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Supplementary to the Study Entitled
The Balkan Campaign
(The Invasion of Yugoslavia)

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Supplementary to the Study Entitled

The Balkan Campaign

(The Invasion of Yugoslavia)

Preliminary Remark

The following elaboration is intended to supplement the chapter "The Invasion of Yugoslavia" contained in the study entitled "The Balkan Campaign" submitted by the Historical Division.

The content of the study was checked by those who had taken part in the happenings and corrected wherever necessary and the course of the campaign then compiled by me in the form of a new study.

The more important records were supplied by Generalfeldmarschall Frhr von Weichs, the then Commander in Chief of the 2. Army, participating at the time, whilst further contributions were supplied by Generaloberst von Vietinghoff and Generaloberst Reinhardt as well as Generals Brandenberger and Reinhard, who were troop commanders within the zone of the 2. Army at that time, and further by Colonel I.G. Crist, then General Staff Officer of the Operational Division of the Luftwaffe.

All information is given to the best knowledge of those involved but is given purely from memory. No documents, diaries, maps or anything similar were available. Hence errors are excepted, particularly as I myself did not personally take part in this part of the Balkan Campaign.

Annex 1: Review of the forces of the 2. Army

Annex 2: Traced map: concentration and chief marching route of the
German forces.

Signed: v. Greiffenberg.

Gen. Inf.

Study approved

Nuernberg, 9.5.47

Signed: Frhr. v. Weichs

Generalfeldmarschall

Background to the Balkan Campaign

In 1940 the Germans in France found a treatise written in the winter 1939/40 by the French General Staff. In this document it was described as inadvisable to make a frontal attack on the German Westwall, particularly because of the insufficient artillery equipment of the French Army. For this reason a wideflung Strategical outflanking of the Central European region was advised, which was to take place either by way of Norway or the Balkans. In view of what occurred in 1940, this document had it is true no bearing whatever on later events, but is nevertheless proof of the fact that Norway as well as the Balkans had at an early stage already played a role in the strategical deliberations of the belligerent powers. For the German command, to become involved in a Balkan campaign could only be most undesirable for the following reasons:

By the basic strategical principle that the bulk of the forces should be concentrated at the decisive point, it should be avoided unnecessarily to split up forces on subsidiary fronts. The war 1914/18 provided warning examples for this.

Events in Africa and Albania^a had dissipated all confidence in the military efficiency of our Italian ally. It was to be foreseen that she would not alone need German help in conquering the Balkans but rather also in holding them, hence, that German troops would be permanently tied up there which could be far better used elsewhere. And by the time the Albanian War had come to its end, this disadvantage had already made itself felt. The Allies understood how to increase difficulties for the

German Command by later vigorously supporting with materials the resistance movements that later developed in the Balkans. This was probably done with the intention of forcing the German Command to use as many forces as possible in the Balkans. The Germans, on the other hand, endeavoured to manage with a minimum of forces on this subsidiary front and, despite the increasing resistance movements, to release from there ever more and more divisions for other fronts.

This gave rise to serious disadvantages for the German command. On the one hand the Balkans, even though the strictest thrift was observed, detracted certain forces from more important fronts. On the other hand the Command in the Balkans in ever increasing measure had too few troops to fulfill its assigned missions.

Although these circumstances could not be perceived in their full scope at the beginning of the Balkan Campaign in 1941, it was nevertheless anticipated that a commitment in these territories must bring in its train all the disadvantages of an additional subsidiary front.

If approaching operations against Russia must be taken into account at the time this campaign commenced, the disadvantage of having to split up forces must have still worse effects. In view of the known strength of the Russian Army all German forces that could possibly be made available must be concentrated.

The Hitler Directive No. 20 of 13.12.40 therefore also determined that once operation "Marita" (Offensive against Greece) had been carried out, all troops employed there were to be withdrawn for new commitment. Hence, as these troops were necessary for any operation against Russia,

it resulted that commencement of any operation in the East had to be postponed according to the uncertain duration of the Balkan Campaign. In view of the Early Eastern winter this must needs be particularly detrimental. In fact the opening of the campaign in Russia was actually delayed 6 - 8 weeks by events in the Balkans. The winter campaign 1941-1942 would perhaps have taken another course if this loss of time had not occurred at the outset of the offensive.

In spite of all these obvious disadvantages the German Command was driven by events to take part in the Balkan Campaign.

The failure of the war action by Italy not alone in Africa but also in the Albanian Campaign - which was undertaken without the knowledge and without the consent of the German Command, led to a serious crisis which the Italians were unable to overcome. Rather, this crisis also brought on the danger of a complete collapse of the Italian Armed Forces. However, for political, military and moral reasons this had to be averted.

Furthermore, as, by her attack on Albany, Italy had forced Greece to give up her neutrality, the door to the Balkans had been opened for the English. But the possible establishment of an English air-base in Greece constituted a serious menace to the Rumanian oil territories. This menace could only be removed by using German forces. (For further particulars see my study on the "Campaign in Greece", already submitted).

The Yugoslav nation having in the coup de etat of 27 Mar 41 at Belgrade declared its intention to fight, the necessity arose for the German Command to extend its plan of operation, which originally aimed solely at occupying the Aegean north coast and the Saloniki Basin

(Hitler Directive No. 20 of 13 Dec 40). This plan was now extended to a concentric attack on Yugoslavia (Hitler Directive No. 25 of 27 Mar 41). This became necessary because Yugoslavia's joining the war not alone gave rise to the danger that the Italian front be destroyed by strategic outflanking but rather also made the planned German operation against the Aegean coast impossible because of the threat to the flanks and the rear.

