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THE OPERATIONS OF UNIT A, 3D COMPIMENT, OPERATIONAL GROUPS,
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES, IN YUGOSLAVIA,
19 JANUARY TO 6 SEPTEMBER 1944
(Personal experience of the Unit Commander)

Type of operation described: GUERRILLA OPERATIONS

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(Author's Note:

Although the above references were read for detailed background material, the matter presented in this monograph is entirely from personal observation or from personal experience of the author during his stay in Yugoslavia. Use of notes will be limited to explanations of terms not in common usage, or to clarify statements made in the body of the monograph.)

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INTRODUCTION

After the defeat of the Yugoslavian Army in April of 1941, the Germans methodically stamped out all resistance against them by destroying those religious and National political parties which might create opposition against their occupation forces.

Although the parties were dissolved, there remained a few people who could not be swayed from their cause in spite of all the measures taken by the Germans. Gradually, as the people recovered from the shock of the defeat, a movement could be observed of the people returning to the parties of their choice in order to overthrow the Germans.

Those who felt that Yugoslavia would best prosper under a monarch, rallied toward Colonel Draza Mihajlovic. He was an ardent Royalist, who was left to lead the underground forces when King Peter fled the country. For the most part, this group was composed of Regular Army officers and men, and of personnel who were in a Nationalist para-military organization which was frequently used to enforce the will of the government. This group became known as the Chetniks. (1)

Others in Yugoslavia felt that there was no hope of ever seeing a free Yugoslavia again, and these banded together under the quislings Medic and Pavelic. This group voluntarily joined forces with the Germans in hope of reward, believing that they would be given free reign to rule Yugoslavia. This group was responsible for massacres and pillages in Yugoslavia which rivalled the actions of the most heartless concentration camp leader.

(1) Literally, a member of a Ceta, which was a company-size unit in the para-military organization mentioned in the body of the monograph.

Colonel Mihajlovic believed that the best way to hold Yugoslavia together was by impassive resistance, for after several raids against the Germans, many Yugoslavs were killed in retaliation. Others, who felt that active military resistance against the Germans was the only way to free their country, banded together to organize underground guerilla units. Although these groups were of different religious and political background, they came to accept the leadership of one man - Marshall Tito. (2) This group became known as the Partisans.

It has become evident during the war and during the period following the war, that Mihajlovic, who professed sustained resistance against the Germans, never offered any serious threat to them. In truth, Mihajlovic actually participated in combat against Partisan forces who were fighting against the Germans.

On the other hand, the Partisans, with a meager start after their country was overrun, continued an ever-increasing resistance against the Germans. From a small force with few arms and supplies, they grew into an army of a quarter of a million men, equipped, for the most part, with captured arms and equipment.

Mr. Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, in February of 1944, told the House of Commons that the Partisans were holding in check fourteen out of twenty German divisions which were in the Balkans.

In addition to the military achievements, the Partisans made great strides in political fields. Up to this time each province was, to a greater or lesser degree, a political party in itself, but under Tito's leadership, Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes subjugated old political ties to

(2) Tito's real name is Josip Broz. He was born of peasant stock in Croatia. In 1915 he deserted from the Austro-Hungarian forces and went over to the Russians. During the Revolution he acquired experience in Guerilla warfare. Upon his return to Croatia he became a union leader and engaged in politics. Between 1929 and 1939, he made several trips to Russia and the Soviet leaders regarded him as an able and farsighted man. Tito began organizing the Partisans in Serbia, and was later appointed president of the National Committee of Liberation. Upon appointment he took the title of Marshall Tito; (3) A-1, p. 63.

unite in the war against the Germans. Prior to this time, the State had done little to unify the nation, but the German invasion had crystallized hatred among most Yugoslavs against the invader.

German exploitation of old hatreds, the racial massacres by the Ustashi (4), and the impassive measures of the Chetniks had all but destroyed the will to resist the Germans. The Partisans not only continued their struggle, but accepted recruits from all political parties and of any religious background, thus proving to those who were skeptical that the Balkan groups could be welded into a cohesive entity.

Because of the seemingly hopeless situation in Yugoslavia, the United States and Britain had long delayed in deciding which group was worthy of support. Military missions were sent to the Chetniks and to the Partisans in order to determine which group would better suit the needs of the Allies.

The United States and Britain decided to back the Partisans, more through military necessity than for political reasons, since they resisted the German invasion more than any other group in Yugoslavia. This decision was reached very late in 1943, and as soon as the decision was made, arms, ammunition, clothing, equipment, and food were sent to the Partisans. The most important items were clothing and food, since the Partisans had a considerable amount of captured arms and ammunition. (5)

United States troops were recruited on a volunteer basis by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), to conduct guerilla operations behind the German lines in Yugoslavia. At the time they were recruited, the decision to back the Partisans had not been made. The original plan was to use these troops as a cadre around which larger groups of Yugoslavs could be organized. These groups were to be armed with any weapons they could get, either captured or supplied to them by the Allies.

(4) THE NAME APPLIED TO THE QUISLING BANDS OF PAVELIC AND NEDIC;
~~(4) This pertains to small arms, for there is not a great need for~~
~~artillery in guerilla warfare; (5) This pertains to small arms, for there~~
is little need for artillery in guerilla warfare.

The plan to recruit Yugoslavs to fight under American leaders was never accomplished, for the Partisans had a complete organization which was combat tested and which was proven sound. As a result, the American unit in Yugoslavia found itself with a large number of officers and non-commissioned officers, but these were used to advantage on the many operations which were conducted.

The basic organization of the guerilla units operating with headquarters in Italy can be seen on the organizational chart at the end of this monograph.

From 15 December 1943 to 18 January 1944, the Germans captured all of the Dalmatian Islands except Vis and Lagosta. (See Map No. 2.) As each island was taken, the Partisans fell back to another island, went directly to Vis, or went to Italy. On 18 January 1944, the Germans captured Hvar Island, the western-most tip of which is seven miles from Vis.

THE TRIP TO VIS

On 19 January 1944, a group of Americans who were specially organized, trained, and equipped for guerilla fighting, sailed from Molfetta, which is a small port town on the Adriatic coast of Italy, to the Island of Vis, an island off the Dalmatian coast of Yugoslavia.

Although the personnel numbered only 8 officers and 40 enlisted men, spirits were high as supplies and equipment were loaded aboard the LCI. This was the first group of the Unit to go to Yugoslavia, and the men sang lustily with approximately 100 members of British No. 2 Commando, a unit with which we were to become well acquainted.

At 1900, with everything loaded and lashed down, the LCI cast off its mooring ropes and was soon on its way across the rough and rolling Adriatic Sea.

The Adriatic was well patrolled by German naval craft, especially by E-boats, Schnell-boats, and R-boats. The E-boats and Schnell-boats are about 125 feet long, capable of 36 knots, and were heavily armed. The R-boats are actually small destroyer escorts.

In spite of the German naval patrols, the LCI made an uneventful crossing, and at about 0400 on 20 January 1944, the Island of Vis was sighted.

The island was under a complete blackout, and as the craft entered the mouth of the harbor at Komiza, a warning shot was fired from a gun in the harbor. The firing of the gun indicated that the Partisans wanted the proper light signal to be given. As soon as the light signal was given, the ship was permitted to enter the harbor.

As the ship nosed toward the dock, a few scattered lights came on and many people could be seen on the wharf. Some of these were laborers who assisted in the unloading of the ships, but many were civilians who were on hand to welcome the American and British troops to the island.

