Dedication

To Buckscraper

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Author's note

Those unfamiliar with Italian Army nomenclature, note that Alpini (plural, Alpini) refers to mountain troops, with at least a degree of special equipment and training, and Bersaglieri (soli bersaglieri) to the light infantry; both categories are historically regarded as elite troops.

Designations suggesting specialist roles for infantry divisions (see key to Table A, page 38) - e.g. 'mountain' or 'semi-mountain' etc. - should be understood as largely theoretical: if not pure propaganda. In practice the issue of vehicles and other equipment fell far short of the level needed to give these titles any practical meaning.

Note also that the Fascist Party's 'Blackshirt' militia units are not the same as the blackshirt volunteers of Mussolini's Fascist Party. The Fascist Party used the term 'Blackshirt' (militia units of the Alpini) for propaganda purposes only. To avoid confusion we do not use the term 'Alpini' in the lists of unit abbreviations.

In the photograph credits, USSR GM = Ufficio Storico Dopo Stato Maggiore Esadirettore.

A short bibliography for the whole series will appear in the third volume. Details of the establishment of e.g. armoured and motorised divisions will appear in the second volume.

Artist's note

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THE ITALIAN ARMY 1940-1943
(1) EUROPE 1940-1943

THE ITALIAN ARMY IN JUNE 1940

ITALY ENTERED THE SECOND WORLD War on 10 June 1940, a full ten months after the start of the conflict. Since his appointment as prime minister - with considerable popular support - in 1932, the demagogue Benito Mussolini (1883-1945) had forged his Fascist Party government into a generally effective dictatorship under his own leadership as "Duce", with the powerless King Victor Emmanuel III as a national figurehead. (While many outrages and murders were committed in his name, it should perhaps be noted that at least before 1943 Mussolini's regime was not guilty of the large scale, systematic barbarities of Nazi Germany.)

In May 1939 Mussolini had concluded the 'Pact of Steel', a military alliance with Germany. He had nevertheless held back from joining his Axis partner in hostilities against the democracies, because he knew that his country was ill-prepared to fight a major war against European opponents. Now, however, with France on the verge of defeat and Britain fighting alone against the might of the seemingly invincible German Wehrmacht, he took his chance. He believed that to delay any longer would put Italy at risk of losing out on the sharing of the spoils of victory. His gamble on a quick Axis victory was to prove ruinously costly for his country; it would lead to the overthrow of his 21-year rule, and to his own death.

On paper Italy had a large and fairly well-equipped army, and although Mussolini's much-promoted boast of 8 million Italian bayonets was not credible she could raise a large if unmodernised force. The Army's mobilised strength in June 1940 was 1,630,000; this would later rise to a peak of 2,653,000. The Italian Army was quite capable of fighting a onecampaign war when all the country's resources could be channelled into a national effort on one front. This had been the case in the First World War, when the Italian Army had managed to sustain a long and bitter struggle against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Now, however, she would be drawn into war on at least two fronts simultaneously, fighting large scale campaigns in both North Africa and the Balkans, and later providing a large contingent for Germany's Russian Front. This kind of total war was far beyond the capacity of Italy's limited resources.

At the outbreak of war the Italian Army had a strength of 73 divisions made up of 196 infantry regiments, 12 regiments of Bersaglieri (light infantry), 10 of Alpini (mountain troops), 12 regiments of cavalry, 5 tank regiments, 92 of artillery and 19 of engineers. The Italian Army was basically an infantry force with very little mechanisation and a shortage of the basic requirements for modern war. Much of the equipment dated
back to the turn of the century and the First World War, and many of the main armaments were approaching obsolescence.

One telling statistic is that in June 1940 the Italian Army had a total of 7,970 pieces of artillery of which only 246 had been manufactured since 1930. A majority of the field guns in use were ex-Austrian models handed over as war reparations in 1918. Many of the guns had been improved by replacing the old wood-spoked wheels with steel; they might look modern because of these cosmetic alterations, but the barrels were still 40 years old.

The Italian armoured force was quite formidable on paper, with over 700 tanks—a strength which compared favourably with the other powers. Closer examination, however, shows that the vast majority of these 'tanks' were in fact tankettes: tiny two-man vehicles armed with machine guns and with armour too thin to stop machine gun bullets. More modern types were in production; but as these newer models came into service they were quickly seen to be outclassed even by the British tanks—themselves hardly the most impressive in Europe—which they were to face in North Africa.

The Italian infantry division had a different structure from those of other contemporary armies in that it had only two infantry regiments and one artillery regiment on strength, whereas in most other armies a division had at least three regiments of infantry plus three or four groups of artillery. This so-called 'binary' type of division was a major weakness, even if on paper it gave the impression that the Italian Army had more formations. Many of the divisions were far from up to strength—out of the 75 on paper only some 20 were fully manned and equipped.

The MVSN

The 'Blackshirts' of the MVSN or 'Voluntary Militia for National Security' were the military arm of the Italian Fascist Party. Originally the militia had a public security role, but from the early 1930s it was militarised and was considered as Italy's fourth armed service after the Royal Army, Navy and Air Force. Raised from volunteer members of the Fascist Party between the ages of 17 and 50 (in two age classes, the older men serving in Territorial battalions), it was supposed to provide a military force of unquestioning loyalty to Mussolini's regime.

In an effort to integrate the MVSN with the Royal Army a Blackshirt ' legion' (two battalions, each nominally 479 strong) was added to each infantry division to act as a 'highly motivated' force within the formation. The introduction of the MVSN units into the order of battle of the Royal Army was greatly resented by Army commanders, who distrusted the MVSN and suspected their lack of military experience. In addition several purely MVSN divisions were raised to fight in the Ethiopian campaign of 1935–36. Four MVSN divisions were also raised to fight in North Africa in 1940, and these were all destroyed in the early fighting. As the war progressed the more reliable

OPPOSITE: A group of officers leave their HQ during a pre-war exercise. From NB right to left, foreground, an Alpini lieutenant-colonel, a black chevron ranking just visible on side of hat; midground, a general commanding an army; midground, an Alpini colonel with a divisional staff on his left sleeve; background, a major of the Transport Corps. All these officers wear the 'corselet' uniform, with two black velvet stripes down the breeches flanking a central piping in the branch colour. For rank insignia details see chart on page 41. (Rex Trya)

The crew of a M1935 81mm mortar during a pre-war training exercise. The corporeal has the M1937 grey-green tunic with black felt collar facings and his divisional patches. His black sleeve chevrons are the larger pattern used from 1937 to 1939. Although we cannot see it, the largior around his neck is probably attached to a hussar's 102mm Bosco Glissenti 1869 revolver. This anticte was still in widespread service with the Italian Army in 1940, and was to continue in use until the end of the war. (Witelli Archive)

and combat-worthy MVSN units were given the title of 'M Battalions'; some of these fought in both Russia and Yugoslavia as anti-partisan troops.

CAMPAIGNS

France

Italy's declaration of war against France and Britain on 10 June 1940 was followed on the 20th by the opening of an offensive into French territory in the western Alps and along the Mediterranean coastline. The Italian army of 32 divisions made little headway in the difficult terrain of the mountains, and only managed to capture a few Alpine villages. On the coast they managed to capture the small French Riviera town of Menton before the French surrender to the Italians was signed on 24 June. The Italian soldiers fought bravely enough, but were let down—as they were, to be fair, in future campaigns—by bad planning and organisation. (One small but telling example of the latter was the fact that the army field kitchens often did not have the necessary pots and pans to make the soldiers a hot meal in the freezing conditions in the Alps.) Italian losses for such a short campaign were heavy, with 631 killed, 2,361 wounded, 2,000 cases of frostbite and 600 men missing. This compares with the French losses of 40 killed, 84 wounded and 150 missing.

ORDER OF BATTLE

WESTERN ALPS CAMPAIGN, 20 JUNE 1940

Army Group West

GOC: Gen Umberto di Savoia
CoS: Gen Emilio Battisti
1st Army

GOC: Gen Pietro Pintor
CoS: Gen Fernando Gelichi
II Army Corps

Forlì, 'Acqui', 'Livorno' Inf Div
'Cameo' Alpine Div
III Army Corps

Marsciano, 'Cameno' Inf Div
1st Alpine Group (5 Alpine bns plus 2 mountain artillery bns)
The Invasion of Greece

At dawn on 28 October 1940 seven Italian divisions of the 9th and 11th Armies began the invasion on four lines of advance from Albania – occupied since April 1939. They managed to get five or six miles inside Greece before becoming bogged down. They found themselves fighting larger than expected forces, who fought with great determination and had a much superior knowledge of the terrain. Italian units were often trapped in valleys while Greek forces moved through the hills and mountains to encircle them; in this way the 'Julia' Alpine Division lost 5,000 men in the Pindus Gorges.

