

The Battle of Crete: A Re-evaluation

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In the space of 11 short days in late May 1941, Crete marked the zenith of the Third Reich. Yet it is significant as more than a simple 'watermark': as this essay shall argue, the battle of Crete held a great deal of contextual influence over the eventual course of the war. I argue also that Crete serves as an excellent focal point through which to observe a variety of strategic, moral, and tactical realities of the Second World War. Naturally, an attempt at complete description of the battle would be impossible, and this essay can only briefly touch upon some long-running historical debates and areas of investigation. These include the role of ULTRA, the code-breaking system used by Allied High Command; the tension between Winston Churchill, Field Marshall Archibald Wavell and General Sir Bernard Freyberg, and much of the ongoing debate about foreknowledge; leadership dynamics within Allied command, and the importance of Crete to the intentionalism vs. functionalism debate. In light of these ongoing debates, this essay will argue for a renewed consideration of Crete by military history, focusing specifically on its more problematic elements.

Introduction

Crete, a long, thin island in the centre of the Eastern Mediterranean, has always been a target of military ambition. Since the time of the Minoans, the Achaeans, Dorians, Romans, Arabs, Venetians, and Turks have all fought to control it, and, over time, have again lost it to more formidable opponents. The possession of Crete, however, should not be considered as just territorial gain, nor can it be imagined as a purely strategic holding – the possession of Crete historically coincides with the 'zenith' of its possessor, and its loss with that power's lapse.¹

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¹ D.M. Davin, *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War, 1939-1945: Crete* (1953) 2.

The particulars of the battle are of some importance to historians examining the relative strengths and competing strategies of Axis and Allied forces in the Mediterranean, and the nature of German early campaign strategy at its zenith. As well as attempting to make some contribution to the above areas of inquiry, I intend to show that Crete may be useful to the historian in assessing the role of airborne infantry within war, the strategic mind of Hitler, the impact of losing Crete to Allied morale, and the utility of intelligence.²

‘Those 11 Days’

Beginning on the 20th May, 1941, with the first paratrooper landings near Maleme, the Battle of Crete already mentioned and claimed the lives of some 1751 British, Greek, Australian and New Zealand soldiers, and that of 2071 German soldiers. Marked by close quarters fighting, confusion, and perhaps above all else, the ever-present dive-bomb raids, the seventh *Fallschirmjäger* [Paratrooper Division] and fifth *Gebirgsjäger* [Mountain Division] Divisions of the German Army managed to capture Crete in its entirety by the 31st May. Those Allied soldiers who could not evacuate were taken prisoner. It is also considered something of a demarcation point for a number of reasons: firstly, it is the last major battle before the invasion of the Soviet Union; it is also, save for the *Market* side of *Operation Market Garden*, the largest single deployment of paratroops in the Second World War. It is also the first instance of an island being successfully invaded from the air, a fact that would weigh heavy on British morale.³ For many, the Battle of Crete is in fact little more than a fullstop in the history of the Second World War. Awkwardly situated between Axis victories in Poland, France, Norway, and the Balkans and the vastness of *Operation Barbarossa*, Crete is often little more than an epithet, ‘the last phase of the Balkans campaign’, ‘the end of German dominance’, and more sombrely, as ‘the grave of the

² Churchill, for instance, devotes two entire chapters of his *History of the Second World War* to it: W. Churchill, *The Second World War* (vol. III, 1950). They were revised and altered many times, for many reasons: to protect the secret of ULTRA post-war, and more significantly, to avoid damaging the reputation and legacy of key figures, including Freyberg and Wavell, who contacted him personally. See: D. Reynolds, *The Ultra Secret and Churchill’s War Memoirs* (2005) 20 *Intelligence and National Security* 218.

³ A. Zapantis, *Hitler’s Balkan Campaign and the Invasion of the USSR* (1987) 64.

German paratrooper'. Finally, the story of Crete is reduced to three simple words: Axis Pyrrhic victory.

