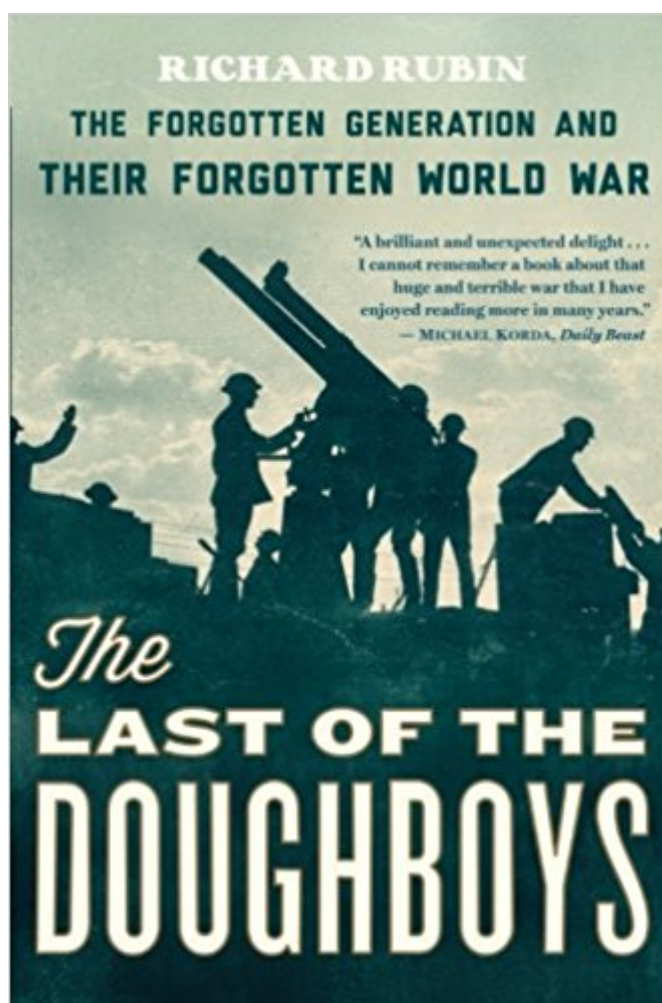




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# The Last Of The Doughboys: The Forgotten Generation And Their Forgotten World War



## Synopsis

“Richard Rubin has done something that will never be possible for anyone to do again. His interviews with the last American World War I veterans—who have all since died—bring to vivid life a cataclysm that changed our world forever but that remains curiously forgotten here.”—Adam Hochschild, author of *To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914–1918*

In 2003, 85 years after the end of World War I, Richard Rubin set out to see if he could still find and talk to someone who had actually served in the American Expeditionary Forces during that colossal conflict. Ultimately, he found dozens, aged 101 to 113, from Cape Cod to Carson City, who shared with him at the last possible moment their stories of America’s Great War. Nineteenth-century men and women living in the twenty-first century, they were self-reliant, humble, and stoic, never complaining, but still marveling at the immensity of the war they helped win, and the complexity of the world they helped create. Though America has largely forgotten their war, you will never forget them, or their stories. A decade in the making, *The Last of the Doughboys* is the most sweeping look at America’s First World War in a generation, a glorious reminder of the tremendously important role America played in the war to end all wars, as well as a moving meditation on character, grace, aging, and memory. “An outstanding and fascinating book. By tracking down the last surviving veterans of the First World War and interviewing them with sympathy and skill, Richard Rubin has produced a first-rate work of reporting.”—Ian Frazier, author of *Travels in Siberia*

“I cannot remember a book about that huge and terrible war that I have enjoyed reading more in many years.”—Michael Korda, *The Daily Beast*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There may be as many as a million surviving veterans of WWII, and their stream of memoirs continues, contributing to their place as part of the "Greatest Generation." But the last known American veteran of the Great War died in 2011. Determined to obtain and document the remembrances of the surviving "doughboys," journalist Rubin began an effort to locate and interview many of them a decade ago. The result is this fascinating and deeply moving collection of individual stories. These veterans, between the ages of 101 and 113, tell their stories in sometimes halting ways; but aided by the patience and prompting of Rubin, they provide a vivid picture of their wartime experiences as well as the vastly different American society from which they sprang. Most of these men came from rural backgrounds, and they used horsepower rather than tractors to plow fields. Some describe their shock at their first exposure to industrial-scale warfare, while others stepped easily into the beginnings of aerial combat. Some recall the comradeship, while others emphasize the terror of trench warfare. This is an important and masterful tribute to those who participated in a conflict that continues to shape the world today. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

