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Monday, Apr. 14, 1941

World War: BALKAN THEATER: Soul v. Steel

The campaign of 1941, the awful convulsion, began last week.

As usual the announcement of intention to attack came after the attack. At 5:15 a.m. the Germans struck. At 5:30 o'clock the German Minister to Athens, Viktor Prinz zu Erbach-Schönberg, presented a note to the Greek Government announcing that, because of the wicked British, it would be necessary to attack Greece. As usual the German High Command announced that Yugoslav and British troops having advanced against them, it had been necessary to "counter-attack."

The Yugoslavs reacted to this nonsense by marching to battle with song. The Greeks, who have tasted the fruits of valor, answered not only with gunfire but with taunts and with determination. They shouted a new version of the classic boast: "We shall throw them into the sea—into the Baltic Sea." They talked a little prematurely of the day the war would end—when Evzones would march through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

The King said to his people: "All together, men, women, children of Hellenes, rise up, clench your fists, stand at my side. . . . Forward, sons of Hellas, in the fight for body and soul!" A spokesman said: "Greece will fight on, no matter what odds are thrown against her, because she has a soul which can never be extinguished." And the Yugoslavs sang a sad old song: Dusa Moja—My Soul.

But soul is softer than steel. The steel teeth of the German Army struck into Yugoslavia and Greece from many directions with many techniques—with divebombing, parachute troops, tanks, mobile artillery, mechanized infantry. One group of attacks (see map) was concentrated on the relatively flat plains of northern Yugoslavia.

But the heaviest and by far the more important drives were farther south. Through the mountains from Sofia to Nish and Skoplje went drives intended to cut the vital Vardar Valley and divide the Yugoslavs from the Greeks. And down the Struma River valley towards Salonika went another drive to break the Greeks' back and roll the British into the sea.

The defenders, though they stressed they were "fighting against forces ten times superior and against mechanical implements one hundred times greater," were not idle. The British at once announced what most of the world had long known: that they had already established a considerable force in Greece.

The Germans' weakest point on the Bulgarian-Greek Front was supply—only one single-track railway. The R.A.F. and the Greek and Yugoslav Air Forces concentrated on supply lines, and daring Yugoslav engineers braved air attacks to impede traffic by sinking four cement-laden barges in the Danube, at the Iron Gate, where the channel is very narrow.

The first day, the Germans claimed they had advanced 18 to 25 miles in northern Yugoslavia. In the Struma Valley they admitted stubborn resistance. To the Greeks, that was gross understatement. They claimed that they were piling the valley high with German dead.

The second day, the Yugoslavs drove the Italians out of Scutari, Albania, and took the Italian-held island of Zara in the Adriatic.

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