

The Suitcase Set

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Volume 5

G3SDS



G8SDS

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

At last, I had a little breathing space and could sleep in my own bed, such as it was. It consisted of some boards on low trestles, a palliase and my sleeping bag. The second morning, on waking, and after some itching and scratching, I found that I had acquired a quantity of lice and fleas. I had a small quantity of dusting power in my first-aid kit. This helped but, no matter how much I tried, then and thereafter, eradication seemed impossible. After a time, all of us were similarly endowed and, although we had constant livestock hunts, it was something we all accepted and it seemed not to bother us much.

I was now committed to using the pedal charger for recharging the 6 volt battery. I tried to get the Chetniks to do this but they soon discovered that it was easier to pedal slowly, as it did not bring in the cut-out. I tried gesticulating, since nothing in my phrase book was of any assistance, but all to no avail. I could quite understand their reasoning, after I had been pedalling for half an hour. It was 'hell' and they were no fools.

Mladen returned after three days. Not only had he acquired a horse and pack saddle but also bought a small bag of wheat flour, two live chickens, eggs, sheep's milk, haricot beans, honey and two bottles of wine from the Morava Valley, not many miles away to the west.

So, we had quite a feast that evening and, of course, before and after the meal there was rakia. I was treated to some Serbian singing and slept like a log. Mladen, obviously a man of some talent, was furnished with five additional sovereigns and sent off on the following morning, to purchase more 'treats.'

It was not long before I began to acquire a small vocabulary of Serbian words, including those for bread, milk, water, beans, rifle ammunition and counting. What is more, I began to form some opinion about each of the six individuals who made up my bodyguard. Two, I knew, were lazy individuals and both kept out of my way in case I found work for them. The others ignored these two and would, I was sure, be reliable given the right circumstances.

By the beginning of June, Roger and John were back. They had walked miles and said they envied the lazy time I was having.

I refrained from telling them about the pedal charger. They had made a reconnaissance of the southern and western sides of the Bor mining complex, and reported that there was a number of open cast and deep mines, with many brick-built buildings. They weren't able to get closer than a couple of miles from the huge perimeter wire fence. There were many pillboxes and emplacements for guns, which appeared to be of 20 and 40 mm calibre. In addition, there were six anti-aircraft guns. They had seen many laden lorries travelling south but it seemed as if most of the products went north by rail.

John said he thought it represented a formidable task for ill-armed Chetniks to attack with any chance of success. Borovich had stated that, if his force of one thousand men were properly equipped and a bombing raid by a small number of RAF bombers was made just before they attacked, there was a good chance of overcoming the opposition. Roger said that, since the arming would take some twenty planeloads of equipment, a plan of this

magnitude was unlikely to receive approval by Cairo, at least for the present. He was sure that a joint venture with the RAF would certainly not come about, as there was no organisation already set up to provide the co-operative effort necessary for its success. Both Roger and John were in agreement, and felt that the best chance of doing something positive was to sabotage the railway, and ambush the road traffic in a number of places. This would be considered in the overall plan, when the other two targets had been inspected.

Meanwhile, they were pleased to know about the plane due on 16th. Anticipating the arrival of a plane, Roger had made provisional arrangements to meet Borovich, and a dropping zone and meeting place had already been agreed. A messenger was despatched with a note, to give Borovich the good news together with the date and to say that we would meet them on the day before the plane was due.

Cairo was given the map co-ordinates and the fire shape 'T'. Our recognition signal was 'F', to which they were to reply with 'G'. Finally, it was decided we would move down to the dropping area a couple of days beforehand. 'How have you made out in our absence?' Roger asked. 'Have wireless contacts been OK?' 'Yes,' I said. 'I think this is a good location, as we're so high up. Your long message was sent in four parts but, so far, there hasn't been a response.' 'I've another long one to send, about Bor, It'll be ready later today, I'll give you a hand to encode it. Now, tell me how you have been getting along with the Chetniks?' 'Three of them and Mladen, are a good bunch, but the other two are lazy and avoid me as far as possible.' 'I'll make sure they are replaced after we receive the first plane' said Roger.

'I've dammed up the stream lower down, so you'll be able to have a bath if the cold water doesn't bother you.' 'Well done. I'll look forward to that. How about battery charging? Has the pedal charger worked satisfactorily?' 'Yes, but it is hard work, because I was unable to get real assistance from our friends.'

'I'll get them to do their bit in future.' said Roger. 'Hopefully, we'll have a petrol charger soon, so the physical effort won't be necessary. Is Mladen here?' 'No, He's out searching. I expect him back soon. I've given him another five sovereigns' 'Was he able to buy a good pack horse?' 'I'm afraid I know nothing about horses, but it seems all right. Mladen is obviously a very sensible character.'

