliegerkorps:-

(a) Stuka attacks on the A.A. sites at the landing places at Maleme and Canea.

(b) Bombing attacks on the three tented camps South of Maleme - Canea.

(c) Bombing attacks on telephone communications in the vicinity of Ierapetra, Candia, Retimo and Canea.

(d) Attacks by the Italian Air Force, Aegean Command on garrisons at Candia and Retimo, in order to weaken the enemy right at the beginning of the battle.

(II) The landings themselves were effectively supported by fighter and fighter-bomber units, who attacked the ground defences in the immediate vicinity of the landing-places, and by bomber units, who attacked more distant A.A. sites.

The success of this support can be judged by the fact that, in spite of the most careful preparations by the enemy, only 7 Ju.52's out of 500 were lost.

(III) The landing of the first wave of the Fliegerkorps XI, as far as the landings themselves were concerned, took place according to plan. The following units were landed:-

(a) Western Group, consisting of:-

- 4 Special-purpose bomber Gruppen, (transport aircraft)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  Special-purpose bomber Gruppen, with gliders.
- The Assault Regt. (except  $\frac{1}{2}$  Battalion).
- 1 Company of the Parachute - A.A. M.G. Battalion.
- 1 Parachute Medical unit.

(b) Centre Group, consisting of:-

- 5 Special-purpose bomber Gruppen, (transport aircraft)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  Battalion of the Storm Regt.
- 1 Parachute Rifle Regt.
- The bulk of the Parachute Engineer Battalion.
- 1 Coy. of the Parachute M.G. Battalion.
- 1 Coy. of the Parachute A.A. M.G. Battalion.
- 1 Medical Coy. and the H.Q. staff of Flieger Division 7.

#### Orders.

Western Group to occupy the airfield at Maleme and to secure it for further landings.

Central Group to take the village of Suda, the town of Canea, to break the enemy's resistance and overpower the local defences.

Each Group was preceded by a half of the Assault Regiment, which landed in gliders amongst the enemy's A.A. defences and eliminated them. The parachutists followed closely in waves.

The landings were made in the face of heavy infantry fire especially from positions which had not been located from the air, such as those on the sloping ground South of Maleme airfield. The tented camp was empty, the enemy was prepared for the landings and already in position. Some of the parachutists were killed during the descent, others shortly after landing. One battalion of the Assault Regiment was dropped too far to the East. In view of the strong defensive fire, a great number of parachutists were unable to reach the armament containers.

Difficulties were increased by the death of the Commander of the Central Group, Lt. General (Generalleutnant) Süssmann who was killed when his glider crashed on take-off on Aegina Island and by the loss of the Commander of the Western Group, Major General (Generalmajor) Meindel, who was seriously wounded shortly after landing. Thus both Groups were left without their appointed leaders.

Fliegerkorps XI and the Luftflotte, were not, however, in a position to obtain a clear picture of the situation until the afternoon, after reports had been received and wireless communication established with the Western Group. On the return of the transport units and the squadrons of Fliegerkorps VIII who had supported the landings, it was naturally assumed that everything had gone according to plan. The second wave was, therefore, sent in without changing the original plan.

### 3. Other attacks by VIII Fliegerkorps.

While the units comprising the second wave were preparing to start, the following attacks were carried out by Fliegerkorps VIII, in support of those units already landed with the first wave and in preparation for the landing of the second wave.

(I) Stukas attacked A.A. positions on the Akrotiri peninsular and on the Southern side of Suda Bay.

(II) Bomber units attacked warships in Suda Bay to prevent them from taking part in the defence or from participating in the battles.

(III) Other bomber units made continuous attacks on points of resistance and A.A. positions at the approaches to Canea.

(IV) In preparation for the landing of the second wave at Retimo and Candia, fighter and Stuka units attacked A.A. sites at Candia as well as troop concentrations at Candia, Ierapetra and Neapolis.

These successfully executed attacks brought considerable relief to the hard-pressed Western and Central Groups, and also facilitated the landings of the second wave.

### 4. Operations by the second wave of Fliegerkorps XI and support by Fliegerkorps VIII

(I) In preparation for the landings and in order to neutralise the enemy's defences, attacks on the following targets were carried out by Fliegerkorps VIII immediately prior to the landings:

(a) A.A. sites at Candia airfield.

(b) A.A. sites at Tschymnon airfield.

(c) Enemy troop movements and points of resistance immediately in the vicinity of the landing zone.

(II) For direct protection of the landings, fighters and fighter-bombers were again employed and were again successful in neutralising the ground defences during the period of air attacks.

(III) The landing of the second wave of Fliegerkorps XI did not proceed according to plan as the landing of the first wave did in the morning

It was not found possible to prepare all the Ju.52's for a second flight at 13.00 hrs. after they returned from their first operation between 09.00 hrs. and 10.00 hrs.

Due to dust clouds on the overcrowded airfields, which could not be subdued even by using all the available fire tenders, and also as a result of aircraft being shot-up, a number of crashes occurred on landing, thus rendering the runways unserviceable and these could not be repaired quickly enough with the means available. Re-fuelling also took longer than had been estimated.

The take-off was a protracted affair, and the order in which it should have taken place was not adhered to. The delay in getting started was particularly serious with the transport units of the Eastern Group which, having had numerous aircraft damaged by enemy action, could not carry the prescribed personnel and equipment for the second wave.

