

Tactical Structure in World War II

Italy

Leland Ness

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Colonial &

Foreign Units

Italian East Africa
Libya
Foreign Units

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Leland Ness

Italian East Africa

At the start of the war the largest concentration of Italian colonial troops, by far, was found in Italian East Africa (*Africa Orientale Italiana*, or *A.O.I.*). The *Regio Corpo Truppe Coloniali dell'Eritrea* had been officially formed in April 1902, although indigenous battalions of Eritreans had been formed fourteen years earlier. On 1 October 1888 the first increment of eight battalions (numbered I-VIII) were activated, although Battalions V-VIII were deactivated again before being reactivated in 1912-14. A second group of ten battalions (IX-XXVIII) was mobilized in 1913-18. All of these units were used on a rotating basis in the pacification of Libya during 1912-27. A third group (Battalions XIX-XXVIII) was formed in 1921-25.

In early 1935 the Eritrean colonial army was ordered mobilized, forming two division HQs (1st and 2nd), four brigade HQs (1st-4th), eight infantry group HQs (1st-8th), 27 field infantry battalions, 1 coastal infantry battalion, 1 machine gun battalion, four mountain artillery battalions (each 3 batteries of 65/17), and two motorized artillery battalions. For the invasion of Ethiopia the Eritrean colonial forces deployed its 1st Division (using the 1st Brigade as its maneuver base), the 2nd Division (2nd Brigade), and the independent 3rd Brigade. These elements had the following components:

1st Eritrean Brigade

- 1st Infantry Group (Battalions I, VI, XVI)
- 5th Infantry Group (Battalions VII, XV, XXIII)
- 6th Infantry Group (Battalions II, XII, XXIV)

2nd Eritrean Brigade

- 3rd Infantry Group (Battalions V, X, XXI)
- 4th Infantry Group (Battalions X, XVII, XII)
- 7th Infantry Group (Battalions IV, XIX, XXII)

3rd Eritrean Brigade

- Battalions III, XIV, XVI, XX, XXV, XXVI, XXVII, XXVIII

A smaller force that developed concurrently was the *Regio Corpo Truppe Coloniali della Somalia*, raised in Italian Somaliland. During 1913-15 the I through IV Battalions were raised, followed by the V and VI Battalions in 1926. These were complemented by a semi-regular mobile border guard formation designated the *dubat* after its white turbans ("bub-at"), formed in 1924. Two years later nine irregular border *bandas*, each of 40-50 men, were formed to supplement the dubat. Six more somali battalions (designated VII-XII) were raised in early 1935.

For the invasion of Ethiopia the Somali colonial forces contributed four regiment HQs, twelve infantry battalions (each of 3 rifle companies and 1 MG company), six dubat groups, seven batteries of camel artillery (each 4 guns), one motorized artillery

battalion (3 batteries of 77/28 guns), eight platoons of 70/14 infantry howitzers, and thirteen garrison companies. These elements gave a total of 3,000 Italian personnel, 17,097 Somalis, and 2,205 mules and camels.

With the conquest of Ethiopia a vast area on the horn of Africa was consolidated into the new AOI. On 15 November 1937 a decree established the single administrative entity of AOI and at the same time consolidated the colonial forces there into a single framework. The pre-existing Eritrean and Somali infantry battalions were reorganized and consolidated into the I through XXVIII Colonial Infantry Battalions. In addition to further recruiting in these two earlier colonies the Italians were able, by playing on new and ancient tribal and ethnic loyalties, to raise forces in the newly conquered Ethiopia as well.

The 1937 plan for the defense of AOI called for a total of 80 infantry battalions (including 60 colonial battalions), 6 colonial cavalry groups, 27 artillery battalions (including 17 colonial), 2 engineer battalions, 7 companies of colonial gunners, and 19 engineer companies (including 16 colonial). In August 1938 a new defense plan was issued that called for expansion of the force to 106 infantry battalions (80 colonial), 16 cavalry groups (15 colonial), 26 artillery battalions (22 colonial), 9 engineer battalions (all Italian), and 10 companies of gunners (5 colonial) for a total strength of 3,700 officers, 3,500 NCOs, and 30,000 Italian and 93,000 indigenous troops. These were to be organized into one "national" (Italian) division, 22 colonial brigades, and a number of separate units.

With the coming of war a third defense plan was issued in September 1939 that expanded the envisioned force yet again to 128 infantry battalions (including 93 colonial and 30 MVSN), 13 cavalry groups (12 colonial), 27 artillery battalions (23 colonial), 9 engineer battalions, 17 bande groups of irregulars and smaller units for a total of 5,000 officers, 5,300 NCOs, 42,000 Italian troops and 148,000 indigenous troops. The final structure, adopted in 1940, called for 148 battalions of infantry (93 colonial and 33 MVSN), 15 cavalry groups (14 colonial), 30 artillery battalions (23 colonial, 1 DICAT, 1 static), 10 companies of gunners (5 colonial), 10 engineer battalions and smaller units for a total strength of 75,000 Italians and 148,000 indigenous troops.

While the Italian units were grouped initially into a standard metropolitan division ("Granatieri di Savoia") and later an extemporized army/MVSN division ("Aosta", later "Africa"), the colonial units were formed for the most part into regiment-sized brigades. To meet the required expansion during 1936-39 the colonial army raised the XXIX through LXXXIX Colonial Infantry Battalions, followed in late 1939 by the XC through XCIV battalions. In early 1940 a final expansion, abandoning the defense plans, was carried out that resulted in the mobilization of ten additional battalions in Eritrea

