Conversation entre le SGT York et le général Lindsey commandant la brigade en janvier 1919 lorsque qu'ils faisaient le tour du site où York captura 132 Allemands.

Brigadier-General Lindsey : "York, comment avez-vous fait ça?"

Alvin York : "Mon Général, ce n'est pas d'ordre humain. C'est une puissance supérieure à celle des hommes qui m'a guidé et protégé et qui m'a dit ce qu'il fallait faire."

Le général inclina la tête et mis ses mains sur mon épaule et dit solennellement : "York, vous avez raison."

Alvin York : "Il n'y pas le moindre doute que Dieu y est pour quelque chose. Il n'y a pas sur terre de puissance capable de sortir quelqu'un de cette situation. De chaque côté de moi des hommes ont été tués ; et j'étais le plus grand et le plus exposé de tous. Plus de 30 mitrailleuses ont concentré leur feu sur moi à bout portant à une distance d'à peu près 25 mètres. Lorsque Dieu est avec vous, vous vous en sortez à tous les coups."

A conversation between Sergeant York and his Brigade Commander, General Lindsey, in January 1919 when they toured the site where York captured 132 Germans.

Brigadier-General Lindsey: *"York, how did you do it?"*

Alvin York: "Sir, it is not man power. A higher power than man power guided and watched over me and told me what to do."

The general bowed his head and put his hand on my shoulder and solemnly said: *"York, you are right."*

Alvin York: "There can be no doubt in the world God being in that. No other power under heaven could bring a man out of a place like that. Men were killed on both sides of me; and I was the biggest and the most exposed of all. Over thirty machine guns were maintaining rapid fire at me, point-blank from a range of about twenty-five yards. When you have God behind you, you can come out on top every time."

Thunder in the Argonne!

Alvin York, the Reluctant Hero:
The Story behind the Man, the Myths and the Events of 8 October 1918

by

Douglas V. Mastriano

Master of Science Strategic Intelligence, National Intel University, 1992
Master of Military Operational Art and Science, USAF Air University 2001
Master of Airpower Art and Science, USAF Air University, 2002
Master of Strategic Studies US Army War College, 2010

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Graduate Academic Unit History

Supervisor: Marc Milner, PhD, Dept. of History

Examining Board: Lawrence Wisniewski , PhD, Dept. of Sociology, Chairperson
Jeffrey Brown, PhD, Dept. of History
Steven Turner, PhD, Dept. of History

External Examiner: Dr. David T. Zabecki, Major General US Army (Ret.)
2012 Dr. Leo A. Shifrin Distinguished Professor of Military History
United States Naval Academy, Annapolis
Honorary Senior Research Fellow War Studies Programme
University of Birmingham

This dissertation is accepted by the
Dean of Graduate Studies.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK
April 2013

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A corrigendum, submitted by the author in June 2021, has been appended to the original submission.

ABSTRACT

Sergeant Alvin C. York is America's most highly decorated "Doughboy" of the First World War. His awards included; the Medal of Honor, the French Croix de Guerre, the Italian Croce de Guerra, and the American Distinguished Service Cross. York's iconic image is honored today in America's collective memory and he is hailed as the idyllic citizen-solider that we should emulate. The current US Army Leadership Field Manual retells the story of York's journey to prominence. But the passage of Sergeant York's image from conscientious objector, to reluctant hero, was not without controversy. York struggled with the fame and opportunity that this brought him, and he discovered the truth of the British adage that it is easier to win the Victorian Cross than to wear it. In the years following his gallant action on 8 October 1918, York was dogged by fame, detractors sniped at the description of events in his citation, the Germans refuted his story, the location of York's exploit was lost to history, while many objected to the use of his story to foster support for America's entry into another, even bloodier World War.

This dissertation takes a hard look at the York story to delineate fact from fiction, to discern the role that both the US Army and the US government played in the elevation of York to hero status, and strives – in the end to uncover the truth behind the legend.

DEDICATION

Thunder in the Argonne is the culmination of a decade of labor. I am blessed to have a family that actively participated in this adventure. Therefore, this work is dedicated to the two most important people in my life; my wife Rebbie and son Josiah.

Rebbie is the hero behind this endeavor. She never hesitated to share in the time-consuming undertaking of digging deeper into the York story, which included numerous journeys to the remote Argonne Forest. She was there from the start, and at the cost of a sprained ankle discovered the specific location where the German 125th Württemberg Regiment machinegun position was situated; the one that York fought against on 8 October 1918. Having a wife willing to share in the Spartan adventures of traversing a century old battlefield is commendable enough, but add to it her keen tactical sense and I am blessed beyond measure. Also with me on nearly every journey to the Argonne Forest was my son Josiah, who literally grew up exploring the sacred soil where so many Americans fought in 1918. From the age of five, Josiah was with me climbing up and down the rugged Argonne hills and he helped unearth the actual artifacts fired from York's weapons that put to rest any honest debate whether York was the hero that the Army claimed. Since then, Josiah has poured his energy into preserving this piece of our American military heritage by undertaking the most ambitious Eagle Scout Service Project I have seen in some thirty years of scouting. Here, Josiah improved and expanded the Sgt York Historic Trail (Circuit du Sergeant York), a trail for visitors to the Argonne Forest to walk where York walked. Looking back, I am humbled that this endeavor was one in which my family participated, sharing the ups and downs, the sorrows and joys that it entailed. What an incredible journey, what an incredible story!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in Sergeant York began as a youth when I watched the movie of his life with my father. There was something striking about the story; namely a hero that never set out to be one and who did not use his notoriety for personal gain. Later in my Army career, I began looking into heroes worthy of emulation, and of course York made my top three list, alongside George Washington and Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. However, upon digging deeper into the York story I was troubled by the lack of precision in the record about York's military service as well as the assertions of revisionist historians who questioned York's actions without a historical reason to do so. Thus was launched a decade long endeavor to get to the bottom of the York story. To arrive at this point, it could not have been possible without the generous help and support of scores of people, too many to name, but I will give it a go in the hopes that I do not miss someone who played an important role in bringing this story together. This will be long in that over the years many people have helped me not only to locate the York site, but also did much to help us place two monuments and build the Circuit du Sergeant York (Sergeant York Historic Trail) where visitors to the Argonne can actually walk where York walked.

Heartfelt thanks to Kory and Beth O'Keefe, who have been the best of friends and principal co-workers in the endeavor to not only discover the York site, but who also were leaders in building and maintaining the Sgt York Historic Trail in the Argonne Forest. Memories of the Argonne diet (turkey and cheese on white bread), waffles, and a sighting of the Jersey Devil in the Argonne (perhaps it was a cow) combine with thoughts of days of hard work. I am blessed to have such faithful and dedicated friends who have selflessly given so much of their time and energy to preserve the York legacy.

Sincere thanks to Major-General Zabecki, the US Army's premier Great War historian, who has provided sage advice on not only how to proceed with the research but also how to perpetuate the York story. He has been this project's mentor and the inspiration behind the historical approach to the research. Thanks also to Colonel Jerry Morelock, US Army Retired, who provided excellent support and the platform of his excellent history magazine, Arm Chair General to get word out to the public on the latest Sgt York discoveries and for also providing wise counsel throughout my research.

Sincere appreciation to Eric Weider, President of Weider History Group. Eric's interest in protecting America's rich military heritage made the purchase, construction and installation of the two Sgt York monuments in the Argonne Forest possible. He is a historian that truly walks his talk. A salute to Ken Delfino of the California, Nevada, Hawaii Kiwanis, and Vietnam Veteran, for his tireless efforts to raise funds for the construction of the Sgt York Historic Trail in France and for going above and beyond the call of duty to ensure we had everything necessary to conduct the 90th anniversary celebration of York's battle in 2008.

Sincere gratitude to the Director of US Army Center of Military History, Dr. Jeff Clark and Robert Dalessandro and their staff for providing support, advice, and oversight of the Sgt York artifacts recovered from the Argonne.

A thank you to Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Parmer, who was the first to start the field work in the Argonne Forest with me. Also appreciation to Mr. Gary Martin, US Army (Retired), a small arms weapon's expert whose skilled eye helped us to precisely locate the location where York fired his sidearm. We were also honored to have the support of Dr. Doug Scott, the nation's expert on historical ballistic analysis. His scientific analysis

of the York bullets and cartridges confirmed our historical interpretation of these artifacts and at long last discredited the detractors.

Thank you to my brother, Sergeant-Major Robert Mastriano (USMC) and his son Ian for their help in the archeological work for the search of the York site. Robert, an expert on battlefield excavation on Iwo Jima and Okinawa applied his knowledge to our work in the Argonne. Thank you also to Bill and Karen Rudge of Bill Rudge Ministry of Living Truth. Bill and Karen threw their support behind our endeavors early on and have provided sound counsel, and support. Also thanks to Steve Warren, Web Stone, Roger Cirillo and Craig Smith for encouraging me to write this history.

A salute to our many valuable French friends who made the work in the Argonne Forest possible. As much of our work was on communal land, we could only proceed with the approval of the Mayor of Châtel Chéhéry and were honored to work with two supportive mayors over the years, beginning with Mayor Roland Destenay who supported our initial digs in the forest. After his election, we were thrilled to work with Mayor Alain Rickal who not only took the bold step of endorsing our work, but approved and supported the construction of the Circuit du Sergeant York. I also thank the people of Chatel Chehery, especially, Dr. Lucien Houlemare and the Adjoints et Conseillers municipaux de la mairie de Chatel-Chéhéry: Pascal Bechard, Anne-Marie Bousselet, Frederic Chopin (the "Sheriff"), Thierry Huet, Jean-Claude Lacreuse, Andre Philippe, Claude Vauche, Pierre Schmitt, Carole Renaut, Ludovic Philippe.

Merci beaucoup to Richard Steffan of the Grandpre Development Department who created the trail signs, information billboards and charts that are along the Circuit du Sgt York in France. Also appreciation to forest manager Frederic Chopin, Mayor

Damien Geroges (Fleville), and French Senator Jean-Luc Warsmann, who stepped in to support our work when it became bogged down. Merci to Dominique Lacorde, the Arnould family of Montflix in Grandpre as well as the Steele family.

The French Military Mission to NATO Land Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany provided excellent assistance throughout my research for translating scores of documents into French and overseeing our coordinating with local officials and law enforcement. Thanks to General Jean-Jacque Scellos the military mission commander, for not hesitating to help us and his staff, Adjoint au chef Lieutenant Colonel Patrick du Portal, Adjutants Laure Botreau, Patrick Delmotte and Stephane Lucas. The prestige and professionalism of the French Military Mission gave us significant credibility in the Argonne and no doubt opened doors for our work. Merci also to Anne Brun and Sebastien Castet , great French service members, with whom I had the pleasure to serve with in Afghanistan, and who too helped in my York research.

I owe a debt of gratitude to the Meuse-Argonne staff of the American Battlefields Monuments Commission (ABMC). Frankly, the monuments and trail construction would have been impossible without their support. In particular, the former director of the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, Mr. John Phil Rivers deserves much acclamation. The United States was blessed to have Mr. Rivers serve in this region, as he had a level of clout and respect by the French that I have never seen achieved by any other American. Indeed, Mr. Rivers cared about historical commemorations and research of American Great War Doughboys, and once he threw his support behind my work, everything fell into place. I am indebted to Mr. Rivers and for all he did behind the scenes to make this possible. He opened doors that would have otherwise remained shut

and was a pleasure to work with. Thanks also to his staff, Jeff Aarnio, Scott Desjardins, Denis Hebrand, Craig Rahanian, Alain Jerioek, Nicholas Raffa, Dominique Didiot, Frederic Francois, Philip Day, G. Postal and Dave Bedford, the current director of the cemetery. Thanks to Jean-Paul & Brigit DeVries - Romagne 14-18 Museum for expert battlefield archeological advice and field assistance (based upon his 30+ years of field work and battlefield archeology). Their passion for the Great War is contagious.

Gratitude also to my international friends in Allied Land Component Headquarters and others across NATO. Appreciation to Lieutenant-General Jack Gardner (US Army) for his support in locating the York site and also to Lieutenant Colonels Mick Tingstrom and Paul Walter who early on evaluated my research methodology. Thank you Oberst (Colonel) Hans Kling of the German Bundeswehr for his help in securing German archival support for this research and for translating several important documents in the endeavor to find where York earned the Medal of Honor. Danke also to German Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) Steff Basener. Steff is like a brother to me, we served together for four years, which included a tour to Afghanistan. Steff provided immeasurable research help, translation assistance and advice on the German perspective of the York battle that otherwise I would have missed. Danke also to the following great German soldiers of the Bundeswehr: Hauptfeldwebel Julius Bonaccio, Oberstleutnant Frank Dietze, Hauptfeldwebel Bjoern Ehlenberger. "Dank u" to my Dutch colleagues who assisted in this endeavor, namely Lieutenant Colonel Jelle De Jong and Captain Dennis de Waal. Heartfelt appreciation goes out to my dear Flemish brother, Gilbert Bosschaerts and Danish brother Anders Paavo Jenson, Major John Auranaune (Norway), Lieutenant Duval Link (Canada), Colonel Fulvio Poli (Italy),

Major Enrico Tizzano (Italy), Lieutenant Colonel Geert Vanlingthout, (Belgium), Sergeant-Major Jose Salas of the 82nd Airborne Division, First Sergeant Gabriel Frank (USA) and Sergeant Brad Gilbert (USA).

Thanks to the many outstanding archivists across North America and Europe; especially to Mitch Yockelson of the US National Archives (NARA) for incredible support. Also thanks to Lieutenant Colonel Gross, and Major Peter Popp, German Bundeswehr, and their staff at the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Potsdam and the Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau and thanks to Loretta Sylvia of the Joint Forces Staff College in Virginia. Appreciation also is extended to Lieutenant Colonel Taylor Beattie, and Ronald Bowman, US Army, for their ground breaking research on Alvin York and the "York Spot" in the Argonne Forest, France between 1999 – 2001.

Thanks to the many volunteers who gave of their time and energy with the field work in the Argonne, which included; the Barber, Eggert, Perkins and Brown families, Detlev Hohenstein, Chaplain David Druckenmiller, Brad Putenbaugh, Chaplain Bob Owen, and his sons Seth and John, and scores of others. Finally, this work would not have been made possible without the excellent volunteer spirit of the Boy Scouts of America Trans Atlantic Council under the fantastic leadership of Vince Cozzone. Literally hundreds of scouts and their families from France, German and the BENELUX contributed to make the Circuit du Sgt York possible. Thanks to the Scouts who focused their Eagle Scout Service Projects on the Sgt York Historic Trail over the past several years. Each of these scouts took on a different portion of the trail, making it among the best in France. The Eagle Scouts are: Nate Eggert (2007-2008), Jeffrey Perkins (2009), John Gerber (2010), Drew Burns (2011), Josiah Mastriano (2011).

Thank you also to the York family, especially Colonel Gerald York (US Army Retired), who has been a friend since 1995. I appreciate all he has done to support my effort to tell the York story. Thank you also to his children; Gerald, Jr and Deb. My Gratitude also extends to Alvin's three surviving children, George Edward, Betsy Ross and Andrew Jackson York. Thank you for sharing personal stories of your father, for being hospitable. It has been a pleasure sharing this endeavor with you.

Sincere appreciation to our dear friends at Oromocto Baptist Church, who embraced us during my resident studies in New Brunswick. We are grateful for the support of Pastor Perry Hanley (and his family), Jeremy McWilliams, Chris and Marla Bruce, the Howe, Sanford, Hone, and LaRocque families. Thank you for opening your arms and hearts to us. Also deepest thanks to Bill Gibson and Mike Aube of Scouts Canada.

Finally, thanks to the University of New Brunswick (UNB), in Fredericton, Canada. It has been a pleasure to work with the professionals at UNB, who have given so much of their time to help me tell the York story. There probably is not a better history department anywhere in North America. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Marc Milner, who poured so much of his time and energy into making this dissertation worth reading, while providing sage advice on how to present my evidence. Thanks also to Dr. Sean Kennedy, Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. Lee Windsor, Brent Wilson, Dr. Craig Brown, Dr. Gail Campbell, Dr. David Charters, Dr. Susan Blair, Dr. Steve Turner, Elizabeth Arnold, Jackie Seely, Valerie Gallant and UNB's Gregg Centre for their role in making this dissertation possible.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ii
DEDICATION iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
Table of Contents xi
Book I Chapter 1 - Thunder in the Argonne 1
Chapter 2 - Writing about York 18
Chapter 3 - Unpromising Beginnings 39
Chapter 4 - At War with the Army 58
Chapter 5 - Marching as to War 90
Chapter 6 - Into the Trenches! 111
Chapter 7 - The Eve of Battle 127
Chapter 8 - Into the Argonne! 139
Chapter 9 - The Germans Are Ready! 159
Chapter 10 - One Day in October 171
Chapter 11 - The War Rages on! 206
Chapter 12 - On Duty in France 225
Chapter 13 - Emergence of a National Hero! 246
Chapter 14 - Life in Pall Mall 270
Chapter 15 - Supporting the War Effort 290
Book II - Finding the York Battlefield 320
Chapter 16 - Where is the York Battlefield? 349
Chapter 17 - Needle in the Haystack? 394
Chapter 18 - CSI meets Sergeant York 445
Chapter 19 - Conclusion 470
Bibliography 481
Glossary 510
Curriculum Vitae

Book I

The Life of Alvin York

Book I Chapter 1 - Thunder in the Argonne

A Battle that echoed across a century

"le plus grand exploit jamais réalisé par un simple soldat de toutes les armées en Europe."

Maréchal Foch, commandant en chef des armées alliées

"Sergeant York, you are the greatest civilian soldier of the war."

General John J. Pershing, Commander, American Expeditionary Forces

It was an exhausting morning for the men of the 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd US Division on 8 October 1918. The unit, which included Corporal Alvin C. York, had been on the move most of the night crossing the Meuse Valley, to get into position to attack the Germans along the high eastern edge of the dense Argonne Forest. The plan was for York's unit to move through Châtel Chéhéry to relieve 1st Battalion, which had been fighting all night on Hill 223 behind the village. After that they were to attack into the Argonne Forest in a northwesterly direction. This attack was to be proceeded by a ten minute US artillery barrage, which was to begin precisely at 0600. After advancing one mile across a funnel shaped valley in the Argonne, the battalion would capture their objective, a small-scale rail line, which was the German's main supply artery into the Argonne. If the Germans lost this rail network, they would lose their ability to remain in the Argonne. The Germans would also have to abandon their strangle hold over the Lost Battalion, which had been surrounded by the Germans a few miles west of here since the 2nd of October. All frontal attempts to relieve the Lost Battalion had failed.

This would be no easy undertaking for the 2nd Battalion of the 328th US Infantry Regiment. The Germans knew that they were coming and arranged a complex network

of defenses that included four regiments who had orders not only to stop the Americans, but also to launch a combined counterattack at 10:30am to force the Americans out of the Argonne Forest. The Americans had no idea that they were marching straight into a death trap.

The Germans had over fifty machine guns, and hundreds of troops to kill anything in the same valley York's unit would soon attack. German forward artillery observers directed barrages and harassing fires against York's unit as it marched towards Châtel Chéhéry, which decimated part of the American's machine gun battalion. To add to their misery, York's battalion was shelled with German poison gas as it moved through Châtel Chéhéry. Despite this, the soldiers donned their masks and continued to move up Hill 223. After getting into position, the men removed their masks and waited for the time to jump off for their attack. Things went terribly wrong from the start. The 6:00am artillery preparatory barrage never materialized. The battalion commander, Major J. M. Tillman, directed that the attack would go with or without artillery support, at the designated time.

At 6:10am, the Americans attacked into the valley in two waves, with two companies in each wave moving parallel with each other.[1] After the Americans cleared Hill 223, they plunged into the valley and were instantly greeted with rifle and machine gun fires from the several hundred German soldiers dug in on the three surrounding hills. Alvin York wrote of this in his diary,

> It was kind of triangular shaped valley. So you see we were getting it from the front and both flanks. Well, the first and second waves got about halfway across the valley and then were held up by machine gun fire from the three sides. It was

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[1] Dr. Gustav Strohm, *Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120* (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922), 161-173.

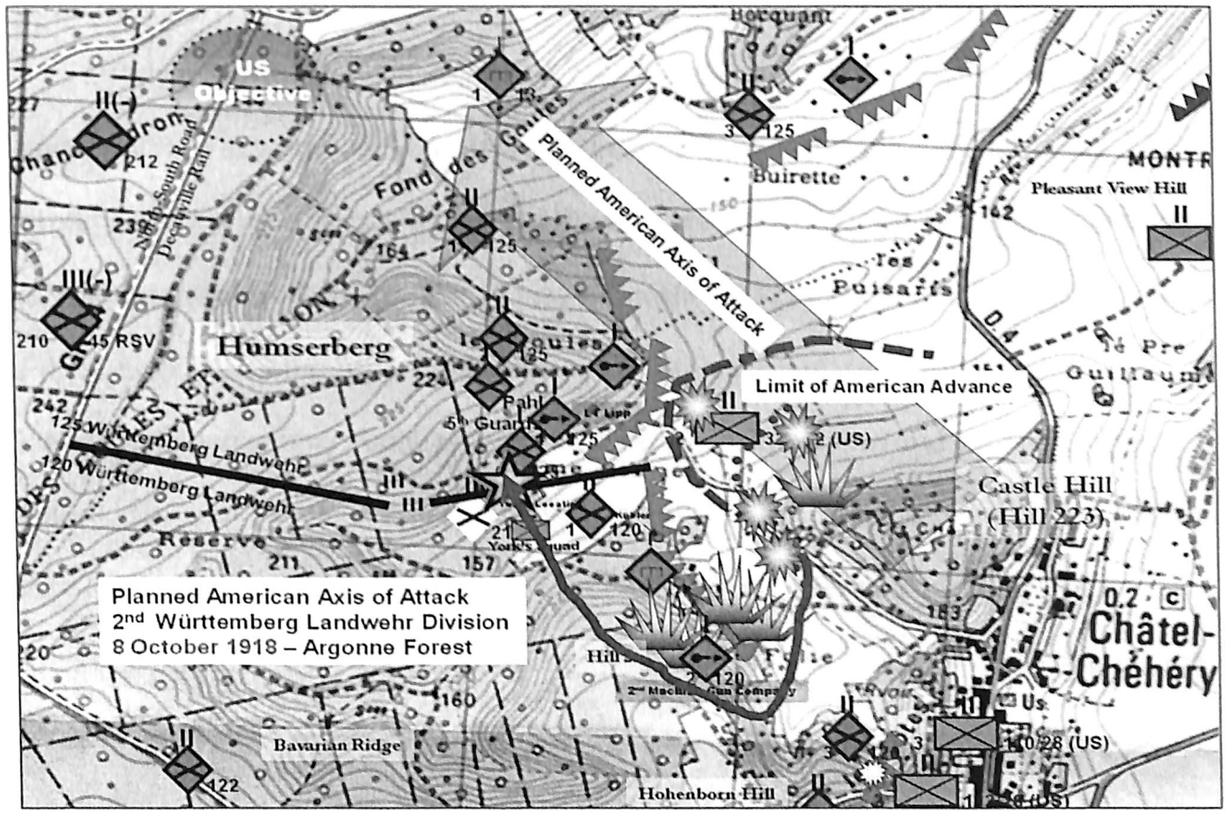
> awful. Our loses were very heavy... The advancement was stopped and we were ordered to dig in. I don't believe our whole battalion or even our whole division could have taken those machine guns by a straightforward attack... The Germans got us, and they got us right smart. They just stopped us dead in our tracks. It was hilly country with plenty of brush, and they had plenty of machine guns entrenched along those commanding ridges. And I'm telling you they were shooting straight. Our boys just went down like the long grass before the mowing machine at home. So our attack just faded out. And there we were, lying down, about halfway across, and no barrage, and those German machine guns and big shells getting us hard. I just knew that we couldn't go on again until those machine guns were mopped up. So we decided to try and get them by a surprise attack in the rear.[2]

The American attack wavered, and seemed doomed to failure. Among the Americans trapped in this fight was Sergeant Harry Parsons, York's Platoon Sergeant, who ordered Acting Sergeant Bernard Early[3] and Corporal York, Corporal Savage and Acting Corporal Cutting[4] to take their squads, work their way behind the Germans and take out the machine guns.[5] Sergeant Early was in charge of these sixteen men and had a difficult task, just how to cross a quarter mile of open ground without being cut down by German small arms fires.[6] This notwithstanding, the men crossed the killing fields.

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[2] Alvin York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary,* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928).
[3] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," *Infantry Journal*, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 348.
[4] Swindler, " 344. Cutting's real name was Otis B. Merrithew. When he joined the army, Merrithew lied about his name, but also his home town and career to prevent his family from finding him.
[5] Swindler, 348.
[6] The 17 Doughboys in this action included; Killed in action: Corporal Murray Savage, East Bloomfield, New York, Private Maryan Dymowsky, Trenton, New Jersey, Private Carl Swansen, Jamestown, New York, Private Fred Wareing, New Bedford, Massachusetts, Private Ralph Wiler, Hanover, Pennsylvania, Wounded in action: Corporal Bernard Early, New Haven, Connecticut (Acting Sergeant during the engagement), Corporal Otis Merrithew, (Cutting), Bridgeport, Connecticut, Private Mario Muzzi, New York City, Private William E. Wine, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, The remaining 8 soldiers in this battle Corporal Alvin York, Pall Mall, Tennessee, Private Percy Beardsley, Roxbury, Connecticut, Private Patrick Donohue, Lawrence, Massachusetts, Private Thomas Johnson, Lynchburg, Virginia, Private Joseph Kornacki, Holyoke, Massachusetts, Private Michael Sacina, New York City, Private Feodor Sok, Buffalo, New York, Private George Wills, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Somehow, the men made it across the open fields and up the hill, out of the killing zone. Once in the forest, Sergeant Early moved his men deliberately around the German



lines, with an eye on outflanking the German machine guns on the hill facing his battalion.[7] As they neared a small stream, two German corpsmen (called in the German Army, sanitation soldiers) laden with canteens spotted the Americans.[8] The advantage of surprise was now lost, or was it? A few shots rang out from the American squad and Early led his men in a chase of the two German soldiers, who unwittingly led them directly to the German battalion headquarters. Here there was a large group of German soldiers eating breakfast and several officers standing around a map. Being taken by

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[7] Swindler, 348.
[8] James A. Hoobler, "Sergeant York Historic Area, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVIII, Number 1, Spring 1979, 4.

surprise by the abrupt appearance of seventeen American soldiers, the Germans in this meadow immediately dropped their weapons, shouted "Kamerad!" and surrendered to Early's men without firing a shot.

Early's skillful maneuver worked, but he had little time before the Germans figured out how few men he had. It would be no easy task to move this group of Germans as they were spread out across the meadow. Sergeant Early impatiently ordered his soldiers to gather the Germans up into some sort of group so that they could move out of there fast. While the Americans were busy pushing the prisoners into order, the German machine gunners on the hill saw the events below them, and signaled to the captured German soldiers to lie down. As soon as that happened, the machinegun opened fire. The hail of bullets wiped out half of the seventeen Americans, killing six and wounding three of them. Of the non-commissioned officers, Sergeant Early was severely wounded and out of action, Corporal Cutting also was critically injured, while Corporal Savage[9] was killed outright.[10]

Of the eight survivors, York was the only Noncommissioned Officer remaining and was now in charge.[11] York ordered his men to stay low and to keep control of the prisoners as he surveyed the situation. Beyond this point, none of the other soldiers took a decisive part in the action and remained in the meadow with the German prisoners.[12]

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[9] George Larrabee, "Sharpshooter from the Hills, *Military History*, June 1987, 56. The death of Savage was a heavy blow to York. York and Savage were good friends and studied the Bible together. Savage was one of York's only Army friends. Also see the following for further information on York' friendship with Corporal Savage: Senator Bachman, Alvin C. York, US Congress. Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Report No. 120, 24 February 1937, 6.

[10] Swindler, 348.

[11] Swindler, 349. CPT Swindler states that the other NCOs played no part in this portion of the combat.

[12] Senator Bachman, , 4-5.

York took advantage of the terrain to quickly work his way into a position to engage the German machine guns on the hill.[13]

York worked his way part way up the slope to a position to outflank the machine gun. There was no way out for the Germans, with York positioned along their exposed flank, he shot at least nineteen and thereby neutralized the chief threat to his men. As his Medal of Honor citation states, *"He charged with great daring a machinegun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon* In this action against the German machine guns, he fired all the ammo from the front of his belt pouches; about fifty rounds.[14] After clearing the German machinegun nest, York wheeled around and returned to the meadow to take control of the prisoners and his men. As York worked his way back to the meadow, he passed behind a platoon of German soldiers in a trench, the officer in this group saw him. Without wasting a moment, the German officer ordered his men to follow him in a bayonet attack on York. When York saw this group of Germans charging out of the trench, he slid on his side near the bottom of the hill and pulled out his .45 Automatic Colt Pistol. Using a hunting skill learned when faced with a fleeing flock of Turkeys, York picked off all of the men from furthest back to the closest. The last to fall was the German officer.

After killing off the perilous bayonet attack, the senior German prisoner in the meadow, Leutnant (Lieutenant) Paul Vollmer (whom the Americans thought was a

---

[13] Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, REP M 420 & 421, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, REP M 422 - I/125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, REP M, 423 - II/125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, REP M, 425 - III/125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch.

[14] Swindler, 349.

major), decided it was time to stop the killing. In the midst of the fight, he stood up and walked over to Alvin and yelled above the din of battle in English,

> Vollmer, "English?"
> York replied, "No, not English."
> Vollmer "What?"
> York, "American."
> Vollmer "Good Lord! If you won't shoot any more I will make them give up."[15]

York told him to do it, and pointed his pistol towards Vollmer as a guarantee that this was not a trick. Vollmer blew a whistle and yelled an order to the Germans on the hill above to surrender, which they did. These soldiers came down the hill in good order. York and his seven men now had 100 German prisoners and were apparently trapped behind enemy lines.

During this surrender, one of the Germans tossed a grenade at York. The grenade missed York, but cost that German soldier his life. [16] Becoming a bit agitated, York ordered the English speaking German officer (Paul Vollmer) to tell the nearly 100 German prisoners to offer no more resistance.[17] York then ordered the prisoners to form up into line a column of two and directed that they carry out the six wounded Americans. After this was done, York took the two German officers that he had captured and placed them at the head of the formation with Vollmer in the lead. York stood directly behind Vollmer, with a .45 colt automatic pistol pointed in his back.

Once York began to move the prisoners, he realized that he did not know how to get back to the American lines. He saw two roads heading west, seemingly towards Hill

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[15] York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, 255-259.
[16] Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival*, Washington, DC, 1929, 33.
[17] Senator Bachman, 5.

223 and relative safety and asked Vollmer which to take. Vollmer suggested the road that followed a gully in front of Humserberg off to the left (north), which was still occupied by a large group of German soldiers. Sensing that this was a trap, York balked at the idea and took them instead along the road that skirted Hill 2 to the south. This was a good choice as this road led directly back to Hill 223 and Châtel Chéhéry.

This artist rendition is an accurate depiction of York fighting off Endriss' bayonet attack. York is at the edge of the meadow with the German prisoners.
From: 1919 *LADIES' HOME JOURNAL* by F. E. Schoonover, titled: *AN ALL-AMERICAN SECOND ELDER.*



As York and his prisoners moved back to the American lines, they ran into another line German soldiers. Being outnumbered, Corporal York threatened Vollmer with his pistol to order these Germans to surrender. Reluctantly Vollmer complied, with the Germans here laying down their weapons and joining the growing line of prisoners. With that, the way to the American lines seemed at long-last open. As the group moved across the valley, the same area where only hours before these Americans were nearly

killed, German artillery erupted around them. York ordered the group to run up the hill to safety. After making it out of this dangerous area, the Americans were greeted by various American officers, who counted 132 German prisoners. The regimental prisoner holding area in Châtel was too small for so many Germans and York was directed to move his catch to a larger one near the town of Varennes. With that, York and his men spent the entire day marching the German prisoners into the American rear.

York went on to receive great praise from throughout the American Expeditionary Forces and ultimately became America's most celebrated "Doughboy." He was commended by his Division Commander, Major-General George B. Duncan, the American Expeditionary Forces Commander, General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing, as well as the overall commander of the Allied forces, French Marshall Ferdinand Foch. His awards included America's highest medal for bravery, the Medal of Honor, as well as the French Croix de Guerre, the Italian Croce de Guerra, the French Legion of Honor, the Montenegrin War Medal and the American Distinguished Service Cross.[18] After the war, York was given the royal treatment in New York City, a standing ovation by the United States Congress in Washington, DC, married his childhood sweetheart, with the Governor of Tennessee presiding over the ceremony and given a house and quality farmland by the people of his state in honor of his heroism. York's iconic image is honored today in America's collective memory, perpetuated by the Oscar Award winning 1940 film starring Gary Cooper, *Sergeant York,* and he is hailed as the quintessential citizen-solider

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[18] The Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) was awarded to York for the 8 October action by War Department General Order 1, dated 2 January 1919. War Department General Order 59, dated 3 May 1919, awarded him the Medal of Honor for the same action, and rescinded the initial award of the DSC.

that we should emulate. Even the current US Army Leadership Field Manual retells the story of York's journey from insignificance to prominence, from conscientious objector to hero, and how he represents the ideal American soldier.

The transformation of York from a conscientious objector to the reluctant American war hero was not, however, without controversy. York struggled with guilt about killing and the fame that his feat brought him after the war was a heavy burden to bear. He discovered the truth of the British adage that it is easier to win the Victorian Cross (the UK's equivalent to the Medal of Honor) than to wear it.

In the following years, York was dogged by fame, American detractors sniped at the description of events, the Germans sought to refute his legend, while others objected to the use of his battlefield gallantry to foster support for America's entry into another, even bloodier conflict, the Second World War. Additionally, one member of York's platoon resented his fame and publically contested his role in the infamous battle, especially after hyperbolic accounts of York's feat were published.

Additionally, a new generation of historians added their voices to the debate, emphatically stating that York received more credit than he deserved, or that the Germans were simply eager to surrender.[19] Lending credibility to these assertions was that the absence of the exact location in the Argonne where the battle occurred was lost to history. Without knowing where York's action actually transpired the question became just how do we know it actually transpired as we have been told? Without knowing where the

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[19] David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero*, (Lexington, Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky; 1985), x, 44-46; Michael Birdwell, "Sergeant Alvin York," Legends and Traditions of the Great War. Available online at the following website: http://www.worldwar1.com/heritage/sgtayork.htm (accessed 16 July 2012).

battle precisely occurred, the deeds of York are rather incredible. How could one man capture 132 German soldiers single-handedly?

In an era where heroes are exposed and deposed, the Alvin York story seemed yet another in a long line of tales in which the great deed may have been exaggerated to justify the nation's sacrifices and losses. In fact, the preceding account of York's feat is how Americans believe what happened on that one day in October 1918. This view is based upon what was perpetuated in popular American culture largely during the inter-war period and has proven to be not accurate historically. Such inaccuracies add fuel to the speculations against York.[20]

Much of what is remembered about York, whether accurate or false, was perpetuated by three sources that shaped how Americans remember York. The first was published in the 1919 *Saturday Evening Post* by George Pattullo.[21] Pattullo titled the article, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," and as the title suggests emphasized York's Christian faith. The second important contributor to the American remembrance of York was the 1928 publication of York's diary, which was light on military analysis, but heavy on folksy mountain culture.[22] The third, and perhaps the most influential presentation of the York story, was the 1941 movie "Sergeant York." This movie arguably has had the greatest impact on the American memory of York. Drawing heavily from the Pattullo article and York's 1928 diary, "Sergeant York" gave a dramatic presentation of his

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[20] David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero*, (Lexington, Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky; 1985), x, 44-46; Michael Birdwell, "Sergeant Alvin York," Legends and Traditions of the Great War. Available online at the following website: http://www.worldwar1.com/heritage/sgtayork.htm (accessed 16 July 2012).
[21] George Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," *Saturday Evening Post*, 25 April 1919.
[22] York, 255-266.

Christian faith, simple mountain life and his battlefield exploits.[23] This movie did well in American theaters as the nation was on the eve of yet another world war, facing not only the Japanese, but also Germany as a potential foe once again. As none of these three sources were serious academic undertakings, a plethora of questions remain. Did York do all that he was credited with doing? How much of the York story is fact? Was the York story a manufactured event to drum up public support for America's entry into World War Two? Was York selected for this fame as he was ideally suited to be a modern day Colonial Minuteman; ready to fight when his nation called?

In addition to the deficient literature published on York, there has been a small, but vocal group of detractors attacking him and his legacy. Several of these remain disparaging of York to this day. Of these critics, York's first and most persistent was a fellow soldier.

From the moment York entered the Army he was surrounded by controversy. Being a devout Christian and a conscientious objector were the initial reasons for this tension. There was one soldier in York's platoon who would harbor a life-long loathing of him. The soldier was Otis B. Merrithew. At the age of twenty-one, Merrithew ran away from home and joined the Army using a fabricated name. Enlisting under the nom du guerre William B. Cutting, Merrithew claimed to be an iceman, although he was a farmhand and even lied about his hometown. It is not known why Merrithew, as a adult, "ran away" from home using a false name. His brother George was already serving on the USS *Nebraska*, so military service does not seem to be the problem for the Merrithew

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[23] Howard Hawks (Director), *Sergeant York,* (Hollywood, California, Warner Brothers Pictures; 1941).

family. Merrithew could not hide his disdain for Alvin York when they met at Camp Gordon, Georgia. Merrithew would often take part in heated arguments together with his close friend Bernard Early (who also disliked York) accusing York of hiding his cowardice behind Christianity. Throughout his life, Merrithew remained a relentless critic of York and often defaulted to ad hominen attacks against York to assert that he actually deserved the credit for the 8 October battle.[24]

Merrithew was severely wounded early in the fight for which York was awarded the Medal of Honor and was unable to perform a significant role in the engagement. So bad were his wounds that when York and the seven American survivors were moving the hundred plus German captives back to friendly lines, York ordered the Germans to carry Merrithew out. Merrithew would sit out the rest of the war in a military hospital.[25]

Angered by the national acclaim York received after the war, Merrithew went on a letter writing campaign in the 1920s and 1930s to declare that he was the true hero of the 8 October battle. In this, he had the support of his local *Boston Globe* which would publish several stories over the years to champion the efforts of their hometown soldier.[26]

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[24] Robert Ellis Cahill, "America Needed a Hero," in *War Wonders,* Peabody, Massachusetts; 1984), 30-38; Tom Mahoney, *Sergeant Alvin York*, American Legion Magazine, 20 November 1968, 22, 45-46; Letter from Otis B. Merrithew dated 11 March 1941, to Warner Brothers agent, Mr. Guthrie, Sergeant York document B00374, March 1941, WBA.

[25] Letter to William Guthrie from Otis Merrithew, 13 January 1941, WBA; Inter-Office Communication from R.J. Obringer to Mr. Einfeld, "Sergeant York Billing," 16 April 1941, WBA; Memorandum from RJ Obringer to Mr. R.W. Budd, Warner Brothers Director of Personnel, 3 September 1941; Inter-Office Communication from Abem Finkel to Hal Wallis, "The Sad Story of Sergeant York," 9 January 1941, WBA; Letter from Otis B. Merrithew (also signed William Cutting), to Jesse Lasky, 12 June 1940, WBA; Letter from Merrithew to Guthrie, 11 March 1941, WBA; Interview between Cutting and Tom Mahoney. Tom Mahoney, "Sergeant Alvin York," *American Legion Magazine*, 20 November 1968, 22, 45-47; George Larrabee, "Sharpshooter from the Hills, *"Military History*," June 1987, 10, 56-57.

[26] "Merrithew Says He Was Leader," *Daily Boston Globe*, Oct 3, 1929, 1; "Senator Walsh Presses Claim For Merrithew," *Daily Boston Globe*, Oct 3, 1929; 12; "New Haven Honors Brookline Veteran," Special Dispatch to the Globe; *Daily Boston Globe*, Oct 13, 1929, A12; "All Six Of York's Squad To Get D.S. C. At Capital," CHARLES GROVES; *Daily Boston Globe*, Oct 4, 1929, 1; "Merrithew Gets Sendoff, Plane's

At the same time, Merrithew went to great lengths to isolate York from the remainder of the unit's survivors by appealing to them to support his claim of heroism, which only received tepid support. Undeterred by this, Merrithew also wrote a series of letters to their army leadership to tell his version of the events. This too bore little fruit.[27] The production of the "Sergeant York" movie enraged Merrithew. He threatened Warner Brothers with a law suit unless he was depicted as the hero in the show. When this failed, Merrithew relied upon his local papers and veteran organizations to garner support, which kept his allegations against York in the public eye.[28]

Many of Merrithew's criticisms of York are still advanced today by Bob D'Angelo, a grand-nephew of Bernard Early. Basing his contentions on Merrithew's former claims, D'Angelo created a group that he dubbed "The Other Sixteen" to represent the soldiers in York's squad with the end to "set the story straight" on what happened on 8 October 1918. As with Merrithew, D'Angelo uses local newspapers and local veteran

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Start Delayed," *Daily Boston Globe*, Oct 2, 1929, 6; "Fall River Veteran Called Hidden Hero," *Daily Boston Globe*, Oct 2, 1929, 6.

[27] Roland Corneau, "Brookline Veteran Recalls Argonne," *Boston Globe*, 8 October 1968, 37; Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 December 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA; Letter from G. Edward Buxton to Otis Merrithew, 19 May 1931 (NARA), Letter from G. Edward Buxton to Otis Merrithew, 24 October 1932 (NARA).

[28] "Sgt York's Buddy to Get Late Medal," *The Tuscaloosa News*, 29 September 1965, 7; "York's Buddy to Get Medal 47 Years Late," *The Portsmouth Times*, 21 September 1965, 7; "Merrithew Gets Sendoff," *Boston Globe*, 2 October 1929, 6; Roland Corneau, "Brookline Veteran Recalls Argonne," *Boston Globe*, 8 October 1968, 37; Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 December 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA;
Letter from Otis B. Merrithew dated 11 March 1941, to Warner Brothers agent, Mr. Guthrie, Sergeant York document B00374, March 1941, WBA; Interview between Cutting and Tom Mahoney. Tom Mahoney, "Sergeant Alvin York," *American Legion Magazine*, 20 November 1968, 22, 45-47; George Larrabee, "Sharpshooter from the Hills, *"Military History*," June 1987, 10, 56-57.

organizations to draw attention to his belief that much of what we know of the York tale is a fabrication.[29]

Meanwhile, on the academic side, two scholars have had misgivings about the York story. The first of these is David D. Lee, who published *Sergeant York: An American Hero* in 1985. Lee is not as hostile as Merrithew, yet he expresses trepidation about what he calls "the myth surrounding York." Lee's argument suggests that York was caught in the vortex of hero makers, especially those behind the movie portrayal of him. This, Lee tells us, is why he believes much of what America knows of the York tale is myth. Yet, Lee does not tell us definitely which parts of the York story are inaccurate, and instead speculates about how heroes are made, leaving the reader with more questions than answers. Additionally, Lee goes to substantial length to criticize faith (delineated upon earlier), and paints York as a sort of religious zealot.[30] Because of these considerations, he is considered a detractor.[31]

One of York's harshest modern detractors, however, is fellow Tennessean Michael Birdwell. Dr. Birdwell is a professor at Tennessee Technical University specializing in Warner Brothers films and Appalachian culture. Birdwell believes that most of the York story is "grossly overstate(d)," and "blown out of proportion..." But, he does not tell us which parts of the York story are fiction or "blown out of proportion." Dr. Birdwell goes on to characterize York's religious beliefs as "fanatical" and says that York would manipulate audiences after the war when "he shamelessly played on people's

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[29] Bob D'Angelo's website, http://www.the-othersixteen.org/faq.html (accessed 1 March 2013); George Krimsky, "Move Over Sgt York," *Waterbury Republican-American*, 8 May 2008; Randall Beach, "Dedicated Group Trying to Set 'Sergeant York' Story Straight," *New Haven Register*, 6 June 2008.
[30] Lee, x-xii, 20-25.
[31] Lee, xi, 92-115.

sympathies" to raise money for his school. Without offering scholarly corroboration, Birdwell also asserts "that York's refusal to capitalize on his fame was a well orchestrated fiction," and that he was also intensely anti-Semitic.[32]

Yet, Dr. Birdwell's greatest indictment against York is of the 1928 biography.[33] Considered by the York family as the most important first-hand source on Sergeant York, Birdwell says, "The question is, what is really York and what is after-the-fact addition and what is plain fabrication? I personally dismiss much of the document."[34] This charge of broad condemnation of the book is not elaborated upon. Birdwell's criticisms of the biography notwithstanding, a greater problem is that much of what he has written on York is grossly inaccurate (see footnote for specific examples) and by this he is unwittingly adding to the myth and legend that he says needs to be removed from the York saga.[35]

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[32] Michael Edward Birdwell, "Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Brothers., Alvin C. York and the Coming of World War II," Dissertation for University of Tennessee, Knoxville, December 1996, 206-266, Michael Birdwell, "Sergeant York," available online at http://www.worldwar1.com/heritage/sgtayork.htm, (accessed 01 March 2013).

[33] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, (New York, Doubleday; 1928).

[34] Craig S. Smith, "Revisiting the legend of an American war hero," New York Times, 20 June 2006, A3. Birdwell concerns with the 1928 biography will be discussed at length later in this dissertation.

[35] In "Celluloid Soldiers" Dr. Birdwell claims that one of the reasons why York became a Christian was that his friend Everett Delk was killed in a fight in 1914. However, Delk was one of those interviewed by Warner Brothers in 1940 and was a chief corroborator for the movie. This error could be forgiven, however, if Birdwell did not have a habit of getting the York story wrong. In one article, his account of the battle is wrought with errors. For instance, he says that the platoon sergeant, Harry Parsons was part of group moving with York (he was not), claims that Bernard Early was hit by seventeen machinegun bullets (there were three, one of which was life-threatening), the men were lost in the Argonne because their map was in French (they had no map)and that the York patrol had been dispatched alone, before sunrise to eliminate the machineguns that the Americans up to that point did not yet even know were there, which is patently false. These are but a few of many errors found in his writings. See, Michael Birdwell, "Sergeant York," available online at http://www.worldwar1.com/heritage/sgtayork.htm, (accessed 01 March 2013) and his dissertation "Celluloid Soldiers."

With the unremitting charges of detractors, concerns about the York literature and the alleged excesses portrayed in the movie, it leaves us wondering if indeed York did accomplish all that he was credited with doing. Just how much of the York story is fact? Was the York story a manufactured event to drum up public support for America's entry into World War Two or to justify high casualties in the First World War?

To understand the significance of Sergeant York's influence on America's collective remembrance of the First World War, and its entry into the Second World War, we need to discern what really happened that cold October day in 1918. Delineating fact from fiction, and discerning what and where the battle occurred is of particular consequence so that we can measure how far officials took the story to advance a particular agenda. It is also of some great consequence to understand the York story in breadth and width. That is, we should approach Alvin York in context and not narrowly focus on the events that led to his Medal of Honor. Understanding his upbringing in the mountains of Tennessee before the war is just as important as digging into the battlefield heroics of October 1918. Additionally, there was more to York's war experiences than that one day in October. Although existing works ignore these, what happened *after* 8 October 1918 is just as important for us to be able to understand the man. By having a holistic understanding of Alvin York before, during and after the war, it will be manifest at what level the US government and Hollywood exaggerated or embellished his deeds to influence public opinion for another war against Germany. It will also demonstrate just how much of the York story is fact and how much is fiction.

Chapter 2 - Writing about York

The Literature about Sergeant Alvin York

Why forgo the advantages of so peculiar a situation?
Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?
Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalship, interest, humor, or caprice? It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world...[36]

Farewell Address of President George Washington 19 September 1796.

Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will [America's] heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.[37]

President John Quincy Adams, 4 July 1821

The rise of Alvin Cullum York from an obscure Tennessee farmer to a celebrated American war hero occurred with startling rapidity. York's meteoritic rise to fame was only possible due to the story written by George Pattullo in April 1919. While on assignment with the 3rd US Army Headquarters in the occupied German City of Koblenz in January 1919, word reached Pattullo of York's exploit.[38] Pattullo saw potential in looking into the York tale and made arrangements for a personal interview. Although Pattullo intended to write something, he rather had hoped to do a controversial article on the Argonne battle and to make headway with this piece by interviewing York's division commander, Major-General Duncan. There were already criticisms about the tactics used by General John J. Pershing in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, which cost the American

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[36] George Washington, "Farewell Address," (Washington, DC., Senate Document number 106-21), 2000, 25. Available online at the following website, http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/farewell/sd106-21.pdf (accessed 07 September 2011).
[37] Lynn H. Parsons, *John Quincy Adams*, (Oxford, England, Madison House Book; 2000), 149.
[38] Telegram from George Pattullo at Third Army Headquarters (Koblenz, Germany) to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, (Prauthoy, France) 30 January 1919. Press File, Alvin C. York Service Record.

Expeditionary Forces more casualties than many believed it should have. This "controversial" Argonne article was to be Pattullo's main focus as he saw York as another public interest piece that would have little enduring value, especially since the war was over. Pattullo was also wary of doing a "hero" piece as he had interviewed several soldiers who were credited with great gallantly, only to later find out their alleged feats were frauds.[39] However, as he researched the battle it became apparent that there was something about York that differed from the other war heroes Pattullo had interviewed and written on. York's struggle to reconcile Christian faith with his patriotic duty and refusal to be called a hero seemed unusual.[40] Not to hedge his bets on the controversial Argonne piece, Pattullo arranged with Colonel Gordon Johnson, the 82nd Division Chief of Staff, for an exclusive interview with York.

Pattullo, a native of Ontario, Canada, served as the editor of the *Boston Herald*. Before the Great War, Pattullo moved to the American Southwest to write cowboy stories. With the outbreak of war, Pattullo became a correspondent in France for the *Saturday Evening Post* and was one of America's most respected war journalists. Although Pattullo had difficulty securing transportation from Germany to France, he managed to join York and Major-General Duncan on the battlefield outside of Châtel Chéhéry in early February 1919. After walking the ground with York, Pattullo conducted a series of interviews with York's officers, as well as with the other soldiers, who were

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[39] George Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," *Saturday Evening Post*, (26 April 1919), 3-4.
[40] Telegram from George Pattullo at Third Army Headquarters (Koblenz, Germany) to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, (Prauthoy, France) 30 January 1919. Press File, Alvin C. York Service Record.

still with the division.[41] At this time, York's unit was deployed at the Prauthoy Training Area, 200 kilometres south of Verdun. Here, the All-American Division was conducting training to improve its ability to conduct large unit attacks and combined arms operations.

Pattullo's timing for his interview with York was providential as the division was just starting an investigation into the deeds of 8 October. York had already been recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism in late October, 1918. But, the division commander suggested that the feat was so extraordinary that he should rather have been put in for the Medal of Honor. Pattullo's visit corresponded with this review into York's battlefield feat.

Pattullo's article was titled "The Second Elder Gives Battle" and published in the *Saturday Evening Post* on 26 April 1919.[42] This article made York an instant celebrity in the United States and laid the foundation of what is traditionally remembered of his battlefield feat. Incidentally, the name "Second Elder" was borrowed from York's title in his home church. His position as the senior elder, made him the assistant pastor, or, as they called it, Second Elder.

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[41] Telegram from George Pattullo at Third Army Headquarters (Koblenz, Germany) to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, (Prauthoy, France) 29 January 1919. Press File, Alvin C. York Service Record.

[42] George Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," *Saturday Evening Post*, (26 April 1919).

Pattullo's "The Second Elder Gives Battle" is a classically written American account that had a certain appeal to the nation's psyche. York's struggle with reconciling fighting for the nation with his Christian faith was the theme of the piece. This in many ways mirrored the United State's own national struggle related to President George Washington's still influential farewell address that admonished the nation against "interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe" or John Quincy Adam's admonishment against going abroad "in search of monsters to destroy."[43] For many Americans, York's struggle reflected the collective view of the nation as God-fearing and well-intentioned people drawn into a war that they did not want. So powerful was American resistance to entering the



Published Weekly
The Curtis Publishing Company

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST
Founded A° D° 1728 by Benj. Franklin

George Horace Lorimer
EDITOR

Volume 191 — 5c THE COPY — PHILADELPHIA, APRIL 26, 1919 — $2.00 THE YEAR — Number 43

The Second Elder Gives Battle

By GEORGE PATTULLO

[43] Lynn H. Parsons, *John Quincy Adams*, (Oxford, England, Madison House Book; 2000), 149; George Washington, "Farewell Address," (Washington, DC., Senate Document number 106-21), 2000, 25. Available online at the following website, http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/farewell/sd106-21.pdf (accessed 07 September 2011).

European War, that President Woodrow Wilson secured his reelection bid in 1916 by playing zealously to the American public on the theme that "he kept us out of the war."[44]

Pattullo's portrayal of York as a modern sort of American Minuteman hearkened back to the ideal soldier-farmer of the Revolutionary War. If such comparisons were not enough, the similarities that "mountain man" York had with American icons (and fellow Tennesseans) Davy Crocket and Daniel Boone were more than enough to make him a household name that personified the American frontier archetype that gripped the collective national imagination.

Pattullo's article remains an influential contribution to the York literature because it includes interviews of the participants that were conducted only months after the battle. Because of this, Pattullo captured an understanding of battle before time, memory and interpretation clouded over it. Finally, Pattullo's perspective as a war correspondent gave him a unique understanding of military operations that subsequent writers have lacked.[45]

Important and formative as Pattullo's article was, it was also characterized by crucial weaknesses. It tells us little, in the first place, of the German experience of the battle. This can be forgiven considering the political chaos in post war Germany as it would have been difficult, if not impossible for Pattullo to interview the German survivors of York's action. Additionally, the key German protagonists were scattered abroad in diverse prisoner of war camps where they would languish until September of 1919. Furthermore, Pattullo was writing an article for a newspaper. Had this been a research piece for a history journal one would expect depth, multiple angles, etc. Finally,

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[44] Walter LaFeber, "The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad," (New York, Norton; 1994), 195-211.
[45] "George Pattullo," *New York Times*, 30 July 1967.

the piece did not include interviews with all of the soldiers.[46] His article excluded the wounded soldiers, namely Sergeant Early, Corporal Cutting (a.k.a. Otis Merrithew) and Private Mario Muzzi, who were in diverse field hospitals across France recovering from their wounds.[47]

With these weaknesses in mind, "The Second Elder Gives Battle" is generally a good source. But it is by no means complete and several inconsistencies were soon to emerge between the Pattullo story and the US Army and German version of the event. Its chief weakness was downplaying the role of the other squad members. For example "There were seven other Americans present at the fight, but it was York's battle and only York's."[48] Statements such as this would eventually create friction between York and the other squad members, especially Corporal Cutting. The fact of the matter was that in both Pattullo's personal interviews and the affidavits provided by the soldiers it was manifest that they too played a role, albeit a greatly lesser one in the action.

Unfortunately, there is a propensity in the military and media to overlook or to gloss over others involved in a combat action to focus on one participant. This is due largely to award citations rarely being collective, but rather focused on the feat of one soldier. Additionally, as we saw in the Pattullo article, the media tends to focus on personal interest stories, which results in the creation of heroes for public consumption. In this sense, the *Band of Brothers* phenomena, the HBO series that celebrated the heroism of a company of soldiers is rare. Yet, rarely do individuals perform great deeds alone; more often than not other soldiers in the fight who contribute, or set conditions by

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[46] Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 3, 4.
[47] Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 3, 4, 71.
[48] Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 3.

which a hero rises to the occasion. Additionally, it is easier for a writer to focus on one soldier and to tell one great story, than wrestle with multiple stories and diverse points of view. Here Pattullo observed in his article, "alleged war heroes... so many are newspaper made; the soldiers over here could explode many a bubble reputation at home."[49] Because of this, he did more research into the York story than one would expect from a reporter, yet he missed the importance of what the others with York accomplished.

The truth of the matter is that Sergeant Early set the conditions for York's action, by expertly manoeuvring the seventeen Americans into the rear of the German line. This was no small feat. Yet, once the German machinegun opened fire, it was York who stood out. This was confirmed not only by York's fellow squad members, but by his platoon sergeant, Sergeant Parsons, and by his company commander as well. Had York not acted as he did, the others would have been either killed or captured. It was because of this that the role of the others is marginalized in Pattullo's article.[50]

This focus on York's feat exclusively was aggravated by the quiet and humble testimonies of several of the survivors, such as Private Percy Beardsley, who consistently refused to "blow their own horn" when afforded an opportunity to do so. As there was no conspiracy to single out York, the official investigation by the U.S. Army in October 1918 and February 1919 inquired if any other soldier should be awarded for heroism. When asked about the battle, Beardsley freely discussed York but did not describe his own central role in the battle.[51] As will be demonstrated later in this dissertation, Beardsley played the second most important part in the fight, but he remains

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[49] Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 4.
[50] "Sergeant York's Exploit," *New York Times*, 7 October 1929.
[51] Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 3, 4.

unrecognized. Because of this, it would be some years before the United States Army recognized several of the other Americans who fought with York that morning. Sadly, Beardsley was not one of them.

While it was manifest that Alvin York conducted himself superbly on the battlefield that day, it also would become clear that he had good help. Pattullo did not pursue this line of the story because several of the participants were recovering from wounds; while others were too humble to "blow their own trumpet" thus setting the conditions for a York centric story that would amplify over time. Additionally, York's humble practice of not discussing his exploits, unpredictably gave "The Second Elder Gives Battle" a life of its own. Indeed, upon arriving at New York on 22 May 1919, York found himself in the midst of a ticker tape parade, fuelled by Pattullo's article. After the cheering ended, York left the army and returned to Tennessee. There remained great public interest in the York story and despite his desire to fade back into a simple life in Pall Mall, writers continued to seek him out. The first one to do so was fellow Tennessean and free lance reporter Samuel Kincaid Cowan.

Cowan published *Sergeant York and His People* in 1922 to positive reviews.[52] Interestingly, Cowan did not make York's military exploits the center piece of this work, but rather attempted to portray the culture and life of Appalachia that gave birth to such great men. As the *New York Times* review of the book said, "Mr. Cowan has utilized Sergeant York as the 'peg' upon which to hang a more or less intimate description of the

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[52] Samuel Kincaid Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company; 1922).

people of the Cumberland Mountains."[53] To paint his picture of the mountain life, Cowan spent two months living in Pall Mall, Tennessee witnessing everyday life as well as the turkey shoots, log-rollings, corn-husking and Christian worship of these people.

Cowan was spell-bound by the simple and difficult life of the Appalachian Tennesseans who seemed to exist in complete isolation from modern America. Indeed, his description of life there suggested that little had change since the days of the early settlers to the region. Cowan asserts that men such as Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone and Alvin York were created in these Spartan conditions:

> Alvin York came from a line of ancestors who were cane-cutters and Indian fighters. The earliest ancestor of whom he has knowledge was a "Long-Hunter," who with a rifle upon his shoulder strode into the Valley of the Wolf and homesteaded the river bottom-lands. Here his people lived far from the traveled paths. Marooned in their mountain fastnesses, they clung to the customs and the traditions of the past. Their life was simple, and their sports quaint. They held shooting-matches on the mountainside, enjoyed "log-rollings" and "corn-huskings." Strong in their loves and in their hates, they feared God, but feared no man.[54]

Cowan's book reveled in stories of the hard-working rough and tumble mountain people that made the nation strong. Building on this theme, Cowan's book took Americans back to the settling of Tennessee with stories of York's ancestors. These were painted larger than life to help the reader come to the conclusion that such a stock of people will necessarily give rise to people like York. Cowan even went as far as taking a racial turn in his writings to imply that heroism was hereditary:

> It has been said of the residents of the Cumberland Mountains that they are the purest Anglo-Saxons to be found to-day and not even England can produce so clear a strain. The mountain families have intermarried and because of the

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[53] "Tennessee's War Hero," *New York Times*, 16 July 1922.
[54] Cowan, 59-60.

> inaccessibility of their homes have remained marooned in their mountain fastnesses. They are Anglo-Saxon in their blood and their customs. They are Colonial-Americans in their speech and credence. They have a love for daring that comes from the wildness and freedom of their surroundings. They have a directness of mind that is the result of unconscious training. They must be sure of the firmness of each footstep they take, and it is through and past obstructions that they locate their game.[55]

Despite its lackluster sales, Cowan was the first writer to portray life in Pall Mall and therefore the first to capture Alvin York's "back story." The description of the turkey shoot reflects an appreciation of some of York's life experiences, all of which were important to making him the man he became.[56]

The chief shortcoming of *Sergeant York and His People* is Cowan's exaggerated account of York's battlefield exploit. It is not clear why Cowan saw a need to do this as what was accomplished on the battlefield was impressive without stretching the truth. However, Cowan opened the book with York's battle exploit and used it as the foundation from which he built the tale of a larger than life pioneer stock still living in Appalachia, representing a sort of mystical backbone of American society. Most of the myth-making and exaggerations regarding the York story can be traced to this book.

Furthermore, when tackling the York's battle experience, Cowan was out of his element. He had little understanding of what he was writing about. He would not be the last York biographer with a loose grasp of the military situation in the Great War. For instance, in his opening chapter Cowan states that York's division was facing the best that Germany had to offer, the Prussian Guards: "A battalion of machine guns is a military unit organized to give battle to a regiment of infantry. Yet, one man, a representative of

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[55] Cowan, 77-78.
[56] Cowan, 110-111.

America on that hillside on that October morning, broke the morale of a battalion of machine gunners made up from members of Germany's famous Prussian Guards."[57] While it is true that a company sized element of the 5th Guards Prussian Infantry Division (Plehwe Regiment) was on "York Hill," the overwhelming majority of forces that he faced were Württembergers, who were never mentioned in this book. Württemberg was a semi-autonomous kingdom of the German Empire, which included Bavaria, Saxony, Prussia and Württemberg. Furthermore, Cowan's notion that York single-handedly fought against thirty-five German machineguns is fiction and this fallacy that became commonplace due to the influence of this book.

Even some of Cowan's seemingly inconsequential statements are patently false. He states that the French were so impressed by York's bravery that they renamed the hill in the Argonne where York fought "York's Hill." Pattullo was the first to mention this with subsequent authors have embraced and even exaggerated the myth. This invention is still cited as fact by writers some ninety years later. The truth is that the local French populace had no idea what happened as they were evacuated by the Germans before the American attack was launched to prevent civilian casualties. The relative ignorance of what happened near their village was only altered by the 2008 dedication of monuments and the construction of the "Circuit du Sergeant York" on the battlefield nearly ninety years afterwards.[58]

The first attempt to write York's biography began in 1927, when Tom Skeyhill sought out York to secure his support in such an undertaking. Skeyhill's war experiences

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[57] Cowan, 30-31.
[58] Cowan, 45.

are worth recounting as they were central in convincing York to allow him to collaborate on his biography. Skeyhill was a veteran of the famous Australian-New Zealand Army Corps' (ANZAC) in the Gallipoli action against the Ottomans (modern day Turkey). The Ottoman Empire was an ally of Germany, and facing a stalemate along the Western Front, the British and French hoped that an amphibious attack would knock the Ottomans out of the war and thereby improve their fortunes. The plan was to land troops on the Gallipoli Peninsula, close off the Dardanelles Straits and then march onto Constantinople. This would conceivably knock the Ottomans out of the war and offer a route to aid Russia.

Serving as a signaller with the 8th Battalion, 2nd Brigade, Australian Imperial Force (AIF), Skeyhill landed at ANZAC Cove, Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 facing robust Turkish opposition.[59] Two weeks later his unit was transferred to Cape Helles where it led the attack to capture Krithia on 8 May 1916. Skeyhill's Australian Brigade lost 1/3 of its men in the ensuing battle.[60] Skeyhill was one of the casualties, partially blinded by a Turkish artillery round exploding near his position. He was transferred to an Imperial hospital in Egypt where he wrote a book of songs and poems titled, *Soldier Songs from ANZAC.*[61] After being discharged from the army, Skeyhill arrived in the United States in 1917 where he earned national acclaim as an orator in garnering American support for the war effort.

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[59] *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Volume 1 - The Story of ANZAC from the outbreak of war to the end of the first phase of the Gallipoli Campaign 4 May 1915*, (Brisbane, Australia, University of Queensland Press; 1980), 253-280.
[60] *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Volume II – The Story of ANZAC from 4 May, 1915, to the evacuation of the Gallipoli Peninsula,* (Brisbane, Australia, University of Queensland Press, 1980). 20-42.
[61] Tom Skeyhill, *Soldier Songs from ANZAC*, (London, T. Fisher; 1916).

After the war, Skeyhill published his second book, *A Singing Soldier*,[62] had his vision restored by an American physician, and settled in New York City as a playwright.[63] While walking the streets of New York City on 22 May 1919, he participated in the welcome given for Sergeant York. "I was one of the thousands that stormed the streets of the city," he wrote, "a returned wounded soldier myself, I felt poignantly the meaning of this uproarious welcome, its joy, and, almost as much, its undercurrent of sadness."[64] In 1927, Skeyhill visited Pall Mall to convince York to also write a biography. York at first refused, but after "reminiscing of old days of the front," Skeyhill convinced him, saying that the money from the book could be used to build a school for mountain children.[65] Skeyhill would serve as the book's editor.

Skeyhill proved the right choice for this project. He convinced *Liberty Magazine* to invest $40,000 to buy pre-published portions of the book as a two-part serial that would be released in the summer of 1928. He also secured an agreement with Doubleday for a nationwide release of the completed book later in 1928 that was titled *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary.*[66] In 1930, Skeyhill worked with York to publish a children's version of his story, which included Appalachian pioneer vignettes, in a book named *Sergeant York: last of the long hunters.*[67] To write these books, not only did Skeyhill imitate Cowan's method of spending time in the region watching everyday

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[62] Tom Skeyhill, *A Singing Soldier*, (New York, Knickerbocker Press; 1919).
[63] "Veteran's Sight Restored: Operation Relieves Skeyhill, Blinded at Gallipoli," *New York Times,* 4 May 1918.
[64] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, (New York, Doubleday; 1928), 2.
[65] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary,* 24-28.
[66] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, (New York, Doubleday; 1928).
[67] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: last of the long hunters*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, The John C. Winston Company; 1930).

life, turkey shoots, and church services, but he surpassed Cowan because he had a grasp of life as a soldier and was less prone to hyperbole.

Skeyhill helped York put together a thoughtful and well-presented biography with little of the embellishment so rampant in Cowan's book. The book also lays out a convincing portrayal of York's actions of 8 October 1918. This was a response to what Skeyhill suggested was a common reaction to the story, one shared by Skeyhill himself: "At first I was skeptical. Who was not? It sounded too much like a fairy tale. It just could not be done, it was not human. Yet it was done."[68] To explain how this feat happened, Skeyhill included affidavits as well as portions of the investigation that the AEF conducted in February 1919. These made the supporting evidence behind the York feat available to the public for the first time. The book became a best seller and provided York with much of the money he needed to build his long sought after local school.

A criticism of the Skeyhill/York book is that it lacks depth in its presentation of York's combat experience. Skeyhill could have used his understanding of combat to flesh out and expand on the annotations from York's diary that are used as the backbone of this portion of the book. Yet, the narrow battle commentaries do not explain what and why York's unit was fighting in the Argonne and the Meuse Valley. Instead, we are given a narrow view of a single action. It would have been a better work had Skeyhill and York researched the Meuse-Argonne Campaign to add historical depth to the story. Instead, we have a rather one-dimensioned and incomplete tale. Additionally, the book is

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[68] Tom Skeyhill (editor), Sergeant York: last of the long hunters, 2.

tied into a tight package that ends abruptly without elaborating on York's life during the decade after the war.

Another criticism of Skeyhill's work is the heavy use of Appalachia slang in his depiction of York. The argument was that by 1928, York's slang was significantly toned down due to his mingling with the outside world. In the end, York approved the book as its author, and these critics do not attack Cowan, a Tennessean, who also used the same heavy mountain dialect in his book.[69] This notwithstanding, Dr. Michael Birdwell attacked the book: "The question is, what is really York and what is after-the-fact addition and what is plain fabrication? I personally dismiss much of the document."[70] Dr. Birdwell's charge is serious and should be considered.

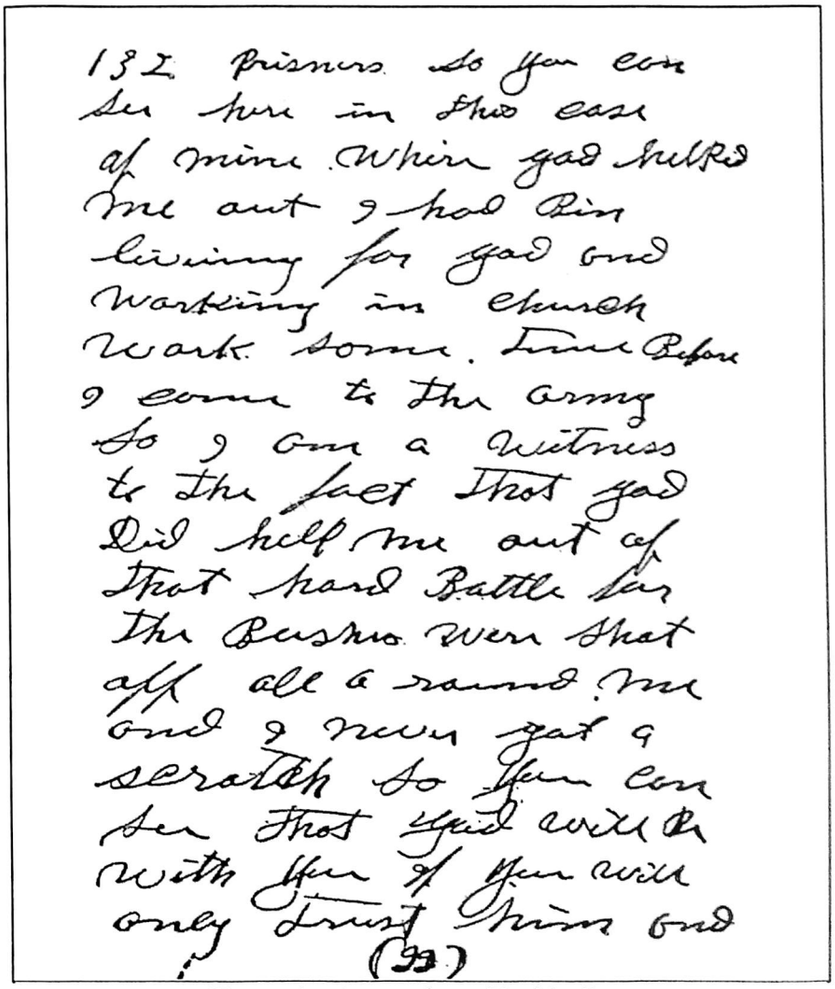


Figure 1 - A page from York's diary

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[69] David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero*, (Lexington, Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky; 1985), 94-97; John Perry, *Sgt. York: His Life, Legend & Letters*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman & Holman Publishers; 1997), 334.

[70] Craig S. Smith, "Revisiting the legend of an American war hero," New York Times, 20 June 2006, A3. Birdwell's concerns with the 1928 biography will be discussed at length later in this dissertation.

The Skeyhill edited biography is one of the most important York sources as it is based largely on York's war time diary. Although Skeyhill did edit some of the commentary, by and large it is from York's 1918 diary with only minor alterations. It is here that one encounters the heavy dialect, and numerous errors in spelling and diction. The complete original York diary is in the possession of the York family and rarely is made publically available, which has fuelled Birdwell's suspicions.[71] Yet, photocopied portions of the diary have been released in its original form and it seems that very little of what York wrote was altered. The York family mailed a complete typed version of the diary to this author to address this detraction, and found it little changed from the Skeyhill book.[72]

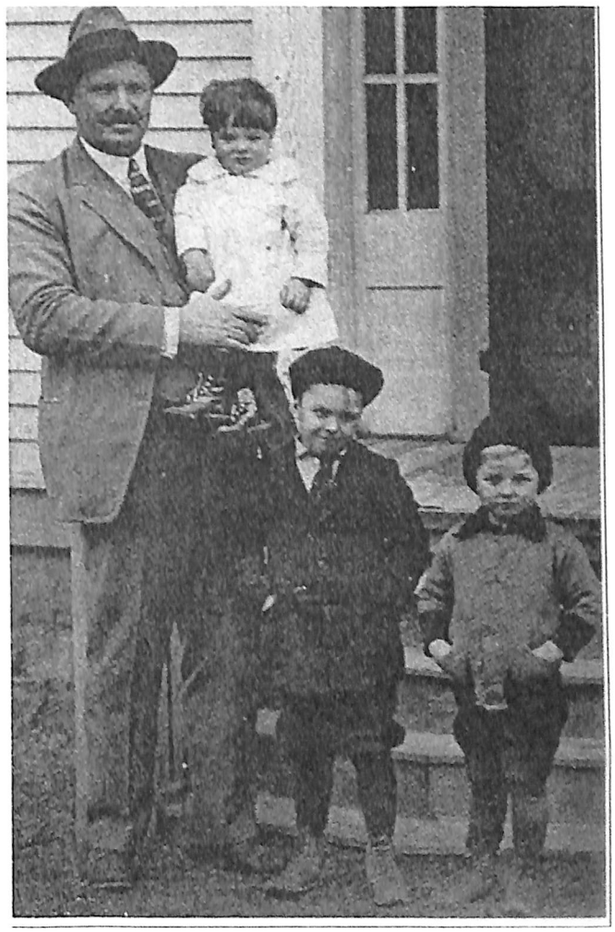


Figure 2 George Edward York (far right) with Sgt York and brother's Alvin Jr., (middle) and Woodrow Wilson York around the time of the Skeyhill stay with the family. (Courtesy of the York Family)

Ninety year old George Edward Buxton York, son of Alvin York, has firsthand knowledge of both Skeyhill and his father. George Edward York rejects Birdwell's condemnation of the biography and said that "of everything thing [I]... read about dad, this book is the most accurate and real representation of [him]." He also

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[71] Craig S. Smith, "Revisiting the legend of an American war hero," New York Times, 20 June 2006, A3. Birdwell's concerns with the 1928 biography will be discussed at length later in this dissertation.
[72] Letter/package from Gerald York, to Douglas Mastriano, dated 5 March 2013.

recollects Skeyhill staying with them and remembers how Sergeant York spoke, saying, "this book was written in the words of my father."[73] With this firsthand commentary bolstering the authenticity of the Skeyhill book, Birdwell's misgivings seem baseless as he has offered no evidence to support his assertions.[74]

Although the 1941 release of the movie *Sergeant York* thrust York into the lime light, it would not be until 1985 that another book was published of his life. The piece, *Sergeant York: An American Hero*, was written by David Lee, an Associate Professor of Western Kentucky University. Lee's focus was two-fold: sort out reality from myth related to the York story, and to discuss why York was "selected" to be an American hero.[75]

Lee's *Sergeant York: An American Hero* is refreshing in that it does not get caught in the hype that overshadowed the York story since 1919. Lee does an admirable job trying to separate fact from fiction and is the first to go beyond the clean happy ending found in Skeyhill and Cowan's work. Lee is painfully honest about York's perpetual financial troubles, conflicts with local power-brokers and his life-long struggle to justify the taking of human life in the Great War. Where Lee falls short, however, is his interpretation of the process by which York became a national hero. This discourse is replete with speculation that does not fit well with the history. Additionally, the story of York's combat experience focuses on 8 October 1918, ignoring over three weeks of

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[73] Email from Debbie York-Dean, to Douglas Mastriano, 5 March 2013.
[74] Dr. Birdwell offers no evidence to support his criticism of the book other than his opinion. Questioning the authenticity of it merely based upon the fact that the York family closely guards the diary is not enough. As mentioned, portions of the diary have been made available in their original form, and Birdwell is unable to demonstrate from these extracts that his allegations are supportable by tangible evidence.
[75] Tom Skeyhill (editor), Sergeant York: last of the long hunters, ix.

combat action. Glossing over York's experience in the Meuse-Argonne to focus on one day does both the reader and York a disservice. This gap persists in the York historiography and perpetuates a rather one-dimensional understanding of York's combat experience.[76]

The problem with the Lee book is that it is not a comprehensive biography of Alvin York and therefore lacks the necessary depth to get to the bottom of the saga. Barely encompassing 150 pages in length, the book ignores and glosses over a plethora of important aspects of the York story. In fairness, Lee never intended his book to be York's biography. He wrote his small book in an attempt to analyze the York tale in the context of a hero-making process, using the York story as the peg upon which to swing his assertions. [77] With this rather narrow focus; Lee gives us an overview of York's life, with particular attention to the 8 October battle in the Argonne. This is followed with his view of the hero making process and uses the York story as a case in point of how heroes are made. Although interesting academically, Lee's hero-making discourse is thin, with his hypothesis falling short of his goal. In such postulations, Lee should have provided a more in-depth description of other Great War heroes, such as Major Whittlesley, or Lieutenant Woodfill (the other two heroes of three mentioned by General Pershing, with York being the third) to make his case instead of using the example of what occurred to York in isolation as the basis of his conclusions.

Finally, Lee is too disparaging academically in defining York's faith. Using terms to describe his beliefs, as "worshipped the harsh Jehovah of the Old Testament," "a

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[76] David D. Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero*, (Lexington, Kentucky, University Press of Kentucky; 1985), x, 44-48;
[77] Lee, x-xii.

severe, fundamentalist church," and "religious warrior" strike the reader as more a condemnation of York's Christian beliefs rather than a historical presentation of it. Either this is a reflection of an underlying aversion that Lee has to York's beliefs, or perhaps a lack of understanding of it.[78] His book does not historically address that the rise in holiness and Pentecostal churches in the United States in the early 20th Century with York's denomination not being "harshest" or most legalistic among these. As will be demonstrated in this work, York's Christian denomination was one of few written rules, but rather centered on grace and the idea of "Sola Scriptura."[79]

Lee also seems fixed on the idea that there was an incongruity between York the warrior and York the Christian. The debate about a Christian fighting in war has been a discussion by the faithful for nearly two millennia. Such discourses have produced a body of writing for Christians to contemplate, such as Saint Augustine's concept of "Just War." Although York had no idea about the age-old Christian debate about war and killing at the time, Lee views York's struggle as a contradiction, which it was not. The problem of a Christian serving his nation during a time of war is a perennial one, not uncommon even today. Lee should have viewed York's personal struggle in the historical context of the Christians theological debate about war.[80]

The last book written on Alvin York was by John Perry, fellow Tennessean, and a prolific author on diverse subjects ranging from history to religious subjects. Published in 1997, *Sgt. York: His Life, Legend & Legacy*, endeavours to take a deeper look at

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[78] Lee, 20.
[79] Vinson Synan, *The Holiness–Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company; 1997), 90-152.
[80] John Mark Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*, (New York, Continuum; 2006), 196.

