
Uneasy Alliances: French Military Intelligence and the American Army during the First World War

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Tucked away in the Château de Vincennes on the eastern edge of Paris lies hidden treasure: a wealth of material documenting the activities of American soldiers in France during the First World War. Unnoticed in their wartime work by most American officials, French liaison officers reported weekly to their superiors on the everyday workings of the American army. Interested primarily in the fighting abilities of American troops, French liaison officers analyzed their training, leadership, performance, progress, and failures. The social history side of the Franco-American relationship was also preserved by these observers who, after the French mutinies of 1917, considered troop morale extremely important. The French-American alliance was a work in progress, dependent on constant negotiation between statesmen, generals, and troops in the field to get beyond the differences imposed by geographical distance, culture, combat experience and race. Seeking to preserve stability within this desperately-needed alliance, these exposés did not shy away from detailing the struggle taking place along the Allied side of the Western Front.

For the most part, reporting on the status of the American Army was the task of the *Mission militaire française près l'armée américaine* (Série 17N). The *Haut-commissaire de la République Française aux États-Unis*, André Tardieu, a close political friend of Raymond Poincaré, the President of the French Republic and of Georges Clemenceau, French Prime Minister in 1917–20, was charged with ensuring a flow of matériel between the two countries. However, Tardieu also reported tirelessly on the competency of the American army to civil and military officials (Série 5N). Besides receiving updates from the *Mission militaire* and Tardieu, the *État-Major de l'Armée* (EMA or general staff of the army) could turn to its *Bureau spécial franco-américain* (Série 7N) or reports from commanders in the field (Série 6N). The *Section américaine* and *Commissariat général des affaires de*

guerre franco-américaines supplied the *Grand Quartier Général des Armées Alliées* (high command of the Allied armies) with additional information (Série 15N). For its contribution to intelligence concerning the Americans, the *2e bureau* or the *Section de renseignements aux armées (SRA)*, within the general headquarters, the GQG (*Grand Quartier Général*) (Série 16N) excerpted numerous comments from the letters of French soldiers about their new American allies. This study draws on these little-known intelligence sources to broaden our understanding of the wartime alliance, encompassing policy decisions, the American soldiers' wartime experience, and the impact that 'spying' on one's ally had on the everyday functioning of the Franco-American partnership.¹

One of the paradoxes of the war was the prevalence of national chauvinism within each respective army, despite the creation of an international coalition on the Allied side. 'We are all fighting together', a French soldier assured his family, 'Americans, English, Italians, Portuguese, Polish, all march as a single man.'² Such displays of unity, however, masked deep divisions among the nations aligned against Germany. Having entered the war late (almost three years after its commencement), President Woodrow Wilson, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, and General John J. Pershing, the commander of the AEF (American Expeditionary Forces), were immediately under enormous pressure to let the French define America's military contribution.

A French delegation left for the US in April 1917, only days after the American declaration of war. Led by Marshal Joseph Joffre, who had been Chief of the French General Staff from 1911 to 1916, its ultimate goal was an amalgamation of the two armies. In the initial phase of organizing the alliance, these French officials realized that using American infantry and artillery units to replenish depleted French divisions would be the culmination, not the starting point of their work. First, the Americans had to raise and train those coveted troops and the officers to lead them. Joffre returned to France after obtaining American consent to send the regular army's 1st Division as an immediate expeditionary force to France. Joffre also secured a place for 34 French instructors to train the newly-formed National Guard and National Army divisions.³ Joffre presented the offer as a way to make up for the loss of experienced 1st Division instructors, but the Americans knew that French intent went much further. It took Tardieu two months to overcome American suspicion of French motives and secure the required invitation from American authorities for the agreed-upon French instructors.⁴ Tardieu's perseverance ultimately won positions for instructors with the French military liaison mission (*Mission militaire*) throughout the stateside American army from the training committee of the general staff to individual training camps. Eventually, 330 would make the trip to the United States.

For Tardieu, influence over officer training remained all-important. French intelligence noted that although 'string-pulling' existed in the appointment of officers, men of real quality could rise quickly. Pershing, promoted directly from captain to general, was luckily cited by a liaison mission observer as an example of the latter. Another saving grace to the American system, Inspector Mignot reported, was that demotions came immediately for mistakes or incompetency.⁵ That was about as far as French praise of the American officer corps went in 1917. The French High Command expected their officers to correct the glaring deficiencies obvious within an army whose last significant combat experience was in the Spanish-American War of 1898. 'American instruction follows regulations 20 years old', complained Tardieu in the summer of 1917, 'they are teaching the Cuban War.'⁶ There were early indications that Pershing had his own doubts about the professional judgement of regular army officers. In France, General Hirschauer spotted excessive centralization in 1st Division. 'One senses that nothing can be done without referring it to General Pershing; these words are constantly repeated "we will propose it to General Pershing"', he noted.⁷

Since most regular army units departed quickly for France, French liaison officers in the camps focused mostly on assessing the progress of newly-assigned National Guard and National Army officers. Discipline problems were rampant, they concluded, because there was no stable non-commissioned officer class to distance these inexperienced officers from their men and break the 'false democratic sentiment' which allowed too much socializing between ranks after hours.⁸ In theory, National Guard officers had already trained as part of the American militia-based reserve force and were ready to take immediate command of the volunteer-based state units now under federal control. In reality, French instructors found their lack of university education and advanced age difficult obstacles to overcome in preparing them for the staff work required of modern army officers. Even writing a simple report seemed a monumental undertaking, complained Captain Besoux from his place alongside 32nd Division.⁹

