Mr. Joyce
Rainer

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REPORT OF

ABBEVILLE

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Richard F. Rainer
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Report of Capt Richard F. Rainer

9 Aug 1944 to 14 Nov 1944

My mission, Abbeville, worked under the direction of the British Headquarters at Bari, Italy and was formed to furnish supplies to the Partisans of the area of Macedonia, bounded by the towns of Stip, Kacane, Caravo Selo, Strumica, and Radoviste, and to furnish information to both the British and American offices in Bari.

I first entered Yugoslavia, second in command of the mission headed by Major Scott Dickinson.

To briefly touch upon events leading up to the formation of my mission, I will tell of our arrival in Yugoslavia and our trip to Macedonian Headquarters. All of this will be in detail in the report given by Major Dickinson of his mission, Spike.

After being recruited in Cairo by Major Scott Dickinson the first of March 1944, we moved up to Bari, 7 April 1944. At Bari we expected to stay only a few days before taking off for our job in Macedonia.

We made our first attempt to enter the country 25 April 1944. This attempt failed due to the plane having to turn back before reaching the Pin Point because of bad weather. We turned back that night and arrived in Bari being greeted by a bit of anti-aircraft fire, as the pilot thought we were over Brindisi and came in unidentified. We made several more attempts to get in until the night of 23 June 1944. We jumped into the British Mission Burlesque, headed by Major Saunders. This was a bad night for all. Major Dickinson hurt his ankle, Sgt. Bizic, his leg, and radioman Kazánauskas, his back in a fall from the tree he landed in. I drifted several miles away from the drop zone and after four or five hours of wandering around the mountains found some Partisans, and later the British Mission. We jumped into Oruglica, which is about twenty miles southeast of Leskovac, in Serbia.

After being chased around the mountains by the Bulgarians, we made our way to Vueje, about ten miles south of Leskovac. Here we met General Tempo, of Marshal Tito's staff, who was just in from Italy, and on his way to Macedonian Headquarters. We moved on out with his party the afternoon of 17 July 1944. After a bit of difficulty, made our way across the Marava and on down to the Macedonian Headquarters, which was located in the mountains called Kozak, about 15 miles northeast of Kumanovo. We saw in the mountains south of Vranjc the remains of many houses that had been burned by the Bulgarians and heard tales of the Bulgarian slaughter of men, women, and children.

After a conference with General Apostolski, head of the Macedonian Partisans, it was decided that I form a mission and be ready to move out in the next seven days with a new Brigade then being formed. This was 23 July 1944. I radioed in for the necessary radio equipment, radio operator, and interpeter, and received word from Bari later that it would take some time to get the operator trained and ready to move on down with my new Partisan Brigade.

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Since the Partisans were very anxious to get this new Brigade, the Fourth, on down to its area to begin its operation and building up, Major Dickenson decided to give me his operator, radioman Kazanauskas, and radio equipment so that I could move on our the next morning. This was 8 August 1944. My interpeter was to be sent down by a patrol later when he came in, but for various reasons was never sent to me.

The mroning of the 9th of August my radio operator and I moved on out with the Fourth Brigade which numbered about 150 to 160 men. Also in the party were men for other brigades located on beyond our destination, the Plackovica mountains due west of Stip. There were about 250 total in our party headed by Commandant Bore, Commanding of the Fourth Brigade.

I had a Partisan assigned to me that spoke a little English. He had been in the States for a few years, fifteen or twenty years ago. I was also given three horses with a Partisan for each horse, after I assurred the Commandant that I could'nt carry my radio, two batteries, generator, gas and oil, and ourpersonal equipment on one horse as he wanted us to do. These men that were assigned to the horses did excellent work in getting everthing to our destination and on our pokrets around the mountains after we were operation in the Plackovica mountains. Had we had the type of Partisans we had seen assigned to missions in Serbia, I am sure that we would have had nothing, or at least nothing in working condition.

Our brigade was made up of three battalions, having about 55 men in each. The battalions were broken down into Chetas (companies) having only 15 to 20 men in each of these. All seemed to be a skeleton crew, organized for expansion, as they expected a large number of new men upon arrival in our new area.

The bunch all seemed in high spirits, no doubt due to the fact that they were heading toward new territory to start recruiting for a large organization.