York.[81] Through numerous interviews with York family and friends, Perry does an admirable job adding depth to our understanding of Alvin York. He does not attack York's faith with loaded words or phrases as does Lee. Perry particularly is strong in his account of York's life after the war, which brings to light the struggles Alvin faced financially until his dying day.

However, there are several areas in which Perry's work is lacking. The primary concern is that there are no footnotes or endnotes. Although Perry includes an impressive bibliography, the lack of cited sources detracts from the book academically. We are left to guess what sources support his ideas. Additionally, as with every York book, Perry's fails to offer an account of York's complete experience in the AEF and in the Great War. The focus of the books starts with York's struggle with conscientious objection and then leaps to the 8 October battle. This is the problem with the York literature.

The variety of books about Alvin York have certainly taken different approaches, but the centerpiece of each has been the 8 October 1918 battle. With Pattullo we have York's introduction to the world, with Cowan a presentation of his country upbringing, with Skeyhill the first attempt to provide evidence of his heroism, with Lee a degree of scepticism and finally Perry's update to the tale. As the majority of the works were written by Tennesseans, there are more than enough vignettes and yarns about life in Appalachia in the books to convince most of York's folksy upbringing. That portion of the history is well told. Yet, despite this, there is no comprehensive biography of Alvin York. The previous works provide glimpses into his life, many of which are incomplete,

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[81] John Perry, *Sgt. York: His Life, Legend & Legacy,* (Nashville, Tennessee, Broadman & Holman Publishers; 1997).

or patently inaccurate, but no all encompassing work. We are left to speculate about how York's sinful life and his later conversion impacted his life as a soldier.

As for York's military service there are many accounts of that one day in October, but very little else. This leaves us with a one-dimensional understanding of York, that skips most of his army experiences in Georgia, France and the UK. None describe the alienation he endured as a soldier, especially when word was leaked of his pacifist beliefs. Nor do they offer any word of the ridicule and mockery that was part of his daily life as a soldier and how this shaped him as a man.

These pieces are also shallow in the presentation of the Meuse-Argonne Campaign. There is no mention that he was involved in the breaching of the Kriemhilde Stellung (German Hindenburg Line) and how these experiences changed his life. The existing literature also lacks a coherent understanding of what the Germans intended and did against York and his unit in the Great War. Furthermore, no-one has undertaken a modern, rigorous assessment of what transpired on "York Hill" on that fateful day of 8 October 1918. Finally, we are also missing a "so what" of the York saga. Lee nearly comes to terms with this, but misses the bigger picture of York's importance by speculations on hero making. Ironically, in the American drive to victory in the fall of 1918, that one day in October seemed unimportant not only to York but to the 82nd Division in general, who were too busy fighting to pause and take notice. Not until the guns fell silent did the command take the time to look into York's exploits. The existing literature focuses so exclusively on that one day that it fails to recognize that there is more to the story than meets the eye.

Chapter 3 - Unpromising Beginnings

The Hard Life in the Upper Cumberland Valley

I am a-telling you I kept going from bad to worse, drinking more and more, and gambling whenever I had the chance or the money, and fighting a whole heap. I was never once whipped or knocked off my feet. I jes kinder thought I could whip the world and more than oncet I set out to do it. I was in a couple of shooting frays too.[82]

Alvin C. York

Life for Alvin York growing up in the Cumberland Valley of Tennessee seemed little different from what the pioneers of the early 1800s experienced. It was a foreign place to most Americans: a land that time seemed to have forgotten. In many respects, Alvin York's corner of the world was little changed from the bygone days when Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett lived in the area. Legend reflected the Cumberland's traditional and time-locked nature with its tales of Indian fighters, Civil War and bushwhackers.[83] Despite the innocent yarns spun about life in Appalachia, there was a dark side to it as well. In the shadows of the rough valleys, bootleggers, gun runners and other men of ill-repute made the region dangerous for the uninitiated. Adding to this was that swathes of the region were largely outside of the control of federal and state law. Alvin York would soon find himself lured into this dark world.

The third of eleven children, Alvin York was born on 13 December 1887 and grew up in a loving, devout, and hard working home. His father, William York, and mother, Mary Brooks York, owned a small farm in Fentress Country, near Pall Mall. This country was solidly rural; the largest town of any consequence was the county seat

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[82] York, Sergeant York, 133.
[83] Cowan, 59, 100-106.

of Jamestown, ten miles south of the York farm. York's parents had a heavy burden with so many children to provide for. The entire York family worked to provide for the family. Life in the valley was hard. Living in a one room cabin, Alvin was required to contribute to the family just as his siblings did. He helped his Mom around the house as soon as he was old enough to do so, and was in the fields working the 75 acres of the family farm with his father before he was six years old.[84] Of this, York said:

> I begun to work almost as soon as I could walk-At first I would help Mother around the house, carrying water, getting a little stove wood, and carrying and nursing the other children to keep them from yelling around after Mother while she was trying to get a bite of dinner for us all. I would go out to the field with Father before I was six years old. I would have to chop the weeds out of the corn.[85]

The rocky soil of the York farm made growing corn extremely difficult.[86] Despite this, Alvin learned to raise crops, take care of farm animals, and to work at the family black smith shop in the cave next to the cabin where he shod horses and mules.[87] By far the most exhilarating thing he learned from his father was hunting. Before he was old enough to hunt, Alvin recalled being "red-eyed, by the gate of his home [as he] watched his father and the hounds go off to the hunt."[88] When that day finally arrived for him to join his father hunting, he displayed an unusual skill that caught his father's attention.

It was during the long hunting trips in the mountains and fields around Pall Mall that Alvin was able to spend quality time with his father. The hunting was a way for the

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[84] York, *Sergeant York,* 121-129.
[85] York, *Sergeant York,* 124. York's diary often contains usages and spellings that are technically incorrect., but will be replicated here as they were published without corrections or editorial comments.
[86] Cowan, 166.
[87] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (hereafter WBA), 2.
[88] Cowan, 148-168.

York family to put meat on the table and to make money on pelts. In such a large family, Alvin became a typical middle son, both quiet, but resolute. It was difficult for him to stand out in the shadow of his two older brothers, Henry and Joe to distinguish himself from the half dozen younger siblings who needed their parent's attention. During these hunting outings Alvin was able to observe his father's Christian character and learning hunting skills:[89] "But I most loved getting out with Father to help him shoot. We would hunt the red and gray foxes in the daytime and skunks, possums, and coons after dark. Often we would hunt all day and do the blacksmithing at night."[90]

In a large family it was difficult to be noticed. Alvin's passion and talent for hunting captured his father's attention.[91] In Alvin, his father found a willing apprentice. At his father's side, Alvin learned how to track animals, to read the weather, train coon dogs and to move unseen in the deep Tennessee woods.[92] Shooting remained his passion and he took every opportunity to perfect his skills with both handguns and rifles. Before long, Alvin matched his father's skill in hunting raccoons, foxes, turkeys, wild hogs and squirrels and had begun winning community turkey shoots.[93] Alvin described the importance that this passion played in his relationship; saying; "It was sorter easy for me to talk [to his father] about guns and hounds and horses and all those things he loved and taught me to love."[94]

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[89] Cowan, 163-166.
[90] York, Sergeant York, 126.
[91] Perry, 30-37.
[92] Cowan, 148.
[93] York, 45-50, 104-111.
[94] York, *Sergeant York*, 137.

York's father was renowned across the region as a hunter and marksman. His expertise as a shooter was so great that often, in "beeve" (beef) shooting matches, when the best five shooters would divide a cow betwixt them, William York would win all five matches and bring the animal back alive and "on the hoof."[95] It was not just in beef shoots that William excelled, but in turkey shoots as well. In these matches, shooters would pay for each shot to kill a captured turkey. The live turkey was tied behind a log, with the firers trying to hit the bird in the head from a distance of sixty yards. Such a crack shot was Alvin's father, that often he found himself bumped to the bottom of the firing order. This gave the tournament participants a chance to raise more money by allowing other shooters a shot before William York hit the bird. York admired his father's skills and would take up his father's rifle in a like manner.[96] Little did he know that it was this love of his father's shooting and hunting that was to prepare him for a dark day in France only a few years later.

The weapon of choice for the York family was the antiquated muzzle loaded rifle. These long and unwieldy rifles were difficult to use, but when handled by a proficient rifleman, proved deadly accurate.[97] Alvin sought to become an expert shot with a revolver handgun also. Finding his inspiration from tales of the bank robber Jesse James, Alvin recalled:

> I used to practise and practise to shoot like them James boys. I used to get on my mule and gallop around and shoot from either hand and pump bullet after bullet in the same hole. I used to even throw the pistol from hand to hand and shoot jes as

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[95] York, *Sergeant York,* 90-101; Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (hereafter WBA), 2-4.
[96] Cowan, 148-150; York, *Sergeant York*, 85-93.
[97] York, *Sergeant York,* 43-49; Cowan, 109-111.

> accurate. I could take that old pistol and knock off a lizard's or a squirrel's head from that far off that you could scarcely see it.[98]

Religion too played a central role in Eastern Tennessee and in shaping Alvin York's character. Yet, this was not the Christianity of liturgy and tradition, but one of which the German Reformer Martin Luther advocated in 1517: "Sola Scriptura," which is using only the Bible and not church doctrine as a guide for living.[99] Although the region was largely influenced by Wesleyan Methodist theology, the people of Pall Mall welcomed itinerant Baptist and Church of Christ in Christian Union (CCCU) preachers due to the lack of ministers.[100] Called "saddle baggers," because of the large bags of Bibles, evangelical tracts and hymn books they traveled with on their horses, these circuit preachers brought the Gospel to the mountain folk mostly through revival meetings. The local population honored the Sabbath and usually the only book any family owned and read was the Bible. Daily family devotions with prayer and Bible reading were conducted by most folks in the region. Saying grace to give thanks to God for each meal was the norm as well, so that faith was expressed throughout the average day.[101]

Church services were important social affairs, which every family in the area would endeavor to attend, dressed in their "Sunday finest."[102] Church meetings included singing and sermon on the need of an individual to recognize his sins, repent from them,

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[98] York, *Sergeant York*, 133-135.
[99] Dr. Rev. Martin Luther, *Smalcald Articles,* 1537, Translated by F. Bente, (St. Louis, Missouri, Concordia Publishing House; 1921), 453-477.
[100] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (hereafter WBA), 6.
[101] York, *Sergeant York*, 74-79.
[102] Lee, 8-11.

and turn one's life over to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.[103] These church events could last all day, and included people bringing food to share in a sort of "pot-luck" fellowship. These were appropriately named "Basket Meetings" in Pall Mall.[104]

The only church in Pall Mall was unremarkable, having been built of wood planks by Methodists in the late 1800s. It was pleasantly situated in the valley near town. The interior was unpainted and lined with rough benches. The women sat to the right side of the church and the men to the left during services. The pulpit was slightly raised at the front of the church, with an altar, or "mourners' bench" just below it.[105] As with most churches in the region, the one in Pall Mall was barren of symbols, icons and illustrations. All that mattered was the Bible.

Public education, although available, was not practicable to the hard working folks of Pall Mall and the Valley of the Three Forks of the Wolf River. Due to the time constraints imposed by a busy farming schedule, school was limited to the summer three months, and often interrupted by the potato harvest, tomato harvest, etc.[106] For Alvin, it was a good summer if he was able to squeeze in a month of school. By the time he entered adulthood, he had the equivalent to a third grade education.[107] As a result, the greatest influence on Alvin York was his parents;

> Both my father and mother were honest, God-fearing people, and they did their best to bring us up that way. They didn't drink, or swear, or smoke themselves, and they didn't believe in us doing those things. They didn't have no use nohow for people who told lies or broke promises. They believed in being straight out

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[103] John Albert Braodus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, (New York; A.C. Armstrong and Son; 1894), 2-17.
[104] Cowan, 103-105.
[105] Cowan, 203-204.
[106] Cowan, 169.
[107] Cowan, 169-173.

and aboveboard. I'm a-telling you they honoured the truth so much that they wouldn't hide it nohow for nobody even if they was to suffer an awful lot.[108]

Alvin grew up in a house filled with stability and acceptance. Behind it all, his father stood out as a man of integrity. William York was not just a Sunday Christian, but one who endeavored to live out his faith transparently in humility and honesty. Whatever he put his hand to; he sought to "do it as unto God." This applied to his work ethic and to his private life: "He was so fair and just in all relations with his neighbors that the people of the valley called him "Judge" York; and his honesty was so rugged and impartial that not infrequently was left as sole arbiter even when his own interests were involved."[109]

The year 1911 was a turning point in the York household. By then, Alvin's two older brothers, Henry and Joe, had their own farms and families. William York was renowned throughout the region for his skill at shoeing horses and mules. One day in 1911, he was severely kicked by a mule, which triggered an illness from which he subsequently died.[110]

Almost overnight, Alvin went from being the over-looked middle child to the head of the household.[111] This required him to run a seventy-five acre farm, the black smith shop and to provide for his widowed mother and younger siblings.[112] It seemed as if the weight of the world had fallen upon him; a burden he was not ready to bear.[113]

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[108] York, *Sergeant York*, 136.
[109] Cowan, 144, 158.
[110] Pattullo, 4.
[111] Cowan, 210-212.
[112] Pattullo, 3-4.
[113] York, *Sergeant York*, 125-131; Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse Lasky, Sergeant York notes, 8 May 1940, WBA.

Unfortunately for Alvin, temptation and escape from the stress of life were just a few miles north of Pall Mall, Tennessee on the Kentucky state line.[114] To avoid liqueur laws, drinking establishments called "Blind Tigers" were built on the state border in abundance with the state line literally painted across the floor inside were.[115] Whenever law enforcement officers turned up, the patrons and the booze moved to the opposite side of the saloon to avoid arrest.[116] Little is known of York's slip into the dissipation of the Blind Tigers as his friends in Pall Mall were hesitant to share derogatory information about him with "furiners." Nonetheless, research by Warner Brothers Studios for the 1941 film and uncovered in the studio archives, helps us to ascertain a more complete view of the York saga during his time of "back-sliding" and are included below.

It should be no surprise that moonshine was the preferred liquor at the Blind Tigers since Kentucky was the leading producer of it in the United States. The proximity of Kentucky to so many markets, in addition to plentiful grain and corn, made it a natural source for the booming business of bootlegging. As the industry was not regulated, there was a danger of the whiskey being thinned with lye, or contaminated with radiator fluid and lead.[117] Corn whiskey, which was locally called "John Barleycorn" or "Mountain Dew" was a particularly potent drink.[118] Some of the brew was 80-90% in alcohol

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[114] Cowan, 210-211.
[115] Cowan, 46-48
[116] York, 5-9; Cowan, 210-212.
[117] Harvey W. Wiley, *A Plot Against the People*, (Ontario, Canada, Hiram Walker and Sons Limited; 1911), 19-28.
[118] Pattullo, 4; Skeyhill, Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters, 140.

content.[119] One of the whiskeys popular was a corn based sugar brew, which resembles a modern fuel known as ethanol.[120]

The Blind Tigers drew a rough crowd. They were the place to gamble, meet women, fight, and most of all, to drink: Alvin declared, "I am a-telling you Sodom and Gomorrah might have been bigger places, but they weren't any worse. Killings were a-plenty. They used to say that they used to shoot fellows jes to see them kick. Knife fights



Alvin York in Pall Mall, TN standing, right back row

[119] David W. Maurer, *Kentucky Moonshine*, (Lexington, Kentucky, University of Kentucky Press; 1974), 50-59.

[120] Bassam Z. Shakhashiri, "Ethanol," University of Wisconsin (9 February 2011). Available online at the following website: http://scifun.chem.wisc.edu/chemweek/pdf/ethanol.pdf (accessed 27 September 2011).

and shooting were common, gambling and drinking were commoner, and lots of careless girls jes used to sorter drift in. It shore was tough."[121] One of the local establishments along the Kentucky-Tennessee border was operated by the Huddleson Family where twenty-five people were killed in bar fights. The Huddelsons, York said, were "an ornery and right smart bad, tough lot of men. They wouldn't do nothin' downright dishonest, but they'd kill you at the drop of a hat."[122]

Because of the violence at Huddleston's Blind Tiger and the poor nature of the moon-shine that was served there, York preferred another border dive called "Marter's Place."[123] The trouble was when York drank, he would get into fights. On occasions, he avoided fights by showing off his shooting skills. Once Alvin was with his usual group of friends and brothers and had a winning string of poker games. The losers were infuriated and pulled out their guns to settle the matter. To avoid a shootout, Alvin quickly pulled out a pistol and shot off the head of a lizard on a distant tree, saying, "If there's going to be any shooting here I will do it." That ended the argument.[124]

As with most young men his age, Alvin's path to self-destruction was slow. Particularly susceptible to his moral decline due to the loss of father, he surrounded himself with companions who encouraged and enabled his downward slide. Describing his slip into perdition, Alvin wrote:

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[121] Skeyhill, Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters, 139-140; York, Sergeant York, 129.
[122] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (hereafter WBA), 4.
[123] Memorandum from Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 15 October 1942, WBA, 5.
[124] Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; George Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.

> At the beginning we used to have a few drinks of a week-end and sit up nights, gambling our money away; and of course, like most of the others, I was always smoking and cussing. I don't think I was mean and bad; I was jes kinder careless. But the habits grew stronger on me. Sorter like the water that runs down a hill at first it makes the ravine, and then the ravine takes control of the water that's the way it was with me. I jes played with these things at first, and then they got a-hold of me and began to play with my life. I went from bad to worse. I began really to like liquor and gambling, and I was 'most always spoiling for a fight.[125]

Before Alvin knew it, his occasional drinks of hard liquor had turned into weekend binges during which he would lose most of his hard-earned money gambling "at poker, dice or some other game of chance."[126]

Joining Alvin on his weekend jaunts to the Blind Tigers in the border settlements of Bald Rock and Static were his brothers Henry and Albert, and friends Marion Leffew, Everett and Marion Delk.[127] "We were a wild crowd," Alvin said, "wilder than wild bees when they're swarming. [128] On a week-end we would go across the Kentucky line and get drunk and look for trouble, and we shore enough found it." Once armed with booze, Alvin and his companions would go on long drinking binges with hard Tennessee or Kentucky moonshine. In addition to shooting under each other's mules, getting into fights and gambling, the group found other ways to mix drunkenness with competition. One of Alvin's favorite games was "last man standing."[129] The six men would drink as much as they could to see who would be the last not to pass out. Often the last two to stand were Alvin and Everett Delk, with Delk usually lasting the longest. The winner of

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[125] York, 128-129.
[126] Skeyhill, Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters, 143.
[127] In his diary, Alvin York refers to this border area as "Ball Rock." Its actual name is Bald Rock, off of Caney Creek Road, which leads south to Pall Mall. York, *Sergeant York*, 130. See also, Skeyhill, *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters,* 140-141.
[128] Skeyhill, Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters, 139-140; Perry, 33-38.
[129] York, *Sergeant York,* 129-133.

this exercise would be awarded all of the unconsumed liquor.[130] On some weekends, the group would purchase their whiskey at the Blind Tiger and then go to Jim Crabtree's farm to consume it. Crabtree would join Alvin, his brothers and the Delk boys in a drink, and then his wife would feed them a large meal before the group became intoxicated.[131]

As expected, this put him in trouble with the law. It started when he delivered a weapon for someone. He was called before a judge on charges of selling weapons across county lines, but he had the case dismissed after proving that it was not his rifle. Alvin's next confrontation with the law occurred while returning from a drinking binge in Kentucky. While riding on his mule intoxicated, Alvin spotted a flock of turkeys sitting on a fence. Alvin sluggishly pulled out his revolver and killed all six. But, the birds belonged to a neighbor and again he found himself in court. Only by paying restitution was Alvin set free.[132]

On another occasion, in the same state of intoxication, Alvin and Everett spotted something white in the darkness. Everett thought that it was a "white pillow." Not wanting to miss a chance to use his weapon at a distant target, Alvin fired. Upon closer inspection, they were appalled to see that he shot neighbor's pet goose. The guilty party fled the scene to avoid a court-hearing.[133] On another occasion, Alvin's drunken

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[130] Lee, 6.
[131] Interview with Jim Crabtree by Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.
[132] York, Sergeant York, 131-133; Skeyhill, Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters, 141-142.
[133] York, Sergeant York, 132; Skeyhill, Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters, 141-142.

recklessness nearly landed him in jail, only avoiding it by hiding in Kentucky "until the excitement died down."[134]

This deteriorating moral conduct troubled his mother, who made it a habit of waiting for Alvin during his extended drinking binges. With violence so common at the Blind Tigers, she was right to be concerned.[135] Mrs. York, nevertheless, never assailed Alvin for his behavior, but tried to lovingly lead him back to the Lord's way. As Alvin said:

> Often she would remind me of my father, of how he never drunk, or gambled, or played around with bad company, and of how he would not like it nohow if he knowed what I was doing; and she used to meet me at the door and put her arms around me and tell me that I was not only wasting this life, but I was spoiling all my chances for the next. She used to say that she jes couldn't bear to think of where I would go if I died or was killed while I was leading this wild life.[136]

How far from his father's counsel his life had drifted troubled Alvin as he held his father in high esteem. Yet, this was not enough to draw him to the straight and narrow. Mrs. York prayed for him and with tears of despair, shared hope from the Bible with him.[137] A passage that left an impression on Alvin was the parable of the Good Sheperd, which described a shepherd who left his flock of ninety-nine to find the one who strayed. Alvin knew that he was that lost sheep and was interested to hear the Savior's desire to bring him back to the fold despite being stained with sin. This notwithstanding, the draw of alcohol was difficult to break and he found himself in a moral conflict.[138]

> All of this was making me feel kinder bad. I jes knowed I was wrong. I jes knowed there was no excuse for me... When you get used to a thing, no matter

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[134] Skeyhill, *Sergeant York*, 141
[135] Cowan, 210-212.
[136] York, Sergeant York, 142.
[137] Pattullo, 4.
[138] York, 141-142.

> how bad it is for you, it is most awful hard to give it up. It was a most awful struggle to me. I did a lot of walking through the mountains and thinking. I was fighting the thing inside of me and it was the worstest fight I ever had. I thought of my father and what a good man he was and how he expected me to grow up like him, and I sorter turned over in my mind all the sacrifices Mother had made for me.[139]

As Alvin York struggled with deciding what path in life he would follow, a lady caught his attention. The girl, Gracie Loretta Williams, lived near the York farm, just across a little stream called Butterfly Branch.[140] Although the existing literature includes glimpses into the attempts by Alvin to court Gracie, they are often fragmented. Yet there is ample source material available to put this piece of the York story together. The most reliable information comes from two unpublished sources: the Warner Brothers Archives and an interview conducted with Gracie in 1976. Using these, we can describe this significant event that would ultimately lead to Alvin turning his back on loose living.[141]

Gracie's quiet strength as well as her good looks appealed to Alvin. Alvin would often take the long way to the woods to hunt squirrels near her family's farm, in the hopes of meeting with Gracie, who was often tending to the family's cows. Here they would have long conversations with both would looking forward to these "chance meetings." Gracie's father, Francis (Frank) Asbury Williams, absolutely refused to allow the two to associate.[142] As far as F. A. Williams was concerned, Alvin was too old for her and an

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[139] York, 142-143.
[140] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (hereafter WBA), 7.
[141] Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976.
[142] George Edward Buxton York was keen to point out to the author during the interview in May 2010 in Pall Mall, Tennessee, that his grandfather (Francis Asbury Williams) was named after, Francis Asbury, a Christian evangelist during the American Revolution, and laid the foundations of much of how Methodism

unbeliever.[143] Mr. Williams was a devoted Christian, who not only faithfully read the Bible, but also endeavored to live it out in his life. In his earlier life, Alvin might have made a positive impression on William despite the age difference between Alvin and his daughter. But by now Alvin had a reputation as a drunkard and a gambler and was considered unfit for any man's daughter.[144]

F. A. Williams sought to live out his faith in humility and integrity, and as such was a highly respected member of the community. His reputation for honesty was so impeccable that he served as a circuit judge. Williams believed that men were not born Christians, but had to choose to become so, just as, Joshua proclaimed: "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."[145] The most important mission for Mr. Williams was his family of thirteen children. To raise them in the understanding of the Lord, he led them in daily prayer and devotions, and endeavored to walk in God's ways before them in word and deed. Of the decision to prohibit Gracie from seeing Alvin, Williams referred to 2 Corinthians 6:14:

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operates today. See the following book for further details; Francis Asbury, *The Heart of Asbury's Journal,"* New York, Eaton & Mains; 1906), x-xii.

[143] Alvin's birthday was 13 December 1887 and Gracie's was 7 February 1900; Interview with Betsy Ross York, 29 May 2010 in Pall Mall, Tennessee.

[144] Interview with George Edward Buxton York in Pall Mall, Tennessee, 28-29 May 2010.

[145] *Holy Bible*, Joshua 24:15, Interview with George Edward Buxton York in Pall Mall, Tennessee, 28-29 May 2010.

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness?"[146]

This prohibition did not pertain to chance meetings along the lane or in the pasture, but there was no way York could romantically pursue Gracie.[147] Alvin had found in Gracie something unusual. She was not naive, but virtuous in her Christian faith. Although she was shy around strangers, there was an inward strength that made her stand out.[148] These were the traits that Alvin sought in a wife as she was in every manner opposite to the girls he met at the Blind Tigers.[149]

As long as her father objected, the relationship would remain distant and limited. Gracie agreed with her father's admonition and made it clear that she would not marry a man such as Alvin and thus she rebuffed his advances.[150] Alvin could only openly see Gracie at church. With this incentive, he became more interested in attending, for the sake of speaking to her at church and walking with her family home after service.[151] As Alvin was a "backslider," these were often awkward encounters. The bottom line was that as long as he was not a practicing Christian, she would never concede to marrying.[152]

Alvin was torn between the choices before him. For now, the easiest thing was to continue along the path of least resistance; that is, feeding his earthly desires. The weekend forays to the Bald Rock and Static Blind Tigers continued, while he tried to

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[146] Interview with George Edward Buxton York, 28-29 May 2010 in Pall Mall, Tennessee; verse quoted from King James Translation of the Bible, which was the format used by Francis Asbury Williams and most Christians in the United States at that time.
[147] York, *Sergeant York*, 149.
[148] Pattullo, 3-4.
[149] Cowan, 215-217;
[150] Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976.
[151] Pattullo, 4.
[152] York, *Sergeant York*, 148.

avoid arrest for his various infractions of the law.[153] But, Alvin struggled in prayer and doubt. His day-long hunting excursions gave him a quiet time to think and to wrestle with the direction of his life. There was a deep emptiness from the choices he had made. Alvin knew that he would end up dead soon if things did not change. A nagging guilt haunted him about the path that his parents had laid out for him, and there was Gracie, who was only interested in a Christian man.[154]

During the week leading up to New Year's Day 1915, the Pall Mall Church hosted a week long revival service led by Reverend Melvin Herbert Russell of Indiana.[155] Reverend Russell was a saddlebag preacher bringing the Gospel across Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee. His years of experience preaching the Gospel in the region, and years of studying the Bible, made him well-suited to reach the locals.[156]Alvin did not need much urging to attend. The desire to find some sort of answer for his woes was weighing heavily upon him, and there was of course the chance to see Gracie, who would certainly be there.[157]

Alvin attended most of the revival meetings that week, which were well supported by the community. The meeting house was packed full. Russell's preaching was straight from the Bible, unlike the soft Gospel so often preached from pulpits today. Russell never minced words, but, like one of the Apostles of old, spoke God's words with an

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[153] Dr. Mike Birdwell asserts that York's conversion was influenced by the death of his friend, Everett Delk in a saloon fight. However, this is grossly inaccurate as Delk lived more than a decade after York's conversion. In fact, Tom Skeyhill interviewed him in 1928 to gather stories of Alvin's "wild days." See, York, *Sergeant York*, 33, where Skeyhill says, "I had interviewed Everett Delk, his pal of hog-wild days."
[154] Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976; York, *Sergeant*, 146-151.
[155] Cowan, 206.
[156] Lee, 39.
[157] York, Sergeant York, 143.

urgency borne of the conviction that, "Now is the time of salvation," for we are all sinners doomed to hell, unless we repent and call upon the Savior.[158]

Alvin watched scores of local folk go forward to the "mourners bench" to repent of their sins and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior at the end of each service. Although the sermons moved him, and what Reverend Russell preached made sense, it was not enough to cause Alvin to join the penitent. Nonetheless, he felt a power behind what Russell preached.[159] If he was to follow the Lord, he knew he would have to do it for himself, not for his mom, his dad or even Gracie. During that week he experienced soul-felt conviction, causing him to contemplate life; "Sometimes I used to walk out on the mountainside and do a heap of thinking and praying before the meetings. Then I would go and listen and pray and ask God to forgive me for my sins and help me to see the light. And He did."[160]

Alvin's life changing decision occurred on New Year's Day 1915. During the last night of the revival service, he listened to Reverend Russell preach on "the wages of sin being death, but the gift of God being eternal life through Jesus Christ."[161] At that moment it all made perfect sense to him. York would later say that the Gospel message was so clear to him at that moment that "It was as if lightening struck my soul."[162] He

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[158] A central theme of this type of preaching was 2 Corinthians 6:2, "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."Samuel Kincaid Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company; 1922), 206-208.
[159] Perry, 40-41.
[160] York, 144.
[161] Interview with George Edward Buxton York, 28-29 May 2010 in Pall Mall, Tennessee; Romans 3:23; verse quoted from King James Translation of the Bible.
[162] Alvin York used this expression to describe his conversion experience to Hollywood screen writers in 1940. Interview with Colonel Gerald York (US Army) in Monterey, California, October 1996; and

saw the sin in his life for what it was, a death sentence, and also understood his need for the Savior. When the invitation was given by Reverend Russell, Sam Williams saw York getting ready to go forward to accept the Lord. Sam Williams had hired Alvin to work around his farm for several years and was concerned about the path he was on. Sam too stood up, put his arm around Alvin and walked down to the mourner's bench with him at the front of the church.[163] Reverend Russell led the penitent in a prayer of repentance and then welcomed Alvin heartily into the family of God. Alvin stood up a changed man.[164]

Interview with George Edward Buxton York in Montfaucon, France, 4 October 2008 during the 90th anniversary commemoration of his father's actions in the Great War.

[163] Sam Williams twelve year-old son, Guy Williams, looked up to Alvin, and often accompanied him on the hunting trips. Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse Lasky, Sergeant York notes, 8 May 1940, WBA; Interview with Guy Williams by Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.

[164] Interview with George Edward Buxton York in Montfaucon, France, 4 October 2008 during the 90th anniversary commemoration of his father's actions in the Great War; Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976.

Chapter 4 - At War with the Army

LIFE'S tol'ably queer. You think you've got a grip on it, then you open your hands and you find there's nothing in them. It doesn't go in straight lines like bees to their hives or quail from the covey.[165]

Alvin C. York

Alvin York's life completely changed after he "got religion," and literally left that church on 1 January 1915 a different man. York's family, and above all his Mom, was elated at his decision to become a Christian again:

> I found out the truth of what the Bible says: 'There is more rejoicing over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety-nine just persons that need no repentance.' I truly felt as though I had been borned again. I felt that great power which the Bible talks about and which all sinners feel when they have found salvation, I felt in my soul like the stormy waters must have felt when the Master said, "Peace, be still." I used to walk out in the night under the stars and kinder linger on the hillside, and I sorter wanted to put my arms around them-there hills. They were at peace and so was the world and so was I.[166]

Of the neighbors, Pastor Rosier C. Pile was perhaps the happiest. Only a few years before, he watched Alvin's fall into perdition and felt helpless to get him on the straight and narrow. Once Alvin made his decision to serve the Lord, Pastor Pile took the responsibility to mentor and disciple him in the ways of the faith.[167] To help him grow as a Christian, Pastor Pile involved Alvin in the church fellowship, helped him to study the Bible and encouraged him to pray for victory over his personal sins. This trinity of prayer, Bible study and fellowship under the mentorship of Pastor Pile was central to

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[165] York, Sergeant York, 146.
[166] York, *Sergeant York,* 144, 147.
[167] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (hereafter WBA), 6.

Alvin's new found faith. He embraced the idea that it was not enough to "get saved," but it was also necessary to follow up this decision with works that furthered the Gospel. In just a few months, Alvin was transformed from a drunkard, brawler and malcontent to a leader in the church, a Sunday school teacher, choir leader and a respected man in the community.

As with anyone with a new lease on life, nevertheless, Alvin found old habits difficult to break. He had developed a taste for alcohol, smoking, and the thrill of fighting, cussing and gambling. When the weekends came around, the temptation to revert to his old pattern of living was intense, "Sometimes Everett or Marion or some of the other boys would drop around and tell me they were putting on another party and invite me to join them. Then it was that I was most sorely tempted. I prayed most awful hard and got a good hold on myself and didn't go." Alvin refused to "backslide," and found that "Each time I refused, it was so much easier next time; and every day it became easier. In a few months I got them there bad things out of my mind."[168]

This time of struggle with personal sins was arguably the most significant point of his life. Resisting the old patterns demonstrated considerable personal courage. Standing against peer-pressure, while choosing to do the right thing, built moral courage in Alvin's life.[169] Looking back, he summed up the struggle, "And that is the greatest victory I ever won. It's much harder to whip yourself than to whip the other fellow, I'm a-telling you, and I ought to know because I done both. It was much harder for me to win the great victory over myself than to win it over those German machine guns in the Argonne

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[168] York, Sergeant York, 146.
[169] Jeff O'Leary, *Brave Hearts Under Red Skies*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado, Cook Publishers; 2003), 91-95.

Forest. And I was able to do it because... God... showed me the light, and I done followed it."[170]

It was commonplace in York's day to think of character as a moral muscle that became stronger with exercise.[171] In this view, every time Alvin chose to do what was right, he developed additional character and moral courage. Using this line of reasoning, the courageous pattern in his private life allowed him to accomplish unimaginable feats in the heat of battle as an outward manifestation of his inward courage.[172] Legendary American Civil War General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain noted:

> We know not of the future, and cannot plan for it much. But we can hold our spirits and our bodies so pure and high, we may cherish such thoughts and such ideals, and dream such dreams of lofty purpose, that we can determine and know what manner of men we will be whenever and wherever the hour strikes, that calls to noble action. This predestination God has given us in charge. No man becomes suddenly different from his habit and cherished thought.[173]

About a year into his new faith, Alvin was concerned by the hypocrisy he saw in the church. The problem was his former weekend party mates. York's unrepentant friends attended Sunday worship services while not hesitating to become drunk on moonshine after church. York was not interested in bringing judgment upon them, but rather in finding a church where the congregation took serious what the Bible said about Christian living. About this time, Pastor Pile hosted a revival service led by circuit preachers from the Church of Christ in Christian Union (CCCU).

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[170] York, Sergeant York, 145.
[171] William J. Bennett, *The Book of Man: Who Are Men, Who Should Men Be, What Should Men Do?*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson; 2011).
[172] O'Leary, 91-95.
[173] Alice Turlock, *In the Hands of Providence*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press; 1992), 340.

The CCCU is a Protestant denomination formed during the American Civil War based in Ohio and Indiana. The founders sought to lead Christians away from divisive social and religious disputes and back to the Bible. Their concern was that the politicization of the pulpit over slavery as well as the heated and often counter-productive theological Calvinist - Arminian doctrinal debate of free-will vice election had no place in the church and that instead members ought to live their lives in grace and good will towards their fellow man. To join this denomination, people had to make a public confession of Jesus Christ, and accept the Bible as the inerrant Word of God.

The key tenet of CCCU that would have a cascading effect upon Alvin was its lack of formal church doctrine. The denomination upheld a literal interpretation and application of what the Bible proclaimed for pure living. Therefore, when it said, "Thou shalt not kill," that was it, as far as the CCCU believed, a Christian could not kill for any reason.[174]

The independent nature of the CCCU, and its "Sola Scriptura" Bible basics appealed to Pastor Pile. At the end of the revival, a CCCU congregation was established in Pall Mall, with Rosier Pile being elected to serve as it leader. In 1916, Pile oversaw the construction of a church facility on the north side of Pall Mall.[175] Alvin followed Pastor Pile's lead and also joined this new CCCU congregation, becoming the "Second Elder," in effect the assistant pastor of the church. What appealed to Alvin about the CCCU was that it required its members to pursue clean living and therefore would not tolerate the open hypocrisy of its members. In York's words: "A man can't [gamble,

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[174] Sam L. Rogers, *Religious Bodies 1916: Part II Separate Denominations History, Description and Statistics*, (Washington, DC., Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census; 1919), 201-207.
[175] Perry, 42-45.

drink nor swear] and belong to our church. He just can't be a Christian on Sundays. He's got to live up to it all the time."[176] As the church's second elder, Alvin "worked harder than even... read the Bible.... led the singing in the church, and... helped in the Sunday school."[177] To reach the area's youth, Alvin led Sunday afternoon singing lessons. After singing, the young people would head off for an afternoon swim in the Wolf River or a game of marbles.[178] So strong did Alvin grow in his faith that he was called upon to preach sermons when Pastor Pile was absent.[179] To Alvin's delight, the Williams Family also joined the CCCU, which gave him opportunities to see Gracie.[180]

Alvin was falling in love with Gracie Williams. His frequent work in the church brought them together often, "I am a-tellin you there was somethin' grand about her, the way she talked in that quiet voice of hers that sometimes got shaky, she was that shy, and the way she looked at you with those big blue eyes as though she was jes trying to see inside of you and help you be good. I jes wanted to be near her and talk to her."[181] She enjoyed practicing singing with Alvin after church on Sunday afternoons. Gracie too found herself attracted to Alvin.[182]

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[176] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.
[177] York, *Sergeant York*, 147.
[178] Cowan, 208-209.
[179] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 5-7; Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976.
[180] Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976, 1-2, 23-25; Perry, 42-44.
[181] York, *Sergeant York*, 148.
[182] Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976; Samuel Kincaid Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company; 1922), 208-210.

Now that he was a practicing Christian, Alvin hoped that Mr. Williams would not prevent him from courting Gracie.[183] Virgil Pile, one of York's neighbors's, observed, "Frank Williams looked on the young buckaroos' wildness askance and was inclined to doubt the parlance of his later religious convictions."[184] Mr. Williams' opposition was rooted in several concerns. First, he wanted to see if Alvin's new found faith was enduring. Secondly, he had doubts that Alvin would be able to provide for a wife. As a hillside "patch" farmer, working the rocky soil, Alvin was barely able to provide for his family. The only way they could overcome this was to augment the income with hunting, blacksmithing and hiring out for other work. But, even this was often not enough to pay the bills. With these concerns Mr. Williams would not allow Alvin to openly court Gracie.[185]

> Her parents were agin me. I couldn't blame them nohow. But I wasn't in love with them at that time, I was in love with Gracie, and we managed to steal meetings, and nobody but us knowed much about them nohow. There was a long winding lane between our homes. It was lined with big shady trees. And there was wild honeysuckle there. And, best of all, it sorter dipped out of sight between the two hills. It was sorter made for us to meet in. So of an evening Gracie would come along this way to get the cows for milking, and I most awful sudden found out there were a heap of squirrels along that old lane. So I would tote the old muzzle-loader and go hunting down that way. I don't recollect getting many squirrels. But I kinder used to always go back there every evening.

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[183] York, 148-152.
[184] Interview with Virgil Pile by Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.
[185] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 7-8.

Alvin's friend Marion Lephew was courting Gracie's older sister Maudie and while at the William's house, he would pass messages from Alvin to Gracie.[186] Gracie and Alvin would also leave notes for each other in an old fence post where she tended cows.[187] Their relationship grew steadily until June 1917 when Gracie accepted his marriage proposal. Alvin nervously sought her father's consent and found Mr. Williams in the fields hoeing potatoes. He slowly approached him and said, "[Gracie and me]... decided to get married." Mr. Williams paused, and answered, "Well, she don't need to marry nobody, but if she's going to marry, I'd as soon she marry you as anybody." [188] Everything seemed to be going his way, even finding a job paying $1.65 for ten hours work a day helping to build a road to Pall Mall.[189] This road that he helped to build would later be named the Sgt York Highway.

Alvin's world would soon be turned upside down. In April 1917, the United States declared war on Imperial Germany. Events in Europe over the previous three years seemed so distant and unrelated to Alvin and his life in the valley.[190] The death and destruction along the Western Front was something that the locals knew very little about. But, comparing it as a dark cloud that gradually became impossible to ignore, York sensed that things were changing not only for his nation, but his valley as well once news

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[186] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, 8 May 1940, document B00374, 2880, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (hereafter WBA), 8.
[187] Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976; Samuel Kincaid Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company; 1922), 215-216.
[188] Gracie Williams York, *The Reminisces of Mrs. Alvin 'Sergeant' York*, Tennessee Regional Oral History Collection, Part I, Number 8, 1976, 23; Alvin York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, (New York, Doubleday; 1928), 150-152.
[189] Cowan, 220.
[190] Cowan, 218-219.

of President Wilson's declaration of war reached them. Alvin tried to ignore the gathering storm in 1917 by focusing on his work and courting Gracie, but this changed when he received a red card in the mail from the federal government directing him to register for the draft.

The draft registration card filled Alvin with confusion over how to reconcile the demands of his government with those of the Bible. The dilemma was deeper than a religious conflict for him. His ancestors were patriotic people, even fighting on the side on the Union during the American Civil War when the rest of Tennessee threw its lot in with the Confederacy. For this, they paid a high price at the hands of Confederate renegades and bandits during that war, with several of Alvin's relatives being killed. There was no question of Alvin serving his nation. The issue was how to do this while reconciling his deeply held convictions of "Thou shalt not kill" with "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." In the summer of 1917, he spent hours in prayer and poured himself into the Bible seeking an answer to the dilemma. Of this, Alvin wrote:

> I wanted to follow both. But I couldn't. They were opposite. And I couldn't reconcile them nohow in my soul. I wanted to do what was right. I wanted to be a good Christian and a good American too. I had always figured that the two were sort of connected. And now I was beginning to find out that they were kinder opposed to each other. If I went away to war and fought and killed, according to my reading of the Bible, I weren't a good Christian, And if I didn't go to war and do these things, according to Uncle Sam, I weren't a good American.[191]

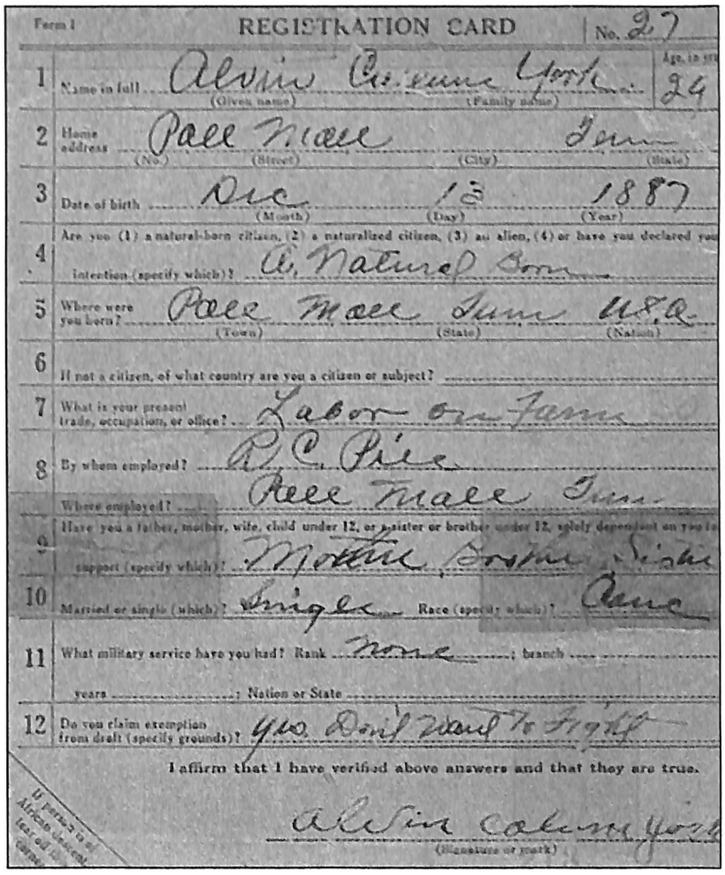
Alvin's conflict was a centuries old debate of a Christian taking up arms in defense of his land. For most American Christians, this was never a serious obstacle. However, the CCCU, and its back to the Bible approach posed a dilemma. That is, when

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[191] York, 155.

he read, "Thou shalt not kill," that ruled out killing in any form and for any reason. The CCCU was not a dogmatic denomination, and left interpretation of to the individual believer. Their focus was on man's sinful condition and need for the Savior Jesus for redemption.

Alvin turned to his spiritual mentor, Pastor Pile, for guidance. Ironically, it was Pile who delivered York his draft notice, while he was working with a crew on building the new highway.[192] As the proprietor of the local store, Pile also operated the town's post office. In this capacity, the Federal Government directed him to serve as the draft registrar for Pall Mall. Pile was the right man for Alvin to confer with for advice. Pastor Pile encouraged him to register for the draft as the government ordered, but to request exemption as a conscientious objector for religious reasons. With that advice, York filed his draft registration card in June 1917.



Form 1 REGISTRATION CARD No. 27

1 Name in full: Alvin Cowan York (Given name) (Family name) Age in years: 24

2 Home address: Pall Mall (No.) (Street) Tenn (City) (State)

3 Date of birth: Dec (Month) 13 (Day) 1887 (Year)

4 Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? U. Natural Born

5 Where were you born? Pall Mall (Town) Tenn (State) U.S.A. (Nation)

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? Labor on Farm

8 By whom employed? R. C. Pile

Where employed? Pall Mall Tenn

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? Mother Brother Sister

10 Married or single (which)? Single Race (specify which)? White

11 What military service have you had? Rank None; branch

years; Nation or State

12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? Yes Don't Want To Fight

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Alvin Cowan York

(Signature or mark)

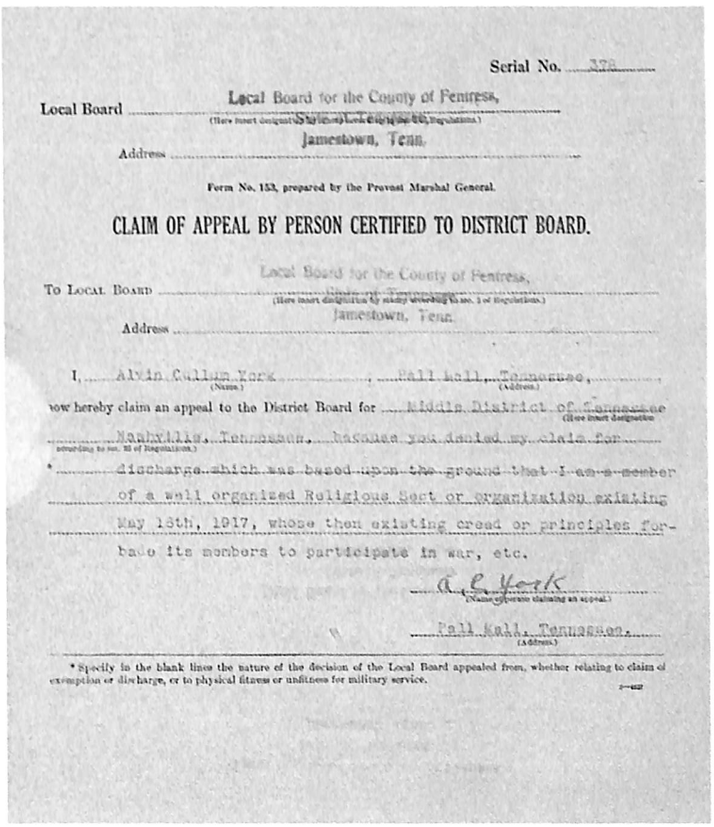
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[192] Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse Lasky, Sergeant York notes, 8 May 1940, WBA.

On the bottom it, on line 12, which states, "Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?" Alvin wrote, "Yes, Don't Want to Fight."[193]

As Alvin's words on his draft card for exemption were inadequate, the Fentress County Draft Board refused his first request for exemption. The county draft board summoned Alvin to Jamestown for a physical exam on 28 August 1917 to ascertain whether he was fit for duty.

Weighing in at 165 pounds and just above six feet tall, Alvin York was certified as physically qualified for military service by a family friend, Dr. W.E. Mullinix (DDS) and Dr. J.N. Chism (MD).[194]



Serial No. 372

Local Board Local Board for the County of Fentress,
(Here insert designation of local board according to sec. 1 of Regulations.)
Jamestown, Tenn.

Address

Form No. 153, prepared by the Provost Marshal General.

CLAIM OF APPEAL BY PERSON CERTIFIED TO DISTRICT BOARD.

To Local Board Local Board for the County of Fentress,
(Here insert designation of local board according to sec. 1 of Regulations.)
Jamestown, Tenn.

Address

I, Alvin Cullum York (Name.), Pall Mall, Tennessee, (Address.),

now hereby claim an appeal to the District Board for Middle District of Tennessee (Here insert designation according to sec. 32 of Regulations.) Nashville, Tennessee, because you denied my claim for

* discharge which was based upon the ground that I am a member of a well organized Religious Sect or organization existing May 16th, 1917, whose then existing creed or principles forbade its members to participate in war, etc.

A. C. York (Name of person claiming an appeal.)

Pall Mall, Tennessee, (Address.)

* Specify in the blank lines the nature of the decision of the Local Board appealed from, whether relating to claim of exemption or discharge, or to physical fitness or unfitness for military service.

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[193] Skeyhill, *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters,* 150; Alvin C. York Draft Registration Card, York File, National Archives; Southeast - Atlanta, Ellenwood, Georgia.

[194] There are two Physical Examination Forms in York's Military Service Packet, a second, typed one states that he was 170 pounds. This second card was filed in after the Fentress County Board improperly filled in the first card. Alvin Cullum York Physical Examination Form Number 14, 28 August 1917, in pursuant to Selective Service Act of 18 May 1917, US War Department.

formalize his request for exemption.[195] Assisted by Pastor Pile, Alvin filed US Form 153 with the Fentress County Draft Board, York wrote;

> I hereby respectfully claim discharge from selective draft on the following ground, that I am a member of a well recognized sect or organization, organized and existing May 18, 1917, whose then existing creed or principles forbade its members to participate in war in any form and whose religious principles are against war or participation therein in accordance with the creed or principles of said well recognized religious sect or organization...[196]

The Draft Board's reply to his request was, "Denied, because we do not think The Church of Christ in Christian Union is a well-recognized religious sect, etc. Also, we understand it has no especial creed except the Bible, which its members more or less interpret for themselves, and some do not dis-believe in war at least there is nothing forbidding them to participate."[197] One of the draft board members, Dr. Mullinix, commented on York during this process, saying, "He didn't object to going to war, but he did object on account of his religion... He just filed his objection with the board. I think Rosier Pile fixed that up. [But] he didn't discuss his objections before the board."[198]

Alvin thought that the board would decide in his favor, but when it did not, his world spun out of control: "I was bothered more than ever. I done done what I thought was right. I followed God, so I thought, even against the judgment of my country... I couldn't accept the written word of man against the written command of God. So I

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[195] Alvin Cullum York, Card Number 218, Serial Number 378, Docket of Local Board of Fentress County, Tennessee, Form 178, 28 August 1918, US War Department.
[196] Alvin C. York, "Claim of Appeal by Person Certified to District Board," Filed by Alvin York to the Jamestown Draft Board, US Army Service File, 1917; Alvin York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, (New York, Doubleday; 1928), 156.
[197] Alvin Cullum York appeal refused by Jamestown draft Board, Order Number 218, US Army Service File Alvin Cullum York, Card Number 218, Serial Number 378, Docket of Local Board of Fentress County, Tennessee, Form 178, 28 August 1918, War Department; Alvin York, *Sergeant York*, (New 157.
[198] Interview with Dr. Mullinix, recorded by Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.

appealed against their decision."[199] The appeal went to the State of Tennessee Draft Board. Alvin included two notarized affidavits, one from him and one from Pastor Pile, affirming his religious objection to war. Nevertheless, this appeal was also refused. In the end, Alvin submitted four appeals for exemption, all of which were refused by the draft boards.[200] Yet, there appears to be considerable inconsistency in what is written in relation to York's explanation of these requests and subsequent appeals for exemption from military service as a conscientious objector. Some of the existing literature makes much of this, but York's Military Service Record provides clarity in this matter.

The problem started with the April 26 1919 George Pattullo article in the *Saturday Evening Post*. In this, Pattullo states, "...York is the Second Elder in the Church of Christ in Christian Union... they are conscientious objectors. But York refused to ask exemption..."[201] Additionally, the first book written on York in 1922 says that York "had to make the plea for exemption, no one could make it for him. Alvin never made it."[202] The fact is that there are four requests from York on record for exemption. The confusion is that once York entered military service he submitted no further written appeals for exemption. Yet, without York's consent additional requests were submitted in April 1918 (discussed later), and these help clarify the contradictory message from the Pattullo article and Cowan book cited above. York considered his requests for exemption when he was a civilian separate from his time in the army. Pattullo and Cowan therefore

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[199] York, 156.
[200] Letter from Roy A. Hill, US Army Adjutant General's Office, to the Commanding General of the 82nd Infantry Division, April 1918, Alvin York Service File, Request for Conscientious Exemption from active military service.
[201] Pattullo3.
[202] Cowan, 222.

created a false impression that York simply swallowed his pacifism and went off to fight for his country. The truth is more complex and this remained an issue that he wrestled with even on the morning of his great combat heroism of 8 October 1918.

With his exemption denied, the only recourse remaining was to hope and pray that he would not be called up for the draft. This waiting was a time of mental and spiritual turmoil for York. He prayed for God's intervention to change the hearts of the draft board and had faith that God's Word would prevail over men. Alvin wrote of this: "I wuz sorter mussed up inside worser'n ever. I thought that the word of God would prevail against all of the laws of man and of nations."[203] Things came to a head on 10 November when he received his draft notice to report to Jamestown, Tennessee for duty on the 14th. He was filled with doubt and confusion. Had all of his prayers gone unheeded? Was his faith misplaced? Only two options remained, either report for duty or flee to the mountains, where he would be hunted as a fugitive.

Pastor Pile encouraged Alvin to put his faith in God and that God often does not reveal his plan for our lives in advance, saying, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." [204] With this, Pile assured Alvin that everything would turn out fine as long as he remained faithful to God's word. With no options remaining, York packed a bag and reported to Jamestown for military service on 14 November 1917.[205] Before leaving, he had a

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[203] York, 161.
[204] York, 156-165.
[205] Alvin Cullum York, National Army Enlistment and Assignment Card, November 1917, US Form 22-2, US War Department; Scripture is Isaiah 55, King James Version; Alvin York, *Sergeant York*, 164-167.

private meeting with Gracie where they promised devotion and reaffirmed their marriage plans upon his return from the army.[206]

York waited in Jamestown for several days until the required number of men arrived. After this, the men were transported to Oneida, Tennessee, and then by train to Camp Gordon, Georgia. He would remain at Camp Gordon for five months before shipping off to France. These five-months of Army training would prove woefully inadequate, but the men would ship off to war nonetheless.

After completing the mundane administration tasks of being integrated into the army at Camp Gordon, York was assigned to the 157th Depot Brigade, issued uniforms and military equipment and began basic training.[207] Many soldiers with Alvin knew that this was going to be the experience of a life time. With this in mind, he purchased a small red pocket sized book to record his thoughts of this adventure.[208] Naming it, "A history of places where I have been," this booklet would serve as the basis for the diary that he published ten years later.

The first morning as a soldier for Private York was a sign of how alien this new world was. As generations of soldiers have done since, his platoon was lined up between the barracks and ordered to "police-call" (clean up) dropped cigarette butts. As most non smokers still assert, York commented, "I thought that was pretty hard as I didn't smoke. But I did it just the same."[209] Coming from the hills of the Upper Cumberland Valley, the flat and pine woods of Camp Gordon, Georgia was a stark contrast to terrain he was

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[206] Cowan, 222-224.
[207] Alvin Cullum York, National Army Military Personal File, 14 November 1917, US Form 267, US War Department.
[208] Cowan, 227.
[209] Cowan, 222-224.

accustomed to. Additionally, he was working with a strange mixture of people and ethnic groups from across the United States. This included immigrants from virtually every corner of Europe, many of whom could not speak a word of English. Until things made sense to him, Alvin determined that the greater part of valor would be to keep a low profile. This would not be too difficult as the training schedule provided little free time. Additionally, he shared little in common with his fellow draftees, especially on their respective views of war. This made things awkward and with this in mind, Alvin wrote,

> I jes went to that old camp and said nothing. I did everything I was told to do. I never once disobeyed an order. I never once raised my voice in complaint, but I was sick at heart jes the same, heard the boys around me talking about what fun would be to go overseas and fight in the trenches I heard them telling of how many Germans they were going to kill if ever they got a chance. I heard all sorts of things about the glory of war. But I couldn't see it like they seed it no-how. I prayed and prayed that God would show me His blessed will.[210]

As it is the soldier's lot to complain about the menial tasks assigned them, York's willingness to quickly, and without protest, accomplish the tasks given him made him stand out to his leaders. Yet, York's struggle with reconciling military service with his beliefs

remained a burden. The concern was that he was being trained to be an infantryman, where bayonet practice and rifle skills were all focused on how best to kill another human being. Had he been assigned to a clerical position, or logistics, he could have reconciled his conflict of faith and fighting. But, being trained to kill kept this quandary ever before him.

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[210] York, 166-167.

He remained in this training unit for three months, enduring daily inspections, and learning how to march, salute, construct trenches, and an array of other diverse tasks.[211] Even so, the hardest part to inculcate to the new recruits was military bearing and discipline.[212] In those early days in the Army, York's training records show that he had a solid camp record, both on and off duty. As for character, his commander wrote that it was "Very Good." This was an excellent start for him, particularly after the completion of his basic training when he was reassigned to the 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd Division on 9 February 1918.[213]

The 82nd Division was also located on Camp Gordon, which made his move from the Depot Brigade seamless. The division had experienced considerable organizational challenges since its creation in August 1917.[214] It was to be Southern Division, comprised of men from Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama. In spite of this, the War Department could not keep up with the expanding requirements to create so many new divisions and ordered that the preponderance of the 82nd's soldier's fill under-strength Southern National Guard units so that these could be more quickly shipped to France.[215] Thus, the 82nd found itself a shell of a unit in late 1917 until sufficient draftees arrived to make it a viable organization again. A large number of these replacements were from New England and the Middle Atlantic States, who soon outnumbered the remaining

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[211] Major-General H.L. Scott, *US Army Manual of Infantry*, (Menasha, Wisconsin; 1917), 5-7.
[212] Scott Candler and Julian Lindsey, *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry*, (Atlanta, Georgia, Foote and Davies Company; 1920), 7.
[213] Alvin Cullum York, National Army Military Personal File, 14 November 1917, US Form 267, US War Department.
[214] ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War,* (Washington, D.C., American Battle Monuments Commission; 1944), 1.
[215] Scott Candler and Julian Lindsey, *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry*, (Atlanta, Georgia, Foote and Davies Company; 1920), 7-9; James Cooke, *The All-Americans At War,* (Westport, Connecticut, Praeger; 1999), 1-6.

southerners.[216] After a survey was done of the soldiers enrolled in the 82nd, it was discovered that nearly every state in the American Union, forty-six of the forty-eight, was represented in the division, thus giving it the moniker of the "All-American Division."[217]

The early days of the 82nd Division were daunting to say the least. After losing its initial allotment of soldiers to other units, it had to start training again with a variety of recruits from diverse regions and ethnicities. Adding to the challenge was that many of these soldiers were recent immigrants from Italy and Eastern Europe. The difficulty that the 82nd's officers faced was that: "...approximately twenty per cent, of these men were of foreign birth and several hundred were not citizens of the United States. Training was seriously handicapped by a substantial percentage of men who were unable to read, write and in some cases even speak English. These were those who could neither speak nor understand the common tongue."[218] This was illustrative of the situation that the entire army faced. Although American draftees came from some forty-six nationalities, the preponderance of the foreigners entering the United States Army were Italians, Slavs, Russian Jews, Greeks and Armenians.[219] In this strange and foreign world of the 82nd "All American" Division York would serve with for the next fifteen months.[220]

Such was the situation for the fledgling American Expeditionary Forces, of which, the commander, General John J. Pershing, commented, "Although the thirty-four

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[216] Frank Holden, *War Memories*, Athens, Georgia, Athens Book Company; 1922), 21-24.
[217] American Battle Monuments Commission, 82d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War, (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office; 1944),1-2; G. Edward Buxton, Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill; 1920), 1-3.
[218] Edward Buxton, Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill; 1920), 2.
[219] Nancy Ford, *Americans All: Foreign Born Soldiers in World War I*, (College Station, Texas, Texas A&M University Press; 2001), 80-88.
[220] Cowan, 229-330.

National Guard and National Army divisions that eventually came to France were, with two exceptions, organized in August and September 1917, they did not receive training as complete units from that time on. They were filled gradually and by piecemeal, weeks and even months usually elapsing before they reached full strength."[221] What Pershing did not grasp was even had the units trained as he wished prior to arriving in France, they still would not have been ready for war. British leaders, such as Lord Kitchener and Winston Churchill, astutely surmised "that it takes two years or more to make a soldier."[222] Regardless of what transpired, these American Doughboys would not enter combat fully ready.

The training tempo for the 82nd Division was ambitious and difficult to sustain. Due to America's lack of preparation, there was a shortage of virtually everything, especially weapons and armaments. While waiting for their rifles to arrive, the soldiers used wooden guns.[223] The men mockingly referred to these as the "Camp Gordon 1917 Model Rifle," which the base saw-mill churned out in the thousands.[224] As one of the battalion's officers wrote, "Up till now the men thought that we were going to beat the Boche with sticks and rocks, while the officers had a hazy idea that we were going to shoot a few with some kind of rifle."[225] Compounding this was that the equipment

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[221] John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the War*, Volume I, (New York, Frederick Stokes and Company; 1931), 380-381.
[222] Winston S. Churchill, *Memoirs of the Second World War*, (New York, Houghton-Mifflin Company; 1991).
[223] Buxton, 3.
[224] Candler and Lindsey, 7, 9.
[225] Charles M. Day, "The B that Stung: B Company on the War Path," (Minnesota Historic Society, War Records Commission; 1919), 2.

arrived piecemeal and sporadically, thereby throwing any training plan off-kilter on a recurrent basis.[226]

To overcome the challenge of building soldiers from disparate civilians, and lacking sufficient equipment, the division conducted training nearly every day and most evenings as well. The training week included instruction and drills Monday through Thursday, forced marches on Friday and day long inspections on Saturday. The average day began at 5:30am with the "agonizing strains of Reveille, blown by one of our new buglers," and ended at 7:00pm.[227] This helped to make up for the time lost teaching the non-English speaking immigrants the common tongue and enabled the rest of the unit to learn diverse military skills that ranged from the use of the bayonet to wearing a gas mask.[228] Additionally, Fort Gordon bristled with all sorts of special training schools, of which, one soldier wrote, "We had schools galore; schools for non-coms, schools for officers, primary schools, and schools for general information, at which the Captain, supported by an all-star cast of company officers, talked himself hoarse, and the company asleep on any subject that came into his mind, from Army Regulations to the care of the feet."[229]

York's regimental commander, Colonel Julian Lindsey, favored training composed of innumerable hours of marching in formation. Called the "Lindsay Special," the recruits learned to conduct close order drills and the manual of arms in addition to

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[226] George C. Marshal, *Memoires of My Services in the World War 1917-1918,* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company; 1976) 182-184.
[227] Herbert D.N. Jones, *History of C. Company, 328th Infantry,* (Hunter Collins, INC, Brooklyn, NY; 1919), 6.
[228] Day, 2.
[229] Herbert D.N. Jones, 7.

moving as a well-trained formation that would be the envy at any parade.[230] The 82nd Division was also ordered by its commander to be a "singing division." Believing that this helped to improve morale and build *esprit de corps*, he had copies of the *Official Camp Gordon Songbook* issued to the troops and demanded that they sing on the march, in the barracks and anywhere else appropriate. The songs included a selection of Christian hymns, patriotic choruses and a few contemporary hits, which included; "Pack Up Your Troubles," "Dixie," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and the "Star Spangled Banner."[231] The men generally did not throw themselves into these songs. But, as one soldier recalled, when-ever a senior officer appeared, they would burst into an enthusiastic chorus until they were well out of hearing range of said officer.[232]

Soldiers in the regiment lamented that the training schedule was too arduous, claiming that, "Colonel Lindsay lay awake at nights devising cute little schemes at midnight... inspections and the like to keep us from idleness during the hours from 10:00 P.M. till 5:50 A.M. Goodness, how we wanted to get to France and forget these inspections and reviews."[233] Some of York's officers echoed this sentiment saying that they over-trained on non-essential skills, but, being almost totally new to the army, and not understanding modern warfare, the leaders honestly did not know what they would face in France.[234] Few of the some two-million American soldiers that arrived in France

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[230] Candler and Lindsey, 9-10.
[231] *Official Camp Gordon Songbook*, (82nd Division, National Army, Camp Gordon, GA; 1917) ; Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 3.
[232] Herbert D.N. Jones, 6.
[233] Day, 2.
[234] Holden, 22-24.

were adequately trained for the realities of the Western Front.[235] This training deficit was exacerbated by contradictory messages that the soldiers were given from "expert" French and British instruction. One soldier in York's regiment wrote, "...foreign instructors arrived on the scene, each to show us the only way to win the war. The French swore by the hand-grenade and the Chauchat [light machinegun], the British swore by the bayonet, and we swore by... well, anyway, we swore and worked a little harder."[236]

York was assigned to G Company, 328th Infantry Regiment. The leadership was a mix of diverse personalities and leadership styles. The regimental commander Colonel Julian R. Lindsey, was a professional soldier who poured his soul into the unit to make it the best it could be. Lindsey was a devout Baptist and an 1892 graduate of West Point, who served in Cuba, China and the Philippines. As a cavalryman, Lindsey gained fame in 1914 as one of the US Army's best polo players.[237] With a wealth of military experience, Lindsey was the force behind the almost impossible training schedule, but like a bull elephant on the African Savannah, he expected results and would not take no for an answer and was unmerciful to weak leaders. York's battalion commander was Major G. Edward Buxton, from Rhode Island, a Harvard graduate with a sharp, intellectual mind, and fatherly approach to his men. Buxton was the first New Englander who York met and he was pleased to hear that he was also a dedicated Christian.[238] Hearing the major speak of Christianity, York was conflicted as to how Buxton could

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[235] John Terraine, *To Win a War,* (London, Papermac; 1978), 156; Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War,* (Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press; 2007), 42.
[236] Herbert D.N. Jones, 7.
[237] "How Polo Ponies Should be Ridden," *The New York Times*, 26 July 1914.
[238] Gonzalo Edward "Ned" Buxton, Jr., May 13, 1880 To March 15, 1949, available online at the following website; http://www.Nogreatercalling.Blogspot.Com (accessed 15 October 2011).

reconcile his faith with military service and war. York reflected, "He was a very good man, but at that time I was most troubled for his soul. I disliked to think that such a good man as he appeared to be would be willing to go to war and lead other men to fight, I couldn't understand how he could sorter square war and killing with his professed religious beliefs."[239] Knowing that Major Buxton was a Christian gave Alvin a glimmer of hope that he may find a sympathetic ear in regards to his religious views against war.

The company commander was Captain E.C.B. Danforth was a tall Harvard educated Georgian, whom York thought was tall and fit as a Hickory pole.[240] Danforth had the hometown advantage as he was just not from Georgia, but from Augusta, just outside the gates of Camp Gordon.[241] York's platoon leader was Lieutenant Kirby Pelot Stewart, an energetic and spirited young officer from Lake City, Florida. The Platoon Sergeant was Harry M. Parsons who hailed from Brooklyn. Parsons was a big-man, had dark hair and blue eyes and an upbeat and outgoing personality. Parsons had a heavy New York City accent, which was referred to "a distinct Bowery brogue."[242] Even so, he was fierce when antagonized and someone the soldiers learned not to cross. He mixed well with the soldiers and enjoyed joking and singing with them to keep up their spirits both in the barracks and during the long forced marches. In civilian life, Parsons was a Vaudeville actor and made good use of this skill to earn the respect of the men. Parsons would prove to be a positive force for York and a stalwart combat leader.[243]

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[239] York, 169.
[240] Skeyhill, 181.
[241] Cowan, 241-243; York, 31, 168-171.
[242] Letter from Major J. M. Tillman to Jesse Lasky, 5 November 1940, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA.
[243] York, 186; Skeyhill, 182.

York's platoon "was made up of Greeks, Slavs, Swedes, Jews, Irish, Germans, and Italians."[244] Describing this diverse group of ethnicities, Alvin wrote,

> So there they put me by some Greeks and Italians to sleep. Well, I couldn't understand them and they couldn't understand me... I had never had nothing to do no-how with foreigners before. When I first heard them talk I kinder thought they were angry with each other; they seemed to talk so fast and loud. I couldn't pronounce their names nohow. There was a great big Pole whose name was Private Feodor Sok. That was easy. We jes called him Sok. There was another, Private Maryan E. Dymowski. I never could get the straight of that nohow. And then there was Private Joe Konotski. I couldn't do much with that either. And there was Private Mario Muzzi and Michael Saccina. These are only a few of the foreigners we done had in my platoon. But they kinder give some idea of what a mixed-up gang we had in the All-American Division...[245]

In the platoon, the men tended to gravitated into regional or ethnic groupings, especially in the cases of the Italians, Poles and Irish. This tribalization compounded Alvin's alienation. It was hard enough for him to fit in, as he was an odd addition to the unit being a Tennessee mountain-man, the tallest of the bunch, who had no experience in mixing with other ethnic groupings.[246] Combine this with his Christian faith and anti-war views as a conscientious objector and this made a recipe for disaster. Fortunately for him, his platoon had not yet heard of his anti-war views. Once word got out, he knew that life would only become worse for him, as men with such beliefs were considered cowards and shirkers by the draftees.[247]

Adding to this loneliness, Alvin felt the urge to fall back into his old sins. This is something glossed over in most of the literature available on York. Under pressure from his platoon mates to fit in, the lure to join the men in heading to down-town Augusta to

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[244] Harry Parsons, affidavit in Alvin York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, (New York, Doubleday; 1928), 240.
[245] York, 180-182.
[246] York, 179-181.
[247] Skeyhill, 157-158; Noah Leatherman, *Diary*, (Rosenort, Manitoba, Prairie View Press; 1973), 1-9.

party and chase women was intense. The temptation was particularly acute in that he was far from home and away from the accountability of his church, mom and pastor. This was perhaps the lowest ebb in Alvin's short military career as he felt alienated and homesick in this environment and sought peace by studying the Bible and in prayer.[248]

His faith enabled him to pass this test of his values, and no doubt that his life experiences had prepared him for this moment as well. Although he was not well-traveled by 1917, his experiences in the Blind Tigers helped him to face pressure, and not to be intimidated by those around him. York had seen much of the world between his humble home in Pall Mall and the wild bars on the Kentucky border. Although wrestling with temptation, he vowed to maintain a professional outlook and to obey every order given him without a complaint. This trait earned Alvin praise from Captain Danforth, who said that "he made a good soldier, being willing and quick to pick up work and obeying all orders."[249] Nevertheless, in early 1917, Alvin determined to seek an opportunity to share his concerns of a Christian fighting in war with the unit leaders.[250]

As Alvin settled into camp routine, he found that there were opportunities to meet other believers. He discovered that there were numerous Bible studies conducted on Camp Gordon, in which he eagerly participated.[251] The most encouraging event for him, however, was befriending Private Murray Savage in his Platoon. From East Bloomfield,

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[248] Cowan, 229-333.
[249] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.
[250] Skeyhill, 157-160.
[251] *Souvenir of Camp Gordon, Atlanta, Georgia*, (Byrd Printing Company, Atlanta, Georgia; 1917).

New York, Savage, although not a conscientious objector, shared York's Christian faith. Being like-minded, the two became friends. [252]

While waiting for an opportunity to see if his leaders would be sympathetic to his objection to fighting, Alvin's regiment finally was issued the M1917 U.S. Enfield "Eddystone" Rifle in March 1918.[253] These rifles, covered in grease, arrived in large boxes. Alvin was horrified to see this, understanding how critical it was to always keep one's rifle clean. After cleaning the weapons, they marched to the Divisional Rifle Range at Norcross, Ga.[254] Having soldiers proficient in shooting their rifles is always imperative in a modern army, but it was the premier soldier skill for the commander of all American forces in Europe, General John "Blackjack" Pershing. Pershing's idea was that as soon as large numbers of American rifleman were put into the lines, they would, with élan and audacity, break the stalemate of the Western Front trench warfare.[255] Because of this emphasis of marksmanship, the judgment cast upon a soldier was often rooted in how good a shot he was. Here, Alvin would find his redemption.[256]

Since the division's rifle range was in an isolated location, each battalion would occupy this area and do nothing but shoot for an entire week.[257] When his unit had its first go at the rifle range, York watched in horror and amusement as "Them-there Greeks and Italians and Poles and New York Jews and some of the boys from the big cities

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[252] Skeyhill, 184.
[253] Bruce N. Canfield, *U.S. Infantry Weapons of the First World War,* (Lincoln, Rhode Island, Andrew Mowbray Publishers; 2000), 76-80.
[254] Buxton, 1-12; Cowan, 230.
[255] Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War,* (Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press; 2007), 30-43; B.H. Liddell Hart, *Reputations Ten Years After,* (Boston, Little, Brown and Company; 1928), 145, 270-275, 278-284, 306-313; Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, Vol., I, 150-156.
[256] Skeyhill, 159.
[257] Candler and Lindsey, 11; Buxton, 1-12.

hadn't been used to handling guns. Some of them didn't even know how to load them, and when they fired they not only missed the targets, they missed the backgrounds on which the targets were fixed. They missed everything but the sky." When York's turn to shoot came, his routine of wetting his front site with his thumb before shooting, "to reduce halation" and glare caused some laughter, yet, this was forgiven when he proved to be among the best shot in his unit.[258] This caught the attention of his officers, who used him to train his platoon on how to shoot.[259]

Being introduced to the rifle that he would carry to France to kill Germans brought York's dilemma back to life. Recognized by his officers as their best marksman, he at long last nervously approached his company commander, Captain Danforth. York told him that although he endeavored to be a good soldier, he had reservations about killing his fellow man. He added that he had "prayed and prayed" but could not come to a resolution on the matter. Interestingly, York said that he would remain a soldier if he was ordered, but explained that his denomination was opposed to war and that killing would be a grievous transgression for him. [260]

Danforth listened patiently to York's concerns and told him that there were other conscientious objectors on Camp Gordon, but that most of these were fakes trying to get out of military service.[261] Unlike these, Danforth knew that York was sincere in his

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[258] Lasky, I Blow My Own Horn, 258.
[259] York, 190; Cowan, 242-244.
[260] York, 168.
[261] There are accounts of citizens suddenly getting religious upon the arrival of a draft card from the U.S. Government. An example is published in Noah Leatherman, *Diary*, (Rosenort, Manitoba, Prairie View Press; 1973). He was not active in any church, or an official objector until the United States drafted him in 1917. Noah Leatherman's *Diary* is a difficult read as it is hard to grasp the author's refusal to do any work in his sudden conscientious objector views. His conversion coinciding with being drafted, in addition to wanting to be idle caused him to be physically abused by his guards. It is such dubious behavior that

opposition to war. He promised to discuss the matter with Major Buxton, and promised York a "square deal." Based upon Alvin's approach of not resorting to threats and ultimatums, he gained Danforth's empathy. This was certainly helped by the fact that York had a reputation of being a hard working soldier.[262]

Later that week, Danforth escorted York to Major Buxton's sparse quarters. Alvin carried his Bible along so that he could go to the source of his faith in the discourse. Although Major Buxton had a friendly demeanor, and was an outspoken Christian, York was not sure what to expect. He knew that the Army had an institutional bias against conscientious objectors, and his cause was certainly not helped by those who were using religion as a pretense to escape the war. Furthermore, with such a rigorous schedule, York could not expect either Buxton or Danforth to invest time in him as there was none to spare with the intense training schedule.

Much to York's relief, Buxton immediately put him at ease by welcoming him to discuss the matter informally as fellow Christians. York recollected: "The major was very friendly-like; he always was with us boys. He told us to sit down. He said he didn't want to discuss this question as a battalion commander discussing it with an officer and a private. He wanted us to discuss it as three American citizens interested in a common

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caused life-long objectors great difficulty in trying to get released from military service as the Army had difficulty shifting the chaff from the wheat. However, such sudden enlightenment is not unusual in a nation's experience. The author of this dissertation eye-witnessed in 1990 several American soldiers suddenly claiming exemption based upon their religious convictions when our unit in Nurnberg, Germany was alerted to deploy to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Shield. None of these men were known as practicing Christians, nor active in the base chapel and ironically were volunteers, who freely joined the Army during the Cold War.

[262] Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival,* Washington, DC, 1929, 9-12; York, 168-169; Cowan, 240-242.

cause. He said he respected any honest religious conviction and would be glad to discuss things as man to man."[263]

Displaying an incredible grasp of the Bible, both Danforth and Buxton walked through the Bible to discuss verses that favored war, while York answered with verses that opposed war. The discourse lasted hours and Buxton later recalled that it remained civil and respectful.[264] Indeed, it was providential for York to have officers with sympathetic and well-informed Christian views who were willing to openly discuss their faith with him.[265] The pattern of the debate was like a page out of Augustine's writings with a compare and analysis of pro-war and anti-war verses. When Buxton read Luke 22:36 "...he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one," York replied with Matthew 5:39, "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other



Figure 3 - Major G. Edward Buxton (AHEC)

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[263] Skeyhill, 160-163; York, 169-170.
[264] Gonzalo Edward "Ned" Buxton, Jr., May 13, 1880 To March 15, 1949, available online at the following website; http://www.Nogreatercalling.Blogspot.Com (accessed 15 October 2011). The United States Army still praises the approach that these officers applied to Private York in modern Leadership Field Manuals. *Military Leadership*, Field Manual 22-100, Washington, DC, Department of the Army, July 1990, 26-27
[265] *Military Leadership*, Field Manual 22-100, Washington, DC, Department of the Army, July 1990, 26-27; *Army Leadership*, Field Manual 6-22, Washington, DC, Department of the Army, October 2006, 8-4, 8-5.

also." When Major Buxton reminded him that Jesus chased the money-changers out of the temple, York answered with John 18:36, "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight,...but now is my kingdom not from hence."[266]

York was impressed by the character of the meeting: "We didn't get annoyed or angry or even raise our voice. We jes examined the old Bible and whenever I would bring up a passage opposed to war, Major Buxton would bring up another which sorter favoured war. I believed the Lord was in that room. I seemed somehow to feel His presence there."[267] As the discussion progressed, Buxton explained that Jesus Christ delegated duties to the Christian in regards to earthly governments when he said, "...Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's," in addition to Saint Paul's admonition from Romans chapter 13, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."[268] These were important scriptures for York to ponder.

