



Poilu: The World War I Notebooks of Corporal Louis Barthas, Barrelmaker, 1914-1918

By Louis Barthas

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The harrowing first-person account of a French foot soldier who survived four years in the trenches of the First World War

Along with millions of other Frenchmen, Louis Barthas, a thirty-five-year-old barrelmaker from a small wine-growing town, was conscripted to fight the Germans in the opening days of World War I. Corporal Barthas spent the next four years in near-cessless combat, wherever the French army fought its fiercest battles: Artois, Flanders, Champagne, Verdun, the Somme, the Argonne. Barthas' riveting wartime narrative, first published in France in 1978, presents the vivid, immediate experiences of a frontline soldier.

This excellent new translation brings Barthas' wartime writings to English-language readers for the first time. His notebooks and letters represent the quintessential memoir of a "poilu," or "hairy one," as the untidy, unshaven French infantryman of the fighting trenches was familiarly known. Upon Barthas' return home in 1919, he painstakingly transcribed his day-to-day writings into nineteen notebooks, preserving not only his own story but also the larger story of the unnumbered soldiers who never returned. Recounting bloody battles and endless exhaustion, the deaths of comrades, the infuriating incompetence and tyranny of his own officers, Barthas also describes spontaneous acts of camaraderie between French poilus and their German foes in trenches just a few paces apart. An eloquent witness and keen observer, Barthas takes his readers directly into the heart of the Great War.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This translation of the diaries and letters of a French corporal on the Western front in World War I brings the gritty reality of trench warfare to an English-speaking audience in a manner unparalleled even in the best soldier writings from that war. The reader feels and smells and hears the mud, the blood, the fear, the deafening noise of exploding shells, the clatter of machine guns, the cries of the wounded and dying. Here is the war as the men in the trenches experienced it.”—James McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*

“This book shows clearly and viscerally what were the origins of French soldiers’ pacifism. . . . Barthas’s voice is unlike any other I know in the vast literature on the First World War. The translation is excellent; the grittiness of the text is captured beautifully, and so is the humanity of the man who wrote it.”—Jay Winter, Yale University

“A revelatory book that brings the French experience of the Great War to life as you read. However much we may think the British and Americans suffered, their agony was shorter and less intense than the tragedy that overwhelmed the French nation in 1914-1918.”—Peter Hart, author of *The Great War: A Combat History of the First World War*

“Ah, the notebooks of Louis Barthas! This book has profound historic value. It is also a genuine work of literature.”—François Mitterrand, former president of France

“Louis Barthas’ stunningly honest, graphic and gripping narrative has rightly made *Poilu* a classic trench memoir.”—Douglas Porch, author of *The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History of the Legendary Fighting Force*

“In Barthas’ telling, the fighting men on both sides of No Man’s Land shared a more natural bond with their fellows than with those career officers who pitted them against each other. Barthas’ detailed real-time reportage captures instances of informal truces and slowdowns between combatants, as they tacitly aid one another in their shared struggle to survive the madness.” —David Wright, *The Seattle Times*

“Among World War I books being published in this centennial year of that conflict's start, none likely can connect readers more directly or vividly to the experience of those who fought it.”—Alan Wallace, *The Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

About the Author

Louis Barthas (1879–1952) was a cooper in a small town in southern France. **Edward M. Strauss** is a fundraising director in higher education and former publisher of *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military*

History. He lives in New York City.

Users Review

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Lou Morton:

The reason? Because this Poilu: The World War I Notebooks of Corporal Louis Barthas, Barrelnmaker, 1914-1918 is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap it but latter it will jolt you with the secret this inside. Reading this book beside it was fantastic author who have write the book in such amazing way makes the content inside of easier to understand, entertaining method but still convey the meaning totally. So , it is good for you for not hesitating having this nowadays or you going to regret it. This unique book will give you a lot of positive aspects than the other book have such as help improving your expertise and your critical thinking technique. So , still want to hold off having that book? If I had been you I will go to the publication store hurriedly.

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