

[]

CAMISE'S ROLE IN THE
CIANO AFFAIR, AS REPORTED
BY HER ABT VI CHIEF:

WILHELM HOETTL

HIC
4
102
116
E5

The Secret Front

THE STORY OF NAZI
POLITICAL ESPIONAGE/

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
IAN COLVIN

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
SOURCE METHODS EXEMPTION 3B2B
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
DATE 2001 2005

WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON
7 CORK STREET, LONDON W.1

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

*Translated from the German
by R. H. Stevens*

*

All rights reserved

*

*First published 1953
Second edition 1954*

Printed by
EBENEZER BAYLIS AND SON, LTD.
Worcester

CHAPTER XV

THE END OF THE FASCISTS

THE liberation of Mussolini has received a great deal of publicity during the last few years but the enterprise which led to the rescue of Ciano and his family has remained wrapped in obscurity. Consequently the completely false story that Ciano was removed to Germany against his will and then handed over to the neo-Fascist Government for trial has gained much credence.

I was myself so closely connected with the rescue of Ciano that I can give the fullest details about it. Here is an authentic account of what happened. Towards the middle of August 1943 a friend of the Ciano family approached Dollmann, Himmler's agent in Rome, with the request that the Ciano family should be conducted to Germany as in Rome they went in fear of their lives. At that time Ciano was confined on Badoglio's orders to his Rome residence and forbidden to leave it. Now, he said, it had come to his knowledge that Badoglio intended to remove him and his family to an island in the Mediterranean in order to prevent any possible attempt at escape.

Himmler submitted Ciano's request to Hitler. The latter was prepared to agree to it and the German Secret Service was ordered to plan the rescue of Edda Ciano and her children. Hitler's orders were emphatic that 'whatever happened, Mussolini's blood in the veins of his grandchildren must at all costs be preserved for the future'. His sole real interest was in these grandchildren whom he regarded as the only important members of the family, although he had a great affection for Edda who was in his opinion the only child of Mussolini worthy of the father.

Ciano was not mentioned in Hitler's instructions. When asked he said that Ciano could come too, if he wanted, and particularly if his wife set any store by his coming. These orders were not considered precise enough, for what would be

the position if Ciano said he wished to come and his wife were indifferent or even against it? Hitler had obviously been influenced by the rumours current in Germany that relations between husband and wife were as bad as they could be. He thought that Edda would be pleased at an opportunity to get rid of her husband. When the Secret Service officers entrusted with the mission asked for more precise instructions, Hitler was gracious enough to say that Ciano was also to be invited to come to Germany as his personal guest.

A rescue by force was out of the question. At the time Rome was firmly in the hands of the new Government. Hitler had explicitly refused to make available the German forces which would have been required had it come to a fight with the Italian police and army units in the city. The rescue could only be accomplished by stealth and guile. I laid plans accordingly and these were accepted unreservedly by both Hitler and Edda and Galeazzo Ciano, to whom they were submitted.

The removal of Edda Ciano and her children was a comparatively simple affair. The Countess had been permitted to take a daily walk with the children, followed at a discreet distance by a member of the secret police. On the day arranged it was agreed that they should walk along a certain street at a definite time. An American car would draw up beside them and the driver would lean out as though to make some ordinary inquiry. The children were to be bundled into the back while the Countess herself got in beside the driver, and the high-powered car would then make off at full speed. The accompanying agent would have little chance of intervention. His usual means of transport was a bicycle, and that would not make pursuit dangerous.

It was a much more difficult task to rescue Ciano himself. The main factor in favour of success was the vagueness of the orders issued to his guards. They had been told he was not to be permitted to leave the house but they had not been told what means they could permissibly use to prevent his flight or, most important of all, whether or not they should use their fire-arms in the event of an attempted escape. It was around this piece of knowledge that the plan was formulated—for we assumed that the sentries on the house doors would not

open fire on a personage whose position was still the subject of controversy. No one was sure, for instance, whether Badoglio regarded him as a prisoner or whether he was protecting him from possible Fascist assassination.

