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MASTERS OF MILITARY STUDIES

AMERICAN OBSERVERS ON THE BATTLEFIELDS OF THE WESTERN FRONT AND THE TACTICAL EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCES IN WORLD WAR I

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Abstract In August and September 1914 the United States Army and Marine Corps deployed observers to the battlefields of the Western Front. Immersed in an environment of rapidly evolving tactical doctrine, the battlefield observers had the potential to positively influence the tactics of the American Expeditionary Forces. This opportunity was not capitalized upon and American Tactical Doctrine Matured primarily as a result of actual combat experience. This paper explores the content of the observers reports and offers explanation for the failure of the United States to capitalize upon the lessons learned by European Armies in the two and one-half years of conflict prior to the commitment of the American Expeditionary Forces.		
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: “American Observers on the Battlefields of the Western Front and the Tactical Evolution of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I”

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Thesis: Although during World War I the United States employed observers on the battlefields of the Western Front, the information they provided lacked the substance and conclusions required to evolve the tactical doctrine of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). In initial engagements, the AEF was largely forced to rely, with predictable negative outcome, upon outdated concepts founded largely upon the prejudices of the Army’s leadership.

Discussion: In August of 1914 the United States Army and Marine Corps demonstrated strong foresight, considering the isolationist perspective of the nation, in detailing officers to the battlefields of Europe. These officers were given little guidance, but their mission was clearly to report on military actions and developments in what was becoming the largest struggle in history. A significant military development of World War I noted by the U.S. was the advance of offensive infantry tactics to cope effectively with the characteristics and lethality of the modern battlefield.

The United States, with a two and one-half year opportunity to observe tactics prior to the engagement of the AEF, arguably should have benefited from the experience of others. However, this was not the case. The AEF in its initial engagements, performed much as its European counterparts did at the onset of the war. Eventually the AEF performance improved, but only as U.S. soldiers and Marines gained personal battlefield experience.

Conclusions: A combination of four significant factors contributed to the failure of the AEF to evolve its tactical doctrine from the reports of battlefield observers. First, the observers were exposed to a wide variety of often opposing opinions and perspectives regarding the foundation for successful tactical doctrine. European tactical doctrine was evolving with each passing day and in this climate it was nearly impossible for observers to pass consistent information from which solid conclusions could be formed. Successful European tactical doctrine emerged concurrent with the employment of the AEF. Secondly, the initial doctrine of the AEF was largely influenced by the prejudices of its aging leadership, principally General John Pershing. General Pershing wielded powerful influence in the training of the soldiers and Marines of the AEF and many of his ideas were misaligned with the reality of the modern battlefield. Third, the AEF, a force of over 1 million men, was formed in an extremely short time. It was a citizen army as opposed to professionals and its lack of tactical expertise reflected this fact. Finally, as always, experience is the best teacher. The AEF did not mature tactically until it gained its own combat experience.

The lesson to be learned from the observer’s experience of World War I is relevant today. Technology arguably has the potential to again dictate the need for change in tactical doctrine. Observers need to be trained to accurately report events. Doctrine development centers must be equipped to form conclusions and to implement accurate and meaningful change.

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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HERIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEW OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEG OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

"For any life, for any profession, an environment of that life or profession is necessary for its full progress of development. The United States Army in peace had been far from any armies of the world and especially in this great war by the action of our own government, its officers had been kept from knowledge of the progress of military art and the development of military specialties."

-Major General Robert Lee Bullard

From the onset of fighting on the Western Front of World War I, characterized by the rapid transition from a war of movement to one of stalemate and trench warfare, it became clear to the British, French, and Germans that the nature of warfare had changed. On the operational level, rail lines facilitated the concentration of forces at a rate far outpacing any army's ability to exploit tactical success. Interlocked machine guns, deeply massed modern artillery, and emerging aviation capabilities added incredible lethality to the seemingly limitless depth of the unbroken defenses along the entire length of the front.¹ This unique type of fighting required a new approach to achieve success. The tenets of this approach were slowly and painfully learned by the antagonists on both sides of the front through the hard lessons of experience.

¹ Hubert C. Johnson, *Break-Through! Tactics, Technology and the Search for Victory on the Western Front in World War I* (Novato, Ca.: Presidio Press, 1994) 1-22

As the British, French and Germans fought, gained experience, and shifted tactical paradigms during the first two and a half years of conflict, America basked in her neutral status. The small and professional American Army's main focus from 1914-1916 amounted to little more than a police action in Mexico. The Army's perspective and traditions were those of a frontier force where the rifleman was supreme. The Army's mission, on a day-to-day basis, was largely that of a garrison force.

"Except for the Spanish-American War, nearly twenty years before, actual combat experience of the Regular Army had been limited to the independent action of minor commands in the Philippines and the two expeditions into Mexico, each with forces smaller than a modern American division."²

While the events in Europe were likely followed out of professional interest by U.S. Army officers, there was little if any indication in the early days of the war that America would eventually become involved.³ There certainly were no indicators that within the next four years the Army of the United States would grow to over a million men in Europe alone. With this perspective, there was little emphasis, as it related to the American Army, placed on the

² General John J. Pershing, *My Experiences In The World War Vol II* (New York: Fredrick A. Stokes Company, 1931) 150

³ Major General Robert L. Bullard, *Personalities and Reminiscences of the War* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925). Gen. Bullard emphasizes throughout his book that many of the problems the AEF experienced early in the war were the result of Governmental limitations on the Army to prepare for

potential value of a careful analysis of information emerging from the fighting in Europe. The Army's tactical bible, *Infantry Drill Regulations*, was in its 1911 edition at the onset of America's involvement in the war; it seems unlikely a serious and comprehensive review of current tactical doctrine based upon lessons being learned in Europe's war occurred.⁴

In contrast to a general American perspective of ignorance of events in Europe, the Army and the Marine Corps did take action at the onset of hostilities on the Western Front which could have secured access to information regarding changing warfare and tactics in Europe. With the declaration of war in 1914, the United States Army and Marine Corps rushed to identify and send officers to observe the actions of the various armies involved in the fighting.⁵ Serving with the armies of the British, French and Germans were company and junior field grade officers who prepared reports on their observations of the war and forwarded them to the U.S. Army War College Division of the War Department.

conflict. Gen. Bullard's assertion is corroborated by other sources including Generals Pershing and Lejeune.

