



DAVID H. STRINGER COLLECTION x 2

ITALY'S FORGOTTEN AIRLINES

PART THREE / WAR AND BEYOND: THE RISE AND FALL OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

Concluding his three-part series on the development of Italy's airlines, from the early pre-war days to the demise of the independents in the 1950s, **MAURICE WICKSTEAD** traces the evolution of the Italian carriers through the enforced amalgamation of the war years, the post-war rebirth of private enterprise and the ultimate swallowing of everything by Alitalia

POLITICAL observers of the time often commented that Benito Mussolini was somewhat distrustful of Hitler in the immediate pre-war period, to the extent of constructing an 1,851km (1,150-mile) series of fortifications, known as the *Vallo Alpino* (Alpine Wall), across Italy's northern frontier. Nevertheless, having watched events turn towards Germany's favour during 1938–39, Mussolini threw in his lot with Germany and on June 10, 1940, took Italy to war against the Allies.

At the beginning of September that year Italy's airlines were mobilised as part of *Comando Servizi Aerei Speciali* (CSAS) under General Aurelio Liotta, with *Avio Linee Italiane* (ALI), Ala Littoria SA (ALSA) and *Linee Aeree Transcontinentali Italiane* (LATI) organised into the *Nucleo Comunicazione* (Communications Group) and their crews transferred to full military status. Even before this, however, on June 5, the South American service had been reduced to one trip per month, and shortly thereafter closed down completely.

A SHRINKING NETWORK

In late 1939, reflecting the worsening situation in Europe, ALSA's network had already begun to shrink, the only remaining foreign destinations being those in Germany, Greece, Spain, the Adriatic and the Mediterranean rim. A temporary timetable issued in March 1940 eliminates Berlin, although Sofia in Bulgaria via Tirana in Albania appears to have been briefly reinstated.

When Italy entered the war, the capacity of ALI and ALSA became largely directed towards military campaigns in the Balkans and Greece. Back in April 1939 ALSA's four examples of the Breda Ba 44 — a much-modified licence-built de Havilland Dragon Rapide — used on domestic Albanian services, had been sequestered by the military for operations surrounding Italy's occupation of the territory. One unusual addition to ALSA's wartime fleet was Douglas DC-3 I-EMOS, which operated the Rome–Tirana service before being exchanged with Germany for various types. Formerly operated by Belgian national airline Sabena as OO-AUH, it had been interned by the Vichy authorities at Oran in Algeria while attempting to reach the Belgian Congo, and was subsequently handed over to the *Regia Aeronautica*.

For a while LATI's entire effort was redirected to providing military support flights to Libya and East Africa, but an impassioned plea by Benito's aviator son, Bruno Mussolini, resulted in the restoration of transoceanic services from June 22, 1940 — although not without handicaps. As well as having to operate on two fronts, LATI lost many of its most experienced crews to the military, and new personnel had to be trained for the long overwater flights, conducted solely by astro-navigation and in complete radio silence. At the same time it was no longer possible to supply overseas and offshore bases regularly by sea. Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties,

Fiat G.212CP I-ELCE of Avio Linee Italiane (ALI) awaits another flight at Zürich-Kloten in Switzerland. Tragically the trimotor was lost in an accident while serving as part of the newly minted ALI-Flotte Riunite on May 4, 1949, when it crashed on approach to Turin in fog, killing the entire Torino FC football team.

LUIGINO CALIARO COLLECTION

