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An illustration gallery follows page 155.
Writing about American military participation in World War I is rewarding but never easy. It is rewarding not only because of the subject’s importance and inherent interest but also because so much of it has not been studied in any detail before. It is challenging because the choice of approach is not straightforward. No one will dispute that, in the United States, World War I is both poorly understood by the general public and understudied in the academy. From the outset, then, the historian has choices to make. One possibility is to take a “popular” approach, seeking to make a seemingly unattractive subject palatable to general readers by emphasizing the doughboys’ personal experiences. Another is to write an academic monograph exploring subjects such as the foibles of high command, the challenges of strategy and tactics, the problems of administration and supply, or even culture and memory. The advantages and disadvantages of either approach are not necessarily clear-cut.

“Popular” books on America in the First World War typically make ample use of letters, diaries, memoirs, and other firsthand testimonies. The advantages of these are obvious. They make events come alive as no dry, official reports can do. They also remind us that, while generals were making decisions at the 30,000-foot level and lines were shifting on maps, individuals were making decisions and enduring or enjoying an infinite variety of experiences on the ground. Because the doughboys’ stories have so rarely been told, and because (as this author can attest) the demand by veterans’ descendants for these stories is great, there is a strong argument in favor of popular studies, regardless of how much academics may decry them. There are, however, dangers. First and foremost, memory is unreliable. Any comparison of personal and official accounts of any given military engagement reveals how much the former suffers from confusion, forgetfulness, rear-area gossip, or even deceit. Because each individual soldier’s experience is unique, every story presents a different perspective. Which does the historian choose? No matter what the popular historian does, critics will inevitably chastise him or her for either glamorizing tragedies or trampling on the doughboys’ dignity by emphasizing their misery and neglecting their heroism.

Academic studies (the good ones, anyway), by contrast, rely largely on official sources, with a few personal accounts thrown in as window dressing
to loosen up the narrative. Here too the advantages are obvious. Official records are, of course, more accurate than personal accounts. Staff and field officers typically prepared these records on the basis of military documents and maps, along with eyewitness testimony. Intended for purposes of professional evaluation, such reports are often profoundly detailed and sometimes exceptionally dry. Although they are indispensable and, in the aggregate, truer to the actual events than (say) a memoir written fifty years after the war ended, official records do not tell the whole story or necessarily even the correct story, and they should not be considered in isolation. Many American after-action reports are based on poor and inaccurate information and even hearsay. Official records are replete with battle accounts that are wholly misleading, reflecting the optimism or pessimism of staff and field officers rather than what the soldiers were actually experiencing. In that sense, at least, there is strong justification not only for perusing official documents but also for considering the personal impressions of men and women remembering what it was like to be there—not a topic of concern for the compilers of official accounts. Although military officials studied the official records to greater or lesser degrees, personal experiences—rightly or wrongly—resonated with both the fighting men and the civilian society to which they would have to readjust.

This book attempts to strike a balance between the official and the personal, if not between the academic and the popular. In recounting and analyzing the combat experiences of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) between November 1917 and August 1918—many of which have never been chronicled before—it makes extensive use of American official records and some use of German and French official records. These records are extensive, and although they have been considered here in great depth, no single author can claim to have done more than scratch their surface. To do them justice would require a team of scholars working many years to compile an official history of the AEF in World War I—something that, alas, has never been undertaken. At the same time, this book seeks to integrate official records with a broad but by no means comprehensive variety of firsthand accounts, especially those that pertain to specific personal memories rather than to general recollections of what supposedly happened.

As with any balancing act, this one is bound to disappoint, in some fashion, both those looking for a “pure” operational study and those looking for a fast-paced narrative of thrill and adventure. No single volume can justly claim to have taken into consideration all the source material necessary to understand all aspects of such a broad sweep of events (ten months is prac-
tically an eternity in modern military history). My hope, however, is that it takes academic and general readers a step or two closer to understanding both the nature and the scale of American military participation in World War I. The tale is compelling, but it will take many more storytellers—and dedicated researchers—before it can be told with the accuracy and thoroughness it deserves.

Many individuals and institutions provided invaluable assistance in the preparation of this work. All scholars of the United States in the First World War are indebted to Dr. Timothy Nenninger, chief of the Textual Records staff at the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland. In the absence of an official history of the AEF, historians must attempt (and for any individual, it can only be an attempt) a broad and deep perusal of the vast collection of records held at NARA. Dr. Nenninger is both the gatekeeper and the foremost expert on these records, and he and his staff extend a kind and actively helpful welcome to researchers. He was particularly helpful in directing me toward G-3 and G-5 files relating to Franco-American relations. This book could not have been completed without his assistance and expertise.

The US Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, is rightfully considered a mecca for researchers on practically every topic in US military history. That reputation emerges not only from the vastness of its invaluable collections but also from the courtesy and professionalism of its staff. Dr. Richard J. Sommers, now emeritus but still welcoming visitors to the center on a regular basis, set the standard that has allowed it to become a model research facility. The collections there played a large role in this work.

Paul B. Barron, director of library and archives at the George C. Marshall Foundation in Lexington, Virginia, provided an invaluable entrée to the foundation’s superb collection of materials relating to Marshall and the 1st Division. Dr. Paul H. Herbert, executive director of the First Division Museum at Cantigny, provided support and advice. Dr. Elizabeth Greenhalgh of the University of New South Wales was instrumental in helping me understand French military records. Alex Gregorio performed invaluable work as a student research assistant in 2013–2014. My gratitude is also extended to Dr. Mark E. Grotelueschen of the US Air Force Academy, Dr. Steven Trout of the University of South Alabama, Dr. Richard S. Faulkner of the US Army Command and General Staff College, Dr. Michael Neiberg
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Of course, all mistakes are my own.
Military history readers rightfully demand plentiful and accurate maps. The perception may be that military historians are unaccountably ignorant of this fact, but the truth is more prosaic. Works focusing solely on high-level strategy can usually narrate within the limits of a few large-scale maps. Tactical-level works face greater challenges, but as long as their scope is not too broad in terms of time, space, or units covered, providing adequate maps remains within the realm of possibility. Unfortunately, works presenting large battles—or a series of large battles—thoroughly and on a tactical level face almost insuperable cartographic obstacles. Custom-drawn maps may cost several hundred dollars apiece, so doing cartographic justice to complex military maneuvers often transcends the limited financial resources of authors and publishers.

This book presents multiple military encounters in detail from the corps level down to the squad level, over a period of ten months, and across broad swaths of eastern France. Visually depicting all the actions described would have entailed the preparation of at least a dozen custom maps (a conservative estimate), preferably of the foldout variety. This author has chosen not to “dumb down” the narrative just to remain within the limited confines of the official maps capable of being reproduced in this volume. Doing so would have meant, for example, neglecting the full story of the fight for Belleau Wood or discarding never-before-told stories of the Marne River defensive and the Aisne-Marne offensive. This would have robbed the narrative of its value.

