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# HOW ITALY WON THE GREAT WAR

*by*

Colonel EDGAR ERSKINE HUME

MEDICAL CORPS U. S. ARMY

LT. COLONEL COMMANDING U. S. ARMY HOSPITALS

with the ROYAL ITALIAN ARMY

1918



*with foreword  
of*

Doctor PAOLO DE VECCHI

JUNE 1930

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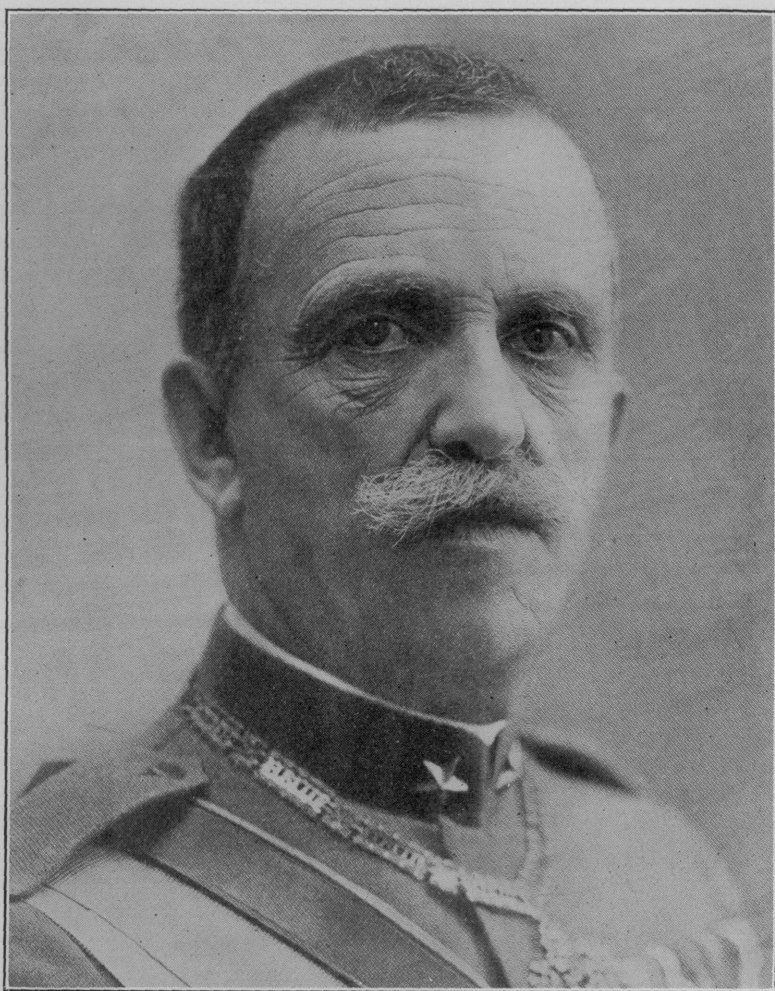
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**HIS MAJESTY KING VICTOR EMANUEL III**  
Supreme Commander of the Italian Armies on Land and Sea  
during the Great War 1915-1918

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## FOREWORD

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While reading the interesting article published by Colonel Edgar Erskine Hume in the June 1929 number of "The Military Surgeon" "Military Operations on the Italian Front in 1918" I could not resist the temptation of inserting it as the "Epilogue" of a work I intend to publish soon under the title:

### PERSONAL RECOLLECTION OF ITALIAN HISTORY FROM THE YEARS 1847 TO 1918

The splendid and accurate description of the two greatest field battles fought and won at the Italian front, written by an eye witness and a distinguished Medical Officer, the Lt. Colonel Commanding the U. S. Army Hospitals with the Royal Italian Army 1918, Edgar Erskine Hume at present Colonel, Medical Corps, Fort Benning Georgia, has been adopted by the U. S. infantry school as a text for the instruction of the officers of the American Army.

It seems strange that the Italian people, who are usually so prone to boast their own deeds, should not have claimed the battles of the Piave and of Vittorio Veneto, as the only field battles won by any of the Allies in the great world war.

The successful battle of the Marne, was certainly a clever action, but

was not a field battle, planned and fought in a regular military way, because it had no preparation, and was a simple fortunate check of an invading army, an episode of successful defence which saved Paris from an early invasion.

And similarly was the epic, superb and splendid resistance of Verdun, the real military glory of France in this last War.

We leave to the noble French Nation these glorious laurels, but we can not consider such actions as field battles, planned and won by an Army as they were both the Piave Battle and that of Vittorio Veneto. All the military actions on the French front were defensive battles, against an invading aggressive Army, on French soil.

Besides we wish to mention the fact that at the French front there were the Armies of four big Nations, with the subsidiary Colonial contingents, and the inexhaustible supply of foods and ammunitions from America, who had given the material support of her men, and above all the moral support of a great nation.

Italy was almost alone, facing a problem of life or death, and with it a powerful army, supported by one of the most powerful Empires of Europe, allied to Germany with the support of Turkey and Bulgaria.

The collapse of an Army Corps at Caporetto the 24th of October 1917 after the unchivalrous and treacherous manipulations of the Germans, who joined the Austro-Hungarians, in the hope of striking a mortal blow to the Italian Army, was followed instead by a miraculous and beneficial reaction, which brought Italy to her feet and woke the people to the realization of the desperate condition of the country whose fate stood in the hands of every citizen, called to fight to a finish.

If the Austro Hungarian Army had succeeded, after Caporetto, in crushing the Italian Army, the war would have been lost, for 500,000 men, elated by a victory, well supplied with large booty in ammunitions and food, would have crossed North of Italy and invaded the southern part of France, while another army could have gone to reinforce the Germans at the French front, in a moment so critical for the allies, terribly exhausted from the long struggle.

Fortunately in that short and terrible contingency, when the spreading of a panic could have cost to Italy her liberty, and to the Allies a disgraceful end of the war, the King, Victor Emanuel III, General Cadorna, and the Staff of brilliant officers who surrounded them did not lose their heads, but maintained instead a wonderful calm and that presence of mind so necessary in such perilous situation.

Although General Cadorna had to be replaced to satisfy the usually unconscious mob clamoring for the head of him responsible for the Caporetto disaster, yet his noble character was so far above the insane attacks of the moment, that he did not cease to give his wise and prudent suggestions in that delicate, critical moment, and to him especially is due the decision of holding the Piave River as the best and most

strategic line of defence, against the insistent advice of the allied staff for a line much farther back.

When the tremendous effect of the Caporetto disaster upon the nation has subsided, the Italian Army intrenched behind the Piave River, was confronted by some very difficult problems, for, beside the loss of many important strategic positions, which she had gained during almost three years of hard struggle and great sacrifice of men and means, she had also lost very large war stores, a considerable portion of her artillery, and a great contingent of veteran troops taken prisoners, wounded or dispersed in the hurried retreat. The effect upon the Nation, at first amazing, soon was followed by one of those great reactions, which have been mentioned in the history of the world.

Perhaps some of the Americans who were at the Italian front at that critical time, must have remembered an incident of the glorious history of the war of independence of the United States of America, and the first battle fought the 17th of June 1775, which went to posterity under the name of Bunker Hill, at Charleston near Boston, Massachusetts where the American Volunteers, 500 in number, were defeated by the regular troops of England 3,000 strong, losing two thirds of their own men, including their own valiant General Joseph Warren, but putting out of action one third of the enemy's soldiers.

The defeat of Bunker Hill, aroused among the American such patriotic national feeling, that moved the young colonists to a strong sentiment of responsibility and unity which brought them to a final triumph.

Such must have been the feeling of the Italians throughout the Peninsula. First a discouragement, then

indignation, and at last a strong sentiment of responsibility, and determination to fight to the end. It was then, that the youths of Italy, who had been prepared for further call, rushed at once to the front, to help the veterans of so many battles, to fill the exhausted ranks, encourage the disheartened, and give new spirit, new strength, the force of the nation.

It is easy to understand how Caporetto, an almost fatal blow to Italy, should have been instead a source of great hopes to Austria Hungary and the army of the Dual Monarchy, hopes largely shared by the German Army struggling almost hopelessly at the French front.

