



I Guardiani del Silenzio

Stand To! The journal of the Western Front Association (June 2016 - number 106)

Review by Bob Wyatt

New member Andrea Contrini from Italy has photographed many of the huge fortifications built on the border between Italy and Austro-Hungary and presents them in this most beautiful book supported by text in English, German and Italian and if prizes were to be given for high quality artistic photography, then this book should win. In this photographic delight are portrayed the buildings and ruins in their gloriously remote mountain settings - without people - as if they had literally just been abandoned. The huge fortifications were built on the border between Italy and Austria-Hungary by both sides. The Austro-Hungarians built the first forts after 1866 to defend the city of Trento and further strengthened the borders after 1908 with seven fortresses. Most of them suffered from their inability to resist the long range artillery used during the war - two metres of concrete without sufficient steel reinforcements afforded little protection. On 12 June 1915 a German 3,5 cm shell penetrated Fort Verena, where first shoot of the war had been fired on 24 May, killing nearly fifty defenders. The war of the fortresses lasted from May 1915 until May 1916 after which they were reduced to silence and they remain silent still, as splendid sentinels in their isolated surroundings. During the 1930s they were weakened when the limited amount of steel in the structures was removed to be utilised by the Italians for their industry. Fort Belvedere was spared in its commanding position atop a mountain, as the author says: "the passing of time has transformed the bulwarks of war among nations in places of peace, keepers of memories".