

Biplane fighter aces

Italy



Generale di Divisione Corrado Santoro

11 November 1910 – 21 June 1988



Santoro at Diredawa, 1940.
Image kindly provided by Sergio Santoro

Corrado Santoro was born on 11 November 1910.

Santoro was a pre-war pilot and on 31 December 1931, he was promoted to Tenente di complemento.

On 31 December 1935, he was promoted to Tenente in spe (servizio permanente effettivo).

Between 10 October 1937 and 14 July 1938 he served as a volunteer in the *Aviazione Legionaria* in Spain using the nom de guerre '*Corrado Salvioli*'. Here he belonged to the 31^a Squadriglia Caccia under the command of Capitano Baylon.

On 10 December 1937, he took part in an escort mission to bombers attacking Sarinena.

On 4 January 1938, he took part in a mission escorting bombers over Teruel.

On 8 June, he took part in an escort mission to bombers attacking Vistabella Choclos. 11 enemy aircraft was claimed shared destroyed (probably on the ground) by 22 Italian pilots.



Image taken during an escort to bombers over Spain.
Leading the formation is Maggiore Rossi and Santoro is flying in the CR.32 behind him.
Image kindly provided by Sergio Santoro

Santoro was promoted to Capitano on 31 December 1938.

On 8 April 1940 he was posted to the Italian East Africa (A.O.I.) as Commanding Officer of the 413^a Squadriglia.

In June 1940, the 413^a Squadriglia was based at Gondar in Ethiopia and equipped with Fiat CR.42s.

On 22 June three aircraft, believed being French, suddenly attacked Dire Dawa at 13:30 (12:15 according to the 410^a diary), favoured by bad weather.

Sottotenente [Komjanc](#) tried to scramble, but his aircraft was hit and burned by a bomb before he could mount in it; he was luckily unhurt. The other pilot on alarm duty, Sergente Maggiore Gaetano Volpe of the 410^a Squadriglia, was taking off, but a splinter stopped him by damaging the engine of

his CR.32 MM4648. Another fighter was damaged, one of ground personnel was killed and two wounded. Capitano [Corrado Ricci](#), CO of the 410^a Squadriglia, recalled the episode:

“... We couldn't start to have our lunch that a bomb rain, damned close, hurries us: who runs to recovery, who lies on ground, ... windows glass shatters and breaks, roof vibrates and a rain of debris and powder covers us and our maccheroni, floor shatters and it seems that explosions never end.

Santoro is on the ground beside me, we're flat as soles as we look on one another, while the hell continues: we're both pale... As soon the explosions cease we jump up and run to the airport. There had been three bombers, absolutely unexpected: a driver is dead, hit by a splinter; Colonnello Pezzi shows me it, a few grams of iron, and says: “For this small bit of damned iron a life has gone... and I'll have to write this to his mother!”

Two more airmen have been slightly wounded, a fighter burns at the end of the field, the oil sump of my engine has been penetrated from side to side. Sottotenente [Komjanc](#) was on alarm duty and was running towards his CR.42, which his engineer had soon started. While he was wearing his parachute, some bombs dropped nearby and the shock wave threw him on ground. As he rose up, he saw his fighter burning: he's now telling this to Santoro, and he's desperate for having lost an aircraft. It seems he still doesn't realize of the extraordinary luck that protected him!”

Early in the morning on 20 August four Blenheims of 39 Squadron and one of 11 Squadron, RAF, attacked the Ala Littoria hangar at Diredawa. This target was hit and damaged; a S.81 under repair being burnt and splinters damaged a CR.32. While on the run-up to the target the bombers were attacked by two CR.42s of the 413^a Squadriglia and 20-year-old Pilot Officer Paul Edwin Osborne Jago's (RAF No. 40916) Blenheim Mk.I (L8474) was shot down in flames by Capitano Santoro, the crew being killed (Pilot Officer Jago, Sergeant John Astil Wilson-Law (RAF No. 580723) and Corporal John Herbert Wintle (RAF No. 519946)). Santoro also hit the 11 Squadron aircraft, which was badly damaged and crash-landed on return to Aden. Santoro's CR.42 was hit in the fuselage during this combat.



