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**Italy Seeks Triumph,  
Finds Tragedy**

**By Michele Armellini**

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**



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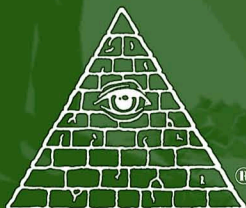
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## IL DUCE'S DISPATCHERS:

Written by

**Michele Armellini**

Edited and Illustrated by

**Gene Seabolt**

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GURPS®

# GRIM LEGIONS

## Italy Seeks Triumph, Finds Tragedy™



By Michele Armellini

Edited and  
Illustrated by  
Gene Seabolt

Additional material by  
Roberto Gasparoni,  
Arturo F. Lorioli,  
Enrico Negro,  
Brian J. Underhill, and  
Hans-Christian Vortisch

<b>GURPS</b> System Design	★ Steve Jackson
Managing Editor	★ Andrew Hackard
<b>GURPS</b> Line Editor	★ Sean Punch
<b>GURPS WWII</b> Line Editor	★ Gene Seabolt
Project Administrator	★ Monique Chapman
Design and Production	★ Gene Seabolt
Print Buyer	★ Monica Stephens
Errata Coordinator	★ Andy Vetromile
Sales Manager	★ Ross Jepson

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Playtesters: Jeremy Amanda, Brandon Cope,  
Peter Dell'Orto, Richard Gadsden,  
Vincent Lefavrais, Phil Masters, Gene Moyers,  
Robert Prior, and Lisa J. Steele.

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## Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the **GURPS Basic Set** – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Page references that begin with CI indicate **GURPS Compendium I**. Other references are CII to **Compendium II**, VE to **Vehicles**, W to **WWII**, W:HS to **WWII: Hand of Steel**, W:IC to **WWII: Iron Cross**, and W:RH to **WWII: Return to Honor**. The abbreviation for *this* book is W:GL. For a full list of title abbreviations, see p. CI181 or visit the updated web list at [www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html](http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html).

# INTRODUCTION

*“If there’s war, the Italians will fight on Germany’s side.”*

– Nazi diplomat Joachim von Ribbentrop

*“That’s fair. We had them last time.”*

– Winston Churchill, in response

Italy considered joining both sides in WWI. Finding more to like in the Entente, the nation sent its armed forces marching into a harsh war until circumstances proved that it had picked the winning cause. Afterward, Italy dreamed of being a world-class power. It wasn’t, but it would take another war to prove it. Once plunged into this second and even greater conflict, Italians painfully learned that they lacked the industry, the technology, and above all, the leadership needed to win.

Many of them also discovered that they lacked a good cause for which to fight, to the point that they gained a reputation for surrendering eagerly. While several factors (discussed in this book) contributed to this, the fact remains that the glory of a boisterous dictator never provides good reason to die. In WWII, Italians did not find glory and conquest, but shame, defeat, and tragic losses. Yet even in tragedy, some of these soldiers showed that honor, patriotism, and a sense of duty were still possible, and they chose to fight, not for the orders they received, but for those few precious things in which they could believe. Both the Allies and Axis would discover that it was risky to belittle Italians who had just a little support and a proper cause.

From the unforgiving Sahara sandstorms to the muddy Balkan trails, from the dark waters of the Mediterranean to the snow-filled trenches of Russia, this book guides the roleplayer who wants to relive the dark fate of these last, grim legions. The following pages will provide history, atmosphere, settings, and plenty of detail for any gaming style featuring “Mussolini’s lions.” The book also offers useful information for Allied or German campaigns in bloody Italy, or partisan adventures.

So, tighten up your puttees and smooth the feather in your cap, for a long march awaits . . .

## About the Author

Michele Armellini makes a living from foreign languages, and in WWII he would probably have been more useful manning a dictionary than a mortar. Nevertheless, he’s a wargamer, roleplayer, and WWII buff. Michele lives in Udine, Italy, with his understanding wife, Silvia, and although a native Italian, he has never eyed any other woman. No, seriously. He has contributed to several previous **GURPS** and **GURPS WWII** playtests, and written for *Pyramid*.

# I. ITALY AT WAR

*“War is normality, peace is the exception.”*  
– Benito Mussolini

Like other European nations, Italy entered the Second World War encumbered by expectations and scars inflicted in what was, for the Italians, the not-so-Great War.

On the Italian front, World War I may have seemed even a bit worse than in Gallipoli. The lines mostly ran through difficult terrain. On the Isonzo river front, bloody trench warfare gave Italy small gains; among the Alpine peaks, soldiers had to regress to the lifestyle of cavemen to survive the winter snow.

The balance was broken when the Central Powers beat back the Russians and could afford the luxury of redeploying troops from the Eastern Front to the Western and Italian. An infamous breakthrough at Caporetto in October 1917 allowed the Austrians to push almost to Venice. The Italian commander, Gen. Luigi Cadorna, blamed his soldiers’ cowardice for the defeat, and remedied that perceived shortcoming with firing squads. Eventually, the Piave river line stood, in no small part because the Austrians had exhausted their supplies.

The Great War ended with a late Italian offensive on a front that had seen more than its share of half-measures and clumsy leadership. Certainly, for the Italians, it left no sense of having been an epic war to end all wars.

In fact, the fighting had left more questions than it had answered.

## A Maimed Victory

When WWI began in 1914, Austria-Hungary and Italy already had a tense relationship, because the Austrians ruled over Italian-speaking regions in the Eastern Alps and Dalmatia. In acquiring those lands as part of the winning Entente war effort, Italy achieved its main war objectives; however, interventionists had hoped for more. They felt the Italian sacrifices merited a slice of the former German colonies, the Istrian city of Fiume, and influence in the Balkans. Italy’s lackluster war

performance, blundering diplomats, and general backwardness combined to ensure that Italians did not wrest these prizes from their Entente companions in postwar negotiations. The Italians bitterly defined WWI as a “maimed victory.”

In addition, the government had promised its troops peacetime rewards when they teetered on the brink of mutiny in the grim months of 1917-18. The veterans counted on better working conditions and sizable pensions for cripples and widows. These prosaic expectations went largely unfulfilled, as well.

## The Growing Costs

This unsatisfying victory had cost the nation 650,000 casualties and twice its 1918 gross national product. Italy’s coffers were depleted, and what could be scraped together by tax hikes went to cover the deficit. The wealthier classes had subscribed to war bonds, so in the eyes of the veterans, they were profiteering from the war.

Italian industries scaled back to a reduced peacetime output and laid workers off. Inflation, unemployment, and hardships weren’t as bad as in Germany, but the Italians had hoped their living conditions would grow better after the war, not worse. The poorer classes grew restless. The Socialist Party was an obvious outlet, but, having opposed the war, it was unpopular with veterans.

## Times of Turmoil

The strikes and riots seemed a prologue to a much-feared general insurrection, and the shaky parliamentary government would be a weak safeguard against that. In 1919, Gabriele D’Annunzio, the showy “soldier poet,” led his “legionaries” to Fiume. They were a rabble of disgruntled veterans, troublemakers, and fanatical nationalists. Yet the Italian government did nothing to stop them for quite a long time. The expedition failed, and disqualified D’Annunzio as a leader for a right-wing movement, but it showed that the government was slow in reacting against such an organization, and that nationalism was still popular.



## CHAMELEON IDEOLOGY

All kinds of visitors came away from an interview with Mussolini under the impression that he shared some of their ideas.

Indeed, his ideology wasn't cast in stone. First and foremost, Mussolini was faithful to himself. He always remained vaguely fond of Socialistlike ideas, even as he became a champion of an aggressive nationalism, but his main aim was personal power and popularity. To that end, he was willing to promise everything to everyone. Eventually, he'd let most of them down. Alliances, policies, and ideals were temporary means to gain the immediate opportunistic end, and while seeking short-term advantages he seldom could pursue long-term plans. The one exception was his alliance with Hitler (p. 6).

The mainstays of his policy were tools rather than purposes: a totalitarian regime, violence, censorship, and favoritism.

Since he lacked a fanatical ideology and feared that extreme measures would weaken his popularity, Fascism never became as totalitarian as Nazism or Communism.

## THE STRONG MAN

By 1920, most Italians just wanted some prosperity, and many thought no parliamentary charade would bring it. Just before WWI, a new player had come to the fore: Benito Mussolini. He had been a menial worker, a teacher, a journalist. Above all, he was a power-hungry Socialist agitator. He left the Socialists when he understood their leadership was not extremist enough, and too solidly entrenched. He also abandoned his previous anti-war stance, and in 1914 opened his own vociferous pro-war newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia* ("The Italian People"). Industrialists discreetly financed him.

As an army corporal, he was wounded in an exercise, thus obtaining war-veteran status. In 1919, he launched his own movement, later known as Fascism, from *Fascio* or "bundle," a term evoking the Roman *fasces*, symbol of forceful authority and unity. It also highlighted the role of the individual as a faceless member of the collective.

## Vets, Goons, and Landowners

The party had no program: Mussolini recruited everybody. He offered belligerent rhetoric to veterans and nationalists, his party's backbone. He made empty Socialistlike promises to the

masses, then unblinkingly meted out violence against the left on behalf of his wealthy backers, especially landowners.

Despite the violence and murder, the Fascists won no parliament seats in the 1919 elections. The Socialists won the most, which frightened the middle classes. Recognizing this, the famous statesman and extraordinary compromiser Giovanni Giolitti decided that he could tame and exploit the Fascists to form a right-wing coalition. New elections were called in 1921. Amidst redoubled Fascist violence and police inertia, Mussolini obtained 35 seats, but he wasn't interested in being anyone's junior partner.

## Bid for Power

On Oct. 28, 1922, the Fascist squads marched toward Rome in an amateurish, chaotic, risky gamble. Many officers sympathized with them, but the Army would have easily dispersed their mobs if King Victor Emmanuel III had ordered it. The weak, badly advised king did not. Instead, he invited Mussolini to form a government.

From then on, things were easy. Mussolini gradually stripped power from every branch of the state. He initially fooled or cowed the parliament, and in the following years he reformed it into a rubber-stamping body. He tamed both the bureaucracy and Fascist internal dissidents.

A crisis arose when Fascist hitmen murdered a popular Socialist leader, Giacomo Matteotti, in 1924, but Mussolini made it through, as he often did, thanks to a mix of oratory, threats, and promises. By 1925, he was solidly in the saddle.

## The Italian New Deal

In theory, the Fascist economy was neither capitalist nor collectivist; it was based on "guilds." In the naïve idea that workers in a given sector shared more interests with their employers than other workers, the *Corporazioni* replaced labor unions. This scarcely masked the advantages given to employers; by 1925, the consumer had lost 8% of his purchasing power. Thereafter, wage cuts repeatedly triggered further declines.

While the state-controlled economy defended monopolies, from industrial cartels to shopowners, it also took measures for full employment. This eased the hardships until the 1929 world crisis. Mussolini boldly faced this depression with his own "new deal," including huge public works, bailouts for key industries, reclamation of swamps, and "battles" (p. 5). These initiatives, together with innovative social benefits for maternity and families introduced in these years, did help the common Italian somewhat.

## FIRST AMONG UNEQUALS

Though the first one in power, Mussolini did not become history's foremost Fascist. Hitler did. Partly, this reflected that Germans responded to Fascism with more vigor than Italians, but it also had to do with Mussolini spending much of his energy on overindulgence. As a young man, he had liked to argue, brawl, drink, and womanize. He had stabbed both a schoolmate and a lover, raped a girl and boasted about it. As a ruler, he remained as distractible as Hitler was single-minded, and once in power he continued to spend hours on newspapers, apparently forgetting that the Italian ones wrote what he wanted.

Although married, he established a relationship with Claretta Petacci, who became an unofficial "Second Lady" by 1936, but he frequently had other hurried encounters in his office. Many Italian women adored him, and quite a few proved it.

Mussolini had no friends. After his brother's death, he became a loner, distrusting even his oldest comrades. He may have even begun to believe his own propaganda; an intelligent Fascist official once remarked, "He's become the statue of himself."

The one man he gradually and grudgingly admitted was on par with him was Hitler. Initially, Hitler was an intimidated, admiring disciple of Mussolini (who kept aloof). After 1933, the Führer became more confident, but Mussolini still thought he was more clever, and did not like nor trust the Germans. By 1938, the *Duce* envied and feared Hitler.

## A Cinecittà Façade

At his core, Mussolini remained a propagandist, more interested in headlines than actual facts. He wanted to look like a superman. Thus, he often took in his own hands four or five key ministries at once. This meant actually leaving in charge undersecretaries that were often overwhelmed, since he preferred yes men to clever men.

He also thought that solving economic problems was a matter of will. He launched "battles," or grand public-relations campaigns, for grain production, against fly infestations, for independence from imports. They were great successes, on paper.

The overall result was a deep divide between appearance and reality. Under Mussolini, trains were on time and desperation was rare; in fact, Italians never read about delays or suicides. As to the armed forces, Italian aviators posted flight records, the navy displayed itself on long cruises, and the army put on showy parades.

Everything certainly looked impressive in the newsreels, but it all would come crashing down to reality with the war.

## POPULAR SUPPORT

By 1932, Italians had largely accepted, if not embraced, Fascism. The king kept aloof, but did not encourage opposition. Some souls would mutter about corrupt officials, or laugh about the most boisterous ones, and intellectuals would get some leeway in their magazines, but that was all.

The small opposition was fragmented. Those that did stand up soon encountered the OVRA political police. The OVRA usually silenced, imprisoned, or exiled dissidents – rather than butcher them – but its relative discretion made it no less effective.

The approval of many Italians, however, was based on the assumption that all of Mussolini's pugnacious boasts were just blather. Meanwhile, *il Duce* was looking ahead, and abroad.

## A WARLIKE EMPIRE

*"Italians must be kept standing up by kicking them in their shins."*

– Benito Mussolini

Dictators *need* enemies, to justify their power, and Mussolini craved prestige and glory. Nothing would have kept Italy out of conflict for long.

## A Brand-New Colony

Abyssinia, the last independent African state of any size, lay between Italian and British colonies, with unclear borders. Conquering it would give glory to the *Duce*, an empire to Italy, and some belligerence to the Italians. Mussolini believed that he needed all three.

The French and British hoped Mussolini would help contain Hitler. In exchange, at the Stresa talks, they reluctantly gave him an unspoken go-ahead in Africa. He declared war against Abyssinia in December 1934, and attacked after a 10-month buildup. The advance was slow, though the Italians used artillery, tankettes, flamethrowers, aircraft, and even poison gas against an enemy relying upon harsh terrain, spears, and old rifles. Finally, on May 5, 1936, Addis Ababa was taken. Tribal leaders resorted to guerrilla tactics, and the Italians to ruthless reprisals and even more gas bombs, because victory had been celebrated and the "rebels" were an embarrassment.

The last outburst was a hand-grenade attack on the viceroy, Marshal Rodolfo Graziani. He survived, with some 200 shrapnel wounds, and ordered indiscriminate reprisals even as his character took on a new, overcautious nature (p. 8).

The League of Nations could not protect Abyssinia, in part because of Great Britain and France's lack of enthusiasm. Trade sanctions were enforced, but not on oil, which would have stopped the Italian army at once. Many Italians concluded that the League had bark, but no bite.

Although short-lived, the League sanctions did damage Italy's economy (p. 14). Regardless, the Italians thought that they had beaten the rich colonial powers that would deny Italy "a place in the sun." Mussolini's image abroad became tarnished, but his popularity in Italy peaked.

By shifting Italy's military might to Africa, Mussolini had lost any chance of bullying Austria into becoming a friendly buffer state, a policy he had considered until 1934. Realizing that Germany would fill the void, he decided to befriend what would shortly become his new neighbor.



## Fascism for Export

Mussolini became more interested in foreign affairs, fancying himself the leader of an international Fascist movement, a Comintern counterpart. By 1936, Italy was the paymaster of Fascist agents, right-wing agitators, and outright criminals in France, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere.

Spain seemed another good setting for this Fascist revolution in July 1936. Galeazzo Ciano, the new foreign minister, convinced his father-in-law that Fascism had to help the Spanish nationalist generals (see p. W10). Mussolini agreed to send aid, which proved crucial in transporting Nationalist troops from Africa. By December, Mussolini decided he could make the most of this war by sending whole fighting units of the Blackshirts (p. 18), who were passed off as "volunteers."

The Italians won at Malaga, then were pushed back at Guadalajara in March 1937, where their offensive against Madrid bloodily failed. In

the bad weather, the Italian "fast war" doctrine (p. 15) – and the Fascist forces in general – were exposed as vulnerable. Mussolini desperately wanted to give just the opposite impression, so he made his troops press on. By mid-1937, the reorganized Italian corps achieved some success, taking Santander. The war dragged on, with Mussolini uselessly trying to force a faster pace on a stubborn Franco, until early 1939.

Some 75,000 Italians served in Spain, but the military did not take away the lessons that the Germans did. The troops, experienced but war-weary, were not kept together. Given the economic cost, loss in military prestige, and Franco's ingratitude, the Spanish Civil War was an utter loss for Italy.

## Balkan Bridgehead

Meanwhile, Hitler's troops entered Austria. With gritted teeth, Mussolini expressed satisfaction. In the crisis of Munich, he posed as a peacemaker, but that was not the role he coveted. He envied Hitler's stature as a fearsome warlord.

Ciano suggested that Italy could stage its own conquest in Albania, a modest country of shepherds and already a virtual Italian protectorate. On April 7, 1939, token Italian forces landed in Durrës; the equally token Albanian militia held its fire. The European powers did not react to Italy's conquest of its own satellite, but this Balkan bridgehead worried neighboring states, with reason.

## Sharing With a Lion

Since 1935, Mussolini had been narrowing his options as to Italy's alliances. Until early 1937, the British remained amicable, since they didn't want to stir up trouble in the Mediterranean. Then contact between Italian and German officials intensified. Germany had ignored the sanctions against Italy, and the two were accomplices in fooling the Non-Intervention Committee trying to curb foreign meddling in Spain. In November 1937, Italy joined the Anti-Comintern Pact of Germany and Japan.

On an impulse, Mussolini agreed to a further military alliance. On May 22, 1939, the Steel Pact was signed. Ciano called it "dynamite," as in explosively risky, because the terms (under most interpretations) required the nations to aid each other even if one *started* a war. (Most such treaties only demand aid for parties *defending* themselves.) Ciano also had wanted a clause stating that both parties would seek peace until 1942. This was not to be; Hitler already was planning to invade Poland and to violate the pact's mandate that both nations consult the other before military action.

Ciano, who thought that he was smarter than the Germans, had been fooled by them.



# THE GREAT BLUNDER



*"I intend to declare war, not to wage it."*

– Benito Mussolini

As Hitler began WWII, Mussolini agonized over what to do. He wanted to go to war as a matter of prestige, but Italy was in no shape for a prolonged fight. Marshal Pietro Badoglio, the chief of staff, had informed him that, upon mobilization, the army wouldn't have enough shirts, not to mention rifles. As to key raw materials, the situation was already critical (see box).

As the Wehrmacht sewed up Poland and turned toward France in 1940, the consummate opportunist devised a neat solution: a short war. If his intervention was carefully timed, the Germans would bear the brunt of the fighting, while he'd still get spoils and glory. Rebuffed prior to Poland, Hitler renewed his requests for Italian aid with France, but Mussolini stalled. Meanwhile, like his colleague, he didn't want to upset the citizenry with shortages of consumer goods, but business as usual meant only modest preparations for war.

The rapid panzer strikes of May surprised everybody, including the *Duce*. He had expected (and secretly hoped) that the French would prove far tougher than the Poles. The overwhelming German success meant that he had to move fast, while an exultant Hitler began telling his now-unnecessary partner that he should wait.

Italy had no reasonable cause for war against France and Britain; its claims on Corsica, Nice, Malta, and some African lands were sheer expansionism. Yet, in those heady days, the war wasn't completely unpopular. Italians believed Mussolini's propaganda, and Hitler had shown that war could be waged at lightning speed, with the boys returning home before they were missed. Jumping on the winning bandwagon seemed attractive.

On May 29, Mussolini announced his decision to his generals. Italy would declare war without any serious preparation, but the war would be short. It was his great blunder.

## Stab in the Alpine Back

No attack plans against France were ready. An army group scrambled from a defensive deployment to an all-out attack. The short battles took place in the difficult and heavily fortified Alps, except for a coastal thrust that took Menton. French morale did not collapse as expected, nor did the Italian binary divisions (p. 15) operate according to plan. In these and many other ways, the bravely fighting troops paid the price for all the hard realities that Mussolini had shrugged off.

The French surrender to Germany put an end to this underhanded campaign. Hitler wanted to woo Vichy France, and Italy had little negotiating power, so the Italian demands – Nice, Djibouti, and Tunis – were dismissed.

## A FINGER IN EVERY PIE

Entering the war for the "opportunity" it presented, Mussolini found himself casting about for victims. By July 1940, he had 37 divisions idling in northeastern Italy, waiting for the Yugoslavs to offer an excuse. As with France, the pies into which Mussolini stuck his fingers contained mousetraps. When Britain refused to yield, the *Duce* belatedly sent 200 warplanes to aid in the ill-fated Battle of Britain (see p. W17). Meanwhile in Africa, he wanted "advances" before the British quit.

## Embroidered in Africa

If his Libyan generals had any reservations about the wisdom of focusing on territorial gains in a desert, instead of destroying the enemy, they had even more pressing problems with which to contend. Their corps could barely muster enough trucks to move one of their "transportable" divisions at a time. Anti-tank guns and ammo were in short supply, and training was poor. Also, anxious intelligence estimates inflated the size of the British 60,000-man force.

## RUNNING ON EMPTY

By the time that Italy entered WWII proper, Mussolini had already wasted much of his ammo. The money spent in Abyssinia could have modernized some 70 infantry divisions, instead. The ensuing trade sanctions, though brief and spotty, created a scarcity of steel, rubber, and above all oil.

Involvement in Spain further squandered assets. Though Franco received mostly obsolete arms, the Italian navy burned tons of fuel in a surreptitious blockade. Albania wasted even more funds. A shortage of hard currency pressed Italy into selling arms, some to nations that would soon be foes.

Finally, the hasty declaration of war meant that 212 merchant ships – the largest and the best in Italy's fleet – were seized in enemy ports or blockaded in neutral ones. Later on, just a couple more tankers would have made a difference for Rommel.

The British were largely motorized, professional, and partly trained for desert and mobile tactics. They easily outflanked static Italian garrisons and blunted the Italian drive. Libya's energetic governor, Italo Balbo (p. 17), demanded trucks and AT guns before "friendly fire" killed him. The grenade-scarred Marshal Graziani replaced him, then repeatedly postponed the offensive, asking for trucks (uselessly idled at the Yugoslav border) and planes (wasted over the English Channel), until a fuming Mussolini threatened his dismissal.

Graziani's mid-September advance masterfully made do. Five divisions moved in countless agonizingly slow columns, allowing the enemy to withdraw to Mersa Matruh. Sidi Barrani was taken, but the exhausted troops had marched 70 miles on a paltry water ration, and the supply system was near collapse. The new legions had to stop.