The following units were landed in the second wave:-

- (a) Central Group (Retimo), using 5 special-purpose bomber Gruppen (transport aircraft):-  
Staff-Parachute Regiment No.2.  
 2 Battalions of Parachute Regt. No.2.  
 2 Heavy companies of Parachute Regt. No.2.  
 Sections of parachute M.G. Battalion.  
 Sections of parachute A.A. M.G. Battalion.  
 1 Parachute Artillery Battery.
- (b) Eastern Group, Candia, using 5 special-purpose bomber Gruppen (transport aircraft):-  
Staff-Parachute Regiment No.1.  
 3 Battalions of Parachute Regt. No.1.  
 1 Battalion of Parachute Regt. No.2.  
 2 Heavy companies of Parachute Regt. No.1.

The orders for the Central Group were to occupy the airfield at Retimo and to push forward in the direction of Suda-Bay.

The orders for the Eastern Group were to take possession of the airfield and town of Candia and to prepare the airfield for future landings.

The landing of these Groups took place, just as with the first wave in the face of enemy defensive fire by infantry weapons. Considerable losses while landing were, therefore, inevitable. As a result of the time-lag in taking off, the landings, too, were spread over a period of time, instead of being concentrated. This was especially so in the case of the Eastern Group. Several units were landed at the wrong places, due to insufficient knowledge of the terrain by the crews of the transport aircraft; thus units tactically belonging together were split up. As with the first wave, considerable losses in weapons were incurred through the inability of the troops to reach the armaments containers.

In these circumstances the Central Group was unable to take possession of Retimo airfield, and the drive of the second Battalion towards Suda Bay had to be abandoned in view of the strong enemy defence South West of Retimo. The Eastern Group also found it impossible to occupy the airfield at Candia, the drive towards the town being halted on its outskirts.

The Commander of Parachute Regt. I as Commander of the Eastern Group, could only attempt during the night to collect as far as possible his widely dispersed troops in order to launch an attack on the next day.

##### 5. Situation on the evening of the 20th May.

No airfields on Crete fully in our possession. The situation was most favourable at Maleme where the airfield was intermittently reported to be in our hands but was still under artillery fire. Reconnaissance showed that on one part of the airfield landing obstructions had been erected.

Thus no airfields were available for the landing of the 5th Mountain Division planned for the 21st May.

Canea was still occupied by the enemy and the attack on Suda Bay from Retimo had made no progress. No contact could be established between the Western and Central Groups and between the first and second waves of the Central Group (Canea and Retimo).

At Candia we attempted to collect the troops to launch an attack on the airfield on the 21st May, but the position here was still largely unknown. Both the Western and Central Groups were considerably weakened by the loss of their Commanders.

No enemy warships could be found in the sea area North of Crete, but later in the afternoon of the 20th May reconnaissance spotted a group of enemy warships due South-East of Crete and also a convoy South-West of the Island on a westerly course. Units of Fliegerkorps VIII detailed to attack these however lost contact later in the evening.

A motor sailing flotilla of 25 ships arrived during the night at Melos from Piraeus, after delay due to strong head winds.

(E) OPERATIONS ON THE 21ST MAY.

I. Plan of action.

1. For the continuation of operations the following had to be achieved:

(a) The occupation as soon as possible of at least one airfield on Crete, in order to carry out airborne landings: for this purpose the airfield at Maleme was chosen.

(b) After landing of reinforcements, the occupation at the earliest opportunity of Suda Bay in order to provide the necessary facilities for the supply of heavy arms by sea.

(c) The appointment of new commanders for the two Groups whose leaders had fallen in battle.

(d) The sweeping of the sea around Crete in order to eliminate any danger to the supply route by enemy warships.

2. Luftflotte Orders therefore contained the following tasks for the 21st May.

(a) Fliegerkorps XI.

(I) Further reinforcements to land by parachute for the Western Group to ensure the occupation of Maleme airfield.

(II) After the occupation of the airfield, the first landings of the 5th Mountain Division to commence.

(III) After the landings of reinforcements have been completed, the holding of Maleme airfield, and a drive towards Canea in order to join up with the Central Group and to occupy Suda Bay.

(b) Fliegerkorps VIII.

(I) Protection for the landing of troops around Maleme and Canea by the neutralisation of enemy defences and support for the land units engaged in battle.

(II) Additional support for the attack on Canea and Suda Bay.

(III) Reconnaissance at dawn of the sea area around Crete, strong forces to be kept ready for attacks on any enemy warships spotted.

/(c)

(c) Admiral Commanding South Eastern Area.

It was essential to make possible the arrival before darkness on the 21st of the 1st Motor sailing flotilla at Maleme in order that heavy arms and ammunition and additional mountain battalions should be placed at our disposal.

3. A renewed attempt to persuade the Italian fleet to put to sea in order to pin down British warships away from Crete, failed due to the refusal of the authorities in Rome.

II. Situation during the night of the 20th-21st May and developments in the naval position.

During the night British warships broke through the Straits of Kato and Kythera and swept the sea area North of Crete and the Northern Coast of the Island. The airfield of Skarpanto was bombarded from the sea, without however producing much damage.

In view of this situation, the Admiral Commanding South-Eastern Area first decided to halt the motor sailing flotilla under escort of the Italian destroyer 'Lupo', just South of Melos.

Units of Fliegerkorps VIII sent out on armed reconnaissance at dawn on the 21st encountered British naval units as they were putting to sea North of Crete, sunk 1 destroyer and severely damaged another as well as 2 cruisers.

At 09.00 hours Fliegerkorps VIII was able to report that the sea North of Crete was clear of enemy ships; orders could therefore be given to the 1st Motor-sailing Flotilla to proceed towards Maleme.

