

Not So Easy Over There: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of the American Expeditionary Force (1917-1918)

A Monograph

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Abstract

Not So Easy Over There: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of the American Expeditionary Force (1917-1918), by MAJ Jared W. Nichols, US Army, 41 pages.

For the past hundred years, the narrative of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) is that it was the combat equal to all sides in World War I and the reason the Allies won the war. It is true that the Allies won the war due to the disproportionate numbers over the Central Powers, but the effective combat prowess of the AEF had little to do with that success. More than any other factors, the ratio of forces over the Central Powers and the effectiveness of the blockade brought the Allies victory. However, the myth of the combat effectiveness of the AEF endures.

The AEF suffered tremendous casualties adhering to outdated nineteenth century warfare disregarding emergent technologies and doctrine. GEN John J. Pershing, commander of the AEF, ordered formations to train in the same manner as the 1914-era armies. The predictable result were the same tremendous casualties that all sides received in the first Battle of the Marne. Units that adhered to the AEF doctrine of “open warfare” met failure on the Western Front, while organizations that willfully disobeyed orders and incorporated European firepower-centric combined arms warfare achieved success.

Rapidly growing the U.S. Army in the event of war is an important and often ignored facet of national defense. The development and study of this monograph aims to provide military planners with a perspective on how to rapidly build an effective Army in a time of national emergency and the pitfalls to avoid.

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It is only right to dedicate this paper to the fallen men of the 16th Infantry, the 137th Infantry, and the 316th Infantry who perished in the mud of the Meuse-Argonne and still lie between the rows of the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Montfaucon, France. That we remember that sacrifice of the men and women of the American Expeditionary Force was not in vain.

Here Rests in Honored Glory an American Soldier Known But Unto God

Acronyms

AEF	American Expeditionary Force
FSR	Field Service Regulations
ID	Infantry Division
IDR	Infantry Drill Regulations
NA	National Army
NG	National Guard
NCO	Noncommissioned Officers
RA	Regular Army

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Introduction

It was the grim common sense of the doughboy and not our obsolete and impossible tactics that won us ground.

— Hervey Allen, *Toward the Flame: A War Diary*

Background of the Study

In the quiet farming villages in the rolling French countryside, time seems to stand still. For hundreds of years, these rural communities maintain the traditional cycle of life as farmers work through the seasons and bring their wares to market. The crossroads of the village of Romange-sous-Montfaucon sit at the intersection of roads dating to Roman times not far from the banks of the winding Meuse River. The seasons come and go, and tranquil village life moves on. It is as if a war was never here. From the center of the village, it is a short walk down Rue de l'Andon to Rue du Général Pershing and the gates of the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery.

Mixed amongst the lush green pastures and hedges laid out row upon row remain 14,246 men from the American Expeditionary Force (AEF).¹ The sprawling 130-acres nestles between the same villages where the men of the AEF fell during the Meuse-Argonne offensive of 1918. It is hard to imagine that one hundred years ago battles raged on these rolling hills and quiet valleys. It is fitting that Rue du Général Pershing runs to the gates of the cemetery, for the men that rest here are due in large part due decisions made by the commander of the AEF, GEN John J. Pershing.

GEN Pershing orchestrated the monumental task of the development, training, and the combat employment of the AEF. The scale of the task was massive, as the US Army grew from a constabulary force of 209,000 men to a force of one million in under two years.² The AEF's rapid growth from inception to the Meuse-Argonne offensive was a tumultuous affair. In less than two

¹ American Battle Monuments Commission, "Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery," American Battle Monuments Commission Cemeteries and Memorials, accessed October 29, 2018, <https://www.abmc.gov/cemeteries-memorials/europe/meuse-argonne-american-cemetery>.

² Richard S. Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 23.

years an entire army trained, deployed, and fought a modern war. The massive effort aside, as late as October 19, 1918, British Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig still characterized the AEF as an “American Army: is not yet organized; it is ill-equipped, half-trained, with insufficient supply services. Experienced officers and NCOs [non-commissioned officers] are lacking.”³

Thesis

American mythology holds that the AEF was a modern army and the equal of its rivals in the Great War, but this characterization could not be further from the truth. The AEF was an anachronistic organization unwilling to change its culture in a new era of modern warfare. The failure to adapt was the failure of Pershing to see a paradigm shift in modern warfare. As the senior commander, he set out the framework for the training of the AEF and its performance in combat. The AEF’s success is uneven across the board and units that achieved success on the battlefield did in despite Pershing and the AEF Headquarters.

Several overarching factors contributed to the AEF’s poor performance. First, it failed to adopt a modern doctrine to direct training and to use in combat. Second, the AEF failed to properly train and equip the National Guard or the draftees of the National Army. Third, GEN Pershing undertook draconian measures to enforce adherence of US doctrine on European battlefields, contributing to their resistance to change. Lastly, the AEF could not logistically support itself and routinely failed to provide logistical support to its subordinate formations. These failures resulted in needless lives wasted and an overinflated sense of American military competency.

Units victorious in combat began the war with a core of seasoned NCOs, trained at all combat echelons, and led by leaders who fully integrated modern European combat methods. Conversely, units that failed were unstable at their inception, adhered to US doctrine, and suffered from leaders unable to adapt to new styles of warfare. In the end, “the AEF succeeded

³ James W. Rainey, “The Questionable Training of the AEF in World War I,” *Parameters*, vol 22 (Winter 1992-1993): 100.

not because of imaginative operations and tactics nor because of qualitative superiority in open warfare, but rather by smothering German machine guns with American flesh.”⁴ A captured German officer best surmised the situation in November of 1918: “The Americans are here, we can kill them, but we cannot stop them.”⁵ The imbalance between German and AEF forces brought victory to the Allies more than any other factor.

Methodology

Throughout the course of study, it is apparent that while units in the AEF share common traits there are conversely large difference in the effectiveness and performance of these organizations. The AEF was not a monolithic organization; it consisted of units from the Regular Army (RA), the National Guard (NG), and the National Army (NA).⁶ Each of these organizations is distinct in its characteristics regardless of what GEN Pershing, AEF Headquarters, and the US government did to break it of its uniqueness. The selected units for study are infantry regiments from the RA, NG, and NA of the First Army of the AEF in the Meuse-Argonne offensive (September 26, 1918-November 11, 1918). The Meuse-Argonne is the supposed apex in the AEF’s combat preparedness in the Great War and with the highest proportion of Doughboys in active combat. The three regiments are a sample of the 172 infantry regiments comprising the forty-three divisions forming that AEF.

The common characteristics these three units share allow for comparisons between performances. They all fought over much of the same terrain in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. The difficult terrain and the seasoned enemy that each regiment encountered was roughly the same despite a difference of a few kilometers. Thus, each unit experienced the same environmental factors in fighting in a damp, cold, and muddy battlefield. It is here that much of

⁴ Rainey, 100.

⁵ Edward Lengel, *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 381.

⁶ John A. Boyd, “America's Army of Democracy: The National Army 1917-1919,” *Army History*, no. 109 (Fall 2018): 14.

the comparison stop, for while the battlefield conditions and structure of the organizations are the same the performance of each organization wildly vary.⁷ The case study portion of this monograph expands on these differences.

The Pre-War American Army

The pre-war American Army consisted of two segments, the RA and the NG, committed to patrolling the frontier and controlling newly acquired colonial possessions.⁸ The structure of forces in 1916 was adequate for limited colonial conflicts and for maintaining order in the continental United States, but inadequate compared to the size and modernity of European field armies in 1917.⁹ The last time an American army stood at the size of the modern European armies was during the American Civil War. Since that time, the US Army remained as a small professional force alongside the state-managed and administered NG. Combined, the RA and the NG were comparable to the size of one corps in the British or French armies.¹⁰

The US government did little to prepare the nation for the global conflict on the horizon. Grudgingly, President Woodrow Wilson allowed the RA and NG to grow their end strength through cautiously through the 1916 National Defense Act, without enacting draft laws.¹¹ In the end, volunteer numbers alone were not enough and the US turned towards the draft through the Selective Service Act of 1917. A big war would require a big army.¹² The US Army had plenty of

⁷ To keep the sample size focused for this monograph required the exclusion of units that did not fight on the Meuse-Argonne under AEF command. The training and combat experience of comparing units under French, British, and American on the Western Front or in other theaters is best suited for another study separate from this one.

⁸ Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 24.

⁹ By 1917, The Regular Army consisted of 180,000 men, and the National Guard consisted of 72,000 men. Rainey, 89.

¹⁰ Grotelueschen, 11.

¹¹ For more information on The National Defense Act of 1916 see: Robert B. Bruce, *A Fraternity of Arms: America & France in the Great War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 49; Grotelueschen, 11, 23.

manpower, what it lacked was modern doctrine and the equipment to see that doctrine put into action.

Open Warfare: Doctrine and Dogma

As the commander of the AEF, GEN Pershing directly influenced the doctrine employed by the AEF in the Great War.¹³ Pershing's intent for American doctrine was what the pre-war Field Service Regulations (FSR) of the US Army prescribed as "open warfare." The centerpiece of the FSR doctrine focused on quick maneuver of infantry over terrain to gain fire superiority with massed rifles.¹⁴ The FSR did not provide any reference to anything beyond brigade-level maneuvers and provided more direction on how to move fresh beef to the zone of the army than it did on integrating tanks, airplanes, or gas in combat operations.¹⁵ The infantry rifle held little power in a modern war of machine guns, tanks, mass artillery, poison gas, and airplanes.