Both German and Austro Hungarian Armies were daily getting more restless and tired of the long fighting, and the events at the Italian front were looked upon with intense anxiety as the last hope for a favorable termination of the great struggle.

The first disillusionment came after the brilliant and successful battle of the Piave, started June 18th and concluded the 24th of June with a communique from the Austro-Hungarian Army staff, characteristic of the situation. But the final stroke to the German Staff came as a crushing blow, the third of November 1918 with the famous proclamation of General Armando Diaz, which read:

"The war against Austria-Hungary, which, under the high direction of His Majesty the King, Supreme Commander, the Italian Army, inferior in number and means, started May 24, 1915, and with unshaken faith and tenacious valor, was followed uninterruptedly and severely for 41 months, is won.

"The gigantic battle started the 24th of October last, in which 51 Italian Divisions, 5 British, 2

"French, one Czechoslovak Divisions, and one Regiment of Americans, against 75 Divisions of Austro-Hungarians took part, came to an end with a complete victory by the Italians.

"The sudden and dashing rush of the 29th Corps of Army on Trento, cutting the retreat of the enemy's Army from that place, while already harassed by the troops of the Seventh Army Corp on the North and by the I, IV and VII on the East Side, forced the complete rout of the enemy.

"From the Brenta to the Torre, the irresistible dash of the VIII, X, and XII Army Corps and of the Cavalry Division, pursued still further the flying enemy.

"Down on the plains, His Royal Highness the Duke of Aosta, rapidly advances at the head of his invincible Third Army, anxious to retake the positions so gloriously conquered, though never lost.

"The Austro-Hungarian Army is annihilated; it had already lost severely at the first attack, but while in her retreat pursued, lost immense quantities of all sort of materials, and entirely the war stores and deposits, left so far in our hands three-hundred-thousand prisoners, with the entire Staff of Commands and no less than five thousand cannons.

"The remnant of the, once, most powerful Army of the world, is returning in disorder and without any hope, by the same valleys through which they previously descended with such trust and pride.

DIAZ.

The tremendous blow, which meant not only the end of the war but the end of an Empire, and that



of a dynasty, centuries old, had an indescribable effect on the German Front, amidst the already over-anxious Staff, which had been anxiously awaiting for days the news from Italy of the final result of the fierce struggle.

After the official statement of the complete collapse of the Austro Hungarian Army, meetings after meetings of the Commanders of the German Army were held with the scope of ending the war with as little disgrace as possible, until the 9th of November, six days after the Italian victory, Emperor William the Second, decided to leave his Army and find shelter in exile. In a recent book published by his ex-chauffeur Wilhelm Warner (Remembrances), the incident of that meeting and the details of the flight of the Emperor to Holland, in almost a state of collapse, are given not entirely to the credit of the man who four years before had started arrogantly to conquer the world, and now almost cowardly abandoned the field of slaughter and destruction of four years of struggle of which he had been responsible, whatever may be said in his defence.

That he had been principally responsible of the war can hardly be denied after so many proofs.

In an interesting book of Morgen-thau, lately published "I was sent to Athen", at page 15th "Rumbling at the approaching storm" it is written:

"These friends, were the German Ambassador at Constantinople, and the German Army officers, who had been brought in to organize and train the Turkish Army. It developed later that the German Ambassador and the German officers were already feverishly engaged in paving the way for the world war that broke the following year". They were scheming for Turkish co-operation in that conflict.

"I have explained the German plan at length elsewhere. Briefly it was to use Turkey and Bulgaria during the impending war for the purpose of wholly segregating Russia from her western Allies.

"After the war, Bulgaria and Turkey were to be made into tributary States, forming the opened corridor of Germany's expansion through to Mesopotamia and India. In working out the details of this scheme, Germany had foreseen that the presence of large bodies of recalcitrant Greeks and Armenians within the Turkish Empire, would constitute a serious military difficulty.

The Evening Post editorial of Saturday June 29th 1929, commenting the bitter protest of the German press on the war guilt writes the following:

"The anti war guilt" protest in Germany, does not seem particularly impressive. It is too artificial, too well regimented. Its quality is indicated by the ironic fact that a Journal bearing the ominous title of "Der Tag", draped its column in black.

"Will power, even when nationally organized, can not change realities.

"The "will to war" and the "will to win", for years were given mass-preaching in Germany. Their impotence was demonstrated. So, too, was demonstrated the fallacy of the propaganda, by which, the High Command, tried to force upon the world, by sheer assertion, its own interpretation of military or diplomatic events.

"Germany can not get rid of the name of "war guilt", merely

"by willing it. History will have  
"to work out the final verdict.

"And the final verdict in the  
"long run will, we believe, be  
"greatly like the contemporary  
"verdict.

Documents are too numerous already to prove that the war guilt came from Germany, and perhaps as an attenuation, not exactly from the German people, but from William II Hohenzollern and his staff of War Lords. In fact in the archives of the Austrian and Hungarian Government it was found that the Emperor of Germany had personally threatened Serbia seven months before the declaration of war.

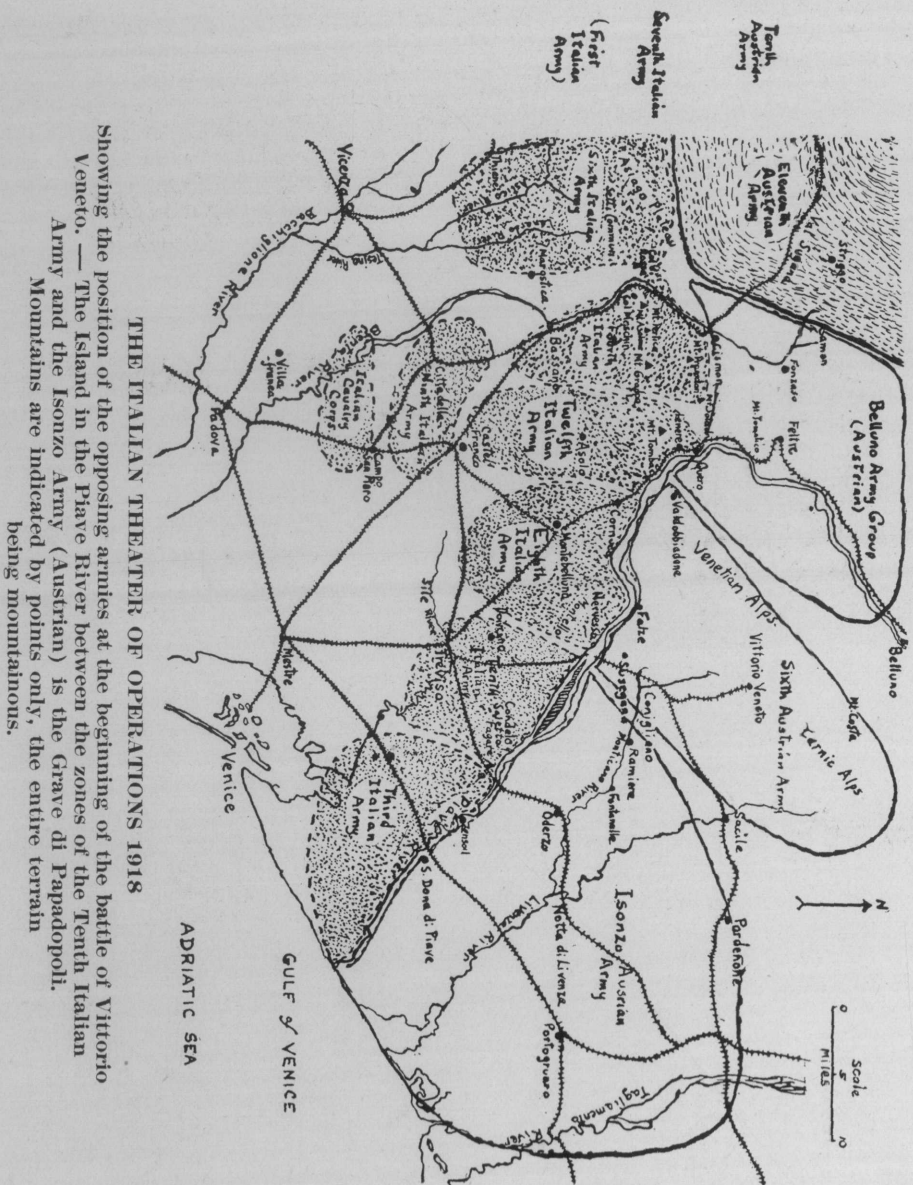
But to return to the scope of my work, I wish to state that the article of Colonel Hume which was published in the "Military Surgeon" of June 1929, was at first presented in form of lectures at the Infantry School, United States Army (the largest Am-

erican Institution of Military Instruction) and then adopted as a text.

