

139. In addition, the extremely rapid German withdrawal northwards was, to a large extent due to his realising that a properly organised and equipped Yugoslav Army, supported by tanks and aircraft, was facing him. He first felt the weight of this on the Karlobag-Gospic-Bihac line, where combined Air/Ground attacks quickly broke up his forward positions. This fact, together with the overall effect of our aircraft in "keeping the enemy's head down" was a decisive contribution to the rapid Yugoslav advance and the over-running of many of his supply dumps and isolated garrisons.

Conclusions (General).

140. Balkan affairs have always been of a complicated nature and this was especially so during the second World War. At the beginning of 1943 there were a variety of Navy, Army and Air formations engaged in various activities connected with Balkan affairs with influence and controls stretching from London to Caserta, Bari and Cairo.

141. It became increasingly clear that with the growing strength of the Resistance movements in the Balkans, together with the overall effect on the war in Italy, it was most important to co-ordinate these activities in one place and on a proper inter-service integrated basis. The fact that the only feasible way of carrying on the war in the Balkans was by air indicated that an Air Officer should be appointed as the Co-ordinator.

142. The Commanders, Navy, Army and Air, their efforts co-ordinated by the Air Commander, had at their disposal staff sections composed of officers who were specialists in their particular task.

143. Thus, any problems which arose could be dealt with quickly and efficiently by the integrated section, on an inter-service basis, whether it was a question of operations, intelligence, signals, or plans; and a co-ordinated solution could be presented to the Commander. A most important advantage, too, was the way in which each service learned to appreciate the others' points of view. The spirit of co-operation and understanding brought about by the physical proximity of the various services and sections facilitated the solution of the most difficult problems. The actual operational air units of the Balkan Air Force were small in number and of various types, but the results achieved were most satisfactory.

144. As a venture in "Combined Operations" it was an experiment which subsequent events proved to have been an outstanding success and an example which could well be followed in future similar circumstances. For these happy results great credit is due to Air Vice-Marshal W. Elliot who commanded the Balkan Air Force from its formation in June 1944 until February 1945, and to Air Vice-Marshal G. H. Mills who succeeded him in command until the Force was dissolved in July 1945.

PART IV.

AIR ACTIVITIES PRIOR TO THE FINAL OFFENSIVE IN ITALY.

INTRODUCTION.

145. When I assumed command of the Royal Air Force in MEDME in mid-March, 1945,

it was obvious that the German War was drawing rapidly to a close. On the Western Front, the enemy had been pushed back to the east bank of the Rhine, and a bridgehead of great strategic importance had been gained at Remagen. By the end of the month, the last great offensive, across the Rhine and into the heart of Germany, had begun, which was to end in the final capitulation on the 8th May of all enemy forces opposed to the Allied Armies in the west.

146. On the Eastern Front, the Russians were engaged in the capture of the East Prussian ports of Danzig, Gdynia and Koenigsberg on their northern flank; they had reached the Oder at Kuestrin, which gave them a good jump-off point for their coming offensive for the capture of Berlin; to the south, they had reached the area of Breslau; and further south still, they were fighting to the west and north-west of Budapest, and were very soon to push on to capture the Bratislava Gap and Vienna.

147. In the Italian theatre, the front was quiet, while the Allied Armies made their preparations for the final offensive which was to start in April and to lead to complete victory. In Yugoslavia, the offensive by Marshal Tito's Fourth Army was just about to start, and was not to stop until it had reached Trieste.

148. This then was the background against which M.A.A.F. was to continue its air warfare in the seven weeks which remained until the war in Europe had ended.

OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVE FOR THE PERIOD 16TH MARCH-8TH APRIL.

Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force.

149. During March the overall mission of the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force remained to carry out its portion of the aim of the Allied Strategic Air Forces in Europe, i.e. "the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic systems, and the direct support of land and naval forces."

The strategic objectives in order of priority were:—

(a) The reduction of the enemy's sources of fuel, particularly petrol, his most critical military supply.

(b) Destruction of lines of communication in Germany, and of facilities for the production, assembly and repair of armoured fighting vehicles.

(c) Attacks in support of land operations. To meet the needs of an urgent tactical situation, temporary diversions of the effort of the M.A.S.A.F. from its primary function could be ordered by the Supreme Allied Commander. Moreover whenever weather or other conditions prohibited operations under (a) or (b) above, elements of M.A.S.A.F. could be made available to augment the Tactical Air Force effort in Italy or Yugoslavia, or to support Russian operations.

(d) Attacks on important industrial areas, when weather or tactical conditions were unsuitable for operations against any of the objectives given above.

(e) Counter air force attacks. These were adjusted so as to maintain the air superiority which had already been gained. No fixed