

Sunday, October 16, 2011

John Wayne: World War II OSS Agent



For years, there have been those who have loudly proclaimed that John Wayne was a draft dodger, that he never served during World War II, and they eagerly point to his lack of enlistment papers or discharge papers as proof positive that he never served. They may be soon eating their words.

As many of you know, Wayne's family recently placed a number of his personal belongings up for auction. Among the items listed in the auction catalog, were two certificates that had been presented to Wayne. The catalog lists them as:

44061 Two 'WWII' Certificates, 1940s

Both presented to John Wayne; the first from the War Agencies of the Government of the United States for "...*Outstanding Service in World War II*;" the second from William J. Donovan, Major General, U.S.A. Director, for "*Honorably Serv(ing) the United States of America as a Member of The Office of Strategic Services*" in 1945; both with JW inventory stickers.

Matted and Framed: 22" x 15" and smaller.

Est. \$1,000 - \$1,500 each

While it is important to take note of both of these certificates as they both indicate service during the Second World War, but take special note of the second certificate, the one from William Donovan of the O.S.S. (forerunner of the CIA). The certificate states that Wayne served honorably "as a member of The Office of Strategic Services."

There has always been speculation about Wayne's World War II involvement, both from his detractors, and from his fans, but this certificate is rarely talked about. Wayne himself told Dan Ford (grandson of director John Ford) that although he tried to enlist in the OSS and even sought John Ford's help in accomplishing this, he was only tasked with information gathering on the front lines of the Pacific. Something he claims he did during his USO tours, and something he tended to downplay. Wayne acknowledged to Ford that he did receive a certificate (most likely the one placed in the auction), stated that he never picked it up. Ford states in his book "Pappy" that John Ford kept the certificate and that it remained in his private papers for the rest of his life.

Is it possible that after John Ford's death the certificate was given to Wayne? I have to wonder. Wayne told Dan Ford that he considered the certificate to be more honorary than anything, and that it was simply something that John Ford had talked Donovan into giving to Wayne. If he thought so little of it, then why would he want it after so many years of not wanting it? Is it possible that Wayne actually did receive the certificate in 1945, and simply did not show it off? Given his well known humility, this is at least

possible. And what of his “service” with the OSS? Could it have entailed something more than has ever been made public? Given the OSS’s (and today’s CIA’s) penchant for secrecy, this too is possible.

In the end, however, it is all speculation, and it is doubtful that anything concrete will ever be found to definitively prove either way. I, for one, however, will always wonder.

You can read more about John Wayne’s involvement in World War II by clicking [here](#), and [here](#). But don’t expect to find the elusive “smoking gun” in either of these articles that will prove beyond any doubt what Wayne did during the war. It isn’t there.

As an addenda to this post, Heritage Auctions (which auctioned off the collection of John Wayne’s personal property) still has copies of the auction catalog for the John Wayne auction. The soft cover edition goes for \$50, and the hardcover edition is selling for \$125. They also have a limited edition collector’s DVD of the items and the auction for only \$19.95. Both can be ordered from the Heritage Auctions website (<https://www.ha.com/common/catalogorders.php#johnwayne>)

They also have the current edition of their magazine for sale, which features a nice cover photo of John Wayne, as well as an interview with Ethan Wayne, and articles about the auction. The magazine can be found here (<http://www.heritagemagazine.com/?ic=leftcol-mag-althome4-013008>).