

evening. I saw them go through to the end of the camp, to the bottom, to the bunker where the crematorium was. One of the girls Pat knew. He recognised her. I didn't know any of them but I made a description of them as soon as I got back. It was so accurate that they were recognised.

Lieutenant Robert Sheppard

SOE agent captured in France, held in Natzweiler concentration camp

Everything was the same as before. They had simply disappeared. That was May, June, 1944, the very moment of Overlord and the landing in Normandy, but we didn't know about it. We were disappearing in the fog. We didn't know about the landing. We knew much later and we hardly believed it. Paris was liberated in August and we didn't know about it.

YUGOSLAVIA

Sergeant Alexander Simić

SOE wireless operator with partisans, Slovenia

I was doing a 'sked' one evening, having a lot of trouble with 'DF'ing, because the Germans used to try and DF us, direction-find us, and also with static and atmospherics. I'd encoded a lot of messages and it had taken a hell of a long time to get through them – I'd had to keep changing my crystal to get a different wavelength – and about six o'clock in the morning I'd had enough. I'd got through everything, got through all the traffic, and I thought, 'Well, I'm going to relax now,' so I did what I shouldn't have done, I switched over to the short wave Forces programme. And to my immense delight I heard, first of all, '*Down in the jungle something stirred*' – that funny little thing. I couldn't believe it, you know, and I wasted quite a bit of valuable juice from my accumulators on it. Then all of a sudden that was cut off and they said, 'Here is an announcement. The second front has started.' They said that four thousand ships were taking troops and equipment and the RAF was sending over planes and bombing the enemy coastal defences and so on. And I got it all down and rushed out and told them and they went absolutely berserk! They fired off all this valuable ammunition. They came and hugged me and kissed me. I can see it now.

Captain Maurice Sutcliffe

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Croatia

By the time I fetched up in Yugoslavia I was very tough and fit and all ready to get involved in what I thought was going to be a very dramatic and fastmoving war. In fact it wasn't fast moving except on rare occasions and it was fairly different to what I had any idea that it would be. I'd imagined people to some extent living in caves and rushing down, putting demolitions on railways and so on, but it was really very much more organised than that. I had no idea when I went into the country that it would be such a huge organisation, the partisan movement.

Captain Basil Irwin

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Bosnia

This little outfit I was with, the 16th Division, I should have thought it must have been about three thousand people. When you get three thousand people moving about in a group in the hills and the mountains, local food doesn't exist in that quantity, and at times their operations were based on the necessity to capture food, capture arms. And they had of course this terrible problem with all the wounded. What to do with them? It was said that rather than let their own wounded fall into enemy hands it was better to shoot them. We had a lot of wounded with us and we were never actually in the

position that we ever left or had to leave our wounded behind. We always somehow broke through with them and they were dragged along in carts and on horseback.

Captain Robert Wade

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Montenegro

I saw a partisan chap who'd had his hand blown partly off with a grenade.



An SOE mission in occupied Yugoslavia.

They gave this chap a slug of alcohol and just held him down and did the operation. There was no anaesthetic there at all. I mean, if you were wounded, you had the operation straight, and if it hurt it bloody well hurt and that was it.

Captain Basil Irwin

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Bosnia

One of the toughest battalion commanders they had was a young girl, tough as hell. Women and men, they were all together. Women were expected to do exactly the same as men. You'd see them carrying exactly the same loads of ammunition, guns and anything else.

Captain Maurice Sutcliffe

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Croatia

Partisan girls were amazing. In a company-sized unit of maybe eighty or ninety people there were maybe twenty or thirty girls.

Captain Robert Wade

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Montenegro

We were walking with partisans along a mountainside goat path with a sheer drop on one side and a sheer mountain going up the other. When it came to the hot spot, where the Germans were dropping a few mortars across, orders came back and everybody obeyed impeccably. They said, 'Four metres between people, eight metres between people,' and as you got toward the hot stuff the line just filtered out and you just walked through it like Russian roulette more or less. If you were hit you just took a damned great tumble down the side of the mountain. It was a really good show. It was brilliantly done.

Major Basil Davidson

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Serbia

We not only sent very large quantities of military munitions and medical supplies, we also performed other services of which perhaps the most important of all was to evacuate the wounded to Italy. Partisan warfare was very fluid and mobile and you had to move from A to B very fast and you can't move from A to B if you have to carry with you hundreds and hundreds of wounded men and women. So the only way you could handle the thing was either to risk their being executed by the Germans or to evacuate them by air. And I'm very proud to say, and I think all of us are very proud to remember, that we did evacuate many hundreds of wounded. I myself evacuated wounded from the area where I was, which was far inland, from an airstrip within sight and sound of Belgrade where there were three German divisions. And that got rid of the wounded, because the wounded, if they were found by the Germans, were invariably shot, with their nurses and with their doctors. They were shot out of hand.