On 2 November, the Greeks counterattacked, and by 22 November had pushed the 200,000 Italians back over the border into Albania, where the fighting turned into a bloody stalemate. Large Italian reinforcements were sent to the theatre over the winter, but despite making limited gains they were unable to force the Greeks out of Albania. Both sides suffered terribly from the freezing temperatures as neither army had adequate cold weather clothing. The stalemate would probably have continued had Hitler not decided to send in German troops to break the deadlock in April 1941.

ORDER OF BATTLE
GREEK CAMPAIGN, 28 OCTOBER 1940

Epirus Sector
Corunna Arm Corps
Skiros, Ferrara, Mf. Divs, Centauro Arm Div
(Total = 12 inf bns, 3 Bersaglieri bns, 4 arm divs, 2 Blackshirt bns)
The invasion of Yugoslavia

The invasion of 6 April 1941 saw attacks launched from Austria, Italy, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria and Albania. Initially only Italian and German forces were involved, but from 11 April they were joined by the Hungarian 3rd Army. Italian participation was limited to the 2nd Army, which advanced southwards down the coast and inland to take the Slovenian capital Ljubljana; and the 9th Army, which came northwards from Albania and met them in the region of Dobrovnik.

With a combined force of 50-odd divisions against Yugoslavia's 28 divisions the result was a foregone conclusion, and Yugoslavia surrendered on 17 April.

Yugoslavia was divided up between the Axis powers, with Italy occupying southern Slovenia, the Dalmatian coastline, Montenegro, and adding Kosovo to Albania. The resistance of the occupying forces began almost immediately, and was tied up large numbers of Italian troops for the remainder of the war (see pages 12-13).

ORDER OF BATTLE

YUGOSLAV CAMPAIGN, 6 APRIL 1941

2nd Army

V Army Corps

'Bergamo', 'Lombardia' Inf Divs

VI Army Corps

'Sassari', 'Friuli', 'Asiatica' Inf Divs

XI Army Corps

'Ve'c', 'Trento', 'Ravenna' Inf Divs

3rd Alpine Group (3 Alpine bns, 1 mountain arty bn)

Motorised Army Corps

'Pestalozzi', 'Torino' Inf Divs, 'Littorio' Arm Div

Colpo (Feld) Army Corps

1st 'Eugenio di Savoia', 2nd 'Emanuele Filiberto' Testo di Ferro',

3rd 'Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta' C erle Divs

Fiume Fortress Police and Frontier Guard units

ORDER OF BATTLE

1940 Fast ('Cielre') Division Establishment

1st Infantry Bde

4th Infantry Bde

1st Machine Gun Bde

1st Antitank Bde

2nd Flak Bn

3rd Flak Bn

1st Armored Bn

2nd Armored Bn

3rd Armored Bn

4th Armored Bn

Wireless operators of an artillery regiment use an RA type radio in a Alpine village during the fighting on the French/Italian border. The operators are wearing pilot's ranks' grey-green wool felt trousers and with their M1934 greatcoat. The soldier watching has the grey-green leather two-pocket bandoleer worn by the artillery and mounted troops. (USSEM)

contingent of the Italian Army consisted of four light infantry regiments of Cacciatori d'Albania ('Albanian Hunters') and 11 militia battalions.

ORDER OF BATTLE

GREEK CAMPAIGN, 6 APRIL 1941

Army Group Reserve

'Casale', 'Terzane' Inf Divs

9th Army

III Army Corps

'Venezia', 'Arezzo', 'Tarso', 'Forlì' Inf Divs

XXVII Army Corps

'Piemonte', 'Parma' Inf Divs, 'Eredità' Alpine Div

11th Army

XI Army Corps

'Cacciatori delle Alpi' Inf Div, 'Pusteria' Alpine Div

VIII Army Corps

'Cagliari', 'Siena', 'Bari', 'Pinerolo' Inf Divs

XXI Army Corps

'Sforzesca', 'Ferrara', 'Modena', 'Brennero', 'Lupi di Toscana',

'Legnano' Inf Divs, 'Julia' Alpine Div

'Special' Army Corps

'Cuneo', 'Aqui' Inf Divs, 'Special' Alpine Div

Army Reserve

'Fuglie' Inf Div, 'Cuneese' Alpine Div

'Centaur' Group (1 arm regt, 1 Bersaglieri bn, 1 cav regt,

1 arm artil regt)
Albanian Armed Forces Command

9th Army

III Army Corps – omitted

XXVI Army Corps – omitted

'Avineto' Sector

'Avineto', 'Firenze', 'Pinerola' Inf Divs

'Cuneense' Alpine Div

XVII Army Corps

'Puglia', 'Firenze' (from 14.4.41) Inf Divs

The Russian Front

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, Mussolini immediately offered to send troops to help his ally. The offer of a corps size force was accepted, and the 'Corpo Spedizione Italiano in Russia' or CSIR was assembled under the command of Gen Giovanni Messe. The corps had a strength of 62,000 men, with two (nominally) motorised infantry divisions of the old 1938 binary type - 'Pavullo' and 'Torino', and a Celere ('fast') i.e. cavalry division, Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta, which comprised two horse cavalry regiments, a Bersaglieri cyclist battalion, an artillery regiment, and a light tank group. Various support, service and specialist units were added to the strength of the CSIR, and it was by Italian standards – quite well equipped.

The CSIR was sent to the southern sector of the German advance in the Ukraine in July 1941, and in its early encounters was successful, taking a number of towns and cities and creating a favourable impression on its German allies. Even though the CSIR enjoyed high priority in the issue of the best available weapons and other hardware, these were not in fact adequate: the regiments were motorised only in theory; the artillery was of First World War vintage; the armoured units still had the useless tankettes, and anti-tank weapons were inadequate. As the Germans discovered late in 1941, on the Russian Front even well-equipped units soon exhausted their supplies and suffered breakdowns and combat losses, and nothing was easy or quick to replace. The sheer scale of the fighting and the distances involved meant that an army with only just enough of everything to go around was soon in trouble.

Mussolini was determined to increase his contribution to the Russian campaign, and thus his credibility as an Axis partner. Despite the hardships suffered by the CSIR during winter 1941/42, and despite objections from Gen Messe, in March 1942 he sent a further seven divisions East; the new organisation took the title of 8th Army, comprising II and XXVI Army Corps. By August the Italians had advanced to the Don with Army Group B (a command of 55 divisions divided between 8th Panzer Army, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 8th and 9th Romanian Armies, 2nd Hungarian and 8th Italian Armies).

The 8th Army was on the Chir river north-west of Stalingrad in November 1942 when the great Soviet pincer movement – Operation Uranus – was launched to cut off the German forces in and around the embattled city. The much better equipped, adapted, and motivated Red Army concentrated their firepower against those sectors of the Axis Front held by Germany's weaker allies – initially the Romanians, whom they broke through, with some difficulty, to link up on 25 November. Just after Von Manstein unleashed his doomed Operation Winter Storm to break through to Stalingrad from the south-west, the tanks of Vorony's South-West Front and the Voroshilov Front smashed through the Italian sector: the Alpine Corps was cut off, and the 8th Army was effectively destroyed as a fighting command. In January 1943 the survivors regrouped in the Ukraine, and by March most had begun to return to Italy, leaving a small number of Italian units behind to help fight partisans.

The 8th Army's losses in men and equipment were disastrous. Out of an army of 220,000 men, 85,000 were killed or missing and 50,000 were wounded. Losses in artillery were equally devastating, with 1,200 guns out of a total of 1,540 being destroyed or abandoned. Motor vehicles were always in short supply in the Italian Army, and the 18,200 lost in Russia out a total of 22,000 were simply irreplaceable.

Although the Italian Army's losses on the Russian Front were grievous, by the huge scale of the fighting in the East they were not significant. Strategic advantages would probably argue that if the same number of men and – more importantly – the same scale of equipment had been sent in 1941 to North Africa instead, they might have tipped the balance there in favour of the Axis forces.

ORDER OF BATTLE

8th Army, Russia, 1942

III Army Corps

'Staraces', 'Avenza', 'Camere a' Inf Divs

XXVI Army Corps

'Pavullo', 'Torino'

Motorised Divs

3rd 'Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta' Celere Div

'Alpine Corps

'Tribestina', 'Julia', 'Cuneense' Alpine Divs

'Vincezza' Occupation Inf Div

The Croatian Legion

The Italians decided to form a Croatian Legion to fight on the Russian Front, in imitation of their German allies – the Wermacht already had one in the form of the 369th Infantry Regiment. Using men from the
replacement Battalion of the 366th, a Legion of 1,211 officers and men was formed (45 officers, 72 N.C.s, 1,100 men and 108 horses). Given the title 'Legione Croata Autostrombata' or Motorised Croatian Legion, the unit arrived in Russia in April 1942. After acquiring itself well during the rest of the year the Legion was largely deployed along with the rest of the 8th Army in December 1942. Attempts to raise a second Legion in May 1943 seem to have come to nothing.