As in the case of regular army officers, Pershing independently arrived at similar conclusions concerning state-appointed National Guard officers. Pershing undertook a systematic campaign during the war to replace them with federally-selected National Army officers. The military liaison mission failed to notice that efforts to dismiss National Guard officers were part of a decade-long struggle between the regular army and the National Guard for control of the American military establishment. French intelligence, however, correctly observed that many of the problems plaguing the National Guard were lingering effects of pre-war domestic conflicts. 'The flaws in the recruitment of the National Guard comes from the fact that only

the inhabitants of the cities can be part of it. Among these, workers are excluded because of the hostility of trade-unions against a military organization that intervenes in strikes against the workers', noted a military attaché in 1917. In his view, these bankers and businessmen were not the Americans they ought to be keen to anticipate. Instead the attaché urged the French ministry of war to look to the new National Army for men capable of making good officers.¹⁰ The haste with which a National Army officer was trained as 'a gym instructor, not a leader' did not escape the critical eye of liaison officers.¹¹ Comparatively, however, they fared the best as intelligence reports detailed their cleverness, courage, and willingness to learn.

Limited to advising the training of specialist units, there was little liaison officers could do in 1917 to counter the ignorance they observed in the stateside camps. The French military liaison mission nearly suffered a fatal blow when American officers returned in March 1918 from a trip to the Western Front just as the German army was preparing a two-week offensive against the British along the Somme river. Questioning the relative quiet they observed in French sectors, Tardieu received reports that these officers were spreading the word that the French army had 'lost its bite and that the British Army was the real model.'¹² Tardieu fired off a telegram to Marshal Ferdinand Foch, who had just been appointed as Allied Supreme Commander, Land Forces, and to General Henri-Philippe Pétain, Commander-in-Chief of the French army, urging them to pay more attention to what American officers saw. In France, however, Pershing realized the seriousness of the 40-mile breach into Allied lines and offered American troops to the French as reserves to prevent the Germans from cutting the Allied armies in two. Moving as this gesture was to many French, it came too late to change the assignments of American soldiers who, in general, were lukewarm about the idea of serving *en masse* under French command.¹³ Instead the far more meaningful change came about stateside. In April 1918 the liaison mission registered one of its greatest successes by finally being admitted into officer candidate schools.¹⁴

These inter-allied struggles revealed how gingerly the Americans accepted the idea of tutelage. Tardieu acknowledged this hesitancy early on when he exalted that the purchase of French-made guns and artillery would indirectly force the Americans to accept French instruction to operate and maintain the matériel.¹⁵ A year later when General Ragueneau, head of the military liaison mission in France, assessed the accomplishments of his officers he knowingly explained that the continued American insistence on calling these instructors 'advisors' or 'liaison officers' summed up their response to the question of melding the two armies. Ragueneau's intent was to replace his superiors' fixation on amalgamation with what he saw as

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more realistic goals given the obvious overt nationalistic orientation of American officers and troops. When the commander of 26th Division told his liaison officer that the French could not 'change an American into a Frenchman', he was reiterating a theme reported from throughout the American army.¹⁶ It was worth remembering, Ragueneau insisted, that American commanders had the full confidence of President Woodrow Wilson, whom he characterized as having 'the most absolute power of any other Chief of State'.¹⁷ Instead of hoping to circumvent American commanders by appealing directly to Wilson, Ragueneau urged his superiors to take solace in the fact that officers of the military mission were successfully making incremental suggestions that had improved the organization and fighting abilities of an American army sincerely dedicated to collaborating with the French.

Ironically, by referring to the instructors of the military mission as liaison officers, the Americans had inadvertently described an important intelligence function which these French officers performed. Pétain formally assigned the French military mission a liaison role in September 1917 by designating the organization the official conduit for questions between American commanders and French military agencies.¹⁸ The reports compiled by military mission personnel went far beyond this limited purpose, however. Instead, they detailed all aspects of the American war effort in an effort to further French dominance of the alliance. In the spring of 1918, a suggestion to acknowledge the evolving intelligence function of the military mission formally drew a quick rebuff from Ragueneau.¹⁹ To have liaison officers now report, not to the military mission but directly to French commanders was a mistake, he contended. The officers, he reiterated once again, were simply advisers requested by the American general staff 'which was always ready to cause their removal if they present the least difficulty'.²⁰ Because the officers endured a long probationary period, they needed, in Ragueneau's view, to be supported as integral members of the American army. 'If they are regarded as detached from the French army itself, they would appear immediately to the Americans as monitoring and surveillance agents of French commanders, immediately suspect and no longer admitted into the central circle of the general staff they would lose, with the confidence, most of their influence', Ragueneau successfully argued.

Ragueneau realized that tainting the liaison officers as spies would have undermined, rather than improved, the valuable intelligence functions they were already fulfilling for the French army. Often frustrated in their instructional endeavours, these intelligence duties gave liaison officers a direct role in shaping the course of French-American relations. As Ragueneau noted, the individual relationships they developed with

American commanders were crucial. His own adopted advice also demonstrated the military mission's success in proposing modifications that affected the fortunes of the French-American alliance.

Together with the intelligence-gathering services of the *EMA* and *SRA*, the French military mission created a valuable portrait of leadership, training, and more surprisingly, the importance of race-relations within the American army and the French-American alliance. Throughout the war Pershing steadfastly refused to reinforce French divisions permanently with American white troops. But he did agree to place four black infantry regiments of the provisional 93rd Division under the control of the French army. A casual conversation between the AEF's Chief of Staff, Brigadier General James G. Harbord, and French officials on 6 January 1918 left Harbord convinced that Pétain 'will be happy to accept these regiments'.²¹ Pétain's willingness to train American blacks as combatants provided Pershing with an unanticipated way to ease the domestic dilemma caused by racial tensions at home. Pershing essentially killed two birds with one stone — he appeased the French demand for American combatants without giving up on his dream for an independent American army and at the same time placated the black community's demands for high-status combat assignments without inflaming the passions of white civilians utterly opposed to the idea.²² Both French military officials and American black advancement leaders incorrectly viewed this decision as the first step towards securing their broader goals. French offers to absorb more black combatants, however, never resulted in the assignment of new units.²³ Instead, AEF officers successfully made a limited concession which endured for the rest of the war. In the end, only 20 per cent of the 200,000 black troops who went to France were combatants, and only 10,000 of these would serve with the French army.

