

Tactical Structure in World War II

Bulgaria

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GENERAL

The Pre-War Structure

The peacetime structure of the Bulgarian Army was built around twelve infantry divisions and four army HQs. The disposition of this force was:

1st Army (Sofia)

- 1st Division (Sofia) [Inf Regts 1, 6 & 41; Art Regt 4]
- 7th Division (Dupniza) [Inf Regts 13, 14 & 39; Art Regt 7]
- 11th Division (Sofia) [Inf Regts 22, 25 & 42; Art Regt 11]
- 1st Army Artillery Regiment (Sofia)

2nd Army (Plovdiv)

- 2nd Division (Plovdiv) [Inf Regts 9, 21 & 27; Art Regt 3]
- 8th Division (Stara Zagora) [Inf Regts 12, 23 & 30; Art Regt 8]
- 10th Division (Kirdzali) [Inf Regts 10, 44 & 47; Art Regt 10]
- 2nd Army Artillery Regiment (Haskovo)

3rd Army (Varna)

- 3rd Division (Sliven) [Inf Regts 11, 24, 29; Art Regt 6]
- 4th Division (Sumen) [Inf Regts 7, 8 & 19; Art Regt 5]
- 12th Division (Sumen) [Inf Regts 31, 32 & 46; Art Regt 12]
- 3rd Army Artillery Regiment (Sumen)

4th Army (Pleven)

- 5th Division (Russa) [Inf Regts 5, 18 & 33; Art Regt 1]
- 6th Division (Vratsa) [Inf Regts 3, 15 & 35; Art Regt 2]
- 9th Division (Pleven) [Inf Regts 4, 34 & 36; Art Regt 9]
- 4th Army Artillery Regiment (Pleven)

Supporting this force were ten cavalry regiments (four of which were earmarked to form a cavalry division), thirty-three border guard battalions, and a tank battalion.

Through 1940 Bulgaria had resisted Hitler's entreaties to join the Tripartite Pact but in early 1941 Germany made an irresistible offer. Bulgaria had long coveted an outlet to the Aegean and Hitler promised them the Greek province of Thrace if they joined the Axis. On 1 March 1941 Bulgaria signed the Pact.

They permitted the Germans to move into Bulgaria in preparation for their attack on Greece and offered their 6th and 11th Divisions, but took no part in the invasion themselves. After the collapse of Greece and Yugoslavia, however, they showed no reluctance to claim their booty.

Greek Occupation Duty

To garrison the former Yugoslav Macedonia they formed a new command, 5th Army, with HQ in Skopje, along with two new divisions, the 14th (HQ Skopje) and

the 15th (HQ Bitola). For the new Bulgarian (ex-Greek) territory of Thrace they formed an ad-hoc formation called Troop Command Aegean of approximately division size with its HQ in Xanthi.

Of more immediate concern to the Bulgarians than any nascent resistance forces they might find in their new territories was the reaction of Turkey. To counter any Turkish moves the 3rd Army HQ was moved to Elkhovo, the 2nd Division to Ljubimetz, the 3rd Division to Yambol and Burgas, the 8th Division to Gradetz, the bulk of the 2nd Cavalry Division to Sredetz, while the 3rd and 4th Border Guard Brigades were activated for frontier duties. In addition, the 11th Division was moved to Maritsa (although under GHQ control rather than as part of the 3rd Army) and the 4th Division was moved to the Varna area for coastal defense duties.

It quickly became apparent that Turkey would not take military action and the troops for the most part returned to their peacetime stations in the autumn of 1941. At the same time, the 11th Division was briefly inactivated, probably to provide cadres for new units being raised. These new units included the "Elkhovo Command" with three infantry brigades that took over the role of watching the Turkish border, and the 21st Division, which was activated for occupation duty in Serbia with its HQ at Nis.

Serbian Occupation Duty

In November 1941 Troop Command Aegean was redesignated the 16th Division. Shortly thereafter the occupation force in Serbia was strengthened through the activation of a corps headquarters (officially I Corps, although more commonly called the Serbian Occupation Corps) and a new division, the 17th, created by drawing the 13th Infantry Regiment and cadre personnel from the 7th Division.

Thus, by February 1942 the Army had the following major units on its order of battle:

- 1st Army (Sofia)
 - 1st Division (Sofia)
 - 7th Division (Dupniza)
 - 11th Division (Sophia)
- 2nd Army (Plovdiv)
 - 2nd Division (Plovdiv)
 - 8th Division (Stara Zagora)
 - 10th Division (Kirdzali)
- 3rd Army (Varna)
 - 3rd Division (Sliven)
 - 4th Division (Sumen)
 - 12th Division (Sumen)

- 4th Army (Pleven)
 - 5th Division (Rusja)
 - 9th Division (Pleven)
- 5th Army (Skopje)
 - 14th Division (Skopje)
 - 15th Division (Bitola)
- I Corps (Serbian Occupation Corps) (Nis)
 - 6th Division (Caprija)
 - 17th Division (Prokuplje)
 - 21st Division (Nis)
- 16th Division (Xanthi)
- 2nd Cavalry Division (Jambol)
- Elkhovo Command (Elkhovo)

This organizational structure remained essentially unchanged through the rest of 1942. Through the year, however, guerrilla activity in Serbia (occupied by Bulgarian troops except for the Belgrad area and the Banat) increased considerably and showed every sign of growing even more fierce. By early 1943 it had become clear that the Serbian occupation force would have to be reinforced. Other events, however, conspired to make this as difficult as possible. One was the Axis collapse in North Africa which opened the whole of the Mediterranean as a potential assault route for the Allies, requiring a further strengthening of the garrison of Thrace. A second was the continuing reluctance of the Army to move or keep its regular forces outside the traditional boundaries of Bulgaria.

Through 1942 only the 6th Division had been deployed outside Bulgaria for any appreciable length of time and pressure was growing to bring that division back to its home garrison as well. Instead of deploying entire regular units, the army had chosen to draw cadres from those regular formations to form new units and fill them out with new conscripts for service outside Bulgaria. Thus had been formed the divisions numbered above 12. A further expansion was ordered in early 1943, resulting in the formation of the 22nd, 24th, 25th, and 27th Divisions, all for occupation duties in Serbia. This permitted the release of the 6th Division to its home stations and the transfer of the 17th Division to Thrace. With the return of the 6th Division, it was apparently felt possible to send the 7th Division to Thrace in mid-1943.

The steadfast refusal to send the regular army outside of the original Bulgarian borders would have its price. In July 1944 a Major Eggers of the German Liaison Command with I Corps wrote a report in apparent desperation to Army Group F describing the state of the corps. The report was bitter and scathing, describing the corps as only marginally useful against partisans and useless against a well-armed foe. He noted that only 9% of the officers in the corps were regulars,

another 10% were long-term reservists in for the duration, while 81% were short-term reservists, barely trained and merely filling time until they were returned to their civilian lives. The troops were overwhelmingly conscripts serving short tours of duty, most of whom had only seven months of military service under their belts. As a result, coordination among units at all levels was almost nonexistent, integration of heavy weapons into the battle was wretchedly inefficient, and morale was so low that unless regular officers were brought in the troops would panic and units disintegrate at the first sign of a modern army.

He also pointed out more concrete problems. There were insufficient transport assets, most notably trucks and the pack animals needed for movement of supplies in the mountains, although he noted that the front-line troops did have enough pack animals for their tactical needs. As a result, ammunition was constantly in short supply. Some weapons, such as anti-tank guns and submachine guns, were almost non-existent in the corps, while what equipment there was old and prone to break down.¹

Realignment in 1943

When regular divisions were required to be stationed outside their traditional garrison and recruiting areas, constituent elements were rotated on a regular basis. Thus, the 7th Division, which normally comprised the 13th, 14th and 39th Infantry Regiments, in August 1943 (as part of II Corps) comprised its original 13th Infantry Regiment, plus the 1st and 41st Infantry Regiments (rotated from the 1st Division). By May 1944, however, all three of these regiments had rotated back home, the 14th and 39th Infantry Regiments returned to the division, and the 68th Infantry Regiment added. Similarly, infantry regiments raised for the 5th Army (numbered in the 50-series) and for I Corps (numbered in the 60-series) were rotated in and out of II Corps divisions.

As a result of the build-up in Thrace a new higher HQ was formed in 1943, the II Corps with its HQ in Drama. It controlled the 7th Division (HQ Langadhas) in and north of the Salonika Peninsula, the 16th Division (HQ Drama) in central Thrace, and the new 28th Division (HQ Komotini) in eastern Thrace.

Thus, by the early summer of 1944 the Bulgarian Army was disposed as follows:

1st Army (Sophia)

1st Division (Sophia) [Inf Regts 1, 6 & 16; Art Regt 4]

1st Motorized Brigade (Sophia)

Heavy Artillery Regiment 1

Pioneer Regiment 1

2nd Army (Plovdiv)

¹Memorandum, MAJ Eggers (DVK 30) to LTC Rathgen (H.Gr.F), dtd 30 Jul 44, in NA T-501 R294.

- 2nd Division (Lubimetz) [Inf Regts 9, 21 & 27; Art Regt 3]
- 8th Division (Stara Zagora) [Inf Regts 12, 23 & 30; Art Regt 8]
- 10th Division (Kirdzali) [Inf Regts 44 & 47; Art Regt 10]
- Heavy Artillery Regiment 2
- Pioneer Regiment 2
- 3rd Army (Varna)
 - 3rd Division (Burgas) [Inf Regts 11, 24 & 29; Art Regt 6]
 - 4th Division (Sumen) [Inf Regts 7, 8 & 19; Art Regt 5]
 - 12th Division (Dobritsch) [Inf Regts 31, 32 & 46; Cav Regts 8 & 10; Art Regt 12]
 - Heavy Artillery Regiment 3
 - Pioneer Regiment 3
- 4th Army (Pleven)
 - 5th Division (Elkhovo) [Inf Regts 5, 18 & 33; Art Regt 1]
 - 6th Division (Vratsa) [Inf Regts 3, 15 & 35; Art Regt 2]
 - 9th Division (Pleven) [Inf Regts 4, 34 & 36; Art Regt 9]
- 5th Army (Skopje)
 - 14th Division (Skopje) [Inf Regts 51, 52 & 53; Art Regt 14]
 - 15th Division (Bitoli) [Inf Regts 54, 55 & 56]
 - 17th Division (Stip) [Inf Regts 48 & 49; Art Regt 17]
 - 29th Division (Vranje) [Inf Regt 59]
 - Cavalry Brigade [Cav Regts 1 & 2]
- I (Serbian Occupation) Corps (Nis)
 - 22nd Division (Nis) [Inf Regts 63, 66 & 103]
 - 24th Division (Uzice) [Inf Regts 61 & 64]
 - 25th Division (Zajecar) [Inf Regts 69 & 70]
 - 27th Division (Prokuplje) [Inf Regts 122 & 123]
 - Infantry Regiment 65
- II (Thrace) Corps (Drama)
 - 7th Division (Langadhas) [Inf Regts 14, 39 & 68; Art Regt 7]
 - 16th Division (Drama) [Inf Regts 57 & 62; Cav Regt 3; Art Regt 16]
 - 28th Division (Komotini) [Inf Regts 10 & 58; Cav Regt 6; Art Regt 28]
 - Coast/AA Artillery Regiment "Kavalla"
- GHQ Troops
 - Guards Cavalry Regiment (Sophia)
 - Cavalry Regiment 4 (Jambol)
 - Coast/AA Artillery Regiment 1 (Varna)
 - Coast/AA Artillery Regiment 2 (Burgas)

By this time, however, deployment to the occupied territories was becoming increasingly irrelevant for the massive Soviet Army was approaching from the east. Although Bulgaria had declared war on the US and Britain, an act most Bulgarians had regarded as little more than a gesture, it had pointedly refrained from declaring war on the Soviet Union and had resisted all German attempts to get them to send troops to the eastern front. The Soviets, however, regarded Bulgaria as having "facilitated" the German operations by occupying parts of the Balkans in conjunction with their Axis allies and refused to let Sofia off that easily.

