

An Iowa Soldier in World War I, by Joe Romedahl, edited by Mildred Romedahl Steele. Boone: JRS/MRS Enterprises, 1993. 136 pp. Illustrations, map, appendix, index. \$8.50 paper.

REVIEWED BY KEVIN B. BYRNE, GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

Joe Romedahl was a farm boy in Boone County, Iowa, in 1918 when he answered Uncle Sam's summons to make the world safe for democracy. At Camp Dodge and then at Camp Logan in Texas he learned how to be a soldier, including how to cope with the petty annoyances of service life. By mid-June, Romedahl embarked for France, where the war continued for five months and he would spend almost the next year of his life. He saw action at the front, although not heavy combat. Most of his narrative concerns more stationary actions, such as guarding bridges or outposts or waiting for a German advance. But he was shot at, shelled, gassed, subjected to aircraft fire, and wounded. He surely saw more of the actual war than did most American soldiers in the Great War.

Yet Romedahl's recollections are largely benign, which may be a function of his Swedish heritage and certainly is consistent with the collective memory of American soldiers in the Great War. As historian David Kennedy has noted, the brevity of American participation in that conflict did little to displace a romantic view of war. For instance, although Romedahl was gassed, he does not relive the experience in these pages. Rather, we hear of the amusing and quirky behavior he saw — or participated in — while hospitalized. His memories form an engaging narrative, written by a likable man with a sharp eye for humorous anecdotes, human foibles and peculiarities. It is not necessarily the "real war," but it is a wonderful example of the perspective that lived on in the folklore of many doughboys.

Some pictures, a map, and a chronology provide welcome additions to the text. In all, this slim volume, edited with care by the author's daughter, makes for pleasurable and informative reading.

Threads of Memory: A Memoir of the 1920s, by Margaret Ott Onerheim. Iowa Heritage Collection. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993. 138 pp. Illustrations. \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY PAMELA RINEY-KEHRBERG, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

In *Threads of Memory*, Margaret Ott Onerheim relates the story of her Iowa childhood. Beginning with a tour of the architecture and furnishings of the family's modest farmhouse in Floyd County, Onerheim then recalls her parents and brothers and the community that

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