

THE SUITCASE SET



**The true story
about radio communications
from behind enemy lines
during the
Second World War**

***Presented and produced by
The South Dorset Radio Society***

This book is dedicated to

Ted Halls wife Isabel

and all her family.

First published with the kind and full permission of
Mr Ted Hall (ex.G3ETA)

October 2001 to April 2002

As a 7 part supplement to the
South Dorset Radio Societies
Newsletter.

www.sdrs.tk



Ted Hall
1937

THE SUITCASE SET

by
Ted Hall (ex-G3ETA)

INTRODUCTION

The following story concerns an episode that occurred during WW2 in which I was involved. I have given it the title of "*The Suitcase Set*" as I believe it could be read by those who have an interest in Amateur Radio and probably know about the set from programmes on TV and radio.

A few words about my RAF career prior to becoming a member of MI5 (SOE.) Special Operations Executive. As a result of a recruiting campaign by the Government for all three fighting services begun in 1936, I decided to join the RAF in August 1937. When asked what I wanted to do by the Recruiting Sergeant I could only say I wanted to learn to be a pilot. I was so ignorant about what comprised the crew of a plane believing the only requirement was a pilot. It was explained that it would first, be necessary to be trained as a wireless operator and then apply to become a member of a bomber squadron.

After three months disciplinary training and a year at the Cranwell wireless school I emerged at the end of 1938 as a w/op 2nd class and sent for further training in the erection of mobile DIF stations. When war was declared in September 1939 I was sent to France and subsequently to Egypt for the North African campaign serving with 73 Squadron equipped with Hurricanes.

How I became involved with the SOE is covered in the story. It shows that my involvement was by accident rather than from any thoughts of a heroic adventure. I am, now, of the age where it is easier to look back rather than think about the future so, I make no excuses for having the opportunity to recall some of the incidents which took place.

Hope you enjoy the story.

* * *

CHAPTER ONE

I had served in North Africa from November 1940 with 73 Squadron equipped with Hurricanes. Our job was to provide fighter cover for the 7th Armoured Division. My story commences in April 1943.

The Allies for the first time were beginning to show that they could match the aggressiveness of the enemy under General Rommel. In 1943 a number of those who had been with 73 from the beginning of the Desert War were posted to other units in the Nile Delta.

This became necessary, as bully beef and hardtack biscuits with hot sweet tea were all we had to eat and drink and the results of this poor diet were beginning to show.

I thought I had drawn an easy number when told that I was posted to Southern Rhodesia as an instructor teaching Canadians how to operate the radio equipment used in Beaufighters. They had been flying Beaus as night fighters in Southern England. These were equipped with RADAR hence their lack of knowledge of HF sets.

I arrived at RAF headquarters in Cairo and was informed that the only method of transport to Rhodesia, at that time, was by ship to South Africa and sailing was limited due to the action of enemy submarines which operated off the East Coast of Africa. A couple of weeks went by, with me asking, every two or three days, about progress in my travel arrangements. For the first time since hostilities commenced in September '39 I felt as if I had been side-tracked, and was impatient to start the next phase of my service life. After three weeks, I received a message asking me to see the Officer responsible for the movement of personnel. My hopes were rekindled and I hurried off to find out what was to happen to me. The officer said he had made numerous requests for information from the Merchant Navy about my transfer but there had been no positive reply. My disappointment must have shown. However, instead of letting me walk away, he had more to say, and I was completely unaware of the unexpected outcome of his words.

He told me that a message had been received from a non-RAF unit in Cairo with the title of MO4 (Military Operations 4). Their request was for the transfer of wireless operators who had considerable field experience and could be recommended for work of a special nature. He said that in the Middle East the RAF was already short of operators so he couldn't comply with the request from MO4, but he implied that it might be something I could do whilst waiting for my transfer. I suspect, too, he wanted to hear no more of my persistent questions about when I could get moving again, and saw this as his opportunity to kill two birds with one stone, to coin a phrase!

'Why not go and see them,' he suggested. I agreed to the suggestion because I was given little to do in my present, temporary, position.

At least it would allow me to think I could be useful to someone. He then handed me a piece of paper on which was written: *Mr. Robins, 6 Rue Eleusis, Cairo 4. Tel. 812 324.* 'Memorise the content and then destroy the paper,' he instructed.

All of this I found strange. First there was the title of Mr., not a rank, and secondly, it was a private address. I found it quite intriguing. I telephoned the mysterious Mr. Robins and made an appointment to see him on the following day. Early the next morning, burning with curiosity, I took a taxi to Rue Eleusis, which turned out to be a dormitory area used by non-Egyptians. There were low-rise apartment blocks interspersed with large houses. The houses were fronted by well-kept gardens and number 6 one of these.

When I rang the doorbell I was asked my name and business by a voice from a concealed loudspeaker. I said my name was Hall and I had an appointment to see Mr. Robins. With that, the door clicked open. I entered the building and found myself in an entrance hall at the far end of which were double doors. I walked along the hall and pushed open one of these doors, this led into a large room.

It contained a number of tables and chairs, and about twenty men in army and naval uniform, standing or sitting and chatting in small groups. Mixed in with them were a few others in civilian clothes. As I entered the room, one of these came towards me. He offered his hand.

‘Good morning, Sergeant, my name is Ron Simpson,’ he said. ‘Mr. Robins is expecting you. Follow me please.’ We climbed a large staircase to the first floor where there were six doors. Simpson tapped on the first of these and a voice from within told us to enter. As we did so a tall, well-built man, aged about fifty, also in civilian clothes, rose from behind a large desk. We shook hands and he introduced himself but failed to mention what position he held. He spoke unaccented English.

‘Would you like tea or coffee, Sergeant?’

‘Coffee, please,’ I replied.

Simpson then departed; presumably to organise the refreshments. Robins invited me to take a chair on the opposite side of his desk.

‘Are you mystified by our request for wireless operators?’ he began.

‘Not particularly’ I replied. ‘The exchange of personnel between Services often takes place, but I don’t know who you are.’ One thing the war had taught us was the need for extreme caution when dealing with civilians, and I was used to receiving instructions from men whose rank was clearly evident.

There was a slight pause ‘I’m afraid, for the moment I can’t tell you, for security reasons,’ he said, almost as if he had been reading my mind. ‘I realise we’re asking a lot of you, to offer yourself for something about which you have little knowledge but, on occasions, that’s the way it is in wartime.’ ‘I came here today to find out what type of work is to be undertaken and for how long,’ I persisted. ‘I’m due to go to Rhodesia shortly and my bosses thought I might be able to help you until my transport is available.’

Robins thought about this for a short while and then said, ‘Supposing I could get agreement with RAF HQ that your journey would be held in abeyance until after you have completed your work with us, would you then consider joining us?’ He gave me a confiding smile.

‘I’m sorry,’ I said stubbornly, ‘but before I can reply I must know more about the work and the length of time involved.’

This caused him to hesitate again, but after a short while he said, ‘Normally, at this stage, I would decline to elaborate. But in view of this *impasse*, which I can quite understand, I have to acknowledge that our shortage of wireless operators changes the situation. As you will know, to train somebody to operate a radio receiver and transmitter, using Morse code at 20/25 words per minute, and gain field experience takes at least two years. As a result, our plans are held up because we have only just started our own training programme.

For the present, we find ourselves dependent on the three main Services for a supply of skilled operators, but our requests are constantly met by them telling us they are short of operators for their own requirements. So, if you are prepared to sign our security form, which is similar to that of the Official Secrets Act, I’m prepared to tell you who we are and what our function is. You might think we are being fussy, but we have to be particularly careful here, in Egypt, as the locals have no particular liking for the British, and we are aware that there are many enemy agents about.’

He gazed intently at me, as if willing me to accept his proposal. ‘Providing I still have the right to opt out at the end of the meeting, I’m prepared to sign your security form,’ I said. With that, he produced a document and I started to read it, but found I couldn’t concentrate and, in any case, I didn’t understand it all. I reasoned that, if I kept my trap shut, I would conform to the requirement, so I signed and he countersigned. At this point our discussion was interrupted by the return of Simpson with the coffee. I was beginning to find the situation interesting and wondered just what was involved. After coffee, we continued our conversation, and I started the ball rolling by putting a card or two of my own on the table.

‘If you can obtain a postponement for the Rhodesian posting and I could have that in writing, I would think seriously about joining you,’ I told Robins. When Robins heard this, his eyes lit up and he said, ‘We do have considerable influence in matters of this sort, and I believe I can get agreement with the RAF, today, for the posting to be held until your return. Of course, I can’t get the decision in writing at such short notice. If I can arrange the matter verbally, you will have to take my word for it that the confirmation will follow. Before we met, I had no knowledge about your forward commitment, but I

had every hope that you would consent to join us, so I've arranged for a medical examination and a session with a psychoanalyst.

'Why don't we proceed with this arrangement and afterwards you can return to me?' In the meantime, I will discuss the matter of your transfer and, I hope, have a positive answer for you in a matter of hours. There will be time for the medical before lunch and I will arrange for Simpson to take you to a nice little Italian restaurant nearby.'

I agreed to this suggestion and he rang for Simpson. When he arrived, Robins asked him to conduct me to Dr Andrews and, afterwards, arrange a table for lunch at Riminto's for the pair of us. After lunch, Simpson was to escort me to Mr Collins. I shook hands with Robins and we left the room.

'You must be an important guest,' said Simpson. 'Lunch at Riminto's is regarded as something special.' I had no reply for this remark but was feeling flattered by the attention I was receiving.

CHAPTER TWO

Dr. Andrews's surgery was behind the last of the six doors. When I had been introduced, Simpson asked if he could be informed when I was free. The medical was thorough, but not as extensive as the one for aircrew. At the conclusion, Dr. Andrews said, 'You're in pretty good shape young man.' He put the cap back on his fountain pen and rang for Simpson.

Riminto's was a small, air-conditioned restaurant, with a number of potted palms and other trailing plants to provide a relaxing atmosphere, where the food was well prepared and presented, though pasta dishes are not among my favourites. During the course of the meal, I tried to find out something about the organisation, but Simpson said he was not at liberty to discuss the matter, which made conversation a little difficult and left me feeling mildly uncomfortable.

On our return, I was taken up to the second floor of the house, where Collins had his office. My ignorance of the medical profession was such that anyone who was not simply a doctor, surgeon or nurse, with a title of psychoanalyst or neurophysiologist put the practitioner in the land of mumbo-jumbo.

After introduction to Collins, I was asked to lie on a couch and relax. He then asked a number of questions, mainly about my early youth and schooling. I explained that my father had been killed in a road accident when I was five years old and my brother three. My mother was left penniless and had been compelled to take a full-time job. As a result, we were sent to a rough, tough boarding school for fatherless children, in Essex. Shortly after leaving school, I joined the RAF, at the age of seventeen. When Collins had finished his questions, Simpson was informed and while we waited for him to appear, Collins wrote a note, put it in an envelope, and sealed it. Simpson was asked to give the note to Robins.

I was sitting opposite Robins once again, He opened the note from Collins, read it through in silence, folded and slid it back in the envelope. Well,' he said, 'I think you will be pleased to know you've passed the medical and nothing derogatory has emerged from your session with Collins. I have also been able to establish that your transfer to Rhodesia can be deferred until a later date. Although it's only a few hours since you made arrangements for this morning's meeting, I've already been able to obtain a copy of your service record. You certainly have had a busy war, with a variety of different types of work, making you just the type of person we require.

'It's time for me to explain something about our background, as I promised. MO4 is part of MI5 and was formed as a result of discussions which took place when Mr. Churchill came to Egypt last year, to thank General Montgomery for the Desert victory.

Mr. Churchill said that an organisation was to be set up to parallel the SOE (Special Operations Executive), who have been supporting the underground activities in France, Belgium and Holland. Assistance was to be given to any properly organised guerrilla movement operating in Eastern Europe and Italy.

At the present time we have Missions in Crete, Greece, Yugoslavia and Italy. Each Mission usually comprises a leader, an explosives specialist and a wireless operator. The Missions, all volunteers, most of them wearing uniform, go in either by submarine or parachute and are supported by the dropping of arms, ammunition and other supplies by parachute. Naturally, as the Missions are operating in enemy territory, there is constant danger, but no sabotage or other action is undertaken if there is an unreasonable risk. 'Well, I think I've said enough for you to make up your mind whether to join us.

I must admit, I had not known quite what to expect by way of explanation from Robins. I felt the need for some time to think.

'If we could have a cup of tea, I'll think it over,' I said cautiously. 'We can have something stronger, if you prefer,' said Robins. 'No, thanks.' I replied.

He phoned Simpson, requested tea and then left me alone in the room for a short while. I was intrigued by what I had heard but not fully convinced that I wanted to take part. However, I couldn't think of a good reason for not doing so. When Robins returned I told him that I had only one question to ask.

'What about the language requirement?'

'Most of our Leaders have the capability to converse in, or at least an understanding of, the language of the country they go to, but we usually find that someone at the other end can speak English.

You would be provided with a phrase book and dictionary in the appropriate language.' After a short hesitation, I said, 'OK, count me in.'

CHAPTER THREE

'Good man. I'm sure you'll find the work interesting and see that it makes a real contribution to the war effort. Now, let's have that cup of tea and push on, because there is no time to spare and I have quite a bit to tell you. You'll find things will happen rather quickly from now on.'

'That makes a change from recent weeks,' I said, with real feeling.

'You will not return to your unit' Robins said. 'I will inform them and arrange for the transfer of your paper work. Ron Simpson will go and collect your kit tomorrow. A room is available here for the next two nights, pyjamas and shaving kit will be provided. Please don't leave the building without being accompanied by Ron Simpson, your Conducting Officer. Our security is as tight as we can make it, because, in the SOE, in France, some networks have been infiltrated and eliminated due to poor security and we must avoid a similar situation happening to us.'

He sat back in his seat and assumed a businesslike expression. 'Now, the subject of pay. Do you have a bank account?' 'No,' I replied.

'In that case, any money due to you will be held by our Accounts Department until your return. Our minimum level of pay is for 1st Lieutenant in the RASC, so you will derive a small financial benefit from joining us. In addition, as you'll not be able to write letters home, a telegram will be sent, each month, to your next-of-kin, saying you are fit and well but unable to write. Is all this clear?'

'Yes, I think so,' I said hesitantly.

'Then, I'll press on, because Ron Simpson will be able to fill in any detail required. The day after tomorrow, an aircraft has been arranged to fly three of our people to Ramat David, in Palestine. You will join them. Their destination is the Parachute Regiment Training School. It is a condition that all our field staff are qualified parachutists. This means they will have completed at least five jumps. We have special arrangements with the Paratroopers for them to do a short course of five days for us. The first two days are spent learning how to fall correctly when you land and the next three days are devoted to the jumps. I told you things would happen quickly.'

'I can see you weren't joking,' I replied.

'After the jumping course,' he went on, 'you will go with Lieutenant Marshall, one of the other members of your party, who is also a wireless operator, to Mount Carmel, only a short distance from Ramat David. Here we have our wireless and code training school. You will spend a week with them, putting together the wireless you will be taking with you and also learning our method of coding messages. On your return, you will report to me.

'To finish our long session,' he said, 'I want to tell you about the other members of staff you will shortly be meeting. Many of them have been members of the LRDG (Long Range Desert Group). This unit has

now been disbanded. I think it is highly unlikely that their contribution towards the winning of the Desert War will ever be truly recognised. As the group is disbanded, the members had three options. They could go into either of the two new units being formed: The SAS (Special Air Service) and SBS (Special Boat Service), or join us. We had so many applications that some had to be declined because we couldn't have employed them all within a relatively short time. The problem was that the LRDG did not have wireless operators who were able to read Morse. They maintained radio silence once they had left base.'

He then made a telephone call to Simpson. 'Ron,' he said, when Simpson appeared, 'I'm sure you'll be pleased to know that Sergeant Hall will be joining us. Will you please show him round the house, see he is accommodated in Room 8, and pick up his kit tomorrow. He will be leaving on Thursday, for Ramat David, with the others. As I will be away tomorrow, please answer any questions he may have. I've rather rushed things today.' Robins turned back to me. 'Well Sergeant,' he said cheerfully, 'I'll not see you again until you return from Palestine. Just one final point, you now have the freedom of the house and there is no doubt that you'll be very popular, as soon as the others see the wireless operator's badge on your uniform. They are all very anxious to get into the field, but lack an operator. Take my advice, avoid detailed discussion with them until you return from the training sessions.'

Simpson showed me round the house. The facilities were excellent and a feeling of friendliness emanating from those we met during our tour; this was a new experience for me, particularly as I had recently spent nearly a couple of years in the desert under canvas. I gave Ron Simpson details about where I had been sleeping at HQ and said I had only a few personal belongings. These would be found in, or on, the locker by the bed. Much of my kit was still unpacked, as I had been expecting the move to Rhodesia. Finally, he took me to Room 8, which contained two beds. I could see no evidence of occupation so presumed I would be alone. He said dinner would be served promptly at 7.30 p.m. and he would look for me in the bar at about 7.

I took a shower and then lay on the bed to think over what had happened during the day. There was no doubt a transformation was going to come about in my life and I could only hope I'd be able to cope with the change. For the previous three or more years of the war I had lived from day-to-day without any thought of the future.

Although I had responsibilities, I'd only had to react to orders from above. Now, it could be different and I found the prospect exciting.

CHAPTER FOUR

I went down to the bar at about seven, the room was well occupied and, to judge by their different uniforms, this was a very mixed bunch. The ranks ranged from Major down to those with no badges on their shoulders or sleeves. There were Australians, New Zealanders and South Africans in evidence as well as a variety of Regimental insignia from Britain.

The majority were from the army; a few wore Naval uniforms. I couldn't see any from the RAF. It was difficult to estimate their ages; many were a deep mahogany colour due to long exposure to the sun. I would have guessed that most were in their twenties and thirties with a few much older, in fact, positively ancient. It was the first time I had seen commissioned and non-commissioned ranks socialising together.

I ordered a gin and tonic. When it arrived, I asked the cost. 'All drinks are on the house,' the barman said. Whilst I was still getting over my surprise, I was joined by Ron Simpson. 'Yes,' he said, 'from now on you will have no personal expenses. When you go operational, gold coins, dollars and local currency will be provided. I think the paper money, other than US Dollars, is printed in the UK, but this is very hush, hush.'

We took our drinks over to an unoccupied table and sat down. 'When we go into the dining room,' Simpson explained, 'you will see two large tables. We can sit at either of these. Our daily rations, with very restricted variety, are provided by the Army Catering Corps. So, dinner is always a choice of a meat dish or salad. Don't ask what sort of meat; it could be goat, sheep, camel or some other mysterious types, but not pork or beef.

We have excellent cooks, who do what they can, but most of the meat is as tough as old boots. There's some compensation in that it can be washed down with a good South African wine.'

During the course of dinner and afterwards in the bar, over coffee and brandy, there were a number of questions directed at me by various people. These were fielded by Ron, who said, firmly, that when I returned from Palestine was the time for discussion. I excused myself at ten o'clock and had an early night.

At breakfast the next morning, I sat next to one of those whom I rather contemptuously described as 'ancient.' When we started to speak, I had difficulty in understanding his broad Scottish accent. 'How long have you been a member of MO4?' I asked. 'About nine months,' he said. 'I was recruited from my job as a mining engineer in Nigeria. I was told they desperately needed people with experience in the use of explosives, and I've been using explosives in mining communities in Africa, for over thirty years. I arrived here just as the members from the LRDG joined us. They are very experienced in the use of explosives for blowing up planes, vehicles and oil installations so, being younger, they are preferred to me. As a result, I feel aggrieved. I've tried to get released back to my job but am constantly told to be patient.'

