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# Opening Waldheim's File

New charges about the handling of partisans, Jews and British POW's

**T**hey were dashing and brave and heartbreakingly young. On April 5, 1944, the team of seven British commandos and three Greek Resistance fighters set out in a fishing boat to raid the Aegean islands of Khalki and Alimnia, which were occupied by the Germans. Then something went wrong; German patrol boats captured the raiders and took them to Rhodes for questioning. On April 24 a report on the interrogation was sent to a German Army intelligence unit known as Group Ic/AO based near Salonika on the Greek mainland. There an officer initialed the document with the letter W. Two days later Ic/AO reported to higher headquarters that further interrogation would be "fruitless" and asked whether the prisoners should be turned over to the SD, the Nazi secret service. The reply came on April 27: Ic/AO was ordered to turn over most of the prisoners to the SD for "special handling"—the euphemism for execution. The victims were never heard from again.

According to a growing pile of documentary evidence, the officer responsible for handling those reports in Ic/AO was First Lt. Kurt Waldheim, the former United Nations secretary-general who now is running for president of Austria. For 40 years Waldheim lied about his military record, claiming that he had been mustered out of Hitler's army after he was wounded on the Russian front in late 1941. Then it was revealed that Waldheim had served in Greece and Yugoslavia from early 1942 until the end of the war. The postwar Yugoslav government even accused him of war crimes, though it did not press the charge. Waldheim retreated in disarray, changing his story as new facts emerged. First he said he had been nothing more than an interpreter, then he claimed that his intelligence work was mere paper shuffling. Waldheim insisted that he knew nothing about many of the atrocities that had occurred all around him in the Balkans.

**'Special tasks':** But the evidence that is emerging now, mostly from wartime archives stored in the United States, leads almost inescapably to the conclusion that Waldheim must have known. Documents examined by NEWSWEEK suggest that his reporting on partisan activity triggered reprisals against Yugoslav civilians. While Waldheim was on duty his intelligence unit



The evidence suggested that he must have known: Looking for votes in Austria

received reports about the deportation of Greek Jews, most of whom ultimately were sent to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Waldheim says, through a spokesman, that he does not recall specific reports about British commandos or reprisals in Yugoslavia. But an Army table of organization says Waldheim's assignment from April 1944 until the end of the war was to keep track of POW interrogations and "special tasks," a phrase that commonly covered executions, torture and the taking of hostages.

Earlier this year Israel and the United States were allowed to examine the secret U.N. War Crimes Commission file on Waldheim, the gist of which soon leaked into the press. Now NEWSWEEK has obtained a copy

of the seven-page document, which is dated Feb. 19, 1948, and records the Yugoslav complaint against Waldheim. The commission charges that Waldheim was "responsible" for reprisals in Yugoslavia because his unit passed on the orders for those actions. The crimes it accuses him of are listed as "putting hostages to death" and "murder." This is not a finding of guilt, but the commission does say it is "satisfied that there is, or will be at the time of trial, sufficient evidence to justify [his] prosecution."

Despite the U.N. report, Waldheim was never prosecuted. So far there is no evidence that he personally committed any atrocities, and his former commanding officer says the young lieutenant had no au-

thority to order such actions by others. Group Ic/AO, attached to the headquarters of Army Group E in the Balkans, did not conduct interrogations or perform executions itself. But it was Waldheim's job to know what was going on—to monitor and route and sometimes to compose the documents that recorded Nazi atrocities. "He was well informed on almost all aspects of the Nazi occupation in the Balkans," charges Hagen Fleischer, a German historian at the University of Crete who specializes in wartime Greek records. "Consequently, he preferred to erase those three years from his résumé."

The British commandos are a new addition to the Waldheim file. The raiders belonged to an elite unit called the Special Boat Squadron [SBS], which waged a very personal, small-scale war in the Mediterranean. "They were on what we used to call an alarm-and-dependency raid, which meant going up to German barracks on Greek islands and killing everybody inside," says British historian Barrie Pitt, himself a wartime SBS veteran. The party was led by Capt. Hugh William Blyth, 31, with Sub-Lt. Allen Lane Tuckey, 21, in command of the fishing boat. After his capture Blyth was separated from the rest of the men and was the only one to survive. By June 6 the others had been subjected to "special handling," the treatment Hitler had ordered for British commandos, even those in uniform.

