

*Edward Alexander Powell was born in 1879 in Syracuse, New York. After studying at Syracuse University and Oberlin College, he began his journalism career at the Syracuse Journal. In 1903 he moved to London to work as an advertising manager for the Smith Premier Typewriter Company, which was based in Syracuse, but within a couple of years he returned to journalism as a correspondent for publications in Britain and the United States. In 1914, after a brief stint as a consular official in Lebanon and Egypt, he became a roving war correspondent, covering World War I from both sides of the battle lines for various newspapers and magazines. When the United States entered the war in 1917, Powell joined the U.S. Army and was commissioned as a captain in military intelligence. An injury took him out of action the following September, and after returning to the United States he left the army with the rank of major.*

*Powell then switched from journalism to a highly successful career as an adventurer, lecturer, and author. Traveling widely around the world, he published more than two dozen books from 1920 to 1954, pausing briefly during World War II to work as a senior political analyst for the Office of Naval Intelligence. When Powell died in Connecticut in 1957 at age 78, the Boston Globe summed up his career in one sentence: "Held up by bandits, challenged to a duel, poking into insurrection in Crete, witnessing the eruption of Vesuvius and hobnobbing with national leaders, Mr. Powell progressed steadily around the world, surviving all disasters and busily producing copy."*

*The following narrative, which has been lightly edited, is excerpted from Italy at War, one of Alexander's half-dozen books about World War I, which was published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1917.*

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The sun had scarcely shown itself above the snowy rampart of the Julian Alps when the hoarse throbbing of the big gray staff car awoke the echoes of the narrow street on which fronts the Hotel Croce di Malta in Udine. Despite a leather coat, a fur-lined cap, and a great fleecy muffler which swathed me to the eyes, I shivered in the damp chill of the winter dawn. We adjusted our goggles and settled down into the heavy rugs, the soldier-driver threw in his clutch, the sergeant sitting beside him let out a vicious snarl from the horn, the little group of curious onlookers scattered hastily, and the powerful car leaped forward like a racehorse that feels the spur. With the horn sounding its hoarse warning, we thundered through the narrow, tortuous, cobble-paved streets, between rows of old, old houses with faded frescoes on their plastered walls and with dim, echoing arcades.

And so into the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele—there is no more charming little square in Italy—with its fountain and its two stone giants and the pompous statue of an incredibly ugly king astride a prancing horse and a monument to Peace set up by [Napoleon](#) to commemorate a treaty which was the cause of many wars. At the back of the piazza, like the backdrop on a stage, rises a towering sugarloaf mound, thrown up, so they say, by Attila, that from it he might conveniently watch the siege and burning of Aquileia. Perched atop this mound, and looking for all the world like one of Maxfield Parrish's painted castles, is the Castello, once the residence of the Venetian and Austrian governors, and, rising above it, a white and slender tower. If you will take the trouble to climb to the summit of this tower you will find that the earth you left behind is now

laid out at your feet like one of those putty maps you used to make in school. Below you, like a vast tessellated floor, is the Friulian plain, dotted with red-roofed villages, checkerboarded with fields of green and brown, stretching away, away to where, beyond the blue Isonzo, the Julian and Carnic Alps leap skyward in a mighty, curving, mile-high wall.

You have the war before you, for amid those distant mountains snakes the Austro-Italian battle line. Just as Attila and his Hunnish warriors looked down from the summit of this very mound, fourteen hundred years ago, upon the destruction of the Italian plain-towns, so today, from the same vantage point, the Italians can see their artillery methodically pounding to pieces the defenses of the modern Huns. A strange reversal of history, is it not?

Leaving on our right the Palazzo Civico, built two score years before Columbus set foot on the beach of San Salvador, we rolled through the gateway in the ancient city wall, acknowledging the salute of the steel-helmeted sentry just as the mail-clad knights who rode through that same gateway to the fighting on the plain, long centuries ago, doubtless acknowledged the salute of the steel-capped men-at-arms. Down the straight white road we sped, between rows of cropped and stunted willows, which line the highway on either side like soldiers with bowed heads.