**OCCUPATION DUTIES**

Apart from the over 250,000 men of the 8th Army fighting in Russia, the main role of the Italian Army in Europe after April 1941 was as an occupation troops. No less than 36 divisions were deployed in the Balkans (Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece and the various Greek islands) and in southern France and the French island of Corsica. The Italian Army encountered resistance to their occupation in all these regions to some extent, and suffered a large number of casualties from the attacks of partisans and resistance fighters. For instance, in the first few months of 1943 alone the Italian occupation forces suffered over 16,500 casualties.

**The Occupation of Yugoslavia**

The Axis forces carved up Yugoslavia between them, with Italy gaining Montenegro, western Slovenia and the coastline of Dalmatia. Western Macedonia and Kosovo were handed over to Albania, which had been part of the Italian 'empire' since April 1939.

Resistance to the Italian occupation came from two quarters: from the Communist Partisans led by Josip Broz Tito, and the Serbian Royalist 'Chetnik' movement led by Col Mihailovic of the former Yugoslav Army. Fierce resistance to the Italians bared up in Montenegro as early as July 1941, and continued with varying intensity throughout the Italian-occupied areas, rising down large numbers of troops (see MAA 142, Partizans Warfare 1941-45 for a more detailed account). In July 1943 there were a total of 14 infantry divisions on occupation duties in various parts of Yugoslavia as well as a large number of support and auxiliary units such as the Frontier and Finance Guards.

To help counter guerrilla actions by the Partisans and the Chetniks the Italians raised local Yugoslav auxiliary forces from 1942. The 'Milizia Volontaria Anti-Comunista' or MVAC were motivated by a desire to fight the Communist Partisans. The violent mutual opposition of the Partisans and Chetniks saw them spend as much time fighting each other as they did the Axis occupation forces; and the occupiers were not slow to encourage this. Chetnik hatred of the Partisans led to some Montenegrin Chetniks fighting for a time under the banner of the MVAC. MVAC units were raised on a local basis by the Italian divisions deployed in particular areas, and were usually recruited along ethnic lines: Catholics, Greek Orthodox and Moslems had their own, usually strictly segregated units. Accurate strengths of the number of MVAC forces are hard to find, but we do know that in March 1943 there were 50,000 volunteers. This can be broken down into 8,000 Catholic, 7,000 Orthodox and 15,000 Moslem (the latter being mostly Chetniks).

**ORDER OF BATTLE**

**ITALIAN OCCUPATION ARMY IN THE BALKANS, 23 JULY 1943**

**ALBANIA**

8th Army

IV Army Corps

'Benevento', 'Parrina', 'Perugia' Inf Divs

XXVI Army Corps

'Arezzo', 'Firenze' Inf Divs

Army Reserve

'Puglia' Inf Div

**HERZEGOVINA**

VI Army Corps

'Marche', 'Messina' Inf Divs

XXVIII Coastal Bde

**MONTENEGRO**

XIV Army Corps

'Emilia', 'Ferrara', 'Venezia' Inf Divs

'Taurinense' Alpine Div

**CROATIA-SLOVENIA**

2nd Army

V Army Corps

'Macerata', 'Murge', 'Rc' Inf Divs

XI Coastal Bde

XI Army Corps

'Cesarina delle Alpi', 'Isorno', 'Lombardia' Inf Divs

XXVIII Army Corps

'Bergamo', 'Zara' Inf Divs, XVII Coastal Bde

Army Reserve

1st Celere Div

**GREECE**

11th Army

III Army Corps

'Ferré', 'Pinerolo' Inf Divs

VIII Army Corps

'Cagliari', 'Piemonte' Inf Divs

XXVI Army Corps

'Molise', 'Casalde', 'Acqui' Inf Divs

CRETE – 'Siena' Inf Div, 51st Special Bde

AEGEAN SEA – 'Cameo', 'Regina' Inf Divs

The crew of an 8mm M1935 Fiat Revelli machine gun from the 30th Artillery Regt, 'Lega di Torinese' Inf Div defend their gun line on the Greek front in winter 1940-41. The stylized branch of service badges with regimental number is just visible on the front of the left hand man's M1933 helmet; all wear the M1934 gorette and knitted balaceuses; the right hand man also has a red neck-sweater. The M1935 Revelli was an up-dated - but not improved - version of the M1914; known to its crews as the 'nemik-buster', it was awkward to handle, required lubrication of the ammunition to function properly, and was prone to 'cook off' chambered rounds during pauses in firing. It also contributed yet another category of small arms ammunition to the army's monstrous logistic requirements - 6.5mm, 7.35mm, 8mm, 9mm, 10.35mm ... (R.Tomasi)
THE CONTINENTAL UNIFORM OF THE ITALIAN ARMY 1940-43

The basic uniform worn by the Italian soldier from 1940 to 1943 saw only a few minor changes during this period. An ordinary soldier of 1943 would to most observers appear exactly the same as he had when Italy entered the war in June 1940. The uniform of 1940 was a mixture of old and new styles, with the stylish and up-to-date steel helmet introduced in 1933 being worn with the panoplied trousers – i.e. reaching below the knee and worn with long puttees – that had been long abandoned by most other European armies.

In 1940 the 'continental' uniform worn by the ordinary soldier in the European theatre consisted of a kustana cap; a greengrey wool tunic of M1937 pattern with open collar; a grey-green cotton shirt and tie; grey-green wool pantaloons worn with wool puttees and deer black leather M1912 boots. The M1934 grey-green wool or man-made fibre single-breasted greatcoat completed the outfit, together with the M1933 steel helmet.

It should be emphasised that the various uniform regulations were often not applied rigidly and all ranks, but especially officers, were given a great deal of leeway. When new items of uniform were issued the soldier could wear the old item until it wore out, or adapt it, e.g. by removing the black collar facing of the M1937 tunic and replacing it with grey-green. Officers were particularly prone to keeping favourite items of uniform long after official regulations had declared them obsolete. The continued appearance of the M1937 tunic in photographs right up to 1945 is testimony to this fact.

The appearance of uniforms in actual service might also vary widely due to relative degrees of wear. For instance, jackets were not cleaned very often while trousers were washed once a fortnight, so the trousers tended to be a lighter shade than the jacket.

Troops' tunics

Models 1933, 1937, 1939, 1940 & 1942

The look of the Italian soldier changed dramatically with the introduction of the M1933 tunic, replacing the M1939 high-collared jacket with a open-collared model worn with shirt and tie. Open-collared jackets had been worn since the First World War by the elite Arditi assault commandos, and it was on this corps' uniform that the new design was modelled. The collar of the M1933 had black cloth facing the top half with the divisional collar patch or armsee sewn to it. Some units had bright-coloured cloth collar facings in branch colours, or, in the case of the cavalry, a different colour for each regiment.

The M1937 tunic differed only slightly from the M1933 in that it had an integral, adjustable cloth belt fastened with a metal clasp. In 1939 a new tunic for NCOs was introduced, but this was little different from the M1933 and M1937 except that it was made from a higher grade of cloth and had a bridle copied from the type in use on the Air Force tunic.

All these models of tunic had three front buttons for other ranks, and two breast and two skirt pockets of pleated patch type with single-button three-point flaps. These early models also had a hidden pocket at the back which was formed by the rear flap; this so-called hanged pocket was used to carry personal effects where the soldier could easily get at them.

The next major change came with the introduction of the M1940 tunic, which replaced the black collar with a plain grey-green one; waistcoats were still worn. A new adjustable belt had two buttons on the front instead of the metal clasp of the M1937.

The M1942 tunic differed little from the M1940; due to wartime shortages the design was simplified and inferior material was used in its manufacture, with canvas employed for the lining.

Officers' tunics

Officers' tunics were of the same basic design as the other ranks', but were better made from superior material. At the beginning of the war most were made from a gabardine material called 'medallone'. This appears in photographs lighter than the grey-green uniform, and was often a striking light grey. In wartime service many officers wore woolen tunics similar to the other ranks' model, but still well-tailored and of a better grade of material. Officers' tunics had four front buttons instead of the other ranks' three.

Legwear

The usual pattern of trousers were grey-green wool (or wool and synthetic mix) pantaloons, which reached just below the knee where they fastened with a button. The bottoms of the pantaloons were covered by the tops of wooden puttees, which were tied around with laces or were guarded with padded sheepskin socks. These ankle-looking trousers were worn in various states of bagginess, and often looked very ungainly indeed. Mounted, motorised and some artillery troops wore a type of wool breeches, flared in the thigh and longer in the leg.

Officers usually wore breeches made of medallone gabardine material, with two black stripes down the sides flanking a central piping in branch colour, e.g. orange-yellow for artillery. More practical (and cheaper) in the field were breeches made from a good quality wool material, or even pantaloons, again made from better quality wool.

The basic leg protection worn by the vast majority of the Italian Army were grey-green wool puttees. These had been worn since the earliest days of the Italian Army, but the type in use during the Second World
War were introduced in 1929. Their unpopularity lay in the fact that they were difficult to put on and, although fastened with cloth tapes, often came undone in combat.

