

PLAYING HISTORY

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Interviews



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*Historical
Re-enactment*

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1) Obviously, the first question is, why did you choose to recall the Second World War? your passion for the history of the WW2 or did you develop it only after your choice to join the Italian Army? And on which side did you decide to take sides in the battle?

The passion comes from afar, from childhood when one went to the sea in Anzio and there continued to emerge from the ground and the sea objects and traces of the war of the Anzio landing. From there the passion for the Second World War. I have never sided with either the allies or the Germans.

2) Why recall a not so distant historical period, whose memory has not yet disappeared and which, thanks to the already advanced technologies of the time, allowed us to receive images, films, documents?

Precisely because the second war is so close to us that the horrors and tragedies have not yet disappeared. Our grandparents still remember. And young people tend to forget. This is precisely the stimulus, to ensure that horrors are not forgotten and that young people can then not make the same mistakes in the future.



3) How much are historical re-enactments linked to historical research? Do WW2 re-enactors also have to be lovers of history in order to be credible?

Historical research is everything. I was born as a historical researcher. Re-enactment is only one way to represent it. The more you look, the more precise you are, the more credible you are.

4) According to your experience how do you decide which front to be part of in this kind of re-enactments?

You decide according to your friendships and passions. There are no politics between us. Fascists and political extremists are not welcome and are removed.

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5) This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Allied landing at Anzio and Nettuno, which took place on 22 January 1944. For how many years has the anniversary been accompanied by the re-enactment? We know that as an expert and president of the association U.B.O.A.T (Underwater Battlefield Organized Anzio Team) you are actively involved in the historical reconstruction of the event. Tell us why you decided to bring this war episode back to life with the U.B.O.A.T. instead of another war event in the area? How many associations of reenactors are involved?





Note:*

The Gustav Line, wanted by the German military leaders to stop the advance of Anglo-American troops towards the capital and organized by the German Field Marshal Albert Kesserling, provided for the fortification of the Abruzzo territory exploiting the natural mountainous and impervious conformation to slow down the Allied advance as much as possible, So much so that it ideally cut Italy in half from the River Sangro to the River Garigliano then went from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the Adriatic Sea through the strategic stronghold of Cassino dominated by its Abbey. Between September and October 1943 the German soldiers who until then had made sporadic appearances in the small towns or cities of Abruzzo, settled everywhere requisitioning most stately homes or strategically important places, raiding everything they needed (food, transport, fuel, weapons) and recruiting, under penalty of shooting, the local populations to carry out the work of fortification, dig trenches and artillery stations.

I have been actively participating in the anniversary of the landing of Anzio-Nettuno for 12 years. First as an individual, then as an exhibitor of uniforms, for about 10 years as president of an association of historical re-enactment. The Anzio landing event is the only one worthy of note for the area. Every year almost 15-20 associations participate.

6) Can you briefly explain the history of the operation "Shingle" known to most as the Landing of Anzio? What is your personal opinion on this episode of war that, as we read, is not considered a perfectly "successful" initiative?

In short, it will be difficult... but briefly, the allied amphibious operation south of Rome was aimed at overcoming the allied impasse on the front of the Gustav line* centred on Monte Cassino.

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That position had to be adjusted in order for the Germans to withdraw and arrive in Rome. This was the plan, but it was badly done and failed. The Allies remained stuck in a blind alley/cul de sac without being able to achieve the purpose of the landing. The Germans reacted very quickly but were not able to annihilate the landed forces. The Allies blamed the commander, Gen. Lucas, for this, but in reality planning errors and a lack of initial troops were the real cause of the failure.



7) There are some little known stories you want to tell us about the landing, I read for example the story of Angelita.

The story of Angelita, never actually finally verified, tells of a girl found crying on the beach by the Scottish Fusilier Christopher S. Hayes during the landing near the Lazio town in 1944. He and his comrades "adopted" the girl, who was called Angelita (some stories say that she had the name embroidered on her dress, others, also told in a song, because she had "wheat hair and a sparrow voice"), and then entrusted her with a crucifix following the allied troops. The story ended tragically after a few days when a German cannon hit the refuge where she and another woman were housed with the subsequent death of both.

On the promenade of Anzio, in 1979, the Municipality, in view of the popularity that the story had assumed and its symbolic value, decided to erect a monument dedicated to the girl that was inaugurated on January 22, 1979, on the occasion of the World Year of Children, to condemn the wars and suffering that these impose on everyone but especially on children.

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8) In Europe, there are many re-enactors of the Second World War, the association U.B.O.A.T, participates also in other re-enactments? How do you relate in your activity with other organizations, including foreign ones? Is there information sharing and mutual support? Which international event would you like to participate in?



The re-enactment for the Second World War is now very widespread. In Italy the phenomenon is expanding but not like in Europe, where events and numbers are higher. For example, there is a strong expansion of re-enactments in Eastern Europe. U.B.O.A.T. is currently limited to the Italian territory because we are trying to create an event that can have more and more visibility and importance, even at the international level, in order to attract more and more foreign associations. But we would like to participate in the events organized in Normandy.

