

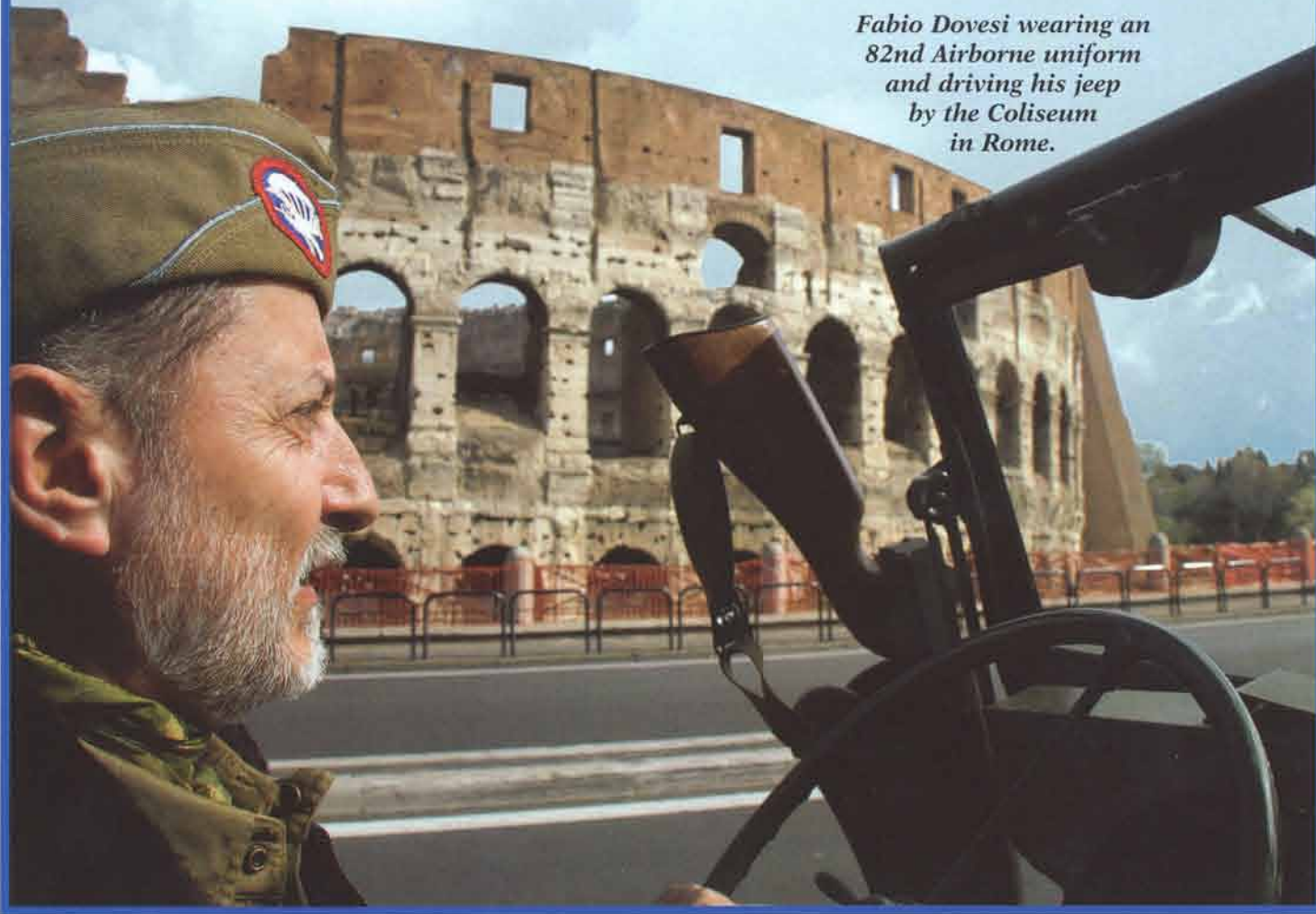
# The Column of Liberation

## Part I: An HMMV and Reenacting Event in Italy



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Fabio Dovesi wearing an 82nd Airborne uniform and driving his jeep by the Coliseum in Rome.



Late on Sunday, 27 April 2008 we had assembled our HMMVs in Ferrara before a large crowd. They had admired our vehicles moments ago near where the DUKWs floated in the Po river. Our long journey was over; we were tired and realized the wonderful days were over. We had said our goodbyes to old and new friends and headed our little convoy back home to Tuscany via the Apennines passes whose control cost so many lives sixty-four years ago.

The *Column of Liberation*, a large-scale HMMV convoy, had covered about 650 miles from Rome to the Po – an unprecedented undertaking in Italy. The Gotica Toscana association in 2007 had conceived the concept. It presented many challenges and the collaboration of many associations and individuals. However, we had learned a lot from our previous MV events and we had a good network with individuals, private concerns, and public administrations on a local and national basis.