Austrian mountain troops in the Isonzo district cling to a rock face, helping one another along with ropes, as they climb over a mountain pass in the Italian Alps to surprise an Italian detachment on the other side. (Granger) (Granger)

It is a storied and romantic region, this Venetia, whose fertile farmlands, crisscrossed with watercourses, stretch away, flat and brown as an oaken floor, to the snowy crescent of the Alps. Scenes of past wars it still bears upon its face, in its farmhouses clustered together for common protection, in the stout walls and loopholed watchtowers of its towns, record of its warlike and eventful past. One must be prosaic indeed whose imagination remains unstirred by a journey across this historic plain, which has been invaded by Celts, Istrians, and Romans; Huns, Goths, and Lombards; Franks, Germans, and Austrians in turn. Over there, a dozen miles to the southward, lie the ruins of Aquileia, once one of the great cities of the western world, the chief outpost fortress of the Roman Empire, visited by King Herod of Judea, and the favorite residence of Augustus and Diocletian.

These fertile lowlands were devastated by Alaric and his Visigoths and by Attila and his Huns—the original Huns, I mean. Down this very high-road tramped the legions of Tiberius on their way to give battle to the Illyrians and Pannonians. Here were waged the savage conflicts of the Guelphs, the Ghibellines, and the Scaligers. Here fought the great adventurer Bartolomeo Colleoni; in the whitewashed village inn of Campo Formio, a far greater adventurer signed a treaty whereby he gave away the whole of this region as he would have given away a gold piece; half a century later Garibaldi and his ragged redshirts fought to win it back.

The Italian army, Powell wrote, “is as businesslike as a blued-steel revolver.”

For mile after mile we sped through a countryside which bore no suggestion of the bloody business which had brought me. So far as war was concerned, I might as well have been motoring through New England. But, though an atmosphere of tranquility and security prevailed down here amid the villages and farmsteads of the plain, I knew that up there among those snow-crowned peaks ahead of us, [musketry was crackling, cannons were belching](#), men were dying. But as we approached the front—though still miles and miles behind the fighting line—the signs of war became increasingly apparent: base camps, remount depots, automobile parks, [aviation schools](#), aerodromes, hospitals, machine shops, ammunition dumps, railway sidings chock-a-block with freight cars and railway platforms piled high with supplies of every description.

Moving closer, we came upon endless lines of motor trucks moving ammunition and supplies to the front and other lines of motor trucks and ambulances moving injured machinery and injured men to the repair depots and hospitals at the rear. We passed Sicilian mule carts, hundreds upon hundreds of them, two wheeled, painted bright yellow or bright red and covered with gay little paintings such as one sees on ice cream vendors' carts and hurdy-gurdies, the harness of the mules studded with brass and hung with scarlet tassels. Then long strings of donkeys, so heavily laden with wineskins, with bales of hay, with ammunition boxes, that all that could be seen of the animals themselves were their swinging tails and wagging ears.

We met convoys of Austrian prisoners, guarded by cavalry or territorials, on their way to the rear. They looked tired and dirty and depressed, but most prisoners look that. A man who has spent days or even weeks amid the mud and blood of a trench, with no opportunity to bathe or even to wash his hands and face, with none too much food, with many of his comrades dead or wounded, with a shell storm shrieking and howling about him, and has then had to surrender, could hardly be expected to appear high spirited and optimistic. Yet it has long been the custom

of the Allied correspondents and observers to base their assertions that the morale of the enemy is weakening and that the quality of his troops is deteriorating on the demeanor of prisoners fresh from the firing line.

Ambulances passed us, traveling toward the hospitals at the base, and sometimes wounded men, limping along on foot. The heads of some were swathed in blood-stained bandages, some carried their arms in slings, others hobbled by with the aid of sticks, for the Italian army is none too well supplied with ambulances, and those who are able to walk must do so in order that the places in the ambulances may be taken by their more seriously wounded fellows. They were dog tired, dirty, caked with mud and blood, but they grinned at us cheerfully—for were they not beating the Austrians? Indeed, one cannot look at Italian troops without seeing that the spirit of the men is high and that they are confident of victory.

Now the roads became crowded, but never blocked, with troops on the march: infantry of the line, short, sturdily built fellows wearing short capes of greenish gray and trench helmets of painted steel; Alpini, hardy and active as the goats of their own mountains, their tight-fitting breeches and their green felt hats with the slanting eagle's feather making them look like the chorus of *Robin Hood*; bersaglieri, the flower of the Italian army, who have preserved the traditions of their famous corps by still clinging to the flat-brimmed, rakish hat with its huge bunch of drooping feathers; engineers, laden like donkeys with entrenching, bridging, and mining tools; motorcycle dispatch riders, leather jacketed and mud bespattered, the light horsemen of modern war; and, very occasionally, for their hour for action has not yet come, detachments of cavalry, usually armed with lances, their helmets and busbies linen covered to match the businesslike simplicity of their uniform. About the Italian army there is not much of the pomp and circumstance of war. It is as businesslike as a blued-steel revolver. In its total absence of swagger and display it is characteristic of a nation whose instincts are essentially democratic.