In Italian East Africa, similar advances took place. The geography made logistics just as troublesome there, and the generals failed to attempt any decisive thrust other than the costly invasion of British Somaliland in August. Instead, they launched limited strikes, and tried to defend all the Italian-held lands, while the British sponsored native uprisings, ensured fuel shortages with their command of the sea, and built up troops.

## The Greek Fiasco

By August 1940, Mussolini longed for a lightning campaign. Yugoslavia was moved to the back burner, but Greece seemed easy prey. Its dictator, Metaxás, was virtually a Fascist, though the court was pro-British. Mussolini, however, wasn't interested in a friendly neutral; he wanted a weak enemy. Ciano also made this his new pet project.

Propaganda and provocations were orchestrated. These failed to motivate the Italians, but warned the Greeks, who quietly mobilized. The last straw was Hitler's surprise "military mission" (consisting of several divisions) to Romania. Mussolini thought that the Balkans were his preserve. He decided to move forward and let Hitler learn about it from the newspapers.

Yet again, the Italians rushed into an ill-planned attack. Some 300,000 reasonably well-trained men had just been demobilized, and nobody worried about a bottleneck at the small Albanian seaports as the offensive began Oct. 28. Eight of the nine divisions in Albania attacked on a wide front against an alert opposition.

By Nov. 10, the Greeks were counterattacking, nearly encircling the thinly spread *Julia* alpine division. By December, the Italians were outnumbered 2-to-1 and withdrawing into Albania, while raw battalions were scraped together

and desperately thrown into the fray. The lack of good ports strangled reinforcements and supplies, so that some battalions were airlifted alone without heavy weapons and immediately put into action. Having made some veiled warnings about this outcome, Badoglio declined responsibility for the disaster even as he resigned. A rival of his, Gen. Ugo Cavallero, replaced him.

The Greeks kept attacking until January 1941. They forced several critical withdrawals, taking villages and ridges, and achieved a final bloody stalemate in the valleys of Tepeleni and Klisura. In February, the front was stabilized. Beginning March 9, Cavallero mounted a new offensive, a frontal headbutt against the strongest Greek positions. A disgruntled *Duce* witnessed this bloody failure. The fiasco came to an end with the German intervention in April 1941 (see pp. W18-19).

## CALLING THE BLUFF

Mussolini had bluffed. If it was too late for the French to raise the ante, Churchill still had chips on the table. The British attack at Taranto (p. 45) came as a shock for the Italians, but far worse was still to come.

## Surrendering in Drove

While the Italians busied themselves building a pipeline in North Africa, the British launched what was initially a spoiling attack Dec. 9. Their thick-skinned Matilda II tanks easily overran Graziani's 150,000 foot soldiers, who occupied poorly fortified camps too far apart to support one another and at the end of fragile supply lines.

The Italian officers reacted too slowly, ordering units in hopeless spots to stand their ground, then demanding lengthy retreats when it was too late. The British annihilated the Libyan and Blackshirt divisions in this confusion.

In January 1941, the Australians attacked the demoralized garrisons in Bardia, then Tobruk. By month's end, both had surrendered. The Italians fell back to the Derna-Mechili area, where a rag-tag collection of untested armor and men blunted the British advance on the 24th. The skittish Graziani ordered a general withdrawal, while the British took a risky shortcut through trackless terrain and cut around the Italian positions with some 50 armored vehicles. The ensuing Italian retreat became a hopeless muddle, with the few combat-worthy units mixed with stragglers and civilians. The small British flanking force withstood the piecemeal breakthrough attempts at Beda Fomm. The survivors surrendered. The Italians had lost some 140,000 men and huge amounts of materiel in the rout.



## A Brave Last Stand

Meanwhile, the British attacked Italian East Africa from both Sudan and Kenya. The Italian units were quickly pushed back from untenable positions, under intense air attacks. British armored cars outpaced their foot columns, and the native troops, while aggressive on the attack, verged on panic when retreating under fire.

Keren offered the Italians a strong defensive position. A mixed force of grenadiers, native troops, cavalry, and blackshirts held out there from Feb. 3 to March 27 against two Indian divisions in succession. The British learned to respect Italian troops given a chance to fight on even terms, as the defenders lashed out with frequent counterstrikes and pinned down units sorely needed in Egypt.

Ultimately, though, the Italians in East Africa ran short of supplies and the native troops began to desert in huge numbers. Cities fell without fighting, and the remaining troops withdrew to fortified positions that could not support one another. The last, Gondar, fell by November 1941.

## The Germans Take Charge

On Jan. 19, 1941, Mussolini met with Hitler, who had been offering assistance. This time, he could not decline. The Luftwaffe was already bombing Malta; now the Nazis would mop up the Greek mess and send armor to North Africa. Mussolini worried that this help would come with a price, but Hitler actually just wanted to prevent his ally's total collapse and further Balkan disturbances. Of course, he did not explain to Mussolini that he already had his sights set farther east.

This arrangement ended the independent Italian strategy. Italians would retain the overall Mediterranean command, but Hitler would decide what to do, then cajole or force Mussolini to oblige. In addition, the upstart German Gen. Rommel was not one to listen too closely to his German superiors, much less the Italian ones.

Rommel's initial daring offensive galvanized the *Ariete* division, an armored unit whose best card was its infantry, all *Bersaglieri*. Other units fought creditably, too, but the Axis onslaught smashed futilely against the tough Australians besieged in Tobruk by the end of April. The Axis would settle for a not very aggressive siege, while waiting for much-needed supplies.

At Halfaya Pass on May 15, *Bersaglieri* and artillery destroyed many of the same Matilda IIs that had been so terrifying six months before. Both this British probe (Operation Brevity) and a relief attempt (Operation Battleaxe, on June 15) failed against a mix of sleek German 88s and old Italian cannons. An unstable stalemate ensued.

## THE BILLS COME DUE

*"We cannot be less present than Slovakia. We have to repay our ally."*

— Benito Mussolini

Meanwhile, Hitler's Russian adventure had begun. Apart from the obligations presented by German aid, the ideological showdown with Communism appealed to Mussolini. The *Pasubio* and *Torino* "transportable" divisions and others participated in the wide-ranging advances of 1941. For the troops, this meant marching for hundreds of miles. When the point units engaged their first Russians, on Aug. 11, their logistics already had collapsed.

The Italians kept going through the conquest of the Donetz region, but by November the corps was exhausted, and some rear-area units were 200 miles behind, lacking vehicles. A last attack before the winter took place at Rykovo.

## Desperate Struggles

Meanwhile, the British launched their Crusader offensive in North Africa. The *Ariete* and *Giovani Fascisti* divisions played important roles in blunting the assault. The British eventually forced the Axis to withdraw by sheer attrition, but an attempted replay of Beda Fomm failed in December 1941. The Axis then reversed the pendulum Jan. 21, 1942, when Rommel launched a surprise offensive and pushed the overextended British 8th Army back to Gazala.

Rommel wasn't even attempting to get along with the new overall commander, Gen. Ettore Bastico, and thought little of his allied troops, but the few mobile Italian units were offering him valuable service, despite their poor weapons.

Extensive minefields guarded the Gazala line, but the British had become demoralized in their turn. Rommel planned a bold, even reckless, attack. On May 26, he looped around the southern end of the British line, liberally sacrificing the Italian divisions to pin down the fortified British infantry in the meantime. His panzers reached the British rear, but their supply line was cut behind them. The *Trieste* motorized infantry division reestablished the supply line to the panzers and *Ariete*.

The gamble had paid off. The Axis were able to engage the British defensive positions, or "boxes," one by one. (These included Bir Hakeim, see p. W:RH12.) Most of the British armor was destroyed, and the South Africans by that time manning the Tobruk lines surrendered the crucial port city. Rommel's German and Italian forces were able to take 33,000 prisoners and an enormous equipment cache.



Throughout these battles, the importance of shipping had become evident. Rommel expected the Italians to keep the Mediterranean lifeline open, and he wanted the logistics to adapt to his plans, not the other way around. Rommel pushed east with 134 tanks, until in turn his lines overextended. The British rudely awakened him by halting his advance at El Alamein in July 1942.

## End of the African Dream

*“15.30. Enemy tanks broke through South of Ariete positions 5 kms North-West Bir El Abd. Ariete now surrounded. Ariete tanks are fighting.”*  
— last message from Ariete division HQ

By Sept. 2, Rommel’s drive had completely faltered, suffering as it was from lack of reconnaissance, surprise, and air superiority. Re-equipped with new gear, the British 8th Army launched a pincer attack Oct. 23 with overwhelming force. The *Folgore* paratroop division held off the southern prong for four days, but the British pushed through to the north.

On Nov. 2, the Germans began to retreat, sacrificing *Ariete* and losing most of the other Italian divisions, as well. The divisions of 10th Corps (*Folgore*, *Brescia*, and *Pavia*) might have been saved if the HQs had risked sending them what trucks they had. Rommel managed to withdraw his mobile troops – that is, the German ones.

The surviving Axis troops fled west with the British plodding after them, while a new Anglo-American army landed even farther west in Operation Torch (see p. W26). Hitler ordered even more troops crammed into a shrinking and

increasingly hopeless bridge-head, including the well-trained *Superga* infantry division.

On March 20, 1943, the mostly Italian 1st Army held the Mareth line against another massive attack by the British 8th Army, with the *Giovani Fascisti* division pushing back the attackers before the Axis troops had to withdraw. After a defeat at Akarit, they stopped the Allies once more in the difficult terrain at Enfidaville and Takrouna. The Italians, who had put on such a poor show to begin the African campaign, were becoming steadfast fighters, but it was all hopeless given that they were cut off. The Axis troops in Africa surrendered May 13, 1943.

## Out of Russia

By spring of 1942, over his generals’ objections, Mussolini had dispatched seven more divisions to Russia. The Italian corps there (the CSIR) thus upgraded to a full army (the 8th), including the Alpine Corps. The troops advanced to the Don with the Germans’ Army Group B (see pp. W24, 26). Though a success, this campaign had come at a price; a Soviet counterattack had overrun the *Sforzesca* infantry division.

The units were well equipped by Italian standards, but not for winter fighting on the Eastern Front. By November 1942, they were stretched terribly thin along 210 miles of the Don, serving as a buffer between Hitler’s Hungarian and Romanian auxiliaries, who held no love for one another.

Aiming to encircle the German 6th Army, the Soviets struck first at the Romanians (see p. W26), then their tanks punched through 2nd Italian Corps. Only the Alpine Corps stood firm, with its *Julia* division struggling to keep open a vital crossroads at Taly.

Then the Hungarians on the *Alpini* left routed, exposing that flank as well. Meanwhile, the Germans had removed their armored reserves and, in some cases, commandeered Italian trucks to flee. The Alpine Corps was attacked in force in mid-January 1943, and pushed back in disarray.

At Nikolajevka on Jan. 26, the remnants of the *Tridentina* alpine division fought valiantly, if chaotically, through the overextended Soviet screen, letting a few survivors slip out of the great pocket. The Italian 8th Army had ceased to exist.



# ENEMY AT THE STRAITS



On July 10, 1943, Operation Husky landed Anglo-American troops at the southeastern corner of Sicily. Some 240,000 Italian troops, plus two German divisions with a few tanks, held the island. Most of the forces were coastal troops: aging Sicilians, badly trained and equipped. Three of the four reserve divisions were mobile only in the Italian sense (i.e., not much). The defenders also had a few companies of obsolete French R35 tanks.

The Allies dropped paratroops in a costly, bungled operation. The inexperienced transport pilots wandered all over Sicily, and nervous Allied naval gunners shot down many of them en route. Still, the paratroops caused chaos in the Axis rear.

The Axis coastal defenses had little with which to oppose the landings. The one truly mobile reserve, the *Livorno* division, counterattacked toward the U.S. beachhead at Gela, along with German panzers. Naval gunfire stopped them in their tracks. Meanwhile, well-stocked fortresses, such as Augusta, fell without resistance.

The Germans blocked the British outside Catania. The U.S. Gen. Patton jumped at this chance, cutting to the northern coast to make a headline-grabbing drive to Palermo. While the Allies thus competed among themselves, the Axis forces retreated through the difficult terrain to the Messina Strait, and crossed it unopposed.

## CRUMBLING RESOLVE

Incidents like the fall of Augusta demonstrated that the Italians had lost faith in victory. The garrison of Pantelleria, which the Italians perceived as their own Malta, surrendered after apocalyptic bombings but without fighting. Farsighted Italians realized that the Germans would now use Italy itself as a buffer; the country would become a battlefield. Those in the know realized that Mussolini would not, could not, abandon his ally. The two dictators met on July 19, 1943. Hitler harangued an ill *Duce*, who did not dare speak up.

## We Want Out!

During July 1943, the one man who could try to demote Mussolini – the king – met with a strange mix of generals, old liberal politicians, and Fascist bosses. The sphinxlike king silently decided the *Duce* had to go, but a formal excuse was needed. This came from an unlikely quarter; the Grand Council of Fascism, a party rubber-stamping body, gathered July 24 to vote in favor of a resolution that returned some powers (including overall military command) to the king.

Mussolini did nothing to stop this. Possibly, he was willing to spread around some of the responsibility he had greedily centralized, or perhaps his astonishment or illness slowed him down. The next day, the king exploited this resolution to order Mussolini's arrest.

His popularity, and that of Fascism, had plummeted. Nobody stepped up to support either. Mussolini himself wrote a humble letter offering assistance to Badoglio, appointed to replace him.

To appease the Nazis, Badoglio announced that the war would go on. The Germans, not fooled, updated their plans to disarm the Italians and rushed more divisions to Italy, while the new government began clumsy negotiations with the distrustful Allies. The Italian authorities thought that they could just opt out of the war, but finally signed a harsh armistice. U.S. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower reserved the right to choose when to announce it; he wanted the news to be held until just before the Salerno landing (see p. W27).

## Elation and Shame

*"The Italian Armed Forces will defend themselves from attacks coming from any other direction."*

– Pietro Badoglio, radio message

The news of Mussolini's fall, and its suggestion that the war would soon end, prompted street celebrations. Badoglio's troops fired on demonstrators, which had never happened under Fascism, but peace seemed close.

On Sept. 8, the Italian generals were caught unprepared when told that the day had arrived. Worse, it had become evident that the Allies actually expected them to fight, and that the Germans weren't just going to kindly leave them central Italy. They became concerned with their own health. A furious U.S. Gen. Maxwell Taylor, who was secretly in Rome, had to cancel Operation Giant II, an airdrop to take the capital, because the Italians were afraid to defend the four needed airports. Important ministers, the royal household, and well-informed generals simply fled, leaving everyone else in the dark.

The pyramid crumbled from the top down. Ministries emptied and officers took unauthorized "leave." Badoglio's ambiguous radio message was the only order that many commanders received. It was difficult to ask the soldiers not to desert when they were left without orders and their generals already had fled. Units dissolved to the cry, "Everybody go home!" Civilians offered plain clothes and looted army depots.

The Germans reacted fiercely. Their paratroops freed Mussolini on Sept. 12 (see p. W:HS9). German commanders, including Kesselring, did not feel bound by honor in dealings with these turncoats; when they couldn't immediately use force, they bought time with phony negotiations.

The Italian units were on their own, everywhere. In Rome, the *Granatieri di Sardegna*, the new *Ariete II*, and elements of other units fought for three days, supported by a few civilians. The 4th Army, in transit from France, simply evaporated, and the Germans did little to capture its soldiers; many would become partisans in Piedmont. In the Balkans, many units surrendered and were sent to German camps. The Italian garrisons put up a fight in many Greek islands; in Leros, they were helped by the British, but to no avail. In Kefalonia, the *Acqui* division valiantly fought until Sept. 21, then surrendered – the Germans massacred 4,800 prisoners.

Part of the air force flew south. The Luftwaffe sank the battleship *Roma* as the navy fled to Malta.

By Oct. 1, the Germans were in charge everywhere north of Naples, but they had failed to round up the Italian soldiers. In December, Italy would begin fielding ground units on the Allies' side (p. 44). Others would remain loyal to Mussolini, fighting in northern Italy as RSI (pp. 44-45) troops.

## A Secondary Theater

Meanwhile, the British had advanced up from the boot's tip, and the Salerno beachhead survived its first, challenging days. The Allies were winning a grinding war in Italy, but in late November 1943 at Teheran they confirmed that the true Second Front was to be in France. Italy, and the alternative prospect of the Balkans, would push the Allied invaders into mountains with only a few easily defended passes where the Wehrmacht could exact a dreadful toll.

The Italian campaign would continue to exact its own price, but it became a sideshow. Its strategic purpose was to pin down German units in Italy, so they wouldn't be available elsewhere. Indeed, for much of the campaign, the Allies had fewer troops in Italy than Hitler, if one counted the anti-partisan units of dubious front-line usefulness.

From October 1943, the campaign settled into a slow routine. The Germans used artful mines and wholesale demolition of the already poor road network. They exploited the difficult ground, camouflage and fortifications, and the bad weather. A line would hold the Allies until the Germans had lost a good portion of the troops in it, or until they had bought enough time to prepare a new line a few miles north.

Much of this could have ended with the Anzio landing on Jan. 22, 1944. Within 48 hours, the Americans had 50,000 men on shore, but their overcautious commander decreed that there they would stay, although Rome was within reach. Given time to react, the Germans threw troops from the rear into the front. Well-prepared to endure the U.S. attack on Jan. 30, they counterattacked with panzer support and opened a dangerous breach in the beachhead. Mutual exhaustion ended the fighting Feb. 22.

The Anzio failure meant that, once again, artillery rounds and infantrymen's lives had to be expended at the bottleneck of the Liri Valley: Monte Cassino (see p. W29). The fortresslike monastery fell to the Poles on May 18. The Americans finally broke out of Anzio, but instead of cutting off the Germans, they hurried to Rome. The Germans redeployed to their next line.

## Patrol Clashes

The Allies were unable to catch the Germans off balance, and U.S. and French units were being withdrawn for Operation Anvil/Dragoon. By late August, the Germans retreated to the Pisa-Rimini Gothic Line, their last and toughest defensive belt.

Its Adriatic side had fewer natural obstacles, so the Canadians relentlessly attacked there for a month. This time, the Germans didn't want to yield ground, but had to. On Sept. 21, Rimini fell, but the Allies had no more reserves to feed into the furnace. The push collapsed with the autumn rains.

The last attempt came on the other side, as the Americans already were attacking across the low but steep Apennines. With the weather worsening, air missions were canceled, yet the Americans came within 14 miles of Bologna and the plains. On Oct. 27, after taking several thousand casualties in a month, they called off the advance.

Troops and civilians hunkered down for another winter, even as an Italian resistance movement began to make itself seriously felt. Allied generals ordered the partisans to go home, warning them that the Allies wouldn't support them. This message was conveyed by open radio broadcast, thus informing the Germans, as well. Although many kept fighting, *Resistenza* activity ebbed to a low in January 1945.

During that winter, only limited actions took place. The RSI's *Monterosa* alpine division and German troops mounted a small attack in the Garfagnana mountains to push back the 92nd American Division, but its African-American enlisted men soon retook their positions. Until the spring, the war would consist of skirmishes between patrols.



# ON TO LIBERATION DAY



The last Allied offensive finally began in April 1945. By then, the Germans had little with which to stop them.

## Partisans' Spring

The dam broke when it became clear the Germans could not hold the Po River line. Some German units were simply moving north, in orderly fashion but without orders. The few remaining Italian Fascists that they left behind scrambled to hide. Meanwhile, the partisans jubilantly entered the promised land of the cities, fighting only rear-guard skirmishes. Many of these fighters had joined the movement only in the previous month, or week. Many of the partisan groups focused on establishing credentials for the postwar shakeout. This especially applied to Yugoslavian units, who pushed west to lay their claims to border lands.

Mussolini left Milan on April 25, Liberation Day. He considered trying the Swiss border, then disguised himself as a German soldier to pass a partisan roadblock. He was recognized and in short order executed, together with a handful of die-hards and his lover.

## A Lasting Legacy

The remaining Germans in Italy surrendered on May 2, 1945. Vendettas and trials shortly followed. Some 610,000 Dalmatians of Italian origin had to leave their land.

The country picked itself up rather quickly thanks to the U.S.-sponsored Marshall Plan. By a narrow margin, Italians voted to get rid of their royals. The king had done nothing to stop Mussolini in 1922, had accepted the war, and had fled to safety in 1943.

Thus, Italy became a democracy and a republic, but the consequences of the war would linger. After Fascism, patriotism became a swear word. After what had happened in 1943, many Italians, never

endowed with a great trust in their state to begin with, would largely place their allegiance with non-national entities, such as the Catholic Church or Communist Party. This lasting legacy remained with Italy for decades after the apocalypse that Mussolini helped create finally ended in 1945.

## WHAT IF . . . ?

A few key decisions could have changed the course of Italy's war. Taking Malta (p. 46), or not attacking Greece, would have greatly improved the nation's prospects; however, given the industrial capabilities involved, it's difficult to imagine Italy winning – that is, on its own. Assuming a German victory (see pp. W:IC121-125), Italy could be a junior partner in the European Reich, providing elegance, relaxed standards, and tame dissidence to the Nazis.

What if Italy had *not* entered WWII? If Mussolini had decided to wait a bit more, maybe he'd have become another Franco. If Italy remains neutral (but tacitly friendly to Germans), all kinds of Mediterranean intrigues present themselves.

There were several attempts on Mussolini's life during his early years in power. Assuming one was successful, probably the Fascist bosses would have formed a collegial dictatorship. Such a weaker leadership would have made many outcomes possible: war but with less brinkmanship, a shaky neutrality, an Italian civil war, or even a mid-war coup in the Yugoslavian style.

The most disturbing speculation centers on the early invasion of Abyssinia. What if Great Britain had truly opposed that war, forcing Mussolini to back off? He would not have poured resources into that adventure, and thus would have had a much more powerful army in 1939, strongly deployed in Libya. He might have been well-prepared to assault Malta, and smarting for revenge . . .

# 2. THE ITALIAN ARMED FORCES

In 1938, Italy appeared to be a formidable world power. Much of its strength was on paper only, but the quality of its assets wasn't below the day's standards. The infantry training was outdated, but no worse than that of the French. Biplanes were in use, but this goes for the British, as well.

So why the poor showing in WWII? Chapter 1 illustrates some reasons, as overall leadership was at best inadequate, but there were technical reasons, too. The Italian industrial base was too small to keep up with the attrition rate of modern war. Modernization programs had been postponed because of the expense of the Abyssinian and Spanish campaigns. Research was hampered by lack of funds:

Italian ships were blind at night, while experimental radars gathered dust in unfunded labs. Logistics and supplies were a nightmare for all commanders.

Additionally, innovation was stifled by a deadly combination: bureaucracy, old generals' narrow-mindedness, and industrial output limits. When a new design had run the gantlet of the first two, it would then be set aside while the lines churned out obsolete equipment, and it would finally have a two-digit production run. Most combatants initially had small quantities of outdated materials, but they were able to replace them quickly, with new weapons in growing numbers. This did not happen in Italy.

## EIGHT MILLION BAYONETS

Mussolini boasted that he could muster 8 million bayonets. It was just propaganda, but it's telling that he thought in terms of bayonets. Anyway, his generals agreed. A large army was in the WWI tradition, it provided more command slots, and the money spread further in an army heavy with relatively cheap infantry. A well-equipped army would have to have been smaller, and thus exert less political influence – neither the generals nor the king would accept that.