The maps reproduced in this volume derive from two previously published sources: *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe* by the American Battle Monuments Commission, originally published in 1938 and reprinted by the US Army Center of Military History in 1992, and the seventeen-volume *United States Army in the World War*, published by the Center for Military History in 1988–1992. Others are taken from originals in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland. It is hoped that these will suffice for the general reader.

Readers interested in perusing the full details of the tactical events covered in this volume are referred to the superb and exceptionally detailed foldout maps published in the divisional *Summary of Operations* pamphlets by the American Battle Monuments Commission in 1944. Fortunately for readers
and military historians, the maps from these paper-bound volumes (which are available in many university libraries) have been reproduced online by the University of Alabama. They are available at: http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/worldwarI/OperationsintheWarIndex.htm.
General Robert L. Bullard remembered the little French town of Fismette as the site of “the only accident of my military career.” His men called the place Hell, partly because they had to pass through “Flames” to get there. “Flames” was doughboy jargon for the village of Fismes, on the south bank of the Vesle River. Situated in a broad, open valley, it was under constant enemy observation in August 1918, and the more the Americans reinforced it, the more the Germans saturated it with high explosives and poison gas. After moving up through Fismes—as thousands of doughboys of the 28th Division had to do that dreary August—the men could either race across a half-ruined stone bridge or pick their way over an adjacent shell-torn and jerry-rigged footbridge to reach Fismette on the river’s north bank. This place, Bullard and other American and French generals insisted, must be held.

Lieutenant Hervey Allen was one of those unfortunate enough to be ordered to cross the Vesle. He tried the stone bridge, but it was under bombardment, and “only a fool would have dashed out.” So he found a drainage ditch, crawled down it, and eventually reached the riverside and the damaged footbridge:

It took me about half an hour to crawl to the river. I had to put my mask on at the last, as the mustard gas was strong in the little hollow in which I lay. My hands were smarting. Some of the shells brought my heart into my mouth; lying there waiting for them was intolerable. I was sure I was going to be blown to pieces. The river was very nearly in flood and so there was no bank, the field gradually getting soggy and
swampy till it sloped out into the water. There was a lot of submerged barbed wire that made going ahead very painful and slow. I had, of course, to throw away my mask as it got full of water. My pistol went also. It was too heavy to risk.

When he reached the footbridge, the way across proved more difficult than it first looked:

Once in the water, I worked along under the single board of the footbridge, shifting along hand over hand, which took me halfway across. There I struck out, plunging in a few strokes to the other side and working through the wire. Swimming with shoes was not so difficult as I had thought, but the cold water seemed to take all my courage, which was what I needed more than ever. Our own machine guns were playing along the railroad track. . . . After getting across, it seemed for a while that I would be caught between the two fires. I lay there in the river for a minute and gave up. When you do that something dies inside.  

Allen survived. In Fismette, however, conditions were much worse than along the river. That tiny village formed a glorified “bridgehead” across the Vesle. The doughboys were supposed to hold it and expand it, if possible, with a view to launching an all-out offensive at a later date. At most, however, the place could hold two companies of men, and all they could do was hold on. From time to time, officers in Fismes or further back—no one above the rank of captain ever made it into Fismette, and the garrison was usually commanded by junior lieutenants—would order patrols, but these were typically shot down as soon as they left the shelter of a stone wall running along the village’s northern rim. And the men had to be vigilant at all hours. As often as the Americans sent out patrols, the Germans attempted to wipe out the bridgehead with soldiers wielding bayonets, grenades, and flamethrowers.

One day, Allen’s good friend Lieutenant Frank Whelton was commanding a small Chauchat (light machine gun) post in a shell hole in Fismette with a few men and his Italian “striker,” Nick de Saza: According to Whelton:

We sat there and waited but nothing more happened and it became too quiet. Nick saw that I was fidgety and started to tell me about his little girl, “joosta eighteen year old, joosta right,” and told of the
wonderful wedding he’d put on when he got home. He said he’d been through war before and there wasn’t a bullet made that could touch him. . . . then he got something off his chest that must have been rankling him for some time. It was the attitude of the other men in the company toward him. He thought that because they called him a “dog-robber” and a few of those other pet names, that they figured he wasn’t much of a soldier. All he wanted was a chance to show up a few of the rest camp heroes, when things started to hum.

While they were talking, the Germans attacked. It began with a barrage that caved in the walls of the shell hole and covered Whelton’s little squad with dirt.

I could hear that barrage in my dreams for many years and I don’t think I’ll ever forget it. Our own artillery joined in and it looked as though the curtain was about to ring down for us. To make matters still worse, another machine gun strafing commenced. Bullets bounced off the edge of our post and crashed into the wall behind us. I knew that something was about to happen and got the gun ready. Nick laid along side of me on my right to feed the magazines while Jeffery lay on Nick’s right to do the observing if I had to fire.

As the shelling stopped and the machine gun fire intensified, Whelton knew an attack was imminent. He was correct.

Finally, by popping up heads for half a second at a time, Nick saw them coming down the river bank. The ground sloped at that point and gave them some cover. I got the gun over the edge and gave them a full magazine. Nick slapped another in its place and I threw the single shot lever in order to conserve ammunition. For about ten long minutes it became a game of hide and seek and then a series of explosions took place very close to us. There was no screech of a shell and I knew then that they must have worked through the ruins in front of us, so I poured a few in that general direction. When I did this, Jeffery called that they were again trying to come down the river. Another explosion at this point occurred just in front of the gun and piled us back into the trench. I remember crying out, “Come on you dirty (and very unprintable language for one who thought he was about to kick in) so-and-so!” and we got the old gun back into position. Nick had just placed a new magazine and I was drawing the handle back to
throw in the first cartridge when there came a flash, a terrific roar and I seemed to float back and drop off to sleep. There was no pain. This feeling couldn’t have lasted more than a couple of seconds because when I opened my eyes again, I could see the barrel of the Chauchat bent in the shape of an “L,” the magazine bent and twisted directly in front of me and from both of them rose a blue flame something like alcohol burning. I stared at it fascinated and it gradually died away. I looked down and saw that I was buried waist-deep in dirt. Then I turned to my right and saw Nick.

There followed one of those moments that every soldier dreads:

He was buried to his waist the same as I, his body erect, helmet off, eyes wide open as if watching over me. I spoke to him, but he never moved. I shook him and he fell back staring up at the sky. Then I saw that the whole right side of his upper body was gone. There was no red blood—just dirty, muddy liquid. I looked beyond him and saw Jeffery’s body. His head was on the edge of the trench, facing forward about three yards away. His left leg was entirely gone but his rifle was still in position near his shoulder. I reached for my forty-five and prepared for what I was sure would come, but nothing happened. Then I laid my head on my arms in the dirt and cried like a fool. This must have relieved my nerves a little because I freed myself from the dirt and crawled back into the protection of the ruins.