III. Activities of Fliegerkorps XI with the Western Group until the afternoon of the 21st May.

1. Successful landings were made by Fliegerkorps XI in the morning of the 21st on Maleme beach with single J.U.52's carrying arms and ammunition. But landings could not take place on the airfield itself which was still under enemy artillery fire. The landing ground on the beach being too small for bigger transport units, it was appreciated that reinforcements for the Western Group to ensure the occupation and securing of the airfield at Maleme could only be landed by parachute.

2. The enemy's position at Maleme showed that there was approximately one New Zealand Regiment East of the airfield with its right flank along the sea and which covered the airfield with artillery fire from the vicinity of Alikianou. The hills South of Maleme were also occupied by the enemy.

3. In view of this position the Commanding General of Fliegerkorps XI decided:

(a) To attack from the West the positions East of the airfield with the Assault Regiment already landed and to strengthen it by landing a further parachute company, together with 1½ parachute panzer companies.

(b) To land East of Pyrgos 2 parachute companies, in the rear of the New Zealand Regiment and to drive westward with these reinforcements.

4. The operation was carried out as planned with 9 landings East of Pyrgos at 15.00 hours and dropping of reinforcements for the Assault Regiment at 16.00 hours.

/These

These landings were successfully supported by Fliegerkorps VIII, who earlier in the day had attacked anti-aircraft positions, points of resistance, tented camps at Maleme, Canea, Retimo and Candia, and ships in Suda Bay.

An attack from the air on batteries firing on Maleme airfield from the vicinity of Alikianou was found to be impossible as they were particularly well camouflaged and in the presence of German aircraft immediately ceased their fire so as not to give away their position.

5. The two companies landing at Pyrgos met with little success; they landed immediately in front of well camouflaged machine-gun nests and infantry positions, or on minefields. Most of their weapon containers were lost and only a very small detachment was able to fight its way to a farm house and form a defensive position.

The attack of the assault troops from the West was more successful. The enemy's resistance broke down after long fighting, Maleme being captured by 17.00 hours, and the airfield was thus safely in our hands.

IV. Landing of the reinforced Battalion of the 5th Mountain Division on the afternoon of the 21st May at Maleme.

A reinforced Battalion of the 5th Mountain Division had previously been ordered to remain in readiness for transport by air as from midday on the 21st May. The execution of the aerial landings was ordered by Fliegerkorps XI even before the airfield at Maleme was actually in our hands and thus the first troops landed in waves at 16.00 hours, although at that time the airfield was still under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire.

Units of Fliegerkorps VIII however successfully neutralised the defences from the air in low flying attacks, and our losses were small.

V. The Development of the position in the Central and Eastern Groups.

1. Central Group

(a) A Detachment of the Group at Canea (Parachute Regt. 3) occupied the terrain around the prison South of Galatos and on both sides of the lake. Attacks by the numerically stronger enemy in the hills South-East of Galatos however did not materialize, but an assault on these hills broke down in view of the strong enemy defences.

(b) Detachment at Retimo.

Divided into two subsidiary Groups:

A weaker Group to the West which defended itself at Perigolia against numerous enemy attacks, and a stronger Group along the coast line East of Retimo airfield which attempted to push through to the airfield. This attack failed against the strong defence from the vineyards at the western end of the airfield.

2. Eastern Group at Candia

This Group was split up into two subsidiary detachments.

/(a)

(a) One Group to the West of the town consisting of II/Parachute Regiment 1 and two companies of Parachute Regiment 2 tried to break into the town of Candia supported by Fliegerkorps VIII. After good initial successes, the attack had to be abandoned due to the defensive fire of the enemy, and the troops that were already in the town had to be recalled.

(b) The Group to the East of the airfield (I/Parachute Regiment 1) tried to attack the airfield at Candia but again experienced such tremendous defensive fire from well built-up positions as to make the attack seem hopeless with the few available heavy arms, and it was therefore abandoned.

#### VI. Development in the Naval position on 21st May.

Aerial reconnaissance of the sea area South of Crete carried out by Fliegerkorps VIII showed the presence of strong enemy naval forces both South-West and South-East of the island.

The bomber units from around Attika, Stukas from Skarpanto, and Italian Air Force units from Rhodes scored the following successes:

3 direct hits on cruisers  
 1 direct hit on a destroyer  
 1 hit on a steamer (approx. 1,000 tons)  
 and two other cruisers were believed to be damaged.

The sea area North of Crete remained clear of the enemy, but the possibility of a fresh break through by British warships had to be borne in mind.

The 1st Motor Sailing Flotilla bound from Melos to Maleme and carrying one mountain battalion, heavy arms, and part of the IIInd Anti Aircraft Regiment, appeared to be capable of reaching Maleme before dark, according to reports from the Italian destroyer 'Lupo'.

Strong head winds and lack of speed however held up the flotilla to such an extent that its first craft only reached Cape Spatha at 23.00 hours, where, to the surprise of both sides, contact was suddenly made with British warships.

Due to the courageous action of the 'Lupo' in firing torpedoes at the enemy from a range of 200 m., although she herself received 18 direct hits which put her out of action, and to the scattered formation of our ships, only a small portion of the Flotilla was caught and destroyed.

To avoid the risk of a similar fate overtaking the 2nd Motor Sailing Flotilla, then on its way to Crete, the Admiral Commanding South Eastern Area ordered its immediate return to the Piraeus, and the problem of supplying heavy arms and reinforcements by sea therefore remained unsolved.