From this, Buxton transitioned to lay out Augustine's Just War arguments and then drew parallels between the German aggression, its atrocities against Belgium and the obligations of government to protect the liberties and freedoms of people. York was not initially convinced by the allegations of German abuses in Belgium, yet he understood

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[266] Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival,* Washington, DC, 1929, 9-12; York, 168-169; Pattullo, 4; York, 170-173.
[267] York, 171.
[268] Gospel of Matthew 22:21, King James Translation; Tom Skeyhill, *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters,* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, John C. Winston Company; 1930), 160-163.

that there were obligations for a Christian to "render unto Caesar" and in so doing, defend the defenseless. At that moment, Captain Danforth delivered the coup de grace by reading Ezekiel chapter 33;

> Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, and took not warning; his blood shall be upon him. But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul. But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.[269]

This scripture, with Buxton's logical presentation of the scriptures in support of the Just War concept and the tone of the discourse impacted York. York parted that evening saying that he would like time to think over all that was said. Major Buxton told him to take all the time that he needed, and inferred that if he could not come to terms with fighting, there was a possibility to transfer him into a non-combat function or to dismiss him entirely from the army.[270] With that, York returned to his duties, weighing what was discussed. Unfortunately, Cowan and Pattullo would have us believe that this meeting settled the matter for York. It did not. He still was unable to reconcile the clash

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[269] Pattullo, 4. Skeyhill, *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters,* 163-164. There is a conflict in the sources as to whom read this to York. The 1928 York/Skeyhill book credits Buxton with this. As Danforth was interviewed for Pattullo's article, it is more likely that he read Ezekiel 33.
[270] York, 174.

of ideas of whether to fight or not to fight due to the training schedule. He just did not have time to think. Additionally, it did not help that word had gotten out about his objection to military service, pitting some of his platoon mates against him. The two who were most troubled by York's religious views were Bernard (Bernie) Early and William Cutting (Cutting enlisted under an alias, his real name was Otis B. Merrithew).[271]

Early was a naturalized citizen hailing from Ireland, who worked as a bartender before entering the army in New Haven, Connecticut. Early liked to drink, curse, fight and going Absent Without Leave (AWOL). Cutting was Early's particular friend, and he shared the same interests. As part of his fictional persona that he created to match his assumed name, Cutting told the men that he was an iceman in Boston. The truth was he worked on farms.[272] The two were not unlike what Alvin was before his rediscovery of Christ on 1 January 1915. Neither Cutting nor Early knew of Alvin's chequered past and that he once fought and drank like the best of them. As far as they were concerned, York was a coward and they wanted him to know it.[273]

As York anticipated, his objection to war led to heated arguments in the barracks. During one of these verbal brawls, Cutting said: "York and... Early had fought over the subject of killing... York had continued on about the foolishness of war until Bernie threatened to blow his brains out and that had ended the argument."[274] A dark cloud settled over the platoon.

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[271] Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival,* Washington, DC, 1929, 9-11, 32-34.
[272] Skeyhill, Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters, 181-183.
[273] Robert Ellis Cahill, "America Needed a Hero," in *War Wonders,* Peabody, Massachusetts; 1984), 30-38.
[274] Tom Mahoney, *Sergeant Alvin York*, American Legion Magazine, 20 November 1968, 22, 45-46.

The consequence of Early and Cutting's hostility, combined with the intense training schedule was that York could not get off alone to pray and contemplate his dilemma. As a final recourse, he applied for and received ten days of leave (21-31 March 1918) to return to Pall Mall to prayerfully consider his decision in the quiet of the Cumberland Mountains.[275] He was thrilled to see his family, to attend his church and, of course, to speak with Gracie. He even helped lead a small revival service in Pall Mall where several people came forward to accept the Lord. But, despite this, a burden was upon him; what to do about the army.[276]

Alvin sought counsel from Pastor Pile, but, his advice merely added to Alvin's confusion, as the anti-war arguments did not reconcile Buxton's convincing arguments about obeying governments. Alvin headed up the lonely mountain with his hunting dogs to make his decision. After thirty-six hours of fasting and praying, a calm settled upon his tortured soul. Alvin said that he was visited by the presence of God, who filled him with a "...peace..., which passeth all understanding."[277] Gone was the doubt and he came down that mountain full of assurance, saying to his mother, "I am going to war with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon... I have received my assurance. I have received it from God himself-that it's right for me to go to war, and that as long as I believe in Him, not one hair of my head will be harmed."[278] With this confidence, York returned to Camp Gordon a new man and ready spiritually for what lay ahead.[279]

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[275] York, 173-174.
[276] York, 174-175.
[277] Interview with George Edward Buxton York, 28-29 May 2010 in Pall Mall, Tennessee
[278] Cowan, 168.
[279] Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival,* Washington, DC, 1929, 9-12.

Chapter 5 - Marching as to War

It was a quiet sector where they put new troops into training before sending them out to No Man's Land. The Greeks and Italians and all of the other boys done fairly well. They shore were turning out to be the bestest soldiers. I was often out on No Man's Land.
Alvin C. York

Alvin returned on 31 March 1918 to Camp Gordon just as his unit received orders to deploy to France. The division had a farewell parade on 4 April that was reviewed by Georgia Governor Hugh M. Dorsey and the widow of the celebrated Confederate Civil War General for whom the camp was named, John Brown Gordon. The next several weeks were dedicated to frantic deployment activities that included packing, issuing equipment, organizing movement routes, preparing rail and ship manifests, developing load plans, and having soldiers fill out stacks of pre-deployment documents that ranged from wills to financial allotments.[280] Adding to the confusion was an order from the War Department to, "...comb out alien enemies [Germans, Austrians, Turks or Bulgarians] and men unfit for service."[281] This created gaps in the regiment that were later filled by inadequately trained recruits.

Thus the odyssey of moving York's unit to France began. Unfortunately, none of the existing works on Alvin York discuss this movement to the ports, their arrival in England or even the training of the men in France. York mentions fragmentary pieces of this part of this story, while the biographers skip over this period, and thereby miss an

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[280] Candler and Lindsey, 11-12.
[281] Day, 3. The trigger for this late shuffling of personnel actually began with the division commander, who asked the War Department to reassign some 2,000 of his authorized number of 28,000 men as they spoke inadequate English (mostly Italians), were those who recently immigrated from Turkey, Bulgaria, Germany and Austria. The War Department rebuffed the division commander for this action, which was too late, only permitted him to release German and Austrian immigrants from the ranks. See James J. Cooke, *The All-Americas at War,* (Westport, Connecticut, Praeger Press; 1999), 21-25.

important part of the York story. It is fortuitous that York's division, regiment and battalion commanders took the time to write their memories. By piecing together these memoires, unit histories, York's diary and memories from men in his unit, we have a clear picture of what York experienced over the next several months. Surprisingly, this is the first endeavor to do this.

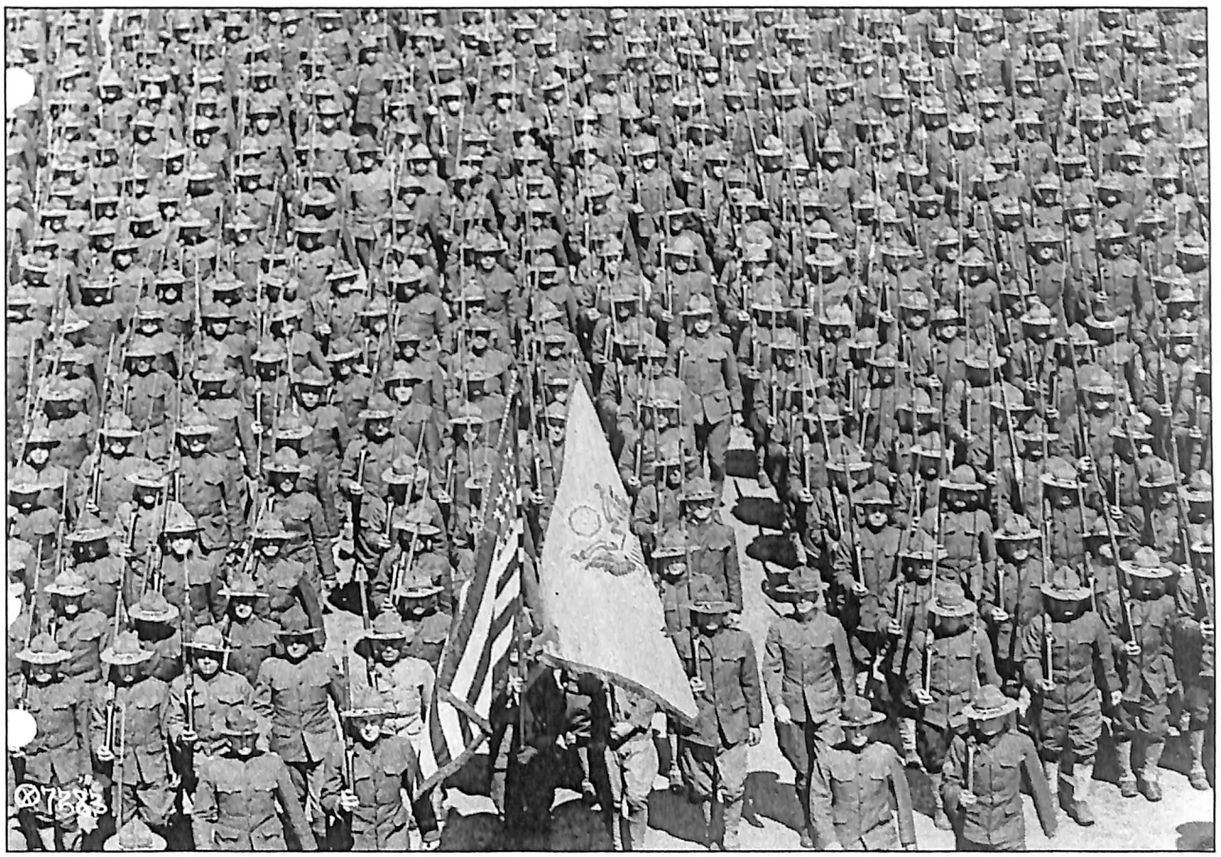


Figure 4 The 328th Infantry Regiment on parade at Camp Gordon in April 1918 (AHEC).

The movement of the 82nd Division from Camp Gordon to France began when elements of the division began travel on 10 April. York's 328th Infantry Regiment departed Camp Gordon on the 19th. The men marched in complete gear, with packs and rifles, to the nearby rail located at Chamblee, Georgia, where local soldiers in the

regiment were given a tearful farewell by family and friends.[282] The regiment spent two days on the train, arriving at Camp Upton, New York on 21 April. Although the conditions on the train were cramped, York was taking in the new experiences, being sustained by his enduring faith, praying;

> O God, in hope that sends the shining ray,
> Far down the future's broadening way;
> In peace that only Thou canst give;
> With Thee, O Master, let me live.[283]

The soldiers were cheered by American citizens whenever the train made a stop, with the largest welcome in New York City where there was "shouting, blowing whistles and tooting horns."[284] The soldiers remained at Camp Upton for nine days, until the ships were ready. While at Camp Upton, York and the men were put through endless inspections, marching, drills and issued more seemingly useless equipment and clothing "...to ensure that the cause of Democracy was satisfied."[285] The leaders foolishly went so far as to say that no time would be given off even for a large number of the men from New York City, which was less than an hour away. This was too much to bear for the Mid-Atlantic and New England soldiers, who were close to home and had not seen their families for some six months. In response, large groups went Absent Without Leave (AWOL).[286]

As most of the 328th's officers were southerners, and were close enough to their families at Camp Gordon to see them often, they did not anticipate that their Yankee men

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[282] Candler and Lindsey, 13.
[283] York, 191.
[284] Candler and Lindsey, 15.
[285] Day, 3; Herbert D.N. Jones, 7.
[286] Bryon W. Barker, *History of the Machine Gun Company 328 Infantry, 82nd Division*, (Worcester, Massachusetts, Belisle Printing and Publishing Company; 1919), 19.

would desire the same courtesy of seeing their families before going overseas. To stem the flow of AWOLs, the regiment eventually caught on and offered furloughs, but this was too little, too late. Most of the men returned although several hundred arrived at Camp Upton after the regiment had shipped out. These men were reprimanded and boarded later ships to catch up with the 328th in France. For many, it would be the last time that they would see their loved ones.[287]

York's regiment commenced rail movement to the Port of Boston late on 30 April, and boarded two Canadian ships of the Montreal based "Allan Line" during the early morning hours of 2:00-4:00am on 1 May 1918. The ships that the 328th boarded were the Steam Ship (SS) *Scandinavian*, which transported the 2nd Battalion (York's unit) and 3rd Battalion, while the SS *Grampian* transported the "1st Battalion, Regimental Headquarters, Machine Gun and Supply Companies."[288] The weather during the men's early morning departure was a cold light rain. Combined with the darkness, it matched many of the men's mood of "feeling gloomy and... dismal" on this final leg of their journey to going off to war.[289]

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[287] Holden, 31-35; Candler and Lindsey, 28-34.
[288] Both of these ships were used throughout the war to transport Canadian soldiers to the Western Front as well. Source: Canadian War Museum, Naval History: The Merchant Navy (1914-1918). Available online at the following website: www.warmuseum.ca/navalhistory (Accessed 21 October 2011); See also "The Allan Line / Montreal Ocean Steamship Company Ship List. Available online at the following website: http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/allan.html (Accessed 21 October 2011); Lindsey, 15.
[289] Holden, 31-35; Scott Candler and Julian Lindsey, 36.

As soon as boarding was completed, the *Scandinavian* and *Grampian* sailed to New York, where they remained until a convoy of sixteen ships was ready. The convoy began its journey across the Atlantic on 3 May 1918 and was escorted on the first leg of the passage by the Armored Cruiser USS *San Diego*, which was a veteran of the acclaimed Great White Fleet.[290] Veterans of the regiment commented on the sadness they felt as the Statue of Liberty faded into the horizon. Nonetheless, the men had troubles of their own, in addition to getting used to the sea, the cramped conditions were so tight that some in the regiment commented that "there wasn't enough room left in the ship for an extra shoe lace."[291]

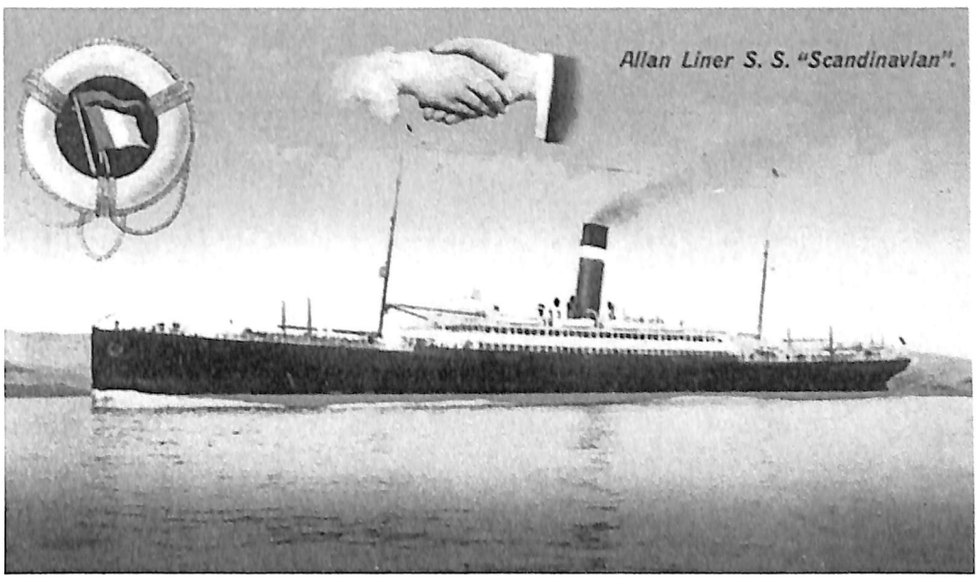


Figure 5 The SS Scandinavian, which transported York and his unit to Europe in 1918

[290] The USS San Diego was originally named "California," but as a subsequent act by Congress mandated that only battleships have state names, its name was changed to the San Diego. The USS San Diego was America's only major naval ship loss, sinking on 19 July 1918 off of New York by a suspected sea-mine laid by German U-Boat 156. George J. Albert, " The U.S.S. San Diego and the California Naval Militia" California Naval History, available online at the following website: http://www.militarymuseum.org/USSSanDiego.html

[291] Herbert D.N. Jones, *History of C. Company, 328th Infantry,* (Hunter Collins, INC, Brooklyn, NY; 1919), 7.

This was the first time that Alvin saw the ocean and sailed on a ship. The cramped quarters, combined with sea-sickness made the trip difficult for him,

> It was too much water for me. Like me, Mark Twain, whose parents come from Jimtown, was borned inland. And he never seed the open ocean until he growed up. And when he stood on the beach and seed it for the first time, his friends asked him what he thought of it, and he said, "It was a success" But when Mark said that he weren't on the ocean. He were on the shore. And when our old boat got away out and begun to pitch and toss I jes knowed Mark was wrong.[292]

The trip improved Alvin's opinion of his foreign troop mates, many of whom had only a few years before had crossed the Atlantic during their immigration to the United States, "The Greeks, Italians, and Poles, and New York Jews stood the trip right smart. That kinder impressed me. It sorter made up for their bad shooting. I sorter got to like them more."[293] During this sea voyage, York's regimental commander, Colonel Lindsay was promoted to Brigadier General, and given command of the 164 Infantry Brigade, which included both York's 328th Infantry Regiment and the 327th. Major Jewett was given command of the 328th temporarily until Colonel Hunter B. Nelson arrived on 26 June 1917.[294]

During the sea journey, the men maintained a busy schedule of training and lectures. As there was little room to spare on the ships, a training schedule was published when particular units would go to the deck to conduct boat-drills, physical exercise, or participate in a lecture on some topic of military importance.[295] During the long journey, the men experienced convoy zigzag operations whenever a suspected U-Boat was spotted, and had to sleep in their clothes with their life-belts on from time to time. The

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[292] York, 192.
[293] York, 192.
[294] Candler and Lindsey, 17.
[295] Holden, 31-35; Candler and Lindsey, 36-38.

interaction of the Doughboys with the ship's crew was interesting. A soldier in York's unit wrote that the ship was operated by the "cockiest gang of Britishers... They didn't get us and we couldn't 'compree' them. They compared us to the Canadians, of whom they had transported... and said that they came over singing and praying, but the bloody bloomin Americans didn't seem to care a darn and they came over gambling and cussing."[296] Other than spotting a few whales in the open sea, the trip across the Atlantic was uneventful. The highlight of the trip for Alvin was studying the Bible with Murray Savage, who was York's best friend in the army.[297]

When the convoy entered the "danger zone" near Ireland, where the risk of being attacked by a German U-Boat was the most likely, an escort of six fast moving British anti-submarine destroyers joined them, of which one of York said: "Remind one of a bunch of well-trained bird dogs trying to get wind of birds."[298] Finally, on 16 May, after a twelve day journey, the ships arrived at Liverpool, England. The soldiers spent the greater part of the day unloading the ships before marching to the Knotty Ash Rest Camp.[299] Alvin and his fellow soldiers learned that the army's idea of a rest camp belied its title. "We learned that we were to march a 'little way' to a 'rest camp.' Reader: take the 'little' out of way and the 'rest' out of camp and put the two together and you have the result... Oh Boy! Something doing every minute! The magic phrase 'Rest Camp' never fooled us again."[300] These had been active throughout the war, witnessing tens of thousands of men passing through, with the ultimate destination being the Western Front.

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[296] Day, 4.
[297] York, 272.
[298] Candler and Lindsey, 17.
[299] Alvin York refers to this as Camp Knotteash on page 193 of his diary.
[300] Herbert D.N. Jones, 10.

York and his men were now in the midst of the machines of war that was quickly moving them forward to face off with Germany.

The Knotty Ash Rest Camp was in eastern Liverpool, eight kilometers from the ships. To add insult to injury, this was no parade and the soldiers all carried added burdens.[301] In addition to their own excessive equipment and rifle, they also carried the equipment and rifles of the soldiers who did not return in time to board the ships, and an assortment of field desks, extra boxes of rations and the like. Soldiers in York's regiment wrote that although the residents of Liverpool were elated to see the Yanks. They were also perplexed by the vast quantities of equipment that the Americans hauled. Some of the soldiers even carried two rifles (that of an AWOL soldier left behind in New York). When asked by an Englishman why they carried two rifles, one of the Americans answered that "...we shot so fast that our rifles got too hot to handle and hence it was necessary to carry some extra pieces."[302]

The next day, 18 May, York's unit boarded a train for a 380 kilometer ride across England to another rest camp near the channel port of Southampton to prepare the men for the final leg of the journey to France. For soldiers recently completing two-weeks at sea, they found the scenic countryside awe-inspiring.[303] What Alvin saw of England impressed him: "The English countryside was...beautiful. It was sort of rolling-like and the parks and fields were so neat and tidy that it 'most looked as though they had special gardeners to look after every few acres of them."[304]

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[301] Candler and Lindsey, 17.
[302] Herbert D.N. Jones, 10.
[303] Scott Candler and Julian Lindsey, 16-18.
[304] York, 193-194.

The men were disgusted to learn that the Southampton Rest Camp was also nowhere near the railhead, and thus they undertook another long road march. The soldiers experienced the same revulsion to the Southampton Rest Camp as the Liverpool Knotty Ash Rest Camp. One soldier said, "The bird that named that "Rest Camp" would call hell an ice box... We got up very early the next morning and started doing a great many unnecessary things that we had no chance of finishing - just something to keep us busy."[305] While waiting transport to France at Southampton, the unit was officially welcomed by a British Officer, who gave every soldier in York's unit a letter from King George V which read, "Soldiers of the United States, the people of the British Isles welcome you on your way to take your stand beside the Armies of many Nations now fighting in the Old World the great battle for human freedom. The Allies will gain new heart & spirit in your company. I wish that I could shake the hand of each one of you & bid you God speed on your mission. Signed, George R. I."[306]

Despite the warm welcome by England and its monarch, York and his fellow soldiers were eager to get into the fight as, "We wanted to get into it and get it over." Their wish was not far from being fulfilled. Late on 20 May 1918, they moved to the Southampton port and boarded the channel transport Viper, arriving at Le Havre, France early on the 21st. During the trip across the English Channel, Alvin was again seasick, saying that it was like being on something "more like a bucking mule than a boat."[307]

After arriving in France, and wearing their M1911 Montana Campaign Hats, the 328th Regiment marched through Le Havre to the excited cheers and waves of the French

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[305] Day, 5.
[306] Holden, 31-35; Candler and Lindsey, 42-43.
[307] York, 194.

and to its final phase of training.[308] The pre-battle bravado of these green troops was dulled as a train full of battlefield casualties pulled up. The injured men were loaded onto ships for medical evacuation to England, giving the 328th a glimpse of the grim reality of war.[309]

The regiment remained in Le Havre briefly. The first order of business was to shed the unnecessary equipment issued at Camp Upton to lighten the load. The men were also finally issued gas masks and helmets. Training was given by British soldiers in the use of the gas mask, who informed the Americans that this little device would be their "best friend" and save their lives if used properly. Six-second drills were conducted over and over again until the men were able to get the masks on in that time, with the training culminating to a trip through the gas chamber.[310] Alvin wrote, "That brought the war a whole heap closer."[311] After this, the men deployed behind the British Fifth Army in the Amiens area of France, to serve both as a reserve in addition to receiving more combat training. Soon there would be ten American divisions near the British Fifth Army.[312]

The idea to station ten American Divisions in the rear of the British Fifth Army area was a compromise in supporting the British and French Armies. The German high command knew that the American Expeditionary Forces would ultimately give the allies

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[308] York, 193-195; Holden, 31-35.
[309] Candler and Lindsey, 21.
[310] Candler and Lindsey, 20-23; Holden, *War Memories*, 58-59.
[311] York, 195.
[312] Buxton, 11-12

a decisive quantitative advantage in soldiers and thereby end any chance of a German victory along the Western Front.[313] It was regarding this that Ludendorff said,

> "with the American entry into the war, the relative strengths would be more in [German] favor in the spring than in late summer... unless we had by then gained a great victory... Only a far reaching military success which would make it appear to the Entente powers that, even with the help of America, the continuation of the war offered no further prospects of success, would provide the possibility of rendering our embittered opponents really ready to make peace. This was the political aim of the Supreme Command in 1918.[314]

Time was of the essence for the Germans. After having secured victory against Russia in late 1917, they hurriedly transferred nearly one million men from the Eastern Front to France. Berlin hoped to deal the Allies a knockout blow before the Americans could stem the tide. This German attack destroyed the British Fifth Army, during *Operation Michael*, which was launched on 21 March 1918. Having the Americans with the 5th Army bolstered their line should another German offensive transpire in this sector. To compound the crisis of 1918, the French Army was close to collapse as well. This was in part due to the massive casualties it suffered during the 1916 Battle of Verdun, and their failed Chemin des Dames offensive in 1917, which triggered widespread mutinies across the front with soldiers refusing to attack any longer. It was in this dire situation, of weakened French and British Armies desperately trying to hold back the tenacious assaults of Germany that the Americans arrived.

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[313] Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914-1918*, (Arnold Publishing, London; 1997), 394.
[314] David Trask, *The AEF & Coalition War Making 1917-1918*, (Kansas, University of Kansas Press; 1993), 30, 43.

In the midst of the 1918 crisis, the French and British worked out an ambitious shipping plan to move the Americans to Europe faster than planned.[315] In the end, the German spring-summer offensives of 1918 failed with the Americans playing an important part in holding them at bay.[316] General Pershing's concept of operations was to regain control over all American forces in Europe once the crisis was over. Thanks to the Allies help, the independent American Expeditionary Army (AEF) would be ready for operations by September.

General Pershing's two volume work, *My Experiences in the World War* goes to great lengths to describe the strategic and operational challenges that he faced in getting an independent American Army into the field during this turbulent period of the war. This was no small matter in that the British and French demanded to use the Americans as replacements (amalgamation) for their depleted forces, while Pershing intended to create an independent American army. Through amalgamation, the British and French argued, the Americans would be in the fight faster than going to the trouble of standing-up a new national army. Indeed, their appeals for amalgamation made sense during the crisis of the German spring offensives as there was a real chance for German victory in the West.[317]

Still, Pershing and President Wilson remained committed to the idea of fielding an independent American army in France to keep the soldiers under American command and this would also increase Washington's influence in the conduct of the war.[318] The

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[315] Trask, 30, 75; Terraine, 69.
[316] John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the War*, Volume II, 211.
[317] Pershing, 391.
[318] Trask, 1-15.

decision for the United States to remain committed to establishing an American Army was perhaps the single most important decision shaping the American "soldier" experience in the Great War. In fact, it would shape the identity and collective memory of the "Doughboy," who served in the Great War. The memories would have been markedly different had the United States amalgamated its forces into the existing French and British force structure; serving under foreign officers. This consideration is detectable in most of the books written after the war, with it serving as the foundation for an American identity both for domestic and international audiences and shaped how the nation viewed itself not unlike how Vimy shaped the Canadian view.[319]

This part of the York saga is completely missing from the existing historiography; however, using unit histories from both American and British point of views, we attain an understanding of what occurred during this period. The British unit that trained York's regiment was the 66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division. While with the British, the Americans turned in their M1917 Eddystone Rifles for temporary use of the British .303 Lee-Enfield. The reason for this was that the British did not use or supply American standard 30.06 caliber ammunition M1917 Enfield. Therefore, the Americans used the British .303 Lee-Enfield while in the line with the Brits. Upon completion of this phase of the training, "The Lee-Enfield rifles... [would be] turned back to the British and the U.S. M1917 Rifle (Eddystone) [would be] reissued."

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[319] Candler and Lindsey, 21.

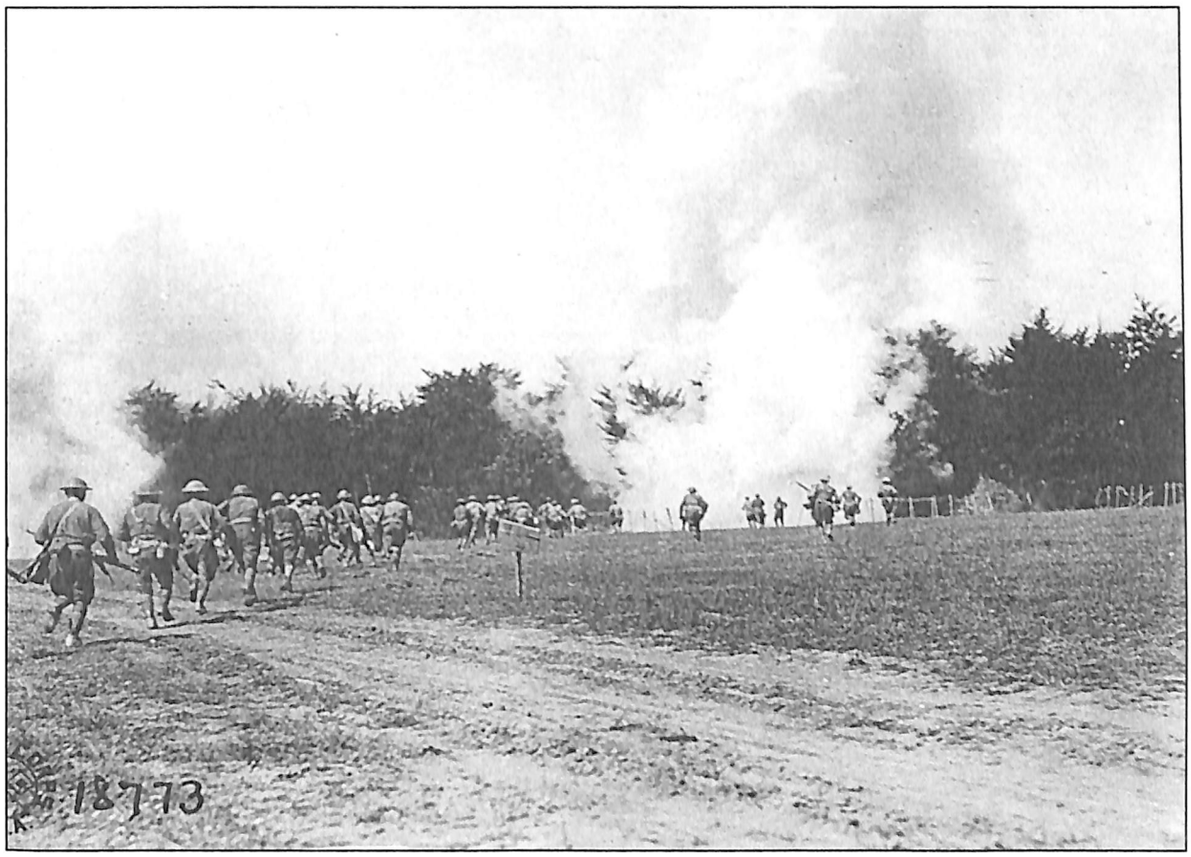


Figure 6 - The 82nd Division trains on how to breach a trench line under the experienced eyes of British trainers

The 328th regiment moved out of Le Havre on 22 May, "packed as tight as sardines in a box" in French troop trains labeled 40 hommes 8 Chevalier.[320] This caused much joking for the soldiers, of which York remarked, "One of our boys who was detailed to load the cars went to the Captain and said: 'Captain, I loaded the forty men all right, but if you put the eight horses in too they will shore trample the boys to death.'"[321] The regiment moved 160 kilometers east, to the French town of Eu, which is located in the Somme River Valley. From here, the regiment marched south some twenty kilometers across the countryside to billet in area villages. The 328th Regimental

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[320] Barker, 19.
[321] York, 195.

headquarters was centered at the village of Horcelaines, with its units set up in battalion training groups, under the supervision of British trainers.[322]

York's battalion was based out of the village of Floraville, where it trained hard, conducted frequent road marches, road movement and prepared to rotate through the trenches. The division commander directed that the units move and march to a different village every day to get reconditioned for combat after the sedentary conditions of weeks on ships.[323] During marching, the men were ordered to sing songs like "Dixie" and "The Yanks are Coming." Now these were sung with gusto and a source of national pride, to the interest of the nearby Brits, or admiring French girls.[324] During this period, most of the soldiers were billeted in barns, where they were introduced to the menace of lice (cooties). In this strange old world, the Americans shared a comical view of their French hosts, as the regimental history noted,

> All the 'easy methods to learn French' that had been bought in the States were brought out, and everyone started to try out his particular brand of "Parlez vouz," with surprisingly unsatisfactory results. We got on pretty good terms with "Vin Rouge" and "Vin Blanc." All the towns the Regiment had been billeted in were about the same, several centuries old and badly out of repair. The village "Vamp" ran the "Vin Rouge" stand, the mayor was the oldest and most disreputable looking citizen in the town and a man's wealth was judged by the size of his manure pile.[325]

York had respect for the British veterans, but generally did not like their "scant" rations. One of the officers wrote: "...with British NCOs, British equipment and British rations, we were in a fair way to become regular John Bulls. For the first two we had

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[322] Candler and Lindsey, 21.
[323] Skeyhill, 172-173.
[324] Skeyhill, 173.
[325] Candler and Lindsey, 23.

some respect, but as for the rations-well, give us gold fish and corn willie every time."[326] Nonetheless, the regiment benefitted from the many field schools that the British Expeditionary Forces had established in the Saint-Valery-sur-Somme training area that were specifically designed to prepare the Americans for combat. Under the guidance of the British 66th Division Commander, Major-General H. K. Bethell, the Americans learned how to operate the Lewis Gun, fight with the bayonet, fire the Vickers machine gun, fired on the rifle ranges, use hand grenades, navigate through wire entanglements, how to react to incoming artillery, the use of mortars and how to prevent death and injury from gas attacks. The enthusiasm in which the British soldiers threw themselves into the training was infectious to the Americans, who were to mimic their unique training methods with one of York's officers commenting: "The flash and pep they put into their drilling and games was refreshing."[327]

The American officers and senior NCOs also rotated through the British front-line trenches, where the division suffered its first combat fatalities. In the meantime, the men continued training under British tutelage, which improved their combat readiness. This was good for the men, as the unit was gradually becoming ready for action, as well as improving Alvin's opinion of his fellow platoon mates. After seeing them weather the Atlantic crossing, they improved too in their shooting (thanks to British instruction). York wrote, "The Greeks and Italians and Jews and Poles were improving. They had

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[326] Herbert D.N. Jones, 10.
[327] Holden, 58.

stayed continuously on the rifle range for a month or two, and got so they could do shooting. They were fairly good pals, too."[328]

This period of training brought in a series of senior officers eager to inspect the readiness of these Americans. The first to visit the men was the BEF Commander, Field Marshal Douglas Haig. His visit was to see how well the 66th British Division was doing as trainers and to take a look at American soldiers that he hoped he would keep in his command. Haig hoped that the Americans would undo the German gains of March and April and "redeem the lost battlefields of Picardy."[329] With this in mind, Haig knew how to win the hearts of the Doughboys. While inspecting American field kitchens, he inquired of the cooks if everything was in order, to which York recounts what a fellow Tennessean said to the Field Marshal, "No, everything is all wrong, most awfully all wrong there is no salt. The Field Marshal turned to the Quartermaster General, who was with him, and asked for an explanation. The Quartermaster said the two last salt ships were torpedoed and there was a shortage. The Field Marshal then instructed him to immediately send some salt to the American kitchen. That kinder tickled our boys."[330]

Haig's visit was followed two days later by Pershing, who evaluated the unit's combat readiness. This caused quite a bit of excitement in York's battalion, "We were anxious to make a right-smart impression on him, because we knowed if we did we would get up to the front-line trenches so much quicker, and our boys were jes rarin to

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[328] York, 194-195; ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War,* (Washington, D.C., American Battle Monuments Commission; 1944), 4.
[329] Buxton, 12.
[330] York, 195-196.

go."[331] After evaluating the unit's performance in various training scenarios, Pershing, gave the unit good marks and made plans to move it into the lines. Although York and his platoon were raring for getting into the war, he was philosophical about it, "Anyone who thinks that soldiering is jes goin' back in again and fightin, is jes plumb foolin' himself. Weeks passed and we never even seen a trench except the training ones. We never once heard the sound of guns. All we did was hike, and hike, and hike and then hike again. They shore kept us a-going hiking. It seemed as though they had sent us to France to kinder test out the strength of them-there American military shoes."[332]

After a month of being out of contact with their loved ones, the first of the unit's mail caught up with them in June, while training with the British. York longed to hear how things were back on the farm and with Gracie. During the time in France, many of the soldiers received "Dear John" letters from their girlfriends breaking off the relationship. Alvin would have none of that, and frequently wrote to Gracie, "I'm so glad to know that you have promised to be true to me until I come back... so please promise me that you will not go with one while I am in France... I am trusting to you to do what you said..."[333]

The division received marching orders to move out beginning 16 June for the French XXXII Corps sector east of Verdun, near where the American sector would be soon created.[334] The soldiers turned in their British rifles and gear, while retaining the British Tommy helmet and gas mask. Once again carrying their American M1917

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[331] Buxton, 12; ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 4.
[332] York, 196.
[333] "Back story information," Letter from Harry Chandlee to Jesse Lasky, 8 May 1940, WBA, 12.
[334] ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 4.

Eddystone Rifles, they were loaded onto the now legendary French 40 hommes / 8 chevalier train cars, (a train car that can carry forty men or eight horses) the men began a two-day ride to the Lorraine Region of France. Keeping an ever positive view of the past month of rigorous training, York reflected: "We shore were a different outfit to the rambunshus crowd of half-wild men that first got together in Camp Gordon, in Georgia..."[335] Most of his mates had a more circumspective view, with the regimental history recording a widely held view of the British,

> We never became very enthusiastic over staying with the British for there was that 'British Army Ration.' We heard a lot about the 'blooming bloody offan'; being 'fed up' and learned to know what 'carry on' meant, but never could understand when and how to use the expression 'cherry-oh,' or just what it signified; nor could we ever feel comfortable or know just how to act in the presence of the all powerful British 'Sergeant Major.' We rather liked the four o'clock tea, which nothing must be allowed to interfere with, but on the whole, were indeed glad to get back to an American outfit.[336]

York and all of the 82d Division, save for its artillery brigade (which was still training with the French), arrived at Toul, France on 18 June and billeted in the surrounding villages. York's battalion was assigned to the village of Lucey. In addition to their American rifles and side arms, the men were issued several French weapons that they would enter combat with. This included the notoriously unreliable Chauchat light machine gun, as well as the 8-mm. Hotchkiss machine gun, all of which required extra training to learn how to operate and maintain. Thus was the cost of America's lack of preparedness, forcing it to rely upon British and French war stocks.

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[335] York, 196
[336] Candler and Lindsey, 23; Day, 6.

Time was given for the men to blow-off steam before going into the trenches although normally, York steered clear of the cafes and bars where the temptations of wine and women were available. While in Lucey, although refraining from drinking himself, York watched his comrades partake of a bit too much wine and cognac and, "being soldiers, they was right smart when it come to finding them-there pretty French girls. Some of them shore knowed more about hunting and finding them, too, than I did about trailing coon and fox back there on the mountains at home." Although the training had improved the unit, it still struggled with the tribal groupings of the men falling into ethnic or regional groups. Combined with the mixture of wine and women; there was certain to be trouble. At the Lucey cafe, York saw this explosive mix come to a head, because, "There was a heap of Irish and Poles in our platoon, and one night in one of the cafes one of the Irish boys said he didn't believe the Poles could fight nohow. Ho ! Ho! That shore started it! They went at it with fists and belts. They turned that cafe into a No Man's Land, only worse, and we had to turn out the guard to stop it."

Although slipping back into his old pattern of drinking, fighting and chasing ladies was readily available, Alvin stood by his convictions and continued to sharpen his moral courage by steering clear of such temptations. He was helped by the encouragement of Corporal Murray Savage, who together studied the Bible with Alvin. York's described this difficult time,

> I didn't go into the towns much. I had put all of the drinkin' and fist-fightin' away behind me. I left it back home on the Kentucky line. I didn't have a drink all the time I was in France. I didn't have a fist fight or an argument. I didn't swear or smoke either. I wasn't any better'n any of the other boys. It was jes my way of livin', that was all. They did what they wanted to do. So did I. Our ways were

different. We let it at that. I did a heap of reading from the Bible. I read it through several times over there.[337]

Despite Alvin's generous recollection of simply going separate ways from the men when it came to partying, this is far from a complete view of the situation. In addition to the clash between ethnic groups, there were some in his platoon who still resented his beliefs and morals, with William Cutting being the chief protagonist. Cutting said that he was sure that York would be a coward in combat, and therefore could not be trusted. Bernard Early, shared this view of York.[338] Simply put, Alvin did not fit in and his faith exacerbated this. Cutting's and Early's view that Alvin lacked what it took to be a soldier was ostensibly confirmed when York again expressed misgivings about killing during bayonet training in late June, just before entering the trenches.[339] With this friction in the platoon, whether ethnic (Irish versus Pole), regional or religious based, they all were soon to get their baptism of fire, that would ultimately demonstrate if such suspicions were warranted.

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[337] York, 198.
[338] Robert Ellis Cahill, "America Needed a Hero," in *War Wonders,* Peabody, Massachusetts; 1984), 30-39; Tom Mahoney, *Sergeant Alvin York*, American Legion Magazine, 20 November 1968, 22, 45-46.
[339] York, 198.

Chapter 6 - Into the Trenches!

We were going In at last. We could hear the guns away in the distance now, jes like the thunder in the hills at home. We seed a right-smart lot of deserted trenches with wire entanglements, all snarled and mussed up. We seed gun emplacements half full of water. We passed an awful lot of graves, with little wooden crosses at their heads. I'm a-tellin' you that brought it home to us.

Alvin C. York

Orders were issued to the 82nd Division to move to Rambucourt and man the front-lines on 26 June. This "quiet sector" east of Verdun was known as the Woevre Front, Lagny Sector. The last heavy fighting here had occurred in 1915 during a French attempt to reduce this salient. However, the Germans managed to hold this bulge, which protruded south to the village of St. Mihiel, as well as retaining the important hill of Montsec, which dominated the area. This bulge jutted into France like a giant "V," with the western base of it anchored near Haudiomont and in the east on the Moselle River and Pont-à-Mousson. After the nine-month long battle of Verdun concluded in late 1916 the area had been relatively quiet, a good place to introduce the Americans to combat.[340]

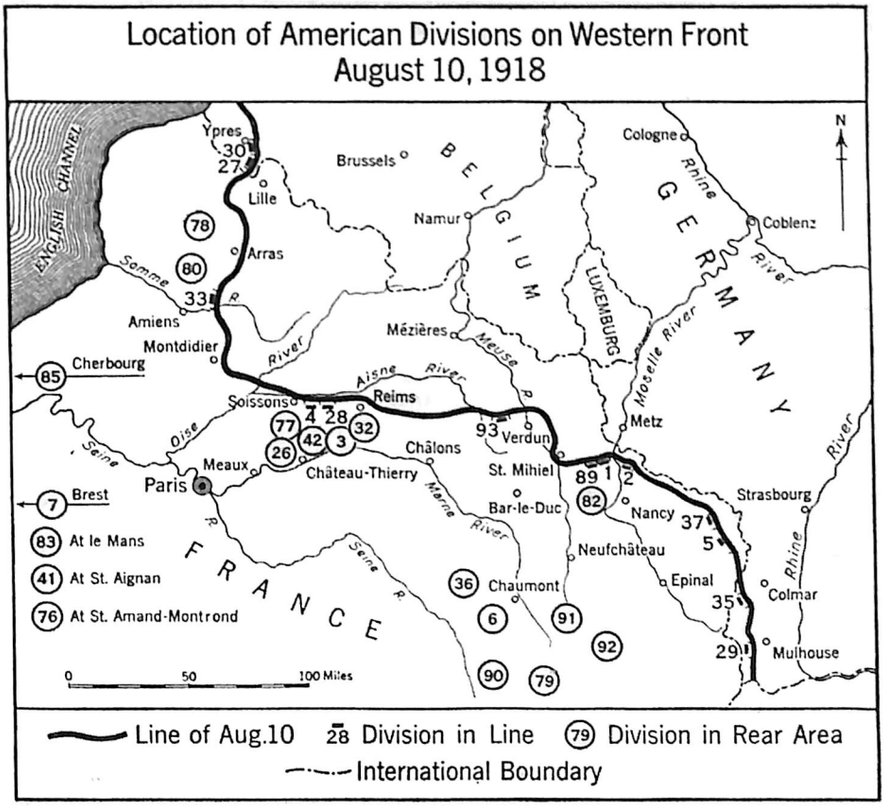
The 82nd was not the first American division to hold this area of the Western Front. Before them was the New England National Guard 26th "Yankee" Division, who had been in the line here for several months. The challenge, though, was squeezing an American division into a French division sector as the European divisions were half the size of the 28,000 strong American divisions.[341] As the 82nd Division moved into the

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[340] ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 4; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).

[341] The massive 28,000 man infantry division was part of General Pershing's concept of operations that he believed would enable these units to remain in the line fighting longer before being pulled out for refitting and re-manning.

line, the French Army ensured that these inexperienced soldiers were well-looked after with experienced support. It was supported by the French 154th Division, French artillery support, and French officers working in the trenches with them. The 82nd's regiments occupied a portion of the front with one battalion (each) in the line, a second in support (three kilometers back) and a third in general reserve (ten kilometers back).[342]



The battalions would rotate roughly every week over the next forty-five days.

York's battalion of the 328th Regiment, still under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Buxton, was the first in their regiment to occupy the forward trenches.[343] The support and reserve would either train, or dig new trench lines. Ironically the time in the front was relaxing, except of course during the brief periods of horror they encountered while in combat.[344]

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[342] Scott Candler and Julian Lindsey, 25; Holden, 66-68.
[343] Buxton, 12-13.
[344] Holden,), 77.

The idea of this being a quiet sector is relative when compared to the scores of casualties along the more active areas of the line. Here, in April and May, the Germans launched attacks of some 400 specially trained trench raiders into the American line. During this encounter, the Yankee Division performed commendably, but suffered hundreds of casualties. Additionally, artillery barrages, gas attacks, enemy air strafing, snipers and the like were daily experiences.



Figure 7 - "On Gas Alert" the Doughboys daily sounded the gas alarm (CMH).

The men of York's battalion were naturally nervous as they moved into the forward trenches, with nothing more than "no-man's land" standing between them and the Germans. All movement occurred during hours of darkness, as anything detected by the Hun would bring artillery and gas attacks. This was the first time that these soldiers had actually served on the front and were shocked by the reality of war. The most striking impression was the smell of death and decay. The men were also appalled by the

condition of the trenches, which often were knee deep in water and difficult to live in.[345] Finally, the destroyed moon-like landscape, combined with the ruins of the villages of Xivray and Marvoisin in the midst of the line added a "spooky" dimension. Here, especially at night, the men saw that "shattered walls made a fine hiding place for the Boche-both real and imaginary."[346]

The endless hours of watch, daily gas warning alarms (usually false), patrolling no-man's land and having all the men on guard during "stand-to," which was the period before dawn when most attacks occurred, wore the men out physically and mentally. Some patrols and relief columns had the misfortune of getting lost in no-man's land at night and ended up spending a day ducking from German rifle fire, while waiting for the cover of darkness before being able to move back to the relative safety of the trenches.[347] Although German artillery was the greatest danger, so too were overly nervous American sentries. On several occasions these inexperienced soldiers, either because of bad nerves, inability to pronounce the French passwords or poor English skills, frequently opened fire on a friendly relief column, which killed and wounded scores of men.[348]

During these trying times, York found comfort in his faith. He spent most of the hours of his free time in the trenches studying his pocket New Testament and praying. Despite the ribbing and mocking by his platoon mates, York was noted by his officers as

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[345] Holden, 69-78; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).
[346] Day, 7; Jones, 14.
[347] Barker, 26.
[348] Holden, 27, 69-78; Candler and Lindsey, 25; Buxton, 14-16; Herbert D.N. Jones, 13.

steady under fire, and having a "can-do" attitude. These attributes earned him a promotion to corporal during this time in the Lagny Sector.[349]

As a Corporal, York was given command of an Automatic Weapons Squad. His men were armed with the French Chauchat light machine gun, he led on several forays deep into no-man's land. Despite the danger, York was unmoved and confident. As German bullets buzzed over York's trench "like angry hornets," he reflected; "I did a heap of thinking and praying at this time. And more'n ever I jes knowed I was going to get back all right. I believed in God and in His promises."[350]

For the next two months, York's division rotated in and out of the Lagny Sector trenches, slowly gaining experience.[351] He was encouraged by the plethora of Christian aid volunteers which tried to ameliorate the soldier's hardships. Volunteers from the Salvation Army, Young Men's Christian Associations, and the Christian Commission set up tents close to the lines to provide hot chocolate, coffee, lemonade, donuts and cake to the soldiers, while sharing the Gospel with them.[352] This was usually a highlight for the

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[349] NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Alvin C. York, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919 under current enlistment, 4. The War Department's Adjutant General's Office did a review of the file on 14 January 1927, and missed the file promoting York to Corporal. Because of this lapse, the War Department added a note to the York file saying that he was promoted directly from Private 1st Class to Sergeant on 1 November 1918. This poor staff work is incorrect based upon the promotion remark annotated on page 4 of his service packet officially granting him Corporal on 8 July 1918. This deficient service record review explains why the American Battle Monuments Commission describe York as a Private in October 1918.

[350] York, 201.

[351] The division's zone was reduced in size on 18 July and thereafter referred to the Lucey Sector; ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War,* 4; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).

[352] Evangeline Booth, *The War Romance of the Salvation Army*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, J.B. Lippincott; 1919), 207-234.

men just coming into and going out of the trench lines and a great witness for the faith as far as York was concerned.[353]

Despite the occasional artillery barrages, gas attacks and isolated trench raids, the preponderance of the soldiers in York's regiment wanted to get into the fight. This itch grew after the division came back empty handed after a series of trench raids to capture a German. These trench raids usually ended with the Americans being thrown back by enemy artillery and concealed machinegun fires operated by a seemingly invisible foe. Seldom seeing a live "Hun" led to a belief that the sector was held only by "a one-legged Boche who operated a dozen machine guns and a battery of 77s by use of a keyboard."[354]

The relief of York's division from this sector was completed on 10 August. They suffered 374 casualties, most by poisonous gas, during their time at the front.[355] The 82nd planned on conducting diverse maneuver training exercises, in compliance with General Pershing's orders that the Americans be ready for open warfare when the German trenches were overrun. But, orders directed them to reinforce the Marne Sector. Shortly after this, that order was rescinded with the proviso to move instead forty kilometers northeast to occupy the Marbache Sector in the town of Pont-à-Mousson. This put the division on the eastern edge of the St. Mihiel salient where they would support the first American Army offensive on the Western Front scheduled for 12 September.

The 82nd Division took its position with satisfaction, as Pont-à-Mousson was a vibrant locale on the Moselle River with its 30,000 residents carrying on normal life

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[353] Day, 7; Holden, 88; Candler and Lindsey, 27; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).
[354] Herbert D.N. Jones, 14.
[355] Buxton, 16.

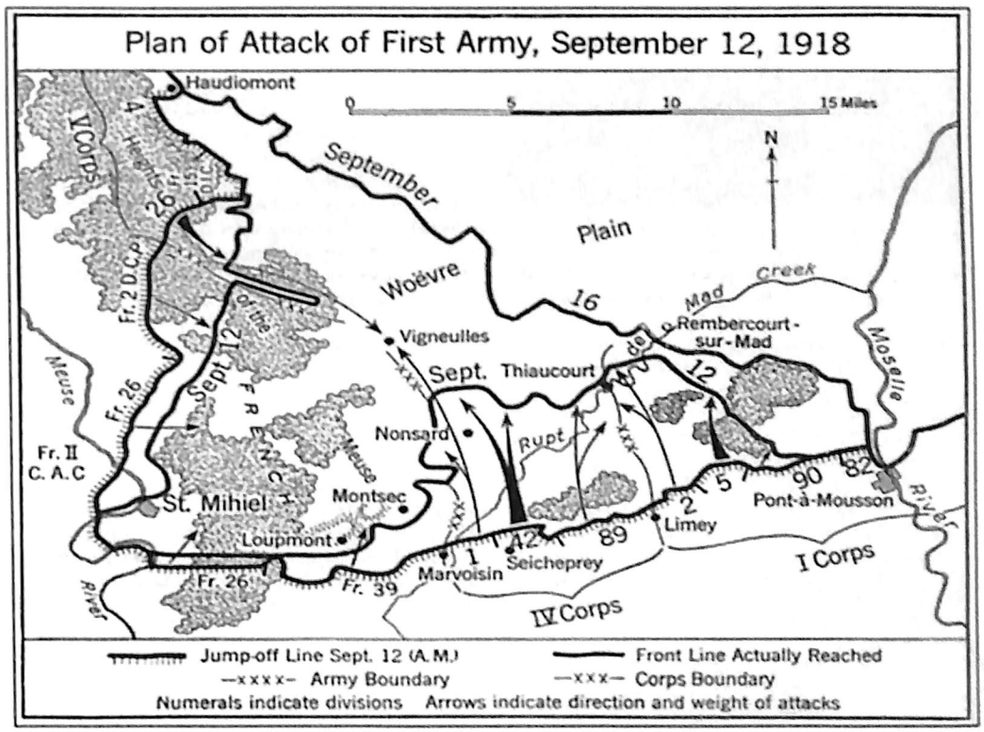
despite being only one kilometer from the front. Apparently the Germans and French had an unwritten agreement to keep this sector quiet and the town had very little physical damage because of this "live and let-live" understanding.[356] The men completed relief of the 2nd US Infantry Division there on 17 August. York's 328th Infantry Regiment replaced the 6th Marine Regiment, which had covered itself with glory in its defense of Château Thierry only two months before.[357] Upon entering Pont-a-Mousson York wrote that it "...was a kinder earthly paradise... The trees and vines were loaded with grapes and apples and everything. The gardens were all kept up nice, with everything kinder ripe and ready, and there was plenty of green grass and shade and cool, clean water. It was most hard for us to imagine that we were still in the war."[358]

The concept of General Pershing's St. Mihiel offensive was to not only exercise the American Army for the first time, but to set the conditions for a strategic blow against the Germans by taking the fortress city of Metz. As Pershing took command of St. Mihiel salient on 30 August, he met with the overall allied commander, French Marshall Foch, who suggested canceling the operation to support a broader attack. After a series of discussions, Pershing convinced Foch to allow the St. Mihiel operation to proceed, albeit with the limited objective of reducing the salient, and then rapidly moving his forces some 100 kilometers northwest, to launch the Meuse-Argonne Offensive a week later. This was no easy endeavor even for a seasoned army. Pershing viewed St. Mihiel

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[356] Candler and Lindsey, 25; Holden, 31.
[357] Holden, *War Memories*, 98
[358] York, 205.

Offensive important both for a morale boost for the AEF in addition to preparing his staff for the next big operation.[359]



As forces arrived for the attack, the Americans began rotating in and out of the trenches there as they just recently had in the Lagny Sector. At first these trenches were quiet, but, in early September, the worst kept secret in France was that the Americans were poised to launch an offensive to reduce the German salient around St. Mihiel. One of York's officers even heard open talk in Paris while there attending Gas Training.[360] The days leading up to the attack encompassed the evacuation of citizens from Pont-à-Mousson, an increase of artillery exchanges and more aggressive patrolling between the belligerents.[361]

Meanwhile, the German High Command contemplated a withdrawal from the St. Mihiel salient. Yet, if it came to fighting, they had three lines of fortified positions from which to defend it. Although the Germans saw the buildup of American forces around

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[359] Pershing, My Experiences in the World War, Vol. 2, 249-259.
[360] Holden, 113-114.
[361] Buxton, 16-18.

the salient, they were slow to react. There were existing plans by the German staff to withdrawal from the pocket should a viable threat appear. This would be more than just having the troops depart; it would also entail the removal of war material, the destruction of defensive positions, and a scorched earth policy to deprive the Americans of any advantage. This would require eight days to complete.[362]

The Germans belatedly issued orders on 9 September to evacuate the salient. As noted by the senior German military leaders, Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg, this was too late when the Americans began their assault on the 12 September.[363] The reluctance of the Germans to order a withdraw from the St. Mihiel salient is understandable in that it served as a buffer to protect the important city of Metz, which gave them strategic depth in defending the crucial east/west rail networks and safeguarding the Iron Basin at Briey-Longwy.[364]



Figure 8 Armed with a French Chauchat light machinegun, Americans fire on German positions during the St. Mihiel Offensive

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[362] Otto von Ledebur, "Rushing the St. Mihiel Salient," in *As They Saw Us*, edited by George Sylvester Viereck, (New York, Doubleday-Doran; 1929), 172-179.
[363] Erich Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen,* (Berlin, Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn; 1919), 572-573; Paul von Hindenburg, *Aus Meinem Leben*, (Leipzig, Hirzel; 1920), 364-366.
[364] Max von Gallwitz, "Retreat to the Rhein," in *As They Saw Us*, edited by George Sylvester Viereck, (New York, Doubleday-Doran; 1929), 230-235.

As the Germans displaced their artillery, began removing war materials, and destroyed defensive positions, the American attack began.[365] The attack included fourteen US divisions (each twice the strength of a European division) and four French divisions, facing eleven German divisions. The force ratio was 3 to 1 in favor of the Allies and was supported by concentrated French and American artillery fires from nearly 3,000 guns that swept deep into the German lines. This was followed by an impressive combined arms operation that included more than 400 tanks, (manned by both French and American crews)[366] and 1,500 Allied aircraft, which gained air superiority thanks to the superb planning of Colonel Billy Mitchell, US Army.[367] Commenting on the beginning of the battle, York wrote,

> It done opened with a most awful barrage from our big guns. It was the awfulest thing you ever heard. It made the air tremble and the ground shake. At times you couldn't hear your own voice nohow. The air was full of airplanes, and most of them American planes. There must have been hundreds of them. They were diving and circling around all over the place like a swarm of birds. We seed several right-smart fights away up there above us.

York's 82nd Division played a supporting role in St. Mihiel by holding the right shoulder as the hinge on which the attack would swing.[368] They were to "keep in contact with the enemy at all times, but to remain in its present position until further orders."[369] This meant that the men would conduct aggressive reconnaissance to keep the German

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[365] von Tschischwitz, *General von der Marwitz; Weltkriegsbriefe*, (Berlin, Ernst Steiniger; 1940), 319.
[366] Harvey L. Harris, *The War as I Saw it; 1918 Letters of a Tank Corps Lieutenant,* (Saint Paul, Minnesota; Pogo Press 1998), 84-88.
[367] Phillip S. Meilinger, *Mitchell Biography*, from *American Airpower Biography: A Survey of the Field,* Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, Alabama; 1997). Available online at the following website: http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/cc/biograph.html (accessed 15 March 2011); Also see Michael Hanlon, *The St. Mihiel Battle*, available online at; http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/stmihiel.htm (accessed 15 March 2011). Michael Hanlon is perhaps the expert on the St. Mihiel fight and is both well published on this subject and a frequent battlefield tour guide of the area.
[368] Barker, 37.
[369] Candler and Lindsey, 25; Holden, 33.

division in front of them from being able to reposition or withdraw. As the attack was underway, York's battalion launched two attacks, with Lieutenant Cox of F Company leading men valiantly in overcoming the German strongpoint at Maison Gauthier, on the west bank of the Moselle River. Such local successes, combined with the rapid advance of the American attack, resulted in the 82nd too being ordered to advance.[370]

York's battalion "went over the top" on the second day of the St. Mihiel Offensive (13 September) in classic Western Front fashion and captured Norroy, the first of many towns that the 82nd Division would liberate in 1918. The American attack was just like any other attack along the Western Front, with the men climbing out of their trenches and holes, and then charging across an expanse of wire and craters. The men were greeted by intense German rifle fires, machineguns and artillery. But the unit had good leaders, with young Lieutenant Kirby Stewart leading his men by example and getting them through the most difficult zones. Advancing with the battalion was Lieutenant Colonel Buxton, and his adjutant, Lieutenant Woods, who made it a point to always advance with their men.[371] York, as a corporal and squad leader, planned on leading his men by being out front also, so, once the whistle was blown to signal the attack, he did all he could to stay ahead of his men,

> So I led the squad. I kinder think they almost led me. I mean I was supposed to be in the front and they were supposed to follow. But no matter how fast I went they wanted to go faster, so that they could get at the Germans. The Greeks and Italians, the Poles and the Jews and the other city boys were still firing pretty wild. They were still mostly hitting the ground or the sky. They burned up a most awful lot of Uncle Sam's ammunition. But they kept on a-going jes the same. They were that full of fight that wild cats shore would have backed away from

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[370] Buxton, 18-25; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).
[371] Holden, 113-114.

them... They wanted to push right on and not stop until they got to Berlin. They cussed the Germans out for not standing and they kept yelling at them to wait and fight it out.[372]

The battle for Norroy was a bit of an anti-climax for York's men. Although they encountered heavy artillery fire, small arms fire and machine guns, the Germans did not stay and fight. As the Americans swept down the heights into the village, the Germans withdrew to a better position north of the town. York observed: "But fast as we went forward the Germans kept on moving backwards, faster. They jes wouldn't stand and fight it out. Our battalion was right in the thick of it, and some of the other companies got mussed up right smart, but ours never lost a man."[373]

After capturing the town, York's men went from house to house, taking a German sniper prisoner. The captured German told the Americans that his unit was ordered to pull back and occupy the high ground two kilometers north of Norroy near Vandieres.[374] The men also discovered that most of the French civilians were forcefully evacuated by the Germans before the attack, to reduce casualties. Unbeknownst to the Germans, seventeen of the 330 residents hid in their cellars and were elated to see the Americans.[375] While in town, York and his squad cautiously approached a house that looked like a fortified headquarters. They quickly broke down the door, expecting to find a group of die-hard Germans holding out inside and instead were greeted by thousands of Belgium Hares, who jumped at the chance for freedom. These quickly scattered into the town and across the valley for freedom instead of being served up for lunch. The men also liberated

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[372] York, 208-210.
[373] York, 208.
[374] Buxton, 24.
[375] Candler and Lindsey, 25; Holden, 33.

several barrels of German beer and French wine which, "...they knocked the bungs out of them and drinked a whole mess of it."[376]

Captain Danforth tried to organize his men for an anticipated German counterattack. As he yelled orders to his men to abandon their booty of German beer and French wine, he saw a soldier walking a goat on a leash. Danforth asked the solider what he was doing. The soldier replied, "Sir, I am jes going back to put a little cream in my coffee."[377] Danforth could just shake his head at such remarks, but he did get his men organized and dug in along the high defensible ground north and northwest of Norroy. This placed the unit two-kilometers in advance of its starting position, a location exposed to German enfilade fires from the east bank of the Moselle.

The anticipated German counter attack did not materialize. In spite of that, the Germans fired a heavy concentration of gas laced artillery fire into Norroy to stop further American advance.[378] This attack began with a type of sneezing gas, to prevent the men from keeping their masks on.[379] This was followed at noon with poisonous mustard gas. Fortunately, the unit's gas officer, Lieutenant Holden, saw to it that every man kept his mask donned. Being in the valley, the gas settled over Norroy. The command set up their headquarters in the old town hall, but moved it outside of town to get away from the gas, just as German artillery destroyed the building.[380]

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[376] York, 208-209; Candler and Lindsey, 124-126.
[377] York, 209.
[378] Buxton, 20-28.
[379] The sneezing (or vomiting) gas was non-lethal, but the filters of most Allied masks were ineffective against it. The filters were generally effective against most of the lethal German gases. Thus, the Germans would fire both types of gas in combination. The vomiting gas forced the soldier to take the mast off in the presence of the lethal gas.

[380] Holden, 128-133.

This German gas and artillery barrage was an attempt to block the Moselle River Road, which passed through Norroy, and prevent reinforcement of York's battalion now deployed north of the town. What this German gas-laced barrage actually succeeded in doing was to prevent food being brought to the men and forced them to wear their gas masks throughout the day.

Late on 13 September, the men saw a vineyard rich with grapes forward of their positions near the German lines. Not having had food all day, the men attempted to liberate the grapes from the vines. This placed them under the watch of a large sausage-shaped German observation balloon. Whenever an American was in the vineyard, the Germans fired an artillery barrage. Orders were eventually issued forbidding the men from getting anymore grapes. Later that night, York could not resist the temptation and quietly crawled into the vineyard because "We were very hungry, and them-there grapes jes natcherly made our mouths water."[381] As Alvin filled his belly with the French grapes, German artillery exploded around him. He quickly ran for cover, crashing into another American. It was Captain Danforth, who too could not resist the Norroy grapes. Both scurried back to their positions for a good laugh.[382]

As the Americans completed its reduction of the St. Mihiel salient, the 82nd advanced two kilometers north to seize Vandieres to support the advance of the 90th American division to their left. They took this area against heavy German resistance on 16 September. With this, the offensive ended, having achieved all of its objectives with astonishing speed. As to the outcome of the St Mihiel offensive, the Americans

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[381] York, 209.
[382] York, 209-210.

performed superbly, and inflicted 7,000 German casualties, captured some 16,000 others, seized 450 enemy artillery pieces and liberated 200 square miles of French territory.[383] The plan could not have occurred at a better time, catching the Germans in the midst of their retrograde operations out of the salient. General Pershing watched in satisfaction as it was due to him that, "...after seventeen months... an American army was fighting under its own flag."[384] The attack cost the Americans 7,000 casualties, with the 82nd suffering 816. The All-Americans, although having a supporting role, achieved remarkable success in their advance up the Moselle River Valley.[385]

The St. Mihiel Operation resulted in several changes to the unit's leadership. The regimental commander, Colonel Hunter B. Nelson was replaced by Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Wetherill. York's battalion commander, Buxton, was advanced to the division staff to serve as the Inspector General. Buxton was actually directed to move to the division staff before St Mihiel, but asked a postponement of this so that he could lead his battalion in combat. The loss of Buxton was a tough blow to the battalion for the men respected his humility and no non-sense leadership style. This change also had implications for York. It was only due to Buxton's empathetic leadership style and Christian faith that Alvin stayed in the army. Replacing Buxton was Captain James

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[383] Pershing, My Experiences in the World War, Vol. 2, 269-273.
[384] NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Pershing, My Experiences in the World War, Vol. 2, 266-2673.
[385] ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations,* 12-13; Buxton, 28-30; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).

McRae Tillman, the senior company commander in the battalion, who would lead the men in the Meuse-Argonne battle yet to come.[386]

With no time to rest on their laurels, the 82nd All American Division was replaced by the French 69th Infantry Division on 21 September.[387] After this was completed, the 82nd began a rushed 100 kilometer westward journey by truck to support the Meuse-Argonne offensive that was to begin on 26 September. The Meuse-Argonne offensive would encompass some 1.2 million men and remains America's largest ever offensive. Reflecting on the week at St. Mihiel, York said: "It was a great success. The feeling of the majority of the boys was one hundred per cent, for General Pershing. As a whole the Army was back of him, believed in him, and would follow him anywhere... But I never did hear of that-there goat any more. I don't know whether the boy got the cream for his coffee or not."[388]

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[386] Candler and Lindsey,, 36.
[387] NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations, 12-13; Cooke, 77.
[388] York, *Sergeant York*, 210.

Chapter 7 - The Eve of Battle

The American and German military situation before York's battle

[The American soldiers looked like] Tommies in heaven. I pressed forward... to watch the United States physically entering the War, so god-like, so magnificent, and so splendidly unimpaired in comparison with the tired, nerve-racked men of the British army.[389]

English nurse Vera Brittain, on seeing the Americans arrive in France, April 1918

On 26 September 1918, the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) launched the Meuse Argonne Offensive. It initially had the support of 100,000 French soldiers that encompassed six of their divisions. These reverted to French control after additional American units arrived to the front from St. Mihiel. The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the first of four major Allied attacks that spanned some 200 miles of the Western Front. This broad attack was designed by Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the Allied Generalissimo, to bring the war to an end in 1918. It would be this offensive that would bring Alvin York.

Foch's grand strategy looked like American Confederate General Robert E. Lee's concept of an "en echelon attack" that he used on 2 July 1863 at the Battle of Gettysburg.[390] The point of an en echelon attack is to launch a series of assaults across a front to not only fix enemy units, but also to draw away reserves, so that by the time that the later attacks occurred, the enemy would have little to no reserves remaining to bolster the newly threatened sectors. The key to success in an en echelon attack is to force the enemy to neglect or weaken portions of his front to create a vulnerability that the attacker

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[389] Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, (New York, Penguin Books, 2003) 310-311.

[390] Credit to perfecting the en echelon attack must be given to Napoleon, to whom France owes its tradition. However, the en echelon was the 18th Century trademark of Prussian King Frederick the Great. Yet, Frederick's trademark tactic was a standard tactic of the Roman Legions.

can exploit. With this design in mind, Foch directed the AEF to spearhead the offensive on 26 September 1918.

The design of Foch's grand plan was that the day after the American assault, the British First and Third Armies were to strike on 27 September, led by the Canadian Corps against Canal du Nord, west of Cambrai. After this, King Albert's Belgians would advance north of Ypres on 28 September. The last attack occurred on 29 September with a Franco - British attack near St. Quentin. These four Allied hammer blows were to be sustained attacks that would overwhelm the German lines.[391] Being the first to attack, the AEF would receive the most attention of German Field Marshall Hindenburg, who said:

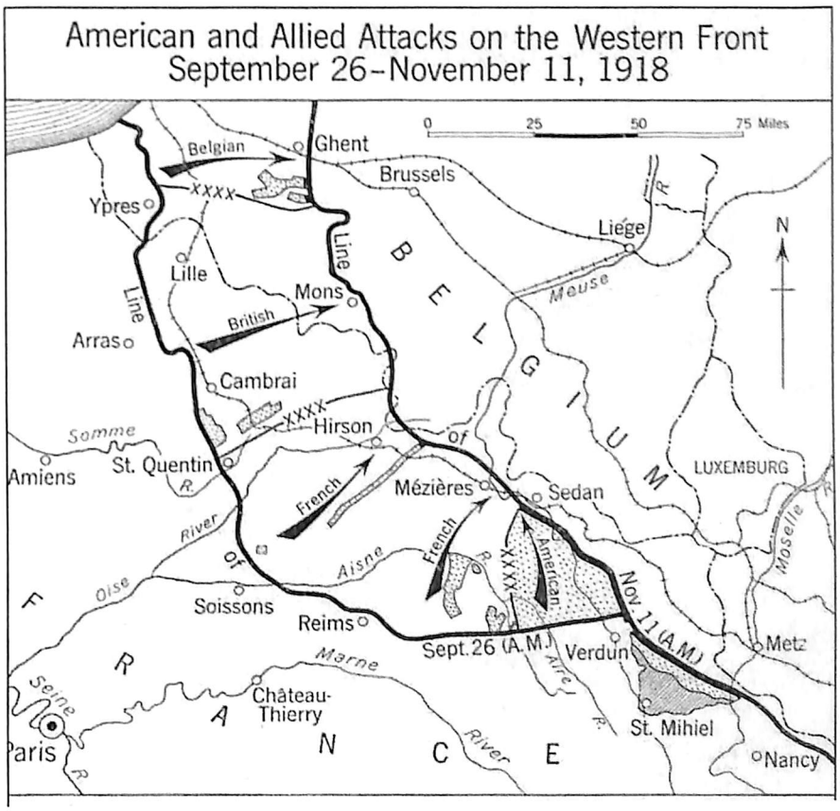


Figure 9 Foch's broad front strategy for late 1918 (ABMC).

> In the following days [after the German spring offensives failed], we essentially held the front against the enemy attacks. However, the situation changed with the expansion of the enemy offensive against Champagne on 26 September [the day that the American Meuse-Argonne Offensive commenced], which expanded the

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[391] Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory,* (London, Headline; 2001) 207-210.

> threat from the coasts to the Argonne. There, [in the Argonne region] the Americans penetrated our lines between the Argonne and Meuse River. Here, the ...American power made itself manifest on the battlefield in the form of an independent army for the first time and validated itself there decisively.[392]

Thanks to the arrival of over one million Americans, and the loss of nearly one million German soldiers during the Spring Offensive, the Allies now had a 37% advantage in men, giving them the flexibility to launch this new broad front offensive.[393] After only six weeks of action, Foch's grand strategy worked. The sustained pressure of these four massive attacks across a large portion of the Western Front was too much for the German Army.

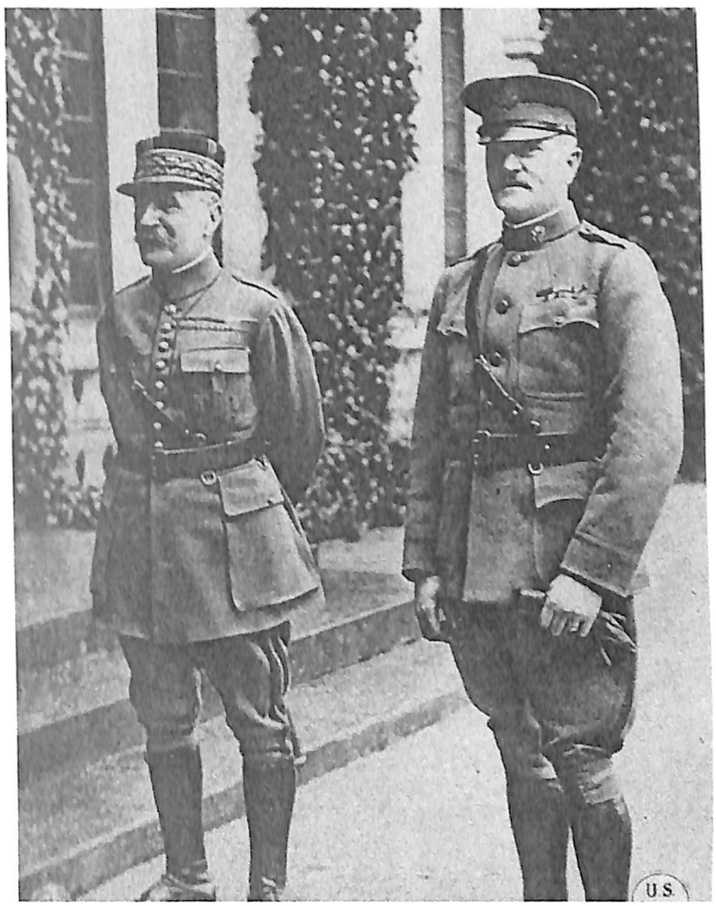


Figure 10 Foch and Pershing meeting at the American Headquarters in Chaumont, June 1918 (NARA)

General Pershing endorsed Foch's grand strategic plan although in his view, the American Expeditionary Forces had the most difficult task. The AEF had to fight against some of Germany's best divisions, across impossible terrain that threatened the heart of their vital Western Front command and control network; the

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[392] Paul von Hindenburg, *Aus Meinem Leben*, (Leipzig, Hirzel; 1920), 366.
[393] Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory,* (London, Headline; 2001) 218-219.

Sedan-Mezieres rail network. According to Hunter-Liggett, the Commander of the American First Army, without this rail network, the German Army in France and Belgium would literally whither on the vine.[394]

What complicated the American task was the distances between no-man's land and the three lines of German defenses where it was the most narrow in the Argonne region. This influenced how the German command responded to the American offensive meaning that the Germans would not easily give ground here as there was little to give. Below are the depth of German defenses across the Western Front:[395]

Argonne	18 kilometers
Cambrai	30 kilometers
Laon	60 kilometers

With the shallow sector in the Argonne, the Germans had little space to give up in the defense, and were compelled to defend every line tenaciously. This is why the German command used the preponderance of their strategic reserves to stem the American attack, unlike at the BEF sector where they could afford to trade land for time and space.

Called the "Meuse-Argonne Offensive," the American attack commenced on 26 September and continued until the Armistice on 11 November 1918. To accomplish this mission, the Americans poured over 1.2 million men into the front, making the Meuse-Argonne Offensive the largest ever American military operation. By the time the guns fell silent, the Americans deployed twenty-two divisions here, the equivalent to fifty-five

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[394] Hunter-Liggett, *A.E.F.*, (New York, Dodd, Meade and Company; 1928), 172-174.
[395] Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War*, (Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press; 2007), 125-128.