Thus the use of German forces against Greece and Yugoslavia, undesirable in the sense of the conduct of the war on the whole, was compulsorily brought about. This development illustrates the grave dangers an ally of inferior military qualities can bring about, especially when such ally, overestimating his own powers inclines to be independent risky actions. Such an ally forces the stronger ally perpetually to divert forces to a direction which is unimportant in regard to deciding the war. This disadvantage became evident both in the conduct of the war in Africa and in the Balkans.

The causes which led up to the opening of the campaign in the Balkans have proved that it had purely defensive aims in view, namely preventing an enemy gaining a footing in a region where he would have endangered our own conduct of the war. Judging by the geographical situation alone the presumption might arise that it was intended to make an offensive use of the Balkans, whether this be against Africa, against the Suez Canal or to gain control of the Mediterranean.

Such strategical use of the Balkans could, however, never become practicable as the necessary forces could never have been made available

either on land or at sea.

The Balkan Campaign can also not be viewed as an intended "strategical feint against the Suez Canal to cover up Hitler's real plan - the invasion of Russia." In weighing the opposing forces neither the costs and the use of the necessary forces nor the risk involved could have made such an enterprise seem worth while. It is impossible to judge from the German side, however, whether the secondary success of a feint attack was unintentionally brought about.

Operations by the 2. ArmyConcentration

The concentration of the 2. Army showed all the marks and the disadvantages of an over-hasty improvisation. This was because, in view of the political situation up to then, neither practical nor theoretical preparations had been made for war against Yugoslavia. The events of 27 Mar changed the position instantaneously and on the same day brought about Hitler Directive No. 25, by which the plans of operation, hitherto directed solely against Greece, had to be extended.

Accordingly the 2. Army under Generalfeldmarschall Frhr. von Weichs was to be newly formed and brought up for the intended attack from the region of Graz. This army was to concentrate with the main forces in Styria, consisting of:

the XVIII Mountain Corps (GenKuebler) with 1. Mountain Division and the Border Troops.

the LI. Corps (Gen. Reinhard) with the 132. Div, the 101. and the 183. Div.

The "General von Briesen" Corps, which did not arrive in time.

Further concentration in the Western Hungarian region:

the XXXVI. Arm. Corps (Gen. v. Vietinghoff) with the 8. Arm. Div., the 14th Arm Div. and the 26. met. Div.

Hence the opinion expressed in the "Study" that the entire 2. Army was concentrated in Western Hungary is erroneous.

Simultaneously Arm. Group 1 (Gen. Oberst v. Kleist) was concentrated near Sofia in Bulgaria and the XXXXI. Arm. Corps (General Reinhard) - (described as the "Timisul Corps" in the Study) - was concentrated in the Timisul Valley for later cooperation with the 2. Army. At first these two groups were under the immediate command of the AOK 12 which was concentrating in Bulgaria against Greece. It was only after they had crossed the border a few days later that they came under command of AOK 2.

The main body of the XXXXVI. Arm. Corps reached Western Hungary by crosscountry marching, only the tanks being railed. On the other hand the three corps to be assembled in Styria traveled by rail. Here particularly the difficulties of the improvised concentration became apparent, as the divisions had to be brought in over great distances, some from the middle of the Reich and some from France. Thus, for instance, the 8. Arm Div of the Arm. Corps came from the region of Dijon. The railway system in the region of concentration was only slightly developed. Although transport was ordered immediately after issue of Directive No. 25 and began at once, the concentration took some time, which was, however, contrary to the wishes of the Command to obtain the speediest success possible. It was to be anticipated that only a minor fraction of the troops provided for could arrive in the concentration area by the 6. Apr. and not more than half by the 10 Apr. Only the Arm. Corps could be ready for commitment sooner.

And actually only 3 Divisions of the Graz Group went into action, these being one of the Corps Kuebler (18. Mountain Corps). two of the

Corps Reinhard (II. Corps) while the Corps Briesen was not used at all.

The divisions which were not required any longer because of the rapid course events had taken were transported away again, part of the transports by rail being diverted en route.

The Commander in Chief of the Army, Field Marshall von Brauchitsch personally took control of the operations, moving his headquarters to Wienerneustadt. Thus, similarly as in the case of the 12th Army which was being concentrated against Greece, the appointment of an Army Group Command was not considered necessary.

The Army's Mission and Plan of Operation

In order to take full advantage of the time gained and also to release troops as speedily as possible, Supreme Command demanded a speedy success, hence earliest possible launching of the offensive.

In the concentric attack planned on Yugoslavia the mission of advancing from the region around Graz in southeasterly direction to Belgrade and from there joining the Arm. Group von Kleist, which was attacking from South to North as well as the Timisul Corps advancing from Rumania (both of the 12. Army), cutting off the Yugoslav Army from its base and inflicting an annihilating defeat upon it, fell to the 2. Army.

In terms of directive from higher quarters the 2. Army was first of all to attack in the general direction toward Belgrade with main point of effort on the left and avoiding the westerly mountainous terrain. Only sufficient troops were to be used against the mountains as would be absolutely necessary for flank coverage. Zagreb was to be occupied early by motorized forces.

