

Tactical Structure in World War II

Italy

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Sources

Notes on Sources & Further Reading

Primary Sources

There are two large collections of Italian Army documents from World War II. One exists on microfilm at the National Archives in Washington DC. A large number of Italian Army files were captured by the Germans in 1943 and were brought to Germany, where they were in turn captured by the Americans. With the rest of the German files, they were brought to the US and eventually microfilmed before being returned to the Italian government in 1967. The microfilmed records are now available at the National Archives in Washington, DC., which has printed a three-volume guide to their contents. All the Italian military records are filed under Group T-821, which prefix is an integral part of their designation.

The other, larger, collection is held by the Italian Army's historical office, *Ufficio Storico*, in Rome. This includes large numbers of documents not included in the German/National Archives collection.

Unfortunately, the filing system used by the Italians was close to random. This is reflected in both the National Archives collection and *Ufficio Storico*'s holdings. When the author visited (admittedly many years ago) the filing system had not been improved upon since the documents were originally filed, making the researcher in Rome entirely dependent on the abilities and memories of the local staff. Reportedly a large percentage of the records were housed in cardboard boxes, unmarked as to contents, in warehouses. Even when found, no photocopy service was available, so all information must be transcribed by hand, a laborious process when dealing with complex tables. Hopefully, conditions have improved.

Thus, it is actually easier to use the National Archives collection than the original documents. Since the National Archives microfilmed the records in their original order and the records guides list the files in that order, the researcher must read them from cover-to-cover and entry-to-entry to find relevant information. Nevertheless, it does catalog the entire collection, an aid not available in Rome.

The basic organizational structure of Italian army units was laid out in two types of documents, tables of organization (*Formazioni di Pace* for

peacetime manning levels and *Formazioni Provvisorie di Guerra* or *Formazioni de Guerra*, the two terms apparently being used interchangeably, for wartime levels) and tables of equipment (*Dotazioni Provvisorie di Mobilitazione*). The organization tables showed authorized unit strength and organization in terms of personnel, crew-served weapons, vehicles and animals. The latter showed allocations of signal equipment, basic ammunition load, medical equipment, etc., although frequent cross-referencing among documents meant that few tables of equipment were complete in and of themselves.

Being technically oriented it is not surprising that the artillery branch made the best effort at providing an orderly structure. With war drawing close they issued (through the *Ufficio Ordinamento e Mobilitazione*, as did all branches) a loose-leaf binder of TOs entitled *Formazioni Provvisorie di Guerra di Alcune Unità dell'Arma di Artiglieria* in April 1940, which provided the organization for the artillery component of the infantry division, the corps and the field army. When changes were made to an organization new pages were sent out with instructions to the user to remove and destroy the old relevant pages and insert the new ones. Thus, a surviving copy of this document, although it bears the cover date of April 1940, includes FPGs that were issued substantially later. Complicating the problem is the fact that the individual pages were not date marked, so the only way to find the date of a particular FPG is to check the list of changes entered in the front (or sometimes the back) of the book. The National Archives has four copies of this book in its microfilm collection (R 35/Fr 1124, R 36/Fr 1124 R 226/Fr 1302, and R 385/Fr 802), all incorporating changes up to July 1942.

As the variety of artillery units increased under wartime pressure an effort was made to file new FPGs in a similar system. The result was a second, similar, book entitled *Appendice al Fascicolo delle "Formazioni Provvisorie di Guerra di Alcune Unità dell'Arma di Artiglieria" Edizione 1940 - XVIII* dated March 1941. This served as a catch-all for almost all subsequently-published artillery FPGs. A problem here is that the record of changes in the books catalog only changes, not additions. Thus, it is impossible to date the TO&Es in the book except in those cases where the file clerk included the cover letter along with the FPG in filling the book. The National Archives has multiple copies of this book, all slightly different, on *Roll 226 (Frames 738, 780, and 1418)* and two copies elsewhere (*R 36/Fr 219 and R 385/Fr 587*).

