The U. S Army Air Forces in World War II

Fueling the Fires of Resistance

Army Air Forces Special Operations in the Balkans during World War II

William M. Leary

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Fueling the Fires of Resistance

Of all the Army Air Forces' many operations in the Second World War, none was more demanding or important than those supporting the activity of resistance groups fighting the Axis powers. The special operations supporting the Yugoslavian partisans fighting the forces of Nazism in the Balkans required particular dedication and expertise. Balkan flying conditions demanded the best of flying skills, and the tenacious German defenses in that troubled region complicated this challenge even further. In this study, Professor William Leary examines what might fairly be considered one of the most important early experiences in the history of Air Force special operations. It is ironic that, fifty years after these activities, the Air Force today is heavily involved in Balkan operations, including night air drops of supplies. But this time, the supplies are for humanitarian relief, not war. The airlifters committed to relieving misery in that part of the world follow in the wake of their predecessors who, fifty years ago, flew the night skies with courage and skill to help bring an end to Nazi tyranny.

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Hitler's Assault in the Balkans

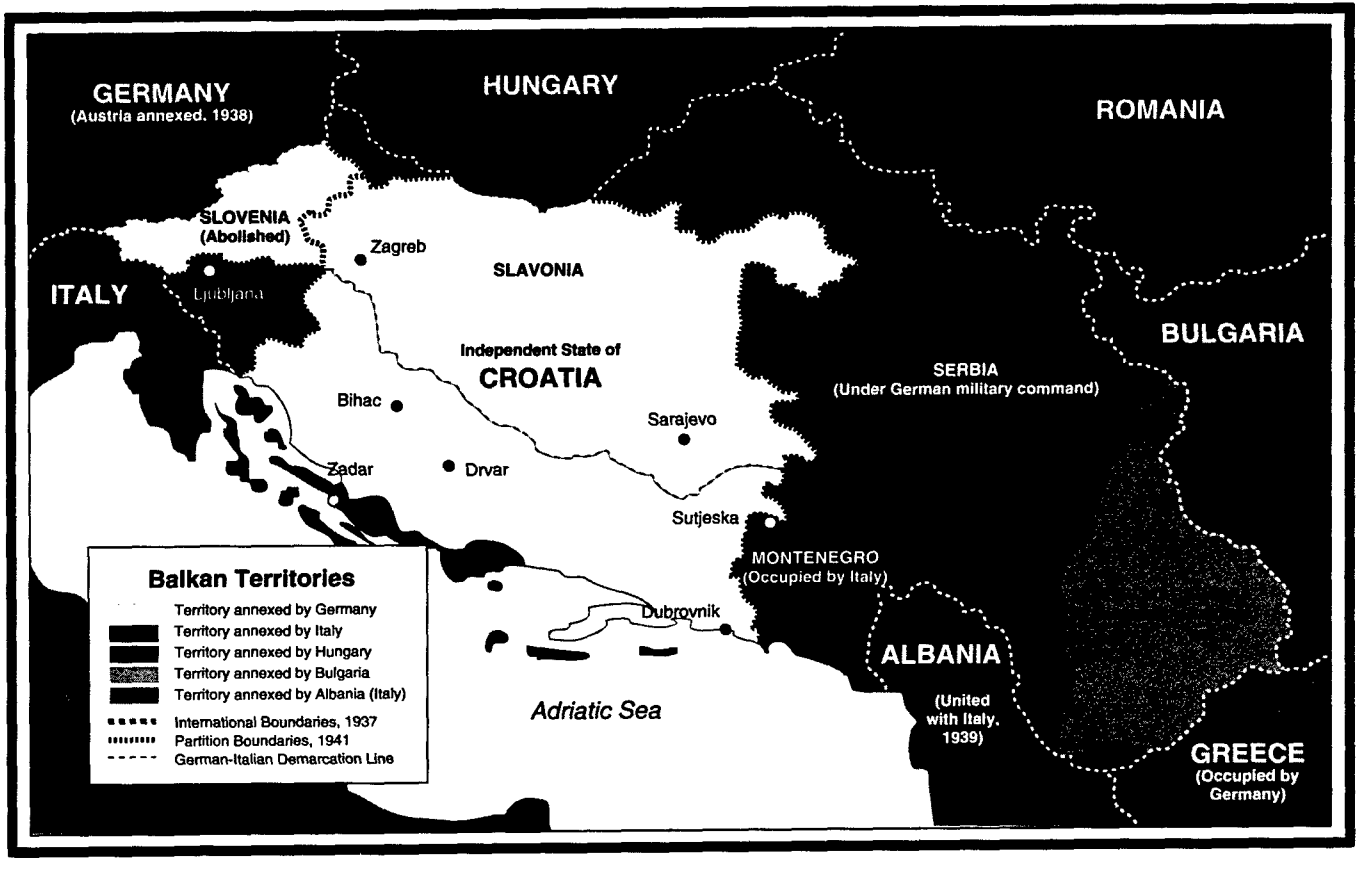
The Second World War began in the Balkans even before Germany attacked Poland in September 1939 and the conflict spread throughout Europe. In April Italy anticipated the wider war when it assaulted and quickly occupied neighboring Albania. With dreams of a new Roman Empire, or at least an expanded Italy, Benito Mussolini saw this as the first step in a grander scheme that next would encompass Yugoslavia. Adolf Hitler, however, vetoed the idea. Germany already exercised economic dominion over the Balkans, and with his own thoughts of conquest, Hitler did not wish to endanger the flow of oil, bauxite, copper, and other crucial war materials by sanctioning an Italian adventure in the region.

Although frustrated by Hitler's lack of enthusiasm for his expansionist schemes, especially after Germany embarked on its own course of aggression, Mussolini would not be denied. In October 1940, this time without informing Berlin, he ordered nine divisions—some 100,000 men—to move from Albania into northern Greece. Expecting a quick victory, the Italian troops brought ample supplies of silk stockings and condoms.

Unfortunately for *Il Duce*, the Greek army proved ready for war. Luring the Italians into the mountains, the Greeks slashed into the long columns of the lead divisions. By mid-November, they had regained all lost territory and began to push into Albania. The war reached a stalemate by winter, with the Greeks controlling more than a quarter of Albania. An Italian offensive in March 1941 failed to dislodge them.

While the Italians suffered embarrassing losses, Hitler was planning the invasion of Russia. Operation BARBAROSSA would take place in the spring of 1941. Concerned about the security of his southern flank, especially the possibility of British air attacks from Greece, Hitler intended to finish what his ally had started. But first he wanted to neutralize the other Balkan States through negotiation and intimidation.

The German diplomatic offensive had some early success. With Romania and Hungary already members of the Tripartite Pact, Germany focused on Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. Bul-


GERMANY
(Austria annexed. 1938)
HUNGARY
ROMANIA
SLOVENIA
(Abolished)
Zagreb
SLAVONIA
ITALY
Ljubljana
BULGARIA
Independent State of
CROATIA
SERBIA
(Under German military command)
Bihac
Sarajevo
Zadar
Drvar
Sutjeska
MONTENEGRO
(Occupied by Italy)
Dubrovnik
ALBANIA
(United
with Italy.
1939)
Adriatic Sea
GREECE
(Occupied by
Germany)
Balkan Territories
Territory annexed by Germany
Territory annexed by Italy
Territory annexed by Hungary
Territory annexed by Bulgaria
Territory annexed by Albania (Italy)
International Boundaries, 1937
Partition Boundaries, 1941
German-Italian Demarcation Line

garia signed the agreement on March 1, 1941, and three weeks later Yugoslavia fell in line.

Soon popular discontent with the Axis alliance surfaced in Yugoslavia. On March 27, Serbian officers of the General Staff led a coup d'état in Belgrade that toppled the government and placed seventeen-year-old King Peter II on the throne. An angry Führer immediately ordered a military assault on both Yugoslavia and Greece. Hitler boasted: "We will burn out for good the festering sore in the Balkans."

The German assault—Operation PUNISHMENT—began on April 6. As waves of bombers rained death and destruction upon Belgrade, infantry and tanks entered Yugoslavia from Austria, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. At the same time, a strong German force invaded Greece from Bulgaria.

In less than two weeks the Wehrmacht forced the largely unprepared Yugoslav military to surrender. King Peter fled the country and formed a government-in-exile. The offensive in Greece went equally well. The Greek 1st Army, which had ousted the Italians the year before, capitulated on April 21. A 75,000-man British expeditionary force sent to assist the Greeks also proved no match for the invaders. The British evacuated the country by the end of the month, taking with them King George II.

Their victory complete, the Germans began to dismember Yugoslavia, annexing eastern Slovenia to the Third Reich and creating an independent state of Croatia under Croatian Fascist Ante Pavelic. Serbia lost portions of its territory to Hungary, Bulgaria, and Albania. What remained came under German and Bulgarian occupation, with General Milan Nedic installed as Serbia's puppet prime minister. Italy gained western Slovenia, sections of the Adriatic coast, and Montenegro. Thus, Hitler had made good on his promise to destroy Yugoslavia as a national entity.

Balkan Resistance Is Born

As the powerful German war machine rolled eastward into Russia on June 22, 1941, the Balkans were allocated several divisions of garrison troops to intimidate local opposition to Nazi rule. In Albania and Greece, their presence was more

than enough, at least at first, to do the job. Ironically, the Albanians and Greeks often seemed more interested in settling internal disputes than rising up against their Axis conquerors. For example, in Albania the insurgent Communist Provincial People's Government, led by Enver Hoxha, at times harassed occupying forces in the southern part of the country, and at other times tried to destroy the loosely organized and poorly armed followers of King Zog. Meanwhile in Greece, two major resistance groups—one Communist, the other Republican—generally spent as much time fighting each other as the Germans. The British constantly tried to bring the two groups together for operations against the occupying forces, but with only limited success.

Events in Yugoslavia were a far different story. Although the country suffered from a divisive nationality problem, resistance to German and Italian occupation exploded into a violent, bloody confrontation that cheered the Allies during the darkest days of the war. In Serbia, Drgoljub (Draza) Mihailovic, an officer on the General Staff, raised the banner of the Cetniks, a guerrilla group that had fought the Turks in the nineteenth century. He quickly became a popular, highly visible figure among the Allies, even appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine in May 1942.

In late June 1941, following the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia's Communist Party joined the resistance. Unlike Mihailovic, Communist leader Josip Broz (known as Tito) remained a shadowy figure for the next two years. So even the early successes of his Partisan fighters were credited to the Cetniks.

At first, the Cetniks and Partisans collaborated against the Germans, but this cooperation soon broke down. By the end of 1941, the two groups were fighting a civil war that would last until the end of World War II. Mihailovic wanted a centralized Yugoslavia, dominated by a greater Serbia, probably under the monarchy; Tito envisioned a federalized Marxist-Leninist state, based on nationality. With respect to the Germans, Mihailovic took a cautious approach. Reluctant to risk his forces, he husbanded his slim resources and waited for the war to turn in favor of the Allies. Cetnik leaders saw the Communists as the main threat to Yugoslavia, so they were prepared to collaborate with the Italian and Ger-

man occupiers in order to weaken the Partisans. Tito, on the other hand, pursued a more aggressive course against Hitler in order to relieve pressure on the Russian front. Although not averse to using the Germans to destroy the hated Cetniks, he generally lacked the opportunity.

