

Fall 2023

ULTRA

Free

A newsletter devoted to *A WORLD AT WAR*, GMT Games' strategic simulation of World War II, and *GATHERING STORM* and *STORM OVER ASIA*, GMT Games' prequels to *A WORLD AT WAR*. To order AWAW, GS OR SOA, go to www.gmtgames.com or phone 1-800-523-6111.

UP FROM THE MINORS

Italy Plays In A World At War

by Dave Hanson

Introduction

In that Other Game known as BASEBALL, full time players find themselves classified as either Major or Minor League. In *A WORLD AT WAR*, countries get classified likewise: as "major powers" or "minor countries." In both games the classification depends largely upon the player's, or country's, physical assets and capabilities. What can he contribute to the Team?

A WORLD AT WAR has its Big League:

3.11 "major powers": the countries which have independent BRP levels and force pools. In *Global War* there are eight major powers: Germany, Italy, Japan, Britain, China, France, Russia, and the U.S....

Occasionally managers find a player who appears to inhabit some kind of middle zone. He dominates his Minor League, and has some assets that his betters up in the Major Leagues can put to good use. But at the Major League level the player just doesn't have the stamina to go toe-to-toe with opponents and stand the slugging. Some nations, like ballplayers, fall into this category of also-rans. In this article we examine the playing card of the Bob Uecker of major powers: Italy.

Italian Statistics

You can't tell the players without a program. The program places Italy on the "European Axis" team.

3.11 In *A World at War*, some terms have exact meanings as defined in the rules. In addition, conventions have developed concerning the use of acronyms, both in conversation and in the rules themselves. The following list sets out the definitions and acronyms used in these rules:

...

"European Axis": All European Axis major powers and minor countries.

For national assets Italy offers Team Axis:

- Air and Naval Nationality DRMs of 1, and a combat training level of 1 – enough to play in the Majors but nothing deserving loud cheers.

- An army with about the same number of factors and capabilities as Turkey or Spain (the two European "major minor" countries), although in most games Italy adds several 2-5 armor units via production.
- The *Regia Aeronautica*, starting five Army air factors (AAF) and one Naval Air Squadron (NAS). It can grow larger, but usually only by a few NAS.
- The ability to increase its ground and air forces from a Fall 1939 mobilization:
Mobilization: In Fall 1939, Italy adds 10 BRPs to its BRP base and level and adds 8 BRPs of units to its force pool (36.11B).
- The *Regia Marina*, Italy's main selling point as a major power: a balanced force of battleships, cruisers and destroyers; although with only two shipbuilding points it can grow but slowly and, if Italy fights, repairs to damaged ships take valuable dock space and time.
- Control of important areas in the Mediterranean:
Control: Italy, Sicily, Sardinia, Albania, Libya, Rhodes, Ethiopia.
- Three RPs. The Italian research capability almost never increases.
- Two DPs, and possibly more. Depending upon Axis strategic choices and good dice rolling, Italy may add a maximum possible five DPs to the Axis total through conquests. Most of these the Axis can obtain fairly easily if they want them. From the Diplomatic Table for Italy:
 - +2 Basic allotment
 - +# Supplementary allotment (one for every 100 BRPs)
 - +1 Axis control of Malta, Gibraltar, Baghdad or Athens (one for each)
 - +1 Axis control of Alexandria or Suez
- An anemic economy and construction limit due to a lack of iron, often requiring BRP transfusions

from Germany. Italy will grow slightly, but with a maximum 20% growth rate it will rarely reach a 75 BRP base and 25 BRP construction limit.

- A tendency to quit under pressure, because of Italy's fragile resistance modifiers.

Geography

One point, Italy's geographical position, deserves more attention than players often give it. A basic axiom of military success requires that commanders keep their forces concentrated for maximum achievement. Ideally a player should not dissipate his army's strength to hold a "rear area" against threats; he should concentrate all his assets against an enemy to his front. Controlling hexes along a map edge assists economy of force. No enemy can get behind the player's units, or outflank them, if the player can anchor his position upon a map edge.

4.41 UNPLAYABLE HEXES: Solid gray areas on the edges of the board are not playable and are impassable to all units, including air and naval units, except where explicitly permitted (see 21.217 for off-board naval movement). Swiss hexes are impassable to ground and air units. The middle four outback hexes are impassable to ground (but not air) units. All other hexes are playable (see 4.43 for impassable hexsides).

By this measure of national security, the Allies have an advantage in A WORLD AT WAR. Russia owns half the land hexes on the Europe map and more in Asia; Britain and the U.S. dominate the blue water hexes; France contributes North Africa. Axis powers in A WORLD AT WAR must face threats from every quarter, except for one: Italy controls a long stretch of the southern European map edge, in Libya. Fighting in Africa can occur only in a few hexes along the seacoast. Italian Africa is valuable to the Axis – and the Italian starting position in Libya can easily expand, given Axis capabilities. The Axis can keep their conquering armies concentrated, and keep on conquering, if they take map edges away from the Allies and make use of those "safety zones" themselves. The big question is: from whom do the Axis take those hexes: Britain, or Russia?