The infantry started out with a similar system. In March 1940 they published *Formazioni di Pace della unità di Fanteria* and *Formazioni Provvisorie di Guerra dell'Arma di Fanteria*, both covering the infantry regiment, the mortar battalion, the 47/32 anti-tank company, the corps machine gun battalion and replacement units. The National Archives has one copy of the former (R 227/Fr 327) and three copies of the latter (R 35/Fr 1040, R 226/Fr 354, and R 227/Fr 390). After this initial issue, however, the concept was paid only lip service and only one sheet of corrections was issued for the FPG book. Instead, new tables were issued as needed and simply filed where convenient for the recipient. The later infantry tables are thus scattered about in small batches in a large number of locations. This system (or rather, lack thereof) did have one advantage for the historian however, in that it did not ensure the automatic destruction of earlier versions of a table the way the artillery system did.

The other branches do not appear to have tried a consolidated grouping of FPGs at all. They were simply issued as needed on the basis required, tables being issued for every size unit from platoon to division. As an example, the initial infantry regiment FPG was included in the infantry book issued in March 1940, but when the decision was made to reorganize the infantry battalion the old FPG was not modified, but a new FPG for the infantry battalion only was issued in late 1942 (thus implicitly superseding a portion of the earlier FPG), followed by a new infantry regiment FPG six months later. Similarly, smaller additions and changes of one or several pages within a document were made with considerable abandon and little clear record keeping. Lacking a numbering system for the tables, of course, any change in organization titles threw further considerable confusion into the system, and mistakes based on this are noticeable even in contemporary SMRE documents.

These other FPGs are scattered throughout the National Archives microfilm collection, the more significant being:

Alcune Unità Metropolitane per l'A.S., May 1940 (R 36/Fr 33)
Battaglione Autoblindo per R.E.Co., June 1941 (R 338/Fr 290)
Battaglione Carabinieri Reali, October 1940 (R 338/Fr 318)
Battaglione Fucilieri dei Rgt. di Ftr. Normale e da Montagna, September 1942 (R 463/Fr 1327)
Battaglione Guastatori, January 1943 (R 475/Fr 738)

Comandi di Grande Unità, May 1940 (R 226/Fr 588 & R 237/Fr 136)
Divisione Alpina, May 1943 (two copies: R 339/Fr 129 and R 463/Fr 1192)
Divisione Aviotrasportabile, October 1941 [corr to Sept 42] (R 475/Fr 455)
Divisione Corazzata, August 1941 [corr to Nov 42] (R 475/Fr 2)
Divisione Corazzata [partial, only art regt], August 1941 [corr to Nov 41] (R 385/Fr 1336)
Divisione di Fanteria da Occupazione, August 1941 (three copies: R 226/Fr 310, R 339/Fr 722 , and R 475/Fr 390)
Divisione di Fanteria Normale Tipo 1943, May 1943 (R 469/Fr 422)
Divisione Motorizzata Coloniale, March 1941 (R 36/Fr 411)
Gruppo Alpini Sciatori, January 1942 (R 198/Fr 1015)
Gruppo d'Artigl. per Div. Paracadutisti, July 1941 (R 469/Fr 369)
Gruppo di Battaglioni cc.nn. da Sbarco, March 1942 (R 37/Fr 21)
Legione Croata, May 1943 [corr to Aug 43] (two copies: R 463/Fr 1125 and R 475/Fr 672)
Legione e Battaglioni cc.nn. Assegnati alle Unità dell'Esercito, April 1940 (R 36/Fr 136)
Nucleo Esplorante Celere, January 1942 (R 463/Fr 984)
Raggruppamento Alpini Sciatori, June 1942 (two copies: R 339/Fr 648, R 463/Fr 1270)
Raggruppamento Esplorante Corazzata (R.E.Co.), September 1941 (R 475/Fr 190)
Raggruppamento Esplorante Corazzata (R.E.Co.) - Ediz. 1942, January 1942 (R 463/Fr 946)
Reggimento d'Artiglieria Paracadutisti [etc], March 1942 (R 469/Fr 354)
Reggimento di Fanteria Normale e da Montagna, April 1943 (R 475/Fr 755)
Reggimento di Fanteria Paracadutisti [etc], July 1941 [corr to May 42] (R 469/Fr 320)
Squadroni Carri L-6, October 1941 (R 475/Fr 443)
Unità di Complementi per la 8° Armata, May 1942 (R 463/Fr 1022)
Unità del Genio per Raggruppamento Alpino, May 1940 (R 227/Fr 484)
13° Reggimento Genio, May 1940 (R 338/Fr 529)