Hitler reacted quickly and fiercely against the resistance. Labelling all uprising in occupied territories as "Communist", the Führer ordered 50 to 100 hostages executed for every German killed by the resistance. In Serbia, this policy led to the massacre of 2,300 men and boys at Kargujevak in October 1941. At the same time, a German offensive nearly crushed both guerrilla forces in Yugoslavia.

British Aid to the Guerrillas

The British recognized the Yugoslav government-in-exile and were anxious to help the Cetniks, but could not provide more than token support. The Special Operations Executive (SOE), charged with encouraging resistance throughout Europe, had only four B–24s earmarked for supply operations in Yugoslavia and Greece. Between March 1942 and January 1943, these aircraft flew twenty-five sorties, mainly to Greece.

Adding fourteen Halifax bombers to the SOE's air fleet in February and March 1943 permitted more support for the Yugoslavian resistance. By midyear, the aircraft of 108 Squadron, based in Tocra, Libya, had dropped some twenty-three tons of materiel to the Cetniks. Meanwhile the British grew impatient with reports of fighting between the Cetniks and Partisans and with the lack of Cetnik action against the Germans. In May Prime Minister Winston Churchill decided to send a mission to the Partisans in order to gather reliable information about their effectiveness.

F. W. D. Deakin, leader of the mission to Tito, arrived in the midst of a major Nazi offensive, Operation SCHWARZ. He shared the Partisans' hardships as they struggled to evade the powerful attack and came to admire their courage. Soon British communications intercepts (ULTRA) confirmed Deakin's impression that the Partisans were doing the bulk of the fighting in Yugoslavia. Operation SCHWARZ, the Ger-



OSS officers consult with Cetnik leader Mihailovic (*second from left*). The Americans are (*left to right*) OSS Lt. Ellsworth Kramer, OSS Lt. Col. Robert McDowell, and Fifteenth Air Force medical officer Jacques Mitrani, September 1944. Courtesy Mike Sujdovich.

mans reported in coded Enigma messages, had left 5,697 Partisans killed but caused only 15 casualties among the Cetniks. This information prompted the British to begin air-drops to the Partisans on June 25, 1943.

That summer Churchill ordered a high-level representative sent to Tito. "What we want," he wrote, "is a daring Ambassador-leader with these hardy and hunted guerrillas." On September 19, Brigadier Fitzroy Maclean—"a man of daring character"—parachuted into Tito's headquarters in western Bosnia.

Maclean arrived less than two weeks after Italy had surrendered to the Allies. At first, the Partisans gained substantial territory and a good deal of military equipment from the defeated Italians. But the Germans responded with a series of offensives that regained much of the lost territory, especially along the Adriatic coast. Partisan control of the coast

between October and December 1943, however, enabled the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—the American counterpart of the SOE—to ship more than 6,000 tons of supplies across the Adriatic, from Bari, Italy, to the island of Vis off Yugoslavia's Dalmatian coast, and to return with several thousand sick and wounded Partisans. Although short-lived, it was an impressive supply operation, especially when compared to the limitations of aerial resupply. During this three-month period, only 125 tons of supplies were air-dropped to Partisans and Cetniks.

Meanwhile, British disillusionment with the Cetniks deepened. Brigadier Maclean thought that the time had come for the Allies to shift all support to the Partisans. "We were getting . . . little or no return militarily from the arms we dropped to the Cetniks," he observed, "which had hitherto exceeded in quantity those sent to the Partisans." In fact, arms delivered to the Cetniks were more likely to be used against the Partisans than against the Germans. "On purely military grounds," Maclean concluded, "we should stop supplies to the Cetniks and henceforth send all available arms and equipment to the Partisans."

This shift in Allied policy was confirmed at the Teheran Conference. A secret "military conclusion," initialled on December 1, 1943, called for support of the Partisans with supplies and equipment "to the greatest extent possible." Also, shortly after the first of the year, the British ordered their liaison officers to cease contact with Mihailovic's forces. "We have proclaimed ourselves supporters of Marshal Tito," Churchill told the House of Commons, "because of his massive struggle against the German armies. We are sending and planning to send the largest possible supplies of weapons to him and to make the closest contact with him."

The Army Air Forces Behind Nazi Lines

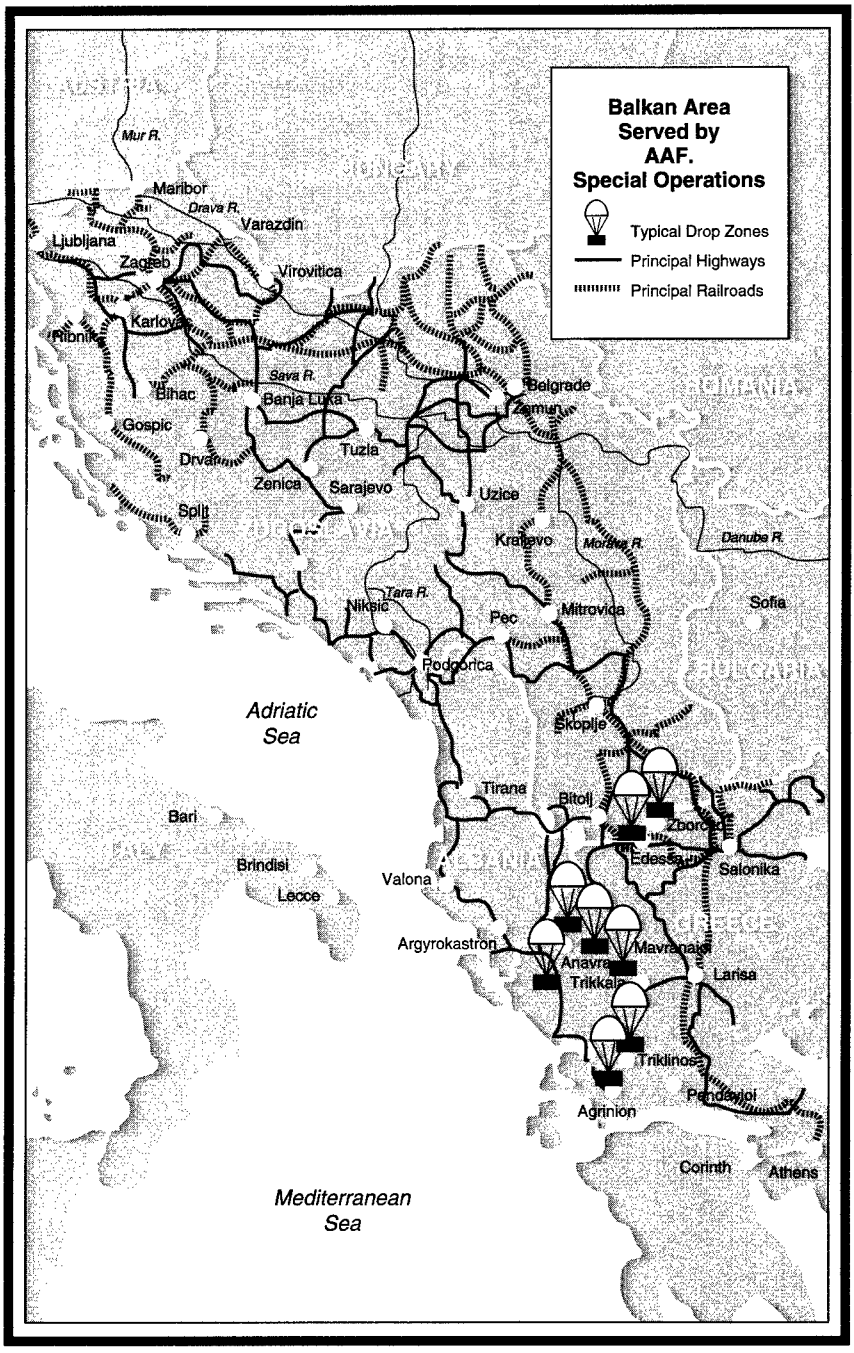
Throughout 1943, the British conducted aerial resupply of Yugoslav, Albanian, and Greek resistance groups. In January 1944, however, Lt. Gen. Ira C. Eaker decided that Americans should "get some credit in delivering knives, guns, and explosives to the Balkan patriots with which to kill Ger-

mans." The wishes of the newly appointed commander of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces led to the assignment of two troop carrier squadrons from Twelfth Air Force to the Balkans supply effort. On February 9, the 7th and 51st Troop Carrier Squadrons of the 62d Troop Carrier Group were placed on detached service with the 334 Wing of the Royal Air Force (RAF).

These Army Air Forces (AAF) squadrons, with an authorized strength of twenty-four aircraft, arrived at Brindisi on the southeastern coast of Italy on February 12. "Brindisi is a quiet town," observed a member of the 7th, "with one tree-lined main stem." There were many British soldiers and airmen in town, but few Americans. Two cinemas offered entertainment, along with service clubs that featured tea, biscuits, and sandwiches. Evenings were a bit livelier: the airmen could drink the local wine while listening to Italian bands.

As it turned out, there was ample time for leisure activities because the weather caused numerous sorties to be canceled. The story of the 7th Troop Carrier Squadron was typical. The squadron's pilots and navigators flew for three days with RAF crews for familiarization. On the afternoon of February 16 operations orders came down from Group: four C–47s would drop on targets in Yugoslavia codenamed STEPMOTHER and STABLES. The designated pilots and navigators studied detailed maps and located the drop zones. At 1930 hours, the crews were briefed on the mission by British officers. RAF navigators would fly with their American counterparts to assist in locating the targets. The four C–47s were loaded with their cargo, and the crews were tense with excitement. At 2145 hours, however, Group informed the flyers that the mission had been canceled because of poor weather conditions. "Everybody was plenty browned off," commented one squadron member.

Unfortunately, the weather failed to improve. Missions were scheduled, aircraft loaded, and crews briefed, but cancellation followed cancellation. "We've been here at Brindisi just about two weeks now," lamented one airman on February 23, "and have yet to complete a tactical mission." The next day the situation changed, when two C–47s dropped 4,496 pounds of propaganda leaflets (called "nickels") over


Balkan Area
Served by
AAF.
Special Operations
Typical Drop Zones
Principal Highways
Principal Railroads
Mur R.
Maribor
Drava R.
Varazdin
Ljubljana
Zagreb
Virovitica
Karlovac
Ribnik
Sava R.
Bihac
Banja Luka
Belgrade
Zemun
Gospic
Drvar
Tuzla
Zenica
Sarajevo
Uzice
Split
Kraljevo
Morava R.
Danube R.
Tara R.
Niksic
Pec
Mitrovica
Sofia
Podgorica
Adriatic
Sea
Skoplje
Tirana
Bitolj
Zborsko
Edessa
Salonika
Bari
Brindisi
Lecce
Valona
Argyrokastron
Anavra
Mavranagoi
Trikkala
Larisa
Triklinos
Pendayioi
Agrinion
Corinth
Athens
Mediterranean
Sea

Greece and Yugoslavia. With all the preparation, the leaflet drop seemed anticlimactic, as it was only necessary to find the country, not pinpoint a drop zone!

