

Enrico Mattei, the Biography

Sources are listed at the end of the document

1906: Enrico Mattei is born in Acqualagna, in the province of Pesaro, on 29 April. He is the second of his father Antonio and mother Angela Galvani's five children. The family is of modest means: his father, a sergeant in the Carabinieri, will have his moment of glory in 1911 when he assists in the capture of the Calabrian bandit Giuseppe Musolino.

1907: With Antonio's promotion to warrant officer, and an attempted move to Camerino which failed because accommodation was hard to find, the Mattei family moves to Matelica in province of Macerata. Enrico is just a few months old at the time. His maternal grandmother Ester Marconi, a nursery school teacher, stays in Acqualagna.

1911-1919: During his three years in infant school, Enrico spends the entire school year with his grandmother, who allows him to return home only for holidays. Thus, for several years Mattei remains as attached to Acqualagna as he is to Matelica. His maternal grandmother is an important influence on him, second only to his mother. After infant school Enrico goes to a boarding school in Vasto, enrolling as a student in the technical middle school. Later he is sent to stay with a relative in Aquila so he can go to the technical high school there and get his school-leaving certificate. But he is a lively, impatient boy who is tired of being at school. The family straightened circumstances and his father's rigid discipline make him eager to leave home and win his economic independence.

1920 (ca.): Enrico's father finds him a job in a bed-making factory in Scuriatti. His first task is to smooth the metal for the bed frames with sandpaper; then the factory owner has him trained as a painter. The work is hard. His shift lasts ten hours, there are few holidays and career prospects are zero. With a workmate, Gaetano Fabiani, he flees to Rome, settles there without his parents' knowledge, and finds work as a waiter. But the escapade lasts little more than three weeks. It all ends when they stow away on a goods train that will take them from Rome to Florence. The train stop for some time at a small station and they are discovered by a railway worker. The episode has all the hallmarks of a lively student prank inspired by Emilio Salgari adventure stories, complete with the ignominious return of the

hungry, frightened runaways accompanied by Enrico's father, doubly furious as both a strict father and a non-commissioned Carabinieri officer.

1923: Dissatisfied with his job as painter of metal frames, Enrico obeys his father and becomes an apprentice at the Fiore tannery in Matelica.

1926: Mattei's career at the tannery, the largest in the area with 150 employees, is meteoric. He is promoted from factory hand to chemical assistant and then to laboratory chief at the age of only twenty. He also manages to set up a fabric shop for his mother. Agip, the state-run oil company created by Mussolini, is born.

1927: After military service with the Sardinian Grenadiers stationed in Viterbo (serving only six months, being a head of household), he returns to Matelica and becomes the tannery owner's chief assistant.

1929: They soon begin to feel the effects of the general economic crisis and business goes from bad to worse. The Fiore tannery closes.

Mattei is left distraught by the collapse, which he did his utmost to prevent. Everything he has achieved over the years seems to have been wiped out. His prestige in the Matelica will be dealt a fatal blow. All he can do is leave town and seek his fortune elsewhere. Giovanni Fiore gives him testimonials and letters of introduction to businessmen he knows, and a severance payment that Enrico would later describe as "higher than the legal minimum". Despite his father's opposition he moves to Milan, where he works as a sales representative for Max Mayer (tanning dyes and solvents) before being appointed sole Italy representative of the Lowenthal company (tanning products and services).

1931: Mattei enrolls in the Fascist party but takes no active part in politics. Instead he develops his business by setting up his first factory in Milan with his brother and sister. The small workshop produces oil-based emulsifiers for the tanning and textile industries.

1934: He sets up Industria Chimica Lombarda at Dergano in the northern outskirts of Milan, making first polishing varnishes and then auxiliary products for the tanning industry. The factory, which now has twenty or so workers, moves to Via Tartini the following year.

Now well-off, he buys the Palazzo Grossetti in Matelica, a once-aristocratic residence full of paintings. He modernises part of it as a home for his parents.

1936: In Vienna he marries Greta Paulas, a Viennese said to have come to Italy as a ballerina with the world-famous Schwartz company.

Then he buys an apartment in Piazza Carnaro for himself, his wife, his brother and two sisters. Marcello Boldrini also lives in the same building. Through him Mattei comes into contact with the Christian Democratic Party in Milan.

His business expands rapidly and the need for raw materials grows correspondingly. Mattei tries to safeguard his own supplies through vertical integration of the business. After a thorough survey of the opportunities for fishing in the Red Sea, he plans to create his own fishing fleet and set up a factory for initial processing of catches. He presents his scheme to the Ministry of Corporations and applies for an industrial fishing licence in Eritrea, hoping to obtain the oils and fats he needs from his catches of dolphins and squids. His brother Umberto travels to the Red Sea in May, but it proves difficult to preserve and process catches on the spot. Though initially encouraging, the Ministry shelves the scheme, possibly in response to opposition from other Italian fishing interests. During the same period Mattei, like many emigrés who make good, starts buying up land in Matelica. He is advised by his mother, who tells when interesting opportunities occur. But here, too, he wants to create something new. He tries the idea of a model farm, rebuilding houses, replanting orchards and excavating on a wide scale. His activities make waves in the rather backward province.

1940-1944: During these years, as Boldrini says, “we shared an apartment, virtually isolated from everyone, as our country’s misfortunes worsened ... When the moment came, Mattei closed the factory to avoid working under the Germans and having his workers subjected to police roundups. He continued to pay their wages and kept some employed in secret to guard his machinery and warehouse stock. He reinstated them all when the war ended.” Mattei gets an accountancy qualification and enrolls at the Catholic University.

1943: In May he meets Giuseppe Spataro, who introduces him into anti-Fascist circles in Milan. After 25 July he and Boldrini join partisan groups in the mountains around Matelica, helping them and supplying them with weapons, despite suspicion over his former

membership of the Fascist Party. He plays only a marginal role in the Resistance, however, concentrating mainly on administering and organising its activities. After a number of roundups he escapes to Milan and makes contact with Augusto De Gasperi and Ferrari Aggradi. In the closing months of the year he goes permanently underground using the name of Este for political activities and Marconi (his grandmother's surname) military operations.

He resumes contact with the local Christian Democrats. Impressed by organisational and military skills, they put him in command of their Freedom Volunteer Corps. He manages to recruit many thousands of men – probably as many as 30,000 – to the Christian Democrat cause in Lombardy, the Veneto, Tuscany and Emilia Romagna.

1944: A North Italian military command of the CLNAI is set up, in which Mattei participates on behalf of the Christian Democrats. On 29-30 July he represents the Christian Democrat Partisan Movement at the Inter-Regional Conference and the National Council in Naples. On 26 October he is captured in Milan, along with thirty or so others, at the Christian Democrats' secret headquarters in Corso di Porta Vercellina. On 3 December he succeeds in escaping from the military barracks in Como where he had been detained, taking advantage of the confusion caused by a short circuit which he himself may have engineered. He meets up with his brother in Dergano, and the following day serves as Christian Democrat delegate in the CLNAI General Command for Occupied Italy comprising Cadorna (commanding officer), Longo and Parri (second-in-command), Mosna (chief of staff) and Argenton (deputy chief of staff).

On 27 October, 1962 Mattei's Morane Saulnier 760 crashes at Bascapè in the province of Pavia as it flies from Catania to Milan Linate. Mattei, the pilot Irnerio Bertuzzi and the American journalist William McHale are killed.

Sources

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