Santoro returning to Direidawa after his combat on 20 August 1940.

Image kindly provided by Sergio Santoro

Santoro managed to be evacuated from East Africa before it fell to the Commonwealth forces.

On 17 August 1941 he took command of the 370^a Squadriglia Caccia, which was based at Monserrato near Cagliari, Sardegna (Sardinia).

In September the 24^o Gruppo was equipped with Fiat G.50s and CR.42s. The biplanes were used for long-distance missions due to better range.

At 08:18 on 27 September 1941 an Italian reconnaissance aircraft spotted a carrier and seven unidentified ships west of La Galite. Towards noon, the Comando Aeronautica della Sardegna received the following message from a Cant Z.506 of 287^a Squadriglia (Sottotente Giovanni Del Vento in MM45252):

"At 37°43' – 8°55' - route 90° - speed 12 nm per hour: 1 battleship, 1 carrier, 4 cruiser, unspecified number of destroyers and steamboats. At 37°55' - 8°45' - route 90° - speed 18 nm per hours: 3 cruisers"

It was the convoy of *Operation Halberd* which included the carrier HMS *Ark Royal*, three battleships (HMS *Prince of Wales*, HMS *Rodney* and HMS *Nelson*), five cruisers (HMS *Kenya*, HMS *Edinburgh*, HMS *Sheffield*, HMS *Hermione* and HMS *Euryalus*), eighteen destroyers (*Lance*, *Isaac Sweers*, *Gurkha*, *Duncan*, *Garland*, *Livery*, *Heytrop*, *Fury*, *Zulu*, *Cossack*, *Foresight*, *Forester*, *Laforey*, *Farndale*, *Lightning*, *Oribi*, *Piorun* and *Legion*) and nine cargos (*Ajax*, *Clan MacDonald*, *Imperial Star*, *Rowallan Castle*, *City of Calcutta*, *Clan Ferguson*, *Dunedin Star*, *Breconshire* and *City of Lincoln*).

At 11:50, eleven S.79 torpedo-bombers of the 280^a Squadriglia, 130^o Gruppo (Capitano Franco Melley (CO), Tenente Alessandro Setti, Tenente Mario Giacomini and Tenente Carlo Deslex), 283^a Squadriglia, 130^o Gruppo (Capitano Giorgio Grossi (CO), Tenente Roberto Cipriani, Tenente Guido Focacci, Tenente Francesco Di Bella and Tenente Camillo Barioglio) and 278^a Squadriglia Autonoma (Tenente Leonardo Venturini (actually belonging to the 280^a Squadriglia) and Sottotenente Gaetano Buccheri) together with three S.84s of the 282^a Squadriglia Autonoma (Capitano Marino Marini (CO), Tenente Antonio Cristiani and Sottotenente Saverio Mayer) scrambled from Cagliari-Elmas. They were escorted by two formations of CR.42s of the 24^o Gruppo Autonomo which took off from Monserrato at 12:20. The first formation of twelve aircraft was led by the Gruppo CO, Tenente Colonnello [Vincenzo Dequal](#) while the rear formation of eight aircraft was led by Capitano Corrado Santoro.

In the rainy weather Santoro's rear formation lost contact with the S.79s after a few minutes, so he decided to lead his aircraft directly to La Galite.

