

NUOVA **ANTOLOGIA** 
MILITARE
RIVISTA INTERDISCIPLINARE DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI STORIA MILITARE

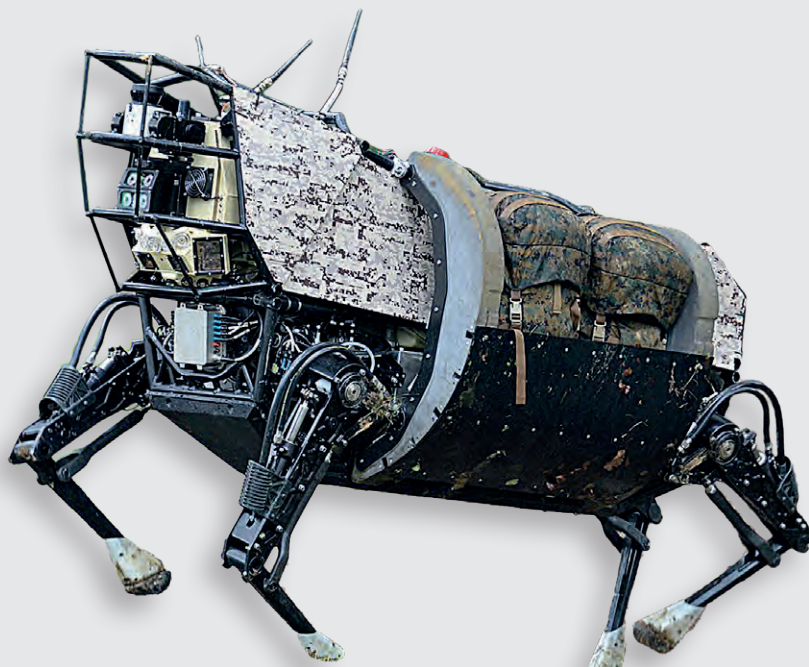
N. 3
2022

Fascicolo 12. Novembre 2022

Storia Militare Contemporanea

a cura di

PIERO CIMBOLLI SPAGNESI



Società Italiana di Storia Militare

Direttore scientifico Virgilio Ilari
Vicedirettore scientifico Giovanni Brizzi
Direttore responsabile Gregory Claude Alegi
Redazione Viviana Castelli

Consiglio Scientifico. Presidente: Massimo De Leonardis.

Membri stranieri: Christopher Bassford, Floribert Baudet, Stathis Birthacas, Jeremy Martin Black, Loretana de Libero, Magdalena de Pazzis Pi Corrales, Gregory Hanlon, John Hattendorf, Yann Le Bohec, Aleksei Nikolaevič Lobin, Prof. Armando Marques Guedes, Prof. Dennis Showalter (†). *Membri italiani:* Livio Antonielli, Marco Bettalli, Antonello Folco Biagini, Aldino Bondesan, Franco Cardini, Piero Cimbolli Spagnesi, Piero del Negro, Giuseppe De Vergottini, Carlo Galli, Marco Gemignani, Roberta Ivaldi, Nicola Labanca, Luigi Loreto, Gian Enrico Rusconi, Carla Sodini, Gioacchino Strano, Donato Tamblé,

Comitato consultivo sulle scienze militari e gli studi di strategia, intelligence e geopolitica: Lucio Caracciolo, Flavio Carbone, Basilio Di Martino, Antulio Joseph Echevarria II, Carlo Jean, Gianfranco Linzi, Edward N. Luttwak, Matteo Paesano, Ferdinando Sanfelice di Monteforte.

Consulenti di aree scientifiche interdisciplinari: Donato Tamblé (Archival Sciences), Piero Cimbolli Spagnesi (Architecture and Engineering), Immacolata Eramo (Philology of Military Treatises), Simonetta Conti (Historical Geo-Cartography), Lucio Caracciolo (Geopolitics), Jeremy Martin Black (Global Military History), Elisabetta Fiocchi Malaspina (History of International Law of War), Gianfranco Linzi (Intelligence), Elena Franchi (Memory Studies and Anthropology of Conflicts), Virgilio Ilari (Military Bibliography), Luigi Loreto (Military Historiography), Basilio Di Martino (Military Technology and Air Studies), John Brewster Hattendorf (Naval History and Maritime Studies), Elina Gugliuzzo (Public History), Vincenzo Lavenia (War and Religion), Angela Teja (War and Sport), Stefano Pisu (War Cinema), Giuseppe Della Torre (War Economics).