Both the course of the battle and the eventual German success have been remarked upon by many writers, and reasons abound, both positive and negative, for the battle's result. Scholarly disputation aside, any claim assessing reasons for victory cannot ignore the blunt reality of the island's topography. Mountainous, thin and long, with poor harbour sites (meaning that supplies had to come through the vulnerable northern harbours of Retimo, Heraklion, and most importantly, Suda Bay), Crete has always been a difficult island to defend. In May 1941, there were only two fully-functioning airfields upon the island at Maleme and Heraklion, with several more under construction. A number of smaller, less accessible airfields existed. Communications were hampered by the layout of the island, and by the sparseness and quality of its roads and railways.⁴

Despite these difficulties, initial reports on the situation were optimistic. Letters to Churchill and Michael Savage, the Prime Minister of New Zealand at the time, show Freyberg as unconcerned with the prospect of an aerial invasion: 'I am not in the least anxious about an airborne attack.'⁵ It was, in fact, the prospect of a joint sea and air attack that worries him greatly, and the final tone of reservation in Freyberg's letter to General Archibald Wavell, Allied Commander in the Middle East, can be directly linked to this fear. 'Although I do not wish to seem overconfident, I feel that at least we will give an excellent account of ourselves, and with the help of the Royal Navy I trust that Crete will be held.'⁶

Intelligence and the Air War

This optimism may have been justified. British military intelligence had until Crete been of modest utility. Yet in the case of Crete, ULTRA revealed the entire plan of *Operation Merkur*, right down to date and

⁴ Davin, above n 1, 11.

⁵ Department of Internal Affairs (Wellington), *Documents Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-1945* (vol. I, 1949) 293.

⁶ *Ibid*, 297.

landing positions, if not accurate troop numbers.⁷ However, after the war, historians debated whether or not this information would have made any practical difference,⁸ coming as it did some two weeks before the first landings on the island.⁹ The information regarding the use of paratroops in the Balkan region had been available since late March, when Enigma revealed movement orders amongst six *JU52 Gruppen*, and that 250 transport aircraft had arrived in Greece from Germany. Likewise, the landing patterns and ground tactics of the paratroopers was well-known, as the standard German parachutist manual, captured as early as May 1940 had been extensively studied throughout the Commonwealth Armed Forces.¹⁰

Despite this confidence, British intelligence was already concerned about the possibility of the Germans exploiting Crete's strategically advantageous position for an assault on the Middle East. Extensive discussion surrounded the possibility that Crete may, in fact, be cover for an airborne attack on Cyprus and Syria, with the final intention of an attack on Iraq.¹¹ General Kurt Student, head of the *Fallschirmjäger Division*, did, in fact, wish to 'jump' (*Sprung nach Kreta*, or 'jump to Crete', is a common name for the invasion) from Crete to Cyprus, and from there to the Suez Canal.¹² The anxiety surrounding an immediate attack upon Cyprus or Syria was so pronounced that even after Enigma had shown Crete as the next objective (on 27th April), indecision still remained as to whether to even defend Crete.¹³

⁷ F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (1979) 419. Most numbers were overestimations.

⁸ *Ibid*, 419. Hinsley's position is restated in a 1996 lecture: F.H. Hinsley, 'The Influence of ULTRA in the Second World War' (Lecture presented at Cambridge University, Cambridge, 26 November 2006) at <<http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/research/security/Historical/hinsley.html>> at 13 October 2006.

⁹ *Ibid*, 415.

¹⁰ B.H. Liddell-Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill* (1948) 240. Student would later express regret for failing to have knowledge of this.

¹¹ Hinsley, above n 7, 411, 417. The Chiefs of Staff, as well as Wavell, suspected a cover plan. The MI14 document detailing said concerns is included in Appendix 14 of Hinsley, above n 7, 573.

¹² B.H. Liddell-Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (1979) 161.

¹³ Hinsley, above n 7, 416.

Nonetheless, the decision was made. The value of the intelligence surrounding Crete was given by Churchill at some £10 million; the value of the island as a strategic asset, to say nothing of the condition of its inhabitants, would surely have been much greater. Intelligence historian Francis Hinsley believes the intelligence to be of greater value because of the 'acute shortage of shipping, equipment and troops throughout the Middle East theatre';¹⁴ however, a counter-argument can be logically sustained in that intelligence cannot be effectively put to use without the *materiel* to utilise the advantages rendered by that foreknowledge. *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War* is also sceptical about the speculation that surrounded the issue of intelligence, largely because of the already-mentioned issue of troop numbers. 'It is unlikely', Daniel Davin concludes, 'that the conduct or the outcome of the battle were affected by the fact that the Enigma, while providing full details of the German plan and a date before which the attack would not take place, did not indicate the exact size of the assault.'¹⁵

