

WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANIONS
TO AMERICAN HISTORY



A COMPANION TO
THE MEUSE-ARGONNE
CAMPAIGN

EDITED BY
Edward G. Lengel

WILEY Blackwell

A Companion to the Meuse-Argonne Campaign

WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO HISTORY

This series provides sophisticated and authoritative overviews of the scholarship that has shaped our current understanding of the past. Defined by theme, period, and/or region, each volume comprises between twenty-five and forty concise essays written by individual scholars within their area of specialization. The aim of each contribution is to synthesize the current state of scholarship from a variety of historical perspectives and to provide a statement on where the field is heading. The essays are written in a clear, provocative, and lively manner, designed for an international audience of scholars, students, and general readers.

WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO AMERICAN HISTORY

A Companion to the American Revolution
Edited by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole

A Companion to 19th-Century America
Edited by William L. Barney

A Companion to the American South
Edited by John B. Boles

A Companion to American Indian History
Edited by Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury

A Companion to American Women's History
Edited by Nancy A. Hewitt

A Companion to Post-1945 America
Edited by Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig

A Companion to the Vietnam War
Edited by Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco

A Companion to Colonial America
Edited by Daniel Vickers

A Companion to American Foreign Relations
Edited by Robert D. Schulzinger

A Companion to 20th-Century America
Edited by Stephen J. Whitfield

A Companion to the American West
Edited by William Deverell

A Companion to the Civil War and Reconstruction
Edited by Lacy K. Ford

A Companion to American Technology
Edited by Carroll Pursell

A Companion to African-American History
Edited by Alton Hornsby, Jr

A Companion to American Immigration
Edited by Reed Ueda

A Companion to American Cultural History
Edited by Karen Halttunen

A Companion to California History
Edited by William Deverell and David Iglar

A Companion to American Military History
Edited by James Bradford

A Companion to Los Angeles
Edited by William Deverell and Greg Hise

A Companion to American Environmental History
Edited by Douglas Cazaux Sackman

A Companion to Benjamin Franklin
Edited by David Waldstreicher

A Companion to American Legal History
Edited by Sally E. Hadden and Alfred L. Brophy

A Companion to the U.S. Civil War
Edited by Aaron Sheehan-Dean

A Companion to the Meuse-Argonne Campaign
Edited by Edward G. Lengel

WILEY BLACKWELL PRESIDENTIAL COMPANIONS

A Companion to Franklin D. Roosevelt
Edited by William Pederson

A Companion to Richard M. Nixon
Edited by Melvin Small

A Companion to Theodore Roosevelt
Edited by Serge Ricard

A Companion to Thomas Jefferson
Edited by Francis D. Cogliano

A Companion to Lyndon B. Johnson
Edited by Mitchell Lerner

A Companion to George Washington
Edited by Edward G. Lengel

A Companion to James Madison and James Monroe
Edited by Stuart Leibiger

A Companion to Harry S. Truman
Edited by Daniel S. Margolies

A Companion to Andrew Jackson
Edited by Sean Patrick Adams

A Companion to Woodrow Wilson
Edited by Ross A. Kennedy

A Companion to John Adams and John Quincy Adams
Edited by David Waldstreicher

A Companion to the Antebellum Presidents 1837–1861
Edited by Joel H. Silbey

A COMPANION TO THE MEUSE- ARGONNE CAMPAIGN

Edited by

Edward G. Lengel

WILEY Blackwell

This edition first published 2014
© 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Inc

Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Offices

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services, and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell.

The right of Edward G. Lengel to be identified as the author of the editorial material in this work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and editor have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services and neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to the Meuse-Argonne campaign / edited by Edward G. Lengel.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4443-5094-4 (cloth)

1. Argonne, Battle of the, France, 1918. 2. World War, 1914–1918—Campaigns—Meuse River Valley. 3. World War, 1914–1918—Campaigns—France—Historiography. I. Lengel, Edward G., editor of compilation.

D545.A63C64 2014

940.54'214381—dc23

2013042865

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Cover image: Frank E. Schoonover, *How Twenty Marines Took Bouresches – Wheat Field Charge, June 6, 1918, 1927* (detail). Reproduced courtesy of the Frank E. Schoonover Fund.

Cover design by Richard Boxall Design Associates

Set in 11/13pt Galliard by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

Contents

Notes on Contributors	viii
Introduction <i>Edward G. Lengel</i>	1
Part I The Big Picture	5
1 Background to the Meuse-Argonne <i>Edward G. Lengel with James Lacey</i>	7
2 Preparations <i>Brian F. Neumann</i>	21
Part II Combat	37
3 The Chance of a Miracle at Montfaucon <i>William T. Walker, Jr.</i>	39
4 The Battle of Blanc Mont <i>Christopher A. Shaw</i>	59
5 The Lost Battalion <i>Kevin Mulberger and Edward G. Lengel</i>	74
6 Clearing the Argonne <i>Edward A. Gutiérrez</i>	85
7 Cracking the Kriemhilde Stellung: The Combined Actions of the 5th, 32d, and 42d Divisions <i>Nathan A. Jones</i>	103

