Nelson, James Carl (Author)

This outstanding book paints the portrait of a small military unit, in this case, Company D of the Twenty-eighth Infantry Regiment in World War I. The regiment saw all of the First Division’s battles, from the American debut at Cantigny to the brutal slogging through the mud, fog, and forest of the Meuse-Argonne. It also paid a stiff price: Company D alone lost 84 men killed in action. Nelson orients the narrative around his grandfather, who lived to 101 despite serious wounds and awakened Nelson’s interest in WWI by what he did not say about his experiences. Nelson set out to tell the Company D story from official records and the documents and reminiscences left behind by dozens of other veterans. He succeeded admirably, thanks to the cooperation of families and his own indefatigable persistence. The most poignant personal story is probably that of Marvin Stainton, a classic happy warrior who fell in the Meuse-Argonne. It and many other stories within the big story add up to a valuable mosaic of the American Expeditionary Force from recruitment to discharge. Nelson also writes so clearly about the background, especially trench warfare, that even readers with minimal WWI knowledge will feel educated as well as fascinated.

— Roland Green