Pershing thought himself the master of modern warfare. In reality, he believed that trench warfare was a state of mind, not a physical reality.¹⁶ Pershing stated, "our mission required an aggressive offensive based on self-reliant infantry."¹⁷ This doctrine was tantamount to the same misguided doctrine employed by the French and the Germans in 1914.¹⁸ Pershing's approach resulted in an "open warfare" doctrine that did not match the reality of war in 1917. Pershing was critical of everything the Allies did and disregarded years of hard-earned combat experience in combined arms warfare when he said that the French infantry "did not rely upon his rifle and

¹² Richard S. Faulkner, *Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 30-31. Rainey, 90.

¹³ Rainey, 97.

¹⁴ Grotelueschen, 15-16.

¹⁵ The FSR dedicates two paragraphs on the importance of troops receiving fresh beef and zero paragraphs on tanks, airplanes, or gas. War Department, *Field Service Regulations United States Army 1914* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Officer, 1918), 131.

¹⁶ Bruce, 128. Pershing, 11-12.

¹⁷ Ibid., 237.

¹⁸ Pascal Lucas, *The Evolution of Tactical Ideas in France and Germany During the War of 1914-1918* (Paris: French General Staff, 1925), 6.

made little use of its great power.”¹⁹ Pershing and Chief of Staff GEN Peyton March disagreed on how to train the AEF. In the end, March controlled stateside training and Pershing controlled all overseas training.²⁰ By 1917, both France and Germany executed tightly coordinated combined arms attacks to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative.²¹ The AEF did not.

The approved “open warfare” doctrine did not provide solutions to stark battlefield realities. AEF field commanders either adopted new approaches closer to the French method of combat or blindly followed “open warfare” doctrine.²² For American officers to admit they needed to copy any portion of Allied doctrine labeled that officer as a “defeatist” by the AEF general staff.²³ Faced with the reality of the modern battlefield, many commanders and their men developed their own doctrinal solutions.²⁴ Units that strictly adhered to American “open warfare” doctrine faced the bloody consequences in the front lines. By October 1918, pushback on “open warfare” doctrine elevated to the level of Army commanders.

At the end of October 1918, LTG Hunter Liggett, newly promoted First Army commander, ceased all attacks until development of an artillery firepower centric plan for the final drive in November 1918.²⁵ Liggett understood the problem at hand and willingly and openly followed a European method of combat with great success in the last drive of the AEF in November 1918.²⁶ Despite Pershing’s efforts, victory came through the adoption of European methods of modern warfare. To say the AEF leadership focused on the wrong aspects of doctrine

¹⁹ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the First World War* (New York: De Capo Press, 1995), 11-12, 237.

²⁰ Rainey, 97.

²¹ Ibid., 127.

²² Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 141.

²³ Bruce, 127.

²⁴ Grotelueschen, 9.

²⁵ Grotelueschen, 56-57.

²⁶ Mitchell Yockelson, *Forty-Seven Days: How Pershing's Warriors Came of Age to Defeat the German Army in World War I* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), 295-296.

and training would be an understatement.²⁷ Before 1914, it would be understandable to have doctrine not keep pace with the modernization of the battlefield, but by 1917, the doctrine of all the belligerent nations changed to keep pace with the times.²⁸

Pershing and the AEF staff developed “open warfare” training plans for all units entering the European theater and supplemented these with the *General Principles Governing the Training of Units of the American Expeditionary Forces*.²⁹ The latter stated, “The rigid attention, upright bearing, attention to detail, uncomplaining obedience to instructions required of the cadets will be required by every officer and soldier of our Armies in France.”³⁰ Pershing wanted leaders who would unquestioningly abide by American “open warfare” doctrine where American courage at the point of a bayonet would overcome all obstacles.³¹

Training and coordination between American infantry and artillery were unheard of in prewar doctrine, and “the artillery was considered an auxiliary, sometimes useful, never necessary, and sometimes a nuisance.”³² The pre-war “open warfare” doctrine describes machine guns as “emergency weapons” with limited application, and heavy artillery as something for use under special conditions and occasional employment.³³ The pre-war table of organization did not have any heavy artillery or tanks allocated for any training let alone experimentation. Leaders did not learn much from the hard-fought lessons of their allies. As late as April 1918, GEN Pershing

²⁷ The *Infantry Drill Regulations of 1911*, revised in 1917 and again in 1918, were the primary doctrinal reference for the infantry in the AEF. In reality, these regulations were not much different from the 1904 regulations with the only significant addition being five pages dedicated to trench warfare. The same manual dedicates 25 pages to the conduct of parades, inspections, and ceremonies. War Department, *Infantry Drill Regulations of the United States Army 1911 Corrected to May 6th, 1918* (Cincinnati, OH: Stewart & Kidd, 1918), 135-140.

²⁸ Bruce, 128.

²⁹ For more information on AEF training see: General Headquarters, AEF, “Program of the Training for the 2nd Division,” G5 Schools, Army Candidates School, Box 1637, File 350, “Information in Regard to Schools and Courses,” RG 120, NARA.

³⁰ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 143

³¹ Faulkner, *Pershing’s Crusaders*, 85; Grotelueschen, 22-23.

³² Grotelueschen, 23.

³³ Grotelueschen, 16.

continued to send training guidance: “Recommend for infantry, musketry, close order drill, minor tactics in open warfare situations For field artillery, driving, care of horse.”³⁴

It is not a question of whether the AEF or War Department knew of the recent developments in modern warfare. Both the AEF and the War Department knew of the evolution in warfare leading up to the entry of the United States in the Great War. In 1914, the War Department stationed additional observers in Europe augmenting those already present at various US embassies.³⁵ Observers stationed with the various Allied (and until 1916 the German) armies provided reports to the US Department of War on the latest developments in weapons and tactics from various fronts.³⁶ American leaders chose to ignore reality and stuck with the old American doctrine in ignorance of modern warfare.³⁷ The US entered the war with a mindset of fighting the war they wanted and not the war that was.

The Reality of Modern War 1914-1916

It was a different war from year to year, and one's reactions were completely different. The intensity changed so much that anybody who'd been out in 1914 and went home and came back in 1917, wouldn't recognize it as the same war.

— British Tommy, *They Shall Not Grow Old*

In the winter of 1914-1915, the system of defensive positions on both sides of the Western Front continued to consolidate into defensive lines and belts (see Figure 1). The failure to overcome enemy lines resulted from the significant losses in the opening stages of the war, lack of materiel, and the harsh European winter.³⁸ To defeat these elaborate defensive fortifications, it took a period of trial and error as each power developed doctrine and technology

³⁴ Robert H. Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 9.

³⁵ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 22-23. Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 4.

³⁶ Grotelueschen, 13-14. Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 23-24.

³⁷ The AEF answer was to structure divisions to have twice the amount of men assigned per division as their Allied counterparts. Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 167.

³⁸ Pascal, 3.

to overcome the opposing forces. From 1915-1916, all sides mobilized their countries for a new type of mass industrial warfare.³⁹ With the stabilization of sources of supply came an effort to develop new technologies to break the deadlock on the Western Front including the incorporation of airplanes, tanks, and chemical warfare.⁴⁰ The belligerents learned through action throughout 1914-1916 buying time until ready to defeat the opposing force.

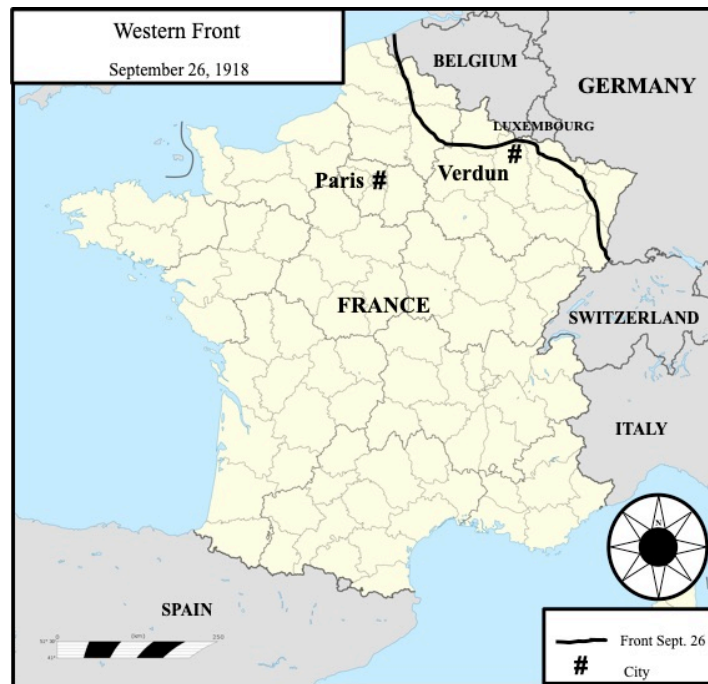


Figure 1: Western Front First Day of Meuse Argonne. Original graphic from author. French Departments and Regions, Wikipedia, accessed April 9, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marseille#/media/File:France_location_map-Regions_and_departements-2016.

Significant advancements in warfare incorporated the application of the science and art of indirect fires in support of maneuver. Firepower centric doctrine was common to all sides by late 1916 and perfected by the German and French forces by 1917. Gone are the days of unsupported mass infantry assaults and the failure to use supporting arms. Modern artillery could easily defeat infantry attacks on a fortified position, and by the end of the war, estimates show that 75% of all

³⁹ By the time the AEF arrived on the Western Front in 1917, British and French supply rates and equipment availability were no longer an issue. Bruce, 97-98; Pascal, 40, 62.