The failure to achieve a permanent amalgamation should not obscure the importance the French attached to Pershing's concession to let American troops complete their training alongside French soldiers. Regardless of his claim that the American people would never accept foreign command of their young troops, Pershing sent 28 out of 34 American divisions to train with French divisions before the former took over their own sectors.²⁴ Pershing's initial acceptance of this idea was conditional, but the *Bureau spécial franco-américain* proved correct in forecasting the results. According to intelligence garnered by the bureau, though the French method of exposing new troops to trench warfare was 'tinged with a realistic bent costly to the Americans, our allies will unanimously recognise that this system is the most expedient way to put their units in fighting form and they will not fail to copy it themselves in their own time'.²⁵

Thanks to the updates on stateside training sent by liaison officers,

French officers already had an idea of what to expect when Americans arrived in the trenches. There was to be no merging with the French, but an amalgamation of sorts had already taken place in the American army. Americans from vastly different backgrounds now found themselves together 'from the purist who only consumes alcohol-free drinks, doesn't smoke, and professes a severe morality to the alcoholic cowboy, bad-mouthed, shameless, brutal, and loose with the revolver for a whim or a bad bet', reported Inspector Mignot.²⁶ Given the weak Socialist Party and non-existent anarchist element in the US, Mignot happily noted an absence of defeatism or revolutionary attitudes like the ones that had plagued the French army in 1917. As far as training went, American troops were well-versed in hand to hand combat and marksmanship. Pershing's belief that only American aggressiveness could break the trench deadlock certainly was in keeping with the American character, Mignot conceded, after observing American soldiers training in the US. 'Even if much weaker than his adversary', he noted, 'the American never retreats. He has been accustomed very young to count only on himself and to box if necessary. In the camps, we have already had to record fights ending by the wounding or death of a man.'

Combativeness was a reasonable quality to hope for in combatant troops. But as thrilled as the French were with the raw qualities of American soldiers, they did not hesitate to point out their shortcomings. The common problem of receiving large numbers of late replacements who received minimal training before sailing to France meant that few units arrived with glowing credentials. The Americans, however, displayed an amazing ability to disregard any suggestion by their allies that they were unprepared. Several instructors were outraged by what they read in American newspapers concerning the combat readiness of American troops. According to the New York city papers, for instance, 'all the men [of the 77th Division] know the details of trench life thoroughly. In reality, they have never dug a hole, never even seen a real trench except in the movies', corrected Lieutenant Pierre Geismer after spending time with the division in Long Island, New York.²⁷

It remained to be seen how these supremely confident troops would fare during their period of training with the French army. The first contacts between American and French troops indicated the blossoming of a decidedly positive relationship. For both the French soldier and those awaiting him at home the landing of American troops represented a glimmer of hope that, finally, the last stage of the war had begun. American soldiers, for their part, fuelled this hope with their undisguised idealistic enthusiasm about participating in their country's first extensive overseas crusade. 'With America's help, we will have them' was soon shouted side by side with

'Lafayette, we are here' to create a symbolic link between the present conflict and the American War of Independence.²⁸ From the French soldiers' perspective there was much to marvel at in the American army — why so many German immigrants would fight for their adopted country and against the brothers or cousins who had remained in the fatherland, how soldiers could so freely disobey their officers without risk of a firing squad, or that American black soldiers 'have voluntarily forgotten that their fathers were sold and bought as slaves by those for whom they are fighting'.²⁹

Given French pride in their own military accomplishments to date, the highest compliment paid to American troops was not a celebration of appealing or curious differences like these, but rather a recognition of how much these eager American troops reminded the French of themselves in 1914.³⁰ French liaison officers knew this meant that they also made all the mistakes of beginners. On the bright side, American morale appeared unaffected by the first losses in the line. 'It makes us hate the "boche" more', one group of Americans told Inspector Valentin during an impromptu funeral for seven fallen comrades.³¹ Nonetheless, French liaison officers sought ways to minimize the patrol ambushes, accidents with grenades, false gas alarms, and general over-eagerness.³² The Americans, for the most part, were enthusiastic students. Captain Besoux could not contain his surprise when all members of 32nd Division asked to take part in a surprise attack exercise, 'even officers whose duties never call them to the trenches'.³³ There were constant reminders, however, that French advisers could do only so much. Pershing visited the 32nd Division and ordered them to take control of no man's land, despite the French commander's decision to focus on teaching his impatient students to defend the sector against a likely surprise attack.³⁴ Contradictory orders like these inevitably strained relations among commanders. 'More than a difference in words, the way of seeing things creates difficulties between us', General Tanant, the commander of the French 33rd Division had realized two months earlier. 'Not only do we not speak the same tongue, we don't even speak the same language', he noted.³⁵ The tendency of 32nd Division to follow Pershing's lead and trot one step ahead of the French was evident to Captain Besoux during the Aisne-Marne offensive. Charging ahead without their French instructors during the heat of battle, the troops reminded the liaison officer of excited hunting dogs who forgot their master in pursuit of their prey.³⁶

The French rank and file were less critical, happy to have 'at last some allies we can count on' who, as one French soldier put it, seemed to be 'the kindest people of all creation [with]... none of the beastliness of the Russians, the stupid pride of the English or the imprudence of the Belgians'.³⁷ The desire for Americans as trench companions was echoed

frequently. 'The Englishman is an ally, the American is a pal', was how another soldier expressed his preference to his family.³⁸ These words summed up the climax of goodwill in the Franco-American relationship in 1918.

