

## **Against all Odds: How did the German Airborne Forces win the Battle of Crete despite the strong Commonwealth Defensive Position?**

**Jonathan Dowdall**

The evacuation of Commonwealth forces from Crete on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1941 was the end of British pretensions to military strength in the Mediterranean. Yet when German airborne forces invaded the island ten days previously, no one, even the Germans, had envisioned such a spectacular result. When their bold and unorthodox aerial insertion had begun, the results had been nothing short of disastrous. None of the German airborne force's objectives had been obtained by the end of the first day, and many in the German High Command were already considering calling off the entire operation. The British Commonwealth defenders had won a series of tactical victories and seemed in a secure defensive position. Yet by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup>, the Germans had seized the initiative, and by the 25<sup>th</sup> of May few historians disagree that German victory was inevitable. To understand how the odds had been defied at Crete, a synopsis of key operational features and events during the battle will be provided, to contextualize this study's analysis. A quantitative and qualitative force assessment will then be made, followed by a study of the command aspect of the battle. The resulting overview will allow for a conclusive statement as to how the German airborne forces turned almost certain defeat into certain victory.

In terms of the defenders, organised under Major General Bernard Cyril Freyberg, the defining feature was to be 'an unfortunate geographical fact'; that of Crete's northward facing plain, and its proximity to mainland Greece.<sup>1</sup> The island's 42,000 defenders were laid out on rugged terrain stretching almost one hundred miles in a thin twenty-mile wide band, between the mountains and sea. It must also be noted that the island was linked up by only a 'ramshackle communications network', and that there were no wireless radios on the island at all.<sup>2</sup> Whilst CREFORCE's<sup>3</sup> location around Suda Bay in the east clearly marked the more densely settled eastern region as a natural strongpoint for defence, in terms of overall military objectives there was a great deal of dispersion.

Out of each of the four naturally defined sectors of the island, centred around the towns of Canea, Suda, Rethymno and Heraklion respectively, three had an airfield. Heraklion was also the island's largest port, whilst simultaneously being the most geographically isolated from the rest of the towns. It was, in broad terms, around these ports and airfields of the island that the defenders were deployed. Most of the key objectives had convenient

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<sup>1</sup> Macdonald, C. (1993), *The Lost Battle, Crete 1941* (London, Macmillan), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Beevor, A. (1991), *Crete – The Battle and the Resistance* (London, John Murray), p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> British and Commonwealth Forces Command HQ.

high ground overlooking them, ideal for artillery and infantry positions, as the island's terrain is very rugged. Moreover, as the Commonwealth troops on Crete had been there for many months, a great deal of tactical fortification had been carried out. On paper, the defender's position seems enviably secure.

For the attackers, Kurt Student (commanding general of the German airborne *XI Fliegerkorps*) had conceived and gained approval for the invasion of Crete almost single-handedly. His plan was for a vertical envelopment, and 'his execution banked heavily on surprise, fright and panic.'<sup>4</sup> Via glider and paratroop insertion of his elite infantry, he intended to achieve a "*Handstreich*" (*coup de main*), the rapid and total seizure of all vital airfields, ports and high ground, so as to facilitate the landing of more reinforcements to support the first wave. The attack would feature three main groups, centred upon the ports of Canea, Rethymno and Heraklion, with the additional objectives of securing whichever local airfield lay adjacent to these towns. 22,030 German infantry were granted for this purpose, though not all would in fact be paratroopers.<sup>5</sup> Up to a third of the force would be Mountain Regiments on loan from preparations for Operation *Barbarossa* in the Soviet Union, and would thus require insertion by sea at a later date.

