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SOE operations in Albania during the Second World War

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Abstract. After Mussolini entered World War II on the side of Hitler, the British sent a colonel into Albania in April 1941 to help the resistance, but he was soon captured. It would not be until April 16, 1943, that two more SOE officers, Lt. Col. Neil McLean and Captain David Smiley, parachuted into northern Greece and crossed the border. Others would follow, including a former lieutenant in the Spanish Foreign Legion, Peter Kemp; Himalayan explorer Bill Tillman; and Reginald Hibbert, whose view of events in Albania in the years to come would put him bitterly at odds with his fellow SOE officers. SOE operations were hampered by woeful British ignorance about Albania. London had only a lower-level diplomatic presence there before the Italian occupation, and the main source of information had been an elderly Englishwoman who had lived there for 20 years. This paper told the story of SOE operations in Albania.

Keywords. SOE, Albania, guerrillas, David Smiley

1 Guerilla War in Albania

After Mussolini entered World War II on the German side, the SOE sent a colonel to Albania in April 1941 to help the resistance, but he was soon captured. Two other SOE officers, Colonel Neil McLean and Captain David Smiley, were parachuted in April 16, 1943, into northern Greece and crossed the border.

Others will follow, including a former lieutenant in the Spanish Foreign Legion, Peter Kemp; Himalayan explorer Bill Tillman; and Reginald Hibbert, whose vision for events in Albania in the years to come will enter in conflict with his SOE colleagues. The first part of the mission was to get to Albania. "The next phase - contacting the Albanian guerrillas and supporting them in the fight against the Italians and Germans - was not so easy." [14]

Britain had only a weak diplomatic presence there before the Italian occupation, and the main source of information was an older English woman who had lived there for 20 years. Worse, the language was one of the oldest, unknown and most difficult in Europe. "SOE very much dependent on interpreters," wrote Peter Kemp. During a mission in the capital, Tirana, Kemp's comrade in the SOE, pulled out a handkerchief to blow his nose, and the Albanian leaders disappeared from here. The behavior and ability of the mission to navigate the tunnels of Albanian politics were not supported by the extremely conservative position of the majority of its members. After the war, Neil McLean became a Conservative MP, while Peter Kemp was one of the few Englishmen to fight for Franco in Spain during the Civil War. In September 1942, the Albanian resistance joined in an LNC, the National Liberation Council, but the leadership group had more in mind than the expulsion of the Italians. The Albanian Communist

Party was secretly established in Tirana in November 1941. Secretary-General Enver Hoxha studied in Paris and owned a tobacco shop unsuitable for the Marxist. Military Commander Mehmet Shehu fought in Spain - with the Republican loyalists. [15]

The British had to parachute their weapons, for the opposition they took part in attacks on the Italians and helped the communists to organize a guerrilla brigade. The surrender of Italy in July 1943 worsened their situation in Albania. The Germans needed Albania as the main source of chromium and moved two divisions there. Then the fragile cohesion of the LNC disintegrated permanently, and the Republicans formed Balli Kombetar (BK, National Front), while Major Abas Kupa, the most popular loyalist leader aided by Smiley and Kemp, sought to restore the unpopular King Zog. The SOE commanders saw Hoxha's supporters as "the best solution out of a sum of very bad solutions" and allocated most of their resources to them. Smiley never mentioned Reginald Hibbert's name in his report and complained bitterly that British liaison officers had repeatedly told them that Kupa, working with the Germans, was softening these lies and reporting them. " Political disputes soon had an impact on fighting with the Germans. Smiley and BK's men ambushed the communist partisans and tried to confuse them. Smiley said: "The aim was to prevent the Kombetar ambush, which in the eyes of the SOE would have given credit to the loyalists." 14] But when McLean, Smiley and Kemp prepared together with the Communists to attack a large German column, Mehmet Shehu canceled the attack.

Smiley wrote that he attributed this failure to cowardice. However, to do Shehu justice, he was a brave man, and at that time he did not know that Shehu had been instructed not to fight the Germans. and with the Italians, but to keep the brigade ready to fight their political opponents.

In November 1943, McLean and Smiley were taken on a patrol boat from Albania to hold a conference in Cairo, while a new mission led by General Edmund Davies was parachuted to help guerrilla groups. Davies had a rude reception from the Albanian communist-style guerrilla resistance when he first met Hoxha. His situation worsened when his constant call to unite all communist and loyalist resistance groups and to be disciplined to attack the Germans went unanswered. I felt we could get the country out of the deadlock with two British troop brigades acting as a guerrilla or half a dozen command units, "Davies complained later. Instead, he was on the defensive when thousands of BK supporters allied with SS Waffen started to fight the Communists. Abas Kupa sought unsuccessfully to a cease-fire with the Germans for help in his fight against Hoxha, and counter-insurgency operations forced Davies and resistance to retreat into the mountains on a harsh winter. On the morning of January 8, 1944, Davies and his mission were attacked by renegade BK fighters. Davies was wounded and taken into custody by two other officers, one of whom went to Colditz High-Security Prison. Chief of Mission Colonel Arthur Nicholls and Captain Alan Hare fled to the mountains, but Nicholls died of cancer and burns, Albania's only SOE death, while Hare lost a few toes before fleeing to the south. On this occasion, sporadic fights were reported between communist guerilla and Germans and collaborationist forces in Valona, Berat and Tepelene areas. [11]. A British report from 18.1.1944 noticed that of various guerilla forces left or wrights wing were more interested in the internal fight than in the fight against German. [12]

