

---

## Book Reviews

---

# Patriot reveals secrets of World War II

by Paul Goldstein

---

### **The OSS in Italy, 1942-45: A Personal Memoir**

by Max Corvo

Praeger Publishers, Westport, Conn., 1989  
334 pages, hardbound, \$39.95

---

If anyone claims to know the history of the United States intelligence community and its actual role in World War II and doesn't read this book, then they should forever shut their mouth and hold their pen. For this book states from the outset that it was written to correct the historical record on the question of secret intelligence and operations of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Italy. And it accomplishes what it set out to do.

Given the fact that practically all the previous books on the history of the OSS were essentially Anglophile apologia, and many with an explicitly pro-British slant, this book represents not only a breakthrough in OSS historiography, but clearly defines the political battles within OSS and those aligned with British intelligence. Although Corvo does not go into the strategic planning or the underlying strategic assumptions that led to the invasion of Italy in 1943, he does provide a detailed view of the key players in OSS and their counterparts' activity during the entire period of U.S. clandestine activity in Italy.

Relying upon his personal diaries and memory, backed by material from the OSS and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) archives, some of which was only declassified as recently as 1984 by the CIA, Corvo fashions both a narrative history as well as a description of the political intrigues which took place to establish OSS's presence in Italy. In particular, Corvo unearths the intrigues of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) to prevent an American-run intelligence operation from being established nearly one year before the United States invaded Italy. He details how the British control over the "Mazzini Society" was one of the central instruments the British used inside the United States

to recruit Italo-Americans. Corvo's personal role in defeating this stratagem is also presented.

### **Britain wanted a 'private preserve'**

Throughout the book he criticizes British policy toward Italy: "Despite the fact that we had enjoyed the utmost cooperation from the British services in the area [Sicily] and that our common goal was to end the war as quickly as possible, maintaining the independence of U.S. intelligence functions was uppermost in our minds. The British policy was to treat Italy as a private preserve. Their field officers expected Italy to become a zone of exclusive British influence once the war came to an end. But SI [OSS Secret Intelligence] Italy had other ideas. We wanted the Italians to make up their own minds about the future. We envisioned a postwar Italy that would stand side by side with the United States in the international alignment which would undoubtedly take place after the war. We were not interested in having OSS play a subservient role to British intelligence because we felt equally qualified."

This kind of criticism of British intelligence probably caused a decline in the publicity that a book of this kind would have normally generated. For the first time anywhere, the underlying political motives for decisions made in OSS are given. Corvo describes the double-dealing activity of OSS Berne Station Chief and later CIA director Allen Dulles. Specifically, Dulles contrived to prevent another OSS operator from becoming head of Switzerland SI. "At this time [mid-October 1942], Brennan [head of SI Italy] was planning to send Dale MacAdoo to Switzerland under State Department cover so that the Italian SI desk could establish direct ties with the Italian underground leaders in Milan, but this effort ran into a number of obstructions. These obstructions were explained when Allen Dulles, head of the OSS New York office, was named to head the Swiss desk in Berne. Dulles had been offered a position in London under David Bruce who was scheduled to head OSS London. For personal reasons he preferred to go to Switzerland where he had served at the end of World War I and where he could stay in touch with some German contacts associated with the legal firm of Sullivan and Cromwell, of which his brother John Foster Dulles was the senior partner."

Corvo's disparaging of one of the so-called legends of the OSS-CIA apparatus was not confined to Dulles. Corvo takes on another OSS-CIA figure, James Jesus Angleton. Angleton, the counterintelligence chief for Italy (X-2) and later CIA counterintelligence chief, was locked in a political struggle with Corvo's SI team over contacts with the Vatican and the effort to end the war in Asia. The controversy between Angleton and Vincent Scamparino (Italy SI), according to Corvo, erupted immediately after the war and had long-term ramifications for U.S. intelligence activity. He traced the source of the controversy to the work of the Italian SI section in which "operators from the section

established close ties at the highest levels of the Vatican secretariat, where the nerve center of Vatican communications with its worldwide network was located." The purpose of this network was the penetration of the Japanese Far East apparatus. Codenamed "Vessel," the operation produced a "wealth of intelligence. . . . Vessel and other Rome intelligence sources provided information from all corners of the globe. Much of this information was quickly relayed to Brennan and Donovan, and from there it found its way to the White House."