⁴ James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I," *Parameters*, Journal of the US Army War College Vol III, no3 (1983)

⁵ National Archives, Correspondence of the War College Division 1903-1918, 8702-05. This file contains copies of the original orders issued to officers sent to Europe at the beginning of hostilities to include

Unfortunately, the opportunity the U.S. Army might have exploited through battlefield observers to gain an understanding of the evolution of offensive tactics occurring in Europe was never realized. There was no focused effort to translate the content of the observer's reports into U.S. Army doctrine. Additionally, due to largely unavoidable shortfalls in the observer's analysis and conclusions, had this effort been consciously undertaken, it is unlikely the results would have been effective in terms of aligning U.S. tactical maturity with requirements of the modern battlefield. In other words, the information regarding offensive tactics compiled by the observers lacked the substance and conclusions required to provide direction to the Army which could have resulted in more effective tactics on the modern battlefield. Therefore, in their initial engagements, the soldiers and Marines serving with the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) were largely forced to rely on misguided training and tactical doctrine based extensively on the outdated concepts and prejudices of the Army's leadership. In terms of the lives of U.S. servicemen, the price for the

correspondence between the officers and the War Department discussing some of the unique arrangements the officers made to facilitate their efforts.

shortfalls in leadership's vision resulting in the requirement to learn as you fight was high.

The Evolution in Tactics- European Armies and the Western Front 1914-1917

To understand the shortfall the U.S. Army experienced in its offensive tactical development it is important to first understand the changes or evolution in tactics on the Western Front during the initial two and half years of conflict. If these reports were to be of use in influencing the tactical doctrine of the AEF it is important to understand what information should have been transmitted. To be effective, the observers' reports would have to align with the changes of tactics in European Armies. Understanding the evolution of offensive tactics also establishes a baseline for tactical doctrine at the time the AEF entered the fighting. This baseline affords perspective regarding expectations for initial American performance on the battlefield.

As European armies adjusted to the stalemate and trench warfare, a tactical state of the art, so to speak, emerged. Over time and based upon some differing experiences, all armies engaged formed an understanding of

what tactics worked and what tactics resulted in heavy casualties with no appreciable success. While the senior military leadership of each nation differed slightly in their opinions of what offensive approaches were most effective, universally, and certainly by the time the United States entered the conflict, they had abandoned their pre-war concepts.⁶

The Western Front at the beginning of World War I was a fluid battlefield environment. As the Germans executed the Schlieffen plan, the French and the British attempted frantically to stop the advance. The tactics employed by both sides were mobile tactics aimed at the flanks of the opposing force. Little thought was given to doctrine and techniques for fighting on the tactical level as the aim of General officers was to win operationally decisive victories.

"In keeping with the predictions of the experts, World War I began as a war of grand maneuvers in which each side sought victory at the operational level. In such a war, the art of tactics, concerned with winning battles, was less important than operational art, concerned with winning campaigns. The loss of a battle, the destruction of a regiment, or even the destruction of a division was seen by the General staff virtuosos who directed the movement of million man armies as inconsequential when compared to the considerations that affected the campaign as a whole."⁷

⁶ Johnson, 59-62

⁷ Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics-Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (Westport Conn.: Praeger, 1989) 1

In this manner, with maneuver room found only to the west, the front quickly leapfrogged along until it became anchored on the coast. In this type of warfare meeting engagements were often the rule rather than the exception. Infantry with firepower generated by the musketry of riflemen was the decisive arm. Cavalry had the missions of protecting flanks, locating enemy formations, and exploiting success.

Early in the fighting the increased power and lethality of both machine guns and artillery was evident. Logistics, which had always limited armies, was made more challenging by the increased appetite for all types of supplies, especially artillery ammunition. On the German side, after the initial effort extended beyond the reaches of German rail lines, the fighting often bogged down for want of food and ammunition of all kinds. After the battle of the Marne it was a combination of logistics culmination, lack of maneuver space, and the effects of the advanced weapons systems which encouraged the digging of the first opposing trench lines. Once the digging of trenches began, the front stalemated.⁸

One of the key points in understanding the initial nature of the fighting of World War I was that it was

warfare conducted in the manner which the German, French and British armies of professional soldiers had anticipated and practiced. Strong traditions and paradigms existed in all armies regarding the conduct of the offense.⁹ Often these existing paradigms prevented the flexibility required to adapt to the new reality. As the fighting progressed, the strong traditions and existing conceptions of how the offense should be conducted carried forward from the initial battlefield environment of fluidity and figuratively crashed on the rocky shore of stalemate and trench warfare.

The second tactical stage experienced by the armies engaged on the Western Front was the stage for which World War I has become infamous. Most people, when they envision the battles of the First World War picture futile charges of infantry being mown down by machine guns and artillery as they leap from the protective cover of their trenches and charge across "no-man's land." From late 1914 until 1917 the antagonists on the Western Front worked to understand the nature of the operational situation as it existed and to overcome its challenges. It became apparent

⁸ Johnson, 29-51

⁹ Johnson, 61-62. The idea that some of the heavy losses experienced by European armies during the war was attributable to institutionalized training and traditions is expressed in other sources as well. For example, it has been suggested that the British disaster at the Somme, which included the employment of horse mounted officers accompanying infantry charges, was the result of just such paradigms.

that operational success depended largely on overcoming tactical challenges largely unforeseen by the leadership of all armies. It is during this stage of the fighting beginning September 1914, that the battlefield observers from the United States had a significant opportunity to report.

During this time period armies experimented with many possible solutions as they searched for answers to the dilemma of attacking defenses in depth. At first it was thought that infantry attacking with the proper aggressive spirit could overcome the trenches if only they chose the proper place to attack. When this failed to produce results the next idea explored worked on the theory that if enough artillery could be massed, the trenches of the opposing infantry could be completely destroyed. After the bombardment the infantry would merely have to occupy the shattered ground. This method failed as well for two reasons. First, most field artillery was unable to damage reinforced concrete fortifications deep in the ground. Second, defense in depth allow the defenders to absorb the pounding of artillery simply by moving back to trenches further in the rear.

In both of the methods of attack described, the infantry employed skirmisher line tactics and formations.

