

Good News From AFSOUTH

By Jac Weller



An assessment

GREECE and Turkey were admitted to NATO on 18 February 1952; both countries have received US military aid since 1948. Americans were glad to have two more allies in our defensive alliance against Communism, but many of us missed the strategic importance of the area. Some were vaguely troubled by having more territory to defend.

A lengthy visit to the Mediterranean area recently was reassuring. Far from being a liability, NATO's right flank may be its greatest strategic asset. Can Russia risk sending hundreds of Bloc divisions west so long as the Soviet homeland is open to attack from the south? Turkey and Greece stretch for 1,300 miles below Russia-in-Europe. Moscow is only 1,100 miles north of the center of Turkey.

The US has spent billions of dollars in this area, but both countries now are economically and po-

litically much improved. Their hatred for Communism and Russia is real; their armies are modern, tough, and ready.

The outlet from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean through the Dardanelles is under Turkish control. Sea lanes to the west pass through the Greek islands. Russia, both Czarist and Communist, has tried for at least joint control of this area for centuries, but still lacks a single warm water port with access to the oceans of the world in time of war.

Both the Turkish bases and the Dardanelles must be held. The long right flank of NATO stretches from the Adriatic almost to the Caspian. Its defense on land is the primary responsibility of "Land South East," the NATO command in Izmir (formerly Smyrna) on the western coast of Turkey. NATO, US, and British air and naval forces throughout the Mediterranean would, of course,

of the military capabilities of NATO's right flank nations



cooperate, but Bloc armies sweeping south would have to be stopped mainly by Greek and Turkish ground forces supported by available forces of the Italian army. In recent NATO maneuvers, US battle groups were flown from America to this area in a few hours. US and British Marines also cooperated. But if war comes, Anglo-American aid will be limited by other commitments.

The NATO right flank is naturally strong. The Black Sea covers more than half the front; rugged mountains lie close behind most of the coastline and along the Turkey-in-Europe and Greek boundaries with Communist nations to the north. To the east, the area between the Black and Caspian Seas is also mountainous and most unfavorable for armor. Throughout the entire length of this position, infantry is of primary importance. Companies and battalions would be operating frequently in country so rugged that even their

organic support weapons would have trouble moving.

The Turkish and Greek armies have carefully prepared themselves for the defense of this area and are ready to begin at a moment's notice. Surprise is virtually impossible, even across the Black Sea because of modern electronic equipment manned in part by US personnel. Our allies here have the necessary artillery and mechanized forces to defend the relatively small areas suitable for attack by armor, but infantry is usually more important. Let's look carefully at these troops, particularly at the weapons, organization, and tactics of infantry battalions and companies. They differ from each other widely, but have been built up after careful review of terrain, national capacities, and previous experience.

We should remember that Greece, Italy, and Turkey have fought each other in the past. There