The 2. Army intended using one Arm. Division of the Arm. Corps Vietingheff (XXXXVI) coming from Western Hungary to attack Zagreb after crossing the Drave, whilst the main body of the corps was to advance toward Belgrade between the Drave and the Save.

The Corps Reinhard (LI.) was first to advance toward Zagreb after forcing the Drave crossing and if necessary to support the units of the Corps Vietingheff committed there. It was intended that the concentrated LI Corps was then to follow the Arm. Corps to Belgrade.

Whilst Corps Kuebler (Mountain Corps) was to cover the right flank

against the mountains, Corps Briesen was to advance as army reserve. The date ordered for commencement of the offensive by the 12. Army was 6. Apr., for the 2. Army 10. Apr. Though concerted opening of the attack would have been more desirable also for tactical reasons, it was not possible on account of the long-drawn-out concentrating movements of the 2. Army. Thus even on the 10. Apr. that army could only have certain units in readiness for attack but was not to await completion of concentration. As the German intentions must needs become evident with the beginning of the attack by the 12. Army it was to be expected that the two frontier bridges over the Murr and the Drave, which were prepared for demolition, would be blown up on that day. In view of the difficult water conditions the erection of bridges must lead to considerable loss of time. Therefore the 2. Army decided to take the Murr bridges at Murreck and Radkersburg on 6. Apr and to form bridgeheads there as well as on the Drave at Bares from Hungarian territory. Commanding heights to the southeast of Strass and north of Dravegrad (Oberdrauburg) were also to be taken.

The 2. Army further had orders to agree upon mutual operations with the 2. Italian Army concentrated in the region of Fiume. Cooperation with the Italians was particularly difficult because of there being no mutual Higher Command, both armies having, rather, to rely on agreements. This is a typical disadvantage of coalition warfare! That this circumstance had no serious consequences was due solely to the fact that resistance by the enemy proved weak.

General Ambrosio, the Italian Commander in Chief was called upon to attack simultaneously with the launching of the general offensive by the German Army on the 1e. Apr. His attack was to follow a southeasterly

direction. He replied however, that such an attack would be too risky in view of the too small supply of ammunition the Italian Army had, and as there were 13 Yugoslav divisions on the other side. By reports of the German Intelligence Service there were only 2 1/2 Yugoslav divisions. It was later found that this figure was much nearer the truth than that given by the Italians.

Furthermore the German liaison staff with the Italian Army Command reported that General Resta, Chief of the Italian General Staff, at present in Army Headquarters on a visit, had declared that he did not consent to the intentions of the German operations. He desired that the German Army should attack from the Graz region in southwesterly direction with main point of effort at the left in order, as he expressed himself, to inflict "a Cannae" upon the enemy before the Italian front. This idea was not in accordance with the German intentions. The object was, not to destroy minor Yugoslav forces, but, with concentrated force to beat the main body of the enemy army.

After repeated negotiations General Ambrosio declared that he was willing to exert "pressure", i.e. to feign an attack and ultimately issued his army order: "The Army will attack when the enemy has collapsed before the front of the German troops."

Enemy Position and Terrain

It was known that very little enthusiasm for fighting would be found among some parts of the enemy army, which was due to the innerpolitical situation in Yugoslavia with dissatisfaction rife amongst the various peoples comprising that state, namely amongst the Croats. Furthermore, the Yugoslav army was only insufficiently equipped with modern weapons. The Serbian was known from the first World War however, as a courageous, tough and well-disciplined soldier. The leadership was known to be determined and ruthless to the point of cruelty. The weak points of the army could, to a great extent, be balanced by the favorable terrain. The Yugoslav was regarded particularly as a past-master at mountain warfare. There was only one mountain division included in the ranks of the 2. Army whilst the main body of the troops were unaccustomed to mountain conditions.

At the outset of the offensive very little was known to the German 2. Army about preparations made by the enemy. The frontier was protected by outposts and some fortifications, particularly at river crossings. The bridges across the Murr and the Drave had been prepared for blasting by the Yugoslavs at points on the frontier. New recruitments were reported from the interior. Certain troop movements by rail and in cross-country marches did little to clear up the picture of Yugoslav intentions. The concentration of fairly strong forces was expected, not in the immediate vicinity of the frontier but rather behind the protecting Drave. It was reported that isolated enemy groups were on the Hungarian frontier as well as eastwards and northwards of the Danube.

Thus, generally speaking, the position was unclear when the German attacks began.

The difficulties presented by the Yugoslav region to the conduct of widespread operations are known. Little developed, in parts wild, mountainous country, poor communication system and sparse population make the command, the movements and the supply of big numbers of troops difficult and, in parts, even altogether impossible. Added to this came the fact that at the outset of fighting the army, in its attack, had to overcome three major rivers, the Murr, the Drave and the Save. On account of the springtime high water the rivers had swollen to tearing torrents. Thus for instance, the Drave at Bares and the lower reaches of the Save were at least as broad as the Rhine at Dusseldorf. A decisive factor was therefore the gaining of undestroyed bridges. On the other hand the terrain between the Drave and the Save toward Belgrade was favorable, being generally flat and intersticed with usable roads, thus allowing of rapid advance by motorized units.

Execution of the Operations.

The Corps Reinhard had at its disposal for the initial attack aiming at the capture of the bridgeheads on 6. Apr only four battalions and three batteries, (6.Apr.) while the main body of the corps was still coming forward. Corps Vietingheff, on the other hand, was able to employ stronger forces.

