

LA VITA AI TEMPI DELLE BATTERIE

international meeting, open court of primary school – Lakki, Leros 14th sept 2015

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The Leros batteries under German rule

When planning the invasion of Leros, the taking possession of the Italian batteries was prepared to secure the island. Besides of deploying personnel for the artillery, one man was chosen for the task of repairing damaged guns and making them serviceable. This was first lieutenant Helmut Kühl, whom I only got to know by the tales of his son. I would like to describe his life as it is typical for the German officers of the period.

He was born in Hamburg in 1906 as the twelfth child of a clockmaker. As five of his six brothers were killed in action in the First World War he was to take over the shop of his father but he went bankrupt in the economic crisis. So Helmut applied for the Navy and was accepted as a cadet in 1928. He became a specialist for artillery. He worked at Wilhelmshaven Naval Yard and asked for an employment at front being sent to Salamis Naval Yard in 1942. For the Leros operation he was to care for the coastal guns and the weapons of the warships there. He made the dangerous journey to Kos probably with the mine ship DRACHE, seeing the convoy ship BULGARIA being torpedoed off Amorgos with many soldiers on board.

He entered Leros on the last day of the battle and went to work.

Many of the Italian batteries had suffered during the fighting, some were hit by bombs and others obviously destroyed by their crews after the surrender, like PL 262 the smaller battery on Mt. Skoumbarda and PL 906 on Mt. Mouplogourna. At the battery "Ciano" on Mt. Clidi, two of the 15,2 cm guns had been hit by bombs. Before the rest could be reactivated, the ammunition dump of the battery exploded by unknown reason in March 1944.

To man the batteries a Navy Artillery Detachment MAA 624 was established under the command of Lieutenant Captain Willschrei. In June 1944 it had 394 soldiers plus 80 Italians, this was 210 below plan.

The first batteries to enter service again were Ducci at Katsouni, Farinata on Mt. Markelos, Lago on Mt. Apetiki, and PL 227 at Katsouni. Later San Giorgio on Mt. Skoumbarda, and smaller batteries at Diapori, on Mt. Merovigli, Mt. Vigla and Vromolithos. In all 10 batteries and two more on the island of Astpalaia.

Some of the Anti Aircraft batteries were later manned by a special Navy Anti Aircraft Detachment MAA 720.

Several smaller were operated by the Army.

Helmut Kühl had his office in the town of Portolago. He was supported by 50 German soldiers and some 150 Italians. He also had to care for guns on other islands like Kos.

At the end of the war he came as a prisoner of war to Egypt. He did not succeed to enter service again in the Navy after the war and worked in the administration of Hamburg. He died in 1990. In 1912 Leros and the Greek Dodecanese came under Italian rule. The decision by Italy to unite with Germany in 1940 would change everything. By summer 1943, Hitler's

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Wehrmacht was faltering as it fought a war on too many fronts. In Russia the Soviets had finally halted the German advance; Axis forces had surrendered in North Africa; the Allies had landed in Sicily and Italy and American-led forces were pushing north towards occupied Europe. In July the Italians turned against *Il Duce* Benito Mussolini, replacing him with *Maresciallo* Pietro Badoglio. The Italian armistice followed in September.