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GERMAN DEFENSIVE POLICY IN THE BALKANS, A CASE STUDY: THE BUILDUP IN GREECE, 1943

Shortly before dawn, April 30, 1943, a lone British submarine slipped into the Gulf of Cadiz and surfaced off the Spanish coast at Huelva, an old Moorish fishing town. As the submarine, HMS *Seraph,* bobbed in the gentle swell, men scrambled on deck with a large container. They opened it and removed the corpse of a Major Martin. A briefcase filled with bogus British documents had been securely fastened to the body with a chain. Crewmen inflated Martin's lifejacket and dropped the corpse gently into the surf. The wash of the screws propelled the body shoreward as the *Seraph* put out to sea and quietly submerged.

So began Operation Mincemeat[1] — an ingenious «ruse de guerre» designed to confuse and mislead the German High Command on the eve of Operation Husky — the Allied invasion of Sicily. That same day, a fisherman scooped the Major's body from the water and returned to port. Spanish officials seized the corpse and, just as the British had hoped, quickly notified the Germans of their peculiar catch. An Abwehr (German military Intelligence) official quietly photocopied the documents; by May 7, the German High Command learned of their spectacular content[2]. According to the falsified papers[3], the Anglo-Americans planned double blows in the Mediterranean in the near future — one against Greece, at two points on the Peloponnese (Kalamata and Cape Araxos); the other against Sardinia or Corsica. Sicily was also mentioned, but here the documents pointed only to a diversionary effort.

1. For a detailed account of the planning and execution of Mincemeat, see Montagu, Ewen, *The Man Who Never Was.* New York. J. B. Lippincott Company, 1954. Mongagu, son of a Jewish banking baron, mastermined the brilliant plan.

2. Schröder, Josef, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt 1943.* Die deutschen Gegenmassnahmen im italienischen Raum: Fall «Alarich» und «Achse». Musterschmidt-Verlag. Göttingen. p. 113; Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung, 7.5.43. Within days of «Major Martin's swim», the British, through intercepts of the Abwehr radio circuit from Madrid to Germany, were aware that Mincemeat was succeeding. Lewin, Ronald, *Ultra Goes To War.* McGraw-Hill. New York, 1978, pp. 279-80.

3. Chief among these was a letter from Lieutenant General Sir Archibald Nye, Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to General Sir Harold Alexander, dated April 23, 1943.

The genius of the Mincemeat plant was the way it wholly confirmed the contours of German strategic thought. Pressed on the strategic defensive through the collapse of Rommel's Afrikakorps and the Allied landings in Marocco and Algeria (November 1942), Hitler and his military advisors had begun to worry about the security of the suddenly vulnerable and inadequately defended southern tier of their «Festung Europa»[4]. Their underlying assumption was that Allied shipping space would permit two simultaneous and independent operations in the Mediterranean theater[5]. In the western Mediterranean, the Germans considered the Italian islands of Sardinia, Corsica and Sicily targets for one prong of the future Anglo-American offensive. By February, 1943, Hitler envisaged the principal danger in Sardinia. From here, he argued, the Allies could threaten Rome and the ports of Genoa and Leghorn; the island could also serve as a springboard for a thrust into upper Italy or southern France[6].

But the Germans focused their concern upon the Balkans, and principally, Greece[7]. With their turbulent populations and reserves of vital war materials, they represented the neurological point of Festung Europa[8]. Greece itself was less important for its mineral reserves than

4. The Germans were fully cognizant that the war had entered a new and forboding stage. See Lagebetrachtung der Seekriegsleitung vom 1.12.1942. In: Salewski, Michael, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung. 1935-1945.* Band II and III. Bernard and Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen. München, 1975. Band III, p. 315.

5. Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung,* p. 361; Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung (War Diary, Operations Division, German Naval Staff), 6.4.43, 20.5.43 (National Archives); Schramm, Percy E., *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht* (Wehrmachtführungsstab) 1940-1945. Band III: 1. Januar 1943-31. Dezember 1943. Bernard and Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen. Frankfurt am Main. 1963. (Band III: pp. 763-64).

6. Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt,* p. 112; Deakin, F.W., *The Brutal Friendship,* p. 346. Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism. Harper and Row. New York. According to Warlimont, Admiral Riccardi, commander-in-chief of the Italian navy, also considered Sardinia the chief Allied target in the western Mediterranean. Mussolini, Field Marshal Kesselring (titular commander of all German forces in the central Mediterranean) and Fremde Heere West, however, expected Anglo-American assault in Sicily. Warlimont, Walter, *Die Kriegführung der Achsenmächte im Mittelmeerraum. Ein Strategischer Überblick.* Foreign Military Study≠P-216. pp. 783 and 784.

7. See, for example, KTB OKW. Band III: 1943. pp. 109-10, 121, 182-83. As early as the beginning of 1943, Hitler had instructed OKW to make a detailed examination of the defense of the Peloponnese.

8. In an address to the German Gauleiters in Munich on November 7, 1943,

its strategic location at the Balkan southern tip. From a secure bridgehead in Greece, the Allies could bomb Hitler's precious Romanian oilfields, provide additional support to Balkan resistance movements, forge a link to the Russians through the Dardanelles, and prepare their big invasion of Europe, which, as the German Naval High Command (Seekriegsleitung) noted in its war diary (June 1943), «is probably planned to take place in the Balkans and to be decisive»[9]. A German setback in the area, moreover, would have an adverse political impact upon its eastern European satellites, and could sweep Turkey into the war on the side of the Allies.