Northern Zone		
Headquarters, Amara		
	3rd Colonial Brigade	11th, 23rd, 30th, 70th & 81st Colonial Bns; 5th Col Pack Art Bty
	4th Colonial Brigade	14th, 25th, 27th & 29th Colonial Bns
	19th Colonial Brigade	21st, 65th & 72nd Colonial Bns; 37th Col Pack Art Bty
	21st Colonial Brigade	77th, 78th, 79th & 80th Colonial Bns; 41st Col Pack Art Bty
	22nd Colonial Brigade	3rd, 46th, 67th, 68th, 69th & 86th Colonial Bns; 44th Col Pack Art Bty
	smaller units	14th Colonial Cavalry Group, one banda group, fifteen bandas
Headquarters, Eritrea		
	5th Colonial Brigade	97th, 105th & 106th Colonial Bns; 5th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	8th Colonial Brigade	101st & 102nd Colonial Bns; 8th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	12th Colonial Brigade	35th, 36th & 43rd Colonial Bns; 12th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	42nd Colonial Brigade	100th, 103rd, 110th & 111th Colonial Bns
	43rd Colonial Brigade	26th, 31st, 41st, 44th & 104th Colonial Bns; 43rd Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	smaller units	2nd, 3rd, 5th & 15th Colonial Cavalry Groups; 16th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
Southern Zone		
21st Colonial Division		
	9th Colonial Brigade	2nd, 17th, 59th & 60th Colonial Bns; 9th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	18th Colonial Brigade	16th, 61st & 182nd Colonial Bns; 18th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	25th Colonial Brigade	7th, 12th & 54th Colonial Bns; 25th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	smaller units	7th Colonial Cavalry Grp, two banda groups
22nd Colonial Division		
	1st Colonial Brigade	1st, 6th, 8th & 18th Colonial Bns; 1st Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	smaller units	one banda group
23rd Colonial Division		
	10th Colonial Brigade	28th, 55th, 181st & 187th Colonial Bns; 10th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	smaller units	one banda group
24th Colonial Division		
	85th Colonial Brigade	183rd, 184th, 185th & 186th Colonial Bns; 85th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	86th Colonial Brigade	188th, 189th & 190th Colonial Bns; 86th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
Eastern Zone		
Headquarters, Harar		
	2nd Colonial Brigade	4th, 5th, 9th & 10th Colonial Bns; 2nd Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	13th Colonial Brigade	20th, 39th & 48th Colonial Bns; 13th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	14th Colonial Brigade	37th, 64th & 83rd Colonial Bns; 14th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	15th Colonial Brigade	38th, 40th, 49th & 142nd Colonial Bns; 15th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn, one mortar co
	17th Colonial Brigade	42nd, 58th & 66th Colonial Bns; 234th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	70th Colonial Brigade	62nd, 140th & 143rd Colonial Bns; 70th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	smaller units	32nd & 107th Colonial Bns; 2nd & 3rd Colonial Coast Artillery Bns; 6th Colonial Cavalry Grp;
		17th Colonial Camel Pack Artillery Bn; one colonial static artillery bn (70/15),
		one colonial artillery bn (77/28), ten irregular bandas
Headquarters, Scioa		
	23rd Colonial Brigade	88th, 89th & 90th Colonial Bns
	smaller units	85th, 87th, 93rd, 151st, 152nd & 153rd Colonial Bns; 1st, 4th, 8th, 11th & 16th
		Colonial Cavalry Grps; four banda groups; twenty-six irregular bandas
Giuba Sector		
	20th Colonial Brigade	76th Colonial Bn; 20th Colonial Field Artillery Bn
	91st Colonial Brigade	75th, 194th & 196th Colonial Bns; 91st Col Pack Art Bty
	92nd Colonial Brigade	74th, 191st & 192nd Colonial Bns; 52nd Col Pack Art Bty
	smaller units	73rd, 94th, 193rd & 195th Colonial Bns; 4th & 5th Colonial Coastal Bns; two bandas
General Reserve		
	6th Colonial Brigad	19th, 24th, 31st & 34th Colonial Bns; 11th Col Pack Art Bty
	7th Colonial Brigade	13th, 15th & 45th Colonial Bns; 7th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	11th Colonial Brigade	51st, 52nd, 56th & 63rd Colonial Bns; 11th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	16th Colonial Brigade	22nd, 33rd, 47th & 53rd Colonial Bns; 6th Col Pack Art Bty
	41st Colonial Brigade	98th, 99th, 131st & 132nd Colonial Bns; 105th Colonial Pack Artillery Bn
	smaller units	50th, 57th & 141st Colonial Bns
East Africa Colonial Forces Order of Battle, July 1940		

(XCVII, C-CIII, CV-CVII, CX and CXI), four in Harar (CXL-CXLIII), three in Scioa (CLI-CLIII), ten in the southern zone (CLXXXI-CXC), six in Giuba (CXCI-CXCVI), and two for the general reserve (CXXXI and CXXXII).

A colonial infantry battalion consisted of a small cadre of Italian officers leading about 500 indigenous troops, and was organized as follows:

	Italian Off	Italian NCO	Italian OR	Indigenous OR
Battalion HQ	4	1	54	
Three Rifle Companies, each	3	0	0	118
Machine Gun Company	3	0	0	91

Each colonial rifle company consisted of a small HQ and two platoons, each of three "baluks" or squads. Each squad was provided with a light machine gun, for a total of six per company. Transport for such a company consisted of four riding mules and nine pack mules. The machine gun company had six medium MGs and was provided with four riding mules and fifteen pack.

Clearly the colonial infantry battalion, with its limited transport, was not designed for heavy or prolonged combat. Nor did the battalion have any indirect fire support assets, lacking even the little 45mm mortars common in the metropolitan infantry.

A total of 110 of the colonial infantry battalions were grouped into 32 colonial brigades. In addition to these line battalions the brigades usually, but not always, included a modest fire support element. Organic to these brigades were a total of seven batteries and 23 three-battery battalions of 65/17 pack howitzers, and one battalion of 77/28 horse-drawn field guns. The 65/17 howitzer, used as a regimental support weapon in the metropolitan army, had limited range and lethality. However, its portability and high-angle plunging fire proved very useful in mountainous Ethiopia much to the cost of the British, whose flat-trajectory 18pdr and 18/25 pdr weapons proved of limited value. Three brigades also included an 81mm mortar company.

In early 1940 the Southern Zone reorganized its forces into four colonial divisions (21st-24th). Only one of these, however, could be considered a division in any real sense of the word, consisting of three brigades (10 infantry and 3 artillery battalions) and a divisional cavalry group. The other three divisions shared only four brigades (15 infantry and 4 artillery battalions) and small irregular units, although each was also provided with a metropolitan static artillery battalion, presumably armed with 77/28 guns.

In the fall of 1940 two brigade HQs and three division HQs were formed by HQ Eritrea after having been reinforced by GHQ reserve elements. These new units were the 1st Colonial Division (5th and 44th Brigades), 2nd Colonial Division (8th and 16th

Brigades) and the 4th Colonial Division (12th and 41st Brigades). Not included in the divisions were the zone's 2nd, 4th, 6th, 11th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd Brigades.

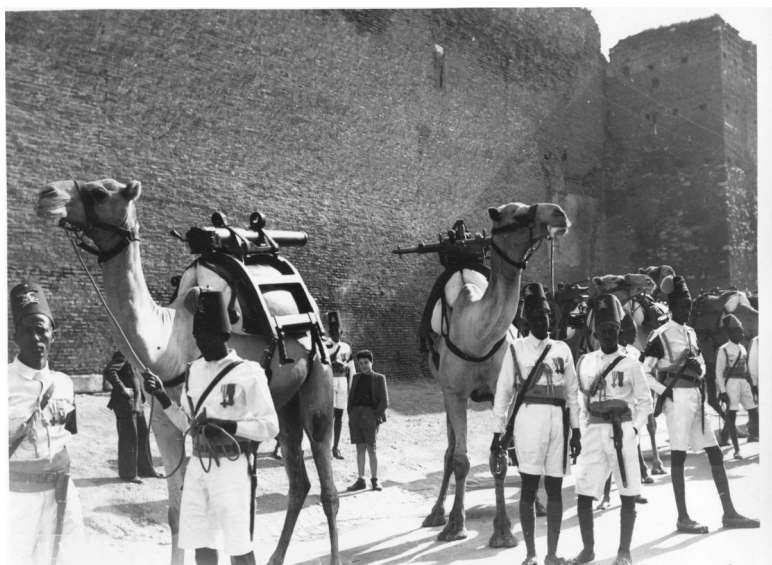
Irregular infantry forces, tribally based, were raised in units called *banda*, of no fixed size, but usually approximating a company or battalion.