Mladen returned, later in the day, with the usual mixture of 'goodies', which earned him the approval of my two companions. Roger tried the white wine and said it was drinkable even though it was very young. We had spit-roasted a suckling pig for dinner, which was pronounced delicious by everyone.

After dinner, when all three of us were relaxing, Roger said he had mentioned to Borovich the subject of Partisans. At first, he was reluctant to admit that there were any more than a few Communists, calling themselves Partisans, in Eastern Yugoslavia. As far as Borovich knew, there were none in our part of Serbia. 'I felt,' said Roger, 'he wanted to say more but was reluctant to discuss the matter. So, I thought it best not to continue but, hopefully, the subject could be reopened at a later time.'

We left Lisatz a few days later; the three of us were looking forward to receiving our first plane and the chance to start improving the appearance and re-arming of the Key Brigade. We met up with Borovich, who explained that the contents of the first plane would be distributed amongst the Central Sub-Brigade, with whom we were at present.

Then, when we gave him details about the arrival of a further plane, a courier would be sent to the Danube Sub-Brigade Commander, for him to send a party to receive the equipment it would bring. This was necessary because the area in which they operated was much more open and easily compromised.

On the afternoon of the 16th, in a mood of excited anticipation, we set out for the dropping ground, which had been selected by Borovich in collaboration with Roger. It was an open area on the side of a shallow valley, which I thought an ideal spot. Material for the fires was collected but not put out in the 'T', to avoid it being seen by any passing enemy aircraft. As the light began to fade, the material was divided up into piles and these piles were spaced at 50 yard intervals, and we settled down to wait, in bright moonlight, for the sound of the plane's engines. The plane was expected to be overhead at about 2300, which meant that we had a wait of about an hour and a half.

As the time approached, all talking ceased and we strained our ears for the sound of a distant engine. At 0100, Roger said there would be no plane tonight. Disconsolately, we dispersed the fire material and started the two-hour walk back to the place of our encampment. There was an unusual quietness amongst the Chetniks.



Ted Hall on right of picture with Draza Mihailovich second from left.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The following morning, at schedule time, I made contact and a message said:-

'Sorry, plane developed engine trouble and had to return. Coming tonight, same procedure.' In due course, we returned to the dropping ground. This time there was not the excited chatter of the previous day. Again, at dusk, the material for the fires was put out and the waiting started.

Shortly after 2300 there was a shout of *avion, avion*, by one of the Chetniks and, despite instructions they had received about the procedure to be followed, the fires were lit. The sound of engines increased and before long we saw, by moonlight, the parachutes descending. It was a wonderful sight. When we thought the drop was complete, I flashed 'thank you' to the plane and the collection of the load commenced.

Roger had decided to adopt the same procedure as Major Richmond. The packages were collected, conveyed by ox-carts and pack horses to a hiding place, where they would be safe until we were sure the enemy hadn't sent out a search party and it was convenient to open and distribute the contents. We then returned to our camp.

The next day, Roger decided that, in future, either he or John would go with me to receive the plane, and the one that didn't go for the reception would be responsible for opening and distributing the equipment. However, since this was our first reception, they would both go for the opening on the following day. This would allow me the morning for sending and receiving any messages.

So, the following morning, Borovich and a band of his excited followers set out with Roger and John to the hiding place. John told me afterwards that, on the way, there was much discussion about who was having what in the way of weapons. In due course, they returned to camp and I saw by the look on Roger's face that something was wrong. Apparently, there had been a good quantity of rifles, Sten guns, two light machine guns and a plentiful supply of ammunition.

However, all the battle-dress uniforms were made for midgets and the desperately needed boots were all size five and six. The only thing Roger could say was that it appeared some quartermaster had decided to clear out his stores of all clothing that was too small for British troops and we had been the unlucky recipients.

He composed a message expressing his anger and said it was vitally important, to restore morale, for a further delivery of larger uniforms and boots to be made urgently. He apologised to Borovich for the blunder and said the matter would be put right as soon as possible. I felt sorry for Roger because it was important that he held a strong hand in negotiating with Borovich. I sent the message the following morning and in the evening came the reply saying they were sorry about the slip-up and would be sending another plane the next day. This information was conveyed to Borovich and the situation eased somewhat.

After our mid-day meal, John and I set out with the Lieutenant and a party of twelve Chetniks for the same dropping ground. The reduction in excitement was noticeable. The plane arrived, the equipment was received and despatched to the hiding place. On our return to camp, an anxious Roger was told of the safe receipt and he went back to sleep in a better frame of mind.

The arms and clothing in this second plane were much more up to expectations, and morale improved forthwith. What is more, a further plane was definitely scheduled to

come the next night. Details of a different dropping ground, fires in the form of an 'H' and recognition signals were passed to Cairo.