### ARMY LITE

If the Italian army was indeed ready for a war, it was the wrong one. The staff thought in terms of alpine engagements in Europe, or a short colonial fight in Africa. This influenced the choice of units and equipment.

The five mobile divisions were supposed to be capable of modern war, but they had dreadful vehicles and not enough artillery. The “transportable” (semi-motorized) divisions and their

North African counterparts were suitable for an Abyssinian-style campaign. Still, the 50 remaining divisions were unmotorized infantry, mountain infantry, or *Alpini* – foot soldiers all.

Since most Italian soldiers would march to war, equipment that could be man-packed was preferable. Also, if lighter isn't necessarily better, it's usually cheaper; getting more for the same price looked good in the newsreels. This philosophy soon extended beyond small arms. The L3/35

was the lightest tank in the war; the 45mm was the smallest mortar caliber. Pathetically, they were both dubbed *d'Assalto* (“assault”), as if to imply that they were built for speed rather than on a budget. All of the small-caliber ordnance had no gun shield. The standard field gun remained a 75mm, while others used the 105mm or 25-pounder.

Another feature of the Italian armory was age. Some 77% of the 10,800 artillery pieces were

WWI vintage, many even Austrian war reparations. Old guns could still kill, but wear reduced range and accuracy, and dud ammo was common.



## Operations and Tactics

Those mobile divisions had been created for the Italian offensive doctrine of *guerra di rapido corso* (fast war), a poor man's *blitzkrieg*. "Fast war" expected infantry to achieve the breakthrough before reserves "overstepped" them in a tricky maneuver to reach the enemy rear. It depended on a decent road network, as the troop trucks had poor off-road capabilities. This made it more vulnerable than the German version to flanking attacks and bottlenecks on the roads. In practice, the doctrine wasted little time in displaying its weaknesses.

As things turned out, Italians did most of their fighting defensively, and their generals had little opportunity to employ high theory. The army still used a cumbersome WWI-style chain of command, with poor communications and a preference for discipline over initiative, so any detailed plan simply took too long to execute. The enemy – and even the German partners – did not wait for inspiration to seep down from on high. By 1942, *Ariete* and other Italian units in the desert had learned effective operations, but their master, in all senses, was a German general, not Italian.

Tactically, Italian infantry used standard procedures, similar to British protocol (see p. W41). They were much better at defending than in offensives. Rigid tactics caused problems during the first clashes in Albania before the situation improved. The British said that Italians were good at keeping the enemy at bay, but wouldn't stand close-quarters combat for long. Platoon tactics were based on the flexibility provided by the two-squad section (see below), where each section had a specific task.

## The Infantry

The Italians organized infantry into a section of 18 men. This divided into a fire squad and a maneuver squad, either evenly or an 8-10 split. The first squad had two two-man MG teams with Breda LMGs, while the other men carried ammo and secured the flanks; the second squad carried rifles and grenades. The LMG squad fired for suppression while the other pushed the assault home. Green NCOs would let ill-trained sections bunch up, often a costly mistake with such a large group.

A platoon had two sections, plus an officer and his aide. This gave it four LMGs, thus greater firepower (when the Bredas worked, p. 27) than a British platoon, but with more encumbrance. Thus, on the advance, Italian platoons tended to be a bit slow. The officer carried a pistol. Early on, the NCOs carried a Beretta SMG only in the *Bersaglieri* (p. 16)



and other special troops. By 1941, each platoon in Russia had an SMG allotted to it.

The company consisted of three platoons and a small HQ. It had no support weapons of its own. The battalion had three such companies, a heavy-weapons company, and HQ. The heavy-weapons company usually farmed out its eight MMGs and 18 45mm mortars to the rifle units.

A regiment had three battalions, a mortar company with six 81mm tubes, an infantry-gun battery of four 65mm (later eight 47mm) guns, HQ, and rudimentary support and medical staffs. Thus, an Italian regiment had few integral support weapons; the division often farmed out its assets.

By 1942, the regiments in North Africa often were reorganized to increase their firepower. They usually had two infantry battalions and an 81mm mortar company. The infantry companies had fewer riflemen, but included 47mm antitank and 20mm antiaircraft sections, and an MMG platoon.

From 1937, a division had two infantry regiments instead of three, an artillery regiment, either a mortar battalion of 18 81mm tubes or an MG battalion, an antitank company of eight 47mm guns, engineers, and support.

Mussolini welcomed the creation of these smaller "binary" divisions that his generals had invented – he could boast of having more of them. In theory, the smaller divisions were to act like large brigades, while the corps took over the division's role as basic operational unit (see p. W37). Corps artillery was to offset the divisions' lack of firepower. In practice, the binary division had no reserve of its own. It could not make up for casualties, exploit success, or fend off counterattacks. The corps was called upon to make up this shortfall, but often it already had committed all of its assets. Still, the concept remained popular, because it created 50% more slots for generals. Interestingly, Mussolini helped correct the issue by accident (p. 18).

The Italians also fielded divisions of mountain infantry; these were not specialized mountaineers like the *Alpini* but had artillery that could be broken down for transport by mule.

The "transportable" divisions were supposed to have enough trucks to move their artillery, with the corps holding trucks sufficient to move the infantry upon demand. In practice, the trucks usually went missing. The remodeled North African divisions were supposed to have the same capacity.

"Libyan" divisions and the colonial brigades were smaller, underequipped units of native troops; the former had no more than 7,500 men and 24 field guns, while the latter varied widely.

As in most armies, specialized units skimmed off the best recruits, leaving poor and uneducated peasants to fill the ranks as line infantry.



## The Armor

The Italians debuted the first post-WWI armor in 1933, with their CV3/33 tankette. Amazingly, it still was serving as a tank in 1940.

Subsequent Italian production had its peculiarities, probably because one design center and an industrial combine handled the task without competition while various government offices constantly changed vehicle specifications. This led to bad decisions such as starting production of the flawed M11/39, with its hull-mounted 37mm gun, even as the turreted M13 (p. 32) was being tested. Production of the latter was delayed until February 1940.

A tank platoon had four or five vehicles. The company had three platoons plus a command tank. The battalion had three, sometimes just two, such companies and a two-tank HQ. A tank regiment had two or three battalions, HQ, and support. In early-war L3/35 and M11/39 companies, *one* tank had a radio! As the war progressed, self-propelled guns were often used in place of tanks.

An armored division had a tank regiment, a reconnaissance unit with armored cars, a motorized *Bersaglieri* regiment including a few AT guns, a weak artillery regiment, engineers, HQ, and support. Initially, one of the three *Bersaglieri* battalions rode motorcycles; later, all rode in trucks.

## Specialized Units

Italian artillerymen were better trained and more dependable than most of the infantry, and most artillery officers were experienced professionals. Nevertheless, the guns themselves were not the only things to date back to the Great War in this service. The favored tactic was a carefully planned bombardment, impressive and effective but taking hours to prepare. Fire on call was never fast. Additionally, ammo was always in scarce supply, and the usually short-ranged guns were vulnerable to counterbattery fire. In North Africa and Russia, artillery was motorized; elsewhere, it mainly relied on draught or pack animals.

A medium artillery battery had four guns, and three of these made a group (battalion). Three, sometimes four groups, plus AA assets, made a regiment (normally two 75mm and one 100mm or 105mm group). Lighter ordnance was grouped in platoons or batteries comprising six, eight, or nine pieces. Larger calibers were used as corps assets.

The Italian cavalry still had mounted units, though new regiments were assigned light armor (armored cars or L3/35 and L6/40 light tanks). From late 1940, a cavalry troop had a three-man command team and three 10-trooper sections, each with its own LMG. (Before, it had an LMG section with 13 troopers serving two LMGs, and

two “saber” sections with nine troopers each.) A squadron had three troops and HQ. A group (battalion) had a small HQ and two squadrons. A regiment had two groups, an MG squadron (with eight MMGs, later 12), HQ, and support. Italian cavalrymen had a dashing reputation, which they lived up to – troopers in Russia carried out some of the last successful cavalry charges in history.

A *Celere* (fast) division contained two cavalry regiments, a *Bersaglieri* regiment with two battalions of truck and/or motorcycle infantry, a group of 61 tankettes, and motorized artillery. This hybrid cobbled together very different mobile formations, and unsurprisingly was difficult to use effectively.

Italian engineers were famously good at building things and at improvising. Their platoons were smaller than the infantry’s, and armed with carbines. When clearing minefields under fire, their main tools were their fingers and bayonet tips. They also provided signal units.

## Elite Units

The best recruits went to the paratroops, the assault engineers, the well-equipped motorized infantry of the *Bersaglieri*, or the mountaineering light infantry of the *Alpini*. The first three sorts sought men with initiative and aggressiveness, while the *Alpini* favored endurance above all.

The *Folgore* paratroop division usually fought as infantry, though hamstrung because it lacked vehicles and had only air-dropped artillery (47mm antitank guns and 81mm mortars). Like the *Bersaglieri*, paratroops received the best available weapons, with a few more Beretta SMGs and flamethrowers than usual among their gear.

The assault engineers, or *Guastatori*, formed a handful of crack battalions, armed to the teeth with MGs, flamethrowers, light mortars, and demolition charges. Their task was blowing things apart; they also took care of minefields. One battalion, with the *Folgore*, also had parachute training.

The *Bersaglieri* traditionally rode bicycles, but by 1940 most had switched to motorcycles or trucks. Later, the cycles would get scarce, too. They were meant as light troops and made up all the infantry in armored and fast divisions. The *Trieste* motorized division had an attached *Bersaglieri* regiment, too. They had 12 men per section, with three sections and three LMGs per platoon.

*Alpini* had three sections and three LMGs per platoon, with 15 men per section. A company had nine LMGs, three MMGs, and three 45mm mortars. A battalion had three regular companies plus four 81mm mortars; a regiment had three battalions. An alpine division had two such regiments, and an artillery regiment with 24 75mm mountain

guns, plus more services and signals than ordinary infantry. It initially had no antitank or anti-aircraft assets; these were added to units sent to Russia.

The *Polizia Africa Italiana* was formed with small, well-trained *raggruppamenti* (temporary groups). They were fully motorized, relying often on motorcycles, but also using trucks and armored cars. Many men were armed with Beretta SMGs. Of the 6,000 PAI men in East Africa, 4,500 were natives, and they always remained disciplined; few other native soldiers were entrusted with an SMG.

## Native and Foreign Troops

The Italians made use of colonial troops, usually led by Italian officers with native NCOs.

The Libyan troops included infantry, cavalry, and, for service in the deep Sahara, *meharisti* (camel troops) and Saharan motorized groups. A battalion of Libyan paratroops was formed, and sadly used as guinea pigs in '38; their high training losses demonstrated that the D37 parachute needed work. They went on to fight well in 1940-41. The Saharan units tended to be the best soldiers.

East Africa saw an exotic mix of Eritrean, Abyssinian, and Somali soldiers. The tribal Somali *dubat* infantrymen wore white turbans. The Italians employed regular and irregular cavalry, and irregular infantry of questionable loyalty. The Eritreans were the most reliable of these troops, the Somali the most aggressive.

Albanians served in irregular mercenary outfits, in auxiliary battalions, or in their MVSN Fascist militia units (p. 18). Other than 1st MVSN Albanian Legion, they were notoriously unreliable. Many refused to fight when the time came, or shot their officers and deserted.

Other foreign units included the small Croatian MVSN legion, which fought well in Russia, and the *Milizia Volontaria Anti-Comunista* (Volunteer Anti-Communist Militia), which hunted Yugoslav partisans with separate Croatian, Serbian, and Moslem legions. Finally, the Italians employed some small turncoat units, such as a Cossack *sotnia* in Russia and never-deployed outfits of Indian and Sudanese ex-POWs.

## INTELLIGENCE

The SIM (*Servizio Informazioni Militari*, Military Intelligence Service) routinely provided overestimations of the enemy forces, just to stay on the safe side, but it also achieved some intelligence breakthroughs. Thanks to agents and traffic analysis, it could often predict when the British fleets were leaving their ports in force. When Yugoslavia was involved in the war, its divisions on the Albanian border received contradictory messages, including orders to withdraw: These were actually sent by the SIM, which had broken the Yugoslav code. The most important success was copying the U.S. "black code" at the Rome embassy. Thanks to this security breach, Rommel received very valuable intelligence sent by the U.S. military attaché in Cairo, until the code was changed.

The Germans did not think that the Italians could keep a secret, but General Amè, the SIM chief, did not trust his own codes too much, and changed them often. Meanwhile, the self-assured Germans kept relying upon Enigma, which the British had deciphered. At times, intelligence garnered in this way from the Germans resulted in Italian ships being sunk.

## BEAUTIFUL AND USELESS

In 1940, the Italian navy had 640,000 tons of ships, making it the fifth-largest in the world, with many modern battleships and heavy cruisers and the second-largest submarine fleet anywhere.

Still, it had weaknesses. The typical cruiser was fast, only because it was lightly armored. There were no radars, although this wasn't a terrible drawback in the Mediterranean, where daylight actions were the norm. The navy had no carriers, and cooperation with the air force was dismal. The assets it did have went underutilized (pp. 45-46), to the point that the battleships seemed "useless."

The navy organized ships into flexible squadrons. Smaller vessels operated in flotillas that often escorted cruisers and battleships. A typical supply convoy might include a tanker, four cargo ships, and 4-6 destroyers and/or corvettes.

## FLASHY AND FASCIST

With officers like the thug-turned-aviation-pioneer Italo Balbo (p. 8) and several party officials (as well as Mussolini's own sons), the air force enjoyed an unparalleled cachet. Unfortunately, it used this influence to avoid the navy's bid to take over its naval-aviation arm.

A fighter *sezione* (section) had three or four planes, and a *squadriglia* (squadron) had 12. Three fighter *squadriglie* made up a *gruppo* (group); two *gruppi* made up a *stormo* (fleet, totaling 72 fighters). A bomber *squadriglia* only had nine planes, and a bomber *gruppo* only two *squadriglie*, so a bomber *stormo* had just 36 aircraft.

Most bombers were old with poor payloads. The three-fighter formation looked nifty, but in combat the second wingman was wasted; by 1941, the German four-fighter grouping was adopted. This still left the air force with many outdated tactics, to go along with its old planes.

Indeed, the Italian pilots were not as modern as they thought. In the '30s, they had attached great importance to aerobatics, because a good WWI fighter was able to turn more tightly than its foe. This kept many of them in biplanes, which had only the advantage of agility over modern designs. German pilots discovered in Spain that a faster fighter can swoop upon a nimbler one without giving it time to maneuver; the Italians failed to notice.

In addition, older fighters lacked a radio, and pilots insisted on outdated open cockpits (p. 34).

When German engines became available, Italian fighters' performance dramatically improved.

## THE BLACKSHIRTS

The *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (or MVSN) was the party's militia. Anybody who had completed his military service could volunteer, and be on part-time duty for 10 years. Party members were strongly encouraged to volunteer; by 1941, a quiet posting to a local anti-aircraft unit was a way to avoid the real fighting.

Early Fascist squads had chosen black shirts in honor of the death-defying volunteer *Arditi* army units in WWI. The MVSN used ranks, and sometimes unit names, taken from the Roman legions.

These *Camicie Nere* (Blackshirt, or CCNN) combat units were smaller than their army counterparts. The platoon had 37 men, when not understrength. A company normally had just two platoons. A battalion had three companies, a HQ, a recon platoon of picked men with no support weapons, and a mortar platoon with nine 45mm tubes. A legion (regiment) had two battalions, HQ, an MG company with 12 MMGs, and support.

By June 1940, three full militia divisions were deployed in North Africa. These were stronger, with each legion having three battalions plus eight 81mm mortars and eight 65mm guns. The division had two of these legions, HQ, an MG battalion, a 47mm AT company, and regular-army units of engineers, support staff, and an artillery regiment.

Territorials (units serving in Italy itself) had yet another structure: mobile cohorts had three companies of three three-squad infantry platoons each, plus an MG platoon with two squads. Standard cohorts had three companies, each with four three-squad infantry platoons – and no MGs whatsoever.

Several autonomous MVSN legions served in East Africa.

## The Party's Army

Throughout the 1930s, the MVSN had acquired territorial-defense duties, with border, air-defense, and coastal-defense branches. By late 1939, though, Mussolini wanted this political army further ingrained into the overall Italian military. He decided to add a Blackshirt component to each army division.

He wasn't worried about the binary divisions' size (p. 15); rather, he perceived the Blackshirts as crack units that would bring the regulars some "Fascist" assault potential. The addition would have helped the binary divisions considerably, but in April 1940 he discovered that the army had been quietly obstructing his plan! Only later in the war was the integration implemented with most units, adding a Blackshirt two-battalion legion to the binary division.

The CCNN troops were not bad, though not the equivalent of their German *Waffen-SS* counterparts. They had some veterans from Spain. Training, tactics, and morale were approximately the same as in the army. A lack of heavy weapons hurt them, but poor leadership did far worse. Low-ranking officers were appointed for their loyalty to their local boss, which did not make them effective commanders. This was particularly true in the three divisions; smaller Blackshirt units fought creditably, for instance at Keren (p. 9) and in Russia.

Later in the war, the MVSN organized the "M" battalions as the militia's elite units. Most M men were veterans, but they still lacked support weapons. By mid-1943, the MVSN also was forming an armored division with a handful of German PzIIIs, PzIVs, and StuGs, but the owners took back their vehicles in the fall.

Other organizations replaced the MVSN when Fascist Italians reformed into the RSI army in northern Italy after the surrender (pp. 44-45).





# ITALIAN ARMS AS OF JUNE 1940

As Italy entered the war, this was its order of battle. Some wartime additions are discussed.

## REGIO ESERCITO

The Italian army fielded 70 divisions: 19 were “complete,” with minor shortages in trucks and beasts of burden; 31 “incomplete,” lacking some vehicles and 25% understrength; and 20 “ineffective,” lacking at least half their transport, 40% of their men, and many weapons.

Of these, 34 were regular infantry, nine mountain infantry, 12 “transportable” (including nine modified to North African standards), two motorized, five *Alpini*, three *Celeri*, two Libyan, and three armored.

The army also had several colonial brigades in East Africa, with about 256,000 troops, of which 184,000 were natives.

Some 1.6 million men were mobilized in 1940. Through 1943, the army added or rebuilt some 54 new divisions, including two of paratroops, one air-transported (but not parachute trained), and two armored. Most new units consisted of low-quality coastal-defense or “garrison” divisions.

## REGIA MARINA

The Italian navy had but two battleships ready, but four were in final trials. Many subs and other small craft had worn engines from the Spanish Civil War blockade, but experienced crews.

The fleet centered on the three *Littorio*-class 45,750-ton battleships with nine 15” guns each. The *Littorio* and *Vittorio Veneto* quickly joined the war, with the *Roma* added in 1942. Four *Caio Duilio*-class 29,000-ton battleships with 10 12.6” guns backed them up: the *Caio Duilio*, *Andrea Doria*, *Giulio Cesare*, and *Conte di Cavour*.

Italy’s seven heavy cruisers included three fast but thin-skinned *Trento*-class 13,000-tonners and four slower but somewhat tougher *Zara*-class 14,500-tonners. All mounted eight 8” guns. The British sank *Zara* and classmates *Pola* and *Fiume* in the Battle of Matapan on March 28, 1941.

The Italians also had 12 light cruisers to begin the war (adding three later), three obsolete cruisers (one moored at Tobruk as an anti-aircraft platform), 59 destroyers (adding eight later), 69 corvettes and escorts (adding 52), 117 submarines (adding 48 plus 26 midget subs), 69 torpedo boats (adding 70), four antisubmarine cutters (adding 50 later), 58 minor vessels such as gunboats and minesweepers (adding 25), and 198 auxiliary craft. They also introduced 105 landing craft during the war.

## REGIA AERONAUTICA

The Italian air force had 25 bomber, 11 fighter, and two ground-attack fleets, and some 70 squadrons for other duties. Many airplanes were obsolete or out of action awaiting repair, or both: 880 of 1,330 bombers were ready, 670 of 1,160 fighters and attack craft, and 540 of 800 other sorts.

The East African troops were supported by another 325 mostly obsolete planes (180 ready).

Relatively modern fighters included only 143 FIAT CR.42s, 118 FIAT G.50s, and 144 Macchi MC.200s. Modern bombers included 612 SIAI S.79s and 172 FIAT BR.20s. Until September 1943, the air force added 4,310 fighters, 2,063 bombers, 1,080 recon planes, and 1,769 trainers.

In June 1940, the order of battle included:

*Aegean*: 1 fleet S.81 bombers and 2 squadrons of mixed CR.32 and Ro.53 fighters. *Albania*: 1 fleet of S.81 bombers and 1 group CR.32 fighters. *Central Italy*: 3 fleets of S.79 bombers, 1 group of Ba.88 ground-attack planes, and 3 groups of G.50 and 1 group of CR.32 fighters. *East Africa*: 3 groups of S.81, 1 of S.79, and 6 of Ca.133 bombers; 4 squadrons of mixed CR.32 and CR.42 fighters; and 5 squadrons mixed Ro.37 and Ca.133 recon planes and transports. *Libya*: 2 fleets each of S.79 and S.81 bombers, 1 fleet of Ca.310 ground-attack planes, and 3 groups of mixed CR.32 and CR.42 fighters. Also 2 groups and 2 squadrons Ca.309 colonial bombers. *North Italy*: 4 fleets of BR.20 and 2 of Cant.Z.1007 bombers, and 3 fleets of CR.42 and 1 of MC.200 fighters. *Sardinia*: a single fleet each of S.79 and Cant.Z.506 bombers, 1 group Ba.88 ground-attack planes, and 1 group CR.32 fighters. *Sicily*: 5 fleets of S.79 and 1 group of S.85 bombers, 1 group each of CR.42, CR.32, and MC.200 fighters. *South Italy*: 1 fleet Cant.Z.506 and 1 group S.81 bombers, 1 group CR.32 fighters. *Army*: 37 observation squadrons, mostly Ro.37s. *Navy*: 21 Cant.Z.501 recon squadrons.

## MVSN

The Blackshirts had three full divisions in North Africa, 39 often substantially understrength legions attached to army divisions, 27 partially understrength reserve assault battalions, seven legions in East Africa, and one in the Aegean.

The MVSN also claimed 98 territorial (home defense) cohorts (many severely understrength), 34 mountain and border battalions, 22 air-defense battalions, 14 coastal- and port-defense battalions, four Albanian legions, 35 road and rail units, and 70 other non-combat formations.

# 3. ITALIAN SOLDIERS

In general, Italian characters are created as described on pp. W62-85, with the following customized national additions and options.

## Female Characters

Even more than in Germany, a good Italian Fascist woman was a mother, not a fighter. Women auxiliaries were rare, outside the rear-area medical services. After 1943, women could find their place in the fighting, either in the resistance – where they'd often fill the dangerous job of couriers – or in paramilitary units of the Fascist remnant army under northern Italy's RSI government.



## CREATING ITALIAN CHARACTERS

Italian soldiers use the following National Advantages and Disadvantages packages.