⁴⁰ Grotelueschen, 13.

casualties were a result of artillery fire.⁴¹ The greatest lesson learned by the French staff was that new doctrine required “more method and less rapidity than in the past.”⁴² Between 1914 and 1915, it is evident that the paradigm of infantry-centric operations shifted to firepower-centric operations.

Firepower Centric Combined Arms Warfare: 1917-1918

By 1917, both Allied and Central Powers favored a firepower-centric doctrine synchronized through combined arms warfare.⁴³ With wartime production at its peak, the front lines received the much-needed materiel to prosecute a firepower-centric doctrine. Overcoming the enemy required more than just raw courage and the offensive will to win.⁴⁴ The Allied armies recognized the “principle of the superiority of means” in the use of all synchronized arms to defeat the enemy.⁴⁵ The doctrine of firepower reigned supreme on the Western Front.

French vs. British Doctrinal Differences

Even though the French army and British army were both on the Allied side, both armies executed tactical operations distinctly separate in their planning and execution. The factors contributing to these distinct and separate military doctrines were the pre-war composition of their militaries, the nature of their respective cultures, and the manufacturing capacity of each nation to sustain a war. In order to understand how the AEF fought it is important to understand whom they learned lessons from and how they incorporated or did not incorporate that doctrine into American “open warfare” doctrine.

The most substantial difference between France and Britain was the cultural difference

⁴¹ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 23.

⁴² Pascal, 182.

⁴³ Pascal, 3.

⁴⁴ For more information on the complexity of German defensive works see: Griffith, 10.

⁴⁵ Pascal, 179.

between the characteristics of a republic and a monarchy's military culture.⁴⁶ The French republican system supported the development of individual initiative and in pushing down responsibilities to lower levels of the military hierarchy.⁴⁷ The pre-war French culture of maintaining a conscripted army ensured that there was a sizeable trained manpower pool to pull from in the event of war.⁴⁸ The British aristocratic culture maintained birthright and one's place in society as the main discriminator between leaders and soldiers.⁴⁹ The British system was more apt to centralize decision-making and not allow individual initiative at the lower levels of the army.⁵⁰ By 1917, both French and British doctrine was firepower-centric combined arms warfare.

French Doctrine by 1917

By 1917, the French Army was the most effective Allied force on the Western Front. The French integration of artillery fires with infantry attacks built on the mantra "artillery conquers, infantry occupies."⁵¹ Overwhelming preparatory fires would render an enemy useless to defend positions, and French infantry would maneuver to occupy those positions and then consolidate those gains. The French incorporated the "bite and hold" strategy to preserve precious manpower and to best utilize resources to gain success. The conscription system provided the French army a large trained manpower pool to draw a large army.⁵² Through attrition, the French were running

⁴⁶ General Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington once compared the French system to the British system and declared, "The French system of conscription brings together a fair sample of all classes; ours is composed of the scum of the earth — the mere scum of the earth." Arthur Wellesley, "Quotes of Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington," Wikiquote, November 13, 1813, accessed November 1, 2018, https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Arthur_Wellesley,_1st_Duke_of_Wellington

⁴⁷ "The officers and the NCO's must make a good use of initiative by choosing the best means of accomplishing the desired end." French General Staff, 11-12. To this point leaders like General Charles Mangin, commander of Tenth Army, stated, "I approve in advance of every act of initiative, no matter what the result may be." Pascal, 154.

⁴⁸ For more information of the use on disciplined initiative in the French Army see: Pascal, 86-87; French General Staff, 11-12.

⁴⁹ For more information on the provinciality of the British officer corps see: Griffith, 6.

⁵⁰ Martin Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma: German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 149, 177-178.

⁵¹ French General Staff, 315.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5.

out of raw manpower to serve at the front. Firepower doctrine was as much of a necessity as it was an effective means of winning on the battlefield.

The French army matched firepower-centric doctrine with revised infantry doctrine suited for the trenches and maneuver warfare.⁵³ French infantry doctrine developed from the 1914 attack en masse to a system called “position warfare” and subsequently “maneuver warfare.”⁵⁴ French infantry doctrine combined the use of specialists with specialized equipment to overcome enemy defenses.⁵⁵ “The best results will be obtained, especially on the offensive, only when three primary conditions are fulfilled: The weapons must act in combination with one another, the supply of stores and ammunition must be assured, and the men must be expert in the use of these weapons.”⁵⁶ To the French infantry, the rifle and bayonet were the weapons of second resort.

British Doctrine by 1917

The British army was enamored with the 1914 spirit of the offense and fell subject to the same pre-war belief that a dedicated infantryman armed with the rifle reigned supreme on the battlefield.⁵⁷ By 1915, the British Army hastily recruited new men to replace losses, but these new armies were “characterized by a low standard of training and by inexperience. The effect of this was to make the army capable of only the simplest strategy.”⁵⁸ For the British, the war remained focused on frontal assaults with the bayonet supported by artillery fire.⁵⁹ Keeping

⁵³ French General Staff, 330-332.

⁵⁴ For more information on the French evolution of tactics see: Pascal, 96.

⁵⁵ French General Staff, 330.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 330.

⁵⁷ The one significant British doctrinal development was the integration of tanks into combined arms warfare, but even then, the tank remained subordinate to infantry. Samuels, 159; Griffiths, 138-159.

⁵⁸ The British did not benefit from previous experience nor have enough personnel to fight a war and train a new army simultaneously. Samuels, 156, 161.

⁵⁹ Aristocratic traditions and the regimental system further inculcated the strict adherence to centralized decision making within the British army. Samuels, 177.

British firepower doctrine simple but still within a framework of “artillery conquers, infantry occupies.”⁶⁰

The nature of British military culture and the desire to keep tactics simple and to centralize control hampered the development of British wartime doctrine to keep pace with German and French doctrine.⁶¹ Significant aristocratic and pre-war military systems detracted from the British army’s ability to execute complex operations or to decentralize their command and control. Maintaining a citizenry of former soldiers provided a marked advantage to both Germany and France had large manpower pools to rapidly establish new armies. The United States faced the same challenges the British faced in the development of a functional modern military.

Birth and Evolution of the AEF

Much like the British Empire, the United States faced significant challenges in building a military out of almost nothing. As one British trainer stated upon seeing an American unit for the first time, “My God! This is Kitchener’s army all over again.”⁶² MG Leonard Wood said the “rush, hurry, and confusion” building a new army through the National Defense and Selective Service Acts resulted in an absence of a functional command structure.⁶³ Failure to convert a nineteenth-century military to a modern industrial army before entering the war had lasting effects on the performance of the AEF. The small professional RA augmented with a larger state administered NG did not result in a modern military structure.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “It tended to encourage soldiers to regard the battalion, and not the brigade or the division, as the true center of authority and therefore tactical planning.” Griffith, 6, 11, 15.

⁶¹ Samuels, 177.

⁶² “Kitchener’s Army” is the hastily organized British Army of 1915 that made it to the front in 1916 and subsequently destroyed on the Somme. Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 140.

⁶³ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 29.

⁶⁴ In the opinion of many Regular officers, the provinciality on the National Guard “handicaps [them] at the start and...valuable time is needed to eliminate it.” Other Regular officers implied that the National Guard had bad habits “...which had to be unlearned before the training in the newer ideas of warfare could begin.” Boyd, 15.

The great myth sold by the US government and the military to the American people was that a draft NA was the equivalent of the RA or the NG.⁶⁵ The confidence of the American public in all branches of the Army had to remain high in order to maintain public support for the war. To cement the idea that US units possessed the same combat capabilities as their peer units, the US government realized it had to propagandize to the American people. “Americans needed to know militarily, they had to understand that a draftee army was as good as a volunteer force – whether true or not – and the draftee needed to believe that he was.”⁶⁶ The myth of the great AEF preexisted any practical application of arms and it existed as a myth to keep public support up for the war.

	Division	Branch	Regiments	Rifles	Automatic Rifles	Machine Guns	Days Training in Line	Days Defensive Duty	Days in Battle	Total Time at the Front	# Soldiers at M-A	Killed in M-A	Wounded in M-A	Missing in M-A	% Casualties
1	RA	16th Infantry	M1903	Chauchat	Hotchkiss	47	148	28	223	32	2662	136	1,237	362	65%
35	NG	137th Infantry	M1903	Chauchat	Hotchkiss	37	43	30	110	7	2800	177	946	40	41%
79	NA	316th Infantry	M1917	BAR	Browning	0	29	18	47	12	2529	429	1,377	233	80%

Figure 2: Unit Comparison of the 16th, 137th, and 316th Infantry in the Meuse-Argonne. Graphic by author from primary resources cited in bibliography.

⁶⁵ Boyd, 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 9.

