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Editor's Note:

April marks the 100th anniversary of America's entry into World War I. Although there does not seem to be as much fanfare in this country as there has been in Europe to mark this anniversary, you can expect the *Journal* to do what it can to mark the occasion. We're going to attempt to get you an article on the era of the Great War with each issue of the *Journal* through 2018.

This issue's first article discusses preparations for war, albeit more than 240 years ago. David Correira's essay on the Battle of Great Bridge, in Virginia, represents one of the lesser known but important early battles of the American Revolution. It has often been called, "The Southern Bunker Hill." Its importance to establishing the position of colonial revolutionaries in the Old Dominion should not be underestimated.

The Military Service Institution of the United States was a Gilded Age attempt to create an institution of higher learning for American military officers—a place where they could discuss ideas and innovations, and through their journal share developments on military issues. Although the Institution was closed after World War I and replaced by other organizations, it influenced American military thinking going into the Great War and beyond.

In 1916, problems in Mexico with Francisco "Pancho" Villa created a crisis that caused President Woodrow Wilson to activate National Guard units across the country. This helped to prepare the nation for the much larger mobilization that would be required in 1917, and it helped the Army avoid the mobilization pitfalls it had encountered in 1898. Fred Greguras outlines the facilities that each state (except Nevada) used to get troops ready for their trip to the Mexican border.

Til next time,
Vincent Rospond

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***An American on the Western Front: The First World War Letters of Arthur Clifford Kimber, 1917-18*, by Patrick Gregory and Elizabeth Nurser. Brimscombe Port, United Kingdom: The History Press, 2016. 351 pp., $35.00 (available in the U.S. through Trafalgar Square Publishing).**

Published diaries of World War I American soldiers are not numerous. This shortage has been ably filled, in part, by a chronicle of the wartime experiences of Arthur Clifford Kimber. Longtime resident of England, Elizabeth Nurser, a daughter of Kimber's brother and keeper of the family archives, in collaboration with her son-in-law, Patrick Gregory, has produced a fascinating memoir. Young Kimber, known to friends and family as Clifford, found himself caught-up in the idealism and humanitarian impulses that affected so many in American universities, following the outbreak of war in Europe.

The son of an eminent Episcopalian clergyman from New York City who died suddenly, Kimber, his mother, and his two brothers moved to California following the father's death. By 1917, Kimber was approaching graduation from Stanford University, but as a romantic idealist found himself motivated to help organize and become a part of the second section of a volunteer civilian ambulance unit being raised on campus for service in France with the American Field Service (AFS). At many of the nation's more prestigious colleges, similar efforts were undertaken, starting in 1916, in response to an aggressive AFS recruiting drive. Feelings of support for the beleaguered French were especially strong, reflecting emotional ties between that country and the U.S. dating back to the American Revolution.

In Kimber's case, he had also experienced a year or so attending school in England as a part of his high school experience, supplemented by holidays in France. He was a remarkably cosmopolitan young American with literary, musical, artistic skills, a student of French language and culture, and possessing a technical aptitude that would prove useful. He also exhibited an inquiring mind, a characteristic that shows clearly in the content of many of his letters, all written jointly to his mother and his two brothers.

Notwithstanding his many competencies, Clifford Kimber was clearly a young man of his times, quintessentially American.

His story, as told in the letters, is also the record of movement from late youth to manhood, a journey conditioned by war and tragically ended by it. Kimber, somewhat remarkably, recorded his evolving views of himself and others, at times overly critically. Thus he moved from being a not overly-popular Stanford student who did not relate well to others, a sort of transplanted East Coast "man of culture and refinement," to one who, though remaining a "straight arrow" sort of person, developed the ability to relate well to his peers. He was unapologetically patriotic in oral and written communication, and by deed, but in a manner that distinctively marks him as an American of the early 20th century.

Involved with the raising of the second unit at the university, Kimber was entrusted with carrying an American flag to France, which became the first U.S. colors raised there when presented to the commander of the French unit to which his volunteer ambulance unit, SSU 114, was attached.

Kimber's experience as an ambulance and a staff car driver with the American Ambulance, soon began to pale, mostly because of extensive periods of time when the unit was not transporting patients and also by his "take" on organizational politics. His ambulance service seems more mundane and less intense than the published recollections of others. In France but a short time, frequently bored with his duties, he found himself interested in becoming trained as an aviator. At that time, numerous Americans had been trained by the French and were flying combat missions as members of units such as the Lafayette Flying Corps.

Kimber was additionally frustrated by the requirement for completion of six months of SSU service before seeking release; in short the impatience of a young man who wanted to play a more active role in the war. The authors also note that the pilot ambitions were not unfounded. Prior to the war, Kimber had built and flown a number of gliders. His desires notwithstanding, many of his letters show his concern with how his mother would react to him becoming a pilot and engaging in aerial combat. He provides a constant barrage of comments about the safety of flying and aerial combat, electing to ignore the less reassuring statistics about such duty. Ultimately his letters exhibit a pragmatic fatalism that alternates with his expressed view that he was predestined to survive and return home.

In April 1917, America had entered the war, arrangements were soon in progress to transfer much of the volunteer ambulance service to the U.S. Army, and "Mr." Kimber soon became Private Kimber,

U.S. Army, when, in September 1917, he was accepted into pilot training, conducted by the French. He chronicles the hands-on part of his training experience in great detail, interspersed with his comments on his fellow student pilots, the French instructors, and his continuing efforts at self-improvement in off-duty time, honing his French skills, recording his astute, candid and detailed observations of the French people, the countryside and its architecture and the impact of war, while continuing to be a prolific photographer.

Upon completing training, Kimber was appointed a 2d Lieutenant and, with his fellow graduates, soon received his first lieutenancy, award of which had been delayed by bureaucratic snafus which Kimber and the other new pilots successfully overcame. Initial dreams of aerial combat were delayed by a period of ferrying assorted aircraft from depots to airfields in France.

Though initially assigned to a French combat squadron, not until August 1918 was Kimber finally assigned as a fighter pilot to the 22d Aero Squadron, 2d Pursuit Group of the U.S. Air Service. With a home station at Kelly Field in San Antonio, the authors show that the pilots of the 22d represented varied flying training venues, including the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain, along with a few French-trained aviators like Kimber. On arrival in France, the squadron had been converted from a bomber to a fighter squadron, with French training. Alas his assignment was brief, flying combat patrols at St. Mihiel and in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. On 26 September 1918, on a strafing mission over Bantheville, Kimber's aircraft was hit either by friendly fire or by German anti-aircraft fire, one round apparently igniting a bomb aboard the aircraft. The plane exploded and Kimber fell to his death.

After the war, his brother George undertook the daunting challenge of locating Kimber's remains. Finally Kimber's grave, incorrectly identified as that of an unknown American soldier, was discovered, and he was interred at the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery, along with the remains of 14,000 other Americans. In 1932, his mother visited the cemetery thanks to a government-funded effort to provide bereaved mothers with some measure of solace.

Replete with excellent maps, many of Kimber's photographs, and with an index and adequate bibliography, *An American on the Western Front* is a valuable addition to the accounts of American participants in the Great War. As for flying training provided cadets by the French, and a brief picture of combat service as a fighter pilot, this reviewer knows of no better account. Kimber epitomizes the combination of American idealism and dedication to duty.

G. Alan Knight