

# 1945 January 15-21

## Married to the Enemy

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### Wife Of Italian Diplomat Anxious To Return To Wisconsin Home After Years In war Area

By LANDRUM BOLLING

ROME, Jan. 5 — (Delayed) — (Special)—When the American men and women who have been overseas during this war get home and start talking about their experiences there won't be many of them who can tell a more exciting story than that of a Wisconsin girl who is now in the fourth winter of her stay in this theater of war. She is Signora Rosette Savorgnan, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. A. O. Sorge, of La Crosse, and wife of an Italian diplomat who used to be vice-consul in St. Louis but is now attached to the ministry of foreign affairs of the Bonomi government.

She was inside Nazi Germany scarcely more than a year ago, she has watched, and cheered, as American bombers plastered an airfield less than a mile from her home, and she has dodged about with her husband from one house to another for weeks at a time to escape arrest at the hands of Mussolini's secret police. Now, as if life were almost back to normal, she puts in nine to five work-day as secretary to an American captain attached to the Allied commission for Italy.

**King Gave Consent**  
A graduate of Milwaukee-Dow-



Anxious to Return to Her Wisconsin Home is Signora Rosette Savorgnan, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. A. O. Sorge, 2214 Cass. She is shown with her husband, Alessandro Savorgnan, Italian diplomat who formerly was vice-consul in St. Louis but now is attached to the ministry of foreign affairs of the Bonomi government. The former La Crosse woman now is secretary to an American captain attached to the Allied commission for Italy.

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While this story does not focus on the Homefront in La Crosse County, it does involve a La Crosse native who had an unusual view of World War II—from the other side. It is also the story of a woman who had to renounce her country for love.

Rosette Sorge was the daughter of Albert O. and Lucinda Sorge of 2214 Cass Street in La Crosse. She graduated from Downers College in Milwaukee.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sorge was part-owner of Tri-State Ice Cream Company, which later became Dolly Madison Dairies. He was later the chairman of Sorge Ice Cream and Dairy in Manitowoc.<sup>2</sup>

Alessandro Savorgnan was the vice-consul in the Italian consulate in St. Louis when he met Rosette Sorge of La Crosse. When Rosette and Alessandro wanted to get married in 1940, the king of Italy had to give his approval because Alessandro was an official in the foreign service.<sup>3</sup> Rosette had to become an Italian citizen to obtain that approval. They were married on December 25, 1940 in Waukon, Iowa.<sup>4</sup>

Because Italy was allied with Nazi Germany, the United States closed all Italian consulates in July 1941. Alessandro and Rosette were instructed to sail to Lisbon, Portugal with other expelled diplomats and their families. When they returned to Rome, Rosette got a job in a government agency.<sup>5</sup>

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States and Italy declared war on each other. Rosette tried to return to the U.S., but she did not have an American passport. In June 1943, Alessandro was posted to the Italian consulate in Salzburg, Austria. When Italy left the war, the Gestapo (German secret police) locked the Italian consular staff and their families in the consulate for three months. Alessandro was pressured to join the new Fascist government in Italy, but he refused.<sup>6</sup>

In December 1943, they were allowed to travel to Rome. There they moved in with Alessandro's parents. Because of his refusal to cooperate with the new government, Alessandro and Rosette were trailed by the police. They had keep moving from house to house. Alessandro's parents would hang a towel out the kitchen window as a signal that their house was being watched, so it was not safe to return. If the police were around, friends would also tip them off with coded telephone conversations.<sup>7</sup>

Their furtive existence continued until early June 1944. Alessandro and Rosette were shot at on June 4th for being out after curfew. The next morning, American soldiers marched into Rome. A few days later, Rosette started working for the American Military Government in Rome.<sup>8</sup>

Rosette Savorgnan returned to the United States in June 1946 aboard a troopship with 9,000 other passengers. After five years living in Italy, Rosette spoke fluent Italian. Her husband joined her to visit with her parents in La Crosse before the couple moved to Nanking, China, where Alessandro would be working in the Italian embassy.<sup>9</sup>

Alessandro's postwar career as an Italian diplomat also took Rosette and their two sons to postings in Caracas, Venezuela;<sup>10</sup> Algiers, Algeria;<sup>11</sup> and New York.<sup>12</sup>

In 1950, Rosette was involved in a legal battle to regain her American citizenship. Before she could marry Alessandro in 1940, she had to sign a document renouncing her citizenship. Her argument was that she did not understand the document at the time because it was in Italian, and her husband had told her that becoming an Italian citizen would not affect her United States citizenship. The case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court where the justices ruled 6-2 against her.<sup>13</sup>

By 1962, Alessandro and Rosette were living in San Francisco. Their two boys spent many of their summers in Manitowoc, Wisconsin with Rosette's twin brothers, and the family frequently visited Rosette's parents in La Crosse.<sup>14</sup>

Alessandro Savorgnan died on March 18, 1973 in Montevideo, Uruguay at the age of 64. He had been Italy's ambassador to Uruguay for about two years. Alessandro was given a state funeral in Rome, and he was buried there.<sup>15</sup>

Rosette (Sorge) Savorgnan, the La Crosse woman who experienced World War II from a truly unique perspective, was almost 89 years old when she died in Novato, California on March 7, 2004.<sup>16</sup>

Jeff Rand  
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### Sources & Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Landrum Bolling, "Wife of Italian Diplomat Anxious To Return To Wisconsin Home After Years In war Area," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, January 21, 1945. Mrs. A. O. Sorge obituary, *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, October 11, 1945, page 20.

<sup>2</sup> "A. O. Sorge, Ex-President Of Dairy, Dies," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, August 31, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Bolling, *La Crosse Tribune*, January 21, 1945.

<sup>4</sup> "Mrs. Savorgnan's Plea For Citizenship Denied," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, January 10, 1950.

<sup>5</sup> Bolling, *La Crosse Tribune*, January 21, 1945.

<sup>6</sup> Bolling, *La Crosse Tribune*, January 21, 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Bolling, *La Crosse Tribune*, January 21, 1945.

<sup>8</sup> Bolling, *La Crosse Tribune*, January 21, 1945.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Stavrum, *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, June 23, 1946, page 10.

<sup>10</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, January 10, 1950.

<sup>11</sup> San Francisco Chronicle Pictures Former La Crosse Resident," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, November 19, 1962, page 5.

<sup>12</sup> "Former Resident and Children Visit Relatives," *Manitowoc Herald Times*, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, July 1, 1952.

<sup>13</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, January 10, 1950.

<sup>14</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, November 19, 1962.

<sup>15</sup> "Diplomat Dies; Mate of Ex-City Woman," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, March 26, 1973, page 25.

<sup>16</sup> Social Security Administration, "United States Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007," database, *Ancestry.com* (<https://ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 December 30), entry for Rosette Andrus Sorge, 2004, SS no. 546-221-806.