

267. The role for the brigade agreed between the War Office and the Belgian authorities in London was that they should carry out garrison duties only. It soon became clear, however, that this decision had not been communicated to the brigade, and on its arrival in the Middle East a demand was made for an operational role. This request was backed by Lieut.-General Ermens, C.-in-C. Belgian Congo, in his interview with me in July, 1943. I stated that, provided the Brigade Group was reorganised on British war establishment, it might be possible to contemplate an operational role after six months' guard duties. With this Lieut.-General Ermens agreed. The continued and extensive guard duties on which the brigade was employed throughout 1943 resulted in little training being carried out; the guard duties were partly responsible, too, for the general apathy to which the majority of the European personnel succumbed, but the promise of a relief from guard duties and of employment in a more active role gave a fillip to morale. At the beginning of 1944 the brigade was showing more aptitude for training.

268. Throughout the period, the Egyptian Army has never failed to meet any request of the British Forces to take over duties within Egypt, to free British troops for operations in field formations. They have taken over the duties of mine watching in the Suez Canal and much of the anti-aircraft and searchlight defence of Egypt, in addition to the coast defence of Alexandria and Port Sudan. Frontier control has been carried out satisfactorily by the Egyptian Frontiers Control Administration, working in close co-operation with Headquarters, British Troops in Egypt.

269. Political problems have occurred in higher command, and the relations of high officers with the Egyptian Government have not always been smooth, but junior officers have been largely unaffected and the rank and file have been good. British Commanders with whom Egyptian units have co-operated have frequently expressed their appreciation of the degree of efficiency displayed, particularly in their anti-aircraft and searchlight duties. This state of affairs is the more praiseworthy since the Egyptian Army has been gravely handicapped throughout by shortages in transport and equipment of all types.

270. In addition to training and equipping Allied troops within the Command, Middle East has also played an active but difficult part in organising and equipping the guerilla movements in the Balkans. These guerilla operations have become, since the beginning of 1943, a serious commitment for the Germans. Movements for national liberation have gathered impetus and strength, and in Yugoslavia especially the Germans have been forced to tie up divisions which would most certainly have been of great use elsewhere. Unfortunately, the Partisans in Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania have not been able to agree on common action in their respective countries against the Germans. In fact their quarrels, which have been very bitter, have helped the enemy considerably and have undoubtedly postponed the realisation of their national liberation.

271. In Yugoslavia the Partisan movement has made the most effective military contribution to the Allied cause. Regular military formations have been organised, and a Partisan

General Headquarters under Marshal Tito has been established. By August, 1943, Partisan troops numbered 100,000, and the collapse of Italy gave them increased morale and easier access to arms and supplies, both from Italian sources and because, with the opening of the Adriatic, it became possible for us to supplement air supplies by shipments. As a result, by the end of the year, Partisan forces in Yugoslavia numbered some 250,000 men. During the year they survived three major attacks and contained a force of sixteen German and six Bulgarian divisions, together with large numbers of Croat and Serbian troops under German command.

272. With Partisan General Headquarters, Middle East Command has maintained constant and cordial relations since the first British liaison officers were dropped by parachute in May, 1943. By the end of the year twenty liaison missions were being maintained with the Partisans, and over 6,000 tons of stores had been shipped to them in addition to 339 tons dropped by air.

273. As against the growing effect of Marshal Tito's Partisans must be set the fact that, by playing upon fear of Communism, German propaganda has succeeded in nullifying the value of the other liberation movement in Yugoslavia, that of the Chetnicks, under General Mihailovic. Large numbers of Chetnicks have actively gone over to the Axis and have taken part in operations against Tito's forces, and by the end of the year the Chetnick movement was of no value to the Allies and was receiving no supplies from Middle East.

274. In Albania, British officers have been instrumental in training national forces, which amounted to four brigades at the end of the year. Here also there were political difficulties between the parties of the "National Front" and the more left wing "National Liberation" movement which, in fact, has carried out most of the operations.

275. In Greece, a British Mission had arrived during January, 1943, but for some time found it impossible to control the quarrels and unco-ordinated activities of the guerillas, among whom the rival bands of the left-wing E.L.A.S. and the Republican E.D.E.S. (commanded by Colonel Zervas) were engaged in constant fights. At last, in July, a National Band Agreement was drawn up to divide the whole country into area commands and control all guerilla activities under a General Headquarters.

276. Under this co-ordinated command, a widespread and successful attack on communications was carried out before and during the attack on Sicily. But when Italy was invaded, the Greeks, realising that the liberation of Greece would not immediately be attempted, relapsed into a civil war in which the E.L.A.S. bands set to work to destroy all other bands, so that they might ultimately claim to be the sole liberators of Greece. During the civil war no more supplies were sent to E.L.A.S., but Zervas, our most loyal ally, was kept supplied. By 19th December, 1943, both parties were exhausted and ready to come to terms and, after an appeal by M. Tsouderos, the Greek Prime Minister, negotiations for a renewal of the National Band Agreement were begun.

277. In Crete, also, a small British mission was established, but the strength of the