



Chapter 1

Cast of Conspirators

Who were these powerful men who conspired against Italy's Prime Minister? Where would their conspiracy take them and the Nation? To whom were their loyalties given? What would happen to Benito Mussolini and the Government if their secret plans were successful? What other nations were they in league with? What would be their fate if their plot was revealed before the meeting of the Fascist Grand Council? What would the loyal Fascists do - what would Mussolini do?

These and other questions were being asked in secret meeting rooms in Rome as their plan to depose Mussolini as the Prime Minister of Italy took on new plotters and new meaning. What certain men did not know was that other secret agendas were being formed without their knowledge.

What they did not know was that Mussolini would accept willingly and gracefully the wishes of his King if he was dismissed from Office while on his regular visit to the Villa Ada to offer his weekly report to the Kingdom of Italy. Mussolini never wanted the Ministry of War portfolio which he knew should have been given to one of the Country's Military Marshals. He also knew that the King and the country knew that few could be trusted with this important and delicate responsibility. The King, as in all other instances, insisted that Mussolini was the only man he could trust with this Ministry.

In classical Roman Latin interpretation of the term, Mussolini could be properly described as a dictator - one who is appointed by the Roman Senate as Chief Magistrate in times of crisis. In modern terms Mussolini was not a Dictator. He was invited to govern by a King, served for twenty-one years as Prime Minister of Italy with the full authority and favor of the King, and was dismissed by a King on July 25, 1943.

The following essay is an attempt to answer some of these questions for the reader. Thumbnail biographical sketches of each major players in this high stakes drama is given along with the then status of the architects of this desperate and dangerous plan.

DINO GRANDI

Grandi, Dino, Conte di Mordano was born June 4, 1895 at Mordano, Italy – he died May 21, 1988 at Bologna, Italy. Grandi joined the Fascist movement early after the First World War. At the national Fascist Congress in Milano in 1921 he failed to gain a prominent post but became a member of the Party's General Directorate. Grandi was a leader in the 1922 March on Rome that brought Benito Mussolini to power and later served in the Chamber of Deputies as a Fascist Party member. He was appointed the Government's Foreign Minister in 1929 and later served as the Ambassador to Britain from 1932 to 1939 where he encouraged stronger ties with the League of Nations and helped soothe British opposition to the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. He was recalled from Britain in 1939 when Adolf Hitler reportedly objected to his pro-British sympathies. While serving in the government cabinet as Minister of Justice and President of the Chamber of Fasces and Corporations, he held secret negotiations with King Vittorio Emanuele III plotting against Benito Mussolini. On the night of July 24, 1943 Grandi successfully persuaded the Grand Council to vote in favour of a motion that would eventually lead to the dismissal and arrest of Mussolini for his mishandling of the war. Grandi was condemned to death in absentia by a Fascist Tribunal in 1944, but he had already fled to Portugal and Brazil. Although he ran a successful business in San Paulo, Brazil he returned to Italy in 1973. Grandi was now a very wealthy man. The former owner of a large Italian



newspaper in Bologna he now owned huge tracts of farm land, cattle breeding, and various other business enterprises.

Dino Grandi first met Benito Mussolini on November 25, 1914 at a rally meeting held at the People's Theatre in Milano. Mussolini had advertised in his newly-owned newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia* for a pro-war gathering of Italian young men and war veterans. Hundreds of men came to hear Mussolini speak. Both Grandi and Mussolini took part in an ensuing pro-war demonstration and both were arrested by the Italian Government.

He joined Mussolini's newly formed Fascist party in 1920 and became a party leader at Bologna and soon acquired a reputation both for his organizational skills and ability and for his sometimes violent conduct.

In 1921 Grandi, along with Roberto Farinacci and Italo Balbo, repudiated Mussolini's party leadership role and it was Grandi who led a orchestrated attempt to bring about Mussolini's downfall. Later Fascist members of the party in Bologna began to circulate a slogan about Dino Grandi - He who has betrayed once, will betray again.