Nuova Antologia Militare

Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare
Periodico telematico open-access annuale (www.nam-sism.org)
Registrazione del Tribunale Ordinario di Roma n. 06 del 30 Gennaio 2020



Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma
Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

©Authors hold the copyright of their own articles.

For the Journal: © Società Italiana di Storia Militare
(www.societaitalianastoriamilitare@org)

Grafica: Nadir Media Srl - Via Giuseppe Veronese, 22 - 00146 Roma
info@nadirmedia.it

Gruppo Editoriale Tab Srl -Viale Manzoni 24/c - 00185 Roma
www.tabedizioni.it

ISSN: 2704-9795

ISBN Fascicolo 978-88-9295-585-1

NUOVA

ANTOLOGIA



MILITARE

RIVISTA INTERDISCIPLINARE DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI STORIA MILITARE

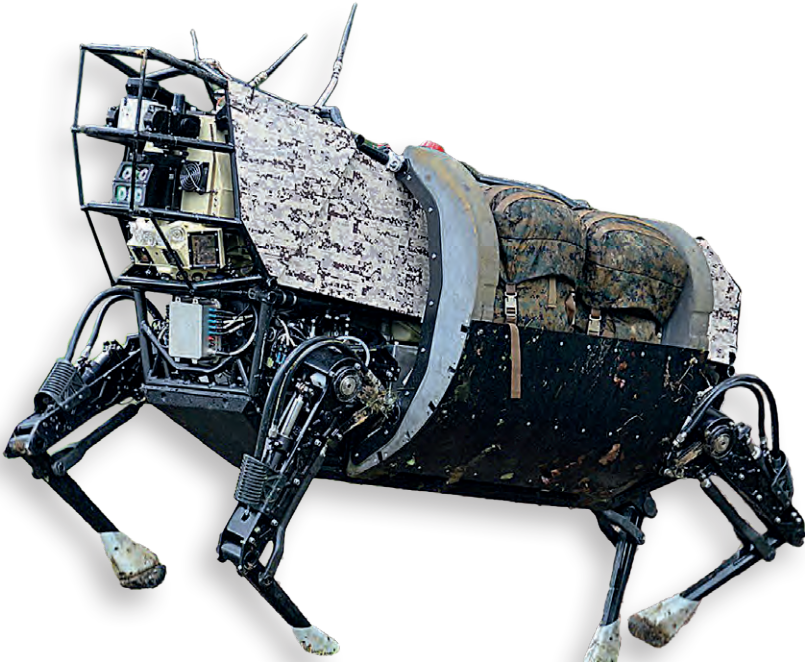
N. 3
2022

Fascicolo 12. Novembre 2022

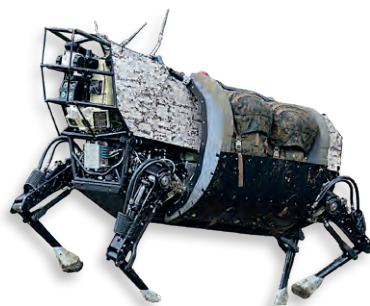
Storia Militare Contemporanea

a cura di

PIERO CIMBOLLI SPAGNESI



Società Italiana di Storia Militare

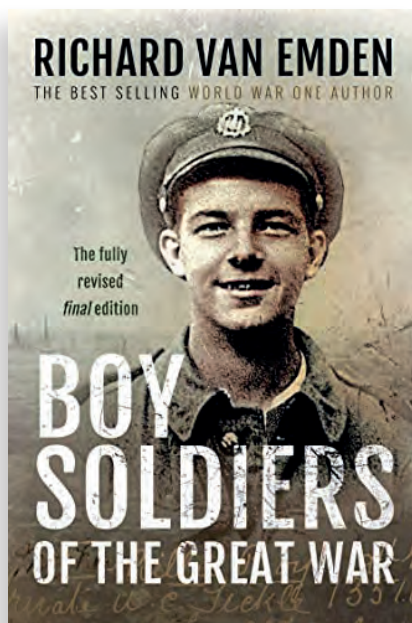


Legged Squad Support System robot prototype, 2021, DARPA image.
Tactical Technology Office, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency,
U.S. Department of Defense, 2012 (wikipedia commons)