We left the Macedonian Headquarters about 7:00 O'clock and marched along at a fast pace until late in the afternoon. We stopped then to try to get some food which none of us had since the day before. It took quite awhile to find places for everyone to eat, but finally got a little bread, cheese, and sour milk. We moved on out after a couple of hours at this place. We moved down into a valley as it began to get dark. This valley was only about fifty to a hundred yards wide so we had no sooner hit it than we were back in the mountains again and traveled on up into the mountains until about midnight. We had a little food after the usual moving around from house to house trying to find food. Serveral of the home owners would break into wails, telling me, without having to know the language, that they were short of food. We were given soon concoction of flour and water, heated, with grease spread over the top. It was very hard to swallow and not very pleasant tasting. It was decided that we stay over night and my party was comfortably settled in a hay barn for the night.

The next morning I was awakened by an old gent that knew a few words of English. He was quite over-joyed to see an American, since he had been to the States, for a short stay years ago. He wanted some American clothes which I was unable to give him..

We were nowin the mountains just north of Krwa Planka, and were, as I found out later, trying to get close to the road between Skpplje and Sofia, so that we could cross it in the early part of the night and be a good distance away when day light arrived, in case we happened to be discovered making the

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crossing.

On the night ofthe 11th of August we hit this Sofia - Skoplje highway and crossed it at a mad pace, or rather run, having to go down the road for about half a mile. We were on this road only about five minutes when we were discovered by the Bulgarian guards. Machine gun fire was thrown up and down the road so we hit the ditch. I, by chance, got separated from the column and found myself approaching the Bulgarians. I then did an fast about-face and after a short search was back in the column again. I found that they had hit straight up the mountain that was to our left. We scrambled up this steep incline amid firing, low harsh commands, and a lot of heavy breathing. From ten thirty on until about eight the next morning we were travelling at a fast pace and with only a very few minutes rest. Six hours of this was straight up the mountain. We were now in the Osogovska Planina and just over into Bulgaria. That night we had lost only one man who was badly wounded and killed himself with a grenade rather than being taken prisoner. As we traveled along that night we could see the electric lights of the Bulgarian town of Gyuechevo below. This was the second time I had seen electric lights since I had been in. The other time was when we were trying to cross the Marava Valley. After daylight our going was very rough and it amazed me that they could get loaded horses over such places that were very difficult for even walking. The horses would fall down every now and then and after a bit of pulling and tugging by a few Partisans, would be up and on their way again, having to move very slowly. We stopped in some woods that morning on a steep slope.

The afternoon of the twelfth we moved on down the mountain back in Macedonia, stopping in a little village for a bit of food, that was quite scarce as it appeared. We had the usual bread, sour milk, and a taste of cheese, and pulled out as soon as we had finished. Off again at a fast pace, making me wonder how much longer my horses were going to last. These people seem to have no sympathy at all for dumb animals and use them until they drop. Some times there can be no other way to treat them in emergencies, but so many times it is done with no reason. whatsoever. We kept going at a fast pace and were wading across the Bregalnica River by midnight, crossing both the river and the highway between Kocane and Carevo Selo that night getting well up into the mountains again by day light. We were close now to our destination the Plackovica mountains. We stopped in a little village to eat and get a few hours rest. In this village the brigade began its recruiting campaign with about an hour of songs and speeches. As a result of this we got about fifteen ragged male Macedonians, giving us now close to 175 men in the Brigade.

Our journey from this village on to the Plackovica was quite uneventful. This same day, 13 August we parted with the other Partisans that were going on South and spent that night in the village of Mitrocrnci.

On the morning of the 14th we started our climb up the Plackovica mountains. At about ten O'clock a Bulgarian outfit was sighted a couple of mountains over. We kept moving on up toward them keeping under cover of the trees, and finally halted on the mountain next to the one occupied by the Bulgarians. There began a lot of buzzing around and a few conferences between the leaders. One battalion moved on out, soon followed by another. The battle was soon under way with the machine guns, rifles, and motar fire. I was told the Bulgarians had about six or seven hundred men, but from the position they were holding and from the number I saw when we first sighted them there could not have been more than three hundred.

The battle was soon over to my amazment. The Partisanz had captured the hill the Bulgarians were holding with only the loss of about four men dead and about six seriously wounded. The Partisans had about eight Bulgarian prisoners, a few of which were full fleged Partisans before the firing had ceased. There were about eight dead of the Bulgarians and no seriously wounded as these must have been carried away by their retreating comrades or else put out of their misery by the Partisans. All the dead Bulgarians were stripped of all wearable clothing and possessions that were of any value. There was about thirty rifles, two light machine guns, ammunition, and other odds and ends captured. That which the Partisans did not want they burned. We moved on out leaving the Bulgarian dead lying there unburied. Crude stretchers were made from captured clothing for the wounded who were unable to walk. Moving them up the mountains was quite a hard slow job. We reached the top of a nearby mountain and then began the interviewing of prisoners. I never was able to figure out how they decided which ones would make good Partisans and which would not, but soon a few were untied and made Partisans, members of our Fourth Brigade. One was sent back to the Bulgarians with a letter of warning from the Partisans. Its exact contents I could not find out as my Partisan interpeter was, in addition to not knowing much English, a rather stupid fellow. I saw only two Bulgarian prisoners shot. They were ordered to lie down by the spring we were all sitting near and were then shot through the head. One died immediately but the other kicked around for awhile. The one that died immediately was given a few more shots just for practice I imagine, but the other was left to his misery. He died shortly afterwards and neither bodies were buried.

