

FOCUSED FIREPOWER

A WWII Wargame for Heroes

The Italian Forces

The last Legions

The Italian Forces

“Luck was missing, not valour.”

The Italian Soldier of World War Two is a much maligned character, often seen as more a figure of fun than as any kind of actual fighter, he is portrayed as the hapless coward, the bumbling incompetent, or, in the case of the Officer class, the strutting peacock more interested in wine, women and song than in actually prosecuting the war.

While as with any stereotype there is often a kernel of truth to be found it is clear that the much maligned Italian soldier is more the victim of circumstance and propaganda than of any real failings on his part. On paper the Italian army was a large, reasonably well equipped force (Italy's post First World War rearmament programme had produced a modern army, unfortunately however it was almost obsolescent again by the outbreak of War), perhaps not quite the “8 Million bayonets” oft quoted by Mussolini but nonetheless a force to be reckoned with.

However, this force was neither prepared nor equipped for a modern fast moving war, her infantry training was outdated, her weapons and equipment mostly worn out or of poor quality, her military doctrine moribund (and, perhaps more important yet, it was still recuperating from military campaigns in East Africa, Spain and Albania).

The Italian army of World War Two was basically an infantry force, lacking in mechanisation and with very little of the wherewithal necessary to conduct a modern war. There was a clear attempt to pattern Italian strategy and tactics along German lines, ultimately however, this was to prove only partially successful. In essence the Italian army was still using a laborious and cumbersome First World War style chain of command, this factor combined with a preference for discipline over initiative and a lack of good communications resulted in any detailed plans simply taking far too long to implement, a far from satisfactory state of affairs when you're thinking calls for rapid attack.

Italy's doctrine of “Guerra di rapido corso”, or “Fast War” depended on the infantry to be able to achieve a breakthrough that would then allow the reserves to “overstep” them in a maneuver designed to reach the enemy rear. It was utterly dependant on a good road network as the troop transport available had poor off road capability thus it was far more vulnerable than the German “Blitzkrieg” to blocked roads and flanking attacks. When actually put into practice this doctrine quickly displayed its failings.

Ironically, as things transpired, Italy ended up fighting defensively for the most part and her Generals had little chance to exercise such high theory.

Ultimately however, Italy's armed forces, unlike those of Germany, had clearly failed to learn the lessons of the Spanish Civil War, they did not adapt to changing times, nor did they improve the armour or firepower of their forces and they would suffer greatly for this omission.

Combine this reality with the fact that there was little actual public support at home for Mussolini's dreams of a war of conquest and the specific circumstance that Italy's assets, already dated, would soon be overwhelmed by the technological advances of her enemies (Italy lacked an adequately sized industrial base of her own, research was hamstrung by lack of funding and imported raw materials lost to Germany or blockade) and we can see that she never had the vigour of her allies let alone her enemies, nor could she hope to compete with them as they replaced lost and outdated equipment with new, often revolutionary, weapons, sometimes at a phenomenal rate.

By placing herself in the Axis camp Italy was essentially dooming herself to failure, Mussolini would gamble arrogantly with the fate of his nation and she would suffer greatly for it, she would endure attack by the Allied forces, be used as one of the bloodiest battlefields of the war by both the Axis and the Allies, be ripped apart by politics and left in near penury when the war finally ended.

Ultimately it would prove to be a “Poor Man's Blitzkrieg.”

The Italian Forces

Italian Army Special Rules

Fractured Chain of Command

Italy at this time had been united for barely more than a century and, essentially, consisted of two different nations; the well educated, forward thinking and prosperous industrial North and the poor, backward and agrarian south. Considerable tension existed between the northerners and southerners. The northerners enjoyed better opportunities than those from the south and thus tended to look down on their southern counterparts.

The enlisted man would endure dreadful food (his rations have been described as the worst of all armies of the Second World war) and living conditions, little thought being given to medical attention, mail or leave while the officer class on the other hand would enjoy good food, tailored uniforms even brothels. Thus the line infantry had a poor opinion of and little trust in their officers and officers had little faith in their men. This could often lead to tragic consequences on the battlefield.

In gaming terms the entire ORBAT is subject to the Fractured Chain of Command special rule. Support units will be assumed to suffer this rule unless marked otherwise.

Professional Officers

Trust and good comradeship could and did develop between effective officers and their men, however, this usually only occurred amongst elite units or in units that had been at the front for some time.

