



Betrayal at Little Gibraltar: A German Fortress, a Treacherous American General, and the Battle to End World War I by William Walker.

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In *Betrayal at Little Gibraltar*, author William Walker has written an engaging account, based on personal narratives and secondary sources, of the 79th Division's baptism of fire during the Battle of the Meuse-Argonne in autumn 1918. His exploration of the 79th's history and specifically the experiences of Maj. Harry D. Parkin of the 316th Infantry Regiment makes for a compelling popular history. That said, Walker's well documented narrative and persuasive argument will attract and inform specialist readers as well.

The "Little Gibraltar" of the book's title was the village of Montfaucon, famous for the strength of its fortifications and dominating view of the area bordering the Meuse River, the Argonne Forest, and Verdun. From this observation post, German artillery, with its reinforced concrete bunkers equipped with telescopes and periscopes, could direct its fire on both the Allies' frontline positions and their supporting areas to the rear. For this reason, the swift capture of Montfaucon was a crucial intermediate objective for the inexperienced American Expeditionary Forces (AEF).

Walker asks why the 79th, one of the least experienced AEF divisions, was charged with taking this critical enemy position on day one of the Meuse-Argonne offensive and why it failed to do so. A former college English professor at Gettysburg College, Walker came upon a copy of Gen. James Harbord's *American Army in France, 1917-1918*¹ in the college library while researching his great-uncle, who died in combat during the war. The book had originally belonged to Maj. Harry D. Parkin, who had written marginalia and a two-page statement at the end of the book accusing Lt. Gen. Robert L. Bullard of dereliction of duty in not supporting the 79th's attack on Montfaucon.

Walker begins by surveying the role of Montfaucon in the previous three years of the war. He then shifts to Parkin and his comrades in the 79th, beginning with their odyssey from civilian life in the (mostly mid-Atlantic) States² through their organization, training, and deployment overseas. He tells the stories of selected soldiers and officers, some personally known to Parkin, others not. The men of the 79th who would shed their blood on the slopes of Montfaucon ranged from upper-middle-class, mainly WASP, officers to immigrants from many nations; from the devoutly religious to hard-drinking roughnecks; from the erudite to the barely literate.

The heart of the book is its examination of the first few days of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, using personal accounts, veterans' memoirs, unit histories, and relevant secondary sources. At the same time, there are serious shortcomings: for one thing, highly pertinent Operations Reports, Unit Histories, and Messages of AEF units are listed in the book's bibliography but not referenced in its footnotes. Thus, for instance, instead of Orders files in the National Archives, Walker adduces Parkin's *Memoirs* to document the orders that told the 79th that the 4th Infantry Division

1. Boston: Little Brown, 1936.

2. Its 316th Infantry Regiment was dubbed "Baltimore's Own."

“is to assist:—in turning MONTFAUCON; and (later) by turning the sector of the hostile 2nd position in our divisional front” (120). Since he has already noted Parkin’s hostility toward General Bullard, he could have reinforced his argument by quoting directly from the AEF Order, the III Corps Order,³ and the V Corps Order.⁴

Walker asserts that much circumstantial evidence indicates that Bullard in fact ordered his 4th Division *not to cross* Corps boundaries to take Montfaucon in the flank or rear while the 79th assaulted it head-on. Based on Parkin’s account as well as other V Corps sources, Walker claims the AEF intended III Corps, principally the 4th Division, to turn to its left, crossing the Corps boundary. He reasons that, since this was a tactic commonly taught in the US Army before the war, Bullard could not, or at least should not, have misunderstood it.

However, this ignores the realities of First World War battlefields, where poor communications prohibited close coordination. Terrain devastated by relentless bombardments impeded movement, especially for the attacker, who had to cross no-man’s-land, while defenders could quickly move laterally behind the frontlines to reinforce threatened sectors. Moreover, such a turning movement in the face of the enemy would have exposed the 4th Division’s flank as well as its boundary with the 80th Division on its right. Absent very precise coordination, such a move could have put the 4th directly in 79th’s line of fire in support of its own advancing regiments.

Beyond the examination of the battle itself, Walker considers the postwar battle for reputation fought by generals John J. Pershing, Hugh Drum, (future Army Chief of Staff) George C. Marshall, and Robert Bullard; he concludes that all four benefited, directly or indirectly, from a cover-up. While truth may be the first casualty in war, it is also the last.

William Walker makes a persuasive, if circumstantial, case for his argument, one that may lead others to dig further for themselves. If nothing else, he reminds us that war is not fought by organizations programmed like modern computers, but by men and women with complex personalities subject to pride, egotism, ambition, compassion, and hatred.

3. I.e., Bullard’s Corps, of which the 4th Division was a part.

4. I.e., Maj. Gen. George H. Cameron’s Corps, of which the 79th Division was a part.