More cursory explanations may be offered. Churchill points to the *Luftwaffe* as a primary reason, claiming that the Germans maintained 'complete superiority in the air.'¹⁶ The few Royal Air Force fighters that initially defended Crete had been removed earlier for logistical reasons.¹⁷ Davin emphasises this lack of any air support in his *Official History*, explaining: 'one shortage above all was conspicuous to the defenders, that of aircraft.'¹⁸ The *Luftwaffe* was certainly effective. Where the lightly-armed paratroopers had difficulty breaking Allied defensive positions, the *Ju87 Stukas* revelled in it and achieved notable success: the Allies had 'nothing to match it.'¹⁹ During Crete, *Stukas* would eventually sink one destroyer and damage a number of cruisers, thus rendering Allied seaborne assistance impossible – and in turn, allowing supply convoys to come from mainland Greece. A dearth of men and *materiel* in

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 418.

¹⁵ Davin, above n 1, 420.

¹⁶ Churchill, above n 2, 240.

¹⁷ See generally Chapter 2 of Davin, above n 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 460.

¹⁹ Freyberg to Wavell, 23 May 1941, Department of Internal Affairs (Wellington), above n 5, 303; Freyberg to Wavell, 1 May 1941: *Ibid* 285.

the region, hindered by the splitting of forces between North Africa and the Mediterranean proper, also led to difficulties in maintaining any semblance of naval power.

Warum 'Sprung nach Kreta?'

As van Creveld puts it, 'the most interesting question is not how Crete was invaded, but *why*.'²⁰ Whilst there are obvious impetuses in German advances from 1939-1941, Crete remains a more difficult prospect to adequately address. Why did the Germans invade Crete? Or, to put it more precisely, why did Hitler decide upon the *Sprung nach Kreta*, or jump to Crete?

A host of answers are immediately evident. The typical understanding of the decision to invade depicts a Hitler reluctant to push his troops too much further south: his eyes were firmly focused upon the East,²¹ and the importance of *Barbarossa* to Crete, and vice versa, must be stressed. Whilst there may have strategic value in holding the Balkans to *Barbarossa*, Crete was another matter. With Italian leader Benito Mussolini's failure to capture Greece, Nazi party leadership had decided to take a more active role in Mediterranean affairs; the Italians, optimistically, referred to it as action 'in parallel'. In truth, it was anything but. Operation Marita, the German invasion of Greece, was a success, but should never have taken place. In turn, the Balkans campaign – designed, insofar as it had a design, to ensure the security of the vital southern flank of *Barbarossa* so that the all-important push to the east could take place without fear of an invasion from Yugoslavia, an alliance of Balkan states, or from the British moving through Greece – had heightened German ambitions in the region. Whilst Hitler had never intended to establish a position of importance in the Mediterranean, an attack upon Greece, he said, must drive the British out completely.²² The strategic advantage of holding the main part of the Balkans is reasonably clear, and, despite the fact that it was at least partly unintentional, German High Command – and especially Hitler – was keen to hold such an important area.

²⁰ M. van Creveld, *Hitler's Strategy, 1940-1941: The Balkan Clue* (1973) 166.

²¹ I. Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-1945: Nemesis* (1999) 366.

²² Kershaw, above n 21, 361. See also van Creveld, above n 20, 96ff.

Crete, however, is another matter. Despite being considered strategically important by both German Supreme Command and by many individual German commanders, Hitler was reluctant to push too far into the Mediterranean. Galled at having to remedy the situation left by the ill-conceived Italian invasion of Greece,²³ stymied by Franco in his plan to take Gibraltar (*Operation Felix*),²⁴ the Balkan campaign fell into a clearly subordinate position to *Barbarossa*. The decision to jump, or *Führer Order No. 28*, sits then in a difficult context.

However Hitler was thinking, Crete is an important position to hold. A natural barrier between Alexandria and the Aegean, the capture of Crete would prevent the British from entering the latter and thus secure the important maritime oil route from the Romanian port of Constanta via the Dardanelles to Italy. This, indeed, is a reason given by Hitler himself in his speech to the Reichstag on May 4th.²⁵ Yet the *Sprung nach Kreta* was never considered an absolute priority, and it appears that pressure from Hermann Göring and Kurt Student eventually forced his hand.²⁶ After talks in Mönichkirchen, Hitler eventually conceded, epigrammatically, that the conquest of Crete would make ‘a good wind-up [*Abschluss*] of the Balkan campaign’,²⁷ and would perhaps distract the world from his eastern intent, if only for a while.²⁸

The true persuasion on Göring’s part came from mentioning the proximity of the three airfields of Crete to the oilfields at Ploesti, in Romania – a vital source of oil for eastern campaigning.²⁹ Ploesti was, in fact, the absolute priority, as Halder writes in his *Kriegstagebuch*, and the reason discussed extensively by Hitler, as documented in his letter to Mussolini on November 20th, 1940.^{30,31} Hitler’s overarching concern was

²³ The formal demand for Greek surrender was famously met by a single word reply: ‘No!’