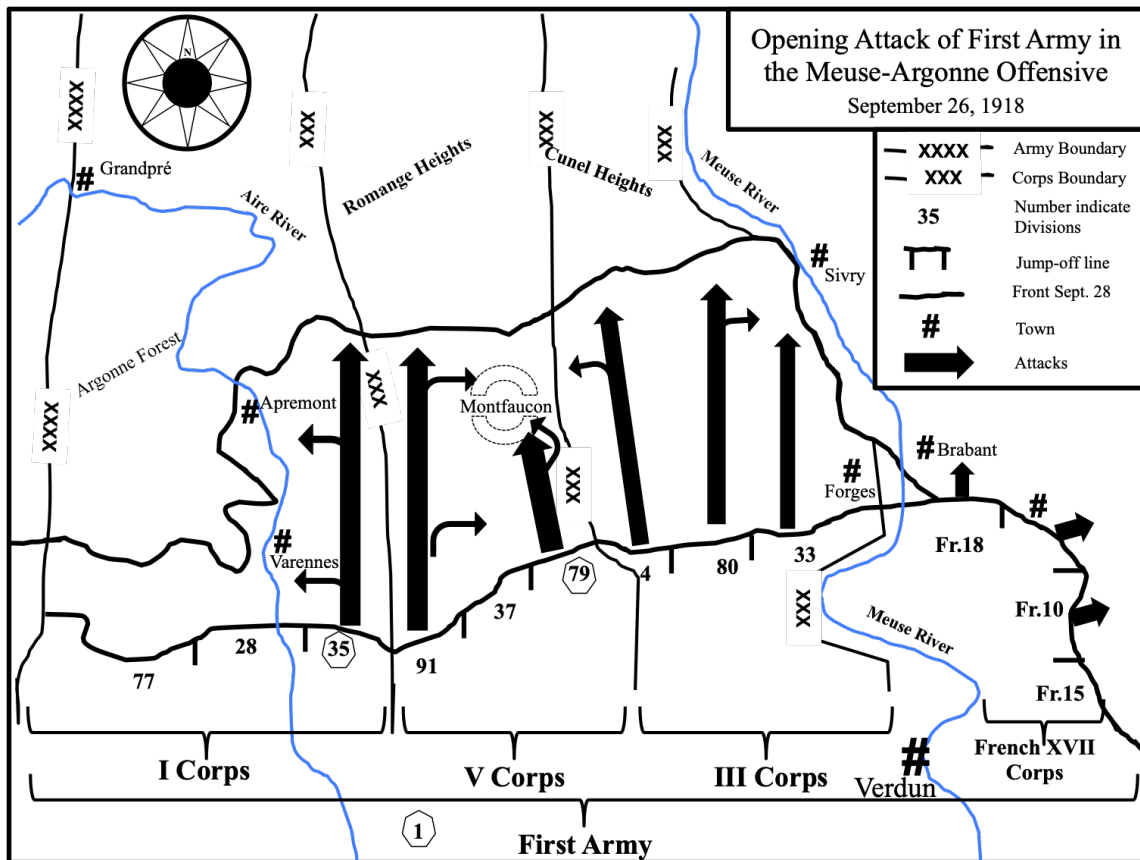


Figure 3: Map of American Expeditionary Force, First Army Attack into the Meuse-Argonne. 1st, 35th, and 79th Division start positions highlighted. Graphic by author.

Tension Growing in the Ranks

Almost immediately at the outbreak of war, tensions arose between the three branches of the Army. The issues between the RA, NG, and NA caused headaches for senior Army leaders. GEN March remarked that, “There had grown a feeling of irritation and friction...between the different elements comprising the army.”⁶⁷ In response to these growing issues, Pershing issued General Order 73 creating one Army on August 7, 1918.⁶⁸ It was an Army in name, but still three very discernable branches. One physical sign of this exchange were orders that required National Army and National Guard soldiers were to change their NA or NG collar insignia with a “U.S.” Even this small physical token could not change the mindsets of many men in the AEF: “The

⁶⁷ Boyd, 16.

⁶⁸ AEF Headquarters officially removed any references to separate branches in order to develop a greater army organizational identity. Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 220.

regulars speak slightingly of the national guard and the guard called the national army conscripts. Even within the regular army, there is a caste of castes, the West Point group; these conspire against their fellows who come up from the ranks.”⁶⁹ Despite orders, each branch developed its own identity and even with the influx of replacements each maintained its own identity throughout the war.

The cleverly worded National Defense Act of 1916 allowed Wilson to bring in NG soldiers as individuals in an effort to negate the power of NG leaders and governors. Once individuals from preexisting NG units entered federal service, the US Army renumbered and organized into the regionally aligned RA, NG, and NA divisions.⁷⁰ The RA competent entirely controlled the manning and training negating influence of the NG. The profound lack of available RA soldiers meant that the NA maintained the highest proportion of draftees throughout the war. The AEF was “one army” in name only. The influences on and development of each organization gave each formation its own unique characteristics. The divisional and regimental numbering system further undermined any effort to make “one army” out of three separate branches.⁷¹

The fear of removal from leadership and sent for reclassification at the Casual Officers’ Depot at Blois, France inculcated the AEF officer corps in fear of losing their positions for any misstep.⁷² As Dr. Richard Faulkner points out, “one of the greatest ironies of the reclassification system was that while officers sent to Blois because of their lack of aggressiveness and initiative, the fear that the depot inspired worked against encouraging those attributes within the AEF’s junior officers.”⁷³ Officers lived in a climate of fear because of Pershing’s exacting standards and

⁶⁹ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 220.

⁷⁰ RA divisions numbered 1 through 8, NG divisions numbered 26-42, and NA divisions numbered 76-100. This stratification between units continued down to the regimental level as RA regiments numbers 1-30, NG 100 series, and the NA 301 and up. Stallings, 377.

⁷¹ The men and more importantly the media referred to themselves as RA, NG, NA throughout the war. Boyd, 26.

⁷² Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 185-186.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 190.

adherence to his instructions, which lend themselves to micromanagement and stifling the initiative by junior leaders.⁷⁴

Adding to the fear of removal was the constant absence of officers and NCOs from AEF training to attend AEF schools to serve as instructors in AEF schools.⁷⁵ As MG Edward Lewis of the 7th Division said, “The action of superior authorities in taking away large numbers of officers of all grades, and enlisted men, to attend school and receive instruction absolutely destroyed all results in the way of instruction on the companies and battalions.”⁷⁶ Even George Marshall remarked that the NA units bound for the Meuse-Argonne were “absolutely scalped” of their officers “in order that the next class at Langres [the AEF training center] might start on scheduled time.”⁷⁷ Pershing’s attempt to build an army in the middle of a war meant that units routinely did not complete unit-level training due to Pershing’s obsession in making the AEF look “more professional.”

The focus on attending training was one major issue each unit in the AEF faced; the other was the quality of instruction. The lack of qualified instructors meant that for many courses recent graduates of those courses were instructors. In addition to taking leaders from units to attend AEF schools, the schools themselves required a large number of officers and soldiers to operate. “Officers feared to make good grades in school because of the danger of becoming an instructor.” The result of these programs was that “the instructors generally were officers who never had active service at the front and their theories were sometimes as complexing (sic) to the veterans just in from the line.”⁷⁸ The early arriving RA divisions at least benefitted from immersive

⁷⁴ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 194.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 174.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 175.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 173.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 175.

instruction with seasoned French Army units and fully implemented French methods of warfare.⁷⁹ Over time, the AEF grew wary of anything other than “open warfare,” and by August of 1918, the AEF slowly worked to remove all foreign instructors from courses.

The Good: The 16th Infantry, 1st Division, Regular Army

May 1917 found the 16th Infantry recently returned from the Punitive Expedition and posted at Camp Newton D. Baker, TX. The regiment filled out with eager volunteers bringing the seasoned core of officers and soldiers to wartime strength.⁸⁰ In six weeks, the regiment integrated the volunteers with the long-serving soldiers of the Regular Army.⁸¹ The War Department selected the 16th Infantry to move to New York with the other elements of the 1st Expeditionary Division arriving on June 8, 1917. The 1st Expeditionary Division consisted of the best RA officers and men available for overseas duty.⁸²

On arrival in St. Nazaire on June 26 the regiment disembarked and moved to the main AEF training camps at Gondrecourt.⁸³ The French 47th Chasseurs Alpins provided trainers to the 16th Infantry training the integration of weapons and tactics according to the latest firepower-centric doctrine.⁸⁴ The British limited their contribution to bayonet training.⁸⁵ The utility of training in successive phases built confidence in the leaders, their men, and their equipment. The

⁷⁹ Regimental Chaplain, *The Story of the Sixteenth in France* (Frankfurt, DE: Martin Flock, 1919), 12-13.

⁸⁰ The Society of the First Division, *History of the First Division During the World War 1917-1919* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1922), 2.

⁸¹ Steven E. Clay, *Blood, and Sacrifice: The History of the 16th Infantry Regiment From the Civil War Through the Gulf War* (Wheaton, IL: The Cantigny First Division Foundation, 2001), 95.

⁸² By the time the regiment sailed for France on June 14, it had consisted of 73 of the 112 authorized officers and 2,523 of the 3,720 soldiers. While short on overall personnel, the regiment benefitted from the high proportion of Regular Army men and willing volunteers. Clay, 95.

⁸³ The Society of the First Division, 7.

⁸⁴ Clay, 98-99.

⁸⁵ The Society of the First Division, 21.

final phase of training attached the 1st Division to a French Corps for service alongside the French army providing further training in the practical application of firepower centric doctrine.⁸⁶

GEN Pershing was not pleased that the entire 1st Division adhered to French style doctrine and not an American “open warfare” doctrine, but there was little he could do considering the distraction of building the rest of the AEF.⁸⁷ Over the three-month training period, the 16th Regiment built a cohesive fighting unit led by competent officers.⁸⁸ After observing the training of the 1st Division, GEN Pershing and the AEF Headquarters drafted *Program of the Training for the 2nd Division*, which served as the foundational document for all subsequent divisions arriving in France. This document curtailed portions of the 1st Division training program in order to shorten the training timeline and doubled down on the importance of “open warfare” doctrine.

