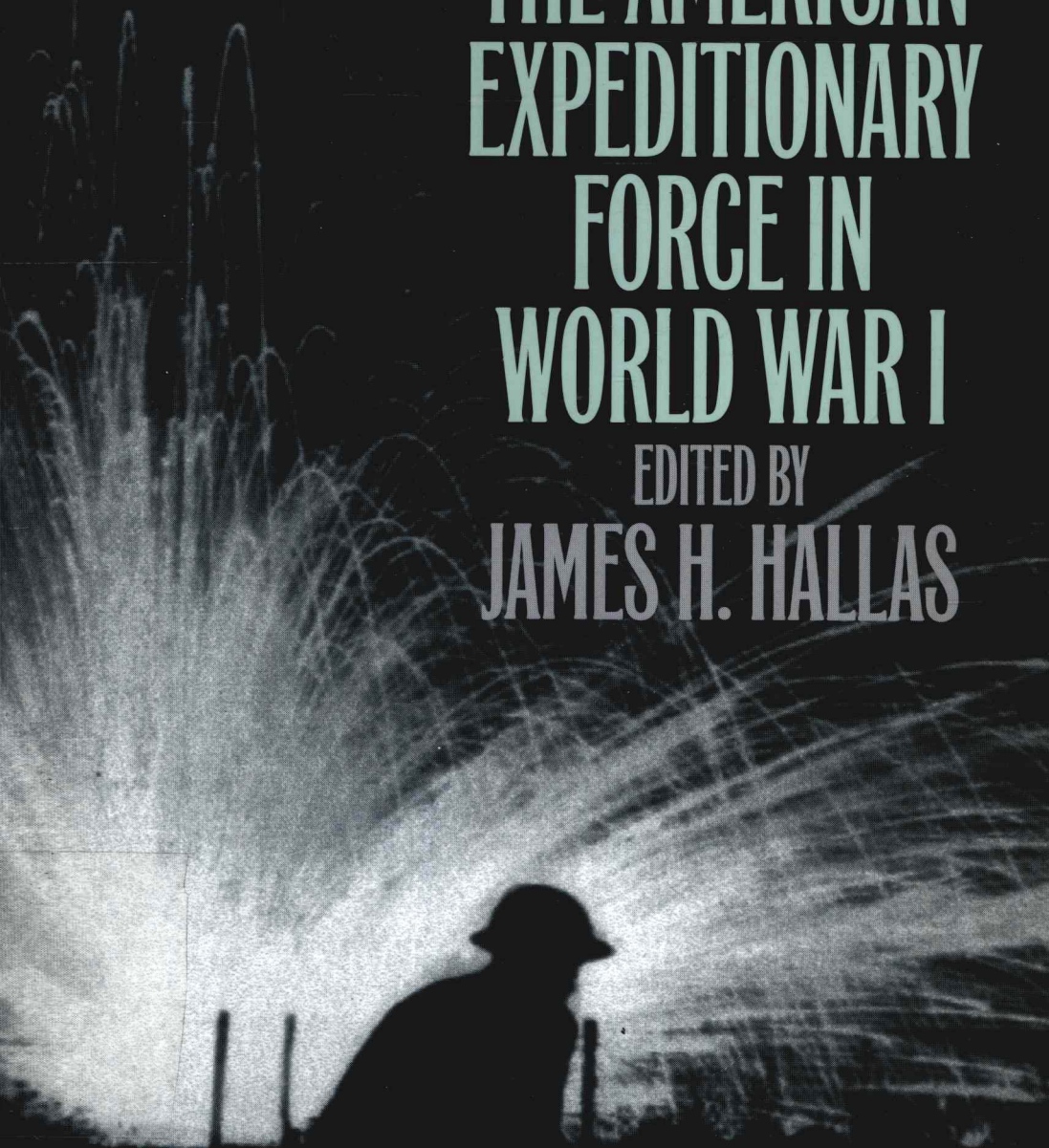


DOUGHBOY WAR

THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE IN WORLD WAR I

EDITED BY
JAMES H. HALLAS



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The American Expeditionary Force in World War I

