

# off the fence.

## WWII

7 x 60'

### EPISODIC BREAKDOWN

#### **1. Ortona 1943: A Bloody Christmas**

It was the bloodiest and most mysterious battle of the Second World War in Italy. In Ortona, a small seaside town in the Abruzzo region, Germans and Canadians literally fought street by street, house by house, even room by room. Why did everyone want to conquer Ortona in December 1943? What was so important about it? And why was it forgotten so quickly afterwards? What embarrassing secret does Ortona hide until this day?

Amazing library footage restored in HD, never before heard eyewitness accounts, documents that have remained secret until now, German photographs recently found and shown for the first time, astonishing computer reconstructions and moving re-enactments help us to relive not only the political and military climate of the time, but take us back to the narrow alleys of the time, standing side-by-side with the soldiers to discover the embarrassing truth that has remained hidden for over half a century.

#### **2. Blue Jeans And Short Skirts - American Trieste After The War**

At the end of the Second World War, Trieste, a city in the north of Italy that had remained in the shadows throughout the conflict, suddenly found itself the focus of great strategic interest. Caught between Italy and Yugoslavia, between the West and the Communist block, it was administrated by America and Britain for no less than nine years. These were the years of Philip Morris cigarettes, of the first blue jeans seen in Europe, of neon signs, nylon stockings, increasingly short skirts, of nights fuelled by martinis and boogie-woogie, and the first Hollywood movies. The American soldier Jim Herring and his Trieste wife Claudia witnessed it all and tell us about those incredible years with the help of never seen archive footage and historical reconstructions. Trieste appeared to be a happy island, but in reality it was revealed to be a powder keg and a nest of spies!

#### **3. Cassino: Nine Months In Hell**

The Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino, halfway between Rome and Naples was one of the most important monuments in the whole of Christianity. During the Second World War the Allied forces decide to bomb the Abbey of Monte Cassino with such unprecedented violence. The battle resulted in one of the worst massacres of the Second World War, with the death of 50,000 from the multinational contingent of the Allied forces, 20,000 German soldiers, plus thousands of Italian civilians, in a battle that went on well into the spring.

Was it really necessary to conquer Monte Cassino to free the road for the conquest of Rome? Why did the Anzio landings not avoid a bloodbath at Monte Cassino? Why didn't the Allies head immediately for Rome?

This engrossing narration will reconstruct all the political and military background behind the dreadful stalemate of the Anglo-American military campaign in Italy in the winter of 1944, the dramatic leadership errors and the mutual lack of trust between the Allied partners.

#### **4. Free Mussolini**

For the first time, unpublished documents and photos reveal the secret of the most daring exploit of all time carried out by special forces: Operation Oak, the liberation of the Duce, Benito Mussolini. Testimonies, memories, filmed material, unpublished photographs, and documents carefully hidden in the Italian archives demolish piece by piece the official Nazi version and make it possible for the first time to recount the incredible chain of events that had a strong effect on public opinion throughout the world during World War II and still conceals many obscure aspects. From July 25, 1943, the day on which the Duce was deposed by a conspiracy within the regime and arrested, there began a ruthless struggle between the Italian, German and Anglo-American secret services to hide or discover where the Duce really was. Now we are finally able to reconstruct them: a Carabinieri barracks in Rome, the island of Ponza, the island of the Maddalena in Sardinia, a farm house in Abruzzo and finally a hotel in Campo Imperatore at an altitude of more than 2,000 feet. In the first three places, the Germans arrived just after the prisoner had been taken away. But the race continued. Everyone was aware of the importance for the outcome of the war of possessing Mussolini. September 12, 1943: the fascist regime in Italy had fallen a month ago. Mussolini was a secret prisoner in an impregnable building in the heart of the mountains of Central Italy, most likely waiting to be consigned to the Anglo-American forces. The post-fascist government of Field Marshal Badoglio thought the hotel in Campo Imperatore was the most secure prison in the world. And it had good reason to think that. Nonetheless, after an attack of just 14 minutes, he was freed.

