

NUOVA **ANTOLOGIA** 
MILITARE
RIVISTA INTERDISCIPLINARE DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI STORIA MILITARE

N. 4
2023

Fascicolo 16. Novembre 2023
Storia Militare Contemporanea

a cura di
VIRGLIO ILARI



Società Italiana di Storia Militare

Direttore scientifico Virgilio Ilari
Vicedirettore scientifico Giovanni Brizzi
Direttore responsabile Gregory Claude Alegi
Redazione Viviana Castelli

Consiglio Scientifico. Presidente: Massimo De Leonardis.

Membri stranieri: Christopher Bassford, Floribert Baudet, Stathis Birthacas, Jeremy Martin Black, Loretana de Libero, Magdalena de Pazzis Pi Corrales, Gregory Hanlon, John Hattendorf, Yann Le Bohec, Aleksei Nikolaevič Lobin, Prof. Armando Marques Guedes, Prof. Dennis Showalter (†). *Membri italiani:* Livio Antonielli, Marco Bettalli, Antonello Folco Biagini, Aldino Bondesan, Franco Cardini, Piero Cimbolli Spagnesi, Piero del Negro, Giuseppe De Vergottini, Carlo Galli, Marco Gemignani, Roberta Ivaldi, Nicola Labanca, Luigi Loreto, Gian Enrico Rusconi, Carla Sodini, Giocchino Strano, Donato Tamblé,

Comitato consultivo sulle scienze militari e gli studi di strategia, intelligence e geopolitica: Lucio Caracciolo, Flavio Carbone, Basilio Di Martino, Antulio Joseph Echevarria II, Carlo Jean, Gianfranco Linzi, Edward N. Luttwak, Matteo Paesano, Ferdinando Sanfelice di Monteforte.

Consulenti di aree scientifiche interdisciplinari: Donato Tamblé (Archival Sciences), Piero Cimbolli Spagnesi (Architecture and Engineering), Immacolata Eramo (Philology of Military Treatises), Simonetta Conti (Historical Geo-Cartography), Lucio Caracciolo (Geopolitics), Jeremy Martin Black (Global Military History), Elisabetta Fiocchi Malaspina (History of International Law of War), Gianfranco Linzi (Intelligence), Elena Franchi (Memory Studies and Anthropology of Conflicts), Virgilio Ilari (Military Bibliography), Luigi Loreto (Military Historiography), Basilio Di Martino (Military Technology and Air Studies), John Brewster Hattendorf (Naval History and Maritime Studies), Elina Gugliuzzo (Public History), Vincenzo Lavenia (War and Religion), Angela Teja (War and Sport), Stefano Pisu (War Cinema), Giuseppe Della Torre (War Economics).

Nuova Antologia Militare

Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare
Periodico telematico open-access annuale (www.nam-sism.org)
Registrazione del Tribunale Ordinario di Roma n. 06 del 30 Gennaio 2020
Scopus List of Accepted Titles October 2022 (No. 597).
Rivista scientifica ANVUR (5/9/2023)



Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma
Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

©Authors hold the copyright of their own articles.

For the Journal: © Società Italiana di Storia Militare
(www.societaitalianastoriamilitare@org)

Grafica: Nadir Media Srl - Via Giuseppe Veronese, 22 - 00146 Roma
info@nadirmedia.it

Gruppo Editoriale Tab Srl -Viale Manzoni 24/c - 00185 Roma
www.tabedizioni.it

ISSN: 2704-9795

ISBN Fascicolo 9788892957930

NUOVA **ANTOLOGIA** 
MILITARE
RIVISTA INTERDISCIPLINARE DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI STORIA MILITARE

N. 4
2023

Fascicolo 16. Novembre 2023
Storia Militare Contemporanea

a cura di
VIRILIO ILARI



Società Italiana di Storia Militare



Distintivo speciale del Dipartimento della Guerra concesso agli addetti al Progetto Manhattan per la Bomba A(Atomica) che hanno lavorato almeno sei mesi tra il 19 giugno 1942 e il 6 agosto 1945

Foto 1198 DOE Ed Westcott 1945 Oak Ridge Tennessee (Wikimedia Commons)

The Road to Defeat

The Reorganisation of the Italian Army after the Winter 1940-41

by PIER PAOLO BATTISTELLI

ABSTRACT. Following the Italian defeat in North Africa and the setback suffered in the war against Greece, the Regio Esercito (the Italian Army) had lost ten of its 70 divisions and suffered heavy losses. Facing developments following the seizure of the Balkans and Germany's attack against the Soviet Union, Mussolini ordered a reorganisation of the army which had to be brought up to strength in order to meet his political-strategic goals. Mussolini's aim was to reinforce the Italian presence on the Eastern Front, guarantee the Army readiness for the occupation of the French territories (southern France, Tunisia, Corsica), and maintain a strategic reserve while reinforcing the North African front and securing the occupied territories in the Balkans. General Ugo Cavallero, the Chief of General Staff, introduced some changes to this plan which was further altered by the Army Staff (Stato Maggiore Regio Esercito), mostly because of the lack of weapons and materiel. By the spring of 1942 the Italian Army not only was short Mussolini's goal of 80 divisions, but had also allocated more resources to the Balkans than envisaged at first. Problems occurred following Mussolini's decision to bring the Italian forces on the Eastern Front up to the strength of an entire army, which was made by depleting the other fronts (mostly the troops ready to seize the French territories) and the strategic reserve as well. The defeat suffered in North Africa in November 1942, along with the Allied landing in French North-West Africa, led to the employment of the last remaining operational divisions and to some kind of full commitment due to the seizure and garrisoning of southern France and Corsica. The final blow came with the losses suffered on the Eastern Front in the 1942-43 Stalingrad offensive and with the creation of the Tunisian bridgehead, which reduced the Italian Army combat effectiveness. By the spring of 1943, Tunisia being lost in May, it was clear that the Army was no longer capable to defend the territories seized and the homeland, having lost most of its operational effectiveness and being no longer capable of creating new units.

KEYWORDS. MUSSOLINI, CAVALLERO, ITALIAN ARMY (REGIO ESERCITO), COMANDO SUPREMO, ARMY STAFF (STATO MAGGIORE REGIO ESERCITO), ARMY ORGANISATION, NORTH AFRICA, EASTERN FRONT, EL ALAMEIN, STALINGRAD, BALKANS, TUNISIA, EASTERN FRONT, AXIS OCCUPATION OF EUROPE, VICHY FRANCE, MEDITERRANEAN

That the Italian Army entered the Second World War almost completely unprepared is a well-known and established fact. Yet quite little has been written about its reorganisation after the Italian defeats in Greece and in Northern Africa during the winter 1940-41, when – according to the commonly used definition – Italy’s war ceased to be ‘parallel’ to that of her German ally and became ‘subordinated’ to it.¹ This reorganisation, along with the reasons that finally brought the Italian Army to collapse again in 1942-43 despite German support, will be examined here.

There have been different examinations of the reasons explaining the Italian lack of military preparedness in the Second World War, mainly connected to the different interpretations of Fascism and its foreign and military policies. About the latter, according to the leading Italian military historian Giorgio Rochat, the Fascist regime was actually not interested in having a military instrument to wage war but only in assuring the Armed Forces’ support in order to preserve its own power inside Italy. Thus, in spite of relatively large military expenditures, the Italian Armed Forces were never required to confront possible enemies, such as Armed Forces of the Western Powers, but rather just to sustain the regime. That was to be done mainly by providing the ideal background to its propaganda based on the concepts of ‘national mobilisation’ and ‘patriotic exaltation’.² Such an approach is closely tied to the first analysis of the Fascist foreign policy made by Gaetano Salvemini, who, as early as in the 1930’s, stated that Mussolini had no coherent foreign policy and that his only aim was to seek occasional and ‘bombastic’ successes. These exploits, aimed exclusively at domestic needs, were ac-

1 This work is based on the researches performed for my Ph.D. thesis, entitled ‘The War of the Axis’. I am indebted to many people for their useful comments and suggestions, to all of them my grateful thanks.

Some hints about the development of the Italian Army during the Second World War, mainly concerning its strength, are to be found only in: Giorgio ROCHAT, ‘Gli Uomini alle Armi 1940-1943’, in: Giorgio ROCHAT, *L'Esercito Italiano in Pace e in Guerra. Studi di Storia Militare* (Milan, RARA, 1991), pp. 262-304. And in: Virgilio ILARI, *Storia del Servizio Militare in Italia. Volume Quarto – Soldati e Partigiani 1943-1945* (Rome, Centro Militare di Studi Strategici – Rivista Militare, 1991), pp. 9-38.