Everything considered, the Italian troops compare very favorably with any in Europe. The men are for the most part shortish, very thickset, and burned by the sun to the color of a much-used saddle. I rather expected to see bearded, unkempt fellows, but I found them clean shaven and extraordinarily neat. The Italian military authorities do not approve of the poilu. Though the men are laden like pack mules, they cover the ground at a surprisingly smart pace, while special corps, such as the bersaglieri and the Alpini, are famous for the fashion in which they take even the steepest acclivities at the double. I was told that, though the troops recruited in the north possess the most stamina and endurance, the Neapolitans and Sicilians have the most élan and make the best fighters, these sons of the south having again and again advanced to the assault through storms of fire which the colder-blooded Piedmontese refused to face.



Clockwise from left: Austrian troops haul a 24cm Mörser M 98 howitzer through a trench dug in the snow; Austrian soldiers fire on the enemy from a mountaintop; a unit of Italy's Alpini march up Mount Adamello. (Clockwise from left: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; Bundesarchiv (2)) (Clockwise from left: Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; Bundesarchiv (2))

It is claimed for the Italian uniform that it is at once the ugliest and the least visible of any worn in Europe. "Its wearer doesn't even make a shadow," a friend of mine remarked. The Italian military authorities were among the first to make a scientific study of colors for uniforms. They did not select, for example, the "horizon blue" adopted by the French because, while this is less visible on the roads and plains of a flat, open, sunlit region, it would prove fatally distinct on the tree-clad mountain slopes where the Italians are fighting. The color is officially described as gray-green, but the best description of it is that given by a British officer: "Take some mud from the Blue Nile, carefully rub into it two pounds of ship-rat's hair, paint a roan horse with the

composition, and then you will understand why the Austrians can't see the Italian soldiers in broad daylight at 50 yards." Its quality of invisibility is, indeed, positively uncanny. While motoring in the war zone I have repeatedly come upon bodies of troops resting beside the road, yet, so marvelously do their uniforms merge into the landscape that, had not my attention been called to them, I should have passed them by unnoticed.

The uniform of the Italian officer is of precisely the same cut and apparently of the same material as that of the men, and as the former not infrequently dispenses with the badges of rank, it is often difficult to distinguish an officer from a private. The Italian officers, particularly those of the cavalry regiments, have always been among the smartest in Europe, but the gorgeous uniforms which, in the happy, carefree days before the war, added such brilliant notes of color to the scenes on the Corso and in the Cascine, have been replaced by a dress which is as simple as it is serviceable.

The Italian government has a stern objection to wasteful or unnecessary expenditure, and all the costly and superfluous trimmings so dear to the heart of the military have been ruthlessly pruned. But economy is not insisted upon at the expense of efficiency. Nothing is refused or stinted that is necessary to keep the soldiers in good health or that will add to the efficiency of the great fighting-machine. But the war is proving a heavy financial strain for Italy and she is determined not to waste on it a single soldo more than she can possibly help. On the French and British fronts staff officers are constantly dashing to and fro in motorcars on errands of more or less importance. But you see nothing of that sort in the Italian war zone.

The Comando Supremo can, of course, have all the motorcars it wants, but it discourages their use except in cases of necessity. The officers are instructed that, whenever they can travel by railway without detriment to the interests of the service, they are expected to do so, for the trains are in operation to within a few miles of the front and with astonishing regularity, whereas tires and gasoline cost money. Returning at nightfall from the front to Udine, we were nearly always stopped by officers—majors, colonels, and once by a general—who would ask us to give them a lift into town. It has long been the fashion among foreigners to think of Italians, particularly those of the upper class, as late rising, easygoing, and not particularly in love with work—a sort of *dolce far niente* people. But the war has shown how unsafe are such generalizations. There is no harder worker on any front than the Italian officer. Even the highest staff officers are at their desks by 8 and frequently by 7. Though it is easier to get from the Italian front to Milan or Florence than it is to get from Verdun to Paris, or from the Somme to London, one sees little of the weekend traveling so common on the British front. Officers in the war zone are entitled to 15 days' leave of absence a year, and from this rule there are no deviations.

