

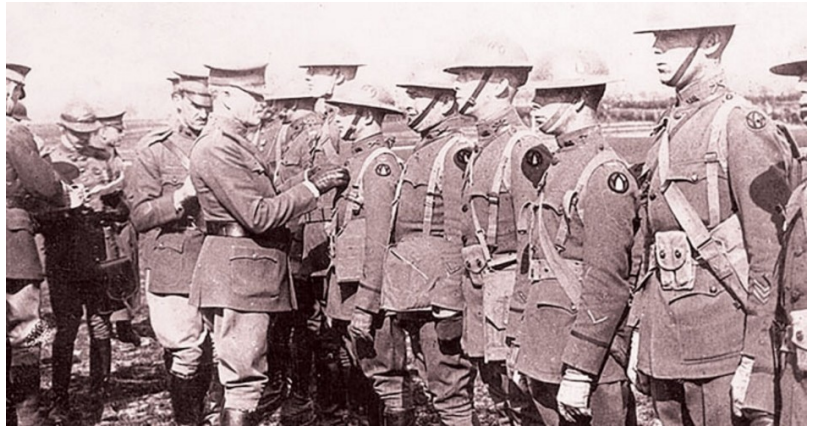


Written by [Brian Farmer](#) on December 4, 2017

Published in the December 4, 2017 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 33, No. 23

Notables of the First World War

When we Americans think about World War I, we may recall the names of certain personalities, such as the leader of the American military forces, General John Pershing, or the flamboyant leader of Germany's "Flying Circus," Manfred "The Red Baron" von Richthofen. But there are other personalities whom we associate with World War II who were major players in their own right during World War I, such as the noble Douglas MacArthur and the ignoble Adolf Hitler. Yet the evil that Hitler later inflicted on the world after acquiring the reins of power in Germany was by no means representative of the German people, many of whom, like the men in the opposing trenches they faced, were Christian. While we (non-German) Americans view Germany as the enemy during World War I, we must also consider that German soldiers fought patriotically for what they viewed as Germany's rightful place in the world. With all of this in mind, we offer the following four brief biographies.



John Joseph Pershing

John Joseph Pershing was born into a family of modest means in Laclede, Missouri, on September 13, 1860. He graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1886 as president of his class.

Pershing's first active service was in the last series of Indian Wars fought in the American West, when he served in the cavalry. He received a Bachelor of Laws degree in 1893 while teaching at the University of Nebraska, and later taught military tactics at West Point. His academic career was interrupted by the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, when Pershing went to Cuba and won a Silver Star. Soon afterward he was transferred to the Philippines, where he joined the hard campaign the Americans were waging against the Moros in Mindanao, ultimately winning the praise of President Theodore Roosevelt.

Roosevelt sent Pershing to act as an observer in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. Roosevelt rewarded Captain Pershing for his work in Manchuria by elevating him to the rank of brigadier general in 1906 over the heads of hundreds of senior officers, an act that created considerable bitterness against Pershing among his fellow officers for many years.



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After another tour in the Philippines, Pershing was rushed back to the United States in 1916 to lead a military expedition into Mexico to pursue Pancho Villa, the Mexican revolutionary who had recently made a surprise attack on the town of Columbus, New Mexico. Upon arriving in El Paso, Texas, to join his troops, Pershing received the news that his wife and three small daughters had burned to death in San Francisco, with only his son surviving. Pershing grimly led his expedition across the border on March 15, 1916 and drove deep into Mexican territory. Although the American troops easily swept aside the Mexicans who attempted to repel them, Pershing was unable to capture Pancho Villa during the 10 months that his troops searched through the hostile countryside of northern Mexico. Nevertheless, President Woodrow Wilson appeared to be satisfied with the effort and promoted Pershing to major general.