8	Storming the Heights of the Meuse: The 29th and 33d Divisions Fight for Control of the High Ground, 8–16 October <i>James S. Price</i>	121
9	Breakthrough and Pursuit <i>Lon Strauss</i>	140
10	African Americans in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive <i>Chad Williams</i>	159
11	Heroes of the Meuse-Argonne <i>James Carl Nelson</i>	179
12	“Oh, she’s a rather rough war, boys, but she’s better than no war at all”: The Meuse-Argonne Offensive and the Diarists of the Rainbow Division <i>E. Bruce Geelhoed</i>	194
Part III France and Germany in the Meuse-Argonne		213
13	The French Fourth Army in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign <i>Elizabeth Greenhalgh</i>	215
14	The 111th (German) Infanterie-Regiment by Exermont <i>Randal S. Gaulke</i>	232
15	The 459th (German) Infanterie-Regiment on the Hindenburg Line <i>Randal S. Gaulke</i>	248
16	The German High Command during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive: 26 September–31 October 1918 <i>Markus Klauer</i>	266
Part IV Perspectives		285
17	“There is a limit to human endurance”: The Challenges to Morale in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign <i>Richard S. Faulkner</i>	287
18	Airpower during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive: 26 September–11 November 1918 <i>Thomas Withington</i>	309
19	French Armored Support during the First Phase of the Campaign <i>Patrick R. Osborn</i>	325
20	Artillery in the Meuse-Argonne <i>Justin G. Prince</i>	340

21	Infantry Tactics in the Meuse-Argonne <i>Jeffrey LaMonica</i>	357
22	Medical Support for the Meuse-Argonne <i>Sanders Marble</i>	374
23	Meuse-Argonne Logistics: Barely Enough, Just in Time, Just Long Enough <i>Larry A. Grant</i>	390
24	Communications in World War I: The Meuse-Argonne Campaign of 1918 <i>William P. McEvoy</i>	410
25	We Can Kill Them but We Cannot Stop Them: Evaluating the Meuse-Argonne Campaign <i>John D. Beatty</i>	425
Part V Lessons		441
26	Changing Views on the Meuse-Argonne Offensive <i>Douglas Mastriano</i>	443
27	Lessons Learned <i>Michael S. Neiberg</i>	457
28	Remembering and Forgetting Meuse-Argonne: The Shifting Sands and Partitioned Perspectives of Memory <i>Kathy Warnes</i>	472
29	The Greatest Battle Ever Forgotten: The Meuse-Argonne Offensive and American Memory <i>Steven Trout</i>	496
	Index	515

Notes on Contributors

John D. Beatty is a professional writer of more than 40 years' experience in military science and in industry. He retired from the U.S. Army Reserve after 27 years of service. He holds both BA and MA degrees in military history from American Military University (part of the American Public University System), and has written and published several books, encyclopedia entries, and magazine articles on the middle period (1860–1960) of American military history. He lives and works in Wisconsin.

Richard S. Faulkner served 23 years in the U.S. Army as an armor officer. He received his Masters in American history from the University of Georgia and his Ph.D. in American history from Kansas State University. He taught American history at the United States Military Academy at West Point and has taught military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

since 2002. His book, *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces* (Texas A&M University Press, 2012) won the Society for Military History's Distinguished Book Award for best book-length publication in American military history.

Randal S. Gaulke is a high-yield bond analyst. Since 1994 he has studied the Meuse-Argonne offensive, especially the German side. In 2007 he led a tour for the Western Front Association's USA Branch. Most recently, he presented on the late war German army, and he continues researching the German perspective.

E. Bruce Geelhoed is Professor of History and member of the Honors College faculty at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. He is the editor of *On the Western Front with the Rainbow Division: A World War I Diary*, by Vernon E. Knipshaus (University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

Larry A. Grant is a retired U.S. Navy surface warfare officer who specialized in seamanship, training, and management. Now a historical researcher and freelance writer, Grant lives in Charleston, South Carolina.

Elizabeth Greenhalgh is an Australian Research Council researcher, based in Canberra, in the University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy. She is the author of *Victory through Coalition* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *Foch in Command* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); her study of France's army during World War I will be published in 2014.

Edward A. Gutiérrez (Ph.D., history, Ohio State University), teaches history at the University of Hartford. His most recent awards include a Guggenheim Foundation Grant and a Memory and Memorialization Postdoctoral Fellowship with CNRS in Paris, France. His book, *Sherman was Right* (University Press of Kansas, forthcoming) examines the doughboys' experience during the Great War.

Nathan A. Jones is a history curator at the General George Patton Museum at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and unit historian of the 138th Infantry Regiment, Missouri National Guard. His research includes the National Guard experience in the Great War, the development of the Tank Corps, General Patton, and war memorialization and memory.

Markus Klauer was born in Remscheid, Germany. While pursuing a

career as a professional soldier, he has published five books and several articles since 2001, most of which consider World War I near the Verdun area. He is currently assigned to the NATO Rapid Deployable Corps in Lille, France.

James Lacey is a defense analyst and military historian who teaches at the Marine Corps War College.

Jeffrey LaMonica is Assistant Professor of History at Delaware County Community College in Media, Pennsylvania. He holds degrees in history from Villanova University and LaSalle University. His dissertation deals with tactical development in the American Expeditionary Forces.

Edward G. Lengel is Professor and Director of the Papers of George Washington documentary editing project at the University of Virginia. His books include *World War I Memories* (Scarecrow Press, 2004) and *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918* (Holt, 2008).

Sanders Marble received his AB from the College of William and Mary and his graduate degrees from King's College London. He has written or edited eight books and a number of articles on World War I and military medicine. He is senior historian at the U.S. Army Office of Medical History, and has worked at the Smithsonian and Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Douglas Mastriano was commissioned in the U.S. Army in 1986. Colonel Mastriano began his career

on the Iron Curtain with the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment in Nuremberg, Germany. After serving along the East German and Czechoslovakian borders, he was deployed to Iraq for Operation Desert Storm. He subsequently served in tactical, operational, and strategic levels of command that included assignments in the Pentagon, the 3d Infantry Division, and in U.S. Army Europe Operations and Plans. His last assignment was with NATO Land Headquarters in Germany, from where he deployed three times to Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, he served as the leader of the ISAF Joint Intelligence Center. Mastriano is a graduate of the Advanced Military Studies Jedi Course, and has Master's degrees in military operational art, strategic intelligence, airpower theory, and in strategic studies. He led an international team of researchers that dedicated 100 days in France to locate where Sergeant Alvin York fought on 8 October 1918. He is currently working on a Ph.D. in military history focused on World War I.

