

Image:Dashiell hammett.jpg

Dashiell Hammett

Samuel Dashiell Hammett (May 27, 1894 – January 10, 1961) was an American author of "hard-boiled" detective fictiondetective novels and short stories. Among the enduring characters he created are Sam Spade (*The Maltese Falcon*), Nick and Nora Charles (*The Thin Man*), and the Continental Op (*Red Harvest*, *The Dain Curse*).

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Early life

Hammett was born in St. Mary's County in Southern Maryland on the Western Shore of Maryland. His parents were Richard Thomas and Annie Bond Dashiell (the name being an Americanization of the French *De Chiel*). "Dash" left school when he was 13 years old and held several jobs before working for the Pinkerton National Detective Agency. He served as an operative for the Pinkerton Agency from 1915 to 1921, with time off to serve stateside in the Motor Ambulance Corps. However, the agency's role in union strike-breaking eventually disillusioned him. In Butte, Montana, Frank Little, a leading organizer for the radical Industrial Workers of the World union, was viciously murdered. Pinkerton agents were thought to be involved, although the crime was never solved.

During World War I, Hammett enlisted in the U.S. Army and served in the Motor Ambulance Corps. However he became ill with the Spanish flu and later contracted tuberculosis. He spent the war as a patient in a hospital in America.

After the war, he turned to drinking, advertising, and eventually, writing. His work at the detective agency provided him the inspiration for his writings.

"Poisonville"

Later years

In 1931, Hammett embarked on a thirty-year affair with playwright Lillian Hellman. He wrote his final novel in 1934, and devoted much of the rest of his life to left-wing activism. He was a strong anti-fascist throughout the 1930s and in 1937 he joined the American Communist Party.

[Image:Dashiell Hammett.gif](#)

In 1942, Hammett enlisted in the United States Army after the United States entered World War II. Though he was a disabled veteran of WWI, and a victim of tuberculosis, he pulled strings in order to be admitted into service. He spent most of WWII as a sergeant in the Army in the Aleutian Islands, where he edited an Army newspaper.

After World War II, Hammett joined the New York Civil Rights Congress, a leftist organization that was considered by some to be a communist front. When four communists related to the organization were arrested, Hammett raised money for their bail bond. When the accused fled, he was subpoenaed about their whereabouts, and in 1951, he was imprisoned for 6 months for contempt of court after refusing to provide information to the court.

During the 1950s he was investigated by the Congress of the United States (see McCarthyism). Although he testified to his own activities, he refused to divulge the identities of American communists, and was Hollywood blacklisted.

Hammett died in Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. As a veteran of two World Wars, he was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

In 1975, writer Joe Gores published **Hammett**, a novel in which a fictional version of the writer was sought out by an old Pinkerton associate to help him solve a case that drags him through the seamy underbelly of 1936 San Francisco. In 1982, Hammett's film version directed by Wim Wenders was released.

Works

- *Red Harvest* (published on February 1, 1929)
- *The Dain Curse* (July 19, 1929)
- *The Maltese Falcon* (February 14, 1930)
- *The Glass Key* (April 24, 1931)
- *The Thin Man* (January 8, 1934)
- *The Big Knockover* (a collection of short stories)
- *Woman in the Dark: A Novel of Dangerous Romance* (published in *Liberty* magazine in three installments in 1933)

Quote

"Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people who do it for a reason, not just to provide a corpse; and with means at hand, not with handwrought dueling pistols, curare, and tropical fish."

Raymond Chandler, in *The Simple Art of Murder*

External links

- [Books by Dashiell Samuel Hammett](#)