July 19, 1915, Monte Podgora: the heroic assault of the Carabinieri in the storm of fire

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On July 19, 1915, on the heights overlooking Gorizia, the Carabinieri wrote one of the most dramatic and significant pages of their military history.

Italy had entered World War I less than two months earlier. On the eastern front, the Royal Army was attempting to overcome the Austro-Hungarian defensive system set up along the Isonzo River and the surrounding heights.

One of the main obstacles on the road to Gorizia was Monte Podgora, also known as Monte Calvario. The elevation was a stronghold of fundamental importance: from its positions, the Austro-Hungarian forces could observe and strike the plain below and the Italian advance routes with fire.

The Carabinieri sent to the front line

The Royal Carabinieri Regiment, mainly composed of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, was placed under the command of the “Pistoia” Brigade.

In those early months of the war, the Carabinieri were not only employed in their traditional roles of military police, rear control, and order maintenance. At Podgora, they were called to fight as infantry, directly on the front line.

After a day of preparation by the Italian artillery, at 11 a.m. on July 19, the order came to attack position 240.

In front of the Carabinieri, however, was an extremely difficult defensive position to conquer. The Austro-Hungarian trenches were protected by multiple orders of barbed wire and, in some places, had been built or reinforced with concrete, making them largely resistant to the preliminary bombardment.

The last stretch of the climb was also steep, uncovered, and completely exposed to the defenders' fire.

The advance under fire

The units emerged from the Italian positions and began to advance under a violent artillery, rifle, and machine-gun fire.

According to the historical reconstruction of the Corps, the assault was to be conducted with bayonets and without opening fire. The Carabinieri advanced while maintaining the order of the units despite the losses, trying to reach the enemy defenses.

The exposed terrain, the slope, and especially the still intact barbed wire, however, prevented them from penetrating stably into the Austro-Hungarian fortified system.

For about four hours, the men remained exposed to the enemy's reaction. At 3 p.m., realizing the impossibility of continuing, the order was given to halt the assault, maintain the positions reached, and consolidate on the ground.

The main objective had not been conquered, but the Carabinieri had not abandoned the field in disorder. Despite the losses and the violence of the fire, the units continued to advance and subsequently held the positions reached.

A very harsh toll

The price paid was severe: **53 dead, 143 wounded, and 10 missing** among officers, non-commissioned officers, corporals, and Carabinieri.

Among the fallen was Captain Eugenio Losco, posthumously awarded the Bronze Medal for Military Valor.

For their conduct during the fighting, the unit's soldiers were awarded **9 Silver Medals, 33 Bronze Medals, and 13 War Crosses for Military Valor**.

The commander of the “Pistoia” Brigade recalled how the Carabinieri stood firm under what he described as a storm of lead and iron.

Even the Duke of Aosta, commander of the 3rd Army, would later recall the tenacity demonstrated by the Corps' soldiers on Podgora: decimated by enemy fire, but not broken.

The first Gold Medal to the Corps' Flag

The sacrifice at Podgora became one of the main symbols of the Carabinieri's participation in the Great War.

The overall conduct of the Corps during the conflict, both on the front and in the rear, led to the awarding of the first Gold Medal for Military Valor to the Carabinieri's Flag.

The decoration was awarded on June 5, 1920. For this reason, even today, June 5 is celebrated as the anniversary of the Corps' founding.

The motivation for the Gold Medal also recalled the contribution of the Carabinieri in the battles of the Isonzo and the blood shed for the Italian victory.

A page of discipline and sacrifice

The assault on Podgora was not a victory in the tactical sense of the term. Position 240 was not conquered that day, and the Austro-Hungarian defenses continued to resist.

The historical value of the episode lies mainly in the conduct of the units: men called to advance frontally against a fortified position, on exposed terrain, and under continuous fire from automatic weapons and artillery.

A situation that tragically summarizes many of the characteristics of World War I: bombardments incapable of completely destroying defenses, frontal assaults, still intact barbed wire, and very high losses to gain a few meters of ground.

Every year on July 19, the memory returns to those Carabinieri who advanced on the slopes of Monte Calvario and remained in place even when the assault had become impossible.

Not a celebration of war, but the remembrance of the discipline, sense of duty, and sacrifice of men who faced one of the toughest trials of the Great War.

News link: https://www.carabinieri.it/in-vostro-aiuto/informazioni/eventi/110-Podgora