

A GOOD READ

Caporetto and the Isonzo Campaign ~ The Italian Front 1915-1918

by John Macdonald with Željko Cimpric.

Published by Pen & Sword Books in 2011.

Hardback - 194 pages. £19.99p ISBN 978 184 8846715.

A profusion of books have been and are written about the many and varied aspects First World War but the campaign fought on the Italian front has been relatively neglected. In the introduction to his book the author comments that "... There are a couple of good highly detailed academic hardbacks on the campaign ... there is a need for a shorter, highly illustrated book ..." about Caporetto and the Isonzo Campaign. The reader is introduced to the background which led to Italy entering the First World War and the internal tensions festering within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

A short biography of the military commanders of both sides tasked with obtaining a decisive victory gives an insight to their character and military competence. The mountainous terrain of the Julian and Tyrolean Alps is vividly described and how the sudden changes in weather conditions both in winter and summer affected the fighting capabilities of the troops and logistic support.

Each of the battles, consecutively and concisely described culminates in the twelfth - the Battle of Caporetto - a decisive victory for the Austro-Hungarian army. Both sides during the three years of a hard fought campaign sustained horrendous and often unnecessary casualties. The Piave offensive and the battle on the Asiago Plateau during the final months of 1918 is briefly described.

For the battlefield visitor the author suggests places of interest to visit. Caporetto (today called Kobarid) has a museum which is internationally recognized for its exhibitions and displays about the history of the area and the campaign.

Sited on the rock strewn Carso plateau is the Redipuglia Memorial and Ossuary. The latter contain the remains of 100,000 unidentified Italian soldiers and inscribed on twenty-two terraces leading up to the memorial are the names of over 38,000 identified Italians. A cemetery at Fogliano, commemorates the Austro-Hungarian dead. Other battlefield memorials and churches in the area are also recommended to be visited.

The book contains a number and good contemporary photographs. Perhaps the maps of the battlefield could have been more clearly defined but this should detract from the overall content of a fascinating and well written book. It is worthy of a place on the bookshelf of anyone with an interest in the First World War. It is also a fitting tribute to John Macdonald who died shortly after completing this book.

Roger G. Coleman