

Exhausted Troops of the Firenze Brigade

Seventh Battle of the Isonzo
September 14 - 17, 1916

Eighth Battle of the Isonzo
October 10 - 12, 1916

Ninth Battle of the Isonzo
November 1 - 4, 1916

The next three battles on the Isonzo, all designed to expand the Gorizia bridgehead, were brief and bloody. Tactically, they featured sharp, uncoordinated local attacks on Austro-Hungarian positions which achieved some progress, but which, as usual, inflicted worse casualties the attackers [75,000] than the defenders [63,000]. These three grim battles probably started the downward spiral of morale in the Italian Army that would culminate a year later in the disaster of Caporetto.

The Second Army was given the objective of the Selva di Terranova, a wooded area lying back from the river in the gap between the Bainsizza Plateau in the north and the Carso to the south. During the Seventh Battle they captured Mte Rombon, but were forced to withdraw. Heavy losses by both armies then caused Cadorna to suspend offensive operations until October. Second Army's biggest success would take place in November when they captured Hill 171 near Mte St Marco behind Gorizia.

Third Army was ordered to advance once again through the Carso pushing the front six miles east. They faced tremendously determined opposition and after advancing nearly a mile in September, their high casualty rate necessitated a halt. The next month their advance was minimal. In early November they drove another mile close to the village of Castagnevizza where the front stabilized as winter approached. By the end of 1916 all the combatants along the Isonzo knew they were trapped in an inescapable war of attrition. Few, though, probably foresaw that even worse was coming in 1917.

Austro-Hungarian Commander
Svetozar Boroevic von Bojna

THE ISONZO

1917

Overview

In war, moral considerations make up three-quarters of the game; the relative balance of manpower accounts only for the remaining quarter.

Napoleon Bonaparte

In October of 1917 the most famous battle of the Great War on the Italian Front, Caporetto — fought along the Isonzo — would result in near catastrophe for Italy. The joint German and Austro-Hungarian assault would break open the Isonzo line, destroy the Italian Second Army and remove 275,000 Italian soldiers, almost all of them as captives, from the battlefield. In that battle there were many tactical shortcomings demonstrated by Cadorna and his subordinates and the Central Powers successfully applied the new “Hutier” or shock tactics. These matters will be discussed in La Grande Guerra's article on Caporetto — but, when entire battalions surrender without fully engaging their opponents, relative skills in the arts of generalship seem inadequate to explain things. A clue as to what must have happened at Caporetto was given a century earlier by [coincidentally] a prior veteran of the Isonzo sector, Napoleon Bonaparte. As quoted above, he identified moral considerations as the major determinant in warfare.