Finally, a separate series of TO&Es were issued with the AS.42 reorganization in Volumes A to M of *Formazioni Provvisorie di Guerra dei Comandi, Reparti e Servizi in A.S.*, dated June 1942, reissued in August 1942 with unknown changes. Copies of these, in the August version, can be found in R 21/Fr 1050 and R 463/Fr 223

Tables of equipment are even more scarce. The author has found the following in the National Archives microfilm collection:

Divisione Corazzata, September 1941 (R385/Fr 1373)
Divisione Alpino, May 1943 (R 339/Fr 129)
Divisione di Fanteria da Occupazione, August 1941 (R 338/Fr 261)
Divisione di Fanteria Tipo, February 1939
Gruppo di Batterie da 75/18 mod.34, July 1941 (R 338/Fr 497)
Gruppo di Batterie da 75/18 mod.34 per Div.Ftr., December 1941 (R 385/Fr 1221)

Raggruppamento Alpini Sciatori, July 1942 (R 339/Fr 617)
Reggimento Artiglieria per D.at., May 1939 (R 338/Fr 857)
Reggimento Artiglieria per Divisione "Tipo" Normale, October 1939 (R 338/Fr 758)
Reggimento Fanteria Carrista Dotato di Carri L, April 1940
Rgt. Bers. Ciclisti non Indivisionato e Relativa Cp. Bers. Motociclisti, April 1940 (R 338/Fr 580)
Reggimento Bersaglieri per A.S., June 1941 (R 338/Fr 226)
Reparti di Fanteria, June 1940
Unita cc.nn. della MVSN, June 1940 (R 35/Fr 915)

There are, of course, major gaps in the coverage available to the researcher at the National Archives. The Italian Army's historical office, *Ufficio Storico*, has a large collection of documents, probably less than half of which represent those returned by the US. The author was provided access to the following tables of organization in Rome, which filled in a number of the missing segments:

Divisioni di Fanteria per la Libia, June 1939
Reggimento di Fanteria per Divisioni en XX & XXI C.A. (A.S.), July 1939
Divisione Motorizzata Coloniale, March 1941
Btg. Misto (Divs Pavia, Bologna, Savona, Brescia), May 1941
Reggimento di Fanteria per Divisioni "Superga" & "Livorno", March 1942
Raggruppamento cc.nn. "30 Gennaio", March 1942
Raggruppamento Celere A.S., June 1942
Btg. di Fanteria per Div. Autotrasportabile (excl A.S.), October 1942
Btg. di Fanteria Autonomo (Volontari Sardi), February 1943
Reggimento Motorizzato Cavallegeri di Luca, February 1943
Legione cc.nn. Nuovo Tipo, May 1943
Divisione cc.nn. "M" Corazzata, June 1943
Btg. Carri P, June 1943
Btg. d'Assalto Motorizzato, August 1943

In addition, numerous mobilization orders, reorganization orders and other administrative documents scattered about in the National Archives microfilm collection and in *Ufficio Storico* were consulted.

There are several types of order of battle documents available in the National Archives collection:

Segnalazioni is a 1-2 page publication issued every two weeks by the Cabinet of the War Office summarizing organizational and manpower issues on a macro level. Issues for 7 June 1940 to 13 April 1941 are available (R 130/Fr 47).

Ordinamento dell'Esercito, 1939, lays out the basic organizational structure of the army on mobilization, with particular emphasis on artillery.

