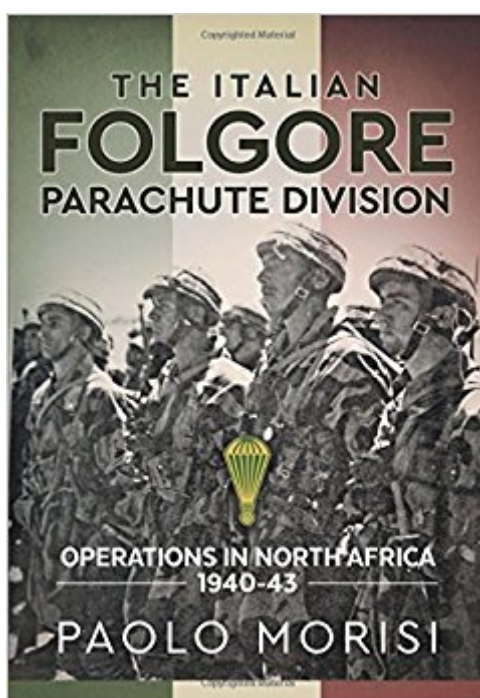


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# The Italian Folgore Parachute Division: North African Operations 1940-43



## Synopsis

The North African campaign was one of the hardest fought episodes of the Second World War, yet the vital part played by the Italian Army - and in particular, its Folgore Parachute Division on behalf of the Axis Alliance - is frequently overlooked. Initially created to emulate the German Fallschirmjäger in order to carry out the planned airborne attack against the British base of Malta, Folgore Airborne Division fought on the battlefields of North Africa - including the key Battle of El Alamein. This elite unit distinguished itself at El Alamein despite inadequate equipment and weapons while facing unfavorable odds. This book describes a paratroop unit that earned the respect of its Allied opponents during some of the hardest-fought engagements of North Africa. The key theme of the book is the paratroopers' involvement in the Axis war effort through an analysis of their training, weaponry and battle tactics. Another key focus is an assessment of the Folgore's specific role during the major battles of the North African campaign. It covers in detail, for example, the Folgore's first fierce military engagement against British and New Zealand troops during the Battle of Alam El Halfa in September 1942. It then details a number of smaller actions that preceded the Battle of El Alamein such as the counter-attack during the British 'Operation Beresford', which led to the capture of Brigadier General G.H. Clifton, commander of the New Zealand 6th Brigade, by a patrol of Folgore soldiers. The focus then shifts upon the Folgore's major engagement of the campaign during the Battle of El Alamein: 'Operation Lightfoot', which was launched by General Montgomery on 24 October 1942. It was designed to break through the Italian-held southern sector of the El Alamein line, where the Bologna, Brescia, Pavia and Folgore Divisions anchored the Axis right flank. While describing key events during this operation, the book also highlights how the Folgore used unusual tactics to repulse the massive enemy-armored attack. This included letting the enemy advance into a 'cul-de-sac' and then launching a counter-attack against its armored vehicles and infantry units from all sides and by a combination of fire from 47 mm anti-tank guns, mortars, hand grenades and other incendiary devices. It describes the desperate retreat in the desert of the Italian units as a result of the collapse of Axis military defenses in November 1942. Finally, it highlights the role of the paratroopers during the last battles in Tunisia - especially those in defense of the Mareth line and Takrouna in the spring of 1943. Illustrated with rare archival photographs, detailed maps and specially commissioned artwork, this volume offers a fascinating insight into a little-studied aspect of Axis forces. The volume draws heavily upon both Axis and Allied (Britain and New Zealand) archival sources such as the war diaries and the post-battle reports of the military units engaged in North Africa. It thus sheds new light into one of the most important campaigns of the Second World War. By drawing from

archival sources from both sides, it also furnishes a more complete and balanced perspective on a critical juncture in the war such as the Battle of El Alamein.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Most British accounts of the campaign tend to focus on the German efforts. This book is a welcome re-balancing that gives due credit to some tough fighters: both the Germans and the New Zealanders had a healthy respect for these men.” (Miniature Wargames) “An excellent, comprehensive study of one of the Axis countries’ most celebrated and famous divisions and their contribution to the war in North Africa.” (Books Monthly) “...a fresh, rare account of an Italian division in training and combat. Beyond that, the special nature of the para division and its bloody destruction at Alamein will be of interest to many readers.” (Stone & Stone Second World War Books)

