

Marianne and Columbia in Arms: The Franco-American Relationship during the First
World War

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Abstract

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The First World War was the United States' first significant foray into European conflict and their first war as part of a major international coalition. The inadequacy of the US Army for the conflict forced them to rely on extensive support from its allies to successfully prosecute the war. For most members of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), the ally with which they most closely associated with was France who provided substantial amounts of equipment, training, and guidance. Most work on bilateral Franco-American relations during the period focus on high level diplomatic and military relations between the leaders of both nations and casts the state of relations as being antagonistic. This paper examines the more mundane experiences of AEF members with French soldiers and civilians and how those experiences shaped American views of themselves and their allies. By examining the American relationship with the French on and off the battlefield, it provides a view of the alliance outside of the staterooms and war rooms and re-examines previous characterisations of the relationship. The first chapter examines American relations with French civilians in port towns, in billets, and on leave through the opinions and behaviour of members of the AEF. The second and third chapter focus on the relationship with the French military not only through American opinions about the military competence of their ally but also examines the development of an American military identity apart from and in opposition to the French. American experience in the war allowed Americans not only to form stronger

relationships than generally acknowledged with the French but also allowed them to develop a stronger sense of their own identity as a people and a country.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND FRENCH CIVILIANS	20
American Arrival in France	25
Sexuality and Race in France.....	35
Americans in Billets.....	56
American Frustrations with the French.....	68
Alcohol and Leave	83
Conclusion	93
AMERICANS INTRODUCED TO THE FRENCH MILITARY	95
American and French Doctrine.....	97
Training of US Forces.....	104
Americans and French military administration.....	125
Conclusion	141
AMERICANS AND THE FRENCH IN BATTLE	144
Americans enter the line	145
French and American socialization.....	156
The first major American battles	174
Tactical reform and the final battles of the AEF.....	193
Conclusion	203
CONCLUSION.....	206
BIBLIOGRAPHY	219

INTRODUCTION

The US role in the First World War was a critical one. While the United States had been vital to the Allied war effort for years through providing loans, raw materials, and agricultural products, the US declaration of war on April 6th, 1917 precipitated a chain of events that led to eventual Allied victory. American financial and material support of the Allies increased and their naval might was critical in drastically reducing the German submarine threat.¹ As the stalemate on the Western Front continued, there was a great deal of hope among the Allies that the United States' military potential could be deployed before the worsening military situation of Russia allowed Germany to concentrate her entire military power against Britain and France. While the power of the US Army was negligible at the declaration of war, the United States made a massive effort to make a decisive impact. By the armistice, there were two million American soldiers, known as doughboys, in France and the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) held nearly a quarter of the Western Front.²

Few countries entered a war by choice so ill prepared to fight it as the United States entered the First World War. The United States had involved itself in global affairs by becoming a colonial power with the acquisition of Pacific and Caribbean territories after a war with Spain and annexing Hawaii but remained isolated from European affairs since the early 19th century. As a consequence, the US Army focused on low intensity colonial warfare or brief expeditions against Filipino guerrillas, Mexican revolutionaries, and Spanish colonial garrisons. None of those tasks required

¹ Michael Adas, "Ambivalent Ally: American Military Intervention and the Endgame and Legacy of World War I," *Diplomatic History* 38, Issue 4 (2014): 703-704.

² Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 355.

very large forces and consequently the US Army was very small, both in absolute terms and relative to population. The Regular Army had approximately 130,000 men in all branches with another 80,000 members of the National Guard.³ Furthermore, the United States military was deficient in nearly all modern warfare equipment. It lacked heavy artillery and despite being the birthplace of the machine gun, had few in service. Military innovations spawned by the First World War such as grenades, tanks, and poison gas were wholly unknown. The small size of the US Army meant it lacked effective staff organisation and personnel that made other Allied armies question whether the American general staff had any idea what they would face.⁴ When the United States entered the war, the only general who had commanded a force larger than a brigade was John Pershing. None had any experience commanding forces the size of a division.⁵ The US military simply lacked the ability to manage the massive increase in its size between April 1917 and November 1918 without outside help.

Perhaps just as importantly, American conceptions of war and the soldier's role remained shaped by the American Civil War. A romanticized view of war as a path to manhood defined by duty and honour such as that presented in the popular and highly influential newspaper serial "The Red Badge of Courage" prevailed among the generation sent to France.⁶ The Spanish American War and the highly publicized and iconic charge up San Juan Hill imbedded in American memory at the time strongly reinforced a Civil War view of the US soldier as possessing toughness, vigour, and

³ Ibid., 18.

⁴ James J. Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals: Command and Staff in the AEF* (Westport CT: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 8.

⁵ Mark E. Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

⁶ Edward A. Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War: How American Soldiers Viewed their Military Service* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2014), 18-22.

determination. Americans had fought the Spanish with unusual recklessness and leading politicians and newspapers praised this as a sign the vigorous young manhood of the Republic and held up the volunteers who fought as the cream of America's youth.⁷ The United States entered the war not only with outdated equipment but also with an image of the soldier that focused strongly on individual courage and determination and an image of battle where the winner was he who exhibited the most spirit and was willing to risk the most harm. As the United States entered the war with equipment and a mentality better suited to the wars of the past than the wars of the present, the US Army had to rely greatly on an ally to build their capacities to prosecute the war. That partner was the French Army who was pivotal in the shaping of the AEF and integrated with them at all levels. Most American divisions sent to France received at least some training and equipment from the French and many received their first experiences in battle under French command or beside French forces. As a result, the American alliance with France was critical to the functioning of the AEF and understanding that alliance is vital to analysing the experience of the AEF during the First World War.

The Franco-American alliance was not simply an alliance between states and militaries. The AEF brought millions of Americans to France on a journey few had even contemplated making mere months before their ships unloaded them in French ports. For most, it was their first experience of a foreign society as well as their first experience in the military. Almost every member of the AEF had to interact with the French at some point during their service and so was able to affect the alliance in their own small ways. Doughboys had to discover for themselves what it meant to be part of that

⁷ John Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 218-230.

alliance and how they felt about their new allies on and off the battlefield. That journey of discovery is the subject of this thesis. American servicemen's beliefs and evaluations of the French, the impact of those perceptions, are of critical importance in understanding the AEF. In turn, the AEF itself is analyzed here as a military force and, simultaneously, as representative of a segment of American society transplanted into a foreign society. In doing so, my work owes a debt to concepts developed in the field of social history in addition to those used in diplomatic and military history. In particular, the concept of "everyday history" often known by its German name, *Alltagsgeschichte*, and other forms of microhistory provides a useful framework. One of the focuses of the approach, as identified by one of its progenitors Alf Lüdtkke, is on the "history of everyday behaviour and experience" whereby "human social practice is shifted into the foreground of historical inquiry."⁸ Practitioners of microhistory or the history of everyday life such as David Bell and Brad Gregory sometimes distinguish between the history of everyday and extraordinary experiences to divide day to day life from remarkable events.⁹

The case of Americans in the AEF constituted both an extraordinary and ordinary experience. The experience of being drafted or volunteering, donning a uniform, training in the use of arms, shipping across the sea to a foreign land, and ultimately participating in battles with hundreds of thousands of combatants was certainly an extraordinary one. Within that experience however, there was much that constituted ordinary interactions and events. The doughboys themselves realized that

⁸ Alf Lüdtkke, ed. *History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

the war would be a unique experience as thousands of young men kept journals and diaries for the first and only time in their lives to record their experiences in uniform.¹⁰ The relative monotony of army life and the routine of training and living with the French allowed Americans to develop patterns of behaviour that they considered routine even within the remarkable overall experience of fighting in a foreign war. Going to war was certainly a unique experience for doughboys but the daily and habitual interactions and actions within it allow for a study of the everyday experience of the Franco-American alliance. While the experiences of the officers and men of the AEF with the French is not the exclusive object of study here, it is the main focus to help understand functioning of the Franco-American alliance on the ground as well as how Americans understood that alliance and themselves through it. As American perceptions of their ally heavily informed the conclusions they reached about themselves and their place in the war, their daily experiences with the French helped to build American self-perception when entering the second decade of the 20th century.

While few historians who study the AEF directly invoke the names of prominent historians of everyday life or microhistory, the focus on the experiences of the men who made up the American Army has been a growing trend in scholarship for decades. The focus on the doughboy experience dates to Edward Coffman's 1968 work *The War to End all Wars; The American Military Experience in World War I*.¹¹ Coffman's focus was not solely on giving voice to men of the AEF but to examine the conflict and "describe that military effort – the planning, organization, and administration as well as

¹⁰ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 205.

¹¹ Edward A. Gutierrez, " 'Sherman Was Right': The Experience of AEF Soldiers in the Great War," (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 2008), 9.

the fighting – in terms of the men who made the decisions and those who carried them out.”¹² As a result, as Coffman acknowledged, he described in paragraphs that which could easily fill books.¹³ Coffman’s approach of viewing the AEF through the lens of the men who composed it was highly influential and his work remains cited in virtually every work on the AEF that has followed. Given the major role the French played in the development of the AEF, they are present throughout *The War to End all Wars* but seldom come into focus from the American perspective. Coffman did briefly explore doughboy relations with the French population and identifies the mixed nature of the relationship with tensions and language barriers existing alongside acts of considerable friendship. He also examined the treatment of black Americans by the French in contrast with American racial attitudes.¹⁴ Aside from those brief interludes, however, the French were analysed mostly for their reaction to American policy and within the confines of their training and support roles with US divisions.

After *The War to End all Wars* several decades passed before considerable new work placed the experiences of the doughboys as a whole at the forefront. During these years, however, there was a proliferation of biographies of major figures.¹⁵ Work on the American soldier’s experience of the war greatly increased since the year 2000. In that year, Gary Mead published *Doughboys: America and the First World War* which continued in Coffman’s tradition by examining the AEF through the eyes of its members while placing even greater emphasis on the experiences doughboys and bringing their

¹² Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, vii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134-135, 231-233.

¹⁵ A by no means exhaustive list of examples of such biographies include: James Cooke’s *Pershing and His Generals: Command and Staff in the AEF*; Clayton James’s *The Years of MacArthur*; Allan Millet’s *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army, 1881-1925*; Forrest Pogue’s *George C. Marshall: Education of a General*; and Donald Smythe’s *Pershing, General of the Armies*.

voices to the forefront of his analysis. Mead focuses on the critical nature of the AEF contribution to the war and “focuses on individual doughboy experience, and tries to place that experience in the larger context of Allied-US relationship during the war itself.”¹⁶ Mead’s view of the American-Allied relationship is as one characterised by “tremendous antipathy between the Americans and their supposed allies, which rapidly developed during the war and became the dominant response during its aftermath” and “truly a case of familiarity breeding mutual contempt.”¹⁷ While Mead focused mainly on the antagonism between the higher levels of the AEF and the Allies, he did mention American disgust with their billets and theft from civilians.¹⁸ For Mead, soldiers returned to the United States with “grim stories of the avarice, arrogance and incompetence of their former allies” so that the Franco-American relationship was overwhelmingly a tense one.

Since Mead published *Doughboys*, others have brought the doughboy experience to the forefront of their study of the war and the men who fought in it. Scholars such as James Hallas in *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I* and Frank Freidel in *Over There: The Story of America’s First Great Overseas Crusade* made the voices of doughboys the primary feature of their work by presenting the recollections of American soldiers with minimal editorial comment or independent analysis. Of those who use the experience of soldiers as part of a larger thesis, Jennifer Keene and, more recently, Edward Gutierrez in particular, have published work to further the understanding of the American soldier. Keene’s 2001 book on the AEF,

¹⁶ Gary Mead, *Doughboys: America and the First World War* (Woodstock and New York: Overlook Press, 2000), xiii-xiv.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194-195, 198.

Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America, in particular examines the opinions of Americans on a wide range of their experience of training, combat, race relations, their allies, and their enemies.¹⁹ She included a brief examination of American relations with the French and characterises them more positively than Mead though not without tension.²⁰ Keene also focused extensively on the African American experience of the war as well as the legacy of supposed French racial tolerance among the American black community.²¹ Gutierrez's focus in his doctoral thesis and the book developed from it, *Doughboys on the Great War: How American Soldiers Viewed their Military Service*, is on how Americans viewed the value and purpose of their service outside of the "lost generation" view of veterans disillusioned with their service.²² In those portions of his work which mentioned relations with the French, he characterised those experiences as largely positive but with a few difficulties such as dislike of the filth in French villages.²³ Mark Meigs devoted extensive attention to the experiences of American soldiers in France and with the French in his 1997 book *Optimism at Armageddon: Voice of American Participants in the First World War* and characterised their relationship with the French as tense but focused mostly on the period between the Armistice and the departure of the AEF. Edward Lengel's study of the AEF in *Thunder and Flames: Americans in the Crucible of Combat, 1917-1918* focused of the tactical

¹⁹ Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 1-2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106-109.

²¹ Aside from her chapter on the topic in *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*, Keene wrote "French and American Racial Stereotypes During the First World War." in *National Stereotypes in Perspective: Americans in France, Frenchmen in America* edited by William L. Chew (Atlanta, Ga.: Rodopi, 2001) and "Memory of the Great War in the African American Community." in *Unknown Soldiers: the American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance*, edited by Mark A. Snell. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2008).

²² Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 40-41.

²³ *Ibid.*, 87-90.

operations of the AEF while under French command and included considerable material on Franco-American tactical cooperation. Lengel strongly emphasised the animosity between French and American command as well as a defence of the competence and courage of the French military which many AEF accounts minimized or dismissed. Aside from work on the experiences of American soldiers, studies of the AEF such as John and Joanne Eisenhower's 2001 *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I* and David Woodward's 2014 *The American Army and the First World War* also devote some space to the Franco-American relationship and tend to focus on high level relations dominated by major conflicts and controversies between French and American commands.

Aside from work specifically on the AEF as a whole and the experiences of doughboys, the Franco-American relationship does appear in writing on other issues of the American military in the First World War. There are two issues that dominate such writing when it comes to the alliance between France and the United States: that of amalgamation and doctrinal disagreements. Amalgamation was the name given to Allied attempts to integrate US soldiers into existing British and French units in order to expedite American arrival at the front and reinforce badly weakened Allied forces. Pershing, his staff, and indeed much of the American leadership, was instead dedicated to the establishment of an independent American army despite the considerable time needed to properly organise and train it. Persistent attempts by Allied command to convince US command to consider amalgamation proved a source of significant disagreement. As Pershing, and many other prominent figures in the AEF, spent considerable space in their memoirs defending American resistance to Allied attempts to

amalgamate Americans which provoked considerable disagreements during the war itself, virtually every work on the AEF addresses amalgamation in some way. Almost all the scholars discussed above address amalgamation proposals and American resistance to them in some capacity. Because French command was active in pushing for amalgamation, the amalgamation controversy forms one of the main ways to analyse Franco-American relations in existing literature, even if it does not constitute a main focus of the work. While most scholars of the AEF address it somewhat, histories of the war that focuses on relations between Allied and American general staffs focus on it quite extensively. Most prominent among historians who study the relations between American and Allied staff is David Trask, whose work remains dominant on the topic of the US as part of a military coalition and integration with the Supreme War Council that coordinated actions between the allies in the final year of the war.²⁴ Trask, in 1961's *The United States in the Supreme War Council: American War Aims and Inter-Allied Strategy, 1917-1918* and 1993's *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking* went into extensive detail about the Franco-American and Anglo-American relationships in the context of relations between command staffs. Amalgamation and the conflicts over strategy made for a contentious relationship between AEF leadership and the Allies. As a result, work that devotes little or no space to the members of the AEF outside of headquarters and bellow flag ranks generally casts the Franco-American relationship as a tense one.

The second issue on which scholars focus when casting the Franco-American relationship as antagonistic is that of doctrine. Virtually every study of American participation of the war acknowledges the importance of the particular battlefield

²⁴ Dennis E. Showalter, "The United States in the Great War: A Historiography," *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 1 (2002): 7.

doctrine Pershing and his staff envisioned as winning the war. That doctrine based on aggressive infantry attacks is generally termed open warfare and proved a major point of contention between American and French commands. Pershing and many of those close to him during the war strongly defended their tactical principles in their memoirs.

Opposed to that doctrine was the variety of doctrines and tactics used by the British and French termed trench warfare. As Allied commanders and governments harshly critiqued Pershing's tactics, historians devoted extensive attention to analysing the development of American doctrine. As open warfare constituted an implicit and explicit criticism of Allied methods of waging war, the debate over which was best also constituted a debate between American and Allied command. As the French had by far the largest training relationship with the AEF and fought beside them far more than the British, doctrinal disagreements often constituted direct disagreements between American and French ideas. As a result, scholars who study doctrinal development of the AEF also study Franco-American military relations as during the war and afterwards those who commented on open and trench warfare identified them as American and French methods respectively. The modern scholars of American doctrine²⁵ in general are quite critical of open warfare in contrast to that used by the allies. While Pershing's doctrinal opinions initially dominated historical discussion of the AEF, decades of research have considerably eroded his reputation.²⁶ As a result, modern scholars of the AEF have effectively agreed with the French on the matter of doctrine. The discussion

²⁵ Notably Richard Faulkner in *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2012; James Rainey in "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I." *Parameters* 13, Issue 3 (1983) and "The Questionable Training of the AEF in World War I." *Parameters* 22 (1992-93); and Mark Grotelueschen in *Doctrine Under Trial: American Artillery Employment in World War I*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001 and *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

²⁶ Adas, "Ambivalent Ally," 706.

of the doctrinal disagreements and their continued prominent place in works on the AEF continue to aid in casting the Franco-American relationship as an antagonistic one.

While work on the AEF rarely makes their relationship with the French the primary object of study, Robert Bruce's *Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War* remains a notable exception for examining in detail the mechanics of the Franco-American alliance. Bruce is also somewhat unusual for emphasising Franco-American friendship, rather than the conflicts between the French and American commands and governments. In particular, Bruce emphasised the importance of the French to AEF development much more than other scholars by focusing on the considerable amount of material support they provided to the AEF as well as their role in training US divisions and commanding US forces during their early battles. Bruce portrayed the Franco-American relationship as being fundamentally a friendly one by downplaying conflicts such as those over prices and emphasising the friendship that developed between French and American soldiers.²⁷ While he does reference doughboys' opinions, Bruce's examination of soldiers' experiences with the French was limited and most of his work dealt with command staffs and generals. As his work serves in part as a refutation of previous categorisations of the Franco-American relationship as strained or antagonistic, Bruce spent a considerable amount of time discussing the issues of amalgamation and doctrinal disputes and arguing why those issues did not cause as much antagonism as previously believed. The first part of a *Fraternity of Arms* extensively examines the opinions and actions of American volunteers who came to France before the US entered the war, but the need for an

²⁷ Robert Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 113-114, 197-198.

examination of higher level relations means his examination of the opinions of the lower ranks was all too brief.

Existing literature on the AEF has so far largely neglected to bring the perspective of the common and everyday experiences of doughboys with the French to the forefront. This work seeks to bridge the gap between the examination of doughboy thoughts and opinions and the examination of the American alliance with France. Previous explorations of the topic have been brief or reduced American everyday experiences with the French to a few anecdotes rather than provide a more thorough and systematic examination of the US Army in France through their relationship with the French below the command level. By focusing less on the overall structure of the alliance or on the momentous events resulting from top down policy in favour of how the men of the AEF experienced those structures and events, we can ascertain how American opinions about the French helped to shape how Americans understood their own military service. By living and fighting beside the French, Americans came to devise clearer ideas of their own identity, capacities, and place within the war. That included how they thought about military virtues and their own identity as soldiers. The considerable time Americans spent living, training, and fighting with the French meant that for doughboys the French were more than a backdrop for their service but were an integral part of it. Thus, a greater understanding of American everyday experiences with the French allows for an exploration not only of a previously neglected aspect of the American experience in the First World War but a greater understanding of the mentality of America's young men in the early 20th century towards a foreign society, their own society through the distinctions they drew, the war itself, and America's role within that

war. If the First World War served as a transition between the ideals and mentality of the 19th century and those of the 20th, understanding how Americans thought about it helps to determine the thinking of the generation that first made that transition.

Traditionally, the history of everyday life and similar historical approaches that focus on the “bottom up” that arose from the “New Left” of the 1960s focus on those neglected by previous history with special focus on those marginalised on the basis of their race, gender, class or sexuality.²⁸ This is not necessarily the case with the analysis presented here. The men examined were disproportionately the more privileged members of American society. The typical doughboy was in his early 20s, white, unmarried, had no prior military experience, and fairly little education.²⁹ A significant proportion, perhaps as many as 20% of the initial draft, were foreign born and included many non-English speakers.³⁰ Approximately 10% of the AEF was African American, a similar proportion to their percentage of the US population, but American command largely confined them to non-combat roles.³¹ The men who left behind written account of their experiences in the war, and are thus presented here, do not evenly represent the demographics of the AEF. Firsthand accounts of immigrants and African Americans are nearly absent. The experiences of these men can only be analyzed based on representations by their native born and white contemporaries as well as through secondary literature. A third of the AEF had less than six years of schooling, 25% of

²⁸ Gary J Kornblith and Carol Lasser, “More than Great White Men: A Century of Scholarship on American Social History,” *OAH Magazine of History* 21, no. 2 (2007), 8, 10; John Brewer, “Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life,” *Cultural & Social History* 7, Issue 1 (2010): 99-100.

²⁹ Gutierrez, “ ‘Sherman Was Right,’ ” 67.

³⁰ Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 49, 52.

³¹ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 231.

native born Americans were illiterate, and less than 15% had graduated high school.³² The memoirs and letters presented are generally from men of a more privileged background than the AEF who were more willing and more able to write about their wartime experiences. The number of officers who left memoirs is vastly disproportionate to their numbers as almost all officers were college educated.³³ As much as two thirds of the AEF came from farming or labouring backgrounds.³⁴ Those who wrote about their experiences were far more likely to have occupations that required more education. As a result, the thoughts and opinions of Americans who served in the war presented is largely that of a white and disproportionately middle class perspective.

Not all the voices featured are middle class or highly educated, but the numbers that far exceed their share of the AEF. As a result, their opinions, which reflect their backgrounds, are not fully representative of the diversity of views in the AEF. In addition, this study disproportionately represents members of the first four divisions sent to France as they spent by far the most time in France and so were most likely to express opinions about the French. Many of those who wrote memoirs published them shortly after the war for public consumption. As a result, they contain self-censorship to make them palatable to an American audience and so might not represent frank assessments of their authors' most intimate thoughts. The discussion of issues of sexuality in particular is stymied by American views on the matter as few doughboys admit to engaging in or

³² Byron Farwell, *Over There: The United States in the Great War, 1917-1918* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 61.

³³ Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri Barbeau, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I*. 2nd ed. (New York: Da Capo, 1996), 60, endnote 15.

³⁴ Mark Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon: Voice of American Participants in the First World War* (Washington Square, N.Y. : New York University Press, 1997), 96-97.

witnessing sexual activity considered unacceptable by US policy and public opinion despite the prevalence of such behaviour in the AEF. As a result, the views of the French represent those of a narrower, if influential, segment of American society than that of the entire AEF.

The first chapter deals with the experiences of doughboys with French civilians, notably the way in which Americans integrated into French villages when billeted within them. Also examined are Americans outside of those villages, be it in port cities or on leave with particular emphasis on how Americans saw the French in terms of their own society. Interaction with civilians formed one of the key doughboy experiences of the war. Whether it was living with French families, buying from French shopkeepers, or chasing French women, French civilians were present in virtually all American experiences not directly tied to training or battle. American views of French civilians and the behaviour they undertook based on those views varied considerably based on how much time they had to overcome cultural differences and reconcile French society with contrasting values found in their own. Initial American views of the French were often negative and doughboys often mistreated French civilians and their property. They were also capable of considerable acts of charity and generosity and many came to see the French civilian population as being friends and worthy of protection. In particular, Americans were quite opinionated on the contrast between “modern” America and “rustic” France, which reflected their own views on the meaning of progress and modernity. Americans did not have a consistent view of French civilians as they disdained some aspects of French life and society while praising others, albeit in often patronising terms. The dichotomy was not reconciled during the war and American

views of the French often varied depending on familiarity and sympathy with given parts of the French population.

The second chapter examines the training period of AEF divisions when they were under French tutelage. It was during this phase that doughboys were confronted by the conflict between the lessons their own command wanted to instill and that which the French tried to impart. The men of the AEF had to navigate the contradictory lessons taught to them and decide whose military competence they respected more. In doing so, they made judgements about the French military and French soldiers. They contrasted those judgements with their burgeoning ideas about their own military identity and what qualities they brought to the war. That contrast provided the foundation for American views as to whether the French were legitimate teachers in the art of warfare. The Franco-American alliance presupposed that the French were legitimate authorities to train American divisions. American command, however, was deeply hostile to the idea of French influence in their divisions and emphasised contradictory doctrine. Doughboys placed between opposing viewpoints largely accepted French authority and respected their trainers though they also began to assert their own military identity that did not necessary conform to the expectation of their allies. In training was when Americans were most deferential to the French and established a respect for them on much more even terms than with civilians. That respect, and the American desire to learn, was a vital part of the Franco-American alliance by ensuring an exchange of expertise in the face of cooler relations between respective command staffs. While establishing that respect however, Americans were also forming distinct ideas about

their own role in the war that did not necessarily correspond to the role the French envisioned for them.

The final chapter deals with the Franco-American relationship in battle and the perceptions of the French Army after witnessing them in combat. During this period, Americans reassessed their views of the French gained in training in light of applying the lessons learned to the battlefield. In addition to determining French military skill, they also assessed their courage and fortitude. After experiencing battle, Americans more fully developed their own independent view of themselves as soldiers in contrast to the French. Experience at the front and behind the lines also allowed for greater socialisation with French soldiers which enabled doughboys to evaluate their French comrades as men as well as soldiers. Different battles produced different evaluations of the French but in general, after a period of uncertainty, American opinion settled on a view of the French as skilled fighters and valued allies who ultimately lacked the exceptional energy and aggression found among Americans. As American forces became more self-sufficient and relied less on French support, American also formed a more independent sense of what fighting in the First World War required and whether either they or the French possessed those necessary qualities.

American views of the French could shift dramatically, as could their behaviour based on those views. Nevertheless, despite American frustrations and occasional disdain, the very real bonds of friendship and sympathy that Americans formed with the French during the war proved a stronger foundation for a military alliance than the often fractious discord between respective high commands would indicate. For doughboys little concerned with diplomatic maneuvering or policy discussions, their experience of

the France and French proved a key part of their military experience as it challenged or reaffirmed the views they had brought with them and forced them to confront what it meant to be part of an American army, and indeed American, in a foreign land.

CHAPTER 1

AMERICAN SOLDIERS AND FRENCH CIVILIANS

Long before Americans saw a battlefield in France, they lived and operated within French civilian society while they trained for war. Experiences outside of the battlefield constituted an important part of the AEF experience and American diaries and memoirs are remarkable as unlike most European accounts, they discuss topics other than the war itself.¹ As a result, the American experience of the war, and of France, was characterised by the nature of their interactions with French civilians. Once the initial shock of travelling to a foreign society subsided, life in and near French towns became routine and allowed consistent patterns of interactions to emerge. Most doughboys spent some time billeted directly in French villages, which partially integrated them into French civilian life. That time forced American soldiers to reconsider their own society in light of the dramatic cultural differences they experienced during their time with French civilians. Leave and recreation also allowed Americans to evaluate and interact with French society as observers of sorts.

The experience of travelling across the ocean to live among a foreign culture was an entirely new one for most Americans. Few had any experience with non-Americans and so their time in France was exceptional in its deviation from their prewar existence. However, the routine of daily life in France settled into repeated and predictable patterns. Days often consisted of the same regimen of training, marching, and living with the French. Within the

¹ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 206.

very alien experience of living in foreign society, Americans established patterns of behaviour and routine to make their daily experiences as ordinary as possible. Doughboys' behaviour in billets was quite different from that when on leave. In billets, Americans integrated into the community which gave them reason to foster close ties with locals. On leave, or in communities which were unfamiliar, Americans were much more apt to disregard local concerns while seeking enjoyment. There was much they came to dislike about France but there was also a feeling of empathy and compassion that developed, especially among those who spent a considerable amount of time in the country.

Americans who compared their own society to that of France were often critical of the latter. Their initial judgements were especially harsh when it came to French industry, consumer culture, and access to scientific methods, all of which Americans considered signs of modernity and progress. More extended contact generally produced a closer and more respectful outlook but Americans never abandoned their views of France as backwards and fundamentally in need of help. The time spent among civilians deeply affected the American experience of them and the daily interactions between the two allowed familiarity and friendship to grow. It was during the period of building such familiarity that the everyday experience of doughboys within civilian France helped to build the wartime relationship between both nations. While Americans often condemned France's society and material conditions, they were more likely to praise her people, particularly for their resilience and fortitude. How the Americans treated French civilians was a matter of great interest to both governments as American arrival coincided with a period of crisis in civilian morale.

By 1917 France was a heavily mobilized society both in terms of the number of men conscripted into the military and in the amount of civilian commitment to the war effort. In

the months prior to American arrival, a series of military defeats, shortages, and economic woes had badly shaken civilian morale and increased support for a negotiated peace rather than the victorious one desired by Allied governments. Labour disruptions and major strikes far worse than any that had previously taken place broke out in several industries, including factories vital to the war effort. Morale and labour problems highlighted the importance of civilian commitment to the continued prosecution of the war. Civilian opinion was a critical component of the war and one of the AEF's major contributions was to improve French morale. Before the US entered the war, many French civilians believed their country incapable of sustaining the war effort beyond the winter of 1917 given the toll it had already taken on the country.² The US entry into the war made a negotiated resolution unlikely, and many civilians despaired over the continued sacrifices they would have to make.³

In order to prove that the lengthened war was worthwhile, the AEF had to prove to civilians that they could make a decisive impact at the front and that they would not impose more hardships on the French than absolutely necessary. The Allies hoped that the AEF would revive their flagging fortunes and morale. If Americans alienated the French population through abuse and misbehaviour, they risked undermining the civilian morale on which the war effort depended. It was for this reason that American perceptions of the French population were so crucial to the war. An AEF that liked and respected the French was less likely to antagonise the civilian population while one that disdained them was likely to cause civilian unrest and thus indirectly undermine the war effort. Americans themselves would also benefit from good relations as they often faced hardships in training and at the

² Jean Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, Tran. Arnold Pomerans (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985), 205, 216, 218-225.

³ Doughty, "More than Numbers," 3.

front. Enjoying time with civilians could serve as an important comfort to Americans and help morale by ensuring that fondly remembered experiences behind the lines counterbalanced hardships in camps or at the front lines. The American and French governments wanted American soldiers and French civilians to develop a close bond because both realised the important, if indirect, effect on the war effort.

The overwhelming majority of doughboys knew next to nothing about France before they arrived. The decades before the First World War saw increased trade and cultural relations between France and the United States. Despite such links, the presence of France in American consciousness was extremely limited. For most of the 19th century, there were few French business houses or representatives in American cities and few Frenchmen visited or immigrated to the United States.⁴ When the French did appear in the American press, it was often in an unfavourable light. American opinion was generally much more critical of French colonialism than that of the British for instance and publications by groups such as the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce accused the French outside of Paris of being “obstructive and parochial” in 1879.⁵ Goodwill generated by the Franco-American alliance during the American Revolution made little impression on Americans so long after the conflict as cultural and diplomatic ties had decayed to the point where few Americans gave any thought to France.

However, France and the United States had grown closer in the years prior to the war with trade volume between the two increasing dramatically since 1901. In addition, both had made efforts to foster cultural ties with symbolic gifts such as the Statue of Liberty and

⁴ Henry Blumenthal, *France and the United States; Their Diplomatic Relation, 1789-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 172; Henry Blumenthal, *Illusion and Reality in Franco-American Diplomacy, 1914-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 7.

⁵ Blumenthal, *France and the United States*, 147, 170.

exchanges of statues of the Marquis de Lafayette and Comte de Rochambeau, French heroes of the American Revolution.⁶ Nevertheless, such gestures had little apparent impact on the men who came to France to fight. Some referenced French aid to the United States during the American Revolution, particularly as both governments heavily emphasised such links, but few if any mentioned any other connection between the two countries. Even if some had knowledge of France's role in securing American independence, or referenced the rhetoric about 'sister republics,' very few had any idea about contemporary France or her people. It was fashionable for wealthy Americans to visit France to admire her culture in the years before the war but they did not look to French culture as a model to replicate in the United States.⁷

At the outbreak of the First World War, thousands of Americans rejected their country's neutral stance and volunteered for the French. Some joined Foreign Legion and fought in major battles in the war; a number of others became famous as fighter pilots in the air war with the French air service, but most volunteered to drive ambulances. Those volunteers came mostly from privileged backgrounds of the class of Americans familiar with France through trips or contact with French high culture, mostly well off college men.⁸ The effect of those volunteers on American views of France on most Americans was limited, however. Many volunteers published memoirs of their experience full of praise for France and the rightness of the French cause, but few members of the AEF made reference to them.⁹

⁶ Ibid., 233, 251.

⁷ Blumenthal, *Illusion and Reality in Franco-American Diplomacy*, 7, 16.

⁸ Edwin W. Morse, *The Vanguard of American Volunteers in the Fighting Lines and in Humanitarian service August, 1914-April, 1917* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons), 1918, 7.

⁹ Examples of published volunteer memoirs include John Bowe's *Soldiers of the Legion* (Chicago: Press of Peterson Linotyping Co., 1918) which detailed his time in the Foreign Legion and other French regiments; famed American poet Alan Seeger's *Letters and diary of Alan Seeger* (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1917) was published after his death at the Somme as a member of the Foreign Legion; American pilot with the French

Even American officers, overwhelmingly drawn from the ranks of the college educated, made few references to more famous American volunteers. If some members of the AEF, especially older men from privileged backgrounds, mentioned having spent time in France prior to the war, the overwhelming majority had no experience of France or the French. Their integration into French society was thus an experience of cultural discovery. Most doughboys had little prior basis on which to interpret their experiences in France.

American Arrival in France

For most members of the AEF, their first exposure to France was the port cities where the ships carrying them to Europe unloaded their human and material cargo. Saint-Nazaire was the earliest port used to unload Americans but many other port towns on the western coast of France, including Brest and Bordeaux, also hosted a considerable American presence. That presence meant that French and American authorities shared control of the port cities and they were often the most visible flashpoints for conflict. While American opinions of the French did evolve over time, their first impressions often formed the basis for all future interactions. Many of the American views about French attitudes, customs, virtues, and place in the civilized world first formed in the weeks following American arrival in France. Because Americans knew so little about the French, their first impressions formed much of the knowledge they used when evaluating France and her society. Opinions about

James McConnell also wrote of fighting for France in *Flying for France with the American Escadrille at Verdun* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, Page & company, 1917) Henry Sheahan's *A Volunteer Poilu* (Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1916) about his time as an ambulance driver; Leslie Buswell also wrote about driving an ambulance in *Ambulance no. 10: Personal Letters from the Front* (New York: A.L. Burt, 1916); supporters of the French cause also published anthologies of writing by volunteers to encourage more to join such as Edwin W. Morse's *The Vanguard of American Volunteers in the Fighting Lines and in Humanitarian service August, 1914-April, 1917* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons), and A. Piatt Andrew's *Friends of France: the Field Service of the American Ambulance Described by its Members*, (Toronto: T. Allen, 1916).

the French formed early in their time in the country reappeared throughout American accounts of the war. While they could modify those opinions, they formed a strong foundation for all future relations with French civilians during the war.

Americans gauged how the French felt about them from the moment they disembarked based on the crowds that came out to greet them. That welcome varied greatly depending on when Americans arrived, so not all of received the same first impressions of France. Even before doughboys had left the United States, the enthusiastic send-offs they received in the United States reinforced a widespread conviction among many that they were going to save France from defeat.¹⁰ As such, they expected a hero's welcome and while some received one, most did not. A division of US infantry was organised and sent to France as soon as possible in order to "show the flag" and boost French morale with later US divisions to arrive as soon as they could be organised and given rudimentary training. The 1st Division sent between June and December 1917 was the first major formation of US troops to arrive in France. Before the bulk of the combat troops of the 1st Division arrived however, newly promoted General John Pershing and his staff arrived in June 1917 to familiarise themselves with the war and to make the necessary arrangements to command the AEF. Among that staff was George C. Marshall whose diaries detail the arrival in France. He described the reception:

Some slight applause greeted the march through, but it was apparent that all of St. Nazaire suffered from a deep depression due to the collapse of the much advertised French offensive of April 17th. We were to learn later that numerous elements of the French Army were practically in a state of mutiny during the latter part of April and the first part of May.¹¹

¹⁰ Keene, *Doughboys*, 107.

¹¹ George C. Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 12-13.

For American soldiers of the 1st Division arriving in Saint-Nazaire after this initial landing, the welcome was different. Some describe their welcome as muted at first, likely, because the townspeople did not know when US troop ships were arriving. Soon, however, locals came out to greet Americans as recounted by a member of the 1st Division:

Later, however, great enthusiasm prevailed in the little French port at the sight of the strange visitors. The troops were welcomed by the populace of the town, and while the French bands played the stirring music of France, the American bands responded with the national air. The Mayor issued a proclamation in which he extended to the Americans the hospitality of France and expressed his country's gratitude for the help and the hope that they were bringing.¹²

The arrival of Americans provoked a great deal of enthusiasm in Saint-Nazaire. Many local residents learned English, women wore American style clothes, and teenage boys shaved their mustaches and adopted doughboy hairstyles.¹³ Public enthusiasm supplemented official and organised greetings for the initial arrival of American troops. Official celebrations and public displays of friendship and appreciation for Americans continued throughout the war.¹⁴ The inhabitants of Saint-Nazaire, both officials and the general population, had very good relations with Americans after their arrival though the enthusiasm did lessen in 1918 as doughboys become omnipresent in the town.¹⁵

Despite different experiences with their initial welcome, all agreed that the French met those Americans who went to Paris in July 1917 to take part in a 4th of July parade with extreme enthusiasm and outpourings of adulation. Pershing and his staff as well as select groups of the 1st Division went to Paris to be formally welcomed to France. France had held

¹² Society of the First Division. *History of the First Division during the World War*, (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1922), 7.

¹³ Yves-Henri Nouailhat, "L'opinion publique à l'égard des Américains à Saint-Nazaire en 1917," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 15, no. 1 (1968): 100.

¹⁴ Yves-Henri Nouailhat, *Les Américains à Nantes et Saint-Nazaire, 1917-1919* (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 1972), 177-180.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 99, 102.

ceremonies for the 4th of July earlier in the war, but none matched the celebration in 1917. The ceremony evoked Franco-American friendship throughout the ages, especially during the American Revolution. The French emphasised the relationship between the Marquis de Lafayette and George Washington, going so far as to assign one of Lafayette's descendants, Lieutenant Colonel de Chambrun, to be Pershing's personal liaison.¹⁶ Pershing himself displayed great tact in Paris during the many ceremonies in his honour and that of the United States and largely made a good impression. While the phrase is commonly attributed to Pershing, it was his aide, Colonel Charles Stanton, who supplied the quote that would be immortalised when, during a ceremony before the statue of Lafayette he declared "*Nous voilà, Lafayette!*" to the cheers and raucous applause of the substantial crowd.¹⁷ Pershing's arrival in Paris came just after the worst period of French Army munities when French morale was at its nadir. The French were hopeful that the arrival of the Americans would boost morale and this proved to be true for the people of Paris.¹⁸ Members of the 1st Division who participated in the parade described the level of earnestness and enthusiasm of the French during the celebrations, which some compared to a childish glee coming from grown men. Private Donald Kyler, a member of the divisional band, describes how eager the French were to help him enjoy his time in Paris when he went out at night:

Outside, numerous French soldiers were eager to show me around the night life of Paris, but I declined their offers and just looked around on my own initiative. Everywhere people were friendly and wanted to buy me drinks, but I again declined. [...] Then I saw another American soldier whom I knew, with French soldier friends, and I joined them.

¹⁶ André Kaspi, *Le temps des Américains: le concours américain à la France en 1917-1918* (Paris: Université de Paris I: Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1976), 98.

¹⁷ Frederick Palmer, *John J. Pershing, General of the Armies: A Biography* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Military Service Publishing, 1948), 20-22, 33-34.

¹⁸ Doughty, "More than Numbers," 4.

We all went to the Follies Bergerie [sic], which was quite an experience for me. I had never seen anything like that before.¹⁹

The ceremonies themselves were organised by the French government with the specific intent of reinforcing French-US relations and the exuberance of the crowd with their cheering, and US flag waving, left a genuine impression on the Americans present.

American press reports of French enthusiasm for early AEF arrival such as the one that appeared in *The Sun* raised the expectations of many:

Gayety and gratitude were the leading notes during those hours; gayety among the arriving Americans and joyful among the arriving Americans and joyful gratitude among the French people of the town, who lined the quays and streets in welcome. [...]

A wild welcome was shrieked by whistles of craft in the harbor and cries of “Vive la France” and “Vive les Etats Unis” seemed to come from every throat in the crowd, which was thickly dotted with the varicolored uniforms of French soldiers and sailors. Meanwhile the bands on the warship were playing “The Star Spangled Banner” and the “Marseillaise” as the American colors were hoisted to their staffs.²⁰

Americans expected a hero’s welcome and the adulation of a grateful population but few received it. As the arrival of American forces became routine, the novelty wore off and the French populace in the ports took less and less notice of them. Some Americans received warm greetings and gifts from locals, but those were mostly members of the first divisions to arrive in France. José de la Luz Sáenz of the 90th Division, which arrived in June 1918, recorded the outrage his unit felt at their fairly uneventful welcome:

The arrival of troops is such a common sight in France that our appearance was met by the coolest of receptions imaginable. It was enough for us to give up or go into a rage. We were expecting some kind of appreciation from the people we came to help liberate from the affront, tyranny, and violence of a tyrant who has the nation in its clutches. We are also here to pay a debt that some of our countrymen previously incurred, but this does not justify the lack of courtesy or appreciation.²¹

¹⁹ Martin Marix Evans ed. *American Voices of World War I: Primary Source Documents, 1917-1920* (London : Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001), 16.

