The Duke of Aosta

Duke Emmanuel Philibert Aosta (1869-1931) served as one of Italy's more competent generals during World War One, and played a role not only in the Italians' greatest success, at Gorizia, but also in the wake of their greatest disaster, at Caporetto.

The son of King Amadeus of Spain and a cousin of Italian King Emanuele III, Aosta commanded the Italian Third Army during the war.

Aosta's Third Army was chiefly responsible for the sole notable Italian success along the Isonzo River. In the sixth (of twelve) battles there, his success in finally capturing Gorizia in August 1916 and establishing an Italian bridgehead across the river, was hailed as a great and timely (in light of growing discontent and pacifist sentiment) success at home. Much of the credit went to Luigi Capello, who was a better self-publicist than Aosta.

Nevertheless Capello's star was not long in the ascendant; with the collapse of the Italian line at Caporetto in October 1918 (chiefly owing to his overconfidence and Italian Chief of Staff Luigi Cadorna's lack of planning) Aosta salvaged little Italy's reputation by conducting an orderly retreat by Third Army beyond the Tagliamento.

Following the war the Duke was appointed Marshal by Benito Mussolini's fascist regime in 1926. His son, Amadeus, succeeded to his title and was subsequently Viceroy of Ethiopia.

The Duke of Aosta died in 1931.

Erwin Rommel

From Wikipedia

Erwin Johannes Eugen Rommel (15 November 1891 – 14 October 1944), popularly known as the Desert Fox, was a German field marshal of World War II. He earned the respect of both his own troops and his enemies.

Rommel was a highly decorated officer in World War I and was awarded the Pour le Mérite for his exploits on the Italian Front. In World War II, he further distinguished himself as the commander of the 7th Panzer Division during the 1940 invasion of France. His leadership of German and Italian forces in the North African campaign established him as one of the most able commanders of the war, and earned him the appellation of the Desert Fox. He is regarded as one of the most skilled commanders of desert warfare in the conflict. He later commanded the German forces opposing the Allied cross-channel invasion of Normandy.

Rommel is regarded as having been a humane and professional officer. Later in the war, Rommel was indirectly linked to the conspiracy to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Because Rommel was a national hero, Hitler desired to eliminate him quietly. He forced Rommel to commit suicide with a cyanide pill, in return for assurances that Rommel's family would not be persecuted following his death. He was given a state funeral, and it was announced that Rommel had succumbed to his injuries from an earlier strafing of his staff car in Normandy.

Rommel was born in Southern Germany at Heidenheim, 45 kilometres (28 mi) from Ulm, in the Kingdom of Württemberg, then part of the German Empire. He was the second of four children of Erwin Rommel Senior (1860–1913), a teacher and school administrator, and his wife Helene von Lutz, who headed the local government council. As a young man Rommel's father had been a lieutenant in the artillery. Rommel had one older sister and three younger brothers, one of whom died in infancy

At the age of 18 he acceded to his father's wishes and joined the local 124th Württemberg Infantry Regiment as a *Fähnrich* (ensign), in 1910, studying at the Officer Cadet School in Danzig. He graduated in November 1911 and was commissioned as a lieutenant in January 1912 and was assigned to the 124th Infantry in Weingarten. He was posted to Ulm in March 1914 to command the No.4 Battery, 46th Field Artillery Regiment, XIII (Royal Württemberg) Corps. Until the start of the First World War he trained new recruits and gave refresher courses to reserve officers, and then returned to the 124th when war was declared. While at Cadet School, Rommel met his future wife, 17-year-old Lucia (Lucie) Maria Mollin (1894–1971). They married in November 1916 in Danzig.

During World War I, Rommel fought in France as well as in the Romanian and Italian Campaigns. He gained success leading small groups of men, using tactics such as infiltrating through enemy lines under cover of darkness, moving forward rapidly to a flanking position to arrive at their rear, and attacking defenders using the element of surprise. Arriving at the front near Verdun on 22 August 1914, Rommel initially commanded a platoon in 2nd Battalion, 124th Regiment. They were assigned to reconnaissance and courier tasks. His first combat experience was on 22 August 1914, when – catching the French garrison unprepared at the village of Bleid – he and three men engaged the enemy without waiting for the rest of their platoon to arrive. Rommel was often ill while on active duty, particularly with stomach troubles and exhaustion, a problem that manifested itself from the beginning of his career. He was appointed Battalion Adjutant in September. On 24 September Rommel was shot in the leg when he engaged several French soldiers armed only with his bayonet (he had run out of ammunition). For this action, he was awarded the Iron Cross, Second Class.