Hard Truth Arrives in 1944

As the Red Army advanced Moscow demanded that Bulgaria declare strict neutrality, withdraw from occupied territories, disarm the German troops in Bulgaria and refuse the Germans rights of transit. After several changes in government the Bulgarians announced in late August 1944 that they would comply with these demands. This, of course, was actually what the Soviets did not want since it would leave a geographically key Balkan state neutral and relatively immune from post-war Soviet leverage. The Red Army continued to roll forward and on 5 September the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria.

On 8 September Red Army units crossed the border into Bulgaria against no opposition and the next day the underground "Fatherland Front", dominated by the Bulgarian Communist Party, took power in a coup, arrested all former government members, and allied Bulgaria with the Soviet Union in the war against Germany.

The Germans responded quickly. Although they did not have significant numbers of troops in Bulgaria itself, they did have sizeable competent units commingled with the Bulgarians in some of the occupied areas. Since the Bulgarian government had announced that all German troops in Bulgaria were to be interned on 2 September, there was little element of surprise in what happened next. There was a large German contingent in Serbia and on the night of 6/7 September they negotiated the disarming and interning of the wretched I (Serbian Occupation) Corps, which they carried out over the next few days with little opposition. The corps and its divisions simply ceased to exist, although they were not officially stricken from the rolls in Sofia until 20 September.

The 5th Army fared somewhat better. There were only 5,000 German troops in Yugoslav Macedonia at the time, formed into two infantry battalions and an AA battalion. As the situation deteriorated, however, the Germans quickly moved additional units in, including flying in elements of the 22nd Airlanding Division. After a show of German force the 14th Division capitulated immediately and the 15th and 17th Divisions disarmed after several days of firefights. The 29th Division and the 1st Cavalry Brigade managed to make it back to Bulgaria, although abandoning their heavy equipment en route. The new Bulgarian government used straggler elements of the Army to reinforce the II Corps, but except for the 1st Cavalry Brigade and three infantry regiments the rest of 5th Army was officially dissolved on 15 October, about a month after it had ceased to exist in military terms.

The II Corps in Greece was luckier, for there were practically no German combat troops in their area and the route back to Bulgaria was short and uninterrupted.

That did not mean that there were no problems. The new Fatherland Front government was determined to hand control of Thrace over to the Greek communist ELAS guerrillas. The Greek non-communist guerrillas were equally strong in this area, however, so the withdrawal had to be delayed until a smooth hand-over of control to the correct faction could be arranged. Thus, the II Corps was not only not immediately withdrawn, but was actually strengthened in late September by a new 17th Division (made up of survivors of the 5th Army) and was redesignated the 7th Army. The withdrawal was finally begun on 12 October and completed on 25 October, at which time 7th Army was dissolved.

Thus concluded this first phase of the second half of Bulgaria's participation in the Second World War, with all occupation forces either disarmed and interned by the Germans or withdrawn back within the original Bulgarian borders.

Changing Sides

The simple return to the *status quo ante*, however, would not satisfy the Soviet leadership. On 17 September the Bulgarian Army had been officially placed under Soviet command and the Soviets had plans for this force. The regular army, which had been held back in the homeland throughout the war, was told in mid-September to prepare to advance westward into Yugoslavia to cut off the German forces in the Balkans. The force to be used was as follows:

- 1st Army
 - 1st Division
 - 2nd Division
- 2nd Army
 - 4th Division
 - 6th Division
 - 9th Division
 - 12th Division
 - Guards Division
 - 2nd Cavalry Division
 - Armored Brigade
 - 4th Border Guard Brigade
- 4th Army
 - 5th Division
 - 7th Division
 - "Delcsev" Brigade
- GHQ Troops
 - 3rd Division
 - 8th Division

The force began advancing on 8 October under the 3rd Ukrainian Front, with the 2nd Army in the north driving towards Vranje, the 1st Army in the center and the 4th Army in the south, forming a pincers on Skopje. Both objectives were

accomplished in the first phase of the offensive, which lasted from 8 to 25 October.

Although the Bulgarian contingent had operated successfully thus far, the Soviets decided that for further operations they preferred a leaner, better-armed, and better-led force. The new formation was entitled 1st Army, and had the following composition:

- 3rd Division [Inf Regts 11, 24 & 29; Art Regt 6]
- 8th Division [Inf Regts 12, 23 & 30; Art Regt 8]
- 10th Division [Inf Regts 10, 44 & 47; Art Regt 10]
- 11th Division [Inf Regts 13, 41 & 42; Art Regt 11]
- 12th Division [Inf Regts 31, 32 & 46; Art Regt 12]
- 16th Division [Inf Regts 57, 58 & 59; Art Regt 16]
- Army Troops

For this effort the Red Army contributed experienced officers and equipment and in late December the 1st Army, with a strength of 99,662 officers and men, was ready for combat. It participated in the Soviet drives in Austria and Hungary under 3rd Ukrainian Front in January and February 1945.

Although effective, some fine-tuning was still felt necessary. First, the span of control of six divisions apparently exceeded the Bulgarians' command and control capabilities and on 17 February two corps HQs were activated, the III Corps (to control the 8th, 10th, 12th and 16th Divisions) and the IV Corps (to control the 3rd and 11th Divisions). Secondly, it was felt that the Bulgarian tactical organization was weak, and steps were taken to bring it into closer conformity with Soviet practice. The Bulgarian Army finished the war with this field organization, fighting as part of the Red Army in Hungary.

INFANTRY

Pre-War Modernization

By 1941 the Bulgarian infantry had begun to reap the benefits of a modest modernization program begun in the mid-1930s. An order placed in 1936 for 3,000 light machine guns with the Brno factory had borne fruit, allowing each rifle squad to be equipped with one of these weapons. Similarly, Solothurn had delivered the bulk of the 308 20mm anti-tank rifles ordered about the same time, allowing the equipping of the infantry anti-tank units. Further plans apparently involved modern mortars and heavy machine guns, but the war intervened before anything further could be accomplished and suppliers (who were exclusively foreign for rural Bulgaria) were fully committed filling their own indigenous requirements.

A rifle company consisted of a headquarters, three rifle platoons, a combat trains and a field trains. Each of the rifle platoons was made up of its own HQ and three rifle squads, each squad having a light machine gun.² An infantry battalion was composed of a headquarters, a signal platoon, three rifle companies, a machine gun company, and combat and field trains. The machine gun company consisted of three platoons, each with four Maxim or Schwarzlose water-cooled machine guns.³

An infantry regiment in peacetime consisted of a headquarters, two such infantry battalions and a heavy weapons company. This latter unit contained a mortar platoon (three 81mm mortars), a close-support platoon (three 37mm infantry guns) and a signal platoon. On mobilization each of the infantry battalions was to "split" into two using mobilized reservists and new conscripts, while the heavy weapons company was to form a mortar company and an anti-tank company.

The division represented both a combat unit for the defense of the homeland and an administrative area responsible for recruiting and training new troops. In peacetime a division consisted of two infantry regiments (each of two battalions), a divisional artillery component (with one 12-gun battalion of 75mm field guns and one 4-gun skeletonized

²British intelligence of April 1940 stated that each rifle squad had a strength of 14 enlisted men and that each platoon HQ consisted of the lieutenant platoon leader and six enlisted. They further estimated the company HQ to consist of the company commander, the first sergeant, a chemical NCO, a "candidate" NCO, a bugler, a drummer, and four messengers. They gave the company a "probable" total strength (apparently in peacetime, otherwise the figures would not add up) of 4 officers and 145 enlisted, with 130 rifles and nine light MGs, along with seven horses. British figures were adopted later by the US in its 1944 *Order of Battle and Handbook on the Bulgarian Armed Forces*. Although reasonable, these figures have not been confirmed.

³The British intelligence handbook credited the MG company with a total strength of 2 officers and 71 enlisted, along with 7 draft horses with carts, 18 pack horses or mules (12 for MGs and 6 for ammunition) and 12 medium MGs. The very low personnel strength, however, almost certainly refers to the peacetime manning level, when only six guns were manned.

battalion of 105mm howitzers), some administrative elements, and, in some cases, a cavalry regiment or brigade.

On mobilization reserves would be called up and the intake of conscripts increased so that the division could field a full combat division while leaving some administrative elements behind to handle the territorial functions. Using stockpiled equipment the field division would have the following appearance:

- Division HQ
- Signal Battalion
 - Radio Company
 - Telephone Company
- Reconnaissance Battalion
 - Two Mounted Squadrons, each (9 LMG)
- Three Infantry Regiments, each
 - Three Infantry Battalions, each
 - Three Rifle Companies, each (9 LMG)
 - Machine Gun Company (12 MG)
 - Mortar Company (6-9 81mm mortars)
 - Anti-Tank Company (9 20mm ATR)
- Field Artillery Regiment
 - Mountain Gun Battalion
 - Three Batteries, each (2 LMG, 4 75mm mtn guns)
 - Two Field Gun Battalions, each
 - Three Batteries, each (2 LMG, 4 75mm guns)
 - Field Howitzer Battalion
 - Three Batteries, each (2 LMG, 4 105mm how)
- Machine Gun Battalion
 - Three MG Companies, each (12 MG)
- Anti-Aircraft Battery (18-24 20mm AA)
- Pioneer Battalion
 - Two Pioneer Companies
- Bridging Column
- Service Support Troops

It will be noted that the above structure left three infantry battalions per division as "excess", since each regiment on mobilization formed four. These extras could either be used to form a fourth regiment for the division or as that district's contribution to a centralized force.

In fact, neither happened. The divisions, as tactical units, were retained in their home districts for the most part. The soldiers they trained were used to form another group of divisions for use in the occupied territories. These new divisions used the mobilization TO&Es already established for the regular divisions, and probably drew down the strength of the regular divisions at home, both in personnel and equipment, considerably.

