Italy Enters the War

23 May 1915
Declares War on Austria-Hungary

- Italy, Germany and Austria-Hungary form the Triple Alliance in 1882
- Mutual support promised in the event of being attacked by a major European power.
- Italy withdraws from the Triple Alliance in 1914
- August 1914 – April 1915 Italy Neutral

At the start of the war, Austria-Hungary is fighting on two fronts:
- Russia
- Serbia

A third front will be added:
- Italy
Secret Treaty of London
England, France, Russia
26 April 1915
Italy promised territorial gains:
- Trentino
- South Tyrol
- Trieste
- Gorizia
- Friaul
- Northern Dalmatia

Italy Outnumbers Austria – Hungary 3 – 2 in military manpower:
- Italy lacked equipment and training.
- Italy was short of machine guns and artillery.
- Italian leaders (Napoleonic tactics) hope to push Austria – Hungary back with the goal of eventually getting to Vienna.
- Italian leaders did not exhibit great care for their men.
The First Italian Soldier to Die in World War I

- Italy at War - 23 May 1915
- Move to occupy key areas
- Cross Isonzo River
- Alpine troops (high morale)

Private Riccardo Di Giusto
- Native of Udine, Italy
- Worked on Italian Railway
- Drafted in January 1915
- Age 20 – Unmarried

24 May 1915 - Struck by Austrian bullet – bounced off spade on backpack – hit in the nape of the neck – dead within minutes

Riccardo di Giusto Monument, Solarie Pass (July 2015)

St. Nicholas Church Udine, Italy (July 2015)
Italy mounts offensive on the Austrian–Hungarian forces at Isonzo River on 23 June 1915

Initial Italian gains will be made along the Italian–Austro-Hungarian border. Fighting on the Isonzo.

Italy will gain some lands held by Austria-Hungary. The front will then only move slightly for the next two years.
The Isonzo / Soča Mountains Today

July 2006 — Remains of the Lower Isonzo River Front

Mt. Kolovrat: Italian / Slovenian Border

1915

1915

(July 2005)
Mt. Kolovrat, Italian / Slovenian Border (July 2015)

The "Carnic Alps"
Austria – Hungary will control the high ground in the Dolomites Alps.

- The war in the Italian Alps will produce large numbers of casualties from both the enemy and the cold weather.
- Avalanche on 13 December 1916 kills an estimated 10,000 Austrian and Italian soldiers.
The first two years of Italy's involvement will be between Italy and Austria-Hungary.

Italy will declare war against Germany on 29 August 1916.

Germany joins the war against Italy with force in October 1917.
The "High Dolomite Alps"

Monte Piana, Italy; 8,000’; July 2014
Italian Trenches - Monte Piana; 8,000’; July 2014

The "High Dolomite Alps"

Marmolada Alps, Italy – 10,150’ – July 2015
Trenches and Bunkers cut out of Solid Rock

The “High Dolomite Alps”

Highest Trench in World War I
3,850m / 12,631’

Austro Hungarian Trench at the peak of “Ortler Alps” during First World War 1917
Monte Pasubio - 2,200m (7,000') (2012)

Ossuary of Monte Pasubio (2012)
6,500 Italian Dead
Asiago, Italy
Before & After (2012)

Ossuary of Asiago (2012)
60,000 Italian dead
1915 - 1918
Catholic Priests Serve in a Variety of Roles

Religion in the Trenches

Life on the battlefront forced the men to live constantly in the presence of death. At any time of the day or night, suddenly, a bullet or shrapnel could take one's life. In the midst of this unreal situation, the presence of religion, lived either as faith or simply as superstition, appears as something quite natural.

This necessity in the daily life of soldiers was resolved by the presence of military chaplains in the army and the widespread distribution of holy pictures and other devotional material.

Drafted into the Italian Army
Trained to be a Medic
Sent to Naples
Became very sick - discharged
Printed on these cards there were, for example, the prayer for peace by Pope Benedict XV and images of Mary as the Queen of Peace who urged respect for the enemy after death. These cards also tried to reassure soldiers with words of acceptance for death that was considered inevitable but aware that Our Lady would still be watching over them. The more superstitious ones instead hung a card with the word “Stop” in front of their heart. It was a kind of supplication (and hope) that was addressed to a possible enemy bullet.
- The war in Northern Italy will continue in a stalemate through summer 1917.
- Germany decides to dedicate forces to assist Austria–Hungary against Italy.
- Leads to the Battle of Caporetto (Kobarid) October 1917.

To Be Continued