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At Belleau Wood

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BOOKS

Asprey, Robert B. *At Belleau Wood*. New York: Putnam, 1965.
375 p.

In the spring of 1918, after almost three years of French stalemate and a succession of futile, costly offensives with diminishing returns, the tired and vastly depleted Allied armies stood totally on the defensive along a battlefield from the channel coast to the Swiss border. The French and British armies were momentarily beaten. The German high command had initiated an offensive to win or lose the war on the western front. (An armistice had already been negotiated with Russia.) By late May it appeared that the brilliantly conceived, German coordinated assault tactic would overwhelm the British and French armies; the Germans again stood on the Marne, the French continued to fall back, and Paris was in mortal danger. Enter the Americans.

At Belleau Wood is the story of a series of actions, culminating at Belleau Wood, which formed the first prolonged test of American arms in World War I and answered questions the world was asking: Will the Americans fight? If they fight, will they win? The author relates how, as the press focused world attention on the battle for Belleau Wood, the Marines gave the foot-by-foot, yard-by-yard, wounding, killing answer.

In telling his story, the author documents not only the events of battle, but the conflict of personalities and resulting division of Allied command along the front. His treatment of some of the commanders is rather harsh, but he reasons that "battle rarely leaves professional reputations unchanged."

Some readers will find only another Marine "glory story" by the contributing editor of *Marine Corps Gazette*. Others will find thought-provoking discussions of leadership and troop morale. This book is recommended as an outstanding documentation and analysis of a battle that is regarded by many military historians as a tremendous psychological victory and turning point for the Allies in World War I.

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