

A SENTRY OVER BORMIO VALLEY: THE VENINI FORTRESS AT OGA

In front of you, around 1730 m of altitude and nearby the hamlet of Oga, the north-eastern flank of Masucco Mount shows a clear counterslope, called Dossaccio : its shape is due to deep-seated gravitational slope deformation (DGSD), that is to say a very very slow mass creep of all the slope, started perhaps during the last deglaciation of the valley.

On the top of Dossaccio, a flat, grey, massive building stands, overlooking the whole Bormio basin and the mountains around it: the First World War fort of Oga, built up between 1908 and 1914, in order to defend Italian northern boundary from a possible Austrian invasion through Switzerland, and named in 1938 after Captain Corrado Venini, dead in combat during the same War.

Surrounded by a wall and a large trench with stakes and interlaced barbed wire entanglement, the fortress is a steady, partially underground complex, with a lower floor suitable to daily life of about 80 soldiers led by 8 officers, and a battery corridor at the upper floor, connecting two kind of gun turrets, cropping out on the flat top of the building. The smaller two, at the ends, are disappearing swivelling ones, equipped with a Gardner machine gun operated manually by turning a crank; with their 2 km radius, they assured the perimetral defense of the structure against infantry attacks. Between them, four wider circular rooms housed each a Military Marine cannon, protected by rotating armoured iron domes. Their range of 12800 m permitted to hit all the passes which lead to Bormio valley, from Foscagno to Fraèle Towers and also the road from Stelvio pass, the favoured access route for an Austrian invasion. The officer in charge of firing, located in a nearby observation sentry box, couldn't see the targets, hidden by the majestic mass of the Reit crest, so ballistic

calculations were based on informations taken by optical signals from lookouts and posts on the surrounding peaks, first of all the Monte Scale barracks. The whole integrate system permitted to force back the violent Austro-Hungarian attacks, saving Bormio and Valtellina from a possible invasion.

During Second World War the fort was not used and consequently abandoned at the end of it and the cannons were sold as scrap metal, but the structure, never hit by projectiles nor damaged in the interiors, preserved also the heating, electric and intercom systems quite intact, in their original aspect; now, it has been restored and opened to visitors, being the most frequented museum of Valtellina.

Through its corridors, gun turrets, caponiers, but also kitchen, sleeping quarters and latrines, you'll have an emotive insight into the hard life of soldiers on these mountains during the so called White War.