

## ALPINE SOLDIER NEW SPECIES OF FIGHTING MACHINE

MARKSMANSHIP IS INFALLIBLE  
AND HE NEVER WASTES  
A SHOT.

DISTINGUISHED THEMSELVES  
BY CAPTURING THE PEAKS  
OF MONTE NERO.

ROME, July 29.—The Italian war has revealed to the world a new arm, the "Alpines."

The Alpine troops are strictly an Italian institution and, with the Bersaglieri form a picked corps. The defense of the Alps is entrusted to them. From the Maritime Alps to the Carnic, thirty-five thousand Alpines, winter and summer nestle among the snow capped rocks of every pass that from France, Switzerland or Austria leads into Italy. Just now with reserves, their number has been trebled.

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First of all an Alpine soldier is a son of the Alps. They are recruited there and they are organized into battalions. Contrary to the general custom prevailing in the army, where a regiment is composed of men recruited from every corner of the country, the Alpine battalions includes invariably men of the same district and they serve in the mountains at whose foot they were born and brought up.

#### **TRAINED IN CHILDHOOD.**

The Alpine soldier learned the tracks and roads leading up to every perk when he was a very little boy and took the weakly supply of bread, cheese, salted meats and tobacco to his father, who was tending a herd of sheep, goats or cows. At thirteen the boy became his father's assistant and at sixteen, at the latest, took his place on the mountain.

In the absolute solitude of the plateaus, before the eternal glaciers, between the rocks and the sky, the youth developed into a taciturn, but determined sort of man. The daily, relentless struggle against the elements and nature obliterated in him the sense of fear.

He feared God, wore a scapular, recited his prayers before wrapping himself in his black cape and laying his head over his sack. For weeks his sole companions were the sheep entrusted to his care. Occasionally a royal eagle hovered over his head or a deer appeared over a rock in the distance. If within range, his gun brought them unflinchingly down.

### **NEVER WASTE A SHOT.**

The mountaineer of the Alps never wastes a shot. His marksmanship must be infallible or the famished wolfs infesting the deep, wooded gorges will destroy his herd. His heart is that of a child. When the sun floods the landscape he sings to his heart's content, the songs which he learned from his mother and his father, pathetic, melodic folk songs, which are transmitted from generation to generation.

When military conscription claimed him he knew every peak, road and track. Constant exposure to the severe winter cold or the heat of the summer had hardened his muscles and made him insensible to fatigue.

### **MEETS FRIENDS.**

In the battalion he found the friends and playmates of his boyhood days. His officers had also been his playmates, but only up to a certain age. One day they had gone to the nearest city to pursue their studies and later on had entered the military academy. They belonged to the wealthy families of the town.

These officers call their men by their first names, often inquire about the health of the folks at home and insist that the soldiers write to them regularly. When the mail reaches the Alpine camp, it is the officer who reads the letters to them. The men regard their officers as bigger learned brothers.

The training of the Alpine includes everything belonging to the infantry arm and more. He is taught how to regard a cave as his fortress and a rock as his redoubt. He is taught methodically and scientifically how to climb an almost inaccessible peak or scale a sheer wall with the help of a rope and a pick. Further he learns how to dynamite a rock in the space of a few seconds and how to set tons of stones rolling down upon the enemy climbing after him.

#### **PUT TO TEST.**

The training and fighting qualities of the Alpine were put to a severe test during the advance in the Trentino and Carnic frontiers where the occupation of the passes

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and the summits dominating them had to be made swiftly and effectively. The task devolved wholly on the Alpines and infantry.

On May 25, at two in the morning the reveille was sounded and the Alpines received the order to scale the summits facing them, chase the enemy away and prepare the ground for the infantry and artillery. Not in a single instance did the Alpine fail to reach their objective.

The Austrians were surprised and either fled or surrendered after a brief resistance. At noon every battery of mountain artillery was in its place and shelling the Austrian forts. Simultaneously the infantry occupied the passes and entrenched itself under the protection of the artillery.

#### **MUST CAPTURE PEAKS.**

On the Carnic frontier, or more precisely, in the Monte Nero sector, the task entrusted to the Alpines was harder and more complicated. The advance there meant the capture of a series of peaks, strongly fortified and well garrisoned, which guard five roads leading to the Ploken Plateau, four thousand feet above sea level, where, under the plans of General Conrad, the troops destined to invade Italy were to assemble. In thirty years Austria spent five hundred millions to fortify the region between Malborghetto and Gradisca, built four strategic railroads for the swift

transport of troops, equipped the forts with the heaviest and most modern guns, and garrisoned them with her best troops.

Probably the exact history of the capture of the five peaks composing the Monte Nero range will never be written, but eye witnesses maintain that this history will be a hymn of praise to the Italian Alpine troops. General Cadorna never uses adjectives in his official bulletins unless he is forced to. Then the adjective stands for what it really means. In describing the capture of Mont Pöce, the fifth peak, the General said the Alpines performed feats which nobody believed possible. The Austrians themselves regarded this particular peak absolutely impregnable. Towards Italy it was nothing but a sheer wall. The only way of approach lay through a deep gorge on the northern side of the mountain looking toward Plezzo. On the Italian side even a sentry was regarded as superfluous.

**SCALED WALL.**

The only way to take the fort was to scale the wall and reach the trenches undetected. The Alpines did it. Those destined to scale the wall went barefoot. A boy went up first with a rope, made it fast to a rock and then one by one the soldiers climbed.

The rest is known. Two Austrian companies were surprised and despatched in their sleep. Two more shared the same fate. Later in the day the Austrians launched against

the Italians a battalion of Hungarian Honved, in a desperate effort to take the position but the battalion was annihilated and the bodies of the Hungarians are still at the bottom of the gorge.

This, perhaps, gives a clear idea of the nature of the ground on which the Italians are fighting. For a long time yet the war will be fought for the most part by the Alpines only.

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