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Cultural Disparity and the Italo-German Alliance in the Second World War

by

Elicia Giannone

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HISTORY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

AUGUST, 2015

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## **Abstract**

This thesis will argue that cultural disparity between Germany and Italy played a significant role in creating and exacerbating problems within the Italo-German military alliance in the Second World War. This will be achieved by first comparing and contrasting trends in Italian and German military culture and broader martial culture throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These trends will then be applied to Italo-German attempts at military cooperation in the North African, Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Eastern theatres of the Second World War. Memoirs will be used extensively to determine what attitudes were between personnel in the Italian and German militaries. What will be found is that military cooperation between these two powers was made ineffective by cultural disparity.

## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I wish to thank my supervisor Dr. Alexander Hill, and my co-supervisor Dr. Annette Timm, for all of their help in the completion of this thesis. Secondly, I would like to thank the University of Calgary Department of History. I wish to thank my family for supporting me through my schooling, and finally, I wish to thank Adam for his patience and endless support.

*Dedicated to my Nonna*

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## Introduction

Cultural tensions are far from unusual in any relationship, but many relationships are not as high stakes as the relationship between two coalition partners in war. On May 22, 1939, Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler cemented a political and military alliance between Italy and Germany with the Pact of Steel. Along with the alliance of these two rulers would come an alliance between their very different military organizations with different cultural values and military histories. This thesis will seek to examine the significance of cultural disparity within the militaries of the Italo-German alliance on their relationship during the Second World War. This will be achieved by examining how the different military cultures, martial cultures, and military histories of the German and Italian militaries contributed to dysfunction within the Axis relationship. It will look at how mistrust was fostered, as well as the military consequences of disparate views and understandings of war.

It will therefore be necessary to first define some of these terms. Military culture as a category includes the customs, values, and norms that influence military organizations. For instance, the extent to which comradeship was valued in the military. Broader martial characteristics include how war is viewed in wider culture, for instance, to what degree war was seen as something to be glorified for its own sake. Martial culture has the ability to influence military culture. For instance, a strong notion of individual sacrifice for the nation may prompt the formation of a military culture that emphasizes fanaticism in combat.

Finally, some other concepts that will be addressed include competing strategic interests that were formed for Mussolini by geopolitical realities and for Hitler by ideology. For instance, Mussolini's desire to conquer the Mediterranean competed with Hitler's desire for *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe. Differing tactical and operational approaches to war will also be considered

since such approaches were influenced by doctrine, which in turn was influenced by the values expressed in military culture. Finally, linguistic differences will also be addressed, for although language is an attribute of culture more generally, it did contribute to communication deficiencies which resulted in military ineffectiveness.

Like other forms of culture, military culture in general is a difficult area of analysis to address in a scholarly way, because it is so complex and affects so many different elements of any given military. Military culture can be made up of shared values, understandings, assumptions, and perceptions about the military and these can be affected by such things as geography, society, history, military experience, etc. Most of the scholarly work on military culture has remained focused on factors that affect military effectiveness, or in the case of Nazi Germany, in order to understand the influence of Nazi ideology on the German armed forces. Excellent work on Germany and Italy has come from scholars such as Richard L. DiNardo, John Gooch, Macgregor Knox, Robert M. Citino, Brian Sullivan, Omer Bartov, and Jürgen E. Förster. However, military culture is often presented by these authors as one factor among many which dictates success or failure in battle, and usually only for one nation in particular. In contrast, I will place military culture as well as martial components of broader culture at the center of my analysis for both countries concerned, seeking to demonstrate how relevant these factors were in making the Italo-German alliance relationship dysfunctional.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the alliance has not been studied in English as extensively as the relationship between the Western allies. While there is a wealth of material on Germany written in English, there is very little on Italy and very few Italian works have been translated. Beyond linguistic barriers, one issue which possibly makes the study of this alliance less appealing is that the Axis lacked any kind of centralized command organization comparable to the Allies'



Combined Chiefs of Staff. It can therefore be more difficult to trace collaboration and cooperation between the two powers. Despite this, there has been some work done on the topic and some of the main questions that scholars have considered when writing on the Italo-German partnership and the Axis coalition more generally include: how Hitler and Mussolini's goals compared/contrasted, whether the two partners performed better or cooperated better in one theatre of war than another; whether separate military organizations (i.e. Army, Navy, and Air Force) fared better in conducting coalition warfare than others; and whether one ally was more to blame than the other for military ineffectiveness.

The Italo-German military alliance in the Second World War has largely been studied by political or military historians seeking to determine its military or strategic ineffectiveness. Most of the work on this subject usually only focuses on one of the powers, however. In these works, the significance of culture is usually only mentioned in brief. In 1988, Jürgen E. Förster wrote on the effectiveness of the German military in the Second World War and concluded that although the *Wehrmacht* demonstrated effectiveness at the tactical and operational levels, Hitler and the Army High Command failed in the realm of strategy.<sup>1</sup> Förster only very briefly addresses the cultural traditions that dated back to Imperial Germany (i.e. the glorification of war) that contributed to the formation of conditions under which the *Wehrmacht* functioned in the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jürgen E. Förster, "The Dynamics of *Volksgemeinschaft*: The Effectiveness of the German Military Establishment in the Second World War," in *Military Effectiveness* vol. 3 edited by Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 180.

Robert M. Citino's book, *The German Way of War*, takes a detailed look at the operational mentality of the German officer corps over the course of almost three centuries.<sup>3</sup> While it is a detailed operational history, Citino does bring in some elements of military culture and doctrine, particularly for example when he discusses the lasting influence of Clausewitz's annihilation concept.<sup>4</sup> However, as Citino explains, the emphasis of his work is on "action rather than theory, on actual operations rather than doctrine."<sup>5</sup> A better resource for establishing such cultural traditions is Ute Frevert's book, *A Nation in Barracks*. Frevert traces the history of conscription in Germany from 1815 to the present and explores how German "military socialisation affected civil society structure and mentality."<sup>6</sup> Frevert examines the development of certain elements of German military culture and tradition, for example, ideological training for war and the tradition of promoting men in the military based solely on talent.

Authors such as Karen Hagemann and Thomas Kühne have also looked at German military culture, although they focus on issues such as honor and masculinity in Prussia, and comradeship in the Second World War respectively.<sup>7</sup> Hagemann demonstrates that the connection between honor and masculinity in the military created a culture in which society praised men who enlisted in the armed forces.<sup>8</sup> Kühne also investigates issues of masculinity; though even more significant to this thesis is his argument that the notion of comradeship

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<sup>3</sup> Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, xvii.

<sup>6</sup> Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Kühne, "Comradeship: Gender Confusion and the Gender Order in the German Military, 1918-1945," in *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* edited by Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, (New York: Berg, 2002). Karen Hagemann, "Of 'Manly Valor' and 'German Honor': Nation, War, and Masculinity in the Age of the Prussian Uprising Against Napoleon," *Central European History* 30, no.2 (1997): 187-220.

<sup>8</sup> Karen Hagemann, "Of 'Manly Valor' and 'German Honor': Nation, War, and Masculinity in the Age of the Prussian Uprising Against Napoleon," *Central European History* 30, no.2 (1997): 187.

became a part of German military culture and doctrine. Similarly, Emre Spencer has written on German military culture and the concept of comradeship at the turn of the 1930s. He argued that the German army placed a great deal of emphasis on fostering comradeship and placing responsibility on the military for teaching soldiers about nationalism.<sup>9</sup>

By comparison, the literature on Italian military effectiveness and Italian military culture is not as extensive and comes from only handful of authors writing in English. In order to explain Italian military ineffectiveness, John Gooch has pointed to facets of Italian military culture and broader martial components to culture. For instance, Gooch has argued that the inability of new talent to be recruited for the Italian General Staff, the strict obedience demanded of soldiers to follow specific and detailed orders, and the lowly social position that officers had in society all contributed to building a rigid, inflexible, and ultimately, ineffective military that was not open to talent.<sup>10</sup> He also argues that national political consciousness ranked far behind local and familial bonds for the average Italian soldier and officers failed to bridge “the gap between the individual and his patriotic duty.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, it was difficult to generate fanaticism in the average Italian soldier. Gooch’s works are great at demonstrating how Italian military culture contributed to Italian military ineffectiveness, but he does not offer equal comparisons with the German example.

By contrast, Macgegor Knox’s works have tried to explicitly compare German and Italian performances equally. On Italian military ineffectiveness, Knox has argued very similarly to

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<sup>9</sup> Emre Sencer, “Fear and Loathing in Berlin: German Military Culture at the Turn of the 1930s,” *German Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (February 2014): 29.

<sup>10</sup> John Gooch, “Italian Military Efficiency: A Debate,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5, no. 2 (January 2008): 262. Also see John Gooch, “Clausewitz Disregarded: Italian Military Thought and Doctrine, 1815-1943,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 9, no.2 (June 1986): 303-324 and *Army, State, and Society in Italy* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 264.

Gooch.<sup>12</sup> In *Common Destiny*, Knox argues that the development of Italian military institutions and military culture, a significant lack of resources, a lack of central command organization and cooperation between the armed forces and political leadership, Mussolini's relationship with Hitler, and the continuous military operations from 1935 onward were all responsible for Italy's uniquely humiliating defeat in the Second World War.<sup>13</sup> While Knox's assessment is very good in demonstrating why Italy fared worse in the Second World War than Germany, it does not delve much into the ways that members of the German and Italian armies interacted with one another.

Lucio Ceva similarly wrote about the role of culture as one factor among many in determining Italy's performance in the Second World War. While the majority of Ceva's work only exists in Italian, one of his articles from 1990 has been translated into English. In this article Ceva reconsiders Italy's role as an Axis partner in the North African theatre specifically.<sup>14</sup> While the majority of the article focuses specifically on Italian military ineffectiveness, there is a portion of his argument that addresses Italian soldiers' feelings towards German soldiers. In discussing why many Italians did not believe in the justification of the war, he writes that popular feelings towards Germans were negative because of traditions of the *Risorgimento* (the process of Italian unification from 1815-1871 in which Italian states were freed from foreign domination and united into one cultural and political entity) and memories of World War I.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Macgregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies: Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime, and the War of 1940-1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and "Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power, and Staying Power in the Italian and German Dictatorships," in *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* edited by Richard Bessel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Macgregor Knox, *Common Destiny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Lucio Ceva, "The North African Campaign 1940-43: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, no.1, (March 1990): 84-104.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

Beyond this basic statement, however, Ceva does not elaborate on what this meant or where these views came from.

Besides Knox's works, there have only been a few monographs that assess the Axis alliance by comparing Germany and Italy together in the Second World War. In one of the first works of this nature to emerge following the war, Elizabeth Wiskemann used the diaries of Fascist Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano and Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels as well as letters exchanged between Hitler and Mussolini to provide a narrative history that spans from the *Anschluss* with Austria to the end of the war. She investigated the similarities and differences in how Hitler and Mussolini viewed the war and ultimately argued that Hitler had clear goals and would use force at any cost to achieve them, while Mussolini was a compromiser and had no clear intentions for the establishment of a new world order.<sup>16</sup> Knox's 1982 book *Mussolini Unleashed* revised this view, however. Knox's book assessed Italy's politics and strategy, focusing on the motives, preparation, objectives, execution, and consequences of Mussolini's assault on the Mediterranean. Knox argued that Mussolini's driving motivation between 1936 and 1941 went beyond egotism and self-justification (which Wiskemann suggested)<sup>17</sup> and was instead an ambition to assert Italy's supremacy in the Mediterranean and destroy the established Italian social order at home through the prestige that would be gained by conquest abroad.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis: A Study of the Relations Between Hitler and Mussolini*, (London: Collins, 1966).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid and also J. Lee Ready, *Germany's Partners and Foreign Volunteers in World War II*, (London: McFarland & Company Inc., 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Macgregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). See also his monographs *Hitler's Italian Allies*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For Mussolini's motives in foreign policy in the years leading up to war see John Gooch, *Mussolini and His Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Sir William Deakin also assessed Hitler and Mussolini as individuals in his book, *The Brutal Friendship*. Deakin brought up the issue of mutual mistrust between Hitler and Mussolini. He argued that Hitler and Mussolini's relationship was contemptuous and that despite their alliance both leaders had a great deal of disrespect for one another and one another's countries. For instance, he describes Hitler's disdain for the Italian military.<sup>19</sup> Mutual mistrust between the allies was expanded on by Burkhart Müller-Hillebrand's book, *Germany and its Allies in World War II*. Müller-Hillebrand made the argument that Germany's half-hearted efforts at collaboration were a consequence of Germany's presumptuous attitude towards Italy's military ineffectiveness.<sup>20</sup> This argument blames German arrogance for poor coalition performance. Similarly, radical views come from James Sadkovich, who, in one of his articles, blames the lack of cooperation in the Axis alliance entirely on the Germans. He argues that the German leadership and German officers adamantly opposed Italian strategic logic at every turn. He also demonstrates that British and German propaganda during and following the war blamed Italy's lack of competency and bravery for any and all failures.<sup>21</sup> While his work does move beyond examining only Hitler and Mussolini's relationship, Sadkovich's perspective tends to be extreme in that he places the blame entirely on Germany for conducting poor coalition war.

More recently, however, these views have been characterized as too simplistic. In 2005, Richard L. DiNardo assessed Germany's role in all of these areas in his important work,

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<sup>19</sup> F. W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler, and the Fall of Italian Fascism*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 206.

<sup>20</sup> Burkhart Müller-Hillebrand, *Germany and its Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration Problems* (Frederick, Maryland: University Publications of America, 1980), 145-146.

<sup>21</sup> James J. Sadkovich, "German Military Incompetence Through Italian Eyes," *War in History* 1, no.1, (March 1994): 39-62, and "Understanding Defeat: Reappraising Italy's Role in World War II," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 1 (January 1989): 27-61.

*Germany and the Axis Powers: From Coalition to Collapse*.<sup>22</sup> DiNardo argues that the Germans conducted poor coalition warfare with its Axis partners for many reasons that cannot be boiled down to their mere arrogance and disgust with their various allies.<sup>23</sup> Rather, Germany's inability to conduct coalition warfare successfully was the result of a lack of unified command organization, the disparate strategic goals of its allies, a strategic culture within the Wehrmacht that struggled with combined operations, and inexperience with treating allies as equal partners.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, in the official German history of the Second World War, the third volume that focuses on the Mediterranean and North Africa thoroughly examines Germany in relation to the other Axis allies. With respect to Italy, Italian economic and military realities are explained in order to provide a clearer picture of the Italo-German alliance, the conflicting political aims of each partner, and their military ineffectiveness as a coalition.<sup>25</sup> Schreiber, Stegemann, and Vogel argue that "the Axis itself... must be considered a *mésalliance*."<sup>26</sup> According to their argument, Germany and Italy were not equal partners in the alliance and this was the most significant factor in making the alliance dysfunctional since Italy's consistent military defeats in Greece and North Africa required so much German assistance.<sup>27</sup>

However, none of the works mentioned thus far have placed culture at the centre of a comparative analysis of German and Italian cooperation in the Second World War. Williamson

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<sup>22</sup> Richard L DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers: From Coalition to Collapse* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> See also for this argument Richard L. DiNardo, "The Dysfunctional Coalition: The Axis Powers and the Eastern Front in World War II," *Journal of Military History* 60, no. 4 (October 1996): 721-722, and Richard L. DiNardo and Daniel J. Hughes, "Germany and Coalition Warfare in the World Wars: A Comparative Study," *War in History* 8, no.2 (April 2001): 166-190.

<sup>24</sup> Richard L. DiNardo *Germany and the Axis Powers: From Coalition to Collapse* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann, and Detlef Vogel, *Germany and the Second World War* vol. 3 translated by Dean S. McMurry, Edwald Osers, and Louise Willmot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 760.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

Murray's article "Does Military Culture Matter?" from 1991 argued that military culture was essential not only to military effectiveness, but also to military innovation.<sup>28</sup> While Murray's article addresses other military cultures such as that of the United States, as well as other time periods such as the Cold War, a small section of Murray's article comparatively assesses German and Italian military culture, establishing that they are a clear example of opposite military cultures, though he does not get into what the consequences of this were when they became military allies.

David Alvarez's article, "Axis Sigint Collaboration: A Limited Partnership," has been one of the few works to focus on the influence of cultural disparity on coalition effectiveness between Germany and Italy, though he focuses specifically on intelligence collaboration and not the military per se. Alvarez argues that only limited attempts at collaboration were made in the realm of intelligence and both powers refused to share decrypted information with one another. Instead of blaming one power or another for causing ineffectiveness with arrogant behaviour, Alvarez observes the way culture had the potential to influence how both powers interacted. The Germans perceived the Italians as being incapable of serious cryptanalysis and lacking in the ability to avoid detection, while the Italians perceived the Germans as overbearing and intrusive.<sup>29</sup> Alvarez suggests that attempts at coordination and cooperation in intelligence were not made because of German attitudes towards its Axis partners. He argues that "German codebreakers found it difficult to believe that any of their partners, with the possible exception of the Finns, could contribute anything of significance to German cryptanalysis. Potential collaborators were too often dismissed as unfit by experience or temperament for serious

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<sup>28</sup> Williamson Murray, "Does Military Culture Matter?" *Orbis* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 24.

<sup>29</sup> David Alvarez, "Axis Sigint Collaboration: A Limited Partnership," *Intelligence and National Security* 14, no.1. (January 2008): 1-17.



collaboration.”<sup>30</sup> Although Alvarez is essentially concerned with the effectiveness of Italo-German Sigint collaboration and its ultimate impact on the war, his analysis implicates cultural differences as a reason for mistrust. As Alvarez states, “Throughout the war this mistrust and prejudice sapped the spirit of Sigint collaboration in the Axis alliance.”<sup>31</sup> It is these kinds of predisposed prejudices that have the potential to be explored as a main focus in the context of the cultural history of this alliance. Such mistrust and prejudice no doubt existed outside of the realm of intelligence and negatively impacted more relationships within the military than just those between intelligence officers.

In most of the works mentioned, cultural disparity appears only briefly as one factor among many hampering military effectiveness and even then it is not investigated comprehensively. In Murray and Alvarez’s works, culture does play a significant role in their analysis of Italo-German cooperation; however, neither addresses the relationship between the German and Italian militaries. It will be the purpose of this thesis to examine the ways that the Italian and German militaries interacted while conducting coalition war with cultural differences at the centre of its analysis.

In order to examine cultural perspectives, it will be necessary to characterize the personal experiences of individual Germans and Italians using several memoirs. It is certainly important to view all memoirs with a critical eye, as memories can be pliable and subject to change over time. Memoirs can also be written with an explicit purpose in mind, for instance, to distance one’s self from involvement in the Nazi or Fascist regimes or to shift the blame of certain failures from one party to another. That being said, cultural perceptions are not so easily gleaned

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

from official directives and reports (though there are some instances) and memoirs are valuable sources to use in order to attempt to establish what the personal sentiments of individual actors were during this period.<sup>32</sup> This thesis will also explore these sentiments from soldiers and leaders of all ranks since personal sentiments that reflect culture are sparsely found to begin with.

First, however, it will be necessary to establish what the differences were between the German and Italian armies. Chapter 1 therefore will consist of a comparative analysis of differing trends in the development of German and Italian military culture, history, and broader martial culture from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Chapter 2 will demonstrate how these factors influenced the Italo-German alliance in the North African, Mediterranean, and to some extent Atlantic theatres of the Second World War. Finally, Chapter 3 will demonstrate how these trends affected coalition war on the Eastern Front, as well as to some extent cooperation after fascism's capitulation in the summer of 1943. What will ultimately be concluded is that disparate cultures did in fact play a significant role in hampering the military effectiveness of the Italo-German alliance.

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<sup>32</sup> German memoirs and diaries that will be used include those by Admiral Karl Dönitz, Lieutenant General Gerhard Engel, officer Helmuth Greiner, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, General Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Werner Mork, General Enno von Rintelen, and Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. While Italian memoirs and diaries used include those of Chief of Staff Pietro Badoglio, Major Paulo Caccia-Dominioni, Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, Officer Eugenio Corti, Admiral Franco Maueri, General Giovanni Messe, Second Lieutenant Nuto Revelli, Amedeo Tosti, Lieutenant Carlo Vicentini, and Lieutenant Bruno Zavagli.

## **Chapter 1: Cultural Differences**

Before demonstrating how culture had an influence on the Italo-German alliance in the Second World War, it is first necessary to establish some key characteristics of the German and Italian militaries and the wider societies from which they came. This chapter aims to identify the differing trends in the development of German and Italian military culture, broader martial culture, and tactics and operations from the early nineteenth century to the years leading up to the Second World War. The purpose is to provide background for Chapters 2 and 3 which will demonstrate how influential these factors were in shaping the behaviours of and interactions between the German and Italian armed forces in all of the theatres in which they were forced to cooperate. Aspects of military culture to be compared in this chapter include for whom or what soldiers and officers thought they were fighting, what qualities were viewed as necessary to produce effective soldiers, and how soldiers and officers related to their comrades and superiors. Aspects of broader martial culture to be examined include how soldiers perceived the military as an institution, and how war was viewed or to what degree warfare was seen as necessary for national survival. Doctrine will also be assessed, as both military and martial culture plays a role in determining doctrine, particularly in the German case since Italy lacked such explicit codified guidelines for conducting war. Finally, differing tactical and operational approaches to war will also be included in this assessment. While they are not always related to military culture, these approaches are still a significant point of analysis since different understandings about how to engage in war also contributed to the ways that Germans and Italians interacted, perceived one another, and were militarily ineffective in the Second World War.

It is important to note, however, that culture is more fragmented than each of these categories might suggest. The cultural disposition of any given military is not uniform, and traits

cannot be generalized to include *all* German or Italian soldiers. There certainly were exceptions and contradictions to common attitudes and behaviours within the same army. This chapter merely attempts to find patterns and general trends which can be compared and contrasted.

Italy's military drew from a primarily agrarian society whose concept of national unity was born out of rebellion. Geographical divisions were deeply pertinent, and the masses historically mistrusted figures of authority, most notably, the armed forces. Germany on the other hand was much more successful at minimizing divisions and uniting Germans behind the greater banner of the nation. The army as an institution in Italy also never gained the widespread respect and popularity that it did in Germany. The Italian army, seeking mere parity with the other great powers of the world, was consistently inflexible, firmly committed to the costly policy of defense through fortification, and demanded absolute obedience from its soldiers.<sup>33</sup> The German army emphasized that war was a necessity and that obedience allowed individuals to act independently on the battlefield because they possessed a uniquely German "fighting spirit". This meant that the higher levels of German leadership were more likely to trust the lower levels of leadership to make tactical decisions on the battlefield without waiting for explicit permission, because their obedience and enthusiastic spirit for war would foster good decisions. War was also characterized as an offensive "all or nothing" zero-sum struggle for universal hegemony.<sup>34</sup> To demonstrate all of these trends throughout this chapter, it is useful to begin with the first instances of conscription in Germany and Italy.

In *A Nation in Barracks*, Ute Frevert examines the cultural history of conscription in Germany from 1789 to 1960. She argues that the earliest German conscript armies instilled a

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<sup>33</sup> John Gooch, "Clausewitz Disregarded: Italian Military Thought and Doctrine, 1815-1943," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 9, no.2 (June 1986): 313.

<sup>34</sup> Macgregor Knox, *To the Threshold of Power 1922/33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and Nationalist Socialist Dictatorships* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 48, 103.

strong sense of military commitment among the German public, and created a cultural sentiment of national belonging and community amongst soldiers.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, Italy's first experiences with conscription had the opposite effect. Many Italians did not possess a strong sense of national consciousness, let alone a nationalistic understanding of the relationship between army and nation, and as a result of the way conscription was introduced in Italy, detested it from the outset.<sup>36</sup>

In 1802, under the Napoleonic authorities of the Republic and Kingdom of Italy, an annual draft conscription was introduced in Italy for the first time for the purpose of guaranteeing a steady supply of soldiers to Napoleon's Grand Armée.<sup>37</sup> While the origins of the Italian army can be traced to 1793, Italians in many different regions of the country had not experienced conscription before 1802. As a result of this forced foreign influence, conscription was a foreign and traumatic concept to Italians, particularly peasants, who were used to their agrarian based ways of life that had thus far not been interrupted by forced military service. Conscription did not appear to have any benefits for them and the idea of being conscripted was genuinely terrifying. Soldiers were often mistreated by their officers who were responsible for theft, beatings, and unjust imprisonment. The noblest classes held these officer positions, and there were no opportunities for advancement for the poor.<sup>38</sup> Comparatively, conscription in Germany looked very different. While there was also certainly some initial resentment, men from the lower classes could at least benefit socially from enlisting.

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<sup>35</sup> Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks* (New York: Berg, 2004), 5.

<sup>36</sup> The modern Italian army was a creation of Napoleon and used as a tool of French expansion, fighting in areas where Italian soldiers had no interests. For more on the Italian army under Napoleonic rule see Frederick C. Schneid, *Soldiers of Napoleon's Kingdom of Italy: Army, State, and Society 1800-1815* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> Alexander Grab, "Army, State, and Society: Conscription and Desertion in Napoleonic Italy (1802-1814)," *The Journal of Modern History* 67, no. 1 (March 1995): 26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

Frevert demonstrates that in 1831 social statuses in the Prussian army could be inverted. For example, a very poor man could be promoted to an NCO based on talent over someone who was financially better off than he was.<sup>39</sup> These policies came from the historical precedent of the Stein-Hardenberg reforms of the years 1807-1819, that were in many ways responsible for promoting the notion that military careers were open to talent regardless of class. These reforms were a direct result of the Prussian military collapse at the Battle of Jena-Auerstedt in October 1806 against Napoleon. German military leaders saw the collapse of the army as a demonstration that reforms needed to be enacted. In an order from August 1808, military careers became open to talent regardless of class. Old cadet schools were dissolved in favour of new training institutes. The most talented officers could be sent to a new academy established in Berlin that would offer three-year preparation for staff responsibilities.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, because German soldiers held the status of “honourable defenders of the fatherland” they would frequently be treated with honour and respect in their civilian lives. This was in part because enlisting was a transformative experience from youth to man. This was expressed by Prussian songbooks from the early nineteenth century that emphasized this transition by suggesting that any man who does not bear arms for his own honor and that of his people cannot be considered a man at all.<sup>41</sup> This had social implications because in some areas young men who had not served in the army were seen as inferior to young men who had. Similarly, when visiting their home villages in uniform, the soldier’s position as protector of the fatherland often made them attractive to women as future husbands.<sup>42</sup> This was not the case at all

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<sup>39</sup> Frevert, 61.