Unfortunately, there was insufficient time for the Danube Sub-Brigade party to be present at the drop zone, but Borovich assured the Danube Sub-Brigade members that the packages would not be opened until they were present. This, he said, would prevent jealousy arising within the Brigade. Once again, the equipment was received and hidden.

In due course, the Danube sub-brigade troops arrived.

What a difference there was between them and our own scruffy friends! Their appearance was tidy, they were clean-shaven and their two officers, one a Captain and the other an Air Force Lieutenant, wore uniforms that were recognisable as such. The Lieutenant, I soon discovered, spoke French; and, at last, I was able to have something of a conversation with a Serb. His name was Zika Ristich, he told me, and he was married with three children. He was a pilot and had been stationed near Belgrade when the Germans attacked Yugoslavia. Their aircraft, without any warning, had been destroyed on the ground in a pre-emptive strike that took place before the Germans bombed Belgrade, so he had not been able to take part in any action.

He said he was partly Jewish and had moved with his wife and family into the country, to avoid contact with the Germans. He had left his wife and children in the care of her parents and joined the Chetniks.

For some time, he said, it had looked as though the might of the German army would prevail. But when they invaded Russia, he was sure we would fight on and, in the end, secure victory. He felt that our presence and the equipment they had come to collect allowed a glimmer of hope, because Britain was not yet defeated and he felt confident that, led by Mr Churchill, we would secure victory.

Our presence was a demonstration of this beginning to happen. He insisted on giving me his metal pilot's badge, to show his personal gratitude. I was a bit bewildered by this gesture, because I knew the badge means a great deal to a pilot. It was probably the one he received when he had qualified for his licence. I thanked him and said I would treasure it.

It was on such occasions as this that I felt what we were doing was worthwhile.

Unfortunately, there was nothing I could think of that I had which would match his generosity but, suddenly, I remembered the sovereigns and gave him one. At first he refused to accept it but, on my insistence, he became tearful. He asked when we would be visiting their territory. I said I felt sure it would be soon but could not say when. They departed later and, I must say, I watched them disappear with some regret.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

'As there won't be any more planes for us in June,' said Roger, 'Our next task is to have a look at the River Danube. Before we came to Yugoslavia, Major Richmond did some research work on navigation in this huge river and the type of tugs and lighters used to

convey war materials to the South and Oil from Ploiesti in Romania to the North. Apart from locks, which Richmond thought might be heavily defended, there are a number of places where movement of vessels is limited to a narrow channel due to shingle banks. He thought there might be a possibility for a small force of armed men with rifles, machine guns and 20mm cannons to get close enough to the river to sink or seriously damage a tug in these narrows so that the barges became uncontrolled and blocked the channel. So, we'll carry out a recce with the Danube Brigade to find out if there's a location, in their area, that suits these requirements. The course of the river flows through flatter land which is more populated. This means we may have to acquire civilian clothes in order to mix with people who are not 'woodsmen' (the word used by ordinary civilians to describe the Chetniks). The wireless set would prove a hindrance if we have to adopt this action. This means you'll return to Lisatz, Ted Are you happy about that?' 'Yes, if I'm not to accompany you I think it's a good place for me to be.'

'Before we separate,' continued Roger, 'I'd like to have a chat about the future. - Do you agree that the Chetniks in this area are less well armed and clothed than we expected and they would not be able to offer much resistance if attacked.' We agreed with this assessment.

'The number of serviceable aircraft available to MO4 and able to reach us with a payload of three tons, will not be sufficient to build up the Chetniks, in our territory, into a fighting force able to carry out aggressive operations before the end of the year. We will adopt an alternative policy. This will be to carry out 'hit and run' attacks such as the one we are planning for the Danube. In addition there'll probably be sabotage of the railway line, north of Bor and the ambush of lorries on the road going south out of Bor. Of course this situation could change overnight if those responsible for the 'Grand Plan' thought Yugoslavia worth considering, if only, in a diversionary role.

'To be frank, I think those responsible for MO4 are having to run the organisation on a 'shoe-string' in order that those in 'high places' can say they are doing their best to comply with Churchill's request. I have the feeling, sometimes, that we are a bit of a side show!' 'Yes,' agreed John 'there is something peculiar about the way the organisation is being run. When this is added to the difficulty in really understanding what it is the Chetniks are seeking to achieve I don't see how we can think about the future unless there is an agreed plan of action. I think we should do our best to find out how much effort the Chetniks are putting into the preparation for resisting the increasing strength of the Partisans and how this affects their willingness to resist the Germans.'