Early-War Organization

The 1941 TO&Es provided for two types of infantry regiment. The "standard" type⁴ was the most common, but there was also a mountain-type⁵ regiment as well. They differed only in transport assets, the former relying primarily on horse-drawn wagons and carts, the latter on pack animals.

In both cases communications were less than ideal, although no worse than many other armies of the time. Each infantry battalion signal platoon was provided with five telephones, a switchboard, and ten km of wire to set up its internal net. The regimental signal platoon held seven telephones, a switchboard, and 30 km of wire for the regimental net. The regimental signal platoon also had the entire allocation of radios, six BMSF.1939 models for distribution as required. The only other signal assets held in the regiment were five telephones, a switchboard, and 17 km of wire in the mortar

	Officers	Warrant Officers	Sergeants	Corporals	Privates	Pistols	Carbines	Rifles	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	20mm AT Rifles	81mm Mortars	Riding Horses	Pack Horses	Draft Horses	Carts	Wagons	Bicycles
Infantry Regiment, Standard Type																		
Regiment HQ & Company	18	5	41	36	212	27	96	122	3	0	0	0	48	11	53	3	22	33
Three Infantry Battalions, each	21	0	68	39	522	76	162	376	27	12	0	0	9	33	103	9	45	0
Mortar Company	4	0	16	29	143	40	67	74	0	0	0	9	1	38	50	0	25	0
Anti-Tank Company	4	0	11	13	45	17	19	28	0	0	6	0	1	14	10	0	5	0
Infantry Regiment, Mountain Type																		
Regiment HQ & Company	18	5	41	36	229	27	96	138	3	0	0	0	48	37	41	1	18	33
Three Infantry Battalions, each	21	0	68	39	599	76	152	454	27	12	0	0	9	134	55	9	23	0
Mortar Company	4	0	17	29	221	40	67	152	0	0	0	9	1	137	8	0	4	0
Anti-Tank Company	4	0	11	13	54	17	19	37	0	0	6	0	1	26	4	0	2	0

Infantry Regiments, 1941

company.
The result
was a
regimental
net
(regimental
to battalion
HQs) that
ran on
radios and
telephones,
battalion
nets
(battalion to
company

HQs) using telephones, and company nets using runners and signal flares.

Carriage of ammunition was affected only slightly by the type of transport held by the regiment. In either case, wagons or pack horses, the regimental mortar company carried 1,272 rounds of 81mm, and the anti-tank company 1,560 rounds of 20mm. Similarly, in either case, an infantry battalion carried either 72,000 rounds of medium MG ammunition if equipped with Maxim guns or 79,000 rounds if equipped with Schwarlose weapons. The only difference was in ammunition for the light MGs, where the standard-type battalion carried 48,500 rounds and the mountain-type 68,500.

⁴officially the *O.V.Peh.Pulk*, or all-army infantry regiment. It was also known as the *Peh.Pulk s Kol.Oboz*. (infantry regiment with cart transport).

⁵officially the *Peh. Pulk s Tov. Oboz.*, or infantry regiment with pack transport.

When Bulgaria signed the Tripartite Pact in 1941 German advisors started arriving and began the laborious task of trying to drag the Bulgarian Army into the mid-twentieth century. With regard to the infantry they noted almost immediately that the battalion had no curved-trajectory weapons and suggested that the regimental mortar company be split up to provide a three-gun 81mm platoon to each of the battalion MG



A Bulgarian 81mm mortar company sets up in 1941.

companies. The Bulgarians, however, refused. They argued that the regimental commander needed a centralized reserve of firepower and would not abolish the regimental mortar company until a replacement was available. The replacement they envisioned was a two-gun infantry gun platoon (later to be expanded to a company) equipped with elderly mountain guns. Some 54 guns meeting this description were available, to be found in 14 mountain artillery batteries, but until replacement mountain guns could be acquired they were needed where they were.

As a short-term answer to the problem, the Bulgarians asked the Germans for 720 ex-French 50mm mortars to be used in the rifle companies. Then, in late 1941, they submitted a comprehensive "shopping list" to the Germans that covered not only improvements in organization, but also force expansion for the new divisions being formed for occupation duties. The list included 4,000 submachine guns; 1,500 Brno light machine guns; 1,080 ex-French 50mm mortars; 100 ex-French 81mm mortars; 32 75mm field guns; 258 75mm mountain guns; 180 105mm howitzers; 567 anti-tank guns; 1,451 artillery rangefinders; 1,800 trucks; and 430 telephones and 87 radios for the artillery.

Modest Re-Armament 1942

After some bargaining and pleading the Germans agreed in January and February 1942 to provide the submachine guns, the light machine guns (but by Steyr rather than Brno), the 81mm mortars, the field guns, the howitzers, 400 anti-tank guns (37mm Skoda models, half for motor traction, the other half for horse-drawn use) and most of the trucks. Initially they also agreed to provide the 720 ex-French 50mm mortars that

Division Headquarters	
Signal Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Radio Company	
Wire Company	
Reconnaissance Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Two Mounted Squadrons, each	[6 LMG, 3 MG]
Three Infantry Regiments, each	
Regiment HQ & Company	[3 LMG]
Three Infantry Battalions, each	
Battalion Headquarters	
Three Rifle Companies, each	[9 LMG, 3 50mm Mort*]
Machine Gun Company	[12 MG]
Mortar Company	[9 81mm Mort]
Anti-Tank Company	[6 20mm ATR]
Artillery Regiment	
Regiment Headquarters	
Battle Group Headquarters	
Mountain Artillery Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Three Batteries, each	[2 LMG, 4 75mm Mtn Guns]
Two Field Gun Battalions, each	
Battalion Headquarters	
Three Batteries, each	[2 LMG, 4 75mm Guns]
Field Howitzer Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Three Batteries, each	[2 LMG, 4 105mm How]
Machine Gun Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Rifle Company	[9 LMG]
Three Machine Gun Companies, each	[12 MG]
Anti-Aircraft Battery	[15 20mm AA]
Pioneer Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Three Pioneer Companies	
Bridging Column	
Medical Group	
Field Hospital	
Medical Company	
Ambulance Unit	
Ammunition Group	
Infantry Ammunition Column	
Artillery Ammunition Column	
Engineer Ammunition Column	
Veterinary Hospital	
Supply Group	
Two Rations Columns	
Bakery Company	
Butchery Company	

* 50mm mortars not actually present

INFANTRY DIVISION 1941-42

had first been requested, but in February they reconsidered and refused to provide any light mortars. Instead, they offered 400 more 81mm mortars. They also could not provide any mountain guns, these being in short supply in Germany as well.

The German advisors repeatedly pressed the Bulgarians to decentralize their 81mm mortars to the battalion level, but the Bulgarians just as firmly refused. Until infantry gun platoons could be formed the mortars would stay where they were.

The Germans also pressed Sofia to form scout and pioneer elements for their infantry regiments. The need for a scout unit had already been foreseen by the Bulgarians and the TO&Es called for each regimental HQ company to include a mounted platoon of three squads (each with a light machine gun). Good riding horses, however, were in short supply in impoverished Bulgaria and such as could be found had already been grabbed up by the cavalry regiments. By mid-1942 the mounted platoons had still not been formed and GHQ turned instead to a proposal to form bicycle platoons in their stead.

The need for a pioneer platoon had apparently also been anticipated by the Bulgarians but little progress was made in actually forming these units. Finally, under German pressure, the process began in mid-1942 through the expedient of simply converting one of the regiment's rifle platoons into an assault pioneer platoon and raising a new rifle platoon.

Communications within the infantry regiment in 1942 are not known, but it seems unlikely that significant improvement had been made from the 1941 TO&Es. Almost certainly runners were used within the companies and telephones and runners between the battalion HQ and the companies. Indeed, even by late 1942 the communications net for an infantry battalion consisted of five telephones (one for the battalion HQ and one for each company) and two radios (one for the battalion HQ and one for the rifle company in the most critical sector). At that time even the regimental signal platoon was not fully equipped, being provided only with one radio for itself and two to be detached to subordinate battalions, along with telephones to each battalion, this representing more of a redistribution of assets than any real improvement.

Divisional fire support was provided by a four-battalion artillery regiment, consisting of one battalion of 75mm mountain guns, two of 75mm field guns, and one of 105mm howitzers, all drawn by draft horses. All were old model weapons, the most modern being the 105mm leFH.18 howitzers acquired from ex-German stocks. Once again, communications facilities are unknown but probably relied heavily on telephones.

A division also included a machine gun battalion consisting of two machine gun companies and a rifle company, probably similar to those used in the infantry battalions.

The 1943 Re-Organization

The infantry divisions were ordered reorganized in January 1943, probably in concert with the German "Plan 43" for military aid. The prior deliveries had included some 4,000 ZK.383 submachine guns from Czech factories; a hundred Brandt and 391 Rheinmetall 81mm mortars; 450 Skoda and 99 Rheinmetall 37mm AT guns and some field artillery prior to Plan 43. The new plan called for the delivery to Bulgaria of 7,700 MP40 submachine guns; 97,000 rifles and carbines; 4,600 light and 1,015 medium versions of the MG.34 machine gun; 800 German 50mm mortars; 1,400 German and 400 ex-French 81mm mortars; 404 50mm Pak38 AT guns; 180 Pak40 and 100 Pak97/38 75mm AT guns; and 192 more 105mm leFH18 or leFH18/40 field howitzers.

These German aid programs facilitated not only the force expansion necessary to garrison the occupied territories, but also a degree of force modernization. A submachine gun was now included in each rifle squad and a 50mm mortar in each rifle platoon HQ, the Germans having finally given ground on this latter issue. While Berlin still could not supply any mountain guns the increased deliveries of medium mortars meant that a small 6-gun mortar company could be added to each infantry battalion while still retaining the larger 9-gun company at the regimental level, satisfying both German and Bulgarian concerns. With the arrival of the 37mm Skoda AT guns it proved possible to decentralize the 20mm Solothurn anti-tank rifles down to the battalion level (one 2-gun platoon per machine gun company) while reequipping the regimental AT companies with the larger, albeit by now themselves obsolete, Skoda weapons.

Under new TO&Es issued in 1943 the regimental HQ company now included signal, pioneer, reconnaissance (nominally mounted, but sometimes bicycle) and police platoons.

Plans were also made to retire 26 old mountain guns from the artillery arm to form 13 infantry gun platoons. These would be assigned to the 13 mountain-type infantry regiments. Infantry gun platoons showed up in the standard infantry regiment TO&E as well, but few seem to have been formed.

Under the new 1943 TO&Es submachine guns were added, one per rifle squad. One step higher, it now proved possible to add a 50mm mortar to each rifle platoon, while the battalion got a two-gun 20mm AT rifle platoon for its machine gun company and a six-gun 81mm mortar company as an independent unit.

