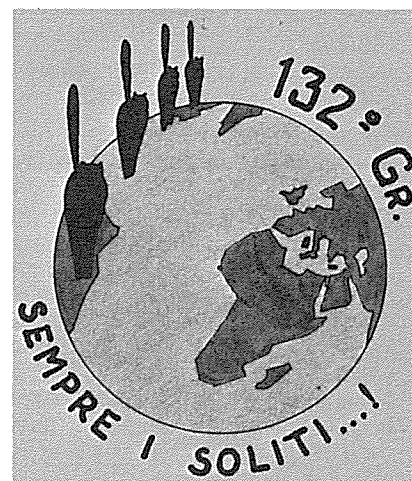
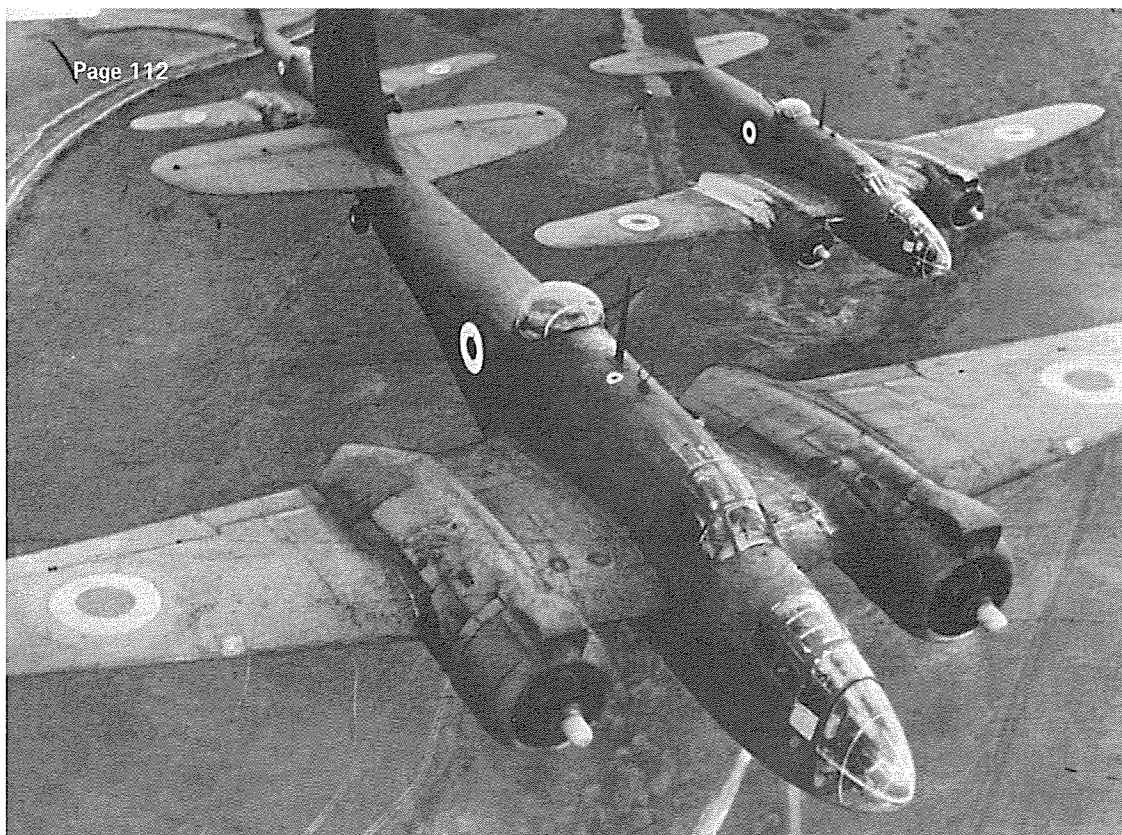




The signs of wear are evident, particularly on the upper engine cowlings of this Baltimore Mk.V.

