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Ben Shepherd, *Terror in the Balkans: German Armies and Partisan Warfare*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012. Pp. vi, 342. ISBN 978-0-674-04891-1.

Review by Spyros Tsoutsoumpis, The University of Manchester (spyros_tsoutsoumpis@yahoo.com).

In his valuable new addition¹ to the burgeoning historiography of guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency in Eastern Europe, Ben Shepherd (Glasgow Caledonian Univ.) addresses occupied Yugoslavia. He concentrates not so much on the partisan movement or ethnic strife that plagued it, though these are important aspects of his study, but on the Wehrmacht, particularly its counterinsurgency operations. Unlike other scholars, who have focused on the experience and motivation of rank and file soldiers,² Shepherd looks to mid-level officers to understand “what motivated German army commanders to conduct the campaign in the way that they did” (236).

The book’s first three chapters discuss how prewar developments “shaped the mind-set of the military institutions” (10) that waged counter-guerrilla warfare in Yugoslavia. Succeeding chapters follow four Wehrmacht divisions and their efforts to quell partisan activities. In a complex but compelling argument, Shepherd recognizes the role of National Socialist ideology in the often barbarous conduct of counterinsurgency; however, he argues that ideology alone cannot explain the disparate approaches of divisional commanders in occupied Yugoslavia. Two other critical influences were the cultural background of individual officers and the nature and pace of the insurgency. Shepherd shows that both the German and the Austrian militaries had historically adopted harsh measures against irregular fighters. This resulted from such factors as military doctrine, social norms, and the experience of fighting *francs-tireurs* in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) and irregulars in the forests and mountains of Bosnia during the 1878 insurrection.

The First World War reinforced hard-line attitudes toward irregulars on the Eastern Front, where forbidding terrain and the otherness of the enemy populations solidified German-Austrian loathing of guerrilla warfare and deep-seated anti-Slavic prejudices. These attitudes “infused officers themselves with a harsher, more obdurate mentality [South Slavs, Jews, and Communists] became the subject of opprobrium” (55), the perceived main culprits behind military defeat and the social collapse and suffering in their countries. “[O]fficers’ experience of the East during the Great War was likely to increase the brutality with which they responded to such conditions during World War II” (254). Further, “Senior officers now belonged to a body that, as a whole, stood ready to wage a singularly brutal form of warfare in the service of National Socialism.... [T]he strength of conviction now animating the senior officer corps as a whole would manifest itself with brutal clarity ... in Yugoslavia” (71).

The Wehrmacht initially showed some restraint, while relations between the local population and German infantrymen were a far cry from the animosity witnessed in Poland and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the escalation of resistance led to a rapid deterioration of civil-military relations and increasingly brutal counterinsurgency methods. Specific tactics and the extent of reprisals varied. Austrian officers were exceedingly ruthless, intent on avenging Serb savagery in the First World War and alleged partisan brutalities against captured soldiers. German officers, on the other hand, were more moderate. Though not precluding reprisals against civilians, they sought to restore some rapport between the Wehrmacht and the rural population and anti-communist elements. However, neither ideology nor the personal circumstances of officers were the sole determinants of counterinsurgency tactics. Geography, political conditions, and the

1. Shepherd has previously published *War in the Wild East: The German Army and Soviet Partisans* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 2004).

2. See, e.g., Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1993) and Hermann Frank Meyer, *Von Wien nach Kalavryta: Die blutige Spur der 17. Jäger-Division durch Serbien und Griechenland* (Mannheim: Bibliopolis, 2002).

quality, morale, and fighting power of their units “all helped shape the circumstances that would in turn determine how officers’ attitudes translated into action” (71).

Shepherd shows that the Wehrmacht was constantly undermanned and lacked equipment for mountain warfare. Most of the troops, men between thirty and thirty-five years old, were poorly trained and without combat experience. Morale was compromised by the extremely challenging terrain, stark weather conditions, and the elusiveness of the enemy. Tired, frightened, and demoralized, the troops lashed out against the unarmed population and villagers—“some of the troops were so brutally inclined that their discipline was seriously threatened” (133). Having learned that such tactics were counterproductive in the long run, some officers adopted a more measured approach, hoping to win over the more conservative civilians, who were alarmed by the increasing strength of the partisans. They opted for flexible measures, relying on mobile hunter groups, instead of the ineffective conventional encirclement operations that took such a huge toll in civilian lives. Despite these efforts, “the tortuous complexities of the ethnic situation rendered ... a straightforward wooing of the population increasingly impossible. Army commanders needed to consider not just whether to engage with the population, but also which particular population groups to engage with in preference to others and how far” (248). This led to a return to earlier tactics as commanders reverted to the use of “maximum destructive force as a panacea” (248). By 1943, the Wehrmacht had not only failed to quash the rebellion, but had actually accelerated the growth of the partisan movement.

Terror in the Balkans is a very well written study, drawing abundantly on archival sources that furnish new insights into the history of resistance and occupation in southeastern Europe, an area largely overlooked by historians. It underlines the need for greater attention to the evolution of Wehrmacht tactics (as opposed to resistance activities and ethnic infighting) and for more local case studies to improve our understanding of counterinsurgency.

Shepherd has also contributed to the current debate over the extent to which the Wehrmacht was “Hitler’s army,”³ permeated by Nationalist Socialist values, with all the consequent implications for war crime culpability. He shows that the Wehrmacht committed atrocities at all levels in Yugoslavia; indeed its activities surpassed those of the notorious SS Prince Eugen division in the same region. Officers and men participated with equal vigour in killing civilians and captured partisans, crushing virtually all dissent.

Finally, the book is a discerning study of counterinsurgency more broadly conceived, in particular, exposing the detrimental effects of ideological rigidity and cultural stereotyping. *Terror in the Balkans* will reward scholars, general readers, and military planners interested in the history of counterinsurgency both in general and in southeastern Europe specifically.

3. See Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1991) and *The Eastern Front 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (NY: St. Martin’s, 2001).