'I'm sorry to hear about your problem.' I responded. 'How old are you?'

'Fifty-two,' came the reply. 'I'm fit and healthy and don't believe there's anything in the work of MO4 that would be too much for me.'

'I think it was very good of you to volunteer. I hope you become part of a mission soon.' I said.

'How long is it since you have been back to Scotland?'

'I've never been back since I left over thirty years ago,' he said.

'I must say, I'm surprised you have retained such a broad accent.'

'Porridge every day for breakfast helps' he said with a smile.

Ron Simpson joined us at that moment and our conversation ceased. I said 'Cheerio' and we left the table.

The following morning, after breakfast, I was introduced to the other three people making up our party: Major Martin, Captain Henderson and Lieutenant Marshall. We were then taken, by one of the Conducting Officers, to Heliopolis, the RAF airfield for Cairo. We had quite a long wait before

departure, during which time there was not much conversation, but I did learn that two of my companions were previously with the LRDG and the other, Lieutenant Marshall, the wireless operator, was from the Signals Corps. He told me that ten wireless operators from the Signals Corps, at present in the UK, would be joining MO4 but their arrival would be delayed. This was caused as it became necessary to take the long journey round the Cape of Good Hope while the Mediterranean was still controlled by the Italian fleet.

We eventually took off in a small De Havilland passenger plane. After a flight of nearly four hours, we arrived, cold and hungry, at an airfield near Haifa and thence, after bully beef, biscuits and a mug of tea, by truck, to Ramat David, where we arrived late in the afternoon. There were six American Harvard aircraft parked close to a hangar and plenty of activity, with trainees doing exercises and jumping off elevated platforms.

We were taken to the wood hut which was to be our billet for the next five days. The Chief Instructor told us that jumping was carried out in the mornings. They made a 5 a.m. start, when the wind speed was usually at its lowest. In the morning, we would be taken to the dropping zone, to observe the procedure.

The following morning, we awoke to the sound of aircraft engines and planes taking off. Shortly after, we went to the dropping zone.

Unfortunately, on that day, there was a 15/20 mph wind blowing, and this was considered to be a bit strong for those with little or no previous jumping experience. As a result, it presented a somewhat disorganised, if not chaotic, scene.

There were a number of groups of six, four and two, jumpers in the air and on the ground; individuals were being dragged along because they were unable to spill the wind from the canopy of the parachutes. A number of instructors were shouting through loud hailer to the descending jumpers. There were two ambulances picking up the injured, and one unfortunate individual, whose static line from the parachute had become entangled with his clothing, was swinging about under the aircraft, with the pilot circling the dropping zone, to give him time to take action. Eventually, the man became free and descended. We went to his assistance and found his face had been lacerated by the static line but otherwise he was uninjured. This was not a good introduction to parachuting for us but the situation was treated light-heartedly.

It certainly made us concentrate more when we commenced training.

CHAPTER FIVE

On the appointed day, at 4.30 a.m., we went to the packing shed and were issued with our parachutes. Then, joined by eight Paratroopers, to make up the full complement. This was also to be the first jump for them.

We enplaned and, after attaching the clip of our static line, located at the back of the parachute, to a wire cable running the length of the fuselage, we sat, six on each side of the aircraft, on wood benches. The person in charge, the Dispatcher, told us we would be jumping in pairs, and after each pair had jumped out, the plane would make a circuit of the airfield before the next pair jumped. He explained that, when the red light by the door came on, we were to approach and stand by the door, one behind the other.

When the red changed to green, he would shout 'Go' and the first person would jump, followed as soon as possible by the other. We would, as he put it, 'make the smartest left turn of our lives'. We would be jumping from 600 feet and, as soon as possible after the jump, we were to listen for instructions being shouted from the ground. The aircraft then took off, all the trainees inwardly quaking and half afraid to look any of the others in the eye.

The red light came on; the first pair went to the door the light changed to green; both men leapt into space. Immediately, there was a thump, thump on the outside of the aircraft. 'They've hit the plane,' gasped one of the Paratroopers, and, to me, it sounded just like that. Unperturbed, the Dispatcher pulled in the two static lines, onto which were attached the fabric cases in which the parachutes had been packed. It was the noise of these striking the aircraft that we had heard. While waiting for my turn to

jump - I was one of the fourth pair - I could not help thinking about that boozy old song: 'Ten green bottles, hanging on the wall.'

It came to my turn. I leapt through the door, my eyes firmly shut. I felt a tugging, then opened my eyes; my feet were above my head and my body had already starting a swinging motion. In a split second of panic, I wondered what they would put in the first telegram to my people back home. I took a grip on myself and began to assess the situation. Unfortunately, I had twists in my shroud lines so, not only was I oscillating from side to side and drifting but also twisting as the lines unravelled. Before I fully realised what was happening, I hit the ground while travelling backwards and was thankful for the heavy rubber headgear as the back of my head struck the ground. With the ordeal over, and 'ordeal' is the best word I can use for the experience, I rolled up my parachute in the manner we had been taught and returned it to the packing shed. We spent the remainder of the day doing more exercises.

We did two jumps on each of the two succeeding days. One minor casualty was Captain Henderson who, on the fourth jump, bruised his right ankle and was told that he would have to wait a few days to make the final training jump. On completion of the course, we had a party to celebrate the occasion. Next day I awoke with a sore head, an affliction made worse when Lieutenant Marshal and I travelled, in a truck, over bumpy roads to Mount Carmel. However, after a shower and an hour on my bed, I felt better but resolved to have nothing stronger to drink for a day or two, than fresh-pressed orange juice, of which there was a plentiful supply as the training school was located on the edge of an orange grove.

The following day, we met Major Rose, the Camp Commandant and Chief Instructor, with his staff of four. The school comprised a collection of eight wooden huts, in a delightful spot and, as we were now higher up, the daytime temperature was ideal. There were eight students being taught wireless theory and practice together with Morse code. In addition, at a later date, they would be instructed in message coding.

In a hut devoted to wireless, Lt. Len Marshall and I were introduced by Sergeant Mason, the instructor to the wireless we would be taking with us when we were operational. It was contained in a medium-sized suitcase. I asked Sergeant Mason about the output power of the transmitter and told that it was between 9 and 12 watts. Since the power of the smallest set I had used before was 250 watts, I expressed my misgivings about the effectiveness of the small set in making regular contact.

'As you will know,' Mason explained, 'more output power means a bigger size and more weight. This set weighs 42 pounds and thought to be the maximum burden for one man to carry over rough country. The base station will be using a much more powerful transmitter, so receiving messages should be no problem. Transmitting messages from the field station to base and maintaining regular schedules is where skill and common sense are required. You will have the opportunity to try out your set' he added reassuringly. 'We have a regular, daily schedule with Cairo for up to one hour. I think you will be pleasantly surprised when you start operating.'

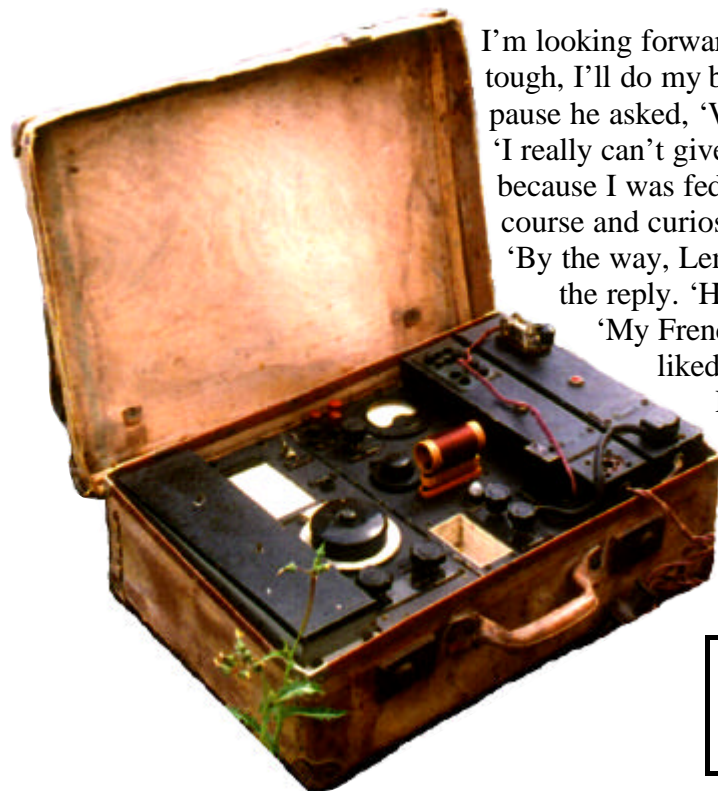
We then received instruction about the various components of the set. It could be operated using 110 volt or 240 volt mains supply, or from a 12 volt heavy duty car battery. We were provided with the various parts and then asked to assemble a set. There was not much involved in this as the component parts only required connecting together with external leads. When mine was complete, I switched on the receiver. The reception was good but there was much interference on the popular frequencies. I was happy with the result. The one remaining doubt was the transmitter. We had to wait for the next scheduled transmission time, 11.15 a.m. on the third day, to get an answer to our questions about this.

During the evening of the second day, Len Marshall asked me what I thought were our chances of making contact on the morrow. 'From the way Mason handled my query about the low power of the transmitter, I'm hopeful.' I replied. 'I've been in the Army since I was a boy,' Marshall said glumly. 'After training at the Signals School, I've only operated main station equipment and, since I gained my Commission, two years ago, I've become a pen pusher, on administrative work. My fist (the term used to describe the hand that operates the Morse key) will be a bit rusty. Do you think we could have a

session of sending and receiving on a buzzer unit tomorrow?’

‘By all means’ I replied, anxious to please. Up to this time, I had found conversation a bit difficult with Len. I went on, ‘I hope you don’t mind my asking, but why did you join MO4?’

‘To get away from the bureaucratic attitude of my superiors,’ he said. ‘This job involves personal risk. Have you thought about that?’ ‘Yes. I’ve been in the army since day one of the war and always working in some headquarters miles from any action, and hardly getting my hands dirty. When a message was circulated asking for volunteers for work of a dangerous nature, I submitted my name and, after various tests, I was accepted.



I’m looking forward to going on an operation and, if the going gets tough, I’ll do my best to cope with the situation.’ After a short pause he asked, ‘Why did you join?’

‘I really can’t give you an answer. I suppose you could say it was because I was fed up with the delay in taking up on an another course and curiosity after discussion with Robins,’ I told him.

‘By the way, Len, do you have a second language?’ ‘No,’ came the reply. ‘How about you?’

‘My French is passable because it was one of the subjects I liked at school and was improved by my being in France for the first nine months of the war. It might be useful.’

**A Suitcase Radio
Photographed at Blandford
Army Camp Dorset**

CHAPTER SIX

On the following day we received instruction in how to make contact with Cairo. The base station, at the appointed schedule time, would transmit a call sign for five minutes. The following five minutes was for us to transmit our call sign on a different frequency. The alternating five-minute sessions would continue for thirty minutes, or until contact was made, then messages would be passed. There would be two such scheduled times in every twenty-four hours.

At 11.15 we both switched on our sets and, without any trouble, the Cairo call sign was heard by both of us. Len made contact on the first transmission. Using different frequencies, I did not make contact until the third attempt. Signal strengths were exchanged and we each received a small coded message. Of course, at that time, we couldn’t decode them. Mason ended the day’s work by saying that we would spend the next two days receiving instruction on encoding and decoding.

Next morning found us back in the wireless training hut; Len and I seated at desks and Mason standing by a blackboard. ‘Today we’re going to deal with the method of coding and decoding messages. It’s a simple idea and carried out without the use of a coding book that can be identified as such,’ he began. ‘This is the key to our method,’ he continued, holding up a paperback novel and then handing each of us a copy of the same book. ‘Before you go on operations, it will be your responsibility to go to a book shop in Cairo and buy two copies of the same paperback. One copy is to be given to the message coding section and you will retain the other. In addition to the book they will require from you a four-figure number that is known only to you, and it must be one you are unlikely to forget. Let us presume you

were born on the 28th day of August, the 8th month, and you decide to use this as your secret number, it would be 2808. This is the number we will be using for our exercises.'

He tapped the blackboard and Len and I concentrated hard. 'We'll start by encoding the sort of message that could be sent to you by Cairo.'

Then turning again to the blackboard, he wrote in capital letters:

EXPECT PLANE TONIGHT RIFLES AMMO COMMA TWO TWENTY MM CANNONS BOOTS
AND CLOTHING FIRE PATTERN ARROW.

'No punctuation marks are used, unless essential for clarity. In which case they are spelt out. As you can see, I have introduced a comma after the word ammo. To encode a message, any page in the book, up to number 99 may be used. I've used page 34. Next, glance down the page and select any line that has at least twelve letters in it. This time, we'll use line 14. As you can see, this reads:

Slipped quietly down the chimney and into the room a well-known Starting at the left, count the letters until you come to the twelfth. Then include any letters left in that word. As you can see, in our example, we have - *slipped quiet* plus *ly*. Take a piece of paper with ruled squares, you'll find some on your desk, and, starting at the top left hand corner, writing across the page, put one letter of the key words in each square.' On the blackboard, Mason wrote: S L I P P E D Q U I E T L Y

'Now, in the row underneath this, starting at the left, number off the letters according to their position in the alphabet. In our example 'D' is 1, the first 'E' 2, and the second 'E' 3, the first 'I' 4 and so on. The complete sequence is - 11 6 4 8 9 2 1 10 12 5 3 13 7 14. So, writing left to right, we have position in the alphabet. Are we OK so far?' 'Yes,' came our reply. 'Fine,' said Mason. 'The next thing to do is write our message into this grid but, before doing so, we insert eight or ten extraneous letters at the beginning and, later, at the end of the message. This is to make decoding more difficult if the message is intercepted by the enemy. So, we have: L E F A I B O C E X P E C T Next row - P L A N E T O N I G H T R I and so on.

The additional letters I've used at the end are: C S A T D O A S T E G. The total number of letters must be divisible by 5. You will see the reason for this shortly.'

He waited while we filled in the grid. When we had finished, he said, 'The next two stages are the tricky bits but I'm sure you'll soon get the hang of it.' Using the same piece of squared paper and leaving a few blank lines, copy the row of figures we have already used, 11 6 4 8 9 etc. Then start at column 1 in the first grid and read down the column, starts with the letters O O D W Write these into rows across the grid. After column 1 you follow on column 2 and so on. When you have done this, repeat the operation but this time, instead of writing the letters into a grid, write them on a piece of plain paper, in groups of five, across the page. This is why the total number of letters must be divisible by 5. Is this understood?' I was not too sure, so I asked him to repeat the two steps. This he did. 'Now,' he said, 'have a go at it. You may confer. While you are doing that, I'll go and make us a cup of coffee.' When Mason returned, he allowed us to drink our coffee in peace before he asked how we had fared.

'Have you arrived at the finished message?' he asked. 'Yes,' said Len, our messages seem to be identical.' Mason then went to the blackboard and, copying from a card, chalked up:

5212 RSTOE LOTNY MRIRF ANAEA HAMDP ATTEM MFFWP MNCOE ELOAI ISTLN
TTEWH XORON CBOGC SGODG RTMAP EOAON WNETB CINOF TTELA NCAIN ASCDS
5212

'The only difference between my version and yours should be the four figure numbers at the beginning and end of the message. These were obtained by adding the page and line numbers to the secret number. There is one difference between the way we do our addition and the normal method. No digits are carried if the total of the two numbers being added together is greater than 9. So, page and line 3414 plus secret number 2808 equals 5212. Can you see how the answer of 5212 comes about? do they compare?' After a bit of figuring, we said we were both happy about the method. 'Please swap papers.' he said. After comparison, all three messages were found to be identical.

Congratulations,' said Mason. 'I bet you found it easier than you thought. If the message is picked up by the enemy, the addition of the extraneous letters makes decoding more difficult, particularly if the message is split up and the parts sent at different times and on different frequencies.

With a little practice, you will have no difficulty with encoding a message.'

He came and placed both hands on my desk. 'There's about an hour to go before lunch time. Will you both compose and encode a message.

The content is not important. Then swap them, ready for decoding. We will deal with this aspect tomorrow.' We spent the afternoon profitably encoding a number of messages and discussing wireless procedures.

The following day, when we were once again assembled, Mason began with a summary of the previous work and then continued the lesson. 'As you may be aware, we have done the hard work. Decoding is just the reverse procedure of coding. Take the four-figure number in group one of the message and subtract from it the secret number. Again, in this case, if the lower figure is greater than the one above, do the subtraction without actually borrowing from the column on the left. Hence, $5212 - 2808 = 3414$ - our page and line number. Are you both happy about this?' 'Yes,' we replied. 'So,' he continued, 'we're back to SLIPPEDQUIETLY and the alphabetical numbering. Will you please carry out this operation.' When we had completed this, he continued - 'There is one more thing you'll need to know before you start decoding. When the message was encoded, you read down the columns and transposed the letters into rows across the grid. Now we do the reverse. Read across the rows and write down the columns. In order to put the letters in the columns, we need to know how many to put in each column. Do you agree?' We agreed.

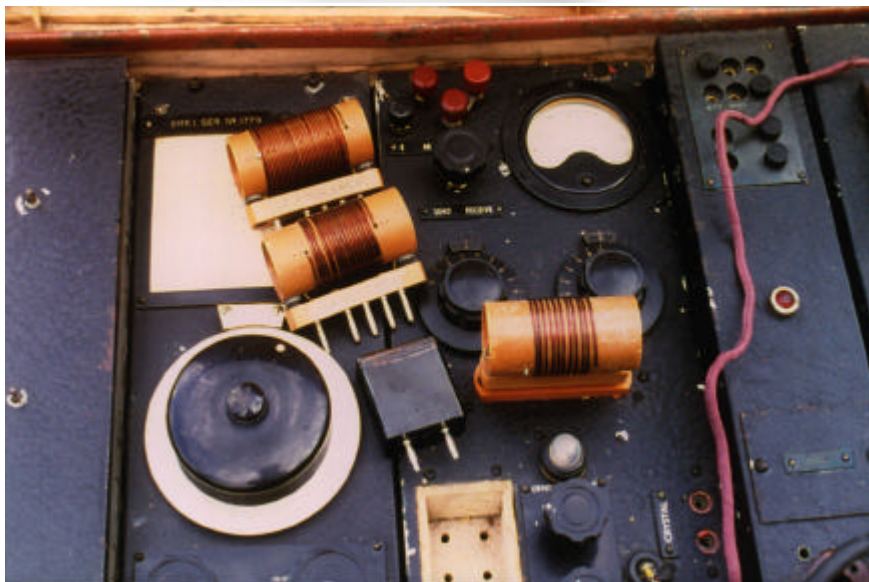
'In your wireless contact procedure you will have indicated to Cairo that you have to send a message comprising of so many groups. We know each group is comprised of five letters, except the two containing the four figure numbers. So, if these two are deducted and the remaining figure multiplied by five, you then have the total number of squares that are required to accommodate the message. Rule off a line on the grid for this number of squares so that when entering letters in the column you know when to stop. I'll wait while you carry out this operation.' When we had finished he asked, again, 'Is everything OK?' 'Still with you,' I said. 'After transposing the letters for the first time, the procedure must be repeated to reveal the message.'