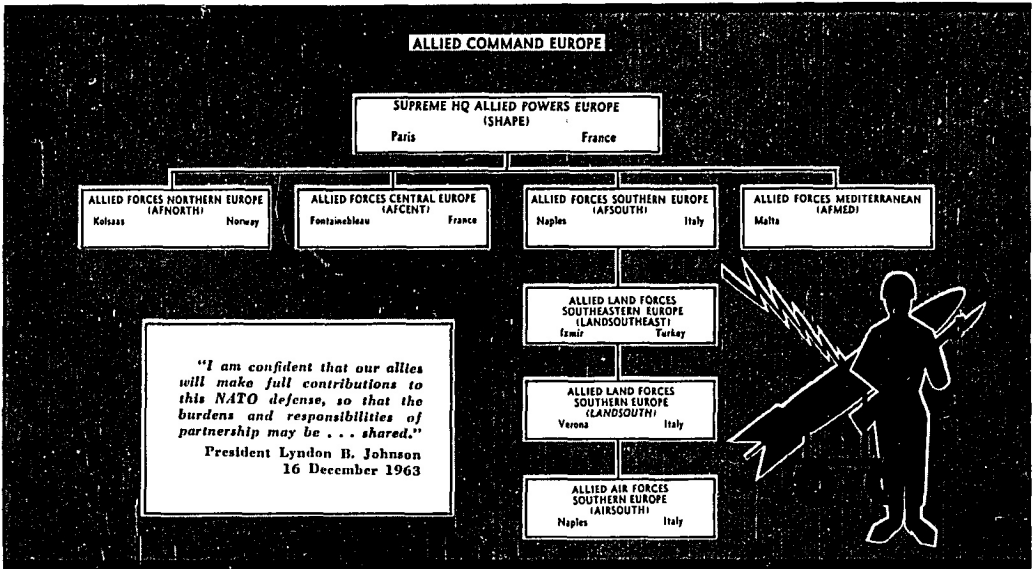


Chart shows relationship of AFSOUTH to SHAPE and other NATO commands

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is still animosity in the hearts of some towards enemies of a generation or two ago. But there is no question of the sincere desire of all three to cooperate against their common enemy. Greek and Turkish units have maneuvered in harmony for extended periods without friction. The soldiers of one nation have been commanded by generals of the other and performed their duty without incident. Italian units have formed parts of all major NATO maneuvers recently. Constant intercourse between the armed forces of these three nations at various NATO headquarters and in the field has made them more than allies; with US and British help, they have become friends.

Defense of Greece

In the event of war, a Bloc theatre commander would undoubtedly consider an attack on Greece where the country is narrow; a penetration into the Greek islands would seriously compromise the NATO position. But this border is one of the most rugged in the world. The Greeks won their Bandit War (1946-49) against Communist enemies in this area. They know it well and are prepared both materially and spiritually to defend their mountains. They realize that they may have to face attacks from across the border as well as in rear areas where long absent Greek Communists

might be dropped along with weapons and supplies. They are confident they can hold.

The Greeks have done more than merely accept US arms, motor transport, and munitions. They have chosen carefully those pieces of equipment which fit their needs and then have assimilated them into their own organizations. With unusual forbearance, they have resisted the temptation to over-arm and become immobile. In general, support weapons are one Echelon higher in the Greek army than in our own.

The Greek general staff has closed gaps in the Salonica area with their limited armored forces, anti-tank missiles, artillery, and mine fields. This territory alone is suitable for a Communist mechanized attack; the Germans used it successfully in 1941, but the Communists would have a much tougher time today. Elsewhere, the mountains are unbelievably rugged. The Greeks have preferred to receive from us natural mules from Missouri—they call them "Trumans"—rather than the mechanical variety. One sizeable area called the "Home of the Devil" successfully defied the Turkish occupation of the rest of the country for hundreds of years.

Greek infantry weapons and tactics are essentially those which worked best in their Bandit War. Only the British in Malaya have done as well since 1945. The Greeks know their country and are specially armed and equipped to fight



Map shows strategic position of AFSOUTH nations in relation to Soviet bloc

there, or in neighboring Turkey.

A Greek infantry division follows the old triangular concept with a support unit at each level. There are three rifle regiments per division and three rifle battalions per regiment. A rifle battalion is composed of 750 men divided into a weapons company and three rifle companies; it is the basic tactical unit of the Greek army. Companies, platoons, and even squads can operate independently when required, but the Greek battalion is the smallest unit that would be continuously employed semi-independently.

The weapons company has four 57mm recoilless rifles, six 81mm mortars, four US Cal. 30 tripod-mounted medium MGs (M-1919A4s), and nine 3.5 inch rocket launchers. The presence of this last weapon at battalion level is unusual in NATO, but was a sound decision for the Greek Army. The rocket launcher is, of course, basically an anti-tank weapon. Battalion commanders know well the terrain over which they will fight and are the best judges of where these weapons will be needed.

Each rifle company is composed of 154 men divided into three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon armed with three US Cal. .30 bipod and butt stock-mounted medium MGs (M-1919A6s), and three 60mm mortars. Each rifle platoon consists of 36 men divided into three rifle squads plus a lightly armed headquarters section. The rifle squads are composed of 10 men and occasionally

have two squad automatic rifles (ARs). In most Greek terrain, however, three ARs—one in each squad—are about all that a really mobile platoon can carry with it and supply with ammo.