AMERICAN IMPRESSIONS OF VIS

The morale of the Yugoslav soldiers and civilians on Vis was at a low ebb, for it was felt that the Germans could take an island as poorly defended as Vis with little difficulty. The arrival of American and British soldiers on Vis, though few in number, bolstered morale, for they were tangible evidence that assistance was on the way. Remarks were heard among the Partisans such as, "If they could come all this way to help us, we will never give up this island to the Germans, unless they destroy every one of us."

Gifts of wine, grapes, raisins, figs, and rakija (6) were given freely to the troops, and the American troops immediately got along well, since they could, to a varying degree speak the language of the Yugoslavs. Many of these soldiers were second generation Americans whose fathers immigrated from the country in which they were to fight. Others were American-born Czechs, Poles, Slovaks, Russians, or Bulgarians, who came to speak the language fluently after a month on the island. This factor was to assist in many of the operations which were to take place later.

(6) A white distilled brandy made from the pulp of grapes after the juice has been extracted.

The troops began to unload the supplies during the semi-darkness and the craft was unloaded by 0800 20 January. After due consideration, it was decided to quarter the Americans at Vis-town, on the eastern end of the island, and the British were to remain in Komiza to garrison that town.

The winding up-hill and down-hill 12-mile march to Vis-town was completed at about 1200. The American troops were to use a large school-house on the water's edge for quarters. This school had served as a Partisan hospital, and was in dire need of cleaning.

Shortly after 1230 a score of women, armed with mops, brooms, brushes, and buckets, came to the school and began cleaning it thoroughly. It was cleaned from top to bottom by the women, one of whom explained that it was as much their duty to clean the building as it was for a soldier to fight. It was later learned that the women had been ordered by Partisan Headquarters to clean the building.

GEOGRAPHY OF VIS

The Island of Vis is approximately eight miles long, extending from east to west, and is six miles wide. The principal cities are Vis-town, an excellent harbor on the Eastern end of the island, Komiza, another excellent harbor on the West end of the island, and Rukavac, a fair harbor on the Southern side of the island. (See Map No. 3.)

The island has a number of high ridges, rising in some cases to 1800 feet, and extending generally from east to west. Between two ridges on the southern side of the island, there is an open plain, known as Vino Polje. This open ground was covered with grape vineyards, and was important in two respects. First, it could be used by the Germans as a likely area in which to drop parachutists or glider troops, and second, it was to be cleared later for use as an airstrip for Spitfires. This will be covered in more detail later in the monograph.

THE PARTISANS

The first impression of the Partisans was quite reassuring. Men and women serve in the fighting forces together, and the American troops initially were shocked to find women in the ranks of the fighting troops. It was a common sight to see a small number of women clad in makeshift uniforms, carrying rifles or carbines, marching with a formation of troops, or to see a woman standing guard at some prominent point.

Uniforms were nondescript, and an individual soldier might have parts of Yugoslavian, German, Italian, and British uniforms. Later, parts of American uniforms also became standard with the Partisans. Normally, they took the best parts of each uniform, if the garments could be obtained. Many wore a Yugoslav tunic, British battle dress trousers (made for Philadelphia QM Depot), German boots, and an Italian overseas cap. In some cases, the Partisans had almost complete German uniforms.

The weapons they carried were as heterogeneous as were their uniforms. All of them were captured from the Germans or Italians; however, Italian weapons predominated, since the surrender of Italy furnished a sizeable arsenal from which several divisions were equipped. Everyone had several hand grenades dangling from his belt; they were as much a part of the uniform as the trousers.

Some of the troops in uniform could not have been more than 15 years old; however, as the war progressed, the youngsters were withdrawn from combat units and were placed into labor organizations. It was found that too many of these youths were needlessly killed.

Although the people are of medium height, they are solidly built, and are in excellent physical condition. Almost to a man they are rugged mountaineers, well-versed in the fine points of mountain fighting.

The Partisans had good esprit de corps, even though their equipment was obsolescent. Morale was good, and discipline was strict, even though the subordinate often called his superiors "Drug". (7)

(7) Comrade.

The Russian influence also manifested itself in the Partisan salute, which was the clenched fist placed on the right temple. (8) At the same time, the individual said, "Zdravo". (9) Following the Russian example, every soldier saluted anyone who ranked him, including corporals and higher. Every Partisan took pride in his ability to salute well.

DEFENSIVE MEASURES ON VIS

As soon as the American and British troops were on the island, defenses were bolstered to prepare for the German attack, which at that time seemed inevitable, but which actually never materialized. Several captured German cannon were on the island, and these had been previously sited by the Partisans to provide all-around fire support. The beaches were covered by several captured machine guns, but it is doubtful if over twenty machine guns were on the island.

A reconnaissance of the island was made by boat and overland, and many beaches suitable for landing areas were found. Most of these had been covered with the few weapons the Partisans had, for they knew the terrain and had disposed their weapons to good advantage.

The following beaches were selected as possible landing beaches which the Germans might use to invade the island:

1. Vis-town, which offered about a mile of good beach to an invading force. However, this area was relatively easy to defend. The harbor is almost completely surrounded by high hills, and at the entrance to the harbor, Host Island divides the channel. (See Map No. 3.) To offset these disadvantages, if the Germans could enter the harbor, they could land their craft at any point they chose. The harbor is about 1000 yards across, therefore the defense areas would be mutually supporting.

2. The area to the north and south of Stoncica, which is on the Eastern tip of the island, offers a mile of fair landing area. In some places, the coastline at Stoncica is rather rugged, but the landing boats of a determined

(8) This was later abolished and a regular military salute was instituted;
(9) Literally, to your health.

invader could beach along the entire Eastern tip of the island. An attacking force striking this area would encounter difficulty in enlarging its beachhead, since high hills dominate the beaches. An attacking force would be limited as to maneuver area because the Stoncica area is actually a peninsula jutting out to the East.

3. The area around Milna on the Southeastern end of the island offers 1000 yards of fair beach; however, the abruptly rising ridges would make this area difficult to secure.

4. Rukavac on the Southern side of the island has 2000 yards of excellent sand beach, and, in addition, has a fair harbor. In this harbor are port facilities for small boats.

5. Zuzica to the west of Rukavac has a fair beach, but it is so small that a large ship could not get into shore to land heavy vehicles or tanks for an attacker.

6. Komiza harbor, on the Western tip of Vis, is an excellent harbor. Port facilities of limited capacity exist, and wharfs or docks will accommodate a large ship. Landing craft and landing ships can nose up to any portion of the harbor to discharge men and equipment. Ships the size of LST's can beach to the south of Komiza to land vehicles.

From a defensive point of view, the hills surrounding Komiza offer good cover and concealment, and troops armed with automatic weapons and mortars could deliver accurate fire on any part of the harbor.

7. Visoka Glava on the North side of the island offers a fair landing area, but the beach is too narrow to support a large scale attack. Again, there are the ever-present high hills which dominate the landing area.

8. The area West of Svati Juraj has a mile of good beach with no obstructions. Since this beach is only a mile from Vis-town, it presented almost immediate success to an assault force.

As it can be seen from the previous discussion, many good beaches existed; however, most of them were of limited size, and all of them had high hills

which an assault force would have to capture before success could be achieved.

After due consideration, it was believed that the Germans would assault at Svati Juraj, Rukavac, or at Milna, or at any combination of these three beaches.

