

R.P. Hurricanes in the Gulf of Trieste. Mustangs and Spitfires remained at readiness throughout the week for support of the 4th Yugoslav Army, but few requests were made.

125. By the 6th May the enemy's withdrawal in Slavonia was rapidly reaching its end. Koprivnica (S.E. of Varazdin) and Bjelovar (E. of Zagreb) fell to the 3rd Yugoslav Army, and with the capture of Kocevje (S. of Ljubljana) by VII Corps the German position was further imperilled in the Novo Mesto area. Generalski Stol was taken and Karlovac threatened. The end of the day saw the enemy pocket north-west of Fiume surrender, and the following day B.A.F. flew its last six sorties.

126. Among the enemy formations caught in Yugoslavia were 15 Mountain Corps, 21 Mountain Corps (including 118, 22 Divisions, and 11 G.A.F. Division) and 91 Corps (including 104 Jaeger, 7 S.S. and 41 Divisions). Elements of 7 S.S. Division succeeded in reaching Central Austria.

127. Outside the borders of Yugoslavia, 188 Mountain Corps, 237 Infantry and remnants of 392 Germano-Croat Divisions, cut off northwest of Fiume, surrendered to Yugoslav forces, but were subsequently allowed to make their way north into Austrian territory.

Summary.

128. Altogether, more than 7,000 sorties were flown by Balkan Air Force during the Fourth Army offensive, between March 19th and 3rd May. More than 100 static targets were attacked, including gun positions, strongpoints, headquarters, barracks, troop concentrations, railway stations, dumps and bridges.

129. So concluded air operations in the Balkans. The task of Balkan Air Force was completed and on 8th May instructions were issued by the Supreme Allied Commander that the A.O.C. should cease to exercise co-ordinating functions in respect of trans-Adriatic operations. Until its final disbandment on 15th July, 1945, Headquarters, Balkan Air Force, therefore continued as an ordinary R.A.F. Headquarters with responsibility only for the control of its various Wings and units.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS.

130. Apart from the normal air operations, considerable effort was expended on Special Operations. Large quantities of ammunition, food and clothing were landed and dropped throughout the country for the Yugoslav Army, utilising a highly developed system of landing grounds and dropping points. Very large numbers of wounded Partisans, together with women and children, were evacuated to Italy from the most seriously threatened areas, their presence in Yugoslavia being a serious embarrassment to the Yugoslav Army. By the end of the war in Europe 36 landing strips had been prepared in Yugoslavia.

131. During the period I was in Command, a Special Operation was carried out involving the evacuation of approximately 2,000 refugees from Slovenia. Marshal Tito had requested this especially as they were in danger of being killed by the Germans withdrawing through the area.

132. The extent of these Special Operations can be seen from the fact that from the formation of B.A.F. until May, 1945, 11,632 sorties were flown to Yugoslavia and 16,469 gross tons

of stores were dropped or delivered to the country. By means of Pickups (landing operations) approximately 2,500 personnel were sent in and approximately 19,000 brought out.

CONCLUSIONS.

133. I have divided this section into two parts, the first part dealing with conclusions from the operational point of view, and the second part dealing with conclusions concerning the Balkan Air Force as a whole.

Conclusions (Operational).

134. A scientifically accurate assessment of the value of the operations by Balkan Air Force in the Balkans has been impossible, as political developments have almost entirely prevented examination on the spot, discussion with the Yugoslavs themselves, and interrogation of prisoners. Even so, from the meagre evidence available from Liaison Officers, congratulatory messages from Partisan Commanders, and from the fact that they were always keen to call for air support, it is certain that our aircraft gave decisive material, and even more moral, assistance to the Partisans.

135. For the reasons given above, the effectiveness of attacks on communications cannot be assessed with precision. The fighter-bombers did not carry cameras, but there is ample evidence that claims for damage to M.T. were on the conservative side and there can be no doubt that these attacks very seriously hindered the enemy's power of movement. Possibly the claims against railway engines were over-optimistic and many more were damaged than destroyed. There is evidence that in attacks on marshalling yards and railway tracks serious damage was inflicted in one third of the attacks. What effect this had cannot be assessed, but from photographic evidence it is fair to say that the damage inflicted slowed up enemy movements effectively, and caused considerable congestion.

136. At sea there is no doubt that the attacks on shipping, which virtually stopped all traffic by day, seriously hindered the enemy and probably convinced him of the impossibility of holding the Northern Adriatic Islands since the adjacent coastline on the mainland had been liberated by the Partisans. The effect of air attack on the enemy's midget craft bases has already been mentioned.

137. There is evidence from photographs, confirmed in some cases from examination on the spot, that the numerous attacks on the enemy's coast defence guns on the Northern Adriatic Islands, particularly on Rab and Krk, neutralised these defences and prevented their effective use against the Partisan forces which took the islands. It would be too much to claim, however, that these attacks did more than cut down losses, as the Partisans were usually careful not to stage an attack until they had reliable information that the enemy had decided to abandon an island.

138. Finally, the air was kept clear for Special Operations aircraft who were able to take in supplies and evacuate personnel by day without interference. This very greatly increased the material aid given to the Partisans. This was achieved even though the enemy knew what was going on, were often within easy reach of the landing strips, and at times bombed them. Our fighters, however, prevented any effective interference at any time.