Greek Small Arms

Until 1948, the Greek army was using British weapons. The navy and air force are still supplied with British small arms; even the army is using them in part for training purposes because of the enormous stocks of .303 British cartridges on hand. But the army was delighted to shift to US arms. British two-inch and three-inch mortars were relatively inaccurate; the .303 Vickers HMG was just too heavy for Greek terrain.

All rifles in active duty units at the present time are US M-1s. The US BAR is the only squad AR presently issued to active duty infantry. US M-1 Thompsons are carried by squad leaders and some other men in each rifle company. But these are essentially prestige weapons; the fighting, save at short range, is to be done with the BARs and Garands. Pistols are more popular in the Greek army than in others because of the personal nature of much of the Bandit War. A variety of US and British models is presently issued.

Greek Infantry Tactics

Greek officers and NCOs are taught that the most important factor in all operations is terrain.

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In both offense and defense, they must first know every foot of their fighting area. Because of Greek terrain, organic mortars are not concentrated so often on a single point as in other services. Each mortar usually has an individual target, or a series of them. The Cal. 30 MGs are placed in accordance with terrain, but with particular emphasis on criss-crossing fields of fire from unit flanks.

A company would normally begin its assault with two rifle platoons in line and the third in reserve. The two assaulting platoons would usually have all three squads in line. The fire tactics of the individual squads would depend on whether there were one or two BARs in the unit. The two-BAR squads would leapfrog forward with their two separate fire teams moving alternately. In the more numerous one-BAR squad, this weapon would cover the advance of the riflemen who would then all fire so the BAR could get forward.

On defense, a company would normally assume a six-rifle squad line and have three in reserve (one from each platoon or a complete platoon according to circumstances). They would pay particular attention to fields of fire for the BARs and MGs, which would interlock in front of their main position so as to cover as thoroughly as possible the entire front. Organic support weapons would be zeroed in for a defensive barrage as soon as a front line was definitely established. At night, all these arms would be left so that fire could be called down in a few seconds.

Greek infantry can operate along guerrilla lines, as they did in their Bandit War. In such conflicts, they appreciate thoroughly the advantages of small offensive victories, which depend upon proper intelligence, aggressive planning, and speedy execution.

Defense of Turkey

The Turks would defend their Bulgarian border in much the same manner as the Greeks would theirs; both are mountainous and rugged. Greece and Turkey would cooperate effectively in joint operations in Europe.

Turkey-in-Asia is a much larger problem. The Black Sea coast and the common border with Russia far to the east stretch for more than 1,000 miles. But it's essentially the same type of terrain. Defending a beach under modern concentrations of bombs, missiles, rockets, and artillery projectiles may be next to impossible. Behind the coast, however, there are mountains as rugged as those close to Bulgaria. To the east, the Russian border country is wild and desolate. The Turkish army would hold this long front with the type of forces most appropriate to local terrain and the composition of Bloc forces attacking. Turkish armor and heavy artillery are adequate



Italian soldier with Beretta SMG



for the country where they can operate, but supported infantry is more important.

Turkish Infantry Organization

The Turkish army has recently reconstituted its divisions on a "Pentomic" plan. Details of their organization differ from the US pattern in that assignment of tanks and light artillery to the five battle groups is not so definite. Each regiment, the Turkish equivalent of a battle group, may include a company of tanks (17) and a battery of 105mm howitzers. But a lot of border terrain is unsuitable for them. Unless the country is fairly open, division commanders will keep these units for general support. More than half the long frontier, including the southern coast of the Black Sea, may be defended by infantry battle groups operating without their tanks and guns.

The combat elements of a Turkish regiment are five rifle companies, one weapons company, and a reconnaissance platoon. Total personnel runs about 1,500 men. The weapons company has 12 jeep-mounted 106mm recoilless rifles and six motorized 4.2-inch mortars. The reconnaissance platoon has two 75mm recoilless rifles, one 81mm mortar, and, if terrain permits, some lightly armored vehicles.

A rifle company consists of 189 officers and men of whom 10 are in the headquarters section, 41 in the weapons platoon, and 46 in each of the three rifle platoons. The headquarters section has four 3.5-inch rocket launchers. The weapons platoon has three 57mm recoilless rifles and three 81mm mortars, as well as personal weapons consisting of 12 pistols and 29 rifles. Each rifle platoon is composed of three rifle squads and a weapons squad. The weapons squad of 11 men is armed with two Cal. 30 MMGs (M-1919A6) and a 3.5-in rocket launcher. Personal weapons consist of six rifles and five pistols.

