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Files Show Kurt Waldheim Served Under War Criminal

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VIENNA, March 3 — Kurt Waldheim, former Secretary General of the United Nations, was attached to a German Army command in World War II that fought brutal campaigns against Yugoslav partisans and engaged in mass deportations of Greek Jews, according to official documents made available here.

The documents also show that, as a young man, he was enrolled in two Nazi Party organizations.

The documents, which were obtained by The New York Times, were found among German military records and in the archives of the Austrian Justice Ministry and the Foreign Ministry. Austria was part of Nazi Germany from the Anschluss, or union, of 1938, to the end of World War II.

Autobiography Skips Period

In authorized biographies and in a recent autobiography, Mr. Waldheim does not discuss his activities during the years involved, 1942 and 1943.

Mr. Waldheim, who headed the United Nations Secretariat from 1972 to 1982, acknowledged in an interview Sunday that he had served in the units in question. But he said he had played a minor role and knew of no war crimes or atrocities ascribed to the units.

In the interview, he said it was the first time that he had heard of mass deportations of Greek Jews from Salonika.

Mr. Waldheim is running for the presidency of Austria. The election is scheduled for May 5, and Mr. Waldheim, in recent polls, has had a slight edge over his Socialist opponent, Kurt Steyrer.

He accused his opponents of using the information about the war years to damage him politically.

"The timing of it is perfect," he said. "For 40 years these things have rested."

Mr. Waldheim belittled his membership in the Nazi groups, saying that his activities were intended to shield him and his family, who were known as opponents of the Nazis.

Some of the allegations against Mr.

Waldheim, attributed to a wartime document, were published here today in *Profil*, a news magazine. Other documents, about his military service, were made available to The Times by the World Jewish Congress and were corroborated independently by The Times.

There have been past charges that he had had Nazi associations. Mr. Waldheim has said on each occasion that he never was a member of a Nazi organization or a Nazi-affiliated organization.

The documents show that in July 1942, after a campaign against Yugoslav partisans, Mr. Waldheim was awarded a high military decoration of the Nazi puppet state of Croatia, the Order of the Crown of King Zvonimir.

The Croatian state was known for persecuting Jews, Serbs and gypsies through deportations, forced labor and mass murders. A former Cabinet minister of that state, Andrija Artukovic, was recently extradited by the United States to Yugoslavia to stand trial on war crimes charges.

Little Known of His Activities

Political commentators say that despite the documentary evidence of Mr. Waldheim's official positions in 1942-43, little is known of his activities, and that the most serious accusation against him may ultimately turn out to be that he was not forthcoming about his past.

The disclosures are nevertheless awkward because of his assertions over the years — when he was questioned, particularly by Jewish groups — that he never had anything to do with Nazi-affiliated organizations.

In 1981, a group of American Jews told him that the United Nations risked losing public support in the United States because of a series of anti-Israeli resolutions under his stewardship.

The recent disclosures also raised the question whether, at the United Nations or earlier as Austrian Foreign Minister, Mr. Waldheim had been susceptible to pressure from the Soviet Union or other countries if they knew of his past activities.

Given an opportunity to comment on the disclosures, Mr. Waldheim denied that he had ever been subjected to political pressure or blackmail.

According to the records made available to The Times, Mr. Waldheim, as a 20-year-old student at the Consular Academy here, was enrolled April 1, 1938, in the Nazi student union, about three weeks after the Anschluss. The following Nov. 18, he was enrolled in a mounted unit of the *Sturmabteilung*, or SA, the paramilitary Nazi organization known as the Brownshirts. He remained a member until he entered military service on Aug. 15, 1939.

Mr. Waldheim said he became aware after the war that he had been enrolled in the SA, but that he had not considered himself, at the time, a member of that organization or of the Nazi student union. The two groups, he said, had been established by "one or two students" and were used for "social gatherings, coffee parties and things like that."

He said the students had a choice among sports of tennis, horseback riding and motorcycle racing. He chose riding, he said, never assuming that this would lead to enrollment in the SA.

