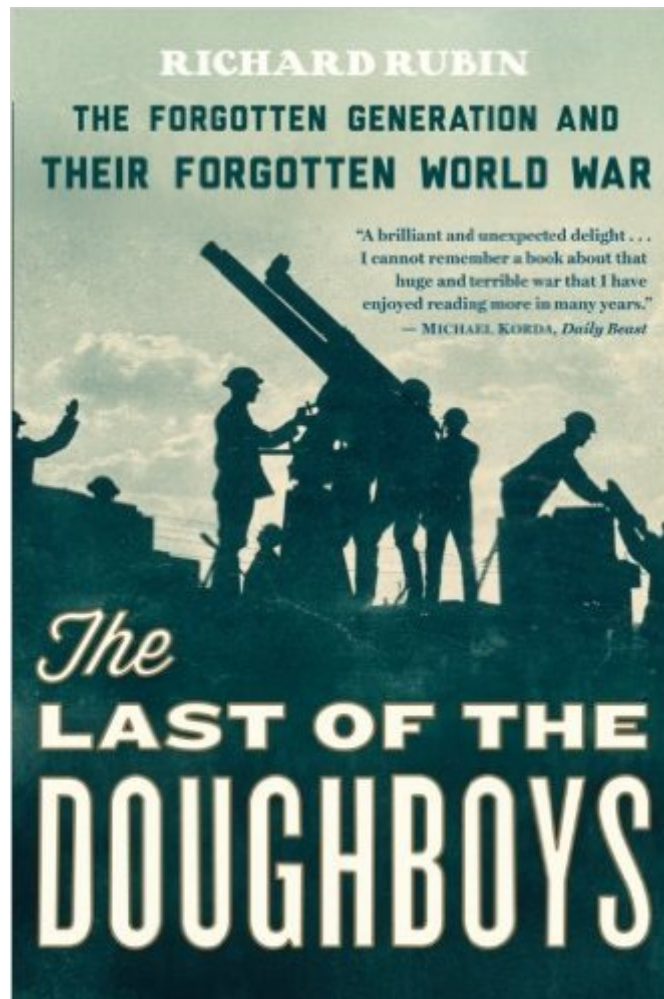


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The Last Of The Doughboys: The Forgotten Generation And Their Forgotten World War



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

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Customer Reviews

This review is hard; I hope I can do this book justice. First I want to say what a commendable service the author has done in providing us with this book. How wonderful for him to make such a monumental effort in finding these men. Men who served the whole world in this war, and whose service and blood and tears were basically forgotten. I know I had never given a thought to those who served in this war. I grew up with WW2 veterans all around, and I didn't give them a thought either, back when I could have talked to them, and found out all about what went on during that war, from the men who fought it. After getting interested in WW2 recently, I have realized it is very hard to find people to tell me firsthand about it and answer my questions. That war got me a bit interested in WW1, but only as background for WW2. This author's book has shown me how remiss I had also been about WW1 and all the people who gave so much in that war. I don't even know which of my forebears fought in WW1, so will need to find out. I know about all the other wars, but just seem to have ignored that one. I think in our family the Depression seems to have eclipsed WW1 to the point that it was forgotten and ignored. This book is just exceptional. There is background, there are stories, there are interviews, there is Americana and history, it just has everything. The author has really poured out his heart through this book. I am so glad that he went to so much trouble to find these men, and to talk to them about everything before they were gone. I had not realized that there had still been people alive who had fought in that war, who could tell their stories. I wholeheartedly recommend this book for everyone to read.

In "The Last of the Doughboys" Richard Rubin has harvested the memories of the last remaining soldiers from the Great War. In this remarkable and intimate account of men who answered the call to duty, Rubin's interviews of surviving American veterans from World War I goes beyond conventional war memories. He brings us the recollections of tragedy, fear, hope, and everyday life of those Americans who served in the trenches, where over 9 million men died: a total of both Central Powers and Allies military personnel (military and civilian casualties totaled more than 37 million). Rubin took on the task of tracking down all living American World War I veterans he could find to bring us this oral history. "The Last of the Doughboys" is not a history of the war itself; it is a history of the physical and moral exhaustion, the misery, carnage and life that was endured by the individual soldiers, the men in the trenches. At times the veterans' stories seemed melancholy, horrors that are hard to forget no matter how much time passes. But then I would picture them staring back though all the years and recalling some incident that brought back memories of youth as they related stories about "the girls upstairs" to Rubin. With these firsthand accounts Rubin has

breathed life into the history of this conflict as it approaches its 100 year anniversary (1914-1918). With all the wars that have taken place since then, it tends to be as remote as the American Civil War. Yet one must remember World War I was the first modern war with the introduction of modern weapons; such as the tank and airplane (aero plane) and extensive use of the machine gun.

Author Richard Rubin's decade of research and interviews has provided a fitting final chapter to the story of World War I veterans - all of whom are now gone. He's covered a vast scope in this book, and while it isn't a comprehensive look at the war itself, it is a solid cultural study of that era, and a look at the senior citizens whose experiences and knowledge often pass us by. Because he covers so much ground, a review can't do his entire effort equal justice. The primary focus is the interviews he conducted with the veterans, all 100+ years old. I was amazed how lucid and interesting the stories were - but that surprise is because of my stereotypes that Rubin's narrative helped overcome. Rubin plays it straight - he lets the veterans speak for themselves, and they aren't always as heroic as you might think. Because they were already 60 years old by 1960, most grew up during the height of American racism, and that comes across in a depressing chapter about how African-American soldiers were (mis)treated. It's really disgusting. It's certainly no vet's fault - it was the times of the era - but it's sad how there were so few (any?) white heroes during that period. I really liked how Rubin described the pop culture of the era, almost all music with ultra-patriotic lyrics - after war broke out. Before war, there was equal time given to staying out of it. But with the "Sedition Act" going into affect once war broke out, Rubin also provides an excellent and timely lesson about how quickly our civil rights were restricted or eliminated.

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