

GIs

in World War II

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The Men Who Wore the Eagle

WHAT EXACTLY IS A “GI?” The term comes from military-speak, seemingly as an abbreviation for “government issue.” Over time, GI came to signify an army enlisted man and, more broadly, an enlisted man of any branch of the US military. It is in this second, broader sense that we use “GI” in this issue, in the same sense as the GI Bill, which applied to all World War II veterans.

So, *GIs in World War II* is about the enlisted men who served—whether in the US Army, the US Army Air Forces, the US Navy, the US Coast Guard, or the US Marine Corps—in the war that saved the world from the Axis powers. It’s about every enlisted man who earned the right to wear the encircled eagle that symbolized honorable WWII service, the so-called “Ruptured Duck.”

This very special issue from the publishers of *America in WWII* follows ordinary American boys on their journey to war—from their entry into the armed forces and their transformation into fighting men, on to the front, and back home as veterans (for those who were so fortunate). Throughout, we try to answer the question “What was it like to be there?”

Of course, we can never *completely* understand what it was like to be there. Nor can we pretend to cram every aspect of GI life, every variety of WWII experience, into one periodical-sized publication. What we have assembled here is a sort of museum exhibit on paper (or on screen for you digital readers!), packed with photos and artifacts, and dedicated to the ordinary American serviceman of World War II.

Not every GI fought hand-to-hand in the pitch black of a Pacific jungle at midnight, though many did. Not every GI carried a wounded buddy up a burning ship’s companionway to safety, or single-handedly took out a machine gun nest, though many performed such feats. The truth is, most GIs in World War II never fought face-to-face with the enemy, or stared down death. Many never saw combat at all. They were the enormous support staff behind the men at the war’s bloody leading edge—the mechanics, clerks, cargo pilots, communications experts, medical personnel, etc., who enabled the US armed forces to go overseas and deliver a crushing blow to the enemies of the free world.

This issue is about all of them, the heroic and the mundane, the battle-scorched and the men behind them.

Each of us on the staff of *America in WWII* had parents who lived through World War II either as GIs overseas or as kids on the home front. *America in WWII* is inspired by their stories told around dinner tables, on porches, and in living rooms over many years—stories that became more complete as we grew older and readier to hear the unvarnished truth.

It is in the spirit of those stories that we create every issue of *America in WWII*. And it is in that same spirit that we present *GIs in World War II*.



“Ruptured Duck”
lapel button, 1945.

KUSHLAN FAMILY COLLECTION

Jim Kushlan
Publisher/*America in WWII* magazine