



Mussolini family portrait, snapped in the early '30s; Donna Rachele, Anna Maria, Romano, Il Duce, Countess Edda Ciano, Vittorio and Bruno

Footnote to History

By Frank Gervasi

RADIOED FROM ITALY

IT WAS late in the afternoon of July 27, 1943, less than forty-eight hours after Benito Mussolini was arrested as he left the presence of King Victor Emmanuel III in the Villa Savoia and was deposited in a common cell in the jail at Piazza Del Popolo. Rome was reasonably quiet, although only the night before last Fascism had crumbled.

There was along the Via Mumentana only the sound of the hobnailed boots of a regiment of gray-green infantry, ordered by Field Marshal Pietro Badoglio to deploy at designated points to keep order. The regiment halted before the burnt-umber walls of the Villa Torlonia, where Mussolini and his family lived. A company commanded by a small, well-built and reasonably competent young captain detached itself from the regiment and took up stations.

Some time later a message was brought down to the young company commander by a servant from the villa. It was from Donna Rachele Mussolini and it summoned him to her. He was ushered by a servant into a hall of the house where the Mussolinis dwelt. They didn't live in the great princely villa of Torlonia, but in a lodge or guest house. Donna Rachele was there to greet him. She was dressed in the nondescript, dark-hued, unpretentious style of middle-class Italian wives. Her reddish-brown gray-streaked hair was neatly brushed into place.

"I have called you, Captain," Donna Rachele said, "to thank you for the unobtrusive manner in which you have taken over your duties. I know that we shall be safe with you here. But I want you to know, Captain," and here she smiled, "that I am quite accustomed to the changing moods of the crowds and quite ready for whatever may befall."

There was a brief silence. Only Rachele was poised and calm. "Here," she said, leading the way out of the square, ugly hall into the living quarters, "I want to show you how we live."

The captain saw an Italian home furnished in the dubious taste of peasants who are able to afford, for the first time in their lives, rugs and heavy furniture and the third-rate paintings which constitute their idea of good living. The captain found himself in what had been Il Duce's office. There was a massive desk, a few chairs and an oil painting of Mussolini's son Bruno in the uniform of an air officer. Bruno was

killed while flying a plane over an airfield near Pisa. He was drunk at the time. Donna Rachele looked long and softly at the painting when she ushered the young captain into the room. "He need not have died," she said.

She picked up a paper cutter and another trivial souvenir and gave these to the captain. Open on the desk was a copy of Karl von Clausewitz's classical handbook on war. Mussolini had been reading portions of it before he left to see the king. There was also an open volume on music.

Donna Rachele was born the daughter of a schoolteacher mother and of a father who ran a trattoria in Predappio, near Mussolini's birthplace. She had been a stout-limbed, full-bosomed, round-faced scullion in her father's kitchen, where she met a wild-eyed radical named Benito Mussolini, and where she met, too, Filippo Corridoni. Later—much later—Corridoni had become her lover.

Then Donna Rachele talked. The words came in a tempered rush. "Mussolini is finished as a political leader. He may be finished as a man. It is reasonable and just that it is so. For he had in his blood the taint of treason. He lived by betrayal. I do not speak of his personal infidelities. These were indeed many. He betrayed the Socialists to follow Corridoni and he betrayed Corridoni to become the tool of the industrialists who wished to crush the revolutionary and liberal elements in Italy for their own gain. Above all, he betrayed himself, for he was a peasant son of a peasant and of common stock. He betrayed the common people and therefore himself. Had he remained faithful to himself, he might have lived a full life as a simple schoolteacher or as the Socialist he promised to be in his early years and perhaps have helped his nation and his people. Had he done so, we might still have Bruno—"

That was all. For twenty-one years, Donna Rachele had been a dim figure in the background of the life of the Duce of Fascism. She never attended public ceremonies, was permitted rarely to open an orphanage or to lay a cornerstone. Now, in honest words to an unsophisticated young captain, she opened the shutters of her existence briefly.