#### VII. Position in the evening of the 21st May.

1. During the course of May 21st, it had been possible to occupy Maleme airfield. A report however received at night indicated the approach of new enemy units from Palaiochora in the direction of Maleme, and renewed enemy attacks on the airfield from the South were therefore expected to take place on the 22nd May.

2. The absence of heavy armour piercing weapons and adequate artillery made itself acutely felt as the enemy employed their armour on all sectors and as enemy artillery was too well camouflaged to be spotted from the air.

3. The support given to units of Fliegerkorps XI by Fliegerkorps VIII became increasingly difficult as the enemy, being in possession of our recognition signals were able to employ them and thus make distinction between friend and foe quite impossible from the air.

4. The British fleet again broke through into the sea area North of Crete and it was therefore impossible to supply heavy weapons by sea.

On the basis of reconnaissance reports it was assumed that the major part of the Alexandria fleet reinforced by naval elements from Gibraltar were operating. No German warships were available and the task of combatting the British Navy therefore fell to the Luftwaffe.

5. The Air Force of the enemy was not in evidence, so that complete air supremacy was still assured over Crete.

(F) OPERATIONS ON THE 22ND MAY.

I. Proposed operations.

For the continuation of operations, the following steps had to be taken :-

1. The airfield at Maleme had to be securely held, as the launching of the attacks on Canea and Suda Bay was dependent on the arrival of reinforcements at this airfield.

2. Other units on the island had to be supplied with weapons and ammunition to enable them to hold their positions against strong enemy attacks.

3. Absolute air supremacy over Crete had to be maintained, in order that other airfields and possible landing grounds not in our hands could be secured against landings by the enemy's air forces.

4. The resumption of the fight against the British Fleet, with a view to making their position in the sea area North of Crete untenable and thus restore our sea supply route.

5. Support to be given to Fliegerkorps XI by Fliegerkorps VIII, especially in the Western Group; for this purpose, operations by fighters and Stuka units based at Maleme.

II. The following tasks were allotted by the Luftflotte in accordance with instructions of the C.-in-C. of the Luftwaffe:

1. Fliegerkorps XI.

(a) Continued airborne landings by elements of the 5th Mountain Division on the airfield of Maleme.

(b) Consolidation of Maleme airfield against enemy attack.

(c) Preparations for the attacks on Canea and Suda Bay.

(d) The supplying of weapons, ammunition and other necessaries to our units.

2. Fliegerkorps VIII.

(a) Attacks on the British Fleet, especially in the sea area North of Crete to be started at dawn. Constant patrolling of the whole sea area from Crete to the African coast.

(b) Support of Fliegerkorps XI in the battles on Crete especially in the Western Group; also attacks on enemy artillery positions, panzers, and points of resistance. Watch to be maintained over the entire island in order to combat in time enemy troop movements and to prevent the bringing up of reserves. Also close guard of airfields and possible landing grounds to avoid their occupation by the enemy air forces.

3. II K.G. 4. (Bombers).

Mine-laying in Alexandria harbour.

4. Admiral Commanding South-Eastern Area.

(a) Reinforcement of Meles as a base for supply shipping by the transfer of anti-aircraft batteries to this area.

(b) Investigation of the possibility of establishing a base for supply shipping at Kythera.

(c) Preparations for the transport of tanks to Maleme by sea.

5. The offer made by the Italian Commander in the Dodecanese to participate in the assault on Crete was accepted after the consent of the C.-in-C. of the Luftwaffe had been obtained.

The Italian authorities were asked to undertake the occupation of the Eastern part of the island. A liaison command was sent to Rhodes.

III. Operations of Fliegerkorps VIII against the British fleet.

Dawn reconnaissance showed that powerful units of the British fleet were in the waters North of Crete, constituting a particular threat for the elements of the 1st and 2nd Motor Sailing Flotillas present in that area. Altogether, three separate Groups with a total of 33 heavy and medium ships were sighted.

The sustained attacks delivered by Fliegerkorps VIII with Stukas and bombers produced excellent results:-

3 cruisers or destroyers were sunk  
 3 other heavy ships badly damaged  
 6 other ships hit, believed severely damaged.

In the course of the afternoon the sea area North of Crete was reported as being clear of the enemy, the British fleet having succeeded in evading its opponents.

It was difficult to say if the British fleet would accept this defeat as final and the renewed appearance of enemy warships in the waters North of Crete during the following night had to be considered as possible.

During these engagements it became clear that the units of Fliegerkorps VIII were not sufficiently strong to fulfill all the tasks allotted to them. As the Crete campaign developed virtually into a battle of "Luftwaffe versus Naval forces in a confined sea area", the immediate transfer of III K.G. (bombers) and I/St. G.1 (Stukas) from Greece to Fliegerkorps VIII was ordered.

IV. Operations of Fliegerkorps XI on the 22nd May.

1. Airborne landings of further elements of the 5th Mountain Division took place, supported by continuous attacks of all available fighters and fighter bombers of Fliegerkorps VIII. Artillery and machine-gun emplacements, points of resistance, enemy troop concentrations and armoured vehicles were successfully attacked by low flying

/aircraft,

aircraft. Losses during the landings were small. Maleme airfield was still subjected to intermittent shell fire, the enemy gun emplacements being too well camouflaged to be ascertainable from the air.

The runway of the airfield was from time to time closed for further landings due to crashes of J.U.52s. However, after the arrival of airfield control personnel, order was established and crashed aircraft were speedily removed from the runway.

