



***Heroes in Death: The von Blücher Brothers in the Fallschirmjäger, Crete, May 1941***

**By Adrian Nisbett**

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Reviewed by USMC LtCol (Retired) Michael R. Janay

This is a book about a warrior family (a true story by the way): the three von Blücher brothers who fought and died in the Battle of Crete in May 1941. It recounts the brothers' real lives, however short, in Germany before World War II, their training as airborne paratroopers (Fallschirmjäger), how they died in the invasion of Crete, and the aftermath of their deaths.

The author's primary research is exceptional — he visited the von Blücher estate in Fincken in central Germany (former East Germany). This town exists today through its farms, but it's searching for a way to the future. It begins with the pre-action phase of "waiting." For as long as there have been armies preparing, training, and rehearsing battle drills, there has always been waiting! The selection and training to be a German airborne paratrooper was tough and demanding. An important point is that these men retained the right to act on their own initiative. They had the ability to move rapidly to trouble spots and immediately go into action. These soldiers had an aggressive spirit and unwavering determination to succeed, and all ranks were encouraged to be leaders. The Fallschirmjäger's Ten Commandments on pages 57-58 gave a no-nonsense summary of what each man's duties and responsibilities were expected. With excellent training and quality of the men first-rate, they were ready for war.

With the beginning of World War II on September 1939, planning was underway for the assault on the Belgian fortress of Eben Emael and the bridges over the Albert Canal. The dramatic, bold, and astonishing operation immediately gave the Fallschirmjäger hero status in Germany. But, the price they were to pay in the Battle of Crete would be great. They did not adjust their doctrine by paying attention to "lessons learned" in earlier battles, and that cost them dearly.

They carried little equipment on their person — their weapons and equipment containers were specially marked. They had not done any terrain appreciation of landing zones either. Also, their parachutes did not have a quick-release harness buckle. The Battle of Crete was destined to play out in the "fog of war" because of Ultra signals intelligence, which gave the British decrypts of German orders and signals relating to The Germans knew the British Royal Navy dominated the eastern Mediterranean, and the Germans also lacked suitable amphibious landing ships needed for a seaborne assault. The British

assumed an attack was imminent and planned the defense. The German concept was to strike all three airfields in Crete almost simultaneously. But this was a hastily conceived operation based on poor intelligence and poor staff work. The operation order stated there were just 5,000 disorganized defenders, when in fact the British had fortified Crete with 43,000 Allied troops from Egypt, who had time to properly prepare a defense in depth. It was the Germans who were totally surprised, not the British! This book describes the Battle of Crete in great detail. In hindsight, the Germans were almost doomed because of over-confidence, poor intelligence on enemy dispositions and numbers, dispersal of forces, and troops who were too lightly armed. Bravery alone should not compensate for such failures, but in fact it did. The Germans won the Battle of Crete, but the price was their airborne jewel — the Fallschirmjäger. There would be no more large-scale airborne assaults.

After World War II all the fallen were re-interred into one cemetery on Crete. The von Blücher family fled advancing Russian armies and lost most of their personal effects. The three von Blücher brothers' only surviving sister as well as the Fallschirmjäger archives provided many of the details which will also impress readers of this book. The lessons of this book are timeless — the professional benefit is the opportunity to learn. I enthusiastically recommend this book to Warriors as well as the families they have to leave behind.