French or British divisions.[396] To stop the Americans, Germany deployed forty-seven of their divisions and the last of their strategic reserves to the Meuse-Argonne area.[397]

Field Marshall Haig asked that his BEF attack not occur until 48 hours after the American's. He wanted the Germans to send their reserves south, so that these would not be available to oppose the British offensive. As Haig told Foch, "I therefore do not

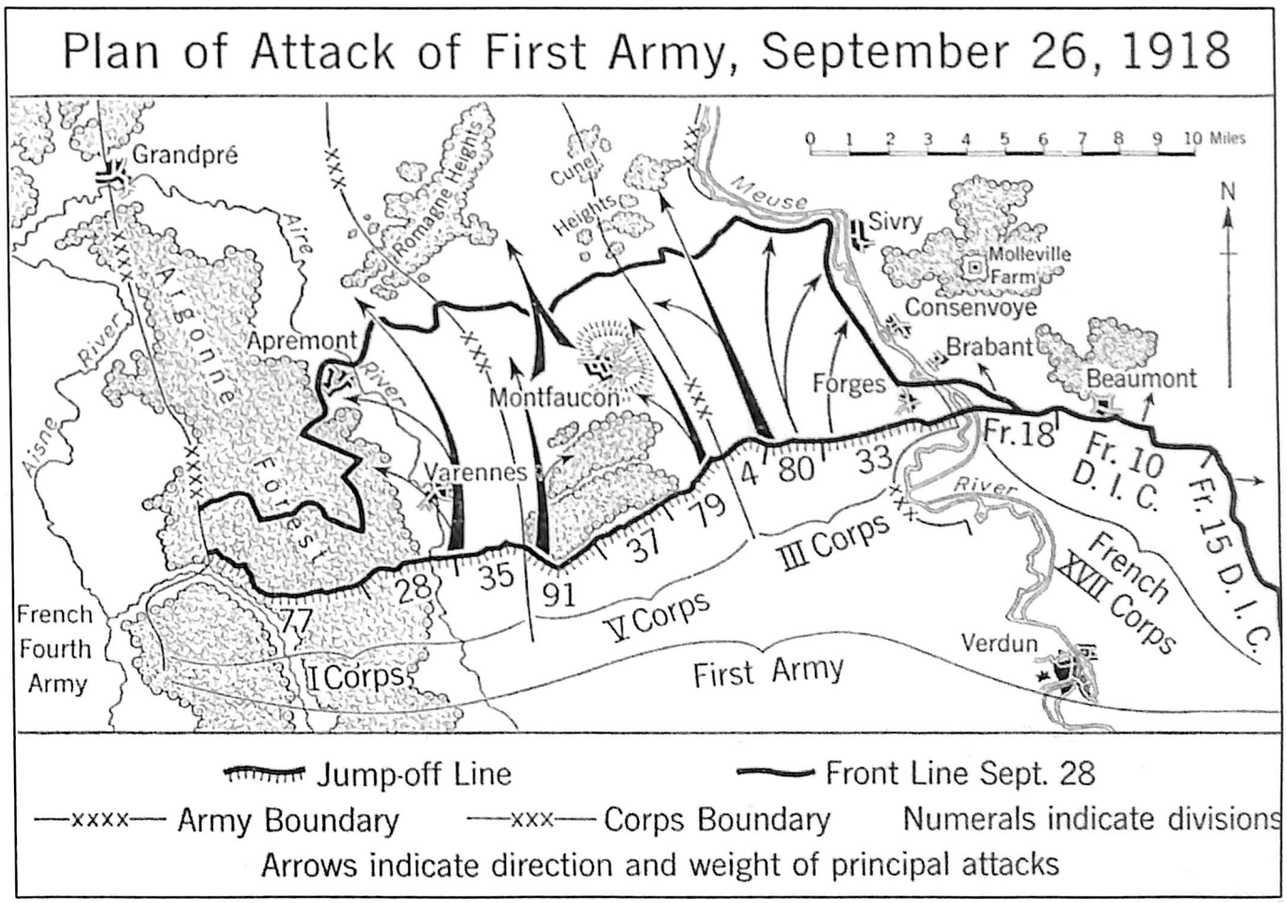


Figure 11 The first day of the Meuse Argonne Offensive (ABMC)

propose to attack until the American-French attack has gone in [the Meuse-Argonne

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[396] An American division was between two-two and one-half times larger than their European counterparts in men, translating to about fifty-five French, British or German divisions.

[397] Charles F. Horn (editor), *Source Records of the Great War*, Volume VI, (New York, National Alumni; 1923), 401-402. These figures are taken by a joint report published by Field Marshal Foch and General John J. Pershing.

Region]. This latter attack might draw off some of the enemy's reserves from our front. I therefore would like to attack two or three days after the main American-French attack. It we could arrange this, there was a chance of the enemy's reserves being unavailable."[398] The day that the Meuse-Argonne Offensive began, the German leadership committed most of its operational reserve divisions to guard its vulnerable flank, thus giving Haig's attack less German opposition than he have otherwise have confronted.

The severe terrain combined with expert German defense made fighting in the Meuse-Argonne intense. The lack of training made this offensive a costly episode for the United States. As the fighting droned on, the Germans grew increasingly concerned about the continual audacious attacks and pulled twenty-one of their divisions from the French and British sectors to stem the American offensive.

Although facing 25% of Germany's strength on the Western Front, the AEF broke the German lines on 1 November and penetrated the Kriemhilde portion of the Siegfried Stellung.[399] In forty-seven days of combat in the Meuse-Argonne, the AEF inflicted 100,000 casualties, took 26,000 prisoners, 847 cannons, and some 3,000 machineguns. When the Armistice went into effect at 1100 on 11 November, the Americans had more men on the front (over two million) and controlled more of the line (21% of the Western Front, for a total of 83 miles)[400] than all other allied nations except France.[401] Although

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[398] Terraine, *To Win a War,* 153.
[399] The Hindenburg Line was an Allied name for the German Siegfried Stellung. The Kriemhilde Stellung was a southern sector of the overall Siegfried Stellung. Ironically, what the Allies called the Siegfried Line in World War II was never called that by the Germans. Then, the Germans called it the West Wall.
[400] Edward Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, (Lexington, Kentucky, University of Lexington Press; 1998), 355.

suffering some 20,000 casualties a week, Pershing was certain that the AEF played a central role in ending the war in 1918.[402]

Due to the pressure that the Americans put on them, the German military leadership lost flexibility as they gave up land in the north, and flung most of its strategic reserves to the south, where, if the Americans broke through, it would be a catastrophe as it would have resulted in the German Army being outflanked. That is the crux of the matter. The Germans could only give up land in the north, where they conducted a lateral line of battle as part of a slow fighting withdrawal. Yet, victory in 1918 would not have been achieved without the combined effects of Foch's brilliant four-prong Belgium, French, British and American offensive that overwhelmed the Germans. None of these armies had an easy time fighting the Germans in the last days of the war. For instance, the Canadian Corps, which spearheaded the BEF attack in the north of France, suffered 60% of its wartime casualties in the last 100 days of the war. Such was the nature of the determined adversary that the allies faced at the close of the war.



Figure 12 General Max von Gallwitz commanded German forces opposing the American Meuse Argonne Offensive in October and November 1918

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[401] John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the War*, Volume II, 390.
[402] Robert Ferrell, *America's Deadliest Battle*, (Lawrence, KS, University of Kansas Press; 2007), Preface.

The Germans could not trade time for space in the Meuse-Argonne as the Americans were close to severing the vital command, rail artery at Sedan. This was the challenge that General Max von Gallwitz, the German commander of the area faced; just how to stop the Americans. Although a breakthrough came much later and an incredibly higher cost in lives than Pershing had hoped, it did occur on 1 November.

The Meuse-Argonne Campaign was not a smooth operation as many American units lacked training in modern warfare, and went into the war with a flawed, perhaps even outdated, military doctrine. This deficiency was compounded by Pershing's refusal to adopt the lessons that the British and French had acquired over the past three years of combat in a fear that it would drive the offensive spirit from the Americans. Mark Grotelueschen's book, *The AEF Way of War,* (2007), does an exemplary job analyzing Pershing's "cult of the rifle," which was the flawed belief that the rifleman alone could break the stalemate of trench warfare.[403] Such ideas were not new and already tried along the Western Front between 1914-1916 at incredible costs in lives, and reflect the 1914 French tactics of Colonel Louis de Grandmaison, the former Director of the *Troisième Bureau* (Bureau of Military Operations).[404] The idea was that élan and the bayonet would carry the day. Nevertheless, when being faced with modern implements of war, such as machineguns, this idea literally melted away as five French armies lost 210,000 men in only two weeks of combat in August 1914. From this experience there was ample

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[403] Grotelueschen, 30-43.

[404] Grandmaison tactical doctrine was known as *attaque à l'outrance.* In 1914 Foch as a brigadier general was also a leading advocate of this doctrine.

evidence that the idea of élan and the rifleman alone could carry the day was indeed wrong.[405]

This explains in part why the Americans suffered so many casualties in the Meuse-Argonne, while gaining little ground in relative comparison.[406] Liddell Hart's 1928 book *Reputations* addresses the price of the AEF's inexperience, the futility of massed attacks and the folly of throwing men against machineguns.[407] Pershing's outdated doctrine that was centered on the infantryman caused him to commit the same errors that the French experienced in 1914 and the British at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. John Terraine's *To Win a War* highlights how Pershing sought to overcome the Germans merely by merely pouring more men in the line. He quotes Foch as saying, Pershing "tried to overcome these difficulties by increasing its forces in the front line; but this only intensified these difficulties and resulted in complete blocking of its rear and bottling up of its communications."[408] The tactic of throwing men into the line

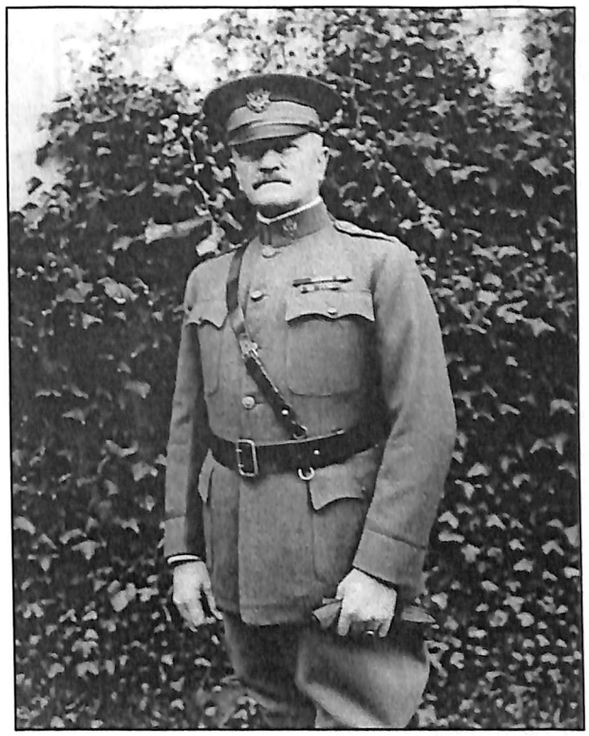


Figure 13 AEF Command General John Pershing tried to overcome the inexperience of his army by large frontal assaults against the German lines (AHEC)

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[405] See an excellent article on this topic by Damien Fenton, Unjustly Accused: Marshal Ferdinand Foch and the French 'Cult of the Offensive' August 2009, (Accessed on 22 December 2010), http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/foch.htm

[406] Grotelueschen, 42.

[407] B.H. Liddell Hart, *Reputations Ten Years After*, (Boston, Little, Brown and Company; 1928), 145, 270-275, 278-284, 306-313.

[408] Terraine, 156.

was so flawed that it caused Pershing to order a tactical pause of six hours during the *first day* of the attack to reset his divisions. Although the pause was necessary, it gave the Germans needed time for reserves to bolster the line.



Figure 14 Major Charles W. Whittlesley (left) commander the 590 men of the Lost Battalion that helped break the German strong-hold in the Argonne, and was the reason why Alvin York's unit attacked into the forest (to rescue the trapped unit) (AHEC).

By the first week of October, the American attack seemed hopelessly bogged down. From the western edge of the Argonne Forest and across the wide Meuse Valley,

the combination of German ingenuity and American inexperience worked to frustrate Pershing's concept of the operation. This notwithstanding, the situation had to be altered. Pershing's staff attempted to find a way to break the German lines and worked with his staff to find a way to break the impasse.

Despite the staff planning, success in this phase of the Meuse-Argonne Operation would turn upon the three small unit actions.[409] These stretched across the front. Along the western edge of the Argonne Forest was the 77th "Liberty" Division, whose joint attack with the French seemingly failed on 2 October. However, a mixed command of 590 Americans found the seam between the German 76th Reserve Division and 2nd Württemberg Division and penetrated a mile behind the German lines. These Americans were called the "Lost Battalion" by the allies or the "Amerikaner Nest" by the Germans. Despite incessant German attacks, the Americans held on for five days under the incredible leadership of Major Charles Whittlesley, which ultimately resulted in the collapse of the German defense in the western Argonne.[410]

Further to the east, in the midst of the Meuse valley, the Germans also thwarted American attempts to breakout. During one of these attacks, an American Company under Lieutenant Sam Woodfill encountered sharp opposition around the village of Cunel. Despite the risks, Woodfill took action, fearlessly charging three successive groups of German defenders, even resorting to hand to hand combat in overcoming

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[409] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Pershing, *My Experiences in the War*, Volume II, 320.
[410] Pershing, *My Experiences in the War*, Volume II, 320-333.

them.[411] The third, and final action that Pershing says played a central role in the AEF regaining the initiative, was by Corporal Alvin York and sixteen other men from the 328th Infantry Regiment, a story told in the next chapter.[412]

Although the Meuse-Argonne Offensive was not as efficient as it should have been in its execution, it was indeed effective in supporting the overall Allied Offensive by drawing off the preponderance of the German strategic reserves. This enabled the British led forces further to the north to exploit gaps in the German lines the thereby bring the war to a conclusion in November 1918.

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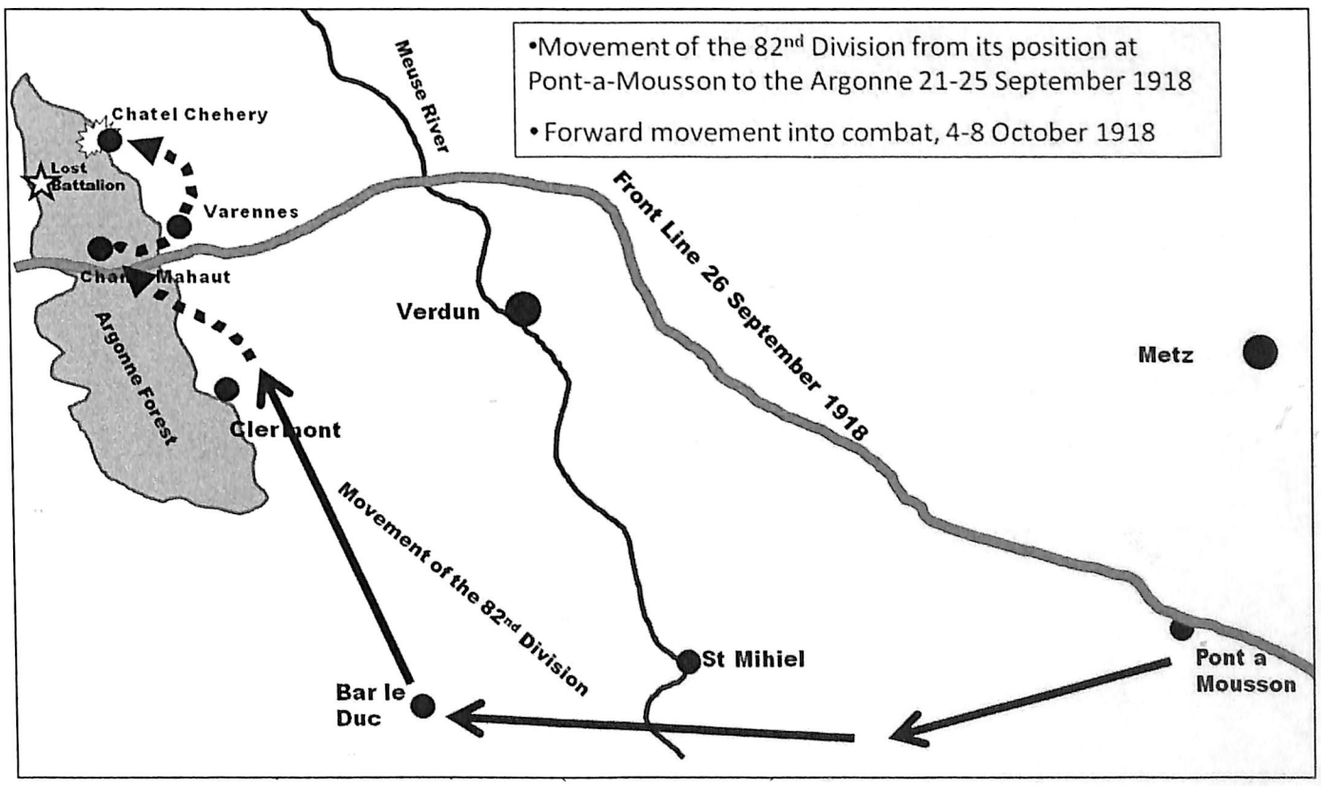
[411] See the Medal of Honor website for details on this exploit, available online at the following website; http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-detail/2612/woodfill-samuel.php (accessed 2 September 2011).
[412] Pershing, *My Experiences in the War*, Volume II, 392.

Chapter 8 - Into the Argonne!

We went out on the main road and lined up and started for the front and the Germans was shelling the road and airplanes was humming over our heads and we were stumbling over dead horses and dead men and shells were Bursting all around me and then it was that I could see the Power of God helped man if he would only trust him.

Alvin C. York

None of the existing literature addresses the movement of York's unit from St. Mihiel to the Argonne in any detail. Only York's diary makes brief comments about it. With that, the literature skips two weeks of experiences and take us directly into the 8 October fight. The result is a deficient approach that has led to a one-dimensional understanding of Alvin York. This has led to overly-simplistic characterizations of him and much misunderstanding about what he did while serving in the Army. As will be seen, there is much more to York than that one-day in October.[413]



The one-hundred kilometer move from Pout-a-Mousson to the Argonne was quite an adventure for Alvin. After riding part of the way in a small train and marching a fair distance, the regiment boarded a massive convoy of busses operated by French Indochinese Colonial soldiers. These the Americans called China-men and they gave York a harrowing fourteen-hour ride to the Argonne. York was intrigued by meeting these foreign people: "I done never seen Chinaman before, and I jes couldn't keep my eyes off them... Them Chinamen were the awfulest drivers you ever seed. They must have sorter had the idea they had to get us there before they even started. The way they done tore and bumped those old French buses over those old French roads was enough to make your hair stand up straight."[414]



Figure 15 Major-General George Duncan was given command of the 82nd Division on 4 October 1918 and saw it through its bloodiest fighting in the Great War.

The convoy took a break in Bar le Duc, where the soldiers purchased grapes and other fresh fruit from stands set up by French farmers. The men were heartened to be welcomed by their division commander, General William B. Burnham, who would be replaced by Major-General George Duncan on 4 October. Burnham had been with the division since its creation at Camp Gordon

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[414] York, 210-211.

and had a close affiliation with it. Pershing ordered Duncan to replace Burnham based upon an Inspector General report in August 1918 that said that Burnham lacked forcefulness and aggressiveness. One note in Pershing's file says that he was not "pushy" enough with his subordinates. Although he performed well in the St. Mihiel offensive in September, Pershing predetermined to oust him once he identified a suitable replacement.



Figure 16 French Colonial soldiers from Southeast Asia transported York's unit to the Argonne in a harrowing ride across the French country side (NARA)

On 3 October 1918, Pershing directed his personal friend George Duncan to replace Burnham. Duncan was a proven leader, having already commanded the 77th Liberty Division, and Pershing viewed him as the type of aggressive, and even ruthless leader needed to carry the division forward into the merciless battle grounds of the Argonne. Duncan was in Paris when the order arrived assigning him as the commanding general of the 82nd. He hurriedly packed his belongings and set off for the Argonne

region to find the division (he had no idea where it was).[415] Meanwhile, Burnham was shipped off to Greece to become the American Military Attaché.[416]

York's unit arrived at their disembark point near Auzeville, just east of Clermont-en-Argonne, where the busses stopped and the oriental drivers announced in French, "Fini!" With that, the regiment off-loaded and moved to a bivouac south of the Argonne in a small wood. Some men were quartered in buildings, but, most had to sleep on the muddy ground in their shelter-halves. As the tired men settled in, they were startled awake by the opening barrage of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, which shook the ground and lit up the sky as 2,700 artillery pieces fired a sustain barrage against the German lines throughout the pre-dawn hours. The men knew that it would be just a matter of time before they would be called forward to fight in the titanic struggle set before them.[417]

York's division was placed in Army reserve as the preponderance of the AEF engaged in the bloodiest fighting that they were to experience. The AEF had by then more men on the front (1.3 million) and controlled more of the line (23% of the Western Front, for a total of 101 miles) than every nation except France.[418] Facing the Americans were resolute German defenders from some forty divisions. It was into this massive machine of war that York was about to be sent.

The wait to go into the lines was no period of rest for the soldiers in reserve. They were on two-hour deployment orders: ready to go into the line at any moment. The

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[415] John J. Pershing, "In the Matter of MG William P. Burnham, 82nd Division," Pershing Papers, on Relief of Officers, August-October 1918, Box 8, National Archives, College Park, MD, George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 117-118.
[416] Holden, 137-140.
[417] Jones, 19; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).
[418] Leonard Ayers, *The War With Germany: A Statistical Summary*, Wash, DC., GPO; 1919), 101-118.

rainy weather was punctuated with occasional sunshine, at which point the regimental band performed for the men. The records state that the men were in rather high morale, sensing that this could be the last great push, although, "Most of the men of the Division had now been in continuous bivouac in rain and cold weather since September 16. As a result of this exposure, many... were suffering from diarrhea, and hard colds..."[419]

While waiting to be called into the battle, the men focused on training and receiving warm clothing, "which were mighty welcome because of the sudden drop of temperatures." [420] They also received several false alarms to deploy into the Argonne. York reflected on the waiting of going into combat: "The war brings out the worst in you. It turns you into a mad, fightin' animal, but it also brings out something else, something I jes don't know how to describe, a sort of tenderness and love for the fellows fightin' with you... I kinder did a lot of thinking and praying about these things as we moved out into the Argonne. Somehow, I seemed to jes know that we were going to get into it right, in them-there woods." York was correct. The Americans suffered some 20,000 casualties a week during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and the 82nd All-American Division would soon also pay its share of the cost of war.

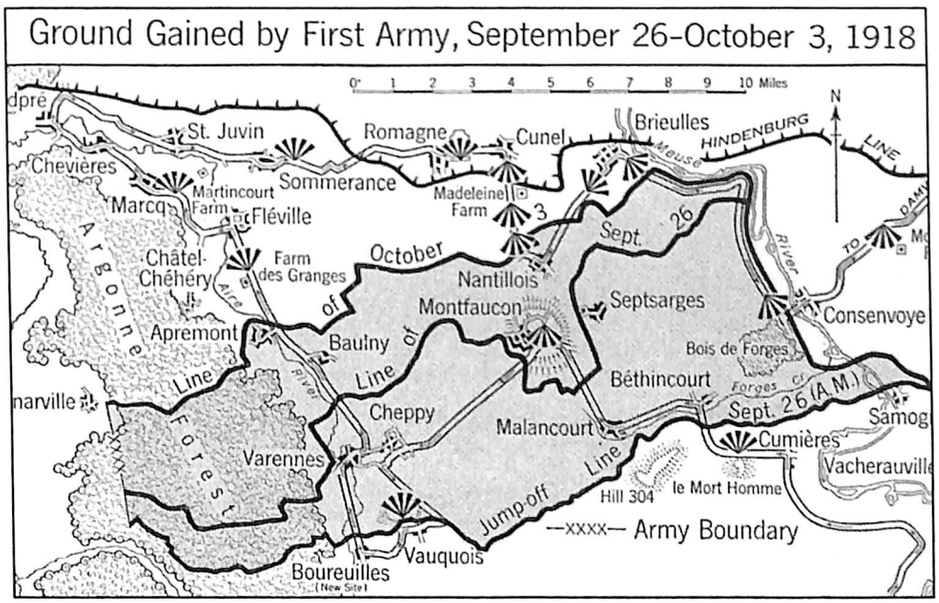
York and the other Americans could not help but feel confident as they prepared to go into the lines. There were signs that Germany was weakening politically. On 29 September 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm was compelled to accept a less than obliging parliamentary government comprised of Social Democrats who demanded an end to the war. Bulgaria also quit the war that same day, while the Ottoman Turks were close to

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[419] Buxton, 30-32; Barker, 42; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).
[420] Jones, 19.

capitulation, leaving Berlin only the Austrian-Hungarian Empire as an ally. However, the Austro-Hungarians were ready to quit the war and had already made a peace overture. Among the many other rumors that circulated was that York's division would not enter the line because there were too many foreign born soldiers in the ranks.[421]

Despite rumors to the contrary, the 82nd was ordered into the Argonne. Between 4-6 October, the division gradually made its way into the southern portion of the Argonne Forest, west of Varennes-en-Argonne. The route was roughly where the American 77th Liberty Division and 28th Pennsylvania attacked on 26 September.[422] As they moved forward, the men were shocked by the carnage and devastation left behind from four years of war between the French and Germans that had left some 150,000 dead here between 1914 and 1918. The contrast was profound as the men walked through the lush virgin Argonne, being much as it had been since Noah's Flood, and then into an ugly landscape unlike anything they traversed before; devoid of vegetation, the ground churned from thousands of artillery rounds exploding upon it,



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[421] Holden, 140-141.
[422] Buxton, 36.

combined with huge gapping craters from the subterranean mine war, that left a five kilometer wide swath of death.[423] Reflecting on this, York said: "The woods were all mussed up and looked as if a terrible cyclone done swept through them. But God would never be cruel enough to create a cyclone as terrible as that Argonne battle. Only man would ever think of doing an awful thing like that. It looked like the "Abomination of Desolation" must have been."[424]



Württembergers shore up the trench line in the Argonne before the American attack in 1918

The men were happy to not to bivouac in the graveyard of devastation from the war, and continued their march a few kilometers further north, into an "untouched" portion of the forest. York's regiment spent time near the extensive German bunker

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[423] Holden, 142-144; Buxton, 35-37; Chandler and Lindsey, 37-39; Barker, 42; Day, 10; NARA, 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).

[424] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); York, 215.

complex at Champ Mahaut.[425] Champ Mahaut is a large series of reinforced concrete bunkers built for the German 5th Army headquarters that was commanded by Crown Prince Wilhelm. He used this complex to command the German assault against the west bank of the Meuse River during the Battle of Verdun in 1916.[426] After this, on 5 October 1918, the 82nd Division deployed near the ancient French town of Varennes, where King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette were captured in 1791 while trying to flee the Paris revolutionaries (and later beheaded). Ironically, the unit was actually stationed next to a large and a well-kept German war cemetery here. [427]

6 October started off deceptively calm for the 82nd. There was a slight breeze, and a bright sun shining that day on the hillside where York and the rest of the 2nd Battalion, 328th Regiment, 82nd Division were waiting for orders. As it was the Lord's Day, York's battalion chaplain, Lieutenant Daniel S. Smart from Cambridge, New York, gathered the men to preach his last sermon before being killed in action. It was an odd place for church service, among the ruins of Varennes with the rumble of artillery nearby and the ever present German aircraft buzzing overhead.[428] At 10:00am, Chaplain Smart pulled out his pocket Bible and read a selection from the New Testament to the hundreds of Doughboys who gathered to hear God's Word:[429]

> I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant

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[425] Buxton, 36-37.
[426] Wilhelm was the commander of the Fifth Army when the bunkers were constructed in late 1915; but by 1918 Wilhelm had long since moved up to command of Army Group German Crown Prince.
[427] ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 16-20; 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).
[428] Day, 10.
[429] Holden, 143-145.

> in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.[430]

Chaplain Smart's sermon and scripture were remembered by the men who survived the carnage that lay ahead.[431]

As many of the men heard their last sermon, the unit leadership was ordered forward to reconnoiter the terrain they would follow on the way to entering the battle.[432] At 8:00pm, the movement order finally arrived. The entire regiment would conduct a fourteen kilometer night movement, along the congested roads leading north out of Varennes, up the Meuse Argonne Valley. Just a few kilometers west of this route was the formidable Argonne Forest, whose heights the Germans still possessed.

As this land had been under German occupation for four years, the Hun knew every choke-point and intersection and were sure to keep these areas under frequent barrage and gas attack to make night movement difficult. As long as the men moved in the darkness, and did not use lights, their chances of being observed and bombarded by the Germans was reduced.[433] Even without German harassing fires, movement would have been difficult. The roads were packed with traffic, men, equipment, ambulances,

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[430] King James Translation of II Timothy 4:1-8
[431] Holden, 143-145.
[432] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 41.
[433] Holden, 145-148.

horses, tanks and supplies going forward to the battle, or back from it. As it was a rainy night, it was particularly dark. In the darkness and chaos, the men were directed by yelling Military Police who would order, "Hold up there! Move to the right of road; Make room for an ambulance to pass!"[434]



Figure 17 - Doughboys marching through the devastated village of Varennes in October 1918

The movement was stop and go, living up to the army maxim of hurry up and wait. After barely making it through Varennes, the entire regiment stopped, and waited three hours on the sides of the road in a down-pour to allow the 157th Artillery Brigade to pass. It had gotten bogged down in the old no-man's land and finally caught up with the division disrupting their movement. This delay meant that the attacking units would go directly from the march into action.[435]

While waiting for the order to continue movement, the soldiers entertained themselves with boisterous singing (it was a singing division after all) and storytelling. Trained entertainers, such as the Vaudeville player Sergeant Parsons rose to the

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[434] Holden, 145-148.
[435] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 44-47.

occasion.[436] Despite the diversion, most of the soldiers had trouble masking their fear. Although disturbed by the death and devastation, nonetheless, Alvin found that his soul was at peace. Relying heavily on his personal faith, he prayed,

> O Jesus, the great rock of foundation
> Where on my feet were set with sovereign grace;
> Through Shells or Death with all their agitation
> Thou wilt protect me if I will only trust in thy Grace
> Bless thy holy name.[437]

Later that night the men were ordered to continue the march. The darkness was punctuated by German flares and star shells, which not only deprived them of night vision, but brought with it artillery fire and gas attacks. The heavy rain of the past several days, combined with the constant movement of men and material, made the roads a terrible mess.[438]

The order given to the 82nd Division instructed it to "seize the eastern slopes of the Argonne Forest... The... 82d Division will attack October 7."[439] The plan was in part to support an effort to relieve the Lost Battalion. The Lost Battalion of 590 men from the 77th Liberty Division had been trapped one mile behind German lines since the 2nd October. Thus far, every attempt to rescue this force had failed. With this in mind, the 82nd Division was to attack into the Argonne to rescue the Lost Battalion by out-flanking the Germans. The idea was that a strike into the German flank would cause them to lift their siege of the 590 Americans. It was planned that this attack would also clear the

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[436] Day, 10.
[437] York, 215.
[438] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 41-49.
[439] H.A. Drum, Field Order number 44, 6 October, 1918, in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume XVI, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 215.

Germans from the eastern Argonne and thereby stop the fire that they had been pouring into the flank of the stalled American attack up the Meuse Valley.[440] Major-General Duncan was concerned about the lack of coordination and preparation that had gone into the plan being directed from higher headquarters, saying, "I was just handed the problem of making the attack... There were no intelligence reports of the enemy..."[441] Furthermore, no coordination had been conducted with the neighboring units (the 1st and 28th Infantry Divisions), upon whom Duncan would rely upon securing his flanks, in addition to sharing the one road in the Meuse Valley to move his division up. This lacked of preparation meant that York's unit was attacking blind deep into enemy territory, something that would cost them dearly in casualties and almost certain defeat. Recollecting his feelings upon receiving the order to attack, Duncan wrote, "We were all rather depressed. It seemed to commit a large body of troops to an assault without thorough orientation, careful placing of troops in an assault and a thorough coordination with artillery presented very grave difficulties." [442]

York's 328th Infantry Regiment was to be in place on 7 October by 5:00am along the meandering Aire River. They needed to be in position before the Germans could detect their location, or they would pay a heavy price in blood with artillery fire. York's sister unit, the 1st Battalion, was ordered to attack through the village of Châtel Chéhéry and clear the hill in the Argonne behind the town called by the Germans Schlossberg (Castle Hill), or Hill 223 by the Americans. After sweeping past what intelligence had

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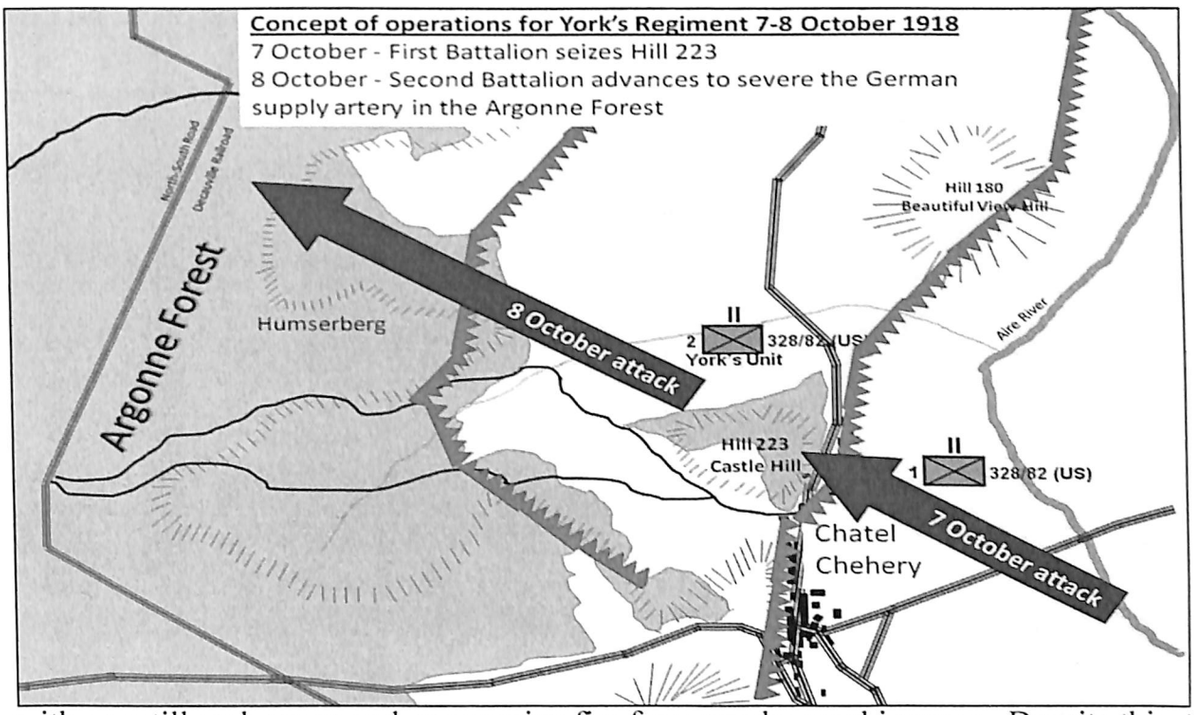
[440] ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 16-2082d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).
[441] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 145-146.
[442] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 148.

predicted would be "token German resistance," 1st Battalion would continue the attack into the Argonne Forest to severe the German supply road and rail network, that was about two-kilometers west of Châtel Chéhéry.[443] The Germans called this supply network the North-South Road. It was a wide road, that also had a small-scale train network parallel to it (a Decauville rail).[444] If 1st Battalion could not seize the German supply road in the Argonne, the burden of doing so would fall to York's battalion. The idea was that if this road and rail line was severed, it would force the Germans out of the Argonne once and for all by depriving them of the only supply network in the forest.[445]

The movement to the staging areas was difficult, but most made it before light. York's unit was set up in muddy craters along the military road. The 321st Machine Gun Battalion had to give way during their movement to allow an artillery unit to pass. This meant that when they took their positions, they were seen by the ever watching Hun. Thankfully, a heavy fog delayed any coordinated or observed German fires for the time being.[446] While the 328th Regiment aligned itself for battle, its sister regiment, the 327th, stormed Hill 180, the bald hill north/northeast of Châtel, sweeping the Germans off of it in a well orchestrated attack. The 327th came away with eighty-one German prisoners and captured four machine guns.[447] But, the Germans proceeded to lay waste to Hill 180

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[443] Day, 11-13.
[444] Franke, 48-58.
[445] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 16-20.
[446] Buxton, 41.
[447] Buxton, 41.



with an artillery barrage and suppressive fire from nearby machineguns. Despite this, the men hung on. Thus far, the 82nd Division was giving a good showing of itself.[448]

As the fog slowly burned away, 1st Battalion of the 328th Regiment moved across the Aire River in battle formation and attacked into Châtel Chéhéry to clear Hill 223 of Germans. Although the Americans were briefed by their intelligence section that the unit they were facing was not a highly rated force, the Germans here were the same that held off the Pennsylvania 28th Division for more than a week along the Apremont Heights to the south, and was part of the force attacking the American Lost Battalion. This so-called second rate division, the German 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, was good enough not only to stop the American advance in the Argonne Forest, but also played the

[448] Buxton, 50-51; 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).

key role in blunting the entire American offensive.[449] This German division took pride in that it only lost ground when the high command ordered it to do so. In fact, when the first-rate American 28th Pennsylvania "Keystone" Division moved into Châtel Chéhéry the previous day, it was forced back by the Württembergers deployed here from the 2nd Landwehr Division.[450] The American intelligence picture of the enemy situation was so clouded that day, that they even reported to the 82nd not to expect resistance on Hill 223 as it was "already in American hands." In fact, Hill 223 was firmly German. They would not give up easily, and would bleed the 1st Battalion, 328th Regiment, so badly that they would not even come close to achieving their objective.[451]

The German 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division commander, General Anton Franke, knew that the Americans would attack Schlossberg (Hill 223), and he fortified it under the command of Hauptman (Captain) Müller and assigned him the mission of holding the hill.[452] The rough Argonne terrain heavily favored the defense with its steep hills, rugged valleys and thick forests. With barbwire, machine guns and rifle pits, it seemed impregnable.[453] The importance of Castle Hill/ Hill 223 was that it not only

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[449] 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regimental Kriegstagebuch Rep M 384 & 385, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 411, 381, 383, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Germany; II Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Rep M 386 & 387 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; III Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Rep M 388 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Anton Franke, *Die 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Stuttgart, Verlag Bergers Literarchives; 1921), 48-58.

[450] Gustav Strohm, Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 (Belser Verlasbuchhandklung, Stuttgart; 1922), 151-177.

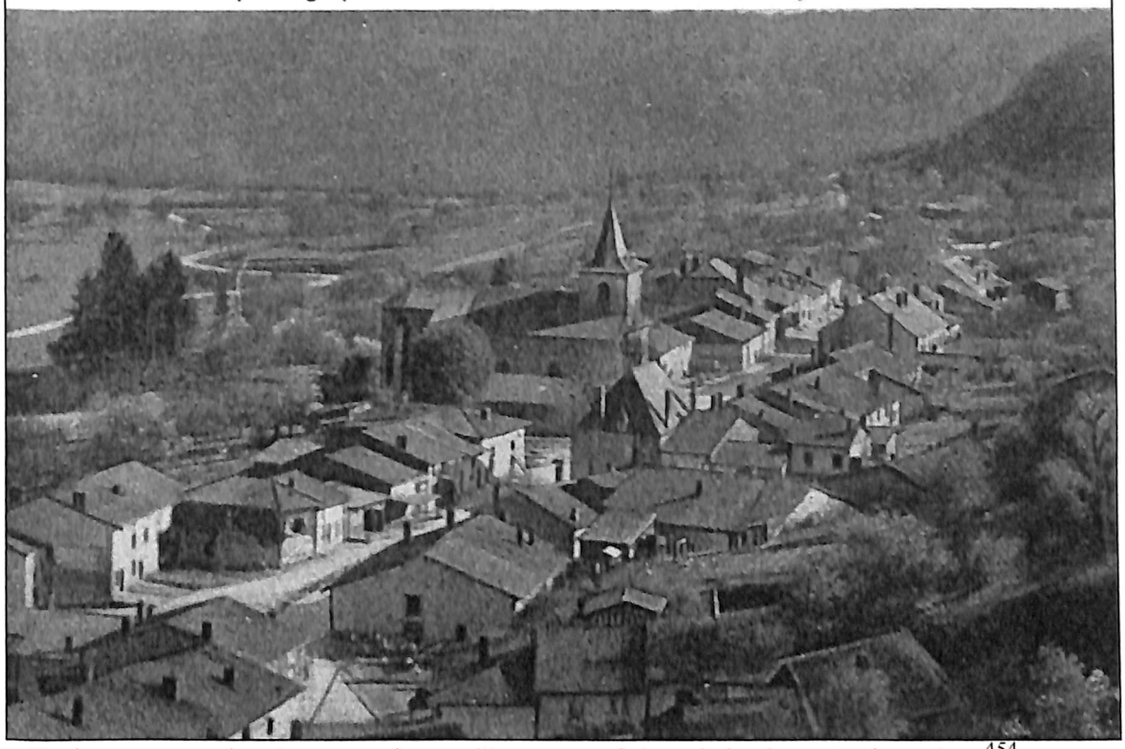
[451] Day, 11-13.

[452] Franke, 48-58.

[453] 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-

dominated Châtel Chéhéry, but, more importantly, it provided an excellent view of the Meuse Valley, where the American main attack was focused. Whoever controlled it,

View of Chatel Chehery from Castle Hill/Hill 223 looking south/southeast. The valley behind th photographer is where York's battalion was nearly defeated.



controlled access to the Argonne here. Because of that, it had strategic value.[454]

York and the men watched as their brother soldiers moved across some two-kilometers of open, up-sloping terrain to attack into Châtel Chéhéry. Thankfully, the regimental commander, Colonel Wetherill, secured a good look at Hill 223, and realized contrary to intelligence reports that it was firmly held by a German battalion. There was no way his men could take it without a heavy artillery preparation. Because of this,

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Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).

[454] Franke, 48-58.

Wetherill delayed the attack for two-hours until the barrage could precede his men up the hill. Once the barrage commenced, the men advanced.[455]

Heavy German artillery barrage erupted on the American battalion as they crossed the Aire River. This was witnessed by York and the men of 2nd Battalion, watching from their support position. The German barrage was supported by heavy machinegun fires from the hill that they were about to storm.[456] In spite of this, the Americans of 1st Battalion, 328th Regiment, pushed on, successfully taking Hill 223 around 1:00pm after a heavy American barrage racked the hill. This barrage fatally wounded the German commander, Hauptmann Müller, who was captured by the Americans where he fell, with his regimental surgeon, Doctor Kögel, remaining by his side.[457]

Despite the good news, the capture of Hill 223 was only the beginning of the battle. The German 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division commander planned on throwing the Americans off of this key terrain feature. He launched a series of counter attacks that would last through the night. To do this, he moved up a battery of 77s from his divisional artillery regiment to provide direct fire that he hoped would literally blast the Americans off of the hill. Additionally, the Pahl Company of the 5th Prussian Guards Division was deployed to support the attack.[458] The Germans nearly prevailed in winning back the hill, with the Americans resorting to their .45 Colt pistols and their backs

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[455] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 54-58.
[456] Day, 10-13.
[457] Viktor-Karl Lapple, Das Württembergische Landwehr Infanterie Regiment Nr. 125 Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Stuttgart, Belser; 1926), 169-173.
[458] 5th Guards Prussian Division Kriegstagebuch, 5 October 1918 - 9 October 1918.

literally at the edge of the eastern cliff overlooking Châtel Chéhéry. It was such a close run battle, that a regimental runner reported that the hill was lost to the Germans.[459]

The cost for the Germans was incredible. From the 125th Württemberg Landwehr Regiment, two Company Commanders, Leutnant Gugeler and Leutnant Butz were seriously injured in the attack, while another officer was missing in action and presumed dead. Hauptmann Bast charged up the hill, leading his company, but died in the attempt with many of his men. Perishing with him was the Württemberg 3rd Machine Gun Company commander, Leutnant Pfizer.[460] Despite their losses, the Germans attacked through the night and into the early morning of 8 October.

As the battle raged, York and the men of 2nd Battalion could only hope and pray that their brothers in 1st Battalion could hold Hill 223. The Germans did all they could to make life miserable for York and his men as well. To prevent the battalion from moving up in support, they were constantly barraged by artillery and strafed by German aircraft and German forward observers directed artillery fire against the 82nd's machine gun unit, wounding and killing scores. This was only a few feet from where York and his men were deployed and they helped recover the dead and mangled bodies.[461]

Other units from the regiment suffered scores of casualties from these German barrages as well. The Germans fired primarily a mix of 77s and Austrian 88 field guns. The difference was that the men usually heard the 77s incoming, while the 88s were not

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[459] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 54-58; Lindsey, 41-45.
[460] Strohm, 161-173; Hauptmann Heinrich Müller, Kriegsrangeliste u. Personal Bogan, M430/3, 7891, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.
[461] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); York, 215-218; Chandler and Lindsey, 41-45; Buxton, 54-58.

heard until the explosion. This made the Meuse Valley a terrible place to seek refuge, with disfigured horses, dead Americans, dead Germans, destroyed tanks, hundreds of wounded, and the ever present artillery adding to the casualty toll.[462] Meanwhile, York's unit made the best of taking cover in muddy craters to avoid the shrapnel of bursting artillery. This was a view of the war that these men hitherto had not witnessed,

> And oh, my! we had to pass the wounded. And some of them were on stretchers going back to the dressing stations and some of them were lying around moaning and twitching. And the dead were all along the road and their mouths were open and their eyes, too, but they couldn't see nothing no more nohow. And it was wet and cold and damp. And it all made me think of the Bible and the story of the anti-Christ and Armageddon.[463]

Due to the stubborn defense of the German Württembergers, the American 1st Battalion failed to get anywhere near the "Decauville" rail, barely holding onto a narrow piece of Hill 223 was the best they could do. The burden now fell to York's 2nd Battalion. Field Order number 2 reached them at 11:00pm on 7 October, directing that 2nd Battalion, 328th Regiment to pass through the remnants of 1st Battalion at 5:00am and resume the attack into the Argonne to seize the German supply network.[464]

As York's officers feverishly planned the attack, the Germans launched night attacks to dislodge the fractured survivors of the American 1st Battalion. When the attacks ended, the Germans retained undisputed control of the western half of Hill 223 with the Americans barely holding the eastern edge of it.[465] York and his men would face these stalwart Germans the next day. This so-called second rate German unit would

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[462] Herbert D.N. Jones, 19; Buxton, 41; Holden, 148-152.
[463] York, 215-218.
[464] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Chandler and Lindsey, 45; Buxton, 58-59.
[465] Day, 10-13; Franke, 48-58.

make 8 October 1918 the single bloodiest day in York's unit history.[466] Yet, if the Americans managed to puncture the line here, it could result in the encirclement of several regiments. To prevent this, the German command ordered their units to pull back from the Lost Battalion siege, thus ending the five-day ordeal for the Americans some six-kilometers to the west.[467]

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[466] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Lapple, 169-173; Buxton, 54-58; Lindsey, 41-45.

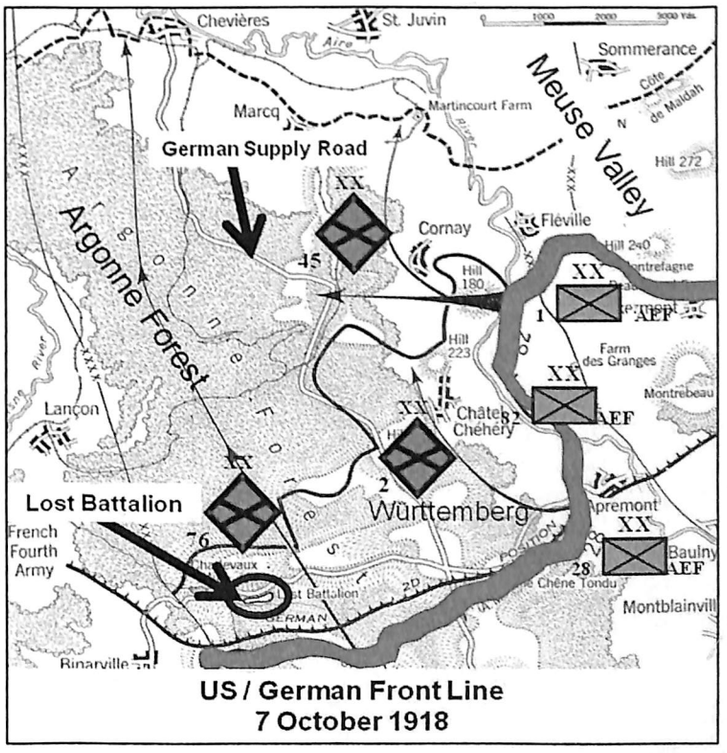
[467] Lapple, 169-173; Franke, 48-58.

Chapter 9 - The Germans Are Ready!

We must, as hitherto, exert all our strength tirelessly to hold our ground against the onslaught of our enemies. The hour is grave, but, trusting in your strength and in God's gracious help, we feel ourselves to be strong enough to defend our beloved Fatherland.

Proclamation issued to the Army by Kaiser Wilhelm II, 6 October 1918

As York's 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment prepared to attack into the Argonne, the Germans were busy with their own preparations. The German command had its hands full 7-8 October 1918. Since the start of their campaign, the Americans had cut an eleven mile thrust up the Meuse Valley deep into German lines. Yet, the Germans used the rugged nature of the Argonne Forest to stem the American push. As a result, the Germans had a deep salient that overlooked the western half of the American flank. By 7 October 1918, there were three significant threats facing General von der Gallwitz in the Meuse-Argonne region.



The first problem for the German command was the "Amerikaner Nest," the Lost Battalion of the 77th US Infantry Division, along the western edge of the Argonne forest. It was a thorn in his side for five days and was more than the neighboring 76th Reserve

Division could handle. The saga began on the 2nd October when about 600 American soldiers penetrated a mile into German lines and settled down for five days in a 600 meter long pocket. Despite several concerted German attacks, the Americans would not surrender. Meanwhile, the 77th US Division launched attack after attack to relieve their men. All of these attacks were unsuccessful thus far, but were taking a heavy toll on the 76th Reserve Division. If the 76th failed to eliminate the American Lost Battalion, Gallwitz's flank would be exposed. As part of this battle, the 2nd Landwehr Division's 122nd Württemberg Regiment was in the fight. The 2nd Landwehr was the same division that would soon face off Corporal York.

The second issue for the Germans was the American attacks against the eastern flank of the Argonne Forest by the American 82nd and 28th Infantry Divisions. This was sound tactical doctrine and Gallwitz knew that the Americans intended to liberate the Lost Battalion "Amerikaner Nest" by hitting the German flank. The third issue for the Germans was that it had to stop the main US attack up the Meuse river valley. This American push threatened to cut the main German rail network and supply artery in Sedan, some 30 miles to the north. This was the most dangerous of the three tactical situations facing the 5th German Army. The 2nd Landwehr division chronicled the predicament:

> The General HQ was concerned about these occurrences and committed elements of the 1st Guard Infantry Division, a portion of the 52nd Reserve Division, the 210th and 212th Regiments of the 45th Reserve Division, the Machine Gun Sharpshooters 47 and 58. However, fighting east of the Aire River, in the woods around Sommerance and Romagne fighting suddenly became intense, so that one could not support both locations. We had to stop the enemy's main attack, which

was now east of the Aire [in the Meuse River valley]. So our artillery around Hohenbornhöhe was used to provide fires against his flank.[468]

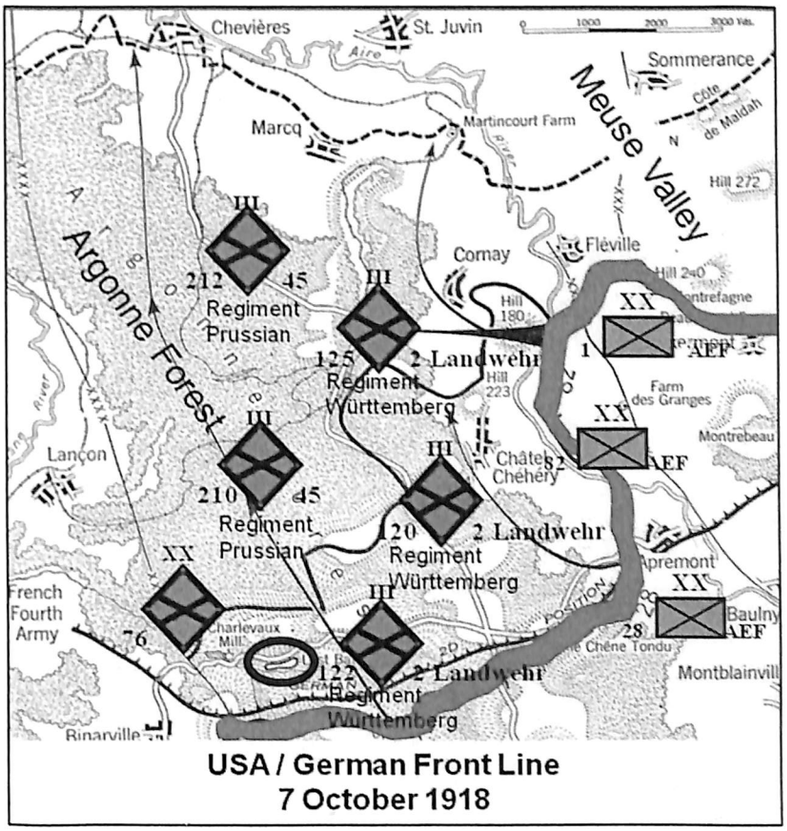
The majority of the German reserves would deploy to the valley to stop the determined American attack there. Meanwhile two regiments from the 45th Reserve Division would help the 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division push the Americans out of the eastern half of the Argonne. If successful, this would threaten the US left flank and secure the Argonne.

Before York's unit attacked into the Argonne, the German 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, which included the 120th, 122nd and 125th regiments was digging defensive positions along the eastern edge of the Argonne forest. They had been making preparations here since the 2 October.[469] A few kilometers off to the west, the 122nd Landwehr Regiment was helping to fight the Lost Battalion.[470] Meanwhile, the German 1st Battalion, 120th Regiment, under the command of Leutnant Paul Vollmer, was the last of the division to pull back from Apremont Woods to the valley behind Châtel Chéhéry to serve as a reserve.[471] This was a welcome reprieve for Vollmer's men, who had been

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[468] Strohm, 161-173.
[469] Strohm, 161-173.
[470] Franke, 48-58; 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regimental Kriegstagebuch Rep M 384 & 385, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 411, 381, 383, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Germany; II Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Rep M 386 & 387 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; III Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Rep M 388 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.
[471] Group of Armies-Gallwitz order 6 October 1918, in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume XI, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 539.

in the thick of the fighting since the Americans launched the Meuse-Argonne Offensive on 26 September.[472]



Leutnant Paul Jürgen Vollmer, or "Kuno" as his friends called him, was a highly decorated soldier, who would play the central role in the action against York on 8 October. Vollmer was from the German Kingdom of Württemberg and was a member of the 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, which was similar to the American National Guard Divisions fighting here. Vollmer had participated in many Western Front campaigns going back to 1914.[473] The Argonne forest was like a second home to both him and his division, for they had served and fought in this area for nearly four years. Vollmer recently assumed command of the 120th regiment's first battalion after its commander was seriously

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[472] Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.
[473] Paul Jurgen "Kuno" Vollmer, Kriegsrangeliste, M430/3, 11828, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv, Stuttgart.

wounded fighting off an American attack on 29 September.[474] The majority of the soldiers in the 120th were from his hometown of Ulm, where he worked as the Assistant Post Master. Vollmer actually started off the war in the sister regiment, the 125th, but transferred back to the 120th in 1916 for a company command.[475]

The ten kilometer move for Vollmer's men on 7 October to a position west/northwest of Châtel Chéhéry proved a difficult one. Harassed on the way by destructive American artillery, the battalion took a greater part of the day before it finally arrived at its assigned location.[476] Vollmer described his move to Châtel as a difficult one, "While marching back to the reserve line, 7 October, and again while returning to the firing line the same day, we passed a great number of artillery positions that had been shot to bits and were in a state of chaos. Part of my own company, the 5th Company 120th Landwehr, was lying on the North South Road; some dead and others wounded, these men were the victims of one single shell."[477]

While Vollmer's men were on the march on 7 October, the 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division saw that the Americans were preparing to attack into the Argonne Forest. Initially elements of the 28th US "Keystone" Division approached Châtel Chéhéry, but were easily repulsed. After this, troops from the US 82nd Infantry Division moved into the town and prepared to attack Castle Hill and a smaller hill a kilometer to

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[474] In a British or an American context, a lieutenant commanding a battalion would be inconceivable. Such was, however, not uncommon in the German Army, especially in 1918 (and again in late 1944 and 1945) owing to high officer attrition rates. Sergeants command companies, captains command regiments, and colonels command divisions frequently during those years.

[475] Paul Jurgen "Kuno" Vollmer, Kriegsrangeliste, M430/3, 11828, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv, Stuttgart.

[476] Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

[477] Strohm, 161-173.

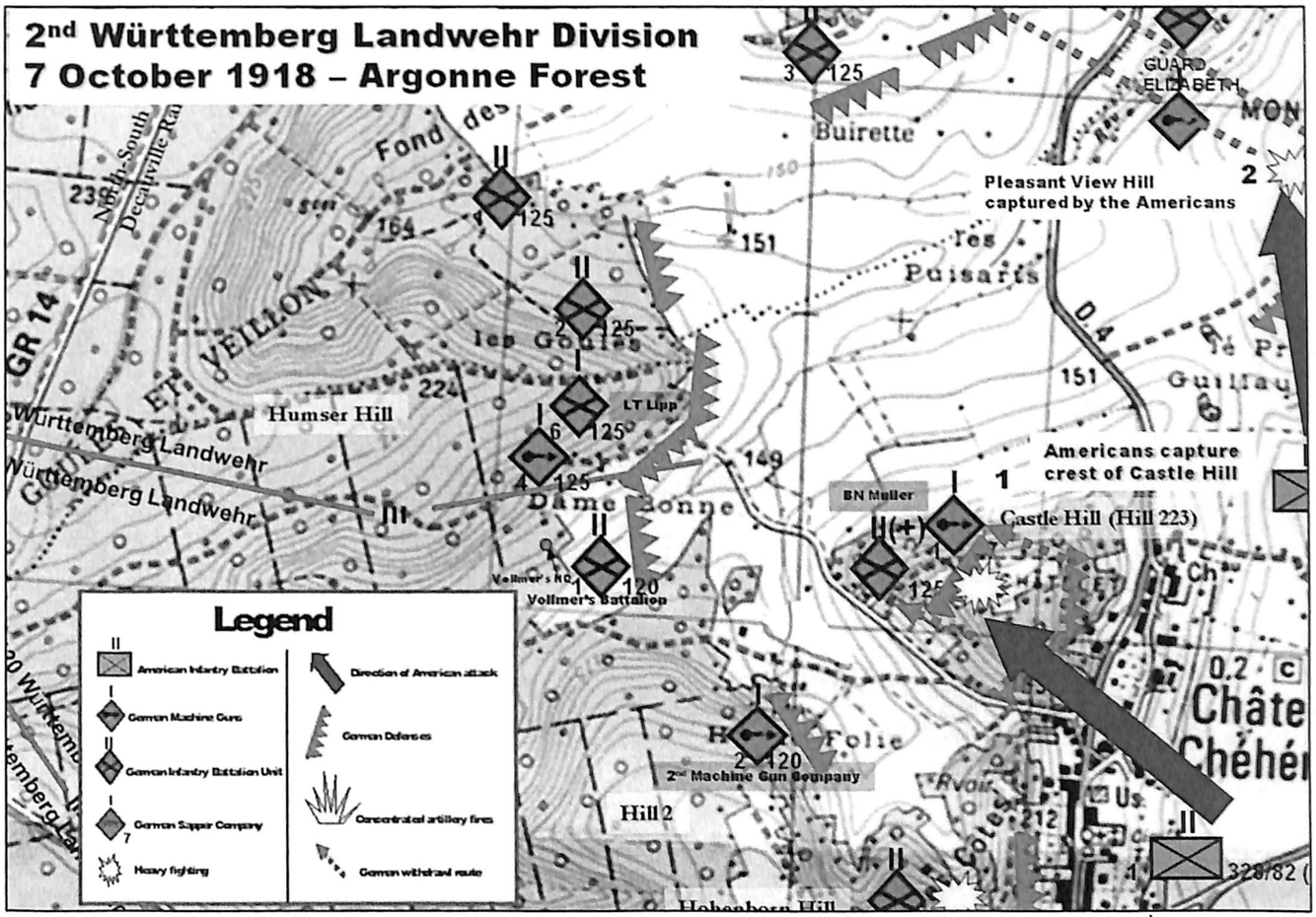
the north that the Germans called Pleasant View Hill (Hill 180). Both hills were key terrain that dominated Châtel Chéhéry and provided an excellent view of the Meuse Valley, perfect for calling artillery strikes against the American main attack down in the valley. On the other hand, whoever controlled Castle Hill also controlled access to the Argonne here. The Germans placed a large number of men on the hill, which included portions of the 125th Württemberg Regiment, the Guard Elizabeth Battalion and the 47th Machine Gun Company under the command of Hauptman (Captain) Müller, who had the mission of holding Castle Hill (the mixed command was named after him and called Battalion Müller).[478]

As requests for artillery support were sent to break up the American military formations moving towards them a terrible American artillery barrage poured upon Battalion Müller, causing numerous casualties. The American artillery slowly rolled back against the remainder of the 2nd Landwehr Division behind Castle Hill. This caused so many casualties that it created gaps in the German lines. The German report stated, "[The unit] found themselves in heavy enemy artillery so that our entire area was covered with the yells of troops taking cover from the incoming fires. It was like the troops were doing a fire waltz movement."[479]

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[478] Lapple, 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

[479] *Feuerwalz* was the WWI German term for a creeping barrage. Gustav Strohm, Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120, (Belser Verlasbuchhandklung, Stuttgart; 1922), 165-170.



The artillery barrage was followed by the push from the 1st Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment of the 82nd US Infantry Division (the sister battalion of York's). Despite overwhelming odds against them, the Germans held on and were only pushed back to the western slope of Castle Hill where they held on through the night, even launching several counterattacks.[480] Thus far, the American assessment of the 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division as second rate unit proved false. The 82nd US Infantry Division also captured Schöne Aussicht (Pleasant View, Hill 180) a kilometer to the

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[480] The German Army Report claims that the Württembergers succeeded in taking back the hill. Group of Armies-Gallwitz 7 October 1918 War Diary Report, in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume XI, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 539; 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).

north, north east of Castle Hill. The loss of Hills 180 and 223 were not good for the Germans in the Argonne. The German hold over the Argonne was slipping away and control of these hills was essential if they intended to stay. The 125th was directed to immediate action. Two determined counterattacks were launched to retake the hills. Although progress was gained after a strong German artillery barrage, the tops of the hills remained in American hands by the end of 7 October.[481]

The German Command watched these developments and understood that the Argonne Forest must be held. It was a natural obstacle that penetrated into the US line of attack, thereby exposing the Americans to flanking attacks and artillery fires. The last of the reserves available in the area were called upon to deploy in support of the 2nd Württemberg Division. This included two regiments (the 210th and 212th) of the 45th Prussian Reserve Division that would launch counterattacks at 10:30am hours on 8 October.[482] The 212th Prussian Reserve Infantry Regiment was directed to help the 125th Landwehr to retake Pleasant View Hill (Hill 180), and the 210th Prussian Reserve Infantry Regiment to assist the 120th in recapturing Castle Hill (Hill 223) and thereby push the Americans out of the Argonne.[483]

None of this was yet known to Leutnant Vollmer or his men. Although veteran soldiers, they knew that their withdrawal as reserve around Châtel Chéhéry could only be

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[481] Hauptmann Heinrich Müller, Kriegsrangeliste u. Personal Bogan, M430/3, 7891, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Chandler and Lindsey, 45; Buxton, 58-59.
[482] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.
[483] Strohm, 161-173; Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 thru 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

a brief respite from battle. As another rainy and muddy autumn day ended, Vollmer's battalion finally arrived at their position west of Châtel Chéhéry in the Argonne late on 7 October. The battalion was supposed to deploy one and one-half kilometers northwest of Castle Hill. Yet, like the rest of what Vollmer was supposed to accomplish this day, this was too difficult to execute. As Vollmer's men occupied the area, American artillery began falling on them. Vollmer saw the valley and meadow below him, about a kilometer closer to the front, and decided to position his unit there. The meadow below "Humserberg," the center hill in the valley behind Châtel Chéhéry, commanded everything in this part of the Argonne The 2nd Landwehr's Operations Officer, Major Spang, noted that the division was "lacking sufficient men to form a solid line, [so] we put up strong points and machine gun nests at vantage points in the terrain." This was a good plan and enough to gain the time needed for the 212th and 210th regiments to arrive for the decisive counterattack the next morning.[484]

Late on 7 October, the 125th and 120th Regiments dug in for the fight that was to come. The 120th's 2nd Machine Gun Company set up fortified positions along Hill 2, just forward and south of Vollmer's battalion. Later that night, Vollmer's 4th Company Commander, Leutnant Endriss, identified gaps in the regiment's line between his position and the 2nd Machine Gun Company. One of Endriss' platoon leaders, Leutnant Kübler, was so anxious to fill the gap that Endriss allowed him to personally ask Vollmer for permission to move his platoon between the battalion and the machine gun company. He told Vollmer, "I regard our situation as very dangerous, for the Americans could

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[484] Strohm, 161-173; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

easily pass through the gaps in the sector of the 2nd Machine Gun Company and gain our rear."[485]

"Kuno" Vollmer directed Kübler to establish liaison with the 2nd machine gun company, which meant that the gap in the line was larger than anticipated. To remedy this, Kübler insisted that Endriss send a note to Vollmer, that stated, "I will, on my own responsibility, occupy Hill 2 with part of 4th Company."[486] Vollmer appreciated his initiative but wrote back to him that per Major Spang's orders, they were to establish strong-points. Besides, reinforcements were due to arrive in only a few hours, which not only included the 210th Prussian Regiment, but also the Bavarian Pioneer (Mineur) Company Nr. 7. With this in mind, he told Kübler, "You will hold the position to which you have been assigned."[487]

As the time for the American attack approached, Vollmer's position was fairly secure as the terrain favored the Germans. Furthermore, on his left was the 125th Württemberg Regiment, with the nearest company from that regiment under the command of Leutnant Paul Lipp a friend with whom Vollmer served between 1914-

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[485] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936; Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

[486] Karl Kübler, Kriegsrangeliste, M430/3, 6369, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart

[487] Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

1916.[488] Tied in with Lipp, and on Vollmer's battalion seam was his most trusted Leutnant in the battalion, Fritz Endriss. Endriss had an excellent reputation as a soldier and an eye for good terrain. In this case, Endriss used a French seventeenth century border trench as the central point for his company's defensive line. This trench was on the southern face of Lipp's center hill, and had excellent line of sight to Castle Hill, making it the center of gravity for Vollmer's entire defensive scheme. The valley into the Argonne and to/from Châtel Chéhéry would be covered by German units on the hills to the north (125th Regiment), south (120th Regiment, and 7th Bavarian Mineur Company) and west (120th and 125th Regiment), in addition to Vollmer's battalion in the meadow.[489]

The German plan for 8 October was that the remnants of Battalion Müller on Castle Hill would defend as long as their ammunition held out. Once they delayed the Americans in this fashion, Battalion Müller would withdraw from that hill and reinforce the 125th on Humserberg.[490] As the Americans chased these "retreating" Germans, they would fall into the trap. Once the Americans were half-way across the valley behind

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[488] Lapple, 5-31, 55-62, 169-173; Paul Adolf August, Kriegsrangeliste, M430/3, 6907 Lipp, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Paul Jurgen "Kuno" Vollmer, Kriegsrangeliste, M430/3, 11828, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv, Stuttgart.

[489] Lapple, 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch.

[490] Chandler and Lindsey, 45.

Châtel Chéhéry, the Germans would open fire on them from the ridges to the north, west and south. This would effectively destroy the attacking American battalion.[491]

Once this was accomplished, the 120th, reinforced by the 210th Prussian Regiment, and the 125th reinforced by the 212th Prussian Regiment would launch a counterattack at 10:30am on 8 October, that would completely sweep the Americans from the valley and retake Castle Hill (Hill 223) and Pleasant View Hill (Hill 180). This would threaten the American main attack up the Meuse Valley and secure the German position in the Argonne, potentially throwing off the American scheme of maneuver for weeks. It was the perfect plan. It was into this death trap that Alvin York's 2nd Battalion, 328th Regiment, 82nd Division would attack..[492]

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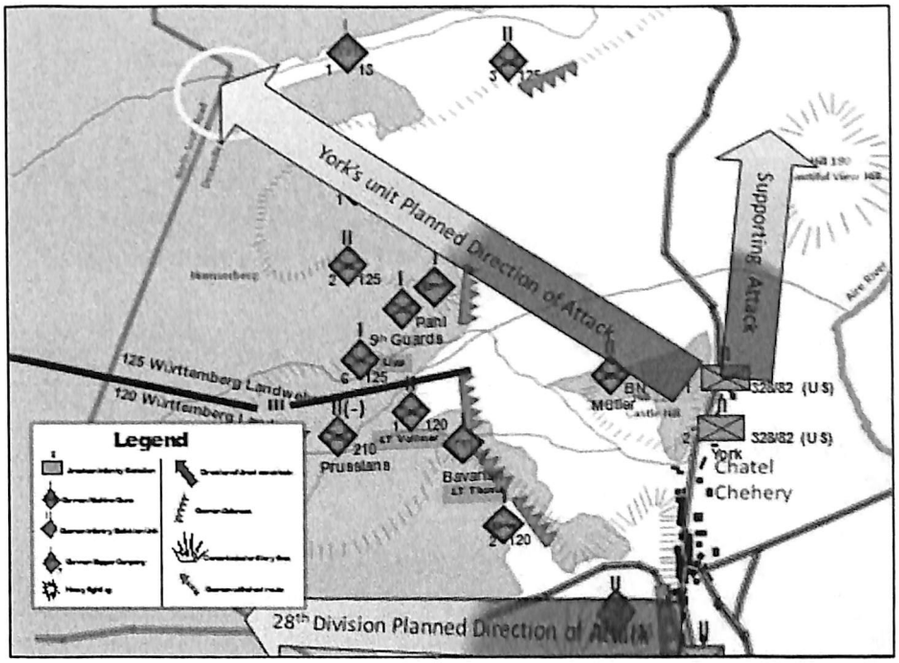
[491] Lapple, 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

[492] Lapple, 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936; 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).

Chapter 10 - One Day in October

I'm a-telling you that-there valley was a death trap. The Germans done got us... I'm a-telling you they were shooting straight, and our boys jes done went down like the long grass before the mowing machine at home. Our attacks jes faded out.
Alvin York, 8 October 1918

The concept of American operations for 8 October 1918 was to launch a three prong attack into the Argonne, with York's battalion advancing in the center while the 1st Battalion pushed from its position on Castle Hill to the right.[493] 3rd battalion would serve in reserve. The 328th Regiments attack was part of a larger assault that day, which included the 110 Infantry Regiment of the U.S. 28th Division, a Pennsylvania National Guard unit , providing a supporting attack to seize the high ground on the left, while another regiment of the 82nd Division (the 327th) would attack on the right, towards the village of Cornay.[494] The



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[493] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War,* 23.
[494] ABMC, *28th Division; Summary of Operations in the World War,* (American Battlefield Monuments Commission, Washington, DC; 1944), 67-69.

time of the attack that would propel Alvin York to renown was changed from 5:00am to 6:00am, to give supporting artillery, as well as the men, a chance to be in place. The attack would be preceded by a ten-minute artillery barrage, with the men stepping off immediately after that at 6:10am. Understanding that their sister battalion had a terrible battle here on 7 October fighting for Hill 223, York's unit was reinforced with a machine gun company and a One-Pounder mortar platoon. A company of fifteen American-manned French light tanks were also available to support the attack if needed. Unfortunately the terrain was not suitable for the tanks to operate. [495]



A company of fifteen American-manned French light tanks were also available to support the 8 October attack into the Argonne. (NARA)

York and his battalion attempted to sleep on the drenched, muddy ground near the Aire River, only getting wetter and dirtier as heavy rain fell upon them through the night. At 3:00am, Captain Danforth and Lieutenant Stewart organized the men to begin their movement to Châtel Chéhéry.[496] According to the plan, York's battalion would pass through the remnant of the Americans holding Hill 223 and then wait for the moment to

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[495] Chandler and Lindsey, 57-59; ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations,* 23.
[496] York, 217-218.

attack.[497] Most of the bridges of the Aire River had been destroyed by the Germans, but American engineers laid narrow boards for the men to cross. Despite the darkness, this was accomplished without incident. Once across the river, the battalion reformed and began the steep one-kilometer hike up to the village of Châtel Chéhéry.[498]

Although there was a fog in the Meuse Valley the morning of 8 October, the day promised to be clear and sunny, giving the Germans excellent observation. As the



Figure 18 The village of Chatel Chehery. (AHEC)

Americans made the climb to the village, German lookouts along the edge of the Argonne caught site of them.[499] Within moments, enemy artillery fires harassed the 328th Regiment's movement to its jump-off line. This included poisonous gas, which further

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[497] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, , 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 22-24.
[498] Chandler and Lindsey, 45; Buxton, 58-59
[499] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.

slowed the formation, as they had to stop to don their masks and then move through the darkness with these on. One of the German artillery rounds exploded in the midst of the column, killing an entire squad.[500] York reflected on this: "They done laid down the meanest kind of a barrage too, and the air was jes full of gas. But we put on our masks and kept plugging and slipping and sliding, or falling into holes and tripping over all sorts of things and getting up again and stumbling on for a few yards and then going down again, until we done reached the hill."[501]

York remembered this movement to the jump-off line on Hill 223 as slow and chaotic. There was no calm, or quiet in the Meuse Valley. Rather, it was alive with the movement of tens of thousands men, trucks, horses, mingled with the terrific explosions of artillery and the splattering of machine gun fires. The men constantly slipped and fell onto the muddy ground, and easily lost their way in the darkness, that was frequently punctuated by bright flashes. Of this, York says, "We were marching, I might say floundering around, in column of squads. The noise were worse than ever, and everybody was shouting through the dark, and nobody seemed to be able to hear what anybody else said."[502]

Just as twilight was breaking, the men made it to Hill 223, much to the relief of the survivors who had held the hill against incredible odds since the previous day. One of the units that York's men relieved was "B" Company, which lost sixty-three men over

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[500] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Chandler and Lindsey, 45; Buxton, 57-59; York, 217-218.
[501] York, 219.
[502] York, 218.

the past twenty hours of fighting.[503] As the men of the 2nd Battalion waited for the order to attack, they all knew that this would be a vicious fight. On the brink of entering the abyss of a violent battle, their thoughts were on divergent contemplations of everything from home to love-ones. For one member of the unit, Private Mario Muzzi, it was his thirtieth birthday. He would be the sole survivor of his squad, with the rest being wiped out by one German machinegun in only a few hours.[504]

Also in York's platoon was Corporal Cutting. York and Cutting had never overcome their antipathy toward each other. Despite the training, and time at the front, no bond of friendship developed. Cutting distrusted York and wondered if he would do his duty and kill Germans. As York led the squad on the left of the attack formation, Cutting questioned, "Would he run and leave us exposed?"[505] Yet, Cutting was troubled by even greater matters that morning. Since he lied about his name to join the army, he wondered how his mom would ever know of his death. His entire service record was a fabrication with not only a false name, but also a fictitious home town and invented career. Everything the Army knew about Cutting was a lie. There were no clues that Cutting was really Otis B. Merrithew.[506] Fearing that he would be kicked out of the army for perjury if he told the truth, he never uttered a word of this; not even to his friend

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[503] Day, 11-13.
[504] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Chandler and Lindsey, 45-46; Buxton, 58-59; York, 219-230; Pattullo, "3-4.
[505] This is based upon a personal interview between Cutting and Tom Mahoney. Tom Mahoney, "Sergeant Alvin York," *American Legion Magazine*, 20 November 1968, 22, 45-47; George Larrabee, "Sharpshooter from the Hills, *"Military History*," June 1987, 10, 56-57.
[506] "Sgt York's Buddy to Get Late Medal," *The Tuscaloosa News*, 29 September 1965, 7; "York's Buddy to Get Medal 47 Years Late," *The Portsmouth Times*, 21 September 1965, 7; "Merrithew Gets Sendoff," *Boston Globe*, 2 October 1929, 6; Roland Corneau, "Brookline Veteran Recalls Argonne," *Boston Globe*, 8 October 1968, 37.

Bernie Early.[507] As "Cutting" was about to come clean about this to Early, it was time to "go over the top" and the secret went with him into battle and nearly into eternity.[508]

As the Americans waited for the order to attack, the Germans were making final preparations to not only defend against them, but to also repulse them from the Argonne entirely. The German battalion commander only two kilometers across the valley from the Americans, Leutnant Paul Vollmer, had a mix of good and bad reports that morning. While organizing his defense from the small wooden hut in the midst of the meadow below Humserberg, he still had concerns about gaps on his right flank. Adding to this anxiety was that his adjutant, Leutnant Bayer, reported sick as the result of being gassed near Apremont the previous day. Vollmer directed Leutnant Glass to serve as the acting adjutant until Bayer returned, leaving one less officer in the line.[509]

But things started to look up after the 7th Bavarian Mineur Company, under Leutnant Max Thoma arrived giving Vollmer more men to put into the line. Immediately behind the Bavarians was a lead detachment of seventeen men from the 210th Prussian Reserve regiment who also reported for duty. Vollmer was ordered to take charge of these units on behalf of the Regiment and to position them where needed. He expertly placed the two units in the gaps on Hill 2 that Kübler and Endriss complained about previously. The Bavarian Lieutenant, Max Thoma, was satisfied with his position and he

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[507] Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 December 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA.
[508] Cahill, 30-38.
[509] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936; Anton Franke, *Die 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Stuttgart, Verlag Bergers Literarchives; 1921), 48-58; 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regimental Kriegstagebuch Rep M411 381, 383, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 411, 381, 383, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

co-located with the machine guns of the 2nd Company, who had excellent observation and fields of fire up the valley. All of the gaps in Vollmer's line were now sealed, and his men were ready to make this a bloody day for the Americans.[510]

As the hour struck 6:00am, things started to go terribly wrong for the Americans. The American infantry were ready to attack and waited for the explosions of supporting artillery to blast a way through the Germans. The barrage, however, never materialized. As the time ticked away towards the 6:10am assault, the officers had a quick meeting, with Major Tillman deciding that the men would go over with or without the barrage. Tillman ordered the light mortar platoon and the machine gun company supporting his unit to open fire with everything they had.[511] Although making a lot of noise, these did nothing to the German defenders, who were safe in their positions.[512]

At precisely 6:10am, the officers of 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment blew their whistles, and ordered the men to attack. As there were few trenches on Hill 223, the men were largely crouching or sitting on the back slope of the hill jutting above Châtel Chéhéry. The large American battalion attacked into the valley in two waves, with two companies in each wave moving parallel with each other.[513] A hundred meters separated each wave. York's unit was in the second half of the lead attacking company, on the left.

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[510] 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regimental Kriegstagebuch Rep M411 381, 383, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 411, 381, 383, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Germany; II Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Rep M 386 & 387 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; III Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Rep M 388 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936; Franke, 48-58.

[511] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Chandler and Lindsey, 45-46.

[512] Buxton, 58-59; York, 218-220; Pattullo, 3-4.

[513] Strohm, 161-173; York, 218-220.

Immediately they crashed into the remnants of Battalion Müller hidden along the low western slope of Castle Hill.[514] York noted of these defenders, "And there were some snipers and German machine guns left there hidden in the brush and in fox holes. And they sniped at us a whole heap. I guess we must have run over the top of some of them, too, because a little later on we were getting fire from the rear."[515] Battalion Müller held on until 1st Company, 47th MG Sharpshooters ran out of ammunition. After this, the Müller detachment retreated across the valley to the lines of the 125th Regiment.