During the course of the day, the following were landed at Maleme :-

2 Mountain Battalions  
1 Mountain Pioneer Battalion  
Elements of a Parachute Artillery Unit  
1 Field hospital.

2. The enemy attack expected from the South did not take place; instead, an attack was launched from the direction of Pyrgos with armoured vehicles. The attack was beaten off and Pyrgos was taken in the subsequent counter-attack.

3. The situation in the Central and Western Groups remained unchanged. The positions already won were maintained, weapons, ammunition, supplies and dressings being dropped where required.

4. A suggestion made by the Commanding General of Fliegerkorps XI that their H.Q. should be transferred to Maleme was turned down by the C.-in-C. of Luftflotte 4, as the continued presence of the Staff at Attika was considered essential to ensure the transit of further reinforcements and supplies. The order was however given that the Staff of the 5th Mountain Division should be transferred to Maleme, and that the Commander of the Division should take over the command of the Western and Central Groups.

#### G. OPERATIONS ON THE 23RD AND 24TH MAY.

#### F. Developments in the Western and Central Groups (Commanded by Lt.Gen.Ringel).

1. Airborne landings on Maleme airfield of further reinforcements, and especially of heavy arms continued according to plan.

The following were landed:

(a) On the 23rd May:

2 Mountain Artillery Units  
1 Mountain Panzer Assault Unit and the greater part of an Armed Motor Cycle Battalion.

(b) On the 24th May:

1st Reconnaissance Unit  
1 Anti-Aircraft Machine-Gun Unit  
1½ Mountain Assault Battalions  
1 Cyclist Company  
Regimental H.Q. of Mountain Assault Regiment 85.

The comparatively small airfield of Maleme, already reduced in size by the debris of previous crashes, saw many further crashes, but the wreckage was shifted with the aid of captured tanks under the energetic supervision of the new Airfield Control staff. Discipline on the airfield improved after strong measures taken by the newly arrived Commander.

2. With the taking over of command by Lt. General Ringel in the evening of the 22nd May, the Units were regrouped.

(a) To secure the airfield, the mopping up of the enemy forces in the Western part of the island was undertaken.

In heavy fighting against guerilla forces and snipers firing from trees, Kasteli and Palaiochora were taken in the evening of the 24th, and the Western part of the island was thus securely in our hands. In addition, the potential threat to the airfield of Maleme of renewed attacks from the West or South was removed.

(b) To secure the airfield against the East, and for the breakthrough to Canea and Suda Bay, two Groups were formed by Lt. General Ringel; the first, under the command of Colonel (Oberst) Utz, (5th Mountain Division), had to break through over the mountains due South, whilst the second Group, under the command of Colonel (Oberst) Ranke, (7th Parachute Division), was to proceed Eastwards along the coast.

Under the pressure of the advance of the 'Utz' Group, the enemy was thrown back on the 23rd May to a position in the hills South of Platanias, from whence they were however dislodged by the rapid advance of the Ranke Group. Platanias was taken and contact was established with the Central Group at Stalos, to which the Group had broken through from its original position between the lake and the prison.

In the evening of the 24th May the enemy was driven back into well constructed positions on both sides of Galatos, and thus held the hills East of Alikianu.

## II. Development of the situation in the Eastern Group.

1. Enemy aircraft made their first appearance over the island on the 23rd May. 5 Bristol Blenheims attacked Maleme airfield in the afternoon without causing much damage. (2 were shot down). Reports were also received from Canea of a landing by enemy aircraft on the airfield there. One of these was shot down in flames.

Renewed landings of enemy aircraft on Crete had to be combatted with every means at our disposal if absolute air supremacy was to be maintained. Therefore the reinforcement of the Eastern Group was ordered by the Luftflotte on the 23rd May.

## III. Activities of Fliegerkorps VIII.

1. Support for Fliegerkorps XI was continually provided. In order to facilitate co-operation between the Group commanded by General Ringel and Fliegerkorps VIII, and to avoid delays, direct wireless contact between the Group and Fliegerkorps VIII was established by our signals formations.

During the course of the next two days, points of resistance, artillery positions and armoured vehicles were attacked. Strong forces attacked Canea, and also Candia, in support of the parachute landings in the Eastern Group.

During attacks on shipping in Suda Bay, in addition to several hits scored on the cruiser 'York', 1 Tanker was set on fire, 4 Merchant steamers were sunk, and others severely damaged.

The entire South coast was continuously patrolled to prevent the arrival of reinforcements, or any attempt at evacuation.

At last in the evening of the 23rd May the long awaited transfer of fighters to Maleme airfield could take place.

2. Operations against the British fleet were also continued. Aerial reconnaissance disclosed in the early hours of the morning the presence of light enemy naval units in the sea area North of Crete. In running attacks, 3 destroyers were sunk and 3 further destroyers badly damaged.

From mid-day onwards the sea North of Crete was clear of the enemy. Armed reconnaissance carried out early in the morning of the 24th failed to discover any shipping, but accurate sighting in the area South of Crete was rendered difficult by a sandstorm, which evidently also hindered the movements of the British.

3. Fliegerkorps VIII provided protection for supply shipping in the Aegean Sea. Useful forces were thus tied down and could not be used for more urgent purposes in other areas.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to obtain a short range reconnaissance staffel from the 12th Army Command, as all the units under their command were already on their way back to the Reich to prepare for the operation 'Barbarossa'. Sea reconnaissance Gruppe 126 could, with its limited aircraft resources, only operate in the Northern waters of the Aegean Sea.