RICHARD VAN EMDEN

Boy Soldiers of the Great War

Yorkshire – Philadelphia, Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2021, pp. 467



An extraordinary book titled *Boy Soldiers of the Great War* was published by Richard van Emden in 2021. The book is based on the research of the British writer. His motivation to make the research came from the fact that although the number of boy soldiers' graves is considerable, it is unfairly suppressed in historiography to deal with the question of their fate during the First World War. The main aim of the book is to present the experiences of boy soldiers who served in the British army, particularly their reasons to join and stay in the army while being aware of the war characteristics. The first edition of the book was published in 2012, the content of which was later revised by the author. In the earlier edition, he provided an exact number of boy soldiers died in the First World War, while in the current version he says it is not worth giving a concrete number of victims because of the unreliability of statistics.

During his research, Emden used English professional literature, magazines and newspapers (*The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Sketch*), but he also selected from a wide range of unpublished resources such as war memoirs and correspondence, documents and recordings from the *Imperial War Museums*, *University of Leeds* and the *National Archives*. In addition, he made 30 interviews with alive veterans of the Great War to integrate the method of oral history, as well.

The book is divided into twenty-one chapters apart from the Foreword (written to the first edition of the book) and the Introduction. As I cannot examine the book in details, I try to highlight those statements which I considered the most significant.

In the Introduction, the author investigates why boys joined the army. He believes it is related to boredom, adventurousness and stress coming from the part of the family or can be seen as an attempt to escape from obligations. Loyalty to the king and the country can also be mentioned among the possible reasons. However, the author also highlights that these youngsters were not really aware of the dangers they would take upon themselves. They thought they would come home with a few unserious wounds, just like the ones they had after climbing trees or ice-skating as children.

In the first chapter, the author states that the idea of soldiering was born quite early in children and their commitment to the country goes back to school years or the time when they were scouts. Another important fact is highlighted: due to high child mortality, children had numerous death experiences 100 years ago, but they did not know anything about the nature of war, so they rather saw it as an adventure. In the second chapter, the circumstances of recruitment and enlistment are presented. From this aspect, it is not only the youngsters who can be blamed for voluntarily joining the army, but also the wardens and recruiting officers who let them do so. Youngsters often changed their names illegally, used the birth certificate of another person or gave false personal details to get into the army, even if they were under the age limit. However, officers did not care about this, given that the candidate met the expected physical standards (body height, quality of eyesight etc.). In the third chapter, Emden deals with the circumstances of training that boy soldiers got and notices that trainers made a joke on rookies all the time. However, it was harder for boys to cope with the farewell after training than thinking of what would be waiting for them on the front. In the fourth chapter, we

can read about the unfavourable conditions of trench war. The author points out that snipers hunted for young rookies who did not keep the rules and often leaned from the trenches. Guard-duties also put a significant pressure on boy soldiers, although not because of their young age, but because they fell asleep very easily in winter weather conditions. In the fifth chapter, Emden writes about the question of English officers. After the catastrophic loss in the first months (between the August of 1914 and March of 1915 6000 English officers died) there was a need for temporary officers who were often chosen from youngsters under the age of 19 (so-called junior officers). Although it was prescribed to be above the age of 21 to be an officer, this limit could be reduced with the countersignature of a fiduciary, along with parental permission. In the sixth chapter, the author emphasizes that the high number of victims led the parents to start asking for their children being sent home. When the new government led by David Lloyd George (1863–1945) was elected, recruiting problems of the first war period broke surface. The author is convinced that the government caused a significant economic damage and administrative trouble for itself when it had to send home boy