The extreme optimism of this plan, which relied upon the initial wave of just 7,000 men capturing key objectives from a defensive force of some 42,000, demonstrates aptly the misinformation which was rife in the German command. The intelligence gathering had been very poor, failing to pick up via aerial photography the numerous location of defensive entrenchment's, some of which directly overlooked selected landing sites for paratroopers. Even more bafflingly, some commander naively predicted a pro-German reaction to the invasion from the Cretans, a theory with no basis in reality.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, I.M.G. Stewart concludes that Student compounded the natural difficulty of attacking fortified infantry positions by aerial insertion by making three fundamental mistakes in his invasion plan.<sup>7</sup> Firstly, he planned to attack all three airfields equally, spreading his already small forces widely across the island. Secondly, his commitments of a re-supply convoy (containing the Mountain Regiments) to arrive within two days of the first landings was suicidal, as the Royal Navy was almost certain to intercept and destroy them. Finally, he committed almost all of his available paratroopers in the first wave, leaving few reserves to cushion any initial set-backs.

More importantly, and perhaps most interestingly for a study of how the Germans won the Battle of Crete, the inherent surprise of the Germans bold aerial insertion was to be negated by the British intelligence services. Ultra had, from the very beginning of the German operation's planning, successfully decoded and passed on reports on their preparations. Freyberg had been delivered information clearly stating the nature of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ansel, Walter (1972), *Hitler and the Middle Sea* (Duke University Press), p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Beevor (2005), p. 348. Appendix B.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>7</sup> Stewart, I.M.G. (1966), *The Struggle for Crete* (London, Oxford University Press), pp. 478-480.

invasion to be an aerial insertion, on 1<sup>st</sup> May.<sup>8</sup> By the 13<sup>th</sup> of May such a complete picture of the invasion forces and objectives was delivered to Freyberg that Keegan calls it ‘one of the most complete pieces of timely intelligence ever to fall into the hands of the enemy.’<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Freyberg’s placement of forces on high-ground around each objective was so thoroughly supported by this intelligence source that when the paratroopers began to drop, his only comment was a dry ‘dead on time!’<sup>10</sup> Without surprise, the German airdrops would never achieve the “*Handstreich*” Student dreamed of, and the odds would be greatly increased against the attackers. Given these factors, the Commonwealth forces seemed to be in an almost perfect defensive situation on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Yet interesting questions have been raised about the nature of the Ultra intelligence. On the one hand, it clearly stated the date and nature of the invasion, handing the initiative to Freyberg, and instilling him with the confidence to deploy his formations in positions of strength. Yet simultaneously, Freyberg appears to have been confused by the reports hints at a naval landing, in reality the convoys Student had assigned to land on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>11</sup> The effects of this on the command of the defence will be assessed later.

In terms of the attack’s execution, it is hard to call the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1941 anything short of a spectacular victory for the Commonwealth defenders. The initial casualties for the Germans were catastrophic. All three attack groups were met by well dug in, and thoroughly prepared defenders. Illustrations abound, such as ‘400 out of 500 soldiers’ killed from the German Battalion dropped on top of Hill 107, overlooking Maleme airfield.<sup>12</sup> In fact, of the 6,718 Germans killed or wounded at Crete, 1,863 came from the first day, from the initial wave of just 7,000 men.<sup>13</sup> Other groups fared better, but all failed to capture their objectives by the end of the first day, whilst many were all but wiped out by subsequent British sweeps. Back at the German Headquarters, Student was considering calling off the operation altogether.

The turning point of this debacle of an attack is universally agreed to be at Maleme airfield. At Platanias and Knossos airfields (outside Rethymno and Heraklion respectively) the Germans had been pushed to a bloody stalemate, and Maleme was initially no better. However, on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> a series of communication problems between the New Zealand battalion on Hill 107 and their compatriots at the airfield’s perimeter led to a ‘disastrous error’.<sup>14</sup> The defenders at the hill were ‘battered but unbeaten’, but due to confusion in the dark and the lack of radios, they failed to make contact with their allies at the airfield. With no way to assert their tactical status they presumed the worse, leading them to make a seemingly necessary, but ultimately

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<sup>8</sup> Keegan, John. (2003), *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda* (Pimlico), p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> Keegan (2004), p. 194.