After we had reviewed the complete procedure, Mason asked us to decode the short messages received from Cairo on the previous day. 'The secret number and the paperback are the same as we have been using,' he assured us. This was accomplished without much difficulty. It was interesting to note that a different page and line had been used for each message and the content looked entirely dissimilar, but the decoded message was the same. He congratulated us in making contact at the first attempt.

'Well, that concludes the part of your training for which I'm responsible.

I think you have made good progress,' Mason said. 'The method of coding is, as I said, simple and, who knows, at a later date, you may find it useful to use in your own private communications.' He gave us a knowing grin. 'Major Rose would like to see you now and I'll finish by wishing both of you good luck with your missions. Your wireless sets will be available tomorrow before you depart.'

We both thanked him for his assistance and said it had been a very interesting week. He then took us to Major Rose. When we had entered his office, Rose said jokingly to Mason, 'Were they carrot or stick students?' 'They worked well and soon understood the coding method,' Mason replied. Then, Rose turned to us and said, 'I know it's been a bit rushed, but Robins is like a cat on hot bricks at present because of the shortage of operators.' He picked up a piece of paper, read it swiftly and said, 'Ah, yes. Your plane is due to take off from Haifa at 10:15 tomorrow. Ron Simpson will meet you at Heliopolis (the airfield for Cairo). We hope you have a pleasant flight and happy landings when you go on the job.' We thanked them both and went to have a beer to celebrate another hurdle overcome.



CHAPTER SEVEN

When I was once again seated in Robin's office, he asked with a smile, 'Did you have a pleasant holiday in Palestine?' I gave him an old-fashioned look and replied, 'The first week had its moments of excitement and I learned a lot during the second week but I need practice with coding and to gain confidence with the transmitter of the wireless.' 'I hope you'll soon have the opportunity to do this, as I've arranged for you to put in some time working in the Wireless Section, where you'll be contacting stations in the field.

But first I want you to meet the two people who form two thirds of the Victor Mission. They are Major Bolton and Captain Hanbury, they require a wireless operator to complete their team. We hope to get four new Missions into the field during May. Two are already on their way to Derna, our landing ground and base for supplies, which is in Libya, some fifty miles west of Tobruk. Our main problem is that sorties are only made during a period of about ten days in each month, when there is sufficient moonlight to allow topographical navigation, as all the dropping areas are remote.

The suitable period this month starts on the 18th.'

He sighed deeply, like a man who bears many burdens. 'During the next three days, I would like you to spend some time with Major Bolton and Captain Hanbury, so that you can assess whether or not you are happy in their company, and to let them take a look at you, too. Remember, you would be living and

working with them day and night for the entire time and we have no way of knowing how long it will be. Three is a difficult number. Do you recall the old adage: Two's company and three's a crowd? Well, it's particularly appropriate in our case. As a matter of fact, we have one Mission which is faced with exactly that problem, and it is the dangerous situation of incompatibility. If you are not completely happy with your intended companions, I'll make some other arrangements.'

This caused me to think for a short while and then I asked about something that had been niggling away at me ever since I became entangled with MO4. "I hope you don't mind me mentioning this, but in the RAF there is a preservation of the 'pecking order', even though commissioned and non-commissioned ranks may make up an air-crew. I'm happy with that arrangement. I know where I am with it. In this organisation there doesn't seem to be any difference between the two, and at times I have something of an inferiority complex."

I'm pleased to try and deal with problems such as this, which our members have,' said Robins. 'You've only been with us a short while and seen us in what might be termed our off-duty-mode. I think you'll find it different when you are in a team of three under a Mission Leader. Then, I would expect you to give the Leader full co-operation. How you address one another is for you to decide at the outset. I think you'll find the problem will disappear.' This made sense, of a sort, and I let it rest there. 'Now,' he continued, 'I want you to go down to the bar, where members will be gathering for a pre-lunch drink. Major Bolton will be there and expecting you. We can talk later.'

As I entered the bar, a number of heads turned to see who had come in. A man, whom I assumed to be Major Bolton, raised his arm and beckoned me to his table. At the table there were two people; Bolton rose to his feet, shook hands, and introduced himself and then Captain John Hanbury.

I reciprocated. 'What are you drinking' said Hanbury

'A gin and tonic, please,' I replied. He then went to the bar.

'Sit yourself down, my friend,' Bolton said. 'Robins tells us you've had a good deal of experience as an operator.'

'Well, yes, it's true. I've done a variety of different types of work but this will be something new, using such a low powered transmitter. It's the sort of power used by amateurs,' I replied.

'I hope you don't mind my asking, but how old are you?' Bolton asked, quizzing me with a pair of shrewd eyes 'I've just had my twenty-third birthday.' 'I must say, you look much younger than that.'

Hanbury then returned with the drinks. As we sat at the small table, I was able to study my drinking companions, and noticed at once, from the colour of their skins, that they had not been in the Middle East very long. Bolton had rather a florid complexion and I guessed that he was in his mid to late thirties. Hanbury was a taller, younger-looking man. 'After lunch, we'll go to a small sitting room, adjacent to John's bedroom, and have a chat, to find out a little about each other,' said Bolton, looking at me in a conspiratorial way, and I nodded.

Hanbury then asked, 'How long have you been out here?'

'I came out from England in November 1940.'

'Were you bored with the journey round the Cape?'

'Fortunately, we didn't have that problem.'

'How did you come out, then?' he persisted.

'I came out with 73 Squadron through the Med.'

'I thought the Mediterranean has been closed to our shipping since the Italians came into the war?'

Hanbury sounded dubious.

'We were part of a special operation; it's quite a story I'll tell you about it when there is more time.'

'I'd like to hear it' he continued.

'Yes, I'm sure it was quite an exciting experience' said Bolton.

Bolton had arranged for coffee to be served in the sitting room and, when we could no longer be overheard, he commenced the conversation. 'First, let me tell you a little about myself. I'm a wartime soldier. I came into the army, with a colleague, to carry out a specific task. What it was doesn't matter, because it was cancelled. We were then recruited into MO4, specifically to go to Yugoslavia because we both speak Russian, a similar language, and we have been having lessons in Serbian which, like Russian, uses the Cyrillic alphabet. My colleague, Major Richmond, was dropped in, during March, to the West

Serbian Territory and I will be leading the Mission to East Serbia. I'm thirty-four years of age and, as far as I know, I have no offensive habits.'

There was a pause and I realised he had finished. I thought this was at least to the point. John Hanbury then took up the autobiographical theme. 'I'm from Auckland, New Zealand. I'm twenty-six years old and was in England seeking a job when war was declared. I joined the British Army and was involved in the early days of the Parachute Regiment, in which I became an Instructor and completed over one hundred jumps. I have also received training in the use of explosives. When the SOE, in England, was formed, I trained some of the French agents and then applied to join SOE myself. I was asked if I would join MO4 instead and agreed to the request.' He sat back and relaxed.

It was my turn to tell them about my background and so, like them I kept it short. 'My name is Ted Hall. I come from Hayes, in Middlesex. As a result of a heavily advertised recruiting campaign by the Government, I joined the RAF in 1937, because I wanted to fly. I was trained as a wireless operator at Cranwell, in Lincolnshire. With the declaration of war, I was sent, as a member of the BEF, to France, to build D/F (Direction Finding) stations for use by the RAF. After the disastrous French campaign, I was evacuated from Brest and joined 73, a Hurricane Squadron. My work was the servicing of aircraft during the Battle of Britain. I've already told you how I came to the Middle East with 73. I served a further year with them, going up the Western Desert with the Wavell offensive against the Italians and then retreating to El Alamein when the Germans, led by Rommel, appeared on the scene.

After that I was posted to 272 Squadron.' 'Thank you for the details,' said Bolton. 'Tell me now, do you know anything about Yugoslavia?' 'Nothing at all,' I confessed, 'Quite frankly, it wasn't until after my initial chat with Robins, that I looked at a map to find it's position in relation to surrounding countries.' 'So, you don't know anything about the history of the country?' 'No,' I replied. 'Well, in due course, if it's agreed that you'll join us, I'll be pleased to tell you what I know. But remember I've not actually been to the country. Now then, if there's anything further you want to know about us, please don't hesitate to ask. I suggest we adjourn for the present and meet again for a drink before dinner. Is that OK?' 'Yes,' I replied.

When I was resting after a shower, I tried to think of anything that disturbed me about these two new associates. I'm pleased to say, there had been no indications of displeasure on their part. I wondered what Bolton had been doing before he joined the Army. When we were having our pre-dinner drink, I asked him about his previous career. 'I was in the Treasury Department of the Civil Service,' he said. 'Did you find it a boring job?' 'Not at all,' he replied, taciturnly. 'I think he held a senior position, somewhat above the level of a pen-pusher,' said Hanbury, ending what might have become an uncomfortable silence.

I had arranged for Ron Simpson to take me to the Wireless Section in the afternoon. This was located within the Army HQ compound in Cairo. The wireless transmitters were maintained by the Royal Corps of Signals and operated by land lines from a separate building, which housed the Receiving and Coding Departments of MO4. Ron introduced me to a number of key people and then asked to be telephoned when I was ready to be escorted back to Rue Eleusis. I saw Len Marshall cheerfully working on a set and he told me he had worried for nothing, as it only took a few shifts for him to get back into the groove.

The first thing I was asked to do was send an article of text on a buzzer unit for a number of operators to listen to. This was done to enable the receiving operator to know who was operating the key the other end. It is the equivalent of recognising a person's voice on the telephone. I was asked to ensure the same procedure was carried out for the next two shifts, as a twenty-four-hour operation was maintained. The reason behind this procedure is to prevent the wireless, if captured, with the coding system, being used by the enemy to communicate with us.

For the remainder of the afternoon I sat in on various schedules. Some were successful and there were others where the field station was not heard. The procedure, as explained before, was for the Base station to send his call sign for five minutes then listen for the field station for five minutes. If contact was not made, Base would transmit for a further five minutes, followed by another five minute listening period,

during which there would be two sets listening. Again, if no contact were established, there would be a five-minute repeat sending and receiving period, during which there would be three receiving sets listening. If contact wasn't made during this period, another attempt would be made at the next scheduled time.

There were field stations that had not been heard from for months, in some cases they had been out of contact since arrival. Despite this, the same procedure as I've described was carried out at each, twice daily, scheduled time. It was reassuring to know that there would be more than one operator listening for you. The base station did not expect to make contact at every schedule, as there were many reasons why the field station might not be on the air. I returned in time for dinner, after which I asked my two associates if they would be happy for me to join them in the Victor Mission. They both seemed keen, but I wasn't quite sure whether this was because they had been waiting six weeks for the Mission to be made up. However, I said I would be happy to join them. This called for a few drinks, after which I retired to think things over in my bath.

I saw Robins on the following morning, and told him I had decided to go with the Victor Mission. He showed his relief. 'I'm pleased about that. I think you three will make a good team.' He then handed me a personal shopping list of things I might consider taking with me. 'Apart from your wireless set, coding book and personal possessions, all other equipment will be obtainable at Derna. You should bear in mind, however, that everything has to be carried and must be capable of being packed quickly. Make sure you have a really good, comfortable pair of boots, if nothing else, because there are no taxis where you are going.' He laughed at his joke. 'I'll fix a time and date for your journey to Derna and then arrange a meeting with all three of you. In the meantime, will you continue working in the Wireless Section.' 'Yes, I've arranged to go there this afternoon.'

I spent two more days in the Wireless Section but, for some undefined reason, I was not allowed access to the Coding Section. When I enquired about this ban, it was explained to me that there might have been confidential messages being decoded, the contents of which they would prefer anybody going into the field not to know. At the conclusion, I worked out with a Controller my schedule for the twice-daily wireless contact times and frequencies. Once again, I received best wishes for a successful mission and was assured that they would be listening for me later in the month.

CHAPTER EIGHT

On May 8th, at 11 a.m., the Victor Mission was assembled in Robins' office.

'You will be leaving tomorrow, by train, for Alexandria,' Robins informed us. 'Then you will travel in a three-ton lorry to Derna. I give you fair warning it is a dusty, bumpy, wearisome journey of about five hundred miles and will take two, perhaps even three, days to complete. You'll know something about these conditions already, Sergeant?' 'Yes, I've been to Derna a number of times, but never after such a long journey,' I admitted. 'That is unfortunately unavoidable. At the present time, the Carbon Mission, to whom you will be dropping, isn't in wireless contact (names of missions were chosen by the Leaders). They haven't been heard for the last three days. The reason for this is not known. They had not reported enemy action in the area. It is more likely an equipment problem. Major Bolton will be talking to you about the principal targets in the territory for which you'll be responsible. The one major advantage Yugoslavia has over other countries is that the Chetnik Brigades are in wireless contact with each other and also with Mihailovich's HQ so, if required, co-ordinated action by the Brigades could be arranged.

'At Derna, you will each be given a money belt containing one hundred sovereigns, fifty half-sovereigns, ten thousand US dollars and a quantity of Romanian or Bulgarian currency. Yugoslavian dinars are not provided. They have roaring inflation and a barrow load of dinars can be had for a sovereign. This money is to pay for your expenses and 'palm-greasing' if appropriate. Unfortunately, you'll have to wear the belts all the time, because a number have been stolen. You'll also be provided with individual first aids kits and, to help relieve the boredom of waiting, we have invited Jasper Maskelyne of Maskelyne and Devants, the London Illusionists, to give you a lecture, and some hints and tips on methods of escape. He has a variety of escape aids available for you to choose from. Personal

weapons will also be available at Derna. There is also a Mission Advisor with whom you should discuss any matters about which you may have a query. Have you finished work in the Wireless Section Sergeant?' he asked. 'Yes. Although, I still need to purchase the two paperbacks, which I'll do this afternoon, when I go shopping with Ron Simpson,' I said.

'Are there any questions you would like to ask?' Robins looked round at each of us in turn. 'Yes,' said Bolton. 'Is it possible to get a message to the Carbon Mission via the Mihailovich wireless network?' 'No,' said Robins. 'The Chetniks will not allow us to communicate in this way. As a matter of fact, when you are in your territory, you could see if there is a way of getting round this problem. Their wireless equipment is very poor and unreliable. If we were able to pass urgent messages via their network, we might be prepared to equip them with suitcase sets.' There were no other questions.

'Well,' Robins concluded, 'it remains for me to wish you the best of luck and safe arrival in East Serbia. The work you will be doing requires a great deal of patience and a good understanding of the Serb mentality.'

During dinner that evening, Bolton raised the subject of his promised background briefing on the situation in Yugoslavia. 'I think it will be better to wait until we are at Derna for our chat about the history and present situation in Yugoslavia. We will have quite a bit of time to kill whilst waiting for our turn to depart. So, I'm for an early night tonight. We could be in for a rough time during the next few days.' I was hardly in a mood conducive to absorbing a history lesson, and was perfectly happy to let Bolton postpone it until I had nothing better to do than pay attention.

CHAPTER NINE

Our journey from Alexandria to Derna took two and a half days and was, as anticipated, a very rough ride. The road, which ran a mile or two from the sea, was now, due to the armies of both sides using tracked vehicles when advancing and retreating, more potholes than macadamised surface, making progress very slow. The particle size of the sand in the Western Desert is so small that any vehicle travelling over it creates a dust cloud, which penetrates everything. Amidst all our trials and tribulations, I was thankful that the one thing we did not have was a dust storm. When this occurs the sun is blotted out, darkness descends and vehicular movement ceases so, it could have been worse.

The Derna I had known was just desert; the low growing shrub had been removed to form a landing strip, and it was strewn with a number of burned out and derelict Italian fighter planes. Now, it was only recognisable by the still present derelict planes. The place was a hive of activity, with many Army and RAF personnel going about their business. An assortment of prefabricated wooden huts and marquees had appeared, and there were also eight Handley Page Halifaxes and three American Liberator bombers. This was the desert base of MO4.

We were thankful to climb stiffly out of the lorry, bones aching and all, I'm sure, nursing a few bruises. We were hot, tired, hungry, and dirty. The transit camps at which we had stopped on the way had poor facilities, most of them lacked an adequate supply of fresh water. An RASC (Royal Army Service Corps) Sergeant, whose name we were told was Richards, met us. He was to be our Advisor. We were taken to a hut and allocated beds. I asked Sergeant Richards if it was possible, before doing anything else, to be taken down to the sea for a swim, because I wanted to remove the grime we had accumulated in the past three days. Yes, he said, he would arrange this. He explained that, normally, a vehicle went down in the mornings and afternoons for this purpose. Unfortunately, we had missed the afternoon run by about half an hour.

The swim in the delightfully warm Mediterranean did a good deal to revive our flagging spirits. We met some of the other Mission people, who said they were bored by the waiting and the monotony of the food. There was, however, the consolation of an adequate bar. In due course, we returned to our hut and had a snooze in a motion-free bed. Dinner was all from tins, for there were no fresh vegetables. We had a meal comprising soup, stew and hard tack biscuits, followed by peaches and Carnation evaporated milk.

After dinner, we all congregated in the bar. One Mission, due to go to Greece the previous month, had made two attempts but the plane failed to make contact with the ground party, so they were still waiting around and hoping for a better result in May. Next day, we went to see Colonel Dent, the Officer Commanding the Base.

‘Welcome, to our home-from-home,’ he said with a wry smile. ‘We are located here as this is the nearest and most convenient place for a base on the North African coast, in relation to the countries we are supporting. This keeps the flying time to the various countries as short as possible. In order to get you to East Serbia, with a worthwhile load of three tons, we have to use the Liberators. Our biggest problem is the state of the weather. What we do, for each month, is to make a provisional schedule; for instance, you’re scheduled for the 19th. On that day the load of weapons, ammunition and clothing for the various flights is assembled.

“At 1600 hours a decision is taken based on the latest weather forecast and serviceability of aircraft, then loading carried out. If, between 1600 and takeoff time, an adverse report is received concerning a destination, the load is removed and replaced by that of a reserve flight. We don’t like doing this unloading and re-loading, but, if we are to maximise the use of the aircraft over about the ten days of the month in which we can operate, it’s essential. The majority of our flights are with equipment only, so we can drop the parachutes with a higher predicted wind speed than when dropping personnel.”

After leaving Colonel Dent, we went to the Stores Office and I handed in my wireless set. ‘Have you selected and tried out your petrol charger?’ I was asked. ‘No,’ I said, ‘where do we go to find this equipment?’ ‘The best thing to do is to get your Advisor to take you round the various stores. You’ll be able to see our stores of equipment and follow through the assembling and loading operations. We are dependent on what captured equipment the Army sends plus the efforts of two search parties we have out, scrounging on our behalf. The problem arises because the rifles and machine guns in use by our Forces, apart from the Sten gun, have a different size of ammunition to that used on the continent of Europe. All equipment we send has been tested but we don’t have the staff to clean each piece.



CHAPTER TEN

Following our afternoon swim, Bolton suggested we settle down somewhere and have the postponed chat about Yugoslavia. We found a vacant table in the bar and, using notes and a sketch map, he began. 'In 1919, following WW1, on the insistence of the British and French, a number of independent states were brought together to form Yugoslavia. These included Bosnia, Croatia, Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.'

'They were then sub-divided into three so-called countries. Croatia and Slovenia were two and the remainder were lumped together with Serbia. The ethnic makeup of this alliance, with the added complication of the prevalent Orthodox, Catholic and Moslem (Islamic) religions, was bound to create problems from the very beginning. On a number of occasions there have been reports of border clashes, with casualties running into hundreds. Apparently, the aggressor in these engagements has been difficult to prove, particularly in the confrontations between the Croats (Catholic) and Serbs (Orthodox). Since we are going to a traditional part of Serbia, having no borders to the other countries who form part of Yugoslavia, we may not have to be concerned about this problem, only time will tell. We need go no further into the historical aspect except to mention that, after Yugoslavia had been conquered by the Germans, in 1941, a number of Croats volunteered to serve with the German army. They were formed into a unit called the *Ustashe*. We may find that they are active in our territory.'