Through the mud we came to the Judrio, which marked the line of the old frontier. We crossed the river by a pontoon bridge, for the Austrians had destroyed the other in their retreat.

"We are in Austria now, I suppose?" I remarked. "In Italia Redenta," my companion corrected me. "This region has always been Italian in everything but name, and now it is Italian in name also." The occupation by the Italian troops, at the very outset of the war, of this wedge of territory between the Judrio and the Isonzo, with Monfalcone, Cervignano, Cormons, Gradisca—

old Italian towns all—did much to give the Italian people confidence in the efficiency of their armies and the ability of their generals.

Now the roads were filled with the enormous equipment of an army advancing. Every village swarmed with gray soldiers. We passed interminable processions of motor lorries, mule carts, trucks, and wagons piled high with hay, lumber, wine casks, flour, shells, barbed wire; boxes of ammunition; pontoon trains, balloon outfits, searchlights mounted on motor trucks, wheeled blacksmith shops, wheeled post offices, field kitchens; beef and mutton on the hoof; mammoth howitzers and siege guns hauled by panting tractors; creaking, clanking field batteries, and bright-eyed, brown-skinned, green-caped infantry, battalions, regiments, brigades of them plodding along under slanting lines of steel. All the resources of Italy seemed crowding up to make good the recent gains and to make ready for the next push. One has to see a great army on the march to appreciate how stupendous is the task of supplying with food the hungry men and the hungrier guns, and how it taxes to the utmost all the industrial resources of a nation.



“By the aid of ropes and levers and pulleys,” Alexander wrote, “monster pieces have been...hoisted up walls of rock as sheer and high as those of the Flatiron Building.” (Archivi Alinari, Florence) (Archivi Alinari, Florence )

Under all this traffic the roads remained hard and smooth, for gangs of men with scrapers and steamrollers were at work everywhere repairing the wear and tear. This work is done by peasants who are too old for the army, middle-aged, sturdily built fellows who perform their prosaic task with the resignation and inexhaustible patience of the lower-class Italian. They are organized in companies of 100 men each, called *centurias*, and the company commanders are called (shades of the Roman legions!) centurions. Italy owes much to these gray-haired soldiers of the pick and shovel who, working in heat and cold, in snow and rain, and frequently under Austrian fire, have made it possible for the armies to advance and for food to be sent forward for the men and ammunition for the guns.

When this war is over, Italy will find herself with better roads, and more of them, than she ever had before. The hundreds of miles of splendid highways which have been built by the army in the Trentino, in the Carnia, and in Cadore will open up districts of extraordinary beauty which have hitherto been inaccessible to the touring motorist. The Italians have been fortunate in having an inexhaustible supply of road-building material close at hand, for the mountains are solid road metal and in the plains one has only to scratch the soil to find gravel. The work of the road builders on the Upper Isonzo resembles a vast suburban development, for the smooth white highways which zigzag in long, easy gradients up the mountain slopes are bordered on the inside by stone-paved gutters and on the outside, where the precipice falls sheer away, by cut-stone guard posts.

