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Ansaldo S.V.A. 5



Italian single-seater biplane of World War One

By [Stephen Sherman](#), March, 2007. Updated March 23, 2012.

Across the Carnic Alps, the self-styled warrior-poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, flew with eleven Ansaldo biplanes of the 87a Squadriglia, in a dramatic long-distance bombing raid on Vienna, August 9, 1918. They arrived over the ancient capital of the Hapsburgs and rained down a lethal storm of ... leaflets ... encouraging the Viennese to go on strike.

Description

The S.V.A. 5 was a fairly standard-looking biplane, its most recognizable features being the "W" shaped wing struts and the boxy, tapered fuselage that flattened out and practically merged with the tail fin. Powered by a 220-hp SPA 6A engine, it was fast enough and capable enough to take on multiple roles: bombing, reconnaissance, and fighting. It was of conventional fabric-covered wood construction.

Development

Early Italian biplanes, such as the Savola-Pomillo, were unsuccessful. In 1916, designers Umberto Savola, Rodolfo Verduzio, and Celestino Rosatelli started from scratch, and laid out a new aircraft. Societa Ansaldo of Genoa and Turin, "Ansaldo," got the contract to build the planes and started in the prototype in December, 1916. After modifications to the radiator and the tail, the Ansaldo's workers at the Borzoli Mare factory, under director Brezzi, finished the first machine in March, 1917.

Sgt. Mario Stoppani must have been a brave man, for on March 19, 1917, he test-flew the prototype SVA at Grosseto. Without modern testing and development procedures and simulations, he must have simply started up the engine, taxied down the field, and took off, hoping for the best. Presumably his first flight was a short one, and in months

that followed, more flights identified defects, even while the Ansaldo plants at Borzoli and Bolzaneto delivered more planes. In 1917, pilots in fighter training schools and the front line found the SVA to have poor maneuverability, but faster than other biplanes like the Hanriot HD.1 and SPAD VII pursuit planes. Thus, in early 1918 it was decided to use the SVA on reconnaissance and bombing missions, but not as a dogfighter. With plenty of lift (for extra fuel) and the speed to evade Austrian fighters, the SVA was well-suited to long-distance observation work.

Operations

On February 28, 1918, four SVAs from the Italian Prima Sezione (First Section) took off from Pontere San Pietro. They included three airplanes carrying two 25-kg (55-lb) bombs each and one equipped with aerial cameras. Pilots Capts. Palli and Palma di Cesnola, Lieut. Orsini and Sgt. Arrigoni flew 250-km (155-miles) over the Alps, reaching Innsbruck, where they dropped their bombs and shot up the train yards. After three hours' flight they were back at their base.

A dedicated aerial reconnaissance unit, the Venice-based 87a Squadriglia, 'La Serenissima,' displaying the Lion of St. Mark on its SVA's, was established in early 1918. This squadron undertook many other long flights along Alpine valleys: Val di Non, Val d'Adige, Passo della Mendola and Valsugana. On May 21, 1918, Two SVAs piloted by Arturo Ferrarin and Antonio Locatelli flew to the German Zeppelin base at Friedrichshafen on Lake Constance, photographed the hangars and returned safely to their base, a distance of 440 miles. In the next month, Locatelli made a 562-mile round trip to Zagreb.

The most famous SVA raid took place in August, when eight S.V.A.s flew to Vienna and back, a journey of 625 miles. The raid was the brainchild of Gabriele d'Annunzio, a rather extravagant, self-styled warrior-poet. Originally, d'Annunzio favored three-engine Caproni heavy bombers, but the Italian high command was unwilling to risk the large aircraft on such a Quixotic mission. SVA two-seaters, another possibility, did not have the endurance for a seven hour flight. But the one-seater SVA 5's did have the range and d'Annunzio organized the raid around them. One two-seater SVA 9, was fitted with an extra 66-gallon fuel tank. Eleven modified SVAs took off from San Pelagio early on August 9, 1918. Eight airplanes, piloted by Palli (with d'Annunzio in back), Locatelli, Massoni, Allegri, Censi, Sarti, Granzarolo and Finzi, made it to Vienna. Sarti was forced to make an emergency landing in enemy territory, while the others went on to take reconnaissance photographs of Vienna and to toss out propaganda leaflets which d'Annunzio had written in his customary high-flown prose.

On the morning of the 9th, at 5:50, from the airfield at Saint Pelagio (Treviso) eleven machines took off: a two-seater with the pilot Captain Palli and Gabriel d' Annunzio, and ten single-seaters, with Locatelli, Allegros, Censi, Finzi, Massone, Granzarolo, Sarti, Ferrarin, Masprone and Contratti. Ferrarin, Masprone and Contratti had to land soon after take-off.

Sarti was forced to land in enemy country, near Wiener-Neustadt. The other seven reached on Vienna at 9:20 and dropped 50,000 pamphlets, written by d'Annunzio

himself:

On this August morning, the fourth year of your hopeless convulsion has ended and the luminous year of our full power begins. The Italian tricolour appears to you suddenly as an indication that destiny has turned.

Destiny is turned. It is turned toward us with one iron certainty. Late is the hour that Germany drags you down, humiliates you and infects you. ... As our faith was strong, here our aviation predominates and predominates until to the end. The victors of the Piave, the victors of the Mar, feel it and know it, with a spirit that multiplies the suddenness of our strike. But, if suddenness were not enough, the number would be enough; and this said for those who are used to fight ten against one. The Atlantic . . . way is closed; and one heroic way, as they demonstrate the newest pursuers that have colored the Ourcq with German blood. On the wind of victory that rises from the rivers of liberty, we have not come, if not for the joy of the boldness. We have not come if not for the contest that we will dare when we want, in the hour that we choose. The rumble of the young Italian wing not somiglia to that one of the funeral bronze, in the sky early riser. However lieta the audacity suspends between Santo Stefano and Graben the irrevocable sentence, Viennese. Viva Italia!

Gabriel d' Annunzio

more to come on the Ansaldo SVA

Sources:

- Avro504.org
- [The Aerodrome](#)