	Officers	Warrant Officers	Sergeants	Other Ranks		Pistols	Carbines	Submachine Guns	Rifles	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	20mm AT Rifles	50mm Mortars	81mm Mortars	37mm AT Guns	75mm Mountain Guns		Riding Horses	Pack Horses	Draft Horses	Carts	Wagons	Bicycles
Infantry Regiment, Standard Type																							
Regiment HQ & Compan	20	5	53	284		31	156	15	87	6	0	0	0	0	0	0		50	8	75	1	37	35
Three Infantry Battalions	26	0	104	686		128	192	27	396	27	12	2	9	6	0	0		11	42	159	26	66	0
Mortar Company	5	0	17	151		40	57	0	66	0	0	0	0	9	0	0		1	14	55	6	24	0
Anti-Tank Company	5	0	14	90		24	65	9	0	3	0	0	0	0	6	0		13	3	41	0	14	0
Infantry Gun Platoon	1	0	3	54		8	46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2		0	3	22	2	8	0
Infantry Regiment, Mountain Type																							
Regiment HQ & Compan	20	5	62	296		31	156	15	99	6	0	0	0	0	0	0		50	25	65	1	32	35
Three Infantry Battalions	26	0	105	835		128	229	27	487	27	12	2	9	6	0	0		10	213	89	9	40	0
Mortar Company	4	0	18	233		40	67	0	167	0	0	0	0	9	0	0		1	116	16	0	8	0
Anti-Tank Company	4	0	14	90		24	65	9	0	3	0	0	0	0	6	0		13	3	41	0	14	0
Infantry Gun Platoon	1	0	3	54		8	46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2		0	3	22	2	8	0

Infantry Regiments, 1943

An equally dramatic change took place in terms of first-line leadership. While the number of privates and corporals in an infantry battalion increased 22 percent compared to the 1941 TO&E, the number of sergeants increased 53 percent. This probably represented lessons learned about the value of lower-level command in the hills of Serbia, Macedonia and Thrace.

The basic load of ammunition was increased slightly from the 1941 pattern. The battalion now carried 2,630 rounds per light MG⁶, as compared to 2,037 under the 1941 TO&E, although medium MG ammunition allocation remained the same at 6,000 rounds per gun. Ammunition for the 20mm AT rifles was increased significantly, from the former 260 rounds per gun (in the regimental AT company) to 460 rounds per gun (in the battalion MG company); while that for the 81mm mortar rose from 141 rounds per gun (in the regimental mortar company) to 165 in the battalion mortar companies and 137 in the regimental mortar company. For the new weapons a battalion carried 131 rounds for each 50mm mortar, and the regimental weapons companies carried 420 rounds for each 37mm AT gun and 130 rounds for each 75mm mountain gun.

Under the new TO&E signal assets comprised two radios, 14 telephones, two switchboards, and 18 km of wire in each battalion signal platoon, and five radios, 14 telephones, one switchboard, and 30 km of wire in the regimental HQ. Other signal assets were limited to two telephones and two kilometers of wire in the infantry gun platoon.

⁶These figures refer to the standard-type regiment. The pack type did not differ significantly.

Improving the Division Base

At the division level the delivery of substantial numbers of howitzers meant that one of the field gun battalions could be reequipped with 105mm leFH18 or leFH18/40 field howitzers. This represented not only a significant advance in firepower per se, but the howitzer was much more useful in the hilly terrain the Bulgarians found themselves in than the flat-trajectory 75mm field gun.

Communications within the artillery were also improved, largely through the delivery of German *tornisterfunkgerät b* backpack radios. Each field battery, gun or howitzer, now had a signal section with one telephone team and two backpack radio teams, while the battalion HQ had three telephone teams and four backpack radio teams. Some flexibility was inherent in this system, but the normal deployment called for one of the battery's radios to go forward with the FO team while the other stayed at the firing position, thus establishing the battery net. The battalion signal platoon would distribute a radio to each battery firing position and keep one itself, this constituting the battalion net. In the mountain battalion, each battery had an additional radio that could either act as a relay station in the battery net or equip a second FO team. The regimental signal platoon comprised five telephone teams, two ground-to-air radio teams, and six radio teams. One of these radio teams was given to each battalion HQ, one kept at the regimental HQ and one given to the battle group HQ that was used to exercise tactical command over the two or three artillery battalions in the critical sector of the division front.

The divisional reconnaissance battalion comprised two mounted squadrons (each of three rifle platoons and a machine gun platoon) and a heavy weapons squadron (with MG, anti-tank and pioneer platoons). Since the timely delivery of information was as important as its discovery the reconnaissance battalion had more signal assets than its infantry counterpart. A mounted squadron included a signal section with three "type b" backpack radios. One would be kept at the squadron HQ and the other two assigned to two of the three line platoons. The heavy weapons squadron, on the other hand, had only a telephone team, whose duty it was to run wire between the company HQ and an FO point. The battalion HQ was provided with four radio teams (one for each squadron HQ and one for the battalion HQ) and two telephone teams. The battalion would also receive a high-power radio as an attachment from the divisional signal battalion to operate in the divisional net.

The divisional anti-tank battalion, a new addition under the 1943 TO&Es, consisted of three small six-gun companies, two equipped with 50mm Pak38 guns and the other with 75mm Pak40 or Pak97/38 guns. Each company consisted of 115 men divided into a headquarters, trains elements and three 2-gun platoons. In addition to the two anti-tank guns each platoon also held two Ford Maultier tractors and two motorcycles, along

with a light machine gun. The battalion also had six cargo trucks and three field cars. All the signal assets in the battalion were held in the battalion signal platoon, which provided four backpack and two field radios, along with a single telephone team.

Another organizational change was made in the supply and transport field, where the prior commodity-specific transport columns were consolidated into general-purpose transport columns. In addition, a 90-ton motor transport column (presumably thirty 3-ton trucks) was added to make the supply system more capable and more flexible.

These elements combined to give the division a total strength of 16,066 men with 14,524 rifles and carbines, 415 submachine guns, 342 light and 159 medium machine guns, 81 light and 84 medium mortars, 18 anti-tank rifles, 39 anti-tank guns, 12 mountain guns, 12 field guns and 24 field howitzers.

A Final Gasp – The 1944 Program

These TO&Es remained in force until Bulgaria switched sides. The burden of providing the weapons, of course, fell on the Germans. As a follow-on to Plan 43 Germany provided 60 more 105mm leFH18/40 howitzers under a February 1944 contract and then launched a series of narrowly-defined arms transfers codenamed "silberpappel" (including 20 75mm Pak40) for delivery in March 1944; "jaspis" (including 110 more Pak40s) for delivery in June-December 1944; and "olivbaum" (80 81mm mortars, 30 Pak40s and 40 Skoda 100mm howitzers) for delivery in August-September 1944. The thrust of these new agreements was an attempt to make the Bulgarian Army more combat-worthy in face of armor. The Soviets were advancing from the east and, although a lesser threat, the Turks appeared restive to the south. Berlin was still clinging to the hope that they could persuade Sofia to fight the Red Army, and to this end capable weapons, particularly anti-tank weapons, would be needed.

It is not certain how much of the 1944 program was delivered, but it was probably less than half. By 1 June 1944 confirmed deliveries included 4,600 MG34 light MGs, 404 50mm Pak38s, 180 75mm Pak40s, 100 75mm Pak97/38s, and 320 105mm field howitzers. Using this equipment the Bulgarians had managed to equip the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 8th Infantry Divisions completely with German machine guns, along with the whole of the I (Serbian Occupation) Corps and the Army-level troops of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Armies. Each of the regular divisions (1-12) and the initial expansion divisions (14-17) had received their full quota of twelve 50mm Pak38 guns and six 75mm guns (model 97/38 in Divisions 2, 4, 7, 10 and 12; Pak40 in the others); and nine divisions (1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 12, 14, 16 and 17) had received 24 105mm leFH18/40 howitzers as well.

The divisions were not treated equally well in terms of equipment. Generally, first priority went to the regular divisions (1-12), then to the expansion divisions (14-17 and 28), and finally to the occupation divisions of I Corps (22, 24, 25, and 27).

Division Headquarters (142)

Signal Battalion (501)

Battalion Headquarters
Radio Company
Wire Company

Reconnaissance Battalion (590)

Battalion Headquarters
Two Mounted Squadrons, each
Heavy Weapons Squadron

[9 LMG, 2 MG]
[3 MG, 3 37mm AT]

Three Infantry Regiments, each (3,149)

Regiment HQ & Company (362)
Three Infantry Battalions, each (816)
 Battalion Headquarters
 Three Rifle Companies, each (158)
 Machine Gun Company
 Mortar Company
Anti-Tank Company (108)
Mortar Company (173)
Infantry Gun Platoon (58)

[6 LMG]

[9 LMG, 3 50mm Mort]
[12 MG, 2 20mm ATR]
[6 81mm Mort]
[6 37mm AT]
[9 81mm Mort]
[2 75mm Mtn Guns]

Field Artillery Regiment (2,708)

Regiment Headquarters
Battle Group Headquarters
Mountain Artillery Battalion
 Battalion Headquarters
 Three Batteries, each
Field Gun Battalion
 Battalion Headquarters
 Three Batteries, each
Two Field Howitzer Battalions, each
 Battalion Headquarters
 Three Batteries, each

[2 LMG, 4 75mm Mtn Guns]

[2 MG, 4 75mm Guns]

[2 MG, 4 105mm How]

Machine Gun Battalion (526)

Battalion Headquarters
Rifle Company
Two Machine Gun Companies, each
Mortar Platoon

[9 LMG]
[12 MG]
[3 81mm Mort]

Anti-Tank Battalion (410)

Battalion Headquarters
Two Medium AT Companies, each
Heavy AT Company

[6 50mm AT]
[6 75mm AT]

Anti-Aircraft Battery (260)

[15 20mm AA]

Pioneer Battalion (1,101)

Battalion Headquarters
Three Pioneer Companies, each
Bridging Column

[9 LMG]
[6 LMG]

Medical Group

Field Hospital
Medical Company
Ambulance Unit

Transport Group

Motor Transport Column (90-ton)
Eighteen Horse Transport Columns, each (6-ton)

Maintenance Company

Supply Group

Bakery Company
Butchery Company
Veterinary Hospital

Security Battalion (not always present)

Total Strength: 16,066 officers & enlisted

INFANTRY DIVISION, 1943-44

Indeed, the 60-series infantry regiments of I Corps did not even use the same TO&Es as the rest of the army's infantry regiments. An infantry regiment serving in one of the 20-series divisions consisted simply of a regimental HQ, a signal platoon, and three infantry battalions, with other regimental troops. The infantry battalion was made up of three rifle companies (each with six light machine guns) and a machine gun company (three 3-gun MG platoons, a 3-gun 50mm mortar platoon, and a 3-gun 81mm mortar platoon). The only concession to modernity was that the machine guns were, at least, the excellent MG34 model.

When a 60-series regiment was rotated out of I Corps, however, it was reorganized onto the normal field TO&E. Thus, the 68th Regiment, while serving with the 7th Division in Greece, used the normal infantry regiment organization except that it apparently never did manage to form the regiment HQ company.