With Battalion Müller out of the way, the Americans cleared Hill 223 and plunged into the valley. The Americans could not but be disheartened by the terrain that was now before them. As they came out of the woods behind Hill 223, the battalion entered a clear and steep valley about one-kilometer wide. This dead-space was devoid of trees, with the ground sloped down to a narrow stream and from there, it jutted up sharply to the large, heavily forested hills of the ancient Argonne Forest. The soldiers knew that the ground favored the German defenders greatly, and this notion was made clear when the Germans opened fire up them from the north, south and west.[516] Describing the terrible situation that they faced,

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[514] Chandler and Lindsey, 45-46.
[515] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); York, 219.
[516] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Lapple, 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; III Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg

> The Germans met our charge across the valley with a regular sleet storm of bullets. I'm a-telling you that-there valley was a death trap. It was a triangular-shaped valley with steep ridges covered with brush, and swarming with machine guns on all sides. I guess our two waves got about halfway across and then jes couldn't get no further nohow. The Germans done got us and they done got us right smart. They jes stopped us in our tracks. Their machine guns were up there on the heights overlooking us and well hidden, and we couldn't tell for certain where the terrible heavy fire was coming from. It 'most seemed as though it was coming from everywhere.

Things were far worse than any of the Americans realized. Not only were the Germans well positioned to defend here, but Major Tillman's battalion was attacking alone, with no support on either their left or right flank. The Pennsylvanians, who were to advance on the left flank, hit tough German resistance from the large Argonne hill before them and were quickly stopped. In addition to this, they were reeling from almost two-weeks of continuous combat, and the effects of attacking without support the day before when the 82nd delayed taking Hill 223 for two-hours on 7 October. The 82nd did not relate this change in plans to the Pennsylvanians.[517] Because of this, they attacked with their right flank in the open and found themselves under withering German fire.[518] By 8 October, there were too few Pennsylvanian soldiers left to capture a strongly held German position.

Due to a last minute change in the plan, Tillman's Battalion was also attacking in the wrong direction. Corps headquarters had changed the unit's attack plan and objective

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Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York," Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

[517] Buxton, 54-58.

[518] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 22.

early on the morning of 8 October. Instead of attacking in a northwesterly direction into the Argonne to severe the German supply road in the Argonne, York's unit was supposed to attack due west, to support the capture of the hills near the village of Cornay, which would advance with the Pennsylvanians who were to attack along the dominant ridgeline on York's left. But, the runner delivering the message to Major Tillman was killed just below Hill 223. and the order never arrived. The 82nd unit attacking on the right flank did receive the order, although only after it had attacked.[519] Having the new plan of attack, the supporting unit on the right flank of York's battalion swung away to the north, leaving York's battalion on their own, with both the right and left flanks "in the air."[520]

Leading the attack in front of York was his platoon leader, Lieutenant Kirby Stewart, holding his Colt pistol high in the air as he waved them forward. As Lieutenant Stewart and his men reached the center of the open valley, a burst of machine fire from the center hill cut the Lieutenant down, throwing him about like a rag doll. His legs were shattered by a blast of German Maxim 8x57 caliber machinegun bullets. Yet, with every attempt to get up, he crumpled into a heap. With incredible bravery, Stewart continued forward by pulling and dragging himself on the ground, and every few seconds waving his pistol in the air and yelling back to encourage his men. Before his platoon could

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[519] Lindsey, History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, 45.
[520] Buxton, 57-59; ABMC, , 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 22-25.

reach the Lieutenant, another German bullet hit him in the head, killing him instantly. [521] Command of the platoon now went to Sergeant Parsons.[522]

By now, the attack was stopped in the middle of the valley, with the men facing largely in a northwest direction. Now began the impossible task of digging into indefensible ground. Sergeant Parsons tried to get orders from Captain Danforth, but could not. Captain Danforth was further to the right leading the preponderance of the company in trying to get around the northeastern portion of Humserberg, the hill in the center of the valley. The burden of command in the middle fell to Parsons. He moved about checking his men, and surmised the situation.[523]

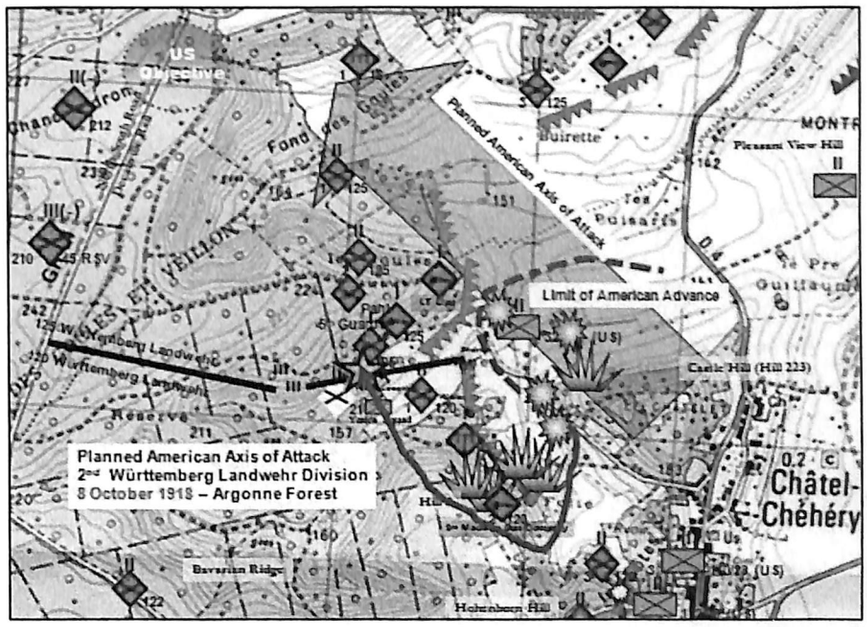
As the Americans had attacked in a northwest direction, the entire left flank was being racked by German machineguns from the large hill in the center of the valley. Seeing this, Parson's saw that the center hill that the Germans often referred to Humserberg was his biggest problem, the machineguns on that specific hill had to be taken out. In this, he was absolutely correct. A large group of soldiers from the German 125th Landwehr Württemberg Regiment, and a company from the 5th Prussian Guards Regiment were positioned there and had excellent line of sight into the American flank. One of the German Company commanders stationed on this center hill was Leutnant Paul Lipp, who would play a central part in the York story.[524] Parsons ordered Early, Cutting,

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[521] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 59; York, 220-222.
[522] Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival,* Washington, DC, 1929, 9-11; 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives).
[523] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74; York, 221-222.
[524] Lapple, 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M

York and Savage to lead their squads to take out the German machineguns on the center hill.[525]

Corporal Early was serving as acting sergeant and was in charge of these four squads, with Cutting, York and Savage being his other non-commissioned officers.[526] Two men from this element had already fallen in combat, leaving seventeen soldiers to make this flank attack that would decide the outcome of the day's battle. The platoon included, Acting Sergeant Bernard Early, Corporal Alvin York, Corporal Murray Savage, Corporal William Cutting, and Privates Maryan Dymowsky, Carl Swansen, Fred Wareing, Ralph Wiler, Mario Muzzi, William Wine, Percy Beardsley, Patrick Donohue, Thomas Johnson, Joseph Kornacki, Michael Sacina, Feodor Sok and George Wills. Early surveyed the ground as the squad leaders gathered their men in the midst of German artillery that was



423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2.

[525] York, 221-222, Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival,* Washington, DC, 1929, 9-11, 32-34.

[526] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 151.

now falling upon them.[527] Directly south, Early saw a deep, natural notch cut into the ridge and determined that this was the best place to attempt the flanking maneuver.[528]

However, moving the men in a parallel direction under the German machine gunners, across exposed ground would be difficult, if not impossible to accomplish. As the group of seventeen began their sprint for the southern hill, suddenly, a barrage of artillery erupted near them. It was the belated American artillery support, and at that moment, it was actually rolling across the southern ridge line where the seventeen Americans were attempting to move. This was exploding upon the German 2nd Württemberg Machinegun Company, which was deployed there. The providential timing of the barrage caused the German gunners to seek cover just at the moment when the seventeen Americans were in their gun-sights. Because of this, all seventeen of the Americans made it up the hill.[529]

Bernie Early led the group in good order up the hill and into the forest. For the men, it was a relief to be out of the death-trap of a valley. Early next turned the men west so that they could move west into the Argonne Forest. This would enable them to move behind, and around the flank of the German machineguns that were holding up the attack

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[527] Mahoney, 22, 45-47;
[528] Cahill, 30-39.
[529] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York," Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936; Strohm, *Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120,* 161-173; York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, 220-223; Franke, *Die 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*), 48-58; I Battalion, 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 411, 381, 383, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regimental Kriegstagebuch Rep M 384 & 385, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

in the valley on the center hill. An hour elapsed during this movement, to ensure that they would not be discovered by Germans.[530]

Early's platoon continued moving south for some 500 meters when he again had them stop to confer with York, Cutting and Savage. He thought they needed to go further before turning the German flank, but wanted to see what his leaders thought. Savage and Cutting thought they had gone far enough, while York suggested that they move a bit further west before attacking into the German flank. Early went with York's recommendation and continued moving west. After a few minutes, the seventeen Americans came across a shallow trench cutting across the northern face of the ridge. Early held another leaders conference and asked York, Savage and Cutting what they thought, continue west into the forest or turn the German flank. This time the consensus was to turn the flank by moving down this trench. The trench was about three feet deep, and great a way to reduce their vulnerability to observation.[531]

The trench was actually not part of the German defenses. It was border line between private and communal land, dug in the seventeenth century.[532] As it was not constructed for military purposes, it was a straight trench, carved into the northern face of the southern ridgeline that overlooked the valley from which these Americans had come.[533] The trench ended near the base of the hill, facing north, and just above a supply road that the Germans had carved into the Argonne Forest. The Americans followed the

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[530] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.
[531] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); "Americans in the Meuse-Argonne Region," in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume IX, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 229. York, 223-224; Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.
[532] Interview with the Mayor Roland Destenay of Châtel Chéhéry, October 2006.
[533] Pattullo, 3-4.

supply road for a short distance to the west, where they came upon a small stream. Bending over the stream were two German sanitation soldiers, with Red Cross armbands, filling canteens. Leutnant Vollmer had sent these men a few minutes earlier from his headquarters to retrieve water for the men.[534]

The Germans froze momentarily in place in utter disbelief. When they saw the Americans surge towards them, the two dropped their water bottles, which made a series of loud, but hollow metallic clangs and then ran for their lives. The Germans ran northeast, across a dense meadow, headed straight back to Vollmer's headquarters to alert the commander to the presence of the Americans. The Germans ran as fast as they could, with the Americans hot on their trail.[535] York recollected,

> They jumped out of the brush in front of us and run like two scared rabbits. We called to them to surrender, and one of our boys done fired and missed. And they kept on a-going. And we kept on after them. We wanted to capture them before they gave the alarm. We now knowed by the sounds of the firing that we were somewhere behind the German trench and in the rear of the machine guns that were holding up our big advance [on the big center hill]. We still couldn't see the Germans and they couldn't see us. But we could hear them machine guns shooting something awful. Savage's squad was leading, then mine, and then Cutting's. Sergeant Early was out in front, leading the way.[536]

Meanwhile, Leutnant Vollmer had moved forward with his battalion to bolster the 2nd Machine Gun, and 7th Bavarian Companies, which bore the brunt of the American attack. After weeks of set-backs, it looked that at last the Germans would take the initiative in the Argonne. Although the American barrage caused considerable German

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[534] Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 December 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA. York, 223-224; Cahill, 30-39.
[535] Percy Beardsley, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 21 February 1919; Alvin C. York, Extract from York's Medal of Honor Citation, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919 under awards, 1919. York, *Sergeant York,* 223-224; Pattullo, 4; Cahill, 30-39.
[536] York, 224; Cahill, 31.

casualties on Hill 2, Vollmer, acting on his own initiative, directed Leutnant Endriss to send a platoon forward to plug the gaps on Hill 2 to shore up the area from American penetration.[537]

Vollmer adjusted his battalion to block any American advance up the valley and thereby retained control of the situation with the Americans suffering rising casualties. Vollmer could be confident of victory, especially when his reinforcements arrived. As the unit report stated, "Without any artillery preparation, the adversary launched a violent attack and there was heavy fighting, which lasted well into the evening. The enemy was repulsed almost everywhere. [The 120th Württemberg's] 1st battalion [Vollmer's unit] absorbed the brunt of the enemy attack without wavering, due to its good defensive position."[538]

Vollmer was busy directing his battalion against the Americans when his adjutant, Lieutenant Glass, approached. Vollmer was relieved to hear from Glass that two companies of the Prussian 210th Reserve Infantry Regiment had just arrived at the battalion command post and were waiting for his orders.[539] The 210th was the force that Vollmer needed to launch the much-anticipated counterattack to push the Americans out of the eastern portion of the Argonne forest. This would defeat the American attack, save

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[537] Strohm, 161-173; Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York," Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.
[538] Strohm, 161-173.
[539] Strohm, 161-173.

the day for the Germans in the Argonne and expose the flank of the main American attack in the Meuse valley.[540]

Vollmer told Glass to join him in meeting the senior 210th Prussian soldier on-site. They needed to be ready for the counterattack not later than 10:30am. There was no time to waste if the attack would be launched on time. The 210th was only a few hundred feet up the valley near Vollmer's humble battalion command post. Vollmer's HQ had its usual number of orderlies, stretcher bearers and runners standing around the shabby wooden shack awaiting orders. However, it was the Prussians that concerned him.[541]

Upon arriving, Vollmer was appalled at what he saw. About seventy soldiers of the 210th had laid down their arms and were eating breakfast. The Prussians had loaves of bread, marmalade, and canned meat out and were in no hurry to do anything.[542] Leutnants Vollmer and Glass reproached the 210th for their lack of preparedness and carelessness. Vollmer reminded them that there was a fight going on and that he needed them. The weary men of the 210th were unmoved by Vollmer's appeals and merely replied: "We hiked all night and first of all we need something to eat." Indeed, these soldiers had moved from positions in the Meuse Valley, through the night, and frequently

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[540] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936; Anton Franke, *Die 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Stuttgart, Verlag Bergers Literarchives; 1921), 48-58; 120 Württemberg Landwehr Regimental Kriegstagebuch Rep M411 381, 383, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart;

[541] Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York," Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

[542] George Wills, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 21 February 1919; Percy Beardsley, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Feodore "Sak" (Sok), affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; York, 225.

under artillery fires. They were tired and hungry. Frustrated by this lack of energy, Vollmer told Glass to go back to the front and then turned to order the Prussians to move quickly. Vollmer's responsibilities were divided between the on-going battle and organizing his task-force for the 10:30am counterattack. He was about to wheel around to make a report to his regimental commander, Major Ziegler, but something was moving across the meadow.[543]

Suddenly, bursting from the foliage of the meadow came the two soldiers that Vollmer had sent to fill canteens yelling "Die Amerikaner kommen!" Off to the right, Vollmer noticed a group of 210th soldiers dropping their weapons and belts, yelling "Kamerad" with their hands in the air. Not knowing what was going on, Vollmer threateningly drew his pistol and yelled to them to pick up their weapons and arm themselves.[544] Just out of Vollmer's vision, to his rear, the Prussians had reacted to what looked like a large group of Americans, charging across the meadow and firing their rifles.[545] Believing it was a large American penetration of some 100 troops, or perhaps American shock-troops, the soldiers of the 210th were caught by surprise and surrendered. Before Vollmer realized what happened, a "large and strong American man with a red-mustache, broad features and a freckle face" captured him. It was Corporal Alvin C. York.[546]

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[543] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.
[544] Strohm, 161-173.
[545] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.
[546] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Michael Sacina, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Buxton, *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* 60-61; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York," US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

Meanwhile, Leutnant Glass, who moments before Vollmer sent back to the front suddenly returned to the command post to report that he had seen American troops moving near the meadow. Before he realized it, Glass too was a prisoner. Everything occurred so quickly that both Vollmer and the 210th Regimental soldiers believed that this was a larger surprise attack launched by the Americans and did not know that it was only a patrol of seventeen soldiers.[547]

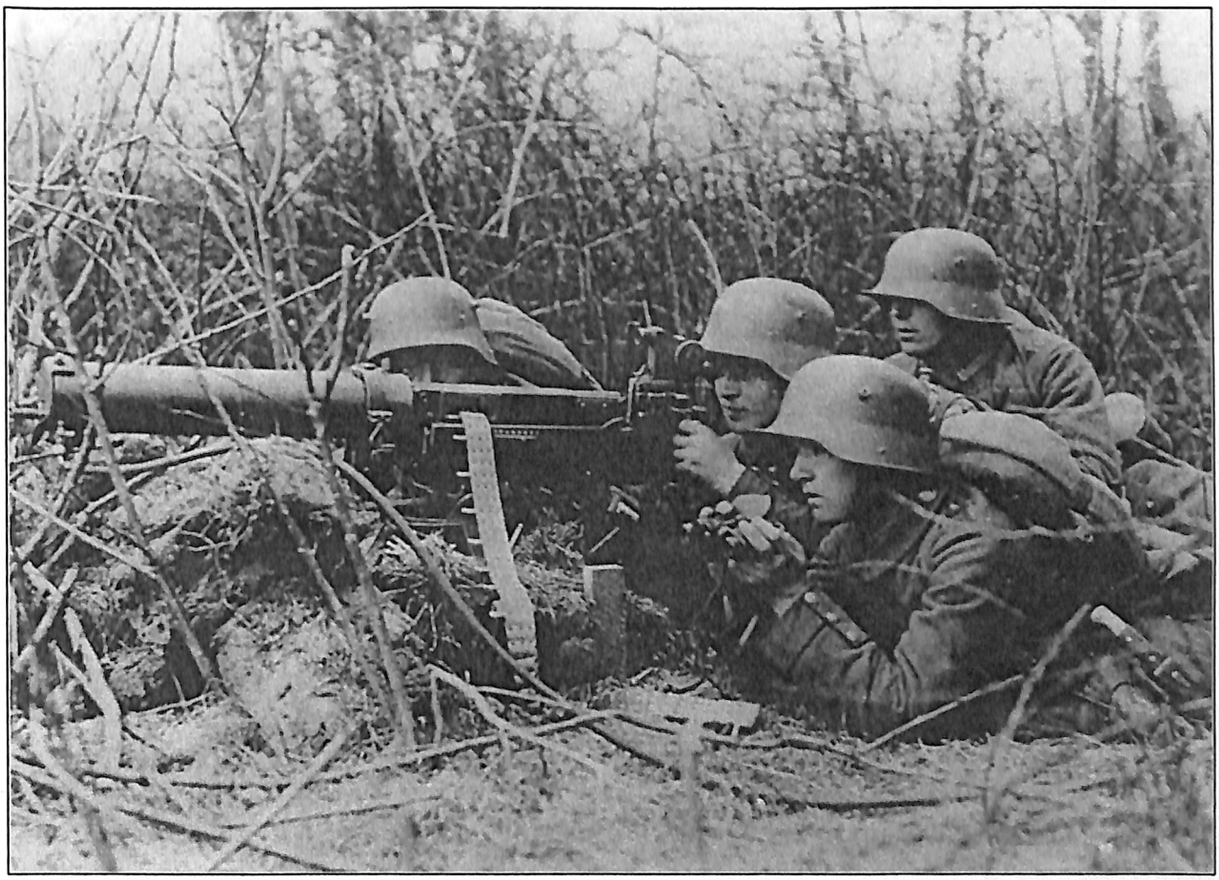


Figure 19 A typical German machinegun crew

[547] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

Bernie Early ordered his men to quickly search the seventy prisoners, line them up and get ready to move. It was a dramatic and chaotic situation. Around the seventeen Americans there was the sounds of war from the valley to the east and the hills in front and behind them, as German gunners fired upon their brothers at arms in the death trap less than half a kilometer away. While the Americans were busy getting the prisoners into order, the 4th and 6th Companies of the 125th Württemberg Landwehr Regiment on Humserberg, the hill literally just above the Americans, realized that there was trouble below.[548]

A crew of German machine gunners under the command of Leutnant Paul Lipp, were directly above Vollmer's HQ and had been firing to the east into the diminishing ranks of the besieged American battalion.[549] On seeing the capture of their countrymen below, the machinegun's crew yelled and signaled to the captured Germans to lie down. As soon as that happened, the Württembergers opened fire. The hail of bullets killed six and wounded three of the seventeen Americans.[550] The situation was so chaotic that several Germans were also killed by the machine gun fire.[551] With that the German POWs started waving their hands wildly in the air, yelling; "Don't shoot, there are

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[548] Lapple, 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart

[549] York, 265.

[550] Feodore "Sak" (Sok), affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; George Wills, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 21 February 1919; Percy Beardsley, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Buxton, *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* 60-61.

[551] "Americans in the Meuse-Argonne Region," in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume IX, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 229.

Germans here!"[552] German Leutnant Paul Adolf August Lipp, the 6th Company Commander, 125th Regiment, steadied his men and had them aim more watchfully, looking for the distinctive British style helmets worn by the Americans. Lipp then went off to bring up rifle men to join the machine gunners to help Vollmer out of this predicament.[553]

The situation for York and the other Americans was not promising. Six of the seventeen Americans were killed outright; Corporal Murray Savage, and Private Maryan Dymowsky, Carl Swansen, Fred Wareing, William Wine and Ralph Weiler, while four others were wounded; Sergeant Bernard Early, Corporal William Cutting and Privates Mario Muzzi.[554] The remaining eight soldiers still able to fight included; Corporal Alvin York, the only NCO left standing, Privates Percy Beardsley, Private Patrick Donohue, Thomas Johnson, Joseph Kornacki, Michael Sacina, Feodor Sok and, George Wills.[555]

The survivors were scattered across the meadow floor, lying on or near their German prisoners, who too were sprawled on the ground trying not to get shot. The

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[552] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936;

[553] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936; Paul Adolf August Lipp, Kriegsrangeliste, M430/3, 6907 Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Lapple, *Das Württembergische Landwehr Infanterie Regiment Nr. 125 Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Stuttgart, Belser; 1926), 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Paul Adolf August Lipp, Kriegsrangeliste, M430/3, 6907 Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Buxton, *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* 60-61.

[554] Private Patrick Donohue was also wounded in this action but stayed with York until the next day when he was directed to receive medical aid.

[555] Patrick Donohue, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Approval of Medal of Honor, Letter from General John Pershing, to Major-General Duncan, 1 April 1919, Alvin C. York US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919 under awards, 1919, Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival,* Washington, DC, 1929, 9-11, 32-34.

German machinegun above them fired at anything that moved. The Americans shouted to each other to ascertain who was injured. Bernie Early was severely injured by five bullets that ripped into his body, while Cutting was incapacitated after being shot by three bullets that tore up his arm and Mario Muzzi was shot in the shoulder.[556] The worst was Corporal Murray Savage, York's close friend, who was shot to pieces. His body and clothes were spread across the meadow in a heap of bloody shreds. York was shocked and dismayed to see the remains of the person he most cared about in the army.[557]

Whatever misgivings York had about fighting vanished upon seeing the death of Savage. Being the only noncommissioned officer not dead or wounded, and with the burden of command now upon him, York determined to stop the killing.[558] After taking a quick analysis of the situation, Alvin seized the initiative. According to the account on his Medal of Honor citation, "He charged with great daring a machinegun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon."[559] The seven other American survivors provided covering fires for Alvin anytime he moved, with Beardsley shooting

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[556] The fact that all of the other non-commissioned officers were incapacitated, leaving Alvin York in command, is attested by the affidavits of Joseph Konotski, Feodore Sok, and Percy Beardsley, each signed and sworn on 23 October 1918, in the Argonne, to Captain W. F. Enneking, 328th Regimental Adjutant.
[557] Buxton, 60-61; Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.
[558] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); "Americans in the Meuse-Argonne Region," in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume IX, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 229-230.
[559] Award of the Croix de Guerre to Corporal Alvin C York, Order Number 16046, General Headquarter the French Armies of the East, Personnel Bureau, 13 April 1919, Approved by Marshal Petain, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919 under awards, 1919; Alvin C. York, Extract from York's Medal of Honor Citation, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919 under awards, 1919; See affidavits of Joseph Konotski, Feodore Sok, and Percy Beardsley, each signed and sworn on 23 October 1918, in the Argonne, to Captain W. F. Enneking, 328th Regimental Adjutant; also see the affidavits of Joseph Konotski, Feodore Sok, and Percy Beardsley, each signed and sworn on 23 October 1918, in the Argonne, to Captain W. F. Enneking, 328th Regimental Adjutant.

the notoriously unreliable Chauchat.[560] In spite of this, most of the American survivors said that the positions that they ended up in after the German machinegun opened fire prevented them from doing much to aid Alvin's assault other than keeping watch over the German prisoners.[561]

To eliminate the machinegun that was causing so much death, York charged partly up "Humserberg," and crossed a German supply road that was about 150 meters above the meadow.[562] He took a prone shooting position just above this road. What York saw about 50 meters to the west were groups of German soldiers occupying two sunken roads that ran above and parallel with the supply road he had just crossed. York's position was the tip of a "V" where the two ancient sunken roads converged. From here, Alvin had clear line of sight up both of these and opened fire.[563] York killed about nineteen Germans in the process.[564] He had fired nearly all of the rifle bullets from his

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[560] The Sergeant York Discovery Expedition recovered rounds in 2006 believed fired by Beardsley in ten meters of where York is believed to have been positioned. See the following website for further information: http://www.sgtyorkdiscovery.com (accessed on 7 November 2011).

[561] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.

[562] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Frank McIntyre, US Army Acting Chief of Staff (Major-General), Award of Medal of Honor to Alvin C. York, US War Department General Orders number 59, 3 May 1919, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919 under awards, 1919.

[563] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," *Infantry Journal*, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 349-350; Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919; Stroh, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* Band 4. Stuttgart, Belser: 1920; "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt. Lapple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926). Also see the following unit reports; First Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Second Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Third Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918, Stadt Archiv Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart.

[564] Patrick Donohue, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the

front belt pouches in this engagement, some forty-six rounds.[565] In an unusual coolness of mind, he frequently yelled to the Germans to surrender so that he would not kill more than he had to. His squad mates could hear him demanding their surrender in the meadow below. In spite of this, the Germans refused to give up and perished in the process.[566] As York contemplated what to do next, Leutnant Lipp was arriving from further up the hill with more riflemen. Taking advantage of the lull, York wheeled about and was on his way back to the meadow to his men and the prisoners.[567]

As York came down the hill, he passed behind the border trench occupied by Leutnant Fritz Endriss, and part of his platoon. Endriss saw York running down the hill and ordered his men to prepare for a bayonet attack. With bayonets fixed and ready, Endriss led the attack and charged out of the trench towards York. Twelve soldiers followed dutifully, but they had no idea what or against whom exactly they were

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328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919; Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.

[565] Report of the Sergeant York Discovery Expedition (SYDE), published in November 2011, as well as special report published by Dr. Doug Scott, "Sgt York's .45 ACPs and 30.06s," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Buxton, 61.

[566] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.

[567] Swindler, 349-350; Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919; Stroh, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* Band 4. Stuttgart, Belser: 1920; "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt. Lapple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926). Also see the following unit reports; First Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Second Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Third Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918, Stadt Archiv Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart.

charging.[568] As far as they were concerned, the battle was to the east, not west. But, they nonetheless followed Endriss.[569]

Seeing this, York slid on his side, dropped his rifle and pulled out his M1911 Automatic Colt Pistol (ACP). Each magazine in this weapon held seven rounds. York stopped adjacent to Private Beardsley, who also had his own .45 ACP fired in support of York. York used a hunting skill he learned when faced with a flock of Turkeys. He picked off the advancing foes from back to front. The logic behind this was that if the lead Germans fell – the trailing Germans would seek cover and be all the more difficult to kill. As German, after German fell, several of the other attackers broke off and headed back to the trench. By now, half of the charging soldiers were gunned down. Right next to York, and unbeknownst to him, Private Beardsley was also fired into the German throng. Between the two, there was no way that this bayonet attack would succeed. During this fracas, a nearby German threw a hand-grenade at York and Beardsley, which exploded behind them in the meadow, wounding several German prisoners.[570]

With his platoon either dead or back in the trench, Endriss was soon charging alone. At point blank range, York fired. Endriss was thrown back when the .45 bullet slammed into his body. He was hit in the abdomen, writhing and screaming in agony less than ten feet from York. This event occurred in clear view of Leutnant Vollmer, who

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[568] Major R.B. Lawrence, "Sergeant York-American Soldier," *Military Exposition and Carnival,* Washington, DC, 1929, 32-33.
[569] Patrick Donohue, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Michael Sacina, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; York, "His Own Life Story and War Diary," 228-338.
[570] Percy Beardsley, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74; George Wills, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 21 February 1919; Feodore "Sak" (Sok), affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919.

was still lying on the meadow as a prisoner. There were now some twenty-five dead Germans lying across the side of the hill.[571]

Just as York mourned the loss of Savage, now Vollmer wanted to save his friend Endriss. In the middle of the fight, Vollmer took action. He stood up and walked over to Alvin and yelled above the din of battle in English (Vollmer lived in Chicago before the war),

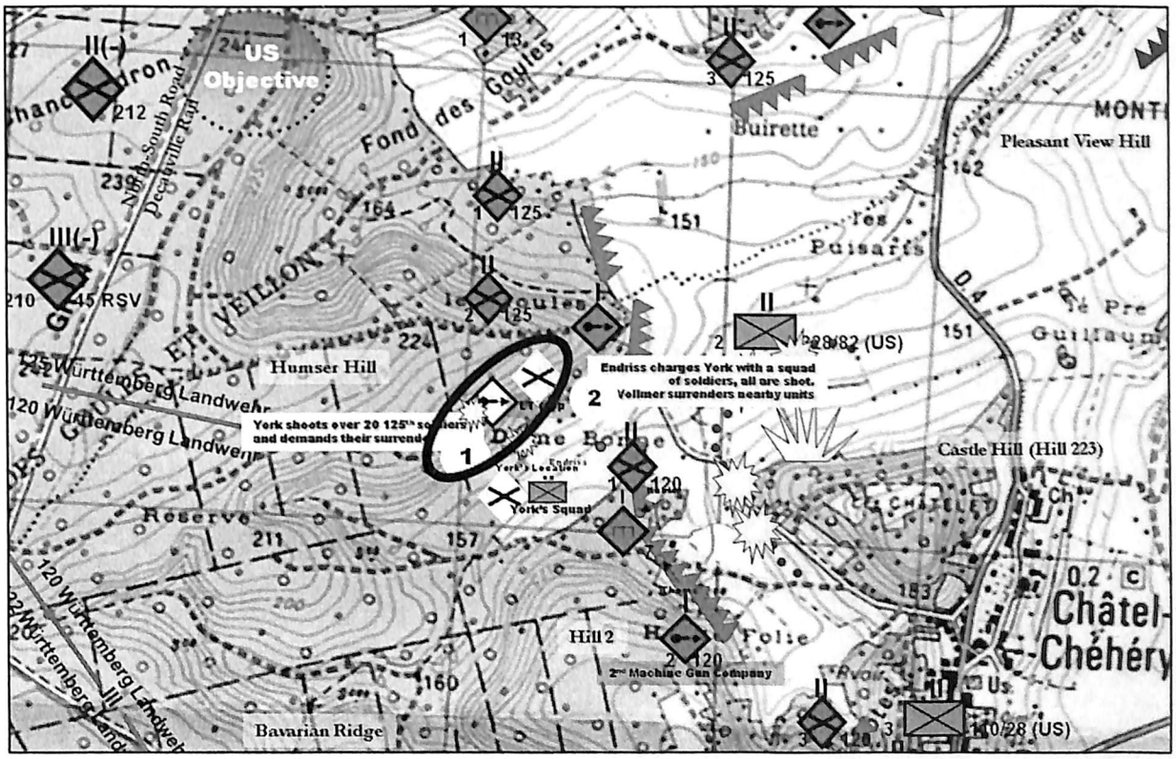
> Vollmer, "English?"
> York replied, "No, not English."
> Vollmer "What?"
> York, "American."
> Vollmer "Good Lord! If you won't shoot any more I will make them give up."[572]

York told him to do it, and pulled out his pistol as a guarantee that this was not a trick. Vollmer blew a whistle and yelled an order. Leutnant Lipp was in charge of the 125th Germans on this part of the hill. He was not sure what was going on, but had lost a lot of men and he knew and trusted Vollmer. Hearing Vollmer's order, Lipp told his men to drop their weapons and to make their way down the hill to join the other prisoners, who were under the charge of only eight Americans.[573]

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[571] Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919; Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.
[572] York, 229.
[573] Percy Beardsley, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 21 February 1919; Viktor-Karl Lapple, *Das Württembergische Landwehr Infanterie Regiment Nr. 125 Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Stuttgart, Belser; 1926), 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; III Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart;

York used Vollmer to translate orders to the some 100 prisoners.[574] As they were readying for the return trip to the American lines, York's men expressed concern that they could handle so many prisoners. Hearing this, Vollmer realized that there were not many Americans after all and asked how many men York had, to which York replied, "I have plenty." York ordered Vollmer to quickly line the Germans in a column of two and



that they carry out the wounded Americans and Germans, which included Vollmer's dying friend, Leutnant Fritz Endriss and Corporal Cutting.[575] Alvin then checked on the wounded Americans, seeing first Bernie Early, who said, "York, I'm shot and shot bad. What'll I do?" Seeing he needed help moving, Alvin answered, "You can come out in rear of the column with the other boys." With that, fellow Irishman Private "Patty"

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[574] Senator Bachman, Alvin C. York, US Congress. Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Report No. 120, 24 February 1937, 5.
[575] Letter from Otis B. Merrithew dated 11 March 1941, to Warner Brothers agent, Mr. Guthrie, Sergeant York document B00374, March 1941, WBA.

Donohue and several of the German prisoners assisted Early, Cutting and Muzzi to the back of the formation to get out of the Argonne.[576]

York took the German officers (Lipp and Vollmer) and placed them at the head of the formation with Vollmer at the lead. Another officer, Leutnant Glass had an overcoat on, and was not observed as being an officer. York stood directly behind Vollmer, with a .45 colt automatic pistol pointed in his back and had to decide which route to take back to the lines. Retracing their steps up into the hills would be suicide, as there would be no way that they could control this large group of prisoners in that difficult terrain. Vollmer suggested that York take the men down a gully in front of Humserberg off to the left, which was occupied by a large group of German soldiers. Sensing that this was a trap, York balked at the idea and took them instead down the road that skirted the ridge line to the south. This was the same road Early led the men across this road when they spotted the first two Germans with the canteens. It was a good choice as it led back to Hill 223 and Châtel Chéhéry, and it was the only route he could safely move the prisoners.[577]

Meanwhile, slightly forward of York was another of Vollmer's officers, Leutnant Kübler and his platoon. Kübler realized that it was too quiet behind the lines and to his left and told his second in command, Sergeant Major Haegele "things just don't look right." Kübler ordered his men to grab their weapons and follow him to the battalion command post. As they approached, he and his men were immediately surrounded by several of York's men. Kübler and his platoon surrendered and joined the prisoners.

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[576] Letter from Major J. M. Tillman to Jesse Lasky, 5 November 1940, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA; Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.

[577] Percy Beardsley, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 21 February 1919.

Vollmer used the opportunity to alert nearby troops by loudly ordering Kübler's men to drop their weapons and equipment belts.[578]

Leutnant Thoma, the 7th Bavarian Commander heard Vollmer's order to Kübler. He turned and saw several of York's men moving up the road. Thoma ordered his men to follow him with their bayonets fixed and ran in the direction of York and the now 100 plus German prisoners yelling "Don't take off your belts!" Thoma's men took a position near the road for a fight. York shoved his pistol in Vollmer's back and demanded that he order Thoma to surrender. The following exchange occurred between Vollmer and Thoma,

> Vollmer; "You must surrender!"
> Thoma; "I will not let them capture me."
> Vollmer; "It is useless, we are surrounded."
> Thoma; "I will do so on your responsibility!"
> Vollmer, "I take all responsibility."[579]

Thoma and his men, with elements of the 2nd Machine Gun Company, surrendered.[580] They dropped their weapons and belts and joined the large formation of prisoners.[581] As they crossed the valley, the Battalion Adjutant of York's unit, Lieutenant Joseph A. Woods saw the formation from Hill 223 and believed that it was a German counterattack. Woods gathered as many scouts and runners as he could to fight off this potential threat. But after a closer look, he realized that the Germans were unarmed and

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[578] Karl Kübler, Kriegsrangeliste, M430/3, 6369, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.
[579] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.
[580] "Americans in the Meuse-Argonne Region," in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume IX, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 230.
[581] Michael Sacina, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

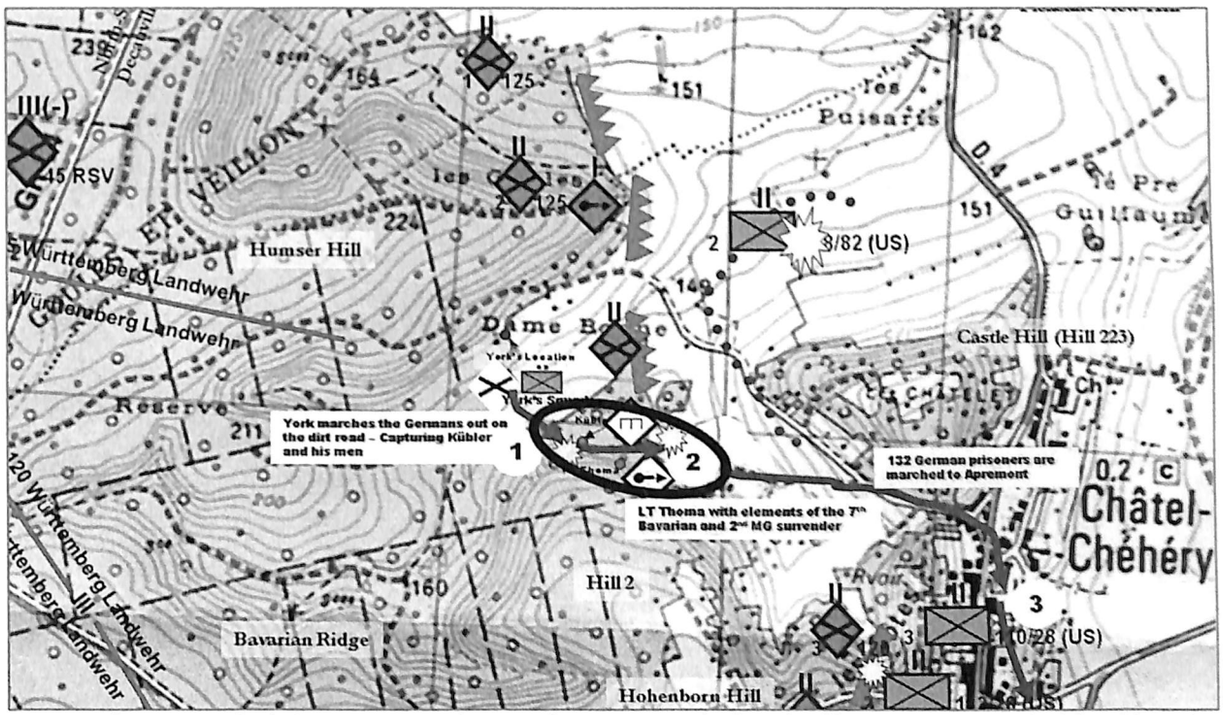
noticed Alvin York at the head of the formation, just behind Vollmer. At Hill 223, York saluted and said, "Company G reports with prisoners sir."[582] Lieutenant Woods answered, "How many prisoners have you corporal?" York, "Honest lieutenant, I don't know." Woods answered, "Take them back to Chatel Chéhéry and I will count them as they go by."[583] He counted 132 German soldiers, with the battalion commander, Major Tillman present as an eyewitness. Lieutenant Woods noted that Cutting and Early were at the back of the formation and "severely wounded, whereby they were taken to the aid station in Châtel Chéhéry with Mario Muzzi." Private Patrick Donohue was also wounded, but remained with the men.[584]

Meanwhile, a German artillery forward observer on Humserberg saw the large formation of troops near Hill 223 and called for artillery fire. As the shells began to land, York ordered the Germans to double time out of the valley. After they made it safely back to Châtel Chéhéry an American Officer saw Vollmer and cut off his rank and Iron Cross. Vollmer protested but was told to shut up. The battalion intelligence officer quickly asked Vollmer a few questions and found the German orders to counterattack and seize Castle Hill at 1030 in Vollmer's pocket.[585] Near Châtel the column was stopped by

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[582] "Back story information," Letter from Harry Chandlee to Jesse Lasky, 8 May 1940, WBA, 12.
[583] Major General Hunter Liggett, *A.E.F.*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1928), 191-197.
[584] Joseph A. Woods,, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 21 February 1919; Letter from Major J. M. Tillman to Jesse Lasky, 5 November 1940, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA; also see affidavits of Joseph Konotski, Feodore Sok, and Percy Beardsley, each signed and sworn on 23 October 1918, in the Argonne, to Captain W. F. Enneking, 328th Regimental Adjutant; General John Pershing Recommendation for the Awarding of the Medal of Honor to Corporal York, cable, sent to the US Army Adjutant General, 14 March 1919, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919 under awards, 1919.
[585] Buxton, 60-62, York 228-338.

the brigade commander, General Lindsay, who said to York, "Well, York, I hear you have captured the whole damned German army."[586]



The wounded Germans and Americans were helped off to the aid station in Châtel Chéhéry, with the remaining Americans being told to walk the 132 German prisoners back to Varennes, some ten kilometers south, as the regimental holding area could not keep so many. To keep control of the prisoners, various soldiers were solicited to help out, which included a tank mechanic, Sergeant A. N. La Plante, of the 321st Company, 1st Tank Brigade, who was returning to his unit in Varennes. He testified that the Americans treated the prisoners' kindly, stopping for rest breaks, and freely provided water to them. When the men at last made it to Varennes, the group stopped and were fed. After eating they headed for a larger prisoner cage near the village of

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[586] York, 235.

Boureuilles.[587] On the way, a 35th Division photographer snapped a photograph of York and his German captives, being clearly identified by the presence of Vollmer, Thoma and Lipp at the head of the group.[588]

York's men frustrated the German plan and bagged a portion of Vollmer's 1st Battalion, 120th Regiment, elements of the 210th Prussian Reserve Regiment, the 7th Bavarian Company, elements of the 2nd Machine Gun Company and elements from the 4th and 6th Companies of the 125th Landwehr.[589] This cleared the American front / left flank. Because of this, the 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment was able to resume the attack.[590] They continued up the valley to reach their objective, the Decauville rail and the North-South Road. This placed the flanks of the 120th and 125 Landwehr Regiments at risk. The German line was broken and the 120th Landwehr would never recover from the loss. The report of the 120th Regiment said,

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[587] Letter from A. N. La Plante, to William Guthrie, Warner Brothers Set Manager, 18 January 1941, WBA; Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 December 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA.

[588] David Schiller, "An Einem Tag im Oktober," *Visier: Internationale Waffen-Magazine*, Dezember 2008, 134-146; Douglas Mastriano, "Sergeant York Fought Here!" *Armchair General*. July 2007, 87.

[590] The Germans had trouble believing that so few Americans could capture so many of their soldiers. After a history of Sergeant York's actions appeared in a Swedish paper in 1929, the German Archives in Potsdam launched an effort to script a rebuttal. The premise was that it was impossible for this to happen to German soldiers. Interviews were conducted with the survivors. During the process, it was evident the Kuno Vollmer did not want to make a statement. When he finally appeared for the interview he was quite uneasy. Before submitting his report, Vollmer asked to read the other statements. After that, he made changes to his and submitted it. The German report is very interesting, but is flawed at its base. This did not only happen on 8 October, but across the Western Front. In fact, the concept of storm tactics was perfected by the Germans and used effectively during their 1918 spring offensive. As with Sergeant York, the German shock troops would drive in small groups deep into the British and French lines and capture hundreds of Allied soldiers. The speed, shock and surprise caught both sides off guard.

The flank of 6th Company reported an enemy surprise attack. Next, the remnant of 4th Company and personnel from the 210th Regiment were caught by this surprise attack, where Leutnant Endriss was killed. The company was shattered or was captured. Also First Leutnant Vollmer ended up in the enemy's hands. Now the situation was worse. Bad news followed more bad news from Chatel to the Schöne Aussicht a large enemy column moved towards the Schliesstal Mulda and the Boulassonbachs [up the valley into the Argonne]. By this, we knew that the enemy was moving against the North-South Road.

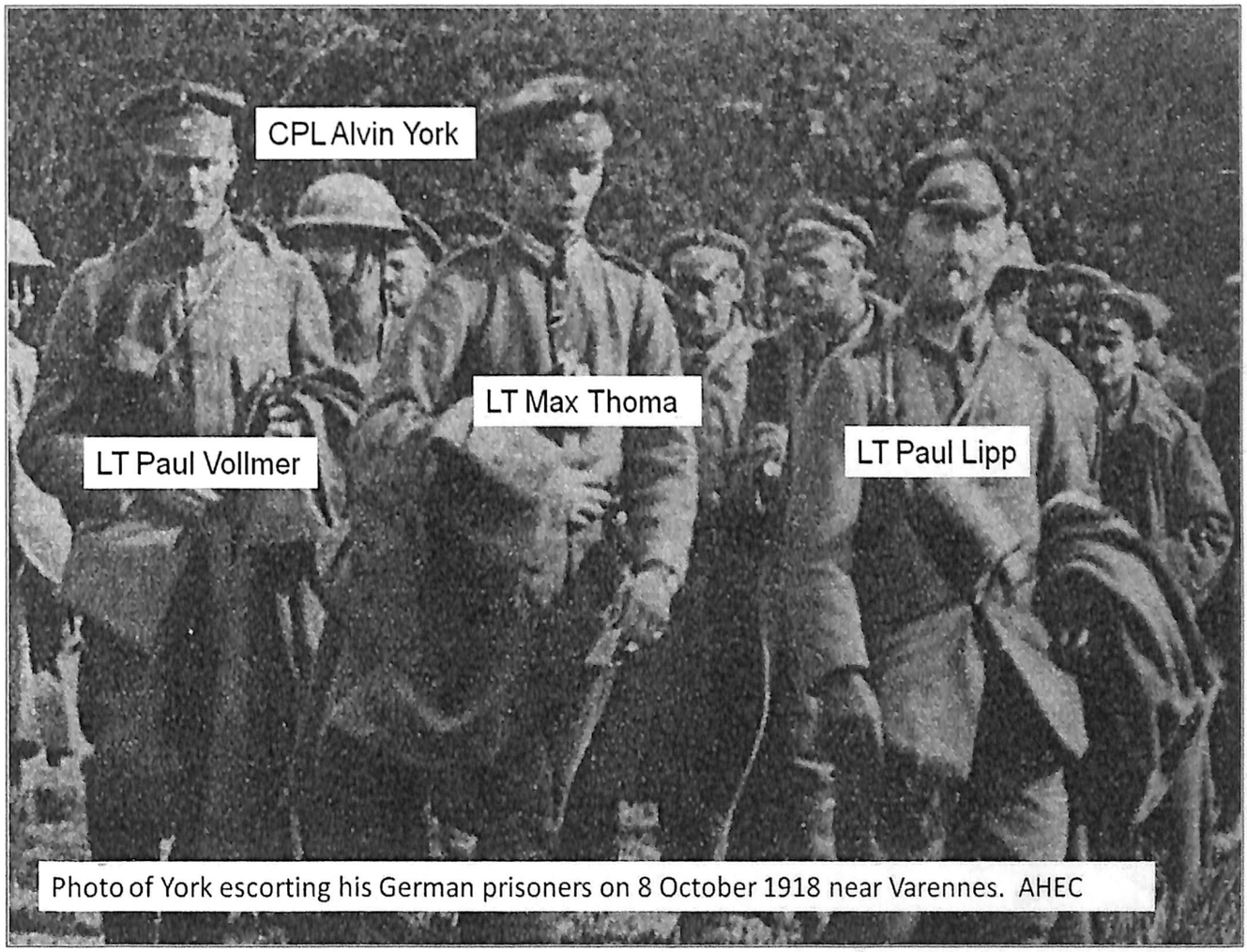


Photo of York escorting his German prisoners on 8 October 1918 near Varennes. AHEC

Several 7th Bavarians evaded capture and reported that the Americans had broken through and captured over a hundred Germans . The command had trouble believing that this could happen to Vollmer, who was known as a confident, reliable and proven soldier. A patrol was sent out to ascertain what happened. When reports reached the 2nd Landwehr Commander that the line was breached by an American surprise attack,

General Franke took action and placed the 122nd Landwehr Infantry Regiment in the gap as a temporary remedy.[591] They deployed on a reverse slope defense in the deep ravine 600 meters south of the York site. This is where a delaying action was fought by the Germans around 2:00pm.[592]

Although there were renewed fears of other American penetrations, there was no panic among the 2nd Landwehr. The unit adjusted its line back to resist further American advances. Portions of the 45th Prussian Reserve Division were unnerved when word reached them that the line was broken, which compelled General Franke to deploy his reserve cavalry squadron to restore order. Despite this, the Argonne was all but lost. The planned counterattack to take Castle and Pleasant View Hills was preempted by this American surprise attack. The 2nd Landwehr lacked the man power now to conduct this operation or to even hold the line against this American assault. If the 82nd Infantry Division pressed the attack now, it would result in the capture of thousands of troops, supplies and artillery.[593] Fortunately for the Germans, the 328th US Infantry had taken a beating as well and did not take advantage of this opportunity. Shortly after this, the order to withdraw from the Argonne was given to the embattled German Army,

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[591] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); 120th reported the following strength late on 8 October. The regiment was greatly reduced by the fighting around Châtel Chéhéry

Unit	Officers	NCOs	Enlisted Men
1st BN	7	20	180
2nd BN	4	18	93
3rd BN	4	4	40

[592] Rektor Kling, Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 27, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 122 (Belser Verlasbuchhandklung, Stuttgart; 1923), 152-196; Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 122 Kriegstagebuch, REP M, 396, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

[593] Württemberg Landwehr Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 through 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

> We received the depressing order at 1030 to withdraw. In good order did the Company move. We did have some luck... There was no fire on the North-South Road. But, we did see terrible things on the road. The results of the artillery; dead men, dead horses, destroyed vehicles blocking the way and destroyed trees were scattered to and fro. Somewhere along the road, between the middle of Hohenbornhöhe and Humserberg, the battalion moved east of the road near the Benzolbahn and east again to our new positions. And what about the enemy? The North-South Road was closed by Machine Gun fire. This happened around 1200 noon. It was amazing that the Americans did not press the attack. In the afternoon of 8 October, the headquarters of 3rd and 5th Army ordered a withdraw from the Argonne line.[594]

A temporary line was established slightly back in the Argonne to give the command time to evacuate its troops from the Argonne Forest. A counterattack was north of the valley against the village of Cornay. This German attack drove the Americans from Cornay, capturing about 100 US soldiers.[595] On 9 October 1918, the final order was issued to evacuate the Argonne and to withdraw into the fortified Hindenburg Line for the final defense before the war ended.[596]

> It was now that... the leader of 5th Army, gave the last word. We needed to occupy the secondary defensive positions further back. In the evening of 9/10 October, the regiment departed from the Argonne. The German soldiers gave so much after hard battles since 1914 – more than 80,000 dead were left here. American artillery briefly hit the Humserberg line during the retreat and always there were the shrapnel. By Cheviers, the Regiment was in shelters. We were dead tired, too tired to contemplate, but able to hold onto hope.[597]

Yet, before the Germans retreated from the Argonne, York and his men would clash here with the Germans once more.

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[594] Strohm, 163-172.
[595] Franke, 55-56.
[596] Württemberg Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120, File M 115: regimental structures and all operations 1914 – 1918, File M 411: Kriegstagebuch, File M433/2: Personnel Lists 1914 – 1921, File M 484: Kriegsstammrollen incl. Ersatzbataillon 1914 – 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; Strohm, 161-173.
[597] Strohm, 161-173.

Chapter 11 - The War Rages on!

> And we were all shot to pieces. There were not many of them-there Greeks and Italians left. But what was left were still fighting like a sackful of wildcats. I shore did like those boys now.
>
> Alvin York, 12 October 1918

Corporal York and his detail would not return to their unit until 10:00 am the next day on 9 October and throughout this time the 82nd Division continued to face fierce German resistance.[598] What occurred dispels notions that the German units in the Argonne were merely waiting for a chance to quit the war. As already described, the 7 October capture of Hill 223 virtually crippled the 1st Battalion in York's regiment. The loses during 8 October for York's 2nd Battalion would remain the bloodiest single day in the history of that unit as well. Unfortunately, 9 October would again prove to be costly in lives for not only the 328th Regiment, but the entire division.[599] To ensure that there would be no slackening of resistance, German commander, General Max von Gallwitz, deployed more reinforcements to the Argonne.[600]

After York's detail marched off the battlefield with the 132 German prisoners, his battalion reached the German supply road and rail network, but were stopped by German gunners in the forest. Meanwhile, two American companies were ordered to attack north near Cornay to take the high ground that had caused so many casualties for York's unit

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[598] York, 270.
[599] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations,* 25-29; Buxton, 70-77; Chandler, 45-49.
[600] Max von Gallwitz, "Retreat to the Rhein," in *As They Saw Us*, edited by George Sylvester Viereck, (New York, Doubleday-Doran; 1929), 253-258; von Tschischwitz, *General von der Marwitz; Weltkriegsbriefe*, (Berlin, Ernst Steiniger; 1940), 327-331.

(Champrocher Ridge), of which Captain Danforth wrote: "Upon reaching about the centre of this valley we were stopped by a withering fire of machine guns from the front, from the rugged heights of the Champrocher Ridge on our right."[601] This ridgeline west of Cornay was defended by the 125th Württemberg Regiment, reinforced by the Prussian 212th Reserve Regiment.[602] The Americans managed to make it to the high ground, but withdrew due to horrific losses in men.[603]

As the men endeavored to weather the German storm of steel, another unit from the 82nd Division captured the village of Cornay, some two kilometers north of Châtel Chéhéry. Here, the 125th Württemberg, the 212th Prussian Regiment and the German 41st Infantry Division launched a counterattack against the Americans.[604] The Germans recaptured Cornay, killed scores of Americans and captured more than one-hundred who were trapped in the town.[605] With Cornay back in German hands, Hill 223 and Châtel Chéhéry were at risk however, this was the last German attack in the Argonne, as they were ordered to withdraw from the forest later that night.[606] Looking back on the conduct of his 120th and 125th Württemberg Regiments, the two primary units that York fought

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[601] E.C.B. Danforth, Affidavit on the events of 8 October, 1918, in Alvin York, 238.
[602] Lapple, 169-173; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; III Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.
[603] Chandler and Lindsey, 47.
[604] Lapple, 173-177; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 420 & 421, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; I Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 422, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; II Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 423, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart; III Battalion, 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, REP M 425, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.
[605] Franke, 55-56.
[606] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Strohm, 171-173; Buxton, 66-77; Chandler and Lindsey, 47-49.

against, German General Max von Gallwitz had nothing but praise, saying they: "conducted themselves excellently."[607] Indeed, the combat record of the Württembergers proved steady throughout the final days of the war.

When York and his men returned from their over-night hike to Varennes, they found their unit deployed near the German supply road, about a kilometer in the Argonne Forest. Captain Danforth was busy leading the men from their new temporary defensive position, and was surprised to see the men alive; asking where they had been. York briefly explained what transpired, much to the amazement of the captain.[608] Danforth replied that this was why he was able to advance the company, because of York's actions the fires from the German gunners on the center hill had slackened enough for him to attack.[609] Before going into the line, York made an unusual request of Captain Danforth; he asked for permission to go back to the site of his battle to verify if any of the men they left behind for dead were actually wounded and still alive.[610] Danforth acquiesced and sent stretcher bearers along with him.[611]

On arriving at his field of battle, York was astounded at how torn up the place was. But, the US Army had already cleared the site of the dead and had removed major pieces of equipment. There was an eerie stillness to the place, which only twenty-four hours before was a scene of death and destruction. Despite this, York and the men with him walked the terrain, calling out if there were any survivors. There were none. He had

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[607] Max von Gallwitz, "Retreat to the Rhein," in *As They Saw Us*, edited by George Sylvester Viereck, (New York, Doubleday-Doran; 1929), 253.
[608] York, 270.
[609] E.C.B. Danforth, Affidavit on the events of 8 October, 1918, in Alvin York, 238.
[610] Swindler, 349-350; York, 177-182.
[611] York, 271.

hoped that just perhaps his close friend Murray Savage had come out of it.[612] This moment had a profound effect on York,

> All was terribly quiet in the field. And I jes couldn't help thinking of the boys that only the day before was alive and like me. Dymowski dead. Weiler dead. Waring dead. Wins dead, Swanson dead. Corporal Murray Savage, my best pal, dead. Oh, my, it seemed so unbelievable. I would never see them again. I would never share the same blanket with Corporal Savage. We'd never read the Bible together again. We would never talk about our faith and pray to our God. I was mussed up inside worser than I had ever been. I'm a-telling you when you lose your best buddie and you know you ain't never going to see him again, you sorter know how terrible cruel war is. There was nothing I could do now for Corporal Murray Savage or any of the other boys that done lost their lives.[613]

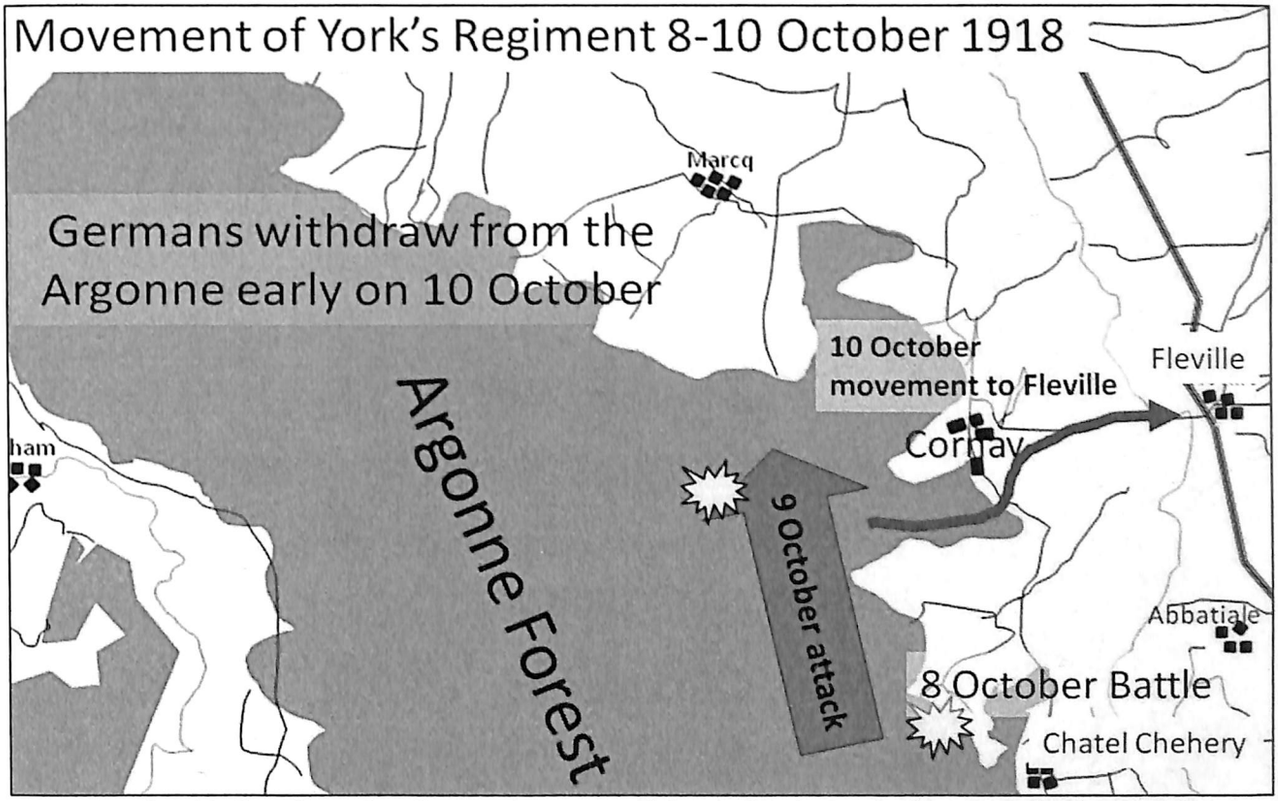
Upon reporting back to Captain Danforth, York was given his position near the German north/south road. He was consumed by thoughts on how he survived, "Two men on both sides of me and two others right behind me were killed, and I hadn't been touched. I tried to figure it out how it come that everybody around me who was exposed done got picked off or wounded and that I alone come out unharmed."[614] Alvin was certain that he had only survived because of divine intervention, "I am a witness to the fact that God did help me out of that hard battle; for the bushes were shot off all around me and I never got a scratch. So you can see that God will be with you if you will only trust him and I say that He did save me Now He will save you if you will only trust Him."[615]

York's unit later attempted an advance up the right side of the German supply road but only made it three-hundred meters forward of their 8 October position before being stopped. Their nemesis from the day before, the Württembergers, put up a robust

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[612] York, 271-273.
[613] York, 272.
[614] York, 273.
[615] York, 276.

defense and would stand firm to cover the withdrawal of German forces and material from the Argonne.[616] With that, Major Tillman ordered his men to dig in for the night, preparing for a further advance to clear the Argonne on the 10th.[617] During this time, Private Patrick Donohue was ordered to the aid station in Châtel Chéhéry to treat a shoulder injury he sustained on 8 October.[618]



On 10 October, the Germans retreated from the Argonne because the loss of the North/South Road made it impossible to hold it. York's men were given a few hours to rest, before moving out. Burial details were sent out to move the dead to a cemetery hastily dug in Châtel Chéhéry, while the unit sorted out casualty numbers. York's

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[616] Group of Armies-Gallwitz Report, 10 October 1918, in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume XI, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 549.
[617] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 25-29
[618] Patrick Donohue, Affidavit on the events of 8 October, 1918, in Alvin York, 256-257.

regiment suffered 718 casualties, which included 28 of its officers.[619] Despite the losses, the men would remain in the line for three more weeks. Later on the 10th, they moved out of the Argonne Forest and into the Meuse Valley under constant German artillery fires, which killed the unit's chaplain, Captain Smart.[620] The men first served as the divisional reserve, being positioned near the village of Fleville.[621] A small French village in the Meuse Valley, Fleville was the scene of particularly terrible fighting only a week before and was in terrible condition.[622]

Over the next three weeks, York's unit would be involved a series of life and death struggles that would contribute to bringing the war to it final conclusion. Yet, York was silent on this part of his life. His diary entries stop on 12 October, and do not resume again until 1 November. This gap was largely due to the constant time in action over this period. Unfortunately, this has led many to believe that York's experience in the Great War ended with the 8 October battle near Châtel Chéhéry. Nothing could be further to the truth. Using unit reports and histories, York's experiences here can be reconstructed.

While waiting for orders to push forward on 12 October 1918, all three battalions of York's regiment were again together, spread out in positions recently vacated by the Germans near Fleville. The terrain in the Meuse Valley was different from what they experienced in the Argonne Forest. Here, the land included rich farm fields, rolling hills

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[619] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 87, 122.
[620] Holden, 143-145.
[621] Chandler and Lindsey, 49.
[622] Buxton, 121-123.

and few wooded areas.[623] While waiting for orders to advance, the men were frequently attacked by German aircraft, which dominated the skies. They not only dropped bombs and strafed them, but, also directed artillery barrages on them.[624]

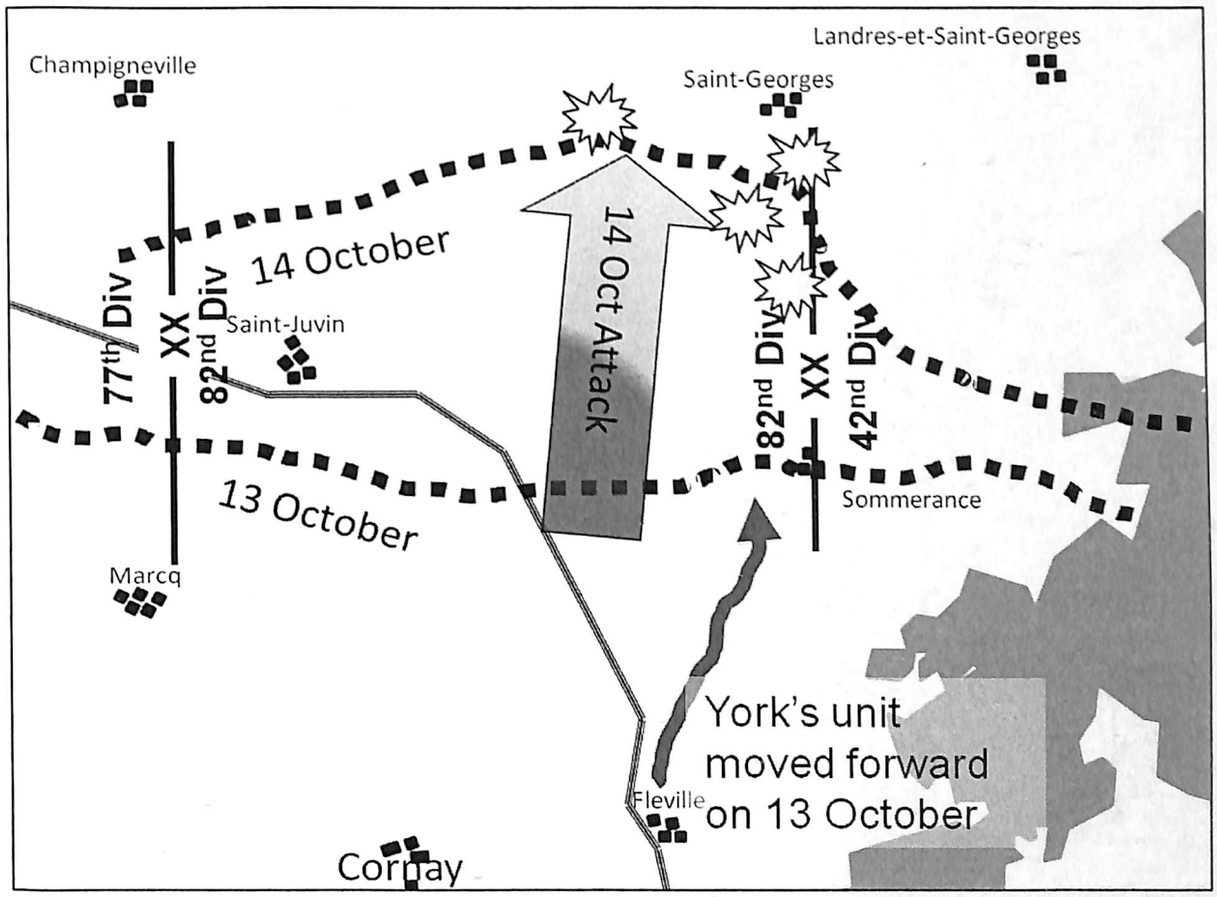
On 13 October, York's unit move to the east flank of the division, to support an attack against the German Hindenburg Line known in this part of France as the Kriemhilde Line. The name Kriemhilde was one of the witches in Goethe's novel *Faust*.[625] The line itself was only a solid defense system in a theoretical sense. Although there were wire, bunkers and trenches, these were not continuous, but rather a series of positions that used the terrain to canalize the Americans into kill zones. The Germans would defend their strong points with machineguns, artillery and use counterattacks to take back any ground lost. For York's unit, the bad news was that in their sector, the Kriemhilde Stellung was a literal line of wire and obstacles.[626] Where there were obstacles, the Doughboys knew to expect German machineguns covering it.[627]

The 14-15 October American push, in which York participated, was a three division attack up the Meuse Valley.[628] This included the 82nd in the center, the 42nd Rainbow Division on the right and the 77th "Liberty" Division on the left.[629] These were

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[623] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Lindsey, 48-53.
[624] Buxton, 120-126; Lindsey, 51.
[625] Strohm, 161-173.
[626] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); 82d Division: Record of Events, in Dept of the Army, *American Expeditionary Forces Divisions*, Volume II, (Washington, DC, Center of Military History; 1988), 355.
[627] Buxton, 84-85.
[628] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); 82d Division: Record of Events, in Dept of the Army, *American Expeditionary Forces Divisions*, 355.
[629] The 77th Division was a New York National Guard unit.

some of the best divisions in the AEF, and there were hopes that the Kriemhilde line would be penetrated by them. York's regiment covered the right flank of the attack, near the town of Sommerance.[630] Just as in 7-8 October push against Hill 223, 1st Battalion of the 328th Regiment would attack first, and then York's 2nd Battalion would pass through them and continue the offensive.[631]



On 14 October, a heavy barrage preceded the scheduled 8:30am attack. York's sister battalion led the attack, with York's unit following 500 meters behind. As soon as the attack began, the Germans unleashed their own artillery barrage that was laced with

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[630] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 155-157.
[631] Lindsey, 51-53.

poisonous gas.[632] York's men were ordered to dig in quickly, as the barrage crashed around them. It was here that York came close to being killed. As he dug near an apple tree outside of Sommerance, "And then bang! one of the big shells struck the ground right in front of us and we all went up in the air. But we all come down again. Nobody was hurt. But it sure was close. "[633]

Forward of York's position, 1st Battalion was in another battle for its life. Having advanced across the rolling hills of the Meuse Valley northwest of Sommerance, the unit was literally in the midst of breaking through the forward zone of the Kriemhilde wire when the German barrage began. Scores of men fell due to the artillery and machinegun fires. The German strong-points here were centered on a dozen forested patches, where well concealed machinegun emplacement were backed by infantry from the 45th Prussian Reserve Division. York's men had encountered these Germans in the form of the 210th and 212 Prussian Regiments near Châtel Chéhéry. The German unit was recently reinforced and showed no signs of breaking.[634] Adding to the contest, German artillery fire was particularly accurate on 14 October, they had excellent observation thanks to having command of the skies with scores of aircraft in addition to having a series of sausage shaped observation balloons up.[635]

Despite the robust German resistance, the Americans pressed the attack, and managed to outflank the Germans and literally cut a foot hold through the Kriemhilde

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[632] Buxton, 141-143.
[633] York, 281.
[634] Jones, 23.
[635] Buxton, 134-136.

wire obstacles.[636] Similar success was experienced on the left, however, there were problems on the right flank. The 42nd Rainbow Division did not advance on this portion of the front, being caught in a vicious battle further east. This meant that once again, that York's unit had an exposed flank, which the Germans would exploit.[637]

As 1st Battalion withered under intense fire, York's unit was ordered to exploit the gap they had cut in the Kriemhilde line. As York's men advanced through exploding German artillery and the rat-at-tats of machineguns, they passed the scene of the battle. Lying scattered across the area were scores of dead and wounded men. Medics and stretcher bearers worked to save the injured, while pieces of flesh, clothing and the accoutrements of war were spread across this French field. The sight was sickening; the moans and screams nightmarish.[638] It was a sober reminder of how real and costly this war was. Many of these men were killed the instant they stood up to attack, most of the officers fell within the first five minutes of the fight.[639]

York's unit, led by Captain Danforth, pushed on and saw that they were to attack up the back slope of a hill that was about a kilometer across and devoid of trees. The Germans held the high portion of it. With the dominant terrain in their hands, the Germans had the Americans under constant artillery and machinegun fire. As York's unit advanced, they saw that the men of the 1st Battalion clung to the ground and moved forward on their bellies.[640] Despite a wall of German fires, York's men pushed forward

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[636] Buxton, 142.
[637] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Lindsey, 52-55.
[638] Jones, 22-25.
[639] Buxton, 140-145.
[640] Day, 13-15; Barker, 44-48, Jones, 23-25.

through their comrades with élan, advancing some 200 meters beyond the regimental objective, the St. Georges-St. Juvin Road.[641] The advance by the Rainbow Division's 166th Infantry on the right again had not kept up with the All-Americans. Because of this, York's battalion found themselves under terrible flanking fires, primarily by a company of German machineguns on the high ground northwest of them (just outside of St. Georges). Being fired upon from three sides was untenable, and as a result, Captain Danforth and Major Tillman pulled the men back and ordered them dig in along the road to prepare for a German counterattack. While here, they were under constant German artillery and machinegun fires.[642]

In the meantime, due to heavy losses, York's 2nd Battalion was merged with the survivors of the 1st Battalion. Major Boyle of the 1st Battalion, being more senior than Major Tillman, was given command. This was followed on 15 October by the merging York's 328th Regiment with the 327th Regiment, also due to the casualties that both of these units had suffered over the past week.[643] Despite the mounting losses, later on 14 October the division issued orders for an attack across the front the next day. The plan called for artillery fires directed against the German positions throughout the night, with non-persistent chemical attacks beginning at 4:00am. The barrage intensified at 7:25am, with the infantry advancing at 7:30am behind a creeping barrage. They were to advance

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[641] Group of Armies-Gallwitz Report, 15 October 1918, in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume XI, 557; Buxton, 144-159.
[642] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations in the World War, 23; 39-41; Buxton, 144.
[643] Lindsey, 55-57.

more than a kilometer forward to seize the high ground above a steep ravine (Ravine aux Pierres) west of St. Georges village.[644]

Throughout the night, American artillery fired into the German lines as planned. As York and the rest of the division prepared for their broad front attack, suddenly, at 7:00am, a heavy German artillery barrage crashed into the Americans. After fifteen minutes of this, the Germans attacked. Striking across the 82nd Division's front, Germans from the Prussian 45th Division, the 90th Division and the 15th Bavarian slammed into the American front. The Germans intended to drive them out of the Kriemhilde line.[645]

The Germans deceived the Americans into coming out of their holes prematurely by briefly stopping their artillery barrage, only to then open up with machineguns, which inflicted more harm than the artillery. Driven back into the holes, and with visibility further reduced by a low, thick fog, the Americans had no advance warning of the actual German infantry assault, until suddenly, emerging out of the mist were gray clad figures; the Germans were upon them.[646]

York's unit received the brunt of the attack, with vicious hand-to-hand battles breaking out across the line in a desperate struggle. In some areas, the Americans were forced back several hundred meters. The German attack did not encompass the entire front of York's regiment, so its left flank was exposed to enfilade fires from the Americans on the far right. Tillman and Danforth rushed men into the exposed German

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[644] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 158-160; Lindsey, 55.
[645] ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations*,42-44; Buxton, 159; Chandler and Lindsey, 55.
[646] Buxton, 159-166.

flank, racking their lines from the side with their rifles, Chauchat light machinegun (Beardsley still had his) and their Colt pistols. With this, the German attack wavered, until another regiment of Germans attacked. Nonetheless, the German assault was destroyed thanks to the planned 7:25am preparatory barrage for the 82nd's own attack that erupted among the Germans moving up to reinforce their men already fighting the Americans. This compelled the German survivors to withdraw under fire.[647]

The timing of the American barrage was perfect in stopping the exploitation of any German gains along the front. All the same, the German attack did desynchronize the planned large American offensive, which turned into a series of regimental assaults to clear out German machineguns.[648] Several American units did seize the initiative and pursue the Germans, which resulted in the temporary capture of the Ravine aux Pierres. Even so, these gains failed to take the well fortified heights, and under heavy localized German counterattacks, and unremitting artillery, the Americans returned to the lines roughly where they started the day. The division history notes that the Germans gave no inclination of a weakening resolve or a desire of easily surrendering in any of these attack.[649]

The weather turned miserable later on 15 October with heavy rain, yet, the Germans seemed particularly interested in reducing the salient that York's unit had created in the lines. This was in large part due to the inability of the neighboring 42nd

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[647] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations*,42-44; Buxton, 161-166.
[648] Day, 13-15; Jones, 22-24; Buxton, 165-166.
[649] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations*,46-48; Chandler, 55, Buxton, 166-173.

Rainbow Division to advance in line with the 82nd, giving the enemy opportunity to fire upon York's unit from the north and east. German machinegun teams continually sprayed the men from the high ground near St. Georges, while German artillery was directed against them by aircraft. Several times, German aircraft strafed York's men, in their water filled holes. Because of this, the regiment refused the line (bent back the right portion of the line) to prevent German infiltration of it.[650]

To bolster York's regiment during this intense period of assaults, two 75mm field guns were moved forward and placed in direct support, with a forward observer literally in the holes along the St. Georges Road with the men. This arrangement enabled the rapid destruction of several German machinegun positions that had been particularly troublesome. Additionally, the 37mm platoon was brought forward to provide more fire power. German artillery ravaged the line throughout the day, but thanks to the additional support there was less harassing fires from German machine gunners on the surrounding high ground.[651]

By now, the miserable weather began to take its toll on the men. Nearly everyone in York's unit was sick. The 328th history wrote of this situation, saying, "The Regiment had been actively engaged night and day since the night of October 6th. The mental and physical strain had been indeed great and the constant rain with resulting mud and shell holes filled with water added greatly to the hardship of the troops. The men and officers patiently and with good spirits stuck to their posts while the wearing-out process

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[650] Buxton, 160-161, Day 14-15.
[651] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Lindsey; 55, Buxton, 160-161, Day, 14-15; ABMC, *82d Division Summary of Operations*,46-48.

continued to take its toll."[652] The regimental surgeon added, "...at least 90 per cent of men suffering from diarrhea and exhaustion. The great majority unable physically to endure an advance much less make attack." Some men literally passed out from exhaustion.[653] Even the equipment began to fail, with the division reporting that nearly all of the Chauchat Light Machineguns were inoperable.[654]

A rotation schedule was soon established, to give each battalion time out of the line into the trenches in and around Sommerance, where at least they were not fired upon as much. The schedule was one day in the line, one day in reserve and one day in support and then back into the line. In the reserve and support trenches, food was brought up and equipment maintained, with the men being able to dry out their clothes. Although each break as the reserve was only twenty-four hours, it helped the men considerably.[655] It was "through the efforts of General Lindsey, bathing facilities as if by magic sprung up from the shell-wrecked ruins of Sommerance. Here was a place where the men could be and were dried out, warmed up, fed up, slept, reclothed and re-equipped."[656]

While in the line along the St. Juvin-St. Georges Road, York and his men were constantly fired upon by German artillery, snipped at by German machineguns, and had to conduct aggressive patrols. On a rare sunny day, the Americans finally had planes in the skies, which resulted in impressive dog fights; on one day, there were some 300 planes fighting across the Meuse Valley. York and his men enjoyed these air combats

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[652] Lindsey, 59.
[653] Jones, 24.
[654] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Buxton, 204.
[655] Buxton, 171-199.
[656] Lindsey, 59.

and were gladdened to see several German planes get shot down. One of these, a German Fokker DVII bi-plane with a light grey fuselage and camouflaged pattern wings, came crashing down near them. The German pilot parachuted to safety and was captured by the machine gunners sent up to support York's unit.[657] The men cut pieces of his parachute for a souvenir.[658] Despite the occasional surge of American aircraft, the Germans maintained air superiority the majority of the time, which caused York's men to suffer all the more from air-to-ground attacks as well as from directed artillery fires.[659]

General Pershing intended to keep these units in the line until 01 November, when he would launch the knock-out blow across the front. That would include a offensive by both a reinforced American First Army and the new American Second Army.[660] As the divisions that would participate in the offensive were moving into position, York's unit had to make do with what they had. From 21 October, until being relieved from the line, ten days later they did not conduct any further major attacks, but rather maintained the rotation schedule in and out of the lines.