This general assessment had no racial qualifications. American soldiers often found their own ranks divided over racial matters, but constructive working relationships were evident everywhere between white French soldiers and black American troops. After the war, a key piece of evidence fell into the hands of W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of *The Crisis*, the newspaper of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which seemed to indicate that white Americans had undertaken a systematic campaign to break the emerging bond between the French and American black soldiers. The document in question was written by Colonel Linard, of the French military mission, to French army headquarters. 'The American point of view on the "Negro question" may appear questionable to the French mind', Linard wrote, '[but] American opinion is unanimous'.³⁹ In his analysis, Linard described how the amicable working relationships which French officers had established with American black officers and soldiers horrified American whites. Linard took care to note that American whites were particularly 'outraged by all public intimacy between white women and blacks'. For the sake of preserving American goodwill, Linard recommended that French officers and civilians maintain a social distance from American blacks. This analysis was transmitted to each commandant in the French army, then abruptly cancelled two days later by the general staff. To Du Bois, the influence of American officials in prompting this request was obvious. Even though withdrawn, Du Bois saw successfully planted seeds of prejudice in the memorandum.

Blaise Diagne, the first African to represent the *Originaires* (urban Senegalese with French citizenship rights) in the French Chamber of Deputies, was not so certain, however, that the Americans were solely responsible for the Linard circular, nor for the sentiments which prompted its creation.⁴⁰ The racial views of white French were critical to Diagne because the Americans were not the only troops of colour serving in wartime France. They had been preceded by a nearly equal number (200,000) of West African troops.⁴¹ Originally a volunteer, mercenary force created at the turn of the century to aid France in its colonial conquest of African lands, the Senegalese Tirailleurs now recruited the sons of Senegalese urban elites (once the Diagne laws of 1915 and 1916 reaffirmed their citizenship rights) and conscripted rural, non-citizen West Africans.⁴² By calling into question how the French army and French people were treating their own colonial troops of colour, the newly-appointed Commissioner-General for Colonial Manpower raised some interesting

questions about the racial dynamic of French society. Rather than accepting at face value Linard's claim that he was simply advising the French army to respect American racial prejudices, Diagne accused Linard of revealing his own. In particular, Diagne took issue with Linard's claim that 'whites' familiarities with blacks are profoundly regretted by our experienced colonizers' who blamed such amicable relations for the 'considerable loss of the white race's prestige'.

The French colonial experience certainly influenced the French army's dealings with American black troops. Among the rank and file, hues of racial thinking were detectable in the comparative nature of compliments which praised the 'handsome twenty-year old boys [from America] whose bearing differs totally from that of the blacks from our colonies'.⁴³ Evidence of a strain of racial decision-making further up the chain of command came when the question arose of who would officer the American black regiments within the French army. General Goybet, in his oversight of the attached 371st and 372nd Regiments, concluded that 'without wanting to compare the black American soldier who already possesses long years of civilization to our colonial soldier, it seems however that the white officer has in him more authority, a greater sense of his responsibilities, and is more apt to command respect than the black officer.'⁴⁴ The French liaison officer of the American-commanded 92nd Division agreed after witnessing 'a soldier accused of insubordination towards his captain tell him, "you are of the same black meat that I am"' that 'the coloured man obeys another black man, whom he considers his equal, with difficulty.'⁴⁵ These officers, however, held American white officers responsible for the critical lack of camaraderie when black and white officers served together, which hampered their ability to work as a team.

These comments were probably both a reflection of the colonial prejudices Diagne knew so well and of the need to appease a powerful ally, which Du Bois clearly saw affecting French command decisions. French officials conceded the importance of constructing the American mass army in accordance with, rather than against, the prevailing racial principles of each nation. Consequently, French officers commanding black American regiments gradually re-formed the officer corps to contain either white or black junior officers, but not both.⁴⁶ Clearly racial thinking was not a uniquely American trait during the war.

American black troops, however, had no qualms about holding France up as a model inter-racial society. They had little direct contact or concern for West Africans and no knowledge of the secret correspondence circulating about their racial ability to lead. The absence of segregated transportation and recreational facilities, combined with the vote of confidence given by the French to their fighting abilities, made the

distinction between France and the US easy to make. French liaison officers were astute observers of the disaffection black soldiers intermittently revealed for the country which denied them the same basic liberties it was willing to champion for the rest of the world. Exhibiting a 'patriotic ardour [which] is certainly less developed than in the other US regiments', black troops within 92nd Division at the same time appeared to French officers as 'inspired by the best feelings for France, for whom they come to fight (and not for the US)'.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the French postal censor reported that letters written by soldiers of the French-commanded black regiments were full of 'regret that they might have to return to American units'.