### Italian Advantages

Purchase Military Rank and resulting Wealth, with remaining points spent among: Acute Senses (p. W182) [2/level]; Common Sense (p. W182) [10]; Contacts (Men from same village or region) (p. CI22) [varies]; Danger Sense (p. W182) [15]; Deep Sleeper (p. CI23) [5]; Luck (p. W183) [15 or 30]; Pitiable (p. CI29) [5]; Reputation from medals (p. 38) or simply good conduct (p. W179) [varies]; improve Fit [5] to Very Fit (p. W182) [15].

Senior officers should be created on the Old Guard template (p. W81). They may add to their National Advantages: Fashion Sense (p. CI24) [5].

### Italian Disadvantages

A stereotypical set could be Poverty (Poor) (p. W180) [-15] and *either* Laziness (p. W185) [-10] and Semi-Literacy (p. W186) [-5] *or* Lecherousness (p. B34) [-15].

Substitute among: Addiction (Tobacco) (very common, p. W184) [-5]; Bad Sight (p. W184) [-10]; Combat Paralysis (p. B32) [-15]; Cowardice (p. W184) [-10]; Chummy (p. CI87) [-5]; Fanaticism (Fascism) (p. W184) [-15]; Gullibility (p. W185) [-10]; Hidebound (p. CI91) [-5]; Indecisive (p. CI91) [-10]; Intolerance (p. W185) [-5]; Odious Personal Habits (p. W179) [-5/-10/-15]; Secret (Anti-Fascist) (p. W186) [varies] *or* Reputation (suspected Anti-Fascist) (p. W179) [varies]; Sense of Duty (p. W186) (to Comrades) [-5] *or* (to the *Duce* or King) [-10]; Social Stigma (Native, for colonial troops) [-5]; Weak Will (p. W187)

[-8/level]. Illiteracy (p. W186) may replace Semi-Literacy [from -5 to -10]; this also requires taking Uneducated (p. CI79) [-5].

### Second-Class Italians

Until 1938, Italian Jews mainly dealt with the Intolerance (religious, not racial) of the occasional Catholic fanatic. In 1938, mainly in order to make Hitler happy, racial laws were passed; Jews lost access to schools, many professions, ownership of land, and many other rights, thus gaining a Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen, -5). The laws gradually worsened, although in private personal relationships, most “Roman-Italic” people wouldn't treat the Jews as outcasts.

Jews were barred from military service; this made them highly eligible for compulsory labor details, such as clearing out bombed buildings. After 1943, the Germans took over and began hunting Jews in earnest, but most Italians reacted by offering fugitives their help. Ironically, many Jews hid in convents.

### Italian Background Skills

Enlisted soldiers often have a farming background; Animal Handling might be particularly useful, as would be some craft skills. Technical skills such as Driving and Mechanic were fairly uncommon. Bicycling and Hiking were widespread. Fascism put emphasis on physical training, so younger troops would often have Jumping, Running, and other athletic skills.

# ITALIAN RANKS

<i>MR</i>	<i>Regio Esercito (Army)</i>	<i>Regia Marina (Navy)</i>	<i>R. Aeronautica (Air Force)</i>	<i>MVSN (Milizia)</i>
8	Maresciallo dell'Impero	–	–	–
8	Maresciallo d'Italia	Grande Ammiraglio	Maresciallo dell'Aria	–
8	Generale d'Armata	Ammiraglio d'Armata	Generale d'Armata	Comandante Generale
8	Gen. di Corpo d'Armata	Amm. di Squadra	Gen. di Squadra	Capo di Stato Maggiore
7	Generale di Divisione	Amm. di Divisione	Gen. di Divisione	Luogotenente Generale
7	Generale di Brigata	Contrammiraglio	Gen. di Brigata	Console Generale
6	Colonnello	Capitano di Vascello	Colonnello	Console
5	Tenente Colonnello	Cap. di Fregata	Tenente Colonnello	Primo Seniore
4	Maggiore	Cap. di Corvetta	Maggiore	Seniore
4	Primo Capitano	Primo Ten. di Vascello	–	–
4	Capitano	Tenente di Vascello	Capitano	Centurione
3	Primo Tenente	–	–	–
3	Tenente	Sottotenente di Vascello	Tenente	Capo Manipolo
3	Sottotenente	Guardiamarina	Sottotenente	Sottocapo Manipolo
2	Maresciallo Maggiore	Capo Prima Classe	Maresciallo Prima Classe	Primo Aiutante
2	Maresciallo Capo	Capo Seconda Classe	Mar. Seconda Classe	Aiutante Capo
2	Maresciallo	Capo Terza Classe	Mar. Terza Classe	Aiutante
1	Sergente Maggiore	Secondo capo	Sergente Maggiore	Primo Capo Squadra
1	Sergente	Sergente	Sergente	Capo Squadra
1	Caporale Maggiore	Sotto Capo	Primo Aviere	Vice Capo Squadra
1	Caporale	–	Aviere Scelto	Camicia Nera Scelta
0	Appuntato*	Comune Prima Classe	–	Camicia Nera
0	Soldato	Comune Seconda Classe	Aviere	–

\* Also *Soldato Scelto*.

*Maresciallo* (marshal) was used as a title for senior generals; more commonly, it also referred to senior NCOs serving as quartermasters, master sergeants, etc. *Maresciallo dell'Impero* was a rank devised to give Mussolini seniority over the already existing marshals, and the same military standing as the king, the only other holder of this

rank. It wasn't the king's idea, nor was he overjoyed to see Mussolini made his equal.

Italian enlisted personnel determine their wealth based on rank as for Soviets and other poor troops (see p. W63). Officers often earned better wages (per the British) and/or enjoyed considerable Independent Income (see p. W65).

## CUSTOMIZATION NOTES

These guidelines can help customize Italian soldiers built using the *GURPS WWII* templates on pp. W72-85.

*Rifleman*: Technical skills (Driving, Electronics Operation, Mechanic, etc.) were uncommon, as were Forward Observer and Swimming; special Guns skills were rare. Animal Handling, Bicycling, and Scrounging were common. Most infantry units were green to average.

*Armor Crewman*: Engineer and Forward Observer were rare, and Electronics Operation uncommon. Most tankers had good Gunner skills. Tankers were average or seasoned; a unit's quality could fluctuate considerably, as experience came at the cost of high casualties.

*Artilleryman*: Teamster and Packing were common, Driving less so. Crews had reasonable infantry skills, and good Camouflage and Orienting. Artillerymen were average or seasoned, often serving their guns to the last.

*Marine*: The one naval infantry regiment was employed as infantry. It can be classed as average; Powerboat and special Guns skills were uncommon. The Navy also had raiders that are better portrayed either with the Frogman (p. 24) or the Commando templates (p. W80), with good scores in Swimming, Boating, and Underwater Demolition, and a seasoned status or better.

*Recon Trooper*: Cavalry, either old-style or armored, was often used for this role. Also, the *Bersaglieri* were meant as mobile infantry. They weren't technically reconnaissance troops, but sometimes were used as such, and this template could be used for them. Bicycling and/or Motorcycle should be required, and +1 to DX and/or HT would be common. They can be rated as seasoned.

*Paratrooper*: Being used as crack infantry, late in the war, the paratroopers lacked parachute training, but they were seasoned or better, and often Very Fit (or optionally had +1 HT).



*Combat Engineer:* Most Italian engineers were good at building things, more than at fighting, but a few *Guastatori* units were good at *destroying* things. These were seasoned or veteran troops, and had Guns (Flamethrower) as well as high levels in Demolition and EOD.

*Sniper:* The Italian Army did not specifically train snipers. There were marksmen, but they'd be most accurately built as highly skilled riflemen.

*Commando:* The term *Arditi* was generic for these troops. They could be special assault platoons attached at battalion level, with the best riflemen, or high-level units, on par with other nations' commandos. They would have Driving (Automobile) and a wide variety of the optional skills.

## ALPINO (MOUNTAIN INFANTRYMAN) 60 POINTS



Italy has a long tradition of mountain troops, since the Alps are its natural northern border. The *Alpini* were recruited on a regional basis among stout mountaineers, used to long marches in difficult terrain. They added to a rifleman's skills the capability of waging war in forbidding altitudes and weather conditions. Additionally, they were outfitted with lightweight mountain guns that could be disassembled for transport by the "truck of the mountains," otherwise known as the mule (p. W195). Use the *Optional Skills*, below, to customize *Alpini* artillerymen, mule handlers, and the few specialist skiers.

Given the nature of mountain warfare, *Alpini* stressed stamina, endurance and steadfastness. They excelled at defensive fighting. When attacking, they'd prefer to surprise the enemy by exploiting "impassable" ground.

*Alpini* saw combat everywhere save in the desert; they often bore the brunt of the battles in Albania. Mussolini also thought it was a bright idea to use them in Russia – where they sorely missed motorized transport.

*Old-Guard Officer:* All officers valued style and patronage (making Ally, Patron, and Enemy common), but true old-guard members were competent, though old-fashioned, professionals.

*Bomber Crewman:* Italian bomber crews were initially average troops, then quality declined.

*Fighter Pilot:* High Piloting and Tactics (Air-to-Air) skills were common, but Armoury was not. Initially seasoned, quality slipped over time.

*Sailor:* Large surface ships' crews usually were green; the rest were average.

*Resistance Fighter:* Italian partisans normally have Bicycling and Hiking but rarely Gunner, special Guns, etc. Most groups were green, though a few ex-soldiers among them might not be.

**Attributes:** ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 11 [10]; HT 12 [20].

**Advantages:** Fit [5] and 25 points in *National Advantages* (p. 20). *Alpini* may take +1 ST [10] as part of their *National Advantages*.

**Disadvantages:** Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20] and -30 points in *National Disadvantages*.

**Basic Skills:** Camouflage (M/E) IQ [1]-11; Climbing (P/A) DX [2]-11; First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-10; Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX [1]-11\*; Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX [1/2]-11\*; Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX+2 [2]-13\*; Hiking (P/A – HT) HT [2]-12; Jumping (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-10; Knife (P/E) DX [1]-11; Soldier (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Spear (P/A) DX-1 [1]-10; Stealth (P/A) DX-1 [1]-10; Throwing (P/H) DX-2 [1]-9; Traps (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10.

**Secondary Skills:** Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-11; Demolition (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-9; Engineer (Combat) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-9; NBC Warfare (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-9; Orienteering (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Scrounging (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-10; Survival (Mountains) (M/A) IQ [2]-11.

**Optional Skills:** Spend 4 points on: Guns (Pistol) (P/E); Gunner (Cannon or Mortar) (both P/A); Carousing (P/A – HT); Skiing (Overland) (P/H); Area Knowledge (any), Cooking, Savoir-Faire (Military), or Telegraphy (all M/E); Administration, Electronics Operation (Communications), Forward Observer, Gambling, Intimidation, Streetwise, or Teamster (all M/A); or Animal Handling, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, or Packing (all M/H).

\* Includes +1 for IQ.

**Customization Notes:** *Alpini* often were seasoned troops, which would justify adding 5-14 points to the template; in this case, Soldier skill should be raised to at least 14 (see p. W71).

# CAVALRYMAN

50 POINTS

The conventional wisdom argues that traditional horse cavalry had become obsolete by WWII. This certainly held true in the most important fights – between first-rate and mechanized forces – but most of the war did not involve first-rate forces clashing with their tanks, air cover, and infantry units bristling with machine guns.

Between the pitched battles, any sort of unit might have made good use of cavalry for reconnaissance, pursuit, patrolling, and anti-partisan warfare. Cavalry enjoyed more mobility than infantry, and in most sorts of rugged terrain a horse (or mule) would outpace the era's military trucks, as well.

Even in a proper fight, Italian cavalrymen repeatedly proved that against old-fashioned opponents, they could still win in the old-fashioned way (p. 42), dismounting when need existed but also engaging in short, decisive mounted charges against poorly equipped Soviet infantry.

Horses offered the further advantage that they required neither factories nor oil, two things in short supply in Italy. They did require attention – much more attention than men – and considerable quantities of fodder; use the rules for draft horses on p. W129. Rest and good-quality fodder could make the difference between an efficient cavalry regiment and a practically dismounted unit, so Italian horsemen were taught to think about their horses' welfare first. Most of the time, they walked rather than rode, to spare their mounts.

Italian cavalrymen maintained their traditionally dashing airs. Often used in vanguard roles, they usually displayed more initiative than the average Italian Fascist soldier.

They were trained as infantrymen, too, and often fought as such. They were armed with a carbine (p. 27) and a “saber,” actually a 42” straight broadsword (see p. W193), which they used for the cut, often in a backswing. They were trained to throw hand grenades from horseback. In Russia, officers and NCOs would employ inelegant but effective SMGs.

The Italians fielded colonial cavalry units, too, sporting colorful uniforms and sashes. They were often more reliable than native infantry, and in a few famous occurrences they forced British armored cars to withdraw.

Many cavalry regiments were seasoned. Those not belonging to a *Celere* division would be most often used in reconnaissance; see p. W76 for more ideas on expanding a recon cavalryman.

Note that a cavalry regiment required many skilled professionals in its support staffs – primary trainers, veterinarians, farriers, and saddlers.



**Attributes:** ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 11 [10]; HT 11 [10].

**Advantages:** Fit [5] and 25 points in *National Advantages* (p. 20).

**Disadvantages:** Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20] and -30 points in *National Disadvantages*.

**Basic Skills:** Animal Handling (Horses) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-8/14; Broadsword (P/A) DX [2]-11; Camouflage (M/E) IQ [1]-11; First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-10; Gunner (Machine Gun) (P/A) DX [1]-11\*; Guns (Light Auto) (P/E) DX+1 [1]-12\*; Guns (Rifle) (P/E) DX+2 [2]-13\*; Hiking (P/A – HT) HT-1 [1]-10; Jumping (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-10; Knife (P/E) DX [1]-11; Soldier (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Spear (P/A) DX-2 [1/2]-9; Stealth (P/A) DX-1 [1]-10; Throwing (P/H) DX-2 [1]-9; Traps (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-9.

**Secondary Skills:** Armoury (Small Arms) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Brawling (P/E) DX [1]-11; Demolition (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Engineer (Combat) (M/H) IQ-2 [1]-9; NBC Warfare (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-9; Orienteering (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Scrounging (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-10; Survival (any) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Swimming (P/E) DX [1]-11.

**Optional Skills:** Spend 4 points on any of: Guns (Pistol) (P/E); Driving (Automobile), Gunner (Mortar), or Lance (all P/A); Carousing (P/A – HT); Area Knowledge (any), Cooking, Leatherworking, Savoir-Faire (Military), or Telegraphy (all M/E); Administration, Electronics Operation (Communications), Forward Observer, Gambling, Intimidation, Streetwise, or Teamster (all M/A); or Explosive Ordnance Disposal or Packing (both M/H).

\* Includes +1 for IQ.

**Customization Notes:** A seasoned trooper would add 15-29 points to the template and spend 4 to raise Soldier skill to a minimum of 14.

The Italians created the world's most advanced underwater attack force in the 10th MAS Flotilla. These naval commandos not only developed their own attack crafts and breathing devices, they also created their own training system from scratch.

The unit hand-picked smart, enterprising officers, together with experienced NCOs and engineering specialists. These men were carefully screened – disadvantages such as Cowardice, Bad Reputation, and Pacifism would not be allowed, unless folded into a Secret disadvantage, and any Secret itself would require an excellent backstory and GM approval. Most physical disadvantages simply would not be allowed.

The frogmen tirelessly trained, both in order to fully explore the capabilities of their special vehicles and to develop the stamina their missions required. The template's ST 11 and HT 12 are a minimum, as these men often performed incredible physical feats, at times while breathing impure oxygen or suffering from the bends (see p. CII132).

The unit had three main specializations: swimmers, SLC pilots, and *Barchini* pilots. The swimmers and SLC (p. 36) pilots were the true frogmen, and trained with rebreathers; the former would reach their targets with no other help but their flippers. The SLC pilots learned how to bypass anti-torpedo nets and port surveillance, how to pilot their unwieldy ride-on torpedoes, and how to attach the warhead to the target's roll stabilizers or propellers. The pilots of the explosive *Barchini*, instead, headed toward an enemy warship on a powerboat laden with explosives and were ejected seconds before the impact. While the SLCs could sink a battleship (p. 45), the swimmers' limpet mines were best used against merchant ships.

These highly skilled, brave, irreplaceable men faced an enormous fatality rate in their work. *Barchini* pilots seldom survived the attack. The missions of the frogmen often took more time than the 1.5 hours that their rebreathers allowed at most. Unforeseen difficulties might let them strike their target, but not return to the rendezvous point. Sometimes, they had badly forged documents and instructions to get through enemy territory, but they weren't trained as spies and were lucky if they managed to surrender.

The one exception to this was the outfit based on the *Oltorra*, an Italian merchant ship interned in neutral Spain, within easy reach of Gibraltar. In a glaring violation of Spanish neutrality, the ship was fitted with a dry dock and a hatch, below the waterline, suitable for both swimmers and SLCs. With such a close base, many frogmen managed to carry out multiple missions.



**Attributes:** ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 12 [20].

**Advantages:** Fit [5] and 25 points in *National Advantages* (p. 20). Frogmen may take Fearlessness [2/level], +1 ST [10], +1 HT [10], or replace Fit with Very Fit [a net +10] as part of their *National Advantages*.

**Disadvantages:** Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20] and -30 points in *National Disadvantages*.

**Basic Skills:** First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-11; Navigation (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Piloting (Ride-on Torpedo) (P/A) DX [2]-12; Sailor (M/A) IQ+3 [8]-15; Scuba (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Swimming (P/E) DX+1 [2]-13; Underwater Demolition (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13.

**Secondary Skills:** Boating (P/A) DX-1 [1]-11; Knife (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-11; Mechanic (Special Crafts) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (Military) IQ-1 [1/2]-11; Seamanship (M/E) IQ [1]-12; Survival (Island/Beach) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10.

**Optional Skills:** Spend 3 points on improving Swimming (P/E); Piloting (Ride-on Torpedo) (P/A); Mechanic (Special Crafts), Sailor, Scuba, Survival (Island/Beach), or Underwater Demolition (all M/A); or Navigation (M/H) – or on any of: Brawling, Guns (Pistol or Rifle), Parachuting (all P/E); Climbing, Powerboat (both P/A); Carousing (P/A – HT); Area Knowledge (any), Scrounging (both M/E); Armoury (Vehicular), Gambling, Hard-Hat Diving, Intimidation (all M/A); or Engineer (Naval vessels) and Explosive Ordinance Disposal (both M/H).

\* Includes +2 for IQ.

**Customization Notes:** For *Barchini* pilots, swap points in either Scuba and/or Underwater Demolition for skill in Powerboat. The optional skills also can be used for Italian naval raiders, which included parachutist-swimmers!



# 4. THE ITALIAN ARMORY

*“War is made by the man and the rifle, the mule and the cannon.”*

– Pietro Badoglio

Along with poor industrial capacity and trade sanctions, Italy possessed a cumbersome bureaucracy and notoriously disorganized system of military supply. In addition, as in WWI, profiteers took their cut. All of these factors conspired to assure that the troops were poorly equipped. Indeed, Italian soldiers in the Greek mud discovered that old boots were much better than new war-production footwear. The latter often had soles made of a material much like cardboard, that fell apart when wet. A great deal of Italian equipment matched this level of performance.

## PERSONAL GEAR

The Italian inventory included a cheaper, low-quality version of most items on pp. W87-90, though the *soldiers* did not always see even this cut-rate fare. In Russia, retreating units sometimes found crucial gear, such as fur-lined winter clothing, carefully stowed away in rear depots.

Italians did not have cutting-edge personal gear, such as walkie-talkies and recorders. Rifle scopes and metal-detectors were extremely rare. The GM may always rule that even the most trivial item happens to be unavailable at any time.

The following items are more specific Italian versions of some equipment. Any numbers in parentheses are hit locations (see p. B211).

### Clothing

*Cappotto in “Lanital”* (6, 8-14, 17-18) – This greatcoat made of synthetic material replaced woolen wear after the trade sanctions. It was infamously useless in cold weather, giving no HT bonus. The old, coarse-wool greatcoats were prized. PD 0, DR 1, \$15, 7 lbs.

*Fascia* – A colored sash identifying one’s colonial battalion, an ancient practice. \$2, 1 lb.

*Fasce Mollettiera* – These WWI-era woolen puttees were worn with baggy breeches in the

standard uniform. They gave good ankle support, but were tedious to put on and tighten (1 minute). If hastily donned, they looked clownish. If worn too tight, they cut off circulation, giving a -1 to HT rolls in very cold weather! They were gradually discarded during the war. Cost and weight included in the uniform.

*Headgear* – Italians usually wore the *bustina* flat side cap, which could be tucked in a pocket. Officers also wore peaked caps. Peaked *bustina* came into desert usage, and late-war uniforms often featured berets. Specialized units often wore distinctive headgear. *Bersaglieri* had cockerel plumes on the helmet or a crimson fez instead of the *bustina*; *Alpini* had a black crow feather affixed to both their helmet and trademark brimmed felt hat. Black-shirts and *Giovani Fascisti* also had a fez, but in black. *Carabinieri* (military police) had a black bicorn hat (gray-green in the field). Colonial units had turbans or other ethnic headgear. Proud soldiers often dismissed the benefits of protection or camouflage, wearing their trademark cap instead of a helmet in battle, or attaching plumes to a helmet.

*Scarponi M1912* (15-16) – These hobnailed boots were often made of inferior materials. Even when winter clothing (p. W87) is available, these boots offer no special protection vs. frostbite. Locally procured Russian felt boots were needed. PD 1, DR 1. \$8, 4.5 lbs.

### Armor and Related

*Giubbotto da Carrista* (6, 8-10, 17-18) – This black leather tanker’s jacket was meant to protect against burns. It was heavy and stifling. PD 2, DR 2, \$40, 8 lbs.

*Elmetto* (3-4) – The standard service helmet offered PD 3, DR 3. \$3, 4 lbs.

*Casco* (3-4) – This crash helmet for tankers was similar to those in use by other nations (see p. W87), but it also had a leather neck flap (PD 1, DR 1) protecting area 5 against attacks from behind. \$40, 4 lbs.

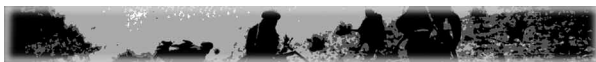
*Tuta Chimica* – This chemical suit was rubberized coveralls providing total protection from contact gases when worn with a gas mask. It was miserably hot and issued only to a few chemical companies. -1 to DX. \$25, 2 lbs.

*Tuta Ignifuga* (3-6, 8-14, 17-18) – Fire-resistant overalls and cape giving PD 0, DR 3 against heat or flame only, these were sometimes worn by flamethrower users, together with a gas mask with filter removed. The outfit did not offer complete protection. \$28, 6 lbs.

## Field Gear

*Giberne* – The standard ammo pouch had two pockets, each holding four clips for 48 rounds total. \$1.50, 0.7 lbs. Sometimes, two were carried, and Italian units used a wide variety of alternate web gear. Cavalrymen, motorcyclists, and artillerymen used a bandoleer like that on p. W:IC57. The paratroops had a unique design with four ammo pockets and four for hand grenades, in canvas (\$2, 5 lbs.). Late in the war, SMG-armed paratroops used the so-called “*Samurai*” canvas ammo vest, which held five SMG magazines on the chest and seven on the back, laid out horizontally

# SMALL ARMS



The Italians used the following weapons; for other common weapons, see pp. W92-93. For reloading information, see p. W91. The names of most weapons include the last two digits of the year of introduction; if not, this is given in parentheses.