Colonial artillery not included in the brigades was limited to one pack artillery battalion, one camel pack artillery battalion, two static battalions (one with old 70/15 howitzers, one with 77/28 guns), and one field artillery battalion (with 77/28 field guns). Also present in AOI were metropolitan artillery units, but these were primarily also equipped with elderly light weapons. In fact, of the 771 field artillery pieces in AOI in July 1940, 312 were 65/17 pack howitzers and 216 were obsolete 77/28 field guns, while another 92 were the even older 70/15 pack howitzer. The metropolitan artillery provided one battalion of 100/17 howitzers, five static 77/28 battalions (I, II, III, CXXI and CXXII), one coastal 77/28 battalion (I), six motorised 77/28 battalions (CI-CVI), one mixed battalion of 77/28 and 105/28, and one battalion of 105/28 guns. The only medium artillery unit present was a single 4-gun battery of 149/13 howitzers.

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The unusual camel pack artillery in East Africa

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Another type of artillery unit was the company of gunners in colonial and mixed (*cp. cannonieri mista*) configurations. These do not appear to have had any fixed organization, but at least one is known to have consisted of two static batteries of 77/28 guns; while another was made up of two motorised batteries, one of 77/28 and the other of 105/28. The bulk of these "companies" seem to have been reorganized into artillery battalions in mid-1940. By July 1940 there remained three mixed gunner companies (1, 2 and 3) and two colonial gunner companies (I and 4).

Complementing the colonial infantry and its artillery support was a smaller colonial cavalry branch. Prior to the conquest of Ethiopia only small number of cavalry units had been formed in East Africa, but in July/August 1936 a new organizational format, *il gruppo squadroni di cavalleria coloniale*, was authorized. Fifteen such groups were ordered raised in five ethnic recruiting areas (Eritrea, Amhara, Scioa, Harar and Galla-Sidamo), and a 16th group was authorized in 1938. These cavalry groups were as follows:

- I Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Scioa), raised May 1935
- II Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Eritrea), raised August 1936
- III Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Amhara), (date unknown)
- IV Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Scioa), raised March 1938
- V Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Amhara), (date unknown)
- VI Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Harar), raised early 1937
- VII Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Galla-Sidamo), (date unknown)
- VIII Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Scioa), (date unknown)
- IX Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Eritrea), raised August 1936
- X Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Amhara), raised July 1938
- XI Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Scioa), raised October 1938
- XII Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Harar), raised August 1938
- XIII Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Scioa), raised September 1938
- XIV Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Amhara), (date unknown)
- XV Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Eritrea), raised August 1938
- XVI Gr. Squadr. Cav. Col. (Scioa), raised September 1938

Such a cavalry group consisted of two or three mounted squadrons and a horse-drawn gun platoon. No further information, unfortunately, is available.

Supplementing these regular colonial cavalry groups were eight irregular units designated *bande a cavallo*, each of 200-300 men, "Bole", "Uolamo", "Amhara", "Auase", "Sciano", "Burie", "Deduo" and "Gallabi". Each banda was led by a single

Italian officer, although command was exercised through the traditional tribal leaders. The bulk of these units were grouped together into the *Gruppo bande a cavallo*, commanded by Captain Guillet, to form a force of 800 horse cavalrymen, 200 camel-mounted soldiers, 400 foot soldiers, an anti-tank platoon and trains for a total of 1,700 men.

The performance of the colonial forces in the 1941 campaign was uneven. Some (apparently particularly the Eritreans) fought very well, while other units tended to melt away. None of the regular colonial forces defected to the invading British or the returning Emperor Haile Selassie, most soldiers simply quitting the battlefield to return home. The tribally-based bandas, however, did switch sides, sometimes more than once, depending on shifting ethnic allegiances.

Libya

The other Italian colonial possession was Libya. The first Libyan troops had been raised in 1911 known as a *banda* of *Savari* (arabic for cavalry). By the end of 1912 no fewer than seven bandas had been raised, each of 100-200 men. At the same time slightly smaller infantry (*I battaglione libico*) and artillery (*I batteria libica* with 70mm mod.1902 howitzers) components were also formed. By 1913 there were no fewer than six Libyan (infantry) battalions, three savari squadrons, eight irregular mounted bandas, and other smaller units formed from Libyans.

On 22 January 1914 this new expanded force was officially titled the *Regio Corpo Truppe Coloniale per la Tripolitania e per la Cirenaica*. Shortly thereafter the mounted arm was reorganized to distinguish between three groups: the *savari* units (organized and equipped like European units and employed as cavalry), the *spahi* units (equipped and outfitted in accordance with local custom and normally employed for internal security), and the *sahariana* units (mounted on camels). Only limited expansion of the force took place, in part because of the small Libyan population, so that by December 1931 the Libyan colonial force had an authorized strength of only six infantry battalions, seven sahariana groups, one cavalry command (2 savari squadrons and 3 spahi groups), one camel artillery group (3 batteries), 2 gunner companies, two sahariana artillery platoons, three signal companies, and an engineer company.

In September 1935 the former Cirenaica and Tripolitania colonial corps were consolidated into the new *Regio Corpo Truppe della Libia*, renamed the *Regio Corpo Truppe libiche* in January 1939, at the same time Libyans were accorded nominal Italian citizenship. The unified Libyan colonial force was authorized an expansion to five infantry regiments, although only three regiments were raised initially: the 1st *Reggimento di fanteria coloniale* (III and V Libyan Battalions), the 2nd Regiment (II and IV Libyan Battalions), and the 4th Regiment (VIII and IX Libyan Battalions). Each regiment also included a HQ company, a machine gun company and a 65/17 gun

	Mobilization Center	Mobilized Units	Non-Mobilized Units
Eastern Libya	Agedabia	IX ("Agedabia") Inf Bn	none
	Barce	none	XII ("Barce") Inf Bn Mixed Complementary Bn
	Bengasi	none	none
	Derna	18 th & 19 th Static MG Cos	XI ("Derna") Inf Bn 14 th & 15 th Static MG Cos 22 nd Bty/VII Art Tn (77/28) 7 th AA Bty XXXI Coastal Bn
	Tobruk	VIII ("Bardia") Inf Bn 1 st & 2 nd Mot MG Cos 16 th & 17 th Static MG Cos VII Art Bn (77/28)(-)(HQ, 20 th & 21 st Bty)	none
	2 nd Infantry Depot	HQ, 1 st & 2 nd Infantry Regts 1 st Division AT Co	1 st Division HQ units
	2 nd Artillery Depot	VI Art Bn (77/28)(-)(HQ, 17 th & 18 th Bty) 6 th AA Bty 1 st Division Motor Trans Gp	1 st Division Artillery HQ 19 th Bty/VI Art Bn (77/28) various motor transport units
	2 nd Engineer Depot	II Engineer Bn	
Western Libya	Garian	V ("Ghibla") Inf Bn 13 th Static MG Co	XVIII ("Garian") Inf Bn HQ & one sqn/IV Spahi Gp one sqn/III Spahi Gp II Mixed Complementary Bn (-1 co)
	Giado & Nalut	III ("Nalut") Inf Bn 5 th , 6 th & 7 th Static MG Cos 7 th Art Bty (65/17)	XV ("Jefren") Inf Bn 3 rd Inf Co/II Mixed Compl Bn
	Homs	II ("Orfella") Inf Bn	XVII ("Tarhuna") Inf Bn IV ("Mergheb") Inf Bn one sqn/IV Spahi Gp III Mixed Complementary Bn (-1 co)
	Misurata	none	XIII ("Zemzem") Inf Bn X ("Nufilia") Inf Bn one sqn/III Spahi Gp
	Sirte	VII ("Beurat") Inf Bn 9 th Static MG Co	none
	Sliten	none	XIX ("Soffegin") Inf Bn 3 rd Inf Co/III Mixed Compl Bn
	Sorman	3 rd Static MG Co	XIV ("Soman") Inf Bn HQ & one sqn/III Spahi Gp one sqn/IV Spahi Gp
	Suk el Giuma	VI ("Gefara") Inf Bn	XVI ("Azizia") Inf Bn 10 th , 11 th & 12 th Static MG Cos 1 Mixed Complementary Bn
	Zuara	I ("Zuara") Inf Bn HQ & 8 th Bty/IV Art Bn (65/17) 1 st , 2 nd , 4 th & 8 th Static MG Cos 3 rd Mot MG Co	9 th Bty/IV Art Bn (65/17) XXX Coastal Bn
	1 st Infantry Depot	HQ, 3 rd & 4 th Inf Regts 2 nd Division AT Co	2 nd Division HQ units
	Cavalry Depot	I Spahi Gp II Savari Gp	none
	1 st Artillery Depot	HQ, 2 nd Division Artillery I Art Bn (77/28)(-)(HQ, 1 st & 2 nd Bty) II Art Bn (77/28)(-)(HQ, 4 th & 5 th Bty) 1 st AA Bty 2 nd Division Motor Trans Gp	3 rd Bty/I Art Bn (77/28) 6 th Bty/II Art Bn (77/28) 2 nd AA Bty various motor transport units
	1 st Engineer Depot	I Engineer Bn	