"An outstanding and fascinating book. By tracking down the last surviving veterans of the First World War and interviewing them with sympathy and skill, Richard Rubin has produced a first-rate work of reporting. Almost a hundred years after the event, he makes that immensely consequential and partly forgotten war as alive as twenty minutes ago." -- Ian Frazier, New Yorker contributor and author of *Travels in Siberia* "Richard Rubin has written the most riveting and astonishing book about World War I that I have read in a decade. No matter what you think about that terrible conflict, this book will lift up your heart, not only about the war but about being an American. It's unique!" -- Thomas Fleming, author of *The Illusion of Victory: America in World War I* "From its boffo, page-length first sentence situating the First World War in American memory (before the Band-Aid and nylon and the ballpoint pen and sliced bread) to its moving concluding portrait of Frank Buckles (1901-2011), the last of the last of the doughboys, this book makes irresistible reading. A fusion of reportage, memoir, and history, *The Last of the Doughboys* is a work of learning, wit, and compassion." -- Jack Beatty, author of *The Lost History of 1914* "Richard Rubin has performed an extraordinary feat of World War I sleuthing. He has managed to track down numerous centenarians -- centenarians!"

who fought in the trenches and has skillfully resurrected their memories in a way that brings that now sepia-toned conflict into focus as sharp as a bayonet. Rubin refers to these doughboys as 'the forgotten generation.' Yet he brings them back unforgettably. And his book is addictively readable." Joseph E. Persico, author of *Roosevelt's Centurions: FDR and the Commanders He Led to Victory in World War II* "Richard Rubin has done something that will never be possible for anyone to do again. His interviews with the last American World War I veterans who have all since died bring to vivid life a cataclysm that changed our world forever but that remains curiously forgotten here. And his research and battlefield visits help us picture the background to the survivors' stories." Adam Hochschild, author of *To End All Wars: A Story of Loyalty and Rebellion, 1914-1918* "My namesake was a great-uncle who faked his age and enlisted in the Army as a teenager shipping off to France and fighting in World War I, where he was wounded and gassed. I cherish his Purple Heart. And I remember long conversations with him as he thought back on his experiences, by turns horrific and comic. Now, in an extraordinary work that combines oral history and personal reporting, Richard Rubin relates his encounters with the last survivors of that war, centenarians all the forgotten generation, as he calls them. The Last of the Doughboys is a book that puts Rubin's trademark style on display: it is deeply researched, shrewdly observed, and warmly humane." Cullen Murphy, editor-at-large, *Vanity Fair* "Richard Rubin's *The Last of the Doughboys* is more than just a collection of memories. It is a moving tribute a final salute to a generation of men who gave their all to win the war that would, they hoped, end all wars. This intimately written book will stand at the forefront of World War I literature for many years to come." Edward G. Lengel, author of *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918* "Richard Rubin's vivid and lively interviews with the last surviving veterans of World War I have preserved the voices and memories of the men who fought the nation's first modern war. It is an important contribution to history, an act of historical justice to soldiers whose achievements and sufferings are seldom remembered, and a fascinating view of history through the eyes of those that made it." Richard Slotkin, author of *Lost Battalions: The Great War and the Crisis of American Nationality* "Richard Rubin's brilliant *The Last of the Doughboys* is a living, breathing monument to an almost criminally unsung generation of American heroes and a vivid and richly detailed portrayal of their era and their war. Beautifully and knowledgably written, the book ensures that the doughboys' achievements on the battlefields of World War I, as well as at home, will never again be forgotten." James Carl Nelson, author of *The Remains of Company D: A Story of the Great War and Five Lieutenants* "The Last of the Doughboys is a fascinating account

of the American experience of World War I and the astonishing power of memory: oral memory, literary memory, and the collective memory of monuments and cemeteries. Actually, it is not the Korean War but World War I that is truly the forgotten war in American culture, but Richard Rubin brings it to life, etched with great narrative richness." *—*• Gerald Early, Merle Kling Professor of Modern Letters, Washington University in St. Louis "A wonderfully engaging study executed with a lot of heart." *—*• Kirkus Reviews, starred review "Affecting . . . Give[s] fresh texture to what's already known. Rubin is skillful in his interviewing, remorseless in his efforts to chase down his subjects, thoughtful of their age. . . He has brought them back to life. His book is a fitting epitaph to brave men too often overlooked." *—*• Publishers Weekly "Fascinating and deeply moving . . . An important and masterful tribute to those who participated in a conflict that continues to shape the world today." *—*• Booklist "A brilliant and unexpected delight . . . Clever, engrossing, moving, and richly detailed . . . Rubin is a sensitive and terrific interviewer, a good listener, with a faultless eye and ear for detail *—*• not only a good writer and born raconteur, with a gift for telling the reader things that are unexpected and fascinating *—*• American songs in World War I, women who joined the United States Navy in World War I, the sad fate of African-American soldiers *—*• but one with a dogged determination . . . What Richard Rubin has done is remarkable--his book is at once a cultural history of a vanished America, simpler, more rural, less driven by technology and science, poorer, but infinitely more *—*• "neighborly," *—*• in the best sense of the word, a military history of the best kind, and a chance to meet a truly fascinating group of people, I liked every one of them, and counted myself lucky that Richard Rubin has achieved the most difficult of feats, to find a new and different way of writing about World War I (which I would have thought almost impossible) and to have brought to vivid life a group of truly forgotten people, who once did something memorable, then slipped through the cracks into a long anonymity from which they might never have emerged. I cannot remember a book about that huge and terrible war that I have enjoyed reading more in many years." *—*• Michael Korda, *The Daily Beast* "A charming, passionate and personal paean . . . Awash in interesting *—*• and poignant *—*• stories." *—*• Minneapolis Star-Tribune "Engaging . . . memorable . . . The book succeeds by creating degrees of connection, even as it reshapes our consciousness." *—*• The Boston Globe *—*•