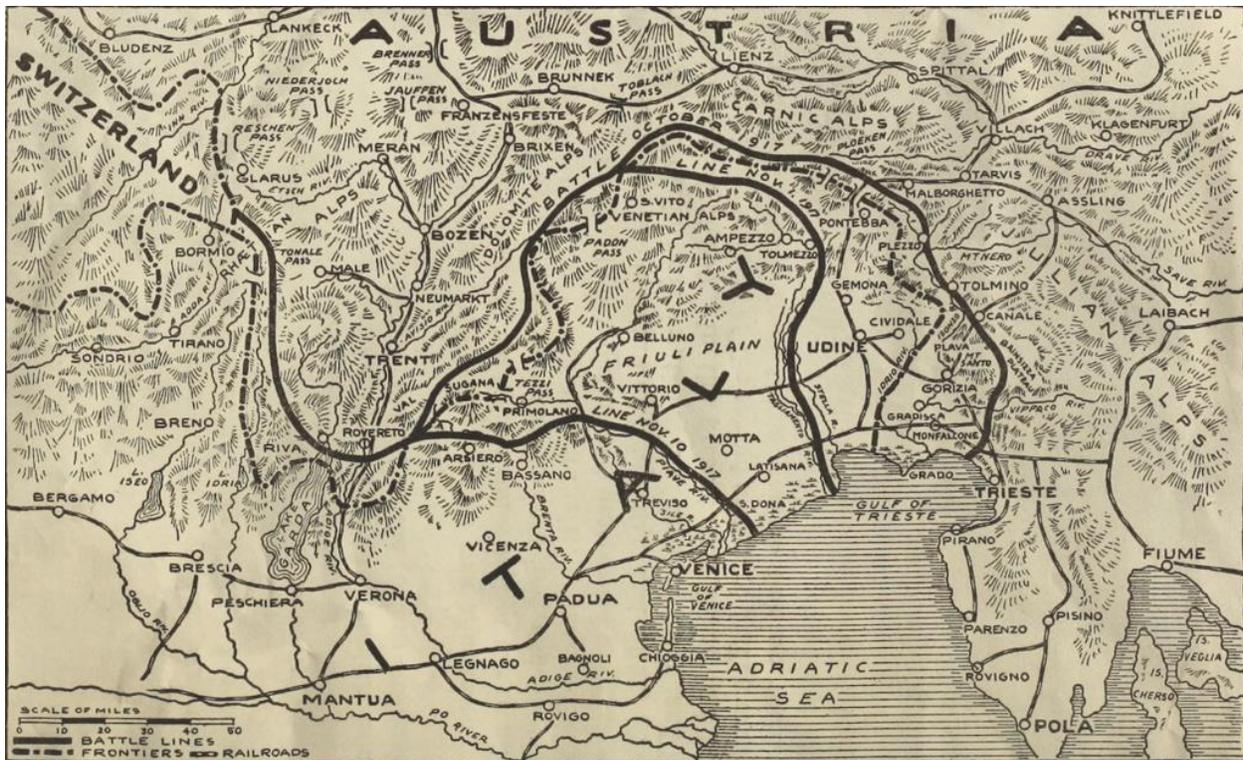
Climbing higher, the roads become steeper and narrower and, because of the heavy rains, very highly crowned, with frequent right-angle and hairpin turns. Here a skid or a sideslip or the failure of your brakes is quite likely to bring your career to an abrupt and unpleasant termination. To motor along one of these military mountain highways when it is slippery from rain is as nerve trying as walking on a shingled roof with smooth-soled shoes. At one point on the Upper Isonzo there wasn't enough room between our outer wheels and the edge of the precipice for a starved cat to pass.

Now we were well within the danger zone. I knew it by the screens of woven reeds and grass matting which had been erected along one side of the road in order to protect the troops and transport using that road from being seen by the Austrian observers and shelled by the Austrian guns. Practically all of the roads on the Italian side of the front are, remember, under direct observation by the Austrians. In fact, they command everything. Everywhere they are above the Italians. From the observatories which they have established on every peak, they can see through their powerful telescopes what is transpiring down on the plain as readily as though they were circling above it in an airplane. As a result of the extraordinary advantage which the Austrians enjoy in this respect, it has been found necessary to screen certain of the roads not only on both sides but above, so that in places the traffic passes for miles through literal tunnels of matting. This road masking is a simple form of the art of concealment to which the French have given the name *camouflage* which has been developed to an extraordinary degree on the Western Front.

That the Italians have not made a greater use of it is due, no doubt, to the wholly different conditions under which they are fighting.

Now the crowded road that we were following turned sharply into a narrow valley, down which a small river twisted and turned on its way to the sea. Though the Italian positions ran along the top of the hill slope just above us, and though less than a thousand yards away were the Austrian trenches, that valley, for many miles, was literally crawling with men and horses and guns. Indeed, it was difficult to make myself believe that we were within easy range of the enemy and that at any instant a shell might fall upon that teeming hillside and burst with the crash that scatters death.

Despite the champagne-cork popping of the rifles and the basso profundo of the guns, it was a scene of ordered, yes, almost peaceful industry which in no way suggested war but reminded me, rather, of the Panama Canal at the busiest period of its construction, of the digging of the New York subway, of the laying of a transcontinental railway, of the building of the dam at Assuan. Trenches which had recently been captured from the Austrians were being cleared and renovated, and new trenches were being dug, roads were being repaired, a battery of monster howitzers was being moved into ingeniously concealed positions, a whole system of narrow-gauge railway was being laid down, enormous quantities of stores were being unloaded from wagons and lorries and neatly stacked, soldiers were building great water tanks on stilts, like those at railway sidings, giant shells were being lowered from trucks and flatcars by means of cranes; to the accompaniment of saws and hammers a city of wooden huts was springing up on the reverse slope of the hill as though at the wave of a magician's wand.



