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Italian Medium Tanks: 1939-45 (New Vanguard)



Synopsis

Several factors delayed and greatly hampered the development of an Italian medium and heavy tank during Rommel's Desert War in World War II. The first was the strategic stance of the country, focussed on a war against neighbouring countries such as France and Yugoslavia, and ill-prepared for a war in the Western Desert. Since these European countries bordered with Italy in mountainous areas, light tanks were preferred as these were deemed much more suitable for the narrow roads and bridges of the Alps. The failure to develop an effective operational plan for North Africa was another factor behind the failed development of an Italian medium tank, along with the lack of communication between the War Department and the Ministry of the Colonies, which not only had actual command over the Italian forces deployed in the Italian colonies of Libya and in Italian East Africa, but was also responsible for developing their defence plans. Furthermore, the development of the medium tank was hampered by the limited number of Italian industries, whose production was also heavily fragmented - hence the SPA-developed engines, the Fiat and Ansaldo hulls and armour, the Breda and army ordnance guns. All these factors delayed the development of the first prototype of an Italian medium tank - the M 11 - which would only appear in 1937 and did not enter production until 1939. Inspired by its British and French counterparts, the M 11 / 39 was a 11-ton medium tank chiefly intended for use as an infantry tank, with its main gun (a 37/40 gun) mounted in a casemate in the hull and its small turret armed only with two machine guns. Actual production was limited to only 100 samples, 76 of which were sent to Libya and the other 24 to Eastern Africa, as production of the turret-gun-armed M 13 had started in the meantime. In June 1940, when Italy entered the war, her armoured inventory numbered fewer than 1,500 light tanks (including the obsolete Fiat 3000) and the 100 newly built M 11 medium tanks, divided amongst three armoured divisions, three cavalry groups and several independent tank battalions. Unsurprisingly, without a tank school, the Italian armoured force lacked the necessary training and experience in the use of tanks and AFVs, and with the tanks lacking radio equipment, there was a widespread absence of tactical and technical knowledge which, along with the limited effectiveness and numbers of the available tanks, made the perfect recipe for the defeats to come.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

offers a fine survey that considers the evolution of Italian armored units during World War II, and is a pick for any specialty collection concerned about the armaments of the war. From how these Italian units experienced disaster on the battlefield to how they returned with innovations that led to victories, this provides a well-detailed survey recommended for any military collection.

- The Midwest Book Review (March 2013) In line with other books in this series, the authors cover the development and construction of the various medium tanks and the semovente from which they were derived. We get to look at their strengths and weaknesses as well as how they did in battle, both with the Italian and German army. It is surprising how many actually survived the war long enough to be placed in various museums and other display venues. It all makes for a book on a subject about which few enthusiasts are conversant. It is a superb look at these vehicle and how they were used in combat.
- Scott Van Aken, www.modelingmadness.com (January 2013) ...continues where the author's fascinating Italian Light Tanks: 1919-45 ended.
- David L. Veres, www.cybermodeler.com (January 2013)

Pier Paolo Battistelli earned his PhD in Military History at the University of Padua. A scholar of German and Italian politics and strategy throughout World War II, he is active in Italy and abroad writing titles and essays on military history subjects. A contributor to the Italian Army Historical Office, he is currently revising his PhD thesis for publication: *The War of the Axis: German and Italian Military Partnership in World War Two, 1939-1943*.

Reading this work and the work on Italian light tanks shed a light for me on why for so long Italian armour had such a bad name. Quite why Italian arms in WW2 were so denigrated. This book, by F Cappellano & P P Battistelli discusses the Italian efforts towards building a medium

tank that could take its place on the battlefield alongside those of other major belligerents. Alas a whole slew of reasons mitigated against this occurring. The book is arranged chronologically and discusses right from the get go the doctrinal and the physical limitations put upon Italian armour development. These included a lack of experience with the concept of tank vs tank combat " tanks being very much viewed as "breakout" weapons until quite close to the wars outbreak " and also the sheer limitations put on weight for any Italian tank given the limits of what many of the nations bridges would support. What is also borne out is the issues that Italian industry had in various areas such as building powerful enough engine plants and building armour plating that was welded rather than riveted. This was certainly new information to me given the fine warships Italian industry was able to put together. How can you build dreadnoughts and not be able to get tanks built? Another issue was that they seemingly made little real preparation for wartime conditions " despite having had AFVs stationed in Libya from as early as 1926 they seem to have not cottoned onto the idea of getting appropriate filters for their vehicles! The work moves along and discusses not only tanks per se but also self propelled guns " an area where the Italians fared better. Given the limited size of these Osprey New Vanguard series of books this is not going to take the place of a broader and in depth exploration of the war in North Africa and/or mainland Italy but there are plenty of instances where there is discussion of battlefield events and it almost engenders a respect for the Italian tank crews going into battle with British and US built tanks that they really stood little chance prevailing against. Towards the end of the book we get discussion of the last developments of heavier tanks for the Italian army and their continued improvement of their self-propelled gun platforms. Illustrations are by R Chasemore and as per all these books they really add something to the work. The whole thing is very fast paced and the amount of information the authors are trying to impart means that parts of the work seem quite dry in their recitation of numbers and developments. There is a bibliography rounding things out and the many photographs complement the text well. My advice would be to buy this along with the work in the same series on Italian light tanks 1919-1945 which taken together provide a very useful overview. I've subtracted one star because the brevity of the work will be an issue for some and the many editorial parings that must have gone into stripping back the story to the bare bones are unfortunate.

It's nice when a publisher puts out a product meant for that minority of tank enthusiasts who have an appreciation for the puny machines produced by Italy in WWII. It took a brave man to go to war in an Italian tank, and many of them fought to the death in these unfortunate vehicles. As a former tank

crewman, I appreciate their bravery. As always, the photos and colour illustrations are first rate, as can be expected from Osprey. This is a good addition to any armoured warfare buff's bookshelf.

This book is a technical review of the development of the Italian medium tank. With that being said some is very dry when describing the tank construction and the lay out of the armor. However, if you are an armor otaku or a modeler this book provided you with the information that few other would.

Very good book, knew next to nothing about Italian tanks of WWII and I've learned a great deal from this book. Recommended for anyone wanting to learn more about Italian tanks.

This small, short book covers the subject entirely and completely. I keep it on my shelf for reference at need. Every single variant and model of Italian WWII tanks are shown in photos. Descriptions of the tanks, the specifications and their use in battle are also covered completely. If you ever want or need to know about the Italian medium tanks, this is the first place to look.

This book covers the basic of Italian tanks used in WW2 from development to action in different theaters. Book has great drawing and pictures, but little on the individual employment of the tank units. Basic coverage on tanks, but also covers the little know tanks at the end of the war. I found the most interesting was the tanks that were developed towards the end of the war.

OK, if you aren't a modeling buff, you might not care for this one. Italian tanks weren't really war winners. It does cover the many variants of Italian tanks, and has a good section on the Semovente style vehicles. If you model Italian WW II tanks this book covers almost all of them, and their variations. Many good pictures.

I have a similar book I picked up in Italy. It's nice to read what the photographs and line drawings were about.

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