<sup>40</sup> James J. Sheehan, *German History 1770-1866* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 309.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Hagemann, “Of ‘Manly Valor’ and ‘German Honor’: Nation, War, and Masculinity in the Age of the Prussian Uprising Against Napoleon,” *Central European History* 30, no.2 (1997): 187.

<sup>42</sup> Frevert, 173.

in early nineteenth century Italy. The Italian army (and nation as well) held the reputation of being militarily incapable, even cowardly, without any great military tradition to call their own. If in Germany military strength was associated with national pride and masculinity, Italy's military defeats became associated with national shame and effeminacy.<sup>43</sup> Leading up to the *Risorgimento*, the Italian army thus became an unpopular institution which symbolized humiliation in society rather than honour.

In general, the connection between military service and honour could be enforced in Prussia, because military traditions involved society as a whole. Again, the Stein-Hardenberg reforms played a role in making citizens conscious of their military duties. Prussian generals such as Gerhard von Scharnhorst expressed that the army had to have “a more intimate union” with the nation and old military forms had to be dissolved in order to create a citizen army led by the most talented professionals that society could produce.<sup>44</sup> In 1817, the social classes were unified by district wide festivals held on Sundays where soldiers would re-enact their war experiences in a ritualized form. The families of the soldiers were also included in this process because they joined in the exercises by “carrying the weapons to the reserves, encouraging them by their presence, regaling them in the breaks with draughts of refreshing drinks, and complimenting them as the future defenders and protectors of their gods, their possessions, and their homelands.”<sup>45</sup> In 1817, reports from *Militair-Wochenblatt* (a leading German military journal in Berlin at the time) indicated that many Germans would come “to watch their family

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<sup>43</sup> Lucy Riall, “Men at War: Masculinity and Military Ideals in the Risorgimento,” in *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy* edited by Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 153.

<sup>44</sup> E. R. Huber, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte* Vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1957-69), 235 quoted in Sheehan, 309.

<sup>45</sup> Frevert, 59.

and friends gathered in performing such an honourable profession.”<sup>46</sup> These were certainly not the earliest images of military service that Italians held.

Traditionally, the rural population of Italy held resentment towards cruel and brutal armies that “crossed their fields, ruined their harvests, and requisitioned their animals.”<sup>47</sup> And yet it was Italian farmers and peasants who were forced to make up the majority of the conscripted army. Conscription also threatened their farms, families, and communities, because they could not afford the economic burden of losing able-bodied young men. In contrast, in the 1820s farmers in Germany could be exempted from conscription if they were the sole breadwinners of their families. This was possible because, unlike in Italy, the majority of the population in this period did not consist of peasants, and the middle class was actively participating in the army.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the burden on the Italian poor was made all the worse by the fact that wealthy Italians could very easily bribe their way out of service.<sup>49</sup>

Take for instance, the example of getting exempted from the draft for medical reasons. In Italy, the rich could easily get away with false exemptions. One noble Italian obtained an exemption by having a surgeon verify that one of his arms was shorter than the other. Another noble obtained exemption under the pretext that his feet sweated when he walked. Inept physicians were not given clear criteria, and others often exempted men because they received some form of bribe, or because they did not support the idea of the draft.<sup>50</sup> In Germany, the government sent army doctors detailed lists of inadequacies that could result in exemption with no exceptions. There were extensive instructions on the criteria for fitness. Appeals were also

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Grab, 26, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Frevert, 49, 80.

<sup>49</sup> Conscription also faced recruitment problems in big cities like Milan, because even the well-to-do objected to military service and did not see a military career as something honourable or desirable.

<sup>50</sup> Grab, 42.



regulated. For instance, if a man was exempt purely for appearing “weakly”, after three years they would be placed under review again.<sup>51</sup> German recruiting commissions were also instructed to post a list with the names of all those deferred to show transparency and control.<sup>52</sup> While Germany was not completely free from instances of corruption, the German army held much stricter rule over conscription, and there were therefore not as many instances of successful evasion as in Italy. In fact, conscription in Italy was so unpopular and poorly regulated that Italians did not just evade and desert, but also revolted.

In Italy, there were several instances of armed uprising in opposition to the draft, particularly in 1808-1809. Some of the most violent uprisings happened in Urbino, Ascoli, Senigaglia, Sassoferrato, and Fabriano where the authorities had to suspend the draft temporarily and French troops began executing protestors. Every year, several thousand Italian draft dodgers found shelter with the locals in their own communities. Desertion also became popular because of the unjust treatment of soldiers by their officers. Also exacerbating problems were the local authorities who either did not want to collaborate in implementing the draft or who did, but did not have the experience or resources to uphold the law.<sup>53</sup> Opposition and desertion hindered the number of conscripts available for Napoleon’s army, and thus measures were taken to establish new courts and harsher punishments (including capital punishment) for deserters. The *gendarmerie* (Napoleon’s policing units operating in Italy) was increased to track down draft evaders, loopholes in the law were closed, and monetary rewards were offered to those who captured or provided information on deserters. The clergy was even granted exemption from

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<sup>51</sup> Frevert, 49.

<sup>52</sup> Young men from the educated classes (who were usually also wealthy) would only have to serve one year, however, the military understood the discontent which would arise if conscripts were filled solely from the poor, and thus commissions were founded to standardize the procedures used to determine who could be exempt. Frevert, 49, 53.

<sup>53</sup> Grab, 42-3.

service in exchange for preaching about the importance of conscription. While all of these measures certainly did not eliminate resistance and resentment entirely, the Napoleonic state in Italy was successful in recruiting tens of thousands of men and establishing an Italian army in the period between 1802 and 1814.<sup>54</sup>

However, the rebelling, draft dodging, and deserting lasted until the collapse of the Napoleonic state in 1814. What is significant about this comparison of conscription processes is that the beginnings of a modern German army were surrounded by opportunities for advancement and the image of pursuing an honourable profession in order to protect the fatherland, while the Italian army was founded on estrangement from military authority and desertion. This sentiment in Italy of reluctance to accept state laws and challenge authority not only helped to lay the foundations for the *Risorgimento*, but also demonstrates how the national armies of Germany and Italy had very different beginnings.

By the time of the *Risorgimento*, most Italians (in particular peasants who formed the majority of the armed forces) still did not have a conception of the military as being linked to national pride in the conventional sense. Unlike in Germany, the notion of “honourably defending the fatherland” in Italy took a different shape, not in support of the country’s rulers and willingness to serve them, but in overthrowing them. Italian nationalists of the *Risorgimento* period condemned the army as a tool of oppression rather than a means of overcoming it.<sup>55</sup> Emilio Dandolo wrote in 1849 that Garibaldi and his officers made a conscious effort “to show huge disrespect for everything which is observed and demanded with the greatest severity in regular armies.”<sup>56</sup> The *Risorgimento* saw Italians waging war in legions free from order,

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<sup>54</sup> Grab, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Emilio Dandolo, *I Volontari ed i Bersaglieri Lombardi* (Turin, 1849), 176-7 quoted in Riall, 159.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 159.

discipline, tradition, and hierarchy, and for many Italians, this was what an honourable armed forces looked like. They were not professional soldiers, they did not wear army uniforms, and they did not go to war because they were forced. The volunteers obeyed only their consciences. As Garibaldi wrote in *Cantoni il volontario*, volunteers only fight when provoked by the “sacred cause of humanity.”<sup>57</sup> Therefore, willingness to fight tended to rely on moral justification and the benefit of the Italian people, rather than political justification and the benefit of rulers.

Drastically contrasting the situation in Italy were the experiences of the military in Germany during 1848-1849. During the German revolutions of 1848-1849, the Frankfurt and Berlin National Assemblies demanded that the Prussian army swear allegiance to the constitution instead of the king in order to oblige popular discontent with the traditional autocratic political structure. However, soldiers in the Prussian army had never complained of this issue and still popularly believed in the legitimacy of swearing loyalty to their sovereign monarch. Friedrich Wilhelm IV noted in 1849 that this proved the success of Prussian military training in inculcating total loyalty and obedience.<sup>58</sup> However, in Italy, since fighting came to be widely seen as a means to benefit the Italian people and not their rulers, familial connections were a stronger force in forming nationalism. During the *Risorgimento* it was common for many Italians to view the nation as a family separate from their rulers, and destined to liberate themselves through revolution. Patriotism thus took on a unique character in Italy, as is demonstrated in the texts of many soldiers from this period. In *Ai Militari Italiani*, Carlo Bianco, a popular nationalist and writer who formed a secret society called the *Apofasimeni* in 1830 in opposition to Italy’s rulers, wrote that the people of Italy were a loving family who longed for freedom from oppression:

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<sup>57</sup> Giuseppe Garibaldi, *Cantoni il volontario* (Milan, 1870), 10-11 quoted in Riall, 157.

<sup>58</sup> Frevert, 85.

“they [the Italian people and not the monarchs or rulers] want to make Italy a single, huge family, which looks after itself by itself... with its children governed by the laws of love and united by the bonds of sincere and warm friendship.”<sup>59</sup> There is an explicit emphasis on being governed by moral laws, rather than those imposed by rulers. Giuseppe Capuzzi, one of Garibaldi’s volunteers, merged the idea of family life with the military when he wrote in 1860, “from the shores of Liguria we were the first to go and help the oppressed, so that the land of Etna could take its place in the Italian family, and enjoy the benefits of liberty. Words cannot express the emotions that these thoughts inspire.”<sup>60</sup> In this instance, military force was characterized as something only to be used for just liberation of the oppressed.

Italian writer and journalist Edmondo De Amicis wrote about his experiences in the Italian military in *La vita militare* published in 1868. In his account of military life in Italy in the nineteenth century, he connects his purpose as a soldier to family when he writes that an Italian soldier will defend his country because it is “where he has his family, home, friends, and sweetheart; all that is dearest and most sacred to us in this world.”<sup>61</sup> He also writes about a superior officer reprimanding him and telling him to “Get into the habit of considering your regiment your family... All this impatience... to return home is anything but soldier-like.”<sup>62</sup> While the Italian army’s intention to make the army the primary bond was there, De Amicis does not adhere to it, most likely because after years of foreign occupation, the Italian army did not have a clear rhetoric of what the relationship between the army and the nation was, and so familial loyalties took precedence over the nation. In 1880, future Prime Minister Sidney

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<sup>59</sup> Bianco di Saint Jorioz, Carlo, 30-42 quoted in Riall, 155.

<sup>60</sup> Giuseppe Capuzzi, *La spedizione in Sicilia Memoire di un volontario* (Palermo, 1860), 5-6 quoted in Riall, 164.

<sup>61</sup> De Amicis, 204.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 342.

Sonnino gave a speech where he considered why enthusiasm from the average soldier was so lacking in Italy:

We make a soldier of the young peasant who suffers hunger every winter, who works in the rice fields... We make of this young man a soldier; we teach him *esprit de corps*, which is a spirit of brotherhood; we teach him honor... and above all we teach him the immense strength that comes from union in association, from the subordination of individual wills for the sake of the common good, from discipline. And after all this we send him back to his squalid dwelling; we send him back to a life of hardship and misery...And then we expect that from all this there should not be born the seeds of rebellion.<sup>63</sup>

As Sonnino observes, characterizing the Italian army as an honourable and unified body was not widely agreed upon by Italians. Most soldiers were not obedient towards authority because they did not reap any benefits from the wars their rulers sent them to fight. Not all Italians were treated equally in modern society, let alone within the army, and thus the people mistrusted their rulers and superiors for treating them poorly, and the rulers likewise mistrusted the masses as volatile and unreliable.<sup>64</sup>

Holding familial loyalties above national ones could also be attributed to geographical divisions. Despite the *Risorgimento*, which created a unified Kingdom of Italy from the different states within the Italian peninsula in 1871, Italy remained highly fragmented and difficult to manage. Regional and parochial divisions were something Italians were very conscious of, and this was relevant not just to peasants, but also to the small educated elite.<sup>65</sup> Exacerbating these divisions was the fact that most Italians were illiterate, and mutually incomprehensible dialects

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<sup>63</sup> Speech by Sidney Sonnino July 7, 1880 in Shepard B. Clough and Salvatore Saladino, *A History of Modern Italy: Documents, Reading, and Commentary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 201-2.

<sup>64</sup> John Gooch, *Army, State, and Society in Italy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 171.

<sup>65</sup> Macgregor Knox, "The Sources of Italy's Defeat in 1940: Bluff or Institutionalized Incompetence?" in *German Nationalism and the European Response* edited by Carole Fink, Isabel V. Hull, and Macgregor Knox (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 255-6.

were spoken across the newly unified country.<sup>66</sup> In *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, sociologist Edward C. Banfield argued that after centuries of foreign rule and corrupt local rule, many Italians considered authority figures and anyone outside of their communities to be untrustworthy. While this is a generalization, what is important to glean is that familial or local allegiances could be held with more importance than any concept of the nation.<sup>67</sup>

These examples demonstrate the unique way in which Italians thought of the nation and a soldier's relationship to it. The people of Italy often thought of themselves as a family and familial love represented a love of the fatherland, but this did not include the nation's leaders or figures of authority (including the armed forces) who were seen as oppressors. Enlistment became a moral choice, and engagement in combat had to be justified on moral grounds. The Italian soldier was meant to defend his own family (and thus defending the nation came to mean defending fellow Italians) against oppression from not just other powers, but also from corrupt authority within. These sentiments were clearly very different from German ideas which came about after German unification in 1871.

Firstly, there are several differences in the ways in which German soldiers tended to view their military lives in relation to their familial ones. German soldiers were taught that their primary bond should be with their troop, and their family of origin did not have a place in this narrative. Soldiers were "the king's children" and under the obligation to obey their parent unquestioningly. Wilhelm II bluntly explained to recruits in the Potsdam regiment of guards in 1891 that they would be expected to "shoot down their own relatives, brothers, even parents" and that such orders would be followed "without a murmur." The soldiers were not to "ask who they

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<sup>66</sup> Macgregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 27.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958), 10.

had to turn their weapons on, but only what their duty demanded of them.”<sup>68</sup> Wilhelm II’s rhetoric helped to promote the notion that a soldier’s bonds to the nation were more important than their bonds to family.

Primary loyalties had to be to the army which was responsible for carrying out the goals of the nation. The relationships within the army were also interpreted differently from the Italian example as well. All Germans in the military, regardless of rank, were presented as equal comrades before their regimental flag, which was a symbol for the nation. Military code proscribed that the flag was “sacred” and it was presented to each regiment by the monarch. Dramatic war stories even recounted how “the ultimate bravery lay in tearing the flag from the enemy’s hands, while the ultimate infamy consisted of deserting the colours in the hour of need.”<sup>69</sup> In this way, the flag was a symbol of the monarch and the nation, and the swearing in ceremony was an emotional experience where the recruit became one with his regiment, his monarch, and his nation. Because the king and the nation needed soldiers and officers equally for its greater purpose, all military personnel were considered equal comrades before the army and the nation. As Ute Frevert writes, this rhetoric presented the army as a “layered but homogeneous institution whose vertical command structures were supplemented and completed by horizontal relations of comradeship.”<sup>70</sup> This meant that despite hierarchical distinctions (vertical relationships), such as those between soldier and officer, every man was an equal comrade (horizontal relationships) fighting for the nation.

In Germany, great efforts were made to overcome regional differences between men within the military in the 1860s. For example, in peacetime, the Bavarian, Saxon, and

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<sup>68</sup> Frevert, 183.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Württemberg armies remained under the chief command of their sovereigns, and only fell under the Prussian king's supreme command in the case of war.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, each army corps was assigned a specific recruitment area so that the regiments were relatively homogenous. By respecting regional origins, the army became the most central and profound link between the fatherland and smaller regional communities. It was hoped that enlistees would take back the seeds of a German national sentiment to their hometowns when they returned.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, the Italians had yet to establish a firm sense of these horizontal relationships. In the hopes of fostering national sentiment, Italian recruits were taken from each of two different regions, mixed together in a unit, and then stationed in a third region. Every four years they were also moved around to prevent their forming close links with any particular neighbourhood, but never returned to their places of origin as in the German example.<sup>73</sup>

While the aim was to separate Italian recruits from their familial ties in order to create national ones, this system of recruitment never achieved its goal, as soldiers seemed to become even less united as a result. Soldiers tended to find other soldiers from their hometowns and band together against other Italians whose regions of origin they held prejudices against.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, the only exception to this system existed within the *Alpini*, who were elite units recruited exclusively from the mountain communities in northern Italy.<sup>75</sup> The *Alpini* historically hold a much a better reputation for military effectiveness, so it is possible that these recruitment methods had a significant impact on promoting unity. Other elite units such as the *Bersaglieri* also hold a much better reputation, and were considered by the Germans to be more effective

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> John Gooch, "Italian Military Efficiency: A Debate," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5, no. 2 (January 2008): 263.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.



than the average Italian unit.<sup>76</sup> The *Bersaglieri* were originally established as a light infantry corps, distinctly marked by their feather plumed hats, and were made to provide effective reconnaissance, rapid attacks, and were trained to move and fight only while running. In 1939, these units received intense physical training and were required to have above-average stamina and marksmanship abilities.<sup>77</sup> It is possible that the *Bersaglieri* had similar recruitment methods as the *Alpini* but an examination of the origins of these exceptional elite units could certainly use more analysis and is lacking in the literature. What is most significant, however, is that when considering the military as a whole (regardless of these exceptional units) Germany was much more successful than Italy in creating horizontal relationships of comradeship within the regular armed forces which in Germany emphasized the priority of fatherland over local community ties.

In 1907, Victor Emmanuel III stated that the Italian people still had “to be educated, to be taught habits of discipline, obedience and orderliness” and that they had yet to learn what “patriotism, in the broad national sense, means.”<sup>78</sup> At the dawn of the First World War, Emilio Lussu described hearing a speech given by a mayor to a group of soldiers going off to war: “[War] has its own beautiful and sublime attractions. Unhappy is he who cannot feel them! Because, oh gentlemen, it is beautiful indeed to die for your country.” Lussu then explains the impact of this speech on the soldiers:

This allusion didn't appeal to anyone, not even the colonel... Even the demeanor with which the mayor had accompanied his exclamation had been inappropriate. It seemed as though he'd wanted to say, “You are more beautiful dead than alive.” A sizable portion of the officers coughed and looked at the mayor disdainfully. The cavalry lieutenant

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<sup>76</sup> At the Italian military memorial in El Alamein, a plaque dedicated to the *Bersaglieri* quotes Rommel in saying “The German soldier has amazed the world, and the Italian *Bersaglieri* has amazed the German soldier.” The *Bersaglieri* were meant to be used for mobile operations, and all of these qualities suggest not only why they were more effective fighters, but also why they were better respected by their German allies, who, as will be established later, were predisposed to favour a fast-paced war of movement.

<sup>77</sup> Ciro Paoletti, *A Military History of Italy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 94.

<sup>78</sup> Gooch, *Army, State, and Society*, 172.

displayed his restlessness with a rattling of spurs. Did the mayor understand how we felt? Probably, because he hurried to conclude.<sup>79</sup>

Lussu describes an environment where Italian soldiers were not willing to die for their nation, because they did not have a strong concept of what that even meant. There were no indications that the military had their best interests in mind because they had never provided Italians with any economic or social advantages historically. This sentiment was also echoed in *La Voce*, an Italian literary magazine from Florence: “This [the fact that Italy was not yet a nation] is what above all Italy suffers from at present,” wrote Italian journalist Giovanni Amendola in 1910, “that the nation is little more than a dying myth and a rising hope.”<sup>80</sup>

Vanda Wilcox has also argued that war-time letters by Italians in the First World War most frequently revolved around familial matters (i.e. the conditions of the family farm, the health of children, and the likelihood of obtaining leave) and did not contain strong themes regarding national sentiment. In addition, any sentiments of patriotism were usually always characterized in a way that expressed defending the nation rather than expanding its territory. As mentioned previously, during the wars of the *Risorgimento* the notion of defending the fatherland was a sentiment equated with defending one’s family. Illustrated trench journals from the First World War, which were produced to increase patriotic determination among the troops, continuously emphasized the link between defending the nation and defending one’s family.<sup>81</sup> This was likely because nationalism was more likely to be fostered if phrased in this way. According to soldiers’ war-time letters, Italians perceived defending the family to be a more worthy cause to fight for than expansionist war aims. Men saw the war zone as definitively not

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<sup>79</sup> Lussu, *A Soldier on the Southern Front*, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Giovanni Amendola, “Il convegno nazionalista,” *La Voce* (December 1910) quoted in Emilio Gentile, *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century* translated by Suzanne Dingee and Jennifer Pudney, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 107.

<sup>81</sup> Wilcox, 288-90.

Italy whereas going home on leave was going into Italy. The lands being fought for were not perceived as lands that needed to be included in the nation because they belonged to Italy. As one soldier wrote, the war was for “the conquest of a wretched piece of land” and there was no use in “conquering a pile of useless rocks.”<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, the rhetoric of defense was always more prominent in inspiring nationalism.

By contrast, during the same period, German soldiers as well as the official manual for the German general staff often expressed the exact opposite of the Italian defensive rhetoric. German soldiers’ letters from the First World War much more frequently mention the importance of the nation and fatherland, and the necessity of warfare for national existence. Soldiers expressed that the best way to defend the fatherland was offensively. As Macgregor Knox writes in *To the Threshold of Power*, Prussian military traditions that emphasized the notion of “military necessity” trampled on moral and legal restraints. This was quite contrary to the Italian military tradition from the *Risorgimento* which emphasized the importance of moral justification for any military conflict. The German general staff’s 1902 manual on the “usages of land warfare” was explicit in its scorn of “humanitarian attitudes that frequently degenerate into sentimentality and pathetic emotion-mongering... in complete contradiction to the nature and ultimate purpose of war.”<sup>83</sup> Doctrine was thus influenced by German martial culture which as mentioned had emphasized that moral justification was not needed for war. Soldiers had to carry out the will of rulers regardless of what it was and by doing so gained honour as protectors of the fatherland. These ideas that were expressed in doctrine also penetrated the consciousness of

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<sup>82</sup> Nuto Revelli, *Il mondo dei vinti*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 73 quoted in *Ibid*, 291.

<sup>83</sup> Grosser Generalstab, *Kriegsbrauch im Landkriege* (Berlin, 1902), 3 in Knox, *To the Threshold of Power*, 103.

German soldiers in the early twentieth century, as these ideas come through in their personal letters.

In examples of German letters from the First World War, soldiers emphasized a willingness to make any sacrifice for the goals of the nation. As one soldier wrote on September 24, 1914, “But now that [war] has been declared, I think it is a matter of course that one should feel oneself so much a member of the nation that one must unite one’s fate as closely as possible with that of the whole... For what counts is always the readiness to make a sacrifice, not the object for which the sacrifice is made.”<sup>84</sup> This letter provides evidence for the two themes in German military tradition before the world wars that have thus far been emphasized. The importance of the nation to the soldier and the inclusiveness he experiences as a member of the nation, and the unwavering support of the goals of the nation, which are meant to be achieved through war.

In these letters, there is also much less emphasis on family and personal life. One soldier wrote to his mother in 1914, “I have realized... since I said good-bye to you yesterday... that if at this time we think of ourselves and those who belong to us, we shall be petty and weak. We must have a broad outlook and think of our nation, our Fatherland, of God— then we shall be brave and strong.”<sup>85</sup> Similarly, another soldier wrote in 1916, “And now one must put all thought of oneself quite into the background, for the sake of one’s nation and one’s Fatherland.”<sup>86</sup> These sentiments suggest that many German soldiers tended to view themselves as unified under the greater banner of the nation well into the First World War as well. Italians did not have such a

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<sup>84</sup> Philipp Witkop, *German Students’ War Letters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 19-20.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

clear understanding of this concept, because they held a more divided picture of their nation during the same period.

Emphasizing these geographical divisions between Italians were instances in the First World War of prejudice between northerners and southerners, or even specific regional prejudices. Some Italians made comments such as, “they say that he is capable of doing horrible things, and I am not surprised because he is Sicilian” and “there are some [men] who are frightening and it is always those Neapolitans.”<sup>87</sup> Language barriers also continued to be problematic. In one regiment during the First World War there could be at least half a dozen distinct dialects spoken at any one time. One soldier complained of being unable to understand his comrade’s “terrible Neapolitan exclamations” while an officer could not understand the “barbaric tongue” of his subordinate.<sup>88</sup>

While the Italian army ran into problems when mixing soldiers from different regions into the same units, the Germans were much better at it. In Germany, the army made a genuine attempt to eliminate the divisions between men from different geographical and social backgrounds. The First World War gave important meaning to the word comradeship. Comradeship became a strong uniting concept for the German army in this period. While initially perceived as something sentimental and humanitarian in the First World War, the rhetoric of comradeship shifted to a much more aggressive interpretation in the Second World War. It came to be seen by the German military as a factor of military strength which could have a war winning impact. In this way, uniting with fellow soldiers became a useful military tool that could help win battles. The interwar period emphasized that all soldiers had to be united in order

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 297.

to carry out the goals of the nation. In 1921, a new set of military manuals *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen* (Leadership and Battle with Combined Arms) dictated: “The leader’s will to victory must be shared down to the last man.”<sup>89</sup> This remained consistent even by 1934, the German soldier’s handbook stated that without discipline, “the army would degenerate to an unrestrained troop” and without comradeship, “the life of a soldier would be equal to an unbearable existence.”<sup>90</sup> The German army taught soldiers that discipline alone could not ensure fighting strength, and comradeship was what kept the soldiers united. Without it, the army could not hope to succeed. Some soldiers even characterized a refusal to adapt to the social machinery of the military as “uncomradely,” “egoistic” and “unmanly.”<sup>91</sup> This rhetoric also blurred the lines between familial loyalties and loyalties to the military and nation.

