



BA BILD 1011-166-0525-39

On June 2, 1941 — two days after the Germans had captured the Greek island of Crete — a detachment of Fallschirmjäger from the II. Bataillon of Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment 1 carried out a reprisal action at the village of Kondomari, shooting 23 men in retribution for the reputed killing of five German soldiers by local franc-tireurs. The summary executions at Kondomari — a clear war crime — are remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, the whole action was photographed by an official Kriegsberichtler (war photographer) attached to the German airborne forces, Leutnant Franz Peter

Weixler, and secondly the shootings constituted one of the very first officially-ordered collective punitive operations against innocent civilians carried out by German forces in an occupied country during the Second World War. It was followed by a quick succession of retaliatory expeditions against other Cretan villages and set a pattern that would soon become all too familiar in the occupied parts of the Soviet Union (Operation 'Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia, was less than three weeks away), then later in the whole of Greece and the Balkans, and finally in Italy and western Europe.

# REPRISAL AT KONDOMARI

On May 20, 1941, the Germans launched Operation 'Mercur', the airborne invasion of the Greek island of Crete by forces of the XI. Flieger-Korps. The parachute and glider troops of the 7. Flieger-Division met tough opposition from the British, New Zealand and Greek forces defending the island and, although soon reinforced by air-landed mountain troops of the 5. Gebirgs-Division, the airborne units suffered extremely high casualties. By May 31, after 12 days of fighting, the Germans had captured Crete, but of the 10,000 Fallschirmjäger that had landed on the island, some 2,500 had been killed or were missing and another 1,300 had been wounded — a loss percentage of 38 per cent. Casualty figures for the whole of the XI. Flieger-Korps were 3,700 killed and 2,600 wounded — representing a loss of over 28 per cent.

One notable aspect of the battle for Crete was the active participation of the local civilian population in the fighting. There were numerous instances when Cretan men — in most cases ordinary farmers, fiercely patriotic, armed with little more than shotguns, knives, pitchforks, axes, spades, even clubs — attacked individual Fallschirmjäger that landed in their fields or olive groves or near their farmsteads. In some cases larger bands of civilians joined regular Greek or Commonwealth troops in proper battle. One

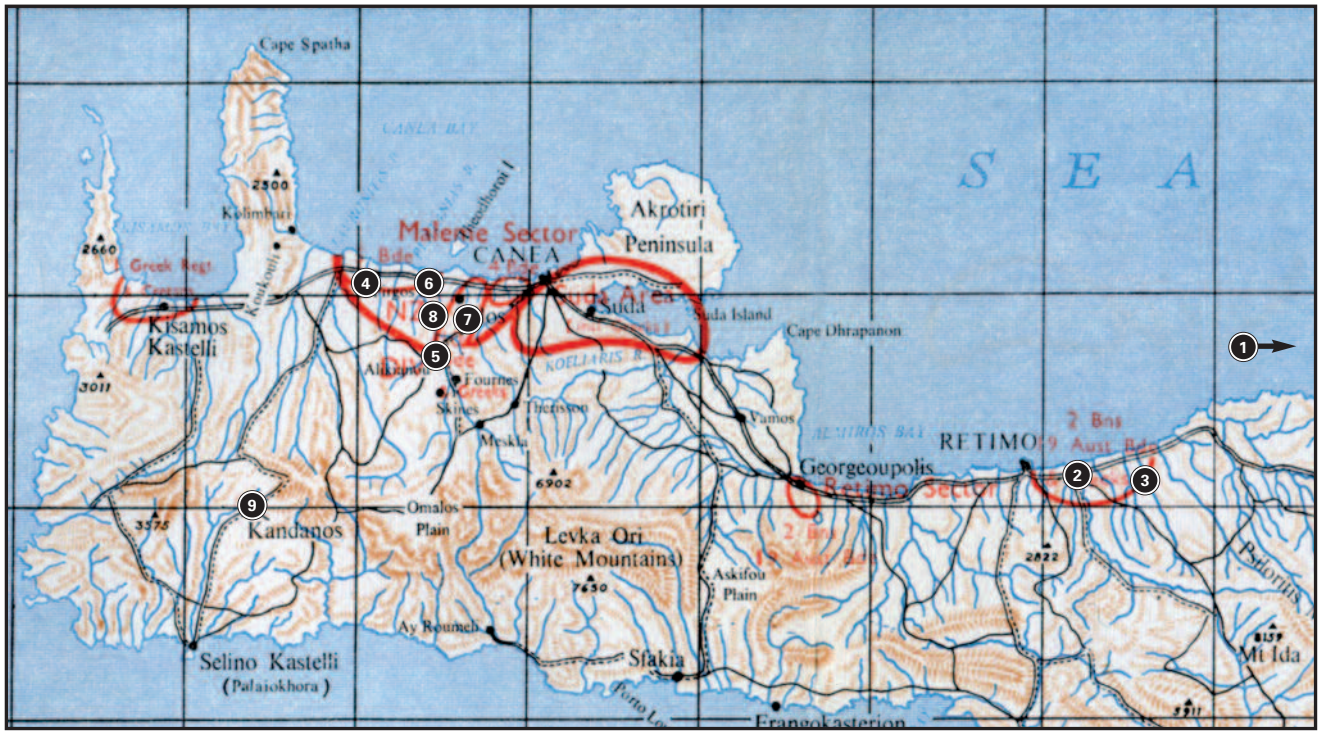
notable example of this occurred in western Crete, south-west of the city of Canea, in the battle zone known as Prison Valley, where on May 20 and 21 a group of local irregulars — women and children reputedly among them — joined with the Greek 8th Infantry Regiment in attacking Fallschirm-Pionier-Bataillon 7 near the villages of Alikianos, Agia and Kyrtomado, inflicting significant losses on them. The Greek infantry and partisans courageously held on in the hills for five more days, until the 26th, when an attack by the reinforced Gebirgs-Regiment 85 finally dispersed them.

Another example happened near the villages of Kandanos and Floria, in the island's south-west corner, where the local population on May 23 first ambushed 14 men of Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon 95 and then assisted regular Greek Gendarme troops in holding up advancing German motorcycle troops from Kradschützen-Bataillon 55, later reinforced by elements of Gebirgs-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 95, for two more days (May 24-25), preventing them from reaching the port town of Palaiokhóra on the south coast.