William P. McEvoy earned his history degrees from the University of Alabama and Kansas State University. He has taught for the University of West Alabama, Blinn College, Bossier Parish Community College, and the University of Maryland University College. He lives in Turkey, and is an education services specialist for the U.S. Air Force.

Kevin Mulberger enlisted in the army in 1989, and was medically

retired with 20 years of service, achieving the rank of sergeant first class. He has participated in the Persian Gulf War, Operation Able Sentry III, Operation Joint Endeavor, Operation Joint Forge, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He has been awarded the Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart. He holds a BA in history from Columbia College and an MA in military history from American Military University.

Michael S. Neiberg is Professor of History in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the United States Army War College in Carlisle, PA. His published work specializes on World Wars I and II, notably the American and French experiences. His most recent book on World War I is *Dance of the Furies: Europe and the Outbreak of World War I* (Harvard University Press, 2011). In October 2012 Basic Books published his *The Blood of Free Men*, a history of the liberation of Paris in 1944.

James Carl Nelson is the author of *The Remains of Company D: A Story of the Great War* (St. Martin's Press, 2009) and *Five Lieutenants: The Heartbreaking Story of Five Harvard Men Who Led America to Victory in World War I* (St. Martin's Press, 2012). He lives in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

Brian F. Neumann was born in 1975 in Texas City. He earned his Ph.D. from Texas A&M University in 2006. He joined the U.S. Army Center of Military History in 2010 as a member of the Contemporary

Studies Branch with a focus on Operation Enduring Freedom.

Patrick R. Osborn is an archivist with the National Archives and Records Administration. He received his MA in history from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and is the author of *Operation Pike: Britain versus the Soviet Union, 1939–1941* (Greenwood Press, 2000). He is currently working on a comprehensive history of American armor in World War I.

James S. Price is an Adjunct Professor of History at Germanna Community College. He received his MA in military history from Norwich University in 2009. His first book, *The Battle of New Market Heights: Freedom Will Be Theirs by the Sword*, was published by the History Press in 2011.

Justin G. Prince is a doctoral student and graduate teaching associate at Oklahoma State University, specializing in the United States Army 1865–1936, with an expected graduation in 2014. His most recent major publication was as lead designer for the computer war game *War Plan Orange: Dreadnoughts in the Pacific 1922–1930* published in 2005.

Christopher A. Shaw holds a Bachelor's degree in military history from the American Military University. He is retired from the United States Air Force, having served 24 years.

Lon Strauss is a lecturer at the University of Kansas; he earned his Ph.D. from the University of Kansas in

2012. His dissertation, “A Paranoid State,” examines U.S. military intelligence during World War I. He is a section editor for “1914–1918 Online” (<http://www.1914-1918-online.net/>), a contributor to *Oxford Bibliographies in Military History*, has a chapter in *The Routledge Handbook of U.S. Diplomatic and Military History*, and is a recipient of the Center of Military History dissertation fellowship.

Steven Trout is Professor of English and chair of the Department of English at the University of South Alabama in Mobile. His books include *Memorial Fictions: Willa Cather and the First World War* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002); *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919–1941* (University of Alabama Press, 2010), and he is co-editor, with Scott D. Emmert, of *World War I in American Fiction: An Anthology of Short Stories* (Kent State University Press, forthcoming).

William T. Walker, Jr. earned a BA and MA from the University of Virginia. After several years of teaching, he entered the field of educational administration and served progressively as associate vice president for public affairs at Virginia Tech, Gettysburg College, and the College of William and Mary. A lifelong student of military history, he is currently vice chair of the board of the Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library in Staunton, Virginia, where he is finishing a book on the 79th Division's experience in World War I.

Kathy Warnes comes from a family of soldiers, with family members serving from the Revolutionary War to World War I and from Korea to Desert Storm. She earned a Ph.D. from the University of Toledo in American history and the Holocaust and focuses her writing about military subjects on individual soldiers instead of generals and battles.

Chad Williams earned a BA with honors in history and African American studies at UCLA, and received his MA and Ph.D. in history from Princeton University. His first book, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010) won the 2011 Liberty

Legacy Foundation Award from the Organization of American Historians, the 2011 Distinguished Book Award from the Society for Military History, and designation as a 2011 CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title. He is Associate Professor of African and Afro-American Studies at Brandeis University.

Thomas Withington is a defense journalist and airpower historian. He is the editor of the *Asian Military Review* and the blog *Chain-HomeHigh*, the author of four books on military aviation history, and a regular contributor to media outlets around the world, providing analysis on contemporary and historical military matters. He lives in France.

Introduction

Edward G. Lengel

The armed forces of the United States entered the modern era on 26 September 1918. On that date nine American divisions totaling about 162,000 men, supported by thousands of engineers, artilleryists, tankers, airmen, and support personnel, launched a massive offensive against German forces in the Meuse-Argonne region of France. If the scale was impressive, so was the technology that the Americans employed on and above the battlefield. American military personnel employed tanks, aircraft, massed artillery, poison gas, extensive mechanized transport, modern communications, and advanced medical equipment for the first time in World War I. The Meuse-Argonne marked their first opportunity to do so on a large scale.

The offensive was multinational in character. French soldiers risked their lives alongside American infantry. French artillery and tanks, and French and Italian airplanes, supported the offensive and played a critical role in its ultimate success. As might be expected, the co-belligerents did not always get along. *Poilus* and doughboys often blamed each other for their difficulties, or refused to provide mutual support. On the whole, though, the alliance worked well, particularly in the Champagne to the west of the Meuse-Argonne. There French and American troops, the latter including U.S. Marines along with African American troops of the 93d Division, worked together efficiently to capture the forbidding ridge at Blanc Mont. This Companion explores elements of Franco-American cooperation and rivalry in both the Champagne and the Meuse-Argonne on all levels in chapters 4, 13, and 19.