In gaming terms the Fractured Chain of Command rule does not apply to Italian Hardened Veterans or Elite units, nor does it apply to Italian Artillerymen who were generally better trained and of a much higher calibre than the average infantryman. One Platoon (never Blackshirts) may upgrade from Regular to Hardened Veterans for +30pts. This rule applies to the unit only so long as their 'Professional Officer' remains alive.

Under German Command

It was frequently noted that, when fighting alongside their German allies, there was a clear improvement in the performance of the Italian soldier. Whilst it is easy to accept the German rationale (the Italians were simply in the presence of superior soldiers) it is far more likely that better weapons and support systems led to such improvements. Bluntly put when fighting alongside the Germans the Italian soldier felt he had a greater chance of survival and his performance was subsequently that much better for it.

If an Italian element is within a Command Range of a German CO, the Italian element does not suffer from the Fractured Chain of Command special rule.

Blackshirts

Mussolini hoped to both enforce his political will, shore up his troops morale and increase the size of his forces at a stroke by attaching his own "Blackshirt" (paramilitary fascist militia) troops to the regular infantry (this was resisted however by the monarchists in the army, who perceived Mussolini as a threat to their own power, and it was only in late 1942 that this integration was completed). It was proposed to attach a Blackshirt (or 'Camicie Nere, CCNN') Battalion to every army division (although, in fact, only half of the divisions were ever assigned one) and intended that they would serve as an independent mobile elite, an assault unit of 'Fascist' shock troops. This was perhaps an unrealistic aim. However, as with the Italian infantry, the bad reputation of the Blackshirts is unfair, their poor performance as soldiers (especially in the desert), should be attributed (for the most part) to a lack of adequate training, a lack of proper equipment (especially heavy weapons) and to a poor command structure (many officers were recruited purely for their loyalty to local party bosses not their military ability).

However, those units that did perform well were often (later in the war) formed into Veteran "M" Battalions, such units were considered to be the 'elite' of the militia forces and can certainly be considered good soldiers. These M Battalion troops gain the Hardened Veterans rule.

In gaming terms this means that the Italian Infantry Company may choose to purchase and add a Platoon of Black Shirt Militia to their forces (paying the appropriate cost in points). Additionally, the Blackshirt Platoon Command Squad acts as a secondary Company Commander for the purposes of Morale and Leadership Tests.

Italian Infantry Company

Infantry Company HQ

Company HQ:

Infantry Company HQ	Pts: 87	UMV: 3
Officer (CO)	Pistol	
Signals NCO (NCO)	Carbine and Field Radio	
7 Riflemen	Rifle	
Runner	Rifle	
Options:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - From 1941, in Russia, the Officer replaces their rifle with a Beretta SMG for free. - Company Runner "Portaordini" may be given a bicycle for +2pts. - May be motorized by adding light truck, paying the points cost listed in the the vehicle document. The Driver for this vehicle is a Rifleman removed from the Supply Platoon, paying the +1 point for the 'Driver' troop type. 		

Company Reconnaissance Section

Whilst the Italian 'sniper' was, in essence, the best available shot (issued with a marked Carcano Rifle that had been tested to ensure accuracy) and not a trained specialist such a trooper would often find himself promoted to the post of Scout Squad NCO. It is worth noting that whilst general consensus states that no telescopic sights were ever fitted to Italian rifles this writer has it on good authority that such equipment did exist and was in use.

Company Recon Section	Pts: 60	UMV: 1
Sniper NCO (NCO)	Sniper Rifle	
Scout Signaller	Rifle and Field Radio	
3 Scout Riflemen	Rifle and Hand Grenades	
Special Rules		
All Scouts (and Sniper) have the Recon Skill and are not affected by the Fractured Chain of Command special rule).		
Options:		
The Sniper NCO may upgrade his Carcano Rifle to German K98 Sniper Rifle for +5pts		

Company Supply Platoon

Desiring to make the combat divisions 'slim and agile' a central "Intendenza" at army level retained almost all of the few trucks available. The theory behind this was to resupply Corps, divisions and even Regiment from the rear forward. The "Guerra di rapido corso" was completely separated from existing Italian capabilities. While functioning adequately in static or slow moving actions, the supply organization was incapable of supporting swift movement. Even something as simple and ordinary as the relocation of a unit would sometimes disrupt the supply chain. As supply was far too centralized forward units were left to the mercy of the vagaries of the "Intendenza" and were often in left in a poor condition as a result.