Late in the month, 7th Squadron received orders to infiltrate a group of American meteorologists and equipment into Yugoslavia. The AAF wanted better weather data both to assist bombing operations by the Fifteenth Air Force against enemy targets in Central and Eastern Europe and to improve the efficiency of resupply efforts in the Balkans. Soon after the Teheran Conference, OSS recruiters went to Cairo to interview meteorologists from the 19th Weather Squadron. Six officers and fifteen enlisted men volunteered for the hazardous duty and were given nine days of jump training at the British parachute school at Ramat David, Palestine.

Operation BUNGHOLE, codename for the first insertions, got underway on February 23. Two C–47s, piloted by 7th Squadron Commander Maj. Paul A. Jones and Capt. John A. Walker, flew from Brindisi to OSS headquarters at Bari, sixty miles to the north, where they prepared to drop two three-man weather teams into western Bosnia. Having waited for a break in the cloud cover over the target area, they left Bari at 1115 hours on the 27th and crossed the Adriatic with an escort of twenty-four P–47s. The pilots made landfall on the Dalmatian coast, just south of Šibenic, then proceeded inland. Flying through heavy snowstorms, they soon reached the area of the drop zone, northeast of the town of Prekaja and close to Tito's headquarters at Drvar. Captain Walker could not locate the target due to the heavy cloud cover and returned to Bari.

Major Jones, however, managed to let down through the overcast. Breaking out at 3,000 feet, he spotted eleven signal fires in the shape of a "V"—the required recognition signal. Jones then made four circling passes, dropping the meteorologists and their equipment. Landing safely in the snow, the weather team—consisting of Capt. Cecil E. Drew (forecaster), Sgt. Joseph J. Conaty, Jr. (observer), and a radio operator—made contact with local Partisans and were escorted to Drvar, where they would be attached to OSS mission CALIFORNIA. Soon the team began taking four observations a day, which were coded by means of two cipher pads and transmit-

ted to Bari. The OSS later deployed six more meteorological teams to the west and northwest of Drvar.

Also in late February, the 51st Squadron conducted Operation MANHOLE, a special mission to transport Russian military representatives to Yugoslavia. Air staff planners at 334 Wing ruled out an airdrop or landing on the newly opened but snow-covered strip at Medeno Polje, ten miles north of Drvar in western Bosnia. Instead, they launched a daytime glider mission. At 0945 hours on the 23d, three C–47s from the 51st departed Bari, each with a Waco CG–4A glider in tow. Escorted by thirty-six fighters, the transports proceeded to the reception area at Medeno Polje. Despite near-zero visibility, the gliders—and their cargo of twenty-three Russians and six British officers—landed safely. The three C–47s then successfully dropped 10,500 pounds of supplies for the mission.

AAF resupply operations began in earnest in early March 1944. Every night C–47s flew missions to Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece, dropping supplies, leaflets, and people (known as "Joes"). Returning to Brindisi after a long night, the aircrews received "a good hooker" of straight rye whiskey, were debriefed by intelligence officers, then were served a breakfast that often featured fresh eggs, a wartime rarity.

During six weeks of detached service with 334 Wing in February and March 1944, the two squadrons of the 62d Troop Carrier Group completed eighty-two sorties and dropped 374,400 pounds of supplies to resistance groups in the Balkans. "We delivered the goods," summarized the 7th Squadron's historian, "at the right place, on time, to the right people, well behind Nazi lines of defense."

Gearing Up to Support the Balkan Patriots

The spring and summer of 1944 saw German forces throughout Europe come under increasing pressure from the Allies. June 6 marked the long-awaited cross-channel invasion of the continent at Normandy. Two months later, on August 15, Allied troops landed in southern France. Meanwhile,

on the eastern front, Soviet forces entered Romania in April. Two months later, the Soviets launched Operation BAGRATION, designed to clear Byelorussia of German troops and destroy the Wehrmacht Army Group Center.

Supply efforts to resistance groups in the Balkans reached a peak during the spring and summer of the Allied offensive. Major organizational changes were necessary to direct and control the increasing number of aircraft assigned to support these special operations. On June 4 General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander of the Mediterranean Theater, formed the Balkan Air Force (BAF) as an interservice headquarters under the command of Air Vice Marshal William Eliot. The BAF encompassed Royal Air Force and U.S. Army Air Forces fighter and bomber squadrons, in addition to the special operations transport units of 334 Wing. By the end of the year, the BAF had become a formidable aerial weapon, with twenty-one fighter, eight medium bomber, and two heavy bomber squadrons.

A few months before, in late March, four squadrons (the 10th, 11th, 12th, and 28th) of the 60th Troop Carrier Group replaced the two squadrons of the 62d Group at Brindisi. Commanded by twenty-four-year-old Lt. Col. Clarence J. Galligan, the 60th Group brought an extensive combat record, beginning with the 1942 invasion of North Africa, to its new assignment.

A spectacular event had marked the 60th's arrival in the Mediterranean Theater. On November 8, 1942, the group transported a battalion of paratroopers from England to Oran, Algeria, for Operation TORCH. Unfortunately, bad weather scattered the formation during the ten-hour nighttime flight, so only twenty-two of the original thirty-nine C–47s arrived in Oran at dawn. Ten dropped their paratroopers; the remainder landed under enemy fire in a large salt flat outside town. While this first combat assault had been far from an unqualified success, it did provide valuable lessons. The 60th Group went on to participate in the battle for Tunisia, twice dropping paratroopers into combat. During the invasion of Sicily in July 1943, it towed gliders to Syracuse and dropped men behind enemy lines at Catania, south of Mount Etna. On the latter mission (Operation FUSTIAN), "friendly" fire from Allied naval vessels brought down nine C–47s and

damaged twenty-three others. The Group lost twenty crew members in the tragedy.

In August 1943, the 60th moved from its base El Djem, Tunisia, to Gela, Sicily. Flight operations slowed over the next six months, with routine resupply and training missions the order of the day. Early in 1944, Colonel Galligan recalls, "I heard of the expanding role to be played in the Balkans by some Troop Carrier Group and petitioned my Wing Commander [51st Troop Carrier Wing] to assign the mission to the 60th. He agreed."

By the time the 60th arrived in Brindisi, Italy, in March 1944, Yugoslav Partisans numbered 300,000—up from 200,000 six months ago—and resupply requests had multiplied. Galligan's men rose to the challenge. In April the Group's C–47s flew 256 successful sorties and delivered 592 tons of supplies. The next month, with improving weather, the tempo of operations nearly doubled. Averaging thirty-five C–47s in the air for nightly missions throughout May, the Group completed 548 sorties and delivered 1,220 tons. June marked the 60th's greatest airlift achievement—delivering 1,612 tons of supplies in 734 sorties.

The RAF's 334 Wing continued to direct overall supply operations, allocating sorties, targets, and tonnage based upon requests from SOE and OSS units in the Balkans. Yet under an agreement between the AAF and the RAF, Galligan retained operational control over his Group. "I was free to accept or reject targets/missions," he noted. "This was necessary for me to apply judgment regarding aircraft readiness, crew capability, weather, etc., etc." Galligan and his operations officer met each morning with the British to select targets for that night's operations. Usually, targets were within 300 miles of Brindisi, and five-hour flights were common, although some targets were 450 miles away and required eight hours in the air. Galligan then passed the information along to his squadron commanders.

The Air Loads Section at Brindisi's Paradise Camp prepared the loads for the transports assigned to the night's missions. Most loads were "standard packs" of food, clothing, arms, and ammunition. Special requests might include radio equipment, explosives, or medical supplies. Rifles and ammunition, cushioned by clothing or other soft material, often

were placed in pararacks. These metal cylinders, five feet long by eighteen inches in diameter, were fastened under the aircraft and releasable from the cockpit. Workers packed fuselage cargo in heavy canvas bags called bundles and rigged them for airdrop. Partisan teams (usually medical evacuees) loaded the C–47s under British supervision. Each transport carried about 4,000 pounds.

Crews were alerted for missions two or three hours before takeoff. At the final briefings, an intelligence officer related the latest information on the enemy situation; then a weather specialist discussed the conditions en route, over the target, and on the return to Brindisi. An air liaison officer described the cargo and recommended drop altitudes and procedures. Finally, an operations officer went over takeoff instructions, routes, characteristics of the target area, identification signals, and other pertinent information. Following a "time hack" to synchronize their watches, the crews departed for their aircraft—and a long night's work.

The Hazards of Night Work

Few navigational aids existed in the Balkans, and airmen had to rely on pilotage and dead reckoning to locate their pinpoints. Arriving in the area of the drop, the crews searched the ground for a lighted signal fire. Once the flames were spotted, the aircraft circled overhead and flashed the letter of the day. Unless the reception committee, using an Aldis lamp or flashlight, returned the proper response, the drop would not be made.

Drop zones, more often than not, were in rugged mountain terrain. The aircraft would descend to 600 to 700 feet, slow to 110 knots, and begin the drop run. Flying several thousand feet below surrounding peaks at night demanded considerable skill and good fortune. There were many close calls and a few fatalities. For example, on the night of June 20/21, Capt. Robert H. Snyder, operations officer for the 28th Troop Carrier Squadron stalled while making a tight turn over a mountainous drop zone. The aircraft crashed, killing the crew.

German night fighters posed another hazard for the unarmed C–47s. Though encounters were rare, the threat of attack remained ever present. On one occasion, a night fighter brought down one of the 60th's transports, giving substance to the threat. Lt. Morris R. Houser was approaching a landing area in northern Yugoslavia on the night of July 21/22 when he saw a yellow light on the ground—the signal that the field was under attack. As he accelerated and began to climb, 20-mm shells from a German night fighter struck the left wing and engine. Houser ordered his crew to bail out, but only copilot Pinkney C. Largent managed to leave the burning C–47. Largent watched in dismay as the airplane spun into the ground, killing Houser and four comrades.

During normal drop operations, the crew chief, radio operator, and Partisan dispatcher stood by the door and waited for the pilot's signal. When received, they began pushing the cargo containers out two by two until the pilot signaled the end of the run. The supplies descended on twenty-eight-foot parachutes, equipped with a fuse that released the pilot chute, pulling out the main chute.

Starting in March 1944, a few C–47s were equipped with radar receivers to help locate the drop zones, especially in bad weather. The Rebecca receivers (AN–PPN–1 sets) recorded radar impulses from a ground station on a cathode ray display tube, giving the navigators the heading and distance to the beacon. The ground set, or Eureka, was a lightweight responder beacon, operating on batteries. Sturdy enough to be dropped from aircraft and carried by mules, the Eureka beacon had a range of about thirty miles when placed on high ground in the mountains. Although the Rebecca/Eureka system sometimes helped navigators find drop areas, it never became a substitute for pilotage and dead reckoning.