Stiff black leather gauntlets were worn by mounted units (either on horseback or on motorcycles), artillery, armoured and transport units. Another more stylish model of leather legging was worn by cavalry, other ranks and NCOs; this was fastened with a long leather strap wrapped around the leg and buckled three-quarters the way up the calf.

The basic other ranks' boots were usually the M1912 black leather hobnailed model; these were often made of inferior materials (they were described as being made of 'cardboard') which disintegrated in the rain and mud of Albania, Greece and Russia. Officers in Europe wore either high-topped leather riding boots, or a better-quality version of the ankle boot worn in the field with socks or even puttees.

### Tunic Insignia

**Collar patches**

Each infantry division had its own unique collar patch which was worn on the upper part of the tunic. (see Table A on pages 38-39 for designs and colours). The patch was rectangular and in 1940 usually measured 60mm x 32mm as the war progressed they were gradually reduced in size. The only exceptions to the standard infantry patches were the two Grenadier Divisions, the ‘Savoya’ and ‘Sardegna’, which wore patches measuring 66mm x 28mm with two bars. All collar patches had a white metal star fixed to the lower centre of the insignia, the emblem of the Savoyard royal dynasty.

Branches other than the infantry wore collar patches called ‘flames’, with the upper end shaped into one, two or three points. The cavalry had three-pointed flames, some of plain colours and some piped.

1st ‘Nizza’ Cavalry Regt - Crimson flame
2nd ‘Piemonte’ Reale Cavalry Regt - Red flame/black piping
4th ‘Genova’ Cavalry Regt - Black flame
5th ‘Novara’ Lancer Regt - Yellow flame
6th ‘Asti’ Lancer Regt - Red flame
7th ‘Milano’ Lancer Regt - Orange flame/black piping
9th ‘Firenze’ Lancer Regt - Orange flame/black piping
10th ‘Vittorio Emanuele II’ Lancer Regt - Yellow flame/black piping
12th ‘Saluzzo’ Light Cavalry Regt - Black flame black piping
14th ‘Montecarlo’ Light Cavalry Regt - Crimson flame black piping
15th ‘Alejandro’ Light Cavalry Regt - Orange flame black piping
16th ‘Guida’ Light Cavalry Regiment - White flame black piping 30th ‘Palermo’ Light Cavalry Regt - Red flame back yellow

**Support branches of the Army**

The Army wore single-pointed flames. When they were assigned to an infantry division the flame was superimposed over the lower part of the divisional patch, so that the divisional colours showed above the flame.

**Other branch collar patches on M1940 uniforms**

- Alpins - Double green flames
- Bersaglieri - Double crimson flames
- Artillery - Single black flame piped orangeyellow
- Divisional artillery - Single black flame piped orange-yellow, over divisional patch
- Alpine artillery - Single black flame piped orange-yellow, over green rectangle
- Engineers - Single black flame piped crimson
- Ennisa - Double red flames on blue rectangle
- Light Tanks - Double white flames on blue rectangle
- Motor Transport - Double black flames on blue rectangle
- Medical Corps - Single scarlet flame
- Veterinary Corps - Single light blue flame
- Supply Corps - Single dark blue flame
- Commissary Corps - Single purple flame
- Administration Corps - Single black flame piped blue
- Stationary Reserve Units - Single scarlet flame
- Mobile Reserve Units - Single orange flame

**Divisional arm shields**

When new divisions were formed in the mid-1930s they were each given an arm shield on the left sleeve of the tunic just above the rank insignia. These were made of tin and later of cloth. The shield-shaped, coloured backgrounds were blue for infantry and cavalry divisions, red for motorised and green for Alpine. They bore a gold/yellow upright central sword with the divisional number beneath it and the title. (e.g. DIVISIONE ALPINA/BIJULIA). These arm shields...
were officially withdrawn from use with the introduction of the M1940 tunic, but examples were still seen worn for a while thereafter.

**Rank insignia**

Ranks were shown up to 1937 on the tunic by the wearing of curved chevrons point upwards on the forearm just above the cuff. The chevrons were black up to the rank of caporale maggiore and gold for sergente and sergente maggiore. The rank chevrons were then moved to the upper sleeve and became shorter, arrow-shaped and point downwards. For a short period in 1937–38 the colours up to caporale maggiore became red while the others remained gold. From 1940 onwards the chevrons became smaller still, and those for ranks above caporale maggiore changed from gold to yellow. (See chart and notes on page 41 for fuller details.)

**Officers' rank insignia**

Warrant officers or ufficiali wore their rank on shoulder boards, and commissioned ranks on the tunic forearms. From acting 2nd lieutenant up to colonel these were in the form of different designs in gold braid. General officers from brigadier to 'first marshal of the empire' wore intricate embroidered classical decorations called spini on the cuffs. (Again, see chart and notes on page 41.)

**HEADGEAR**

**The bustina**

The field cap worn almost universally by the Italian Army was the very popular *bustina*. This was a widecap with a front visor flap which was usually worn folded up, and ear-flap flaps which were generally fastened together over the crown by means of a button. The *bustina* was made of the same grey-green wool or wool and synthetic mixture as the rest of the uniform, varying slightly in both quality of cloth and design. Branch of service cap badges for other ranks, generally of black rayon sewn on to a grey-green backing, were worn on the front flap.

Officers' caps, of the same design as other ranks', were initially made from corduroy garrison but later from wool; the side flaps were fastened with press stud instead of a button. Their cap badges were made of gold wire on a grey or grey-green backing depending on the cap material. A branch of service badge was worn on the front flap and, set slantwise on the left front of the crown, a rank badge as follows:

- Augur (ufficiale) = gold star with black centre
- Sottotenente = gold star
- Tenente = two gold stars
- Capitano = two gold stars with gold bar
- Primo capitano = three gold stars
- Primo capitano = three gold stars with gold bar
(Ranks from maggiore to colonnello were mounted in a rectangular gold frame.)
- Maggiore = one gold star
- Tenente colonnello = two gold stars

**A motorcyclist pauses during the advance into Yugoslavia.** His greatest asset is the M1934 model issued to mounted troops, with a larger steel cylinder, bigger breast pockets and more flared slits to allow for riding. His machine is a Moto Guzzi GT717 with the Brera 30 light machine gun mounted on the handlebars—a combination in widespread use. (Modern History Museum, Ljubljana)
were indicated by a series of bands around the base; these 'tapes' were 10mm deep, and were made of gold braid following the same rank sequence as that used in the cuff rank insignia – e.g. three thin bands for capitano, two thin above one thick for tenente colonello (see chart on page 41). The bands were divided by thin piping, generally of the same material as the cap braid in service branches made in the branch colour, e.g. light blue for the Veterinary Corps. General officers from the rank of brigadier upwards had a silver band of the same gros­ embroidery as used on the cuffs, with a series of plain silver bands above, according to rank.

**Alpini headdress**

The Alpini wore a special grey-green brimmed felt hat; on the left side was a pompon or boss covering the mount for a feather. For other ranks this was coloured in battalion sequence – white for 1st Bn, red for 2nd, green for 3rd and blue for 4th Battalion. For officers the boss was gold and for general officers, ranks were also shown by the kind of feather worn: a crown’s feather for other ranks and NCOs, an eagle feather for officers and a goose feather for generals. The Alpini were very proud of their traditions and particularly cherished the left hat – so much so that officers who had served in the Alpini at any time previously during their career would often unofficially continue to wear it. Alpini officers’ ranks were worn on the left side of the hat behind the feather in the form of inverted gold head chevrons in the usual sequence, e.g. two thin chevrons for tenente, one thin over one thick for maggiore, etc. General officers had a silver lace rhomboid box in the same place, with one and two stars in the centre for brigade and divisional generals respectively.

**Steel helmets**

The standard steel helmet used by the Italian Army throughout the period was the M1933 which was introduced in that year. This was painted grey-green; until 1942 it usually had a black scimitar branch of service braid on the front with the number of the unit in the centre. During the early campaigns the old M1916 'Adrian' helmet was still in use with some units such as Anti-Aircraft troops, the Sanitary Corps and 'Blackshirt' units. Coastal divisions formed in 1939-43 to defend the coastline of Italy were second-line units and many of these troops seem also to have worn the Adrian helmet.
One interesting footnote is that photographs of the fighting with France in the Western Alps in June 1940 show some soldiers of the 'Corseria' Infantry Division wearing the Czechoslovakian M1934 helmet. It is not known why the Italian Army should be wearing these helmets at that time or from what source they came; the only logical explanation is that they were supplied by the Germans from stocks acquired following the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939.

**PROTECTIVE CLOTHING**

**Greatcoats**

The standard infantry greatcoat throughout the war was the M1934 single-breasted pattern, which was made from a coarse woollen cloth or a synthetic material called 'Lunitat'. Coats made from the latter were said to have been virtually useless, as the material had no warmth-giving properties at all. The greatcoat had two side pockets with flaps, and two slash chest pockets which could be used for warming the hands; the five front buttons were covered with a fly flap, and the coat had plain shoulder straps. Insignia on the greatcoat were usually limited to white metal national stars on the collar and rank chevrons on the upper sleeve. The mounted troops' version had a broader shawl collar and more generously cut skirts.