The historic pattern of British intervention in the Balkans, as well as the traditional English-Russian competition in the region, reinforced Hitler's conviction that the southeast would be the target of a major enemy assault. The Dardanelles and Salonika campaigns of World War One, and the disastrous Balkan venture of 1941, ilustrated the tenacity of British imperial interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Surely, Churchill would attempt to demonstrate in 1943 the validity of his grand design of 1915 — of a decisive offensive against enemy occupied Europe from the southeast. But with the German debacle at Stalingrad (November 1942 - January 1943), the prospect of eventual Soviet penetration into the Balkans had become very real indeed. Only a British military return to southeastern Europe could hold back Soviet expansion into the area. Such were Hitler's thoughts, and they fuelled his fears that the Balkans would be the principal object of Anglo-American strategy upon the conclusion of the North African campaign. Thus, as early as December 1942, the Germans had begun to reorganize and to reinforce their position in the southeastern theater. These efforts accelerated significantly after the «revelations» furnished by Mincemeat, which, by May 14, 1943, Hitler, OKW (Oberkom-

General Jodl (Chief of operations branch, OKW) asserted that the continued control of the Balkans was of decisive importance («kriegsentscheidend») to the German war effort. According to Jodl, 50% of Germany's oil, 100% of chrome, 60% of bauxite, 29% of antimony and 21% of copper were drawn from the Balkans. KTB OKW, p. 1612. See also, KTB Skl, 29.5.43; Lagebetrachtung der Seekriegsleitung, 20. Februar 1943, in: Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*. Band III. p. 334.

9. KTB Skl. 16.6.43. As late as September 10, 1943, Goebbles would note in his diary that «without doubt the spearhead of the Anglo-American invasion will be pointed in that direction (i.e., at the Balkans) in the immediate future». Lochner, Louis P. (ed.), *The Goebbels Diaries 1942-1943*. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut. 1976. pp. 433.

mando der Wehrmacht, German High Command) and the concerned German intelligence staffs had accepted as genuine[10].

Until December 1942, the Germans had been content to leave the occupation and the defence of Greece almost exclusively to the Italians. A strip of territory along the Greek-Turkish border, as well as Athens, Piraeus, Salonika, half of Crete and a handful of Aegean islands had come under German control. In the Peloponnese there were no German troops, only a handful of naval and wireless personnel sprinkled along the coastline[11]. The Italians, in contrast, fielded some 10 divisions upon the Greek mainland and in the outlying Dodecanese islands. Altogether, their forces in the Balkans and the islands amounted to 33 divisions[12]. But the great majority of these formations consisted of older occupation troops, poorly officered and equipped; their contribution to the common defense negligible. The Italians, moreover, by early 1943, had done little to fortify the extended Greek coastline. Their few «strong points» lacked modern coastal artillery, reinforced concrete bunkers and supplies beyond five days[13].

The burden of providing a realistic defense for the Balkans fell squarely upon the Germans. Hitler proceeded first to reorganize the German command structure in the area. His Directive No. 47 (December 28, 1942) made the «South East» a fully operational theater

10. Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt,* pp. 113-14; KTB Skl, 12.-13.5.43; Wagner, Gerhard (ed.), *Lagevorträge des Oberbefehlshabers der Kriegsmarine vor Hitler 1939-1945*: Vortrag beim Führer im Hauptquartier «Wolfschanze» am 14.5. 17.30 Uhr. pp. 501-02. Frederick A. Prager. New York; Tashjean, John E., «Operation 'Mincemeat' - 5 deutsche Dokumente». In: Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau 11, 1961, pp. 278-82. The fourth document, a directive issued by Hitler on May 12, stated that «measures regarding Sardinia and the Peloponnese take precedence over all others». OKW/WFST/Op. Nr. 661055/43.

11. Stadtmüller, Georg, «Der Partisanenkrieg in Südgriechenland», p. 83. In: Das Parliment, aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, B v/57.

12. Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt,* Verteilung der italienischen Divisionen. Stand 1.3.43. Map opposite p. 136. The Italian 11 Army was responsible for the defense of Greece. According to A. A. Pallis, German occupation policy in the Balkans «was everywhere the same — that is, to hold the valleys and principal towns through which the main lines of communication passed but not to fritter away troops on the permanent garrisoning of remote mountain areas». Pallis, A. A., «Problems of Resistance in the Occupied Countries». Document located at Hoover Library, Stanford, California.

13. Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe E. (U.S. National Archives). T-311, Roll ≠175, ≠000566: Aktennotizen, Chefbesprechungan, Tätigkeitsberichte. January to July, 1943; Kriegstagebuch, Admiral Aegean. T-1022, Roll ≠4023. 17.5.43.

of war, with its commander-in-chief, Colonel General Alexander Löhr (Oberbefehlshaber Südost/OB Heeresgruppe E) directly responsible to the Führer. The task of Löhr's Heeresgruppe E was three-fold: a) to prepare the coastal defenses, b) destroy the growing resistance movement[14], and c) secure the Balkans from an enemy offensive from Turkish territory[15]. Directly subordinate to OB Südost in Greece were the Befehlshaber Salonika-Aegean (Major General von Studnitz) and Befehlshaber Southern Greece (General Wilhelm Speidel). Despite its ambitious assignment, Löhr's army group was diminutive in size, for it amounted to no more than a half-dozen divisions[16], including the elite 7 SS Prinz Eugen Gebirgsjäger (mountain) Division. The remaining divisions were distinctly second class, and earmarked for counterinsurgency operations in Yugoslavia[17]. None of these formations were stationed in Greece. Löhr would have to start from scratch to build his defensive front.