The divisional structure in I Corps was no better. Two of the four divisions were binary, having only two infantry regiments. Artillery support was limited to a single battalion, usually a miniature version of a normal artillery regiment, with one battery each of 75mm mountain guns and 105mm howitzers, and two batteries of 75mm field guns. For reconnaissance two of the divisions in I Corps (24 and 27) had a single mounted squadron, while the other two divisions had nothing. These divisions did include machine gun battalions, but without the mortar platoons. Finally, the 20-series occupation divisions operated with much reduced service support elements.

The initial expansion divisions formed for the 5th Army in Macedonia (14, 15 and 17) apparently used the standard infantry regiment organization. They also used the standard artillery organization, retaining the original organization (one mountain battalion, two field gun battalions and one field howitzer battalion) to the end, although it was common for one battalion of each regiment to be on detached duty at any time. They included machine gun and pioneer battalions, but no reconnaissance element or AA battery, and had reduced service support.

The other initial expansion division, the 16th serving in Greece, also used the standard infantry TO&Es (with bicycle platoons replacing mounted platoons in the regimental HQs). The artillery regiment had an anomalous organization of two 75mm field gun battalions (one permanently detached to the 28th Division), one battalion of 105mm howitzers, and one of ex-Soviet 122mm howitzers. The division lacked a machine gun battalion but did have the normal anti-tank battalion and AA battery. Also absent was the reconnaissance battalion, but in compensation, the 3rd Cavalry Regiment was attached permanently. Pioneer and signal elements were consolidated into a single battalion with one signal company, one pioneer company and a bridging column. Transport was reorganized into one 40-ton horsed column and one 50-ton motorized column, and other division services appear to have been held on the normal divisional

scale.

The other expansion division, a later addition, the 28th also in Greece, was an ad-hoc formation built by borrowing elements from other divisions. It had a line strength of two regiments (the 10th Regiment from the 10th Division, and the 58th Regiment from the 16th Division). Both used the regular 1943 TO&E, including the mounted platoons in the regiment HQ company and the battalion mortar companies, but the 58th Regiment inexplicably included four infantry battalions instead of three. For reconnaissance it had two divisional reconnaissance battalions (borrowed from the 6th and 10th Divisions) as well as the 6th Cavalry Regiment. Its artillery regiment consisted of a 75mm field gun battalion from the 16th Division and a 105mm howitzer battalion from the 6th Division. It also had two AT companies (one 50mm, one 75mm), an AA platoon, a signal company, a pioneer company, a 25-ton motor transport column, a 45-ton horse transport column, and other reduced-scale divisional services.

Because of the disparate nature of its subordinate divisions the II Corps in Greek Thrace makes an interesting study. It held one regular division (the 7th, on its regular organization but without the MG battalion), an initial expansion division (the 16th, with three infantry regiments, a cavalry regiment, a full artillery complement except for that detached to the 28th Division, and no MG or reconnaissance battalions), and an ad-hoc expansion division (the 28th, with two infantry regiments, a cavalry regiment, a weak artillery regiment, two reconnaissance battalions and no MG battalion).

All were apparently kept at or close to full strength, for the strength return from II Corps on 1 April 1944 showed the following:

	7th Div	16th Div	28th Div
officers	506	319	
warrant officers	75	156	88
NCOs	3,695	3,457	2,201
privates	13,906	13,899	9,867
submachine guns	427	423	330
carbines	5,687	4,541	4,232
rifles	7,796	8,610	4,853
rifle grenade launchers	96	103	96
light machine guns	395	408	301
medium machine guns	176	177	130
50mm mortars	31	48	33
81mm mortars	91	75	63

20mm AT rifles	12	16	13
37mm AT guns	23	15	21
50mm AT guns	12	12	8
75mm AT guns	6	6	4
75mm mountain guns	12	0	0
75mm field guns	16	12	12
105mm field howitzers	8	12	16
122mm field howitzers	0	12	0
20mm AA guns	15	15	6
riding horses	1,230	1,397	1,199
draft horses	3,511	2,633	2,649
pack horses	1,473	910	423
wagons & carts	1,356	1,258	866
trucks	84	71	37
field cars	10	21	3
motorcycles	52	49	20

The Bulgarian volte-face did surprisingly little to change organization or equipment of the infantry. In the spring of 1945 the 1st Army was still equipped to the same scale as before and the only Soviet weapons in evidence were some submachine guns (replacing and supplementing earlier models), and 57mm and 76mm AT guns.

Border Guards

Another, albeit smaller, component of the infantry was the border guard element. The pre-war army included 33 sector commands, approximately equivalent to battalions. In mid-1941 twelve of these were grouped to form the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th Border Guard Regiments, which in turn were formed into the 3rd and 4th Border Guard Brigades based at Ustrem and Boliarovo, respectively. In early 1942 these units were transferred to the Black Sea shore to perform coastal defense and surveillance duties, the 3rd Brigade (3rd and 4th Regiments) being based in Varna and the 4th Brigade (5th and 6th Regiments) in Burgas.

The Border Guard regiments used the TO&Es of the infantry regiment (standard type) and were thus identical in all respects. The 1943 reorganization added some smaller support elements, such as the mounted squadron, but left the basic organization intact. Under the new plan the Border Guard brigades had the following composition:

Brigade HQ (117)
Signal Company (292)
Mounted Squadron (136) [6 LMG, 2 MG]

Two Infantry (Border Guard) Regiments, each (3,100)
Artillery Regiment (1,263)
 Field Gun Battalion
 Three Batteries, each [2 MG, 4 75mm guns]
 Field Howitzer Battalion
 Three Batteries, each [2 MG, 4 105mm how]
Anti-Tank Company (182) [5 LMG, 6 or 10 50mm or 75mm AT]
Anti-Air Battery (168) [9 20mm AA]
Pioneer Battalion (433)
Brigade Services (1,578)

The final type of infantry unit was the Territorial Regiment. Ten of these regiments, numbered 1 to 10, existed in 1941 along with the 3rd and 4th Territorial Brigade HQs. The regiments were theoretically organized and equipped identically to the infantry regiments, but it is not clear whether this was fully implemented. In late 1941 the "Elkhovo Command" was formed to guard the Turkish border, permitting infantry divisions to return to their peacetime garrisons. This command consisted of the 3rd Territorial Brigade (comprising the 3rd and 8th Territorial Regiments), the 4th Territorial Brigade (the 4th and 5th Territorial Regiments) and one undesignated brigade (commanding the 44th Infantry Regiment and an unidentified territorial regiment). In addition, each brigade included a 105mm howitzer battalion (each of three 4-gun batteries), while the 3rd and 4th Territorial Brigades shared six 37mm AT platoons.

The only other known deployment of the territorial force was the inclusion of the 6th Territorial Regiment in the 21st Division at Nis in early 1942. By late 1943 the territorial force seems to have disappeared, probably drawn down to provide personnel for the infantry regiments.

CAVALRY AND ARMOR

Pre-War Cavalry

The army's peacetime structure provided for eight cavalry regiments and four brigade HQs. These could be formed into two cavalry divisions, but the demand for smaller mounted elements was such that it seems unlikely that serious consideration was ever given to forming both divisions simultaneously. On mobilization in 1941 the cavalry order of battle was as follows:

- 2nd Cavalry Division
 - 3rd Cavalry Brigade
 - 4th Cavalry Regiment
 - 5th Cavalry Regiment
 - 4th Cavalry Brigade
 - 8th Cavalry Regiment
 - 10th Cavalry Regiment
 - 2nd Motorized Infantry Regiment
 - 2nd Horse Artillery Regiment
- 1st Cavalry Brigade
 - 3rd Cavalry Regiment
 - 6th Cavalry Regiment
- 2nd Cavalry Brigade
 - 1st Cavalry Regiment
 - 2nd Cavalry Regiment

The pre-war organization of the cavalry regiment is unknown, but probably comprised three or four line squadrons and a machine gun squadron.⁷ The motorized infantry regiment consisted of two infantry battalions, each of three rifle companies, a machine gun company and possibly a heavy weapons company with AT and mortar platoons.

The Early War Period

The TO&E for a cavalry regiment published in 1941 provided for two variants, identical except for the presence in one of a 6-gun mortar platoon. Each of the 138-man rifle squadrons consisted of a headquarters and three platoons, each of three squads. The regimental anti-tank platoon used the 20mm Solothurn AT rifle carried by pack horses. All the communications equipment (except signal rockets) for the regiment was carried by the regimental signal platoon, comprising eight telephones and 30 km of wire.

⁷British intelligence of 1939 claimed a regiment consisted of a HQ, a motorcycle section, a signal section, trains elements, three rifle (or sabre) squadrons, and a machine gun squadron. They credited the rifle squadron with having four rifle platoons (each of four sections) and a light MG platoon (with four light MGs), while the MG squadron was said to have six medium MGs and two anti-tank guns. These elements gave the regiment an estimated wartime strength of 30 officers and 600 enlisted, a rather low figure. German intelligence in 1940, however, said that a regiment consisted of a headquarters, three rifle squadrons (each with six light MGs), a machine gun squadron (eight medium MGs) and an anti-tank platoon (two 20mm AT rifles).

Certainly with the outbreak of war the cavalry organization changed. The organization of the cavalry division in February 1942 was as follows:

- Division HQ
- Signal Squadron
- Reconnaissance Squadron
- Two Cavalry Brigades, each
 - Two Cavalry Regiments, each
 - Four Rifle Squadrons, each [12 LMG]
 - Machine Gun Squadron [6 MG]
- Motorized Infantry Regiment
 - Two Motorized Infantry Battalions, each
 - Three Rifle Companies, each [9 LMG]
 - Machine Gun Company [12 MG]
 - Anti-Tank Company [6 20mm ATR]
 - Mortar Company [9 81mm mort]
- Horse Artillery Regiment
 - Three Battalions, each
 - Three Batteries, each [4 75mm guns]
- Pioneer Squadron
- Division services

Even by this time, however, the division had not been fully formed. The reconnaissance squadron was to have been an armored car unit but no such vehicles were available so it was formed on a provisional basis with a mixture of mounted troops and field cars. The pioneer and signal squadrons were still being formed in February. The 2nd Infantry Regiment was serving under I Corps in Serbia and could not be immediately spared for conversion, and in any event sufficient vehicles were available only for one of its two battalions.

In the meantime, the other cavalry elements had been farmed out to support the field forces. The 1st Cavalry Brigade was subordinated to the new 15th Infantry Division under the 5th Army in ex-Yugoslav Macedonia. It served the rest of the war there, either under the 15th Division or directly under 5th Army command as circumstances dictated. The 2nd Cavalry Brigade was sent to the new 16th Division in ex-Greek Thrace. Its regiments remained there for the rest of the war as well, although they served at various times under the 16th and 28th Divisions, and the brigade HQ led an on-again-off-again existence depending on whether a unified command for the two regiments was deemed necessary.