At precisely the agreed time Ciano was to step out of the house and get immediately into a car which would approach at that moment, halting only long enough to enable him to get in. The plan could only succeed if the timing on both sides was observed to the second. Ciano's suggestion that he should first look out of the window to make sure that the car was approaching was not practicable. It would inevitably have aroused suspicion and so was rejected. All that was really required was for both parties to synchronize their watches to the split second. But even this simple task took two days to accomplish. On 27th August all was ready.

Both enterprises succeeded without any unexpected incident. The policeman accompanying the Countess had no suspicions at all. He was about twenty yards behind the party when the car drew up and before he could run to the spot the car was already drawing away. Count Ciano stepped swiftly out of the house at exactly the right moment, leapt into the slowly-moving car the door of which was already open to receive him. Everything happened so rapidly that the police had no chance of taking any counter-measures, and even if one of them had opened fire the shots would most probably have gone astray. Apparently the guard did not report the whole truth of the affair to higher authority, for the most varied accounts were going round, even in official circles, both as to the time and the manner of the escape.

The rest was easy. The two cars had been ordered to make for the courtyard of a house in Rome where a closed lorry of the German Wehrmacht would be waiting to take them to the airport. The Frascati airport was too far away and to get there the lorry would have had to run the gauntlet of a number of street barriers and control posts, at any one of which its passengers might have been discovered. A landing ground nearer the city was chosen. But here too there would be Italian units who could be allowed no idea of what was happening. A Junkers transport plane was therefore ordered to be ready with its

loading-doors open. The lorry backed hard on to the plane and the passengers were able to pass from one vehicle to the other completely unobserved. It was as well that these meticulous precautions had been taken for when the lorry arrived a group of Italian workmen were standing immediately beside the plane, and one of them would certainly have recognized Ciano.

On the way to the landing ground there was one critical moment. The lorry had to come to a complete halt at each of the street barriers. The Italian sentries made no difficulty for beside the driver sat a German Air Force officer who had all the necessary documents. But a German military policeman nearly ruined the whole scheme. He declared that he had heard children's laughter coming from within the lorry and was about to investigate under the very noses of his Italian colleagues. I sat quietly inside the lorry. The German staff officer in front took charge and his angry rebuke to the sentry prevented a painful discovery.

Even before the plane had left the ground, Ciano began to pull gold cigarette cases, bracelets and rings out of all his pockets and to make a first inventory. His little daughter too had a small satchel crammed with jewellery. Before he was rescued Ciano had already sent his valet ahead to Germany with a small leather sack full of the most valuable trinkets. Even at the most hazardous moment, his keen business instincts had obviously not deserted him!

The flight to Germany was accomplished without incident, except that to avoid any suspicion the passengers had to wear their light summer clothes—the children were in rompers—and as bad weather forced the aircraft to fly at a height of something like 18,000 feet over the Alps, they were chilled to the bone. Thanks to the forethought of Skorzeny there were two bottles of brandy that helped to keep out the cold. Countess Edda and the children swigged the brandy, but Ciano himself hardly touched a drop. At Munich the party and its rescuer were officially welcomed in Hitler's name and driven to a villa on the Starnberger Lake.

There I had many long conversations with the Cianos. At first Ciano tried to disguise the actions which had led to the

downfall of Mussolini, but Countess Edda made not the slightest attempt to hide the truth. Her forthright character which knew no half measures in love or hate would not tolerate any such evasion. With irrefutable logic she showed exactly where and how her father's policy had been wrong, though her affection for him was still deep. Ciano gradually came to agree more and more with her opinion, particularly when he saw that his German audience showed considerable understanding of many of his actions.