It was 14 minutes of pure military boldness, which we will relive minute by minute, with German repertory films, re-enactments and graphic reconstructions, in order to discover the incredible truth.

#### **5. Heimat Südtirol - Canonical Michael Gamper**

The name of Canon Michael Gamper is almost unknown outside the South Tyrol. Yet the work of this priest, born in 1885 in Prissian, demonstrates how one man's stubborn attachment to his faith and his land can prevent the tide of history sweeping aside the identity of a people. His extraordinary battle in defence of the cultures and rights of minorities - not only ethnic and linguistic minorities - and his firm Christian opposition to the European totalitarianism of the 20th century make Canon Michael Gamper one of the founders of today's Europe, where the borders between states are little more than marks on a map. Telling the story of Michael Gamper means recounting half a century of the history of South Tyrol, the events, characters, ideas and the dynamics of a battle for the rights of a people.

#### **6. Mussolini 25 July 1943, The Fall**

The fall of the Fascist regime and Benito Mussolini on 25 July 1943, in the middle of the Second World War, is one of the most important events in Italy's history, one of those moments that marks a watershed in the collective nation's memory. We have always been told that Mussolini unexpectedly found himself in a minority during a session of the Grand Council of Fascism and thus deposed and arrested. A simple version, but.... false! The documentary describes what was really happening behind the scenes during those days through colour footage, evidence, intercepted phone calls and original eyewitness accounts of the amazing series of unknown conspiracies and secret plots that brought down the Fascist regime. For the first time, we hear the recollections of the friend and confessor to Dino Grandi, who wrote the proposal that placed Mussolini in a minority, and who had been one of the conspirators in a plot to kill Hitler and Mussolini just days earlier. Who stopped them and why? Above all, for the very first time we see a document that had been lost until now, entitled: "Minutes of the meeting of the Grand Council of Fascism of 25 July 1943". From this emerges the possibility of a conspirator who has remained in the shadows until now, perhaps the only person who always really knew what was going on, and who tried to manipulate events to his own ends.

## **7. 2nd December 1943: Hell On Bari**

Voll besetzt", "completely full": it is the morning of 2 December 1943 when Werner Hahn, the pilot of a German reconnaissance plane, sends a message to his base saying that the port of Bari is full of ships. That is exactly what the Luftwaffe General Staff in Italy have been waiting to hear. In the afternoon, 105 German JU 88 bombers take off with the aim of bombing the port of Bari; at 19:30 they take the Allied defences completely by surprise. It is a massacre: by the end of the operation, 17 ships have been destroyed and the port of Bari has been made inoperable for many weeks. But it is not over: hundreds of sailors and ordinary citizens fill the hospitals. They have not been burnt and they are not wounded, but they are beginning to have rashes, burning eyes and respiratory problems. Many are even dying without explanation. Why? What is going on? What military secret lay behind those strange deaths? Eisenhower sent his own medical officer to shed light on the events: in the end he made a terrible discovery, an American merchant ship, the John Harvey, was transporting a top secret cargo, mustard gas, a highly toxic gas banned by the 1925 Geneva Protocol. The ship had exploded in the port, dispersing its 550 tons of lethal gas in the air. The strictest military censorship is imposed on events in Bari. All the papers are classified Top Secret. It is Churchill himself who gives the order that all British files remove any reference to mustard gas, in sharp contrast to the Americans. Why was the aerial bombardment of the port of Bari one of the biggest secrets of World War II? Why did the Allies send a ship full of chemical weapons to Italy? What was it for? Why did Churchill insist on always denying that there was mustard gas at Bari despite all the evidence? Did the Germans really find out that a ship full of mustard gas exploded at Bari? Who knew about the cargo of mustard gas at Bari when the ship exploded? Was everything possible done to save the victims, or were they sacrificed for military secrecy? The documentary will be structured like a detective story. The excellent enquiry documents, found in a variety of archives scattered all over the world, will serve as the basis for the documentary, along with interviews with surviving eyewitnesses.