The Sugarphone, on the other hand, proved an unqualified success. A very high frequency radio, it permitted two-way voice contact with the ground. Featuring a range of five to ten miles (line-of-sight), the ground set weighed only thirty pounds. In August 1944, thirty C–47s from the 60th Group were fitted with Sugarphone equipment. The radio was first used during the evacuation of 1,000 wounded Partisans from Brezna, Montenegro, on August 22 and 23. The pilots on this

mission had to land on a hastily constructed emergency strip, with a large crater on the approach end. Sugarphone radio contact with the ground contributed much to the success of this operation, as it did in many later missions.

Despite the Rebecca/Eureka and Sugarphone technologies, bad weather and the lack of proper ground contact continued to plague Balkan operations. Between April and mid-October 1944, the 60th Troop Carrier Group failed to complete one-third of its 4,587 resupply attempts. Of the 1,280 failed sorties, 661 were attributed to weather and 486 to an incorrect recognition signal or no reception committee.

Evacuations Against the Odds

In early April 1944, C–47s of the 60th Group began to land on rough airstrips in Partisan-held territory. Not only were landings more efficient than airdrops in delivering cargo and personnel, but they also allowed the transports to evacuate wounded Partisans. The disposition of the wounded was a constant problem for the guerrillas. The Germans commonly executed wounded resistance fighters, so Tito's forces had to carry their wounded while fleeing from Wehrmacht units. Also, the available medical care could not treat serious wounds. Evacuation to Italy thus proved a boon for the guerrillas, improving both combat effectiveness and morale.

Evacuation operations started on the night of April 2/3, when C–47s piloted by Capts. Karl Y. Benson and Floyd L. Turner set down on a crude strip at Medeno Polje, near Drvar, and removed 36 wounded Partisans. Sixteen more missions were flown during the month, bringing out 98 patients. And this was only the beginning. In May the 60th Group evacuated 1,061 people, including 777 wounded Partisans.

Early June brought an urgent call for a mass evacuation in response to a major German offensive against Tito's forces. Ordered to destroy the guerrillas in their main strongholds in Croatia, the Wehrmacht's XV Mountain Corps launched Operation RÖESSELSPRUNG (Knight's Gambit) on May 25. Parachute and glider troops from SS Rifle Battalion 500 de-

scended on Drvar, while infantry units converged on the area from Bihac, Knin, and Livno.

Tito himself barely managed to avoid capture and fled with his headquarters personnel into the Prekaja Mountains. Germans troops followed, and by early June they nearly had the guerrillas encircled. At dusk on June 3, Tito and his staff, along with a group of wounded soldiers, slipped through the enemy lines and reached an emergency landing strip at Kupresko Polje.

The first transport to arrive at the airstrip happened to be a Soviet-operated Lend-Lease C–47, part of a small Russian detachment serving with 334 Wing. At 2200 hours, the Soviets (having taken off from Italy without orders) evacuated Tito and a few close associates to Bari, scoring a modest propaganda victory. Three C–47s from the 60th Group then landed and brought out seventy-four people.

The evacuation continued the following night, when seven American transports removed the remainder of Tito's staff and a number of wounded. On the night of June 5/6, as German forces approached, six C–47s evacuated 118 more wounded Partisans. Enemy troops captured the airstrip a few hours after the last plane departed.

Operation RÖESSELSPRUNG failed to destroy Tito's forces, thanks in large part to the more than 1,000 sorties flown against enemy troop concentrations by the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces. Yet the cost to the Partisans had been high. The 1st and 6th Partisan Divisions, which bore the brunt of the fighting, suffered some 6,000 casualties. Fortunately, the Partisan organization, if temporarily disrupted, remained intact.

An evacuation of a different sort took place the following month. On the afternoon of July 2, Lt. Harold E. Donohue of the 28th Troop Carrier Squadron received a briefing on the night's mission: six aircraft would land at a valley airstrip in northern Croatia codenamed PICCADILLY LITE 106. A single line of nine fires would mark the 1,300-foot strip. AAF pilots should land to the north side of the fires—and beware of the 500-foot hill to the south, and the larger mountain to the north.

After dark, the designated aircraft departed Brindisi at two-minute intervals. Donohue headed north, across the

Adriatic Sea, wondering what dangers lay ahead for his twenty-sixth sortie. He already had experienced two close calls. Once, on a mission to Greece, while passing near the German naval base on the island of Corfu, he had encountered a night fighter. The fighter stitched holes in the tail of the C–47, but Donohue managed to escape. Another time, returning from an airdrop mission to Bosnia, he had run into heavy ice and come close to ordering the crew to bail out; fortunately, he regained control of the plane before the mountainous terrain claimed another victim. A fellow pilot from the 28th Squadron was not as lucky: on the night of May 21/22, facing similar weather conditions, Lt. Joseph J. Plasse and five crew members disappeared in the Bosnian mountains.

This night, however, Donohue enjoyed clear skies as he crossed the Dalmatian coast and climbed to 11,000 feet. Passing north of Zagreb, he headed toward PICCADILLY LITE 106. Soon he spotted the line of nine fires. Gunfire flashed to the east of the field. To the west, he saw a wrecked aircraft burning on the side of a mountain. Donohue descended and gave the signal "A" with his Aldis lamp. The ground responded with the correct "D."

Although the situation below seemed unclear, Donohue decided to land. Making a tight circle to the left over the fires, he set up for his approach. The pilot skimmed over the top of the 500-foot hill, then flared out as he reached the first fire. At the third fire, he dumped his flaps. The C–47's tail came down as he passed the sixth fire, and Donohue jammed on the brakes. The aircraft had no sooner stopped when Partisans swarmed on board to unload the cargo of 4,500 pounds of blankets and ammunition.

Gunfire sounded in the background as a British liaison officer approached Donohue and described "a sticky situation." None of the other aircraft had landed. As soon as the transport was unloaded, the Partisans would be abandoning the airstrip and moving into the hills. They would be unable to take along a group of orphans that had been collected. As the Germans likely would kill the children, could Donohue help? "Of course," he replied.

"They came out of the shadows between the bushes," Donohue recalled. "Some were barefoot, and some wore nothing



One C–47 could deliver up to six mules, when needed by the guerillas for transportation over the rough Balkan terrain. Courtesy Robert L. Miley.

but nightshirts. Some tottered along, barely old enough to walk, and were helped by the older ones. There was no jostling or pushing or complaining. They just came quietly and formed into a line." Three nurses moved toward the plane, carrying babies. The line seemed endless. Donohue noticed one little girl, about two years old. The father of a child about

the same age, he picked her up and held her. "This one will go for sure," he told himself.

Donohue climbed on board and made his way toward the cockpit. The three nurses and larger children sat in the aircraft's eighteen bucket seats. Smaller children sat on their laps. The floor of the C–47 was strewn with children, and Donohue had to be careful not to step on them. He did not know how many children had boarded the aircraft—nor did he want to know.

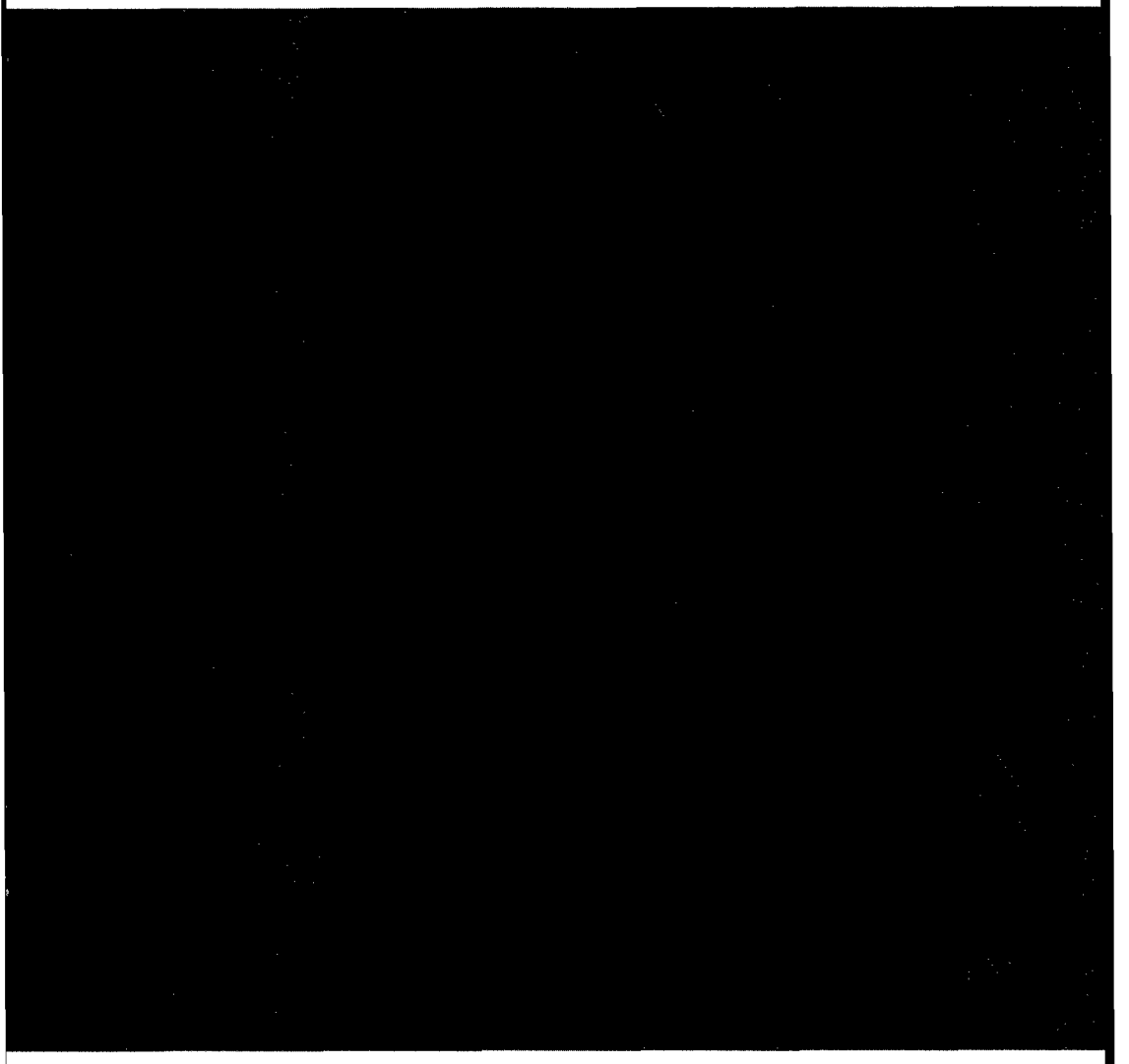
Donohue started the 1,250-horsepower Pratt & Whitney engines. As the cylinder-head temperatures began to rise, he looked down the line of fires and the 500-foot hill that lay beyond. Holding the control column tightly to his stomach, he set half flaps, stood on the brakes, and advanced the throttles. When he no longer could hold the aircraft, he released the brakes. The C–47 lunged forward, engines screaming. The tail came up immediately. At the fifth fire, Donohue tried to coax the aircraft off the ground. It rose a little before dropping back down. As it passed the seventh fire, slowly gaining speed, the plane began to skip a little. Reaching the last fire, Donohue jerked the aircraft off the ground. The propellers bit the air. He was flying, but barely. The hill loomed ahead. Donohue eased back on the stick. The aircraft shuddered, close to a stall, but managed to wobble over the crest of the hill.