Overall Axis Strategy

The Axis must go into each game with a plan. The plan must coordinate the various Axis powers with the aim over accomplishing the overall European Axis team goal. The Victory Conditions lay out the basic goal: to survive until at least Fall 1945 in order to defeat the Allied powers. Not all Team Axis members will survive that long, unless the Axis have pushed the Allies into a position from which they can't recover. Most likely the strongest player, Germany, will be the "last man

standing", but each member, including Italy, has a role to play in the plan to keep the Team in the game until at least late 1945.

The Axis war plan usually follows one, or sometimes more, of the following basic Axis strategies:

- **Pound Britain:** Conquer and occupy Britain (a Major League player in the Allied camp) while staying off Russia and the U.S. (even bigger Major Leaguers). This goal can be aided by the Axis conquest of Gibraltar.
- **Pound Russia:** Weaken Britain economically and try to grab parts of its empire (usually Malta and/or Egypt), and then attack and conquer (or at least weaken) Russia, hoping to delay effective American utilization of its full strength.
- **Sweep the Mediterranean:** Obtain complete control of the Mediterranean front, including Gibraltar and Suez, the gates to the Mediterranean Sea, while attacking and weakening both Britain and Russia in their homelands.

This last strategy offers Italy its best opportunity for survival past 1943, since it will keep the Allied navies from moving into "Our Sea".

Each turn Italy stays in the war is a turn that Germany enjoys backup relief in its lead role as Axis chief slugger. Italy can provide critical assistance to Germany in each of the Axis strategies. Aid generally takes the form of lending units to participate in German-led operations, and occasional Mediterranean naval initiatives. First we shall review Axis research projects that directly benefit Italy.



Pasta-Flavored RPs

We began this discussion by examining the Italian stats. When it comes to spending RPs, Italy benefits from any improvements to the capabilities listed above. But Italy itself contributes only three RPs per year to the Axis total, and it's a safe bet that's about all the Italians will

ever see in *direct* research or production benefits. The Germans will hog the rest of the RPs for themselves. But sometimes research projects intended primarily for Germany's benefit spill over and aid Italy. We'll ignore general research in this treatment, which clearly benefits both Axis major powers.

Improving Nationality DRMs and CTL

German units constitute the bulk of the European Axis forces. They begin the game with the capability to conduct almost any operations they want to. In many games the Axis won't spend any RPs to improve nationality modifiers for their air, naval or ground forces, which leaves the "minor" countries – including Italy, to fight the war with whatever skills they have.

Air Nationality DRM, Naval Nationality DRM and CTL research all have the same basic profile:

Results:

1-2	No effect.
3	[+1]
4	[+2]
5	[+3]
6	[+4]
7	[+5]
8	[+6]
9	[+7]
10+	Increase...

All three projects also have the same type of negative feedback modifier based on the level achieved by the senior partner in the alliance (for the European Axis: Air Nationality DRM: -2; Naval Nationality DRM: -3; CTL: -2). In addition, Air and Naval Nationality DRM research receives a +1 modifier for each radar research achieved.

The difficulty in achieving these results is a strong incentive to just leave them alone and concentrate on other projects. However, results in all of these projects help Italy to some degree. Italy gains the most benefit from a Naval Nationality DRM increase, although that's usually the project the Axis are least likely to pursue, and not only because it suffers from the largest negative modifier.

Germany's fleet is normally small, so a Naval Nationality DRM increase is of limited use to its surface fleet. But if Germany plans a strong submarine campaign, then a Naval Nationality DRM increase helps in the Atlantic as well, and the *Regia Marina* will obtain substantial collateral benefits from this project. A timely increase in Italy's naval capability may give the Axis naval superiority in the Mediterranean Sea in the critical years 1941 or 1942, perhaps resulting in the conquest of

Egypt.

More commonly, the Western Allies will achieve a Naval Nationality DRM increase, increasing their initial advantage over the Italians, because the Western Allies have both the incentive (strategic warfare in the Atlantic and the Pacific) and RPs (lots) to research this project. From the German perspective, the incentive to invest in Naval Nationality DRM isn't as great, because the Axis destiny will ultimately be determined on land, not at sea.

Italy would also benefit from an Axis CTL increase: the Italians would gain an attrition modifier, airdrop capability if the Italian airborne unit is produced, the ability to exploit more effectively with their 2-5 armor units, and, most importantly, the ability to participate in a second round of ground combat with ground, air and naval units:

15.82 EFFECTS OF CTLs:

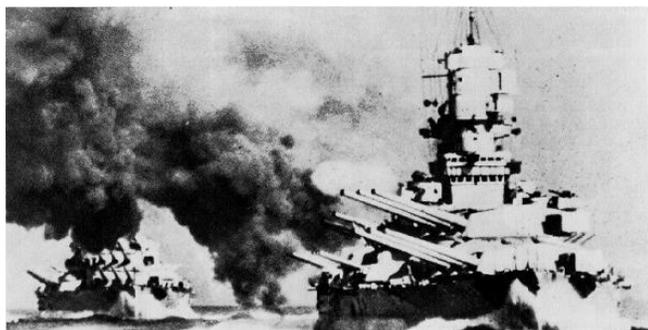
A. GROUND ATTACKS: A CTL of one or less permits only one round of ground combat. A CTL of two allows a second round of ground combat. A CTL of three allows a third round of ground combat, and so on.

