

Edward A. Gutiérrez. *Doughboys on the Great War: How American Soldiers Viewed Their Military Experience.* Modern War Studies Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014. 320 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-1990-0.

Reviewed by William Gorby

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Edward A. Gutiérrez's *Doughboys on the Great War* is a fascinating and lively book. His military history seeks to correct the claim made by Edward M. Coffman in *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (1968) that "it is impossible to reproduce the state of mind of the men who waged war in 1917 and 1918" (p. 12). On the contrary, Gutiérrez aptly takes the reader into the minds of the men of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Building off recent social histories, such as Christopher M. Sterba's *Good Americans: Italian and Jewish Immigrants during the First World War* (2003) and Chad L. Williams's *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (2010), the author argues persuasively that historians can access "the psyche of the doughboys" (p. 2). Gutiérrez is able to do this by effectively mining 30,847 Military Service Records (MSRs) completed immediately after the war by AEF veterans from Utah, Minnesota, Connecticut, and Virginia. Rather than utilizing solely memoirs, diaries, and oral histories conducted many decades later, Gutiérrez puts the reader squarely in the mentalities of soldiers shortly after the war, while their ideas were still fresh in their minds.

Gutiérrez disagrees with the traditional image of the disillusioned "Lost Generation" as de-

picted by authors F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, E. E. Cummings, and Ernest Hemingway. He finds that most AEF veterans returned to America proud of their military service. Gutiérrez places this generation in the proper context, noting how they grew up during the Victorian era when popular culture emphasized an overtly romantic image of the Civil War. This "warrior ethos" gave future AEF soldiers an inaccurate perspective on military conflict (p. 19). Most did share an abiding sense of duty to their country, personal honor, and an athletic masculinity. Many would have agreed with William W. Parker of Norfolk, Virginia, who said "my attitude towards military service is of the highest that any man can have, and I felt it was necessary that I do my duty for I am an American and fight for her principles" (p. 23). Influenced as well by pro-war propaganda from Great Britain prior to 1917, Gutiérrez makes great use of the MSRs to show why young men were more than willing to fight in World War I.

While the overall historical account Gutiérrez tells is not new to historians of the First World War, the in-depth, personal insights from ordinary soldiers and junior officers makes the book groundbreaking in the field. While at times overusing similar quotes from soldiers' MSRs, he tells stories of why soldiers from different geo-

graphical, racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds were willing to go off to France; he shares their experiences in military training camps and sea voyages, interactions with their French and British allies, comradeship with fellow soldiers, and battle against the mud and louse of the trenches; and he relays the horrors of combat. He repeats what other historians have noted that AEF soldiers found their training less than satisfactory. Sergeant Philip W. Higgins from Clinton, Connecticut, found after his nine months at Camp Devens, Massachusetts, that he “developed a feeling of disgust at seeing so much time wasted in obsolete training methods” (p. 62). However, for other men, camp life was their first interaction with a diverse group of people.

Gutiérrez is at his best in chapter 5 detailing the “supreme test” of the AEF soldiers on the western front in 1917-18. The MSRs reveal patterns in how the men viewed combat. Most were frustrated by an unseen enemy who engaged in distant artillery bombardments. However, fighting the Germans in hand-to-hand combat reinforced their preconceived ideas that their military service was serving a greater purpose. Many spoke of the barbarism of combat and the dehumanization it fostered. Sergeant John J. Echols from Hartford, Connecticut, noted: “In order to arrive at the point where you can stick a bayonet in another you have to slough off all civilization has built up since the Stone Age” (p. 109).

These and many other personal accounts from ordinary soldiers make *Doughboys on the Great War* a thrilling read. Gutiérrez has tapped a long underutilized base of primary sources. While some might criticize him for sample bias, he consistently notes in the introduction and conclusion the limits of his analysis, since he is utilizing MSRs from only four states. This is especially true when suggesting that most doughboys returned home and “functioned as normal citizens” after the war (p. 148). How true would this statement be for working-class veterans who suffered immediately

during the recessionary postwar economy in the industrial Midwest and central Appalachia? Gutiérrez also notes the problem of generalizing too much from the MSRs for African American veterans, who tended to answer like Corporal Thomas Clary of the 369th Regiment: “I love my country better, I know what a good home we have” (p. 90). Gutiérrez stresses that black veterans had to frame their answers in this positive light or incur the punishment of segregationist officials. My one major critique is the repetitive nature of some of the examples from the soldiers, and especially Gutiérrez’s oft-repeated argument that soldiers reprised the thoughts of Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman that “war is hell” or “Sherman was right” (pp. 100, 105, 160). Even with this aside, I highly recommend Gutiérrez’s *Doughboys on the Great War* for a wide readership. It is by far one of the best social histories of American soldiers in World War I that I have read.

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