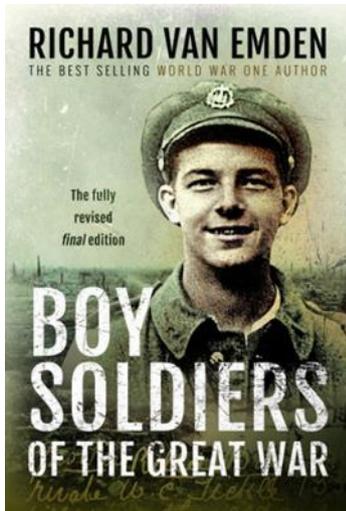


**BOOK REVIEW**  
**BOY SOLDIERS OF THE GREAT WAR**  
**Richard van Emden**  
**Pen & Sword Military 2021 (hb)**  
**ISBN: 978-1-39901-163-1**



In the acknowledgement section of this book Richard van Emden expresses his hope that this book does justice to those who served and in many cases died so young. In my view it is fair to say that he has done exactly that and in such a way that the account he brings to us in this revised edition of his previous work on the topic is done in an even-handed, well balanced way under pinned by an engaging narrative.

This work is sub titled as a 'fully revised and final edition' and having had the pleasure of reading his first volume which was a very enlightening work at the time, I think this current edition is probably the final word on the topic, but no doubt more information will come to light especially as I note below RN and RM are excluded from this work. But – this is not to detract from the effort needed to produce this comprehensive book!

In the years since the end of the great war the topic of boy soldiers has been variously politicised, emotive and far from subjective. Richard van Emden brings 20 years of research and conversations with almost 300 veterans to bear in this magisterial work in which he maintains a high standard of objectivity, which I believe is key to the presentation of this topic. He is very clear that 'times' were very different back then and warns against measuring events by the mores of this century. It is this that enables the objective view rather than the subjective. No doubt there was collusion at many levels including groups of 'friends', parents, recruiting staff and boys themselves aided by the fact that there was no requirement to prove date of birth and therefore age. Having enlisted myself at age fifteen I have great empathy with those who did likewise all those years ago countered by the loss of a Royal Marine great uncle killed in action at age 15 at Anzac.

This sad fact alone makes me wonder if there is scope for a further work on the Royal Navy and Marines who served 'under age' which by necessity Richard has had to exclude?

This is a thorough work reflecting the magnitude of the task in order to bring this book to the reading public and should be on the bookshelf of anyone with an interest in the Great War .

***Martin Willoughby***