

In both areas the attackers suffered from the same handicap. The Bainsizza and Carso are, as described in our Isonzo Background article, "enormous natural fortresses". The new target for 1917, the Bainsizza, rises so rapidly and so high from the Isonzo that a frontal assault would be nearly suicidal. For once, however, tactics were adjusted to the situation. In another admirable bit of creativity it was decided that the plateau, with the help of fourteen bridges to be placed across the river by engineers, would be assaulted from the north at a section where the terrain was not as challenging for assault troops. Despite heavy casualties the men of the 24th Corps crossed the river, advanced behind an effective artillery barrage, forced their adversaries to withdraw and eventually occupied about half of the plateau.

On the Move in the Isonzo Sector

On the south edge of the plateau a secondary attack was staged from Mte Kuk resulting in the capture of Mte Santo which had resisted in the 10th Battle. These advances around the plateau stopped when the artillery support was not able to follow further and the Austro-Hungarian forces, always good on the defense, started taking advantage of the many caverns and hiding places provided by the Bainsizza's weird geology. Nevertheless, after the success of the 6th Battle of the Isonzo when Gorizia was captured, this effort was the most impressive military achievement by the Italian Army on the Isonzo.

Elsewhere, it was the same old story of frontal assaults on well developed defensive positions. After a final, inadequate attempt to capture Mte Gabriele which had been fortified with galleries and dugouts for years, the offensive ceased. Something was in the air. Cadorna sensed the Germans were about intervene and he wanted to get ready.

His preparations were to prove thoroughly inadequate, but that is a story to be told elsewhere. With the end of the Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo one of the sadder chapters in humanity's annals concludes. There were other dreadful battlefields in the Great War Verdun, the Somme, Ypres, Gallipoli where multiple battles were fought, but only on the Isonzo was the same futility engaged in ELEVEN times.

Sources and Thanks: A number of works were consulted for this article including: The British Official History, Military Operations: Italy, 1915-19, Edmonds & Davies; The War on the Italian Front, Luigi Villari; An Illustrated Companion to the First World War, Anthony Bruce; Purnell's History of the First World War, Vol. 2, Num. 16, Barrie Pitt, ed. and Vol. 4, Num. 12, Peter Young, ed.; Isonzo: La Dove Morirono, Schaumann & Schubert; La Guerra Italo-Austrica: 1915-1918 Amadeo Tosdi; Mark of the Beast, Alfredo Bonadeo.

Photos were kindly provided by Ray Mentzer, Mike Iavorone and Alessandro Risso.