To buttress the Italian positions on the Peloponnese, Rhodes and in the Dodecanese islands, the Germans supplied their Axis partners with large quantities of modern weapons[18]. By mid-February 1943, the construction of coastal fortifications on the islands of Crete and Lemnos, as well as in southern Greece and Salonika was well underway; earlier, the German High Command had approved the dispatch of several batteries of coastal artillery each for Crete and Lemnos. The reinforcement of Rhodes, the Peloponnese and Salonika with modern coastal artillery remained a pressing concern[19]. In addition to these efforts

14. The Greek resistance, assisted by a tiny British military mission, had scored their first major success on November 25, 1942, when they blew up the Gorgopotamos railway viaduct. See Woodhouse, C. M., «The Greek Resistance». In: *European Resistance Movements 1939-1945.* Pergamon Press. New York. 1960.

15. Hubatsch, Walther, *Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegsführung*, pp. 209-16. Bernard and Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen. Frankfurt am Main. 1962.

16. OKW KTB. p. 9. Schematische Kriegsgliederung, 1.1.43. These divisions were 704, 714, 717, 718 infantry divisions and 7 SS Prinz Eugen.

17. The 700 number divisions were established in April 1941, as divisions of the 15th wave. They consisted primarily of older personnel and were poorly equipped with heavy weapons. In the spring of 1943, OKW would reorganize and upgrade them into Jäger divisions. See Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe E. T-311, Roll ≠ 175, ≠ 000463.

18. KTB Heeresgruppe E, ≠ 000551; KTB OKW, pp. 14, 16. According to the records of Heeresgruppe E, the question of weapons deliveries to the Italians commanded the «highest interest of the Führer».

19. KTB Heeresgruppe E, ≠ 000412.

on land, the German navy blanketed the approaches to the Greek mainland and the strategically important islands with mine barrages. To strengthen the Luftwaffe in the Balkans, Hitler reorganized the X Fliegerkorps (air corps) into Luftwaffenkommando Südost (South East Air Command). Löhr had earlier received three JU-88 D high altitude reconnaissance aircraft (Höhenaufklärungsflugzeugen)[20].

To parry an Allied landing operation in Greece, OKW envisaged an operational reserve of four divisions. To this purpose, Hitler ordered the transfer of the newly created 11 Luftwaffe Field Division to the Peloponnese (December 21, 1942)[21]. Heeresgruppe E proposed the complete motorization of the division and its employment as a mobile reserve; OKW agreed. When a lack of resources thwarted this intent, Löhr allotted the division to the static defense of the valuable Corinth Canal[22]; by late May 1943, its batallions were firmly ensconced on the Saronic Gulf[23]. In March, OKW decreed the dispatch of 117 Jäger (light) Division to Greece, as well as the formation and transfer of a Sturmbrigade (assault brigade) to Rhodes. By early April, the troop trains carrying 117 Jäger Division were chugging southward from Yugoslavia; by early May, its regiments were established in Attica as an operational reserve (operative Eingreifreserve)[24]. The Sturmbrigade Rhodes was formed from elements of 22 Infantry Division on Crete. Lavishly equipped and extremely mobile, it was later expanded into a full division[25].

20. KTB OKW. pp. 116, 469. Because of the insatiable demands of other theaters of war for aircraft, the German Balkan airforce remained necessarily small. During Operation «Schwarz», (May-June 1943) a counterin-surgency operation in Yugoslavia in which the Luftwaffe was involved, the number of daily sorties flown fluctuated from a half-dozen to approximately 90 on June 1 and 8. OKW KTB, pp. 497, 574, 612, etc.

21. OKW KTB, p. 28. The division consisted of the following elements: Luftwaffen-Jäg. Rgt. 21 and 22; Luftwaffen-Art. Rgt. 11; Panzerjäger-Abt. Lw. Feld-Div. 11 and Luftwaffen-Pion. Btl. 11.

22. For the value of the Corinth Canal to the Germans, see KTB Skl, 11.6.43.

23. KTB OKW, pp. 502, 539-40, 552; Heiber, Helmut, *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen.* Die Protokollfragmente seiner militärischen Konferenzen. 1942-1945. p. 206. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. Stuttgart. 1962.

24. KTB Heeresgruppe E, ≠ 000449, 000453; KTB OKW, pp. 295, 427. 117 Jäger Division was comprised of the following units: Jäger-Rgt. 737 and 749; Art.-Rgt. 670 plus miscellaneous elements.