In presenting the precious and important document of such historical value for the Italians, for their vital part taken in the great war, I wish to thank the distinguished Officer for his just and impartial description of the two battles and recommend him to the gratitude of the Italian people whose achievements in the great war have been misrepresented and almost ignored.

The valuable acknowledgement made by Lord Cavan, Commander of the British Divisions, who fought with the Italians at the Piave and Vittorio Veneto, of the report of Colonel Hume, as well as the numerous letters of praise sent to him by various commanders of the Italian troops are certainly a well deserved price for his work.

**Doctor PAOLO DE VECCHI.**  
**April 1930.**



### THE ITALIAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS 1918

Showing the position of the opposing armies at the beginning of the battle of Vittorio Veneto. — The Island in the Piave River between the zones of the Tenth Italian Army and the Isonzo Army (Austrian) is the Grave di Papadopoli. Mountains are indicated by points only, the entire terrain being mountainous.



## MILITARY OPERATIONS ON THE ITALIAN FRONT IN 1918

The defeat of Caporetto on October 24 1917, shook Italy's military strength to its foundations. It cost her not only some eight hundred thousand effectives but enormous stores of the munition of war. Austria depleted stocks were suddenly replenished and her enthusiasm for the war redoubled. Italy's darkest hour had dawned. Her allies were appalled by Austria's sudden advance, for the whole events of the defeat occupied but a single month.

But military history has often recorded defeats which by their moral effect have proved in reality victories in disguise.

Such we are told was the effect of the battle of Manassas or Bull Run on the North in the American civil war. Caporetto produced such results. Italy saw the necessity of giving attention to her "civil front" which had been weakened through neglect and pernicious German propaganda. Italy's allies at once realized that a closer union must be effected between the nations engaged against the Central Powers. The dispatch of foreign troops to Italy to fight side by side with the Italians brought home to her people that Italy was engaged in a world struggle.

The valuable work of the American Red Cross at this juncture must not be forgotten, for by their aid in the care of the families of soldiers, the fighting spirit of the troops was increased and in addition they assisted greatly with their Ambulances bearing the American flag.

The rapid recovery of the army showed the fighting quality of the nation. The Italian defence in the mountains were strengthened. The Italian engineers, always one of the most brilliant groups in any army, had constructed extensive galleries, especially in the Monte Grappa and Monte Pasubio. These famous passages built chiefly by blasting in the soft rock, were used by both sides as a means of increasing defensive strength.

Galleries were in many places started on one side of the mountain and run directly through to the side facing the enemy, there to branch out into chambers for machine guns and other defences.

Lateral communication was also by means of galleries. The length of the system, particularly on Mount Grappa, was very extensive and aid stations and even field hospitals were installed in some of them. The noise

from the reverberation of the guns was terrible. In such terrain it was of course impossible to bury the dead, rude cairns being used in lieu of graves.

A road some seventeen kilometers long was built in two months, climbing from the plain to an altitude of 8,000 feet. Additions were made to the "teleferica" system of transportation and these cable railways crossing chasms and glaciers were extended so that they might be used for supplies of all kinds, carrying them to the mountain fortifications. Many of the wounded were evacuated in this manner.

Caporetto had taught Italy the dangers of inadequate defensive organization of the ground. Indeed it almost appeared that now she had lost sight of the principle of the offensive and thought only of the defense. Roads were prepared for use in another retreat if need be. The Venetian plain was organized by the construction of five successive lines. The first was on the Piave, the second was the Brenta and Bacchiglione Rivers, the third extended from the Lake of Garda to the sea, the fourth from Switzerland to the sea continued the Garda line to the north, and finally the fifth line was the river Po, with provisions for inundation reaching seventy-five miles inland from the sea. It seemed that the existence of this elaborate system of defenses was, almost as much as other factors, the cause of the decision to leave the first offensive step to the enemy.

The Austrian main hope rested on the memory of Caporetto. She was between the horns of a dilemma and had to face a revolution at home or go forward. The Dual Monarchy could look back on many victories or old on the soil of northern Italy. Custoza and Novara were fond memories and the leaders of the Imperial and Royal troops were not slow in

reminding their men of them. The grain of Italy was coveted by the hungry Austrians who called the coming effort the "hunger offensive."

The year 1918 opened with the Italians holding firmly the line of the Piave River, and straining every energy in a desperate effort to increase their output of war material. It was almost like making bricks without straw. She had never been so short of provisions and the civil population was almost in want that the army might be supplied. The American ambassador had it on reliable information that at the New Year Palermo had been without grain for two days, Naples had only a two days' supply and there was hardly a city outside the War Zone which had more than enough to last a fortnight. One must conclude that had Austria's offensive been successful she would have been disappointed in her war loot.

The news of Caporetto had brought Italy promises of allied aid. Five British and Five French divisions were promised her from the Western Front. Those who would belittle Italy's arms must not overlook that Italy, unaided, had stemmed the tide of the Austro German advance on the Piave before a single soldier of the Entente reached Italy. Italy's wonderful recovery after Caporetto gave the British and French time to march ninety miles to the Montello unmolested by an enemy.

During the early days of the winter, there were a number of minor engagements with the enemy. The Third Army, under the Duke of Aosta, early in January, cleared the Austrians from the bridgehead at Zenon, while on January 14 there was a successful attack on Monte Asolone. By the end of the month, General Pecori-Giraldi captured

some 3,000 prisoners in his attacks on the Col del Rosso, and Monte di Val Bella. These actions heightened Italian morale, but on the whole, the Italian front was quiet. Ludendorf in France had need of his Germans so that Austria-Hungary was left without the promised help. As the winter wore on and the Italian offensive at first scheduled for spring failed to materialize, four French and two British divisions were returned to the French front.

General Diaz was cautious; some of the leaders of other armies, particularly the French, thought over-cautious. But we have the opinion of the British commander in the Italian theater of war that General Diaz's decision to await the attack was fully justified. His own forces were being daily reduced by British, French and Italian divisions being sent to France, while the Austrians had not sent any help to their allies. The decision to await the Austrian offensive was reaffirmed, and many of the guns already in position on the Asiago, were withdrawn into reserve or placed in new positions on the Piave.

### **The Battle of the Piave.**

The Italian Supreme Command had full knowledge of the coming attack which was to be expected in May or June. Their armies were thus disposed: On the west side of the Trentino salient from the Stelvio to Lake Garda was the Seventh Army under Tassoni. The First Army under Pecori-Giraldi was on the east side of the Trentino salient from Garda to Sculazzon. On its right, covering the Asiago Plateau, was the Sixth Army under Montuori. The Sixth Army included the British XIV Corps under the Earl of Cavan, and the French XII Corps. The Grappa was held by the Fourth Army under Giardino. The new Eighth (formerly

the ill-fated Second) Army under Pennella held the upper Piave and the Montello, while on its right under the Duke of Aosta, lay the Third Army extending along the river to the sea. The Ninth (formerly the Fifth Army under Morrone was in reserve under the "Comando Supremo". Thus were the fifty-six divisions at the disposal of General Diaz placed between the Stelvio and the sea.

The position of the enemy had remained about the same through the winter. The Eleventh Army under Scheuchensteuel, lay between Astico and the Piave astride the Brenta. On its left was the Tenth Army under Krobotin (composed chiefly of German speaking soldiers). These two armies constituted the Group under Field Marshal Conrad von Hotzendorf. Along the Piave was the Group of Field Marshal Boroevitch von Bojna, made up of the Sixth Army under General the Archduke Joseph, and the Isonzo Army under General von Wurm, consisting of the best Hungarian divisions.