Finally, after being in the line continuously since 7 October, the 82nd Infantry Division was relieved. York's unit was among the last out. Through the last night, they had to conduct aggressive patrols forward of the lines to prevent the Germans from gathering intelligence that the American 80th "Blue Ridge" Division was conducting a relief in place of the 82nd. At 1:00am, 1 November, York and his men came out of the

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[657] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 157.
[658] Buxton, 196-199, Lindsey, 57, Day, 15-16, Jones, 24.
[659] Lindsey, 57-59.
[660] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); "Americans in the Meuse-Argonne Region," in Dept of the Army, *Military Operations of the American Expeditionary Forces*, Volume IX, 252.

line and began a long and dark walk to a rest area in the Argonne. All of the men who came out of the Argonne with him on 8 October also came out alive with him on 01 November. This included; Privates Percy Beardsley, Thomas Johnson, Joseph Kornacki, Michael Sacina, Feodor Sok, George Wills, Patrick Donohue (who was back after having his injury from 8 October treated).[661]

As the men slowly made their way through the dark French morning, masses of artillery shook the ground and lit up the sky as the final American offensive of the Great War commenced. Although facing 25% of Germany's entire strength on the Western Front, the AEF broke the German lines here on 1 November and burst forth into open warfare. In only forty-seven days of combat in the Meuse-Argonne, the AEF inflicted 100,000 casualties on the enemy, took 26,000 prisoners, 847 cannons, and some 3,000 machineguns. When the Armistice went into effect at 1100 on 11 November, the Americans had more men on the front (over two million) and controlled more of the line (21% of the Western Front, for a total of 83 miles)[662] than all other allied nations, save for the French.[663] Although suffering some 20,000 casualties a week, Pershing was certain that the AEF played a central role in ending the war in 1918.[664] Writing about this, the German commander opposite the Americans, General Gallwitz said,

> We were surprised by the vastness and vigor of America's military expansion. We admired the intensity with which a big army had been created, with a marvelous all-round equipment. The American Army had numerically strong,

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[661] Patrick Donohue, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Approval of Medal of Honor, Letter from General John Pershing, to Major-General Duncan, 1 April 1919, Alvin C. York US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919 under awards, 1919.
[662] Coffman, 355.
[663] Pershing, *My Experiences in the War*, Volume II, 388-390.
[664] Ferrell, *America's Deadliest Battle*, (Lawrence, KS, University of Kansas Press; 2007), Preface.

> well set-up, substantial, human material endowed with great energy... Wherever operations were developed systematically ...superior forces won. After all, it was the astonishing display of American strength which definitely decided the war against us.[665]

To get to this point, the units in the line paid a heavy price. York's regiment lost 30% of their men, some 1,189 soldiers.[666]

York's unit moved to Champ Mahaut, the former headquarters for the German command in the Argonne, and Camp De Bouzon, near Varennes. While here, York was promoted to Sergeant for his conduct in the face of the enemy over the past month.[667] Alvin wrote of this in a bitter-sweet manner, "I was made a sergeant just as quick as I got back out of the lines. But, oh, my! so many of my old buddies were missing and we scarcely seemed the same outfit."[668]

The men were fed hot food, and given billets to rest in. The next day, the regiment marched south to Florent-en-Argonne, near St. Menehould and were loaded onto busses to set up in barracks at Martigney-les-Gerbonvaux on 5 November 1918. For the next several weeks, the division received replacements and prepared to go back into the line. York, and the other veterans were granted a seven day leave.[669] York and most of his men were sent to the Roman bath resort town of Aix les Bains, not far from the Italian border. Although he did the usual touring of the town, York said, "We had been

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[665] George Sylvester Viereck (editor), *As They Saw Us*, (Cranbury, NJ, Scholar's Bookshelf; 2005), 286-287. This portion of the book is a verbatim chapter written by German Army Group Commander General Max von Gallwitz. Further related discussion of this is found in the following book, Von Tschischwitz, *General von der Marwitz*, (Berlin, Ernst Steiniger; 1940).
[666] ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations, 54.
[667] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Alvin C. York, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Army Service File, 1917-1919, current enlistment, 4.
[668] York, 282.
[669] Lindsey, 63.

in the Argonne for several weeks without any relief and were tired and worn out and went down there to rest."[670]

While on leave, word reached the men that the Armistice was signed and that the war was to end at 1100, 11 November. Aix les Bains erupted into rejoicing, with both the French and Americans joining in the celebration. York did not join the jubilant throngs, but instead went off by himself as he was still mentally and physically exhausted from his experience in battle. He went to the town's church to pray and then after that he went to his hotel room to write a letter home. "I was glad the armistice was signed, glad it were all over. There had been enough fighting and killing. And my feelings were like most all of the American boys. It was all over. And we were ready to go home." [671] That was the question, just when would he go home?

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[670] York, 283.
[671] York, 284-285.

Chapter 12 - On Duty in France

I'm a-telling you them were the homesickest days I ever had in my life.
Alvin York, April 1919

York and his platoon returned to the division in mid-November and moved with it to the Prauthoy training area, some 200 kilometers south of the Argonne.[672] Although Germany had agreed to an armistice, the peace treaty had not yet been signed. While some Allied units prepared to march into Germany, the 82nd prepared for the possibility of renewed fighting. York and his men were billeted in the surrounding villages, and spent their time training and marching.[673] General Pershing's headquarters "directed that maneuvers of all kinds be commenced with great vigor."[674] Because of this, the division threw itself into a rigorous training schedule in late November and early December. The purpose of this was to apply the lessons learned during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, refine combined arms operations and to improve tactical deployments. With so many veterans now in the ranks, the command was impressed by how rapidly the unit improved. It certainly was a more professional force than it was six-months ago.

Yet, challenges remained for the 82nd Division to contend with. There was a considerable turn-over in the unit's staff, in addition to numbers of men succumbing to sicknesses or gas-related injuries that they had suffered during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. This was exacerbated by the constant arrival of replacements to bring the division back up to strength. Despite this, by December 1918 the 82nd was back up to

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[672] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); ABMC, 82d Division Summary of Operations, 53.
[673] Lindsey, 63.
[674] Buxton, 214-215.

pre-Meuse-Argonne strength levels, however, for York and the other survivors, the division just did not feel the same as so many of their comrades were either dead or wounded.[675] This was exacerbated by the fact that the men were physically and mentally worn. York summed it up, "The boys were longing to get home. They felt they had done their jobs. The war was over. They were kinder restless. I was that way too."[676] Despite the resistance to carrying on with the training, it had to be done. Yet, it was not as simple as just getting on with army training. The Prauthoy training area was not equipped for winter cantonment, and the men were kept busy with weather-proofing their billets.

The frustration and monotony of this time was broken briefly by the Christmas visit of President Wilson and his wife who were in France to attend the preliminary to the Paris Peace Conference.[677] York and several of his comrades were able to attend this event near Pershing's headquarters at Chaumont. Although York missed the unit's Christmas dinner, he wrote that it was a thrill to see the President and the First Lady, writing: "Mrs. Wilson was dressed very nice and she had a smile on her face all the time... and Mr. Wilson was wearing a large black silk hat with a light grey fur coat he also had a smile on his face So that cheered the boys to see [them]."[678]

The men had a rigorous training regimen, and by late December were able to conduct battalion, regimental, and brigade level operations and maneuvers.[679] The training was challenging. Some of the men commented that they should have had this

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[675] Buxton, 210-215.
[676] York, 286-287.
[677] "Visits of US Presidents to France since 1918," US Department of State, available online at the following website: http://france.usembassy.gov/visitsfrance.html (accessed 12 November 2011).
[678] York, 284-285.
[679] Day, 15.

sort of training before they went into action. One soldier in York's regiment correctly surmised, "In reality, we got some excellent training [here]. It is however, a matter of grave discussion, why, when at Camp Gordon, we were taught to sing, while after the armistice we were taught to fight."[680]

Their corps commander Major-General Summerall, watched the 82nd division excel at unit level operations and officially designated them an assault division.[681] At long last, *after* the war, the men in York's unit truly felt that they now knew how to fight. As one of the unit's officer's remarked, "By this time we had learned that after all the infantryman's weapon is... the rifle. Bayonets are simply a clumsy can opener for bully beef and cracker cans. The "Cho-Cho" (Chauchat Light Machinegun) was made by a plumber and not a very good plumber either. Grenades were originally designed for killing fish and gas masks are excellent for company punishment..."[682]

Training was to end with a divisional exercise supervised by the corps commander. The first attempt at this in December turned into some-what of a catastrophe. The miserable winter weather turned worse, causing large numbers of men to suffer cold-weather injuries. It was one of the stormiest, wet and windy periods that these men had experienced in France.[683] Because of this, the training was scaled back in January and no further division level training events were planned.[684] One soldier in York's unit said, "Many a disposition, which was nearly completely spoiled, as evidenced

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[680] Day, 16.
[681] Major-General Summerall, Fifth Army Corps Commander, General Orders Number 8, February1919, reproduced in Day, 32.
[682] Day, 16.
[683] Barker, 56.
[684] Buxton, 216-217.

by the unusual amount of profanity used, was just saved from complete destruction by the timely order to call off the maneuver."[685]

With the ambitious divisional training schedule scaled back, the men had a lot more time on their hands. This made the wait for orders to return home seem agonizing. Idleness was not acceptable. The units were expected to conduct frequent inspections and training to maintain readiness and a soldierly appearance.[686] Major-General Duncan made it a point to speak often with the troops. Also, services were held to honor the memory of the men who fell in action. To keep unit morale high, Duncan tasked division chaplain, Reverend C. Tyler, with the job of leading and organizing schools to prepare the men for civilian life. Tapping the expertise of the men in the ranks, the schools included instruction in writing, American History, reading, French, spelling, mathematics and agriculture.[687] At one point, some 8,000 of the division's men were attending school.[688]



Figure 20 Major-General Duncan, 82nd Division Commander. (AHEC)

Yet, tensions in the unit remained high, with the men wanting to go home sooner than later. The problem came to a

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[685] 82d Division, entry 1241, RG 120; 328th Infantry Regiment Records, entry 2133, RG 391; ABMC Division files, 82nd Division, RG 117 (National Archives); Barker, 55-56.
[686] Buxton, 220.
[687] Barker, 58.
[688] Buxton, 220.

head during a dance there was almost a fight between the officers and drunk enlisted soldiers who crashed in on the dance to secure the affections of the local French girls. York said, " I'm a-telling you that made them-there captains and lieutenants mad. They ordered me to call out the guard and get the boys off the floor. But that was a harder job than busting the Hindenburg Line. The boys hung on to the girls and didn't want to give them up or stop dancing nohow"[689] York defused the conflict by roping off half of the floor for the officers and the other half for the enlisted men, all enforced with armed guards. The fact of the matter was that the men had grown weary of waiting for the orders to return to the states and tensions were growing.

The tensions were exacerbated when orders arrived to sail home in January, which "spread a wave of happiness across the regiment." Yet, the men's enthusiasm faded soon thereafter, when the shipping date was postponed or changed every few weeks.[690] After several weeks of these emotional highs and lows, Duncan took action. He ordered that the 82nd would stay the course with its training program as well as enforcing its high standards of conduct and discipline,

> Although the training of the Division at the present time is very different from the training required in anticipation of operations, it is no less important and fully as difficult. Within a short time all but a few members of the Division will return to civil life and they should be as well lifted to take up civil pursuits as the present conditions permit. The qualities acquired during the period of military training should make all members of this command more useful citizens than they would otherwise be, and the knowledge of foreign countries and customs, submission to discipline, individual initiative, pride of organization and self-sacrifice for a cause, are just as necessary after discharge from the army as they have been in the A. E. F. No effort should be neglected to continue the development of these qualities.[691]

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[689] York, 289.
[690] Lindsay, 63.
[691] Buxton, 221.

The division command also hoped to boost the men's morale with a generous leave program. Captain Danforth organized the AEF's only leave train to Italy, in which 1,100 soldiers participated.[692] There were also trips to Paris, which York visited in March with several other men from his unit. On this visit, York toured the wholesome side of the city alone as the soldiers with him were interested in other diversions. Of this, York commented, "I could have gone out like a whole heap of the boys and fooled around with the mademoiselles and the vin rouge; and sorter tried to forget the war and them-there Germans I done killed in the Argonne. But I didn't drink and I had a girl of my own back home in the mountains."[693] A few days after returning from Paris, York found himself on a train headed back there again. He was selected by Major-General Duncan as one of the 82nd Division's representatives for the creation of the American Legion.[694] Incidentally, Alvin's mentor, G. Edward Buxton was a founder of the American Legion in Paris, even writing its constitution.[695] York attended all of the Legion's sessions in the Hotel de Gabriel and predicted that it would grow into an influential organization.

While in Paris, York became hopelessly lost in the metropolis. Laughing at the situation afterwards, York said, "That is the only time that I ever got bewildered as to direction. Right in the middle of that-thar old city the streets are all sorter mixed up.

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[692] Jones, 28; Buxton, 220.
[693] York, 290.
[694] Telegram issued by Major-General Duncan to issue Sergeant Alvin C. York travel orders to represent the 82d Division at the Executive Committee of the American Legion, 3 April 1919; Divisional telegram granting authorization of special leave for Sgt York in conjunction with travel to Paris for American Legion, 4 April 1919, Alvin York Service Record, War Department.
[695] American Legion History, available online at http://www.legion.org/history (accessed on 12 November 2011).

They seem to have no beginnings and no ends. And when they do have ends they sorter go plumb up against a blank wall... I tried to get my direction by the sun, but I could not see it. Ho ! Ho! And I'm telling you I couldn't make heads nor tails out of the names of the streets. I didn't know where I was."[696] In desperation, York asked an attractive French lady for help. The "mademoiselle" escorted York to a street car and put him on it. She spoke to another "right-smart girl," who was driving the street car and took York back to his hotel. Sensing the humor in this, York wrote, "So you see I never takened any girls home in France but one of them had to take me home, ho, ho."[697]

Chaplain Tyler had other plans for York. He knew of York's faith and his battlefield heroism and saw an opportunity to reach the unit's soldiers with the Gospel if he had York share his testimony with the troops. Word spread across the AEF about York and he became a sort of local celebrity in France. York's talks were such a hit that soon Chaplain Tyler was traveling across France with him to speak to thousands of other Doughboys over a period of six-weeks. These were simple revival services sanctioned and supported by the AEF command where York would not only share his testimony, but often would lead singing as well. York says some of the trips were more harrowing than fighting in the Argonne.[698] To get to one speaking engagement, the chaplain arranged for Alvin to ride in a motorcycle side-car.[699] After breezing across rough French country roads at eighty miles-per-hour, York said, "It was asking too much of God, travelling like that. In front of the machine guns in the Argonne I couldn't protect myself. So I expected

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[696] York, 291.
[697] York, 290-291.
[698] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 153.
[699] Skeyhill, 224.

Him to look after me. And He done it and I come out unharmed. But there was no sense rushing like mad over those old roads on a motor cycle."[700]

The size of the group that York addressed varied in size from small events in a YMCA hut, to addressing entire units. It seemed that no matter where he went, the crowds came to hear his story. This was a tremendous time for Alvin. His time teaching Sunday School and preaching sermons in Pall Mall helped him in these meetings. Often when he finished sharing his testimony, he would be sent off with a standing ovation, of which Alvin always answered with a smile and "I thank yea."[701] Of this, Skeyhill wrote, "His simple faith impressed even the most skeptical, and there was not a man present who did not acknowledge that perhaps after all the mountaineer knew what he was talking about."[702]

Either way, York typically had a large audience wherever he traveled, with the chaplain rounding out York's speaking with the singing of Christian hymns and delivering a sermon of his own. York had a high regard for Chaplain Tyler's earnest desire to reach the soldiers with the Good News, "He was a nice man and a powerful preacher."[703] Major-General Duncan supported these efforts to keep the morale of the men up, which he expected his unit chaplains to play a central role in maintaining.[704]

While in the Prauthoy training area, the division took time to properly award its soldiers for acts of heroism during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The command took affidavits on what York accomplished on 8 October from the surviving soldiers. The first

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[700] York, 286.
[701] Cowan, 266.
[702] Skeyhill, 224.
[703] York, 286.
[704] Buxton, 220-221; York, 285-287.

review of York's heroism was led by Captain Danforth and occurred on 23 October during one of the twenty-four hour rotations out of the line. Based upon Danforth's request, General Lindsay authorized a further investigation into York's feat.[705]

To ensure the integrity of the inquiry, an officer from outside York's regiment was assigned as the investigation officer; Captain Frank M. Williams of the 82nd Division's 325th Infantry Regiment. Captain Williams had no relationship with York and was viewed as an honest broker in the investigation. The investigation included interviews and signing affidavits by available eyewitnesses. What exists of this inquiry are the signed affidavits of Privates Beardsley and Kornacki, which supported the recommendation that York receive the Distinguished Service Cross.[706] This request was forwarded up the chain of command for consideration and approval. Colonel Wetherill immediately approved it and secured the consent of the Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Lindsey. Major-General Duncan approved the award on 30 October, with the statement to General Pershing (the approving authority), "This case has been investigated and the recommendation for the award of Distinguished Service Cross is concurred in."[707] The award was approved by the American Commander in Chief in early November. York was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) on the 30th of November

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[705] Memorandum from 164th Brigade Commander, to 82nd Division, requesting investigations officer, 23 October 1918. Memorandum from Captain Williams to Major-General Duncan, recommending the DSC for Alvin York, 14 November 1918.

[706] Memorandum from Captain Williams to Major-General Duncan, recommending the DSC for Alvin York, 14 November 1918; Alvin York, Affidavits, US Army Service Record, War Department, 23 October 1918.

[707] Recommendation for D.S.C. for Corporal Alvin C. York, memorandum from the 328th Commanding Officer, to the 82nd Division Commanding officer, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Military Awards, War Department, 1918-1919, 23, 25, 30 October and 02 November 1918.

1918.[708] The DSC is second only to the Medal of Honor in recognizing acts of heroism and gallantry on the battlefield.

It was during the post-war period at Prauthoy that Captain Danforth reviewed the AEF policy on the Medal of Honor, and submitted a request to have York's DSC rescinded and recommended that York be awarded the Medal of Honor instead. By January 1919, Danforth's request reached the division commander, Major-General Duncan. Duncan not only gave his consent to conduct a thorough investigation into the matter, but also would personally be involved in the walk-over of the terrain where Alvin fought. This triggered a rigorous investigation into York's 8 October battle.

Prior to the formal investigation into the battle, a chance meeting would forever change York's life. Had this not occurred, he most likely would have received his medal and then faded into obscurity as most recipients did. When the United States entered World War One in 1917, one of America's greatest portrait painters, Joseph Cummings Chase, lived in Paris. The US Government sought his services to paint portraits of American DSC recipients during and after the war. Chase accepted this commission, for which he was given the rank of Colonel, and then let loose to capture portraits of American heroes. This assignment brought Chase into the trenches and everywhere else to paint the soldiers. By the time that he completed this task in the spring of 1919, he painted 142 portraits.[709]

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[708] Alvin York, US Army Service Record, Military Record, Military Awards, War Department, 1918-1919, 30 November 1918.
[709] Joe Chase, *Script*, 11 April 1942, 11.

In January 1919, Chase caught up with the 82nd "All American" Division to complete portraits of its DSC awardees. Among the first he sketched Major General Duncan, who was recently awarded that medal. During the sitting, Duncan and Chase discussed the division's other DSC recipients, with York being among these. Duncan's description of York's transition from conscientious objector, to war captivated Chase. Duncan told Chase, "The exploit of this tall, raw-boned Tennessee mountaineer, with a red face and red hair, is the most remarkable I have heard of in the whole war."[710] Once Chase completed his portrait of Duncan, he painted York. Chase found York humble and quiet about his feat and sensed that there was something different about this man.[711] On his own volition, Chase contacted George Pattullo, who was a *Saturday Evening Post* war correspondent and suggested that he write a story about York. Pattullo at that moment was on assignment with the 3rd US Army Headquarters, in the occupied German



Figure 21 The Joseph Cummings Chase portrait of York

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[710] Joseph Cummings Chase, *Soldiers All: Portraits and Sketches of the Men of the A.E.F.,* (New York, George H. Doran Company; 1920), 105-115.
[711] See Secretary of War Baker's comments in York, ix; Joseph Cummings Chase, *Soldiers All: Portraits and Sketches of the Men of the A.E.F.,* (New York, George H. Doran Company; 1920), 105-115.

City of Koblenz. Pattullo took Chase's recommendation on investigating the York story wherewith he contacted the 82nd.[712]

Pattullo's interest in York served another purpose for he had hoped to do a piece on the Argonne battle via an interview with the 82nd Division Commander, Major-General Duncan. There were criticisms in the United States about the tactics used by General Pershing in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, which many believed cost the American Expeditionary Forces more casualties than it should have. It seems that Pattullo saw York as another public interest piece that would have little enduring value.[713] Yet, doing a study on York would give Pattullo access to the 82nd's senior officers for a critical discourse on the tactics used in the Argonne. Furthermore, Pattullo had already encountered false heroes during his days covering the war. Of this, he said that there were many, "alleged war heroes... so many are newspaper made; the soldiers over here could explode many a bubble reputation at home."[714] Because of this scepticism, Pattullo did considerable research into the York story more than one would normally expect from a news reporter. Only after he checked its accuracy, would he publish any story on York. What intrigued Pattullo about Alvin York was the personal struggle to reconcile Christian faith with patriotic duty.[715] Just in case he found York to be genuine, Pattullo arranged with the 82nd Division Chief of Staff, Colonel Gordon

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[712] Telegram from George Pattullo at Third Army Headquarters (Koblenz, Germany) to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, (Prauthoy, France) 30 January 1919. Press File, Alvin C. York Service Record.
[713] Telegram from George Pattullo at Third Army Headquarters (Koblenz, Germany) to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, (Prauthoy, France) 30 January 1919. Press File, Alvin C. York Service Record.
[714] George Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," *Saturday Evening Post*, (26 April 1919), 4.
[715] Telegram from George Pattullo at Third Army Headquarters (Koblenz, Germany) to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, (Prauthoy, France) 30 January 1919. Press File, Alvin C. York Service Record.

Johnson, for an exclusive interview with Alvin. Although Pattullo had difficulty in finding transportation from Germany to France, he managed to join York and Major-General Duncan on the battlefield near Chatel Chéhéry.[716]

The battlefield investigation occurred on a cold Argonne morning in early February. Several inches of snow covered the ground and there was a heavy early 1919 wintry overcast. With Pattullo, Duncan and York was an Army photographer, who snapped a series of photos of the York site, the surrounding terrain and the graves of the soldiers who fell that day.[717] York's battlefield tour was one of several that day near Châtel Chéhéry for the division. Soldiers were on hand to go over the terrain on Hill 223 as well, so there was a large entourage in the area that morning. But York was the only Medal of Honor inquiry and had priority for Duncan. Joining them on the investigation was most of Alvin's chain of command, including his regimental commander, Colonel Wetherill, and brigade commander, Brigadier-General Lindsay.

The group went over the ground, peppered York with questions, and had him retrace his steps. Throughout the walk, the Army photographer was busy documenting the terrain. Towards the end of the investigation Brigadier General Lindsay asked, "York, how did you do it?" To which, Alvin answered, "It was not man-power but hit [it] was divine power that saved me. I told him that before I went to war I prayed to God and He done gave me my assurance that so long as I believed in Him not one hair of my head

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[716] Telegram from George Pattullo at Third Army Headquarters (Koblenz, Germany) to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, (Prauthoy, France) 30 January 1919. Press File, Alvin C. York Service Record.

[717] Telegram from George Pattullo at Third Army Headquarters (Koblenz, Germany) to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, (Prauthoy, France) 29 January 1919. Press File, Alvin C. York Service Record.

would be harmed; and even in front of them-there machine guns He knowed I believed in Him." Lindsay, moved by York's comments, put his arms around York's shoulders and said in a low voice, "York, you are right."[718] York's regimental commander, Colonel Richard Wetherill, agreed with York's belief that this was an act of divine intervention, and not luck, or skill, when he said to Alvin during the tour of the battle-ground, "It is not human to do what you have done."[719]

Even George Pattullo was astounded by what he saw and heard. This seasoned reporter, who had seen so much of the war, could not come up with a rational way to explain how York got out of the fight alive. During the visit to the battlefield, Pattullo and York had this discussion, "At last I said: 'I cannot understand, even now, how any of you came out alive.' York replied, simply but earnestly, 'We know there were miracles, don't we? Well, this was one. I was taken care of -- it's the only way I can figure it.'"[720]

The officers on the investigation team discussed various temporal reasons how York accomplished the feat. Some suggested that it was luck, being the right man in the right place, while others commented that as mountain man, York had the skills to accomplish such a deed.[721] Alvin patiently listed to their speculations, but flatly rejected each one, saying;

> There had to be something more than man power in that fight to save me. There can't no man in the world make me believe there weren't. And I'm a-telling you the hand of God must have been in that fight. It surely must have been divine power that brought me out. No other power under heaven could save a man in a place like that. Men were killed on both sides of me and all around me and I was the biggest and the most exposed of all. I have got only one explanation to offer,

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[718] York, 278.
[719] Skeyhill, 222-223.
[720] Pattullo, 74.
[721] Skeyhill, 222-224; York, 272-274.

> and only one: without the help of God I jes couldn't have done it... There can be no arguments about that. I am not going to believe different as long as I live.[722]

The investigation into the awarding of the Medal of Honor to York included several interviews, starting with the initial affidavits signed by Privates Beardsley and Kornacki on 23 October 1918, the investigation expanded significantly. On 6 February, the eyewitnesses to the event were interviewed by the investigation officer, Lieutenant Edwin Burkhalter, and George Pattullo.[723] Those interviewed included every soldier present for duty; Privates Kornacki, Sok, Sacina, Donohue. After being interviewed, their statements were typed and each soldier swore an oath and signed an affidavit recognizing Alvin York as being responsible for the heroic deed of 8 October.[724]

More interviews were conducted over the next weeks to complete a detailed analysis of the events. This included questioning the remaining members from York's platoon as well as the officers who eye witnessed any aspect of the event. For this portion of the inquiry, the 82nd Divisions' Adjutant, Major Boyd, conducted the inquiry. After completing the interviews, these eyewitness too were sworn an oath and willingly signed their affidavits, which supported York as the chief player in the action. This set of testimonies was sworn and signed on 21 February, and included the supporting testimony of Privates Beardsley, Wills, Captain Cox (the only officer to traverse the York site on 8

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[722] York, 275-276.
[723] Pattullo, 4; Medal of Honor Award Packet, prepared by Lieutenant Burkhalter, February 1919, Alvin C. York Military Service Packet, US War Department, 1917-1919.
[724] Joseph Konotski (Kornacki), affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Feodore "Sak" (Sok), affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Michael Sacina, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919; Patrick Donohue, affidavit of 8 October 1918 Battle near Châtel Chéhéry, given at Frettes, France 6 February 1919;

October) and Lieutenant Woods, who was the first officer to see the men moving out of the Argonne with 132 German prisoners.[725]

Pattullo departed the division convinced that this feat was in fact accomplished by York. He set about writing the article that would propel York into fame. Meanwhile, the division staff continued to work on York's Medal of Honor packet, finally submitting it on 1 March 1919. The packet was endorsed by Captain Danforth, Major Tillman, Colonel Wetherill, Brigadier-General Lindsay and Major-General Duncan. General Pershing made the final endorsement before securing approval from President Wilson.[726] Pershing approved the recommendation and a cable was sent to President Wilson on 15 March supporting the Medal of Honor for York.[727] As the command waited for a decision on York's Medal of Honor, General Pershing directed that an investigation be conducted to ascertain if awards should be given to any of the other seven soldiers with York in the battle.[728]

The 82nd had already looked into granting awards to the other soldiers. Captain Bertrand Cox, the primary investigation officer assigned to this review concluded on the 14 March, after two-weeks of looking into the matter that, the "Result of investigation does not justify recommendation for any of the seven men engaged with Sgt. Alvin C.

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[725] Captain Bertrand Cox, affidavit given at Frettes, France, 21 February 1919; Lieutenant Joseph Woods, affidavit given at Frettes, France, 21 February 1919; Private Percy Beardsley, affidavit given at Frettes, France, 21 February 1919; Private George Wills, affidavit given at Frettes, France, 21 February 1919; George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 153..

[726] Medal of Honor Award Memorandums, February - April 1919, Alvin York Military Service Packet, US War Department, 1919.

[727] General John Pershing, "Recommendation for the Medal of Honor," to the War Department, Washington, DC, 15 March 1919, Alvin York Military Service Packet, US War Department, 1919.

[728] Adjutant Whitley, "Recommendation for Decorations," Personnel Division, Decorations Section, GHQ, AEF, 01 March 1919.

York."[729] This conclusion was reviewed before going forward to General Pershing and was endorsed by Major Tillman, Colonel Wetherill, Brigadier Lindsay and Major-General Duncan.

York's Medal of Honor was approved on 20 March 1919, stating,[730]

> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy near Chatel-Chéhéry, France, 8 Oct., 1918. After his platoon had suffered heavy casualties and three other non-commissioned officers had become casualties, Cpl. York assumed command. Fearlessly leading seven men, he charged with great daring a machine gun nest, which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon. In this heroic feat, the machine gun nest was taken together with four officers and one hundred and twenty-eight men and several guns.[731]

Major-General Duncan inquired if General Pershing would be available to give the award, but unfortunately, he was not. The honor then fell to Duncan, who ordered a division parade to officially present the Medal of Honor to Sergeant York on 18 April 1919.[732] Duncan's words to York on this auspicious occasion were, "The commanding general takes particular pride in announcing to the command this fine example of courage and self-sacrifice. Such deeds are evidence of that spirit and heroism which is innate in

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[729] Investigation Memorandum, 14 March 1919 signed by Captain Cox, forwarded to the 328th Regimental Commander, Alvin York Military Service Packet, US War Department, 1919.
[730] Approval of Alvin C. York Medal of Honor, War Department Cablegram, to General Pershing, 20 March 1919.
[731] General John Pershing, "Recommendation for the Medal of Honor," to the War Department, Washington, DC, 15 March 1919, Alvin York Military Service Packet, US War Department, 1919; Approval of Alvin C. York Medal of Honor, War Department Cablegram extract, to General Pershing, 20 March 1919; Alvin C. York Medal of Honor Citation, GHQ Personnel Division, 22 March 1919; Major-General Frank McIntyre, Award of Medal of Honor to Alvin C. York, as directed by the Acting Army Chief of Staff, General Orders Number 59, US War Department, Washington, DC, 3 May 1919.
[732] "Medal of Honor Presentation Guidance Request," message from Major-General Duncan to General Pershing, US Army Telegram, 8 April 1919; Letter from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee to Jesse Lasky, 8 May 1940, 17, WBA.

the highest type of American soldier and responds unfailingly to the call of duty wherever or whenever it may come."[733]

This event was followed by Marshall Foch awarding the French Medaille Militaire and the French Croix de Guerre with Palm.[734] Ironically, in preparing for the French event, York was with his men on police call, picking up cigarette butts, just as he had his first day in the Army at Camp Gordon.[735] The ceremony and words spoken at this award ceremony led by Marshall Foch are worth recounting. The French call this event a Prise d'Arme. The ceremony for Sergeant York commenced with the command "Attention" that was followed by "Gardez-vous!" Gardez-vous triggered a trumpet call, and the words, "Sergeant York, Troix pas en Avance!" With that, York smartly took his place at the front of the formation, adjacent to Marshall Foch. Once York was in position, the following citation was read in French, "All the non-commissioned officers of his platoon having been put out of battle, he took command and with 7 men succeeded in reducing to silence a nest of enemy machine-guns, capturing 132 prisoners, 4 of whom were officers, and several machine-guns."[736] With that, Marshall Foch pinned the award on York's chest, near his heart and said to him, "Le plus grand exploit jamais realise par

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[733] Perry, 96-97.
[734] Medaille Militaire was (and still is) France's highest military decoration for combat valor. The Legion of Honor is a higher decoration, but it is awarded for distinguished non-combat service and also for civilian service. The Medaille Militaire can only be awarded to enlisted soldiers and to general officers. Company and field grade officers are not eligible. If York had been an officer he most would have been awarded the Legion of Honor. See Alvin York Award Packet, from US Army Adjutant General, to Representative Joseph W. Byrnes, 17 February 1922, Alvin York Service Packet, War Department; Individual Record of Decorations and Citations of Alvin C. York, corrected copy as of 5 April 1923, Alvin York Service Packet, War Department.
[735] Perry, 97.
[736] Alvin York French Award, General Headquarters of the French Armies of the East, Order Number 16,046, Approved by Marshal Petain, 13 April 1919, Alvin York Service Packet, War Department.

un simple soldat de toutes les armees en Europe!" (The greatest achievement accomplished by a common soldier in all the armies of Europe!).[737]

After word spread to several of the other allied nations of York's heroism, they too recognized him with their own awards for heroism. The first of these to do so was the Balkan nation of Montenegro. Under direction of King Nikolas I, the Montenegrin Minister of War ordered that York be awarded their Silver Medaille pour la Bravoure Militaire.[738] Italy followed by awarding York their highest award, the Croce di Guerra.[739]

Interestingly, despite receiving these high awards, York never wrote home neither about these nor anything about what he did on 8 October. Instead, his letters discussed the farm, planting season, discourses on the health of the York farm's working animals, and the like. Such humility tends to say a lot about his character. In fact, his family would only get word of what Alvin did in France from an unusual source a month later.

In April, the division finally entrained for Bordeaux.[740] Here they camped some twenty-five miles outside of this port city at St. Selve.[741] The men were kept busy with drilling, range firing, school, basketball games and baseball tournaments, which York's regiment won.[742] There were even soldier talent shows, musical reviews, theatrical dramas and vaudeville acts also put together.[743] Helping the men's morale was that the

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[737] York, ix; Cowan, 256; Captain Carlysle, Warner Brothers Research Department, inter-office communication to Herman Lissauer, 23 April 1941, WBA.
[738] Certificate from the Montenegrin Minister of War to Alvin C. York, May 1919, Alvin York Military Service Packet, War Department.
[739] Order of Awarding the Cross of Military Valor to Alvin York, 9 December 1921, Alvin York Military Service Packet, War Department.
[740] ABMC, 82d Division summary of Operations, 53; Buxton, 222.
[741] Captain T.B. Fay, Report of Changes, Alvin York signing in off of leave, 12 April 1919, to report to St Selve, Alvin C. York Military Service Record, 1919.
[742] Jones, 28; Barker, 63.
[743] Jones, 28; Barker, 54-56.

billeting at St. Selve was the most comfortable that they had yet experienced in Europe.[744] Despite this, York, said, "... I jes sat around... waiting for that-thar old ship to come and take us home. Oh, my! The days went by slower and slower. It jes seemed as if we would never get away from France. I'm a-telling you them were the homesickest days I ever had in my life."[745]

When orders arrived to board a ship for home, the division marched with shouts and cheers to the Bordeaux embarkation camp for debugging, equipment cleaning and filling out paper work for the return journey.[746] The ship designated to take York's battalion home was the SS *Scranton*, which they would board at the American docks at Bassens.[747] York said: "I'm a-telling you I was tickled. So were the boys."[748] The mood at the docks was invigorating. The Red Cross was giving the men candy, gum, chocolate, coffee and jam sandwiches, while a military band played stirring music as they stood in formation waiting for their names to be called.[749] The sunny weather matched the men's mood as one-by-one; each was called to enter the ship. As York and the last sixty-six men waited to board the vessel, they were turned away as the ship was too full to carry them and were told to wait for another ship. This was devastating as the men watched their battalion sail off without them.[750] Thankfully, their wait was of short duration when the SS *Ohioan* arrived the next day. York and his sixty-six comrades boarded the ship

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[744] Lindsay, 63.
[745] York, 292.
[746] Jones, 27; Lindsay, 63.
[747] Barker, 64.
[748] York, 292.
[749] Barker, 64-65.
[750] Lindsay, 65

with the regiment machinegun company and the 3rd Battalion taking up the rest of the vessel. With great cheers and yelling, their journey home began at 2:26pm on 10 May.[751]

York spent the twelve day trip sea-sick as the SS *Ohioan* was a small vessel and took rough seas hard. Although the weather proved not too bad for the North Atlantic, it was more than Alvin could stand and he was so sick some days that he just wanted to be alone.[752] Things got worse for him on 15 May when the ship's captain received a wire that there would be a big welcoming ceremony for him when they arrived in New York. Alvin did not want any attention and just wanted to go home, saying: "And that hed me worried. I would hev got out and walked if I could hev."[753] York had no idea what was yet before him, but things were out of his hands.

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[751] The battalion cleared the embarkation camp that day, fully intending every one of its soldiers to be on the SS *Scranton*, York's Military Service Record states that he returned on that ship. However, thanks to the desire of the Tennessee Society to throw York a considerable welcoming home ceremony, cables were sent to the Scranton, while at sea to confirm that York was on board. Finding that he was not, the War Department notified them that he was arriving a day after his battalion on the SS *Ohioan* at the Port of Hoboken, New Jersey on 22 May.

[752] Barker, 64-65.

[753] York, 293-294.

Chapter 13 - Emergence of a National Hero!

Here sits in the gallery the man who has been credited with the greatest individual feat of bravery of the war...Sergeant Alvin C. York, of Tennessee.

Tennessee Congressman Cordell Hull, 24 May 1919
Introducing York to the U.S. Congress

The SS *Ohioan* arrived at New York at 2:00am on 22 May. But a heavy fog prevented the ship from proceeding to the dock. With that, the ship dropped anchor, waited for the fog to clear, and did not get underway again until 10:00. The trip up the channel seemed particularly slow to the men, who were eager to be back on American soil. As the fog parted, York shared the thrill of his shipmates: "I can't tell you how I felt when our ship steamed up New York Harbor and I seed the skyscrapers sorter standing up against the sky. In the distance they looked jes a little like the mountains at home when you see them from a long way off. Oh, my, I was so homesick."[754] Finally, at 2:00pm, the ship, escorted by two tugboats docked at pier number 2 in Hoboken, New Jersey.[755] Upon seeing the Statue of Liberty, York noted that several soldiers said to her, "Take a look at me, Old Girl. Take a good look at me, because whenever you want to see me again you will have to turn around."[756]

What York did not know was that as he was waiting for his ship in France, George Pattullo's article hit the news-stands on 26 April 1919 in America's largest paper, the *Saturday Evening Post.* Titled, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," the article was received in America with unexpected jubilation, making him an instant star. The story of

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[754] York, 295.
[755] Barker, 65.
[756] York, 295-296.

Alvin York seemed to captivate the American imagination and in some way reflect the collective psyche of the populace, starting with reluctance to enter the war, to when, once in it, completing it with sharp finality. He seemed to represent how American viewed themselves; pioneers, devout, patriots, slow to action, but firm in resolve.[757]

Editorials soon appeared in American papers about the Pattullo article extolling the virtues of the American Doughboy and patriotism as traits personified by Alvin York. One of these editorials published in New Jersey in May reflected the tone of these writings, saying, "From them, who did so much for America, comes the call to us to do our duty to our country..."[758] A group of influential Tennesseans in New York City stepped in to arrange the greatest reception that any returning soldier would receive in the aftermath of the Great War.

This group called themselves "The Tennessee Society of New York." The Tennessee Society was founded in 1899 by a group of elite sons of their native state, who were living in the "strange and unfriendly city" of New York.[759] This group included powerful businessmen and influential political figures, and was well-positioned to give York an unforgettable welcome home ceremony.[760] As soon as they read about York in Pattullo's article, the Chairman of the Society, Dr. James J. King, immediately sent a

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[757] Pattullo, 3-4, 71-74.
[758] "Americans All!" The South Amboy Citizen, 10 May 1919, 16.
[759] Originally named the New York Tennessee Club, after five years of incredible success, it expanded to a New York state wide organization, and renamed the Tennessee Society in New York.
[760] Dixie Dittfurth, "The Tennessee Society in New York," Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; "Honor Sergt. York, Hero of Argonne," *The Washington Post,* 23 May 1919, 2..

letter to Alvin York, who was still in France. York wrote back to Dr. King, informing him of his anticipated return, and that he was in good health.[761]

With that, Dr. King tasked the Chairman of the Society's Entertainment Committee, Captain E. A. Kellogg, to coordinate the reception for York. This proved to be no small endeavor. Using his "Bakers and Confectioners Manufacturing Company" letterhead, E.A. Kellogg wrote to the adjutant general in Washington, D.C., and Major General Shank, the senior officer at the port of Hoboken asking them to allow York to attend a banquet in New York City in his honor as well as being permitted to stay at the prestigious Waldorf Astoria Hotel.[762]



Figure 22 SGT York on the S.S. Ohioan upon arrival at Hoboken, New Jersey, he was barraged with a throng of press and admirers. (AHEC)

These letters caused the US Army bureaucracy to slowly begin staff actions to determine where exactly York was and on what ship he would return. At the beginning of this process, the Chair of the Tennessee Society, Dr. James King, actually had more current information on Alvin's situation than the Army. There was quite a bit of confusion in the Army's Hoboken Troop Movement Office as York was suppose to be on the Steamship *Scranton* and they had not been advised of him being bumped onto the SS *Ohioan*.[763]

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[761] Record of telephone conversation between Dr. James J. King and the US Army Troop Movement Office, 6 May 1919, Alvin C. York Military Service Recorder, 1919.
[762] Letter from E.A. Kellogg to the US Army Adjutant General, 2 May 1919; Letter from E.A. Kellogg to Major-General Shank, 3 May 1919; Telegram from E.A. Kellogg to the US Army Adjutant, 3 May 1919.

Major-General Shanks expressed reservations about granting York any of leave, saying, "It is always a dangerous thing to give special favors to a man because they are quoted as precedents in other applications... I have, however... arranged... to give him a forty-eight hour pass so that he may join you."[764] This was insufficient and the War Department was contacted by a string of influential Tennesseans that compelled the Army Adjutant General to order Major-General Shanks to grant York a five day furlough. This would give time for York to attend the New York City events, in addition to being able to visit Washington, DC. This was accomplished in no small measure through the influence of York's Congressman, Cordell Hull.[765] York was informed while at sea that the Tennessee Society intended to welcome him home, but he had no idea how big the welcome would be.

After the ship docked, York saw a throng of people waiting to greet him on the deck below. He was "Plumb scared to death" and hid on the ship until most of the passengers disembarked. Finally, the delegation came on board and York was warmly greeted by a group of Tennessee Society leaders.[766] A photographer snapped the photos of York, bedecked with medals, with the rigging of the Ohioan behind him. As he was led off the ship by the delegation a throng of cameramen and reporters pressed into him.

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[763] War Department telegram to E.A. Kellogg that York was on the Steamship Scranton, 21 May 1919, memorandum explaining why York was on the S.S. Ohioan, 22 May 1919, Alvin C. York Military Service Record, US Army War Department, 1919.
[764] Letter from Major-General Shanks to .A. Kellogg, granting York a forty-eight hour pass, 5 May 1919.
[765] Letter from the Army Adjutant General to Major-General Shanks, granting York a five-day furlough, 15 May 1919; Official furlough form granting York five-days leave, with permission to visit Washington, DC., by the command of Major-General Shanks, 22 May 1919.
[766] "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," New York Times, 23 May 1919, 15.

Only then did the 328th Regiment soldiers traveling with him realize that they had a hero in their midst and they cheered him on enthusiastically. Some of these men on the *Ohioan* were interviewed and were unanimous in saying: "Not once... has he shown any disposition to regard his exploit as important.[767]

As they endeavored to make their way to the car, reporters peppered York with questions about the war, being a conscientious objector and his faith in God. York responded in his characteristic brief folksy manner, which seemed to endear him to them. In none of his answers did he take credit for the feat and actually rebuffed attempts to pin the deed on his personal heroism by saying, "It was the hand of God that guided us all and brought about the victory... I feel it was through Him that I accomplished what I did." When asked about what was next, he said that he planned on entering the ministry.[768] York wrote: "I knowed, of course, that a committee from the Tennessee Society was going to meet my boat. And they did. They tried to make a most awful fuss over me. They seemed to think I done done something wonderful. I couldn't see it that way no how. I done done my duty like most any other soldier would have done when he was up against the same thing."[769] It took the group thirty minutes to push through the throng to reach their touring car. Much of the excitement in New York was fueled by the Tennessee Society. Neil Cullom was their lead planner for the York welcome to New

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[767] "Sergeant York: Argonne Hero Given Big Ovation," *Nevada State Journal*, 23 May 1919, 1; "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," New York Times, 23 May 1919, 15.
[768] "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," New York Times, 23 May 1919, 15.
[769] "Sergeant York: Argonne Hero Given Big Ovation," *Nevada State Journal*, 23 May 1919, 1.

York. He worked tirelessly with city officials to hold nothing back in welcoming Alvin. Cullom shrewdly named this project the "York must see New York Committee."[770]

After reaching the car, they begin their trip to New York City. After a short ferry ride across the Hudson River, York was driven in an open car across New York City and welcomed by throngs of cheering citizens, who lined the streets and filled windows of the skyscrapers above.[771] York said of this reception, "It seemed as most everybody knowed me. They throwed a most awful lot of paper and ticker tape and confetti out of the windows of those big skyscrapers. I wondered what it was at first. It looked like a blizzard I didn't understand that it was for me until they told me. I thought that they did the same thing for 'most every soldier that came back."[772] When the Tennessee Society escorts in the car with York informed him that this welcome was solely for him; York was shocked.[773] Two complete strangers attended the ticker-tape parade that would later play an important role in perpetuating the York story; movie mogul Jesse Lasky and Australian author Tom Skeyhill.

While working in his office on the eighth floor of the "Famous Players-Lasky" offices, at the corner of Forty-First and Fifth Avenue, Jesse Lasky heard the "hysteric demonstration that welcomed Sergeant Alvin C. York back from the... War." Lasky looked out the window and saw the sky full of confetti as the car carrying York passed. At that instant he had "a hot flash of inspiration" and set about to buy the rights to York's

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[770] "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," New York Times, 23 May 1919, 15.
[771] "Conscience Plus Red Hair Are Bad For Germans," Literary Digest, 14 June 1919, 42-48.
[772] York, 296.
[773] Skeyhill, 225-226; "Sergeant York: Argonne Hero Given Big Ovation," *Nevada State Journal*, 23 May 1919, 1; "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," New York Times, 23 May 1919, 15.

story.[774] Over lunch that afternoon, Lasky ran into Flo Ziegfeld, who said to him, "Did you see York's reception? I've got a great idea. I'm going to spot him in the Follies. If I can get him in just a little piece... opposite Will Rogers he'll be a sensation." Lasky had already sent his agent to see York and answered, "Well. Good luck. I expect to put him in a picture." Lasky ran into another famous entertainer, Lee Shubert, who said he wanted York in a revue. It seemed that the entire New York entertainment industry was abuzz with excitement.[775]

A few blocks from Lasky was Tom Skeyhill. the veteran of the Australian-New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), and the Gallipoli Peninsula of April 1915.[776] As Skeyhill stood on that street in New York City as York passed, "I was one of the thousands that stormed the streets of the city... It seemed as if the floodgates of men's very souls had burst apart and all the pent-up passion of centuries had stormed forth in a mighty surge. Mobs everywhere, with banners, bands, bells, whistles, singing, screaming, clanging, whistling, and in every other way acclaiming the big hero of the day. Everybody's hero, everywhere. Ticker tape in endless waves streamed down from the tall buildings... At first I was skeptical... Yet it was done."[777] Skeyhill wanted to know more about the York story, and would tell it, if no one else would.[778]

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[774] Jesse L. Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn*, (New York, Doubleday and Company; 1957), 252-253.
[775] Bill Rice, "Sergeant York Movie," via Robert Taplinger, Director of Warner Brothers Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941,WBA; Theodore Strauss, "Out of the Incubator," *New York Times*, 29 June 1941.
[776] Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918: Volume 1 - The Story of ANZAC from the outbreak of war to the end of the first phase of the Gallipoli Campaign 4 May 1915, (Brisbane, Australia, University of Queensland Press; 1980), 253-280.
[777] Skeyhill, 1-3.
[778] Skeyhill, 5.

After this, York was escorted to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel where he was treated like royalty. The hotel manager, Oscar Tschirkey, used to welcoming dignitaries and powerful political figures, personally escorted the mountain man to a luxurious suite. Once in the room, E.A. Kellogg showed York a framed photo of his mother that they thoughtfully put in his room. Alvin was excited to see this photograph.[779] Later an attempt was made to telephone his family, since Pastor Pile recently had a phone installed in is general store. York said that after some minutes of trying, the call failed to go through.[780]

Later, York was feted by the Tennessee Society at a dinner in the Waldorf-Astor. He was surrounded by dignitaries, generals and admirals in attendance, which included Representative Cordell Hull. Thankfully, there were people familiar to him, such as his division commander, Major-General Duncan, and Joseph Cummings Chase, the artist who painted York's portrait and who propelled him to fame by passing word to George Pattullo that previous January.[781] Although glad to reacquaint himself with these men, York was preoccupied by the table setting before him: "I didn't know what all the plates and knives and forks and spoons were for."So, I kinder slowed up and jes kept a couple of moves be hin'd the others. So I knowed what to do."[782] The evening was full of speeches, all in praise of York; something he neither sought, nor desired. As the night droned on, York's mind wondered back to the mountains of Pall Mall: "In the middle of that-there old banquet I got to kinder dreaming about home and the little log cabin and

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[779] "Conscience Plus Red Hair Are Bad For Germans," Literary Digest, 14 June 1919, 42-48.
[780] York, 298.
[781] "Conscience Plus Red Hair Are Bad For Germans," Literary Digest, 14 June 1919, 42-48.
[782] York, 297.

my mother and Gracie and them-there hound dogs of mine. I knowed I was to be with them soon, and I sorter couldn't think of anything else."[783]

After Major-General Duncan gave a moving introduction to Alvin, the audience called for a speech to tell his 8 October war story. York only hesitatingly stood up, and said, ""I guess you folks all understand that I'm just a soldier boy and not a speaker. I'd love to entertain you-all with a speech to-night, but I just can't do it. I do want to thank Major-General Duncan for his courtesy in coming to this dinner-party you-all have given for me, and I want you-all to know that I thoroughly appreciate all your kindness and attention. I just never will forget it."[784] As York sat back down, there were shouts from the dinner guests for York to tell his war story. General Duncan leaned over to him and said, "Sergeant, you are with friends, tell them about [the war] just as you would tell me." But Alvin politely refused, "I will do anything the General orders me to do but it is one of the things I want to forget," With that, Duncan relented, telling him, "You don't have to say a word."[785] The Tennessee Society ended the dinner with a $2,000 Victory Note.[786]

Although exhausted, York would not enjoy his Presidential Suite.[787] Later that evening, Congressman Hull took York on a late train to Washington, D.C. They first visited the War Department to meet Secretary Newton D. Baker, as well as the Army Adjutant General, Peter Harris, who had granted him the furlough. After that, they visited the White House to meet President Wilson's Secretary, Joe Tumulty (the president

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[783] York, 297.
[784] "Conscience Plus Red Hair Are Bad For Germans," Literary Digest, 14 June 1919, 42-48.
[785] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 154.
[786] "Sergeant York: Argonne Hero Given Big Ovation," *Nevada State Journal*, 23 May 1919, 1; "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 23 May 1919, 15.
[787] "Sergeant York is Feted," *New York Times*, 26 May 1919, 10.

was not available).[788] After that, there was a visit to the House of Representatives, where from the floor of the House, Congressman Hull said: "Here sits in the gallery the man who has been credited with the greatest individual feat of bravery of the war...Sergeant Alvin C. York, of Tennessee." The House rose in a standing ovation, which York acknowledged by standing and saluting.[789] York had the honor of being escorted to the House floor, where, "...the members all come around me. And there was more questioning and a whole heap of cheers and applause. By this time I was sorter feeling like a red fox circling when the hounds are after it. I was beginning to wonder if I ever would get back to my own home again."[790] After this, York was whisked back to New York City, where he was given a tour of the Stock Exchange at Wall Street, where business was suspended to give him a rousing welcome.[791] Speaking about the Stock Exchange: "That didn't mean nothing to me nohow. A country boy like me jes couldn't understand what it was all about. Rifle-guns, hounds, foxes, coons, mountains, shootin' matches, I understand these things."[792]

York was asked what he most wanted to see in New York City and answered, "The desire uppermost in his heart... [Was] of seeing the New York subway system." The people of New York obliged, with the President of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company, Theodore P. Shontz, arriving at Grand Central Station in his private subway car, the Mineola where York was given the grand tour of the subway system, with a host of experts joining the ride to explain the system to him. Coming out of the tour, Alvin

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[788] "Conscience Plus Red Hair Are Bad For Germans," Literary Digest, 14 June 1919, 42-48.
[789] "Sergt. York Visitor in City," *Washington Evening Post*, 24 May 1919, 1-3.
[790] York, 299; Skeyhill, 227; "Washington Hails Brave Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 25 May 1919, 14.
[791] Cowan, 50, 271.
[792] York, 299.

was asked by a reporter if the subway was anything like the trenches, to which York replied in his taciturn and blunt way, "Not much."[793] After that, Alvin was taken to a musical revue at the Winter Garden, where he said, "Some of the women had on fewer clothes than in Paris."[794]

As Alvin's time in New York came to an end, entrepreneurs approached him with offers of vast sums of money if he only lend his name to their product or idea.[795] York was taken aback, "They offered so much money that it almost takened my breath away."[796] One of the first business propositions was from Jesse Lasky, who sent one of his aides to buy the rights to the York story for film, "...to get York's name on a contract no matter what it cost." His aide went straight to the Waldorf-Astoria and despite offering hefty sums of money; he could not convince York to do this. The other business propositions offered to York were from the Shuberts, Florenz Ziegfeld, and other producers and vaudeville acts.[797] This included a $20,000 a week deal to appear in a revue.[798]

Other offers included magazine deals, and a $10,000 book deal.[799] On being asked to perform on stage, York said, "...wouldn't I look funny in tights, ho, ho."[800] The total offering exceeded $250,000, which would have made Alvin the richest man in Pall

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[793] "York Sees Subway From Private Car," *New York Times,* 27 May 1919, 7; "Details on IRT Subway: 1919," Dr. Letter from Irving Deakin to Herman Lissauer, Warner Brothers Research Department, 6 September 1940, WBA.
[794] "Back story information," Letter from Harry Chandlee to Jesse Lasky, 8 May 1940, WBA, 12.
[795] Cowan, 50-51.
[796] York, 299.
[797] Bill Rice, "The Private Life of A Motion Picture," Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, California; 1941, WBA, 1-3.
[798] Skeyhill, 112-113.
[799] "Sergeant York Home," *New York Times,* 01 June 1919, 1.
[800] York, 300.

Mall.[801] Yet, Alvin's rebuff was clear, "My life is not for sale and I don't allow Uncle Sam's uniform for sale."[802] This would not be the last time that Lasky would try to "Bag Alvin York."[803] With such a man before them, York-mania seemed to infect everyone. Even one of York's Tennessee Society hosts, Malcolm Meacham, went to the press saying, "I would not be surprised if York would be the next Governor of Tennessee. He can have anything he wants down there."[804] York was unmoved: "I sorter felt that to take money like that would be commercializing my uniform and my soldiering... So I didn't take their thirty pieces of silver and betray that-there old uniform of mine." He wanted to go home "to the mountains where I belonged."[805]

Despite the refusals for publicity and movies, Alvin did leave a vague opening for something to be written about or by him in the future if they would "show what the boys done done over there and also to show what faith will do for you if you believe right."[806] But, this exception to his refusal to sign the rights of his life to anyone was sealed in his diary and none knew that this was the only angle that he would accept. It would take Jesse Lasky nearly twenty-years to figure out this winning approach with Alvin York.[807] With that, he departed New York without signing any contracts or deals and reported

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[801] Bill Rice, "The Private Life of a Motion Picture," a short story on how the Sergeant York Movie came into existence, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA, 2-3.
[802] Memorandum from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jess L. Lasky, Warner Brothers Studios, 8 May 1940, WBA, 18.
[803] Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn,* 253; Memorandum from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, Warner Brothers Studios, 8 May 1940, WBA, 18.
[804] "Sergeant York is Feted," *New York Times,* 26 May 1919, 10, Cowan, 50-51.
[805] York, 300.
[806] York, 300.
[807] Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn,* 253-255; Memorandum from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, Warner Brothers Studios, 8 May 1940, WBA, 18-20; Bill Rice, "The Private Life of a Motion Picture," a short story on how the Sergeant York Movie came into existence, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA, 2-5.

back to his unit. Ironically, this response by York endeared him even more to the American public. Here at last was a man willing to stand up for the ideals and values that made America great, even giving up the opportunity to become materialistically rich. York had indeed captured the American imagination.[808]

It seems inevitable however, that fame also attracts its detractors. Even as Alvin stepped off of the ship, on 22 May, controversy was stirring. Unfortunately, some of the articles and news-reports added hyperbole to the tale. This actually began with the Pattullo piece. Although there were several inconsistencies in the story, overall it was fairly accurate. Its chief weakness was downplaying the role of the other squad members by saying, "There were seven other Americans present at the fight, but it was York's battle and only York's."[809] The fact of the matter was that in both the personal interviews and the affidavits provided by the soldiers to Pattullo it was manifest that they too played a role, albeit a lesser one in the action.

As the story broke across the nation it stirred scores of copy-cat versions of the battle, written by ambitious reporters eager to add some new aspect of the tale. Each of these early pieces borrowed extensively and exclusively from Pattullo. But, merely copying what was already in print was not enough and these took the tale a step further to add a new twist to it. Before long, pieces were published saying that York captured 132 Germans single-handed. Ironically, a New Jersey paper wrote a good article on the battle before York returned from France. The piece went to great length to remind the readers that there were seventeen men in the attack, and York was just one of them. Listing them

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[808] "Sergeant York Home," *New York Times,* 01 June 1919, 1.
[809] George Pattullo, 3.

by name, the piece gave the entire seventeen great credit. Yet, this fair piece says: "York did the fighting and killing single-handed..."[810]

Neither York nor the US Army made such bold assertions. York tended to mention the other men, down play his own role ("I only did my duty the best I could") and when he did speak of himself, he reminder the listeners that he did what he did only because of God.[811] An example of this is a speech he gave in July 1919: "I live and practice a full salvation and I believe in continual prayer. While I was in France, I prayed continually to God..."[812] Furthermore, York's Medal of Honor citation states clearly that he was not alone, but had seven men with him during the latter part of the action, which is accurate. Despite this, the press spun the tale and their story seems to grow the more it was told.

The first doubt as to what Alvin did was posed to Major-General Duncan by a *New York Times* reporter. As Duncan stepped off of the transport *Sierra* at New York City, the reporter questioned the authenticity of York's actions. Duncan answered: "The case was thoroughly investigated... and the result was the recommendation for the Medal of Honor... He is one of the bravest men and entitled to all the honor that may be given to him."[813] This question was posed by the same *New York Times* reporter to York a few days later as he also stepped off of the ship onto American soil. When the reporter told York that there were soldiers in his unit who doubted his courage, Alvin was taken a-

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[810] "Americans All!" The South Amboy Citizen, 10 May 1919, 16.
[811] "Capital Hails York," *The Washington Post,* 25 May 1919, 3.
[812] "Honor York and Read," *The Washington Post,* 13 July 1919, 7.
[813] "Calls Sergt. York 'Bravest of Men,'" *New York Times*, 22 May 1919, 9.

back and said: "Sure 'nough? Well the [soldiers] made affidavits... that I had done all the things claimed."[814]

It is worth noting that the reporter's assertion that soldiers of the 328th protested the award is impossible. The ships bearing those men had been at sea for ten days with no way that a reporter could have contacted them. Furthermore, there are no reports or documentation of any protests against York being awarded the Medal of Honor while the division was in France. This *New York Times* reporter's question, with the added assertion that 328th Regiment members opposed his Medal of Honor was no doubt a fabrication. Yet, this would be the first of a series of questions or complaints about the York saga that would be printed over the next ninety years, all traceable to this *New York Times* reporter fabrication.

For one soldier to receive so much attention, this *New York Times* reporter correctly surmised that there would eventually be someone who would protest. For York, the bar was set high, arriving to a ticker-tape parade, greater than any other single, junior enlisted soldier in American history. Then there was also York's never-ending statement that his God made this deed possible. Such statements tended to make people uncomfortable, because, if such was true, it has ramifications for one's life. The idea that York survived the carnage because of Divine Intervention also speaks of a miracle.

Had York faded into history, as so many other heroes of the Argonne would, the looming controversy over his exploits would not exist. But, this was not to be his lot. He would be thrust into the public eye and would therefore suffer the scrutiny and jealously

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[814] "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 23 May 1919, 15.

of some, all of which makes for a good news story. Thus any controversy becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. A reporter makes an unfounded assertion in the form of a question, knowing that it will be just a matter of time before someone steps forward with an axe to grind. When a disgruntled veteran comes forth he finds a willing press interested in controversy all in an effort to sell papers. Ironically, it was the press that exaggerated York's feat beyond reality, and they would fuel the flames of jealousy and rivalry to cause friction between Alvin and his "buddies," by giving rivals a prominent platform to attack York. Indeed, jealousy is a powerful emotion, and would turn men who once fought shoulder to shoulder against each-other.

For York, however, controversy was far from his mind in May 1919. He had only one thing on his mind; home. With his furlough up, York reported to Camp Merritt, New Jersey to begin the process of demobilization. He was offered a chance to forego the final out and go directly home, but refused this special treatment, saying, "I want to see the thing through from start to finish." From Camp Merritt, York was sent to Fort Oglethorpe, near Atlanta.[815] After a long train ride, Alvin arrived there on 29 May 1919 and paid .20 cents for two pair of lost army stockings from his military issue. York received his final pay through 30 May (his final authorized travel day) and began the last leg of his journey.[816]

York's final character evaluation in his Military Service Record was rated as "Excellent," thus ending his short, but illustrious career in the US Army. In his records

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[815] Alvin C. York Travel agreement, for final movement to Pall Mall, Tennessee, signed at Camp Merritt, 27 May 1919.

[816] Alvin York, final endorsement on military clearing papers, signed by York and First Lieutenant Edward Harman, 29 May 1919, Military Service Record, 1919; Alvin C. York final pay form, and final out clearing papers (page 9), May 1919, York Military Service Record, 1919.

there are no derogatory annotations, no infractions of military law, no reports of A.W.O.L. or of violating any orders. Every officer signing his records stated that he had either "Very Good" or "Excellent" character.[817] Alvin reflected on his experience in the army and wrote, "I'm a-saying right here that they treated me right smart all the time that I was in the Army, They done played the game with me and they played square. So far as I am concerned the officers and everybody connected with the Army done done the right thing by me. They were right-smart folk."[818]

Alvin arrived at Crossville, Tennessee in the afternoon of 29 May. This was the closest to home the train could bring him to Pall Mall. Here, Alvin was surprised to see six cars from Jamestown (reputed to be the entire fleet of cars in Jamestown at the time) lined up to pick him up. Jamestown was the final stop before arriving at Pall Mall and home. After greeting the welcoming home committee, and other well-wishers, York looked at the line of cars and said, "Which rig do you-all want me to get in?" To this, every driver waved for him to take a seat in their car.[819] Alvin was thrilled to see the two most important Christians in his life there. Pastor Pile and Sam Williams had driven their Model T's up to Crossville to meet Alvin: he rode home with them.[820]

Alvin arrived in Jamestown at 7:00pm, where, to his great delight, his mother, and his brothers and sisters were eagerly waiting for him. The same Dr. Mullinix who had recommended his draft was on hand and recorded that there was no outward emotions,

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[817] Alvin York, Military Service Records, between 1917-1918, US War Department, 1919.
[818] York, 301.
[819] "Sergeant York Home," *New York Times,* 01 Juné 1919, 1.
[820] Interview with Guy Williams by Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.

Mom York simply said, "Hello Alvin," with Alvin answering "Hello Ma." The Doctor observed that Mom York had tears in her eyes.[821] After being welcomed home, he climb onto a mule pulled wagon and began the thirteen mile ride to Pall Mall, along a windy, hilly path. Along the way, his neighbors and friends came down to the path to welcome their hero back.[822] Greetings, such as "How are you Al?" were answered by him with, "Oh, fair to middlin. How's the hogs and crops?"[823] This was a thrilling time for York, being back with his family, friends and his valley. The closer he was to home, the happier he became.[824]

With great delight, Alvin arrived at Pall Mall, where a group of well-wishers waited for him, all shooting their guns into the air in celebration.[825] He had a conversation with Pastor Pile, who was relieved to hear that Alvin still was strong in his faith.[826] The pastor could only say about what had happened to York, was, "The Hand of God was on you Alvin."[827] Pastor Pile admired York's ability to so easily turn down the opportunities to make money, laughingly saying that had he been offered $10,000 to write his life story, "I reckon I'd have been a getting busy writing if it had been me."[828]

As soon as Alvin's hunting dogs heard his voice near the cabin, they came running. "And, oh, my, what a joyful time I had with them-there hound dogs of mine. I done set down and looked at them and patted them and they wagged their tails and licked

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[821] "Back story information," Letter from Harry Chandlee to Jesse Lasky, 8 May 1940, WBA, 12.
[822] York, 301.
[823] "Sergeant York Home," *New York Times,* 01 June 1919, 1.
[824] Cowan, 51.
[825] Interview with Guy Williams by Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.
[826] "Church Upholds Sergt. York," *The Washington Post,* 3 June 1919, 6.
[827] York, 301.
[828] "Sergeant York Home," *New York Times,* 01 June 1919, 1.

my hands, and then, ho, ho, they bayed and sorter circled round, and sorter lit out for the woods; jes to sorter remind me that they hadn't been foolin' round nohow while I was away, and they still knowed where the coons and possums and the foxes were."[829]

Although his dogs were ready to go hunting, Alvin "went a-hunting for Gracie."[830] Alvin met Gracie at her home near Butterfly Branch where the two went off alone to speak. York had reason to be concerned. Although they had been were technically engaged in 1917, Gracie was the one who wanted to wait for marriage until he was back from the war. With this on his mind, Alvin wanted to set a date for the wedding.[831] Although they never disclosed the details of their dialogue, it was here she consented to marriage. York could not be happier. The girl, for whom he stayed pure, despite ample opportunities in France otherwise, would be his wife.[832] For Alvin, things just seemed as if they could not get any better than this.[833] Alvin and Gracie would be married within the week.

There was much that York wanted to do on arrival back home. The first thing he did the next morning was to climb up his mountain to where he had gone a year before to ascertain God's will for his life when struggling with the idea of serving in the Army and where he felt God speak to him, saying, "He had given me my assurance that even if I didn't think it right I should go jes the same; and would be protected from harm; and would come back without a hair of my head injured." On this spot, York raised his hands to heaven in thanksgiving for all God did to bring him through the storm in the Argonne,

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[829] York, 301.
[830] York, 301.
[831] Gracie York, 22-25.
[832] "York to Wed Girl of 17," *The Washington Post*, 5 June 1919, 4.
[833] "Sergeant York Home," *New York Times,* 01 June 1919, 1.

and so much more. After that, York wanted to get back to the way things were, saying, "In a few days I had the old uniform off and the overalls on. I done cleaned up the old muzzle-loader. It was all over. I was home."[834]

Meanwhile, the Governor of Tennessee, Albert H. Roberts had been trying to catch up with York at Fort Oglethorpe to convince him to come to Nashville for a state welcome home parade. When this did not materialize, the Governor attempted to get York to commit to a 4th of July celebration in Nashville, something else York was not interested in. Finally, on hearing about York's impending marriage, Governor Roberts offered to conduct the wedding. Although Alvin preferred to have Pastor Pile conduct the ceremony, the governor's offer was too much to refuse and they agreed as long as it was conducted in Pall Mall.[835] Governor Roberts relented, but insisted that immediately following the ceremony, the entire wedding party travel to Nashville with him.[836] Upon meeting York later that week, Governor Roberts was impressed by York's character, saying, "York is no faker. There is nothing about this whole York setup that is not absolutely genuine."[837]

Alvin and Gracie were married on 7 June in Pall Mall. Between 3,000-6,000 people came from around the region to attend the ceremony, jointly led by Governor Roberts and Pastor Pile.[838] The wedding was conducted outside, on a large rock on the York farm property. York's bride, Miss Gracie (as he would call her throughout his life),

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[834] York, 301-303.
[835] Gracie York, 22-25.
[836] Margaret Phillips, *The Governors of Tennessee*, (Gretna, Louisiana, Pelican Publishers; 2001), 154-155; Cowan, 75-79.
[837] Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.
[838] "Sergt. York Marries Boyhood Sweetheart," *New York Times*, 8 June 1919, 14.

spoke often of the Christian symbolism of being married on the "solid rock" was like being built on Christ.[839] The people of Pall Mall provided the food for this celebration, which was bigger than anything the town has experienced. The weather was perfect, and it truly was idyllic in its setting in the Valley of the Three Forks of the Wolf River. York said, "And the mountain people provided the vittles. They brought in goats and hogs and turkeys and slaughtered and dressed them right there on the hillside. They set up a table, the largest I ever seed, and they done piled hit up with all the meats and eggs there was and with sweet potatoes and cornbread and milk and jams and cakes and a whole mess of other things. We were married on the mountainside above the spring and under the shady trees and with the blue mountains and green grass and the flowers all around."[840] After they exchanged their vows, Alvin and Gracie kissed for the first time to the cheers of the throng of spectators.[841]

After celebrating in Pall Mall, the wedding party, complete with Pastor Pile and Mom York, started their journey to Nashville to be entertained by the Governor on 9 June.[842] There were rousing speeches, cheers and applause by proud Tennesseans. At the largest of these events, 20,000 people attempted to hear Alvin speak at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, with only 6,000 of these being allowed into the theater.[843] As usual, Alvin kept his remarks few, and firmly set the pattern how he would contend with his war talk, by saying;

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[839] Gracie York, 3-4, 22-27.
[840] York, 305-306.
[841] Interview with Betsy Ross York, and George Edward Buxton York, in Jamestown, and Pall Mall, Tennessee, 30 May, 2010.
[842] "York Going to Nashville," *The Washington Post,* 9 June 1919, 1.
[843] "Back story information," Letter from Harry Chandlee to Jesse Lasky, 8 May 1940, WBA, 12.

> ...you have come here to honor me. I am willing to believe that this honor you are doing here is for me personally. Every American soldier that took the oath of allegiance to his country and the flag could have done exactly the same thing I did if it had been his to do it. You don't owe me any honor. Every reason you have now for honoring me you have for honoring each and all of these boys. God gave me the opportunity to do this great service as I believe for the cause of humanity. I want you to realize every soldier here would have done the same thing.[844]

But throughout this tour, and speaking to crowds, York consistently refused to talk about anything he had done, and instead either gave the credit to God or to the American Army generally. In the midst of the celebrations, the most important event for Alvin and Gracie was meeting with the Tennessee Rotary Club, who pledged to raise enough money to provide them with a fully furbished farm, replete with good bottom land, in Pall Mall.[845]

After being feted, the couple was to travel to Salt Lake City, Utah as a guest of the National Convention of Rotary Clubs that was being held there. The trip would include stops and speaking engagements along the way, but Alvin and Gracie were weary of the public exposure. They conferred with Pastor Pile, who said that this was "a vain glorious call of the world and the devil." Pile himself was remorseful in that he felt coerced into attending a Vaudeville show, for which he later wrote a public apology of repentance to the newspaper for attending such a worldly event.[846] With that in mind, and wanting some peace, Gracie and Alvin canceled the trip and returned home on 11 June with the rest of the bridal party. The couple moved into the York cabin with his

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[844] Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.
[845] "York Gives Up Honeymoon," *New York Times*, 12 June 1919, 5, "Alvin C. York Memorial Fund," Rotary Club of Nashville, 1919-1924.
[846] "York's Pastor Repents," *New York Times*, 18 June 1919, 22.

mom and a few of the younger siblings, and settle down to a traditional life of running the York farm until the Rotary house was built.[847]

Alvin had hoped to escape the limelight and take up the quiet life of hunting and farming that he had known before the war. This was the way of life of his forefathers for more than one-hundred years, and what he intended to do as well. However, there was a something inside him stirring that would not allow York to accept things in Pall Mall as they were. Despite efforts to fade into obscurity, it seemed that the limelight always fell back onto York. This endeavor to return to a solitary life in Pall Mall was not helped by Alvin's new worldview. At first he desired to go back to the way things were, but, it was not possible, as he had changed and the war changed him. He was exposed him to progress, innovation and other technological advances that were actually beneficial to people. This was the type of progress Pall Mall needed.

This divergence between Pall Mall and the rest of the world was evident during his journey across the USA and Europe. Life in Pall Mall seemed frozen in time. Additionally, it was quite an effort to actually travel in or out of Pall Mall with the closest train seventy-five kilometers away in Crossville. Even traveling to the county seat of Jamestown, less than twenty kilometers away on a battered mountain road was an all-day endeavor. Alvin struggled with his dilemma: "The whole outside world seemed to have changed. But not our valley. Everything there was kinder the same. But I knowed, though, that I had done changed. I knowed I wasn't like I used to be. The big outside

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[847] "York Gives Up Honeymoon," *New York Times*, 12 June 1919, 5; "Alvin C. York Memorial Fund," Rotary Club of Nashville, 1919-1924.

world I had been in and the things I had fought through had teched me up inside a most powerful lot."[848]

The tipping point for Alvin occurred at church, where he was appalled that nothing had changed for the children, with the same ones listening and the same ones sleeping in services. Meanwhile, his thoughts raced across what he had witnessed, seeing entire towns razed, watching thousands of lives extinguished. Yet, the locals seemed unaware and unmoved by the cataclysm that swept away so many. He was not sure what to do, but living in blissful isolation and ignorance from the rest of the world was no longer an option: "The war had come and gone. Millions of boys had been killed and wounded. Millions of dollars had been poured out jes like water. Homes all over the world had been desolated. Some of the old countries had been all mussed up and new ones had come up and sort of takened their places. The whole outside world seemed to have changed. But not our valley."[849] York was "sort of restless and full of dreams and wanting to be doing something..." Alvin wanted roads built into Pall Mall, modern schools, improved farming methods, libraries, and up-to-date homes. York shared his dreams with Gracie, who supported this desire. But he was not sure of what to do to.

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[848] York, 303-304.
[849] York, 303-305.

Chapter 14 - Life in Pall Mall

I ain't going to show any favoritism nohow. I fought with Catholics and Protestants, with Jews, Greeks, Italians, Poles, and Irish, as well as American borned boys in the World War. They were buddies of mine and I learned to love them. If there is any of them in these-here mountains we'll make a place for them in these schools. I'm a-going to give all the children in the mountains the chance that's a-coming to them. I'm a-going to bring them a heap o' larnin.

Alvin C. York on improving life in Pall Mall

Alvin continued to struggle with the dilemma about what to do to change Pall Mall, "The whole outside world seemed to have changed. But not our valley. Everything there was kinder the same. But I knowed, though, that I had done changed. I knowed I wasn't like I used to be. The big outside world I had been in and the things I had fought through had teched me up inside a most powerful lot."[850]

The Great War forever changed the world in so many ways. Four empires vanished (the Ottoman, German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian), four ancient dynasties ended (Hohenzollerns (German), Hapsburg (Austrian), Romanovs (Russian) and Ottoman (Turks). Some twelve million died directly from the effects of the war and up to 100 million more in the plague of the Spanish influenza that swept the world in the aftermath of the war.[851] The map of Africa was redrawn and in the Middle East and Eastern

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[850] York, 303-304.

[851] Alfred W. Crosby, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*, (New York, Cambridge University Press; 2003), 209-219; Dorothy Ann Pettit, *A Cruel Wind: Pandemic Flu in American 1918-1920*, (Murfreesboro, TN, Timberlane Books; 2008), 1-9; Niall Johnson and Jürgen Mueller, "Updating the Accounts: Global Mortality of the 1918-1920 Spanish Influenza Pandemic," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (Spring 2002), 105-115.

Europe, new nations sprung forth. Life had changed, and it was imperative for the folks of Pall Mall to catch up with the world, or be consumed by it.

With Bible and rifle in hand, Alvin went to his prayer spot on the mountain to contemplate his new dilemma.[852] His prayers were answered quickly and he believed that God had equipped him for taking on the challenge of bringing changes to his valley. Reflecting on this, Alvin said,

> And the more I thought the more I kinder figured that all of my trials and tribulations in the war had been to prepare me for doing just this work in the mountains. All of my suffering in having to go and kill were to teach me to value human lives. All the temptations I done went through were to strengthen my character. All the associations with my buddies were to help me understand and love my brother man. All of the pains I done seed and went through were to help and prepare me. And the fame and fortunes they done offered me in the cities were to try me out and see if I was fitted for the work He wanted me to do.[853]

And then there was Alvin's fame. The only gift he accepted was the Rotary Club initiative to provide him and his wife with a farm and land.[854] It did not seem right to take more.[855] Yet, he left the door open to take any offer that would bring glory to God, and honor his fellow soldiers.[856] The key ingredient for York was as long as he was not acting on selfish gain, he could use his notoriety for the improvement of others. With this in mind, he saw it morally right to use this fame for the improvement of life for his people, especially that of the children.[857]

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[852] Skeyhill, 231-233; York, 304.
[853] York, 304-305.
[854] "Alvin C. York Memorial Fund," Rotary Club of Nashville, 1919-1924.
[855] Skeyhill, 233.
[856] Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn,* 253-255; Memorandum from Julien Josephson and Harry Chandlee, to Jesse L. Lasky, Warner Brothers Studios, 8 May 1940, WBA, 18-20; Bill Rice, "The Private Life of a Motion Picture," a short story on how the Sergeant York Movie came into existence, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA, 2-5.
[857] Cowan, 288-290.

