

Fourth Battle of the Isonzo **November 10 - December 2, 1915**

The Fourth Battle of the Isonzo was really a second phase to the Third Battle. Fighting was more, but not exclusively, concentrated around Gorizia and on the Carso. In the first case, the Second Army mounted its greatest assault capturing Oslavia, but with not quite enough momentum left to gain Gorizia. South down to the Adriatic, the Third Army simply accumulated more and more casualties. Typical, was the fighting around Mte Sei Busi where five more assaults were mounted by the Italian Army. Towards the end of the Fourth Battle, action heated up again up and down the Isonzo Front from Tolmino down to Mte San Michele reaching a peak at the end of November. From the 1st of December to mid-month action shifted from major frontal assaults to small local actions. Halting for the winter, the troops on the Carso would learn they had achieved little since June except exchanging the pounding sun of the summer for a crushing northern winter wind off of the Alps know as the Bora.

Gas Warfare Arrives on the Italian Front - 1916

THE ISONZO

1916

Overview

If the campaign is protracted, the resources of the State will not be equal to the strain. . . then no man, however wise, will be able to avert the consequences that must ensue.

Sun Tsu - *The Art of War*

When Italy entered the Great War in 1915, it had hoped to tilt the balance of force against the Central Powers, ending the war quickly and allowing them to gain some long sought after territorial gains on the cheap. By the start of 1916, however, they found they were engaged in a protracted *Total War* placing undreamed of social and economic strains on the nation. Italy's government and military had to justify this burden with some successes on the battlefield. Their new allies had also started placing demands on them to continue on the offensive to alleviate pressures on their fronts. Austria-Hungary, likewise, had mobilized its entire dual-empire to support its war effort and needed to keep popular support. Also, to inhibit the disintegration threatened by the growth of ethnocentric nationalism, they could not afford to surrender any territory. On the Isonzo, all of this meant that in 1916 Italy needed to continue attacking and Austria-Hungary needed to continue defending. The war of attrition would continue growing with both sides blind to the inevitable consequences.

Fifth Battle of the Isonzo **March 9 - 17, 1916**

In February of 1916, the German Army on the Western Front launched a tremendous assault on the city of Verdun and its surrounding fortress zone in northeast France. At a conference at Chantilly, France Marshal Joffre requested that Italy and Russia take the offensive on their respective fronts to reduce pressure on the French forces. Cadorna ordered a broad, but half-hearted, offensive nearly immediately.

Probes were made at Tolmino, Gorizia and the Carso. In most cases they were more demonstrations than full assaults. These died out after about a week because of bad weather and some bracing counterattacks staged by the Austrians, most notably at Santa Maria near Tolmino. The Italian Army also still needed more guns and artillery shells. The allies committed to sending Italy heavy artillery pieces; and further offensives were delayed until the new weapons and sufficient shells could be assembled.

Meanwhile, in the Trentino, the Austrians were marshalling their own forces for an assault. If they could mount a successful attack down off of the mountains, cross the Asiago Plateau, then occupy the Venetian Plain, they could cut-off all the Italian forces in the Carnic and Julian Alps and along the Isonzo. This major operation, called the