## Semiautomatic Pistols

Special units increasingly received pistols during the war. Machine-gunners also had one.

***Glisenti-Brixia Pistola Mod 10:*** The WWI service pistol, this vaguely resembled the Luger P08 (see p. W94). It replaced the Luger’s action with a weak blowback design that could only fire the underpowered 9mm Glisenti cartridge. The pistol could chamber 9mm Parabellum, but Malf became 15 with a critical failure yielding a blown-up pistol! Beretta designs replaced it in official service, but some were reissued toward the end of WWII.

***Beretta Pistola Mod 35:*** A version of the Mod 34 (see p. W94), chambered for .32 ACP. It was used by the air force and police. The similar Mod 31 was in service with the navy.

## Revolvers

***Glisenti Pistola a Rotazione Mod 89:*** An obsolete double-action revolver chambered for a blackpowder cartridge, this remained in service in

(and resembling a samurai’s armor). It also had six hand-grenade pockets. \$4, 6 lbs.

*Telo Tenda* – This is half of the two-man tent on p. W88. The M1929 design was the first item ever printed in camouflage; two versions were made, one for the desert. It gives a +1 to Camouflage and can be worn as a poncho. Captured stocks were used by the Germans.

## Diving Gear

*Autorespiratore ad Ossigeno* – Frogmen (p. 24) used these oxygen rebreathers. They had a 1.5-hour oxygen supply and no telltale bubbles escaped to the surface. They were dangerous to use; roll against Scuba -1 initially and every 15 minutes up to 45 minutes, then at a cumulative -2 for each additional 15 minutes. Going below 30’ will result in “the bends” (see p. CII132). \$160, 38 lbs.

*Maschera, Pinne, Boccaglio* – Mask, fins, and snorkel were also standard gear. The fins give +1 to Move in the water, but walking Move 1. The snorkel allows a swimmer to breathe with his face in the water, and gives anyone searching for him a -2 to Vision rolls to spot him. \$3, 6 lbs. More information is on p. W:HS23.

sizable numbers. It takes one second to open the loading gate and prepare the weapon for unloading; six seconds to push out each single case; six seconds to insert new ammo; and one more second to prepare it for firing (14 seconds in all).

## Shotguns

Shotguns were considered hunting weapons, but they saw some use in partisan warfare.

***Lupara:*** This “gun for wolves” is a sawn-off double-barreled shotgun used by shepherds, hunters, partisans, and mafia killers. Many models were used; the stats are for a generic one.

## Rifles

Virtually every young male knew how to handle a rifle before being conscripted, because as a boy he had trained with the scaled-down 5.5mm *Balilla*, meant for firing with blank cartridges. Mussolini had 30,000 of these toys built, a costly part of his bid to make a warrior of every Italian.

***Vetterli-Vitali Fucile Mod 70/87:*** Converted from the single-shot Vetterli Mod 1870 by insertion of a Vitali box magazine, this was obsolete in WWI. Still, some East African native units in garrison used them. The Mod 70/87/15 (1915) was also used in East Africa; it was a marginally safe

wartime expedient with a new barrel and Mannlicher-type clip-loaded magazine to fire the 6.5mm Mannlicher; use stats of the Mannlicher-Carcano Mod 91, except for Malf 16 and Wt 10.5.

#### ***Mannlicher-Carcano Fucile***

**Mod 91:** The standard prewar bolt-action rifle, this combined the Austrian Mannlicher design with ideas of Salvatore Carcano of the Turin arsenal. After minor improvements, it remained an outdated, slow-firing firearm, yet no worse than the German rifle.

***Mannlicher-Carcano Moschetto Mod 91:*** A cavalry carbine version of the Fucile Mod 91, this often featured an integral bayonet, folding below the barrel. Paratroops also used it. The Moschetto Mod 91TS (1897), issued to artillery crews and engineers, was similar, as was the slightly upgraded Mod 91/24, though usually without a bayonet.

***Mannlicher-Carcano Fucile Mod 91/38:*** Another shortened Fucile Mod 91, this was intended to fire the 7.35mm Carcano round, but from 1940 most were made or rebored to take the old 6.5mm Mannlicher. The Germans used both versions after 1943, and some were rechambered to fire 7.92mm Mauser (use the damage and range values of the Mauser Kar 98k, p. W92).

***Mannlicher-Carcano Moschetto Mod 91/38:*** The short carbine version of the Fucile Mod 38. Originally in 7.35mm Carcano, but from 1940 again in 6.5mm Mannlicher. A number were supplied to Finland in 1939/40; Germans also used them from 1943. Lee Oswald used one in 1963.

***Mannlicher-Carcano Fucile Mod 91/41:*** A final modification for war production, this also fell into German usage in 6.5mm, 7.35mm, and 7.92mm, the last using Kar 98k stats as above.

***Steyr-Solothurn Fucile Controcarro S Mod 36:*** Known to the Swiss supplier as the S18-1000, this was imported in small numbers for use as an antitank rifle, mostly in 1941. It was fired from a bipod and monopod, or a 101-lb. detachable two-wheeled carriage. It fed from a 10-round magazine inserted on the left and lacked a gun shield.

## Submachine Guns

Italian submachine guns were built to fire the Mod 38A cartridge, a slightly more robust 9mm Parabellum. The extra powder wasn't enough to increase damage in game terms, but if other 9mm weapons fire the round, their Malf is reduced by 1 (to 16 if "Critical"). The Italians mostly used the Mod 38 and 38A (see p. W96) throughout the war.

***Beretta Moschetto Automatico Mod 38/42:*** This and the 38/43 were Beretta Mod 38As



simplified for wartime production. An optional 20-round magazine weighed 1 lb. After the surrender, production continued under German supervision.

#### ***FNA-B Moschetto***

***Automatico Mod 43:*** This was a wartime design, but still was too complex to be made cheaply. Some 7,000 were hand-tooled, and mostly

used by RSI men. It had a folding stock. An optional 20-round magazine weighed 1 lb.

***"Variara" (1944):*** The partisans made this Sten knockoff marginally more reliable than the original by copying the Beretta trigger assembly. Stats as per p. W92, but Malf is always Crit.

***FAI TZ Moschetto Automatico Mod 45:*** Produced in small numbers for RSI troops, this crude, unreliable weapon actually debuted in 1944.

## Machine Guns

***Steyr-Schwarzlose Mitragliatrice Mod 07/12:*** Austrian war reparations, these old MGs remained in use in East Africa. For stats, see p. W:IC64.

***Hotchkiss Mitragliatrice Mod 14:*** Blackshirt units in Italy often used these; see p. W:RH38.

***FIAT-Revelli Mitragliatrice Mod 14:*** The standard MMG during WWI, this was still widely used in WWII. A bulky and unloved beast, it was water-cooled and used a hopper feed.

***Breda Fucile Mitragliatore Mod 30:*** One of the first air-cooled light machine guns with quick-change barrel, this was the standard LMG for Italian troops. Its unusual integral 20-round magazine was replenished with 5-round clips. This made reloading slow and the magazine susceptible to damage and jams, but in a pinch 6-round rifle clips could be used.

***Breda Mitragliatrice Mod 31:*** This air-cooled heavy MG mostly served on vehicles (treat as a Very Long Ground HMG, p. W130). It could also be mounted on a 41.5-lb. tripod for anti-aircraft use. It fed from a 20-round box magazine.

***FIAT-Revelli Mitragliatrice Mod 14/35:*** This updated version of the Mod 14 was air-cooled and chambered to fire the 8mm Breda.

***Breda Mitragliatrice Mod 37:*** The standard air-cooled MMG, this was normally reliable despite its unusual stripper feed, which required oiled cartridges (and tidily replaced them in the feed tray, though the spent brass seldom was reusable). Oiling was a problem in cold weather (Malf 15). The Mod 38 (see p. W130) based on it was designed for installation in vehicles. Its top-mounted 25-round magazine gave a Malf. of Crit.



## Mortars

**OTO-Brixia Mortaio d'Assalto da 45mm Mod 35:** One of the weirdest weapon designs in the war, this very complicated breech-loading light mortar featured accuracy, a high rate of fire, and direct-fire capability – but its puny range and

HE round meant none of this mattered much. Nevertheless, these mortars provided the main battalion-level support for Italian infantry in 1940.

**OTO-Breda Mortaio da 81mm Mod 35:** A reliable mortar with reasonable range, this was a version of the Brandt Mle 31. Stats per p. W93, 97.

## ITALIAN SMALL ARMS TABLE

### Semiautomatic Pistols – Use Guns (Pistol) Skill

Weapon	Malf	Dmg	SS	Acc	I/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Glisenti-Brixia Mod 10, 9mm Glisenti	Crit.	2d-1	10	2	130	1,600	1.9	0.3	3~	7+1	8	-1	0	\$20
Beretta Mod 35, .32 ACP	Crit.	2d-1	10	2	130	1,600	1.9	0.3	3~	8+1	7	-1	+1	\$40

### Revolvers – Use Guns (Pistol) Skill

Weapon	Malf	Dmg	SS	Acc	I/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Glisenti Mod 89, 10.35mm Italian	Crit.	2d+1	10	2	150	1,700	2.4	0.3	3~	6	11	-2	-2	\$15

### Shotguns – Use Guns (Shotgun) Skill

Weapon	Malf	Dmg	SS	Acc	I/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Lupara, 12-gauge	Crit.	4d	11	3	25	150	8	0.3	2~	2	12	-3	-3	\$40

### Rifles and Anti-Tank Rifles – Use Guns (Rifle) Skill

Weapon	Malf	Dmg	SS	Acc	I/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Fucile Mod 70/87, 10.4mm Vetterli	Crit	4d+2	15	7	500	2,000	9.5	0.4	1/2	4+1	10	-2	-7	\$10
Fucile Mod 91, 6.5mm Mannlicher	Crit.	6d	14	8	600	3,000	8.9	0.3	1/2	6+1	11	-2	-7	\$25
Moschetto Mod 91, 6.5mm Mannlicher	Crit.	6d-2	12	7	500	2,500	6.9	0.3	1/2	6+1	11	-2	-6	\$25
Fucile Mod 38, 7.35mm Carcano	Crit.	6d+2	14	8	600	3,200	7.9	0.3	1/2	6+1	11	-2	-6	\$40
Moschetto Mod 38, 7.35mm Carcano	Crit.	6d	12	7	500	3,000	7.5	0.3	1/2	6+1	11	-2	-6	\$40
Fucile Mod 41, 6.5mm Mannlicher	Crit.	6d	14	8	600	3,000	8.5	0.3	1/2	6+1	11	-2	-7	\$35
Fucile Controcarro Mod 36, 20mm S.	Crit.	6d□3(2)	20	12	1,400	6,000	138	17.5	1	10	30B	-2	-	\$400

### Submachine Guns – Use Guns (Light Auto)

Weapon	Malf	Dmg	SS	Acc	I/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Hold	Cost
Beretta Mod 38/42, 9mm Parabellum	Crit.	3d-1	10	6	160	1,900	8.9	1.7	9*	40	10	-1	-5	\$70
FNA-B Mod 43, 9mm Parabellum	Crit.	3d-1	10	6	160	1,900	8.7	1.7	7*	40	10	-1	-4	\$140
TZ Mod 45, 9mm Parabellum	16	3d-1	10	6	160	1,900	8.3	1.7	9	40	10	-1	-4	\$20

### Machine Guns – Use Guns (Light Auto) or Gunner (Machine Gun)

Weapon	Malf	Dmg	SS	Acc	I/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	ST	Rcl	Cost
FIAT-Revelli Mod 14, 6.5mm Mannlicher	Crit.	6d	20	10	600	3,000	40+51	2.5	8	50	23	-1	\$250
Breda Mod 30, 6.5mm Mannlicher	16	6d	17	10	600	3,000	24.5	1	8	20	11B	-1	\$135
Breda Mod 31, 13.2mm Hotchkiss	Crit.	10d	20	14	1,300	5,500	112+42	8	20	20	50	-1	\$600
FIAT-Revelli Mod 14/35, 8mm Breda	Crit.	7d	20	10	1,000	3,900	58+41	20	9	300	29	-1	\$275
Breda Mod 37, 8mm Breda	16	7d	20	10	1,000	3,900	44+41	1.5	7	25	24	-1	\$320

### Mortars – Use Gunner (Mortar)

Weapon	Malf	Dam	SS	Acc	Ind.	Wt	AWt	RoF	Cost
OTO-Brixia Mortaio da 45mm Mod 35	Crit.	2d+1[2d]	20	6	580	35.5	1.1	1/3	\$450

### Hand Grenades – use Throwing

Weapon	Damage	Wt	Fuse	Hold
Bomba a Mano Mod 35	1d+2	0.4	Impact	0
Bomba Controcarro "Passaglia"	6d□8 [2d]	4.9	Impact	-6
Bomba Controcarro Incend. OTO Mod 42	6d□2 [2d]+Spec.	2.6	Impact	-4

### Mines – Use Underwater Demolition

Weapon	Malf	Type	Damage	Wt	Fuse	Cost
Floating Limpet Mine	15	HEAT	5d□2 (10)	11	300 and up	\$40

### Flamethrowers – Use Guns (Flamethrower)

Weapon	Max	Wt	Shots	Cost
OTO Lanciafiamme Mod 35	25	59	12	\$240

Other stats as per p. W93.

## AMMO TABLE

See p. W91 for common ammo.

Common Name	Modern Name
6.5mm Mannlicher	6.5□52.5mm
7.35mm Carcano	7.35□51mm
8mm Breda	8□59mm
9mm Glisenti	9□19mm
10.35mm Italian	10.35□20mmR
10.4mm Vetterli	10.4□47mmR
13.2mm Hotchkiss	13.2□99mm
20mm Solothurn	20□138mmB

## Grenades and Charges

Most Italian grenades were offensive; the thrower would be charging in straight behind them.

**Bomba a Mano Mod 35:** The Italians used a bewildering variety of hand grenades, but these were the most common, sharing the same designation and about the same effects. They were made by Breda, OTO, and SRCM. Their impact fuses weren't very dependable (and not at all if landing in fresh snow), which together with the bright red color resulted in the nickname *Diavoli Rossi* (Red Devils). Later in the war, some could be fitted with fragmentation sleeves; Dam 1d+2 [2d], 0.7 lbs.

**Bomba Controcarro "Passaglia":** Capt. Passaglia, an engineer officer, invented this example of desperate Italian creativity. A 2-kilogram soup tin was filled with explosives and fitted with an impact fuse and handle. Brave troops such as paratroopers and *Giovani Fascisti* used this with some success, creeping close to tanks and hurling it in their tracks. The thrower usually got caught in the blast radius.

**Bomba Controcarro Incendiaria OTO Mod 42:** This uncommon combination of explosives and incendiaries only hurt armor if it hit a vulnerable spot, but proved nasty against other targets. After the explosion, treat as a flamethrower shot causing 2d burning damage on the first turn (p. W93, 99).

**Floating Limpet Mine:** This limpet mine (see p. W:HS22) came with an inflatable ring that gave it neutral buoyancy. A swimmer could thus tow underwater a much greater weight. It was attached with clamps to roll stabilizers or propellers.

## Flamethrowers

By 1940, Italian flamethrower units already had extensive experience in Abyssinia and Spain.

**Lanciafiamme Mod 35:** This had the same ignition problems as the M-1A1 (see p. W99); however, the problem was solved with the Mod 40 (which also weighed just 38 lbs.). Its short range made it suitable for use against trenches where the enemy was already pinned by other fire.

# THE MOTOR POOL



The following Italian vehicles saw frequent service in WWII; p. W100 describes the format in which they are described. For the unarmored portions of artillery pieces, a suggested default of DR 5 is recommended (see p. W:IC71 for more information), though the description of each one lists no armor as purchased.

## NEW WEAPONS

These Italian weapon options are additions to those already listed in *GURPS WWII*.

## VEHICULAR WEAPONS TABLE

Torpedoes – Use Gunner (Torpedo) or (Depth Charge)

Weapon	Malf	Type	Dam	SS	Acc	Max	Spd	End	RoF	Ldrs	VSPs	Wt	Cost
100-lb. Depth Charge	15	HEC	6d□120	30	(0)	200	3	67	1/3	1	0.4	[100]	[\$200]
450mm Torpedo	15	HEC	6d□750	20	(0)	4,400	23	190	1/15	2	5.7	[1,400]	[\$2,800]
Alternate setting:						8,790	17	517					

## Torpedoes and Depth Charges

**100-lb. Depth Charge:** The MAS powerboats carried small depth charges of this size. They were used in the same fashion as the larger charges (see p. W132).

**450mm Torpedo:** This small torpedo was suitable for powerboats, pocket subs, and aircraft. Other nations also fielded smaller torpedoes than the standard naval sizes on p. W132. The Italian version had two alternate speeds.

# 75MM FIELD GUN

The typical Italian artillery piece was an outdated 75mm field gun, originally a 75L27/M1906 model of a Krupp gun with wooden, spoked wheels. The M1906/12 model was an improvement for horse artillery. The M1911, intended to replace the M1906, was a Deport design, but in the same caliber and barrel length. Both the M1911 and M1912 had improved elevation and traverse, and later most guns got metal wheels, but with poor or no suspensions. This made it a good idea to tow the guns *on* trucks rather than *behind* them; on occasion, these were mounted in a true “portee” mount to fire from the truck bed.

Most were aging, with worn barrels reducing their real range. As an artillery officer inelegantly put it, “The poor old sods do it on their own feet.” The heaviest charge had to be used to achieve the nominal maximum range, which quickened the wear. Accuracy and reliability deteriorated, too. Ammo stocks were often just as old, especially in East Africa; the dud percentage was remarkable.

Like most older field guns, they weren’t suitable for antitank work, given low muzzle velocity, slow traverse, and inadequate sights. HEAT rounds were always in short supply, but made an impression on tanks unlucky enough to be hit.

In 1940, about 3,050 guns of the various models were at hand. Crews were 8-10 men.

# 47MM ANTI-TANK CANNON

Italian troops usually had to rely upon the 47mm as their antitank gun. After the war’s first months, it filtered down to battalion or company level in eight-gun companies or two-gun sections.

Developed from the Czech Böhler design, the gun proved a crucial weapon in Spain’s civil war. The caliber offered a decent HE punch, so unlike its 37mm and 2-pounder contemporaries the 47mm doubled as a light antipersonnel weapon.

The gun benefited from the usual Italian light construction (p. 14). It could be manhandled and included ropes for the crew to haul it, and could be broken down into five parts for easier transport. On the other hand, it had no gun shield and a short barrel, so its performance was remarkably inferior. It also did not hold up well when being towed behind trucks; the axle in particular was prone to breakage. It was sometimes mounted in truck beds as a “portee” weapon.

The usual crew was six men, but as few as two could keep on firing in an emergency. In standard practice, the gun would be deployed with the wheels removed. The tank gun M1939 was based on this weapon’s action and barrel.

## Cannone da 75L27

Subassemblies: Very Small Wheeled chassis +2; two wheels +1.

Occ: – Cargo: –

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body	4/18	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
Wheels	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5

### Weaponry

75mm Short TG/75L27 [Body:F] (0 rounds).

### Equipment

Body: Indirect-fire mount.

### Statistics

Size: 10'□6'□7' Payload: – Lwt: 1.1 tons  
Volume: 18 Maint: 125 hours Cost: \$2.6K

HT: 9. HPs: 85 Body, 28 each Wheel.

*gSpeed*: \* *gAccel*: \* *gDecel*: \* *gMR*: 1.25 *gSR*: 2  
Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed.

\* As for towing vehicle after towed weight added.

### Design Notes

HT was reduced from design value to reflect the real-life balkiness of these worn pieces. This wasn’t so much a design flaw as simply an unrepairable symptom of old age . . .

## Cannone Anticarro da 47/32 OTO-Breda Mod 35

Subassemblies: Motorcycle chassis +0; two wheels -1.

Occ: – Cargo: –

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0
Wheels	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5

### Weaponry

47mm Short TG/OTO-Breda Mod 35 [Body:F] (0).

### Statistics

Size: 10'□3'□3' Payload: – Lwt: 0.35 tons  
Volume: 2.4 Maint: 190 hours Cost: \$1.1K

HT: 8. HPs: 20 Body, 8 each Wheel.

*gSpeed*: \* *gAccel*: \* *gDecel*: \* *gMR*: 1.5 *gSR*: 2  
Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed.

\* As for towing vehicle after towed weight added.

### Design Notes

Again, HT is reduced, but this time to reflect a poor and light design, not old age.



# CARRO ARMATO LEGGERO L3/35 AND VARIANTS

Italian military observers at the 1931 British drills saw Carden-Lloyd carriers serve as “placeholders” for very light tanks. In part because they desired a “mountain tank,” the Italians decided this was the concept they wanted. FIAT-Ansaldo happily obliged, because tankettes were easy to build and cheap enough for the army to order in quantity.

The *Carro Veloce* (“fast tank”) entered production in 1933, then was upgraded in 1935. Essentially a mobile MG nest, it was intended to avoid heavy weapons with its speed.

In truth, the tankette was hopelessly obsolete by 1936, when it had to face Soviet-built T-26s (see p. W:FH37) in Spain; against determined infantry, the lack of a turret was a liability, too. The tankers had to improvise, such as by towing a 37mm antitank gun behind one of the tankettes. The authorities never admitted that the vehicle was outdated; in 1937, an order was placed just to prevent unpopular layoffs.

In 1940, about 1,000 L3/35s made up the bulk of Italian armor. Their only advantage was being small targets, but their size made them easily overturn in broken ground. With all of its hatches on top, an overturned vehicle was a deadly trap. Understandably, the crews despised them.

The crew includes a commander who serves as gunner and a driver. The tankette burns 1.4 gallons of gas per hour. The standard loadout costs \$28. The engine was started with a hand crank.

## Carro Armato Leggero L3/35

Subassemblies: Midget Tank chassis +2; Large

Weapon superstructure [Body:T] +2; tracks +1.

Powertrain: 31-kW standard gas engine with 31-kW tracked transmission, 16-gal. standard tank.

Occ: 2 CS Both      Cargo: 2 Body, 0.3 Sup

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
All:	4/50	4/30	4/30	4/20	4/30
Tracks:	4/20	4/20	4/20	4/20	4/20

## Weaponry

2□Gr. LMG/Breda Mod 38 [Body:F] (1,085 each).\*

\* Linked.

## Equipment

Body: Casemate mount. Sup: Signal rods.

## Statistics

Size: 10'□5'□4'    Payload: 0.3 tons    Lwt: 3.6 tons

Volume: 23      Maint: 128 hours    Cost: \$2.5K

HT: 12. HPs: 400 Body, 150 each Track, 120 Sup.

gSpeed: 29 gAccel: 2 gDecel: 20 gMR: 0.25 gSR: 4

Ground Pressure Low. 2/3 Off-Road Speed.

## Design Notes

The design purchases 2,500 rounds of MG ammo; the historical value has been used, instead.

This design mildly breaks the rule stating that a superstructure can't be larger than the body, because it comes halfway between a sensible Very Small Tank (such as the Panzer I) and a midget unmanned vehicle. The tracks' DR was reduced and the ground pressure arbitrarily defined as Low (instead of Very Low) to represent the thin, badly designed treads.