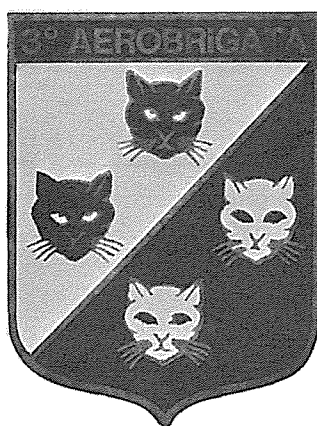
MARTIN 187 IN ITALIAN SERVICE

Photographs from Italian Aviation Historical Office except as noted.

The invasion of Sicily in July 1943 led to the armistice with Italy as an almost immediate consequence, although the capture of Italy's central city was to take almost another year. However, the war-weary Italians had very heavy casualties, and King Victor Emmanuel imprisoned Mussolini, placing Marshal Badoglio in charge, who ultimately negotiated a peace. The Allied/Italy armistice came on September 8, 1943.

After that armistice with the Allied forces was signed Italy almost immediately began opposition to the Germans and war against them was declared on 13 October by the South Government, headed by the King. The Allies wished to encourage participation against the German forces, but at the same time were wary. However, within a few days of this new declaration, all the Regia Aeronautica's units, until then subdivided into "sturmi,"

Below, the emblem of the 278th Torpedo Squadron, born in 1940, (at left) lent its four cats to the 132nd Bomb Group of Stormo Baltimore in 1944. The motto, *SEMPRE I SOLITI*, was added and thus began the Stormo Baltimore's own insignie. The present day insignie, sported on RF-84F airplanes, is shown at right. When the 3rd Stormo Caccia was formed in 1948 from the disbanded Stormo Baltimore, the four cats were resumed in the new insignie.



By Dr. Ing. TULLIO MARCON

"gruppi," and "squadriglia," were reorganized in three "Raggruppamenti," comprising respectively all the fighters, the bomber and transport airplanes, and the seaplanes still based on the South Italy airfields, or those which landed there after escaping seizure by Germans.¹

By the end of December 1943, the Raggruppamento Bombardieri e Trasporti was based at Lecce airfield and had collected a total strength of 104 airplanes. Only 63 of these were serviceable; most of them were Cant.Z.1007's, Savoia SM.79's and SM.72's — three engined bombers and transports. The Raggruppamento consisted of two groups, the 8th Bombing Group (made up of Squadriglie 19th, 190th, 260th, and 265th) and the 132nd Transport Group (made up of the 241st, 253rd, and 281st squadriglie).

Whilst the Italian fighter and transport units effected an almost immediate operation with Allied air forces, the bombing units saw a very limited use until the Spring of 1944. The bomb units were mostly destined for supply-dropping duties in the Balkans, and for personnel and material ferrying in addition to the cargo planes. This situation stemmed from lack of precise orders by the Allied Headquarters, and from poor condition of the airplanes still on charge after three years of first-line service. One other factor, as discussed below, was that bombing, by its very mission relates to dropping explosives on targets, many of which for the advancing Allied forces, were in Northern Italy.

Supply drops were accomplished by the Cant.Z.1007's of 88th Group, which had 28 of them in mid-October 1943 but these were reduced to only 12 by August 1945. Eight of them were lost to the German opposition in 1944.

At last, in the Spring of 1944, the Allied Headquarters originated the Balkan Air Force, and it was stated that an Italian bombing unit would join its 254th Wing in addition to the Royal Air Force and South African Air Force squadrons. The B.A.F., then commanded by Air Vice Marshall W.A.B. Bowen Buscarlet, RAF, was made up of English, American, Polish, Greek, Russian and Yugoslavian units, plus the Italian, and was to support the armies and partisan groups fighting in the Balkans. A conglomerate

force, it used fighters, fighter-bombers, light and medium bombers, and cargo planes. The 254th Wing comprised the Italian units, RAF Beaufighters, and SAAF Marauders.

This Italian "Stormo" which was to join the 254th Wing had combined the two Groups, 28th and 132nd. Personnel was transferred to these from the other groups of the Raggruppamento, the 88th and the old 132nd. The new unit, hence, was to include in a unique stormo the names and traditions of the best of the Italian bombing, transport and torpedo squadriglie of WWII. The squadrons of the new unit were the 19th and 260th (in 28th Group) and the 253rd and 281st (in the reconstituted 132nd). For its official denomination, it was preferred to follow a WWI practice, giving it the name of the main airplane used, in this case the Martin Baltimore. Thus from early 1944 until 1948, when it was disbanded, the unit was known as the "Stormo Baltimore."

