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Ben Shepherd. *Terror in the Balkans: German Armies and Partisan Warfare.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012. 384 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-04891-1.

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On April 6, 1941, Germany armies invaded Yugoslavia after it had refused to join the Axis countries. Within eleven days, the Yugoslavian army surrendered and the country came under the control of the Nazi Empire. Almost immediately, Yugoslavian partisans organized themselves and began armed resistance against Nazi occupation. Throughout a conquered Europe, and also from 1941 in the territories taken over from the Soviet Union, Germany waged war against irregular forces, but Yugoslavia was an exceptional case because of the intensity of its resistance. Although the partisans in the Soviet Union constituted an operational problem for the German forces, partisan warfare was integrated within the total obdurate struggle between two giant armies. In Yugoslavia, in contrast, this was an irregular war that engaged German forces in an area clearly controlled by Germany. For the Soviet Union, the partisans were an auxiliary arm of the regular forces that was used to execute missions beyond enemy lines according to directions from Moscow, although this was not so at the beginning of the war. In Yugoslavia the partisans were the army.

In his 1977 book, *Guerrilla: A Historical and Critical Study*, Walter Laqueur claims that partisan warfare in Yugoslavia had received complete and comprehensive documentation but that a number of essential questions had not yet been answered.[1] However, his work deals mostly with partisan warfare and the rise to power of Josip Broz Tito who tried to unify all the peoples of Yugoslavia against the Germans, their Italian allies (until the autumn of 1943), and the Croats. Partisan warfare in Yugoslavia began in July 1941 with the call by Tito for a general uprising. The Germans regarded the partisans, whom they called gangsters and bandits, as a serious danger, and began a series of large assaults against their strongholds. By November 1941 Serbia was swept clean, and the partisans retreated to Bosnia-Herzegovina; later on, with increased pressure from the German armies and their allies, a further retreat was made to Montenegro. The Germans feared that partisan control over the eastern part of Bosnia and the Dalmatian coast would allow the Allied forces to land there. This fear increased with the elimination of the German and Italian presence in North Africa in May 1943 and with German estimation that the Allied forces were planning an invasion on the European shores of the Mediterranean. Therefore, from 1943 until the spring of 1944, the Germans carried out another series of wide-ranging attacks. These actions incurred severe damage to the civilian population that served as a protective rear for the partisan forces. The anti-partisan operations by Germany in Yugoslavia during the entire course of the war were the largest ones to be conducted, even in comparison with the eastern front and against the civilian population in the conquered countries of Western Europe.[2] The question is why was the maltreatment of the civilian population in Yugoslavia so murderous (in terms relative to the size of the population before the war and the number of victims)? This question cannot be answered only by citing the fear of Germany that partisan activity with the active support of the population would assist the Allied forces, since a similar situation could have been created on the eastern front and even in Western Europe.

Jonathan Gumz, in his article on German policy in independent Croatia, offers a number of arguments that explain, according to his interpretation, the policy of Germany in occupied Yugoslavia.[3] Firstly, he argues that one should remember the fact that Germany had set up an independent state–Croatia–whose leaders upheld the ethnic cleansing of Serbians. The second argument was the general anti-Slav policy of Nazi Germany as demonstrated in other parts of Eastern Europe. This argument is accepted in research and is represented, for example, in the works of Omer Bartov. The third argument is the directional chaos of Adolf Hitler in the bureaucratic system of the Reich. This lack of direction and the failure to create a centralized system led to competitions among the various government bodies, and in the case of Yugoslavia these were the Foreign Office, the SS, and the Wehrma-

cht. The chaos allowed junior army officers the freedom of action to suit their own world views and the military realities in the sectors of activity over which they were given command. Also, Gumz adds, Hitler had no interest at all in what was taking place in Yugoslavia, in contrast to other countries in the East. This fact consequently enabled the continued freedom of action.

The book under review by Ben Shepherd carries this argument forward but also makes further important additions. In his book, which is well written with an impressive use of archival material, Shepherd claims that there is another factor in the murderous policy of Nazi Germany in occupied Yugoslavia. His argument is that the cultural background of some of the middle rank officers, those who were in command of the fighting divisions, constituted a significant factor in the formation of this policy. Most of these officers were of Austrian origin, and from an in-depth analysis of the documents pertaining specifically to the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War, the claim was broached that the military experience of the Austrians during that war played a role in the brutalization of the following officer generation that fought in Yugoslavia. We can occasionally find officers who participated in both wars. Shepherd also asserts that National Socialist ideology was only one of the factors, and that in fact this ideology that was based on the concept of Social Darwinism, had already been developed at the end of the nineteenth century.