In 1938, *Wehrmacht Education and Military Experience* dictated that comradeship was supposed to give soldiers a “feeling of security and thus of being at home.”<sup>92</sup> This relation of comradeship to the family, with the head of the troops as the father for instance provided a universally familiar foundation for the social structure of the military. It also made the notion of comradeship as well as the hierarchical separations within the military seem natural and therefore unquestionable.<sup>93</sup> Where Italians saw the concept of family and the concept of military as very separate, for Germans the lines between home front and war front were blurred by this strong notion of comradeship and its far-reaching applications. During the Second World War, in a letter home to his wife, one soldier even referred to his marriage in terms of comradeship. In

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<sup>89</sup> *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen* (Berlin: Offene Worte, 1921) paragraph 10 quoted in Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 242.

<sup>90</sup> Thomas Kühne, “Comradeship: Gender Confusion and the Gender Order in the German Military, 1918-1945,” in *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* edited by Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, (New York: Berg, 2002), 240.

<sup>91</sup> Kühne, 241-2.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

the letter the soldier spoke of his wife's "great comradeship" to him, while she regularly called him "my comrade for life."<sup>94</sup> In the Weimar Republic, the idea of the "companionate marriage" used military metaphors like comradeship to describe a marriage between a man and woman that was based purely on the happiness of the two individuals and not exclusively on producing children. In 1929, German writer Lola Landau characterized this kind of marriage as the union of "two free personalities [who] will march along the same path toward a great goal, allowing the uniform beat of their steps to blend into a single rhythm."<sup>95</sup> Landau's descriptions are familiar to characterizations of military comradeship and so it is possible that this was another way the military connected the personal relationships of Germans to military relationships.

While there is very little known about the sentiments of the *Volksdeutsch* after their integration into the *Wehrmacht*, Austrian historian Thomas R. Grischany suggests that notions of comradeship were at least particularly relevant to many Austrians in the Second World War and that they felt very much integrated from the first successful stages of the war, until the invasion of the Soviet Union. He attributes this integration to feelings of comradeship, which were exacerbated through successful military victories, and the appeal of "völkisch"<sup>96</sup> features of German nationalism that were merely reapplied to the *Volksdeutsch*.<sup>97</sup> The importance of comradeship should not be underestimated, for the concept united soldiers with one another, to their superiors, to their families, and to the nation. For Germans, these boundaries became

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 245, 246.

<sup>95</sup> Lola Landau, "Kameradschaftsehen," *Die Tat* 20, no. 11 (February 1929), 831-835 quoted in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* edited by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 703.

<sup>96</sup> That is to say the ideas which prescribed racial equality (or superiority when contrasted with those considered to be of an inferior race) to those of German or Aryan descent.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas R. Grischany, "Austrians into German Soldiers: The Integrative Impact of the Wehrmacht Service on Austrian Soldiers during World War II," *Austrian History Yearbook*, 38 (January 2007): 177.

blurred, while Italians were much more divided, and as individuals they identified with and were loyal to their hometowns and families more so than the nation.

Following the First World War, most Italians had no real reason to put these divisions aside for any greater concept of the nation. As one historian writes: “In 1920, workers felt betrayed by the government that had drafted them and for whom they fought in the war. They did not love the Fatherland, because the Fatherland had sent them to the trenches, giving them no better life after the war.”<sup>98</sup> Consequently, the armed forces still remained an unpopular institution, because it was the most concrete symbol of the state and forced military service.<sup>99</sup> A historical record of military failures (such as at Adua in 1896 or at Caporetto in 1917) also made the army all the more unpopular and undesirable to join. The Italian army offered little scope for initiative or reward for effectiveness in battle, and a majority of corrupt and poorly qualified leaders remained firmly in place.<sup>100</sup>

In 1915, five time Prime Minister of Italy Giovanni Giolitti harshly stated that Italians had for decades been sending “their most stupid sons into the army because they did not know what to do with them.”<sup>101</sup> They sent the “black sheep and half-wits” because most Italians did not view the army as a prestigious institution.<sup>102</sup> In other words, the men who entered the army voluntarily did so because they were incapable of supporting themselves in some other career. Though an unforgiving statement, it was true that as a result of the Italian army’s unpopularity, Italy had a much smaller pool of military talent to choose from compared to Germany. Italian families from the upper middle classes stubbornly denied their sons to the *Regio Esercito* (The

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<sup>98</sup> Ciro Paoletti, *A Military History of Italy* (London: Praeger Security International, 2008), 154.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 154.

<sup>100</sup> Knox, *Common Destiny*, 234.

<sup>101</sup> John Gooch, *Army, State, and Society in Italy*, 173.

<sup>102</sup> Knox, “The First World War and Military Culture: Continuity and Change in Germany and Italy,” in *Imperial Germany Revisited* edited by Sven Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 216.



Royal Italian Army) whether as regular or reserve officers.<sup>103</sup> By contrast, from the late nineteenth century onwards, the German lieutenant “made his way through the world as a young god” and even Germans of the upper middle class actively sought careers in the military because they perceived them to be honourable professions.<sup>104</sup> The German army had a genuine mass following, and because of this popularity, Germany had a much better pick of keen military talent.<sup>105</sup> These were trends that persisted into the First World War for Germany.

The Italian officer corps (still reserved only for social elites and not open to talent), however, continued to abuse their powers, promote men based on seniority rather than merit, and treat soldiers poorly.<sup>106</sup> This contributed to instances of animosity from Italian soldiers such as Emilio Lussu. In his memoirs from the First World War, Emilio Lussu emphasized resentment for his superiors who had “Steak for breakfast, steak for lunch, steak for dinner” and “a salary that would last [his] family two years.”<sup>107</sup> To Lussu and his comrades, their own generals were the enemy in war. “We should kill them all,” he recounts one of his comrades saying, “If they all died, we’d be better off too... If they all died, the war would be over.”<sup>108</sup> Wherever the Italian army failed, such as at Caporetto in 1917, soldiers were accused of cowardice, incompetence, and of having an “absence of faith” by their officers, and officers were similarly accused of these same things by their superiors. Superior officers were given the “sacred authority” to execute any soldiers perceived to be cowardly. Between 1915 and 1918, the Italian army was responsible for

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<sup>103</sup> Knox, *To the Threshold of Power*, 72.

<sup>104</sup> Macgregor Knox, “Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power, and Staying Power in the Italian and German Dictatorships,” in *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* edited by Richard Bessel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 119.

<sup>105</sup> Knox, *Common Destiny*, 229-30.

<sup>106</sup> Vanda Wilcox, “Encountering Italy: Military Service and National Identity during the First World War,” *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 3, no. 2 (2011): 286.

<sup>107</sup> Emilio Lussu, *A Soldier on the Southern Front* translated by Gregory Conti (New York: Rizzoli Ex Libris, 2014), 107.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

shooting roughly 750 men after trial, and several hundred more on the simple order of an officer. The enforcement of obedience through terror by the Italian army cannot be underestimated as another factor reinforcing its unpopularity.<sup>109</sup>

By contrast, Germany was much more successful in eliminating this harsh divide between soldiers and officers. As mentioned previously, German military tradition had a much clearer concept of fatherland, and presented soldiers and officers as being equal before the nation. The one hundred year Prussian tradition of compulsory military service in Germany created a lasting impact on German state and society. Historically, the foundations for the *Reichswehr* and *Wehrmacht* had already been created in the nineteenth century. For many Weimar-era German officers, their aim after the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and the creation of the “stab in the back” myth (which accused German civilians on the home front of losing World War I instead of the military) was to return Germany to an era of unquestioning military and national loyalty. According to the military press, the way to achieve this was to build up the military as an example to the whole nation, above all to its youth.<sup>110</sup> The image of the officer as an educator of the nation was important to the German army. The officer had to communicate what the nation meant to soldiers. By contrast, in Italy, no tradition had ever existed of the officer as schoolmaster or educator to shape the army’s view on and relationship with the nation, and thus also the soldiers’ relationships with their superiors. This was also a more difficult task to achieve in Italy, considering the high rates of illiteracy among Italian soldiers.<sup>111</sup> In the interwar years, where Italy struggled with communicating the importance of the army to Italians,

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<sup>109</sup> Knox, “The First World War and Military Culture,” 220.

<sup>110</sup> Emre Sencer, “Fear and Loathing in Berlin: German Military Culture at the Turn of the 1930s,” *German Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (February 2014): 29.

<sup>111</sup> Gooch, *Army, State, and Society in Italy*, 172. For literacy statistics during this period see Max Roser, “Literacy,” Our World in Data. <<http://ourworldindata.org/data/education-knowledge/literacy>>.

Germany continued to regard its military as a serious and important occupation imbued with nationalism and honour.

With the rise of National Socialism, increasing opportunities opened up for many German soldiers as well. One important reason for this was the continuation of the tradition that gave German men the ability to be promoted in a military career based on talent and not class. When the Nazis came to power, anyone of “Aryan descent” with their “financial affairs in order” could become reserve officers. With the exception of Jews, this allowed many Germans from different classes the opportunity for social advancement. National Socialism also emphasized that the military embodied struggle, sacrifice, and community. Ute Frevert argues that making a “sacrifice for the *Volk*” was the “highest honour” which benefited the “welfare of the whole.”<sup>112</sup>

The *Wehrmacht* was responsible not only for producing well-trained soldiers, but also for educating men who were aware of their national identity and obligations to the state. This sentiment culminated with the *Wehrmacht* swearing-in ceremony where a personal oath of absolute obedience was sworn to Hitler beginning in 1934.<sup>113</sup> There was nothing comparable to this in Italy. This demand to put the goals of the nation before one’s own personal will had been well established in German military tradition, but Nazism amplified this tradition by demanding absolute obedience to Hitler personally. Omer Bartov has argued that the personal sentiments of soldiers often became blurred with Nazi values and beliefs, because of this established relationship between Hitler and the armed forces and the persistence of education within the

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<sup>112</sup> Frevert, 254.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 251.

armed forces.<sup>114</sup> However, it is also significant to address the opinions of soldiers who did not support Hitler or Nazism personally, and what their views were concerning the *Wehrmacht*.

Felix Römer argued in his article on nationalism and conformism among soldiers in the *Wehrmacht* that traditional dividing lines (i.e. between social classes, political positions, and religions) were largely blurred in the *Wehrmacht*. Römer demonstrates that soldiers from the working classes who had a communist upbringing or communist political past expressed their dissent and opposition to the regime, while still maintaining a positive image of the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>115</sup>

According to 460 morale questionnaires<sup>116</sup> which Römer compiled, more than 90% of soldiers (including both those loyal to the regime as well as opponents of Hitler for various social, political, religious, or other reasons) agreed that the *Wehrmacht* possessed only positive soldierly virtues and that the morale and fighting spirit of the German infantry was incomparable to any other group of soldiers.<sup>117</sup> Römer argues that reasons for this involve a shared pride in the abilities of the *Wehrmacht* and the German military's reputation as an honourable organization which were ideas deeply rooted throughout German society, and the social dynamics within the army which pushed soldiers to live up to their comrades' expectations. Using eavesdropping transcripts Römer also demonstrates that these opinions were not feigned by soldiers.<sup>118</sup>

Identification with the nation also proved to be a unifying force whether soldiers came from the formerly socialist or Catholic working class. Even those who explicitly identified

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<sup>114</sup> Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and the War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 117-9.

<sup>115</sup> Felix Römer, "Milieus in the Military: Soldierly Ethos, Nationalism and Conformism Among Workers in the *Wehrmacht*," *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no.1 (January 2013): 135.

<sup>116</sup> A series of surveys conducted in 1942-1945 by the US interrogation centre Fort Hunt given to interned *Wehrmacht* soldiers with the aim of eliciting the mood within the German armed forces, including attitudes towards Hitler and National Socialism.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 136.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

themselves to be against Hitler and Nazism widely and proudly characterized themselves as good German soldiers. Patriotism was still regarded as a virtue and loyalty to the nation could be seen as being above and beyond party politics. Though of course, there were still a minority of those who held political loyalties in direct opposition to the Nazis such as communists and felt bound neither to the *Wehrmacht* nor the nation.<sup>119</sup> What is significant, however, is the power of the position that the armed forces possessed in wider German culture. This was something long established since the nineteenth century, and persisted during the Nazi regime. Regardless of their political loyalties, many *Wehrmacht* soldiers who did not support Hitler had the ability to place some concept of Germany and the German army above the Nazis, because nationalism and the importance of the armed forces had historically been so important in German society. There was nothing comparable to these measures in Italian history or traditions. Improving morale and fostering cohesion was not something that the Italian army was historically good at. There had never been a great unifying message from the general staff to percolate through the officer corps. As John Gooch writes, “the staff remained a small, closed corps envied for its privileges and disliked for its influence.”<sup>120</sup>

Fascism in Italy had a much more difficult time inspiring nationalism and loyalty to the regime amongst members of the armed forces in the same way that this was achieved in Germany. Mass education was difficult to achieve within a population with relatively low levels of literacy. It was therefore more difficult to popularize a national cult around Fascism and Mussolini.<sup>121</sup> Fanaticism was also much more difficult to generate, because, as demonstrated in the first chapter, the Italian army had historically struggled with fostering cohesion in the name

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>120</sup> Gooch, *Army, State, and Society in Italy*, 175.

<sup>121</sup> Knox, *Common Destiny*, 25-6.

of fatherland. The popularity of the army as an institution also did not have historical precedent as in the German example, and the lowly social position occupied by the Italian officer persisted into the Fascist era. As John Gooch has argued, exclusivism continued to plague the officer corps in its upper reaches, and this only served to continue the military's unpopular reputation.<sup>122</sup> In addition, unlike in Germany, the loyalty of the population was vied for by authorities other than Mussolini. The Church, for instance, played a significant role in hampering nationalism and loyalty to the state in Italy, particularly among the peasant population in the southern regions. The Church presented religion, rather than blood, as the overriding division within the human species, and this undercut the ability of ideas about racial superiority to take precedence over religious divisions.<sup>123</sup>

Macgregor Knox argues that, "German myths were of sterner stuff, and near-universal literacy and the relative absence of countervailing forces gave Nazi propagandists a far deeper grip on the population than their Italian counterparts."<sup>124</sup> In the Italian north, the working classes were not inspired by Fascism's promises, and Fascism barely reached the peasantry of the South or on the islands, where illiteracy and semi-literacy still plagued a third of Italy's population, even by 1940.<sup>125</sup> By contrast, Hitler was much better at appealing to all Germans. With the exception of the Jewish population, Hitler's notions of a collective *Volk* diminished the class, religious, and economic differences in German society by appealing to all Germans on a racial level.<sup>126</sup> In Italy, however, the Church played a significant role in vying for the loyalties of the population, and thus a racial nationalism comparable to Germany's never materialized. Hitler

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<sup>122</sup> Gooch, "Italian Military Efficiency," 261-262.

<sup>123</sup> Knox, *Common Destiny*, 25.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

merely reinforced old ideas of the military as the school of the nation, of discipline, comradeship, and the ultimate expression of the national community.<sup>127</sup> Certainly, between the *Risorgimento* and the Second World War Italians became much more aware of their country through their personal experiences, but the Germans were much more successful at fostering cohesion and understanding among soldiers for what it meant to fight for their fatherland. This cohesion and understanding also was not limited to the German army's sense of nationalism.

German military doctrine emphasized flexibility and receptiveness to new ideas. For instance, German military leaders relied on the initiative of a soldier's creativity to solve problems on the battlefield. In German military culture, *Auftragstaktik*, the policy of "issuing directives stating the overall intentions of the supreme command, while leaving a high degree of initiative and the issuance of specific order to subordinate commands," was a result of the legacy of Carl von Clausewitz's *On War*. Clausewitz's notion of "imponderables" (unforeseen circumstance which can arise in war) demanded flexibility on the battlefield. Rigidity could not overcome unforeseen circumstances.<sup>128</sup> As Williamson Murray has argued, this flexibility and receptiveness to new ideas remained a consistent feature of German military culture in the First World War, and was even reinforced by the loss of the war and the military limitations placed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>129</sup> In 1932, Werner von Fritsch and Ludwig Beck applied this feature of military culture to doctrine when they wrote in the German army's basic doctrinal manual, *Truppenführung*, that "the conduct of war is an art, depending upon free, creative activity, scientifically grounded. It makes the highest demands on individuals." It also stated that,

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<sup>127</sup> Frevert, 250.

<sup>128</sup> Peter Paret, "Clausewitz," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* edited by Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 212.

<sup>129</sup> Williamson Murray, "German Army Doctrine, 1918-1919 and the Post-1945 Theory of 'Blitzkrieg Strategy,'" in *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890-1945* edited by Carole Fink, Isabel V. Hull, and Macgregor Knox, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 75.

“the conduct of war was based on continuous development. New means of warfare called forth ever changing employment.”<sup>130</sup> In 1937, General Oswald Lutz, who oversaw the motorization of the German army in the interwar years, applied flexibility to tactics. Lutz urged tank units to exploit breakthroughs immediately, pursuing second and third objectives once the first was reached. Units had to have the flexibility and initiative to push on immediately.<sup>131</sup> These tactics were not completely revolutionary either. The German *Strosstruppen* or “stormtroopers” used similar tactics in the First World War. These units were lightly equipped and their training emphasized individual initiative and advancing at fast speeds.<sup>132</sup>

Italian military culture on the other hand never favoured flexibility nor did their leaders believe in the ability of the individual soldier to improvise or take initiative on the battlefield. The *Regio Esercito*’s ideal soldier was passive, faithful, and took their very detailed and specific orders willingly, nothing more.<sup>133</sup> Unlike in Germany, the Italian soldier was never expected to show the boldness or self confidence of independent action that Moltke the Elder’s 1888 infantry regulations demanded of even the lowly riflemen. *Truppenführung* also explicitly stated that, “the commander must allow his subordinates freedom of action,”<sup>134</sup> and “the command of an army and its subordinate units requires leaders capable of judgement, with clear vision and foresight, and the ability to make independent and decisive decisions, and to carry them out unwaveringly and positively.”<sup>135</sup> By contrast, under Fascism, Italian official doctrine preached a cult of obedience to superiors, which ultimately turned into passiveness and inactivity on the part

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<sup>130</sup> *Die Truppenführung* (Berlin, 1933) quoted in Williamson Murray, “Does Military Culture Matter?” *Orbis* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 27-42.

<sup>131</sup> Murray, “German Army Doctrine,” 83.

<sup>132</sup> Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1989), 82.

<sup>133</sup> Knox, *Hitler’s Italian Allies*, 30.

<sup>134</sup> Par. 37, *On the German Art of War: Truppenführung* trans. and ed. by Bruce Condell and David T. Zabecki, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2009), 23.

<sup>135</sup> Par. 6, *Ibid*, 17.



of officers.<sup>136</sup> To possess any of the independent qualities emphasized by the German military could be seen as a breach of discipline in the Italian military.<sup>137</sup>

After Italian unification, tactical flexibility and open-mindedness would have been precisely the qualities that would allow the Italian military to fight overseas wars while maintaining defense at home, but these qualities never evolved within the traditionally-minded Italian military leadership. The army stood firm in its old ways. During the First World War, many Italian military leaders continued to perceive individualism as the cause of Italy's historic military failures. The Italian army's chief of staff, Luigi Cardona, expressed this kind of "control mania" during the First World War. He openly denounced "excessive individualism" for it had been "the principal cause of the setbacks that we have encountered in almost all our wars." Obedience was the "irreplaceable foundation of military discipline" which forbade tactical freedom.<sup>138</sup>

Italian doctrine also suffered from being so defensively oriented. After Italian unification, the army chose a policy for national defense which emphasized fortification. This was not so much influenced by culture, but rather made sense because Italy's geographical position was very vulnerable and its enemies could easily reach most of Italy's major cities. As John Gooch demonstrates in *Army, State, and Society in Italy 1870-1915*, hundreds of miles of exposed coastline made Italy vulnerable from the sea, while on land Italy faced the difficulties of fighting in the Alps. Despite its costliness, the importance of defense and fortification was always more significant than offense and territorial acquisition.<sup>139</sup> Such works as Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* failed to influence Italian tactics, because the emphasis on offensive warfare was for the

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<sup>136</sup> Giorgio Rochat, *Le Guerre Italiane 1935-1943: Dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Torino: Einaudi: 2008), 180.

<sup>137</sup> Knox, "The First World War and Military Culture", 216.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>139</sup> Gooch, *Army, State, and Society in Italy*, 171.

most part irrelevant to Italy. The Italian military had concentrated on the primacy of the defensive and its leaders showed no willingness for adaptation or flexibility.<sup>140</sup> The first full translation of *On War* would not even appear in Italy until 1942.<sup>141</sup>

In fact, studying warfare's intricacies like Clausewitz and von Moltke never became "fashionable" in Italy. As a result, there was not a coherent "school of thought" or ideas about a concrete Italian military doctrine until the 1920s.<sup>142</sup> While there was some attempt at reform with the arrival of Fascism and such military thinkers as Emilio Grazioli and Emilio Canevari, attempts to form an offensive army based on quality rather than a defensive one founded on quantity never truly materialized in any way comparable to Germany.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, too much emphasis was placed on superiority in numbers and "faith in Fascism" to bring about victory which may have had success in Italy's ventures in Africa in the 1930s, but would have dire consequences in the Second World War.

Other ideas that had deep roots in military history, but lasted well beyond the First World War, included German views on war more generally. "All or nothing" and "victory or ruin" were central ways of thinking about war from the military leadership. An example of this kind of martial culture being applied to military operations can be found in plans such as Schlieffen's which relied on a single swift blow. The grand objective of all military action was overthrowing the enemy, not relying on defense for survival.<sup>144</sup> One of Clausewitz's most influential ideas was the notion that in wartime "direct annihilation of the enemy's forces must always be the

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<sup>140</sup> Gooch, "Clausewitz Disregarded," 313.

<sup>141</sup> Gooch, *Army, State, and Society*, 170.

<sup>142</sup> Gooch, "Clausewitz Disregarded," 322.

<sup>143</sup> Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals: The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy 1922-1940* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2007), 208-211

<sup>144</sup> Citino, 147.

dominant consideration.”<sup>145</sup> This concept continued to be prevalent in German doctrine in the twentieth century. In 1916, General Erich Ludendorff applied martial culture to the battlefield when he argued that “offensive struggle seeking decision in movement and in great battles... remains our ultimate military ideal, upon which Germany’s future will be founded even in time to come.”<sup>146</sup> Macgregor Knox argues that at the end of 1917, these views affected military tactics and operations as German defensive efforts had actually mutated back into offensive attacks. The “culturally over-determined loathing of defensive war” by the army was only briefly overcome, and even the defensive Siegfried Line was used for massive offensive escalation.<sup>147</sup> According to Robert Citino, these kinds of offensive and aggressive tactics were the only way for Germany to achieve a fast and decisive victory of annihilation, which before the First World War the army had historically been successful with.<sup>148</sup>

Isabel Hull’s influential work, *Absolute Destruction*, examines this annihilation concept and suggests that Germany was unique in its emphasis on military necessity (that wars were necessary for national survival). She argues that this uniqueness explains the escalation in the use of violence by the German military in the twentieth century.<sup>149</sup> *Absolute Destruction* is useful in that it addresses how influential culture is and how it can have a strong influence on the behaviours of armies during war. German martial culture influenced doctrine because war was viewed as a zero-sum struggle for existence and doctrine therefore emphasized a war of complete annihilation that did not have to consider moral or legal restraints, since war was for survival.

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<sup>145</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 228.

<sup>146</sup> Knox, “The First World War and Military Culture,” 217.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>148</sup> Citino, 306.

<sup>149</sup> Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

Clausewitzian thought also made contributions to German military culture, in particular, the notion of “the fighting spirit.” According to Clausewitz, “Military spirit... is one of the most important moral elements in war.” He believed that the necessary preconditions for this spirit are “a series of victorious wars” and “frequent exertions of the army to the utmost limits of its strength.”<sup>150</sup> Even before the publication of *On War*, German thinkers like Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Ernst Moritz Arndt claimed that the German “spirit” for war was deeper, more authentic, and more original than all other nations.<sup>151</sup> This was a sentiment that disregarded mathematical necessity. The power of materiel and numbers was perceived to be inferior to *Volksgeist*, the spirit of the German people. It was suggested that *Volksgeist* had the power to bring about “a victory of the soul against overwhelming numbers.”<sup>152</sup>

In the years leading up to the First World War, this military cultural value influenced doctrine. General Friedrich von Bernhardi expressed the importance of the “fighting spirit” when he wrote that the troops who can “advance more vigorously than the others” and that have “boldness, daring and genius of leadership” will prove superior.<sup>153</sup> In the 1937 edition of his First World War memoir *Attacks*, Erwin Rommel argues for the superiority of “the fighting spirit” and “unbounded spirit of self-sacrifice” of German infantrymen and junior commanders. This notion comes up again in his description of a September 1914 German attack: “Our fighting spirit was unbroken in spite of all we had passed through.”<sup>154</sup> During the interwar years, the military press also emphasized the importance of maintaining the “fighting spirit” despite the loss of the First

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<sup>150</sup> Clausewitz, 189.