B. AIR AND NAVAL SUPPORT FOR GROUND ATTACKS: The CTL of air and naval units only affects their participation in ground combat and has no effect on the number of rounds of air or naval combat in which they may engage. Air units are considered to be participating in ground combat when they are providing ground support (18.55); naval units are considered to be participating in ground combat when they are carrying invading ground units (21.51) or providing shore bombardment (21.52). Air units with a CTL of one may only provide ground support for the first round of ground combat; destroyers with a CTL of one must withdraw from invasion combat, together with the ground units they were carrying (regardless of the CTL of the ground units) after the first round of invasion combat; naval units with a CTL of one may only provide shore bombardment for the first round of invasion combat.

Air units with a CTL of one may only provide ground support for the first round of ground combat; destroyers with a CTL of one must withdraw from invasion combat, together with the ground units they were carrying after the first round of invasion combat (regardless of the CTL of the ground units); naval units with a CTL of one may only provide shore bombardment for the first round of invasion combat. Unfortunately for Italy, because the Germans already enjoy CTL +2, this project is another project that the Western Allies and Russians are more likely to pursue than are the European Axis as Italy and Axis minor countries gain much more from an Axis CTL increase than does Germany.

The European Axis are very likely to invest in an Air Nationality DRM increase. This is the most flexible of the three projects for the Axis, as it affects all air combat and reduces both German and Italian air losses, while increasing those of the Allies. The *Regia Aeronautica* will be grateful for a +2 Air Nationality DRM, whether they are engaging Western Allied air or naval units.

However, Italy rarely will possess as many as six army air factors or their naval air equivalent; ten is about the most Italy can possibly see, even if GATHERING STORM games see Italy mobilize air units and the Axis divert air production to Italy in A WORLD AT WAR. Italy benefits less from an Axis Air Nationality DRM increase simply because it has fewer air units than Germany.



Other Naval Projects

Other air and military projects are of limited value to Italy, which is a naval power. But several other naval research projects deserve attention because they have an impact on Italy's ability to conduct a naval war against Britain. First among these is:

Torpedoes

(European Axis, Western Allies, Japan)

Japan begins with one "7+" torpedo result and a result of "1-2" [+0].

The European Axis begin with a result of "4" [+2].

Restriction:

European Axis RPs may not be placed in torpedoes until the 1940 YSS. Western Allied RPs may not be placed in torpedoes until the 1942 YSS.

Modifiers:

-1 For each torpedo result achieved by the rolling alliance faction (-1 for one torpedo result, including the initial Japanese result; -2 for two torpedo results; and so on).

Results:

1-2 No effect.
 3 [+1]
 4 [+2]
 5 [+3]
 6 [+4]
 7+ Friendly submarine SW combat and submarine attack dice rolls are increased by one; enemy ASW SW combat dice rolls are decreased by one. [-1]

The Axis will usually conduct torpedo research as Germany fights for modifiers in the Battle of the Atlantic, but Italian submarines get shipments of new torpedoes right along with the Germans. If the British fight for Malta, it's not unheard of for Italian submarines to sink

and damage more British naval factors than does the Italian surface fleet.

Somewhat less likely to appear, but still very useful, is:

Harbor Attack

(European Axis, Western Allies, Japan)

Results:

1-2 No effect.
 3 [+1]
 4 [+2]
 5 [+3]
 6 One target in harbor may be attacked.
 7 Two targets in harbor may be attacked.
 8+ Three targets in harbor may be attacked.

Explanation:

Harbor attacks are resolved using the Harbor Attack Table.

Harbor attacks were of course an historical Italian specialty. Ask the Royal Navy engineers, who spent so much time working on the *Queen Elizabeth* and the *Valiant*, only to see them sitting on the bottom of Alexandria's harbor. A timely harbor attack can give the *Regia Marina* local command of the sea at a critical moment for Axis Mediterranean operations, just as the Alexandria mini-sub operation did historically.

Counter-intelligence, which is one of the cheapest and most versatile research projects, helps protect against harbor attacks, as well as performing a host of other useful functions.

The least common, but perhaps most widely underestimated, research project for the Italian navy is anti-submarine warfare research:

Anti-submarine Warfare

(European Axis, Western Allies, Japan)

ASW is a high technology project. Only one RP may be allocated in the first year in which research is done, two RPs in the next year in which research is done, and so on.

The Western Allies begin with a result of "4" [+2].

Restriction:

Western Allied RPs may not be placed in ASW until the 1940 YSS. Japanese RPs may not be placed in ASW until the 1942 YSS.

Modifiers:

+1 For each radar research result achieved.
 -1 For each ASW result achieved by the rolling alliance faction (-1 for one ASW result; -2 for two ASW results; and so on).