<sup>10</sup> MacDonald (1993), p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Keegan (2004), p. 195.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>13</sup> Beevor (2005), p. 151.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

disastrous, withdrawal from Hill 107.<sup>15</sup> It is this part of the battle that draws so many to conclude that ‘the British need not have lost.’<sup>16</sup>

When the situation became clearer on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, the Germans had secured the high-ground of Hill 107, forced away the remaining infantry at the airfield, and had even begun to land Junker 52’s with much needed supplies and reinforcements. The battle was not yet settled, but once some spirited but all too late Commonwealth counter-attacks on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> had been repelled, the Germans were beginning to dominate the battlefield. The bridgehead they had secured allowed the Germans to land 13,000 men over three days, leading to a German land offensive on the 24<sup>th</sup> which quickly overwhelmed the Suda and Canae sectors by the 25<sup>th</sup> of May.<sup>17</sup>

The Commonwealth forces lost the Battle of Crete when they lost at Maleme. The bridgehead secured there was the German’s only real gain and it proved decisive. What needs to be understood is why, in these early days of the battle, the British did not simply re-seize the airfield. The Commonwealth forces still outnumbered their opponents at this stage, and also had tanks and artillery with which to beat the Germans off their gains. Yet the Germans held Maleme, and won the Battle of Crete. The next stage of our study demands that we carry out a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the Commonwealth and German forces to explain how the Germans succeeded against the odds.

General Freyberg was handed command of CREFORCE on April 30<sup>th</sup>, meaning that he had twenty days in which to organise its defences. He had originally arrived at the head of the New Zealand Corps, but now adopted command of a large and eclectic mix of infantry numbering 42,460. An overall assessment of these Commonwealth Forces can be summarised as follows.<sup>18</sup>

Properly Formed Commonwealth Infantry	24,500*
Greek Infantry	9,000
Gendarmes	1,200
Cretan Irregulars	3,000
R.A.F Personnel and other remnants from the evacuation of Greece.**	Approx. 4,760
<b>Total:</b>	<b>42,460</b>

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Keegan (2004), p. 206.

<sup>17</sup> Ansel (1972), p. 326.

<sup>18</sup> Figures from Beevor (2005), p. 346. Appendix B.

\*Note that Beevor’s approximation of ‘almost half’ is here substituted by Ansel’s more precise breakdown of Commonwealth infantry numbers. Found in Ansel (1972), p. 237.

\*\*Note also the designation of ‘R.A.F Personnel and other remnants from the evacuation’ to account for the 4,760 personnel not directly assigned a designation, presumably amalgamations such as the Marine Composite Battalion, or the Engineering Detachment at Maleme.

In terms of qualifying the military value of these figures some facts must be considered, as some historians have viewed them to be a ‘deceptive figure’.<sup>19</sup> The Australian Regiments and the New Zealand Corps, including the rightly feared 28th Maori Battalion, made up the majority of the properly formed infantry. Five pre-war professional British Army Battalions, such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Black Watch and 2<sup>nd</sup> Leicesters, were also present, accounting for about 9,000 of the total. However, the Greek infantry is considered to have been as much as half under-strength due to equipment problems, whilst the Cretan Irregulars were an ad-hoc reaction to invasion, so their military strength is hard to quantify.<sup>20</sup>

Ansel in fact concludes that perhaps as many as 6,000 of the men under CREFORCE were entirely un-armed personnel.<sup>21</sup> What can immediately be deduced is that, like many aspects of the forces defending Crete, what was available on paper and what could be called upon to fight were two very different things. Considering the dispersion of the defensive positions, and the lack of communications equipment, each individual group of infantry would have to take responsibility of its own sector. The inability of the defenders at Maleme to clear out the survivors of the Battalion dropped in the Tavrontis Riverbed is just one example of how lack of personal initiative from the isolated defenders contributed to the German victory. Indeed, the confusion that led to the withdrawal at Maleme was as much to do with a lack of tactical cohesion as miscommunication. Clearly, dealing with paratroopers requires a pro-active defence, in order to sweep away air inserted infantry before they can properly form. The quality of the Commonwealth forces on Crete hampered such operations.