After slight fighting the attack succeeded. All bridges fell into German hands undamaged, with the exception of the Murr crossings in the sector of Corps Vietingheff, these having been destroyed beforehand. The railway bridge north of the mouth of the Murr and Drave was also taken against slight resistance. Although practically undamaged it was not suitable for road traffic. In view of the weak forces available, narrow bridgeheads were formed at Murreck and Radkersburg on the Murr and at Barcs on the Drave. A commanding height at Spielfeld, south of Strass, which was occupied by the enemy, was taken.

The number of prisoners taken was comparatively high, which allowed the assumption that their fighting value was low. Also, deserters had already landed from planes at the airfield at Graz.

After this easy success the Command found itself faced with the question whether it would be advisable to push forward in the direction of Mariber where the Drave bridges might possibly also be taken undamaged. As short range reconnaissance also showed the outpost area to be free of all enemy troops, our troops felt the urge to continue the advance. However, Higher Command did not make any such alteration to the original intentions.

In view of the uncertain situation, a concentration of considerable Yugoslav forces south of the Drave was to be expected.

With the weak forces at that juncture available such a circumstance could have led to a set-back for which responsibility could not be accepted. Should the enemy intend destroying the Drave bridges at Mariber, it would be impossible to prevent him doing so even in the event of the advance being continued immediately, as no fast units were available at the Murr. It was therefore decided that further advance should be postponed at least to await the arrival of the three infantry divisions of the first wave. Such arrival was scarcely possible before the 10. Apr.

On the other hand the bridgeheads which up to now had been kept narrow, were extended upon the arrival of new troops, thereby, advancing the concentration. By 10. Apr. concentration had so far advanced that operations could be continued with units of good fighting power. The next objective was, after forcing the Drave crossings to both sides of Mariber, to capture Zagreb, the capital of Croatia and then (10. Apr.) to regroup for further advance toward the southeast with Belgrade as main point of effort. At the same time advance motorized units between the Drave and the Save were if possible to gain ground toward Belgrade and to set up communication with the Armored Group Kleist of the 12. Army, which group was advancing from the South.

To this end Corps Vietingheff was to advance on Belgrade with two divisions, but to wheel around on Zagreb with one division. Via Mariber - Rogatec, Corps Reinhard with its right division was to gain the area to the northwest whilst, with its left division, it was to cross the River Drave at Pettau and Steinburg to reach the area to the northeast of Zagreb.

Corps Kuebler was to advance via Drauburg - Zilly with the only division (1. Mountain Division) available as yet, to protect the right flank. Movements went forward according to plan though they were hampered by destruction of bridges, roads and railroads.

The destruction of the Save bridges at Zagreb, on the other hand, had been prevented by the rebelling Croates. The further the divisions pierced into Croatian territory, the less resistance they found. The Yugoslav troops, consisting for the greater part of Croates, simply dispersed or deserted to our lines.

Armored Corps Vietinghoff also had practically no intelligence on the enemy at the outset. The first task assigned to this corps was to take the bridge at Barcs. This mission was carried out by surprise successfully in the evening on 7. Apr., during rain, the garrison stationed at the bridge being taken by surprise in a double attack from the front and the rear by pioneers who crossed with pneumatins, before they were able to carry out the blasting which had been prepared.

The 14. Armored Division (Kuehn) was the first to cross the frontier river and on 10. Apr. was set advancing on Zagreb in two columns:

The left column first pressed from Virovitica southward toward the occupied heights to force a passage by the main road for the following main body of the division. Then it was to gain Zagreb on the road via Daruvar as cover for the left flank.

The right, main Column advanced toward Zagreb along the railroad via Virovitica - Klostar - Bjelovar. Little resistance was encountered, but just as everywhere else bad or destroyed roads were found. However, it was

possible to make up a train on which about one battalion was trucked. The Divisional Commander arrived in Zagreb with these troops in the evening of 10. April, welcomed by the population as liberator. Other parts of the division and the other column only reached Zagreb the next day having been delayed by localized engagements.

The surroundings of the town were mopped up and the Save Bridges secured. On account of communication difficulties the division had temporarily to be placed under the direct control of the Army.

In respect of the advance on Belgrade Corps Vietinghoff had ordered:

8. Armored Division immediately follows the 14. Armored Division via Barcs the main body advancing to Vukovar by the road south of the Drave, then south of the Fruska-Gora-Mountainrange via Mitrovica to Belgrade, where connection will be taken up with the XXXXI. Armored Corps ("Timisul Corps") and the Armored Group Kleist (see page 20).

The 26. Motorized Division follows the 8. Armored Division over the bridge, then advancing as protection for the right flank via Nasice - Vinkovci to Mitrovica. To the East, beyond Brod, the bridges over the Save to be taken by special units.

The 8. Armored Division commenced crossing the bridge in the night following the 10. Apr., found very little fighting during the further advance and in the late afternoon of 12. Apr reached Zamun with its reconnaissance units. (12. IV.) Scouting units entered Belgrade. The Save bridges to Belgrade had been blown up.

On the same day the 26. Motorized Division with its advanced units pierced as far as in the region westward of Mitrovica.

The Save bridges had been blown up, parts of a floating bridge at Mitrovica had been removed, but it could be repaired with resources available to us. The middle section of the big bridge at Sabas had been blown up but had fallen into the river in such favorable position that an emergency bridge could be built, supported by the arch.