More British and Americans came to the island, and at the end of January 1944, the Allied forces on Vis numbered 125 Americans and 600 British, including an antiaircraft unit with twelve 40-mm AA guns, and 5000 Partisans. After this date, the Partisans streamed into Vis from the German-held islands and from Italy to swell the garrison on the island.

With the British and Americans came trucks and gasoline, mines, barbed wire, demolitions, artillery pieces, mortars, and much other vital equipment with which to set up an adequate defense on Vis.

All beaches were mined. Gasoline drums filled with a mixture of gas and oil were placed on explosive charges a few yards from the beaches, so they could be exploded and set afire if the Germans attempted a landing. Barbed wire entanglements were erected at the beach exits, and machine guns and automatic rifles were sited to cover the obstacles. Artillery and mortars were assigned sectors of fire and all beaches were registered from primary, alternate, and supplementary positions. Antiaircraft artillery was sited to cover the entire island.

Antiairborne measures included placing reserve troops, Partisans for the most part since they were more numerous, in positions centrally located to cover the area adjacent to Vino Polje which was the logical parachute drop zone. As a defense against glider troops, 55-gallon oil drums were filled with rocks and were piled three or four high, thus extending about ten or twelve feet into the air.

Since Vis was the only Dalmatian island of any size in Allied hands, it was imperative that it be held at all costs. Prior to the capture of the other Dalmatian islands by the Germans, Partisan boats used them to trans-load supplies to smaller craft, then send these smaller craft through the

German blockade to the Yugoslav Mainland where these supplies were urgently needed. The Germans also realized the importance of Vis. From a strategic and tactical viewpoint, it was imperative that they capture Vis. The Germans were in a good position to capture the island, for 19 German divisions were in Yugoslavia, with only a few actually engaged in combat with the Partisans.

SUPPORTING ARMS AND SERVICES

In the early part of February 1944, naval units of the American and British Navies were sent to Vis to destroy any German invasion before it could reach the beaches of Vis. Three MTB's (10) and three MGB's (11) were sent to Vis. These ships were docked at Komiza. One American Air Rescue Boat (12) came to Vis and was docked at Vis-town. In Manfredonia and Bari, Italy, two U.S. and two British destroyers were on call to the Vis garrison.

At Foggia, Italy, several squadrons of fighters and bombers were on call to the Vis garrison. In the event of an invasion, these planes could be overhead in an hour, since Foggia is only 100 air miles from Vis.

Radio stations were set up on Vis to contact Headquarters Force 133 (13), to contact aircraft which would operate in support of the Vis garrison, and to contact naval craft stationed at Vis, or those which might come from Italy.

In the space of a few weeks Vis was changed from a weak island base to a strong fortress capable of withstanding an assault by a large force. Instead of finding weak resistance, the Germans would first encounter British and American naval units, then would be subjected to air attack by our planes, and if they succeeded in breaching these forces, would have to assault well-organized beach defenses. At best, during the first night, they could make a small beachhead, possibly reaching the crests of the outer fringe of hills adjacent to the beach. (14) It was felt that on D plus 1, the concentrated

(10) Motor Torpedo Boats are slightly larger than U.S. PT boats, and mount four torpedo tubes; (11) Same hull as the MTB, but this craft mounts two 40-mm cannon, four 20-mm guns, and eight machine guns; (12) ARB's are about the same size as a PT, and mount 24 rockets and four 20-mm cannon; (13) Headquarters in Bari, Italy, for Allied forces operating in the Adriatic. This HQ was primarily British, but worked closely with OSS HQ in Bari; (14) It was believed that the assault would be made under cover of darkness.

force of Infantry, in conjunction with artillery, could at least contain the beachhead, while naval and air units would prevent the landings of additional troops.

OPERATIONS, GENERAL

In order to throw the Germans off balance, it was decided to conduct a series of raids against the German garrisons. By employing Partisan, British, and American troops, attacks would be made against isolated German installations. Operations such as assaults, feints, reconnaissance patrols, combat patrols, ambushes, artillery shoots, naval operations, and air strikes were to be carried out against the Germans.

The Partisans covered all of the islands with isolated detachments varying in strength from three to fifty men. The mission of these detachments was to secure information of the Germans, and to report promptly any military information they found. Usually the information came to Partisan HQ at Vis two or three days after it was obtained, for radio equipment was not available in large quantities. Normally, any information which was picked up on the islands, was dispatched by couriers who landed on the islands during the night, contacted the isolated Partisan detachment, and after securing any information awaiting them, sailed back to Vis. By the time the information reached American or British HQ the situation was often changed. It is not the intent of this monograph to discredit the Partisans and their efforts, for they did the best they could with the equipment with which they had to work.

All operations in which the British or Americans participated, had to be cleared through Partisan HQ at least 48 hours prior to departure from Vis, so that the Partisan detachment on the target island could be alerted. (15) This was also done to keep the British and American forces from taking too large a part in the operations in Yugoslavia. (16)

(15) a. To let the detachment know what was taking place, b. to be prepared to meet the unit on shore, c. to supply the unit with guides, if necessary; (16) For political reasons, the Partisan High Command did not want the Americans and British credited with a large share in the liberation of Yugoslavia. Political ties with Russia were close, and the Partisans did not want to become obligated to the U.S. and Britain.

THE FIRST OPERATION

On 8 February 1944, Lt Walter F. Rutkowski was sent to the island of Solta (see Map No. 2) to reconnoiter the German positions and to determine the strength of the garrison. With an escort of two Partisans and with two American soldiers, Lt Rutkowski departed from Vis. He sailed in a Partisan craft which was 40 feet long and which was capable of about 8 knots. With him he took an SCR 300, to enable him to promptly report any information he obtained.

Under cover of darkness, the group managed to reach Solta, and by 2400, 8 February, the craft was unloaded. As soon as the craft left for Vis, the group hid the extra rations among the rocks at the water's edge. Guided by the Partisans, the group went to a cave which was two hours distant by foot from the place at which the landing was made.

With the assistance of the Partisans, Lt Rutkowski made a complete reconnaissance of all German outposts which could be knocked out. After six days on the island, sharing K and C rations with the Partisans and getting in return cabbage soup, rice, and octopus, the daily reconnaissances finally yielded a remunerative target. On the seventh day, 15 February 1944, Lt Rutkowski returned to Vis with a complete report. All personnel had countless questions to ask the group, for they were the first to go on patrol on a German-held island.

At a staff meeting, Lt Rutkowski gave all of the information he had obtained during his patrol. As a target, he selected the town of Grohote, in the central part of the island of Solta. Approximately 125 Germans garrisoned the town, and their dispositions were accurately plotted on a sketch which gave the exact locations of the Command Post, the radio shack, and the buildings which were used to billet troops. The sketch included the number of Germans in each building and the locations of pillboxes.

These figures were gathered by counting the number of Germans who entered the buildings when darkness approached. One building could not be seen too well, and to determine the number of Germans in it, the patrol would

have to occupy an open position on the side of the hill. Rather than jeopardize the success of the mission, Lt Rutkowski turned to a Partisan who was a member of the island garrison, and asked if he knew the number of Germans billeted in the building. The Partisan stated that he did not know the strength, but that he would find it.

With that he called a boy of about 14 years to him, talked to him for a time, and when he finished, the boy walked away from him straight into the town. The lad went directly to the house in question, opened the door, and walked in. After a few seconds, he came out assisted by a German soldier who threw him out by the scruff of the neck. The boy came back and said there were 16 Germans in the house.

