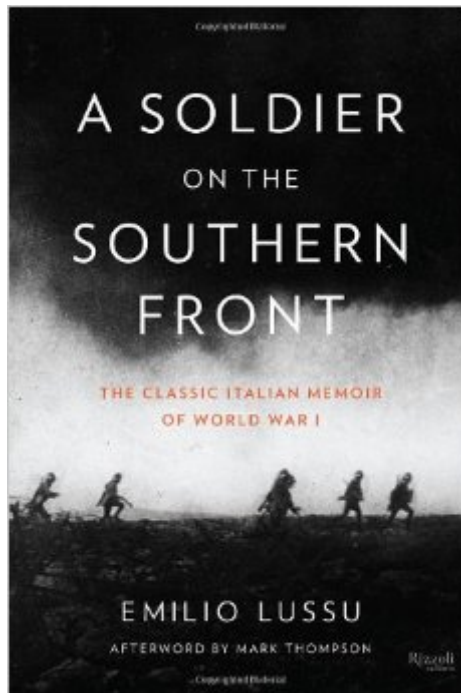


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A Soldier On The Southern Front: The Classic Italian Memoir Of World War 1



Synopsis

A rediscovered Italian masterpiece chronicling the author's experience as an infantryman, newly translated and reissued to commemorate the centennial of World War I. Taking its place alongside works by Ernst Jünger, Robert Graves, and Erich Maria Remarque, Emilio Lussu's memoir is one of the most affecting accounts to come out of the First World War. A classic in Italy but virtually unknown in the English-speaking world, it reveals, in spare and detached prose, the almost farcical side of the war as seen by a Sardinian officer fighting the Austrian army on the Asiago plateau in northeastern Italy, the alpine front so poignantly evoked by Ernest Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*. For Lussu, June 1916 to July 1917 was a year of continuous assaults on impregnable trenches, absurd missions concocted by commanders full of patriotic rhetoric and vanity but lacking in tactical skill, and episodes often tragic and sometimes grotesque, where the incompetence of his own side was as dangerous as the attacks waged by the enemy. A rare firsthand account of the Italian front, Lussu's memoir succeeds in staging a fierce indictment of the futility of war in a dry, often ironic style that sets his tale wholly apart from the Western Front of Remarque and adds an astonishingly modern voice to the literature of the Great War.

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Customer Reviews

Rare view of WW I through Italian eyes. An officer's memoir, not fiction, and written some 20 years after the events it is plain spoken, matter-of-fact recollection with a share of humor and nips of sardonic descriptions of military/human decision making. Wish he, or other Italians, had written

more....

A powerful and beautiful, and beautifully translated, narrative by a soldier who understood his private suffering in the broader context of great shifting events. But the few pages describing Lt. Santini, a pair of wirecutters, an Austrian machinegun, and the savage stupidity of a commander willing to waste lives make the hot core of the narrative's true story. A great book.

In this book, Emilio Lussu captures his experience of trench warfare in WWI in the "Southern Front" which is northern Italy. The book anticipates "true life fiction" before Capote and Mailer made the genre mainstream. In the Afterward, British historian Mark Thompson describes the small instances of poetic license (i.e. the actual names of the characters, the actual times and locations of the events). The reportorial style of these short vignettes can mask the author's deeper message. This is the newly united Italy, with nobles in leadership positions fighting for the House of Savoy. The men who do the actual dying are fighting for Italy. The leadership is best represented by General Leone who is shown to be out of touch with the men and quite casual with their lives. The dynamic this creates is best articulated by Lieutenant Ottolenghi who comes to see the leadership as the enemy. The book is all too short. The info on the author in the Afterward and on the book jacket make him an intriguing personality. If this weren't so sad, I can see some episodes as SNL comedy sketches.

The book was an excellent history of the experiences of a well-educated officer in the Italian army who was in support of the war but appalled at how the commanders treated the soldiers. The book details the suicidal orders given and the lack of preparedness on the part of the army. An outstanding read on a sad chapter in history

A classic of WWI literature and of world literature---no more no less.

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