After Donohue gained airspeed, he climbed to 11,000 feet and set course for Bari. Crew chief Jennings B. Harrell came up to the cockpit and informed him that he was carrying sixty-nine passengers—three nurses and sixty-six children. Thanks to his superb airmanship, all had been saved.

Guns and Mules

In August 1944, Montenegro became the scene of heavy fighting after the Wehrmacht's Prince Eugen Division and 21st Mountain Division attacked General Peter Dapei's Second Partisan Corps there. The Germans sought complete control of the rail and road arteries through southern Yugoslavia to Bulgaria and northern Greece, which allowed their troops to be evacuated from the south. Thus, the 60th Group made

Aerial Resupply of the Balkan Resistance



A B–24 Liberator of the 885th Bomb Squadron Special drops supplies to Partisans behind enemy lines, February 1945.

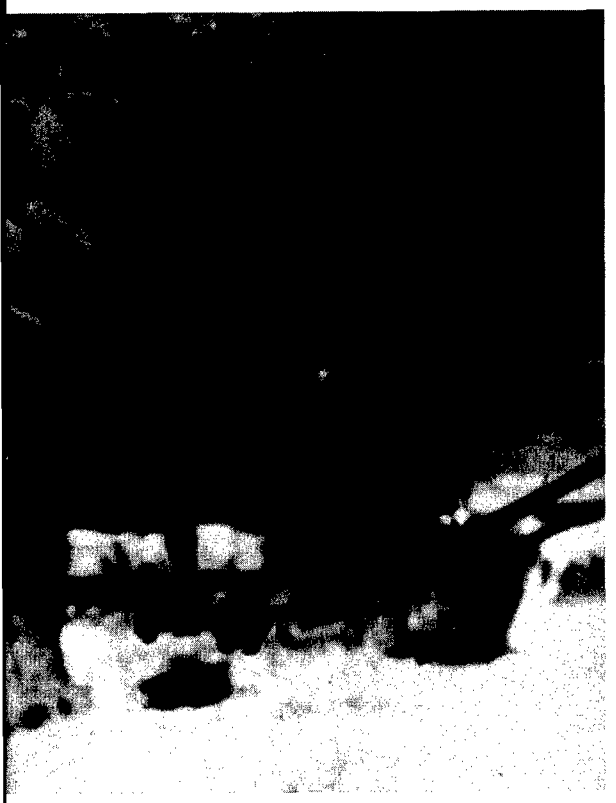




Above: **Resupply missions started with assignments to various squadrons. Sorties were recorded, along with takeoff time and time over the target.**

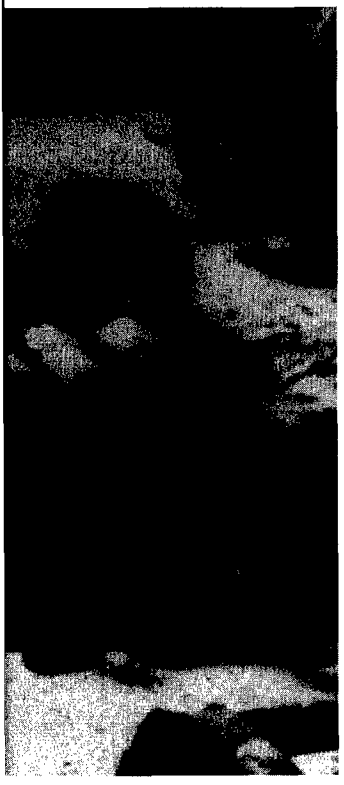


Right: **Parapacks and bundles are packed by the British and Partisans according to the needs of the resistance groups in the target zone.**



Left: Parapacks were hung much like bombs on racks under the fuselage of the aircraft.

Below: Parachute and static line are attached to a parapack.







Above: **A parapack being loaded for a resupply mission.**



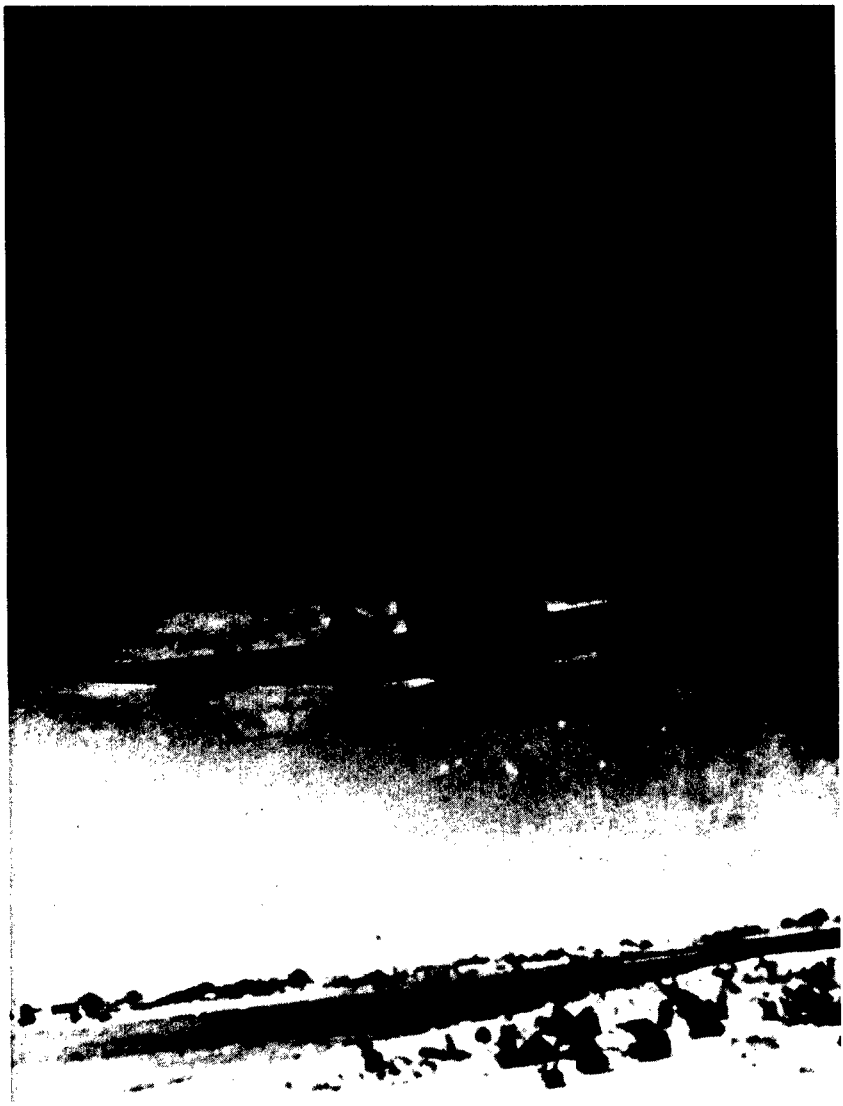
Right: **Cargo is readied for the pass over the drop zone.**





Above: **Bundles loaded inside the aircraft. Static lines from parachutes are hooked and readied.**

Left: **At the "green light" signal from the pilot, bundles are hurriedly pushed out into the night.**



A C–47 makes a supply drop over Yugoslavia.

many landings on Partisan-held airstrips with urgently needed supplies. At one point, the guerrilla defenders of a mountainous airstrip asked for twelve 75-mm guns, plus thirty-six mules to pull the artillery pieces. The guns posed no problem for the 60th, but the unit had never before carried mules. Although aircrews recoiled at the prospect of hauling the animals in their "well-kept C–47s," they made the necessary modifications. Just as the strange cargo was ready for delivery, the weather turned bad. Pilots had to fly by instruments between two jagged mountain peaks in order to reach the airstrip, located in a narrow valley. Despite the many difficulties, the guns and mules arrived safely.

The fighting in Montenegro continued, with the Germans gaining the upper hand. After a series of fierce actions, the Partisans abandoned the towns of Kolašin and Andrijevicá and retreated toward Skopje. Slowed by more and more casualties, Tito's forces sent their wounded on a four-day march to an emergency landing field at Brezna, ten miles north of Nikšic. With the Germans rapidly closing in, 334 Wing launched a massive evacuation effort. Beginning on the morning of August 22, transports from the RAF's 267 Squadron arrived at the airstrip and carried out 200 people. In the afternoon, twenty-four C–47s from the 60th Group—six aircraft from each of the four squadrons—landed on the former cornfield and brought out 705 wounded Partisans and 17 Allied airmen. Finally, that night the Russian Air Group flew out the remaining 138 wounded guerrillas.

The operation had been an outstanding success. In less than twenty-four hours, Allied transports had evacuated 1,059 wounded Partisans and 19 other personnel. The Partisans of 2d Corps, relieved of their wounded and resupplied, were able to go on the offensive, forcing the enemy to retreat.

By the summer of 1944, airlanded operations had become more frequent for aircrews of the 60th Group. Most landings took place at night, but a few were made during daylight, especially as the threat from the Luftwaffe declined. The process of establishing and operating airstrips behind enemy lines had been greatly assisted by the efforts of the Balkan Air Terminal Service (BATS). Consisting of a British officer and five or six enlisted men, a BATS party operated out of a jeep and trailer, equipped with radios, navigational equip-

ment, and signaling devices. BATS teams identified terrain that would be suitable for airstrips, supervised the clearing of fields, facilitated the landing of aircraft by signal or radio, and monitored the loading and unloading of cargo and personnel. The first BATS party arrived at Medeno Polje in mid-May; by July there were five units and sixteen landing strips. Most of the fields were cleared grassy areas, 800 to 900 feet long, in deep valleys. Still, aircrews usually considered it safer to airdrop cargo than to land, when the nature of the operation gave them the option.

With more airstrips and improved terminal service, landings by the 60th Troop Carrier Group rose from 50 in May, to 125 in June, and 194 in July. In all, between April 2/3 and October 17, 1944, transports from the 60th made 741 landings in Partisan-held territory and brought out 9,322 personnel, mainly wounded.

The success of the Allied resupply effort can be measured by the alarm sounded among the German authorities. "Supplies sent to the guerrillas by the Allied Air Forces," the commander of the XXI Mountain Corps wrote in July 1944, "have recently been on a scale which cannot be permanently tolerated." To disrupt the effort, Second Army headquarters launched Operation CASANOVA. Countermeasures included the use of mobile antiaircraft guns near drop zones, false signals to mislead Allied transports aircraft, and attacks on drop zones by small commando units. Yet the German operation failed to stem the ever-increasing aerial flow of supplies to guerrilla groups in the Balkans.

Rescuing Downed Airmen

Evacuation of downed Allied airmen became a priority for the 60th Group during the summer of 1944. In May, the Fifteenth Air Force began a major bombing campaign against the Ploesti oil field in Romania—the source of more than one-quarter of Germany's petroleum. By August, 350 bombers had been lost. Many of the crews survived: some came down in Partisan-held territory, while others found refuge in Serbia with General Mihailovic's Cetniks.