The 2nd Cavalry Division remained at its home base in Jambol through most of the war. The cavalry division and the separate cavalry brigades (and regiments) were subjected to a major reorganization in January 1943, just like the infantry.

The 1943 Re-Organization

The new cavalry regiment was configured as a headquarters, four rifle squadrons, a machine gun squadron and a heavy weapons squadron. The regimental HQ included a trains platoon and a signal platoon. The signal platoon was much improved, being provided with sixteen telephones and 40 km of wire, but more importantly, now being provided with four S.65 radios. The rifle squadron consisted of a headquarters, three rifle platoons (each with three rifle squads), a machine gun platoon (of two squads) and combat and field trains. The machine gun squadron was built around two machine gun platoons (each of three squads) and a pioneer/chemical platoon. The heavy squadron had two mortar platoons (each three squads), an anti-tank rifle platoon (of two squads), and an anti-tank gun platoon (of three squads). The heavy squadron was the only element of the regiment to have its own signal squad, this being provided with four telephones and 10 km of wire. The squadron carried 456 rounds of 81mm ammunition, 900 rounds of 37mm, and 540 rounds of 20mm anti-tank. The apparent reason for the retention of the anti-tank rifle was that it was carried by pack horses and thus could go places the draft-pulled 37mm guns could not.

	Officers	Warrant Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Pistols	Submachine Guns	Rifles	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	20mm AT Rifles	81mm Mortars	37mm AT Guns	Riding Horses	Pack Horses	Draft Horses	Carts & Wagons	Motorcycles
Cavalry Regiment (Basic), 1941																	
Regiment HQ & Squadron	15	3	27	153	30	0	150	0	0	0	0	0	116	7	90	42	2
Four Rifle Squadrons, each	4	0	15	119	17	0	112	9	0	0	0	0	130	7	11	5	0
Machine Gun Squadron	4	0	12	132	38	0	101	0	12	0	0	0	136	37	19	9	0
Anti-Tank Platoon	1	0	3	17	6	0	14	0	0	2	0	0	21	5	0	0	0
Cavalry Regiment (with mortars), 1941																	
<i>as above, but add:</i>																	
Mortar Squadron	4	0	13	125	36	0	97	0	0	0	6	0	116	21	47	23	0
Cavalry Regiment, 1943																	
Regiment HQ & Squadron	15	4	38	187	27	0	197	0	0	0	0	0	126	2	108	51	4
Four Rifle Squadrons, each	5	0	25	155	21	9	139	9	2	0	0	0	162	21	17	8	0
Machine Gun Squadron	4	0	17	126	23	7	108	3	6	0	0	0	106	0	41	21	0
Heavy Weapons Squadron	5	0	21	142	43	0	119	1	0	2	6	3	113	4	61	24	0

The cavalry

Cavalry Regiments 1941-45

regiment had a total strength of 1,279 and was provided with 177 pistols, 980 carbines, and 43 submachine guns (one per rifle squad) as well as the heavier crew-served weapons. In addition, the pioneer/chemical platoon carried 160 mines and four mine detectors, along with two small rubber boats.

Division Headquarters (142)	
Signal Battalion (mot) (315)	
Battalion Headquarters	
Radio Company	
Wire Company	
Two Cavalry Brigades, each (2,668)	
Brigade Headquarters (70)	
Two Cavalry Regiments, each (1,299)	
Regiment Headquarters (244)	
Four Rifle Squadrons, each (185)	[9 LMG, 2 MG]
Machine Gun Squadron (147)	[3 LMG, 6 MG]
Heavy Weapons Squadron (168)	[1 LMG, 2 20mm ATR, 6 81mm Mort, 3 37mm AT]
Infantry Regiment (Partly-Motorized) (3,139)	
Regiment Headquarters	
Motorized Infantry Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Three Rifle Companies	[9 LMG, 3 50mm Mort]
Machine Gun Company	[12 MG, 2 20mm ATR]
Mortar Company	[9 81mm Mort]
Two Partly-Motorized Infantry Battalions, each as above (motorized infantry battalion)	
Anti-Tank Company (mot)	[6 37mm AT]
Mortar Company (partly motorized)	[9 81mm Mort]
Horse Artillery Regiment (2,392)	
Regiment Headquarters	
Four Artillery Battalions, each	
Battalion Headquarters	
Two Field Gun Batteries, each	[2 MG, 4 75mm Guns]
Field Howitzer Battery	[2 MG, 4 105mm How]
Machine Gun Battalion (mot) (518)	
Battalion Headquarters	
Rifle Company	[9 LMG]
Two Machine Gun Companies, each	[12 MG]
Mortar Platoon	[3 81mm Mort]
Anti-Tank Battalion (mot) (410)	
Battalion Headquarters	
Two Medium AT Companies, each	[3 LMG, 6 50mm AT]
Heavy AT Company	[3 LMG, 6 75mm AT]
Anti-Aircraft Battery (partly motorized) (239)	[15 20mm AA]
Pioneer Battalion (mot) (896)	
Battalion Headquarters	
Two Pioneer Companies, each	[9 LMG]
Bridging Column	
Division Services (2,173)	
Transport Group	
Group Headquarters	
Fifteen Horse Transport Columns, each (6-ton)	
Motor Transport Column (90-ton)	
Maintenance Company	
Medical Group	
Field Hospital	
Medical Company	
Ambulance Unit	
Veterinary Hospital	
Bakery Company	
Butchery Company	

Total Division 15,560 officers & enlisted

CAVALRY DIVISION 1943-44

All cavalry regiments, whether in the cavalry division or not, conformed to this new organization. A local exception was found in the 3rd and 6th Regiments in Greece, which removed the machine gun platoons from the rifle squadrons and concentrated them in a much-enlarged machine gun squadron.

The plan to provide a motorized infantry regiment for the cavalry division proved overly ambitious in light of the shortage of motor vehicles. Even by mid-1944 little progress had been made in this regard. It is possible that had they stayed with the two-battalion organization used in 1941/42 enough motor vehicles could have been found, but the 1943 reorganization expanded the regiment to three battalions. The result was that only one of the battalions and the anti-tank company could be fully provided with motor vehicles, and the rest of the regiment had to be content with either walking (with trucks to carry the heavy equipment) or being moved in successive groups by pooled transport.

Several alternative organizations were tried for the divisional artillery regiment. One, which appears to have lasted longest, called for four identical battalions each with one howitzer and two field gun batteries. Another organization that saw some use, however, saw the regiment organized into three 3-battery field gun battalions and a single 3-battery field howitzer battalion.

The cavalry division was used, apparently with little organizational change, briefly against the Germans when Bulgaria changed sides, but the rest of the cavalry force appears to have been disbanded.

The Start of the Armored Force

The first acquisition of armored vehicles by the army came with a 1934 contract to Ansaldo for 14 CV33 tankettes and an equal number of heavy trucks to carry them to battle. These were delivered in early 1935 and shortly thereafter the 1st Tank Company was formed with a strength of 4 officers and 86 enlisted. In September 1936 a second contract was placed, this time with Vickers for eight of its 6-ton Mark E tanks in the single-turret configuration. The 2nd Tank Company, with 167 men, was formed at the same time and was ready and waiting when the tanks arrived in 1938.

The two companies participated in joint maneuvers with the cavalry division and on 1 January 1939 were both placed under the command of the new 1st Tank Battalion. The battalion had a total strength of 173 men and comprised the headquarters, 1st (Ansaldo) Company, 2nd (Vickers) Company, and a maintenance platoon.

In February 1940 26 Skoda LT-35 tanks (known as T-11 models in Bulgaria) were purchased from Germany and delivered in February-April of that year. A further ten were purchased in the summer and delivered during the winter of 1940/41, and this

permitted the raising of a third company in the battalion. A further expansion of the force took place when Germany sold Bulgaria 40 ex-French R.35 tanks in April 1941. These were delivered quickly and used to form the 2nd Tank Battalion. On 25 June the 1st Armored Brigade was officially formed in Sofia⁸, consisting of a tank regiment (with the 1st (Skoda/Vickers) Tank Battalion and the 2nd (Renault) Tank Battalion) a reconnaissance company, a motorized infantry regiment (of two battalions), a motorized artillery regiment (with an 8-gun light field howitzer battalion and a 4-gun 150mm howitzer "battalion"), a pioneer company, an anti-tank company and a maintenance company. This expansion did not come about easily, however, for by 15 August the brigade still had a strength of only 1,802.

Creating the Tank Brigade

Nevertheless, the filling out of the brigade continued and by March of 1942 it had the organization shown in the accompanying table. Serious shortcomings remained, however. One was the now almost traditional shortage of signal assets. Of the 17 Skoda tanks in a company, only four had radios, those presumably for the company commander and three platoon leaders. Only one of the Skodas in each of the brigade, regiment and battalion HQs had a radio. Only one R.35 tank had a radio, that in the battalion HQ. None of the Vickers or CV33 tanks had radios. Presumably for this reason Bulgarian doctrine called for the employment of the Vickers company in the role of SP anti-tank rather than as a tank unit.

A second problem was the disparate characteristics of the tank types. The Renaults were not only much slower than the Skoda tanks but also proved quite unreliable and thus coordinating the actions of the two tank battalions proved almost impossible.

Other problems included the lack of the 50mm mortars that were called for in the infantry TO&Es, a lack of armored cars to fill out the reconnaissance battalion, a shortage of engineer equipment that kept the pioneer battalion to company strength, and the lack of a powerful anti-tank gun.

By the end of 1942 the armored brigade's strength had risen to 3,809, close to its authorized level. Training, however, was not proceeding well and its tactical performance in maneuvers was rated as poor by German observers. The observers also noted that the tanks themselves were by now obsolete (in the case of the Renaults) or obsolescent (Vickers and Skodas). In early 1943 German offered 12 PzKw IV tanks and 20 StuG III assault guns to try to alleviate this problem. With such

⁸Officially the unit was called the 1st Armored Regiment. That, however, creates confusion with the "tank group" HQ (as the Bulgarians styled it) that existed as a command echelon between the brigade HQ and the tank battalion HQs, as well as creating the perplexing problem of having an infantry regiment an organic part of a tank regiment. Further, the unit created was much more akin to a brigade in the traditional sense than a regiment since it incorporated a wide range of arms and services under a single HQ. On 1 October 1943 the unit was officially redesignated the 1st Armored Brigade by the Bulgarian MoD but that designation will be used in this text to refer to the unit from June 1941.

