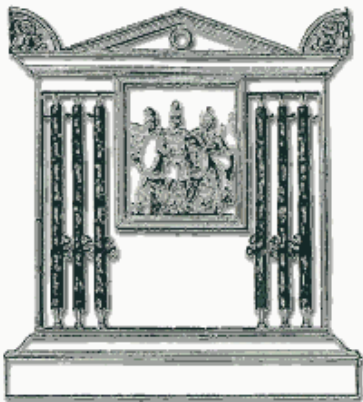




## Chapter 10 Death at Mezzegra



Disillusioned, physically weakened, morally devastated, Mussolini found himself in a military truck, heading for Milan, on the morning of April 25, 1945. With him in the truck were a small band of German bodyguards. He was a man on the run, with no where to go. Now, sixty one years old, with all his former glory and power in ruins, he appeared to not have the will to escape his fate, which lay ahead in the small lake area of Mezzegra, which he was smart enough to know was about to overtake him.

Wishing to avoid armed conflict which would have resulted in much bloodshed in the streets of Como, he stopped to write his last letter to his wife Rachele, and then ordered the convoy to continue to the Lake Garda area.

On the way to Como, the trucks stopped in Dongo where, in the public square, Clara Petacci waited for him. He asked her, "Why have you decided to follow me?" She answered, "This is the way I want it."

His letter to Rachele read;

Dear Rachele, here I am at the last stage of my life, at the last page of my book. We two may never meet again, and that is why I am writing and sending you this letter. I ask your forgiveness for all the harm I have unwittingly done you. But you know that you are the only woman whom I have really loved. I swear it before God, I swear it before our Bruno in this supreme moment. You know that we must make for the Valtelline. Take the children with you and try to get to the Swiss frontier. There you can build a new life. I do not think they will refuse to let you in for I have been helpful to them, and you have had nothing to do with politics. Should they refuse, surrender to the Allies, who may be more generous than the Italians. Take care of Anna and Romano, especially Anna who needs it so badly. You know how I love them. Bruno in heaven will help you. My dearest love to you and the children.

Your Benito, Como, 27th April, 1945  
Year XIII of the Fascist Era.

There have been many shrouded and often contradictory accounts of the events of Mussolini's final night and part of a day on earth. It is impossible to determine what actually occurred and why it occurred. What is known and generally agreed upon is that Mussolini was captured and taken prisoner by Signor Pier Bellini delle Stelle, a commander of a partisan group of soldiers known as the 52nd Garibaldi Brigade.

Bellini wondered what in the name of God do I do with this man. He sent a messenger to Como with the news that his Brigade had captured Benito Mussolini and awaited orders. He was determined to preserve Mussolini's safety, until he could hand him over to a higher authority or to some legal body which would treat the former Prime Minister of Italy according to law.

Meanwhile Bellini, in Dongo, found Clara Petacci. He went with her into an office, dismissed her guard and closed the door. Bellini sighed, "Look I know who you are. I know you are Clara Petacci. I have just come from him and he asked me to tell you that he is well and safe." She then admitted who she was and asked, "Is he truly safe?" Bellini assured her of his safety and well being. "He is well guarded and will come to no harm." He quickly saw that Clara was more intelligent than she appeared and was well spoken. He asked what she wanted. She said "My life is with him. I know what everyone thinks, that I was in this affair for the money, his power, his influence, but that is not the truth. I loved him and still do. Is that difficult to believe?"

### The Assassin

The senior of the two Colonels, the one who was to lead the mission to Dongo, was a determined, ruthless fighter, who would not be deterred by anyone or anything to carry out his instructions and his purposes. His companion, that early morning, was Ido Lampredi, also a determined and dedicated Communist. They discussed the make up of the team they wanted and as it neared two o'clock in the morning they began their malevolent journey with a dozen men, a car and an armoured half-track vehicle.

Unknown to the team, Audisio was hatching a ruthless, desperate secret plan in his mind. If circumstances and fate played into his



plan, he would be able to execute the scheme single-handed. His orders from the Committee were to seize Mussolini, and then return him to Milan for trial and execution.

Before leaving Milan, a still mysterious series of meetings by soldiers and diplomats, transpired which in the end provided Captain Valerio with the following document;

*Colonel Valerio (otherwise known as Magnoli, Giovanbattista) is an Italian officer belonging to the General command of the Volunteers Freedom Corps. The National Liberation Committee for Northern Italy has sent him on a mission in Como and its province and he must therefore be allowed to circulate freely with an armed escort.*

E. Q. Daddario, Captain

The pass was signed by a United States Allied liaison intelligence officer attached to the U.S. Fifth Army, who had been one of the first officers to enter Milan. The pass was stamped by the five-pointed red star of the Volunteer Corps.

With the pass safely in his pocket Audisio began to put together the details of his trip to Dongo to meet Captain Bellini and to seize Mussolini.

### **The Last Day "The Assassination"**

Alone in the room, Audisio faced Bellini and said, "I have come here to shoot Mussolini." Bellini was stunned into silence. Bellini soon responded by telling this stranger that it had been arranged with the representatives of the Como Committee that very morning to bring Mussolini to the prison in Como where he would be held until he was handed over to the proper authorities.

Bellini counted on two things which could stop Audisio in his execution plan. First, the telephone calls to Milan he hoped fervently would give him the extra authority he now required and second, only he and Canali knew where Mussolini was being kept. There he was set back by learning that Audisio had left to get Mussolini. Bellini knew that Canali would not have betrayed him, so who was it that knew where their prisoner was being kept. He discovered it was Moretti, the dedicated Communist, who had helped to take Mussolini to his friends' farm house earlier this morning.

At the farm house, Moretti first cleared their path by speaking with the two men guarding Mussolini and Clara. Audisio went into the house, up the landing and threw open the door to the bedroom.

"I have come to liberate you," he told the startled pair of captives.

"Really?" answered Mussolini.

"Yes, quickly, get ready. We have no time to lose."

"Where are we going?"

Audisio neglected the question and asked if they were armed. Mussolini replied that he had no weapons and neither did Clara.

"Then let's go," Audisio insisted.

A hundred metres down the road, Audisio called a halt and the car came to a stop directly opposite the gateway to the Villa Belmonte. Audisio sprang from the car, and opened the doors. Audisio then placed Moretti further down the road with orders to stop any vehicles approaching.

"Get out" he barked at his two victims sitting in the back seat. "Get out," again he shouted. Both were now pale and terrified as they both now knew Audisio's plan and their fate in life. "Over there," he pointed his gun towards the gateway. Without a word Mussolini walked towards the wall and stood against it, staring at Audisio. Clara went over to him and stood by his side.



Audisio yelled to Moretti to give him his gun. Now Mussolini knew he was going to die. He shouted, "Shoot me in the chest." These were his last words. The MAS gun opened up. Clara Petacci was hit first and slipped to the ground. Audisio hit Mussolini with a volley of bullets and he also fell to the ground. Then Audisio walked over to the two bodies and fired a single shot into Mussolini's heart.

The last bullet may have fulfilled a recent wish of Mussolini. He had told his intimates and family, when he was certain all of his hopes and ambitions were lost in the turmoil of the war, "I would rather take a bullet in the heart than be tried as a common criminal in New York's Madison Square Gardens."