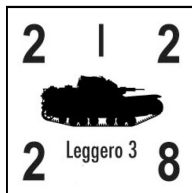


ITALIAN ARMOR VS BRITISH ARMOR

The First Clash in North Africa

The Italians

The Italians entered WWII with a definite shortage of modern armored vehicles. In the early part of the North African campaign, they had no large armored formations. Armored Groups were formed by combining several tank battalions together but they usually included no infantry or artillery. Following is a survey of what they had to face the British with in the opening rounds of North Africa.



The L3 was a small tankette of only 3 tons weight with a crew of two. It was armed with a single machine gun. It was an unreliable vehicle of questionable value but it represented the bulk of Italian armor in North Africa in this period. Most infantry divisions list a battalion of these in their organization, but in actual use, they nearly always operated detached from their home division. Over 300 of these were in North Africa for the opening rounds..



The M11/39 (medium, 11 tons, 1939) was the first major Italian attempt at an armored vehicle with a gun. It had 2 machine guns in a turret and a hull mounted 37mm gun with limited traverse. Off road movement was terrible due to poor suspension. Altogether, this was an unsuccessful vehicle and was quickly replaced by the M13/40. Only 100 of these were built. 70 were available for Operation Compass.



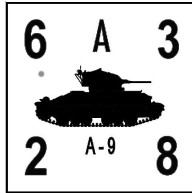
Although built on the same chassis as the M11/39, the M13/40 (medium, 14 tons, 1940) was a much superior design. It mounted a 47 mm gun in a turret, along with two machine guns and improved armor. This tank (along with the slightly improved M14/41) was the mainstay of the Italian army for the rest of the war. 799 of these were built altogether, but only 72 were in North Africa for Operation Compass

The British

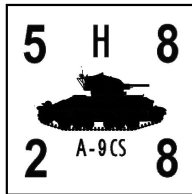
The British forces in North Africa, although small, included the very excellent 7th Armored Division along with forward thinking commanders who knew how to use tanks. Although many of the British tanks were light tanks of little value against the later German tanks, they were more than adequate to fight the Italians with. In addition, the Matilda tanks which arrived in North Africa before Operation Compass completely outclassed anything the Italians had.



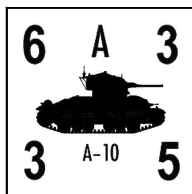
Although very lightly armored and armed only with machine guns, the Mk VI B was a fast and fairly reliable vehicle. These little machines served in many British armored formations in the early part of the war and were phased out as better tanks became available.



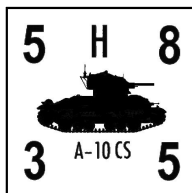
The A-9's were built to satisfy the British requirement for a fast cruiser tank. The 2 pdr gun was a fast and accurate weapon easily capable of destroying all Italian tanks of the period. The very light armor was a liability which limited the ability of this tank to support infantry operations.



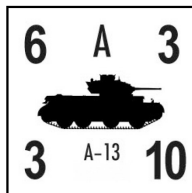
The A-9Cs was an A-9 with a 3.7 inch howitzer mounted as a main gun to provide better infantry support. A few of these would be mixed with the regular versions.



The A-10 was an up-armored version of the A-9 but the chassis was overloaded and the speed was much reduced.



The A-10CS also had the 3.7 inch howitzer mounted for infantry support.



The A-13 was the next development in the cruiser tank line. The superior Christie suspension increased the speed and mobility over previous models greatly. The reliable 2 pdr gun was still in use in this tank.



The Matilda was a heavily armored infantry tank which proved to be the most effective battle tank of North Africa in the early stages, earning the nickname of "Queen of the Desert". The Italians had no effective anti-tank weapon to use against it and usually had to rely on their heavy artillery firing over open sights in order to combat it.