

The adventures of the Ruspoli brothers on the Odessa front, 1941, as can be best extracted from various sources

Sources:

- Italian Aces of WW2, Giovanni Massimello & Giorgio Apostolo (1)
- Cruciati ai inaltimilor (Crusaders on the heights by Sorin Turturica), including memoirs of Lt Ioan di Cesare, 23 confirmed kills, (2)
- Drumul celor putini (The road of the Few), memoirs of Lt Theodor Greceanu, 24 confirmed kills (3)
- Asii aviatiei de vanatoare romane (Aces of Romanian Fighter pilots), g-ral Victor Strambeanu , including memoirs of many actual pilots (4)

I've selected only this most trustful sources in order to recreate the story of the Ruspoli brothers on the Odessa front.

In July 1941 the Romanian air forces are informed by g-ral Jienescu, the Minister of Air about **the imminent arrival of an Italian detachment.** (3) specialized in the photographic and movie documentation from the air of the ongoing air combat. (1,2,3,4).

The detachment's arrival was approved by Mussolini (1,3) and were received by Cpt Popisteanu, commander of Gr7 , who gave strict orders to be protected at all times and at all costs. (2,3,4)

The material consisted of 3-4 Macchi aircrafts (1,2,3,4) model "modified C.200" (1), and a transport aircraft Junkers with 3 engines and also a wide range of photographic and movie equipment.

The people in the Italian detachment consisted in:

- Carlo Mauritzio Ruspoli di Poggio Suasa (1,2,3,4), nicknamed Picci by the Romanians (3)
- Marescotti and Constantino Ruspoli (1), his brothers, (2,3,4), not mentioned by their names from the Romanian sources, also fighter pilots by romanian sources, parachutists by italian source.
- 2 more Italian fighter pilots (2,3,4)
- -Tehicians, mechanics, support crew

At first, at the specific orders of cmd Popisteanu, the Italians performed filming operations (1,2,3) and ground attack missions (3,4) the 7.92mm machine guns (?? surely a mistake, the C.200 had 12.7 mm) being well suited for strifing enemy infantry. (3). They were always escorted by 2-4 romanian pilots with Me-109 E. (3,4)

On 21 aug 1941, Lt-Cmd Popisteanu is shot down by 3-4 I-16 Rata aircrafts, in a well documented fight. After his death, the Italian pilots insist in flying actual combat missions, and the new Gr 7 commander, Cpt-Cmd Mihail Romanescu, grants their wishes, as they wanted to revenge Popisteanu's death. (2,3)

After some succesul missions, on 27 aug 1941 (1) the Italian pilots took off along Romanian pilots in response to a aerial alarm concerning "a formation of Il-2 assault planes escorted by a very strong I-16 fighter escort"(3)

A terrible air skirmish issued, in which the italo-romanian side was in great numeric disadvantage and were forced to break organized fight (cells, pairs) and fight individually (1,3)

Carlo Maurizio Ruspoli managed to shoot down a pair of I-16 that were chasing him, but crash lands later on due to heavy damage taken by his aircraft and returns by foot to the aerodrome . (1,2,3)

All the other Italian pilots **engaged in this aerial fight are shot down and killed.** (2,3,4). Although in Romanian sources they are mentioned as “the other Ruspoli brothers” (2,3,4) in Italian sources they (Marescotti and Constantino) are mentioned to be killed in 1942 at El Alamein, north Africa. (1)

Therefore it is my educated guess, but based on this forementioned sources, that **the other 2 italian casualties were the Italian fighter pilot that came with the Ruspoli brothers, but not** Marescotti and Constantino.

Some days later, early in the morning the surviving Italian aircrafts (only one? Carlo’s aircraft was brought to the airfield?) were hidden near a tree line, with their tails between the trees for camouflage. “During a sudden attack by soviet assault planes the Italians aircrafts caught fire. Not having any available aircrafts left, the Ruspoli brothers left for home. This happened just before the final attack upon Odessa.” (2)

The remains of the dead Italian pilots were repatriated in Italy. (3)

Some time later, Carlo Maurizio Ruspoli came to Bucharest and spoke to the Italian military attaché in order that some of the Romanian pilots of the 7th Fighter group to receive brevets and insignias of the Italian airforce. (3). This fact is confirmed by the actual ownership of those items by some surviving Romanian pilots (Cantacuzino, Greceanu, Di Cesare).