Pershing's expedition was recalled in February of 1917, and three months later, after the United States had entered World War I, Pershing was sent to France to command the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), which was just then being created. President Wilson gave Pershing a free hand in organizing his forces, but directed Pershing to keep his troops under U.S. command and not allow them to be merged into a combined Allied unit. When he arrived in France, Pershing discovered that the Allies did not want an untested American army, but preferred to have American troops slowly fill their own depleted ranks. Pershing insisted on training a separate American force and on keeping them away from the fighting until they were prepared to wage an offensive. He was determined to prevent the Americans from being dragged into the wastefulness of trench warfare, and envisioned an army of one million men under his command by the spring of 1918. Supported by U.S. Secretary of War Newton Baker, Pershing succeeded in achieving his goal, much to the consternation of the Supreme War Council, composed of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, and Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando.

When the massive German offensive of 1918 threatened to break through the French lines, Pershing volunteered some reinforcements to Marshal Ferdinand Foch. American actions in the battles at Château-Thierry and Belleau Wood stopped the Germans on the Marne River and opened the eyes of both the Allies and the Germans to the combat readiness of the American forces.

In August of 1918, the newly formed American First Army was concentrating on the St. Mihiel offensive. At the last minute, Marshal Foch called off the attack, arguing that American reinforcements were needed elsewhere along the front. Pershing refused to break up his unit, and the struggle between Foch and Pershing was finally settled through the mediation of Marshal Henri Pétain. The AEF eliminated the St. Mihiel salient and, a few days later, almost 600,000 men were shifted to the Meuse-Argonne area, where they advanced against fierce German resistance. In 47 days of continuous fighting, the American forces had pushed forward to Sedan, chewing up German divisions as fast as they were thrown in. The armistice came three days after the AEF reached the outskirts of Sedan.

Pershing's creation of the American forces from scratch was one of the greatest feats of World War I. Starting from nothing, Pershing produced an army of two million men within 18 months. The entry of the Americans on the Western Front was decisive in the winning of the war. The iron discipline and stern military bearing that Pershing maintained earned him the nickname "Black Jack," showing that he won respect, if not affection, from his fellow soldiers. On September 3, 1919, Pershing was made general of the armies, a rank unique in American military history. He was made chief of staff in 1921, a post that he held until his retirement in 1924. Pershing died in 1948 at the age of 88 and was buried in



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Arlington National Cemetery.

Douglas MacArthur

Douglas MacArthur was arguably America's greatest war hero in both world wars. He was born on January 26, 1880 in Little Rock, Arkansas. He spent his early years on the western frontier, before enrolling at the United States Military Academy in 1899.

Photo: AP Images

This article appears in the December 4, 2017, issue of The New American.

The following year, an incident occurred that nearly ended MacArthur's hopes and dreams of pursuing a military career. He was summoned to appear before a court of inquiry as a principal witness in a case of hazing in which he had been one of the alleged victims. Under questioning he explained all of the circumstances but declined to reveal the names of the cadets involved, because his parents had taught him two immutable principles: never lie and never tattle. But this put MacArthur in a desperate situation. If he were ordered to reveal the names but disobeyed the order, he could be expelled. Sensing the struggle her son was going through, MacArthur's mother sent him this message during a recess of the court:

Do you know that your soul is of my soul such a part
That you seem to be fiber and core of my heart?
No other can pain me as you, son, can do;
None other can please me or praise me as you.
Remember the world will be quick with its blame
If shadow or shame ever darken your name.
Like mother, like son, is saying so true
The world will judge largely of mother by you.
Be this then your task, if task it shall be
To force this proud world to do homage to me.
Be sure it will say, when its verdict you've won
She reaps as she sowed: "This man is her son!"

After reading that message, MacArthur later wrote that he knew what to do: He would not rat on his fellow cadets. In the end, the names were obtained through other means, and the military was saved from having to destroy the career of one who turned out to be one of its greatest leaders.

After his graduation from West Point (at the top of his class), he served in the Canal Zone and in Texas, as well as on the General Staff in Washington, D.C., before seeing his first active service during the American intervention in Mexico. MacArthur was appointed to the rank of major in 1915, after his return to Washington, D.C. When the United States entered World War I in April of 1917, General John "Black Jack" Pershing was chosen to lead the American forces in Europe. MacArthur was impressed by Pershing's soldierly bearing and strength of character.