25. KTB Heeresgruppe E, ≠ 000046. By September 1943, the Sturmdivision Rhodes boasted four battalions of motorized grenadiers, equipped with guns of 75, 50 and 28 mm calibre; a reconnaissance group, outfitted with some 40 armored

Despite the German efforts to shore up their eastern Mediterranean defenses, the results, by early May 1943, had been modest at best. Instead of the desired corps-size operational reserve, the OKW situation maps showed only two complete divisions in Greece, and one of these was limited to static coastal defense. The naval and Luftwaffe forces at Löhr's disposal remained meager indeed[26]. The Italians, moreover, the bulk of their better formations destroyed at Stalingrad and in North Africa, could offer no meaningful reinforcement[27].

The slowness of the German buildup resulted, in part, from specific logistical problems presented by the southeastern theater. The lack of an adequate rail infra-structure was particularly crippling. A single, one-track railroad from Zagreb (Agram) to Athens funnelled troops and supplies to Greece; as of mid-March 1943, its daily capacity was limited to 12 trains from Belgrade to Salonika and to seven trains from Salonika to Athens. By mid-May, the latter stretch could handle 9½ trains per day. The gradual accretion of Allied sea and air superiority in the Mediterranean and the lack of adequate shipping space in the Adriatic further diminished the flow of supplies to Löhr's army group[28].

The Balkan Resistance movements, as well as the dubious reliability and fighting value of the weary Italian occupation forces, posed additional dilemmas for the German defense of Greece. OKW recognized clearly that a successful defense against an enemy landing would require a pacified hinterland and secure lines of communication[29]. In

cars and 20 jeeps; a tank battalion with 41 tanks; two batteries of 105 mm and one battery of 150 mm guns, many self-propelled, plus additional divisional artillery; five batteries of 88 mm guns; in all, some 6,000 to 7,000 men. Smith, Peter C.; Walker, Edwin, *War in the Aegean.* pp. 54-55. William Kimber. London, 1974.

26. As of May 1943, German naval forces in Greek waters included the 21 Sub-Chaser Flottila (Unterseebootsjagdflottilla), with its compliment of mine-laying vessels; the coastal patrol flottilas «Attica», «Salonica» and «Crete»; and the former Greek destroyer «Hermes», which was sunk on May 7. In addition, a detachment of naval artillery and a flak unit were in position off the Attica coastline: Marineartillerieabteilung 603 (Aegina-Phleves) and Marineflakabteilung 720 (Salamis). On the island of Crete, the Germans had established the Marineartillerieabteilung 520. See Lohmann, Walter; Hildebrand, Hans H., *Die deutsche Kriegsmarine 1935-1945.* Podzun Verlag. Bad Nauheim.

27. The Axis setbacks in southern Russia coupled with the capitulation of their forces in Tunesia (May 1943) had claimed some 16 Italian divisions.

28. KTB OKW, p. 1561; KTB Heeresgruppe E, ≠ 000565; Heiber, *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen,* pp. 208, 219.

29. KTB OKW, p. 168.

January 1943, the Germans, with support from the Italians and the Croatians, began a series of vigorous operations in Yugoslavia («Weiss» 1-3) against the insurgent forces of Tito and Mihailovic[30]. But success was not forthcoming, for the Italians performed in sub-par fashion[31]. In May, the Germans launched a more successful offensive when they struck hard at communist forces in Herzegovina (Operation «Schwarz»)[32]. At no time, however, did they succeed in completely eliminating the insurgent threat in the Balkans.

The expulsion of the Axis forces from North Africa (May 1943) complicated further the task of Löhr's army group, for it raised the spectre of an Italian withdrawal from the war. Increasingly despondent over the disintegration of their African empire and the aerial bombing of their homeland[33], the Italians tottered on the brink of collapse. Fully aware that the loss of their Axis partner would uncover their entire southern flank, Hitler and OKW began to prepare plans for the defense of the Mediterranean without Italy[34]. Thus, the transfer of German formations to Greece also served to fill the vacuum that would exist there following an Italian capitulation[35]. In the meantime, the Germans could hardly feel sanguine about the determination of Italian troops in Greece to resist an enemy landing. In an effort to tighten his control of the expected invasion battle, General Löhr recom-

30. The three-stage offensive was concluded by mid-March 1943. General Lüters, the German Commissioner General (Bevollmächtiger General) in Croatia, conducted the operations, in which 12 German, Italian and Croation divisions participated.

31. KTB OKW, p. 168. Hitler, angered by the poor showing of the Italian forces, complained to Mussolini in an «unusually sharp letter». (May 19, 1943). Warlimont, Walter, *Die Kriegführung der Achsenmächte im Mittelmeerraum*. Foreign Military Study # P-216 (U.S. National Archives). p. 806.

32. Operation «Schwarz» continued until mid-June. According to German estimates, Tito's partisans suffered 11,000-12,000 dead. KTB OKW, p. 694. German formations involved included 118 Jäger, 369 Infantry, 7 SS Prinz Eugen and 1 Gebirgsjäger divisions. Italian, Croatian and Bulgarian units also participated in «Schwarz».

33. KTB Skl, 22.24. - 26.5.43.

34. According to Warlimont, it was during the Führer conferences on May 19-20, 1943, that this planning began: Operation «Alarich», for southern France and Italy and «Konstantin» for the Balkans. OKW later combined them into one plan - «Achse».

35. The Italian capitulation came on September 8, 1943. In most cases, the German forces in Italy, southern France and the Balkans were able to disarm Italian troops with a minimum of bloodshed.

mended, albeit unsuccessfully, the tactical subordination of the Italian 11 Army to his army group (February 1943)[36].

