



This  
**MONTH** in  
military  
history ...

**1836:** Alamo defenders call for help

**1862:** General Ulysses S. Grant provides the first major Union victory of the war when he captures Fort Henry on the Tennessee River.

**1917:** Germany resumes unrestricted submarine warfare

**1941:** Rommel goes to Africa

**1944:** U.S. troops capture the Marshall Islands

**1950:** Klaus Fuchs arrested for passing atomic bomb information to Soviets

**1961:** The United States Air Forces begins Operation Looking Glass, and over the next 30 years, a "Doomsday Plane" is always in the air.

**1965:** U.S. warns North Vietnam of forthcoming bombing operations.

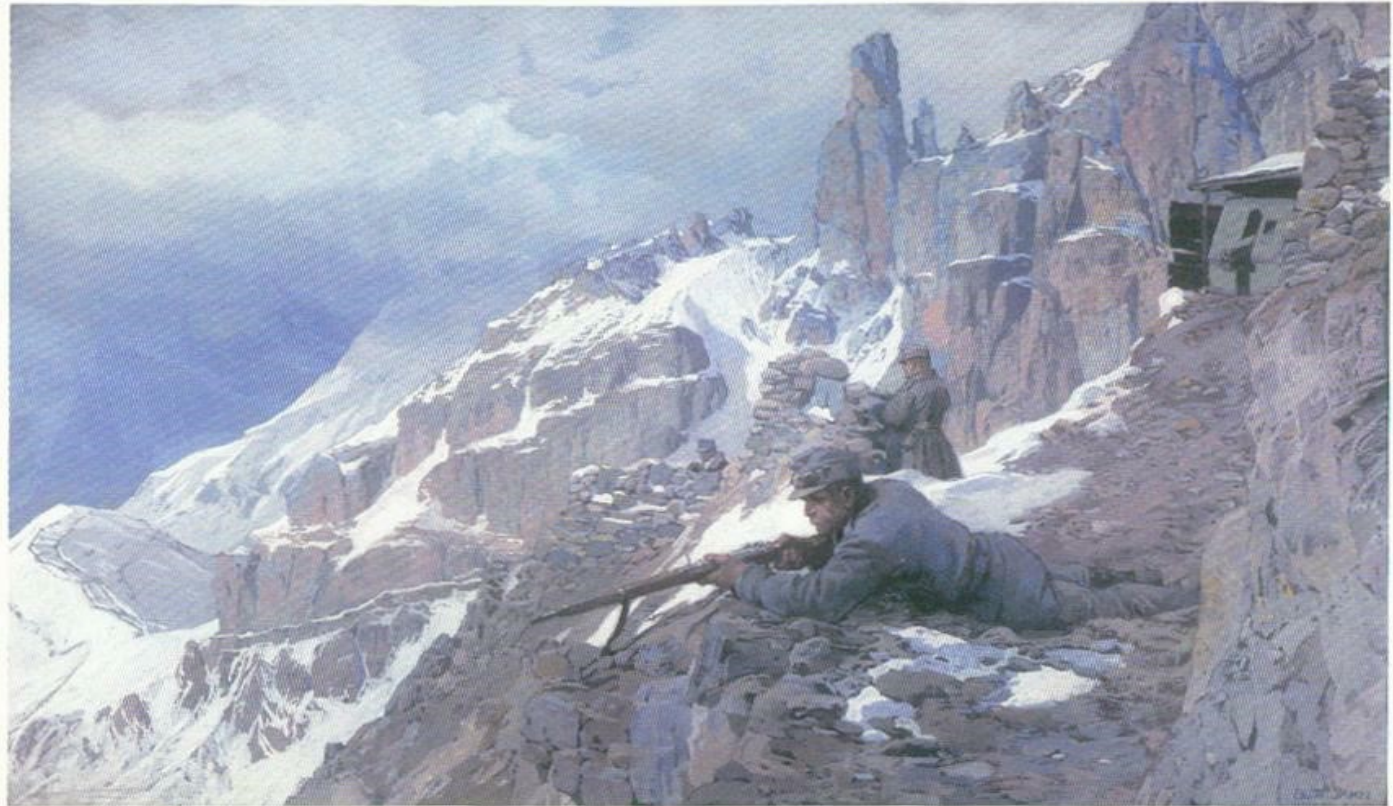
**1989:** The last Soviet armored column leaves Kabul.