Results:

1-2 No effect.
 3 [+1]
 4 [+2]

- 5 [+3]
 6-7 Enemy submarine SW combat and submarine attack dice rolls are decreased by one; friendly ASW SW combat dice rolls are increased by one. [-1]
 8+ Enemy submarine SW combat and submarine attack dice rolls are decreased by two; friendly ASW SW combat dice rolls are increased by two. [-2]

Explanation:

Results for ASW are implemented gradually – see 41.84.

Axis ASW research results raise the safety margin and reduce the costs of the critical supply run past Malta to North Africa. Because the Germans don't benefit from this defensive project, the Axis usually won't pursue it. But the investment of one or two RPs may save the Italian navy 10-15 factors in 1940 and 1941, and lead to significant gains in the Mediterranean by saving Italian destroyers and cruisers which normally fall victim to British submarines.

Air and Military Production

Axis air and military production is often used to expand the German force pool, in part because German air units have a higher Air Nationality DRM and in part because German air and ground units are likely to remain in play for longer than Italian units. There are some Italian units that are well worth considering, however:

- Italian 2-5 armor units are the only Axis armor units which can be produced until Germany can produce 5-6 armor units). If Italian armor units are used to create a breakthrough or to form the first link in an exploitation chain, their limited exploitation abilities are not a handicap, and their presence will allow exploitation by more German armor units.
- Italian infantry units are useful for garrison duties and can be built using the Italian construction limit, which is often under less pressure than the German construction limit. Of course if Italy surrenders before Germany, any produced Italian infantry units will disappear, while German infantry units will fight to the end.
- Italian air units may be built in Sicily and used during the Allied player turn after their construction, because they don't have to be redeployed to be useful (in the same way newly-constructed German AAF used to defend against Allied bombing comes into play right away).
- Italian NAS can be built using the Italian naval air training rate (one NAS per turn), so if naval air units are part of the overall Axis strategy, it may

be best to produce some German and some Italian NAS, so they come into play more rapidly.

- If a Mediterranean strategy, or even just the flow of the game, makes it likely that Italy will outlast Germany, then late game Italian force pool additions might slow the Allies down by a turn.

Forts and Railheads

The construction of a fort requires an Axis RP and the BRP cost must be paid by Germany, so Italy cannot contribute in this area. There are also restrictions constructing forts in Italy itself:

32.14 RESTRICTIONS: Fortification construction is subject to the following restrictions:

...

E. European Axis fortifications must be constructed by Germany. Germany may not construct fortifications in Italy or Sicily until Italy has surrendered.

Railheads also require an Axis RP, but Italy can foot the bill for railheads built in Africa and the Middle East:

28.654 RESTRICTIONS: Railhead construction is subject to the following restrictions:

...

E. European Axis railheads must be constructed by Germany (EXCEPTION: Italy may construct railheads in Italy and in any Mediterranean front islands and colonies that contain an Italian unit at the moment of construction).

Where might Germany usefully build fortifications in the Mediterranean, and where might Italy usefully build railheads? And how does using these results in the Mediterranean compare to using them elsewhere, where they clearly benefit the Axis cause?

The two most common locations for Axis fortifications are Tripoli (to maintain an Italian presence in Africa) and Malta (because once the Axis take Malta, the fortress is eliminated and therefore if the Axis fail to supply Malta for a single turn, all the Axis units in Malta will be eliminated from isolation). As noted above, beach defenses in Sicily and Italy are no longer allowed prior to an Italian surrender.

Railheads can be a vital part of a Mediterranean strategy, both offensively and defensively. An Axis railhead in Tobruk can accelerate an Italo-German drive into Egypt and permit the Axis to take advantage of temporary British weaknesses in the Middle East. An Italian railhead in Sicily or southern Italy facilitates the siege of Malta and the reinforcement or withdrawal of Axis air from that region, as well as facilitating a rapid Axis response to Allied threats against Sicily and southern Italy later in the game.



Mussolini's Mobilization

While Italy can't count on getting a share of Axis production, when the game begins, Italy has some decisions to make as to what goodies to seek for the Italian military from Italy's 1939 mobilization.

Italy can't count on getting a share of Axis production, so Italy has some decisions to make as to how to structure its military forces. This starts in GATHERING STORM, where each Italian mobilization generate two units of different types (armor, infantry and air). In A WORLD AT WAR these translate to eight BRPs worth of units, air factors or naval air squadrons.

Classic A WORLD AT WAR allows a single Italian mobilization in Fall 1939, which generates eight BRPs worth of units (consistent with the GATHERING STORM values). If GATHERING STORM has been played, Italy will have mobilized units in accordance with whatever strategic plan the Axis might have made, and these units will either be in Italy's force pool at the start of the war or will enter Italy's force pool during A WORLD AT WAR.

As an aside, Italy may declare war on the Western Allies until it has fully mobilized, which in classic A WORLD AT WAR means Italy may not declare war until Winter 1939, at the earliest.

Here are the relevant rules:

36.31 FORCE POOL INCREASES: Mobilization increases the force pool of the mobilizing major power. In the turn of mobilization, the mobilizing major power announces and records the types of units being mobilized and when they enter its force pool, then places the units in the appropriate location on the turn record track (EXCEPTIONS: Shipbuilding increases - 36.34; deferred force pool additions - 36.351). The size of force pool increases from mobilization is proportional to the mobilizing major power's growth rate:

...