Since the early 1990s, Paolo Morisi has dedicated himself to academic and military studies research and has published books, articles and book reviews on European and military history. He has published several journal articles and reviews in peer-reviewed academic journals such as *Modern Italy*, *Political Studies Review*, *Michigan War Studies Review*, *Telos* and the *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*. He has also received an award for his latest book publication that traces the history of Italian crack mountain storm-troopers of the First World War, entitled *Fiamme Verdi* (Bassano del Grappa, Itinera Progetti Editore, 2012). He is currently working on a comparative analysis of the Austro-Hungarian *Sturmtruppen* and the Italian *arditi* during the First World War for

Helion & Company. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in History/Politics from the University of Bologna, Italy and a Master of Arts Degree in Political Studies from Columbia University, New York City.

Superbly researched and well written account marred only by a few errors in word usage as the author is not a native English speaker. Not sure why Helion editors did not catch these prior to publication, but they appear rarely enough to warrant not deducting a half- or full star from this review ranking. There is a lot of information packed into the 192 page account, which is organized as follows: Chapter 1 - Recruitment and Training (readers will notice that the Germans played a large role in the formative years of this unit); Chapter 2 - Malta (the invasion that never was constituted the original motivation behind the creation of an Italian airborne division); Chapter 3 - Major Operations Prior to El Alamein; Chapter 4 - Operation Lightfoot (Folgore's most successful battle against the 8th Army); Chapter 5 - Tunisian Campaign 1943; and Chapter 6 - Conclusion: Folgore - An Assessment. There are also two appendices consisting of Orders of Battle and List of Gold Medal for Valor Recipients plus a short bibliography and index. One point that I especially liked was the fact that tactical actions were discussed from the perspective of both sides involved. These engagements were very interesting in that the Italian parachutists were often in combat against Commonwealth units such as New Zealanders. In addition, the author points out that Italian and German parachutists often took part in combined night patrols. I found this volume to be an especially welcome addition to my military history collection as it is as useful account as IRON HULLS, IRON HEARTS which covers Italian armored units. Highly recommended to readers interested in something other than the stereotyped accounts of Italian military performance in WW2.

A much needed reassessment of the Italian military and the larger role they played in WWII. In Anglo countries we've been told that Rommel & the Germans did all the fighting in North Africa and the Italians did nothing. So Not true. Rommel only came with a small corps of mechanized tanks, artillery & vehicles, While millions of Italians made up the army that fought the Allies in North Africa. The Italians fought the British bravely & now the truth is coming out about their larger military role they played. A must for those interested in Italian military which is hardly mentioned, except in constant mockery, stereotypes & prejudice in Anglo countries.

Only book I know of covering this unit. Excellent read from start to finish, book has many pictures and maps. Easy to follow along to and read book covers the unit from start to finish. Most

interesting portion to me was the development of the Italian airborne corps and the covering of the proposed invasion of Malta.

Contrary to the other reviews i feel that this book has downsides too. The biggest one are the origin of the photos all of which are from the official archive of the Italian military, which unfortunately means a lot of the Africa ones are generic and do not show Folgore members in action. The author has not managed to get hold of a single photo album of a former member of the Division which in my opinion should have been possible and would have elevated the book considerably. His primary sources do not list a single German Afrikakorps Divisional history, surely a must considering the interaction between Italian and German forces. He is a undoubtedly a good historian but his weapons knowledge needs updating, see page 48 with weapons range approximate a mile or less for a sub-machine gun!!! Or does he mean the Breda machine-gun but in the same sentence he states it was only carried by officers and NCO's - so it must be the sub-machine gun. You cannot rely entirely on this weapons count for the division either, the number of 81mm mortars seems to change, he states 18 for the division but the Artiglieria regiment had another 18 which he forgets about later in the book. All in all a useful book but I advise caution in certain areas.

FOLGORE has been a fun read for me. Pretty accurate, told me some new stuff, especially the training. Turns out the Folgore ONLY took volunteers. Surprised no Nino Arena was in the bibliography. There is some minor typos and some poor editing. Sometimes numbers do not agree.

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