

GURPS[®] GRIM LEGIONS[™]

**Italy Seeks Triumph,
Finds Tragedy**

By Michele Armellini

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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March to the megalomaniac visions of the man who would be Caesar reborn! Inside you'll find:

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Gene Seabolt

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GRIM LEGIONS

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Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the **GURPS Basic Set** – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Page references that begin with CI indicate **GURPS Compendium I**. Other references are CII to **Compendium II**, VE to **Vehicles**, W to **WWII**, W:HS to **WWII: Hand of Steel**, W:IC to **WWII: Iron Cross**, and W:RH to **WWII: Return to Honor**. The abbreviation for *this* book is W:GL. For a full list of title abbreviations, see p. CI181 or visit the updated web list at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

INTRODUCTION

“If there’s war, the Italians will fight on Germany’s side.”

– Nazi diplomat Joachim von Ribbentrop

“That’s fair. We had them last time.”

– Winston Churchill, in response

Italy considered joining both sides in WWI. Finding more to like in the Entente, the nation sent its armed forces marching into a harsh war until circumstances proved that it had picked the winning cause. Afterward, Italy dreamed of being a world-class power. It wasn’t, but it would take another war to prove it. Once plunged into this second and even greater conflict, Italians painfully learned that they lacked the industry, the technology, and above all, the leadership needed to win.

Many of them also discovered that they lacked a good cause for which to fight, to the point that they gained a reputation for surrendering eagerly. While several factors (discussed in this book) contributed to this, the fact remains that the glory of a boisterous dictator never provides good reason to die. In WWII, Italians did not find glory and conquest, but shame, defeat, and tragic losses. Yet even in tragedy, some of these soldiers showed that honor, patriotism, and a sense of duty were still possible, and they chose to fight, not for the orders they received, but for those few precious things in which they could believe. Both the Allies and Axis would discover that it was risky to belittle Italians who had just a little support and a proper cause.

From the unforgiving Sahara sandstorms to the muddy Balkan trails, from the dark waters of the Mediterranean to the snow-filled trenches of Russia, this book guides the roleplayer who wants to relive the dark fate of these last, grim legions. The following pages will provide history, atmosphere, settings, and plenty of detail for any gaming style featuring “Mussolini’s lions.” The book also offers useful information for Allied or German campaigns in bloody Italy, or partisan adventures.

So, tighten up your puttees and smooth the feather in your cap, for a long march awaits . . .

About the Author

Michele Armellini makes a living from foreign languages, and in WWII he would probably have been more useful manning a dictionary than a mortar. Nevertheless, he’s a wargamer, roleplayer, and WWII buff. Michele lives in Udine, Italy, with his understanding wife, Silvia, and although a native Italian, he has never eyed any other woman. No, seriously. He has contributed to several previous **GURPS** and **GURPS WWII** playtests, and written for *Pyramid*.

The Italians created the world's most advanced underwater attack force in the 10th MAS Flotilla. These naval commandos not only developed their own attack crafts and breathing devices, they also created their own training system from scratch.

The unit hand-picked smart, enterprising officers, together with experienced NCOs and engineering specialists. These men were carefully screened – disadvantages such as Cowardice, Bad Reputation, and Pacifism would not be allowed, unless folded into a Secret disadvantage, and any Secret itself would require an excellent backstory and GM approval. Most physical disadvantages simply would not be allowed.

The frogmen tirelessly trained, both in order to fully explore the capabilities of their special vehicles and to develop the stamina their missions required. The template's ST 11 and HT 12 are a minimum, as these men often performed incredible physical feats, at times while breathing impure oxygen or suffering from the bends (see p. CII132).

The unit had three main specializations: swimmers, SLC pilots, and *Barchini* pilots. The swimmers and SLC (p. 36) pilots were the true frogmen, and trained with rebreathers; the former would reach their targets with no other help but their flippers. The SLC pilots learned how to bypass anti-torpedo nets and port surveillance, how to pilot their unwieldy ride-on torpedoes, and how to attach the warhead to the target's roll stabilizers or propellers. The pilots of the explosive *Barchini*, instead, headed toward an enemy warship on a powerboat laden with explosives and were ejected seconds before the impact. While the SLCs could sink a battleship (p. 45), the swimmers' limpet mines were best used against merchant ships.

These highly skilled, brave, irreplaceable men faced an enormous fatality rate in their work. *Barchini* pilots seldom survived the attack. The missions of the frogmen often took more time than the 1.5 hours that their rebreathers allowed at most. Unforeseen difficulties might let them strike their target, but not return to the rendezvous point. Sometimes, they had badly forged documents and instructions to get through enemy territory, but they weren't trained as spies and were lucky if they managed to surrender.