Libyan Mobilization Plan, March 1940

platoon, while the 4th Regiment was further supported by a 65/17 pack battalion of three batteries.

For the invasion of Ethiopia the Libyan colonial corps contributed a *Divisione indigena Libia*, consisting of three regiments each of two battalions with a battalion of 65/17 howitzers, for a total force of 250 officers, 150 NCOs and 1,200 Italian other ranks, and 8,500 Libyan other ranks, along with 2,000 mules, 2,000 camels and 48 motor vehicles. The division was disbanded on its return to Libya following the conquest of Ethiopia.

In mid-1939, as war approached, Italy decided to reinforce its Libyan colony. On 15 August SMRE ordered the mobilization of eight Libyan infantry battalions (I - III and V - IX), I Spahi Group, the Savari Group, the 8th Motorized Machine Gun Squadron, the Parachute Battalion¹, nine static machine gun companies (numbers 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 16 and 18), two motorized machine gun companies (1st and 2nd), two engineer battalions (1st and 2nd), four 77/28 field gun battalions (1st, 2nd, 6th and 7th) and a 65/17 howitzer battalion (4th).

The major elements, of course, were the infantry battalions, and creation of these continued, comprising the XIV, XVI and XVIII Battalions on 29 August; the XV Battalion on 2 September, and the XI Battalion on 25 September, although they were not mobilized at the time. As the number of infantry battalions increased it became clear that an intermediate level of command between North Africa HQ and the battalions would be needed and in December SMRE ordered the mobilization of the 1st to 4th regimental HQs.

On 20 February 1940 North Africa Command issued its organization order for two new Libyan divisions. Each Libyan division was to consist of:

- 2 infantry regiments (each 3 battalions)
- 1 anti-tank company (47/32)
- 2 artillery battalions (77/28)(each 3 batteries)
- 2 light AA batteries (20mm)
- 1 mixed engineer/signal battalion

The light AA batteries (numbered 1, 2, 6 and 7) were mobilized in April 1940, and the division HQs, along with the X and XIII Infantry Battalions, on 23 May. Divisional service units were mobilized shortly thereafter.

An infantry battalion had three rifle companies, each of three rifle platoons. A rifle platoon consisted of four “baluks”, each of eleven Libyans with rifles and a light machine gun. In addition, the company had three machine gun baluks, each of eleven

1 The Libyan Parachute Battalion is discussed separately in the section on airborne troops.

Libyans with an elderly Schwarzlose medium MG. During the year each infantry battalion was reinforced by a two-gun 47mm platoon that was added to the HQ company. Thus, by December 1940 each battalion consisted of a headquarters company (with a 2-gun AT platoon) and three rifle companies (each with three rifle platoons and a machine gun platoon). Each rifle company was armed with a total of 18 pistols, 72 Model 91 rifles, 12 light machine guns and three medium machine guns. The battalion was provided with a small number of motor vehicles for capable only of limited logistical support. For active operations each battalion received sixteen trucks from the divisional motor transport group to supplement the twelve organic to the battalion.

Battalions not intended for use in the divisions used pack animals in lieu of motor transport. A rifle company in such a unit was provided with a total of five riding mules (for the Whites and the Libyan company sergeant major), fourteen pack mules and six camels. One mule was allocated to each rifle platoon to carry the light machine guns and ammunition, three to the MG platoon for similar duties, and the remaining eight mules carried rifle and machine gun ammunition. Three camels carried ammunition, two water, and one officers' baggage. The company carried a total of 15,000 rounds of ammunition for the rifles, 14,700 for the light machine guns and 8,000 for the medium machine guns. The infantry regiment (*raggruppamento di fanteria libica*) had no combat support elements, and thus lacked the mortars and infantry guns found in the metropolitan units.

The 1st Libyan Division (initially comprising the 1st and 2nd Regiment HQs; VIII, IX, XI, XII, and XIII Infantry Battalions, VI and VII Field Artillery Battalions, 6th and 7th Light AA Batteries, divisional AT company, engineer battalion and division services) was deployed to the east, facing Egypt. The 2nd Libyan Division (the 3rd and 4th Regiment HQs; II, VI, VII, XIV, XV and XVI Infantry Battalions; the I and II Field Artillery Battalions; 1st and 2nd Light AA Batteries, divisional AT company, engineer battalion and division services) was deployed in the west, facing Tunisia.

By mid-1940 the number of battalions raised exceeded the establishment of the two divisions, so on 10 July SMRE ordered the mobilization of the *Raggruppamento Maletti*, consisting of the 1st Group (5 Libyan infantry battalions), 2nd Group (2 battalions), a sahariano battalion, the 65/17 howitzer battalion, a 75/27 gun battalion, two 47mm companies, and an 81mm mortar company.