In all, 41 of the ex-RAF Baltimores were allotted to the Regia Aeronautica. These were the latest marks manufactured, Mk.IV, serialled "FA" and Mk.V, serialled FW. They had already fought in Egypt with the Desert Air Force, and if not largely combat worn out, they were far from being new machines.

The Baltimore was Martin Model 187, and the type had been produced from the outset in 1941 to R.A.F. requirements; when production ceased in May 1944, the Royal Air Force had received 1,575 of them in five Marks, and were using them exclusively in the Mediterranean theatre, by day and by night, in light bomber and attack squadrons.

Following is a comparison between the Martin Baltimore and the Savoia Marchetti SM.79, the typical three-engined bomber of Regia Aeronautica in WWII:

	Baltimore	SM.79
Power	3,300	3,00
Span	61 ft.	69 ft.
Wing area	540 sq. ft.	660 sq. ft.
Loaded Wt.	23,000 pounds	25,000 pounds
Wing Loading	43 lbs./sq.ft.	38 lbs./sq.ft.
Top speed	300 m.p.h.	270 m.p.h.
Landing	105 m.p.h.	75 m.p.h.
Crew 1	4	5

No airplane of the Baltimore type had ever before been used by Regia Aeronautica crews. They had been accustomed to the large, slightly underpowered, three-engine types with good maneuverability, no high wing loads, and reasonably slow landing speeds. Moreover, these aircraft had no foot brakes or electrically operated turrets; communication among crew members was

direct, without aid of an interphone system. Finally, as in all Italian airplanes, the throttles were operated in a way opposite to the Anglo-American ones, i.e., pull back to increase power instead of push forward.

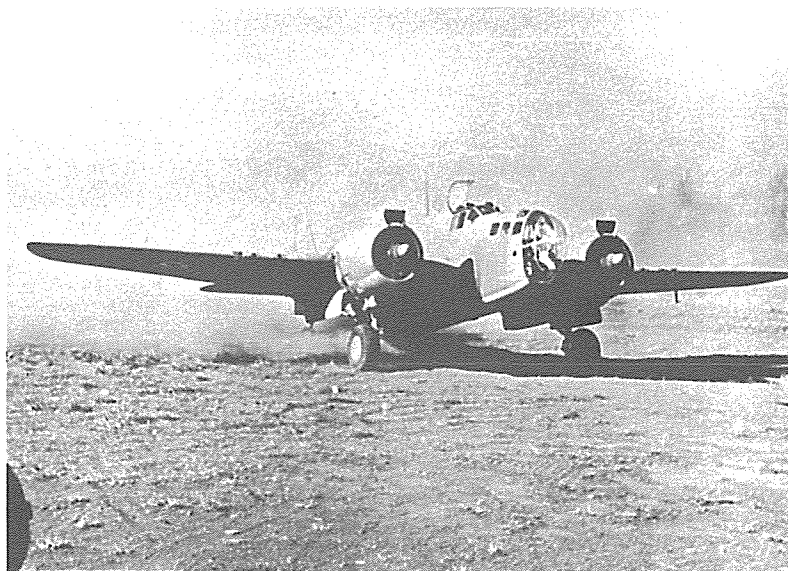
Three of our Italian pilots were sent to the Desert Air Force Training Center at Shandur, Egypt, to be trained on the Baltimore in June. They were met with difficulties: not only they had to learn flying the airplane by solo (as there was no place for a second pilot/instructor), but had to become acquainted with the elaborate RAF radio procedure during takeoff and landing. Finally, they had to forget the classic Italian formation flight (a vic [Vee] of five airplanes with the leader flying lower) in favor of two stepped vics of three airplanes each, with the leader flying higher than his wingmen.