Brigade Headquarters	[3 Skoda]
Signal Company	
Reconnaissance Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Motorcycle Rifle Company	[18 LMG, 4 MG]
Tankette Platoon	[5 CV33]
Heavy Weapons Company	[3 LMG, 3 81mm Mort, 3 37mm AT]
Tank Regiment	
Regiment HQ & Company	[2 Skoda]
I Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	[2 Skoda]
Two Companies, each	[17 Skoda]
One Company	[5 CV33, 8 Vickers]
II Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	[3 CV33, 1 R.35]
Three Companies, each	[13 R.35]
Motorized Infantry Regiment	
Regiment HQ & Company	
Two Motorized Infantry Battalions, each	
Battalion Headquarters	
Three Rifle Companies, each	[18 LMG, 2 MG, 3 50mm Mort]
Machine Gun Company	[8 MG]
Heavy Weapons Company	[8 LMG, 3 81mm Mort, 3 37mm AT]
Mortar Company	[6 81mm Mort]
Motorized Artillery Regiment	
Regiment Headquarters	
Light Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Three Batteries, each	[2 MG, 4 105mm How]
Medium Battalion	
Battalion Headquarters	
Two Howitzer Batteries, each	[2 MG, 4 150mm How]
Gun Battery	[2 MG, 4 105mm Guns]
Field Gun Battery	[2 MG, 4 75mm Guns]
Anti-Tank Battalion (mot)	
Battalion Headquarters	
Four Anti-Tank Groups, each	[1 LMG, 4 37mm AT]
Anti-Aircraft Battalion (mot)	
Battalion Headquarters	
Light Battery	[15 LMG, 15 20mm AA]
Medium Battery	[9 37mm AA]
Heavy Battery	[4 75mm AA]
Pioneer Battalion (mot)	
Battalion Headquarters	
Two Pioneer Companies, each	[9 LMG, 2 MG]
Bridging Column	
Brigade Services	

Armored Brigade, March 1942

small numbers, there was not much the German Military Mission could do, but they did come up with a plan that would at least secure their long-sought goal of getting the Renaults out of the armored brigade. The Germans proposed a tank regiment of two identical battalions, each consisting of two mixed companies (each 5 StuG III and 3 PzKw IV) and one light company (14 Skodas). Other Skodas would be used for command tanks and the Renaults would finally be released from the brigade to form infantry support detachments.

The Bulgarians refused. They proposed simply adding five StuG IIIs to the Renault battalion and using the PzKw IV tanks to replace the Vickers tanks in the Skoda battalion. The remaining 15 StuG IIIs would be formed into an assault gun group under the brigade's artillery regiment. The Germans, in turn, balked at this, it smacked of "throwing good money after bad" to integrate assault guns with the R.35 tanks. An impasse had been reached.

The Germans backed down. They agreed to provide 43 PzKw IV tanks instead of just 12. This would permit the formation of two modern tank battalions. The Renault battalion would still be included in the brigade's order of battle but was no longer critical to its performance. The StuG IIIs would be used to form an independent assault gun unit.

The new organization that the Bulgarians found acceptable called for two mixed tank battalions and one Renault battalion. A mixed battalion consisted of a HQ (one Skoda and one PzKw IV) and two medium and one light tank companies. A company had one tank in its HQ and three platoons (each 3 PzKw IV in the medium companies, or 5 Skodas in the light companies). Due to shortages in equipment, each company in the II mixed battalion was short one tank.

Once this reorganization was complete in late 1943 the Bulgarians finally removed the Renaults from the brigade and sent them to south-central Bulgaria to fight the nascent partisan movement, and ten were further shipped to the 29th Division at Vranje for use against Tito's forces. To replace the Renaults the Bulgarians formed a new III Tank Battalion, without tanks, to await further German deliveries.

By the end of 1943 the Germans had delivered all 20 armored cars that had been ordered (13 SdKfz.222 and 7 SdKfz.223), 46 of 91 PzKw IV tanks ordered, and 25 of 55 StuG IIIs ordered. The delays certainly slowed down the completion of the brigade but it cannot be said the Bulgarians showed any sense of urgency themselves. Indeed, by the end of 1943 the actual personnel strength of the brigade was as follows:

	Officers	NCOs	OtherRanks	Total
brigade HQ	8	24	49	81
reconnaissance bn	13	43	368	424
tank regiment	59	317	826	1,202
motorized infantry regt	55	174	1,370	1,599
artillery regiment	35	120	616	771
others	5	17	127	149
TOTAL	175	695	3,356	4,226

The strength of 4,266 represented slightly less than half of the brigade's TO&E strength, with particular shortages in service support that would have made deploying the brigade in combat a short-term proposition only.

Except for the tank regiment and the reconnaissance battalion the brigade still had the March 1942 organization at this time. The tank regiment nominally consisted of a headquarters and HQ company (with signal and pioneer platoons) and three tank battalions, each with a HQ, signal platoon, two medium companies (each 14 PzKw IV), and a light company (16 Skodas). In the reconnaissance battalion the tankette platoon had been replaced by an armored car company, fitted out with the vehicles recently delivered from Germany. The 3rd Tank Battalion, as well as the brigade's pioneer and anti-aircraft battalions, existed only as personnel formations, however. They were still awaiting their equipment from Germany.

This equipment finally arrived in the spring of 1944. At the same time, it was decided to reorganize the motorized infantry regiment by streamlining the fire support elements and adding a third battalion. Other changes were a strengthening of the anti-tank battalion with more modern weapons, the addition of a second motorcycle rifle company to the reconnaissance battalion, and the deletion of the 75mm and 105mm guns from the artillery regiment.

Through 1942 and 1943 the German advisors to the Bulgarian Army had had little good to say about the state of training and readiness of the armored brigade. Things began to turn around in 1944, however, and the brigade's performance started to improve considerably. This was a source of some pride to the German advisors until late summer when it became apparent that Bulgaria might change sides.

The Armored Brigade Goes Into Combat

On 8 October the brigade saw its first combat, ironically against the Germans. Under the 2nd Army it participated in the drive into Yugoslavia until 22 November, probably losing about half its tank strength in combat. The motorized infantry was also being attrited considerably. By early November the infantry battalions apparently had only

Brigade Headquarters

Signal Company

Reconnaissance Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Armored Car Company

[18 Armored Cars]

Two Motorcycle Rifle Companies, each

[18 LMG, 4 MG]

Heavy Weapons Company

[4 81mm Mort, 3 37mm AT]

Maintenance Platoon

Tank Regiment (1,572)

Regiment HQ & Company

Three Tank Battalions, each

Battalion Headquarters

Two Medium Companies, each

[15 Pzkw IV]

Light Company

[16 Skoda](LT-35 in 2 bns, LT-38 in 1)

Motorized Infantry Regiment (2,587)

Regiment HQ & Company

Three Infantry Battalions, each

Battalion Headquarters

Three Rifle Companies, each

[9 LMG, 2 MG]

Heavy Weapons Company

[1 LMG, 8 MG, 4 81mm Mort, 3 50mm AT]

Artillery Regiment

Regiment HQ & Battery

Light Field Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Three Light Field Batteries, each

[2 MG, 4 105mm How]

Heavy Field Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Two Heavy field Batteries, each

[2 MG, 4 150mm How]

Anti-Tank Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Two Medium Companies, each

[3 LMG, 9 50mm AT]

Heavy Company

[3 LMG, 6 75mm AT]

Anti-Aircraft Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Light Battery

[4 LMG, 12 20mm AA]

Medium Battery

[2 LMG, 9 37mm AA]

Heavy Battery

[2 LMG, 6 88mm AA]

Pioneer Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Two Pioneer Companies, each

[9 LMG]

Bridging Column

[8 LMG]

Four Motor Transport Columns, each (60-ton)

Maintenance Company

Medical Group

Field Hospital

Medical Company

Ambulance Unit

Administrative Company

Total Brigade 9,348 officers & enlisted

ARMORED BRIGADE, JULY 1944

two rifle companies per battalion instead of three, and the 3rd Infantry Battalion was reduced to serving as a replacement center for the other two.

Lacking effective maintenance for the vehicles, replacements for lost equipment, and a reservoir of trained personnel to replace losses, the brigade had probably lost most of its effectiveness by late November. It was not employed in combat thereafter. A composite tank battalion with 35 tanks (Skodas and PzKw IVs) was formed from the division and it served with the 1st Bulgarian Army to the end of the war without, however, seeing much combat.

The StuG III assault guns that were not incorporated into the armored brigade were used to form two independent assault gun units, the 1st Detachment in June 1943 and the 2nd Detachment in December. Each of these consisted of three batteries and had a total of about 25 StuG IIIs. They appear to have taken no part in the war against Germany.

Leland Ness

OTHER UNITS

The Field Army

Each of the four field armies, equivalent to a western corps, in the pre-war army had a fixed base element of its own troops. The largest element was the army artillery regiment of four battalions. One was a mountain battalion with three 4-gun batteries of 75mm pack guns and three were medium battalions. One of these battalions was horse-drawn, with three 3-gun batteries of 120mm howitzers, while the other two were motorized: one with two 2-gun "batteries" of 105mm guns and the other with three 4-gun batteries of 150mm howitzers. The force was less than impressive, the 120mm howitzers being Schneider M07 and M11 models of pre-WW I vintage with a range of only 8 km, and the 105mm gun "battalion" being actually a battery in size. This, however, exhausted the army's artillery holdings, there being no other artillery assets available except some museum pieces that were never even mobilized.

Other elements assigned to each of the field armies was a pioneer battalion, a labor regiment, a signal battalion, and an infantry replacement regiment, the latter sometimes being used as a combat unit.

Because there were no further holdings of artillery the 5th Army, raised to occupy ex-Yugoslav Macedonia, was formed without an artillery regiment. Similarly, the I (Serbian (Occupation) and II (Thrace) Corps were also bereft of corps artillery at formation. The lack of artillery for these forces, particularly II Corps which could theoretically be called upon to face a conventional foe, combined with the archaic weaponry fielded by the four army artillery regiments, finally forced the Germans to act with military aid in 1942.

In late 1941 the Bulgarians presented Berlin with their first "shopping list" and it included 180 light field howitzers (105mm, 40 for motor traction, 140 for horse), 28 heavy field howitzers (150mm, for motor traction), 8 medium field guns (105mm, for motor traction), and 8 heavy howitzers (210mm, for motor traction). The Germans agreed to provide the required equipment, using 105mm leFH18 howitzers, 155mm ex-French M17 howitzers, 105mm K.39 guns and 220mm ex-French howitzers.

The 105mm howitzers were delivered during March-May 1942, with the 220mm howitzers arriving in the later half of that period as well. The 155mm howitzers arrived in July. In late 1942 some 44 150mm sFH18 weapons were delivered. The 1943 plan added a further 192 105mm leFH18 howitzers and 24 captured ex-Soviet 122mm M1931 guns. In parallel with the acquisition of these new weapons, the Germans also set about equipping and training a target acquisition battery for each army artillery regiment, consisting of a sound-ranging platoon, a flash-ranging platoon, and a plotting platoon.

By mid-1943 an army artillery regiment had the following nominal composition:

- Regiment HQ
- Target Acquisition Battery
- Mountain Artillery Battalion
 - three batteries, each [4 75mm mtn guns]
- Light Field Howitzer Battalion
 - three batteries, each [4 105mm howitzers]
- Motorized Light Field Howitzer Battalion
 - three batteries, each [4 105mm howitzers]
- Motorized Field Gun Battalion
 - three batteries, each [4 105mm guns]
- Motorized Heavy Field Howitzer Battalion
 - two batteries, each [4 150mm howitzers]

This pattern appears to have been followed fairly closely in practice, the main deviation being that the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Army Artillery Regiments each had a second motorized heavy field howitzer, probably equipped with the 155mm ex-French weapons.