Peter Kemp was also on the run. He was sent to the Albanian-majority province of Kosovo to organize Muslim separatists, but was betrayed. He never found the identity of his traitor and was forced to flee to Macedonia.

Kemp crossed the border and flew away. In April 1944, McLean and Smiley returned to Albania with Major Julian Amery, the son of a member of the Churchill cabinet and a future right-wing parliamentarian. They worked with Kupa to launch a series of attacks on the

Germans units in north, hoping to bring more weapons from the SOE, but only one truck entered. [14]

On 12th May 1943, SOE took in discussion memorandum YCD/1207 of the on the subject of British policy towards the Russian defectors in the Balkans. S.OE is considering taking up the question of the general strengthening of British attitude with the foreign secretary, but that it is unlikely that he will take steps before C.D and D/H return.

SOE felt that Great Britain should adopt a much stronger attitude in replying to the various complaint and attacks which the Russians have made about British attitude.

SOE felt that shortly it would also be desirable British FO to go even further than this and take a page out of the Russians' book. SOE would, in feet, not only take a firm attitude in answering them but adopt a more offensive attitude towards them. There were very considerable bodies of Russian nationals at that moment fighting alongside the Germans in the Balkans against the guerilla movements. There were, for instance, Armenian troops in Albania. Russians in Greece and Yugoslavia, and Kalmuk also in Yugoslavia. SOE believed that in the whole of Europe there were something in the neighborhood of 300,000 Russian national fighting's alongside the Germans against resistance movements could we not take a very strong line with the Russians concerning these bodies, and said that if the Russians are incapable of controlling their nationals when once they have surrendered to the Germans, they should at least undertake a very strong propaganda campaign to persuade them to fight on the side of the guerilla forces and not against them.

It seems to SOE that the British had an admirable weapon available here and that it is a great pity not the use it. Further, by failing to do so Great Britain only lost reaped in Russian eyes. No doubt there were other ways in which SOE could take the offensive also, which would readily be suggested by the D/F section.[1]

SOE makes filets containing information about Albanian politicians For example: BERATI. Dhimitor

An Orthodox Christian from Korce. Aged probable about 50. Educated in Romania. An active Albanian patriot under the Turkish regime.

Held a post in the Albanian Foreign Office under Zog and was instrumental in the conclusion of commercial treaties with Greece and Yugoslavia. Minister of National Economy, 1935.

At the time of the Italian invasion, he was Albanian Minister in Rome but he did not handle the negotiations preceding the invasion, as these were entrusted to General Sereggi.

In 1942 he took over the direction of the Albanian commercial and agricultural Society "Shated". Under Kruja he became Minister of Popular Culture, and in April 1943 he was appointed member of the Albanian Representation to the Government at Rome.

- MICAGO, Dhioni

Graduate in law. Member of Albanian delegation to Third Balkan Conference at Bucharest 1932. Resident in Romania.

- ZOGRAFI, Vasile.

Delegate at Balkan Conference in 1932.

- BUTKA. Sefret.

Professor. Nationalist guerilla leader. January 1943. Guerilla-band of Sefret Butka and Jaup Dishnica now active in the Korca area. Also, a woman, Viti Shanini, with this band.

April 1943. The patriots commanded by Prof. Safet Butka, who formerly head of the French lycee at Korcha, destroyed an Italian detachment between Kroch and Kolonja, killing most of the Italians capturing the others. The same band set free the political prisoner in

Voskopoj, where they also seized a large number of arms and ammunition from the military stores.

A detachment of this band, led by Tase Blushi, fought with Italians at the village of Gjonomath between Voskopoj and Korcha, in which they killed Major Romeo, two lieutenants and two fascists civil. They afterward burned the military storehouses, barracks, and office at Gjonomath. Some of Butka's followers also liberated 12 political internees in the hospital at Korcha, killing 5 Italian sentries. Hysni Lebenica was the most active of all guerilla leaders in South Albania. Safet Butka was also prominent.[7]

2. Civil War in Albania

The approach has been received from one of the leaders of Balli Kombetar party who proposed to undertake resistance to Germans if they can garage geographical boundaries for independent Albania after the war? Whole question support of resistance groups in Albania at present under the support of resistance groups in Albania at present under discussion with the Foreign Office.