.. They both declared Italian misfortune had begun with Italy's entry into the war in June 1940. Mussolini had been under no illusions about the weakness of his country but he had been convinced that a final German victory was imminent, and that Italy would be losing a unique opportunity if she failed to intervene on the side of her Axis partner in the final phases of the war. Indeed, according to Ciano, Mussolini had more than once expressed the fear that when victory had been won Germany might well turn on Italy and transform her into a complete vassal State. The entry of Italy into the war against France had been Mussolini's own decision, and both the Cianos reiterated that they had opposed this step and tried to dissuade Mussolini from taking it.

But the greatest misfortune for Italy, they claimed, was Germany's attack on Soviet Russia. The Duce, the Fascist leaders and indeed the whole Italian people had regarded the Russo-German non-aggression pact of August 1939 with revulsion in their hearts. On the other hand, all had clearly recognized that a war with Russia before the campaign in the West was ended would inevitably lead to catastrophe. Neither Mussolini nor Ciano had any chance of influencing Hitler for they had been kept in the dark as to his intentions until the very last moment. The Duce had also complained often and bitterly at this German habit of delay in informing their Italian ally of most important and vital decisions until a few hours before the decisive moment. Again and again the Italian Government had found itself confronted with a *fait accompli*.

Mussolini and Ciano do not appear to have seen eye to eye on the question of the desirability of a separate peace on one front or the other. Ciano was of the opinion that every effort

should be made to conclude a peace by negotiation with the Western Powers and that the war in the East should be pursued until Bolshevism was utterly destroyed. Mussolini was inclined to take the reverse view. Ciano, a shrewd calculator and superior to Mussolini in appreciating foreign affairs, wished to see Germany's urge for expansion directed eastwards where it would be occupied for a very long time and would therefore be no menace to Italian domination in the Mediterranean basin. Apart from this he was essentially a man of the west. Mussolini on the other hand was, according to Ciano, full of complexes against Britain and America. The dream of his life was to see those two powers driven to unconditional surrender and he regarded the defeat of Britain as the essential preliminary to the expansion of the Italian empire in Africa.

However, it was not the divergence of their views on foreign policy alone that was responsible for the estrangement between the two men. Ciano and his wife repeatedly asserted that with the increasing deterioration of the war situation, Mussolini's rabid Socialist views became more and more apparent. The Duce had often raved in the most violent and uncouth manner against the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, expressing his utter contempt for them and threatening to destroy them in the future. Ciano and his group were therefore really concerned lest Mussolini should set up in Italy after the war a system which was but little different from that in Russia.

Ciano had very little love for a National Socialist Germany and made no attempt to hide it in the conversations at the Starnberger Lake. He regarded Ribbentrop as a disaster. When he found that his German audience was in agreement with him he spoke more and more frankly.

Ciano's description of the relations between Hitler and Mussolini has already been published in detail. At first Mussolini thought little of Hitler and the knowledge that he was an Austrian and not a Prussian was repugnant to him. It was not a personal sympathy for Hitler as the leader of a political movement after his own heart which had finally driven Mussolini to Germany's side, but rather the array of nations in the political field, and in particular the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations at the time of the Abyssinian war. The impression left on Musso-

lini by his visits to Germany was strong. Grandiose military parades and massive popular demonstrations superbly organized in Berlin left Mussolini convinced of the might of National Socialist Germany. Later he repeatedly told his son-in-law that Italy had no alternative but to march at the side of the most mighty Power in the world. His attitude at the time of the invasion of Austria in March 1938 is perhaps proof that he realized military action by Italy against her powerful neighbour would be most dangerous.

Though siding with Germany, Mussolini had moments of doubt and crisis, said Ciano. Germany's invariable lack of tact infuriated him and caused him to rave for hours on end and utter the wildest threats. But when Ciano and those who thought like him tried to take advantage of the occasion to strengthen Mussolini's own independence, he would immediately swing to the other extreme and declare that nothing on earth could shake his absolute loyalty to his German partner.