Skirmisher tactics were based upon the concept that the individual infantryman armed with a rifle was the key element to battlefield success. The marksmanship skills of the individual rifleman and his initiative were heavily relied upon. Musketry fire was considered the primary source of supporting fires to destroy or suppress enemy positions. Skirmisher line tactics normally employed infantrymen in linear formations with little spacing between individual riflemen. These linear formations would be launched in the attack in a series of waves. Each wave would conduct rushes of up to one hundred meters and then suppress the enemy for subsequent waves.¹⁰

The closely aligned ranks of these formations formed ideal targets for machine guns and artillery fire. Attacks would quickly bog down when the advancing troops were caught in murderous fires. In some cases the firestorm faced by the advancing soldiers was so severe they could not even clear their own trenches. Musketry in general had little positive effect in reducing fortified machine gun nests or artillery positions. The formations could not even expect any measure of success in facing similarly armed infantry in an opposing trenchline. As had been evident as early as 1863 at the battle of Fredericksburg

¹⁰ Johnson, 57-82

during the American Civil War, the firepower even of the individual rifleman armed with modern weapons in the defense was formidable.

As a general rule during the first two stages of the fighting on the front, skirmisher line formations were employed without the thought of using coordinated artillery to support the attack. Artillery was employed in two principal manners; an initial bombardment which often served, more than anything else, to alert the enemy and in a timed "rolling barrage" designed to suppress the enemy until the assaulting infantry could close to bayonet range. Machine guns were likewise not generally employed in mobile support of skirmisher line infantry attacks, their employment was largely limited to overhead fire. The concept of combined arms had yet to emerge.

Arguably the third stage in the evolution of tactics on the Western Front was that of siege warfare. Armies became stagnant in their focus on surviving in the trenches and small, localized successes as opposed to continuing the quest for breaking the stalemate. As with any defensive position, the trenches became more and more formidable over time. The challenge of the offense in this environment increased proportionally to these improvements.

"Frontal attacks, moreover, would be more difficult in position warfare than in mobile warfare. Barbed wire severely limited opportunities for creeping up on an enemy in small groups. The fact that a defender could study the ground in front of him over a matter of days and even weeks meant that effective fire could be brought against the entries and exits to covered positions along an avenue of approach. Finally the opportunity for the defender to integrate his machine guns and artillery into his defensive plans was far greater in position warfare. All these factors combined to make the dash across "no mans' land" the few hundred meters that separated one side from the other, a very difficult proposition."¹¹

A significant advance in tactical concepts to emerge during this stage was the realization that more powerful weapons than rifles were required by the infantry if they were to overcome defensive positions in the attack.

Technology was leveraged in the hope of breaking the stalemate. Each army began to employ greater numbers of machine guns. Advances were made in the use of grenades, small and portable trench mortars, and flame-throwers. Versions of an assault rifle appeared. Hope for a significant breakthrough on the operational level diminished during this phase as the focus shifted to solving the tactical problems of the battlefield.¹²

It was during this phase of the tactical evolution that the AEF began to deploy to Europe. The Americans were welcomed by the Allies as they brought with them enthusiasm

¹¹ Gudmundsson, 27

¹² Johnson, 113-139

and confidence undimmed by the stalemate that had consumed the armies of Europe for the past three years. This enthusiasm embodied a level of naiveté to the realities of modern warfare they were about to face. Tactics had changed and America had not kept pace with the change.

The Observer's Reports

The reports from the military observers assigned to the armies of the antagonists on the Western Front contain vast amounts of varied information. The reports from the observer assigned to Berlin for instance, were produced on a monthly basis and adhere to a distinct and unique format. The focus of these reports is mainly on information that was operational and strategic in nature. An example of this might be the observer's opinions on the state of German morale, or reports of large-scale troop movements. With limited exception there was little information of the tactical nature of the war or of efforts being made to overcome the static nature of the battlefield.¹³

With this in mind and after reviewing some of the original orders issued to observers sent to Europe, there seems to have been little in the way of guidance provided

¹³ The reports reviewed include those from the National Archive, Correspondence of the War College Division 1903-1918, files 8977

by the War Department regarding what information would be of use to the U.S. Army. The content of the reports appears mainly to be driven by those issues the observer was either drawn to by his own interest or background or by the focus and issues foremost at the time for the army he was observing. In some cases, later in the war, the observers received Western Union telegrams from the War College Division requesting specific information.¹⁴ These requests for details on a specific topic were sometimes prompted by information included in an earlier report. For the most part however, the officers were on their own to determine and transmit the information they deemed valuable. This lack of guidance in itself was a shortfall in U.S. efforts to gain knowledge on the war and a timeless lesson learned for future employment of officers on similar missions.

The reports of Majors James W. Barker and James Logan, Jr., and Captains Frank Barker and Morgan Churchill, who were assigned to France and routed reports through the military attaché in Paris, contain some of the best information and analysis regarding the requirement for evolving offensive tactics in the face of the changes in

¹⁴ It appears in some cases an observer would receive and respond to messages from the War Department requesting clarification of a prior report.

warfare. The usefulness and focus of these reports may also be a result of the freedom these officers had to move about and observe the battlefield or to talk with the men and officers of the French army. As the war progressed and out of the interest of security, many of the battlefield observers, especially those in Germany and Austria, were subjected to censorship by the army they were serving alongside.¹⁵

Additionally, based on the content of the reports reviewed it is clear the French, perhaps more than the British or the Germans early in the war, recognized the required changes in tactics and reacted. This observation is further validated by other sources:

"The British Expeditionary Force did not react as quickly as the French General Headquarters to the evident tactical crisis of late 1914."¹⁶

The French focused their effort on attempting to understand how they needed to evolve their doctrine. As a result, some of the most tactically interesting reports submitted by the military observers assigned to France are simply forwarded copies of French papers and pamphlets discussing tactics for trench warfare.

¹⁵National Archives, Correspondence of the War College Division 1903-1918, 8799, 8759

¹⁶Hubert C. Johnson, *Break-Through! Tactics, Technology and the Search for Victory on the Western Front in World War I* (Novato, Ca.: Presidio Press, 1994) 61

Examining observer reports in chronological order is useful as it potentially demonstrates the refinement and maturation of tactical thought through the gaining of experience. An early report, submitted by Major Spencer Colby detailed his conversation with a French artillery officer in November 1914.¹⁷ Immediately, the futility of applying manpower against material was noted along with the potential of artillery and machine guns. Major Spencer reported:

"[The artillery officer] believes artillery is responsible for the greater part of the losses to the enemy during the war. He did not like to make an estimate as to the proportion of men killed by artillery fire, but on being urged a bit said he would not be surprised if it went up to 75%."¹⁸

The artillery officer was referencing the casualties the Germans suffered in the attack due to artillery fire. This indicated early in the war that the latest changes and developments making artillery more effective had contributed to its overall effectiveness on the battlefield against the massed troop formations employed by the Germans at the onset of the war.

