

## **Balkan war 1943 – 1945**

By Fitzroy Maclean 1949

**Clothbound edition**

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### **Review**

“Balkan War 1943 - 1945” forms part of a book “Eastern Approaches” written by Fitzroy Maclean in 1949. The author was born in England in 1907. In the mid 1930’s he spent five years as a Diplomat in the Soviet Union, where he learned Russian and used every opportunity to travel to Central Asia and other forbidden regions within the Soviet Union. He returned to England and became a member of the British Parliament and was assigned to the desk in the Southern Department of the Foreign Office. When the Second World War broke out he became a Brigadier in the British Army’s Cairo-Office for the Middle East. In early 1943 Maclean was appointed by Winston Churchill as Ambassador-leader to the various partisan groups in Yugoslavia.

On April 6, 1941 Yugoslavia had been attacked by the Axis together with their regional allies Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. On April 10, Pavelic declared Croatia’s independence. Following the capitulation of the Yugoslav government on April 17, the country was divided among the occupying forces.

Resistance against the occupation started in Bosnia, where the royalist Cetnic started to fight Nedic together with the remaining army forces of the Simovich-government. At the same time communist forces, led and regrouped by Tito joined their resistance. Up to September 1941 the three groups succeeded to liberate most of Serbia and parts of Montenegro. The subsequent brutal repression of the German forces and the differences between the groups fighting the occupation soon led to territorial loss and to the reduction of their influence.

In 1943, when Maclean was sent to Yugoslavia, the two rival resistance leaders, Mihailovic and Tito, were simultaneously fighting each other as well as the German forces. Maclean’s principal task was to find out which movement was more efficient in fighting the Germans.

“Balkan War 1943 - 1945” describes many a close-up meetings of Maclean with Marshal Tito in a Bosnian cave and on the island of Vis. Maclean gives a fascinating portrait of this extraordinary man as well as of the other leaders of the partisan war.

Based on the author’s assessment of the military situation, he recommended to the British Government that Marshal Tito, rather than his rivals should be supported. In light of the further military and political developments on the Balkans, it remains an open question, however, whether it was indeed wise for the British Government to follow this recommendation.