The one exception to this was the outfit based on the *Oltorra*, an Italian merchant ship interned in neutral Spain, within easy reach of Gibraltar. In a glaring violation of Spanish neutrality, the ship was fitted with a dry dock and a hatch, below the waterline, suitable for both swimmers and SLCs. With such a close base, many frogmen managed to carry out multiple missions.



Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [20]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 12 [20].

Advantages: Fit [5] and 25 points in *National Advantages* (p. 20). Frogmen may take Fearlessness [2/level], +1 ST [10], +1 HT [10], or replace Fit with Very Fit [a net +10] as part of their *National Advantages*.

Disadvantages: Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20] and -30 points in *National Disadvantages*.

Basic Skills: First Aid (M/E) IQ-1 [1/2]-11; Navigation (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Piloting (Ride-on Torpedo) (P/A) DX [2]-12; Sailor (M/A) IQ+3 [8]-15; Scuba (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Swimming (P/E) DX+1 [2]-13; Underwater Demolition (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Boating (P/A) DX-1 [1]-11; Knife (P/E) DX-1 [1/2]-11; Mechanic (Special Crafts) (M/A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (Military) IQ-1 [1/2]-11; Seamanship (M/E) IQ [1]-12; Survival (Island/Beach) (M/A) IQ-2 [1/2]-10.

Optional Skills: Spend 3 points on improving Swimming (P/E); Piloting (Ride-on Torpedo) (P/A); Mechanic (Special Crafts), Sailor, Scuba, Survival (Island/Beach), or Underwater Demolition (all M/A); or Navigation (M/H) – or on any of: Brawling, Guns (Pistol or Rifle), Parachuting (all P/E); Climbing, Powerboat (both P/A); Carousing (P/A – HT); Area Knowledge (any), Scrounging (both M/E); Armoury (Vehicular), Gambling, Hard-Hat Diving, Intimidation (all M/A); or Engineer (Naval vessels) and Explosive Ordinance Disposal (both M/H).

* Includes +2 for IQ.

Customization Notes: For *Barchini* pilots, swap points in either Scuba and/or Underwater Demolition for skill in Powerboat. The optional skills also can be used for Italian naval raiders, which included parachutist-swimmers!

CARRO ARMATO MEDIO M13/40

The M13/40 was the Italian main battle tank, such as it was. It had been slowly developed between 1937 and 1940, to replace the poorly designed stopgap M11/39.

Its best feature was cheapness. The engine was a heavy, underperforming diesel, yielding an indifferent off-road performance, while the riveted armor was poor. A piercing hit sometimes just caused a hole on other tanks, but on the M13 the rivets popped, the plates cracked, and splinters flew inside. The FIAT-Ansaldo tank deserved its nickname, “the Iron Coffin.”

The main gun was the rather unspectacular 47mm Mod 39. Upon its debut, the M13/40 could square off with early British Cruiser tanks, if carefully deployed, but thick-skinned infantry tanks could easily piece its thin armor while ignoring the Italian rounds. The M13/40 soon became hopelessly outclassed, but soldiered on. The British always considered it a threat against infantry, thanks to its 47mm HE round and considerable firepower in MGs.

Some 1,750 of all the M13 variants were produced, a drop in the ocean of other countries’ armor production. Having captured considerable numbers, Commonwealth troops deployed the vehicle in 1941. (The Australians of the 6th Cavalry painted large kangaroos on theirs.) German second-line troops also deployed them after 1943.

The crew includes a commander (who also serves as gunner) and loader in the turret, and driver and radio operator in the body. The radio operator also handles the hull MGs and the commander the anti-aircraft MG, which was normally stowed inside the tank until needed.

The turret rotates about 15° per second when the hydraulic traverse is used, or at 2° if hand-cranked by the gunner. The engine burns 3.7 gallons of diesel per hour. A full load of fuel and ammo costs \$500.

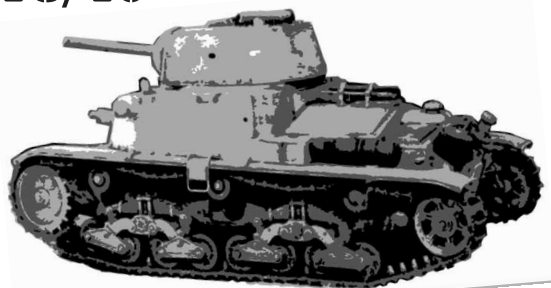
Carro Armato Medio M13/40

Subassemblies: Small Tank chassis +3; full-rotation Small AFV turret [Body:T] +2; fixed Mini open mount [Tur:T] +0; tracks +2.

Powertrain: 93-kW standard diesel engine with 93-kW tracked transmission, 48-gallon standard tank, 8,000-kWh batteries.

