

# ALLE ORIGINI DEL SAR

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-- PETER SCHENK --

## The German 7<sup>th</sup> sea rescue squadron

When in 1935 the German Air Force, the "Luftwaffe" was founded, it was felt necessary to establish a rescue service for crews of planes with emergencies over sea. As for the German coast, two areas around sea plane bases at the North Sea and three, later four on the Baltic coasts were marked. The commanders of these sea plane stations were at the same time leaders of the rescue service in their area. Every area was allocated a sea plane tender and several tender launches which provided help near the station or coast.

From 1939 special seaplanes were converted from the twin engine biplane Heinkel 59. It had a range of 350 km and could operate until Beaufort 3. The planes were painted white and had red crosses to mark them as rescue planes. First they were unarmed but when during the battle of Britain they were attacked, they got a defence armament and camouflage painting. Later some captured French flying boats Breguet Bizerte were deployed until with the Dornier 24 which had been designed in Germany but produced in the Netherlands a very modern and reliable tri-engine flying boat with a range of 1000 km operating in open sea until Beaufort 6 was found.

It should be mentioned that not only German plane crews were rescued but also enemy personnel and even ship crews like 34 sailors of sunken ships of convoy PQ 17 in the Arctic Sea. 492 allied flying personnel was rescued during the war.

With the ongoing of the war, more units were necessary to be deployed in the different theatres of war. For the Aegean Sea a 7<sup>th</sup> sea rescue squadron with five Heinkel 59 was established in March 1941. Commanding officer was Oberleutnant Kurt Wachsmundth. The planes were first flown to Varna in Bulgaria. In April they were deployed to Saloniki Mikra where they had their first missions. The squadron became part of the sea rescue station XI in Greece under Major Fengler, later Majors Bartels, which had also three rescue launches of the 11<sup>th</sup> rescue flottilla. For the Crete operation in May three Dornier 24 flying boats from the 6<sup>th</sup> sea rescue squadron at Sicily enhanced the unit. The squadron was stationed at Athens Phaleron and had also bases at Milos and at Molai on the Pelopones. On 21 May an invasion fleet of small vessels with a battalion on board was destroyed by British warships. 300 men drowned and 178 were rescued by sea planes of the unit. 84 more were saved by the three rescue launches. Later

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when the British cruiser "Gloucester" had been sunk by German bombers, one of the rescue launches rescued 65 of his crew.

In June 1941 Oberleutnant Tettner took over the command of the 7<sup>th</sup> squadron.

In 1942 the station moved to Iraklion on Crete as the supply line to the North African campaign became important. Commander was now Oberleutnant Hans Tretter. The planes of the 7<sup>th</sup> rescue squadron were based in Suda. In June a major air sea battle occurred with two British convoys for Malta which were decimated. The 7<sup>th</sup> squadron flew costly missions until all planes were lost or damaged.

In May 1943 Hauptmann Hans Lösch was in the head of the squadron until he was relieved in March 1944 by Oberleutnant Hans Glinkemann.

In the autumn of 1943 the squadron is busy as during the German Invasion of Kos and Leros several ships were sunk, among them Ingeborg, Kari and Sinfra. The planes are also used to bring soldiers to Astipalaia which took the island.

In summer 1944 Leros was also used by the squadron. Beside the rescue missions there were also transport missions, among them mail.

With the new commander Oberleutnant Karl-Heinz Daehn the unit had to support the evacuation of German troops from the Greek islands in October. The 8<sup>th</sup> squadron from the Black Sea was withdrawn to Athens Phaleron to further support this mission. The planes transported 3000 soldiers. The remaining six Do 24 and two Ju 52 flew on 24<sup>th</sup> October to Vienna. 181 men of the squadron had to retreat over the Balkans with trucks. They arrived Germany completely.

In the whole Mediterranean 1818 men were rescued by the planes of the sea rescue squadrons.