

Blackjack

Well, it's July...and what do we invariably think of when it turns to July?...ol' Blackjack Pershing, of course, since it was in May (!), back in 1917, that he was named commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.), as Americans prepared to head for France during World War I (*although somewhat belatedly, since the war had already been going on for some three years*).

He was John J. Pershing, born in Linn Co., Missouri, in 1860; he graduated West Point in 1886; and by the beginning of World War I he had already made a name for himself in the military and had quite a career while he was at it. A cavalry officer, Pershing rode in campaigns against the Indian chief Geronimo in 1886 and against the Sioux during 1890-1891. After the latter campaign, he was an instructor in military tactics at the University of Nebraska from 1891-1895. While there, he took the opportunity to earn himself a law degree in 1893. From 1897-1898, he was back at West Point; this time as an instructor.

But Pershing wasn't destined to serve out his career in the classroom. In 1898, America found itself at war with Spain, or, more accurately, Spain found itself at war with America. Pershing served with distinction. From 1899-1903, Pershing served in the Philippines, gaining national fame as he commanded the campaign against the Moro rebels.

In 1905, he was an American military attache in the Russo-Japanese War and was promoted to brigadier general in 1906. Twice (1906 and 1909) he returned to the Philippines to further deal with the Moro, defeating them in 1913. In 1915, he suffered a devastating defeat, albeit not on the battlefield—his wife and three daughters perished in a fire at their home in San Francisco.

But Pershing carried on. It was Pershing who led the much-publicized but unsuccessful punitive expedition (1916-1917) against Pancho Villa in Mexico. When the United States finally entered World War I in 1917, Pershing was at the head of the American forces. It was his talent for organization that was largely responsible for the molding of hastily trained American troops into well-integrated combat units, and it was Pershing that insisted on the Americans constituting a separate force under his own command. After the Great War, Pershing was promoted to permanent General of the Armies of the United States. From 1921-1924, he was Chief of Staff. He retired in 1924. Before dying in 1948, Pershing wrote two books about his experiences in the War.

Pershing, of course, is only one of many famous American generals, from George Washington through Stonewall Jackson to Colin Powell. Wouldn't a collection of American generals be a novel idea? This might be a very interesting category for those who love history, as I do. I happened to find the Pershing cover pictured here in my VIP/Personality collection, but other covers of generals are out there; hotel collectors, for example, know that there are lots of Washingtons, Grants, and Lees. There are a number of store sets that would be appropriate covers, as well. A challenging idea!

Actually, I don't know anyone who collects Generals...but I think I just talked myself into it!