Austria had great advantage of position. From the crest of the mountain wall they could look across the whole plain from the borders to the sea as on a promised land. On a clear day Venice was visible. As before, Field Marshal Conrad reminded his men that their fathers, their grandfathers and their ancestors had fought and conquered the same enemy with the same spirit, and, he might have added, on the same fields.

The plan was to push down from the mountains onto the plain, cut the communications of the Piave front, and turn the flank of every Italian corps between the Monte Grappa and the sea. At the same time the whole of the Piave line was to be attacked by the infiltration tactics of Ludendorf. The friction between the Austrian leaders, Conrad and Boro-



**MARSHAL LUIGI CADORNA**  
Chief of the Military Staff of the Italian Army

vitch, was such that the resulting plan was a sort of compromise, between Conrad's idea of an attack on the Asiago Plateau, and that of Boro-evitch, who wished to drive straight across the Piave. It had all the disadvantages of most compromises. They divided the reserves between them since mutual jealousy would not let either consent to leave them under General Headquarters. This violation of the principles of cooperation and mass handicapped the offensive at its inception. The Italians were never without accurate information as to the enemy's plans, for there was a constant trickle of deserters, so that surprise was out of the question.

Ludendorf's tactics were badly understood. One wonders how the Austrians could think themselves capable of carrying on an operation more than twice as big as that of Ludendorf, without the striking power that he had at his disposal. In Ludendorf's attack in Picardy in March, 1918, he had had 10,000 men to the mile. The Austrians, on the other hand, in a far more rugged terrain, had only about half that number. "The Italians," they said, "cannot be everywhere strong; if we attack everywhere we shall discover their soft places." Though his own artillery preparation extended over a line from the River Astico, to the Venetian lagoons, and he had a 40 per cent superiority in guns (7,500 to 5,400), in reality the Austrian offensive spread out in such a way that it enabled the Italians to apply a great deal more strength in meeting the first shock. Instead of a single great battle in one sector where the assailant had the superiority of force, there resulted a piecemeal attack involving many separate battles.

The Austrian offensive, called by them the "Radetzky Offensive," started on June 15. Diaz's informa-

tion of their plan enabled him to anticipate the attack with his artillery and the enemy actually began under a disadvantage. The Austrian advance was in two sections. The first was in the plains on a twenty-five mile line between the Montello and Santa Dona di Piave, under Boro-evitch. The second was on a eighteen mile line from Monte Grappa to Canove, under Conrad. In the mountains, the Austrian concentrations represented about eight bayonets to the yard. On the Piave the fight hinged on the Montello. This is an isolated ridge about seven hundred feet high and over seven miles long — ideal for defense. If this hill could have been held by the enemy, he might have turned the Italian line to the south. Boro-evitch crossed the Piave at three places, at Santa Dona di Piave near the coast, at Fagare opposite Treviso, and at Nervessa. There was an almost immediate Italian counter-attack, but the enemy nevertheless got a footing on the Montello under the northern and eastern slopes of which the Piave flows. Now it was that Field Marshal Boro-evitch made a serious mistake in his imitation of the German tactics. He failed to mass his reserves to establish his gains.

At this point nature intervened. The Piave which had been full at the time of the launching of the Austrian attack, began to rise. Torrential rains quickly turned the river into a raging flood. The logs which had been felled higher up the stream were swept down, and, acting like so many battering rams, destroyed the bridges over the river. Only far down near Santa Dona di Piave where the channel is broad, were there bridges left, and here, but four. One Austrian writer says that their offensive was stopped by heaven's inexorable and cruel veto, and another remarks that the sun of the Imperial powers sank



at this time and from then on evening fell rapidly. The four remaining bridges were excellent targets for the Italian artillery.

On June 18, the main Italian counter-offensive began. The Eighth Army advanced against Archduke Joseph, commanding the Austrian Sixth Army, and to the south the Duke of Aosta's Third Army broke through the Austrian center between Fagare and Candelù and occupied the bank of the Piave at Saletto. The Austrians on the Montello were slowly pressed back, and on June 19, Marshal Boroévitch ordered a retreat. By June 23 the whole of the Montello was again in Italian hands and the Austrian offensive had definitely failed.

In the meantime, Conrad's army group had attacked on the Grappa, the effort being confined to the region between the Brenta River and the central mass of the mountain itself. Under him was also the Eleventh Army striking between the Astico and the Brenta. The effort against Grappa was by the Tenth Army under General Krobatin. There were several successful attacks by the enemy in comparatively small areas, such as on Col del Miglio, Col Fagheron, Col Fenilon, and Col Moschin, also breaking through the front line on Monte Solarolo. But all attacks were finally repulsed and the enemy thrown back, so that by the afternoon on June 15, the first day of the offensive, it had been checked and all points gained by the enemy, were again in Italian hands.

Not only had there been friction between the two Austrian leaders, neither of whom was in supreme command, but there had been no tactical intercommunication between their forces. The Austrian attack on the long front instead of confining themselves to a concentration for a break on a front of twenty or thirty

miles which would have been sufficient had any real breach been made, was a violation of the principle of mass, which cost them dearly. Similar disregard for certain other principles of war likewise proved costly. Their piece-meal attack was no worse than their allowing the Italians to know their whole plans, so that the withering fire of the Italian artillery fell upon them just as they were preparing for the advance. "They had failed grotesquely," says Hays, "and their offensive power was at an end. Their morale was hopelessly lowered and domestic revolt threatened." On the other side, Italy with sudden force, which even her leaders may well have believed impossible, had hurled the Austrians back across the Piave along the greater part of the course of the river and had wrested from their grasp the positions on the Asiago and Grappa which, if retained, would have rendered inevitable the abandonment of the Asiago-Grappa-Piave line, and the loss of Venice.

Austrian opinion seems to be divided as to whether they would have won the campaign even had the Piave offensive been successful. The remark made in 1859, by a Jager to the defeated General Gyulai was often quoted: "Die Roszle waren schon gut, aber die Fuhrleut' sind nichts wert." And indeed it was not possible to place the blame elsewhere than on the Austrian leaders. Marshal Conrad was severely criticized, and was relieved from his command, his Group being taken over by the Archduke Joseph. Schwarte, however, remarks that he is the outstanding soldier of the Fatherland (Austrian) of the twentieth century, and met a typically Austrian fate. The Italian opinion seems to be that Italy was saved by her resistance on the Piave, but that Austria was crushed by the final victory of Vittorio Veneto.

The Earl of Cavan, the British commander in Italy, felt very strongly that the Italian success should have been followed up, and that a bold stroke would have brought about the same result in July that it finally did in October. However the weight of opinion is that Diaz acted wisely in not striking at that time, though his divisional commanders all reported a state of collapse in the enemy's ranks. But General Gathorne-Hardy, the British chief-of-staff, reminds us that Italy had no superiority in numbers, that the Austrians had really shown no signs of demoralization, and that in an apparently similar situation on the French front in 1918, the Supreme War Council had decided on a defensive policy. The collapse of Austrian morale did not occur until well after the Piave battle when there was no longer an opportunity to follow up the Italian success. Of course the chance for a counter-stroke passed when the Austrians got back across the Piave, for any attack in the mountains would then have required (as it later in reality did require) slow and methodical preparation. Besides this, any extension of the line would have rendered the precarious left flank more vulnerable.

The Austrian command prepared their people for the bad news of their failure with a communiqué on June 24, which is quoted as being characteristic: "The situation created by the rising of the waters and the bad weather have obliged us to abandon the Montello, and some sectors of the other positions conquered on the right bank of the Piave. The order given with this purpose four days ago, already has been carried out, in such a way that our movements were completely hidden from the enemy." But this movement had not escaped the notice of the Italians, for the communiqué of General

Diaz dated June 27 says: "From the Montello to the sea, the enemy defeated and hard pressed by our brave troops, is recrossing the Piave in disorder."

Here ended the Austrian hope of gaining peace by victory. The battle cost them 25,000 prisoners, about 100 guns and 150,000 casualties. Caporetto was avenged.