On his return in January 1915, Rommel was assigned to command 9th Company, 124th Regiment, stationed in the trenches near Argonne. On 29 January, he and his platoon crawled through 100 yards (91 m) of barbed wire to engage the French, who were positioned in blockhouses and earthworks. His company was running low on ammunition and were ordered to retreat. Rommel ordered an attack on one of the blockhouses to keep the enemy from opening fire on the withdrawing men. For his work that day, he was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class.

He continued to soldier in the trenches of France for another nine months, and received a minor shrapnel wound to the leg on 29 June 1915. He was promoted to *Oberleutnant* (first lieutenant) and transferred to the newly created *Königliche Wurttemberg Gebirgsbataillon* (Royal Wurttemberg Mountain Battalion) of the *Alpenkorps* in September. He was commander of 2nd Company, which trained in mountain warfare in Austria until December, when they were posted on a 6-mile (9.7 km) stretch of front in the Vosges Mountains of Alsace. They remained there, seeing action in reconnaissance work and raids on enemy positions until October 1916, when they were moved to the Southern Carpathians to fight the Romanians, who had joined the conflict in August. In August 1917, his unit was involved in the battle for Mount Cosna, a heavily fortified objective on the border between Hungary and Romania. They succeeded after nearly two weeks of difficult uphill fighting and were withdrawn to reserve on 25 August. The

unit spent six weeks recuperating in Carinthia, and Rommel received leave to return to Danzig to see his wife and recover from a gunshot wound to the arm that he had received in the fight at Mount Cosna.

The Mountain Battalion was next assigned to fight on the Isonzo front, a mountainous area which had been the scene of near-constant fighting since the entry of Italy into the war on the Allied side on 23 May 1915. The offensive known as the Twelfth Battle of the Isonzo, or the Battle of Caporetto, began on 24 October 1917 with a four-hour artillery barrage. Rommel's *Abteilung*, consisting of three rifle companies and a machine gun unit, was part of an attempt to take enemy positions on three mountains: Kolovrat, Matajur, and Stol. Beginning at dawn on 25 October, Rommel took advantage of the terrain to outflank the Italians and gain control of the ridge on Kolovrat, taking 1,500 prisoners in the first three hours. Noticing that there was no field of fire on a supply road leading down to the village of Luico (now Livek), Rommel and 150 of his men proceeded down and captured the town, 2 miles (3.2 km) behind enemy lines. Believing the presence of Rommels' group to be proof that their lines had collapsed, a column of Italian light infantry, 2,000 strong, surrendered after a brief firefight. Before dawn on the 26th, Rommel led his *Abteilung*, now reinforced with two additional machine gun companies, toward Matajur. They took the village of Jevszek without a fight, capturing another 1,600 men. In spite of orders not to attack, they assaulted Matajur from an unexpected direction from behind the Italian lines, arriving at the summit shortly before noon on 27 October. In two and a half days, he and his small contingent of men had captured 81 guns and 9,000 men (including 150 officers), at the loss of six dead and 30 wounded. Acting as advance guard in the capture of Longarone on 9 November, he again decided to attack with a much smaller force. Reinforcements continued to arrive, and fighting continued through the night. Convinced that they were surrounded by an entire German division, the 1st Italian Infantry Division – 10,000 men – surrendered to Rommel at dawn. For this and his work at Matajur, he (and his battalion commander, Major Theodor Sproesser received the order of Pour le Mérite. After a week on leave in January 1918, Rommel was promoted to *Hauptmann* (captain) and assigned to a staff position with XLIV Army Corps, where he served for the remainder of the war.

GEN Luigi Capello

From firstworldwar.com
http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/capello.htm

General Luigi Capello (1859-1941) was an Italian commander during World War One who achieved initial success and popularity at Gorizia and along the Isonzo before suffering disgrace at Caporetto in 1917.

A somewhat unpredictable field commander, Capello was an outspoken critic of bureaucratic inefficiencies within the Italian army. While his open campaign to improve army efficiency ought to have made him a natural ally to army Chief of Staff Luigi Cadorna it did not.
His habit during wartime of allowing journalists to accompany him on the Italian front infuriated Cadorna, who strove to exclude both press and politicians from all aspects of the conduct of the war (thus Capello's welcoming of civilian authorities to the front further engendered Cadorna's suspicions regarding Capello's ultimate ambition).