The *Column of Liberation* was a major event for HMMV collectors and reenactors as well as publicizing our hobby with its educational and entertaining value. Thanks to efforts by many participants and the dedication of the Gotica Toscana executive secretary plans moved from the project stage to reality in a few weeks.

The 2008 event was timed for the 63rd WWII Italian Liberation Day celebrations hoping to raise funds for charity. The Italian Red Cross supported it and we chose the Giuseppe E. Margherita Coletta Charity Association as our beneficiary.

In late afternoon of Friday, 18 April 2008, our HMMVs assembled near the southern outskirts of Rome. Many participants, both old friends and newcomers, had already joined us for the night. They had come from all over Italy for this truly national event. The next day we drove along the paved roads of Rome, an unprecedented undertaking for a privately organized HMMV group.

**La Colonna della Libertà**  
da Roma al fiume Po  
19-27 Aprile 2008

RICONOSCIMENTO DELLA PRESIDENZA DELLA REPUBBLICA

PRINCIPALI ATTRAVERGAMENTI:

- Roma 19 Aprile 2008
- Museo Storico Aeronautica Militare 19 Aprile 2008
- Viterbo 19 Aprile 2008
- Orvieto 20 Aprile 2008
- Perugia 20 Aprile 2008
- Castiglion Fiorentino 20 Aprile 2008
- Lucca 20 Aprile 2008
- Firenze 25 Aprile 2008
- Pistoia 25 Aprile 2008
- Scarpeta 25 Aprile 2008
- San Lazzaro di Savena 26 Aprile 2008
- Ferrara 26 Aprile 2008
- Serridei di Felonica 27 Aprile 2008

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The national 'Column of Liberation' road sign.



Filippo Spadi (driver) and organizer of the 'Column of Liberation' convoy with navigators Bambagiotti and Gallo.





*Antonino De Rosa's Italian Heavy Artillery Tractor TP inside the Italian HMV museum in Rome.*

Our column had formed along the Ardeatina Highway. Then the "Move up," call came and the column drove down the highway. The first stop was the Cecchignola military base, home of the Italian Historical Museum of Military Motorization. The museum, directed by Col. Matteace, is a paradise for HMV collectors with its top-class exhibits of some extremely rare vehicles. The base was primarily a final assembly point for our column's entry into Rome.

The Rome City Police (Gruppo di Intervento Traffico) waited for us at the Cecchignola with motorbikes and a police car. They cleared the route as we drove along the old Roman roads: the Ardeatina, the Appia Antica, then through the Terme di Caracalla. We entered the old city gates and reached the Coliseum where its majestic bulk impressed us as much as it did US Fifth Army soldiers in June 1944. Along the Fori

Imperiali we reached our final destination in Rome; the Altare della Patria, Italy's shrine to the Unknown Soldier erected at the turn of the 20th century. We carefully secured our parked vehicles amid the usual crowd of international tourists. This show had not been included in their trip plan by any travel agency!

Rome is a beautiful, magical city, and our bagpiper played a short homage to the Unknown Soldier on the Altare della Patria's imposing stairs. The huge monument dwarfed our vehicles, even the largest one, – De Rosa's SPA Artillery tractor. For almost an hour tourists and HMV collectors enjoyed seeing the vehicles. For us it was hard to fully comprehend our presence at such a symbolic place in our national capital.

We reassembled and left on our morning trip to Lake Bracciano via Corso Vittorio Emanuele II along the Tiber to the Flaminio Stadium. Rome was behind us and we



*Carroli's fully equipped GMC on the road to Ferrara; it was a long trip for the vehicle.*



*Last minute preparations outside the Italian HMV museum before departing the museum complex.*

*Some of our vehicles lined up outside the Italian HMV museum and ready to continue the 'Column of Liberation.'*

*An M4A1 76mm Sherman tank used by the Italian Army after the war.*



*An Italian M41 tank (75/18) and behind it an M14/41 Italian tank.*







Approaching Rome by the Appia road entering the ancient Porta San Sebastiano.



There were few civilian cars Saturday morning in Rome near the Coliseum.



This Fiat 508, four-seater, light, 4x2 field car took part in the 'Column of Liberation' with the owner dressed in period WWII Italian uniform.



The piper on the 'Altare della Patria' the most important monument to the KIA Italian soldiers.

Simonelli's 6x6 Dodge WC62 photographed in Rome before leaving for Viterbo.



