

75TH BATTLE OF LEROS

international meeting, municipal theater of Lakki - Leros, sept 26th 2018

PETER SCHENK

The Battle of Leros according to the diary of Dr. George Repp

Georg Repp was born in 1909 in Darmstadt near Frankfurt and studied medicine in Munich, Giessen and Frankfurt. He got his military drill in 1938/38. In 1940 he took part on the West Campaign in France and in 1941 on the Balkans war.

Probably in 1942 he was in the III. Battalion of Grenadier Regiment 440 on the island of Lesvos.

The diary starts on 26. September 1943 when the battalion was transferred from Mytilini on Lesvos to Pireus:

At 1.00 beginning of journey on board of the landing boat F 370, arriving at 6.00 next day.

29.9. Slept on deck in Pireus. The companies get quarters in a school in Pireus, officers in private rooms nearby. At 10 with Cdr. of the battalion Helmuth Doerr and adjutant to Admiral Aegean in Athens.

Doerr was a friend of Repp as he grew up in the same town. In the meeting, obviously the planned operation "Eisbaer" the landing on Kos was discussed.

1.10. Loading on transport "Ingeborg" of 2500 t. At 20 convoy ready off Pireus. Sailing southeast to Serifos and Sifnos.

2.10. Short stop between Paros and Antiparos. Deception course, later changed for Cos.

3.10. 5.00 Convoy with 5 transports, 2 submarine chasers, 1 motor minesweeper, 2 "Q" sailing ships arrived north of Cos and west of Pserimos. Landing begins still in the dark. Enemy is shelling with artillery, AA guns, mortars. Then low level attack of three enemy torpedo planes, good AA fire, one plane crashes burning into the sea. Then the staff and 2 groups of 9th Company is being brought to the shore by a minesweeper. 150 m in front of the coast we disembark into a smaller motorboat and a leaking boat, landing east of Marmaris. During the landing we experience well aimed shelling, the battalion is moving forward, occupies the height in front of us. Headquarter of battalion in a house north of the street Cos - Linopoti. During the whole day attacks on the positions of the battalion. In the afternoon again low level attacks of enemy planes against our ships, this time 2 are shot down, one being a four engined bomber which sinks burning on the water for a long time near a ship. Soon 5 Englishmen and some Italians are brought in, some of them wounded. 1 Englishman with a belly shot. We get more Italian prisoners from batteries, until 9 pm some 240, additional 400 on the way. Lt. Herbstrick in the night at the eastern perimeter of Antimachia with Pak and AA guns.

4.10 With motorcycle and sidecar to Antimachia. Some hours sleep in Italian sick-ward with flees. With the first light shooting with infantry weapons by attacking Englishmen. I went back to alarm battalion headquarter. Attack of 11th Company

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with Pak, meeting with German units of Küstenjäger and Fallschirmjäger from the opposite side, following fleeing Italians and Englishmen behind the airport until Cephalos. Further Stuka attacks, clearing of the area by our companies.

5.10. Back seizing of Italian field hospital 126, establishing of an own sick-bay, we found large quantities of captured Italian medical material.

6.10. Victory Festival at all units.

7.10. 7.00 Back with all units to the headquarters. In the evening preparations for loading into 2 ferry lighters.

8.10.2.00 Leaving to Calino, arrived Isola Vecchia Bay at. 4.15, camp. Observing south coast of Leros. Tomorrow will be X day. Till the evening arrive more units, but no order to attack.

9.10. In the night enemy torpedoboats off the bay which fire flares looking for us. During the day it becomes known, that tomorrow Leros is to be taken. (The replacement for Cos, 1 Batl. 999 attacked and sunk two days ago, some 800 losses, rest saved by seaplanes)

10.10. Still in camp. In the night shelling. No losses.

11.10.X day because of bad weather (gale) postponed again. Stukas are not in the air. 17.15-17.45 heavy shelling of the bay. 2 wounded.

12.10. During the night in a cave. X day again postponed because of bad winds. At noon suddenly with staff 9th Company with a ferry lighter to Vathi. Beautiful bay, simple men in orange farms. The next nights are spent on concrete floor. Daily shelling of Isola Vecchia Bay. In the nights bombing by Blenheim Bombers.

15.10. Caiki with food and medicine from Cos on route to Isola Vecchia was sunk by a submarine. I was scheduled for this boat but it did not stop at Vathi. 10 missing, rest saved. In the afternoon a duel with a "Q" sailing vessel and a submarine observed. The submarine has to dive after several 8,8 cm hits. 2 British destroyers always loiter around east of Cos and Calino. We are much too weak on the sea to cope with them.

16.10. The Staff is moved to Calino town. 9.Company stays in Vathi, 10th And 11th .Company are in the north of the island. The Leros operation is postponed to an undefined time.

17.10. Bombing of the harbor.

18. and 19.10. Heavy shelling from the sea. Transport "Trapani" is hit and burning with the ammunition exploding all night. Most shells hit the town, my house is hit in the doorway, we are in the trench. Dead and wounded civilians and from XI./999.

20. and 21.10. Air raid on Antimachia. Airport unusable by deep bomb craters. Constant enemy air reconnaissance over the island in these days. Shelling of Cos town by cruisers (?) and destroyers, sudden air attack on a minesweeper with many wounded, sinking of ferry lighters and submarine chasers by destroyers with dead and wounded. Sinking of a caiki with supplies off Isola vecchia with no casualties. Landing of a British commando probably north of Mirties which was to determine the size of troops on Calino. They were taken prisoner by 11th Company.