#### IV. Preparations for the bringing up of further supplies by sea.

1. The bringing up of further supplies by sea was still very necessary in order:

(a) To relieve the transport aircraft units.

(b) To transport heavy arms, panzers, and lorries which could not be transported by air and were badly needed on Crete.

2. As experience had shown, sea transport was only possible by day. The transport ships could not leave harbour until it was reported that the sea North of Crete was clear of the enemy, and had to arrive at their destination before darkness fell. An essential condition for the crossing itself was thorough reconnaissance carried out by the Luftwaffe.

3. The following measures were taken to secure adequate protection for our shipping:

(a) Melos and Kythera were fortified as bases for the departure of supply shipping to Crete.

For the protection of the harbour at Melos 2 3.7 cm. anti-aircraft guns of the 2nd Flak Regiment were installed while the defence of Kythera harbour was assured by an 8.8 cm. A.A. battery.

(b) Armed reconnaissance by Fliegerkorps VIII was carried out at dawn of the sea area North of Crete and reports were sent to the Admiral Commanding South Eastern Area who ordered the ships at Melos to sail if no enemy vessels had been sighted. Afterwards close watch of the Straits of Kythera and Kaso by Fliegerkorps VIII, and further armed reconnaissance of the sea area South of Crete were carried out.

In addition to these reconnaissance activities, intensification of our aircraft reporting system in the Straits of Kythera and Kaso was ordered.

/(c)

(c) The Admiral Commanding South-Eastern Area collected a number of fast ships, capable of covering the distance between Melos and Crete in the shortest possible time.

At first only small ships could be employed as only Maleme beach was available for landings. Only after the occupation of Suda Bay could larger ships be used.

#### H. CONTINUATION OF OPERATIONS UNTIL THE TOTAL OCCUPATION OF CRETE.

##### I. The Group commanded by Lt. General Ringel.

1. The supply of further reinforcements for this Group was carried out according to plan. The scale of these reinforcements depended on the availability of transport aircraft and the demands of other units on the Island.

The following units were landed at Maleme:

On the 25th May: 2 Mountain Assault Battalions.  
1 Armed Motor Cycle Company.

On the 26th May: 1½ Mountain Assault Battalions.  
Staff of Mountain Assault Regiment 141.  
1 2 cm. Battery.  
1 Heavy Artillery Unit.

On the 27th May: The remainder of the reinforced 5th Mountain Division.  
1 Armed Motor Cycle Battalion.  
1 Mountain Assault Battalion of the 6th Mountain Division.

2. Operations to break the enemy's resistance now continued according to plan. After a mass attack by Fliegerkorps VIII on Canea on the 26th, successful penetrations into the enemy's positions West of Canea were effected on the 27th May. The enemy's resistance in Canea was broken and the town itself taken. On the 28th Suda Bay was occupied during the pursuit of the beaten enemy. On the 29th contact with the Eastern Group was established.

On the 30th May Ierapetra was taken, and we joined up with the Italians who had landed on the 28th at Setera.

On the 1st June, as a conclusion to the battles on Crete, the last British forces were captured at Sphakia after an arduous drive over the White Mountains.

##### II. The Eastern Group.

1. The Eastern Group succeeded by the 27th May in occupying the heights South of Candia with the help of reinforcements landed on the 24th, and were thus able to surround the enemy engaged in defending the airfield.

2. When on the 28th further landings took place of the Parachute Battalions formed from the remainder of the 7th Parachute Division, the enemy's resistance was broken and the airfield taken with the help of a mass attack by Fliegerkorps VIII on Candia. Further advances towards the West on the 29th led to the Group linking up with that commanded by Lt. General Ringel.

##### III. The Italian Expeditionary Corps.

The Italian Expeditionary Corps which landed on the 28th May at Setera with one reinforced Regiment began their advance towards Ierapetra without meeting any serious enemy resistance.

/After.

After this landing it was impossible for the enemy to withdraw to the Eastern half of the island to evacuate their forces from there.

#### IV. Attacks by Fliegerkorps VIII.

The attacks carried out by Fliegerkorps VIII up to the conclusion of operations on Crete may be listed as follows:-

1. Continued support of Fliegerkorps XI in its battles on Crete. The close co-operation between the Ringel Group and Fliegerkorps VIII proved particularly fruitful. Air attacks on Canca and Retimo were invaluable in breaking the enemy's resistance at those points.

2. Armed reconnaissance of the South coast was carried out from dawn onwards. No large scale evacuation of troops was observed. Attempts by the British to escape in small motor-boats and sailing ships were frustrated by means of attacks by fighters and fighter-bombers.

3. Watch of the sea area South of Crete to the limits of the range of our aircraft, with armed reconnaissance and attacks on enemy warships and troop transports in these waters. Mine-laying operations in Alexandria harbour were also continued.

4. Close protection of our own transport ships in the Aegean Sea against submarine attacks. Thanks to this continuous protection, and in spite of the presence of numerous enemy submarines in the Aegean Sea, no severe losses in shipping were sustained.

5. Preparations for the return of Luftwaffe units to their maintenance and equipment bases prior to the beginning of operation 'Barbarossa'. The smoothness and speed with which this withdrawal was effected, and the rapidity with which full service-ability was restored to the units that had taken part in operations against Crete, represented a remarkable performance by all concerned.

#### V. Activities of Admiral Commanding South Eastern Area.

By making use of the base at Melos, our sea transport operations were able to proceed according to plan. With the occupation of Suda Bay, regular supply crossings with bigger vessels became possible.