Captain Maurice Sutcliffe

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Croatia

We had perhaps a total of thirty aeroplanes in, two or three a night, until the Germans made night attacks on the aircraft as they tried to land on our strip. A strip sounds rather like a prepared airfield; it was just a few fields put together. We'd pile them in. There were no stretchers or anything. We'd put straw on the bottom of the aircraft and then people would just get in. They were never strapped in. In an old Dakota we'd get maybe twenty-six, twenty-eight, very seriously wounded people. I mean, they'd lost both legs, lost both arms. I was just one location. There were five or six, maybe seven different locations throughout the country doing that sort of thing. We certainly lifted out from my own little strip maybe 250 people – 250 lives that would have been lost.

Captain Basil Irwin

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Bosnia

One of the great things that impressed me was the extraordinary courage and ability of the pilots who used to come in. They never reconnoitred these fields. They came in at night, didn't circle but used to come absolutely straight down on to the ground, just putting on their landing lights when they were about twenty feet off the ground.

Captain Maurice Sutcliffe

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Croatia

The air force was trying to knock out the German war effort, the oil fields at Ploesti in Romania and the manufacturing areas on the north side of Vienna. Those were the two main targets and we were very much en route and whenever we saw a vast formation of aeroplanes going over, one of my operators would say, 'Right, we've got some guests for supper tonight.' And of course, right enough, over the next few days you'd find a few airmen trickling in. They would then spend anything from a couple of days to several weeks with us. If there were too many of them we'd try and move them on somewhere where we knew there was a strip operating.

Major Basil Davidson

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Serbia

Once the German retreat had started, it was important to know what German units were coming through and how much was coming through and one of my jobs was to go into Novi Sad. Novi Sad was then the capital of Hungarianoccupied Yugoslavia and through it was coming the retreating

German Army, being driven hard by the Russian Army on its heels. One would sit in a café, in civilian clothes naturally, with a partisan friend also in civilian clothes, and we would be chatting and drinking coffee and so on and hoping to see, round the edge of one's paper, what was going through the square. One would then go back to one's hidey-hole and put it into code for one's wireless operator. He would then send it back to base.

Captain Basil Irwin

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Bosnia

When the Russian advance got nearer, the Yugoslavs stopped us evacuating their wounded. The only reason we could really gather was that they wanted to be able to demonstrate to the Russians when they arrived, 'Look at what we've suffered.' On the other hand they had the idea that the Russian Army, when it did arrive, would have all the facilities that one would have thought of a Western army. But of course, when the Russians did arrive, it was quite a different matter. They arrived on foot and with horse-drawn guns and transport and they were living off the land.

Lieutenant Commander Alexander Glen

Naval intelligence officer, attached to SOE, with partisans, Serbia

It was bloody silly. We'd captured a small German unit with motor-bicycle sidecar things and a little scout car and a motorised twenty-millimetre Oerlikon-type anti-aircraft gun. We must have been three or four partisans, three or four Brits, it was quite a nice wide road so we drove off in those things, really racing against each other, came round a bend and the road beyond had been blown. There, on the other side, was a machine-gun post, manned, and that was our first meeting with the Russians. They didn't shoot. God knows why not, we'd literally hurtled round in German equipment. The opposite happened. They got up, came across, great huggings and kissings and whacks on the back, etc. Their unit had just crossed the Danube that morning in company strength.

Captain Maurice Sutcliffe

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Croatia

The leading elements were very good. They had modern equipment, vehicles, looked fairly well dressed. But the follow-up, they were terrible. I mean, they were a rag-tail, desperate-looking lot of people who stole everything they could find and made themselves terribly unpopular. I think the Yugoslavs were very disillusioned with the Russians, almost straight away.

Captain Basil Irwin

SOE liaison officer with partisans, Bosnia

It was quite extraordinary because they treated us with no hostility or suspicion but they treated the partisans like dirt. Partisan officers, wherever they could, had got uniforms and jackets made and put on some golden stripes or something for rank. And it was such a shock to the partisans, who thought here was the welcome they were giving to their brother Slavs and the great Russian Army and so on, to be really treated like dirt by them.

GREECE

Major Brian Dillon

SOE liaison officer

On 6 June we invaded Normandy. I thought it would be a good idea to let people know in the