<sup>151</sup> Knox, *To the Threshold of Power*, 48.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

<sup>153</sup> Friedrich von Bernhardi, *On War Today* (London, 1912), 179 quoted in Michael Howard, “Men Against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* edited by Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 519.

<sup>154</sup> Erwin Rommel, *Attacks* (Vienna, VA: Athena Press, Inc., 1979), 43.

World War and the implications of the Treaty of Versailles. As one author wrote, it was of great importance that the army once again achieve “spiritual unity” with the nation.<sup>155</sup>

The idea of German soldiers possessing a “fighting spirit” was connected to German history and historical figures in that the German quality of the “fighting spirit” was greater than that of any other nation in the opinion of the German military. There were not any comparable ideas in the Italian army because they did not have great military leaders like Frederick the Great and Bismarck, nor a history of military victories to draw upon as examples of the “fighting spirit.” Despite some celebration in post-*Risorgimento* oratory and schoolbooks, Rome was too distant and ambiguous to serve as an example to the people, despite the fact the Mussolini very much saw himself as the leader of a new Roman empire. The closest thing they had was Garibaldi, but he only led a mismatched group of revolutionaries, not the entire nation.<sup>156</sup> The Italian army did not really possess a widely acknowledged understanding of themselves as a unique nation with exceptional leaders unlike any other nation in Europe. Italy did not seek the universal hegemony of Italians through war, but merely redemption from its reputation as the least of the great powers.

Studying the differences in the military and martial cultural histories of Germany and Italy is important because military cooperation can be made even more difficult by cultural disparity. The potential for misunderstandings and antagonisms is greatly increased purely because of the different cultural backgrounds of the two participants attempting to collaborate. Germany’s military had historically been a popular institution with opportunities to establish a valuable career, while Italy’s was notorious unpopular and feared by the people, and thus did not

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<sup>155</sup> Sencer, 29.

<sup>156</sup> Knox, *To the Threshold of Power*, 115.

attract the most capable Italians for service. Where German military and civilian leaders clearly articulated the military's relationship with the nation, the Italian military did not do as well as Germany to foster cohesion and many Italians feared their superiors who were often corrupt elites who demanded absolute subordination. By contrast, German soldiers could actively pursue promotions despite their class and were given freedom and creativity on the battlefield to show their talents. Due to geography and history, the Italian nation had traditionally favoured fortification as the best tactic for national defense. German soldiers perceived war as the means for national survival and total annihilation of the enemy was the primary goal. Finally, the Germany military's belief in the "fighting spirit" was something often believed in Germany to be possessed uniquely by Germans, and a comparable understanding of racial superiority never emerged in Italy.

From these examples, it is not hard to see how one nation's cultural trait could be perceived as weakness by another, or how one nation might perceive one mode of doing things as more efficient than another. The examples from this chapter are the most relevant to understanding why Germans and Italians held certain perceptions and prejudices of one another's militaries in the Second World War. These perceptions will be revealed in the following chapters, which will demonstrate the clash of cultures in a collaborative setting, how these clashes are connected to the broader trends of each nation's military or martial culture demonstrated in this chapter, and what the consequences of these clashes were during the Second World War.

## Chapter 2: North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic

When Germany and Italy cemented their alliance in 1939, their respective military cultures and traditions were carried with them to multiple theatres of war. This chapter will explore the ways that differing martial characteristics, strategic priorities, and military cultures and histories exacerbated dysfunction in Germany and Italy's military alliance. This chapter will observe the Mediterranean, North African, and in some instances, Atlantic theatres of war, while the following chapter will explore the Eastern Front and some problems faced by German forces in Italy after Mussolini's capitulation. This chapter will show that dissimilar martial components to broader culture, strategic priorities, and military cultures had an effect on the way that German military and civilian leaders viewed their Italian allies. Some consequences of their dissimilar views in these areas include Hitler's reticence to share war plans with Mussolini, Mussolini's pursuit of parallel war, the formation of disparate German and Italian strategic goals, disagreements over tactical and operational issues on the battlefield, differing enthusiasms for the war, and tension and mistrust at all levels.

It is significant to establish that mistrust between the two allies began before Italy had even joined the war. In the months leading up to Germany's invasion of Poland, Italian mistrust of Germany was fostered at the highest levels of Italian decision-making. In July of 1939, Hitler sent a letter to Italy regarding the coming war with Poland. He wrote that the war was

a purely Nordic matter and Germany is able to handle it by herself. Italy in fact is not involved, and in addition her military preparations are only just beginning so her intervention would not mean any substantial help. Italy therefore should remain at peace and merely give us proofs of her friendship.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Pietro Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War: Memories and Documents* translated by Muriel Currey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 6-7.

This conclusion was a perfectly reasonable one for Hitler to arrive at since Italy would not have been prepared to enter the war at this time; however, Mussolini's interpretation of the letter elicited a dramatic response. Pietro Badoglio, Italian Chief of Staff, wrote that Mussolini was furious with the letter and stated:

Now Hitler refuses our help unless he asks for it if things go wrong. The Germans are terrible as enemies and unbearable as friends. But if Hitler intends to proceed entirely on his own that means I recover my liberty of action. You must immediately prepare plans to strengthen the fortifications on the German frontier.<sup>158</sup>

In response, Badoglio reflects: "That he had been politely put on one side, as if of no importance, infuriated Mussolini and obscured his judgement."<sup>159</sup> This instance demonstrates the power of perceptions between the allies. Mussolini was so offended by the exclusion of Italy in Hitler's plans that he demanded that the Italo-German border be fortified. While many inconsistencies have been identified in Badoglio's postwar writing,<sup>160</sup> the notion that Mussolini felt as though he was constantly being slighted by the Germans is something that is consistent within the memoirs of other members of the Italian high command.

Count Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, also reflected in his diary a similar sentiment to Mussolini's. The German high command's secretiveness over their war plans not only fueled mistrust, but keeping the Italian high command ignorant also created the Italian perception that the Germans did not feel that the Italians were worthy of knowing German intentions. Therefore, this sense of mistrust trickled down from Hitler and Mussolini to the relationship between Germany and Italy's foreign ministers. On August 11, 1939, after a meeting with Hitler and Joachim von Ribbentrop (Nazi Germany's Foreign Minister) Ciano wrote:

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>160</sup> See Gaetano Salvemini, "Pietro Badoglio's Role in the Second World War," *The Journal of Modern History* 21, no.4 (December 1949): 326-332.



Von Ribbentrop is evasive whenever I ask him for particulars about German policy... He has lied too many times about German intentions toward Poland not to feel uneasy now about what he must tell me and what they are really planning to do... At times our conversation becomes very tense. I do not hesitate to express my thoughts with brutal frankness. But this does not move him. I am becoming aware of how little we are worth in the opinion of the Germans...I feel that as far as the Germans are concerned an alliance with us means only that the enemy will be obliged to keep a certain number of divisions facing us, thus easing the situation on the German war fronts. They care for nothing else. The fate that might befall us does not interest them in the least. They know that the decision will be forced by them rather than by us. And finally, they are promising us only a beggarly pittance.<sup>161</sup>

This passage demonstrates that these feelings of mistrust did not begin and end with Hitler and Mussolini. More importantly, it demonstrates that the partnership was incapable of preserving trust and balance at the highest levels of leadership, where this trend continued after Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939.

Ciano wrote in March 1940 that the Germans “do things and undo them without consulting us, frequently acting against our views. Their present dealings, as those of former times, offer a suitable pretext to insist on our freedom of action.”<sup>162</sup> Four days later, during the last meeting at Brenner Pass on March 18, 1940 before Italy entered the war, Hitler withheld information on German intentions to attack Norway. Hitler even went as far as to give false information to the Italian military attaché in Berlin, General Efesio Marras.<sup>163</sup> Not only was information about future plans withheld, but plans involving the current operational situation in France in May 1940 were not shared with the Italians either. Hitler sent instructions on May 23 that dictated that he had

no objection if the Italian military attaché in Berlin, General Marras, or his agent or any other Italian officer would be invited to visit on the western front to be informed of

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<sup>161</sup> Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diary 1939-1943*, edited by Malcolm Muggeridge (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1947), 124-5.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>163</sup> Richard L. DiNardo and Daniel J. Hughes, “Germany and Coalition Warfare in the World Wars: A Comparative Study,” *War in History* 8, no.2 (April 2001): 170.

certain war experiences. However, it must be ensured that the concerning Italian officer receives no insight into operational matters on this occasion.<sup>164</sup>

While it may be easier to understand why this tendency to withhold information made the Italian high command distrust the German high command, it is more difficult to pin down why the German high command distrusted its supposed “closest ally” to such an extent as to withhold basic war plans in the first place. Here, as Richard L. DiNardo and Daniel J. Hughes have suggested, attitudes on cultural and sometimes racial superiority played a role.<sup>165</sup> Hitler and other high level members of the Nazi leadership, and in particular *Luftwaffe* General Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, often evaluated the Italians according to their own racist beliefs.<sup>166</sup>

Kesselring notoriously characterized the Italians in racial terms, suggesting that they had “inherent” qualities as “southerners” of Europe. After the war, he stated that “the Italian soldier was not a soldier from within. It is possible that I, as a northerner of a different species, am applying the wrong standards—but the results seem to prove my point.”<sup>167</sup> He wrote that Italians were “hot-blooded,” “conceited to an extent which a northerner cannot conceive,” and had “only three fashionable passions: coffee, cigarettes, and women.”<sup>168</sup> He showed particular disdain for Italians from the South of Italy, stating that rural Italians were “a mass of people who, like children, could be led anywhere.”<sup>169</sup> Kesselring also wrote that the Italian “species” was inferior

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<sup>164</sup> National Archives Microfilm Publication T78, roll 656, frame 000034.

<sup>165</sup> DiNardo and Hughes, 188.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>167</sup> Albert Kesselring “Italy as Military Ally,” *World War II German Military Studies: A Collection of 213 Special Reports on the Second World War Prepared by Former Officers of the Wehrmacht for the United States Army* Vol. 14 edited by Donald S. Detwiler, Jürgen Rohwer, and Charles B. Burdick (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 11.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

and held “natural” behaviours that were “in sharp contrast with the characteristics of people from the North [of Europe].”<sup>170</sup>

Hitler also viewed Italy without an understanding for their military history or military culture, and formed discriminatory ideas over the extent to which Italian culture was martial. On August 26, 1942, in a discussion with Admiral Erich Raeder about how Italy was sapping Germany’s moral courage, Hitler stated:

We should never succeed in keeping [the French] army down to a strength from which, within three years, they would not be in a position to smash the Italians; for that matter the Paris police are capable of that by themselves! And so we must always be on hand to help the Italians... The touchiness of the Italians comes from an inferiority complex.<sup>171</sup>

In judging Italians on a social level, Hitler also stated that

fanaticism is a matter of climate... Nothing of that sort in Italy... The Southerner has a lighter attitude towards matters of faith... We ought not to expose ourselves to the mirage of the southern countries. It’s the speciality of the Italians. Their climate has a softening effect on us. In the same way, southern man cannot resist our climate... From a social point of view, the sickest communities of the New Europe are: first, Hungary, then Italy.<sup>172</sup>

The Italians were depicted as so militarily incapable that the Paris police by themselves would be capable of beating them. Hitler also referred to the Italians as a “soft” people, who were weakening the Germans. It is also implied here that Italians did not have the same level of “fanaticism” or “faith” that the Germans did. In this sense, the Italians were judged by Hitler and Kesselring in the context of *Kampfgeist* (that is, the aggressive and enthusiastic “fighting spirit” for war), a concept, as explained in the previous chapter, that was a prevalent feature of German military culture. In their comparisons they established that the Italians were too “soft” and lacked the “fanaticism” necessary for war because of their position as “southerners” of Europe. Instead

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> *Hitler’s Table Talk 1941-1944* translated by Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (New York: Enigma Books, 2000), 660-1.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, 9, 116-7.

of considering that *Kampfgeist* may not have been a factor of Italian military culture in the same way that it was a facet of German military culture, Hitler and Kesselring argued that it was the racial characteristics of Italian soldiers that made them incapable fighters.

These examples also demonstrate that the Italians were judged according to Nazi standards of race. Nazism placed the “natural purity” of the German *Volk* above all other races.<sup>173</sup> As Hitler had stated in the previous quotation, Italy was only behind Hungary on Hitler’s list of the sickest communities of Europe. So in this context, the Nazi leadership already had a predisposed understanding of Italian capabilities. Hitler, of course, made many more general sweeping statements about the racial characteristics of various peoples other than the Italians, but what is most significant is that many high ranking Germans preferred to draw discriminatory conclusions to explain the fighting capacity of one of Germany’s “closest” allies. As a consequence, members of the German leadership seem to have felt that the Italians were unworthy, in both military and racial contexts, to be given full disclosure of German war plans.

Security concerns were also particularly relevant to the German leadership. In regards to withholding plans for Norway and France, on October 28, 1940, Hitler’s army adjutant Lieutenant Colonel Gerhard Engel said “the Führer could not have acted other than in secrecy for every second Italian was either a traitor or a spy.”<sup>174</sup> Hitler echoed these sentiments in January 1941: “Secrets are badly kept amongst the Italians, and what Italy has to-day, the rest of the world will have soon!”<sup>175</sup> And again in May 1942: “The whole marine business [referring to

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<sup>173</sup> Macgregor Knox, *To the Threshold of Power: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and Nationalist Socialist Dictatorships* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 125.

<sup>174</sup> Gerhard Engel, *Heeresadjutant bei Hitler 1938-1943* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1974), 88 quoted in Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, 229.

<sup>175</sup> *Hitler’s Table Talk*, 178.

naval warfare] is conceivable only in complete secrecy, which is not expected by the Italians.”<sup>176</sup> These examples demonstrate that at the highest levels of leadership, Italians were not trusted with important information relevant to German war plans for fear that the information would not be secure.

The German high command’s failure to inform their ally on so many of their plans created many surprises for Mussolini and he chose to reciprocate with the ill-conceived invasion of Greece. In a meeting between Badoglio and German Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel in November 1940, Keitel asked Badoglio why Italy had begun the offensive against Greece without informing the German General Staff. Badoglio informed Keitel that he had received explicit instructions from Mussolini not to inform any Germans. Badoglio wrote in his memoir that after informing Mussolini they were bound by the terms of the alliance to inform the Germans, Mussolini responded angrily: “Did they tell us about the campaign in Norway? Did they tell us about the opening of the offensive on the western front? They behaved as if we did not exist—I shall repay them in their own coin.”<sup>177</sup> Based on this instance, the lack of transparency previously demonstrated by the German leadership was certainly a motivator in Mussolini’s decision not to tell his allies about the invasion of Greece.

Germany and Italy were by no means equal partners in the Axis alliance relationship. Italian goals would always be subordinate to German ones as far as Germany was concerned, and this also played a role in Mussolini’s decision to invade Greece without informing Hitler. In a meeting on October 12, 1940, Ciano recalled that Mussolini stated “Hitler always faces me with a *fait accompli*... He will find out from the papers that I have occupied Greece. In this way the

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<sup>176</sup> “Kriegstagebuch Abteilung Ausland,” Nr. 242, 21 May 1942 National Archives Microfilm Publication T77, roll 1429, frame 000349.

<sup>177</sup> Badoglio, 113.

equilibrium will be re-established.”<sup>178</sup> Another motivator then, was Mussolini’s desire to impress Hitler with a surprise Italian victory and therefore be perceived as an equal and capable ally by Hitler. In this case, mistrust and the unequal balance between the two Axis allies resulted in withholding information, which led to reciprocal military action without mutual consent or coordination between Germany and Italy.

The significance of this mistrust is important because it made close cooperation not only tense and difficult, but also less desirable for both leaders. Helmut Greiner, who was charged with writing the War Diary at the German Armed Forces Supreme Command Headquarters from 1939-1943, recalled Hitler’s reaction to Mussolini’s decision to invade Greece: “To his advisors Hitler declared that he was disgusted with the Italian operation against Greece, of which he had not been informed and the outcome of which he considered to be hopeless, that he had lost all interest in close military co-operation with Italy.”<sup>179</sup> Italy’s invasion of Greece can be seen at least in part as a result of the mistrust that existed between the two allies, and this mistrust, which stemmed from perceptions of one in another (such perceptions were formed in part from military cultural differences), exacerbated the tense atmosphere between leaderships and even made Hitler somewhat less interested in the prospects of close collaboration with Italy.

In the months leading up to the June 10, 1940 Italian entry into the war, Mussolini frequently characterized Italy’s “honour” as being at stake if Italy did not fight in the war and have a considerable presence. In August 1939, after a meeting with Hitler, Ciano recalled Mussolini’s insistence that honour compelled him to go to war with Germany:

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<sup>178</sup> Ciano, 297.

<sup>179</sup> Helmut Greiner, “Greiner Series: Italy, Winter 1940-41,” *World War II German Military Studies: A Collection of 213 Special Reports on the Second World War Prepared by Former Officers of the Wehrmacht for the United States Army* Vol. 7 edited by Donald S. Detwiler, Jürgen Rohwer, and Charles B. Burdick (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 16-17.

I return to Rome completely disgusted with the Germans, with their leader, with their way of doing things. They have betrayed and lied to us. Now they are dragging us into an adventure which we do not want and which may compromise the regime and the country as a whole... I don't know whether to wish Italy a victory, or Germany a defeat. In any case, given the German attitude, I think that our hands are free, and I propose that we act accordingly, declaring that we have no intention of participating in a war which we have neither wanted nor provoked. The Duce's reactions are varied. At first he agrees with me. Then he says that honour compels him to march with Germany.<sup>180</sup>

Then again, in Ciano's diary entry from a few days later "Mussolini, impelled by his idea of honour, might be led to reaffirm his determination of going along with the Germans."<sup>181</sup> What is meant by honour is that Italy must redeem itself militarily from its disastrous failures (such as at Adua in 1896 or Caporetto in 1917) in order to be taken seriously and become a true world power. In a secret memorandum from March 31, 1940 to the King, Ciano, and the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces, Mussolini wrote:

Italy cannot remain neutral for the entire duration of the war without resigning from its role, without disqualifying itself [as a world power], without reducing itself to the level of a Switzerland multiplied by ten... Accordingly, the problem is not that of knowing whether Italy will enter the war, because Italy cannot avoid entering the war. It is only a question of knowing when and how; it is a question of delaying our entry into the war as long as possible and as is compatible with honor and dignity. This delay is necessary: a) so that we may prepare ourselves in such a way that our intervention determines the outcome; b) because Italy cannot wage a long war, that is, it cannot spend hundreds of billions as the present belligerent countries are obliged to do.<sup>182</sup>

Similarly in his speech from June 10 from the Palazzo Venezia balcony, Mussolini declared that "destiny" had decreed war, because "honour, self-interest, and the future" could not be ignored.<sup>183</sup> In 1922 Mussolini said that Italians "dream of a Roman Italy that is wise and strong, disciplined and imperial," and in 1919 he said that he saw Italy's future "fatally in the

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<sup>180</sup> Ciano, 125.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>182</sup> "Mussolini's Decision on Eventual Participation in the War, March 31, 1940," *A History of Modern Italy: Documents, Readings, and Commentary* edited by Shephard B. Clough and Salvatore Saladino (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 507.

<sup>183</sup> *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini* edited by Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, vol. 29, (Florence 1951-1981), 403-5 quoted in R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2002), 369.

Mediterranean. Only if Italy will be strong and powerful at sea will it carry the symbol and sign of the new order and history and will it be able to form with its own hands its new, bigger destiny.”<sup>184</sup> Therefore, Mussolini was acutely aware of Italy’s reputation as the least powerful of the imperial powers and was intent on recreating Italy as a new version of the Roman Empire that would dominate the Mediterranean.

These historical precedents not only played a role in motivating Mussolini to bring Italy into the war, but when combined with German contempt for Italy, also motivated Mussolini to pursue a parallel war. Parallel war (in theory) would be a war that the Italians would conduct alongside but independently from Germany. On March 4, 1940, Ciano made the connection in his diaries between Mussolini’s endless pursuit of honour and world power status and Germany’s contempt toward Italy:

I go with General Marras to the Duce; the former is very pessimistic about the German attitude toward us. He is convinced that the Germans, notwithstanding a certain respect for us, maintain their hatred and scorn unchanged, now aggravated by what they call a second treachery. No war move would be so popular in Germany, both for the old and younger generations, as an armed invasion pushed in the direction of our blue skies and warm seas. This and other things Marras frankly told the Duce, who is shocked by the report. The Duce repeated his theory of parallel war, and again insisted that Italy will never enter the war on the side of the Western Powers.<sup>185</sup>

Parallel war seems to have been in part a response to Hitler and the German high command not respecting Italy and Italian strategic goals. It also came from Mussolini’s distrust of Hitler since the 1930s, particularly over Hitler’s designs on Austria. The Italian high command held deep seated fears about Germany during Hitler’s first years in power. If Hitler had elected to attempt an *Anschluss* at the moment that Italy planned to annex Ethiopia (a task that would commit large numbers of Italian troops and equipment), such expansions along Italy’s own borders would have

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid, vol. 13, 18 (Florence 1951-1981), 143, 160-61 quoted in Jan Nelis, “Constructing Fascist Identity: Benito Mussolini and the Myth of Romanità,” *The Classical World* 100, no. 4 (Summer, 2007): 399, 403.

<sup>185</sup> Ciano, 216.



generated great anxiety among the members of Italian high command (many of whom, such as Pietro Badoglio, held an anti-German stance at this time).<sup>186</sup> In a meeting between Hitler and Mussolini in June 1934, Mussolini was convinced that he had persuaded Hitler to maintain ongoing Austrian independence. Later, Mussolini would temporarily align with French foreign minister Pierre Laval in January 1935 to warn Hitler to avoid any rash move against Austria. And repeatedly, senior Nazis had promised that Germany would keep out of Austria.<sup>187</sup> So a lack of disclosure over true intentions was a problem which had plagued Germany and Italy's relationship since the 1930s and no doubt contributed to Mussolini's decision for parallel war.

As Mussolini stated in March 1940, only the pursuit of Italian goals would give Italy the respect it deserved as a true world power and those goals would always be subordinate to German ones unless parallel war was pursued:

There is left the other hypothesis, that is, a war parallel to that of Germany for the purpose of reaching our objectives. These objectives are summarized in this statement: freedom on the seas, a long window to the ocean. Italy will not be a truly independent nation so long as Corsica, Bizerte and Malta are the bars of its Mediterranean prison and Gibraltar and Suez its walls. Once the problem of its land frontiers is solved, Italy, if it wishes to be a true world power, must solve the problem of its sea frontiers. The very security of its empire is tied to the solution of this problem.<sup>188</sup>

Considering Italy's reputation as an incapable military power, and Germany's contempt for Italy, the desire to prove Italy's worth as a capable world power contributed to the pursuit of parallel war. Once parallel war had become the established course of action, the attempt to prove Italy's honour in the Mediterranean would have military consequences.

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<sup>186</sup>Robert Mallet, "The *Anschluss* Question in Italian Defence Policy, 1933-37," *Intelligence and National Security* 19, no. 4 (December 2004): 684.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 686, 689

<sup>188</sup> "Mussolini's Decision on Eventual Participation in the War, March 31, 1940," *A History of Modern Italy*, 307.

After Italy had suffered great military defeats in Greece in December 1940, Germany began assisting Italy with weapons deliveries.<sup>189</sup> Greiner wrote that, “Besides the very desirable transfer of transport airplanes and trucks, German help was not requested for the time being, because the Duce wanted the campaign against Greece to be carried out exclusively by the Italian Armed Forces.”<sup>190</sup> Badoglio and also General Franz Halder recalled the Italian refusal of assistance on multiple occasions.<sup>191</sup> During the same period, General von Rintelen also complained of the Italians dishonestly reporting circumstances:

I’ve learned that the Italian General Staff are constantly showing a favourable situation. On several occasions we have been told that the front is now consolidated, without having been held for more than a few days, so even after these manifestations take place, we can by no means be certain that the current front will be held.<sup>192</sup>

These pre-emptive claims of Italian military accomplishments by the Italian General Staff to their German allies suggests that the Italian leadership also consistently felt like they had to prove Italy’s worth to Germany. Mussolini’s parallel war was meant to demonstrate Italy’s military capabilities to its German allies after being slighted by the German high command on so many occasions. However, the initial refusal of German aid and falsely reporting favourable situations only heightened tensions between the two allies, because these actions placed Italy in a more militarily vulnerable situation and created a false representation of their position in Greece.

The German and Italian militaries found themselves at odds over many different strategic, tactical, and operational issues over the course of the war and poor cooperation resulted. In February 1941, Hitler’s instructions on the “Behaviour of German troops in the

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<sup>189</sup> Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann, and Detlef Vogel eds. *Germany and the Second World War* Vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 456.

<sup>190</sup> Greiner, “Greiner Series: Italy, Winter 1940-41,” 30.

<sup>191</sup> See Badoglio, 32 and Franz Halder, *The Halder Diaries* edited by Arnold Lissance (Washington: Infantry Journal, 1950), 170, 174, 195.

<sup>192</sup> “No Title,” Nr. 242/1027, 10 December 1940 National Archives Microfilm Publication T78, roll 656, frame 000117.