Rachele is in Germany now, with her youngest children, Romano and Anna Maria. The eldest son, fat Vittorio, is there, too, and her daughter Edda is in Switzerland waging a losing fight against tuberculosis. ★★★

Try it on...for sighs!

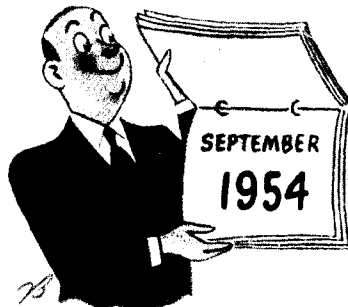


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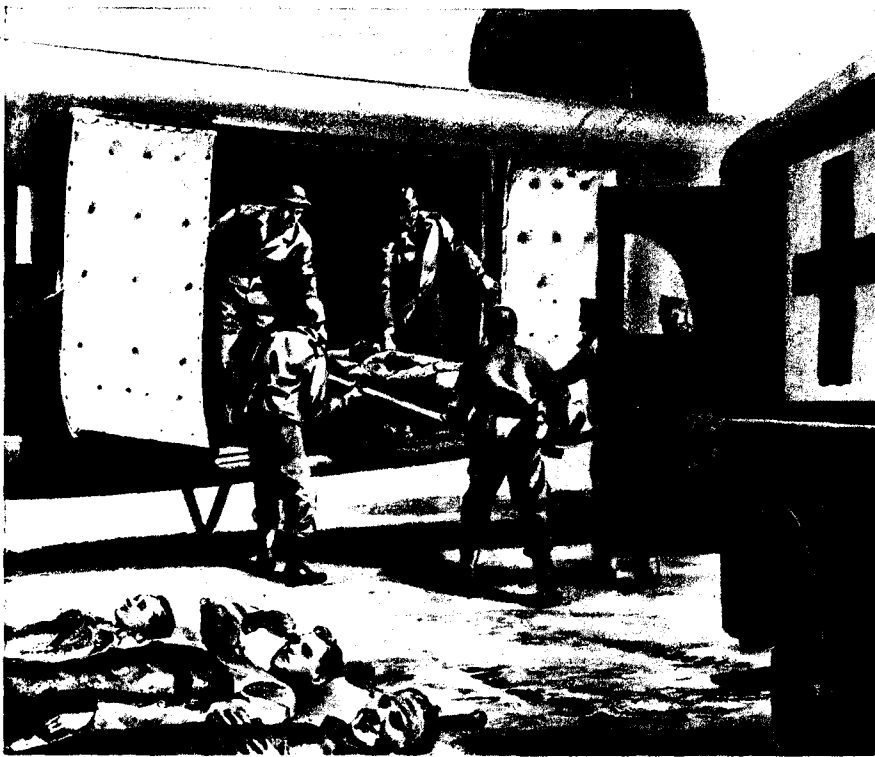
To have and to hold!

Two things—more important than ever—homefronters should do: Buy extra War Bonds; hold them until they mature. Don't cash in your Bonds!

ARROW TIES

SHIRTS, UNDERWEAR, HANDKERCHIEFS

Sulfa, Plasma—and Air



1. Since the start of the war, thousands of wounded Americans have been evacuated from battle zones by air. Said the Air Surgeon General's report: "The record places air evacuation in a group with the sulfa drugs and blood plasma as one of the three greatest lifesavers of modern military medicine."



2. In long-range transport planes such as the Liberator Express, no wounded American fighter is more than 60 hours' flying time from the finest hospital in the U. S. A.