## Variants

The command variant had just 1,500 MG rounds and a medium radio with a huge aerial.

The L3/35 *Lanciafiamme* was the flame-throwing version. The tankette had to tow the flammable liquid in a wheeled, lightly armored trailer made by FIAT. This was an extremely vulnerable solution, so much so that some field workshops built a smaller container, protected by additional armor plates and placed over the engine. The standard flamethrowing vehicle had a medium tank flamethrower (see p. W135) and one MG with 1,820 rounds. Neither had any special mounts (traverse of a few degrees). With the trailer, the total weight is 4.7 tons and gSpeed is 21.

By 1939, any tanker would say the L3/35 was underarmed. Field-expedient solutions were adopted, modifying a handful of tankettes per battalion. Usually, additional weaponry was placed in front of the commander's hatch; he had to expose himself to use it. Both Solothurn ATRs and 45mm mortars were used in these cases, mounted in a limited-rotation Mini open mount.

## Rimorchietto per Liquido Lancifiamme

Subassemblies: Very Small Wheeled chassis +2; two off-road wheels +1.

Occ: –    Cargo: 12.5, but no real provision for it.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
All:	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5

## Equipment

Body: 70 shots for flamethrower.

## Statistics

Size: 7'□4'□3'    Payload: 0.6 tons    Lwt: 1.2 tons

Volume: 18      Maint: 700 hours    Cost: \$80

HT: 12. HPs: 85 Body, 28 each Wheel.

gSpeed: \* gAccel: \* gDecel: \* gMR: 1.25 gSR: 2  
Ground Pressure High. 1/6 Off-Road Speed.

\* As for towing vehicle after towed weight added.

# CARRO ARMATO MEDIO M13/40

The M13/40 was the Italian main battle tank, such as it was. It had been slowly developed between 1937 and 1940, to replace the poorly designed stopgap M11/39.

Its best feature was cheapness. The engine was a heavy, underperforming diesel, yielding an indifferent off-road performance, while the riveted armor was poor. A piercing hit sometimes just caused a hole on other tanks, but on the M13 the rivets popped, the plates cracked, and splinters flew inside. The FIAT-Ansaldo tank deserved its nickname, “the Iron Coffin.”

The main gun was the rather unspectacular 47mm Mod 39. Upon its debut, the M13/40 could square off with early British Cruiser tanks, if carefully deployed, but thick-skinned infantry tanks could easily piece its thin armor while ignoring the Italian rounds. The M13/40 soon became hopelessly outclassed, but soldiered on. The British always considered it a threat against infantry, thanks to its 47mm HE round and considerable firepower in MGs.

Some 1,750 of all the M13 variants were produced, a drop in the ocean of other countries’ armor production. Having captured considerable numbers, Commonwealth troops deployed the vehicle in 1941. (The Australians of the 6th Cavalry painted large kangaroos on theirs.) German second-line troops also deployed them after 1943.

The crew includes a commander (who also serves as gunner) and loader in the turret, and driver and radio operator in the body. The radio operator also handles the hull MGs and the commander the anti-aircraft MG, which was normally stowed inside the tank until needed.

The turret rotates about 15° per second when the hydraulic traverse is used, or at 2° if hand-cranked by the gunner. The engine burns 3.7 gallons of diesel per hour. A full load of fuel and ammo costs \$500.

## Carro Armato Medio M13/40

Subassemblies: Small Tank chassis +3; full-rotation Small AFV turret [Body:T] +2; fixed Mini open mount [Tur:T] +0; tracks +2.

Powertrain: 93-kW standard diesel engine with 93-kW tracked transmission, 48-gallon standard tank, 8,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: 2 CS Body, 2 CS Tur      Cargo: 1 Tur

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	4/115	4/100	4/100	4/55	4/25
Tracks:	4/35	4/35	4/35	4/35	4/35
Turret:	4/145	4/100	4/100	4/55	–



## Weaponry

2□Gr. LMG/Breda Mod 38 [Body:F] (1,728).\*  
 Ground LMG/Breda Mod 38 [Tur:F] (864).\*  
 47mm Short TG/OTO 47/32 Mod 35 [Tur:F] (87).\*  
 Ground LMG/Breda Mod 38 [OM:F].†  
 \* Hull MGs linked; turret weapons linked.  
 † Uses turret MG’s ammo when deployed.

## Equipment

Turret: Medium radio receiver and transmitter, 3-kW traversing gear.

## Statistics

Size: 16’□7’□8’    Payload: 0.8 tons    Lwt: 15.4 tons  
 Volume: 64    Maint: 58 hours    Cost: \$12.1K  
 HT: 11. HPs: 1,000 Body, 400 each Track, 150 Turret, 30 Open Mount.

gSpeed: 23 gAccel: 2 gDecel: 20 gMR: 0.25 gSR: 5  
 Ground Pressure Low. 2/3 Off-Road Speed.

## Design Notes

Ammo allotments, weight, and performance have been modified slightly from design values to reflect historical figures. HT has been reduced from 12 to reflect the vehicle’s poor reputation.

The standard load of 87 tank-gun rounds is shown, but in the field Italian tankers often crammed in as many as 20 additional shells.

## Variants

The first M13/40s lacked a radio and the fourth MG. Late production runs added a fire extinguisher (see p. W137).

The M14/41 had a more powerful engine, and desert-model air cleaners. Though too little, too late, the M15/42 was a real improvement. It had a 142-kW gas engine with 100-gallon tank; the 47/40 gun with 111 rounds; a smoke discharger mounted on the back of the body (a fixed Mini open mount with two Smoke Dischargers, see p. W143); and thicker, better-quality front armor (body F DR 165, turret F DR 190). The gSpeed was 25. Its engine compartment was taller and longer, so a Medium Tank chassis would be in order.

# CAMIONETTA SAHARIANA AS42

The Italians already had specialized Saharan units (p. 17) for patrol duties, but the incursions



by the British LRDG patrols (see p. W:HS12) soon illustrated that men mounted in fleet, nimble vehicles could perform great feats in the desert.

Their response was to create the Sahariana, an unarmored vehicle built on the sturdy chassis of the *AB41 Spa* armored car. They stripped most of the frills, including the second driver's seat that was standard in armored cars of the time, leaving them a vehicle with an excellent power-to-weight ratio. An already outstanding endurance could be increased by hanging up to 20 jerry cans of gasoline in a five-wide-by-four-deep rack on the car's left side.

Only some 200 vehicles were built, and they entered the desert war too late. The *Raggruppamento Sahariano* served with distinction only from November 1942 to April 1943. Four *Arditi Camionettisti* (*Camionetta*-riding commandos) companies were outfitted. One fought in Tunisia, one in Sicily, and one was deployed in Rome. After 1943, men of the 10th *Arditi* regiment formed a *Camionettisti* recon company with the 2nd German *Fallschirmjäger* division.

The vehicle seats up to six men or as few as three; seats were added or removed appropriately. (The design below uses the most common configuration.) The commander, next to the driver, fires the MG. With five or six men, each vehicle could dismount a recon team on foot without leaving the car unmanned. The engine burns 2.4 gallons per hour. The sample loadout given below costs \$170, including provisions but not the cost of any cargo.

## Camionetta Sahariana AS42

**Subassemblies:** Heavy Standard Wheeled chassis with mild slope +3; limited-rotation Mini open mount +0 [Body:T]; full-rotation Small Weapon open mount +0 [Body:T]; two Mini fuel racks [Body: R, L]; four off-road wheels +2.

**Powertrain:** 60-kW standard diesel engine with 60-kW all-wheel-drive transmission, 106-gallon standard tank, 16,000-kWh batteries.

**Occ:** 5 XCS

**Cargo:** 17.3X Body

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body	4/9	3/6	3/6	3/6	3/6
Wheels	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5	3/5
Fuel Racks	3/5	0/0	3/5	3/5	3/5

## Weaponry

Gr. LMG/Breda Mod 38 [OM1:F] (1,992 rounds).\*

Ground LMG/Breda Mod 37.†

20mm Long Gr. AC/Breda Mod 35 [OM2:F] (456).

\* Other MG also uses this ammo supply.

† Carried in body with tripod for dismounted use.

## Equipment

**Body:** Navigation instruments, large radio receiver and transmitter, fire extinguisher, provisions (40 man-days), 15 VSPs for exposed cargo.

**OM2:** Universal mount. **Fuel Racks:** Provision for carrying 20 5-gallon DR 3 jerry cans (0.2 VSPs and 39 lbs. each) as exposed cargo.

## Statistics

**Size:** 17' 6" 4' **Payload:** 2.1 tons **Lwt:** 6.4 tons  
**Volume:** 59 **Maint:** 130 hours **Cost:** \$2.4K

**HT:** 12. **HPs:** 660 Body, 113 each Wheel, 30 Open Mount 1, 45 Open Mount 2, 45 Fuel Rack.

**gSpeed:** 49 **gAccel:** 2 **gDecel:** 10 **gMR:** 0.75 **gSR:** 4  
**Ground Pressure High.** 1/4 Off-Road Speed.

## Design Notes

Ammunition loadouts have been adjusted slightly to historical figures.

This chassis was introduced on p. W:IC65. Unlike most wheeled designs, it featured a prominently sloped front facing. Since it's about the size of a Small Halftrack, we rule that this eats up 4 of the standard 45 VSPs (same as the halftrack with mild slope) and incorporate it as a special feature.

The above loadout is for an extended patrol. Payload includes a half ton of miscellaneous cargo, which might be more provisions, spare parts, mines, long and thin sand channels of metal or canvas for negotiating soft sand, etc. For a shorter mission, the jerry cans wouldn't be carried.

## Variants

The Sahariana sometimes carried other weaponry. The LMG could be replaced by a Solothurn ATR, and the 20mm AAG by a 47mm antitank gun. Sometimes, there was a third open mount for the second MG.

The Sahariana II had a ragtop option, but the guns could not be fired with it in use. The car doubled the fuel-rack capacity of its forerunner, carrying 20 jerry cans on each side in double-high racks.



# CACCIA FIAT CR.42 “FALCO”

The CR.32 biplane had been a great success in Spain, and the CR.42 was its evolution. A very light fuselage counterbalanced its somewhat heavy engine in a design that was probably the best biplane fighter ever built – fast, sturdy, highly maneuverable, and a real pleasure to fly.

Of course, the biplane era was long gone. By the time that the CR.42 entered service in 1939, monoplanes ruled the air. It would take far more than agility to survive in WWII’s skies.

Certainly, the CR.42 did not compensate with firepower, mounting just two 12.7mm MGs. It also featured an old-style open cockpit; Italian pilots preferred these because the wind on their face acted as a low-tech HUD. They could evaluate their speed and risk of stalling by the airflow. Of course, in the sort of adverse weather that these pilots encountered over the English Channel when they joined the Battle of Britain, open cockpits lost most of their appeal.

Even though the CR.42’s outdatedness was beyond dispute, the Italian air force kept flying it to the bitter end. It was even the most common Italian fighter, with 1,781 produced. By 1941, most were fitted with wing hardpoints and used in the fighter-bomber role, while the Italians’ limited number of modern monoplane designs took over the pure fighter role. Still, an Italian pilot both skillful and lucky could surprise an unwary adversary with this nimble mount.

The Hungarians deployed the CR.42 on the Russian front, and the Belgian air force used it briefly against the Luftwaffe in 1940.

The aircraft burns 32 gallons of aviation gas per hour. Fuel and ammo costs \$45, plus \$880 if carrying two 220-lb. bombs.

## Caccia Fiat CR.42bis “Falco”

Subassemblies: Light Fighter chassis +3; Recon biplane wings +2; three fixed-strut wheels +0.

Powertrain: 627-kW HP gas engine with 627-kW prop, 92-gallon standard fuel tanks, 4,000-kWs batteries.

Occ: 1 XCS Cargo: 4.7 Body, 2.2 Wings

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	2/3	2/3*	2/2C	2/3*	2/3*
Wings:	2/2C	2/2C	2/2C	2/2C	2/2C
Wheels:	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3
Cockpit:	0/+12	0/+11	0/+14	0/+12	–

\* Treat as 2/2C on 50% of hits.

## Weaponry

2 [Med. Air. HMGs/SAFAT M 31 [Bod:F] (400 each).\*

\* Linked.



## Equipment

Body: Navigation instruments. Wings: 220-lb. hardpoint on each.

## Statistics

Size: 27' [32' [10' Payload: 0.5 tons Lwt: 2.4 tons

Volume: 144 Maint: 87 hours Cost: \$5.3K

HT: 7. HPs: 50 Body, 50 each Wing, 5 each Wheel.

aSpeed: 267 aAccel: 8 aDecel: 15 aMR: 3.75 aSR: 1

Stall Speed 61. -6 aSpeed with loaded hardpoints.

gSpeed: 234 gAccel: 11 gDecel: 10 gMR: 0.5 gSR: 2

Ground Pressure Very High. 1/8 Off-Road Speed.

## Design Notes

The historical wing area (241 sf), aSpeed (design aSpeed 262), and MG loadout (design purchases 750 rounds) were used. To represent the metal cowling around the engine with cloth elsewhere on the fuselage, 1.5 points of metal and 1 point of cloth DR is purchased for the sides, bottom, and top, to represent DR 3 over half of each facing and cloth DR 2 on the other half. Alternatively, a pod could have been mounted on the front of the chassis to represent the engine housing, but the method used came closer to historical statistics.

## Variants

The CR.42bis was the most common version, with or without the wing hardpoints that English-language references usually distinguish as the CR.42s. *Squadriglia* commanders’ planes added a medium radio.

The first version, the CR.42, had one Medium Aircraft HMG and one Aircraft LMG, the Breda-SAFAT Mod 30 (with 600 .303 rounds).

The CR.42ter added two more HMGs in blister fairings under the lower wings’ leading edges.

The CR.42CN (*Caccia Notturmo*, or night fighter) was fitted with a radio, flame dampers, and underwing searchlights much smaller than those on p. W139; treat them as having 1-mile range at 0.1 VSPs, 25 lbs., and \$10 per searchlight. It was not exactly a match for the late-war radar-equipped night prowlers which usually mounted *much* heavier weaponry.

# MAS CLASSE 500 “VELOCISSIMO”

The Italian Navy fought most of the Great War in the Adriatic Sea. This confined, shallow water was ideal for coastal torpedo powerboats.

In WWI, these were named “MAS,” for *Motoscafi Armati SVAN*, or armed powerboats built by the SVAN shipyards. (The acronym stuck even when they were built elsewhere.) Gabriele D’Annunzio, who took part in a famous torpedo-boat mission, coined a flashy Latin motto with the same initials: *Memento Audere Semper*; i.e., “Remember: Always dare.”

Dare, the Italians did. Aggressiveness, speed, and bold night actions were the trademark of these boats’ crews, who numbered two Austrian battle-ships among their victims.

After WWI, the development of the MAS continued. Even more emphasis was placed on speed, because many targets began to carry quick-firing guns to deal with torpedo boats. Light, fast, aggressive hydrodynamic hulls were designed. Unfortunately, most design elements that are good for speed are bad for seaworthiness, and the MAS became a fair-weather weapon; with a slightly choppy sea, a fast ride became a very bumpy ride. Darkness also became less of a defense as radar technology was introduced on target vessels.

Yet, the powerboats saw extensive combat in WWII. In their traditional missions, they experienced many failures, such as a costly attack on Malta, and successes, such as the sinking of two cruisers and countless minor vessels. They also carried out anti-submarine duties, but with little success, given their small depth charges and rudimentary hydrophonic tubes. They were employed in long patrols south of Sicily, a task for which they had not been built, with costly losses. They also escorted coastal convoys.

Since the MAS were fast and expendable, they were also used for special operations, to deploy and extract agents and raiders (pp. 21, 24). Small flotillas were deployed in the Dodecanesus and even as far as the Black Sea and the Ladoga.

In the sample boat built by Baglietto Shipyards, battle stations required one of the nine-man crew in the engine room, two in the superstructure, and the other six on deck, manning the MGs and readying the torpedoes. All of these stations actually are standing room, except the pilot’s seat.

The two main engines burn 75 gallons of aviation gas per hour at top speed. The craft also has two cruise engines, with greatly reduced performance, but using only 3 gallons per hour at cruise speed. (These also would be much quieter.) The two torpedoes cost \$5,600; the other ammo and fuel cost \$1,400.

## MAS Classe 500 “Velocissimo”

**Subassemblies:** Light Cutter chassis +5; waterproofed Large Weapon superstructure +2 [Body:T]; two full-rotation Mini open mounts +0 [Body:T].

**Powertrain:** 1,492-kW supercharged HP aerial gas engine and 60-kW HP gas engine with 1,492-kW screw, 710-gallon light tank, 16,000-kWs batteries.

**Occ:** See above. **Cargo:** 36 Body, 4 Sup

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	3/5W	3/5W	3/5W	3/5W	3/5W
Sup:	3/5	3/5	0/0	3/5	–

### Weaponry

Aircraft LMG/Breda Mod 30 [OM1:F] (1,500).

Very Long Gr. HMG/Breda Mod 31 [OM2:F] (500).

2□450mm Torpedoes [Body:T].

6□100-lb. Depth Charges [Body:T].

### Equipment

**Body:** Large radio receiver and transmitter, 30 bilge, 2 bilge pumps, fire extinguisher, bunk, 2 hammocks, 3,400 lbs. of hardpoints for torpedoes and depth charges. **Sup:** Autopilot, navigation instruments, 1-mile passive sonar, searchlight. **OMs:** Universal mounts.

### Statistics

**Size:** 56’□14’□14’ **Payload:** 5 tons **Lwt:** 24.6 tons

**Volume:** 402 **Maint:** 29 hours **Cost:** \$49K

**HT:** 12. **HPs:** 3,000 Body, 120 Sup, 30 each OM.

**wSpd:** 44 **wAccel:** 9 **wDec:** 0.3 (5) **wMR:** 0.05 **wSR:** 3  
On auxiliary cruising engine:

**wSpd:** 13 **wAccel:** 0.4 **wDec:** 0.3 (0.5) **wMR:** 0.05 **wSR:** 3  
**Draft:** 4. **Flotation Rating:** 36 tons.

### Design Notes

Design wSpeed 38 and Draft 3.2 were replaced with historical figures. This uses a standard, fine-lined hull, but places armor on it from the *Wooden* option. This gives it all the effects of its real-life wooden construction under the game rules.

The *Isotta Fraschini* engines in these boats were very light, so all weight-reducing options were used. In real life, they overheated quickly.

### Variants

Some boats, including many in the Black Sea, replaced the 13.2mm HMG with a 20mm Breda autocannon, in a constant effort to beef up anti-aircraft firepower. A “gunboat” version eliminated the torpedoes and carried three 20mm guns.

Several older classes also remained in service.

# SILURO LENTA CORSA SLC SERIE 200

The Abyssinian War brought unwelcome visitors in the Mediterranean: the British Home Fleet. Traditionally, the Italians had compared their naval assets with those of the French; now Mussolini's brinkmanship stood to bring about a war pitting his sailors against the much more fearsome Royal Navy.

Some intelligent naval gunnery officers understood what that implied, so they came up with an "asymmetrical war" solution: a pilot-ed torpedo. Frogmen would steer it into enemy ports, beyond the usual nets to deter torpedoes, and under the moored warships' bellies. The project was developed in total secrecy. The prototype was powered by an elevator's electric motor.

The selected men of the newly born 10th Special MAS Flotilla (p. 39) tinkered on their "slow-running torpedoes." By 1940, they were ready. They might have carried out a submarine Pearl Harbor, but nobody ordered it. The British bases had time to tighten their security, and failed attacks warned the enemy. Nevertheless, the coup in Alexandria (p. 45) was the single greatest success of the Italian Navy in WWII.

For each successful mission, however, many more went awry. The SLCs were experimental weapons, very temperamental, and the frogmen's oxygen rebreathers were even less reliable. Additionally, the torpedoes built at S. Bartolomeo Shipyards maneuvered so poorly that they earned the nickname *maiale* (the pig).

The pig has two riders, one of them an officer. One man could pilot it alone, but deploying the warhead often required two men. The vehicle could travel for about 66 minutes at top speed, or for about 15 miles at 2.3 knots.

## SLC Serie 200

**Subassemblies:** Small Boat chassis with sub option +2; Small Weapon superstructure +1 [Body:T].

**Powertrain:** 1-kW electric motor with 1-kW screw transmission, 4,000-kWs batteries.

**Occ:** 2 MCS      **Cargo:** 6.2 Body, 2 Sup

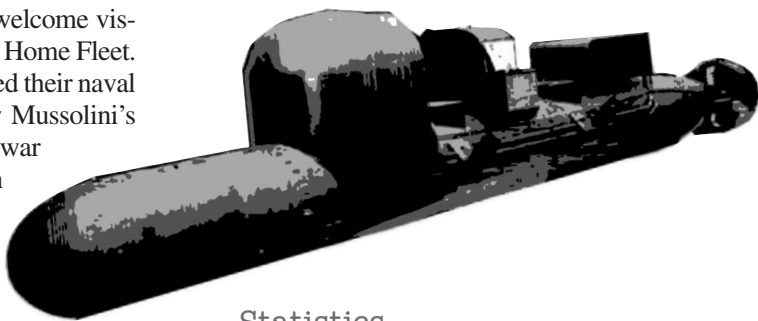
Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	3/10	3/10	3/10	3/10	3/10
Sup:	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/3	-

## Weaponry

550-lb. warhead doing 6d+1,100.

## Equipment

Body: 0.4 bilge, navigation instruments.



## Statistics

**Size:** 24'x2'x4'    **Payload:** 0.3 tons    **Lwt:** 1.8 tons  
**Volume:** 19      **Maint:** 160 hours    **Cost:** \$1,570

**HT:** 10.    **HPs:** 90 Body, 45 Superstructure.

**wSpd:** 6    **wAccel:** 0.1    **wDecel:** 1.7 (1.8)    **wMR:** 0.1    **wSR:** 1  
**Draft:** 1.3.    **Flotation Rating:** 1.6 tons.

**uSpd:** 3.5    **uAccel:** 0.1    **uDecel:** 1.7 (1.8)    **uMR:** 0.1    **uSR:** 1  
**uDraft:** 4.    **Crush Depth:** 32 yards.

## Design Notes

Historical figures were substituted for design uSpd 4 and Crush Depth 30; uMR was arbitrarily lowered to reflect the vehicle's reputation.

This is a modified 533mm torpedo. The design system lacks a boat chassis that exactly matches the torpedo, but the Small Boat is not horribly oversized. Both cycle seats include fairings, with a particularly large one for the pilot housing instruments and controls. These are open in the back and certainly not sealed; since the design already was 19% overweight (an artifact of the overly large chassis), these are treated as simply elaborate extensions of the crew stations. (One would be just as justified in treating them as small, unsealed subassemblies had the design been underweight.) Behind the riders is an open-frame cargo container holding various tools, including a pneumatic cable cutter.

The vehicle's flotation is just sufficient to keep itself and cargo from sinking. It is assumed that the riders' own flotation keeps them afloat.

Both *Iron Cross* and (more briefly) *Dogfaces* explain bilges and electrical motors. Note that every pound of water taken in the bilge will require ditching a pound of tools to keep the pig afloat.