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MacArthur was assigned to the Rainbow Division, so called because it drew its members from all parts of the United States, rather than from one state or territory, which was an innovation at the time. By the end of 1917, only four of the 24 divisions that Pershing had promised the Allies were complete, and the Rainbow Division was one of them. At this time there were only 175,000 American soldiers in France.

One of the first actions involving any American military unit in World War I was in the Luneville-Baccarat area in February of 1918, where the Rainbow Division relieved a French unit. In his first action, MacArthur led a raiding party through the barbed wire, for which he received the American Silver Star, as well as the French Croix de Guerre, which General Georges de Bazelaire presented to MacArthur. After pinning it on his tunic, the general kissed him on both cheeks.

In March of 1918, MacArthur led a raiding party into German lines and was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross, a battle honor second only to the Congressional Medal of Honor. The Rainbow Division was withdrawn from action on July 19, after having suffered more than 1,500 casualties, and MacArthur won his second Silver Star. Thrown back into action on July 25 along the Marne River, MacArthur led his 42nd Division (the Rainbow Division's official designation) from the front during a particularly bloody action involving hand-to-hand fighting. For this he was awarded a second Croix de Guerre and a third Silver Star, and was made a commander of the French Legion of Honor.

During the St. Mihiel offensive, MacArthur's 42nd Division broke through a line that had been held by the Germans since 1914, which resulted in the capture of almost 15,000 prisoners and 450 guns. MacArthur, now a brigadier general, was awarded two more Silver Stars.

In the Meuse-Argonne campaign, which the 42nd Division entered on October 11, MacArthur led another successful attack, for which he received his second Distinguished Service Cross. After pushing forward to Sedan, the 42nd Division was finally withdrawn on the night of November 9-10. Now a major general, MacArthur was awarded his seventh Silver Star the day before the Armistice ended World War I on November 11, 1918.

There were some who were jealous of MacArthur's many awards, as well as critical of his idiosyncratic methods, such as leading from the front and walking around the battlefield unarmed. When General Pershing was informed of these criticisms, he was said to have replied, "Stop all this nonsense. MacArthur is the greatest leader of troops we have." MacArthur's commanding officer wrote to Pershing that "he had filled each day with a loyal and intelligent application to duty such as is without parallel in our army." At the end of World War I, MacArthur's reputation as America's greatest soldier was already secure, and his heroic stature was destined to become even greater.

Manfred von Richthofen

It was only 11 years before the outbreak of World War I that the first airplane flight had taken place. During those years, there were a number of opportunities to test the military applications of aircraft. Initially, the role of aircraft was limited to reconnaissance, as generals wanted their pilots to bring them information on the enemy's movements, and saw them as a useful extension of the traditional cavalry scout, rather than as pioneers of a new military arm in their own right. Naturally, it became important to repel enemy airplanes before they could observe one's own positions and movements. Hence, the second year of the war witnessed the development of aircraft types specifically designed for aerial



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combat.

The Germans had a strange social attitude toward flying. Piloting an aircraft was likened to driving a car which, before 1914, upper-class gentlemen had employed chauffeurs to do. The first pilots of the Imperial Air Service were therefore recruited from the noncommissioned ranks. Officers acted as observers, in the rear cockpit, from which they told the pilot where they wanted to be flown. The excitement of the chase quickly broke down these social taboos, especially as frustrated cavalymen saw the chance to experience in the sky the thrill of combat that the trenches were denying them on the ground.

The improvement in the offensive capacity of aircraft and the emergence of highly skilled pilots inevitably transformed the character of air warfare. During 1915, the haphazard encounters of individual aircraft gave way to carefully planned air campaigns designed to gain dominance over those sectors of the front where great ground battles were in progress. The new policy produced a new type of airman, the so-called ace, who was celebrated in national propaganda as his reward for victory over at least five enemy airmen. An ace was often given command of a fighter squadron, whose other pilots tried to model their performance on his.

On the German side, such an airman was the charismatic Manfred von Richthofen, a Prussian cavalry officer and passionate hunter who had a reputation as an almost fire-breathing man of action. He summed up his attitude toward aerial combat in these words: "I am a hunter. My brother, Lothar, is a butcher. When I have shot down an Englishman, my hunting passion is satisfied for a quarter of an hour." Richthofen eventually shot down 80 enemy aircraft (the highest tally of any World War I fighter pilot), most of them in his scarlet Fokker triplane, which became his trademark and was the origin of his nickname, "The Red Baron."