Italian Theatres of War” already predicted the tensions that would arise in working alongside an ally that did not have the same military capabilities as Germany:

Our allies, who are fighting on all theatres of war against a powerful and superior enemy and are equipped with insufficient weapons due to the limited economic efficiency of Italy, must be provided with valuable psychological and military assistance. You must therefore be free from infringing arrogance, and value their accomplished achievements with legitimate and proud feelings. They should be judged only by their deeds, by their exemplary discipline, courage, and by their military skill. This is the only way to win the respect and recognition of our allies.<sup>193</sup>

Hitler was already expecting tensions to be high in coalition warfare, and yet beyond these kinds of basic instructions, no real efforts were made by the German military to understand Italian martial culture, geopolitical interests, military culture, or military history and what conflicts could arise as a result of competing modes of thought and differing priorities. Germany could have learned that Italian strategic goals were so incompatible with German ones that disagreements over the importance of certain theatres would inevitably arise.

Firstly, the German and Italian high command could not agree on the significance of the Mediterranean as a theatre of war. In Italian Admiral Franco Maugeri’s memoir, *From the Ashes of Disgrace*, he infers that Mussolini stated “Never, never have the Germans realized the importance of the Mediterranean.”<sup>194</sup> In regards to the failure to capture Malta he wrote:

If we had captured and occupied it—a large “if” I grant, but the probabilities were all in our favour—we would have been the masters of the Mediterranean... The responsibility of this failure lay, above all, in the land-mindedness of the Germans who were never able to understand and evaluate the Mediterranean problem in its true aspects and importance.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> “Verhalten deutscher Truppen auf Italienischen Kriegsschauplätzen,” Nr. 242, February 1941, National Archives Microfilm Publication T77, roll, 1429, frame 000892.

<sup>194</sup> Franco Maugeri, *From the Ashes of Disgrace* edited by Victor Rosen (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1948), 137.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-4.

In May 1940, Hitler expressed opposite intentions from Maugeri's when he said that "the war would be decided in the West."<sup>196</sup> As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Italy's geographic position made control of the Mediterranean essential to their national power, but Hitler's pursuit of *Lebensraum* (Hitler's idea that living space could be created in East Europe for "Aryan" Germans) did not necessarily include a conquest of the Mediterranean.

These disparate strategic goals and differing understandings of war priorities, formed by competing geopolitical interests, contributed to the ineffectiveness of coalition war. As a result of differing priorities, and the fact that in this unequal partnership Italian goals were subordinate to German ones, Germany could not always economically afford to meet the supply demands of their allies in the Mediterranean. If Italy had in fact been economically capable of fighting a truly parallel war, differing war priorities may not have been such a problematic issue. But because of Italy's great dependence on Germany for war materials and support, mistrust was exacerbated when German deliveries fell short of what had been promised, or compromises had to be made in order to secure German support for Italian goals during the course of the war in the Mediterranean.<sup>197</sup>

After the war Kesselring, who was appointed as Commander in Chief South in November 1941, reflected on the consequences of trying to resupply the Italians with war materials in the Mediterranean:

German aid to Italy was bound to conflict with the requirements of other theatres of war. If this conflict was to be avoided as much as possible, German aid had to remain confined to half-way measures which could not produce satisfactory results in any field... At the start of the war in the Mediterranean area the amount of German aid to Italy was determined exclusively by Italian requests for assistance. During subsequent stages political and military decisions were influenced to a great extent by considerations for our

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<sup>196</sup> "No Title," Nr. 242/1027, 28 May 1940, National Archives Microfilm Publication T78, roll 656, frame 000036.

<sup>197</sup> DiNardo and Hughes, "Germany and Coalition Warfare in the World Wars: A Comparative Study," 174.

own needs and, above all, by considerations for the requirements of the over-all war effort... absolute belief in continental strategy had completely taken hold of the German command and that the true significance of the Mediterranean to our own and to the enemy's effort was therefore not recognized in time.<sup>198</sup>

Maugeri also made mention of these tendencies in a diary entry from August 17, 1941 where he expressed that Malta should have been a priority over the conquest of Egypt:

To have elected the conquest of Egypt—not yet accomplished and God only knows if it will ever be—instead of the all-essential objective of capturing Malta. Those damned Germans! They push us, they crowd us, they shout us down, they make us do what they want us to do—generally much more than lies in our power—because they've gotten the idea we are lazy. Our ideas, doubtless more intelligent than theirs, are considered by them simply as the expression of our lack of willpower. Stupid Germans!<sup>199</sup>

In addition, in regards to perceived Italian laziness, another German colonel in the infantry similarly stated: “In the morning, the captain has a bellyache, the colonel has a hangover, and nobody wants to fight.”<sup>200</sup> The German military leadership prioritized its own interests above those of its allies and had the tendency to view its allies without an understanding for their strategic goals and concerns. As Kesselring writes, military decisions were influenced to a great extent by German strategic needs. Rommel even admitted that the Germans “had probably always demanded more than [the Italians], with their poor armament, had been capable of performing.”<sup>201</sup> Italy's strategic concerns over the Mediterranean did not factor prominently in German plans.

As was previously stated, military culture influenced the way that Italian soldiers were held to German standards of what defined a capable soldier, and this trend continued during operations in the Mediterranean theatre. In May 1942 during the siege of Malta, the German

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<sup>198</sup> Albert Kesselring, “The War in the Mediterranean Area Part 1,” *World War II German Military Studies* Vol. 14, 2.

<sup>199</sup> Maugeri, 83.

<sup>200</sup> Hans Speier, *From the Ashes of Disgrace: A Journal from Germany, 1945-1955* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 114.

<sup>201</sup> Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 325.

Supreme Command war diary wrote that Hitler did not believe in the success of the operation in Malta because “The Italian naval and land forces do not have the necessary experience to date to possess *Angriffsgeist*.”<sup>202</sup> To not possess *Angriffsgeist* meant that the soldiers and officers did not possess the aggressive attacking spirit that was necessary for carrying out offensive manoeuvres. Similarly, in a report compiled using the postwar writings of Helmut Greiner, Burkhardt H. Müller-Hillebrand, and Hans von Greiffenberg, the Italians were said to lack the “driving spirit” necessary to carry out the fighting during operations in the Yugoslav campaign. The report stated that “both commanders and troops of the Italian Second Army lacked aggressiveness and initiative.”<sup>203</sup>

Clausewitz wrote that a necessary precondition for this kind of aggressive fighting spirit that was frequently referenced by German high command was a “series of victorious wars” and “frequent exertions of the army to the utmost limits of its strength.”<sup>204</sup> Beyond ancient Rome, Italy of course did not possess a military history laden with a series of frequent or victorious wars that had pushed the limits of Italian strength. Ancient Rome, however, served as a complicated example as it was (along with ancient Greece) frequently used by Hitler to prove that Germans had descended from classical Greece.<sup>205</sup> From many German perspectives then, Italy could be blamed (as in the cases of Malta and Yugoslavia, even if only in part) for the negative outcome of an operation because they did not possess a quality that had never even been a significant part of their military culture in the first place. Therefore, feelings of superiority

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<sup>202</sup> “Kriegstagebuch Abteilung Ausland,” Nr. 242, T77/1429/000349

<sup>203</sup> “The German Campaigns in the Balkans (Spring 1941): The Yugoslav Campaign,” *World War II German Military Studies: A Collection of 213 Special Reports on the Second World War Prepared by Former Officers of the Wehrmacht for the United States Army* Vol. 13 edited by Donald S. Detwiler, Jürgen Rohwer, and Charles B. Burdick (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 65.

<sup>204</sup> Clausewitz, 189.

<sup>205</sup> For more see John T. Quinn, “The Ancient Rome of Adolf Hitler,” *Classical Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (2000): 141-156.

could come about when one ally saw the other as not possessing the qualities that made effective soldiers.

This was often the case in Admiral Karl Dönitz's memoir, *Ten Years and Twenty Days*. Dönitz initially addresses the problem of perceptions in his memoir, claiming that he pursued coalition warfare with the Italians in the Atlantic conscious of the problems that could arise from trying to understand another military power through one's own cultural lens:

One should never try to find in the fighting men and the people of an ally the same characteristics as one believes oneself to possess. The ways of life and thought, the whole upbringing and training of their soldiers were different from ours. One's dealings with allies, therefore, should be free of prejudice, devoid of any semblance of a sense of superiority and should be conducted with great tact... In my instructions to our training establishments I specifically laid down that they must be allowed to find out their own shortcomings for themselves, must themselves be left to seek the advantages to be derived from our previous experience and should not be confronted with these matters too suddenly or too brutally.<sup>206</sup>

However, it is possible that this sentiment was something Dönitz did not actually believe in during the war and merely included in his memoir retrospectively. This becomes apparent when he writes about his experiences with the Italians in the North Atlantic. He too valued Italian capabilities in the context of German military cultural understandings of *Angriffsgeist* as well as with some of the racist attitudes exhibited by Hitler and Kesselring:

The reasons for the Italian successes in the middle and South Atlantic and their failure in the convoy battles under the hard conditions in the North Atlantic lay ultimately, in their natural character and their martial characteristics. They are perfectly capable of delivering an assault with great gallantry and devotion, and, under the stimulating impetus of an offensive, will often display greater dash and daring than the Germans, who are less prone to be carried away by the thrill of battle. The war at sea affords many examples of their *élan* and offensive spirit... A convoy battle, however, demands not only gallantry and the offensive spirit, but also the toughness and endurance required to carry out the exacting task of remaining for hours and days on end in close and dangerous proximity to the enemy, compelled at the same time to abstain from any action until all

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<sup>206</sup> Karl Dönitz, *Memoirs Ten Years and Twenty Days* translated by R.H. Stevens (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1959), 145-6.

other boats have reached the spot and the time for the general attack comes. It is these qualities of toughness and endurance that we possess – or so I believe – to a greater degree than do the Italians; and it is for those reasons that they were of no great assistance to us in the North Atlantic.<sup>207</sup>

Such characterizations, however, were not entirely accurate of the Italians' involvement in the Atlantic, and although their effect on the campaign as a whole was slight, they were responsible for a useful number of sinkings of isolated merchantmen. However, it was not the lack of toughness and endurance that prevented the Italians from being useful in convoy battles, but rather faults in Italian submarine designs (i.e. their submarines were slow to dive and had large conning towers that made them easily visible) which limited their effectiveness in these situations.<sup>208</sup> Dönitz judged the Italian forces in the Atlantic according to the standards of German military culture and determined that although the Italians were capable of demonstrating *Angriffsgeist* in some instances, toughness and endurance were not elements of their “natural character,” and this was why they had failed to perform in convoy battles. In this way, military culture obscured the way the Italian forces were viewed and judged by many of their German allies.

Another way that Germans at both the highest and lowest levels of the military judged Italy's fighting capabilities from military culture was through the relationships that existed between Italian officers and soldiers. In North Africa particularly, where the Germans and Italians worked most closely together, many Germans were disturbed by the relationships between Italian officers and soldiers. This demonstrates another way that the Italians were held to the standards of German military culture and failed in comparison. Following the war, Kesselring wrote about the relationship between Italian officers and soldiers, and how this gave

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 149-50.

<sup>208</sup> Bernard Ireland, *Battle of the Atlantic* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 51-2.



him the impression that the Italians did not possess the comradeship between leaders and men necessary for fighting effectively:

I attributed this unsatisfactory state of affairs above all to the lack of contact between officers and men. An Italian officer led a segregated life; having no perception of the needs of his men, he was unable to meet them as occasion required, and so in critical situations he lost control. The Italian private, even in the field, received quite different rations from the officers. The amount multiplied in ratio to rank; and needless to say, along with the greater quantity the tidbits went to the top. The officers are separate and were very often unaware of how much or what their men got. This undermined the sense of comradeship which should prevail between men who live and die together.<sup>209</sup>

Writing after the war, Rommel also echoed these concerns:

Particularly harmful was the all-pervading differentiation between officer and man. While the men had to make shift without field-kitchens, the officers, or many of them, refused adamantly to forgo their several course meals. Many officers, again, considered it unnecessary to put in an appearance during battle and thus set the men an example.<sup>210</sup>

During the Battle of Tobruk, Rommel also expressed that the Italian soldier “was willing, unselfish and a good comrade, and, considering the conditions under which he served, had always given far better than the average,”<sup>211</sup> while the Italian officer “had thought of war as little more than a pleasant adventure and were, perforce, having to suffer a bitter disillusionment.”<sup>212</sup>

This was not just something reflected by those in command positions, however.

Werner Mork, a German truck driver in North Africa, also observed the tense relationship between Italian soldiers and officers:

There was one thing in Derna that we found to be very unpleasant and that was the carryings-on of the Italian rear echelon bastards. The appearance of these overblown, cock of the walk, proud officers were a crude contrast to the Italian brothers-in-arms that

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<sup>209</sup> Albert Kesselring, *Kesselring: A Soldier's Record* translated by Lynton Hudson. (Norwalk, CT: Easton Press, 1994), 121.

<sup>210</sup> Erwin Rommel, *The Rommel Papers* translated by B.H. Liddell Hart (London: Collins, 1953), 261-2.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-2.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

fought beside the Germans in the front lines. The showy arrogant, haughtiness of these rear echelon types was even offensive to the Italian civilians who had settled there.<sup>213</sup>

In the previous chapter it was explained how a strong or positive relationship between the soldier and the officer was never well established in the Italian army. In Italy's past wars, soldiers recalled the physical and verbal abuse they received from officers, and a highly strict hierarchical system remained in place where the officers and the men led separate and unequal existences. One reason for this was that the ordinary soldiers were not usually promoted based on talent.<sup>214</sup> Unity between officers and soldiers was never something instilled by the Italian armed forces as effectively as the German armed forces, because comradeship among all ranks was not seen as having a war-winning impact as it was in Germany.

By contrast, the German military had historically placed a great deal of emphasis on comradeship between all ranks, and in the Second World War comradeship came to be seen by the military as a significant factor of military strength. The German military also had been promoting men based on talent and not class since German unification in 1871. It is not particularly surprising then to find that low opinions of Italy's armed forces, such as those from Kesselring, were influenced by competing military cultures. The hierarchical and uncomradely relationships between officers and soldiers appeared backward and inferior to the armies of Germany who had already made such significant progress in eliminating these social distinctions from their armed forces.<sup>215</sup> As Richard L. DiNardo has argued, German officers should have

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<sup>213</sup> Werner Mork, *Aus Meiner Sicht* ('From My View'), translated by Daniel H. Setzer (2009), <[www.home.comcast.net/~dhsetzer/Mork/](http://www.home.comcast.net/~dhsetzer/Mork/)> "Driving Supply Trucks in Africa, 1942 Part II", 7.

<sup>214</sup> Knox, *Common Destiny*, 234.

<sup>215</sup> Lucio Ceva, "The North African Campaign 1940-3: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, no.1 (March 1990): 88.

realized that the faults of the other Axis armies were “a reflection of the stratified nature of the societies these armies were representing”<sup>216</sup> and not the fault of the soldiers themselves.

However, when observing the opinions of those involved more directly with the Italians, such as Rommel and Mork, the Italians were given a fairer assessment. The soldiers themselves were characterized more positively than their officer counterparts, and unlike in Kesselring’s assessment, the entire army was not considered to be lacking comradely spirit just because of the poor relations between officer and soldier. In North Africa, Germans who were participating more directly with the Italians on the battlefield gave them more positive and less racially charged characterizations. They also recalled instances of individual heroism amongst Italian soldiers. Rommel wrote:

The duties of comradeship, for me particularly as their Commander-in-Chief, compel me to state unequivocally that the defeats which the Italian formations suffered at El Alamein in early July were not the fault of the Italian soldier... There is no doubt that the achievement of every Italian unit, especially of the motorised forces, far surpassed anything the Italian Army had done for a hundred years.<sup>217</sup>

And Mork recalled:

In my time in Africa I knew many Italian soldiers as good comrades who would share their last drop of water or their last cigarette with you. I also owe my life to an Italian as I will describe later. The humanistic qualities were no worse and sometimes better, and often more humane than my own comrades who with typical German haughtiness characterized the Italians as cowards. Humanism stood in contrast to a ‘Germanic Valor’ that was not learned, but inherent.<sup>218</sup>

Rommel and Mork demonstrate from their memoirs that there were indeed Germans who could at least be understanding of Italian limitations and difficulties and speak to the heroic performances of the individual Italian soldier.

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<sup>216</sup> Richard L. DiNardo, “The Dysfunctional Coalition: The Axis Powers and the Eastern Front in World War II,” *The Journal of Military History* 60, no. 4 (October 1996): 722.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-2.

<sup>218</sup> Mork, 7.

However, these opinions were not usually held by high ranking Germans who did not have personal experiences with Italian soldiers on the front as Rommel and Mork did. A consequence of the poor characterizations of the Italians by high ranking Germans was a tense atmosphere for military cooperation. Mork wrote that

the relationship with the Germans was very tense even up to Rommel's staff itself. This tension was so intense that cooperation between German and Italian staffs was hardly possible... There were many rumors of sabotage and betrayal carried out by the Italian staff in this echelon.<sup>219</sup>

Similarly, an Italian Major in North Africa, Paulo Caccia-Dominioni, wrote that when Giuseppe Mancinelli was promoted to the rank of General

he did all he could to smooth off the sharp edges of contact between the two races; but although he got on well enough with the Germans, the general atmosphere of the place remained hostile rather than anything else. Rommel's three closest collaborators – General Gause and Colonels Bayerlein and Westpal – disliked and despised the Italians. Rommel himself was still the most kindly disposed of them all and had the honesty in his changing moods to vary his criticism with genuine appreciation.<sup>220</sup>

Caccia-Dominioni observed that, although Rommel was the “most kindly disposed of them all”, there were indeed generals and other senior commanders in North Africa who despised the Italians, and as a result of having these two different cultures attempting to work together without any substantial framework for understanding one another, the general atmosphere remained hostile. So although instances of understanding can be found more commonly from members of the German military who were actually on the battlefield, these positive sentiments did not stop conflicts from arising over competing cultural ideas about the importance of comradeship among all ranks.

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Paulo Caccia-Dominioni, *Alamein 1933-1962: An Italian Story* translated by Dennis Chamberlin (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966), 106.

In the North African theatre of war, competing military doctrines also proved to make coalition warfare increasingly difficult at a tactical and operational level. In September 1940

Rommel wrote about Rodolfo Graziani's Italian forces:

But its worst feature was the fact that a great part of the Italian Army consisted of non-motorized infantry. In the North African desert, non-motorized troops are of practically no value against a motorized enemy, since the enemy has the chance in almost every position, of making the action fluid by turning movement round the south. Non-motorized formations, which can only be used against a modern army defensively and in prepared positions, will disturb him very little in such an operation. In mobile warfare, the advantage lies as a rule with the side which is subject to the least tactical restraint on account of its non-motorized troops.<sup>221</sup>

From this passage it is evident that many principles of German military doctrine discussed in the previous chapter remained firmly in place in the Second World War. German military doctrine had consistently emphasized the need for fast-paced offensive warfare.<sup>222</sup> German manuals for tactical doctrine from *Das FuG* in the 1920s to *Truppenführung* in the 1930s always focused on mobile warfare, the primacy of the offensive, and defense purely as a temporary prelude to the offense.<sup>223</sup> These techniques were not lost on Rommel, who expressed in this passage that non-motorized units (such as those of the Italians) were of “practically no value” against motorized forces. These aspects of military doctrine are significant, because within the same theatre, German and Italian military leaders had very different outlooks on how the war should be fought and this influenced how they viewed each other as militarily capable allies.

From the same entry Rommel expressed his frustration with the Italian army when he observed Italian General Rodolfo Graziani's slow moving fighting style:

Graziani's Army was set in motion in September 1940, at a time when the British had nothing in Egypt capable of halting the Italians before Alexandria. Starting from the

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<sup>221</sup> Erwin Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 91.

<sup>222</sup> Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 147.

<sup>223</sup> Bruce Condell and David T. Zabecki, 3.

Bardia area, the Italian divisions moved across the Egyptian frontier at Sollum and then along the coast to Sidi Barrani. The weak British holding forces did not stand to fight a decisive action, but skilfully fell back to the east before the advancing Italians. After reaching Sidi Barrani, Graziani did not continue his advance, but chose instead to fortify the territory he had gained and lay a communication road along the coast; then he went on to assemble stores and reinforcements and to organise water supplies... Weeks and months passed, but Graziani still stood fast at Sidi Barrani.<sup>224</sup>

It is significant to note that Italy certainly had some potential to be better motorized in this theatre of operations if resources had been more concentrated. For instance, when Graziani halted at Sidi Barrani in September 1940, he requested some motorized transport at the very least. Mussolini, however, rejected this appeal because he wished to use what resources he had for an attack he planned on Yugoslavia.<sup>225</sup> In addition, the lack of initiative in pursuing mobile warfare also influenced defeats through the summer of 1941. While Graziani did suffer from a lack of trucks and tanks, he did have artillery in abundance and, as Lucio Ceva has argued, could have tried to advance further by motorizing one or two infantry divisions supported by artillery, rather than trying to move his large marching infantry all together on foot.<sup>226</sup> Ceva argues that although this would not have allowed Graziani to conquer Egypt, he would at least have put up a better show.<sup>227</sup> Ultimately, when it came to mobile warfare, Graziani did not exhibit much initiative to adapt to mobile warfare in North Africa and Mussolini likewise had no interest in emphasizing mobility in this area because he refused to send motorized transport since his sights were set on other regions.

The lack of importance that was placed on mobile tactics could perhaps be attributed to the ways that the Italian military thought about tactics which, as demonstrated in the previous

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<sup>224</sup> Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 91-2.

<sup>225</sup> Lucio Ceva, "The North African Campaign 1940-43: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 3, no.1 (March 1990): 86.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

chapter, often emphasized the fortification of captured areas, rather than the pursuit of additional goals after accomplishing the initial one.<sup>228</sup> This drastically contrasted with German military doctrine that emphasized pushing on to capture second and third objectives as soon as possible.<sup>229</sup> German and Italian military leaders had drastically different understandings of how to pursue the war in North Africa, and without a centralized command to determine what kind of tactical approach to take, disagreements inevitably emerged.

In January of 1941, German General Hans Freiherr von Funk wrote about the Italian forces in Libya:

The current situation in Libya and its probable further development make it appear advisable to refrain from joining the Italians in the purely defensive measures planned by them, which moreover do not appear at all promising, but rather to participate in strength in a large-scale offensive defense.<sup>230</sup>

Once again, the disparity in approaches is clear and also had real consequences for the war effort. As General von Funk realized, it would be necessary to dispatch stronger forces to Libya in January 1941 in order to conduct an offensive defense as imagined by the Germans. Such forces, however, would arrive too late for an offensive operation.<sup>231</sup> Because these two allies possessed such different understandings of warfare, they attempted to approach the same military situation in opposite ways. And as has been demonstrated previously, the lack of trust between the two allies prevented them from forming any kind of cohesive unified command.<sup>232</sup> In this instance, troops could not be sent to Libya in time to remedy the situation in January 1941, because a

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<sup>228</sup> John Gooch, "Clausewitz Disregarded," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 9, no.2 (June 1986): 313.

<sup>229</sup> Williamson Murray, "German Army Doctrine, 1918-1919 and the Post-1945 Theory of 'Blitzkrieg Strategy'," in *German Nationalism and the European Response, 1890-1945* edited by Carole Fink, Isabel V. Hull, and Macgregor Knox, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 83.

<sup>230</sup> "Greiner Series: Africa 1941," *World War II German Military Studies*, Vol. 7, 13.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>232</sup> Only in the final stages of the campaign in North Africa was a combined command structure attempted, and by then it was too late to have a significant effect on cooperative effectiveness. See DiNardo, *German and the Axis Powers*, 170.

single approach had not been determined beforehand. As German General Enno von Rintelen wrote in 1947, despite the political friendship between Hitler and Mussolini, this had “no effect on the military relations [between Germany and Italy], which were characterized by a rather cool restraint on both sides.”<sup>233</sup> Military relations were thus highly impacted by competing military doctrines that emphasized opposite tactical approaches to war.

Within this same theatre and the relationship between Rommel and Gariboldi, differing military cultures also impacted chain of command. As Rommel recounts in April 1941, he had tense arguments with General Italo Gariboldi over the lack of *Auftragstaktik* (a feature of German military culture that dictated it was only necessary for directives to state the overall intentions of supreme command while leaving the means of achieving intentions up to subordinate commands)<sup>234</sup> in the Italian military:

On my return to H.Q. I met the Italian Commander-in-Chief, General Gariboldi, who was by no means pleased about the course of the action to date, and berated me violently, principally because our operations were in direct contradiction to orders from Rome... He wanted me to discontinue all action and undertake no further moves without his express authority. I had made up my mind to stand out from the start, for the greatest possible measure of operational and tactical freedom and, what is more, had no intention of allowing good opportunities to slip by unused. As a result the conversation became somewhat heated. I stated my views plainly and without equivocation. General Gariboldi wanted to get authority from Rome first. But that way days could go by unused; I was not going to stand for it, and said that I intended to go on doing what I felt I had to in whatever situation might arise. This brought the argument to a climax. At that very moment, a signal arrived—*deus ex machina*—from the German High Command, giving me complete freedom of action, and settling the argument exactly as I wanted it.<sup>235</sup>

While the German military culture approached war by emphasizing “free” and “creative” activity in the armed forces, Italian military culture emphasized a cult of absolute obedience to superiors

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<sup>233</sup> Enno von Rintelen, “The German-Italian Cooperation During World War II,” *World War II German Military Studies* Vol. 14, 6.

<sup>234</sup> Peter Paret, “Clausewitz,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* edited by Peter Paret, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 212.