Were American black soldiers wrong about the conclusions they drew from their welcome in France? To answer this question, one must appreciate that the extent to which American black soldiers were embraced in France as Americans first, blacks second was arguably the exact inverse of how they were perceived within their own army. In the line, American black troops found their race ignored as French soldiers focused instead on their embodiment of the very best American characteristics: bravery, discipline, and cordiality.⁴⁸ 'One day some American troops were assigned to us, black troops, not as trainees, but as reinforcements and it was our job to look after them', Albert Veyrenc remembered of his experience as a young lieutenant in a French army unit which served with the 369th Regiment. 'At first', Veyrenc recalled, 'getting reinforcements surprised us, but it made us very happy to think that this was a prelude to the full-scale American effort to help us chase the Germans out of our country.'⁴⁹ A stronger testament to the welcome they received as 'our American allies' came from the letters written by French troops serving with black troops which, full of descriptions of their American qualities, do not mention their race at all. 'You now know what it is to be treated as a man', F. J. Grimké of the NAACP pointed out to a group of black veterans in April 1919.⁵⁰

Many white American soldiers, however, did not share the high opinion of the French held by their black compatriots. The honeymoon was over when one French soldier saw fit to notify his parents that 'we continue to fight with the "boche" and do our best to live in peace with the Americans.'⁵¹ The Americans were determined, one French officer noted 'not to show themselves inferior to the other nations at war'.⁵² These soldiers did not hesitate to champion Pershing's war philosophy and reproached their French trench companions that 'it's not surprising, hiding away this way, that your war lasts so long.'⁵³ Tired of war, wondering if there would be any Frenchmen left to enjoy the peace, the French soldier found the American soldiers' naïveté about the nature of modern war sometimes easier to accept than the Americans' enthusiastic reaction to every rumour of peace. After only a few months of fighting 'they are waiting for the peace with a lot more impatience

than us', complained one French soldier, 'what would they say in our place?'⁵⁴ As annoying as the American ego may have become, general respect for American soldiers' fighting abilities remained strong in French soldiers' letters. The postal censors (*Contrôle postal*) reported that as a general rule those writing home believed that the Americans had 'profited marvellously from the lessons and advice, to the point of equalling their French instructors and comrades'.⁵⁵

French liaison officers also had much to say about American soldiers' performance on the battlefield. A French-American offensive along the 24-mile sector between the Meuse river and the Argonne forest began on 26 September 1918 as part of the Allied thrust towards Sedan which continued until the Armistice of 11 November. During the Meuse-Argonne campaign, the American army was at last firmly under American command. As predicted by their earlier judgements, French liaison officers monitoring the action tended to criticize American officers for accomplishing too little with such fine troop material. During the opening day of the offensive, for example, units of 79th Division quickly lost contact with their rolling barrage.⁵⁶ As the second and third waves of American assault troops stumbled into the first formation, the 'herd' stalled despite help from French tank units in destroying German machine-gun nests. The Americans also continued their earlier mistake of exacerbating their losses when they failed to use the ground to protect themselves. The French officer was willing to forgive the men. He noted that, since most had only been in service for three months, their bearing was 'decent'. He instead blamed the officers for pushing the troops forward too quickly without securing the ground over which they had already advanced. The Division paid a heavy price for its failure to 'clean out' enemy machine-gun nests adequately when demoralizing attacks on reserve troops escalated their fatalities. When similar problems occurred further down the line in the more experienced 91st Division, the liaison officer again absolved the men for mistakes made by superior officers who were not 'equal to the troops they had the honor of commanding'.⁵⁷ Far more troubling, however, for the future fighting potential of 79th and 91st Divisions than these mistakes were junior officers who tried 'to redeem their ignorance with bravery' and instead suffered a disproportionately high casualty rate.⁵⁸

The racial problems of the American army were also in evidence during the battle. The black community had high hopes that a successful performance by black troops on the battlefield would strengthen the post-war struggle for civil rights. The lack of training within 92nd Division did not give these soldiers much of a chance to meet these expectations.⁵⁹ Instead, the disastrous experience of 368th Regiment, the first American-commanded black unit to participate in the Meuse-Argonne offensive,

became an oft-cited example by those opposed to allotting increased combat responsibility to black soldiers.

The 368th's assigned task of remaining in coordination with the French 38th Army Corps on the initial day of the assault gave French liaison officers ample opportunity to observe how 'the difficulty of the terrain and the inexperience of the black troops' resulted in 'a lot of confusion during the fighting'. Four days later, the French corps staff declared that it 'was not satisfied with the loaned aid' and requested the withdrawal of the 368th from the line.⁶⁰ As humiliating as the breakdown in command and general panic within the ranks was for the 368th, the French military mission documented that many white American regiments met with similarly disappointing results during the campaign. The shortcomings of 368th Regiment, however, exposed the unique pressures of being a black combatant in the American army. Following the withdrawal of the 368th from the line, 'knowing that their fate to come depends in large part on their present conduct' a French liaison officer witnessed the unruly greeting Major General Charles C. Ballou, commanding the 92nd Division, received when he visited the regiment.

Upon his descent from his automobile he saw himself surrounded by men telling him not to judge them by what had happened, that they were asking that a new chance be given to them to show that this time they would know how to behave, and if not advance, they at least would hold onto the terrain. Then came Colonel Moss, commander of the 367th, bearer of a petition from the officers and non-commissioned officers of his regiment who hoped not to be judged by their neighbour's work and to try their luck for themselves.⁶¹

The appeals were made to no avail and the entire 92nd Division was quickly withdrawn from the line.⁶²

To the Americans, the problems of the 92nd revealed the weakness of the black combatant under fire. The French, however, lumped the operational deficiencies of black and white units together and concluded that American divisional and corps officers were not yet up to the task of coordinating a sector-wide assault. When they were stopped by German artillery and machine-gunners only half-way to their objectives in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, the springtime view that the Americans needed a guide in strategic manoeuvres was confirmed. Pétain read the reports of his field officers and urged the French Prime Minister Clemenceau to speak with Wilson once again about Pershing's exclusive focus on creating a complete, independent American army. Pershing's quick reorganization of his command structure, however, convinced Foch to discourage Clemenceau from his inclination to follow this advice.⁶³

Improving the tactical sense of American officers was one thing, but the question still remained of how long it would take the Americans to avoid the traffic jams that kept units waiting for supplies as German resistance increased.⁶⁴ The entire American army stalled while the AEF general staff struggled to resolve the supply and liaison problems which crippled its plans for a war of movement. Meanwhile, on the left the French pushed forward successfully.⁶⁵ One way to correct this problem, suggested French liaison officers, was to improve American soldiers' respect for their own equipment. The matériel discarded by Americans on the roads leading to the battlefield astounded those who came across the jettisoned mounds of debris.