2 See (amongst the other titles): Giorgio ROCHAT, ‘Il Fascismo e la preparazione militare al conflitto mondiale’, *Storia e Memoria* 1 (1994), pp. 9-20. Giorgio ROCHAT, ‘Il ruolo delle forze armate nel regime fascista. Mussolini e le forze armate’, in Giorgio ROCHAT, *L'Esercito Italiano in Pace e in Guerra. Studi di Storia Militare* (Milan, RARA, 1991), pp. 193-219. Giorgio ROCHAT and Giulio MASSOBRIO, *Breve Storia dell'Esercito Italiano dal 1861 al 1943* (Turin, Einaudi, 1978), pp. 208-262.

tually needed to support Fascist propaganda and to consolidate Mussolini's power in Italy further by granting him popular support.³

Rochat's approach has been criticised, mainly by two Anglo-Saxon historians, MacGregor Knox and Brian Sullivan. In their own analysis both have enhanced the expansionism and the aggressiveness that characterised Mussolini's foreign policy, a policy that wasn't, however, supported by adequate means. Behind this failure were not only Italy's well-known social and economical weaknesses, but also the incapable Italian military leaders and the drain on financial resources imposed by the Italian-Ethiopian war and by the Italian involvement in the Spanish civil war, which prevented a modernisation of Italian Armed Forces. Thus, while in 1935-38 Italian military expenditures were actually superior to both those of France and Great Britain, almost two-thirds of these were needed to cover the costs of these wars which, though being functional to Mussolini's expansionist policy, actually exhausted the Italian Armed Forces. Also the Italian military doctrines – aimed at the 'guerra di rapido corso' (short duration war) – not only badly influenced Army's organisation, but even limited the development of an Italian mechanised force.⁴

3 For an historiographical analysis of the subject see: Jens PETERSEN, 'La Politica Estera del Fascismo come Problema Storiografico', in: Renzo DE FELICE, ed., *L'Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La Politica Estera Fascista e la Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 1973), pp. 11-55. Stephen Corrado AZZI, 'The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy', in: *The Historical Journal*, 36:1 (1993), pp. 187-203. R.J.B. BOSWORTH, *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London, Edward Arnold, 1998). See also: Gerhard SCHREIBER, Bernd STEGEMANN and Detlef VOGEL, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 3 – Der Mittelmeerraum und Südosteuropa. Von der »non belligeranza« Italiens bis zum Kriegseintritt der Vereinigten Staaten* (Stuttgart, DVA, 1984), essay of Gerhard SCHREIBER at the pages 96-111. Brian R. SULLIVAN, *A Thirst for Glory: Mussolini, the Italian Military and the Fascist Regime, 1922-1936* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1984), pp. 12-20.

4 MacGregor KNOX, *Mussolini Unleashed 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 3-33. MacGregor KNOX, 'The Sources of Italy's Defeat in 1940: Bluff or Institutionalized Incompetence?', in Carole FINK, Isabel V. HULL and MacGregor KNOX, ed., *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890-1945* (Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), pp. 247-266. MacGregor KNOX, 'The Italian Armed Forces, 1940-3', in Alan R. MILLETT and Williamson MURRAY, ed., *Military Effectiveness. Volume III – The Second World War*

The Italian Army in 1940

According to the above mentioned historical analysis the lack of preparedness of the Italian Army was either the consequence of Mussolini's lack of interest in an effective fighting force or the consequence of Italian military leaders' incompetence. No matter what the cause, however, when Italy entered into war in June 1940, her land forces were basically unprepared. The roots of this problem are to be found in the 'Pariani's reform', which was named after General Alberto Pariani who in October 1936 became Undersecretary of War and Chief of the Army Staff. Started in the autumn of 1938, this reform – envisaged by Pariani since 1935 – actually shaped the organisation of the Italian Army until 1943. Its roots can be traced both to the experiences of war against Ethiopia (where the Italian divisions were hampered by logistic requirements) and to the widely accepted doctrine of the 'guerra di rapido corso'. Its aim was to free the divisions from their logistic burden and to ease their manoeuvrability. Hence their strength was reduced by one third – this was mainly accomplished reducing from three to two the infantry regiments – while their allocation of weaponry was to remain more or less the same. Only the artillery was reduced to three fourths of its original allocation, thus leaving the Italian divisions with only three battalions ('gruppi'). Thanks to their increased firepower (except for the artillery) and being relieved of most of their logistic apparatus, which was carried by the Army Corps, the Italian Army divisions were supposed to be more effective in breaching the enemy defences and manoeuvring to exploit the success.⁵

This reorganisation has been largely criticised by the Italian generals during

(Winchester, Massachussets, Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 136-179. SULLIVAN, *Thirst for Glory*, pp. 271-294 and 352-407. Brian R. SULLIVAN, 'The Italian Armed Forces, 1918-40', in Alan R. MILLETT and Williamson MURRAY, ed., *Military Effectiveness. Volume II – The Interwar Period* (Winchester, Massachussets, Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 169-217.

5 On the "Pariani's reform" see (other than the above mentioned titles): Lucio CEVA, *Le Forze Armate* (Turin, UTET, 1981), pp. 258-263. Dorello FERRARI, 'Per uno Studio della Politica Militare del Generale Alberto Pariani', *Studi Storico Militari* (1988), pp. 371-400. Ferruccio BOTTI and Virgilio ILARI, *Il Pensiero Militare Italiano dal Primo al Secondo Dopoguerra* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1985), pp. 215-230. Fortunato MINNITI, *Fino alla Guerra. Strategie e Conflitto nella Politica di Potenza di Mussolini, 1923-1940* (Naples, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2000), pp. 29-34. Ferruccio BOTTI, *La Logistica dell'Esercito Italiano. Volume IV – dalla Guerra Integrale alla Guerra Nucleare (1940-1981)* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1995), pp. 55-70.

the war as well as by post-war historians, although it actually foreshadowed some principles – increase of firepower and enhancement of manoeuvrability – that influenced the armies of nations like Germany and United States during the war. However, two major drawbacks ultimately led to the failure of ‘Pariani’s reform’. The first one was the inadequate logistic support provided to the single divisions, a support that couldn’t be sustained by Corps’ troops. The second one was the lack of modern and adequate weapons and equipment for the units, in particular of medium and heavy artillery and of motor transports.



Federico Baistrocchi

The impact of ‘Pariani’s reform’ on the structure of the Italian Army wasn’t immediate, though it proved to be decisive. As it had been established in 1938, the Italian Army was to be composed of 63 divisions: 51 infantry, 2 motorised, 2 armoured, 2 cavalry and 5 mountain. As Pariani stated in a report for Mussolini on 14 January 1939 these divisions could have been mobilised (i.e. brought to full strength) in the spring of 1940, that is after the reorganisation process (that was to take place during the course of 1939) had been completed.⁶ Actually in mid-August 1939 the Italian Army was to be composed of 67 divisions, that is

⁶ Mario MONTANARI, *L'Esercito Italiano alla Vigilia della 2^a Guerra Mondiale* (Rome, Stato Maggiore Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1982), pp. 20-23.

the original 63 divisions plus 4 more ‘Blackshirts’ divisions.⁷ But after the war broke out in Europe in September 1939, and after that Mussolini had declared Italy to be ‘non-belligerent’, it became clear that even 67 two-regiment divisions represent too weak force. Thus at the end of October a conference was held at the War Ministry in which a new army establishment was examined. According to its conclusions the army strength was to be increased to a total of 73 divisions, although, according to Pariani, a final strength of at least 90 divisions had to be reached. In his view this figure actually represented the minimal army strength needed to meet operational requirements. On 31 October Pariani issued a new report to Mussolini which illustrated the conclusions drawn during the conference and the provisions needed to face the new requirements of weapons and ammunitions, asking in the meantime for Army’s budget increase.⁸ Three days later, however, Pariani was sacked by Mussolini who appointed General Ubaldo Soddu as new Undersecretary of War and Marshal Rodolfo Graziani as new Chief of the Army Staff.

In early November 1939, according to Pariani, the Italian Army had 71 divisions, 38 of which at full strength, while 17 other divisions were ‘on paper’. Thus Pariani estimated that 88 divisions would have been available in May 1940, of which 64 at full strength.⁹ However, these figures were contested by Marshal Pietro Badoglio, the ‘Capo di Stato Maggiore Generale’ (Chief of General Staff). In a note for Mussolini not only did he criticise the ‘Pariani’s reform’, but he also observed that at the moment only 10 divisions could be considered complete, while another 29 had minor shortages. No mention of the 17 divisions ‘on paper’ was made.¹⁰ This was clearly a matter of evaluations, though the contrast between the two military leaders is noticeable. Also noticeable is the fact that only in mid-December 1939 Mussolini ordered that, for the next August, the army was to be composed of 64 divisions, 4 of which were to be ‘Blackshirts’. The remaining

7 “Blackshirts” divisions were raised mainly with volunteers from the Fascist Militia, the “Milizia Volontaria Sicurezza Nazionale”. They had, however, allotments of army personnel, mainly in the services or in such “technical” units like the artillery regiment.

8 Archivio dell’Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito (hereafter AUSSME) H-10/1, Conference held on 30 October 1939. AUSSME H-9/5, note for Mussolini of 31 October 1939.

9 MONTANARI, *Esercito*, pp. 367-370 (Pariani to Badoglio, 2 November 1939).

10 Antonello BIAGINI and Fernando FRATTOLILLO, ed., *Diario Storico del Comando Supremo. Volume I: 11.6.1940 – 31.8.1940 – Tomo II* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1986), pp. 157-159 (Badoglio’s note of 1 November 1939).

7 divisions out of the 71 available had to be reduced to cadres without being disbanded. Also two colonial divisions (not to be counted in the total of 71) were to be raised.¹¹ A few days later the War Ministry sanctioned Mussolini's decisions, stating also that Pariani's minimal goal of 90 divisions was to be considered just a general aim.¹²

The roots of the Italian defeats of winter 1940-41 lay clearly in these events. The reorganisation process of the Italian Army began in 1938-39 with the goal of raising 63 operational divisions for the spring of 1940. In August 1939 four more were added bringing the total to 67. However, at the end of 1939, even this limited aim was abandoned and a more modest goal of 66 divisions (including the colonial ones) had been established. Since, according to Pariani, 90 divisions represented the minimal army strength,¹³ the conclusion is that the Italian Army was going to enter into the war having only some two thirds of its required strength. Mussolini, nevertheless, described this situation as 'not ideal but satisfactory'. However, such a failure was not only Pariani's fault. The long reorganisation process he described to Mussolini in January 1939 was clearly needed to let the army to get acquainted with its new structure, as it was needed to complete the new weapons production programs. Yet if Mussolini's decision to limit the army strength – though questionable – can be explained by Italy's political and economical needs, it's actually hard to explain Badoglio's inactivity. Clearly he didn't like Pariani's reform and was rather unwilling to develop it any further, though he admitted it was not actually possible to reverse back to the old system. That does not explain, however, how the Italian Army in June 1940 only had 52 operational divisions (either complete or with minor shortages) out of a total of 71. Even worse, the difference between the number of operational divisions available in early November 1939 and those available in June 1940 was only 13, and the latter figure was actually 8 divisions short Mussolini's limited aim of 60.