'In 1941/42 reports of guerrilla activities in Yugoslavia began to be received by our Government. It was established that a General Mihailovich was their leader and had been placed in that position by the Yugoslavian Government in exile, in Britain. His followers were known as *Chetniks*. Reports on the Russian wireless gave details of another band of guerrillas, the Partisans, led by Marshal Tito, a Croat. 'Early in 1942, a Colonel Hudson was sent, by submarine, to try and establish the true position. He landed on the Adriatic coast and, since it was the area in which Tito was supposed to be active, Hudson tried to make contact with him, but failed. There was a question mark concerning this Marshal Tito. We know that his real name is Joseph Brodz and he was a political activist with communist tendencies, prior to the war. Colonel Hudson, after failing to make contact with Tito, went eastwards, found a Chetnik Brigade and, eventually, was taken to Mihailovich. Therefore, when it was decided to provide support to Yugoslavia, the first Mission, under command of a Colonel Bailey, was sent to Mihailovich in mid 1942. Since that time five Missions have been established with the Chetniks, in Central and East Serbia will be the sixth.'

In my original discussions with Robins, it was mentioned that, if possible, they would like the Chetniks to be well enough organised so that a major diversionary operation could be carried out just prior to the time when our forces launch a major attack on Southern Europe. The objective would be to draw off some of the enemy forces. If the British Missions thought the Chetniks were good enough to carry out such an operation, it's possible it would be supported by parachute troops.' Bolton asked me, 'Have you any questions?' 'I've understood what you have said, so there are no questions on that, but the problem created by the nationalistic and religious differences is not easy for me to understand; I'm completely ignorant about these matters. How conscious of this situation do we have to be?' 'I think it's something you needn't concern yourself about, particularly as you don't speak Serbian. As I've said, the differences between the various groups may not be evident in our part of the country,' he concluded, leaving me considerably less than convinced that these ethnic and religious differences were really so unimportant.

He placed the sketch map on the table and smoothed it with his hand. I again felt curious about his past career, since he seemed to be so remarkably well informed about matters which, surely would have been secret. I knew by now, though, that I should probably have to remain in ignorance. This suited me well enough. 'The part of the country in which we will be operating is bounded on the East side by the River Danube, and in the North extends to about fifty miles south of Belgrade. In the South it goes to the junction of Serbia with Rumania and Bulgaria. In the west, it comes up to the Carbon Mission territory. It's a mountainous territory, with only a few macadamised roads connecting the larger towns. Other places are linked with dirt roads or tracks.' He traced the borders with a finger while he explained the sketch map to us.

‘Our brief is to collect intelligence about Axis military dispositions and to encourage and promote resistance by the guerrillas, particularly by sabotaging lines of communication and facilities of value to the Germans. Supplies of weapons, ammunition and clothing to re-arm and re-equip the Chetniks will be dropped by parachute.

‘There are three strategically important targets in our area. First, the River Danube, which carries barge traffic bringing supplies for the South Russian front. Secondly, there is a railway which is doing the same thing and, in addition, carries personnel. Thirdly, there is a copper mine at Bor, which we understand is providing about a third of the German requirements for that metal.

‘I had hoped to have more information from Major Richmond, who is with the Carbon Mission, but contact with them has been intermittent and, as we have heard, there has been no contact at all for the last three days. We will be unable to leave until communication with them has been re-established. Have you any questions?’ ‘Yes,’ said Hanbury, ‘do we have any idea of the strength of the Chetniks in our territory?’ ‘No, I’m afraid we have no idea,’ replied Roger. ‘To attack the important targets you have mentioned,’ said Hanbury, ‘will require a good deal of planning and a considerable number of troops to carry out the plan.’ ‘Yes, of course,’ said Bolton. ‘Naturally, it’s not anticipated that we will be in a position, for at least six months, to mount operations of this complexity. Our first task will be to carry out a reconnaissance of the territory, to establish the disposition of the forces available to us and those against us, as well as consider the difficulties in travelling from place to place. I don’t think we can do much planning until we have established those three points.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

After dinner that evening we were assembled in the bar and a presentation was made by Jasper Maskelyne. He began by explaining that he was Jasper Maskelyne of Maskelyne and Devant. They were illusionists and, in peace time, performed in London’s theatre-land. He had volunteered for service and would normally have been rejected, due to his age, but his specialised ability had been thought an asset.

We were shown a variety of escape aids: maps printed on silk, which could be stitched into the lining of clothing; mini compasses inserted into smoking pipes; and brass military buttons which concealed a compass. There were small saws moulded into a flexible rubber covering for concealment about ones anatomy. This last item, not unnaturally, drew a good deal of hilarious comment. He gave a demonstration of how to pick various types of lock, and showed us how to change our appearance. The talk, apart from being informative, was also entertaining, and after the fashion of a good, pre-war children’s party, he invited us to help ourselves to any of the escape aids that appealed to us. When I had a moment in which to ponder the direction my life was taking, I was almost glad that the transfer to Rhodesia had been postponed. My days were interesting, busy and rewarding, and the future would be stimulating; of that I was certain.

The next day, Sgt. Richards gave us a tour of the various huts and marquees where the weapons and ammunition were stored; some Italian and some German in origin. There was also a large quantity of British Sten guns, which had been developed specially to use 9mm ammunition available in Continental Europe. There were mortars of different types; 20 mm cannons; heavy and light machine guns; in fact, every type of weapon that would be of use to guerrilla forces.

We were then taken to the place where the battery charging equipment was stored. Most of the charging motors were of American manufacture. I chose one, tried it out and was satisfied with its performance. In the same place, I also saw a number of pedal chargers. These were of German manufacture and resembled bicycles without wheels; with a generator mounted where the back wheel would have been. I asked for one to be included with our shipment. My two companions thought I was taking something which we would never use, but I knew what cantankerous things petrol charging motors could be, not forgetting the fact that one needs petrol to make them work.

On a number of occasions, we had heard small arms being fired. Bolton asked if we could try out the German Schmeisser machine pistol as a possible personal weapon. This was agreed so, on May 17th, we

spent a good deal of time at their range, trying out a number of weapons. In the end we all settled for a Smith and Wesson .38 calibre pistol.

There was good news, too. Communication with the Carbon Mission had been re-established. The problem had been flat batteries, as they had run out of petrol for the charger. Major Richmond asked Bolton to make sure he brought some Scotch as part of the cargo, because he could not take the local firewater. The news gave us a lift and a check revealed that we were still scheduled for the 19th. The arms and clothing in our plane was intended for the Carbon Mission, as we would be dropping in their territory.

That night, with many things on my mind, I found it difficult to get to sleep; I went for a walk outside the hut, to get a bit of air, and almost walked into Jasper Maskelyne, who was having a quiet smoke. He said he was a poor sleeper and was kept awake by one of the other occupants of his hut, who snored loudly.

He said he would like to ask me a personal question.

'Fire away,' I said, 'I'll answer if I can.'

'What makes you volunteer for this hazardous activity?'

'I've already been asked that question a number of times since I agreed to become part of a Mission. I think most of those who volunteer would find it difficult to give a positive answer. I haven't met anybody yet whom I thought was doing it out of bravado, or who thought they had something to gain by volunteering. It could be curiosity or boredom. I just cannot answer the question.'

'Thank you,' he said. 'I would have been surprised to receive a straight answer. I wouldn't have volunteered, if I'd known what a lousy place this desert is. There's some compensation in meeting brave people like you.'

I felt embarrassed at his remark. He wished me good luck and disappeared into his hut.

During the morning of the 19th we went for a final briefing with Colonel Dent, who informed us that the weather forecast for Eastern Serbia promised broken cloud and a wind-speed of 5/10 mph. The plane would be loaded at 1600 and we should be present when this was being carried out. Take-off time was 1900 and we were asked to contact the pilot about half an hour before this and he would give us details of the flight plan. We were then handed our money belts I was surprised how heavy and cumbersome mine was. I had not given this any thought until now, but the prospect of wearing it all the time was something about which I was not happy.

Following a swim in the afternoon, we went to see the equipment being loaded into the plane. The bulk of it seemed to have been packed into six, 10-foot-long, cylindrical, light metal, canisters with parachutes attached, which were loaded into the bomb bays, and a variety of smaller packages, again with parachutes attached, which were loaded into the fuselage. After an early dinner, it was time to don our heavy flying/jump suits. These were necessary as it would be extremely cold in the plane. We were to be provided with sleeping bags. Somehow, sleep seemed to be elusive these days.

CHAPTER TWELVE

At 1830 we met our pilot and navigator and were surprised to discover that they were Americans. Apparently, they had delivered the plane, which had only been loaned, and had been asked to stay on and fly the MO4 sorties. The flight plan was to set a course to take us over the Mediterranean, into the Adriatic and over Albania. The course would then be north-east across Yugoslavia, to pick up the Danube at Turnu Severin, where there was a distinctive loop in the river. Then we would fly west for about fifteen minutes, to reach the dropping zone. The plane would circle the dropping zone and look for a recognition signal from the ground. In our case, it was the morse letter 'X', sent on an Aldis lamp or torch, and we would reply with 'Y', and then fires on the ground, in the shape of a 'V', would be lit. The recognition signals had become necessary as the enemy, on previous occasions had attempted to obtain the cargo, by lighting fires of their own when they heard aircraft engines at night.

Our crew had already taken cargo to the Carbon Mission, so they had some idea of the district. The navigator said that, when they crossed the Albanian coast, the height would be increased to twelve thousand feet, due to the mountainous territory, and he would fly higher still if there was any anti-aircraft fire.

The flying time would be approximately five hours and forty minutes. We were asked to go forward into

the cockpit for take-off, as we would be carrying a full load of fuel and it would help with weight distribution. And, so we began our flight into the unknown.

At take-off, the pilot opened the throttles, there was a roar from the four engines and the plane gathered speed down the sandy runway. There came the time when I thought the pilot would ease the stick back and we would become airborne, but no, we continued in touch with the ground. I could see the end of the runway rushing towards us. At the last minute, just in time, the wheels left the runway. I exhaled slowly and my fingers unclenched. I had been certain that we were going to be in trouble before we had started. The pilot said the load was really beyond the recommended maximum, which meant he needed the full length of the runway.

The fuselage of our Liberator had been specially modified to provide a hole in the bottom through which parachutists and packages could exit. During the flight there was a cap over the opening. The rear gunner was to act as dispatcher. He told us that, on the first run over the target, two of the smaller packages would be dropped, to see how they drifted in relation to the fires. If necessary, the Navigator who operated the ready and go lights would take the drift into account. The Dispatcher also showed us an oxygen mask on the end of a length of rubber hose. 'If you find oxygen necessary, you'll have to share the mask.'

With nothing else to do but wait, we climbed into the protective warmth of our sleeping bags. Some two hours later, the dispatcher informed us that we would shortly be ascending from 6 to 12 thousand feet. It became increasingly colder and we experienced difficulty in breathing and making body movements, so we began to share the single oxygen mask, which brought small relief.

Fortunately, the sensation brought about by anoxia was soon ended when the height was reduced. The dispatcher informed us that the Liberator had actually been flying at 15,000 feet, in order to avoid the anti-aircraft fire as we crossed the coast.

After we had been flying for about four hours, we were told there was now complete cloud cover and, since it was impossible to go lower, due to the mountainous territory, we were flying on a plotted course. Unfortunately, this cloud cover continued, so the pilot turned at the calculated time and started to circle, in the hope of finding a sufficient break in the cloud for the ground signal to be seen. The circling continued for about half an hour, before the pilot said that it was regrettable but the mission would have to be abandoned, as he could not afford to expend more fuel and it was necessary to have left the enemy coast behind before daybreak. Our return flight would take less time as we would be flying over Greece. I climbed back into my sleeping bag and vainly tried to sleep while we made our way back.

The long haul back to Derna was completed without incident, but we felt decidedly groggy after twelve hours in a non-heated, non-pressurised, plane, particularly when there was the added frustration of not having had a successful flight. We were re-scheduled for another trip two days later. Unfortunately, it achieved the same result.

There was time for just one more effort that month. If this was not successful it would mean that we had to spend another month at Derna, which we found a most distressing prospect. The third attempt went well and we arrived over the dropping zone with a clear sky. Signals were exchanged with the ground and fires in the form of a 'V' were lit. The covering over the hole in the floor was removed by the dispatcher, and when the red warning light turned to green, the first two packages were dropped. On the next run, Bolton was first to slide down the platform above the opening to the hole, followed by me, with Hanbury last. What a fantastic change there was. One second the air was filled by the drone of the aircraft engines, the next all was quiet.

I saw the fires out to my right, but before I could take in anything else or practice my Serbian words *Preatel Englais*, Friend Englishman, I had landed. Based on the previous jumps I had made, I'm sure we had jumped from less than 600 feet. I landed, completely in the clear, about 50 yards from the fires. I was immediately surrounded by a motley bunch of men, then seized by a large bearded gent and smothered with kisses. His alcohol-laden breath was a bit much to take on an empty stomach, but his intentions were friendly.

After releasing my parachute, I was led away to meet Major Richmond, the leader of Carbon Mission. He greeted me with a pleasant smile. 'You took long enough to get here' he said, jokingly. Did the others jump at the same time as you?' he asked. Before I had time to reply, Bolton joined us and, a couple of minutes later, Hanbury arrived. There was a good deal of thankful handshaking. All three of us were in one piece, despite the fact that Bolton and Hanbury had become tangled up in the trees. The local Chetnik Commander, Colonel Papich, was then introduced and also Richmond's explosives man,

Lieutenant Arlo, who, I was surprised to learn, was a Serb.

The troops were conducting a search for all the precious packages that had been dropped. Richmond said that his policy was to collect all the packages, load them on to ox-carts and pack-horses and send them away, to be hidden until it was convenient for unloading and distribution. When the search was completed, we would go off to the place he had made his HQ, which was, he explained, about two hours walk.

In spite of the clear sky and moonlight, the trees cast a deep shadow over the ground and, away from the fires, it was almost pitch black. The air was cold, with the night smells of damp earth and resin that are part of every forest. Once our ears became attuned to the silence, we became aware of the sounds of feet moving softly, the sudden sharp snap of a twig, distant screams of owls and nocturnal animals, the gentle sigh of the breeze amongst the pine needles. I drew in deep gulps of the clean, sweet air and shivered.

During the walk, in the dark, where each step was either up or downhill, in this unfamiliar, forested country, we new arrivals, carrying heavy packs, soon discovered how unfit we were, as we stumbled rather than walked along. This called for a number of rests.

Eventually, we arrived at Richmond's camp and were shown a place to sleep. I can assure you that I needed no rocking on that occasion.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

When I woke, it was broad daylight and the sun was streaming in through the one small window in the room. I went outside and became aware of how green everything was; just like the countryside back home at this time of the year. When the smell of wood smoke was added to this, it was very pleasing. I then became aware of all the aches and pains occasioned by the walk from the dropping zone.

Other people were on the move and I met Lieutenant Porter, the Carbon Wireless Operator who told me his Christian name was Gordon. He took me to another cottage, where we had a meal of very coarse, wholemeal bread, scrambled egg and a mug of really strong tea. Gordon said the scrambled egg was made from a large sack of powdered egg which had been received on an earlier flight. It tasted all right to me. 'You've had trouble in making contact recently,' I said. 'Yes, it was lack of petrol to charge the batteries. Normally, if I run out, I can buy small quantities which have been stolen from the enemy but my supplier has disappeared. Nobody seems to know what has happened to him. Fortunately, one of our patrols came across an enemy lorry parked on the side of the road and as nobody was around, they pinched the two Jerry cans attached to the back of the vehicle as well as some other things. One of the cans was full of petrol and the other contained water, so I was able to resume my contacts with Cairo.'

'Do you know if there is any petrol in the provisions in your plane?' 'I don't know what was in the small packages. Everything was in some sort of box and wrapped in packing material to cushion the impact on landing. All we saw was the packages being loaded into the aircraft.' 'With the four gallons I had in the Jerry can, I'll be all right for about a month or so and, if there isn't any in your cargo, I'll tell Cairo to make sure there is some on the next flight.' 'Are you satisfied with your wireless?' I asked. 'I've only made contact on about 50% of my schedules. I started to keep a log but, as you will find out for yourself, we missed schedules while I was on the move and it was incomplete, so I gave up.' 'For those schedules when you were on the air, were you happy?' I persisted, needing to be reassured about whether my role would be useful or not. 'To be truthful, I have to say no, but I'm still trying the various frequencies that can be used, so it's too soon to give a precise answer to your question.'

We were then interrupted by Lieutenant Arlo, who said Major Richardson wanted a meeting with everyone before going to the place where the equipment from the previous night had been hidden. I asked Gordon about Lieutenant Arlo, and he told me he was at university in Alexandria when war was declared and, eventually, recruited by MO4.

When we were assembled, Major Richardson addressed us. 'I've a few things to say before we go to open the containers and distribute the equipment that came yesterday. The two Sub-Brigade Commanders of Colonel Papich's Brigade will be meeting us on the site. I understand we have about a two-hour walk. Since being in Serbia, I've learnt that any distance described as being more than a five-minute walk takes two hours and often longer, so be prepared.

'At present, we are on the western slopes of the Homoljske Mountains. This range dominates the whole of Eastern Serbia. As we start out, you'll notice that we'll be walking through a succession of small fields and woods. This forms the summer and autumn grazing grounds for the goats and sheep of the local farmers. They move up into the cottages at about this time of the year, with their young offspring and the livestock. Two months ago, when we arrived, this whole area was covered in deep snow. Now, there is a good growth of grass and the trees are covered in leaves.

'At present we are occupying two cottages. They are all of the same design, of wattle and daub construction. Inside, there are two rooms, a living /sleeping room and a room with an open fire for cooking and storage. The smoke from the fire has to find its way out through a hole in the roof. In winter, the occupants go down to the lower slopes, into hamlets, again with

cottages of the same construction. The hamlets in this area are snowbound in winter; nevertheless, it provides the convenience of some sort of social life which, as far as I can see means, for the men, drinking large quantities of '*rakia*,' the local firewater, made from plums, and making babies. You will see that many of the cottages have a small orchard of plum trees close-by.

'One of the problems we have is the necessity for being constantly on the move. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, we, together with the Chetnik troops, soon exhaust the local food supply and, secondly, it doesn't allow the enemy to fix our position for long enough to prepare a plan of attack. The enemy forces in this area are Bulgarian troops with German officers and they are garrisoned at Pozervac, some thirty miles away to the north. In addition to these troops, there are the Ustashe, the Croatian Quislings. We have learned that they are aware of our arrival but so far have not made any move against us. Now that the snow has gone, we can expect more activity from them.



'We had arranged for some Chetniks from the East Serbian Brigade to be here to provide an escort for you, but when you didn't arrive on the 19th, they returned. It was agreed that, when you did arrive, we would send a man to inform them. He left last night. I think it will be three or four days before they return. Well, I think that's enough chat for now so, let's get going.'