Company Supply Dump - 3 Resource Points	Pts: 155	UMV: 3
10 Troopers	Carbines	
Options:		
- Up to 3 Resource Points may be added for + 35pts each. The high points cost reflects the terrible Italian supply situation.		

Horse and Limber Section - 3 per Platoon	Pts: 26	UMV: 1
Driver	Carbine, Manning a Horse & Trailer	
3 Troopers	Carbines	

Italian Infantry Company

Infantry Platoon - 3 per Company

Infantry Platoon HQ: It is easy to berate the ordinary Italian infantryman but we must remember that when given the opportunity he would often fight with both skill and courage, if led competently he would fight and die in conditions that would have forced the armies of the industrial democracies to cringe. The Italian soldier was let down not only by a lack of proper training and quality equipment but also of a decent cause to fight for, the dreams of empire of a mad dictator are no good reason for any man to lay down his life

Platoon tactics were built around the flexibility offered by the two-squad (binary) section where each section had a particular task to perform. Those two sections were divided into a fire squad and a maneuver squad, the first squad has two Breda LMG's it's additional men served as ammo carriers and secured the flanks; the second squad was armed with rifles and grenades and it's job was to press the assault home as the LMG squad fired in support.

Platoon HQ	Pts: 18	UMV: 2
Officer (CO)	Pistol and Hand Grenades	
Runner	Rifle and Hand Grenades	
Options:		
- May be motorized by adding light truck, paying the points cost listed in the the vehicle document. The Driver for this vehicle is a Rifleman removed from an Assault Squad, paying the +1 point for the 'Driver' troop type.		

Assault Squads: Practically every male Italian youth was conversant with rifle shooting as, under Mussolini's dictate, he had trained with the 5.5mm 'Balilla' (a weapon designed for firing BLANK cartridges) during childhood. However, this tactical advantage would be effectively cancelled out due to the nature of the weapons issued to the Italian rifleman. The main Italian rifle of WW2 was the Carcano Modello 1891, a bolt action rifle that actually predated WW1, it was both an outdated, underpowered (it's 6.5 mm cartridge being fairly weak) and slow firing weapon (however, it was certainly no worse than it's contemporaries).

Clearly, the Italian flair for innovation and excellence in design so exemplified by the Cei-Rigotti (one of the first automatic rifle designs ever) and the Beretta Model 1938A sub machine gun was never allowed to achieve it's true potential, it was inhibited by a combination of the narrow minded vision of the old generals, bureaucracy and the lack of an adequate industrial production base.

Assault Squad - 2 per Platoon	Pts: 49	UMV: 1
Sergeant (NCO)	Rifle and Hand Grenades	
10 Riflemen	Rifle and Hand Grenades	

Support Squads: The standard LMG for the Italian infantryman was the Breda Model 1930, this was a poor weapon with a slow rate of fire which jammed easily and, due to the sights being placed on the gun body, was also considerably inaccurate. About the only good thing that can be said about the Breda Model 1930 is that, if its ammunition ran out or in drastic situations, 6-round rifle clips could be fired instead. Such was the popularity of this weapon that it would often be discarded in favour of captured enemy weapons (the troops in Africa would get rid of their Breda 30's and replace them with a British Bren gun at any and every opportunity).

Support Squad - 2 per Platoon	Pts: 49	UMV: 1
Sergeant (NCO)	Rifle	
2x Gunner & Loader	Pistols, Manning Breda Model 1930 LMG	
5 Riflemen	Rifle	
Options:		
- May be motorized by adding light truck, paying the points cost listed in the the vehicle document. The Driver for this vehicle is a Rifleman removed from the squad, paying the +1 point for the 'Driver' troop type.		

Italian Infantry Support Company 1940-1943

Heavy Machine Gun Platoons - 2 per Company

HMG Platoon HQ: The Italian army of WW2 had a plethora of machine guns in use within a variety of roles (anti-aircraft, vehicle mounts etc. they even went so far as to strip some aircraft machine guns and convert them for ground use!) Many of these weapons were old and unreliable but they could still be found in use at the end of the war.

By far the most numerous machine gun to be found among the Italian infantry of WW2 was the Breda M1937 a tripod mounted, gas operated, air cooled medium machine gun which, despite its failings, was relatively reliable and well liked by its crews.