In October of 1922 Grandi with Count Galeazzo Ciano, Cesare Maria DeVecchi, and Luigi Federzoni made several attempts to persuade Mussolini to join a Salandra Government Administration instead of pursuing his goal of defeating the Liberals and forming a Fascist Government. Once in power Mussolini appointed only DeVecchi. He excluded Grandi as he was disappointed in Grandi's political manoeuvring while in Rome.

On July 20, 1932 Mussolini made Dino Grandi Italy's Ambassador to the Court of St. James at London. This, in historical hind sight, was Mussolini's greatest political mistake. Later in 1939 he recalled Grandi to Italy, telling him, You have been over-Anglicized and far too close to British political leaders. Adolph Hitler reported to Mussolini that he was opposed to the political views of Dino Grandi from the very beginning of their relationship. Earlier that year Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York, after a visit to the Vatican, said of Dino Grandi "We have our Italian Darlan."

Although Grandi may have been secretly in league with British interests, he enthusiastically supported Italy's entry into the ongoing war in 1940. He described England's position as being openly aggressive against Italy and ill-advised in their European political manoeuvring and declarations of war. His private thoughts may have been far removed from his public statements. He fairly gushed with unending public praise of Il Duce, once declaring to him "You know how limitless and unconditional my loyalty to you is."

In 1942 Dino Grandi was willing enough to remark to Count Ciano that he marvelled at his ability to disguise himself as a loyal Fascist since he joined forces with Mussolini in 1922.

In January, 1943 as the war situation continued to worsen rumours began in Rome that Marshal Ugo Cavallero was openly announcing his willingness to succeed Mussolini if he should be replaced by the King. The talk was that Dino Grandi, Giuseppe Bottai, and Roberto Farinacci were also candidates. These were in all probability the first thoughts and steps in their plot which developed later and finally manifest itself at the Grand Council Meeting of July 24, 1943.



On January 23rd, 1943 Mussolini replaced Cavallero with General Vittorio Ambrosio, as Chief of Staff. On April 5th Mussolini assumed the duties of Foreign Minister and transferred Count Ciano to the post of Ambassador to the Vatican. He dismissed Bottai from all his governmental duties, and Dino Grandi from his post as Minister of Justice.

The King once said of Grandi, “ He is lacking in integrity. I don’t like him very much. He is not a sure element and with Mussolini he’s two-faced.” The King disliked politicians in general and in the end had only a high regard and admiration of Mussolini’s honesty and intellectual brilliance.

Grandi’s screen of party loyalty could not erase his life long desire to be a man of political substance and international importance.

Grandi had spent much of his time and energy developing his plan to depose Mussolini from power. To accomplish this he needed the help of party leaders, the King, and especially from Galeazzo Ciano, Mussolini’s son-in-law, married to Mussolini’s only daughter Edda whom Mussolini loved with a very deep fatherly devotion. Grandi’s plan was at first seen as a daring, ill-conceived act of madness. As it began to grow in thought and enterprise, Grandi recruited sufficient members which then made it an achievable move, but at the same time a very dangerous one for everyone concerned. The future of the entire nation was a risk. Failure would not be allowed and would lead to arrest and possibly confinement or even death. This plan would surely be branded an act of treason. His plan needed the approval and the participation of people in the very highest positions of the country. He worried about the Germans – what would they do to those that deposed or harmed that one man that they held in high reverence. This factor was always given the highest degree of concern and fear when he thought of the plan’s consequences.

Dino Grandi made his recommendations for a new government telling Duke Acquarone that having connections to or with the Fascist Party should not be considered. He recommended Marshal Caviglia for Prime Minister as he was the only marshal not associated with a history with the Fascists. He mentioned industrialist Alberto Pirelli for the important post of foreign minister. They were both well known to the Allies and would be welcomed as negotiators for any peace overtures. The Duke replied “ What about Badoglio? He is favourably looked upon by the King. Grandi replied “ He is an anti-Fascist who has accepted honors, titles, and money and is one of those most responsible for the war being lost. He is the last person in the world to evoke the faith of the King and the Italian people—he is the worst possible choice as head of the government.”