When we set out, I noticed that Gordon was not one of the party. Arlo said he was to be responsible for packing the wireless set, batteries and charger, if enemy troops were reported in the area. The equipment received the previous night had been concealed in an old quarry and on arrival we met the Chetniks from the Sub-Brigades. There was considerable excitement as each package was unpacked and the contents distributed. There were ten Stenguns, twenty-four rifles, two mortars, hand grenades, ammunition, battle-dress uniforms and boots. In addition to this there were two Jerry cans of petrol for Gordon and Richmond's case of Scotch.

I watched anxiously as each package was opened, until I had my hands on my wireless, which seemed to have arrived in good condition. I then learned the bad news; the parachute had not opened on the package containing my charging engine. The engine had been flattened and was obviously useless and beyond repair. My decision to bring the pedal charger was immediately vindicated.

The equipment that was to go with us was loaded onto packhorses and sent on its way. It was at this time that I had my first taste of *rakia*, a colourless liquid so strong that it took my breath away when I sampled it. We had a lunch of hard-boiled eggs, goat's cheese and once again, the coarse bread, which I found quite tasty. After a short rest, we returned to Richmond's camp.

My second scheduled time for contact that day had passed so I made everything ready for the next morning and then asked Bolton to compose an arrival message, which I encoded. At 10:40 the next morning, I heard Cairo start sending his call sign and at 10:45 made my reply. This was received by Cairo, with good signal strength reported. I sent my message and then celebrated the successful first contact with a nip or two of *raki*.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Two days later, a scruffy band of men arrived at our camp. They were unkempt, many were bearded, all of them poorly clothed and with shabby footwear of different types, including some made from car tyres. The one item of clothing most had in common was a grey forage cap with a badge on the front. They had two pack horses with them, so we guessed they were to be our escort. A few of them had a rifle, which appeared to be old, one had a light machine gun and a bandoleer of bullets twined round his shoulders. The one thing they all had in common was a large knife, which they carried in a sheath at the waist. There was considerable excitement when the new arrivals began talking with the others about their battle-dress uniforms, boots and weapons.

First, there were introductions; their leader was dressed in a crumpled, light blue, uniform jacket, which I am sure was two sizes too small, and a pair of dark brown pantaloons with a number of holes in the seat. Then, the remainder of the party shook hands with us and regaled our ears with a good deal of excited chatter, interpreted by Roger to mean they were very pleased about our arrival. Apparently, they were looking forward to us providing them with similar equipment to that which had already been received by the local Brigade. It was decided that, after a meal and a rest for the new arrivals, we would start on the return journey.

Measured on the map, the distance we were to walk was about twenty-five miles. All three of us realised that the distance would be considerably greater, due to the hilly nature of the land and lack of roads or tracks. The packhorses were loaded and we set off, but as we still needed frequent rests and it was difficult to find a track that was manageable by the horses, progress was slow. We had some steep climbs and I learned the trick of looking down as I took each step. In this way, I avoided seeing the climb ahead, which seemed to help. After about eight hours of walking, it was nearly dark when we came to the cottage that was to be used for our overnight break. I was surprised how well the Chetniks had maintained a steady walking pace, when they had such little food and poor footwear.



An old woman who lived in a nearby cottage provided us with bean soup, a little goat's cheese and *kachamak*, which is prepared by mixing a coarsely ground maize with water until it achieves the consistency of porridge. It is then stirred, while being heated in an open pot, until it sets. At this point, it is turned out and cut into slices. This, I learned, was the staple diet of all country folk, as well as the Chetniks. Maize is a much more reliable crop than wheat to grow in the hilly areas. I found it almost inedible and felt sorry for anyone for whom it formed the staple food.

We started early the following morning and, at about 3 pm., our band of weary travellers arrived at a collection of five cottages, which was the present HQ of the Key Brigade. The loop in the Danube that had been used for navigation by our aircraft is known locally as the Key to the Danube and this had been taken for the name of the Brigade.

We were introduced to the Brigade Commander, Colonel Borovich, a well-built, but short man with a goatee beard, who, unlike his troops, was respectably dressed. He told us he had been a

member of the Army High Command and was a personal friend of General Draza Mihailovich. Bolton arranged a meeting for the following morning for a general discussion. He then composed a message for Cairo, to confirm that we had now made contact with the Key Brigade and which also described the poor state of the troops. This was sent at an evening contact. I was beginning to have confidence in the performance of the wireless transmitter, as I had not failed to contact Cairo during each of the four schedules I had been able to make.

Bolton said he would rather Hanbury and I weren't at the meeting, as he didn't want to keep translating what Borovich was saying. He said he thought it would interrupt the flow. He was finding it difficult enough to follow the conversations, with his incomplete knowledge of the language. He would take notes, he promised, and provide a summary afterwards. 'Fine,' said Hanbury, 'we'll take a short walk, to look at the area.' During the walk, when we had stopped for a rest, Hanbury asked me why I seemed to have difficulty in using his Christian name 'I've a hang-up about rank,' I explained. 'Prior to me joining MO4, the situation was that the difference between commissioned and non-commissioned ranks in the RAF was maintained. I believe it's easier to preserve discipline if there is no familiarity.' 'Well, I think the circumstances are different now, so it's Ted and John from now on,' Hanbury said, clapping me firmly on the back. 'OK, John.' I said.

'I know it's only a short time since our arrival, Ted,' Hanbury continued, using my Christian name at once, 'but is the situation here similar to that which you imagined it would be?' 'To be quite frank, John, I didn't know what to expect. Since I joined the RAF in 1937 and particularly since war was declared, I've lived life on a day-to-day basis, performing whatever task was set to the best of my ability. You could say I've become physically active and mentally lazy. I've found it better to carry on in that way because there are less disappointments. What little thought I had given to the matter certainly didn't include meeting such poorly armed and clothed people like those we have met.'

'Have you formed any opinion about how well you think these Chetniks would fight if they are given arms and better clothing?' asked John.



Draza Mihailovich

'No,' I said, 'I haven't thought about it, but since you ask, I think, if we're attacked at the present time they might turn and run. There would be some excuse, too, because none of them has sufficient ammunition to fight defensively, let alone carry out an offensive engagement. They're such a mixed bunch, but my feeling is, that with training and proper leadership, they might be effective.' 'I agree with what you say. There's much to do before they're in a position to cause the enemy much concern. Hopefully, we'll know more after this morning's discussion.' We slowly made our way back to hear what Bolton had to tell us.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

'I've learned a good deal from my chat with Borovich,' Bolton said, when we got together with him later. 'The discussion wasn't easy to follow, due to the language difficulty. However, as I see it, the situation is as follows: At the present time, the strength of each of the three sections of the Key Brigade is about fifty men. The numbers were limited to about fifty because of the food problem. They haven't any money to go out and buy food and are dependent on the goodwill of small, local, subsistence farmers.'

Bartering, rather than selling, was the usual way these farmers disposed of any surplus they had. Providing food for the Chetniks reduced their already poor standard of living.

‘Their Government in exile, in Britain, has told the people it is their duty to support the Chetniks. The only way information is passed to these country people is by a daily news bulletin broadcast by the BBC, but only a few of them have a wireless set, and they are not very well informed about affairs. It’s also illegal to listen to the BBC. There is a daily paper, *Novo Vreme*, produced and sold in the towns, but it contains nothing more than German propaganda.

‘In each of the three sections of the Key Brigade there is a permanent core of about twenty men; the others serve roughly six months, return home and are replaced by others. If there were sufficient arms, clothing and food Borovich claims he could provide a force of about a thousand men.

‘They have often moved base, sometimes after a stay of only two or three days. A stay of two weeks is rare. The moves apart from the reasons of food, he suggests, are necessary to confuse the enemy as to how many Chetniks there are in the territory. The HQ of the enemy in this area is at Bor, the copper mine. They are Romanians with German Officers, some of them from the Gestapo. The mine has been heavily fortified and presents a formidable target. The usual way the enemy carried out action against the Chetniks, when the roads were not snowbound, was to send out two, sometimes three, lorries full of troops and, somewhere along the road, the lorries would stop. The troops would descend and fan out over the countryside, hoping to come across a band of Chetniks who, they knew, were poorly armed. Borovich said he felt that the real reason for the exercise was to rob the local farmers of their animals and other foodstuffs.

‘The road was kept under constant observation, usually by the farmers’ children. When the lorries were seen to stop, the news was passed from one family to another by blasts on a whistle, and then each family would snatch as many possessions as they could manage to carry and go deep into the forest. The enemy, if they achieved nothing and to show their frustration, usually set fire to one or two cottages.

‘The work in Bor mine is carried out by forced labour. Initially, the miners were Greeks and, apparently, they were not good workers. Poles are gradually replacing them. A number of Greeks had escaped and some found by the Chetniks. They were given instructions on the best route back to Greece, but it was unlikely they would be successful. Any stranger in a district where there were no Chetniks would almost certainly be killed by locals, for their clothing, footwear and any other possessions they may have. Borovich said that, even before the war, a stranger walking alone in this part of the country would have been at risk.

‘He asked if we were going to provide him with a list of the equipment he was to receive and when it would arrive. He was surprised when told that it was not as simple as that because there were many resistance fighters who all needed support. We would only be able to tell him when a plane was due to arrive. The contents would depend on what captured equipment had become available.’

I felt that, for someone who professed to a limited understanding of the local language, Bolton had done a good job in gaining knowledge of this important aspect. But, he had more to tell us, ‘Borovich has agreed to arrange for us to be taken to a place higher up in the mountains and not easily accessible. We’ll make a base there, so that we can have regular wireless contact with Cairo. This will be for the period during which John and I will carry out a reconnaissance of the Key Brigade area. The reconnaissance won’t be done in one go because there will be planes to receive. We are going to start by looking at the Bor mine, which, I’m told, is about fifteen kilometres from the place where our base will be. ‘A bodyguard of six Chetniks will be provided for you, Hall, and on Borovich’s suggestion, we will buy a pack horse, to be used by one of the men who knows this area well, to search for sources of food which can be bought.’

John interrupted by saying, ‘I’ve had a go at him about Christian names, Roger, and it’s now Ted Hall.’ ‘I was going to have a word with you myself,’ said Bolton, looking at me. ‘Anyway, Ted, I want a

message sent as soon as possible, asking for details of what planes we can expect during June.' 'That will be tomorrow morning,' I said. 'At what time?' '09:20.' I replied. 'OK, we'll leave immediately after you've finished. Apparently Lisatz, that's the area we're going to, is about twelve hours walk.' He paused for a moment, to let that interesting fact penetrate our slightly benumbed minds. Twelve hours in this country was going to test our muscles, and that was a fact. 'Well,' concluded Roger, 'it was tough going this morning. I would like to have had a better command of the language, but that will come. There's something about these Serbs that I've yet to understand. I spoke about the planning of offensive action when we have provided arms and clothing, and Borovich calmly said that all offensive actions would be originated by them and submitted to Mihailovich for approval. I pointed out that all forces in Southern Europe are now under the command of General Eisenhower; that includes the British, so it surely also includes the Chetniks. His response was to inform me that he and his groups had not yet received orders to that effect. To avoid giving offence, I didn't prolong the discussion on that subject, but I'll have to return to the situation later.

I failed to make contact with Cairo at 0920 so it was decided we would stop for a break at 18:00 and I would rig up the wireless in time for an 18:30 schedule. This proved successful. Our progress during the walk, on which we were accompanied by the Lieutenant and twelve men, was improving and we needed fewer rests. We arrived at Lisatz just before dark, having spent the last two hours of the walk continuously trudging uphill, through a thick forest of tall trees. It was noticeably colder, the higher we climbed.

Our destination, was some small clearings in the forest to form patches of grazing and there were also three cottages, all of them occupied.

We were given a place to sleep, two in one cottage and one in another. The Chetniks slept in outbuildings, with the goats. The following day, one of the cottages was made available for us. Roger then spoke to me about being alone with the Chetniks.

'Are you happy about being alone with this wild looking bunch?'

'Yes, they seem friendly enough,' I replied, 'and they're probably thinking we will be responsible for bringing them clothing and arms, and that alone will ensure my safety. I think I'll be able to make myself understood by using my phrase book and sign language.' 'I learned from my chat with Borovich that many of the people in this part of the country are of mixed Serb and Romanian blood and speak Vlasi, so don't be surprised if they fail to understand you when you ask for something.' 'Right, I'll bear that in mind.' 'What ever you do, don't leave your money belt lying about anywhere,' Roger urged.

'OK. I'll make sure I keep it concealed. By the way, Roger, there is a small item sealed in a cotton wool package in my money belt. Do you have one?'

'Yes, we all have the same. They contain sixty commercial diamonds, worth about £60 each. These are only made available to the Yugoslav Missions because we are furthest away and the number of aircraft available to deliver supplies to us is limited. It is hoped they can be used to purchase arms, but I've no idea if this will be possible. So far, I've not mentioned the subject of money to Borovich. I'll find out more during our reconnaissance of Bor, because he is going to be with us.' I raised an eyebrow. Roger had given me the idea that he was not entirely reassured about the trustworthiness of friend Borovich and his band of followers.

We'll be leaving tomorrow, and I haven't the faintest idea how long we'll be away, but I'll guess it would be a week to ten days. Before we go, I'd like to find a place near to your cottage, which could be used to hide the wireless set if you have to make a quick move. If we return and you're not here, we'll find either the wireless or a note telling us the situation. I don't expect you'll be bothered by an enemy patrol, because we are so far from the Bor to Zaiacha road and it entails such a steep climb to get here. Not far above, it becomes treeless and there is just scrub or bare mountain. As you can see, there is still snow up there.

'I've had a word with Mladen that's the name of the chap who's going to buy your food. He has already gone to perform his first task: the buying of your packhorse. I gave him five sovereigns, which represents a great deal of money with their high inflation, and I said he was to account for how the money was spent.' 'Thanks, Roger,' I replied, the familiarity of using his Christian name no longer quite so difficult to handle. 'Let's go and find this hiding place, shall we? We'll just find the most suitable

place and I'll adapt it for the wireless later.'

We agreed on a spot about a hundred yards from the cottage, and I said I would arrange to have some bushes and tree branches cut, ready to conceal our equipment if the need arose. 'According to my diary,' I said, 'the next moon period should start on about 10th June. Has it been decided where the next dropping ground will be?' 'No, but I'll make sure we are back in time to give a position to receive the aircraft.'

I've prepared a long message for Cairo. It's an expanded version of the information I gave you yesterday after my talk with Borovich. It includes my comments together with some questions that arise.' 'OK, Roger, I'll start on coding it as soon as you're gone. What duties are planned for the five Chetniks, and Mladen, when he returns?' I asked, doubtful whether I could exert authority over any of them, especially since we shared no common language. 'Their duty is to look after you and see you come to no harm. They understand that quite well.' 'Am I right in thinking the only practical access to this place is by the route we used?' 'Yes. I think so, but you can explore the district, to make sure.' 'I've noticed that some two hundred yards below here there's a place which allows a view of about a mile or two of the track lower down. I would like to place an observer there, from six in the morning until nightfall, with each Chetnik doing a two hour stint. If a patrol appears, there would be sufficient time for us to withdraw, if considered necessary.' 'I think that's a good idea,' Roger confirmed. 'Will you please tell them of this requirement?' 'Yes, I'll get them together now.'

The following morning, when Roger, John and a party of six Chetniks had departed and our observer was in position, I took a look at the message composed by Roger. It would certainly be the longest, by far, that I had encoded.

I decided to break it up into four parts and send them on different schedules. On the schedule that morning I received a message which, when decoded, said the provisional plan was for us to receive two aircraft in June, the first of which could be expected on 16th June.

We could be hopeful, too, of having yet another one. Details were required of the map co-ordinates for the dropping ground and the recognition signals for the first drop.

Not far from our cottage was a small stream created by the melting snow. I found a place where I was able to make a dam with a depth of about 2 feet of water, just sufficient to permit me to lie down in it and soak my body. Unfortunately, even though the weather was fine and very hot by mid-day, the water was too cold for me to say truthfully that the experience of bathing in it was enjoyable.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

At last, I had a little breathing space and could sleep in my own bed, such as it was. It consisted of some boards on low trestles, a palliasse and my sleeping bag. The second morning, on waking, and after some itching and scratching, I found that I had acquired a quantity of lice and fleas. I had a small quantity of dusting power in my first-aid kit. This helped but, no matter how much I tried, then and thereafter, eradication seemed impossible. After a time, all of us were similarly endowed and, although we had constant livestock hunts, it was something we all accepted and it seemed not to bother us much.

I was now committed to using the pedal charger for recharging the 6 volt battery. I tried to get the Chetniks to do this but they soon discovered that it was easier to pedal slowly, as it did not bring in the cut-out. I tried gesticulating, since nothing in my phrase book was of any assistance, but all to no avail. I could quite understand their reasoning, after I had been pedalling for half an hour. It was 'hell' and they were no fools.

Mladen returned after three days. Not only had he acquired a horse and pack saddle but also bought a small bag of wheat flour, two live chickens, eggs, sheep's milk, haricot beans, honey and two bottles of wine from the Morava Valley, not many miles away to the west. So, we had quite a feast that evening and, of course, before and after the meal there was rakia. I was

treated to some Serbian singing and slept like a log. Mladen, obviously a man of some talent, was furnished with five additional sovereigns and sent off on the following morning, to purchase more 'treats.'

It was not long before I began to acquire a small vocabulary of Serbian words, including those for bread, milk, water, beans, rifle ammunition and counting. What is more, I began to form some opinion about each of the six individuals who made up my bodyguard. Two, I knew, were lazy individuals and both kept out of my way in case I found work for them. The others ignored these two and would, I was sure, be reliable given the right circumstances.

By the beginning of June, Roger and John were back. They had walked miles and said they envied the lazy time I was having.

I refrained from telling them about the pedal charger. They had made a reconnaissance of the southern and western sides of the Bor mining complex, and reported that there was a number of open cast and deep mines, with many brick-built buildings. They weren't able to get closer than a couple of miles from the huge perimeter wire fence. There were many pillboxes and emplacements for guns, which appeared to be of 20 and 40 mm calibre. In addition, there were six anti-aircraft guns. They had seen many laden lorries travelling south but it seemed as if most of the products went north by rail.

John said he thought it represented a formidable task for ill-armed Chetniks to attack with any chance of success. Borovich had stated that, if his force of one thousand men were properly equipped and a bombing raid by a small number of RAF bombers was made just before they attacked, there was a good chance of overcoming the opposition. Roger said that, since the arming would take some twenty planeloads of equipment, a plan of this magnitude was unlikely to receive approval by Cairo, at least for the present. He was sure that a joint venture with the RAF would certainly not come about, as there was no organisation already set up to provide the co-operative effort necessary for its success.

Both Roger and John were in agreement, and felt that the best chance of doing something positive was to sabotage the railway, and ambush the road traffic in a number of places. This would be considered in the overall plan, when the other two targets had been inspected.

Meanwhile, they were pleased to know about the plane due on 16th. Anticipating the arrival of a plane, Roger had made provisional

arrangements to meet Borovich, and a dropping zone and meeting place had already been agreed. A messenger was despatched with a note, to give Borovich the good news together with the date and to say that we would meet them on the day before the plane was due.

Cairo was given the map co-ordinates and the fire shape 'T'.

Our recognition signal was 'F', to which they were to reply with 'G'. Finally, it was decided we would move down to the dropping area a couple of days beforehand.

'How have you made out in our absence?' Roger asked. 'Have wireless contacts been OK?' 'Yes,' I said. 'I think this is a good location, as we're so high up. Your long message was sent in four parts but, so far, there hasn't been a response.' 'I've another long one to send, about Bor, It'll be ready later today, I'll give you a hand to encode it. Now, tell me how you have been getting along with the Chetniks?' 'Three of them and Mladen, are a good bunch, but the other two are lazy and avoid me as far as possible.' 'I'll make sure they are replaced after we receive the first plane' said Roger.