By the autumn of 1940 the possibility of raising two more Libyan divisions was being discussed. It was felt that while the activation of a third division could be accomplished in a fairly straightforward manner using existing non-divisional troops, the formation of a fourth division, largely by conscripting additional personnel, would

	Officers	NCOs	Italian Other Ranks	Libyan Other Ranks		Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	20mm AA Guns	47/32 Inf/AT Guns	77/28 Field Guns		Motorcycles	Cars	Light Trucks	Heavy Trucks	Water Vehicles
Division Headquarters	20	15	16	125		0	0	0	0	0		4	0	0	20	0
Two Infantry Regiment HQs, each	3	1	1	26		0	0	0	0	0		2	1	0	2	0
Six Infantry Battalions, each	19	5	6	662		36	9	0	2	0		1	1	0	12	0
Division Artillery HQ	4	4	1	48		0	0	0	0	0		2	0	0	0	0
Two Field Artillery Battalions, each	19	26	59	457		0	6	0	0	12		5	4	2	71	3
Two Anti-Air Batteries, each	4	3	3	95		0	0	6	0	0		5	0	0	15	0
Anti-Tank Company	4	1	3	79		0	0	0	6	0		1	0	1	7	0
Engineer Battalion	17	37	207	337		0	0	0	0	0		6	2	79	0	0
Motor Transport Group	9	16	68	187		0	0	0	0	0		14	13	17	149	11
Baggage Group	4	2	0	258		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0
Medical Section	9	6	10	122		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0
Supply Section	4	3	13	69		0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0
Total	237	174	460	6353		216	66	12	18	24		57	31	101	404	17

Libyan Division, 1940

be somewhat more troublesome. In either case additional funds and equipment would be needed from Italy, and neither were forthcoming before the battle was joined.

In the late autumn of 1940 the 2nd Libyan Division and the Maletti Group were brought east in preparation for the advance into Egypt, and two more infantry battalions (XVII and XIX) mobilized.

The two Libyan divisions advanced into Egypt with the Maletti group immediately behind. Each of the Libyan battalions was apparently reinforced by an attached two-gun 20mm Solothurn AT rifle platoon, but this was clearly insufficient. All three formations were completely destroyed by the initial British counterattack in January-February 1941.

Only one of the original Libyan infantry battalions, the XVIII, on detached duty in the rear, survived the initial British onslaught, but it appears to have been destroyed in mid-1941.

With the formation of the original battalions into the two divisions the Italians began the process of replacing them in their normal more sedentary duties by raising a new group of infantry battalions. Initially these were formed into coastal battalions, but some appear to have been converted to field formations in late 1940 or early 1941. These were followed by a second series of field infantry battalions.

Only two coastal battalions, the XXX and XXXI, seem to have been raised. These units were apparently configured as a smaller version of the field battalions. Essentially a static formation the coastal battalion had a 44-man HQ (with no heavy weapons and five pack animals) and three 151-man rifle companies each of two rifle platoons and a machine gun platoon.

Orders for mobilization of the second series of field infantry battalions began with a 9 January 1940 order raising the XXXVI Battalion for eastern Libya, followed by the XXXV Battalion on 18 January for Western Libya, the

XXXIV Battalion on 26 December, the XXXVII Battalion for the south on 9 February 1941, and the XXXII Battalion about a month later. These appear to have followed a slightly different organization from the first group of battalions. Those intended for use in a never-fulfilled third division saw their overall strength remain the same, but one of the baluks in each rifle platoon was reduced in strength, its light MG lost, converted to the "patrol and sniper" role, and the manpower thus saved used to form a three-gun machine gun platoon in the battalion headquarters company. It was thus a somewhat more defensively-oriented organization.

	Italian Officers	Italian NCOs	Italian other ranks	Libyans	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	47mm Guns	Riding Animals	Pack Animals	Motorcycles	Light Trucks	Trucks
Divisional Infantry Battalion												
Battalion HQ Platoon	2	2	1	54	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	9
Machine Gun Platoon												
Platoon HQ	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three Baluks, each	0	0	0	11	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anti-Tank Platoon												
Platoon HQ	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Two Baluks, each	0	0	0	9	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Companies, each												
Company HQ												
Command Baluk	1	1	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Three MG Baluks, each	0	0	0	11	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Platoons, each												
Platoon HQ	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Baluks, each	0	0	0	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Patrol & Sniper Group	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Divisional Infantry Battalion												
Battalion HQ Platoon	1	2	2	47	0	0	0	6	4	0	0	0
Machine Gun Platoon												
Platoon HQ	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Three Baluks, each	0	0	0	11	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pack Baluk	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0
Anti-Tank Platoon												
Platoon HQ	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Two Baluks, each	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Pack Baluk	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	0
Three Rifle Companies, each												
Company HQ												
Command Baluk	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Three MG Baluks, each	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pack Baluk	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0
Three Rifle Platoons, each												
Platoon HQ	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Baluks, each	0	0	0	12	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Patrol & Sniper Baluk	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Libyan Infantry Battalions, 1941-42

The non-divisional infantry battalions were made slightly more capable by the assignment of a pack mule to each rifle baluk for the light MG and its ammunition.

Also mobilized with the initial group on 15 August 1939 were nine static machine gun

	Italian Officers	Italian NCOs	Italian other ranks	Libyans	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	Draft Mules	Carts	Armored Cars	Motorcycles	Light Trucks	Heavy Trucks
Motorized Machine Gun Company												
Company Headquarters												
Command Baluk	1	1	0	15	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Signal Section	0	1	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Transportation Section	0	1	1	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	5
Armored Car Section	0	1	4	13	0	0	0	0	4	1	0	0
Three MG Platoons, each												
Platoon HQ	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three MG Baluks, each	0	0	0	10	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Static/Garrison Machine Gun Company												
Company Headquarters									0			
Command Baluk	1	1	0	4	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Three Rifle Baluks, each	0	0	0	16	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Four MG Platoons, each												
Platoon HQ	1	0	*12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Three MG Baluks	0	0	*7	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

*in almost all cases, actually Libyans

Libyan Machine Gun Companies

border, assuming the role held by GaF static machine gun companies on Italy's borders, while numbers 14, 15, 18 and 19 served in the garrison of Giarabub in the south facing Egypt, and Company 16 seems to have been assigned to Kufra even further south. Each of these was made up of a headquarters and four 3-gun platoons. Having only a single mule with a cart for transport they were entirely immobile. The units in the east were destroyed by the Australian attack on Giarabub on 10 February, but the rest seem to have survived into late 1941 or early 1942.

Two motorized machine gun companies² (1st and 2nd) were also raised under the initial mobilization order, but apparently the 1st Company was dissolved or converted to a static company, for by December 1940 it no longer existed. The 2nd Motorized Machine Gun Company as still in service at Giarabub, and a 3rd was supporting the mounted battlegroup, this probably representing a reorganization of the former 8th Motorized MG Squadron. Belying its name, the motorized MG company was actually equipped primarily with light machine guns and was provided with fifteen light and medium trucks for transport. It did, however, include four armored cars, presumably the old Model 611 versions, and three RF.2 radios.

² Also designated as squadrons at various times.

By October 1940 the Libyan cavalry forces had been reorganized into four "groups" each of three squadrons, although nominally they were to have four squadrons apiece. The four groups (II Savari and I, III and IV Spahis) were nominally subordinated to a mounted battlegroup HQ, the *Commando raggrupamento cavalleria libica* that had been mobilized on 31 May 1940, but in fact were spread out along the Tunisian border. The two types, Savari and Spahi, were organizationally identical, the difference being that the Savari units were provided with Army horses, while the Spahis were recruited from Libyans who could provide their own mounts, presumably with subsidies paid.



