

Operation Mercury

By J.S. Anderson



The dawn of Tuesday, 20 May, like many earlier dawns on Crete, gave back to the twisted olive trees their daytime grey and revealed beneath them men standing to their arms. As the light increased the noise from the company areas of cooks preparing breakfast grew louder, and the troops, the end of stand-to approaching, began to feel in their pockets for the cigarettes they would roll and soon be smoking. The air attacks that also came with the daylight seemed no more than an assurance that this day would pass like others. So at stand-down men merely grounded their weapons, lit their cigarettes, and sniffing the air from the company kitchens or cocking a wary eye upwards prepared circumspectly to join breakfast queues with their dixies. It would be another day of sunlight, of route marches with a swim at the end of them, of putting final patches to the defences, or of rehearsing company tactics on the olive-clad hillsides. There was scepticism enough for those who declared that today would be the day. (*The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945* Davin, D. M.)

The Battle of Crete was a battle during World War II on the Greek island of Crete. It began on the morning of 20 May 1941, when Nazi Germany launched an airborne invasion of Crete under the code-name *Unternehmen Merkur* ("Operation Mercury"). Greek and Allied forces, along with Cretan civilians, defended the island.

The Battle of Crete was unprecedented in three respects: it was the first mainly airborne invasion; the first time the Allies made significant use of intelligence from the deciphered German Enigma code; and the first time invading German troops encountered mass resistance from a civilian population. In light of the heavy casualties suffered by the paratroopers, Adolf Hitler forbade further large scale airborne operations. However, the Allies were impressed by the potential of paratroopers and started to build their own airborne divisions. This was the first battle where the *Fallschirmjäger* ("parachute rangers") were used on a massive scale. (*Wikipedia*)

Requires: Base Game, Days of the Fox, Normandy and 2 Map Packs

Objective: The Germans must control both victory objectives at the end of round 10.

Rounds: 10 **Actions per side:** 3

Terrain: The stream is shallow.

Special: British setup first. The Germans have the starting initiative.



British Commonwealth Army Forces (22 Battalion)

Division 1	Division 2
8 Squad Bases	10 Squad Bases
3 Officers	2 Officers
1 Elite Infantry	2 Elite Infantry
21 Regular Infantry	32 Regular Infantry
2 MG	2 MG
2 Mortar	4 Bren Gun Carriers
2 Matilda II	2 Concealed squad markers
1 AT Gun	6 Entrenchment markers
1 Medic Token	
2 Concealed squad markers	
6 Entrenchment markers	

Special Units

RAF / FAA Personnel (light green bases)

2 Squad bases, 6 Regular Infantry

Platoon from 21 Battalion (dark green base)

1 squad base ,1 Elite Infantry, 3 Regular Infantry, 1 Concealed squad marker

Setup: Divisions 1 & 2 setup anywhere in their respective areas (see map) with the following exceptions (No units may setup in the German landing zones):

Div. 1- AT Gun must be placed on the hex containing the 3 point neutral command objective.

Div. 2- May not setup in any of the 3 green bordered hexes.

RAF / FAA Personnel- 1 squad in each of the green bordered hexes on map tiles 1A and 11A.

Platoon from 21 Battalion- Green bordered hex on map tile 12 B.

Card Decks: Hero, Ground Support I

Starting Cards: 0

Operations Cards: Mass Confusion, Shattered Morale

Special Rules: Special Units (green bases) may not be moved.

The British Player(s) must pay 1 command point to move any unit.



German Paratroops

Division 1
 8 Squad Bases
 4 Officers
 6 Elite Infantry
 18 Regular Infantry
 1 MG
 1 Mortar
 1 AT Gun (Round 2)
 3 Medic Tokens

Division 2
 8 Squad Bases
 2 Officers
 6 Elite Infantry
 20 Regular Infantry
 1 MG
 1 Mortar
 1 AT Gun(Round 2)
 2 Medic Tokens

Setup: German Paratroops start off board, they are landed during the **Action Phase** of turn 1.

Card Decks: Air Raider, German Reinforcements I (*German reinforcements are additional paratroopers that have landed off board.*)

Starting Cards: 3

Bonus Cards: German Air Support Deck I (The German player(s) may draw 2 cards from this deck at the start of the game and 1 additional card in each command phase. These cards may be played for free and do not require the establish contact step shown on some cards. *This is air support that was prearranged by the High Command before the start of the invasion.* Unused cards are discarded before a new one is drawn each round. *Use them or lose them.*) These cards are in addition to the other cards.

Operations Cards: No Surrender, Seize the Initiative

Special Rules: Paratrooper landings are conducted as follows. Using the numbered transport markers assign 2 squads to each number. Place all transport markers on the map within the landing zone area for those units (see map). All transport markers must be placed at the start of the action phase before play begins. As an action select a numbered marker and roll 1 die for each squad on that number. The die roll is the drift direction. Drift is 1 hex from the marker. Place the squads. (Note: Placing a squad does trigger **OP Fire** since the squad has just moved into the hex.) Squads landing in a building hex are lost. Squads landing in a woods hex suffer 1 loss. Squads from either division may be landed in any order the German player(s) desires. All of the squads must be landed during Round 1. As soon as a squad lands it may take actions normally with the following exception. Squads containing heavy weapons may not **fire** during the 1st round. AT Guns are landed the same way in Round 2 and may not be fired during that round.

Select 1 squad containing an officer in Division 1 (*Battalion HQ*) and mark it with a 2 point German command objective. So long as this squad remains on the map the German player collects these points during the collect income phase.



Optional Special Rules

Place a bomb crater and a smoke marker in a hex bombed by the Germans. *A great deal of dust was created during the bombing of Crete. Making it difficult for the defenders to see the landings.*

Rounds 8-10 take place at night. Reduce line of sight to 4 hexes during these rounds.

The British MG's where very low on ammo. Remove them from play after they have fired 3 times and replace them with regular infantry.

Notes

During the battle of Crete the Germans had complete air superiority. Few if any allied planes where based on the island. *This is reflected in the scenario by the Bonus Air Support Cards the German player receives.*

During the battle the British had near complete breakdown of communications. Most all of their phone lines where cut and the noise made it very difficult to communicate. *This is reflected in the scenario by the special cost to move British units and the Operations cards.*

One of the more interesting things about this battle, from a scenario design standpoint, is the near equal sized forces on both sides. This is fairly uncommon and made this a good choice for a balanced game scenario.

The Special Units on the British side represent forces that where present in the area that the British commander did not have control over. *This is why they can't be moved.* There was one platoon from 21 Battalion in the south and some air support personnel near the air field. The RAF personnel had received a little infantry training but not much. *This the reason these squads are reduced strength.*

The story of this battle is told in great detail at:

<http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2Cret-c3-1.html>

Clarification

German Paratrooper landings require 1 action to land 2 squads. Additional actions are required to activate these squads. So for 3 actions you can land and activate 2 squads.