Captains Graziani and Gerardi and Lt. Crespi ended their training in Egypt successfully and, upon their return to Italy, the Stormo was officially formed as of 1 July 1944 at Ottaviano airfield, near Naples. Of the total of available pilots in the Stormo Baltimore, 75 percent of them had considerable flying experience while the rest were only fresh from flying schools. Thus, it was decided to assign the former to piloting the Baltimore and the latter to navigate for them, acting also as bomb-aimers. Italian roundels were painted over the RAF insignia on the wings.³

Within November 1944 the transition training was accomplished, recording 1783 flights. The way was not uneventful due to some serious accidents. The first of these occurred on 23 August when Major Buscaglia, C.O. of the 28th Group, crashed soon after takeoff and died of injuries, causing grief among the Italian aviators. Major Carlo E. Buscaglia had been C.O. of the former 132nd Torpedo Group. He was the ace of the Italian torpedo units, with more than 100,000 tons of Allied shipping sunk or seriously damaged during 32 actions. He was shot down, with his SM.79 and four other crewmen in the Bougie Bay (Algeria) on 12 November 1942 during an attack on an Allied convoy. Wounded, he was taken prisoner and sent to the United States. After the Allied/Italian armistice he was returned to Italy and upon hearing of his Group being reformed, he applied for service. He was posthumously awarded the Medaglia d'oro (Gold medal), the highest Italian decoration.

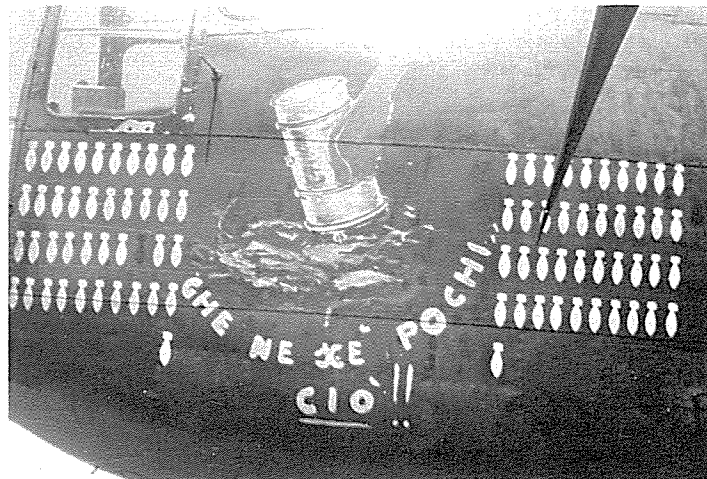
On 20 August another Baltimore piloted by Lt. Cella of 132nd Group, crashed and burned while taking off and the pilot died later. The third, and similar, casualty occurred on 6 October,

At Ottaviano airfield, Summer 1944, the Baltimores received from the RAF were gone over by maintenance crews for familiarization and limited repair. At right, the now-Italian Baltimore taxiing, ports for fixed guns show in leading edge of wing. (Photo - r. Interconair Aviazione #26/33)





Left, pilot and bombardier/navigator prepare to enter Baltimore with 10 mission marks. The one at right, with 82, may indicate highest number of



missions flown by any of the Italian Baltimores. The motto is in Venetian slang. (Stato Maggiore Aero. Cat. #56211 & #56561)

involving F/Sgt Nocera of 28th Group. The primary reason for disasters was the Baltimore's tendency to swing during takeoff.

In early 1944 the Stormo Headquarters, headed by Lt. Col. Roveda, was deployed to Biferno (Termoli), together with 132nd Group under Major Erasi and its 16 aircraft. 28th Group, commanded by Lt. Col. Moci, followed with 16 Baltimores on 3 December. These gave the Stormo the equivalent of two RAF Squadrons (including reserves). The Group Insignia was that of the 132nd Bomb Gp.⁴

The war situation at the end of 1944 was still frustrated for the Allies. North Italy was occupied yet by German forces. Many crews of Stormo Baltimore had their families there. To avoid the problems inherent in sending men over their own homeland on bombing raids, the Allied Headquarters assigned the Italian unit the campaign then being waged in Yugoslavia.

