

## **Verbundkatalog Kalliope**

### **Stranger Than Fiction.**

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# This World At War

## LAST WEEK . . .

In Italy, all German forces surrendered unconditionally. Benito Mussolini's death by execution was revealed. The 5th and 7th Armies met in the Brenner Pass.

In Germany, Adolf Hitler's death was announced from Berlin. Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz was named to succeed him.

On the east-west fronts, all German forces in Holland, north-west Germany, Denmark surrendered unconditionally. Berlin was captured by the Red Army.

In the Pacific, the British seized Rangoon. Stiff fighting continued on Okinawa.

In Washington, President Truman began expenditure-cutting before VE-Day, appointed Frank E. Hannegan Postmaster General.

In San Francisco, Argentina was admitted to the United Nations Conference and work begun on the conference charter.

## EUROPE

### Surrender in Italy

Highlighting last week's stupendous crescendo of events was the capitulation of the German armies in the theater where resistance, it was generally thought, might continue the longest. In northern Italy the Germans had maintained their most cohesive, sizeable force still fighting the Allies; elsewhere the disintegration of the Wehrmacht had already set in. It had generally been thought that the German forces in Italy would guard the southern approaches to the "inner fortress" in the Austrian Alps. Actually that last redoubt was conquered before it developed.

This final smashing of the Wehrmacht in Italy was no easy matter. If the Nazi defense collapsed, it collapsed because of the weight and the brilliant performance of the Allied armies. Even in surrender the Germans in Italy and Austria looked fit. They still functioned as an organization; in most cases commanders could still communicate with their troops; they still had considerable supplies and transport. The German prisoners streaming down the Po Valley into PW camps did not seem overly weary; they were not the dog-tired variety which clogged the roads of the western front.

The unconditional surrender in Italy set the pattern for another such mass surrender in the west; the end of the war might come now at any moment.

### Stranger Than Fiction

If some soothsayer or fiction writer had predicted, two or three years ago, that Hitler and Mussolini were to die practically at the same time, everybody would have shrugged off the prophecy as grossly improbable. "Things just don't happen that way," would have been the general verdict. "After all, history is no melodrama."

But that is precisely what history is, at times—a melodrama of monumental grandeur and simplicity. The creator and director of this performance introduces two villains and allows them to become powerful. Their unholy partnership causes a great deal of trouble and tribulation. As they go on collaborating in their sinister schemes, the world despises and fears them as the double symbol and two-headed incarnation of one evil principle. In the end they perish together; justice catches up with both, practically at the same time. Things do happen that way.

The ex-Duce was shot by Italian Patriots in a village near Lake Como, on April 28. About 72 hours later, on May 1, the German radio announced the Fuehrer's death. At the same time Mussolini played



EZRA POUND

Whereabouts of a traitor. See Front and Center.

his last scene in the open, under clear and verified circumstances, the conditions of Hitler's end remain shrouded in mystery. Some skeptics doubt that he is dead at all; others suspect he may have died days, if not weeks or months, before Admiral Doenitz introduced himself as his successor.

Presuming that Hitler was still alive and still in his right senses on April 28, it would be interesting to know how he reacted to the news from Italy. After all, the man whose body was now strung up and kicked about on a public square in Milan had once been his master and model. When Benito established his dictatorship, Adolf was still an anonymous beginner. The success of the self-appointed Caesar in Rome stimulated the ambition of the would-be Superman in Munich. An eager and reverent disciple, Hitler studied and aped Mussolini's gestures and tactics. The Duce's example was instrumental in shaping the Fuehrer's character and career.

When the two met, in June, 1934, Hitler was already in power, but he still looked up to Mussolini as the founder and "grand old man" of Fascism. The meeting took place in Venice. Hitler arrived by plane, dressed as a civilian in his traditional raincoat; Mussolini received him in a gold-braided uniform, with a dagger at his side. As the German visitor walked toward him, the Italian dictator is alleged to have said: *Non mi piace*—"I don't like the guy."