C. ITALY: 8 BRPs of units for each turn of mobilization.

36.32 ELIGIBLE UNITS: Force pool increases from mobilization, even if deferred and combined with production, can only be used to generate the following types of units:

A. Army air. A major power may mobilize no more than five AAF in one turn (EXCEPTION: If the U.S. mobilizes in both theaters in the same turn, the U.S. may mobilize up to ten AAF in that turn).

B. Naval air.

C. Armor:

- Italy may mobilize only one 2-5 armor unit.

- ...

D. Infantry.

36.341 RESTRICTIONS: Shipyard mobilization is subject to the following restrictions:

...

D. Italian and British mobilizations may not be used to increase shipbuilding.

36.35 TIMING OF FORCE POOL INCREASES: Force pool increases from mobilization are subject to the following delays:

...

B. AIR: Four turns.

C. INFANTRY: Two turns.

...

E. ARMOR: Six turns.

As in the real war, Italy's ambitions greatly exceed its capabilities. However, Italy's armed forces aren't negligible, either. An additional eight BRPs of units may not seem like much, but the very scarcity of Italian units makes the choice of what to mobilize that much more important. The following analysis also applies to Italian GATHERING STORM mobilizations, which allow Italy to customize its force even more.

The Axis decision as to which Italian units to mobilize should reflect the overall Axis strategic plan:

- Conquer Britain? Mobilize AAF and NAS, which can cover the Channel and attack the Royal Navy.
- Maul Britain and try to conquer Russia? Try a 2-5 armor unit for use in North Africa and some infantry, including several 1-3 infantry units for Russian winter attrition fodder.
- Conquer the Mediterranean? Italy will need NAS to siege Malta and Gibraltar; but infantry will also be useful because eventually the Allies will get into the Iberian peninsula and the Germans may be busy elsewhere.
- Defend against Allied attacks while Germany goes elsewhere (including attacking Russia instead of France – perish the thought)? Mobilize all infantry, preferably a couple of 3-3 infantry units and one 2-3 infantry unit.
- Something else? Ask yourself what Italian units will best help accomplish the chosen Axis goal.



The following examples show possible variations of Italian mobilizations for particular purposes:

- An anti-British strategy or a Mediterranean strategy:
 - two AAF, two NAS; or
 - four NAS, one 2-5 armor unit; or
 - one AAF, one NAS, one 2-5 armor unit
- An anti-Russian strategy:
 - one 3-3 infantry unit, one 1-3 infantry unit, one 2-5 armor unit.
- A compromise or defensive mobilization:
 - two 3-3 infantry units, one 2-3 infantry unit; or
 - two 3-3 infantry units, two 1-3 infantry units; or
 - two 2-3 infantry units, one 2-5 armor unit.

Of course, ultimately it is more important how the units are used, rather than precisely what is mobilized, so Axis players are well-advised not to spend too much energy on Italy's one mobilization.

The same cannot be said for Italy's prewar mobilizations, although the Axis grand strategy is only one consideration as to when and what Italy mobilizes. The Axis may need specific types of units to better contest the GATHERING STORM balance of power, and Italy may also refrain from mobilizing armor units as war approaches because it takes six turns to arrive in Italy's force pool. Both Axis and Allies players may fail to appreciate the importance of mobilizing quickly in GATHERING STORM, in order to enter the war with an immediate military edge.



“Team Spirit”

Italy lacks the ability to conduct major military operations completely on its own. While Axis “cooperation” may be one-sided, with the Italians lending key parts of their scant military strength to aid German ventures, the Axis war effort as a whole benefits from a more balanced cooperation.

Germany can conquer Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries and France on its own, without Italian help. Historically Mussolini only brought Italy into the war when he thought Hitler would garner all the loot and glory for himself. Hitler was peeved at the intrusion.

When the Germans turn their attention to their more dangerous opponents, Britain and Russia, Italian assistance becomes more valuable. Italian units can aid Germany against Britain, Russia or both.

“Lent Italians”

For those ADVANCED THIRD REICH players who have trouble letting go, here is a timely reminder:

52.41 LENDING OF ITALIAN UNITS PROHIBITED: Italian units may not be lent to Germany.

All Italian assistance to Germany is *a la carte*, in that Italy must pay the BRP cost for any offensive operations conducted by its unit. For air and ground units, the cost is one BRP per factor used. Still, the increase in overall Axis firepower on a crucial front often makes this a price worth paying.

American Sensitivities

Until the U.S. enters the war, the Axis also have to pay attention to this annoying USAT modifier:

- +1 For every 15 Axis BRPs spent on offensive operations each turn. A remnant of eight or more BRPs at the end of the Axis player turn triggers an increase; a remnant of seven or fewer BRPs is ignored.

In order to avoid triggering this modifier, the Axis will normally try to use something like 5-7 Italian factors outside the Mediterranean front. If the Germans send out a small raider group (two ships), then five Italian air and ground units may undertake offensive operations without triggering the USAT modifier. If Germany doesn't raid, then another two Italian factors may be used.