¹⁷ National Archives, Correspondence of the War College Division 1903-1918, 8698-1

¹⁸ National Archive, Correspondence. 8698-1

Maj. Colby's report also mentioned the French artillery officer's comments at this opening stage of the war regarding machine guns and entrenched infantry:

"He states the work of the machine guns has been most effective [in the defense]. If a machine gun is given anything of a field of fire and a fair chance in numbers he does not believe it can be taken by infantry charge...he seems to have the same idea with reference to infantry. He does not believe in daylight, with anything of equal numbers defending it, a fairly made and reasonable trench can be taken by an infantry charge.¹⁹

In the case of this report, the artillery officer was not discussing tactics that were successful in the offense, but noting rather the effectiveness of the defense armed with modern weapons against skirmisher line tactics. The conclusions to be drawn from this document at this early stage of the war were reinforcing lessons that first became evident to U.S. leadership during the American Civil War. It was proven at places like Mayre's Heights during the Battle of Fredericksburg, Cemetery Ridge during the Battle of Gettysburg, and at Cold Harbor that infantry attacks against entrenched infantry were no longer effective. In the years between 1865 and 1914, technological improvements in weapons systems only enhanced this reality and increased the futility of any similar attack attempted.

¹⁹ National Archive, Correspondence. 8698-1

In another report, Lieutenant Colonel Spencer Crosby, the military attaché' in Paris, provided a synopsis of a conversation with a French colonel of the infantry titled "Infantry Notes".²⁰ In this report the French colonel was critical of the French approach placing too much responsibility for initiative on the individual soldier and on small units. The colonel maintained that in the heat of battle the only actions troops could reasonably be expected to execute were "those simple principles which have been ground into him."²¹ This comment potentially resulted from initial frustrations on the part of the French in making progress in the attack in the face of extreme firepower from machine guns and artillery. In this case the French colonel's analysis of the situation suggested that if the success of the attack depended on the initiative of the individual soldier, the attack would fail as the individual was overwhelmed by the situation that confronted him. The French colonel's reaction to this situation was to suggest a reduction of the responsibility for individual initiative. In other words, make the individual responsible only for the simplest actions which have been drilled into him during training. This would suggest the

²⁰ National Archives, Correspondence of the War College Division 1903-1918, 8698-31

²¹ National Archives, Correspondence, 8698-31

French colonel to be an advocate of the tactics that would afford tighter control of troop formations by officers and non-commissioned officers.

The observations made by the French colonel regarding the difficulties of individual action and the concern for loss of control and momentum in the offense in the face of intense firepower were not unique. His perspective, shared by others in Europe and likely in America as well, was the basis for the continued use of skirmisher line tactics at the beginning of the war in spite of the evidence from recent conflicts demonstrating the futility of these formations.

"Military authors such as Fritz Honig and J. Meckel had painted terrifying pictures of attacks conducted in open order falling apart because large numbers of troops took advantage of the fact that they were far enough away from their officers to permit them to hide during the battle. The belief that the increased casualties that resulted from dense formations were a fair price to pay for the guarantee that troops would remain under the direct supervision of their officers became widespread."²²

Unfortunately, the conclusions the French colonel formed from his observations, that the solution to the problem of attacks slowed by enemy fire was to minimize the initiative expected of the individual, were later proven to be inaccurate.

²² Gudmundsson, 8

A second shortfall in French offensive capability identified by the French colonel in his comments was the lack of marksmanship skills of the individual soldier. The colonel asserted not enough emphasis was being placed on this skill during training. This shortfall resulted in inaccurate and ineffective fire by the French, with most of their shots being high above the heads of the Germans. Individual marksmanship was deemed important for the obvious reasons of desiring to make every shot account for one dead German. Perhaps however, the colonel's observations were not an actual reflection of the inaccuracy of the rifle fire as much as they were a statement of the ineffectiveness of rifle fire in general in trench warfare. The French at this point in the war would have relied upon the rifle and musketry to fix the Germans in order for other riflemen to gain ground in the attack. In other words, sustained and accurate rifle fire was the only type of organic fire support available to the infantry. The ability of the individual to deliver accurate rifle fire was one of the foundations of skirmisher line tactics. The French colonel's explanation for the failure of this tactical approach was the inability of the French soldiers to make their rifle fire effective. The truth was more likely that rifle fire itself, no matter

how accurate, was not effective against well-fortified soldiers possessing even similar weapons capabilities.

The conclusions Americans reviewing this report were likely to form would have reinforced the perceived effectiveness of skirmisher line tactics. The focus of the French colonel's criticism centered on the shortfalls of the French troops in executing the basic infantryman skills associated with skirmisher line tactics. In other words, it was not a failure of the tactics, it was the failure of the poorly trained or disciplined troops to execute the tactics properly. A similar and reoccurring theme criticizing the skills, especially marksmanship, of the individual soldier was expressed by General Pershing once the AEF engaged.²³

In a report submitted by Lieutenant Colonel Cosby, Captain Frank Barker, an observer with the French Army, forwarded an article written by a French Infantry Company Commander titled "Study on the Attack in the Present Period of the War- Impressions and Reflections of a Company Commander."²⁴ The author was Captain Andre' Laffargue of the 153rd French Infantry. Captain Laffargue's article discussed his experiences with trench warfare. He was

²³ Pershing. Throughout his book, General Pershing included letters he wrote to the United States indicating his level of dissatisfaction with the training level of the American troops arriving in Europe. One of his major complaints was shortfalls in rifle marksmanship skills.

prescriptive in his efforts to explain what was required for success in the attack on the modern battlefield. The War College Division of the War Department submitted the article for publication in the September-October 1916 issue of "Infantry Journal." This fact lends considerable significance to the report because it indicated army leadership thought the ideas and concepts worthy of consideration. Through publication in a professional magazine the information had the potential to be viewed by a wide audience.

Early in his article, Captain Laffargue revealed the drive behind his motivation to produce this report was to expose the changes in the assault dictated by the realities of the modern battlefield. He hoped to write so that others would profit from the sacrifices of his many comrades in arms.