A detailed analysis of the composition of the Italian Army on 10 June 1940 compared with the situation on 1st October 1940 is actually revealing. When Italy entered into war her army (excluding the troops deployed in East Africa) had 73

11 MONTANARI, *Esercito*, p. 226 (Mussolini's note of 13 December 1939).

12 AUSSME L-14/121, War Ministry note of 19 December 1939.

13 The figure of 90 divisions actually matches the total number of infantry regiments – 180 – deployed by the Italian Army in the First World War, what made such a goal likely to be attained.

divisions and a total strength of about 1.4 million. More than half (59 %) of the divisions were infantry, although this percentage rises considerably by adding to this figure those divisions having a similar organisation. These included the ‘divisioni alpine’ (mountain divisions), trained and equipped for mountain warfare, and the ‘divisioni autotrasportabili’ that, like the ‘divisioni autotrasportabili Africa Settentrionale (AS)’, were nothing else than ordinary infantry divisions ready to be carried but lacking adequate truck allocation. Adding to the total also the ‘divisioni camicie nere’ and the ‘divisioni libiche’ (the first composed of volunteers Blackshirts, the second of Libyan personnel), the Italian Army was actually composed of 66 infantry divisions out of a total of 73 (90 %). Though impressive, even this figure does not fully explain Italian military lack of preparedness, since it ought to remember that in May 1940 even the mighty German Army had only 10 % of motorised and armoured divisions.

(total number) Type of division	Efficiency: Complete	(**) Minor shortage	Not complete
(43) Fanteria	9 (11)	23 (32)	11
(5) Alpine	5 (5)		
(3) Autotrasportabili	3 (3)		
(9) Autotrasportabili A.S.	- (4)	4	5 (5)
(3) Celeri	3 (3)		
(2) Motorizzate	2 (2)		
(3) Corazzate		3 (3)	
(4) Camicie Nere (*)	- (3)		3
(2) Libiche	-	-	-
Sum: 73 divisions	22 (31)	30 (35)	19 (5)

Table 1: Divisions available in the Italian Army, 1st June 1940

(*) One of these divisions was disbanded before 10th June.

(**) Figures in brackets refers to 1st October 1940.

(Source: AUSSME M-3/3, Army Effectiveness at 1st June 1940)

Most evident is the fact that only one third of the army's divisions were actually complete, that is they were at full strength and with all the required weapons and equipment. Most of the divisions available were considered efficient, having just minor shortages in their strength and in the availability of weapons and equipment. Sometimes, however, these minor shortages proved to be decisive. Almost all of the tank battalions of the 'divisioni corazzate' (armoured divisions) were equipped with the light 3-tons tanks, that had proved to be vulnerable to infantry yet during the war against Ethiopia. Also the four 'divisioni autotrasportabili AS' lacked part of their weapons and equipment allocation, while 22 infantry divisions lacked their heavy mortars and anti-tank gun allocation. At least one-fourth of the divisions available lacked most of their weapons and equipment allocation, if not part of their strength, though the War Ministry considered them operational, but with a reduced combat efficiency.¹⁴

Only at the end of September 1940 did the Italian Army reach a level comparable to that Mussolini had required in mid-December 1939. Though it was still composed of 73 divisions, the army had acquired an improved efficiency level. Some thirty-one divisions were considered complete and other 35 had only minor shortages, which made a total of 66 more or less operational divisions. Worth to note, the only incomplete divisions were the five out of nine 'divisioni autotrasportabili AS' deployed in Libya.¹⁵ This situation was not to last for long, however, since at the end of September Mussolini, together with the Undersecretary of War Soddu and the Chief of General Staff Badoglio, decided on a massive reduction of the army's strength in Italy to face the incoming winter. This was needed to free a good deal of men necessary to the agriculture as well as to reduce army's financial strain. The reduction was to be obtained with the dismissal of the 'older' draftees (those belonging to the classes 1896-1915) from the divisions deployed in Italy, which were to be left at 50-75 % of their strength.¹⁶ On 2 October Badoglio issued the orders and within a few days the army began to dismiss more than half of the 1.5 million men at arms in Italy. As a consequence, only 10 of the 50 divisions deployed in the Italian mainland remained complete and efficient,

14 AUSSME M-3/3, Army effectiveness at 1st June 1940. See also: MONTANARI, *Esercito*, pp.302-319.

15 AUSSME M-3/3, Army Effectiveness at 1st October 1940.

16 AUSSME H-9/3, Note to Mussolini of 20 September 1940. AUSSME N-9/2073, Soddu to Badoglio of 1st October 1940.

while another 17 divisions were left at 70-80 % of their strength and the remaining 23 divisions were reduced to cadres. At the beginning of November, there was a stop in the demobilization process, mainly concerning the class of 1915 and those men part of the units scheduled to move to Albania. Finally, on 26 November, Badoglio issued orders for a new army's mobilisation to face the worsening situation in Albania.¹⁷ It was too late, however. In mid-December only 6 complete divisions were available for Albania: four had been already sent, two more were on their way. Apart from these events, the 10 motorised divisions forming the strategic reserve, all of which were complete, and 7 other infantry divisions were being brought up to strength to be sent to Albania as well.¹⁸

However, while the Italian Army's demobilisation of autumn 1940 (sometimes considered to be one of the reasons of the Italian defeat in Greece) greatly reduced army's combat efficiency, it must be considered that its effects were minimal when compared to those the Italian defeats in both Greece and Northern Africa had on the Italian Army.

The Consequences of the Italian Defeats

Ill-conceived and even worst prepared and carried out, the Italian attack against Greece soon turned into a disaster. A mere eleven days after the offensive started, the Italian advance was stopped with only limited gains, and a week later the Greek counterattack began. At the beginning of December the seemingly unstoppable Greek advance into Albanian soil generated a political crisis that brought many changes in the Italian military leadership. Badoglio resigned and was soon replaced by General Ugo Cavallero, who eventually assumed the command of the Italian forces in Albania. Badoglio's fate was shared also by the Undersecretary of Navy and Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Cavagnari, who was replaced by Admiral Riccardi after the British attack at Taranto harbour of 11-12 November. Meanwhile, on 9 December, in North Africa the British attacked the advanced Italian positions at Sidi Barrani that had been reached the previous September during the short-lived Graziani offensive. Soon the British counterattack (oper-

17 Mario MONTANARI, *La Campagna di Grecia. Tomo I* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1980), pp. 66-70. Francesco ROSSI, *Mussolini e lo Stato Maggiore. Avvenimenti del 1940* (Rome, Tipografia Regionale, 1951), pp. 75-79, 98-99.

18 AUSSME L-13/44, Army Effectiveness at 15 December 1940.

ation ‘Compass’) became a major offensive, later to be known as ‘O’Connor’s offensive’, and in January 1941 it brought the collapse of the Italian positions in Western Cyrenaica. Less than a month later the offensive came to an end with the British victory at Beda Fomm on 7 February, and the destruction of Italian 10th Army. Since March and April 1941, however, the Italian situation did change, thanks to the German intervention in both Northern Africa and in the Balkans.



Alberto Pariani

Apart from their moral, political, military and strategic consequences, the defeats of winter 1940-41 also greatly affected the strength and organisation of the Italian Army. During ‘O’Connor’s Offensive’ in North Africa the Italians lost some 130,000 men and huge quantities of weapons and materiel, including some 400 tanks and more than 800 guns. Nine out of the ten divisions of the 10th Army that had been wiped out were disbanded, while the tenth division had to be completely reorganised. That left the Italians in North Africa with only five – largely incomplete – infantry divisions and with one armoured division hurriedly sent from Italy.¹⁹ Although less attention has been paid to the consequences of Italian Army’s defeats in Albania, these had not minor impact than the defeats in North Africa. In October 1940

19 I.S.O. (Ian Stanley Ord) PLAYFAIR, *The Mediterranean and Middle East. Volume I: The Early Successes Against Italy (to May 1941)* (London, H.M.S.O., 1954), p. 362. Mario MONTANARI, *Le Operazioni in Africa Settentrionale. Volume I – Sidi el Barrani. Giugno 1940 – Febbraio 1941* (Rome, Stato Maggiore Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1985), p. 431.



Alfredo Guzzoni

there were 8 Italian divisions in Albania and other 22 were added between November 1940 and April 1941. Not only were most of the divisions sent to Albania ad hoc and incomplete (what made subsequent reorganisation necessary), but the average losses suffered by almost every division in the area affected their combat effectiveness. About 650,000 Italian soldiers fought in Greece and Albania (that is more than three times the number of men who fought in North Africa in the same period) and no less than 154,000 became casualties. This number also includes soldiers who were victims of serious illness such as frost-bite.²⁰

As early as 19 December 1940 General Guzzoni (Cavallero's deputy) estimated that the Italian Army had lost the equivalent of 8-10 divisions in Albania and, though these had not been disbanded, they badly needed reorganisation.²¹ In all, with the defeats in Albania

20 MONTANARI, *Grecia*, pp. 938-943. Details about the losses suffered by any single Italian division in Albania are hard to find and often quite unreliable. According to the above mentioned Italian official history, the "Acqui" infantry division suffered a total of 2,095 casualties (dead, wounded and missing). However Giorgio Rochat, who stated the division actually lost 3,005 men, has contested this figure. See: Giorgio ROCHAT, 'La Divisione «Acqui» nella Guerra 1940-1943', in: Giorgio ROCHAT and Marcello VENTURI, ed., *La Divisione Acqui a Cefalonia. Settembre 1943* (Milan, Mursia, 1983), pp. 21-55 (reference at p. 25).