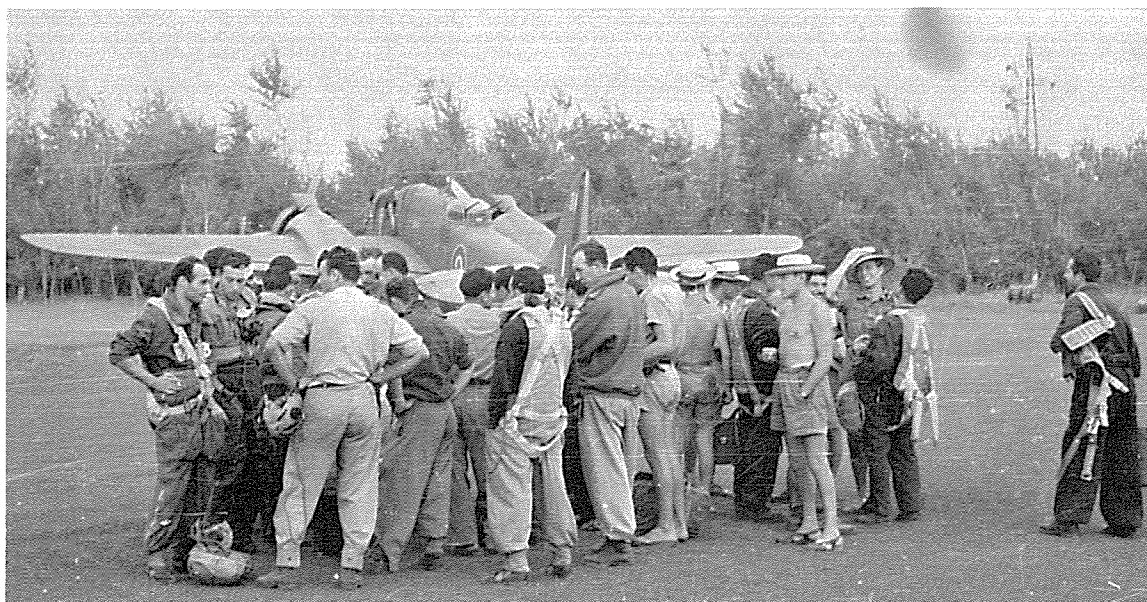
The first sortie was carried out by five Baltimores of 132nd Gp. against the railroad marshalling yards at Konjic on 19 November whilst on 22nd November six airplanes attacked the Podgoritza road bridge. It was the beginning of a long series, involving pin point targets, in which the Stormo had to gain fame among the 254th Wing of B.A.F. On 11 December 23 airplanes from both groups made their first raid together, again hitting Konjic. From

then on, the average of Baltimores sent out daily into action was 20, weather permitting.

The first combat loss occurred on 19 December, when Baltimore FW-425 of 132nd Group, crashed in the Adriatic sea on the return from a target with its crew of four, Lts. Biagiola and Cavallo, Warrant Officer Birra and Gunner Campanile. All were listed as missing.

The winter of 1944/45 was, it may be remembered, very cold. Often flying was impossible for the adverse weather. Stormo Baltimore's men had to live in tents only, the air strip at Biferno lacking buildings of any sort. Their flying suits and personal equipment were poor, and generally little aid could be obtained in foods and materials.*

* Churchill made the point that the entire Italy campaign was starved for the total needs to wrest the peninsula from the German forces. Though the agreement had been made at Tehran to make *Operation Overlord* (the invasion of Normandy) the prime concern, there was also the conquest of the Italian Peninsula but demands for pulling the forces from the Italian campaign became more insistent in order to make the landing on the French Riviera coast, called *Operation Anvil*. In consequence, though the battle for Italy pinned down from nineteen to twenty-five divisions of German troops and supporting air and naval forces, thus contributed to the success of the French invasions, there were never enough troops and armour available to the Allies in Italy to carry it through forcefully. See Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. II*, pages 384-387.



Crew gathered for briefing at training session in Summer of 1944. Casual dress was not only order of the day but also of necessity. Baltimore, Number 31 on fin, still has RAF roundel and fin flash.



Nicknamed "Little Flower" this one showed at least 31 mission marks. Significance of the slashes on the bomb outlines is unknown. At right, the



crew of No. 10, "Little Star," of 132nd Bomb Gp. relax for a smoke before takeoff. (Stato Maggiore Aero. Cat. #56301 & #56299)

From the beginning of February 1945 the weather improved gradually and in that month 400 sorties were sent against Konjic, Bihac, and Busovaca marshalling yards, the Rab batteries, the Jablanac and Senj piers, the Zenica bridge, and other targets at Gespic, Sokolac, Otocac, and Brinje, all in Yugoslavia.