A month later, the Armistice terminated debates on military strategy, fighting endurance, and logistics. The contest now turned to how the participants would remember their contribution to the victory. "We won the war", you don't hear anything else when you talk about the peace with them', complained one French soldier.⁶⁶ For their part the Americans resented the French army's tendency to focus on their country's economic, rather than military, contribution. The battle of the memoirs was well under way by the time the French and American general staffs were circulating competing accounts of the final four months of the war among the international press corps assembled to cover the deliberations surrounding the peace-making at Versailles.⁶⁷

This competition over the claim to victory reappeared with a vengeance when troops from each army began their occupation of Germany. French and American soldiers shared the conviction that they had fought on the side of democracy and against the forces of tyranny. Eventually, French veterans would draw on the horrors of their four long years in the trenches to champion 'patriotic pacifism'.⁶⁸ American veterans, on the other hand, would advocate a short period of universal military training to guard against what they remembered as their utter unreadiness to fight when first sent into action.⁶⁹ Yet how the memory of the war infiltrated the initial encounters between Allied troops and the occupied Germans betrayed none of these later tendencies. Revealing how tenaciously he still clung to the horrors of the war, a French soldier recounted that 'I always carry a few photos of the ruined countryside with me and when a boche finds that I am not paying enough for a chicken or a rabbit, I terminate the payment with a small photo and they don't demand any more, they understand.'⁷⁰ Sergeant Ernie Hilton, on the other hand, sought camaraderie from his verbal ritual of recalling the war, earnestly confiding in a friend at home that 'Germany is not such a bad place to be. There is a dutchman [sic] living at our place who fought against us in the St Mihiel drive, and now we eat at the same table, share our tobacco and laugh at each other's experiences. This may sound rather queer

to you but this is the way we are treated and the way we treat the Germans.⁷¹ Surrounded by a defeated population who, as one American soldier confidently claimed, 'got respect for us — more respect for us than the British or the French', American soldiers' perception of themselves as the war's only truly victorious nation was strengthened during their occupation of Germany.⁷²

Reassured by the Germans that it was the United States which had won the war, the ensuing friendly relations which developed between American soldiers and German civilians immensely irritated French soldiers.⁷³ A series of contradictory rumours pervaded the French army. One set held that Americans were the dupes of a carefully-orchestrated German propaganda campaign to contrast the brutality of the French with the humanity of the Americans in hopes of guaranteeing American support for a lenient peace settlement. The more cynical accused the Americans of pursuing their own national interests by recruiting former German officers to train their post-war army. When American troops began to declare in their conversations and letters home that 'we fought the war on the wrong side', American officials realized that they also had a problem.⁷⁴ A swift series of regulations forbidding fraternization between American soldiers and German civilians followed, which French officials thankfully noted dramatically reduced contact between the two populations and subsequently eased the tension in the Franco-American relationship.⁷⁵

Yet these bans on fraternization did little to address the larger problem which now preoccupied the French military mission, namely that American white troops were returning home full of anti-French feeling.⁷⁶ Even Pershing privately worried about the possible political consequences of his troops' turn against their ally. The French feared that American veterans might prejudice American public opinion against the peace treaty or against future reconstruction aid. Seeking to protect their interests, French intelligence kept constant watch on the state of American soldier opinion, interviewed American Legion founder Theodore Roosevelt Jr upon his return to the US, organized a huge Fourth of July celebration on the Champs Elysées, and successfully recommended distribution of as many *croix de guerre* among American combatants as possible.⁷⁷ Yet one looks in vain for much soldier commentary on international politics. Their "spirit broke" by all these "damned European affairs"⁷⁸ American soldiers, so 'as to not upset their own lives and to avoid Bolshevism prefer to put an ocean between themselves and these excited peoples of Europe, whose debates tire them', noted one French liaison officer.⁷⁸ To a certain extent, a quick rehabilitation of the Germans in the eyes of American soldiers, who consistently claimed to have fought against German militarism and not against the German people, made the soldiers' demand to return home 'toot sweet' more justifiable.

'Men from all the races of the world meet each other on the battlefields of Europe', noted a French soldier after his first experience fighting side by side with American black troops.⁷⁹ By 1918 there was a terrible truthfulness to his observation. His reflection revealed that when troops of different nations came into contact with one another, foreign relations developed a social history not normally seen when international contact was limited to the diplomatic corps. Thus, the social history of the Great War continues to fascinate as the international coalition proves as fruitful an arena for the social historian as the battlefield. These contacts left their mark on the personal experience of war, as well as on the general alliance. French liaison officers worked to improve the daily functioning of the alliance by confronting the friction between ranks, races, and nationalities as they came into contact with one another on the Western Front. Learning as much as possible about their new ally proved an effective way to ensure worthwhile American aid to France in the latter nation's moment of crisis. By contributing to the Allied victory, the non-adversarial spying performed by the French military mission to Pershing's forces may be seen, in retrospect, to have valuably served the national interests of both the French and the Americans.