However Capello's attitude towards the press paid personal dividends in the form of favorable coverage, particularly following the Italian success at Gorizia in August 1916.
In the wake of his personal success at Gorizia Capello found himself transferred to the less glamorous Trentino sector, before he was moved back to the Isonzo at the head of Second Army in early 1917.

Second Army's limited success at the Eleventh Battle of the Isonzo that summer was entirely wiped out by the calamitous events at Caporetto in October, when a surprise German offensive demolished the Italian lines and resulted in 300,000 Italian casualties (both wounded and captured).

Capello's part in the fiasco brought him official disgrace in a parliamentary report published in 1919. Warned of the possibility of an attack in the sector he ignored Cadorna's orders to withdraw his artillery to safety west of the river. Instead he issued orders of his own to prepare his best units for a pre-emptive Italian offensive.
Ill while events at Caporetto began to play out, he returned to his post on 24 October by which time it was too late to save the Italian position. He therefore recommended to Cadorna that a withdrawal of some 50km be initiated. Cadorna ignored Capello's advice - doubtless in revenge for Capello's earlier attitude to his own orders - and Capello succumbed to illness again.

Following publication of the 1919 parliamentary enquiry into the events surrounding Caporetto - which blamed Cadorna as much as Capello - he remained in the post-war Italian army. With the rise of Mussolini's brand of fascism he joined the Fascist Party but was expelled in 1923 for his Masonic connections.

Two years following his expulsion from the Fascist Party Capello was arrested and charged with conspiracy to assassinate Mussolini. Consequently sent to prison he emerged to freedom eleven years later in 1936.

He died in 1941.

Generalfeldmarschall Svetozar Boroević

From Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svetozar_Boroevi%C4%87

Boroević was born on 13 December 1856 in the village of Umetić, Croatian Military Frontier, Austrian Empire (present-day Croatia). His father Adam was a border guard officer, his mother was Stana (née Kovarbašić).

Boroević was of Serb descent. Boroević himself stated once that he was a Croat and that Croatia was his homeland, while he is often simply called "Croatian".

In 1889, he married Leontina von Rosner, daughter of a late Austrian colonel, Friedrich Ritter von Rosner. The couple had one son, Friedrich Borojević von Bojna, named after his mother's father. The son died in 1918.

Boroević advanced quickly through the ranks, corporal in 1872, Oberleutnant in 1880. Between 1887 and 1891 he underwent additional military training and worked as an instructor after that, becoming a major in 1892. In 1897 he was promoted to the rank of Oberst (colonel), and appointed chief of staff of the Seventh Corps of the Imperial & Royal Army in June 1898, where he remained until February 1904. In 1904 he was promoted Major General (Generalmajor). In 1905 he was created a Hungarian nobleman (since Croatia was one of the Lands of the Holy Hungarian Crown) with the attribute *von Bojna*. In 1908 the monarch made him Field Marshal Lieutenant (Feldmarschallleutnant). He became the commander of the Sixth Corps in April 1912 and in 1913 General of the Infantry.

When World War I started in 1914 he was in command of the Sixth Corps on the Eastern Front. In early September 1914 he became commander of the Third Army, and on May 25, 1915 he was sent to the new Italian front, taking part of the Third Army with him and leaving the rest to Army Group Mackensen. There Boroević became the Commander of the Fifth Army, with which he organized a defense against the Italians and broke countless offensives. Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf, Chief of Staff, Supreme Army Command, recommended that they fall back and avoid trying to defend the better part of today's Slovenia, claiming it was indefensible. Boroević persisted, maintaining that the Slovenes would stand their ground when faced with the defense of their own country. This appealed to Emperor Francis Joseph and he was given command on the Soča (Isonzo) front.

Boroević's troops contained eleven Italian attacks and he was hailed as the *Knight of Isonzo* in Austria-Hungary, while his soldiers adored him and called him *Naš Sveto!* ("Our Sveto!"). For valor in combat he was promoted to the rank of Generaloberst on May 1, 1916. On August 23, 1917 he rose to the position of commander of the Southwestern Front, which was later renamed *Army Group Boroević*. In January 1918, he opposed Hungarian proposals to split Austria-Hungary's Army into separate Austrian and Hungarian units. He became Field Marshal on February 1, 1918, and was also awarded numerous medals, including the highest order for Austro-Hungarian soldiers, the Military Order of Maria Theresia.