Another, more grim and gruesome aspect of the civilian participation in the defence of their territory were the acts of brutality meted out to killed and wounded Germans. It is undeniable that in the aftermath of heated battle, some Cretans turned to roughing up

By Karel Margry

and sometimes killing captured soldiers and even to maiming and pillaging the corpses of fallen enemy. For example, a platoon of the 6. Kompanie, II. Bataillon, of Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment 1 under Leutnant Peter Mürbe came down near the village of Kastelli Kissamou, west of the Tavronitis river and well west of Maleme airfield, and was completely annihilated by the Greek 1st Infantry Regiment, 53 of the 73 Germans being killed and the remaining 20 wounded and taken prisoner, after which an angry civilian mob began slashing up the corpses of fallen Fallschirmjäger and knifing and clubbing to death the wounded until stopped by two New Zealand officers, Major Thomas Bedding and 2nd Lieutenant Lestock Baigent, attached to the Greek regiment. Reports of such excesses soon reached the German troops and, even before the end of the battle, exaggerated stories had started to circulate, attributing the excessively high casualties of the Fallschirmjäger to torture and mutilation by the Cretans. (Fighting had been savage on both sides and there were in fact also quite a few cases where captured Germans had been shot by British and Commonwealth troops and even some where Maori soldiers had mutilated dead Germans.)



NEW ZEALAND OFFICIAL HISTORY

The shootings at Kondomari on June 2 were not the first, nor the last, of the reprisal actions carried out by Fallschirmjäger or Gebirgsjäger troops in Crete during the battle for the island or in the immediate aftermath. The main retaliations carried out by them were at [1] Tsalikaki, west of Heraklion (May 22, 40 civilians shot) (not on the map), [2] Misiria (May 23 and 24, 60-70 civilians shot), [3] Asteri (June 1, 12 civilians shot),

[4] Kondomari (June 2, 23 civilians shot), [5] Alikianos (June 2, 42 civilians shot), [6] Patellari (June 2, nine civilians shot), [7] Agia (June 2, 12 civilians shot), [8] Kyrtomado (June 2, 25 civilians shot) and [10] Kandanos (June 3, eight civilians killed, village razed). By the time the last of the Fallschirmjäger units had been withdrawn from the island and returned to Germany in late July, punitive actions had cost over 200 Cretan lives.

According to the Hague Convention of 1907, defining the Laws and Customs of War on Land, maltreatment of prisoners of war constituted a violation of these laws and as such was liable to punishment. Thus the Germans had the right to punish Cretans of whom it could be proven that they had committed such acts. According to the same convention, it was permitted to punish civilians found guilty of being a franc-tireur (i.e. armed combatant but not recognisable as such). However, in both cases, punishment should be limited to the individual culprits, who were to be tried by proper courts. These could hand out death sentences. However, summary executions (i.e. without trial) were not allowed. Similarly, as the codes of law clearly stipulated, collective punitive operations against innocent civilians (seizure of

funds, summary executions, razing of villages, etc) were not allowed and therefore constituted a war crime. Faced with unexpectedly fierce opposition, the Germans on Crete did not give much heed to the laws of war. As early as May 22, the third day of the battle, Major Karl-Lothar Schulz, commander of the III. Bataillon of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 1, ordered the summary execution of 40 civilians in the village of Tsalikaki, west of Heraklion, on the grounds that they had been arrested while in possession of German weapons and had participated in attacks against the paratroopers. The following day, May 23, Generalmajor Julius Ringel, the commander of the 5. Gebirgs-Division, issued an order that ruthless reprisals were to be taken against any act of defiance or brutality on the part of the civilians:

‘An assassination of a German Luftwaffe soldier on May 22, 1941, has shown that the Greek population participates in the fighting in civilian clothes, also in German uniform, and shoots and stabs wounded men, cuts rings from them, and mutilates and plunders fallen soldiers. Where a Greek civilian is found with a fire-arm in hand, he is to be shot immediately. The same is to be done with attacks on wounded men. In villages, hostages are to be taken at once (men aged 18 to 55) and they and the inhabitants are to be informed that if any acts of hostility against the German Wehrmacht take place there will be shootings right away, ten Greeks for each German. In addition the villages in the vicinity are to be set on fire. The burgomasters are to announce this in their municipalities.’



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COURTESY PATRICK OTT

*Left:* Driving up to Kondomari from the city of Canea, the Fallschirmjäger detachment passed several places where the dead bodies of fellow paratroopers still lay where they had fallen. Some were still in their parachute harness, having been killed during the descent or straight after landing. Immediately after the executions, Weixler

went back and photographed some of them. *Right:* Other dead paratroopers had clearly been pillaged. Whether this had been done by regular soldiers — British, Commonwealth or Greek — or by Cretan civilians could hardly be established but the Germans tended to ascribe all these acts of brutality to the local population.

**Right: This is Weixler's first exposure after arriving in Kondomari. The Fallschirmjäger have alighted from their lorries and start searching the houses. In all, Weixler would take 41 photographs during the reprisal action.**

Infuriated by the involvement of the civilian population in resisting the invasion, Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe (of which the airborne forces formed part) ordered General der Flieger Kurt Student, commander of the XI. Flieger-Korps and newly nominated Commandant of 'Fortress Crete', to launch collective punishment operations against the locals. Thus on May 31, the day the fighting ended, Student issued an order for punitive operations. Under the heading 'Reprisal Measures' it read:

'It has been convincingly established (a) that the population of Crete (women and youngsters included) has to the largest extent participated in direct combat; (b) that they have tried to interfere with our communications, in particular as franc-tireurs in ambush positions; (c) that they have maltreated and tortured our wounded; (d) that they have murdered our soldiers in the most gruesome manner; (e) that finally they have even mutilated dead bodies in the most revengeful and bestial manner.

'The troops have already, in as much as this was possible during combat operations, themselves taken measures in self-defence. Now the time has come to systematically investigate all such cases, carry out retaliations and conduct punishment operations, which are also to serve as deterrent for the future. I intend to proceed with extreme hardness. To this end I direct the following:

'(1) All atrocities of which I myself have been informed (especially in the Maleme — Kastelli area) I will have punished myself.

'(2) Under supervision of the commanders of Gruppen Ost (General Ringel) and West (Oberst Ramcke), suitable older officers are to be appointed with the regiments and Kampfgruppen respectively, who are to immediately investigate all such cases up to complete retribution. I put special importance on that — as much as possible — the retribution is carried out by the actual unit that has suffered under the bestial atrocities.

'(3) Appointed as chief coordinator for reprisal measures at corps headquarters is Major Bock [the corps intelligence officer], for whom this is now priority task.

'To be considered as reprisal measures are: (1) shootings, (2) fines, (3) burning villages (all cash money to be secured beforehand for the benefit of the relatives [of the German victims]), (4) extermination of the male population of entire areas. Permission for (3) and (4) can only be granted by me. It is to be obtained in the shortest possible way (with succinct motivation).