Albania; reply sent to Balli Kombetar leader's approach was that allied aid to his organization must be limited and dependent on its ceasing hostilities against partisans. Partisan activity increasing generally in the south-east road sabotage and Guerilla exploits reported from Dibber, Berat, Konispol [4]

On 15.2 1944 a very successful attack on Kampepenek chrome mines of partisans in which machinery cable conveyor and buildings destroyed. Zogist leader has undertaken to start operation in Prizen area. Shortly, German defensive in progress against partisans in Berat area. [10]

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On 24.3.1944 Albania partisans occupied Konispol taking German prisoners but appear to have lost it later. They are again operating east of Tirana. German units have been leaving Valona for the north. Valona now under martial law A.B.L.O considers there was a prospect of general civil war failing allied occupation of Albania on German withdrawal.

On 28.3.1944 were reported German action in Valona area which ended with the dispersal of local LNC partisans. First partisans brigade has moved into Peze area, south of Tirana. German reported to evacuate the coastal area of Cavaje, reports receive of formation of new national party at present called Tirana Group with Abas Kupi, Hehdi Frasherri and Fiori Dino as members. [6]

On 5.4.1944 In Albania 100 jaeger division withdrawn to Hungary. Only parts of 104 jaegers and 297 infantry divisions remain in Albania. Garrison in Korce area strengthened by Bulgars and Armenian mercenaries. Government forming 4 gendarmerie battalions to work against partisans and British in Dibber area. Fifth partisan brigade retook Borsh despite the severe lack of food and Clothing and hostility of Balkan.

Some supplies now reaching them, partisan's repelled attack south of Korce capturing 150 Armenians and booty. Germans evacuated civilians from Valona coastal area.

On 19.4. 1944 minor activities against Germans continue but later have been able to withdraw one division of Garrison Northwards. [2]

On 26.4 1944. some successful attacks. Minor actions in Tepelen area and bridge destroyed near Lake Malik. A new liaison mission recently in this country for briefing successfully infiltrated. [5]

On 28.4. 1944 one successful sortie minor actions in Tepelena area and bridge destroyed near Lake Mali. New Liaison's mission recently in this country for briefing successfully infiltrated. The approach has been received from one of the leaders of Balli Kombetar party who proposed to undertake resistance to Germans of they can garage geographical boundaries for independent Albania after the war? Whole question support of resistance groups in Albania at present under the support of resistance groups in Albania at present under discussion with the Foreign Office. [10]

On 11.5. 44. Albania. 14 successful attacks. SOE. in Korce reports LNC. control the majority of southern Albanian and was in a position to undertake major activates... Also prepared to hold the section of coast for 7 to 14 days and provide personnel to move stores if they can be shipped too. [6]

On 10.7. 1944 a reference of SOE request for Moscow broadcast urging contending factions avoid armed clashes. Foreign Office state that in their opinion this measure alone inadequate stops civil war. Furthermore, approach soviets unless His Majesty. Government willing makes a similar appeal. [1] B. fro, suggest the first aim is to promote reconciliation between Hopxa and Kopi where after they would reconsider and might recommend declaration by three allied nations and might

It is feared that this will be a lengthy procedure as soviets probably have little interest in Albania. [10]. "I went for two days and went through all the stages in preparation for the civil war". He broke up with McLean and Amery to contact other legal groups and had several close discussions with the Germans, the Communists, and even the British. [13]. Smiley had to hide in a partisan shelter and was then warned to leave a house, from which he fled five minutes before the enemy arrived. While driving uniformed partisans in a car, a German sentry slowed them down, but he did not look into the vehicle and passed. Smiley was walking down a side street, armed with his loyalists in uniform, when a single German man rode his bicycle behind them, going out and walking beside them for almost half an hour before moving on! "My companions thought this was a huge joke and Ramiz kept laughing," Smiley recalled. "I often wonder who the German thought we were; maybe he knew and was doing the only thing possible because we were all armed and could easily kill him".

The mission was evacuated at sea on the night of October 13-14, 1944. They sent a message to London asking them to take Abas Kupa, but a pro-communist SOE officer blocked them. When a second message came and was approved, Kupa ran away alone.

In November 1944, the Germans withdrew and Enver Hoxha had everything under control for a few weeks. "With very little British and American intervention, we could have saved Albania for the West," said Julian Amery. Reginald Hibbert did not agree to be closer to events: "In 1944 Albania was liberated by a revolutionary force, which brought Enver Hoxha to power". [14]

3. Operation Valuable: One Last Foray into Albania

The next moment when Neil McLean, David Smiley, Julian Amery and British Intelligence were involved in Albania, they planned to overthrow the communists. Between 1949 and 1954, about 200 trained exiles were parachuted into Operation Valuable to organize a revolt. With the exception of a few people who fled to Greece, most of the officers were killed and more than 1,000 members of their families were also executed in retaliation. Because he was involved in the early planning of Operation Valuable, McLean, Amery and Smiley accused double agent Kim Philby of failing the operation. [15]

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