It took only a few moments before the remaining doughboys in Fismette were essentially leaderless. Their lieutenants were killed, wounded, or fighting for survival like the rest of their men. Fismes was entirely cut off from them. No officers of any kind were available to issue commands. And yet—somehow, incredibly—the garrison held, fighting the Germans hand to hand and finally driving them out. As the fighting died down, Allen appeared, found Whelton lying stunned with a group of wounded, and ordered him back across the river with those who could walk. “Although I tried to put on a front when you told me to go back with the wounded who could walk,” Whelton wrote to Allen almost twenty years later, “I’ll confess to you that I was just a horribly scared kid and I prayed all the way back that I might have a chance to pull through safely.”

Whelton and Allen were among the lucky ones. On August 27, 1918, less than two weeks after they departed Fismette, the Germans—members of the battered but elite 4th Guards Division—stormed the bridgehead and
wiped it out. A few dozen of the more than 200 men in the garrison, made up of two companies of the 112th Regiment, managed to swim across the river to safety; the rest were killed or captured. While they recovered, Bullard and his officers, including 28th Division commander Major General Charles H. Muir and 112th Regiment commander Colonel George Rickards, tried to determine what had gone wrong. Some pointed to one cause; some to another: the troops had not deployed properly, they were tired, they were poorly led, their equipment was insufficient, the Germans were just too strong. For Bullard, however, the blame for this military “accident” and the tragic loss of American lives lay entirely with the French. And his accusing finger was only one of many pointed in the same direction for all manner of mistakes great and small.

Popular conceptions of America in the First World War—so far as they exist at all—are laden with stereotypes. Some depict the war as a miserable slugfest from top to bottom, with no lessons to convey. Others dismiss American participation as fleeting and insignificant. More optimistic interpretations, especially popular in the ten years after 1918 but still common today, portray the doughboys as the saviors of France who physically stopped the German army on the road to Paris and then thrashed the kaiser’s minions until they surrendered; or they claim that the doughboys provided the confidence in victory that allowed the beleaguered British and French to fight on. Whereas European writers commonly ignore or undervalue the American contribution, many American writers like to portray soldiers of the Entente powers—especially France—as beaten men or even craven cowards who were unable to stand up to Germany until the doughboys arrived on the scene. Unfortunately, World War I scholarship has yet to reach a critical mass sufficient to explode many of these misconceptions for good.

Scholarship on the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in combat during World War I includes some works of high quality, but coverage is spotty. Moreover, most scholarly studies have been written from the perspective of military and political administration rather than at the company to regimental level. Discounting general studies, two important recent works examine US training, leadership, and combat performance: Mark E. Grotelueschen’s The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I (2007) and Richard S. Faulkner’s The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces (2012). These works are foundational texts in modern AEF scholarship because of the clarity with which they set the context of poor or nonexistent training, “hard knocks,”
and eventual improvement in the field. Thorough narrative and analytical accounts of individual actions, however, are few and far between.

Excluding unit histories, significant book-length works on battles occurring before the Meuse-Argonne (September 26–November 11, 1918) can be summed up in a single paragraph. Detailed works on early actions such as Bathélemon (November 1917) and Seicheprey (April 1918) have yet to be written. For Cantigny, there is Allan R. Millett’s *Well Planned, Splendidly Executed: The Battle of Cantigny, May 28–31, 1918* (2010). Nothing has been published about the action of the US 3d Division at Château-Thierry at the end of May 1918—admittedly, only an interlude. For Belleau Wood, there is Robert Asprey, *At Belleau Wood* (1996), some general work on the US Marine Corps in World War I by George B. Clark, and a host of lesser works. For other actions by US Army units during the first half of July—from the capture of Vaux to the Marne defensive of July 15–18—nothing of scholarly importance has been published since shortly after the war. For the Soissons offensive of July 18–22, there is Douglas V. Johnson and Rolfe L. Hillman Jr.’s *Soissons 1918* (1999). Nothing of note has been published on American forces in the Aisne-Marne or Oise-Aisne offensives lasting from July 18 until September. Mitchell Yockelson, *Borrowed Soldiers: Americans under British Command, 1918* (2008), examines American actions in Flanders, while Robert J. Dalessandro’s *American Lions: The 332nd Infantry Regiment in Italy in World War I* (2010) is the only thorough book on its subject. Finally, for Saint-Mihiel, there is James H. Hallas, *Squandered Victory: The American First Army at St. Mihiel* (1995). In almost every case, these works portray their subjects from the command (AEF, army, corps, or division) level.

One result of this paucity of scholarship is that our knowledge of the AEF before September 26, 1918, takes the form of a series of vignettes rather than a totality of knowledge. In contrast, our knowledge of AEF operational concepts and training—thanks in large part to Grotelueschen and Faulkner, among others—is quite strong. We are also aware, thanks to works by Edward Coffman and David Trask, of the outlines of the amalgamation controversy that plagued John J. Pershing’s relations with Genera-Hitalissimo Ferdinand Foch and Field Marshal Douglas Haig. But after that, we venture into largely uncharted territory. We know (or think we know) that after experiencing a couple of embarrassing German raids, the AEF went on the offensive in late May when the 1st Division took Cantigny. Simultaneously, Ludendorff launched a major offensive along the Chemin des Dames on May 27 and shattered the French army before the US 3d and 2d Divisions helped stem the tide. After that, the marines attacked Belleau Wood and took it after suffering terrible casualties. There followed a series of lesser
actions before the 3d Division—known as the Rock of the Marne—helped halt the final German offensive of July 15. Three days later, the US 1st and 2d Divisions went on the offensive at Soissons, forcing the puncture that eventually deflated the Marne salient. Thereafter, American forces operated in a kind of haze before the opening of the Saint-Mihiel offensive on September 12—the first action of the war by an independent American army. Through it all, the doughboys trained, gained combat experience, and prepared for the big battles to come in the autumn.

Providing some sense of narrative cohesion to this series of events is one of the goals of this volume. The combat development of the AEF from November 1917 to September 1918 was a process that took place neither episodically nor entirely at the command level. For instance, the 1st Division developed with changes in leadership and the application of new command priorities during events occurring both at and behind the front. Regiments, battalions, companies, and squads developed for better or worse as they accrued positive and negative experiences, weeded out or appointed officers, and gained or lost unit cohesion. Episodes such as Cantigny defined certain units at certain points in time, whereas long, grueling experiences at Fismette would help define the 28th Division and its constituent units. No one narrative can bring every experience equally to the fore. Sometimes this is because of a lack of adequate source material, and other times it reflects the simple fact that not every American division participated in operations of equal significance (though admittedly, they were all significant to the men doing the fighting). Much more needs to be written before American military operations in this period are fully understood. However, a unified narrative can provide a broader and deeper understanding of how the AEF developed between its landing in France and the opening of the Saint-Mihiel offensive.