James H. Hallas



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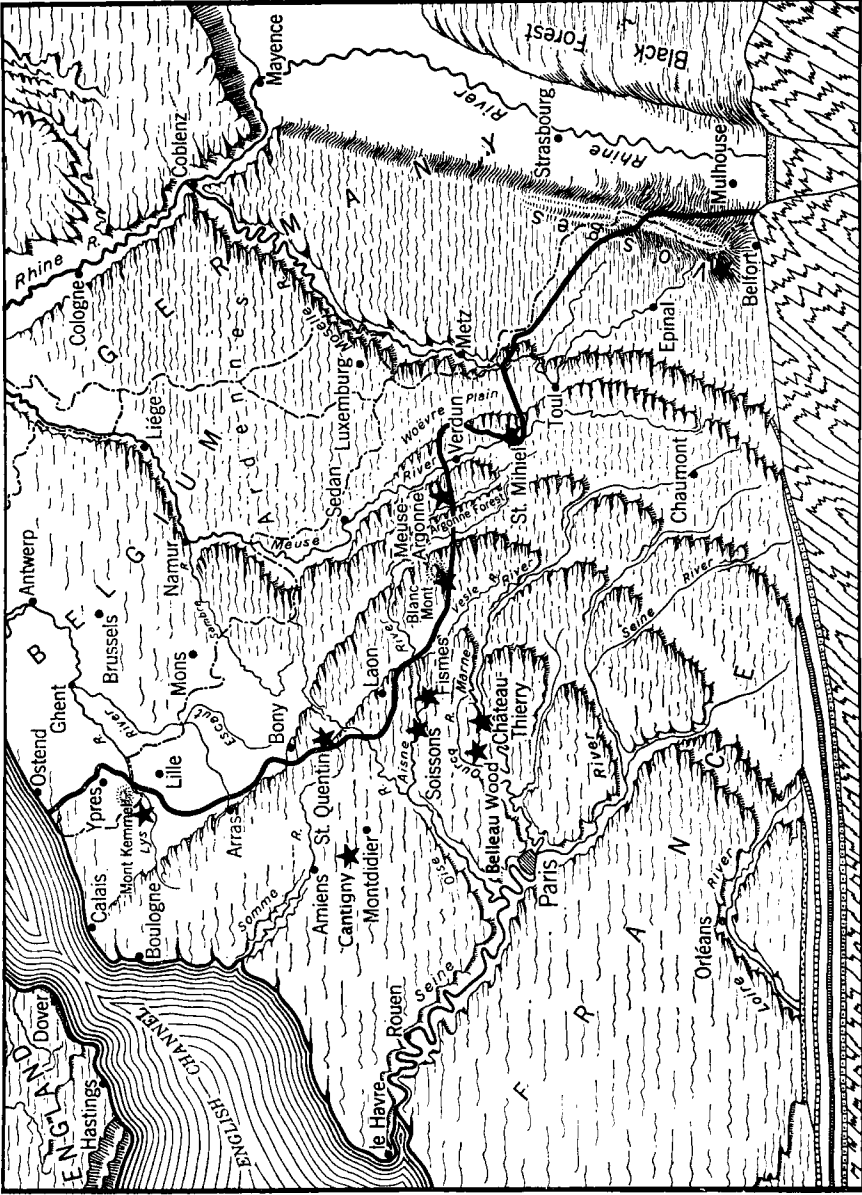
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Doughboy War

Where the Americans Fought in France



— Front Line of March 20, 1918

- - - International Boundary

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Introduction

Why write about them now?

They are gone and largely forgotten, those once jaunty young men with the quaint dishpan helmets, the spiral puttees, and high-collared wool tunics. The songs they sang, the weapons they used—their very concept of the world—are mere curiosities to most of us today.

But they were so American! A latter-day historian referred to them as “the fierce lambs.” Fierce they certainly were; their combat record brooks no dispute. And yes, they were lambs, their lack of sophistication and worldliness sometimes humorous, often touching and sometimes sad and a bit pathetic. They were farmers and mill workers, students and clerks, men whose roots went back to the original 13 colonies and men who were barely off the boat from Europe and had yet to master the English language. Few in the ranks were well educated, a surprising number (by today’s standards, at least) were illiterate.

Nearly 5 million Americans served in the armed forces during World War I—the largest fighting force the country had ever seen. Some 2 million of them served in Europe where U.S. presidents had traditionally promised never to interfere. Nearly 80,000 of them died there.

They went because they had to go, most of them; because they were expected to go; and many because they wanted to go. They went to save France, to repay LaFayette, to skin the Kaiser or just, as one Marine veteran recalled, “to see what all the noise was about.”

Of course they were innocents. So was their country.

