

# The Suitcase Set

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Final



Volume 7 of 7

G3SDS



G8SDS

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## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Life became hectic. What with avoiding the enemy, getting the injured down to the house for their operations and looking after the Americans there was not much time to talk to the other new arrival, Captain Dash. Later, we established the reason for their injuries, They had both landed in very tall trees, we thought, about fifty or sixty feet from the ground. It was completely dark, so dark that they couldn't see the ground. Mott was close to the trunk of the tree so he released his harness, grabbed the trunk with the idea of sliding down but the trunk became too large and he fell. Ramus was not near the trunk but figured the ground couldn't be far away so he released his harness and dropped. Both men said that before leaving Derna they were told we were on the run so after landing they must expect to be on the move immediately.

The American airmen, before they took off, had all been given a small wallet containing US Dollars, and Romanian currency, together with messages printed in various languages. These said that large sums of money would be given to those that helped them get to an American base. In addition there were maps and compasses. They soon acquired a taste for rakia and, because they paid the locals well, were provided with plentiful supplies. I regret to say that when they had been at the bottle they were difficult to control. We made it our number one task to arrange for them to be taken to, and passed on to, Major Richmond's Mission.

The operations on the two men, carried out on a long kitchen table, were only partially successful. The Doctor said that the situation could be rectified when they were operated on again in a proper hospital. The main thing was that the injuries to both men gradually became less painful, as long as they were lying down and stationary. Unfortunately, both were still stretcher bound so had to be carried everywhere. Transporting them on a stretcher in the mountainous territory in which we lived was a trying experience for them. It was just not practical to think of passing them on to the West in the same way as we had done with the Americans. We were fortunate in finding a retired doctor to look after them medically and an escaped Russian POW to assist them physically. This man was appreciated very much by Captain Ramus because he was able to converse with him (Ramus was of Russian descent). The man was big and very strong and could lift Ramus as though he was a baby.

We were now into October and the first snows arrived. The injured, after a long and painful journey were accommodated at Lisatz, where the inaccessible nature of the terrain would mean they were less likely to be disturbed by the enemy. I think it would be an exaggeration to say they were improving but rather they were living with their disabilities and putting on a brave face. In chatting to Mott I found his major concern was the affect his injuries would have on his golf swing. Not being a golfer myself, I couldn't offer an opinion and found it mildly amusing that such an insignificant thing received consideration over all the other problems.

Their mental condition was gradually improving though neither was able to walk but Len Mott could sit a horse. It was decided that before winter set in Roger and Alan Martin would go to meet Major Richmond for a general discussion about the current situation and in particular the deteriorating situation between the Chetniks and Partisans. Meanwhile, I was to accompany Dash to assist him in starting the Polish Brigade. He was never addressed with a Christian name and, in fact, his real Polish name which he wrote on a piece of paper for me was twelve letters long and full of s's, z's and v's and for me, unpronounceable.

It was not long before I realised that Dash was an individual of a type I had not met before. He was about 6ft tall, quietly spoken and slim, perhaps thin would be a better word. Apart from Polish he was fluent in English, French and German. He said he was thirty-two years old and had been a regular soldier on the General Staff. He was extremely polite, in an Edwardian way, and always smartly dressed in riding breeches and highly polished riding boots and a battle-dress jacket. His confident manner made him, to me, a soldiers' soldier - a leader. He told me that after the German invasion of Poland he had made his way South, through Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greece; thence by fishing boat to Egypt. Subsequently, he was recruited by MO4 to assist in the creation of the escape route for politicians out of Poland.

He was unable to understand why the arming of the Polish contingent was forbidden. He was going to speak to Borovich and give him an assurance that, if allowed to do so, their weapons would never be used against the Chetniks. After I had been with him about a week, during which time I suppose he had had time to assess me as an individual, he said, 'Do you think the Allied support for Mihailovich will continue?' 'I've no idea.' I replied, 'I'm confused by what I think of as the political situation. When I agreed to come to Serbia, it was to be involved in the fight against the Germans. I wasn't told anything about a civil war. What do you think will happen?' 'I regret to say, I think the support that Tito is getting will be sufficient to overcome the Chetniks. How long the British will continue to support Mihailovich I couldn't say. If I had to guess, I don't think it will be much longer.'