Ordinamento di Guerra della M.V.S.N., Unità cc.nn. di Guerra, October 1940, updated to March 1941 (R 36/Fr 4) is an excellent source, providing a complete order of battle for the combat elements of the MVSN, as well as a summary of the organization and strength of the different kinds of units.

Stato di Efficienza Divisioni dell'Esercito was published monthly by SMRE and listed each of the divisions in the army with a brief 1-4 line summary of its current state. The documents are scattered about the film collection, with batches covering February, June, and October 1942 (R 136/Fr 1089), December 1942 (R 348/Fr 234), and January to August 1943 (R 2/Fr 834).

Stato di Svolgimento di Alcuni Argomenti Interessanti la Commissione Suprema di Difesa presents the minutes of the meetings held by the Supreme Defense Commission roughly every two months. The Commission's brief was apparently oriented strongly towards air defense and anti-parachute/anti-sabotage efforts, for that is the subject matter of most of the minutes. Very interesting figures on anti-aircraft inventories. The minutes for June 1940 to December 1942 are filmed as R 206/Fr 563 to R 207/Fr 98.

Nevertheless, there are still some major gaps for which little primary documentation is available. This includes particularly the celere units, the colonial and Libyan forces, and the early armored units. It seems unlikely that these will be filled until a full inventory of *Ufficio Storico's* holdings can be accomplished, if then.

Some manuals captured during wartime have been turned over the the US Library of Congress. These include:

Ispettorato delle Truppe Celere, *Istruzione Formale per I Bersaglieri (ciclisti e motociclisti)* (Rome, 1937)

Maraschi, Carlo, *Manuale Militare per l'Ufficiale di Complemento e l'Allievo Ufficiale di Fanteria* (Milan, 1942)

Ministero della Guerra, *Addestramento della Fanteria, vol. II - Impiego e Addestramento Tattico* (Rome, 1939)

S.M.R.E., *Manuale per l'Ufficiale degli Alpini* (Rome, 1941)

S.M.R.E., *Manuale per il Graduato - Parte Generale, Comune a Tutte le Armi* (Rome, 1943)

S.M.R.E., *Nozioni di Organica per i Corsi Allievi Ufficiali di Complemento* (Roma, 1942)

Ufficio Addestramento, *Istruzione sull'Affardellamento dei Bersaglieri Ciclisti e Motociclisti e sul Trasporto delle Armi e delle Munizioni sulla Biciclette e sui Motomezzi*

(Rome, 1939)

Secondary Sources

Surprisingly, there is no single English-language work on the Italian Army in World War II. Three excellent works are available, Cervi's on the Greek campaign, Knox's felicitously-titled work on Italy's diplomatic and military maneuvering in the early-war period, and Sweet's study of the impact of mechanization, but they are the only three sources in English. Leser's book is the definitive study on the airborne forces.

Cervi, Mario, The Hollow Legions: Mussolini's Blunder in Greece 1940-41 (New York, Doubleday, 1971).

Knox, MacGregor, Mussolini Unleashed 1939-41 (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982).

Sweet, John, Iron Arm, the Mechanization of Mussolini's Army 1920-1940 (Westport (CT), Greenwood, 1983)

Leser, Jeffrey, Infantrymen of the Air: An Operational History of the Royal Italian Airborne Forces in the Second World War, 1936-1943, (Helion, 2023_

Source material is considerably easier to find in Italian. In particular, the multi-volume history of the war by the Army's *Ufficio Storico* must be mentioned. This series provides a wealth of order of battle detail for the various campaigns they cover. Unfortunately, the only one to deal with organizational issues is:

Italy, SME, Ufficio Storico, L'Esercito Italiano Tra la 1° e la 2° Guerra Mondiale (Rome, 1954)

There is no single work dealing with overall order of battle or mobilization of units. One that comes closest is a lineage book:

Italy, SME, Ufficio Storico, L'Esercito e i Suoi Corpi, Sintesi Storica (2 volumes) (Rome, 1971).

It suffers from that defect common to all armies' lineage books, that it covers only those units currently in existence and traces their histories back. The vast majority of units that formed the wartime armies, which no longer exist in the smaller peacetime establishments, are ignored completely. This particular work, however, does contain good

general text comments on the evolution of the various branches of service.