Sought to Protect Family

He said his basic motive for taking part in the gatherings was to shield himself and his family from political harassment, a common enough motive at the time.

Indeed, Mr. Waldheim's personnel file in the Austrian Justice Ministry quotes a character reference written in 1940 by a gauleiter, a Nazi party official, revealing lingering distrust. The official described Mr. Waldheim's father, Walter, a schoolteacher until the Nazis stripped him of his job, as a follower of Kurt Schuschnigg, the Austrian leader who opposed the Anschluss, and said that the son "through his braggadocio gave proof of his antipathy toward our movement."

The official added that the younger Mr. Waldheim had "proved himself" through military service, eliminating doubt of his qualification for Government service.

Mr. Waldheim, in discussing joining the student group at the Consular Academy, said in the interview:

"I did not want to refuse because I thought that is harmless, it is not political involvement. Naturally, it was important for me. If I ever had the idea of finishing my studies, I had to have some protection."

Continued

"I never received a membership card. I was never informed that I had become a member. The most that can be concluded from this is that somewhere in a file I was listed as a candidate, but even that I do not know."

In 1946, when Mr. Waldheim was appointed private secretary to the then Austrian Foreign Minister, Karl Gruber, a Socialist, an anonymous denunciation led to an investigation of his political past. Though the inquiry absolved him of any Nazi links, the enrollment records were evidently never deleted from his personal file.

Why had he never discussed this when accused of Nazi ties? Mr. Waldheim said he had not been a member.

"And even if it were true, well, so what," he said. "It would still not be a sign of Nazi thinking or that I was a proponent of theirs. You should not exaggerate. The student union was nothing, a totally harmless, fully uninteresting organization, in which most of those went who wanted to study, to somehow be left in peace."

Service With Lohr Acknowledged

He was equally insistent in defending his record as a soldier. The potential embarrassment arises from his service on the staff of Gen. Alexander Lohr, an Austrian who was executed as a war criminal in Belgrade in 1947.

In the interview, Mr. Waldheim acknowledged that he served on General Lohr's staff in 1942 and 1943, at a time of military operations against Yugoslav partisans and mass deportations of Greek Jews.

Mr. Waldheim had not previously disclosed information about this period. In his recent autobiography, "In the Eye of the Storm," he suggests that his military career ended in December 1941, when he was wounded in the leg on the eastern front near the Russian town of Orel, and that after his recovery in 1942, he was permitted to resume his law studies.

But German military records in West Berlin show that Mr. Waldheim was assigned to German Army Command 12, based in Salonika, Greece, on March 14, 1942, and was sent to Belgrade where he apparently served as an Italian-German interpreter in Yugoslavia and Albania in 1942 and 1943.

Calls Croatian Award Routine

General Lohr's command, including German, Italian, Croatian and Bulgarian forces, was then engaged in campaigns against Tito's partisans in which villages thought to be harboring guerrillas were wiped out.

In July 1942, Mr. Waldheim was awarded Croatia's Zvonimir medal, in silver and with oak leaves, indicating that it was earned "under enemy fire."

Moreover, a photograph that was discovered last year by an amateur historian in Innsbruck and is now in the possession of The Times shows Mr. Waldheim with Italian and German officers, including Gen. Artur Phleps, the commander of the 7th SS Volunteer Division "Prinz Eugen," on May 22, 1943, at an airstrip in the Montenegrin town of Podgorica, now Titograd.

According to records of the Yugoslav War Crimes Commission, General Phleps's division, composed of Croatian and other Slavic volunteers, was guilty of some of the most brutal crimes against civilians.

Mr. Waldheim called it "absolutely absurd" that he was in any way involved in atrocities. He described his role as that of an interpreter in discussions between Italian and German commanders.

Mr. Waldheim acknowledged having received the Zvonimir medal, but said it was given to virtually all staff members "as a matter of routine."

"Someone with bad intentions might conclude, because partisans were there, Waldheim must have committed war crimes," he said. "That is pure nonsense."

