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In its list of the "Top 10 Badass Marines," Leatherneck magazine declared that Major George W. Hamilton "never asked anyone to do anything he wasn't prepared to do himself . . . and do better." Indeed, the author of A History of the United States Marine Corps once called Hamilton "the most outstanding Marine Corps hero in World War I." A leader of the first major American assault on June 6, 1918, and the last ranking officer in the American Expeditionary Forces to learn that the war was over, Hamilton remained in the thick of the fighting from start to finish. Although he earned the Distinguished Service Cross, the Croix de Guerre, and two Medal of Honor recommendations for his service, Hamilton's fame stalled when he died prematurely in 1922. With this first complete biography, Hamilton takes his rightful place among the first rank of American military heroes.

George W. Hamilton, USMC: America's Greatest World War I Hero Details

Date : Published June 27th 2011 by McFarland & Company

ISBN : 9780786463213

Author : Mark Mortensen

Format : Paperback 314 pages

Genre : History, Biography, War, World War I, Nonfiction, Military, Military History, Military Fiction



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From Reader Review George W. Hamilton, USMC: America's Greatest World War I Hero for online ebook

Glen Craney says

Sometimes history has a way of righting past injustices. Caught up in the inter-services infighting over the role the Marines played in the battle of Belleau Wood, Captain George Hamilton never received the Medal of Honor for which he was twice recommended by superiors. A century later, Mark Mortensen, the grandson of one of Hamilton's privates, chanced upon the Marine officer's all-but-forgotten story and decided to do something more than just say "thank you for your service."

The result was this superb and heartfelt biography, long overdue. The author humbly prefaces this, his first book, by advising readers that he is a sales executive in the textile industry. Yet no caveat is required; Mortensen writes with the clarity and authority of a veteran historian, deftly weaving in larger world events with Hamilton's personal experiences, and supplementing the narrative with revealing photographs of several officers and men who served with the American Expeditionary Force.

While in France researching Floyd Gibbons (a correspondent and character in my historical novel about the war), I had the honor of walking the fields of Belleau Wood and other battles so well described by Mortensen. I wish I'd had his book with me on that trip. I hope he will consider taking up the causes of other neglected American heroes of the Great War, some of whom he has noted in this work. But I won't spoil the discovery for the reader. Highly recommended.

I received a complimentary copy from the author, and this honest review was posted without obligation.

Skjam! says

Disclosure: I received this book through a Firstreads giveaway, on the premise that I would review it.

Everyone who served in a military in World War One is dead, and we're rapidly coming up on the centennial of the Great War itself. I expect we'll be seeing a flood of books, TV series and films on the subject. So it's no surprise that someone decided to do a biography of George W. Hamilton, one of the most impressive people involved in the war.

It's not as good a book as it could be, however. The problems start with the introductory material, which overdoes trying to sell the reader on why this book should be written about this person. Some of the famous Marine terseness would have served well here.

Major Hamilton did not keep a journal and did not get around to writing his memoirs, and very few of his letters are still in existence. To cover for this lack of primary source material, particularly in the earlier chapters, the author lists various historical timeline events that Hamilton might have heard about or been in the vicinity of. There's also a fair amount of attempted mindreading. "Hamilton would surely have been interested in..."

Once the book gets to Hamilton's war service, the book gets more solid--probably both because of the extensive documentation of events, and because it's the meat of the story. I'll just say that the subtitle of the

book is well supported.

The disappointing and short post-war years are covered, followed by a "where are they now" segment for people George W. Hamilton was close to. There's a postscript that sounds like the author's attempt to start another attempt to get Hamilton the Medal of Honor (arguably, he was robbed.) Extensive footnotes, a fine bibliography and an index round out the volume.

The book is primarily intended for schools and libraries, and is retailing at \$45 a pop; I'd suggest checking your local library for a copy and skipping straight to the war chapters.

For more history reviews, see <http://www.skjam.com/tag/history/>

Frank says

This is a well-researched first book by this author. It's the story of one of the key marine leaders who fought in WW1 - during the time when the marines, and the United States, began to establish their battlefield renown. Mortensen gives the reader a feel for the times surrounding WW1. And he especially provides insight into what made the marines so effective.

A worthy beginning - I look forward to more books from Mortensen.

'Aussie Rick' says

The author has a love and a passion for the subject matter and rightly so, a forgotten hero of the Great War. The author has attempted to set the record straight and present the life and death of a USMC hero and a brave American; George W. Hamilton.

Whilst reading this book you will come to understand why this man joined the Marines, why he volunteered for duty in Europe, why he learnt to fly in the fledgling air arm and why he died. The author, Mark Mortensen, is not a professional writer and at times that shows as does his zeal to present Hamilton to his readers, directed mainly at an American audience.

Overall this is a good story of a brave man who did his duty and was present at all the major battles fought by American forces on the Western front during the Great War. For those interested in the early history of the USMC or America's involvement in World War One.

Elizabeth says

I won this book in a goodreads giveaway. I enjoyed this compelling story of George Hamilton and all that he did for his country. He was a true American hero and I am honored to have gotten a closer look into his life.

Frederick Danysh says

This is the biography of Marine Corps officer George W. Hamilton who served during World War I. It was an easy read about a company level officer unlike the usual fare about generals and admirals. I liked that the author tied in current events of the era to give perspective and trace the personal character development of Hamilton. I also appreciated the fact that he also gave some background of many enlisted Marines that Hamilton served with. This is a good book that touches on World War I and life in America during the early 20th century. A job well done. This was a gift from the author but that in no way influenced the review.