²⁰ “Landing of U.S. Army in France Without Hitch,” *The Sun* (New York), July 01, 1917, page 1, page 6.

²¹ José de la Luz Sáenz, *World War I Diary of José de la Luz Sáenz*, ed. Emilio Zamora, trans. Emilio Zamora and Ben Maya (Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 139.

Sáenz and the men in his unit wanted some tangible or visible symbol of gratitude from the French. Appeal to Lafayette and the American Revolution meant little as France faced a threat to its very existence which justified special gratitude on their part in the minds of many Americans. That the French were not according Americans due gratitude for having come to rescue France formed the basis of many complaints that doughboys first voiced as they disembarked. In general, while the receptions became less noticeable later in the war, even those outraged by a tepid greeting soon found some aspects of their interactions with French civilians endearing.

Among them was the chance to socialise with children. The presence and boldness of the children dominated American impressions of ports and their inhabitants as they were active in welcoming the Americans, even after the adults had stopped being excited. Many soldiers who described their landing made mention of children going up to the ships as they docked and besieging the men with requests for goods or offers to trade. Asking for food was a particularly popular activity. Of particular interest were items like chocolate and white bread that had all but disappeared from France during the war. Private Edward Trueblood of the 29th Engineers remarked on the scenes his unit saw soon after disembarking:

We passed many peasant women and children while we were marching through the railroad yards. Some of them were offering cakes and nuts for sale, others were begging white bread from us. It was here that we first heard those two French words that became so familiar to us before we left France, "Donnez moi." It was "donnez moi" this and "donnez moi" that, especially from the children who begged cigarettes, pennies, and anything else that the American boys might have to give away.²²

Children, especially young boys, were very open in asking for items from the Americans because it was effective. AEF soldiers treated French children with tremendous indulgence

²² Edward Alva Trueblood, *Observations of an American Soldier During his Service with the A. E. F. in France, in the Flash Ranging Service* (Sacramento, Calif., The New publishing company, 1919), 11-12.

and gave them all sorts of goods from cigarettes (ostensibly for their fathers at the front) to chocolate, to food, to other small items as well as showering them with affection and pats on the head.

Even when an American soldier had a mixed or an overall negative impression of the port cities they seldom extended those criticisms to the children they saw. American soldier newspaper *Stars and Stripes* provided a description of the relationship French children often initiated with American forces and how Americans felt about them:

With a small boy's sure instinct for finding the nearest kitchen, they made their way, dodging sentinels, straight to the cook shacks, and began to use ingratiating manners on the cooks. Small boys were strictly *défendu* in the cantonment, but it is notorious that our cooks were among the first to pick up handy phrases of French: and everybody knows, furthermore, that the first of our linguist to learn handy phrases picked them up from small boys. [...]

In exchange for handy phrases of French, for running errands and for furnishing entertainment in the way of songs and wrestling matches, they received a quota of copper clackers. They were respectful always, and apparently had few bad habits outside of a great precociousness in the matter of cigarette smoking.²³

American affection for French children became the subject of wild rumours among the French. One such story alleged that in Besançon, Americans were effectively abducting children from the streets in order to serve them dinner and champagne.²⁴ French children generally befriended Americans for material reasons as a source of money and goods. While Americans often had genuine affection for the French children that approached them, they did offer practical benefits such as teaching doughboys a bit of French. Children were the first members of the French population whom Americans embraced and so they served as something of a gateway to befriending other Frenchmen. French parents looked kindly on doughboys that treated their children well and the children often served as translators who

²³ "Our Pals, The War-Waifs of France," *Stars and Stripes*, March 15, 1918, page 4.

²⁴ Kaspi, *Le temps des Américain*, 130.

convinced many Americans of the qualities of the French people. The visible presence of children and their willingness to interact with Americans represented the first real chance doughboys had to get to know some of the people France. After an initially disappointing reception, interactions with children provided a bright spot in their everyday experiences which allowed them to form a more positive impression of France and her people. The mutual affinity between French children and the AEF deepened as Americans moved into the interior of the country and it provided the first examples of Franco-American friendship.

The boldness of local children may have charmed Americans but what else most immediately noticed about the French port towns, especially in Brittany, was the poverty. Many Americans described that the towns, and especially the rural areas they entered, as filled with people whose dress and manner struck them as backward and rustic. Of particular interest to Americans were the wooden *sabots* worn by the lower class rural population. The meagre living conditions of the French population were the subject of frequent comment by doughboys throughout their presence there. Even soldiers from rural areas found such sights surprising. Corporal Elmer Sherwood, a college student from small town Indiana, of the 42nd described the area around Saint-Nazaire as backward: “The natives are not progressive, however, and live in houses built in past ages. They are, in fact, poorer than the inhabitants of any other district of France, using the methods of industry and agriculture long ago discarded in America.”²⁵ Americans often took the relative lack of mechanised farming as a sign of backwardness though in reality it had more to do with the absence prewar labour

²⁵ Elmer W. Sherwood, *A Soldier in World War I: The Diary of Elmer W. Sherwood* ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2004), 11-12.

shortages that often spurred agricultural mechanisation.²⁶ Those impressions deepened as the Americans marched inland to await transport by rail to their training camps.

The region of France most Americans entered on their way to the interior exacerbated those impressions. Brittany was one of the poorest and least developed regions of France.²⁷ Edward Trueblood noticed the change in the dress of the people as he moved further inland while still remarking upon the “peasant” nature of the people:

We noticed as we got away from the coast, that there was a change in the style of dress of the peasants. We no longer saw the round hats with the ribbon streamers hanging down behind, so familiar in the rural districts around Brest. The dress of the peasants, farther in the interior, was more like that of the laboring classes of America. The men and women both wore serviceable clothes of dark material, but few of them wore anything on their heads. Sabots were worn instead of leather shoes. [...] This must have been rather uncomfortable, but the French peasantry seemed not to mind it at all.²⁸

Americans sometimes described French villages as if they belonged to another time.

Chaplain Bryant Wilson and intelligence officer Lamar Tooze provided a description of a French village they considered to be almost a relic of the past:

Instead of a row of neat business blocks, with flat glass windows and several stories in height, and homes with well-kept lawns situated in districts devoted to residential purposes exclusively, they found in these towns single-storied stone or concrete buildings, old and brown with age, with moss-covered, thatched roofs, and casement windows which were conspicuous if they were unbroken. [...]

It was the provincialism of these people which made us feel as if we had suddenly found ourselves living in another an earlier, age; away from the confusion of our everyday American life; away from the clanging of industry and the rush of commercialism; away from the top-speed pace characteristic of America and Americans. We had pierced the veneer of civilization and had struck the “hard pan” of life.²⁹

²⁶ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1871-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 124-125.

²⁷ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 13

²⁸ Trueblood, *Observations of an American Soldier During his Service with the A. E. F. in France*, 22-26.

²⁹ Bryant Wilson and Lamar Tooze, *With the 364th Infantry in America, France, and Belgium* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1920), 26, 31.

Americans interpreted the physical appearance of the town: that of old buildings occupied for centuries unlike almost anything in the United States as a sign the people were just as backwards.

A town and people seemingly untouched by the industrial age was one history itself had seemingly abandoned and transported Americans to a different century as well as a different country. Despite the language barrier and apparent backwardness of the village, Wilson and Tooze: “came to know and love these peasant people who in their simplicity seemed to connect the Medieval with the Modern.”³⁰ Even when complimenting locals, substantial differences in the standards of living created something of a patronising attitude towards French civilians as a people in need of American methods and customs to “modernize” them. Some like Chester Jenks attributed a form of romantic pastoral simplicity to the rural population such as when he claimed:

Provençals are not like Parisians. Parisians are Frenchmen tempered by cosmopolitanism – tempered by civilization and education and by contact with other people; Provençals are true Frenchmen. Innocent, harmless, and useful, these simple religious country folk do not tire of their quiet pastures.³¹

Implicit in such American descriptions of France was that it was fundamentally behind the United States in key ways. Some might admire pastoral simplicity but the lack of “progress” and the signs of industrial civilization were clearly alien to the doughboys that chose to comment. As Americans lived and served in rural parts of France, the American experience of France was mostly that of French peasants and their villages. Doughboys identified the rural lifestyle as the quintessential French way of life as their experiences during the war made them believe that was how most Frenchmen lived. The young men of the AEF

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 27

³¹ Chester Walton Jenks, *Our First Ten Thousand* (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1919), 71.

revealed their thoughts on modernity in the contrast they drew with their experience in the United States and that in France. The physical infrastructure of rural France and the dress of its people were instrumental in establishing such views of the French.

The first American experiences of France consisted mostly of observing locals rather than more in depth interactions, aside from those with children. Without such interaction, the French had little ability to actively influence the views of American who initially mostly based them on the social and economic conditions of France and the most apparent signs of gratitude or indifference. With little prior information and few opportunities to befriend civilians, aside from children, doughboys judged France on what they could see. Whether their greeting was warm or absent, they saw a poor and backward countryside with few signs of the industrial society they believed to be the norm of modern civilization. Even witnessing more urban and developed part of France later did little to alter their views of the country at large. David Kennedy's examination of American society during the war claimed that the AEF experience in France reinforced American myths of the "Old World" as exhausted and effete in contrast to American energy and dynamism that would come to the rescue of Europe.³² Kennedy's assessment is largely accurate, but later experiences ensured that that was not the only way in which Americans saw France. As Americans began to settle into the country, living in areas many found so different heavily influenced how they treated locals and how they experienced their time in civilian France.

Sexuality and Race in France

³² Kennedy, *Over Here*, 207.

Aside from observing socio-economic conditions in France, Americans also judged French habits and morals. While many found them equally foreign and worthy of condemnation, they also had a chance to meaningfully interact with different French values either to partake in them or reject them outright. A certain culture shock was inevitable for the mass of young men who had never been outside their own country and the difficulties in reconciling different cultures and attitudes persisted throughout the war. The subject that most surprised many Americans was what they interpreted as the much more open sexual mores of the French. The openness, and legality, of prostitution in France was a cause of much bewilderment. Marine Lieutenant Herman Zischke was quick to draw conclusions on French morality when he declared: “the ‘bad’ women are pests – they just seem to fill the streets – and are so open and shameless about it too. I’ve come to believe the French are more immoral.”³³ Even the mores of law-abiding urban French citizens shocked Americans, including Edward Trueblood when he observed: “The warm blooded French people have ideas that differ widely from those of Americans in many respects, and it is nothing unusual to see a French couple making love in broad daylight with persons passing by on all sides, in one of these public parks.”³⁴ Americans discounted the more reserved sexual mores of conservative rural France, portraying France as a sexual playground.

Moral condemnation did not prevent Americans from participating in the looser sexual behaviour they attributed to the French. The French believed that it was Americans who were acting in a vulgar fashion by openly “calling upon” women and otherwise having

³³ George B. Clark ed., *Devil Dogs Chronicle: Voices of the 4th Marine Brigade in World War I* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 93.

³⁴ Trueblood, *Observations of an American Soldier During his Service with the A. E. F. in France*, 16.

an overly assertive attitude when addressing even “respectable” women.³⁵ The fact that armies attract prostitutes likely distorted American perceptions and the number of brothels that surrounded US bases gave an inflated impression of their prevalence. So pervasive was the view of France as a land of open sexuality that American GIs weaned on their fathers’ tales of sexual escapades in the country arrived in 1944 expecting a land of lustful and willing women.³⁶ How different individual Americans found French practices depended on their own backgrounds as the level of openness of sexuality differed across the United States, but the considerable difference many Americans perceived, served to create a lasting view of the French as a very sexual people, regardless of the accuracy of such an image.

Americans who commented on the different customs of the French sometimes noted their views of sexuality but often couched their observations under the general category of “morals.” The openness towards sexuality displayed by women in particular surprised many. Such was the case with a US officer while riding in a train car cabin with French and American soldiers:

One of us had a naughty French Comic paper, and I was holding it in my hands when the lady got in. In somewhat of a quandary as to the proper thing to do under the circumstances, I offered it to her before reading it myself. She thanked me and said that she had already read it, and imagine my horror when I opened the paper and found it full of pictures such as the American public would never allow in print. “Do you mean to say that you read such a paper,” I asked her in surprise. “Oh, not in public,” she answered, “my husband or my brother send them home to me.”³⁷

Americans interpreted the availability to lewd material in France as a sign of a much more sexually permissive society. Americans who wished to see such images had little trouble in

³⁵ Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 127.

³⁶ Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 2.

³⁷ Francis R. Stoddard, *War time France; The Story of an American Commission Abroad* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1918), 27.

finding them as women often sold them to disembarking troops who proved to be eager customers.³⁸ American demand for such content clearly existed despite denunciations from some in the AEF. That French women were more open in their sexuality than what Americans expected had been the result of the 30 year old movement partially spurred by the hope that it would alleviate the country's prewar population crisis and it had been supported by French feminists and anti-feminists alike in order to liberalise French sexual mores and give women more choice in their partners.³⁹ Generally, Americans who voiced an opinion defined French moral characteristics as being inferior to theirs with the openness to sexuality being a subject of particular complaint. Major Charles Biddle, for example, wrote to his mother on the subject of French morals though he tempered his judgements by acknowledging cultural differences:

[Moral conditions in France] are not good I must admit, according to our standards, but then you must remember that French ideas on these things are entirely different from ours even among the best people. They are brought up to an entirely different standard and worth while ones live up to their own ideals although at the same time doing things we would not approve of. It seems to me that if a man lives up to his own standards of what is right, that that is about all you can expect of him.⁴⁰

French sexual morals may have surprised Americans and elicited rebuke from those in the AEF who believed in the moral order advocated by the middle and upper classes, but their behaviour did not always align with such moral outrage.

Few, if any, Americans admitted to frequenting brothels in French towns though some mentioned other men who pursued relationships with French women or noted that they themselves had done so. Marine Lieutenant Zischke gave a good example of a colleague

³⁸ Nels Anderson, *Nels Anderson's World War I Diary*, Ed. Allan Kent Powell (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2013), 48.

³⁹ Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 93-94.

⁴⁰ Charles J. Biddle, *The Way of the Eagle* (New York: C. Scribner's, 1919), 18.

who sought out French women despite a language barrier: “Ashurst who is quite a fusser holds that it is a very embarrassing thing to be making love to a French girl when you can’t speak French. He evidently has tried it.”⁴¹ Americans attempting to flirt with French women was a subject of frequent humour both in memoirs and in contemporary publications such as the AEF soldiers’ newspaper *Stars and Stripes*. The majority of the jokes featured inept doughboys attempting to compliment women with absurd pick-up lines or fumbling in their non-existent French. Despite such caricatures, many romantic interactions occurred. A number of Americans began relationships with French women that ended in marriage. While precise numbers are unknown there were as many as 10,000 war brides produced by the First World War, most of them French. Overwhelmingly, these were young, working class women, largely peasants.⁴² Relationships with industrial workers, shop girls, or local women hired by the AEF for clerical duties were also common.⁴³ US soldiers tended to seek out “respectable” women who reminded them of home, as marriage prospects and they avoided those with “bad reputations.”⁴⁴ Americans who married French women were overwhelmingly from enlisted ranks.⁴⁵

Given the background of most of the women, relationships often began in billets with local women or in French towns and cities where wounded or sick men spent time convalescing. American military authorities made no formal policy on the issue of marriages. There was a significant drive to prevent US soldiers from having sex with local women but the issue of marriage was not subject to nearly as much restriction. The French

⁴¹ Clark, *Devil Dogs Chronicle*, 96.

⁴² Nina Mjagkij, “Forgotten Women: War Brides of World War I,” *Amerikastudien*.32, Issue 2 (1987): 191, 194.

⁴³ Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 18.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁵ Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 99, 132.

were in favour of permitting marriages for fear that AEF members would abandon pregnant women.⁴⁶ While there was some discussion, the AEF decided that it had no right to restrict the marriages of US soldiers as the choice to marry was considered a critical individual right in the United States.⁴⁷ American forces would eventually facilitate the transit of thousands of war brides to the United States after the war.⁴⁸ The way Americans who chose to relate their wartime experiences spoke about sexuality in France and the way much of the AEF behaved differed very dramatically. Americans pursuing romantic and sexual relations with French women constituted an important feature of the wartime experience for many. While most of the resulting relationships were brief, thousands formed long lasting bonds.

Regardless of individual reactions, attitudes towards sexual relations were a cause of considerable tension in port towns, especially on the issue of prostitution. The French, accepting prostitution as an inevitable feature of war, made arrangements to accommodate and regulate sexual contact between soldiers and women. The US attitude was much more prohibitionist and attempts were made to prevent all sexual contact or at least to proscribe contact with prostitutes. Conversely, in some ways, the French considered sexual contact between soldiers and women to be a desirable occurrence, particularly as French national rhetoric often linked sexual and military prowess.⁴⁹ At least one French doctor believed that the “coquettishness” of French women would prevent moral decay caused by the allegedly rampant homosexuality in the German Army.⁵⁰ American views of sexual morality were far different and considered all non-marital sexual contact undesirable. The US government was

⁴⁶ Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances*, 12.

⁴⁷ Mjagkij, “Forgotten Women,” 192.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴⁹ Kimberley A Reilly, “ ‘A Perilous Venture for Democracy,’ : Soldiers, Sexual Purity, and American Citizenship in the First World War,” *Journal of the Gilded Age & Progressive Era* 13, Issue 2 (2014): 245.

⁵⁰ Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*, 95.

especially sensitive to the social purity movement that exerted considerable political pressure in the early 20th century.

The movement, part of larger reform movements under the aegis of Progressivism, was especially opposed to prostitution and drew on the support of a wide variety of groups including clergy, feminists, temperance organisations, and physicians.⁵¹ Those groups, which represented overwhelmingly middle class constituencies, put tremendous pressure on the government to ensure the moral preservation of America's youth while in the military to the extreme that supportive publications sent correspondents to US camps to investigate moral conditions.⁵² Before American entry into the war, the US Army had no objection to sexual contact between its members and women. In fact, at several garrisons on the Mexican border officers actively provided prostitutes for their men in the belief that sex was required for one to be a good soldier.⁵³ The practise of American soldiers patronizing prostitutes and engaging in extramarital sex did not interest the American public as long as the force remained a small, professional, and volunteer one, made up almost entirely of working class men. But with mass conscription came demands that the Army take steps to protect the morality of America's youth and widespread public pressure convinced the US Army that keeping its soldiers chaste and sober was of paramount importance.⁵⁴

Because Brittany was the major US point of entry into France and had a large US military presence, the AEF exerted much more administrative control than most other parts of France. Brittany corresponded to the French 10th *Région Militaire* but the governance

⁵¹ Barbara Meil Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue: The Politics of Prostitution and the American Reform Tradition: With a New Preface* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 150.

⁵² Reilly, " 'A Perilous Venture for Democracy,' " 227-228.

⁵³ Allan Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States since 1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 54.

⁵⁴ Reilly, " 'A Perilous Venture for Democracy,' " 229.

there was a shared responsibility between French and American military authorities.

Differing attitudes on the role of prostitutes caused some tension, especially between French municipal officials and US authorities in port cities. Fears of venereal disease (VD) were a major preoccupation, both because of the risk of making troops unfit for duty and because of possible public relations repercussions back home should news of widespread disease in the AEF emerge. Venereal disease was a serious issue for armies during the war as before antibiotics, treatment was difficult and it kept men out of the fighting line.⁵⁵ So important was the issue that one of Pershing's first orders in France concerned VD prevention.⁵⁶ French attempts to accommodate such concerns reflected an ignorance of just how strongly US officials categorically opposed prostitution. The French relied on a system of regulated brothels, called *maisons tolérées*, to prevent VD by monitoring and testing prostitutes. In order to address the concerns about disease, French officials proposed to open a certain number of brothels to Americans, but the AEF almost instantly rejected the idea on the grounds that it did not fulfill US objectives and that the American public would never accept such a measure.⁵⁷ While American command placed all brothels off limits, the French refused to cooperate with attempts to expel prostitutes from areas around US camps.⁵⁸

At the heart of the disagreement was a fundamental difference in American and French conceptions of sexuality. Regulated prostitution was abhorrent to American progressives because it represented a tacit endorsement of the exploitation of women and the

⁵⁵ Many armies on the Western Front had very high rates of VD infection with the Australians and Canadians having a rate of approximately 150 cases per 1000 soldiers, the Germans having 110 per 1000, the French 83 per 1000, and the British a more modest rate of 30 per 1000. (Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 107.)

⁵⁶ Jean-Yves Le Naour. "Le sexe et la guerre: divergences franco-américaines pendant la Grande Guerre (1917-1918)," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 197 (2000): 104-105.

⁵⁷ Liaison Officer in Rennes to Chief Liaison officer, June 29, 1918, Box 2007, entry 51, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Force (WWI), NARA.

⁵⁸ Le Naour, "Le sexe et la guerre," 105-106.

acceptance of a sexual double standard that expected chastity from women but not men.⁵⁹ The view of male sexuality promoted by the AEF was one in which chastity was compatible with male vitality whose energy should be devoted to activities like boxing rather than wasted on vices such as sex.⁶⁰ That conception of sexuality was the product of a campaign by American reformers to impose a middle class view of masculinity that prized sexual purity, temperance, sobriety, and personal hygiene over working class masculinity expressed in customs of drinking, gambling, and emphasis on sexual prowess.⁶¹ For the French, the sexual freedom of soldiers and men was sacred and the government had no right to limit it. To forbid the *poilu* from having sex would be to call into question the vitality of the French male and the nation itself, as an ideal soldier could face the enemy on the battlefield and seduce a woman behind the lines.⁶² The French refused to apply VD prevention measures on men and focused entirely on regulating prostitutes.⁶³ The French considered their system of regulated brothels to be the solution to preventing the spread of VD while acknowledging that soldiers would patronise prostitutes.⁶⁴

US requests to ban prostitution entirely struck the French as fundamentally unreasonable, naïve, or ridiculous. The men charged with combatting venereal disease, John Hopkins urologist Colonel Hugh Young and his associate Colonel Edward Keyes, found the French entirely unhelpful:

We have not received the slightest co-operation from[sic] the French authorities. With reference to fighting venereal disease at Saint-Nazaire. In fact, all the efforts, and

⁵⁹ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 35.

⁶⁰ Michelle K. Rhoades, "Renegotiating French Masculinity: Medicine and Venereal Disease during the Great War," *French Historical Studies* 29, Issue 2 (2006): 315.

⁶¹ Douglas F. Habib, "Chastity, Masculinity, and Military Efficiency: The United States Army in Germany, 1918-1923," *The International History Review* 28, no. 4 (2006): 738, 741-742.

⁶² Rhoades, "Renegotiating French Masculinity," 295, 298.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 315-316, 323.

⁶⁴ Le Naour, "Le sexe et la guerre," 106.

particularly those of the Mayor, have been most antagonistic. He has tried in every way to get people to say that it would be better to open the houses of prostitution and have the miserable condition of our troops as it was some months ago. The Mayor has tried in every way to get a wedge in so that our men can be allowed all kinds of liberty while in this port. When you think that transports of 12,000 to 15,000 men used to come through this port and stay here as long as ten or fifteen days and that an average of \$20 to \$30 was spent by each, you can easily see how much the town loses by our methods.⁶⁵

On occasion, American emphasis of male chastity caused concern among local officials, such as the mayor of Saint-Nazaire, who feared that men deprived of the sexual outlets of brothels would rape and abduct local women. Americans believed that they could control the male sex drive and prevent men from having sex while the French were not convinced that this was the case.⁶⁶ As a result, the French military felt that regulated brothels were the key to reducing the harms of disease while the AEF preferred to prevent sex altogether.

The drive to eliminate access to prostitution was often coupled with the desire to restrict alcohol access which the US treated with a similarly prohibitionist attitude, particularly as establishments serving American soldiers with liquor and sex tended to spring up side by side. The largest US training camp in Brittany, Camp Coëtquidan, where much of the training for the US Field Artillery was done, which was not near any particularly large towns, soon attracted a host of quickly built establishments to serve soldiers. US authorities complained about the number of “cafés” and “soldier hotels,” which is to say, bars and brothels run by what they considered disreputable characters and they wished to clear these out.⁶⁷ The camp commander complained of the difficulty in removing those institutions because French authorities insisted that Americans follow all legal procedures to evict them.

⁶⁵ Frank B Freidel, *Over There: The Story of America's First Great Overseas Crusade* (Short Hills, NJ : Burford Books, 2003), 57.

⁶⁶ Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 104-105.

⁶⁷ Liaison Officer in Rennes to Chief Liaison officer, June 29, 1918, Box 2007, entry 51, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Force (WWI), NARA.

As a result, they were rarely gone for long.⁶⁸ Americans advanced the suspicion that the large number of foreign nationals running those establishments was a potential den of spies in an effort to persuade the French to permanently dismantle the shops.⁶⁹ The argument proved ineffective and the issue persisted throughout the war. The presence of Americans and their money meant that even in small communities near camps: “Gaudy structures with appropriate names, such as the ‘American Bar,’ the ‘Stars and Stripes,’ appeared and prospered.”⁷⁰

As US officials were never able to get French cooperation in keeping their men away from prostitutes, they resorted to emphasising the risks to soldiers themselves. The US Army screened the one hour film “Fit to Fight,” which emphasised the danger of VD carried by prostitutes was shown to almost all their soldiers.⁷¹ Those warnings almost always cast foreign women as aggressive and predatory to the point that a US private noted that health lectures were so hyperbolic they gave the impression Americans that French women would rape them the moment that they disembarked in France.⁷² Officers also warned their men against sexual contact, warning their men that any sexual contact with women near camps would result in disease and ruin their lives.⁷³ Some officers included the entire French population in their warnings as was a case related by Edward Trueblood which had a major effect on his unit:

⁶⁸ Report to Chief Liaison Officer for Activities between April 30 and May 12, 1918. Box 2007, entry 51, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Force (WWI), NARA.

⁶⁹ Commandant of 10th Military Region to the French Minister of War, March 14, 1918, Box 2007, entry 51, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Force (WWI), NARA.

⁷⁰ John W. Russell, ed. *History of Battery B, One Hundred Third Field Artillery, Twenty-sixth Division* (Providence: E. L. Freeman company, 1922), 31.

⁷¹ Steven L. Piott, *Daily Life in the Progressive Era* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Greenwood, 2011), 229-230.

⁷² Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances*, 23.

⁷³ Vernon E. Kniptash, *On the Western Front with the Rainbow Division: A World War I Diary*, ed. Bruce Geelhoed (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 30.

[Outside of Brest] we were again addressed by an officer and cautioned to be careful about coming in contact with the French people, and particularly with the women and children of the lower classes. We were informed that the lower classes of women and the peasant children are nearly all syphilitic [sic], especially in seaport towns. This sent a shudder through us, for we had already been fondling some of the French children, before we realized the necessity for caution. The warning was heeded and thereafter the boys kept the peasants at a distance.⁷⁴

Such warnings did little to change the pervasive American impressions of the French as a backward and immoral people.

Prostitution and drinking establishments were a fact of life in France that the AEF hoped its men would ignore. Despite such attempts and the condemnation of the presence of prostitutes by those who wrote memoirs, the continued existence of brothels and open prostitution near bases indicates that doughboys made use of such services. Brothels in Saint-Nazaire were so popular that as early as September 1917 three brothels staffed by 55 to 65 women were each serving 1,500 Americans servicemen a day.⁷⁵ That did not include men patronising the considerable number of unregistered prostitutes drawn to port cities by these lucrative opportunities. So many prostitutes came to Saint-Nazaire that locals complained they were ruining the city.⁷⁶ One French police officer remarked that Americans got a terrible impression of France because they spent all their money on prostitutes and got VD.⁷⁷ That reality forced the AEF to concede that abstinence was not a viable way to prevent VD and provided chemical prophylactic stations whose use was mandatory after sexual encounters. Those measures were so effective that they reduced VD rates to a quarter of that present in camps in the United States where they tended to emphasise avoiding prostitutes

⁷⁴ Trueblood, *Observations of an American Soldier During his Service with the A. E. F. in France*, 13.

⁷⁵ Le Naour, "Le sexe et la guerre," 105.

⁷⁶ Nouailhat, "L'opinion publique à l'égard des Américains à Saint-Nazaire en 1917," 100-101.

⁷⁷ James F. McMillan, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society, 1870-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 107.

but were lax about mandated prophylactic use.⁷⁸ Despite French dismissal of US VD prevention methods, the kits proved so useful that the French adopted them as a supplement to the regulated brothel system.⁷⁹ The French adoption of the US system was voluntary and included no penalties for men who did not seek treatment as the French military was unwilling to adopt a VD prevention strategy that placed responsibility for disease on anyone other than prostitutes.⁸⁰ Fundamental ideological differences in conceptions of sexuality prevented French and American authorities from resolving a disagreement that was a persistent irritant in Franco-American relations behind the lines.

Intimate relations beyond those of the strictly transactional nature were also common enough that stories of dates and courting often figured in the diaries and letters of soldiers. It seems that enough US soldiers appreciated French attitudes towards sexuality and took advantage of opportunities to pursue relationships with them, either strictly sexual ones, or with an eye towards marriage. French women, far from passive in the process, often actively pursued or instigated such relationships for monetary or romantic reasons. Many noted that American soldiers were very popular among local women who often sought out relationships with them because Americans were generous and many women saw their gifts as a way to supplement meagre wages. This was especially popular among widows who could count on little support from the French state.⁸¹ Many women also found Americans to be exotic, exciting, or more desirable than French men either due to their physical appearance or because some found that they treated women better.⁸² Franco-American relationships were so common that French soldiers complained that Americans were too successful with

⁷⁸ Reilly, “ ‘A Perilous Venture for Democracy,’ ” 243-244.

⁷⁹ Le Naour, “Le sexe et la guerre,” 112-113.

⁸⁰ Rhoades, “Renegotiating French Masculinity,” 323-324.

⁸¹ Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances*, 21.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

women, which led to a wave of insecurity among the *poilus* as to their own ability to attract women.⁸³

The US Army, entrusted to protect their soldiers' virtues, failed in its efforts and according to the Army's own estimate, 71% of AEF servicemen had engaged in sexual relations while serving.⁸⁴ Even those entrusted to enforce American dictates proved open to temptation as the highest VD rate among the AEF was among military police charged with guarding brothels to ensure Americans didn't enter them.⁸⁵ Part of the failure may be attributable to changing sexual morality among American youth. The strict gender boundaries of American society were increasingly dissolving and a more open expression of sexuality was becoming more prevalent among young people, especially among the urban working class.⁸⁶ While far from universal, many of the young Americans who went to France held very different views on sexuality than the generation attempting to prevent them from having sex. In addition, the working class men that made up most of the AEF often did not share the middle class outlook on sexuality their superiors were attempting to impose. Americans took an interest in French views of sexuality as soon as they disembarked and the concentration of brothels and prostitutes in port cities was a testament to how quickly doughboys engaged with the sexual culture they found. Even those who did not pay for prostitutes might attempt to date French women. Career military officers charged with preventing fraternization were certainly not immune from temptation. Pershing himself began a relationship with a Franco-Romanian artist, Misceline Resco, whom he met the day

⁸³ Kaspi, *Le temps des Américains*, 129-130.

⁸⁴ Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances*, 23.

⁸⁵ Farwell, *Over There*, 145.

⁸⁶ John Whiteclay Chambers, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920* 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 93-95.

after arriving in France.⁸⁷ While condemning ‘loose’ sexuality was the ‘proper’ response manifested in American policy, for many men of the AEF, the pursuit of French women for casual relationships was an important part of their experience of the war and among the first things they did once established in France. Chances for sexual and other relationships with women were a major source of recreation for the men of the AEF who formed one of the main sources of perceptions of French society as they were such a major part of American everyday experience during the First World War outside of camp and the battlefield.

If Americans found sexuality in France drastically different, they found racial dynamics even more alien, especially when racial and sexual issues collided. The US Army was rigidly segregated, and black and white soldiers did not serve in the same units save for the officer corps of black units that were almost exclusively made up of white men. In addition, American command treated black units and soldiers with utter contempt, often assigning them the most undesirable duties such as burying the dead.⁸⁸ Many American political and military leaders advised using black troops entirely for labour based on racist notions and biased intelligence tests that “proved” they were only suitable for manual work and not to be trusted in combat lest they be overcome with “bloodlust” and attack white Americans.⁸⁹ Racist and tyrannical white officers and NCOs often commanded African Americans sent to France, especially in labour divisions. Black troops also had to operate under restrictions that barred them from fraternizing with French women, entering French homes, or visiting certain cafés.⁹⁰ African American soldiers could expect little in the way of

⁸⁷ Farwell, *Over There*, 90.

⁸⁸ Charles H. Williams, *Negro Soldiers in World War I: The Human Side* (New York: AMS Press 1970) [Reprint of the 1923 ed. which was published under title: *Sidelights on Negro soldiers*], 146-147.

⁸⁹ Barbeau and Barbeau, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 42-45.

⁹⁰ Williams, *Negro Soldiers in World War I*, 148-149.

fairness or sympathetic treatment from the US Army, but many found experiences with French civilians to be a refuge from American prejudice.

Many Americans believed France had a far more open attitude to racial mixing than the United States, a situation that delighted African American soldiers but which often disgusted white ones. In many ways, French racial attitudes were similar to American ones when it came to stereotypes about black men. France had brought many men from their colonies: Arabs, West Africans, Madagascans, Indochinese and others as soldiers or labourers. French officials and the population often held many ideas about the lustful sexual desires of such men, particularly Muslim Arabs and Africans.⁹¹ Many French soldiers feared that “their” women would sleep with black men.⁹² The French attempted to prevent racial mixing and especially mixed relationship between women and colonial men as they saw such relationships as assaults on the “prestige of European women” and an attack on national identity itself. American authorities shared discomfort with mixed relationships but methods of preventing them differed starkly. The French often placed some of the blame on women themselves for such contact rather than hold the colonial men at fault. There was also French tolerance for limited contact between colonial men and white women, especially if such contact was strictly commercial.⁹³

As a result, rigid segregation of the races did not apply in France as it did in much of the United States. The fact that France was mostly racially homogeneous and that the war was the first time the French had to confront racial issues outside of an imperial context

⁹¹ Richard Standish Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 207.

⁹² Margaret H. Darrow, *French women and the First World War: War Stories of the Home Front* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 85.

⁹³ Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 203, 206-207, 210.

meant that they had not dealt with racial mixing in a metropolitan context.⁹⁴ Despite their own racial views, the French were stunned to witness the segregation and open racism of the US Army.⁹⁵ French self-image as a land of equality between men that meant many French officials paid, at least, lip service to the idea of a colour-blind society and many even made attempts to implement it.⁹⁶ That led to a situation where segregation was not enforced on African Americans by French authorities.⁹⁷ Instead, the French relied on a campaign of educating the French populace about the “dangers” of racial mixing but they focused on men from the colonies rather than African Americans.⁹⁸ As a consequence, many leading African American intellectuals held up France as a bastion of racial equality at the time. As African Americans felt that the French treated them much better than the United States, some moved to France after the war, which created a substantial African American community in Paris in the 1920s. French racist ideas tied into a system of racial and colonial stereotypes but most Americans, black and white, only witnessed the lack of segregation and the seemingly greater tolerance for interracial relationships and concluded that France was not a society that drew strong racial distinctions.⁹⁹

Those impressions shocked and appalled many white Americans who were insulted to see black men given such leeway. That French women, whether prostitutes or not, openly responded to the advances of black men especially outraged white Americans who saw it as a

⁹⁴ Najia Aarim, “Colored Soldiers and Racial Formation in the Great War: French Racial Attitudes toward American Negro Troops and Algerian ‘Tirailleurs,’” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 28 (2000): 284-285.

⁹⁵ Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁹⁷ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 231-232.

⁹⁸ Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 214-217.

⁹⁹ Tyler Edward Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 17-20.

serious sign of French degeneracy worthy of disdain.¹⁰⁰ Some black troops used that outrage as a source of resistance to American racism and openly flaunted their white French girlfriends, especially in front of white Southern soldiers.¹⁰¹ White Americans were capable of violence when confronted with interracial relations, especially when alcohol was involved, as in one case in Bar between French colonial soldiers and doughboys described by ambulance driver Avery Wolfe:

Unlike Americans, the French do not draw a color line, and so these colored troops are accepted by the French girls on the same basis as any other man. This gets under the Americans' skin, so much in fact that there is always trouble whenever the two mix. A couple of nights ago, some Americans were in one of the combination drinking and dancing places, when one of the Americans objected to a colonial's attention to one of the girls. This infuriated the colonial, all of whom are magnificent specimens, and he started after the American with a large knife. The American pulled out his forty-five and dropped him in his tracks. This started a riot that led to the killing of five and the wounding of several more. As a result, the Americans were excluded from the city and the place was closed.¹⁰²

The very sight of black men in a relationship with white women enraged most Americans, even when the black man was not American. Interracial relationships did not please French officials but they did not openly move to suppress them either. Such displays disgusted a great many of the white American soldiers who often spread stories of black depravity and rape to compel the French to avoid black soldiers, a tactic that sometimes worked.¹⁰³

Those attitudes were not universal but they were so widespread that in general perceived French racial tolerance outraged Americans, particularly as many believed the French were “spoiling” blacks and making them insolent. American politicians and

¹⁰⁰ Alexander Woollcott, “Them Damned Frogs,” *The North American Review* 210, no. 767 (Oct. 1919): 493.

¹⁰¹ Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience during World War I* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 102, 107.

¹⁰² Avery Royce Wolfe, *Letters from Verdun: Frontline Experiences of an American Volunteer in World War I France*, eds. William C. Harvey and Eric T. Harvey, (Casemate: Philadelphia & Newbury, 2009), 124-125.

¹⁰³ Williams, *Negro Soldiers in World War I*, 72-73.

commentators often blamed post-war race riots and activism by black veterans on the French for giving blacks unreasonable expectations of freedom and on French women for being open to their advances.¹⁰⁴ Many white Americans feared the loss of their ability to impose on black soldiers the restrictions of American racial hierarchy after their exposure to a French racial ideology which seemed less openly discriminatory.

The feeling that France was more racially tolerant was a near universal theme in writings from and about African American AEF soldiers.¹⁰⁵ Virtually every study of the attitudes and experiences of African American doughboys emphasised they believed France was a far better place to be black than the United States.¹⁰⁶ Many, especially those from the South, found French attitudes and the freedoms accorded them much more appealing than American attitudes.¹⁰⁷ Even before the war, prominent black intellectuals like W.E.B Du Bois and Frederick Douglass had depicted France as a racially tolerant society.¹⁰⁸ The view continued well after the war with Civil Rights leaders using French racial tolerance as a counterpoint to American segregation and racism.¹⁰⁹ Charles H. Williams's 1923 book examining African American participation in the war, *Sidelights on Negro Soldiers*, made much the same points and noted that many African Americans felt much better treated in a foreign land than in the United States. The view of France as a much better place to be black

¹⁰⁴ Aarim, "Colored Soldiers and Racial Formation in the Great War," 282-283.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁰⁶ Recent writing about African American doughboys that emphasise favorable African American perceptions of France include: Nina Mjagkij's *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience during World War I* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011); Chad Louis Williams's *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); and Adriane Danette Lentz-Smith's *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁷ Jennifer D. Keene, "Uneasy Alliances: French Military Intelligence and the American Army during the First World War," *Intelligence & National Security* 13, Issue 1(1998): 27-28.

¹⁰⁸ Stovall, *Paris Noir*, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Jennifer D. Keene, "Memory of the Great War in the African American Community," in *Unknown Soldiers: the American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance*, ed. Mark A. Snell, (Kent, Ohio : Kent State University Press, 2008): 63.

than the United States during the First World War has a strong presence in historiography and popular writing about black soldiers during the conflict.

Ironically, racist American views and treatment of their black soldiers contributed to the relatively good treatment they received from the French. Many civilians were apprehensive at the first sight of black Americans, fearing that they were savages. Prolonged contact with them convinced many French civilians that black Americans were not only civilized but highly courteous to the degree that many preferred them to whites.¹¹⁰ Due to American beliefs about black criminality, the AEF heavily policed their black units and severely punished any sort of misbehaviour. The result was that while misbehaviour by white soldiers was often ignored, black soldiers were very careful to ensure the French welcomed them and avoided behaviour that antagonised their hosts.¹¹¹ As a consequence, many French civilians came to believe black Americans were more respectful than whites, and appreciated them more than the white AEF members, and in turn treated them very well. Mixed race doughboy Ely Green who served with a black labour regiment in Saint-Nazaire portrayed his experiences with the US Army as an endless string of racist insults and degradations but the country of France as a racially tolerant paradise in comparison. In particular, the fact that French women pursued relationships with African Americans and the French imposed no segregation caused Green to claim that unlike the United States, France respected African Americans as men and treated them with democratic equality rather than use degrading them with unequal treatment and racial epithets. His experiences in France proved so empowering that he claimed that before he left: “I rolled over and over kissing the

¹¹⁰ Jennifer D. Keene “French and American Racial Stereotypes during the First World War,” in *National Stereotypes in Perspective: Americans in France, Frenchmen in America* ed. William L. Chew (Atlanta, Ga.: Rodopi, 2001): 277-278.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 278-280.

concrete every roll as a respect to the French soil under the French flag where free men live and die. I would gain this respect in the United States. I will fight the rest of my life and fight to abolish the slave name Negro.”¹¹² Green’s views were far from unique as perceived French attitudes towards race received almost universal praise by African Americans, but outraged most whites. The day to day experience for black doughboys was racist treatment by their own army but far more positive experiences with the French which left a lasting memory of French tolerance on the African American community.