Thus, whilst Corps Vietinghoff approached the enemy capital from the West, the XXXXI Corps (Reinhardt) had advanced from the northeast and Armored Group 1 (Kleist) from the South.

The XXXXI Corps (Reinhardt) consisted of: Infantry Regt "Gross-Deutschland" SS-Division "Das Reich", the Armoured Training Brigade from Bukharest and other assignments. Only parts of the "Herman Goering" division, which had also been assigned, arrived in time, and it did not take part in the advance.

The Corps' instructions read, to advance on Belgrade by shortest route and take possession of that town.

The thrust was made in two attack groups. The reinforced regiment "Grossdeutschland" advanced on the left along and astride the road to Alibunew. To the right of it the SS-Division "Das Reich" was set advancing in the general direction from northeast to southwest, also toward Alibunew.

The directive held good for both attack groups that the attack group which reached Alibunew first was assigned the road Pancevo - Belgrade from there on for its further advance. This directive set up keen competition between the two attack groups, urging them to make every effort to reach the mediate, important, objective, Alibunew and then as speedily as at all possible to gain the good road.

Even the assembly on Rumanian territory along the frontier had taken place in extremely bad weather and on miserable roads. In the territory where the attack was carried out road conditions were yet worse. The SS-Division "Das Reich" in its sector found no roads at all that were usable for motor traffic in rainy weather and eventually had to also make use of the roads in the sector of the regiment "Grossdeutschland". But even these roads in parts could scarcely be traversed by motor vehicles. In the SS-Division's sector the whole terrain was so marshy and wet (it was said to have been artificially kept wet by irrigation for rice growing) that whole units were able to help themselves in no other way than by marching barefooted with their boots over their shoulders. Enemy resistance was very slight and only worth mentioning at the anti-tank trench which was found in the entire invasion region at a depth of between 1 and 2 kilometers from the frontier. Alibunew was reached on the first day of the offensive, the Regiment Grossdeutschland being the first there. This regiment now also had the advance by the major road, whilst the SS-Division kept to the right in drier country now with some fair roads. No halt, far less a night's rest was allowed the troops in the Alibunew area, rather, the demand was made, to take the next intermediate objective without delay, i.e. the Tamis bridge, which was to be taken undamaged. Pancevo was soon reached by the Armoured Battalion and the Regiment Grossdeutschland, that followed with units on all manner of vehicles. The big Tamis bridge had been destroyed, the river swollen by flood-waters to a breadth of 120-150 meters, forming a barricade that could not be overcome with available means.

The Regiment Grossdeutschland lost valuable time through not deciding soon enough to cross by improvised means and was also held up by a series of misunderstandings until it was once again set on the advance by measures taken by the Corps.

In the meanwhile the SS-Division "Das Reich" had also reached the River Tamis and had without hesitation though under difficulties crossed it at least with some of its reconnaissance units. A strong scouting force advanced farther toward Belgrade and found Serbian assault boats on the northern banks of the Danube. They immediately crossed the river and entered the city Belgrade. The first act of the commander of the scouting troop was to relieve the personnel of the German Embassy, who were under pressure of confinement, (13. April). He then proceeded with the released German Military Attache and his scouting troop to the Chief Mayor and had the city of Belgrade surrendered to himself by that official. The following morning the first battalion of the Infantry Regiment "Grossdeutschland" landed in Belgrade from ships coming from Pancevo. Lives lost by the XXXXI Armored Corps were very few. The only officer killed was the victim of murder committed by an inhabitant who shot him from ambush.

After a few days the XXXXI. Armored Corps was withdrawn from the front and transported away, taking no further part in the campaign in Yugoslavia.

Operations by Armored Group 1 (von Kleist) advancing on Belgrade from the South were closely connected with the engagements of the XXXXI. Armored Corps just described.

This Group consisted of the XI. and XIV. Corps with the 11. Armored Division, the 60. Motorized Division, 5. Armored Division, 4. Mountain Division and the 198. Division but only found it necessary to employ parts of these forces to break enemy resistance. After slight fighting along the main road advanced by, i.e. Sofia - Nisch - Kragujewac, the Group on 13. Apr. occupied the city and the fort of Belgrade after this had repeatedly been attacked from the air. Following the capture of the capital the entire group was placed under control of the AOK 2 similarly to the XXXI. Corps. When the AOK assumed control the units composing the Armored Group were still distributed in great depth along and to both sides of the advance route. Thus General Command XIV was at Belgrade with the 11. Armored Division, the 60. Mot. Div. being 100 kilometers to the rear, whilst the 5. Armored Division, which had originally been inserted between these two divisions had pivoted out to the south at Nisch. Sidewards and to the rear followed Gen. Com. XI with the 4. Mountain Division and the 198. Division.

Upon arrival at Zagreb on 13. Apr. Army High Command of the 2. Army found the following position:

Corps Vietinghoff with one division west of Belgrade. The capital in possession of Armored Group 1 and the XXXI. Corps. The 14. Armored Division had united with the infantry of Corps Reinhard in Zagreb. This corps as well as Corps Kuebler had reached the Save and their advance units had already crossed it.

The 2. Italian Army had now also started its attack from Fiume and rapidly advanced without encountering any appreciable resistance along the coast of the Adriatic Sea in Dalmatia, occupying Laibach.