Each rifle squad is made up of 11 men, including a squad leader and two fire teams of five men



Turkish infantrymen: "They can and will attack."

each armed with one AR and four rifles, one capable of launching grenades. The squad leaders on the border have rifles, although some in Ankara carry SMGs.

The Turkish rifle company is one of the most powerful direct fire units in NATO. Their squad is the only standard two-AR squad in NATO other than our own. The two Cal .30 MMGs in each infantry platoon backing up six ARs would provide a real advantage against, for instance, a Russian platoon which has nothing but intermediate power small arms. Turkish platoon arms and ammunition are heavier, of course, but don't have to be carried so far.

Turkish Small Arms

All weapons in the Turkish army from the platoon MGs up are standard US arms. ARs and below, however, are predominately Turkish. The nation has a considerable small arms manufacturing potential: 7.62 NATO ammo is being produced and exported. The Turks have chosen to continue to make and use their own rifles and ARs chambered for the 7.92mm Mauser cartridge. They prefer a Turkish version of the Mauser bolt rifle, which is both sturdier and more accurate than the used US M-1s available for comparison purposes.

Squad ARs in Turkey are of two types. The Hotchkiss is French designed, but Turkish made; these are more common. There are also some Czech Brno ARs similar to the British Bren. Both types are relatively heavy—25 pounds plus loaded—but deliver accurate bursts with great reliability. Disassembly and cleaning, almost a fetish in the Turkish army, are simple and easy.

SMGs are not issued regularly in infantry companies; they are used in armored and artillery units and in infantry reconnaissance platoons. The Turks feel that they are valuable for some special operations but not for regular combat. The British Sten firing the 9mm Parabellum Luger cart-

ridge, and the US M-1 Thompson chambering the .45 ACP, are available in considerable quantities.

The Turks are presently manufacturing a semi-automatic pistol similar to the German Walther police model (PP) which was used extensively by the German army during WWII. All I saw were chambered for the .380 ACP, called the 9mm Browning in Europe. This weapon is light, compact, and sufficiently powerful for personal defense. The Turks say that no pistol is satisfactory for infantry combat, but point out that some members of heavy weapons crews can carry more ammunition if they are not burdened with rifles.

Turkish Infantry Tactics

In the larger sense, the Turkish army will be on the defensive if a shooting war starts. Their NATO mission is to keep Bloc forces out of Turkey and to hold the Dardanelles. An overall defensive does not, however, preclude regiment, division, and corps attacks. The Turkish infantry with its love of cold steel at close quarters is well qualified for this type of combat. Their organic mortars, recoilless rifles, MMGs, and rocket launchers give numerous fire teams ample cover in the usual leapfrog daylight attack patterns. Night, bad weather, and difficult terrain hold no terrors for Turks. They can and will attack.

On the other hand, the tactical thinking of the Turkish army indicates a slight preference for defense. This is based, no doubt, on their national character. As Britain and France found out when they were the allies of Russia in WWI, no soldiers anywhere could fight more stubbornly than the Turks did in Gallipoli, even in the face of apparently impossible logistic disadvantages. In Korea, they just wouldn't give up a foot.

The Turks prefer to occupy a series of strong points rather than a continuous line of trenches. In such a defensive alignment they rely, until an enemy approaches within relatively close range, on their ARs and MMGs. Their mortars, like their howitzers if they are available, will be directed by forward observers using the latest type US communications equipment. Recoilless rifles will normally be held for targets of considerable value because their blast to the rear gives away their position with the first shot.

Italian Infantry Organization and Small Arms

The Italian army is potentially even larger than that of Turkey. In some ways, it is better adapted to come quickly to the assistance of the primary defenders of the NATO right flank than any other in Europe. Its ability to do this in real force would depend, however, on whether there were attacks on Italy. If Yugoslavia and Austria were allowed to remain neutral, NATO commanders would be able to use a substantial part of the Italian army in Greece and Turkey.