A warmer, padded, double-breasted version with a removable cloth lining also existed, but it is not known if these were general issue or were acquired only by the lucky few. A double-breasted fleece-lined coat is also seen in photos of CSIR officers. The standard officers' greatcoat was double-breasted and made from high quality woollen cloth, sometimes of a noticeably lighter grey; it had two rows of three front buttons, and no shoulder straps. Silver stars were worn on the points of the large collar, and rank insignia on the forearms.

Other types of officers' coats seen in use included a very popular double-breasted 'windcheater' type (see Plate C5). It was made from hard-wearing brown canvas with a canvas belt and brown leather shoulder patches. A dark brown or black leather double-breasted coat was also seen but was not in widespread use; this was of the same style as the leather coats issued to tank crews (see Plate E) and may have been purchased privately by individuals. As in every army, officers always had the option of buying better equipment than their standard pattern, and this was particularly true when it came to coats.

**Winter clothing**

The Italian Army was sent to fight in Russia with little special equipment or clothing suitable for the severe conditions that they would encounter there – Italian uniforms had not even been adequate for the fighting in Greece in the winter of 1940–41. As the CSIR were transported through Eastern Europe by train their commander, Gen Messe, took matters into his own hands. While in Rumania he bought a large number of fleece habs to issue to the troops – locally called circuas, these were commonly worn by the Rumanian population. Another type of fleece-lined hat
An infantry officer on the Eastern Front wears the type of fleece cap generally seen in use by the Alpini; typically, he has the branch/regimental badge from a bustina sewn to the front flap. The trousers are double-breasted with a deep collar, and fleece lining can be seen at the open neck. (Francesco Mazzolari Archives)

In snowy conditions two types of white two-piece coveralls were apparently used in Russia. The first had been developed before the war and issued to various units; it may have been one-piece, but details are elusive. The second type was a two-piece suit with a drawstring-fastened collar and wrist straps on the jacket and ankle straps on the loose-fitting trousers. This new type seems to have been issued to the Alpini unit, and perhaps only to a few select units such as the "Monte Cervino" Ski Battalion (see Plate F3). Priority in the issue of these suits seems always to have been enjoyed firstly by the Alpini, and then by the Bersaglieri, as these are the troops usually seen wearing them.

White canvas helmet covers were worn with the white coveralls, and sometimes with the grey-green uniform. Suprisingly, the Alpini still wore their coloured pompons and feather on the white helmet cover, which must have rather defeated the object of the camouflage. Some Alpini were even seen to wear their famous felt hats, with the brim pulled down at the back to give a little extra protection from the cold. Luckily soldiers might also receive a lambswool surcoat to be worn with the white coveralls again, these were largely issued to a few elite units.

Apart from the coveralls loose-fitting white hooded coats were also worn. The Alpini had a so-called "anticrisi", a gusset that was usually worn over the top of the uniform, helmet and equipment for guard duty.

Footwear still largely consisted of the standard hobnailed boot, which was of little use in extreme cold and caused large numbers of frostbite casualties. Requests from the army in Russia for felt boots like the Soviet sulaiki fell on deaf ears: like the other armies on the Russian Front the Alpini wore improvised footwear to try to protect their feet, though some soldiers were issued with canvas overboots which helped greatly.

Special winter clothing of all types was always in short supply and the majority of soldiers on the Russian Front had to make do with the basic uniform with the addition of wool gloves, scarves and balachesas.

Chemical and burn protection

Special protective clothing was worn by specialist troops, and included a grey asbestos suit which was supposed to be worn by flame-thrower operators. The jacket was double-breasted, the right side being pulled across the chest and fastening level with the left arm. Both the collar and cuffs fastened tightly with buttons, and when worn with the loose-fitting trousers and a hood gave overall protection to the body. The hood seems to have come in two types: one incorporated goggles, and the other left the face exposed and was worn with a gasmask without the canister fitted. Although the suit must have been very hot and uncomfortable it was worn even in the extreme heat of North Africa. However, photographic evidence indicates that many flame-thrower operators went into action with no protective gear at all — whether by choice or by necessity is not known.

The development of chemical warfare had been given a great deal of emphasis in the pre-war years. The Italians had used gas in both their conquest of Ethiopia and the suppression of rebellion in Libya in the 1930s. Chemical troops were issued with rubberised coveralls similar to
YUGOSLAVIA, 1941
1: Tavanta, 'Centauri' Armoured Div
2: Sargente, 3rd Motorcyle Co., 3rd Bersaglieri Regt, 3rd Colore Div 'Principe Amedeo Duca d'Aosta'
3: Caporale maggiore, 23rd Sector, Frontier Guarda

RUSSIAN FRONT, 1941-43
1: Soldato, 'Savola' Dragon Regt, 1941
2: Casach volunteer, Groupo Serbice, 1942
3: Centrale nera ostia, MTBN 14th M Br 'Leonessa', 23 Marchi Regimental Group, 1941
RUSSIAN FRONT, 1942
1: Volunteer, Italian Croatian Legion
2: Seregente, 79th Inf Regt, 'Pasubio' Inf Div
3: Alpino, 'Monte Carnero' Ski Battalion

OCCUPATION OF YUGOSLAVIA, 1941-43
1: Capo marinaio, MVBn 67th Br 'Lesenslo'/Dalmatia, 1942
2: Soldato, 66th Inf Regt, 'Venetia' Inf Div, 1942
3: Capo squadra, MVAC/Dalmatia, 1942
the flame-throther suit but tighter fitting around the face and other extremities. Unbearably hot even in the southern European climate, these were soon discontinued when the threat of chemical warfare faded.

Other protective items included asbestos mittens worn by machine gun crews when changing the hot barrels of their weapons. Grey-green leather gloves with ringmail protecting the palms were also used by mortar and machine gun crews for the same reason.

**Fatigues**

Fatigue uniforms were issued to be worn as work clothes when performing menial tasks in the barracks and on work details. The uniform consisted of a medium grey loose-fitting cotton jacket and pantaloons trousers made of poor quality material. Ties/pins on the uniform consisted of white cloth stars on the collar, and rank chevrons where appropriate. There is evidence that fatigues were sometimes worn on the march in summertime, presumably to save wear and tear on the grey-green wool uniform and for greater comfort.

**Personal equipment**

The standard rifle was either the M1901 Mannlicher Carcano in 6.5mm or the slightly modernised M1901/1908 version firing a 7.35mm round; each had a six-round fixed magazine.

The Italian soldier’s personal equipment in the infantry and other unmounted branches consisted of a grey-green leather belt with a single-claw buckle usually worn off-set to the left. Two leather cartridge pouches were worn together at the front, each carrying four six-round

A mixed group of six soldiers stood in a Russian town having just received medals for bravery. From left to right: a sergeant major and two privates of the Bersaglieri, a corporal of artillery; and an officer and sergeant of infantry. The three Bersaglieri and the artilleryman are wearing the greatcoat issued to mounted troops with the large shawl collar. The infantry officer wears the officers’ double-breasted model of the M1934 greatcoat, and the NCO the single-breasted version. There is also an interesting mix of equipment; the two Bersaglieri privates wear their own special belt with two small cartridge pouches, the gunner the two-pocket bandolier, the infantry officer a ‘Sam Browne’ belt with holstered Beretta M1934, and the infantry NCO the standard belt with twin pouches. (USMME)
clips of rifle ammunition. These were supported by a looped strap which fastened to D rings behind the pouches and passed around the neck - from the viewpoint of weight distribution this was a poorer design than the V or N straps used by other armies.

The bayonet was carried in a fitted grey metal scabbard fastened to the belt at the left hip by means of a grey-green leather frog. An extending truncheon could also be worn on the belt in a combination frog with the bayonet.

The M1939 knapsack worn on the back accommodated the soldier's personal kit. Slung over the right shoulder he also carried a gas mask bag of either M1935 or M1935 model. A light canvas haversack or 'tactical bag' was also sometimes carried slung; and both types of gas mask bag served as extra stowage space when the gas mask was discarded after the threat of gas attack diminished. Fluted aluminium water bottles, worn slung over the left shoulder, came in two different sizes - a larger capacity type was issued to Alpini.

The most up-to-date item - well ahead of its time when first introduced - was the M1929 camouflage tent section or shelter quarter. Of tightly woven cotton duck printed with a camouflage pattern of forest green, chestnut brown and grey, this could be joined with others to make a light tent. It could also be adapted for wear as a poncho which gave protection against the elements as well as providing good camouflage.

**MVSN and foreign troops' uniforms**

The MVSN or Blackshirt units wore the same basic uniform as the Royal Army with a few slight differences.