A force of 100 Americans, 100 Commandos, and 100 Partisans embarked for Vis on LCI's, and under cover of darkness sailed for Solta. An unobserved landing was made far from the German garrison. After a five hour cross-country march, the troops were in position at 0700.

A Polish officer with a loud speaker began talking to the Poles who had been impressed into the German Army and who were a part of the garrison. His attempts to induce the Poles to surrender was greeted by mortar and machine gun fire. When the firing subsided, a British officer who spoke German, told the Germans that they were completely surrounded and were greatly outnumbered, and that there was no chance for them to escape. This attempt was also answered by fire. At last, he told the Germans that a force of fighter-bombers would come over and bomb them, and after that, the Allied troops were coming in after them.

Twelve fighter-bombers flew over and dropped several live bombs and quite a few duds, in order to get the civilians out of the town. After most of the civilians left the town, the Germans were again contacted with the loudspeaker, and were told that a greater number of planes would come over if they did not lay down their weapons. The volume of fire which answered this speech was not as heavy as that which came after the two previous

broadcasts, but some of the German weapons fired at the invisible Allied troops. Looking at the situation from the German point of view, it must have been very demoralizing.

The second wave of fighter-bombers came over and dropped a heavy load of bombs. As the last bombs fell, the troops moved from their firing positions into the assault, for in most cases they were within 200 yards of the German positions. Making their way through the gaps in the wire, the troops succeeded in reaching the row of houses and pillboxes held by the Germans.

After a half-hour of fighting, those Germans who were not killed or wounded, surrendered. In this raid, one American was killed and three were wounded. The combined losses of the Partisan and Commando forces amounted to one killed and ten wounded. The surprise of the raid caught the Germans off balance, and when they were told they were surrounded by British, American, and Partisan forces, they lost all semblance of order and cohesion.

Those Germans who surrendered preferred to surrender to American or British forces, for they were afraid of what the Partisans would do to them. The Germans had killed many Partisans who had been taken prisoner, and the German soldiers were afraid of similar treatment at the hands of the Partisans.

Although the author has no personal knowledge of German prisoners being killed by the Partisans, rumors to that effect were common. In order to prevent possible mistreatment of American or British troops who might be captured, all Germans who were captured by American or British forces were taken to a PW cage located at Zena Glava and were guarded by British soldiers. This was done so that there would be no chance of mistreatment of these prisoners at the hands of the Partisans. Prisoners taken by British or American forces were handled according to the terms of the Geneva Convention. Many American soldiers expressed doubt that similar treatment would be received at the hands of the Germans in the event of capture.

RECONNAISSANCE MEASURES

Constant observation of the German garrisons was necessary to keep abreast of the changing situation. A screen of reconnaissance patrols was

placed on the islands not in Allied hands. These patrols usually consisted of an officer or NCO with four men. These patrols would infiltrate through the German lines at night, usually with the aid of a Partisan guide, and would observe the enemy positions. Through the use of a pre-arranged code, any information which was obtained was sent by radio to Vis. These patrols were usually equipped with SCR 300 radios.

As information was received by American HQ on Vis, it was quickly processed by Lt Carl E. Bathory, the S-2. After copies of all intelligence were placed in the files and on the Situation Map, copies were made for distribution to Partisan and British HQ. Upon receipt of information of vital importance, it was dispatched by courier, although usually information was sent through a message center operated by the British. Telephone communication existed on Vis, but this method of communication was considered not secure, and therefore was not used for important messages.

VIS DEFENSES

By the end of February, Vis was considered as an almost impregnable fortress, for much more equipment was brought in to bolster the defenses. 90-mm antiaircraft guns were emplaced to provide protection against German aircraft which flew daily high altitude reconnaissance missions, and to provide protection from the occasional bombings.

Meanwhile, all troops on the island were undergoing rigid mountain training and night training, not only from a defensive point of view, but from the offensive aspect as well, for it was realized from the few operations conducted, that most of them would be night operations.

On 20 February 1944, a group of 30 Air Corps engineers, a U.S. unit, arrived at Vis to carve a landing strip out of the level ground near Vino Polje (see Map No. 3). The antiairborne "Spargel" (17) was taken down and the bull dozers went to work rooting out the heavy grape vines and leveling the field.

(17) German for asparagus. It is a slang expression for poles or obstacles set up for antiairborne defensive measures.

After one week, a field 3000 feet long was made in the valley. Although this field could not be used to base bombers, it would take Spitfires or a similar size plane. Upon completion of the landing strip, eighteen Spitfires were based on the field during the day, and at night, since they would be vulnerable to night bombings, they were flown back to Italy. The value of these planes in offensive and defensive roles was great, for now air cover could be given to daylight operations. Daily air patrols soon forced the German Navy to ship only at night, for during daylight hours, their cargo vessels were easy prey for the Spitfires.

The primary purpose of the field was that it served as a landing ground for the Spitfires; however, it was extensively used by American bombers which were damaged on bombing missions over the Balkans. All pilots of the American 12th and 15th Air Forces were told that they could land at Vis if they could not return to bases in Italy. During the eight-month stay on the island, approximately 1200 American airmen were fed, quartered, and sent back to Italy to rejoin their units. Many were given medical care, and others, less fortunate, were buried in the Allied Cemetery on Vis.

OPERATION ON HVAR

On 22 February 1944, a new German unit arrived on the Island of Hvar (see Map No. 2). Capt Andy Rogers and five men were dispatched to the island to determine the type of unit, its strength, dispositions, and its mission.

Capt Rogers and his men were taken to Hvar by a Partisan craft, and were safely landed. Escorted by a guide, the group went to a cave hidden in the hills. Here Capt Rogers, through an interpreter, told the Partisan detachment commander what information he wanted. The Partisan commander stated that he had the information which was wanted, even to the point of knowing the routes the German patrols took.

A plan was made by Capt Rogers to ambush one of these four-man patrols on the outskirts of town, during hours of darkness. Capt Rogers and his men

made their way to a point from which the town could be seen, and made his reconnaissance. That night, the group started down the narrow road along which the patrol would pass, and when the crossroad which had been selected for the ambush was reached, Capt Rogers disposed his force.

The Germans, however, had changed the route of the patrol, and a Partisan who was left to guard the escape route, hurriedly approached Capt Rogers and told him that the patrol was coming toward the corner at which he had been stationed. Capt Rogers immediately gathered his group, and moving as silently as possible, went toward the crossroad which the Germans were approaching. As Capt Rogers and his men got to the corner, the Germans rounded it, meeting the Americans face to face. A close fire fight ensued, during which all of the Germans were killed or wounded. T/Sgt Zevitas was the only American wounded, and he had a flesh wound in his left thigh.

Capt Rogers picked up insignia of rank, unit insignia, a few papers, and some German weapons before he departed. In addition, the patrol dropped K-ration boxes, an American bayonet, and the wounded man's steel helmet, so that the Germans would know it was an American operation, thus reducing the likelihood of retaliation against the civilians in the town.

Carrying the wounded man as best they could, the party made its way to the hills, crossed them, and went to a cove in which a Partisan boat was waiting. Capt Rogers and his men made their escape only because he had the foresight to emplace a Browning Automatic Rifle in a position from which it could cover an exit to the main German billet in the town. When the firing began, the Germans poured out of the building. As they came out into the open, the BAR fired on them, accounting for at least ten or twelve. The remainder of the Germans contented themselves to firing out of the windows. After holding the Germans at bay for about ten minutes, the BAR team withdrew, and made their way to the waiting boat. As soon as the BAR team was aboard, the Partisan craft headed for Vis.