For a specialized study such as organizational development, few general histories can provide the necessary detail found in the official histories. Some more specialized works that were consulted most often, and to which the reader is referred for further information, were:

Cappellano, Filippo & Nicola Pignato, Il Regio Esercito alla Vigilia dell' 8 Settembre 1943 (Parma, Storia Militare, 2003)

Clerici, Carlo Alfredo, Le Difese Costiere Italiane Nelle Due Guerre Mondiali (Parma, Storia Militare, 1996)

Crociani, P & PP Battistelli, Italian Blackshirt 1935-45 (Oxford, Osprey, 2010)

Finazzer, Enrico & Ralph Riccio, Italian Artillery of WW II (Sandomierz, Stratus, 2015)

Lucas, Ettore and de Vecchi, Giorgio, Storia della Unità Combattenti della Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale 1923-1943 (Rome, Volpe, nd)

Longo, Luigi E., I "Reparti Speciali" Italiani nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale (Milano, Mursia, 1991).

Lundari, Giuseppe, I Paracadutisti Italiani 1937-45 (Milan, Militae Italiana, 1989)

Pafi, B., Falessi, C. & Fiore, G. Corazzati Italiani 1939-45 (Rome, D'Anna, 1968)

Pignato, Nicola, Armi della Fanteria Italiana nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale (Parma, Ermanno Albertelli, 1971)

Pignato, Nicola, Artiglierie e Automezzi dell'Esercito Italiano (Parma, Ermanno Albertelli, 1972)

Pignato, Nicola, Motori!!! Le truppe corazzate italiane 1919/1994 (Trento, Gruppo Modellistico Trentino di Studio e Ricerca Storica, 1996)

Pirrone, Giorgio, "La Brigata Corazzata Speciale in Africa Settentrionale" in Revista Militare, May-June 1979, pp.105-112.

Riccio, Ralph, Italian Tanks and Fighting Vehicles of World War II (Henley-on-Thames, Pique Pub., 1975)

Rosignoli, G., MVSN 1923-43 (Farnham (Surrey), Rosignoli, 1980)

Vitali, Giorgio, Sciabole nella Steppa: La Cavalleria Italiana in Russia (Milan,

Murisa, 1976)

Information on Naval coastal forces can be found in the Navy's official history:

Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare, La Marina Italiana nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale, Vol XXI, L'Organizzazione della Marina Durante il Conflitto, Tomo II: Evoluzione organica dal 10-6 1940 all' 8-9-1943, (Rome, 1975)

Tertiary Sources

The holdings of the National Archives, *Ufficio Storico*, and the official histories have rendered the wartime intelligence publications almost superfluous. Four such publications were consulted:

(British) War Office, M13 Draft Handbook on Italy, 1936-1942, (PRO WO 208/4807)

(British) War Office (M.I.3.b.), Revised Notes on the Italian Army, December 1942

(British) GHQ, MEF, Brief Notes on the Italian Army, August 1942

(German), OKH H-1, Handbuch der Italienischen Heer, March 1939 (NA T-78, R 445, Fr 6419423)

(US) Military Intelligence Service, TME 30-420 Handbook on the Italian Military Forces, August 1943.

The most widely-known of these is the US TME 30-420, which has been reprinted, albeit without a good deal of its organizational coverage, by Game Publishing Company of Allentown PA in 1984 after editing by Victor Madej. The original version is available on microfilm from the National Archives. The US handbook borrows extensively from the British December 1942 publication, adding some later information and deleting sections no longer relevant, i.e., on Libyan forces.

The US publication is a handy reference, but the editor's comment in the reprinted edition that "In checking post war information [concern about errors] was put aside because the information was found to be more than 98% accurate" seems questionable.

Such information was used here only when it could be verified in general terms by primary sources. The only table to be taken from tertiary sources was that dealing with Libyan units, for which data

apparently exists no where else and which matches, in general terms, strength returns still existing.

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