

# The Doughboy

250 Arrowood Lane • Ernest Viquesney, Artist  
by Troy Brown

There have been few monuments in the history of Clarksville that have had as long a lifespan as the Doughboy. This statue of an American soldier holding a grenade in one hand, his rifle in the other, was dedicated to those who fought for the U.S. during World War I. It is one of Clarksville's most beloved pieces of civic art.

Since its dedication in 1929, this statue has had an interesting existence. It has seen generations of Clarksville High School students grow up before its marble eyes. It has also been relocated around Clarksville several times.

According to The Leaf-Chronicle, the statue spent 43 years in front of Clarksville High School, before being moved to the armory on Ft. Campbell Boulevard in 1972.

On April 15, 2010, the Doughboy was rededicated in front of the Transit Station on Legion Street, in downtown Clarksville. Many descendants of World War I Veterans were in attendance for the rededication, ceremony including the children of Alvin York, one of Tennessee's most iconic World War I heroes.

In 2015, the Doughboy was relocated yet again to the Brigadier General Wendell H Gilbert Tennessee State Veterans Home.

It was one of the few Doughboy statues of its type made out of stone. Wise said Clarksville's Doughboy is a rarity because it was sculpted from marble. Most of them were cast out of bronze.

The Doughboy statues were made by several different artists, but there are two artists in particular worth mentioning in regards to Clarksville's Doughboy.

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The first is Ernest Moore Viquesney, an Italian born artist living in Indiana. Viquesney made the Clarksville Doughboy in addition to several other statues, some of which look very similar to those made by the second artist, John Paulding. In fact, Viquesney faced a lawsuit in 1922 claiming his “Spirit of the American Doughboy” infringed the copyright of Paulding’s statue, “Over the Top”.

According to Wise, Viquesney eventually lost the copyright to create the Doughboy, but at some point, he continued to make them.

## **Maintaining the Doughboy**

Although Clarksville’s Doughboy is rare because it is composed of marble, it also requires more maintenance.

Before the statue was rededicated in April 2010, Wise refurbished the piece. Before refurbishing the Doughboy, Wise suggested making a cast of it, then having a bronze statue made, while putting the original one in a museum. This would have cost more money, but it would have preserved the original, preventing a need to repair the statue.

By 2009, the Doughboy’s face had all but been destroyed. After spending over 80 years outdoors, nearly all of the facial features were eroded, from years of acid rain, weathering, and shoddy maintenance, especially after vandalism.

The process of replacing the head of the Doughboy was fairly straightforward. The most challenging aspect was the face of the Doughboy was totally unrecognizable due to damage. This made it necessary for Wise to basically create a new face from scratch. “I

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used photographs [from other Doughboys] to try to go from, but a lot of people say it's me, and if you look at it close enough, it probably is, because I'm [looking in] a mirror [thinking], 'well, I need a nose,' Wise said.

Although he used his nose for the sculpture, the face in general was a generic face, modeled as closely as possible to the photos he had to work with.

Wise made some modifications to more accurately represent the gear U.S. soldiers used during World War I. The helmet appeared to have originally been modeled more closely to European models.

Greg Williamson, a photographer for The Leaf-Chronicle, had an authentic World War I helmet that belonged to his great-grandfather. He allowed Wise to use it to model the new helmet after. This helmet was a little wider, and wasn't as deep as the original. Wise also replaced the rifle and bayonet held in the left hand of the statue. The original gun was donated for scrap metal during World War II.

The process of replacing the rifle was not an easy task. There were questions about what kind of gun the Doughboy originally held. It also had to be determined if the gun was supposed to be to scale, because the piece itself is not.

"There are parts of [the Doughboy] that are [to scale]. His hands are life size. His face is roughly life size, but he's only about 5 foot, 2 inches," Wise said.

Eventually the Enfield 1917 was chosen because it was the gun primarily used by U.S. troops in World War I. It turned out to be a perfect fit.

"Just like [the hand] had been carved [to hold] it," Wise said.

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