"He who risks his life and does not wish to die but to succeed, becomes at times ingenious. That is why I, who was part of the human canister for more than nine months, have set about to consider the means of saving the inestimable existence of so many humble comrades, or at least to figure out how the sacrifice of their lives may result in victory."²⁵

Captain Laffargue's article does well in illustrating the problems facing assaulting troops in this war. In his

²⁴ National Archives, Correspondence of the War College Division 1903-1918, 8698-42

²⁵ National Archives, Correspondence, 8698-42

opening paragraphs he explained how critical it was for attacks to accomplish their goals as quickly and as decisively as possible in the face of the new levels of operational mobility.

"It must be accomplished in one day as otherwise the enemy reforms, and the defense, with terrible engines of sudden destruction, will later recover its supremacy over the attack."²⁶

He demonstrated that he recognized and understood the capabilities of entrenched troops, machine guns and artillery against attacking formations. He also understood and illustrated the typical German trench system as well as the obstacle plans of wire entanglements that support the defensive trenches. Captain Laffargue discussed artillery's role in the attack, although it is interesting that he did not express the importance of artillery in direct support of attacking infantry. This was most likely a result of the difficulty of coordinating the fires of artillery with the communications systems of the day. However, in discussing the use of artillery as preparation fire for an attack, Captain Laffargue explained how ineffective the French 75 mm gun proved to be to this point in the war. He asserted that aerial torpedoes were worthwhile to use against enemy trenches, but the 75 mm had little positive

effect at all. Fortified positions considered to be destroyed by heavy 75 mm fire were hardly damaged. When the infantry attacked the enemy emerged to man his weapons.

Captain Laffargue believed success on the battlefield depended most heavily upon the élan of the infantry. Pressing the attack vigorously, in the face of massive losses, was required for success. As expressed in this passage, he is a proponent for the continued use of skirmishers attacking in waves from the trenches and for the rifleman as the key to victory. While he recognized the changed nature of the battlefield, his solution was similar to the French colonel's solutions examined earlier. Laffargue advocated pressing the attack with even more vigor and control and emphasized the foundations of skirmisher line tactics.

"The March on the Line of Attack- Each echelon starts out successively at a single bound and moves at a walk (even in cadence if it were possible). It is curious to observe how much this pace conduces to a cold resolution and fierce scorn of the adversary. At Neuville, all units instinctively started at a walk. Afterwards take the double time at slow cadence, in order to maintain the cohesion; make several rushes, if necessary, of 80 to 100 meters. They should not be multiplied, at the risk of breaking the élan.

When a great effort has been made to scorn the fire of the adversary, it should not be destroyed by a change to an attitude signifying fear.

At 60 meters from the enemy, break into charge.

²⁶ National Archives, Correspondence, 8698-42

The Alignment.-To march in line is the capitol point, the importance of which one must have experienced in tragic moments to tell how prodigious is its influence. Moreover, the march in line is as old as war itself. The alignment holds back the enthusiasts, and gives to everyone the warm and irresistible feeling of mutual confidence. At Neuville, we marched at first at a walk, then at a slow double time, aligned as on parade. I constantly heard behind me through the rattling machine guns, the epic, splendid shout of supreme encouragement running all along the line. "Keep in line! Keep in line!" down to the humble reservist, C, who in spite of the bullets making gaps all about in the ranks, kept his young and agitated comrades on the line."²⁷

Captain Laffargue's only recommendations to the attackers for reducing casualties being caused by the defenders in the trenches was for the infantry riflemen to adopt a form of quick shooting. As the Germans raised their heads he advocated shooting at them quickly to keep their heads down. He further discussed the need to maintain the momentum of the attack and explained how rapidly attacking troops were expended through heavy casualties and sheer exhaustion.

Towards the end of his article, Captain Laffargue asserted how helpful it would have been to have organic firepower accompanying the attacking infantry to be employed to reduce enemy machine gun positions. This firepower, he suggested would be light, wheel mounted artillery pieces, and could be used in the direct fire

²⁷ National Archives, Correspondence, 8698-42

mode. He made the same point regarding a similar utility for the light machine gun and even stated the need for machine guns in the attack could be reduced if the infantry were equipped with automatic rifles.

Therefore, Captain Laffargue's efforts transmitted a mixed message to the reader. He demonstrates a strong understanding of the problems infantry faced on the battlefield and the deadly nature of modern weapons. He understood that the latest efforts to employ artillery to prepare enemy positions prior to the attack were largely futile. On one hand he emphasized skirmisher line methods which ultimately proved to be ineffective. At the same time, almost as an after thought he identified the need for mobile firepower in the form of light howitzers and automatic rifles. He was on the brink of discovering and expressing the requirement for fire and maneuver tactics, but was so entrenched with the concept of skirmisher line formations that his good ideas were lost.

Americans reading Laffargue's article could not be expected to draw accurate conclusions in terms of the reality of the modern battlefield. Laffargue's emphasis pointed to the continued employment of skirmisher line tactics. In his book, Stormtroop Tactics, Bruce Gudmundsson, familiar with Laffargue's article, summarized

the essence of the message that would have been clear to Americans exposed to his article.

"He was held back, however, by a desire, common to many military men to maintain control over the attack by maintaining control over the attackers...He insisted on the need to maintain the skirmisher line formations until the point where, 50 meters from the enemy trench, bayonets were lowered and close combat began."²⁸

Following on the heels of the submission of Captain Laffargue's article, a report was submitted by four military observers of a translation of a French report encapsulating French observations and lessons learned in the war to this point. An interesting feature of this article is the report was basically a secret French document the observers copied and passed to the American War Department.²⁹ In this regard the observers stressed that the contents of this report were "of a most confidential character."

The article highlighted the fact that there were many changes in tactics from those practiced prior to the outbreak of the war. The need for teamwork between the artillery and the infantry was stressed, the extent of the use of entrenchments as never before seen, and the extensive use of the machine gun in the attack. This report also highlighted the effectiveness of artillery fire

²⁸ Gudmundsson, 195

against massed troops and specified the size of the ideal fighting unit to be 50-60 men, with a requirement for the identity of the officers to be concealed, as they would have undoubtedly become targets of enemy fire.