'I've dammed up the stream lower down, so you'll be able to have a bath if the cold water doesn't bother you.' 'Well done. I'll look

forward to that. How about battery charging? Has the pedal charger worked satisfactorily?' 'Yes, but it is hard work, because I was unable to get real assistance from our friends.'

'I'll get them to do their bit in future.' said Roger. 'Hopefully, we'll have a petrol charger soon, so the physical effort won't be necessary. Is Mladen here?' 'No, He's out searching. I expect him back soon. I've given him another five sovereigns' 'Was he able to buy a good pack horse?' 'I'm afraid I know

nothing about horses, but it seems all right. Mladen is obviously a very sensible character.' Mladen returned, later in the day, with the usual mixture of 'goodies', which earned him the approval of my two companions. Roger tried the white wine and said it was drinkable even though it was very young. We had spit-roasted a suckling pig for dinner, which was pronounced delicious by everyone. After dinner, when all three of us were relaxing, Roger said he had mentioned to Borovich the subject of Partisans. At first, he was reluctant to admit that there were any more than a few Communists, calling themselves Partisans, in Eastern Yugoslavia. As far as Borovich knew, there were none in our part of Serbia. 'I felt,' said Roger, 'he wanted to say more but was reluctant to discuss the matter. So, I thought it best not to continue but, hopefully, the subject could be reopened at a later time.' We left Lisatz a few days later; the three of us were looking forward to receiving our first plane and the chance to start improving the appearance and re-arming of the Key Brigade. We met up with Borovich, who explained that the contents of the first plane would be distributed amongst the Central Sub-Brigade, with whom we were at present. Then, when we gave him details about the arrival of a further plane, a courier would be sent to the Danube Sub-Brigade Commander, for him to send a party to receive the equipment it would bring. This was necessary because the area in which they operated was much more open and easily compromised.

On the afternoon of the 16th, in a mood of excited anticipation, we set out for the dropping ground, which had been selected by Borovich in collaboration with Roger. It was an open area on the side of a shallow valley, which I thought an ideal spot. Material for the fires was collected but not put out in the 'T', to avoid it being seen by any passing enemy aircraft. As the light began to fade, the material was divided up into piles and these piles were spaced at 50 yard intervals, and we settled down to wait, in bright moonlight, for the sound of the plane's engines. The plane was expected to be overhead at about 2300, which meant that we had a wait of about an hour and a half. As the time approached, all talking ceased and we strained our ears for the sound of a distant engine. At 0100, Roger said there would be no plane tonight. Disconsolately, we dispersed the fire material and started the two-hour walk back to the place of our encampment. There was an unusual quietness amongst the Chetniks.



Ted Hall on right of picture with Draza Mihailovich second from left.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The following morning, at schedule time, I made contact and a message said:- *'Sorry, plane developed engine trouble and had to return. Coming tonight, same procedure.'* In due course, we returned to the dropping ground. This time there was not the excited chatter of the previous day. Again, at dusk, the material for the fires was put out and the waiting started.

Shortly after 2300 there was a shout of *avion, avion*, by one of the Chetniks and, despite instructions they had received about the procedure to be followed, the fires were lit. The sound of engines increased and before long we saw, by moonlight, the parachutes descending. It was a wonderful sight. When we thought the drop was complete, I flashed 'thank you' to the plane and the collection of the load commenced.

Roger had decided to adopt the same procedure as Major Richmond. The packages were collected, conveyed by ox-carts and pack horses to a hiding place, where they would be safe until we were sure the enemy hadn't sent out a search party and it was convenient to open and distribute the contents. We then returned to our camp.

The next day, Roger decided that, in future, either he or John would go with me to receive the plane, and the one that didn't go for the reception would be responsible for opening and distributing the equipment. However, since this was our first reception, they would both go for the opening on the following day. This would allow me the morning for sending and receiving any messages.

So, the following morning, Borovich and a band of his excited followers set out with Roger and John to the hiding place. John told me afterwards that, on the way, there was much discussion about who was having what in the way of weapons. In due course, they returned to camp and I saw by the look on Roger's face that something was wrong. Apparently, there had been a good quantity of rifles, Sten guns, two light machine guns and a plentiful supply of ammunition. However, all the battle-dress uniforms were made for midgets and the desperately needed boots were all size five and six. The only thing Roger could say was that it appeared some quarter-master had decided to clear out his stores of all clothing that was too small for British troops and we had been the unlucky recipients.

He composed a message expressing his anger and said it was vitally important, to restore morale, for a further delivery of larger uniforms and boots to be made urgently. He apologised to Borovich for the blunder and said the matter would be put right as soon as possible. I felt sorry for Roger because it was important that he held a strong hand in negotiating with Borovich. I sent the message the following morning and in the evening came the reply saying they were sorry about the slip-up and would be sending another plane the next day. This information was conveyed to Borovich and the situation eased somewhat.

After our mid-day meal, John and I set out with the Lieutenant and a party of twelve Chetniks for the same dropping ground. The reduction in excitement was noticeable. The plane arrived, the equipment was received and despatched to the hiding place. On our return to camp, an anxious Roger was told of the safe receipt and he went back to sleep in a better frame of mind.

The arms and clothing in this second plane were much more up to expectations, and morale improved forthwith. What is more, a further plane was definitely scheduled to come the next night. Details of a different dropping ground, fires in the form of an 'H' and recognition signals were passed to Cairo.

Unfortunately, there was insufficient time for the Danube Sub-Brigade party to be present at the drop zone, but Borovich assured the Danube Sub-Brigade members that the packages would not be opened until they were present. This, he said, would prevent jealousy arising within the Brigade. Once again, the equipment was received and hidden. In due course, the Danube sub-brigade troops arrived. What a difference there was between them and our own scruffy friends! Their appearance was tidy, they

were clean-shaven and their two officers, one a Captain and the other an Air Force Lieutenant, wore uniforms that were recognisable as such. The Lieutenant, I soon discovered, spoke French; and, at last, I was able to have something of a conversation with a Serb. His name was Zika Ristich, he told me, and he was married with three children. He was a pilot and had been stationed near Belgrade when the Germans attacked Yugoslavia. Their aircraft, without any warning, had been destroyed on the ground in a pre-emptive strike that took place before the Germans bombed Belgrade, so he had not been able to take part in any action.

He said he was partly Jewish and had moved with his wife and family into the country, to avoid contact with the Germans. He had left his wife and children in the care of her parents and joined the Chetniks. For some time, he said, it had looked as though the might of the German army would prevail. But when they invaded Russia, he was sure we would fight on and, in the end, secure victory. He felt that our presence and the equipment they had come to collect allowed a glimmer of hope, because Britain was not yet defeated and he felt confident that, led by Mr Churchill, we would secure victory. Our presence was a demonstration of this beginning to happen. He insisted on giving me his metal pilot's badge, to show his personal gratitude. I was a bit bewildered by this gesture, because I knew the badge means a great deal to a pilot. It was probably the one he received when he had qualified for his licence. I thanked him and said I would treasure it.

It was on such occasions as this that I felt what we were doing was worthwhile. Unfortunately, there was nothing I could think of that I had which would match his generosity but, suddenly, I remembered the sovereigns and gave him one. At first he refused to accept it but, on my insistence, he became tearful. He asked when we would be visiting their territory. I said I felt sure it would be soon but could not say when. They departed later and, I must say, I watched them disappear with some regret.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

'As there won't be any more planes for us in June,' said Roger, 'Our next task is to have a look at the River Danube. Before we came to Yugoslavia, Major Richmond did some research work on navigation in this huge river and the type of tugs and lighters used to convey war materials to the South and Oil from Ploiesti in Romania to the North. Apart from locks, which Richmond thought might be heavily defended, there are a number of places where movement of vessels is limited to a narrow channel due to shingle banks. He thought there might be a possibility for a small force of armed men with rifles, machine guns and 20mm cannons to get close enough to the river to sink or seriously damage a tug in these narrows so that the barges became uncontrolled and blocked the channel. So, we'll carry out a recce with the Danube Brigade to find out if there's a location, in their area, that suits these requirements. The course of the river flows through flatter land which is more populated. This means we may have to acquire civilian clothes in order to mix with people who are not 'woodsmen' (the word used by ordinary civilians to describe the Chetniks). The wireless set would prove a hindrance if we have to adopt this action. This means you'll return to Lisatz, Ted Are you happy about that?' 'Yes, if I'm not to accompany you I think it's a good place for me to be.'

'Before we separate,' continued Roger, 'I'd like to have a chat about the future. - Do you agree that the Chetniks in this area are less well armed and clothed than we expected and they would not be able to offer much resistance if attacked.' We agreed with this assessment.

'The number of serviceable aircraft available to MO4 and able to reach us with a payload of three tons, will not be sufficient to build up the Chetniks, in our territory, into a fighting force able to carry out aggressive operations before the end of the year. We will adopt an alternative policy. This will be to carry out 'hit and run' attacks such as the one we are planning for the Danube. In addition there'll probably be sabotage of the railway line, north of Bor and the ambush of lorries on the road going south out of Bor. Of course this situation could change overnight if those responsible for the 'Grand Plan' thought Yugoslavia worth considering, if only, in a diversionary role.

'To be frank, I think those responsible for MO4 are having to run the organisation on a 'shoe-string' in order that those in 'high places' can say they are doing their best to comply with Churchill's request. I have the feeling, sometimes, that we are a bit of a side show!' 'Yes,' agreed John 'there is something peculiar about the way the organisation is being run. When this is added to the difficulty in really understanding what it is the Chetniks are seeking to achieve I don't see how we can think about the future unless there is an agreed plan of action. I think we should do our best to find out how much effort the Chetniks are putting into the preparation for resisting the increasing strength of the Partisans and how this affects their willingness to resist the Germans.'

'As Robins is the only Senior Executive in Cairo,' continued Roger, 'it's obvious that a Board or Committee in London is really running the show. Following our chat I'm going to compose a message to Robins that will ask some very pointed questions to which I expect a direct answer. Now, I will arrange with Borovich to provide us with an escort to the Danube Brigade. The recce of the railway North of Bor will be done during the month of August.' Looking at John, Roger continued, 'I'll also ask if you're any nearer getting your Wireless Operator.' 'What's this all about.' I asked. 'I'm sorry,' said Roger, 'We decided not to mention that John had only agreed to come with me as second in command due to the shortage of wireless operators. When one becomes available he will move South and start a new territory.' 'Oh! Thank you for telling me,' I said with a hint of irony. For a few seconds there was silence. 'I really must get a message to Richmond suggesting we have a meeting early next month,' continued Roger, 'to compare his assessment of the situation with ours. Isn't it possible for you to set up a communication link with Gordon?' he said looking at me.

'When I was working in the Wireless Section in Cairo I asked if there was an arrangement for communication between the Missions. I was told that it had been tried but as all the sets were operated as mobiles and on the move at unpredictable times the fixing of regular schedules had proved ineffective. I was also told that Cairo would only act as a link for passing messages between Missions in cases of emergency because it overloaded the system. The only way would be to have a controlling station through whom all the others could work. If the Chetnik organisation becomes co-ordinated properly with the MO4 Missions in a supporting role then it would become necessary to have a wireless network with a controller. When we next see Gordon Porter I'll discuss with him the setting up of a weekly scheduled time for us to see if it works just between our two stations. It means we will need two new paperbacks. I wouldn't like there to be another copy of the one I use for messages to Cairo to be with someone else in the field.' 'Ask Cairo to send two books as soon as possible.' said Roger. 'Yes, certainly' I said.

'While we're on the subject of wireless contact, I was talking to Zika Ristich from the Danube Brigade,' and asked about wireless communication between Chetnik Brigades. He said it was a bit of a joke because the equipment was so antiquated, unreliable and all run from dry batteries which were difficult to replace. Communication was very much a hit or miss affair and the operators didn't bother keeping regular schedules. Can you ask Borovich if we can see his wireless set-up, maybe it'll help to know the true position.' 'Yes I'll ask him.'

Now, John and I will be rejoining the Central Brigade and following our discussions with Borovich I will send you a note, by courier, with details about the outcome and information to pass on to Cairo. I will take coding details to encode the message before being given to the courier.'

When I was once more at Lisatz and made wireless contact, there were a number of messages waiting. I received these and could see that, with the very long message Roger had handed me on our departure, I had a great deal of coding and decoding to do. I did the decoding first in case there was anything of an urgent nature.

The first was an answer to Roger's original long message. It gave a lot of facts and figures about Bor. The mine was British owned and managed by the company's own employees prior to the war and included some German staff. The British had left at the outbreak of war in September 1939.

Apparently, Roger had already been told that there was a draft plan for an attack on Bor to be considered as part of a diversionary operation prior to the major attack on mainland Europe. The importance of Bor and the River Danube was such that they were considering sending an Observer and Wireless Operator whose sole job would be to report the daily activity carried on at these two targets. Roger was asked for

his comments.

The poor state of the Chetnik organisation had been reported, by others, on a number of occasions and, we were told MO4 was doing all it could to improve the situation. However it was not considered of high priority by the Eisenhower HQ. Was there any possibility of us buying weapons from the enemy as was currently being done in Italy?

We were scheduled to receive four aircraft in July. Included with the cargo would be a Wireless Operator for Captain Hanbury and a Mission of two who would be going to Romania. A second message asked for Roger's comments on the possibility of receiving a Polish Officer who would be engaged in creating the Southern end of an escape route for Polish politicians who were favourably disposed to Western culture and might form part of a postwar government. There was another message which apologised for failing to include a replacement charging motor. One had been packed but obviously dropped to the wrong Mission. Without fail there would be one on the first plane in July.

The slog on the pedal charger and the coding of Roger's mammoth situation report kept me busy for a number of days. One afternoon, I was taking a rest in the shade of the trees, when a disturbing incident occurred. I became aware of the sound of an engine. A minute or two later I saw, coming over the top of a hill, a Fieseler Storch light aircraft. This type of slow-moving plane was normally used for observing artillery fire. I had seen them used by the Germans in North Africa and, at that time, we had been told that Rommel had one for his own personal transport so they were to be targeted if seen during our strafing missions. After the plane had disappeared I realised it had flown on a direct course so had not been observing us. If it had been and seen us, I'm sure it would have circled. The Chetniks had said nothing to us about spotter planes so, perhaps this was something new. If, in the future, the Storch was to be used to assist the ground forces it would help to overcome the advantage of concealment we had by the use of the forest. I would ask Roger to tell the Chetniks to make an effort to keep the surrounding to the cottages tidy to help prevent our presence being noticed from the air.

FIESELER Fi 156C "STORCH"



The original "Storch, (German for stork), was designed in 1936, in Germany, by Dr. Gerhard Fieseler, and played an important role for the Luftwaffe in the Second World War as a reconnaissance utility and personnel carrying aircraft.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

When Roger and John returned they were pleased with their recce of the Danube. There was an ideal place to carry out an attack on a tug and its barges. What is more they were happier about the quality of the troops in the Danube Brigade. A plan would be prepared and discussed with Borovich for an attack at the end of July or beginning of August.

If some positive, successful, action was taken, it might improve the flow of materials.

Roger was not happy about the two people coming to reconnoitre Bor and the Danube. This meant an increased size of our party with the necessity to feed, escort and guard them. If it was a requirement, we could arrange for the Chetniks to do this work. Could we be sent details of the information they required before sending the two people? He gave this as a reply to their message. The suggestion of sending the Polish Officer was fortunate because Roger had learned there were already a number of Poles who had escaped from Bor and were creating a problem. This was because they were being collected together by the Chetniks with no idea of what to do with them. If they could be formed into a unit and

commanded by the Polish Officer it would, perhaps, provide an answer. He asked Cairo if the Pole was prepared to do this. The only problem would be feeding them. It would mean we would have to spend more money on buying food because we couldn't expect the Chetniks to feed them. This was something else to discuss with Borovich.

Since I had learned that John would be leaving us, I remembered the chap that I had met at the breakfast table in Cairo, who told me he was a mining engineer. His special knowledge would be useful if, at a later date, we were to plan for a frontal attack on the mine. I told Roger about the man and he said he was agreeable for him to come as a replacement, if still available. I sent a message to Cairo about this but had to say I didn't recall the person's name but gave a description.

I told Roger about the appearance of the Fieseler Storch. This caught his interest and he said we might have a problem in the future if the Storch was to be used in assisting the enemy to search for us. He would see that the Chetnik Brigade Commanders were told about this development. Two days later Roger and John left, with their escort, to join the Central Brigade.

Some days later I received, by courier, an encoded message from Roger. The first point covered was his discussion with Borovich about the proposed attack on the Danube shipping. Surprisingly, he agreed to this with little persuasion but he insisted that if successful there would have to be a payoff of additional equipment. He would prepare and submit a list.

The next point was about the two people who, after dropping to us, were to go to Romania. Borovich advised against this unless they were accompanied by an escort. If we were prepared to pay for this, he could arrange for the escort to be formed by Serbs who were living in Romania near to the Danube. Borovich said that as two strangers, without an escort, they were unlikely to survive. He was unwilling for us to see his communication section. He didn't give a plausible reason why not but that was the position. Borovich was agreeable to the Polish Officer taking command of the escaping Poles. He said we could clothe them, but they weren't to be provided with any weapons.

I assembled the points relevant to Cairo in a message and sent it. They responded concerning the escort for Romania by saying the two people going had been informed and they considered an escort unnecessary. Their Mission, the purpose of which we weren't informed about, was composed of a British Officer and a Romanian Wireless Operator. Cairo also gave the date for the next month's first sortie. It was to be 21st July.

A few days before the first July aircraft was due to arrive, Roger, John Hanbury and I together with Borovich and Chetniks from the Danube Brigade were encamped near to the selected dropping ground and I sent details to Cairo of the map reference and recognition signals. Weapons and ammunition were to be given to this Brigade sufficient for the proposed attack on the shipping. A 20mm cannon was requested for the main armament.

Roger gave me details of the plan they were going to use. The Danube, at the place they had chosen, was nearly a mile wide, most of it quite shallow, caused by many, shifting, shingle banks. The only navigable channel, which was regularly dredged, to enable it to be used by tugs and their towed barges was about two hundred yards off the West bank (our side). The length of the channel, which had two bends, was about a mile long and a hundred yards wide with a fast flowing current.