The 1st Division is the only division that completed GEN Pershing prescribed three-month approved training cycle.⁸⁹ The 1st Division, unlike any other unit in the AEF, had the benefit of a core of seasoned Regular Army leaders, it completed all prescribed collective training, and it received most of its training from the French Army. The result of these experiences is that the 1st Division adopted French-style firepower centric doctrine.⁹⁰ George C. Marshall, at the time a member of the 1st Division staff, remarked that GHQ “did not approve of the French methods of instruction, but did not order us to discontinue them.”⁹¹

The greatest strength of the 16th Infantry Regiment was its core of seasoned soldiers from the outset of the war. “These were the men that enabled the Sixteenth to hold on. The ranks

⁸⁶ Clay, 99.

⁸⁷ For more on the problems Pershing faced in building the AEF see: Rainey, 92.

⁸⁸ Clay, 98-99.

⁸⁹ Grotelueschen, 59.

⁹⁰ The division also benefitted from all of the 1st Division artillery formations completing the entire prescribed training for artillery units and able to support the division, unlike most divisions who did not benefit from organic support. Ibid., 59-60.

⁹¹ Ibid., 62, 69.

thinned out; many officers had fallen. Then it was that the old regulars showed the results of their long training. Without hesitation, they would assume command of companies or even battalions, and frequently when the sergeant or corporal who was leading the troops killed, another would leap forward and take his place.”⁹² Throughout the war, the 16th Regiment benefitted from a larger core of professional soldiers than regiments of the NG or NA. This is the most significant characteristic attributing to the success of the 16th Regiment in combat.

The 1st Division established firepower centric warfare before stepping off to relieve the 35th Division in the Meuse-Argonne offensive.⁹³ MG Charles Summerall, commander of the 1st Division, understood what it took to win on a modern European battlefield. As the former commander of the 67th Field Artillery Brigade and then the 1st Field Artillery Brigade, he understood liaison operations and the importance of indirect fires planning.⁹⁴ Set-piece attacks with firepower support and continued liaison between elements were the hallmarks of the 1st Division. The 16th Regiment benefitted from a command structure that allowed the regiment to utilize French firepower centric methods of warfare and the ability to make decisions at the regimental and battalion levels.

In the Meuse-Argonne, the 16th faced the same challenges to supply, the lack of air cover, and reduced artillery support that the rest of the AEF face. Unlike other units, they utilized their infantry support equipment like the 37mm cannon and the Stokes mortar system, with significant effect to support the infantry advance.⁹⁵ Machine guns crews bounded forward as infantry advanced moved to intermediate objectives, consolidated gains, and then reorganized before moving out again. This method of maneuver allowed for maintenance of command and

⁹² Regimental Chaplain, 54.

⁹³ By September 1918, the 16th Infantry Regiment consisted of a core of seasoned officers and NCOs but reduced in strength from combat operations and recently filled with new draftees to replace losses. At the start of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the 1st Division was the reserve of the First Army. The Society of the First Division, 111.

⁹⁴ Grotelueschen, 135-136.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 134.

control and integration of fires and supporting arms. Casualties mounted, but the 16th Regiment relied on its core of seasoned veterans to pull the unit through.

The 16th Regiment achieved many victories on the battlefields of France, but much of what it achieved is due to the factors that surrounded the creation of the 1st Infantry Division. Effective units in the AEF benefited from senior leaders who shielded them from the wrath of GEN Pershing, effectively implemented French firepower doctrine, maintained a higher proportion of volunteers and a core of seasoned soldiers who could rapidly train replacements. These factors distinctly set regiments like the 16th apart from other regiments in the AEF. The characteristics of units fitting this profile are predominately RA units within the 1st Infantry Division. No other units within the AEF benefitted from a set of factors conducive to success than regiments within the 1st Division and especially not units within the NG or NA.

The Bad: The 137th Infantry, 35th Division, National Guard

The 35th Division of the AEF is unique in that its pre-war training and employment contributed to its failures on the Western Front as much as any other factor. The National Guard of 1916 was part citizens' militia and part social men's club rather than a well-trained combat force. With little to no oversight at the Federal and State level, the National Guard varied in each locality.⁹⁶ These units existed on paper as state-level regiments but in reality, were individual companies spread across the vast expanse of both states. In September 1917, these units drew together at Camp Doniphan on Fort Sill, OK to form into new battalions, regiments, and brigades.

At Camp Doniphan, the training gaps in the National Guard system resulted in a lower state of combat readiness. Training devolved back to training based on Cuban or Philippine experience and heavily relied on the FSR and ISR. The National Guard also has its fair share of

⁹⁶ The 35th Division consisted of units drawn together from across the Missouri and Kansas National Guard 14,287 from Missouri and 9,781 from Kansas. Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 1; Stallings, 377.

issues due to the continued election of officers by the men of the NG.⁹⁷ It took until August 1917 for the 35th Division to receive *Training Bulletin 656: Infantry Training* when the division switched to training for “open warfare.”⁹⁸ *Training Bulletin 656* governed the rest of the training and introduced the division to the concept of trench warfare. In one aspect, it was worse than the division had any prior experience since it immediately fell back on that experience instead of preparing for the realities of modern war.

The fear of relief from command permeated the senior leaders of the 35th Division. It was clear that GEN Pershing and the AEF Headquarters wanted to replace most of the senior NG officers with RA officers. Almost any excuse would result in the relief of NG commanders, and while some of these beliefs are valid for age or incompetence, many of these were reliefs in order to put RA West Point men into command. Most division commanders of the AEF could not stand up or give an honest opinion to GEN Pershing, and with already slim odds of surviving command, few NG leaders were willing to risk their careers.⁹⁹ The friction between the RA officers and National Guard officers trickled down to all levels and resulted in factionalism that plagued the AEF throughout the war.¹⁰⁰

Things did not get any easier for the 137th Regiment as it arrived in France and prepared to enter the front lines. Out of the seventeen NG divisions embarked for France, only four divisions received thirty days of training, three received twenty-five days of training, and four received fifteen days to zero days of training before fighting at the front.¹⁰¹ The remaining six NG divisions were never made it to the front in division form and instead served as Service of Supply

⁹⁷ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

¹⁰⁰ An external RA inspector informed the leadership of the 35th Division that “they were too familiar with their men” and that “This division bears all the earmarks of a National Guard Division.” It was not a harmonious relationship between equal partners in the AEF. Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 220-221; Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 132.

¹⁰¹ Stallings, 377.

Depots, training depots, or were broke apart and sent as replacements to units from across the AEF.¹⁰²

The 137th Regiment arrived in France and immediately set to the training scheduled outlined by AEF Headquarters. Instead of conducting collective training with their respective units, a high proportion of officers, and specialty positions sent off to complete the various AEF schools.¹⁰³ The 137th completed the AEF prescribed training in France and then spent nearly a month under British command and then another month under French command. This assignment provided the 35th Division with almost three months of training time before heading into the Meuse-Argonne offensive.¹⁰⁴ Switching back and forth under different training doctrine resulted in a loss in proficiency and a failure to develop cohesion. Variance in training aside, in comparison to other units in the NG and NA this was a considerable amount of training.

While the timeline for training appears to meet the standards outlined by AEF Headquarters, there were significant shortfalls in execution heading into combat. The majority of the division did not shower or receive clean uniforms in a month, and the division was still in light summer uniforms instead of the winter woolen uniforms.¹⁰⁵ Noticeably absent were ammunition, air support, and artillery. “Into the biggest battle in American History they were sent, there being only 20 rounds of pistol ammunition to the man, and less than 50 grenades to the company. And their shotgun shells were so old and sodden with rain they threw away these guns after attempting the first shot.”¹⁰⁶ The lack of supply extended to combat necessities like hand

¹⁰² Service of Supply (SOS) was a major headquarters in the AEF that managed sustainment. Assignment to an SOS Depot meant that those assigned served in sustainment roles behind the lines. Stallings, 377.

¹⁰³ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division* 12-13.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the redundant training of the 35th Division see: Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 12-13.

¹⁰⁵ For more on the failures of the AEF logistics system see: Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ Ben Hudson, *Company E 137th Infantry A.E.F. 1917-1919* (National World War I Museum Archive 2009.87.1), 38.

grenades and machine guns.¹⁰⁷ Lack of supply did not make for an ideal start to offensive operations.

The 137th Regiment faced significant difficulties in its first major offensive operation of the war.¹⁰⁸ These problems were a result of the AEF's failures to plan operations properly and to provide logistical support to the AEF. The AEF Headquarters had a habit of holding all the information in the headquarters and not sending it out the subordinate elements for fear of operational secrecy.¹⁰⁹ The result of this action was that lower echelons were never able to synchronize operations or provide the right amount of logistic support to the front line units. The desynchronized the opening stages of the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Without the right supplies or the right support, the 35th Division threw itself at the German defenses in the Argonne forest. While the fierce German resistance broke the division, the lack of able leadership in the AEF contributed to the failure.

The fear of relief of command by GEN Pershing ran rampant in the AEF. MG Peter Traub, commander of the 35th Division, was no exception to this mindset, and five days before launching the Meuse-Argonne offensive, he removed both brigade commanders and all four infantry regiment commanders from their positions.¹¹⁰ The fear of not adhering the mantra of “open warfare” resulted in the continued removal of untrusted officers and unplanned unsupported uncoordinated attacks against a dogged outmanned foe. The new leaders did not know their formations, and no one seemed to know the plan of attack.