An Italian infantry division is composed of

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three regiments consisting of three battalions each. There are separate supporting elements at each level. A battalion is composed of three companies plus a heavy weapons company with six 81mm mortars and four 107mm recoilless rifles, all motorized. A rifle company consists of 124 men divided into three rifle platoons, company headquarters, and a heavy weapons platoon which has two Breda HMGs, two 57mm recoilless rifles, and two 60mm mortars.

The Beretta SMG is the most numerous weapon in the Italian army. Their "rifle" squad consists of seven men armed with four SMGs, two US M-1 rifles, and one US BAR. This unique small arms distribution leads to changes in tactics and effectiveness. Offensively, the SMGs and liberally issued hand grenades give a considerable assault potential. Defensively, the BAR and the two M-1s will need the support of crew-served heavy weapons available at company and battalion level. The SMG in Italy is effective only at the shortest ranges because of the power of the cartridge, the difficulty of directing the weapon precisely, and the fact that training emphasizes instinctive pointing at below eye level rather than aiming.

The Italian army prefers its Breda HMG to ours for the weapons platoon of each rifle company, even though an additional type of ammunition (7.92 Mauser) is required. This weapon is effective in long bursts and is accurate because of its weight (about 85 pounds) and relatively low cyclic rate (about 450 rpm).

The Beretta SMG is not often seen outside Italy. There are several different but essentially similar models, all easily identified by the two separate triggers. All are straight blowback actions and fire the 9mm Parabellum (Luger) cartridge. They have permanently attached wooden stocks, but do not now take bayonets. They weigh between nine and 10 pounds loaded and are usually 31 inches long.

I fired a Beretta extensively. The two-trigger arrangement has definite advantages. Fast single shots at 100 yards can be delivered with consider-

able accuracy with the front trigger, if one aims the weapon like a hunting rifle. This is not, however, the standard way of firing the weapon in the Italian army. They prefer "squirt" fire, although targets even at close range never have as many holes in them as recruits expect.

The rear trigger gives these bursts. Because of its weight and a good muzzle brake, it holds well in full-automatic fire. I was able to place every shot of a single 30-round burst on a life-sized silhouette at 20 meters. The weapon could be improved, however, by lowering its cyclic rate below the present 700 rpm. Young soldiers who have little experience with firearms would benefit particularly from such a change.

The standard pistols in the Italian army are the well-known Beretta semi-automatics first made before WWII. These are chambered for the .380 ACP, and are light (weight loaded 25 ounces), compact weapons, well-made and nicely finished. Because of the forward projection on the bottom of the magazine, they feel good in the hand.

The Italian army may be called on to fight anywhere in Europe and is more flexible than either the Greeks or the Turkish armies. The relatively small, lightly armed Italian platoons and companies suggest, however, a preoccupation with the type of combat in which they were engaged from 1943 through the end of WWII. This was largely conducted in the mountains and not usually on formal lines. The Italian offensive capacity would be most welcome, if the primary NATO defenders of Greece and Turkey had brought their assailants to a stand and were ready to roll them back.

Conclusions

The right flank of NATO is good news. NATO bases there must be thorns in the bottom of the Kremlin. If we are worried about Castro's Cuba, think how much more carefully the Russians have to consider what NATO has in Turkey. Ankara is closer to Moscow than Havana is to Washington.

The tough infantry units of our three allies in the area are most impressive. They will fight differently, but all will be effective. The Greeks and Turks will be particularly tough—for they will be defending their homelands. US ♣ MC

a la General

♣ Soon after taking command of the 2d Marine Division, Gen "Chesty" Puller was scheduled to inspect our battalion. The battalion commander asked me what was scheduled on the menu for that day. I replied, "Chicken a-la-king, sir!" The Colonel pondered whether we should try and get permission to serve steak instead—but then decided to go ahead with the scheduled meal.

On the day of the inspection, when Gen Puller entered the mess for lunch, he immediately asked me, "What's for chow today, Lieutenant?" "Chicken a-la-king, sir!" I replied.

The general looked surprised and said, "Well, good; I was beginning to think that all these mess halls ever served was steak."

\$15.00 to Capt L. P. Charon