HMG Platoon HQ	Pts: 29	UMV: 2
Officer (CO)	Pistol	
2x NCO (NCO)	Rifles	

HMG Squad - 2 per Platoon	Pts: 104	
HMG Team - 2 Per Squad		UMV: 2
NCO (NCO)	Rifle	
Gunner & Loader	Pistols, Manning Fiat-Revelli Modello 35 HMG	
6 Riflemen	Rifle	
Options:		
- Fiat-Revelli Modello 35 may be upgraded to the Breda Model 1937 for 5pts.		

Light Mortar Platoons - 2 per Company

Mortar Platoon HQ: The unusual and complex design of this light mortar makes it perhaps one of the most peculiar weapons of the war, it could be carried folded on a man's back by means of a padded back board, this allowed the weapon to be unfolded whilst still attached to the carrier whereupon the firer could sit on the padded section to operate the mortar, appearing to all and sundry very much like a man upon a rowing machine.

The weapon was breech loaded but nonetheless could attain a rate of fire of 25rpm this, perhaps, was its only good point, the mortar bomb had poor fragmentation and the weapon itself was far too complicated for its intended role (consider the British 2" mortar for a good example of how it should have been done).

Mortar Platoon HQ	Pts: 39	UMV: 2
Officer (CO)	Pistol	
NCO (NCO)	Rifle	
Driver	Rifle, Manning Horse & Trailer	
3 Riflemen	Rifle	

Mortar Squad - 3 per Platoon	Pts: 59	
NCO (NCO)	Rifle	
Mortar Team - 3 Per Squad		UMV: 1
Gunner & Loader	Pistols, Manning Brixia 45mm Modello 35 Mortar	
2 Riflemen	Rifle	

Italian Infantry Support Company 1942

Additional Units for 1942 North African Forces

Anti-Tank Rifle Platoon - 1 per Company

AT Rifle Platoon HQ: For most forces in the war, the anti tank rifle soon became obsolete as enemy armour became thicker and harder to penetrate. The Italian army was more reluctant to discard their AT rifles since, in this case at least, they held a tactical advantage. The Italian issued Solothurn 20mm AT rifle was far superior to its counterparts in both range and penetrative power. The troopers within this unit were organized into 2-man weapons teams who were then attached to individual infantry squads to ensure they were effective on the front line rather than as dedicated anti-tank elements.

AT Rifle Platoon HQ*	Pts: 21	UMV: 2
Officer (CO)	Pistol	
NCO (NCO)	Rifle	

AT Rifle Squad - 3 per Platoon	Pts: 48	UMV: 1
3x Gunner & Loader	Pistols, Manning Solothurn Anti Tank Rifle	

*Each weapons team MUST be attached to squads within the Company and may not be fielded on their own.

Should 2 or more AT Rifle sections be taken, the Platoon HQ may also be attached to a squad, thus providing another Officer within the Company Structure.

CCNN 'Blackshirt' Platoon - 1 per Company

Blackshirt Platoon HQ: Mussolini's 'Bully Boys', the Blackshirts were loathed and feared by the regular soldiers.

All Blackshirt troopers are considered to be Fanatics and do NOT suffer from the Fractured Chain of Command Special Rule. If upgraded to M Battalion Veterans, troopers in the platoon also gain the Hardened Veterans Rule.

Blackshirt Platoon HQ	Pts: 28	UMV: 2
Officer (CO)	Pistol & Hand Grenades	
2 Riflemen	Rifle & Hand Grenades	

Blackshirt Rifle Assault Squad - 2 per Platoon	Pts: 71	UMV: 1
Sergeant (NCO)	Rifle & Hand Grenades	
10 Riflemen	Rifle & Hand Grenades	

Blackshirt Support Squad - 2 per Platoon	Pts: 53	UMV: 1
Sergeant (NCO)	Rifle & Hand Grenades	
Gunner & Loader	Pistols & Hand Grenades, Manning Breda 30 LMG	

Options:

- Infantry in Africa may have Molotov Cocktails for +1pts per model.
- From 1941 all NCOs and Officers have a Beretta SMG.
- From 1941 the player may elect to upgrade the entire platoon to "M" Battalion Veterans for +2pts per trooper.

Italian Paratroopers 1942 - 1943

"I wish to say that in all my life I have never encountered soldiers like those of the Folgore."

