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THE GEOMORPHOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS OF THE ITALIAN/AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN FRONT IN THE DOLOMITES DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

ABSTRACT: VERGARA M.N., CARTON A., FRANCESE R. & BONDESAN A., *The geomorphological constraints of the Italian/Austro-Hungarian Front in the Dolomites during the First World War.* (IT ISSN 0391-9838, 2020).

Many documents within the enormous historiography of the First World War on the Italian Front highlight the importance of physical geography, yet specific and systematic studies of the influence of morphology on war in the Alps are scarce. Geomorphology influenced the battles that occurred on the main passes in the Dolomites. Geomorphological and military history maps were created for four of the most important areas on this front. The steep and high valley sides, part of the unique geomorphological

setting of the Dolomites, determined unassailable positions from which the defenders, with protected and sometimes relatively accessible rear lines, could control and hinder enemy transit through the valleys by use of crossfire. From this point of view, the alpine terrain, as the result of the morphogenetic processes that took place in the region, can be considered as one of the key geographical aspects that controlled the conduct and the outcomes of the fighting in the valleys and passes.

KEY WORDS: Military geosciences, Mountain warfare, Alpine geomorphology, Dolomites, First World War.

RIASSUNTO: VERGARA M.N., CARTON A., FRANCESE R. & BONDESAN A., *I condizionamenti geomorfologici sul fronte Italo-Austroungarico nelle Dolomiti durante la Prima Guerra Mondiale.* (IT ISSN 0391-9838, 2020).

Quasi ogni testo del cospicuo corpus storiografico del fronte italiano durante la Prima guerra mondiale pone l'accento sull'importanza della geografia fisica, ma sono relativamente scarsi gli studi specifici e sistematici tesi a valutare l'influenza della morfologia sull'andamento della guerra nelle Alpi. Questo lavoro si concentra sul condizionamento generato dall'assetto geomorfologico sugli scontri avvenuti in corrispondenza dei principali passi dolomitici. Per raggiungere questo obiettivo sono state redatte carte geomorfologiche e storico-militari delle quattro aree più importanti relative a questo tratto di fronte. I versanti ripidi e particolarmente elevati delle valli, peculiari dell'ambiente dolomitico, costituivano posizioni di fatto inattaccabili da dove i difensori, con retrovie protette e talvolta scarsamente accessibili, potevano controllare e precludere al nemico il transito lungo le valli potendo ricorrere al fuoco incrociato. La caratteristica geomorfologia delle Dolomiti ha rivestito pertanto un ruolo fondamentale nel condizionare lo sviluppo e l'esito degli eventi bellici che hanno interessato i passi e le valli alpine.

TERMINI CHIAVE: Geoscienze militari, Guerra di montagna, Geomorfologia alpina, Dolomiti, Prima Guerra Mondiale.

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A. Bondesan coordinated the research; geomorphological mapping was mainly performed by A. Bondesan and A. Carton, and partly by R. Francese and M. Vergara; M. Vergara carried out historical and GIS analysis. All of the authors participated in the field survey, data analysis, and conclusions.

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INTRODUCTION

The centenary of the First World War (WWI) represented an opportunity for reinterpreting military events (Pozzato, 2015a, 2015b) as well as for interdisciplinary investigations (Note & alii, 2018). In this sense, the study of the battlefields and theaters of war not only through the