

this tumultuous year. While informed by recent scholarship, *1916: A Global History* does not advance any startlingly new interpretation or argument, and seems aimed at a broad, non-specialist audience. Still, scholars of the war would do well to read it, if only to remind themselves just how broad the context within which they must situate their own work really is.

Jesse Kauffman

Eastern Michigan University  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

***An American on the Western Front: The First World War Letters of Arthur Clifford Kimber, 1917–18.*** By Patrick Gregory and Elizabeth Nurser. Gloucestershire, Stroud, U.K.: History Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-7509-6052. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 351. £20.00.

A stand-out among the stack of memoirs and letter collections occasioned by the World War I centennial, *An American on the Western Front* is both historically valuable and deeply moving. Over the course of this remarkable book, we come to know a young Californian, circa 1917–1918, as he leaves Stanford University to serve with a volunteer ambulance unit in France, transfers to the fledgling U.S. Air Service, and experiences the joys and terrors of aerial combat in the skies over the Western Front. And we are with this twenty-two-year-old aviator (or so it feels) when his Spad fighter explodes above the Meuse-Argonne battlefield on 26 September 1918. It would take military authorities three years to locate and conclusively identify his shattered remains, which today rest among the more than 14,000 graves at Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, the largest American war cemetery in Europe.

Clifford Kimber (he preferred to go by his middle name) entered the Great War under unique circumstances. The son of a prominent Episcopal vicar in New York City and an artistic, strong-willed, and independent mother (following her husband's death in 1909, Clara Evans Kimber moved her family to the West Coast, founded a music school in Palo Alto, and raised her three boys on her own), Clifford enjoyed the distinction of carrying with him to France the very first American flag to be raised at the front line following the U.S. declaration of war. Various patriotic organizations in California entrusted the undergraduate with the delivery of this sacred banner to the 1st Stanford Unit of the American Field Service. The symbolic importance of Clifford's mission as the bearer of the "First Flag," combined with his deceased father's onetime political and social connections, afforded him a memorable audience with his hero Theodore Roosevelt in New York. (Later, Clifford would come to know Quentin Roosevelt, the former president's son and another fatality of the air war.) And during his transatlantic crossing, he met the actress Lillian Gish, who was en route to England to begin work on the D.W. Griffith film *Hearts of the World* (1918).

But these encounters with celebrities, memorable though they are, ultimately matter less than the vivid picture that this book paints of Clifford Kimber's person-

ality (proverbial warts and all) and his day-to-day activities as a volunteer ambulance driver and subsequently as a *chasse* pilot assigned first to the French 85th Escadrille, then to the American 22nd Aero Squadron. Authors Patrick Gregory and Elizabeth Nurser (the daughter of Clifford's brother George) have done a masterful job of fitting the most important of Clifford's letters into a contextual narrative that tells the story of America's involvement in World War I. But it's Clifford's voice, sometimes callow but always earnest and overflowing with impressions, that haunts the reader.

Early on, he decided to describe for his mother and brothers everything he thought and experienced with absolute frankness. And so he did, omitting only place names and unit information, both prohibited by censors. Some of the letters from his months in the American Field Service deal with his social awkwardness (this son of a clergyman could be a bit of a prude) and with his realization that he was sometimes prone to pomposity (Clifford perhaps made too much of his stewardship of the "First Flag," a defect that did not go unnoticed by his peers). The letters from his flying days soon tackle more serious subjects, as comrades begin to die all around him, victims of ubiquitous training accidents or encounters with more experienced German adversaries.

Through it all, Clifford's faith in the American cause and confidence in himself seldom wavered. And one senses that this posture had little to do with the needs of his audience back home. Rather, Clifford wrote of the man he truly was—or, at least, truly wanted to be. His death comes as a shock, even though we know it will happen from the very first page. Patrick Gregory and Elizabeth Nurser are to be commended for bringing this lost aviator back to life in an exceptionally well-researched and well-illustrated volume, a poignant textual memorial to Clifford Kimber and to all the other young Americans who never returned from the War to End All Wars.

Steven Trout

University of South Alabama  
Mobile, Alabama

***Wolfbounds and Polar Bears: The American Expeditionary Force in Siberia, 1918–1920.*** By John M. House. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8173-1889-5. Maps. Tables. Photographs. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xix, 243. \$49.95.

Colonel John House has written a narrative history of the American intervention in Siberia. He examines aspects of this intervention with extraordinary thoroughness, describing the military structure of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) and even its kit and matériel in great detail. Though some may consider this minutiae, in fact, these brush strokes skillfully flow together into a broad picture of how the U.S. soldier lived and performed his duty in Siberia, the military geography of which the author also describes. The strength of this book is in these descriptions,

Copyright of Journal of Military History is the property of Society for Military History and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.