21 BIAGINI and FRATTOLILLO, ed., *Verbali delle Riunioni Tenute dal Capo di S.[tato] M.[aggiore]*

and North Africa, the Italian Army lost no less than 270,000 men (roughly 20 % of its total strength in June 1940), or some 20 divisions or equivalent, that is more than one fourth of all the available divisions. In mid-June 1941 the Italian Army was down to 64 divisions of which only 6 – less than 10 % – could be considered complete and fully operational. Of the remaining units no less than 53 divisions had various shortages, sometimes so serious to need a reorganisation, while at least other 5 divisions had to be fully reorganised (see table 2).

(total number) Type of division	Efficiency: Complete	Minor shortage	Not complete / reorganising	Unknown (*)
(43) Fanteria	1	19	1	22
(5) Alpine	1		1	3
(3) Autotrasportabili	3			
(5) Autotrasportabili A.S.				5
(3) Celeri			3	
(2) Motorizzate	1			1
(3) Corazzate		2		1
Sum: 64 divisions	6	21	5	32

Table 2: Divisions available in the Italian Army, 15th June 1941

(*) Mostly in reorganization in Albania and Greece or engaged in North Africa.

(Source: AUSSME N-9/2091, Army Effectiveness at 15 June 1941)

Though a comparison with the figures of the previous October is hardly possible, it is clear that the Italian Army's operational capability (meaning the percentage of operational divisions) was approximately reduced to one-half: 27-odd divisions either complete or with minor shortages in June 1941 against 66 in October 1940. In addition, another 9 divisions had been destroyed, which was 12 % of the entire army divisional strength. In October 1940 the operational capability

Generale. Volume I: 26 Gennaio 1939 – 29 Dicembre 1940 (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1982), pp. 132-134 (Conference held at the Comando Supremo on 19 December 1940).

of the army roughly corresponded to two-thirds of Pariani's minimal requirement of 90 divisions, while in June 1941 it corresponded to no more than one-third of this requirement. The already weak Italian Army was now barely capable of conducting independent operations, and recovering some more operational capabilities had become an urgent priority.

First Plans for a Recovery

It has been pointed out that the Italian Army might have learned the lesson in North Africa between December 1940 and February 1941²², and, it should be added, in the war against Greece between October 1940 and April 1941. Simply it did not, or at least not in the proper way. Behaving in no different way than its British counterpart after Dunkirk, the Italian Army lost no time in analysing the lessons of the lost campaigns. Also, the Italian Army hierarchy acted almost like the men at the British War Office, who 'remained committed to their belief that the army able to deploy the greater weight of material won wars...'²³

The Italian Army, which began the war with the assumption that 'numbers were decisive', an assumption that had 'determined Italian doctrine and force structure', just remained faithful to it 'despite repeated demonstrations of its fallaciousness'²⁴ and, at the end, confirmed both its doctrine and force structure. Convenient scapegoats for the military blunders in Greece and Northern Africa were found in the local commanders, soon replaced, in the lack of strength of Pariani's 'divisione binaria' and in the 'mighty' British Matilda tank. However, decisions had to be taken to regain some kind of military effectiveness²⁵, a task

22 KNOX, 'Italian Armed Forces', p. 159.

23 David FRENCH, *Raising Churchill's Army. The British Army and the War against Germany 1919-1945* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 189.

24 KNOX, 'Italian Armed Forces', p. 153.

25 In the Italian Army military effectiveness was generally related to strength and weaponry, while only scant attention was paid to tactics and training. In June 1941 the Army Staff ordered the creation of appropriate "training battalions" for selected infantry NCOs, while in November a directive was issued concerning the "moral and training improvement" of the army for the coming spring. The latter focused on gaining a quick reaction capability at command level, at increasing infantry's marching capabilities, at avoiding panicking in front of enemy attacks led by armoured units and at increasing reconnaissance and communications. LUCIO CEVA, *La Condotta Italiana della Guerra. Cavallero e il Comando Supremo 1941/1942* (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1975), pp. 72-73, 161-164. AUSSME M-3/38, Army Staff

initially met with the belated attempt to increase the strength of the available divisions and asking the Germans to supply large quantities of new weapons. Only later the real problem was to be faced, when decisions had to be taken involving the entire army structure.

As early as 10 November 1940 Mussolini urged his military leaders to increase from two to three the number of regiments in all the infantry divisions. This was a belated criticism of the ‘Pariani’s reform’ and a request to proceed with a re-mobilisation of the army. But as the deputy Chief of Army Staff Roatta²⁶ observed, such mobilisation not only required some 100,000 new draftees, but also a call back to arms of almost all the men that had been discharged in the previous October. This was impractical given the lack of weapons and equipment. The only possible solution was to proceed with a slow and gradual mobilisation according to priorities: namely Albania, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, Corsica and finally the western border.²⁷ At the end of November Mussolini agreed this was the only possible solution and ordered the army to gradually bring to full strength 50 divisions in the Italian mainland and in Albania. Since it was not possible to add a third regiment to the divisions, he ordered to add to each division a ‘legione camicie nere’ (‘Blackshirts legion’) and a mortar battalion.²⁸ Since March 1940 some infantry divisions already had a ‘legione camicie nere’ attached,²⁹ nonetheless Mussolini’s decision did not meet with the approval of his military leaders.

directive of 28 November 1941. As a matter of fact no real improvement was attained on the effectiveness of the average Italian units, being the “renaissance” in North Africa due only to the employment of elite armoured and motorised units (see FRENCH, *Churchill’s Army*, p. 219).

26 General Roatta acted as Chief of Army Staff in lieu of Marshal Graziani since June 1940, when the latter replaced Marshal Italo Balbo as the Supreme Commander in Northern Africa. After Graziani’s dismissal in February 1941 Roatta was appointed Chief of the Army Staff.

27 BIAGINI and FRATTOLILLO, ed., *Verbali delle Riunioni Tenute dal Capo di S.[tato] M.[aggiore] Generale. Volume IV: 1° Gennaio 1943 – 7 Settembre 1943* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1985), pp. 242-252 (Conference held at Palazzo Venezia on 10th November 1940). AUSSME M-3/1, Roatta’s note of 13 November 1940. AUSSME H-9/9, War Ministry to Mussolini of 18 November 1940.

28 AUSSME H-9/6, Mussolini to Roatta of 23 November 1940. See also in: BIAGINI and FRATTOLILLO, ed., *Diario Storico del Comando Supremo. Volume II: 1.9.1940 – 31.12.1940 – Tomo I* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1988), pp. 445-446.

29 A “Blackshirts legion” was generally composed of two infantry battalions and a machine gun company. However, only seldom these were at full strength.

Shortly before being replaced, Badoglio welcomed the idea of putting a definite end to the ‘Pariani’s reform’ by adding a third regiment to the divisions. However, he observed that such a change had to be introduced very slowly and he also contested Mussolini’s decision to replace the third regiments with a ‘Blackshirts legion’, which, being smaller than a regular regiment and inferior in terms of firepower, he saw as no adequate replacement.³⁰ Roatta also shared Badoglio’s view on this, although he admitted that there were no other options and that no changes in army divisions’ organisation could be introduced at the time.³¹ Neither wanted a two-regiment division nor a ‘Blackshirts legion’ as the third regiment. Circumstances dictated, however, that this last option was the solution chosen by the War Ministry in January 1941.³²

The failure to reorganise the organisational structure of the division was matched by the failure of the belated attempt to re-mobilise the army. The rapid deterioration of the situation in Albania and North Africa soon made it clear that Mussolini’s aim to raise to full strength 50 divisions just could not be achieved. On 20 March 1941 Roatta (now Chief of Army Staff) observed that only 26 divisions or less (mostly incomplete) were still available in Italy, a consequence of the latest transfers of divisions to Albania and Libya. Since almost every one of these 26 divisions were needed to defend Italy as well as her borders and her ambitions in Southern France and Corsica, no reserve was left. The conclusion was that if the Greeks – also thanks to the British support – were able to fight for a long time the Italian Army was going to face an unavoidable crisis.³³ This was probably the basis of the subsequent decision not to re-raise those divisions lost in North Africa but rather to use all the available means to bring the remaining ones to full strength.³⁴

However, the central drawback to the army’s reorganisation was a lack of weapons. This was a shortfall that the Italians had requested their German ally to bridge. According to the list issued by Roatta on 17 December 1940 the Ger-

30 AUSSME M-3/1, Badoglio’s note of 23 November 1940.

31 AUSSME I-4/13, Roatta’s note of 23 December 1940.

32 AUSSME I-4/13, War Ministry note of 22 January 1941. Occasionally some of the divisions deployed in the Balkans had a third infantry regiment attached. This was the only exception to the basic rule.