Then Grandi told the Duke that he plans to fly to Madrid. Once there he will contact his friends in the English and American governments.

Grandi was now forty-seven years old, a rich man of somewhat dubious national and some international influence. Most of what he had accumulated while in politics was directly attributable to his membership in the Fascist Party and the Government Ministries he held in the Italian Government for the past twenty years.



He did not confide in any Fascist Party members the nature of his plan for the Grand Council Meeting of the secret meetings he had with the King and the King's Advisors. There still was time for that.

In summation it can be said that Signor Dino Grandi, the Count of Mordano, was all things to all people: an opportunist, a flatterer, a realist, a revolutionist, a disarmament advocate, a pacifist, a superficial loyal Fascist, an Anglophile, a cynical Machiavellian, a skilful and intelligent negotiator, and more. He sketched out a detailed conspiracy plan for the king and after its successful completion he left Italy soon after Sunday, July 25, 1943. After a financially successful life in exile Dino Grandi was rewarded in 1947 with a full pardon from the Allied Forces Supreme Command of all former military and political charges . He then returned to the land of his birth.

THE KING

When King Vittorio Emmanuele III invited Benito Mussolini to form a new government in 1922 Italy was then in a post war state of economic disorder and social confusion. Once in power Mussolini reorganized the entire country and created a national sense of patriotism and economic well being. For the next twenty-one years the King became a strong supporter of Benito Mussolini and the new Fascist government which had created this modern social and economic miracle. Now, twenty-one years later in the summer of 1943 everything had changed for the king. Besides the outbreak of World War II in 1939, European monarchies were facing a difficult period of time in European history. Italy was no exception. There were Republican forces at work with intentions to bring to an end the reign of The House of Savoy, which began in 1861 with King Vittorio Emmanuele II and ended in 1946 when King Vittorio Emmanuele III abdicated the throne after a nation wide referendum rejected the Monarchy in Italy.

Now it was the day of the King's apostasy. He had given all the necessary orders to see this conspiracy through to its fateful end. He left it to one man to begin the drama at tonight's Grand Council Meeting at the Palazzo Venezia. Everything was in readiness at the House of Savoy. Having used Dino Grandi as a willing conspirator, the King was ready to sacrifice him and his plans and instead brought in Marshal Pietro Badoglio to head the government and General Vittorio Ambrogio as Chief of Military Staff.

COUNT GALEAZZO CIANO

Count Ciano was born in 1901 into a wealthy Livorno family whose father, Count Costanzo Ciano, an Admiral in the Italian Navy, was a first world war national hero, and an early member of the Fascist Party, a Cabinet Minister who had followed in the political foot steps of Mussolini. After a series of attempted assassinations, Mussolini made Count Costanzo Ciano his successor in case of his early death. Galeazzo made his first mark in 1932 when he was assigned to work in the Foreign Office. He was well educated, intelligent, a polished young man who possessed a remarkable memory for department details. He married Edda Mussolini in 1930. He was promoted to Foreign Minister in 1937. When Count C. Ciano died in 1939, it was generally believed that Galeazzo would be the successor of Benito Mussolini as Fascist party leader and Prime Minister of Italy.



Dino Grandi and Ciano did not see eye to eye on most matters of state and were often at logger heads with each other. Both were ambitious rich men who brought much talent and energy to their respective government ministries. Ciano agreed to work with Grandi on his now famous Grand Council motion, as he secretly wanted to protect the health and well being of his father- in- law and was becoming greatly disillusioned with the intrigues of international politics and their attending policies of duplicity and deceit. His motives were neither sinister or subversive but in the end he would lose his life over these fundamental points of view. He was now forty years old, a father and husband and surely had a view to live out his life with his family, away from the terrors and fears of international global warfare.