Collar insignia on the standard tunic was a black double flame with a small silver fasces instead of the star of the Royal Army. The 'M Battalions' had a red stylised letter M on the black fasanthe with the silver fasces passing through it. Black cotton shirts were often worn under the tunic instead of the green-grey Army type; and a narrow black stripe was often worn down the side of the pantaloons. These were often worn with black woollen socks pulled up to just below the knee, and over the top of these a pair of white socks with the tops rolled down over the top of the boot.

Combat headgear was the usual M1935 steel helmet; but a soft black felt hat with a haring tail was worn instead of the austere, and sometimes in combat. One item unique to the MVSN was the black Cyrillic script 'volunteer on route for the Russian Front parade their flag - note the 'vandyked' edging in the old Austro-Hungarian style - and the MVSN pennant which shows that they were officially part of that organisation. On the left arm of the flag-bearer's greatcoat can be seen the chequered shield of the Legion, and on the collar the white-metal fasces of the MVSN. (USIMM2)

**MVAC troops**

The Yugoslavian MVAC volunteers were dressed in a wide variety of uniforms with each region having its own distinct type; these often included a mix of Italian and pre-war Yugoslavian items. Slovenian volunteers wore either Italian or Yugoslavian tunics, initially with Yugoslavian sidecaps. The wearing of black berets was widespread, and these were usually adorned with badges of one or two types. One had a skull with either

Russia, 1942: the crew of a 47mm anti-tank gun prepare for action. By this stage in the war the 47/32 had become ineffective against Soviet armour, but these were the best the Italians had - and even they were in short supply. In this cold the crew have only the standard single-breasted greatcoats with buttonless and gloves. (USIMM2)

Cacciatori d'Albania units raised in 1941 wore normal Italian uniform with their own collar insignia. This consisted of a red patch with blue edge and a black diagonal stripe, bearing a white metal anticloistered 'Skanderbeg' helmet above the usual star.

The Albanian Royal Guard wore standard Italian uniform with a purple T-shaped collar insignia with a star and an antelope head as worn on the Skanderbeg helmet. They also wore the M1933 steel helmet with a black stencilled Skanderbeg helmet on the front.
A group of Alpini artillerymen in short sleeve order manhandle a 66mm mountain gun during an anti-partisan operation in Yugoslavia. Some of them have put up spirals of foliage in their hat bands. With their cotton shirts they wear the wool pantalon trousers in a loose and baggy style often seen among the Alpini. (James Bond)

crossed bones behind it or a dagger in its teeth; the other was a simple gladius sword, sometimes with a small round shield in front.

In 1942 the Italians issued some volunteers with 2,500 tropical uniforms dyed a tan or light brown colour. Slovenian MVAC volunteers were also issued by early 1945 with a winter uniform which consisted of a black overcoat, jacket and trousers worn with a white shirt. Some Slovenian MVAC officers were also provided by their employers with good quality Italian officers' uniforms.

Some Chetnik volunteers who were absorbed into MVAC units would have worn their usual ex-Yugoslav Army uniform and do not seem to have adopted MVAC rank insignia.

One small unit which wore its own unique uniform was the 'Oriënt' Volunteer Battalion, a 250-strong unit raised in the area around the port of Cattaro in Montenegro. They were grey-green uniforms, trousers and berets with large red oval cap badges. On the collar of the tunic they had small badges in the shape of two white metal cross Roman swords, and the same symbol appeared in the middle of the cap badge. Other units, like the Moslem 'Sandjak' Militia of eastern Montenegro, white part of the MVAC forces were dressed in civilian clothes and were armed with whatever they could get hold of, which was probably the usual ex-Yugoslav equipment.

Helmets were seldom worn but two models that were in use were the Adrian M1915 model and the Czech M1935. Both types were formerly in use by the Yugoslav Army, and in the case of the Adrian the Yugoslav coat of arms badge was removed from the front. The Slovenian 'Legion of Death', a 1,700-strong MVAC unit, certainly wore both types of helmet with civilian and ex-Yugoslav Army clothing when formed in August 1941.

MVAC ranks were shown by the wearing of small triangular pieces of cloth or metal, either on a blue armband on the left sleeve, or on the front of the beret or other headgear slightly offset to the left. While not universally displayed such insignia do seem to have been worn by the more regular units from Slovenia and Dalmatia.

Red cloth triangle - Squad sub-commander
Red cloth triangle bearing white cloth star - Squad commander
Yellow cloth triangle - Platoon sub-commander
Yellow cloth triangle bearing metal star - Platoon commander
Silver metal triangle - Company sub-commander
Silver metal triangle bearing silver star - Company commander
Gold metal triangle - Battalion sub-commander
Gold metal triangle bearing gold star - Battalion commander

Croatian Legion

The Croatian Legion raised to fight on the Russian Front wore Italian Army uniforms with MVSN insignia since they were officially part of that organisation. A silver shield with the title 'Hrvatska' at the top above a red and white chequer-board shield was worn on the left sleeve of the tunic or greatcoat. M1933 steel helmets were issued, but the great majority of legionsmen seem to have worn the standard Italian button cap with an MVSN badge on the front. (See Plate F1.)

Cossack Volunteers

The small Cossack volunteer unit raised by the Italian Army on the Eastern Front was originally issued with Italian tunics and breeches. Ex-Soviet Cossack trousers were also worn. A chevron in the Russian national colours of white, blue and red was worn on the left sleeve of the tunic, and was the only distinguishing insignia of the unit. (Some sources say that the chevron was worn on the right sleeve, but as the Italian Army always wore unit and other insignia on the left arm it is fairly safe to assume that their Russian auxiliaries followed suit.) Later the Cossacks were allowed to wear their own national dress which consisted of the black Tokheksu felt-hat coat with the same chevron insignia on the sleeve. Both types of uniform were worn with the Cossack lambswool (polushki) cap, which came in white or black. (See Plate E2.)

A Blackshirt of an 'M Battalion' stationed in Yugoslavia to fight partisans marches past with a Berdich 1910 light machine gun on his shoulder. The insignia of a red star lies on his shoulder, with a silver fasces through the middle can be clearly seen on the double black flire collar patch; see also Plate E3. The rest of the uniform is standard M1940 Army issue apart from the black cotton shirt. (USSME)

This unit of ski troops on anti-partisan patrol in the mountains of Yugoslavia wear the two-piece snow suits were usually associated with service in Russia. By this date - winter 1944/45 - the branch badge was no longer centred on the steel helmet. They wear standard leather equipment, and the foreground man is using a canvas 'tactical bag' to carry his gear. (USSME)
Table A: Infantry Divisions serving in Europe 1940-43

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<td>Orange</td>
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<tr>
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<td>57</td>
<td>79,74</td>
<td>57, 127</td>
<td>F, G, Gocc</td>
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<td>Lombardia</td>
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<td>77,78</td>
<td>30, 10</td>
<td>F, G, Gocc</td>
<td>Red/white stripe</td>
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<td>Macerata</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>151,122</td>
<td>151, 112</td>
<td>G, Gocc</td>
<td>White/or blue</td>
<td>White/or blue</td>
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Key:
- A = Albania, C = Corsica, F = French campaign, G = Greek, O = Orange, V = Victory, Vf = Victory of Free France
- Gocc = German occupation of Greece, S/or = Soviet occupation of Sicily, Vf = Victory of Free France

Division Name: Monteva (104), Marche (52), Molise (16), Molise (37), Murne (154), Napoli (24), Novara (157), Pavia (49), Palermo (9), Pavia (151), Pavia (103), Padua (10), Piemonte (152), Prato (29), Pravina (24), Prato (186), Puglia (36), Ravenna (3), Riviera (13), Reggio (50), Rome (105), Salerno (39), Siena (12), Serravalle (2), Siena (51), Spergola (1), Terzo (48), Terni (52), Venice (159), Venice (19), Verona (156), Zara (159)
THE PLATES

A: WESTERN ALPS, 1940

A1: Gunnery, 59th Artillery Regiment, ‘Cagliari’ Infantry Division
A member of the crew for a 75mm field gun, he wears the Model 1933 steel helmet with the black star-backed artillery branch badge on the front. Underneath this he wears his butts in lieu of a wooden cap, when used in this way the busbcot soon wore out and could not be worn for its intended purpose. His M1930 jacket has a black-tipped collar piped in yellow for the artillery, and bearing his division’s distinguishing patches — red with white stripes, and the national silver star. The black leather gauntlets and grey-green leather banded cap were worn by a variety of mounted units as well as the artillery.

A2: Caporale, 89th Infantry Regiment, ‘Cosseria’ Infantry Division
Like nearly all italian troops fighting in this campaign the corporal still wears the M1937 uniform underhis M1934 greatcoat. The greatcoat, worn throughout the war and worn in Russia, lacked warmth because it was single-breasted. His cap is the popular busbcoat, and he is holding the M1933 helmet, both with infantry branch badges. His light machine gun is the 6.5mm Beretta M1930, a poor design, chronically prone to feed problems in the field due to a synthetically cartridge lubrication system, it nevertheless had to serve the Italian Army throughout the war.

