



Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I by Richard S. Faulkner.

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On 4 July 1917, Gen. John J. Pershing, Commander of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), and his staff visited the Marquis de Lafayette's grave at the Picpus Cemetery in Paris.¹ Pershing's aide, Col. Charles Stanton, captured the moment when he uttered the unforgettable phrase, "Lafayette, we are here." Over two million American soldiers eventually arrived in France, charged by President Woodrow Wilson to "make the world safe for Democracy." Who were these men of the AEF who came to pay an overdue debt to Lafayette? How did they come to be in the Army? How were they trained? What did they expect and what did they actually experience? These are some of the questions military historian Richard Faulkner (US Army Command and General Staff College) seeks to answer in his sweeping study of "Pershing's Crusaders."

Faulkner does not concentrate on battles, command decisions, or politics. Pershing figures mainly in reference to his specific orders, and other generals, President Wilson, and Secretary of War Newton Baker appear only in passing. Instead, the author "humbly follows the tradition of Bell Irvin Wiley in *The Life of Johnny Reb* and *The Life of Billy Yank*" (4),² presenting a social history of the Doughboy from his entry into service through the war and the postwar occupation of Germany to the AEF's return home. *Pershing's Crusaders'* twenty-four chapters proceed both by topic and chronologically. We see the Doughboys training in stateside camps, voyaging across the Atlantic, learning how to use new weapons, interacting with Allied civilians and soldiers, suffering anticipation anxiety, enduring combat, patrolling no-man's land, suffering from wounds and illnesses, receiving medical care, dealing with German prisoners, living as POWs themselves, enjoying what passed for entertainment, and adjusting to postwar life.³ The author covers the meeting of basic physical needs—food, clothing, shelter, and sleep—but also the men's ethnicity, morality, religion, and sexual behavior.

The emphasis throughout is on infantrymen, who made up the majority of the AEF, but airmen, artillerymen, chaplains, Marines, supply troops, and tank crews receive due attention as well. We learn of tensions between the infantry—who suffered the worst deprivations and casualty rates—and those they believed to be living the "easy life" in the rear.

The author points out that inexperienced officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) had to earn the respect of their men by sharing their experiences. The Doughboys, being products of a democratic society, considered their relations with their officers to be based on a social contract rather than a matter of blind obedience. Soldiers served most willingly under officers who did not recklessly waste

1. Photograph at *Wikipedia*, s.v. "John J. Pershing" – www.miwsr.com/rd/1714.htm.

2. Subtitles: *The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978) and *The Common Soldier of the Union* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971). Bell is one of the dedicatees of *Pershing's Crusaders*.

3. Faulkner finds that World War I veterans resented the stinting on benefits for them by their own government. See, further, Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr, 2001).

their men's lives and provided them with the necessities of life. By contrast, resistance to untested replacement officers crippled the performance of, for example, the 5th division in October 1918.

Faulkner's fluid narrative style carries readers through his 776-page tome. True, there is a daunting array of facts and figures, but they are presented judiciously, and the author consistently relies on engaging accounts of the experiences of individuals or groups to illustrate his points. This gives readers a strong sense of personal connection to the Doughboys.

The author contends that the Doughboys' war experiences enabled them to play critical roles in postwar social movements. For instance, having fought in a national cause and enjoyed greater social acceptance in France, African-American soldiers returned home more committed to defending their civil rights.⁴ This phenomenon has been studied before, but Faulkner makes another point about race that has received less consideration. In the decade after the war, many white Doughboys joined the resurgent Ku Klux Klan, which, unlike its Reconstruction forerunner, had become in the 1920s an urban, northern, and anti-immigrant organization. If the army strove to be a melting pot, native-born whites emerged from it with a distinct distaste for their foreign-born and first-generation comrades.