33 AUSSME M-3/3, Roatta’s note of 20 March 1941.

34 AUSSME M-3/3, Comando Supremo note of 23 March 1941.



Carlo Geloso

mans were to be asked to deliver to Italy some 7,850 trucks and no less than 800 tanks and 300 armoured cars. The Italian requests also included 1,650 light (37 millimetres) and 675 medium antitank guns as well as 990 '88' antiaircraft guns, and as many artillery pieces as possible.³⁵ These requests were presented, without

³⁵ BIAGINI and FRATTOLILLO, ed., *Diario Storico del Comando Supremo. Volume II – Tomo II*,

success, to the chief of the German High Command Keitel during a conference held on 30-31 December 1940. First of all the Italian requests were clearly exaggerated (800 tanks were about one fourth of all the tanks the Germans deployed in the attack against the Soviet Union), also the Germans were unwilling to supply large quantities of weapons to the Italian Army that were needed by the Wehrmacht. In the end the German High Command agreed to supply limited quantities of weapons and materiel, including about 3,800 trucks, 100 light and 250 medium antitank guns (along with other 250 French 25 millimetres guns) and 450 French-built tanks. The only item the Germans agreed to supply in such a quantity to match Italian requests was artillery, of which about 700 mixed pieces (mostly French and Czech built) were to be delivered.³⁶ In any case the actual deliveries of weapons and other materiel from Germany not only were limited in their quantity, but also were tardily carried out.³⁷

Given these problems, it is not surprising that in June 1941 the Italian Army had a very low efficiency level and had no effective reorganisation plan in place. Until June the Italian military leaders only aimed at bringing up to strength the available divisions and to repatriate as many units as possible from the Balkans area.³⁸ Only two new divisions were to be raised and these were a new 'divisione paracadutisti' (paratroopers) and an armoured division, the latter intended to be equipped mostly with the tanks that had to be delivered by the Germans. However, international developments between May and June 1941, particularly the German attack against the Soviet Union, soon affected the Italian strategy and consequently the reorganisation of the Italian Army. The first consequence was the decision to take part in the German war against Soviet Union, which involved the deployment at the Eastern Front of an Italian Army Corps composed of two 'divisioni autotrasportabili' and a cavalry division. The worsening of Italian-French relations also moved the Army Staff to increase from 7 to 9 the number of divisions deployed against France.³⁹ Clearly the Italian Army was going to

pp. 291-294 (Roatta's note of 17 December 1940).

36 AUSSME L-13/45 and N-9/2190. Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv Wi./IB 1.33. (Contains various notes on the conferences held on 30 and 31 December 1940).

37 About the deliveries of weapons from Germany see the reports in: AUSSME N-9/2190.

38 See the note issued by the Army Staff of 24 April 1941 (in: AUSSME N-8/1449).

39 See the conferences held at the Army Staff on 26 June and 1st July 1941 (in: AUSSME N-8/1562).

face increased needs, for which, however, no adequate means were available. As Cavallero said during a talk held on 2 July with the German military attaché von Rintelen, German help was essential to reorganise the Italian Army, which in any case could only bring up to strength the divisions already available. No new unit could be raised, apart from the two above mentioned divisions and some static infantry divisions to be employed in occupation duties.⁴⁰

Mussolini's Plan and the Basis of Army Reorganisation

On 14 July 1941 Mussolini reverted his attention to the matter of the army's organisation instructing his Chief of Army Staff Roatta to develop a plan for gradually raising new divisions to reach a total of 80.⁴¹ Ten days later Mussolini issued to the Chief of General Staff Cavallero and to the King Vittorio Emanuele a 'note on the political-military situation' which summarised the Italian strategy and policy in view of the recent developments. According to Mussolini the situation in North Africa had come to a stalemate due to many different factors, such as the impregnable British defence of Tobruk and the lack of Axis troops. Hence, unless new factors arose to change this situation, the number of divisions to be deployed in this area had to be limited to 10: that is 2 armoured and 2 motorised divisions, along with 6 infantry. However, this was only a small part of the strategic needs that the Italian Army had to meet. To increase the Italian role in the war against Soviet Union Mussolini wanted a second Italian Army Corps to be ready, a motorised one when possible. Also, given the ambiguous attitude of the French Vichy government (and the Italian interest on some French territories), preparations had to be made to be ready to invade Southern France and Corsica, as well as Tunisia. These tasks actually required much more divisions than an 'active' front like Northern Africa did: in all 10 infantry divisions, 4 mountain, 2 motorised and 1 armoured. Similar needs had to be faced at the eastern frontier as well, given the uncertain attitude of the Croatian government. Hence for the Balkans, other than the divisions already employed in occupation duties in Greece and in Albania, 10 divisions were needed, of which 2 should have been armoured and 2 motorised. Finally, there were the needs connected to the defence of Italy (actually her main islands, Sicily and Sardinia) and the establishment of a strategic

40 AUSSME N-8/1343, Cavallero's diary, entry for 2 July 1941.

41 AUSSME N-8/1343, Mussolini to Roatta, 14 July 1941.

reserve. The first required 7 infantry divisions, while the second needed another 20 divisions. As Mussolini concluded, by the spring of 1942 the Italian Army had to have no less than 80 divisions.⁴²

Apart from any consideration about Mussolini's conduct of the war, it is clear that his requests about the army's reorganisation were simply utopian. His note presented the army with tasks that could not be met, furthermore, he seemed to be completely oblivious of its present condition. In all he foresaw the employment of 70 divisions, of which no less than 5 had to be armoured and 6 motorised, yet without taking into account how many divisions were actually engaged in occupation duties in the Balkan area (including Yugoslavia, Greece and Albania). The striking contrast between the reality and Mussolini's requirements can be clearly seen by comparing the latter with the actual number of divisions available. At the end of July 1941 the Italian Army had 64 divisions, one of which was being fully reorganised. Only 3 armoured and 2 motorised divisions were available. That meant the army was 16 divisions short of Mussolini's goal of 80, and that one third of the divisions to be newly raised were to be either armoured or motorised, an unrealistic proportion especially for the Italian Army dependent on German armoured materiel.

The contrast between the army hierarchy intention to bring up to strength the available divisions and not to raise new ones and Mussolini's plan is quite clear, yet no one seems to have raised any objection. Consequently, at the end of July the Army Staff developed a first draft of a new reorganisation plan that dictated the raising of 16 new divisions by the spring of 1942. Of these 10 were to be infantry (including 6 static divisions, one of which was raised in August 1941), 1 mountain, 1 airlanding infantry, 3 'autotrasportabili' and 1 armoured. A second armoured division had to be restructured from an existing cavalry one and the new paratroopers division (not considered amongst the 16 new ones) had to be created as well. The 80 army's divisions (plus one, the paratroopers) were to be deployed as follows: the 'active' fronts included 14 divisions in Northern Africa (including 2 armoured and 7 motorised), 4 of which were to be deployed against Tunisia, and other 5 divisions in the Soviet Union. In addition, eleven divisions,

42 AUSSME N-8/1343, Mussolini's note of 24 July 1941. Worth to note Mussolini's aim of 80 divisions was actually 10 divisions short Pariani's minimal requirement of 90 divisions, that is roughly the number of divisions that had been disbanded after the defeats in winter 1940-41.

including 1 armoured, had to be deployed against France, 10 (including 2 armoured) against Croatia⁴³ and 19 were reserved to perform occupation duties in Albania and Greece, including the Aegean. Another 12 divisions were required to defend the main islands and Southern Italy (including Rome), while 9 divisions – plus the paratroopers – were to form the ‘strategic reserve’. Only a few days later, on 1st August, Cavallero finally approved this plan.⁴⁴ The differences between Mussolini’s plan and the one approved by Cavallero are stark. The most striking was the larger allotment of units for occupation duties in the Balkans (19 rather than 10) and for the defence of Italy (12 rather than 7). That left only 10 divisions rather than 20 to form the strategic reserve, a number further reduced to 9 when the War Ministry decided to raise only 8 static infantry divisions and to include the paratroopers division in the total of 16 divisions to be raised.⁴⁵

Between August and November 1941 some 7 new divisions were raised. Apart from four static infantry divisions these were the paratroopers division, the air-landing infantry division and a new mountain division. Two existing infantry divisions began to be motorised.

Facing Strategic and Economical Limits

Two main hindrances prevented both Mussolini’s and the army leaders’ re-organisation plans from becoming effective. The first was strategic, being the consequence of the Axis’ military developments that affected Italian policy and strategy. The second was simply the economic consequence of the limited availability of raw materials and the consequence of this on Italian war production.

The first strategic limitation came from developments in North Africa where, according to Mussolini’s and Army’s plans, 10 divisions were to be deployed against the British forces and 4 other were to be deployed against French-held

43 Following an agreement with Croatia (formally an independent state), in early July 1941 Italian troops began to withdraw redeploying within their own borders. This account for Mussolini’s request to have 10 divisions (two of which armoured) deployed against Croatia which, like Vichy France, was to be quickly seized when necessary. Soon after, in early August, the beginning of partisans’ insurgency led to the redeployment of Italian troops in Croatian soil.

44 AUSSME I-4/76, Army Staff note of 29 July 1941. AUSSME N-8/1344, Comando Supremo note of 1st August 1941.

45 AUSSME H-1/30, War Ministry note, undated (between 1st and 3 August 1941).

Tunisia. Such reorganisation of the Italian forces in the area had actually already been envisaged in early May by the Army Staff whose first plan aimed at deploying in North Africa 3 armoured, 7 motorised, and 4 static infantry divisions. According to this plan five divisions (four 'autotrasportabili AS' and one motorised) were to be transformed in 'divisioni motorizzate AS' and a sixth – the division that had been badly mauled during the British offensive of winter 1940-41 – was to be transformed into a static infantry division. Another seven divisions were to be moved to North Africa, though only one (a motorised division) had already been selected, while the availability of the other six was not certain.⁴⁶ However, both the strain imposed on frontline units by continuous operations and the inadequacies of Italian naval transports made it impossible to realise this plan. At the end of June the Army Staff concluded that, given the current capabilities of the naval transports to Libya, only 8 divisions could be available in the area at the end of summer, and of these only four out of six were to be reorganised.⁴⁷ On 18 November 1941, when the British Army attacked again in 'Operation Crusader', only 9 Italian divisions were available in Libya, and were soon reduced to 8 by the destruction of one of them during the British offensive. In January 1942, when the British offensive came to end, the Italian units in Northern Africa were again in a poor state. This moved the Italian Theatre Commander, General Bastico, to suggest a general reorganisation for the Italian divisions intended to further reduce their strength while increasing their firepower.