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22.10. The first quiet night again. A fifth Englishman is taken prisoner.

23.10. Nothing special, quiet night.

24.10. Quiet night. English sloop 350 t, 200 crew, 32 knots, mined 7 miles northeast Calino. Some survivors rescued. At 10.00 I got EK II by Lieutenant General Müller with five other soldiers.

30.10. Yesterday "Ingeborg", the ship we came with, was sunk near Stampalia as the last remaining of our convoy. The captain is said to be dead or heavily wounded.

10.11. Suddenly after dinner heavy shelling from sea for 1,5 hours. 2 dead, 6 wounded, but not from our men. I took care of them until 3 in the morning. Our former house got a full hit

11.11. In the afternoon suddenly order to attack for the 12.11. Great surprise because of full moon and no naval forces here. At 2 am loading into engineer landing boats. Close along the coast to the north with the escort of a "Q" sailing ship and a lead boat. Suddenly a turn and back to the harbor. At 22.00 left port again. Waited in Akti Bay near the sunken submarine chaser UJ 2109 for 1 ½ hours then crossed over to Kalolimno.

12.11. Here we met with the rest of the convoy. Sailed to Körfezi Bay, east of Leros. Then to Leros town in Alinda Bay. We and the staff were in an engineer landing boat and the Companies in a ferry lighter under the lead of a motor minesweeper earmarked to land in Palma Bay. Already near the coast order was given under middle shelling to turn back. We made it good out of the fire. We saw some boats landing, one burning, some others turned also back. Great worry because we would have probably made it. Another attempt at 10.30. The ferry lighter is running fast we are following more slowly. The ferry lighter gets a disgusting shelling and has to return eventually. It was astonishing that she came out of this hell. She got a hit from above which brought a gasoline motor to explosion and this ignited hand grenades. 10 dead and 50 wounded! Many heavily wounded, mostly from 11th Company. Lt. Schneider and Lt. ... with 16 men jumped overboard. Treatment of the wounded in the horrible helter-skelter! Transferring the dead and wounded to the engineer landing boat in a bay of island Pitta and return with the mortal ferry lighter to Vathi.

13.11. Left port at 1 in the night with engineer landing boats and assault boats. About the same way and after 2 hours new assault on the southeast cape of Alinda Bay. We soon came in our assault boat in the light of 3 search lights which kept us and drew the fire of all guns on us. It was simply horrible! We ran with full throttle, with the bow wave soaking us in dazzling light. When there was no possibility to evade the fire, we had to turn off again! That was the third attempt! With constant shelling, we used smoke without much effect. Eventually Lt. Günther fell overboard trying to rip off a smoke candle from the railing. In this moment the fire stopped and we could take him on board again unmolested finding him soon drifting. Now we returned to Calino. The other engineer landing boats had landed all right. The sea became very rough and we made hardly way. We got a lot of water into the boat and avoided sinking only by fierce drawing. We returned at about 8.30 into the well

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known Isola Vecchia Bay where Lieutenant General Müller had his headquarters and had to cope with many difficulties. We were completely soaked and stiff and the seasickness had taken its toll. The day went with drying our clothes and medical equipment.

14.11. In the afternoon we board again the assault boat of Lieutenant Bunte, which has only one engine running. We sailed to unit with other boats in Penzonda Bay. At 19.45 new attempt together with several engineer landing boats, motor minesweepers and submarine chasers. Lucky sail with quiet sea and overcast sky. Slowly we are approaching the coast, again the southeast cape of Alinda Bay, only lit for a short time by a searchlight which extinguished after fire by an engineer landing boat. Under heavy artillery and AA gun fire we came into the dead angle of the batteries and landed at 22.00 at the assigned place as the last boat. We were not yet all out of the boat when a Stuka bomb hit near a landing boat causing 2 dead. Now we climbed up a steep rocky slope, Mt. Appetici, when heavy artillery fire started which did not afflict losses, though. The joy of the others landed earlier which had suffered hard was immense. We took cover into the battery bunkers for the night.

15.11. With the first light Stuka and Ju 88 appeared and hammered the enemy artillery and AA gun positions. The nearby castle was taken at noon after Stuka attacks. In the meantime the northern group was been separated from us and one company and one platoon of battle group "von Saldern" taken prisoner. The outcome of the battle had become questionable as Alinda Bay was not yet taken to allow supplies to be brought in. With no option for that, the northern group was to fight their way to us to free the Pandel Bay. This succeeded during the day.

16.11. Same picture. Running Stuka attacks on enemy batteries, Enemy artillery and mortar fire.

17.11. Capitulation

22.11. 20.00 arrived Tiganion/Samos (Pythagorion)

5.12. 5.30 left Karlovasi/Samos with ferry lighter, called on Chios at 12 arrived Mytilini on 6.12.

Here ends the description of the battle. Georg Repp stayed on Lesvos until 1944. Remarkably he got acquainted with the daughter of the local surgeon, Ioanna Poumpoura. He had to leave because of the German retreat from Greece over the Balkans and became British prisoner in Austria. In 1947 he opened a surgery in Darmstadt and in 1949 he married Ioanna in Switzerland. They had one daughter whom we owe this diary and the photos. Repp died in 2001.