Sidney Lewis, aged 13, waiting to be discharged after being returned from France

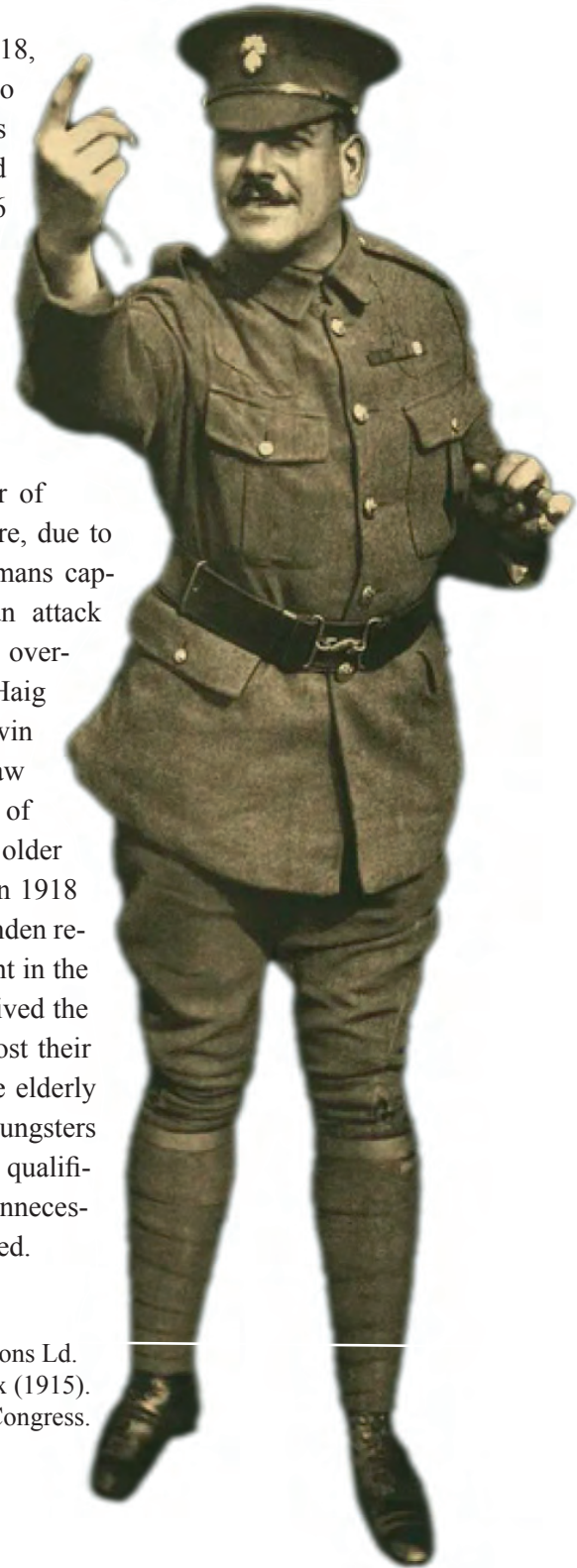
soldiers at its own expense. In the seventh the moments of attacks are analysed: the continuous fire and the noise of bombings had such a shocking effect on young soldiers that they became gray-headed men from boys. According to a regulation introduced on the 17th December 1915, youngsters who were under 17 were sent home, except those (in spite of all protest of parents) who wanted to stay or were pronounced capable of further fight. However, when Edward Stanley followed Herbert Kitchener in the position of recruiting manager in 1916, he or-

dered that nobody could join the army until turning 18 years and 9 months.

While one third of the youngsters left the army by the autumn of 1915, as people were getting more and more aware of war conditions, the number of newly recruited soldiers also decreased by the second half of 1915. Consequently, compulsory military service was enforced in January 1916. According to another instruction made in June 1916, soldiers who had already joined the army were controlled again based on their birth certificate, those under 17 were sacked, and soldiers between the age of 17 and 19 were sent to the reserve. However, misunderstandings also occurred. On the one hand, soldiers under 18 who served overseas returned home only if they were willing to do so. On the second hand, the above-mentioned instruction only referred to non-commissioned officers and enlisted men, while officers could further serve overseas above the age of 18. In the tenth chapter, the author writes about youngsters who hoped that the battle of Somme would end in success. They wrongly believed they could advance without any resistance at the opposite side, but they suffered an enormous loss already on the first day of the attack (20.000 dead and 40.000 wounded soldiers). Emden also highlights that parents did not request their sons to be sent home, which can be explained by three reasons: the activity of the German army in Verdun, the belief in the success of the battle of Somme and the short amount of time that had passed since the June instruction. However, as a result of the lost battle, a new instruction was released in October 1916, which obliged all boys under the age of 17 to return home whether they wanted or not. Boy soldiers between the age of 17 and 18,5 could make the decision themselves, while those above the age of 18,5 had to stay in their trainer unit in France until the age of 19. Thanks to strict regulations, it was impossible to join the army under the age of 17. Consequently, less than twenty soldiers under the age of 16 died in all fronts in 1917. The twelfth chapter deals with the reasons parents gave in order to reach their children's home-coming from the army. Some of them argued that their family did their share from the war and did what they could. Others suggested that their children would serve the war more efficiently in the munition-factory. There were also parents who wanted their children back referring to subsistence difficulties. In the thirteenth chapter, the author writes about the decision made in April 1917, according to which boy soldiers were collected and trained more professionally, under the direct control of an officer whose only task was to ensure the collective welfare of the boys. In the fourteenth chapter, the author points

out that due to the German attack in 1918, there was a great pressure on the army to call back any youngsters they could. As a result, the age limit was firstly reduced to 18 years 7 months and then 18 years 6 months.

