

I am honored that you chose to read this novel. Thank you! I made every effort to portray the historical events in this novel with as much accuracy as possible. I take full responsibility for any factual errors. Some are deliberate for the sake of the story, with scenes or actions within scenes that are entirely fictional. Here is my opportunity to tell you what is true and confess my speculative and fictional sins.

Ab Johnson, Arthur Beck, Lyle McCormack, Carl Larsen, Jack Johnson, Ira Cunningham, Alice Simmons, Ben Grant, Hiram Stoops, Walt Gordon, Capt. Saunders, and Private Worthington and his crew are figments of my imagination. Nearly all the other characters are based on real people, though their conversations, actions, and thoughts are fictionalized.

Fiction allows the author's imagination to fill gaps that inevitably occur in the historical record. Major Richard Derby probably didn't pull any Roosevelt family connections to make things happen, but he could have. The idea of Ab Johnson's motorcycle was inspired by Derby, who barreled around the battlefield in a motorcycle sidecar. The character of Lt. Colonel Walt Gordon was based on an Army staff officer who I chose to not name. It was impossible for this Marine father to read his analysis regarding the relief of the Fourth Brigade and not feel my blood boil a century after the fact. Some readers may find their favorite story about the Battle of Belleau Wood missing in this novel. I hope they will forgive me. There are too many stories of individual sacrifice and heroism to include in this novel.

Ab Johnson was not based on any real person and is not autobiographical, even though I am a Marine father twice over. It is unlikely that a US Army major would do some of the things he did in the novel. His actions are ones I'd like to think a Marine father in his position might imagine doing. I'm not aware of anyone using a motorcycle to ferry supplies and wounded during the battle for Hill 142. The scene where he and Major Smith conspire to inform the regimental commanders of the pending battle on June 6th was fictional.

I changed Henry Lenert's story by adding Carl to it. Lenert was alone when the better part of a German company surrendered to him. He knew where his lines were and didn't stop in Lucy on his way to the brigade HQ. I made up his speech idioms, and the part about the Lugers (which were coveted battlefield souvenirs). I thought it looked better that way.

Maps were included to help readers understand the geography. The troop movements and dispositions during the Battle of Belleau Wood were complex and best shown in maps. Please forgive me if I was off by a hundred yards here or a quarter mile there. I'm a physician, not a cartographer.

The motorcycle on the cover is probably not an Indian. My cover artists and I couldn't find any open-source photos of Indians with sidecars. I chose the Indian since that was the motorcycle Derby used. The soldier pictured has a messenger pouch, which Ab Johnson may have needed to stow papers as he worked his way around the supply side of the battle.

Grammarians who use *The Chicago Manual of Style* might take exception with my decision to capitalize the words "Marine" and "Marines". I did this deliberately to fall in line with the way

Marines and Marine publications treat the words. Grammarians can throw copies of *Chicago* at me, but Marines have guns. Semper Fi!

I didn't portray General Bundy in a very good light. The Marines under his command didn't seem to have a high opinion of him. It appears he didn't have a high opinion of them, which only got worse after the difficulties the Seventh Infantry had in its relief of the Marines. He was in a very difficult position as an American general under French command. I suspect that instances like this led to the current policy that American troops only go into battle under American command. General Pershing fought for this but was overruled by higher command in this battle.

The Battle of Belleau Wood played an important role in the history of the inter-service rivalry between the US Army and US Marine Corps. Marines were used for ship boardings and small infantry actions within the context of naval operations prior to 1900. The Navy owned the seas, and the Army owned the land. Army opinion was that the Marines fought skirmishes while the Army won wars. Army leaders objected the idea of two infantry organizations in the American military all the way past the end of the Korean War. Teddy Roosevelt had advocated rolling the USMC into the US Army. The fact that the press extolled the daring do and ferocity of the Marines in the Battle of Belleau Wood only served to fan the fires of US Army resentment.

Historians debate the importance of the Battle of Belleau Wood. The battle didn't win the war. However, it stopped a critical breakthrough by the German Army that appeared to threaten Paris, and thus the outcome of the war. The Germans outran their logistics and may have reached their limits by the time they reached the Château-Thierry sector. The French and Americans didn't know that at the time. The perceived threat to Paris drove the French to desperation. The Fourth Brigade of Marines met the tip of the German spear by pure chance. The Second Division, the US Third Division and the French 167th combined to stop the last big German advance during the war. After this battle, along with actions by the French and British farther north, Germany moved in only one direction: Backward.