Following the dramatic «confirmation» of their Mediterranean strategy by the Mincemeat plant, the Germans redoubled their efforts in Greece, their alarm now centered clearly on the Peloponnese. From his «Wolfsschanze» (Wolf's Lair) headquarters, hidden deep within an East Prussian forest, Hitler pondered the new developments and charted his response. At a conference with Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel (Chief, OKW), on May 19, 1943, his thoughts and intentions were clear. An attack on the Balkans, Hitler admonished, was «almost more dangerous than the problem of Italy, which if worse comes to worse can always be sealed off somewhere». The danger, he continued, «is on the Peloponnese, that they (the Allies) establish themselves there... I have therefore decided... to place a tank division squarely on the Peloponnese...»[37].

Chosen for the task was 1 Panzer Division (Lieutenant General Walter Krüger). All but destroyed in the fighting in central Russia, it had withdrawn to France (January 1943) to refit and recouperate. In mid-May, it possessed 60 Mark IV and a dozen Mark III flamethrower tanks[38]. On May 23, it began the circuitous three week, ca. 100 train journey from France, through Karlsruhe-Vienna-Budapest-Ploesti-Sofia to Greece. By June 17, all elements of 1 Panzer had reached the Peloponnese[39]. Krüger's Kampfgruppen (battlegroups) deployed quickly, and prepared for their role as an operational reserve. A tank battalion (II./Pz.Rgt.1) occupied the area around Nauplia; the division's two Panzer Grenadier Regiments (1 and 113 Pz.Gren.Rgt.) the Patras the Tripolis areas. The divisional artillery was distributed among the individual battlegroups. OKW subordinated the division to Gen-

36. KTB Heeresgruppe E, # 000430.

37. Heiber, *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen,* pp. 210-12; KTB Heeresgruppe E, # 000046; also, Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters,* pp. 317-19.

38. The Mark IV's were equipped with 7.5-cm-KWK L/58 m. guns and armored skirting («Panzerschürzen»). Stoves, Rolf O. G., *1. Panzer - Division.* p. 411-20. Chronik einer der drei Stamm - Divisionen der deutschen Panzerwaffe. Verlag Hans-Henning Podzun. Bad Nauheim. 1961. The division also had a dozen command tanks (Befehlspanzer) and was earmarked to receive a battalion of the new Panther tanks by mid-July. Heiber, *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen,* pp. 211-12.

39. KTB OKW, pp. 432, 521, 561, 592, 617, 643, 659. Stoves, *1 Panzer Division,* p. 415. The terrain and poor quality roads in the Peloponnese, however, were hardly suited for the activities of a tank division. KTB Heeresgruppe E, # 000592.

eral Hellmuth Felmy's LXVIII Army Corps staff, recently transferred to Greece to assume operational command of German formations on the Peloponnese[40].

In addition to Krüger's tank division, OKW ordered the immediate transfer of 117 Jäger Division from Thebes to the Peloponnese. The division moved swiftly to reinforce the Italian security units at the Araxos and Kalamata airfields, each with a battalion supported by additional artillery and anti-tank weaponry. By May 26-27, regimental groups were in position around Argos (Jäger Regiment 749) and Tripolis (Jäger Regiment 737). For service as coastal defense batallions, the High Command funneled elements of 999 Strafgefangene (convict) Division to the Peloponnese[41]. And, in mid-June, 104 Jäger and 1 Gebirgsjäger divisions were on their way to Greece[42]. The rail movement of 104 Jäger Division (General Ludwiger) from Serbia commenced on June 15; OKW ordered its deployment in the Arta-Agrinion area of southwest Greece. 1 Gebirgsjäger Division (Lieutenant General Stettner) began its ardous land march from Montenegro four days later. Discomfited by near tropical heat and occasional thundershowers, elements of the division reached Florina in early July[43]. Some two weeks later, the division would be deployed in northwestern Greece (Epirus). The assignment for both divisions was two-fold: a) to provide an operational reserve and support (Rückhalt) for the local Italian troops in case of an Allied landing, b) to combat the growing insurgent activity in western Greece. To complete this substantial migration of men and machines, OKW shifted a battalion on assault guns to western Greece (Sturmgeschützabteilung 201), to serve as a small mobile reserve[44].

Meanwhile, Hitler's little navy in the eastern Mediterranean had

40. KTB OKW, pp. 588, 648, 653, 670, 686; KTB Heeresgruppe E, # 000017, # 000588.

41. KTB OKW, pp. 514, 519, 540, 552, 558, 592; KTB Heeresgruppe E, # 000035, # 000039; Heiber, *Hitlers Lagebesprechungen,* pp. 208, 243.

42. 104 Jäger Division consisted of Jäger-Rgt. 724 and 734 and Art. Rgt. 654; 1 Gebirgsjäger Division was composed of Geb. Jäger-Rgt. 98 and 99, Geb. Art. Rgt. 79.

43. Tagesmeldungen 1. Gebirgsjäger Division, (U.S. National Archives) T-315, Roll 68: # 001144, # 001172, # 001186; also Lanz, Hubert, *Gebirgsjäger. Die 1. Gebirgsdivision. 1935-1945*, pp. 249-52. Verlag Hans-Henning Podzun. Bad Nauheim. 1954.