From July 6 until October 24, there was no fighting on the Italian front, except minor raids. General Diaz with the same caution that had characterized his action in the earlier part of the year, was biding his time.

Political events assumed a more and more important role. The publication of the Pact of London was made the most of by the Austrians. On the face of that amazing document, it appeared that Italy had entered the war on terms of apparently cold barter. The Southern Slavs in the Austrian Army were told that Italy was fighting only to subjugate large areas of their lands, and many of their people to the Italian domination. But on April 10, 1918, the Italians and the Yugoslavs came to an understanding at Rome, and the aspirations of this subject people were recognized. Thenceforth there were numerous desertions from the Yugoslavic units, and Austria began to withdraw them from the Italian front. Not only the Yugoslavs were going over to the allied side, but the Poles were following their example. A third Slavic people had long ere this decided to cast their lot with the enemies of the dual monarchy. The Czechoslovaks had organized one of their three Legions in Italy (the other two being in France and Siberia respectively). These music loving soldiers sang the old Bohemian songs of the days of Czech freedom, many of which were forbidden in Austria and shouted in their own language to the compatriots in the

Austrian lines to come over and aid them in obtaining Czechoslovak independence. Wholesale desertions of Czechs (in one case an entire company) in response to such a call took place. There was a Czechoslovak Division organized in time to take part in the battle of Vittorio Veneto.

During the autumn the old Austro-Hungarian monarchy passed peacefully away more or less as a result of senile decay, but one must not conclude from this that the Imperial and Royal Army was anything but very much alive. It was the army alone that had ever given the dual state any real unity, and it had on many other occasions tided the government over a crisis. In 1848, Radetzky at the head of the army saved the monarchy at a moment of similar uncertainty. Field Marshal Boroévitch was, like Radetzky, a Slav, but unlike Radetzky, he was no great leader, and the falling away of others of his race from his army left him without one of its strongest elements, an element which had always supported Radetzky. The battle fought in October, 1918, showed how an army will often go on fighting, simply because it is an army and for no other reason. Only when the army was overwhelmingly defeated did it go to pieces, and it is not too much to suppose that had the Austrians held the Piave in October, the army would "not" have gone to pieces. Conversely if the Italians had defeated Radetzky at Custoza, his army might have broken up for political reasons and the Emperor Francis Joseph have reigned over his heterogeneous empire for but a few months instead of seventy years. In times of revolution, as history has shown over and over again, the winning of a battle counts not less but far more than in times of stable government. By the irony of fate, the only forces of the Teutonic League which on Oc-

tober 26 had not been beaten, were those of Austria. The Turks and Bulgars had suffered defeat. The Germans were staggering to their fall, but only Austria-Hungary remained unconquered.

The class of 1900 in Italy had been called. There is a thrill in the achievements of these seventeen-year-old boys, but there were no more reserves. In the words of Ambassador Page, Italy had ground her seed corn. They were being trained for the spring offensive that seemed possible.

There was a growing feeling among Italians that Italy was being deliberately isolated by her allies and held back particularly by France. The Americans, they thought, were being kept from coming through to Italy. The American Army Ambulance Service had originally been organized for duty with the French Army. About the time, however, that their training was almost completed it appeared that their services were not wanted by the French. They were thereupon offered to the Italians who accepted them and transported them to Italy on Italian ships and at Italian expense. Hardly were they arrived there when fifteen sections, or one-half of the total number, were transferred to France. This incident did much to create resentment on the part of the Italians.

With the end of summer there was considerable speculation as to why General Diaz did not launch an attack in cooperation with the offensive being fought by the other allies. The writer, on temporary duty in France from Italy, was asked over and over again why the Italians alone of the allies were doing nothing. Lord Cavan himself remarks that it was hard to sit idly by through July, August, and September, while so much was happening on the French front.

But Diaz had his reasons again. He had lent troops to Foch and as now Austria had but one front, she had a superiority of twelve divisions and approximately 20 per cent artillery predominance. Furthermore she still held all of the best positions. The signs of internal decay in Austria were significant and Diaz awaited developments.

During the summer of 1918, the 332nd U. S. Infantry, a part of the 83rd Division, was sent to Italy where it was received with joy. By having battalions sent to different localities and wearing different combinations of uniform equipment, it appeared that there was a large body of American troops in the country. After the Armistice, Austrian officers stated that they thought that there was not less than an American division opposite them. As a matter of fact, the only U. S. Army organizations on the Italian front, besides the 332nd Infantry with the 331st Field Hospital attached were: the U. S. Army Ambulance Service (fifteen sections), the U. S. Army Hospital Center (Base Hospital 102 expanded), and a varying number of aviators. The medical and aviation units were attached to the Italian Army and not under American orders. The Headquarters of the U. S. Army Ambulance Service was at Mantua and their units were attached to Italian troops all along the front. The U. S. Army Hospital Center was located at Vicenza being under the "Intendenza" of the Fourth and Sixth Italian Armies (Armies of the Grappa and the Plateaux), but surgical and other units were attached at various times to the Third, Eighth, and Tenth Armies. Field hospitals were maintained at Asolo, Tarcento, Lonigo and other places. The additional personnel for this work was supplied by the Italians. During the epidemic of influenza, personnel were loaned to

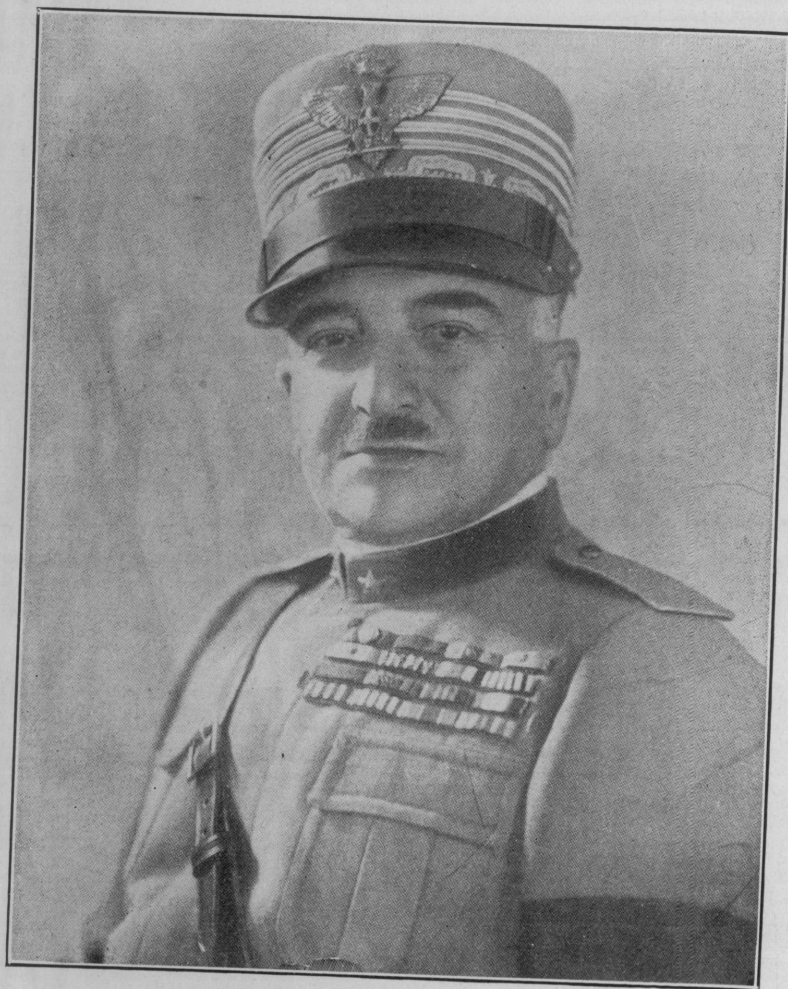
Ambulance No. 227 of the "Forces Francaises en Italie". Both the Army Ambulance Service and the Hospital Center (Base Hospital 102), were cited in Italian orders and both are given credit for the battle of Vittorio Veneto by the U. S. War Department. This is perhaps the only instance of battle credit to a base hospital (General Orders No. 5, War Department, March 8, 1926).