In the fifteenth chapter, Emden states that during the great German attack in the spring of 1918, self-mutilation was more and more widespread among the soldiers, as they wanted to escape from the front this way. Although the number of British soldiers died were less than before, due to the inexperience of youngsters, the Germans captured many of them. After the German attack stopped in 1918, the age limit to fight overseas was raised to 19 again. As Douglas Haig (1861–1928) needed every soldier to win the war, there was no chance to withdraw youngsters from the front. Still, as a result of previous instructions and the boys getting older by then, the number of youngsters died in 1918 was very low. In the sixteenth chapter, Emden reflects on the lost youth of boys who fought in the war. He highlights that even if they survived the war, their life was ruined because they lost their study and career opportunities. While the elderly could continue their pre-war life, the youngsters could not do this in the lack of necessary qualifications. Therefore, they felt themselves unnecessary, especially if they had become crippled.



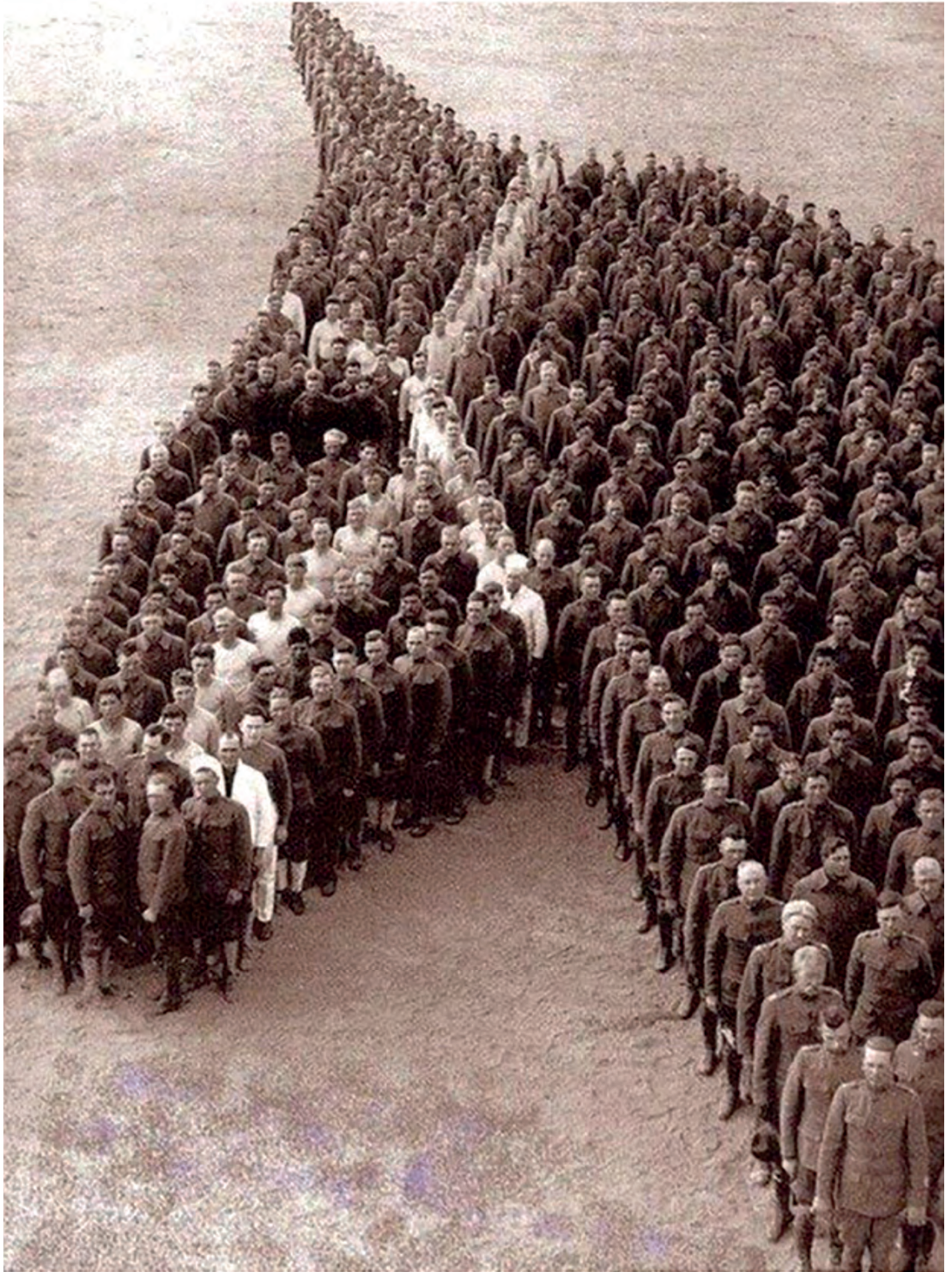
Soldier beckoning printed by David Allen & Sons Ltd.
Harrow, Middlesex (1915).
Original from the Library of Congress.