When the United States entered the war in the spring of 1917, the standing army numbered less than 130,000 men—this at a time when millions were engaged on the Western Front. The largest organization in the U.S. Army at the time was the regiment—a unit

numbering some 2,000 men. The military owned 55 aircraft, of which General John J. Pershing, the soon-to-be commander of the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F.), recalled, "51 were obsolete and the other 4 obsolescent." There were not enough machine guns, not enough artillery pieces, not enough uniforms, not enough ships to transport an army to Europe.

No wonder the Germans scoffed.

And yet the U.S. contribution did ultimately save the Allied cause. It had been a near thing. The French had come close to collapse in 1917 and the British were hard pressed. But the flood of American manpower arriving in France in 1918 erased any hope Germany had for outright victory.

Two out of every three American soldiers who reached France took part in battle. A total of 2,084,000 U.S. soldiers reached France. Of these, 1,390,000 saw active service in the front lines. Forty-two American divisions reached France before war's end. Of these, 29 took part in active combat service. The rest were used for replacements or arrived as the hostilities ended.

The places they fought, many of them, would be spoken of with reverence for years afterward in American Legion Halls, at Memorial Day Parades, by Gold Star Mothers, and in the mills and on the farms, on city streets, and in every corner of America they called home: the Marne, Soissons, Belleau Wood, the Vesle, the Hindenburg Line, St. Mihiel, the Argonne . . . always "the Argonne."

The following pages do not touch on the "romance" of the air war—if incineration thousands of feet above mother earth can be considered romantic. Rather, it is the story of the ground soldier—the combat infantryman, the artilleryman, the engineer, who slept in the rain, ate corned beef from a can, and fervently hoped the next German artillery shell would fall far from his personal funk hole.

A few of the participants became legends: Sergeant Alvin York, the conscientious objector turned warrior who earned a Medal of Honor; Marine Sergeant Dan Daley, who rose up out of the wheat at Belleau Wood, turned to his mates, too many of whom had only a brief time left on this earth, and cried, "Come on you sons of bitches! Do you want to live forever?"; and Ulysses Alexander, whose regiment of the 3rd Division stood on the shore of the Marne River like a rock and shattered one of the last great German attacks of the war.

The bulk of them just did what they were told and tried to stay alive. Most of them found that war was nothing like what they expected.

The English called them Sammies, at first, a play on Uncle Sam, but the American soldiers never took to the name. Some called them Yanks. But they have gone down in time as "the doughboys."

Perhaps, even now, at this late date, they have something to teach us about what it means to be an American.

This was their war.

1

War

*I*t was 8:20 P.M. Monday, April 2, 1917. A light rain was falling in Washington as President Woodrow Wilson ducked into a waiting car and set out toward Capitol Hill, a cavalry escort clattering protectively alongside. As of that early spring evening, Europe had been at war for over two and a half years. Millions had been killed or maimed. Now, in a few moments, Wilson intended to ask Congress to commit the United States to the European abattoir.

The decision had not come easily. From the start of the great conflagration in Europe in the summer of 1914—the inevitable result of years of rivalries and entangling alliances—Wilson had urged the United States to remain neutral in both heart and deed. Isolationist sentiment had prevailed at first, reinforced by what one historian termed “134 years of studious disengagement from the affairs of Europe.”¹ But as the months passed and the war in Europe settled into a stalemate of mud and blood on the Western Front, neutrality became more and more problematic. Lucrative U.S. trade with the Allies, clever British propaganda, the seeming brutality of German submarine warfare, the natural ties of blood and national origin, all contrived to impel American sympathies toward the Allies.

As 1917 arrived, relations with Germany deteriorated further with the German announcement that unrestricted submarine warfare—halted less than a year earlier due to U.S. protests—would be resumed. Wilson broke diplomatic relations with Germany in early February. Then came the revelation that the German foreign minister had proposed a treaty with Mexico to come into the war on the German side should the United States join the Allies. In March, three U.S. ships were torpedoed as German submarines once again began to take their toll. Anti-German fever swept the country. And now Wilson, a one-time college professor who only five months before had narrowly won re-election on promises of peace, was about to ask for war.

He arrived to find many of the Congressmen wearing or carrying small

American flags. "The world must be made safe for democracy," he told them. He asked the nation to "accept the status of belligerent which has . . . been thrust upon it . . . [and] to exert all its power and employ all its resources to bring the Government of the German Empire to terms and end the war." And finally, "To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other."

Congress gave him a standing ovation.

"Think of what it was they were applauding," Wilson remarked to his secretary as they rode back to the White House. "My message today was a message of death for our young men. How strange it seems to applaud that."²

Four days later, Congress formally approved a declaration of war.