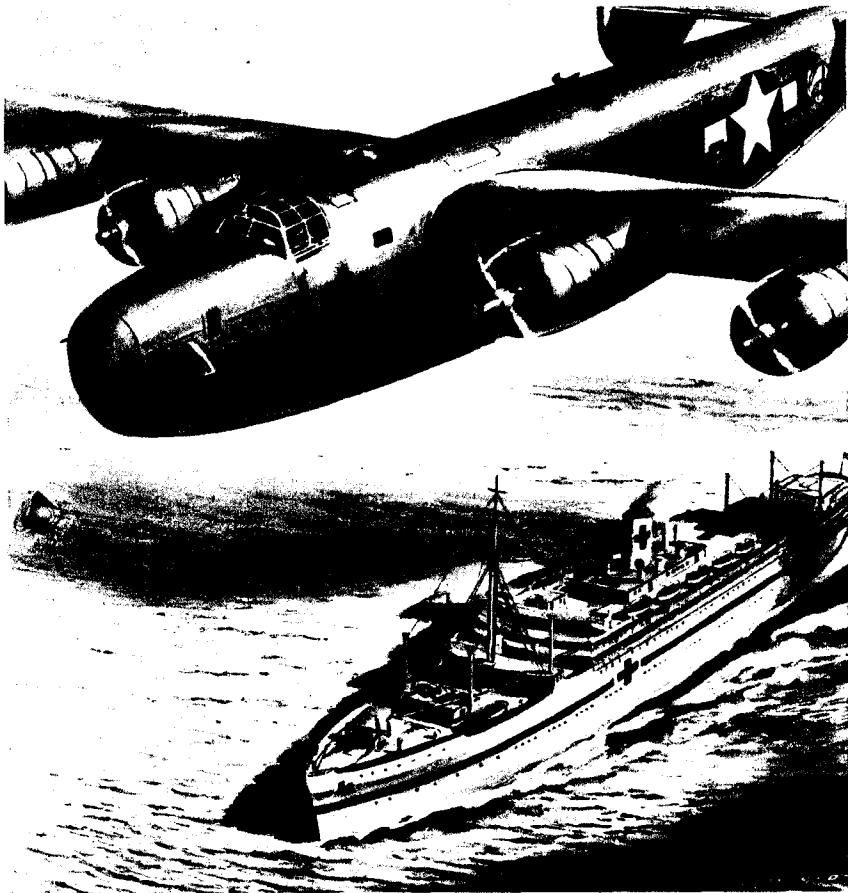


3. As the hospital plane streaks across the ocean, a flight nurse gives somebody's blood—perhaps yours—to this wounded soldier, who might otherwise never get home for the special care that will restore him to health.