OSS officers already had secured Marshal Tito's cooperation to retrieve downed airmen. In January Maj. Linn M. Farish and Lt. Eli Popovich had parachuted into Partisan headquarters at Drvar to arrange assistance in rescuing American flyers. Following a meeting with Tito on January 23, orders went out to all Partisan units to do everything possible to locate downed airmen and conduct them safely to the nearest Allied liaison officer. Popovich, an engineer, then supervised the construction of an airstrip at Medeno Polje, north of Drvar.

In mid-April, Farish and Popovich parachuted into Macedonia, landing near Vranje (north of Kumanovo), close to the Bulgarian border. They had a threefold mission: to arm and supply Partisan units, to report German troop movements, and to evacuate Allied airmen. Having secured the cooperation of the local Partisan leader, who turned over to them four airmen who had been sheltered in the area since the first Ploesti raid in August 1943, the two OSS officers made their way north to contact Petar Stambolic, commander of Partisan forces in Serbia. With the enemy in pursuit, the journey took two weeks. Stambolic immediately pledged his support. On the night of June 16, after much hardship, Farish and Popovich evacuated thirteen American flyers from an airstrip in the Jastrebac Mountains, north of Prokuplje.

While operations in Partisan-held territory were hampered only by the enemy, efforts to retrieve aircrews from Cetnik-controlled areas ran afoul of the tangled web of Balkan politics. The British, who considered that part of the world within their sphere of interest, had shifted their support to Tito and were determined to sever all ties with Mihailovic lest they offend the Communist leader. American attempts to maintain contact with the Cetniks had been rebuffed by London. Nonetheless, Maj. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, Commander of the Fifteenth Air Force, was determined to rescue his downed airmen. On July 24, 1944, thanks to the efforts of Twining and several OSS officers, General Eaker directed the Fifteenth Air Force to establish an Air Crew Rescue Unit (ACRU). This independent organization of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces, attached to the Fifteenth Air Force, would be responsible for locating and evacuating Allied airmen throughout the Balkans. Having neither an "intelli-

gence" nor a "liaison" function, it softened British objections about contacts with the Cetniks.

Selected to head the ACRU was Col. George Kraigher of the AAF Transport Command. This proved an inspired choice. Kraigher had flown for the Serbian Air Force in World War I. As operations manger for the Brownsville (Texas) Division of Pan American Airways in the 1930s, he pioneered instrument flying on the Brownsville-Mexico City route. Transferred to the new Pan American Airways-Africa Project in 1941, Kraigher played a key role in developing the air route from Miami to the Middle East, via Brazil and West Africa. When this route was turned over to the military in 1942, he accepted a commission in the AAF.

Taking over the rescue unit, Kraigher immediately formed two parties. One would work with Tito's Partisans; the other would go to Mihailovic's Cetniks. George S. Musulin, an OSS officer who had led a liaison mission to Mihailovic and one of the foremost advocates of maintaining contact with the Cetnik leader, was named commander of ACRU #1 (known to the OSS as the HALYARD Mission). On the evening of August 2/3, 1944, after several abortive attempts, Musulin and two enlisted men parachuted into Mihailovic's headquarters at Pranjane, fifty-five miles south of Belgrade.

Musulin learned that some 250 Allied airmen awaited evacuation. As nearby German garrisons no doubt would soon learn about his mission, the OSS officer realized he had little time to waste. Unfortunately, the only available airstrip was on a narrow plateau on the side of a mountain, and it was far too short for C–47 operations. Using 300 workmen and sixty ox carts, the Cetniks managed to lengthen and widen the dirt strip to 1,800 by 150 feet. Though the airstrip was still marginal, there was no choice but to attempt the evacuation.

Six C–47s from the 60th Troop Carrier Group left Italy on the evening of August 9. Two planes turned back with engine trouble, but four managed to land on the tiny strip. Restricted to twelve evacuees per aircraft, the group departed around midnight, carrying out the first forty-eight airmen. The War Diary of the 10th Troop Carrier Squadron rightly termed the operation "extremely hazardous"—one that called for "the utmost in flying skill and teamwork."

Just after dawn, six more C–47s arrived, with an escort of twenty-five P–51s. While the fighters attacked targets in the local area to give the impression that a normal air strike was in progress, the transports landed, picked up another group of joyful evacuees, and departed. An hour later, a second wave of six C–47s and fighters showed up and repeated the process. In all, the morning's work brought out 177 American airmen, plus a few other Allied personnel. A delighted Colonel Kraigher seemed to be "floating around in the air four feet above the ground." Three more missions were flown to Pranjane, two in August and one in September 1944, retrieving another 75 American airmen.

September also marked the beginning of a major Partisan offensive against the Cetniks. This forced the Air Crew Rescue Unit to locate a new landing site to evacuate airmen who continued to fall into the hands of Mihailovic's hard-pressed followers. The experience of Sgt. Curtis Diles, a B–24 nose gunner of the 455th Bomb Group, was typical of many during

Sgt. Curtis Diles, *third from left*, and fellow airmen were evacuated from Kocevljevo on September 17, 1944. Courtesy Mike Sujdovich



this period. On September 8, just after a bombing run on a bridge north of Belgrade, an antiaircraft shell exploded under the flight deck and severed the B–24's control cables. Nine crew members managed to bail out: one man was immediately captured by the Germans, and Cetniks picked up another whose knees were full of shell fragments and took him to a hidden hospital.

Sergeant Diles and three others landed close together and were welcomed by local Cetniks "with open arms." Three days later they were joined by three more of their crew members. The group then traveled together until they reached an emergency landing area at Kocevljevo on September 17. Along the way, Diles became impressed with his treatment by the Cetniks. He even had the opportunity to speak (through an interpreter) with General Mihailovic. The Cetnik leader seemed to be a humble, honest man, genuinely concerned about his people. One could tell by the tone of his voice, Diles recalled, that he spoke with conviction.

On the afternoon of the 17th, two C–47s arrived to pick up Diles, his six fellow crew members, and thirteen other downed airmen. The tiny emergency strip, located on a meadow, had a downhill slope that ended in a stand of trees. Happily, both aircraft managed to land safely, and Sergeant Diles and his companions were soon on their way to Italy.

The last HALYARD mission took place on December 27. Two C–47s, one piloted by Colonel Kraigher and the other by 1st Lt. John L. Dunn, left Italy at 1100 hours. Escorted by sixteen P–38s, they reached an emergency landing field at Bunar at 1255 hours. Spotting a hole in the overcast, Kaigher led the way to land on a 1,700-foot strip that was frozen just enough to support the weight of a C–47. The airmen were met by Capt. Nick Lalich, an OSS officer who had replaced Musulin as head of the HALYARD mission in August. The transports were quickly loaded with twenty American airmen, one U.S. citizen, two Yugoslavian officers, four French army and four Italian army personnel, and two remaining HALYARD team members. The aircraft took off at 1315 hours, marking the end of an extraordinarily successful project: between August 9 and December 27, a total of 417 personnel had been flown out of Serbia, including 343 American airmen.

Little One's Journey

Meanwhile, the Partisans continued to assist in the evacuation of downed airmen, often at great cost to themselves. As OSS officer John G. Goodwin pointed out, "Crews had a knack for coming down between the lines," and on several occasions "Partisans were wounded or killed trying to save these men from the enemy." Journalist and former Partisan Edi Šelhaus has documented Partisan rescue efforts in Slovenia that returned 305 U.S. airmen to their home bases between January 30, 1944, and March 1, 1945. A typical episode involved the crew of the B–24 *Little One* from the 464th Bomb Group.

On July 19, 1944, *Little One* departed southern Italy as part of a thirty-nine-ship formation ordered to attack the Allach Aircraft Engine factory in Munich. En route to the target, the propeller of its #1 engine had to be feathered. Flying on three remaining engines, pilot Thomas MacDonald was forced to descend to 16,000 feet, while the main formation continued at 22,000 feet. Nevertheless, MacDonald managed to stay with the group and drop his bombs on the factory from the lower altitude.

Then, hit by flak over the target, *Little One* lost its #2 engine and its electrical system. The B–24 limped across the Alps and had passed over Udine, Italy, when its #3 engine quit. By now the plane was over Croatia's Istrian peninsula, south of Trieste. MacDonald, with no other choice, gave the order to bail out.

Copilot John C. Rucigay and top turret gunner Merle Weik landed together in a plowed field. A pistol-wielding Yugoslav motioned them to follow. Having been briefed about Partisan activity on the Istrian peninsula, Rucigay assumed—correctly—that they were in safe hands. The two airmen were taken to a camp in the woods, where six more crew members joined them over the next few hours. Only the pilot and bombardier were still missing. The men spent the night in the small village of Krnica. The next day, they began the long trek to an evacuation airstrip in Slovenia. Pilot MacDonald soon joined the group; bombardier Robert Dennison did not show up until July 26.

The ten crew members spent nearly two weeks with their Partisan guides, walking back trails at night and sleeping in the woods by day. They passed north of Fiume (Rijeka), reached the border near Skrad, entered Slovenia, and finally arrived in a valley that had been liberated by the Partisans. Near the small village of Nadlesk, a 1,500-foot grass airstrip had been laid out, parallel to a stream. The area was a staging point for evacuating Allied personnel and wounded Partisans.

Little One's crew spent two weeks in the valley, free to explore the countryside. Then, on the moonless night of August 19, a C–47 from the 60th Group landed, dropped off supplies and weapons, and departed with a group of Partisan wounded and Allied personnel. A second C–47 appeared the following Saturday, the 26th, with more cargo and two passengers. (*Life* photographer John Phillips and Capt. James Goodwin would accompany the Partisans on a raid into enemy-held territory.) The plane carried out another group of wounded and evacuees, but not the survivors of *Little One*.

To the B–24 crew's great relief, two C–47s arrived the next evening to pick up the remaining evacuees. Their month-long adventure had come to an end. "For us survivors," copilot Rucigay later wrote, "it was a memorable experience that we wouldn't forget. I was one of the lucky ones."

The successful and sustained evacuation of Allied airmen from the Balkans, with the assistance of both the Cetniks and Partisans, ranks as one of the outstanding achievements of AAF special operations. Between January 1, 1944, and October 15, 1944, according to statistics compiled by the Air Crew Rescue Unit, 1,152 American airmen were airlifted from Yugoslavia, 795 with Partisan assistance and 356 with the help of the Cetniks. During the same period, 47 U.S. flyers were evacuated from Greece and 11 from Albania.

Nazi Forces on Retreat in Greece

Besides the operations in Yugoslavia, AAF C–47s supported the resistance movement in Greece. The 62d Group began flying there in February and March 1944, when the British were trying to persuade the Communist ELAS (Na-

tional Popular Liberation Army) and the Republican EDES (National Democratic Greek League) to set aside their fratricidal conflict and focus on the Germans. The 60th Group continued the airdrops in Greece during 1944, but the effort remained low key, amounting to less than 10 percent of the total aerial resupply operations in the Balkans.

The busiest period came in September and October. As the Germans began to withdraw their ninety thousand occupation troops, ELAS and EDES guerrillas cooperated to harass the retreating enemy. On October 1, four thousand British troops made an unopposed landing on Poros, an island on the west coast of southern Greece. Two weeks later, they entered Athens in the wake of the departing Germans.