Spahis at Homs, Libya, 1938

The cavalry were armed solely with rifles and light and medium machine guns, having no HE-throwing or anti-tank weapons. Each mounted squadron was made up of three rifle platoons (each three buluks) and a machine gun platoon. The group HQ included

	Italian Officers	Italian NCOs	Italian Other Ranks	Libyans	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	Riding Animals	Pack Animals	Motorcycles	Trucks
Group Headquarters Detachment										
Headquarters Section	5	2	2	0	0	0	12	0	0	0
HQ Buluk	0	0	0	14	0	0	13	1	0	0
Radio Section	0	1	5	6	0	0	12	10	0	0
Dispatch Rider Section	0	0	0	14	0	0	5	1	9	0
Transportation Section	0	1	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	10
Four Mounted Squadrons, each										
Squadron HQ										
HQ	1	1	2	8	0	0	4	7	0	1
Service Buluk	0	0	0	6	0	0	5	1	0	0
Three Rifle Platoons, each										
Platoon HQ	1	0	0	3	0	0	5	0	0	0
Three Rifle Buluks, each	0	0	0	11	1	0	11	1	0	0
Machine Gun Platoon										
Platoon HQ	1	0	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	0
Three MG Buluks, each	0	0	0	8	0	1	8	3	0	0

Spahi or Savari Squadron Group

mounted troops. There was no fixed organization for a Meharist squadron but the usually consisted of a headquarters and three or four troops (platoons) with a total

a radio section with six teams, five with transceivers and one with a receiver. Also included were a dispatch rider section with horses and motorcycles and a transportation section with all ten of the group's trucks. The sole support unit of the mounted battlegroup was a single motorized machine gun company.³ The mounted units seem to have disappeared in late 1941 and early 1942.

Also formed were two irregular "meharist" groups of camel-

³ The 3rd Motorized MG Company was almost certainly a redesignation of the 8th Motorized MG Squadron mobilized in the initial wave of 15 August 1939. It is not clear whether it reorganized along infantry lines or retained its earlier cavalry organization. That cavalry TO&E called for a 51man headquarters, three 27-man MG platoons (each with two medium MGs) and an 18-man armored car platoon with a motorcycle and four armored cars.

strength of 300-350 men. Each troop was divided into sections, commanded by Libyan NCOs. A camel was provided for each man, with about 20% extra for pack loads of weapons and ammunition, plus about 70 more pack camels for water, supplies, etc. The reason for the large squadron size was the need to rest the camels (and men) on a frequent basis, and the consequent need for units to rotate in and out of action. In 1940 a machine gun section was assigned to each squadron, this consisting of 43 men and 51 camels (including two for weapons and six for ammunition) armed with two Schwartzlose machine guns and 14,000 rounds of ammunition. In 1941-42 the squadrons were further reinforced with an additional two sections each.

Five field artillery battalions were also mobilized from Libyan personnel. Four (I, II, VI and VII) were motorized formations armed with old 77/28 field guns. Two were allocated to each Libyan division. No information has survived about these except that shown in the staff table for those divisions (see earlier). The other battalion (IV) was a pack unit with 65/17 pack howitzers.

The pack battalion appears to have been designed to be distributed as batteries to isolated garrisons. Each battery had enough transport to be mobile, and the motorized supply section was well-equipped, at least by colonial Italian standards, but the entire group had only two radios, both of them R2 receivers.

	Italian Officers	Italian NCOs	Italian Other Ranks	Libyans	Machine Guns	65/17 Pieces	Horses	Mules	Pack Mules	Bicycles	Motorcycles	Trucks
Group Headquarters	5	5	2	58	0	0	5	5	6	2	0	2
Three Batteries, each												
Battery HQ	1	2	3	42	0	0	2	3	11	2	0	0
Firing Battery	3	0	1	87	2	4	3	2	40	0	0	0
Ammunition Section	0	0	0	34	0	0	0	3	20	0	0	0
Baggage Trains	0	1	1	14	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Supply Section												
Section HQ	3	2	3	31	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	5
Three Detachments, each	0	1	2	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9

Libyan Pack Howitzer Battalion

Somewhat more longer-lived were the lighter Libyan forces. The most notable were the "sahariana" units. These had been reorganized under the 1929 defense plan into seven groups, with the VI and VII Groups being activated in 1930. Under the 1935 plan two motorised sahariana companies were added. Under the 1937 plan the camel-mounted sahariana units were phased out while the semi-motorised elements were expanded to a four-company battalion. Each of the new sahariana companies, starting in 1934, consisted of a motorised platoon, a camel platoon, and a flight platoon with a small liaison aircraft and ground crew.

In 1939 the sahariana companies were reorganized into entirely motorised formations. The new organization called for a headquarters platoon with 22 Italians (including 2 officers) and 5 Libyans, two *autosahariana* platoons, a machine gun platoon and a

flight platoon. Each of the motorised platoons had an Italian officer, an Italian NCO, five Italian other ranks and 25 Libyan soldiers. It was armed with 5 pistols, 10 carbines, 18 rifles, and 3 light machine guns and was carried on four AS.37 trucks. The machine gun platoon had seven Italians (an officer, an NCO and five other ranks) and 22 Libyan soldiers. It was armed with 10 pistols, 16 carbines, 4 rifles and 4 medium machine guns, all carried on four AS.37 trucks. Such logistical support as was available was found in the HQ platoon, which was provided with four AS.37 trucks and three heavy trucks. The flight platoon, not always present, had no fixed organization, but usually held three “Ghibli” light bomber/transport.

	Italian Officers	Italian NCOs	Italian Other Ranks	Libyan Other Ranks	Horses	Mules	Camels	Pistols	Rifles	Light MGs	Medium MGs	Schwarlose Medium MGs	45mm mortars	20mm AA Guns	37/45 AT Guns	47/32 Inf/AT Guns	75/27 Field Guns	77/28 Field Guns	Field Cars	Light Trucks	Heavy Trucks	Extra-Heavy Trucks	AS.37 Tractors	Other Vehicles	
Sahara Command HQ Platoon	3	7	1	50	0	0	6	20	62	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2 nd Sahariana Company	0	10	32	76	0	0	0	2	121	4	4	0	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	5	0
3 ^d Sahariana Company	1	13	52	56	0	0	0	23	132	4	4	0	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	5	0
4 th Sahariana Company	1	9	30	83	0	0	0	24	112	4	5	2	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	5	0
5 th Sahariana Company	0	8	25	80	0	0	0	16	108	4	4	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	0
52 nd Libyan Static Machine Gun Company	0	4	5	112	0	0	0	28	94	0	0	13	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
53 rd Libyan Static Machine Gun Company	0	10	11	79	0	0	0	28	111	0	2	14	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
54 th Libyan Static Machine Gun Company	0	8	7	69	0	0	0	29	154	0	0	13	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
55 th Libyan Static Machine Gun Company	1	13	9	119	0	0	0	29	249	0	0	13	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
56 th Libyan Static Machine Gun Company	1	16	18	138	0	0	0	31	155	0	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	0	0	0
57 th Libyan Static Machine Gun Company	0	19	30	112	0	0	0	28	174	0	2	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
58 th Libyan Static Machine Gun Company	1	21	14	255	0	0	0	38	390	8	2	12	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
61 st Libyan Static Machine Gun Company	0	3	0	116	0	0	0	12	118	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Group of Bandas of Irregulars	1	1	1	389	5	0	49	3	438	?	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1 st "Meharisti Fezzan"	2	12	1	322	0	0	438	27	342	13	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2 nd "meharisti Sciati"	1	13	3	328	0	0	525	28	349	13	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4 th Company/XXXVII Libyan Battalion	0	8	7	169	0	0	0	11	196	12	2	13	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sahara Anti-Aircraft Battery	0	11	39	75	0	0	0	0	179	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
21 st Gun Company	1	11	100	0	0	0	0	8	100	0	4	2	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sahara Battery	0	2	23	0	0	0	0	1	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
839 th Field Gun Battery	0	5	39	0	0	0	0	1	48	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
842 nd Field Gun Battery	0	2	43	0	0	0	0	0	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
844 th Field Gun Battery	0	4	39	0	0	0	0	1	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
856 th Field Gun Battery	0	4	42	0	0	0	0	3	74	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mixed Engineer Company	2	29	40	14	0	0	0	20	152	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Services	4	41	151	40	0	0	0	47	1832	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	37	16	73	13	*	
* 1 ambulance. 14 water tank trucks. 4 workshop trucks. 5 tracked tractors. 3 other vehicles																									