The Comando Supremo approved the proposal at the end of January,⁴⁸ though at the end of April the reorganisation was still under way and most of the units were largely incomplete having only an average 60 % of their established strength. Only two units (an armoured and a motorised division) were at 80 % of their established strength.⁴⁹ This situation was a consequence of transportation problems, which also affected the deployment of new units. A decision was taken during a

46 AUSSME M-7/426, Army Staff note of 5 May 1941. AUSSME I-4/21, Comando Supremo note of 19 May 1941. The six divisions still to be selected included 2 armoured (including the one to be raised using the tanks delivered by the Germans), 1 motorised and 3 static infantry divisions.

47 AUSSME N-7/1157-A, Army Staff note of 28 June 1941.

48 AUSSME I-4/33, Bastico' note of 3 January 1942. AUSSME N-8/1466, Comando Supremo note of 22 January 1942.

49 AUSSME I-4/37, Comando Supremo note of 29 April 1942.

series of conferences held at the Comando Supremo at the beginning of March 1942. Completing the units already available was the first priority, so only two new divisions (one armoured and one motorised) were scheduled to move to Libya. Three other infantry divisions would follow these. However, a few days later, Cavallero changed the plans and decided to send only one armoured division and to delay, until the end of the year, the transportation of any other division.⁵⁰ In early August 1942, at the climax of the Axis offensive toward El Alamein, only 9 Italian divisions, mostly incomplete, were in Northern Africa rather than the 14 planned in the previous summer.

Another major strategic limitation was the situation in the Balkans. The matter of how many Italian forces were needed for occupation duties in Yugoslavia was first discussed in a conference held at the Comando Supremo on 17 April 1941 (that is eleven days after the beginning of the German attack). The conclusion drawn was that some 8-9 divisions were needed, and since 14 divisions were actually engaged against Yugoslavia it was agreed that no less than 4-5 divisions could soon be made available for other purposes.⁵¹ Three days later the Army Staff issued its own orders to deploy 7 divisions in the Yugoslav territories. After a week orders were changed and two other divisions were added, bringing the total to 9.⁵² This was a consequence of the political tensions between Italy and the new state of Croatia, a condition which did not affect at all the decisions concerning the forces to be employed in occupation duties in Greece. Here, according to an Army Staff's analysis of March 1941, no less than 11 divisions were needed.⁵³ But in this case too, plans had to be changed soon. At the end of April new plans were developed, which assessed that 16 divisions were required for occupation duties in Greece, along with other 4 divisions to be deployed in Southern Yugo-

50 AUSSME I-4/36, Comando Supremo note of 4 and 6 March 1942. Elements of this armoured division (the "Littorio") were already in Libya. The division had to be completed between June and October with the transfer of other elements from Italy.

51 BIAGINI and FRATTOLILLO, ed., *Verballi delle Riunioni Tenute dal Capo di S.[tato] M.[aggiore] Generale. Volume II: 1° Gennaio 1941 – 31 Dicembre 1941* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1984), pp. 33-37 (Conference held at the Comando Supremo on 14 April 1941, morning).

52 AUSSME N-9/2075 and M-7/208, Army Staff note of 20 and 27 April 1941. These plans were elaborated before the agreement with the Croatian government which led to the temporary withdrawal of the Italian units from the country. See note 43.

53 AUSSME N-10/2244, Army Staff note, undated (but March 1941).

slavia (Montenegro and Kosovo) and 3 to be deployed in Albania.⁵⁴ It was clear that to deploy 32 divisions in the Balkans (9 in Northern and 2 in Southern Yugoslavia, 5 in Albania and Kosovo and 16 in Greece) was too much of a burden for an army now reduced to 64 divisions. As a consequence the Army Staff suggested reducing this number to some 23-28 divisions.⁵⁵ However, growing political tensions with both Croatia and Bulgaria and the beginning of the partisan revolt in the Yugoslav territories compelled the Italians to maintain a large number of divisions in the area.

Mussolini's plan of July 1941 assessed that 20 divisions were needed in the Balkans, but did not contain any reference to either Albania or Greece. On the other hand Comando Supremo's plan suggested a total of 28 divisions for both Yugoslavia (10 divisions) and the area Albania-Greece (18 divisions). In August 1941 there were 31 divisions in the Balkans, almost the half of the 64 divisions of the Italian Army. Of these 9 were in Slovenia and Croatia; 11 in Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo, and other 11 in Greece. Between October and November two divisions were repatriated bringing down the number to 29 (9 in Slovenia and Croatia; 10 in Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo, 10 in Greece and the neighbouring islands).⁵⁶

At the end of 1941 the Italian Army deployed in the Balkans one division more than the 28 suggested by the Comando Supremo and some 8 divisions more than Mussolini had envisaged. Yet, at the beginning of 1942, the situation worsened. The growing danger represented by the partisan activity in the Yugoslav territories soon compelled the Germans to increase their counterinsurgency operations in the area and to suggest that the Italians do the same. This necessitate a further strengthening of the Italian forces in the area, a measure that both Cavallero and the newly appointed Chief of Army Staff General Ambrosio took into ac-

54 AUSSME N-9/2075, Army Staff note of 20 April 1941. In: AUSSME N-9/1449, Albania Theatre Commander note of 24 April 1941.

55 AUSSME M-7/208, Army Staff note of 27 April 1941.

56 About the Italian forces in the Balkans see: Dorello FERRARI, "Considerazioni sull'Ordinamento delle Truppe nelle Campagne Balcaniche 1939-1943", in: Bruna Micheletti and Pier Paolo POGGIO, ed., *L'Italia in Guerra 1940-43* (Brescia, Fondazione Micheletti, 1982), pp. 125-140. See also: Salvatore LOI, *Le Operazioni delle Unità Italiane in Jugoslavia (1941-1943)* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1978). No analysis of the Italian military occupation of both Albania and Greece has appeared so far. The Italian division in the Dodecanes islands is not included in the totals.

count as early as the end of December 1941. Lack of available divisions reduced this strengthening to the bone. On 3 January 1942 Cavallero ordered only one division to be sent to Croatia, while four newly raised static infantry divisions were intended to replace an equal number of operational divisions in the area.⁵⁷ However, they were deployed without freeing any formation already in the area. In March 1942 the Italian Army had 32 divisions in the Balkans (12 in Yugoslavia, 10 in Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo and 10 in Greece and the islands), and this number increased to 34 in June (15 in Yugoslavia, 10 in Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo and 7 in Greece).



These strategic limitations in the Balkan area were further emphasised by Italian economic deficiencies that hampered the raising of new formations. Less than three weeks after Cavallero had approved the reorganisation plan, the Army Staff summarised the basic needs to be satisfied to raise the 16 new divisions. The result was the army lacked some 9,000 trained officers and no less than 11,000 non-commissioned officers and 200,000 men, it also lacked horses and trucks. New weapons – including about 300 tanks, 6,500 automatic guns, 1,300 mortars, 500 antitank gun and 900 artillery pieces – could actually be produced in 6-10

⁵⁷ AUSSME M-3/59, Meeting held at the Army Staff on 30 December 1941. AUSSME N-8/1345, Cavallero's diary, entries for 30 December 1941 and 3 January 1942.

months, but only if no other needs (like an increase in the number of divisions deployed in the Eastern Front) had to be satisfied.⁵⁸ Cavallero too came to the same conclusions, and on 13 September 1941 he finally ordered a slight modification of the reorganisation plan. Only 35 of the divisions already available were to be brought to full strength while 16 new divisions had to be raised in any way possible. The only absolute condition was the creation of 2 armoured and 3 motorised divisions.⁵⁹

Next day the matter was discussed again in a meeting between representatives of both the Comando Supremo and the Army Staff. The latter not only noticed the gap between requirements and production capabilities, but noticed also that the lack of trained men and of transportation capabilities made the creation of 16 new divisions a task hard to meet.⁶⁰ At the end of September a new analysis by the Army Staff offered an even gloomier picture. Though more divisions than expected were to be available in Italy, only a limited number of units could actually be available for the deployment in North Africa, the Eastern Front or the Balkans. This was a consequence of the slow pace in raising new divisions, which made them unfit for operations except on paper. For the spring of 1942 some 21 divisions (of which only 19 were going to be operational) could be available in Northern Italy, that is, to be deployed on the western border or to be placed in the strategic reserve. This was actually one division more than envisaged by the plan. Also 16 other incomplete divisions (plus the paratroopers one) were going to be available in Southern Italy or in the main islands. Again there were four divisions more than envisaged by the plan. However, that left only 24 incomplete divisions available for the Balkan area and a total of 17 divisions available for both Northern Africa and the Eastern Front. That meant five divisions less than envisaged by the plan for the Balkan area and two less for both North Africa and the Eastern Front.⁶¹

Italian capabilities only permitted the maintenance of a limited number of operational units, 10 in Northern Africa (plus 4, second grade, deployed against Tunisia) and 3 on the Eastern Front. Other strategic and political needs, such as the defence of Italy, the occupation duties in the Balkans and the readiness

58 AUSSME I-4/76, Army Staff note of 20 August 1941.

59 AUSSME N-8/1460, Cavallero to Roatta of 13 September 1941.

60 AUSSME M-7/408, Conference held on 14 September 1941.

61 AUSSME H-1/30, Army Staff note of 26 September 1941.

to move against Vichy France had to be faced somehow using incomplete units. It was clear that the army could not afford to be involved in new tasks that required an allocation of operational divisions; hence, no new unit was available to be sent to the Eastern Front. On 16 October 1941 Cavallero agreed to the Army Staff's analysis.⁶²

But the worst was yet to come. At the end of 1941 the Italian Army had 71 divisions, 9 less than the intended 80, and only 34 of them (14 in Northern Africa and 20 in Italy) to be brought to full strength.⁶³ At the beginning of 1942 the army was facing many tasks of strategic rele-



Ezio Rosi

levance: the fighting in North Africa and in Soviet Union, the defence of Italy, the occupation duties in the Balkans and the readiness to move against French territories. But only 71, mostly incomplete, divisions were available to confront these tasks, which made it impossible to face new strategic and political requirements. Thus, according to Cavallero, Mussolini's request to send six more divisions to the Eastern Front to create an Italian Army could only be partially met. Only three divisions could eventually be sent, and only when the situation in both the Balkan area and in the Mediterranean was favourable to the Axis.⁶⁴ At the beginning of 1942 the debate between Mussolini and Cavallero reached a climax. Mussolini, taking advantage of the German crisis in the east and being confident of the German capabilities to win the war, looked at strengthening the Italian presence on

62 AUSSME H-1/30, Comando Supremo note of 13 October 1941.

63 BIAGINI and FRATTOLILLO, ed., *Diario Storico del Comando Supremo. Volume V: 1.9.1941 – 31.12.1941 – Tomo I* (Rome, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito – Ufficio Storico, 1995), p. 648.