<sup>235</sup> Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 111.



that often turned into passiveness and inactivity on the part of officers. General von Rintelen similarly wrote that the Italians “conducted the war against the British just like a colonial war, in spite of the fact that the opponent was European and that only the battlefield was on colonial ground... Hitler’s headquarters became very impatient.”<sup>236</sup> A culture of obedience to authority in a highly regimented hierarchical army influenced Gariboldi’s inclination to receive authority from Rome before acting, while a culture of taking individual initiative influenced Rommel’s emphasis on the need for immediate action without explicit permission in order to save valuable time. More generally, the entire Italian approach to war in this instance appeared backward to the German generals who grew impatient with their slow moving style. The consequences in this situation involved further intensification of mistrust and high tensions when Rommel said that he intended to do things his own way regardless of Italian intentions because the Italian command was not up to the task of carrying on a war “where the requirement was lightning decision followed by immediate action.”<sup>237</sup> In May, Ciano demonstrated the further consequences of tensions in North Africa when he wrote:

Mussolini instructs me to read an order of the day which Rommel addressed to our divisional commanders in Libya. He goes so far as to threaten to denounce them before military tribunal. It seems that, owing to this, some trouble has arisen, and I would be surprised if it were otherwise. In Albania, too, where at a certain point our Army has had to face considerable obstruction from the Germans, the feeling of resentment towards our Allies is marked. The Duce realizes this and gives Farinacci the responsibility of drafting a letter to Hitler to call attention to what has happened.<sup>238</sup>

While Rommel’s behaviour was perhaps exceptional, his disagreements with Gariboldi were grounded in the different approaches to warfare exhibited by Germans and Italians.

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<sup>236</sup> Enno von Rintelen, Enno von Rintelen, “The German-Italian Cooperation During World War II,” *World War II German Military Studies* Vol. 14, 28.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-2.

<sup>238</sup> Ciano, 338.

Another space for misunderstanding existed within differing enthusiasms for the war. Broader martial culture determined many of the attitudes towards war and these in turn affected enthusiasms. This is a significant area of analysis because the Italian lack of enthusiasm for the war could make many Germans on the battlefield resentful that they were fighting next to “cowardly” Italian soldiers. In North Africa, Mork observed that,

there were differing opinions on the combat units of the Italians. Certainly the very arrogant German haughtiness played a role, fed by the negative assessment of the Italians in the First World War. But there were several incidents that justified these low opinions because there were several Italian units that went over to the British without putting up any fight whatsoever. This was something the German soldiers couldn't understand, and it made them really angry that they were risking their necks for these cowards. Given their viewpoint in those times, unfortunately it was understandable that they would think only of themselves.<sup>239</sup>

As Mork demonstrates, many Germans viewed the Italians' military capabilities based on negative assessments of Italy's performance in the First World War. Because of Italy's historic failures at Caporetto, for instance (in which Austria-Hungary and Germany overwhelmingly crushed Italian forces), they were already presumed to be incapable of effective military combat. In this way, military history also played a role in the negative assessments Germans in the military had of their Italian allies. But without an understanding for the greater context of Italian views about war, it was difficult to understand that the majority of Italians did not see Hitler's war aims as worth fighting for. In this context, enthusiasm for the war played a significant role in the perceptions that members of the German military formed of their Italian comrades. As Mork writes, there was “something the German soldiers couldn't understand about the Italians,” and that likely included Italy's hasty capitulation in certain combat situations.

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<sup>239</sup> Mork, 7.

Ciano wrote frequently and worriedly in his diaries about Italy going to war without any enthusiasm. In August 1939, while Mussolini was considering whether or not Italy should remain neutral, Ciano wrote that a war alongside Germany “would be a mad venture, carried out against the unanimous will of the Italian people, who as yet do not know how things stand, but who, having had a sniff of the truth, have had a sudden fit of rage against the Germans.”<sup>240</sup>

Likewise in the Mediterranean theatre, Mauerer reflected on the Italian will to win and explained that the average Italian did not understand why they were fighting in Greece:

In that respect, alone, Italy was almost completely unprepared despite all the exhortations and saber-rattling of Mussolini and his minions. The masses of Italy were totally unready and unwilling to bear the terrible miseries and sacrifices of modern war. The apathy and disinterest in the war on the part of the people as a whole was reflected through the ranks of our armed forces, starting from the top and working down... We have experienced three thousand years of wars, famines, invasions, plagues, victories, defeats, dictatorships, republics, empires... We knew this war was pointless, profitless. We knew we had been plunged into a reckless adventure... No one had given them any convincing reason why they should be fighting at all because there really wasn't any reason, convincing or otherwise. As individuals, I think our soldiers, fliers, and sailors have no cause to reproach themselves. They were fighting against impossible odds.<sup>241</sup>

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the Italian military had not placed a great deal of emphasis on educating its soldiers on the purpose of the war they were fighting or in cultivating national sentiment. The average Italian soldier was never given a satisfactory reason for fighting the Second World War. Although there was some initial enthusiasm, wars historically had never reaped many economic benefits for the Italian people, and so Mauerer's claim that the people started to see the war as “pointless” and “profitless” is convincing. In an excerpt from his diary on June 10, 1940 he also stated, “The only reason, the only justification for taking part would be given if either England or Germany made a move to occupy our territory. Then, and only then,

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<sup>240</sup> Ciano, 127. See also entry on p. 258.

<sup>241</sup> Mauerer, 4, 108.

should we have taken up the sword.”<sup>242</sup> This statement also reflects Italy’s martial culture which emphasized the importance of morality in war. The previous chapter demonstrated that nationalism was much easier to foster when Italians were defending their own borders, because territorial acquisition was harder to prove as a morally justified cause for war.

Similar sentiments to Maugeri’s were also echoed on the North African front. Italian Captain Paulo Caccia-Dominioni, whose memoirs recount the second battle at El Alamein wrote:

The 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Bersaglieri occupied Sidi Barrani, Buq Buq, El Maktila and Alam el Nibeyiwa... names soaked in the bloodshed in those tragic hours that had seen the destruction of Graziani’s army, when the incompetence of leaders and politicians had brought shame on 400,000 Italians who did not deserve such a fate and who, in other hands, would have given an honourable account of themselves. How many of the troops today knew that beneath this very sand lay men of our divisions, lined up like the Alpini who fell at Adua? What good had been served by the sacrifice of the two Libyan divisions and the men who served under Maletti? But such thoughts were out of place.<sup>243</sup>

Caccia-Dominioni’s account similarly recalls Italian sacrifices with a sense of pointlessness.

What is particularly significant is his comparison of the Italian Libyan divisions to the *Alpini* who fell at Adua in the First Italo-Ethiopian War. Italy decisively lost and was humiliated by the events at Adua in 1896 and Italians had unanimously condemned the government and its leaders for the excursion in several demonstrations.<sup>244</sup> This comparison is significant because it suggests that, to Caccia-Dominioni, the war was not seen as justified and the lands in North Africa they were attempting to conquer were seen as being just as undesirable as they had been in 1896.

The German military and its leaders on the other hand, were very clear about what the German military was fighting for. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, these ideas made sense and fit in well with German martial culture and history. In the report referenced earlier in this chapter from October 1938, Hitler established that the purpose of the war was to

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>243</sup> Caccia-Dominioni, 34-5.

<sup>244</sup> Alessandro Triulzi, “Adua: From Monument to Document,” *Modern Italy* 8, no.1 (May 2003): 101.

secure the nation and state's historical future. The war has a high moral purpose with ethical justification. The war is beyond a purely political act, or a military battle for economic benefits. Stake, profit, and loss rise to previously unimagined heights. The end of a lost war threatens not only damage, but the destruction of the state and the people... The war is a struggle for the survival of each individual. Since everyone has everything to gain and everything to lose, everyone has to use everything. This means the end of any private activity only for the duration of the war, forcing all manifestations of state and private life under the guiding principle: "The attainment of victory."<sup>245</sup>

In Hitler's explanation it was not just about the physical things which could be profited from war, it was about the survival of individuals, not just the concept of the nation. On June 10, 1940, when Mussolini spoke of Italy's purpose in joining the war he said that "we want to snap the territorial and military chains which suffocate us in our sea... [Italians] could not really be free if they do not have free access to the Ocean." Mussolini's concept of the purpose of the war was mainly for territorial acquisition, so that Italy could control the Mediterranean. He also framed the war as a battle against "the plutocratic and reactionary democracies of the west" that had blocked these aspirations.<sup>246</sup> He also said, "Our conscience is absolutely clear"<sup>247</sup> in regards to pursuing these goals, but without an explanation for why such goals were morally right. From the perspective of average Italians, Mussolini's rhetoric claimed that war only benefitted a greater concept of nation, which was not something Italians held with more importance than local and familial bonds anyway as demonstrated in Chapter 1. Hitler, by contrast, had Nazism's racial agenda as explanation for the moral rightness of the war's cause. Mussolini had nothing comparable. Mussolini also never emphasized that the war would benefit individual Italians like Hitler claimed the war was for the survival of individual Germans.

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<sup>245</sup> "No Title," Nr. 242, 19 October 1938 National Archives Microfilm Publication T77, roll 1429, frame 000266.

<sup>246</sup> *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini* edited by Edoardo Susmel and Duilio Susmel, vol. 29, (Florence 1951-1981), 403-5 quoted in Bosworth, 369.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

Traditionally, views about warfare had been framed in German martial culture as a zero-sum struggle for national survival. There was an emphasis by the military on the notion of “military necessity”, that is, war was necessary for national survival and therefore trampled on moral or legal restraints.<sup>248</sup> The Italian population by contrast had historically not perceived expansionist war aims as worth fighting for. In Italian martial culture, it was understood that Italy’s national survival counted on defending the borders that already existed. Furthermore, Chapter 1 established how Italian martial culture placed importance on the moral justification for war, a tradition established by the *Risorgimento*. Maugeri, in talking of the Italian blunder in Greece, wrote: “Our armed forces fought bravely and well, considering their lack of leadership and belief in the moral rightness of their cause.”<sup>249</sup>

By contrast, in another report from October 1938, Hitler made clear his basic beliefs in the conduct of war and emphasized the importance of the military’s total belief and faith in the leadership:

The requirements of the political and military successes of a state are obedience, loyalty, and faith in leadership. Without it every officer and troop is worthless. An indifferent or even unwilling obedience is not enough... Where Germany has been victorious in the past, there were emotional forces at work, which proved to be more effective than the superiority of the enemy in numbers and material.<sup>250</sup>

Hitler explained that an “indifferent” or even “unwilling” level of obedience made every officer and troop worthless. Therefore, from Hitler’s perspective, it could be argued that a significant majority of Italian officers and soldiers were worthless because Italian hearts were not in the war. Without understanding why Italians hearts were not in the war, Italians appeared cowardly in the

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<sup>248</sup> Knox, *To the Threshold of Power*, 103.

<sup>249</sup> Maugeri, 108.

<sup>250</sup> “No Title,” Nr. 242, T77/1429/000264.

face of battle from the German perspective. Especially in instances such as those Rommel wrote of in February 1941, where

Italian troops had thrown away their weapons and ammunition and clambered on to overloaded vehicles in a wild attempt to get away to the west. This had led to some ugly scenes, and even to shooting. Morale was as low as it could be in all military circles in Tripoli. Most of the Italian officers had already packed their bags and were hoping for a quick return trip to Italy.<sup>251</sup>

Rommel observed that without comparable enthusiasms for the war, ugly situations including shooting at the Italian forces emerged when Italians attempted to flee from combat. With such different enthusiasms for the war, racially discriminatory characterizations were often framed in the context of Italy's cowardice or inability to fight.

For instance, Kesselring connected instances of poor battlefield performance to racist ideas about "northern" Europeans and "southern" ones:

As might be expected from a nation of southern temperament, the Italian armed forces were trained more for display than for action... Even if the lack of combat training facilities was particularly obvious in the Italian barracks, mere soldierly discipline fell far short of my ideal as a German officer. One had only to watch a simple changing of the guard to see that the Italian soldier had no enthusiasm for his profession. Perhaps as a differently constituted Northerner my standards of judgement were wrong, but I think events justified me.<sup>252</sup>

In this example, Kesselring does not have any explanation for the Italian soldier's lack of enthusiasm, and so draws racial conclusions by connecting lack of enthusiasm to the "southern temperament" of the Italian armed forces. Similarly, a couple of months after the disastrous failed attempt at seizing of Tobruk in late 1941, Ciano wrote in his diary:

Again Mussolini complains of the behaviour of the Germans in Italy. He has before him the transcript of a telephone call by one of Kesselring's aides, who, when speaking to Berlin, called us "macaroni" and hoped that Italy, too, would become an occupied

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<sup>251</sup> Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, 100.

<sup>252</sup> Kesselring, *Kesselring: A Soldier's Record*, 120-121.

country. The Duce is keeping a dossier of all this, which “is to be used when the moment comes.”<sup>253</sup>

The comment from Kesselring’s aide created an impression on the Italians of how poorly members of the German leadership thought of them and their fighting capabilities. Historians such as John Gooch and Lucio Ceva have demonstrated that the Italians did in fact often fight well in North Africa.<sup>254</sup> So, when the allies did not share the same level of enthusiasm for the war and this was not understood, everything that Italy (the militarily weaker ally) failed to achieve was often perceived as laziness or idiocy by the members of German high command who did not have personal experiences on the battlefield to draw from.

As a consequence of these misunderstandings, many Italians in the military felt that they were unreasonably shouldering the bulk of the responsibility for military failure. In July 1942, Caccia-Dominioni recalled a meeting he witnessed between someone only described as a privileged visitor and Captain Guiglia, who were going over a report that involved tank losses and casualties. Captain Guiglia declared that even though the Italians had suffered greater losses than the Germans, it did not stop them from “moaning about the Italians running away, the Italians not wanting to fight, the Italians losing their colonies and expecting the Germans to win them back for them without lifting a finger to help, etc. etc.”<sup>255</sup> Another Italian officer also complained about the cowardly reputation given to the Italian army by the Germans:

Since things have taken a turn for the worse, you hear the same old story: “The Italians are giving in again.” It was only to be expected. It’s always the weaker partner who bears the brunt of it when the luck begins to change – especially when the stronger partner is a master in the art of covering up his own weaknesses and exaggerating those of others.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Ciano, 426.

<sup>254</sup> See for instance John Gooch, “Italian Military Efficiency: A Debate,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 1982): 257-265 and Lucio Ceva, “The North African Campaign 1940-43: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 13, no. 1 (March 1990): 84-104.

<sup>255</sup> Caccia-Dominioni, 77.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.



In August 1942, General Barbasetti di Prun (Chief of Staff at North African *Comando Supremo*), said on the question of transport and reinforcements: “This last point was the most tricky, for the Germans were always ready to accuse us of negligence, in an attempt to shift the responsibility on to our shoulders whenever things took a turn for the worse.”<sup>257</sup> In these instances, some Germans within the military did not have an understanding of Italian military history and martial culture more broadly and therefore did not understand why Italian enthusiasm for the war was so low. Therefore, there was a popular perception within the German military that the Italian forces were lazy, negligent, and incapable of putting up any kind of fight. While both powers had their faults and were responsible for various failures, the part that martial culture played in the poor conduct of coalition warfare is certainly not irrelevant. Two countries with vastly different militaries, cultural practices, and histories attempted to work together with poor understandings of one another. Nor were any attempts made by either power before or during the war to understand their culturally distinct military allies.

This chapter has demonstrated how different military cultures, martial cultures, tactical, operational, and strategic ideas affected or influenced the main theatres of war that Germany and Italy attempted to cooperate and conduct coalition warfare in. Franco Maugeri wrote that the Axis alliance was a fatal one, “because Italians and Germans were culturally and spiritually poles apart.”<sup>258</sup> In many ways this was true. At the highest levels of German leadership, racial and cultural biases most certainly existed. The German leadership’s understanding of the Italian military was based on its own cultural perceptions of what made a successful military, and thus mistrust was easily bred because Italy’s leaders and armed forces were perceived to be so

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>258</sup> Maugeri, 8.

untrustworthy and incapable. This led Hitler and other high ranking Germans to withhold war plans and refrain from fully disclosing intentions to their Italian allies, which then resulted in reciprocal actions from Mussolini. Geographic positions also dictated the type of strategic goals that were pursued by each power, and that happened to be in direct opposition to one another. Tactical and operational approaches were also argued over in North Africa, because doctrine and military culture differed so much between Germany and Italy. While some understanding of the Italian position existed from Germans working directly with the Italians on the battlefield, ultimately this did not do anything to relieve the tension and mistrust that existed at all levels. The lens of Germany's own culture and experience with war was important in establishing how many Nazi leaders as well as members of the German armed forces perceived their Italian allies, particularly in those theatres in which the two powers were forced to cooperate closely.

### Chapter 3: The Eastern Front and the End of the War

The military, economic, and ideological focal point of Hitler's strategy in 1941 was always Russia.<sup>259</sup> For Mussolini, however, militarily, economically, and ideologically, a war on the Eastern Front made little to no sense. Reasons for Mussolini's decision to involve Italy on the Eastern Front were similar to some of his reasons for entering the war more broadly. He assumed that involving Italy in this theatre would allow him to claim a share of the spoils after a German victory, but what those spoils were was never clear.<sup>260</sup> Mussolini also wanted to send Italian troops to the Eastern Front in order to assert his equality as a partner in the Axis alliance.<sup>261</sup> However, even if Italian soldiers had been fully convinced of their purposes in North Africa and the Mediterranean, those limited and parallel aims were incompatible with a German crusade for *Lebensraum* in the East. As Richard L. DiNardo has argued, Mussolini's limited reasons for committing Italian forces on the Eastern Front never even reached the common Italian soldier or officer in the army.<sup>262</sup> This is perhaps why tensions and mistrust were even higher in this theatre than in the Mediterranean or North African theatres of the war. This chapter will explore the ways that incongruent martial cultures, military cultures, and military histories affected cooperation between Germany and Italy on the Eastern Front. It will also account for other sources of tension such as differing levels of military modernity, as well as broader cultural differences such as in language.

In addition to examining the Eastern Front, this chapter will also address some of the difficulties Germany faced in trying to cooperate with Italians after Mussolini's arrest on July 25,

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<sup>259</sup> Richard L. DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers: From Coalition to Collapse* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 92.

<sup>260</sup> Richard L. DiNardo, "The Dysfunctional Coalition: The Axis Powers and the Eastern Front in World War II," *The Journal of Military History* 60, no. 4 (October 1996): 727.

<sup>261</sup> Mario Fenyo, "The Allied Axis Armies and Stalingrad," *Military Affairs* 29, no. 2 (Summer, 1965), 60.

<sup>262</sup> Richard L. DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 157.

1943. A consequence of the different martial characteristics and military cultures and histories of each army was a tendency for German military leaders to perceive their Italian allies as incapable fighters, which, when pointed out with arrogance, further alienated the Italians from the alliance relationship. Subsequently the German military leadership held the Italian (and Romanian and Hungarian) armies as responsible for key military failures on the Eastern Front. Differences in the broader cultural elements of Germany and Italy, for instance different languages, resulted in the inability to communicate effectively between allies and also limited the ability to use foreign equipment in a timely manner on this front. Finally, the disparate approaches to political education within each army had a considerable effect on different levels of enthusiasm for the war which not only contributed to military ineffectiveness, but also impeded German efforts to recruit Italian soldiers for the German army following Mussolini's arrest.

Firstly, it is necessary to establish that Italo-German relations on the Eastern Front were indeed a problem. On February 16, 1943, Hitler issued an order titled, "Treatment of the Remaining Allied Armies in the East." In the report, Hitler stated that,

From a number of reports and complaints I have been forced to see that German troops and departments have often been treating the remains of the Italian, Romanian, and Hungarian armies in the East in an insulting manner. If troops fall prey to panic, they will no longer follow orders. Every German officer is of course entitled and obliged to ruthless intervention by any means. I must condemn it if the disciplined force should be treated by German agencies and troops with contempt and unworthiness. A prerequisite for a promising application of these men is their confidence in German camaraderie and a precondition of this is to be treated fairly by us... All German soldiers should also recognize that each case of unworthy treatment of allied troops in the East would provide material for activity directed against Germany by oppositional elements within these countries, and could only endanger the political agreement with these countries... I therefore expect that the allied troops, as in the past, are always treated with comradeship and decency.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> "Army High Command 2," Nr. 31811/52, 16 February 1943 National Archives Microfilm Publication T312, roll 1217, frame 000516.

Evidently, the tensions between the German and Italian armies on the Eastern Front were significant enough for Hitler to issue a directive on appropriate behaviour between allies. What is also relevant from this report is that tensions seem to have existed not only between German and Italian officers or those in leadership positions, but also between soldiers. In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that in February 1941 a very similar report had been issued by Hitler over these issues in other Italian theatres of war. Like in the example from 1941, nothing beyond these very basic instructions was done to improve these tense relationships. Hitler's directive also does not appear to be effective in eliminating these issues, as they came up again within a few days and then again in the following month.

A German report from February 19, 1943 (from an unidentified signatory) indicated that German soldiers and officers were still not demonstrating respectful behaviour towards the other Axis allies, but like Hitler's report from 1943, there were not any instructions given on how to remedy the situation. The report stated that,

it should be noted again that many German soldiers and also officers, in sometimes justified bitterness, do not preserve decency, comradeship, and correct behaviour towards allies as it must be demanded and expected of a German soldier.<sup>264</sup>

Evidently if Germans in authoritative positions within the German army condoned this behaviour and believed mistreatment to sometimes be justified, not much would be done to remedy the circumstances. Later, in mid-March, the Italians continued to complain of these behaviours as nothing had improved. The minutes of a meeting on March 17, 1943 between Italian Fascist Dino Alfieri and German Secretary of State Gustav Adolf Steengracht von Moyland stated that, "the feeling of the German army and public towards their Italian comrades in arms was subdued.

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<sup>264</sup> "Army High Command 2," Nr. 31811/52, 19 February 1943 National Archives Microfilm Publication T-312, roll 1217, frame 000515.

The Duce was considering what could be done to re-establish complete and comradely confidence.”<sup>265</sup>

One of the differences in each society that contributed to dysfunction, but was not quite influenced by culture, included differing levels of military modernity. This was an area that increased many German leaders’ irritation with Italian forces. Italy’s lack of military modernity resulted in the immobility and military ineffectiveness of the Italian units on the Eastern Front. In regards to both the immobility and ineffectiveness of the units, economic limitations played a large role. In 1941, the Italian Expeditionary Corps (*Corp di Spedizione in Russia* or CSIR), operating on the Eastern Front with German General Ewald von Kleist’s First Panzer Group in Army Group South consisted of about 62,000 men and only 5,500 motor vehicles. In addition, General Efasio Marras, the Italian Military Attaché in Berlin, ascribed the defeat of the Italian Eighth Army at Stalingrad who fought along the Don River, to having to defend too long a front with too few modern weapons. Antitank guns were so ineffective that the troops developed a fear of enemy tanks.<sup>266</sup> What can be found in this theatre is that Italy did not have the economic means to properly equip their forces for mobility or effectiveness, because supplies had been spread thin over the theatres of war that Italy was already involved in. Additionally, resupply or new equipment from the Germans never amounted to much because of Germany’s own economic limitations. The German economy consistently failed to produce enough tanks, assault guns, trucks, etc. (with the exception of aircraft) to meet even German needs, let alone the needs

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<sup>265</sup> Steengracht Minute. March 17, 1943. Italian Collection TNA quoted in F. W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler, and the Fall of Italian Fascism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), 209.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

of its Italian (and Romanian and Hungarian) allies. In addition, Germany often sold its allies captured material that was usually obsolete.<sup>267</sup>

A lack of modern weapons led to tensions because, according to German military doctrine which emphasized improvisation with limited means, the excuse of lacking weapons was not legitimate. German General Hermann Hoth, commander of the Fourth Panzer Army, wrote to the commander of the Romanian Fourth Army, that the Romanian, Hungarian, and Italian armies failed to make use of improvisations such as employing field artillery in an antitank role to perform more effectively with fewer materials on the Eastern Front.<sup>268</sup> What had been overlooked by General Hoth was the fact that the means to establish alternative antitank defenses were also in short supply.<sup>269</sup> General Hoth also did not consider that Italian military doctrine had never emphasized this improvisational approach to warfare. According to *Truppenführung*, the basic doctrinal manual for the German army in the 1930s, the ability of the men to take initiative to creatively solve problems was a key component to a modern army.<sup>270</sup> By contrast, the Italian army had expected a cult of obedience from the enlisted men, which discouraged initiative and creativity in battle. Any soldier could even be reprimanded for improvising on the battlefield without explicit permission.<sup>271</sup>

Therefore, General Hoth perceived the failure to make use of improvisational possibilities as a demonstration of the incapability of Italian soldiers to fight. A consequence of this was that a major cause of friction between Germans and Italians on the Eastern Front was the German

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<sup>267</sup> DiNardo, "Dysfunctional Coalition," 718-720.

<sup>268</sup> "Hoth to Konstantinescu," 17 December 1942, National Archives Microfilm Publication T311, roll 269, frame 000566 quoted in DiNardo, "Dysfunctional Coalition," 721.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Williamson Murray, "Does Military Culture Matter?" *Orbis* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 139.