Alvin saw three things that were needed in his community; roads, vocational schools and the expansion of Christian teaching, in the form of a local Bible School. He wasted no time on having a good road built into Pall Mall. Using his clout and the influence of the Tennessee Governor, he visited the State Highway Department in Nashville, who wasted no time in beginning work on cutting a good road across the mountains into Pall Mall. This road is now called U.S. Route 127, or the "York Highway." The route constructed due to Alvin's influence was the sixteen kilometer portion that links Pall Mall to Jamestown and gave the valley access to the world outside.[858]

Next came the most difficult to achieve, that of building a school. Based upon the notion that York would use his fame to raise money, he established the "York Foundation" for raising funds to build schools in the region. His desire was that the foundation would not only pay for the construction, but also pay the teacher's salaries, as well as maintaining the facilities to provide for a quality education. York wanted to ensure that the next-generation had the education that he never received, and with this, a greater chance of success.[859] Additionally, it was imperative that the school provide scholarships so that every child could attend regardless of their parent's financial state.[860] He desired that the children be provided a quality education that would first teach the basics, and then vocational skills. Alvin thought that the vocational aspect should focus

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[858] Skeyhill, 232-235; York, 306.
[859] Cowan, 288-289.
[860] Cowan, 289.

on skills needed in the region, such as animal husbandry, carpentry, dressmaking, farming, fruit tree growing, home economics, etc.[861]

With this vision, York took to the road to raise funds in the fall of 1919, which turned into a trip across the nation. He was assisted by his friends in the Nashville Rotary Club, who made arrangements with Rotarians around the country to plan and organize events to support Alvin's foundation. Traveling with Gracie for a portion of the journey, Alvin was received by large crowds and excited ovations. Naturally, they wanted to hear about his war experiences, which York continued to shy away from. His tour, although having a good start, was cut short. After a speaking engagement in Boston, Alvin suffered from acute appendicitis, forcing him to abruptly end that round of visits. This was the first of a string of health issues that he would wrestle with.[862] Despite this, his fund-raising was off to a good start, which he would continue through 1920 in New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago and many other cities.[863]

Nevertheless, his personal financial situation took a turn for the worse in 1921. The problem was that the Rotary Club failed to raise enough money to cover the cost of the farm and Alvin simply did not have such money. E.J. Buren, a writer for *The World*, published a moving article in *The Washington Post* that was the first to help the public understand the York financial problem and the truth about the farm. Buren wrote that, although the Nashville Rotary claimed to have purchased and given the farm to Alvin York, it had not done so as of December 1921. This had not happened as they still owed

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[861] York, 307; Perry, 136-137; Cowan, 288-289.
[862] "Sergeant York Stricken," *New York Times*, 31 January 1920.
[863] "Sergt. York Gets $215 for Schools," *New York Times,* 19 April 1920; William S. Howland, "War Hero's Dream Now Coming True," New York Times, 6 June 1926.

considerable money on the property, as their donation solicitations had fallen well below what was needed. Because of this, Alvin, Gracie, and then eight month old son, Alvin Jr., were still living with his mom.[864]

Upon hearing of York's financial dilemma, the Federal Government attempted ameliorate his indebtedness. York's House Representative, Cordell Hull, and Senator McKellar, lobbied to vote through Congress a Bill, House Resolution 8599, granting York retired status as an Army Lieutenant (under the House version) and a captain (under the Senate version). If passed, this would have provided him a modest monthly pay allotment.[865] This included an appeal to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, who answered the request with a hearty endorsement, noting that although an exception to policy, none deserved it more.[866]

As Congress discussed and debated the matter, the War Department's enthusiasm waned and faded, especially when a new Secretary of War entered the fray. This process dragged on for nearly a decade. By 1928, the bureaucracy prevailed, with Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis paying lip-service to Alvin York, but laying down all the reasons why he should not receive such a benefit. Davis claimed that doing this for York put the

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[864] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34. Their first son was ill, and died only four-days after he was born; "Alvin C. York Memorial Fund," Rotary Club of Nashville, 1919-1924.

[865] House of Representatives Bill H.R. 8599, Sponsored by Cordell Hull, 66th Congress, 1st Session, 20 August 1919; Senate Bill S. 2368, Sponsored by Senator McKellar, 5 August 1921.

[866] Letter to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, from Congressman Cordell Hull, requesting promotion and retired status for Alvin C. York, 22 May 1919; Letter of support from the Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker, to Honorable Julius Kahn, Chairman of the House Committee on Military Affairs, 26 August 1919.

national defense at risk by paying out annuities to inactive members, to saying that the Medal of Honor was sufficient recognition of his heroism.[867]

The Congressional effort to commission York as a retired officer with pay benefits would go on for sixteen years before the Bill was passed in Congress.[868] By the time this Bill reached the President for signature it was 1942 and Franklin Delano Roosevelt was President. He signed it into law without question.[869] No doubt that the outbreak of the Second World War was the only thing that made this possible. The Bill promoted two other Great War heroes to Major; Alvin York and Sam Woodfill. Woodfill and York were two of the three greatest heroes of the First World War according to General Pershing.[870] The third, Major Whittlesley, the commander of the Lost Battalion, was given no benefit as he died in 1921.[871]

The public did not know that these initiatives to help York failed and assumed that he was taken care of by his nation. When asked by E.J. Buren when was the last time he received anything from the US Government, York replied that he received $60.00 on 30 May 1919 as his final pay from the Army.[872] Since then, there was nothing.[873] In this he was treated no differently than any other AEF veteran. This was all the pay and

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[867] Letter from Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis, to Honorable John M. Morin, Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs (US Congress), opposed to commissioning of Alvin York, 31 January 1928.
[868] "Oppose Award to Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 20 August 1921.
[869] "SGT. York is Made Major in Infantry," *New York Times*, 8 May 1942; ""Sergeant York, Woodfill are Majors Now," *The Washington Post*, 8 May 1942, 1.
[870] John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, (New York, Frederick Stokes & Company, 1931), 392; "Passes Bill Rewarding York," *New York Times*, 13 February 1935.
[871] John J. Pershing, "My Experiences in the World War," *New York Times*, 29 March 1931.
[872] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34.
[873] Alvin C. York pay voucher, Military Service Packet, US War Department, May 1919.

benefits any soldier would receive coming back from the Great War. Alvin expected no more.

The misperception about Alvin's housing situation started on his return from France in May 1919. While being escorted around New York City, he was told that the Nashville Rotary Club had not only purchased the land, and the farm, but that it was his, without any debt or hitches.[874] However, this was not so. The massive 410 acre farm was purchased for $23,000, with the Rotary raising $10,937.50 of the cost, leaving York with the burden of paying the remaining $12,062.50.[875] This did not include the extra $15,000 that it would cost to have a home built on the farm, with barns, etc.[876] Raising such money was nigh impossible for York even in a good farming season. 1921 proved a particularly difficult year and even though he worked night and day, "His hay was practically burned up and other crops failed."[877] Although Alvin appreciated the Nashville Rotary Club's generous donation, this was more than he could handle financially, especially as he also had to purchase $3,000 worth of machinery and animals to start working the land. This placed him, for the first time in his life, in a debt that he could not pay no matter how hard he worked.[878]

To get out from under this crushing debt, York's friends urged him to sign a film or vaudeville deal to raise money. Nevertheless, he refused to compromise on the matter,

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[874] "Alvin C. York Memorial Fund," Rotary Club of Nashville, 1919-1924.
[875] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34.
[876] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34.
[877] "Hero York Harassed, Can't Make Farm Pay," *New York Times*, 21 July 1921.
[878] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34.

saying, that the same God that brought him safely through the war, would likewise also safely see him through this trial.[879] Of this he said, "My conscience told me that both propositions were wrong and I refused to consider them at any price."[880] York added during a speaking engagement at Asbury College that, "he would rather be 'a pauper and homeless knowing that he was serving God and would have a Home in heaven.'"[881] This moral stance earned him condemnation in some circles, by individuals who saw nothing wrong with taking the expedient way out of his financial crisis and selling his story to vaudeville. Some of the critics were so angered by his morality against signing stage deals that they not only withdrew financial support from their pledges to help pay off the farm, but also slandered his performance as a soldier. When asked to respond to the personal attacks, Alvin refused.[882]

The Nashville Rotary, with help from the local newspaper, attempted to raise the remaining money, but could not and told E.J. Buren that it looked like they would fail in even making the next payment. Nevertheless, the matter gained national attention that garnered out-pouring of support for Alvin. The Tennessee Society of New York again rose to the occasion and solicited generous donations from its members. Additionally, the *Chicago Tribune*, Edgar Foster of the *Nashville Banner*, the New York Stock

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[879] "Hero York Harassed, Can't Make Farm Pay," *New York Times*, 21 July 1921.
[880] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34.
[881] "Refused $1,000 a Night," *New York Times*, 31 May 1922.
[882] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34.

Exchange, and Marvin Campbell, an Indiana banker, used their influence and personal funds to raise money for the indebted and "homeless" sergeant.[883]

A fundraising drive to provide York with the money he needed by Christmas was undertaken across the nation in 1921.[884] At last, the public had the truth on Alvin's financial need and rallied to pay off his land and house. With a heart of thanksgiving, York was given the deed to the land he thanked both America and God for providing for his needs. Four long years after the land was pledged to him, work could begin on a house for Alvin, Gracie and their growing family.[885]

Although facing mounting debt, York refused to give up on his dream of building schools for the children of his area. By 1922, he had collected $12,000 of hard cash (in the York Foundation Fund) and had a further $20,000 in pledges. True to his morals, 100% of the money raised in this endeavor was strictly for construction of schools. A board of advisors was appointed to dutifully and faithfully monitor the use of all York Foundation funds, as well as to ensure the integrity of this undertaking.[886]

In the midst of this, York received a boost in notoriety with publication of a book by Sam Cowan, called, *Sergeant York and His People* in 1922.[887] Cowan claimed to hail from York's region of Tennessee and took an interesting approach to the story. Instead of making Alvin's military exploits the center of this work, he focused on life in Appalachia.

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[883] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34.
[884] Lee, 74-75.
[885] "Tennessee Society to Help Sergeant York," New York Times, 5 October 1921.
[886] E.J. Buren, "Sergeant York, Homeless Hero of War Got $60: Awaits, Farm," *The Washington Post*, 4 December 1921, 34.
[887] Samuel Kincaid Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company; 1922).

As the *New York Times* review of the book said, "Mr. Cowan has utilized Sergeant York as the 'peg' upon which to hang a more or less intimate description of the people of the Cumberland Mountains."[888] To develop this portrayal of the mountain life, Cowan spent two months living in Pall Mall and witnessed the now legendary turkey shoots, log-rollings, and the importance of the Christian faith to these people. Cowan was spell-bound by the simple, yet difficult life that these Appalachian Tennesseans lived. It was because of this Cowan suggested that men such as Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone and Alvin York exist.[889] Yet, sales of the book were disappointing as interest in the Great War had already faded in the United States.

In the meantime, York continued criss-crossing the United States over the next several years to raise money for his school. A major breakthrough occurred when the State of Tennessee and Fentress County each pledged $50,000 in support of York's vocational high school in 1926.[890] Meanwhile, the land for this facility was given by several generous donors. The County gave York 135 acres of prime land near Jamestown, while several lumbermen donated more than 1,235 acres of land for this endeavour. With these, in addition to the many financial gifts that had been safely tucked away in the York Foundation account in Nashville, it was time to start construction.[891]

The decision to build the school in Jamestown instead of Pall Mall made sense, as it offered the children from across the county an opportunity for an education in a central location. Because of this, York's school would have to add dorms for those coming from

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[888] "Tennessee's War Hero," *New York Times*, 16 July 1922.
[889] Samuel Kincaid Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, (New York, Funk and Wagnalls Company; 1922), 110-111.
[890] York, 306.
[891] William S. Howland, "War Hero's Dream Now Coming True," New York Times, 6 June 1926.

further out. On 8 May 1926, Alvin broke ground for what would be called the "Alvin C. York Industrial Institute," before the applause of some 2,000 supporters. This first building would be made of stone and brick and was to be ready for use in the fall. Yet, despite this success, much work remained to be done. The construction of dormitories, barns, clearing a pasture and erecting a wood-working shop were all yet to be accomplished. The plan was to have ten teachers and 200 students. While the construction was ongoing, the York Institute would formally begin in an old building across the street until the new facility was ready. The eighth anniversary of York's 8 October 1918 battle (1926) was the appointed day to officially open the school, but this had to be postponed to 1927.[892] Although Alvin proudly graduated his first class in May 1927, he would soon discover that fighting the Germans was easier than fighting local politicians.

The selection of the site by Jamestown pitted York against the local powerbrokers, which had been growing in their opposition to him. Although York leveraged his popularity to push through his agenda, he would find that this tactic could only go so far. Alvin would soon discover that, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home." There was a segment of influential officials and rich business men who resented York's celebrity and political power. They made up half of the Board of the York Foundation[893] Although Alvin had powerful political friends in Nashville, and in Washington, D.C., the local faction was scheming to push him aside as quickly as possible. Alvin soon found that it was easier to work with people outside the

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[892] William S. Howland, "War Hero's Dream Now Coming True," New York Times, 6 June 1926.
[893] Interview with George Edward Buxton York, and Betsy Ross York, 30 May 2010 in Jamestown, Tennessee. Verse reference is Matthew 13:57b, King James Translation.

region, who did not have agendas or ambitions to side -track his vision for educating the area's youth. He also felt acutely betrayed by these former "friends," who had turned against him. The challenge York faced was daunting, "The Board they give me couldn't see things the way I did. So I have had a most awful hard fight, a much worser one than the one I had with the machine guns in the Argonne."[894]

The local powerbrokers included a list of influential figures in Fentress County; W.L. Wright the Jamestown Bank President, Judge H.N. Wright, J.T. Wheeler, County Superintendent Ocie O. Frogge, Ward R. Case, George Stockton and W.E. Porter.[895] They seemed to oppose his every move. Alvin was only able to achieve his 1926 ground breaking by public hearings, which won local support and the state government intervention.[896] Yet, the local power-brokers did all they could to stymie his school with the end to push York out of the way altogether. In their defense, they did have a different vision as to how the York Foundation and school should be run. York lacked formal education, lacked qualifications to run this institution and was inclined to install similarly unqualified friends and family into key positions. Meanwhile, those opposed to him preferred to install qualified people with professional educational experience. As the driving force behind this effort, York wanted to keep control of his institution. With these polar opposite views, things were about to come to a head.[897]

The bickering caused York to initiate law-suites against those that he saw as standing in the way of the school, causing him much anguish. In one incident, York had

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[894] York, 174.
[895] "Alvin C. York Presses Aim," New York Times, 18 September 1927, E6.
[896] "York Sues Over School," *The Washington Post*, 17 September 1927, 16.
[897] Perry, 165-175.

the furniture and equipment removed from a temporary school building so the court had to decide who had the legal right of its use. In the midst of this, Alvin continued to raise money for the school, while trying to take care of his family and farm.[898]

After losing the support of the local power-brokers, it became difficult for Alvin to run the institute. He appealed to the state to intervene and in response it took over the Institute in 1936, much to Alvin's chagrin. This was the price of overcoming the local Dixie Mafia.[899] Understandably, not having a formal education put York in a distinct disadvantage with the state administrators, who forced York to resign. As a consolation, the Prohibition Party name Alvin as their Vice-Presidential Candidate the same week that he lost control of his school, for the 1936 Presidential Election, an honor that he graciously declined.[900]

Despite the trials and tribulations, York had accomplished the impossible, and the school is still vibrant and active today. He brought education to his region and thereby gave his people opportunities that he had lacked. Without his tireless leadership in seeing this project to its conclusion, it never would have come to fruition.

Throughout the seventeen year odyssey to raise the "Alvin C. York Institute," Alvin poured his heart and soul into this work. His family and farm suffered for this, by having him gone so much trying to raise funds to make the dream a reality. With every speech, Alvin was asked about the Great War, something he shied away from, or down-

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[898] "Sergt. York's Troubles," *The Washington Post*, 26 July 1927, 6.
[899] "Sergt. York Quits School: Hero Leaves Institution He Founded in Row with State," *New York Times*, 9 May 1936
[900] "Dry's Draft York; He Refuses to Run," *New York Times*, 8 May 1936; "York Will Seek No Office," *New York Times*, 8 May 1936.

played.[901] All he wanted to discuss was his school and the kids in Fentress County. In exasperation to a war question, he answered: "I'm trying to forget the war. I occupied one space in a fifty-mile front. I saw so little - it hardly seems worth while discussing it. I'm trying to forget the war in the interest of the mountain boys and girls that I grew up among."[902] He only slowly grasped the idea that, it was the war that drew the crowds and provided the donations to build his school in 1927. It fell to someone, whom York never had met to come into his life with an idea on how to address this; it was Tom Skeyhill, who had witnessed York's arrival in New York in May 1919.

Skeyhill came to Pall Mall to meet York, and after two tries, finally caught up with him. He soon secured permission from York to write a biography. Skeyhill's war experiences helped persuade York to allow him to collaborate on his biography.[903] While walking the streets of New York City on 22 May 1919, he had participated in the overwhelming welcome that was given for Sergeant York. In 1927, Skeyhill made his way to Pall Mall to convince York to write a biography. At first, York refused, but after "reminiscing of old days of the front," Skeyhill convinced him, saying that the money earned from this could be used to build and expand the school for mountain children that he so desired.[904] Skeyhill would help York by serving as the book's editor.[905]

Skeyhill proved the right choice. He convinced *Liberty Magazine* to invest $40,000 to buy pre-published portions of the book as a two-part serial released in the

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[901] "Sergeant York Here in School Fund Drive," *New York Times*, 4 February 1928, 2.
[902] "Sergeant York Winches," *New York Times*, 19 January 1927.
[903] "Tom Skeyhill, "Author, Dies in Plane Crash," *New York Times*, 23 May 1932.
[904] "War Hero Writes for School: Sergt. York Publishes Book to Get Funds for His Students," *The Washington Post*, 28 October 1928, R12; Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, (New York, Doubleday; 1928), 24-28.
[905] S.T. Williamson, "Sergeant York Tells His Own Story," *New York Times*, 23 December 1928.

summer of 1928. He next secured an agreement with Doubleday for a nationwide release of the completed book later in 1928, titled; *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*.[906] In 1930, Skeyhill also worked with York to publish a children's version of his story, which included numerous Appalachian pioneer vignettes, in a book named, *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters*.[907] To write these books, not only did Skeyhill imitate Cowan's idea to spend time in the region watching everyday life, turkey shoots, and church services, but he also had a grasp of life as a soldier. In this, he surpassed Cowan's work.

Despite being shallow on the war proper, Skeyhill helped York put together a well-presented biography. Its strength is that it lays out a convincing case of the evidence supporting York's actions on 8 October 1918. This was to answer what Skeyhill suggested was a common reaction to the story, "At first I was skeptical. Who was not? It sounded too much like a fairy tale. It just could not be done. It was not human. Yet it was done," he wrote in the preface of his book.[908] To answer such questions, Skeyhill included affidavits as well as portions of the investigation that the AEF conducted in February 1919. The book was a resounding success being followed quickly by a "boys" version of the story in 1930. Titled, *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters,* the book was dedicated to Alvin's sons, Alvin Jr., George Edward Buxton, Woodrow Wilson, Sam Houston and Andrew Jackson.[909]

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[906] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, (New York, Doubleday; 1928).
[907] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, The John C. Winston Company; 1930).
[908] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters*, 2.
[909] Tom Skeyhill (editor), *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters*, 2-9.

York traveled around the country raising money for his school. It seemed that America could not get enough of him, and with the story out at long last, perhaps the clamoring for war stories from him would end. Between 3-5 October, the US Army War College conducted its annual fair in Washington, D.C., with the highlight of the exposition being a twice daily reenactment of the SGT York action.[910] Calling it, "Smashing through the Argonne with Sergeant York," it drew 10,000 spectators at each event that included displays of the Army's and Air Corp's latest weapons.[911]

To reenact the York action accurately, the US Army assigned several officers to go through the archives and to interview eye-witnesses. However, the officers could not find maps that accurately depicted the location in France. To fill this historical gap, the researchers contacted Buxton and Danforth. The problem was the neither one of these officers were eye -witnesses to the action and thereby had to rely up second and third hand information to develop their own grossly inaccurate sketches.[912] Despite this, the Army made the best of what they had to support the reenactment. These grossly inaccurate maps would later mislead future investigations in France to find the York site, which would not be corrected until 2006.

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[910] Major R.B. Lawrence, "The Army Puts on its Show," *The Washington Post*, 29 September 1929, 6; "Sergeant York's Feat Exhibition Feature," *The Washington Post*, 22 September 1929, 5.
[911] "Daily 'War' At Capital: Sergeant York Captures 132 Foes Amid Bombs at Army Show," *New York Times*, 5 October 1929; "Army Again Fights Battle Of Argonne," *The Washington Post,* 4 October 1929, 22; US Army, "Smashing Through the Argonne," *Military Exposition and Carnival: War College 3-5 October, 1929* (Washington, DC, GPO; 1929), 38.
[912] Major Danforth letter to Captain Swindler, 5 August 1929, and LTC Buxton letter to CPT Swindler, 23 July 1929, RG 165, US National Archives, College Park, MD.



"Smashing Through The Argonne With Sergeant York"

TIME SCHEDULE

4.00 P. M., Afternoon Performance
9.04 P. M., Evening Performance

PHASE ONE.

1. The Americans open fire with four (4) machine guns and intermittent fire by artillery and 37 mm. guns.

The assault sections, which represent the Second Battalion of the 328th Infantry Regiment, are in position to jump off and attack the enemy.

The enemy forces are occupying strong defensive positions.

2. The American assault sections move out; antiaircraft guns fire at an enemy observation plane.

The attacking forces fight their way forward 150 yards, where they are stopped by strong machine gun fire of the enemy and the enemy's artillery opens up on the attacking American doughboys.

3. Over the lines comes a friendly plane and drops a message to the attacking force.

PHASE TWO.

4. It is now found that the enemy machine guns must be silenced or the attack can not go on.

The assault platoon in which is Sergeant York and his squad which helps to make up the three squads of the platoon, is ordered to go around in rear of the enemy to take the machine guns in rear. The platoon disappears on the east flank. At this time an enemy officer calls for a conference at his headquarters—the little house plainly seen on the grounds.

5. The American patrol appears behind the enemy defense position. Sergeant York can be identified by his white helmet. They are seen chasing two fleeing enemy soldiers.

6. While the patrol is counting up the enemy prisoners, it is suddenly fired on with heavy losses.

York is seen some distance from his men, who all drop to the ground and seek cover.

York immediately opens fire with his rifle and begins picking off members of the enemy machine gun crews. One by one they drop.

7. As York's rifle ammunition is exhausted from the front pockets of his belt he is attacked by an enemy officer with five men using rifles and bayonets.

York draws his pistol and kills this group, one after another.

He has now secured the ammunition from the rear pockets of his belt and is about to resume his fire on the machine gunners.

Out from the group of enemy prisoners comes the Major of the enemy battalion. York tells him that he must surrender his men or he will be the next to die.

The enemy commander blows his whistle and the machine gunners cease firing and come out with their arms above their heads and surrender.

8. York now forms his prisoners in a column with the American wounded being carried at the rear and York places himself at the front of the column with three enemy officers.

The column moves toward the enemy lines, and comes upon other enemy machine gun nests, when York threatens to kill the enemy major unless he orders his men to surrender; this is done and York effects their capture.

9. The group now crosses through No Man's Land to the American lines.

Two enemy ambulances now come on the field and remove their dead and wounded.

PHASE THREE.

10. The enemy now occupies the main defensive position and lays wire for tank defense.

Now that the machine guns have been accounted for by Sergeant York, the American attack is renewed, supported by two tanks and a barrage of artillery fire.

11. The attack proceeds by infiltration in the rear of the tanks and is held up temporarily, 75 yards from the enemy trenches.

A smoke screen is laid by bombs.

Two artillery guns gallop up and go into action.

12. As the tanks advance one of them runs upon a mine, which explodes under the tank.

Both tanks now pierce the enemy position and the infantry assault follows through.

13. The house in the enemy lines is on fire from exploding shells.

One of the tanks smashes through it.

The enemy is driven from the position.

14. Final assembly and march to the rear by both forces, saluting Sergeant York.

Figure 23 The official program for York's reenactment at the US Army Expo in 1929 (AHEC)

York and the surviving members of his platoon were invited as guests of the US Army to participate in this event. The expo culminated with the presentation of the Distinguished Service Cross to Sergeant Early, for leading the sixteen men into the German flank that morning in 1918. Among the others invited from York's outfit was Corporal William Cutting.[913] Having enlisted under the false name of William Cutting,

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[913] "Plane Ride Refused by Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 22 September 1929.

Otis B. Merrithew had begun a campaign in the early 1920s against the US Army to secure an award for himself, and claimed that it was he who took over when Sergeant Early fell, not York.[914] It will be remembered that Merrithew confessed to a personal dislike of Alvin York while they served together in the 328th Infantry Regiment. Ironically, the difference between the two remained stark. York wanted to forget the war and would rather talk about his school, while Merrithew continually talked about the war and wanted others to know his point of view on this matter.[915] To set the record straight, Merrithew began a letter writing campaign to local newspapers in 1920. Having not achieved headway there, Merrithew found another way with his invitation to the 1929 Army War College Exposition, which put him in contact with Danforth, Harry Parsons, Buxton as well as the other squad members.

Nevertheless, his endeavors to get a medal were not supported. Cutting's Platoon Sergeant, Sergeant Harry Parsons, flatly rebuffed him. This was the same Parson whom Cutting claimed he handed the prisoners to on Hill 223, and according to Cutting, supposedly witnessed this fact. Of this, Parsons said, in his thick Brooklyn brogue, "It was York's party... It was York's Battle."[916] To be sure that he was understood, Parsons added in another interview that he rejected Cutting's allegations, by saying, "Alvin York deserves every bit of the credit given him."[917] Cutting also hit a dead end with his former Company Commander Captain Danforth, who rejected his assertion that Cutting was the

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[914] "Plane Ride Refused by Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 22 September 1929.
[915] Cahill, 30-38; "Sergeant York Winches," *New York Times*, 19 January 1927; "Sergeant York Here in School Fund Drive," New York Times, 4 February 1928, 2; Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 Dec 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA; Cahill, 30-38; Mahoney, 22, 45-46.
[916] "Sergeant York's Exploit," New York Times, 7 October 1929.
[917] Robert Talley, "Eleven Years After War Finds Members in Different Jobs," *Niagara Falls Gazette*, 11 November 1929, 4.

hero of the battle, by saying, "Credit was given where credit was due."[918] Cutting's last avenue was Colonel Buxton. Buxton was not at all involved in the action, and instead was far from the battle and working on the division staff in October 1918. Buxton, ever judicious, offered to review any facts that he could present.[919]

The Army Exposition not only put Cutting in contact with his squad mates, but with the press as well, who were attracted by the controversy, regardless of the merits of it. As for Cutting's demands to being awarded a Silver Star, Buxton refused to support him, but told him that he was authorized the Purple Heart, because the affidavits that Cutting produced were too vague to support his side of the story. The only concession given was by Brigadier-General Lindsay, who mentioned Private Wills, Beardsley and Konotski in his Brigade commendations report in 1919. Lindsay conceded that all the men in the attack should have been listed therein.[920]

Buxton was quick to point out that the facts were with York, saying: "All investigation by those in authority and the affidavits of the surviving enlisted men clearly indicate that York bore the chief burden of initiative and achievement in the fire fight and during the later stages of the engagement." Buxton was quick to reject the press generated hyperbole about York's feat being "single-handed" or that he was "A one man army."[921] Neither York, nor the United States Army ever made such a claim; it was the media that created that notion. Although willing to provide Cutting with advice, and a listening ear, Buxton could not throw his support behind a claim that lacked material

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[918] "Upholds Sergeant York," New York Times, 13 August 1935.
[919] Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 December 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA; Cahill, 30-38; Mahoney, 22, 45-46.
[920] "Sergeant York Story is Denied," *Providence Journal*, September 1930.
[921] "Sergeant York Story is Denied," *Providence Journal*, September 1930.

evidence. Despite this, Merrithew would persist in his undertaking to receive a medal to the end of his days.[922]

[922] Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 December 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA; Cahill, 30-38; Mahoney, 22, 45-46.

Chapter 15 - Supporting the War Effort

> We are standing at the crossroads of history. The important capitals of the world in a few years will either be Berlin and Moscow, or Washington or London. I, for one, prefer Congress and Parliament to Hitler's Reichstag and Stalin's Kremlin.
> Alvin C. York May 1941

Alvin's odyssey in the Great War changed his life and his understanding of the world. As most veterans, he desired that the nation not be involved in another war. However, as the international situation darkened in the 1930s, York was not easily led down the non-interventionist path. During this turbulent interval, York would find himself a key public figure standing against the popular view of nonintervention. His most influential move would be to agree to the making of the movie that would depict his life, and serve as a device for Hollywood moguls to advance the idea of intervening in Europe. This movie, combined with the attack on Pearl Harbor, would help solidify the nation's role in the Second World War, in addition to shaping America's remembrance of York for future generations.

Between the Great Depression and the rise of belligerent powers in Germany, Japan and Russian, the 1930s proved turbulent for the world. The failure of Wilson's push for American membership in the League of Nations marked a return to American nonintervention. Watching the rise of Hitler in Berlin in the early 1930s caused many in the United States to wonder what had been the value of American intervention in the Great War. From an American point of view, the world should be left to sort out its own problems; the nation was behind the safe barrier of two oceans. As Hitler reconsolidated his grip over the Rhineland, Germany rearmed in contravention to the Versailles Treaty,

Spanish fascists seized Madrid, and as Imperial Japan invaded and mercilessly occupied Manchuria, American church groups, peace societies and veteran organizations rallied the masses "to a common resistance to the next war."[923]

The political discourse of the 1930s was driven by a new brand of conspiratorial isolationists or, more properly called anti-interventionist, led by North Dakota Senator, Gerald P. Nye.[924] Although tracing their roots to George Washington's 1796 farewell address, anti-interventionalists had been more active in American politics since the 1898 Spanish-American War in which the nation had acquired former Spanish possessions that stretched from the Caribbean Sea to the Philippines. The strength in the anti-interventionist movement was not just its general appeal, but also since its followers spanned the American political spectrum from the far left and far right.[925]

The outcome of the First World War and the growth of the American arms industry seemingly empowered the anti-interventionist populist base, finding strong political advocates Senators Burton Wheeler (Montana) and Gerald Nye. In 1936, Senator Nye published a report suggesting that the powerful American arms industry, in collusion with American bankers, had manipulated international affairs to deceive the

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[923] "Peace to be Theme on Armistice Day," *New York Times*, 9 November 1936.
[924] The term "isolationists" is, according to Bill Kauffman, a pejorative term at the time. Kauffman states that it is an acceptable term for modern historians to use when defining anti-interventionalists as those who are (1) anti-imperialistic,(2) opposed to war for principle, such as keeping the world safe for democracy (Wilson's mantra in the First World War), and (3) opposed to international treaties and/or organizations that diminish American sovereignty such as the League of Nations. This describes the policies of Senators Nye and Wheeler, as well as the platform of the America First Committee (AFC). See, Bill Kauffman, *American First!* (New York, Prometheus Books; 1995), 16-17; Justus D. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon,* (New York, Rowan and Littlefield Publishers; 2000), x.
[925] Doenecke, Storm on the Horizon, 2-9.

nation into entering the Great War.[926] Nye went on to say that the modern arms industry would draw the United States into another war.[927] Because of this belief, Senator Nye was a leading voice in Congress in pushing through a series of Neutrality Acts to prevent the United States from entering the next war.[928] As the last chances to reign in Hitler or to contain Imperial Japan faded, Senator Nye and Senator Wheeler of Montana ensured that the United States would do nothing as the world slipped into chaos.[929] Ironically, many of leading anti-interventionist went to great lengths to blame Hitler's invasions of Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, France, Yugoslavia and Greece on both British and American policies and not on Hitler's expansionist worldview. This view was alluded to by Wendell Wilkie, the Republican nominee during the 1940 Presidential election, "It is the duty of the President of the United States to recognize the determination of the people to stay out of war and to do nothing by word or deed to undermine that determination."[930]

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[926] Bill Kauffman resists the notion that the AFC was at its core anti-Semitic and suggests that this allegation is based upon the oft-quoted Lindbergh 11 September 1941 Des Moines, Iowa speech. To be sure, Senator Ney was careful not to directly attack those of Jewish roots. Reviewing the literature analytically, moreover, both Nye and the AFC leadership did repeatedly condemn areas of America society believed to be dominated by Jews. This included the usual suspects, such as Hollywood, banks, and agents of international commerce. These attacks did not necessarily make him anti-Semitic. It must be added that Nye was an unabashed Anglophobe. Senator Gerald Nye, Report of the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry (also called "The Nye Report"), U.S. Congress, Senate, 74th Congress, 2nd sess., February 24, 1936, (Washington, D.C., GPO; 1936), 1-13; Bill Kauffman, *American First!* (New York, Prometheus Books; 1995), 16-25, 82-92.

[927] Senator Gerald Nye, Report of the Special Committee on Investigation of the Munitions Industry (also called "The Nye Report"), U.S. Congress, Senate, 74th Congress, 2nd sess., February 24, 1936, (Washington, D.C., GPO; 1936), 1-13.

[928] "Neutrality Acts, United States State Department; Office of the Historian. Available online at the following website; http://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/Neutrality_acts (accessed 21 November 2011).

[929] Lawrence H. Larsen, "Gerald Nye and the Isolationist Argument." *North Dakota History* 47 (Winter 1980): 25-28.

[930] Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon,* 10-15, 21-22, 83-84, 159-160. Wilkie was, unlike his Republican rivals, an interventionist and would be among the first to defend Hollywood's interventionist movie productions.

Taking advantage of their popularity, Nye and other proponents of the anti-interventionist brand drew together like-minded citizens under the organization of the America First Committee (AFC) in September 1940, quickly drawing 850,000 members into its ranks. Polls taken in 1941 suggest that some 80% of the nation agreed with the AFC's position of not becoming militarily involved in another European war.[931] Unfortunately, those stepping outside of the isolationist view were typically condemned as warmongers.[932] This short-coming notwithstanding, those embracing the AFC worldview reached around the nation, with even the popular American aviator Charles Lindbergh becoming one of its spokesmen.[933] Having visited Germany in 1936, Lindbergh fell under the spell of Nazi good will. Blaming a tripartite conspiracy of British interests, Jewish influence and the Roosevelt Administration as warmongers, Lindbergh spoke around the country in support of Senator Nye's passion to keep the nation out of any war at all costs."[934]

This popular inclination to avoid foreign wars should be no surprise as Americans historically perceived themselves as isolationists. This perception of the nation as historically isolationist in its nature was not necessarily connected with reality. The United States conducted its first war after independence in 1801 against the North African Barbary Pirates, to protect its commerce. This was followed by near continuous frontier wars against the native population, and a War with Britain, Mexico and Spain,

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[931] Bill Kauffman, *American First!* (New York, Prometheus Books; 1995), 21-22.
[932] Wayne S. Cole, *Senator Gerald P. Nye and American Foreign Relations*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press), 1962, 65-69
[933] Doenecke, Storm on the Horizon, 2-5.
[934] The Charles Lindbergh website provides both audio and pdf files of speeches given by this influential America figure that are indicative of his isolationist proclivities. Available online at the following website http://www.charleslindbergh.com/americanfirst/index.asp (accessed 21 November 2011).

with that latter war giving the United States a string of possessions around the world. Certainly, in addition to this historical view, the Great Depression made Americans more inward looking than they naturally tended to be. Furthermore, many veterans viewed their 1917-1918 involvement in France as of little enduring value, since the Germans were once again spilling blood across Europe.[935] This caused many to reject York's calls for preparedness, saying, "You fought to make the world safe for democracy. What did it get you?"[936]

Despite the overwhelming popularity of the anti-interventionist point of view, York boldly spoke against the prevailing political winds and advocated intervention in both Europe *and* the Pacific to stop the imperial advances of both Japan and Germany. In remarks given on Armistice Day, 1937, he stated that he was "ready to fight again in the interest of... peace." Prophetically commenting on Japan's recent aggression in Asia, York added, "Japan is fighting an undeclared war in China and after it conquers that country it is going to come over here... I'd just as soon we got into it now as later."[937] Here at long last was a prominent and respected spokesman for the interventionists. York's calls for intervention could not be ignored by his detractors especially when the world learned that the Japanese Imperial Army stormed into Nanking, the capital of Chiang Kai-Sheik's Nationalist China. This victorious Japanese celebrated by unleashing

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[935] Steven Trout, *On The Battlefield of Memory,* (Tuscaloosa, TN, University of Alabama; 2010), 66-69.
[936] George Bookman, "Sergt. York Urges Convoys For All-Out Aid," *The Washington Post*, 31 May 1941, 4; Speech Given by Sergeant Alvin C. York at Arlington on May 30 1941, "Must Fight to Keep Liberty, Says York," *New York Times*, 31 May 1941; "Text of the President's Armistice Day Speech," *New York Times*, 12 November 1941.
[937] "Sergeant York Ready to Join War on Japan," *New York Times*, 12 November 1937.

a six-week long demonic orgy of murder, rape and atrocities that claimed 300,000 Chinese lives.[938]

York wasted no time giving his view of Nazi German as well. On the twentieth anniversary of his Argonne Forest 8 October battle, a reporter caught up with York in Pall Mall and asked him about the deal that Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had made with Hitler, at the cost of Czechoslovakia. Displaying uncanny understanding, he answered, "I believe if we want to stop Hitler we must knock him off the block. He has been given what he wanted this time, but he'll ask for more."[939] When asked if he would be willing to go again and fight for his country, Alvin answered that he would be and that all men should be willing to defend their nation. York's sons came forward to say they were ready to fight Germany, starting with Alvin York Junior.[940] Just four weeks later the Nazis unleashed their persecution of the Jews across Germany in what is now called Kristallnacht.

As the anti-interventionalists turned up their rhetoric, so did Alvin York. He was selected by President Roosevelt as the guest speaker at Arlington National Cemetery. Speaking at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in May 1941, York went to great lengths to delineate the error of the non-interventionists, saying, "We must fight again! The time is not now ripe, nor will it ever be, to compromise with Hitler, or the things he stands for." Alvin went on to directly assault the credibility of Senator Wheeler and Charles Lindbergh and pointed out that they never had served their country in time of war,

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[938] Iris Chang, The Rape of Nanking: the Forgotten Holocaust of World War II, (New York, Basic Books; 1997), ix-x, 4-7.
[939] "Sergt. York Offers Plan to Stop Hitler; Must Knock Him Off Block Says Hero of 20 Years Ago." *New York Times*, 9 October 1938.
[940] "Sergeant York's Son 'Ready,'" *New York Times*, 14 September 1939.

saying, "both... were denied that privilege, which... explains why they feel differently than the veterans do about this country's most pressing problems." Finally, he urged the nation's leaders to act now to help Great Britain, to include fighting by its side "to renew the lease on liberty."[941] The words were stirring, if not prophetic. The President of the United States was so moved, that in later speeches he quoted York's works, especially the following portion,

> There are those in our country who ask me... 'You fought to make the world safe for democracy. What did it get you?' Let me answer them now. It got me twenty-three years of living in an America where humble citizens from the mountains of Tennessee can participate in the same ceremonies with the President of the United States. It got me twenty-three years of living in a country where... Liberty is stamped on men's hearts... By our victory in the last war, we won a lease on liberty, not a deed to it. Now after 23 years, Adolf Hitler tells us that lease is expiring, and after the manner of all leases, we have the privilege of renewing it, or letting it go by default... We are standing at the crossroads of history. The important capitals of the world in a few years will either be Berlin and Moscow, or Washington or London. I, for one, prefer Congress and Parliament to Hitler's Reichstag and Stalin's Kremlin. And because we were for a time, side by side, I know this Unknown Soldier does too. We owe it to him to renew that lease of liberty he helped us to get. [942]

By the time he spoke at Arlington in May 1941, York was already a committed advocate of American intervention. In fact, the changing international situation finally prompted him to let a feature film be made of his Great War exploits. Jesse Lasky, the Hollywood mogul who first approached Alvin in his hotel room in May 1919 never lost interest in the Alvin York story. It was he who peered out of his Fifth Avenue office building that afternoon to see the out-pouring of excitement in welcoming Sergeant York

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[941] George Bookman, "Sergt. York Urges Convoys For All-Out Aid," *Washington Post*, 31 May 1941, 4.
[942] George Bookman, "Sergt. York Urges Convoys For All-Out Aid," *The Washington Post*, 31 May 1941, 4; Speech Given by Sergeant Alvin C. York at Arlington on May 30 1941, "Must Fight to Keep Liberty, Says York," *New York Times*, 31 May 1941; "Text of the President's Armistice Day Speech," *New York Times*, 12 November 1941.

back to the United States, only to have his movie idea rebuffed with "Uncle Sam's uniform ain't for sale."[943] When Lasky wrote a letter to Alvin York in late 1939 "He didn't even bother to answer." After that, Lasky sent a telegram suggesting that they meet in Jamestown, which they did.[944] Alvin brought Gracie, whom he did not even introduce to Lasky and the three sat in his hotel room to converse.

By the time Lasky and York met, Europe was in turmoil again. The Germans had invaded Poland, occupied Austria, seized all of Czechoslovakia, and France and Great Britain had declared war on Hitler. For Lasky, the time was now for a movie on York's life. The discussion, or rather the lack thereof, between Lasky and York was quite fruitless. Lasky did not make headway in convincing York to sign a movie deal. Further frustrating him was that Alvin hardly said a word. Of this meeting, Lasky wrote, "[I kept] dribbling the conversational ball myself the whole time, with that huge hulk blocking the goal." Once Lasky ran out of "verbal ammunition" he asked York to meet with him again, to which Alvin answered, "I won't refuse that, but I don't want you to be hopeful."[945] On that note, Lasky returned to Hollywood trying to think of a way to get Alvin to relent on his stubborn refusal to a movie deal. The idea of having a movie made of his life was something that he had refused since 1919 and it seemed to become a symbol to York of his refusal to profit personally from his war experiences. Lasky needed a more convincing approach if he was to maneuver York out of that position.

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[943] Bill Rice, "The Private Life of A Motion Picture," Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, California; 1941, WBA, 1-2.
[944] Lasky, I Blow My Own Horn, 252-253.
[945] Lasky, I Blow My Own Horn, 253-254.

Finally, on his fourth visit to Tennessee, Lasky asked York to meet him in Nashville, and to bring a lawyer. Lasky was certain that he found a way to help York get over his resistance to a movie deal. Meeting in the Andrew Jackson hotel, Lasky began by asking him about agreeing a movie, to which Alvin seemed even more resistant to than before.[946] The conversation between them changed when Lasky launched into his prepared discourse,

> Sergeant, you risked your life for your country in the World War and you'd do it again if your country needed you, wouldn't you? That need exists right now and I know that you're going to give your life to your country-through the powerful medium of the screen. This country is in danger again and the people don't realize it yet. It's your patriotic duty to let your life serve as an example and the greatest lesson to American youth that could be told.

This was an honest and timely appeal in that the United States was in the midst of debate of starting the Selective Service that would lead to the draft.[947] The country was warming to the urgent calls of York and others to intervene. How could Alvin refuse now? Lasky was hopeful when York answered, "Maybe we do have something to talk about."[948] Lasky went on to explain to York that his struggle of reconciling Christianity with fighting for freedom would help American young men reconcile their own struggles, as the nation was on the brink of another war.[949] Nevertheless, the lawyers spent the next few days wrangling over details of whether Tennessee law or California law should

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[946] Robert S. Taplinger, Director of Publicity, "Sergeant York: Production Notes," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA, 1-2.
[947] Bill Rice, "Sergeant York Movie Information," Warner Brothers Studio, 1942, WBA, 1-3; Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn,* 254.
[948] Lasky, I Blow My Own Horn, 254.
[949] Bill Rice, "Sergeant York Movie Information," Warner Brothers Studio, 1942, WBA, 1-3.

dictate the contract terms.[950] The important part for York, beyond embracing "his patriotic duty" was that he would use the proceeds of the film to complete the Bible School he was building in Pall Mall. During this struggle between the lawyers, Lasky noticed that Alvin would often leave the room for periods of time. Wondering what Alvin was doing, Lasky followed him, to see that York was in his room, on his knees praying to God for guidance.[951]

Although Alvin was willing to sign a movie deal, his lawyer could not come to terms with Lasky. York's lawyer insisted that the deal be based upon Tennessee law, while Lasky insisted that it must be Californian law (where the film would be made). York's lawyer was unmoved. On 21 March 1940, Lasky was ready to give up until he thought of a trick that would include Tennessee Governor Prentice Cooper. With this in mind, he slipped away, contacted the governor and asked him to witness the signing of the movie contract, to which Governor Cooper eagerly agreed. To get York to the governor's office, Lasky tipped a bellboy to come into where he, York and their lawyers were debating and announce that there was a call for Lasky from the Tennessee Governor. Lasky pretended to get the call in the lobby and returned after a few minutes to say that Governor Cooper wanted the entire party at his office immediately to witness the signing of the movie deal. York's lawyer was flabbergasted and demanded that they

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[950] "Sergeant York Balks at Lasky Film Offer; Like Trading for a Mule, Says War Hero," *New York Times,* 16 March 1940.
[951] Lasky, I Blow My Own Horn, 254-255.

would not sign a real contract and would tear up the contract if no agreement was reached.[952]

Upon arrival, Governor Cooper was told that they were not quite ready to sign the real contract just yet, but were posing for the cameras. The governor played along. He pulled a bill that he could not get through the legislature out of his desk, and had York and Lasky sign that official looking document. On cue, the photographers snapped photos of the signing. The group returned to the hotel to resume arguments over the contract. That afternoon, when breaking for a meal, York and his lawyer saw newsboys on the streets selling newspapers that proclaimed that he had signed a movie deal. When Alvin saw this, he said, "I guess we'll *have* to sign it now!"[953] The ruse worked!

The actual contract was signed on 23 May 1940, by Lasky and York in Nashville.[954] Having secured a movie deal with York, Lasky now needed a studio willing to do the project. First he contacted RKO, which turned the idea down flatly. This was followed by a rejection from Paramount, the studio that Lasky founded. Their reason for the refusal was "that war pictures were dead, that nobody had made a war picture for ages because the public didn't want them."[955]

Finally, Lasky approached Harry Warner of Warner Brothers Studio. Lasky met with Harry at the Warner Brothers Farm, where his friend Charles Einfeld spun the story with patriotic flare (based upon advice from a former employee working at Warner

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[952] Robert S. Taplinger, Director of Publicity, "Sergeant York: Production Notes," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, 1941, WBA, 1-3.Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn,* 255-256.
[953] "Sergeant York in Film; To Be Lasky Technical Advisor in Picture Based on His Life," *New York Times*, 24 March 1940; Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn,* 255-256.
[954] Contract between Alvin York and Jesse Lasky signing movie rights to the latter, 23 March 1940, WBA.
[955] Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn*, 257.

Brothers). As he talked through the York story line, Harry picked up his phone, called his brother and said, "Jack, I want you to make a deal with Jesse for a story he wants to do. I believe in it so do it for my sake."[956] After more than twenty years of persistence, Lasky was about to make his most successful motion picture ever.[957] The working title was "The Amazing Story of Sergeant York."[958] A team of researchers were dispatched to Pall Mall, while all the facts and information available on Alvin York was compiled.[959] The Warner Brothers researchers were granted access to York's military records, the Congressional Record and interviewed anyone who had information about him.

York insisted that the movie not be a war picture, and that it should be a broad presentation of his life, focusing on God's role in his life and the community service Alvin had provided to his region.[960] With that in mind, Lasky assigned writers to the script, which included Abem Finkel, Harry Chandlee, John Huston and Howard Koch. Howard Hawks would serve as the film's director.[961] To support their work, some eleven months of research went into the film, which included spending several weeks in Pall Mall where the researchers observed local culture and even a turkey shoot. Lasky had Gary Cooper pegged as the perfect "Alvin York," and with that in mind, sent a telegram to Cooper on behalf of Alvin, saying "I have just let the motion picture producer, Lasky

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[956] Einfeld was Lasky's studio manager at Paramount and was at Warner Brothers as head of publicity. former Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn,* 255-256.
[957] Lasky, Jr., *Whatever Happened to Hollywood?* (New York, Funk & Wagnalls; 1975), 223-225.
[958] "Screen News Here and in Hollywood; Jesse L. Lasky to Make 'The Amazing Story of Sergeant York for Warner,'" *New York Times*, 5 April 1940.
[959] Request from Tennessee Governor Prentice Cooper to the War Department to cooperate with Warner Brothers on the movie, 10 April 1940, Alvin C. York Military Service Record, US War Department. Preceded by a request from Warner Brothers Studios for access to York's Military Service Record, 10 January 1941.
[960] "Sergeant York Balks at Lasky Film Offer; Like Trading for a Mule, Says War Hero," *New York Times,* 16 March 1940.
[961] Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn*, 252-261.

to film the story of my life I would be honored to see you on the screen as myself, Sergeant Alvin C. York."[962]

The problem was that Gary Cooper belonged to Sam Goldwyn, another movie mogul, former business partner and ex-brother in law of Jesse Lasky. In the golden age of American cinema, accomplished and popular actors like Gary Cooper were contract employees of individual studios. Warner was livid that Lasky would make such a bold move. Yet, Lasky would not be deterred, saying, that Cooper was the only actor who would do for Sergeant York. As the wrangling for Cooper went on, Warner Brothers considered Ronald Reagan for the role if Goldwyn would not concede. Since Reagan was known for "playing the companion of the leading stars... He hardly ever got the girl." Because of this, most believed that he would not be a good fit for Sergeant York.[963]

After several weeks of discussion, Goldwyn agreed to loan Cooper in exchange for Warner Brothers biggest star, Bette Davis. The deal loaned Cooper for twelve weeks to Warner Brothers in exchange for Bette Davis playing the lead in the hit movie *Little*

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[962] In his book, *I Blow My Own Horn,* 255-25, Lasky claims sole credit for this decision on Cooper. However, Bill Rice's twenty page discourse on the movie, says that Lasky and Alvin York first discussed Cooper as the right choice. However, Jesse Lasky's son, Jesse Junior, also then in show business, wrote that his dad indeed resorted to "subterfuge" to secure Cooper in the role of York. This subterfuge, he says, included the forged telegram. See Bill Rice, "The Private Life of A Motion Picture," Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, California; 1941, WBA, 4; Jesse Lasky, Junior, *Whatever Happened to Hollywood,* (New York, Funk & Wagnalls; 1973), 224-225.

[963] Much of this is based upon what Lasky, Jr. records in his book. When Jack Warner heard that Ronald Reagan was running for the Governor of California for the 1966 election, he answered, "Governor, no. Bad casting. The *friend* of the governor." Lasky, Junior, *Whatever Happened to Hollywood,* (New York, Funk & Wagnalls; 1973), 224-225, 336-337. Jesse Lasky Junior was an accomplished screen writer and served as an assistant director for the Sergeant York movie. See Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.

Foxes.[964] Once the deal was set, Lasky brought York to Coopers house in Los Angeles (Lasky and he were neighbors), to get them acquainted. Lasky wrote that it was like being at a funeral wake, with neither saying much, until they got onto the topic of guns, and then all bets were off. [965]



Figure 24 - Gary Cooper and Alvin York during their first meeting in Los Angeles. (Used with permission from Warner Brothers Acrchives School of Cinematic Arts, USC (WBA)

Putting the script together proved daunting, between the demands of various folks in Pall Mall, and diverse threats of law-suits of people trying to squeeze the studio for money. Additionally, York wanted a wholesome actress to portray Gracie, not "any cigarette smoking actress." The sixteen year old Joan Leslie seemed a good fit for

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[964] Inter-Office Communication between Sam Goldwyn and J. L. Warner, agreement on Cooper & Davis actor exchange, 30 August 1940, WBA; "Gary Cooper Expected to Play in Warner's 'The Amazing Story of Sergeant York,'" New York Times, 23 July 1940.

[965] Howard Koch, *As Time Goes By*, (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc; 1979), 74-75; Lasky, *I Blow My Own Horn*, 259.

this requirement, as she never had smoked and was the same age as Gracie when York proposed to her and was perfect for the role.[966]

Pastor Pile also had concerns that Hollywood would be tempted to take great liberties in the characterization of him and his Christianity. He feared that Hollywood would depict Christianity as a harsh, superstitious religion, which it was not.[967] To provide just the right touch to the portrayal of Pile as a down-to-earth, kindred spirit sort of preacher, Walter Brennan was selected to play the part.[968] Brennan was another great pick, not only because of being a fit for the role, but that he was a veteran of the Great War, having served in the 101st Field Artillery in four campaigns, and wounded in action by gas. Ironically, this veteran would be a conscientious objector in the film. Knowing of Pile's concerns for an accurate portrayal, Brennan "played the part with reverence and with deep respect for the sterling qualities of the mountain preacher."[969]

With that in mind, Pile only signed the movie release form when Warner Brothers agree in writing that they would not misrepresent him, or to portray anything in the movie contrary to his beliefs. Key to this agreement was that, "Pile was not a 'hell and brimstone' shouting' preacher' so typical of the...revivalist. He would strongly object to any change that would make his religion appear dogmatic, or based on any belief in the superstitious."[970] Beyond this, Warner Brothers was dogged by a few minor challenges,

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[966] Bill Rice, "The Private Life of A Motion Picture," Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, California; 1941, WBA, 4-5.
[967] Interview with George Edward Buxton York, in Pall Mall, Tennessee, 29 May 2009, and in Châtel Chéhéry, France, 4 October 2008.
[968] Inter-Office Communication from Abem Finkel to Hal Wallis, 9 January 1941, WBA.
[969] Bill Rice, "The Private Life of A Motion Picture; for Veteran's Publications," Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, California; 1941, WBA, 1-3, 7-8.
[970] Inter-Office Communication from Abem Finkel to Hal Wallis, "The Sad Story of Sergeant York," 9 January 1941, WBA.

such as Gracie's father refusing to be depicted in the movie. The resolution to this was replacing him with a fictitious uncle on the screen.

The biggest challenge was securing consent forms from the people depicted in the film. This was new territory for Hollywood, as most films portrayed fictitious or historical personalities. Apart from securing approval from the diverse folks in Pall Mall, Warner Brothers had a daunting task of contacting soldiers from York's unit. William Guthrie, Warner Brothers Studio Location Manager, was given that task to track down these people and to have them sign releases to be portrayed in the movie.[971] Guthrie traveled some 10,000 miles across the United States to accomplish this mission. In the end, Guthrie secured thirty-four releases, which included all of the men still living that were involved in York's action of 8 October 1918.[972] Knowing this, York requested that "those men receive credit for their share of the engagement" in the movie.[973]

Despite this good will, there was a flaw in Guthrie's approach in having the affidavits signed. The intent was to secure these without payment, and if payment was necessary to pay as little as possible. Most of York's ex-platoon mates signed their release, by October 1940 with each receiving as little as five dollars. However, Merrithew (Cutting) wrangled for and received $250 and then told the others what he received. Merrithew took advantage of this opportunity to stir up the soldiers, saying to Warner Brothers, "...you will hear from all the other survivors looking for the balance of

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[971] Bill Rice, "The Private Life of A Motion Picture," Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, California; 1941, WBA, 4-5.
[972] Inter-Office Communication from Jesse Lasky to the Warner Brothers Research department on "real" personalities to be portrayed in the movie, 20 September 1940, WBA.
[973] Bill Rice, "The Private Life of A Motion Picture," Warner Brothers Studio, Burbank, California; 1941, WBA, 6.

the $250.00 in addition to demanding that his version of the battle be portrayed in the film, and not York's.[974] After receiving several threats from him, the Warner Brothers legal department labeled Merrithew the "principal beefer."[975]

Merrithew began writing to Warner Brothers as soon as he read in a newspaper about the movie being made about Sergeant York. In his letters, Merrithew claimed that none of the soldiers in the unit signed affidavits to support York's feat and that the story was patently false. To explain away the affidavits in the War Department that supported York, Merrithew said that whatever the soldiers signed was a supply slip and not a legal document.[976] Merrithew went on to threaten William Guthrie if they did not go with his story, saying "Warner Brothers will have a court case on their hands."[977]

These threats caused the Warner Brothers Legal and Story Departments some discussion on how to calm Merrithew. They even contemplated using Ronald Reagan to depict him in the movie. Yet, they decided against that when Merrithew could not present convincing evidence in support of his allegations. With that, Warner Brothers ruled out working with Merrithew. Yet, they were concerned for the potential bad press that he could generate. Although having no legal obligation, the studio decided to pay all the men in York's element the same amount that was given to Merrithew.[978] The studio

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[974] Letter to William Guthrie from Otis Merrithew, 13 January 1941, WBA; Letter from Mary Kornacki to William Guthrie, 3 April 1941; Letter from Joseph Kornacki to William Guthrie, 16 Jan 1941.
[975] Inter-Office Communication from R.J. Obringer to Mr. Einfeld, "Sergeant York Billing," 16 April 1941, WBA.
[976] Letter from Otis B. Merrithew (also signed William Cutting), to Jesse Lasky, 12 June 1940, WBA; Letter from Merrithew to Guthrie, 11 March 1941, WBA.
[977] Letter to William Guthrie from Otis Merrithew, 13 January 1941, WBA; Letter from Merrithew to Guthrie, 11 March 1941, WBA.
[978] Memorandum from RJ Obringer to Mr. R.W. Budd, Warner Brothers Director of Personnel, 3 September 1941; Inter-Office Communication from Abem Finkel to Hal Wallis, "The Sad Story of Sergeant York," 9 January 1941, WBA.

also decided to go through the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to facilitate tracking down the men faster, and to shield themselves from criticism.[979]

For Warner Brothers, there was no drama in securing consent forms from the preponderance of the people depicted in the movie. Sergeant Parsons, Lieutenant Colonel Buxton, Brigadier-General Lindsay, Major-General Duncan, Major Tillman, General Pershing, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, and many others signed the release form without financial compensation.[980] With these, the screen writers determined that the battle scene "would follow as closely as possible the facts as stated in the Congressional Record." This was wise from a presentation standpoint as well as from a legal point of view, considering the threats from Merrithew. When all was said and done, the research by Warner Brothers' was exhaustive.[981]

The movie was to be about a man, and not a soldier, who when called upon to defend his nation was able to reconcile his religious beliefs with his patriotic duty. The movie was divided into three parts, York's life before the war, his service in the army and return to the United States.[982] Although trying to stay close to reality, there were liberties taken in the story. The most dramatic was the depiction of York being struck by lightning, thus leading to his conversion.[983] Alvin approved this dramatization of his conversion, saying that when he heard and understood the Gospel presentation on 1

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[979] Letter from Bill Perkins (Warner Brothers General Counsel) to Roy Obringer, on utilizing the Headquarters of the VFW to eradicate any perceived ill-will and to make it less expensive finding the soldiers to be paid, 12 May 1941, WBA.
[980] Interoffice Communication from Jesse Lasky, to Roy Obringer, "Sergeant York Release Forms," 25 October 1940, WBA.
[981] Inter-Office Communication from Abem Finkel to Hal Wallis, "The Sad Story of Sergeant York," 9 January 1941, WBA.
[982] Bill Rice, "Movie Synopsis," Warner Brothers Studio, 1942, WBA.
[983] Howard Koch, *As Time Goes By,* 74-75.

January 1915, it was indeed as if lightening struck his soul.[984] Another addition to the story was a fictitious character, named Pusher Ross. "Pusher" was created by writer Harry Chandlee and portrayed as York's army companion. The point of having this New York Subway-man was to make the transition in 1919 New York City, when York asked to see the subway seem less peculiar.[985]

Another adaptation to the movie was the portrayal of York's feat occurring in the context of the popular remembrance of the Great War. The attack into the Argonne Forest on 8 October 1918 depicts long lines of trenches, severed trees and land scarred by four years of artillery bombardments. Actually, when York marched into the Argonne that October morning, there were very few trenches, and the land was virtually untouched. Instead of charging through bands of barbed wire, and into heavily fortified networks of trenches, they actually faced a thick forest, punctuated by pockets of German defenders.[986]

The final major adaptation was the debate between Major Buxton and Captain Danforth with Alvin York when they discussed his objection to fighting in war. The truth of the matter was that when the three discussed this in 1918, the conversation was focused solely on what the Bible said about this topic. However, one of the writers,

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[984] Although the screen-writers took credit for this, Alvin York used this expression to describe his conversion experience to Hollywood screen writers in 1940. Interview with Colonel Gerald York (US Army) in Monterey, California, October 1996; and Interview with George Edward Buxton York in Montfaucon, France, 4 October 2008 during the 90th anniversary commemoration of his father's actions in the Great War.

[985] Letter from Harry Chandlee to Jesse L. Lasky, "Conception Ideas Added to Sergeant York," 15 October 1942, WBA; Bill Rice, "Movie Synopsis," Warner Brothers Studio, 1942, WBA, 8-11; "Back story information," Letter from Harry Chandlee to Jesse Lasky, 8 May 1940, WBA, 22-23; Inter-Office Communication from Abem Finkel to Hal Willis, 9 January 1941, WBA..

[986] Steven Trout, *On The Battlefield of Memory,* (Tuscaloosa, TN, University of Alabama Press; 2010), 240-248.

Harry Chandlee, added the scene where Buxton gives York a lesson on American History, and loans him a history book to contemplate his decision. This was to make the debate more palatable to the less religious, while appealing to patriotism.[987] By doing this, one can almost see from this, York handing the torch to the next generation to finish the job.

Although there were numerous other adaptations, the only other one worth pointing out is a scene of Gracie stealing a kiss from Alvin before they were married. All of the York children interviewed made it a point to mention several times that their mom was not pleased with that scene as the first time they kissed was on their wedding day. They said that Gracie York expressed concern that people would think that she was morally loose.[988]

The studio went all out on the production of this movie, even hiring Donohue Hall to teach the actors the dialect of the Cumberland Valley.[989] The treatment included some ninety camera days, seventy production days, 123 studio sets, eight outdoor locations and an eighty acre battlefield. The largest set was the mountain depicted in the film where Alvin would pray. This stood forty feet high and included 121 trees.[990]

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[987] Letter from Harry Chandlee to Jesse L. Lasky, "Conception Ideas Added to Sergeant York," 15 October 1942, WBA.
[988] Interview with Colonel Gerald York (US Army) in Monterey, California, October 1996; and Interview with George Edward Buxton York in Montfaucon, France, 4 October 2008 during the 90th anniversary commemoration of his father's actions in the Great War; Betsy Ross York, interview in Jamestown at Suva's Restaurant, 30 May 2010.
[989] Bill Rice, "Movie Synopsis," Warner Brothers Studio, 1942, WBA.
[990] Robert S. Taplinger, "Sergeant York Production Notes," Director of Publicity, Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA; Warner Brother's "Synopsis of Sergeant York," Warner Brothers Studio, 1941, WBA.

When the movie was completed, Jesse Lasky and Warner Brothers Studio pulled out all the stops to triumphantly open the picture. The release date was centered on 4 July 1941, and would include a rare double premier, one in New York City and the



Figure 25 - Scene from "Sergeant York" when Major Buxton hands York an American History book. - a fictional part of the York story to appeal to the United States patriotically. (WBA).

second in Washington DC. The grand-premier in New York City was Wednesday night 2 July.[991] Alvin York and Gracie were welcomed to New York City by scores of Boy Scouts, the American Legion Band, color guards, drum and bugle corps, Veteran of Foreign Legion Posts 516 and 599, in addition to hundreds of well-wishers, with Colonel

[991] "Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, 30 June 1941.

Buxton amongst them. Even the 1940 Republican Presidential Candidate Wendell Wilkie turned up to support what would be Hollywood's single most important interventionalist film.[992] The drive down Broadway was nearly a repeat of the reception he received in May 1919 with scores of well wishers lining the way.[993] The celebration culminated at the Astor Theater, where the film opened.

A few weeks later, the entourage arrived in Washington DC for a similar grand opening at the Earle Theater. York, Gracie and their son Woodrow Wilson York were escorted to Washington, D.C. by



Figure 26 Alvin and Gracie York are welcomed to the White House by President Roosevelt. To the right is Jesse Lasky. (WBA)

Tennessee Governor Prentice Cooper. Upon detraining in Washington, D.C., York was welcomed by a similar group of Boy Scouts, veterans and scores of Congressman. After

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[992] Michael S. Sherry, In the Shadow of War, (New Haven, Conn, Yale University Press; 1995), 53-55. Wilkie favored intervention and would soon find himself defending Hollywood's interventionalist movies in front of Senator Nye's committee.

[993] "Sergeant Of Screen, Sergeant in Person," *New York Times*, 2 July 1941; "Of Local Origin," *New York Times*, 2 July 1941; Bosley Crowther, "The Screen in Review," *New York Times,* 3 July 1941.

giving a few remarks, the group was whisked to the White House for a meeting with President Roosevelt, who was thrilled by the movie (having had an advanced screening). Joining York was Tennessee Senator McKellar, his division commander Major-General Duncan and Jesse Lasky.[994]

The film was a smashing success, no doubt due to its timing. When the movie was released, Nazi Germany had recently invaded Russia and already conquered most of Western Europe. Meanwhile, in the Pacific, tensions were on the rise as America imposed tough embargo sanctions on Japan. The reviews were positive and endorsed the timely patriotic message, and the struggle of a young man going off to war.[995] It was to be the most successful movie that Lasky ever made of the hundreds that he generated over the course of his life.[996] By December 1941, it grossed more than $4 million in theater rentals and by March, would take in more than $10 million.[997] Lasky truly had a keen sense of timing as it was released just five months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, ensuring that it would have an enduring effect upon the American psyche.[998] Cooper would walk away with an Academy Award for Best Actor, and was "rated the leading money-making star, "while Joan Leslie would be thrust into fame and stardom due to her performance as Gracie York.[999] The movie may also be responsible

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[994] "Sergt. York Here for Film Premier," *The Washington Post*, 3 July 1941; Gerald G. Gross, "President Greets Sergt. York," *The Washington Post*, 31 July 1941, 1; "Sergeant Alvin C. York Coming to His Premier," *The Washington Post*, 27 July 1941, L3.
[995] Nelson B. Bell, "Twenty Years of Effort Results in Might Film," *Washington Post*, 27 July 1941, L3.
[996] Norman Zierold, *The Moguls,* (New York, Coward-McCann, Inc; 1969), 166.
[997] "Film Money-Makers Selected by Variety," *New York Times*, 31 December 1941.
[998] Lasky, I Blow my Own Horn, 252-262, Lasky, Whatever Happened to Hollywood?, 224-225.
[999] "Academy Award to Joan Fontaine: Gary Cooper Takes Honor for Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 27 February 1942; Frank S. Nugent, "The All-American Man," *New York Times*, 5 July 1942; "War Films Shoot the Girls to Stardom," *New York Times*, 15 January 1950; "Gary Cooper, Dead of Cancer," *New York Times*, 14 May 1961.

for why the 82nd "All-American Division" was among the first divisions brought back to active service, with Major-General Omar Bradley serving as its commander at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. This was part of the army's initial expansion to 3.6 million men under arms.[1000]

In the midst of the jubilation, Senators Nye and Wheeler and their "non-interventionist" colleagues in Congress held hearings to indict the producers for making anti-German "war propaganda" films, which he described as "the most vicious propaganda that has ever been unloosed upon a civilized people."[1001] In some ways, Senator Ney attempted to use his platform to intimidate Hollywood from producing films he viewed as provocative.[1002] In a speech before the America First Committee, Ney said Hollywood had, "been operating as war propaganda machines almost as if they were directed from a... central bureau." He went on to list the offending pictures, *Sergeant York, Man Hunt; I Married a Nazi,* and the *Great Dictator.*[1003] In trying to rally the masses, Nye's boosters in the America First Committee attempted a failed boycott of theaters showing these movies in New Jersey.[1004]

Hollywood had long been a target of Senator Ney. In an earlier speech, Nye proclaimed at an America First meeting in St. Louis, that Hollywood was "the most

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[1000] "Army Rebuilds 3 Divisions of 1918 Fame," *The Washington Post*, 26 March 1942, 8.
[1001] U.S. Congress. Propaganda in Motion Pictures: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, US Senate, (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office 1942), 6-7.
[1002] Bill Kauffman, *American First!* (New York, Prometheus Books; 1995), 16-25, 85-88.
[1003] "Nye Says Films Spread War Wave," *New York Times*, 2 August 1941. Nye would ask Harry Warner why there were no anti-British movies, and instead just anti-Germany ones. Interestingly, the 1939 movie *Drums Along the Mohawk*, despite fulfilling this desire, was not mentioned by Ney or Warner as being a balance to *Sergeant York.*
[1004] "War Films Face Boycott Threat," *New York Times*, 20 September 1941; John Trumpbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, (New York, Cambridge University Press; 2002), 77-81; Larry Ceplair, *The Inquisition in Hollywood,* (New York, Doubleday Press; 1980), 160..

gigantic engines of propaganda... to rouse the war fever in America... Are you ready to send your boys to bleed and die in Europe for [movie executives]?"[1005] Later in his speech, Nye made what would prove to be the fatal error of describing the ethnic background of Hollywood's producers as both foreign born and Jewish.

The 1940 Republican Presidential Candidate, Wendell Wilkie, rose to Hollywood's defense, "The motion picture industry and its executives are opposed to the Hitler regime in Germany; they have watched with horror the destruction of a free life within Germany and the ruthless invasions of other countries by Nazis...We abhor everything which Hitler represents."[1006] Wilkie went on to label Nye's hearings as being "a barefaced attempt at censorship and racial persecution." Nye's retort to Wilkie was just as pointed, "I detest race prejudice and I shall be found in the very front lines of those who give battle to it."[1007] There is no evidence that Nye was anti-Semitic. Wilkie, however, had so pithily framed the argument, that Nye would spend the remainder of his political career fending off charges of anti-Semitism.[1008]

Notwithstanding, Harry Warner was among the producers and studio owners summoned to testify before a Senate Committee investigation (a sub-committee of Senator Wheeler's Interstate Commerce Commission), Warner denied that *Sergeant York* was designed to incite war, or that he had attended any secret, conspiratorial conferences

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[1005] Wayne S. Cole, Senator P. Nye and American Foreign Relations, (Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press; 1962), 186-188; Michelle Flynn Stenehjem, *An American First: John T. Flynn and the America First Committee,* (New York, Arlington House Publishers; 1976), 148-149.
[1006] U.S. Congress. Propaganda in Motion Pictures: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, US Senate, (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office 1942), 18-19.
[1007] U.S. Congress. Propaganda in Motion Pictures: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, US Senate, (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office 1942), 11.
[1008] Michelle Flynn Stenehjem, *An American First: John T. Flynn and the America First Committee,* (New York, Arlington House Publishers; 1976), 148-149; Wayne S. Cole, Senator P. Nye and American Foreign Relations, (Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press; 1962), 188-190.

to orchestrate propaganda. He demonstrated that the movie was an accurate portrayal of an American hero and first screen biography of living person.[1009] Additionally, Warner laid out a convincing rebuke to Nye's allegation of a broad Hollywood conspiracy saying rather that there was fierce rivalry between the studios.[1010] His most powerful remark, however, against these hearings was, "You can correctly charge me with being anti-Nazi. But no one can charge me with being anti-American."[1011] Despite this robust defense, the hearings dragged on, with the Senate investing scores of hours trying to contain, or at least curb, Hollywood's anti-Nazi position.[1012]

Despite their efforts otherwise, the America First Committee, Nye and Wheeler would be over taken by events in December 1941 with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which was followed by Hitler's declaration of war against the United States on 8 December. With that, the debate over intervention became passé with history remembering Nye and the like-minded in a negative light. In the end, the timing of York's movie could not have been better in that it helped to prepare America morally and mentally for the need of going to war. Again, twenty-three years after his 1918 battle, Sergeant York again had done his country a great service.[1013]

[1009] U.S. Congress. Propaganda in Motion Pictures: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, US Senate, (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office 1942), 318-320.
[1010] U.S. Congress. Propaganda in Motion Pictures: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, US Senate, (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office 1942), 338-339.
[1011] John Trumpbour, Selling Hollywood to the World, (New York, Cambridge University Press; 2002), 79. At the same hearing, Darryl Zanuck, another Hollywood mogul, gave a fiery statement that disproved Ney's conspiratorial contention in addition to informing the committee that he was a Methodist; illustrating that not all the producers were Jewish as had been alleged..
[1012] Michael S. Sherry, In the Shadow of War, (New Haven, Conn, Yale University Press; 1995), 53-55; Neil Gabler, An Empire of Their Own, (New York, Crown Publishers; 1988), 344-347..
[1013] U.S. Congress. Propaganda in Motion Pictures: Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate Commerce, US Senate, (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office 1942), 338-340.

During the Second World War, Alvin volunteered to serve as a soldier, but due to health issues, this was declined. He was, however, put in charge of the local draft board. York also placed himself at the disposal of the War Department, which used him to speak to troops around the country. He gave rousing speeches and admonished the men not to fall under the spell of alcohol. Alvin's most personal and recurrent topic of course was the importance of faith. He encouraged service men to read the Bible as he did in the Great War to find hope and God's purpose for their lives. Alvin reminded them that it was this same faith that carried him through difficult and turbulent times, and that his God would do the same for them if they only trusted in Him. Perhaps the most moving visit he made was speaking to his 82nd All-American Division, before they headed overseas.[1014]

Alvin also supported diverse war fund-raising initiatives. Early in 1942, he encouraged the nation to donate to the Red Cross.[1015] He also used his fame to raise money for War Bonds and loaned his name to the Citizens Committee to Display the Flag. This patriotic organization encouraged Americans to display the flag at all times as a symbol of their support for the men serving in harm's way.[1016] At the same time, Alvin continued to expand his Bible School, pouring the money from the movie into it, and for a time he even toyed with the idea of running for Congress to fill Tennessee's Fourth District seat vacated by Albert Gore.[1017]

[1014] S.J. Woolf, "Sergeant York - Then and Now," *New York Times Magazine*, 15 August 1948.
[1015] "SGT. York Urges Aid for Red Cross," *New York Times*, 19 February 1942, 11.
[1016] "McArthur Aids Flag Body," *New York Times*, 7 April 1942.
[1017] "Sergeant York May Seek Seat of Rep. Gore," *The Washington Post*, 13 May 1942, 12.

York's mother died at 77 years of age at his home in Pall Mall on 22 May 1943. Meanwhile, his sons Woodrow Wilson (Woody) and George E. Buxton, (Edward) were heading off to the army.[1018] After the war ended, life in Pall Mall returned to normal, with Alvin now keeping a watchful eye on the Russians. Nevertheless, his remaining years would be dogged by financial and health troubles.

York suffered two strokes and colitis in 1949, with his doctor saying that "he was a pretty sick man."[1019] The next year, Alvin suffered from pneumonia, and was admitted to the hospital for high blood pressure and heart disease.[1020] In 1954, Alvin suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and a stroke that was to make him bed-ridden for the last ten-years of his life.[1021] The American Legion donated a special electrical bed on 8 October 1960 to ease York's life a bit.[1022] In 1962, he underwent prostate surgery and had an intestinal hemorrhage. His health continued to decline in 1963.[1023]

Throughout this period, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) had been hounding York to pay taxes they had calculated that he owed from the proceeds of the movie. In their zealous assault, the IRS had managed to drive Jesse Lasky nearly to the poor house because of the success of the movie *Sergeant York*, and it seemed they would do the same to America's most celebrated Great War hero.[1024] The IRS belligerently refused to consider any compromise for York, despite the fact that he built two schools for his

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[1018] "Sergeant York's Mother Dies at Home of Hero," *The Washington Post*, 23 May 1943, 14.
[1019] "Sergeant York in Serious Condition After Stroke," *The Washington Post*, 8 May 1949, M2; "Sergeant York Stricken," *New York Times*, 8 May 1949.
[1020] "Sergt. York Must Spend Week in Hospital," *The Washington Post*, 5 July 1950, 5.
[1021] "Sergeant York Feeling Better," *New York Times*, 10 March 1954.
[1022] "Sergeant York Gets Tribute," *New York Times*, 9 October 1960.
[1023] "Sgt. York, 74, Acutely Ill," *New York Times*, 28 May 1962.
[1024] Lasky, Whatever Happened to Hollywood, 378-379.

region, was known for his generosity, and had poured his soul into supporting the nation in World War Two. The pressure and stress that the IRS pushed on him exacerbated his rapidly declining health. By 1959, the IRS declared that he still owned them $85,442. At 72 years of age and bedridden, there was nothing York could do to address the IRS's claims.[1025]

Speaker of the House, Congressman Sam Rayburn of Texas created the Sgt. York Fund in Washington D.C. in 1961 to alleviate York's financial troubles.[1026] Heavily supported by Tennessee Congressional members, and the American public at large, the fund raised more than $50,000. Under heavy political pressure, the IRS finally relented and agreed to settle the matter for $25,000. The remaining $25,000 from the York Fund was put into a trust to be "given to him as he needs it."[1027]

On the 2 September, 1964, Alvin York passed away at 76 years of age. President Johnson issued a statement of sympathy for the family and sent General Matthew Ridgeway to the funeral as his representative. More than 8,000 people attended the ceremony that included the current Tennessee Governor, Frank Clement, the former, Governor, Prentice Cooper who had played such an important role in Alvin's life. The 82nd All-American Division sent an honor guard, and its band to pay tribute to their most famous soldier. Presiding over the ceremony was the former pastor of the "York Chapel," which Alvin helped to build in Pall Mall, Reverend R.D. Brown. He honored York's life by preaching a message of salvation to all in attendance. Alvin C. York was

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[1025] "Go Easy on Sgt. York, Tennessee Asks," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 18 Feb 1959, A1.
[1026] "$21,200 Given to York Fund," *New York Times,* Apr 3, 1961.
[1027] "Rayburn Starts Drive To Aid Alvin C. York," *New York Times,* March 19, 1961, 82; "10,000 Give to End Hero's Tax Debt," New York Times, 9 April 1961.

laid to rest where this odyssey began some fifty years before, at the same church where he went forward to accept the Lord on 01 January 1915. Who would have known that day in 1915 would be the single most important day of his life. What would have happened had he left that church without going forward? Alvin said that day turned out to be the "peg upon which the rest of his life swung." When he went forward that cold January morning in 1915, everything changed , although York did not know how significant this one decision would be for him.[1028]

William Cutting outlived York and kept his view of being the true hero of the Argonne. By 1967, Cutting secured supporters in the New England press, and local politicians, who persuaded President Johnson to authorize him being awarded a Silver Star for his role in the 8 October 1918 battle. President Johnson gambled that by awarding Merrithew the decoration it would boost popular support for his Vietnam intervention. At long last, Cutting had achieved the recognition that he had fought all his life to secure.[1029] To get to this point, however, aspersions had been cast upon the Army as well as York. In light of this, some wondered if the York story was true, and sought, without success to pinpoint the actual location of where the battle was fought in France. It seemed that as the nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of the end of the Great War that there were more questions than answers on Alvin York.

