

## Chapman University Chapman University Digital Commons

---

History Faculty Articles and Research

History

---

2003

# Review of "A Fraternity of Arms: America & France in the Great War" By Robert B. Bruce.

Jennifer D. Keene

*Chapman University*, keene@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/history\\_articles](http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/history_articles)

 Part of the [European History Commons](#), [Military History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Keene, Jennifer D. "Review of A Fraternity of Arms: American & France in the Great War By Robert B. Bruce." *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 101, no. 3 (2003):371-373. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2003.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Articles and Research by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [laughtin@chapman.edu](mailto:laughtin@chapman.edu).

---

Review of "A Fraternity of Arms: America & France in the Great War" By  
Robert B. Bruce.

**Comments**

This review was originally published in *Register Of The Kentucky Historical Society*, volume 101, issue 3, in 2003.

**Copyright**

Kentucky Historical Society

*A Fraternity of Arms: America and France in the Great War.* By Robert E. Bruce. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003. Pp. xx, 380.

Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95.)

In *A Fraternity of Arms*, Robert Bruce sets out to reexamine cooperation between the American and French armies to remind us of the positive and mutually beneficial relationship that developed between the United States and France during the First World War. Appearing in the wake of popular calls to boycott French wine and congressional publicity stunts that changed the name of french fries to liberty fries, Bruce's message has a certain timeliness to it. Indeed, as Bruce amply demonstrates, the extent of Franco-American cooperation during the war was truly staggering. France provided training in trench warfare and most of the artillery, shells, and planes used by American forces. The Americans offered needed raw materials and millions of fresh and enthusiastic soldiers to bolster French morale and provide the winning edge against the Germans in 1918. More importantly, Bruce underscores how nearly every American military operation of the war was in reality a joint Franco-American effort. Even after the Americans took over their own sector of the front in the fall of 1918, French artillery and infantry divisions provided essential assistance in the American-commanded Meuse-Argonne campaign.

But personalities matter much more to Bruce than these overall statistics, and the book provides an in-depth and penetrating analysis of the great men leading the armies on each side. In Bruce's account, Joseph Joffre, Phillipe Pétain, Ferdinand Foch, and John J. Pershing are the main actors determining the fates of the men under their control, and therefore their friendships, squabbles, political alliances, and strong-willed personalities receive much attention. Although Bruce discusses the well-known disagreements between French and American commanders over amalgamating American forces directly into French units and Pershing's disdain for trench warfare, he carefully emphasizes that the desire to find a collective way to defeat Germany ensured that these leaders found ways to resolve these differences and form an effective coalition.

Bruce describes the strategic and political situation France faced in the last two years of the war very well and also clearly explains the tactical and strategic breakthroughs on both the German and French sides that finally gave the Allies the edge on the battlefield. There is only fleeting discussion of relations between men in the ranks, however, even though such stories serve mainly to support Bruce's thesis that genuine friendships and mutual respect developed between enlisted men of each army. This analysis seems superficial compared to the in-depth examination given to relationships among the leaders of

each army. It is a bit surprising not to find more about the four American black regiments that fought as integral parts of the French army. More than any other group of American soldiers, they epitomized the positive experiences of American troops serving with the French and the different racial climate that existed in each army. Throughout the war, France tried to use American racial concerns as a way to gain those American troops it coveted so dearly, and therefore more attention to racial matters seems appropriate in discussing the Franco-American military relationship.

Bruce gives both the French and Americans high marks for their cooperative spirit, which he contrasts often throughout the book with British narrow-mindedness. Bruce contends that the Americans disliked the British and much preferred to serve with the French. But this purported disagreeableness of the British often seems overstated, as does the downplaying of their contribution to the final victory. Bashing the British to build up the French fails to take into account a decade's worth of scholarship reevaluating the final victory as a true Allied victory and detracts from the book's main idea that despite different political and strategic visions, winning the war was a goal that required finding ways to develop productive professional relationships on the Allied side.

*A Fraternity of Arms* is a well-written account of the Franco-American military relationship that presents an affectionate and admiring portrait of France's wartime leaders. These larger-than-life personalities who sensed that the entire fate of their nation lay in their hands dominate this account of the First World War. The American leaders pale in comparison. Although he seems to find the French more captivating, Bruce by no means slights the American contribution to the final victory. Indeed, he helps modern readers rediscover just how high the stakes were in 1918 and appreciate anew an often-forgotten episode of Franco-American cooperation and goodwill.

JENNIFER D. KEENE is an associate professor at the University of Redlands in southern California. She is the author of *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (2001) and is currently completing a book on African American soldiers' experiences during the First World War.