In contrast, the German airborne forces designated to attack Crete were a unique formation. The XI Air Corps recruited men who were ‘a special type of soldier, tough, intelligent, and self reliant.’<sup>22</sup> This ‘Parachutists Spirit’ was instilled in all of the Corps members, including the five hundred Junker 52 crews that were attached directly to the Corps control.<sup>23</sup> Unlike their opponents, the Germans had clear goals, tactical objectives, and immense personal drive. The setbacks of the initial landings were massive, but once formed, the XI Air Corps Battalions were some of the best infantry in the world. This ‘Parachutist Spirit’ had led a twenty man team to test the defences of Hill 107 on the night of the 20<sup>th</sup>, leading to its occupation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, once the airfield was secured, the Germans held it against counter-attack whilst simultaneously facilitating mass air landings. To describe the effort as Herculean would seem over dramatic, but most historians agree it was a ‘ruthlessly single-minded’ process.<sup>25</sup> To blame the Commonwealth forces for losing Maleme is only half the story. The Germans then had to hold it, and this effort was successful due to the resilience of their infantry.

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<sup>19</sup> Ansel (1972), p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> Beevor (2005), p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Ansel (1972), p. 237.

<sup>22</sup> MacDonald (1993), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Beevor (2005), p. 147.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

However, other elements that need to be considered to correctly assess the fighting capacity are the numbers of specialist equipment such as artillery and tanks available to each side, and then the inter-service support provided by both the naval and air forces.

In terms of tanks and artillery, the Germans had a great deficiency compared to the Commonwealth forces. They could not insert armour artillery from the air, so were at the mercy of what seemed to be a huge British advantage in heavy equipment. However, the issue was once again a matter of strength on paper versus the reality. For armour the Commonwealth situation was an embarrassment. Despite the presence of the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Tank Regiment and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hussars, the number of working Matilda infantry tanks can be placed as low as twenty.<sup>26</sup> In the entire battle in fact, there is only evidence for seven Matildas actually engaging the enemy, and most broke down or malfunctioned even then. At Maleme, the counter-attack on the 21<sup>st</sup> was stalled by the Matilda tank support bogging itself down in loose ground. The Germans were let off easy in this respect; they had not come prepared to deal with armour, so the paratroopers around Maleme were much relieved to see the British tank advantage wasted.

As for the Commonwealth artillery, the majority was to be provided by anti-aircraft guns in Suda Bay's 15<sup>th</sup> Coastal Defence Regiment. The majority had little effect on the battle, due to the dispersed nature of the fighting, but the presence of a battery of guns overlooking Maleme was a key feature of the German struggle to reinforce the site by troop carrier. During the decisive moments of the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> the artillery kept up continuous fire on the airfield, hampering landings and even hitting directly several aircraft. Interestingly, the position was eventually silenced by aircraft support, an important factor that will be discussed momentarily. Overall however, it was too small a number of guns with too few trained crew operating them. Tanks and artillery did not sweep the Germans off the airfield, because the equipment available to the Commonwealth forces was sub-standard at best.

What the Germans lacked in armour and artillery, they more than made up for in air-power. As the invasion was technically being carried out entirely under Luftwaffe command, it is unsurprising that fighter and bomber support would be a prominent feature of the German military force, and that the co-ordination between German land and air forces was extremely effective. Sheer weight of numbers was an important factor, as the following *Luffewaffe* aircraft figures illustrates.<sup>27</sup>

Long Range Bombers	315
Twin-Engined Fighters	60

<sup>26</sup> Beevor (2005), pp. 345-346. Appendix B.

<sup>27</sup> Figures from JIC report presented 27<sup>th</sup> April, found in Macdonald (1993), p. 137.

\*Note that this report accounts for all *Luffewaffe* aircraft within deployable range of the Crete from the Balkans region. The inflated figures over Beevor's more conservative estimates are justified, as whilst all 885 aircraft were clearly not engaged over Crete specifically, the interception of the Royal Navy which shaped the battle as sea was carried out by a much larger force.