Ciano, at least while he was in the Starnberger villa, was in complete agreement with Mussolini in his contempt for the Italian people. The situation in which he found himself may well have been partly responsible. He felt that he had been betrayed, overthrown and driven into exile. In his bitterness he cordially endorsed Hitler's assertion that Mussolini was 'the only Roman among a whole bunch of Italians'. His antipathy towards his own people sprang, however, from different sources to that of Mussolini. The Duce despised the Italians—or professed to do so—firstly because they were too weak, too docile and too peace-loving; and secondly because they remained indifferent to his dreams of a vast empire and failed to share their Dictator's conception of real greatness. It was for these reasons that he used to wish Italy had a more severe winter, which would harden his soft people. He regarded Prussian military discipline and organization as his ideal. He even went so far as to imitate the Prussian ceremonial parade step under the guise of the *Passo Romano*.

Ciano's ideals took a different line from the military imperialism of his father-in-law. He had hoped rather to see his country as the centre of a spiritual and cultural hegemony in Europe. His antipathy was more instinctive and was directed against

other elements of the Italian people than those which evoked Mussolini's scorn. But the disillusionment of both sprang from the failure of the nation to rise to the different roles which each in his own mind had assigned to it. Ciano felt so strongly on the subject that he said his children were not to be brought up as Italians and were never to return to Italy. As far as he was concerned, he declared, he would rather see them become Cubans.

Ciano's account of the events which led up to the fall of Mussolini proved, on later investigation, to be substantially correct. He emphasized that the action of the Grand Council had nothing whatever to do with the conspiracy of the King and Badoglio, and that there had been practically no point of contact between the two groups. A number of eminent Fascist officials headed by Grandi and Bottai had long ago realized that Mussolini's policy was leading Italy to ruin. They regarded the Duce as physically and mentally exhausted and incapable of mastering the great problems with which the desperate situation confronted him. They also felt that the Fascist movement had lost so much of its original driving force. It was no longer an instrument worthy to wield the supreme power in a totalitarian state. They had accordingly formed a plan whereby Mussolini was to retain his position as a figurehead, but was to be relieved in a large measure of his dictatorial executive authority. The real power was to be vested in the King, who would be in a favourable position to make peace proposals to the Western Powers with every hope that they would receive quick and full consideration. These negotiations were to be started immediately by Grandi, who had already made many promising contacts via Lisbon and Madrid with London. The plan met with the full and unanimous approval of all the Fascist leaders, including Mussolini's oldest supporters like de Bono, de Vecchi and Federzoni. Ciano declared that he had repeatedly urged Mussolini to face the realities of the situation and to extricate Italy from the war. Had he done so, the *coup d'état* of the Fascist Grand Council would have been unnecessary. Mussolini had admitted the force and the justice of Ciano's arguments, but had asserted that it was incompatible with Italy's honour to leave her ally in the lurch. There had remained,

then, no alternative but to put forward a motion of no confidence at the Grand Council.

The activities of the Royal Household against Mussolini were quite separate. There the mainspring was the Crown Princess Maria José, who had told Ciano as long ago as 1942 that she would do everything she could to get Italy out of the war. In Ciano's opinion, the royal plot had been maturing for a long time; but it had begun to take concrete form only after the Allies had landed in Sicily and the hopelessness of the situation had become apparent. The threads of the conspiracy were held in the hands of the Court Minister, Count Pietro Acquarone, whose principal colleagues were the Chief of the General Staff, General Ambrosio, and the Chief of Police, Carmine Senise. Marshal Badoglio, in whom none of the original conspirators had much faith, was drawn in much later and then only on account of the prestige of his name with the armed forces.

Such tenuous links as existed between the Fascist opposition group and the King's party were furnished by Ciano himself. The King had a high opinion of his statesmanlike qualities and had instructed Acquarone in 1942 to sound him, to see how far his co-operation could be counted upon. Ciano asserted to me that he gave no more than a non-committal answer. After his dismissal he ceased to be of any interest to the Royal party, for once out of office, he had little influence in the country. A long illness during the most important period of the conspiracy had further kept him from any active part. He had, it is true, a few talks with Badoglio, but no definite agreement for a future co-operation had been reached.