**'Very correct work':** The following July two more British commandos and an American medic were captured. One commando died of his wounds in a military hospital while the other was handed over to the secret police. The American, James Doughty, was sent to a POW camp and survived the war. The disposition of this case also was reported to Waldheim's headquarters, and the paper was initialed with a W. There is no proof that Waldheim actually read the document, but wartime records establish that he was on duty at the time and that it was his job to read such documents. Waldheim's boss, former Lt. Col. Herbert Warnstorff, told NEWSWEEK's Debbie Seward that the young officer always "did what he was supposed to do—very correct work."

At times, according to Warnstorff, Waldheim's job took him into the field with Gen. Alexander Löhr, a fellow Austrian who later was hanged for war crimes. One field trip may have occurred in July 1942, when German troops massacred and imprisoned thousands of Yugoslav partisans and civilians in the Kozara Mountains. Waldheim received a medal for "merit under enemy fire." He has said that the award was purely "routine," but investigators from the World Jewish Congress charge that of the 20,000 troops in the operation, Waldheim was one of only two who received the medal.

Back at his desk Waldheim had ample



Yugoslavia, 1943: The lieutenant (center) in the field

opportunity to read other incriminating documents. Investigators say he almost certainly knew that Italian soldiers in Greece were rounded up by the Germans for deportation to labor camps after Italy's surrender in 1943. During Waldheim's years in Greece thousands of Jews also were rounded up, including nearly all of the 46,000 who lived in Salonika, right under Waldheim's nose. Earlier this year Waldheim claimed that he had never noticed the deporta-



A lost raider: Commando Tuckey

tions. But in a letter stamped "secret" and dated April 28, 1944, Waldheim's unit was asked to contact the SD to arrange for the evacuation of the 2,000 Jews remaining on the island of Corfu. They were duly shipped off to Auschwitz. On July 15 another message was sent to Waldheim's unit with a paragraph headlined DEPORTATION OF THE JEWS, describing operations on Rhodes and Crete.

**Shooting hostages:** Group Ic/AO also kept up to date on campaigns against partisans. On Aug. 11, 1944, Waldheim signed a report for Löhr's Army Group E on "activity" by partisans on Crete. Three days later an Army document reported that a "cleansing operation" had been launched in the area; the Germans "shot to death 20 hostages," it said. On Oct. 12, 1944, Waldheim signed two reports alerting the high command to "strengthened bandit activity on the Stip-Kocane road" in Yugoslavia. (Partisans were frequently referred to as

bandits.) On Oct. 14 the Germans burned three villages along the road and murdered 114 residents. A Waldheim spokesman insists that such a reprisal would not have been discussed at Waldheim's level and that a local commander would have done it "on his own." But later Waldheim signed a report carefully recording the death of 739 "bandits" in October—and the capture of only 63 weapons.

The investigation of Waldheim's wartime activities is still gaining momentum and will probably continue after the Austrian election on June 8, which the 67-year-old conservative is expected to win. Some people questioned whether it made sense for investigators, including the World Jewish Congress, to focus on Waldheim, who was, after all, only a first lieutenant. Simon Wiesenthal, the Vienna-based Nazi hunter, complained that the WJC campaign against Waldheim was "reviving anti-Semitism" in Austria. Although Wiesenthal agreed that the charges against Waldheim were "serious," he dismissed the former Nazi officer as "an opportunist" rather than a war criminal. But Waldheim rose to the top of the United Nations and now seems likely to become president of a democratic country. No longer an insignificant first lieutenant, he may owe the world an explanation about what he knew and why he kept his silence.

RUSSELL WATSON with DAVID NEWELL and JOHN BARRY in Washington. ANDREW NAGORSKI in Vienna. THEODORE STANGER in Athens and bureau reports