²⁴ Kershaw, above n 21, 348.

²⁵ G. Schreiber, B. Stegemann & D. Vogel, *Germany and the Second World War* (vol. III) (D. McMurry, et. al. trans, 1995 ed) 527.

²⁶ Kershaw, above n 21, 367; See also van Creveld, above n 20, 167-168; S. Mitcham, *Men of the Luftwaffe* (1988) 117; and Liddell-Hart, above n 12, 159.

²⁷ W. Ansel, *Hitler and the Middle Sea* (1972) 199.

²⁸ *Ibid* 203.

²⁹ See also W. Murray, *The Luftwaffe 1933-45* (1996) 74.

³⁰ F. Halder, *Kriegstagebuch. Tägliche Aufzeichnungen des Chefs des Generalstabes des Heeres 1939-1942* (1962-1964) Entry dated April 24th, 1941.

³¹ Documented in Zapantis, above n 3, 213-216.

with Ploesti: he refused to let the veteran 22nd Airborne Division, veterans from the earliest days of campaigning in the Netherlands, to leave their guard of Ploesti to take part in *Operation Merkur*.³²

Intentions and Functions; The limit of airborne troops

Of all German operations, Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's 'ideological war', had been the most important for months, if not years. And ideological it became. Hitler's continued inability to separate strategic imperatives from racial and ideological concerns is never more obvious than in the Mediterranean campaign, with Hitler regarding the region, notably excluding Greece, as racially 'degenerate'.³³ Plans for the *Reich* included a Europe as far west as the Ural Mountains, using the eastern European states as Lebensraum – his Europe never included the Mediterranean. As he put it once to his advisors – '*Lasst uns Nordisch bleiben*' [let us stay Nordic].³⁴

Treating Merkur as such, the entire affair may be treated as something of an argument for intentionalist views of Nazi leadership, as the strategic importance of holding the Mediterranean, and Crete most centrally, appears to have all but lost upon Hitler. Lack of a strategic objective is shown clearly by the fact that, while *Führer Order No. 28* superficially endows the operation with an offensive purpose ('As a base for air warfare against Great Britain in the Eastern Mediterranean we must prepare to occupy the island of Crete...'),³⁵ Hitler himself described it as a 'defensive holding' in an early speech to the Reichstag and was content to treat it as little more than an obstacle between the Aegean and Alexandria.³⁶ The relative strategic advantages that Crete afforded for further advancement into the region – proximity to Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and North Africa; control of shipping – were, it seems, also lost on Hitler, despite 'desperate attempts' by Naval High Command to convince him to use the fall of Crete as the beginning of 'intensive

³² Liddell-Hart, above n 12, 159.

³³ Ibid, 11.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Führer Directive no. 28. For further discussion, see also W. Warlimont, *Die Kampfführung der Achsenmächte im Mittelmeerraum* ['The Military Command of the Axis Forces in the Mediterranean Theatre'] (1958) 367, 200.

³⁶ van Creveld, above n 20, 170.

operations against the English bases and fleet in the eastern Mediterranean.³⁷

Crete also serves as a useful demonstration of the particular role of paratroopers. Through notable successes at Eben Emael and throughout the Netherlands, the elite German *Fallschirmjäger* divisions had become something of an obsession to German High Command.³⁸ However, disagreement remained as to the particular strength of paratroops within a broader strategic framework: 'there was a tendency to regard these troops as constituting the major threat, whereas they only served as an advanced guard to the main body landed by troop carrier during succeeding days.'³⁹

The Allies, themselves, were struck by the casualty rates amongst the German paratroopers: as Freyberg states in his letter to Wavell on the 24th May, 'The fighting has been very fierce and we can definitely say that the much-vaunted parachutists have been heavily defeated. I cannot believe they will be used again for a similar objective.'⁴⁰ Hitler expressly forbade the use of paratroops in taking objectives.⁴¹ From a deployment of some 22,000 men, Crete claimed the lives of 2,071 German soldiers, left 2,594 injured, with a further 1,888 missing – more than the rest of the entire Balkan campaign, and during a time when casualties throughout the German armed forces were unexpectedly low.^{42,43} Notably, paratroopers were not used in the capture of Malta, barely a year after Crete.⁴⁴

³⁷ Unsigned Memo, 1.6.1941. Cited in van Creveld, above n 20, 170.