Alexander pointed out in his book that the Italian front in World War I was longer than the

French, British, and Belgian fronts combined and that its trenches in one line would have extended from New York to Salt Lake City. (University of Toronto) (University of Toronto )

As I watched with fascinated eyes this scene of activity, as city idlers watch the laborers at work in a cellar excavation, a shell burst on the crowded hillside, perhaps 500 yards away. There was a crash like the explosion of a giant cannon-cracker; the ground leaped into flame and dust. A few minutes afterward I saw an ambulance go tearing up the road.

“Just a chance shot,” said the staff officer who accompanied me. “This valley is one of the few places on our front which is invisible to the Austrian observers. That’s why we have so many troops in here. The Austrian aviators could spot what is going on here, of course, but our fliers and our anti-aircraft batteries have been making things so hot for them lately that they’re not troubling us much. That’s the great thing in this game—to keep control of the air. If the Austrian airmen were able to get over this valley and direct the fire of their guns, we wouldn’t be able to stay here an hour.”

My companion had thought that it might be possible to follow the road down the valley to Monfalcone and the sea, and so it would have been had the weather continued misty and rainy. But the sun came out brightly just as we reached the beginning of an exposed stretch of the road; an Austrian observer, peering through a telescope set up in a monastery on top of a mountain 10 miles away, caught sight of the hurrying gray insect which was our car; he rang up on the telephone a certain battery and spoke a few words to the battery commander; and an instant later on the road along which we were traveling, Austrian shells began to fall. Shells being expensive, that little episode cost the emperor-king several hundred kronen, we figured. As for us, it merely interrupted a most interesting morning’s ride.

Leaving the car in the shelter of a hill, we toiled up a steep and stony slope to a point from which I was able to get an admirable idea of the general lay of Italy’s Eastern Front. Coming toward me was the Isonzo—a bright blue stream the width of the Thames at New London—which, happy at escaping from its gloomy mountain defile, went rioting over the plain in a great westward curve. Turning, I could catch a glimpse, through a notch in the hills of the white towers and pink roofs of Monfalcone against the Adriatic’s changeless blue. To the east of Monfalcone rose the red heights of the Carso, the barren limestone plateau which stretches from the Isonzo south into Istria. And beyond the Carso I could trace the whole curve of the mountains from in front of Trieste up past Gorizia and away to the Carnia. The Italian front, I might add, divides itself into four sectors: the Isonzo, the Carnia and Cadore, the Trentino, and the Alpine.

“The Italians evidently grew tired of letting the Austrians have their way with the town.”

Directly below us, not more than a kilometer away, was a village which the Austrians were shelling. Through our glasses we could see the effects of the bombardment as plainly as though we had been watching a football game from the upper tier of seats in the Yale Bowl. They were using a considerable number of guns of various calibers and the crash of the bursting shells was almost incessant. A shell struck a rather pretentious building, which was evidently the town hall; there was a burst of flame, and a torrent of bricks and beams and tiles shot skyward amid a geyser of green-brown smoke. Another projectile chose as its target the tall white campanile,

which suddenly slumped into the street, a heap of brick and plaster. Now and again we caught glimpses of tiny figures—Italian soldiers, most likely—scuttling for shelter.

Occasionally the Austrians would vary their rain of heavy projectiles with a sort of shell that went bang and released a fleecy cloud of smoke overhead and then dropped a parcel of high explosive that burst on the ground. It was curious to think that the guns from which these shells came were cunningly hidden away in nooks and glens on the other side of that distant range of hills, that the men serving the guns had little if any idea what they were firing at, and that the bombardment was being directed and controlled by an officer seated comfortably at the small end of a telescope up there on a mountain top among the clouds. Yet such is modern war. It used to be one of the artillerist's tenets that his guns should be placed in a position with a "commanding" range of view. But nowadays guns "command" nothing. Instead they are tucked away in gullies and leafy glens and excavated gun pits, and their muzzles, instead of frowning down on the enemy from an eminence, stare blindly skyward from behind a wall of hills or mountains.

