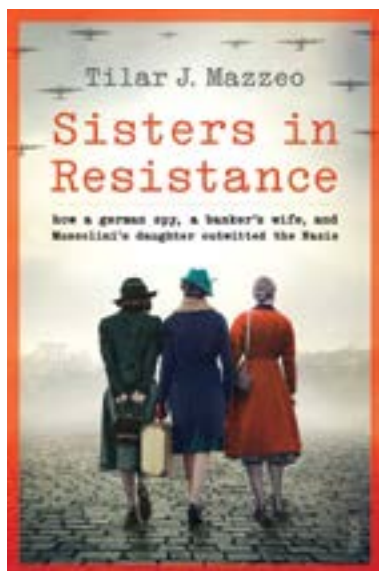


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Sisters in Resistance: How a German Spy, a Banker's Wife and Mussolini's Daughter Outwitted the Nazis

By Tilar Mazzeo

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While well-rooted in research, Tilar Mazzeo's *Sister's in Resistance: How a German Spy, a Banker's Wife and Mussolini's Daughter Outwitted the Nazis* reads more like a John Le Carre spy thriller. The three 'sisters' of the title are:

1. Hilda Beetz, newly married to a fellow Nazi, who is young, beautiful and highly capable (the German spy);

2. Frances de Chollet, a bored socialite who, nearing middle age, is looking for some excitement in her life in Switzerland (the banker's wife)

3. Edda Ciano, favourite daughter of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini and wife of Italy's former foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, who has her husband's diaries and writings in her possession while she is in exile in Switzerland.

Galeazzo Ciano had written an indiscreet and explosive series of diaries and papers outlining what he really thought about Hitler, the Nazi elite and his father-in-law, Mussolini. As the tide of war turns against both Hitler and Mussolini, both of their fascist regimes and the Americans are desperate to get their hands on what had become known as the 'Ciano Papers'. The Nazis and Italian fascists intend to destroy them, while the Americans intend to use them as evidence in upcoming war trials.

Despite its spy thriller elements, at the heart of Mazzeo's book is the question: 'Can bad people still do good things and be remembered for them?' This is a theme that she returns to again and again throughout. She is at pains to point out that both Ciano and Edda did some terrible things, supported a terrible regime and did nothing until it was of benefit to them, but the significance of the Ciano Papers to the prosecution of prominent figures in the Nazi regime, such as Germany's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Joachim Von Ribbentrop, cannot be ignored.

Another theme that is also touched upon repeatedly is how women are often written out of history. The three 'sisters' are at the crux of the story (and there is even a fourth 'sister' who is never mentioned in any official documentation) yet their roles in the

drama are greatly downplayed in any official documentation. Instead, it is three men who are given the most kudos for obtaining these important papers for the American intelligence services. These men were Paul Ghali, a journalist for the Chicago Daily News; Alan Dulles, an American intelligence officer in Switzerland (where Edda had fled when her husband was arrested by Mussolini); and Emilio Pucci, Edda's lover, a racing car driver who became a renowned fashion designer after the war.

Sisters in Resistance is not only a thrilling account of the events surrounding Edda, Ciano and his papers in the years from 1943 until the end of the war, but Mazzeo deftly creates the characters and motivations of three very different women. These women come from three very different backgrounds, yet they somehow forge very real friendships in a time of hardship and uncertainty.

While not all of the Ciano papers were found, much of them were delivered into the hands of American intelligence through the efforts of these women. They were later used in the Nuremburg war trials and then were published after the war and became a bestseller.

Overall, the book is a great read and would interest students and teachers who would like to know more about Italy's uneasy alliance with Nazi Germany and the end of Mussolini's regime. It is also a good example of 'forgotten' history, where the true players in a specific event are often, not always deliberately, written out of history.