³⁸ C. Buckley, *Greece and Crete 1941* (1952) 184.

³⁹ The failure of German caïques to make the British naval blockade is, perhaps, another reason for the abnormally high paratrooper casualties: see generally Davin, above n 1, Chapter 4; See also Buckley's depiction of paratroopers as 'skirmishers': Buckley, above n 38, 184; and contentions to the view, namely: P. Lisitskiy 'Using Airborne Assaults and Special Operations' (2005) 14 *Military Thought* 169-170.

⁴⁰ Department of Internal Affairs (Wellington), above n 5, 305. Italics my own.

⁴¹ Kershaw, above n 21, 367.

⁴² Ibid. Distorted casualty figures led to initial estimates much higher than the final total.

⁴³ As Student remarked, 'the whole French campaign had not cost us as many lives as a single battle in 1870': Buckley, above n 38, 303.

⁴⁴ van Creveld, above n 20, 170. See also R. Bennett, *ULTRA and Mediterranean Strategy* (1989) 51.

The Aftermath

So, after 11 days of hard fighting, Crete was taken. The evacuation of Commonwealth troops continued until the last moments, taking Commonwealth troops to Alexandria and leaving the few left behind with the prospects of becoming prisoners, or continuing the fight as guerrillas.⁴⁵ The British were left dismayed, frustrated and disappointed by the loss of Crete. A substantial loss of face had occurred, extending further than a simple 'bloodied nose':⁴⁶ failing to hold Crete was a failure to defend against an airborne attack over a stretch of water thrice the width of the English Channel. In the same month, air raids increased in volume over London. The HMS Hood, pride of the Royal Navy, was sunk by the German battleship Bismarck. Britain's 'island status', which Churchill had emphasised in rhetoric for years was becoming less secure.⁴⁷ Or to put it more bluntly, as Sir Harold Nicolson does, 'that battle has, I fear, dealt a very serious blow to our morale.'⁴⁸

The repercussions of Crete on British morale, both civilian and military – as difficult as morale is to adequately quantify – can be easily seen in two areas: through a general feeling of disappointment, whether in the capabilities of leadership or otherwise, and through a replenished sense of insecurity. If Hitler could make Crete part of his *Reich*, it was thought, then surely he could do the same with Great Britain. At a time when *Operation Sea Lion* was widely expected despite repeated postponement, the threat of invasion, now accompanied by images of dive-bombing and paratrooper landings, grew markedly closer to home.⁴⁹ Whilst 'those 11 days' of Crete would stake themselves indissolubly in New Zealand's national consciousness ('Soldiers never fought better than

⁴⁵ The guerrilla movement can only be mentioned in passing. For more, see G.C. Kriakopoulos, *The Nazi Occupation of Crete, 1941-1945* (1995); and G. Psychoundakis, *The Cretan Runner* (1998).

⁴⁶ See generally: Department of Internal Affairs (Wellington), above n 5.

⁴⁷ W. Churchill, no title (Speeches in the House of Commons and at St. James' Place, London, June 4, 18, 1940 and June 12, 1941). Indeed, Estorick considers this doctrinal reliance upon the sea surrounding Britain to be something of a 'Maginot complex': E. Estorick, 'Morale in Contemporary England' (1944) 47 *American Journal of Sociology*, 464, 467-468.

⁴⁸ Entry on the 20th May, 1941: N. Nicolson (ed), H. Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters* (vol. II, 1967) 171.

⁴⁹ Amongst the civilian populace, at least: see Estorick, above n 47, 468.

they fought on Crete; and not least among them the soldiers of the New Zealand Division'), the damage had been done.⁵⁰

Yet for all the less empirical consequences of Crete, there are many more that can be directly felt in the weeks, months, and years following the battle. As Davin says in his official history of the battle, 'just as a move in chess is conditioned by what has gone before and is seen in its full implications only through its consequences,'⁵¹ the true importance of the battle of Crete can be seen only in the effect it has upon later events during the war. Crete would affect the course of the war in North Africa, dissuade Allied command from establishing a Second Front, and go some way into destroying the Mediterranean Strategy. Its most significant contribution, however, is the most basic: it delayed *Operation Barbarossa*. The impact of the Balkan campaign on the beginnings of *Barbarossa* has been widely commented upon, and only a few things remain 'as fact'. For instance, it is clear that holding Crete meant maintaining a garrison, and preserving it as a site of strategic worth meant devoting precious *Luftwaffe* resources to it, removing both men and *materiel* from the war effort in the East. Casualties from the elite *Fallschirmjäger* [Airborne] and *Gebirgsjäger* [Mountain] divisions cannot have helped.