Dive Bombers	240
Fighters	270
<b>Total :</b>	<b>885*</b>

In terms of British fighter cover, there was nothing near a force that could rival this force. Crete itself technically accommodated three RAF and one Fleet Air Arm fighter squadrons, with a theoretical strength of some 300 aircraft, but the reality was once again much less.<sup>28</sup> The four formations had actually lost 200 aircraft and 150 aircrew in the retreat from Greece.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the bombing raids that commenced in the week leading up to the battle so badly damaged the remaining force that on the 19<sup>th</sup>, the day before the invasion, all the survivors were flown back to Egypt. Attempts were made to fly fighter missions from the air-bases in North Africa, but whilst estimates vary, the total available fighter cover for the British at Crete is placed at a maximum of thirty or so.<sup>30</sup> That is a ratio of almost 66 to 1 in favour of the Germans, so it can clearly be stated that the Germans had complete air supremacy. More importantly, it would mean the Junker 52's that would deliver the reinforcements and supplies so desperately needed at Maleme would do so unhindered by the RAF.

Indeed, German air supremacy is cited by many to be an important element of the German victory on the ground. Tactical air support around Maleme was particularly decisive. During the counter-attack of the 21<sup>st</sup>, it is estimated that as many as 400 planes harassed the Commonwealth forces in just three hours.<sup>31</sup> The potent artillery barrage of Maleme mentioned earlier was eventually silenced when the battery lost half its men to dive-bomber attack, a significant factor in the German air landings being successful.<sup>32</sup> Indeed the sheer weight of air power, harassing and impeding advances at key moments, can be seen to be decisive when we consider the relatively precarious hold the Germans had on Maleme until the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Whilst the Commonwealth forces clumsily scrambled to assemble a counter-attack force, the Germans were calling in close tactical support which was readily available and devastatingly effective. The factor of air power is vital in explaining their reversal of fortunes.

Finally, the factor of naval power is an interesting one, but perhaps ultimately a side-note to the main battle. Student's inclusion of a naval element in his invasion plan, considering the wholesale reluctance of the Italian Navy to meet the British in open water, seems to make the convoys' destruction almost inevitable. A total of almost sixty commandeered Greek ships set sail laden with artillery and other heavy equipment on the night of the 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>33</sup> They were countered by a Royal Navy force of four battleships, eight cruisers and thirty destroyers.<sup>34</sup> Clearly, that the British had complete naval supremacy is as little in

<sup>28</sup> Macintyre, Donald (1964), *The Battle for the Mediterranean* (London, B.T. Batsford LTD), p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas, D.A. (1972), *Crete 1941 – The Battle at Sea* (London, Andre Deutsch), p.115.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>32</sup> Stewart (1966), p. 266.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas (1972), p. 135.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

doubt as that the Germans had complete air supremacy. What is important for our study is that this naval element, other than turning away the support convoys, played no direct role in the land battle. In truth, the Luftwaffe so heavily engaged the Navy that it could barely carry out the Commonwealth evacuation on the 30<sup>th</sup>, a sign of which support arm was of most value in the Mediterranean theatre. As such, the one place that the British had greater military power was the one that played the smallest part in the Battle of Crete.

The picture that is beginning to emerge is that the numerical superiority of the defenders, and their supposed heavy weapons support, was perhaps not as helpful as it might seem. The occupation of Maleme by just 2,000 men seems to suggest that the disparity in force quality was substantial. The need to concentrate the dispersed Commonwealth defenders to overwhelm the dynamic threat the paratroopers posed was paramount, but the eventual attempts faltered and eventually failed. Here the factor of command, in particular that of General Freyberg, is a vital element in explaining the Battle of Crete. How did Creforce fail to bring their forces to bear more effectively considering the relatively small size of the island?

Whilst the issue of radio communications explains some of the initial mistakes at Maleme, giving some credence to the view that ‘one hundred wireless sets could have saved Crete’, this cannot be taken to be the decisive factor.<sup>35</sup> The failure to counter-attack represents a far more fatal flaw in operational planning. Most historians place the blame firmly on Freyberg’s understanding of the Ultra intelligence. The fact is that two battalions were held in reserve at CREFORCE, a mere twenty miles from Maleme. If they had been committed on the 21<sup>st</sup>, it can easily be argued that the airfield could have been retaken, the German’s only gain reversed, and victory assured. These battalions were Freyberg’s response force for a sea invasion, and no clearer evidence exists for proof that a ‘fundamental misunderstanding permeated defence decisions’.<sup>36</sup> His ‘continuing concern about a sea-landing’ was not resolved until both convoys had been defeated on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, but by then Maleme was awash with German reinforcements, and the moment to strike was slipping away.<sup>37</sup>