However, as Corvo states, "too many powerful influences within the OSS coalesced against us, and these influences were secretly militating for our immediate liquidation now that the war was over. . . . Our plans had been carried out sometimes with little or no support from field headquarters; sometimes over objections from superior headquarters; but always with the objective of advancing U.S. interests and OSS expertise in the intelligence struggle and the coordination of special operations."

Thanks to Corvo and his team, finally some of the truth of what happened in Italy during World War II has come to light. Early in the book he reveals that the U.S.-based Italian mafia of Lucky Luciano and his Jewish gangster partner Meyer Lansky had little or practically nothing to do with aiding U.S. forces' landing in Sicily, debunking a myth that Corvo's enemies had used to smear him as a mafioso for lo these many years.

## In memoriam: Max Corvo, 1920-1994

by Paul Goldstein

On June 8, in the small town of Middlefield in the rolling hills of the Connecticut Valley, a solemn military funeral at St. Sebastian Cemetery proceeded with friends, admirers, and family mourning the loss of a wonderful man. The ceremony, conducted by a Sicilian Jesuit priest, Father Joseph Sibilano, praised the "quiet hero" as a man of God and country. He described an individual who devoted himself to a mission greater than himself and who gave to his country and family a living legacy. This "quiet hero" is Biagio Max Corvo. Known among all as Max, he gave himself to the cause of freedom he so cherished and fought for in his lifetime.

Max Corvo was born in Augusta, Sicily, on May 29, 1920, son of Cesare Corvo and Giuseppina Arena Corvo. When his father came under political attack by the Mussolini government, the nine-year-old Max was sent to the United

States. Max volunteered for the U.S. Army in 1941 and, stationed at Fort Lee, Virginia, drew up plans for operations behind enemy lines in the Mediterranean region during World War II.

His work impressed senior officers, and he was transferred to the Italian Secret Intelligence branch of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). By creating a plan for the development of partisan warfare in Italy and the Mediterranean, coupled with a special relationship to the Vatican and Italian political figures, Max helped change the course of history; by being in the right place at the right time, and having personal moral courage, Max accomplished a great deal.

The success of the Italian unit of Secret Intelligence caused Max to be mischaracterized, and in some cases slandered, by fellow OSS officers and historians who sought to minimize both Max's role and that of the unit he served with. His detractors promoted the idea that two mafia figures, Meyer Lansky and "Lucky" Luciano, were responsible for helping the OSS and the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) in securing the landing of Allied forces in Sicily and then Italy. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Many Americans have never heard of Max Corvo. I wish that more had known him, because their lives would have been better for it. I was privileged to meet him 13 years ago, to get a personal glimpse of the kind of man he was: Prior to that, I had only known Max through the books written about the OSS and his unique role in the Italian campaign, which were filled with distortions and lies.

In 1989, he began setting the record straight in his groundbreaking autobiography, *The OSS in Italy: 1942-45* (see accompanying review). Max revealed some of the true history of the events surrounding his activity during World War II. Max ran operations against the British-dominated Mazzini Society in the United States. Ironically, later on, the British were forced to support Max's operations because of the tremendous success his unit had throughout Italy. Max became, at the ripe age of 23, one of Gen. William Donovan's special operators, whom he could fully trust to carry out his mission.

### Angleton, 'Source Vessel,' and Hiroshima

Max's book never received the attention it deserved. Why?

Max blew open the myths about what happened in the Italian campaign and the subsequent defeat of Mussolini's Fascist state. He subtly cut into the twin myths upon which the Central Intelligence Agency had built its reputation: its two top officials, Allen Dulles and James Jesus Angleton. Max sought the truth about their record in Europe during the war and in Italy itself. Not only had Dulles and Angleton mishandled matters in Italy, but what was written in most of the historical accounts about the secret operations of