The action of the Fascists in the Grand Council was carried out, according to Ciano, 'with a clumsiness and stupidity which only German generals could have equalled'. Not one of those responsible had any clear conception of what was to happen after the motion of no confidence had been passed. Each may possibly have had some sort of a programme of his own, but any unity of thought and purpose was wholly lacking. The King was quick to take advantage of this confusion and indecision, which gave him the chance to carry out his coup against Mussolini earlier than he had planned. The latter fell into the trap like a child. Had he been in full possession of his

health and senses he would undoubtedly have rejected with the utmost suspicion the King's invitation to a conference at the Villa Savoia.

In spite of a measure of natural personal prejudice, Ciano's appreciation of the situation was on the whole both just and correct. There were, of course, many details of which he had no knowledge, for he was not in the confidence of the inner ring of the Royalist conspirators. The opposition group in the Grand Council was divided by a multitude of various special interests and aims, many of them of a purely personal nature, and could present no united front. The majority was averse to co-opting Ciano, and it was only the consideration that the name of Mussolini's son-in-law would be of great value which finally led them to invite him to co-operate. He was, however, unable to assume any leading role in their councils, and probably for this reason: his logical summing-up of the situation carried no weight.

Ciano's opinion that the King seized an opportunity offered by the situation created by the Grand Council and made good use of it, is probably quite accurate. There is certainly no evidence to show that the two plots were in any way co-ordinated, and Mussolini is justified when he speaks of 'traitors betrayed'. The Fascist opposition group and the Grand Council were robbed of the fruits of their labours by the skilful opportunism of the King.

After his rescue, Ciano's one desire was to leave Europe as quickly as possible. He had no intention of returning to Italy, even in the event of victory, and an indefinite stay in Germany did not appeal to him at all. His intention was to go first to Spain and then on to South America. As a means of ensuring his departure he made me a good business proposition. He offered to part with his diaries in exchange for facilities for his voyage.

In the course of the talks by the Starnberger Lake, Ciano had told me so much about his diaries that there was no doubt of their political and historical value.

He had allowed it to be understood that Ribbentrop would be so compromised that he would be unable to continue any longer as Foreign Minister. This fact impressed Kaltenbrunner

greatly, for if there was one thing above all others that he desired to see, it was the dismissal of Ribbentrop. Ciano had discovered this hostility at their first meeting, and he made masterly use of his discovery. Kaltenbrunner's approval of the deal was won.

I made all the necessary arrangements through the German Secret Service. Ciano and his wife had already received their false South American passports, when the whole plan was spoilt by a bad mistake on the part of the Countess. Against my advice, she insisted on asking Hitler's permission and support when she visited him at Fuehrer Headquarters. The result was the very reverse of what she had hoped. Hitler forbade the German Secret Service to allow Ciano to depart. He wished Ciano to return to Italy, and he was sure that he would be given an important post in the new Government, for at Castle Hirschberg, where Mussolini had resided since his liberation, a complete and formal reconciliation had in the meanwhile been effected between the Duce and his son-in-law. Goebbels and Ribbentrop supported Hitler's views. Ribbentrop, who had a shrewd idea of the compromising material that Ciano could produce against him, was most anxious to see him remain within the frontiers of the German dominated territories. He confessed to Kaltenbrunner that Ciano, if allowed to go abroad, might start 'a regular stink' (*eine Schweinerei*) against him.

Therefore when Mussolini, strongly influenced by Buffarini, also demanded the return of Ciano to Italy, Hitler agreed. Ciano, though unwilling to go, feared no harm to himself. On the contrary, he consoled himself with the thought that it would probably be easier for him to get to South America from Italy than from hermetically sealed Germany. He was indeed greatly surprised when on landing at Verona he was arrested by the Italian Police and flung into prison.