The first three chapters of the book provide the essential historical background for comprehending the activities of the Germans in Yugoslavia during the Second World War. These chapters deal with the ideological development of the concept "Social Darwinism" and how it turned into a military mechanism during the First World War and reached its barbarous climax in the Second World War. Other chapters in the book are devoted to specific analyses, well supported by relevant documents, of the various divisions that were active in Yugoslavia. Through this comparative discussion, the reader is able to understand the similarities and differences in activity between each division in comparison with the others, and also the causes for such differences, especially in the regions in which war was conducted among the various ethnic and religious groups of which Yugoslavia was composed. Shepherd stresses the differences in the activities of the divisions as being due to the size of the territory and the topographical characteristics in the sectors for which each division was responsible.

Shepherd's book is important for a number of reasons. The first and most basic one is the fact that it gives an additional historical dimension to studies about the war on the Balkan front which has not been granted the same generous attention by scholarly research as have other war theaters. Another aspect that Shepherd raises is that an analysis of the murderous manifestation of Nazi ideology is based on principles that had already been formulated at the end of the nineteenth century and were applied in the test case of the Balkan arena. The book can also be placed as part of the historical discussion on German anti-partisan warfare during the Second World War, as well as the development of counterinsurgency in general. There is no doubt that democratic states cannot conduct this type of military policy. But the case of Germany in the Second World War in general, and in the Balkan theater in particular, constitutes an additional chapter in the military history of counterinsurgency in exactly the same way as guerrilla warfare has been given comprehensive discussion in books that deal with the history of this phenomenon.[4]

The book has another important aspect. The German army–the Wehrmacht–remains the subject of many debates among historians dealing with the history of the Third Reich. This debate may be summed up by the question raised by Bartov: "was the Wehrmacht Hitler's army?"[5] That is to say, was the Wehrmacht a professional organization or a powerful tool of Nazi-Socialism to carry out its plans and to obtain *lebensraum* in the East and the overthrow of Germany's enemies in the West? The claim that the Wehrmacht was an efficient professional organization from the military viewpoint was almost immediately raised by German military officers at the end of the war. These officers tried to distance themselves from the war crimes, the crimes against humanity, and racial murder carried out by SS units. Basil H. Liddell-Hart writes that "they (= the German officers) were essentially technicians, intent on their professional job, and with little idea of things outside it. It is easy to see how Hitler hoodwinked and handled them, and found them good instruments up to a point."[6] Shepherd's careful and precise research proves that the Wehrmacht was a partner in the war crimes that Germany executed during the course of the war, and in the case dealt with in this book, in the Balkan. Although the divisions that Shepherd examines were composed of Austrians, and the 369th division was composed of Croats, many German officers also served in these divisions.[7] The divisions were under the command of 65th Corpus (Yugoslavia) as part of the 12th Army that was responsible for the area of Southeast Europe. All these military frameworks belonged to the Wehrmacht.

Shepherd examines an issue that has not yet been

given any profound discussion in the general research on the Second World War. His book has the ability as well to cast light on the cultural background for the war crimes and racial murder carried out during the 1990s after the breakup of Yugoslavia. This is a well-written book that bases its arguments on an in-depth analysis of archival material. Besides its military aspects, this is also an important work for the continued discussion of the frightful crimes that Germany performed during the Second World War and that must never be forgotten.

Notes

[1]. Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Weidenfeld, 1977), 215.

[2]. Punitive measures against a civilian population and ethnic cleansing by the Germans were not distinctive of the Second World War. This policy had already been adopted by Germany at the end of the nineteenth century in Africa and even in the territories it had conquered during the First World War. See Peter Lieb, "Few Carrots and a Lot of Sticks: German Anti-Partisan Warfare in World War Two," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare,* ed. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (Oxford: Osprey, 2008), 59-61.

[3]. Jonathan Gumz, "German Counterinsurgency Policy in Independent Croatia, 1941-1944," *The Historian* 61, no. 1 (1998): 33-50.

[4]. One of the first comprehensive studies dealing with German warfare against the partisans is Robert M. Kennedy's *German Antiguerrilla Operations in the Balkans (1941-1944)* (Washington DC: CMH Publication 104-18), 1954. See also Charles D. Melson, "German Counter-Insurgency Revisited," *Journal of Slavic Military History* 24 (2011): 116-146. For a review of partisan warfare in Yugoslavia, see, for example, Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, 214-220; N. I. Klonis, *Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Robert Speller, 1972), 79-88; and John Ellis, *From the Barrel of a Gun* (London: Greenhill Books, 1995), 162-176.

[5]. Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3. See also Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945* (Oxford: MacMillan, 1985), 76-87.

[6]. Basil H. Liddell-Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill* (London: Cassell, 1948), 7-8.

[7]. The other divisions studied in detail in the book are the infantry divisions 704, 342, and 718, which belong to the Wehrmacht. For the German order of battle in Yugoslavia (1941-45), see http://www.vojska.net/eng/world-war-2/germany/division/.

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