No further difficulties were experienced as the British fleet did not again succeed in breaking through into the waters North of Crete.

#### J. AIR SEA RESCUE SERVICE.

With the conclusion of the Greek Campaign, the forces available for the air sea rescue duties in the Aegean Sea were insufficient for the attack on Crete, in which 2 divisions had to be transported by air over the sea, and in which the activities of Fliegerkorps VIII constantly took place over water.

Frequent requests by the Luftflotte for the strengthening of existing units resulted in only 3 additional aircraft being sent from the Air Sea Rescue Centre in Sicily.

I. In organising the air sea rescue service, it was thus imperative to rely on help from other quarters.

1. All suitable aircraft were concentrated at the Aegean Air Sea Rescue Centre which had been moved to Phaleron.

(a) The aircraft available were 5 HE. 59's  
and 3 DO. 24's.

(b) The FW. 58's attached to fighter squadrons were detailed for the dropping of rubber dinghies.

(c) Reinforcement of Westa 76 (Meteorological Unit), for the dropping of rubber dinghies.

(d) Sea Reconnaissance Gruppe 126 equipped with HE. 60's was used for searching the sea for crashed aircraft.

2. The employment of a large number of surface craft was found to be impossible in view of the scarcity of shipping in the Aegean; with the greatest difficulty barely 3 craft could be mustered.

3. Adequate supplies of rubber dinghies for dropping from aircraft were received from the Reich at the Aegean Air Sea Rescue Centre.

4. Admiral Commanding South Eastern Area ordered that all ships in the Aegean Sea, especially those of the Italian Navy, should be quickly summoned for rescue duties.

5. Air sea rescue bases were set up at Molos and Molaci.

II. Thanks to these measures it was found possible to avoid great losses at sea. As an example, after the routing of the 1st Motor Sailing Flotilla, the majority of the troops swimming in the water were saved.

During the course of operations, 178 men were rescued by aircraft and 84 by surface craft.

The success of the service deserves particular praise, as rescues often took place close to the coast of Crete in heavy seas, and were in many cases only possible by over-loading the aircraft taking part.

Many lives were saved after the sinking of the 1st Motor Sailing Flotilla by Italian speed boats and by the Italian destroyers 'Lupo' and 'Lyra' whose conduct was exemplary.

## K. CONCLUSIONS.

### I. British conduct of Operations.

As was later shown by captured enemy documents, the British expected a German parachute attack on Crete. The preparations carried out, the employment of the British fleet, and the tough resistance encountered proved that the enemy intended to hold Crete with all possible means. Churchill's statements in the House of Commons at the beginning of the Crete campaign also confirmed this intention.

To sum up the situation:

1. Already during the operations in Greece the British had foreseen the possibility of parachute landings on Crete. This was proved by the many documents captured.

2. The actual day of the attack on Crete was well known to the British through their efficient espionage system in Greece, which in the short space of time available could not be completely eliminated.

3. All important points on Crete were well prepared against attack; heavy guns were well camouflaged and put in positions covering the airfields from all sides.

4. The only weak point in the British defence of Crete was the absence of their Air Force during the decisive days. But neither Luftflotte 4 nor Fliegerkorps XI ever anticipated the extent of the opposition actually offered by the British.

5. In the event of future parachute landings it must be expected that the British, having learnt their lesson on Crete, will have undertaken far more thorough preparations.

## II. Choice of landing areas.

1. The first waves of Fliegerkorps XI landed on the three existing airfields in the middle of strong and well prepared enemy defences. The enemy's heavy guns should have been captured by troops landing in the immediate vicinity with gliders, but this was nowhere found possible.

2. A repetition of an attack under such circumstances will not be possible; future attacks will probably have to be made in a locality free from the enemy, and the terrain necessary for subsequent landings will have to be occupied during the initial attack.

## III. Possibilities of operational and tactical surprise.

During the Crete campaign the enemy was surprised neither operationally nor tactically. Such surprise is only possible, where an army succeeds in

(a) Landing the transport units and gliders on the landing grounds at the last moment; this is only possible with an adequate and efficient ground organisation.

(b) Avoiding enemy air reconnaissance after the landings of transport units and gliders.

(c) Concealing the presence of parachute troops up to the last moment in such a way that no one becomes aware of their presence (by strict security measures on airfields and in barracks).

## IV. Formation of a point of concentration and of reserves.

1. At the beginning of operations points of concentration must be established so as to enable other attacks and landings to take place in conformity with the general plan.

2. The detailing of units for subsidiary landings can only take place when adequate forces are available. Forces should only be split up when it is absolutely essential to do so. Adequate reserves of paratroops must always be maintained for use in any emergency. During the attack on Crete, it was often necessary to call on these reserve forces, which were available because due to the loss of a number of transport aircraft, not all the intended forces had been transported.

V. Training of parachute troops.

The requirement that in future operations paratroops should jump when clear of the enemy's defences demands additional training, so as to enable the paratroops to attack the enemy after mustering. It will in the future be more a case of gaining new ground than of holding terrain already conquered. Thus from the point of view of training, it will be easier to train an experienced infantryman or mountain trooper as a paratrooper than to train a paratrooper as an infantryman.

VI. Suitability of mountain troops for airborne landings.

1. The employment of the 5th Mountain Division in the aerial landing was a great success. The armament of the mountain artillery fulfilled the requirements of air transport in every way, and the time taken for preparations was very small.