NOTES

1. See the following for a more detailed description of the records available in Série N, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, Château de Vincennes, Paris, France (hereafter, SHAT). Jean Nicot, 'L'histoire de la première guerre mondiale: l'apport des archives de l'armée', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 11 (July–Sept. 1968) pp.535–42; Lee Kennett, 'World War I Materials in the French Military Archives', *Military Affairs* (April 1973) pp.60–1; Jean Nicot *et al.* (ed.) *Inventaire sommaire des archives de la guerre 1914–1918*, 3 Vols. (Troyes: Imprimerie La Renaissance 1972).
2. Contrôle postal militaire (18 Aug. 1918) 16N 1446, SHAT.
3. André Kaspi, *Le temps des Américains: le concours américain à la France en 1917–1919* (Paris: U. de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne 1976) pp.44–5.
4. André Tardieu à M. le Président du Conseil, télégramme chiffré no. 841 (26 July 1917) 5N 126, SHAT.
5. Le candidat inspecteur auxiliaire Mignot à M. le Commissaire spécial chef du service de sûreté de la mission militaire française près l'armée américaine (18 March 1918) 17N 47, SHAT.
6. Tardieu aux Affaires Étrangères, télégramme chiffré no. 630 (1 July 1917) 5N 126, SHAT.
7. Rapport du Général Hirschauer au sujet de la 1ère division américaine (24 Nov. 1917) 6N 141, SHAT.
8. Tardieu à M. le Général Vignal, télégramme chiffré no. 4752 (17 Jan. 1918) 6N 137, SHAT.
9. Capitaine Besoux, officier de liaison de la 32° DIUS à M. le Général chef de la mission française auprès de l'armée américaine (1 June 1918) 17N 118, SHAT.
10. Attaché militaire, Washington DC, au Ministre de la Guerre, Paris (26 Dec. 1917) 17N 9, SHAT.
11. Rapport sur les conditions de l'instruction de la 77° DIUS au Camp Upton, mai 1918, 17N 127, SHAT.
12. Tardieu au Ministre de la Guerre, Général Foch et Général Pétain, télégramme chiffré no.

- 7117 (13 March 1918), 6N 137, SHAT.
13. L'opinion française et les Américains d'après le contrôle de la correspondance du 15 avril au 15 mai 1918. Rapport récapitulatif pour la période du 1 au 31 mars 1918, service de sûreté, mission militaire française près l'armée américaine. 17N 47, SHAT.
 14. Rapport du lieutenant-colonel Fagalde au Ministère de la Guerre (25 July 1918), 6N 141, SHAT.
 15. Tardieu au Président du Conseil, télégramme chiffré (16 July 1917) 6N 137, SHAT.
 16. Capitaine Malick, officier de liaison près la 26^e DIUS à M. le Général, chef de la mission militaire française près l'armée américaine (19 May 1918) 17N 9, SHAT.
 17. Général Ragueneau, chef de la mission militaire française près l'armée américaine au Général commandant en chef les armées du nord et du nord-est (May 1918) 17N 9, SHAT.
 18. Le Général en chef à M. le Général commandant le groupe d'armées de l'est (25 Sept. 1917) 17N 150, SHAT.
 19. Le commandant le groupe d'armées de l'est à M. le Général commandant en chef (15 April 1918) 17N 9, SHAT.
 20. Général Ragueneau à M. le Général, commandant en chef les armées du nord et du nord-est (18 April 1918) 17N 9, SHAT.
 21. Memorandum from the Chief of Staff (6 Jan. 1918) folder 693, file 1003.2; Textual Records of the AEF 1917-23, Record Group 120, US National Archives, Washington DC, quoted in Kaspi (note 3) p.181.
 22. For conflicts between AEF headquarters and the Washington-based general staff over Pershing's Jan. 1918 decision, see 'A Cable History of the Colored Soldiers', box 50, Records of the Historical Section (Entry 310); War College Division and War Plans Division, 1900-42; Textual records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165, US National Archives (hereafter, 310/165, USNA). For pressure from black community leaders to create black combatant units see 1917 correspondence between W.E.B. Du Bois and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, Library of Congress, Washington DC (hereafter, Du Bois Papers).
 23. Président du Conseil, office des missions au commissaire français, New York (28 May 1918). Rapport du Général Berthelot, chargé de mission à M. le Président du Conseil, Ministère de la Guerre (29 June 1918), Fonds Clemenceau, 6N 53, SHAT.
 24. Lt-Colonel C.H. Goddard, 'Franco-American Relations', File No. 7200-E, Thomas File, 310/165, USNA.
 25. Etat-Major de l'Armée: bureau spécial franco-américain, note au sujet de l'emploi de l'armée américaine, 1918, 6N 136, SHAT. See Pétain-Pershing exchanges in 6N 141 for negotiations over training American troops in line with French units.
 26. Le candidat inspecteur auxiliaire Mignot à M. le commissaire spécial, chef du service de sûreté de la mission militaire française près l'armée américaine (18 March 1918), 17N 47, SHAT.
 27. Rapport sur les conditions de l'instruction de la 77^e DIUS au Camp Upton, 17N 127, SHAT. For predictions of problems training excessively confident American troops, see Le Général Tanant, commandant la 33^e division d'infanterie à M. le Général commandant le 10^e C[orps d'] [Armée] (11 April 1918) 17N 9; and Renseignements sur les pays alliés d'après le contrôle postal (14 April 1918) 16N 1528, SHAT.
 28. Les Américains et l'opinion française d'après le contrôle de la correspondance du 15 mai au 15 juin 1918, 17N 47, SHAT.
 29. 170^e Division, sondage du 3 juillet, 16N 1410, SHAT. Contrôle postal militaire (2 Oct. 1917) 17N 47, SHAT. Contrôle postal militaire, 2^e Armée (11 Aug. 1918), 16N 1397, SHAT.
 30. Les Américains et l'opinion française d'après le contrôle de la correspondance du 15 juin au 15 juillet 1918. Les Américains et l'opinion française d'après le contrôle de la correspondance du 15 septembre au 15 octobre 1918. Both in 17N 47, SHAT.
 31. Rapport récapitulatif pour la période du 1^{er} au 30^e avril 1918, service de sûreté, mission militaire française près l'armée américaine, 17N 47, SHAT.
 32. Rapport de l'officier de liaison près la 90^e DIUS, mission militaire française près l'armée américaine (30 Aug. 1918) 17N 135, SHAT.
 33. Capitaine Besoux, officier de liaison à M. le Général, chef de la mission militaire française