In spite of this set-back, I did not abandon the scheme of furthering the departure of Ciano. I was soon in contact with him. I got my Roman secretary, Hildegard Beetz, smuggled in to him as a woman interpreter. She suggested to him that he should not go to Spain, but to Hungary. By keeping him in this way more or less within the confines of Germany's empire, Kaltenbrunner hoped to allay Hitler's misgivings.

Ciano agreed to this, and a Hungarian nobleman was found who was ready to receive him on his estate in Transylvania. A formal and written agreement was even drawn up and signed by Ciano and Kaltenbrunner, whereby the former promised to hand over his diaries to the German Secret Service in return for his liberation from prison. To show his appreciation, Ciano was anxious to do more and to hand over in advance a certain portion of his documents. He disclosed the hiding-place of these papers in Rome to the 'interpreter' who had won his confidence, and asked her to bring them to him at once. The documents were found in the place indicated, and this sample afforded ample proof of the immense value which the complete collection would be.

The plan of rescue was delightfully simple. On the ground that information had been received that Ciano, with the connivance of the Italian prison staff, was to be allowed to escape, the Commandant of the German Security Police in Verona was to occupy the prison with his own men. Later the Germans would simply declare that their intervention had come too late and that Ciano had already fled. As soon as his safe arrival in Hungary had been signalled and confirmed, his wife would hand over the rest of the diaries. Himmler and Kaltenbrunner had agreed thus to act on their own responsibility on the grounds that Hitler's orders had specifically only forbidden the removal of Ciano to any place outside the area of German domination. They hoped that the importance and interest of the Ciano papers would persuade the Fuehrer to give his retrospective sanction to this independent action on the part of the supreme Head of his Secret Services.

But at the last minute their courage failed them. They had heard that Goebbels and Ribbentrop were both urging Hitler to show no favour to Ciano. Fearing that this counsel might prevail, Himmler and Kaltenbrunner decided that after all they must obtain Hitler's specific permission before proceeding any further. As was only to be expected, Hitler's reply was uncompromising; he forbade any attempt to help Ciano and threatened severe punishment of anyone who disobeyed him. It was then objected that by his refusal he was practically condemning Ciano to death. But Hitler retorted: 'Mussolini will

never permit the father of his beloved grandchildren to be put to death.'

Hitler, without doubt, sincerely believed that the arrest of Ciano and the case against him need not be taken seriously, that it was just a 'bit of thundering Italian bluff', and that no harm would come to the ex-Foreign Minister. He is now known to have told Goebbels that he had been sorry that Mussolini had not punished Ciano and the other renegade Fascists, but he was quite sure that he would shield his son-in-law from the extreme penalty.

As far as Mussolini was concerned, Hitler was right; but he forgot that Mussolini was no longer the Duce of yore, and that beside and against him were working forces in the neo-Fascist Government which he was not able to control. Buffarini and Farinacci were the prime movers in the campaign against Ciano. These neo-Fascist leaders apparently feared that they would be gravely compromised by Ciano's disclosures, and consequently they never ceased to demand his head. Mussolini allowed himself to be intimidated by them to such an extent that during the trial at Verona he did nothing to help his son-in-law, though it may be assumed that it was always his intention to reprieve him later. The events leading up to the execution of the sentence are still not known to the last detail, but it is clear that up to 10th January, 1944, the night before the execution, Mussolini had not received the expected petition for reprieve, and the news that Ciano had been shot came as a profound shock to him.

Ciano died next day with the bitter feeling that the Germans in their negotiations had deceived and betrayed him in the most contemptible manner. He refused to believe that his rescue had been seriously planned and had been prevented only by the cowardice of Himmler. But he retained his poise to the last, and he spent the whole night before his execution reading Seneca with Hildegard Bectz.

This efficient member of the German Secret Service not only delivered Ciano's letters to his wife and thereby gave the Countess the chance to send the diaries to Switzerland in good time, but she also played no small part in arranging the flight of the Countess herself and in ensuring, through my authority,

that those who had helped her were not punished. In this way, although he had actually had nothing to do with the rescue plot, Edda's friend the Marquis Emilio Pucci was saved from certain execution.