ALERT

On 22 February 1944, a special courier from Allied Headquarters on Vis arrived at American HQ with a document marked, "Most Secret". In essence, the document read as follows:

"Information from Force 133 indicates that Germans will attack Vis at 2200 tonight. Enemy force estimated at 10,000 men. All ranks will stand to (18) from 1800 tonight."

Group commanders were immediately called together for a conference at the Command Post, and the information which was received was passed on to the commanders. A detachment of 30 officers and men, under the command of Capt Leonard J. Prus, was to be left in the school to cover that portion of the harbor which the American forces were assigned to defend. The remainder of the unit was to move to the prepared defensive areas immediately behind the school, from which the unit could defend its assigned sector, or move to the assistance of units on the flanks.

Extra ammunition was issued and each soldier had his emergency pack with him. The emergency pack was a musette bag filled with a pair of socks, 1 K-ration, 1 D-ration, 4 grenades, extra ammunition, several pair of socks, and anything else the individual soldier wanted to carry.

While the land forces prepared for the expected assault, the Navy was also preparing. All the Naval craft on Vis, American, British, and Partisan, were sent out to patrol the waters adjacent to Vis. The four destroyers from Italy came over and patrolled the waters near the German-held islands to intercept German Naval units.

Air force units in Italy were alerted, and 8 British Beau-fighters were on constant patrol over the island. Those planes in Italy remained on the alert, awaiting orders to attack any German convoys which might attempt to land troops on Vis.

(18) British term for 100% alert.

At 1830, just as it became dark, all weapons on the island were test-fired. The firing continued for about five minutes, and it reassured all personnel to see the heavy volume of fire which was delivered from all of the weapons on the island.

No attack came on the night of 22-23 February. At 0600 23 February, the "stand down" was ordered by Island HQ. All the men except those necessary for guard and KP were allowed to sleep. Since the night of 23-24 February was also to be a dark night, it was expected that an attack would be made on that night. A calm sea was predicted, so conditions would be ideal for an attack.

At 1000 23 February, a force of 120 Flying Fortresses and Liberators flew over Vis. From Vis, the formations flew in different directions, for they were on their way to bomb targets at Sibenik, Split, and Dubrovnik, on the Yugoslav coast. All ports which were known to contain German Seibel Ferries or escort vessels were bombed.

These bombings evidently took their toll of enemy ships, for no attack was made on the night of 23-24 February. The garrison on Vis was kept on full alert, for agents and reconnaissance groups warned that 1800 Engineer Assault Troops were on Korcula. Information from OSS HQ in Bari was that many German ships were being moved from Greece and Albania, and were moving to the North. Agents in Yugoslavian port towns sent information that many boats were coming to the port towns from the South. All information that could be pieced together indicated that the Germans would attempt to take Vis, for in addition to being a supply base for the Yugoslavs, it was also an Allied Naval base for small craft. It also had enough troops on it to become a threat to the German flank.

At 2000 on 25 February, as the troops moved to the defensive areas, three great fires could be seen on Hvar. It was believed that these fires had been started by the Partisans to warn the Vis garrison of a coming assault. These fires were forest fires and later it was learned that they were started by the Germans to drive the Partisans out.

RETURN TO ITALY

On 28 February, a radio message was received from OSS HQ in Bari, to the effect that Unit A was to return to Italy. No explanation was given, so a message was sent to Bari requesting confirmation of the first. Confirmation was received and on 1 March 1944, the entire Unit departed from Vis. As the Unit entered the harbor at Manfredonia, it was greeted by the Commanding Officer of American guerilla troops in the Balkans, Lt Colonel Phillip G. Lovell, a veteran of World War I. He was astounded to learn that the entire unit had returned, for he wanted only the Greek-speaking group of the Unit to return to Italy to prepare for an operation in Greece. When Lt Colonel Lovell was shown the messages we had received, he found them completely changed from the form which he had written. The code clerks had completely changed the meaning of the message when they paraphrased it for transmission. The Unit was given a four-day rest in Italy, and again went back to Vis.

On 10 March 1944, a German News Agency dispatch was heard from Berlin. This communique stated that an Anglo-American Commando Force, 1500 strong, and commanded by a British General named Churchill, was installed on the island of Lissa (19). The communique continued, "The present task of these 1500 men is to make the island a secure supply base, and to guard the supplies for Tito which the Americans had deposited there. It must be expected that these men will also attempt to carry out raids at some points of the Dalmatian Coast, and on other islands". (20) The above report came from Berlin a month and a half after the Allies landed on Vis. The accuracy of the report indicates the effectiveness of the German intelligence system.

ARTILLERY SHOOT

On five occasions, American troops accompanied British artillery to German-held islands to protect the artillery from German infantry. The artillery was landed on enemy-held islands to shell installations and troops.

(19) The Italian name for Vis; (20) A-7.

One such artillery shoot occurred on the island of Brac (see Map No. 3). At 0800, just as the Germans were formed for breakfast, the artillery opened fire. Over 300 casualties were inflicted on a garrison of 800 men. The Partisans claimed that the losses were much higher than the figure given above; however, it is believed that they exaggerated the German losses, so that more operations of the same type would be carried out.

At 2000 on 28 March, three days after the above described operation, a force of 15 German planes came over and bombed the airstrip and Vis Harbor. Although the bombing was not accurate, some bombs fell on the HQ of 43 Marine Commando, which was located near the airstrip. Eight Commandos were killed in this raid. Of the bombs that fell in Vis-town, most fell into the water and exploded harmlessly. The few which landed in the town knocked down several houses, but did no military damage. Several civilians were killed in this raid.

It came to be the German habit to bomb Vis after any large-scale operation was conducted, therefore it became Standing Operating Procedure for all personnel to clear the billets for several nights after each operation, for the foxholes provided far more protection than the buildings of the town.

Another artillery shoot took place on Korcula (see Map No. 3). The target was a German garrison, but there were three batteries of artillery within counterbattery range of the point at which these guns were to be landed. A battalion of British artillery was to land, concentrations were planned to neutralize the German batteries, then fire was to shift to other targets.

One German battery which was on the Eastern tip of Hvar, was out of range to deliver effective counterbattery fire on the British guns; however, to make certain that the battery would not be moved to a position from which it could deliver effective counterbattery fire, a force of 30 Americans was sent to Hvar to block the road which the Germans would have to use for movement of their guns.

The British artillery and prime movers were loaded into LCM's, and other personnel were loaded into LCI's. LCA's were taken with the force; however, no troops were embarked on them on the movement from Vis.

The convoy left Vis at 2000 and sailed to a harbor on Scedro Island, which is South of Hvar (see Map No. 3). When the ~~convoy~~ ^{CRAFT} reached the harbor at Scedro, they were camouflaged, since German reconnaissance aviation was active in the area. Allied planes did not accompany the convoy, because secrecy was essential.

When night fell, the 30 Americans with their equipment loaded into two LCA's. The group carried two 60-mm mortars, two 2.36" rocket launchers, and four light machine guns. A British naval officer who knew the cove to which we were to go, joined the group and the two LCA's started for Hvar.

Lt Michael J. Kopenits and two NCO's had gone directly to the cove on Hvar the previous night. He was to select one of the several positions outlined to him from a map study.