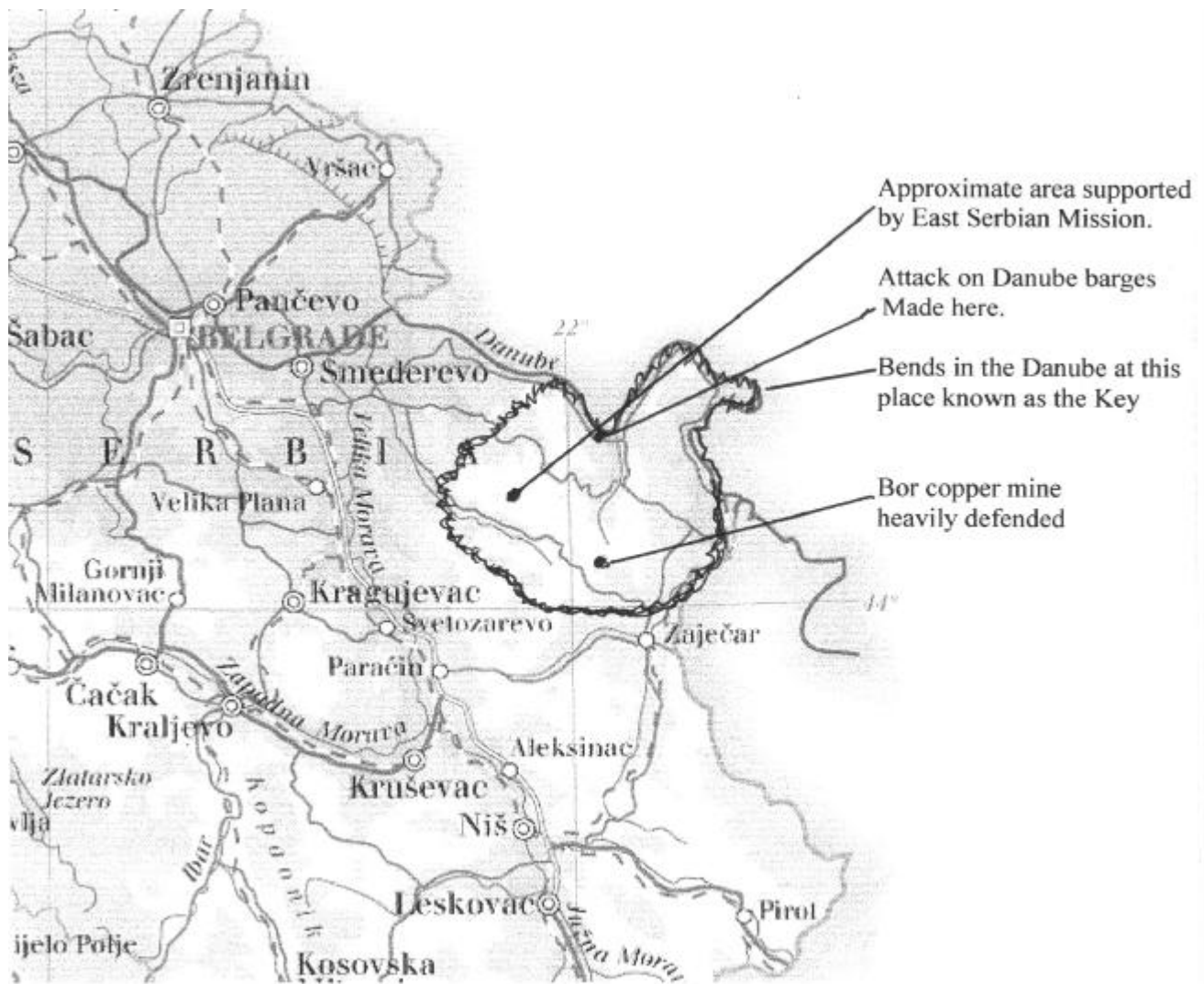
For upstream traffic six barges were towed one behind the other and for downstream the barges were roped together to form a block. This made control, by the tug, easier in the fast flowing stretches of the river. It was planned to attack a tug going in the upstream direction. The object being to concentrate fire power on the bridge of the tug, so it would lose control and the barges drift downstream, out of control, and sink or, otherwise, block the channel. The barges had a carrying capacity of about five hundred tons each. The Chetniks were to have the assistance of a retired Danube Pilot who would fire the first shot when the tug was in the most vulnerable position. There was no movement of tugs during the hours of darkness. Traffic began as soon as there was sufficient daylight for safe navigation, at this time of the year, about 4am. The plan was for the Chetniks to move into the selected firing positions, during darkness, and attack the first tug that came along going upstream.

On the night of 21st an aircraft was heard, signals were exchanged, fires lit and parachutes seen. One of the Chetniks shouted '*Dva Avions*' He was right, there were two aircraft and we had expected only one. As soon as both aircraft had departed, the search was on for the packages and out of the gloom appeared two men. These turned out to be the Wireless Operator whose name was Sergeant Tom Lomas and the mining engineer, Lieutenant Alan Martin.

It wasn't until we came to introductions that Alan remembered me. He said, 'I was mystified as to who could have put in a word for me because I'd forgotten our little breakfast-time chat. I'd reached the stage of complaining to anybody and everybody, who would listen, about being left on the shelf. Anyway, I'm very thankful to you and hope to prove useful.' 'Have you brought any porridge oats?' I asked him. 'Yes.' He replied. I laughed and said 'I thought you were only joking.'

The amount of equipment we received was far greater than could be managed in the carts and packhorses we had available. It was decided to unpack the metal canisters in the hope of finding the right weapons for the Danube people. This proved satisfactory. The 20mm cannon together with a good supply of ammo, one heavy and two light machine guns and rifles were found and handed out but there didn't appear to be any sights for the 20mm gun. Alan said that if the sights were not found in other packages he felt he could make a temporary replacement. The rest of the packages were conveyed away and the empty containers hidden in the forest.

We had brought my packhorse to carry back the charging motor we had been promised. We found the packages containing Tom Lomas's wireless, batteries and charging motor and thankfully my motor, undamaged. All this equipment would have been too much for the one pack-horse, so a couple of saplings were cut down and using them as poles, the wireless and one charging motor were attached to them by a sling. These were carried on the shoulders, by four of our escort. It was decided that Tom and I would go to Lisatz. I was to tell Cairo, as soon as possible that the remaining flights would be received at the same place and then gave details of the changed fire patterns and recognition signals. The others would remain and after receiving the other two aircraft proceed with the Danube operation. They would return to Lisatz as soon as they could after that. We had breakfast with them and after Roger had given me the usual long progress reports, we wished them good luck in their mission and Tom and I departed.



CHAPTER TWENTY

On the walk to Lisatz I realised how much fitter I was than on our arrival, because Tom, like us, requested frequent rests while I would have been content to keep on walking. Tom, who I thought rather frail and of quiet temperament, told me he was twenty-five and had originally been in the Tank Corps and wounded in the French campaign. After a spell in a hospital he had been transferred to the Signal Corps and following training, volunteered for 'special duties.' Naturally, he was full of questions about how I had found things in Yugoslavia. I said we could have a long chat when we arrived 'home,' which was how I regarded Lisatz.

I also realised I was beginning to adjust to the nomadic life we were leading. It does require, amongst other things, the acceptance of going for a short walk with a spade in the absence of running water and immersing in cold mountain streams when the temperature is more fitting to a hot bath. It also meant the washing and debugging of personal clothing and those tasks which, with situation normal, men can somehow have performed by others. On occasions I had to resort to my Brothers remedy for situations which had become irksome. You have to say to yourself 'life – is – FUN' and believe it.

When we were installed at Lisatz and had sent Mladen off to buy some goodies Tom set up his wireless set and, at the first attempt, made contact. This I'm sure will have given him a 'kick' as it did for me. The weather was fine and sunny but too hot unless one was in the shade of the trees. Tom and I had a number of talks, mainly about matters concerning Yugoslavia. He was, as I had been, completely unaware of the political set-up in the country. I told him what had happened since our arrival. He had been led to believe that there was more activity by the enemy in trying to capture us.

'Where did that information originate?' I asked.

'It was general talk at the meal table' he replied.

'We haven't reported any increased activity by the enemy but that may change if the attack on the Danube is successful' I added.

'Why did you choose to come to Yugoslavia?' I continued.

'I liked the idea of going to an already established Mission' he replied.

'Did you know you will be going south after the Danube operation?'

'Yes, John Hanbury told me'

'Were any Missions being sent to the Partisans?' I asked

'Yes I believe so but I don't know any details.'

'It seems ridiculous to me. There could be a situation where two Missions were fighting one another.'

'There was talk that a Brigadier is going to be sent to each Mission HQ to avoid this happening.' He concluded.

A week later, early in the morning, Roger and party arrived. They were exhausted but elated. The attack on the Danube had gone according to plan and been successful. Apparently, the firing directed at the wheelhouse of the tug had shattered the glass screen together with the surrounding woodwork and killing the two occupants. Large clouds of smoke or steam had come from the wheelhouse and the tug brought momentarily to a halt before being swept downstream together with the barges and at least one barge overturned in the channel. The 20mm cannon had jammed after about a dozen rounds but the job had been done. The action had been abandoned because they had come under artillery fire from the Romanian shore. Fortunately, we hadn't suffered any casualties. The good news was sent to Cairo.

Roger also mentioned that before the attack on the Danube the two people going to Romania had been received and escorted to a place near Turnu Severin. They didn't reveal the purpose of their mission. They had been told of the dangers that could arise with just two people wandering about in the countryside. This information didn't seem to concern them.

After a couple of days rest, John and Tom Lomas together with an escort and a loaded packhorse left for a rendezvous with some of the members of the Brigade he was to join. The arrangements had been made by Borovich. I asked if this had been done by a wireless message but nobody knew. I felt a sadness with John's departure because it had been a happy though short association.



*'The first thing the Gestapo
had done was to hang ten
Serbs from lamp posts in Donji
Milanovac'.*

*Picture taken at the time by
Ted Hall*

CHAPTER TWENTYONE

Roger decided that we would move our base further north above Bor in preparation for the sabotage of the railway lines that carried material from the mine to Germany. When we joined up with Borovich, we found that all hell had been let loose because of the attack on the Danube. The first thing the Gestapo had done was to hang ten Serbs from lamp posts in Donji Milanovac, the nearest town to where the incident took place. Much increased activity, by the enemy, was reported in their searches to find and kill or capture us. We now had a price on our heads and life was being made difficult for the Serbs in those areas regularly patrolled by the Germans. They were being urged to reveal our whereabouts with the promise that when the terrorists were caught, life would return to normal.

It wasn't until some weeks later that we received information that the enemy had captured John and Tom in a sweep. The circumstances surrounding this were never clear but I knew that something was wrong when I checked with Cairo and told that Tom was not coming up at the scheduled times for the wireless contact.

We were now into August and congratulated by Cairo for the successful outcome of our attack on the Danube. They also informed us that the RAF from bases in the Middle East were to start dropping mines in the Danube to make navigation hazardous. We would receive at least three aircraft during the month. Borovich said the majority of this would be given to the Northern Sub-Brigade as they were to be responsible for any attacks on the railway. He requested that we make sure Cairo was informed of the suffering endured by the Serbs as a result of enemy action, after the attack on the Danube.

Alan Martin suggested we ask Cairo for a number of dummy, explosive, 'fishplates.' We learned that this was the term for the two plates which, at that time, were used to join sections of railway line together (today the sections are welded). The fishplates were made of wood painted to look like steel and containing an explosive charge. They were attached to the rail by magnets built into the plates and the charge triggered as the engine passed over them. This request was passed to Cairo and we were told that some would be included in the first sortie. Roger decided that all our movements would be made at night because the enemy troops returned to their barracks after each day. Apparently, they had a fear of the forest at night.

Early in August we heard on the BBC News that a raid, by a large force of American Liberator bombers, was made on the oilfields at Ploiesti in Romania. Shortly after, we received a message from Cairo, asking us to be on the lookout for American aircrew shot down on the raid. Fifty-six aircraft had failed to return to base in North Africa. It was no surprise, therefore, when three aircrew were brought to our camp. Apparently, when the crews were briefed before the raid, they were told that if their aircraft was damaged and a false landing necessary they should try and get, either, south to Turkey, where they would be interned, or westwards to Serbia with a chance of being picked up by Guerrillas. The three, that had been brought to us, were part of a crew whose aircraft had been badly damaged over the target, and two crew members killed. They had parachuted when the Danube had been crossed and had been unable to find the other four members who had jumped with them. Borovich was asked to inform all his Chetniks about the possibility of finding other airmen.

During the course of the following three weeks we received three aircraft and another two American airmen were picked up. The Ploiesti incident, and another I will be describing shortly, coincided with the beginning of what I might term the 'Political' phase of our mission. This occurred at the same time as we were being kept on the move by the enemy. Roger gave me the job of concealing, housing and feeding these airmen. No easy task as we were constantly on the move. After we had sheltered the US airmen for about two weeks a message was received from Cairo telling us to pass them on to the next Mission to the West. Gradually they were to be taken to the Adriatic Coast where they would be picked up by submarine.

Listening to BBC News bulletins, it became obvious, to us, there was more and more talk about the existence, in Yugoslavia, of 'Partisans' under the leadership of Marshall Tito. The Allies had landed in

Italy and not met a great deal of resistance until they came to Mount Casino. Apparently, when the subject of support for Yugoslavia was discussed by the Eisenhower staff, they ignored all past history, and said those who offered resistance to the Axis Forces were those who would receive support. The Partisan HQ was just across the Adriatic and so supplying them with arms, in relatively large quantities, by sea and air, was a simple operation. In consequence, there became an imbalance, in power, between them and the Chetniks. Roger told us that, in more than one discussion with Borovich, he had raised the question of the two ideologies.

It had obviously caused embarrassment and the best response he had received was that there was no Communist organisation in Eastern Serbia. - But, for the present, to return to our story.

The three aircraft that had been scheduled for us had been received during August and a number of attacks on the railway had taken place. Two engines with freight wagons had been derailed. As a result, sweeps by larger quantities of troops were taking place and the local civilian punished in various ways with a number hung or shot. On a number of occasions these sweeps were assisted by the Storch aircraft circling the search area. It seemed that if we kept our movements to the dark hours and camped well into the forest, we could keep one jump ahead of them.

Only one aircraft was scheduled for September. Roger asked why the number was not to be more, only to be told that there were problems with serviceability of aircraft. Despite a number of requests the facts about the general organisation of MO4, requested in Roger's signal, remained unanswered. Twice we were given provisional dates to receive the aircraft but on each occasion these were cancelled at the last hour. Finally, on the 28th of the month, towards the end of that moon period, we were assembled at the dropping zone. This was on the lower slopes of the mountain near Lisatz and, in fact, a small clearing near our campsite. We had given up finding accommodation in cottages due to the attentions of the low flying spotter aircraft. The Chetniks were very good at constructing a wigwam type shelter using a central pole, planted in the ground, against which branches of trees were placed and leaves stuffed into the open areas to form a wind break. Fires for cooking were concealed and only lit during the hours of darkness.

At the scheduled time, for the arrival of the aircraft, we were ready with the fire pattern laid out. The aircraft arrived, signals were exchanged and fires lit, but no parachutes were seen. Alan remarked that the aircraft seemed to be high as it passed overhead and we agreed. When the sound of the engines disappeared, we put out the fires and scattered the ashes. Searching the area away from the fires was difficult due to the trees and undergrowth. After a short while some parachutes and packages were found. Then a man was brought to us by the Chetniks. He gave his name as Captain Dash. He asked if the two people, who jumped with him, had been found. I told him that we had not expected any personnel and asked for more details. It turned out he was the Polish Officer about whom we had previously received information. He said the others were a Captain Ramus and Sergeant Mott who, he understood, were to gather information about traffic on the Danube and output of the mines at Bor.

We sent the Chetniks out to search in ever widening circles and eventually it was reported to us that two men had been found, both of them seriously injured. We went to see what the situation was and found one man unconscious and the other in severe pain, from multiple injuries, and unable to stand. We only had torches and as they were wearing the heavy flying suits we couldn't establish the extent of their injuries. It was decided to make a sort of cradle for each of them, using blankets, and then carry them to our makeshift wigwams. The flying suits were cut off and we found that Ramus, who by this time was semi-conscious and moaning continuously, had a compound fracture of one leg and the other, by its shape, also badly broken. The remaining injuries were not apparent. Mott complained about pains in both arms and both legs but with no external sign of his injuries.

Dash asked if we had any medical assistance. We had none. Dash, who said he had a slight medical knowledge and with our assistance straightened both of Ramus's legs and we bound them together with field dressings. There was then a discussion about what action we should take. Should we carry them to a road and hope that the Germans would find them. We were certain that no local person would act as go between as they would surely have been arrested and probably shot. One of the Chetniks, who had lived near Bor, knew that one of the Serbian doctors on the staff of the mine lived in a small village a couple of miles from the mine compound. This was about six or seven miles away. We sent him, on horseback, to see if the doctor would come and diagnose the injuries. Fortunately, our medical packs included morphine so both men were given a shot.

I had a wireless schedule at 08.30 so Roger composed a message giving details of the situation as far as we knew it. I decided to keep the wireless link open awaiting Cairo's response. At schedule time I passed the message, which was given top priority, and we waited. In the meantime, the Doctor arrived.

Fortunately, he had a horse so time was kept to a minimum. Roger thanked him and he carried out an inspection of both men as thoroughly as possible under the circumstances. He was not certain about the full extent of the injuries but Ramus had two broken legs and one broken arm and Mott, at least one broken ankle and spinal injuries. During the time the doctor was with us we received an answer to our message to Cairo. *Coming tonight with equipment to carry out operations. Do you have a doctor who can perform these, if not, we will send a surgeon in the plane?*

We asked the Doctor if he could help. He said he was prepared to carry out the operations if the men were taken to a house that had electricity and he suggested a place that he thought would be safe. He redressed both Ramus's legs which included splints made from tree branches. He advised that we must do our best to keep both men warm, otherwise pneumonia may set in.

We informed Cairo that a surgeon would not be necessary and we would receive the plane that night. Fortunately for us, conditions were good and the plane arrived. When the equipment was unpacked, we were amazed at the number and variety of instruments, anaesthetic equipment, bandages and powder for plaster casts. In addition there were two folding stretchers, which made the carrying of the injured less of an ordeal for them. Later in thinking about the appalling situation with which we were faced, I was surprised about the reaction of those involved. I'm sure that if I'd had to face the situation alone I wouldn't have been able to cope.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Life became hectic. What with avoiding the enemy, getting the injured down to the house for their operations and looking after the Americans there was not much time to talk to the other new arrival, Captain Dash. Later, we established the reason for their injuries, They had both landed in very tall trees, we thought, about fifty or sixty feet from the ground. It was completely dark, so dark that they couldn't see the ground. Mott was close to the trunk of the tree so he released his harness, grabbed the trunk with the idea of sliding down but the trunk became too large and he fell. Ramus was not near the trunk but figured the ground couldn't be far away so he released his harness and dropped. Both men said that before leaving Derna they were told we were on the run so after landing they must expect to be on the move immediately.

The American airmen, before they took off, had all been given a small wallet containing US Dollars, and Romanian currency, together with messages printed in various languages. These said that large sums of money would be given to those that helped them get to an American base. In addition there were maps and compasses. They soon acquired a taste for rakia and, because they paid the locals well, were provided with plentiful supplies. I regret to say that when they had been at the bottle they were difficult to control. We made it our number one task to arrange for them to be taken to, and passed on to, Major Richmond's Mission.

The operations on the two men, carried out on a long kitchen table, were only partially successful. The Doctor said that the situation could be rectified when they were operated on again in a proper hospital. The main thing was that the injuries to both men gradually became less painful, as long as they were lying down and stationary. Unfortunately, both were still stretcher bound so had to be carried everywhere. Transporting them on a stretcher in the mountainous territory in which we lived was a trying experience for them. It was just not practical to think of passing them on to the West in the same way as we had done with the Americans. We were fortunate in finding a retired doctor to look after them medically and an

escaped Russian POW to assist them physically. This man was appreciated very much by Captain Ramus because he was able to converse with him (Ramus was of Russian descent). The man was big and very strong and could lift Ramus as though he was a baby.

We were now into October and the first snows arrived. The injured, after a long and painful journey were accommodated at Lisatz, where the inaccessible nature of the terrain would mean they were less likely to be disturbed by the enemy. I think it would be an exaggeration to say they were improving but rather they were living with their disabilities and putting on a brave face. In chatting to Mott I found his major concern was the effect his injuries would have on his golf swing. Not being a golfer myself, I couldn't offer an opinion and found it mildly amusing that such an insignificant thing received consideration over all the other problems.