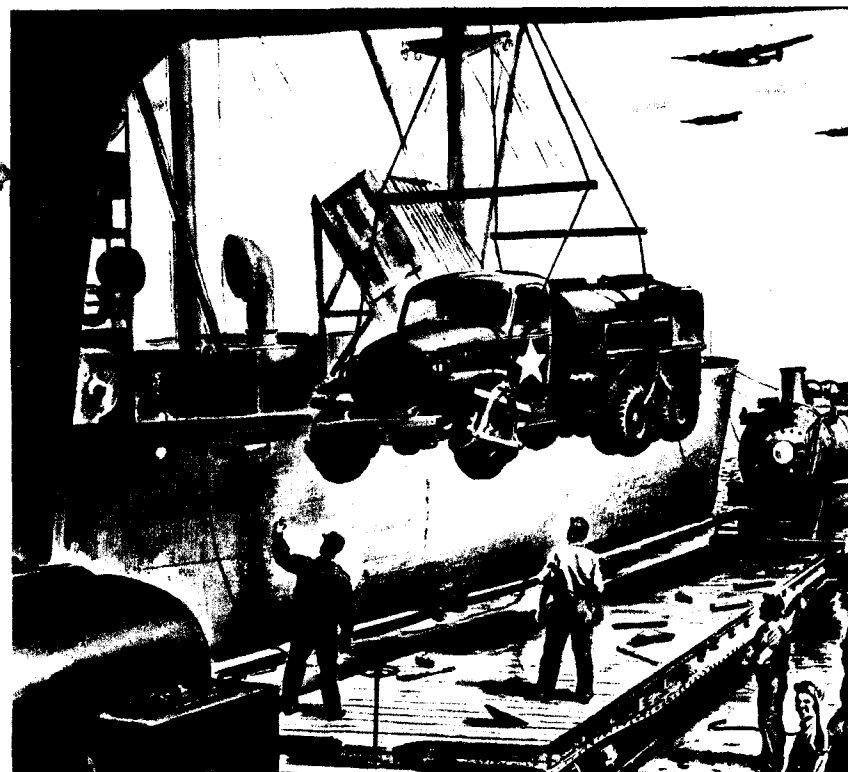


4. From many a remote and inaccessible combat zone, the plane is the *only* means of getting casualties back to base hospitals.

CONSOLIDATED VULTEE AIRCRAFT



5. The ambulance, hospital train, and hospital ship still transport most of our war casualties. But many a time when *minutes* can save a life, the 4-mile-a-minute speed of the flying ambulance does exactly that!



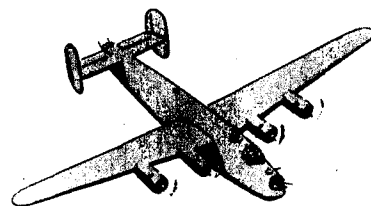
6. One reason we are winning the war is the way in which the truck, the train, the ship, and the plane are teaming up together. And the task of rebuilding the peacetime world will be a challenge which all forms of transportation must meet in the same way.

But the plane, in addition to its use as a global air transport, will have still *another* role to fulfill: a permanent postwar Air Force can well become the ever-watchful guardian of the peace we shall have won so dearly.

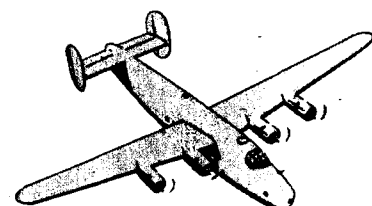


No spot on earth is more than 60 hours' flying time from your local airport

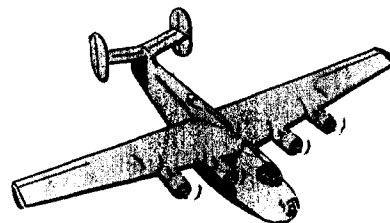
From "Flying Jeeps" to Leviathans of the air — The planes shown below were all designed and developed by Consolidated Vultee. When peace comes, the company will be in a position to provide the postwar equivalent of such planes, from small, privately owned "air flivvers" to huge, trans-oceanic cargo-and-passenger planes.



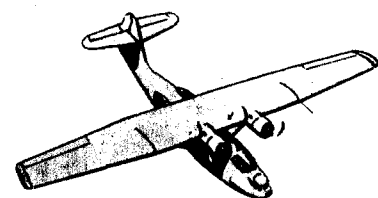
LIBERATOR . . . 4-engine bomber



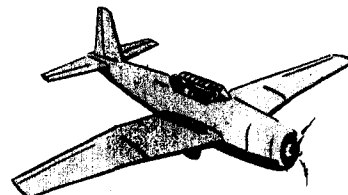
LIBERATOR EXPRESS . . . transport



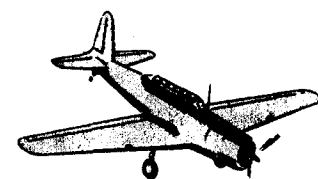
CORONADO . . . patrol bomber



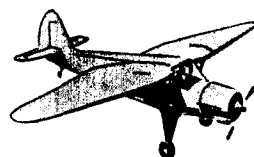
CATALINA . . . patrol bomber



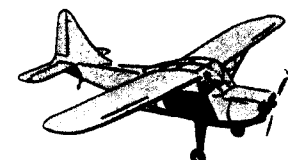
VENGEANCE . . . dive bomber



VALIANT . . . basic trainer



RELIANT . . . navigational trainer



SENTINEL . . . "Flying Jeep"

QUICK FACTS FOR AIR-MINDED READERS

Air Giant — The new Consolidated Vultee Model 39 transport — the Liberator Liner — has passed its test flights successfully. Capacity: 48 passengers — or, as a sleeper, 24. Top speed: 275 m.p.h. Flying range: over 4000 miles.