Although one of the LCA's developed a leak because of the rough seas, both managed to enter a cove which was believed to be the one called for in the plan. A landing was made at 0200 without giving a recognition signal. As the author stepped from the LCA to the dark shore, he was stopped by three armed men who were in civilian clothes. One of the men said, "Stoj! Ko ide?" (21) After it was explained to the Partisans that they were talking to an American, they relaxed somewhat, although they were still somewhat apprehensive. When they were asked if Lt Kopenits was at that cove, they loosened up completely, for only now were they absolutely certain we were not Germans. One of the Partisans stated that he heard of the proposed operation, but also said that the officer was waiting at another cove, to which he would be glad to take us. The group sailed 1200 yards further to the East, and entered the proper cove, where Lt Kopenits was found.

By 0230, the group of Americans was on the shore and while the men remained at the beach, the author accompanied Lt Kopenits to a house which

(21) Halt! Who goes there?

served as a Partisan Command Post. There the position selected was shown on a map, and the recommendations of Lt Kopenits were accepted. By 0300 the group was marching toward the position selected, and by 0530, just as it was getting light, the group was in position. A patrol of ten men was sent forward to set up an outpost position, while the remainder of the group stayed in a covered position near the point selected for the road-block.

At 0700 the British artillery opened fire. They fired at all the targets in the area, and fired counterbattery against the German artillery within range. In spite of the fact that the German battery on Hvar could not fire against the British, no attempt was made to move the guns. The American unit remained astride the road on Hvar until 1000, then moved to the cove in which the LCA's were waiting, and boarded the craft.

At 1200 the group sailed to Scedro, where it was learned that the LCI's would not be available to take the group back to Vis. The crossing of the Adriatic was to be made on the LCA's. The sea was very rough, and by the time the LCA's were thirty minutes out of Scedro, all but a few men were seasick. The 30-mile crossing was made in six hours, because the rough seas slowed the craft to about five knots.

NAVAL SUPREMACY ACHIEVED

During April, more British and American naval craft arrived at Vis, and the MGB's and MTB's went after the German ships which sailed in the Dalmatian waters. Slowly the Germans had their naval superiority taken from them, and the initiative passed to the Allies. Through the combined action of the Air Arm and the Navy, the Germans were forced to do all of their shipping at night.

AMBUSH OF GERMAN INSPECTION TEAM

On 10 April 1944, a group of German staff officers were to conduct an inspection of the German-held islands in Dalmatia. On 11 April, Lt Ben C. Dobrski and eight men were sent to Korcula, where the Germans were inspecting installations, in order to kill or capture the inspecting party. It was

known that only two large garrisons existed on the island, therefore it was assumed that the Germans would travel on the road between them.

Upon arrival at the point selected, Lt Dobrski disposed his group astride the road. Partisan information indicated that the inspection team was to come along the road on that day, therefore the group remained alert. The information which the Partisans had obtained was correct, for it wasn't long before the German Colonel and Major came along in a Volkswagen, escorted by a motorcycle in front and a motorcycle in rear. When the Germans drew near, the Americans opened fire. The first bursts from the Thompson sub-machine guns stopped all of the vehicles. A few more bursts were fired into the vehicles to take the fight out of any Germans who might not have been wounded.

As Lt Dobrski arose and started running toward the vehicles, a German soldier picked up a Schmeisser and fired a burst at the approaching officer. One of the rounds struck Lt Dobrski in the leg, shattering his thigh bone. Four of the soldiers picked up the wounded officer and carried him for half a mile into the hills. When a building was reached, a door was torn off, and it was used as a stretcher. The party then resumed the hard climb into the mountains. In order to pass through some of the narrow paths, the door had to be carried above the heads of the soldiers, and on two occasions, when a soldier lost his footing, Lt Dobrski fell off the makeshift stretcher. After marching for two hours, the group stopped to dress the wound and applied what first aid it could. A splint was placed on the officer's leg. Morphine was given as required, and sulfa powder was applied directly to the wound.

Because of a heavy sea, a ship could not be sent to Korcula to pick up the men. Three days later, an American Air Rescue Boat managed to reach the island, in spite of the heavy sea. Lt Dobrski was evacuated directly to Bari, where he was put into a waiting ambulance and taken to the hospital.

For the above-described operation, Lt Dobrski was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, and in addition was awarded the British Military Cross.

A TYPICAL RECONNAISSANCE PATROL

Reconnaissance patrols were constantly on the islands to observe German positions and to report any changes by means of radio. Although each patrol varied somewhat, they all followed much the same pattern. The author with S/Sgt Pastilock, S/Sgt Murphy, and Corp Pounovich departed from Vis for the island of Solta. This patrol was to obtain information relative to enemy dispositions and strength in preparation for an attack against them.

The patrol left Vis at 2030 on 27 April 1944 aboard a small Partisan craft. At 2330, after an uneventful crossing, the island of Solta was sighted. By 2400, the supplies and equipment were ashore. After hiding those supplies which were not immediately necessary, the patrol was marched to a cave. Carrying an SCR 300 and food enough for two days, the march was made up a steep, rocky slope, which extended from the shoreline to a height of 800 feet. When the top of the cliff was reached, the march was made along the crest, which made walking easier. The cave was reached at 0230.

At 0700 the following morning, the entire group, composed of four Americans and five Partisans, a conference was held with the Partisans, who outlined the general situation to the author. There were approximately 480 Germans on the island, and all the civilians had been taken to the Yugoslav mainland to deprive the Partisans of a source of information. The first day was spent reconnoitering the island and learning the routes of patrols used by the Germans. Radio contact was made with Vis at 1200.

At 0900 the second day, radio contact was made with Vis to transmit all information of importance. During this transmission, a Partisan came to the radio and stated that a German patrol of 18 men was 800 yards from the position. Within several minutes, a Partisan guard from the other side of the position came up and stated that a patrol of 12 men was 400 yards from his post, and that it was still approaching his position. At the same time, two ME 109's came over our position, turned around, and came over again.

Believing that the Germans had taken a fix on our position through the use of direction finders, two Partisans were sent to the west flank to observe

the 18-man patrol, while the remainder of the party moved to the east flank where the other patrol was 200 yards from our position.

All men were warned not to fire until the author fired, and then were sent to positions which dominated all approaches to the area in which we were hidden. The radio was buried and rations were hidden under some rocks.

The Germans were carrying their weapons slung, and seemed too nonchalant to be looking for Partisans. The patrol approached to within 75 yards of the thicket in which we were hidden, then halted, unslung arms, and sat down for a smoke. After a few minutes, they arose and went in the direction from which they came. The patrol on the west flank also turned away. Since there were 480 Germans on the island, reinforced with a battery of artillery, no action could be taken against the patrols.

After reconnoitering for two more days, making plans for the proposed attack on the Solta garrison, the group was picked up and taken back to Vis. After returning to the Island of Vis, the plan was laid before the Partisans, but they felt that it would be better if their troops made the attack, therefore this attack was not made by American troops as was initially planned.

U.S. NAVAL PERSONNEL ON VIS

On 4 May 1944 five American Air Rescue Boats came to Vis. Along with these craft came 75 Marine Raiders and Navy Beach Jumpers. Although this personnel was trained in assault operations, it was not used to a great extent in ground combat. This group was invaluable because of the special equipment with which it was equipped. Recorders, loudspeakers, printing presses for propaganda leaflets, and other special equipment were used to good advantage. The propaganda leaflets were taken to German-held islands and were placed on main roads where they were certain to be found by the Germans.