Military historians sometimes forget that it takes at least two sides to fight a battle. Nowhere is this neglect more apparent than in the Meuse-Argonne, which has hitherto been studied almost entirely from the American (and to a far lesser degree the French) perspective. Yet while there were heroes in plenty among the American and French troops who fought in this battle, the bravery and tenacity of German soldiers in the Meuse-Argonne almost surpass comprehension. Exhausted by four years of unremitting warfare; bereft of fallen comrades; racked by influenza; weakened by supply shortages; and upholding a cause that even their highest leaders had begun conceding as lost, German soldiers fought on with a grim determination that astounded their adversaries. Chapters 14–16 of this volume utilize German-language primary sources to study the Kaiser's forces in the Meuse-Argonne and the conduct of the German general staff.

General John J. Pershing and his officers have been criticized for conducting the offensive without regard to advice proffered by their French and British co-belligerents. Their attitude is understandable in the context of the long struggle over amalgamation that preceded the creation of the American First Army and the launching of the Meuse-Argonne offensive. American military leaders had been champing at the bit for so long that they were determined to show what they and their doughboys could do. In the process they discarded many valuable tactical lessons that the French and British had already learned, and the cost of their disdain was steep in American lives. Yet the doughboys learned extraordinarily fast. Confronting unanticipated and rapidly changing battlefield conditions, American soldiers adapted rapidly and overcame challenges that would have stymied other men. Nowhere was this truer than in the breaching of the Kriemhilde Stellung at Cunel and Romagne in mid-October by troops of the 5th, 32d, and 42d Divisions, set forth in chapter 7.

Alas, even the quickest wits and most exemplary bravery could not always overcome the arrogance or stupidity of some generals. At Montfaucon on 26–27 September, as chapter 3 of this Companion demonstrates, the jealousy, thirst for glory, and even gross disobedience of certain high-ranking officers in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) set back the offensive's timetable by days and probably cost the lives of thousands of American soldiers. The fiasco of the American 1st Division at Sedan in November, described at length in chapter 9, did not cost many lives but brought glory-seeking to the level of farce. Also farcical, but far more tragic, was the scapegoating of African American officers of the 92d Division for the unhappy events around Binarville in the offensive's first days, as described in chapter 10.

Criticism of certain American generals should not overshadow the facility and even brilliance with which others overcame challenges and led First Army to eventual victory. The offensive would not have been possible in

the first place had it not been for Pershing's determination to resist pressures for amalgamation and create a clear and independent role for American forces on the Western Front, as described in chapter 1. Although the infantry tactics prescribed by Pershing were arguably deficient, chapter 21 suggests that they brought a recognizable new vigor to the battlefield. Logistics were always a problem for the AEF, but chapters 2, 23, and 25 of this Companion look at the exemplary skill, despite titanic obstacles, with which First Army staff arranged and prosecuted this massive undertaking.

Ultimately, any study of the Meuse-Argonne comes down to the soldiers. On the surface, the offensive appears to have introduced a new style of technological warfare in which inventions such as aircraft, tanks, and radios transformed the battlefield and reduced reliance on the infantry. In practice, however, these technologies often failed to perform up to expectations (see chapter 18, 19, and 24). To Pershing's credit, he recognized well before the offensive began that victory ultimately depended on the individual infantryman; yet as chapter 20 demonstrates, artillery remained king of the battlefield in the Meuse-Argonne, as elsewhere in World War I. For the soldiers, as described in chapters 17 and 22, factors such as food, rest, and proper medical care were paramount in the creation and maintenance of strong morale. Given the often abysmal conditions endured by doughboys in the Meuse-Argonne, it is perhaps surprising that morale remained as strong as it did, or that First Army produced so many heroes (see chapters 5 and 11).

The impact of the Meuse-Argonne offensive on the war's outcome is difficult to measure. European and Canadian historians, as described in chapter 26, have typically downplayed the American contribution to the victory over Germany. They prefer to limit the doughboys' impact in France to the realm of the psychological, arguing that awareness of the vast American manpower reserves gave the French and British confidence to fight on to victory, and concomitantly weakened the German will to resist. Other historians have pointed out that the Germans certainly continued to fight fiercely enough in the Meuse-Argonne, which shielded a major railway junction that fed that Kaiser's armies along the entire Western Front. Unlike in other areas, the Germans in the Meuse-Argonne could not afford to trade space for time, but fought tooth and nail for every inch of ground after the initial outpost lines had been overrun. The historians writing in this Companion do not agree on whether the Meuse-Argonne offensive played a major role in defeating the German army in 1918, but it is clear that the offensive's impact transcended the actual fighting. As chapter 27 sets forward, real or perceived lessons learned in the Meuse-Argonne significantly influenced the interwar development of the U.S. armed forces and informed American conduct in World War II.

Americans who fought in the Meuse-Argonne were transformed by their experiences there. While each man's and woman's service in France was

unique – making it senseless to speak of a generalized “soldier experience” – it is safe to say that no individual would ever be the same. The doughboys’ struggles to return home and adapt to civilian life were traumatic not only for themselves and their families but for American society at large, as explained in chapter 28. Public commemoration of the Meuse-Argonne, described in this Companion’s final chapter, groped toward understanding of the doughboys’ sacrifices but never fully bridged the gap between propaganda and reality.

The Meuse-Argonne – that most under-studied of all major battles in American military history – remains shrouded in mystery even on the eve of World War I’s centennial. The 29 essays gathered together in this volume do not entirely clear away the mystery, but they do bring us closer to an understanding of the battle’s importance and its impact in Europe and the United States.

