

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Anne Cipriano Venzon, ed. *The United States in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1995. xii + 830 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8240-7055-7.

Reviewed by L. Martin Kaplan (Historian, U.S. Army Center of Military History)

Published on H-War (January, 1996)

The United States in the First World War offers a fairly comprehensive one-stop reference guide for scholars and researchers looking for quick answers to questions on a multitude of topics relating to America's participation in the Great War. The topics covered, organized alphabetically, range from domestic issues such as preparedness, foreign relations, industrial mobilization, tax policy, regulatory agencies, civil rights, the woman's movement, and the peace movement to military operations, technology, training, and major unit histories. Coverage also includes biographical sketches of domestic and foreign personalities. Brief bibliographies accompany the major articles.

In compiling the *Encyclopedia*, the editors sought to provide a balanced overview of the United States at war. This ambitious undertaking is achieved, but at a price. Generally speaking, if one asks the right questions, looking for a quick reference rather than a definitive examination, one will be satisfied with the quality and composition of most entries. Scholars and researchers with no prior knowledge of a particular topic will find the *Encyclopedia* particularly useful. However, many users will need to consult additional sources for those entries that lack sufficient depth and detail to satisfy more than a cursory treatment of the topic. In some cases, where two or fewer bibliographic citations accompany an article, users will be disappointed if they expect to delve too far beyond the *Encyclopedia* for additional information.

With over 200 individual authors contributing to the *Encyclopedia*, it is not surprising that the quality of the articles is uneven. The biographical portraits and several of the military-related topics stand out as victims of this qualitative see-saw. Another drawback is the style in which many of the biographies are written. Because these essays often lack a good introduction, one must read through most of the article before the relevance of the individual to the American experience in World War I is revealed.

Although the editors have tried to provide a reasonably comprehensive survey of important issues, individuals, and technologies that directly affected the United

States during the Great War, certain omissions cannot go unnoticed. For example, among the topics devoted to weapons technology, which include such entries as small arms and hand grenades, a category on mortars is excluded. For military historians, perhaps the most glaring error of omission is the treatment of artillery.

Few would deny the preponderant role played by artillery in the war, but the *Encyclopedia* does not devote attention to this topic. The user will not find references to field, anti-aircraft, or railway artillery weapons or to artillery training and doctrine. Nor will one find biographical sketches of the U.S. Army's most prominent artillerymen, Major General William Snow, the U.S. Army's Chief of Field Artillery, and Major General Ernest Hinds, the Chief of Artillery in the Allied Expeditionary Forces. The user should be forewarned that artillery also does not receive adequate attention in the major articles providing context on the U.S. military involvement in the war. Entries such as "Trenches and Trench Warfare," "United States Army: Training," and "United States Army: Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF)" are devoid of more than a passing reference to the role of artillery in the war.

At \$95.00, the *Encyclopedia* may be beyond the pocketbooks of most people interested in owning a copy. There is no question that it will be a welcome and useful addition to many libraries, as well as to individual students of the Great War, because there is no other comparable single volume currently available that offers the breadth of coverage on the United States in World War I that the *Encyclopedia* provides. Discriminating scholars or researchers should weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the volume against their needs before making a determination to own it.

Though it may not be destined to be a classic, but this work fills a void that has existed too long in the historiography of the Great War.

Copyright (c) 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: L. Martin Kaplan. Review of Venzon, Anne Cipriano, ed., *The United States in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. January, 1996.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=256>

Copyright © 1996 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.