

SD CINEMATOGRAFICA PRESENTS:

Operation Edelweiss

THE NAZI WAR FOR OIL

A DOCUMENTARY

BY RENZO CARBONERA



In the twentieth century, oil became a vital resource, influencing and sometimes determining the outcome of wars, diplomacy, politics and the world economy, not to mention the impact it had in the ecological field. Our story is about the Nazi regime's desperate thirst for oil, which proved crucial to the outcome of the Second World War.

Nazi tanks, airplanes, submarines and ships, as well as Hitler's infamous super weapons, the Wunderwaffen, and the first jet-propelled aircraft, the Messerschmitt, all required huge quantities of oil. And Germany did not have this resource. This is why, in 1942, the Wehrmacht launched an operation aimed at conquering the vast Soviet oil reserves: the oil fields of Grozny and Baku in the Caucasus. The 49th Mountain Corps took part in a battle that is considered one of the most arduous and little known of World War II: Operation Edelweiss.

The aim of Operation Edelweiss is to conquer the massive Mount Elbrus (5648 meters high), to gain control of the mountain pass and block the Red Army on the Caucasus plain. The exploits of these mountain daredevils will enable the German navy to conquer the huge Baku and Caspian Sea oilfields, setting off from the Mediterranean, without having to clash with the Soviets. These deposits, the largest in Europe, would provide the Third Reich with enough oil to supply the nation and its thirsty war machine.

Before the war, oil had not assumed the importance it has today. About 80% of the world's energy came from coal, a resource that Germany possessed in abundance. But to win such a highly technological conflict as the Second World War, which was based on motorized equipment and weapons, oil resources were of paramount importance.

The oil age thus began during the bloodiest war to ever inflict our planet. But the battle in the Caucasus mountains and the Elbrus massive has almost been forgotten, despite being of fundamental importance to the outcome of the war.

A vanguard of 150 men led by Colonel Groth is sent to seize the passes that lead to the Elbrus massive. It is August 10, 1942. But the German Gebirgsjaeger are not alone in these mountains. They will be faced very soon with the vanguard of the Red Army, which has been sent in the area.

The first contact takes place on August 17, when the Germans reach a Soviet ski resort and hotel, a hotel of absurd ostentation and luxury in the middle of nowhere, belonging to the Soviet travel agency Inturist. Exhausted after several days of climbing and with a heavy storm approaching, Colonel Groth and Sergeant Kuemmele are invited by Soviet soldiers to the heated bunker built next to the Inturist Hotel: the Germans bring the bread, the Soviets the vodka. Together they drink to peace, listening to Beletsky's stories. But the idyll does not last long: the following day the German forces return, put the Soviets to flight and seize the site.

Part of the documentary, with relevant dramatic reconstructions, focuses on this dramatic and significant event, as a way of introducing the main characters of the story: Colonel Groth, Captain Gammeler, Marshal Kuemmele, the war correspondent Gorter and, from the Russian side, Captain Beletsky.

On August 21, 1942 Colonel Groth and Captain Gammeler, along with twenty-one experienced climbers reach the top of Mount Elbrus, a feat that is still etched in the annals of mountaineering and extreme sports in general. An undertaking so arduous that the Nazi flag flew atop Elbrus for several years after the end of the war. It was the last Nazi flag to fly anywhere in the world.

Through the mountaineering feats of these individual we will discover a new more human and epic aspect of war. What is particular about Operation Edelweiss is just this succession of fierce battles interspersed with moments of collaboration, which were necessary to survive in this odd situation where the enemy is not only the opposing army but also nature and human limitations.

Of the division, less than twenty soldiers survive and abandon the Elbrus Massive in January 1943, tagging onto the Nazi army retreating from Russia after the defeat at Stalingrad, a prelude to the fall of the Third Reich.

Would the War have ended differently if the Nazis had succeeded in taking control of the oil the Wunderwaffen needed?

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