9) We know of your commitment also in diving activities, a passion that led you to write the book "The stranded whale - History of war and wrecks of the landing of Anzio" published by Herald Editore. This passion has also allowed you to find wrecks that were lost during the WW2. Tell us about these findings, the emotions you felt and how important they were for those who were able to know the fate of their soldiers or their loved ones.



The sea area in front of the cities of Anzio and Nettuno is strewn with landing wrecks. Among the many, I would mention the story of the LCI 20, an infantry landing ship, which sank on the first day of landing. On 22 January at 10.34 6 German fighter-bombers Focke Wulf 190 attacked the ships engaged in the landing. One bomb hit the LCI 20. The infantry managed to land but the crew had 2 dead and 4 injured. The ship's commander was the subject of an enquiry and found guilty of not having been able to effectively counter the fire caused by the bomb. The ship is still there today near the beach now demolished by the waves in the shallow water. The emotions aroused by these wrecks are strong but even more so are the memories of the survivors and their families.



10) What contribution have the women made during the WW2? We are talking about both female soldiers and civilians. Did your research extend to the point of gleaning information also from this part of the universe? **

Note **:

However, the decisive turning point, which led to the granting of the right to vote in several countries, starting in Great Britain in 1918, was the outbreak of the First World War.

The massive sending of men to the front opened up the world of work to women, breaking down the barrier between jobs



traditionally reserved for women and those traditionally reserved for men.

During World War II, the role of women was even more significant. With the onset of the conflict and the appeal of the male working age population to the duties of war, the needs of factories and offices, but also the needs of families, slowly led to an increase in the number of women in work outside the home both in Italy and in the rest of the nations involved in the war. Almost 350,000 women served in the U.S. armed forces, performing both administrative and logistical tasks, working as mechanics, radio operators, trainers of male soldiers, nurses. (data from The National WWII Museum | Women in WWII.)

In Italy, women played a significant role in the partisan resistance against the Nazis, fighting in the field alongside the men, acting as informants, carrying out the fundamental operations of connection between the various nuclei of partisans, hiding and treating the wounded, organizing clandestine lodgings and meeting places for the military and political leaders of the partisan movement, and finally writing the publications of the underground press.



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Women played a fundamental role in the war and in Anzio they also played a fundamental role. Although they were not directly involved in the fighting, it was up to them to take care of logistics, field hospitals and services. Many women were killed in accidents or bombings. The Nurses, for the most part, were those who shared field life and the trenches with the men, living and dying with them.

11) As far as the supply of vintage equipment, uniforms and military means is concerned, what can a new reenactor get out of the various "Militaria" markets? As soon as you become part of an association of the WW2, how is it decided the role that the newcomer will play?

Here, too, knowledge of history and study reign supreme. Without accurate studies, the uniforms of a reenactor will be approximate and unrealistic. Many can go to markets and buy, but few know exactly what to choose and how. This is learned through years of study and research. Approximation doesn't pay off. The role in associations depends on the objectives set by the association itself and can vary greatly. The main objective is to represent realistic and correct historical uniforms. The "behaviour" to be maintained during the events must also be particularly studied and reproduced.



MARCOMARZILLI



12) What about "civil" events (I'm thinking of dances or other recreational activities) of this historical era?

Similar events are linked and are useful to amalgamate participants. The same rules are equally valid.

13) Have you ever hosted, or made contact with, those who really participated in the landing? Have they ever witnessed your re-enactment of the landing and what have they told you about it?

We often host veterans of the landing. Lately they are unfortunately less and less for age problems but every time it's a surprise.

They have remained young in spirit and when they can ask to participate in our re-enactments. For us it is always a pleasure and an honor to have them with us to tell their adventures.

14) Historical research has allowed us to find, in addition to the wrecks, the remains of many soldiers now buried in military cemeteries scattered throughout the Italian national territory. In Neptune there is the American Cemetery* and Shrine built two days after the allied landing in Anzio as a temporary war cemetery for the fallen of the countryside of Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and Rome, becoming permanent in 1956. Is the re-enactment of the landing also a moment of commemoration for these fallen?**



*Note ***:*

7,862 soldiers from various battles rest in Neptune. In 490 tombs are also buried the remains of those who could not be identified and 12 women including Red Cross members and auxiliary military and civil horrendously killed (data from the City of Neptune).

It definitely is. Paying tribute to those who gave their lives in our territory for our freedom is a must. Mind you, the honors to those who have fallen are given to all those who fought or died, whether allies, Germans or Italians. Some fought for valid ideals, others for ideals in which we do not recognize ourselves but which today are all the same. All our honours go to them.



Thanks to Claudio Morino to have granted us the pleasure of letting us discover with him the world of the WW2 reenactors.

Appointment to the next interview with the actor Daniele Pecci!

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