We moved out as it began to get dark at a very slow pace due to the difficulty of carrying the wounded. About three hours later we stopped for the night in a place that could be easily defended. During the day we had eaten some bread and cheese that was captured from the Bulgarians.

Next day radioman Kazanauskas tried to get in contact with our British headquarters, Bari, but was not successful. We moved out immediately, as the Partisans were waiting so that we could finish our schedule. They stopped again that afternoon to let us try contact Major Dickinson's Mission that was with Macedonian Headquarters. The Partisans had a message they wanted us to get through for them, as they had not made contact with their Headquarters since we left. Again we were unsaccessful. We were now completly out of food and things were beginning to look rather bad.

~~Official~~ the night of the 15th of August we held our first conference with the Brigade staff. I knew only a few words of their language and they knew no English and my Partisan interpeter forgotten most allthe English he had ever known, so he had informed me earlier. This turned out to be a rather comical conference, with a lot of hand motions, pantomines, etc. I finally made out pretty much what was on their minds. They wanted complete equipment for the men they had and for about two hundred more. All this they wanted right away as usual. The only difficulty was they could not give me any exact location that we could expect to receive the drops. I could see the need for lots of equipment as our Partisans were using a lot of Bulgarian clothing and equipment and would make the going rough in any further encounters with the Bulgarians, being next to impossible to distinguish Partisans from Bulgarians now.

The morning of the 16th we had a little bread and cheese that some of the Partisans had gotten from a village down the mountain. We moved on from this location at six O'clock and hit some rather rough climbing during the morning. The wounded had been hidden away so the Partisans were no longer hampered by having to carry them. I worked on a message for the British about the equipment the Partisans wanted, having to do this when we would get a few minutes rest during the march. Again they stopped so we could make our morning skedule. Contact was made but the operator on the other end signed off after letting us know that he had knothing for us and not waiting to find out whether or not we had a message for them. A mistake of this kind is highly inexcusable and could cause serious results. At this time is seemed a serious error to me , as I was not sure from skedule to skedule whether we would be able to stay on the air or not. The Bulgarians knew pretty much our location and that our number of men was small. Our charging engine had failed to start after many attempts, leaving us with only a hand generator which belonged to the Partisans. This generator took six to eight hours of hard turning to produce enough electricity to work an hour on the radio. With the situation as it was it would be impossible to keep the batteries charged sufficiently for all skedules.

About three O'clock of the afternoon of the 16th of August the Partisans found themselves on the same mountain with the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians had a larger force this time and was reported to me to be over a thousand strong. I again doubted their word, but I could tell it was a larger number than the outfit that was encountered on the 14th. This time the Bulgarians moved in from two directions. I started to move into a position to see this battle but was quickly ordered to move back. The Bulgarians were located intwo positions on the opposite side of the mountain from the Partisans. The Partisans counter-attacked from three directions, over the top of the mountain, and from both sides. Every available man and woman was put into action from which I could tell the battle was not progressing as well as the last. The wounded Partisans began comming back. I noted in particular one fellow that had been hit by mortar fire. He had been hit on one ear, on his hips, and had several fingers that were almost off. This fellow seemed proud of his injuries and it seemed to me he was being decorated rather than being treated for his injuries. Never once did he act as though he was in pain at all.

As it began to grow dark the firing slacked and finally ceased. We waited around for several hours to find out what the Bulgarians were going to do, and, as it became evident that they had pulled on back, it was decided that we would hold our positions for the night. The wounded, the Brigade staff, and my little party were all gathered in one small area. The fellow lying next to me was badly wounded and groaned off and on for several hours, stopping now and then to ask for water. When I awoke the next morning I saw them carrying him away to be buried, as he had died in the early hours of the morning.