American views of race and sexuality in France rarely reflected the nuances present in the France. Officially, Americans decried French sexual morality and many Americans who commented on it were condemnatory. Yet that attitude was quite at odds with the actual behaviour of American soldiers in France. While some of that difference might represent hypocrisy on the part of doughboys, it also represents a divide between the middle class chroniclers of American wartime experiences, and the behaviors of other soldiers, who represented the more diverse socioeconomic make-up of the AEF. For tens of thousands who landed in France, French women proved alluring and many chose to spend leisure time in their company. That men who sought more emotional and long term relationships preferred women who reminded them of home demonstrated that doughboys that came to know the French could overcome language and culture barriers to see the French as being fundamentally similar to Americans. In terms of race, the seemingly more tolerant attitude of the French was a critical part of the African American experience of the war and provided some measure of refuge from the humiliation and injustice that was the experience of being black in the US Army. Americans brought their racial ideologies the fact that the French did

¹¹² Ely Green, *Too Black, Too White*, eds. Elizabeth N. and Arthur Ben Chitty (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 442.

not treat African Americans the same way Americans did proved a major point of contention with white doughboys.

Americans in Billets

While Americans had some interaction with French civilians in port cities, they did not really integrate civilian France until they moved inland for training. It was then that they had the opportunity to live with French families in billets. It was in such billets that they had the opportunity to develop bonds with the French. American soldiers had never billeted with civilians before, as the Third Amendment to the US Constitution explicitly prohibited the practice, but it was very common in France. In training camps, US troops sometimes billeted in civilian homes when the camps were near significant civilian populations and there were inadequate barrack facilities available. They also billeted on occasion when in rear areas of combat zones without sufficient barracks. For many, experiences in billets defined their view of French civilians more than any other part of their time in the country. The views of historians on the nature of the American relationship with French civilians often depend on how they interpreted the nature of the American experiences in billets. Those like Gary Mead who emphasise turbulent relations portrayed the time as mostly miserable with doughboys disliking French civilians while proponents of a more positive Franco-American relationship such as Robert Bruce emphasised the friendships that developed rather than the tensions that arose. Those that paint a more mixed relationship such as Keene and Gutierrez focused on both the positive and negative American experiences in billets. While American time in billets was far from universally positive, the relationship Americans developed with

locals and the fondness with which many remembered the villages they stayed in indicate that many came to care deeply about the French, if not for everything about them.

As Americans were living with the French, language barriers existed but did not necessarily preclude communication. Many, particularly officers, took lessons in French aboard transport ships on their way over but that yielded limited success. A key similarity among the more humorous tales told by American servicemen involved language mishaps, including one told by George C. Marshall on attempting to speak with a French officer:

Intending to comment on the wonderful morning, I remarked, “je suis très beau aujourd’hui.” He gave me an odd look and I mentally translated my remark. During the ensuing twenty-six months I never spoke French again except when forced to.¹¹³

Despite such embarrassing mistakes, Americans noted that they and the French were generally able to understand each other by developing a hybrid French/English patois. Using children as interpreters or simply by pointing and gesturing meant that language barriers did not completely prevent interaction.

There was a significant distinction between the billeting experiences of officers and that of enlisted men. Officers typically billeted within civilian homes and lived with families, often in a bedroom vacated by a son or brother at the front or who had become a casualty of war. As a result, they enjoyed luxuries such as real beds and home cooked meals. For enlisted men, a more typical billet was a vacant home or a barn either with or without farm animals.¹¹⁴ A number of them were dismayed at having to reside with animals as this was a rare practise on US farms even if common on French ones.¹¹⁵ As a consequence, and

¹¹³ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 12.

¹¹⁴ Nimrod T. Frazer, *Send the Alabamians: World War I fighters in the Rainbow Division* (Tuscaloosa The University of Alabama Press, 2014): 49-51.

¹¹⁵ Sherman L. Fleek, *Place the Headstones where they Belong: Thomas Neibaur, WWI Soldier* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2008), 75.

also because large groups of enlisted men often billeted on the property of a single family, they had much less close interaction with French civilians who were housing them. During the often extended billeting period, a number of factors came to characterise American relations with French civilians both in positive and negative ways.

Weather shaped the Americans' relationship to their French hosts as the winter of 1917-1918 was a particularly harsh one. Many Americans related how uncomfortable their winter accommodations were owing to the lack of heating and hot water. Osborne de Varila described the discomfort of a barn he stayed in:

The floors of these barns were so ancient that they were rotten, and several of the boys fell through and sustained ugly bruises. In a windstorm the barn-billets rocked like boats at sea, and when the weather was frigid we had to burrow down under the hay with our blankets to keep warm. The orders against smoking in billets were rigid, and we were not allowed to have lamps or candles.¹¹⁶

This was not exclusive to those billeted with civilians as many French barracks lacked heat. Those used by Americans at Camp Coëtquidan, for example, were built for Napoleon's *Grande Armée* and had remained virtually unchanged. The lack of heat was a source of consistent complaint from those who had trained in camps with heating or areas far enough south not to require it. Aside from the cold, mud was ubiquitous during the period as heavy rainfall continued throughout much of the spring and many had tremendous difficulty adjusting to the cold and the mud.¹¹⁷ Long marches along roads turned to mud by heavy rains, led to some bitterness from most who saw it as a far cry from a country famous for its beauty, though frustration was rarely directed at French people themselves.

¹¹⁶ Osborne De Varila, *The First Shot for Liberty; The Story of an American who went over with the First Expeditionary Force and Served his Country at the Front* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1918), 109.

¹¹⁷ Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 84-85.

AEF members experienced the hospitality of the French in different ways. For many officers their hosts were friendly, gracious, endearing and very welcoming. George C. Marshall, for example, describes the effect of the family he billeted with, and particularly the lady of the house, during his time in Chaumont during the winter of 1917-1918 where the AEF had its headquarters: “my next six months were spent here, the most depressing, gloomy period of the war. We often referred to it as the Winter of Valley Forge, and Madame Jouatte was in no small measure responsible for my being able to keep a stiff upper lip and wear an optimistic smile those days.”¹¹⁸ Americans attributed motherly affection to the care and attention they received from French women where they billeted. Some French women came to see doughboys as surrogate sons. On one occasion, a French woman billeting an American wrote to his mother in West Virginia to praise both her son and the United States:

Your son is truly charming Madam, and it is with great pleasure that we have welcomed him at our fireside, where for a few days he has taken the place of eldest son, also an officer, who fell for France last year. [...] We will not forget either that he has been the first of the Allies who has sat at our fireside and that he has made us know your country.¹¹⁹

Most doughboys stayed with older inhabitants as virtually all young men were in the military and many young women had gone to urban centres to work in war industries. Thus, older couples and women, especially those whose sons were at the front or casualties, came to treat their boarders as something of surrogate sons. While older men were less friendly, young and old women as well as children were often conspicuous in their welcome of Americans.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 18.

¹¹⁹ Freidel, *Over There*, 70-71.

¹²⁰ Lt. Col. C.H. Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*. (1942), Box 1, UD Entry 6, HM 2008, RG 165: Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, NARA, 6-7.

Enlisted men benefitted less from the motherly affection of their billets as most were in large groups who did not interact as closely with the families whose barns they inhabited. As a result, they did not receive home cooked meals or special attention. It was still common for enlisted men to interact with civilians, particularly women, notably when it came to buying food to supplement their rations. They were often pleased to find locals from whom they could buy fresh eggs, milk, and on occasion meat of much better quality than any rations they received from their mess kitchens. Enlisted men often described warm, friendly sentiments from French civilians though very close individual relations with them were less common than among officers. Corporal Francis Austin of the 305th infantry demonstrated the types of bonds that could develop between the enlisted and French civilians and the comforts it offered from army life:

Fifty of us sleep in a big barn full of hay. The barn belongs to the most delightful old lady and her husband. There are some wonderful children, a little girl about eight and two little boys about eight and ten. We are great friends already, and you can imagine what a change it is, after a day's hike or drill, to come into a home, where for a few cents you can get a cup of coffee, a couple of eggs, and a wonderful sleep, and best of all be with such loving and hospitable people. [...] I would give anything in the world to know French well, but at present I have to talk slowly and concerning very simple things. They are so wonderful, just like our own farmers, and none of them have visited the big cities but just live winter and summer in this beautiful Paradise.¹²¹

Despite the many ways in which life was different in France and the many hardships Americans endured, time with French civilians allowed them to identify with the French and see them as worthy of protection and friendship despite the differences.

Despite their different languages and cultures, a significant number of Americans admired much about French civilians. When Americans arrived in France, the country had been at war for three or four years. As such, France was a society on which war had taken a

¹²¹ M. A. DeW. Howe ed., *Memoirs of the Harvard Dead in the War Against Germany*, vol. 5, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 309-310.

heavy toll and who had geared itself into a state of total war. What Americans noticed most prominently were the consequences of war. Even well behind the front, the signs of wartime suffering were obvious as Jay Lee observed:

We can see, even back here in western France, signs of the war in such things as German prisoners, hospitals for the wounded, orphan asylums, and the always prevalent uniforms. And the black dresses! The women of France have my profound respect. The signs of mourning are everywhere, in the sombre garb of the women; but on their faces not a sign of anything but courage, patience, and a steadiness of purpose which accounts well for the fine work of the men at the front. The spirit of France, as I interpret it from my brief observation, is steadfast.¹²²

Descriptions of the country's suffering were ubiquitous. Joy and friendliness were still much in evidence, but most could not help but notice a sense of fatigue among the population and a desire for the war to be over.

Nevertheless, most Americans who commented on that exhaustion also commented on the underlying resilience of the people they saw in the towns and villages of France.

Francis Stoddard in particular categorised the resolved of France despite her pain:

France has suffered terribly. With much of her country obliterated and the inhabitants taken into slavery, with her sons killed and the murderers still on French soil, she fights bravely on, unmindful of her wounds, and without any other idea as to the outcome of this war except a victory for France and the ending forever of the frightful Prussian menace that has for years threatened her national existence.¹²³

A frequent theme of those comments was how easily the French population seemed to accept sacrifice and privations. Some such as Jesse Dickson, an African American in the medical corps, remarked on the sacrifices made by civilians: "you can see in so many different ways how the people are sacrificing every luxury to aid the country. Our country may have a big toll to pay before the war is over, but never as great as ... France."¹²⁴ The all-purpose

¹²² Jay McIlvaine Lee, *The Artilleryman; The Experiences and Impressions of an American Artillery Regiment in the World War. 129th F.A., 1917-1919* (Kansas City, Mo.: Press of Spencer Printing Co., 1920), 44.

¹²³ Stoddard, *War time France*, 171.

¹²⁴ Freidel, *Over There*, 64.

expression “*C’est la guerre*” used when some misfortune or privation was imposed was so noticed by Americans as an example of resolve in the face of adversity that it entered the lexicon of the AEF and appears in many letters and memoirs as a rhetorical point after describing some blunder, error, or difficulty. José de la Luz Sáenz contrasted the calm resilience of the French in their daily lives with the panic of American troops who had never experienced an attack from the air:

Even the poor French families who were still walking the streets could tell from the screams that our sergeant was scared. The townspeople continued with their daily routine as if there was no danger. This was enough to embarrass us because of the noisy display our very brave sergeant made.¹²⁵

The impression of the French as unshakable was officially encouraged by the French government. Within France, propaganda urged women as well as men display “heroism” and stoic resolve in order to demonstrate the fortitude of the republic.¹²⁶

If the French wanted to promote an air of being unblinking in the face of adversity, they succeeded with many Americans who scoffed at the idea that the French were defeated or ready to surrender. Those statements probably did not accurately reflect the state of French morale but many saw a real strength in the character of the populace which they admired. Ferdinand Jelke portrayed the French as having lost hope of victory but made no suggestion that they were willing to surrender when he claimed that they “have lost hope of [the war] ever ending and just grimly keep on fighting.”¹²⁷ A subject of particular comment about the French reaction to hardship was how little they complained. Praise of French

¹²⁵ de la Luz Sáenz, *World War I Diary of José de la Luz Sáenz*, 184.

¹²⁶ Susan R. Grayzel, “‘The Souls of Soldiers’: Civilians under Fire in First World War France,” *Journal of Modern History* 78, Issue 3 (2006): 614-616.

¹²⁷ Ferdinand Frazier Jelke, *Letters from a Liaison Officer* (Chicago: George F. McKiernan & Company, 1919), 19.

resilience was widespread among Americans and even those who had little interest in getting to know the French commended it.

Beyond the recognition of French hardships, many Americans displayed great empathy with civilians whose suffering greatly moved them. That was most noticeable when witnessing French refugees. When the 2nd Division advanced to counter advancing German forces in May 1918, it passed a stream of refugees displaced by the fighting. Men of the division described the scene as most pitiable with the young and old forced onto the roads with what few possessions they had time to bring. Comments such as those of corporal Rendinell were common:

On the edge of Meaux we seen refugees. The roads were crowded with them. A steady stream of carts with the few belongings they could take along. Some of the peasants pulled their carts themselves because they did not have any cattle. Old women & young women with babies at their breasts. Children hung on to their skirts & they all looked tired & were crying. Hundreds of them knelt on the side of the road when they seen us go by & prayed for us. It sure was a pathetic scene. We were not laughing now like we were before. This was the saddest procession I ever seen.¹²⁸

Some, like private Hemrick recounted that such scenes fueled their commitment to duty:

The scene of human misery brought tears to the eyes and a silent prayer to the lips of godly men in the trucks and a curse filled with hate from the lips of the rogues. None were indifferent, none could be. [...] This emotional experience was like a baptism of fire, a preparatory ritual, that qualified us for the task destiny had given us to perform. Pains of hunger, hurts from bullets and shells, tired muscles and lost sleep, all of these we would accept as our due and the emotional pay we would contribute to the people we saw along that trail of misery.¹²⁹

Others expressed similar shock and outrage at German aircraft bombing civilian targets from Paris to towns behind Allied lines. Most considered such deliberate or indiscriminate targeting of civilians an utterly barbaric act and vowed that they would avenge those civilians killed. Ferdinand Jelke claimed that air raids provoked “considerable openly

¹²⁸ Clark, *Devil Dogs Chronicle*, 137.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

expressed indignation among American officers, who are not accustomed to this indiscriminate slaughter of innocents.”¹³⁰ The narrative of Americans coming to France to protect defenceless civilians figured heavily in American propaganda.¹³¹ Many doughboys drew upon that narrative as a reason for fighting the war after witnessing its civilian victims first hand. Corporal Francis Austin found his experience with the French especially moving:

it would be the finest thing in the world to help protect the farms and the hospitable, lovable peasants. [...] If I don't accomplish a single other thing over here, I am going to show these people that we are their friends and allies, and do all I can to make the men respect them and in no way take advantage of them.¹³²

Aside from the civilians killed or displaced, hardships imposed by the war elicited much sympathy and a desire to help. The history of the 35th Division recounted that on entering a rural billet:

Our men observed that virtually all the farm work was done by women. [...] The Missouriians and Kansans were not accustomed to this. Men did the work in hayfields at home. Col. Edmund j. McMahan of the 138th said that all men of his regiment who wished to do so might volunteer to assist the women in fields on Sunday after church serve. Eight hundred men volunteered.¹³³

More than simply a duty to defend France from the Germans, many men of the 35th Division considered it part of their duty as men to aid French women with difficult tasks. In doing so, they attempted to replicate the division of labour by sex they were used to in the United States and hoped to save French women from tasks Americans believed they had been forced to perform due to the hardships of war. Inspired by similar scenes, many

¹³⁰ Jelke, *Letters from a Liaison Officer*, 54.

¹³¹ Charles V. Genthe, *American War Narratives, 1917-1918: A Study and Bibliography* (New York: D. Lewis, 1969), 13-14.

¹³² Howe, *Memoirs of the Harvard Dead in the War Against Germany*, vol. 5, 273.

¹³³ Clair Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the 35th Division*, (St. Louis: Guard Publishing Co. 1919), 39.

Americans helped with work in villages which earned them much praise from locals.¹³⁴ In witnessing French refugees and other hardships, Americans found a moral justification for their fight beyond the need to defend democracy or defeat the Kaiser. Abstract concepts such as the struggle between democracy and authoritarianism yielded to the more tangible need to defend the helpless, at least when Americans witnessed the effects of war. The narrative of brave doughboys fighting to defend France and her people was an oft repeated part of the rhetoric of doughboys as to their role in war. This role as protector of the innocent and self-image as saviours was the main reason Americans also felt entitled to French praise and gratitude.

The empathy for French civilians also helps to explain American fondness and generosity toward children as many spoke about how deprived they were compared to their American counterparts and many soldiers hoped to brighten their lives with gifts. Many French children found employment as unofficial ambassadors and liaisons using the English they had learned. American affection for children was so deep that they launched official and semi-official initiatives to help war orphans or those children otherwise affected by the war. The most well-known and systematic was a campaign by the doughboy newspaper *Stars and Stripes* to collect donations and allow units to “adopt” French “war orphans”¹³⁵ and pay for their upkeep and education for the duration of the war and afterwards. *Stars and Stripes*, which began publishing in February 1918, very quickly made the campaign one of its centrepieces. Promotion of the campaign and exhortations to donate were often front page material. By most accounts, the campaign was highly successful with thousands of

¹³⁴ Frazer, *Send the Alabamians*, 52.

¹³⁵ War orphans were defined as having lost their fathers in the war, their mothers may or may not still have been alive.

orphans being “adopted,”¹³⁶ and the significant funds raised doing much to cement US-French friendship.¹³⁷ Some units took particular pride in their donations such as Battery B of the 103rd Field Artillery Brigade whose unit history devoted an appendix entry to Germaine Sylvais and her younger brother whom they sponsored and considered as sorts of unit mascots. The battery also made plans to help them after the war: “During the rest of our stay in France we took care of our two orphans by pay day contributions, and when we left France we left enough money behind to care for them for about two years. The veteran organization intends to keep up the work.”¹³⁸

Aside from large AEF wide efforts, many describe small local campaigns often organised from the bottom up to provide for local children. Christmas in particular brought out American compassion for local communities. Lieutenant Warren Robinson of the 26th Division described what his unit did for Christmas in his billet:

Although we were not able to do our usual giving to our own families and friends this year, the officers and men quartered in this little village contributed over three thousand francs to show the inhabitants what a real American Christmas tree was like. There was a present for every man, woman, and child in town. In house after house I have heard the remark that they will never forget the Noel of 1917. They need something to cheer them, for they have known war as a near neighbor for three years and a half now.¹³⁹

In Saint-Nazaire, Americans hosted a Christmas celebration for more than 1,200 children and distributed gifts.¹⁴⁰ Who could be more generous towards French children was cause for a dispute between members of the 2nd Division according to Laurence Stallings: Some Marines in the 2nd Division said their “Toys for Tots” were more generous than those of the infantry

¹³⁶ Alfred E. Cornebise, *The Stars and Stripes: Doughboy Journalism in World War I* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), 124-125.

¹³⁷ Lt Col Perry Osborn to Chief Liaison Officer, Nov 15, 1918. Box 2070, entry 51, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Force (WWI), NARA.

¹³⁸ Russell, *History of Battery B*, 106.

¹³⁹ Howe, *Memoirs of the Harvard Dead in the War Against Germany*, vol. 5, 273.

¹⁴⁰ Nouailhat, “L’opinion publique à l’égard des Américains à Saint-Nazaire en 1917,” 99.

brigade's, while others said the Marine Christmas was cheapskate in comparison."¹⁴¹

American generosity was at least partly pragmatic, as noted by a member of the 26th Division on his arrival in a new billet: "we immediately began to get acquainted with our French neighbors through the always effective medium of American sweets and cigarettes".¹⁴²

Aside from practical concerns, the scale of sincere, and sometimes anonymous generosity, was also a product of genuine feelings of empathy and affection for the people they lived with, in many cases, for months at a time.

As mentioned, initial impressions of the French as poor and backwards never disappeared; yet many Americans came to believe that the French possessed many admirable qualities after living among them. Those Americans who had the most favourable recollection of villages usually attributed it to the friendship of the French people. As enlisted men were slower to get close to French civilians, more time in billets allowed them to overcome communication issues and form friendships.¹⁴³ Americans sometimes spent time with locals in leisure activity as described by Wilson and Tooze:

Our life in the training area was not wholly devoid of diversions. We went boar hunting with our French friends with varying success. A few even angled in the "river" usually coming back with a – good story! Some of the enthusiastic showmen of the regiment built open-air theaters in the area and staged shows which featured everything from a strong man to a Hula Hula dance. Some of the most interested spectators were the French who crowded into the theater to witness the performance. The fact that they could not understand English did not seem to detract from their enjoyment of the program.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys; The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 41-42.

¹⁴² Russell, *History of Battery B*, 48.

¹⁴³ Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 88-89.

¹⁴⁴ Wilson and Tooze, *With the 364th Infantry*, 34.

Pity motivated some American goodwill, but aside from such paternalistic attitudes, many also made friends with locals or otherwise became very close to them which motivated Americans to both aid them and to invoke their suffering when going into battle.

Billeting with the French provided many opportunities for Americans to interact closely with them and integrate themselves into the daily lives of those civilians. While they did not abandon initial impressions of France, interactions in with civilians in billets provided a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of France. Training accompanied by endless marches and bad weather as well as the poor living conditions in billets made life in France difficult for Americans. Given those difficulties, French civilians provided some measure of comfort and relief from the hardship and monotony of army life for those who had the chance to befriend them. As interactions with the French went from novel to routine, patterns formed in how Americans treated them. Time with the French provided a break from grueling military schedules, so Americans were eager to alleviate French suffering in turn. While Americans did not see French civilians as true peers, they developed a strong sense of empathy and compassion for them. Americans saw themselves as coming to the aid of the civilians who allowed them into their homes but the relationship was not without the daily annoyances of people from very different societies living together.

American Frustrations with the French

Americans may have developed fairly good relations with the population in their billets, but sympathy and affection did not erase fundamental differences between both societies. The alleged backwardness of the French population doughboys noticed when they disembarked caused problems when integrating into French village life. The physical

discomfort of the billets and patronising American attitudes meant that frustration and occasional contempt existed alongside compassion and friendship in the American experience of their time with French civilians. The biggest American complaint was the “frugality,” money grubbing, and profiteering that many felt French merchants and peasants indulged in. Historians of the AEF often emphasise the issue in prices setting the tone for American relations with French civilians. Gary Mead, for instance, identified French avarice and greed as a core American perception of their wartime experience that figured prominently in the stories veterans told about the war.¹⁴⁵ Robert Bruce’s study of the Franco-American relationship characterized American relations with French civilians as very good but made special mention of discontent over prices a major source of complaint.¹⁴⁶ While complaints about prices did not define the entirety of the American relationship with civilians, it was the largest complaint against the French that most made Americans question the goodwill and gratitude of the French population.

AEF soldiers received an unusually generous salary with privates overseas being paid \$33 a month as compared to \$1.70 for a *poilu*.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Americans sometimes had trouble thinking of francs as real money as related by Chester Heywood:

Our men, and many of the officers, too, couldn’t for a time make heads or tails out of the French money. [...] the paper pieces – five, ten and twenty franc notes didn’t look like real money to the boys and were dirty and torn like no American bill, even the worst of them. Then, too, the smallness of the French paper made it hard to realize that it represented real money.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Mead, *Doughboys*, xii,

¹⁴⁶ Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms*, 111-114.

¹⁴⁷ David Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 66.

¹⁴⁸ Chester D. Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War: The Story of the 371st Infantry* (Worcester, Mass.: Commonwealth Press, 1928), 34-35.

Disparaging remarks calling franc paper notes “cigar coupons” were not uncommon.¹⁴⁹

Some merchants actively deceived Americans in order to overcharge.¹⁵⁰ The 101st Field Artillery brigade provides one example of American willingness to spend:

Americans quickly ate up all the surplus food in the region, so that prices went rapidly up. The French were not slow in noticing that the American soldier had considerable money and would pay almost any price, partly from desire to buy, partly from ignorance of proper values.¹⁵¹

French merchants and peddlers were quick to capitalize on the source of revenue. To prevent inflation as well as gouging or hoarding of necessary goods, the French instituted a series of price and wage controls as well as various regulations on quantity of goods sold to any one customer. French authorities were generally very keen on enforcing those regulations as they feared that price gouging could sour relations and cause resentment as well as raise prices for local civilians beyond their ability to pay. A major fear among the French communities that hosted Americans was that their presence would increase the cost of living.¹⁵² American officials were similarly concerned and tried to emphasize French regulations to their men. Correspondence between US liaison and French authorities displayed the absolute agreement of both sides on the topic, with each agreeing to work at their respective ends to prevent prices from rising beyond allowed maximums.

Official efforts met with very limited success however. US officers complained throughout the war to the liaison office of overcharging but official efforts met little success. The fundamental problem was that the French had an incentive to charge high prices so long as Americans were willing to pay. Years of experience meant that the member of other

¹⁴⁹ Jonathan Lighter, “The Slang of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, 1917-1919: An Historical Glossary,” *American Speech* 47, No. 1/2 (1972): 32.

¹⁵⁰ Nouailhat, *Les Américains à Nantes et Saint-Nazaire, 1917–1919*, 130-131.

¹⁵¹ *BEING the Narrative of Battery A of the 101st Field Artillery* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Brattle press, 1919), 37.

¹⁵² Nouailhat, “L’opinion publique à l’égard des Américains à Saint-Nazaire en 1917,” 100.

Allied armies in France had developed bartering skills and an understanding of what an item should cost while Americans never did. With some difficulty, some soldiers were able to adapt to French practices, such as s Edward Trueblood:

I found it no easy matter to make my purchases. In the first place, the French merchants, knowing that many of the American boys had money to spend, asked about four prices for everything, and, secondly, the French methods of doing business are quite different from our own. But by spending practically the entire day, by attempting Hebraic methods in purchasing, and by pretending that I had only a few francs to spend, I managed to spend about \$25 in buying the few things that I wanted to bring home.¹⁵³

The casual anti-Semitism Trueblood used to describe bargaining used by the French indicates that he considered the practice distasteful or somehow beneath an honest man who wished for forthright pricing. Indeed, common stereotypes of Jews in the United States held that they were effeminate and conniving who used deception to get what they wanted.¹⁵⁴ Most Americans seem to have agreed as they tended to pay the prices quoted instead of attempting to bargain. In a wartime environment, where there was little money circulating, French shopkeepers discovered this, and upped their prices to maximize profit.

A great many Americans purchased small luxuries from French shops for themselves or as gifts, often to French women, as well as food to supplement their rations. As shopkeepers could get far higher prices from doughboys than they could get from others, they often bought up or hoarded goods that were in high demand by Americans, depriving locals. It was not only merchants who charged high prices. Soldiers billeted in French towns often purchased items, particularly food, from locals who were more than willing to offer goods at inflated prices. French peasants were experienced in this type of commerce

¹⁵³ Trueblood, *Observations of an American Soldier During his Service with the A. E. F. in France*, 71.

¹⁵⁴ Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 68.

since most typically sold much of their best produce.¹⁵⁵ Wartime price controls and labour shortages reduced the profitability of grain and the most valuable crops became eggs, milk, poultry and other farm products.¹⁵⁶ Those were the types of goods purchased by Americans, so many peasants sought to compensate for their falling income by charging as much as possible. Many Americans realized that the prices they paid were well in excess of what was normal or reasonable and resented such pricing. Many were particularly incensed as they felt it was a very ungrateful thing to do to an army that had travelled across the Atlantic to save France. High prices often existed in communities that were enthused about American presence and where they praised them heartily. It was a dichotomy some remarked upon, including the fairly satirical *History of the 305th Infantry*:

[The mayor] is proud to sell one of his poor pigs for a mere fifteen hundred francs to the brave Americans hastening to the rescue of France; he opens up a bottle of one dollar champagne in their honor and declaims grandly, "The Americans and the French are brothers; ten francs please."¹⁵⁷

While not necessarily relating real events, those stories expressed a feeling among many Americans that the French who they were here to save were not above exploiting them.

There existed an unmistakable link between the presence of Americans and local prices. John Russell, who trained at Camp Coëtquidan remarked that in the shops in nearby communities: "the paper Franc willingly parted company from the 'Soldat Americain' and prices soared each day" but that in the difficult to travel to Rennes where American presence was smaller "One could buy fabulous pastry at fabulous prices."¹⁵⁸ Many doughboys noticed the link, particularly when entering towns that had no previous American presence. Local

¹⁵⁵ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 134-135.

¹⁵⁶ Darrow, *French women and the First World War*, 181-183.

¹⁵⁷ Frank B. Tiebout, *A History of the 305th Infantry* (New York: The 305th Infantry Auxiliary, 1919), 56.

¹⁵⁸ Russell, *History of Battery B*, 31-32.

prices were modest until the French discovered how much money they had and how freely they spent.¹⁵⁹ While there was widespread dissatisfaction with prices, a number of AEF members were somewhat understanding of why they occurred. Artilleryman Jay Lee provided an explanation of why he felt the prices were as they were and defended the French for charging them given the high cost of goods:

With the high prices which these French villagers were undoubtedly compelled to pay for their supplies, and the difficulty of getting them at all; [...] and on the other hand the sudden unlimited demand, represented by long “queues” of soldiers lined up to take their turns, each drawing as much pay in a month as a French soldier would get in four or six, and apparently willing to spend it all freely, without questioning or bargaining – what wonder that prices seemed and were high when compared with values we had known at home before the war. Perhaps we did not realize, as we all have since our return home, the enormous increase in prices of everything, throughout the world. At least our money went where it was greatly needed.¹⁶⁰

Others claimed only a subset of merchants who also gouged their own countrymen charged highly and so greed was not characteristic of the French people at large. Many Americans recognised that their own behaviour played a large part in the prices they had to pay and that their countrymen continued to pay despite some grumbling. Nevertheless, they still considered such prices unfair, as they felt themselves part of an army that had come to save France, not enrich its merchants

It was possible for Americans to obtain good prices in France but their willingness to spend money and the sheer amount they had contrasted very sharply with French frugality, and wartime austerity prompted many to take maximum advantage of the situation. Americans noted locals and communities offered good prices if they were particularly fond of their guests but these seem to have been in the minority. Given American spending habits, the French did not believe they were charging more than their guests were able to

¹⁵⁹ Louis Wardlaw Miles, *History of the 308th Infantry, 1917-1919* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), 32-33.

¹⁶⁰ Lee, *The Artilleryman*, 198-199.

pay, as Osborne De Varila observed: “The villagers used us very generously until some of the artillerymen learned to speak French fairly well and put them wise to the pay we were getting. Then they thought every American soldier was a millionaire and began to soak us in the matter of prices.”¹⁶¹ Americans behaviour did little to discourage that impression as Americans sometimes deliberately paid more than quoted prices in a show of generosity such as described by Chester Jenks when his unit entered a French town:

Perhaps one of the strangest things the boys discovered in this little French town was the fact that they could get a haircut for ten cents and a shave for five; but one had to wash one’s own face thereafter. Such an opportunity to economize did not last long, however; for a soldier accustomed to pay twenty-five cents for a haircut would think the barber to ‘reasonable’ and offer him a large tip, with the result that all the barbers in town forthwith increased their rates rapidly.¹⁶²

Some French women were more than willing to leverage romantic affection to access luxuries as recounted by corporal Rendinell:

Four of my buddies picked up a peachy French blonde apiece one night and of course the skirts steered them into a swell restaurant. My, how those girls did order food. They must have been starved waiting for the Americans get to France. Then they topped it with four bottles of cognac. The bill those birds got must have been the number of U.S. troops in France.¹⁶³

In a report on Franco-American relations written after the war by Lieutenant Colonel Goddard, he commented that the clash between frugality and profligacy was very significant leading to perceptions of the French as money grubbing and French perceptions of Americans as spendthrifts, views that bred significant ill feelings between the two.¹⁶⁴

American resentment over prices increased dramatically when supplies were not affordable. There were occasions where due to supply or administrative problems, units

¹⁶¹ De Varila, *The First Shot for Liberty*, 55.

¹⁶² Jenks, *Our First Ten Thousand*, 104.

¹⁶³ Clark, *Devil Dogs Chronicle*, 98-99.

¹⁶⁴ Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*, 11-12.

went without pay for extended periods of time. As Americans had become accustomed to purchasing supplemental goods, they came to expect that such goods would always be available to them. High ranking Americans claimed that their men were highly respectful of French property such as the claim by George Marshall that:

I doubt if any soldiers in the history of the world were ever so considerate and so respectful of the rights and interests of inhabitants in a war-ridden country, as were ours. A man of the First Division would no more think of picking up an apple from the ground under a peasant's tree than he would of committing some serious offense. The men really were so good that the French early adopted the practice of complaining if they even scratched the soil.¹⁶⁵

Pershing expressed similar views in his memoirs and considered the AEF perhaps the best behaved army in history in terms of respecting locals.¹⁶⁶ Yet despite the claim that Americans considered their hosts' property inviolable, there were many acts of thefts when money was short or doughboys could not purchase what they wanted. A certain sentiment of entitlement was evident from Americans when it came to farm produce from the communities in which they billeted. The history of the 35th Division provided an example of the type of behaviour that could result from a delay in pay:

One of the results in the area south of Epinal was that beehives began to disappear. They would be discovered in the early morning by the thrifty French peasant women, lying in a concealed place, and expertly looted of honey. This custom became so widespread in the army that it finally brought a general order from expeditionary headquarters setting a special penalty on the offense of robbing beehives. Our men had regarded it as a sort of joke. They had come all the way over here to fight for France, so they would just help themselves to a little French honey.¹⁶⁷

Others told similar stories of vandalism and theft. Those acts outraged peasants but there were few real consequences. While US officers had many powers of summary judgement and court-marshal, they seldom exercised them. Those officers looking to discipline their

¹⁶⁵ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 14.

¹⁶⁶ John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 1 (New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), 129.

¹⁶⁷ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont*, 40.

men usually referred formal charges to headquarters but often neglected to fill out paperwork properly or submit necessary documents.¹⁶⁸

Those oversights, as well as AEF reticence to use general court-martials in cases of minor crimes, meant that many acts went unpunished. The lack of action did little to discourage future similar actions in billets. Acts of petty theft or destruction of property did have the risk of turning French towns against Americans. British Empire troops, especially Australians, had worn out their welcome in many French towns due to acts of theft, destruction, or general disruptive behaviour.¹⁶⁹ When recalling their experiences, many Americans mentioned some amount of theft, from civilians or fellow soldiers.¹⁷⁰ Doughboys did not behave as well as their commanders claimed but convictions for serious offenses were still considerably less than that of other armies.¹⁷¹ While ineffectiveness in American military justice meant that some serious offenses went unpunished, the AEF's misbehaviour appears to have consisted mostly of petty theft and vandalism rather than serious crime, at least in billets. While American abuse of their billets was not endemic enough to turn the countryside against them *en masse*, they complicated relations with locals, especially in towns where they did not stay long enough to compensate with acts of generosity. American forces were liable for damages caused by their men in billets and many French citizens did submit claims.¹⁷² Claims for damage to property or livestock such as illicitly milking cows were common and while billeting soldiers admitted some were valid, a suspicion existed that

¹⁶⁸ Gerald H. Hagar, "The Judge Advocate General's Department in the American Expeditionary Forces," *California Law Review* 8, No. 5 (1920): 310-313.

¹⁶⁹ Craig Gibson, "Through French Eyes: The British Expeditionary Force and the Records of the French Postal Censor, 1916-18," *History Workshop Journal* No. 55 (2003): 182-184.

¹⁷⁰ Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 100.

¹⁷¹ Mead, *Doughboys*, 88-89.

¹⁷² Hagar, "The Judge Advocate General's Department," 302, 321-323.

the French were putting forth claims for fictional damages.¹⁷³ That the United States compensated civilians for the damage caused by their men might have mitigated French resentment somewhat, but Americans developed bad reputations in some towns. Long periods of boredom in cold and uncomfortable billets mixed with a feeling of being cheated left many bitter against the French.

Of all the complaints about France and the French, the issue of prices was most prominent followed only by the issue of cleanliness and personal habits. Living conditions were another annoyance and, in many villages, bred distaste for France. Historians often emphasise the often appalling living conditions of the AEF and much of the squalor of which Americans complained were the conditions of their billets. Mead's analysis of the writings of doughboys emphasised that experience in billets convinced many that the French lacked basic hygiene.¹⁷⁴ Gutierrez portrayed a more positive Franco-American relationship than Mead but emphasised that mud and filth characterized the living conditions of most of the AEF in France.¹⁷⁵ The US military put tremendous emphasis on cleanliness of both soldiers and their lodgings. While issues of personal hygiene were usually not sources of serious complaints, the cleanliness of lodgings was a serious cause of frustration for Americans. Almost the first thing Americans noted about the billets and cantonments were their filthy states. At Camp Coëtquidan, many Americans lived in century old barracks previously used to house German POWs. The reaction of the 42nd Division, for example, to those barracks was utter disgust:

¹⁷³ Wilson and Tooze, *With the 364th Infantry*, 29-30.

¹⁷⁴ Mead, *Doughboys*, 194-195.

¹⁷⁵ Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 80-90.

Amongst all the “horrors” of war, experienced by the Rainbow Artillery, nothing left such an indelible mark on the minds of those chosen for this cleaning up job as preparing these barracks for the occupancy of the brigade.

They were so dirty and so full of lice that each morning before going to work the men and officers took off their uniforms, put on overalls over their underclothes, and tied up their heads in handkerchiefs so as to protect their hair.¹⁷⁶

Americans reacted to those barracks with utter disgust and were eager to enact orders to clean them up. Inheriting filthy facilities from the French caused few problems as they were easy to clean. But living with civilian population caused a host of conflicts over what constituted filth.

There was probably nothing in French rural communities that aggravated Americans more than the *fumier*: large manure piles stacked next to their owners’ homes as fertiliser. Animal manure was the primary and often only fertiliser used in rural France as chemical fertilisers were slow to spread even in the most developed provinces.¹⁷⁷ Americans found it particularly unpleasant to live next to such piles in the heart of French villages. Aside from the smell, Americans viewed them as unsanitary and a health risk. Orders given to AEF troops emphasized that their first duty when entering a billet was to make provisions for sanitation which included cleaning up any barns and billets they were in and moving the *fumier* outside of town. French townspeople almost universally considered that an unacceptable assault on their property, livelihood, and way of life. Americans were perplexed at how fond the French were of the piles. Frank Tiebout described American discovery of the manure piles in a billet in a comedic tone:

Ha! The size of the pile is doubtless an index to wealth and standing in the community. The biggest pile, the biggest citizen. Correct. He is the genial Mayor, who is honored to

¹⁷⁶ Henry J. Reilly, *Americans All: the Rainbow at War: Official History of the 42nd Rainbow Division in the World War* (Columbus, Ohio: F.J. Heer Print. Co., 1936), 99.

¹⁷⁷ Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 122.

place at Captain Dodge's disposal his best bedroom, the windows of which give immediately upon that prized monument resting so near the door-step.¹⁷⁸

Americans had little respect for how the French lived and considered the signs of village life that did not conform to American customs ridiculous. That lack of respect meant Americans were eager to eliminate such piles at the earliest opportunities.

Locals met any attempt to relocate manure piles with outrage and protest. Major Leland Garretson of the 80th Division remarked on how much doing so upset the French:

They are damned touchy about their manure, [...] You know you can engineer a fairly active 'affaire' with a Frenchman's wife with very little risk, and if you can beat him in a bargain, he is not a bad sport, but if you cut down one of his trees, or fuss with his manure pile he takes on something awful.¹⁷⁹

In removing manure piles, Americans did not only integrate into village life but took deeply unpopular measures to reshape it to their liking. Americans imposed their ideas about modernity and used the presence of their men to reshape French life to more closely resemble that which Americans were accustomed. When Americans insisted on moving manure, French civilians resigned themselves to it though they remained bitter at US presumptions such as in a case witnessed by Heywood Broun:

The decision of American officers that all manure piles must be removed from in front of dwelling houses met a startled and universal protest. Elderly Frenchwomen explained with great feeling that the manure piles had been there as long as they could remember and that no one had ever come to any harm from them. The American officers insisted, and at last a grudging consent was forced. I saw one old lady almost on the point of tears as she watched the invaders demolish her manure pile. At last she could stand no more. "They make a lot of dust," she said critically, and went into the house.¹⁸⁰

The French sometimes protested more formally, thought it did not prevent Americans from carrying out their orders according to Osborne de Varila:

¹⁷⁸ Tiebout, *A History of the 305th Infantry*, 56.

¹⁷⁹ Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*, 206.

¹⁸⁰ Heywood Broun, *The A. E. F.: With General Pershing and the American Forces* (New York: D. Appleton, 1918), 57.

The edict [to remove manure piles] nearly started a revolution in the village. The villagers seemed to regard these manure heaps as heirlooms, and I guess some of them were. The inhabitants appointed a committee to call upon the commander and protest against the removal of the historic piles, but our ranking officer was firm, and said they must go. The next day we went at the heaps with shovels and carted the fertilizer to a place a considerable distance from the village. The village smelled fifty per cent sweeter after that, and life was less burdensome.¹⁸¹

Few Americans expressed sympathy with French desires not to have their way of life so disrupted. Because French practices inconvenienced Americans who saw them as signs of a less developed society, Americans considered such disruption to be in the ultimate best interest of the French in order to bring them closer to modernity. The memory of manure piles and other unsanitary conditions in France remained with the AEF so that the image of cleaning those piles entered the American political lexicon after the war as a metaphor for cleaning up political corruption. Mark Meigs's identified increased American consciousness of the virtues of their own society, especially regarding hygiene, as one of the most immediately apparent legacies of the war that many US papers discussed as the AEF returned to the United States.¹⁸²

Other attempts to reshape French towns encountered resistance over issues that most Americans considered trivial. Americans worked to clean the barns they occupied and one of their tasks was to sweep away the extensive cobwebs that had accumulated. Americans were shocked to find that action aroused much protest from French residents. Americans saw cobwebs as signs of poor housekeeping but French peasants who valued them in a superstitious fashion thought their removal signalled that harm would come to the family owning the barn.¹⁸³ Most Americans were very surprised at such superstitions and

¹⁸¹ De Varila, *The First Shot for Liberty*, 108.