Tito is already making a show of taking the fight to the Germans and this goes down well with the Americans yet, Mihailovich continues relatively inactive.' 'What will you do if support is withdrawn and you're left to fend for yourself?' he asked. 'I suppose I'll do whatever Roger suggests.' 'Well,' said Dash, 'I hope to be allowed to continue with setting up the escape route irrespective of who is the leader in Yugoslavia and, as I can't communicate and work effectively without a wireless, would you consider joining me?' 'I would be happy to work for you but only if it's sanctioned, firstly, by Roger and then by Cairo. I don't have the right to please myself and if I acted against their orders it might be considered that I had deserted and my wireless schedules would, of course, be discontinued.' 'Thank you,' he said, 'the situation may never arise but I hope you didn't mind my mentioning the matter.'

'No, I'm pleased you did because I'm getting a bit confused as to what is going to happen in the Spring. I can't see much being done between November and March because we'll be snowed in. 'Yes,' continued Dash 'the organisation of the Missions to Mihailovich seems to be lacking in control. There seems to be very little appreciation of the fact that the transportation of so much war material for the Russian front is being carried out through Serbia and the Danube. This has become necessary because the rail network, through Poland, is little used as it's constantly being sabotaged. I suppose it's to be expected as the Allies are concentrating on planning and carrying out an invasion somewhere in the West which means this area is neglected.'

We eventually found the escapees in the forest above the village of Zlot some ten miles from Bor. They were a very bedraggled, surly looking, bunch of fifteen men, poorly clothed and of all ages between about twenty and fifty. They were living in the wigwam type shelters of the type I've already described. When they were assembled and addressed by Dash I could almost see a physical change take place in them. They seemed brighter and eager to listen to what he was saying and then, afterwards, were full of questions.

Later, Dash told me, that they were depressed because there was little food and no information about the progress of the war or what was happening in Poland. They had been told that if any stealing took place on the surrounding small farms they would all be shot. They told him that escaping was no problem because those responsible knew that replacements were easily obtainable and as supervision was poor nobody did any work unless physically threatened.

He said his first task was to get more food for them and then better clothing. I told him about Mladen and how he operated. He asked me to inform Cairo about the situation and request that clothing and dried food should make up the bulk of the aircraft load he had been promised. He asked if my packhorse could be used to carry food and I agreed.

The following day he left, alone. The Chetnik guards were unhappy about this but Dash insisted. He returned some four hours later with the horse loaded with sacks of haricot beans and maize (the staple diet). At first I was amazed that he had been able to do this, but then I had a sneaking suspicion that he had some command of the Serbian language, a hidden talent that he had not mentioned to me. I asked him about it and he said, with a smile, 'Yes, I do know a few words.'

'What plans have you made for the immediate future.' I asked. 'Well' he said, 'This group are in poorer health than I expected so I don't think much can be done before we are snowed in for the winter. From information they've given me I expect there'll be more escapees to add to the number. As soon as it's possible to move about freely again, in the new year, a few of them will accompany me to make contact with the next group involved in the escape route further north. I'm going to stay here for now and organise food supplies. I

have prepared a message for you to send on your next schedule to Cairo. I'm asking for the Chetniks to be told that my escort must be armed and that we are to be regarded as a separate but friendly group. You will go back, with the escort, to join Roger'. 'OK,' I said, 'I'll get cracking on coding the message, my schedule time is in forty minutes.'

Before I left an incident occurred which, when thinking about it later, made me shudder. One of the Poles came to me and indicated that he wanted to borrow my pliers. I gave them to him and because I couldn't communicate verbally didn't ask why he wanted them. A short while later one of the others returned them to me. This man indicated that the person who borrowed the pliers had used them to remove an aching tooth. Later, I mentioned the incident to Dash and he told me he had heard about it and said that the man had extracted the tooth himself because he couldn't trust the others to take out the right tooth! The following day I left to rejoin the Key Brigade.

The only way a group of Chetniks found another group was by asking small farmers for information. It was amazing how these peasants knew what was going on in their district. There were no local newspapers or radio, but they knew. Nobody could move about the mountainous areas without their knowledge. If they didn't wish to meet you they would disappear into the forest; accordingly, if you met anybody you knew they were friendly. These peasants are an insular people and lived as far as possible without money. They bartered anything and everything: maize for clothing, chickens for footwear and eggs for children's toys etc. Prior to the war, they were forbidden to thresh their own grain. This was done by a visiting government team with tractor and machinery. A quantity of grain was then retained, by the threshers, instead of levying tax.