On 21st February, during an attack on Arsa coal mines, antiaircraft fire hit FW-851; it was set on fire and crashed with its crew. Major Erasi, C.O. of 132nd Group, died in the crash with Lt. DiStefano, and Sgts. Sciammamini and Rossi. In the same raid 14 more of the Baltimores were hit variously by a/a fire. The loss of Maj. Erasi was keenly felt. He had been C.O. of the 278th Torpedo Sqdn in 1940, the first Italian unit in this role, and was one of Italy's ace fliers. His targets, among the many Allied vessels sunk, included the British cruisers LIVERPOOL and GLASGOW. He was posthumously awarded the Medaglia d'oro.

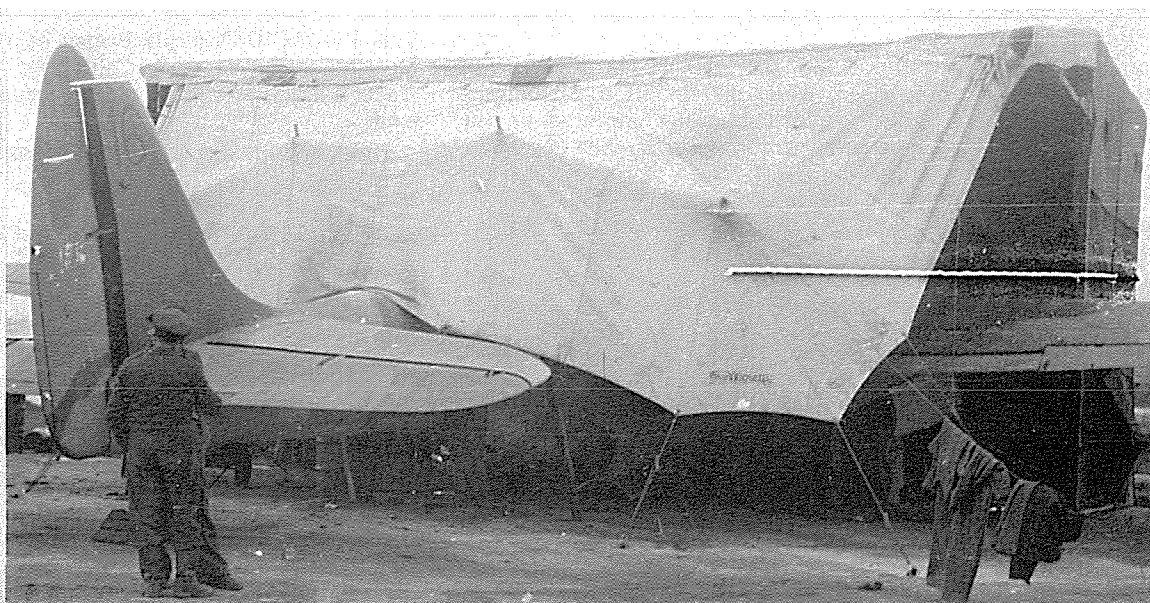
The last war loss of Stormo Baltimore occurred on 12 March. While 18 of the Baltimores were taking off towards the Rab batteries again, FW-474 of 132nd Gp. swung along the strip and its bomb load exploded, killing Lts. Grazioli and Petruzzeli, W/O Maggio and Sgt. Serafino. The targets assigned the Group in March were mostly the Bos Kripa, Bos Novi, Kostajnica, Ogulin and Voljnia marshalling yards, all heavily protected by anti-aircraft guns.

In April, 550 sorties were sent to various targets, among them the Otoka bridge, the Rab, Cherso, Veglia, and Lussino batteries, the Brioni Piers, and several marshalling yards. In all of these raids the anti-aircraft fire was especially fierce and the airplanes were often hit. On May 4th, all of the serviceable 24 airplanes left in Stormo Baltimore attacked the bridge between Sisak and Memetimec. It was to be the last raid for them, as on the next day, May 5th, a radio message called back those which had been launched against Zagreb.