The ‘Taurinense’ was one of several Alpine divisions deployed in this campaign in the mountainous border region between France and Italy. The NCO wears the M1937 uniform; his felt Alpine hat has the green pompon of a 3rd Alpine Battalion attached to the feather-holder on the left side. On the left sleeve above his rank chevrons he wears the divisional arm shield which although being phased out was still in use some time. The special equipment used by these mountains troops includes a M1939 mountain rucksack and climbing rope and a M1934 alpenstock. His rifle is the standard M1938 6.5mm Carcano used by most Italian soldiers during the war.

B: GREECE, 1940-41

B1: Caporale, 21st Infantry Regiment, ‘Siena’ Infantry Division
This junior NCO wears the standard M1940 uniform, with M1933 helmet and M1938 boots, as worn by the Italian Army throughout 1940-43. On the left sleeve above his rank chevrons he wears the silver badge of the ‘Andri’ troops — an upright plume between laurel and oak sprays — signifying that he has volunteered for a special assault squad within his regiment. The single gold chevron high on his right sleeve is a wound stripe: these came in three colours — gold for wounded in action, silver for wounded in service, and red for wounded in the national cause. On the grey-green collar of the M1940 jacket he wears his divisional patches. The Carcano M1938 rifle — which served the Italian Army for over 50 years in various models — fired a 6.5mm round which lacked stopping power. There had been attempts to convert them to 7.35mm, and from 1938 some rifles in the new calibre were issued. The onset of war found this programme incomplete, and from 1940 all new rifles reverted to 6.5mm; but the 7.35mm rifles were already in use alongside the old calibre, causing logistic nightmares.

B2: Soldato, 77th Infantry Regiment, ‘Lupi di Toscana’ Infantry Division
This infantryman of the ‘Wolves of Tuscany’ Division wears the same uniform as B1. His equipment consists of the M1939 knapsack, to which is fastened a M1929 camouflage section/pouch and an aluminium mess tin (which could also be carried in its own cover). The gasmask bag is the M1935; later the gasmask was often discarded so that the bag could be used to carry other kit. His standard issue waterbottle is slung on the right, and on the left, in a combination frog with the bayonet, one of three different variants of entrenching tool.

B3: Camiciera nera, 1st Albanian Legion MVSN, 1941
This unit consisted of Albanians recruited since the take-over of their country by Italy in April 1939. Most Albanian units were very unreliable — some even arrested their Italian officers and deserted — but this particular Legion came out of the

Table B: Alpine Divisions serving in Europe 1940-43

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<td>F, gau, Gau</td>
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<td>Alpi Orientali</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tr>
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*Notes: 1. Alpine Infantry Regts began the war with varying numbers of battalions, but from 1942 were standardised at 3 battalions each of 3 companies. 2. In 1941 Alpine Groups each had 3 battalions.*
MVSN Rank Insignia, 11 June 1940 - 8 September 1943

Colours: (1 - 2) Field marines, coastal transport, on upper sleeves; red chevrons; (1, later gold, then black triangles, gold embroidered eagle (1) or laurel wreath (2)). (3 - 6) General officers, official cap badges; gold wire embroidered eagle with gold laurel wreath (3), gold laurel wreath and diamond on grey-green backing (4), dark blue backing to diamond (5), dark blue backing to diamond (6). (7 - 10) Field officers, official cap badges; (7 - 8) black wire backing to diamond, on black backing (9, 10). (11 - 13) Submarines officers, official cap badges, gold wire backing to diamond, with black wire backing (11 - 12). (13 - 15) Senior NCOs, sub-officers, black plate shoulder straps, silver broad bars and badge. (16 - 20) Junior NCOs and senior other ranks, cloth base and gold 450 gradate on upper sleeves silver wire (16 - 17, 19) or red wool (18 - 20) chevrons. Junior other ranks - cotton needle pt., cotton needle ring were no insignia.

1. Primo comandante (Field Marshal)
2. Comandante (Field Marshal)
3. Comandante generale (Grand Marshal)
4. Lusso (Duke of Savoy) (Chief of State magazine (Acting Dux))
5. Lusso (Duke of Savoy) (Chief of State magazine (Chief of State))
6. Lusso (Duke of Savoy) (Chief of State)

This enlisted soldier is in training, as shown by the white stripe round the edge of his collar. (A stripe all the way around the collar indicated officer training, and a section round the front point only, NCO training.) This also provides a good view of the upper part of the M1940 tunic, with its pleated pockets and integral cloth belt. (Rey Tryx)

This diagram shows the distinct uniform of the Italian Blackshirts. The obvious distinctive feature is the white felt hat based on his country's national headgear. On his left sleeve he also wears a badge made from baulese - the double-headed black eagle of Austria on a red background. His rank of Blackshirt is equivalent to that of a general, with a large laurel wreath and diamond. On his breast he carries his dagger used by all Blackshirt troops, and an OD service pistol. Worn with the M1940 coat is the field cap, which is worn with the Italian Army in World War II.

G: GREECE, 1940-41

1. Capitano, "Edico" Alpine Battalion, 5th Albanian Regiment, "Trintindana" Alpine Division

This captain in the Albanian Astronauts wears the official version of the felt hat with a gold woolen badge of the corps on the front; on the left side is a black eagle's feather mounted behind a gold braid, and his rank is indicated by three chevrons. He wears the M1940 wool jacket and trousers made from a superior grade of material, with the insignia of his rank. The collar on his coat displays the "Trintindana" insignia of the Alpini with the officers' pattern eagle, and his rank insignia is worn in the lower sleeves. The grey-green shirt and tie was a mark of superior quality to those of the rank and file. Instead of putting it on a pair of woolen socks and trousers, he wears it on the bottoms of his trousers, and on the backs of his shoes, there is a small metal badge on the calf.

This is the typical uniform of the Italian Blackshirt centerpiece, wearing a black velvet collar and piping. He wears breeches and black leather boots, and his Beretta M1934 is holstered in his "15 Browning" type belt.

This major wears the popular "windcheater" officers' coat, worn at the time. Made of coarse canvas cloth, it is double-breasted and has brown leather shoulder patches. His uniform is worn in the usual way. He wears the double-breasted grey wool coat, its rank is shown by the gold wire in gold stars on a gold frame and fixed on the breast, and the small badge is a central red and yellow collar and piping signifying his infantry branch. His high boots may have been purchased privately, they are often replaced with more practical ankle boots during the course of the war.
A colonel of a support branch wearing the grey-green peaked service cap. his rank is indicated by the number of bands of braid - reflected light obscures these here, but there are three thin above one thick, divided by narrow lines of the hat colour. He may well be a member of the Medical Corps, in which case his single collar flames would be emerald (maroon). This cap badge has the cross in the centre to signify that he is at Army Headquarters or attached to a military school. (Rex Tru) practical item worn throughout the war. On the left sleeve is the red arm badge of the deepwater riper above his gold-yellow rayon chevrons. He is wearing leather mounted troops, and artillery leggings, and has the special belt and armament pouches of the Bersaglieri. He is armed with the Carcano M1919/38 carbine, a slightly modified version of the M1917.

D3: Caporale maggiore, 23rd Sector, Frontier Guard
Guardia alla Frontera units - designated as 'ectors' - were quite heavily involved in combat during the invasion of Yugoslavia. This NCO wears the standard M1940 Army tunic and pantalons, the collar bearing the single green flame with red border which characterizes the GAP infantry arm. His hat is the same as worn by the Alpini but without the feather-dollar, which is replaced by a decoration called the 'Nepazia' - again in the green and red colours of the infantry.

On the front is the metal cap badge with his unit number 'XXIII'. The GAF wore the M1932 helmet in combat.

E1: Russian Front, 1941-43
E1: Soldato, 'Savio' Dragon Regiment, 1941
Honored casually may have been largely obsolete by this time, but as this regiment proved, when properly deployed against a disorganized enemy, they could still be deadly. On 24 August, 1942, at Tachov (the Don) one squadron of this unit bravely charged 2,000 Soviet infantry with sabres and hand grenades while the rest of the regiment made a dismounted attack; the enemy were routed, though at a cost. This trooper wears the M1933 helmet with a black cross, special to the Savio Legio, on the front; his M1940 tunic has the regiment's black triple flame collar patch - decorated with red piping in 1942. The other distinctive item of this regiment's uniform is the red necktie (adopted in memory of a wounded messenger of the regiment in the 18th century who reported to his general with the white lace collar of his uniform covered in his own blood. These black leather leggings were worn by other ranks in the cavalry. He is armed with a M1989/1938 carbine and a M1971 staff. Captured Soviet PPSh-41 sub-machine guns were very popular with the Savio troopers and were often used in combat; one was in fact carried by the officer in command of their famous charge.