Fifty-four of Richthofen's victims literally went down in flames. The reason for this ghastly outcome was that the fuel tank was positioned as close to the engine as possible and, on most models of airplanes, the magnetos (alternators with magnets used to generate current for the ignition in an internal combustion engine) were geared to the propeller shaft by direct drive. Hence, a hit which struck the engine almost always ruptured a fuel line and, even if the engine was stopped, the windmilling of the propeller would keep the magnetos sparking, with fire being the inevitable result. Since British pilots carried no parachutes, they had the choice of either burning to death in their airplanes or being killed by the fall if they jumped free.

Richthofen owed his skill in combat at least partly to his early experiences as an observer with another pilot, Kurt Wisseemann, who suffered from tuberculosis and was determined to die in the air rather than in his bed. Wisseemann had a habit of flying his aircraft to within a few feet of the enemy he was chasing, and the fact that Richthofen survived those encounters seems to have convinced him that he was invulnerable. His favorite expression was, "One must overcome the inner *Schweinehund* (cowardice)," and he did seem to have succeeded in suppressing within himself every trace of fear and doubt. Richthofen filled his room with trophies of the aircraft that he had shot down and lit the room with a chandelier made from the rotary engine of a British victim so that even in sleep he could be reminded of aerial combat.

In the end, Richthofen's feeling of invincibility led him to take risks and, during his final flight on April 21, 1918, he broke some basic rules of engagement: Do not fly too far into enemy territory and do not



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fly too close to the ground. On that day, the Red Baron was coming to the rescue of his cousin, Wolfram von Richthofen, who was being attacked by Wilfrid May, a Canadian pilot. The Red Baron succeeded in driving off the threat to his cousin, but came under attack from another Canadian pilot, Arthur Brown. Brown attacked quickly from a great altitude and had to veer away to avoid hitting the ground. Given the trajectory of the bullet that ultimately killed Richthofen, it is generally acknowledged that it was fired from the ground in an area occupied by Australian forces, not from Brown's aircraft. Richthofen was highly respected by the Allies and was given a respectful burial, which allegedly included a memorial wreath inscribed with the words, "To Our Gallant and Worthy Foe."

Adolf Hitler

Adolf Hitler was born in Braunau am Inn, Austria, on April 20, 1889, the third child of a customs official. His father had an overbearing nature and wanted the young Adolf to become a government official. But the boy wanted to become an artist and dropped out of secondary school in 1905. From this period Hitler developed a love for the operas of Richard Wagner, which he first heard in Linz, and which evolved into his intense German nationalism.

After the death of his father, Hitler applied to enter the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in 1907 but failed. He returned to his home, where he cared for his mother, Klara, who was dying from breast cancer. Klara's horrific suffering and agonizing death under the care of a Jewish physician left Hitler utterly devastated. Some historians speculate that this sowed the seed that was later to develop into his virulent anti-Semitism, ultimately culminating in the Holocaust.

Hitler then returned to Vienna and eked out a pitiful existence as a freelance artist, residing most of his time there in a men's hostel. In 1910, an acquaintance described him thusly: "From under a greasy, black derby hat, his hair hung long over his coat collar. His thin and hungry face was covered with a black beard above which his large staring eyes were the one prominent feature. He was lazy and moody and he disliked regular work. He had none of the common vices. He neither smoked nor drank, and was too shy and awkward to have any success with women. His passions were reading newspapers and talking politics."

Disgusted with what he viewed as the degeneracy of Vienna and with a declining and decaying Austrian empire, Hitler moved to Munich, Germany, in January of 1913, in order to evade the military draft in Austria. But the authorities tracked him down and in January of 1914 Munich police officials brought him before the Austrian consul, whereupon he was obliged to report for duty in Salzburg, Austria. Hitler arrived in Salzburg in early February, but was found to be too frail for military service and was allowed to return to Munich.