In the operational period between Nov. 11, 1944 and May 1945, the Stormo Baltimore accounted 4,886 combat flying hours, plus 425 for other purposes, and dropped 1225 tons of bombs. These were in 189 actions involving 1554 sorties. Their losses were 20 airmen, four of them missing, and three airplanes destroyed. The percentage of bombs on target was estimated as about 50%, the best among the units of the 254th Wing of B.A.F. This was despite the obsolete Baltimore bombsights. For their precision on pinpoint targets, Maj. Erasi and Lt. Col. Moci became famous as "Mr. Bridge" and "Mr. Stopping Train." Formation flight was adjudged "above the average" by Allied Headquarters.

There had been an initial suspicion of the loyalties of the Italian airmen. Allied H.Q. never admitted it officially, but it was

At Biferno airstrip there were no buildings of any sort so maintenance was carried on under large tents. Photograph circa early 1945. Number 16 on fin.



ascertained that during the first sorties of Italian Baltimores against German targets an Allied airplane followed at a distance of a few miles, keeping the Baltimores in sight. This caused bitterness among the Italian airmen, and within a few days the H.Q. ceased this "control."

When the War ended the entire Stormo was awarded the Medaglia d'Argento (Silver Medal), which was the second highest Italian award. Later, another pilot of Stormo Baltimore, Lt. G. Badalini, of the 260th Bomb Sqdn, was awarded the Medaglia d'oro.

At the date of V-E Day there were 32 Baltimores in first line service, and about ten in the flying schools. In June, the Stormo moved from Biferno to Rome and its airplanes were used for training and communication. After the War, they continued in use, and during 1946 accounted for 3129 flying hours, and the next year, 1947, for 2542 including maritime reconnaissance. The Stormo moved to Palese airfield on April 1, 1948 and it was disbanded. Its personnel went to a fighter unit, the 3rd Stormo Caccia, equipped with P-38 Lightnings. The remaining Martin Baltimores, the last conventional bomber type in Italian service, were scrapped.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The source of the data and the photographs for this article is the Italian Aviation Historical Office, Rome, Italy. Its original denomination was "Ufficio Storico dell'Aeronautica Militare."

NOTES:

1. From WWI to the present the basic Italian unit has been the "squadriglia," with a strength of five to twelve airplanes, depending upon its role and first-line equipment availability. Two bomber

"squadriglie" (or three for fighters) made up one "gruppo," and two bomber "gruppi" (or three for fighters) made up a "stormo." It should be noted that the size of a U.S.A. squadron was considerably larger than that of an Italian "Squadriglia." Roughly, the size of a U.S. squadron could be compared to that of an Italian "gruppo."

2. See also Christopher F. Shores, "Martin Maryland and Baltimore Variants," *Profile No. 232*. Windsor (Berks): Profile Publications Ltd., 1972.
3. Red/white/green roundels were the Italian national aircraft during WWI and were resumed after the Armistice in 1943. In the period between the Italian insignia had been the 3 black "fasci" on each wing, a white band around the fuselage, and a white cross on fin and rudder, with Savoia house arms.
4. In the Italian language the idiomatic expression "essere quattro gatti" (to be four cats) implies "to be very, very few people." When the original 278th Torpedo Sqdn. was formed there were only a few pilots with it, and their insignia was a torpedo with two white and two black cats on it. When 132nd Gp. was reorganized with Sq. 278 and 281 the insignia of 278th became that of 132nd Gp. A variation on the theme came when 132nd Gp. went to Baltimores and the motto "sempre i soliti" was incorporated in it. It is interesting to note that the insignia of the 3rd Aerobrigada (formerly 3rd Stormo, after the Stormo Baltimore was disbanded, has maintained the tradition, depicting four cat's heads in its shield emblem.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dott. Ing. Tullio Marcon has been a member of the Society since 1964, and beside a lifelong interest in aviation, has also been a contributor on naval subjects. He is currently a correspondent of the Italian magazine, *Interconair Aviazione e Marina*, which published his articles on the Regia Aeronautica in WWII. His articles on the history of Italian naval aviation have appeared in *Warship International*.

Dott. Ing. (for university degree in civil engineering) Marcon is Chief Engineer for the city of Augusta, Sicily, and a Naval Reserve engineering officer of the Italian Navy.