General Diaz felt that there were two possible plans open to him. The first was to drive the attack home with every available man, in case a possibility presented itself of the allies gaining a real superiority of force. The second possibility was to make a preparatory attack as the first phase of a more complex effort in case the enemy should succeed in reestablishing a solid front in all theaters of war. The events in Palestine and in the Balkans, particularly the prospect of success on the Salonica front, made him abandon all idea of a limited offensive. It was imperative that Austria be compelled to hold all her forces in Italy and not release any to her sorely pressed allies.

### **The Battle of Vittorio Veneto**

The plans of the Italian Supreme Command for the offensive now known as the battle of Vittorio Veneto, were elaborately worked out. It was decided to begin by a feint on Mount Grappa followed by the main effort across the Piave.

The position of the Italian armies was as follows: The Sixth Army under General Montuori was on the Asiago Plateau between the Brenta and Piave Rivers. It included the British Forty-eight Division. The Twelfth Army, including the French Thirty-third Division and commanded by the French General Graziani, lay along the Piave as far south as the Montello. The Eighth Army un-



**MARSHAL ARMANDO DIAZ**  
Successor of Marshal Cadorna after Caporetto

der General Caviglia was on the Montello. South of it was the Tenth Army, including the British XIV Corps (consisting of the Seventh and Twenty-third Divisions), and commanded by General the Earl of Cavan. South of Cavan to the Adriatic was the Third Army under H. R. H. the Duke of Aosta. The Fourth Army, under General Giardino, held the Grappa while the Ninth Army, under General Morrone, was in reserve.

The arrangement of the Austrian armies was: On the left wing was the Piave Armies commanded by Field Marshal Boroevitch von Bojna, and consisting of the Sixth Army and the Isonzo Army (sometimes incorrectly called the Fifth Army, from which former organization it was partly built). The Isonzo Army held the line along the river from the sea to Ponte della Priula. The Sixth Army continued the line of the river from the Ponte della Priula to above Valdobbiadene, opposite Monfenera. Next came the independent command known as the Gruppo Belluno under General von Coglia, which held the line as far as the Brenta and separated the Piave Armies from the Trentino Armies. The Trentino Armies, commanded by the Archduke Joseph, consisted of the Eleventh Army under General Scheuchensteuel and the Tenth Army under General Krobatin. The Eleventh Army held the line between the Brenta and the Astico on the Plateau of the Seven Communes. The Tenth Army stretched from the Astico to the Swiss border.

In their plans for defense the Austrians had counted first on the Piave itself. Secondly, on a well prepared belt of positions extending a mile and a half deep, called the "Kaiserstellung", or Imperial Position. In rear of this, extending some two miles back, was a less well prepared

line known as the "Konigstellung", or Royal Position.

As might be expected, there is a disagreement between the Italian and Austrian writers as to the number of troops that were engaged on each side. The report of the battle made by the Comando Supremo of the Royal Italian Army says that there were 57 Italian Divisions, or 769 Battalions against 63½ Austrian Division consisting of 827 battalions. The fifty-seven Italian Divisions included three British, two French, and one Czechoslovak Divisions and the one American regiment. The Austrian account states that there were 57 Italian Division consisting of 850 battalions opposing 57½ Austrian Divisions. Furthermore, the Austrians claim that their divisions were so greatly reduced in numbers, that they were some two hundred battalions under strength, while the Italian Divisions were at full strength. While each side had twelve battalions to the division, the Austrians had in addition, a battalion of storm troops to each division, while the Italians had one to each corps. Each Austrian Battalion had four rifle companies, and one machine-gun company. The Italians had one less rifle company per battalion. Austria had, of course, a much larger population from which to draw. Probably the most accurate statement of the composition of the Austro-Hungarian forces available at the moment that the offensive began, is to be had in the confidential British report. This document states that the Austrians had: 54½ infantry and 6 dismounted cavalry divisions. Of these nine of the infantry (the 5th, 16th, 74th Honved, 10th, 39th Honved, 27th, 38th Honved and 44th Schutzen), and four of the cavalry (the 1st, 8th, 11th Honved, and 12th) divisions, owing to sickness, mutiny and the transfer of troops of

Hungarian nationality to Hungary, were so reduced in strength as to be each only equivalent to about a single regiment. On the whole front during the course of the battle, every infantry division except the Fifty-seventh, and every cavalry division was thrown into the fight, making a total engaged of  $53\frac{1}{2}$  infantry and 6 cavalry. Of these,  $32\frac{1}{2}$  infantry, and 2 cavalry divisions, were either captured or rendered useless as combatant units.

The Italians had a slight superiority in guns, with 8,929 to the 7,000 of the Austrians. One of the most important preparations for the offensive was the massing of the artillery and ammunition. The Italians located 5,700 guns and some 6,000-000 rounds of ammunition in the main battle line of 62 kilometers. Of these, about 2,600 guns, and 3,300-000 rounds had to be brought up as reinforcements. The Austrians had plenty of ammunition, but were unable to use it.

There were tactical objections to a plan requiring an attack in an easterly direction. If the Italians were to penetrate into Austria, Italy itself would be exposed, for its safety depended on the defense in the mountains against a hostile counterstroke. Bridges and roads in the East were at all times menaced from the air, and the maintenance of communications would be exceedingly difficult. Equally weighty were the objections to an attack in a northerly direction for the mountain altitude of 9,000 feet would almost surely mean a snow covering as late in the year as October. Thus the physical difficulties confined the attack of the Asiago Plateau and the mountains dividing that plateau from the Val Sugana. For these reasons, the Italian Supreme Command decided to strike at Vittorio Veneto on a line bisecting the two lines of difficulty, and

at the same time dividing the two Austrian Armies, separating them from each other and from their base. The Earl of Cavan holds that General Diaz is entitled to much more credit for this plan than he is generally given.

The attack was to begin with a feint on Monte Grappa by the Fourth Army, then the main blow to be struck by the Twelfth, Tenth and Eighth Armies against the Austrian Isonzo and Sixth Armies, driving a wedge between them. The Twelfth Army was to fight up the Piave to Feltre whence an important road led to the Trentino. The Eighth Army was to make good the water shed of the Valmarino on the line of communications of the Sixth Austrian Army, and to drive the Austrians northward. The Tenth Army was to move due east to the Livenza, protecting the flanks of the two armies on its left in their northward drive, and at the same time driving the Isonzo Army in a different direction of retreat from its neighbor.

One of the reasons for the battle starting with a feint on Grappa, was that the Piave was high and still rising, so that the attack could not start on October 15 as it otherwise would have done. The river had gone down considerably by the night of October 26-27. Lord Cavan cites the devotion of the Grappa Army for its work in drawing the Austrians from the main effort on the Piave. "This duty was performed with a devotion worthy of a great place in military history".

The battle began at dawn on October 24, exactly one year after the tragedy of Caporetto, by an attack of the Fourth Army on Monte Grappa as planned. Opposite the Fourth Army the Austrians had massed no less than eleven divisions with an additional ten and a half divisions in reserve. On the other hand there were but twelve divisions with prac-

tically no reserves opposing the Eighth and Tenth Italian Armies. These dispositions alone show the importance of the feint attack on the Grappa. The attack of the Fourth Army was supported by the left wing of the Twelfth Army and the Artillery of the Sixth Army. A thick fog, later turning to pouring rain, limited the artillery action on both sides in effectiveness. The Austrians resisted stoutly and their machine-gun fire was most effective. Certainly the enemy showed no signs whatever of dry rot. Like most holding battles it was costly to the attack. Some of the wounded from the first moment of the fight were admitted to the U. S. Army hospital unit attached to the Grappa Army. The peaks of Monte Asolone, Monte Pertica and Monte Spinoncia were captured from the Austrians, but could not be held against the violent counter-attack.

