



Antonio J. Muñoz, *The German Secret Field Police in Greece, 1941-1944*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018.

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This study makes an interesting contribution to a wider historical debate on the practice of German anti-partisan warfare during the Second World War, in particular, the blurring of the lines between, on the one hand, the Holocaust and punitive measures launched against resistance groups and, on the other, the overlapping roles of the German Army Secret Field Police units (*Geheime Feldpolizei*, or GFP), the Gestapo and other National Socialist security organs such as the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD). Over the last three decades or so, historical knowledge of the machinery of destruction in combat

zones and rear areas in all the territories occupied by the Germans and their Axis partners has advanced considerably. While the GFP units were numerically small, they were nonetheless significant cogs in the broader apparatus of the Nazi war of extermination.

In examining the *Geheime Feldpolizei*, this study focuses primarily on Greece. The book begins with a brief history of the organizational development of the GFP, an overview of Greek history from 1832 to 1940 (Chapter 1), Hitler's war aims in the Balkans (Chapter 2), and an overview of the GFP units in the wider context of the ideological dimensions to Germany's conduct of the war (Chapter 3). The core of the book is formed by three central chapters: Chapter 4 analyses the organization of the GFP in Greece; Chapter 5 looks at the role of the GFP in the subjugation of the Greek people; and, Chapter 6 considers the part played by the GFP in the attempt to carry out the policy for the elimination of the Jews as it unfolded in Greece. While the book purports in its title to be a study of the activities of the German Secret Field Police in Greece, it does range beyond this subject geographically, considering its activities in the Balkans, namely, Yugoslavia, Romania and Bulgaria (Chapter 7), in the West and Scandinavia (Chapter 8), and in the Soviet Union (Chapter 9).

The biggest challenge facing the author has been the fragmentary nature of the surviving documentation. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that there were during the Second World War, in total, around 90 GFP units, each consisting of around 30-40 men. This means that the archival footprint left behind is scattered across different sets of files. Muñoz has nonetheless done an excellent job in scouring through files held at the German military archives in Freiburg i.Br., the National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, various archives in the United States, as well as making good use of post-war trial records.

There are one or two weaknesses in this work. The opening chapters provide almost too much contextualisation, with a historical survey of Greek history, 1832-1940, and Hitler's war aims in the Balkans, providing very broad entry points into the subject matter. There is a hint of repetition in places. The author also, rather irritatingly, refers to "England" and "English troops," when Britain and British troops would have been more accurate. Some more rigorous and ruthless editing might have enhanced the opening chapters. Moreover, this is also by no means the first book on the subject of the

Geheime Feldpolizei, with a number of works appearing in recent years in both English and German.¹

What *The German Secret Field Police, 1941-44* does offer, however, is the combination of an organizational history and group biography with specific case studies of the activities of the GFP across Europe, including the Soviet Union. There are numerous individual details that this approach offers, although it does at the same time reveal an unresolved tension in the structure of the book: it appears that the author could not decide whether to write a history of German crimes in Greece or a general history of the GFP in the Second World War. The chapter on the GFP in the Soviet Union, for instance, is quite extensive, detailing the involvement of GFP units in the killing of partisans, listing all the GFP units employed in 1941, relations between the GFP and SS/SD, and including case studies of specific units.

The author's conclusions in terms of his case study of Greece may not come as a surprise but represent an assessment which is nonetheless worth reading. The behaviour of the GFP in Greece became progressively worse after the Italian surrender in September 1943, since they had succeeded in protecting many of the Jews in their zone of occupation up until that point. Still, even before this, the GFP acted as an important agent of policy towards Greece in that it assisted in the exploitation of the nation's resources to support the German war effort. This led to thousands of deaths in the Great Famine of 1941/42. During the German occupation regime, at least 21,000 Greeks were executed either for anti-occupation activities or as victims of reprisal actions. This number excludes victims of other massacres. The GFP played a significant part in this murderous work, which also included brutal interrogations of suspects. As the German Army began to pull out of Greece in 1944, the GFP was given the task of directing the destruction of Greek infrastructure in order that it could be denied to the Western Allies. Of particular note is the role played by the GFP in the deportation of

¹ Most notably, the studies: Gordon Williamson, *German Military Police Units 1939-1945* (London, 1997); Robert Winter, *Die Geheime Feldpolizei* [The Secret Field Police] (Wolfenbüttel: Melchior Verlag, 2013); and, an East German study, Klaus Geßner, *Geheime Feldpolizei. Zur Funktion und Organisation des geheimpolizeilichen Exekutivorgans der faschistischen Wehrmacht* [Secret Field Police. On the function and organization of the secret police Exekuti process of the fascist Wehrmacht] (East Berlin: Militärverlag, 1986). In addition, an important article was published two decades ago: Paul B. Brown, "The Senior Leadership Cadre of the Geheime Feldpolizei 1939-1945," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17 (Fall 2003): pp. 278-304.