¹⁸² Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 214.

¹⁸³ Frank E. Roberts, *The American Foreign Legion: Black Soldiers of the 93d in World War I* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 79.

considered it further evidence of peasant unsophistication. Because the day to day life of doughboys involved integration into French villages, they were unwilling to accept a physical environment that caused them such disgust if at all possible. The habitual interaction with a practice Americans considered uncivilized caused considerable resentment and distaste no matter how friendly or courageous doughboys found the French.

Americans who considered cleaning and reshaping French towns natural and entirely desirable had great difficulty in understanding why the French would choose to live in such conditions. Throughout the 19th century, the United States industrialized faster and more completely than most of Europe. Americans especially prized investments in machinery and improved technology due to the scarcity of skilled workers, inexpensive land, and high cost of labour that made such investments a key part of American economic expansion. As a result, an ethos that glorified modern technology evolved in the United States that held that machines not only brought economic prosperity but also benefitted people and “emancipated” them from hard physical labour. Technology served as a civilizing force that defeated ignorance, superstition, and poverty and brought not only better wages and health but also better morals.¹⁸⁴ As a result, the dominant outlook of Americans, especially middle class ones, towards industry was that the process conferred virtues to the population that embraced it. A civilization could move further towards human progress by industrializing and embracing the values of hard work and efficiency or remain mired in savagery.¹⁸⁵ The ideology of technological innovation as civilization formed a strong part of American observations of French village life. Because the French remained attached to the old fashion

¹⁸⁴ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 42-43, 52-53.

¹⁸⁵ Daniel Bender, *American Abyss: Savagery and Civilization in the Age of Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 16-17.

in their dwellings, way of life, and customs, Americans believed they lacked an element of civilization Americans possessed. Americans felt they could deliver the French from their poverty and backwardness by such acts as removing manure piles, cleaning towns, and otherwise advocated for increased mechanization to bring the French into the present. Americans admired some French qualities and often formed friendships with them but Americans thinking about civilization still placed the French at a less advanced stage of human existence they Americans thought that they had attained.

While Americans who entered billets had the opportunity to befriend the French and counter stereotypes formed by their initial impressions of the country, a number of issues gave rise to new problems. Complaints about billets came from the conditions imposed by French rural poverty. French peasants, aside from being backward in the minds of many Americans, were also much poorer than the AEF soldiers associated with the typical living conditions of farmers back home. At the turn of the 20th Century, a period known as the “Golden Age of agriculture” had begun in the United States which resulted in tremendous prosperity for farmers who saw their income outstrip that of urban workers.¹⁸⁶ The generation of Americans who made up most of the AEF was one for whom farming was a mostly prosperous profession, outside of the Appalachian South where the type of agriculture more closely resembled that in France.¹⁸⁷ Thus, most Americans who grew up on farms found French living conditions far below those to which they were accustomed. As few Americans were familiar with the type of rural life prevalent in France, they considered the lifestyle, behaviour, and conditions that came from it both foreign and contemptible.

¹⁸⁶ David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 161-163.

¹⁸⁷ Piott, *Daily Life in the Progressive Era*, 11-13.

While Americans integrated into French society, they were also extremely disruptive and both their money and their drive to make French towns more like American ones presented the French with hardships and opportunities to profit. Americans deeply affected commerce in the communities they visited and physically altered French communities through theft and vandalism as well as attempt to “improve” them. Americans experienced those disruptions and the French reactions to them with assertions of the values of their own society and formed expectations of French gratitude that often went unmet. Americans expected a universally positive reception from the French but when locals charged them high prices or objected to moving manure piles, doughboys reacted with bitterness and occasionally stole what they felt the French owed them. Those attitudes did not nullify the affection they felt for the French nor preclude their willingness to aid French villagers but it did indicate that Americans were not willing to fully accommodate French demands without having their own desires met.

Alcohol and Leave

Americans disrupted French society by their presence but many of the most severe problems that arose were the result of the availability of alcohol. The US military’s policy towards alcohol was, by and large, prohibitionist with a preference that soldiers not drink either in uniform or when off duty. That reflected an American political environment and culture that was growing increasingly hostile to the consumption of alcohol with many states already having prohibition laws and active campaigns to impose nationwide prohibition that would succeed in ratifying a constitutional amendment a few months after the war’s end. In the United States, drinking was a morality issue and typically cited alongside prostitution as a social vice targeted by the social purity movement who sought to prevent soldiers from

engaging in either.¹⁸⁸ The same pressure that made the US Army attempt to prevent illicit sex also pushed it to attempt to eliminate drinking.

France had an entirely different outlook. Alcohol consumption was ubiquitous and entirely acceptable, even expected. The French Army issued wine, called *pinard*, to its soldiers as part of their rations and it was such an integral part of the French military that Chester Jenks claimed of the French soldier: “Give him his wine and he will fight till doomsday. If he has his quart of ‘pinard’ he is happy; if not, he is going to know the reason.”¹⁸⁹ There was an expectation among adult men in France to drink alcohol as ambulance volunteer Julien Bryan discovered when the French men in his unit “joked all during the meal about their wine and told me I’d never be a real poilu [...] if I didn’t drink pinard. So finally I let them pour me out a glass and we gave a toast to the speedy ending of the war.”¹⁹⁰ Some Americans believed that the French imparting their own drinking culture onto Americans would be a beneficial development by promoting moderation. Heywood Broun believed:

One factor which worked for temperance was the French fashion of making drinking deliberate and social. When an American can be induced to sit down to his potion he is comparatively safe. These little village cafés did no harm after the first brief period when the American soldier had his fling and they served the good purpose of encouraging fraternization between doughboy and poilu.¹⁹¹

Despite such hopes, the type of drinking in which Americans partook, especially on leave, was binge drinking of hard liquor. Indeed, they even influenced French drinking culture by such as popularising drinks like the gin cocktail among parts of the French population.¹⁹²

Given the vast cultural difference and the widespread availability of alcohol in France,

¹⁸⁸ Reilly, “‘A Perilous Venture for Democracy,’ ” 223.

¹⁸⁹ Jenks, *Our First Ten Thousand*, 91.

¹⁹⁰ Julien Bryan, *“Ambulance 464” Encore des Blessés* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), 118-119.

¹⁹¹ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 84-85.

¹⁹² Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 77.

complete prohibition for the US Army was impossible, as that they could not be expected to police every establishment and because French authorities refused to cooperate. The US Army emphasized the value of remaining sober to its members in the hopes that they would choose not to drink while also limiting access to establishments that sold hard liquors. The US military so opposed drinking in its ranks that, citing fear of causing controversy and rebuke from the American civilian population, it declined an offer from French officials to distribute champagne to US troops for the 14th of July.¹⁹³ The AEF tried to prevent its men from consuming alcohol in France but it was no more successful than in trying to prevent sexual contact. A great many doughboys hated Army rules and regulations.¹⁹⁴ As a result, they were difficult to enforce and resistance to them forced US officials to accommodate the behaviour of their troops who were unwilling to comply with restrictions.¹⁹⁵

In many ways, the task was impossible and impractical; there was simply too much liquor in France and too many Americans willing to buy it. US generals were willing to defer to French customs when it came to drinking since doing otherwise would have been untenable.¹⁹⁶ In practice, US officials tolerated the sale of light wines and beers to US troops as they rarely led to drunkenness unless taken in considerable amounts. Pershing himself, while supporting the moral basis of prohibition, acknowledged its impracticality when it came to lighter alcoholic beverages:

It is a question whether under ordinary circumstances in times of peace a healthy moral sentiment cannot be created as a safeguard against excesses, yet during the war when men were not surrounded by the restraining influences of home life limited prohibition was necessary. Even though it had been possible of enforcement, I should not have

¹⁹³ Major Clark, Acting Chief of American Military Mission to French GHQ to Commander in Chief of the French Armies, June 20, 1918. Box 1, entry 1574, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Force (WWI), NARA.

¹⁹⁴ Mead, *Doughboys*, 149.

¹⁹⁵ Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, 113-114.

¹⁹⁶ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 132.

issued orders to our armies prohibiting the use of light wines or beer. Armies are simply a cross-section of the people whom they represent and their psychology is the same, and any attempt to enforce such an order would have led to difficulties. Furthermore, coopération[sic] by the French to that extent would have been out of the question.¹⁹⁷

It is clear that a great many Americans were not only comfortable with alcohol's presence in France but actively sought it out. Many who had never touched alcohol in the United States took up drinking after arriving in France.¹⁹⁸ From the moment that the AEF landed, French merchants and peddlers lined up to offer wine, beer, and spirits to American soldiers and continued to do so until the war's end.¹⁹⁹ The US set up "hot drink stations" to provide their men with non-alcoholic beverages as an alternative but they had little effect on drinking habits.²⁰⁰

French soldiers serving with American often shared the wine they were issued. In even the smallest towns and billets, the locals, with ample access to spirits of all kinds, were more than willing to sell them to Americans, even to share it freely on occasion such as when the doughboys departed for the front. Many Americans drank alcohol for simple convenience or to make other items more palatable. An ambulance driver noted that despite their dislike for the taste of *pinard*, he and colleagues found a practical reason to drink it:

The Americans have never looked upon Pinard as a thirst-quencher, but during the first days of the Belgian offensive we drank it eagerly and blessed the man who was responsible for tis appearance in French rations. Those who are acquainted with a "*cuisine roulante*" know how greasy are the soups and meat and potatoes; Pinard cuts this grease like mechanic's soap and undoubtedly does much to keep the poilu's tummy functioning in the proper manner.²⁰¹

Much US drinking was opportunistic because alcohol was what was available but there were also many cases where Americans specifically sought it out.

¹⁹⁷ Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 1, 281-282.

¹⁹⁸ Mead, *Doughboys*, 199-200.

¹⁹⁹ de la Luz Sáenz, *World War I Diary of José de la Luz Sáenz*, 141.

²⁰⁰ Reilly, " 'A Perilous Venture for Democracy,' " 224.

²⁰¹ George J. Shively ed., *Record of S.S.U. 585* (New York: E.L. Hildreth & Co. 1920), 94-95.

Many American soldiers relished the chance to drink in France and took advantage of it at every opportunity. Marine private Gulberg confidently stated that: “Of course the first thing a soldier thinks of when he hits a new place is vin rouge and cognac”.²⁰² Learning how to ask for “*vin blanc*” in French was considered a necessary skill on par with learning basic greetings.²⁰³ Their fondness for alcohol was so intense that it sometimes interfered with their duties. Corporal Rendinell recounted one incident where his unit used their assigned duties to get alcohol from the French: “We were sent to load manure for the frogs. We thought we would make a little something on the side out of it. Who would give us the most cognac, we would do the work for them.”²⁰⁴ They were able to avoid consequences for that action despite the risk of souring relations with civilians.

The issue of drinking in billets seems to have been most intense when stressors such as awful weather unpopular duties were present. If Americans could not purchase alcohol, they were more than willing to charm or barter with the French to get it. Marines of the 2nd Division were not above emotionally manipulating locals:

We got orders to go up to the front. All of us boys went out visiting these French people in town. We told them we were going to Verdun because a lot of them have brothers & kin folks there. Some cried, so we cried too. We sure put on a good act because they kept fetching out the wine & cognac. I guess I must of cried at every house in the village.²⁰⁵

Despite it being the potential for problems and against US policy, officers in charge of billets seem to have done little to curtail drinking at the time, either because they themselves indulged or because they did not consider the efforts worthwhile. Many officers were quite hypocritical in admonishing their men for drinking and carousing with women while they,

²⁰² Clark, *Devil Dogs Chronicle*, 115.

²⁰³ Wilson and Tooze, *With the 364th Infantry*, 31.

²⁰⁴ Clark, *Devil Dogs Chronicle*, 102.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

themselves, enjoyed both quite liberally.²⁰⁶ In fact, drunkenness and the disorderly conduct resulting from it was the leading cause of charges levied against commissioned officers.²⁰⁷ The tendency of officers to indulge in alcohol despite their responsibility for keeping their men sober was even a subject of satirical comment by *Stars and Stripes* who depicted fictional US officers claiming that alcohol restrictions were merely for enlisted men in an article praising a French restaurant owner.²⁰⁸ Many Americans seem to have used alcohol as a social lubricant. One American claimed that the key to getting special treatment from restaurant orders was to order “du vin” as doing so “always melts recalcitrant French hearts”.²⁰⁹ Despite occasional problems, drinking in billets generally did not cause major disorder as Americans still had many military duties to perform and remained under the supervision of their officers which limited opportunities for binge drinking. In addition, forming bonds with local residents mitigated drinking related misbehaviour as Americans had an interest in keeping local goodwill. Drinking on leave when freed from such controls was much more troublesome and disruptive.

Pershing’s fear that the lack of “restraining influences of home life” would cause excess drinking proved accurate. Being in France already removed the young men of the AEF from their own communities but leave also separated them from their substitute communities and “home” life in camps and billets. Leave thus provided opportunities for enjoyment of those experiences in France that transgressed boundaries imposed by AEF policy and American expectations without the normal consequences imposed by military discipline and being part of a town or village. Leave, for Americans, was highly restricted,

²⁰⁶ Mead, *Doughboys*, 200-201.

²⁰⁷ Hagar, “The Judge Advocate General's Department,” 311.

²⁰⁸ “Her Table is Spread for men in the Ranks,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 5, 1918, page 5.

²⁰⁹ Heber Blankenhorn, *Adventures in Propaganda; Letters from an Intelligence Officer in France* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin company, 1919), 76.

particularly after American divisions were committed to battle in force after May 1918. As a result, those who received leave were keen to enjoy it to the utmost as they often had a few days. Paris was especially popular as Americans expected to find it as much in mourning as the rest of the country but instead: “We were flabbergasted to find Paris just as gay as ever, only more so, on the surface.”²¹⁰ Paris was a major leave and recreation area and it often featured scenes of heavy drinking. Americans not only drank freely in restaurants but frequented bars and other establishments that sold harder liquors. The official diaries kept by liaison officers and submitted to the Chief Liaison Officer detailed the issues they dealt with. In areas where many Americans went on leave, they recorded quite a few altercations between Americans and Frenchmen.²¹¹ Probably the most common were traffic accidents where drunk American drivers hit French pedestrians. Other transport related incidents involved Americans refusing to pay taxi drivers or worse, forcing them to drive them under threat of violence.

Drinking was often the cause of other violent altercations in urban areas with unruly soldiers assaulting locals or using threats and weapons to extort money or alcohol.²¹² Such skirmishes were a fairly frequent occurrence. Colonel C. F. Martin in his 1943 report on the leave system acknowledged that disruptive behaviour on leave was a major problem:

Unit commanders had issued weekend passes permitting their men to visit towns and localities in their vicinity, but the lack of knowledge on the part of the soldiers of the French language, ways and customs, and perhaps a difference in the ideas as to ways of having a good time, led to misunderstandings and in some cases to more serious disturbances.²¹³

²¹⁰ Jelke, *Letters from a Liaison Officer*, 25.

²¹¹ Examples of such diaries are found in Box 2077, Entry 49, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Force (WWI), NARA.

²¹² Nouailhat, *Les Américains à Nantes et Saint-Nazaire, 1917–1919*, 124-128.

²¹³ Quoted in Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 76.

Liaison officers recorded brawls with French soldiers and civilians as well as assaults or rapes committed by Americans on leave. Officials frequently attributed drinking as a core cause of such incidents with the perpetrators noted as being drunk or having been drinking. Drunken assaults and thefts were common enough and a liaison officer noted that he had many complaints from the French about such acts, including sexual assaults, but was ill equipped to deal with them. As the descriptions of the perpetrators rarely extended beyond “an American,” follow up was difficult despite French requests to address the issue.²¹⁴ In addition to identification problems, American military police lacked the central organization and trained personnel to be truly effective.²¹⁵

During the war itself, the lack of leave opportunities served to limit the number problems and ensured that such incidents occurred in the confined areas where soldiers were stationed. However, in the short period immediately following the war (November and December of 1918), the number of confrontations multiplied in correlation with soldiers spending much more time on leave. Both in the official post-war US report and the historiography of the AEF identified such situations as a major cause of tension. Drinking related offences were frequent enough among AEF members to be a serious problem, though such excess drinking and violence was only prevalent among a minority. It may be that Americans were unused to a culture where alcohol was so freely available and that, coupled with the desire for a good time, led many to uncontrolled drinking. American prohibitionist attitudes were largely ineffective and many did not accustom themselves fully to a French drinking culture that was more social and moderate.

²¹⁴ Weekly report from Liaison Officer in Rennes to Chief Liaison officer, Jan 27, 1919, Box 2007, entry 51, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Force (WWI), NARA.

²¹⁵ Patrick V. Garland, “Profiles from the Past,” *Military Police* 10 no.2 (2010): 41.

Both the French and Americans were deeply concerned about such issues, especially doughboy assaults on French civilians, because of their potential to cause serious conflicts. The French civilian population was active in lodging complaints about American behaviour to their own authorities and to the AEF. French civilians apparently were willing to tolerate such incidents as a consequence of war as long as they remained rare and Americans were fighting the Germans.²¹⁶ At war's end, when unwanted behaviour became a bigger problem, civilians were no longer willing to endure AEF excesses. As there was no longer any need for American fighters, this situation fed the deterioration of French-American relations in the immediate aftermath of the Armistice.²¹⁷ The US Army was keen to control its soldiers' worst behaviour and demonstrate to the French that they were serious about ensuring their men treated civilians with respect. Marshall explained American thinking on the matter shortly after US arrival in France in a particular case:

We were all much disturbed, the second and third days in St. Nazaire, by the report of an attempted assault on a French peasant girl by one of our men. [...] A court was convened and within 24 hours and the man sentenced to thirty years' confinement, and the sentence immediately approved. The French people were thunderstruck at such a procedure, and while it was very drastic so far as the particular individual was concerned, there can be no doubt but that it made a lasting impression, not only on the men of the first Division but on most of those who followed.²¹⁸

While it was very unlikely that the man would serve anywhere near that sentence, the US Army implemented the punishment to show the French civilian population that they were serious about ensuring discipline and protecting civilians from criminals in US uniform.²¹⁹ If officers treated minor offences with a fair amount of lenience, they dealt with more serious offences as promptly and as severely as possible in order to prevent Americans from

²¹⁶ Nouailhat, *Les Américains à Nantes et Saint-Nazaire, 1917-1919*, 209.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 201-203.

²¹⁸ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 13-14.

²¹⁹ John S.D. Eisenhower and Joanne Thompson Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of the American Army in World War I* (New York : Free Press, 2001), 42-43.

receiving a reputation as lawless and undisciplined. Regardless of US and French efforts, it remained a challenge to suppress criminal behaviour given the endemic lack of reliable descriptions of perpetrators.

Alcohol caused the most severe problems between the AEF and the French because it amplified the way Americans acted when confronted with the differences and frustrations they had in France. For example, Americans who saw black men and white women flirting might have quietly grumbled about it when sober but could start a fight when drunk. Others, resentful about overcharging might have been inclined to simply take what goods they wanted and assault anyone who attempted to intervene. That effect, combined with the relative lack of restrictions, made American behaviour on leave their most disruptive. While in billets, the frequent bonds of friendship with locals tempered American behaviour but without close relationships with French civilians, American behaviour often worsened. Since doughboys treated leave as a “special” experience due to its rarity, many did not feel bound by the norms of behaviour expected in their more “regular” time in billets and camps. Leave was only a small part of the American experience in France but it was the one that caused the most problems between the AEF and the French civilian population. Those who mistreated civilians while on leave were a minority and despite a certain amount of misconduct which prompted French complaints, Americans made an overall positive impression on locals. Many written testimonies and civilian accounts and praised their friendliness, courtesy, and respect for locals.²²⁰ Alcohol factored very heavily into much the American experience in France, and in particular their experiences of recreation within French society. Whether it provided comfort from the frustrating duties, or consumed in

²²⁰ Nouailhat, *Les Américains à Nantes et Saint-Nazaire, 1917–1919*, 133, 182, 195-197.

excess in order to have fun, drinking and the problems it caused were one of the main ways in which Americans experienced the different norms of France.

Conclusion

The American experience in civilian France contrasted revulsion and misbehaviour with compassion and friendship. Americans were certainly capable of both in their treatment of the French, sometimes integrating well into French villages and sometimes treating the French as little more than obstacles to the comforts to which they felt they were entitled. The mixed nature of their experiences was well elaborated in a letter by a machine gun captain quoted by *Stars and Stripes* reporter and sergeant Alexander Woollcott:

My battalion was billeted for four months in a small town not far from Dijon. Last November we marched down from the Argonne, a distance of 150 miles. The town has perhaps three hundred people altogether. A tourist might tell you that it was picturesque, but things have a rather different aspect when viewed from the tonneau of a limousine or from the first floor of an old barn, and whatever else it might have been, it certainly was darned uncomfortable. Our battalion, about 1,000 strong, found themselves confronted with roofs that leaked and doors that seeped, with cooties and with mud, with endless inspections and drills, fatigues and marches, with rain for 53 (actual count) consecutive days, to say nothing of a shortage of fuel, a lack of lights and few amusements. I think any fair-minded person would agree that obviously the thing to do was to drown your troubles in vin blanc, and although I must say the men behaved remarkably well, still, there was all the drinking that the Army pay allows, and the things incident to it.

We stole honey and rabbits, smashed windows, tore up doors for firewood, shot wild boars with service rifles, with wonderful disregard for the safety of the French civique, and once in a while would start a killing party, which fortunately, never killed anyone, although some poilus told me they thought it safer at the front. Aside from these things, there were the necessary evils incident to occupation - i. e., increased prices, ruined roads, and the general wear and tear.

Yet in spite of all these things, in spite of the fact that we had run over their town roughshod, there was not a woman in the town who did not cry when we marched away. The cynic will say that they were thinking of the 60,000 francs we spent there each month, but I think it was more than that. Big, sunny, exuberant Yanks - as carefree and cheerful as school boys - how could any one, let alone the kindly French people, help liking them? You cannot tell me that the one desire of these peasants of Yonne was to see us go - no, not by a good deal. With all our faults, they loved us still, and with all our talk there are lots of us who have learned to love the French.²²¹

²²¹ Woollcott, "Them Damned Frogs," 495.

Such statements were certainly self-serving, but they represented the American attitude that they had come to help the French and that the French should love them for it. That help extended to bringing American “improvements” to France where possible. Since they disembarked, Americans identified France and its people as being in need of modernization, which was to say Americanization. It was such sentiments that prompted them to describe acts like cleaning French villages as efforts to “educate the people” rather than as impositions on their way of life.²²² While Americans were willing to accept, and benefit from, some French customs, they still fundamentally expected France to conform to American standards as much as possible. American acceptance of the French was thus highly selective. It was when the French failed to provide what Americans felt they deserved that problems arose. Behaviour on leave also demonstrates that some took the chance to enjoy themselves as licence to treat the French in appalling ways. Yet despite those very real sources of conflict, the unnamed machine gun captain was correct that there was something alluring about them in French eyes. The American contribution to the war eclipsed that of France’s other allies, including that of the British, in the eyes of the French population despite their relatively short time in the country.²²³ That the French grew attached to Americans speaks to the impressions made among the population as they lived beside them. The French population was an important part of the American experience of the war and while not all interactions were positive, most Americans seem to have had an overall positive impression of their experience in civilian France.

²²² De Varila, *The First Shot for Liberty*, 107.

²²³ Gibson, “Through French Eyes,” 186.

CHAPTER 2

AMERICANS INTRODUCED TO THE FRENCH MILITARY

While Americans lived in billets and familiarized themselves with the French civilian population, they were training for battle. It was in training camps that Americans first came into contact with French soldiers and many first learned how to be a soldier. The AEF was almost entirely composed of new recruits when it arrived in France. In the 2nd Division, for example, 87% of the Regular Army brigade's members were new, and 74% of its Marine Brigade had served less than a year in the Corps.¹ Time in French training camps was often the first experience of any military training for most of the men in the early divisions to arrive in France. Divisions that arrived in the spring and summer of 1918 usually had some experience in US training camps but still spent some time with the French to refine their skills and prepare them for frontline service. Their distinct military cultures meant that the French and American commands stressed different skills and attitudes. As Americans interacted with the French nearly daily during their training, they needed to learn how to negotiate those differences. Doughboys had to decide whether they wanted to emulate the French soldiers training them or conform to the ideal their commanders endorsed. US doctrine emphasised tactical and personal aggression to create a soldier who always advanced and overcame his opponent through his skill with rifle and bayonet. French combat doctrine evolved to emphasise limiting casualties that resulted in slower and more methodical attacks and

¹ Farwell, *Over There*, 94.

cooperation with artillery as they did not consider the infantryman the main force that decided battles. The contrast between American and French ideals was respectively between fighting spirit and technical combat skill. Those with the most experience with the French were more likely to integrate some French ideas into their own military identity but retained distinct ideas. Those Americans who dealt with administrative aspects of the war also identified fundamental differences between their practices and those of the French which they tried to reconcile. Training was an ideological conflict between methods categorised as American and French. The struggle for doughboys was to learn to accept French soldiers as experts while simultaneously trying to maintain an “American” outlook on their role in the war.

While the United States drafted an enormous number of men, it lacked the ability to train and deploy them within a reasonable timeframe. As a result, American forces came to depend very heavily on French resources and expertise. In the interest of getting them to the battlefield as quickly as possible, the French trained most American divisions in whole or in part. American soldiers needed to accept the French Army as competent and knowledgeable in order for their training to fully take hold. While the United States had intended to supply its own forces, constant shortages in shipping meant that the AEF purchased more supplies in France than it received from the United States.² The US military was also dependant on the French for heavy weapons and their ammunition because attempts to manufacture them domestically failed.³ In addition, securing the facilities needed to house men and supplies required extensive negotiation

² David F. Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 15-16.

³ Daniel R. Beaver, *Modernizing the American War Department: Change and Continuity in a Turbulent Era, 1885-1920* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2006), 91-92; 174-175.

with the French. Well before the battles of 1918, the United States and French militaries had integrated behind the front lines. The partnership was often a difficult one given cultural differences. But there were also fundamental disagreements between the American and French militaries on matters of doctrine and training. Despite such problems, many Americans were perfectly willing to work closely with the French for the expertise they offered.

The American relationship with the French military demonstrated a considerable cleavage between the AEF high command and much of the rank and file. General Pershing and his staff held many French ideas in contempt, tried to limit their influence, and sidelined those who championed them. Despite their efforts, the degree to which Americans depended on French expertise and the relationship that formed between the doughboys and their trainers meant that there was a degree of French influence. Soldiers of the AEF were not necessarily willing to adopt the French outlook but were willing to integrate what they found useful about their training to a greater degree than the AEF general headquarters (GHQ) would have preferred. American command's resistance and the ideas of doughboys about how they should fight ensured that Americans were not completely deferential to the French, but that did not prevent professional respect and the consequent bonds between both armies from forming.

American and French Doctrine

The relationship between the French and American military establishments was a troubled one largely due to fundamental disagreements over doctrine. Contrasting ideas of how to conduct the war and attempts to implement divergent ideas lay at the heart of

many of the conflicts that plagued the Franco-American military relationship. American doctrine had developed before the war and attempts to adapt such ideas to a First World War context consumed much of the US Army's thought. The US Army's prewar lack of modern equipment heavily informed the type of doctrine the US developed and much of the disagreement between French and American forces centered on how to use that equipment. Artillery was the critical area in which the US Army was most deficient. Quantity and accuracy of artillery fire were generally the deciding factors in battles on the Western Front with artillery becoming more central to military doctrine. French doctrine for use of offensive or defensive artillery emphasized that the first and most important job of a commander was to use his guns to destroy or otherwise neutralise the enemy's guns.⁴ In contrast, the fundamentally defensive and naval operation focused Coastal Artillery dominated US artillery. The US Field Artillery that supported the US Army was so small that it had to close its only artillery training school in 1916 to provide the personnel and guns for Pershing's Punitive Expedition to Mexico.⁵ Furthermore, the Coastal Artillery's staff had fiercely resisted a unified training program for fear of losing prestige to the Field Artillery. This made the establishment of a systematic training program difficult.⁶ The expansion of the US artillery was one of the most dramatic of any branch of the US Army, ballooning from 9,000 men in April 1917 to 400,000 by the armistice.⁷ As the United States was unable to accommodate such an expansion alone, it relied on the French to train its artillery arm more fully than any other part of the US Army.

⁴ Major Legrand, "Lecture on the use of Artillery in Defence," *Field Artillery Journal* 8, Issue 1 (1918): 28.

⁵ Mark E. Grotelueschen, *Doctrine Under Trial: American Artillery Employment in World War I* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 4.

⁶ Memo for General Pershing, February 12th, 1918. Box 2076A, entry 49, RG 120, NARA.

⁷ Philip J. Haythornthwaite, *The World War One Source Book* (London: Arms and Armour, 1992), 312.

The US artillery's reliance on French training was also a result of its wholesale adoption of French equipment. The US Army judged its own guns insufficient for modern warfare. Rather than design new ones, it opted to adopt French artillery. Initially there were plans to manufacture copies of the guns in the United States but attempts to do so could not overcome technical and organizational problems.⁸ The United States had to purchase the guns directly from the French and have them delivered to AEF forces in France. US manufacturing never produced weapons larger than small arms in adequate numbers to supply the AEF. The United States did, however, supply massive quantities of raw materials and components such as high explosives. The Americans purchased virtually all of their artillery, aircraft, tanks, and machine guns from the French, typically in exchange for the raw materials and resources the Allies had been dependant on for some time.⁹ Occasional equipment shortages resulted but by and large the arrangement was sufficient to meet AEF needs. American equipment, often obsolete, remained in use for training in the United States but the fact that the AEF overwhelmingly employed French equipment, which meant that the French occupied an important training role.

As a consequence of the type of warfare the United States had been fighting for past decades and the lack of heavy equipment, the US Army had developed a combat doctrine that heavily emphasised the idea of a "self-sustaining" infantry and an emphasis on infantry rifle firepower.¹⁰ The US Army trained their soldiers to fire accurately to a range of 600 yards but it was rare for European armies to train anybody for that range

⁸ Beaver, *Modernizing the American War Department*, 91-93.

⁹ Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms*, 104-107.

¹⁰ Richard Shawn Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 20.

with the exception of specialist marksmen. As rifle firepower had proven itself in the Philippines and Mexico, American commanders as well as the rank and file soldiers placed a great deal of confidence in it.¹¹ Pershing retained an outlook that insisted that methods and skills that had proven themselves in such low intensity conflicts remained relevant in the First World War, saying in his memoirs that:

The armies on the Western Front in the recent battles that I had witnessed had all but given up the use of the rifle. Machine guns, grenades, stokes mortars, and one-pounders had become the main reliance of the average Allied soldier. These were all valuable weapons for specific purposes but they could not replace the combination of an efficient soldier and his rifle.¹²

US command remained firmly dedicated to that idea for the entire war.

In addition to the influence of colonial conflicts on US Army methods, America's wars in the early 20th Century shaped the image of the US soldier. The Spanish American War and the Rough Riders' famous charge up San Juan Hill created an especially strong image in the minds of the American public. Press reports from the war and other famous representations of the conflict perpetuated the typography of the American soldier as tough, wild, virile, robust, and always ready for combat. This built upon the existing tradition of the tough, virile soldier that dated from the time of the US Civil War as tough and virile.¹³ The combination of romanticized views of the Civil War, often promulgated by the many still living veterans of the conflict who had raised their children on tales of valour and glory, and the extreme popularity of the Rough Rider image meant that Americans held an especially idealized view of war as an arena

¹¹ The very good marksmanship training of Americans along with their excellent rifles served to mask the influence of battlefield developments that made the concept of self-sustaining infantry obsolete because it had allowed Americans to effectively neutralise Mexican machine guns with rifle fire during the Punitive Expedition to Mexico. (James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I," *Parameters* 13, Issue 3 (1983): 37).

¹² Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 1, 153.

¹³ Pettegrew, *Brutes in Suits*, 219-226.

for individual heroism and displays of chivalry and honour.¹⁴ That image of the American soldier was one where individual courage and determination Americans possessed above all other nations won battles. Because of AEF insistence on the unique value of American expertise and spirit, it tried to mold the US soldier of the First World War into the type of soldier that had existed in prior conflicts rather than adapt their outlook to the current conflict. That insistence on maintaining a vision of the US soldier from previous war caused considerable conflict in the face of French attempts to impart the lessons they had learned during the war.

Pershing entered the war with strongly held ideas about why the war had become a stalemate and how to rectify it. As years of trench warfare had sapped Allied “offensive spirit,” he believed that it was the US Army’s job to break that stalemate through offensive action that would breach German defensive lines and resume a war of movement that would destroy the enemy.¹⁵ In his memoirs, Pershing repeatedly emphasised the soundness of his own doctrines in contrast to failed Allied ideas.

Pershing was particularly keen to limit French influence as he felt that:

If the French doctrine had prevailed our instruction would have been limited to a brief period of training for trench fighting. A new army brought up entirely on such principles would have been seriously handicapped without the protection of the trenches. It would probably have lacked the aggressiveness to break through the enemy’s lines and the knowledge of how to carry on thereafter. It was my opinion that the victory could not be won by the costly process of attrition, but it must be won by driving the enemy out into the open and engaging him in a war of movement. Instruction in this kind of warfare was based upon individual and group initiative, resourcefulness and tactical judgement¹⁶

¹⁴ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 178-179.

¹⁵ James W. Rainey, “Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I,” *Parameters* 13, Issue 3 (1983): 35.

¹⁶ Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 1, 151.

The doctrine developed from such beliefs, known as “open warfare,” had no specific definition, but emphasized fighting in the open without fortifications or artillery support.¹⁷ US Army instructions based on the idea of open warfare instructed US soldiers and officers to rely on movement and initiative rather than the rigid pre-planned movements.¹⁸ Pershing’s instructions to his subordinates on how to train American forces strongly emphasized the importance of bold action and aggressive thinking. Pershing had so little interest in learning about British and French tactics that US Army Chief of Staff Peyton March characterized Pershing’s knowledge of Allied doctrine as “profound ignorance.”¹⁹ Pershing’s strongly held ideas about ideal tactics also contained a conception of the ideal soldier as energetic and aggressive who used his initiative and his rifle to overcome the stalemate that prevailed on the Western Front for years just as he had earlier overcome the Spanish in Cuba. His criticism also implied that the Allies, particularly the French, were not energetic soldiers and had allowed trench warfare to breed a moribund complacency that risked corrupting Americans. A key goal in US basic training was to foster a culture of aggressiveness that produced the sentiment that battlefield courage was the ultimate test of manhood and patriotism among the AEF. Jennifer Keene has described the AEF’s insistence on personal combat skills and esprit de corps as a “cult of aggressiveness” that permeated all levels of the US Army. Even organizations charged with organizing recreational activities reinforced the ideal of the aggressive and self-reliant soldiers through widespread programs to promote boxing among doughboys.²⁰ Given the severe criticism of his doctrine during

¹⁷ Keene, *Doughboys*, 38.

¹⁸ AEF Combat Instructions, September 5th, 1918. Box 181, Entry 310, RG 165, NARA.

¹⁹ Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*, 84.

²⁰ Keene, *Doughboys*, 36-41.

the war, Pershing sought to vindicate his doctrine by insisting that unique American aggression and willingness had been the decisive factor in winning the war. American soldiers had to decide for themselves whether this was the case by choosing to accept or reject American command's characterisation of the French and their training as not providing a proper example of battlefield conduct and the type of soldier one should aspire to be.

The US military established its combat unit strengths with open warfare in mind. A US division included 28,000 men, more than double the size of European divisions.²¹ The large size of units remained consistent down the chain of command with US brigades, regiments, battalions, and companies all being much larger than their European equivalents. While some explanations for the large formations present the possibility that they were created to compensate for the US Army's chronic lack of experienced command and staff officers, scholars generally state that the key reason for the size of divisions was so that they could sustain casualties and continue to operate offensively.²² The US Army emphasized the combat infantryman much more than any other army on the Western front. At the same time, the French Army had been decreasing the proportion of combat infantry since 1915 in favour of massive expanding the artillery arm.²³

The French Chief of the General Staff (*Chef d'état major*), given the position shortly after the US entry into the war, General Philippe Pétain, had learned the exact opposite lessons from combat than Pershing had. Pétain had always focused on a

²¹ Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 18-19.

²² Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 27-28.

²³ Haythornthwaite, *The World War One Source Book*, 177, 183.

firepower based doctrine, which held the position that artillery conquers and infantry occupies.²⁴ The increased French focus on artillery was part of broader infantry organization reforms to substitute firepower for manpower by placing greater emphasis on grenades, automatic weapons, and skirmishing tactics.²⁵ Such tactics meant that highly organised attacks that placed little importance on the infantryman's rifle was the main French assault method and the one the French attempted to teach doughboys. Changing French tactical doctrine removed the infantryman and his initiative as the fundamental building block of battlefield doctrine. While Pétain and Pershing had a mutual respect and got along fairly well on a personal level,²⁶ they had diametrically opposed military views. Those views manifested in vastly different ideas of the ideal soldier and how they should behave on the battlefield. Since many of those ideas were mutually exclusive, Americans trained by both their own army and that of France had to decide to which model they wanted to adhere.

Training of US Forces

Despite important doctrinal disagreements, the lack of American capacity meant that the French had considerable control over US training, especially in the first year of American participation in the war. The 1st Division began arriving in France in the summer of 1917. Further divisions sent to France in whole or in part before 1918 included the 2nd, 26th, and 42nd Divisions.²⁷ Of the first divisions sent to France, the 1st

²⁴ Ian Sumner, *They Shall Not Pass: The French Army on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Barnsley : Pen & Sword Military, 2012), 169.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁶ Donald Smythe, *Pershing, General of the Armies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 22-24.

²⁷ The 2nd Division was a Regular Army division most famous as it contained the only US Marines to see combat in the First World War. The 26th "Yankee" and 42nd "Rainbow" Division were National Guard

and 26th Divisions had received almost no training in the United States and thus were especially dependant on the French.²⁸ It was those divisions that most had to navigate the very distinct French and Americans ideas on the proper conduct of the war.

The training program designed for American divisions followed a three stage structure. In the first stage, a US division received advanced training behind the lines at the hands of veteran French divisions. The second stage involved periods in the front lines of a “quiet” sector where American units in increasingly greater sizes from company to regiment would serve alongside the French and under their command. The last stage involved reuniting the entire division for large scale maneuvers where to find and rectify any defects with additional training before sending the division to the front.²⁹ The US Army planned for basic training to take place in the United States so that the troops would receive only more advanced training from the French. Training for artillery and infantry was typically separate, with a division’s artillery brigade expected to join their infantry component in the final phase of training. Artillery also served in quiet sectors brigaded with French batteries in support of US forces where possible. Officials devised the process to take place over a period of six months but the 1st Division was the only formation that went through the full planned program.³⁰

In March 1918 the launching of the first German spring offensive precipitated a major crisis among the Allies as major German advances broke Allied lines and forced the commitment of almost all available reserves and caused great fear that the Allies

units mainly from New England though the “Rainbow” division acquired its nickname from having members from 26 states.

²⁸ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 39-41.

²⁹ Forrest R. Blackburn, “The A.E.F. Under Foreign Flags,” *Military Review* 48 (1968): 59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

would lose the war if Americans did not soon begin to make their presence felt on the battlefield. In response, the number of Americans shipped to France increased massively as the British provided additional shipping tonnage for the task.³¹ In February 1918, there were some 300,000 American in France and the number had been growing by approximately 50,000 men a month. That number increased to 500,000 men by April, 700,000 men by May, and continued to grow at a similar rate until October when some 1,900,000 Americans were in France.³² The Allies were eager to bring men to bear as quickly as possible and so sought to accelerate American training. This compressed the training schedule for US divisions to three months which often resulted in discarding the third stage of training. The training of the first four divisions in France was much more thorough than the divisions that came afterwards but had also received less training before their arrival in France their training than subsequent divisions.

When the 1st Division arrived in France, it was far less experienced and professional than the French had wanted or expected. The AEF was very eager to conceal just how inexperienced US forces were as they were concerned with making a good first impression on the French. The US Army placed much emphasis on outward signs of proper discipline as they feared the French would not respect Americans as a fighting force if they saw them as unprepared.³³ The 1st Division received a warm welcome and many Frenchmen were impressed with the size and vigour and American soldiers, but officers like Marshall feared doughboys:

³¹ Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 61-62.

³² Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 2 (New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1931), 84.