The left wing of the Twelfth Army, supporting the Fourth, descended from Monte Tomba and Monfenera into the basin of the Alano where it succeeded in occupying the north bank of the Ornic. The Austrians, as has been shown, held the commanding positions so that the Italian troops were faced by almost perpendicular walls of stone which were further defended by machine guns. In one of the sectors on the right of the Grappa, some of the Italian assault units prepared the way of the attack by the use of electric and hydraulic drills which were used to cut foot holds in the solid rock of the precipice. Thus the Italian Arditi and others scaled the cliffs, and took centers of resistance which could have been captured in no other way. One battalion of the Arditi, or shock troops, without any artillery preparation climbed the steep slopes, surprised the enemy, and captured an important position on the Col di Baretta. It was a common expression

in the Italian Army, that every kilometer forward, meant also a kilometer upward.

The strong resistance on the Grappa, while not altering the design of General Diaz that this should be a feint to conceal his real plans for the advance on the Piave, was perhaps more than he had expected. The First Army in the Val d'Astico and the Sixth Army on the Asiago Plateau now made fierce attacks with the object of engaging the enemy in those sectors and preventing his sending reinforcements to the Grappa region. The Italian attack on Grappa continued with the object of causing the enemy to throw in his reserves. The crossing of the middle Piave which had been fixed for the night of October 24-25, had to be deferred for a few days longer on account of the condition of the river. Thus the maintenance of the fight on Grappa continued to be highly important. After the Armistice, it appeared that the Austrians had to the end thought that the Grappa was the point of the main effort, and even some of the Austrian histories written after the war, mention this as a separate battle.

The first attempts to cross the Piave were made by the Tenth Army. The utmost secrecy as to the projected movement had been maintained. General Diaz held it of the greatest importance that the enemy be kept in ignorance not only that there was to be an attempt to cross the river, but that there had been any change in position of the British troops. To insure this secrecy, the British Forty-eighth Division on the Asiago Plateau, passed under the command of the Italian XII Corps. No British gun was allowed to fire on the Piave, and all British officers and men were clad in the Italian grey-green uniforms. The Tenth Army consisted of the Italian XI and the British XIV Corps.



The former was already holding a sector of the Piave from Ponte di Piave to Palazzon. The British XIV Corps was concentrated near Treviso.

The Tenth Army was faced by a difficult problem. The Piave, by this time in full flood, was nearly two miles wide with numerous channels dotted with islands. The current measured more than four feet per second. The largest island in the Piave is the Grave di Papadopoli, about three miles long by one wide. In the main channel, the river flowed at about ten miles per hour. This island was held by the enemy as an outpost.

On October 21 the British XIV Corps was moved in line with and to the north of the Italian XI Corps from Salettuo to Palazzon. On the night of October 23-24, two British battalions without previous artillery preparation, crossed the main channel, surprised the Austrians, and occupied the northern half of the island. The movement, skillfully arranged by the Italian engineers, was by means of flat bottomed boats, holding six men and rowed by experienced Italian boatmen. On the following night the rest of the island was occupied by the British Seventh and Italian Thirty-seventh Divisions. Thus with the main channel behind, it was comparatively easy to lay bridges and prepare for the main attack in relative security. After an artillery preparation lasting practically all night, the Tenth Army attacked on the morning of October 27, the Italian Corps on the right, the British Corps on the left. Two bridges were put up under great difficulty, and the enemy overwhelmed after a hard fight. Many men of the Tenth Army were lost by drowning.

On the left of the Tenth Army, about ten kilometers distant, the Eighth Army managed to throw a

cross two of the seven bridges that they had expected to construct. The accuracy of the Austrian artillery fire on these bridges was marvelous. Such was the difficulty of the work, and so great were the losses, that it was decided to attach the Italian XVIII Corps to the Tenth Army under Lord Cavan in order to pass it across the river on the bridges of the latter army. On the night of October 27-28, parts of the XVIII Corps passed across and took over the front from Borgo Malonotte to Col Tonon. As a result of the many broken bridges it was not possible for the XVIII Corps to deploy all its troops required, but it attacked nevertheless on the morning of October 28. The remainder of the Eighth Army crossed during the night of October 28-29 in the vicinity of Nervessa and on the following morning the Italian XVIII Corps again passed to the Eighth Army.

The Twelfth Army threw one bridge over the river in the Pederobba region at Valdobbiadene. The crossing, like others scheduled to take place earlier, was delayed by the orders of the Italian Supreme Command on account of the sudden rise of the river. The crossing was actually made during the night of October 26-27, the remarkable achievement of passing an army of three divisions over a single bridge under heavy enemy artillery fire having been accomplished. The French writers claim the lion's share of the credit for this for their division, though it is not apparent that it was more skillful than the two Italian divisions. The Austrian account laments their failure to exert a slight pressure on the bridgehead which, they say, would have been sufficient to have held back the Twelfth Army.

Once the Italian Armies were across the river their successes followed each other rapidly. During the night of October 29, the Tenth

Army advanced up the Montecano River to Fontanelle and on to Ramiera. The British XIV Corps (mounted) acted vigorously and pushed forward so rapidly that it was able to secure the bridgehead over the Montecano between Vazzola and Cimetta intact, though it had been prepared for demolition. This saved many hours of delay in pursuit. On the same day the 23rd Bersaglieri Division passed to the Third Army with a view to clearing the front of that army by attacking southward. It was replaced by the Tenth Division in the Italian XI Corps. At the same time the 332nd United States Infantry joined the British XIV Corps. The Twelfth Army pushed up the Piave as far as Alano. The Eighth Army swept on to Vittorio Veneto and entered Conegliano.

On the morning of October 30, the Twelfth Army was on Monte Cesen, and Feltre was under fire. Thus General Diaz had fairly driven his wedge between the Austrian Sixth and Isonzo Armies.

The capture of Monte Cesen by the Twelfth Army was doubly important in that it made possible the accomplishment of the second mission of the Eighth Army. The latter army was, after reaching Vittorio Veneto, to turn to the north and secure the bridges separating the plains from the Piave in Val Sugana, thus reaching the rear of the Grappa pass. Not only did the Twelfth Army thus protect the left flank of the Eighth Army, but at the same time it denied maneuver to the enemy in the gorge of Feltre.

By the evening of October 30 the Tenth Army reached its objective, the Livenza at Francenigo, and Sacile. The next day that river was crossed between Motta di Livenza and Sacile. On that day, the Italian XVIII Corps was again transferred from the Eighth to the Tenth Army.

From this time on, in the words of the Earl of Cavan, the retreat became a rout.

The crossings of the Livenza caused the enemy to weaken on the front opposing the Third Army, and the latter was able to cross the Piave on the afternoon of October 30, and advance rapidly to the Livenza. Even so, however, it met with a rather surprising degree of resistance from rear guards until other troops crossed at Salgareda, Romanziol and Santa Dona di Piave, after which there was little opposition.

November 1 was given over to bridging the Livenza so that the Cavalry Corps under H. R. H. the Count of Turin, could pursue the enemy. The advance was resumed and on November 2, the Tenth Army reached the line: Villota-Praturlone-Riverna east of Pordenone-San Quirino-Aviano.

Meanwhile, in the area of Monte Grappa, the enemy was becoming more and more involved. On October 27 he counter-attacked eight times against the Monte Pertica, but each time was repulsed. For six hours the fight about the summit was terrific. Service was rendered by the American Army hospital units with the Fourth Army and all their installations were rapidly filled to overflowing. On October 28 and 29 the melee continued. Italian columns advanced from the Asolone to the Col della Baretta to assist in the occupation of Monte Pertica, Monte Prasolan, and Monte Solarolo. The enemy resisted stoutly and threw his last reserves into the fight. Thus it was that the Fourth Army, though unable to cut the Austrian communications in the area of the Dolomites and in the plain, rendered the desired assistance to the other armies since it effectively involved all the enemy's reserves of the Feltre area so that they could not be sent into the

gap that had by that time been opened by the Eighth, Tenth, and Twelfth Armies. Both the immediate and general Austrian reserves were brought up.

The retreat of the Austrians opposite the Grappa Army began on the night of October 30-31. Their rear guard was unable to hold back the Fourth Army, which now forged ahead, realizing that while it had heretofore fought for the advantages of other armies, it now had a chance to join in the general advance on its own account. By the following evening, the left wing of the Fourth Army was in the possession of Monte Roncone looking down on the Val Cison with patrols thrown out towards Fonzaso. The center had pushed through to Feltre and the right was able to reach Monte Tomatico and cut off the Austrians who were still resisting the right of the Twelfth Army north of Quero.