We made a hasty tour of the battle area with the Brigade staff and located many dead Bulgarians and two or three wounded Partisans that were lying unconcious in high undergrowth. There were also a couple of dead Partisans located that were missed in the search made earlier. I was told that there were about fifty Bulgarians killed and ten prisones taken. I actually saw all the prisoners but counted only about twenty five dead Bulgarians. The Partisans had about twelve killed and about the same number wounded. Those that were able were put on donkeys

captured from the Bulgarians, the others were carried on stretchers made from Bulgarian uniforms.

During this battle of the 16th I saw several Bulgarian prisoners released and put into action against their own soldiers. One Bulgarian was credited with killing six Bulgarians by motar fire upon a position he knew to be occupied. This shows the spirit of the Bulgarian Army at this time.

Among the dead Bulgarians we found a body dressed in civilian clothes. I was told that this was an anti-Partisan Macedonian who they called a Chetnik. This was the first I had heard of any Chetnik movement in Madedonia. I had sent a message to Bari on the 15th giving the supplies asked for by the Partisans and also the pin point by use of polar coordinates using the town of Stip as the reference point. I did this because the only map I had was a one to one million scale map and had used this same method with good results when I was with the mission headed by Major Dickinson. I later found out that the British office was unable to locate my pin point by these coordinates.

From the 17th of August until the 20th the Brigade moved from mountain to mountain, never staying very long in one place, hiding in the woods. The wounded had been hidden away. During this time I received no messages from Bari saying whether or not we could expect planes. The Partisans were getting very impatient about the planes and each night would hold a couple of conferences with me, making all sorts of threats. I was quite puzzled over the situation as I had heard nothing from Bari and could offer no plausible excuse for the supplies not being sent.

The night of the 20th and the morning of the 21st we kept on the move and were told that we were going into a town in the valley below, that was believed to have only a small force of Bulgarian police on duty there. We entered this town of Blatac about eleven O'clock in the morning and after a few shots were fired it became evident that the town was ours for awhile anyway. Here we got lots of much needed food, and set up our radio for the afternoon skedule. On the afternoon skedule we received two messages that were not in our code, so it naturally became evident that there was a mix up in Major Dickinson's and my codes and skedules.

We moved out from Blatac a little after midnight and arrived in another village about seven O'clock the next morning. We stayed in this village until dark a nd moved back towards the mountains at a very fast pace until just before daylight. We stopped near the town of Berovo and the Partisans moved around intoposition to attack the town, which was rather heavily garrisoned by the Bulgarian police force. I was told at day break the attack was started and we all moved into the town which was, after a couple of hours of fighting, was taken over by the Partisans except for one building which the Bulgarians held with machine gun fire. Two or three Partisans were killed and about five were wounded. The firing was still continuing as we left with a few Bulgarian City Officials taken as prisoners. The Partisans took money from the bank and odds and ends including a small amount of bandages for the wounded. We moved almost at a run to the near by town of Vladimerovo, which made me believe that the Bulgarians were being reenforced and were pursuing us, but saw only a couple of German planes, FW189, (twin fuselage like our P-38's) with the Bulgarian black cross on them.

These came down very low and circled around for an hour or so but dropped none of their bombs nor fired any of their machine guns. We stayed in this valley until after dark and then moved on back to the mountains.

The 24th was spent out in the woods again with nothing happening except a big scare caused by a party of Partisans in Bulgarian uniforms coming into the area. Everyone was dashing about ready to fight for their lives, because this party was in the area almost before anyone knew it. This made me wonder about the men they had out as sentinels. That night we moved on back further into the mountains.

The morning of the 25th the Bulgarians were again sighted on the next mountain. The situation was pretty serious now as most of the ammunition had been expended, especially for the stens, their favorite weapon. I was told that the Partisans would not attack but just hold the mountain we were on and hope for the best, letting me know, of course, what a failure I had been for not having supplies for them. This same day we received a message in our code which put us back in contact with Bari. I sent in X and Y coordinates from both my map and from the Partisans map.

On the night of 27th August we received our first two planes which brought exactly what was needed except for the medical supplies. Medical supplies were not so urgently needed now. I was informed all the wounded had been killed by the Bulgarians. The hiding place of the wounded had been disclosed to the Bulgarians by some of the people in a near by village. Yet I had been told time and time again that the people of Macedonia were united against the Axis.

We received planes again on the 29th, and 31st. On each of the three nights we received planes we were on a different mountain. We had to make a mad dash up the mountain on one of these nights after having to leave the drop zone against my wish.

The Partisans were moving down to the valley below to start their recruiting campaign and would not allow me, for some unknown reason, to remain behing with a few Partisans for guards and fire builders. That night I was able to reach a position after three hours of hard climbing where I could receive the planes.