AAF transports supported the British forces. On October 11, seven C–47s from the 7th Troop Carrier Squadron took part in a major operation that transported 123,000 pounds of supplies from San Pancrazio, Italy, to Araxos airfield, near Athens. The next week, the 60th and 62d Groups flew 246 sorties to the Araxos-Athens area, air-dropping and landing 327 tons of equipment and 2,000 personnel.

The aerial resupply effort shifted to central Greece in late October and early November, as the Germans continued their retreat northward. In December, as the last German troops crossed the border, full-scale civil war broke out in Greece between ELAS and EDES. The British sided with the non-Communist forces. Although RAF squadrons from 334 Wing were employed to support British troops on the ground, AAF transports did not participate in these operations.

Albania also became the site of AAF C–47 operations in 1944, especially during the summer and fall. By June the forces of the Communist Provisional Peoples Government (or LNC) numbered about 20,000. British leaders sympathized with the anti-Communist followers of King Zog, but when efforts to reconcile the two groups failed, London decided to support the LNC on the purely military grounds that the Communists were engaging four German divisions.

During 1944, AAF transports flew 301 successful sorties, dropping 602 tons of supplies to LNC guerrillas. C–47s also made 86 landings in Albania, bringing in 172 tons of cargo. Unfortunately, these Albanian operations cost the AAF two aircraft and their crews.

A Job Well Done

Mid-October 1944 brought to an end the 60th Group's six-month detached service with the RAF's 334 Wing. Between April 1 and October 17, the Group flew 3,307 successful sorties, made 1,280 landings behind enemy lines, delivered more than 5,000 tons of supplies, infiltrated 2,576 people, and evacuated 9,322 individuals. The cost to the Group was ten C–47s lost and twenty-eight men killed. The loss of one transport per 458 sorties, AAF historian Harris G. Warren reflected, constituted "a remarkable record that testified to the pilots' skill in evading enemy flak, night fighters, and mountain peaks and was a tribute to the faithful performance of ground crews."

Although they realized that their wartime missions were secret, members of the 60th at times lamented their lack of public recognition. "We have never received much publicity since being overseas," one flyer complained. But General Eaker certainly appreciated the efforts of the 60th Troop Carrier Group and its young commander. He awarded Galligan the Legion of Merit and approved his promotion to colonel in September 1944. The next month, he sent a handsome commendation to the Group:

> We in this Theater Headquarters have noted with admiration the volume of your day-to-day operations. We are also conscious of the tremendous import your operations have had in the depreciation of German influence and effort in the Balkans and the growing strength of the Partisan effort which is demoralizing German troops in the area. . . . I know of no organization in this theater which has done better. Their difficult operations, conducted with great skill, resource and courage, have contributed materially to the success of the overall air effort in the Mediterranean theater.

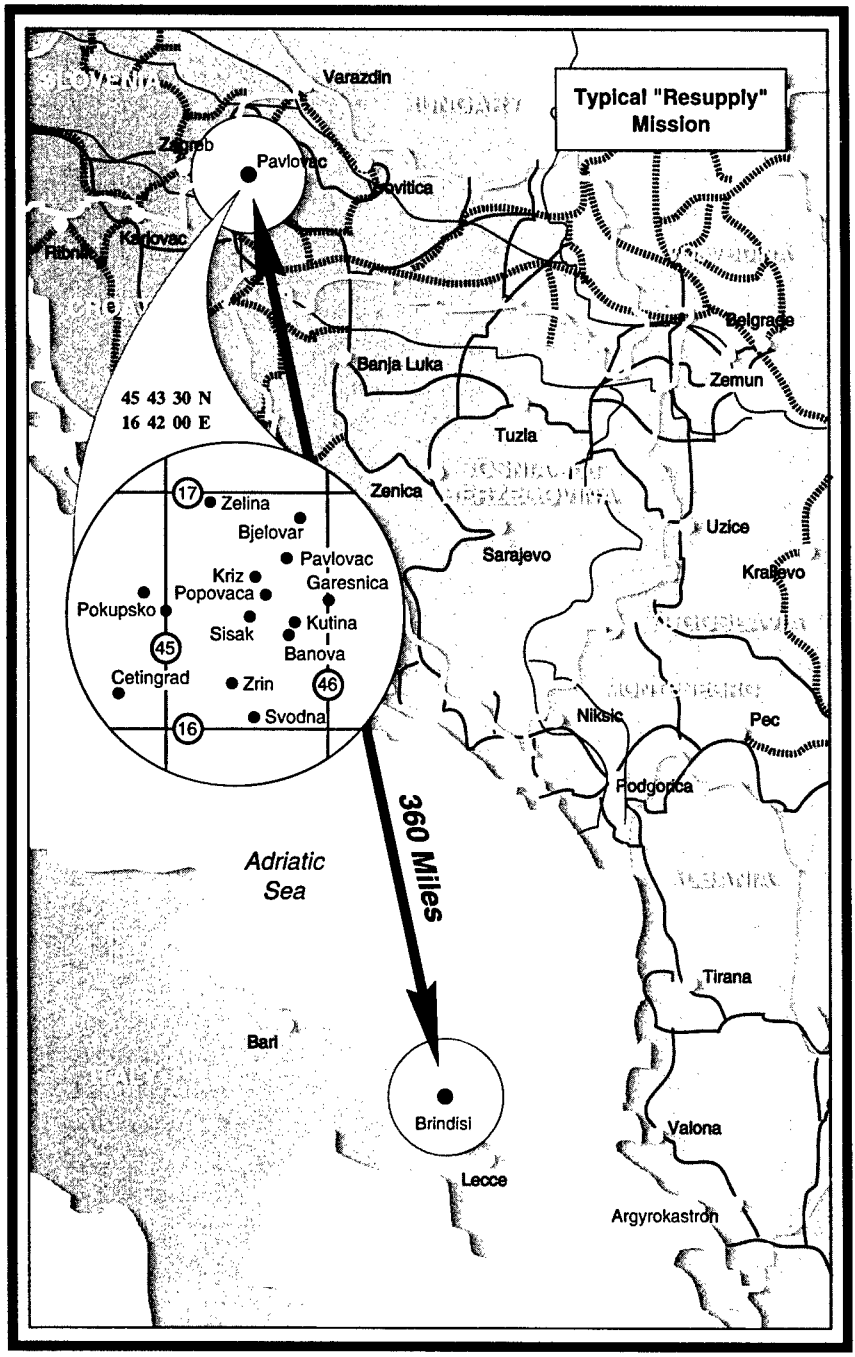
In November the 60th received a prestigious AAF Presidential Unit Citation. One of the Group's airmen commented upon learning the news: "This means we can wear that much-coveted blue ribbon on the right side of our uniforms."

Special Operations Units Do Their Part

The departure of the 60th Group from Brindisi saw the Germans in retreat throughout the Balkans. Enemy forces had begun to pull out of Greece in late August. Harassed by the Balkans Air Force, especially during Operation RATWEEK in early September 1944, the Germans managed to complete their withdrawal from Greece in early November. At the same time, Russian and Partisan troops entered Belgrade, marking the beginning of the end for Axis control of the Balkans. The Germans, however, were not yet finished. By the end of November, they managed to stabilize their defenses in central Yugoslavia along the Fiume-Mostar-Sarajevo-Vukovar line.

Starting in October 1944 and continuing until the German surrender in May 1945, a variety of AAF units became involved in resupply operations in the Balkans. In early October, the 885th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) (Special), an experienced special operations unit that had been awarded a Presidential Unit Citation for support of resistance groups in France, moved to Italy and began flying missions to distant targets in Yugoslavia and northern Italy. The 885th was joined in late December by the 859th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy) (Special). On January 20, the two squadrons were combined to form the 15th Special Group (Provisional) under the command of Col. Monro MacCloskey. The 15th was redesignated the 2641st Special Group (Provisional) two months later, on March 17.

The 885th Squadron quickly settled into the routine of Brindisi. At 0900 hours, the squadron commander would attend a meeting at 334 Wing headquarters and select targets from a priority list compiled from OSS/SOE requests. Operational planning was similar to that of the troop carrier units, although the bombers of the 885th carried a heavier load than the troop carrier C–47s. The B–17s carried fourteen bomb rack containers, each weighing 300 pounds, while the B–24s transported sixteen. The ball turrets of the special operations aircraft had been replaced with a cargo hatch, permitting the dropping of fuselage cargo and/or people. In all, the bombers could lift some 6,000 pounds of supplies and personnel to distant targets.


Typical "Resupply" Mission
Varazdin
Zagreb
Pavlovac
Kutina
Karlovac
Belgrade
Banja Luka
Zemun
45 43 30 N
16 42 00 E
Tuzla
Zenica
17
Zelina
Bjelovar
Pavlovac
Kriz
Garesnica
Popovaca
Pokupsko
Sisak
Kutina
45
Banova
Cetingrad
Zrin
46
Svodna
16
Sarajevo
Uzice
Kraljevo
Niksic
Pec
Podgorica
360 Miles
Adriatic Sea
Tirana
Bari
Brindisi
Valona
Lecce
Argyrokastron

Type of Aircraft	Douglas C-47
Aircraft No.	701
Aircraft Letter	L
Time Up	2106
Time Down	0225
Total Time	5 HRS 19 MIN

1st Lt. William M. Bell (pilot)
2d Lt. William J. Mey (co-pilot)
1st Lt. Peter A. Machnik (nav)
Crew
T/Sgt. Kenneth L. Reinhardt (crew chief)
S/Sgt. Rinehart M. Lindeman (rad opr)
Franje Kimpala (dispatcher Yugo)

Aerodrome or L.O. BRINDISI, ITALY

LOAD

Type of Cloud	6 containers – 592 lbs.	
Amount of Cloud	*20 packages – 1465 lbs.	FULL LOAD DROPPED
Base of Cloud	7 bundles – 313 lbs.	
Visibility	Total Net – 2370 lbs.	
General Weather	minimals – 150 lbs.	
	Total Gross – 4494 lbs.	

* LOAD DISCREPANCY OF ONE PACKAGE

Map or Chart Y000 # 30
Reference 1,500,000

Task or Duty ICARUS 105/MAGISTRATE (MIKLYUS area) 45 43 30 N 16 42 00 E Nickelling: POPOVACA, Yugo

Time	Height	Place	Narrative
2106	Climbing	Brindisi	WEATHER : CAVU
2340	9500	Miklyus	S/C from base.
			ETA target: saw "T" of 9 fires. No red flare. Flashed A rec N.
2355	2900	"	
2357	2900	"	
2359	2800	"	
0002	3000	"	
0005	3000	"	
0007	3000	"	
0009	3000	"	
0024	9500		
0027	9500	Popovaas	
0020			
0225	9500		
2235		Brindisi	

RUN	HDG	IAS	CONT	PKG	BND
1	130 •	130	6	3	0
2	135 •	130	0	4	0
3	135•	135	0	6	0
4	125 •	140	0	7	0
5	125 •	140	0	0	3
6	120 •	135	0	0	4
7	120 •	130	0	2 (pkg mail)	

ONE PKG OF GASOLINE CAUGHT IN DOOR. WAS NOT FREED OVER DZ.
FULL LOAD DROPPED.
Flashed case after each drop and three times after last.
S/C for POPOVACA : nickel target.
Nickelled POPOVACA 12 miles N (350 +-20 mph wind)
DZ AT COORDINATES AS GIVEN ON TIS.
S/C for base.