**1991:** Operation Desert Storm ejects Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

# The ASC History Newsletter

100th Anniversary of World War I:

## Fighting in the Alps



Some of the most ferocious fighting of World War I was conducted in the Alpine regions of Southern and Central Europe. This area contains higher elevations with year-round snow cover and valleys that contain deep and fast-flowing rivers separating the mountains.

These mountains multiply the difficulty of conducting offensive operations. Entrenching and building fortifications are far more difficult tasks in higher altitudes. It is more difficult to employ direct fire weapons with accuracy when forced to fire upwards. However, the effect of artillery and small arms fires are enhanced, as shells break up rocks to create additional projectiles. Likewise, shells that landed near defensive positions often killed by concussion or avalanches.

Mountainous areas are physically debilitating and requires extra calories and water for soldiers. The bitter cold killed acclimatized and specially trained troops alike. Wounded soldiers were at greater risk from exposure and frostbite if not promptly evacuated. The long arduous supply line to these front-line soldiers in the Alps made it even more difficult to mitigate these constraints.

In 1914, most of the major European states that contained mountains or that bordered nations with mountains possessed special elite formations to operate at higher elevations. In 1889, the French Army created the *Chasseurs Alpins*. In 1914, these battalion sized formations, instead of regimental sized, were located in the Vosges Mountains. They were equipped with specialty mountaineering gear and lighter artillery that could be more easily transported in mountainous terrain.

In 1872, the Kingdom of Italy cre-

ated the *Alpini*. These soldiers were recruited from the Tirol and other alpine regions, many of which were already alpine guides. To this day, the *Alpini* are very distinctive, wearing a Tirol fedora adorned with a feather.

Austria-Hungary began the war with two regiments of mountain troops. The men of the *4th* and *27th Regiments* were drawn from the Austrian Tirol area and were very familiar with the Alpine terrain bordering Italy. As the war progressed, standard Austrian light infantry units (*Feldjäger*) were deployed in the Tirol, the Alps and the Carpathians.

Germany began the war without specialized mountain forces but converted certain units for specific employment in the Balkans. The initial German mountain formations consisted of light infantry (*Jäger*, or Hunter) regiments from Bavaria and Württemberg. Later, on May 19, 1915, the German High Command authorized the formation of a division-sized force known as the *Deutsches Alpenkorps* (German Alpine Corps). Among its members who distinguished themselves was Captain Erwin Rommel (nicknamed the Desert Fox by the British during WWII for his successes in North Africa). The Corps was commanded by General of Artillery Konrad Krafft von Dellmeningen, former chief of staff of the Bavarian Army and an expert on mountain operations.

The best examples of Alpine warfare during World War I occurred in the Carpathian Mountains in 1914-1915 and in the extended battles in the Alps between Austria-Hungary and Italy during 1915-1918.

The Austrian offensives in the Carpathians had both positive and negative affects on the Austrian Army. At

the outset of the conflict, Russian troops seized three important passes through the Carpathians. The subsequent offensives by the Austrians cost them 89,000 killed, wounded or captured, many of which were their most experienced mountain fighters.

On the positive side, the Austrian Army learnt valuable lessons which they utilized when Italy entered the war in 1915. Austrian troops rushed to seize important terrain as the Russians did earlier. Once established in these defensive positions, the 100,000 men of the Austrian Army fought off the 385,000-strong Italian Army.

Between 1915 and 1918, twelve battles were fought across the Isonzo River line with staggering loss of life. Italian forces commanded by General Luigi Cadorna repeatedly assaulted the Austrian lines, attempting to gain the heights held by the Austrians under Field Marshall Svetozar Boroevic von Bojna. At the end of the war the American 332nd Infantry fought against Austrian troops in the Vittorio Veneto offensive. American author Ernest Hemingway was a Red Cross ambulance driver in the Italian Alps. His book "A Farewell to Arms" uses WWI Alps as backdrop.

Today, as our climate changes and glaciers melt, the battlefields, once covered by snow and ice, are becoming visible again. With every day, more and more soldiers from both sides who never came home are being found and repatriated to their homelands.

"Until they are home"  
-DPAA motto