- près l'armée américaine (19 June 1918) 17N 118, SHAT.
34. Chef d'escadron Lobe, chef de groupe à M. le Général chef de la mission militaire française près l'armée américaine (30 June 1918) 17N 118, SHAT.
 35. Général Tanant, commandant la 33^e division d'infanterie à M. le Général commandant le 10^e CA (11 April 1918) 17N 9, SHAT.
 36. Rapport d'ensemble du chef d'escadron Lobe, chef de groupe des officiers informateurs près la 32^e DIUS, opérations du 29 juillet au 6 août [1918] 17N 118, SHAT.
 37. Rapport sur les troupes américaines en France d'après le contrôle postal (28 Oct. 1917); 'Les Américains et l'opinion française d'après le contrôle de la correspondance du 15 juillet au 15 août 1918', both in 17N 47, SHAT.
 38. Les Américains et l'opinion française d'après le contrôle de la correspondance du 15 août au 15 sept. 1918, 17N 47, SHAT.
 39. Au sujet des troupes noires américaines, 7 août 1918. For original see 7N 2257, SHAT. For version published in the USA, see *The Crisis* (May 1919) pp.16-17. Cf. Kaspi (note 3) pp.302-4.
 40. Commissaire général des effectifs coloniaux à M. le Ministre de la Guerre (16 Nov. 1918) 6N 97, SHAT.
 41. Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en Afrique Occidentale française, 1914-1919* (Paris: U. de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne 1982) p.404.
 42. Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational 1991) p.46.
 43. Appréciations des troupes françaises sur les troupes américaines, d'après le contrôle postal en mai 1918, 17N 47, SHAT. Compte-rendu de mission, visite aux 369^e, 371^e, 372^e régiments noirs américains (27 May 1918) 17N 76, SHAT.
 44. Général Goybet, commandant la 157^e division d'infanterie à M. le Général commandant le 13^e CA, 18 juillet 1918, 17N 76, SHAT.
 45. Chef de battalion Lestre, chef de groupe, à M. le Colonel, chef de la mission militaire française près l'armée américaine, 16 oct. 1918. Notice statistique sur la 92^e DIUS, mission militaire française près l'armée américaine. Both in 17N 138, SHAT.
 46. Etat-Major, 157^e Division, Note confidentielle concernant les cadres du 372^e RIUS (21 Aug. 1918). Le lieutenant-colonel Linard à M. le Général commandant en chef les armées du nord et du nord-est, 5 sept. 1918. Both in 17N 76, SHAT.
 47. Rapport de l'officier de liaison de la 92^e DIUS à M. le Général en chef de la mission militaire française près l'armée américaine (15 July 1918). Le lieutenant de Saint Ceran, officier informateur à M. le chef de bataillon Lestre (5 Aug. 1918) 17N 138, SHAT.
 48. Contrôle postal militaire, 2^e Armée (18 Aug. 1918) 16N 1397, SHAT.
 49. Albert Veyrenc, interview in film documentary *Men of Bronze* (1977) researched, produced, and directed by William Miles.
 50. F. J. Grimké, 'Address of Welcome', in Herbert Aptheker (ed.), *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932* (NY: Carol Publishing 1990) pp.241-2. More generally on the black soldiers of the US 367th, 368th and 369th Infantry Regiments, see Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *Unknown Soldiers. African-American Troops in World War I* (NY: Da Capo Press 1996).
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 52. Mission militaire près l'armée américaine, 18 mars 1918.
 53. Mission militaire française près l'armée américaine (25 June 1918) 17N 47, SHAT.
 54. Contrôle postal militaire, 2^e Armée (27 Oct. 1918) 16N 1397, SHAT.
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 56. Mission militaire française près la 79^e DIUS (8 Oct. 1918) 17N 128, SHAT.
 57. Capitaine Thierry-Mieg, observations sur les opérations de la 91^e DIUS pendant la période du 26 septembre au 4 oct. 1918, 17N 137, SHAT.
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 59. Alan Greer (92nd Division chief of staff) to Senator Kenneth D. McKellar (6 Dec. 1918) Reel 6/431, Du Bois Papers.

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65. Trask (note 63) pp.127-9.
66. Contrôle postal militaire, 10e Armée (8 Dec. 1918) 16N 1447, SHAT.
67. Mécontentement du G.Q.G. Américain (25 March 1919) 17N 48, SHAT. Note de service (15 March 1919), 17N 47, SHAT. 'The American Military Factor in the War' (14 Jan. 1918) File No. 811.20/1, General Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, 1918-31 (Entry 27), Records of the American Commission to Negotiate Peace, Record Group 256, USNA.
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74. Naval Intelligence Report (26 Feb. 1919), File No. 10314-414(11); Security Classified Correspondence and Reports, 1917-41 (Entry 65), Office of the Director of Intelligence, General and Special Staffs, RG 165, USNA. Memorandum for General Connor (26 Dec. 1918), folder 'American Forces in Germany', box 373, John J. Pershing Papers, Library of Congress. Memorandum for General McIntyre (13 March 1919), File No. 1010-7, General Correspondence, 1917-21 (Entry 8), Office of the Chief of Staff, Textual Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs, RG 165, USNA.
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