That being said, it is important to recognize that the history of the AEF in this period resists broad generalizations. Some outlines are clear. American officers and men lacked training, and they paid the price for it in France. Although every division suffered unnecessary casualties on its introduction to hard fighting, for nearly inexplicable reasons, some performed well almost from the outset (42d Division), while others (26th Division) did not. The reasons for these divergences cannot be attributed to differences in tactical doctrine or command and control. Often, they simply depended on circumstances. And though the maxim that experience begets competence generally applies, the arc is not always easy to trace. The 2d Division, for example, plunged into Belleau Wood employing outmoded tactics that resulted in tremendous slaughter. In the unique combat conditions in those
woods, which often left the men out of touch with officers above the squad level, marines and soldiers quickly learned to overcome through improvisation—ironically, the individual initiative championed by Pershing. On the very different battlefield of Soissons a month later, however, the lessons learned in Belleau Wood would have a largely negative impact on the conduct of operations.

Nowhere is the importance of avoiding generalizations more important than in the case of Franco-American relations. Many American works portray this relationship as almost uniformly poor. The bitter controversy over amalgamation, resulting in verbal battles and even near fisticuffs between Foch and Pershing, is well known. So are the images of fleeing French soldiers crying “la guerre est fini” while hardy marines and doughboys hurried to take their places in the line. In the many Francophobic American works on the war, men such as General Jean-Marie Degoutte—a longtime American bête noir—appear alternately as craven cowards (at Château-Thierry) and fanatically bloodthirsty butchers (at Fismette). Robert B. Bruce, in *A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War* (2003), has provided a useful corrective to some of these more extreme accounts. The research presented here, however, suggests a more nuanced view. At some levels and in some places, Franco-American relations were quite good; in many others, they were generally tense. And in a few cases—particularly with regard to the US 2d and 3d Divisions—Franco-American relations were dismal to the point of costing lives. At the tactical level—which is my primary focus—American and French soldiers cooperated effectively in some cases and failed to do so in others. In almost every instance, however, the temptation to blame the French for every setback suffered by American forces proved too strong to resist.

Part of the reason for the skewed perspective in many American accounts of the war is a strange unwillingness to consider French and German points of view. Thus, there is a tendency to take for granted sometimes slanderous and usually secondhand reports that French units fled or “did not advance” or that German units resisted stoutly or surrendered spontaneously for no discernible reason. This is true despite the availability, either digitally or in print, of extensive French and German records. Although providing French and German perspectives on the events of November 1917–September 1918 was not the original intent of this book—which aimed to focus on Americans rather than provide a multinational study of the operations themselves—some operations and relationships are impossible to understand without a perusal of French and German primary source materials. This book emphasizes military operations that took place before the American
First Army came into its own at Saint-Mihiel; it does not cover American operations under British command or those in Italy (admirably handled by Yockelson and Dalessandro, cited above). As such, this book can rightly be considered a study of AEF operations under French command. Readers should not assume, however, that this book provides the last word on the French and the Germans. Vast troves of unexplored archival materials continue to beckon intrepid researchers.

European records will have to be studied much more thoroughly before any reliable conclusions can be reached about the military impact of American intervention on the western front in 1918. Without a doubt, American formations packed a punch. They were large, moderately well supplied, and always aggressive. Enough anecdotal evidence exists in French and German records to suggest that the Americans boosted the allies’ morale and discouraged the kaiser’s men.\textsuperscript{4} Just as it is currently impossible to fully quantify the military impact of American forces in 1918, anecdotes cannot prove whether French forces fought more strongly or more ineffectually because of the appearance of American forces nearby. In broad outlines, this book suggests that French forces fighting alongside Americans performed much more effectively than they have been given credit for; however, Franco-American command and tactical dysfunction frequently precluded operational success.

More humbly, this book tells some of the stories of those who fought. Such an objective is not as unscholarly as it might seem, for World War I was a peculiar war. Technological advances in weaponry such as artillery, machine guns, and poison gas, combined with technological deficiencies in communications, practically ensured that most men fought beyond the command reach of officers above the battalion level (and often below it as well). It was a common characteristic of military operations that major generals, brigadier generals, and even colonels and majors often lost touch with operations after they began and restored contact only after they had concluded. In this context, generals often appear in this narrative as distant figures—not from any inherent bias but because that was how the war was fought. In Belleau Wood, for example, no American officers ever figured out exactly how the main German position was finally broken—for the simple reason that a few marines spontaneously decided to follow an uncharted streambed and break through an unidentified unit boundary into the German rear, making all the difference. Yet many other stories remain to be told. And although this book takes us some steps—hopefully, many steps—toward a better understanding of American military operations in World War I, it also points out how much remains to be learned.
Setting the Stage

War preparedness cannot be accurately assessed solely by numbers of troops mobilized and quantities of military equipment. When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, it possessed a far-flung Regular Army of 121,000 men, a Marine Corps of 13,000 men and 462 officers, and a National Guard with 80,000 men under arms. 1 The tally was small but certainly not unprecedented for a Western democracy entering a major war. In 1914 Great Britain’s first expeditionary force to France consisted of only 100,000 soldiers—famously derided by Kaiser Wilhelm II as a “contemptible little army.” Like the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) three years later, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was in many respects unprepared to fight a major war. Deficient in large-caliber artillery, machine guns, and ammunition, its troops also lacked widespread combat experience. Although many British officers and soldiers had participated in colonial conflicts such as the Boer War, no one, from Commander in Chief Sir John French down to the lowliest private, had any wartime experience on the scale they were about to encounter on the western front.

Contrary to the stereotypical image of an imperial, horse-fancying, and hidebound British military establishment, Sir John French’s contemptible little army was a sleek, modern affair by the standards of the time. The Haldane Reforms of 1907 had thoroughly overhauled the British army from top to bottom, introducing innovations and adaptations that included an up-to-date Imperial General Staff, a seven-division overseas expeditionary force, a fourteen-division territorial force, and an efficiently operating reserve. Wedded to the time-honored British regimental system,
these reforms established the foundations for a military organization capable of either fighting colonial wars in Africa and Asia or expanding to almost unlimited proportions for war on the European continent. Anticipating the possibility of a major war before it occurred, British military planners insisted on regular field exercises and practice mobilization. Of course, it helped that they had to navigate only the English Channel to deploy to Europe.

The US Army of 1917 was comparable to the British army of 1914 at some levels. It had also been recently reformed, albeit not so thoroughly, during the tenure of Secretary of War Elihu Root (1899–1904). In addition, American staff and field officers in 1917 were not necessarily less combat experienced than their British counterparts had been in 1914. In the Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War, the Philippine insurrection, the Mexican expedition, and numerous smaller conflicts, Americans such as John J. Pershing had gained experience comparable to that of the veterans of Great Britain’s imperial wars. Fifty years earlier, the United States had experienced conflict on a scale not seen in Europe for a century or more. Most important, in 1917 the United States enjoyed the advantage—at least in theory—of being able to observe the Great War’s military developments from the sidelines and learn from its protagonists’ missteps. No such opportunity had availed itself—with the dubious exception of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905—to military observers from any of the European belligerents before they marched off to war in 1914. That Pershing and many of his generals and staff officers did not adequately learn from the mistakes of others constitutes one of the war’s many tragedies.