"I committed no crime in the whole time. I sat there and the German command gave orders to the Italian units and the Italians gave messages back, and they needed an interpreter. I was not chief of the liaison staff. There was a whole group of interpreters."

Airstrip Meeting Confirmed

Mr. Waldheim said the 1943 meeting in Podgorica was the only time he ever met the SS general or was in that town.

The potentially most embarrassing disclosures concern Mr. Waldheim's presence in Salonika in the spring of 1943, after the Yugoslav campaign.

According to Raul Hilberg, the American historian and author of the book, "The Destruction of the European Jews," the deportation of 42,830 Jews from Salonika to death camps at Auschwitz, Treblinka and Lublin was carried out by German forces under the command of General Lohr, Mr. Waldheim's commanding officer, between March and May 1943, part of which time Mr. Waldheim was in Salonika.

Gerald Reitlinger, a historian of the Holocaust and author of the book, "The Final Solution," said General Lohr was "perhaps more implicated in Jewish deportations than any other Wehrmacht commander."

Witnesses described how dozens of German Army trains left Salonika day after day bearing the Jews to their death in extermination camps.

Analyzed Troop Movements

Mr. Waldheim acknowledged that he had been serving on General Lohr's staff in Salonika, but he said his activity consisted in analyzing reports on enemy troop movements. He denied knowing anything of the deportations.

Mr. Waldheim, visibly shaken, said, "I regret these things most deeply, but I have to repeat that it is really the first time that I hear that such things happened. I never heard or learned anything of this while I was there. I hear for the first time that there were deportations of Jews from there."

Although Mr. Waldheim writes in his autobiography that he studied law in Vienna during this period — "it was impossible to leave Austria," he writes, "the borders had been closed"

— he in fact continued his military service under General Lohr in the Balkans until the end of the war.

A front-page photograph in the German Army newspaper of the Balkans, *Wacht im Südosten*, dated Dec. 3, 1944, which Mr. Waldheim recognizes as genuine, shows General Lohr peering at maps surrounded by several officers, including Mr. Waldheim.

Why had he neglected to allude in the past to this period of his military service? he was asked. In response, he quoted from the foreword to his autobiography: "This is not a book of memoirs in the ordinary sense, nor is it a comprehensive account of events during my term of office as Secretary General of the United Nations."

Not Worthy of Comment

He said he never considered his later wartime experiences as worthy of comment.

"I never said that my book made claim to completeness," he said. "Otherwise it would have been so boring that no one would have read it."

The version of Mr. Waldheim's war record that he conveys in his autobiography was also communicated by him to Representative Stephen J. Solarz, a Brooklyn Democrat, in November 1980, when the legislator wrote to him about his war record, based on allegations in the *New Republic*.

Mr. Waldheim responded, "First of all, I wish to say that I was never associated in any way with the Nazi youth movement." Referring to his service with an Austrian division on the eastern front in 1941, Mr. Waldheim told Mr. Solarz that he had served with a reconnaissance unit.

"It certainly had no contact or connection with extermination units. I myself was wounded on the eastern front and, being incapacitated for further service at the front, resumed my law studies at Vienna University, where I graduated in 1944."

Information Supplied by C.I.A.

Mr. Solarz also asked the Central Intelligence Agency for information and was informed: "We believe that Waldheim was not a member of the Nazi youth movement, nor was he involved in anti-Jewish activities."

The C.I.A. said it had learned from German records that Mr. Waldheim had been drafted in 1939 to serve with the 45th Infantry Division as a staff intelligence officer with the rank of lieutenant. The division, according to the C.I.A. information, saw action in Poland and France and in the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.

"There is nothing in the files to suggest that while in this unit, Waldheim participated directly or indirectly in anti-Jewish activities," the C.I.A. said.

The letter, from Frederick P. Hitz, the C.I.A.'s legislative counsel, went on to say that Mr. Waldheim's service with the unit ended in 1941 when he received a leg wound. His recuperation, the C.I.A. said, required almost a year and it added: "he was discharged from military duties following his recovery and returned to study law in Vienna."