

(c) Suda Bay.

Commander—Maj.-Gen. Weston, R.M.
 16th and 17th Australian battalions,
 both improvised.
 Some 1,200 British riflemen, formed
 from various units.
 106th Regiment, R.H.A., armed as
 infantry.
 Two Greek battalions.

(d) Maleme.

Commander—Brigadier Puttick, N.Z.
 Div.
 4th New Zealand Brigade in area
 west of Canea.
 5th New Zealand Brigade in
 Maleme area.
 10th (Improvised) Infantry Brigade
 of composite battalions formed
 from various New Zealand per-
 sonnel and two Greek battalions.
 One additional Greek battalion.

There were anti-aircraft defences round Suda Bay and at Maleme and Heraklion. The field artillery consisted of captured Italian guns intended for static defence only. Two infantry tanks had been provided for each of the aerodromes at Heraklion, Retimo and Maleme; and three additional "I" tanks were also sent to the island. The single means of land communication between the various sectors was the road which ran along the north coast of the island and was obviously likely to be the target of enemy air attack. The shortage of transport in any case prevented the possibility of large-scale reinforcement from one part of the island to another. Each of the three main groups, at Heraklion, at Retimo, and in the Suda Bay-Maleme area, had to fight as a separate force. The general scheme of defence was the same at each, to prevent enemy landings on the aerodromes and landings, whether air-borne or sea-borne, at the beaches.

58. The main enemy attack was preceded by air attacks, principally on Suda Bay and on shipping, which gradually increased in intensity. It soon became obvious that it would be impossible for our small force of fighter aircraft to maintain itself on the island and that it would merely be destroyed on the ground. It was accordingly decided to withdraw the few aeroplanes that remained, which was done on 19th May. There were thus none of our aircraft on the island during the attack, except two Hurricanes which reached Crete on 23rd May.

59. In a communication sent to me three days before the attack, General Freyberg reported that he had just returned from a final tour of the defences and felt greatly encouraged. He described the excellent morale of the troops and the strenuous efforts to render the island as strong as possible. He said in conclusion that while he did not wish to be over-confident, he felt that at least the defenders would give a good account of themselves, and trusted that with the aid of the Navy, Crete would be held. He did not anticipate, any more than anyone else, the overwhelming strength in which the German Air Force was to make the attack, nor how carefully and skilfully their plans had been laid nor the losses they were prepared to accept to attain their object.

60. The main enemy attack began soon after dawn on 20th May, with a heavy bombing attack on Maleme aerodrome. Under cover of

the clouds of dust and smoke which resulted, and while the bombing was still in progress, between 50 and 100 gliders landed troops in a river bed west of the aerodrome, whence they attacked the aerodrome. About the same time large numbers of parachutists began to land near Maleme, south and south-west of Canea and on the Akrotiri Peninsula north of Suda Bay, where gliders also landed. The great majority of these parachutists were accounted for, but a certain number succeeded in establishing themselves at various points and caused some trouble. His Majesty the King of Greece had a narrow escape from a party of parachutists which landed near the house in which he was. He made his escape with difficulty, and then under the protection of a platoon of New Zealanders, crossed the mountains by narrow tracks to the south coast, where he was taken off by a destroyer.

In the afternoon, similar attacks by parachutists were made against Heraklion and Retimo. At the former it is estimated that about 2,000 were landed, the great majority of whom had been killed or captured by the following morning. At Retimo, about 1,700 appear to have landed; the majority of these were also accounted for, but a party of about 100 succeeded in establishing themselves in buildings on the route between Retimo and Suda Bay, and thus cut off communications by land between Retimo and Force Headquarters during the remainder of the fighting. An effort to dislodge this party made several days later was unsuccessful.

Altogether, it is estimated that over 7,000 men, armed and equipped with great forethought, were landed on this day from the air. They suffered extremely heavy casualties and only at Maleme aerodrome did they succeed in establishing any serious footing.

61. On 21st May, every effort was made to eject the enemy from Maleme aerodrome. The experience of the previous day had shown what tremendous support was afforded to the enemy by his air forces, which made movement by day almost impossible. A night attack was therefore made by the 20th New Zealand Battalion and the 28th Maori Battalion, who recaptured almost the whole of the ground lost, but were exposed at daylight to intensive bombing by the enemy air forces and compelled to withdraw.

During the 21st and 22nd May troop-carrying aircraft continued to land on and about Maleme aerodrome although under artillery fire. It is estimated that as many as 600 troop carriers landed on one day. Their losses must have been extremely heavy, but they were able to establish a sufficiently strong force to drive back our troops in the Maleme sector with the aid of intensive support from bombing and fighting aircraft, which made movement by day practically impossible.

During the nights 21st/22nd May and 22nd/23rd May the Royal Navy intercepted and sunk large numbers of small craft transporting enemy troops, but suffered considerable losses during daylight from enemy air attack.

62. On 24th May and 25th May the fighting continued with the same intensity. The enemy continued to land troops and to force back our line from the Maleme area towards Canea, which was heavily bombed and almost