Roger had decided that our winter quarters were to be near Lisatz so that visiting the injured, was relatively easy, when we donned snowshoes, which prevented us from falling up to our armpits in the soft snow. And so, the short days and long nights of winter were upon us. With little to do but play cards, listen to English and Serbian news bulletins broadcast by the BBC, which told us of the deteriorating relationship between the Chetniks and Partisans. However, according to news reports, at last, the war seemed to be turning in our favour. At Christmas we had a party held at the cottage housing our injured. We did our best to cheer each other up but with no great success. There was regular contact with Cairo but they didn't seem interested in what we had to say.

On 9<sup>th</sup> March 1944, the message all of us dreaded was received from Cairo. It simply stated that a High Command decision had been taken not to supply any more arms and ammunition to Mihailovich and his Chetnik Brigades. They assured us more detailed information would follow. A week went by without any further news. Apparently, Mihailovich, himself, had not been informed of the decision prior to its general release on the BBC and regarded as disgraceful. We didn't know what attitude the Chetniks would adopt. Would they hold on to us as hostages? Would we be imprisoned? Would we be shot? There followed a number of anxious days whilst those responsible for deciding what was to happen to us reached agreement. For the first time since I had landed in Serbia I went to bed with a revolver under my pillow! Finally, Mihailovich decided that we could leave the country but our arms must be left behind. He passed orders to all Brigades that the British were to be given any assistance they required to leave.

At first our HQ, which was in the process of moving from Cairo to Bari in Italy, wanted us to make our way to the nearest Partisan unit. However, Tito refused to accept anybody who had previously been with the Mihailovich Forces.

Eventually, we received instructions to make our way to the small village of Topola, about one hundred and ten miles due west of Lisatz. The powers that be were trying to arrange for aircraft to pick us up from there. That was the easy part for us. What about Captain Ramus, still confined to a stretcher and Dash with his Polish troops?



Now that the decision had been taken to evacuate us, I told Roger of the suggestion by Dash that I should join him. Roger said he would think about the implications. Later he asked me if I had given thought as to what might happen when the British support was withdrawn. I replied by saying that if Dash could have weapons for his men, which I felt sure he would be able to buy, I would feel as safe with them as trying to make my way to Topola or, perhaps, to the West Coast. 'OK.' said 'Roger, I'll ask Cairo if they agree to your staying'.

The outcome being that Cairo was against my staying and indicated that Dash should rejoin our party for the evacuation. I was sent, together with an escort, to tell Dash of this decision. When we discussed the matter, he said he wasn't prepared to leave and asked me, again, to join him. I said that without the agreement of Cairo, I couldn't be of much use to him, because there wouldn't be support. There was also the unknown factor of what action the Partisans might take. From the reports I had seen they seemed a ruthless bunch.

On the night before my departure from Dash's camp, I thought long and hard about staying but since I didn't have the same personal involvement as Dash I felt satisfied with my decision. So, with much regret I left Dash and returned to Lisatz and told Roger of Dash's decision to stay behind. Roger said he didn't feel he had any responsibility for Dash as he was involved in another project.

While I had been away Ramus complete with sledge, horse, Russian and escort had left for Topola. A rendezvous had been arranged for half distance to see how they were making out. It wasn't until mid-April that, with heavy hearts, we finally left Lisatz. There was still a good deal of snow about but Spring was in the air. We had decided to take six Chetniks with us for support. The attitude of all those Chetniks who were, in some way attached to us, had not changed at all. Most of them, I feel sure, were, like me, bemused by the situation.

A few days before we departed, Roger sent a messenger ahead with a note to Major Richmond suggesting we meet them before they left and go as one party. In this way, our exodus from Serbia began, travelling at night and resting by day. We had a number of major roads to cross but fortunately these were little used at night. Our difficulties increased by having to cross the River Morava and two smaller rivers. Due to this, progress was slow with much waiting about.

When we reached the place selected for the rendezvous with Ramus, we learned the distressing news that he and his party had been captured in one of the increasing number of sweeps the enemy were making. It was not 'till much later that I learned the true story.

Towards the end of our journey we sent scouts ahead to make contact with other Missions, who, like us, were toiling towards Topola. We were constantly on the look out for Partisans, Ustashe or any of the other smaller enemy forces. Fortunately, it was only on one occasion that we met resistance. It was early evening, not quite dark, and we had just started out when we noticed a line of troops, wearing dark blue uniforms, which nobody could positively identify, walking in extended order towards us, some three to four hundred yards ahead. Since there was no reaction from them we were reasonably sure we had not been observed. Richmond took charge and brought those with rifles forward. When the enemy were about 150 yards ahead of us, he gave the order to open fire. Two of them were hit and the others carrying the wounded disappeared into the undergrowth. We waited for about two hours and, by then, it was completely dark, with no moon. We moved forward slowly, met no resistance and continued on our way. We learned later that they were Ustache troops.