At 12:15 eleven S.84s of the 36^o Stormo took off from Decimomannu. This was the Stormo's first operative mission on this tour of operations. The 109^o Gruppo (Capitano Bartolomeo Tomasino (CO) and Sottotenente Pier Vincenzo Morelli from the 258^a Squadriglia and Maggiore Goffredo Gastaldi (Gruppo CO), Capitano Giusellino Verna (CO) and Tenente Mario Paccarié of the 259^a Squadriglia) was led by the Stormo's CO, Colonnello Riccardo Helmuth Seidl (258-?/MM22845) while the 108^o Gruppo (Tenente Remo Rossi of the 256^a Squadriglia and Capitano Alfonso Rotolo (CO), Tenente Piercarlo Amante and Tenente Danilo Barro of the 257^a Squadriglia) was led by Maggiore Arduino Buri (Gruppo CO) in "256-9". These aircraft, being faster than the S.79s, passed them. During the course, Tenente Morelli, who possibly had engine troubles, was slightly late and joined the 108^o Gruppo, which was in the rear. The 108^o Gruppo was also met by Santoro's Fiat CR.42s and S.84s of the 282^a Squadriglia.

At 12:59 they were attacked by eight Fulmars of 808 Squadron from HMS *Ark Royal*. They were intercepted by the CR.42s, which miss-identified them as 12 Hurricanes and claimed one of them

destroyed and two probables. Actually, a Fulmar was damaged, and by mistake shot down by HMS *Prince of Wales*' AA fire while returning to the carrier (29-year-old Lieutenant Malcom William Watson and 20-year-old Sub-Lieutenant Paul Wilfrid Noel Couch both KIA). Sottotenente Morelli (MM22460) still lagging, was shot down jointly by the Fulmars of Lieutenant Lewin and Lieutenant Medland.

According to Santoro's own logbook he claimed three Hurricanes shot down and three more as probables (according to other sources he claimed two Hurricanes) when he returned to base after 80 minutes.

The 108^o Gruppo and the 282^a Squadriglia were the first to spot the enemy, north of La Galite. Maggiore Buri split the formation and dived, covered by the fighters at 2500 meters, to attack the ships from both port and starboard. Before they could release the torpedoes, Capitano Rotolo (MM22476) was hit by AA fire and, out of control, collided with his right wingman, Tenente Barro (MM22486). Both S.84s crashed into the sea.

At 13:00 Maggiore Buri and Tenente Amante attacked HMS *Rodney* (Buri thought it was HMS *Nelson*) but their torpedoes narrowly missed the battleship. The same happened to Tenente Rossi who attacked a destroyer. At 13:03 Marini, Cristiani and Mayer attacked another destroyer and claimed to have hit it. These two destroyers, both missed, were HMS *Lance* and Dutch *Isaac Sweers*. While retreating from the attack the Italian aircraft were attacked for 15 minutes by Fulmars, two of which were believed shot down: one of them was credited to Mayer's gunner 1^o Aviere armiere Domenico Mignosa, although the latter was mortally wounded. Lieutenant Firth and Sub-Lieutenant Wardrop claimed a "BR 20" destroyed (i.e. Mayer's S.84, which landed safely), while Pilot Officer Leggott and Sub Lieutenant Magwood claimed another as damaged.

The 109^o Gruppo, which had run into bad weather and been forced to fly around a storm, spotted the fleet at 13:15. They were forced to do a 270^o turn ahead of the fleet to attack it from the starboard side. They surprised the ships at 13:30 and Colonnello Seidl and Tenente Tomasino (MM22444) attacked HMS *Nelson*, which was hit by a torpedo (probably Seidl's) on the portside prow, making a hole of 3,5 x 5 meters, while the second torpedo missed the target. HMS *Nelson* was out of commission for six months due to the damages suffered. Soon after this however, Seidl and Tomasino were shot down by AA fire from HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Sheffield*. Of the second group, Capitano Verna (MM22458) was shot down by Fulmars before he could release his torpedo, while Maggiore Gastaldi and Tenente Paccarié attacked a destroyer or a cruiser (possibly HMS *Euryalus*). During this action, another Fulmar was shot down by "friendly fire" of HMS *Rodney*, but luckily this time the crew (Sub-Lieutenant Percy Guy and Leading Airman Jones) was rescued.