<sup>271</sup> Macgregor Knox, "The First World War and Military Culture: Continuity and Change in Germany and Italy," in *Imperial Germany Revisited* edited by Sven Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 216.

perception of Italian fighting capabilities. As Italian General Giovanni Messe recalled in his memoirs, it was not unusual for Germans to see the Italians as the “Greasy Auxiliary” that was poorly dressed, lacking military competence, and was judged by their inability to keep up with the Germans on the Eastern Front.<sup>272</sup> Although all of the other Axis allies on the Eastern Front had been judged similarly, the Italian approach in particular was understood by Germans in leadership positions as too regimented and unable to make those improvisations that were so necessary to combat operations. Divergent understandings of the amount of flexibility and initiative that should be allowed to lower ranks was such a significant source of tension because criticisms were often pointed out by German leaders with an arrogance that further alienated Germany’s Italian allies.<sup>273</sup> General Messe characterized the friction that the slow moving nature of the Italian army caused in his memoir *La Guerra Al Fronte Russo* (The War on the Russian Front). On the morning of June 2, 1942 in a meeting with Italian General Magli and Mussolini he said,

I am convinced... that an army of over 200,000 men will be found very uncomfortable in Russia... Our poor and antiquated weaponry, the total lack of suitable armored vehicles, the great failure of the vehicles, the serious problems of the transports and supplies, are made more difficult by incomprehension and the uncompromising egoism of the Germans.<sup>274</sup>

Similarly Italian lieutenant Nuto Revelli noted in his memoirs, *La Guerra dei Poveri* (The War of the Poor) that he felt Germans on the Eastern Front were, “arrogant, [and] convinced they could treat [Italians] as inferior.”<sup>275</sup> Similarly, Italian lieutenant Bruno Zavagli wrote in *Solo un*

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<sup>272</sup> Giovanni Messe, *La Guerra al Fronte Russo* (Milan: Mursia, 2005), 18-21.

<sup>273</sup> DiNardo, “Dysfunctional Coalition,” 722.

<sup>274</sup> Messe, 216.

<sup>275</sup> Nuto Revelli, *La Guerra dei Poveri* (Torino: Einaudi, 1993) 107 quoted in Hope Hamilton, *Sacrifice on the Steppe: The Italian Alpine Corps in the Stalingrad Campaign, 1942-1943* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2011), 190.



*Pugno di Neve* (Only a Handful of Snow) that the Italian soldiers “could observe unlimited wickedness and egoism” from the Germans.<sup>276</sup>

A reason for German egoism was that Italy consistently proved to be nothing more than a burden to the German army on the Eastern Front. Italian General Raffaele Cadorna wrote that the Italian soldiers, “experienced more directly than others, by means of continuous and painful comparisons with [our] allies and the enemy, the depressing spectacle of our lack of preparation [for war].”<sup>277</sup> The Italian army had been built for defense, and a lack of productive capacity restricted the output of vehicles, but Mussolini sought to place the Italian army in the middle of a mobile charge across the Eastern Front anyway.<sup>278</sup> In addition, Italy could have been capable of devoting sufficient resources to either Russia or North Africa, but certainly not both.<sup>279</sup> The Italian lack of preparedness for this multi-front war exacerbated tensions because Italy could not adequately supply themselves and the German economy had consistently failed to produce the requisite number of mobile vehicles necessary for its allies as well.<sup>280</sup> As a result, the German military leadership often classified the Italians as incapable for not using alternative means such as improvisation to overcome obstacles, even though such approaches were never a part of Italian military culture.

Language barriers also impeded the Italian army’s ability to move quickly on the Eastern Front. Linguistic differences paired with a lack of resources had a poor effect on communications. While German officers who attended the *Kriegsakademie* did in fact receive

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<sup>276</sup> Bruno Zavagli, *Solo un Pugno di Neve* (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2010), 207-8 quoted in Hmlton, 161.

<sup>277</sup> Mario Niccoli, “La Resistenza italiana,” *Enciclopedia italiana Seconda appendice 1938-1948* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1949) 686-91 in *A History of Modern Italy: Documents, Readings, and Commentary* edited by Shepard B. Cough and Salvatore Saladino (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 526.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-60.

<sup>279</sup> DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 165.

<sup>280</sup> DiNardo, “Dysfunctional Coalition,” 718.

foreign language training as part of their course of instruction, English and French were usually the most common languages that were learned.<sup>281</sup> The Italians also did not possess diverse foreign language skills that would prepare them for a military alliance with Germany. While some high level Italian officers were conversant in German or French, understanding of foreign languages was not a learning priority for the majority of the Italian army. In Chapter 1, it was established that levels of literacy and education in general were rather low within Italy during this period and so the language capabilities of most Italian soldiers were also limited. By comparison, language was not much of an issue and provided only very few difficulties for the German Army in its relations with the Finns. In the Finnish school system German was taught as a second language, and thus most Finish officers knew German well.<sup>282</sup>

These language barriers between Germany and Italy contributed to communication failures on the Eastern Front. For example, German liaison efforts were hampered at times by a shortage of translators and interpreters. Of the few that they had, too many were relatively unfamiliar with military terminology. Therefore, they did not have the skills to properly convey a German commander's concept of operations and orders to the Italian commanders in question.<sup>283</sup> Language barriers were also problematic when dealing with different German and Italian equipment. Eugenio Corti, an Italian officer assigned to an artillery battalion of the Pasubio Division on the Eastern Front, wrote about these kinds of misunderstandings in October 1943:

In October, the Alpine Corps received a shipment of German anti-tank and antipersonnel mines. Up until this point, the Italians had had no experience with mines, and required clear instructions. The shipment of mines came with instructions written in German. No

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 714.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, 713-4.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 716.

one, according to Lieutenant Pasquale Grignaschi of the 124<sup>th</sup> Engineering Company, could translate the highly technical instructions.<sup>284</sup>

Since the alliance provided a frequent exchange of materials, language barriers became significant in limiting how easily and quickly those materials could be effectively used. This only further exacerbated the tensions that were already so pronounced over supply issues and Germany's inability to meet Italian requests for more materials.

On March 17, 1943, Italian Fascist politician Giuseppe Bastianini wrote to fellow Fascist Dino Alfieri over the issue of war materials and Germany's inability to effectively supply Italian units for mobility. He does not see Germany's economic limitations as a reason for Italy's poor supply situation and instead accuses Germany of intentional frugality in the face of Italian requests:

Evidence has mounted as to the deterioration of the climate between the two allies. I am sending you a note which speaks of the bad atmosphere towards us in Germany. I am sending it to you because it is not the only one of its kind and it is in direct contrast to the idea we had here of Italo-German relations; or rather, of the German state of mind about us. What is the real truth? ...scarcely any of the war materials we asked for have been sent. Now comparing this with the situation in the enemy camp, where material is sent in bulk from the USA to Russia, and to England, this extreme parsimony about material in the face of our need, and in the common interest, does serious moral and material harm.<sup>285</sup>

This is significant because this perception contributed to feelings of animosity between the two allies. As Bastianini said, the climate between the two allies had deteriorated. These tensions were never mended because the supply situation never improved and the Italians were unable to reach the positions of the German forces on the front lines in a timely manner due to their

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<sup>284</sup> Eugenio Corti, *Few Returned: Twenty-eight Days on the Russian Front, Winter 1942-1943* translated by Peter Edward Levy (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1997), 44.

<sup>285</sup> Bastianini to Alfieri, March 17, 1943. Italian Collection TNA quoted in Deakin, 207.

immobility.<sup>286</sup> Some Italians also began to characterize what they saw as malicious attempts made by Germans on the Eastern Front to purposely inhibit the Italian army.

In October 1941, during a private conversation with Mussolini, General Messe described the current conditions facing his soldiers, focusing particularly on the shortage of adequate transportation hampering the ability of his troops to keep up with German mobile divisions, as well as slowing the necessary flow of supplies from distant bases. Messe complained that deliveries of fuel to Italian troops arrived late and caused a slowdown in the Italian advance. At the same time, the Germans were becoming increasingly impatient and frustrated with the pace of Italian units, which were unable to rapidly reach German forces on the front lines.<sup>287</sup> Messe suggested that it was precisely Germany's slow transition of supplies to Italian units that made them move so slowly in the first place, and thus the Italians were being unfairly judged since circumstances were out of their control.

Other Italians have also written about the mistreatment they received by their German allies as a result of the scarceness supplies on this front. One Italian soldier, Amedo Tosti, wrote that as soon as the Germans began to face difficulties on the Eastern Front, the Italian units were shortchanged or supplied in a haphazard manner.<sup>288</sup> Italian officer Eugenio Corti also wrote about these kinds of experiences in December 1942:

Among other things, I heard of horses being unhitched from our isolated sleighs, which were loaded with wounded men, then hitched to some of their innumerable ones. And there was not a thing our soldiers could do because they were unarmed. One distinguishing feature of the Germans was that they performed deeds of this kind with utter impassivity, as if it were all in a day's work.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> DiNardo, "Dysfunctional Coalition," 718.

<sup>287</sup> Hamilton, 8.

<sup>288</sup> Amedo Tosti, *Da Versailles a Cassibile: lo sforzo militare italiano nel venticinquennio 1918-1943* (Roma: Cappelli, 1954), 165-66 in Fenyo, 69.

<sup>289</sup> Corti, 109.

Similarly, Lieutenant Zavagli recalled that in December 1942,

the Germans were the first to stop resisting and to flee with every vehicle, even stealing some Italian trucks. When Italian soldiers begged for a place from those already fleeing, and if they tried to climb on a truck, the good allies sneered at them, and hit their hands with the butts of their rifles until they let go.<sup>290</sup>

The tensions brought on by these instances also did not seem to improve as fighting on the Eastern Front continued into 1943. In June 1943, another Italian report indicated that during the battle on the Don the German units attached to Italian divisions refused to obey orders. The report alleged that German military ambulances refused to transport wounded Italian soldiers and generally speaking, the Germans denied the Italians all assistance.<sup>291</sup> Finally, in the spring of 1943 Bastianini wrote to Alfieri over similar issues that Zavagli and Corti brought up:

Think how very difficult it is to un-poison the minds of our comrades returning from the Soviet battle fields, who tell horrible tales of their suffering during the full retreat, when they were retreating on foot and fighting, and the others were flying to safer places in motor vehicles (some belonging to the Royal Italian Army)—if, in fact, there was a flight... Anyway, I am sure you will know how to use your tact and the necessary sincerity in time to smooth out the atmosphere.<sup>292</sup>

While German liaison officers tried to stop these practices, their efforts were largely ignored by most German soldiers.<sup>293</sup> The persistence of these issues from the winter of 1942 to the spring of 1943, demonstrates that these problems were never solved.

Even though the German economy was not capable of adequately supplying its allies, some Italians like Bastianini did not understand this and resentment was fostered by perceived German frugality. Italians who were actually fighting on the Eastern Front also faced increased animosity from their German allies because of the scarceness of materials. In tense situations such as retreating, vehicles were stolen and fought over, and Italians felt as though the Germans

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<sup>290</sup> Zavagli, 207 quoted in Hamilton, 161.

<sup>291</sup> Report dated June 1, 1943. Italian Military Collection TNA IT 4572 quoted in Fenyo, 69.

<sup>292</sup> Bastianini to Alfieri, March 17, 1943. Italian Collection TNA quoted in Deakin, 207.

<sup>293</sup> DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 155.

were treating them unequally by denying them all assistance. Whether these claims were true or not, Italians on the Eastern Front were certainly convinced of this and reports on the lack of camaraderie between Germans and Italians demonstrate that tension between the two allies was a legitimate concern.

A consequence of the uncomradely and often hostile environment in which these two allies operated in was that the Italian and other Axis armies were often blamed for military failures in this theatre of operations. As has been demonstrated, Germans in leadership positions had no confidence in the abilities of the Italian troops, and Italians at all levels of the military were acutely aware of these opinions. Despite the problems and grievances listed by Italian military leaders, members of the German military continued to emphasize that it was actually the fighting quality of the Italian (and Romanian and Hungarian) forces that was hindering all military efforts on the Eastern Front.

In March 1943, Alfieri complained to Bastianini that the Italian Expeditionary Corps, along with Romanian troops, were being blamed by the German forces for the failure to capture Stalingrad in the winter of 1942/1943. Alfieri claimed that the Germans had “emphasized this point with every publicity [and] had even ordered their cinematograph units to take films of the Italians in full flight.”<sup>294</sup> Alfieri felt that the Germans had unfairly portrayed the Italians while never demonstrating their own failure to produce reserves and supplies.<sup>295</sup> Italy’s failures in the Mediterranean also prefaced the opinion that high ranking Germans had of Italian capabilities on the Eastern Front. In July 1941, German Field Marshal and Chief of the German High Command Wilhelm Keitel wrote: “How were half-soldiers like these [Italians] supposed to stand up to the

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<sup>294</sup> Minute of the Italian Ministry of Popular Culture to the Italian Embassy, Berlin. April 17, 1943. Italian Collection TNA quoted in Deakin, 205.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

Russians, if they had collapsed even in the face of the wretched peasant folk of Greece?”<sup>296</sup>

Keitel also characterized the Italian military as “jealous” of the German military and its accomplishments, because they could not have accomplished such feats for themselves.<sup>297</sup> In one instance, Keitel blamed broader Italian strategic goals as getting in the way of German ones and reflected on what might have been gained on the Eastern Front had Italy not pursued its own goals in the Mediterranean:

Of course one can only muse on what might have been, had things only worked out differently: even if it was too much to ask of our good fortune that Italy should have stayed out of the war altogether as a benevolent neutral, just consider the difference if Hitler had been able to prevent their irresponsible attack on Greece. What would we not have saved by way of aid to Italy for her senseless Balkan war? ...How differently things would then have looked in Russia in 1941: we would have been in a far stronger position, and above all we should not have lost those two months... How true was the saying that a permanent alliance can never be forged with the powers of fate!<sup>298</sup>

In this instance Keitel placed the incongruent strategic goals of Italy at the center of failure in Russia. Mussolini’s dream of mastering the Mediterranean was not only incompatible with German interests on the Eastern Front, but to Keitel, also *unequal* to Germany’s strategic goals. Italy’s goals were unique to Italy’s geopolitical position and, as a secondary partner of the Axis alliance, Keitel felt that these goals should have been disregarded entirely. This was made clear by Keitel earlier in his memoirs where he discusses Italy’s involvement in France in 1940:

Italy’s entry into the war was more of a burden to us in the OKW than a relief. The Führer was unsuccessful in his attempt to hold Mussolini back at least for a while... Even then, despite our assistance and the weakness of the French Alpine front, the Italian offensive very rapidly ground to a halt... Nothing did more to impede our collaboration and *entente* with the French, even as early as the autumn of 1940, than our having to respect Italian aspirations and the Führer’s belief that we were obliged to subscribe to them.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Wilhelm Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Wilhelm Keitel Chief of the German High Command, 1938-1945* edited by Walter Gornitz and translated by David Irving (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 160.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>299</sup> Keitel, 111-2.

This passage makes it clear that Keitel did not perceive the Italians to be equal partners in the Axis alliance. They were presented in this passage as only getting in the way of German aspirations, and even when given assistance in the face of a weak enemy, were still incapable of offensive maneuvers. Keitel even chides Hitler in this passage for believing that it was necessary to respect Italian aspirations at all.

Characterizing the Italians as incapable fighters and responsible for larger failures were themes that were also echoed in the diary of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein who blamed Italian, Romanian, and Hungarian soldiers for losses on the Eastern Front, and argued that the lack of fighting capacity of the Italian forces was something which German High Command should have recognized from the start. In late autumn, 1942 he wrote in his diary that, “German Supreme Command may have been unprepared for the allied armies to break down so completely, but any illusions about the Italians’ fighting capabilities, of course, were inexcusable from the start.”<sup>300</sup> Manstein also wrote about his thoughts on the Italian performance in late December 1942 during the Battle of Stalingrad:

Exactly what happened to the Italians was not known. It seemed that only one light division and one or another of the infantry divisions had put up any resistance worth mentioning... Where, on the other hand, the forces were to be found to compensate for the loss of the Rumanian and Italian armies – and before long the Hungarian one as well – remained a complete mystery. This, in due course, was what caused the remainder of the Caucasus front to be abandoned.<sup>301</sup>

Ultimately, two things tend to come through the memoirs of Germans in leadership positions within the German military on the Eastern Front. Firstly, the Italians were not capable fighters, and secondly, they were responsible for broader German military failures. It is significant to note

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<sup>300</sup> Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories* edited and translated by Anthony G. Powell (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958), 293.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 342-4, 379.



that historians such as DiNardo have since proven that General Messe's CSIR had actually performed reasonably well on the Eastern Front, despite its limitations. It was involved in the encirclement of Soviet forces at Kiev and also played a significant role in the capture of Stalino in October 1941.<sup>302</sup>

However, the problem of Italians abandoning the front appears to have been a concern later in the campaign since the German economy also had to produce materials for Italy. At a military conference held by Hitler at the Wolf's Lair at Rastenburg in March 1943, Hitler and Chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces High Command Alfred Jodl discussed the issue of rearming existing Italian divisions on the Russian front. Hitler stated

I shall tell the Duce that it makes no sense. We give them weapons and it is the same self-deception... We cannot again equip 700,000 Italians... I shall tell the Duce that it would be much better to take these units away... and get them into shape here in Germany... It is no use giving the Italians weapons for the building up of an "an Army" which will lay down its arms at the first opportunity in front of any enemy. It is equally no good equipping an army if one is not sure of its internal security.<sup>303</sup>

On December 22-24, 1942, in the village of Arbuzov (often referred to as the valley of death by those who fought there) where thousands of Italians in the 35<sup>th</sup> Army Corps died, the problem of Italians fleeing battle became so problematic that, as Eugenio Corti recalled, the Italians were sometimes held at gunpoint to proceed:

I did the rounds of the men again, in order to exhort them and cheer them. Some had fled. Getting wind of this the Germans suddenly sent two soldiers armed with submachine guns to take up position behind us at appropriate distances from each other. Woe betide anyone who now tried to abandon position! I smiled wryly to myself at the thought of our propaganda about Soviet commissars holding their men at gunpoint.<sup>304</sup>

What is significant is that it was not the inability of Italians to fight that had caused them to abandon the front lines, but rather a lack of enthusiasm for the war that was mostly responsible.

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<sup>302</sup> DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 127.

<sup>303</sup> Hitler Military Conference, No. 23. Beginning of March 1943 quoted in Deakin, 206.

<sup>304</sup> Corti, 49-50.

This was not adequately understood by Keitel, Manstein, or Hitler who never addressed the factor of enthusiasm when complaining of the ineffectiveness of Italians on the Eastern Front. However, this is a quality that should not be underestimated for it had a significant impact on the differences between Italian and German fighting capabilities on the Eastern Front.

While a lack of enthusiasm for the war was something also exhibited in the North African and Mediterranean theatres of war, on the Eastern Front enthusiasm seemed to be even more lacking for the Italians. It has already been demonstrated that a lack of materials played a role, but another important reason was that many soldiers did not see eastward expansion as a goal even remotely worth pursuing. Ultimately, German soldiers were much better prepared ideologically for the fighting in this theatre. The previous chapters have established that German martial culture had emphasized the notion of “military necessity” which determined that moral and legal constraints could be disregarded for the goals of the nation as dictated by its rulers.<sup>305</sup> Nazism took this cultural element to all new radical levels. In *Hitler's Army*, Omer Bartov argues that Hitler and his war ambitions were often held with such importance by German soldiers that personal sentiments became blurred with those of the Nazis, and this phenomenon was stronger in the Army and in the Hitler Youth than any other organizations in the Third Reich.<sup>306</sup> It is not insignificant to note that the majority of the members of these organizations belonged in the younger age groups who had already been drilled with Nazi ideology prior to their military service.<sup>307</sup> By contrast, Macgregor Knox argues that the Italian army had failed to mobilize the fighting power of enterprising junior officers and enthusiastic Fascist youth volunteers. For

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<sup>305</sup> Macgregor Knox, *To the Threshold of Power 1922/33: Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and Nationalist Socialist Dictatorships* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 103.

<sup>306</sup> Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and the War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 117-9.

<sup>307</sup> Felix Römer, “Milieus in the Military: Soldierly Ethos, Nationalism and Conformism Among Workers in the Wehrmacht,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 48, no. 1 (January 2013), 140.

instance, the *Giovani Fascisti* division (formed from young volunteers from the Young Fascist University) received little encouragement from the regime and opposition from military professionals.<sup>308</sup> Ultimately, Germany was much better at taking advantage of ideology to improve the enthusiasm German forces had for war.

German soldiers were taught to trust completely in Hitler's political and military wisdom while never doubting either the moral implications of his orders or the outcome of his prophecies.<sup>309</sup> One sergeant wrote with confidence that "Germans [were] fighting for a just cause, and therefore, victory will be ours."<sup>310</sup> A private similarly wrote that the battle on the Eastern Front was "for a new ideology, a new belief, a new life! I am glad that I can participate, even if as a tiny cog, in this war of light against darkness."<sup>311</sup> For some soldiers in the German army, fighting in the East was a fanatical crusade against Bolshevism and Eastern European Jewry. Bartov argues that this kind of ideological training also "provided the soldiers with an image of the enemy which so profoundly distorted their perception that once confronted with reality they invariably experienced it as a confirmation of what they had come to expect."<sup>312</sup> In a letter from the Eastern Front in July 1941, a *Wehrmacht* officer wrote that the German people "owe a great deal of debt to the Führer, for had these beasts come to Germany, such murders would have taken place... no newspaper can describe what we see here and the crimes committed

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<sup>308</sup> Knox, "Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power, and Staying Power in the Italian and German Dictatorships," 131.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>310</sup> *Deutsche Soldaten sehen die Sowjetunion*, (Berlin, 1941), 55 quoted in Bartov, 163.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60 quoted in Bartov, 166.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*

here by the Jews.”<sup>313</sup> Bartov argues that as the progress of the German army slowed, the troops’ faith in Hitler and his goals only increased in proportion to the hopelessness of the situation.<sup>314</sup>

By contrast, as Italian forces pushed on and faced serious opposition, the morale of the troops sank, especially when the harsh winter set in. As one lieutenant, Luciano Mela of the Savoia Regiment wrote,

I’ve had it! I’m not afraid to say the person responsible for sending a division ahead in the condition which ours finds itself is an assassin. We’re without food, with broken shoes, uniforms in tatters, with just a little ammunition issued to each individual... To raise spirits and rekindle enthusiasm, soldiers are left with almost nothing to eat... without wool clothing, with broken shoes, and trousers falling to pieces.<sup>315</sup>

For Mela it was a lack of these basic needs that were of more concern than the greater purpose he was fighting for. Framing the campaign on the Eastern Front as a noble crusade against Bolshevism and Judaism never really penetrated the Italian military mentality, nor was ideological training a crucial component of Italian military culture in the same way it was in Germany.<sup>316</sup> As one Lieutenant, Carlo Vicentini, of the *Alpini* of the Monte Cervino battalion wrote in his memoirs *Noi Soli Vivi* (We Just Live), “[in the infantry] there was minimum technical or psychological preparation for combat... One cannot blame the ordinary soldier, the blame rests with the criteria of training.”<sup>317</sup>

Mussolini also did not understand the importance that Hitler placed on his crusade in the East. On a number of occasions Mussolini urged Hitler to make peace in the East in order to confront the Anglo-American forces in the West, who Mussolini perceived to be the real

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<sup>313</sup> Letter 104 Ortwin Buchbender and Reinhold Stertz eds., *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges* (München, 1982), 74 quoted in Bartov, 106.

<sup>314</sup> Bartov, 166.

<sup>315</sup> Luciano Mela and Pietro Crispi, “Dovidania” and “Savoia Cavalleria dal fronte russo alla resistenza,” in Paola Mocchi, “Dalla Russia con orrore” *Seconda Guerra Modiale 2006* <<http://www.cronologia.it>> quoted in Hamilton, 9.

<sup>316</sup> DiNardo, “Dysfunctional Coalition,” 175.

<sup>317</sup> Carlo Vicentini, *Noi soli vivi* (Milan: Ugo Mursia Editore, 2005), 194 quoted in Hamilton, 71.

enemy.<sup>318</sup> Mussolini did not understand the extent to which Hitler's invasion of Russia was an intensely ideologically driven aspiration. The Fascist regime lacked the ideological coherence and conviction to generate a similar kind of fanaticism in Italian troops, especially for a war on this front which did not hold any symbolic meaning for Italians or even for Mussolini.<sup>319</sup> Albert Kesselring argued that most Italians had not even perceived any part of the war as a threat to Italian existence: "I never had the impression that the [Italian] people knew from the beginning that they were fighting for their very existence."<sup>320</sup> As Chapter 1 demonstrated, Italian martial culture had traditionally established that the fight for Italian national existence or existence in general was a defensive concept. Soldiers from the wars of the *Risorgimento* to the First World War tended to express that Italian national survival meant defending the borders of Italy from foreign invaders. When Mussolini changed this rhetoric to suggest that Italy needed control of the Mediterranean to survive, whether it was believed or not by the average Italian soldier, it certainly did not have anything to do with Eastern Europe. Italian soldiers therefore had no real reason to be fighting along the Don or in the Caucasus, when their obvious political interests lay mainly in the Mediterranean due to geopolitical realities.<sup>321</sup>

Many Italians also did not perceive Bolshevism or Judaism as threats to Italian national survival. In fact, General Messe wrote in his memoirs that "the Italian was an impartial and attentive observer of the communist system."<sup>322</sup> DiNardo argues that since the Italians (and

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<sup>318</sup> R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2014), 4.

<sup>319</sup> Macgregor Knox, "Expansionist Zeal, Fighting Power, and Staying Power in the Italian and German Dictatorships," in *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* edited by Richard Bessel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 131-1.

<sup>320</sup> Albert Kesselring "Italy as Military Ally," *World War II German Military Studies: A Collection of 213 Special Reports on the Second World War Prepared by Former Officers of the Wehrmacht for the United States Army* Vol. 14 edited by Donald S. Detwiler, Jürgen Rohwer, and Charles B. Burdick (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), 7.

<sup>321</sup> Richard L. DiNardo and Daniel J. Hughes, "Germany and Coalition Warfare in the World Wars, A Comparative Study," *War in History* 8, no.2 (April 2001): 189.

<sup>322</sup> Messe, 204.

