

1988

The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I

David F. Trask

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Trask, David F. (1988) "The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 41 : No. 1 , Article 29.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol41/iss1/29>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Guadalcanal, fighting a determined enemy at a distance of only a few feet or yards, with weapons designed for long-range use, and where tactics will fail and operable strategy will become clear only in hindsight. Eric Hammel has written a concise, readable, colorfully descriptive but unassuming tribute to those who served their nation with distinction at that difficult time. To have been at Guadalcanal was the mark of a tested hero for many years. These men, pictured so well by Hammel, would agree with Hemingway's words from that same year, "I have seen much war in my lifetime and I hate it profoundly. But there are worse things than war; and all of them come with defeat. The more you hate war, the more you know that once you are forced into it, for whatever reason it may be, you have to win it."

DAVID G. CLARK
Captain, U.S. Navy

Coffman, Edward M. *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986. 412pp. \$35

This standard work, first published 19 years ago, is reprinted in paperback without change, a fitting decision because no alternative interpretation has materialized. Coffman's book remains the best single history of the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) during World War I. He sought to produce an account "more comprehensive than earlier histories"

by moving beyond traditional headquarters narratives and bringing in "the people who were actually involved . . . at all levels." In this respect he anticipated John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* and aspects of the "new social history."

Nevertheless, the book culminates rather than inaugurates a historiographical effort. Like predecessor accounts that it replaces, the book concentrates on the A.E.F. of 1917-1918 and the celebration of its achievements. Although more candid and less partisan than earlier accounts written closer to 1917-1918, the book—like other such works—is essentially an operational history of the A.E.F. Limited analyses of national policy and strategy are subordinated to operations, although mobilization and logistics receive measurable coverage. The book approaches its subject from the national perspective, minimizing treatment of the larger struggle of which the American contribution was a part.

We leave Coffman's pages with the feeling that despite all manner of difficulties, including unpreparedness and obtuseness on the part of the Allies, the A.E.F. became a splendid fighting force and made the difference in the war. The youthful, vigorous, and pristine republic was successful in its effort to resolve the conflict that had exhausted decadent Europe. General John J. Pershing emerges as the hero of the enterprise—taut, disciplined, seasoned, and determined—the embodiment of what it takes to win campaigns

despite all manner of interference from the home government and allies.

The only competitor volume is that of Harvey DeWeerd, *President Wilson Fights His War*, also published in 1968 as part of the Macmillan series on the wars of the United States. DeWeerd attempted to break with the traditional approach to his subject, recognizing the obvious reality that the struggle was essentially European in nature: "Europe was fully engaged for four years . . . any attempt to describe the American contribution in a vacuum, or to present the European phases of the war as mere background to the American effort is bound to produce distortion."

Unfortunately this promising approach did not lead to a distinctive, authoritative outcome. Despite his intent, DeWeerd produced a book that in essentials is similar to those of the A.E.F.—tradition centered. He provides extensive background, devoting most of the first two hundred pages to the development of the war during 1914-1917, before the A.E.F. became a factor. Moreover, he recognizes that American operations in 1918 were an aspect of inter-Allied campaigns—the desperate Anglo-French-Belgian defense against the great German offensives of March-July and Foch's decisive counteroffensives of July-November.

Until someone offers a new analysis based on a perspective different from that of the traditional A.E.F. studies and does the task well, *The War to End All Wars* will remain

the standard general history of the American role in the great conflict of 1914-1918.

DAVID F. TRASK
U.S. Army Center of Military
History

Gall, Lothar. *Bismarck: The White Revolutionary 1851-1898*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986. 676pp., 2 vols. \$69.90

Published in German in 1984, this important work constitutes the first in-depth reevaluation of Otto von Bismarck by a major West German historian since 1945. Gall, professor of modern history at Frankfurt University, has taken as his theme, Bismarck the "white" or conservative revolutionary. The two volumes, divided at the year 1871, abound with attestations to the Iron Chancellor's ability to conduct the politics of the feasible. The statesman who emerges from these pages based his actions upon cold, rational calculations of power politics, knew the limitations of any given situation, and placed *realpolitik* above *idealpolitik*.

Gall has two major points to make. First, he rejects both the positive hero worship of Bismarck by the Prussian school—largely based upon Bismarck's memoirs wherein the chancellor wrote history not "as it happened" but rather as he wished it to have happened—and the denigration of Bismarck's accomplishments by today's scholars. Along the way, Gall rejects the thesis that Bismarck was the master manipulator. Rather