In the last chapters, the author sums up his statements and introduces his methods for defining the number of boy soldiers. He argues that this number can only be estimated given that the concept of 'boy soldiers' is also ambiguous. Namely, the age soldiers were rounded up not only during the recruitment process, but in the case of death, as well. In case we still want to determine the number, it can be said that – apart from the naval army and the colonial areas – approximately 100 to 110 thousand soldiers died at or before the age of 18, while the number of boy soldiers fought in the war is surely higher than 250 thousand. To make any statements, Emden randomly selected 1000 out of the 2046 boy soldiers whose life he examined. Although the sample is not that big, the randomly selected sample makes it a representative solution.

Emden concludes that due to stricter recruiting examination, youngsters were selected a lot more in 1914 than in 1915 when there were less volunteers and a bigger need for soldiers. According to Emden, 15% of the 2,67 million volunteers were under the age limit, which means that approximately 400 thousand boy soldiers fought on the Western front. In the twentieth chapter, the story of the youngest boy soldier, Sidney George Lewis (born in 1903) can be read. He fought in the battle of Somme when he was only 12 years and 4 months old! In the closing chapter, the author lists the names and most important personal details (date of recruitment, body height, place and time of duty etc.) of boy soldiers who died in the war.

It is not only its novelty that makes the book so valuable, but also the original illustrations (photos, newspapers etc.) that are pieces from the author's own collection. As a historian who investigates the social history of the First World War, I hope that Richard van Emden's book would be a sample for similar research in the future regarding the history of other countries.

RÓBERT KÁROLY SZABÓ



650 Officers and Enlisted Men of Auxiliary Remount Depot N° 326 Camp Cody, N. M., In a Symbolic Head Pose of "The Devil", Saddle Horse ridden by Maj. Frank Brewer, remount commander / Photo by Almeron Newman, *Rear 115 N. Gold Ave., Deming, N.M.*.(1919)
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

Storia Militare Contemporanea

Articoli / Articles

- *Oltre Enrico Rocchi. Cultura e storiografia dell'architettura militare per il XXI secolo,*
di PIERO CIMBOLLI SPAGNESI
- *L'Affaire Ullmo. La trahison de l'officier de marine Ullmo en 1908. Comme un écho déformé de l'Affaire Dreyfus,*
Par BERNARD HAUTECLOQUE
- *The Battle of the Lys. The Uncovered History,*
by JESSE PYLES
- *The Goennert Plot: An Attempted Entente-Sponsored Coup in Austro-Hungarian Tianjin and Shanghai in 1917,*
par MATHIEU GOTTELAND
- *Le Potenze vincitrici e il controllo del commercio di armi nei primi anni Venti. I limiti della cooperazione internazionale,*
di LORENZO FABRIZI
- *La città militare di Roma a La Cecchignola e i piani per la crescita industriale della Capitale nella prima metà del XX secolo,*
di CRISTINA VENTRELLI
- *The Shanghai Incident (1932). An Analysis Based on Some New Italian Sources,*
by ROCCO MARIA COLONNA
- *De la calle a la trinchera. El frente como escenario de lealtad y compromiso de la Guardia Civil en la Guerra Civil Española,*
por JAVIER CERVERA GIL
- *World War Two and Artillery,*
by JEREMY BLACK
- *Africa Settentrionale 1940-1941. Una rilettura della guerra nel deserto tra Jomini e Boyd,*
di BASILIO DI MARTINO
- *German Plans for an Invasion of Sweden in 1943: A Serious Endeavour?,*
by PAOLO POZZATO and MARTIN SAMUELS
- *Le navi bianche. L'evacuazione dei civili italiani dall'Africa Orientale,*
di DECIO ZORINI
- *SOSUS. I sistemi americani di sorveglianza idroacustica sottomarina sviluppati durante la guerra fredda,*
di MARIO ROMEO
- *Insurgencia y contrainsurgencia: la guerra de guerrillas de los cristeros y la estrategia para combatirla usada por el ejército mexicano (1926-1929),*
por JUAN GONZÁLEZ MORFÍN
- *Tre lenti sul conflitto religioso messicano. Lo sguardo del British Foreign Office, de La Civiltà Cattolica e del mondo cattolico belga,*
di FEDERICO SESIA

