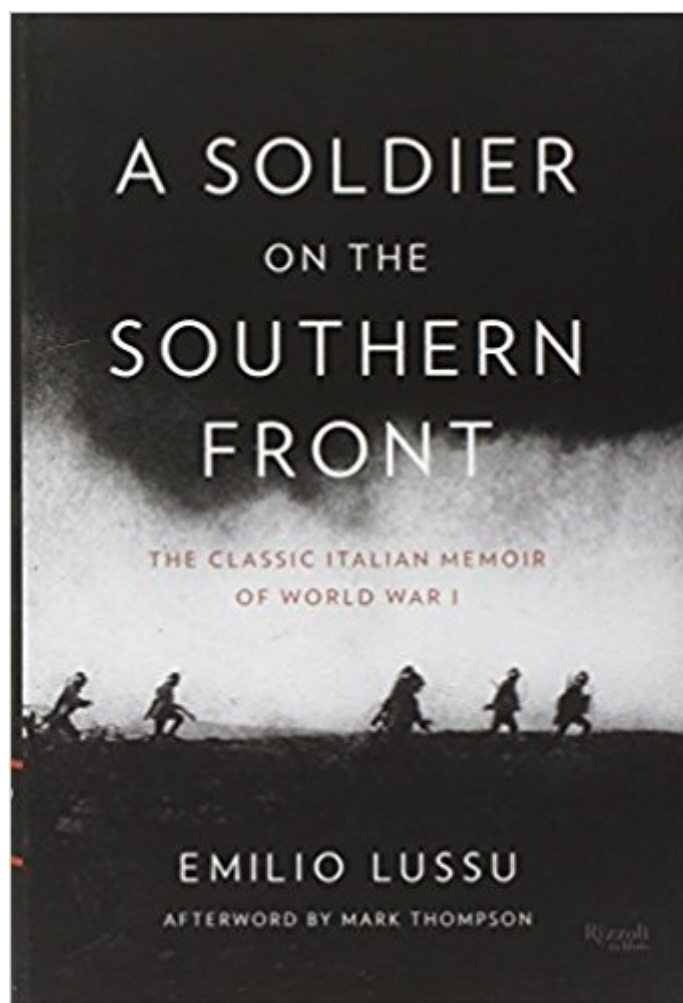


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# A Soldier On The Southern Front: The Classic Italian Memoir Of World War 1



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This beautiful, harrowing, moving, occasionally comic memoir of the experiences of the Sardinian writer, Emilio Lussu, on the Italian-Austrian front...in the First World War has remained largely unknown to English-speaking readers. ...Its republication in a new translation...means it should now find a place on the bookshelf alongside Robert Graves and

Erich Maria Remarque." -Times Literary Supplement"Any avid student of history, particularly military history, will be enthralled with *A Soldier on the Southern Front*...this book will not soon be forgotten."

-New York Journal of Books"The recovered memoir of a brave Italian soldier in World War I. It is a story of trench warfare in 1916, but more importantly, it is the story of the men who fought and their derision of their commanding officers. The author's memory is vivid, and the characters demand it. The author writes about a war of maneuver to save lives rather than a war of position that would cost them. Lussu's philosophy of war was born in the days he lived through and wrote about." -Kirkus Reviews"Part lyrical Italian mojo, part authorial descriptive genius, part 100-year-old stoicism, this eminently readable book ungraphically describes the infantry experience." -Library Journal"...Emilio Lussu's *A Soldier on the Southern Front*, stands as a closely observed critique of wartime generalship that is demonstrably inadequate to the task at hand...Lussu's own recollections of combat stand out, because he retains throughout a tone of remarkable dispassion even while recording instances of senior officer ineptitude likely to mortify even the most obdurate donkey. *A Soldier* recounts a single year in the combat history of the Sardinian brigade to which Lussu was assigned throughout the war...by stitching together a series of loosely-related episodes, Lussu provides a detailed and compelling picture of what it was like to fight the Austrian army in the mountains of northern Italy. Mostly, it was miserable. As on the Western Front so too on the Southern one: Service in the trenches combined filth, deprivation, exhaustion, and periodic terror, reinforced by an acute awareness of being at the mercy of forces utterly without mercy." -Andrew Bacevich in *Raritan*

Emilio Lussu (1890-1975) served as an infantry officer in WWI and was decorated several times for valor. A fervent antifascist, he spent much of the 1920s in exile in France, fought in Spain against Franco, and returned to Italy in 1943 to join the resistance. Mark Thompson is an award-winning British historian. He is the author, most recently, of *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919*.

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....

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.

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.

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.

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