GENERAL SITUATION

During May and June, the unit was sent to Italy in groups of from 10 to 20 men, for the purpose of taking a parachute training course at the British Parachute School at Brindisi. During these months, activity was limited to

several operations in which American troops were taken aboard naval craft to act as boarding parties, looking for German ships to capture or destroy.

The Germans bombed Vis several times, but these bombings never did much damage. The largest of these raids was made by 30 planes which bombed Vis on 11 May 1944. The raid lasted from 0005 until 0045. During the height of the raid, no military installation was hit; however at the end of the raid, a gasoline storage area was hit, which destroyed 1500 gallons of gas.

Small scale land operations were also being conducted by the Commandos and the Partisans, and as a result of the total effect of all these Allied operations, the Germans seldom ventured out after dark, and during the day patrolled with strong patrols. The harassing effect of the Allied raids had placed the enemy on the defensive, and had lowered his morale.

GERMAN SITUATION

After several months of operations of the type described above, the Germans began to concentrate their forces from isolated posts on the Dalmatian Islands to stronger positions, strategically located, so that they could better protect their shipping lanes.

Because of Partisan activity on the Yugoslav Mainland, roads were almost impassable. Bridges were blown out, and railroads were destroyed. Partisan forces, which continually harassed German transportation, brought traffic to almost a complete standstill. In order to maintain their forces in Albania, Greece, and Southern Yugoslavia, the Germans were forced to rely on ships to transport men and materiel to those areas.

BRAC OPERATION

Shortly after D-Day in France, a force of 5000 Partisans, Commandos, and Americans conducted an operation on the Island of Brac. This operation lasted for one week. The Germans, thinking this move was the preliminary step to an Allied invasion of Yugoslavia, withdrew three divisions from the Russian front and one from the Italian front, and moved them toward the Yugoslav coast opposite the Island of Brac. As these troops were assembling on the Mainland of Yugoslavia, the Allied forces sailed from Brac and returned to Vis. This

operation also served to take pressure off the Yugoslav forces which were heavily engaged with the Germans. In one of the German offensives against Partisan forces, Marshall Tito narrowly escaped capture. An Allied plane was flown to the Mainland, picked up Marshall Tito, and flew him to Vis, where he remained until October when the Germans began withdrawing their forces from Yugoslavia.

PELJESAC PENINSULA OPERATION

Because of American and British naval action, and because of Allied aircraft, all German shipping began to move only at night, close to the shore line. These ships travelled at slow speed, and if a ship was heard to seaward, they immediately turned into a cove and hugged the shore line. In this manner, they could not be detected by radar, nor could they be seen against the land mass.

On 18 June 1944, the author was called to Vis HQ and upon arrival there, it was found that the task of driving these German ships away from the shore was given to the Americans. The mission was to be accomplished through the use of a land force.

Upon receipt of the order, Lt Carl Bathory, the S-2, and Capt Alex W. Keer, the S-3, were contacted to assist in the planning for the operation. Lt Bathory gave all the information he had on German shipping routes and on troop dispositions. After deciding to conduct the operation on Peljesac Peninsula, the author, the S-2, and the S-3 proceeded with the preparation of the plan.

In general, the plan was to take a force of 34 Americans who were to carry two 2.36" rocket launchers, two heavy machine guns, two Browning Automatic Rifles, twelve submachine guns, and ten M1 rifles. In addition, six British soldiers from the Reserve Support Regiment (22) were to man a 75-mm pack howitzer. All of these weapons were to be set up in a cove on

(22) A special British unit equipped with artillery, mortars, and machine guns, which was used to support Commando operations.

the shipping lane adjacent to the Peninsula, and were to fire at any worthwhile target which might appear.

To be certain all personnel who were to participate in the operation knew exactly what they were to do, they were taken to a cove on Vis which approximated the one from which the operation was to be conducted, and were thoroughly briefed.

Lt Kopenits was selected to go to Peljesac with Capt Keer to determine if the cove selected by map study would be satisfactory. After two days they returned, and stated that the cove would be satisfactory, then in general terms described it.

At 1700 22 June, the group left Komiza harbor aboard two Air Rescue Boats. As escort there were four MGB's, three MTB's, and two other ARB's. The group sailed to Lagosta Island, arriving there at 1930. To be certain the ships would not be seen by the Germans, the convoy remained at Lagosta until 2100, then departed for the Peljesac Peninsula. (See Map No. 4.)

The cove on Peljesac was reached at 2330 and the escort craft sailed to the East to mislead the Germans. At that time two pneumatic rubber boats were inflated, and the group shuttled to shore. By 0030 23 June, the entire group was ashore. The men moved to prearranged places and took what cover they could find among the rocks on the shore.

The pack howitzer was placed at the center of the cove, and the machine guns, BAR's, and 2.36" rocket launchers were placed on the points of the cove. Riflemen and submachine gunners took their posts covering the automatic weapons. Along with the equipment mentioned above, a captured German searchlight was taken to the Peninsula. Three telephones were brought along for communication; however, one of them was smashed during the unloading. (See Map No. 4.)

As soon as everyone knew his position, the order was given to assemble at the center of the cove to set up a perimeter defense which would be maintained during daylight. At 0330 three men were sent 1000 yards to the East

with a field telephone in order to alert the unit in the event German ships approached.

The rations, water, boats, and ammunition were hidden and the 75-mm howitzer was assembled. (See Map No. 4.) At 0350, a German convoy slipped past our positions, but it could not be engaged. At 0400 it began to rain and this rain continued during the entire operation.

The entire day of 23 June was spent in the security of the brush near the cove, so that German patrols would not see any of the party. Security detachments were sent out to prevent surprise attack against the assembly position.

At 2000, the troops were sent to their firing positions. As the last men were approaching their positions, a small German craft came by within 100 yards of shore. This craft was too small to fire at and since the position was well camouflaged, the craft was allowed to proceed. Five minutes after the craft passed, a messenger came to the CP with a message from Lt Bentham. In essence the message read: "One of my men was relieving himself in an open area when the German boat came by. He is sure he was seen by one of the Krauts."

If the Germans aboard the craft had seen us, we could expect an attack by a large force the next morning. There was still plenty of time to call the boats which were waiting on Lagosta for the signal to pick us up. However, if the group departed Peljesac, it would do so without accomplishing its mission. The decision was made to remain.

On 24 June all men were assembled, and a strong perimeter defense was set up at the cove to meet any German attack which might develop. No German attack was made, therefore, it was assumed that the Germans on the craft did not see the soldier.

At 2030 the men were sent to their positions on the shore to wait any German ships which might pass that way. Weapons were protected from the heavy downpour by covering them with blankets and shelterhalves. Ammunition was kept close to the guns and was kept dry. The camouflage was stripped from in front of the howitzer, and the group was ready for action.

At 2240, 24 June, the telephone rang and the soldier on the East flank said he heard motors. Finally, he stated that some boats were in front of him going toward our positions. He estimated their speed as 5 miles per hour, and stated they were close to shore, with four boats in column.

The personnel at the cove were alerted, the 75 was loaded, and everyone waited tensely for the ships. It had been planned that the 75 would fire at the second ship, leaving the first ship in line for the guns on that flank, while the third would be fired at by the guns on the other flank. The signal to open fire was the firing of the 75.