No considerable enemy forces were found south of the Save. By the statements of the Croats in Zagreb no appreciable resistance was to be expected in Croatia, Dalmatia or Bosnia as these provinces had joined the Croatian State and intended becoming close allies of Germany.

From this position the 2. Army drew the following conclusions: the original plan of operation namely, advance with main point of effort on the left directed at Belgrade, was based on the assumption that the Yugoslav army would make a stand in a decisive battle defending the capital. As Belgrade was however now already in German hands and the enemy had apparently withdrawn with his main forces to the mountainous country southwest of Belgrade, this plan of operation had become superfluous. The main object must now be, not to keep all forces concentrated for a decisive stroke, but rather to comb the country on a broad front with individual battle groups in order to smoke out the enemy resistance centres, to disarm dispersed enemy forces and thus as speedily and thoroughly as possible to pacify the whole land.

For this reason Corps Vietinghoff deployed the 8. Armored Division (Brandenberger) via Sabac to Valjevo - Uzice and the 26. Motorized Division (Henrici) from Mitrovica to Zvornic while the 14. Armored Division (Kuehn) was set on the march toward Serajevo. Deployment of the divisions took place essentially along the mountain roads available.

The right division of Corps Reinhard was ordered to Banjaluka with detachments to Karlovac and Bihac, the left division followed Armored Division Kuehn via Sisaak toward Serajevo whilst the 101. Division was retained at Zagreb.

After a short, fierce battle the 26. Motorized Division of Corps Vietinghoff took the bridge at Zvornik and then continued on its way in the direction of Serajevo. In part the enemy now, after laying down arms, marched in alone in regimental groups to surrender. The number of prisoners was so great that a count was impossible.

Division Brandenberger was held up at the Save bridge at Sabac and the enemy succeeded in blowing up the bridge by means of long distance ignition whilst the crossing was taking place. Repair was possible, however, in 16 to 18 hours.

Heavy fighting developed anew at Valjevo and Uzice. At the latter place the German troops had to ward off a night attack. A Yugoslav Army Staff was captured. In the further course of developments tanks of Corps Vietinghoff pierced to as far as Dubrovnic (Ragusa), where they established connection with the Italian forces, other units reaching Serajevo via Visegrad where they united with units of Armored Division Kuehn which had in the meanwhile arrived there.

The divisions of Corps Reinhard reached their objectives, Banjaluka and Serajevo according to plan. That the infantry was able to travel the whole distance from Zagreb to Sisac is proof of how little the enemy desired to fight.

During all these movements differences of opinion repeatedly arose with the Italians, which took their rise rather from political than from military considerations. In terms of the agreement, the Italian army had been assigned a certain stretch along the coast of the Adriatic as its zone of operations. In order to obtain an increased influence on the Croatian State then being formed, the Italian army demanded that

its line of demarkation be extended to the East, thus claiming an extension of its zone of operation. Thus the Italians also demanded that they occupy Karlovac, being anxious to advance their zone of occupation to as close to Zagreb as possible. As the Supreme German Command acceded to the Italian demands, Karlovac was evacuated by the German forces.

Without consulting the German Army High Command the Hungarians, with a Corps formed for that purpose, had taken possession of the Batschka-the Yugoslav territory north of the Danube and west of the Theiss. It is said that intense fighting took place here.

Before the pressure of the advancing 12. Army in southern Yugoslavia and Greece as well as the 2. Army in Northern Yugoslavia the remnants of the Yugoslav army had withdrawn to the mountainous territory southwest of Belgrade, approximately between Drina and Bosna. Army High Command (15.IV.) therefore ordered the 2. Army to undertake a concentrated attack against this enemy in order to drive him into the inhospitable Karst mountains of Bosnia and Dalmatia. This operation did not come into effect, however, as, on 15. Apr. already the Yugoslav Army Command by delegates under the white flag offered to accept an armistice.

The Armistice

On 15 Apr. the Commander in Chief of the 2 Army was ordered to Belgrade, there to conclude an armistice. On 16 Apr. Yugoslav General Body arrived there with instructions to ask for the German terms. However, he had no authority to treat or to sign. A draft of the treaty was handed him with the request to immediately have authorized persons sent to Belgrade in order to avoid further bloodshed. For this purpose an airplane was placed at his disposal. General Body declared: "I am an old man and have never yet flown, but I am willing to bring also this sacrifice for my Fatherland!"

A striking instance of the backwardness of the Yugoslav Army! The Armistice was concluded on 17 April. It was signed on the German side (17.IV.) by the Commander in Chief of the 2. Army, on behalf of Italy by the Italian Military Attache in Belgrade. Hungary was represented by a liaison officer, who, however, refused to sign the treaty giving as his reason that "Hungary was not at war with Yugoslavia". The Yugoslav Government had sent former Foreign Minister Markovic and a general.

From the Yugoslav side the suggestion was made that the government be left a restricted territory with a small army similarly as had been done with France in 1940. This suggestion had to be refused by the German side. Unconditional capitulation was demanded.

The Treaty therefore demanded the surrender of all weapons and other war material on land, sea and in the air. The entire personnel was to be treated as prisoners--of--war. The discharge of such persons as might be required for the administration and care of the country was reserved

for later regulation. The death sentence was threatened for troops independently dispersing in order to independently carry on with resistance. (18.IV.) The Treaty took effect on 18. Apr. Immediately after signing of the Armistice the main body of the German troops was removed for service elsewhere, the motorized units being the first to go. They were later replaced in part by so-called security-divisions, practically untrained, inadequately equipped troops of very little fighting value. High Command of the 2. Army also left the Balkans a few weeks later.

