

November 1921: Dr. Charlie commissioned as brigadier general in the United States Army

On Nov. 4, 1921, Charles H. Mayo, M.D., was commissioned as a brigadier general in the Medical Reserve Corps of the United States Army. This recognition was followed by a similar commission for his brother, William J. Mayo, M.D, on Dec. 23 that year.

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The Mayo brothers combined global values and American patriotism. Dr. Will joined the Medical Reserves Corps in 1912, followed by Dr. Charlie the next year. Like many Americans, they watched the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1914 with growing anticipation that the United States would become involved in the conflict. Both brothers served on the General Medical Board of the United States Council for National Defense shortly after it was established in 1916 with the goal of preparing America for possible military action.



Dr. William J. Mayo M.D. (left) and Dr. Charles H. Mayo, M.D.

When the United States declared war on Imperial Germany in April 1917, the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army, William Gorgas, M.D., asked Dr. Will to be a consultant to his office in Washington, D.C. Under Dr. Will's leadership, a team of surgical specialists was formed, on which Dr. Charlie also served.

As with their personal and professional travel, the brothers alternated trips to the nation's capital, so one was always at the Clinic in Rochester. Unfortunately, the demands of wartime service in addition to pressing patient loads at the Clinic took a toll on the middle-aged brothers. On one of his trips to Washington, Dr. Charlie came down with pneumonia. Dr. Will developed a severe case of jaundice that kept him away from the Clinic for two months. Both brothers recovered, however, and had many subsequent years of professional activity.

In 1926, the Mayo brothers were honored for their service to the nation when they received the Distinguished Service Medal of the United States.

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The Mayo brothers had the highest regard for service members in the American military. In 1928, they donated 23 bells for the Rochester Carillon at the top of the new diagnostic building, later named the Plummer Building. The largest bell bears the inscription "To the American Soldier," and by tradition every concert of the Rochester Carillon begins with "My Country Tis of Thee."

During the dedication ceremony, Dr. Will said:

"Today, we dedicate this carillon to the American soldier, in grateful memory of heroic actions on land and sea to which America owes her liberty, peace and prosperity."