Some convoy vehicles parked near the 'Altare della Patria' building in Rome, similar to the photographs made 1944.

entered Highway 2, the Cassia, with its heavy and chaotic traffic but the police escort cleared the traffic out to the city limits. We were then on our own up to Lake Bracciano and the Italian Air Force Museum at Vigna di Valle for lunch where the museum is sited. Before WWII Vigna di Valle was an important seaplanes base. After a lunch we visited the museum with its rare machines such as the Italian Campini n. 1, the first jet plane to fly a long distance in August 1940, and several Macchi's and Savoia's of Schneider Cup fame. From the beautiful scenery of Lake Bracciano we started on the third leg of our trip to Viterbo via Sutri, Capranica, and Vetralla. The region is traditionally known as Tuscia. Here the Etruscans built their sophisticated civilization before Roman domination took over, almost three thousand years ago; the region is one of gentle hills, old villas, cattle and sheep in the fields, and vineyards.

We passed by Sutri, its ancient Roman settlements and its amphitheater. After a short stop at Capranica to refuel we proceeded to Viterbo. Only a couple of vehicles had mechanical problems. A Willys jeep displayed its remarkable strength by towing a fully loaded 3/4-ton Dodge over very steep hills for several miles to Viterbo.

German troops at the 'Foro Traianus,' the first present since 1944.



A 'First Special Service Force' (FSSF) reenactor photographed with his jeep in front of the church of Ss. Nominis Mariae ad Forum Traiani. The FSSF, the 'Devil's Brigade,' was raised under joint Canadian and American auspices; the brigade trained in Helena, Montana and served with distinction in Italy during WWII.

At the outskirts of Viterbo the local police escorted us to the Piazza del Plebiscito and the Corso. It was crowded but we finally reached the barracks of the Italian Army's Non-Commissioned Officers School, our stay for the night.

After security checks at the gate we parked in the main barracks square before having dinner. About seventy of us slept in barracks in typical military fashion. Cots, lockers, and the 'cube' of blankets and sheets, all to be carefully setup in the morning. Many recalled their military service...often numerous years ago.





Mussolini's personal CANT-Z-506 aircraft.



P51 Mustang, SM-82 and the other aircraft inside the museum.



Savoia Marchetti SM79 called 'Gobbo Maledetto.' It saw service during the war in the Mediterranean area against the British Navy and became very famous in due time.



FIAT CR-32 made by Hispano for the Spanish war.

Ludovici's Patrizia and Alfonso with a 1942 Ford Sedan staff car at the Italian Army base.



Following an early breakfast we reassembled with the vehicles on the main square for the reveille formation. The hymns of the several Italian arms and services were played followed by our national anthem, which we all sang together with the military cadre at the flag raising ceremony. The school's Deputy Commander, General Di Luzio, gave a farewell speech on behalf of the Italian Army. We thanked him for his hospitality, for providing logistical support, and the opportunity to stop at this symbolic location.

Our route was about 100 miles from Viterbo to Castiglion Fiorentino by way of Orvieto, Todi, and the Lake of Bolsena. The beautiful, hilly landscape caused us to form two sections, light and heavy vehicles, so that both columns could proceed at their own pace.

We avoided main highways by using detours along secondary roads. Jeeps and motorcycles guided us through hamlets and towns. Reassembly was in the beautiful little town of Montecastello di Vibio where the locals offered refreshments. Many of us had never seen this enchanting place before. But our stay was short as it was far to our midday stop at Lake Trasimeno.



First line of vehicles and crews at the Italian Army base stand-ready for the Flag Honor.



Some of the BMW motorcycles that participated in the convoy photographed in the town square at 'Foro Traianus.'





Masola's Command car in front of the FEB group.

Grassilli's Kubelwagen at the drop zone. His turnout is that of a perfect German officer.



Umbria is 'the green heart of Italy.' The only Italian region south of the Alps without a seacoast, its landscape reflects three millennia of civilization – Etruscan, Roman, the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and more recent historic times. The entire landscape is the product of labor and the work of generations.

Finally we reached our restaurant near Castiglione del Lago where there was a large crowd. After a tasty meal and a beautiful view of Lake Trasimeno we left for Castiglione Fiorentino where the whole population was waiting. Bands played and the Military Corps of the



Iussig's well restored Dodge WC64 KD ambulance in Rome.



The Del Grano's brothers Kubelwagen. They also jumped in allied uniforms from 'Dragem-oot,' a historic C-47 aircraft.

Part of the 'Column of Liberation' leaving Rome. It took forty-five minutes for the convoy to clear the city.



Italian Red Cross had set up a demonstration camp complete with tents and equipment, including a rare WWII Italian artillery tractor. Speeches, bands and majorettes added to the festivities.

Most of the Column of Liberation had been through Umbria and Tuscany; the second section of our Column – the Lucca Detachment – had set up a vehicle exhibition, together with the local Italian Red Cross, at Lucca west of Florence. They were to join us later in Florence and proceeded north with us.

Phase one was over. We oversaw the recovery of our HMVs and started our return trip home on chartered buses or by car. Tired but satisfied we looked forward to the coming Friday and the beginning of the second half of our adventure. *To be continued.*

German Sturmgeschütz III aütsf. G. This relic was in the area for fifty years after WWII before relocation to the museum.