Airport for Air Giants — New York City's projected airport will have runways totalling 13 miles in length, one of which will be over 2 miles long. This airport can handle 1000 plane movements per day. (Capacity of present N. Y. airport: 270 plane movements per day.)

1000-mile Shuttle Trips — The Naval Air Transport Service in the Pacific now flies 320,000 miles per week, carries over 5500 passengers monthly, "adds another stop every time the Japs lose an island."

Tomorrow's Airmen — The total strength of the Army Air Forces now exceeds 2,300,000 officers and enlisted men — a vast reservoir of skilled pilots and aircraft technicians which will ensure postwar America's remaining "a nation on wings."

Consolidated Vultee is the largest builder of airplanes in the world.

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A SHORT SHORT STORY COMPLETE ON THIS PAGE



GAMEWARDEN ANDREW FLAXON found the young couple in a duck blind on the tip of Rice Island. He stepped from the head-high rushes and said, "Nice shooting. Nice teal you got there. Now, mind if I check the licenses?"

The young man turned a tanned, grave face and stirred the teal with his toe. "They're yours. You've caught us cold, no licenses and no duck stamps."

He was a good deal more of a gentleman about it than any poacher Flaxon had met up to now.

The girl said quickly, warmly, "But, heavens, my husband's just back from the Pacific! This is his furlough. Surely you're not going to be technical—"

Her husband interrupted, "It's the law, Stelle. He has to enforce it."

Flaxon's glance was briefly wondering before he said, "I'll have to take the names."

"Lieutenant and Mrs. William Beale. We're at the resort, but I left the car and my uniform at a cabin below here. If we could stop there—" The lieutenant waited for Flaxon's nod, and said, "We might as well all three go in the boat."

Flaxon sat in the bow, facing the girl, while Beale poled off. She watched the game warden, her lips parted and her breath coming unevenly. It was cold enough to see her breath.

"Would it make any difference," she said suddenly, "if I told you this happens to be our honeymoon?"

Beale's pole struck the water with a splash. "Oh, now, Stelle!"

"Well," she said, "it really is. Three years ago doesn't count, and this is the one I wanted to remember."

And when she said that, Flaxon remembered the whole story. The names hadn't meant anything to him, but the honeymoon three years ago had fueled a winter's hot-stove gossip. There were people who said that when Bill Beale reached in his pocket, it was a hunting license he tried to give the minister; of course, nobody could have known that, and it just showed how the story grew.

It had been about dusk when the honeymooners stopped at Kramer's crossroads store and bought a week's box of groceries. Kramer said the bride had been upset about having to buy canned milk for her coffee; she had seemed to expect there would be a morning delivery of milk bottles on Rice Island.

Before winter ended, he had built up the story to the point where she had been even more upset because he hadn't had any caviar and pâté de foie gras on his shelves.

They had tire trouble or they took the wrong road, and it was toward eleven at night when the young couple stopped at Ed Traynor's for their key. Ed had the key because he'd been hired to clean out the chimney, only he hadn't got around to it. When it blew up rain toward morning, Ed remembered he hadn't got around to mend the roof, either. But he probably laid it on a little thick when he said the roof leaked mostly over the built-in bunk bed.