³³ Smythe, *Pershing, General of the Armies*, 29-30.

making such an unmilitary appearance in the their slouch uniforms and exhibiting so few traces of formal discipline, created the impression in the minds of the French officials that our soldiers were kindly, timorous oafs. Certainly they gathered the impression that we understood nothing of the military business, since this division was supposed to be the pick of the Regular Army, and yet it looked like the rawest of territorial units.³⁴

Pershing was especially adamant that officers “act the part” of disciplined professional as he may have feared that his hastily trained junior officer corps was not up to the task.³⁵ American command’s insistence that their doctrine could break the stalemate on the Western Front presupposed a level of military experience and expertise in order to lend credibility to American claims. Such credibility was difficult to maintain in Allied eyes if American soldiers acted as if they knew nothing of war. Concerns over the French military taking Americans seriously were justified to some degree. André Kaspi’s extensive studies of the records of French postal censor reports indicated that despite their fond feelings for Americans, many French soldiers were initially unsure about their new ally’s ability to fight.³⁶

The French 47th Infantry Division, known as the “*Chasseurs Alpains*,” an elite formation of the French Army, conducted the training of the 1st Division. The *Chasseurs* had expected to encounter an American division that had undergone basic training and that was familiar with simple maneuver and rudimentary use of their weapons.³⁷ They were surprised to find that many of the American troops lacked relevant skills and so, much early training focused on getting Americans to learn the basics. The *Chasseurs* made a very strong impression on virtually every American with whom they came into contact. The men of 1st Division were nearly universal in

³⁴ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 14.

³⁵ Mead, *Doughboys*, 111.

³⁶ Kaspi, *Le temps des Américain*, 125-126.

³⁷ Eisenhower and Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 54-55.

expressing their respect and admiration for their trainers. Heywood Broun described how quickly the *Chasseurs* made an impression: “Nobody called these men froggies. They called them ‘chasseurs.’ It was enough to see them march to know that they were fighting men.”³⁸ American troops greatly admired the *Chasseurs* and listened to their instructions, eager as they were to learn how to be soldiers from men who were obviously experts in the matter. Americans felt great pride when they executed maneuvers, and many expressed a desire to surpass their trainers in skill or at least prove their worth. Most Americans noted that the *Chasseurs* treated them very well and that they were demanding in their training but approached Americans with a spirit of camaraderie, praised achievement and framed criticism constructively. The First Division mentioned some of the methods the French used to motivate them: “contests were held between the *chasseurs* and our men in the use of weapons. The most friendly rivalry existed and the warm-hearted Frenchmen were loud in their applause when their pupils excelled them.”³⁹ More than simply learn from the French, Americans wanted to prove themselves their equals or surpass their trainers. If Americans offered one complaint about the French it was that they were too eager to treat practice battles as the real affair while Americans preferred to see them more as learning experiences rather than battle simulations.⁴⁰ Despite minor issues, the US division that spent the most time training with the French were satisfied with that training and got along very well with the *Chasseurs* whom they deeply respected. Officers of the 1st Division respected their

³⁸ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 58.

³⁹ Society of the First Division, *History of the First Division During the World War*, 21-22.

⁴⁰ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 73.

French trainers so much that they credited the French with developing the division from inexperienced recruits to a fighting force.⁴¹

The 1st Division had great respect for their trainers and, of all divisions, commented the most about them. They recognized that the *Chasseurs Alpains* were an elite force superior to regular French divisions. The *Chasseurs* particularly impressed artillery lieutenant Curtis Wheeler as their physical attributes suggested the strength and vigour American command considered vital:

Then there were two subalterns of the Chasseurs Alpains, with clear blue eyes and weather-beaten faces – short, stocky men with bursting calves and shoulders and thick chests. Their talk and their manner was different from the regular run of officers of whom I have met so many, and they merit, I think, the name of their corps – *diables bleus*.⁴²

Most who spent time describing their training recounted the often tedious daily life in a training camp involving long marches, the digging of trench systems for practice, new weapon demonstrations, and drills. Those mentioning their trainers typically emphasised their competence and note that the French were very generous when it came to praising Americans when they succeeded and were respectful. The demonstrations by French soldiers shocked Americans who felt themselves ready to enter battle quickly as their training in the US had not prepared them for the tactics and weapons they had to learn.⁴³ After the war, combat veterans admitted that they felt their training in the United States had been grossly inadequate.⁴⁴ Most Americans were very aware that they badly needed experienced trainers and so welcomed their French trainers.⁴⁵ While

⁴¹ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 71.

⁴² Curtis Wheeler, *Letters from an American Soldier to his Father* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1918), 35.

⁴³ Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*, 115-117.

⁴⁴ Keene, *Doughboys*, 44.

⁴⁵ Frazer, *Send the Alabamians*, 52.

many appreciated praise, some wished their instructors would be more direct in their criticisms as according to Heywood Broun: “The French were always careful to phrase unfavorable criticism in pleasant words and there were times when the sting was not felt.”⁴⁶ The French wished to appeal to American pride by not criticising them too harshly but some American considered this overly polite or evasive, an issue that reoccurred when dealing with the French in administrative matters. For the most part, Americans appreciated the French approach to training as according to Richard Faulkner’s study of US training, the respectful attitude, patience, and tact of French trainers greatly aided the training process and one of the key reasons the French were more successful in training Americans than the British.⁴⁷ Other American divisions trained by the French usually expressed the same respect as the 1st Division, albeit vocally and less emphatically. Doughboys were clearly willing to accept the French as qualified to train them and held their skill in high regard.

The French put very little stock in open warfare and in training Americans almost completely ignored it in favour of teaching defence and attacks in trench systems as well as the ways to construct and occupy fortifications.⁴⁸ As such, a considerable number of Americans complained of a French lack of will to fight the enemy. Lieutenant Chester Easum was particularly disappointed that the attitude he attributed to the Allied men holding the front he saw when he visited the front: “Far from being determined to sell their lives or their sectors as dearly as possible, they were primarily interested only in survival, in holding their areas as cheaply as possible by being careful

⁴⁶ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 242.

⁴⁷ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 155.

⁴⁸ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 40-41.

not to provoke ‘the Boche.’ ”⁴⁹ Americans did not appreciate all French lessons. Some soldiers, when in battle, lamented their lack of proper open warfare training, especially when engaged in battles that took place outside of established trench systems. In retrospect, a number of Americans felt their training by the French was somewhat deficient and were unhappy with the exclusive focus on trench warfare. A number of US Marines including John Thomason Jr. complained of platoon tactics taught by the French for being unsuited to the battles Americans faced:

Platoons were formed in four waves, the attack formation taught by the French, a formation proved in trench warfare, where there was a short way to go, and you calculated on losing the first three waves and getting the fourth one to the objective. The Marines never used it again. It was a formation unadapted [sic] for open warfare, and incredibly vulnerable. It didn’t take long to learn better, but there was a price to pay for the learning.⁵⁰

Despite such complaints about French attitudes or tactics, those who had a chance to contrast American and French training were often favorable to the latter as being overall better suited to battlefield conditions. Corporal Frederick Shaw of the 1st Division reflected a fairly common view when he expressed gratitude for the expertise of foreign trainers compared to American ones in a survey after the war: “I feel our Division was fortunate in that we received bulk of our training overseas, enabling us to become acclimated.”⁵¹ Despite doctrinal disagreements, most in the infantry respected their French trainers for their experience, professional behaviour, or skills as teachers.⁵² Even officers such as Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff of the 42nd Division, who largely agreed with the focus on open warfare, believed it would be foolish to ignore French

⁴⁹ Freidel, *Over There*, 93.

⁵⁰ John W. Thomason Jr., *Fix Bayonets: With the U.S. Marine Corps in France 1917-1918* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1926), 9.

⁵¹ Quoted in Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, 118.

⁵² Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 87.

expertise and sought to foster good personal and professional relations with them.⁵³

Americans did not uncritically accept French training and developed their own ideas of what aspects of their training was ill suited for American temperament or tactics but they still appreciated French trainers and often considered them better authorities on proper battlefield behaviour than their own commanders.

Some Americans mentioned language difficulties but usually only as a minor problem.⁵⁴ In cases where language proved a problem, both sides developed workarounds such as in a case related by Heywood Broun:

No interpreters were needed with the machine guns. Instead each American company was divided up into little groups and a chasseur placed at the head of each group. I watched the instruction and found that little language was needed. The Frenchman would take a machine gun or automatic rifle apart and holding up each part give its French name. The Americans paid no particular attention to the outlandish terms which the French used for their machine gun parts, but they were alert to notice the manner in which the gun was put together and in the group in which I was standing two Americans were able to put the gun together without having any apart left over after a single demonstration.⁵⁵

Only one American division reported language being a major problem; most claimed it posed no problem at all.⁵⁶ While there was the occasional complaint about French trainers being condescending or dismissive of American recruits, American comments about the courtesy and respect of their trainers vastly outnumbered such complaints. Some took their admiration to an extreme, describing the French soldier as the “high water mark” of a soldier and claiming that while Americans had great potential it would

⁵³ D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur*, Vol. 1, 1880-1941 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 151-152.

⁵⁴ Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms*, 119.

⁵⁵ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 67-68.

⁵⁶ Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*, 3-4.

be a while before they could compare.⁵⁷ Pershing greatly feared the amount of influence the French exerted on his men as it risked undermining his doctrines as he said of the early divisions in France that:

Our units then in training were nearly all recruits and many of the officers and non-commissioned officers were easily influenced by the ideas of the French designated to assist us. In order to avoid the effect of the French teaching it became necessary gradually to take over and direct all instruction ourselves. For the purpose of impressing our own doctrine upon officers, a training program was issued which laid great stress on open warfare methods and offensive action.⁵⁸

Americans with no experience in the army may not have accepted everything the French taught about being a soldier in the war, but they were receptive enough to make their commanders fear that the French were undermining US doctrine by convincing doughboys that French methods were superior. American command preferred that their men acquire the expertise offered by the French without absorbing their attitude toward the war but this was not always possible. Daily interaction with French trainers developed a strong base of respect for French methods and abilities that few Americans questioned until they saw battle.

The training that artillerymen received incited of much less disagreement between American and French high commands. Pershing and the AEF staff lodged frequent complaints about the infantry training by the French but his criticisms did not extend to training of artillerymen.⁵⁹ The lack of personnel, proper equipment, and facilities among the US Field Artillery meant that the French were responsible for most of the training of American artillerymen.⁶⁰ The US artillery was woefully unprepared for the modern battlefield and so the French worked very hard to bring them up to their own standard.

⁵⁷ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 282.

⁵⁸ Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 1, 152-153.

⁵⁹ Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms*, 126.

⁶⁰ Grotelueschen, *Doctrine Under Trial*, 20.

Those American gunners who trained in the United States did not paint a complimentary picture of American artillery training, often characterizing it as outdated. 2nd lieutenant Curtis Wheeler found the artillery training in the United States so primitive compared to that he received from French trainers that he likened the transition as having “learned to shoot with a bow and arrow, and now it is necessary that I learn to handle a Winchester.”⁶¹ American gunners comparing themselves to the French were often awed and intimidated by their ally’s experience as was the case with those of a battery of the 101st Field Artillery Brigade whose history declared:

If we impressed our allies by our numbers, they impressed us even more strongly by their experience. [...]Our self-esteem shrank and shrank as we talked to Tommies and Poilus whose vast knowledge made us feel more and more like earthworms.⁶²

The French artillery training program heavily influenced American artillery and taught skills consistent with trench warfare doctrine rather than open warfare.⁶³ Americans had trained on US guns when they were available in the United States but received French guns on arriving in their camps in France. Many American gunners were, at first, very dismayed to the point of being “literally disgusted,” on learning they would have to retrain on new guns, feeling that wasted their entire time training in the United States.⁶⁴ American gunner Osborne De Varila noted that when the gunners first saw the artillery they were to use⁶⁵ he “had to laugh when I looked at the French 75-millimeter guns, they

⁶¹ Wheeler, *Letters from an American Soldier to his Father*, 39.

⁶² *BEING the Narrative of Battery A of the 101st Field Artillery*, 31.

⁶³ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 203-204.

⁶⁴ Major Clark to Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, August 6th, 1918. Box 1, entry 1573, RG 120, NARA.

⁶⁵ Widely regarded as the best field gun of the War, the French 75mm field gun formed the backbone of the French artillery to the point of being almost the only gun in service in the French Army in 1914. First entering service in 1898, the gun had a revolutionary hydro-pneumatic recoil system that prevented the wheels from moving after each shot so that the gun did not need to be re-aimed. This feature allowed a trained crew to deliver 15 accurate shells a minute, up to 30 *in extremis*, to a range of over nine kilometers depending on ammunition. (Haythornthwaite, *The World War One Source Book*, 83).

seemed so small and inferior when compared with our American field pieces” but after some experience with them “I underwent a radical change of opinion after several days of target practice with the little fire-eaters. I found that we could do faster and more accurate work with them than with the more warlike looking American pieces.”⁶⁶

Artillerymen grew so fond of their French guns that a poem printed about them in *Stars and Stripes* identified the guns as the “soul of an embattled France” and used them as a tangible sign of the Franco-American alliance.⁶⁷

French artillery training focused much more on long-ranged firing based on maps where the positions fired on would not be directly observable by the gunners themselves. Curtis Wheeler billeted with a 15 year veteran of the US Field Artillery commissioned as a 1st lieutenant who had great difficulty with the French training program which focused strongly on calculation and indirect fire as “He is weak on mathematics and book-larning’ generally, and I coach him.”⁶⁸ The skills demanded from the prewar American artilleryman did not necessarily correspond to those needed in the First World War. American gunners reflected comments by the infantrymen on the skill, helpfulness, and praise given to them by the French and were generally very happy with their training. Artillerymen were probably more satisfied with training by the French than infantrymen as there was no real competing artillery doctrine that AEF headquarters sought to impose. Whether it was in the infantry or the artillery, American interaction with the French left doughboys impressed with French expertise and

⁶⁶ De Varila, *The First Shot for Liberty*, 51-52.

⁶⁷ “Mlle. Soixante-Quinze,” *Stars and Stripes* April 26, 1918, page 8.

⁶⁸ Wheeler, *Letters from an American Soldier to his Father*, 51.

experience. They may not have always admired their trainers' aggression, but Americans were eager to learn as much as they could.

The US Army War College continued to use French personnel and documents for artillery training even after American personnel took over infantry training and the production of relevant instructions. The French also allowed American officers to attend their artillery schools with interpreters in order that they follow the same program given to artillery cadets and, in turn, teach other American gunners. While the US Army set up its own school system, it sent considerable numbers of American infantry officers to French schools, especially specialised schools for machine guns or other new weapons. The officers sent to those schools were typically junior officers, especially those from the first US divisions in France. While the number of those officers was fairly limited, they had broader influence throughout the AEF as acknowledged by the 1st Division's unit history:

Many of the junior officers took courses of instruction at British and French schools, after which they had short tours of duty at the front. [...] It was realized that in these schools and training grounds the foundation was being laid for the development of the great American Army that was to follow and that many of the officers and soldiers of the First Division would be required as instructors in other schools and for other divisions when they arrived.⁶⁹

The result was a mass of new American officers and men whose training had a strong French influences commanded by a senior officer corps more dedicated to Pershing's emphasis on open warfare. There were exceptions and some senior US officers used French doctrine as an influence. The most notable was General Charles Summerall, who arrived in France to command an artillery brigade but later held important AEF

⁶⁹ Society of the First Division, *History of the First Division During the World War*, 20.

commands.⁷⁰ After witnessing Allied, and especially French, methods, he proposed adopting more firepower for AEF divisions and described the hostile response he received from the American staff:

I was at once viciously attacked, personally and officially, by officers of the staff, whom I hardly knew, for trying to promote a lot of artillery generals, for advocating the light howitzer, and for such a quantity of artillery. I replied with equal force and resentment. I told them that the infantry would pay in losses for lack of artillery.⁷¹

Despite such a rebuke, Summerall remained so favourably disposed to French methods that the French government actively supported his career in order to foster closer US-French relations.⁷² While there were marked differences in how Americans and the French saw the training of infantry, most US gunners adopted the viewpoint of their French trainers wholesale.

It was not only in France that Allied influence was present. Training camps in the United States used British and French advisors, though American officers remained largely responsible for training. Britain and France sent personnel to US-based camps soon after America entered the war. Pershing would have preferred to avoid Allied trainers in the United States and worked to minimise both the number of trainers and their influence.⁷³ The number of foreign trainers was never particularly large, with about 600 officers and NCOs roughly evenly divided between the British and the French. They overwhelmingly concentrated on technical training concerning particular

⁷⁰ Summerall was promoted to command the 1st Division and eventually the US V Corps, ending the war with the rank of Lieutenant General.

⁷¹ Charles Pelot Summerall, *The Way of Duty, Honor, Country: The Memoir of General Charles Pelot Summerall* Ed. Timothy K Nenninger (The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 106-107.

⁷² Kaspi, *Le temps des Américains*, 110.

⁷³ Raphaëlle Autric, "La rivalité franco-américaine: l'instruction des soldats américains en France (1917-1918)," *Revue Historique des Armées* no. 246 (2007): 27.

aspects of warfare rather than on devising overall training plans or shaping doctrine.⁷⁴ Historians dispute the influence of those trainers. Some claim that their influence was minimal owing to the small number involved and AEF Headquarters' resistance to them.⁷⁵ But others assert that their influence was greater than their numbers indicate as they trained the trainers in the US Army and so diffused their ideas and methods throughout the entire force.⁷⁶ Given that most Americans who arrived in France did so with the ideas of aggression promoted by the AEF firmly in mind, if Allied trainers provided skills to some doughboys, they didn't substantially modify their attitude.

American experience with foreign trainers in training camps was not uniform. In their letters and memoirs, a great many devoted little space to describing their training, while many mention, without adding further comment, that a French or British officer or NCO conducted a certain type of training. Others describe a very close bond between their unit and their foreign trainers however. The history of the 305th Infantry Regiment described a French officer, Lt Henri Poiré, attached to the unit for training in the United States indicated that a great feeling of mutual fondness that developed between both. At first, Americans had little interest in his lectures but they eventually appreciated him so much that when the demobilised Poiré visited the unit shortly after the war, they presented him with an engraved watch and fondly reminisced of their time together.⁷⁷ All of the officers and men the French sent to the United States, combat veterans with

⁷⁴ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 126.

⁷⁵ Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, 73.

⁷⁶ Eisenhower and Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 62.

⁷⁷ Tiebout, *A History of the 305th Infantry*, 20-21, 216-217.

relevant expertise, were instructed to be mindful of American methods and temperament in order to avoid offending them.⁷⁸

That the French made efforts to demonstrate their respect for Americans and their methods, helps explain the overwhelmingly positive feelings Americans expressed about their trainers. Most Americans who mentioned their foreign trainers emphasized their skill, experience, and how useful their lessons were. Many doughboys appreciated lectures but others, including those of the 305th Regiment were more interested in what their foreign trainers could tell them about life at the front:

Having read endlessly of the Western Front and filled with the glamour of the trenches, we were thrilled to see and hear the men who had been there. Captain Nicot, charming personally, interesting in his lectures on bombs, but far more interesting when recounting far into the night his vivid intimate tales of life in the trenches⁷⁹

Americans did not always have the same positive impression of their British trainers as they did for the French. Official documents relay a request from American authorities to remove a particular British officer as a trainer in the United States due to his arrogance, dismissive attitude towards Americans, and the very clear impression that he did not want to be in the United States.⁸⁰ French trainers did not face such accusations. Indeed, one request to remove a French trainer due to inadequate language skills went to pains to emphasise that both his expertise and his demeanour were beyond reproach.⁸¹ Despite their inexperience, Americans had considerable pride in their own potential and the role they were to play. They did not want to imitate the French or adopt every aspect of the

⁷⁸ Autric, "La rivalité franco-américaine," 30-31.

⁷⁹ Tiebout, *A History of the 305th Infantry*, 20.

⁸⁰ Telegram to Chief Training Section from Commandant Eames of Fort Still, Okla., January 7th, 1918. Box 208, Entry 310, RG 165, NARA.

⁸¹ Telegram to Chief Training Branch from Commandant Morrow of Camp Sherman, Ohio, July 9th, 1918. Box 208, Entry 310, RG 165, NARA.

French Army, but they deeply respected the French and were willing to use French experience to help them develop their own identity and skills as soldiers.

Pershing and his staff did not share that appreciation for Allied trainers they were eager to get rid of them as soon as possible. On August 27th 1918, Pershing proposed that the US Army become completely self-reliant in terms of trainers and jettison all foreign instructors as soon as possible. Among the allegations he levelled against the trainers was that they were not competent to teach their subjects, claiming many had never been in battle and that they were corrupting the US Army with defective doctrine. While the War Department dismissed the claim of incompetence as a pure fabrication, it agreed that the US Army had reached the point where it could take full training responsibility for itself and that it should do so to build US capacities.⁸² The men receiving the training rarely put the skill and competence of foreign trainers into question and camp commanders continued to make extensive use of them until ordered to stop. Opposition to foreign trainers was mostly ideological and based on the fear that they would undermine American methods and doctrine. The commander of the 35th Division found serious fault with the training of his men in the United States at the hands of foreign officers:

By the time Gen. Wright returned from France, the men knew a lot about digging trenches and throwing hand grenades, and in the use of the bayonet they had made amazing progress. Gen. Wright seemed to think that they had devoted too much time to these specialties and not enough to the straight, standard lines of military training. He wanted them to be as nearly perfect as possible in the use of the rifle, accurate in firing at all effective ranges and skilled at maneuvering in the open or in woods by day or by night.⁸³

⁸² Memo for the Chief of Staff on the Use of Foreign Officers, September 10, 1918. Box 208, Entry 310, RG 165, NARA.

⁸³ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont*, 27.

But for most trainees who were not privy or particularly concerned with competing training philosophies, foreign officers provided valuable insights into fighting the war as well as the mastery of methods and tools entirely new to the US Army.

A key goal of training by the French was to familiarize Americans with a variety of new weapons. Getting artillerymen to use new equipment was fairly simple as it was the only equipment issued to Americans and the French had a mostly free hand in training. Infantry weapons that Americans purchased in large numbers from the French would need special training for use and integration. The US government relied on the French for all of that equipment save mortars which they purchased from the British.⁸⁴ The French had the primary responsibility for introducing Americans to virtually all of the new weapons. Most of the weapons aimed to increase the firepower of infantry and allow them to take and hold fortified positions. French training material placed a great deal of emphasis on such weapons and held that every soldier should carry a considerable number of grenades, that all men be trained in the use of automatic rifles and rifle grenades, and that tactics focus on getting men within grenade range of fortifications. The material mentioned rifle fire accuracy, but as little more than an afterthought to the firepower new weapons provided.⁸⁵ In contrast, American concepts of infantry firepower held that the primary instrument in delivering it was the rifle. Americans met the introduction of new weapons by their French trainers with some uncertainty. As the French had made such weapons centrepieces of their infantry tactics, American adoption of new weapons determined how much they were willing and able to

⁸⁴ Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms*, 104-105.

⁸⁵ *Reorganization of the Infantry Company. French Army. Translated from French Secret Note G.Q.G. September 10, 1917 at Headquarters American Expeditionary Forces. October, 1917. Box 119, entry 310, RG 165, NARA.*

adopt the French tactical viewpoint. As a soldier's tools were essential in their battlefield behaviour, the American attitude towards the weapons the French introduced revealed the degree to which they were willing to accept the French view of how they should approach battle.

There were often occasions where Americans were very dissatisfied with French equipment and sought ways to make it more to their liking. The French introduced a number of new infantry weapons, most notably the automatic rifle, the 37mm gun, grenades, and rifle grenades.⁸⁶ Integration of these weapons into service was uneven and difficult. Americans tended to reject the use of weapons they deemed frustrating or ill-suited to their tactics and instead relied on their rifles. A belief that the weapons were of low quality often drove complaints, especially those levelled against the Chauchat automatic rifle. Lawrence Stallings, for instance, claimed that the Chauchat was: "said to be made of battlefield scrap but believed by Doughboys to have been fashioned from rusty sardine cans."⁸⁷ American repeatedly told of the importance of accurate fire also found the Chauchat frustrating as in one assessment by private Kyler:

⁸⁶ The Chauchat automatic rifle was widely manufactured during the war and issued to virtually every combat platoon in the French Army and AEF. Operated by a two person team it was designed to enhance infantry firepower volume. French tactics with the weapon emphasised suppressing the enemy while attacking and maximising firepower while minimizing manpower needs in defence. (*Manual of the Automatic Rifle (Chauchat): Drill, Combat, Mechanism*, United States, Adjutant-General's Office 1918, 13-14, 17-20.).

37mm guns, also known as one pound guns, were light and direct fire artillery pieces issued to American and French infantry designed to advance with them and destroy machine gun nests and fortified positions. (United States Army. Ordnance Department, *Handbook of Artillery: Including Mobile, Anti-Aircraft and Trench Materiel*, Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1920: 50-51.).

Designed to extend the range of grenades, the rifle grenade was a special grenade that was fired by attaching a metal cup, or *tromblone*, to a rifle muzzle and securing the grenade in the muzzle so when a bullet was fired it would strike the grenade's base and activate a propellant that would send the grenade flying in a high arc with an effective range of 150-200 meters. (Patterson, *The World War I Memoirs of Robert P. Patterson*, 82. and Evans, *American Voices of World War I*, 32).

⁸⁷ Stallings, *The Doughboys*, 60.

One gun could shoot more shots than all the rest of the squad combined for short periods. So it added a lot to our fire power. But it was not accurate at over a few yards, was too heavy, too clumsy to aim, and in general not effective except against very close concentrated targets. [...] I believe that controlled and aimed shooting is more effective than trying to spray the landscape with shots, most of which have no effect whatever ,except to deplete the ammunition supply.⁸⁸

Americans also rarely used rifle grenades because they deemed the French rifles that had been adapted to their use far inferior to American rifles.⁸⁹ Issues such as the weight of a weapon or failure to appreciate its value also caused Americans to ignore new weapons issued to them. Corporal Rendinell demonstrated the unpopularity of the weight of Chauchat ammunition when he claimed:

Each squad has 2 automatic rifles & 4 ammunition bags of 25,000 rounds to carry. We take turns carrying the ammunition bags.

When they checked up after a hike my squad had only 1800 rounds left all told. What a bawling out they give us. Each of the boys threwed [sic] away a couple of handfuls every time it come his turn to carry. I throwed [sic] plenty away myself.⁹⁰

Americans often made use of field modifications to make weapons more to their liking. Sometimes French officers taught those modifications as in a case where a French officer taught the men he was training to weld pieces to a machine gun in order to compensate for inaccuracy caused by difficult to control recoil.⁹¹ On other occasions, US divisions made their own modifications as was the case with the 42nd Division who attempted to modify their rifle grenades in order to avoid having to use disliked French rifles though initial attempts resulted in men being wounded when their field modified *tromblons* exploded.⁹² While the Rainbow Division eventually fixed the problem, improvised modifications were only a partial solution. The American tendency to

⁸⁸ Evans, *American Voices of World War I*, 31-32.

⁸⁹ Reilly, *Americans All*, 173.

⁹⁰ Clark, *Devil Dogs Chronicle*, 100.

⁹¹ Pierpont L. Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals: The World War I Diary of Pierpont L. Stackpole*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 19.

⁹² Reilly, *Americans All*, 173-174.

discard inconvenient weapons sometimes caused difficulties as lamented by Hervey Allen when he wanted to make use of rifle grenades but “Most of the men had thrown away their *tromblones* anyway. I found this often happened in other commands.”⁹³ In a latter battle, Allen made the problem with this attitude clear when pinned down:

One of our scouts was there. “Look here, lieutenant,” said he, and between the cracks in the roof pointed out a haystack about fifty yards away. I looked at it carefully through his glass. From it poked the ugly nose of a machine gun from which went up a faint blue haze. Oh! If we only had rifle grenades then!⁹⁴

Not all were disdainful of French weapons and some commanders made sure their men practiced with them. That was the case with Captain Robert Patterson and one of his lieutenants who saw the value of rifle grenades: “It was a powerful weapon, but for some reason was rarely used by the soldiers. Hayes was one of the few officers who saw the good points of the rifle grenade; when in the lines he constantly kept his men at work firing them.”⁹⁵ Americans integrated French weapons haphazardly and often individual units determined how much they used a particular weapon based on the preferences of officers and men. Americans discarded those French weapons they found inconvenient as they did not consider the advantages they offered worth the considerable difficulty involved. Complaints of inaccurate or cumbersome weapons demonstrated that the American emphasis on aggressive attack and accurate fire exerted considerable influence on many Americans. As French weapons had greater use in more meticulous, slower paced, attacks based on firepower superiority, they clashed with ideas of the bold attacking infantryman. That Americans were unwilling to suffer the restrictions on their mobility and marksmanship French weapons imposed was one of the more tangible

⁹³ Hervey Allen, *Toward the Flame: A War Diary* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1934), 235.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 271

⁹⁵ Robert Porter Patterson, *The World War I Memoirs of Robert P. Patterson: A Captain in the Great War* ed. J. Garry Clifford (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), 82.

demonstrations that they were forming a view of their own qualities as soldier closer to Pershing's ideal of the aggressive rifleman.

Americans and French military administration

Aside from the purely military relationship with the French Army, cooperation with French military administration was critical to the AEF but it could also be a source of considerable disagreement. Americans were dependant on the French for the supplies and facilities that allowed them to operate in France. Extensive relationships with French commanders were necessary in order to organize training and military cooperation which involved interacting with the French military bureaucracy. Americans faced considerable barriers to forming such a relationship due to cultural differences and the decisions of AEF command. As in the relationship with civilians, different standards of what was normal initially impeded close cooperation and bred occasional resentment. As it was critical to ensure friendly relations with French authorities, both sides eventually bypassed such difficulties but it is important to note that Americans lacked the same level of respect for French military administration as they did for French combat troops. As in training, Americans identified certain behaviours as characteristically French or American.

The French had certain cultural expectations that Americans did not and those expectations led to more than a few unintentional insults. The French expected a much greater degree of courtesy and formality in conversations, even when dealing with military matters. Liaison officer Ferdinand Jelke found the French insistence on courtesies frustrating and a waste of time when dealing with urgent issues:

One constantly must study the courtesies and formalities which are so dear to a Frenchman's heart, for they are quick to imagine a lack of refinement and recoil under the aggressive manners of the American officers. It is necessary to observe what seems to us an exaggerated form of politeness – a regular Alphonse and Gaston continuous performance. For instance, upon entering an office, a regular round of hand-shaking ensues, and again twice before leaving, one upon starting to leave, and after much more conversation, again upon actually departing. [...]

Frenchmen are rather shy of the rapidity with which Americans do business. The poorest way to make haste is to show an indication of being in a hurry, or by coming directly to the point, for one saves time in the long run by going over a certain amount of preliminary formalities and lengthy explanations even in the most urgent matters.⁹⁶

Americans like Jelke tended to value a far more direct approach with a much greater emphasis on brevity. Those who had to interact with the French in an official capacity often remarked that while they wished to discuss business right away, their French counterparts took a much slower approach to conversation. Lieutenant Oliver Ames Jr. for instance said that while he liked the French: “the trouble is they (the French) talk a little too much without saying much, and always when you're in a hurry, and they're so polite about it that you've got to be polite while all the time you're boiling within yourself.”⁹⁷ George C. Marshall expressed similar frustrations with the French while emphasizing how much getting results depended upon meeting the expectations of French officers:

Through long experience while with the First Division, I had learned something of how to get results in dealing with French officials. They were very punctilious in their attitude, but sometimes the most courteous delays proved exceedingly irritating. Time was golden to us and to me personally, and, therefore, red tape was apt to be somewhat infuriating. About this stage of my career in France, I developed the practice of utilizing a collection of military phrases commonly employed by a certain type of French officer, who had graduated from the Ecole de Guerre and occupied most of the important staff positions in the French Army. My old friend “en principe,” of disastrous consequences during early Gondrecourt days, was the leader in this collection. “C'est bien entendu” was a close second, and there were many more which I have now forgotten. It was rather amusing to see

⁹⁶ Jelke, *Letters from a Liaison Officer*, 72-73.

⁹⁷ M. A. DeW. Howe ed., *Memoirs of the Harvard Dead in the War Against Germany*, vol. 3, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922), 610.

how readily the employment of one or more of these stock expressions would win for me special regard and favorable action, and I employed them freely⁹⁸

Americans found the French emphasis on formalities between parties to be annoying, evasive, and time wasting. The French tended to find American directness and haste to be insultingly abrupt and disrespectful. Just as Americans stressed aggression on the battlefield, they stressed efficiency and directness in official dealings and the failure of the French to adhere to those priorities frustrated many.

As related by Marshall, the French military had an entire administrative culture when it came to making requests and interacting with officers not in one's direct chain of command. Ignorance of relevant terms and expectations was deeply frustrating for Americans who found French bureaucracy slow and burdensome. Some aspects of French administration, such as the train system, were almost universally considered inefficient and a source of complaint.⁹⁹ Some were willing to grudgingly admit the French system worked as in one case observed by staff officer Pierpont Stackpole: "General Reno, calling on General Liggett, digressed to describe what he regarded as the cumbersome method of the French in handling wounded, as respects paperwork, but admitted that they get away with it."¹⁰⁰ When it came to military bureaucracy, differences between French and American expectations made it difficult for Americans to interact with a system upon which they often relied, despite efforts at accommodation by the French. Relatively few rank and file soldiers experienced this sort of interaction with the French, but it was very common for the officers and commanders whose experiences influenced their outlook of the French. Since military administration proved

⁹⁸ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 126-127.

⁹⁹ Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals*, 24.

a source of complaint for US officers, it helps to explain the difference between perceptions of the French between doughboys and their officers as well as demonstrate that the differences between French and American attitudes was not restricted to questions of tactics.

The day to day relationship between the AEF and the French Army ran mostly through the US Liaison Office. Much of what the Liaison Office dealt with was logistical in nature, particularly with the acquisition of facilities for US use and issues of locally purchased supplies. They also relayed requests between the US and French Armies and acted as a facilitator between both armies' command. The AEF also sent liaison officers into French military regions where US troops were located in order to manage relations between both forces. They also attached liaison officers to French military formations which worked closely with US forces. As such, managing much of the US-French relationship constituted an important duty of liaison officers, particularly the daily and habitual issues that allowed French and Americans to work together productively.

The role of the Liaison Office was critical as few American commanders understood how to access the French administrative system on their own. Many commanders transmitted request for needed equipment and supplies through improper channels as they did not know who they should contact.¹⁰¹ The problem was a subject of frequent complaint from French officials who felt the Americans were wasting the time of the incorrect authorities while ignoring established procedures. French military administration differed considerably in structure from US administration with ranks and

¹⁰¹ Circular Letter from Chief of Staff, Service of Supply to Section Commanders, Aug 27, 1918. Box 3486, Entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

responsibilities not aligning with US expectations.¹⁰² American commanders did not seem to appreciate the role of intermediaries and facilitators in the French system and preferred to deal directly with the relevant authorities. While the French were willing to accommodate American preferences to a degree, they preferred they go through established systems and the respective liaisons services of both armies. As the shortage of US shipping forced Americans to rely on the French for many of their supplies, the sheer volume of requests necessitated officers specifically charged with such matters which many American commanders were slow to appreciate. The difficulties in understanding French military administration combined with American preference for directness could pose real risks for American-French cooperation. A US liaison officer explicitly outlined such risks by pointing out that a US commander in Blois had been doing a reasonably good job when it came to securing lodgings and premises for various American organisations. Nevertheless, he raised fears that American lack of understanding of the French system and lack of “tact” could incite future problems. Among his fears was that the US Army’s habit of frequently transferring officers to new posts hampered their ability to develop relationships with their French counterparts. His concern was that sooner or later the US would assign a US officer to the region who would antagonize his French counterparts through lack of tact and knowledge of procedure. This could result in the loss of those leased facilities and be a major setback for US-French relations in the region.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Lt Col. Clark to Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, US GHQ, April 8, 1919, Box 2, Entry 1573, RG 120, NARA.

¹⁰³ Assistant Chief Liaison Officer to Captain Forbes, May 7, 1918. Box 3487, Entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

The particular French concern over the US's frequent changing of officers reflects an important factor in the French Army that was largely lacking in the US Army: the great importance placed on personal relationships and off-duty socialization. Army dentist Lester Stone, for example, described the way he socialised with the French officers off duty when stationed at an evacuation hospital: "Evenings I play bridge with the French officers, and if I am lucky win as much as fifteen centimes – about three cents. We play for one tenth of a centime a point. It is a pleasure to be with these men."¹⁰⁴ Such socialization was not as common among American forces as the French seemed to place more emphasis on crafting personal friendships as well as professional working relationships. Even French generals and high ranking officers to who had US liaison officers on their staffs placed much importance on social gatherings. Luncheons and receptions were very common, with senior officers typically eating together. The French considered such gatherings essential to ensure good relations, to discuss issues, and to trade favours that kept the officers' commands working well together. As an example of the importance the French placed on personal relationships, General Summerall quoted French General Henri Gouraud as saying that the "best liaison is at the dinner table" when hosting a lunch for American generals and his own officers.¹⁰⁵ The US failed to appreciate the importance to the French of such practices. As one liaison officer pointed out, American liaison officers were often not privy to them as the US tended to undervalue their liaison officers. Most American liaison officers were either captains or lieutenants, occasionally majors, and the head of the service, a colonel. However, as it was rare for captains to receive an invitation to a general's table, the

¹⁰⁴ Howe, *Memoirs of the Harvard Dead in the War Against Germany*, vol. 5, 89.

¹⁰⁵ Summerall, *The Way of Duty, Honor, Country*, 106.

French often did not invite their attached liaison officers to such events.¹⁰⁶ The Liaison Service pushed for more promotions to rectify the situation, and to retain officers who tended to consider the Liaison Office a career dead end, but the AEF Command was very hesitant to offer such promotions.

American forces often neglected liaison services despite the high value placed on them by the French. Liaison officers complained that American commanders often treated them as little more than interpreters and “telephone boy[s]” to relay messages rather than as specialists who could play a more active role.¹⁰⁷ It seems that many US generals did not trust or appreciate that their liaison officers were under the command of the French forces rather than US officers.¹⁰⁸ The US Army often distrusted liaison officers for a lack of discipline or “military” qualities. Many liaison officers had spent time in France previously as ambulance driver volunteers or with relief organisations such as the Red Cross before the US entered in the war. They were selected for their language skills and “understanding” of the French in order to function as diplomats. Few had received military training or had any military experience. The US military accorded little respect to men who had not undergone training in US camps and often sidelined men who had no combat training with US forces, even if they were otherwise very effective officers. The case of Lt. Freeborn, who had been a volunteer ambulance driver, is illustrative. The US Army had commissioned him as a lieutenant in the Liaison Office due to a severe lack of qualified officers. Despite working on a number of important issues, US GHQ officials ordered him dismissed citing his lack of military

¹⁰⁶ US Infantry Major to General Avery Andrews, Nov 5, 1918. Box 2070, entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

¹⁰⁷ Captain Gray to Chief Liaison Officer, Oct 14, 1918. Box 2068, Entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

¹⁰⁸ Captain Gray to Chief Liaison Officer, Sept 12, 1918. Box 2068, Entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

training which they felt disqualified him from holding a post. His superiors in the Liaison Office eventually had the order rescinded, arguing that he was skilled, working on vital issues, and well-liked by the French.¹⁰⁹ Liaison officers were acutely aware of the problem with commanders and one memo from the chief of the Liaison Service to his men emphasized the need to uphold the highest discipline and the need to be prepared for inspection at any moment as any defects found would serve to reinforce biases of AEF command and diminish trust in the service.¹¹⁰ The lack of respect for liaison officers was part of a broader AEF contempt for men in non-combat roles which the US Army seemed to take pains to emphasize that they were not “true” soldiers.¹¹¹ The US military had commissioned men as effectively uniformed diplomats out of necessity but were typically unwilling to value them fully in that role.

As the Liaison Office was the best qualified and most experienced in dealing with French authorities, the AEF’s sidelining of it and its officers exacerbated the problems most Americans had in navigating French administrative bureaucracy. A liaison officer, Major Charles Bryan, related a particular example of the AEF HQ’s ignorance of French military culture. When he went to AEF HQ in Chaumont to relay a greeting from General Hirshauer who commanded the French 2nd Army deployed adjacent to US forces and heavily involved in training activities with them. US ignorance of the importance of courteous gestures was very much on display. The officer complained that US staff officers ignored him despite his insistence that such courtesy messages were a serious matter to the French who expected a response shortly.

¹⁰⁹ Capt. Clark to AEF Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, June 9, 1918, June 29, 1918. Box 1, entry 1573, RG 120, NARA.

¹¹⁰ Circular Letter from Chief Liaison Officer, Oct 22, 1918. Box 2070, entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

¹¹¹ Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*, 179.

He bemoaned what he perceived as Pershing's refusal to acknowledge that General Hirshauer was his equal in rank and that he must be treated with the respect French colleagues expect from each other.¹¹² US officials often sent out reminders to the AEF on what the French expected in terms of courtesy. Important in such reminders was that formal language was expected and responses to French request were to be acknowledged quickly if they could not be complied with right away.¹¹³ Both of those expectations were at odds with the US Army's more direct and businesslike style. The persistence of such reminders indicates that American adherence to them was imperfect and American complaints about the apparent uselessness of such of courtesies indicate they their value was never really appreciated. Pershing himself wrote frequent complaints about his interaction with French administration in his memoirs which he often found obstructed his attempts to acquire supplies. While generally disdainful of French officials, he did acknowledge their good relations with US liaison officers:

In the [Services of Supply] a true spirit of coopération[sic] was often absent among subordinate French officials, who seemed to make little attempt to understand our problems. Among the higher officials the desire was usually there, but only by dint of constant urging could we obtain the meager and insufficient facilities that we had to put up with. [...] It must be said, however, that the French officers of the liaison group as individuals attached to various organizations were always found anxious to make things go smoothly, though in many instances they clung to the notion that we should adopt French ideas and methods. It can also be said that the services of our American liaison officers with the French at various offices and organizations in the Services of Supply were almost without exception praised by the French.¹¹⁴

It is notable that while he acknowledge French praise for US liaison officers, he did not accord them any praise himself and made no mention of using those good relations to secure French cooperation.