'As Robins is the only Senior Executive in Cairo,' continued Roger, 'it's obvious that a Board or Committee in London is really running the show. Following our chat I'm going to compose a message to Robins that will ask some very pointed questions to which I expect a direct answer. Now, I will arrange with Borovich to provide us with an escort to the Danube Brigade. The recce of the railway North of Bor will be done during the month of August.' Looking at John, Roger continued, 'I'll also ask if you're any nearer getting your Wireless Operator.' 'What's this all about.' I asked. 'I'm sorry,' said Roger, 'We decided not to mention that John had only agreed to come with me as second

in command due to the shortage of wireless operators. When one becomes available he will move South and start a new territory.' 'Oh! Thank you for telling me,' I said with a hint of irony. For a few seconds there was silence. 'I really must get a message to Richmond suggesting we have a meeting early next month,' continued Roger, 'to compare his assessment of the situation with ours. Isn't it possible for you to set up a communication link with Gordon?' he said looking at me.

'When I was working in the Wireless Section in Cairo I asked if there was an arrangement for communication between the Missions. I was told that it had been tried but as all the sets were operated as mobiles and on the move at unpredictable times the fixing of regular schedules had proved ineffective. I was also told that Cairo would only act as a link for passing messages between Missions in cases of emergency because it overloaded the system. The only way would be to have a controlling station through whom all the others could work. If the Chetnik organisation becomes co-ordinated properly with the MO4 Missions in a supporting role then it would become necessary to have a wireless network with a controller. When we next see Gordon Porter I'll discuss with him the setting up of a weekly scheduled time for us to see if it works just between our two stations. It means we will need two new paperbacks. I wouldn't like there to be another copy of the one I use for messages to Cairo to be with someone else in the field.' 'Ask Cairo to send two books as soon as possible.' said Roger. 'Yes, certainly' I said.

'While we're on the subject of wireless contact, I was talking to Zika Ristich from the Danube Brigade,' and asked about wireless communication between Chetnik Brigades. He said it was a bit of a joke because the equipment was so antiquated, unreliable and all run from dry batteries which were difficult to replace. Communication was very much a hit or miss affair and the operators didn't bother keeping regular schedules. Can you ask Borovich if we can see his wireless set-up, maybe it'll help to know the true position.' 'Yes I'll ask him.'

Now, John and I will be rejoining the Central Brigade and following our discussions with Borovich I will send you a note, by courier, with details about the outcome and information to pass on to Cairo. I will take coding details to encode the message before being given to the courier.'

When I was once more at Lisatz and made wireless contact, there were a number of messages waiting. I received these and could see that, with the very long message Roger had handed me on our departure, I had a great deal of coding and decoding to do. I did the decoding first in case there was anything of an urgent nature.

The first was an answer to Roger's original long message. It gave a lot of facts and figures about Bor. The mine was British owned and managed by the company's own employees prior to the war and included some German staff. The British had left at the outbreak of war in September 1939. Apparently, Roger had already been told that there was a draft plan for an attack on Bor to be considered as part of a diversionary operation prior to the major attack on mainland Europe. The importance of Bor and the River Danube was such that they were considering sending an Observer and Wireless Operator whose sole job would be to

report the daily activity carried on at these two targets. Roger was asked for his comments.

The poor state of the Chetnik organisation had been reported, by others, on a number of occasions and, we were told MO4 was doing all it could to improve the situation. However it was not considered of high priority by the Eisenhower HQ. Was there any possibility of us buying weapons from the enemy as was currently being done in Italy?

We were scheduled to receive four aircraft in July. Included with the cargo would be a Wireless Operator for Captain Hanbury and a Mission of two who would be going to Romania. A second message asked for Roger's comments on the possibility of receiving a Polish Officer who would be engaged in creating the Southern end of an escape route for Polish politicians who were favourably disposed to Western culture and might form part of a postwar government. There was another message which apologised for failing to include a replacement charging motor. One had been packed but obviously dropped to the wrong Mission. Without fail there would be one on the first plane in July.

The slog on the pedal charger and the coding of Roger's mammoth situation report kept me busy for a number of days. One afternoon, I was taking a rest in the shade of the trees, when a disturbing incident occurred. I became aware of the sound of an engine. A minute or two later I saw, coming over the top of a hill, a Fieseler Storch light aircraft. This type of slow-moving plane was normally used for observing artillery fire. I had seen them used by the Germans in North Africa and, at that time, we had been told that Rommel had one for his own personal transport so they were to be targeted if seen during our strafing missions. After the plane had disappeared I realised it had flown on a direct course so had not been observing us. If it had been and seen us, I'm sure it would have circled. The Chetniks had said nothing to us about spotter planes so, perhaps this was something new. If, in the future, the Storch was to be used to assist the ground forces it would help to overcome the advantage of concealment we had by the use of the forest. I would ask Roger to tell the Chetniks to make an effort to keep the surrounding to the cottages tidy to help prevent our presence being noticed from the air.

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FIESELER Fi 156C "STORCH"



The original "Storch, (German for stork), was designed in 1936, in Germany, by Dr. Gerhard Fieseler, and played an important role for the Luftwaffe in the Second World War as a reconnaissance utility and personnel carrying aircraft.

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