

Jeffrey LaMonica. *American Tactical Advancement in World War I: The New Lessons of Combined Arms and Open Warfare.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2017. 180 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4766-6419-4.

Reviewed by Brian North (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

Published on H-War (July, 2018)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

The centennial of the First World War saw the publication of numerous books that improved our understanding of the conflict and its lasting influence. Jeffrey LaMonica contributes a deep analysis of doctrinal development with his book *American Tactical Advancement in World War I*. LaMonica is an associate professor of history and coordinator of the Global Studies Program at Delaware Community College in Media, Pennsylvania. He received his master of arts in history from Villanova University and master of philosophy in liberal arts from the University of Pennsylvania. LaMonica seeks to understand how the First World War American Expeditionary Force (AEF) sought to employ the concepts of combined arms and open warfare and why they were unable to execute them better. He examines the AEF's published doctrine, pamphlets, combat instructions, and reports and concludes that American leadership, particularly General John Pershing, understood that soldiers must apply both combined arms and open warfare doctrine at the tactical level to restore mobility to the battlefield. However, their efforts to implement these concepts was hindered by the lack of available equipment, a pressing demand for troops at the frontlines, and the conflict ending just as the American forces began to gain combat experience. LaMonica argues that the disconnect between having a clear doctrinal concept and un-

prepared military force would reassert itself again in 1942 in the deserts of North Africa and islands of the Pacific, with American troops once again paying the price for lack of experience in combat casualties.

LaMonica organizes his book in four thematically organized chapters. The first chapter examines the AEF doctrine and draws out the concept of combined arms warfare. LaMonica combs through doctrinal and training manuals, demonstrating how the AEF sought to integrate new weapons technology in support of infantry advance. Rather than viewing combined arms as simply the combination of infantry, artillery, and armor, LaMonica expands his scope to include the important role in the doctrine of chemical weapons, machine guns, mortars, automatic rifles, special weapons, tanks, aircraft, engineers, mounted cavalry, and communications. Recognizing the changing nature of combat, he notes, the AEF focused on integrating a combined arms team to support the infantryman.

The second chapter shifts to examining the same broad range of sources for indications of open warfare concepts. LaMonica defines open warfare as a replacement for frontal attacks by using brisk, erratic, perpetual movement forward in columns under cover of fire and maneuver. Open warfare emphasized initiative and impro-

visation by junior leaders to achieve limited strategic objectives. Pershing pushed his open warfare concept through pamphlets and training starting in 1917, although the final doctrine was only published weeks before the Meuse-Argonne offensive in the fall of 1918. While many authors have talked about Pershing's desire to return mobility to the battlefield, LaMonica provides details on how the AEF implemented the concepts in tactical doctrine.

Chapter 3 moves to the AEF training efforts on both combined arms and open warfare. Pershing designed a deliberate and sequential training plan for newly arrived units, but the lack of available training equipment, poor stateside training, and the need to rapidly send units to the frontlines in response to the German spring offensive significantly compromised its effectiveness. LaMonica summarizes the efforts and challenges of training soldiers from each specialty. For example, most field artillerymen never fired a round stateside. Shortages of automatic rifles, machine guns, and tanks meant that there was very little combined arms training for infantrymen before they went to the front. The impact on the battlefield from the lack of US industrial capacity clearly shows in this chapter. The US supplied only ten tanks, eighty-one cars, ninety-six trucks, twelve wheeled tractors, three recon vehicles, and sixteen motorcycles—far short of the over fifty thousand vehicles requested (pp. 75, 82). Thus, according to LaMonica, the majority of soldiers were forced to learn how to fight in this new form of warfare through combat experience and instinct for survival rather than relying on training or doctrine.

The final chapter examines combat performance of the AEF. LaMonica relies on orders, reports, and after-action reviews from Pershing, First Army Commander Lieutenant General Hunter Liggett, and First Army G3 Colonel George Marshall to assess the AEF. LaMonica focuses on the Meuse-Argonne offensive as the most developed application of the combined arms and

open warfare concept. He credits Pershing's concepts of combined arms and open warfare, reinforced with hard-earned combat experience, with enabling the rapid advances. He finishes the chapter with a case study of the 5th Division's successful integration of small arms and supporting arms during the offensive.

LaMonica's conclusion traces the adoption of combined arms and open warfare in the postwar US Army doctrine and training leading to the Second World War. Under the influence of Pershing, AEF doctrine and experience at Meuse-Argonne guided the interwar Field Service Regulations, which remained relatively stable through 1941. Rather than a rifle-only force, the US Army embraced the need to integrate all arms to enable maneuver on the battlefield. However, lack of funding restricted attempts to further develop or train on these concepts. LaMonica again traces the interwar advancements and challenges for each type of weapon system or branch. His conclusion relies heavily on works by William O. Odom (*After the Trenches: The Transformation of U.S. Army Doctrine, 1918-1939* [1999]) and David E. Johnson (*Fast Tanks and Heavy Bombers: Innovation in the U.S. Army, 1917-1945* [2003]), as much of this material is outside the scope of the main book. LaMonica's conclusion draws parallels between the unpreparedness of 1917, 1941, the 1990s, and 2000s, citing a common theme of immature doctrine, lack of training, and a shortage of specialized equipment requiring the US Army to learn on the battlefield through combat experience and survival instinct.

LaMonica delivers a valuable analysis of how US leaders envisioned warfare in their first major conflict of the twentieth century. By taking a broad view of combined arms and open warfare, he provides historians with useful summaries of how the AEF viewed supporting arms in doctrine and training. His concise assessments of doctrine and training highlight the emergence of many new weapons at the tactical level, expanding beyond

the typical focus on tanks and aircraft. LaMonica's chapter on the AEF in action is less effective than his earlier chapters. The decision to focus primarily on the final month of the war and rely heavily on the perspective of senior AEF leaders results in a less than convincing argument. The effectiveness of the AEF during the Meuse-Argonne offensive was unclear at the time, and historians have only continued the debate. Was the rapid American advance a result of applying superior tactics or because of a deliberate German withdrawal? LaMonica's analysis does not add much to this debate, even with his case study of the 5th Division. LaMonica also reaches too far in his conclusion, as he wades into the interwar years' debate relying heavily on the perspective of only two of the growing number of historians interested in this period. As a result, his attempt to link the pre-World War I army with subsequent American experiences is unconvincing and distracts from his primary contributions.

American Tactical Advancement in World War I provides readers with a good understanding of how the US Army of 1918 articulated its vision of combat. Possibly best suited for a niche audience, the book deserves credit for highlighting efforts to integrate supporting arms into a team supporting the mobility of infantrymen. While taken for granted in retrospect, the building of small units composed of rifles, automatic rifles, and grenadiers closely supported by mortars, tanks, and close air support was a major innovation in warfare. LaMonica thus provides insight into the development of thought in the AEF.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Brian North. Review of LaMonica, Jeffrey. *American Tactical Advancement in World War I: The New Lessons of Combined Arms and Open Warfare*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. July, 2018.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=51671>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No
Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.