The United States was not even remotely ready for armed conflict on a large scale. In 1917 its armed forces were deficient in both military equipage and combat doctrine—as the British had been three years earlier. The AEF had a good rifle—the Springfield—but there were insufficient quantities to supply an army of millions. It also lacked adequate machine guns and artillery and was almost bereft of mortars, grenades, automatic rifles, tanks, and aircraft. Doctrinally, as Mark Grotelueschen has pointed out, the American army of 1917 remained fixated on fighting conflicts like those it had engaged in against decrepit Spanish colonial forces or Filipino and Mexican guerrillas. Emphasis was placed—rightly, in that context—on mobility, initiative, and light infantry weapons. In neither respect had the British in 1914 been very different.

The fundamental difference between the British in 1914 and the Americans in 1917 was this: whereas the former had long viewed their involvement in a major conflict as a strong possibility, the latter continued to be-
lieve, almost up to the last moment, that they would be able to steer clear of large-scale war. Unlike the British, the Americans lacked a well-defined military infrastructure or apparatus for rapid organizational expansion. With no military organization in 1917 above the regimental level (and very little even at that level), and with no coherent plan to expand training or to organize on a scale sufficient for modern warfare, the United States’ armed forces were critically handicapped from the start. Therein lay the basic contrast between Great Britain in 1914 and the United States in 1917. The BEF had an immediate, tangible impact on the fighting in France and Belgium despite its puny size, inadequate equipment and munitions, and conceptual unpreparedness for modern war. The AEF took much longer to make its presence felt after arriving in Europe, even though the Americans’ weaponry and supplies of basic necessities were not much worse than the BEF’s had been three years earlier. True, the war in 1917 was far different from the war in 1914; however, the Americans enjoyed the advantage of easing into the conflict over a period of months against a still potent but already half-beaten adversary, whereas the British had been hurled into war against enemy forces that were confident, fresh, far better equipped, and up to ten times larger.

Many American officers and men were simply not up to the task of combat—and they and the men they commanded often paid with their lives. In 1918 American staff and field officers endured the same painful process of weeding out incompetents that the British, French, and Germans had undergone long ago. Looked at broadly, however—and keeping in mind that most Americans stubbornly resisted the military wisdom proffered by their cobelligerents—the ability of American officers and men to tackle the steep learning curve of combat was surprising. In 1917 many seasoned British, French, and German generals were still repeating the same mistakes they had made at the war’s outset—and on a large scale. Overall, the Americans seemed more adaptable, as evidenced by the tactics employed by the marines in Belleau Wood between June 6 and 24, 1918. Unfortunately, despite efforts by Pershing’s general headquarters (GHQ) and staff officers at other levels to incorporate these lessons and transmit them to the AEF, for a variety of reasons, each green unit entering combat had to relearn the principles its predecessors had imbibed in blood. As Richard S. Faulkner has rightly argued, “the ill-coordinated and costly frontal attacks that continued to characterize American infantry operations from Soissons through much of the Meuse-Argonne seem to belie the assertions that the skills of the AEF improved over time.”3 Yet units engaged in lengthy combat did improve over time, albeit haltingly. For instance, the 28th Division, a cal-
low, unwieldy division in July 1918, had become an effective and tactically proficient formation three months later. Despite their short if intense experience of combat, the veteran American forces deployed in Europe were among the most potent anywhere in the world by the time of the armistice. The story of how that transformation came about is one of the more compelling dramas in American military history.

The deficiency of the training offered to American volunteers and conscripts in 1917–1918 is the stuff of legend. Overseen by generals and staff struggling to create an expeditionary force from scratch, and commanded by field officers who often knew less about military matters than they did, the bewildered doughboys stumbled through basic training. They had few weapons of any kind—not even rifles. Marching out of slapdash training camps hastily constructed across the country, they engaged in close-order drill, endless route hikes, and some rifle and bayonet training, but little else. Tactical regulations, studied assiduously by historians and lambasted for their shortcomings, were poorly understood at the regimental, battalion, company, and platoon levels. As events would show, what little instruction was received by officers and men had little time to sink in. Under trials of combat, they followed the book for a relatively short time before tossing it aside and proceeding by instinct.

Officer training, as Faulkner has demonstrated, was dismal on the whole and negatively affected performance in the field. Of the 200,000 officers required for the wartime army of some 4 million men, only 18,000 were already serving in the Regular Army and National Guard in April 1917. Of the 182,000 new officers required, some would come from the reserve, be commissioned from the ranks, or attain commissions by other venues; about half received their commissions from officers’ training camps. Most of these young men were recent or soon-to-be college graduates, and their courses of instruction must have reminded them of cramming for final exams. Time was at a premium, and there was much to learn. Aside from the obligatory drill and marching, officer candidates learned the rudiments of tactics and the military arts. However, these courses were taught by inexperienced instructors who were often trying desperately to get themselves up to snuff. As one instructor put it, “It was a case of the blind leading the blind.” Like students overdosed on information, officer candidates took their exams and then promptly forgot much of what they had learned. As a result, during their first weeks in the field, junior officers needed a lot of hand-holding, and the quality of their performance generally reflected the
amount of real-time tutelage they had received. When they lost contact with headquarters (as frequently happened under battle conditions), junior officers did what they thought best at the moment, often without regard to the training they had received in camp. Others whose Stateside training was deemed inadequate by their superiors or themselves spent extra time training in France, and as a result, they never made it into the field before the war ended.4

This is not to say, of course, that the tactical theories expounded by Pershing and his staff were irrelevant. Pershing’s notorious belief in the primacy of mobility and the rifle and bayonet over trenches and heavy weapons was widely expounded and generally understood. Despite horror stories of new recruits and conscripts who were sent to the front without knowing how to operate weapons of any kind, once they entered combat, most doughboys were familiar with their rifles and knew how to use them effectively. American troops were aggressive, as Pershing demanded, and they demonstrated a distinct preference for open warfare over trench warfare. American-built trenches in France were few and far between, making the phrase “over the top” something of a misnomer when applied to attacking American troops. In the field, French observers frequently pointed out Americans’ tendency to rely excessively on their rifles, advance too quickly without regard to their flanks, and fail to dig in effectively.