¹¹² Major Bryan to Chief Liaison Officer, Sept 15, 1918. Box 2068, Entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

¹¹³ Memo for Chiefs of General Staff, Sections, and Departments, Jan 17, 1918. Box 3488, Entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

¹¹⁴ Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 1, 328.

A key part of the courtesies the French expected was recognition of exceptional administrative service through medals and honour, and they were quite generous in awarding them to Americans, including the Liaison Service. In turn, American officers who worked closely with the French submitted long lists of French liaison officers, administrative personnel, and rear area specialist for US medals citing their crucial value and assistance to US forces.¹¹⁵ They also emphasised the fact that the French had given out many medals to Americans in similar functions and expected the US military to be similarly generous as a matter of reciprocity and diplomatic protocol.¹¹⁶ While the US military was fairly generous in awarding medals to French servicemen who fought side by side with Americans, it was much less willing to offer awards to non-combatants. A US military culture that was less open to awarding medals in general was even less willing to award medals for acts that did not involve action under fire; indeed, the US military had virtually no awards for which enlisted men in non-combat roles were eligible.¹¹⁷ When the US Army adopted the French practice of awarding chevrons for every six months of service at the front, they considerably narrowed French definitions of frontline service from up to 50 miles behind the lines to only those areas within the range of German guns.¹¹⁸ Pershing's staff rejected a long list of French personnel in noncombat roles recommended for the Distinguished Service Medal by US liaison officers.¹¹⁹ The French Army and French soldiers placed great importance on decorations and the lack of US generosity to French servicemen was a source of

¹¹⁵ Lt. Col Clark to Adjutant General (Decorations Bureau), April 12, 1919; Colonel Clark to Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, May 27, 1919. Box 2, Entry 1573, RG 120, NARA.

¹¹⁶ Liaison Officer in XII Military Region to Chief Liaison Officer, Jan 11, 1919. Box 2069, Entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

¹¹⁷ Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*, 183.

¹¹⁸ Keene, *Doughboys*, 58.

¹¹⁹ Commander in Chief to US Military Mission to French GHQ, April 19, 1919. Box 2, Entry 1573, RG 120, NARA.

disappointment, especially as the French had been very generous towards Americans in according honours. The French military was far more willing to recognise and value non-combat service, including that performed by Americans. The American insistence on aggression meant AEF command only considered service under direct threat of enemy fire as worthy of recognition. Doughboys largely accepted and perpetuated that ideal of worthy service as even non-combat soldiers sought out tokens and souvenirs from the front and emphasised any danger their service might have entailed in order to prove that they were worthy soldiers of the type US officials valued.¹²⁰

Misunderstandings and frustration between the French and American military systems were endemic but the sheer volume of matters requiring attention forced American and French officials to work together. Requests for documents, maps, equipment, resources, and personnel fill the files of the Liaison Office and most were resolved quickly and with little difficulty. While there were frequent complaints about Americans not following procedure and constant reminders about proper channels and forms, as the French recognized the importance of getting the US into the fight as quickly as possible, accommodated Americans. As with the issue of training, the men who worked with the French on daily basis held a much higher opinion of them than AEF command. The administrative frustrations between French and American authorities never disappeared as the different systems made it difficult to meet each other's priorities. Nevertheless, American and French officers continued to work together, befriend each other, and expedite critical requests by accommodating respective cultural expectations. While US-French administrative cooperation was not

¹²⁰ Keene, *Doughboys*, 55-60.

optimal, the fact that the US was able to meet its needs is testament to the functional working relationship forged between the two national armies despite the considerable impediments present.

Despite their resistance to adopting French ideas, AEF command and a great deal of American senior staff were pragmatic enough to recognize that they would need to learn from those who had been fighting the war. Although Pershing may have held very strong opinions about the war's conduct he realized he would have to reorganize the AEF's structure if it was to conduct a modern war. Administratively, Pershing and his staff organized the AEF in a manner very similar to the French Army by adopting a five bureau system in which each bureau charged with administering a certain aspect of the army such as training or operations.¹²¹ American officers charged with establishing bureaus often relied heavily on the French model or copied them wholesale as was the case with the US staff system.¹²² General Hunter Liggett stated that the AEF abandoned their initial organization for Army Corps in favour of the French model.¹²³ Such reliance was borne of the lack of American experience in military administration for forces as large as the AEF. As an example, US officers charged with developing an intelligence section had to do so essentially from scratch as the pre-war US General Staff only had four officers dedicated to intelligence work.¹²⁴ While American officers examined the intelligence systems of all Allied armies on the Western Front, they based theirs in large

¹²¹ Beaver, *Modernizing the American War Department*, 107.

¹²² Allan R. Millet, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army, 1881-1925* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1975), 315.

¹²³ Hunter Liggett, *Commanding an American Army: Recollections of the World War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), 22.

¹²⁴ Cooke, *Pershing and His Generals*, 92.

part on the French system due to the necessity of working very closely with them.¹²⁵

Correspondence between French and American headquarters, done through the French military mission to the AEF GHQ, reveals quite a bit of intelligence sharing, ranging from basic requests for detailed maps of the sectors that American divisions were heading, as well as reports on German troop strength and the interrogation of German prisoners. There were also pieces of advice such as French reminders to tell American soldiers not to keep German documents and newspapers as souvenirs but to give them to intelligence officers.¹²⁶ General John DeWitt who was in charge of supply organization for the 42nd Division and later the US 1st Army partially credited the French system in developing his organization:

The changes that were brought about in the First Army were those which would naturally occur when the Army itself was organized and on its own service of supply began to function. The system of supply which was evolved during the training period of our division was a perfectly natural one. This because of our close association with the French. Also my study of the French System within the Army led me to apply what I learned to our division, knowing later that I would become G-4 of the First Army.¹²⁷

Even with the US GHQ's scepticism of French doctrine, Americans recognized French organizational expertise and many were willing to learn what they could from their French counterparts.

Aside from the administrative systems, many other AEF members were very interested in observing and learning from the French. Visits by American officers to French sectors of the front were common before American divisions went to the line in order to observe and learn. US and French officials coordinated visits by all manner of

¹²⁵ Ibid., 92-94.

¹²⁶ Letter from French Ministry of War to the American Mission to the French GHQ, September 9th, 1918. Box 1, entry 1573, RG 120, NARA.

¹²⁷ Reilly, *Americans All*, 106.

US officers from generals seeking to learn about command in a trench environment to engineering officers looking to see for themselves the technical challenges they soon would contend. US engineering officers were particularly keen to visit the French to learn the proper construction of bunkers and trench systems. Other technical services such as transport and repair also took advantage of opportunities to see how the French met the challenges of modern warfare. Visits to the front were the only way for many American officers to get familiar with battlefield conditions before their own men would be subject to them and the French were very accommodating in arranging hundreds of visits in order to build US capacity.

In late 1917, the US Army initiated an extensive program to send its generals to visit French lines to witness the challenges of modern warfare in order to prepare them for their commands.¹²⁸ Occasional difficulties arose such as a case when an American general and his staff arrived at the front lines to find that the French general and his staff were not aware of the scheduled visit and so had not made any arrangements.¹²⁹ Most visits, however, took place without difficulty. Many of the US officers who undertook visits were senior officers such as generals and colonels but there were also a considerable number of junior officers. Beginning in March of 1918, the French made arrangements for hundreds of junior American infantry and artillery officers to spend time at the front with French units.¹³⁰ George C. Marshall, who served as director on planning on Pershing's staff, noted the usefulness of a visit he undertook to Verdun in August 1917 as it allowed him to see major offensive operations from the commander's

¹²⁸ General Pétain to Commanders of French I, VI, X and II Armies, October 13, 1917. Box 1, entry 1575, RG 120, NARA.

¹²⁹ US Chief of Staff to Colonel Frank Parker, October 31, 1917. Box 1, entry 1575, RG 120, NARA.

¹³⁰ L'Aide-Major Général to the Mission Militaire Française à Chaumont, March 13, 1918. Box 1, entry 1575, RG 120, NARA.

perspective. Visits to the front with the French were a key method by which influential American officers learned about the conditions of modern warfare. Americans also visited British sectors as well as Canadian and Australian forces but most of their tours were with the French. While not enough to alter American doctrinal outlook, the French role in shaping American's first impressions of the front influenced many American officers, especially in the specialized technical services.

Aside from visits to the front lines, a considerable number of American officers were very interested in learning from the use of French material and taking advantage of the French military's experience even if not specifically directed to do so. For example, a gas warfare officer noted that his men were very eager to learn about the latest developments in the field and so asked the French Army to send him relevant materials as the US Army's materials were not up to date.¹³¹ A lack of American training material could spur US forces to act on their own initiative to get material from the French as was the case with the 149th Field Artillery Brigade who used private funds to hire a retired French Field Artillery officer in New York to verify and help translate French artillery documents.¹³² Many Americans were more than willing to rely on foreign training material, even those wary of foreign trainers themselves.¹³³ The US Army was not adverse to the practice as historical records of the US Army War College indicate that a great many documents pertaining to training were translations of French pamphlets and other documents, as well as lectures by French officers.¹³⁴ Those documents included

¹³¹ Captain Zanetti, Liaison Officer, Gas Service to Major Clark, Acting Chief of American Military Mission to French GHQ, June 18, 1918. Box 1, entry 1574, RG 120, NARA.

¹³² Reilly, *Americans All*, 50.

¹³³ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 50.

¹³⁴ Examples found in Box 131, Entry 310, RG 165; Box 181, Entry 310, RG 165; Box 191, Entry 310, RG 165; Box 204, Entry 310, RG 165.

guides on maintenance of the Chauchat automatic rifle, pamphlets on infantry tactics, firing table guides for artillery pieces, instructions on the use of communication equipment, and other pertinent documents distributed as training material by US forces.

No matter how much the AEF may have resisted French influence, the lack of alternatives meant that it was still very reliant on the French. As American military administration was under greater direction from AEF command, its members did not have the same ability to adopt French innovations as their colleagues in combat divisions. As a result, no matter how much liaison officers wanted to forge stronger working relationships, an unresponsive GHQ thwarted them. Despite those limits, enough of the men charged with doing the vital administrative business of the AEF recognized the value of the French Army's example and worked closely with the French to adopt those structures and techniques useful to American forces. There were many liaison officers who worked very closely with the French and made progress on meeting the AEF's needs so that much of the military bureaucracy had far greater regard and admiration for their ally than their commanders did. The disagreements between American liaison officers and their commanders over how to interact with the French reflected that between most doughboys and the higher ranks of the AEF. Those for whom interaction was a daily event faced some difficulty and retained distinct ideas about the proper way to do things but came to understand French methods and priorities and tried to integrate what was useful and necessary into their own practices. Commanders determined to follow American methods and priorities often had a more antagonistic relationship with the French and resisted French influence on their forces. Mundane interaction and the realities of what the AEF needed to function fostered

cooperative relationships between Frenchmen and Americans while refusal to compromise on predetermined conclusions led to conflict.

Conclusion

The French were omnipresent in the formative period of the AEF when it transitioned from the raw recruits who disembarked in France to a decisive presence on the battlefield. Training in France was the introduction to both French soldiers and military life at all for many AEF members, especially those in the first divisions to arrive in France. Training under French officers allowed Americans to form opinions about French competence as well as evaluate how French ideas contrasted with the values stressed by American command. The AEF knew the value of French expertise but also feared the influence it exerted on their men. More than a simple disagreement over tactics, Americans often cast doctrinal differences as questions of fundamental national character. When Colonel Harold Fiske, head of AEF training, complained that junior officers and enlisted men were too deferential to French tactics, he claimed that “In many respects, the tactics and technique of our Allies are not suited to American characteristics or the American mission in this war [...] Their infantry lacks aggressiveness and discipline.”¹³⁵ Fiske’s fear was not only that the French would undermine the AEF’s doctrine, but weaken the very qualities Americans needed to win the war. While then men who attended French training camps started to develop their own identity as soldiers that emphasised aggression and rifle firepower more than the French did, they were not nearly so dismissive of the French as their commanders. A number of American veterans, especially in the 1st Division, were grateful to receive so

¹³⁵ Quoted in: Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*, 118.

much training from foreign soldiers with experience and skill.¹³⁶ The bonds of respect Americans formed for their trainers also meant that they were eager to impress them and the desire to prove themselves worthy in French eyes was a powerful motivator for many doughboys.¹³⁷ The American view of themselves as soldiers had not yet fully formed as they had not yet tested their training in battle but the beginnings of that identity first formed in training camps in tandem with and in contrast to the French.

Outside of training camps, Americans interacted with the administrative services of the French Army on whom they relied, especially in the first year of their participation in war. As with civilians, Americans expected the French to adapt to American priorities and norms as much as possible. Americans never completely integrated into the French administrative system as they did not adopt attitudes and practices that the French considered cornerstones of military cooperation. As in training, many Americans saw the value of the expertise and experience the French offered but preferred to make use of that expertise on their own terms rather than defer entirely to their ally. Those with the most experience in interacting with the French, namely member of the Liaison Office, were most willing to accommodate the French and enjoyed a close working relationship with them. American command's distrust of French influence and devaluing on non-combat services served to limit the benefits provided by such a relationship. That many Americans used French material and organizational structure to build their own ideas and organizations indicates that their experience with the French led to recognition of the advantages the French military offered to an inexperienced force. Americans still wanted to retain an American

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹³⁷ Keene, *Doughboys*, 108.

character to their forces based on their own particular ideas of the values and characteristics the AEF brought to the war. Doughboys developed those characteristics, already elaborated by commanders and in American training documents, in greater contrast to the French after they entered battle.

CHAPTER 3

AMERICANS AND THE FRENCH IN BATTLE

Americans first began to develop a sense of their own identity as soldiers in training but taking part in real combat accelerated and strengthened that development. The French introduced Americans to the front lines and active combat shifted the nature of the Franco-American military relationship. In camps and schools, Americans saw the French as teachers or as examples to follow. When in line with French soldiers, they interacted with them as partners on a much more equal footing. Battle tested Americans' assumptions about French military talent and combat forced them to reconsider whether French expertise truly represented the pinnacle of skill in the First World War. While the French retained an important training function, Americans could independently develop their tactics and the ideas about military values that underpinned such doctrine.

Theorists of human identity since Friedrich Hegel have argued that identity involves a continuous process of construction in opposition to "others."¹ In forming their identity as soldiers, the French served the role of the "other" as they were the foreign military Americans knew most about. In particular, Americans compared the fighting spirit of both armies and formed opinions about the qualities they brought to the war which the French lacked. American observations of the French were both

¹ Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 2-3.

sociological and military. They formed, or reformed, opinions on the character and nature of French soldiers as well as their skills and abilities. Americans often joined those judgements and perceptions of military ability with ideas of national character. While the respect for French soldiers instilled in training came into question, the experiences of shared victories led many to hold up the *poilu* as a skilled, determined fighter and a worthy ally. While Americans largely liked and respected French soldiers, they were also determined to form an independent identity as combatants. Since most Americans served alongside the French, doughboys contrasted themselves with French soldiers. The contrasts they drew as well as the relationship they developed with their French peers indicated how they saw themselves their role in the war and that of their ally.

Americans enter the line

American divisions did not initially transition directly from training camps to the heat of battle. The second phase of their training embedded them within French divisions so that the French could provide additional training and guidance while both were holding the line together. The divisions that arrived in 1917 had the most opportunity for training and spent the longest in quiet sectors with the French. Only the 1st, 2nd, 26th, and 42nd Divisions, some 120,000 combat troops arrived before 1918. By April 1918 when American arrivals greatly increased, only those four divisions were

adequately prepared for combat and had served in quiet sectors.² The first Americans entered the line as early as October 1917 but the bulk of American divisions served in quiet sectors in the spring and summer of 1918. Late in the war, some newly arrived divisions proceeded directly from their camps to battle without first serving in quiet sectors. As the four earliest divisions in France spent the longest in quiet sectors, they had the most opportunity to develop a relationship with the French.

De facto temporary amalgamation occurred at the tactical level as American and French forces occupied the same positions side by side. American forces were placed in quiet sectors under French command so that they could be “seasoned” and gain the skills needed to survive on the battlefield. French soldiers provided briefings and advice on all aspects of trench systems from living in them during the day and night to conducting offensive and defensive combat operations.³ In accordance with plans for which section of the front the AEF was to take over from the French, most American divisions occupied sectors in Lorraine from the Swiss border to Verdun. The goal of time in quiet sectors was to help Americans transition from training to active battle, but they also served as a transition in the American relationship with the French from teachers to comrades.

Lorraine had seen little major combat since 1915, thus rendering it an ideal location to familiarize Americans with the front at minimal risk. French forces bordered the entire American army in the region which served to minimize contact with the British. This served as an excellent opportunity to “*encadre*” US forces in order to

² Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 121, 146-147.

³ Frazer, *Send the Alabamians*, 69.

discretely influence them which the French government saw as desirable.⁴ As a result of the lack of major offensives and the fact that both sides used the sector to rest divisions exhausted from other more active sectors of the front and an informal truce prevailed. German and French forces largely confined themselves to the occasional artillery duel or trench raid but otherwise allowed a “live and let live” attitude to reign. Americans found truces distasteful as they were very eager to conduct operations against the enemy.⁵ Pershing feared that the lack of French aggression would corrupt American forces and wrote in his memoirs that:

Training in quiet sectors in association with French divisions, upon which the French laid so much stress, had proved disappointing during the past months, as their units coming out of the battle line, worn and weary, failed to set an example of the aggressiveness which we were striving to inculcate in our men. Of course our own officers were immediately responsible, but they were frequently handicapped by the lack of energy of tired French officers.⁶

While those in line did not have such a negative appraisal, serving in quiet sectors was generally unpopular, at first, with Americans even if they recognized the value in familiarizing themselves with the front lines. As much of the trench system had fallen into disrepair due to disuse, Americans had to rebuild and improve them under French supervision.⁷ Expanding and repairing the trench system proved very unpopular as Americans had an “aversion for work with pick and shovel”.⁸ The primary goal in quiet sectors was to teach Americans how to properly conduct trench warfare under the guidance of seasoned French veterans, but Americans often did not agree with the attitude of their trainers.

⁴ Kaspi, *Le temps des Américain*, 101.

⁵ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 158-159.

⁶ Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 2, 114.

⁷ James Cooke, *The All-Americans at War: the Eighty-Second Division in the Great War, 1917-1918* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1999), 44.

⁸ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 60.

The chief enemy that the Americans faced in quiet sectors was boredom. Many complained that quiet sectors made for tediously long hours of work or observing no man's land for attacks that would never come. A number of French officers who were unwilling to allow Americans to carry out activities normal even in quiet sectors exacerbated that boredom. After the *Chasseurs Alpins* trained the 1st Division, it served in Lorraine in the line with the French 18th Infantry Division under General Joseph Bordeaux. Bordeaux proved a very unpopular man with Americans who felt that he displayed a total lack of confidence in Americans' skills. Marshall in particular felt that the 1st Division was wasting its time under French command as Bordeaux was:

a Frenchman of the stiff, punctilious type, and it quickly became apparent that we would be involved in a long repetition of the training we had already received. He also planned for a number of demonstrations by French troops. We had found that these demonstrations did not do us much good. They were rather cut-and-dried affairs and it was very hard for our men to take in the important points. We wished to be given problems by the experienced French officers and then left to work them out for ourselves, as best we could. After this we wished to have the French officers criticize our solutions, impersonally and impartially.⁹

American officers including the 1st Division's commanding general repeatedly complained which did force changes and while they did antagonise Bordeaux, training was: "very satisfactory and much more rapid than in any previous period."¹⁰ When German raids against the 1st Division inflicted a number of casualties including some men captured, many Americans blamed Bordeaux's policy against patrols as such activities could have intercepted or at least detected the raiding force before it caused damage.¹¹ For Americans eager to prove themselves in line, French commanders who restrained them proved a source of resentment.

⁹ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹¹ Eisenhower and Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 82-83.

Even when the French did not hinder them, most Americans found their time in quiet sectors stifling due to a lack of opportunities for real combat. According to Lawrence Stallings, the inexperienced men of the AEF were eager to fight as doing so was a mark of honour among doughboys:

Every man in the 1st Division wanted to go on patrol, and then a raid; each wanted to kill a German, to capture one, to be the first. If not the first in the A.E.F., then he wanted to be the first in the whole damn division, or brigade, regiment, battalion, company, platoon, squad.¹²

Marine Corps scholar George Clark believed that the time the 2nd Division spent in a quiet sector near Verdun was useless as it did not prepare the division for later battles.¹³

Many in the division would have agreed, especially in light of the hardships endured.

Yet Private Martin Gulberg acknowledged the value of serving under trench conditions to prepare them for battle:

Here, under French tutelage, we engaged in the hardest kind of intensive training. It was winter, the weather was cold and often stormy, but this did not make any difference. We were subject to rush calls during the night, such as forced marches on the trenches, occupations and relief, patrol work, gas and raid signals, sham raids, and other details of trench warfare, such as developed in this war. When we got through we were as hard as nails.¹⁴

French irritation with Americans' constant disruption of quiet sectors matched American frustrations over their inactivity. Americans who went to such sectors noted that their French counterparts announced to them that it was a "*très bon secteur*" and otherwise "*très calme*" because of the lack of heavy fighting.¹⁵ The history of the 35th Division quoted a common sentiment from doughboys on hearing French advice not to provoke combat with the Germans: "That's a fine way to win a war! Let's go right

¹² Stallings, *The Doughboys*, 37.

¹³ Clark, *Devil Dogs Chronicle*, 113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁵ *BEING the Narrative of Battery A of the 101st Field Artillery*, 103.

through them! We can raid those trenches, drive the enemy back, and with proper artillery help, push right through the Rhine Valley.”¹⁶

The French were less enthused at American attempts to liven up quiet sectors as recounted by Frank Tiebout after his regiment retaliated for German raids: “The French who so ably chaperoned our first few weeks on this front, before withdrawing from their intimate association with us, were terror-stricken lest our artillery should fire on towns held by the enemy, or that any pronounced offensive should be precipitated.”¹⁷ Local civilians were especially displeased at US aggression as German retaliation threatened further destruction of their land and property.¹⁸

Disparaging comments from Americans sarcastically asking if “this is war” were not unheard of and the very concept of a quiet sector seemed to have offended many doughboys taught to behave with maximum aggression towards the enemy.¹⁹ Some interpreted the French desire for the sectors to remain quiet as a lack of will to fight.²⁰ Americans could be more sympathetic to French concerns after hearing French soldiers talk about their hardships in more active sectors as when one French officer refuted allegations from men of the 35th Division that his men lacked the will to fight:

A week ago we were fighting on the Chemin des Dames. We lost 65 per cent of our men. The regiment lost 42 officers, among them our Colonel and two Majors, killed [...] All that we wish to do here is to rest for a little while, show your troops the way about the trenches, receive our replacements, work them into our companies, and then return to the great battle, wherever France needs us most.²¹

¹⁶ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont*, 45.

¹⁷ Tiebout, *A History of the 305th Infantry*, 63-64.

¹⁸ James, *The Years of MacArthur*, 164-165.

¹⁹ Guy Emerson Bowerman, *The Compensation of War: The Diary of an Ambulance Driver during the Great War*, ed. Mark C. Carnes (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 66.

²⁰ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 158-159.

²¹ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont*, 45-46.

Despite any reconsiderations similar statements provoked, French attitudes and orders deeply frustrated Americans who found them too restrictive. That the enemy was an invisible one who could not be confronted directly especially grated Americans.²²

Despite French recommendations of caution and restraint, untested Americans wanted to fight and believed that they should prosecute the war at every opportunity. Much of the American eagerness was that of inexperienced men who had little understanding of what battle involved but wanted to prove their own courage. The longer Americans spent in quiet sectors, the more their behaviour came to resemble that of the French.

Experienced American division levelled similar complaints about green doughboys disturbing quiet sectors that the French had made.²³ While experience wore off some American eagerness to fight, the aggressive mentality of the AEF made many doughboys question whether their allies were really fighting the war to their utmost. Americans became convinced they could and should do more to press the Germans than the French were willing to allow them.

While American forces disliked service in quiet sectors, such service provided opportunities to experience trench life firsthand and to adopt beneficial practices from the French. Many doughboys who had not sought out advice from French troops in training did so once they experienced front line conditions.²⁴ Watching their French counterparts and copying some of their habits was also popular. For example, Americans fed their men by battalion using very large field kitchens but this practice proved impractical in the trenches. Many Americans copied the French method of

²² Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 108.

²³ Keene, *Doughboys*, 46-49.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

feeding their men in small groups using *marmites* that allowed men to cook their own rations at their posts rather than wait for food delivery or having to leave the lines. The habit of borrowing the French *marmites* was so common that the US Army issued their own versions to several brigades.²⁵ Americans encountered and made use of other French innovations when entering the trenches as was the case with the 371st Regiment:

In many positions that we took over from the French we found empty meat and vegetable cans tied to the wire defences. In these cans were a few pebbles. They made a good automatic alarm for if the Germans started to cut the wire these home-made bells would sound off and the French would set off flares and drive off the enemy.²⁶

American adapted to trench life partly by learning for themselves under French guidance and partly by copying them directly. Americans questioned French willingness to fight, but they were more than willing to learn from their allies on practical matter relating to trench life. Americans' first test of battle occurred during their time in quiet sectors and developed their combat capacities in conjunction with the French.

Even in quiet sectors, occasional fighting provided Americans with their first combat experiences, as they tended to liven up quiet sectors. That was partly because the Germans were eager to test American forces and capture prisoners and in part because American aggression invited retaliation. Americans' experience of war was a raid on the 1st Division by German forces in early November 1917. Despite resistance, raiders killed three Americans, captured 11, and wounded several more.²⁷ The raid was a source of concern for Americans who feared negative assessments by French officers as was the case with Marshall when he: "became convinced that [General Bordeaux]

²⁵ Weekly Report from Liaison Officer Attached to French 7th Army to Chief Liaison Officer, July 2, 1918. Box 2067, Entry 51, RG 120, NARA.

²⁶ Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War*, 95.

²⁷ Eisenhower and Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 82-83.

feared our men had not made a sufficiently determined resistance.”²⁸ Given their lack of experience, Americans feared that the French would further impede their ability to fight if the AEF failed to prove itself. Those fears were not entirely unreasonable as many Americans had hidden in dugouts during the raid and those that did fight often did so in a confused and ineffective fashion. Despite those problems, French reports and public statements praised American determination and claimed they fought hard.²⁹ The French organized grand funerals of the three men killed with emphasis on their significance to the Franco-American alliance.³⁰ While Americans’ first combat was a small defeat, the fact that they had stood and fought acquitted them in French eyes and provided a boost in confidence for both armies. The Germans launched similar raids against Americans throughout their time in quiet sectors and US troops repelled many. This served to build confidence in the divisions for whom this was their first engagement. Invariably, Americans wished to conduct retaliatory raids and prove their own mettle. Doughboys were often very eager to take an active part in battle not only to prove themselves to their fellow soldiers but also to the French.³¹ Given the high level of organization needed for raids and US inexperience in the field, the French, hesitant to allow Americans to raid by themselves, organized joint raids and assigned trench raid specialists. Some American officers such as Douglas MacArthur were especially eager to plan and participate in raids to ready themselves and their forces for battle.³²

²⁸ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 47.

²⁹ Edward G. Lengel, *Thunder and Flames: Americans in the Crucible of Combat, 1917-1918* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 31-32.

³⁰ Smythe, *Pershing, General of the Armies*, 59-60.

³¹ Frazer, *Send the Alabamians*, 68.

³² James, *The Years of MacArthur*, 157.

Americans conducted most early raids in conjunction with, and often led by, French troops in order to gain experience. As in training, Americans valued French advice and guidance. Pierpont Stackpole gave an example of the type of advice the French provided in order for Americans to avoid mistakes caused by experience:

The French major in conversation with me objected to wire cutting in trench raiding as making a noise that would soon draw fire, even though snippers were covered with burlap. The Germans (and French sometimes) synchronize shell explosions with wire cutting to prevent detection but the explosions must not be too frequent and create too much interest and the process is a tedious one.³³

The French sometimes loaned the Americans equipment such as trench knives, a weapons so well liked that many kept them.³⁴ The preparation for raids and their undertaking were major events, for most Americans and they often occupy a considerable amount of space in the histories and accounts of divisions. As raids provided opportunities to prove themselves, many Americans were very eager to undertake them and there was no shortage of volunteers. In fact, one French criticism of American raiding plans was that they involved too many men, which risked confusion and friendly fire incidents.³⁵ Initial American raids often faced considerable difficulties in cooperating with the French. They were very prone to confusion and mistaking French personnel for Germans, especially as raids typically took place at night. Americans, occasionally “captured” French soldiers accidentally due to early difficulties in distinguishing French uniforms from German ones.³⁶ Inexperience and excitement also caused embarrassing incidents such as a friendly fire incident by a marine colonel

³³ Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals*, 32.

³⁴ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont*, 62.

³⁵ Reilly, *Americans All*, 198.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 201.

returning to his own lines after a successful trench raid accompanied by a French captain:

the colonel, bringing up the rear, halted about half-way over, drew his hitherto virgin pistol, and wheeled around for a parting shot – something in the nature of *un beau geste*. Seeing this, the tall French captain, to his rear and left, drew his pistol and wheeled also, imagining pursuit. The colonel – and to this attest the scout officer and the sergeant – then shot the Frenchman through the – as sea-going Marines say – stern-sheets.³⁷

While American aggression sometimes led to similar mistakes, both sides usually treated them as isolated and embarrassing incidents and many joint Franco-American raids encountered no such problems. The French treated American aggression as something of a liability and French troops who accompanied doughboys tried to restrain them from delving too deeply into the German trenches in search of prisoners due to the risks involved.³⁸ American soldiers who saw the French in action during raids were typically very impressed by their skill. Americans valued the opinions of their French superiors as was the case with Captain Lloyd Ross of the 42nd Division who expressed great pride and pleasure at the compliment paid to him by a French major after a successful trench raid when the major said American forces: “carried out the operation just as well and efficiently as the French companies which had been on either of our flanks.”³⁹ Frank Freidel, who studied many American memoirs, categorised the Franco-American military relationship as extremely positive and that both sides held each other in high esteem.⁴⁰ The defining difference between the French and Americans in quiet sectors was that the Americans were far more aggressive while the French tried to restrain that aggression. From their first joint time in line, both armies had different

³⁷ Thomason, *Fix Bayonets*, 212-215.

³⁸ Reilly, *Americans All*, 148.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴⁰ Freidel, *Over There*, 98.

outlooks on their role when not committed to major combat operations. Despite those differences, the soldiers of both armies had time to develop close bonds.

French and American socialization

Aside from introducing Americans to combat and trench service, the quiet sectors introduced them to French soldiers in a social context. Opportunities for off-duty socialization were limited in training and when billeted in the civilian population but service together in the trenches allowed Americans to get to know the *poilu* not only as fighters but as people. That mutual goodwill would develop was far from inevitable as both had demonstrated a willingness to take strong dislike to their other allies. The French had considerable scorn for allies who they believed were not pulling their weight or were incompetent. A liaison officer noted that those feelings were behind a surprising dislike for the Belgians: “It is a great surprise to find the Belgians, so lauded and regarded as heroes, are now generally disliked. It is said they have lagged and shirked their duty, and are resting on the laurels of their first magnificent stand in holding back the Germans.”⁴¹ The Italians, who sent a force to the Western Front, were held beneath contempt by the French and British after the disaster suffered by the Italian Army at Caporetto in November 1917.⁴² The British certainly weren’t immune from French

⁴¹ Jelke, *Letters from a Liaison Officer*, 45-46.

⁴² Smythe, *Pershing, General of the Armies*, 31-32.

The nearly month long battle from late October to mid-November introduced large scale storm trooper infiltration assaults which allowed a joint German and Austro-Hungarian Army to make major advances in Lombardy. Breaking a stalemate that had endured along the Isonzo River since 1915, the speed of the advance provoked fears that Italy could be knocked out of the war as Central Power forces came dangerously close to Venice before being halted along the Piave River. The relatively modest number of Italian killed and wounded compared to the hundreds of thousands taken prisoners raised fears that Italian soldiers had lost the will to fight and could no longer be relied upon. (John Macdonald, and Zeljko Cimpric, *Caporetto and the Isonzo Campaign: The Italian Front 1915-1918*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2011: 149, 172).

contempt as demonstrated by Alden Brooks, an American serving with the French Army, in a scathing assessment of the British shared by his French comrades in the wake of Operation Michael in March 1918:

But in any case, a lazy self-satisfied English Army come down from Ypres, nominally to take it easy for a while, and further lulled by the Germans into false ideas of security. And so no real defence anywhere, practically no secondary defences whatsoever; and all our former organization of the sector heedlessly tossed aside; maps, firing-plans, information concerning the enemy, thrown out like so much refuse; trenches trampled in; machine-gun emplacements unused; and a priceless underground telephone system in lead casings scoffed at, abandoned.⁴³

Americans risked the ire of the French if they did not perform well or acted in ways the French felt were frivolous. Americans in turn had little tolerance for allies that condescended to them and taken a strong dislike to the British due to the arrogance many felt the British displayed.⁴⁴ In order to become friends rather than grudging allies, both sides had to convince the other of their competence on the battlefield and hold a respectful attitude outside it.

As American and French soldiers often stayed in the same dugouts and shelters and took meals together, they had ample opportunity for close interaction. Close contact was much more restricted with divisions that arrived in France in the summer of 1918 given accelerated training schedules and because the US Army increasingly integrated newly arriving divisions with experienced American divisions rather than French units. For those divisions who served closely with the French for a considerable amount of time, relations were, for the most part, very good. The relationship between French and American troops was so close that Robert Bruce claimed it was the “cornerstone” of the

⁴³ Alden Brooks, *As I Saw It* (New York: Knopf, 1930), 31.

⁴⁴ Mitchell A. Yockelson, *Borrowed Soldiers: Americans Under British Command, 1918* (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 216-219.

alliance.⁴⁵ Friendships could develop very rapidly in the trenches as was the case with the 35th Division:

Four Americans would be put in a dugout with four Frenchmen, a dark, wet place it would be, and they would have no word of common speech. Four others would be assigned to stand sentry duty with four other Frenchmen. The next morning at breakfast time the warmest friendships would have established. They slapped one another on the back and swapped cigarettes and pooled rations. It was great night for the cordiale.⁴⁶

The mixing of American and French units usually produced amicable relationships built on friendship, camaraderie, and understanding.⁴⁷

Language barriers were an initial issue, but within the close confines a trench life, doughboys and *poilu* were able to devise systems of gestures, slang, and hybrid English-French that served their purposes.⁴⁸ American enlisted men often had an advantage over many of their officers in overcoming language barriers which allowed them to form closer bonds with the French according to Heywood Broun:

American officers got along well with the French but they never reached the same degree of chumminess that the men did. They met French officers at more or less formal luncheons and had to go through a routine of speeches largely concerned with Lafayette and Rochambeau and Washington. Poilus and doughboys did not go so far back for their subjects of conversation. The American enlisted man had a great advantage over his officer in the matter of language. He might know less French but he was much more ready to experiment.⁴⁹

More junior officers were also more willing to attempt to cross the language barrier as “[t]he most daring man in the use of unfamiliar language was not a soldier but a second lieutenant. He took great pride in his talent for pantomime and asserted that his

⁴⁵ Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms*, 197.

⁴⁶ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont*, 46.

⁴⁷ Frazer, *Send the Alabamians*, 66-68.

⁴⁸ Kaspi, *Le temps des Américains*, 296.

⁴⁹ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 86-87.

vocabulary of some thirty words and his gestures filled all his needs.”⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, those who interacted most with the French on a daily basis, the enlisted and those officers who served in line with them, best overcame barriers to friendship. As a result, the lower ranks of AEF generally had closer relationship with the French than officers of higher rank.

Many recounted tales of friendship between the two and both Americans and French soldiers documented them. For example, one American quoted a French soldier he served with claiming that “an Englishman is an ally, but an American is a pal.”⁵¹ Similar statements about the French referring to the Americans as *camarades* and *amis* rather than just allies were very common and Americans reciprocated by calling the French friends and expressing positive sentiments about their character, attitude, and abilities, especially after Americans proved themselves in battle.⁵² One factor which favourably disposed Americans to the French was that they saw them as lacking the rigid class distinctions as that of the British Army and as having a far more relaxed attitude. Americans tended to chafe against overly burdensome attempts to impose strict discipline on them, noting that the British expended much energy trying to get Americans to conform to their own standards of discipline.⁵³ An American captain believed that four years of war had “worn off all but the essential” of the French Army who no longer bothered trying to get their soldiers to conform to every tiny regulation as long as they did their duty and fought well.⁵⁴ After the French Army mutinies of 1917,

⁵⁰ Ibid., 88.

⁵¹ Keene, “Uneasy Alliances,” 25-26.

⁵² Evans, *American Voices of World War I*, 91

⁵³ Miles, *History of the 308th Infantry, 1917-1919*, 35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 69.

French soldiers considered a good officer to be one who displayed familiarity with their men rather than remaining aloof.⁵⁵

The apparent lack of barriers between French officers and enlisted men was a popular topic with some Americans like Preston Gibson:

There is a wonderful comradeship between the French officer and the soldier and little line of discrimination is drawn. An officer does not hesitate to offer a soldier a cigarette and stand and talk to him, so that the French army is really like on great family. When the officer calls upon the soldier to do something the order is executed with the greatest spirit of enthusiasm.⁵⁶

Gibson contrasted this attitude unfavourably with many in the newly commissioned men of the AEF claiming that the “new American army officer may be very prone to feel his authority, and if such cases develop the sooner the new officer realizes that the soldier is more important than himself the sooner he will have a force willing to fight with him and under him.”⁵⁷ While some Americans found French discipline lax, especially in comparison to the British, Captain Robert Patterson emphasized that despite that flaw they were still effective soldiers: “I found later that the French, although good soldiers, were not much on discipline. The saluting was very casual. [...] Nevertheless the French fought very well, as everyone knows.”⁵⁸ Some clearly hoped that their commanding officers would take after the French example and place respect for their men above enforcing rigid discipline.

Relaxed and informal attitudes put Americans at ease began with the French officers who commanded them and extended down the ranks to the French NCOs and privates who dealt with Americans in a friendly and unpretentious manner. Lieutenant

⁵⁵ Sumner, *They Shall Not Pass*, 178.

⁵⁶ Preston Gibson, *Battering the Boche* (New York: The Century co. 1918), 40-41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁸ Patterson, *The World War I Memoirs of Robert P. Patterson*, 27.

Kenneth Fuller considered the French and their attitude towards Americans to be a source of comfort:

When I get gloomy about the war, there is nothing helps me so much as to find some poilus and talk with them. They are splendid. Though they have suffered so terribly, they are full of fight and hope, and confident that the Boche cannot hold out much longer. They have nothing but praise for the Americans, and the word they use mostly in describing them is *cran*. I guess you know what it means, a sort of dare-devil *élan*, I think.⁵⁹

The sharing of meals could also bring benefits to men of both armies for reasons outlined in the history of the 42nd Division:

The Americans who always had a greater quantity of food than the French and probably a greater variety, always lived very poorly by comparison with the French, even in their officers' messes. The reason is simple. The French are excellent cooks and know so well how to get a great deal out of very little. The Americans are poor cooks and culinary managers to say nothing of frequently being downright wasteful.⁶⁰

For officers, offers to share meals characterised French overtures of friendship as was the case with artillery lieutenant Edward Gardiner who described being befriended by French officers when: "They asked me to lunch and gave me meat, cabbage, potatoes, coffee, bread, butter, and *confiture*."⁶¹ Americans serving in quiet sectors did much to earn French friendship. While initially uncertain about American abilities, their performance and fighting spirit reassured the French and earned their respect. Some Americans like Sergeant Linton Swift observed that initial French respect for Americans was limited by AEF inexperience and "[t]hat, friendly as they were toward us, the French could not accept us whole-heartedly until they understood us better and until we had shown what stuff we were made of" but after Americans proved themselves in battle

⁵⁹ Howe, *Memoirs of the Harvard Dead in the War Against Germany*, vol. 3, 409.

⁶⁰ Reilly, *Americans All*, 250.

⁶¹ M. A. DeW. Howe ed., *Memoirs of the Harvard Dead in the War Against Germany*, vol. 4, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 183-184.

“they have found out the average American is a real man, who may lack some of their own forms of politeness, but who, nevertheless, will insist on carrying an old woman’s burden for her; [and] they have discovered, also, that the American is a good fighter.”⁶²

When they served together on the front lines Americans and French soldiers got along well enough that they overcame occasional conflicts and disagreements rather than allowed them to breed resentment. Hervey Allen described an example during a confrontation over use of a road:

One Frenchman, who shouted something at the captain, was pulled down off his wagon by one of our men and given a swift kick. The other Frenchman gave him the laugh and the whole thing blew over in friendly bantering. Both our men and the *poilus* were too good-natured really to make trouble. There was one war on already.⁶³

Americans typically told tales of altercations with French soldiers as amusing anecdotes with both sides coming away without bitterness unlike similar stories involving British soldiers. Drunken fights between French and American soldiers on leave occurred but this owed more to severe inebriation than persistent dislike.

Even when scuffles between the soldiers of both armies broke out, both sides were able to sort out tensions fairly easily such as in the aftermath of one fight witnessed by Alden Brooks when he spoke with the American sergeant who instigated it:

I told him that while we had no objection to his friends and himself coming and talking to our men, or having a sociable drink together under the trees in the French manner – and I elaborated on the French manner – we couldn’t tolerate any more rough stuff. [...] After that, at any rate, we enjoyed model fraternizings[sic] – khaki figures sitting our under the trees in a quiet stiff manner and drinking win from tin cups, much as if from a teacup, little finger held in the air, all in French manner, no doubt.⁶⁴

⁶² Freidel, *Over There*, 69-70.