The Italians evidently grew tired of letting the Austrians have their way with the town, for presently some batteries of heavy guns behind us came into action and their shells screamed over our heads. Soon a brisk exchange of compliments between the Italian and Austrian guns was going on over the shattered roofs of the town. We did not remain overlong on our hillside, and we were warned by the artillery officer who was guiding us to keep close to the ground and well apart, for, were the Austrians to see us in a group, using maps and field glasses, they probably would take us for artillery observers and would send over a violent protest cased in steel.

On none of the European battle fronts is there a more beautiful and impressive journey than that from Udine up to the Italian positions in the Carnia. The Carnia sector connects the Isonzo and Trentino fronts and forms a vital link in the Italian chain of defense, for, were the Austrians to break through, they would take in flank and rear the great Italian armies operating on the two adjacent fronts. West of the Carnia, in Cadore, the Italians are campaigning in one of the world's most famous playgrounds, for, in the days before the Great War, pleasure seekers, from every corner of Europe and America swarmed by the tens of thousands in the country round about Cortina and in the enchanted valleys of the Dolomites. But now great gray guns are emplaced in the shady glens where the honeymooners used to stroll; on the terraces of the tourist hostelries, where, on summer afternoons, men in white flannels and women in dainty frocks chattered over their tea, now lounge Italian officers in field uniforms of gray; the blare of dance music and the popping of champagne corks has been replaced by the blare of bugles and the popping of rifles.

If you have ever gone, in a single day, from the sunlit orange groves of Pasadena up to the snow-crowned peaks of the Coast Range, you will have as good an idea as I can give you of the journey from the Isonzo up to the Carnia. Down on the Carso the war is being waged under a sky of molten brass, and in summer the winds which sweep that arid plateau are like blasts from an open furnace door. The soldiers fighting in the Carnia, on the other hand, not infrequently wear coats of white fur to protect them from the cold and to render them invisible against the expanses of snow. When I was on the Italian front, they told me an incident of this mountain warfare. There was desperate fighting for the possession of a few yards of mountain trenches and a half-battalion of Austrian jagers—nearly 500 men—were enfiladed by machine-gun fire and wiped

out. That night there was a heavy snowfall, and the Austrian corpses sprawled upon the mountainside were soon buried deep beneath the fleecy flakes. The long winter wore along, the war pursued its dreary course, to 500 Austrian homes the Austrian War Office sent a brief message that the husband or son or brother had been “reported missing.” Then the spring came, the snow melted from the mountainsides, and the horrified Italians looked on the 500 Austrians, frozen stiff, as meat is frozen in a refrigerator, in the same attitudes in which they had died months before.

With countless hairpin, hair-raising turns, our road wound upward, bordered on one hand by the brinks of precipices, on the other by bare walls of rock. It was a smooth road, splendidly built, but steep and terrifyingly narrow—so narrow in places that it was nothing more than a shelf blasted from the sheer face of the cliff. Twice, meeting motor lorries downward bound, we had to back along that narrow shelf, with our outer wheels on the brink of emptiness, until we came to a spot where there was room to pass. It was a ticklish business.

At one point a mountain torrent leaped from the cliff into the depths below. But the water power was not permitted to go to waste; it had been skillfully harnessed and was being used to run a completely equipped machine shop where were brought for repair everything from motor trucks to machine guns. That was one of the things that impressed me most—the mechanical ability of the Italians. The railways, cableways, machine shops, bridges, roads, reservoirs, concrete works that they have built, more often than not in the face of what would appear to be insurmountable difficulties, prove them to be a nation of engineers.



A four-man team of soldiers in an Austrian artillery unit ready an 8cm Feldkanone M.5, the standard field gun of the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I, that's been hidden in the entrance to a cave. (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek) (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek)

Up to the heights toward which we were climbing so comfortably and quickly in a motorcar, there was before the war, so I was told, nothing but a mule-path. Now there is this fine military road, so ingeniously graded and zigzagged that two-ton motor trucks can now go with ease where before a donkey had difficulty in finding a footing. When these small and handy motor trucks come to a point where it is no longer possible for them to find traction, their loads are transferred to the remarkable wire-rope railways, or *telefericas*, as they are called, which have made possible this campaign in cloudland. Similar systems are in use, all over the world, for conveying goods up the sides of mountains and across chasms. A wire rope running over a drum at each side of the chasm which has to be crossed forms a double line of overhead railway. Suspended on grooved wheels from this overhead wire are "cars" consisting of shallow iron trays about the length and width of coffins, one car going up as the other comes down. The floors of the cars are perforated so as to permit the draining off of water or blood—for men wounded in the mountain fighting are frequently brought down to the hospitals in them—and the sides are of latticework, and, I might add, quite unnecessarily low. Nor is the prospective passenger reassured by being told that there have been several cases where soldiers, suddenly overcome by vertigo, have thrown themselves out while in midair.