Hitler was 25 years of age when World War I broke out in August of 1914. Although he was an Austrian national, Hitler was allowed to enlist as a volunteer in the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment. The war on the Western Front was everything that Hitler could have hoped for. Here was escape from failure and frustration in a world that refused to recognize his talents. Now he was an integral part of the most powerful war machine in the history of the world, in which he found direction and purpose, for he was assigned to regimental headquarters as a dispatch runner. As such, he carried messages from regimental headquarters in the rear to company headquarters in the frontline trenches. He liked his job so much that he never sought to be promoted beyond the rank of lance corporal. Living conditions were relatively comfortable and clean at regimental headquarters. More importantly, the position gave Hitler



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a feeling that he was helping to carry out important military decisions, for the orders he carried set battalions in motion, started artillery barrages, or commanded units to hold ground regardless of losses.

A number of soldiers who served with Hitler later made it clear that he was not very popular with his comrades because he was always deadly serious and never laughed or joked. Hitler responded to the usual soldier's gripes with furious lectures about patriotism and the duties of a soldier. His one indulgence was a passion for sweets. It became a joke in his unit that, if he found a tin of candy, nothing could keep him away from it, not even machine gun bullets or artillery shells.

Hitler was remembered for his strong opposition to the Christmas Truce of 1914, when to the chagrin of military higher-ups, soldiers on both sides of "no-man's land" ceased fighting for Christmas, and even played a game of football (soccer). As

Gerard DeGroot noted in a December 2014 article in the U.K. *Telegraph*:

Playing football rudely exposed the contrived nature of wartime animosity. For that reason, it was quickly quashed. Gustav Riebensahm, an officer in the 2nd Westphalian regiment, immediately complained to his commanders that "the whole thing has become ridiculous and must be stopped." Near Ypres, a corporal named Adolf Hitler voiced the view that fraternisation "should not be allowed." General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien echoed that sentiment, reminding his subordinate commanders that "Friendly intercourse with the enemy ... [is] absolutely prohibited." An even sterner directive was issued by the 1st Army commander, General Douglas Haig, who warned that soldiers caught fraternising could face a firing squad.

In *The Christmas Truce of 1914*, Tom Streissguth wrote, "Hitler did not approve of the Christmas truce, and he believed any fraternization with the enemy was a stain on German honor. He is quoted in several accounts as declaring, 'Something like this should not even be up for discussion during wartime.'"

There was something else that Hitler was remembered for in his unit: He lived a charmed life. Time after time, when bullets claimed a comrade, he escaped unscathed. After one notable attack that left the regiment decimated, one survivor turned to Hitler and said, "Man, there is no bullet with your name on it!" This served to reinforce Hitler's conviction that he had been miraculously spared for a special mission.

Despite negative reviews from his comrades, all of Hitler's commanding officers agreed that he was a brave and exemplary soldier. One officer who recalled his courage noted that Hitler somehow always managed to keep himself scrupulously clean. In a 1932 court case, in which Hitler sued a newspaper for libel after it reported that his conduct during the war was cowardly, another officer testified to Hitler's bravery. Hitler won the case.

In addition to winning the Iron Cross, Second Class as early as December of 1914, Hitler was one of the very few common soldiers of World War I to be awarded the Iron Cross, First Class. There are differing accounts of how he won it, but three things seem clear. First, he was entitled to it. Second, it was important to him both personally and politically. He wore the Iron Cross constantly, as it was visible proof of his claim that he was an unknown hero of the Great War. Third, the award shows that he had reason to be grateful to a Jew, for Hitler never would have received the honor were it not for the efforts of the regimental adjutant, Hugo Gutmann, a Jew.

Hitler was blinded by mustard gas on October 15, 1918 and evacuated to a military hospital near Berlin. News of the armistice less than a month later left him appalled and shocked. This was the "November



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shame," perpetrated by the "November criminals," who had spawned the misbegotten "Jew republic." Something clicked, and Hitler reached what he called "the most decisive decision of my life." He must answer the voices that he said he had heard while lying in his hospital bed. The voices told him to rescue the Fatherland from the Jews who had violated her. So delusional was Hitler, years later he would remind his followers that, when he started his mission to the German people, he was 30 years of age, the same age that another Messiah began His mission.

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