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PREPARATIONS FOR THE COMMITMENT OF PARACHUTE AND OTHER AIRBORNE UNITS IN
THE PROJECTED INVASION OF MALTA.

JUNE 1942

by

the Commanding General of XI Air Corps

Major General [Generalleutnant] Gerhard Conrad

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PATERNO, CATANIA

ABBREVIATIONS: Ju 52 - Junkers airplane, Type No. 52

DFS 230 - small glider

GO 240 - larger glider

B 1 single-engine training plane for beginners

OB Sued - Commander in Chief South (Air Fleet 2)

Field Marshal [Generalfeldmarschall] Kesselring.

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From 20 December 1940 to 31 January 1943 I was commanding general of XI Air Corps.

In the beginning of June 1942, my Commanding General -- Lt. Gen. (General der Flieger) Student -- summoned me to his headquarters across the street from my office in the newpart of Tempelhof Airfield, Berlin.

General Student informed me of a projected joint operation with the Italians for the capture of MALTA, to be launched probably by the end of June. As in the invasion of CRETE, my mission would be to direct the air transport groups (special purpose) in the commitment of parachute and other airborne troops. Tentatively, I was to have at my disposal ten groups of Ju 52's with three wing headquarters.

Upon outlining the contemplated ground operations -- a phase authoritatively treated in another study -- General Student inquired how I intended to employ my groups.

Keeping in mind the experiences I had gathered during the invasion of CRETE, I suggested the following tactics: First, a strike by bombers and stukas. Then the troop carrier force would turn toward the objectives at an accurately plotted point southeast of MALTA. With the gliders in the lead, the force would come out of the sun in an uninterrupted string, adhering to a precisely calculated time table. The airheads permitting, the planes might also come in abreast. The first gliders were to land with the aid of spin chutes as soon as the last bomb had exploded. So that the groups of Junkers aircraft might find their objectives in case the island was hidden by a smoke screen, special reconnaissance planes (pathfinders) were to mark an approach line on the water by means of floating smoke markers. At the time, these smoke markers were being tested at the island [sic] of ZINGST.

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Next, General Student asked the following questions:

1. How many fully trained parachute operations observers are on hand?
2. How many glider pilots have finished their training? How many of these have received training with spin chutes?
3. How many DFS-230 and GO-240 gliders are operational?
4. How soon prior to D-day would I have to take charge of the air transport groups (special purpose) for conducting unit training and completing mechanical overhauls?

At the present time, I can of course no longer remember the exact figures I supplied in answer to questions 1 to 3 above. However, the following should be reasonably correct:

1. About 600 fully trained parachute operations observers were available.
2. Approximately 450 glider pilots, 200 of them with spin-chute experience, had completed their training.
3. Roughly 300 DFS-230 and 200 GO-240 gliders were operational.

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In reply to question 4 above, I requested that I be put in charge of the air transport groups (special purpose) three weeks prior to D-day, if possible. Furthermore, I proposed to organize all B-1 basic training planes in my jurisdiction into tow squadrons, or perhaps tow groups.

During the following days I once more inspected the Parachute Operations Observer School at FREIBURG IM BREISGAU, and checked on the glider training of the groups in LANGENDIEBACH near HANAU and NEUHAUSEN near KOENIGSBERG. Subsequently I flew to SICILY to inspect in person the airfields in the light of my previous experience during the CRETE operation. The airfields

-2- were to have been selected with a view toward the accomodation of ten groups.

After reporting to OB Sued in TAORMINA, I flew on to CATANIA. Upon my landing, the Generals Mueller and Buchholz took me on an inspection tour of the new auxiliary airfields southwest of CATANIA, west of FOCE DEL SIMETO (see Maps 1:100,000 of CATANIA and PATERNO), and the airfields at CALTAGIRONE, GELA, and COMISO. The auxiliary airfields were nothing more than recently harvested fields full of stubbles. They had no facilities for quartering troops, could not possibly be camouflaged, had no water supply, and -- of course -- no repair shops. Telephone facilities supposedly were yet to be installed, and quarters erected.

The airfields impressed me as being not very suitable because a great amount of dust would be swirled up during the dry summer. Moreover, some of the auxiliary fields were located extremely close to each other and laid out along an east-west axis, so that during take-offs into east winds the planes -- and especially the tow trains -- would endanger one another.

On the following day I inspected the airfields at REGGIO and VIBO-VALENTIA. The former appeared to be adequate for our purposes, the latter seemed to be too small.

Upon my return to BERLIN, I immediately submitted a detailed written report on my observations and reported my misgivings. A few days later General Student informed me that the MALTA operation would not be carried out.