Perhaps as a result of the article by Captain Laffargue, the report advocated the need for absolute control of the infantry in skirmisher lines and recommended the training of the individual infantryman to assume leadership and responsibility. Some final observations were made regarding the emerging and critical role of aerial observers prior to the commencement of any attack. The report ended with some remarks made by the American observers of how some of the methods and equipment emerging as successful on the Western Front could perhaps have been employed in "colonial warfare" or warfare with the Indians. This last remark afforded some insight regarding the American Army's perception of their most likely involvement in future conflicts.

The value of this report to the American readers would have been principally to raise levels of awareness of the difficulties of trench warfare by demonstrating the extent to which the French are struggling. It offered, however, nothing in the way of insight or conclusions as to how to

²⁹ National Archives, Correspondence of the War College Division 1903-1918, 8698-47

align tactics to overcome these difficulties.

Additionally, it did not point to any shortfalls in American tactics compared to those being used in France. Americans lacking the intimate perspective offered only through personal engagement would have been hard pressed to use this report as the basis for a review of tactical doctrine.

Colonel Joseph E. Kuhn, military attaché, Berlin, reported on 30 October 1916 the results of the first two days of the British and French effort in the Battle of the Somme.³⁰ The report was significant only in that it portrayed again the utter futility of attempting attacks of massed infantry against entrenched troops and the ineffectiveness of field artillery against fortified positions. In this battle the British and French believed they were attacking in a quiet sector where the Germans would not expect an offensive. The British and French attacked utilizing skirmisher line tactics only after a massive artillery bombardment that was described as heavy as "20,000 shots of all calibers and many hundreds of mines were counted against a front section of three kilometers."³¹ With a few, operationally insignificant exceptions, the

³⁰ National Archives, Correspondence of the War College Division 1903-1918, 8977

³¹ National Archives, Correspondence, 8977-

attacking troops were repulsed across the front with absolutely horrific casualties.

Captain Laffargue's article demanded attacks be pressed home with vigor and spirit. It appeared in the battle of the Somme, the British and French had plenty of energy, and pressed the attack, but still failed at terrible cost. In what seems in retrospect to be incredible, the report described how British officers in instances attacked mounted on horseback against the German trenches. In other cases the German artillery fire was so effective, that even after the massive pre-attack bombardment, British troops were not even able to get clear of the trenches before they were cut down.

"The English as well as the French attacks, which took place in deeply echeloned thick columns and which surged forward in numerous waves, were carried out with noteworthy dash. The leaders at times charged mounted in advance of their troops. But almost everywhere the attacks were repulsed in front of the German positions by well placed German artillery fire."³²

This report further discussed the effectiveness of machine guns in the target rich environment the gunners faced. One account was given of two guns firing 27,000 rounds from three barrels in three hours against the attacking troops. For the British troops on the ground the reality of what

³² National Archives, Correspondence, 8977

they faced and the futility of their efforts must have been obvious. Colonel Kuhn observed that of the British prisoners captured, many had raised their courage to clamber over the tops of the trenches by heavily fortifying themselves with alcohol.

The value of this report as it pertains to America's preparations for war was minimal. The report accurately expressed the results of British and French efforts at the Somme but failed to offer solutions. In a similar manner to the efforts of all other observers, Colonel Kuhn highlighted the deadly nature of trench warfare but offered nothing to suggest that the British might have enjoyed success had they changed their tactics. The report, while interesting, reads much like a newspaper article and conveys only the facts surrounding the action. Questions are not raised, conclusions are not drawn and solutions are not offered.

The reports of the battlefield observers prior to the engagement of the AEF in World War I accurately reflect the existing confusion and frustration European Armies experienced in their attempts to overcome fortified defenses of great depth. As noted, however, the reports lack any conclusions or recommendations which would have had any potential use in adapting U.S. tactical doctrine.

Their shortfall is understandable when it is considered that the observers could hardly have been expected to draw accurate conclusions or make recommendations when even those engaged in the fighting failed in this regard.

Belleau Wood: An Example of the Failure of U.S. Tactics in the Initial Engagements.

The AEF as an independent organization was to first participate in battles and operations on the Western Front in 1918. These initial battles provided the most compelling evidence of the effectiveness and the status of American tactical doctrine and training. It was in battles such as Belleau-Wood and Soissons and during operations such as the Meuse-Argonne where the American Army's effort to build effective units was to be validated and where the AEF tested the effectiveness of its espoused key to tactical success, the concept of open warfare.

Strategically, the outcome of American involvement in the war was never in doubt. The war had been, for the first three years, one of attrition at all levels of conflict. The tremendous weight of the American effort tipping the balance expressed in sheer numbers of infantrymen alone would be decisive. Germany could not

expect to counter the allied efforts even with the recent relief gained through the peace with Russia or through their emerging advanced adaptation of tactics to modern warfare. It was at the operational and tactical level however, where American performance when compared to its allies could be measured. The measurement was quantified in terms of the speed of operational gains and in the numbers of U.S soldiers and Marines killed in battle. Allied officers participating in the fight observed the tactical formations and the coordination of supporting arms such as artillery, aircraft, and tanks and reported on American performance. British and French units, experienced in three years of trench warfare fighting in units alongside Americans quickly noted the speed of the U.S. advance and the effectiveness of American leadership.

In May and June of 1918, American Marines and soldiers were rushed to blunt the German offensive along the Marne. The Second Division, which included the Marine brigade with battalions from the Sixth Marine Regiment, counter attacked to drive the Germans from positions established in Belleau Wood. The German position was foreboding. The boulder strewn, kidney shaped woods which measured roughly one by three kilometers were a natural fortress favoring the defender. When the Marines attacked it was on line and

without supporting artillery. The closest analogy to the tactics employed in the fight was to those of the Civil War battlefields of Gettysburg and Antietam.

"Yet today there seem to be marked similarities between the experiences of those men in 1918 and their grandfathers in the 1860's. Mounted dragoons with lances at rest; horse-drawn cannon wheeling into firing position; lines of infantry, dressing right as if on parade, marching across open fields toward the enemy—all seem to belong to an earlier time, but they were part of the experience of the men who fought through Belleau Wood. More than the sights, there was the same basic dependence of the commanders on the courage and spirit of their men rather than technique to win the battle. But in the 1860's the cruel test was over in hours. At Belleau Wood the hours ran into days and on into weeks, with the gas barrages intensifying the horror"³³.