2. A further possibility would be the employment after training of army divisions as parachute troops in order to place the attack on a broader footing. The construction of gliders suitable for air transport would greatly facilitate the course of airborne undertakings.

VII. Employment of the J.U.52 as a transport aircraft.

1. The employment of the J.U.52 was again successful.

2. The value of the parachute troops lies in their use of this aircraft, which is equally indispensable for training purposes, and for air transport in general. The construction of a special aircraft for airborne operations, which would pin down valuable personnel and materials for a long time, is not therefore necessary.

3. The additional employment of larger aircraft, to transport the same number of troops and arms with less aircraft is an urgent problem. (Particularly for night operations).

VIII. Transport of heavy arms and Panzers.

The necessity for the use of heavy armour-piercing weapons and panzers showed itself soon after the beginning of operations. In future campaigns, this will be even more important during an attack on well planned enemy defences.

Facilities for the carrying of heavy arms and panzers by air must be provided, either with large aircraft or large freight gliders.

IX. Time necessary for preparations.

1. The time required for the preparation of large airborne attacks will always be fairly long due to the necessity of building up considerable supplies on airfields, and of thorough reconnaissance of landing points.

2. The employment of smaller parachute groups in connection with ground operations appears very promising and could be carried out with considerably less time for preparations, providing that the parachute and transport units are already under the local command, and do not have to be brought up from other areas.

X. Air Supremacy.

Absolute air supremacy is the essential condition for the success of an airborne attack. During the operations on Crete, this was achieved by the complete elimination of the enemy air force. Where this is not possible, strong forces of fighters and fighter bombers are required for the protection of the landing areas.

## XI. Air Support.

The powerful attacks carried out by Fliegerkorps VIII in support of battles on Crete, and the effective protection of the landings, were decisive factors in the success of the operation. It was thanks to this air support that the landings took place without greater losses and also that the stubborn resistance of the enemy was finally broken.

## XIII. Operations against the British fleet and the protection of our own supply shipping.

The battle against the British fleet was decided in favour of the Luftwaffe. Thus it was established that enemy warships operating in a confined area can be neutralised by air attack.

Attacks of this kind, together with the protection of supply shipping, require strong forces specially trained in anti-shipping operations, and depend also on favourable weather conditions. The increasing attacks carried out on the British warships eventually silenced their strong and effective anti-aircraft guns. In the afternoon of the day on which the main attack was launched, anti-aircraft fire had ceased almost completely, and the mass attacks of Fliegerkorps VIII were afterwards doubly successful. Aircraft carriers no longer dared to come within the range of the Luftwaffe.

XIII. The establishment of a flying control system before the landings again proved to be very necessary. Breaches of flying discipline must be avoided at all costs, and wrecks immediately cleared away so as to keep the runway clear for the continuous landings of transports.

XIV. The clothing of the parachute troops and mountain assault troops was not suited to the climate; it was too airtight and made fighting under the hot sun considerably more difficult. It was not possible to supply tropical clothing in the short space of time available.

The question of supplying suitable clothing for a particular climate must not be neglected in future campaigns.

## L. SUMMING UP.

With the conclusion and occupation of Crete on the 1st June, 1941, this important base in the East Mediterranean was securely in our possession and the British had once again been decisively beaten on land, sea, and in the air.

12,245 British troops and 2,266 Greeks were captured, and at least 5,000 enemy soldiers were killed. In addition, 136 guns, 30 Panzers and large quantities of stores fell into our hands. Approximately 14,000 Italians were freed from captivity.

The British fleet suffered a severe defeat. 8 cruisers, 10 destroyers, 1 submarine and 5 speed boats were sunk by Fliegerkorps VIII, together with 10 cargo ships with a total tonnage of 15,000 BRT. and a number of small coastal craft.

24 hits were observed on cruisers, 13 hits on destroyers, and 1 hit on a battleship, so that many other ships were damaged in addition to those reported sunk.

/During

During the period 20th May - 1st June, 21 enemy aircraft were shot down and 12 aircraft destroyed on the ground.

Our own losses were as follows:

(a) Of the troops employed on Crete:

Dead: 1,915 Officers, N.C.Os. and men.  
Missing: 1,759 Officers, N.C.Os. and men.

(b) From Fliegerkorps VIII and XI (flying personnel):

Dead: 76 Officers, N.C.Os. and men.  
Missing: 236 Officers, N.C.Os. and men.

The achievement of this singular success was in great part due to the outstanding and heroic fight of the parachute and mountain troops on Crete, operating under the most difficult climatic and geographical conditions, and to the unceasing efforts of Fliegerkorps VIII and the transport units.

For the first time an Air Force Command had directed an operation in which units of all three services took part.

Co-operation with the respective commands of the other services (12th Army Command and Admiral South East) was excellent throughout the operation. The extremely difficult supply question, an essential condition for our success, could only be solved by a combined effort of all commands, including the already overworked Luftwaffe staffs in Bulgaria and Rumania who were preparing for operation 'Barbarossa'.

Most valuable help was rendered by the Italian Commands concerned, especially the Italian Commander in the Dodecanese and the Italian Admiral in the Aegean.

The efforts of the ground crews in the maintenance of serviceability under great difficulties and with the most primitive means also deserve the highest praise.

As a result of these ceaseless efforts it was possible to report to the Reichsmarschall in the evening of the 1st June 1941:

"Task fulfilled, Crete now free of the enemy".

The Chief of Luftflotte 4  
and Commander South East.

Sgd. LOHR

Generaloberst (General).

Distribution same as Translation No. VII/21.