Chris says

I served 30 years in the Marine Corps and was an oral historian for five years and I'd never heard of this man. Talk about professional embarrassment. Boy did this guy get screwed due to interservice rivalry and Pershing. Recommended for the MOH not once but twice and they both were denied by the Army. He did however get the Army's equivalent of the Navy Cross plus French medals. He leaves the service for a year and returns to the Marines and becomes a naval aviator only to tragically die in an air mishap at a battle reenactment at Gettysburg in 1922. Where there was trouble or a decisive point in France with the AEF he was there leading the way-he made success happen-at time leading two battalions as a major. If POTUS wants to right an injustice from days gone by then he or she should start with George Hamilton and award him the MOH. Lack of maps mars an otherwise interesting book. I was a little surprised at Hamilton's actions prior to the armistice. Too many men were lost on the last day of the war due to misguided obedience to orders and martial energy of the Army's corps commander. Oh how times have changed.

Gerry says

Veterans of any given war and battles have either the ability to write the story in true sense to what was experienced or they cannot relay anything other than words which go meaningless. The same holds true for Historians. In this case – Mr. Mortensen clearly has not only told the story – he has made an extra effort for the person unfamiliar with war to understand the implications of the same. For book enthusiasts such as myself (and within this particular genre of History, Battles, Wars, etc) much is gained and nothing is lost to this time frame; the saddened and heroic events unfurl before your eyes as you read the pages. By all accounts what Mr. Mortensen did here for one Major George W. Hamilton was nothing shy of excellent – the memory of Major Hamilton will now live on for those who take this book up and read it.

Mr. Mortensen clearly shows in my opinion why Major Hamilton deserved the CMOH. In the process he takes nothing away from Soldiers such as U.S. Army Sergeant Alvin York for his own actions during this same war. He also takes nothing away from USMC Gunnery Sergeant Dan Daly; nor does he take anything away from famed American Pilot Eddie Rickenbacker to include credit where-it's-due provided to the famous Red Baron. In short, no veteran, military service, nor nation is slighted at the expense of convincing all of us that Major Hamilton deserved the CMOH. In this manner it is here where “Duty, Honor, Country...” are the proper decent tone to the story of one. Mr. Mortensen captures the peripheral events of the time to the particular battles in order to keep the reader in place, and this allows the reader the wider picture of events. In addition this helps to round out the overall experience. A mere 16 days after G.W.

Hamilton entered Aviation School for the U.S. Marine Corps, General Billy Mitchell had successfully sunk the Ostfriesland (21 July 1921) without dropping a bomb onto the ship – intentionally dropping bombs near the ship and successfully sinking it in the process to prove his point about the need for a separate Air Branch of the Armed Services. I am certain that (then) Captain Hamilton would have read about the event in papers and may have even discussed this with classmates of the time.

This book begins with the cover – “never judge a book by its cover...” many of us have been told from early childhood. The cover employed clearly captures not only the words within; it encapsulates the embodiment of the total of the “Lost Generation.” The modern day person will have a keen feel for what they are about to undertake even before one reaches the dedication, acknowledgment, and preface to the first chapter. It is in my opinion safe to say “judge this book by its cover.”

Great courage, great Marine, wonderful life and one excellent book!

Semper Fidelis

Mark Mortensen says

Review from author

The World War I era was an exciting time yet so many pieces of American participation were never fully documented. Army General John J. Pershing and Sergeant Alvin York became true heroes and from the Marine Corps side General John. A. Lejeune rose as a legend and then there is the lesser known Major George W. Hamilton, whom I consider to be America’s greatest World War I hero.

I tried to coax my good friend, military historian and author of many books George B. Clark into writing Hamilton’s biography; however he stated that with all of my research I should write the book. As George tells it, he won and I documented Hamilton’s life history. If you are not familiar with Major Hamilton you are missing the story of one of America’s finest patriotic warriors of all-time.

I formed a true friendship with Major Hamilton’s closest living relative, an elderly nephew. During our first conversation I mentioned that I was leaning towards writing the biography of his uncle, which prompted him to plainly state: “...with all the Hamilton’s dead along with all WWI veterans [except Frank Buckles at the time] no one would be interested except the two of us”. Such is the culture of society. The nephew located extremely historical letters in his attic, which are included in the book. I’m most thankful that he fully appreciated the published book before he passed away.

Here's to Major George W. Hamilton USMC:

Jim says

When Mark Mortensen set about writing his first book he didn't do it the easy way. He chose as his subject

an officer who was dead for almost a century and who left no spouse or progeny to perpetuate documentary or anecdotal information to use as source material for his book. Furthermore, Maj Hamilton was an officer who was all but forsaken by the military he served so well, being bypassed for promotions and, inexplicably, denied a Medal of Honour for an action for which that decoration was awarded to a subordinate who accompanied him. His death so soon after the war resulted in his being practically forgotten.

Despite the research obstacles he must have faced, Mr Mortensen has pieced together a detailed biography of Hamilton. It has the added benefit of a number of period photographs and the occasional map. WWI buffs will want to mine the lengthy Bibliography for other titles to add to their reading list. This is a valuable contribution to the too-short list of American WWI literature.

Matthew Dambro says

The author attempted the impossible. He tried to write a biography of someone who kept no diary, left no children or widow. He tried to write the story of a life with no source material except official reports and newspaper clippings. The amazing thing is that he almost pulled it off. One gets an idea of the man from this volume.