Occ: 2 CS Body, 2 CS Tur Cargo: 1 Tur

| Armor | F | RL | B | T | U |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|
| Body: | 4/115 | 4/100 | 4/100 | 4/55 | 4/25 |
| Tracks: | 4/35 | 4/35 | 4/35 | 4/35 | 4/35 |
| Turret: | 4/145 | 4/100 | 4/100 | 4/55 | – |



Weaponry

2□Gr. LMG/Breda Mod 38 [Body:F] (1,728).*
 Ground LMG/Breda Mod 38 [Tur:F] (864).*
 47mm Short TG/OTO 47/32 Mod 35 [Tur:F] (87).*
 Ground LMG/Breda Mod 38 [OM:F].†
 * Hull MGs linked; turret weapons linked.
 † Uses turret MG’s ammo when deployed.

Equipment

Turret: Medium radio receiver and transmitter, 3-kW traversing gear.

Statistics

Size: 16’□7’□8’ Payload: 0.8 tons Lwt: 15.4 tons
 Volume: 64 Maint: 58 hours Cost: \$12.1K
 HT: 11. HPs: 1,000 Body, 400 each Track, 150 Turret, 30 Open Mount.

gSpeed: 23 gAccel: 2 gDecel: 20 gMR: 0.25 gSR: 5
 Ground Pressure Low. 2/3 Off-Road Speed.

Design Notes

Ammo allotments, weight, and performance have been modified slightly from design values to reflect historical figures. HT has been reduced from 12 to reflect the vehicle’s poor reputation.

The standard load of 87 tank-gun rounds is shown, but in the field Italian tankers often crammed in as many as 20 additional shells.

Variants

The first M13/40s lacked a radio and the fourth MG. Late production runs added a fire extinguisher (see p. W137).

The M14/41 had a more powerful engine, and desert-model air cleaners. Though too little, too late, the M15/42 was a real improvement. It had a 142-kW gas engine with 100-gallon tank; the 47/40 gun with 111 rounds; a smoke discharger mounted on the back of the body (a fixed Mini open mount with two Smoke Dischargers, see p. W143); and thicker, better-quality front armor (body F DR 165, turret F DR 190). The gSpeed was 25. Its engine compartment was taller and longer, so a Medium Tank chassis would be in order.

REFERENCES



Unfortunately, many standard references, including some of those listed in previous **GURPS WWII** books, tend to overlook the Italian efforts in the war, particularly the desert campaign. The following will provide more information. Most are in English, though a handful of first-rate Italian-language references also is included.

Books

Richard Collier, *The War in the Desert* (Time-Life, 1977). A basic overview of the desert campaign, useful for color, although a bit dated in its treatment of the Italians' role.

Jowett & Andrew, *The Italian Army 1940-1945* (Osprey, 2001, three volumes). These three booklets of the Osprey Men-at-Arms series don't just focus on uniforms; they provide basic info on the Italian Army, plenty of data as to equipment and ranks, and quick notes as to TO/Es and unit histories.

Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1981). An accurate political

biography of the man who shaped Italy's war, also useful for home-front settings.

Victor Madej, *Italian Army Order of Battle 1940-1944* (Valor, 1990). A very technical and crunchy presentation, but not easily found.

James J. Sadkovich, *The Italian Navy in World War II* (Greenwood, 1993). A thorough reassessment of the navy; while revisionist, this book is solidly documented and provides interesting insights.

G.A. Shepperd, *The Italian Campaign, 1943-45* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1968). A detailed military history.

Rex Trye, *Mussolini's Soldiers* (Airlife Publishing, 1995). Mainly dealing with Italian soldiers' gear, this also offers a lot of other details, including trivia, anecdotes, and information about conscription, training, customs, commendations, papers, etc.

Mario Montanari, *Le operazioni in Africa Settentrionale* (USSME, 1990, four volumes). A detailed military history of the desert war from the point of view of the Italian Army.

Ferruccio Botti, *La logistica dell'Esercito Italiano (1831-1981)* (USSME, 1995). Explores why Italy couldn't sustain a modern technological war.

Ceva and Curami, *La meccanizzazione dell'Esercito fino al 1943* (USSME, 1989, two volumes). Describes industrial-output decisions and their consequences for the armed forces.

Films

Open City (Roberto Rossellini, 1945). This story of a resistance leader in Rome incorporates a good deal of real footage of the late war.

Two Women (Vittorio De Sica, 1961). A look at the grim realities of the Italian home front starring Sophia Loren in an Oscar-winning performance.

A Walk in the Sun (Lewis Milestone, 1946). Italy really is not much more than the backdrop, but this powerful and human story of a U.S. platoon in the Salerno landing and afterward would translate almost in pure form to a realistic campaign. Quite different from the era's usual war stories.

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