Other three divisions (not included in the number of 34) were to be brought at full strength to be eventually sent to the Eastern Front.

64 AUSSME N-8/1345, Cavallero to Mussolini of 6 January 1942.

the Eastern Front as a way to regain that position of ‘Germany’s first ally’ Italy had lost in the winter of 1940-41. On the other hand Cavallero focused instead on Italy’s interests in the Mediterranean and, given the lack of resources, was unwilling to undermine her strength there. Yet, though Cavallero was true to the original plan of July 1941, Mussolini’s strategy was actually coherent with his ambitions to make Italy a first class power.⁶⁵

The contrast between Mussolini and Cavallero only had a possible solution: the completion of army’s reorganisation plan laid down in the previous summer, which included a ‘strategic reserve’ that might provide the formations needed for the Eastern Front. Very soon, however, the goal of an 80-divisions army proved to be impossible to reach. At the end of January 1942 the Army Staff not only belatedly admitted it was not possible to raise 16 new divisions, but also that even more limited aims could hardly be met for the coming spring. According to the latest version of the reorganisation plan (the one Cavallero did approve in October 1941) the army was to have 80 divisions in the spring of 1942: 64 already available and 16 newly raised. Of the first 33 were to be brought to full strength while only 4 of the newly raised divisions could actually be completed. However, at the end of January 1942 only 7 new divisions had been raised and only 6 of the 70 available divisions were at full strength.⁶⁶ Thus it was possible to foresee that at the end of June 1942 – when the reorganisation was to be completed – the Italian Army was going to have no more than 77 divisions, of which only 31 would be completed and at full strength.⁶⁷ At last, the failure of the reorganisation plan had been acknowledged. This failure was not going to be accepted by Mussolini who on his side insisted on the need to increase the Italian involvement at the Eastern Front. On the other hand both the Army Staff and Cavallero suggested a limited increase of the Italian military involvement there, while a larger strategic reserve had to be maintained. Their incapability to move Mussolini to accept their point of view, as well as their incapability to meet the army’s needs, soon brought the Italian Army to run straight down the road to defeat.

65 For a basic reference to the events that led to the deployment of an Italian Army in the Eastern Front see: Lucio CEVA, ‘La Campagna di Russia nel Quadro Strategico della Guerra Fascista’, in Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Cuneo e Provincia, ed., *Gli Italiani sul Fronte Russo* (Bari, De Donato, 1982), pp. 163-193.

66 One division was disbanded in Northern Africa at the end of January.

67 AUSSME I-4/76, Annexes to Army Staff note of 27 January 1942 (note cannot be found).

The Road to Defeat: Unbalancing Means and Ends

Already in mid-May 1942 it was obvious that the reorganisation plans laid down first by Mussolini and then by Cavallero in the previous summer had failed (tables 3 and 4).

Divisions available (of which at full strength)	Cavallero's Plan, October 1941	Army Staff's Plan, January 1942	Actual situation, 15 May 1942
Fanteria	39 (11)	39 (7)	42 (4)
Occupazione (*)	8 (0)	8 (0)	8 (0)
Alpine	6 (4)	6 (3)	6 (3)
Autotrasportabili	5 (2)	5 (4)	5 (0)
Celeri	2 (2)	2 (1)	2 (0)
Motorizzate (**)	12 (12)	11 (11)	(+) 8 (2)
Corazzate	6 (4)	4 (3)	(+) 4 (0)
Paracadutisti	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (0)
Aviotrasportate	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (0)
Totals	80 (37)	77 (31)	77 (9)

Table 3: Reorganisation plans and army's composition in May 1942

(*) Static infantry.

(**) Including the "divisioni AS 42".

(+) Actual situation of the divisions in North Africa uncertain. There were 2 "corazzate" and 6 "motorizzate" divisions.

(Sources: AUSSME I-4/76, Annexes to Army Staff note of 27 January 1942. AUSSME M-3/38, Army Effectiveness at 15 May 1942)

Though between January and May 1942 other 7 new divisions were raised (3 'autotrasportabili' and 4 static infantry), thus bringing the total of the newly raised divisions to 14 (2 short the initial aim of 16), the Italian Army only had 77 divisions.⁶⁸ It was not only 3 divisions' short Mussolini's aim of 80, but it was

⁶⁸ This figure does not include the "divisioni costiere" (coastal divisions), created since 1942 from existing local defence units. Being fit only for coastal defence, and being almost completely incapable of any redeployment, these formations were never considered by the Italian Army Staff amongst the number of the "operational" divisions.

also some 22 divisions short its own aim of having at least 31 operational units at full strength. Italian Army deficiencies were obvious: the continuous strain on the available resources imposed by the war in Northern Africa and (to a more limited extent) by the involvement in the Balkans and the Eastern Front simply made it impossible to bring other formations to operational status. Actually only 9 divisions were complete and fully operational and even adding to this number the 8 divisions in Northern Africa and the 3 divisions at the Eastern Front, the final result – 20 divisions – remained far from both Cavallero's and Army Staff's aims. The limited operational capabilities of the Italian Army were not, however, the only reason for the Italian defeat. This was the result of both the failure of the army's reorganisation (itself the result of the lack of resources and their inadequate allocation) and of the incapability to fit Italy's strategic and political aims to the actual capabilities of her army. Rather than the lack of resources, it was the inadequate use of the available ones that finally would result on the failure of Italy's military goals.

Area / Number of divisions	Cavallero's Plan, August 1941	Army Staff's Plan, January 1942	Army deployment, May 1942
North Africa (*)	14	12	8
Balkans	29	32	34
Soviet Union	5	3	[plus 6] 3
Italy (**)	32	(+) 30	[less 6] 32
Total	80	77	77

Table 4: Deployment of Italian Army divisions according to plans and actual situation, May 1942.

(*) Including Tunisian Border

(**) Including the strategic reserve, home defence and units ready to move against the French territories.

(+) Including 3 divisions eventually scheduled for the Eastern Front.

(Sources: AUSSME N-8/1344, Comando Supremo note of 1st August 1941. AUSSME I-4/76, Annexes to Army Staff note of 27 January 1942. AUSSME M-3/38, Army Effectiveness at 15 May 1942)

The only area where the plans were met was Northern Africa, although it was not possible to deploy the four divisions needed to face Tunisia there (which

could have been quite useful when the Allies landed in Northwest Africa). Otherwise both Cavallero's and Army Staff's plans failed to provide the number of estimated divisions assessed as necessary. Not only did the Balkans drain much more resources than expected, but also only a limited number of the divisions deployed in the Italian mainland or in the islands was actually available in the strategic reserve. Between summer and autumn 1942 almost 11-17 divisions were either engaged in defence tasks in Italy or were kept ready to move against France. That should have left some 15-20 divisions to form a strategic reserve, but Mussolini's aim of deploying an entire Italian Army on the Eastern Front had not yet been accomplished.



Mario Roatta

To increase the Italian effort against the Soviet Union by deploying an entire Italian Army on the Eastern Front was one of the keys to Mussolini's war policy and strategy since June 1941. Not only could that assure Italy's role as Germany's first ally, but it could also permit the direct exploitation of the large Russian sources of raw materials. Of course these advantages had a price that Italian Army leaders were unwilling to pay. The most important fact was that to send some six other divisions to the Eastern Front would have made them unavailable for other tasks. That not only meant the strategic reserve was going to be dramatically reduced, but also that a good deal of the limited available resources would have been drained to bring these units up to strength. This meant a further reduction in the number of operational divisions. Cavallero and other army leaders did try, without success, to reduce from six to three the number of divisions to be sent. In the end, Mussolini's will and the German requests resulted in seven Italian divisions being moved to the east during the summer of 1942.

The consequences of this decision and of the events of the second half of 1942 led to the collapse of Italian operational capabilities by the end of November 1942. In August the Italian divisions in Northern Africa suffered the attrition of the Axis' push toward El Alamein, which finally compelled Cavallero to send more

units, including the elite paratroopers and the airlanding divisions. The Balkans totally absorbed all available resources and prevented any redeployment until early 1943, also Vichy's France collapse in Northwestern Africa after the Allied landing of 8 November moved the Italians to seize those territories in which they were interested. In mid-November 1942 the Italian Army had 79 divisions (close to the initial aim of 80) of which, however, only 8 were at full strength. Also, only 16 incomplete and newly raised divisions were still deployed in Italy, while eight other divisions were deployed in Southern France and in Corsica. At the end of 1942 there still were 34 divisions in the Balkans and only a limited number of divisions in the 'active' fronts like Northern Africa (11 divisions) and at the Eastern Front (10 divisions).⁶⁹ These represented the bulk of the elite formations of the Italian Army, being for the most armoured, motorised, paratroopers and 'Alpini' (mountain infantry) divisions. Thus when the defeat at El Alamein was followed by the defeat at Stalingrad, the Italian Army lost more than some of its divisions, it lost great part of its remaining operational capability. This was confirmed with the surrender of Axis forces in Tunisia in May 1943. When the Allied landed in Sicily in July 1943 what Italy had left was just the shadow of an army.