If the cars are properly loaded, and if there is not a high wind blowing, the teleferica is about as safe as most other modes of conveyance, but should the cars have been carelessly loaded, or should a strong wind be blowing, there is considerable danger of their coming into collision as they pass. In such an event there would be a very fair chance of the passenger spattering up the rocks 1,000 feet or so below. There is still another, though a rather remote possibility: that of being shelled while in midair, for certain of the telefericas run within view of the Austrian positions. And sometimes the power which winds the drum gives out and the car and its passengers are temporarily marooned in space. Aviation, motor racing, mountain climbing, big-game hunting, all seem commonplace and tame compared with the sensation of swinging helplessly in a shallow bathtub over half a mile of emptiness while an Austrian battery endeavors to pot you with shrapnel, very much as a small boy throws stones at a scared cat clinging to a limb.

Yet over these slender wires has been transported an army, with its vast quantities of food, stores, and ammunition, and by the same method of transportation have been sent back the wounded. Without this ingenious device it is doubtful if the campaign in the High Alps could ever have been fought. But the cables, strong though they are, are yet too weak to bear the weight of the heavy guns, some of them weighing 40 and 50 tons, which the Italians have put into action on the highest peaks. So by the aid of ropes and levers and pulleys and hundreds of brawny backs and straining arms, these monster pieces have been hauled up slopes as steep as that of the Great Pyramid, have been hoisted up walls of rock as sheer and high as those of the Flatiron Building. You question this? Well, there they are, great eight- and nine-inch monsters, high above the highest of the wire roads, one of them that I know of at a height of 10,000 feet above the sea. There is no doubting it, incredible as it may seem, for they speak for themselves—as the Austrians have found to their cost.

The most advanced positions in the Carnia, as in the Trentino, are amid the eternal snows. Here the guns are emplaced in ice caverns which can be reached only through tunnels cut through the drifts; here the men spend their days wrapped in shaggy furs, their faces smeared with grease as a protection from the stinging blasts, and their nights in holes burrowed in the snow, like the igloos of Esquimaux. On no front, not on the sun-scorched plains of Mesopotamia, nor in the frozen Mazurian marshes, nor in the blood-soaked mud of Flanders, does the fighting man lead so arduous an existence as up here on the roof of the world. I remember standing with an Italian officer in an observatory in the lower mountains. The powerful telescope was trained on the snow-covered summit of one of the higher peaks.

“Do you see that little black speck on the snow at the very top?” the officer asked me.

I told him that I did.

“That is one of our positions,” he continued. “It is held by a lieutenant and 30 Alpini. I have just received word that, as the result of yesterday’s snowstorm, our communications with them have been cut off. We will not be able to relieve them, or get supplies to them, much before next April.”

And it was then only the middle of December!

In the Carnia and on the Upper Isonzo one finds the anomaly of first-line trenches which are perfectly safe from attack. I visited such a position. Through a loophole I got a little framed picture of the Austrian trenches not 500 yards away, and above them, cut in the mountainside, the square black openings within which lurked the Austrian guns. Yet we were as safe from anything save artillery fire as though we were in Mars, for between the Italian trenches and the Austrian intervened a chasm half a thousand feet deep and with walls as steep and smooth as the side of a house. The narrow strip of valley at the bottom of the chasm was a sort of no man's land, where forays, skirmishes, and all manner of desperate adventures took place nightly between patrols of jagers and Alpini.

As with my field glasses I was sweeping the turmoil of trench-scarred mountains which lay spread, below me, like a map in bas-relief, an Austrian battery quite suddenly set up a deafening clamor, and on a hillside, miles away, I could see its shells bursting in clouds of smoke shot through with flame. They looked like gigantic white peonies breaking suddenly into bloom. The racket of the guns awoke the most extraordinary echoes in the mountains. It was difficult to believe that it was not thunder. Range after range caught up the echoes of that bombardment and passed them on until it seemed as though they must have reached Vienna. For half an hour, perhaps, the cannonade continued, and then, from an Italian position somewhere above and behind us, came a mighty bellow which drowned out all other sounds. It was the angry voice of Italy bidding the Austrians be still.