At the end of May we made contact with the British leaders of the mission who had been with Mihailovich. We were told to make camp about ten miles from the large field which, if approved by the RAF, was to be used as a landing ground. Days went by without any information about the evacuation plan. Later we learned that the RAF said the landing ground was too small and an alternative site must be found. When the Americans from the Ploiesti raid, who had become attached to HQ, heard this they inspected the site and said that it was suitable for the landing and take-off of Douglas DC3's and asked for their HQ to be contacted. This was done and without asking for any details, other than those provided by the aircrew on site, said they would come and pick us up. On the night of 5<sup>th</sup> June they sent six DC3's and took off the whole party. We were taken to Bari in Southern Italy. After a good night's sleep we awoke to the agreeable news that it was 'D' day.

During the course of the next few days there was a period of what could be called debriefing or perhaps post-mortem. All the Missions through their leaders expressed discontent about poor support and lack of co-ordination but no satisfactory answers were given due to the change of HQ from Cairo to Bari taking place, at that time, and the fact that Robins was no longer the Chief Executive.



So ended the Allied support for Mihailovich and his Chetnik troops. It should be remembered that, initially, they were the recognized resistance movement to the German invaders in Yugoslavia. The fact they were an organised movement with the will but, unfortunately, not the means of offering armed resistance, seems to be forgotten. It was the Allies who, having sent personnel, failed to provide them with sufficient arms. With hindsight it is easy to see that a great deal of bloodshed in that country, which continues to this day, more than fifty years later, might have been reduced, if not avoided, had advice from those who served in the territory been heeded. This doesn't make it easier for those with no knowledge of Yugoslavian history, for that period, to understand how and why Tito gained such dictatorial powers. Each of the participants who returned had cause to think about their future. A number of them opted to become part of the Allied Control Commission which was already being formed. This organisation was to be responsible for running Western Europe when hostilities were over. I had no wish to be part of this. I had already decided to return to the RAF and as soon as possible start investigating how I was to 'earn a crust' in a civilian occupation. It was a world that I knew nothing about and my skill in punching a Morse key would not be an asset.



Before leaving MO4 to go to the RAF HQ, which was also at Bari, I said goodbye to Roger and thanked him for his consideration and friendship, particularly when the going was tough. We exchanged addresses and promised to exchange Christmas cards if there was no other communication.

After the war was over, I received a letter from him which did help to lift some of the mystery surrounding those members of MO4 who had been in East Serbia and 'disappeared'. Roger had attended a re-union and there he met Captain Ramus. After being captured by the Germans, Ramus claimed he was of Swiss nationality which caused confusion. He was not ill treated, in fact, they arranged for him to go into hospital and his injured legs and arm were operated on and he reckoned he was about 90% fit. Subsequently, he was imprisoned in Oflag 4c POW camp. Here, quite by coincidence, he had met John Hanbury who, after capture, had been tortured but had survived. When John and his party had been attacked he became separated from Tom Lomas, his operator, and didn't see or hear of him again. After the war he checked POW lists but failed to find his name.

Roger also mentioned that he had done some checking on what had happened to Dash. There were reports from a Partisan Mission that a 'British' officer had been reported killed in a skirmish with Rumanian troops near Belgrade. There were no reports of the two who had gone to Rumania.

So ends my story of some of the personal experiences that took place, during a vital year, in the turbulent history of Yugoslavia. I emerged physically unscathed and learned a lot about human nature. Some years later, during the Tito era, I was asked to present a technical paper to students at Belgrade University. I offered to do this if, in exchange, a guide could accompany me on a touring holiday in Eastern Serbia. My offer was declined and, to my regret, the request to do the lecture cancelled.

When I had decided to publish this story and was looking for information concerning the reason why the support for the Chetniks had been withdrawn and given to Tito I came across the following article written by Colin Brown and John Crossland. It was published by "The Independent" newspaper on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1997. If the content is true then the reason for some of our frustrations becomes understandable.