The S.79s of the 130^o Gruppo, escorted by [Dequal's](#) twelve fighters, had spotted the enemy at 13:20. The formation split up to perform an attack from various directions: the 280^{<A< SUP>} and the 282^a Squadriglie from north, the 283^a Squadriglia from south, the 278^a Squadriglia and Tenente Deslex from west. Before they could attack, they were chased by six Fulmars, but the CR.42s managed to claim one of them shot down; actually a reconnaissance Swordfish was severely damaged, but managed to make an emergency landing on the carrier. The north-coming torpedo-bombers, partially covered by bad weather, surprised the enemy. Tenente Deslex (MM24077) tried to attack HMS *Ark Royal* at sea level, but was shot down by AA fire before having released the torpedo. Venturini and Bucceri attacked HMS *Ark Royal* and HMS *Cossack* at 13:58, missing both (even if both claimed hits on a cruiser each). Soon after they were chased for 20 minutes by a "Beaufighter" (actually Fulmars), which killed Venturini's radio operator, 1^o Aviere marconista Antonio Cilla. The 280^a Squadriglia's Melley and Setti believed to have shared a hit on a light cruiser (probably HMS *Lightning*, which had a narrow miss), as did Giacopinelli, whose S.79 was riddled by bullets. The 283^a Squadriglia, due to the good weather by its side, was soon discovered by the ships. Intense AA fire and the attack by some Fulmars prevented them to aim at the ships. At this point (13:59), Sergente Maggiore Luigi Valiotti of the 354^a Squadriglia, in an attempt to divert the AA from the torpedo-bombers, began to perform aerobatic manoeuvres over

the heads of the astounded gunners, which after a while started to shoot at him. Valiotti avoided the shells for six minutes before being killed when his CR.42 (MM7195) crashed into the sea. Notwithstanding Valiotti's sacrifice, Capitano Grossi, after several unsuccessful attempts, realized he could never pass such a barrage and decided to return to base. They landed at 15:50, still attacked by Fulmars, which in addition strafed the airport, damaging ten seaplanes and injuring three of the ground personnel.

Italian Intelligence stated that, apart from HMS *Nelson*, also HMS *Ark Royal* and a destroyer was damaged, and another destroyer, a cargo ship (*Imperial Star*) and a cruiser did not enter in Valetta harbour. The British admitted that HMS *Nelson* was damaged and that *Imperial Star* was sunk (damaged in a later attack by two S.79s of the 278^a Squadriglia from Pantelleria at 21:10, and then scuttled) and the loss of three aircraft (the two Fulmars erroneously shot down respectively by HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Rodney* and (possibly) the Swordfish) while claiming three torpedo-bombers and a CR.42 destroyed by AA fire, and two torpedo-bombers (identified as BR.20s), one CR 42 and two Z.506 shot down by fighters.

Seidl (currently the 36^o Stormo of the Aeronautica Militare Italiana is entitled after him), Tomasino and Verna were posthumously awarded with the Medaglia d'oro al valor militare. Of all of the crew of the seven torpedo-bombers shot down, only one surely survived; Aviere marconista Guerrino Soravia, Capitano Tomasino's radio operator, who was rescued by HMS *Forester* with a broken leg and becoming a POW. According to some sources also 1^o Aviere motorista Pietro Panettieri and Aviere Sc. Ugo Vernacotola, of the same aircraft, also survived.

On 20 March 1942, four boats of the 3rd Motor Launches Flotilla (ML126, ML129, ML130 and ML132) left Gibraltar towards Malta. The following day they were spotted by an Italian recon aircraft.

At 11:50 on 21 March, six CR.42s of the 24^o Gruppo took off from Monserrato led by Capitano Alberto Brondi (CO of the 355^a Squadriglia) and armed with bombs. As they found the boats in the Gulf of Bona, they dive-bombed them. The CR.42s didn't score any direct hits due to evasive manoeuvres by the boats, but the bombs exploded close to their targets and damaged two of them. The CR.42s then strafed the boats before returning and landing safely at 15:10.

