

Mussolini's Love Letters With Aviation Week

Aviation Week

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Benito Mussolini is remembered today as the fascist Italian leader and Nazi ally who was executed and strung up next to his mistress in the waning days of World War II. Less known is that the bombastic dictator was a more respected figure when he rose to power in the 1920s as Italy's premier.



In a fawning letter to Mussolini published in the April 4, 1927 issue of AVIATION – as Aviation Week & Space Technology was then known – the magazine's founder and publisher, Lester D. Gardner, expressed "the deepest admiration from innumerable Americans who are interested in aeronautical problems. By them, you are considered a unique leader of the world in aeronautical progress."

Gardner, who observed Italy's aviation industry first hand during a 21,000-mile tour of Europe, Africa and the Near East, went on to hail Mussolini's efforts to make Italy impregnable from air attack. "A strong air defense renders aggression through the air an impossibility," he

wrote. "...You deserve the unstinted praise of every traveler for the creation of the Italian air lines and the splendid facilities that you have made available for following the most picturesque air route in the world along the Italian coast."

Premier Mussolini Salutes American Aviation

Sends High Praise To Americans Through AVIATION

Mussolini's reply to Gardner was published in the same issue. "I am well aware of the magazine "Aviation" which you edit is the champion in your country of the broadest and most rapid developments of the wings of peace and war," he wrote. "The United States of America are certainly among the most alert vanguards of the development of aviation."

The good feelings would not last. Sixteen years later, bombs would be raining down on Rome from swarms of U.S. aircraft. Those Italian air defenses were apparently not as impregnable as Gardner thought they were.