For these reasons only inadequate personnel were available for the Armistice commissions which had to be formed. Thus, disarming and disbanding of the Yugoslav Army was only superficial and incomplete. This laid the foundation for the resistance movements which developed after a while.

Remarks

Though the weaknesses of the Yugoslav Army were in part known to German quarters, it nevertheless came as a surprise that the campaign was over within twelve days without any considerable resistance having been put up.

The reasons for this unexpectedly rapid and smooth development seem to be as follows: The Yugoslav Government had to take into account the results of the Simovit insurrection of 27. Mar. As, at that juncture the mass of the German Army was not bound down to any other sphere of war and further, in view of the presence of strong German forces in Bulgaria, an early German offensive was to be expected. Going by the experiences gained in the 1939 and 1940 campaigns a German attempt was to be expected

to gain early success by concentrating the Luftwaffe and motorized units.

The task of resisting an enemy so vastly superior in numbers and in material could scarcely be accomplished for long. Nevertheless one could hope by fighting to gain enough time to enable the Allies to render effective support. The mountainous parts of the country, which must needs make the use of the modern German weapons difficult, could make this task easier. The Yugoslav Army Command therefore had to prepare a thorough defense of the country. Evidence of such lines of thought being entertained is found in the many preparations for destruction before the front of the 2. Army, furthermore the permanent garrisoning of the front fortifications which were, admittedly, not very strong. In the operational field, however, preparations seem to have been inadequate. Mobilization and assembly were not carried out and completed in time. It was absolutely essential to concentrate the troops according to the main objectives in view, in order to be strong at the decisive points so as, if necessary, to be able to operate on the inner line.

Instead of that the Yugoslavs scattered their units along the whole long frontier and consequently were too weak all over to put up any serious resistance. The old principle:

"He who would make everything safe, makes nothing save," has gained new significance in the age of modern, mobile warfare.

What made things more difficult for the Higher Command was the fact that in the air attack on Belgrade all means of communication had been destroyed and the controlling organs forced to retreat hurriedly.

Equally decisive as these failings in the command was the lack of any will to fight in considerable parts of the Yugoslav troops, which became particularly evident on the 2. Army front.

The German Command was ill informed on innerpolitical circumstances in Yugoslavia. Though the existence of certain political tensions was known, the quick success of the Croatian revolutionary movement nevertheless came as a surprise.

From statements by prisoners taken it could be gathered that even higher Yugoslav officers had no understanding for the meaning and purposes underlying this war.

How little will to fight there was, is proved by the following little episode, reported by the Commander of a German Motorized Infantry Unit: Whilst on the march from Hungary in the direction of Zagreb his regiment surprised a Yugoslav unit in its garrison, where mobilization had not yet been completed. An evening party was just taking place in the barracks of these troops. After a hasty negotiation of capitulation the evening party continued, both parties now taking part in it.

The scanty power of resistance now led the German side to underrate the fighting value of the Balkan peoples. That they were mistaken in this respect was revealed in the course of the ensuing years. The Jugoslavs' will to fight, which had failed in the 1941 campaign, was awakened in the resistance movements than following!

Their tenacity in mountain warfare and guerilla warfare, so well known since 1914/18, and which has become a habit and the main strength of these peoples, caused the German Command more and far greater difficulties

in the following years of the war than had been the case in the 1941 campaign.

Experience in cooperation between Air Force and Army

The Yugoslav campaign held no new aspects for the ground forces, especially as there was no really equal enemy. It is not necessary to stress that Engineer Troops and the Bridge-Building Units were kept particularly busy on account of the numerous river sectors and swamped territories.

In respect of the use of Armor the same as has been said about the subject in the report on "The Campaign against Greece" applies, though in far lesser degree. Undoubtedly the speed of the German motorized units played a great part in bringing about the speedy collapse of the Serbs and influencing them in their decision to make an early offer to capitulate.

The main point of issue in respect of the use of the Air Force also lay in the Greek war zone rather than in the Yugoslav. However, as the subject of cooperation between the army and the air force were only briefly touched on in the aforesaid report about Greece, certain experiences of war in this sphere are herewith again more minutely described as basically valid for the entire Balkan campaign.

Experience gained in the Spanish, Polish and French campaigns in cooperation between Armored Units and tactical units of the air force could be tested in the Balkan campaign, could be confirmed and, with regard to the mountainous country, completed. Here, a new realization gained was the decisive importance of uninterrupted communication being

maintained between the rapidly advancing Armored spearheads and the air units overhead.

Visual signals and wireless telegraphy were the means chosen to report on the respective positions of the Armored Units. To ensure smooth cooperation exhaustive preparations had to be made.

- a) All units had to be supplied uniform maps, the most suitable being photomaps compiled from air-reconnaissance, with coordinated report and order grids.
- b) then development of a quickly functioning and reliable meteorological service.
- c) distribution of the Communication Details, with wireless equipment, amongst the divisions, Corps and Armies, and the setting-up of a system of radio beacons (Funkstern) for the forming of a reliably functioning wireless communication.
- d) determination of uniform wave-lengths for Armored spearheads and air units for the relaying of situation reports to the units in the air and the command post of the air corps.
- e) determination of uniform visual air signals.
- f) testflights by the units in the future attack area.
- g) familiarizing Armored units with the effects of bombing immediately before their own lines.