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PATRICK OTT

**The house has been completely modernised but the lower half of the stable on the left remains recognisable. Our comparisons at Kondomari were taken by Patrick Ott, the grandson of a Fallschirmjäger veteran. He found the house one street away from the execution site.**

'It is now of the essence that all measures are carried out with the greatest speed, with disregard of all formalities and with conscious elimination of special courts. This whole case is a matter of the troops and not

of the regular courts. They are not appropriate for beast and murderers.

'Photos and written material that is already available, as well as photos and reports to be added as soon as possible, are



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**Left: The first household — men, women and children — has been rounded up and is being escorted to the assembly point**



PATRICK OTT

**at the northern end of the village. Right: The main street through the village as it looks today.**



**Left: Still with the same group, Weixler pictured them joining with another family at a T-junction just short of the collecting point. Right: The junction is located near the northern end of**



**the village. The road on the right leads to the village church and the one straight ahead leads down to the coast and the main road to Canea.**

to be immediately submitted to me; likewise the personal details of all maltreated, murdered and mutilated men, listing rank, name, unit, result of investigation, and next of kin.

'The commanding general, signed Student.'

It is said that several senior officers stormed out of the conference at corps headquarters in protest of the order but there were others who were quite prepared to lead execution squads.

One of the units that followed up on Student's reprisal order was Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment 1. Commanded by Generalmajor Eugen Meindl, the regiment had landed in the vicinity of Maleme airfield and Canea town in the first wave on May 20. The I. Bataillon had come in by gliders but the rest of the regiment had parachuted in. They came down almost on top of the 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, part of the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Division, and suffered severely at their hands. However, reinforced by several battalions of the 5. Gebirgs-Division that landed the next day they were able to force the New Zealanders to retreat.

During the fighting, the regiment had faced tough resistance not only from the New Zealanders but also from Cretan civilians, which in some cases had led to acts of brutality, one case of particular infamy within the regiment being that of Leutnant Mürbe's platoon of the II. Bataillon at the hands of an angry mob at Kastelli Kissamou on the first day of the invasion.

The man put in charge of the reprisal actions in the Sturm-Regiment's zone was 24-year-old Oberleutnant Horst Trebes. An officer on the staff of the III. Bataillon, he had been in the thick of the fighting and had seen many of his fellow officers killed or wounded. For Operation 'Merkur' he had initially been assigned to the Kampfgruppe (90 men from the regimental staff and III. Bataillon) under Major Franz Braun that was to land near the bridge over the Tavronitis river in nine gliders to the west of Maleme with mission to capture the bridge and then help in the reduction of the anti-aircraft gun position on the west side of the airfield. Trebes and Oberleutnant Martin Schächter each led an assault group against the bridge. Shortly after, as they attacked to relieve Leutnant Helmhart Kahleiss's stricken platoon of the 4. Kompanie, I. Bataillon, Major Braun was killed, whereupon Trebes took charge of the Kampfgruppe. He set free the platoon, capturing 30 enemy troops in doing so.

Later that day, the commander of the 13. Kompanie of the IV. Bataillon, Oberleutnant Paul Sauer, was seriously wounded and Trebes took over command of the company. However, when within a short time the whole leadership of the III. Bataillon became casualties — Major Otto Scherber, the battalion

commander, killed; Hauptmann Rudolf Witzig of the 9. Kompanie seriously wounded; and Oberleutnant Rudolf Schulte-Sasse of the 10. Kompanie, Oberleutnant

Rolf Jung of the 11. Kompanie and Oberleutnant Herbert Gansewig of the 12. Kompanie killed — Trebes was ordered to assume command of the heavily depleted battalion.



**Three more men arrive at the assembly point. In the background stand two of the vehicles — captured British lorries — with which the Fallschirmjäger have driven up from Canea.**



**Today, with the trees gone, one has a clear view of the sea.**

**Right: With quiet apprehension, the villagers watch the proceedings and await developments. They are sitting by the side of the road, completely unaware that the grove behind them will within a short time become an execution ground.**

The following day the remnants of the Sturm-Regiment captured Hill 107, the vital height dominating the Maleme airfield. Trebes's force participated in this attack, securing the northern part of the hill, with Trebes showing considerable bravery. Reinforced by fresh parachute troops, and now led by Oberst Hermann-Bernhard Ramcke (General Meindl having been seriously wounded during the first hours), the regiment then captured the villages of Maleme and Pirgos and advanced eastwards to Canea. On May 27, they, together with Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 3 and part of the 5. Gebirgs-Division, took the city.

For the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment, this signified the end of the fighting in Crete. In eight days of combat they had lost over 700 men killed and missing. Of the 580 men of the III. Bataillon, 250 had been killed, 115



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**Left: One of the detachment's NCOs (in khaki shorts) walks back up to the T-junction to check how the round-up is proceeding. Most accounts of Kondomari identify this man as Oberleutnant Horst Trebes, the officer in command of the Fallschirmjäger detachment,**



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**but comparison with other photos in Weixler's series shows that this is not true. (Trebes carried a pistol holster on his belt and his shorts were longer — see page 42). Right: The main street through the village is today named 'Street of the Executed of June 2, 1941'.**

wounded and 135 were missing, leaving only 80 survivors. When Trebes received the order to carry out reprisal actions, he was the only original officer left in the entire III. Bataillon.

Exactly why the choice of their reprisal action fell on the small village of Kondomari is not clear. Situated three kilometres south-east of the Maleme airfield and two kilometres inland from the northern shore, the village had been in the defensive sector of the 21st Battalion of the 5th New Zealand Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel John Allen having set up Battalion HQ in the village with the companies bivouacking in and around it. On the first day of the German invasion, the battalion had opened fire on the Ju 52 aircraft passing overhead and decimated the paratroopers coming down. Of the 24 Fallschirmjäger that had landed right in the village, one was captured alive, two were wounded, and the rest were killed. The 21st Battalion spent most of the second day waiting for orders, then on the third day, May 22, attacked towards the north-west in 5th Brigade's futile attempt to regain Maleme airfield. The undertaking did not go well and by evening the attacking companies were back in their original positions, having suffered considerable casualties. On the 23rd

the battalion, having achieved little, abandoned Kondomari (leaving the battalion aid post and 70 wounded behind) and joined 5th Brigade's retreat to the east. As far as is known, there are no reports from the battalion of Cretan civilians having taken part in the fighting around Kondomari.