The Twelfth Army passed the Quero defile toward Feltre on October 30, as stated, and the enemy seeing his rear menaced, gave orders to retire on the Fonzaso-Feltre front on the night of October 30-31. Defenses for such a purpose had been prepared in advance at the San Boldo Pass and the Fadalta defile. The Fourth Army attempted to follow at once, but the strong rear guard fighting of the Austrians, held them back. The enemy were not only numerically stronger but they had excellently prepared artillery and machine gun positions from which a heavy fire was directed against the Italians. The rear guard was finally overcome, but not before the enemy had withdrawn into their desired position.

The Sixth Army while supporting the Fourth in its advance, moved into the Brenta Valley and occupied Cison, surprising here an entire regimental headquarters. With the occupation of the Feltre basin, the

Austrian occupation of the Asiago Plateau weakened. On October 28 the enemy troops in the Seven Communes (the Eleventh Army) had withdrawn into the so called "Winterstellung", north of the Asiago basin. They announced a "voluntary withdrawal". "Taking into consideration the resolve so often expressed to bring about the conclusion of an armistice and peace, putting an end to the struggle of nations, our troops fighting on Italian soil will evacuate the occupied region". They were of course too late, for it was hardly likely that General Diaz, already sure of a great victory, would listen to their proposals based on such withdrawal.

Now the second phase of the Italian plan was everywhere to be put into operation, and the whole Austrian positions in the Trentino were threatened. The enemy's retirement showed that he too understood the threat and would endeavor to save in this way a part of his forces. The whole Italian Army was therefore to advance in a great wave, extending from the Stelvio to the Sea, and make good a victory already assured. The first Army was ordered to advance on Trent. The Sixth Army was ordered to advance towards the Egna-Trent front. The Fourth Army was to advance toward the Bolzano-Egna front. The Eighth Army was to advance beyond the junction of the valleys at Belluno by the Cadore road (Upper Piave) and the Agordino road. The Seventh Army was to advance toward the Mezzolombardo. The Twelfth Army was to concentrate in the Feltre basin and await orders. The Tenth and Third Armies, were ordered to advance to the Tagliamento and the Cavalry to push beyond so as to forestall the enemy at the Isonzo bridges. Each of these armies did what was expected of it.

The Tenth Army reached the Tagliamento from San Vito to the north of Spilimbergo, little opposition being met. On November 4, the 332nd U. S. Infantry had its baptism of fire when forcing a passage of the Tagliamento, "an operation", says Lord Cavan, "which they carried out with the same dash as had always been shown by American troops." The regiment captured about a hundred prisoners and suffered a few casualties, many of its men being bitter at being thrown into the fight when an armistice was expected.

The armistice was signed on November 3 at Villa Giusti, to become effective at 3:00 P. M. the following day. The line, which reached from the Stelvio to the Adriatic, was the following: Sluderno — Spondigna and Prato di Venosta in the Val Venosta — Male and Cles in the Giudicarie — Passo della Mendola — Rovere della Luna — Salorno in the Val d'Adige — Cembra in the Val d'Avigio — Monte Panarotta in the Val Sugana — the Tesino basin — Fiera di Primiero — Chiapuzza — Domegge — Pontebba — Robic — Cormons — Cervignana M Aquileja — Grado. Of course before this time the Italian troops had occupied Trieste by sea.

The consequences of the battle were of course the annihilation of the Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Army. The number of prisoners taken is uncertain, but General Gathorne-Hardy, the British chief of staff, says that at least one-third of the Austrian infantry and practically the whole of their artillery were in the hands of the Italians at the finish.

Vittorio Veneto was one of the most important battles ever fought. It was the greatest decisive victory of the World War, and in point of numbers of men engaged on the both sides — almost two million — the largest battle of all history. It was

essentially an Italian victory, for more than 90 per cent of those engaged on the side of the Allies were Italians. There has, nevertheless, been a tendency for those who do not love Italy, to belittle the Italians' victory, and indeed their part in the war. Austria's weakness is stressed by the French even more than by the Austrians themselves. Even in the description of the passage of the Piave by the Twelfth Army, Normand calls it the crossing by the "Franco-Italians" — this, despite the fact that there was but one French Division in that army to three of the Italians. This is but poor return for Italy's help. In the first days of the war, Italy's attitude of benevolent neutrality enabled the French to leave unguarded a frontier of 240 kilometers, and quickly transfer 200,000 troops to the north to oppose the German advance, troops which arrived in time to participate in the battle of the Marne. When, despite the efforts of the Germanophile Premier Giolitti, the German economic grip on the country, and the financial difficulties growing out of the costly war in Libya, Italy entered the Great war, it was at a dark moment for the Allies. The Russians were in full retreat in the Carpathians and almost without munitions. From this time on the eastern front was practically transferred to Italy, instead of to France, as must otherwise have been the case. Almost the entire Austro-Hungarian Army was immobilized in Italy, only four divisions reaching the French front during the entire war, while six German divisions served in Italy. The importance of this to the allied cause is often overlooked. Let us remember what happened on the French front when the German troops were released from the Russian front.

While the Austrians were undoubtedly badly in need of food supplies,

their army, as always happens in such cases, was supplied, though the civil population was in want. This was true also in Italy. The Germans give Italy credit for her share in the final victory. Ludendorff said that one of the chief causes of the German defeat was the lack of support from Austria, "gripped more tightly than ever at the throat by Italy." It does not lessen the credit of Italy that the Austrian Army was weakened just before the battle of Vittorio Veneto, for if such were the case, it was the Italians that had brought it about. The World War was not won in a day, and the criticism that Italy won over a demoralized enemy may also be made of Foch's victories in 1918.

It is perhaps worth while in this connection to mention that at no time were there as many troops of the Allies in Italy as there were Italians on other fronts, including the French. The foreign troops in Italy, to repeat, consisted of three British, two French, and one Czechoslovak Divisions, one American regiment and three companies of Roumanian volunteers.

Italy's losses were very great. The Battle of Vittorio Veneto cost her more than 35,000 dead. The proportion of her dead to her population was 1.5 — greater than the percentage of British dead to her population (white only). Of the Fourth Army seven Italian Divisions alone lost 20,000. But at the Armistice she held half a million Austrian prisoners. Of a population of thirty-four millions, Italy mobilized five millions. She lost in all about half a million killed and more than a million wounded, about half of whom were permanently disabled.

The suffering of the precipitate Austrian retreat are said to have been comparable to those of Napoleon's army on the retreat from Moscow.

Great masses of men waited for hours to move a few feet or a few hundred yards and then had to halt anew on a road littered with the carcasses of horses and parts of material. Many Austrians died of fatigue or even hunger. The wounded were unable to receive attention in the disorder. Many of them were brought into American hospital units days afterwards in pitiable conditions. The only food that many had had was from the bodies of horse carrion along the roads. The plight of groups of nursing sisters was particularly miserable, though treated with great consideration by the Italians. One group of these nurses, some of whom were members of religious orders, were brought to the U. S. Army hospital at Vicenza where they remained quartered with the American nurses until they could be sent home. Personnel from the American Hospital Center, after the Italo-Austrian armistice, assisted in the administrative and professional work of captured field hospitals, our officers and men working side by side with their late enemies.

By the outcome of the war, Italy secured the watershed of the Alps as her national frontiers. Few people realize how thin was this fringe of mountainous ground formerly held, and how it was commanded by the higher Alps to the north. The Treaty of 1866 had established these artificial and vulnerable bounds for Italy. The Austrians stood along the southern scarp of the Carnic, Cadoric, and Julian Alps, and there was ever present the danger of their descent into the plains of Lombardy and Venetia.

At last Italy was "redenta" and the dreams of the Italian patriots of half a century before, of Mazzini, Cavour and Garibaldi, had come true.



## SOURCES

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The author has drawn on his personal experiences in Italy and with the Italian Army before, during and since the World War. Many of the data on which the account is based were obtained from other eye witnesses, including several Army, Corps and Division commanders, enemy as well as allied, also from the American Military Attachés and other observers. The following list includes the more important published accounts.





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