¹⁰⁷ Geoffrey Wawro, *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2018), 323.

¹⁰⁸ The 137th Infantry Regiment consisted of pre-war National Guardsmen as well as a few hundred-draft replacements in the 35th Division in the III Corps of First Army. Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 25.

¹⁰⁹ Carl Ristine, “Notes on Recent Operations,” November 20, 1918, 235.50.1, box 16, Thirty-fifth Division historical, entry 1241, RG120.

¹¹⁰ The exchange between MG Traub relieving BG Charles Martin is very telling when Traub said to Martin, “In your case, I said that you had excellent tactical ability and the qualities of leadership, but that you lacked force, and as a result, the order was issued.” Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 23-24.

The 35th Division's Meuse-Argonne attack was a debacle from the start. MG Traub did not have an appreciation for divisional planning and adding to this was the short amount of time to prepare the division to attack.¹¹¹ The secrecy in planning at AEF headquarters provided less than thirty-six hours of notification between receiving the orders to attack and stepping off. There were only enough copies of orders and maps for battalion commanders leaving company-level leaders to try to memorize orders and maps. The rush to move forces into place in time for the start of the offensive further decimated the troops.

The AEF Headquarters and 35th Headquarters failed to properly coordinate artillery and air support for the infantry once the attack passed into German lines. After the initial bombardment, the division easily captured Vaquois, but once moving out of Vaquois they were out of range of artillery support.¹¹² No provision in the plan provided any unit in the division artillery support past the first phase of the battle. Lack of practical training or experience decreased the amount of artillery support the 137th received to one fourth of what the 1st Division.¹¹³ On top of these challenges, the artillery brigade commander, BG Lucien Berry thought that airplane spotting for artillery was "no damn good."¹¹⁴ Into the teeth of the German defenses the 137th marched unsupported.¹¹⁵

When the replacement commanders told MG Traub that the division was stuck and taking enormous casualties, his only guidance was "it is General Pershing's order; it must be done."¹¹⁶ The 35th Division threw itself at German lines for four days with the result of over 6,000

¹¹¹ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 133.

¹¹² Ferrell, *America's Deadliest Battle: Meuse-Argonne 1918*, 59.

¹¹³ The gunners of the 35th Division fired one to two rounds a minute in comparison to the gunners of the 1st Division who fired a rate of ten rounds a minute. Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 67.

¹¹⁴ Ferrell, *America's Deadliest Battle: Meuse-Argonne 1918*, 67.

¹¹⁵ For more on the failures of the 137th see: Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 66.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

casualties with some battalions reduced to 200 men and led by lieutenants.¹¹⁷ The 137th was not prepared for this style of warfare and failed to bring artillery spotters, air coordination panels, shortwave radio, or even telephone wire.¹¹⁸ The 137th and the 35th Division resorted to runners for coordination. The greatest failure of GEN Pershing and adherent of the mindless “open warfare” doctrine was the continued call for more vigorous frontal attacks against prepared positions. The result was unnecessary lives wasted for minimal gain.

By the morning of September 28, 1918, the 137th sat decimated and stalled near the town of Varennes. The constant call to move forward against staunch German defenders was impossible.¹¹⁹ With no artillery support, no resupply, and no planned medical evacuation the men of the 137th struggled to hold the ground gained in the Montrebeau Woods.¹²⁰ The immaturity of the AEF caught up to the 35th with devastating effect.¹²¹ Traub continued to call for attacks into Montrebeau Woods and on the morning of September 29, 1918, the entire division went to pieces. The 1st Division alerted and marched to the relief of the beleaguered 35th Division.¹²²

The Meuse-Argonne offensive in its initial stage was a complete debacle. After the battle, one Doughboy put it best: “They ought to be court-martialed and shot, every sonofabitch from Traub on down. By God they oughta jail those bastards for murder, taking us in there without artillery support.”¹²³ The NG division did not have the cohesion to be an effective force, it did not have the leadership to lead it in combat properly, and it did not have the proper support to ensure

¹¹⁷ Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 103-104.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 66.

¹¹⁹ Ferrell, *America's Deadliest Battle: Meuse-Argonne 1918*, 61.

¹²⁰ The 1st Division found abandoned stacks of functional weapons and equipment where men of the 35th Division cast them off in their race to get to the safety of the rear. Ibid., 63-64.

¹²¹ For more information on the 35th's failures see: Carl Ristine, “Notes on Recent Operations,” November 20, 1918, 235.50.1, box 16, Thirty-fifth Division historical, entry 1241, RG 120. LTC Peck submitted a report on October 26, 1918 that laid out seventeen points of failure of the 35th Division. For more on LTC Peck's report see: Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 111-112.

¹²² Officers of the 1st Division sought for leaders of the 35th to conduct a sector handover with and found that, “The men said they didn't know where their officers were.” Wawro, 370.

¹²³ Wawro, 328.

its success. Instead of facing the facts of the matter, the reaction of members of the AEF headquarters echoed the sentiment that, “This is exactly what one expects of a National Guard division.”¹²⁴ Even with the collapse of the 35th Division on the night of September 28, 1918, GEN Pershing ordered calls to every division commander on September 28, 1918, to “tell him he must push on regardless of men or guns, night or day.”¹²⁵ The AEF teetered on the edge of chaos.

The Ugly: The 316th Infantry, 79th Division, National Army

The NA program was a debacle from the start. The United States was not ready for the influx of volunteers, let alone the influx of draftees. The compound effect of inadequate training facilities, lack of equipment, and the struggle of making soldiers out of civilians resulted in NA units that were not ready for front line service. Adding to the problems of the NA were issues with finding leaders to lead the new army of draftees. Outside of the 1st Division, the rest of the AEF faced shortened training timelines due to military emergencies at the front but in most cases a due to self-induced decisions by the AEF leadership. Under no circumstances were NA training camps prepared for the influx of men to the colors.¹²⁶

The 316th Infantry formed at Camp Meade, MD on August 30, 1917. The majority of officers were newly minted officers from the Officer Training Camps, and the men were primarily draftees from mid-Pennsylvania.¹²⁷ Leadership manning of the 79th Division was like that of most NA divisions, thrown together from spare personnel in the RA and newly trained officers. In the case of the 316th Infantry, a skeleton leadership formation reported a few days before the draftees arrived at Camp Meade. Newly minted officers from the three-month Officer’s Training Camp and NCOs promoted out of the ranks of the RA formed the core of the battalion

¹²⁴ Wawro, 371.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 329.

¹²⁶ The majority of NA camps were built from the ground up and were bereft of barracks, sanitary facilities, potable water, and training facilities. J. Frank Barber, *History of the Seventy-Ninth Division A.E.F. During the World War 1917-1919* (Lancaster, PA: Steinman & Steinman, 1922), 18.

¹²⁷ Barber, 22.

and company leadership. The training camps furnished enough officers, but the RA could not release enough prior service personnel to man NCO positions in the 79th.¹²⁸ The only long-serving RA personnel assigned to many of these units was the brigade and regimental commanders laterally transferred from the RA.¹²⁹ On the company and battalion level, this meant that only three months of training separated the men from the officers in experience.

Officers with little to no military experience identified other men with no experience to assist them as NCOs. “The officers earned their pay those days – drilling, marching, teaching; organizing a company out of a mob; training a shipping clerk to know the difference between a service-record and an invoice; raising an iron-moulder [sic] to be a supply sergeant; and turning a star pugilist into a mess-sergeant.”¹³⁰ At the battalion and below levels of the 316th, the unit made do with amateurs at all levels of the organization.

In line with priorities of GEN Pershing and pre-war military thinking, rifle marksmanship was the centerpiece of training for the 79th Division. Even though the 79th built a full trench system adjacent to Camp Meade, MD, “This trench system was a marvel to behold. The Kriemhild Stellung was a dingy ditch beside it. It was a masterpiece, a work of art, and, of course, nobody thought of profaning it by using it. So there it lay in lonesome grandeur in those Meade woods and plains, the apple of the engineer's eye, too sacred for a vulgar doughboy to desecrate, except when it needed fixin.”¹³¹ Mastering the rifle continued as the centerpiece of training even as the RA units faced the grim realities of the Western Front. “Orders from G.H.Q. across the sea

¹²⁸ Less than 1.5% of an NA division consisted of RA officers or NCOs. There were not enough RA men to pull into NA formations to provide a skeleton of a unit to fill out with new men. Boyd, 8.

¹²⁹ Barber, 20.

¹³⁰ Carl E. Glock, *History of the 316th Regiment in the World War 1918* (Pittsburgh, PA: Unknown, 1919), 10; Berber, 24.

¹³¹ Berber, 12.

had warned American commanders to allow nothing to overshadow the importance of the rifle as the infantryman's main reliance in combat."¹³²

Of primary importance to the RA leadership was the training of the NA through the AEF school system. The various stateside schools intended to train up the new NCOs and specialists in the basics of soldiering and leading. The intent was to catch the NA formations up with experience of the RA and NG by schooling. Without men with real experience, leaders defaulted to using the IDR and the FSR as the documents to train off.¹³³ NA formations were more susceptible to "open warfare" and the pre-war doctrine due to lack of anything else to reference. The NA regressed due to lack of properly educated trainers and blind obedience to old doctrine. "A lot of this knowledge was later salvaged with the barracks bags."¹³⁴

Between August and June 1917, the 79th Division trained over 95,000 men at Camp Meade.¹³⁵ Throughout its time in training, the 79th received orders to transfer thousands of trained men out of the division to backfill other divisions training in the US or to send replacements to units in France. As early as October 1917 the War Department started reassigning men out of the 79th Division. In the first culling of the 79th, the 316th Regiment lost 1,000 men, and the division lost 5,000 to reassignment. Essentially the 316th never got to train on anything other than basic marksmanship because it was always dealing with training new draftees. The once prided regionalism changed as new drafts increasingly came from other states or were foreign born Ohio.¹³⁶ When the 79th Division sailed for France its 27,000 men

¹³² Boyd, 16.