But there were contradictions. While Pershing expounded the concept of the “self-reliant” infantryman in the context of strong “individual and group initiative, resourcefulness, and tactical judgment,” he also cultivated a culture of strict obedience to orders throughout the AEF. Although trench warfare was treated as a degenerate and aberrant form of warfare, most US troops received some form of training in trench warfare, especially in France. Despite the long battle against amalgamation conducted by the Wilson administration along with Pershing and his staff, most of the US troops who participated in fighting through August 1918 did so under French or British command. As a result, French and British officers had opportunities to impart lessons of their own to the doughboys under their care. Even the rifle was not sacrosanct. From the beginning, AEF doctrine emphasized light over heavy weapons, but men like Colonel (later General) Charles P. Summerall and Lieutenant Colonel John H. Parker lobbied aggressively for a greater emphasis on artillery and machine guns. And although their efforts were unsuccessful at first, it did not take long for the AEF in France to appreciate the utility of both types of weapons and to use them in quantity.5

There was, then, an inherent though largely inadvertent flexibility
in AEF tactics in practice, if not in doctrine. Men were taught doctrines based on Pershing’s ideas and the Field Service Regulations of 1914 (updated to 1917), emphasizing initiative, rapid maneuver, mobility, flexible (not massed) assault tactics, rifle fire superiority, fire and maneuver, and close-quarters combat. The understanding of these doctrines among field officers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and men, however, was often shallow at best. In combat, what Pershing understood as “self-reliance”—independence from artillery and other supporting arms—was easily translated into independence from camp doctrine and the chain of command. Improvisation was often atavistic, as officers habitually opted for the thick linear formations that Pershing’s open-warfare doctrines were intended to replace. Thus, as Douglas Johnson remarked, US training initially produced “infantry that attacked in linear formations of the decades gone by . . . that only knew how to attack straight ahead . . . [that was] unfamiliar with its normal supporting arms . . . [and that was] willing to be killed in straight-ahead attacks because it knew no better.”

Grotelueschen has suggested that the units that “rose above” these backward concepts did so “despite official AEF doctrine [rather] than because of it,” but this is not necessarily true. In many instances, official AEF doctrine was actually helpful—such as inside Belleau Wood, where individual initiative and facility with rifle and bayonet were primary, and supporting weapons such as artillery and mortars were largely ineffective. In other cases, ineffective training ironically facilitated either the flexible interpretation of certain dicta—even (heaven and Pershing forbid) incorporating French and British advice—or their abandonment altogether. This was especially the case when combat conditions required quick decision making outside the orbit of headquarters staff. Remembering the principles of obedience pro pounded in camp, officers and men at first floundered in such conditions, but then they learned how to make up their own minds. Wasn’t this what Pershing called “resourcefulness”? British captain Alexander Stewart, an officer in the prewar army, commented on one aspect of this phenomenon, noting the difference between the old “Regular Army” British officers of 1914 and their “New Army” replacements of 1916 and afterward:

I think that all the regular officers, anyhow all those I met up to and including the rank of Major, were splendid fellows; but nevertheless speaking generally I soon came to the very definite opinion that the new “war officers” were infinitely more capable, led their men better and did their job better than the old pre-war regulars with whom I came into contact. The old regular was frightened of doing anything
that was not quite according to Cocker, and to my mind went far too much on the assumption, “theirs not to reason why”; very fine and very brave, but if God has given you a brain why not use it? There were of course very many exceptions but, again speaking generally, it seemed to me that the longer a man had been in the army the less intelligent he was.\textsuperscript{7}

This was, after all, one definition of an army of citizen-soldiers, and it may help explain why the AEF was able to adapt so quickly.

At the battalion level and above, officers were more hidebound and took longer to learn. In part, this was the inevitable result of their distance from the battlefield and the generally poor apparatus for transmitting knowledge from below. In Belleau Wood, for example, General James Harbord’s slowness to understand the nature of the fighting resulted partially from his subordinates’ inability to supply him with accurate intelligence—a state of affairs he found exceedingly troublesome. Eventually, however, they adapted, at least at the division level. As Grotelueschen has pointed out in his case studies of the 1st, 2d, 26th, and 77th Divisions:

Commanders at various levels opened up infantry attack formations and made them more flexible; they stressed the importance of communication up and down the chain of command, as well as with neighboring units, during battle; they increasingly appreciated the benefits of comprehensive attack plans designed to take and hold relatively small portions of enemy defensive positions (and eliminate the defending troops within those limited areas); and, perhaps most important, they began to see firepower as the sine qua non of battlefield success.\textsuperscript{8}

Yet the progression was not linear, and it often failed to take changing circumstances into account. General Robert Bullard’s experiences and lessons learned with the 1st Division in early 1918, for example, did not translate well to the Vesle in August 1918, where his overly aggressive stance would harm units (e.g., 28th Division) under his command in III Corps. Moreover, an increasingly adversarial attitude toward the French by Bullard, Harbord, 1st Division commander General Charles P. Summerall, and 3d Division commander General Joseph T. Dickman would significantly hinder their ability and willingness to apply what should have been easy lessons—such as the need for well-paced attacks.

* * *

[ 16 ] CHAPTER ONE
Three Regular Army divisions, the 1st, 3d, and 4th (along with the 3d Brigade of the 2d Division) participated significantly in US military efforts in the spring and summer of 1918. In theory, these divisions formed from pre-war regiments were better prepared for combat than the formations that would follow. But they were not comparable to the “regular” divisions of the old BEF that went to war in 1914—much to the surprise of the French and British officers who received the Americans during their initial period of training in Europe. When the United States entered the war, the old Regular Army regiments were, for the most part, dismantled to form new unit cadres and then received a mass infusion of wholly green officers, NCOs, and men. The 1st Division, for example, “was almost as much a new creation of inexperienced officers and soldiers as the other divisions that followed.” Training for the Regular Army was on roughly the same level as that for officers in the National Guard—that is, quite poor. The difference was that Regular Army officers at the battalion level and above were more likely to have had long terms of military service.⁹

The War Department set aside division numerals 26–75 for National Guard formations. Of these, only the 26th, 28th, 32d, and 42d Divisions were ready in time to see significant combat in the spring and summer of 1918. The perception was widespread, especially at Pershing’s GHQ, that National Guard formations as a whole were less experienced, more poorly trained, and less efficient than their counterparts in the Regular Army. That impression was misleading. Although the training of National Guard officers and men was poor overall, it was no worse than in the Regular Army. Many National Guard officers and men had seen prewar combat, and their esprit de corps was often quite strong. And although both Regular Army and National Guard officers were perniciously affected by some of the principles foisted on them in camp, the latter “were less likely to be dogmatically committed to the anachronistic elements of prewar U.S. Army doctrine.” Nevertheless, like many other rivalries in the AEF, rivalries between Regular Army and National Guard officers hindered combat efficiency in France. Army–National Guard distrust long predated the war and had been exacerbated by the 1916 National Defense Act, which enhanced National Guard autonomy over the objections of many in the army establishment.¹⁰

In the context of the AEF as a whole, the Marine Corps was unique. And, of course, the marines thought of themselves that way. When the United States entered the war, Marine Corps commander Major General George Barnett determined that his men would play a leading role in the conflict. But despite their subsequent status as elite troops in the United States’ arsenal, Barnett’s task of securing recognition and support for his
marines was not an easy one. The US Army accepted the services of the 5th Marine Regiment—at the time of its formation, one of the only truly veteran units in the country—only reluctantly. Barnett formed the second regiment, the 6th, at his own initiative, and his attempt to build up two more regiments into another brigade that could constitute an all-marine division came to naught. Instead, the 5th and 6th Regiments would eventually form the 4th Brigade of the US 2d Division, along with the 3d Brigade of US Army troops.  