- General Hughes, 44th Infantry Division

It is a little known fact that the Italian army was actually one of the first advocates and users of airborne troops, the first real paratroop drop being carried out by Italy in November 1927 (and a training school for paratroopers was in place as early as 1938).

The Italian paratroops were an elite corps of men within the Italian army, extremely well trained (usually by combat veteran instructors), physically fit, thoroughly skilled in parachute operations and infantry tactics, only the best men passed the exacting standards required of those highly capable troops (there was a 60% drop out rate amongst recruits).

The Paratroops sought men with both initiative and aggressiveness, it is fair to say that they found them, they served with valour and distinction in every theatre of war in which they fought, often fighting with outright suicidal bravery.

Italian paratroops usually found themselves fighting as infantry and, whilst short on vehicles and artillery (the only guns available to them were those that could be airdropped, namely, 47mm anti-tank guns and 81mm mortars) they were usually given the best equipment available and, like the Bersaglieri, found themselves with a few more flamethrowers and Beretta SMG's than would normally be expected amongst their kit.

Much like their counterparts in the German Paratroops (whose respect and admiration they won whilst fighting together in Italy) it was their fate, late in the war, to be used as crack infantry (their role as airborne troops being, again like the Germans, generally redundant by this point in the war). Many new recruits to the Italian paratroops at this time lacked actual parachute training this, however, did not make them any less formidable.

Italian Paratroopers Special Rules

Fanatic

The Italian Paratrooper was an extremely aggressive and determined soldier, his courage and fighting spirit were absolutely extraordinary. Therefore all Italian Paratroops are covered by the 'Fanatic' Special Rule.

Well Drilled

The Italian Paratroops were particularly well trained and only men of the highest calibre would be accepted into their ranks. Italian Paratroops are considered to be Well Drilled.

Hardened Veterans

All Italian Paratroopers are Hardened Veterans

Additional Equipment:

The Bomba Controcarro "passaglia" was an improvised anti-tank grenade consisting of a 2-Kilogram soup tin filled with explosives and fitted with an impact fuse and handle. Paratroopers, often with great bravery, used this improvised device with some success against the weak points of tanks unfortunately, the user often was caught in the blast radius.

Counts as Anti-tank grenade but follows rules for Molotov Cocktails

Italian Paratroopers 1942 - 1943

Parachute Infantry Company HQ

Parachute Infantry Company HQ:

Parachute Company HQ	Pts: 137	UMV: 3
Major (CO)	Pistol, SMG and Hand Grenades	
Captain (CO)	Pistol, SMG and Hand Grenades	
Senior Sergeant (NCO)	Pistol, SMG and Hand Grenades	
8 Riflemen	Pistol, Carbine and Hand Grenades	
Options:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One Rifleman may upgraded to sniper, replacing their carbine for a rifle, for +5pts. - May take Bomba Controcarro "passaglia" Anti- tank grenade for an additional **pts - May be motorized by adding light truck, paying the points cost listed in the the vehicle document. The Driver for this vehicle is a Rifleman removed from the squad, paying the +1 point for the 'Driver' troop type. 		

Parachute Infantry Platoon - 3 per Company

Parachute Infantry Platoon HQ:

Parachute Platoon HQ	Pts: 66	UMV: 2
2 Lieutenants (CO)	Pistol, SMG and Hand Grenades	
2 Corporals (NCO)	Pistol, SMG and Hand Grenades	
Options:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May take Bomba Controcarro "passaglia" Anti- tank grenade for an additional **pts - May be motorized by adding light truck, paying the points cost listed in the the vehicle document. The Driver for this vehicle is a Rifleman removed from an infantry squad, paying the +1 point for the 'Driver' troop type. 		

Parachute Infantry Squads:

Parachute Infantry Squad - 2 per Platoon	Pts: 104	UMV: 1
Corporal (NCO)	Pistol, SMG and Hand Grenades	
2x Gunner & Loader	Pistol, Carbine, Manning Breda Model 1930 LMG	
3 Riflemen	Pistol, Carbine and Hand Grenades	
Options:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May take Bomba Controcarro "passaglia" Anti- tank grenade for an additional **pts - May be motorized by adding light truck, paying the points cost listed in the the vehicle document. The Driver for this vehicle is a Rifleman removed from the squad, paying the +1 point for the 'Driver' troop type. 		