## HOW A SOVIET MOLE UNITED TITO AND CHURCHILL

“Why did the Government back Tito? Nothing was known about him and they actually thought he was a woman.” Secret reports on one of the most controversial British undercover operations of the Second World War are to be released Monday. This will show that a Soviet spy may have been responsible for the British switching support to Tito’s forces in the former Yugoslavia. The documents, including transcripts of secret wartime signals to London, are being released by the Public Records Office. They will show evidence that the role played by James Klugman - the Soviet mole who converted the British spy, Donald Maclean, to Communism - in switching British allegiance from a Yugoslav royalist resistance leader called Mihailovich to Tito, at a critical point in the Second World War. By switching support to Tito’s forces, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) helped to force the German retreat, but it cost Mihailovich his life - he was executed after the war as a collaborator - and ensured that the former Yugoslavia remained a Communist state under Tito’s control.

SOE spies who fought in the Balkans included the former Tory MP Julian Amery. Other famous names who flit in and out of the tales of SOE derring-do and duplicity in the region include Paddy Leigh Fermor and Major Anthony Quayle, the screen actor.

Rupert Allason, author of spy books under the pen name Nigel West, and former Tory MP said the real issue raised by the papers was the reason for the British government’s backing of Tito. Nothing had been known about Tito - Fitzroy Maclean, a British agent, thought he was a woman and the government became convinced that Mihailovich was a collaborator with the Germans - something the “Ultra” code intercepts showed to be untrue.

The signals sent by Klugmann, who was an intimate of the traitors Blunt, Philby and Burgess at Cambridge, will for the first time confirm the claim of an agent, quoted by Andrew Boyle in the “Climate of Treason,” that Klugmann was principally responsible for the massive wartime sabotage of the Mihailovich supply operation and for keeping from London information about the impressive activities of the Mihailovich forces in the fight against the Germans. They will be of particular interest to a decoder at Bletchley Park, nerve centre of the government’s radio intelligence war, who, while preserving the anonymity of her wartime role, gave additional weight to the theory of Klugmann’s secret agenda. “I was in section 3L at GCHQ Bletchley Park with the job of preparing a weekly summary of the Yugoslav situation for Churchill. At the time I wasn’t particularly suspicious that our information didn’t seem to be acted upon, but have become so since. I now wonder if many of our reports were sent to the section where people like Philby were working,” she said. “Certainly Klugmann seems to have played a more important role than we thought. Two former Communist wartime agents assured me he did, but they didn’t elaborate,” she added.

The files, 969 in all, cover the operation of the SOE in Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Romania, which, with the exception of France, was the most controversial theatre of the sabotage operation launched by Churchill “to set [occupied] Europe ablaze”.

Unfortunately, the blaze all too frequently singed SOE operatives themselves as they were caught up in internal politics particularly in Greece and Yugoslavia. While fighting the German and Italian invaders, the Yugoslavs were simultaneously locked in combat with each other. A Special Operations Executive (Balkans) operated from Cairo, and was ordered to carry out the policies of Churchill’s government, which initially supported Mihailovich’s Royalist Chetnik forces. The signals sent to SOE HQ in Baker Street, London, and to Churchill’s Cabinet were based, in part, on intelligence gleaned from German Ultra code traffic filtered through Bletchley Park and passed to the only person authorised to receive it, Colonel S.M. (Bolo) Keble.

A further opportunity for scanning the information from Yugoslavia was provided by the influence exerted by John Cairncross. Subsequently he was also unmasked as a Russian agent and named as the Fifth Man recruited from the same Cambridge background, who in 1943 was working with the Yugoslav section of GCHQ at Bletchley Park.

The concerted efforts of the Cairo office eventually bore fruit when the British government dropped its support for Mihailovich. The Kew files are redolent of the suspicion and duplicity which blighted relations between SOE Cairo and its Foreign Office masters and which threatened to tear the intelligence community in the Balkans apart. The evidence of a power struggle which developed over the role of Brigadier Sir Fitzroy Maclean, who was parachuted in as Churchill's personal representative and came to exercise a powerful influence with Tito.

Two months later, Bill Deakin, later Sir William Deakin, Senior Intelligence Office in Yugoslavia, rated Klugmann "indispensable. . . and giving invaluable service." The file reveals that it was known that Klugmann had used his position to advance Tito's cause. There was no suspicion on the part of the Mihailovich missions that political motives were responsible for the lack of support. The general belief was that somebody was 'cooking the books' since there were large numbers of sovereigns and dollars being expended without any one person being responsible for them.

I did not enter any discussions because I had had enough of the 'cloak and dagger life' and although physically fitter than when I joined MO4, I was mentally worn out and needed a rest. When I presented myself to the RAF HQ in Bari they had no knowledge of my existence as my records were in HQ Middle East in Cairo. It was decided that I was to return to the UK and my records be sent from Cairo to be united with me again.

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