Marine training was much more intensive than that undergone by US Army or National Guard formations. The primary marine boot camps were at Parris Island, South Carolina, and Mare Island, California. There, the all-volunteer recruits completed eight-week courses in physical training, drill, close-quarters combat, and marksmanship. Private Melvin Krulewitch described a typical day’s first exercise after reveille at 0500 hours:

“Standby for Swedish” would be the next command, and we would then begin our physical drill under arms—the Marine Corps had adopted the Swedish system as part of the training and hardening process. Exercising with the nine-pound Springfield included vertical and horizontal swings, side and forward lunges, rifle twists, and most difficult of all, the torturing front sweep—you held the rifle overhead with hands on the stock and the muzzle, and lowered your arms at full length to touch your toes without bending your knees. . . . Again and again we did this, pushing our limits.  

The physical training was tougher than any of them had imagined, but unlike the endless route hikes endured by most army recruits, it was training with a purpose. And it gave them a hardness they would need in France. Rifle training was also intensive, as described by another recruit:

You shoot from three positions: prone, kneeling, and sitting. We shoot from 200, 300, 400, 500, and 600 yards. From the latter distance, those bull’s-eyes look like pin-heads. Rapid fire you shoot ten shots in one minute. It’s real exciting when you are actually shooting. The things sound like a cannon. They shoot a bullet as long as your index finger. All rapid fire is done, not at a bull’s-eye, but at a silhouette of a man’s head and shoulders, the bottom of which is 36 inches.  

This too would prove valuable in places like Belleau Wood. After boot camp, the marines were sent to advanced training at a camp
in Quantico, Virginia, which had been established in May 1917. There, the men underwent more drill and marksmanship training and learned about infantry weapons and trench warfare. Some (but not all) junior officers received instruction in command and tactics—though it was not always suited to the realities in France. Second Lieutenant James McBrayer Sellers of the 2/6th Marines remembered that “practically all we did at Quantico was drill and dig trenches. We did not have any real combat training, map reading, or other obligatory requirements for survival in the field. And our trenches were anything but standard. We just dug wherever we were and whatever the contour of the ground would call for.”

In aggregate, then, marine training did not impart a great deal of knowledge, but it did inculcate courage, toughness, and esprit de corps. The marines—both veterans (who already had some field experience) and new recruits—displayed a special kind of arrogance that set them apart from other troops. They were the best, and they knew it. The marines’ disdain for other services—and allies—sometimes made them difficult to work with. They were perfectly willing to go it alone, and they often did. Nevertheless, as a fighting force, the Marine Brigade towered over its contemporaries in 1917 and had the potential to become even better—elite in every respect of the word—in 1918.

The hopes and travails of the American Expeditionary Forces were evident as the doughboys began to arrive in France. At the time (and even today), Pershing was one of the United States’ more controversial top military commanders. Seemingly inscrutable, he was a complex man possessed of indomitable willpower and a fierce determination to achieve victory. His confidence in his troops was embodied in his unyielding belief in their innate superiority over their war-wizened European cobelligerents. This attitude permeated the AEF staff and officer corps, resulting in an often irrational stubbornness when it came to collaborating with or learning from the British and French and a driving desire to prove that American troops could win the war single-handed. Yet Pershing was a detached commander; he was much more absorbed in problems of politics and grand military administration than in studying American performance in the field and determining how to develop and improve it.

Pershing’s staff was an equally complex mixture of talent and hidebound prejudice. And for much of the war, it was in flux. Pershing had begun assembling his GHQ in May 1917 in close collaboration with his first chief of staff, Colonel (later General) James G. Harbord. Born in Illinois in 1866,
Harbord had served in the army since 1889 and was energetic and amiable. But aside from a brief stint with Pershing pursuing Pancho Villa, Harbord had never seen combat, and his understanding of field tactics was purely by the book. Events would prove him a better administrator than a field commander. In assembling their staff, he and Pershing favored men with credentials from the Army Staff College and the Leavenworth School of the Line. Many of the officers they selected were exceptionally talented, but none of them were visionaries.

The GHQ structure was laid out in General Orders No. 8 on July 5, 1917, and updated in General Orders No. 31 on February 16, 1918. It established the component general staff and technical staff, with the former divided into “G” sections for administration, intelligence, and so on. The GHQ staff members who would have the greatest practical impact on operations in 1918 were the chief of intelligence (G-2), Major (later Brigadier General) Dennis E. Nolan, and the chief of operations (G-3), Colonel (later Brigadier General) Fox Conner. Conner in particular would play an important role in evaluating and comparing American and French (he was fluent in that language) combat operations. Significantly, the GHQ staff system was ordered to be replicated at the corps and division levels. Thus, each army, corps, and division commander had a chief of staff who wielded strong authority, including the ability to issue orders in the commander’s absence. This sometimes created competing chains of authority, and it caused problems with the French, who expressed particular frustration over working with divisional chiefs of staff.

On the whole, though, the AEF staff arrangements worked effectively enough at all levels. This was fortunate, because the administrative challenges were overwhelming. The logistical problems of assembling and training the AEF in the United States were daunting enough, but those involved in shipping the AEF to Europe, organizing it into a coherent whole, and preparing it for combat were even more so. The organization of the so-called blockbuster or square divisions, containing up to 28,000 men in four regiments and two brigades, exponentially increased the organizational challenges. In theory, such large divisions would be able to absorb substantial punishment without losing steam and thus be capable of serving longer terms at the front; in practice, however, they stretched the already rudimentary American staff, administration, and supply mechanisms to the limit. As a consequence, divisions took longer to organize, train, equip, and deploy, and as experience would prove, there was no concomitant benefit in terms of their durability at the front. Indeed, squeezing such large formations into narrow frontages designed for European divisions would
promote administrative confusion and clog the lines of supply. Ironically, this increased the temptation, in the summer of 1918, to break up these divisions and introduce them to the front in brigade-size units or smaller.

Shipping such large formations to Europe was, of course, challenging. The first organized military unit to make the journey to France was the 1st Division in June 1917, with the 5th Marine Regiment (a sometimes unwelcome appendage) accompanying it on separate ships. Elements of the 2d Division (which would be assembled in Europe) and the 3d, 26th, 28th, 32d, and 42d Divisions followed later in 1917 and in the spring of 1918. Logistical support for these formations was initially provided through the formation of the Line of Communications in the summer of 1917, which shanghaied the unfortunate marines to reinforce its inadequate personnel. This would later become the far better-staffed and (under Harbord) better-managed Services of Supply. Early arrivals benefited from the presence of constituent artillery, engineer, and machine gun units, but by the spring of 1918, the emphasis on shipping only infantry to France meant that the American divisions were only partially formed and had to rely on French support and supply units. Heavy equipment was typically of British or French manufacture, and aside from a limited number of American squadrons, tank and air support was entirely European.