Faulkner also argues that Doughboys "were pioneers of the American sexual revolution" (3). Wrenched from their quiet small-town lives and thrown together in camps with men from all parts of the United States, they were exposed to the looser sexual mores of French wartime society, and, faced with the prospect of dying on the battlefield, lost their prewar moral convictions, something American civilians and the US government feared would happen. In April 1917, moral crusaders who had been shutting down red-light districts received authority to purge communities around training camps of sin and vice. The War Department even created a morale branch to coordinate these anti-vice campaigns.

The AEF's puritanical attitudes toward sexual activity were criticized in France, where licensed prostitution was tolerated. Unlike the Poilus, who were issued condoms, Doughboys were scolded about the dreaded sexually transmitted diseases they might bring home with them to infect their wives and sweethearts. Pragmatic concerns led the AEF to moderate its moral policies over time, but they never approached the openness of the French. In any case, repressive measures were ineffective: there were 357,969 *reported* cases of venereal disease among American soldiers (396),⁵ who, besides souvenirs and battle scars, brought home relaxed standards of sexual behavior.

The Doughboys are praised here for their resistance to the nihilism and brutal inhumanity engendered by the war.⁶

Whether the doughboy viewed his German enemy as a lethal, harsh schoolmaster, a devious and deluded Hun, or a pitiful and dejected prisoner, he should be commended for his ability to overcome the vicious and dehumanizing propaganda of the era to treat his foe with humanity. Although the Americans sometimes gave into stereotypes and the passions of the war, it seems that these incidents were rather limited and not unique in the experiences of the war's other combatants. (324)

The author criticizes the inadequate training given the Doughboys. Pershing's overemphasis on rifle tactics and open ground combat, combined with poor logistical planning, left AEF troops ill-

4. See, esp., William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana: U Illinois Pr, 1996), not cited by Faulkner.

5. The French saw this as evidence of American puritanical foolishness. Soldiers having unprotected sex with unregulated prostitutes cost the US Army millions of man hours and weakened its effectiveness as a fighting force.

6. See, further, Edward Gutiérrez, *Doughboys on the Great War: How American Soldiers Viewed Their Military Experience* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2014) 15.

prepared to fight.⁷ To be blunt, the American army was an amateur operation. The lack of a coherent war plan leaves students of the conflict wondering just what the War Department had been doing since 1914. One regiment of the 4th division, for instance, arrived in France without ever having fired a shot during their training. Untrained officers could not even competently schedule eating breaks for their men. The leg wrappings and puttees of the ill-designed M1917 uniform may have looked martial in photographs, but they cut off blood circulation to feet, accelerating the spread of debilitating trench foot. *Pershing's Crusaders* shows that American commanders might have avoided many such problems by consulting more closely with their French and British allies, who had already been at war for three years when the first elements of the AEF arrived in Europe.

Faulkner perceptively highlights another cause of the AEF's heavy casualties in summer and fall 1918—the lack of veteran NCOs, the backbone of any effective military. Inefficient selection and poor training of new NCOs exacerbated this deficiency and contributed to high casualty rates.

Pershing's Crusaders is the culmination of twenty years of research and writing. Faulkner has examined (and often acquired) diaries, letters, and photographs of thousands of Doughboys. He is scrupulously careful to support generalizations with hard facts. Such well-advised caution is typified in the following summation of his discussion of Doughboys' religious experiences:

It is possible that most soldiers simply passed through the war without having their faith greatly altered by the experience at all. Unlike much else in the record of the doughboys' experiences, the record of their religious beliefs is too idiosyncratic and incomplete to make too many bold declarations on their spirituality. (430)

Richard Faulkner fully achieves his aim “to give the reader an understanding of what it meant to serve as a Doughboy in the Great War” (2). The breadth and depth of the coverage of its subject and its lucid prose make *Pershing's Crusaders* must reading for all students of World War I, the Progressive Era, and particularly the lives of American soldiers at a defining moment of the twentieth century.

7. American commanders felt vindicated by the successes of the German stormtrooper tactics in 1918: see Mark E. Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2007) 47.