This remarkable book is the story of the people, times, and conditions of life for the few remaining World War I veterans able to recount their lives to the author. It is also an extraordinary account of the author's efforts to find these forgotten characters of history. They were ordinary men and

women, whose lives were forever changed by their experiences during World War I and before and after. The author's sensitivity to the difficulties of capturing their stories, all were well over 100 years old when he interviewed them, is a truly faithful account of their lives. It puts the horrors and madness of unending trench warfare, into a wider account of what many experienced - not only in those trenches, but behind the scenes. There are men who built those trenches, who supplied them, who buried the dead, as well as men who killed and were killed, captured and were wounded. In his accounts of their war-time lives, the author is able to present a comprehensive story about the times and the lives of his main characters with remarkable clarity. These were ordinary and yet extraordinary people, who were largely forgotten. He found them, not from US military and veterans records but from the French records and that nation's recognition and awards to the AEF soldiers who still lived into the 21st century. This is a lengthy tribute to them and to their lives, and should remind us of that "worst of all wars" which brought the next one, and still resounds in the stories of those who still fight wars. I highly recommend this book to those who want to understand American history and the many unknown characters whose lives and stories make us all human. It's a long but truly compelling read; told with affection, humor, and well-researched history. It is the story of people brought alive by the author's brilliant interview skills and writing, well-organized presentation, and remarkable skill in reporting the reality of these unforgettable men and women, now no longer with us.

This is a down in the mud and blood eyewitness remembrance of WWI by the guys who were there. Books like this should be read by all who are so quick to go to war. Surely evil doers have to be dealt with, but graphic accounts of the resulting gore and horror of war should never be underestimated. Stories of the reality of war should be read by all who consider themselves informed as to military action. This book is one of many not to be ignored by people who consider themselves civilized.

The Last of the Doughboys serves as a crucial link in the history of World War One. I have long been interested in the war and have read military and political histories of the war's background, battles, and peace settlement. The huge number of casualties, tons of armament, length of battles, etc. make it difficult to remember that there were people involved in not only the big picture, but in millions of small ones too. "Doughboys" finally puts a human face on those massive events. I worked for the VA in the 1980's and 1990's when WWI vets were starting to get really old. Mr. Rubin is correct that VA never had a systematic way to track and identify these vets. There were, however,

sporadic, informal attempts to reach out to these vets to see if VA could do anything for them. I found them much like Mr. Rubin describes. Some were simply too far gone physically or mentally to communicate, but there was a group of sharp, fit veterans who looked at us "government types" with bemusement at best and anger at worst. These were proud people with no sense that the government owed them anything. For the record, individual VA employees also played a small but crucial role in the French Government's Croix de Guerre program. It was often a VA employee who assisted relatives in completing the application, guided the family towards the necessary records (which were sometimes in VA's possession), and sadly, explained to the families of deceased vets that they weren't going to get the medal - even if their doughboy had died on the battlefields of France. I hope some youngster reads this book and begins a systematic attempt to do this with WWII. If WWI is any indication, the project will be completed around 2040.

The WWI centennial in 2014 sparked a new interest in WWI for me. Having now read quite a few books on the topic, I put this one top on the list. Not so much for a general history, but to personalize it and empathize with the experience of those who lived through it. I'm thankful that Rubin had the inspiration to write this while there were still a few WWI vets around! He has done a real service to that generation and to those of us who remember them. I've been reading military history for most of my life and can think of very few books that had the same impact on me. The anecdotes about the war are fascinating, as are the observations on growing old. Bottom line, this is exceedingly well done and a must for anyone interested in the US experience in WWI.

This is the best history of world war I that I have read. Perhaps it is the best because it because it presents actual people rather than battles and events. The author uses a touch of humor in his presentation of these real people and their stories.

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