The bravery of the Marines at Belleau Wood was unquestioned. Tactical skill however, was non-existent. "The Marines attacked in waves of four ranks, little different from an American Civil War assault. To the German defenders it was like a flashback to 1916, when they had mowed down British infantry at the Somme."³⁴ The Marines suffered 5,200 casualties in the twenty days of fighting, a total which amounted to approximately 64% of the strength of the Marine Brigade. On one day alone, June 6, the Marines suffered 1,087 casualties as they "in well aligned

³³ Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars, The American Experience in World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) 215

³⁴ Rod Paschall. *The Defeat of Imperial Germany 1917-1918* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1989) 156

waves...crossed the wheat fields dotted with poppies."³⁵

These casualties included those killed and wounded, many of whom were gassed. General Lejeune, who was present for much of the fighting, noted "again it was decisively shown the great importance of artillery to infantry. Infantry alone without material makes little or no progress. If the enemy combines personnel and material, we must do the same."³⁶

In accounts of the battle for Belleau Wood there was no mention of fire and maneuver. In fact, the opposite was true as the Marines attacked on line. Machine guns were not employed in the offense to suppress the enemy and to allow the infantry to advance. Even artillery was ignored as attacks without even a preliminary barrage were conducted. The Germans noted the Americans had severe leadership shortfalls and the troops attacked bravely and in dense masses. The wood itself limited maneuver on both sides of the fight as surely as any intricate system of trench works supported by obstacles. The ability of the U.S. Marines to flush the enemy from defensive positions and to defeat him in the open as advocated at the time, was not demonstrated or realistic. At Belleau Wood, the

³⁵ Paschall, 217

³⁶ David. F. Trask, *The American Expeditionary Forces in 1918*, (Washington, DC: No Publisher Listed, 1989) 4, Chap. 4

Americans combined courage and aggressiveness with tactics abandoned by the British, French, and Germans in the first years of the war. They made no attempt to fire and maneuver, and while ultimately successful, the price the Marines paid in blood was substantial.

Why the American Army Failed to Evolve

It would appear, based upon the tactical methods employed by U.S. Soldiers and Marines, that the reports of the battlefield observers had little impact upon the tactical development of the AEF. The Americans in their first engagements executed tactics by now considered ineffective by European armies. It is not likely however, that the reports of observers were totally ignored, instead there were other, more significant factors influencing the tactical doctrine of the AEF.

American leadership, most particularly General Pershing, who alone was the most influential individual shaping U.S. doctrine during the war, understood that tactics in the modern battlefield environment had changed.³⁷ His understanding aligned with the one clear theme that could be universally extracted from the observer reports.

³⁷ James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I," *Parameters*, Journal of the US Army War College Vol III, no3 (1983)

The American shortfall was not a failure to recognize the change, it was a failure to accurately interpret and adapt to the change.

At the time of World War I, the United States Army did not have an established system for the development of doctrine. The current doctrine development center, Training and Doctrine Command, did not exist at the time. An analogy to this might be formed by considering a modern day commander attempting to sort through information regarding enemy activity without the benefit of an intelligence section. While conclusions may be drawn based on the massive amount of disorganized information provided, they are likely to be inaccurate and influenced by that individual's background, ideas, and prejudices. General Pershing and the AEF, blindfolded by poor insight to the nature of the problem, completely missed the mark.

The reports of the battlefield observers, far from being ignored, were likely read by officers in the War Department who would distribute the information as they saw fit to those who might have had an interest in the information contained. For instance, the massive amount of detailed description concerning the construction of field fortifications would have been distributed to army

engineers. In another case, information regarding mobile field kitchens or providing fodder for horses would have been forwarded to the quartermasters. This process however was haphazard and far from a disciplined evaluation of the material with an eye for applicability to the U.S. Army. In the case of the development of doctrine for the attack, interpretation of the reports was not subjected to a process designed to determine requirements or to refine tactics. The interpretation of reports would be made by individual readers. The meaning, as it related to future U.S. involvement in the conflict, was therefore subject to inaccurate interpretation. In this regard these reports, rather than enlightening, may have been a key element in the misguidance of the American Army. This is especially true when the content of articles like Captain Laffargue's is considered.

The strategic position of the United States up until the final months prior to its entry into the conflict may have had bearing on the use of the observer reports. The observers with the French army suggested that some of the information they were gathering regarding the effectiveness of machine guns might prove useful to the United States in future "colonial conflicts." This drives home the point of fact that most Americans did not believe the United States

would get involved in the war in Europe. The United States Army until 1917 was not even preparing for fighting in Europe. *With this prevailing attitude it would have been difficult to generate the interest, or more importantly the resources required, to embark upon a serious review of the changing doctrine in Europe based upon the reports of battlefield observers.* To imagine the next step of translating this effort into determining the doctrinal requirements for an Army of the United States, which by the end of 1918 would become so large it would have been unimaginable by even the most visionary men of the time, is unrealistic.

What the United States had instead of a combat development system was General Pershing, a strong willed man with a well-established opinion concerning the nature of tactical doctrine in modern war. General Pershing recognized the futility of trench warfare and understood the small advances represented by wresting a trench-line from the German defenders would not win victory on the operational or strategic level. He was further convinced that the French, and to a lesser extent the British, worn out from three years of fighting, had become overly conservative in their concern over casualties. The French were basing their offensive tactical doctrine on the skills

required to fight in the trenches with little consideration of what lay beyond.³⁸

General Pershing resisted the French method of training, which he viewed to be limited and narrow, as vigorously as he resisted European overtures suggesting amalgamation. Pershing believed, accurately enough, that victory lay in success beyond the trenches. He underestimated, however, the significance of the challenge the trenches posed. In this regard, the attitude of General Pershing at the beginning of American involvement was not unlike that of European generals in 1914. He focused his attention on the operational level without considering the prohibitive tactical difficulties.

To inspire the aggressive attitude among Americans he deemed essential for victory and in recognition of the need to fight beyond the trenches, General Pershing insisted on training for what he called "open warfare." Open warfare, which focused on the capability and élan of the individual rifleman, was envisioned by Pershing as the key to the defeat of the enemy once the fluidity of the battlefield had been re-established.

³⁸ General John J. Pershing, *My Experiences In The World War Vol II* (New York: Fredrick A. Stokes Company, 1931) . General Pershing's insistence that Americans train independently was based upon his strong belief that the French had become defensive minded. This theme is repeated throughout his book and in his correspondence throughout the war.