To all accounts, it appears that Kondomari was selected chiefly because this is where the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment, and particularly its III. Bataillon, had suffered its heaviest losses, mostly in the first minutes of the parachute drop. After the battle, the olive groves and fields around the village were found

**Right: More villagers are brought in. Already it appears that the men between 18 and 50 years of age are being separated from the elderly men, women and children.**



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**Right:** A uniform jacket bearing the epaulettes of a Fallschirmjäger lieutenant, and showing a bullet hole in the back, has been found in one of the houses. Here the unnamed Luftwaffe inspector of lieutenant rank who accompanied Trebes's detachment to Kondomari examines the hole. (Again, the Lieutenant in this picture is often identified as Trebes but, since the latter had a small beard, clearly it is not him.)

strewn with the dead bodies of Fallschirmjäger, many of them still in their harness, their parachutes hanging from the olive trees and cactuses.

The exact details of what happened at Kondomari on June 2 are known mainly through the efforts of one man, a German army photographer named Franz Peter Weixler, who not only photographed the shooting of the civilians but left a detailed account of what he saw as well.

Weixler, who originated from Munich, was 41 years old at the time, much older than most of the Fallschirmjäger troops. He had fought in the First World War and between the wars had worked as a banker, first in



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**Left:** With the able-bodied men now set apart from the others, one of them is being singled out for special attention. His fellow villagers have identified him as having ambushed and killed a German soldier,

(in khaki shirt and shorts), he is being questioned by Trebes (left). Under interrogation, the Cretan admitted to having fought with the New Zealand troops and having killed a German. **Right:** Looking on at centre, still bareheaded, is the Luftwaffe inspector.

Berlin and then in 1930 becoming director of the Preussische Landes-Pfandbrief-Anstalt (Prussian Regional Mortgage Bank) in Munich. Although he joined the NSDAP and the SS in 1933, his political outlook was Catholic and Christian-Democratic, and he soon became an opponent of the regime and in 1934 he was arrested by the Gestapo. His trial before a Special Court was cancelled due to an amnesty but Weixler was ousted from the Nazi Party and the SS. In 1937 he was fired from his position as bank director for political reasons, after which he made a living as freelance photographer and writer. In 1939 he was called up for military service, his photographic work leading to him becoming a Bildberichter (official army photographer) in the Propaganda-Kompanieen with the rank of Leutnant.

**Right:** The house in the background has been replaced by a modern dwelling. The large white upright plaque marks the beginning of the stone-surfaced footpath that leads to the monument to the victims of the reprisal, situated at the far end of the execution site.



PATRICK OTT

**Right:** In his post-war account Weixler mentioned that among the villagers being brought in was 'a heavily wounded old man, his head wrapped in bandage'. It is not quite clear what is happening in this shot but no doubt the person standing in the roadway in mid-distance is him.

In May 1941, his unit, Propaganda-Kompanie 690, was assigned to cover the airborne invasion of Crete. Weixler joined Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment 1 and landed in one of their gliders near Maleme, covering the fighting for the airfield and Hill 107 and the regiment's subsequent actions up to the final capture of the island on May 31. It was two days after the end of fighting that Weixler became a witness to the Kondomari massacre. He writes:

'On June 1 or 2, 1941 (an Easter holiday), I was in my billet in the capital of Crete, Canea, when after dinner a young officer, the Adjutant of the II. Bataillon of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 1, told me that "that afternoon I would have an opportunity to see something very interesting". I became curious and in answer to my question, he told me that a punitive expedition would be sent against several villages near Maleme since the corpses of parachutists, massacred and plundered, had been found. The Oberkommando der Luftwaffe (Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe) had been informed of this several days before, and an order had been received from Göring according to which the sharpest measures, i.e. the shooting of the male population between 18 and 50 years of age, was to take place.

'I told the young officer and Hauptmann Walter Gericke [the commander of the IV. Bataillon of the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment] that I had never seen a single massacred parachutist among the hundreds and hundreds of fallen men, but had seen dozens of dead comrades who because of the tropical heat and rapid decay had eyes, noses and even ears missing from their faces.

'I quickly walked over to the Ortskommandant of Canea, Major Edgar Stentzler [the commander of the II. Bataillon of the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment], who told me that a commission of the German Foreign Office had flown in from Berlin the day before in order to carry out an investigation concerning the alleged massacring of German soldiers. All he had to do was to comply with the order received from the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, of which he had been informed by the divisional Chief-of-Staff, Major Conrad-Bernhard Graf von Uxküll.



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BA BILD 1011-166-0525-18

**The selected men have been told to stand up, perhaps either to listen to a speech by Trebes, translated by his interpreter, or in order to be counted. There are 22 men discernable in this shot. Standing at centre, with bent knee, is Georgios Galanis, the only man who, in a few minutes' time, will manage to escape death.**

'I recounted to Stentzler that I had seen with my own eyes though binoculars how, in the evenings of the first few days of fighting, big vultures had picked on the corpses of our

comrades, who still hung from their parachutes on olive trees in the enemy lines — an observation also made by other soldiers. I reminded the major that during the fighting he and I together had seen innumerable dead and half-decayed comrades, but not a single murdered or massacred man, and that I would consider it outright murder to execute Göring's order.

'The rumours of "massacres" and mutilations, I said, originate without exception from younger soldiers whose overheated imagination in conjunction with the mental stress of the last days of combat had caused these wild and incorrect rumours.

'I implored Major Stentzler, who after all was Kampfgruppen-Kommandeur of the Maleme sector, in any case not to send out the punitive expedition, at which point he reprimanded me as a subaltern officer and forbade me to interfere in these things since I had been assigned to the Fallschirmjäger for the Crete operation only and merely as a photographer.

**Left:** The men are ordered to sit down again. They still look remarkably calm and collected so it seems unlikely that Trebes has already disclosed the fate that awaits them. Nonetheless, the Fallschirmjäger have drawn a closer cordon around the men, albeit still with their weapons at ease.



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BA BILD 1011-166-0525-21

**Left: Meanwhile, Trebes has gone to address the remaining villagers, who have been anxiously watching the proceedings from a few metres away. Through his interpreter, he told them that the men were going to be shot in reprisal for having murdered five German soldiers, and gave orders that their corpses were to be buried within two hours. Note that there are still a few younger-looking men in the crowd. This,**



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**together with the fact that just prior to the execution five men were exchanged for five others, indicates that the German plan was not to kill all male villagers between the age of 18 and 50 but a limited number — 25 in retribution for the five Germans killed. Right: The same view today, looking south-east. Just visible above the trees is the top of the village church tower.**

‘At that I ran over to the staff quarters of the II. Bataillon, where Oberleutnant Horst Trebes was just making a speech to a group of about 30 men, to the effect that the “action would have to be carried through as quickly as possible as a reprisal for our murdered comrades, and that everything would be carried out under his command”. I took a picture of this speech, although I was fully aware that I had no permission to do so, nor for taking the other pictures later.