⁶³ Allen, *Toward the Flame*, 160-161.

⁶⁴ Brooks, *As I Saw It*, 172.

For all the official disagreements between respective GHQs, the difficulties many had integrating into the French military system, and mixed relations with civilians, the vast majority of American soldiers who recorded their interactions with the French expressed friendship with them. Many recounted that the French were more than willing to share their wine with Americans who developed a taste for it. The men of the 101st Field Artillery Brigade recounted some of those interactions:

Despite our apparent madness, the French like us. In turn, we found the French soldiers exceedingly likeable, far different from the civilians around Coetquidan. They had plenty of “Pinard,” the red wine issue to the French army ; we had plenty of tobacco. Over “Pinard” and cigarettes, stories of the war and of American passed back and forth.⁶⁵

The French also shared supplies in more critical situations with French soldiers sharing their food and water with doughboys during offensives as Americans were often poorly supplied or threw away their backs and could spend days on the front lines without receiving more supplies.⁶⁶ Not only did Americans develop a respect for French abilities in quiet sectors but they came to appreciate them as friends. The French returned the affection Americans felt for them as many French troops were charmed by their new ally and had difficulty pulling themselves away from conversations with them.⁶⁷ As Americans felt better treated by the French they were willing to overlook occasional disagreements and confrontations. The friendship developed on the front lines carried over to environments that were more social where American and French soldiers often sought out each other’s company.

⁶⁵ *BEING the Narrative of Battery A of the 101st Field Artillery*, 57.

⁶⁶ Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 276, 366.

⁶⁷ Kaspi, *Le temps des Américains*, 129.

The friendship attested to by so many extended to rear areas of the line where socialization occurred outside of the confines of trench life. A soldier on the Western Front typically spent 40-50% of his time in the trenches and much of the rest of his time behind the lines.⁶⁸ While men in rear areas were not on leave, they were not actively manning the front and so had more time for leisure activity aside from labour and training assignments. Rear areas often brought Americans back into contact with village life, especially in Lorraine where many villages retained some of their civilian population. As time in rear area villages and billets was shorter than during training, Americans had less opportunity to spend time with civilians or develop the close relationships they may have in villages further behind the lines. Bars, canteens, and other facilities catering to soldiers set up either by civilians or organisations affiliated with the military were common and served as gathering places for off-duty French and American soldiers. Many Americans, both officers and enlisted men, recount going to such establishments where French soldiers were present and socializing with them quite actively. Officers often organized joint events for their men and there were many instances of invitations, given especially to officers, to attend speeches by French officials and other gatherings.

Aside from formally organized events, many Americans and Frenchmen socialized in impromptu joint concerts where each performed their own songs to mixed crowds. In one case during a meeting between US sailors and French soldiers “The entente grew and presently there was an allied concert. The sailors sang, ‘What a wonderful Mother You’d Make,’ and the French replied with the Verdun song, ‘Ils Ne

⁶⁸ Craig Gibson, “The British Army, French Farmers and the War on the Western Front 1914-1918,” *Past & Present* No. 180 (2003), 179.

Passeront Pas,’ and later with ‘Madelon.’”⁶⁹ ‘Madelon’ was quite popular with Americans as thousands learned and sang it, including at events where only Americans were present.⁷⁰ Mixed musical performances organized by organizations such as the YMCA were also popular with French and American bands contributing different styles.⁷¹ Some music had lasting cultural influence as was the case with jazz which became a veritable sensation in France after African American doughboys introduced it to the country.⁷² As soldiers took whatever opportunities for leisure they could, social mixing of French and American soldiers was a frequent feature of rear areas where both armies were serving.

Mixed sporting events were also popular when weather permitted with the French teaching the Americans soccer and learning baseball and basketball. The YMCA established *Foyers du Soldat de L’Union Franco-Américaine* with the specific purpose of fostering American-French relations through sport.⁷³ Americans not only interacted when they manned posts in the trenches, they also sought out social interactions with their French peers and eagerly engaged in mixed competitions and joint events without official prompting. The socializing both built upon and contributed to the friendship between the two armies in the trenches. Not all Americans sought out French soldiers. Some found language too great a barrier while many others simply lacked opportunities because they served in an area with few French soldiers. Nevertheless, many doughboys took up the opportunity to fraternize with the French as they swapped songs, stories,

⁶⁹ Broun, *The A. E. F.*, 27.

⁷⁰ Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 101.

⁷¹ Sherwood, *A Soldier in World War I*, 35.

⁷² Stovall, *Paris Noir*, 20-22.

⁷³ Thierry Terret, “American Sammys and French Poilus in the Great War: Sport, Masculinities and Vulnerability,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28 Issue 3/4, (2011), 351.

food, and alcohol. Both sides also engaged in informal trades of goods where both profited such as an occasion observed by Chester Jenks:

The French soldier received a meagre weekly ration of the meanest grade, while the American soldier always had his accustomed cigarettes. It was a not uncommon sight to see him stop a poilu and offer him his package in return for a light; which the latter always had in the shape of a briquette – a contrivance of flint and steel, a wick, and gasoline, made by the French from pieces of shell and often a work of art⁷⁴

In contrast with their impressions of civilians, American descriptions of relations with French soldiers were almost always positive. Many spoke of the friendship between both armies or described the qualities of French soldiers in positive terms. French soldiers reciprocated those feelings, often describing Americans as “*bons camarades*” and finding them better companions than the British.⁷⁵

The French relationship with African American troops was an especially close one. African Americans made up about 10% of the AEF who used them overwhelmingly for labour, making up about 1/3 of AEF labour troops.⁷⁶ Relegation to non-combat services deeply frustrated black doughboys who mostly wanted to serve as soldiers rather than as conscript labourers.⁷⁷ Of the only two black combat divisions raised by the AEF,⁷⁸ American command transferred the 93rd composed of the 369th, 370th, 371st, and 372nd regiments to the French to serve the dual purpose of alleviating their demands for amalgamation and to appease the many AEF members who opposed black combat forces.⁷⁹ The 93rd Division was unusual in that many of its officers were

⁷⁴ Jenks, *Our First Ten Thousand*, 121-122.

⁷⁵ Kaspi, *Le temps des Américains*, 295-296.

⁷⁶ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 231.

⁷⁷ Keene, *Doughboys*, 40.

⁷⁸ The 92nd Division and the 93rd Division.

⁷⁹ Barbeau and Barbeau, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 113.

black and the 370th initially had an entirely black officer corps.⁸⁰ That the division was African American severely affected their treatment by the US Army whose racist attitudes and policies meant that they gave the division little attention when it came to training, assigned them the worst accommodations, and subjected them to all manner of racist restrictions such as extremely limited leave.⁸¹ In addition, white troops and American military police often subjected black doughboys to considerable verbal and physical abuse, especially while drunk, including murder.⁸² One example in Saint Nazaire involved a white Marine bayoneting a black soldier for picking up a piece of candy off the ground and a resulting fight between black and white soldiers nearly escalated to the point where only the intervention of an officer prevented white troops gunning down the black ones.⁸³ Such discriminatory and violent treatment led to considerable resentment against the US Army. Largely re-equipped and supplied by the French, almost all interaction the 93rd Division had after their transfer was with the French Army. The French 157th “Red Hand” Division received the 371st and 372nd regiments. The other regiments served in multiple French divisions throughout the war. The 93rd Division fought with the French Army in a number of major battles including the Second Battle of the Marne and the Meuse-Argonne.

⁸⁰ Benjamin Doizelet, “L'intégration des soldats noirs américains de la 93e division d'infanterie dans l'armée française en 1918,” *Revue Historique des Armées* no. 265 (2011): 7.

Under pressure from the African American middle class and intellectuals, the US government allowed a single class to train at an officer training centre in Des Moines, Iowa as the state was known for having relatively peaceful race relations. The class was almost unique in that it did not require officer candidates to be university educations but had a higher age requirement than that for white officer candidates. Of the approximately 1,300 candidates accepted, just over 600 received commissions. No further black candidates were accepted or trained. (Barbeau and Barbeau, *The Unknown Soldiers*, 58-62.)

⁸¹ Stovall, *Paris noir*, 5-10.

⁸² Chad Louis Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 113.

⁸³ Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial*, 102.

A number of early integration issues arose as very few members of the 93rd Division spoke French and it was initially difficult to secure adequate numbers of interpreters though this was eventually rectified.⁸⁴ Reorganisation of American forces also necessitated retraining. This exacerbated the already significant training burden of having to learn the use of new weapons. The AEF had also warned the French not to treat black soldiers too well or to “overpraise” them, outraging the members of the 93rd Division.⁸⁵ While the French did not heed those requests, they irritated some division members by comparing them to colonial forces whose uniforms coincidentally resembled those of American forces.⁸⁶ The French military possessing substantial black colonial forces and tended to consider them to be “uncivilized” and “savage” and held that such men were only good for assaults as they were too unreliable to hold the line under fire.⁸⁷ French stereotypes also viewed Africans as simple, childlike, and eager to please the French creating a paradoxical view where Africans were at once innocent and brutal.⁸⁸ Initially, the French investigated whether black American troops conformed to stereotypes they held of their own colonial soldiers. A key part of the initial interactions between the French and black American soldiers was to convince the French that African Americans were “civilized” men rather than African “savages.”⁸⁹ Americans were more likely to categorize men based on the colour of their skin and to rely on biology as a source of racist prejudice. French racist assumptions were much more deeply tied to ideas of “civilizations,” “savagery,” and “culture” rather than biology

⁸⁴ Memo on Training in France of 369th Infantry, April 29th, 1918. Box 1385, file no. 15700 to 15716, RG 120, NARA.

⁸⁵ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 231-232.

⁸⁶ Autric, “La rivalité franco-américaine,” 4-5.

⁸⁷ Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 61-63.

⁸⁸ Keene “French and American Racial Stereotypes during the First World War,” 267-269.

⁸⁹ Stovall, *Paris noir*, 17.

alone.⁹⁰ The French could be convinced that black American troops were “civilized” men like other Americans rather than the “uncivilized” men of the colonies. While racist assumptions were part of the African-American experience in the French Army, the French gave them the “prove” themselves in a way the US Army did not. Once The French familiarized themselves with African American soldiers, they assessed them in largely the same way they assessed white American troops.

Despite having to operate under the burden of French racial assumptions, most members of the 93rd Division found French treatment of them to be quite good. The lack of segregation and much more polite treatment by French officers generated considerable goodwill for the French.⁹¹ The rank and file also remained unaware of French complaints and so the compliments they received from French officers dominated their views of them.⁹² Just as a relatively more open attitude blinded African Americans to French racism on matters of interracial relationships and segregation, their treatment by the French Army produced a mistaken view that they were not subject to racist assumptions and that the French considered people of all races to be equal. Already pleased by their relative freedom to interact with civilians and receiving the same apparent treatment as other American soldiers created tremendous goodwill. Even within the division, white American officers often behaved in a racist fashion towards their men and especially fellow black officers. As a contrast to such treatment, African Americans generally expressed considerable praise for their treatment by French officers. A history of the regiments that served with the “Red Hand” division written by

⁹⁰ Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 289.

⁹¹ Keene, “Uneasy Alliances,” 27-28.

⁹² Keene, “French and American Racial Stereotypes during the First World War,” 277.

two of the regiments' veterans portrayed French officers as appalled at the racism of white American officers and otherwise praised the French for their racial attitudes while condemning American hypocrisy in fighting for democracy while denying it to its black citizens.⁹³

The courtesy and respect shown by the French to the 93rd Division was an important enough rhetorical point after the war that African American commentators ignored racist French views of Africans to propagate a narrative of France as a colour blind society.⁹⁴ Black doughboys enjoyed excellent relations and friendships with French soldiers who often treated them as brothers in arms.⁹⁵ Black officers had particularly strong friendships with French officers as white American officers often had little respect for their black peers.⁹⁶ For their service, the French rewarded African Americans with many citations and medals as well as considerable praise.⁹⁷ In fact, members of the 93rd Division were the first of the US Army to receive the *Croix de Guerre*.⁹⁸ The 93rd Division's members reciprocated those sentiments and were often very impressed with the French soldiers they fought with, even more so than other American soldiers were. As an example of the esteem for the French that they held,

⁹³ Monroe Mason, and Arthur Furr, *The American Negro Soldier with the Red Hand of France* (Boston: The Cornhill Company, 1920), 76, 98-99.

⁹⁴ Keene "French and American Racial Stereotypes during the First World War," 270-271.

⁹⁵ Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial*, 99, 106.

⁹⁶ Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 131-132.

⁹⁷ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 232-233.

⁹⁸ Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 118.

The French had awarded several to Americans volunteers in the French Army before the US entered the war.

some of the only American commanders who considered French forces superior to American ones were the commanders of the regiments of the 93rd Division.⁹⁹

The soldiers of the 93rd Division grew attached to their French colleagues with the members of the 371st and 372nd regiment described as having grown very proud of the “Red Hand” Division. On their return to US service at the war’s end, the Army forced the men to remove their insignia and the 371st regiment’s colonel noted that: “The men in the regiment were all very proud of the Red Hand and I remember that most of our officers and men hated to take it off.”¹⁰⁰ The other regiments also grew close to the French and took pride in the accomplishments of their own regiments and those of the divisions they fought with. As a symbol of the bond, the insignia of the reunited 93rd Division issued after the war was a French Adrian helmet that all the members of the division felt was a fitting symbol of their joint Franco-American service.¹⁰¹

The fact that American treatment of their black troops was repressive and unfair made many of those troops more comfortable dealing with French soldiers than their white countrymen. French stereotypes of black men were prevalent but African Americans rarely if ever noticed or remarked upon them. Because the treatment they received in France was so much better than in the United States, black Americans judged France through the lens of American racism and Jim Crow. As a result, they did not see French racism but focused on how little racial prejudice the French showed compared to Americans. They falsely saw France as colour blind because the American racial

⁹⁹ Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War*, 241.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

discrimination was so extreme.¹⁰² Because of the perceived relative lack of racism, the African American experience with the French military was very similar to that at the hands of civilians in that African American veterans consistently expressed strong positive impressions of the French.¹⁰³ The African American attraction to French society was so strong that many constructed it as a utopian counterpart to the United States.¹⁰⁴ On the occasions where African American soldiers interacted with French African colonial soldiers, the fact that France permitted black men to fight was interpreted a sign of French respect for her colonial subjects that the United States did not possess towards her own black population. Ely Green found American denial of the manhood of black soldiers due to a refusal to allow most of them to fight one of the most humiliating aspects of his service. When he saw a Senegalese soldier decorated with the *Croix de Guerre* and *Legion d'Honneur* and the apparent respect with which the French treated him he declared: "I hadnt[sic] ever been excited as I were today. I had witnessed what it meant to be a black man. I found myself thanking God that I am now a black man to the French flag."¹⁰⁵

Most African Americans wanted to prove themselves in combat as worthy of the rights and dignity white men received. Those black soldiers who did serve in combat expressed more pride at having done so than the average doughboy.¹⁰⁶ Because the French accorded their colonial troops the chance to fight, African Americans believed that the French had far more respect for the abilities and manhood of black men than the

¹⁰² Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 163.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 162

¹⁰⁴ Adriane Danette Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 153.

¹⁰⁵ Green, *Too Black, Too White*, 401.

¹⁰⁶ Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 166.

United States. A considerable number of black troops spent a great deal of time with French soldiers and due to the contrast in treatment by the American and French militaries, the friendship that many developed with the French was perhaps the most pronounced of the war. As with French civilians, the French military provided something of a refuge from American racism for African Americans who, for the most part, deeply respected the French and their abilities.

Some of the most outwardly evident French influence on American soldiers was in their lexicon. Americans used varied terms for the German with “Hun” and to a lesser degree “Fritz” and “Dutch,” but by far the favoured term was the French word: “Boche.” The term was so common that *Stars and Stripes* provided a humorous take on it as well as a pronunciation guide.¹⁰⁷ Other French words used were often specific military terms lacking in the US military or which the French had first taught them. Americans usually used the French abbreviation for command posts “PC,” short for *poste de commande*, for instance. Americans almost always used other terms such as *abris* and *camions* over English ones. Many Americans also picked up French sayings and terms. Especially popular was “*tout de suite*”, typically rendered in writing as “toot sweet” or some other spelling to mimic American pronunciation as well as the popular “*c’est la guerre*” for use as rhetorical punctuation when some misfortune was being described. Americans also anglicized French terms, such as adopting “cherch” for “*chercher*” and took to calling canned beef “monkey meat” as French soldiers did.¹⁰⁸ Wilson and Tooze explained how French terms spread through the AEF:

¹⁰⁷ “Bushes they are, then” *Stars and Stripes* Feb 15, 1918, page 1.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Lighter, “The Slang of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, 1917-1919,” 29, 80.

We learned to express time on the basis of twenty-four hours rather than twelve, although it took some mental calculation at first to decipher what was meant by an order to “move forward at fifteen o’clock.” At first we were also puzzled when asked, “Where is Regimental P.C.?” “P. C.” turned out to be the abbreviation for “Post of Command” and soon became such a necessary part of our vocabulary that we applied it to our billets and pup tents.¹⁰⁹

As Americans used French terms, they spread them through the AEF so that those who had not had much close contact with the French adopted them as well.

More than simply training and fighting beside them, the French influenced how Americans talked about the war and the enemy. That language not only allowed Americans to express their experiences but helped to form it. Rather than simply reflecting reality, language constructs the meaning people place upon their experiences as it is how individuals comprehend the world and give form to their consciousness.¹¹⁰ Americans, almost all of whom had never been in the military before, lacked the linguistic tools to express some of their wartime experiences and turned to the French soldiers they served beside as a source for those tools. Time with the French not only affected how Americans thought about the war, but how they conceptualized the conflict and aspects of their service. They thought about some parts of the war and the enemy in French terms, investing some of the French meaning into their own language while also adapting them to their own use and investing them with American concepts of what it meant to serve in the First World War.

The first major American battles

¹⁰⁹ Wilson and Tooze, *With the 364th Infantry*, 35.

¹¹⁰ Andrew August, “Narrative, Experience and Class: Nineteenth-century Social History in Light of the Linguistic Turn,” *History Compass* 9, Issue 5 (2011), 387-388.

May-June 1918 saw the first large scale employment of American forces in battle as massive offensives organised by German Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff pushed the Allies to employ American forces. The first American forces to see battle were the 1st and 2nd Divisions who were the best trained of those available. The first engagements provided widely different conclusions about the French and demonstrated the major doctrinal differences between both armies. Prior to May, just 163 Americans had died in combat as the AEF had undertaken no major combat operations.¹¹¹ In two weeks after May 28th, the AEF sustained many times that number of casualties and two very distinct and seemingly contradictory impressions of the French Army emerged among Americans: that of the helpful, competent ally; and that of the incompetent and cowardly force. The 1st Division first saw action at Cantigny.¹¹² As it was the AEF's first real battle, and the French provided a multitude of equipment to ensure success, including tanks, aircraft, considerable artillery, and specialist flamethrower troops as well as liaison officers to aid in communication.¹¹³ In addition, despite lip service to open warfare, the commander of the 1st Division, General Robert Bullard, integrated many of the French tactics he admired into his assault plan.¹¹⁴

Partly as a result of that support and partly due to American determination to make their first foray into battle a successful one, the AEF captured Cantigny after intense fighting. While American losses were heavy, those who took part expressed a great deal of praise for French assistance. French Artillery support received particular

¹¹¹ Smythe, *Pershing, General of the Armies*, 111.

¹¹² The battle of Cantigny was a relatively small battle involving the 28th Infantry Regiment against a small salient in the Allied line between Amiens and Compiègne held by a battalion of the German 18th Army. American forces captured the town in a rapid assault and held it against repeated German counter attacks. (Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 156-158).

¹¹³ Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms*, 199-200.

¹¹⁴ Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*, 227, 232.

praise before much of it had to be withdrawn to counter German advances elsewhere. Both American and French soldiers praised the qualities they believed the other possessed. For instance, a French tank commander praised American spirit and courage while a doughboy praised the skill and experience of French flamethrower detachments that assisted Americans.¹¹⁵ The French also showered American forces with praise and citations as they had demonstrated that they could engage and defeat the Germans on equal terms.¹¹⁶ As a result, the first significant American engagement of the war boosted American self-confidence as well as French and American confidence in each other's abilities.

The 2nd Division's first action days later earned similar praise for the French but bred ill feelings among many of the division's members. In the closing days of May, Ludendorff launched his third grand offensive on the Western Front and broke through the French 6th Army along the Chemin des Dames ridge.¹¹⁷ In his memoirs, Pershing used the success of the German attack as evidence that open warfare, which he claimed the Germans practiced, was superior to the trench warfare of the allies.¹¹⁸ The US 2nd Division, rushed forward to counter German advances and to cover the retreat of battered French divisions, made a stand near Château-Thierry. The 2nd Division went into position on French *camions* past refugee columns and lines of retreating French troops. French troops struck American forces as being demoralized and pessimistic,

¹¹⁵ Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 53-54.

¹¹⁶ Society of the First Division, *History of the First Division During the World War*, 76-88.

¹¹⁷ Known as the Third Battle of the Aisne, German forces launched a surprise attack on French and British forces holding the Chemin Des Dames ridge captured by the French the previous year. Inflicting severe casualties on Allied troops massed in forward trenches, the Germans made considerable advances in the closing days of May. (Liddell B. H. Hart, *The Real War, 1914-1918*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1930, 411-413).

¹¹⁸ Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol 2, 64.

many reported that the French felt the war was lost. Such sentiments did little to endear French soldiers to a 2nd Division, men confident of their own skills and convinced that they would defeat the Germans. Private Warren Jackson described how watching French soldiers retreat severely damaged the division's opinion of them:

Then there met us on the road that day French soldiers, worn-out, haggard, and dejected, retreating in disorder from the oncoming Germans. They reminded on more of hunted beasts than human beings. We had regarded an experienced French soldier as worth several Americans, and now they were retreating. It would not have been unnatural for the Americans to despair at this turn of affairs, but I do not recall on word of fear or other evidence of a desire to turn back.¹¹⁹

When the 2nd Division took up position, many offered negative evaluations of the French troops. They claimed the French ordered them to retreat but that Americans refused to comply.

The most famous statement expressing the contrast between American eagerness and French demoralisation was that of Marine Captain Lloyd Williams who rebuffed a French order to fall back by declaring: "Retreat, hell! We just got here."¹²⁰ Americans also offered indictments of the French rank and file with many claiming that those on their left were little in evidence or that they had outright retreated. Lieutenant Elliot Cooke expressed considerable disdain for the French:

We passed French soldiers going to the rear, on the roads and in the fields, the backwash of an army in retreat. Some turned their heads away, others saluted us disparagingly, while a few even shouted, "Fini la guerre," and waved for us to go back. They had small faith in our ability to stop the Germans. Well, we had plenty of doubts about theirs, too.¹²¹

The first interaction the 2nd Division had with the French in a large battle left many doubting their ability. Tales of exhausted and beaten French forces retreating appeared

¹¹⁹ Clark, *Devil Dogs Chronicle*, 146.

¹²⁰ Gutierrez, *Doughboys on the Great War*, 100-101.

¹²¹ James H. Hallas, *Doughboy War: The American Expeditionary Force in World War I* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 84-85.

throughout the AEF due to second hand accounts and word of mouth. Scenes of exhausted stragglers were common wherever a successful offensive occurred no matter the army, but inexperienced Americans were not used to such sights. Stories of French weakness in the face of the enemy proved popular because they enhanced American self-regard as the only force that could win the war.¹²²

The successful stand of the 2nd Division entered AEF and Marine Corps legend despite the fairly small scale of their involvement in battle. French divisions had fought determined delaying actions for days and the single day of fighting between German and American forces resulted in only 74 US deaths with only a single regiment engaged. Nevertheless, American depictions of the fight distorted events in what Edward Lengel called a “haze of self-serving braggadocio and propaganda” which allowed Americans to claim they alone had halted the Germans.¹²³ If Americans began to doubt French willingness to fight in quiet sectors, Château-Thierry confirmed that view for many. That the French had been fighting for years and had suffered a severe defeat days earlier did little to soften American criticism of their behaviour during the battle. It was French colonial and metropolitan forces who did most of the fighting around Château-Thierry with Americans in a supporting role but American reports greatly exaggerated that role in order to demonstrate that US forces had stood their ground.¹²⁴ No matter the reality, the image that emerged from Château-Thierry was that of stalwart Americans standing where the demoralized and beaten French had faltered. The belief that American morale and determination could prevail when French experience had failed was a central tenant

¹²² Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 66-67.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 89-94.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-73.

of open warfare doctrine and Château-Thierry was the first battle to which Americans could point as validation of that theory. Americans attempted to put that belief into greater practice in the days after Château-Thierry.

Fighting was not over for the 2nd Division who participated in a counter-attack at a location forever linked to the AEF and the Marine Corps: Belleau Wood. The battle, along with a smaller scale assault on the neighbouring town of Vaux, was mostly an American affair with a few French liaisons and advisors. The battle was the furthest American commanders had ever gone in trying to implement open warfare doctrines and it demonstrated the severe limitations of relying on the supposed unique qualities Americans brought to the war. There was perhaps no fully trained division in France in June 1918 as dedicated to open warfare as the 2nd Division.¹²⁵ The opinions of the division's commanding General James Harbord, the emphasis on aggression, and the fact that the French Army had been discredited in the eyes of many of the division's members made for a force eager to prove that aggression and rifle firepower could overcome where the French and British had not. Americans relied almost completely on infantry assaults when they conducted their first assault on Belleau Wood on June 6th. American plans were for a major infantry assault across open ground without a bombardment beforehand and without a creeping barrage to maximise infantry shock and firepower.¹²⁶ Brigadier General Albertus Catlin demonstrated the American

¹²⁵ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 200-201.

¹²⁶ Grotelueschen, *Doctrine Under Trial*, 36-37.

The creeping, or rolling, barrage involved artillery firing in front of advancing infantry in order to "screen" them. The timing of the barrage's advance depended on terrain and expected infantry progress. The purpose of the barrage was to suppress enemy infantry and machine gunners. (J. S. Finan and W. J. Hurley, "McNaughton and Canadian Operational Research at Vimy," *The Journal of the Operational Research Society* 48, no. 1 (1997): 10-11.)

emphasis on leading from the front despite French warnings and the dangers involved, as well as the close bond that could form between French and American officers:

Beside me stood Captain Tribot-Laspierre, that splendid fellow who stuck to me through thick and thin. He had been begging me to get back to a safer place, but I was obstinate and he never once thought of leaving me. When I fell he came out of his cover and rushed to my side. He is a little man and I am not, but he dragged me head first back to the shelter trench some twenty or twenty-five feet away. My life has been spared and I owe much to that Frenchman.¹²⁷

Many were not as fortunate as General Catlin and the initial assault failed with massive casualties, including many officers.

The costly failure of the first assault caused a re-evaluation of the American approach as the second assault on June 10 made much greater use of the artillery.¹²⁸

American infantry assaulted much more carefully and relied less on “dash” as described by John Thomason:

Combat groups of weary men, in drab and dirty uniforms, dressed approximately on a line, spaced “so that one shrapnel-burst cannot include more than one group,” laden like mules with gas-masks, bandoleers, grenades, chaut-chaut clips, trudging forward without haste and without excitement, they moved on an untidy wood where shells were breaking, a wood that did not answer back, or show an enemy.¹²⁹

The assault was much more successful in getting American into the Wood and overcoming the initial defences but heavy fighting continued for weeks. The lessons learned from the second assault were not fully absorbed until June 24th when a final assault making heavy use of artillery resembling a set piece attack emphasized in training by the French succeeded in taking the Wood. The battle for the Wood was successful but came at the cost of 8,000 casualties which represented about a third of the division’s strength, with many battalions suffering astronomically high losses. Given

¹²⁷ Albertus Wright Catlin, and Walter A. Dyer, *With the Help of God and a Few Marines*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1919), 118-119.

¹²⁸ Grotelueschen, *Doctrine Under Trial*, 40-41.

¹²⁹ Thomason, *Fix Bayonets*, 48.

the heavy casualties suffered, the 2nd Division altered its pure open warfare approach in its assault on Vaux. Launched after the capture of the Wood, the attack more closely resembled a trench warfare assault in which used extensive artillery preparation closely coordinated with the infantry assault.¹³⁰

The reaction of the French to Belleau Wood was enthusiastic but not entirely complimentary. Alden Brooks described the reaction of his French colleagues:

French opinion grew a little critical. Wonderful heroism, yes! But what were the Americans doing in those woods? Why take the woods, anyway? The woods once taken at a heavy sacrifice like this, there were other woods in the same fashion close behind. [...] Let those in the wood be withdrawn and the woods be subjected to a severe bombardment, and the rest would be easy.¹³¹

The assault, however, earned much praise for American courage and tenacity in the face of massive losses and very stiff resistance. French enthusiasm for Americans spiked after the battle with universal praise for the costly American victory.¹³² The French were particularly impressed by the Marine Brigade, renaming Belleau Wood the “*Bois de la Brigade de Marine*” in honour of the men who fought so hard for it. Americans, typically, only heard the praise and most who described French opinion expressed noted that it was always positive. That the French praised those aspects of American character, spirit, courage, and the determination that doughboys themselves emphasised helped to reinforce American self-image as effective, if inexperienced warriors. While American forces never again relied entirely on the aggression of their infantry to overcome all obstacles, future tactical developments always kept the idea of American aggression and fighting spirit at the forefront.

¹³⁰ Grotelueschen, *Doctrine Under Trial*, 42-50.

¹³¹ Brooks, *As I Saw It*, 169.

¹³² Kaspi, *Le temps des Américains*, 274-275, 293.

After Belleau Wood and Vaux, American forces found themselves once again under French command and preparing to meet a new German offensive. French armies integrated a number of American divisions much as they had in quiet sectors though they were no longer under their ally's official tutelage. The status of equal partners meant many American officers felt empowered to challenge French doctrines they considered incorrect and disagreements were common throughout June-July 1918. Issues of appropriate deployments were frequent points of contention. French official doctrine called for a defence in depth with a lightly held front line that allowed men to withdraw under heavy assault and reform with reinforcements at a subsequent defensive line. While there was no official American doctrine on the matter, most commanders preferred deployments that would allow US troops to engage German forces as quickly as possible and they were very resistant to the idea of withdrawing in the face of an enemy attack. When the French commanders issued order to hold defensive positions, French forces interpreted the order to mean a lightly held front line with a planned withdrawal to a secondary position while Americans interpreted it to mean holding the first trench line at all costs.¹³³ Some objected based believed that tactical withdrawals were impractical for inexperienced Americans. George C. Marshall, when discussing plans for such a tactical withdrawal strategy with a French officer, agreed that: "If it were possible of execution, this certainly would have been the most economical method of demoralizing the Germans in the earliest stages of their attack" but in practice it would be difficult to achieve for Americans in part because "we were somewhat inexperienced in this warfare".¹³⁴ Disagreements about deployments could reflect a lack

¹³³ Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 213-218.

¹³⁴ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 104.

of trust in the competence of the other army as was the case with a Colonel Ulysses Grant McAlexander and his regiment attached to the French 125th Division. As he deployed his men, he expected an attack from three sides as he lacked confidence in French forces on his flanks willingness to stand firm.¹³⁵ Not all American officers disagreed with French tactics and many were perfectly willing to implement French directives, particularly if they had a great deal of respect for the French general commanding them. The idea of withdrawing in the face on an attack, even to as part of a deliberate strategy, was not consistent with the values the US Army emphasised.

When the Germans launched their fifth offensive on July 14th, 1918 known as the Second Battle of the Marne, both Americans and Frenchmen fought together in considerable numbers. The German assault fell upon the French 4th and 6th Armies. While those were mostly French forces, considerable numbers of Americans were involved.¹³⁶ The offensive was a major German defeat as attacks against French and American troops of the 4th French Army failed within hours. German forces made some advances against the French 6th Army but French and American forces halted them at Château-Thierry. The American action at Château-Thierry involving the US 3rd Division resembled that of 2nd Division in May-June, and earned the 3rd Division the nickname “the rock of the Marne.” When French forces on US flanks withdrew to secondary positions when under German attack, Americans interpreted that action as a

¹³⁵ Eisenhower and Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 154-155.

¹³⁶ Unlike previous successful spring offensives, German forces lacked the element of surprise as Allied forces were aware of the time and date of the German attack from information gleaned from prisoners and deserters. A massive Franco-American barrage on German assault forces minutes before the German bombardment was to begin inflicted massive casualties and disrupted German plans. The German assault on the French 4th Army was a complete failure which nowhere penetrated the French main line of resistance. Attacks of the French 6th Army were more successful and advanced to Château-Thierry. A key part of the French strategy was to leave the front trenches mostly undefended and conduct a defence in depth which made German bombardment ineffective. The 6th Army’s less effective defence was a result of their failure to adhere to the defence in depth plans. (Hart, *The Real War*, 420-422).

French rout.¹³⁷ As with the first stand at Château-Thierry, some contrasted American resolve with French retreat. Corporal Edward Redcliffe told a fairly fanciful tale of the determination of Americans in the face of French defeat when he claimed that Château-Thierry turned the tide of the war: “despite the fact that the French of the 10th or 6th army had fallen back, their officers being shot by our men when they ordered them to retreat also.”¹³⁸ Prominent officers such as General Summerall promoted the idea that only the AEF had stood firm in face of a German assault by claiming in his memoir that: “On the night of July 14, the Germans crossed the Marne River, driving the French before them, and were advancing rapidly, with little opposition, on Paris.”¹³⁹ Even Americans such as Captain Jesse Woolridge who did not claim the French were in total retreat portrayed them as tired and shaken:

When the United States 3rd Division took up its position on the Marne the French were positively pitiful in their state of nervous tension. We were given orders to speak to French officers and men only in the most optimistic terms. They said, “We are war-worn and war-weary.” When asked, “Are you beaten?” almost invariably their God-given spirit responded, “Oh no, but we are very tired.”¹⁴⁰

While the Second Battle of the Marne was a major Allied victory in which the French played the largest part, the experiences of a number of US divisions contributed to the developing narrative of a vigorous American Army taking up the burden of defending France from an exhausted and weakened French Army.

As with previous instances where relatively untested American forces succeeded in battle, the French were quick to accord thanks, credit, praise, citations, and held grand ceremonies in their honour. Praise from the ranks of the French Army were also

¹³⁷ Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 229.

¹³⁸ Evans, *American Voices of World War I*, 94.

¹³⁹ Summerall, *The Way of Duty, Honor, Country*, 125.

¹⁴⁰ Hallas, *Doughboy War*, 100-101.

forthcoming as noted by Alden Brooks who wrote that, while there was some “headshaking” over 50 Senegalese *tirailleurs* killed by Americans in a friendly fire incident, the French felt that “They had the right stuff in them, these fellows. In fact, American stock all at once had jumped very height.”¹⁴¹ Victory also provided French and American soldiers opportunities to celebrate together with Hervey Allen described the spirit of camaraderie: “There was a spirit of rejoicing in the air, a consciousness that the German tide was on the ebb. ‘*Américains et français, bons camarades,*’ said one little soldier. I gave him a cigarette.”¹⁴² After Château-Thierry, both the French and American GHQs were convinced that the AEF could stand in the line of battle as equals. As a consequence, they would play a critical part for the remainder of the war. In addition, the battle provided many opportunities for the French and Americans to fight together and produced incidents doughboys could point to as tangible symbols of the friendship between themselves and the *poilus*. Lieutenant Robert Keene described on such incident and the effect it had on him:

An old Frenchman (he looked at least 50) in a tattered blue uniform was walking slowly down the road carrying on his back, towards the dressing station, a wounded American doughboy. Every time I have felt annoyed since then at France, this picture comes to mind and my anger softens.¹⁴³

Even if they found the French exhausted or too eager to retreat, Americans still valued them as comrades and shared sacrifice in battle further solidified the respect between them.

After the failure of the fifth German offensive, Allied command decided to launch a counter-offensive as quickly as possible around the town of Soissons to regain

¹⁴¹ Brooks, *As I Saw It*, 157.

¹⁴² Allen, *Toward the Flame*, 67.

¹⁴³ Hallas, *Doughboy War*, 116.

the initiative. The counteroffensive, known as the Aisne-Marne, lasted from July 18th to August 6th and included the battles of Soissons and the Vesle. These involved very close cooperation between French and American forces and conclusively demonstrated the need for doctrinal reform. The French, who contributed the majority of the forces, devised the battle plans and commanded the assault but included a considerable American contingent, often tasked with spearheading attacks.¹⁴⁴ American troops sent to the front were aware of the offensive's importance and the critical role they were to play in it. Americans considered their role in spearheading the attack of sign of French trust in their abilities. Raymond Austin of the 1st Division described the honour he felt at serving alongside the legendary 1st Moroccan Division which included the Foreign Legion:

After the capture of Cantigny, the First Division was rated as shock troops and for a while we belonged to the finest corps of the French army – the one containing the best Moroccan divisions and the Foreign Legion. It was considered a high compliment to this division to be chosen to open the big attack beside the very finest French troops.¹⁴⁵

The plans for the counteroffensive were in many ways an ideal fit with American doctrine as the assault's commander, General Charles Mangin, was renowned for his aggressive tactics. The objectives of the attacking divisions were unlimited rather than tightly controlled so that they were to advance as far as possible into German lines to destroy the salient around Soissons.¹⁴⁶ The lack of established defensive systems meant that assaults would strike a weakly entrenched enemy across open ground just as open warfare held to be the ideal situation in which to destroy enemy forces. Many Americans found that their training by the French had not prepared them for the battle.

¹⁴⁴ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 84.

¹⁴⁵ Evans, *American Voices of World War I*, 98-100.

¹⁴⁶ Grotelueschen, *Doctrine Under Trial*, 61.

Colonel Conrad Babcock explained for why he disliked the formation of assault in waves used at Soissons as it was poorly adapted to the combat his men faced:

It must be remembered that the French taught the First Division this attack formation. When the French prescribed it, they were thinking of an attack against an objective, possibly two or three hundred yards away, perhaps even less. In France, during the fortress warfare of 1915 to 1918 the assault battalions, support battalions and reserves jumped off from deep trenches. By the time the first wave (assault platoon) had reached the enemy firing trenches, into which they jumped, the second wave had emerged from their jump-off trench. Therefore, what with their own trench system and that of the enemy, the attackers were not all above ground at the same time; but when the final objective was a mile to several miles distant, this compact attack formation, led by skirmishers, resulted in great losses and maintaining direction became impossible.¹⁴⁷

When it came to actual attacks, Americans such as those in the 2nd Division often modified French taught formation to align more with their emphasis on rifle and automatic rifle firepower.¹⁴⁸ Soissons caused many Americans to question the value of their training at the hands of the French as they felt it had ill prepared them for battle outside a trench system.

During the battle itself, American forces interacted very closely with the French as both were intermixed quite freely with considerable French forces, including tanks and artillery, attached to American divisions. How American troops would see the military competence of their allies was very much in doubt on the eve of the counteroffensive. Some had worked well with the French in previous battles while others considered them to be inferior troops. As most of the American division then ready for battle fought at Soissons,¹⁴⁹ this event provided the largest portion yet of the AEF the opportunity to contrast themselves with the French. Some units that had

¹⁴⁷ Conrad S. Babcock, *Reminiscences of Conrad S. Babcock: The old U.S. Army and the new, 1898-1919*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 76.

¹⁴⁸ Thomason, *Fix Bayonets*, 14.

¹⁴⁹ Initially the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 26th divisions later reinforced by the 42nd, 32nd, and 28th divisions

previously disdained the French praised them in action at Soissons as was the case with a Marine lieutenant who was so impressed by the appearance and gallantry of the French cavalry he saw that he declared: “If spirits walk, Murat and Marshal Ney an’ all the Emperor’s cavalry are ridin’ with those fellows.”¹⁵⁰ The close contact between American and French forces allowed doughboys to more fully access what they thought of their ally. Those assessments were overwhelmingly positive. Generally, Americans had more respect for the French the longer they served together.¹⁵¹

As the counteroffensive was ultimately successful, most Americans praised French ability, courage, and skill. French colonial troops in particular made a strong impression on Americans even if descriptions of them were rife with racial stereotypes of “savage” Africans; no American denied that they were excellent fighters. The 1st Moroccan Division made such a strong impression on the 1st Division that one of the division’s officers, Edward Johnson, claimed they inspired his men to adopt their tactics:

it was by observation of the Moroccans in this action that the regiment learned the method of advance ordinarily utilized by European veterans, whereby the assault line, having lost the barrage, progressed steadily forward, individuals, under the eye of their squad leaders, moving at a run from shell-hole to shellhole. When stopped by resistance – usually a machine gun – the squad, section, or platoon engaged it by fire from the front, while flankers immediately worked around with rifles and grenades to take it from the flank. It was a common saying in the 1st Division that the Moroccans taught them how to fight.¹⁵²

French colonial forces earned much praise from Americans who saw them as embodying hard-fighting spirit and determination even if they were not “civilized” men.

When Americans compared themselves to French soldiers, they often rated themselves as better fighters although few ordinary doughboys denigrated the *poilu*’s

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 122-123.

¹⁵¹ Keene, *Doughboys*, 110.