* 1 ambulance, 14 water tank trucks, 4 workshop trucks, 5 tracked tractors, 3 other vehicles

Commando Militare del Sahara Libico, 1 January 1942

The parent command for the sahariana units was the Libyan Sahara Military Command (CMSL) *Territorio Militare del Sud* formed in June 1938 with about 12,000 troops (2,500 Italian and 9,500 Libyan). This force initially consisted of 4 Libyan battalions, 2 sahariana companies, 1 meharisti (camel) company, 6 static MG companies, 1 pack artillery battery, 2 light (20mm) AA platoons and services. During peacetime this force was responsible for maintaining internal security in the interior of Libya against the historically troublesome and well armed nomadic tribes who

wandered about the Sahara Desert unconcerned with the national boundaries drawn by European diplomats.

During the war the CMSL also took on the role of raiders, similar to the British LRDG, from their bases deep in the heart of the Libyan desert. During the war the CMSL was divided into three sectors, one based at Hon, about 150 miles from the sea south of Sirte; one at Sebha, about 175 miles further south; and the third at Ghat, 310 miles south-west of Sebha in the extreme southwest corner of Libya. This corridor contained the bulk of the inland population of Libya and the Italians hoped that by garrisoning each of the major oasis towns with a static machine gun company that they could control the area. Roving patrols were furnished by the mobile sahariana companies.

By April of 1941 the following Libyan units were still in place:

- X Corps
- XVIII & XXXVI Libyan Battalions
- XX Corps
- Covering Sector "Nalut"
- Static Libyan MG Companies 4, 5, 6 & 7
- IV Spahi Group (sqns 1, 2 & 3)
- Covering Sector "Chibla"
- XXXII Libyan Battalion
- Static Libyan MG Companies 13, 50 & 51
- Irregular Bandas "della Chibla" & "Gialo"
- Covering Sector "Zuara"
- Static Libyan MG Companies 1, 2, 3 & 8
- Libyan Cavalry Battlegroup
- I Spahi Group (sqns 1, 2, 3 & 4)
- II Savari Group (sqns 1, 5, 6, & 7)
- III Spahi Group (sqns 1, 2 & 3)
- Sector "Homs"
- XXXV Libyan Battalion
- Static Libyan MG Company 11
- Tripoli Fortress
- Static Libyan MG Companies 10 & 12
- Comando Militare del Sahara Libico
- "Hon" Sector
- XXXVII Libyan Battalion
- Static Libyan MG Companies 55, 58 & 61
- Sahariana Companies 4 & 5 (being raised)
- Irregular Group "Giofra"
- Air Detachment (8 Ghibli, 6 S.81, 7 Cr.42 & 1 Ca.133)
- "Ubari-Serdeles-Ghat" Sector
- Static Libyan MG Companies 52, 53 & 54
- Meharisti Companies 1 & 2
- Camel Group "Tuaregh"
- "Murzak" Sector
- Static Libyan MG Companies 56 & 57
- Sahariana Companies 2 & 3

Meharisti Compagni 3
Air Detachment (3 Ghibli)
"Zella" Sector
Static Libyan MG Company 59
Sahariana Company 1

As the sahariana companies turned their attention from security duties to fighting the British they also adopted heavier weapons, allowing these units to operate mixed patrols, much like the LRDG, with one truck each with a light machine, a medium machine gun, a 20mm auto cannon, and a tractor with an anti-tank gun. In spite of this impressive armament, however, the sahariana companies appear to have achieved little, even in their counter-raider role.

The other major type of unit employed in the interior was the static machine gun company. Thirteen such companies were raised, numbered 50-62, although numbers 59 and 60 were destroyed early in the war at Kufra in the far south. Unlike the static MG companies in the north, those in the 50- and 60-series do not appear to have had a fixed organization. Armed with old Schwarzloze medium machine guns, these units appear to have had little consistency of organization except that those companies garrisoning oasis towns that did not have a collocated artillery battery were provided with three 45mm Brixia mortars. Because the strengths of the units depended to varying degrees on local recruitment most units had more personal weapons than they had personnel to man them.

Also present in Libya were two battalions of the PAI, or Italian African Police, the *Romolo Gessi* and *Romolo Goddo* battalions. These battalions were small units, consisting of two motorcycle companies and an armored car company.

Foreign Units

In August 1935 Alessandro Lessona, the undersecretary of colonies, proposed raising an Italian foreign legion to stiffen the defenses of Italy's colonial holdings (and probably provide the scheming Lessona with his own power base as well). He specifically envisioned a division of 10,825 men (including 8,243 foreigners) consisting of three 2-battalion infantry regiments, a machine gun battalion, a heavy weapons battalion, a 65/17 artillery battalion (to be provided by the army), an engineer/signal company and training and service elements. In November 1937, however, Lessona was dismissed from office and the plan dropped.

The use of foreigners was revived on a smaller scale for operations on the eastern front. In early 1942 SMRE activated the *Legione Croata* in Croatia. An initial increment consisting of an infantry battalion, an 81mm mortar company and a 47/32 gun company were dispatched to the eastern front with the 8th Army, where it was destroyed.

The order to rebuild the Croatian Legion was issued in May 1943 and provided for an organization of two infantry battalions, an 81mm mortar company, a 75/13 pack howitzer battalion, an 85-man engineer/signal platoon, and 756-man replacement unit. The organization of the Croatian Legion did not differ much from standard Italian practice. The rifle section consisted of a sergeant, a corporal assistant section leader, and three teams, one of a corporal and nine riflemen, and two each of a corporal or PFC and 3-man light MG crew. The platoon HQ consisted simply of the platoon leader and a runner. The rifle company HQ platoon included a mortar section with a sergeant and 13 other ranks, a 14-man resupply section to carry ammunition forward on their backs, and a pack transport section with 31 pack animals, twelve of which each carried a light MG and 300 rounds, six each carried a 45mm mortar and 30 rounds, four each carried 90 rounds of 45mm ammunition, two carried hand grenades, and the other seven various company items. The HQ also included two signallers with semaphore flags.

The MG company had four platoons, each of two 22-man sections. Unlike the rifle units, the MG sections had the pack mules organic to their own organization, each having one mule to carry the MG and 300 rounds and one mule to carry a further 1800 rounds. The MG company headquarters included a ten-man signal squad that was provided with two telephones and two km of wire, as well as four signallers with flags. The battalion HQ company had a reconnaissance platoon that provided three 13-man scout sections and a signal platoon with a 15-man telephone section (four telephones and 6 km of wire), a 19-man optical section (with three optical signal stations and four semaphore teams) and an 8-man messenger squad.

