ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

HISTORY

From Belleau Wood to Bougainville
Robert Wallace Blake
Author House
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Three Stars (out of Five)

"Forward of the 75s," says World War I veteran Robert Blake, referring to the iconic frontline artillery piece of its time, "there's no such thing as patriotism. It's guts, discipline, comradeship, and loyalty to your comrades that keeps the men going and sends them forward."

Such frank admissions and smart observations by the late retired major general of the US Marines are what make *From Belleau Wood to Bougainville*, the companion volume to his life's story, a worthy addition to any collection of military memoirs. The general's son, Robert Wallace Blake, lovingly and artfully told the tale of his father's meritorious service in and between the world wars in *Bayonets and Bougainvilleas*. Unlike the first volume, this second is not an original work; instead, it combines two primary sources that allow General Blake and his wife to tell parts of their story in their own words.

The first half of this slim volume is a transcript of an interview the general gave to a US Marine Corps historian in 1968. The general answers specific questions about his combat experience. The most thrilling answers relate to his role in the 1918 Battle of Belleau Wood, where he fought in the trenches, battled his way through barbed wire, and danced gingerly across the field avoiding machine gun bullets. While he played an important part in the battle of Bougainville during the Solomon Islands and other campaigns in the Pacific during World War II, his comments on his earlier service provide the best read.

Robert Wallace Blake has provided a bare minimum of commentary on his father's interview, the transcript of which had languished in the file cabinets of the Marine Corps Historical Center. While he lets his father speak for himself, the author heavily annotates and edits the source material employed for the second half of his book: His mother's journal of the family's travels abroad during the years between the wars.

While most of her journal is quite bland and merely descriptive of where they lived and visited, Rosselet Wallace Blake offers a few gems too, including her observations about Spain's "new republic in the throes of birth" in 1932 and her time, during the 1920s, "living like a

sailor's girl" as she moved from port to port "following the fleet."

Joined together by a collection of family and military photographs, the book's primary source documents provide a unique but fleeting and incomplete glimpse into the lives of a marine and his wife in the first half of the twentieth century. The interview transcript and journal would have been better suited as appendices to *Bayonets and Bougainvilleas*, which contains more information and tells a more complete and coherent story than the author's second volume.

Through his hard work and research, Robert Wallace Blake has compiled a work of great value to any student of the lives and service of US Marine Corps members and their families.

Mark McLaughlin