The control of all air units, comprising one short range reconnaissance squadron, 4 - 6 dive-bomber groups, 1 to 2 bombardment groups, 4 to 5 fighter groups, lay in the hands of the VIII. Air Corps, Commanding General - then Air-General Frhr. von Richthofen.

This air corps had been specially formed to support the rapid advance of the Armored units and had accordingly been formed and trained as a short-range or tactical corps. The peculiarity of this air corps lay in its special equipment with means of communication and in its having control of formations of close support airplanes.

On principle the command post was placed in the vicinity of the Army Corps committed to the main point of effort, but chosen so that close contact could also be maintained with the other corps of the army and with the Army. In the Greece campaign for instance, the command post was first north of the Rupel Pass and later near Volo in Thessaly.

The concentration area of the air units was brought up as close as possible in order to shorten the flight distances, thereby speeding up support for the army units.

The close reconnaissance service was to make continuous reports on enemy movements etc. ahead of our own Armored spearheads, including the dropping of reports in the immediate vicinity of these spearheads. Fighter Plane units relieved each other in the air, thus forming constant covering for the advancing Armored units as well as for the other air units. The use of bomber units at the outset of operations was directed at objectives agreed upon with the army and at times coordinated with action by army units. Such objectives might be within or without artillery range (for instance at the Rupel Pass).

In the further course of operations the Commanding General of the air corps was at all times kept informed on the situation at his Command Post without delay by means of the current wireless reports sent by the

communication details or by the Armored spearheads, so that, acting on his own initiative or according to the wishes of the army, further attacks on particularly difficult objectives could be undertaken.

By means of the wireless communication between the respective armored spearhead and the air unit in the air, the latest position could be reported shortly before the releasing of bombs so that erroneous bombings or the dropping of bombs within our own ranks could usually be averted in spite of the fact that the terrain made clear sight difficult. A further aid in averting these mishaps was the use of the visual air signals.

Control of the airforce being in one hand (Commanding General of the VIII. Air Corps) made a concentration of the bombing attacks on main points and the continuous support of such armored spearheads as designated by the army according to developments in the situation as being most urgent, possible scattering and consequent greatly lessened effect of the air attacks was thus eliminated.

Experience gained in the Balkan campaign taught the lesson that to obtain perfect coordination between air and armored units in mountainous country it is best to use staffs accustomed to cooperating with each other and also of units accustomed to working together.

Absolutely minute conformation to the times ordered and agreed upon is the prerequisite of successful cooperation.

Mutual command of airforce and army have proved themselves as practicable.

Successful cooperation between air and armored units calls for flexibility particularly on the part of the Air Command. This maxim, that pertains for level country, holds in far greater measure in the case of mountainous territory as evidenced by the Balkan campaign with its rapidly changing weather situations, its terrain conditions so difficult of survey.

The maxim of firm concentration of the air forces and their employment at strategically most important point, not necessarily at a point most urgently necessary in battle, also held good in particularly great measure in the mountainous country of the Balkans.

MS # B-525

Campaign in Yugoslavia
1941

Survey of 2. Army's Forces
6. May 1941

Annex 1

Cooperating with

VIII. Air Corps
V. Rheinhofen
Meister

V. Briesen
(Failed to
arrive)

Frontier Defense
Troops.

(Light)

Only placed under command as
from 13 May

Arm Gr. I.

Signed: V. Greiffenberg

MS # B-525

Campaign in
Yugoslavia 1941

Concentration and Main Marching
Routes of German Forces

Annex 2

only as far as Zagreb

from here 1 Regt

Zagreb

Kar Lovac

Vinkovice

Infantry and Mountain Div.
Arm. and Mot. Div.
Italians

Belgrade

Sofia

Scale about 1: 1,000,000

Signed : V. Grellenberg

The XXXIX Mountain Corps (Kuebler) had under its command, so far as I know, beside the 1. Mountain Division (Lanz) only Frontier Defense Troops, who only followed a short distance across the Drave after the attack. What became of them subsequently is not known to me.

Signed: Lanz.

9. May 1947

8. Armored Division	: Brandenberger.
14. " "	: Kuehn.
26. Motorized Division	: Henrici.
183.	: Eberhardt
11. Armored Division	: Cruewell.
SS-Reich	: Hauser.
Grossdeutschland	: V. Stockhausen.

Page 19, second last sentence: "Not scouting units" should be
motorcycle company.

Page 26, third sentence: the bridge had already been blown up prior
to the crossing - about 12. Apr - see p. 19,
last sentence, by time of renewed advance i.e.
19. Apr, it was already usable.

Page 25, third sentence: It was the motorcycle battalion of the 14. Armored
Division that advanced to Ragusa and not tanks.

This advance only took place 3 days after capture of Serajevo.

Fourth Sentence: Corps Reinhardt only reached Serajevo long after the
provisional armistice treaty concluded between me and
the Servian High Command had come into force.

Page 29 : Under the heading "Experience or Reasons for the early
Collapse" the speed of our motorized units" as compared
with the slow serbs, set forth more minutely in my
contribution, should, in my opinion, also be mentioned,
as it was this speed, in the first place, that led to
the offer of capitulation of 15. Apr.

Signed: v. VIETINGHOFF.