Greece's Jewish population which saw the elimination of about 80% of the country's Jews.²

The closing chapter, which sketches out the post-war career of Wilhelm Krichbaum, the head of the GFP during the war, provides important context to the post-war writing of the organization's history by him. Krichbaum had a pre-war career which certainly fitted him for the role he was to take on in Nazi Germany's genocidal war. A veteran of the Great War, during which he served in one of the stormtrooper units, he participated in the failed Kapp Putsch, then became active in the *Organisation Consul*, a death squad responsible for the murder of Matthias Erzberger in 1922 and the Foreign Minister, Walter Rathenau, the following year. He joined the Nazi Party in 1923, serving also in the NSDAP brownshirt SA militia. In the pre-war army, he rose to become regimental commander of the Infantry School, Dresden. During the Czechoslovak Crisis of 1938, he served as Army Field Police Chief, based in the armed forces High Command (OKW). From 1940 until the end of the war, he was the Chief of Field Police of the Army. With such an unimpeachable "National Socialist biography," what is remarkable is that after the war he was entrusted with the task of writing a history of the GFP by the US Army as part of their employment of former German officers in writing historical reports.

Not surprisingly, Krichbaum in his 1947 study did his level best to portray the GFP as an army intelligence unit, engaged in mundane intelligence-collecting activities. He avoided mentioning the organization's additional duties of treating Jews and political commissars as partisans, meaning that most likely they would be shot, also downplaying heavily the GFP cooperation with the SS. What came to the rescue of Krichbaum and other former members of the GFP was the hunger of the US Army and Office for Strategic Services for any intelligence on the Soviet Union as the Cold War began to emerge from the fog of the immediate post-war period. In 1948 Krichbaum was recruited by Reinhard Gehlen to his intelligence organization which was to become the Federal German Foreign Intelligence Service, the *Bundes-nachrichtendienst*. This provided a further level of protection, not just for Krichbaum, but also for several other former GFP members. One of the consequences of this decision emerged after

² Needless to say, much of this is not especially new. See, for instance, the coverage in Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941-1944* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

Krichbaum's death in 1957: it was discovered that he had been recruited earlier by Soviet intelligence.

This book holds some intriguing insights and reveals some fascinating details about the German war effort in the Balkans. While German crimes during the occupation of Yugoslavia have attracted considerable interest among historians since the "Wehrmacht Exhibition" ignited a public debate in Germany about war crimes,³ Greece has received less attention by comparison.⁴ The value of the book is added to by six appendices which provide: I. The Structure of the SS Command in Serbia, 1941-42; II. Structure of the SD in the Occupied Regions of Western Europe (Befehlshaber der Sicherheitsdienst); III. Commanders of the Order Police "Serbia"; IV. Uniform and Rank Insignia of the GFP; V. An Organizational Table of the GFP; VI. An Order of Battle for the GFP in France, Spring 1941. Thus, to sum up, Muñoz's study is a welcome addition to the literature on German Army police units and their involvement in war crimes during the Second World War.

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³ Useful background on the debate can be found in Hans-Günther Thiele (ed.), *Die Wehrmachtsausstellung. Dokumentation einer Kontroverse. Dokumentation der Fachtagung in Bremen am 26. Februar 1997 und der Bundestagsdebatten am 13. März und 24. April 1997* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1997).

⁴ In fact, the chapter in the volume which accompanied the "Wehrmacht Exhibition" which examined crimes committed by the German armed forces during their occupation of Greece helped stimulate research interest in this subject. Mark Mazower, "Militärische Gewalt und nationalsozialistische Werte. Die Wehrmacht in Griechenland 1941 bis 1944," in *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, edited by Hannes Heer & Klaus Naumann (Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, HIS, 1995), pp. 157-190. This chapter was a German translation of the original article which appeared in the journal *Past and Present* in 1992.