At 2250, the sound of motors grew louder, and finally the nose of a ship was seen dimly as it appeared from behind the edge of the cove. The flashes of lightning made it evident that the boat was an E-Boat. The British sergeant on the 75 asked if he should fire, but he was told to track the boat, keeping the sights at the center of the ship. The E-Boat travelled at five knots, therefore was easy to track. As soon as the sergeant announced that he was out of traverse, he was told to fire. A direct hit amidships blew the boat half way out of the water. The searchlight, manned by Lt Phillips, a British officer in charge of the artillery piece, was turned on to illuminate the cove. All the men began firing, and the troops had little difficulty picking off the Germans as they ran to their guns. After a few seconds, the German guns opened fire, but they were silenced before they fired for two minutes. The E-Boat came so close to the right shoulder of the cove, that hand grenades were thrown on the deck.

Meanwhile, the second ship, a small cargo boat, was taken under fire by the 2.36" rocket launcher, the machine gun, and the BAR on the left flank. The Bazooka, manned by Corp Fornowski, obtained two hits on the ship. As the second ship entered the center of the cove, a round from the 75 set it afire. The fire of most of the small arms was then directed at it. The fire spread quickly to all parts of the ship.

The third ship in line was another E-Boat, and it was hit by three rounds from a Bazooka as it turned to the open sea and picked up speed. A

small blaze was started on the deck of this boat. As this boat fled to the open sea, a round from the 75 was fired at it, but this round missed. The guns of this ship sprayed our positions as it headed toward the open sea.

The fourth ship in line turned toward the open sea, and it only came under the fire of small arms, therefore no appreciable damage could have been caused. It did not fire at our positions.

The burning cargo vessel was loaded with ammunition and pyrotechnics, and when the flames reached the hold, rockets, tracers, and exploding ammunition burst out of it filling the sky with streamers of all colors.

Radio contact was made at 2300 with the ships which were awaiting our signal at Lagosta. These ships started for our positions immediately; however, they would not reach our positions until 0130, 25 June.

At 2330, the order was given for all personnel to assemble at the center of the cove. By 2345, all personnel were at the center of the cove, along with two prisoners who were captured as they swam ashore.

Motors were heard at 2400, and as all personnel assumed the prone position, two E-Boats came by slowly, about 75 yards from shore. No firing could be done against these boats since the men were out of position. They proceeded past the position and did nothing to molest our troops.

The rubber boats were taken to the shore and were inflated. The 75 was disassembled, and was placed into the rubber boats, ready to be loaded onto the boats which came to pick us up. At 0130, two ships were seen a short distance out to sea, directly in front of our position. Though these ships were not ARB's, it was plain that they were not E-Boats. Contact was made by radio, and it was found that the ships were Sub-chasers which had been substituted for the ARB's.

A light signal was given to the ships to guide them into the cove, and after several trips with the rubber boats, the group was off the Peninsula, along with all of the supplies. A last minute check was made to make certain no one was left on land, then the craft sailed toward Lagosta. When the Commanding Officer of the Sub-chasers heard there were E-Boats in the area,

he alerted his radar operator to watch for signs of ships on the radar screen.

By 0400, the two craft reached Lagosta, and they remained there until daylight. When daylight came, the craft sailed for Vis, arriving there at 1015, 25 June. The prisoners were sent to the PW cage at Zena Glava, and a phone call was made to RAF at the airfield. Soon three Spitfires were on their way to the target area to reconnoiter the area. Two E-Boats were found beached near Trstenik on the Peljesac Peninsula, but several 500-pound bombs made certain that these ships would never float again.

A letter was received from Brigadier G.M.O. Davies, commanding Land Forces, Adriatic, commending all who participated in the operation.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Following this operation, a few minor engagements developed, but no large scale or outstanding operations took place, principally because the Partisans would not permit Americans or British to operate as freely as they did before. Although the Partisan High Command was delighted at the early successes of British and American units, now, as the Russians approached Yugoslavia, a definite change in their policy was evident.

The Germans had fallen back from the islands, and attempts to place American and British troops on the Mainland resulted in politely worded, but positive rebuffs from the Partisan High Command. Obstructions of all kinds hampered American and British troops. After many requests, a small party was allowed to go to Yugoslavia by boat, but as the group approached the shore, it was fired upon by a German shore patrol, and as it was evacuating to Vis, a German patrol boat fired at them.

Another group was to parachute into Yugoslavia to contact Partisan forces and assist in dropping supplies to them for operations against the retreating Germans. Lt Ward and 16 men parachuted into Yugoslavia, but were met with coldness by the Partisans. His messages indicated that he was not allowed to perform any type of mission. Orders were sent to Lt Ward from Bari to make his way through the German lines, and to return to Italy.

At length, seeing no alternative, a request was made to Area HQ in Bari to evacuate the Unit from Vis. Lt Colonel Lovell, the Commanding Officer, arrived at Vis several days later, and after understanding the situation, ordered the Unit back to Vis.

On 6 September 1944, the Unit returned to Italy. The military chapter in Yugoslavia was completed; now it remained for diplomats to arrange the concluding chapter.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

After reading this report, those officers whose experience has been with Infantry units in combat, will believe that the operations described herein could have been more numerous or more aggressive. It must be remembered that operations were being conducted against an enemy vastly superior in strength and in equipment. With this in mind, it is the belief of the author that the selection of operations and the frequency thereof served the purpose for which the Unit was sent to Yugoslavia.

The original mission of the unit was the defense of Vis Island; however, when the Island became secure, the mission was changed to that of keeping as many German troops as possible in the Balkans to decrease the German strength on other fronts. Although this mission was accomplished to some degree, it would have been more effective to bring in a unit such as a Regimental Combat Team for a short period of time. Through the use of a striking force of this size, the Germans would have been forced to place more troops on the Dalmatian Islands for their defense, or would have been forced to withdraw to the mainland.

Operations were hampered due to the restrictions imposed by the Partisan High Command. As was mentioned in the monograph, all operations had to be cleared through the Partisan HQ. If Partisan HQ felt that Partisan troops could perform the mission as outlined to them, they would prevent British or American troops from participating, and would send some of their own troops to conduct the operation - usually after the pattern outlined to them.

Concerning those operations conducted by the Americans, it is believed that a good account was given.

Comparative losses of American forces and Germans during the period which this monograph covers are as follows:

	<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>	<u>Captured</u>
Americans	2	18	0
Germans	50 (app)	150 (app)	15

German losses include those actually counted (or estimated) on operations conducted by Americans.

LESSONS

1. Surprise is essential for the conduct of successful guerilla operations.
2. Superior enemy forces can be forced to the defensive by a planned line of action, using all available troops and material at decisive points.
3. The harassing effect of small scale attacks, destruction of signal communication, and incursions on the enemy's lines of communication destroy enemy morale.
4. Special arms, equipment, and methods of operation are of great assistance in conducting Partisan warfare.
5. Raiding parties must carry enough supplies and equipment for the duration of the operation.
6. Enemy superiority in aircraft, artillery, and infantry can be neutralized by passive defensive measures, by operating at night, and by a thorough knowledge of enemy dispositions and routes of communication.
7. The knowledge of enemy patrol routes permits movement of troops with a greater degree of freedom and safety.
8. Since the Germans were tied to their established supply system, ^{they} ~~he~~ especially vulnerable if these supply lines ~~was~~ ^{were} destroyed.
9. The use of varied methods of combat misled the enemy and prevent him from developing a defense against you.

10. The doctrine outlined in Section XI, FM 100-5, is sound and can be applied to guerilla tactics.

11. An aggressive and imaginative leader can keep the enemy guessing by varied and unusual tactics.