Merkur and Barbarossa

Most significantly, however, time spent securing Greece – including the weeks spent planning *Merkur*, as well as the 11 days of battle – meant time lost from the beginning of *Operation Barbarossa*. From this position of certainty, however, substantial variance can be found in reports. Conservative accounts, such as that of General Fritz Halder, make relatively modest claims, and stress the loss of equipment and manpower, rather than time. He modestly concludes only that Crete (and indeed, the entire Balkans campaign) diminished overall German 'striking powers for *Barbarossa*.'⁵² Furthermore, an increasing ambition led Hitler to insist that air supremacy must be had over the eastern

⁵⁰ Davin, above n 1, 463. Fictional reports of the battle are varied, but all regard the battle with reverence: see, for instance, C.K. Stead, *Talking About O'Dwyer* (1999).

⁵¹ Davin, above n 1, 1.

⁵² From his diary. Cited in W.G. McClymont, *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War, 1939-1945: To Greece* (1959) 483.

Mediterranean, requiring extensive, continued deployment (of troops who were previously assigned to *Barbarossa*) in order to maintain troop and aircraft numbers.⁵³ Aircraft losses – largely from Crete, and particularly from within the ranks of the vital transport *Ju52 Gruppen* – also hampered the Luftwaffe’s potency in the first weeks of Barbarossa, and it became ‘incapable’ of fulfilling the role demanded of it upon invasion.⁵⁴

Other accounts stress the importance of time lost from *Barbarossa* – some four to six weeks in all.⁵⁵ Although the influence of heavy rain in the East during April and May prevents an exact estimate on the delay,⁵⁶ British wartime leaders were exultant. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden stated, during a speech in Manchester on 23rd October 1941, ‘Greece’s brave defence ... delayed his prearranged attack on Russia for at least six most important weeks. What would those six weeks of campaigning weather be worth to Hitler now?’⁵⁷ This comment was repeated by *The Times*, on January 10, 1942; and more optimistically by Churchill, who concludes that ‘a delay of five weeks was imposed ... as the result of our resistance in the Balkans ... no one can measure exactly what consequences this had before winter set in upon the fortunes of the German-Russian campaign. It is reasonable to believe that Moscow was saved thereby.’⁵⁸

The triumphalist speculations that pervaded British popular discourse were useful in clawing back some measure of public trust in the usefulness of the Greek campaign, but they nevertheless remain just that: speculations. While it is certainly fair to say that Crete, as the final

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ R. Edwards, *German Airborne Troops* (1974) 51. See also K. Assmann, ‘The Battle for Moscow, Turning Point of the War’ (January, 1950) *Foreign Affairs*, 309; and W. Maser, *Hitler: Legend, Myth, and Reality* (1973) 298.

⁵⁵ McClymont, above n 52, 158.

⁵⁶ Liddell-Hart, above n 10, 184-185. Zapantis wishes to dispute this ‘rain thesis’ as something of a myth, and provides meteorological evidence to show that rainfall was not drastically above average in the weeks before *Barbarossa*: Zapantis, above n 3, 146-163. Nonetheless, the evidence seems to suggest that the prospect of losing crucial mobility was enough to deter an early invasion.

⁵⁷ Zapantis, above n 3, note 179, 163.

⁵⁸ Churchill, above n 2, 316.

stage of the Balkans campaign, delayed Barbarossa, the implications of such a delay can and perhaps will never be known certainly.

Conclusions

Yet, for all of its troubling uncertainties, for all of its odd and unplanned qualities, Crete stands fast only as the final total victory for Germany during the Second World War. As the power of Germany waxed bright in the *Blitzkrieg* years of 1939 to 1941, and as it later crumbled, Crete's status as a symbol of strength again held true. The swastika flag was finally lowered on Crete on May 23rd, 1945, taking with it thousands of German and Allied soldiers, and marking the close of a very peculiar chapter in the Second World War.

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