Part I

THE BIG PICTURE

Chapter One

BACKGROUND TO THE MEUSE-ARGONNE

Edward G. Lengel with James Lacey

November 1917 found the nations aligned against the Central Powers in a difficult situation. Continuing political turmoil brought the Russian government to its knees, allowing Germany to release dozens of divisions for service on the Western Front. Seven of them assisted the Austrians in launching a successful offensive against the Italians at Caporetto in October. The Italian army fell back over 95 kilometers and nearly collapsed. Meanwhile, a bloody and largely futile British offensive at Passchendaele that began on 31 July and lasted through November had resulted in the loss of another 200,000 men. Some wondered whether France and Britain were still capable of offensive action. Pershing's intelligence officers told him that the Germans would be able to bring up to 217 divisions into action on the Western Front by the spring of 1918. Even with the anticipated arrival of several large (compared to their European equivalents) American divisions, the Germans would enjoy a superiority of about 46 divisions (Lacey 2008, 129–30).

Above all, the French and British needed manpower to replenish their depleted units. Although the United States had declared war on Germany in April 1917, by the autumn only 175,000 doughboys had arrived in Europe and few of them had seen action of any sort (Smythe 1986, 69). The amalgamation of American soldiers into Allied units as individual replacements thus seemed a reasonable idea to the hard-pressed Entente powers. They already possessed the division and corps staffs that the Americans lacked and would take many months to build. Amalgamation would also ease the shipping problem, allowing the Americans to concentrate on transporting men to Europe without worrying about organizational

details, equipment, or supplies. Incorporated into European formations, American soldiers could gain combat experience right away, pending the formation of an independent American army at some unspecified future date.

Pershing rejected amalgamation outright. His argument for the formation of a separate American army rested in part on national pride. But he also predicted compatibility issues, such as language difficulties for men serving with the French, and the possible refusal of soldiers of Irish and German descent to serve under British command. Another consideration, albeit unstated, was the probability that amalgamation would weaken the American position in postwar peace negotiations. President Wilson and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker had instructed Pershing to resist amalgamation partly upon this basis.

Past experience did not recommend the benefits of French and British leadership, for all their protests about the lessons they had learned. Since 1914, they had lost millions of men dead and wounded in one bloody campaign after another, often for trifling gains. French marshal Joseph Joffre was reputed to have remarked that it took about 15,000 casualties to train a major general; and British prime minister Lloyd George allegedly hoarded soldiers in the safety of the English countryside, away from the grasping fingers of his bloody-minded general, Douglas Haig (Lacey 2008, 131). Pershing likely imagined with horror the outcry that would have resulted if thousands of American soldiers died as cannon fodder in further pointless offensives under foreign command. He did not entertain the possibility that French and British military leaders might indeed have learned the lessons of past mistakes, and thus have been more cautious about incurring useless casualties than their American counterparts.

Pershing's continued resistance to amalgamation brought him under heavy pressure from the French and British. Marshal Philippe Pétain told Colonel Edward House, Wilson's presidential advisor, that Pershing's intransigence made him unsuitable for command of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), and requested his replacement. European officers, diplomats, and politicians traveled to Washington with the same message, evidently unaware that Wilson and his secretary of war had dictated the anti-amalgamation policy to Pershing in the first place. Nevertheless, in a show of good intentions Baker directed General Tasker Bliss, the army chief of staff and American member of the Supreme War Council, to look into the matter. Bliss listened patiently to the British and French, and sensed their growing desperation. From London, he reported to Baker that "they all seem very rattled over here. . . . They want men and they want them badly. . . . If we do not make the greatest sacrifices now and, as a result, a great disaster should come, we will never forgive ourselves, nor will the world forgive us" (Lacey 2008, 131).

Bliss's growing responsiveness to European demands left Pershing singularly unimpressed. He wondered aloud why the British were allegedly hoarding men in England and sending thousands more soldiers to the Middle East and Africa instead of sending them to the Western Front. Pershing rejected a British proposal to ship 150 American battalions to France as replacements, proposing instead to fill the ships with six full American divisions that would fight under American command (Smythe 1986, 70). Bearding Bliss in his den at the Supreme War Council, Pershing barked that there would be no amalgamation, and that was that. When Bliss suggested that they refer the final decision to Washington, Pershing shot back: "Well, Bliss, do you know what would happen should we do that? We would both be relieved of further duty in France and that is exactly what we should deserve" (Smythe 1986, 77). Bliss relented and promised to stand alongside Pershing in resisting amalgamation. At a meeting of the council the following morning Bliss solemnly announced that "Pershing will speak for both of us and whatever he says with regard to the disposition of American troops will have my approval" (Pershing 1931, 2:305). Facing a newly determined American duo, the British submitted to Pershing's proposal to ship six American divisions to Europe, but insisted that the Yanks begin their training behind British lines. Clearly the struggle over amalgamation had not yet ended.

The long-anticipated German offensive made possible by the collapse of Russia took place on 21 March 1918. Twenty-six under-strength British divisions holding positions near the Somme fell back before an onslaught of 71 German divisions following a massive artillery barrage. German *Stoßtruppen*, or storm troops practicing innovative infiltration tactics, opened a gap 65 kilometers wide in the British lines. The overwhelming initial success of the German offensive, codenamed Operation Michael, caused widespread consternation among British and French leaders. As German penetrations expanded in April, something like panic developed. Pétain took steps to cover Paris even if it meant cutting links with the retreating British, while Haig told his troops that their backs were to the wall. "Every position must be held to the last man," he declared; "there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end. The safety of our homes and the freedom of mankind alike depend upon the conduct of each of us at this critical moment" (Stephenson 2011, 72–73). Some British officers nevertheless spoke of pulling back to the Channel ports for possible evacuation to England. Although the Germans were stopped just short of Amiens, the British Fifth Army had suffered 164,000 casualties and lost 90,000 prisoners, along with 200 tanks, 1,000 guns, and 4,000 machine guns (Lacey 2008, 133).

