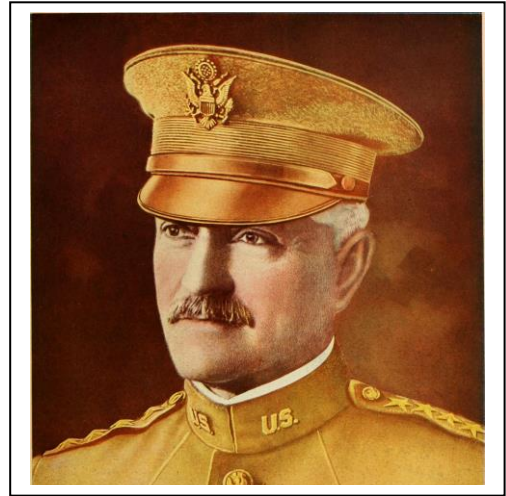


John J. “Black Jack” Pershing

John Joseph Pershing was not a born military man. He was born in the small town of Laclede, Missouri, in September of 1860. He began his young adult life as a schoolteacher about nine miles from his hometown. He heard about a chance to continue his education. He decided to pursue the opportunity. He and other young men took a test given in his state. The prize for the competition was an appointment to West Point, the United States Military Academy. He won the competition and joined the corps of cadets in 1882. He proved to be just a so-so student. He did, however, excel as a class leader. He was admired for his ability to lead. He was also feared for the intimidating ways he accomplished his goals.



After graduation, Pershing kept busy serving his country. First, he fought in the West against the Sioux and Apache. He then became a college professor teaching military tactics for four years. He fought in the Spanish-American War in 1898. He earned the nickname "Black Jack" by leading the African-American Tenth Cavalry in the frontier and at San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War in 1898. He was sent to the Philippines in 1903, where he helped stop a rebellion of Moro natives. He was appointed as a military attaché to Japan during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. He observed the war and recorded what happened for the purpose of preserving history.

In 1906, John J. Pershing was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. He received this promotion before 800 officers who had more seniority in the army. Most of these officers could not help but wonder if the promotion had something to do with his marriage to Helen Frances Warren. Her father just happened to be the chairman of the Senate Military Affairs Committee. Pershing had also formed a friendship with President Theodore Roosevelt. Both of these coincidences seemed to help his advancement through the ranks.

In 1915, Pershing was sent to Mexico where he was to pursue and capture Pancho Villa. Villa was a bandit who was creating havoc in the American towns along the Rio Grande River. Pershing was not able to capture Villa, but he did put a halt to much of his activity. It was 1917 before the United States decided to get involved in World War I. President Woodrow Wilson had tried to stay neutral, or

not take sides in the conflict. Pershing was put in charge of the American Expeditionary Force that was to be sent to Europe. When he realized his forces consisted of only 25,000 men, he knew he was in trouble. His first goal was to recruit and organize an army of more than 500,000 men. He accomplished this task and headed to Europe. When Pershing arrived in Europe, it was his plan to keep the American fighting forces together and mount their own offensive. This was not the plan of the British and French troops already there. The British and French troops had been seriously depleted by casualties. The British and French commanders were relying on the American troops to reinforce their armies. Pershing's men spent the first few months helping the allies. Then he followed through with his plan to start his own offensive.

September of 1918 saw a half million American soldiers taking on the German army. In late September, the Germans proved one of Pershing's ideas to be very wrong. He had decided that the German machine gun was not a weapon that he needed to worry about. The American stand at Meuse-Argonne ended as a stalemate due greatly to the presence of the German machine gun. On November 1, Pershing gave up his command. The Americans joined the British and French with a new plan of attack. This plan worked. On November 11, 1918, an armistice was declared. Pershing voiced his discontent with this decision. Pershing didn't want a treaty to be signed until the Germans surrendered unconditionally. He was overruled.

Pershing was hailed as a military hero when he returned to America. In 1921, he was given the title of U.S. Army Chief of Staff. He retired from active duty in 1924 when he was 64 years of age. He was given the title General of the Armies by Congress. This is a title that had only been held by General George Washington. Pershing wrote his autobiography, *My Experience of War*, in 1931. This autobiography won the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for History in 1932. Pershing lived in Washington, D.C., until his death in 1948. He may not have been the best student in school, but he became the most celebrated soldier of the century.