The evening of April 2nd I had accepted an invitation to dine and go to the opera in New York City. Our party occupied a box on the right-hand side of the stage, about halfway to the front. The opera was "Canterbury Pilgrims," by DeKoven, with a German cast. During the entr'acte many of the men in the audience rushed out to Seventh Avenue to buy newspapers. There was an "Extra," reporting that the President had asked Congress for a declaration of war. This newspaper, the *New York Evening Telegram*, was then printed in pink. It was the most unusual sight, looking down from our box, to see every fourth or fifth person sitting in the orchestra, "dressed to kill," (for in those days no one would have thought of going to the opera without the man wearing a dress suit and the woman in a low-necked gown), reading a pink newspaper! At the end of the next act, the leading soprano, Margarete Ober, a German, fainted dead away.

After the opera was over the curtain went up again. The audience all stood, the entire cast appeared, and led by them the audience joined in singing the "Star-Spangled Banner." It was impressive and moving.

Congress did not delay in declaring war. From then on it was only a question of time as to how and where and when those of my age would serve. We knew nothing of the mutinies in the French army, the result of the bloody failure of the French Commander-in-Chief Neville's offensive. We were full of hope and enthusiasm.³

—Robert W. Kean
New York

I happened to be in Boston that day [war was declared] and while walking up Washington Street saw a terrific mob of people in front of the *Boston Globe* office, reading the bulletins.

In the crowd in front of the *Globe* office, many people were expressing their thoughts, and from the consensus I heard, they were one hundred percent behind our president. It was said that the sinking of the *Lusitania*⁴ was the last straw that led us into war; also that the French had their backs right up against the wall and needed our help. Remembering our history and how General Lafayette came to our assistance during those dark days of our first fight for independence, perhaps we had an obligation to our sister republic, the Republic of France.

Papers were selling like hotcakes. On my way home I bought an *Evening Globe* and as I sat in the surface car I started reading the paper and I observed that everybody else was doing the same.⁵

—Connell Albertine
Massachusetts

When the U.S. entered the World War I knew I would be called from reserve. But without waiting I reenlisted—in fact, I joined up that same day, April 6, 1917.

All of the men at the ranch wanted to go along with me. Half of them barely knew where the war was and didn't give a damn.

We caught the train to Waco, and soon as we got there all of us, 32-strong, trotted right up to the recruiting office and took the oath. That was sure one happy crowd.⁶

—Dan Edwards
Texas

I quit my job at the steel mill and went to see Mr. George Hainey, chief electrician, and Mr. Elliott Lewis, assistant chief electrician, and told them I was enlisting in the Navy. They wished me good luck and assured me my job would be waiting for me when I got back and I thanked them. Shook hands with the boys. I was the first from the line gang to enlist. Next morning I went to Cleveland and stayed for three days to get away from home until Mother stopped her crying.

I went and registered to be drafted. Some of my friends were there and I asked them to come with me and join the Navy, but none wanted to, so I went alone. The first man I met was a U.S. Marine. He sure looked fine, too. He showed me the Marines' posters, first to fight on land or sea, and I was so impressed that I signed. He was a fast worker all right. I got back home and told Mother and Dad that

I had enlisted and nobody was going to stop me. It was like a funeral around home.⁷

—*Joseph E. Rendinell*
Pennsylvania

On the 14th of April I made my decision to enter the Marine Corps, at which time I'd learned that I couldn't be an aviator because of faulty eyesight. There wasn't any main recruiting station in Minneapolis, so knowing that I probably couldn't even pass the eye examination for the Marine Corps, I went up to the sub-station and memorized the eye chart which was in plain view in those days with a big capital "A" and a "T" and "F" getting smaller as it went down the column. I then went over to St. Paul, and the recruiting office was on the fourth floor of an office building and one had to get his name in the book in order to get an appointment for a physical examination. That line, to get your name in the book, extended up the office down the hall and down four flights of steps, down on the sidewalk and around the corner—just to give you an idea of the enthusiasm. Now, this was on the 14th of April, eight days after the [declaration of] war. This will just give you an idea of the enthusiasm which the youth of that city at least, and I know from all other cities, responded to the call of arms. It was something that I'm afraid is a thing of the past now (in 1973).⁸

—*Merwin H. Silverthorn*
Minnesota

I was 17, unmarried, of course, and had no responsibilities to hold me back. I felt that I looked old enough to pass a recruiting sergeant and that the call for men was urgent enough to justify me in camouflaging my age by one year. Anyhow, I thought, I can go to France and grow up with the war.