With about 75 BRPs to spend each year, Italy is able to afford the cost of such offensive operations, while still maintaining its shipbuilding program (six BRPs per turn) and replacing losses.

Things aren't quite so simple in the year in which Italy enters the war in 1940, because of the declaration of war cost of 35 BRPs. Mediterranean offensives or heavy air losses can also throw a monkey wrench into the works. However, if necessary, Germany can grant BRPs to Italy near the end of the year to keep the Italian war effort going.

A Helping Hand

Here are some examples of typical Italian aid to Germany:

Against Britain, and later the U.S.:

- Five AAF and at least one NAS may assist Operation Sealion or, indirectly, German bombing, either by providing ground support or counterairing British AAF which would fly defensive air support or oppose German bombing. Italian air units may also besiege the British fortresses in Malta and possibly Gibraltar, attacking British shipping which tries to protect sea supply to those key hexes.
- Italian 2-5 armor units cannot be effectively used in Britain, but later in the war it is efficient to station an Italian armor unit in France to prevent

the Western Allies from fortifying an invasion hex by placing it in a ZoC. Italian armor units may also be used to suppress partisans.

- Italian infantry can be used to defend beaches, to reduce the garrison load on the German army, although the Axis have to be careful because Italian infantry and replacements incur a -1 DM defending outside the Mediterranean front.

Against Russia:

- Italian ground and air units may not conduct offensive operations on the eastern front, so Italian units are of limited value against Russia.

9.93 ITALY:

...

B. Italian air, armor and airborne units may not carry out any offensive actions on the eastern front at any time.

One notable exception arises if Russia has gained control of Rumania, which is on the Mediterranean front.

- Italian 2-5 armor units still have a ZoC in Russia, and may therefore prevent partisan construction in key hexes.
- 1-3 infantry units, an otherwise humble unit, prove eminently useful in protecting more valuable German 4-6 armor and 3-3 infantry units against Russian winter attritions in 1941 and 1942, as the Italian infantry may be taken as losses in designated hexes.
- An Italian airbase counter can help with German logistics on the eastern front, although German AAF may not stage into an Italian airbase in the turn it is placed.

18.146 Only air units belonging to the placing major power may use an airbase in the phase in which it is placed... In subsequent phases of the turn of placement, air units belonging to the placing major power's major power allies, minor allies and associated minor countries may use the airbase...

“What can we do by ourselves?”

Italy cannot swing at each and every pitch. Scant resources, a relatively weak army small air force, a decent but rather brittle navy, and a suspect economy all demand that Italy carefully select its battles. If the “correlation of forces” is favorable and Italy can gain a local superiority over whatever foe it faces, it may be able to assure a victory with a minimum of casualties. In certain operational areas Italy can achieve these conditions, and accomplish something even without German help.



North Africa

Depending upon the strength of the defending Western Allied forces, which initially consist mainly of Commonwealth units in Egypt, Italy may be able to take small initiatives in the Western Desert, or possibly Tunisia. In rare instances, such as when Germany applies serious pressure to Britain in 1940 or 1941, the British may not defend Egypt strongly enough to block Italian limited or full offensives. Whenever Italy gains an opportunity to breach the Alamein position, and possibly the Suez Canal, they should try for it. If Germany conquered France and did not establish Vichy, so that the North African colonies are independent, then the Italians can bring them (back) into Rome's Empire within a turn or two, although they may never repay Italy the cost of conquest.

Malta

Besieging Malta is best done along with some German AAF or NAS in Sicily. But if Italy mobilized AAF and/or NAS, then Italy may have sufficient land-based air to back up its fleet and submarines. With these air and naval forces, Italy can either dissuade Britain from attempting to supply Malta or exact a toll if the British do run sea supply. One big advantage is that a siege of Malta doesn't cost Italy any BRPs, other than to replace air and naval losses if battles occur.

Italy may eventually invade Malta. This is a

worthwhile goal, as the Italians can clear out a dangerous British submarine nest and gain an Italian DP. But with a CTL of one, an Italian invasion of Malta *must* succeed on the first combat roll. A 2:1 attack might work, and may be worth trying, especially if Britain has only one ground unit in Malta (so a result of "d" doesn't mean "defeat"). Getting up to 3:1 attack is much better, but takes more time to reduce the DM of the forces in Malta and may not be possible without German help.

The Axis must keep in mind this restriction on shore bombardment:

21.526 LIMITS ON SHORE BOMBARDMENT: The total number of combat factors added to a ground attack by shore bombardment depends on the Naval Nationality DRM of the naval units providing shore bombardment. This limitation is distinct from the limitation on ground support from air units.

A. NAVAL NATIONALITY DRM OF ONE: For naval units with a Naval Nationality DRM of one, the number of combat factors added to a ground attack by shore bombardment may not exceed the total number of ground factors involved in the invasion attack.

B. NAVAL NATIONALITY DRM OF TWO: For naval units with a Naval Nationality DRM of two, the number of combat factors added to a ground attack by shore bombardment may not exceed twice the total number of ground factors involved in the invasion attack.