Studi e Documenti

- *Operazioni aviotrasportate in Sicilia. Genesi ed effetti,*
di CARMELO BURGIO
- *Il codice etico delle Forze Armate russe nella guerra moderna e contemporanea,*
di NICOLA CRISTADORO
- *Battlefield Tour e Staff Ride. Concetto, Organizzazione e Condotta- Guida allo studio professionale delle operazioni militari,*
di LUGI P. SCOLLO

Recensioni / Reviews

- JEREMY BLACK, *Land Warfare Since 1860*
(di MATTEO MAZZIOTTI)
- MICHAEL M. OLSANSKY, *Militärisches Denken in der Schweiz im 20. Jahrhundert*
(di GIOVANNI PUNZO)
- FABIO MINI, *Le Regole della Guerra.*
(di MATTEO MAZZIOTTI)
- HENRI ORTHOLAN, *L'armée austro-hongroise 1867-1918*
(par TOTH FERENC)
- GERHARD ARTL *Ortigara 1917.*
(di PAOLO POZZATO)
- FILIPPO CAPPELLANO, *Dalla parte di Cadorna.*
(di PAOLO POZZATO)
- MICHAEL EPKENHANS ET AL., *Geheimdienst und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg.*
(di GIOVANNI PUNZO)
- RICHARD VAN EMDEN, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*
(by RÓBERT KÁROLY SZABÓ)
- LINO MARTINI, *Cronaca di un dissenso.* (di MARIO CARINI)
- ALBERTO MONTEVERDE, PAOLO POZZATO, *Camillo Bellieni ed Emilio Lussu.*
(di VIRGILIO ILARI)
- MASSIMO GUSO, *Italia e Giappone (1934-52)*
- JAMES PARRIS, *The Astrologer: How British Intelligence Plotted to Read Hitler's Mind*
(di GIOVANNI PUNZO)
- JOSEPH WHEELAN, *Bitter Peleliu.* (by JEREMY BLACK)
- MAURIZIO LO RE, *Il settimo mare* (di MARIO CONCIATORI)
- THOMAS VOGEL, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Italien 1943-45*
(by PASCAL OSWALD)
- PAOLO POZZATO - FRANCESCO TESSAROLO, *Guerriglia e controguerriglia tedesca*
(di GASTONE BRECCIA)
- JOHN NORRIS, *The Military History of the Bicycle:*
(di Riccardo CAPPELLI)
- LUGI SCOLLO, *Le Mitragliatrici dell'Esercito Italiano.*
(di VIRGILIO ILARI)
- CARMELO BURGIO, *I ragazzi del Tuscania.* (di PAOLO POZZATO)
- ALESSANDRO CECI (cur.), *Afghanistan*
(di VIRGILIO ILARI)
- *La Cina e il Mondo.*
(di ELEONORA ZIMEI)
- BASILIO DI MARTINO, *La Regia Aeronautica nel Dodecaneso*
(di VINCENZO GRIENTI)
- VINCENZO GRIENTI ET AL., *In Volo per la Vita*
- ROBERTO CHIARVETTO e MICHELE SOFFIANTINI, *A sud del Tropico del Cancro.* (di V. GRIENTI)
- SYLVAIN CHANTAL, *Turco*
- THOMAS BOGHARDT, *Covert Legions:* (di ILYA D'ANTONIO)
- *Storia dell'intelligence, rassegna bibliografica*
(a cura di GIUSEPPE PILI)