His southern prong of the last Austro-Hungarian offensive was defeated the at the Battle of the Piave River. The front was maintained until end of October 1918, when the Italian army launched the decisive offensive of Vittorio Veneto as non-Austrian troops left their positions following the secessions of their nations from the dual monarchy (Czechs and Slovaks on October 28, South Slavs on October 29, Hungary on October 31). After that Boroević fell back to Velden, where he sent a telegram to the Emperor offering to march on Vienna to fight the anti-Habsburg revolution in the imperial capital. It is not certain whether the Emperor was given this message (Boroević doubted it); the offer was refused on behalf of the Emperor. After the Imperial & Royal Army had been demobilized by the Emperor on November 6, Boroević was retired, by the War Ministry in liquidation, bon December 1, 1918.

After the demise and disintegration of Austria-Hungary, Boroević decided to become a citizen of the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. He was not welcome despite offering his services to the National Council of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. So he stayed in Carinthia, now Austria's southernmost state; his personal belongings, which were in Slovenia, were confiscated. He died in a hospital at Klagenfurt. His body was transferred to Vienna where he was entombed at the Central Cemetery. The grave had been paid for by the former emperor Charles.

Luigi Cadorna

From Wikipedia

Marshal of Italy Luigi Cadorna, 4 September 1850 – 21 December 1928, was an Italian General and Marshal of Italy, most famous for being the Chief of Staff of the Italian Army during the first part of World War I.

Born in Piedmont in 1850. In 1860 Cardona became a student at the "Teuliè" Military School in Milan. At fifteen he entered the Turin Military Academy. Upon graduation he was commissioned as a second lieutenant of artillery in 1868. In 1870, as an officer in the 2nd Regiment of Artillery, Cadorna participated in the occupation of Rome as part of a force commanded by his father. As major he was appointed to the staff of General Pianell, afterwards taking the post of Chief of Staff of the Verona Divisional Command. As Colonel commanding the 10th Regiment of Bersaglieri from 1892 Cadorna acquired a reputation for strict discipline and harsh punishment. He wrote a manual of infantry tactics which laid stress on the doctrine of the offensive. Promoted to lieutenant general in 1898 Cadorna subsequently held a number of senior staff and divisional/corps command positions. On the eve of Italy's entry into World War (1915) he was close to peace-time retirement age and had a history of differences with his political and military superiors.

Cadorna had been offered the post of Chief of Staff for the first time in 1908, which he had rejected over the issue of political control during wartime. He was again offered the position in July 1914. When Italy entered the war in May 1915 on the side of the Entente, Cadorna fielded thirty-six infantry divisions composed of 875,000 men, but with only 120 modern artillery pieces.

Cadorna launched four offensives in 1915, all along the Isonzo River. The goal of these offensives was the fortress of Gorizia, the capture of which would permit the Italian armies to pivot south and march on Trieste, or continue on to the Ljubljana Gap. All four offensives failed, resulting in some 250,000 Italian casualties for little material gain. Cadorna would ultimately fight eleven battles on the Isonzo between 1915 and 1917. Additional forces were arrayed along the Trentino salient, attacking towards Rovereto, Trento, and Bolzano. These attacks also failed. The terrain along the Isonzo and Trentino was completely unsuited for offensive warfare–mountainous and broken, with no room for maneuver.

On 24 October 1917 a combined Austro-Hungarian/German army struck across the Soča (the Slovene name for the Isonzo River) at Kobarid (called *Caporetto* in Italian) and by 12 November had advanced all the way to the Piave River. Cadorna's disposition of most of his troops far forward, with little defense in depth, contributed greatly to the disaster; but graver still were the responsibilities of other officers, notably Pietro Badoglio, then corps commander in a sector overrun by the Austro-German attack. Cadorna himself had been on leave for most of October and his immediate subordinate was seriously ill.

The Italian Army fled in disarray and seemed on the verge of total collapse; 275,000 soldiers surrendered. Italy's allies Britain and France sent eleven divisions to reinforce the Italian front, and insisted on the dismissal of Cadorna. He was relieved of command on 9 November 1917. The new Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando appointed the respected General Armando Diaz as Chief of General Staff, with Badoglio named as his second-in-command. Cadorna was reassigned as the Italian representative to the Allied Supreme War Council set up in Versailles. The Italian forces thereafter rallied behind the Piave and Monte Grappa and, with the help of the Allied divisions, reversed the course of the conflict.

