

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DIRECTIVE.**Introduction.**

77. Before proceeding to deal with Balkan operations, it is most important to note some of the main problems with which the Balkan Air Force was faced, in so far as they were special conditions which had hitherto not been met by previous air forces. On the purely combat side, implementation of the Directive called for two major tasks:—

(a) air support for the Partisans, or, as they were called from the beginning of 1945, the Yugoslav Army of National Liberation (J.A.N.L.),

(b) attacks on the enemy's road, rail and sea communications on which he was so dependent for the maintenance of his position in the Balkans, and where, when he had to move, he offered the best chance of being effectively engaged.

78. The degree and kind of support afforded to those Partisans operating in the liberated sections of Yugoslavia, did not differ from that given to Partisans operating in the zones still under the general control of the Germans. The boundary between the liberated and unliberated zones was at all times extremely uncertain.

Support Operations.

79. Operations in support of the Partisans were, throughout, seriously hampered by the guerilla nature of the forces, inadequate communications between them and Balkan Air Force, and the inability of the Partisan leaders to appreciate what the Air Force could, or could not, do for them. From the first, R.A.F. Liaison Officers with W/T links to B.A.F. were established with the Partisan Corps, but this sketchy W/T communication could not be maintained on a 24-hour basis. These facts, coupled with Partisan reluctance to disclose their plans or to frame time-tables to which it was possible for us to adhere, severely limited the opportunities for really close support. A further drawback was the reluctance of the Partisans to make an attack in daylight and the inability of our aircraft to attack at last light and return the 200 miles or more to their bases in darkness.

80. Added to this was the fact that the Partisans were primarily guerillas, and as such moved rapidly and frequently; some villages changed hands as many as fifty or sixty times, and areas that were Partisan controlled one day, were often over-run by the enemy on the next and vice versa. This made the task of keeping up-to-date situation maps a big one.

81. Operations under this heading, therefore, normally consisted of fighter-bomber, rocket projectile, or bomber attacks on communications leading up to, or strongpoints in, areas where the Partisans were engaging the enemy offensively or defensively on a considerable scale; or on strongpoints or enemy-held villages near which isolated Partisan formations were being hard-pressed. Beaufighters, in particular, became highly effective in specialised attacks of this nature.

82. For the Yugoslav Fourth Army offensive in Croatia in the Spring of 1945, these difficulties were considerably reduced by an increase in the number of Liaison Officers and an improvement in communications; for instance, for

long periods there was a direct telephone line from the Yugoslav 4th Army Headquarters to Balkan Air Force Advanced Command Post at Zadar. This allowed much better support to be given to the Partisans, though naturally it never reached the highest standard achieved between modern air forces and armies.

Attacks on Communications.

83. Apart from shipping attacks, operations against communications fell into three main categories:—

(a) attacks on large scale concentrations of Motor vehicles when the enemy moved in force. A typical instance was the German withdrawal from the Sarajevo salient in April, 1945. On these targets all types of aircraft were concentrated, and help was called for from other formations. The brunt of these attacks was, however, normally borne by fighter-bombers.

(b) armed reconnaissance of railways and roads. Railways provided profitable targets throughout. In the first days roads also gave good results, but later, unless large scale movements were afoot, few targets were seen and the main value of the reconnaissance lay in denying the use of the roads to the enemy by day and forcing him to use them by night, when they were always liable to Partisan attacks. These armed reconnaissances were almost entirely the task of Spitfires, Mustangs and P.39s.

(c) attacks on marshalling yards, rail tracks and bridges. These were mainly the task of the light bombers and R.P. Beaufighters, with incidental fighter-bomber attacks usually made when no other targets were offered on the particular stretch of road which was being swept. Apart from the actual casualties or damage inflicted upon personnel and material, these attacks occasioned sufficient damage to installations to prevent the enemy ever really catching up with repairs, and this had a definite effect in slowing up movement by rail.

Attacks on Sea Communications.

84. These were the task of the Rocket Projectile Hurricanes and, occasionally, Beaufighters. All enemy sea traffic up the Adriatic coast and amongst the islands was virtually stopped after the establishment of the advanced bases at Vis and Zadar brought it within effective range of the Hurricanes.

85. In addition to attacks on the actual craft themselves, attacks on enemy small naval craft bases in the Northern Adriatic played a major part in denying their use to the enemy and thus eliminating what was potentially a serious threat. R.P. Hurricanes and Beaufighters proved very effective for this work. Anti-flak support was normally given for these targets by Spitfires or Mustangs. Several attacks of this kind were made in co-operation with light Naval forces. Special mention should also be made of the highly successful attacks carried out by XV Air Force (U.S.A.A.F.) on Pola, Trieste and Fiume.

Bases.

86. Normally all except Special Operations aircraft operated from strips at Canne and Biferno, just south-east of Termoli, which is itself just north of the spur formed by the