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North American Indians in the Great War. By Susan Applegate Krouse. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. 248 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. $45.00.

Anthropologist Susan Applegate Krouse employs the records of Joseph Kossuth Dixon to shed light on the experiences of American Indian servicemen during the First World War. A former Baptist preacher, Dixon waged a two-decade-long campaign before and after WWI to preserve a record of Indian cultures and traditions before Native Americans "vanished" as distinctive peoples. To this end, Dixon traveled extensively to photograph and film reservation Indians, at times choreographing or staging scenes that fit his somewhat romanticized view of indigenous life. On the eve of the U.S. entry into WWI, he argued for the creation of segregated Indian units as a means of preserving what he believed was an inherent "warrior spirit" and to encourage Indian esprit de corps. After the war, he lobbied Congress to pass legislation extending citizenship to noncitizen Indians as a demonstration of national appreciation for their wartime service.

To preserve an account of Indian military service and to bolster his argument for citizenship, Dixon sent questionnaires to reservations across the country to solicit information from Indian veterans. Nearly 500 soldiers (and 849 reservation employees) completed the questionnaires and returned them to Dixon, providing a critical Indian perspective on the war and military life. Krouse reproduces a broad sampling of these questionnaires (or interviews)—many of them verbatim—and allows the veterans to tell their own stories for the first time: why they served, what jobs they performed, and what they witnessed both on and off the battlefield. Their testimonies make a significant contribution, as does Krouse through her excellent research and the context she provides for each excerpt. She also includes a useful appendix that examines the three most important primary source materials regarding Indian service in WWI and the likely motivations that led to the creation of each.

According to Krouse, the "most important" aspect of her study is the chapter exploring the postwar frustration and disillusionment of Indian veterans—the personal economic losses they suffered as a result of being away from home, confusion over their citizenship status, and their desire to gain the full rights of citizenship. The difficulty with this section is that many of the problems facing Indian veterans existed before they went to war or were problems that non-Indian veterans faced as well. Failure to receive annuity payments, problems with their allotments, incompetent or unhelpful reservation staff, and confusion over citizenship status were all dilemmas facing many Native Americans prior to the war, and thus cannot be linked necessarily to military service. Problems with pay, insurance, and financial difficulties associated with being absent from farms or livestock for extended periods, meanwhile, were not unique to Indian veterans, but afflictions borne by many returning servicemen across the country. The desire of some Indian veterans for citizenship must also be viewed with caution since many (Iroquois veterans, for example) did not seek citizenship or saw little benefit in obtaining it. Legislation passed shortly after the war to extend citizenship to veterans who filled out the proper paperwork was a dismal failure as evidenced by the paucity of applicants.

The most important aspects of this study remain its provision of an Indian perspective on the war and its alerting scholars to the existence of the Dixon papers.

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