As is known, Ciano's diaries were sold in Switzerland by the Countess to the Americans. The portions which had already been given to the German Secret Service had a romantic history. At the end of April 1945, in accordance with a general instruction from Hitler, the originals and the translation were destroyed, together with all the secret files of the State Security Service Headquarters in Berlin. (Micro-photos had been taken, but what became of them is not known.) These valuable papers seemed therefore apparently lost for ever. Suddenly, however, a copy of them made its appearance. Hildegard Beetz, who had retrieved them from their hiding-place in Rome had, strictly against orders, kept a carbon copy of the translation with which she herself had been entrusted. As the Russian armies pressed forward during the last phases, she buried them in her garden. In the summer of 1945, with the assistance of the American secret service, she managed to retrieve them. They were finally handed over to the American State Department. So the whole of the Ciano diaries came to be preserved, memorials of the short-lived Fascist empire.

Fifteen months after the death of Ciano, his doom was swiftly overtaking Mussolini. I was keeping a close watch on the Fascist leaders in the last months of the war, and so am able to add something to the general knowledge of the last days of Mussolini. It is a strange story of treachery that is not yet fully explained. Much has already been written about those last days and hours of the Duce, but there are still some facts without which the story would be incomplete.

Of particular interest is the part played by the flabby Buffarini, Minister of the Interior. On 23rd April, through some middlemen who were on my staff, he approached the German Security Police in Italy with the proposal that this awkward man, Mussolini, should be got rid of by luring him into the hands of the partisans. The Security Police, Buffarini suggested, should issue false passports to Mussolini and his party, and he himself would then persuade him to flee to Switzerland, taking the route via

Como and Menaggio to the frontier. But at the frontier, the partisans would be lying in wait for him. . . .

At almost the same moment Dr. Marcello Petacci, brother of the beautiful Clara Petacci, approached a German police official in Meran with an almost identical proposal. He did not, it is true, lay any particular emphasis on the handing over of Mussolini to the partisans but—and this was much more in keeping with Petacci's character—he promised to ensure that the Duce took the treasure of the Salo Government with him. This was to be the bait for the securing of German co-operation, and Petacci contented himself with claiming only a most modest fraction of the loot for his pains. It so happened that a senior officer of the German Secret Service was in Meran at the time, and the two proposals were submitted to him. He rejected them at once and forbade any further communication with either Buffarini or Petacci. Then, feeling that perhaps he had exceeded his authority, he sent a wireless message to Kaltenbrunner giving all the details and asking for instructions. Later it was found this message never reached its destination.

Can it really be a coincidence, a pure though surprising 'concatenation of circumstances', that Mussolini later took exactly the route which Buffarini had suggested to the German police—and that his murderers were waiting in exactly the right place and at exactly the right time? Or had Buffarini . . .

As far as is known, Mussolini received Buffarini in Como on 26th April. The former Minister of the Interior, whom Mussolini three months earlier had said he never wished to see again, certainly suggested that Mussolini should flee to Switzerland. From his villa on the banks of Lake Como, he told the Duce he had had admirable opportunities of studying the routes used by smugglers, and he offered his services as a guide. It is, however, very curious since he knew the ropes so well that he had himself not already taken the road to safety instead of incurring the risk of waiting to assist a man whom he had hated so fiercely since his dismissal.

Mussolini's last letter to his wife which he entrusted to a policeman likewise fell into the hands of Buffarini, as is known from the memoirs of Donna Rachele, the widow of Mussolini. All these facts have some connection and they all point to dark

treachery concerning the death of Mussolini. Buffarini is dead—captured in flight by the partisans at the spot which he had recommended to Mussolini and, like Dr. Petacci, murdered by them in a manner which suggests that they were anxious to be rid of their partners in crime.

Whatever may be the verdict on Mussolini, however disastrous for Italy his policy may have been, his undeniable place in history demands that the mystery enshrouding his death should be resolved, while there are still men alive to tell the truth about his end.