

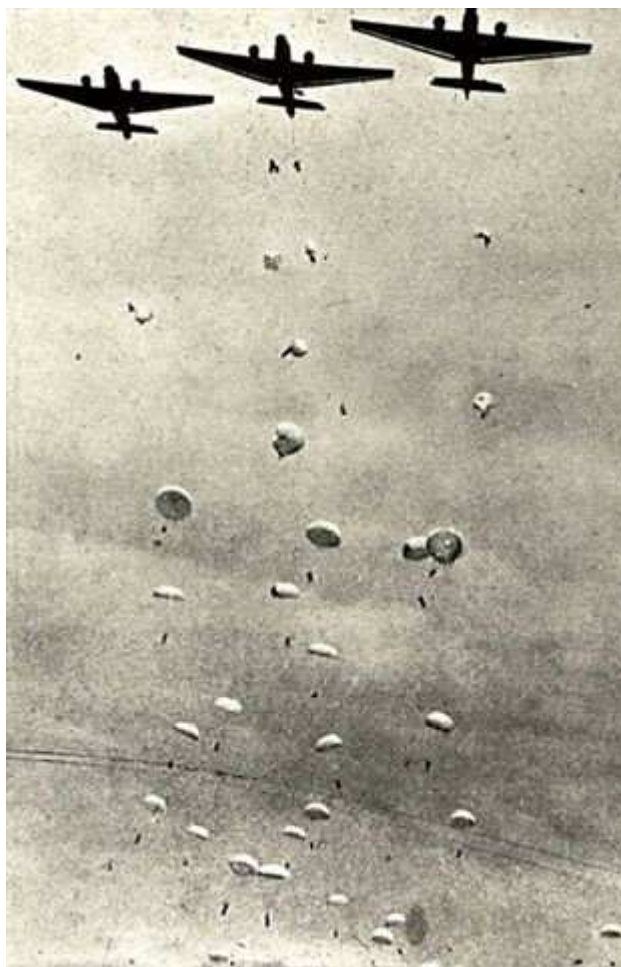


**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**  
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:



## The occupation of Crete during World War II (abstract) Operation "Mercury" – Airborne invasion on Crete 1941

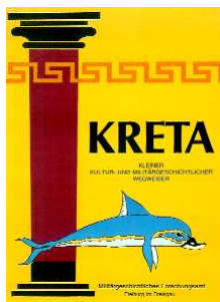
The "Battle of Crete" (German: *Luftlandeschlacht um Kreta*; Greek: Μάχη της Κρήτης), called Operation "Mercury", was the first big airborne operation of world history. On the morning of 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1941 German bombers, destroyer aircraft and dive bombers attacked the archie positions and fortifications Máleme, Rethymno and Iraklion. Hereafter "Ju 52" aircraft dropped (belated) 15,000 German paratroopers on Crete, commanded by Colonel-General KURT STUDENT. The Allied forces commanded by the New Zealand General BERND FREYBERG had a strength of 32,000 men supported by approximately 10,000 Greek soldiers. Because the allies "had cracked the German Enigma encryption machine", they were warned before the upcoming attack. So prepared, thereto the underestimate of the strength of the opposition by the German army, the resistance was very violent; a large part of the German paratroopers was shot down already in the air, wounded or ended up in the sea. The operation seemed almost failed. But after "Height 107" could be taken, from where the airport at Máleme was controlled, additional 14,000 German mountain troopers landed through this airport and sea at Crete. The complete occupation of Crete (in tough fighting) lasted up to 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1941. After taking Crete the locals had hard to suffer for their active defense of the island. In addition to resistance fighters hundreds of civilians were victims of the war.



Today many **Memorials** and the **military cemetery at Máleme** remind the visitors to the struggles around Crete.

They are **monuments** and **hope for reconciliation and peace** at the same time.

The following literature is recommended to those who want to inform closer, more detail and rating free regarding operation "Mercury" (in German):



MILITÄRGESCHICHTLICHES FORSCHUNGSAMT (1989): Kreta. Kultur- und Militärgeschichtlicher Wegweiser. – Broschüre (Freiburg im Breisgau), 165 Seiten, Verlag E. S. Mittler & Sohn, Bonn

XYLANDER, M. VON (1989): Die deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft auf Kreta 1941 - 1945. – Broschüre (Einzelschrift zur Militärgeschichte, 32), 158 Seiten, Verlag E. S. Mittler & Sohn, Bonn

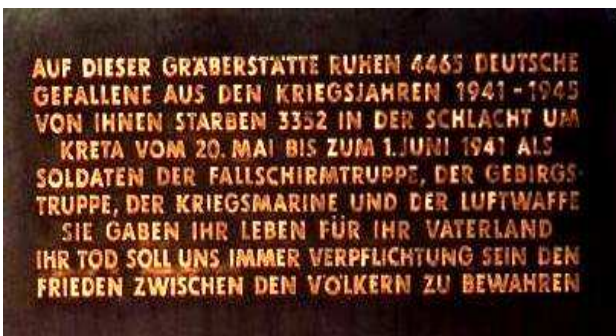
Additional info can be found at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Merkur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Merkur)





The pictures are showing two monuments in the village centre of **Kandanos**. The village is located north of the south coast village **Paleochora** in the south west of Crete. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1941 the German occupiers practiced here bloody retaliation for a partisan attack. They set fire to the town and destroyed it to the ground. Many residents were killed. The inscription of the monument (picture left) is translated: "Here was Kandanos." It was destroyed as atonement for the murder of 25 German soldiers. Kandanos was destroyed for retaliation for the bestial murder of paratroops by armed men and women (of the town) from ambush. Today Kandanos is rebuilt; the "German Action Atonement" gave the village a water work as a gesture of reconciliation  
**Pictures** (right.): *U. Kluge* (2004)

The images are showing pictures of the German military cemetery at Máleme. The cemetery was inaugurated in 1974 by the war graves commission. In the cemetery building, you can read the names of the here recumbent 4.465 soldiers.



The figure below shows the paratrooper memorial (left early and right today) at Chania. Become dilapidated, winter storms brought the Eagle down in 2001, so that only a bald socket was left of the "German bird" (as he was called by the Cretans). The future of this monument is uncertain.



During the week from the 20<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> of May people commemorates in many places in Crete the "Battle of Crete 1941 - and the Cretan resistance". Commemorations held almost in every major city, like on the 20.05.2002 in Iraklion. Here a former resistance fighter (fig. right, with "Bodyguard") provided himself for a souvenir photo.  
**Picture:** *H. Eikamp*

The Cretan resistance in World War II was called **ANDARTIKO**. The first organised "Andarten" emerged shortly after the "Nazi Wehrmacht" had attacked Chania on the 20. May 1941.