C. NAVAL NATIONALITY DRM OF THREE OR MORE: For naval units with a Naval Nationality DRM of three or more, the number of combat factors added to a ground attack by shore bombardment may not exceed three times the total number of ground factors involved in the invasion attack.

Absent an Axis Naval Nationality DRM increase, the number of attacking factors the Italian navy can add to an invasion is limited to the strength of the invading ground units. This doesn't rule out the possibility of a successful invasion of Malta, but the need for a lengthy siege and a serious commitment of Axis air power is clear.

Gibraltar

If the Axis can gain a position astride the straits, by activating or conquering Spain or gaining control of French North Africa, Italy can contribute materially to a siege of Gibraltar. The British won't usually let Gibraltar go without a fight, so a successful siege of Gibraltar will require German land-based air squadrons to assist, although the Italian air and navy will be needed for any actual attack on Gibraltar. As a result of a recent prohibition on the use of Axis forces in Vichy French colonies, any Axis plan to capture Gibraltar requires control of Spain, either diplomatically or by conquest.

Greece

Normally, attacking Greece is a bad deal for Italy. Historically Mussolini took on the Greeks and regretted

it. In A WORLD AT WAR, Italy can try again, and might do better with careful planning and a heavy commitment of resources.

If Italy starts the game with most of its army in Albania, it can declare war on Greece in the first turn of the war. One or two Italian AAF destroy the Greek AAF. The Greeks will usually either defend the Albanian frontier with one 1-3 infantry unit in each of the frontier hexes, or will place two Greek infantry units in Athens and then defend into hex DD27, west of Athens.

Against the frontier defense, Italy should attack the central Greek defender, then advance into the hex with a 2-5 armor unit that will isolate the other two Greek units. The Italians can then advance to Athens.

If the Greeks abandon the frontier, then the Italians attrition them. Once Italy adds another 3-3 infantry unit to their force pool in Spring 1940, they can attrition at the 11-20 level in Summer 1940. The Italian 2-5 armor unit remains adjacent to DD27 to prevent rebuilds. If Italy manages to eliminate two Greek infantry units in a single attrition (a two out of three chance), the Italians may be able to take DD27, then attrition Athens itself.

Another option is for Italy to invade Crete, to make British naval operations in the eastern Mediterranean more difficult.

If Britain or France declares war on Italy, in order to gain Greek association, this plays into Italy's hands, as Italy gets +2 on its resistance and USAT are reduced by two. But such a dramatic response is hardly needed – as the whole Italian plan for conquering Greece is far fetched and ties up too many Italian forces. Still, there are Axis players who can't resist the temptation to try to steal a march on their historical counterparts, and Axis control of Athens gives Italy a DP, which (more importantly) increases Italian resistance by one level and therefore may keep Italy in the war for a turn or two longer – or at least force the Western Allies to divert greater resources to knocking Italy out of the war.

This goal can be accomplished in other ways, such as a German invasion of Greece before Barbarossa or by naming Greece as a diplomatic target, but the benefits of using the otherwise idle Italian army to carry out this task early continue to attract many Axis players. The problem is that the Italian army won't remain idle for long, and diverting Italian resources to an attack on a neutral minor country means exerting less pressure on Britain when it's at its weakest, so the costs and benefits of attacking Greece have to be carefully considered. Some of the groundwork for this attack can be laid in GATHERING STORM.



The Italian Albatross

A possibly apocryphal, but supposed real, exchange occurred in the late 1930s between the pompous German Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop, and Winston Churchill, at that time still in the political wilderness.

Boasting that Germany was bound to prevail in any future conflict, should the British be so ill-advised as to oppose the German drive for European hegemony, Ribbentrop pointed out that Italy would be allied with Germany in the next European war.

Churchill growled his response: "That's only fair – we had them last time."

Italy is not always an asset to the Axis war effort. The Mediterranean front offers opportunities, but can also be a burden, as it provides a wide range of avenues of attack for the Western Allies once they are strong enough to take the initiative.

Once the Axis start tracking oil consumption, both German and Italian builds require oil:

27.35 CONSTRUCTION OIL EFFECTS: For each alliance faction, the number of oil counters expended to offset construction oil effects affects construction costs as follows:

...

I. German and Italian construction costs are combined when determining the effects of European Axis oil expenditures for construction purposes, although each major power has a distinct construction limit; building Italian units at normal construction cost requires additional oil if Germany spends 25 BRPs or more on construction.

Italy is no longer a source of cannon fodder which can be rebuilt without concern for the Axis oil reserve. The game now reflects Italy's historical fragility in this area.

But there's more. The Minor League aspect of the Italian war effort is reflected in several other important rules.

First, on defense, there is the combined effect of:

41.924 TEMPORARY CTL EFFECTS: The CTL of ground units is reduced by one in the following situations:

A. All ground units in partial supply or subject to army oil effects. This reduction is not cumulative if both conditions apply (30.522A, 33.61C).

and

15.82 EFFECTS OF CTLs:

...

