

H-Net Reviews

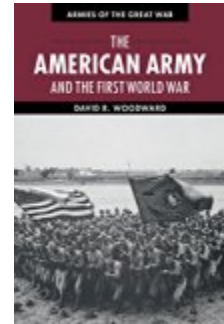
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David R. Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 484 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-01144-1; \$29.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-107-64886-9.

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Commissioned by Seth Offebach



Commendably, Cambridge University Press is publishing separate works on the belligerent armies of the First World War in its *Armies of the Great War* series. David R. Woodward, emeritus professor at Marshall University, has written the book on the American Expeditionary Force. He has previously published *Hell in the Holy Land: World War I in the Middle East* (2006); *Trial by Friendship: Anglo-American Relations, 1917-1918* (1993); *American and World War I: A Selected Annotated Bibliography of English-Language Sources* (2007), and other works on the war.

As an overview of the American military experience, *The American Army and the First World War* is quite good. Robert H. Zieger's work *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* is a good text to introduce students to the overall American experience, not just that of the military; but Woodward's is a better choice if students and general readers are looking for a focus on the American army. Woodward covers all of the important topics. He organizes the book chronologically beginning with the Spanish-American War and American military struggles to modernize in the early twentieth century to the Armistice on November 11, 1918. He discusses doctrine and training, conscription, amalgamation, tactics and operations; he even has a chapter on the vital aspect of logistics and the service of supply, as well as the Siberian intervention. Scholars of the war, however, will not find any new scholarship here.

Woodward includes some archival material in his citations; for example, the Center of Military History's (CMH) seventeen-volume publication of selected documents titled *The US Army in the World War* makes several

appearances. However, his most cited works are memoirs by the usual suspects: James Harbord, George C. Marshall, John J. Pershing, Peyton C. March, and Eric von Ludendorff. He also includes some anecdotal evidence from the veteran surveys that the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center did in the late 1960s. Woodward lists the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration Record Group (RG) 120 in the bibliography; however, he does not appear to cite from these vital documents on the American Expeditionary Force. He does reference the papers of Woodrow Wilson and other key diplomats, as well as CMH's reprinted volumes of primary documents from RG 120. Archival research, though, is noticeably lacking. He displays a good grasp of the older works on the United States in the war and some of the newer scholarship. However, Woodward introduces *The American Army and the First World War* with claims that his book incorporates significant works from the newer scholarship. Much of that recent scholarship is missing. Readers will find important new research by Richard Faulkner, Mark Grotelueschen, and Jennifer Keene in the citations. Their works on the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) are necessary inclusions in any evaluation of American military participation in the Great War. Other important works, such as Peter F. Owen's *To the Limit of Endurance: A Battalion of Marines in the Great War* (2007), Chad L. Williams's *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (2010), Richard Slotkin's *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* (2006), and Christopher Capozzola's *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (2008), are noticeably missing. These texts, and others, would have added to

deeper evaluations of tactics and operations, race, conscription, culture, and more. Newer memoirs like John Lewis Barkley's *Scarlet Fields: The Combat Memoir of a World War I Medal of Honor Hero*, edited by Steven Trout (2012), also does not make an appearance. Many of the works in the bibliography are not found in the citations. Additionally, Woodward often utilizes direct quotes from other books, with a proper citation, but he does not engage the original sources himself. Worse yet, Woodward cited the Wikipedia entry on the Bonus March and the Western Front Association's tables of organization for the British on the Somme. Information on both of these subjects is available from more appropriate sources.

Readers with a more intimate knowledge of the war will notice some oversights, as well. For instance, Woodward refers to the Aisne-Marne Offensive as a counteroffensive, which it did become. However, it originated as a French offensive about a month prior to the attack on July 18, 1918. Field Marshall Ferdinand Foch altered the planned offensive when he learned that the Germans would also initiate one of their own in the same region of Chateau-Thierry on July 15. It became advantageous to shift some of the troops from the offensive to the defensive and simply retain the preplanned attack to coincide with the Germans' failed attempt.

Additionally, Woodward criticizes General James G. Harbord, commanding the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division at the Aisne-Marne, for only committing one Marine regiment on the second day of the attack. What a deeper engagement with the primary sources on the battle would uncover is that Harbord was calling for his division's relief by the end of the first twenty-four hours. His soldiers and marines had had very little food and water over the previous forty-eight hours. They had little time to prepare or collect supplies, since the offensive was such a well-kept secret and most American participants did not learn of the impending assault until it was almost time to attack. Thus, the 6th Marines, Harbord's reserve on the first day of the attack, was the only unit not overly fatigued and under strength that was available to operate on the second day. All of this speaks to concerns with not only American conduct in battle, but Franco-American relations, especially communication and liaison that adds to the historical context of Pershing's battle over amalgamation. The book is lacking a more critical assessment of American combat. Thus, readers are left without a more complex understanding of the multiple influences on not just the tactical results, but the operational and strategic issues as well.

While the author offers anecdotes of learning opportunities in combat, such as outflanking a machine gun position as opposed to a frontal assault, he does not analyze why these lessons were not incorporated as the war raged on, especially from the Aisne-Marne to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Woodward devotes some space to American training difficulties. However, a discussion of Pershing's training program for the 1st Infantry Division in France as a model for subsequent divisions is missing. He also does not illustrate how that intricate training program never fully came to fruition or how pulling individuals out for the multiple specialized schools and training classes in France interfered with unit cohesion and combat effectiveness, all of which compounded difficulties with American overall lack of tactical sophistication. Furthermore, though Woodward mentions Pershing's threat of replacing officers, he does not assess the commander's organizational culture. Pershing frequently relieved officers who did not deliver the goods. Soldiers considered relief of command and embarking to Blois, where the Office of Reclassification was located, as a career killer. By promoting results at any cost, Pershing established a cultural environment that produced high casualties and incidents such as Charles P. Summerall's "race to Sedan."

Other questions arise over what is missing in *The American Army and the First World War*. What of America's role as an Associated Power instead of a full Ally? How about the African American experience? Though Woodward describes racism connected with the training of black soldiers, there is no mention of the four African American regiments Pershing loaned to the French indefinitely. Among those was the vaunted Harlem Hell Fighters, one of the most decorated American units in the war. The 92nd Division, comprised of another four African American regiments, participated in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The issues and controversies surrounding these and other units are not covered.

These criticisms aside, David R. Woodward's book does offer a good overview of the American army's participation in the war. Throughout the work, he delves into Pershing's struggles against amalgamation. He does well discussing logistical difficulties, from ferrying Americans and equipment across the Atlantic to getting supplies behind the lines in France. Woodward also offers a good description of how Americans imbued with a romanticized vision of war were disillusioned with rear area service. His explanation of American unit reorganization, deciding upon a square division double the size of any European division, along with the number

and hierarchy of command regarding artillery and machine guns is a positive addition. Students and general readers will definitely find this work readable and come away with a better appreciation of the American Expeditionary Force's trials and tribulations. For that, Wood-

ward should be praised. Scholars, however, will be left still waiting for a definitive work on the American military in the war to replace Edward Mac Coffman's dated *The War to End All Wars* (1998).

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