They differed from each other in various respects. Mussolini was a corrupted intellectual; Hitler an outright barbarian. The Italian believed in the superiority of the Latin tradition; the German established himself as the champion and prophet of the Nordic "master race." While the former had a good time, begot children and kept mistresses, the latter was sexually inhibited or abnormal and tried to hide his deficiencies or perversions behind the hypocritical pose of ascetic purity. The interests of the two dictators occasionally came into collision—especially on the Austrian question. In short, both had plenty of reasons to dislike each other—quite apart from the fact that neither was capable of liking anyone but himself.

Yet they needed each other. In the beginning Hitler depended on Mussolini's prestige and experience; later Mussolini would have been helpless without Hitler's military and economic support. Whatever the difference between them, their alliance or "Axis" was logical and organic. Both denied and insulted the dignity of Man; both believed in violence as the ultimate truth. It was only nat-

ural, indeed, inevitable that both should be destroyed by the disaster which they prepared and provoked together.

### Lt. Robertson's Handshake

In Wurzen, Germany, on April 25, there was a jeepload of American soldiers consisting of Lt. William D. Robertson of Los Angeles, Calif.; Cpl. James G. McDonnell of Peabody, Mass.; Pfc. Paul Staub of The Bronx, New York City and Pfc. Frank P. Huff of Washington, Va. Lt. Robertson, a short, good-looking Yank who had been a pre-medical student at the University of California in Los Angeles before the war, was using his patrol to maintain a semblance of order in Wurzen, through which masses of fleeing civilians and freed slave laborers were hurrying. Finally, Robertson's captain suggested he and his men head east and steer away civilians who might be headed for Wurzen. At 10:30, the four-man patrol jeeped out of town.

Fifteen miles north of Wurzen, the Yanks met 30 British prisoners of war who had escaped. There were more British and some American PWs further up the road, they indicated, so Lt. Robertson's jeep kept on until it reached a town on the Elbe River, called Torgau, then some 20 miles west of the 1st Army's most advanced forces. While talking with groups of slave laborers whom they liberated in the undefended town, the lieutenant's patrol heard small arms fire nearby. Torgau's civilians explained that the town had just been heavily shelled by the Russians who were just across the river, about 150 yards wide at that point.

Robertson, not sure of his reception, rigged up a flag and attached it to the jeep on a pole cut from a tree. Then a brainstorm hit him. He went into a German drugstore, got dyes and crudely painted red stripes and a blue field on his flag. Near the river was a castle-like building surmounted by a tower. The four Americans climbed to the top. Lt. Robertson shouted the only Russian word he knew—*Tovarisch*—and waved his crude *Old Glory*.

From the woods opposite, where an armored car was visible, came back yells which the Americans couldn't understand. Then the car let go with colored flares, the prearranged signal for the linkup meeting, wherever it should occur. But Lt. Robertson had no flares. He tried to explain this in English and waved his flag. His answer was two rounds of anti-tank fire which roared past the tower. The four Americans got the hell out of there fast.

In the town they found a liberated Russian laborer who could speak English. He was persuaded to climb to the top of the tower and explain the situation. The men in the armored car yelled back that the Germans had pulled a trick on them with an American flag earlier, and that was why they shot. Then the Russians ran out of the woods and down the Elbe's bank to where a blown-up bridge sagged across the stream. The Americans ran down their own side and clambered across the twisted girders toward the clambering Russians. First to shake hands were Lt. Robertson and Pvt. Nikolai Ivanovich Ardreef.

Thus, reported the U. S. Army last week, occurred the first officially-recognized juncture between the west and east fronts in Germany, one of the most historic linkups in the history of warfare. Drew Middleton of The New York Times put it this way: "The first official contact between the Red Army and the Allies' Expeditionary Forces was made at 4:40 on Wednesday, April 25, when a second lieutenant and three men of an intelligence and reconnaissance platoon of the 273rd Regiment of the 69th Infantry Division of the 1st Army met elements of the 173rd Regiment of the 58th Guards Division of the 1st Ukrainian Army on the girders of a demolished bridge at Torgau on the Elbe, 25 miles northeast of Leipzig." How Lt. Robertson put it in his first letter home was another story.

### Tight-Rope Specialty

Through World War II, the Republic of Eire has stuck to a stiff-necked neutrality. Until last week, the peak of her rigid rebuff to war was considered her ban from Irish newspapers of Vatican pronouncements on Nazi atrocities in Po-