Landed empty. MISSION COMPLETELY SUCCESSFUL.
REMARKS:
Saw 10 or 12 vehicles headed NW between towns of ZUPA and ZAGWOZD at 43 23 4. , 17 04 E.

FOR THE SQUADRON COMMANDER:

ROBERT A. GOLDBERG
2nd Lt., Air Corps.
Asst. G-2 Officer.

PART B (on reverse) to be completed according to relevant pro-forms in H.Q. R.A.F. M.E. Instruction 34.

One of the OSS officers who eagerly awaited the supplies delivered by the long-range special operations aircraft was Franklin Lindsay. His experiences during a perilous seven-month mission to northern Yugoslavia offer a "consumer's" view of the aerial resupply effort. Lindsay parachuted into Slovenia, south of the Sava River, via a RAF-manned Halifax bomber from 334 Wing on the night of May 14/15, 1944. His mission was to move northward into Styria (Stajerska)—the portion of Slovenia that had been incorporated into the Third Reich in 1941—link up with resistance groups in the area, and cut railroad lines to prevent German reinforcements from reaching the Italian front as Allied forces pushed up the peninsula into northern Italy.

Over the next seven months, operating in both Styria and northern Slovenia, Lindsay learned a great deal about how the covert/special operations aerial supply system functioned. Each month, Allied Force Headquarters in Bari, Italy, would advise Tito (through Brigadier Maclean) about the number of sorties that would be available for the next month. Tito's headquarters then would allocate these sorties among the various Partisan groups. While Tito would determine the volume of supplies for each group, OSS and SOE liaison officers would work with the local Partisan commanders to determine the specific composition of the loads. Maclean would be informed about target priorities and, in turn, would pass the information from Partisan headquarters to Bari. The most interesting aspect of this process, Lindsay observed, was that Tito controlled the allocations of Allied supplies "to meet his own political and military objectives."

As Lindsay proceeded with his mission to destroy railroad bridges and tunnels in Styria, aerial supply drops provided the essential explosives for his task, as well as other necessary arms and equipment for his Partisan associates. Besides the usual frustrations of bad weather and poor communications, it became increasingly clear to Lindsay "that neither we nor base Air Operations had more than the vaguest understanding of each other's problems, capabilities, or limitations." It proved difficult to secure the right supplies, at the right place, and at the right time. At one point, for example, Lindsay urgently needed antibiotics for the hidden hospitals of the Partisans in northern Slovenia. Despite a flurry of ra-

dio messages to Italy, the requested medical supplies failed to appear. Instead, the OSS officer received a shipment of absentee ballots for an Army battalion to use in the election of 1944. While disheartened, Lindsay "put the ballots to good use as toilet paper, which was always in short supply."

Although the volume of cargo increased with the arrival of the 885th Bomb Squadron in Brindisi, airdrops tended to be "standard loads" that might or might not be of use. This, Lindsay noted, caused "deep frustration" among Partisans who "had been waiting days for desperately needed supplies, only to receive supplies they couldn't use." In one case, a group of one hundred Partisans without weapons waited eight days for a requested arms drop. Five aircraft finally appeared, but they delivered only standard packages of ammunition. "It seemed at times," Lindsay reported, "that total tonnage delivered rather than meeting priority requirements was the objective in Italy."

Despite these problems, vital cargo often managed to reach the OSS officer. In November 1944, Lindsay received seventy-one planeloads of arms and explosives. In all, RAF Halifaxes and AAF Liberators airdropped some fifty tons of explosives to the OSS mission in Styria and northern Slovenia between May and December. Lindsay and his Partisan comrades put the materiel to good use, disrupting enemy rail traffic for lengthy periods. The official history of OSS operations called Lindsay's mission "a spectacular achievement," and special operations aircraft played an essential role in making it possible.

Troop Carriers Persist

While long-range special operations aircraft contributed much to the guerrilla attacks against both the entrenched and retreating Germans, troop carrier units continued to form the backbone of supply operations in the Balkans. The 7th Troop Carrier Squadron began flying resupply missions from Brindisi on October 22. Five days later, it was joined by the 51st Troop Carrier Squadron. Bad weather in late October and early November limited sorties to the Partisans; however, by the end of November the two squadrons had

managed to land and air-drop some 772,000 pounds of supplies. In early December, the 7th was withdrawn from Brindisi, greatly reducing AAF operations. The 51st concentrated its efforts on Albania during the month, delivering 101 tons of supplies to resistance groups.

In January 1945, the 51st Squadron completed sixty-two sorties, including fifty-one landings, many at Belgrade's Zemun airdrome and in the Nikši area of Montenegro. Improving weather in February resulted in 140 successful sorties, mostly daylight missions, and the delivery of 196 tons of supplies. The pace of operations quickened even more in March, with 197 successful sorties, although many of these missions could now be classified as noncombat. One noteworthy operation at the end of the month, however, recalled the hazards of earlier missions.

On March 21, Tito requested the mass evacuations of about 2,000 refugees from an area northeast of Fiume. Heavy fighting was taking place between Partisans and retreating Germans, and these people were caught in the middle. The assignment went to the 51st Squadron, commanded by Maj. Bruce C. Dunn.

Within three days, an emergency airstrip, located midway between Fiume and Zagreb, was ready to receive incoming C–47s. But the situation was extremely hazardous because Partisans were fighting Germans only three miles away. Major Dunn had based thirteen C–47s at an airfield outside Zadar, a coastal town 100 miles southeast of Fiume. On March 25, Dunn's transports began shuttling between Zadar and the emergency landing strip. The C–47s evacuated 788 adults and children the first day and also delivered 95,000 pounds of supplies for the Partisan fighters. On the second day, despite worsening weather, the 51st hauled another 142,000 pounds of supplies in and brought out 1,253 refugees. That night, a German bombing attack damaged the landing strip, ending Operation DUNN, but the great majority of refugees had already been extracted.

Between January and March 1945, the 51st Squadron delivered 728 tons of supplies and 719 people to the Balkans, evacuating 2,600 individuals on return flights to Italy. During the same period, the 859th and 885th Bomb Squadrons flew 350 sorties to Yugoslavia, dropping 690 tons of cargo.

The special operations bombers were particularly active in supporting Partisan attacks in northern Yugoslavia against the German withdrawal route from Bosanski Brod to Zagreb, along the Sava River valley.

At the end of March, as the war drew to a close, the 51st was withdrawn from Brindisi, and the 2641st Special Group shifted its efforts to northern Italy. This left only the 16th Troop Carrier Squadron, which replaced the 51st, to support Partisan efforts in the Balkans. The 16th flew 183 successful sorties in April, many to supply resistance fighters in the Sarajevo and Zagreb areas. The squadron's C–47s then delivered another 150,000 pounds during the first week of May. Aerial operations ended on May 11, following Germany's surrender, with three sorties to Zemun and five to Grabnovica.

No Longer a Secret War

The statistics compiled by the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces at the end of the war bear eloquent testimony to the magnitude of AAF special operations efforts during 1944 and 1945. AAF transports and bombers flew 3,369 successful sorties into the Balkans (79 percent to Yugoslavia) and dropped 7,149 tons of supplies to resistance groups. In addition, 989 C–47 landings behind enemy lines brought in another 1,972 tons.

Most of the supplies were used by resistance groups to engage and harass German, Italian, and other occupying forces. At the end of 1943, the Germans had sixteen divisions in the Balkans. Most of these units, postwar studies confirmed, could be considered garrison troops, consisting primarily of older men and operated with substandard armored and motorized equipment. Nonetheless, they constituted a force that the Allies preferred not to see on other fronts. Their combat capability certainly was more than a match for the resistance fighters.

The Partisans of Yugoslavia, the largest resistance group in the Balkans, numbered more than 300,000 by the fall of 1944 and controlled large portions of the country. The Germans moved freely throughout Yugoslavia, however, until they retreated back to the fatherland in late 1944. Also, until

the final months of the war, engagements between German and Partisan units invariably resulted in disproportionate losses for Tito's forces. For example, during Operation WEISS, a Wehrmacht effort during early 1943 to destroy Partisan units in the mountains west of Sarajevo, more than 8,500 Partisans were killed and 2,010 captured. Conversely, the Germans had only 335 killed and 101 missing.

Despite heavy losses, the Partisan movement continued to grow. The Nazis found what previous invaders of the Balkans had learned: they might be able to occupy portions of the rugged countryside, but they could not crush the will of the hardy natives of the region. Also, their severe retribution against civilians only added recruits to the Partisan ranks-and increased the savagery of the combat.

Unfortunately, some of the supplies delivered to the Balkans were used not against the Germans, but against ethnic, religious, and political opponents in the internecine civil wars that raged in Greece, Albania, and Yugoslavia. Indeed, the violent clashes between Partisans and Cetniks in Yugoslavia often overshadowed the struggle against their common enemy. Beginning in 1941 and continuing until the end of World War II, the two resistance groups fought a vicious subwar. The British decision to support the Partisans meant that, like it or not, the Allies delivered to Tito the arms and ammunition used to crush the Cetniks.

A number of American intelligence officers recoiled at the horrors of this civil war and their own country's role in it. OSS Maj. Linn Farish expressed these sentiments in 1944:

> It is not nice to see arms dropped by one group of our airmen to be turned against men who have rescued and protected their brothers-in-arms. It is not a pleasant sight to see our wounded lying side by side with the men who had rescued and cared for them—and to realize that the bullet holes in the rescuers could have resulted from American ammunition, fired from American rifles, dropped from American aircraft flown by American pilots.

Farish earlier had been concerned that the AAF was not receiving adequate recognition for its supply efforts in the Balkans. "Now," he concluded, "I wonder—do we want it?"

The aftermath of war also left emotional scars on many of the U.S. airmen rescued by the Cetniks, often at great cost to

the guerrillas. In March 1946, General Mihailovic at last was captured by Tito's forces. A number of rescued Allied airmen attempted to appear and testify when he was tried in June for collaborating with the enemy, but to no avail. Mihailovic's execution on July 17, 1946, seemed to them a terrible injustice.

The techniques and tactics devised for special air operations, employed with so much success in the Balkans, Western Europe, and Asia, were largely forgotten after the war as the AAF—later, the United States Air Force—focused on strategic air power. During the Korean War, the Air Force once again had to develop a special operations expertise. At this time, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) became the real focus for covert air special operations. For reasons of high policy, contract aircrews of the CIA assumed this task, supporting anti-Communist resistance groups throughout the world during the 1950s and 1960s.

"The [60th Troop Carrier Group] is awaiting the day when the full story of their work and accomplishments can be told," one of their number wrote in August 1944. In the years that followed, the impressive record compiled by the skilled and dedicated airmen of wartime special operations has been acknowledged, although never to the extent that it deserved. Their successors in covert air operations continue to await recognition, paying the price of anonymity that secrecy demands.

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