

Starvation Genocide in Nazi Occupied Greece:1941-1944. The Lieber Code: Starvation was no Crime at Nuremberg

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ABSTRACT

The policy pursued by the Nazi Empire in the conquered territories led to starvation of the population, with a resulting mortality rarely accounted for in history. The only widely known genocidal policy was the premeditated murderous racial one. In fact, the policy had more extensive expressions, particularly in occupied Eastern European territories and in Greece, namely Starvation, the topic of the present study [1,2].

Keywords: Greece, Starvation, WWII, Nazi Occupation.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Genocide was developed by Raphael Lemkin, a Ukrainian trained Polish/Jewish lawyer, a polyglot of 12 languages including most of the Eastern European ones, Western ones and an Asian one. Lemkin managed to escape in 1939 via the Baltics to Sweden and eventually settled in the USA. Due to his language skills, he was assisting at the Nuremberg Trials. Although he coined the term GENOCIDE much earlier, it was not accepted for indictment at these Trials [3-4].

Lemkin's definition included several aspects of the Genocide, such as **political** (Germanisation of the Blood related people); **social** (annihilation of intellectuals); **cultural** (obliteration of non-German languages); **religious** (obstruction of foreign religious influence); **moral** (debasement of national groups); **biological**, (reduction of non-Germanics birth and lower nutrition to increase child mortality) and **physical** (extermination of the sub-humans).

Additionally, of particular importance is the **economic** aspect of Genocide, aimed at degrading the economic foundations of nations, to lower their standard of living and exhaust their energies to oppose their subjugation [5-7]. It is within a medical aspect

that this author promotes the concept of **Starvation Genocide**.

For legal indictment several aspects of Genocide must be considered: The Food policy of the Nazis, aimed at the nutrition of the Wehrmacht. As an extension of this policy, the nutrition for the occupied population was based on racist food allocation. Starvation, whether premeditated or emerging along the process of the war, it was nonetheless with intent. The consequences were well known, the economic and human tragedy calculated, the resulting Starvation, therefore it should be considered as Genocide [5-10].

The War in Greece: it was the Italian dictator's wish to revive the old Roman Empire. Indeed, the Italians occupied Libya and Ethiopia before WWII, followed by the invasion of Albania, and eventually in October 1940, an attack on Greece. The weak Greek Army managed nonetheless to repulse the Italians. The German Fuehrer felt obliged to maintain the prestige of his Italian ally. Consequently, the Wehrmacht invaded Greece in April 1941. The victorious Nazis offered the northern part of Greece, the old Thrace region to the Bulgarian allies (depicted in Fig.1 in green), the Western side of Greece country to the Italian allies (in blue), and retained control of the central a era, the main ports, the island of Crete, and some small islands, and the coast opposite Turkey on the Black Sea (in red).

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Fig1. Map of Greece

The occupation of Greece (Operation Marita) was not programmed by the Axis, as they were contemplating Operation Barbarossa, (the invasion of the Soviet Union) scheduled for 11 May 1941. This Southward diversion on the 6.4.41, in fact delayed the aggression towards the East by 42 warm and dry days, pushing the war closer to wintertime that in 1941 proved to be severe, contributing to the eventual German defeat in the East.

The criminal intent is expressed by the invasion of Greece without the necessary self-food supply but rather in tending to rely on local sources. Aware of the scarcity of their food supply, German soldiers resorted to an extensive spoliation of the local population. The Nazi invasion of Greece led to the plundering of food (eg. animals, fish, citrus, figs, raisin), of resources (eg. metals, minerals, fuel, salt, leather) and transportation utilities (eg. trucks, cars, boats, tractors).

This initial excuse for food confiscation of the first few days, namely the lack of provision, was soon dissipated and was proven false. Indeed, plenipotentiaries and representatives of large German companies, (Krupp, IG

Farben, several mining, and shipping companies) soon appeared as officials in Greece and extended the confiscation processes outside the food industry. Their representatives were either confiscating part of the local products or forcing Greek companies to transfer or sell their shares at very low prices to the German industrial representatives. For instance, already by May 1941, the Krupp representative reported with satisfaction back to Berlin that *‘the entire output of Greek mines of pyrites, iron ore, chrome, nickel, magnesite, manganese, bauxite and gold was obtained for Germany on long term basis’* [11].

The food confiscation continued during the occupation. The original actions complied with the ‘Green Plan’ of Marshal Goering regarding all occupied countries: *‘This continuous concern for the aliens must come to an end once for all. I could not care less when you say that people under our administration are dying of hunger. Let them perish so long as no German starves’* [4].