This novel focuses on the Marines and Navy Medical. That is not to denigrate the heroic actions of the US Army during the battle. The Second Division's Army Third Brigade fought valiantly alongside the Marines. The US Army's Third Division fought a vicious battle in and around Château-Thierry while the Battle of Belleau Wood raged. The story of "The Rock of the Marne" Third Army Division is for a different novelist to fictionalize.

The importance of the battle to the USMC is the subject of less debate. Prior to the battle, the USMC was a small organization that didn't fight big battles. Some historians call the Battle of Belleau Wood "The birthplace of the modern Marine Corps". Others debate the point. I consider it to be a crucible—in essence, the fulcrum upon which USMC history turned.

The matter of what happened to battlefield commanders like Lt. Col. Wise is an interesting question. He was an experienced commander. He knew how to read a map and communicate. Yet, during the actions between June 11-15, he misinterpreted communications, maps, and directions. The maps he and the other battalion commanders had were inadequate and June 10th was the first time he had been in the woods. He, like his men, was starved, sleep deprived, subjected to an unknown amount of toxin exposure, and was pummeled by repeated shock waves

from artillery shelling. I speculate that Wise suffered from a combination of what we now call acute combat stress syndrome along with an element of traumatic brain injury.

The effects on the short- and long-term brain function of humans subjected to artillery barrages is a subject that has received little formal study for understandable reasons. Much of the recent work on blast-related brain injury relates to singular or repeated events but not the effects of sustained bombardment over many hours. Wise and his men were on the receiving end of intense bombardment on multiple occasions. He was blown out of his foxhole by a nearby explosion on one occasion. It is dreadful to think of what these explosive forces did to the delicate connections within the brains of the troops on both sides.

The long-term complications of gas injuries are clear, however. Dr. Orlando Petty tried to rejoin the Navy after the war but was denied because of physical limitations due to the gas exposure that led to his Medal of Honor. After the war he suffered from “ill health” until his suicide in 1932. He was a brilliant endocrinologist who played a significant role in diabetes care at the time when insulin first came into use.

The exact wounds and circumstances that led to Captain Lloyd Williams’s death were not clear to me. I was therefore left to speculate and tried to fill in the blanks as well as I could. I hope the Williams and Petty families will forgive any inaccuracy on my part. Likewise, Gunny Stockham’s exact actions and wounds aside from the gas exposure were unclear to me. He was probably not in the Luzancy gas hospital when he died. I chose to portray his death the way I did to show the impact of his loss on men who knew him.

My descriptions of the fictionalized real people in this novel are as accurate as I was able to make them with limited resources. Black and white photographs of the people involved helped. Details like height, weight, build, and eye color were invented where I could not find accurate information about those attributes. The only service records available to me were furnished by André Sobocinski, the historian of the Navy Bureau of Medicine. If I have offended any of their descendants, I hope they understand I didn’t intend to do so. Whether they cursed or smoked is unknown to me. I toned down the salty language significantly, and hope Marines will forgive me for f-ing doing that.

I am hard on the French Army in this novel. I wrote from the perspective of the Americans who fought in Belleau Wood. Available memoirs don’t have many positives to say about the commanding general of the French Sixth Army. The movement of the Second Division at the end of May was probably even more chaotic than I portrayed it. The scene where General Pershing arrives to find his division on the move without his knowledge is not recorded in his memoir of the war. I found it in a biography about Navy Lt. Joel Boone, who had no reason to not tell the truth. Many accounts document that the French command kept battle plans secret from their American allies until the last moment for “security reasons”. This bedeviled American commanders throughout the war. The French “intelligence” about Belleau Wood was as deficient as I portrayed it.

Marines were treated with disdain by some French officers and returned the lack of respect on the spot. The incident with Captain Lloyd Williams is a legendary example. The Marines respected

the hardship French troops had suffered and their courage and skill as soldiers. Various Marine memoirs reflect a great deal of compassion for the French civilians displaced by the war, the subject of my novel *Dogs Don't Cry*.

One historical inaccuracy I uncovered is the spelling of Lieutenant Junior Grade Weeden Osborne's first name. He spelled it Weeden. If you're interested, visit my website biography about him for the details.

Please consider reading my other Novels of the Great War. They involve many of the same characters and show events from differing perspectives. These include *An American Nurse in Paris* and *Dogs Don't Cry*. You will find background information and photographs that relate to the events portrayed in this novel, the real people involved, and World War I medical care in my website, <https://johnfrederickandrews.com>. There is a link on the website to sign up for my newsletter.