In France, Pershing and his generals came face-to-face with the problem of how to negotiate the relationship with their cobelligerents (hereafter referred to as allies). The story of the amalgamation controversy has often been told. Foch and Haig, along with Clemenceau and Lloyd George, believed that the best way to use the Americans in the short term was to integrate them into French and British military units at some level. In some forms, the argument for “amalgamation,” as it came to be called, encompassed the radical suggestion that the Americans don their allies’ uniforms and fight as full-fledged members of their armies. It is doubtful that the French (fighting a war of survival and thus profoundly invested in victory) and the British actually expected the Americans to accept this proposal. Amalgamation did, however, serve as a bargaining ploy. At a minimum, the French and British sought to establish and maintain the arrangement that prevailed in the spring and summer of 1918, whereby distinct American units from brigade to platoon level would be incorporated into larger European formations.

Any such arrangement would not have endured for long. Pershing had been instructed by Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to work toward the establishment of a “separate and distinct” American army on the western front. More important, Pershing himself was inclined that way. In this,
as Donald Smythe has pointed out, Pershing was like any other general worth the uniform he wore: “In preserving American troops under his own command (which many think was the great Pershing achievement), he was simply following a national tradition and the natural inclination of any commander.” Although they expected that an American army would form eventually, the French and British were determined to delay that day as long as possible—hopefully, long enough to ensure that France was out of immediate danger and that any mistakes made by the Americans would not ruin the cause altogether.  

The battle between Pershing and his European associates over amalgamation grew increasingly bitter as the war progressed. For Harbord, the Americans’ predicament at the hands of their allies amounted to a kind of martyrdom. He wrote in his diary:

> Our Allies hate each other and disagree on many subjects but they are a unit when it comes to casting lots for our raiment. They seem to look on America as a common resource, and while loudly proclaiming their wish to see America on the firing line as a National Unit, resort to all manner of subterfuge to defeat and delay that eventuality to which we look forward with such hope.

The ongoing disputes between Pershing and his British and French counterparts were closely monitored throughout the AEF. Of course, the great majority were rooting for Black Jack to triumph and get the long-cherished American field army formed as soon as possible.

The amalgamation dispute would continue to hover—menacing and tangible—over every American combat deployment through the summer of 1918. In practice, American units were amalgamated, albeit temporarily, with French (and British) units from the division level all the way down to the platoon level. Born of necessity, this arrangement produced dangerous tensions. On French sectors of the front, American and French military observers watched every deployment closely, with an eye toward determining whether American troops fought more effectively under European officers or American officers and whose tactics, whose morale, and whose raw human material was superior. Each party had a vested interest in ensuring that the evidence from the field enhanced their own point of view. As such, the process of assessment—a vital component of any military endeavor—was skewed from the start. Objectivity was impossible.

Upon the Americans’ arrival for training in France, tensions were evident immediately and at all levels. Language barriers and cultural differ-
ences caused trouble between the doughboys and French civilians. “We had the feeling that we were over there to help them,” complained Private William P. Carson, “yet all that concerned them was getting paid for damages.” Among common soldiers, NCOs, and junior officers, differences seemed to be ironed out fairly quickly, and a sense of mutual respect developed. At staff and command levels, however, resentments often increased over time. Some officers were afraid the Yanks were taking their French instructors too seriously, to the detriment of their effectiveness and the overarching objective of forming an independent American army that could say it had won the war on its own merits.18

Of all the American divisions that would experience combat in the spring and summer of 1918, the 1st, 2d, 26th, and 42d came the closest to completing the standard three-month training program advocated by Pershing. In many respects, this gave them an advantage over the divisions that followed later in the spring of 1918, when the constantly changing situation at the front forced the adoption of more ad hoc training plans. Yet, as the guinea pigs, these early arrivals had to overcome the many challenges of learning from the French. On October 8, 1917, 1st Division’s commander, Major General William S. Sibert, sent a memo to Pershing outlining some of the disjunctions his officers were already beginning to face and the measures he had adopted to solve them. “Much trouble has been experienced with interpreters,” he wrote. “It is particularly difficult to secure an interpreter who will convey the full meaning of one’s remark to the person addressed. It is also hard to be certain that the interpreter understands what you mean.” He continued:

Training in conjunction with French troops is slow and we have found that after one or two demonstrations by French organizations it is difficult to keep our soldiers interested. . . . Our officers are not sufficiently familiar with trench warfare conditions to draft good problems and both the officers and men fail to visualize the possible effects of hostile artillery and trench mortar fire. Consequently dispositions of troops, liaison arrangements, etcetera, which seem satisfactory to us frequently meet with severe and absolute[ly] correct criticism from French officers observing the exercises. They will quickly explain to our satisfaction how impossible or dangerous the dispositions, liaison arrangements, etcetera, would be under battle conditions.

We have made the most rapid progress since adopting the following arrangement:

French officers prepare a series of company, battalion and regimen-
Problems in training with the French persisted at all levels, however, provoking another memo from Sibert to Pershing on November 27, in which the division commander pointed out major difficulties with liaison, especially at the battalion level.\textsuperscript{19}

The 26th Division, organized from New England National Guard formations and dubbed the “Yankee” Division, received more extensive training in European trench warfare tactics than any other American division. This was partly due to the fact that its commander, Major General Clarence Edwards, had spent a month in the autumn of 1917 with British and French divisions in service on the western front. He was therefore more open than many of his counterparts to European methods, such as reliance on artillery and machine guns, and his troops were trained primarily by the French in their own manner. French army commander General Henri-Philippe Pétain suggested taking this a step further in a letter to Pershing dated December 28, 1917. Pétain recommended breaking up the 26th Division into its four constituent regiments, each of which would train for two months at the front with a different French division. After that time, the division would be reassembled and sent to the front as an intact unit that could eventually help form an American sector.\textsuperscript{20}

The suggestion was not well received at GHQ. Colonel Paul B. Malone, then a member of the AEF general staff’s training section, wrote a memorandum for Harbord on January 3, 1918, in which he stated that training for both trench and open warfare would be beneficial, but the Americans would learn only trench warfare from the French—something they could do just as well on their own. “If not at the same time trained in open warfare,” Malone wrote, “these regiments will, in the event of a successful assault from the trenches, be incapable of successful action in the open.” He
therefore recommended against Pétain’s proposal and believed that American regiments should not train with French divisions. On the same day, Colonel Fox Conner wrote to Harbord suggesting that the French proposal was indicative of their weak “moral state” and reflected “sentiments as to the coming German offensive which bodes no good to the allied resistance. . . . The Allied morale in high quarters must be nursed in order that the war may continue until such time as our forces can turn the balance in our favor, i.e. 1919.” Conner was willing to countenance Pétain’s proposal—under strict American supervision—but only with the 26th, 2d, and 42d Divisions.

In the event, only the 26th Division received such a Francocentric course of training, giving GHQ and Pershing—who already had problems with Edwards—an incentive to demonstrate that the Yankee Division performed less proficiently under fire than did other units trained according to more strictly American methods.  

Even as the first stages of training moved forward, doughboys were receiving their first small tastes of combat on the western front. Those portions would rapidly increase.