E. DEFENSE AGAINST GROUND ATTACKS: Infantry and replacements with a CTL of zero or less incur a -1 DM unless defending in a capital, objective hex, IC, bridgehead or railhead; or in their home country. Canadian, South African and Free French units are considered to be "in their home country" when defending in Britain (15.33C).

Since Italian units normally have a CTL of one, in any turn in which the Western Allies cut fully supply to North Africa, Italian infantry and replacements will incur a -1 DM.

The Italians run into the same problem fighting outside the Mediterranean front or even in Italy, if things have gone badly in North Africa:

15.33 NEGATIVE DMs: Ground units are subject to a negative DM as follows:

...

B. Italian and minor country units are subject to a negative DM as follows:

- Italian infantry and replacement units defending in any type of hex outside the Mediterranean front incur a -1 DM.
- Italian armor, infantry and replacement units incur a -1 DM if Rome is under Allied control or there are no Axis units in Africa (56.111).

The first bullet in 15.33B means that the days of light beach duty for the Italians in France are gone. If there is any danger of Allied offensive operations, on either the western or the eastern fronts, the Italians are best kept closer to home.

But it is also worth noting that the second bullet of 15.33B provides that Italian armor, as well as Italian infantry and replacements, incur a similar -1 DM if the Axis have been evicted from Africa (or if Rome is under Allied control, but this usually theoretical, because this will usually knock Italy out of the war anyway). Italian armor is also less effective when attacking enemy infantry units, unless the Axis have researched a combat training increase.

Nor is Italy's weakness confined to defense. Italian armor is less effective on exploitation than German

armor:

15.33 NEGATIVE DMs: Ground units are subject to a negative DM as follows:

A. Infantry, replacements and partisans incur a -1 DM if attacked by exploiting armor with a CTL of two or more, unless defending in a capital, objective hex, IC, bridgehead or railhead. Airborne, marine, commando, Chindit and armor units (subject to 15.331) are not subject to this -1 DM when attacked by exploiting armor.

Conclusion

In A WORLD AT WAR, Italy plays a supporting role and rarely, if ever, snags major victories on its own. But even with its limitations, Minor Leaguer Italy can play in the Majors. Someone who contributes by drawing walks, hitting sacrifice flies and laying down bunts helps the team win as much as the slugger who hits the home runs.

The war in Europe ends when Germany surrenders, whether or not Italy has also surrendered, but Italy's resistance level modifies the German resistance level:

German Resistance Table - 55.11	
+/-#	German DP level as calculated at the end of the current Allied player turn. The German DP level may be negative.
+2	German control of Berlin.
+1	German control Breslau, Essen, Cologne or Leipzig (+1 for each).
+1	German control of Berchtesgaden.
+#	For each strategic atomic attack made by Germany (+3 for the first attack; an additional +2 for the second attack; an additional +1 for each subsequent attack).
-#	For each strategic atomic attack against Germany (-3 for the first attack; an additional -2 for the second attack; an additional -1 for each subsequent attack).
-1	For each German city containing a firestorm marker.
+#	The Italian resistance level. The Italian resistance level may not be less than zero, whether or not Italy has surrendered
Explanation: Check at the end of each Allied player turn. If the net result is zero or less, Germany surrenders.	

This means that if Italy succeeds in obtaining some of its historical goals, the Western Allies may have divert significant forces to the Mediterranean in order to reduce the Italian resistance level or to conquer Italy. Otherwise Italy may increase in the German resistance level sufficiently to extend the game Europe, which in the end is how you win.

The diplomatic points gained by Italy for these goals, which in turn modify the Italian resistance level, provide us with a quick checklist of what areas each side wants to control in the Mediterranean. They are pretty much what anyone with a passing knowledge of World War II would expect:

Conclusion

ITALY

- +2 Basic allotment
- +# Supplementary allotment (one for every 100 BRPs)
- +1 Axis control of Malta, Gibraltar, Baghdad or Athens (one for each)
- +1 Italian control of Belgrade
- +1 Axis control of Alexandria or Suez
- 2 Allied control of Rome
- 1 Allied control of Genoa or Milan (one for each)
- 1 Allied control and full supply of two or more hexes in mainland Italy
- 1 Allied control of all hexes in Sicily
- 1 Allied control of all cities in Libya
- 1 If Germany declared war on Spain

Just as strong chess players have the ability to make the best use of their weakest, as well as their strongest, pieces, a good Axis player will take advantage of Italy's strengths, such as they are, while at the same time masking Italy's weaknesses. This is similar to the idea that A WORLD AT WAR players should maximize their opportunities on secondary and tertiary fronts, even though there is a natural inclination to focus on the most important front (have you noticed how, in almost every game, players move first on the front where they are doing best?)

Every Italian player wishes Italy was stronger (Mussolini certainly did), but Italian aspirations run into the reality that Italy's nationality modifiers are lower than Germany's and that boosting Italy with research and production will come at Germany's expense. Still, as this article discusses, there are many ways for Italy to pressure the Western Allies, and there are almost certainly other stratagems waiting to be discovered by creative GATHERING STORM and A WORLD AT WAR players.



One of many imaginings to inspire Italian players.