

THE LOST BATTALION
(U.S., 2001, 100 Minutes)

On October 2, 1918, the U.S. 308th Battalion became surrounded in the Argonne Forest during an Allied offensive when the French and American troops on its flanks withdrew without informing the 308th. Without food, water and reserve ammunition and cut off from supply and communication lines, the battalion held out for five days. When finally rescued, less than half of the battalion remained alive. The commander, Major Charles Charles Whittlesey, a patrician New York lawyer, struggled with his superiors over the overly-ambitious objectives designed by the American command. It is the fall of 1918, but American commanders are fighting the war with tactics as technologically outmoded as those used by the French and British in 1915 and 1916. Whittlesey kept his vastly outnumbered troops alive and fighting in the face of insurmountable odds, and received the Medal of Honor for his actions. However, he was so traumatized by the battle that he committed suicide by jumping overboard on the return voyage to the U.S.

Composed mostly of immigrants from New York City and westerners, the 308th mirrored the diversity and complexity of early 20th Century American society. Note how American troops, who flew French aircraft, also were using French infantry weapons, especially the Chautchat (probably the worst machine gun of the war!). **The Lost Battalion** also captures the surreal horror of World War I in which armies killed with machine guns yet communicated by carrier pigeon.