Then in the morning Flaxon's son—he was in the Seabees now, but had been a deputy warden three years ago—had stopped by and found the cabin full of smoke and rainwater and the bride in tears. It seemed the groom had given her a 20-gauge gun, but had forgotten to bring any shells except for his 12-gauge, and anyway she didn't want to hunt any ducks. She wanted to know how far she'd have to walk to catch a bus. Flaxon's son had been wondering whether to try to talk her out of that when the groom came along, using his 12-gauge as a crutch. His pole had slipped and he'd fallen in the boat and wrenched his knee.

"Three years ago was ghastly," Stelle Beale said now, "and I should think even a game warden would feel we were entitled to a better honeymoon than that one."

The groom came along, using his 12-gauge gun as a crutch. He had fallen in the boat and wrenched his knee. The bride wanted to know how far she'd have to walk to catch a bus

Flaxon told her, "But you should have brought licenses along with the gun and boat and everything else you needed this time."

"I'm trying to tell you," the girl said. "It's just a short furlough, and we drove up to the resort mainly to get away from a million of my relatives. I merely suggested stopping by the cabin and seeing if the boat and all these things were all right. Then poking around behind the ice chest, I ran onto the shells. They'd fallen and been there out of sight all the time."

"That's right. We found the shells accidentally and I took a chance shooting them without a license, and that's all there is to it." Lieutenant Beale brought the boat to a small stone landing. "Come along, Warden. I'll be a minute changing, Stelle."

He went up a grass-grown path toward the cabin and, behind him, the girl laid a hand on Flaxon's sleeve. "Wait," she said, and fumbled in a bright fabric handbag. "Here. But don't tell Bill."

Flaxon stared astonishedly at the two postcard-sized pasteboards. "You got the licenses okay," he told her. "What's all the run-around for?"

"Well," Stelle Beale said, "I knew we'd find those shells. I hid them that very morning on purpose to spoil the whole trip, and it's what I'm trying to make up to him now."

"You probably just aren't the outdoors type. So what? My wife never went hunting with me in her life. Plenty of wives don't."

The girl said, "Look. Of course buying this cabin and coming up here away from people means a lot to Bill. But there was more to it. My family had a different honeymoon planned for us. And they had a lot of other plans for the rest of our lives—without asking Bill. That honeymoon of ours was a regular family issue; we came up here to prove that Bill and I were going to lead our own lives, and then I went back on it—on him."

"He sprained his knee, the way I heard it," Flaxon began.

"Bill's knee was just a lucky accident," she said wryly. "It kept him from finding out right away what a terrific flop it was all going to be. My hiding those shells was the first step toward making it one. There were other steps—little ones like arguments over how we'd spend an evening, and big ones about my family wanting him to claim exemption from the Army—and all of it leading up to the divorce."

FLAXON gave a headshake. "I guess I'm dumb. I don't know if you two are married or divorced or what."

"We were remarried yesterday," the girl said. "Bill did go into the Army and went overseas and—well, I've learned what things are important. That's what this second honeymoon is all about." She moistened her lips and continued, "All right, it's not much. But it's a start, and a better start than I made before. I wanted to begin over, and begin right this time. . . ."

Andrew Flaxon thought a minute; then he said, "I can say I'm letting him go with a warning because of my kid that's with the Seabees in the Pacific."

He went up the footpath. Lieutenant Beale, waiting, thrust the cabin door shut and said, "Now we're alone, I want to show you."

Flaxon gaped at the pasteboards in the lieutenant's hand. "You two are beyond me! What's the big secret, anyway?"

The young man smiled a little and said it was a long story. "I had an idea Stelle was planning a hunting honeymoon because—well, it's personal and you wouldn't understand. But I wasn't telling you the truth about those shells, Warden. I knew very well they were back of the ice chest here, because I saw her hide them there that morning."

"You did, huh?"

"It's a long story, but the thing is, I could see right then that our marriage wasn't working out the way we planned," Bill Beale said. "You don't want to let on to Stelle though, or she might guess I only went and pretended to sprain a knee that morning. I figured we could work it out somehow in the long run if we had a second chance. I always believed that."