Such brutal losses of men and territory spurred further talk of amalgamation, and even Pershing had to admit the need for compromise. Secretary

Baker, visiting London, secured Pershing's agreement to focus on rushing essentially unequipped American infantry and machine-gun battalions to Europe. However, the six divisions that had been promised earlier would still be sent as intact units, and American ships would continue to transport support troops and equipment at their own pace, with the goal of eventually building a separate American army. The compromise only partially reduced tensions. At another meeting of the Supreme War Council in May, Foch demanded to know whether Pershing would be "willing to risk our being driven back to the Loire?" "Yes," Pershing responded, to Foch's dismay, "I am willing to take the risk. Moreover, the time may come when the American army will have to stand the brunt of this war, and it is not wise to fritter away our resources in this manner." The stubborn American thereupon pounded his fist on the table, yelling, "Gentlemen, I have thought this program over very deliberately and will not be coerced" (Pershing 1931, 2:28–29).

At other times, and especially in public, Pershing expressed somewhat more altruistic sentiments. He responded to Foch's request for help with a declaration that "the American people would consider it a great honor for our troops to be engaged in the present battle. I ask you for this in their name and my own. At the moment there is no other question but of fighting. Infantry, artillery, aviation, all that we have is yours: use them as you wish. More will come, in numbers equal to the requirements" (Harbord 1936, 244). In truth, however, he could deliver very little. The most effective and well-organized American division in France was General Robert Lee Bullard's 1st Infantry Division, which moved into the line in May to support the French near Cantigny. By then, however, the need for American support no longer loomed so critical. Although the Germans continued their offensives at different points of the front, they were clearly losing momentum.

Pershing nevertheless saw the appearance of the 1st Division at the front as an opportunity to deliver a blow against Germany – for propaganda purposes if nothing else. Although the village of Cantigny possessed no particular military value for either side, it could gain fame as the first settlement liberated by the Americans – if the 1st Division could take it. Bullard promised that he could, and Pershing ordered the necessary orders to be drawn up. As the attack commenced on 28 May, Pershing nervously paced back and forth at 1st Division headquarters. Turning to Bullard, he released some of his pent-up exasperation from the amalgamation controversy of the past few months: "Do [the French] patronize you? Do they assume superior airs with you?" he demanded. Bullard quietly responded "They do not. . . . I know them too well." "By God!" Pershing burst out, "They have been trying it with me, and I don't intend to stand for it" (Eisenhower 2001, 129). Meanwhile the attack went in, and succeeded.

While the 1st Division beat off German counterattacks around Cantigny and American journalists publicized the triumph, the French in the Chemin

des Dames sector to the south attempted to weather a sudden crisis. On 27 May, Ludendorff launched a new offensive that caught the French completely by surprise and shattered a 50-kilometer sector of the front. German troops penetrated 50 kilometers and caused 100,000 French casualties, with an additional 60,000 captured (Lacey 2008, 139). Pershing met with a gloomy Foch, recently appointed Allied Supreme Commander, on 30 May, and was subjected to another verbal barrage on amalgamation. Pershing bristled at Foch's apparent loss of nerve, and self-consciously agreed to send American forces to the rescue of their supposedly beaten compatriots – on condition that they fight as intact units. Facing an immediate crisis, the French submitted to the conditions. For the first time, American units would see action on a large scale.

Pershing sent his 2d and 3d Divisions toward the lines while the 1st Division expanded its sector at Cantigny so that the French could send more reinforcements to stem the German advance. Trucks driven by natives of French Indochina hauled thousands of Yanks by way of Paris toward the front, but the infantry had to march the last stages on foot. Doughboys and Marines had never seen retreat on a large scale before, and as they approached the combat zone they imagined that the entire French army had disintegrated. French peasants and disgruntled *poilus* cynically regaled the green doughboys with cries of “la guerre est finie,” reinforcing the impression that only a couple of American divisions stood between the Germans and Paris. American officers told their men that the fate of France depended entirely on them. Closer to the front, French units continued to resist the Germans heroically, but without attracting any notice from their cocksure American compatriots.

Major General Omar Bundy commanded the 2d Division, and Pershing had selected many of its officers. It consisted of an army and a Marine brigade, the latter commanded by Pershing's former chief of staff, army Brigadier General James Harbord. Although the division was well trained and had experienced something of trench warfare in quiet sectors, it remained an unknown quantity. Potentially the meshing of army and Marine units might create serious problems. Moreover, Pershing had doubts about Bundy's strength of character and ability to command effectively under the stresses of combat. He therefore appointed Colonel Preston Brown to serve as Bundy's chief of staff. A ruthless, no-nonsense officer who had been accused of illegally executing Philippine insurgents a decade earlier, Brown served effectively as Bundy's backup and support.

General Jean Degoutte, commanding the French XXI Corps near Château-Thierry, proposed to commit the 2d Division's regiments to the battle as they arrived. Brown, taking this as a transgression against French promises that American divisions would fight as intact units, raised a ruckus. Instead, he proposed to deploy the division behind the French and hold the line as they pulled back. Degoutte consented and asked the Americans to

establish lines facing east toward Château-Thierry. He then turned to Brown and asked, “Can the Americans really hold?” Brown complacently replied, “General, these are American regulars. In a hundred and fifty years they have never been beaten. They will hold” (Bonk 2007, 46). At least, that is how Brown remembered the exchange.