‘The punitive expedition consisted of Oberleutnant Trebes; a Luftwaffe inspector of Oberleutnant rank whose name I did not know; an interpreter; two NCOs and about 25 parachutists of the II. Bataillon of Sturm-Regiment 1. I introduced myself to Oberleutnant Trebes and asked him not to carry out the order of which I had learned, arguing that blood-revenge still existed in Crete, whereupon he bellowed at me in front of all the men that he “had lost over 100 men of his company because of these swines and had freely volunteered to carry out the retaliatory expedition and would allow no interference whatsoever”. I was then permitted to accompany the Kommando, riding as a passenger in a captured British lorry, without knowing at first where we were going.

‘Shortly before the town of Maleme, we turned left and drove through a dark, fairly long olive grove, stopping several times to look at dead bodies of Fallschirmjäger. One corpse was naked and fully covered in maggots. Trebes shouted “Again a pillaged comrade!” and incited the men against the civilian population. A bit further on lay another

Fallschirmjäger, wrapped in his parachute, whose nose was missing. Again, Trebes screamed that the inhabitants of the nearby village had done this. I objected, telling him that one could clearly recognise the decomposition of the nose, mouth and eyes.

‘Then came the village of which I learned only later that it was named Kondomari. The two lorries stopped, Oberleutnant Trebes shouted his commands, and the men got off and ran into the few houses of the little community. Within a short time, they had driven



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**Having heard the shocking news, the men, women and children are told to leave, being driven away by the paratroopers. They appear to be taking it all with astonishingly little protest or emotion.**



the entire population — men, women and children — together into the little square. Even a heavily wounded old man, his head wrapped in bandage, was brought in.

‘A German soldier brought out the uniform coat of a Fallschirmjäger lieutenant which had been picked up in one of the houses and which had a bullet hole in the back. Trebes immediately had the house burned down.

‘Then another village inhabitant was brought in, whom the other inhabitants accused of having shot German soldiers as a sniper. According to the interpreter, the man admitted to having, on order of the British, fought as a soldier and having killed a German soldier. None of the other villagers could be found guilty of any crimes or plundering, and it was then that I interfered in the interrogation and told Trebes that he should now give the order to return and only take the one man with him. However, Trebes, whose face was now totally twitched, gave orders to put all men, except the elderly ones, apart and chase the women and children away. Then he ordered the interpreter to tell the women and elderly that all of the men of the village would be shot because of having murdered German soldiers, and that the corpses would have to be interred within two hours. Then the people were driven away.



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**The Fallschirmjäger line up across the road from where the hostages are sitting. There are 24 men visible in this shot, thus it shows most of the 30 soldiers that made up Trebes’s detachment.**



BA BILD 1011-166-0525-27

**Weixler’s next frame appears to capture the moment when the men learn that they are going to be shot, for this is the first in which they appear to show some agitation. Meanwhile, in the background, the firing-squad is taking up position.**



NIKOS VALASIADIS

‘The men between 18 and 50 years old now stood alone on the square, but did not yet realise their fate. When Trebes turned his back for a few moments, I took the opportunity to send away some nine men, who were standing nearest to me, i.e. I escorted them through the cordon and through the interpreter told them that they should flee into the mountains right away and hide themselves. At that moment, Trebes came running and asked me what was going on. I told him that these men were under 18 and over 50 years old. Trebes screamed that he forbade me any further interfering, I was making his people nervous, he was giving me a formal order to distance myself from the site, he would report me.

‘Then everything unrolled very quickly. Trebes had the men form a half circle, gave the order to fire, and after about 15 seconds everything was over. Individual coups-de-grâce were given by the Luftwaffe inspector and one other man.

‘Trebes and the soldiers were quite pale after the execution. In all his excitement he had barely noticed that, despite the prohibition, I had taken pictures of it. I asked Trebes whether he realised what he had done, and he replied that he had only fulfilled the order of “Hermann” [Göring] and avenged his dead comrades.

‘I do not know to whom Trebes reported the carrying-out of the murder order, because my nerves were so shocked that I immediately went to my own billets.’

What Weixler failed to mention in his statement, but what his photos clearly showed, is that a number of the Greek hostages, just before the German firing-squad opened fire, in desperation tried to make a run for it, dashing away through the olive trees behind them. Most of them were hit and killed in the attempt but two men — Georgios Galanis and Aristeides Vlazakis — made good their escape, albeit with bullet wounds. They reached an overgrown field some 200 metres away. Galanis stayed hidden there but Vlazakis decided to return to his house as he was losing a lot of blood and wanted to take care of his wound. However, the Germans followed the blood trail and found him there and, after some chasing and shooting, he was finally shot dead as he reached his brother’s house next door.

**Left: Today just an inauspicious grove bordering the main road into the village. This comparison was taken by Nikos Valasiadis.**

**Right: Next, the Cretans are told to line up in the field. Now fully aware of what is going to happen, some are vehemently pleading and arguing with the Germans.**

After the Germans had left, the remaining villagers found one survivor, Evripides Daskalakis, crawling away a few meters from the execution site. He asked for water and died a few moments later.

Thus, Georgios Galanis was the only one who managed to escape death. In all, 23 men were murdered in the execution. Thirteen of the victims came from just four families, five of them belonging to the Daskalakis family, three each to the Vlazakis and Apostolakis and two to the Papadakis. The youngest was 21, the eldest 47.

Five men had a narrow escape just prior to the execution. One of the villagers being rounded up, a man named Korkidis (first name unknown), carried with him a note written by a wounded German paratrooper a few days ago, stating that Korkidis had helped him. When he presented the paper to his captors, he was released and also allowed to take his son and three more men with him. The Germans then substituted these five with five others.



BA BILD 1011-166-0525-28



BA BILD 1011-166-0525-29

**The firing-squad has formed up and Trebes is about to give the order to open fire.**

The massacre at Kondomari was not the only reprisal action against Cretan civilians emanating from Student's order. That same day, June 2, similar executions of civilians took place in three other communities, further to the east. On June 2, the village of Alikianos — near where local irregulars had joined in combating Fallschirm-Pionier-Bataillon 7 on the second day of the battle — was surrounded by German forces. Forty-two male civilians were marched to the churchyard and shot in groups of ten in front of their relatives. On the same day and during similar operations, 46 more civilians were executed in nearby villages: nine in Patellari, 12 in Agia and 25 in Kyrtomado respectively.