Technically, this vehicle should cost more, because torpedoes use very advanced hydrodynamic construction to achieve high speeds, but this vessel ruins all that by adding all the riders, fairings, and such. Ruthless GMs could add \$5,000 to cost to represent countless perfectly recessed brass screws and similar fittings made useless here . . .

## Variants

An early series had only a 500-lb. warhead and negligibly smaller batteries in game terms.



# 5. ON THE FRONT

Italian soldiers led colorful – if often tragic – existences in their military careers ranging from run-down barracks to distant battlefields.

## TRAINING CONSCRIPTS

*“Believing, obeying, fighting.”*  
– Fascist motto

Youths often served in paramilitary organizations; see *Society in Uniform*. Then, in peacetime, they were drafted at age 20 for an 18-month term. Students could postpone their service until they were 26, but by 1938, basic courses for reserve officers were compulsory at university.

Training was carried out in three six-month cycles, gradually perfecting the drills from personal up to regimental level. This effective training structure was watered down by half-measures: live-fire training was insufficient and large, expensive exercises were seldom executed.

The actual content of the training was not as modern as the training structure itself. The program did bring the men up to high physical-fitness standards, via long marches and rudimentary athletics, but questionable fare such as close-order drills, the “Roman step,” and garrison formalities ate up much time. The standard assault tactics relied upon a straightforward rush by the men in a section, as their LMG covered them, a costly failure in real combat. Defensive schemes were linear and rigid. At best, antitank and urban combat received perfunctory attention. Naturally, specialized units were trained better than men in the standard line infantry.

After the war began, some combat-veteran instructors improved training, but equipment shortages hampered it. Preparation was uneven, and often curtailed by war demands. Reservists were assumed to be combat-ready, thanks to the even more-outdated training they had received years before. In 1940, some North African divisions were completed with 38-year-olds who had last served in 1925! The divisions preparing for the aborted Malta landing got the best wartime training, and fought well (the *Folgore* paratroops and the *Superga*, *Friuli*, and *Livorno* infantry divisions).

## SOCIETY IN UNIFORM

Mussolini called Achille Starace, the zealous party secretary from 1931, “an obedient cretin.” With those credentials, Starace took on the task of intertwining Fascist pomp into every facet of Italian life. Socially compulsory gatherings and parades gave plenty of opportunities to show off extravagant black uniforms. The party dictated how most Italians dressed, saluted, and spoke. The ultimate objective was to dictate how every Italian *thought*, but Starace ultimately failed at that in most cases. The average Italian copied their leaders in paying lip service to iconized ideals, and donned a uniform because it brought immediate benefits.

This extreme emphasis on outward appearances also transformed the party from an uneven coalition of right-wing ideas into a hollow consensus-building tool reinforcing Mussolini’s personal popularity. He replaced independent-minded bosses with yes men as the pomp increased.

Many youths liked what they saw, and treasured their little Fascist rifles (p. 26). The party built *Case della Gioventù* (youth halls) where boys could practice sports and train. From the youth halls they entered pre-military service, before conscription landed them in a gloomy barracks.

There, they found no gyms nor modern equipment, and they received much of the same training that they had already undergone, close-order drills intended to instill blind obedience. Youngsters, in particular those in the all-volunteer *Giovani Fascisti* division, did fight like Fascist lions, as they had been taught. Their older comrades of the reserve, however, had already seen through the sham. Marching in the cattle square was one thing, playing the heroes for Fascism another. Many privately decided that they’d do their duty, but nothing more.

The biggest mistake was ignoring the importance of teamwork. Due to equipment shortages, and in order to postpone the unpopular mobilizations, the divisions were completed right before embarkation. The men had no time for training together. Such units couldn't be expected to become a team. The Greek front saw the worst disintegration of these slapped-together units. The exceptions were, again, specialized troops.

Adding to the problems, in the 1930s the army reduced its number of lower officer ranks – even while increasing slots for higher ranks! – so that in 1940 many captains were middle-aged reservists who had last served as lieutenants in the '20s. This created poor, sometimes awful, leadership.

## SERVICE CULTURE

The post-WWI army possessed a patriotic, stoic sense of duty; officers tempered that with flair and a large measure of self-importance. The army still was a major unifying force within Italy.

Fascism courted the officer corps from the outset, and gradually won them over. In 1934, officers were “authorized” (i.e., encouraged) to become party members. The army looked down on the Blackshirt militia, yet from 1935 the two became more and more intermingled.

Officers' general attitude toward the enlisted remained outdated, and ultimately proved a real Achilles' heel. Food and living conditions were dreadful, though roughly on par with a poor peasant's lifestyle, and the crude uniforms came in three sizes that fit all. The officers, meanwhile, wore elegantly tailored uniforms, often in a slightly different shade that made it easy to distinguish them, and ate far better than their men.

## A WIDE RANGE

These sample Italian units will serve to illustrate a variety of campaign styles.

## REGULAR GIUSEPPES

Infantry divisions made up the run-of-the-mill Italian units. Their quality varied considerably.

### The 64th “Catanzaro”

The *64th Divisione Fanteria Autotransportabile “Catanzaro” Tipo Africa Settentrionale* was formed in June 1940 in Cyrenaica on the North African “transportable” model. Its specialists came from a disbanded low-quality Blackshirt division. Reserve officers led its green infantry regiments.

After a brief training, the *Catanzaro* moved forward, though it had only 39 functioning trucks.

This huge divide mirrored the class gap between the officers, who were predominantly from northern Italy, and the often southern soldiers. Some officers expected their men to be stupid and lazy – which led the men to behave exactly as expected.

Comradeship could and did develop between caring commanders and their men, but this usually happened only among elite troops or after a unit had been on the front for some time.

Throughout the war, home leave was rare, sapping the morale of both soldiers and their families.

Senior officers' careers relied on patronage. Promotions rarely resulted from merit alone. Conversely, senior officers were seldom demoted, but rather shuffled somewhere else.

## COMMENDATIONS

Numbers are Reputation bonuses per p. W63.

One campaign or service award is +0, but several may be worth +1; a Russian Campaign badge is always worth +1. Officers promoted for War Merit (on the field) could show it with a badge (+1). Volunteer service in previous wars was acknowledged with a medal (+1). The War Merit Cross was awarded for long front-line service, combat wounds, bravery in combat, or mention in dispatches (+0, but it could be awarded multiple times; a bronze or silver crown on the ribbon gives a +1, a gold crown a +2).

The Cross of Military Valor was established in 1941, and it was worth +1.

The really valuable award was the Medal of Military Valor, in bronze (+2), silver (+3), or gold (+4). The last was usually awarded posthumously.

The Italians held German commendations (see pp. W49 and W:IC36) in high regard.



It was withdrawing from Buq Buq after the fall of Sidi Barrani when the British 7th Armoured overran it. The artillery engaged the tanks, but when they closed in, the infantry surrendered *en masse*. Remnants reached Bardia, and surrendered there.

The unit combined awful training and leadership with woeful equipment and motivation. Its combat performance helped forge the Italians' poor reputation in WWII, deservedly in this case.

### The 19th “Venezia”

The mountain infantry of the *19th Divisione Fanteria da Montagna “Venezia”* began the war in reserve in Albania. A “mixed” and reinforced division, *Venezia* had two extra battalions of Albanian infantry and an artillery group. A Black-shirt legion wasn't added until December.

Its first engagement was typically Italian. Rushed up front, one of its regiments was forced back while deploying. The other retook the position, but with one regiment in disarray and the other fully committed this binary division (p. 15) could barely hold its ground. The Albanian battalion *Tomor* attacked Nov. 4, was routed by the Greeks, and ran away, firing on the *Carabinieri*.

Nevertheless, the *Venezia* was one of the best divisions in Albania. It withstood casualties and doggedly fought a thankless war of attrition.

After the campaign, the *Venezia* took up occupation duties in Montenegro, establishing a tacit non-aggression deal with the Chetniks.

In September 1943, other units in the Balkans surrendered to the Germans; the *Venezia* did not. It held out around Berane and established radio contact with the new government. Airdrops were organized as terms were reached with the Communist partisans. In December, the division became the *Garibaldi* Italian Brigade, which fought in Yugoslavia until March 1945.

## TOP NOTCH

Some specialized units maintained a higher standard than the line infantry.

### The 3rd “Julia”

The *3rd Divisione Alpina “Julia”* stood out even among the handpicked *Alpini* (p. 22).

In 1941, the corps on *Julia*’s flanks failed to maintain contact as the Greeks counterattacked along their central sector. By Nov. 2, the enemy had infiltrated and cut *Julia*’s supply lines.

All alone, *Julia* broke out through the mud, inflicting heavy losses while taking 25% casualties. Exhausted, the *Alpini* were replaced by the *Bari* infantry division, then had to hurry back to the front when that unit was routed. The *Julia* never got rest.

By July 1942, the division had redeployed in Russia with the Alpine Corps. During the Soviet winter offensive (p. 10), it had to abandon prepared positions and move to Taly, where it kept that crossroads open to let other units withdraw. Committed in the rearguard, it fought gallantly but was inevitably destroyed, with few survivors.

Every man in a *Julia* battalion came from the same mountains. These close-knit groups took care of their own and cherished the *Alpini* tradition.

### 8th Reggimento Bersaglieri

As part of the *Ariete* armored division, the *8th Reggimento Bersaglieri* proved one of the best Italian mobile units. The *Bersaglieri* were armed to the teeth in comparison with ordinary infantry.

They exploited their 47mm antitank guns ruthlessly, concealing them for point-blank ambush.

The regiment was destroyed at El Alamein.

## THE BEST OF THE BEST

Italy fielded a few elite units, perfect for a cinematic campaign running against the grain of the nation’s general image from WWII.

### The 185th “Folgore”

The *185th Divisione Paracadutisti “Folgore”* were the first Italian paratroops, and a true elite. Only 40% of the initial trainees completed the rigorous program that thoroughly versed them in infantry tactics and parachute drops.

Apart from a small unopposed parachute drop on Kefalonia, they were employed in the desert as infantry after Operation C3 (p. 46) was cancelled.

The *Folgore* participated in the El Alamein battles, throwing back an armored assault without tank support (p. 10), often with suicidal over-the-top counterattacks. Forced to retreat when the rest of the line failed to hold, the survivors were captured while trying to escape on foot.

A new *Folgore* battalion was created with some 600 men, many of them *Folgore* veterans returning from hospital. It fought in Tunisia, distinguishing itself in infantry attacks against the Kiwis at Takrouna.

Other of these old paratroops reappeared when the *184th “Nembo”* was created as a paratroop division, though its new men had no jump training. Its battalions fought Yugoslav partisans. It was deployed in Sardinia when the surrender came. Its units split up, some following the Germans to Corsica to fight with the RSI (p. 44) and others forming the core of the best CIL (p. 44) unit.

### 31st Battaglione Guastatori

The *31st Battaglione Guastatori* was an elite battalion of assault engineers (p. 16) specializing in mines. They were the first to break through Tobruk’s fields, under heavy fire. They fought with the *Folgore* at El Alamein, where they planted mines and carried out aggressive night patrols. They were wiped out along with the paratroops.

### 10th Flottiglia MAS

Formed in 1935 as the *1st Flottiglia*, this La Spezia-based unit only accepted the best men and trained them tirelessly (p. 24). The daring frogmen and SLC pilots mostly belonged to this flotilla, whose officers, unlike most of the navy, were less royalist than Fascist. After 1943, this unit became something much different (p. 45).



# THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE

During the first year of Italy's war, Mussolini had Italian soldiers march to varied locales.

## THE MICRO CAMPAIGN

The actual fighting against France lasted four days, luckily for the soldiers. A lack of training in assaulting fortifications caused unnecessary losses; the engineers had no specialized assault battalions at the time. The artillery usually wasn't given enough time for its preparations (p. 16) and ammunition stockpiles quickly dried up. Air support was minimal. Logistics was an utter mess. Frostbite took a remarkable toll, with 2,151 cases – in a two-week summer campaign, in the well-known Alps.

All of this showed Italian soldiers on the French front how unprepared they were. At the time, they did not complain about their poor weaponry or leadership; they only grumbled about the indifferent performance of the supply units.

The sea war also was short and strange. The "already defeated" French bombarded the coast of Genoa. The Italian fleet cautiously moored far away, while air-force assets took off with a three-hour delay. The only real retaliation came from coastal batteries and a WWI torpedo ship converted into a mine layer, but halfway through the fight one of its torpedo tubes malfunctioned.

## THE "BROKEN BACK"

An October demobilization wasted the few lessons learned in France. Mostly green troops began the Greek campaign, a winter war in the forbidding Epirus mountains. Rain, snow, biting cold, deep mud, and flash floods heavily influenced operations. Italian generals complained about the weather. Meanwhile, the Greeks attacked in it.

Indeed, they never gave up. Even when the numbers shifted in favor of Italy, they attacked and kept their invader off-balance. Their equipment and weaponry were no better than the Italians' – but they were defending their homes and country, and their tactics soon proved more suitable for the environment. They learned from experience.

Meanwhile, many of the higher-quality Italian regiments were quickly "expended," causing ill-trained, unacclimatized units to be thrown into the fray. They paid in blood for inexperience. Also, given the deployment problems (pp. 14-15), battalions often were sent to the front as detached units, with a resulting loss in cohesion and logistics.

In a campaign that began to resemble WWI, the Greeks exploited reconnaissance, night movements, surprise, and concentration – traditional

concepts that eluded the Italians. The Greeks unhinged enemy positions by infiltrating and outflanking them. With a brittle and continuous line, the Italians began to quickly withdraw from these attacks, before learning to deploy mutually supporting strongpoints and a counterattack reserve.

Conversely, Italian attacks devolved into frontal headbutts. The artillery executed general bombardments more often than direct-support missions. The attacking infantry usually was quickly pinned down by fire, companies failed to maneuver, and often a second wave wasn't provided.

The Italian troops grew disillusioned with their service's inefficiency, then largely lost faith in their leadership, but they didn't become vocal about it. They just lost any enthusiasm for fighting. They still defended themselves stubbornly, but only a grim sense of duty kept them taking part in the bloody and futile set-piece attacks.

Again, frostbite took a high toll, and the Greeks inflicted more casualties than they took, despite usually fighting offensively. Mussolini had sworn that Italy would break Greece's back. By April 1941, when Greece fell to German troops, everybody knew who had broken whom.

## VS. THE PARTISANS

After mid-1941, the Balkans left the headlines, but the war went on. Italy annexed a swath of Dalmatia, and firebrand administrators tried to transform it into a Fascist Italian province. They failed, and their unthinking brutality spawned unrelenting hatred that would surface as vendettas in 1943-45.

A full-fledged war raged within Fascist Croatia and the rump Governorate from the start of the occupation. Its first outbreak in July 1941 surprised the Italians. Soon, they were knee-deep in guerrilla ambushes, hostage-takings, and reprisals.

Some Italian occupation troops eventually became as ruthless as their German contemporaries. Their reprisals against civilians both retaliated for the partisans' barbaric treatment of prisoners and acknowledged that the population itself was the enemy. As this war dragged on, the privates felt frustration, fear, hate, and a sense of futility.

A touch of Balkan politics was included: Gen. Draza Mihailovic's royalists usually kept an unspoken non-aggression pact with the Italians, as they hated the Croats much more than the invaders, and Tito's Communists just a bit less than that.

The occupation of Greece may have been the mildest. The Italians were dubbed the *s'agapò* ("I love you.") army. Liaisons were common;

Greek women sold the only thing they had left in the economic ruin and famine left by defeat.

Most Italian occupation troops still seemed humane, because the Germans and local collaborators were much worse. As long as Italians remained in charge, they saved some 500,000 Jews, Serbians, and Gypsies from the Croatian slaughterhouses. Some 240,000 French Jews flocked to the small Italian occupation zone (see p. W:RH11), the only relatively safe place in all of France.

## FLIES, SAND, STEEL

The main fighting theater for Italians became Africa, where the soldiers would see plenty of flies, sand, steel, but precious little water.

The soldiers led a grim existence in the desert, always lacking water, food, creature comforts, and ammunition. The inadequate rations often would dull the soldiers' physical edge; the GM should use the dehydration rules (see p. W205), and may rule that after several months in the desert, an Italian soldier loses the Fit advantage. Chronic diarrhea was common and debilitating; the only real cure was rest, with plenty of clean water and food.

The Italians took to "night-time shopping," sneaking through minefields to search abandoned British vehicles for water and the enemy's superior rations. (Note that the average British soldier looked undernourished to American eyes!)

The Italians gradually came to adapt the Germans' desert tactics, but they had to make do with inferior weapons. Rommel could deploy the *Ariete* armored and *Trieste* motorized divisions almost like German units, but the rest could only man stationary positions. Thus, most Italian infantry took part in few attacks. They marched in the night, dug their shallow foxholes in stony ground, measured out their puny rations, and hunkered down under brutal artillery barrages and air strikes. They could do little to retaliate. The British would build observation towers for their own shellfire, but the Italian artillery lacked the range and/or ammunition supplies to take them down.

Those riflemen that survived the mines, shells, and illnesses could expect one of three things to end their defensive drudgery. Friendly armor could break through, which meant marching forward. The enemy could break through the line elsewhere, which meant marching backward, or running without the unit's heavy weapons, to avoid encirclement. Or the enemy might attack their part of the line, in which case they usually held the ground while more mobile troops counterattacked – and took any credit for a victory.

The Italians gained a reputation for a ludicrous eagerness to surrender. Undeniably, they did

so in numbers, but demoralization and weak motivation were not the only factors. In the desert, an encircled strongpoint has no option but surrendering once it runs out of water. Retreats also are common in the desert – and nearly useless if on foot like most Italian units. Given similar conditions, enemy troops surrendered just as quickly as the ill-led and -equipped Italians.

Nevertheless, British propaganda felt it useful to portray the Italians as cowardly buffoons. This mostly served to improve German prestige. No self-respecting English officer would admit that the mandolin-playing "Eye-ties" had given his unit a bloody nose; he would attribute any setback to the Germans. In turn, the Wehrmacht gladly took credit when things went right, and blamed the Italians when things went wrong.

Italian morale seesawed with Axis fortunes in the desert, having hit an all-time low in February 1941. Rommel's successes heightened the expectations of the more aggressive soldiers. Their effectiveness constantly improved; ironically, they fought some fine actions right at the end in Tunisia.

## THE LAST OLD WAR

In East Africa, Italian soldiers well knew that they were not at the forefront of the *Duce's* empire-building. They were mostly keeping the flag high while buying time. Nevertheless – or maybe for this very reason – they often fought bravely.

They worried about contaminated water, meager rations, worn tires, broken machine guns, dud rounds, and deserting natives first – then, they worried about the enemy. Their lack of air cover prompted bold enemy bombing and strafing runs, which were hard on morale. Some had families there, which also brought worries, as they might fall into the hands of the bloodthirsty, British-backed Abyssinian bands.

The resistance became desperate as each stronghold fell and logistics came apart. Eritrean troopers often remained loyal, but other natives deserted in droves. It might all depend on the personal charisma of their officer. His troopers nicknamed one Lt. Guillet *Commundár as Shaitan* (the devil's commander), as he led faithful colonial cavalry in a long behind-the-lines guerrilla campaign.

After the cities fell, the mountain strongholds kept fighting, out of pride. For the British, these were mop-up operations, but they weren't painless. Gen. Nasi's men at Gondar and Wolchefit Pass fought on stubbornly. When they surrendered, on Nov. 27, 1941, they had no artillery to speak of, and were half-starved.

At the Amba Alagi and at Gondar, the British accorded the defenders the honors of war, saluting the Italian flag as it was lowered for the last time.

## UKRAINIAN SUNFLOWERS

Ideology and hubris took Italian soldiers all the way to the Don. In 1941, the Italian Expeditionary Corps was sent to aid the German invasion of Russia. Back home, there was the heady expectation that Russia would fall by Christmas, while the soldiers kept marching through endless plains and wondering what they were doing there.

The corps took ground and prisoners, but the ground was “scorched earth” and by then the Soviets were not leaving large units to be encircled. The Italians did well in their first, low-key combats, but the Soviet resistance stiffened. By October, the Italian infantry had to take to fortifications, engage in street fighting, and fend off counterattacks.

The Italians experienced their share of Soviet attacks in the dreadful Axis winter of 1941-42. They held their positions, at the cost of heavy losses that were but a hint of what was to come.

## THE POCKET

By the next winter, the Italian 8th Army manned defensible, well-built trenches, but they were stretched terribly thin with no reserves. They could, and did, withstand infantry charges after powerful artillery strikes; they could not handle a maneuver battle to staunch armored breakthroughs.

After the initial onslaughts (p. 10), for most Italian soldiers the winter was a nightmarish rout in murderous temperatures as low as -70°. They marched in the snow in disordered columns of stragglers. Command and supply functions had vanished and units disintegrated; a lucky soldier could rely on a few comrades. Most had only their own stamina and will to keep them alive.

The Soviets seldom attacked the columns; they just occupied towns, filling all available shelter, and let their winter do the dirty work. Cossack horsemen harassed the exhausted stragglers. Isolated farmhouses might be a warm one-night’s salvation, or traps brimming with partisans.

The few survivors began trickling home by March 1943, with tales of the enemy’s superiority, the generals’ ineptitude, and the Germans’ cold-blooded lack of solidarity. Not counting POWs, some 84,000 men and 16,000 trucks were lost.

Most of those taken prisoner were among the first POWs the Soviets took in this campaign – and thus suffered some of the worst brutality from captors still eager to avenge Axis misdeeds. More than 100,000 went into captivity and only some 12,000 ever returned. When one of these rare souls showed up on his doorstep as a rail-thin specter in 1946, his daughter shrieked, “Mommy, who is this man? Send him away.”

## THE LAST HURRAH

On Aug. 24, 1942, the 3rd *Savoia Cavalleria* regiment proved that well-led cavalry could still perform its traditional role: charging infantry. The Soviet 812th Rifle was preparing to move at dawn from its shallow foxholes near Isbuschenskij, with two battalions (1,900 men) and artillery support. The 2nd squadron moved to the enemy left flank and charged with sabers and hand grenades all across the enemy front; meanwhile, MGs, regimental artillery, and an attack on foot supported them. The troopers lost their commander, but reformed and charged again, alongside the 3rd squadron.

The *Savoia* lost some 100 men, but the enemy was routed with 450 casualties and 600 prisoners.

On Oct. 17, 1942, the 14th *Cavalleggeri di Alessandria* had been encircled by Titoist partisans in the region of Perjasica in Croatia. They fought their way out, under mortar and MG fire, as any good cavalry would, using several charges.

While these last charges of WWII proved that motivated cavalymen could sometimes still manage with sheer bravery and naked steel, they were sadly out of place in a mechanized war.

## THE WAR COMES HOME

*“The king doesn’t overestimate the 8th Army’s losses.”*

– Gen. Puntoni, the king’s aide

Allied bombings and landings brought the war to Italy’s cities, beaches, and hills.

## Sicilian Epilogue

Operation Husky (p. 11) would become the final blow to the morale of Italians, who had begun considering the war to be pointless.