Their mental condition was gradually improving though neither was able to walk but Len Mott could sit a horse. It was decided that before winter set in Roger and Alan Martin would go to meet Major Richmond for a general discussion about the current situation and in particular the deteriorating situation between the Chetniks and Partisans. Meanwhile, I was to accompany Dash to assist him in starting the Polish Brigade. He was never addressed with a Christian name and, in fact, his real Polish name which he wrote on a piece of paper for me was twelve letters long and full of s's, z's and v's and for me, unpronounceable.

It was not long before I realised that Dash was an individual of a type I had not met before. He was about 6ft tall, quietly spoken and slim, perhaps thin would be a better word. Apart from Polish he was fluent in English, French and German. He said he was thirty-two years old and had been a regular soldier on the General Staff. He was extremely polite, in an Edwardian way, and always smartly dressed in riding breeches and highly polished riding boots and a battle-dress jacket. His confident manner made him, to me, a soldiers' soldier - a leader. He told me that after the German invasion of Poland he had made his way South, through Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greece; thence by fishing boat to Egypt. Subsequently, he was recruited by MO4 to assist in the creation of the escape route for politicians out of Poland.

He was unable to understand why the arming of the Polish contingent was forbidden. He was going to speak to Borovich and give him an assurance that, if allowed to do so, their weapons would never be used against the Chetniks. After I had been with him about a week, during which time I suppose he had had time to assess me as an individual, he said, 'Do you think the Allied support for Mihailovich will continue?' 'I've no idea.' I replied, 'I'm confused by what I think of as the political situation. When I agreed to come to Serbia, it was to be involved in the fight against the Germans. I wasn't told anything about a civil war. What do you think will happen?' 'I regret to say, I think the support that Tito is getting will be sufficient to overcome the Chetniks. How long the British will continue to support Mihailovich I couldn't say. If I had to guess, I don't think it will be much longer. Tito is already making a show of taking the fight to the Germans and this goes down well with the Americans yet, Mihailovich continues relatively inactive.' 'What will you do if support is withdrawn and you're left to fend for yourself?' he asked. 'I suppose I'll do whatever Roger suggests.' 'Well,' said Dash, 'I hope to be allowed to continue with setting up the escape route irrespective of who is the leader in Yugoslavia and, as I can't communicate and work effectively without a wireless, would you consider joining me?' 'I would be happy to work for you but only if it's sanctioned, firstly, by Roger and then by Cairo. I don't have the right to please myself and if I acted against their orders it might be considered that I had deserted and my wireless schedules would, of course, be discontinued.' 'Thank you,' he said, 'the situation may never arise but I hope you didn't mind my mentioning the matter.'

'No, I'm pleased you did because I'm getting a bit confused as to what is going to happen in the Spring. I can't see much being done between

November and March because we'll be snowed in. 'Yes,' continued Dash 'the organisation of the Missions to Mihailovich seems to be lacking in control. There seems to be very little appreciation of the fact that the transportation of so much war material for the Russian front is being carried out through Serbia and the Danube. This has become necessary because the rail network, through Poland, is little used as it's constantly being sabotaged. I suppose it's to be expected as the Allies are concentrating on planning and carrying out an invasion somewhere in the West which means this area is neglected.'

We eventually found the escapees in the forest above the village of Zlot some ten miles from Bor. They were a very bedraggled, surly looking, bunch of fifteen men, poorly clothed and of all ages between about twenty and fifty. They were living in the wigwam type shelters of the type I've already described. When they were assembled and addressed by Dash I could almost see a physical change take place in them. They seemed brighter and eager to listen to what he was saying and then, afterwards, were full of questions.

Later, Dash told me, that they were depressed because there was little food and no information about the progress of the war or what was happening in Poland. They had been told that if any stealing took place on the surrounding small farms they would all be shot. They told him that escaping was no problem because those responsible knew that replacements were easily obtainable and as supervision was poor nobody did any work unless physically threatened.

He said his first task was to get more food for them and then better clothing. I told him about Mladen and how he operated. He asked me to inform Cairo about the situation and request that clothing and dried food should make up the bulk of the aircraft load he had been promised. He asked if my packhorse could be used to carry food and I agreed.

The following day he left, alone. The Chetnik guards were unhappy about this but Dash insisted. He returned some four hours later with the horse loaded with sacks of haricot beans and maize (the staple diet). At first I was amazed that he had been able to do this, but then I had a sneaking suspicion that he had some command of the Serbian language, a hidden talent that he had not mentioned to me. I asked him about it and he said, with a smile, 'Yes, I do know a few words.'

'What plans have you made for the immediate future.' I asked. 'Well' he said, 'This group are in poorer health than I expected so I don't think much can be done before we are snowed in for the winter. From information they've given me I expect there'll be more escapees to add to the number. As soon as it's possible to move about freely again, in the new year, a few of them will accompany me to make contact with the next group involved in the escape route further north. I'm going to stay here for now and organise food supplies. I have prepared a message for you to send on your next schedule to Cairo. I'm asking for the Chetniks to be told that my escort must be armed and that we are to be regarded as a separate but friendly group. You will go back, with the escort, to join Roger'. 'OK,' I said, 'I'll get cracking on coding the message, my schedule time is in forty minutes.'

Before I left an incident occurred which, when thinking about it later, made me shudder. One of the Poles came to me and indicated that he wanted to borrow my pliers. I gave them to him and because I couldn't communicate verbally didn't ask why he wanted them. A short while later one of the others returned them to me. This man indicated that the person who borrowed the pliers had used them to remove an aching tooth. Later, I mentioned the incident to Dash and he told me he had heard about it and said that the man had extracted the tooth himself because he couldn't trust the others to take out the right tooth! The following day I left to rejoin the Key Brigade.

The only way a group of Chetniks found another group was by asking small farmers for information. It was amazing how these peasants knew what was going on in their district. There were no local

newspapers or radio, but they knew. Nobody could move about the mountainous areas without their knowledge. If they didn't wish to meet you they would disappear into the forest; accordingly, if you met anybody you knew they were friendly. These peasants are an insular people and lived as far as possible without money. They bartered anything and everything: maize for clothing, chickens for footwear and eggs for children's toys etc. Prior to the war, they were forbidden to thresh their own grain. This was done by a visiting government team with tractor and machinery. A quantity of grain was then retained, by the threshers, instead of levying tax.

Roger had decided that our winter quarters were to be near Lisatz so that visiting the injured, was relatively easy, when we donned snowshoes, which prevented us from falling up to our armpits in the soft snow. And so, the short days and long nights of winter were upon us. With little to do but play cards, listen to English and Serbian news bulletins broadcast by the BBC, which told us of the deteriorating relationship between the Chetniks and Partisans. However, according to news reports, at last, the war seemed to be turning in our favour. At Christmas we had a party held at the cottage housing our injured. We did our best to cheer each other up but with no great success. There was regular contact with Cairo but they didn't seem interested in what we had to say.

On 9th March 1944, the message all of us dreaded was received from Cairo. It simply stated that a High Command decision had been taken not to supply any more arms and ammunition to Mihailovich and his Chetnik Brigades. They assured us more detailed information would follow. A week went by without any further news. Apparently, Mihailovich, himself, had not been informed of the decision prior to its general release on the BBC and regarded as disgraceful. We didn't know what attitude the Chetniks would adopt. Would they hold on to us as hostages? Would we be imprisoned? Would we be shot? There followed a number of anxious days whilst those responsible for deciding what was to happen to us reached agreement. For the first time since I had landed in Serbia I went to bed with a revolver under my pillow!

Finally, Mihailovich decided that we could leave the country but our arms must be left behind. He passed orders to all Brigades that the British were to be given any assistance they required to leave. At first our HQ, which was in the process of moving from Cairo to Bari in Italy, wanted us to make our way to the nearest Partisan unit. However, Tito refused to accept anybody who had previously been with the Mihailovich Forces. Eventually, we received instructions to make our way to the small village of Topola, about one hundred and ten miles due west of Lisatz. The powers that be were trying to arrange for aircraft to pick us up from there. That was the easy part for us. What about Captain Ramus, still confined to a stretcher and Dash with his Polish troops?

Now that the decision had been taken to evacuate us, I told Roger of the suggestion by Dash that I should join him. Roger said he would think about the implications. Later he asked me if I had given thought as to what might happen when the British support was withdrawn. I replied by saying that if Dash could have weapons for his men, which I felt sure he would be able to buy, I would feel as safe with them as trying to make my way to Topola or, perhaps, to the West Coast. 'OK,' said 'Roger, I'll ask Cairo if they agree to your staying'.

The outcome being that Cairo was against my staying and indicated that Dash should rejoin our party for the evacuation. I was sent, together with an escort, to tell Dash of this decision. When we discussed the matter, he said he wasn't prepared to leave and asked me, again, to join him. I said that without the agreement of Cairo, I couldn't be of much use to him, because there wouldn't be support. There was also the unknown factor of what action the Partisans might take. From the reports I had seen they seemed a ruthless bunch.

On the night before my departure from Dash's camp, I thought long and hard about staying but since I didn't have the same personal involvement as Dash I felt satisfied with my decision. So, with much

regret I left Dash and returned to Lisatz and told Roger of Dash's decision to stay behind. Roger said he didn't feel he had any responsibility for Dash as he was involved in another project.



While I had been away Ramus complete with sledge, horse, Russian and escort had left for Topola. A rendezvous had been arranged for half distance to see how they were making out. It wasn't until mid-April that, with heavy hearts, we finally left Lisatz. There was still a good deal of snow about but Spring was in the air. We had decided to take six Chetniks with us for support. The attitude of all those Chetniks who were, in some way attached to us, had not changed at all. Most of them, I feel sure, were, like me, bemused by the situation.

A few days before we departed, Roger sent a messenger ahead with a note to Major Richmond suggesting we meet them before they left and go as one party. In this way, our exodus from Serbia began, travelling at night and resting by day. We had a number of major roads to cross but fortunately these were little used at night. Our difficulties increased by having to cross the River Morava and two smaller rivers. Due to this, progress was slow with much waiting about.

When we reached the place selected for the rendezvous with Ramus, we learned the distressing news that he and his party had been captured in one of the increasing number of sweeps the enemy were making. It was not 'till much later that I learned the true story.

Towards the end of our journey we sent scouts ahead to make contact with other Missions, who, like us, were toiling towards Topola. We were constantly on the look out for Partisans, Ustashe or any of the other smaller enemy forces. Fortunately, it was only on one occasion that we met resistance. It was early evening, not quite dark, and we had just started out when we noticed a line of troops, wearing dark blue uniforms, which nobody could positively identify, walking in extended order towards us, some three to four hundred yards ahead. Since there was no reaction from them we were reasonably sure we had not been observed. Richmond took charge and brought those with rifles forward. When the enemy were about 150 yards ahead of us, he gave the order to open fire. Two of them were hit and the others carrying the wounded disappeared into the undergrowth. We waited for about two hours and, by then, it was completely dark, with no moon. We moved forward slowly, met no resistance and continued on our way. We learned later that they were Ustache troops.

At the end of May we made contact with the British leaders of the mission who had been with

Mihailovich. We were told to make camp about ten miles from the large field which, if approved by the RAF, was to be used as a landing ground. Days went by without any information about the evacuation plan. Later we learned that the RAF said the landing ground was too small and an alternative site must be found. When the Americans from the Ploiesti raid, who had become attached to HQ, heard this they inspected the site and said that it was suitable for the landing and take-off of Douglas DC3's and asked for their HQ to be contacted. This was done and without asking for any details, other than those provided by their aircrew on site, said they would come and pick us up. On the night of 5th June they sent six DC3's and took off the whole party. We were taken to Bari in Southern Italy. After a good night's sleep we awoke to the agreeable news that it was 'D' day.



During the course of the next few days there was a period of what could be called debriefing or perhaps post-mortem. All the Missions through their leaders expressed discontent about poor support and lack of co-ordination but no satisfactory answers were given due to the change of HQ from Cairo to Bari taking place, at that time, and the fact that Robins was no longer the Chief Executive.

So ended the Allied support for Mihailovich and his Chetnik troops. It should be remembered that, initially, they were the recognized resistance movement to the German invaders in Yugoslavia. The fact they were an organised movement with the will but, unfortunately, not the means of offering armed resistance, seems to be forgotten. It was the Allies who, having sent personnel, failed to provide them with sufficient arms.

With hindsight it is easy to see that a great deal of bloodshed in that country, which continues to this day, more than fifty years later, might have been reduced, if not avoided, had advice from those who served in the territory been heeded. This doesn't make it easier for those with no knowledge of Yugoslavian history, for that period, to understand how and why Tito gained such dictatorial powers.

Each of the participants who returned had cause to think about their future. A number of them opted to become part of the Allied Control Commission which was already being formed. This organisation was to be responsible for running Western Europe when hostilities were over. I had no wish to be part of this. I had already decided to return to the RAF and as soon as possible start investigating how I was to 'earn a crust' in a civilian occupation. It was a world that I knew nothing about and my skill in punching a Morse key would not be an asset.



Before leaving MO4 to go to the RAF HQ, which was also at Bari, I said goodbye to Roger and thanked him for his consideration and friendship, particularly when the going was tough. We exchanged addresses and promised to exchange Christmas cards if there was no other communication.

After the war was over, I received a letter from him which did help to lift some of the mystery surrounding those members of MO4 who had been in East Serbia and 'disappeared'. Roger had attended a re-union and there he met Captain Ramus. After being captured by the Germans, Ramus claimed he was of Swiss nationality which caused confusion. He was not ill treated, in fact, they arranged for him to go into hospital and his injured legs and arm were operated on and he reckoned he was about 90% fit. Subsequently, he was imprisoned in Oflag 4c POW camp. Here, quite by coincidence, he had met John Hanbury who, after capture, had been tortured but had survived. When John and his party had been attacked he became separated from Tom Lomas, his operator, and didn't see or hear of him again. After the war he checked POW lists but failed to find his name.

Roger also mentioned that he had done some checking on what had happened to Dash. There were reports from a Partisan Mission that a 'British' officer had been reported killed in a skirmish with Rumanian troops near Belgrade. There were no reports of the two who had gone to Rumania.

So ends my story of some of the personal experiences that took place, during a vital year, in the turbulent history of Yugoslavia. I emerged physically unscathed and learned a lot about human nature. Some years later, during the Tito era, I was asked to present a technical paper to students at Belgrade University. I offered to do this if, in exchange, a guide could accompany me on a touring holiday in Eastern Serbia. My offer was declined and, to my regret, the request to do the lecture cancelled.

When I had decided to publish this story and was looking for information concerning the reason why the support for the Chetniks had been withdrawn and given to Tito I came across the following article written by Colin Brown and John Crossland. It was published by "The Independent" newspaper on 15th July 1997. If the content is true then the reason for some of our frustrations becomes understandable.

HOW A SOVIET MOLE UNITED TITO AND CHURCHILL

"Why did the Government back Tito? Nothing was known about him and they actually thought he was a woman." Secret reports on one of the most controversial British undercover operations of the Second

World War are to be released Monday. This will show that a Soviet spy may have been responsible for the British switching support to Tito's forces in the former Yugoslavia. The documents, including transcripts of secret wartime signals to London, are being released by the Public Records Office. They will show evidence that the role played by James Klugman - the Soviet mole who converted the British spy, Donald Maclean, to Communism - in switching British allegiance from a Yugoslav royalist resistance leader called Mihailovich to Tito, at a critical point in the Second World War. By switching support to Tito's forces, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) helped to force the German retreat, but it cost Mihailovich his life - he was executed after the war as a collaborator - and ensured that the former Yugoslavia remained a Communist state under Tito's control.

SOE spies who fought in the Balkans included the former Tory MP Julian Amery. Other famous names who flit in and out of the tales of SOE derring-do and duplicity in the region include Paddy Leigh Fermor and Major Anthony Quayle, the screen actor.

Rupert Allason, author of spy books under the pen name Nigel West, and former Tory MP said the real issue raised by the papers was the reason for the British government's backing of Tito. Nothing had been known about Tito - Fitzroy Maclean, a British agent, thought he was a woman and the government became convinced that Mihailovich was a collaborator with the Germans - something the "Ultra" code intercepts showed to be untrue.

The signals sent by Klugmann, who was an intimate of the traitors Blunt, Philby and Burgess at Cambridge, will for the first time confirm the claim of an agent, quoted by Andrew Boyle in the "Climate of Treason," that

Klugmann was principally responsible for the massive wartime sabotage of the Mihailovich supply operation and for keeping from London information about the impressive activities of the Mihailovich forces in the fight against the Germans.

They will be of particular interest to a decoder at Bletchley Park, nerve centre of the government's radio intelligence war, who, while preserving the anonymity of her wartime role, gave additional weight to the theory of Klugmann's secret agenda. "I was in section 3L at GCHQ Bletchly Park with the job of preparing a weekly summary of the Yugoslav situation for Churchill. At the time I wasn't particularly suspicious that our information didn't seem to be acted upon, but have become so since. I now wonder if many of our reports were sent to the section where people like Philby were working," she said. "Certainly Klugmann seems to have played a more important role than we thought. Two former Communist wartime agents assured me he did, but they didn't elaborate," she added.

The files, 969 in all, cover the operation of the SOE in Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania, which, with the exception of France, was the most controversial theatre of the sabotage operation launched by Churchill "to set [occupied] Europe ablaze".

Unfortunately, the blaze all too frequently singed SOE operatives themselves as they were caught up in internal politics particularly in Greece and Yugoslavia. While fighting the German and Italian invaders, the Yugoslavs were simultaneously locked in combat with each other. A Special Operations Executive (Balkans) operated from Cairo, and was ordered to carry out the policies of Churchill's government, which initially supported Mihailovich's Royalist Chetnik forces. The signals sent to SOE HQ in Baker Street, London, and to Churchill's Cabinet were based, in part, on intelligence gleaned from German Ultra code traffic filtered through Bletchley Park and passed to the only person authorised to receive it, Colonel S. M. (Bolo) Keble.

A further opportunity for scanning the information from Yugoslavia was provided by the influence

exerted by John Cairncross. Subsequently he was also unmasked as a Russian agent and named as the Fifth Man, recruited from the same Cambridge background, who in 1943 was working with the Yugoslav section of GCHQ at Bletchley Park.

The concerted efforts of the Cairo office eventually bore fruit when the British government dropped its support for Mihailovich. The Kew files are redolent of the suspicion and duplicity which blighted relations between SOE Cairo and its Foreign Office masters and which threatened to tear the intelligence community in the Balkans apart. The evidence of a power struggle which developed over the role of Brigadier Sir Fitzroy Maclean, who was parachuted in as Churchill's personal representative and came to exercise a powerful influence with Tito.

Two months later, Bill Deakin, later Sir William Deakin, Senior Intelligence Office in Yugoslavia, rated Klugmann "indispensable. . . and giving invaluable service." The file reveals that it was known that Klugmann had used his position to advance Tito's cause. There was no suspicion on the part of the Mihailovich missions that political motives were responsible for the lack of support. The general belief was that somebody was 'cooking the books' since there were large numbers of sovereigns and dollars being expended without any one person being responsible for them.

I did not enter any discussions because I had had enough of the 'cloak and dagger life' and although physically fitter than when I joined MO4, I was mentally worn out and needed a rest. When I presented myself to the RAF HQ in Bari they had no knowledge of my existence as my records were in HQ Middle East in Cairo. It was decided that I was to return to the UK and my records be sent from Cairo to be united with me again.

* * *