The next day, June 3, forces of the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment, in all probability again led by Oberleutnant Trebes, arrived at the village of Kandanos, where the locals had for three days held up the German advance to the south coast. Most of the population had fled, but the Germans found and killed

**Right: With bullets flying, some of the men have fallen to the ground, while others, on the right, try to escape by dashing off into the trees.**



BA BILD 1011-166-0525-30

eight persons (very old people, six men and two women), slaughtered all the animal stock and burned all the houses. A few more homes were destroyed in the nearby villages of Floria and Kakopetro. After its destruction, Kandanos was declared a 'dead zone' and its remaining population was forbidden to return and rebuild it. The Germans erected signs at both ends, one of them reading 'Kandanos was destroyed in vengeance of the bestial murder of a platoon of Fallschirmjäger and a half platoon of engineers by armed men and women in ambush' and the other 'Here stood Kandanos, destroyed in retribution for the murder of 25 German soldiers, never to be rebuilt again.'

This was not the end of the reprisals. General der Flieger Alexander Andrea, who on July 21 succeeded Student as the Commander of Fortress Crete, continued the latter's campaign of retaliations. On August 1, two months after the first executions at Alikianos, the Germans gathered 118 civilians at a bridge over the Keritis river near the village and shot them after forcing the victims to dig their own graves. Twelve of those killed were from Alikianos, the rest came from the nearby villages of Fournes, Skines, Vatolakos, Koufo, Prases, Karanou, Lakkoi, Orthouni, Nea Roumata and Hosti.

BA BILD 1011-166-0525-32

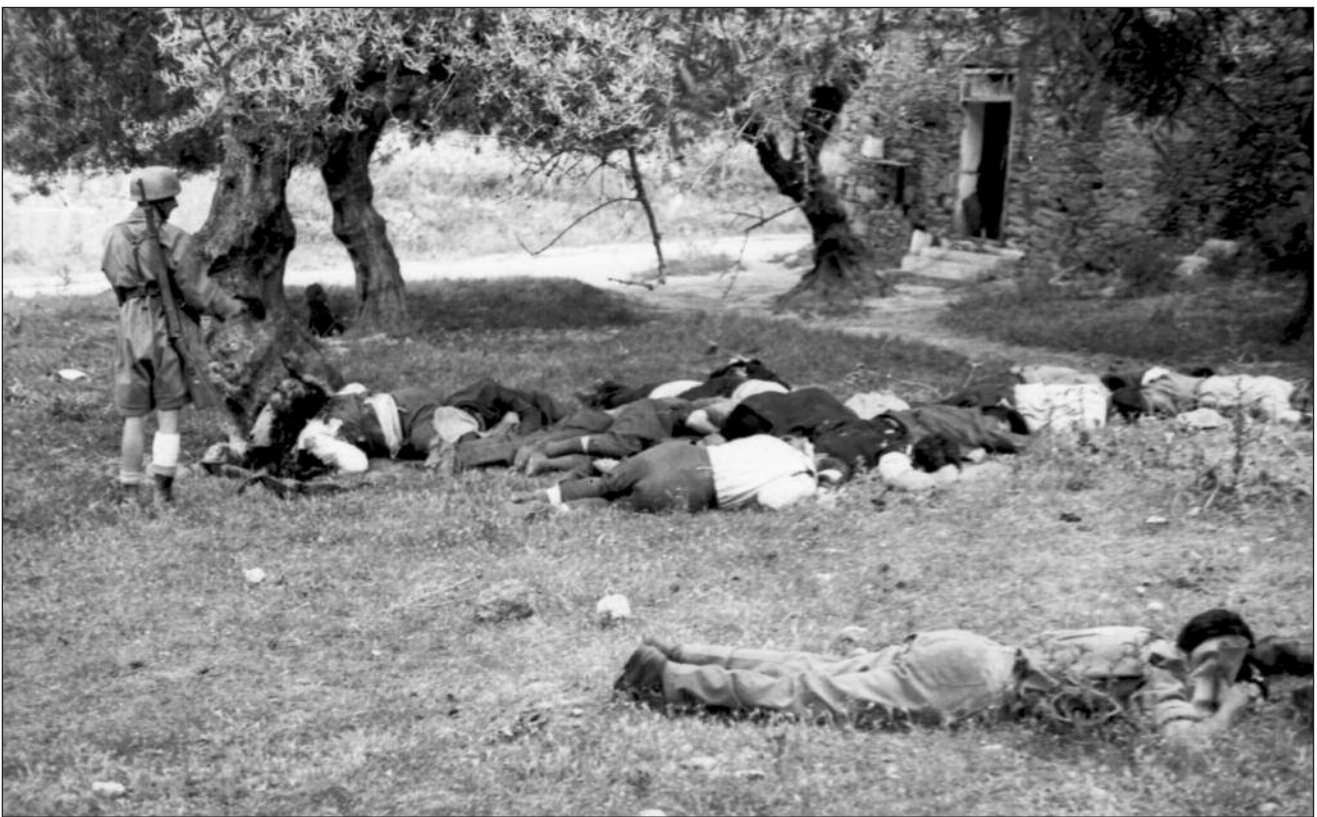


BA BILD 1011-166-0527-03A

**Left:** Smoke from the hail of bullets hangs over the tangle of men, some already dead, others gravely wounded. Weixler rapidly took six more pictures, all of them virtually identical to this one, and from the gunsmoke in them one can deduce that the firing-squad continued to fire at the bodies for several more

**seconds after the first volley. Right:** Having quickly changed the film in his camera (or, more likely, having turned to a second camera) Weixler moved up to the mass of bodies and photographed them from close up. Seventeen victims can be discerned in this shot.

BA BILD 1011-166-0527-04A



**Two men — the Luftwaffe inspector and a Fallschirmjäger (seen here) — then went round finishing off those who were still alive with a pistol shot. In the foreground lies one of the men hit while making a dash for it.**

For two of the main German actors in the Kondomari shootings, the reprisal action had a tragic aftermath.

Twelve days after Kondomari, on June 14, Horst Trebes was awarded the Knight's Cross for his courage and leadership in the capture of Hill 107. Shortly after, the Sturm-Regiment returned to Germany, the troops being received as heroes in their garrison towns. On July 19, Trebes, together with other Knight's Cross winners of the Crete battle, was received by Hitler at his 'Wolfschanze' headquarters near Rastenburg. A few days later, there was a celebration party in the III. Bataillon's barracks in Halberstadt. The drunken evening ended in tragedy when Trebes — the battalion commander —



PATRICK OTT

carelessly shot and killed a fellow paratrooper, Oberjäger Karl Polzin, a member of the famous Stoss-Trupp 4 of Sturmgruppe 'Granit' of Sturm-Abteilung Koch that had captured Fort Eben Emael in Belgium on May 10, 1940 (see *After the Battle* No. 5). As the party was winding down Polzin was drunk and sleeping in the bathroom with the door closed. Trebes, who was also intoxicated, could not rouse him by banging on the door or shouting. He drew his pistol and fired into the floor, but the ricocheting round killed Polzin. Rumour had it that Polzin had nagged Trebes about his 'bravery' in Crete, alluding to his role in the reprisals.