44. Kriegstagebuch der Heeresgruppe E. T-311, Roll # 176, # 000007; Führungsabteilung: Tagesmeldungen, Beurteilungen, Einzelbefehle and other miscellaneous documents.

been hard at work. Spurred to action by the Mincemeat documents, minelaying operations accelerated rapidly. The German mine layers honeycombed the western approaches to the Peloponnese and the Gulf of Patras with mines; they also placed their barrages off Corfu, in the Dodecanese and at other threatened areas[45]. On May 19, the Commanding Admiral, Aegean (Vice Admiral Werner Lange) received instructions «to investigate and prepare the initiation of a patrol service off Crete, and the establishment of well-stocked PT boat bases on Crete and in the southern Peloponnese». Some two weeks later, the responsible authorities ordered Naval Group South (Marinegruppenkommando Süd, Admiral Kurt Fricke) to select and establish bases and operational harbors for PT boats and motor minesweepers in the Aegean[46]. In August, the Kriegsmarine positioned a new minesweeper flottila (12. Räumbootsflottilla) to Greek waters. Proposals of Naval Group South to reinforce the coastal defenses with large quantities of artillery far exceeded the material resources of the navy[47]. But here, too, the Germans managed some progress. From May-August 1943, they established artillery detachments at the Gulf of Patras and Kalamata (Marineartillerieabtei lungen 617 and 609, respectively) and a flak unit at Piraeus (31. Marinebordflakabteilung)[48]. Plans to interrupt Allied shipping in the eastern Mediterranean by mining the ports of Said and Alexandria could not be carried through for want of the appropriate aircraft. In general, the efforts of the German navy to make a meaningful contribution to the defense of Greece failed because of the need to concentrate their resources in Italian waters[49].

45. KTB Skl, 19.-20.5.43, 28.5.43, 2.6.43, 10.6.43, 11.6.43, 13.6.43, 18.6.43, 22.6.43, 30.6.43, 12.7.43, 13.7.43. Axis mine laying vessels included the *Drache, Bulgaria, Barletta* and the *Morosini.*

46. KTB Skl, 19.5.43, 2.6.43. The war diaries of Admiral Aegean and of the Kommandant der Seeverteidigung Attika have also been thoroughly examined, though they yielded little of value. (T-1022, Rolls # 4023 and 2669, respectively).

47. KTB Skl, 22.6.43.

48. Lohmann; Hildebrand. *Die deutsche Kriegsmarine.* Following the Italian capitulation, the German navy employed two additional groups of torpedo boats in the Aegean (21 and 24 Schnellbootsflottillen).

49. Warlimont, *Die Kriegführung der Achsenmächte im Mittelmeerraum.* pp. 808-09. According to Warlimont, although «the sum total of the OKW measures in the Balkan area remained considerably behind the defensive preparations against landings in Italy, in no way did this signify a vaccillation or a change in our appreciation of the situation. The German High Command still viewed the Balkans as the strategic goal of allied Mediterranean strategy».

Suddenly, in early July, German concern shifted from the Peloponnese to the area north of the Gulf of Patras. Numerous reports, Löhr informed the High Command on July 3, pointed to an Anglo-American landing operation on the west coast of central Greece (west of Jannina, Arta and Agrinion)[50]. To meet the enemy attack, Heeresgruppe E quickly flung motorized advance guards (mot.-Vorausabteilungen) of 1 Gebirgsjäger and 117 Jäger divisions into the threatened sectors, with the mass of both formations to follow[51]. To obtain a clearer picture of the Italian defensive preparations on the west coast, OKW instructed Löhr to dispatch two staff officers on an inspection of the area.

On July 10, 1943, the Allies landed in Sicily[52]. That Mincemeat was indeed a ruse was no longer in doubt, yet the Germans refused to revise their estimates of Allied intentions in the Balkans. On the 9th, when the Anglo-American deployment against Sicily was clearly apparent, Keitel produced an «Appreciation of the Enemy Intentions in the Mediterranean». The Allied assault on Sicily, Keitel reasoned, would most likely be followed by landings in Greece, not Italy. The attack would begin with the seizure of the islands off the Gulf of Patras. «If the enemy succeeded in reaching the rail line Salonika-Athens», he continued, «the Peloponnese as well as Crete and the Dodecanese would fall like ripe fruit in his lap». The political repercussions on Hungary and Romania would be most unpleasant; and from air bases in northern Greece, the Allies could bomb the Romanian oil fields. For the first ware of such an operation, Keitel estimated that the Allies had three tank divisions, three tank brigades and eight infantry divisions[53].

50. KTB OKW, p. 753; KTB Heeresgruppe E, # 000597.

51. KTB OKW, p. 754, KTB Heeresgruppe E, T-311, Roll 176, # 000008, # 000009.

52. Tactically, at least, the Germans were not taken by surprise. German aerial reconnaissance had observed the movements of the Allied convoys throughout July 9. About their destination there could be no doubt. KTB Skl, 9.7.43; Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung,* p. 363. German aerial reconnaissance in the eastern Mediterranean was severely curtailed by the inexorable growth of Allied air supremacy. By June-July 1943, a truly accurate picture of the Allied buildup in the ports from Tripoli east and in the Levant was impossible to obtain. KTB Skl, 16.6.43, 23.6.43, 21.7.43; KTB Heeresgruppe E, T-311, Roll 175, # 000601.