American journalists would subsequently magnify beyond all proportion the actions of the 2d and 3d Divisions in resisting the German advance. Their tales of American heroism and French cowardice – the latter bordering on the slanderous – have endured in military legend, and been echoed by some historians who claim that the Yanks single-handedly defeated the German offensive and saved Paris. Historian James Lacey, for example, derides European historians who have “tended to minimize the contributions of the Second and Third Divisions in stemming the German advance,” and asserts that “for five days not a single French unit had stood its ground and fought” until the 2d Division stepped in and saved the day (Lacey 2008, 141). In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Translated German army records indicate that Ludendorff’s thrust around Château-Thierry (which anyway did not aim toward Paris) had ground to a halt by 3–4 June – primarily in the face of tenacious *French* resistance, and before substantial numbers of Americans had come into contact (Zabecki 2012; *Translations* 1930, vol. 4).

None of which, of course, should detract from the heroism of American soldiers and Marines once they did enter the fight. On 6 June, Harbord ordered his Marine brigade to attack the Germans in Belleau Wood, where they suffered incredible slaughter – including 5,000 dead or wounded – over the following few weeks. In the process they learned some painful lessons. During the battle’s first days, the Germans were shocked as much by the weight of the American assault as by the clumsiness of their tactics. In time, however, they came to respect the gritty determination of the Americans to achieve success whatever the cost. Experience also taught army and Marine field officers the value of elementary tactical principles, and of battlefield improvisation. Recognizing the symbolic importance of the fight for Belleau Wood, the commander of the German 28th Division had told his officers that “it is not a question of the possession or nonpossession of this or that village or woods. It is a question whether the Anglo-American claim that the American army is equal or the superior of the German army is to be made good.” On 26 June, however, the triumphant cry rang out: “This Wood now exclusively U.S. Marine Corps” (Lacey 2008, 142).

The aftermath of Belleau Wood saw a convergence of sorts around Château-Thierry. By the end of June, five American divisions – the 1st, 2d, 3d, 4th, and 28th – were in close proximity in the region. Pershing seized on the opportunity thus offered by ordering General Hunter Liggett to establish the American I Corps at Château-Thierry on 21 June. By 4 July,

the corps had entered the line as a distinct entity, although elements of some divisions – particularly the untried 28th – remained intermingled with French formations. Pershing hoped that with another corps or two he could build the First American Army.

The loss of Belleau Wood emboldened the Americans but it did not faze Ludendorff, who determinedly launched further extensions to his grand offensive. These culminated on 15 July, when German artillery opened fire against French and American positions along the Marne east of Château-Thierry. Doughboys of the American 3d and 28th Divisions – the latter distributed piecemeal among French units despite Pershing's insistence to the contrary – held on alongside equally determined (for the most part) French infantrymen, known as *poilus*. As the German offensive broke down in chaos, Foch set the machinery in motion for an immediate counterblow toward Soissons. Success would sever German supply routes for their troops in the region and force a general withdrawal. Encouraged by the confident Pershing, the French commander allocated the American 1st and 2d Divisions – the latter still reeling from its horrific experiences in Belleau Wood – to the attack.

The counteroffensive was a rush job, and allowed little time for proper preparation. The Americans hurried pell-mell toward the front. Moving up through pouring rain and intense darkness during the night of 17–18 July, some infantry became hopelessly lost while others literally jogged, exhausted, into their jump-off positions just as the whistles blew calling the advance. Many artillery, machine-gun, and other support units became caught up in one of the greatest traffic jams in history – until 26 September, the first day of the Meuse-Argonne – and did not arrive at the front until the attack was well underway. Reconnaissance was nonexistent, and French officers and guides provided little aid. The attack went in regardless, with the 1st Division, now commanded by Major General Charles Summerall, on the left; the French 1st Moroccan Division in the center; and the 2d Division, now commanded by General Harbord, on the right.

The suddenness of the attack caught the Germans by surprise, and resistance collapsed in some places. Reserves were slow in coming up, and some German officers despaired of holding Soissons. Fortunately for them, the 2d Division collapsed in total exhaustion after a day's heavy fighting, while units of the 1st Division became hopelessly entangled with the Moroccans and each other. Although the advance reached 5 kilometers on the first day, it slowed down drastically thereafter in the face of disorganization and stiffening German resistance. German reinforcements – increasingly ravaged by influenza, like many units along the line – nevertheless fought bitterly. Summerall's 1st Division remained in the line for three days after the 2d Division withdrew, and he became increasingly frustrated at the slow pace of the advance. When a French staff officer asked Summerall whether his men could continue the fight, he testily replied, "Sir, when the 1st Division

has only two men left, they will be echeloned in depth and attacking towards Berlin.” To a battalion commander who complained that the enemy had stopped his advance, the general angrily blustered, “you may have paused for reorganization, but if you ever send me a message with the word stopped in it again you will be relieved of command” (Smythe 1986, 57).

The slowness of the Franco-American advance gave the Germans enough respite to conduct a planned, orderly withdrawal from the salient. Nevertheless, to the Americans the results smelled a lot like victory despite the loss of 7,000 soldiers from the 1st Division alone, including three-quarters of its field grade officers (Stewart 2005, 2:38). The failure of the 15 July offensive and further setbacks against the British left the Germans definitely on the defensive by August. Since 21 March they had lost over a million men, while Yanks continued to debark by the tens of thousands at French ports. German chancellor Georg von Hertling later said: “We expected great events in Paris for the end of July. That was on the 15th. On the 18th even the most optimistic among us understood that all was lost. The history of the world was played out in three days” (Strachan 2003, 298). The initiative had passed permanently to the British, French – and Americans, if they could find a way to take advantage of it.

Whatever the American battlefield contribution, the Yanks continued to provide an incalculable boost to French and British civilian and military morale. British nurse Vera Brittain reflected, as she saw American soldiers for the first time, that “they looked like Tommies in heaven. I pressed forward to watch the United States physically entering the War, so god-like, so magnificent, so splendidly unimpaired in comparison with the tired, nerve-racked men of the British Army” (Strachan 2003, 311). The numbers alone were enough to lift the spirits of even the most war-weary observers. By midsummer Pershing had 1.2 million American soldiers and Marines in Europe, bringing them close to total British and French strength on the Western Front.