Although Trebes was the battalion commander, such an offence could not go unpunished. Put before a court-martial, he was only spared the death penalty due to his stature as a Knight's Cross winner and because of his mother-in-law's direct appeal to Reichsmarschall Göring. She had worked as an army nurse in 1917 and met Göring when he was a young fighter pilot in military hospital after being shot down. Seeing her son-in-law in dire trouble, she asked Göring for a favour and he interceded on Trebes's behalf.

Trebes was stripped of his commission as well as every award including the Knight's Cross. Now demoted to a simple enlisted Jäger, he continued service with the Sturm-Regiment. Eventually he regained his commission, being appointed company comman-

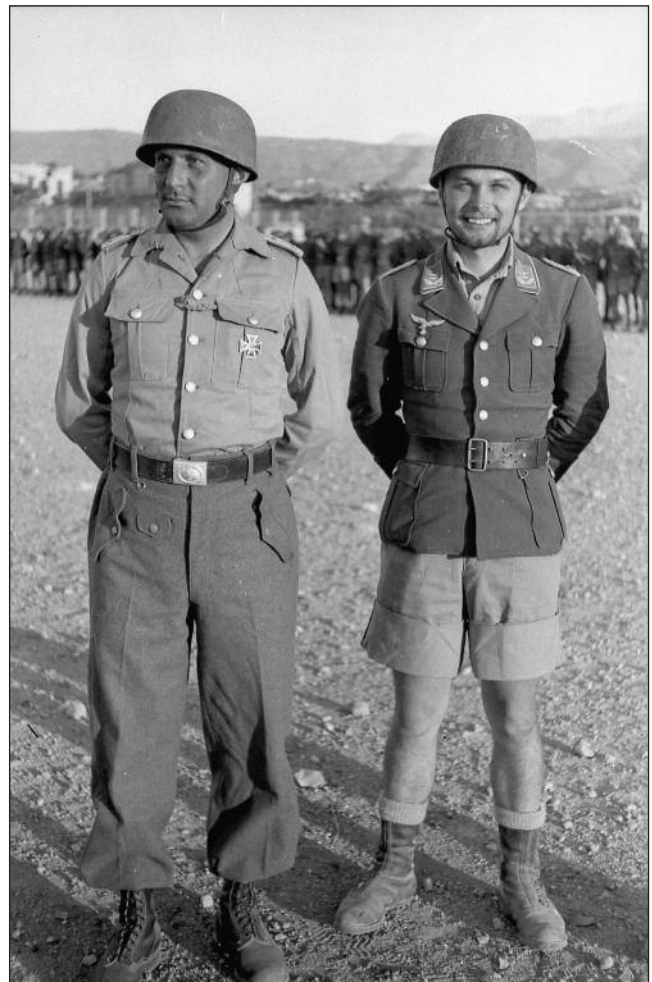
#### LIST OF VICTIMS OF THE KONDOMARI EXECUTIONS, JUNE 2, 1941

Family Name	First Name	Father's First Name	Age
Daskalakis	Evipides	Panagiotis	40
Daskalakis	Nikolaos	Panagiotis	30
Daskalakis	Elias	Panagiotis	27
Daskalakis	Christoforos	Panagiotis	
Daskalakis	Michail	Konstantinos	25
Georgilas	Georgios	Emmanuil	38
Michelakis	Elias	Stylios	43
Filippakis	Stylios	Konstantinos	47
Drakakis	Antonios	Emmanuil	31
Frantzeskakis	Ioannis	Apostolos	38
Vilitas	Evangelos	Michail	
Vlazakis	Michail	Nikolaos	
Vlazakis	Charalampos	Nikolaos	
Vlazakis	Aristeides	Nikolaos	45
Apostolakis	Georgios	Ioannis	39
Apostolakis	Antonios	Artemios	29
Apostolakis	Artemios	Apostolos	
Papadakis	Konstantinos	Andreas	28
Papadakis	Andreas	Nikolaos	27
Sarris	Nikolaos	Ioannis	30
Sfyridakis	Antonios	Georgios	26
Kalogridis	Georgios	Nikolaos	
Frantzeskakis	Antonios	Ioannis	21

In all, 23 men were murdered in the reprisal shooting. From the names of their fathers, one can see that of the five victims from the Daskalakis family, four were brothers, and that the three victims named Vlazakis were also brothers.



The day after the Kondomari shootings, the Germans also raided the village of Kandanos, 40 kilometres to the south, in another punitive expedition, murdering eight of the citizens, killing all the livestock and burning the entire village down. Afterwards, they erected signs at the entrances meant to serve as a warning and deterrent to the Cretan population. This one reads: 'Kandanos was destroyed in vengeance of the bestial murder of a platoon of Fallschirmjäger and a half platoon of engineers by armed men and women in ambush'.



On June 14, 12 days after he had led the reprisal shootings at Kondomari, Oberleutnant Horst Trebes received the Knight's Cross at a ceremony in Canea for his courage and leadership in the Crete battle. Here he stands with Hauptmann Walter Gericke, the commander of the IV. Bataillon of the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment, who received the same decoration. However, Trebes would soon fall into disgrace and lose both his commission and his Ritterkreuz due to a drunken shooting incident at his garrison barracks in Halberstadt.



PETEVASILI

**Today, memorials throughout Crete commemorate the victims of the campaign of terror unleashed by the German occupiers. The one at Kondomari was erected at the far end of the execution field, the panel on the left listing the names of the victims.**

der in the III. Bataillon in January 1942. The following month, he was sent to North Africa where he became commander of the 1. Kompanie in Major Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte's Fallschirmjäger-Lehr-Bataillon, keeping that position when the unit became Kampfgruppe von der Heydte in Fallschirmjäger-Brigade 'Ramcke'. However, the incident with Polzin had left Trebes emotionally shattered, and he appeared reckless, even suicidal, in the face of the enemy, tempting fate with every chance he got. (Many sources say that he lost his right arm in North Africa, however many photos after this time show him with both arms — and still wearing his Knight's Cross!) On November 1, 1942, he was promoted to Hauptmann and in early March 1944 he was transferred to Normandy to assume command of the III. Bataillon of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 6 at the request of Major von der Heydte, the regimental commander, who was in desperate need of seasoned commanders. He was killed in action by a strafing Allied aircraft near Saint-Denis-le-Gast, south-west of Saint-Lô, on July 29, 1944.