The legion was supported by an artillery battalion with two pack howitzer batteries of 75/13 weapons. The firing battery was divided into five squads each with nine mules. Four the squads were gun squads, with six mules per gun and three mules each carrying 12 rounds of ammunition. The fifth squad carried battery equipment. The battery's ammunition trains provided a further twenty ammunition mules. Battery HQ included a 20-man telephone section and a 4-man radio team, that latter with a pack-mule-carried transceiver. The battalion service battery provided a platoon to support each line battery, this platoon including a pack ammunition squad (10 mules each carrying 12 rounds), a draft ammunition squad (three 2-horse carts, each 198 rounds), and a draft rations squad (two 2-

	Officers	NCOs	Other Ranks	Light Machine Guns	Medium Machine Guns	45mm Mortars	81mm Mortars	75/13 Howitzers	Riding Horses	Pack Horses	Draft Horses	Carts	Motorcycles	Light Trucks	Bicycles
Legion Headquarters	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Headquarters Company															
Command Platoon	2	4	51	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2
Service Platoon	1	6	77	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	30	15	0	10	0
Two Infantry Battalions, each															
Battalion Headquarters	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Headquarters Company															
Command Platoon	2	5	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0
Signal Platoon	1	2	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Reconnaissance Platoon	2	3	41	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Three Rifle Companies, each															
Headquarters Platoon	3	4	94	0	0	6	0	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	1
Three Rifle Platoons, each	1	2	39	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Machine Gun Company															
Headquarters Platoon	2	3	59	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	1
Four MG Platoons, each	1	2	44	0	4	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0
Mortar Company															
Company Headquarters	2	3	49	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	1
Three Mortar Platoons, each	1	2	27	0	0	0	2	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0
Artillery Battalion															
Battalion Headquarters	6	4	65	0	0	0	0	0	17	13	4	2	0	0	3
Two Howitzer Batteries, each															
Battery Headquarters	1	2	48	0	0	0	0	0	11	7	2	1	0	0	1
Firing Battery	3	2	114	0	2	0	0	4	3	45	0	0	0	0	0
Ammunition Trains	0	1	34	0	0	0	0	0	1	20	0	0	0	0	1
Field Trains	1	1	57	0	0	0	0	0	1	38	0	0	0	0	1
Service Battery															
Battery Headquarters	4	3	36	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	12	6	0	0	1
Two Service Platoons, each	1	1	66	0	0	0	0	0	3	22	20	10	0	0	1
Mixed Engineer Platoon															
Platoon Headquarters	1	1	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1
Engineer Section	0	1	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wire Signal Section	0	1	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Radio/Optical Signal Section	0	1	34	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Field Replacement Battalion															
Battalion Headquarters	6	6	89	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	4	2	3	0	1
Two Rifle Companies, each	6	10	211	12	0	6	0	0	0	31	0	0	0	0	1
Heavy Weapons Company	5	10	186	0	8	0	3	0	0	15	0	0	0	0	3

Croatian Legion, from May 1943

horse carts).

In July the draft transport section of the legion HQ's service platoon was deleted and its 15 two-horse carts replaced by five light trucks and further detail changes were made in August. It is not known, however, how far the raising of the 2nd Croatian Legion proceeded before the armistice.

A more purely internal security force raised in the Balkans was the MVAC (*Milizia Volontaria Anti-Comunista*). The rise in partisan warfare in Yugoslavia had placed great strains on the Italian garrison divisions there, and in response to this the local commands took to raising right-wing locals to aid in security duties. The raising, training and equipping of these units were the responsibility of the local Italian garrison division, which would "sponsor" such units. This led to wide divergence in the standards of training, organization and equipment among the various MVAC units, and the result can be best summarized in tabular form [see table ____].

Sponsoring Unit	M.V.A.C
"Cacciatori delle Alpi" Division	(A) 19 companies with an average strength of 87 men. Sufficient rifles for all personnel. One to four light MGs per company, not distributed proportionally with manpower strength. Four companies also had one or two medium MGs. No heavier weapons.
"Isonzo" Division	(A) 3 companies (average 96 men, sufficient rifles for all, total five light MGs). (B) 2 battalions total 1,018 men, 993 rifles, 17 light MGs, 5 medium MGs
"XXI Aprile" Blackshirt	(A) 8 companies averaging 87 men. Sufficient rifles for all personnel. One to five light MGs per company, totalling 16.
XI Raggruppamento GGFF	(A) 7 companies averaging 103 men. Sufficient rifles in most cases for all personnel. One to five light MGs per company, totalling 13. Two companies also had a total of 4 medium MGs. (B) 1 battalion of four companies with a total of 665 men and 575 rifles, 10 light MGs and 2 medium MGs.
"Zara" Division	(A) 6 companies averaging 121 men, 117 rifles, 4 submachine guns. No heavier weapons.
Celere Division	(A) 6 mounted squads, each 15 men with rifles (B) 1 company being formed with 63 men with 60 rifles
"Emilia" Division	(A) 2 territorial "companies" with a total of 1,216 men armed with rifles (B) 1 battalion of 258 men with rifles. Total force short about 250 rifles
"Sassari" Division	(A) 12 Orthodox units with an average strength of 417 men with 405 rifles, 6 light MGs, 3 medium MGs. Also a total of 16 45mm mortars. (B) 5 Herzegovnian units with an average strength of 560 men with 540 rifles, 1 submachine gun and 13 light MGs.
"Bergamo" Division	(A) 4 companies with an average strength of 80 men with rifles. 1 company had a light MG.
"Re" Division	(A) 4 companies with an average strength of 233 men with 233 rifles, 5 light MGs, 5 medium MGs, 1 45mm mortar.
"Murge" Division	(A) 12 Orthodox units with an average strength of 420 men with 3 light MGs. Total "Murge" units (including Moslem, below) are about 500 rifles short. (B) 2 Moslem units, each of 390 men. Probably equipped similarly with the Orthodox units immediately above.
"Marche" Division	(A) 6 units with an average strength of 525 men with 4 light MGs. Total force short about 75 rifles
"Messina" Division	(A) 2 units totalling 704 men with 536 rifles and 4 light MGs.
Major MVAC Units, 15 February 1943	

As can be seen, the MVAC relied almost entirely on rifles, using machine guns, submachine guns, mortars and other heavy weapons on a sparing basis. Because of the diversity of ethnic groups in the area, the various groups were usually organized into separate units. Thus, the Catholics were concentrated in the Bergamo Division

and a 511-man unit in the Messina Division, while the Moslems were limited to two units in the Murge Division. Since these units were locally recruited their strengths and organization varied considerably. The major factors seem to have been the population base in a given town or village, the political orientation of the populace, and the ability of the local fascist leaders to enlist others in their cause. Thus, the detachments under the tutelage of the Young Fascists, for instance, varied in size from 24 men with one light machine gun (and, incidentally, 50 rifles to allow for expansion) to one of 225 men with five light and three medium machine guns. These units, of course, were destroyed on Italy's capitulation.