



## *Sons of Freedom: The Forgotten American Soldiers Who Defeated Germany in World War I* by Geoffrey Wawro.

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Several new studies of the American experience of World War I have been published in the last decade, owing in part to the conflict's centennial remembrances. Most have concerned narrowly defined aspects of the war. By comparison, the award-winning historian Geoffrey Wawro (Univ. of North Texas) adopts a broader to the subject. This comes as no surprise given his expertise in analyzing conflicts comprehensively.

Wawro disputes the misplaced idea that US participation in the conflict was useful, but not essential, to the Allied victory: "had the Americans not entered the war and deployed 2 million troops to France, the Allies would most certainly have lost" (xxv). The book's introduction lays out his plan of analysis, concentrating on particular campaigns in which Americans fought.

Wawro's argument is tripartite. His first four chapters focus on events prior to 1917, looking at the American home front, military experience, and relations with the Allies (and Germany) up to the point of US involvement. The next five chapters cover the key period between the American declaration of war in 1917 and the end of the German Spring Offensives in 1918. The final seven chapters concern the last few months of the war—the so-called "Hundred Days"—and the fighting at St. Mihiel and during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. In each of these sections, the theme of American responsibility for ending the war is the guiding principle of the narrative.

In chap. 1, the author provides context for his argument in the book's first segment, starting with details of the course of the war prior to the Americans entrance, with close attention to the financial and material challenges faced by France and Britain. The second chapter addresses the same themes, but from the American perspective, with close attention to US contributions and attitudes prior to 1917. The next two chapters develop one of Wawro's secondary points—rehabilitating the reputation of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) Doughboy. Wawro clarifies the unenviable status of the prewar US Army, to wit, "old, drunk, and stagnant, forged in the doldrums of peace" (55), as a basis to work from. Throughout the rest of the book, he demonstrates the American transformation into a more competent and respectable National Army.

The book's second section traces battles and campaigns where the American Army was thrown in by division and brigade to shore up Allied lines where the French and British had been battered by the German Spring Offensives. Wawro examines the first two German offensives (Michael and Georgette), and then, sequentially, the third Offensive (Blücher), Belleau Wood, Chateau-Thierry, and the Second Marne. While much of this section analyzes specific battles, Wawro often returns to two theses. The first is the growing competence of American troops, though not without a steep and costly learning curve. "So many trained Doughboys were entering the line every month that the Allies, so close to defeat in the spring, now were scenting victory" (251). The second theme of this section is the diplomatic back-and-forth between the Allied military leaders, especially the French and Gen. John J. Pershing.

The book's final section is a straightforward account of the last push to the end of the war and the Meuse-Argonne Campaign. But the unique contribution here is Wawro's emphasis on the American role in the overall Allied plans and conduct of the fighting during the war's last months. By October 1918, he maintains, the Americans had proven to be the driving force for Allied victory, a fact the Allies resented.

America's allies—victory in sight—were suffering buyer's remorse and would spend the rest of the war, what remained of it, talking down the American contribution to victory. They knew America had saved them, but they deplored the political cost and its vast ramifications. (439)

These hard feelings widened diplomatic rifts late in the war and thereafter. The book's last chapter sums up Wawro's main thesis, namely that

without those vast American reserves and the American blows in the Aisne-Marne salient, Saint-Mihiel, and the Meuse-Argonne, the French, British and Italians would have been unable to defeat the Germans in World War I.... After the war, the Allies, vaunting their own great sacrifices, would downplay or simply ignore the American contribution in a deliberate way that became a historical way. (509)

Though Pershing is praised for his political acumen during the conflict, Wawro finds his military performance "much less magnificent" (508). Lt. Gen. Hunter Liggett was the star of the war for the Americans.

The book has some shortcomings, beginning with a dearth of maps. Those included are mainly operational in perspective. (Serious readers will do well to keep at hand the Center for Military History's 77-Series Publications on the Campaigns of the First World War.) The title's promised stress on the "Doughboy" fades as the narrative develops and Wawro concentrates on the strategic, operational, and diplomatic aspects of US military operations. He frequently criticizes contributions of the Allies, downplaying the importance of specific actions, such as the British blockade, or highlighting failures that sometimes "made German victory almost certain" (506). These arguments exceed the scope of Wawro's study; by introducing them, with limited discussion, he raises questions about their full validity.

These minor issues aside, Geoffrey Wawro presents an admirably complete picture of US involvement in World War I, something missing from scholarship on the conflict. His welcome account in *Sons of Freedom* has set the standard in the field for the foreseeable future.