

World War I Veterans Who Shaped Future Decades

World War I (1917-18) produced some of America's most prestigious leaders from among the 2 million doughboys who served overseas.

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Since the birth of our nation, many veterans have gone on to greatness in a variety of fields. From U.S. presidents to well-known authors, athletes and actors, WWI is no exception. Here is a look at some of those famous vets from the "Great War."

Harry S. Truman
(1884-1972) b. Lamar, Mo.
33rd President

Ranked No. 7 (a "near great") among U.S. presidents, Harry Truman (1945-1953) brought the war in the Pacific to a swift end in 1945. He also launched the Truman Doctrine to contain communism.

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Shown here with his VFW life membership cad, America's 33rd President Harry Truman ranks high on the list of famous World War I veterans. He served a year in France during the Great War. Desegregating the armed forces and unifying them under one secretary of defense is just one of the many acts Truman's presidency is known for.

Other legacies of his term as president include the authorization of the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, helping establish NATO and presiding over the Berlin Airlift.

Truman also desegregated the armed forces and unified them under a single secretary of defense.

As captain of D Btry., 129th FA Regt., 35th Inf. Div., he fought in the Vosges Mountains, St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives. Truman served in France from April 13, 1918, through April 9, 1919.

A biographer wrote, "The decision to go into the Army during WWI was the crucial event in Harry Truman's life." Truman agreed: "My whole political career is based upon my war service and war associates." He was a lifetime VFW member.

Christopher Mathewson

(1880-1925) b. Factoryville, Pa.

Baseball Player

America's first sports hero, "Christy" Mathewson was one of baseball's greatest pitchers. He perfected the "screwball," and his strikeout record with the New York Giants endured some 50 years. He played 17 seasons (1900-16) and was among the first elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

At 38, Mathewson volunteered for the Army, serving in the Chemical Warfare Service in France. He accidentally inhaled mustard gas during a training exercise at Chaumont and was exposed again on Flanders Field, resulting in a lengthy hospital stay.

"Matty" was manager of the Cincinnati Reds (1916-18) and president of the Boston Braves (1923-25) before succumbing to tuberculosis at 45. His greatest legacy was instilling sportsmanship in America's youth.

Walter A. Brennan

(1894-1974) b. Swampscott, Mass.

Actor

First to win three Academy Awards as best supporting actor, Walter Brennan appeared in some 241 roles between 1929 and 1974, both in television and movies. He has been called the most successful and familiar character actor of American sound films.

As an enlisted man in C Btry., 1st Bn., 101st FA Regt., 26th Inf. Div., Brennan was in France from November 1917 until April 1919. His unit fought in four major offensives: Champagne-Marne, Aisne-Marne, St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne. He lost half of his teeth because of

exposure to gas in France.

Brennan began his entertainment career at 15 as a vaudeville actor, rekindling his love for acting in 1929 after relocating to Los Angeles. He had early roles in films such as *The Invisible Man* (1933) and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935).

He earned his first Academy Award for his role as Swan Bostrom in the 1936 film *Come and Get It*. His two other Academy Awards were for roles in *Kentucky* (1939) and *The Westerner* (1940). One of Brennan's most memorable roles was as Pastor Rosier Pile in *Sergeant York* (1941), for which he received an Oscar nomination. On TV, he is best remembered for playing Grandpa Amos in *The Real McCoys* (1957-63).

After five decades of work in television, Brennan was awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Feb. 8, 1960. And in 1970, he secured a spot in the Hall of Great Western Performers four years before his death at age 80.

Laurence T. Stallings
(1894-1968) b. Macon, Ga.
Author

Stallings was writing advertising copy for a Marine recruiting office when he decided on July 24, 1917, to enlist in the Marine Corps Reserve. He set sail attached to the 145th Co., 3rd Replacement Bn., from Philadelphia on the *USS Henderson* on April 24, 1918, en route to France.

Arriving on May 7, Stallings changed units a few times before being assigned to the 47th Co., 3rd Bn., 5th Marine Regt. He commanded 3rd Platoon during the Battle of Belleau Wood beginning June 8.