Whether the Americans were yet ready to fight on a large scale was another matter. The events at Belleau Wood and Soissons had convinced the French and British of American bravery, but not of American preparedness. Stubbornly unwilling to take friendly advice, the Yanks had often marched into battle with parade-ground tactics that ensured appalling casualties. Without question, the American divisions packed a lethal punch – but they had not shown the ability to endure for the long term on the battlefield despite their large size. After their epic struggle at Belleau Wood, the Marines of the 2d Division had been willing but physically unable to endure for long the privations of combat around Soissons. The 1st Division, despite its long training and success at Cantigny, had broken down in confusion at Soissons despite some early successes. Similar problems emerged as various American divisions contributed to the Aisne-Marne offensive in August. To European observers, the Americans fought like lions – when

they could avoid tripping over their own feet. Foch and his generals imagined such mistakes being replicated on a large scale and could not help but shudder. They were not yet reconciled to the formation of an independent American army.

Pershing, however, had seen enough. True, there had been some confusion and disorganization among American units at the front, but he put this down – with good reason – to insufficient training and the absence of adequate support resulting from the “infantry first” policy in shipping the AEF overseas. So far as he was concerned, the time had come for the formation of First Army. Brushing aside further talk of amalgamation, he issued orders on 14 July for its creation, effective 10 August. In pondering the section of the front that the new army would occupy, Pershing at first thought of sticking to the Marne salient with which the troops were already familiar. On further consideration, however, better opportunities to test First Army’s mettle seemed to beckon elsewhere. Buttonholing Pétain and demanding his support, Pershing confronted Foch with the idea of launching an American offensive to eliminate the German salient at St. Mihiel. Although the salient had grown quiescent in recent years, it dated from 1914 and still constituted a thorn in the side of French defenses on the Western Front. With luck, the Americans might even be able to continue their offensive toward Metz and drive toward – or even across – the German border.

With Foch’s apparent consent, Pershing happily set to work deploying troops and preparing for the attack. He officially took command on 30 August, and invited Foch to visit his headquarters on the same day. If Pershing expected praise and vindication from his wily French adversary, however, he had another thing coming. Striding into headquarters, Foch breezily declared his intention of modifying the plan to reduce the St. Mihiel salient. German-held territory on the Western Front, he pointed out, now constituted a single large salient. The way to reduce that salient was not to hit it here and there like a toy balloon, but to squeeze it relentlessly in concentric attacks until it burst. To make that happen, he proposed to have the British continue their attacks on the Somme while the French and Americans (with the latter of course in a junior role) pressed the Germans toward Mézières. This change of plans would of course reduce the scope of, or entirely put an end to, the planned offensive against St. Mihiel.

Foch proposed that Pershing leave nine divisions to contain the St. Mihiel salient, and remove the remainder of the American First Army northwest to the Champagne and Argonne Forest sectors. There they would perform a subsidiary role in a large French offensive against the southwest portion of the German Western Front salient, attacking in two separate areas with a French army in between. Operationally, French Fourth Army would take control over the Americans. Mindful of the alleged American mismanagement of operations at Belleau Wood, Soissons, and the Aisne-Marne, Foch

further suggested that French generals should accompany American divisions and corps – implicitly so that they could provide assistance and advice to the well-intentioned but inept Yank officers. “I realize I am presenting you with a number of new ideas and you probably need time to think them over,” the Frenchman glibly concluded, “but I should like your impressions” (Pershing 1931, 2:244).

Pershing’s response could not have surprised Foch, who had spent enough time arguing with his American counterpart to realize that he did not back down easily. “Marshal Foch,” Pershing responded furiously, “here on the very day that you turn over a sector to the American army and almost on the eve of an offensive, you ask me to reduce the operation so that you can take away several of my divisions and assign some of them to the French Second Army and use others to form an American army to operate on the Aisne in conjunction with the French Fourth Army, leaving me with little to do except hold a quiet sector. . . . This virtually destroys the American Army that we have been trying so long to form” (Pershing 1931, 2:244). He went on to point out that the abrupt reconfiguration would create a logistical nightmare for the Americans, possibly leaving them incapable of operations for weeks. Besides, the St. Mihiel salient threatened the flank of any advance in the Champagne and Meuse-Argonne, and should be eliminated as a preliminary to Foch’s concentric attacks. Brushing Pershing’s objections aside – no doubt with a Gallic shrug – Foch offered his regrets but said he saw no alternative to his plan. A showdown thereupon commenced.

After further discussion, Pershing returned to the idea of giving First Army an independent sector of operations on the Western Front. Seriously annoyed by now, Foch rejected Pershing’s sally and asked with barely concealed contempt, “Do you wish to take part in the battle?” Pershing, his own dander thoroughly aroused, responded: “Most assuredly, but as an American Army and in no other way.” “There is no time to send an entire Army,” Foch snapped. Pershing replied, “Give me a sector and I will occupy it immediately . . . wherever you say.” The argument continued. Foch spoke of the lack of American artillery and support formations, and Pershing angrily countered that in that case the French and British had only themselves to blame. It was they, after all, who had insisted that the United States focus on sending only infantry overseas to combat the German spring and summer offensives. It was Foch’s responsibility, not Pershing’s, to make up the shortfall in guns and support formations (Pershing 1931, 2:246).

Frustrated at the growing impasse, Foch opted to escalate. “Your French and English comrades are going into battle,” he sneered; “are you coming with them?” He might as well have dropped a live hand grenade on the table. “Marshal Foch,” Pershing growled, “you have no authority as Allied commander-in-chief to call upon me to yield up my command of the American Army and have it scattered among the Allied forces where it will