Consequently, the daily food allocation in the occupied territories was based on racial policy [3,4]:

carbohydrate:	100% for Germans, 76% for Poles, 36% for Greeks, 20% for Jews]
proteins:	[97% for Germans, 71% for Dutch, 38% for Greeks, 20% for Jews]
fat:	[77% for Germans, 65% for Dutch, 40 for Greeks, 0.32% for Jews]

As a result of extensive looting and shop confiscations, by 28.4.41, food became scarce, a wide range of black market emerged, and the economy collapsed. [10,11]The nutritional deprivation was quick to surface, all construction ceased as no cement or iron was available. Hospitals and pharmacies were the last to be emptied and their contents sent to Germany, as reported by the American representative of Food Relief organization [11,12].

The urban famine was more severe and by the end of 1941, there were already soup kitchens in Athens. In the rural areas and the islands, many farmers escaped to mountains and food was hidden. Grain supply from overseas was blocked by the British Navy, aggravating the famine until late 1942, when the blockade was eased, and the Red Cross/Swedish assistance was let in[11].

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A dispute emerged between historians about the extent of food confiscation, but most of the existing documents and numerous personal testimonies of survivors provided stories of soldiers entering homes and eating the family's dinner. It was reported that in the first year of invasion, the basic caloryintake decreased from 80% to 60% of the daily energy requirement. Further decreases occurred subsequently, leading to a low of 400 calory per day.

People starved to death, but amongst the survivors, surprisingly, infectious diseases appeared with lower frequency.

Who gave the orders? The '*Hunger Plan*' was prepared by the secretary of the Food Ministry(Herbert Backe), delivered as '*Weisung*'(directive), to assure food for the Wehrmacht in the third year of the war to come. The Plan was ratified by all Secretaries of Ministries present at the Berlin conference on the 2 May 1941, expecting '*zillions, namely, 20-30 million deaths from starvation*' [12,14,15]. The protocol said:

1. *The War can only be continued if all Armed Forces are fed by Russia in the third year of war.*
2. *There is no doubt that as a result many millions of people will be starved to death if we take out of the country the things necessary for us.*

The directives initially planned for the East, were soon adopted for Greece. The occupying Army in Greece was led by generals, SS and Police leaders. The economic side was led by the more sympathetic and pragmatic Herman Neubacher, overriding the fanatic Walter Blume's '*Chaos theory*', namely to '*exterminate all Greek opponents and leave behind a scorched terrain*'. [16] Although Blume was demoted, the devastation during the war erased villages, shacks, and small human lodges in the countryside; eventually also involving the large cities such as the capital and Thessaloniki. The Allies liberated Greece in 1944.

The great Famine: In accordance with the statement of Marshal von Rundstedt in 1943 (a war criminal charged, but not tried due to ill health): '*One of the great mistakes of 1918 was to spare the civil life of the enemy ... The only means (to victory) ... is organized underfeeding, which is better than machine guns*' [3].

What caused the deaths? Famine induced death is prominent in the documents discovered after liberation. There was wholesale looting of Athens, food and fuel reserves were confiscated. The invaders took meat, cattle, sheep dairy herds for their own use.

It was reported by the America Aid Agency that the wanton extent of animal destruction during the war recorded the slaughter of 55% of the horses, 50% of mules, 59% of cows, 70% of sheep, 71% of pigs, 78% of donkeys, 68% of chickens and 56% of goats. The

available milk was minimal in quantity and eggs were a rarity [18].

During the winter of 1941, the streets of Athens were full of edematous children's bodies, with sunken eyes, inexpressive and apathetic, with large swollen abdomens, no tissue under the skin, bleeding from the nose, mouth, and intestines [11,17,18]. Surprisingly, avitaminosis C, (scurvy) appeared in this citrus rich country, as fruits were thrown into the rivers. Avitaminosis B1 and B3 (the pellagra) also appeared, not seen in many years.

Apart from malnutrition induced diminished immune suppression, resulting in an increase in infectious diseases, starvation remained the main cause of death. Statistics indicated that for the period of the war, namely 1941-44, compared to the prewar 1939-41, there was significant increase in death due to starvation, an increase in malnutrition related heart disease(cardiomyopathy), but surprisingly, a decrease in tuberculosis (18).

The connection between cardiac disease and starvation was established clinically, biochemically, and histologically by researchers in the Ghetto of Warsaw, where a group of detained physicians analyzed the '*Hunger disease*'. Their buried archives were exhumed after the war by the few surviving physicians and published in Poland, France and were eventually analyzed at Columbia University, NY.[19,20].

The surprising findings on the Greek islands were the slightly better conditions compared to the urban areas of the mainland, all were compiled and extrapolated to the entire occupied Greece.