Conclusions: the Fatal Gap

According to MacGregor Knox, 'in the realm of strategy, the foremost characteristic of Fascist Italy's last war was a notable, if fluctuating, gap between political goals and strategic objectives',⁷⁰ a sentence that best summarise Italy's strategic failure in the Second World War.

In June 1940 the Italian Army was already understrength and incapable to reach any strategic objectives, as demonstrates the failures against French positions in the Western Alps and in the Western Desert against the British Army. The combination of the army's demobilisation in October 1940 and of the defeats suffered against Greece and in the Northern Africa worsened the situation even more, sanctioning Italy's dependence on the German military strength. Musso-

⁶⁹ AUSSME M-3/38, Army Effectiveness at 15 November 1942. Between May and November 1942 other 3 divisions had been raised using available units (only one, a second paratroopers division, was composed of new units). One division had however been disbanded in Northern Africa in August.

⁷⁰ KNOX, 'Italian Armed Forces', p. 143.

lini's recovery plan of 1941 represented a necessary step which, determining Italy's strategic objectives and the means to reach them, was to serve the purpose of attaining his political goals. Though not void of flaws, it – especially after the changes introduced by Cavallero – had some meaningful aspects that should not be undervalued. It was aimed at reaching a goal which, theoretically, was within the Italian capabilities, given both Pariani's evaluations of October 1939 and the losses suffered in winter 1940-41. Also, Cavallero's aim to establish a core of 35 fully operational divisions was not far from the creation of such 'small, well-led, mobile and at least partly armoured force'⁷¹ seen as the best possible solution for the Italian Army. In spite



Ugo Cavallero

of this, the recovery plan could not overcome two major encumbrances: Italy's lack (or misuse) of resources and Italian Army leaders' lack of flexibility. The established goals were never met, while both Cavallero and the Army Staff insisted in pursuing them regardless of the increased (and somehow unexpected) strain on available resources imposed by the developments in the theatres of war.

All problems came to surface when Mussolini demanded the army to perform a new task: to increase the Italian presence at the Eastern Front well beyond his own requests of the previous summer. Cavallero's opposition to Mussolini's demand was valid, but he did not consider that strategic objectives must serve political goals, and not the opposite. The difference in approach between the two was never resolved. In 1942 the Italian Army remained understrength and unable to meet the parameters set by Mussolini, or even the more limited ones established

⁷¹ KNOX, 'Italian Armed Forces', p. 154.

by Army Staff. In conclusion neither Mussolini nor the army leaders proved to be able to balance available means to ends. When in July 1941 Mussolini ordered the army to raise 16 new divisions he had a clear strategic view of his own political and military aims, yet he seems to have been almost completely unaware of the conditions of the Italian Army and of its real potential. Actually he, like most of the army leaders, had a blind faith in the German capabilities. Hence, Mussolini only had a limited interest in an army capable to wage a war of its own, but rather he was just interested in having an army that could sustain Italian interests and policy. He accepted that a 'token army' was enough. One ready to show its presence, but not particularly capable. What is actually surprising, however, is not Mussolini's attitude on the matter but rather the army leaders' ineptitude to seek for alternative solutions. Not only Mussolini's plan was not rejected on the basis of the true army capabilities, but the reorganisation plan, elaborated by the Army Staff and finally approved by the Comando Supremo, only brought minor changes to Mussolini's own. Italian Army leaders' interest in the Balkan area moved them to increase their efforts there thus reducing the strategic reserve to half the number of divisions Mussolini had requested. This was not a strategic blunder *per se*, though it added a significant drain to the army's already limited resources. When on 6 January 1942 Cavallero presented to Mussolini his own analysis of the Italian military and strategic imbalance between means and ends, he actually endorsed the army's interests and opposed Mussolini's aims. However, the latter's refusal to surrender his policy and strategy was only met by a subdued acceptance. Army Staff was incapable of elaborating a plan that could satisfy both Mussolini's requests and army's own limited means. When at the end of January 1942 the Army Staff admitted that the goals of the reorganisation plan just couldn't be met it only acknowledged its own failure, but suggested no other solution.

With the defeats in Northern Africa and on the Eastern Front the already limited operational capabilities of the Italian Army were almost completely destroyed. The inevitable consequence of the fatal gap between means (or strategic objectives) and ends (or political goals) was that what was going to happen next would depend upon the major Axis partner, Italy having no longer the resources to influence the outcome.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AZZI, Stephen Corrado, 'The Historiography of Fascist Foreign Policy', *The Historical Journal*, 36:1 (1993), pp. 187-203.
- BIAGINI Antonello and Fernando FRATTOLILLO, "The Sources of Italy's Defeat in 1940: Bluff or Institutionalized Incompetence?", in Carole FINK, Isabel V. HULL and MacGregor KNOX, ed., *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890-1945* (Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), pp. 247-266.
- BIAGINI Antonello and Fernando FRATTOLILLO, ed., *Diario Storico del Comando Supremo. Volume I: 11.6.1940 – 31.8.1940 – Tomo II* (Rome, USSME, 1986).
- BOSWORTH, R.J.B., *The Italian Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London, Edward Arnold, 1998).
- BOTTI, Ferruccio and Virgilio ILARI, *Il Pensiero Militare Italiano dal Primo al Secondo Dopoguerra* (Rome, USSME, 1985).
- BOTTI, Ferruccio, *La Logistica dell'Esercito Italiano. Volume IV – dalla Guerra Integrale alla Guerra Nucleare (1940-1981)* (Rome, USSME, 1995).
- CEVA, Lucio, *La Condotta Italiana della Guerra. Cavallero e il Comando Supremo 1941/1942* (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1975).
- CEVA, Lucio, *Le Forze Armate* (Turin, UTET, 1981).
- CEVA, Lucio, 'La Campagna di Russia nel Quadro Strategico della Guerra Fascista', in Istituto Storico della Resistenza in Cuneo e Provincia, ed., *Gli Italiani sul Fronte Russo* (Bari, De Donato, 1982), pp. 163-193.
- FERRARI, Dorello, 'Per uno Studio della Politica Militare del Generale Alberto Pariani', *Studi Storico Militari* (1988), pp. 371-400.
- FRENCH, David, *Raising Churchill's Army. The British Army and the War against Germany 1919-1945* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ILARI, Virgilio, *Storia del Servizio Militare in Italia. Vol. IV – Soldati e Partigiani 1943-1945* (Rome, CeMiSS – Rivista Militare, 1991).
- KNOX, MacGregor, *Mussolini Unleashed 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- KNOX, MacGregor, 'The Italian Armed Forces, 1940-3', in Alan R. MILLETT and Williamson MURRAY, ed., *Military Effectiveness. Volume III – The Second World War* (Winchester, Massachusetts, Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 136-179.
- MINNITI, Fortunato, *Fino alla Guerra. Strategie e Conflitto nella Politica di Potenza di Mussolini, 1923-1940* (Naples, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2000).
- MONTANARI, Mario, *La Campagna di Grecia. Tomo I* (Rome, USSME, 1980).
- MONTANARI, Mario, *L'Esercito Italiano alla Vigilia della 2ª Guerra Mondiale* (Rome, USSME, 1982).
- MONTANARI, Mario, *Le Operazioni in Africa Settentrionale. Volume I – Sidi el Barrani. Giugno 1940 – Febbraio 1941* (Rome, USSME, 1985).

- PETERSEN, Jens, 'La Politica Estera del Fascismo come Problema Storiografico', in: Renzo DE FELICE, ed., *L'Italia fra Tedeschi e Alleati. La Politica Estera Fascista e la Seconda Guerra Mondiale* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 1973), pp. 11-55.
- PLAYFAIR, I.S.O. (Ian Stanley Ord), *The Mediterranean and Middle East. Volume I: The Early Successes Against Italy (to May 1941)* (London, H.M.S.O., 1954).
- ROCHAT, Giorgio, 'La Divisione «Acqui» nella Guerra 1940-1943', in: G. ROCHAT and Marcello VENTURI, ed., *La Divisione Acqui a Cefalonia. Settembre 1943* (Milan, Mursia, 1983), pp. 21-55.
- ROCHAT, Giorgio, 'Gli Uomini alle Armi 1940-1943', in: Id., *L'Esercito Italiano in Pace e in Guerra. Studi di Storia Militare* (Milan, RARA, 1991), pp. 262-304.
- ROCHAT, Giorgio, 'Il Fascismo e la preparazione militare al conflitto mondiale', *Storia e Memoria* I (1994), pp. 9-20.
- ROCHAT, Giorgio, 'Il ruolo delle forze armate nel regime fascista. Mussolini e le forze armate', in G. ROCHAT, *L'Esercito Italiano in Pace e in Guerra. Studi di Storia Militare* (Milan, RARA, 1991), pp. 193-219.
- ROCHAT, Giorgio, and Giulio MASSOBRIO, *Breve Storia dell'Esercito Italiano dal 1861 al 1943* (Turin, Einaudi, 1978), pp. 208-262.
- ROSSI, Francesco, *Mussolini e lo Stato Maggiore. Avvenimenti del 1940* (Rome, Tipografia Regionale, 1951),
- SCHREIBER, Gerhard, Bernd STEGEMANN and Detlef VOGEL, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band 3 – Der Mittelmeerraum und Südosteuropa. Von der »non belligeranza« Italiens bis zum Kriegseintritt der Vereinigten Staaten* (Stuttgart, DVA, 1984).
- SULLIVAN, Brian R. *A Thirst for Glory: Mussolini, the Italian Military and the Fascist Regime, 1922-1936* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1984).
- SULLIVAN, Brian R., 'The Italian Armed Forces, 1918-40', in Alan R. MILLETT and Williamson MURRAY, ed., *Military Effectiveness. Volume II – The Interwar Period* (Winchester, Massachussets, Allen & Unwin, 1988), pp. 169-217.