¹³³ Ibid., 13.

¹³⁴ Many of the doctrine books went into the garbage. This passage makes an analogy between the doctrine books and the maligned issued barracks bag. The doughboys commonly threw out the barracks bag in order to lighten the load of the combat pack. Ibid., 14.

¹³⁵ William T. Walker Jr., *Betrayal at Little Gibraltar: A German Fortress, a Treacherous American General, and the Battle to End World War I* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 86.

¹³⁶ Foreign-born doughboys comprised 15-18% of all men in the NA. Glock, 15; Boyd, 13.

complement consisted of 15,000 newly drafted men with less than two months of training.¹³⁷ The constant drain in human resources to backfill other units, paired with the shortage of equipment and the lack of experienced leaders meant that the division did not mature into any cohesive unit.

The 79th Division commander, MG Joseph Kuhn, was a RA officer assigned by Pershing to command one of the newly formed NA divisions. MG Kuhn graduated from West Point 1885 with Pershing.¹³⁸ Commissioned into the Corps of Engineers, Kuhn was the only engineer officer assigned in command of a division during the Great War. While Kuhn did not have extensive experience leading in combat, he did serve as a military observer in the Russo-Japanese War and on the German General Staff before the US entered the war.¹³⁹ From 1915 until relations with Germany soured in late 1916, Kuhn spent over a year observing how the Germans led, trained, and recruited an army. During this same period, the German Army was in the midst of converting to a modern firepower centric doctrine and in the early development of Stoßtruppen tactics.¹⁴⁰ Even with his first-hand experience observing the enemy from within and knowing the German generals opposing him personally, he would not move away from “open warfare” or challenge any order from Pershing.¹⁴¹

With the shortage of men in the AEF, the “required” training quickly fell by the wayside in order that GEN Pershing could launch the Meuse-Argonne offensive at the agreed upon date. Instead of sending a veteran battle hardened division into the teeth of the German defenses, GEN Pershing used untested and poorly trained NA divisions. In the first wave of the first day of the Meuse-Argonne offensive was the 79th Division, assigned to seize the most well defended

¹³⁷ 58% of the newly arrived draftees with little training and noted that half of the recruits had not fired a rifle before arriving in France. Walker, 86.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 97-98.

¹³⁹ Walker, 96-97.

¹⁴⁰ Stormtrooper tactics.

¹⁴¹ If there was an ever an officer in the AEF who understood the developments of modern warfare, it should be in all intents and purpose a man like MG Kuhn. MG Kuhn feared removal from command since he was the only engineer officer in the AEF assigned a division command. Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division*, 50.

German position at the highest elevation of the front, Montfaucon.¹⁴² The 79th had both not completed its prescribed overseas training and did not have any combat experience.¹⁴³ Into the maelstrom of the Meuse-Argonne Pershing sent amateurs to attack the most well defended German sectors on the entire Western Front.¹⁴⁴

The secrecy of the AEF headquarters meant that combat formations, like the 316th Infantry, received one days notice to prepare for the attack. The men of the 79th did not believe that they would be the ones to assault such positions: “No one in the enlisted ranks dreamed that a division, without previous blooding, was to be one of the center divisions in the opening phase of the final drive of the World War. If the men heard rumors that they were destined to take Montfaucon, they laughed at them.”¹⁴⁵ Rumor became a reality when orders to attack arrived at the 316th Regiment at 1900 hours on September 25, 1918, to attack at 0530 hours on September 26, 1918.¹⁴⁶

Without conducting firepower centric training, the men of the 79th Division could only perform the most rudimentary tactics. The rush to get the 79th to the front meant that they did not complete any training with artillery, tanks, or airplanes.¹⁴⁷ Without the correct training and without time to plan and rehearse the attack the 79th Division attacked en masse in compact formations.¹⁴⁸ AEF headquarters planned to incorporate mass artillery barrages and the rolling barrage in advance of the troops, but no method of liaison established between the units of the 79th and those of the artillery. Once the infantry left the jump off trenches, they would be at the mercy of the Germans once outside of the close artillery range.

¹⁴² Of the nine attacking divisions of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, only seven of nine completed their overseas training and five of these divisions lacked any combat experience. Boyd, 19.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁴⁴ Montfaucon rose to 1,122 feet above the Meuse-Argonne Front. Yockelson, 113.

¹⁴⁵ Barber, 69.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 78.

¹⁴⁷ Walker, 93.

¹⁴⁸ Walker, 118-119, 123.

With poorly trained men, untested leaders, and adhering to outdated doctrine, the 316th walked on line into the attack.¹⁴⁹ On the morning of September 26, 1918, the first wave of the 79th Division stepped off after the artillery bombardment lifted with the first wave followed a rolling barrage.¹⁵⁰ Almost immediately, the lead waves of the 79th could not keep up artillery support.¹⁵¹ Additional delays occurred due to wiring parties failing to clear bare wire, and a friendly smokescreen provoked a panic because the men thought it was a German gas attack.¹⁵² Without tactical experience, the green troops bunched together to remain near their leaders and for the comfort that remaining in a large group. Quickly the attacks bogged down as casualties mounted.

The attacks of the 313th and 314th failed disastrously and units ceased to function as organized forces due to high proportion of leader casualties.¹⁵³ To bolster the 79th Division, elements of the 3rd Tank Brigade under COL D.D. Pullen rolled to support the attack. Pullen found that the remaining officers in the first wave “had no authority over their men” and that “it would best be described as a mutiny.”¹⁵⁴ Without a tradition of initiative embedded in the culture of the organization, there was no one else to take charge. The 315th and 316th Regiments attempted to pass through the confusing mess of men and equipment to scale the heights of Montfaucon. Slowly the tank support waned as the fragile vehicles suffered mechanical failures or accurate German fire.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ The 316th Regiment consisted of almost entirely draftees with one regular Army officer, arriving at the front in time for the offensive and assigned to the 79th Division, V Corps of the First Army.

¹⁵⁰ Yockelson, 114.

¹⁵¹ The lead wave consisted of the 313th and 314th Infantry with the 315th and 316th in reserve. Ibid., 114.

¹⁵² Yockelson, 114.

¹⁵³ Wawro, 317.

¹⁵⁴ This US tank brigade was a mixture of French and US troops operating French FT-17 and Schneider tanks. Wawro, 318.

¹⁵⁵ Wawro, 324.

The German defenses on Montfaucon consisted of over 113 mutually supported machine gun emplacements on elevated bluffs.¹⁵⁶ German COL Victor Keller stated, “The young American troops attacked with admirable pluck, through for the most part unsuitable formations. Swarms of riflemen standing upright were no rarity” before mowing down portions of the 79th Division.¹⁵⁷ A French tank officer told an engineer officer in the 79th, “In four years I’ve never seen the like of this. Your men are all over terrain, fully exposed to the Boche.”¹⁵⁸ Without the ability to disperse and without reliable and well-trained officers and NCOs units made inviting targets for German machine gunners and artillery.¹⁵⁹

The inexperienced 79th Division did not have a chance to appreciate the usefulness of various weapons within the infantry formations or of the other supporting arms, leaving needed equipment in the rear. The hodgepodge of remaining men of the 79th Division continued to push towards the heights but effectively stalled along the valley floor. MG Kuhn, in fear of removal from command, immediately ordered to launch another attack at midnight. The 316th huddled at the base of Montfaucon, the men now out of water, and with no resupply.¹⁶⁰ The night assault never materialized as it took until 0500 on the morning of September 27, 1918, to even locate survivors of the subordinate regiments.¹⁶¹

As dawn broke on the morning of September 27, 1918, most of the officers of the 316th were dead or wounded, but orders arrived to renew the attack. “In the inevitable confusion many units were almost entirely isolated, despite the unflagging efforts of runners to re-establish

¹⁵⁶ Barber, 87.

¹⁵⁷ Walker, 145.

¹⁵⁸ Boche is a common disparaging epitaph used by the French towards Germans. Wawro, 366.

¹⁵⁹ Wawro, 320.

¹⁶⁰ Light rainfall started on the night of September 26, 1918, and the men of the 316th collected water in their mess tins to have something potable to consume. Glock, 38.

¹⁶¹ MG Kuhn relieved BG Noble from command of the 158th Brigade as morning broke on September 27, 1918. The 316th Regiment fell under the 158th Brigade, 79th Division. Wawro, 331-332.

contact.”¹⁶² On September 27, 1918, the 79th Division captured Montfaucon. The morning of September 30, 1918, it was clear that the 79th Division had to remove from the front line to reorganize. “Relief had become imperative, not only on the account of the constantly mounting losses, but because of the impossibility of getting food and water to the men. The road to the supply dumps was choked and jammed to a dead standstill, holding up ammunition and supplies of every description.”¹⁶³ The evening of September 30, 1918, the veteran 3rd Infantry Division marched to the relief of the tired and worn 79th Division.¹⁶⁴

The 79th Division moved to a quieter sector of the Western Front on October 6, 1918. For much of the rest of the war, the division rebuilt the units that combat in the Meuse-Argonne destroyed. When the Armistice formally announced to the 316th, “There was no cheering, no shouting, no overflowing of spirits.”¹⁶⁵ The war took its toll on the men of the NA. Upon return to the United States, the men of the 316th Regiment voted down a proposal to march in a victory parade in Philadelphia and instead detrained and went home.¹⁶⁶ From the arrival of the first draftees to demobilization, the men of the 316th spent twenty-two months in service, forty-seven days at the front, and five harrowing days in the Meuse-Argonne.