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They documented a 'Great Famine' Grade II, in accord with the international classification, namely over 100.000 death from starvation.(a million is classified as 'Catastrophic Famine', Grade I, such as in the Nazi occupied Ukraine/Soviet lands)[11,13,21].

For Occupied Greece, the deaths from starvation during the war were 300.000 out of the total of 400.000, the difference being murder of partisans, victims of bombardments and the 60.000 Jews deported to Birkenau, from which some 3000 returned [11,13,14]. No details about natural death rate were published.

The outcome: Once the tide of the war turned against the Nazis, the Bulgarians altered their servitude to the Axis power and Greece regained occupied Thrace. Consequently, Bulgaria was released from compensatory obligations. The Italians, who also changed sides, turning against Nazi Germany, and

losing the 'Roman Empire', were also released from compensatory duties.

Germany remained the culprit of the 'Great Famine' in Greece. Although their intention was not to exterminate the local population (as the Final Solution for the Jews), their behavior nevertheless amounted to Genocide, leading to high mortality[23].

During the post-war period, Greece's recovery was slow, assisted by the relatively early cessation of the naval blockade and by the post-war international forces. It was followed by the resurgence of infectious epidemics as the main causes of death. As such, the excess death from tuberculosis (TB) increased from 16% of the total death during prewar to 38% in the post-war period. Heart disease decreased from 28% to 11%. On Malnutrition, the excess total death comparatively from war to post war period was reduction from 572% to 301% of fatalities [17,18,21][Fig.2].

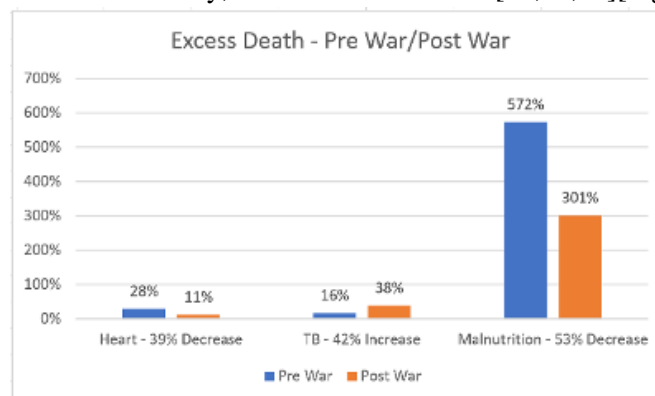


Fig2. Causes of Excess death in Post-war period as compared with the Pre-War Heart and TB and to war time Malnutrition

How did the Justice system perform in Greece? There was initial retribution against collaborators and soon the country underwent extreme political upheaval, resulting in violence and civil war.

What type of justice was administered to the occupiers?

The distant instructor of food acquisition, (Food Minister in Berlin and desk criminal Herbert Backe) faced criminal trial, but for fear of extradition to the Soviets, he committed suicide in jail [13,15]. At the Nuremberg Trials, he could have been tried and possibly released, based on the same code that was judged in Marshall von Leeb for the Siege of Leningrad, despite the 800.000 deaths. The Court was not able to establish that inducing Famine was illegal, based on a Law, valid in the USA since the 1860-65 Civil War, namely the 'Lieber Code'[22].

Franz Lieber (1798-1872) was a Prussian born jurist, where he was arrested for his liberal ideas, and his opposition to the militaristic regime. After his release from jail, he emigrated to the USA and eventually became a professor of Law at Columbia University. His Code, signed by President Abraham Lincoln, accepted that '*it was legitimate to starve a besieged city into submission or to blockade an entire country*'. [21] The Code was later changed, stating that '*Military necessity does not admit of cruelty..... nor of wanton devastation of a district*'. This later change was apparently either not known or not recognized in Nuremberg in 1945.

The German generals in the Greek tragedy of the 20 Century received verdicts:

Jurgen Stroop and Alex Lohr were executed; Walter Blume's death was commuted to life imprisonment and released in 1951; Walter

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Shimina committed suicide before trial; Herman Neubacher, received 20 years arrested only in 1959, was committed for life, but released in 1993[11].

A high-ranking intelligence officer in Greece during the occupation, Kurt Waldheim, made a post-war international career, becoming Secretary General of the United Nations and was later elected President of Austria.

In Summary, it is suggested that the Nazi occupation of Greece, should be considered Starvation Genocide.

Famine, in today's scientific assessment would be graded from Hunger to Malnutrition and Starvation. The situation in Greece during the years of occupation would be retrospectively assessed within the new 'Hunger Index' and considered 'severe', with some 4.5% out of the pre-war population of 7 million, perishing due to a lack of nutrition [13,21,23]. Although not premeditated, the intent or parts of it were clear, the act of the occupying forces resulted in Starvation Genocide.

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