After the war, there was an enquiry held by the Italian government to investigate the defeat at Caporetto. It was published in 1919 and was highly critical of Cadorna, at that time a bitter man busy with writing his memoirs who claimed that he had no responsibility for the defeat, despite fleeing to Padua during the battle and abandoning the entire Italian Second Army to its fate. Nevertheless, he was made a Field Marshal (Maresciallo d'Italia) in 1924 after Benito Mussolini seized power.

Field Marshal Cadorna died in Bordighera in 1928.

Otto von Below

From: firstworldwar.com
http://www.firstworldwar.com/bio/below_otto.htm

One of the more capable German field commanders of the First World War, Otto von Below (1857-1944) - a cousin of Fritz von Below (reported variously as his brother), another field commander during the war (causing some confusion among British military intelligence) - served on numerous fronts during the war, beginning the conflict on the Eastern Front, and also serving in the Balkans, in Italy, as well as on the Western Front.

Below's wartime career began in East Prussia. There he commanded I Reserve Corps at the Battles of Gumbinnen and the First Battle of the Masurian Lakes. He also fought at the Second Battle of the Masurian Lakes in February 1915, briefly commanding Eighth Army from November 1914 (taking over from General von Francois).

Success in East Prussia led to further postings in Courland, Salonika and on the Western Front (where he led the Sixth Army around Lille in April 1917). However his reputation chiefly stems from a notable success at Caporetto in October and November 1917, where he commanded the Austro-German Fourteenth Army.

His successful adoption of 'infiltration' tactics at Caporetto earned him command of Seventeenth Army on the Western Front. Pitting him against the manifestly stronger British in March 1918 - during the great German push of that spring, the Kaiserschlacht Offensive - the German High Command apparently expected von Below to pull another rabbit out of the hat, as at Caporetto.

Below’s reputation preceded him; his success as a commander at Caporetto served only to alert British Third Army military intelligence of imminent likely attack wherever he was stationed; preparations were consequently undertaken.

Below was expected to overrun Arras during March 1918; his inability to do so led to the failure of the German campaign to capture the Somme that same month.

Ending the war from October 1918 in command of First Army, Below oversaw the retreat of the Germans from Reims to positions preparatory for a last stand defence of German territory.

Theodor Sproesser

From Wikipedia,
https://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodor_Sproesser&prev=search

Theodor Sproesser, 10 September 1870 to 8 February 1933, was a son of Major General Theodor Karl Gottlieb von Sproesser (1836-1907.

Sproesser served in the Wuertemberg Army from 1889 until the end of the First World War. This included participating in the expedition to suppress the Boxer Revolution in China in 1904-5. With the outbreak of the First World War Sproesser commanded the regimental MG company, until he was promoted to major on August 19, 1914 and given command of the 2nd Battalion. He fought on the Western Front until in November 1914 his unit was transfered to the Eastern Front . He fought against the Russians until the end of August 1915 when he was injured in a fall from his horse and sent home. After his recovery he was appointed commander of the Wuertemburg Mountain Battalion (WMB), consisting of six mountain-rifle companies with six mountain MG companies. After intensive instruction and training the battalion was sent on 1 January 1916 to the Vosges. In October 1916 Sproesser moved with his battalion to the Balkans and fought on the extreme right wing of 9th Army campaigning against Romania.

In October, now on the Italian front , Sproesser‘s battalion was the right wing of the Alpine Corps during the Battle of the Twelfth Isonzo in the Julian Alps. It conquered the Kolovrat and Matajur . Subsequently, November 9 it managed to reach Longarone on the Piave. Here, some 10,000 Italian soldiers surrendered to the battalion. For these

achievements Sproesser was awarded the highest Prussian bravery award, the Pour le Mérite.

Sproesser returned with his battalion in February 1918 to the Upper Rhine and enlarged to a mountain regiment with two battalions. Fighting in France Sproesser was seriously wounded by shrapnel and his left hand shattered. These wounds never completely healed.

At the end of the war he was still in the hospital. After his recovery, in June 1919, the Provisional Reichswehr accepted him as Lieutenant Colonel of the newly formed 13th Infantry Regiment. After February 1, 1922 Sproesser was promoted, Colonel, and on 1 October 1923, was appointed the commander of the Glatz fortress. He retired on 31 March 1925 with a promotion to Major General.

Retired Sproesser published several newspaper articles and two military historical works in which he highlighted the achievements of the Württemberg Mountain Battalion during the First World War.