

Between Gorizia and the sea, the Austrians withdrew to the east across the river. Gorizia itself, however, was defended on the west side of the river with Podgora and Oslavia turned into bastions and further supported by a surrounding ring of mountains, most importantly, Mte Sabatino to the north and by the Carso plateau to the south. At Podgora fighting assumed the inferno-like character of Verdun with vicious street fighting amidst artillery barrages. For a few short hours the Italian Re and Casale Brigades were able to advance far enough to look down into the streets of Gorizia, but were eventually beaten back. On the Carso they gained small footholds at Adgrado and near Redipuglia and little else.

After failing to make any other significant progress, Cadorna halted. He realized his artillery was inadequate and he was further hindered by a chronic shortage of shells which was never to be resolved. Thus, besides his own flawed strategic thinking, ordnance problems would also limit the offensive capabilities of his Armies throughout the war.

Austrian Troops Approaching the Isonzo

Second Battle of the Isonzo July 18 - August 3, 1915

Fighting intensified when offensive operations resumed in July. Austro-Hungarian forces started absorbing their own heavy casualties incurring 45,000 killed and wounded in a single month. Combat at the bridgehead sectors around Plezzo and Tolmino resumed and became scenes of nearly continual struggle transcending the official dates of the Isonzo battles. The adversaries engaged in hand-to-hand combat on the plateau of Mte Krn. [See photo on 1917 page.] The battle for Podgora, front door to Gorizia, was resumed with a vengeance. Eventually the town was captured by the 6th Corps of the Italian Second Army after a tremendous artillery barrage.

It was during this battle that the Carso started to gain its fearsome reputation. One Austro-Hungarian unit, the 20th Honved Division was broken losing two-thirds of its men. On July 25th, Mte San Michele [more a hill than a mountain but commanding the local terrain] became a focal point of fighting. A collection of Austrian regiments known as the Richter Group (after the Colonel commanding) would become part of the war's mythology by mounting a suicidal counter-attack here. After three weeks, with ammunition running low, the fighting died out with little changed.

Typical Section of the Isonzo North of Gorizia

Third Battle of the Isonzo October 18 - November 3, 1915

The brutality of the fighting escalated even further with the Third and Fourth Battles of the Isonzo. General Cadorna was now looking for The Big Breakthrough, but continuing his neglect of the Principle of Mass he committed forces the length of the Front once again. He did try to narrow his areas of attack in each region and raised his artillery count to 1,200 guns, but once again, he spread his forces too thin for what he hoped of them.

Efforts to reduce his enemy's bridgeheads at Plezzo and Tolmino were ordered leading to innumerable, but indecisive, actions in those areas. Other attacks were mounted against Plava on the south edge of the Bainsizza Plateau. Also, the Carso heated up once more as St. Michele became the keystone to a flanking move on Gorizia. Nearby Monte Sei Busi, defended ferociously by the Austrian 106th Division, was the scene of at least four major assaults. Attacking on narrower fronts, though, meant the Austrians could focus more of their firepower over smaller sections. Boroevic also started receiving additional divisions from the Eastern and Balkan Fronts and staged some ferocious counterattacks against the Italians around Ste Michele. In early November Italy's Comando Supremo ordered a temporary halt to reevaluate the situation.

Italian Troops Approaching the Carso