At 15:30, Capitano Santoro took off with six CR.42s (Tenente [Giorgio Moretti](#) and Tenente Francesco Rocca of the 354^a Squadriglia, Sottotenente Franco Mazzariol and Sergente Maggiore Edoardo Lion of the 355^a Squadriglia and Sottotenente Renato Luziani of the 370^a Squadriglia). They found two of the motor-boats (ML129 and ML132), which probably had been damaged by the previous attack. As they strafed them, ML129 exploded and sunk, while ML132 reached the Tunisian coasts and stopped near the Bona pier.

Santoro's aircraft was hit in the engine by defensive fire and he had to land at Bona. The others landed safely at 18:15.

Italians claimed a boat sunk and another damaged. Actually, ML132 was so damaged that it was declared damaged beyond repair.

On 15 July he took part in dive bombing of an enemy cruiser sailing at 37^o 23' lat and 8^o 25' long.

On 13 November 1942 Santoro was promoted to Maggiore.

Santoro left the command of the 370^a Squadriglia on 31 March 1943.

Santoro ended the war with 4 victories, these being claimed while flying Fiat CR.42s.

During his career he was decorated with two Medaglie d'argento al valor militare, one Medaglia di bronzo al valor militare and one Croce di guerra al valor militare. He also received two promotions on war merits.

Santoro remained in the Air Force after the war and was promoted to Tenente Colonnello on 1 December 1945.

On 31 August 1953 he was promoted to Colonnello.

Between 1955 and 1956 he served as Commander of the 4th Aerobrigata.

He was promoted to General di Brigata on 31 December 1961.

When he retired he was promoted to Generale di Divisione.

Santoro passed away in Frascati (Rome) on 21 June 1988.

Claims:

Kill no.	Date	Time	Number	Type	Result	Plane type	Serial no.	Locality	Unit
	1940								
1	20/08/40		1	Blenheim (a)	Destroyed	Fiat CR.42		Diredawa	413 ^a Squadriglia
	20/08/40		1	Blenheim (b)	Damaged	Fiat CR.42		Diredawa	413 ^a Squadriglia
	1941								
2	27/09/41		1	Hurricane (c)	Destroyed	Fiat CR.42		200km off Sardinia	370 ^a Squadriglia
3	27/09/41		1	Hurricane (c)	Destroyed	Fiat CR.42		200km off Sardinia	370 ^a Squadriglia
4	27/09/41		1	Hurricane (c)	Destroyed	Fiat CR.42		200km off Sardinia	370 ^a Squadriglia
	27/09/41		1	Hurricane (c)	Probable	Fiat CR.42		200km off Sardinia	370 ^a Squadriglia
	27/09/41		1	Hurricane (c)	Probable	Fiat CR.42		200km off Sardinia	370 ^a Squadriglia
	27/09/41		1	Hurricane (c)	Probable	Fiat CR.42		200km off Sardinia	370 ^a Squadriglia
	1942								
	21/03/42		1	Torpedo boat (d)	Shared destroyed on the water	Fiat CR.42		Gulf of Bona	370 ^a Squadriglia
	21/03/42		1	Torpedo boat (d)	Shared destroyed on the water	Fiat CR.42		Gulf of Bona	370 ^a Squadriglia

Biplane victories: 4 destroyed, 3 probably destroyed, 1 damaged, 2 shared destroyed on the water.

TOTAL: 4 destroyed, 3 probably destroyed, 1 damaged, 2 shared destroyed on the water.

(a) Blenheim L8474 of 39 Squadron shot down. The pilot Pilot Officer P. E. O. Jago and his crew killed.

(b) Blenheim of 11 Squadron badly damaged and crash-landed on return.

(c) Claimed in combat with Fulmars from HMS *Ark Royal* which lost two Fulmars from 808 Squadron, reportedly shot

down by friendly AA fire. Only claimed in his logbook. According to other sources Santoro only claimed two Hurricanes.

(d) ML129 and ML132 of the 3rd Motor Launches Flotilla sunk.

Sources:

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Italian Aces



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