On June 25, a shell fragment lodged in Stallings' leg and a grenade that had burst at his feet drove his tin helmet into his right cheek. Though suffering from these wounds, he persevered with about nine men and stumbled into a German company.

Stallings charged an enemy machine gun nest and threw a grenade, which finished them off, but not before several bullets tore off his right kneecap.

Stallings begged the doctors to save his leg. For eight months, he recuperated in French hospitals before leaving France on Dec. 17, 1918, after more than seven months overseas. Due to the severity of his wound, Stallings was medically retired as a captain on June 28, 1920.

He spent a great deal of time in the Naval Hospital in Brooklyn before doctors had to amputate his right leg at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 1922. (His left leg was amputated in 1963.)

This loss did not deter Stallings. Before the war, he had been a reporter for the *Atlanta Journal*. Afterward, he joined the *Washington Times* in 1920, then the *New York World* in 1922. He co-wrote the play *What Price Glory*. It opened in 1924 to rave reviews.

“The play established Stallings as one of the brilliant young writers coming out of the First World War,” according to one historian.

In 1924, *Plumes*, Stallings’ first and only novel, was published. Based on his own combat experience, the leading character is a young soldier who loses his sense of patriotism after losing a leg to war.

Stallings flourished as a writer with bylines in many publications such as *American Heritage*, *Esquire*, *Saturday Evening Post* and the *New York Sun*. He once said in reference to his novel: “Like a lot of writers, I had just one thing to say, and I said it. There wasn’t any more.”

His short story *The Big Parade* became the movie *The Big Parade* (1925), which was MGM’s largest grossing film for 14 years.

Stallings’ *The First World War: A Photographic History* came out in 1933 and became a

classic. From 1927 to 1938, he was editor and manager at Fox Movie News.

During WWII, he went back on active duty on April 2, 1942, retiring as a lieutenant colonel from the Marine Corps Reserve on June 28, 1943. He was attached to the Army Air Forces in Washington, D.C.

Stallings also wrote screenplays, including *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) and *The Sun Shines Bright* (1953).

In 1963, Stallings' last book, *The Last Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917-1918*, chronicled the history of the war.

Edwin P. Hubble

(1889-1953) B. Marshfield, Mo.
Scientist

Regarded as the greatest astronomer of the 20th century, Edwin Hubble determined that galaxies exist outside of and are receding from the Milky Way. He made landmark discoveries at Mt. Wilson Observatory in Pasadena, Calif., and was instrumental in building the Palomar Observatory (1948), from which he conducted research until his death. "Hubble's constant" profoundly affected cosmology (study of the universe).

A major in the 2nd Bn., 343rd Inf. Regt., 86th Inf. Div., Hubble arrived in France on Sept. 23, 1918. He spent only a brief time at the front. After occupation duty in France and Germany, he left Europe from England in August 1919.

During WWII, Hubble was chief of ballistics at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland and director of the Supersonic Wind Tunnels Laboratory, earning a Medal of Merit for his work.

Robert R. McCormick
(1880-1955) b. Chicago, Ill.
Publisher

One of the giants of journalism, Robert McCormick influenced public opinion for five decades. He made the *Chicago Tribune* the largest circulation newspaper in the Midwest and the world leader in ad revenues. He also pioneered “vertical integration” in publishing. McCormick championed the cause of a free press during his entire career. Some say he invented the modern newspaper and shaped the era’s political times.

Commanding two batteries of the 5th Field Artillery Regt., 1st Inf. Div. and later the 122nd FA Regt. (33rd Div., Illinois N.G.), McCormick served in France from July 1917 to August 1918. He fought at Mont Sec, in various other sectors and at Cantigny, where he was knocked unconscious by a German shell.

Service in the “Big Red One” was a source of lifelong pride. He renamed his estate Cantigny, hosted veterans’ reunions, helped unemployed vets, provided wheelchairs to the disabled and aided war widows. He was buried in his WWI uniform.

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