After the first of September the recruits began moving up into the mountains where weewere located. They came several hundred each day until we had a band of over three thousand with equipment on hand for only two hundred of these. This gave up about four or five hundred armed Partisans to control the area. These had been broken down into three units that moved in separate directions to operate in the area and pick up more recruits. I saw very little of the leaders after the 10th of September and was never able to persuade them to let me accompany them on any of their raids on the towns of our area. I had only my radio operatior to leave behind to take care of the plane drops, which was their main interest in us of course. With a small band of Partisans we stayed inthe mountains until the 6th of October. We had heard from Bari that we could expect no more planes as the area we were in was to be under the control of the Russians and Bulgarians. There came up then the question of the ammunitionforthe British weapons they possessed. This question was never settled.

In September while we were in the mountains the Germans moved in small forces followed by larger forces coming in from Greece in an attempt to go north. I was told that towards the ent of October there were six German divisions in Macedonia and twoof them coming into our area towards the last of September. These were hit at various points by the Partisans but were brought to a stop mainly by the Bulgarian forces as the Germans moved over towards the Bulgarian border near Caravo Celo. The Partisans did not have the equipemtn nor the men to stop these forces alone, but I do know that they did play a big part in wiping out the Germans that were in this area. Had they been able to organize and be equipped sconer they would have been able to do much more.

The Germans in this area offered to make peace with the Partisans but were refused. In return the Germans burned many homes and buildings in the various towns of that area. Kocane, a town of about eight thousand, was hit the worst of the towns. I saw with a loss of about seventy-five per cent of the buildings the Germans also killed quite a few ofthe civilians. There were about a hundred killed in the town of Buovo and a like number killed in several of the other towns.

From the prisoners brought in by the Partisans, the Germans appeared to be below on equipment. The men were either very old for soldiers or very young and many had on the native goat skin shoes and their uniforms were in miserable shape.

About the 6th of November the last occupied town, Stip, was freed of the Germans. The Germans that survived made their way back to Skolpje, so I was told.

As a rule the Partisans of this area kept no prisoners, shooting them soon after their capture. Before the capitulation of Bulgaria there was no way for the Partisans to keep prisoners as they were on the move all the time. One Bulgarian Colonel who had caused much death and destruction in this area was carried vack to the scene of his crimes and killed. Death was the common punishment for crimes even among their own soldiers, as it was either death or no punishment at all. I never actually saw a Partisan shot but had heard of cases that soldiers had been shot for even small stealths. The firing squads were composed sometimes of both male and female Partisans.

The people in all this area were very short of clothing and had only what they could make themselves. This appeared to be an old story for the peasants in the mountains, but in the villages they had been using clothing of the type that we have. Probably made in Bulgaria. I was told that clothing had been almost impossibel to get for the past three years.

The only decent building in this area are the ones that have been built by the Serbians and the Bulgarians, mostly court houses and garrisons for their soldiers.

The civilians in most all of these countries seem to have taken the blunt of the war, and are now ready for a government of their own. The Partisans even with their late start in Macedonia are the ruling factor with practically no organized opposition. So the people have, as a whole, turned toward communism as a hope for peace and their betterment. There are lots of

the people not in favor of this. A number of anti-Partisans were brought in and shot while we were in the mountains in SEPTEMBER, being left in the woods unburied.

The leaders of Macedonia are looking ahead and hoping to have a consolidated Macedonia consisting of what is sometimes called Southern Serbia, Greek Macedonia, and Bulgarian Macedonia. This would give them what they call the original state or country of Macedonia.

The people have been held backfor centuries by other countries who have dominated tham and this has checked their progress. They have very little industry. They are also lacking in schools of the higher grades. TO enter a proffession such as medicne, law, or engineering, their people must go to another country to study. So as a whole the people are very ignorant and uncultured. Their villages are a mass of filth and poverty even in the larger ones in the valleys where the people are considered comparatively well off.

As in all Partisans territory, the people here look toward Russia as their guiding light. They have a great admiration for the United States and England, seeming especially interested in the United States because a great number of their people are living there.

The people of Macedonia are very much against any government that will give Serbia the upper hand over them. This point was cleared, so I was told, by one of Tito's staff officers who told the people that Macedonia could expect a country of their own or else be a Federated State as part of Yugoslavia. The latter, in my opinion, will be the final outcome, but the people as a whole want their own country separate from any other government.

They have a good reason for this, as their country has made practically no progress and live in most areas as their people did hundreds of years before them. They have a long way to go to reach a desirable standard of living, exploition of their natural resources, and the education of their people.

Both my radio operator and myself were evacuated from Sofia on 14 November 1944.

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