53. Though the bogus Mincemeat documents had pointed only to a landing in the Peloponnese with two divisions, German estimates of Anglo-American shipping space had very early led to the conclusion that the Allies could land as many as 6-10 divisions in the first wave of their Mediterranean offensive. Keitel's estimate is higher still. KTB Heeresgruppe E, T-311, Roll 176, # 000023; see also, Tashjean.

Long after the Allied landings in Sicily, in fact, the Germans clung to the delusion that Greece would be the target of a major Anglo-American amphibious assault. On July 21, OKW ordered their most celebrated general, Rommel, and the staff of Heeresgruppe B to Salonika, with instructions to take over the defense of Greece, where an Allied landing was considered «increasingly possible» in the near future[54]. Several days before, Löhr had reported the disturbing results of the staff inspections of 11 Italian Army readiness to his superiors. The Italians had done nothing to fortify the coastline; the airfields also lacked adequate protection. The strength of General Vecchiarelli's (C-in-C Italian 11 Army) forces in western Greece was wholly incommensurate with the tasks at hand. Löhr proposed the immediate subordination of Italian 11 Army to Heeresgruppe E. A meaningful reinfordi cement of the coastal defenses, he asserted, would require a dozen adtional fortress batallions, as well as adequate flak and Luftwaffe reinforcements. 1 Gebirgsjäger Division should be shifted closer to the coast[55].

Hitler issued a new directive (Führerweisung 48) for the defense of the Balkans on July 26. Enemy landings, it began, would soon commence on the Peloponnese, on the west coast of Greece, and against the islands of Crete or Rhodes. The directive embraced the proposals put forth by Heeresgruppe E and emphasized the pressing importance of effective counterinsurgency measures to secure lines of communication in the southeast[56]. More importantly, it provided for the forma-

«Operation 'Mincemeat' - 5 deutsche Dokumente»: Abt. Fremde Heere West, Nr. 7/43 gkdos Chefs. den 8. Februar 1943, KTB Heeresgruppe E, T-311, Roll 175, # 000590.

54. Following the collapse of Mussolini's government on July 25, however, Hither immediately recalled Rommel to Rastenburg, and entrusted him with the command of German forces in northern Italy, as originally intended. KTB OKW, pp. 774, 815; KTB Skl, 21.7.43.

55. KTB OKW, pp. 753-54, 800-01; KTB Heeresgruppe E, T-311, Roll 176, # 000036. On July 12, OKW had decided to send another battalion of assault guns to Greece, this time to the Peloponnese.

56. On the night of 20-21 June, Greek resistance fighters had cut the railway between Salonika and Athens at six points; shortly before, partisans had ambushed a motor vehicle column of 117 Jäger Division. To counter this sudden surge of activity, OKW had ordered the transfer of 2 Regiment «Brandenburg» and SS Gebirgspolizei Regiment 18 to Greece. The High Command also dispatched large quantities of anti-aircraft artillery to Greece to secure the rail line from Salonika to Athens (28 8.8 cm, 18 3.7 cm and 72 2 cm. flak guns). KTB OKW, pp. 746, 764, 816-17.

tion of a six division reserve (two tank, two armored infantry and two mountain divisions) along the rail line Belgrade-Larissa[57]. To implement these plans, OKW reorganized the entire command structure in the Balkans. Special Order No. 3 to Directive 48 (August 7) created a new army group, F, and charged its commander, Field Marshal Maximilian von Weichs, with the defense of the entire southeastern theater. Löhr's Heeresgruppe E, though subordinate to Weichs, remained operationally responsible for the defense of Greece and the islands[58]. To complete the reorganization in Greece, the High Command ordered the formation of a new army corps staff-XXII Gebirgsjäger. Commanded by General Hubert Lanz, it would assume control of 1 Gebirgsjäger and 104 Jäger divisions on the west coast[59].

By August 1943, the German buildup in Greece was essentially concluded. Yet, when measured against the wishes of the High Command, the results were clearly unsatisfactory. Five divisions, some fortress battalions and additional regiments lay scattered along a bulging front from Epirus to Salonika; the mobile reserve envisaged in Directive 48 would never materialize. Indeed, the sporadic, incremental nature of the buildup illustrates the want of a consistent strategic purpose; the failure to concentrate forces at a given point, the lack of secure knowledge of enemy intent. Hitler's injunction that Greece be defended everywhere along its outer coastal perimeter was wholly beyond the forces at Löhr's disposal. By early August, in fact, Heeresgruppe E faced a grim three-fold task which taxed its slender resources to the utmost: destruction of the partisans; disarming of Italian troops in the event of an Italian capitulation; preparation of the defense against an enemy landing. In an appreciation on September 16, 1943, the commander of Heeresgruppe F (Weichs) laid out his problems in fulsome detail: «The defender must fight on the Aegean, Ionian and Adriatic fronts. The length of the front and the weakness of our own forces require mobile operations; the ruggedness (Unwegsamkeit) of the operational area forbids it. The advantage of interior lines is, consequently, not present, and a central reserve does not exist. Thus, the

57. Hubatsch, *Hitlers Weisungen für die Kriegführung, 1939-1945,* pp. 218-22.

58. Hubatsch, *Hitlers Weisungen,* pp. 224-27.

59. KTB OKW, pp. 914, 943, 946; Fricke, Gert, «Das Unternehmen des XXII. Gebirgsarmeekorps gegen die Inseln Kefalonia and Korfu im Rahmen des Falles «Achse». (September 1943). p. 33. In: Militärische Mitteilungen. Vol. I:1, 1967.