Whilst Keegan’s study of the subject allots a substantial part of the blame to Bletchley Park’s handling of the raw decrypts<sup>38</sup>, it cannot be ignored that Freyberg disregarded all assurances from Admiral Andrew Cunningham, head of the Naval Task force, which the convoy would easily be dealt with. Moreover, he seemed to gloss over details in a report received on the 21<sup>st</sup> which clearly stated the inbound convoys were not even due for Crete, as he greatly feared.<sup>39</sup> In short, Freyberg ‘had failed to understand the total dependence of the Germans on Maleme’, with fatal consequences.<sup>40</sup> The benefit of hindsight must not be ignored, but it is clearly an embarrassment that the ample reserves

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<sup>35</sup> Stewart (1966), p. 481.

<sup>36</sup> Beevor (2005), p. 162.

<sup>37</sup> Keegan (2004), p. 206.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>40</sup> Stewart (1966), p. 482.



around Canae were not moved the mere twenty miles needed to support Maleme. Freyberg lost the tactical initiative because of this misperception, an important factor in the German's reversal of fortunes at Crete.

The final question that needs to be addressed is if any of the Commonwealth weaknesses suggested were easily avoidable? For the question of resources, it is difficult to state conclusively that more could have been provided. Greece had been a disaster for the British and too little equipment had successfully been evacuated to better equip the defenders. Crete must after all be viewed 'against the background of the whole Middle Eastern Command,' which was experiencing an immensely difficult time in North Africa.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, the RAF could in truth not rectify the complete lack of fighter cover, as Crete was too distant from Egypt, and too small a theatre, to gain true strategic priority. There just were not enough planes. As for heavy equipment, or even the simple addition of radios, Freyberg inherited the deficiencies of his predecessors in these areas and had little time to fix them. It is not as if the mythical 'one hundred radios' deemed necessary to have changed the outcome were sitting un-used in Egypt. Rommel's advances against the Commonwealth forces in Africa meant any such equipment was already in use.

The fact is that Crete was far from being a secure fortress in the model of Malta or Gibraltar. It was an underdeveloped and tactically difficult place to conduct warfare. The Commonwealth forces were well dug in, but not well trained in how to handle the threat of paratroopers. In light of such deficiencies the likelihood of tactical errors like those at Maleme, or command mistakes like those made at CREFORCE HQ, seems high. Crete was not an ideal bastion from which to tackle an invasion, and Freyberg had an unenviable task that was only made harder by his mistake over the Ultra intelligence.

What can be seen is the amalgamation of four key factors that contributed to the German victory, despite the strong Commonwealth defensive positions and their Ultra intelligence windfall. Firstly, clear deficiencies in the quality of Commonwealth infantry and equipment made their efforts at dislodging the Germans haphazard, and at times simply ineffective. Secondly, the efficient and determined efforts of the German infantry in their exploitation of good fortune at Maleme were vital. Holding onto these gains despite counter-attack and artillery bombardment demonstrates that their superior fighting qualities were a key factor. Thirdly, the complete air supremacy the Germans possessed allowed them to re-supply by troop carrier without fighter interference. Simultaneously, it dominated the battlefield, aiding the German bridgehead. Finally we see a British command with misplaced priorities and a lack of good communications structure, meaning fresh combat troops went un-used at key moments.

The result was by no means inevitable. Yet once the communications faults of the defenders had opened up Maleme to be taken, the German's clear strengths were utilised to great effect. With such a dynamic attacking force a similar mistake as the one at

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<sup>41</sup> Buckley, C. (1952), *Greece and Crete 1941* (London, HMSO), p. 300.

Maleme, if it had occurred instead at Heraklion or Platanias, would no doubt have been exploited with equal ferocity. Clearly, despite the Commonwealth forces strong defensive positions, they could not afford any slip-ups against such a dangerous adversary.