Even as mainlanders began cursing the *Duce* they had once praised, the Sicilians already were ready to make their own peace. The regime had sensed as much, and replaced local civil servants with mainland transplants; this irritated the population without solving any problems.

The few defending units that didn’t just simply dissolve rarely received timely orders. They were widely scattered along the coasts, with no vehicles. Allied air raids were overwhelming, and services inefficient. Even those who would soldier on in the Axis cause could read the writing on the wall.



# THE HOME FRONT

In 1940, living conditions in Italy had been slowly improving, and rationing was not immediately implemented. Thus, when rationing became unavoidable in early 1941, it had to be strict. The black market boomed immediately. Citizens were encouraged to replace roses with kitchen gardens.

In 1941, Allied air raids were small, and Italians with no relatives on the front could ignore the war. Cinemas, theaters, and stadiums were open. Good food did become increasingly scarce, and those not living in the countryside had to spend a small fortune on the black market. By March 1941, the monthly ration of fat was 400 grams. Things got worse from there, and by December 1942 hungry civilians had to be relocated out of cities.

In 1943, veterans were telling their relatives the unvarnished truth, while the bombings became intensive. In March, factory workers went on strike. They were “only” protesting the food shortages, but the regime was unable to prevent or repress the demonstrations. The population was just hoping for the war to end soon, no matter how.

During the last two years, living conditions were grim to desperate in Northern Italy. What consumer goods the Allies hadn’t destroyed, the Germans had pillaged. (For instance, they requisitioned trainloads of buttons.) The farmers hoarded food, to sell to black marketeers or support the partisans, so city-dwellers were close to starvation. The southern cities knew their share of need, too, but by then they were also experiencing the Americans’ bottomless spending and giving.

## IN THE MOUNTAINS

As early as Sept. 9, 1943, the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (National Liberation Committee) was founded, with representatives of the Communist, Socialist, Democratic-Christian, Liberal, and Action parties. Despite this united oversight, the Italian *resistenza* was more of a grass-roots movement. The committee politicians found it difficult to establish reliable contacts with the units. Only the Communists had some centralized control over their own formations.

The partisans gathered in the mountains. Many were Communist, and displayed their allegiance with red scarves and stars. Some groups had a former Royal Army core; these called themselves *Badogliani* and wore blue insignia. The Demo-Christians wore green scarves. Others were initially just gangs of youths dodging the Germans, and later the draft; some lacked any political persuasion until the end. Some were just bandits.

A partisan’s life was dreary. Most had few arms, so they had to avoid direct confrontations.

During their first winter, they simply waited for a quick Allied offensive, while carrying out wearisome foraging missions, patrols, and sentry duties. At times, aggressive leaders would stage an ambush, preferably against RSI units rather than Germans. These had little real impact but did help to erode the Fascists’ morale.

In the spring of 1944, more youths joined up, and with an eye toward postwar politics some groups mushroomed with these untrained volunteers. The British were sending in radio operators, and after these, plentiful airdrops: Stens, explosives, uniforms to outfit whole “brigades.” (Partisans called a company-sized unit a “battalion.”)

All this made the leadership bold. They attacked Fascist outposts, and even established “partisan republics” (see p. 44). This spurred the Germans to react with full-blown offensives.

Initially, the partisans made the mistake of trying to weather these attacks in fortified sites, often without supporting each other. (Political differences sometimes played into this.) Such attempts were doomed. The partisans would learn, and fare better by using hit-and-run tactics, but the enemy learned, too, and by mid-1944 the attacks became sweeps that began by encircling whole mountain provinces. The partisans would scatter; individuals had a better chance of escaping the German net, but this would seriously disrupt the units.

The partisan ranks grew thinner during the 1944-45 winter, with bad weather and after Alexander’s ill-advised message (p. 12). Then they rapidly expanded again for the war’s end.

The partisans relied on civilians to feed, shelter, and warn them. Many civilians helped them, and often paid for that when the Germans razed villages and massacred hostages. Factory workers who weren’t serving in the RSI because of their key jobs sabotaged production and went on strike.

The mountain partisans wanted to fight in a uniform of sorts – not that the Germans treated their captives any better for that – but a small number of partisans fought in the cities in street clothes. These were organized in cell-like structures, being the most vulnerable to capture and torture. Some were spies; others employed terrorist tactics that triggered disproportionate Nazi reprisals.

Each partisan formation was unique. The same mountain might shelter a large Communist “brigade” with high morale but low training, smarting for a fight but lacking weapons, and a smaller outfit of *Badogliani* with British-dropped Stens, led by experienced but wary ex-army officers.

By the war’s final days, the various partisans ruled the Italian countryside, in a chaotic sort of way, and the Germans knew it. They feared the partisans everywhere in their rear.

## CARVING ITALY UP

By late 1943, Italy was up for grabs. In the north, Mussolini's Social Republic claimed to be in charge, but local authorities usually failed when they tried to act outside German interests. The occupier had many heads, too: Kesselring commanded the troops, but the SS commander Wolff did not take orders from him, and the ambassador, Rudolph Rahn, had the most influence over Mussolini.

The Germans annexed the *Adriatisches Küstenland*, between the Adriatic Sea and the Austrian border, and built the only extermination camp in Italy with the infamous Odilo Globocnik as the area's *gauleiter*. Also, in the mountains of this area, the Germans established the *Kosakenland*. Renegade Cossacks were settled there, with their families, to fight the partisans. Eventually, the Western Allies delivered these brutal and desperate men to Stalin.

The partisans proclaimed pocket-sized "partisan republics" – one of them within the *Kosakenland!* – where they created democratic governments. The Germans usually crushed them after a span of a few weeks to six months.

In the south, the Allies considered occupation zones, like those to be used in Germany, but in January 1944 they gave the Badoglio government control of the rear areas.

later they took the position and their morale improved. The Western Allies agreed to enlarge the CIL, or *Corpo Italiano di Liberazione* (Italian Liberation Corps). By April 1944, the CIL had 22,000 men in two divisions, including a "paratroop" division (p. 16) with many volunteers. In the summer of 1944 this unit saw heavy fighting in central Italy. CIL *Alpini* often surprised the Germans in "impassable" mountain terrain.

By 1945, the CIL had six "combat groups," all with British equipment and some with a good combat record. Each possessed two regiments of infantry and one of artillery. Commonwealth units provided transportation and tank support. Like the partisans, the CIL helped to restore a sense of national pride.

## THE BITTER END

On Sept. 27, 1943, Mussolini created the Italian Social Republic, or RSI, largely because he did not know

what else to do. This motivated many of his men, too; many simply lacked the guts to desert. Others knew the war was lost, but wanted to end it on the same side on which they had started. They included deluded youngsters, old-timers who believed this was the real Fascist state, and plain goons.

Also known as the Republic of Salò, after the Garda lake town which was its nominal capital, the RSI belied its socialist propaganda by executing "traitors" who had obeyed Badoglio's orders and Grand Council members who had voted against Mussolini. Ciano died with them, despite his wife's efforts to save him.

The Germans held 615,000 Italian prisoners. Many recruits for the RSI army came from this pool, although most refused this chance to escape the appalling camps; 29,000 would die in them. Four divisions were trained in Germany, then served in Italy in anti-partisan and coastal-garrison duties; after a while, they began suffering from desertions. Generally, the Germans only trusted small, independent outfits to actually fight the Allies. The *Nembo* paratroop battalion (p. 39) fought at Anzio, taking 70% casualties.

The MVSN (p. 18) was replaced by the *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana* (GNR, National Republican Guard), which reached a strength of 84,000, employed against the partisans. The all-volunteer Black Brigades, 30,000 die-hard Fascists, supplemented it. The GNR's *Leonessa*

## THE ITALIAN ALLIED ARMY

After September 1943, hundreds of thousands of Italians languished in various POW camps. Execution awaited many officers, beatings and starvation many ordinary soldiers, in both German and some Allied camps. The Yugoslav Communist partisans, or Titoists, sometimes preferred to disarm the Italians, kill the officers, and push the soldiery toward the Germans. (This did not happen when the units stuck together, p. 39.) The Greek Communist ELAS partisans were worse than even the Soviets.

All over the world, the Western Allies had plenty of Italian POWs. When they tried to recruit them, not many volunteers came forward. The POWs did not trust what they were told, and maybe they had just had enough.

In Italy, however, Italians could see what was going on with their own eyes. Soon, the Allies employed locals in their ports. Pack animal drivers led ammunition columns to the front, often under German artillery fire.

Badoglio was anxious to field combat units, too; on Oct. 13, he had declared war against Germany. On Dec. 8, the 1st *Raggruppamento Motorizzato* – a hodge-podge of infantry, *Bersaglieri*, and mountain guns – attacked German paratroops on Monte Lungo. The Italians were pushed back with losses, and suffered desertions, but a week

armored group had obsolete Italian vehicles, but most units were infantry; however, they were well-armed with SMGs and mortars, and sometimes armored cars and improvised armored trucks.

The 10th MAS Flotilla (p. 39), or X MAS for short, became an independent private army. Its charismatic commander, Prince Valerio Borghese, dealt directly with the Germans, and Salò authorities once even arrested him. Its volunteers (some 20,000 at their peak) often lacked a strong Fascist faith, but they did fight well. The “flotilla” soon fielded more ground battalions than powerboats and pocket subs. It was mainly employed on the eastern border, fighting Yugoslav partisans.

The Germans also fielded the weak 29th Waffen-SS Italian Division, which was employed with mixed results against the partisans. Independent Italian SS battalions fought at Anzio. The Germans used many Italian workers, too, both in

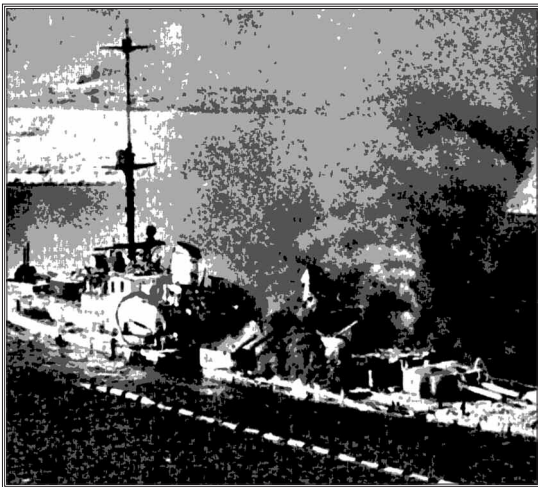
Germany and in Italy, often through the Todt Organization. This ranged from temporary forced labor in Italy to slavery in German camps. In 1943, there were already 300,000 Italian workers in Germany, whose conditions steadily worsened.

Most RSI forces had women’s units. They also had many “police” units where unprincipled sorts found a relatively secure refuge.

The RSI life was bleak. The troops had better food and more cigarettes than anybody else, but their morale went from bad to worse. Popular support was either scarce or insincere. They spent their free time together, as lone soldiers were easy targets. Partisan ambushes, snipers, and bombs also took their toll. Some RSI soldiers preferred active anti-partisan operations, where they had local superiority, rather than sitting in garrisons like lame ducks. Many did not survive the final “purification” in 1945.

## HIGH SEAS, LONELY SKIES

For Italian sailors and pilots, the war was no less futile than for the much abused ground troops. They also suffered from the poor planning and leadership that crippled the *Duce*’s dreams.



### NO BID FOR THE MED

In June 1940, Malta was defenseless and Alexandria vulnerable. The British had more battleships in the Mediterranean than the Italians, but they were divided between Egypt and Gibraltar. Yet no offensive operations were launched. The enemy could afford to lose a battleship; the Italians could not. So, the admirals were overcautious.

Most Italian naval battles were defensive affairs, as the navy escorted convoys that the British attacked. At times, the fleet went on the offensive, trying to intercept convoys to Malta,

and this achieved sizable successes in mid-1942. Most engagements, however, achieved little, because the captains and admirals fought through a thick “fog of war,” with little support from the air (p. 17). At Punta Stilo on July 9, 1940, Italian bombers mistakenly attacked their own fleet.

As clash after clash ended in defeat – or at best, a draw – the admirals grew even more cautious. They resorted to the fleet-in-being strategy – husbanding their ships in harbor as a potential threat. The British called their bluff, with aggressive maneuvers in the Mediterranean, but dwindling fuel reserves and the lack of air cover kept the Italians from sallying forth to meet them.

Instead, the British came to them. Carrier-launched Swordfish biplanes daringly torpedoed three battleships in Taranto on Nov. 11, 1940, crippling two for months and sinking the third.

On Dec. 18, 1941, Italian frogmen joined this game. Deployed with their “pigs” (p. 36) by the special submarine *Sciré*, they crippled two battleships, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant*, and sank a tanker at Alexandria. After an accident, one crew had to drag their torpedo on the bottom while battling malfunctioning rebreathers. The frogmen were caught and locked in the *Valiant*’s belly after they had set the charge, in hopes they’d disclose where it was. They did not, but survived the blast.

The Italians did not fare well at conventional submarine warfare, despite their large fleet. They lacked advanced technology and largely relied on the periscope, deployment tactics and communications were backward, and the confined Mediterranean is a poor base for submarine operations.



By far the most important naval war objective for the Italian navy was escorting the convoys to Africa. Despite Rommel's accusations, the navy delivered 88% of what was shipped. Unfortunately, sometimes there was little to send, especially fuel. The escorts and merchantmen carrying out this wearisome, thankless duty suffered heavy losses, but did their job.

## WAR IN THE SKIES

Mussolini seemed to think that the air force was a propaganda weapon. He ordered it to carry out missions that could not possibly be sustained as serious efforts, because of the technical and logistical limitations of air power. The air generals made him happy with token, demonstrative actions. Airplanes were sent to Belgium for a battle that was almost over and lost, and handfuls of bombers went to drop a few scattered bombs over targets barely within their range, such as Gibraltar, Athens, or Aden. These initiatives were almost useless in practice. Nevertheless, they cost men and aircraft.

Mussolini sent an air contingent to Russia, consisting mainly of fighters and recon planes; these were often grounded because of the overextended supply chain and weather. In winter, flights would be cancelled because the ground crews couldn't get the engines running. In spring, the airstrips were flooded.

The main ground-support missions were flown over the desert. The airplanes were gradually fitted with the appropriate filters. The pilots struggled to keep up with the increasing numbers and quality of the enemy aircraft. Ground-attack missions could be carried out with CR.42s and Italian-manned Stukas, while the best fighter was the MC.202. The aviators would see their share of unbearable dust storms and hasty retreats.

The longest-lasting air campaign was the battle over Malta. Odds and conditions seesawed a lot, as the Germans sent in reinforcements or withdrew them, and the British did the same by launching fighters from their carriers. Sometimes, a joint effort by the *Regia Aeronautica* and the *Luftwaffe* would neutralize Malta. Axis aircraft would then leave their Sicilian airports, giving the British a chance to repair Malta's airstrips and redeploy their assets on the embattled island.

The air force did a poor job of helping the naval war. Its reconnaissance efforts were short-ranged and ineffective. It initially tried to sink Allied vessels by dropping small bombs from

## PLANS FOR MALTA

Belatedly, the Italians came up with a plan for taking Malta, from which the British constantly raided Axis operations in the Mediterranean. Operation C3 was intended to remove that threat by July 1942.

The plan depended on the Germans offering their paratroops, but also lots of gliders and Ju-52s, fuel, and sizable air support. The airborne attack would have included the *Folgore* paratroops, the *La Spezia* airlanding division, the German paratroops, and two air force battalions, one of raiders and one of airborne engineers to repair the captured airstrips. The seaborne troops included a marine regiment and three special-assault naval battalions, three well-trained "assault" divisions, two infantry divisions, Blackshirts, and a special armored group.

One of the few operations that the Italians had planned carefully, rather than improvised, C3 eventually was scrapped so that Rommel could push east instead of giving up resources to the island campaign. It is debatable whether canceling it changed the war's course. Possibly, canceling C3 was a strategic mistake, but by mid-1942 the problems and threats that the supply lines faced had little to do with the island.

high altitude; the effect of these attacks on maneuvering warships usually was laughable. Italian pilots also provided air cover for convoys, in missions that were usually very boring – but could instantly become very deadly. Because of issues with flight endurance, sometimes a full 36-aircraft outfit had to fly in relays in order to keep just two fighters over a convoy at all hours.

Once the Italians figured out that the torpedo was a much better weapon for attacking ships from the air, the British began to suffer. Because the air force had but one *squadriglia* of torpedo bombers in 1940, small numbers of first-class crews flew long, lonesome missions to strike at warships. In 1942, the existing *squadriglie* were merged into the 132nd Independent Torpedo Bomber Group. Its decorated commander, Maj. Buscaglia, sank some 100,000 tons. To be effective, these attackers had to fly in low, slow, and close. This often resulted in high casualties.

The final campaign was against Allied bombers. By then, the Italians sometimes had good aircraft, but not enough training . . . nor sleep, nor food. Also, they were hopelessly outnumbered by Anglo-American fighters. RSI pilots also fought, and died, in this manner. By the time that the RSI took the air, the Allies were fitting the CIL-based air force with U.S. aircraft and committing these units in the Balkans.

# CAMPAIGN STYLES



An Italian campaign can add distinctive elements to the styles of play found on pp. W158-162.

## SACRIFICE

After their first combat experiences, most Italian soldiers realized they were expendable pawns (see p. W158). This campaign style is very appropriate, given that Italy suffered many defeats and losses. Soldiers will frequently experience brutish living conditions. PCs can lose their lives, or freedom, as abruptly as it happened to real soldiers. This can terminate the campaign, or turn it into a POW affair (see p. W162).

Any of the sample units (pp. 38-39) is suitable. Even being the best meant heavy losses.

## BITE THE BULLET

The gritty campaign style should still recognize that defeat will come in the long run. Yet soldiers might hold out that there's a chance of making today's fight matter. They may be striving to avoid a long, grim interlude as POWs, or to establish a democratic power bloc for a territory that will fall in postwar dispute, or simply to survive and become better soldiers. In this sort of setting, the GM shouldn't be too realistic as to the odds of being killed or wounded for Italian servicemen.

Preferably, the campaign unit shouldn't be mere infantry, as these divisions rarely got a chance to exhibit martial glory. If the PCs' division will be obliterated in a mid-war defeat, the GM should have a trick ready to redeploy their troops elsewhere, either by placing them among the handful of survivors or having them sent on a remote errand just before their unit marches into its last battle. (A unit's *next-to-last* battle is a great time to let PCs get wounded, for GMs who like to fudge the results to this extreme. This would place the soldiers in hospital when they hear about their comrades' demise . . .)

## COMING OF AGE

An intriguing arc might be made of the "coming of age" of Italian soldiers. Initially, they are young and confident, maybe true Fascists. The war wakes them up; they see its horrors, and the emptiness of Fascist promises. In 1943, they'll make their choice. They might decide that they have to follow Mussolini, no matter what. In this case, they'll serve with the RSI (pp. 44-45), and the campaign tone will become somber, and still might spend no time celebrating the Fascist myth.

Alternatively, the troopers might understand what is best for Italy, and make the other, no-less-difficult choice. They'll become partisans, or fight with the CIL (p. 44).

An ideal campaign unit might be the *Venezia* division (pp. 38-39), or the characters might be among the few *Folgore* veterans in Sardinia (p. 39). Otherwise, they might be forced to decide in a POW camp; this might be just as interesting.

## UNEXPECTED ELITE

A four-color campaign, with the PCs as elite soldiers, is an unexpected possibility. All the cinematic options on p. W160 should be used. The characters will be fighting on the morally questionable side; this could be tempered by applying the foreboding threads described on p. W:IC114 and/or by blending in the "coming of age" theme.

Paratroopers, *Guastatori*, or frogmen (p. 24) are suitable characters. If they are committed in the desert, the GM should be ready to have them all lightly wounded and sent back, lest they become POWs. Alternatively, determined (and lucky) men did adventurously escape after the destruction of their units.

If the soldiers are frogmen, the best survival chance is given by the *Oltterra* (p. 24).

## LOST TROUSERS

The Australians besieged in Tobruk (p. 9) could not afford to feed prisoners. An anecdote has it that once they captured a bunch of Italians, and simply sent them back, without weapons, boots . . . or trousers.

A play-for-laughs campaign is always possible. All the British propaganda about the buffoonish, cowardly, bumbling "Eye-Ties" would be true. Standard Disadvantages (p. 20) should be chosen, and Cowardice may be common. These troops think that all Australians are 2 meters tall. Officers are either fanatics or absent-minded peacocks wearing a flashy uniform but without a lick of military expertise. Combat should never be deadly; the British always show up in overwhelming numbers and offer surrender terms, then a cup of (usually wretched) tea to those who agree to them. If capture is avoided, it's generally a matter of sheer luck rather than any prowess.

Eventually, this may well become a light-hearted POW campaign. The ideal unit is the *Catanzaro* division (p. 38) or a rear-area outfit, often ordered to redeploy in the midst of nothing – and forgotten once it's sent there.

# REFERENCES



Unfortunately, many standard references, including some of those listed in previous **GURPS WWII** books, tend to overlook the Italian efforts in the war, particularly the desert campaign. The following will provide more information. Most are in English, though a handful of first-rate Italian-language references also is included.

## Books

Richard Collier, *The War in the Desert* (Time-Life, 1977). A basic overview of the desert campaign, useful for color, although a bit dated in its treatment of the Italians' role.

Jowett & Andrew, *The Italian Army 1940-1945* (Osprey, 2001, three volumes). These three booklets of the Osprey Men-at-Arms series don't just focus on uniforms; they provide basic info on the Italian Army, plenty of data as to equipment and ranks, and quick notes as to TO/Es and unit histories.

Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1981). An accurate political

biography of the man who shaped Italy's war, also useful for home-front settings.

Victor Madej, *Italian Army Order of Battle 1940-1944* (Valor, 1990). A very technical and crunchy presentation, but not easily found.

James J. Sadkovich, *The Italian Navy in World War II* (Greenwood, 1993). A thorough reassessment of the navy; while revisionist, this book is solidly documented and provides interesting insights.

G.A. Shepperd, *The Italian Campaign, 1943-45* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1968). A detailed military history.

Rex Trye, *Mussolini's Soldiers* (Airlife Publishing, 1995). Mainly dealing with Italian soldiers' gear, this also offers a lot of other details, including trivia, anecdotes, and information about conscription, training, customs, commendations, papers, etc.

Mario Montanari, *Le operazioni in Africa Settentrionale* (USSME, 1990, four volumes). A detailed military history of the desert war from the point of view of the Italian Army.

Ferruccio Botti, *La logistica dell'Esercito Italiano (1831-1981)* (USSME, 1995). Explores why Italy couldn't sustain a modern technological war.

Ceva and Curami, *La meccanizzazione dell'Esercito fino al 1943* (USSME, 1989, two volumes). Describes industrial-output decisions and their consequences for the armed forces.

## Films

*Open City* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945). This story of a resistance leader in Rome incorporates a good deal of real footage of the late war.

*Two Women* (Vittorio De Sica, 1961). A look at the grim realities of the Italian home front starring Sophia Loren in an Oscar-winning performance.

*A Walk in the Sun* (Lewis Milestone, 1946). Italy really is not much more than the backdrop, but this powerful and human story of a U.S. platoon in the Salerno landing and afterward would translate almost in pure form to a realistic campaign. Quite different from the era's usual war stories.

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