E2: Cosass volunteer, Gruppo Savio, 1942
The Italian 8th Army followed their German allies' success in Russia and recruited their own small unit or 'clan' of Cosassians in September 1942; total strength was a colonel, four other officers and 360 Cosassians. This unit was eventually attached to the lanciers of the 'Novara' Regt; after the Italian withdrawal from Russia they joined German Cosassian units. This volunteer wears a red-tape black lambswool papakha cap; an Italian M1940 jacket issued to him by his new employers, and ex-Red Army breeches and boots. On the left sleeve he has a chevron national insignia in the Russian colours of white, blue and red. He retains Red Army leather equipment and his Mosin Nagant M1910 rifle, and is showing his Italian comrades his traditional national sabres.

Camicia nera scelta, MVSN 14th M Battalion 'Legnanesi', 23 Marzo Regimental Group, 1941
'M' for Mussolini' battalions were raised from battle-proven Blackshirt volunteers and were given a more active combat role than the less reliable fellei fascists. These units were particularly active in fighting partisans in Yugoslavia and were included in the 8th Army sent to Russia. This carpenter private wears the MVSN black fel, which was often seen in combat, and the collar patch of double black flames with an embroidered M and silver fasces. As an LMG gunner he has on his belt a holstered pistol, and also the tools and spares pouch for the Breda 1930.

F: Russian Front, 1942
F1: Volunteer, Italian Croatian Legion
This small unit, recruited in Croatia during the Italian occupation for service in Russia, was made up of an infantry battalion, a mortar company and an anti-tank company. This volunteer wears the M1934 wool greatcoat - totally inadequate for Russian winter conditions; on the left sleeve is the Croatian national shield, a red and silver white-white-cherrywood shield beneath 'Hrvatska' ('Croatia' in Croatian). Because the Legion was ostensibly a Blackshirt unit it has the white metal fasces of that movement on its coat collar and the MVSN cap badge on his bustina, which he wears with the tassel pulled down over a privately acquired baldachin. In these conditions the issue M1932 hobnail boots wore a virtual guarantee of frostbite. His rifle is the modified M1938 version of the Ljungman M1931 Carcano; he has a Breda 35 grenade fastened to his belt.

F2: Sergente, 79th Infantry Regiment, 'Pasubio' Infantry Division
This NCO has managed to equip himself better than most for the Russian winter. He is wearing the padded, lined, double-breasted version of the greatcoat, and has been supplied with a Russian made calico fisce cap purchased by his commanding officer. This was not standard issue, though, to give it a more official look many soldiers sewed on the badges from their foreign caps. This man has been very fortunate in getting hold of a pair of insulated canvas overboots, and has a woolen balalaika and 'trigger finger' mittens. He carries a Polish Mauser WZ23 anti-tank rifle.

An MVSN Blackshirt from the 15th Bn, attached to the 'Lupi di Toscana' Division on the Greek-Albanian border. On the collar note the MVSN's black double flames with white metal fasces. The small gold 'honour badge' of this division can just be seen above the metal ribbons on his left breast - two 'heading wolves' heads in an oval wreath. (USMME)

which was supplied in large numbers to the CSR by the Germans from war booty. That they accepted such an obsolete item shows from desperate; they were far some kind of weapon to use against the Soviet avenger.

F3: Alpino, 'Monte Cervina' Ski Battalion
This ski unit was added to the strength of the 8th Army in Russia because of its specials in fighting in winter conditions. The covering is a two-piece garment, the top having laps up the front and sides so that it could be pulled tight. Dark trousers were sometimes worn on the slopes of the coverall, but not generally - although the strong traditions of the Alpini seem to have won out over common sense in the case of the red black and black clover leaf worn on the white helmet cover. (Feather-holders were fastened to the hem of a wire mount aimed clipped under its rim.) The special white-coloured canvas cartridge pouch belt was unique to the Alpini and had four pouches instead of the usual two. His weapon is the M1918/1938 carbine with folding bayonet.

Two Carabinieri on guard outside a railway station somewhere in occupied Yugoslavia in 1943. Both wear the 'luxury' bicorne hat with the grey-green cloth cover and black badge, the M1934 single-breasted greatcoat, puttees, and the M1931 black fur-rimmed bimbolet. The Carabinieri performed security police duties throughout the occupied areas in addition to their primary role as military police. See Plate NG, USMME

G1: Occupation of Yugoslavia, 1941-43
G1: Capo maniopoli, 67th Blackshirt Battalion 'Toscana', Dalmatia 1942
This Italian Blackshirt officer in command of local Yugoslav MMV Troops holds the rank equivalent to a Royal Armante lieutenant. His M1940 wool jacket has double black collar flames with small red fasces, the forarm rating has diamonds instead of loops in the top line of braid. On active
service, he wears a pullover with his wartime pattern breaches, although he retains the smart but impractical officers' high boots. His helmet has the black stencilled badge of the MVSN on the front; turned into his belt is his black MVSN buskin, worn in limited numbers from the mid-1930s. His belt supports a holster-type Beretta pistol, his MVSN dagger, and a canvas pouch with 30-round magazines for his 9mm Beretta M1938 sub-machine gun. All other Italian small arms of the Second World War this SMG was highly regarded by all who encountered it.

G2: Soldato, 84th Infantry Regiment, ‘Venezia’ Infantry Division, 1942
This private of the ‘Venezia’ Infantry Division wears his M1939 camouflage-tinted field jacket arranged as a poncho; this was the first camouflage-printed item issued as standard to any army, and in this at least the Italian Army was ahead of its time. Foliage is attached to his helmet by means of a cord passed through the ar-vent. Under the poncho he is wearing standard M1940 uniform; note the combination of long socks and puttees, often seen in the field. Note the fighting knife on his belt, the Royal Army version of the ‘Schutzen’s’ dagger.

G3: Capo squadra, MVAC; Dalmatia, 1942
This colourful character is a squad leader in the Dalmatian MVAC, the ‘Voluntary Anti-Communist Militia’ raised from the peasant of the various regions of Italian-occupied Yugoslavia to help fight the Partisans. The distinctive headgear is a soft skull cap with a piece of black cloth tied around it and hanging down behind; on the feet is the skull and dagger badge peculiar to the Dalmatian MVAC mounted on a wooden cockade. The Dalmatian MVAC were divided into 100-strong companies called bersiche, segregated along

H: OCCUPATION OF THE BALKANS, 1941-43

H1: Vice-brigadire, 87th Battalion, Royal Finance Guard; Epirus, Greece, 1941
This Finance Guard was an integral part of the Army with a peacetime role as an anti-smuggling and anti-espionage service. Their wartime responsibility for internment and external security led to small units being posted throughout occupied territories; and these became relatively easy targets for Partisan attacks. The Finance Guard had a slightly different rank system from the rest of the Army – this vice-brigadire is the equivalent to a sergeant. His uniform is the standard Army issue with the yellow double-flame collar patch of the Finance Guard, and his helmet is brimmed as was the usual practice with these troops. The M1939 gasmask bag is here used to carry grenades, as was often the case during the war. His weapon is the M1915/1924 carbine.

H2: Appuntato, 13th Mobile Battalion, Royal Carabinieri, ‘Firenze’ Infantry Division; Albania, 1942
The Carabinieri Real were the senior corps of the Italian Army, and fulfilled the role of military police. They had their own unique system of ranks; this appuntato is the equivalent to a corporal in the infantry branch. He wears the traditional 'scozia' bicorn hat; made of black felt, in the field this was worn with a grey-green cloth cover with a cloth version of the cap badge on the front. The rest of the uniform is normal M1940 issue, with the large, distinctive collar patches of the Royal Carabinieri. As he is on guard duty he wears basic equipment, including the grey-green leather mounted moores’ bandolier for his carbine ammunition but with a holstered 10.35mm Bocko Gisanti M1889 revolver attached to the end.

H3: Sergente maggiore, 27th Battalion, 11th Bersaglieri Regiment, 1st Corpo Division ‘Eugenio di Savoia’; Yugoslavia
This sergeant-major of the elite light infantry corps is relaxing in shirt sleeve order, which consists of a grey-green flannel shirt with zip collar and his rank chevrons on the left sleeve. (Officers when wearing shirt sleeve order would display above the left breast pocket the same system of rank stars as worn on the side of the bussola.) He is proudly wearing the red felt fez with blue tassel which, along with the corded feather plume worn on the service hat and helmet, was the main distinction of the Bersaglieri. (The fez was ‘presented’ as a compliment to their bravery by the French ‘Zouaves’, alongside whom the old Austrian Army fought in the Crimea in 1854-56.) He is about to take a drink from a standard issue water bottle, and he carries his food in the canvas ‘tactical bag’ at his feet.
At its peak the Italian Army contributed 2.5 million troops to the Axis war effort. English-speaking readers tend to think of this army in terms of the North African campaign, but far more Italian troops served in other theatres. They invaded, and later bore the major burden of occupying, the Balkan countries; and Italy sent 250,000 troops to fight on the Russian Front. In this, the first of a three-part study, Philip Jowett covers the European theatre - including Russia - from 1940 to Italy’s armistice with the Allies in 1943. Many interesting uniforms, a number of them new to most readers, are meticulously illustrated by Stephen Andrew.