The other main protagonist for whom Kondomari would have dire consequences was Franz Peter Weixler. Having returned from the reprisal expedition, Weixler had his film developed and prints made by a friend in Athens. Still shocked by what he considered a war crime, he was determined to use the photos to expose the crimes committed by the Nazi regime. As he later wrote: 'The film was then taken from me by my Dienststelle (superior office) and I had to sign a statement that I did not possess any prints or copies of the negatives. However, I did succeed in hiding the prints, and a copy of the reprisal order issued by the division, and to use these later in my activity against Hitler and his regime.'

In late summer 1941, Weixler was dismissed from the Wehrmacht for political reasons, being demoted and graded 'unworthy for military service'. Back in Germany, he would tell not just his friends but also many other people, even total strangers on the

train, of what he had witnessed in Crete and show them the prints he had secreted out. Inevitably, he was denounced and in late 1943 he was again arrested by the Gestapo, this time on accusation of high treason and continued 'morale-undermining activities' — both of which were punishable with a death sentence under Nazi law. He was charged in particular with having leaked uncensored material related to the paratroopers' activities in Crete, notably his photographs taken in Kondomari, and having helped some Cretans to flee.

Weixler's trial, first before the People's Court in Berlin and then passed on to the State High Court in Munich, dragged on endlessly, mainly because his files both in Berlin and at the Gestapo office in Nuremberg were destroyed by fire. Sent to Munich's Neudeck Prison on January 16, 1944, to await his verdict, he spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of the Gestapo. He was on their list of Todeskandidaten (candidates for execution) and only narrowly escaped being shot.

Freed by the American capture of Munich on April 30, 1945, Weixler reported to the

Allied authorities and submitted an affidavit on what he had witnessed at Kondomari in 1941. It was used during Göring's trial in Nuremberg in November 1945.

After the war Weixler entered into politics, participating in the founding of the Christlich-Soziale Union (CSU), the Christian-Democratic conservative party in Bavaria, in his home town of Krailing and becoming a provincial party delegate. The memory of what he had witnessed in Crete never left him and in 1957 he even travelled to Crete to meet up with Georgios Galanis, the lone survivor of the execution. Together with Artemis Georgilas (brother of one of the executed) and Michalis Sarris (one of the men spared by Korkidis' note), he visited Kondomari. When the locals were informed about Weixler's identity, they were not particularly pleased but nonetheless received him according to their traditional custom of hospitality, presenting him with a raki drink in the local coffee-house. Weixler, sensing their embarrassment and feeling uncomfortable, tried to apologise by stating that he had not been involved in the shooting and had only been the photographer. At that point, one of the survivors stood up and told the group that the formal requirements of hospitality had been observed and that they should now leave. The villagers then immediately left the taverna, leaving Weixler on his own. He died in Bad Reichenhall on April 23, 1971, aged 71.

Weixler's film from Kondomari, despite its explosive content, was processed through regular Propaganda-Kompanie channels and eventually, after the war, ended up, together with thousands of other PK films, in the German Bundesarchiv (federal archives) in Koblenz. Here the negatives were discovered in 1980 by the Greek journalist Vassos Mathiopoulos, who was unaware of the actual location of the shootings they depicted. Their connection to the events at Kondomari was later established via extensive research by journalist Kostas Papapetrou, after which Weixler's photographs became widely known.



AVI

**That on the right is made up of tiles which show reproductions of 15 of the photos taken by Franz Peter Weixler.**



The razed village of Kandanos was rebuilt after the war. The local memorial incorporates stone slabs reproducing the exact wording (in German and Greek) of the two wooden signs set up at the entrances to the village by the Germans.



The monument at Alikianos, 14 kilometres south-west of Canea, commemorating the 42 men executed in the village on June 2 and the 118 persons killed in the follow-up reprisals at the Keritis river bridge on August 1.

Kurt Student, the general who had issued the order that led to the reprisals, was tried for war crimes in May 1947, being charged with eight cases of mistreatment and murder of prisoners of war by his men in Crete. However, his crimes against the civilian population of Crete, like those at Kondomari, Kandanos and Alikianos, were not included in the charges and Greece's demand to have Student extradited was declined. Tried before a British military tribunal, he was

found guilty of three charges, but avoided a stern punishment owing to the testimony of Major-General Lindsay Inglis, who had been commander of the 4th NZ Brigade in the Crete battle. Student was sentenced to five years in prison but was given an early discharge in 1948 for medical reasons. He was never tried for crimes against civilians. Student died in Lemgo on July 1, 1978, aged 88.

Alexander Andrea, the general who continued Student's reprisal campaign (until he

asked to be relieved from his post of island commandant in late August 1942), was arrested by the British in May 1945 and extradited to Greece in January 1946. Put on trial before a war tribunal in December 1947, he was initially sentenced to death but this was commuted to life imprisonment. After spending four years in Athens' Averoff Prison, he was pardoned by King Paul of Greece and released in January 1952. He died in Wiesbaden on April 3, 1979, at age 90.



PIERRE KOSMIDIS



HISTORIC.DE

Left: The memorial at Floria to the nine local men who fell in action against advancing German mountain troops on May 23 and to the 16 victims of Nazi reprisals carried out in the community between 1941 and 1944. Right: Quite ironically, directly across the road from the Greek memorial stands the monument erected by the 5. Gebirgs-Division in 1941 to commemorate the 14 men of the 3. Kompanie of Gebirgs-Pionier-Bataillon 95 killed by the Cretan irregulars in the action of May 23. Largely forgotten and much decayed, between 1986 and 1991 the memorial was completely restored by the private initiative of a Bundeswehr officer, a retired Hauptmann in the Gebirgsjäger from Oberfranken in Bavaria, who worked on it during his holidays in accord with

the burgomasters of Kandanos and Floria. Finding the monument's original marble plate damaged, he commissioned a Bavarian stonemason to produce an exact replica, albeit without the swastika, and the restored memorial was re-dedicated on May 23, 1991 — the 50th anniversary of the event. Most students of the Crete battle are familiar with the eagle-topped memorial to the II. Bataillon of the Luftlande-Sturm-Regiment erected by the unit after the battle at Canea (see the front cover of *After the Battle* No. 47) but this one at Floria is far less known. Yet, it is still often visited by members of the Gebirgsjäger-Kameradschaft (Mountain Troops Veterans Association) who strive for reconciliation with the Greeks.