¹⁵² Woodward. *The American Army and the First World War*, 288.

abilities. At Soissons and the Vesle, American troops tended to advance faster than the French located on their flanks as their assault tactics were more aggressive. The result was that they often took fire from the flanks and had to halt their own assaults to wait for the French to catch up.¹⁵³ Accounts of French forces failing to keep pace are ubiquitous in American descriptions all the battles in which they fought side by side. Not all such descriptions are reliable however, Edward Lengel extensively studied American tactical operations and concluded that American commanders frequently blamed the French for every setback and often refused to acknowledge French successes.¹⁵⁴ Even rank and file Americans often neglected to mention French contributions they did not directly witness in order to emphasize their own prowess in fighting the Germans. Americans often continued assaults and advances after the French halted to reorganise which resulted in very high casualties. Few American officers and men ever considered whether the French approach was better and insisted their own approach was the correct one.¹⁵⁵ Even though he did not serve in combat, Ferdinand Jelke had the same reaction to Soissons as many in comparing French and American spirit and determination, even if it came at a cost: “The flight has been stopped, thank God! for the moment, by the hardihood and intrepid bravery of the Americans. The French are inclined to save their men, but Americans threw themselves into the vortex of the fiery furnace and fought regardless of loss of life [...]”¹⁵⁶

As American forces tended to define military efficiency as the seizing of objectives rapidly, they defined their own forces as more efficient. In a survey after the

¹⁵³ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 260-261.

¹⁵⁴ Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 8-9.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 105-106, 257, 300.

¹⁵⁶ Jelke, *Letters from a Liaison Officer*, 89-90.

war on comparative military effectiveness, the largest proportion of American commanders evaluated their own men as more military efficient than the French. The second largest group believed their men were of equal efficiency to the French as the higher American casualties mitigated more rapid advances as a measure of effectiveness.¹⁵⁷ The emphasis on rapid advance as a measure of military efficiency reflected American attitudes about measuring individual ability against measurable standards. Mark Meigs studied the attitudes of doughboys and concluded that their ideas of the value of individual courage was infused with Progressive Era ideas that an individual could best find his identity by measuring it against a “scientifically” set standard and comparing his achievement against that of others in a larger society.¹⁵⁸ Territory gained and the speed at which they acquired it served as the measurable standard of how soldiers viewed themselves and their units in comparison with both the French and other American forces.

While many were willing to forgive slower French advances as the product of different tactics or war exhaustion, some bitterly resented French slowness on the battlefield. Colonel Babcock of the 28th Regiment expressed frustration with the French while boasting of his own unit’s ability despite superior French experience when he noted: “The French regiment to our left with its three war years and many conflicts could not keep up to the gallant 28th; and, in consequence, we suffered from the left flanking fire of the enemy from the jump-off to the last assault.”¹⁵⁹ Babcock had had difficulties with the French to his left earlier and found the French commander’s

¹⁵⁷ Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*, 2-3, 7-8.

¹⁵⁸ Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 44-45.

¹⁵⁹ Babcock, *Reminiscences of Conrad S. Babcock*, 83.

explanation of heavy casualties for not advancing unconvincing because: “He was no worse off than we were.”¹⁶⁰ By 1918, the French preferred to advance more slowly and by bounds to minimize casualties and as a result advanced more slowly than British or American forces.¹⁶¹ The only American unit to report very poor relations with the French in the after war survey, the 3rd Infantry Brigade of the 2nd Division, explicitly cited the French failure to keep up with as the reason for excessive American casualties and the cause of strained relations.¹⁶² Americans who fought beside the French usually praised them but they still defined aggression and rapid advances than more cautious attempts to reduce casualties.

Despite frustrations over failure to keep pace, American-French cooperation was ubiquitous at Soissons and the Vesle, with both coordinating their attacks, arranging for support in advancing, and adjusting their deployments as circumstances necessitated. Americans had often called upon French guns and aircraft and praised their effectiveness. Cooperation was not always ideal as many mistakes, translation errors, and communication troubles caused complications but these were common problems on all battlefields, especially the longer the battle lasted. Franco-American battlefield cooperation was poor as often as it was good due to communication and liaison problems as well as tension between American and French commanders.¹⁶³ Some American officers, especially generals and their staffs had very poor relations with their French commanders to the point where some openly contemplated disobeying orders. According to Pierpont Stackpole, the chief of staff of the US III Corps attempted to have

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 82

¹⁶¹ Liddell B. H. Hart, *The Real War, 1914-1918*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1930, 462-463.

¹⁶² Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*, 2.

¹⁶³ Lengel, *Thunder and Flames*, 8-9,

Americans forces disobey orders from the French 6th Army under whose command they were.¹⁶⁴ Commanders like General Summerall cast doubts on French abilities by questioning the number of prisoners captured by the French and falsely claiming that French divisions were not in battle as long as American ones.¹⁶⁵

There is little evidence that such problems filtered down to the lower ranks as cooperation at the regimental and battalion level was largely without serious disagreements between both armies. As Americans fought and died beside the French and relied on their support in battle, they had a very different perspective than generals frustrated with French senior commanders. The bonds formed in battle proved strong between members of both armies. The result of Franco-American cooperation was that while Americans tended to rate themselves the superior fighters, most had seen the French fight, shared victory with them, and had few doubts as to French abilities. Hervey Allen was quick to refute suggestions that there was animosity between the soldiers of both armies after the Aisne-Marne:

It is only just to add, in view of recent criticism, that all during this time our respect, liking and admiration for the French were unqualified. The good nature of the *poilu* is apparently inexhaustible, and the French officer is nearly always a gentleman, in all ordinary contacts at least, which is not so universally true in our army, unfortunately.¹⁶⁶

Even in affirming value of the attitude Americans brought to the war, doughboys often gave the French their due for having held the front so long and their underlying courage, even if hardship had worn off much of their energy. Members of an American ambulance unit that spent considerable time with the French, after giving considerable

¹⁶⁴ Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals*, 119-121.

¹⁶⁵ Summerall, *The Way of Duty, Honor, Country*, 126-128.

¹⁶⁶ Allen, *Toward the Flame*, 131-132.

praise to the *poilu*'s earlier efforts in resisting the Germans, claimed that American reinforcements and spirit served to revitalize the weary French:

after more than three years of what seemed an almost fruitless struggle, the *poilu* was weary, well-nigh unto death. [...] And then help came from across the seas. [...] The coming of these fellows-in-arms was for him the beginning of a new era. [...] Could he hold out until they should be able to shoulder their part of the burden? "Yes," said the *poilu*, and proved it a little later, during the critical period of the spring of 1918, when he fought with all his old courage and strength, fighting his best when the days were darkest. (And those days were dark, too.) There for the hundredth time the *poilu* was put to severest of tests, and for the hundredth time he surmounted an adverse fate.¹⁶⁷

The aggressive spirit which so many Americans, both officers and enlisted, identified as the key to being a proper soldier was not absent in the French, merely worn and dormant, ready for doughboys to awaken when they fought beside the *poilu* in the thinking of at least some Americans.

Tactical reform and the final battles of the AEF

For the Aisne-Marne counteroffensive, American forces overwhelmingly used open warfare tactics and relied upon aggressive infantry assault, though with more support weapons than at Belleau Wood. While this approach was relatively effective at Soissons where they made rapid advances, along the Vesle, American forces often ground down in costly assaults while making few gains in the face of much more determined resistance along rivers. The Aisne-Marne, which cost the AEF 50,000 casualties,¹⁶⁸ prompted changes in US tactics that blended open and trench warfare principles. The French were eager to offer advice as they had observed and critiqued

¹⁶⁷ Shively, *Record of S.S.U.* 585, 115-116.

¹⁶⁸ Grotelueschen, *Doctrine Under Trial*, 75.

Americans since they entered battle.¹⁶⁹ French criticism of American battle performance tended to centre on two main themes: lack of communications and tactical inflexibility.¹⁷⁰ The lack of communications usually referred to the lack of effective liaison with artillery and adjacent units. Many American descriptions of battle make mention of losing contact with neighbouring units, be they French or American, which prompted uneven advances and units bleeding into each other's assigned zones. The French also frequently criticized relatively sparse American artillery. This American lack of appreciation for artillery's power owed more to ideology rather than any deficiency in their artillery training. American forces also suffered from a relative lack of firepower as a US division was more than twice the size of a French one but had proportionately fewer guns.¹⁷¹ General Summerall, who commanded the 1st Division at the Aisne-Marne, made similar critiques of American tactics when he stated that:

Our heavy losses were directly due to our lack of sufficient artillery to neutralize the enemy, as I had warned the staff in Paris. Those men really knew nothing about firepower in battle or the meaning of artillery. Corresponding results from insufficient artillery occurred in every battle.¹⁷²

French criticism of American infantry was that its performance in battle, while gallant, displayed many of the features of an inexperienced and inflexible force. Most frequent was the observation that Americans attacked in far too dense a formation which led to excessive casualties from machine guns and artillery.¹⁷³ Pétain himself communicated that complaint to American commanders and urged them to be more

¹⁶⁹ Keene, "Uneasy Alliances," 18.

¹⁷⁰ Extracts from the Reports of the Operations of the American Troops in France (May to August 1918), French High Commission in the United States, October 7th, 1918. Box 181, Entry 310, RG 165, NARA.

¹⁷¹ Reilly, *Americans All*, 522.

¹⁷² Summerall, *The Way of Duty, Honor, Country*, 132.

¹⁷³ Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 92-93.

economical in the use of their men.¹⁷⁴ In effect, the French and some American officers objected to a strategy that placed high American morale and determination ahead of the more technical aspects of battle the French emphasised. Officers like Marshall believed such critiques fundamentally misunderstood American identity and skills as soldiers:

The French commander and his staff endeavored to handle the American units after the same fashion as their own. Small and complicated maneuvers, with frequent pauses, was the method pursued, which was not well adapted to the temperament and characteristics of the American soldiers. Our men gave better results when employed in a ‘steamroller’ operation, that is, when launched in an attack with distant objectives and held continuously to their task without rest or reorganization until unfit for further fighting. Their morale suffered from delays under fire, their spirits were best maintained by continued aggressive action, even though the men themselves were approaching the point of complete exhaustion.¹⁷⁵

Rather than a mark of inexperience, Marshall and those who held similar opinions believed that American doctrine should derive from American values which were very different than those of the French.

Fully training Americans forces in French tactics was not unheard of as the French reorganized the 93rd Division so as to better integrate it into French doctrine.¹⁷⁶ The 369th Regiment especially impressed the French to the point where one French officer said he saw the potential to make it equal to any of their first rate regiments.¹⁷⁷ Despite claims that Americans could not quickly learn them, the 369th Regiment made skilled use of French tactics at the Second Battle of the Marne and repelled all German attacks that came against it.¹⁷⁸ Despite that, the AEF staff tended to blame high

¹⁷⁴ Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals*, 117.

¹⁷⁵ Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918*, 179.

¹⁷⁶ Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War*, 36.

The reorganisation converted some to rifle companies to machine gun companies and using the “extra” men to create a replacement (or depot) force charged with training replacements and providing specialised training. (Heywood, *Negro Combat Troops in the World War*, 36).

¹⁷⁷ Memo on Training in France of 369th Infantry, April 29th, 1918. Box 1385, file no. 15700 to 15716, RG 120, NARA.

¹⁷⁸ Roberts, *The American Foreign Legion*, 112-114.

American casualties on French generals who commanded US troops than on defective doctrine or inexperience.¹⁷⁹ American insistence of aggression was a deliberate choice based on a conception of the American soldier.

The AEF used aggressive methods to ensure that their conception of the strengths of their men remained dominant in the face of questions. Despite extensive training with the French and visits to the front, few Americans openly questioned the doctrine of open warfare or suggested trench warfare methods because Pershing and his staff suppressed such sentiments. The AEF enforced the idea of open warfare zealously and any officer who was thought to call it into question risked dismissal at the hands of efficiency boards that treated such doctrinal questioning as making an officer unfit for duty. Such was the case with General William Sibert who originally commanded the 1st Division before Pershing dismissed him, effectively for being too quick to adopt the French tactical viewpoint.¹⁸⁰ That and similar dismissals had a chilling effect in the AEF where no officer dared champion trench warfare as anything other than a temporary doctrine needed to break into open warfare.¹⁸¹ By insisting doctrinal purity was linked with basic competence, the AEF made a claim that attempts to make the US Army more similar to the French was a dereliction of duty. Some officers were too extreme and expressed open hostility for their ally. This was the case with Colonel McAlexander of the 38th Infantry Regiment, 28th Division, who refused to take any advice from the French to the point where he was a liability and dismissed. His replacement, Colonel

¹⁷⁹ Adas, "Ambivalent Ally," 708.

¹⁸⁰ Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall, Vol. 1, Education of a General, 1880-1939* (New York: Viking, 1963), 129.

¹⁸¹ Joseph Douglas Lawrence, *Fighting Soldier: The AEF in 1918*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (Boulder, Colo.: Colorado Associated University Press, 1985), 48.

Parker, had a much more favourable disposition to the French as he was a graduate of the *École de Guerre* and had been an observer with the French Army before the War.¹⁸²

While open hostility was discouraged, American officers who wished to implement French methods had to do so subtly. Sibert's replacement, General Robert Bullard, trained his division to integrate many of the lessons taught by the French even if they contradicted American ones.¹⁸³ Some officers like General Summerall who replaced Bullard after his promotion, drew considerable influence from French ideas even if their opinions about the French's will to fight were less flattering. Many officers below flag level who interacted closely with the French were also quick to integrate similar lessons. Colonel Babcock, who had expressed frustration at the lack of French aggression, nevertheless trained his regiment in methods similar to those used by the French at Soissons.¹⁸⁴ Other officers insisted that their men use the weapons provided by the French to the utmost. AEF tactical doctrine development typically changed from the bottom with the innovations of junior officers working their way up the chain of command.¹⁸⁵ Some of those officers were willing to make use of French equipment and learn from them but remained committed to ideas of exceptional American energy and courage.

American command sought to retain an aggressive open warfare doctrine even if they recognized that their previous attempts to do so had been excessively costly. Attempts to adapt open warfare to battlefield realities included making attempts to

¹⁸² Millet, *The General*, 334-335.

¹⁸³ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 65-66.

¹⁸⁴ Babcock, *Reminiscences of Conrad S. Babcock*, 111.

¹⁸⁵ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 58.

replicate German storm trooper tactics.¹⁸⁶ Training memos sent out from the AEF which emphasized the need for more flexibility and to assault indirectly still placed strong insistence on infantry marksmanship, aggression, and repeated the need for a “self-reliant” infantry while relegating trench to trench assault to a complete afterthought.¹⁸⁷ As tactical innovations did not spread through the training system quickly enough to affect new divisions arriving in France, inexperienced US forces often relied on “steamroller” tactics similar to those employed at the Aisne-Marne. Divisions that arrived in the Summer-Fall of 1918 did not have the time to benefit from bottom up tactical adaptation.¹⁸⁸ The more experienced divisions of the AEF largely drove tactical innovation on their own drawing on their experience and that of their allies. The 1st Division was especially active in developing a more firepower based approach and the division was one in which French training influence was especially strong. Even the 2nd Division which initially had one of the lowest opinions of French abilities adopted firepower based tactics with the division’s new commander, John Lejeune, insisting his force learn to use weapons introduced by the French and improve artillery accuracy and coordination.¹⁸⁹ New divisions arriving in summer 1918 were seldom aware that their training was inadequate and so continued to replicate the problems both the American and French militaries identified. The final phase of the war saw more experienced Americans combine the sense of aggression emphasised by their command with some of the innovations they learned by serving alongside the French.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 44-46.

¹⁸⁷ Training Memo signed by General Pershing, August 5th, 1918. Box 181, Entry 310, RG 165, NARA.

¹⁸⁸ Faulkner, *The School of Hard Knocks*, 274-275.

¹⁸⁹ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 59-60, 200-201, 238-239.

After major fighting along the Vesle ceased, Allied high command implemented the promise made to Pershing at a military conference in Abbeville in May, 1918 and allowed the US to form the First American Army. Rather than serve as individual divisions under the command of foreign generals, Americans were under the full command of their own officers and army who planned and conducted their own operations.¹⁹⁰ American armies conducted two major battles in which Americans made up the majority of forces: Saint-Mihiel¹⁹¹ and the Meuse-Argonne¹⁹² but they included considerable numbers of French troops. While most of the French forces attached to US armies were artillerymen, aircrew, liaison officers, and communication personnel as the AEF was still lacking in those branches, a number of French combat divisions served under American command. In addition, for the Meuse-Argonne American forces were to coordinate with the French 4th Army on their left. The AEF conducted the attack on Saint-Mihiel mostly along the lines of open warfare doctrine but included much more substantial artillery support than initial American thinking had considered necessary. The 2nd Division made more extensive and effective use of heavy artillery than in previous battles.¹⁹³ Owing to overwhelming numerical advantage¹⁹⁴ and the element of

¹⁹⁰ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 262-264.

¹⁹¹ Saint-Mihiel, which gave its name to a significant salient in French lines, was the first target of the independent American Army. Approximately 20 kilometres southeast of Verdun, the French made several unsuccessful attempts to eliminate the salient in 1914-1915. The salient's position allowed German artillery to enfilade French positions at Verdun and cut a major rail line that would have made supplying the French positions there much easier. While no major combat had occurred since 1915, the salient's elimination remained a major Allied objective as a precondition to a more general assault on the Western Front. (Hart, *The Real War*, 452-457).

¹⁹² Part of the massive simultaneous concentric offensives on German forces which known as the Hundred Days Offensive, the Meuse-Argonne was a joint assault by the American 1st and French 4th Armies on German positions north of Verdun. The offensive's main objective was to sever German rail lines from Metz which American command hoped would force the Germans to evacuate France even if other Allied offensives failed to drive them out. The battle remains the bloodiest in American history with over 120,000 American casualties including over 25,000 dead. (Hart, *The Real War*, 461-462; Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 299).

¹⁹³ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 245.

surprise, Americans achieved a rapid victory at Saint-Mihiel and eliminated the salient at the cost of 7,000 men, well below the casualty level of the 2nd Division at Belleau Wood. The success of the battle served as a vindication for open warfare in the eyes of Pershing and his staff. The victory masked the AEF's main problems at Saint-Mihiel: communication breakdown which often made for poor artillery-infantry cooperation after the initial assault and a lack of command and control.¹⁹⁵ Attempts to replicate those rapid advances at the Meuse-Argonne against a far better defended German position combined with pre-existing AEF problems made for a more difficult and bloody battle that forced many commanders to innovate in the field, sometimes relying on French advice.

The AEF plan of battle at the Meuse-Argonne called for a rapid assault on the enemy positions to break through the German defensive lines before they could deploy reserves and make a stand in their heavy fortifications.¹⁹⁶ As American forces entered entirely new sectors, they relied on the French for information on terrain and enemy defences. As the short time allotted precluded Americans from deeply familiarizing themselves with the region, French guides stayed with American forces to direct American troops to their jump-off points. Those Americans privy to the exchanges acknowledged how important briefings, maps, and guides were in allowing their forces to situate themselves. Most US division slated to assault on the first day were

¹⁹⁴ The US deployed nearly 550,000 men at Saint-Mihiel with the US 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 26th, 42nd, 78th, 82nd, 89th, and 90th division initially deployed and the 35th, 80th, and 91st in reserve.

¹⁹⁵ Trask, *The AEF and Coalition Warmaking*, 113-114.

¹⁹⁶ While defences at Saint-Mihiel were a state of severe disrepair due to years of neglect, those at the Meuse-Argonne were well maintained and formidable. German defences consisted of four lines of the fortification, the most formidable of which was the *Kriemhilde Stellung*, also known as the Hindenburg Line. Significant barbed wire obstruction, concrete bunkers, and other fortifications as well as the region's difficult terrain made the German position extremely formidable. (Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 300).

inexperienced recent arrivals in France that lacked the tactical innovation and experience possessed by more veteran divisions.¹⁹⁷ Initial American assaults were remarkably successful with a number a major objectives seized, but they failed to achieve the hoped for breakthrough.¹⁹⁸ American assaults ground to a halt after a few days in the face of mounting resistance as inexperienced troops became exhausted and were repelled in many places. The Meuse-Argonne was launched on September 26th and by early October American assaults had stalled and the battle came to resemble a trench warfare stalemate with much of the month consumed by costly assaults to gain small amounts of ground. As similar forms of trench warfare was precisely what the French had attempted to train them for, several US officers looked to the French troops attached to them for methods to break the stalemate. After initial assaults had stalled, the AEF sent more experienced US divisions into the line. Those divisions were often more willing to take French advice when planning operations at all levels.

The nature of Franco-American cooperation could be as minor as tactical advice between soldiers as was the case when an officer of the French 4th Army advised marines on how to seize a position at Mont Blanc:

Courteous and suave, although he swayed on his feet from weariness and his eyelids drooped from loss of sleep, the Frenchman summed up the situation for the Marine captain. "We hold this fire trench. In your sector are four communication trenches running to the Essen work, which is about a hundred metres distant. We hold most of the boyau on the extreme right; the others we have barricaded. You cannot take this Essen trench by frontal assault!" [...] You can only get forward by bombing you way in the boyaux.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ 23 American divisions, nearly every US combat division in France, fought at the Meuse-Argonne. US divisions on the first day of the battle consisted of the 3rd, 4th, 28th, 32nd, 33rd, 35th, 37th, 77th, 79th, 80th, 91st, and 92nd divisions with the 1st, 29th, and 82nd in reserve.

¹⁹⁸ Eisenhower and Eisenhower, *Yanks*, 223.

¹⁹⁹ Thomason, *Fix Bayonets*, 148-150.

While the marines did not unquestioningly follow the advice offered, they kept it in mind when planning their own assault. The 2nd Division was initially very resistant to French ideas, but had learned somewhat from past mistakes and devised a battle plan for Mont Blanc that more resembled those the French used rather than one US doctrine advocated.²⁰⁰ Despite such plans and seeking French advice, the 2nd Division still used very aggressive tactics so that their capture of the Mont Blanc was the bloodiest day of the war for them.²⁰¹ The French also advised Americans at the command level as in the case of the 33rd Division which adopted a battle plan recommended by their French liaison officer in order to seize one of their objectives.²⁰² Rather than always assume Americans plans and approaches were the best, time with the French Army formed a respect for their abilities so that Americans sought out and listened to their advice even if it did not always prevail. Many doughboys put great faith in the French troops supporting them with some going as far as to claim they preferred the assistance of French artillery as it was more reliable.²⁰³

Such cooperation was not universal as some other American commanders categorically refused to take any advice from the French. Alden Brooks believed those Americans who refused French advice did so because: “This was to be an American offensive, *the* American offensive, and there was no need for the French to put their say in at all.”²⁰⁴ Americans still wished to conduct the battle their own way in order to prove themselves as an army as well as soldiers. Some officers used cooperation with the

²⁰⁰ Woodward, *The American Army and the First World War*, 344-345.

²⁰¹ Farwell, *Over There*, 249.

²⁰² Frederic Louis Huidekoper, *Illinois in the World War: The History of the 33rd Division, A.E.F.* vol. 1 (Springfield, Ill: Illinois State Historical Library, 1921), 62, 329-330.

²⁰³ Keene, *Doughboys*, 42-43.

²⁰⁴ Brooks, *As I Saw It*, 247-248.

French to avoid or to modify American orders they found unwise. Such was the case with General Hunter Liggett, commanding the US I Corps. Finding Pershing's timetable unreasonable, he negotiated with French General Gouraud on when to launch a combined attack and in doing so, was able to justify the delay he needed by citing the need for the French to prepare.²⁰⁵ Liggett was very open to French ideas, even if they did not conform to American doctrine such as in one case at the Meuse-Argonne when:

French VII Corps General Claudel said his preparations were complete for an operation on the high ground on the twenty-second, a heavy artillery concentration preceding a lively attack, with limited objective – old sector warfare style. General Liggett approved of the plans exhibited.²⁰⁶

The decisive breakthrough achieved on the Meuse-Argonne in late October owed much to adopting an artillery-based and meticulously planned assault not unlike those emphasised by the French while still giving the aggressive infantryman a prominent place.

Conclusion

Despite any lessons learned from the French, doughboys never abandoned the faith they placed in their own ability to advance aggressively under fire despite losses. Indeed, they defined the willpower and determination to do so as a fundamentally American contribution that ended the war once the British and French lost such vigour. Historians who examined American attitudes about their service such as Gutierrez, Keene, Meigs, and Kennedy all attested to the unusually positive and optimistic outlook American veterans had about their service compared to their European counterparts. American accounts of the war exuded romantic imagery about crusades, knights errant,

²⁰⁵ Liggett, *Commanding an American Army*, 103-104.

²⁰⁶ Stackpole, *In the Company of Generals*, 177.

grand adventure, and feats of valour that rarely gave way to weariness and resignation present in the memoirs of Europeans; even the postwar US literature of disillusionment derived much more from traditional American resentment of authority rather than denouncing the violence of war itself.²⁰⁷ The American experience in the war was very different from that of European powers due to their relatively brief involvement and the fact that they did not experience much of the extended trench warfare that characterised most of the Western Front. The American war record consisted mostly of victories, large and small, and coincided with a shift fighting on relatively more open and fluid battlefields as successful offensives often removed battles from established trench systems. This gave Americans the impression that their arrival at the front had changed the nature of the war and not even more traditional trench warfare along the Vesle and the Meuse-Argonne changed that impression.²⁰⁸ This impression convinced many that the courage, resourcefulness, and aggression of the American soldier won the First World War just as it routed the Spanish at San Juan Hill. As a result, Americans valued “active” battlefield skills as they believed it required more skill, wits, and bravery and saw the war as a chance to prove their physical courage in the attack rather than passively holding trenches which did not constitute an adequate test of their skill in the minds of doughboys.²⁰⁹ Americans delighted in telling tales of their own ferocity, even if those tales were fanciful claims of castrating and killing prisoners or appropriated from Allied armies. This led Jennifer Keene to conclude that that war reinforced the emphasis on aggression taught to them.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 212-214, 224.

²⁰⁸ Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 39-42.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 58, 64.

²¹⁰ Keene, *Doughboys*, 50.

Americans constructed their image as soldiers as bold and aggressive who had effectively turned the tide of the war and brought American vigour and valour to a weakened France. The French may have been skilled, brave, and good friends in most battles who may have provided valuable advice but for doughboys, they still lacked America's New World energy and spirit that won the war and would guide America to further heights in peace. American experiences in the war and their observation of their allies convinced them that it had been the United States and their methods which had won the war and conquered not only the Germans but the trenches that had worn down the Germans, French, and British. American veterans would later come to feel betrayed by their government and disillusioned with the world the war created, but the war itself mostly reinforced American self-perception as the most dynamic and innovative of nations powered by a remarkable spirit compared to an Old World which needed an injection of American vitality no matter any other virtues it might have.

CONCLUSION

The Armistice on November 11th, 1918 and the collapse of the German monarchy put an end to the fighting for doughboys but it did not mean an end to life in the Army. This came as a shock to Americans who believed they would return home once they had helped to end the war. Americans began expressing great eagerness for the war to be over so they could leave throughout the autumn of 1918.¹ Yet soldiers learned that they would not leave Europe as quickly as they had hoped. Hundreds of thousands of Americans were sent to occupy a section of Germany near Coblenz as a bridgehead on the Rhine, but even those soldiers who were not given new orders could not return immediately as much of the shipping that had been used to transport the AEF to France returned to civilian use. Only 26,000 of the two million Americans in Europe returned home by November 1918 on the basis of little more than luck. Most doughboys remained in Europe until the summer of 1919, with 40,000 in France and 240,000 in Germany in August 1919. The last Americans did not leave Germany until 1923.² For doughboys, those months in France or Germany meant all the tedium of drills and stifling Army regulations without the justification that such restrictions were necessary in order to win the war. A crisis of morale developed as the men of the AEF eagerly awaited their opportunity to return home despite Army attempts to ease boredom with sports and education programs.³ The shift from wartime to peacetime meant a dramatic shift in the American relationship with the French.

¹ Keene, *Doughboys*, 111.

² Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 69-70.

³ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 358-359.

The Franco-American relationship suffered a sudden and surprising deterioration in the immediate aftermath of the war. Peace changed the context of the way Americans and Frenchmen interacted. Rather than being allies in a war that threatened to destroy France, the two were victors presiding over a beaten foe. The most immediate consequence that soured American friendship with the French was the argument over to who had a greater claim to the laurels of victory. Americans believed that their contribution to the war was by far the most decisive and that they deserved full credit for defeating Germany. A report by the American GHQ reinforced that perception not only by exaggerating the US contribution to victory but by ignoring much of the Allied assistance the AEF received and categorizing British and French forces as nearly passive in the final months of the war.⁴ Doughboys may not have agreed with that extreme but they echoed the sentiment that they were first and foremost the ones who defeated Germany. The French, naturally, strongly disagreed with that assertion. French authorities had heavily praised US efforts during the war to the point of exaggerating American contributions to various battles but now that the war was over, the French resented American attempts appropriate the entirety of the credit for winning the war. Given this environment, Americans were watchful of any slight, real or perceived, by the French that minimized American contributions. When the Allied supreme commander, French Marshal Ferdinand Foch, reduced the size of the American occupation zone in Germany and redistributed it to French troops, doughboys widely interpreted it as an attempt to deny them proper credit and rob them of an opportunity to march into Germany as victors.⁵ When Americans did arrive in Germany, their

⁴ Keene, *Doughboys*, 118.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

opportunities to interact with the Germans also cast the French in a very unfavourable light in American minds.

Americans held fundamentally different views about Germans and their responsibility for the war from the French and those differences created tensions. Few Americans knew anything about France prior to the war but the same was not true of Germany. A sizeable German minority existed in the United States since major German immigration in the 1850s and many non-German Americans respected them for their productivity, ingenuity, and industriousness. Germany itself also earned considerable respect and admiration in the United States before the war for its ability to become a first rate industrial power after unification in 1871.⁶ American propaganda did demonize Germans and Germany during the war but the men of the AEF were very eager to reconcile with the Germans and quickly befriended civilians and German prisoners. Doughboys seemed to blame German leaders, notably the Kaiser, for the war rather than the German people themselves. American soldiers believed their role was to install a democracy that would make the Germans peaceful and then leave. German officials and the population encouraged this belief by claiming that they wanted a new Constitution in the mold of the American one. They even suggested that the American presence inspired the population to vote in the national and regional elections in 1919 for the National Assembly that would draft the new Germany parliamentary constitution, correctly wagering Americans would not know Germany had had an elected Parliament since 1871.⁷ Unlike the French, the German population and veterans were also happy to confirm American beliefs that they had won the war and never challenged the belief that

⁶ Ibid., 111-112, 117.

⁷ Ibid., 113, 117, 122-123.

it was the AEF that destroyed the German will to fight.⁸ German authorities' confirmation of American beliefs brought doughboys into direct conflict with French perceptions of the war and subsequent peace. For the French, the goal of any peace settlement was not to make Germany more democratic, but rather to secure future French safety and exact revenge. They often critiqued American "naiveté" in believing German flattery and feared a lax American attitude towards Germans would allow them to plan a new war unpunished.⁹ Americans identified average Germans with American values, work ethic, democratic ethos, and as a source of validation for their wartime narratives when the French ceased to do so.

The material conditions of Germans also strongly influenced Americans and caused resentment of the French. Germans gave doughboys a surprisingly warm welcome and provided them good meals and comfortable beds in civilian houses at reasonable prices. Prosperous German towns and a countryside unspoiled by war also contrasted favourably with the often poor and war-ravaged French villages many had been billeted.¹⁰ Americans also felt German towns were cleaner and that the German lifestyle more closely resembled that to which Americans were accustomed.¹¹ Since most of the major complaints Americans had against French civilians were absent among Germans, doughboys quickly befriended locals and re-evaluated how generous the French had really been towards them. Americans routinely ignored AEF directives to avoid fraternizing with German civilians and the situation so worried American and French high command that they imposed stricter rules against fraternization and allowed

⁸ Ibid., 121.

⁹ Ibid., 117, 121.

¹⁰ Ibid., 120-121.

¹¹ Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*, 19-21.

doughboys to visit French resort towns in order to rekindle their love of France. The French government also issued a large number of *Croix de Guerre* medals to Americans to reinforce that France did in fact appreciate US contributions to the war.¹² Despite these measures, Americans continued to hold Germans in high esteem. Americans often found French behaviour towards occupied Germans to be overly harsh and rumours of French abuses spread through AEF ranks further turning American opinion against the French.¹³ Americans wished to act as gracious victors towards a people they have quickly grown fond of, that the French did not call French character into question for the men of the AEF.

For those Americans who remained in France eagerly waiting to return to the United States, complaints about the French became ever more bitter. Prices in France remained high, especially compared to those in Germany and false rumors of French greed and perfidy spread throughout the AEF. Some doughboys believed that France was extorting massive payments from the US government for use of land and military facilities.¹⁴ Americans had always resented French price gouging, but after the war, they could no longer explain it through wartime desperation.

To combat this growing unrest, the AEF accorded much more generous and frequent leave to its men after December 1918, and hundreds of thousands of doughboys took advantage of those opportunities. American drinking and disregard for locals were always at their worst when they were on leave, and the sudden and massive increase in the number of soldiers on leave caused incidents of disruptive and violent behavior to

¹² Keene, *Doughboys*, 125.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

multiply. Reports of property damage caused by Americans, especially broken café windows increased and peaked in spring 1919. As Americans spread out through France in greater numbers, they caused major price increases by eating through local food supplies and disrupted French lives.¹⁵ This provoked major resentment and hostility from the French who were no longer willing to endure American excesses in the name of victory now that those excesses became more frequent and France had no further need of American presence.

Previously positive French opinion towards Americans quickly disappeared after the Armistice due to American arrogance regarding their role in the war and their tendency to drive up prices beyond the ability of locals to pay.¹⁶ Tensions that had been present during the war came to the forefront in the aftermath though Franco-American relations did somewhat stabilize and improve in the early months of 1919 as both sides adjusted to peace.¹⁷ However, Americans never fully recovered their sense of friendship and solidarity with the French between the end of the war and their departure to the United States. American veterans often opposed continued American military and economic support for France once they returned to the United States, a position contemporary observers attributed to the tense state of Franco-American relations in the months following the Armistice.¹⁸ Once the war was over and the AEF's task complete, both Americans and Frenchmen felt it was time to part.

¹⁵ Meigs, *Optimism at Armageddon*, 76-79.

¹⁶ Goddard, *A Study of the Anglo-American and Franco-American Relations During World War I, Part II*, 6-7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18-21.

¹⁸ Keene, *Doughboys*, 126.

Most Americans went to France confident in their own abilities and the virtues of their society. Their experiences in the country largely reinforced those perceptions and generated an intense pride in their service. American wartime experience, while filled with its share of terror and misery, did not totally disillusion doughboys the same way it did for so many other combatants. Experiences with French civilians and military personnel proved an initially disorienting experience but once they settled into regular patterns of army life and entered the battlefields of Europe, doughboys used the behaviour and conditions of the French to give meaning to their own service and assess the value of American society. For white Americans, that meant confirming what they had long believed: that the United States was unique among nations and the progressive light to the world. Americans certainly came to admire and respect much about the French and form personal friendships with them but it was a respect that never questioned the American way of life and doing things. French villages could be idyllic refuges from the stresses of the modern world but they were still fundamentally unattractive to most Americans as a permanent way of life specifically because they seemed so disconnected the machinery of modernity and the scientific rationalism so prized in the United States. Americans were also happy to pursue French women and saw them as an escape from the tedium of Army life but they didn't necessarily respect those women compared to American ones. American experiences strongly contributed to the stereotype of French women as lascivious and sexually predatory, for instance.¹⁹ Those stereotypes had existed before the war but it was another example of Americans

¹⁹ Alan S. Rosenthal, "The Gender-Coded Stereotype: An American Perception of France and the French," *The French Review* 72, No. 5 (1999): 901.

using their experiences in order to draw a contrast between their own virtuous society and the less virtuous one of France, reinforcing common American mentalities.

In their own minds, Americans ended the war by contributing what the powers of Europe were no longer capable of doing for themselves. The Europeans, and the French in particular, still had lessons to offer an inexperienced force but Americans largely tried to adapt European technical skill unto American attitudes and methods of war. The US Army adopted a similar outlook after the war where official Army boards charged with modifying American doctrine in light of lessons learned during the war opted to retain the idea of the infantry as the decisive arm of battle but integrated greater firepower in the form of more automatic weaponry, light artillery, and tanks.²⁰ This represented a median between open and trench warfare that also effectively encapsulated the American experience of the war where the US Army and its soldiers realized it needed to learn from its allies but insisted on the primacy of their own fundamentally American methods that derived from their own virtues as a people.

African Americans had a far different experience in France and learned different lessons from the war. Coming from a deeply racist society within a highly discriminatory US military meant that they experienced abuse and degradation within the AEF. France and the French represented an outlet from those negative experiences. Experiencing a society that most interpreted as racially egalitarian convinced many that their own goals of equal treatment in the United States was possible. The unprecedented freedom and respect they received from the French delighted African American doughboys and inspired many to make their own society more like the one they believed

²⁰ Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, 352.

France possessed. African American veterans used their wartime experiences as a foundation for sustained commitment to a fight for freedom and civil rights.²¹ Those veterans formed a core part of the movement for greater civil rights in the decades after the First World War.²²

The American relationship with the French was unique as Americans were not nearly as eager to form positive relationships with their other main ally in the war. Many of the contrasts Americans drew with the French could also have applied to the British, yet Americans found it much harder to get along with the British than they did with the French. At first glance, there was little reason why this should be the case. Americans spent little time with British civilians and rarely mentioned them so that any “rustic” or “backwards” habits like those of the French could not antagonize doughboys. Americans faced minimal language barriers with the British and the two had far more shared culture than France and the United States. The British mentality towards fighting also better aligned with American priorities as the British trained the few US divisions under their tutelage, such as the 27th and 30th Divisions, with an emphasis on aggressive fighting with the bayonet. The British offered many of the same criticism of American conduct that the French did: that Americans were brave, had good morale, and advanced aggressively but that they lack technical skill and neglected to take precautions when conducting operations.²³ Despite this, Americans rarely demonstrated the kinds of friendship towards the British as they did with the French.

²¹ Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 346-349.

²² Chad L. Williams, “Vanguards of the New Negro: African American Veterans and Post-World War I Racial Militancy,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, No. 3 (2007): 347-349.

²³ Yockelson, *Borrowed Soldiers*, 110, 184-185, 214.

The likely cause of this was the fact that the British did not accommodate American self-image to the same degree as the French. British soldiers confident in their own skills never missed an opportunity to insist that they were better fighters than doughboys.²⁴ Some American memoirs and unit histories devoted special attention to the insults of British soldiers and NCOs such as the history of the 35th Division which claimed that a British sergeant denigrated American courage by telling a “joke” about how the next war would be between the “two yellow races,” United States and Japan.²⁵ Americans sometimes claimed the French high command had little confidence in them or did not believe they could achieve the objectives set by Pershing but anecdotes about rank and file French soldiers so openly denigrating American courage and value as soldiers were virtually unheard of. The language barrier might have helped the Franco-American relationship as Americans might not have understood any particularly harsh and critical statements by the French if they occurred.

American recollection of the French attitude towards them was dominated by French compliments whether in training or at the front. Because the French reinforced American views of themselves as great warriors come to win the war, even if they needed to learn some of the skills of modern warfare, Americans felt valued and appreciated by the French in a way they didn't by the British. The American experience in the First World War confirmed many American perceptions of themselves and of their society as dynamic and energetic. That confirmation came from a contrast they drew with the British and the French. Since the French largely treated them in a way that validated that mentality, Americans felt comfortable calling them friends and allies, at

²⁴ Ibid., 217.

²⁵ Kenamore, *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont*, 32.

least until after the war when that French praise drastically lessened. American behaviour in France demonstrated a strong belief in an entitlement to praise, gratitude, and recognition of their efforts, even if they exaggerated the impact of those efforts. When an ally contradicted that American mentality, such as by claiming to be superior soldiers, charging high prices, and resisting American attempts to clean up their villages, Americans resented them. When their ally validated that sense of entitlement by allowing Americans to prove themselves, praised their actions in battle, or cheer for them when they arrived, Americans reciprocated with considerable praise. Since the French military did the most to make Americans feel valued as allies and soldiers, Americans enjoyed their closest relationship of the war with the men of the French Army.

There was real animosity between the French and the Americans both during and especially after the war, but it was not the only or overwhelming legacy of the AEF experience in France during the war. During the 1920s, the narrative of conflict overshadowed that of cooperation between the Americans and the French.²⁶ As they were writing their memoirs or publishing their war diaries, many veterans told a different story however. While those writings did not deny the conflicts that arose between the French and Americans and remained insistent on the virtues and special qualities of America and Americans, they often cast the relationship in a very positive light. Alongside complaints about prices, many wrote of their admiration for the fortitude of the French, the friendly greetings they received from civilians, and the respect they had for the *poilu*. Many recalled the mud and cold with dread while fondly

²⁶ Bruce, *Fraternity of Arms*, 287-289.

remembering distributing toys to children or laughing about failed romantic adventures. Interspersed with tales of the horror of war were stories of sharing simple meals and wine with French soldiers whenever there was a break in the fighting. Even when doughboys found French soldiers lacking in energy they still described the brotherhood born of fighting beside them. While few Americans could describe their war experience as pleasant, many recalled their time with the French as a bright spot in the sea of mud and drudgery that often constituted service in the First World War. The unit histories of divisions, regiments, and batteries published after the war often went to great lengths to praise the French and note that friendly relations existed between them. Americans who wrote of their own experience or compiled unit histories acknowledged and described difficulties but many chose to defend the French either by claiming those aspects of France that annoyed Americans were the result of the hardships of war or were not widespread. While the French frustrated Americans more than those defences would indicate, many were willing to forgive them or examine the American role in causing problems. The white majority of the AEF did not question American society and values but many conceded that the time spent with the French had on balance been a positive experience.

For both white and black Americans, experiences with the French proved one of the defining relationships of the First World War by providing a foreign society unto which Americans projected their beliefs about the virtues and faults of their own society. Americans had unique experiences with the war due to their relatively brief involvement and the belief among doughboys that their entry had ended the futility of trench warfare. Those experiences, and contact with the French, for the most part reinforced what

Americans believed about their country before their service rather than force them to reconsider their identity and patriotism in the face of such a different country and people.

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