Other initiatives were underway to improve the field army support efforts as well. In the spring of 1942 five independent anti-tank battalions were activated, one for each home army and one, surprisingly, for the 5th Army in Macedonia as well. The logic for providing the 5th Army, engaged in anti-partisan duties, with an anti-tank battalion but not a field artillery component is not clear. Initially, an army AT battalion was to be a fully motorized formation with three companies each with twelve 37mm Skoda guns. In fact, however, trucks were not available in sufficient numbers so for most of 1942 each battalion consisted of one motorized company and two horse-drawn companies.

By 1943 the 37mm Skoda was obsolete, its only remaining virtue being that its light weight made it suitable for use with front-line infantry. This was not an important consideration for corps-level units, however, and a replacement had to be found. The Plan 43 arms transfer included 280 75mm AT guns, 180 standard German Pak.40 weapons and 100 ex-French guns refitted as AT weapons as Pak.97/38. These were delivered in the second half of 1943 and early 1944. Half of the more powerful Pak.40s were allocated to reequip the army AT battalions on a scale of three 6-gun companies per battalion. The five battalions, now fully motorized, seem to have been reorganized and reequipped in the summer and autumn of 1943.

The army pioneer battalions were also modernized. Each company received nine light MGs to enable them to carry out assault tasks. The battalion's bridging columns were also to be modernized, but this turned out to be a slow process. At the start of the war the army pioneer battalion's bridging column was provided with German First World War pontoon bridging equipment capable of carrying a 7-ton load over 66 meters or 2.5

tons over 120 meters. This was sufficient for a horse-drawn army with light equipment but motorization made these bridges obsolete. Plans called for the replacement of these units with new German "Type B" bridging sets capable of carrying 20 tons over 100 meters. The first set was delivered to the 2nd Army Pioneer Battalion in May 1942 but no further sets arrived.

Another component of the field army was its signal battalion. This unit consisted of three wire companies, a telephone operating company, and a radio company and had a total strength of 24 officers, 75 NCOs and 725 other ranks. For transport it had 85 two-horse wagons, 21 commercial-type 4x2 trucks, a single field car, and 40 motorcycles. The battalion had a total of 300 km of "semi-permanent" (very heavy) wire which the three wire companies used to run lines to the subordinate divisions, the army artillery regiment, and any attached cavalry HQ. The heavy cable was slow to unwind, especially from the horse-drawn wagons used, and this, combined with the limited quantity available, generally limited the corps net to a single line between the army HQ and each subordinate HQ. The radio company comprised a radio platoon and a motorcycle messenger platoon. The radio platoon provided three 100W transceivers to the Army HQ and one more to each subordinate division, as well as to the army artillery regiment HQ and, if present, the cavalry HQ.

In January 1942 the army announced plans to modernize its field army signal battalions. Each wire company would get six trucks to speed their operations and the telephone operating company two more. The battalion would also get 300 km of German heavy field cable and an additional 54 km of "semi-permanent" cable. This, it was hoped, would speed up the installation process so that not only would the battalion be more responsive in a mobile situation, but also permit redundant communications to be established. It is not known whether this program was implemented, but it seems likely that it was.

The increased German deliveries of arms and equipment meant that the field army base elements could be expanded to that shown in table [] by mid-1944. Although much improved over its 1941 predecessor several points should be noted. First, the artillery component was equipped with weapons that in most other armies would have been divisional. Second, the corps included no reconnaissance units. In theory, GHQ cavalry regiments could have been used, but these were usually attached to infantry divisions in Greece to act as a mobile combat force. Third, communications were still tied primarily to landlines, with the lack of responsiveness inherent in that system.

Another factor to be considered is that only the home armies (i.e., 1-4) had this level of support. The 5th Army's base consisted simply of an anti-tank battalion and a signal battalion. The two corps were little better off. I (Serbian Occupation) Corps, starting in early 1944, was provided with an artillery regiment HQ that commanded a single

Army Headquarters

Signal Battalion (828)

Infantry Replacement Regiment (3,320)

Regiment HQ & Company

Three Infantry Battalions, each

Battalion Headquarters

Three Rifle Companies, each

Machine Gun Company

Mortar Company

Mortar Company

Anti-Tank Company

[9 LMG, 3 50mm Mort]

[12 MG, 2 20mm ATR]

[6 81mm Mort]

[9 81mm Mort]

[6 37mm AT]

Army Artillery Regiment (4,045)

Regiment Headquarters

Observation Battery

Mountain Artillery Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Three Batteries, each

[2 MG, 4 75mm Mtn Guns]

Light Field Howitzer Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Three Batteries, each

[2 MG, 4 105mm How]

Motorized Light Field Howitzer Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Three Batteries, each

[2 MG, 4 105mm How]

Motorized Light Field Howitzer Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Three Batteries, each

[2 MG, 4 122mm How]

Motorized Heavy Field Howitzer Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Three Batteries, each

[2 MG, 4 150mm How]

Motorized Field Gun Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Three Batteries, each

[2 MG, 4 105mm Guns]

Anti-Tank Battalion (mot) (422)

Battalion Headquarters

Three Companies, each

[3 LMG, 6 75mm AT]

Pioneer Regiment (1,103)

Regiment Headquarters

Pioneer Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Two Pioneer Companies, each

Assault Pioneer Company

[9 LMG]

[10 flamethrowers]

Bridging Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

Bridge Construction Company

Bridging Column

Air Reconnaissance Group (885)

Labor Battalion (2,033)

Transport Battalion

Battalion Headquarters

One or Two Motor Transport Companies, each (360-ton)

Three Horse Transport Columns, each (6-ton)

Medical Group

Supply Group

Maintenance Group

Total Strength 14,116 officers & enlisted

FIELD ARMY BASE, JULY 1944

mountain artillery battalion provided with twelve ex-French 105mm pack howitzers. Other elements included a signal company, a pioneer battalion and logistics units. II Corps in Greek Thrace included two coastal artillery regiments, two AA battalions and a naval infantry battalion for coastal defense, but for field operations had only two signal companies, a security battalion and no pioneer troops, along with a very slim proportion of logistics elements. A II Corps Artillery Regiment led an on-again-off-again existence but only to command artillery battalions that had been pulled from subordinate divisions.

Coast Artillery

The coastal artillery pre-war had been formed into two regiments, one with six batteries based at Varna and the other with eight batteries based at Burgas. Their equipment and strength is unknown.⁹

With the decision to annex Greek Thrace the requirement arose for additional coast defense units to guard the Aegean coast. Two regiments were formed, probably in 1943, using primarily ex-French guns delivered by Germany. They were unnumbered and known by the location of their HQ, the "Kawalla" Regiment (Greek Kavalla) and the "Dedeagotsch" Regiment (Greek Alexandroupolis).

The two regiments were a mixture of Bulgarian and German units. Their organization was as follows (with German units shown in parentheses):

Kawalla Regiment

I Battalion (Kawalla)

one battery [2 MG, 3 37mm AT, 4 105mm ex-French guns]

two batteries, ea [2 MG, 2 50mm AT, 2 75mm guns, 4 155mm ex-French guns]

one battery [3 MG, 3 37mm AT, 2 50mm AT, 2 75mm guns, 4 220mm ex-French guns]

II Battalion (Orfano)

one battery [2 MG, 2 20mm AA, 2 50mm AT, 4 105mm ex-French guns]

one battery [2 MG, 2 20mm AA, 2 50mm AT, 4 105mm ex-Yugoslav guns]

one battery [2 MG, 6 155mm ex-French guns]

(+ *one German battery with four 122mm ex-Soviet guns*)

(+ *one German battery with four 152mm ex-Soviet guns*)

IV Battalion (Keramotti)

one battery [1 MG, 3 105mm ex-French howitzers]

one battery [9 MG, 2 75mm guns, 4 105mm ex-French howitzers]

one battery [6 MG, 4 105mm ex-French howitzers]

Dedeagotsch Regiment

III Battalion (Porto Lago)

one battery [3 MG, 3 37mm AT, 2 75mm guns, 6 105mm ex-French guns]

one battery [3 MG, 3 37mm AT, 2 75mm guns, 4 105mm ex-French guns]

⁹British intelligence in 1941 reported the Bulgarian inventory to consist of twenty 75mm Krupp M04 guns, two 100mm Schneider long M89 guns, ten 105mm M02 Russian guns, two 220mm Krupp guns and four 250mm M03/D45 guns. There has been no confirmation of these numbers or types.

(+ two German batteries each with four 122mm ex-Soviet guns)
(+ one German battery with four 105mm ex-Yugoslav guns]
(829th German Coast Artillery Battalion) (Dedeagotsch)
one battery [3 MG, 3 37mm AT, 2 75mm guns, 4 105mm ex-French guns]
one battery [3 MG, 3 37mm AT, 2 50mm AT, 2 75mm guns, 6 105mm ex-French guns]
one battery [3 MG, 3 37mm AT, 2 50mm AT, 2 75mm guns, 6 155mm ex-French guns]
one battery [2 50mm AT, 4 220mm ex-French guns]
(+ one German battery with four 105mm ex-Yugoslav guns)
(+ one German battery with four 122mm ex-Soviet guns)

These units were protected by two anti-aircraft battalions, each consisting of a searchlight battery, a light AA battery, and two 4-gun 88mm AA batteries. There were some differences between the two battalions: in one the searchlight battery was equipped with nine 150cm lights and the light battery with nine 20mm AA guns; in the other, the searchlight battery had eight 60cm lights and the light battery had fifteen 20mm guns.

The coastal and AA units in Greece were, of course, pulled out along with II Corps after Bulgaria declared war on Germany.

Anti-Aircraft – A Question Mark

Little is known of Bulgarian anti-aircraft forces. British intelligence estimated in January 1941 that the Bulgarian home defense AA command was formed into four groups, one in each army area. These were the 1st AA Group (Sofia), 2nd AA Group (originally in 4th Army, moved to Kazanlak in 2nd Army), 3rd AA Group (Plovdiv) and 4th AA Group (Shumen). These controlled a total of 18 heavy AA batteries, each with four 88mm guns. They also estimated the presence of 61 light AA batteries, each with six 20mm guns.

It would seem that this estimate was not far off the mark, for in November 1944 German intelligence reported that the Bulgarian AA force consisted of the 1st (unlocated, probably Sofia), 2nd (Kazenlak), 3rd (Jambol) and 4th (Gorno Orechowitza) Anti-Aircraft Regiments. The 1st Regiment was said to consist of 15 batteries and the others of 8-10 batteries apiece. Each battery was estimated to consist of 110 men in a headquarters/observation platoon and two firing platoons, the latter each consisting of three 10-man gun squads