Hungarians) were utterly appalled by the atrocities of German occupation policies on the Eastern Front, this only further undermined the value of Germany as an ally in Italian minds.<sup>323</sup> For example, Arrigo Paladini, an Italian soldier in the CSIR, witnessed the execution of 150 Jews on July 31, 1941. In his diary two weeks later Paladini wrote

I never thought I would find myself before such brutality and gestures that are highly immoral. They preach civilization but we become soiled by barbarism. I used to admire the German soldier but from today he presents himself in a different light: that of a strong but profoundly barbaric warrior.<sup>324</sup>

By contrast, a dispatch by the Italian Consul-General in Innsbruck on April 7, 1943 indicated that “a feeling of increased consideration for the [Russian] army and possibly even for Russia” existed among Italians who had a marked respect for the industrial potential of a society with which they were not familiar.<sup>325</sup> Similarly, General Messe wrote that

the relationship between the soldiers of the CSIR and [Russian] civilians walked spontaneously to a mutual understanding that had come about in real friendliness: affinity in the way of conceiving the affections, the family, the love of the land, a common tendency to sentimentality, the strong sense of dignity and hospitality and that of their Russian family, formed a fertile ground for mutual relations.<sup>326</sup>

As Richard Bosworth has argued, Mussolini never placed an emphasis on merging Judaism with Bolshevism as threats to the Italian race. In fact, racist violence under the Fascist regime had been concentrated on the Arab, African, and Slav populations of Libya, Ethiopia, and the Balkans, not the Soviet population.<sup>327</sup> Many Italians evidently did not have a strong ideological motivation to despise the enemies they were fighting in this theatre of operations, and thus it was

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<sup>323</sup> DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 134.

<sup>324</sup> Arrigo Paladini “War Diary July 19, 1941-January 1942,” quoted in Stanislao Pugliese, *Desperate Inscriptions: Graffiti from the Nazi Prison in Rome 1943-1944* (New York: Bordighera Press, 2002), 9 quoted in Hamilton, 12.

<sup>325</sup> Report of the Italian Consul-General in Odessa April 7, 1943 Italian Collection quoted in Deakin, 206-7.

<sup>326</sup> Messe, 94-5.

<sup>327</sup> Bosworth, 4.

more difficult to have the enthusiasm to fight on in harsh conditions when their purpose there was not ideologically motivated.

Enthusiasm was also difficult to generate because many Italians did not have faith in Mussolini's leadership in the same way that many Germans had faith in Hitler's. Admiral Franco Maueri claims to have once told a German captain "here in Germany... your people are docile. They are not independent and individual like [Italians]. They submit to authority, without questioning or combating it."<sup>328</sup> While a vague and general statement, Maueri's characterization is somewhat truthful since within the German army, soldiers were taught to have unquestioning faith in Hitler's military and political decisions. If they did not, discipline could be enforced, for example, through German penal battalions.<sup>329</sup> Unlike in Germany, a personal oath of allegiance was never sworn by soldiers to Mussolini as it was by German soldiers to Hitler in 1934. As early as November 9, 1942, Maueri also wrote the following passage in his diary: "Dark and anxious days. We've been swept out of Libya... Meanwhile, inside our Italy, discontent grows and grows... Already, in Italy, you can see people preparing to change sides. The Duce is spiritually far away. He has lost touch with the people."<sup>330</sup>

Also speaking to the lack of faith in Mussolini's leadership was General Messe. In a similar vein to Maueri, Messe reflected on the lack of Italian enthusiasm on the Eastern Front when he wrote that the Italian soldier was, "listening suspiciously to too many speeches designed to convince him of what he cannot and does not want to accept: justice and the needs of the war."<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Maueri, 83.

<sup>329</sup> See for example, Hans P. Klausch, *Die Bewahrungstruppe 500* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995). In addition, German military courts had imposed 30,000 death sentences on soldiers throughout the war, see Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* translated by Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 165.

<sup>330</sup> Maueri, 93.

<sup>331</sup> Messe, 204.

Messe mentions the moral importance Italians placed on the necessity of the war. Italian martial culture dictated that the purpose of wars had to be justified in order to be accepted. As demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, among Italian soldiers, personal moral justification for and belief in the reasons for war had always been more significant in fostering national sentiment and enthusiasm than political justifications dictated by the government. Mussolini had failed to convince Italians that involvement on the Eastern Front had any kind of moral justification. As a result, many Italians did not understand why they were fighting in Russia. A private letter (signatory illegible) to Bastianini from the Eastern Front on April 10, 1943 read:

Among the officers of both higher and lower rank a general feeling of rancour and distrust against the Germans as responsible for every mistake is generally predominant here. A dangerous anti-Fascist spirit lurks and creeps.... the majority do not understand that our frontier is today on the Don.<sup>332</sup>

It would appear that the more that enthusiasm dwindled amongst Italian soldiers, the more they came to mistrust their German allies. The letter also reveals that Italians held Germany accountable for their misfortunes on the Eastern Front, and so it is not particularly surprising to find that many of the Italian officers and men in this theatre went on to join and lead partisan bands in Northern Italy by the end of the year.<sup>333</sup> The German army had an ideological element to military training designed to indoctrinate soldiers and officers with Nazi conceptions of who the enemies of the German nation were, thus better preparing them psychologically for the rigors of the Eastern Front.

The consequence of a lack of Italian enthusiasm for the war was that the Italians were unable to maintain effectiveness in battle and sometimes eagerly retreated.<sup>334</sup> Enthusiasm for war was particularly important to the German military, as enthusiasm and fighting spirit were valued as

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<sup>332</sup> Private letter to Bastianini, April 10, 1943 (Signature illegible) Italian Collection quoted in Deakin, 207.

<sup>333</sup> Deakin, 207.

<sup>334</sup> DiNardo and Hughes, "Germany and Coalition Warfare in the World Wars," 175.



factors contributing to and sometimes determining success or failure in battle. As Kesselring wrote, “If Mussolini was unable to produce such a psychic conversion of the people toward war, then he should never have entered war in the first place.”<sup>335</sup> Keitel likewise wrote in his memoirs that,

the Führer had faith in Mussolini and in his revolution, but the Duce was not Italy, and Italians were Italians all the world over. These were our allies, the allies who had not only already cost us so dearly, who had not only abandoned us in our hour of need, but who were eventually to betray us too.<sup>336</sup>

In their memoirs, German military leaders rightly accuse Mussolini of making the mistake of committing Italian forces on the Eastern Front where Italian enthusiasm was so low. Where Germany maintained consistent ideological training within the army to instill motivation for the war in the East, Italians received no such training and some expressed that they found more cultural affinity with the Russians whom they were supposed to despise. Therefore, throwing up arms was not necessarily a characterization of weakness, but rather, a consequence of the lack of any ideological training (which was not a prominent factor in Italian military culture anyway) that could have prepared Italian morale and enthusiasm for a rigorous war on the Eastern Front.<sup>337</sup>

Germany would continue to face problems in cooperating with the Italians for these reasons, and once it appeared as though Fascism would soon capitulate, matters only worsened for the Germans attempting to work with Italians in the military. Hitler and other members of German high command began to notice certain cooperative problems on the Italian front in May 1943. In a meeting between Hitler, *Sonderführer* Alexander von Neurath, and various other

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<sup>335</sup> Kesselring, “Italy as Military Ally,” *World War II German Military Studies* Vol. 14, 7.

<sup>336</sup> Keitel, 160.

<sup>337</sup> DiNardo, “Dysfunctional Coalition,” 729.

military leaders including Keitel and Rommel, problems in Sicily were discussed. Von Neurath stated:

The German forces in Sicily have become relatively unpopular... The Sicilians claim we brought war to their island, we ate—with more or less appetite—everything they owned, and now we're going to make the English land there as well... The war will be over when the English arrive—this opinion is shared by many people in Southern Italy. They also believe that once the English have landed, the war will end sooner if the Germans have left than if they stay on and cause problems.<sup>338</sup>

After Hitler asked what the official Italian response was to counter this opinion, von Neurath stated that the Italian authorities responded:

What do you expect us to do? That's public opinion. The people see it that way—and [German soldiers] didn't make themselves popular with the people; they seized things and ate their chickens... We can't do anything about it. Germans soldiers insult Italian soldiers too.<sup>339</sup>

Hitler also worried about whether the Italians would actually take part in defending their homeland from an Allied invasion. During the meeting Hitler expressed: “What worries me is these people's lack of *desire*, and we do see this. The Duce can try as hard as he wants, but he is sabotaged.”<sup>340</sup> All of this assessment came too late however. As has been demonstrated in the ways that Italy was blamed for failures on the Eastern Front, Hitler and the army's high command lacked a comprehensive understanding of Italy's broader practical strategic concerns which did not include Eastern Europe, as well as Italian martial culture which indicated that moral justification was necessary for war, and finally Italian military culture which had never emphasized that officers should be training soldiers in ideological fanaticism. As Richard L.

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<sup>338</sup> “Meeting Between the Führer and Sonderführer v. Neurath, May 20, 1943,” in *Hitler and His Generals: Military Conferences 1942-1945* edited by Helmut Heiber and David M. Glantz and translated by Roland Winter, Krista Smith, and Mary Beth Friedrich (New York: Enigma Books, 2004), 133.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-4.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

DiNardo argues, any reasonable assessment should have convinced the Germans that Italian hearts were not in the war in the same way that German hearts were.

Another consequence of these problems was that, following Italy's surrender on September 8, 1943, Germany also faced difficulties in trying to recruit Italian volunteers for the German army. A German report from October 1943 indicated that high command was "of the opinion that in the present situation in Italy, the recruitment of a larger portion of volunteers for the specified command units will have no success. The Italian soldier is absolutely tired of war, and no promises are voluntarily made for active military duty."<sup>341</sup> Furthermore, the report indicated that the Italian government was clearly showing their opposition to Germany by having the inclination "to evade decisions by hiding behind the responsibilities of various departments. To make matters more is that almost all of the military acquisition points of conscripts have dissolved."<sup>342</sup> Captain Otto-Wilhelm Kurt von Menges also wrote that the "mood and attitude of the population continued to be defined by a general uncertainty about the evolution of things and of absolute passivity in relation to the problems identified by the Fascist government in regards to cooperation with the German leadership."<sup>343</sup> He also wrote that, "there is no doubt that most of the Italian authorities are emotionally in opposition to German authorities," a conclusion von Menges arrived at because Italians had not been treating English war criminals harshly enough by German standards.<sup>344</sup>

This report also shows that even when the German leadership acknowledged the lack of enthusiasm in Italy, they did not have an understanding for why it existed:

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<sup>341</sup> "Italien-Versch. Allgemein," Nr. 220, 13 October 1943 National Archives Microfilm Publication T78, roll 328, frame 6285095.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> "Italien-Versch. Allgemein," Nr. 220, T78/328/6285097.

<sup>344</sup> "Italien-Versch. Allgemein," Nr. 220, T78/328/6285098.

Despite all means of advertising agencies by corps and divisions as well as through propaganda and recruitment by itinerant Italian officers, no significant progress has been made so far in the recruitment of volunteers... In order to strengthen the confidence of Italians serving in the German army, it would be expedient to give them a special badge on their uniform.<sup>345</sup>

The suggestion that enthusiasm could be raised merely by giving the Italians serving in the German army a special badge suggests how disconnected von Menges was to understanding the perspective of his Italian allies. Ultimately, the German military's pursuit of volunteers during this period was futile, because an understanding for the Italian perspective had never existed before or during the war, let alone after it. As a result, many Italians in the army abandoned their German allies by the end of 1943. A report titled "The Fate of the Old Italian Army" from December 1943 evaluated the Italian forces which could possibly be recruited to the German army:

Of an assessment of 20 divisions containing approximately 430,000 men, tens of thousands are expected to have joined bands or merely returned to their hometowns in Northern Italy. In southern and central Italy, of approximately 400,000 men, only 2,000 were interned on the German side. Throughout all of Italy, only 13,000 troops have joined Germany. Of a total of 1,520,000 men of the old Italian army, 42,000 men remained on the German side voluntarily. Not detectable Italians of which the majority returned to their hometowns = 469,000.<sup>346</sup>

This report further demonstrates that Italian hearts were not in the German war effort, and a great number of Italians saw no justification for participating in the war voluntarily. Many joined partisan efforts or simply returned to their hometowns. This document further suggested that the causes for this phenomenon were essentially the following:

The mass of the Italian people, including officers, officials, etc. is tired of the war and sought peace at any price. It lacks any sense of dishonor at the behaviour of the Badoglio government. It is not perceived as a betrayal and shame... The Italian officer's sense of honor endures the betrayal of Badoglio without significant reaction.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> "Italien-Versch. Allgemein," Nr. 220, T78/328/6285152

<sup>347</sup> "Italien-Versch. Allgemein," Nr. 220, T78/328/6285154-6285155.

As the report observes, many Italians did not perceive Badoglio's armistice with the Allies as much of a betrayal at all. So it is not particularly surprising that many Italians valued returning to their hometowns or villages over fighting against the Badoglio government that had, in the German frame of mind, betrayed Mussolini. Historically, Italian nationalism was most easily fostered not in support of the country's rulers and a willingness to serve them, but in overthrowing them, especially when those rulers were foreign. So it was not that unusual that a portion of the Italian forces decided to join partisan groups. Italian partisans were also not insignificant because they played an active role in the liberation of Florence in August 1944, and thereafter were improved in organization, structure, and materials thanks to Allied support.<sup>348</sup>

Expelling Germany from the Italian borders followed a similar rhetoric that expelling foreign invaders such as France had in nineteenth century Italian history. One historian, Mario Niccoli, wrote in 1949:

Thus from the very beginnings the Resistance appeared as a truly national movement in that it was fed by a common anti-German feeling linked to the traditions of the Risorgimento and of the First World War. It was a popular movement in that it recruited or involved all classes of citizens – the clergy and the army, the bourgeoisie and the nobility, the urban and rural proletariat – with a most marked participation by the working classes which for the first time took part in the nation's history in a large and organized manner.<sup>349</sup>

A March 1944 circular by the *Giustizia e Libertà* group also stated that resisters to Nazism were “champions of a general sort of patriotism aimed at chasing the foreigner from the fatherland's sacred soil.”<sup>350</sup> While this example comes from an anti-fascist organization, Niccoli argues that

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<sup>348</sup> Julie Le Gac, “From Suspicious Observation to Ambiguous Collaboration: The Allies and Italian Partisans, 1943-1944,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 5 (October 2008): 726.

<sup>349</sup> Mario Niccoli, “La Resistenza italiana,” *Enciclopedia italiana Seconda appendice (1938-1948)* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1949), 686-91 quoted in Shepard B. Clough and Salvatore Saladino *A History of Modern Italy: Documents, Readings, & Commentary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 526.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid*, 529.

many of the men in the Italian army who joined partisan movements were not even politically motivated either. Some disbanded soldiers who were unable to reach their homes had, according to Niccoli, “taken to the hills moved by feelings which often did not go beyond violent reaction against the military leaders by whom they thought themselves betrayed.”<sup>351</sup>

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the ways that incongruent martial components to broader culture, military culture, and military history generated conflict between Germans and Italians fighting on the Eastern Front. As several reports indicated, these conflicts were a legitimate concern for both the Italian and German military leaderships. It has also addressed factors such as differing levels of military modernity and languages which also exacerbated problems. Firstly, differing levels of military modernity created conflicts over the speed with which the Italian army moved towards the front and the quantities of supplies which could be delivered to them. The lack of materials available also amplified tensions since the Italians accused Germans of stealing their few vehicles and refusing to assist Italians during retreats. Broader cultural differences, such as in language, also prevented the timeliness with which Italians could use German equipment since most Italians could not understand German instructions for using them and there were not enough translators. Germans in military leadership positions also unjustly blamed Italian soldiers’ fighting abilities for military failures without taking into account the supply situation or Italian enthusiasm for the war. Finally, martial and military culture played a role in determining the different levels of enthusiasm that were expressed in this theatre of operations. These issues also created problems for Germany not only during the fighting in Eastern Europe, but also following Mussolini’s capitulation because of the struggle to recruit Italian soldiers on Germany’s side.

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

After Italy surrendered to the Allies on September 8, 1943, Italian forces were left scattered across the Italian peninsula and the rest of the Mediterranean without precise instructions. The Italo-German alliance was formally over, and in the coming months the German armed forces would face the Allied invasion of Italy alone. German forces already in Italy deployed to defend Northern Italy as well as tighten their grip on Rome. Italian forces, on the other hand, were completely disorganized. Many soldiers abandoned their units, returned to their home villages, joined partisan bands, or were captured, deported, or killed as traitors by the *Wehrmacht*. However, this did not necessarily mean that all Italian soldiers were eager to join the Allies either.

The existing Italian military leadership wrongly assumed that Italian soldiers would be willing to immediately partake in Allied operations following the Italian armistice which had established peace with the Allies. Attempts by the Badoglio government to recall soldiers to arms between the end of 1943 and early 1944 were a complete failure. On September 20, 1943, General Mario Roatta remarked that the armistice was not that significant to the soldiers:

Italian troops, who were forced in a cowardly manner by the Germans to bear arms, are now participating in the same struggle as the Anglo-Americans, of whom they are now and without any official proclamation allies. Once again, after a momentary absence imposed on her by others, Italy has returned to her age-old tradition.<sup>352</sup>

Roatta refers in this passage to Italy's long history of foreign occupation, and the struggle of enlisted men to show willingness for participation in conflicts that, despite taking place in Italy, were being conducted by other powers. One reason unrelated to the willingness of soldiers was that the Italian authorities lacked the means to punish absentee soldiers. After the armistice,

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<sup>352</sup> AICSR, fondo Palermo, busta 14, fascicolo 22 - Il problema degli assenti dal servizio in relazione ad un eventuale provvedimento di amnistia, Allegato 2 - Riscossa, 20 September 1943, p. 2, quoted in De Prosopo, 2

Giovanni Messe, who had been appointed Chief of Staff of the *Esercito Cobelligerante Italiano* (Italian Co-Belligerent Army) stated that Italian civilians also made matters difficult by “rebell[ing] against all established authority.”<sup>353</sup> On September 23, 1944, Prime Minister of Italy, Ivanoe Bonomi (who replaced Badoglio on June 9, 1944) introduced conscription for males born between 1914 and 1924. In the first weeks that attempts were made to impose conscription, popular protests arose.<sup>354</sup> Ultimately, once the Italo-German Axis had capitulated, the majority of the Italian population, soldiers and citizens alike, was evidently tired of war. The relationship between the Italian and German armies had dissolved, and the Italians felt displaced as unwilling partners of both Germany and the Allies.

Throughout the Second World War, the Italo-German alliance was one of two culturally disparate countries who sought to pursue national interests that often conflicted. In the Italian case, the political leadership was relatively unsuccessful in selling those aims to the troops. Comparatively, the Allies were much more successful in conducting both coordinated and parallel coalition war, because their power was better strategically focused. Though not entirely without their own problems, Britain, America, and the Soviet Union could focus all of their efforts on the greater purpose of overturning Hitler’s conquest of Europe. Evidently, the prioritization of goals should ideally be agreed upon by both parties in order for coalition war to operate smoothly. Germany and Italy were not involved in the Second World War for the same reasons, nor were their capabilities as evenly balanced as the Allies since Italy heavily relied on Germany for war materials. It is also not insignificant that Britain and America profited from

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<sup>353</sup> Archivio Istituto Campano di Storia della Resistenza (AICSR), microfilm Allied Control Commission, 10230-115\31 Foggia Zone General - Italian Army, Italian Army round-up, 18 April 1944 quoted in Mario De Prosopo, “Reconstructing the Army of a Collapsed Nation: the Kingdom of the South of Italy (September 1943-March 1944), *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 18, no.1 (January 2013): 11.

<sup>354</sup> De Prosopo, 12.



linguistic, cultural, and ideological affinity.<sup>355</sup> This was not the case for Germany and Italy and their military cultures, martial cultures, and histories played a role in exacerbating dysfunction within the alliance relationship. Wider strategic interests and linguistic differences also contributed.

Almost immediately after the Pact of Steel was signed on May 22, 1939, Hitler and Mussolini found themselves at odds over what Italy's role would be in the coming invasion against Poland. Hitler did not want Italy to have any part in the invasion, and when this was made clear to Mussolini he demanded that the Italo-German border be fortified. Mistrust was created immediately as racist preconceptions about the extent to which Italian culture was militaristic influenced Hitler's reticence to share war plans with Mussolini thereafter. Mussolini felt as though he was continuously being slighted by the secretive German leadership, and thus he refused to inform Germany of Italy's ill conceived invasion of Greece. Mussolini wanted to pay Hitler back for his consistent secrecy over war plans and also use a surprise victory in Greece to prove Italy's military capability as an Axis ally. Despite Mussolini's efforts to distinguish Italy as an equally capable ally, Germany and Italy were by no means equal partners. As far as the German leadership was concerned, Mussolini's desire to conquer the Mediterranean would always be subordinate to Hitler's pursuit of *Lebensraum* in the East. Mussolini therefore pursued parallel war in order to satisfy Italy's incongruent war aims, as well as to prove that Italy (historically, the least dominant of the colonial powers) could reassert its supremacy in the Mediterranean. Initially refusing German aid and falsely reporting favourable situations in

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<sup>355</sup> For more on this see John Baylis, *Anglo-American Relations since 1939: the Enduring Alliance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

Greece were two consequences of this desire of Mussolini's to redeem the Italian nation from its historic military failures and humiliations.

Military culture played a role in the way that many Germans perceived their Italian allies in the Mediterranean. The Italians were cited as not possessing qualities that were unique to German military culture like *Angriffsgeist*. Other military cultural characteristics of Italy's army, such as the negative relationships between soldiers and officers, were also seen by the German military as evidence of the shortcomings of Italian soldiers, since comradeship among all ranks was emphasized so much in German military tradition. These Italian soldier-officer relationships were representative of a military that neglected to promote men based on talent.

Misunderstandings would also plague the Italo-German alliance relationship in the North African theatre of war. Competing tactical and operational approaches to war played a role in disagreements, because military leaders, such as Generals Rommel and Gariboldi, could not agree on the same way to approach operations. Where the German army emphasized flexibility and immediately pushing on to capture second and third objectives after initial goals were achieved, the Italian military emphasized absolute obedience to authority and the necessity of receiving explicit permission before acting. Mistrust, tension, frequent disagreements, and disrespect for the formal chain of command were all consequences of such disparate views.

Finally, differing enthusiasms for the war were also influenced by different cultural assumptions about warfare in general. Italians like Maugeri and Caccia-Dominioni wrote that in their experiences in Greece and North Africa, they and their Italian comrades did not have a clear understanding why they were fighting the war. Italian martial culture tended towards the notion that wars had to be justified on moral grounds, but Mussolini was explicit in stating that the conquests of North Africa and Greece were being pursued specifically for the purpose of

territorial aggrandizement. Historically, Italian nationalism and enthusiasm had always been easier to generate when Italians were defending their own borders or expelling foreign rulers, not conquering new territories. By contrast, German martial culture had consistently presented war even beyond German borders as a zero-sum struggle for survival, and Hitler was much more successful at connecting the war to the survival of individual Germans which gave soldiers the potential to have a personal stake in the war. A lack of Italian enthusiasm served to hamper military efficiency while simultaneously fostering resentment from Germans who perceived their Italian allies as cowardly.

Lack of enthusiasm for or at least commitment to the war proved to be a particularly serious problem on the Eastern Front. Once again, tensions between the allies in this theatre were exacerbated by competing military cultures and broader martial components to culture. Differing enthusiasms for war on the Eastern Front were even more drastic than in North Africa and the Mediterranean, due in part to differences in ideological training. In German military culture and throughout German history, officers in the armed forces were responsible for educating soldiers on the purposes of the war. In addition, traditions that originated with the Prussian military emphasized that soldiers had existed to fulfill the wishes of rulers, and Hitler reinforced this notion by demanding a personal oath of loyalty from the military in 1934. Military culture and history therefore made it easier for Hitler to inspire fanaticism within the German army with his political goals through demonizing the “Judeo-Bolshevik” threat on the Eastern Front. This served to better prepare German soldiers psychologically for the rigors of the Eastern Front. By contrast, the Italian army did not have a tradition of officers as ideological educators, and local and familial bonds were usually held to be more significant than loyalty to rulers. Furthermore, participation in the war on the Eastern Front was strategically incompatible with Mussolini’s

goals in the Mediterranean and North Africa beyond gaining favour with Hitler—who did not even want the participation in the first place. Even if Italian soldiers had been convinced of the importance of Mussolini's aims elsewhere, the Eastern Front was a much harder sell. A result of these issues were Italian desertions, German resentment of their Italian allies, and finally Germans in leadership positions blaming the Italian army (along with the Hungarian and Romanian armies) for military failures on the Eastern Front. Finally, a lack of Italian enthusiasm also influenced the postwar difficulties Germany faced in trying to recruit Italian soldiers for the German army.

One of the more general differences between Germany and Italy on this front was vastly different levels of military capability. Italy's lack of preparedness to fight a modern war in comparison with Germany led to significant problems in the relationships between Germans and Italians on the Eastern Front. Where German military doctrine preached improvisation with limited materials, the Italian military discouraged its soldiers from attempting anything creative in battle that they were not instructed to do. The result was Germans in leadership positions placing the blame for military failures on the fighting quality of the Italian units despite the Italians' lack of materials and lack of training for improvising with such limited materials. Finally, another way that cultural disparity impacted this and other theatres was through language barriers. A lack of linguistic training within both countries armed forces and too few translators played a role in the inability of Italian units to use equipment in a timely manner. All of these various misunderstandings served to amplify tension and mistrust at all levels.

The Italo-German alliance was in so many ways unequal and uncooperative. The imbalance of power, preparation, expertise and resources made it so. However, the issue of culture cannot be omitted as a significant factor in exacerbating other problems and sometimes

creating new ones. In the North African, Mediterranean, and Eastern theatres of war, Germany and Italy's disparate cultural approaches to war inhibited the effectiveness of their coalition.

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