There were two shortfalls to General Pershing's insistence on training for open warfare. The first shortfall as indicated earlier was in the accuracy of General Pershing's assessment of effective tactics. The General's concepts when compared to the direction of tactics to date in the war were wrong. According to Pershing, in open warfare the role of the rifleman and musketry on the battlefield was the key to success. Machine guns, grenades and automatic riflemen, relied upon to an increasing extent by all European armies at the time, were considered the weapons the French would favor for their short-sighted, trench focused efforts and were therefore unappreciated by General Pershing.³⁹

General Pershing's concepts of the requirements for success on the modern battlefield aligned with the main theme of the article by Captain Laffargue. General Pershing in a similar manner to Captain Laffargue, championed the capabilities of the rifleman and discusses the absolute requirement for aggressively pressing the attack. However, not surprisingly, the General did not appreciate the use of machine guns in the attack, the coordination required between infantry and artillery, or

³⁹ James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I," *Parameters*, Journal of the US Army War College Vol III, no3 (1983)

the need for increased firepower in the hands of the infantry.

The second shortfall in General Pershing's insistence on open warfare was in its implementation. As generals often do, General Pershing spoke in broad sweeping generalities rather than specifics. For example, he did not articulate specific details on battalion level training and techniques for open warfare, as no general officer would. On the other hand he was quick to recognize tactics and training he considered misaligned with his concept and he applied immediate influence to correct these shortfalls. His book, *My Experiences*, is filled with many examples of his correspondence to the United States expressing concerns regarding the focus of training efforts for entry-level soldiers. In applying such pressure, General Pershing, who did not hesitate to relieve commanders he believed incompetent, wielded tremendous influence on the direction of U.S. tactical doctrine development. This influence served more to crush creative thought than to enhance innovation and left his subordinates wondering what the General really meant by open warfare and how to implement his broad based direction in actual training.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ James W. Rainey, "Ambivalent Warfare: The Tactical Doctrine of the AEF in World War I," *Parameters*, Journal of the US Army War College Vol III, no3 (1983)

Aside from the deficiencies involving the lack of a combat development system, preventing maximization of the utility of the observer's reports, the AEF was faced by two related, almost insurmountable obstacles in developing effective doctrine. The first obstacle was time and the second the experience of the Army as a whole.

What the AEF accomplished in a time period of approximately eighteen months was staggering. The American Army and Marine Corps transformed from ranking 16th in the world in 1917 to fielding an army across an ocean that contained, by the fall of 1918, more than a million men. Organizing, equipping, moving, and sustaining an Army of this magnitude alone was an incredible feat. Establishing schools and providing training of any quality was yet again another monumental effort. This is especially true when one considers the Army was engaged in fighting simultaneous with its mobilization. With so many focuses of effort combined with pressure from the sagging Allies to rush as many men forward as possible to the front, it is of little surprise the AEF did not have the time initially to take a hard look at refining offensive tactics. Everyone was so busy getting to the fight that the concerns of how to execute would have to be addressed only when they became an immediate and pressing concern.

The problem the AEF faced in providing adequate training for a rapidly mobilized army was not unique to the American effort in the war. The Germans had experienced the same problems in 1914. The description of their experiences in Gudmundssons's Stormtroop Tactics aligns remarkably with later accounts of the American experience.

"The major deficiency of the units in the Fourth Army lay in the area of training. In the course of the months of August and September 1914, the volunteers had been trained by officers and NCOs largely ignorant of modern warfare.....Many were new to the latest model (M1898) Mauser rifle and tactics that had been developed to make the most of its virtues. As a result, the training that was imparted to the eager young men in surplus dark blue uniforms consisted mostly of close order drill and bayonet fighting."

The second obstacle the AEF would have to overcome in refining doctrine was the overall experience level of its Army. The U.S. Army was far from professional. In fact it was so small that the professionals could not even be said to constitute the core around which the rest of the organization grew. Many of the professionals who comprised the pre-war Army did not prove effective in the AEF and were fired by General Pershing. Some of these men were merely old men who lacked the aggression and physical stamina to compete at the young man's game. Others lacked the mental agility to keep pace with the requirements of such a large army at war.

With so much general inexperience, which would have been especially pervasive at the company grade and junior field grade levels, where the focus of tactics resides, it is doubtful that many would recognize and understand the need to validate or modify U.S. doctrine until first contact with the enemy.

To the credit of the U.S. Army, once experience had been gained on the battlefield, it exhibited the rapid ability to change and adapt effective techniques for the attack as was evident in the latter stages of the Meuse-Argonne campaign. Perhaps this is an advantage of a non-professional army that does not fight with ingrained notions of how battle is or is not to be conducted. Effective tactics were able to evolve rapidly in an army with little institutionalized tradition dictating the manner in which tactics were executed.

Conclusions

Therefore, while the opportunity existed for the United States to gain an advantage in the evolution of tactical doctrine through its battlefield observers the potential was never realized. Given the climate of general tactical confusion resident among all European armies at

the time, the shortfalls in the substance of the observers' reports is certainly understandable. No army engaged prior to the deployment of the AEF, to include the Germans, produced a viable solution to the challenges of trench warfare.

As the United States engaged, tactical doctrine in the war arguably reached a fourth and final stage. Following the third phase, which was more or less that of siege warfare, the potential appeared for a return to a more fluid battlefield environment. This was made possible through both German stormtroop tactics and allied tactics of fire and maneuver capitalizing on combined arms attacks employing tanks and aircraft. The AEF, after overcoming its initial shortfalls in tactical competence improved as rapidly as any other army engaged.

This does not imply the U.S. effort to send observers to the battlefields was wasted and the only valuable lessons to be learned are gained through personal experience. What it does suggest is that there needed to have been a system in place to make sense of information provided through observers and compare the refined information to current doctrine and tactical practices.

This lesson is as relevant today as it was eighty years ago. Many consider the advances in technology that

challenged the doctrine of the day to constitute a revolution in military affairs. If this was the case one must recognize the rapidly advancing technology of today could generate or influence a revolution in military affairs that would make our current doctrine obsolete. This revolution could potentially be demonstrated on a modern battlefield in a conflict without U.S. direct involvement. In this situation, having trained observers on the ground and the analysis apparatus in place to accurately assess the impact of new technology could determine success or failure in future war.

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