In the midst of the intense recruiting campaign for the National Guard, I was at the theater one night when a call was made for volunteers. During the speech of the recruiting agent, I made up my mind. He wound up by asking all the men willing to serve the country, to see her through her present emergency with rifles in hand, to step upon the stage. As I sat very near to the stage, I was the first to present myself. When I filled out my application, I chose the old New York 69th—because it and I were Irish.

Next morning we recruits of the night before went to the armory. There we were taken in charge; passed through our physical examinations, and five of us were sent to Company K, Captain J.P. Hurley's company. All five of us were young; all about my age, and, when the captain had been called out to look us over by the first

sergeant, his eyes traveled up and down our line, and he exclaimed, "What are we getting now, sergeant, a Boy Scout outfit?"⁹

—Corporal Martin J. Hogan
69th New York Regiment

To young enthusiasts, such as we, war consisted of following the flag over a shell torn field, with fixed bayonet. Hadn't we stood for hours gazing at the recruiting posters? We could picture ourselves in the near future as pushing the Hun back from trench to trench, stopping only now and then to cut notches in the stocks of our rifles.¹⁰

—Justin M. Klingenberg
West Virginia

What strikes me most, I think, is the eagerness of the men to get to France and above all to reach the front. One would think that, after almost four years of war, after the most detailed and realistic accounts of the murderous fighting on the Somme and around Verdun, to say nothing of the day-to-day agony of trench warfare, it would have been all but impossible to get anyone to serve without duress. But it was not so. We and many thousands of others volunteered. Perhaps we were offended by the arrogance of the German U-boat campaign and convinced that Kaiserism must be smashed, once and for all. Possibly we already felt that, in the American interest, Western democracy must not be allowed to go under. But I doubt it. I can hardly remember a single instance of serious discussion of American policy or of larger war issues. We men, most of us young, were simply fascinated by the prospect of adventure and heroism. Most of us, I think, had the feeling that life, if we survived, would run in the familiar, routine channels. Here was our one great chance for excitement and risk. We could not afford to pass it up.¹¹

—William L. Langer
Massachusetts

About 4,000,000 men served in the U.S. Army during World War I—another 800,000 served in the Navy, Marine Corps, and other services. Five out of every 100 American citizens took up arms. New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas furnished the most troops—367,864, 297,891, 251,074, 200,293, and 161,065 respectively. The Regular Army numbered only 127,500 officers and men at the start of the war. The largest organization was the 2,000-man regiment—this at a time when whole corps and armies were fighting on the Western Front. More men were needed. The most obvious and immediate pool of manpower were the so-called citizen soldiers—the National Guard, numbering 174,008 men

from every state except Nevada. Some 77,000 of the Guardsmen were already in federal service, mobilized for duty during the Mexican border troubles in 1916.



The second line of defense, the National Guard, under mobilization orders since the declaration of war, was called into active service at twelve noon, July 25, 1917, and mobilized in their respective armories all over the Union.

On that unforgettable day, at exactly noon, fire bells, whistles, and sirens were shrieking out their message in multiples of five, for the alarm call to arms was 5-5-5. Startled people ran into the streets in wonder, leaving their noonday meals untouched. Such excitement prevailed, with everybody talking about war, that one would have got the impression that the enemy was only miles away.

Bidding a hasty farewell to my employer and fellow workers, my fingers tingling from their earnest handshakes and my ears ringing with "Good luck," "Don't forget to write," and "Bring me back a German helmet," and the like, I started for the Somerville Armory, where Companies M and K of the 8th Massachusetts Regiment were stationed.

The streetcar which I boarded hardly seemed to move. All along the route we picked up other Guardsmen, who like myself were answering their country's call. Fares were forgotten, as the conductor, imbued with the spirit of patriotism, thought only of getting us to the armory as soon as possible.

The bells and sirens were still sounding as we arrived at the armory. We had to fight our way in as there were hundreds of people milling around on the sidewalk around the wide-open doors, many of them looking through the windows. Inside the armory there were many Guardsmen already in uniform and discussing the situation. I immediately got into my uniform and proceeded to the drill hall, shaking hands with others of my buddies . . .

How true it was, as someone on the streetcar we were riding on remarked, "Well, a lot of us will never see the armory or home again." Of course, each one's chance of coming home was as good as the next fellow's, so no one gave it much thought.¹²

—Private Connell Albertine
Massachusetts National Guard

I remember looking around the room after my physical examination and enrollment. Here were the men I was going out with to war. Larry Williams was playing ragtime on the piano and singing.