



Did You Know?



Hero & Spy Master

The roster of distinguished Army Navy Country Club members includes a Buffalo, New York attorney and Army Reserve officer who is the only individual to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal (3) and the National Service Medal, not to mention the Silver Star, the Purple Heart (3), and decorations from a number of other nations for his service during both World Wars. He is best known as the first leader of the Office of Strategy Services (OSS), the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), during World War II.

William J. “Wild Bill” Donovan

Born January 1, 1883 in Buffalo, New York, Donovan graduated from Columbia University and Columbia Law School where he was a classmate of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Returning to Buffalo after law school, Donovan joined the law firm of Love & Keating in 1909 and, two years later, opened his own Buffalo firm in partnership with a Columbia classmate, Bradley Goodyear. In 1912, Donovan helped form, and became the leader of a New York National Guard cavalry troop which was mobilized in 1916 to serve on the U.S.–Mexico border during the campaign against Pancho Villa.

With a field promotion to major, he returned to Buffalo where he joined the 69th Regiment which was training for America's expected entry into World War I, and eventually became part of the 42nd Division whose chief of staff was Douglas MacArthur.



During World War I, Major Donovan led the 1st battalion, 165th Regiment of the 42nd Division. Serving in France, he suffered a shrapnel wound in one leg and was almost blinded by gas. After performing a rescue under fire, he was presented the Croix de Guerre. He also was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for leading an assault during the Aisne-Marne campaign, in which hundreds of members of his regiment died, including his acting adjutant, the poet Joyce Kilmer. The events of this battle and the 69th Infantry Regiment's role in it were dramatized in the James Cagney movie, "The Fighting 69th".

Appointed chief of staff of the 165th Regiment, Donovan fought in battle near Landres-et-Saint-Georges on October 14–15, 1918. Struck in the knee by a bullet, he "refused to be evacuated and continued to direct his men until even American tanks were turning back under withering

German fire." After lobbying by his friend Father Francis Duffy, a famous and widely revered Army chaplain, Donovan was awarded an Oak Leaf Cluster of the Distinguished Service Cross (i.e., a second DSC) for his service in that battle. After the Armistice, Donovan remained in Europe as part of the occupation. On returning to New York in April 1919, Donovan, now a colonel, was widely discussed as a possible candidate for governor, but he rejected the idea, proclaiming his intention to return to Buffalo and resume the practice of law.

From 1922 to 1924, while maintaining his private law practice, he also served as US Attorney for the Western District of New York. A high point came in 1923, when, as a result of continued pressure from Father Duffy, Donovan was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic acts in the battle at Landres-et-Saint-Georges.

In 1924, when President Calvin Coolidge cleaned house at the Department of Justice in the wake of the Teapot Dome scandal, he appointed Donovan's former professor Harlan Stone as Attorney General and named Donovan as Stone's assistant, in charge of the criminal division. When Stone was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1925, Donovan was put in charge of the Department of Justice's antitrust division.

Resigning from the Department of Justice in 1929, Donovan moved to New York City and formed a new law firm. In 1932 he unsuccessfully ran on the Republican ticket to succeed Franklin D. Roosevelt as Governor of New York.

At the start of WWII Donovan sought a responsible place in the wartime infrastructure and was given increasingly important assignments culminating in his appointment on July 11, 1941 as the Coordinator of Information (COI), a position from which he began to lay the groundwork for a centralized intelligence program. In 1942 Roosevelt changed the COI from a White House operation, placing it under the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Donovan was returned to active duty in the U.S. Army in his World War I rank of colonel. He was promoted to brigadier general in March 1943 and to major general in November 1944. Under his leadership the OSS would conduct successful espionage and sabotage operations in Europe and parts of Asia, helping to prepare the ground for the 1942 Allied invasion of North Africa. Donovan took part in the Allied landing at Salerno and Anzio. On D-Day, Donovan was on one of the ships that took part in the Normandy landing.

As World War II began to wind to a close, Donovan focused on preserving the OSS. Despite the opposition of J. Edgar Hoover, Donovan was confident he could talk the president into the idea. After Roosevelt's death Donovan's political position was substantially weakened. Although he argued forcefully for the OSS's retention, he found himself opposed by the new president, Harry S. Truman, who abolished the OSS on September 20, 1945 despite Donovan's and the OSS's integral part in the initiation of, research for and prosecution of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg.

In 1946, Donovan resumed the practice of law, traveled extensively and ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate. He also lobbied privately for passage of the National Security Act of 1947 which created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Denied by Truman the leadership of the CIA, he worked behind the scenes to promote the hiring of former

OSS personnel. In the 1952 presidential election he supported Dwight Eisenhower but still did not get his coveted CIA position. He declined appointment as the ambassador to France but subsequently accepted the position of ambassador to Thailand, from which he resigned in August 1954, returning to the New York to resume his law practice. William J. Donovan died on February 8, 1959 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.