DAUNTLESS DISCOVERY

Edward T. Maloney, Buena Park, California.

In the summer of 1959, Planes of Fame Museum acquired a battered old fuselage, an ex-Navy SBD-5 "Dauntless" dive bomber. It had sat idle since the end of World War II in a field in San Fernando Valley under a row of pepper trees. Her wings, canopy, and tail feathers were gone — lost due to a fire, and needed some tender loving care. It was still in faded three-tone U.S. Navy camouflage paint of World War II. Nothing was known of its past history and no records or documents could be located.

The 1944 tires were flat but an air bottle soon remedied that and to our amazement the old tires still held air. The SBD was towed on its landing gear to a nearby storage yard and later moved sixty miles to Claremont, California where it remained in storage until 1965.

During Christmas vacation 1965, the SBD was brought out of storage and restoration began. While the aircraft was being prepared for painting hitherto hidden markings appeared on the engine accessory cowl and fuselage during the sanding operation. They consisted of a bird riding a very large bomb with the name "SHIFTLESS SKUNK" at the top. The names "FRANCOIS" appeared in yellow under the left side front cockpit and "UNKA" on the left side rear cockpit. Al Clemens, museum staff artist, carefully restored the markings and though the mystery of its identity still remained it was believed to have been a combat aircraft due to the unique markings and a large amount of spent ammunition found in the flooring and belly compartments of the aircraft. Some battle repairs were also evident.

The key to this SBD's past history was found in S/L Cliff Jenks' article "The Douglas Dauntless in RNZAF Service." This airplane had been one of the 68 U.S. Navy SBD-5 Dauntless' assigned to the Royal New Zealand Air Force during the Pacific War.

Our SBD-5, BuNo 28536 was built at the Douglas El Segundo plant and accepted by the U.S. Navy in June 1943. It arrived at Espiritu Santo Island and was one of 32 SBD-5's assigned to No.

25 Sq. Royal New Zealand Air Force and was further assigned to F/S N.I. Kelly and his gunner F/S B.E. Cullen. Its names and markings, like the majority of names and insignia on No. 25 Sq. airplanes, came from characters in New Zealand newspaper comic sections.

Kelly and Cullen flew the airplane in the campaign against Rabaul and other Japanese strongholds from March to May 1944 and on May 20th 1944, the SBD's of Sq. 25 were flown off Piva Airstrip for the last time. The squadron landed at Renards Field, Russell Island and the aircraft were handed back over to the U.S. Navy.

SBD-5 BuNo 28536 was then overhauled and reassigned to a U.S. Navy-Marine unit and remained in the South Pacific for another year. For some unexplained reason it was sent back to the United States, one of the very few combat aircraft to be returned to the United States. This author would be pleased to hear of any other SBD airplanes.

This RNZAF/USN airplane may be seen at the Planes of Fame Museum in Buena Park, California. It lacks wings and if any reader can locate a pair for the museum a \$100 finders fee will be paid.

REMAINING SBD/A-24 DAUNTLESS AIRCRAFT IN THE U.S.

- SBD-6 National Air and Space Museum — on loan to U.S. Marine Corps Museum.
- SBD-5 Robert Griffin of Confederate Air Force, formerly in Planes of Fame Museum and ex-Mexican Air Force.
- A-24 Painted like SBD, held for U.S. Navy Museum, Pensacola, Fla. An ex-Mosquito abatement aircraft of Portland, Oregon.
- SBD-5 Barret Tillman. Now flyable, at Portland, Ore.
- A-24B S. McGreggor. An ex-Mexican Air Force, ex-photo survey aircraft, ex-Tallmantz airplane.
- SBD-5 Planes of Fame Museum, Buena Park, California

MAILING DATE - 3rd QUARTER NEWSLETTER 14 JULY 1972

A SPECIAL MAILING OF THE BOOKING ARRANGEMENT BROCHURE FOR THE A.A.H.S. TOUR TO GREAT BRITAIN WAS MADE (via 3rd class mail) to all Members on 31 May 1972. If you did not receive one, send S.S.A.E. to AAHS, P.O. Box 996, Ojai, CA 93023.