Aegean and Ionian fronts must be defended rigidly and without depth»[60]. Proposals to shorten the front along the line Corfu-Salonika encountered Hitler's firm opposition[61].

But the German defensive preparations in Greece must be considered within the mosaic of Germany's overall war effort. Simply stated, by early 1943, Hitler's resources were alarmingly insufficient when compared with his ballooning military commitments. In the East, 159 German divisions clung precariously to a front some 2,600 kilometers in lenght, opposite Soviet forces greatly superior in number. To regain the initiative lost at Stalingrad, Hitler planned a spring offensive in southern Russia, against the Kursk salient. Though limited in scope, it would consume the most important reserves of the German High Command[62]. And despite German anxieties vis-à-vis the Balkans, the entire sweep of the western European coastline, from Norway to the Iberian Peninsula, was now vulnerable to Anglo-American amphibious operations. To confront this awesome challenge would require prodigious quantities of coastal troops, fixed fortifications and mobile reserves[63]. The surrender of Axis forces in North Africa (May 1943) had created an additional concern. To Hitler, a complete Italian collapse was inevitable; when it came, the defense of the Italian peninsula would demand a formidable German military commitment[64]. Thus, the multiple strains along the periphery of Hilter's embattled empire and the resources they consumed, left little for the defense of the eastern Mediterranean.

60. KTB OKW. p. 1114.

61. Apparently, Hitler feared the impact that a German withdrawal from the outer coastal perimeter and the Greek islands would have on the neutral posture of Turkey. Salewski, *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung*. p. 381; see also Röhricht, Edgar, «Die Entwicklung auf dem Balkan 1943-45». p. 391. In: Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau. Juli 1962, Heft 7.

62. Hitler would delay the offensive until early July, to build up his tank forces. Thirty-three first class divisions, including 19 tank and armored infantry divisions, would be employed in the Kursk offensive. See Klink, E., *Das Gesetz des Handelns* - Die Operation Zitadelle 1943.

63. As of February 1943, the German High Command envisioned a mobile reserve of 6-8 divisions in the area of OB West (France and the Low Countries). OKW KTB, pp. 100, 124, 130, 136.

64. By late-July, Hitler had already shifted four divisions (16 and 26 Panzer and 3 and 29 Panzer Grenadier divisions) from France to Italy. Schröder, *Italiens Kriegsaustritt,* pp. 121-30.

Viewed in the above context, the German buildup in Greece in 1943, given additional impetus by Mincemeat, represented a significant investment in men and material; it mirrors, moreover, a fundamental fallacy of German strategic thinking. Never really understanding the nature of or tensions within the Allied coalition, the Germans tended to exaggerate the British-Russian antagonism and to neglect the very real differences in the history, temperament and war goals between the British and the Americans. To Hitler, buried away in his East Prussia headquarters, it was axiomatic that Churchill would attempt to beat the advancing Red Army to the Balkans. Hitler was basically correct in his analysis of Churchill's thinking, for throughout 1943 the Prime Minister remained a vigorous advocate of a Balkan strategy[65]. What the German dictator and his military advisors failed to see was that the Americans would never sanction such a policy. With their inveterate suspicion of colonial powers, the Americans refused to serve as an adjunct to Britain's «Imperial» ambitions[66]. But the Germans, mesmerized by their own strategic misconceptions, built up their defenses, deployed their divisions, and waited-for an invasion of Greece that would never come.

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65. See Elisabeth Barker, *British Policy in South-East Europe in the Second World War.*

66. For discussions of Anglo-American diplomacy, see Howard, Michael, *Grand Strategy*. Vol. IV: August 1942 - September 1943. Her Majesty's Stationary Office. London. 1972; Matloff, Maurice, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare.*

German Order of Battle in Greece (July 1943)

OKW

Heeresgruppe E (Löhr)

Befh. Saloniki-Ägäis	Sturm-Division Rhodos	Befh. Süd-griechenland	LXVIII Armeekorps	Kommandant Festung Kreta
1. Gebirgs-Division		11. Luftwaffen-Feld Division	1. Panzer-Division	
			117. Jäger-Division	
		104. Jäger Division		
				Festungs-Brigade Kreta
				22. Division ital. Sienna

German Order of Battle in Greece (August 1943)

OKW

Heeresgruppe F. Weichs
Heeresgruppe E. Löhr

XXII. Gebirgs-Armeekorps (Lanz)	Sturm-Division Rhodos	LXVIII Armeekorps (Felmy)	SS-Polizei-Regiment 18 SS Polizei-Panzer-Grenadier Regiments 1+2	Kommandant Festung Kreta
1. Gebirgs-Division		1. Panzer-Division*	2. Regiment Brandenburg	22. Division Festungs-Brigade Kreta
104. Jäger-Division		11. Luftwaffen-Feld Division		
		117. Jäger-Division		

* 1 Panzer Division was transferred to the Ukraine in October 1943.

War operations, Southeastern Theater