

Happened today: on December 31, 1935, the 5th Alpine Division “Pusteria” is born

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On **December 31, 1935**, exactly **ninety years ago**, while Italy was engaged in the complex campaign in East Africa, the Royal Army created a new large unit destined to leave a deep mark in the history of the alpine troops. Thus was born the **5th Alpine Division “Pusteria”**, a formation that, although characterized by a relatively short operational life, **would write pages of great military significance, distinguishing itself for its deployment, sacrifice, and esprit de corps**.

Established at a crucial moment for the Italian Armed Forces**, the “Pusteria” was conceived to operate in extreme contexts**, where the harshness of the terrain and climate required trained, motivated units capable of sustaining prolonged operations in prohibitive conditions. **A division that, from its inception, fully embodied the alpine spirit:** resilience, discipline, and sense of duty.

The establishment and the first units

The Division was officially established on **December 31, 1935**, under the command of **General Luigi Negri Cesi**, drawing men and experiences from other Alpine Divisions and newly mobilized complement units.

From its inception, the “Pusteria” was configured as a complete and operational large unit, composed of:

- **7th Alpini Regiment**
  - Battalions *Feltre*, *Pieve di Teco*, *Exilles*
- **11th Alpini Regiment**
  - Battalions *Trento*, *Intra*, *Saluzzo*
- **5th Alpine Artillery Regiment**
  - Groups *Belluno* and *Lanzo*
- **5th Alpine Engineer Company**
- **VII and XI Complement Battalions**

The **Artillery Group “Belluno”**, already existing, was joined by the newly formed **Group “Lanzo”**, created specifically for the new Division. The batteries were thus organized:

- **Group Belluno**
  - 1st battery (Susa)
  - 11th battery (Mondovì)
  - 24th battery (Belluno)
- **Group Lanzo**
  - 5th battery (Aosta)
  - 13th battery (Conegliano)
  - 21st battery (Vicenza)

East Africa: the baptism of fire

The “Pusteria” was immediately assigned to the African theater, participating in the operations of the **Ethiopian Campaign**. The Alpini operated in extreme conditions, far from the mountainous environment for which they had been trained: scorching heat, rugged plateaus, water shortages, and long supply lines.

In that context, the Division was employed in the harsh battles of **Tigray**, **Amba Aradam**, **Amba Alagi**, and **Mai Ceu**, distinguishing itself for discipline, resilience, and esprit de corps.

In these operations, it demonstrated discipline, resilience, and esprit de corps, but paid a heavy toll: **220 casualties**, including those killed in action and from disease.

In **April 1937**, the Division returned home. On **April 12, it landed in Naples** and the next day paraded in Rome, symbolizing a unit that had fulfilled its duty in one of the most challenging theaters of the time.

The reorganization and new structure

In **May 1937**, the Division was reorganized:

- The **7th Alpini** retained the battalions *Belluno, Feltre, Pieve di Cadore*
- The **11th Alpini** was reconstituted with the battalions *Bassano, Trento, Bolzano*
- The **5th Mountain Artillery Regiment** retained the groups *Belluno* and *Lanzo*
- The 5th Engineer Company became the **Mixed Engineer Battalion “Pusteria”**

The batteries were also reassigned:

- Group **Belluno**: 22nd, 23rd, 24th
- Group **Lanzo**: 16th, 21st, 44th

From France to the Balkans

In **June 1940**, with Italy's entry into the war, the Division was deployed on the western front, in the area of **Colle della Maddalena**, as a strategic reserve.

In **December 1940**, it was transferred to the **Greek-Albanian front**, where it operated hard alongside the Division “Julia”, suffering new losses in a harsh and exhausting theater.

In **July 1941**, the “Pusteria” was sent to **Montenegro**, engaged in counter-guerrilla operations against the partisans. A difficult deployment, marked by continuous combat and constant wear on the men.

Returning to Italy in August 1942, it was subsequently transferred to **occupied France**, with tasks of garrison and territorial control.

September 8, 1943, and the end of the Division

At the beginning of September 1943, the commander **Gen. De Castiglioni** was recalled to Rome and the command temporarily passed to **Gen. Emilio Magliano**. The armistice caught the Division in the area between **Grenoble and Gap**, with much of the materials and heavy armaments already prepared on railway convoys for the return to Italy.

The German reaction was immediate: **the Division Command** and the **11th Alpini Regiment** were captured, while the **7th Alpini** and the **5th Artillery Regiment** managed in part to evade capture and retreat towards national territory. Many Alpini were taken prisoner; others, returning home through difficult and often fragmented routes, joined the first nuclei of the **Resistance** in the Piedmont mountains.

With **September 8, 1943**, the history of the **Alpine Division “Pusteria”** came to an end, which **was never reconstituted**.