The 79th Division followed and adhered to “open warfare” doctrine as prescribed by GEN Pershing and AEF headquarters. The 316th did not have an opportunity to train in a firepower-centric style of warfare or to learn any other method. The failure of the NA was not a failure of the men within the formation; it was a failure of the RA officers who designed and implemented the NA program. It is telling that the NA program ended with the Great War and did

¹⁶² The losses in the 313th Infantry resulted in the three battalions of the regiment consolidating into one battalion. Glock, 40, 42.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 44.

¹⁶⁵ The 316th marched out 1,858 effective men present for duty reduced in half from 3,800 men assigned. Glock, 87, 106.

¹⁶⁶ Glock, 106.

not reinstate for World War II. The men who survived the Great War did not want to repeat the mistake of an army of amateurs led by amateurs.

The Quiet Shift to Firepower-Centric Warfare

In early October 1918, GEN Pershing suffered a nervous collapse witnessed by his aides.¹⁶⁷ This was the low point for a man stuck in the doctrine of the nineteenth century. The stress was too much for GEN Pershing, and he realized that he could not micromanage the AEF. He distributed command of the First Army and the Second Army to LTG Hunter Liggett and LTG Robert Bullard respectively.¹⁶⁸ Pershing ordered lessons learned from the early stage attacks disseminated across the AEF.¹⁶⁹ Combat experience brought many AEF formations around to firepower-centric doctrine, but in order to be successful, it still took leaders who also bought into the doctrine. The results of the early attacks in the Meuse-Argonne demonstrated that forces properly supported by combined arms, properly dispersed, and given intermediate objectives could win.

Leaders like MG Summerall and LTG Liggett made it clear that they would not send their Doughboys into an attack unless the conditions set for success. In the preparation for the final drive from November 1-11, 1918 Summerall said, “It is essential that fire superiority rather than sheer man power be the driving force of the attack.”¹⁷⁰ Since November 1918 and to the modern era, this stands as a central tenet of the US military. Leaders like Summerall and Liggett led the much-needed change of strategic and tactical vision in the AEF. Leaders were the bridge to resources like artillery and aviation support that provided the extra support outside of the infantry formations. In the last phase of the Meuse-Argonne offensive from November 1-11, 1918 the AEF got it right. The extent of firepower-centric doctrine also became a comical event as

¹⁶⁷ Wawro, 378.

¹⁶⁸ Both men brought up in the 1st Division style of firepower-centric warfare.

¹⁶⁹ Wawro, 377.

¹⁷⁰ Groteluschen, 268.

Figure 4 humorously shows.¹⁷¹

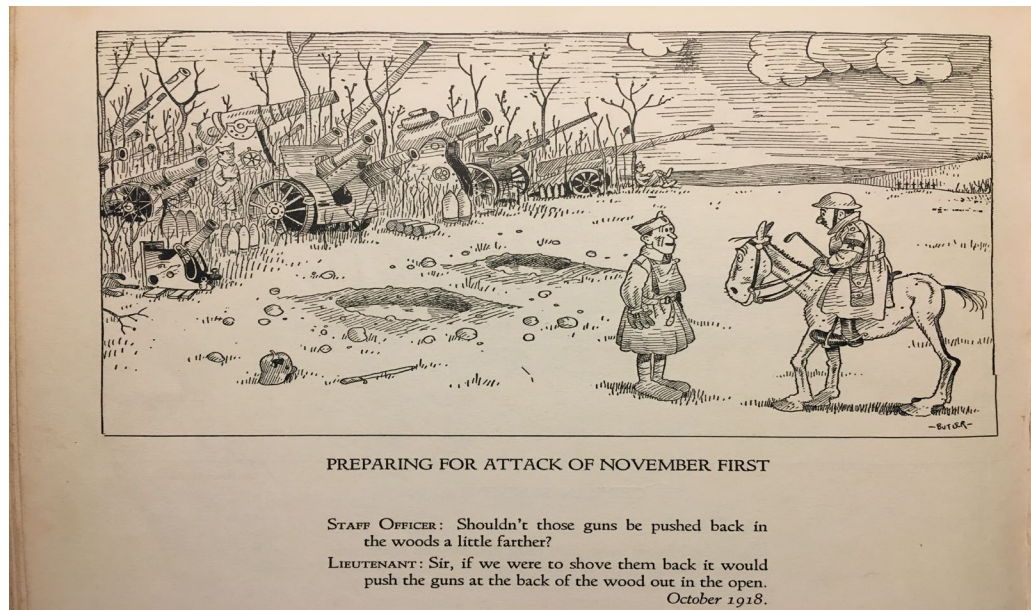


Figure 4: Cartoon by Alan B. Butler, “*Happy Days!*” *A Humorous Narrative in the Drawings of the Progress of American Arms 1917-1919* (Washington, DC: Society of the First Division, A.E.F: 1928)

Conclusion: The AEF’s Failures Obscured in Victory

The tragedy of the AEF is that allocated enough time to train, arm, and equip for a modern war it could have performed far better than it did. The leadership of the AEF, namely Pershing, did no favors in rapidly pushing an unproven force to the front line and expecting it to perform any differently from amateurs. The US government contributed to the lackluster performance of the AEF by delaying initiation of the draft, poorly equipping the RA in the pre-war period, and relegating the NG training and equipping to state governments. The post-war impression of the AEF’s performance is that it performed remarkably well; the reality was that it performed marginally at best.

The Armistice arrived before the casualties mounted and the American people came to the full realization of the human cost of the war. The leaders and soldiers that experienced the war

¹⁷¹ Alan B. Butler, “*Happy Days!*” *A Humorous Narrative in the Drawings of the Progress of American Arms 1917-1919* (Washington, DC: Society of the First Division, A.E.F: 1928), 82.

knew the truth obscured by victory, that the war was unnecessarily bloody and that unnecessary slaughter occurred at their expense. The effects of the war directly contributed to continued distrust of the professional soldiers of the RA by the members of the NG. As early as 1919, the NG and the legislatures of their respective states launched investigations into the conduct of the war and the decisions made by GEN Pershing.¹⁷² The feeling that GEN Pershing and RA officers used the AEF to further their careers permeated the thoughts of the former AEF members. Following the war, veterans' groups organized and the political power of the NG grew to counter the RA. The veterans focused much of their resentment on Pershing and the senior leaders of the AEF. The veterans knew what happened "over there."

When units of the AEF arrived at the front and experienced the trenches for the first time, they knew the reality was far different from what the official AEF training prepared them. Units were lucky if they had senior officers who could counter Pershing's incessant calls for "open warfare" and audacity to defy or counter a former West Point classmate. Units suffered when they followed the AEF "open warfare" playbook to the letter, either out of ignorance of what else to do or through blind obedience to Pershing's edicts. In many cases, this led to an army of sycophant leaders blindly following a man who spent little to no time at the front and blind to reality of the modern warfare.

George C. Marshall concluded in a general assessment of the combat capabilities of the AEF that it was "difficult to carry out any operation exactly according to Hoyle, because of the limited amount of training and complete lack of experience on the part of the men and the young officers, and the frequent lack of material and other means which, theoretically, were supposed to

¹⁷² Joseph E. Persico, "Nov. 11, 1918: Wasted Lives on Armistice Day" *Army Times*, November 9, 2017, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.armytimes.com/veterans/salute-veterans/2017/11/10/nov-11-1918-wasted-lives-on-armistice-day/>

be available.”¹⁷³ Performance of units in the AEF was uneven across all units, but the discrepancies in performance between the RA, NG, and NA units were preventable.

The failure to properly train and equip units in the AEF and especially units of the NA was criminal. The overreliance on rifle marksmanship training meant that men trained for the wrong century of warfare. Failures to take into account the reality of the Western Front and the dominance of supporting arms like artillery resulted in a false impression of modern war. The failure to heed the advice of military observers or to take into serious consideration lessons learned by foreign armies reeks of overconfidence in the abilities of an untested Army and the ignorance of untested leaders. No amount of courage can overcome a wall of artillery and a hail of interlocking machine gun fire.

The savagery of the war was not in vain. In the subsequent twenty-three year period between the World Wars, the young leaders of the RA, NG, and NA grew to be the great generals of World War II. The former doughboys redrew plans for training, equipping, and employment of the Army in the event of another major conflict. The result of the failures and successes of the Great War was that the Army of World War II was a better-trained and equipped force. If the mistakes made in the Great War did not occur then, then they undoubtedly would occur in the first major war the United States entered. The successes and failures of the AEF in the Great War shaped the Army of World War II. In the end, it took leaders who realized that the nature of warfare changed and brave enough to disobey orders.

¹⁷³ Hoyle is in reference to the common book used for card games of the era. Hoyle’s provided a “how to” in playing a game and is determining the rules and adjudication of said rules. This is where the term “according to Hoyle’s” comes from. Rainey, 100.

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