[1028] "Sergeant York, War hero, Dies," *New York Times*, 3 September 1964, 1; "Sergeant York Buried Near His Home," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 6 September 1964; "Sgt. York's Rites Attended by 8,000," *New York Times*, 6 September 1964.
[1029] "World War One Hero Will Get Silver Star After 47 Years," *Herald Tribune,* 20 Sep 1965, 3.

Book II

Finding the York Battlefield

Book II - Finding the York Battlefield

The significance of 8 October 1918 battle for which York was awarded the Medal of Honor was a turning point for him and left an indelible impression on American Great War literature. So notable were York's actions, that it was written extensively about in the 82nd Division's history, and described in the biographies of Major General George Duncan (division commander), Major General Hunter Liggett (First Army Commander), and General John Pershing (American Expeditionary Forces Commander).[1030] However, recently, there has been a debate over the exact location of the 8 October 1918 site. This has cause some to question the authenticity of York's feat who allege that since there is a lack of clarity on the site's location, therefore how can we know for sure that it actually happened.[1031] This begs the question, how did the York site come to be lost over time? Was it lost at all? The location of the York battle site does have an interesting history.

After York fought there on 8 October 1918, Captain Bertrand Cox led his men across this ground just minutes after the battle. In fact, Cox was the only American officer known to have traversed the York site.[1032] Then a Lieutenant, Bertrand Cox was the support platoon leader for Company F, 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment. He testified that during his unit's movement to the Decauville Railroad on 8 October 1918

[1030] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63; George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 145-155; Major General Hunter Liggett, *A.E.F.*, (New York, Dodd, Meade and Company; 1928), 172-174; John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the War*, Volume II, 390-392.
[1031] Marie Huret, "Il faut sauver le sergeant York," *L'Express,* 09 November 2006, 60-61; Craig S. Smith, "Revisiting the legend of an American war hero," *New York Times*, 20 June 2006, A3.
[1032] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 153.

that they passed over the ground where York's fight occurred.[1033] His sworn affidavit states:

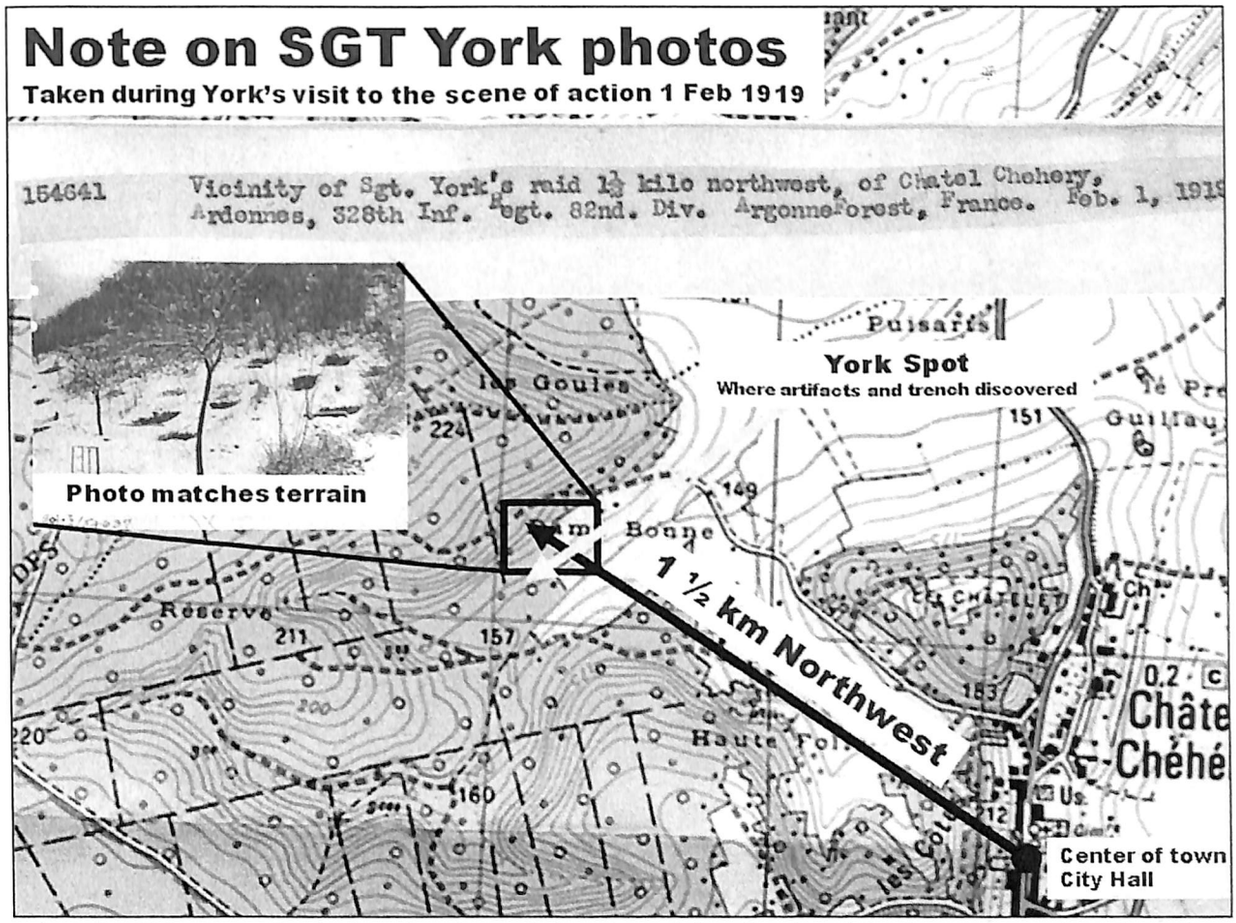
> On the morning of October 8th, I commanded a support platoon of "F" Co., 2nd Bn of the 328th Inf. Shortly after Corporal York and his detachment of seven men succeeded in capturing the greater part of a German battalion, I advanced with my platoon and passed the scene of the fight which took place before this capture was accomplished. The ground was covered with German equipment and I should estimate that there were between 20 and 25 dead Germans on the scene of the fight.[1034]

The importance of Captain Bertrand Cox's account is of great significance as he was both the only American officer to traverse the York site and he was to be a key witness called to corroborate the York story in the 1919 investigation. Cox placed the location of the action approximately 1 1/2 kms northwest of Chatel Chéhéry, along the forward edge of the hill often referred to as Humserberg.[1035]

The next recorded visit to the site of York's action was on 9 October 1918, the day after the battle. After returning from the overnight hike to drop his prisoners off at Varennes, York asked Captain Danforth for permission to go back to the site to see if any of the men they left behind were still alive. Danforth granted York permission to check and sent stretcher bearers with him. Upon arriving at the scene of the action, York wrote

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[1033] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," *Infantry Journal*, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 349-350.
[1034] Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919.
[1035] Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919; George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 153.



that the US Army had already cleared the site of the dead and had removed abandoned equipment. This was the same location visited by Cox the day before.[1036]

The next official visit to the battle site occurred in January 1919 during the investigation into York's feat. Attending the investigation were York, *Saturday Evening Post* Journalist George Pattullo, York's regimental commander, Colonel Richard Wetherill, his brigade commander, Brigadier General Julian Lindsay, his division commander, Major General George Duncan, and an Army photographer. There are no records of the group having used maps during this visit. However, the US Army

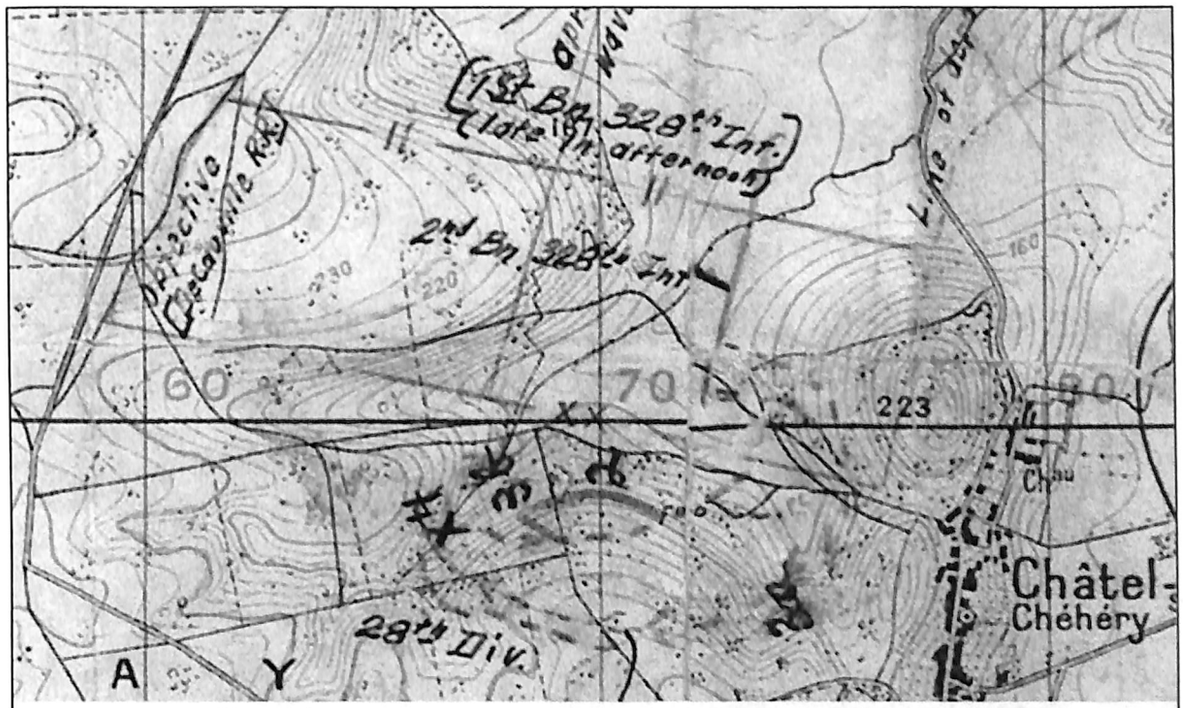
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[1036] Swindler, 349-350; York, 271-273; Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919.

photographer documented the event and took pictures of the terrain where he fought off the German bayonet attack. The caption on one of the photos is clear where this action happened, saying, "Vicinity of Sgt. York's raid, 1 1/2 kilo northwest of Châtel Chéhéry." This corresponds to the movement of Captain Cox's "F" Company and indicates the York site was not actually lost yet.[1037]

In 1929, the US Army War College planned to perform a reenactment of Sgt York's action at their annual Army Carnival and Exposition in Washington, DC. To portray the York action accurately, the US Army assigned several officers to go through the archives to reconstruct the event. However, the officers could not find maps that depicted the York location in France. To fill this information gap, the researchers contacted Buxton and Danforth.

[1037] York site photographs, Army Historical Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, Pennsylvania; York, 222-223, 271-278.



"I am afraid that no one, not even York himself, can give you a very accurate lay-out of the fight." **Captain Danforth, 5 August 1929**

The problem was the neither Buxton or Danforth were eye -witnesses to the action, nor were they present at the 1919 investigation. With this lack of firsthand knowledge, Buxton and Danforth could only guess where the action occurred.[1038] The Buxton / Danforth sketch placed the action well outside of the 82nd's area of operations and in a deep gorge of no military value. Furthermore, their location is 600 meters south of where Cox, the US Army photographer, and the Germans say the fight occurred. Danforth warned the US Army War College not to use their sketch, saying, "I am afraid that no one, not even York himself, can give you a very accurate lay-out of the fight." Because of this, the Buxton/Danforth map had no value to the Army War College researchers and was not used to support the exposition. However, this sketch would

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[1038] Major Danforth letter to Captain Swindler, 5 August 1929, and LTC Buxton letter to CPT Swindler, 23 July 1929, RG 165, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

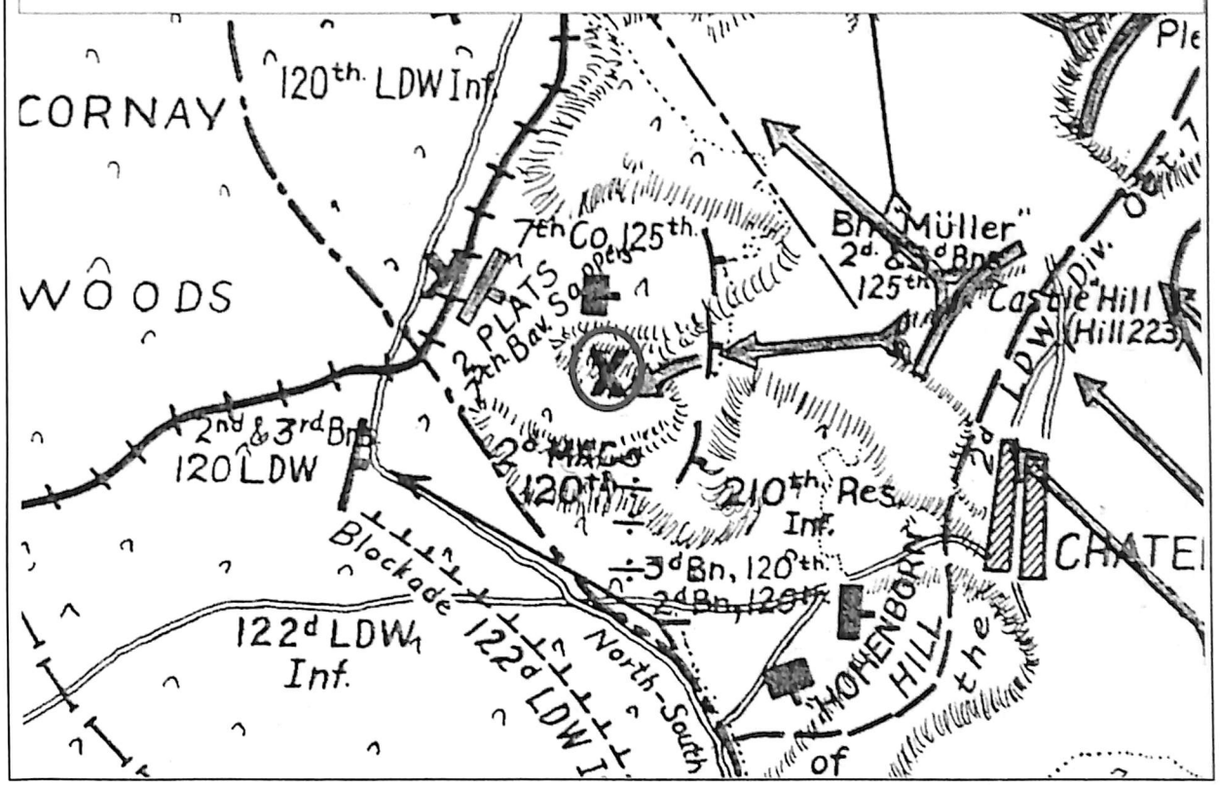
eventually find its way into the archives, which would be a pitfall for later American researchers.[1039]

Meanwhile, German researchers gathered in Potsdam (Germany) to ascertain what happened on 8 October 1918. Many of the key players were interviewed: Lieutenant Paul Vollmer, Lieutenant Paul Lipp, Lieutenant Max Thoma, Lieutenant Karl Kübler, and Sergeant Major Haegele. These soldiers represented the 120th and 125th Württemberg and the 7th Bavarian Pioneer (Mineur) Company, the key units fighting against York. Unlike the post-war maps of Danforth and Buxton, who did not participate in the York action, the German officers were all present during the battle. Together, they annotated on the map where the battle occurred with an "X." This "X" location is within 10 meters of Captain Cox's testimony and 20 meters from the 1919 AEF annotated photograph.[1040] This accurate depiction of where York's action occurred did not inform the 1929 US Army War College investigation, because the Americans did not receive a copy of this study until 1936, seven years after their exposition and carnival.

[1039] Major Danforth letter to Captain Swindler, 5 August 1929, and LTC Buxton letter to CPT Swindler, 23 July 1929, RG 165.

[1040] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York," 2 July 1929, Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, 2-21; York site photographs, Army Historical Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, Pennsylvania; York, 222-223, 271-278; US National Archives, College Park, MD; Swindler, 349-350; York, 271-273; Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919.

German map sketch of the 8 October 1918. The "X" is where they confirm as the location of where Alvin York's action occurred.



The next attempt to document the location of the York scene of battle occurred in the 1990s and was undertaken by two American Special Forces soldiers, Lieutenant Colonel Taylor Beattie and Major Ronald Bowman. Ron Bowman described the challenge of narrowing down the search for the York site, when he wrote;

> The folks of the town and the American cemetery - only had vague ideas and knowledge of it, at least all the ones I talked to. They didn't know much more than where the big plaque was [in the village]. A little later I took Taylor with me and he took to the challenge with vigor. As I said, he developed a firestorm of a desire to retrace the tale and really know - how, what, where, and when, the reality of the Sgt York story occurred.[1041]

Their methodology was to scrutinize the York historical records with an eye to combining what was published on the action with military terrain analysis. Terrain

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[1041] Email from Ronald Bow to Douglas Mastriano, 01 March 2013.

analysis is using geography to gain the best advantage militarily. How soldiers view terrain has changed little at the tactical level and remains a valuable tool in both combat situations as well as when trying to recreate a historic military action. The methodology encompassed the following considerations:

> We have approached the analysis of events in the ravine as soldiers would approach a tactical problem, through the application of the METT-T and OCOKA concepts. METT-T stands for Mission. Enemy. Terrain and weather, Troops and Time available. OCOKA further breaks terrain considerations into Observation and Fields of fire, Cover and concealment, Obstacles, Key terrain, and A venues of approach. While exploring Hill 223 and the ravine, we approached our question, "York, how did you do it?" as a tactical problem from both the American and German perspectives. Thus we analyzed how we would have attempted to accomplish Sergeant Early's mission to "work around behind those guns" or, alternately, the mission of a German officer tasked with defending that terrain, applying the principles of METT-T and OCOKA.[1042]

Using this approach of METT-T and terrain analysis, Beattie/Bowman placed the location of the action at the base of the large hill 1 1/2 kilometers northwest of Châtel Chéhéry. The Beattie/Bowman site is within ten meters of the aforementioned Cox testimony and the 1919 photograph of the terrain. Interestingly, Beattie/Bowman did not have access to these two sources and did not use them to inform their assessment. Their primary source was the 1928 York auto-biography which was edited by Tom Skeyhill.[1043]

I began my research into the York story in the early 1990s. What was initially found on York lacked the tactical clarity and depth that he sought. Without knowledge of the Beattie/Bowman ground breaking terrain study, I began gathering data on York's 8 October battle from various sources with a desire to reconstruct the battle as it really

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[1042] Taylor V. Beattie and Ronald Bowman, "In Search of York: Man, Myth & Legend," *Army History,* Summer-Fall 2000, Washington, DC., 5.
[1043] Taylor V. Beattie and Ronald Bowman, "In Search of York: Man, Myth & Legend," *Army History,* Summer-Fall 2000, Washington, DC., 1-14.

happened. What became clear was that much of the data readily available on the fight was disjointed and slanted from the American perspective. It was also apparent that no American had conducted research in the German archives to try to understand what happened from the other side. This was a shortfall that I desired to rectify by conducting research in the German archives.

I did my first field research trip to France in 2002. Using terrain analysis, the York biography and the other sources I had uncovered, it was evident that the battle occurred close to where the Cox testimony, the German sources as well as where the AEF had placed it; 1 1/2 kilometers northwest of Châtel Chéhéry (although I did not yet have those sources to corroborate this analysis). Before long, I had assembled a large international team to support this search. This group would be called the Sergeant York Discovery Expedition (SYDE). It would include some fifty members and affiliates, from eight nations bringing a level of expertise and skill often unparalleled in such work. It included historians, geospatial analysts, researchers, archeologists, museum curators, professional military members, family members, soldiers from several NATO nations, intelligence analysts, imagery analysts, and small arms weapons experts.

Over the next several years, I scoured the archives for every piece of data I could find on the York battle. The research would eventually reach across North America and Europe. By 2006, I had uncovered a wealth of information from the German archives which brought a level of clarity to the 8 October 1918 battle hitherto unknown. Among the data collected were maps and overlays which would prove central to locating the battle site. These would later be found to correspond to Cox's testimony as well as AEF reporting.

As the US and German archival data was analyzed, a clearer understanding of the York battle was discerned. I punctuated my archival research with trips to the Argonne where I would walk the actual battlefield and annotate on a map where the Americans and Germans wrote where events transpired to see if this made sense from a military terrain analysis point of view. Additionally, I conducted a surface survey of the specific 100 meter area in the Argonne which the sources all pointed to as the scene of the York fight. This included walking this ground in the Argonne with an eye on any evidence of the battle. This would also include a gridding on a map and the ground to interpret the finds of the surface survey.[1044] The initial surface survey showed the location of the German machinegun that York attacked, the 120th Landwehr garbage pit, the ancient border trench utilized by German Lieutenant Fritz Endriss and his platoon (the group which would bayonet attack York), several German fighting positions (at the base of Humserberg and visible on the AEF 1919 photography of the York fight), and the areas used by German riflemen to combat York's men.[1045]

During these trips to the Argonne, I met the local historian, Dr. Lucien Houlemare. Dr. Houlemare speaks excellent English, resides in the village of Châtel Chéhéry, owns a portion of the land near the York action and considered himself well-informed on York. He took me to the location where he believed York fought and it turned out to be very close to where I had determined the action to be, confirming that he was on the right course. Additionally, in 2005, I met with Taylor Beattie to discuss his

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[1044] Interview with Dr. Susan Blair, Department of Archeology, University of New Brunswick, 8 May 2012.

[1045] Thomas F. King, *The Archeological Survey: Methods and Uses*, US Department of Interior, Washington, DC; 1978, 1-15; Heather Burke and Claire Smith, *The Archeologist's Field Handbook*, (Crow's Nest New South Wales, Australia; 2004), 64-88.

analysis and findings and was pleased to find out that Beattie too was in the same area I had pinpointed.

As I prepared to conduct an in depth archeological site survey, a group from Tennessee made a hasty trip to the Argonne under the direction of Dr. Michael Birdwell of Tennessee Technical University. Birdwell was joined by Tom Nolan of Middle Tennessee State and David Currey (Currey is a director of a historic house in Nashville that is used for weddings). They traveled to the Argonne in March 2006. Having less than four days to conduct research (5-8 March), the team, none of whom had archeological training, used one amateur metal detector to scan a 500 meter area, an ambitious plan.[1046] Their search was hampered by four inches of snow and a lack of clarity about where precisely to search. They were thus compelled to conduct a wide general scan of the area.[1047] This group would eventually call itself the York Project, with Mr. Nolan later ousting Dr. Birdwell as its leader.

The problem with the York Project was that it based its assumptions and assessments of the location of the York fight entirely upon the discredited 1929 Danforth/Buxton map. This is the same map that Danforth warned the Army against using, saying, "I am afraid that no one, not even York himself, can give you a very accurate lay-out of the fight."[1048] This mistake placed them in a deep ravine *600 meters*

[1046] Leon Alligood, "Scholars put Sgt York WW I Heroics on the Map," Tennessean.com, available online at the following website http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1600919/posts (Accessed 4 March 2013).
[1047] Thomas Nolan, "Battlefield Landscapes," dissertation submitted to TSU, San Marcos, TX, May 2007, 69-73.
[1048] Thomas Nolan, "Battlefield Landscapes," dissertation submitted to TSU, San Marcos, TX, May 2007, 50-53; Major Danforth letter to Captain Swindler, 5 August 1929, and LTC Buxton letter to CPT Swindler, 23 July 1929, RG 165, NARA.

south of where the York site was declared to be by credible American and German sources. Because of this, they ended up far from the right place and nowhere near where the AEF photographer snapped the photos of the York site, or anywhere near where the German investigation of 1929 placed the action and more importantly, far from where Captain Cox said it occurred. It was also far from where the local French historian, Dr. Houlemare thought it was and 600 meters away from where Beattie / Bowman claimed as well.[1049] Birdwell and Nolan made the fatal mistake by staking everything upon one discredited source, and thus surveyed a part of the Argonne far from the York fight and in fact were recovering artifacts from a different action not related to York's.[1050]

Their problem was compounded by premature claims of success. During their brief time in the Argonne they uncovered only 161 German 7.92 casings, fifteen 30.06 live and three expended US cartridges. This sort of scant evidence could be uncovered in literally any ravine, hill, meadow or valley in the Argonne.[1051] Furthermore, they had merely circumstantial evidence that there was a German machinegun in the area. The presence of the 7.92 casings does not confirm that a machinegun was in the spot they claimed. In fact, German rifles use the same caliber rounds as the German Machinegun (MG) 08/15. To verify that an actual MG 08/15 was located in a specific position, one either needs specific parts of the MG recovered from the area, or fragments of the

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[1049] Taylor V. Beattie and Ronald Bowman, "In Search of York: Man, Myth & Legend," *Army History,* Summer-Fall 2000, Washington, DC., 1-14.

[1050] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York," 2 July 1929, Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, 2-21; York site photographs, Army Historical Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, Pennsylvania; York, 222-223, 271-278; US National Archives, College Park, MD; Swindler, 349-350; York, 271-273; Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919.

[1051] Thomas Nolan, "Battlefield Landscapes," dissertation submitted to TSU, San Marcos, May 2007, 69-71.

"Patronengurt," which was the cloth belt used to feed the bullets into the MG 08/15. They found neither, and such a discovery would remain elusive to them in future trips.

Even more fatally, however, was the fact that there were no .45 cartridges recovered from their survey.[1052] Birdwell speculated that perhaps these artifacts would never be found as he presumed that after nearly ninety years they would have rotted away.[1053] Both Nolan and Birdwell mistakenly told the press that, "the .45 casings may have deteriorated in the boggy ground."[1054]

Lack of evidence notwithstanding, Birdwell and Nolan apparently hoped to make a media splash with their announcement. Nolan explained that this premature press announcement was necessary so that they could convince donors to pay for their next jaunt to France, saying, "We do plan to return, but we funded this ourselves so we are looking for additional money that will allow us to continue our work."[1055] The improvised press conference was held in Tennessee on 22 March 2006, just two-weeks

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[1052] Thomas Nolan, "Battlefield Landscapes," dissertation submitted to TSU, San Marcos, May 2007, 50-53.

[1053] Craig S. Smith, "Revisiting the legend of an American war hero," New York Times, 20 June 2006, A3; Jenny Barchfield, "France 'York Spot' May Have Been Located," The Associated Press, 26 October 2006. Available online at the following website http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/26/AR2006102601314.html (accessed 4 March 2013).

[1054] Leon Alligood, "Scholars put Sgt York WW I Heroics on the Map," Tennessean.com, available online at the following website http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1600919/posts (Accessed 4 March 2013). During their next jaunt to the Argonne, Nolan would find a large cache of US .45 cartridges. However, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's (TBI) analysis clearly stated that none of these came from a Automatic Colt Pistol (York's weapon). TBI instead informed Nolan that what they found came from a revolver, like the type carried by the 28th Pennsylvania Division. This finding was concealed for five years until Nolan made a gaff statement mentioning this shortcoming. See Gina Fann, "In the Footsteps of Sgt York," The Murfreesboro Post, 23 December 2012. Available online at: http://www.murfreesboropost.com/in-the-footsteps-of-sgt-york-cms-33812 (accessed 5 March 2013).

[1055] "Lisa Rollins, Texas State Doctoral Student Tom Nolan Leads Discovery Team," Middle Tennessee State, 20 March 2006. Available online at the following website: http://www.txstate.edu/news/news_releases/external_news/2006/03/wwIherofound032006.html (accessed 5 march 2013).

after their brief trip to France.[1056] Here, they announced: "We're 80 percent certain that we have found the right location."[1057] Yet, they had uncovered nothing to make such a bold statement. Even Nolan would be forced to admit some months later that "We don't have enough evidence to reach any definite conclusion."[1058]

However, this did not compel them to change their approach. Instead, the York Project would plunge ahead (fallacy of sunk costs) to do all it could to prove that they were right. They staked everything on the Buxton / Danforth map and could not go back.[1059] This became problematic when Nolan announced that he would use his report from their work in the Argonne to write his ninety one page (of text) doctoral dissertation.[1060] In early 2007, French authorities asked Mastriano to arrange a meeting with Nolan to discuss why his site was 600 meters away from what the primary sources claimed. However, Nolan refused to discuss this, saying,

> ...I am under no obligation to spend my time and money to meet with LTC Mastriano to discuss a matter that is not subject to negotiation. ...I feel that any interpretive development at the site is best left to local and regional French

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[1056] "Lisa Rollins, Texas State Doctoral Student Tom Nolan Leads Discovery Team," Middle Tennessee State, 20 March 2006. Available online at the following website: http://www.txstate.edu/news/news_releases/external_news/2006/03/wwIherofound032006.html (accessed 5 march 2013).

[1057] AP News, "Location of Sgt. York's WWI heroics Found?" AP News, 22 March 2006. Available online at the following address: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/11965337/#.UTUMBKVJOAg (Accessed 04 March 2013).

[1058] Jenny Barchfield, "France 'York Spot' May Have Been Located," The Associated Press, 26 October 2006. Available online at the following website http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/10/26/AR2006102601314.html (accessed 4 March 2013), Craig S. Smith, "Revisiting the legend of an American war hero," New York Times, 20 June 2006, A3.

[1059] Leon Alligood, "Scholars put Sgt York WW I Heroics on the Map," Tennessean.com, available online at the following website http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1600919/posts (Accessed 4 March 2013).

[1060] Thomas Nolan, "Battlefield Landscapes," dissertation submitted to TSU, San Marcos, TX, May 2007, 1-13, 50-53; Major Danforth letter to Captain Swindler, 5 August 1929, and LTC Buxton letter to CPT Swindler, 23 July 1929, RG 165, NARA.

organizations that are familiar with regional heritage tourism and economic development issues.[1061]

Nolan would make two more trips to the Argonne in an attempt to collect sufficient evidence to demonstrate that his site was correct. Yet, despite his efforts, no historical society, any independent group, scholarly organization, or the French would support his claims.

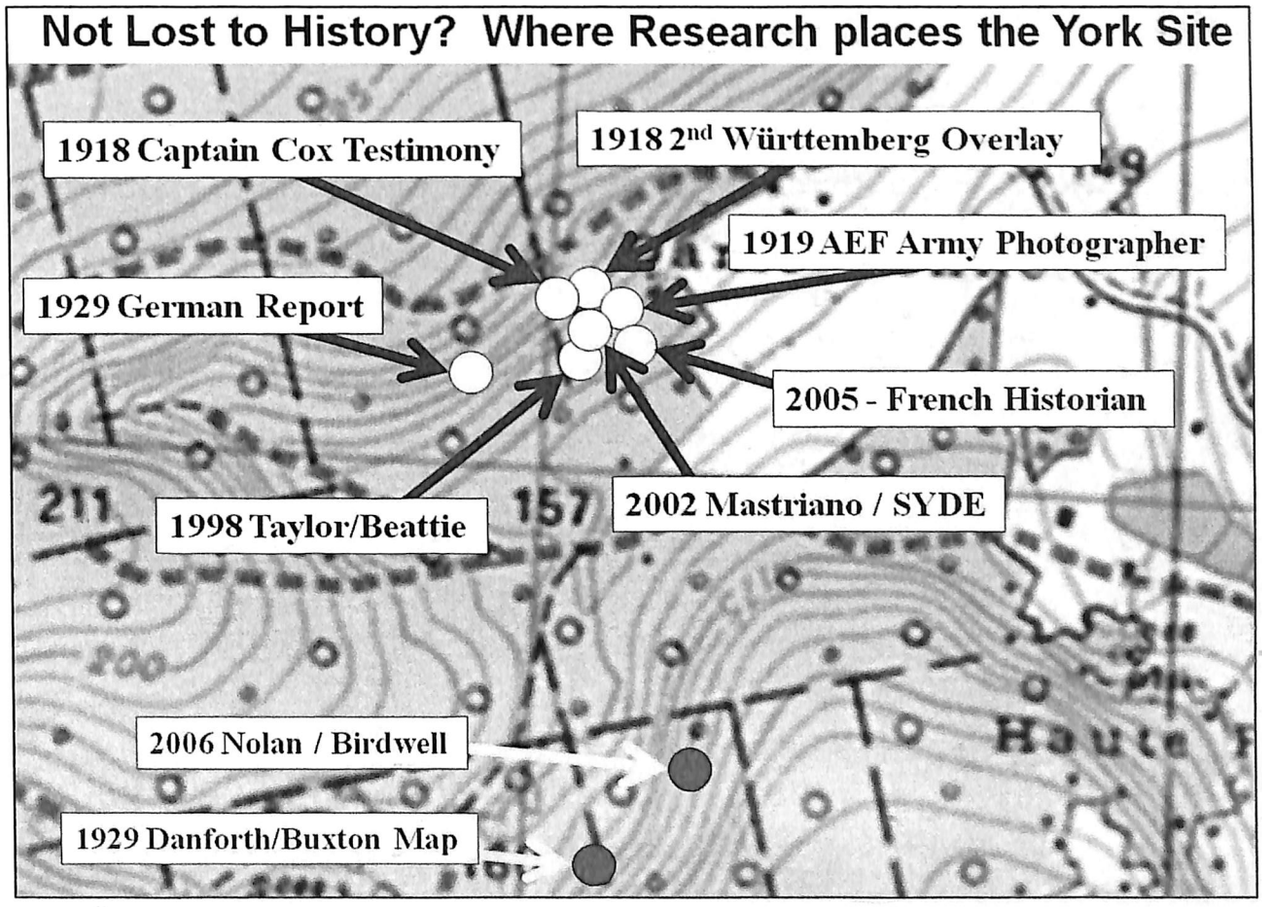
Meanwhile, Mastriano's SYDE would spend more than 100 days conducting research in the Argonne. Working closely with a variety of American and French officials, and having their research supervised by the Center of Military History, SYDE made considerable progress in the search for the York site. By October 2006, sufficient evidence was gathered to make a formal announcement describing the work and where the evidence pointed. In the end, the evidence supporting the Mastriano / SYDE claim would include forensically confirmed cartridge casings that came from the same type of pistol used by York (a Colt .45 ACP), 3.06 rifle casings that matched the type of rifle York used, the dog-tag and personal effects of a German soldier involved in the York fight (a 125th Landwehr soldier), remnants of Vollmer's headquarters, hard evidence of the German MG 08/15 (both pieces of the machinegun in addition to fragments of the Patronengurt), and confirmed artifacts belonging to both the 120th Landwehr and 210th Prussian regiments. This, combined with several thousand other pieces of evidence confirmed much of what we know of the York saga.

The history of the York site is intriguing. It seems that the location was never actually lost to history. The current debate and confusion over it is rooted on the

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[1061] Email from Tom Nolan to Douglas Mastriano, 9 January 2007.

imprudent claims of Birdwell/Nolan's York Project. In fact, the fallacy of the site being lost to history is a myth of their own creation. The problem for them remains the Buxton/Danforth map. By embracing as accurate the discredited Buxton/Danforth map, Nolan had to explain away or ignore the many other sources which made it clear that the York site was actually some 600 meters north of their location. This forced them to discredit the 1919 AEF photograph, ignore Cox's testimony, pay no attention to the 1929 German investigation map, disregard the local French historian, discount the work of Taylor and Beattie and then to attack the Mastriano / SYDE site. Perhaps the site was indeed never lost to history as the historic records clearly placed it where the monuments now stand in the Argonne Forest.



To find where York fought required a well rounded historical approach that integrated data from both the German and American sources, in addition to applying military terrain analysis, geospatial technology, battlefield archeology and ballistic firearms forensics. This provided a process that both historically and scientifically get to the bottom of the York story.

The overarching research methodology used to guide the approach to this study included the following integrated fundamentals:

1. Primary source research in German and American archives (research facilities)
2. Military terrain analysis, and geospatial mapping (field work)
3. Doctrinal templating (using German 1917-1918 doctrine) (research facilities)
4. Screening criteria - based upon historic data and archeological finds (field work and research facilities)
5. Battlefield artifact evidence (field work)
6. Ballistic forensic analysis (laboratory work)

Through this rigorous six step process, one would be able to historically, analytically and scientifically determine the site of the York battle without relying upon subjective interpretations. In effect, the methodology of history, plus terrain analysis, plus archeology, plus forensics would enable the research team to accurately locate the York site. This complex approach would prove daunting in that the historic information about the battle was contained in hundreds of sources. Additionally, during the field research phase, archeological evidence would be introduced into the assessment and trigger an automatic reconsideration of any assumptions or presumptions.[1062]

This research problem was initially approached using a linear model. However, due to the complexities of the dynamic problem set of trying to coherently resolve the

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[1062] Heinz Klein and Michael Myers, "A Set of Principles for Conducting and Evaluating Interpretive Field Studies in Information Systems," MIS Quarterly, Vol., 23, No. 1, March 1999), 67-88.

debate over the York site, a linear approach, although a traditional academic tool to resolve research problems, did not work well. The difficultly was that a linear academic approach was not effective enough to combine the complex nature of the analysis that included academic research, field research, scientific ballistic forensics and archeology. Frankly, the linear approach was wrought with pitfalls and academic blind spots as the researcher starts with a set of *fixed* preconceived ideas and faces the danger of not being able to see beyond predetermined judgments. This sort of linear approach often entices its user to unethically interpret data to fit their preconceived suppositions, even when faced with a proverbial "square peg and round hole."[1063]

To prevent such a pitfall from contaminating the research, an approach was adopted by which the problem set was continually reassessed to ensure that data was not interpreted to fit a preconceived notion. The model adopted to do this was a variation of what is today called "design." Design applies critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe complex, ill-structured problems and develop approaches to solve them."[1064] Such an approach was ideal for working through the complex research that was conducted, research that spanned four distinct professional disciplines (archeology, military terrain analysis, history, ballistics analysis).[1065]

[1063] Joe Kincheloe, & Peter McLaren, Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research; in Denzin. & Lincoln, (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd ed., (London, Sage Publications; 1994), 279-313.
[1064] Department of the Army, *The Operations Process*, US Army, Washington, D.C., March 2010, 3.1 - 3.7; Mary Lacity, "Understanding qualitative data: a framework of test analysis methods," *Journal of Management Information Systems,* 1994, 137-155.
[1065] Joyce P.Gall, *Applying Educational Research: a Practical Guide*, (Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., New York; 1999), 361-367; Joe Kincheloe, & Peter McLaren, "Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research," in Denzin. & Lincoln, (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd ed., (London, Sage Publications; 1994), 279-313; Department of the Army, *ADP 5-0 The Operations Process*, US Army, Washington, D.C., May 2012, 6-15.

Furthermore, this modified design model was necessary in that both US and French officials required an approach that would include a disciplined method to demonstrate where the York site was located. It was imperative that the approach relied upon fact rather than merely interpretive circumstantial evidence. Additionally, since the research data came from four different professional disciplines, the modified design approach was uniquely equipped to effectively process and interpret the finds.[1066]

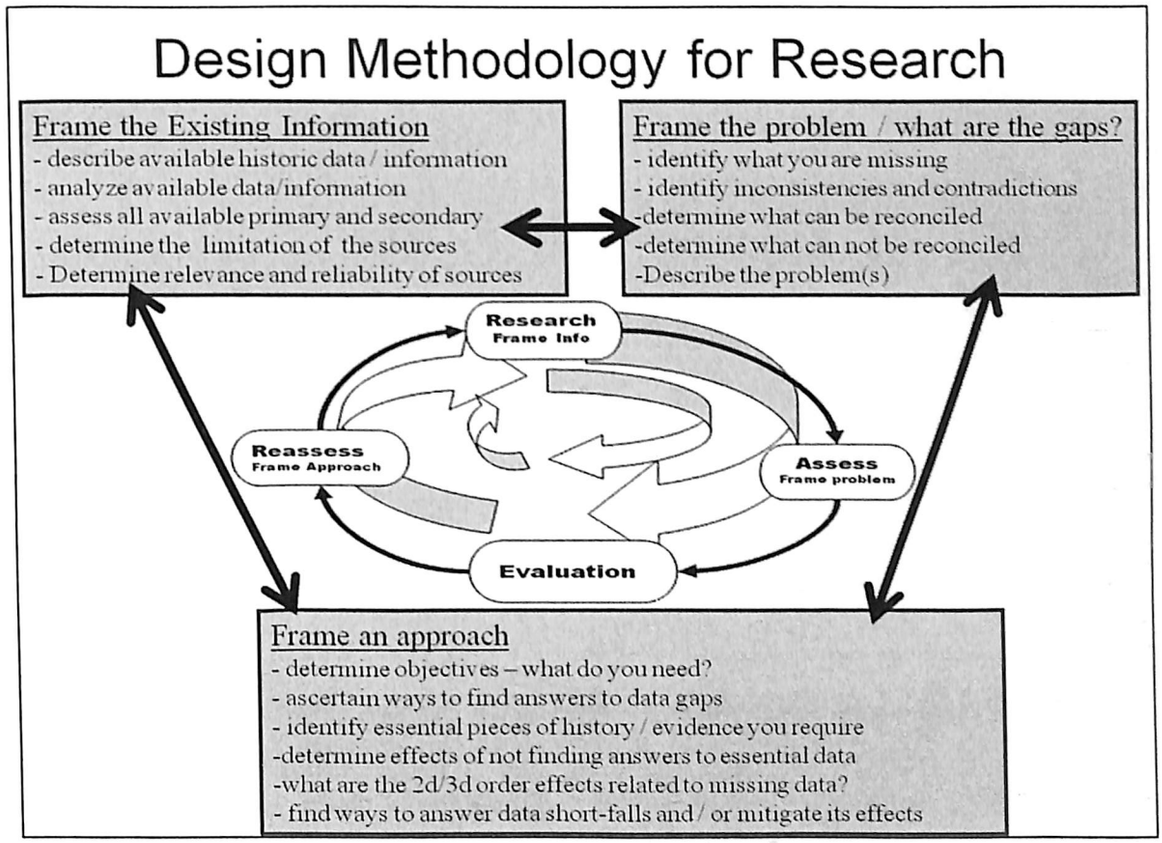
A central component of this analytical approach included using critical thinking and analysis in assessing the data and archeological finds. This would enable the researchers to understand the nature of the "environment" and thereby help answer what was known at that moment about the York action. Once this was ascertained, we were able to identify the "problems," that is, what information gaps existed and what else was required to determine the York location. After this was determined, an approach was developed to ascertain ways to address the information gaps. At this point, the entire process would start again with a reassessment and then a reframing of the environment, a reframing of the problem and so on.[1067] This cyclical approach was necessary because the identification of a particular artifact or data set could alter the known environment, and thereby change the nature of the problem. This "reframing" enabled the analysis to

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[1066] Felicity Kelliher, "Interpretivism and the Pursuit of Research: An Integrated Approach," *Journal of Business Research Methods*, Volume 3, Issue 2, 2005, 123-132

[1067] Joyce P.Gall, Applying Educational Research: a Practical Guide, (Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., New York; 1999), 361-367; Joe Kincheloe, & Peter McLaren, Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research; in Denzin. & Lincoln, (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd ed., (London, Sage Publications; 1994), 279-313; Department of the Army, *ADP 5-0 The Operations Process*, US Army, Washington, D.C., May 2012, 6-15; Stefan Banach, The Art of Design, *Military Review*, March-April 2009, 105-114.

proceed without being compelled to interpret all data on the basing of preconceived ideas and beliefs.[1068] The following chart demonstrates the research methodology:[1069]



The fundamentals applied to this design methodology were built upon the aforementioned six discipline research approach. Each shall be addressed in turn to clearly delineate how the research and field work was conducted. It is worth restating that the approach encompassed the following considerations:

[1068] Joe Kincheloe, & Peter McLaren, Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research; in Denzin. & Lincoln, (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd ed., (London, Sage Publications; 1994), 279-313; Department of the Army, *ADP 5-0 The Operations Process*, US Army, Washington, D.C., May 2012, 6-15.Robert Yin, *Case Study Research – Design And Methods, Applied Social Research Methods Series,* (Thousands Oakes, CA: Sage Publications; 1994).

[1069] Adopted from Department of the Army, *ADP 5-0 The Operations Process*, US Army, Washington, D.C., May 2012, 6-15 and US Army War College Curriculum on Design, used in support of Theater Strategy, Department of Military Strategy, Plans and Operations, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2012.

1. Primary source research in German and American archives (research facilities)
2. Military terrain analysis, and geospatial mapping (field work)
3. Doctrinal templating (using German 1917-1918 doctrine) (research facilities)
4. Screening criteria - based upon historic data and archeological finds (field work and research facilities)
5. Battlefield artifact evidence (field work)
6. Ballistic forensic analysis (laboratory work)

This list should not be interpreted as a linear approach to the research. To be certain, much of the archival research occurred before the field work commenced, yet, as mentioned, finds would often force a return to the archives to look for answers to new questions. Furthermore, as the knowledge of the battle increased, each of the above six considerations were reevaluated and reapplied to the field work. During this complex process, hypothesis were questioned, assumptions evaluated and analysis conducted to see if and what we knew was relevant.

The first step was logically conducting primary source research in the various German and American archives (research facilities). As previously discussed, this is how the physical location of the York site was academically determined and located. The next step would be to verify the accuracy of these sources with actual field work in the Argonne Forest in the approach of archeology.

In the end, some 1,000 hours would be dedicated to this segment of the study, that is, conducting research in the archives, much of which occurred before the field work began. This in depth analysis would score every possible source and location to accumulate the most complete picture of the York battle of 8 October 1918. This would encompass research in scores of facilities in both Europe and North America, in addition to discussing the finds with various European and American historians.. Below is a sampling of the places and facilities central to this phase of the research:

United States of America:

Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle, PA
US National Archive, College Park, Maryland
US National Archive, Atlanta, Georgia
US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA
US Joint Forces Staff College
USAF War College Library, Maxwell AFB, AL
Pall Mall, Tennessee for interviews with the descendants of Alvin C. York
Military Service Records Archive in St. Louis, Missouri
Warner Brother Studio archives in UCLA, California

Federal Republic of Germany:

Baden-Württemberg Stadt Archiv, Stuttgart
Imperial Archiv, Potsdam
Militär Archiv, Freiburg
Bavarian State Archiv, München
Ingolstadt Archiv
Ulm Stadt Archiv
Rottweil Stadt Archiv
Fredrichstadt Archiv

French Republic:

Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, Romagne
14-18 Museum, Romagne
Historians and officials in the Meuse-Argonne Region, in the villages of;
Chatel Chehery, Cunel, Verdun, Romagne, Varennes, Cornay, Gesnes

During the reframing and reassessment of the research problem, questions would arise that required a return to the archives to answer new questions or issues that arose from a particular discovery. Frequent return trips were made to the archives to answer new questions, or to ascertain greater clarity on a specific issue. As discussed, this could not be a linear approach as new questions constantly arose. For instance, one of the most important discoveries during the archeological portion of the study was the unearthing of the complete identification tags and personal effects of a German soldier. This required an in depth study in the archives to ascertain who this soldier was, why was he there,

what was his role during the York action, etc.[1070] It also caused us to inquiry as to the effect this find had on our deductions, and how did it change what we believed and thought. It was such events that made the modified design approach ideal for this type of research.[1071]

The next consideration used throughout this research to locate the York site was applying military terrain analysis, and geospatial mapping (field work). Assisted by some of the finest geospatial technicians in Europe, historic maps depicting the York site (previously described) were rigorously analyzed to ascertain where the eye-witnesses placed the battle. This, combined what was revealed in the archival research equipped the researchers to visit the Argonne with a fairly certain area where to look. Upon arriving at the Argonne, the ground was evaluated, much as Beattie and Bowman had in the 1990s. The purpose of this non-invasive terrain walk of the York battle site was to ascertain if where the sources placed the action made sense from a military terrain perspective.[1072] As will be discussed in some great detail later, the finding was a resounding yes.

[1070] Roland Idler, "Heimkehr nach 90 Jahren – Das Schicksal des im Ersten Weltkrieg vermissten Steinbachers Wilhelm Härer (1882 bis 1918)," *Backnanger Jahresbuch*, (Backnang, Germany; 2009), 182-199; Roland Idler, "Heimkehr nach 90 Jahren; Erkennungsmarke aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg," *Stimme & Weg*, April 2009, 17.

[1071] Joe Kincheloe, & Peter McLaren, Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research; in Denzin. & Lincoln, (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd ed., (London, Sage Publications; 1994), 279-313; Department of the Army, *The Operations Process*, US Army, Washington, D.C., March 2010, 3.1 - 3.7; Mary Lacity, "Understanding qualitative data: a framework of test analysis methods," *Journal of Management Information Systems,* 1994, 137-155; Peter Corcoran, "Case studies, make-your-case studies, and case stories: A critique of case-study methodology in sustainability in higher education." *Environmental Education Research, Vol. 10 No.*, 2004, 7-21; Department of the Army, *ADP 5-0 The Operations Process*, US Army, Washington, D.C., May 2012, 6-15; Stefan Banach, The Art of Design, *Military Review*, March-April 2009, 105-114.

[1072] Thomas F. King, "The Archeological Survey: Methods and Uses," US Department of Interior, Washington, DC; 1978, 1-15; Heather Burke and Claire Smith, *The Archeologist's Field Handbook,* (Crow's Nest New South Wales, Australia; 2004), 64-88.

An example of this terrain analysis was the location of the German machinegun that York was credited with eliminating. This weapon had to be in a position where it could engage the main American attack in a valley to the east, while at the same time be able to cover the meadow where York and the other sixteen Americans broke through. It would be unthinkable that the Germans would deploy any machinegun in a position where it could not be used to its maximum effective range in a defensive operation. The position of the machinegun was on the southern elevation of the central hill (Humserberg). From here it could engage targets as far as the outskirts of Châtel Chéhéry 1 1/2 kilometers to the east, while at the same time cover targets in the meadow to the south (where York broke through). Therefore, this position made perfect sense from a terrain analysis perspective.[1073]

Another factor applied to this research methodology was military doctrinal templating (using German 1917-1918 tactics). In addition to the site making sense from a terrain perspective, it also should compliment how the Germans normally deployed in a combat situation. Using the machinegun once again as the example, German deployment of this asset was central to their defensive concept in 1918 (this example shall be described in great detail later in this dissertation). To properly use the lethality of the machinegun to their advantage, the Germans sought a location where the gunners had extensive fields of fire and observation, that is they could see and shoot to the maximum range possible based upon the lay of the ground. As mentioned, the location of this particular machinegun was ideal from that perspective, in addition to being able to cover

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[1073] York site photographs, Army Historical Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

the boundary between the 120th and 125th Landwehr Regiments. Unit boundaries where (and remain) points of vulnerability in deployed line units. In fact, stumbling upon such a boundary enabled the American "Lost Battalion" to penetrate a mile behind German lines. The position of the German machinegun that York eliminated both had excellent observations/line of sight, but was along the 120th and 125th regimental seam, bolstering this weak point.[1074]

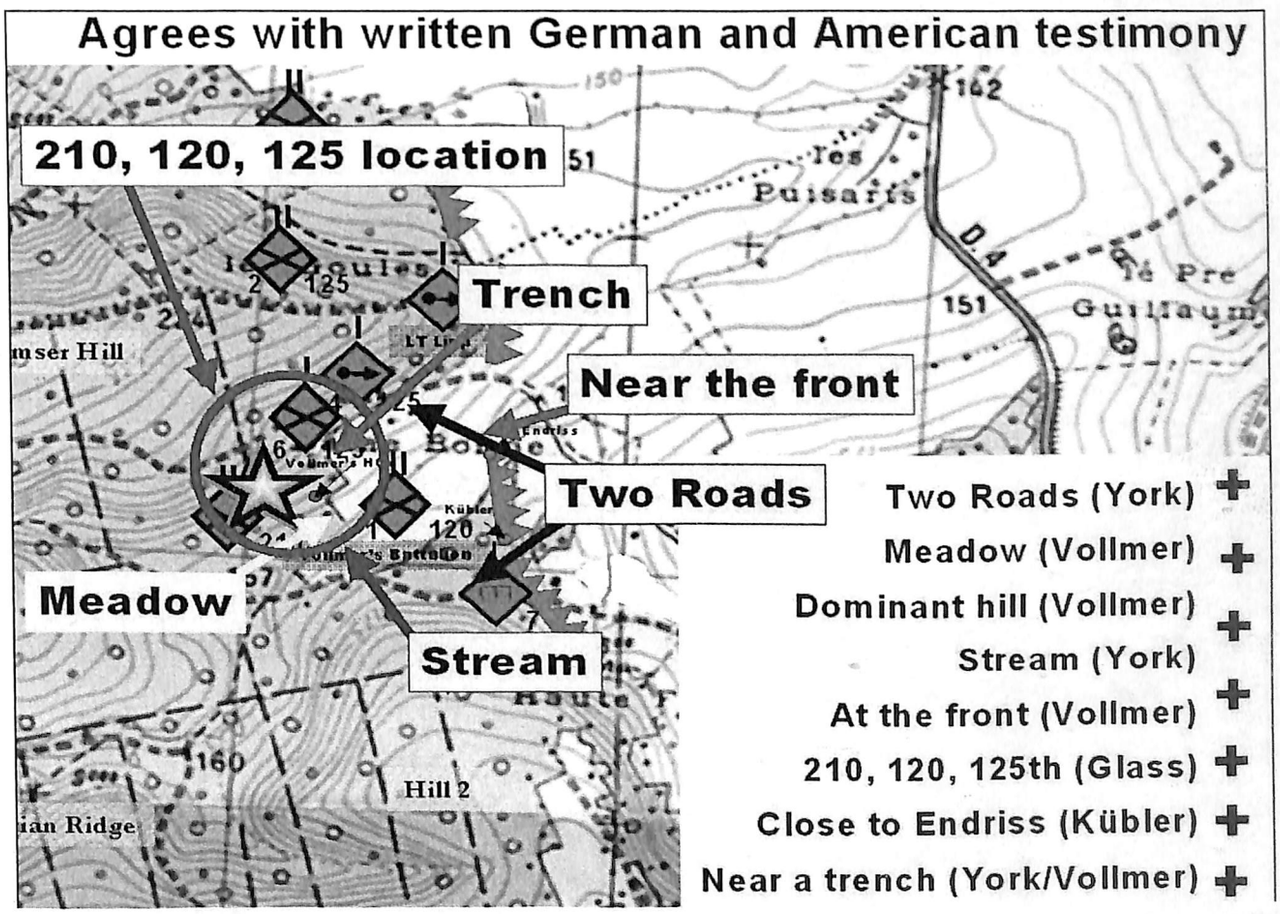
As the research considered terrain analysis, German deployment doctrine, and the archival data, a set of screening criteria were developed from the sources to evaluate where the York site was located. This screening criteria was a list of geographic points, unit considerations or deployment locations which the German and American sources mention being near the scene of action. These were developed and applied to the research to further reduce interpretation and opinion from falsely claiming a certain locale as York's. The screening criteria shall be discussed in some great detail later in the dissertation. However, an example of this is that York mentions that where he fought there were two German supply roads near it. Therefore, the York site needed to be near the nexus of two German roads. The sources also state that there was a trench from which German Lieutenant Fritz Endriss launched his bayonet attack against York. Trenches in this part of the Argonne were rare, making having one near the York site not only imperative, but also a central non-interpretive screening criteria to judge the veracity

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[1074] Lapple, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926); Gustav Strohm, Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120, (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922); Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921).

of any locale determined to the "York spot." Some of the screening criteria garnered from the primary sources include the following considerations;

a. Does it agree what is written about the German units involved in the battle?
b. Is it in a meadow below a dominant hill (York's and Vollmer's testimony)
c. Is it consistent with military tactics techniques & procedures (TTPs)?
d. Is it along the flank of the German 125 and 120 Regiments?
e. Does the terrain match the photographs taken in 1919?
f. Is it supported by battlefield archeology?
g. Is it close to the 1st Battalion, 120 RGT battlefront and in the 1/120th sector?
h. Is it logical from a tactical military perspective?
i. Does it agree with written German and American testimony?
j. Is it located where the machine guns can engage the Americans in the valley?
k. Is it on terrain that impacted the outcome of the battle (decisive terrain)?
l. Does it agree with the sequence of the units in the action?
m. Is it close to a trench (York's and Vollmer's testimony)?
n. Is it close to Vollmer's headquarters? (Vollmer and Kübler's testimony)
o. Is it near two roads (Vollmer and York's testimony)



The fifth component of the search for the York site was battlefield archeology. Having ample time to do the field work, there was no rush to make premature claims. Additionally, being self-funded, there was no pressure to quickly create results in order to convince donors to make financial contributions to pay for future trips to France. Without these constraints, the work proceeded carefully and deliberately. As mentioned, several visits to the Argonne occurred before any digging in the soil transpired. It was imperative that whatever field work that was conducted in the Argonne meshed with the archival data, military terrain analysis, German deployment doctrine as well as the factual based (non-interpretive) screening criteria. This began with a pre-dig evaluation of the terrain.

The pre-dig evaluation of where York fought was indispensable to the concept of the operations and approach to the field work. It revealed that although there had been some logging and farming nearby, the area where York fought had been left undisturbed. Thus, we could expect a fairly well-preserved excavation. Therefore, with minor alterations and some erosion, the terrain would be fairly close to what it was nearly a century ago and therefore, the location of the artifacts should generally match where the records of the battle claimed the action occurred.

By the time that the field work began in earnest, the analysis of the archival sources had narrowed down the search area to a 100 square meter area of the Argonne Forest. There was no need to fish for artifacts on a broad large scan. The sources going back to 1918 had consistently pointed to one area of the Argonne where the York action occurred. Beside the extensive archival research, the work to support the actual field work actually commenced in 2002 with the aforementioned walking this specific ground

in the Argonne with an eye on any evidence of the battle (without actually disturbing the earth). This included map the area to interpret the finds of the surface survey.[1075] This initial surface survey was central to the work in that it already had pinpointed several key locations connected with the York battle (such as the Endriss trench). [1076]

Over time, and after some 100 days of field work, the York story slowly came together. It seemed that indeed that the York site was never actually lost, but rather poor research and premature claims had confused those interested in this portion of history. However, even with a high degree of confidence over the finds, and their locations being consistent with the history, more was desired to confirm this assessment. To do this, Dr. Douglas Scott, one of the world's preeminent ballistic forensic analysts offered to scientifically evaluate the 3.06 and .45 cartridge casings and bullets that we assessed were fired by York. As mentioned, the Tennessee York Project team had their .45 cartridges evaluated, and all were found to come from a revolver (not York's weapon), posing a very damaging setback to their assertions. Therefore, it was with some trepidation that the artifacts were set to Dr. Scott by the Center of Military History, in Washington, DC (which has custody of the preponderance of the York artifacts). His assessment and evaluation will be discussed in considerable detail in a later chapter,

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[1075] Interview with Dr. Susan Blair, Department of Archeology, University of New Brunswick, 8 May 2012.

[1076] Thomas F. King, "The Archeological Survey: Methods and Uses," US Department of Interior, Washington, DC; 1978, 1-15; Heather Burke and Claire Smith, *The Archeologist's Field Handbook,* (Crow's Nest New South Wales, Australia; 2004), 64-88.

however, he confirmed what we had excavated indeed came from the type of side arm and rifle that York used.[1077]

Thus, using an academic derivation of the design methodology, bolstered by a disciplined and holistic approach to pinpointing the York site, it seems that this location has been found. In considering this research methodology, what is clear was that there never has been such a rigorous, detailed and well rounded approach to any such action in the American Meuse-Argonne Campaign of 1918 has ever been conducted in the region. Although the research, screening criteria, terrain analysis and unit doctrinal templating are sufficient in themselves to confirm the discovery of the York site, it is logical to suggest that the results of Dr. Scott's scientific evaluation of the artifacts effectively ends the debate for any informed individual.

[1077] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 10.

Chapter 16 - Where is the York Battlefield?

Using German and American archival data find the York site

General Lindsey: *"York, how did you do it?"*

Alvin York: *"Sir, it is not man power. A higher power than man power guided and watched over me and told me what to do."*
York talking to his brigade commander, during the 1919 Army battlefield investigation.

Although the battle near Châtel Chéhéry was not York's only action in the Great War, it was the one that defined him. Indeed, that one day in October elevated York from obscurity to prominence in America. The challenge is how much of the York story is true. As demonstrated, hyperbole and exaggeration has been embraced as part of the York story. With the exact location of where York fought on 8 October 1918 seemingly "lost to history" it is not an easy endeavor to recreate the events of that battle to ascertain the truth. This is especially difficult to accomplish with the inaccurate 1929 US Army Exposition maps that Colonel Buxton and Captain Danforth sketched for that event eleven years after the battle. Their sketches place the scene of action well outside of the 82nd's area of operations and in the 28th Infantry Division's sector in a deep gorge of no military value. Danforth was clear that he thought the sketch was wrong, "I am afraid that no one, not even York himself, can give you a very accurate lay-out of the fight."[1078]

What does the history say about the location of where Alvin York fought? One thing that is certain is that Sergeant York must have been within 50 meters of the 120th and 125th regimental border to be able to not only engage both units, but to also be able to

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[1078] Major Danforth letter to Captain Swindler, 5 August 1929, and LTC Buxton letter to CPT Swindler, 23 July 1929, RG 165, US National Archives, College Park, MD.

capture prisoners from both of these units. [1079] The location of this regimental boundary was determined by the German divisional commander of the area in October 1918, General Adolf Franke of the 2nd Württemberg. He designated the southern portion "Humserberg" as the border between the 120th and 125th Landwehr Regiments. This is important since York had to perform his deed along this regimental border.

Fortunately, it *is* possible to overcome this apparent gap in the Alvin York story. The key is to use a well rounded forensic historical approach that integrates data from both the German and American sources and field work in the Argonne Forest, in addition to applying military terrain analysis and battlefield archeology to get to the bottom of the York story. Of course, such a multi-discipline approach is no easy endeavor, but is the best way one can filter fact from fiction in this incredible event without relying upon a subjective interpretation to the process.

There is abundant information on this action available in both the United States and Europe to piece together the York saga. The American documentation on York's action includes his military file and scores of unit reports. Even so, American historians

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[1079] See the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry*; Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918; Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Argonne Defensive Line, Ia 5608, 31 August 1918 (Nr. 28) (2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 4 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 5 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 6 October 1918, 1:25,000,; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 7 October 1918, 1:25,000 Ia6503 (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army).

have neglected the abundant German records available on the battle of 8 October 1918. For the German archives, the key is not simply being able to read German, but to understand these in a historic military context. Once this is accomplished, the American and German version of the events pertaining to 8 October 1918 can be pieced together and analyzed in some great detail.

Another valuable piece of history relating to this battle is found in the division investigation that looked into the York feat, which was led and organized by the 328th Infantry Regimental Commander, Brigadier-General Lindsey. When General Lindsey heard about York's action, he suggested that awarding him the Distinguished Service Cross was insufficient to commemorate such an act of heroism. That notwithstanding, the Distinguished Service Cross was awarded, while an inquiry went forward to see if his battlefield feat was worthy of the Medal of Honor. On 1 February 1919, less than four months after York's famous battle, an investigative team led by the division commander, Major-General Duncan and Brigadier General Julian R. Lindsey, returned to the battlefield outside of Châtel Chéhéry. The purpose was to sort fact from fiction, interview his squad members and then to determine if York's actions merited the Medal of Honor. On the day of the physical examination of the battlefield, a light snow covered the ground, but other than that, little had changed since that fateful day. During this terrain walk, York recalled that he and General Lindsey had the following conversation,



Figure 27 Brigadier Julian R. Lindsey, Commander of the 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd Division. The photo was taken in November 1918. Photo: AHEC

General Lindsey: "York, how did you do it?"

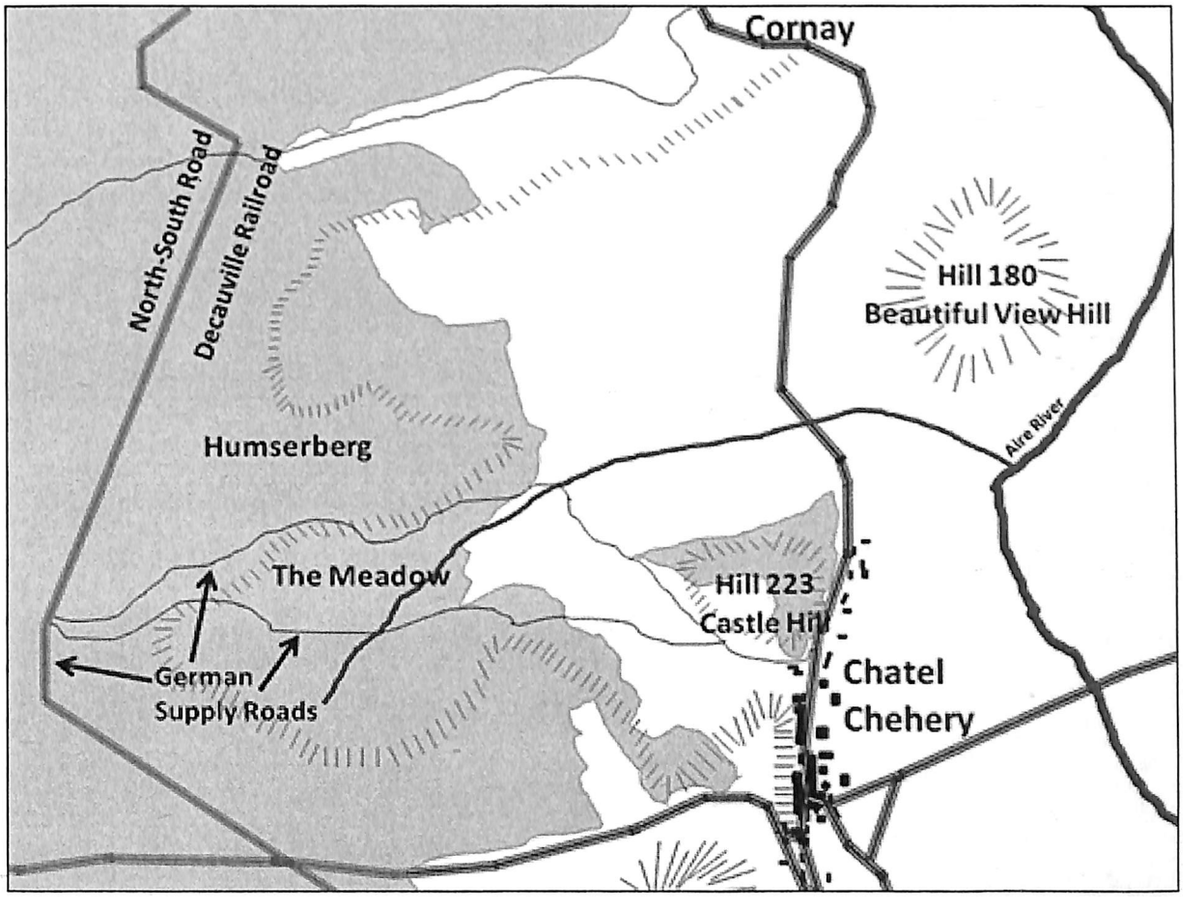
Alvin York: "Sir, it is not man power. A higher power than man power guided and watched over me and told me what to do."

And the general bowed his head and put his hand on my shoulder and solemnly said, "York, you are right."

York: "So you can see here in this case of mine where God helped me out. I had been living for God and working in the church some time before I come to the army. So I am a witness to the fact that God did help me out of that hard battle; for the bushes were shot up all around me and I never got a scratch. So you can see that God will be with you if

you will only trust Him; and I say that He did save me. Now, He will save you if you will only trust Him."[1080]

After walking the ground, reviewing the affidavits of the other squad members, and speaking with York at great length, he was convinced of the exceptional nature of what was accomplished on 8 October 1918, directed that York be recommended for the Medal of Honor, which was approved and awarded him two months later.



Unfortunately, if any maps were used by Lindsey's investigative team, they were lost to history, if they existed at all, for there is no record of them. Yet, the photos and the affidavits from this investigation survive and are the single most important body of

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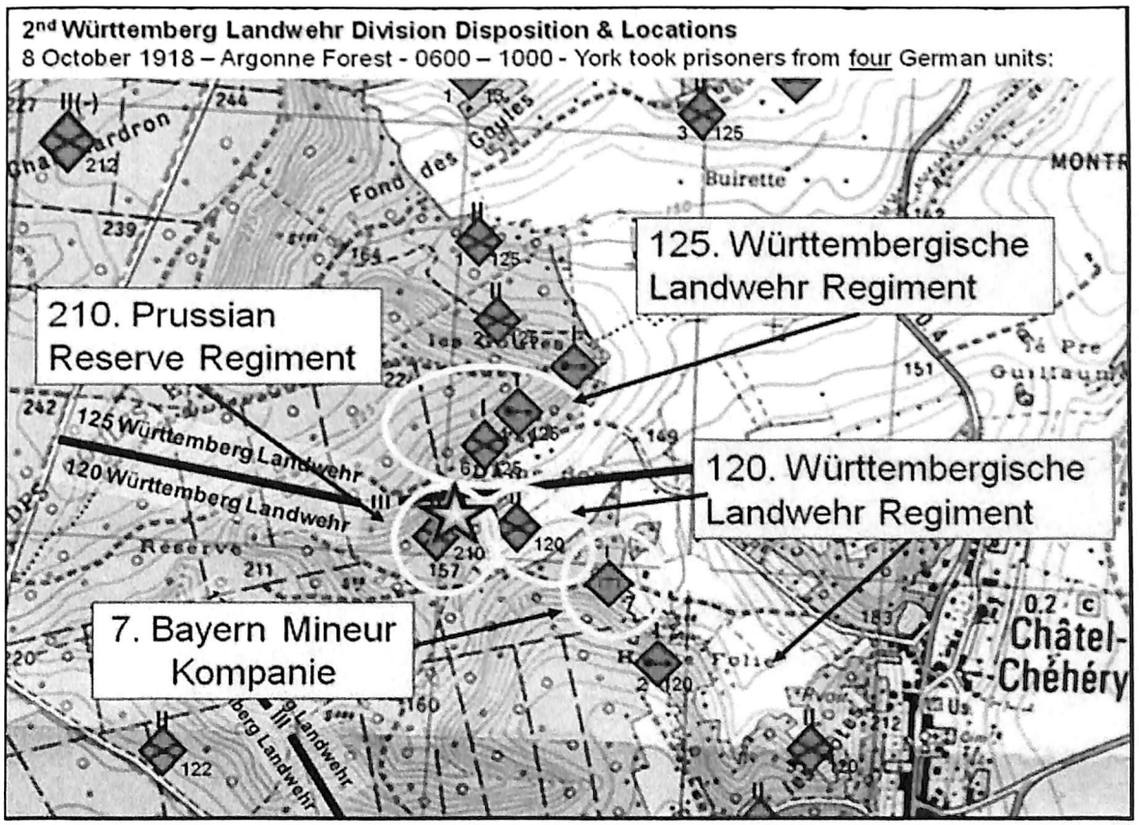
[1080] Alvin York, *Sergeant York,* 188-195.

documentary evidence of what happened on 8 October. The affidavits describing the action and the photos record the specific ground. A note on the back of one of these photos provides an important notation of where York's feat occurred: "One and a half kilometers northwest of Châtel Chéhéry." Meanwhile, the battle ground Châtel Chéhéry has generally been preserved, and the Argonne Forest has reclaimed any parts of the area.

Understandably, research endeavors to sort out the York event of 8 October 1918 have focused upon the American archives and the American sources. Indeed, this is a good place to begin one's research, but, unfortunately this is where the investigations have also stopped. This approach demonstrates a lack of scholarship and is why legend and myth has found its way into the York story. The problem of relying just upon what is available from the American sources alone is that it is impossible to precisely locate the place of York's action solely by them. As previously described, the attack that transpired on 8 October morning went horribly bad, completely throwing-off the 328th's scheme of maneuver in that the Germans not only stopped the Americans, but ultimately channelized them to the meadow on the south-side of "Humserberg" (the center hill northwest of Châtel Chéhéry). Additionally, as the attacking force, the Americans were not firmly fixed to a particular defensive line as the Germans were. This made the idea of pinpoint accuracy of what actually transpired quite difficult, if not impossible especially in light of how the robust German defense completely altered the American plan of attack.

The solution to this problem was to scour the German archives to ascertain how the Germans describe the event. The German archives contain some two-hundred primary source German archival documents and books not available in the United States

that provided not only maps and overlays, but detailed battle accounts that proved quite accurate from a defender's point of view. These German fill the gaps in the American reporting and documents and allow the site of York's actions to be located with a high degree of certainty.



By fusing the relevant data from the American and German sources, it was quite evident that there was only one possible area in the entire Argonne Forest of France where this event could have happened. The location needed to be along the boundaries of the three German regiments involved in the York action. Interestingly, in over four-years of war, there was no moment when the 120th Württembergische Landwehr Regiment, the 125th Württembergische Landwehr Regiment, and the 210th Prussian Reserve Regiment,

served together, except for the morning of 8 October 1918.[1081] This narrowed down the search area significantly thanks in large part due to an overlay found in the German archives.[1082] The star on the following map denotes the only area that fits this historical requirement. From this deduction, it is clear that the York site must be at or near the location depicted on the map. These two sources tell us exactly where York fought.[1083]

Narratives and antidotal evidence in these German primary documents and accounts (primarily regimental histories) further reinforce this interpretation. In 1918 many of the German positions were improvised to respond to the contours of the American attack. One of the important finds was that several of the key German participants referred to a trench near the meadow where the fight took place.[1084] There was only *one* trench anywhere near the meadow in 1918, quickly narrowing the options

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[1081] Lapple, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926); Gustav Strohm, Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120, (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922); Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921).

[1082] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Argonne Defensive Line, Ia 5608, 31 August 1918 (Nr. 28) (2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 4 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 5 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 6 October 1918, 1:25,000, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 7 October 1918, 1:25,000 Ia6503 (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army).

[1083] Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army),
Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army).

[1084] "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Potsdam, Germany (1929); 2nd Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Report, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army notebooks 4, 5), 6-9 October 1918

for the York action when matched to the corresponding unit boundaries of the three key German regiments involved.[1085] Not coincidentally, this lone trench is 1 1/2 kilometers northwest of Chatel Chéhéry, just as the annotation on the photo from 1919 states where the York site was located.[1086]

This hard evidence pointing to the site of York's action notwithstanding, it is important to locate. Humserberg is of great importance to the search for the York site, because it was the hill that overlooked the York site and from which German machine-gunners fired upon York and the other sixteen Americans. The Germans mention two locals northwest of Châtel Chéhéry as "Humserberg." This is significant in that the German and US records state that this land mass sat astride the boundaries of the 120th and 125th Württembergische Landwehr Regiments. We know with certainty that it was here that Alvin York fought and captured soldiers from both of these regiments. But which hill is it?

The customary location of *Humserberg* is the hill 1 1/2 kilometers northwest of Châtel Chéhéry (west of Schlossberg and Hill 180). The other is the high-ground north of this location, a little more than two kilometers from Châtel Chéhéry. Thankfully, this variance is not too daunting to overcome as both of these hills and are geographically connected to each other and both can be rightly called Humserberg. Just as hills and

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[1085] 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918.
[1086] York site photographs, Army Historical Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

mountains in both North American and Europe often include ridges, saddles, and usually not a solitary high point, so it is with this Humserberg.[1087]

It is important to note that the preponderance of the documents written in October 1918 call the hill 1 1/2 kms northwest of Châtel Chéhéry proper *Humserberg*. This is confirmed by the 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division battle disposition overlay from 7 October 1918, which labels Humserberg as the hill 1 1/2 kms northwest of Châtel Chéhéry and as the terrain feature astride the 120th and 125th Württembergische Landwehr Regiments. The unit battle chronicles written during the operation are in agreement with this conclusion.[1088]

[1087] Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Argonne Defensive Line, Ia 5608, 31 August 1918 (Nr. 28) (2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 4 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 5 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 6 October 1918, 1:25,000, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 7 October 1918, 1:25,000 Ia6503 (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Potsdam, Germany (1929); Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921).

[1088] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army). Also, see the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, a m*assive work of 454 pages containing 29 photos, 2 color maps, a divisional organization chart in color, reprints of commendations received by the division, and a complete regimental roster with brief service histories of all men serving in the regiment; Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army)

The chief drawback regarding the Danforth/Buxton sketches is that they place York's action about a kilometer south of the 125th Landwehr Regiment. This challenge alone disqualifies their map. It was a 125th's machine gun that York fought against and from whence he collected prisoners, which included Lieutenant Paul Lipp. Furthermore, neither Danforth nor Buxton witnessed nor traversed the York scene of action, making their contribution rather questionable as they relied upon hearsay. Because of this, the Danforth/Buxton map is beyond all doubt wrong.

Additionally, the Danforth/Buxton location is impossible from a logical military terrain analysis perspective. It places the York action on the narrow southern slope of a distant hill which was 600 hundred meters away from action. This location makes absolutely no sense militarily as it is not able to influence the fight in the valley, being restricted by hills and geographic dead-space. Further analysis of the terrain reveals that the Danforth/Buxton location lacks line of sight, observation and is a military "dead zone," meaning that it is not key terrain, nor able to influence the outcome of any fight in the area and therefore could be easily blocked, contained, or bypassed.[1089]

Moreover, the German accounts are clear that the area denoted by Danforth and Buxton was only used during the fighting withdrawal that occurred four-hours after the York fight was over. It was here that the Germans used reverse slope defense to pull Captain von Sick's battalion to safety after the center collapsed north of here due to York's actions hours earlier. General Franke, the 2nd Landwehr Divisional Commander used both the 122th Regiment and his cavalry squadron (reserve) to plug the gap in order

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[1089] See this source for a discussion on this: Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," *Infantry Journal*, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 347.

to prevent the Americans from destroying his two cut off battalions, which were able to breakout (neither of these units fought against York).

The German and American accounts are clear that the 125th machine gunners were in a position to both engage the main body of York's battalion (in the valley west of Châtel Chéhéry) while able to also engage York's squad. Additionally, the bottom of the Danforth/Buxton location includes a near cliff at its base, which does not correspond to the photos taken of York "at the site" in 1919. Finally, using imagery analysis, and shadow analysis of these photos, it is clear that York was facing due south in the photo taken in February 1919. If the Danforth/Buxton position was accurate, York would have to face due west. Danforth's forthright disclaimer that memory and time took a toll on this attempt to reconstruct the battle rather explains the error.[1090]

A recently identified source actually has sufficient data to resolve the Danforth/Buxton conflict and thereby eliminates the need of subjective interpretation regarding the location of the York site. The importance of Captain Bertrand Cox's account is of great significance as he was both the only American officer to traverse the York site at the time and he was a key witness called to collaborate the York story in the 1919 investigation.[1091]

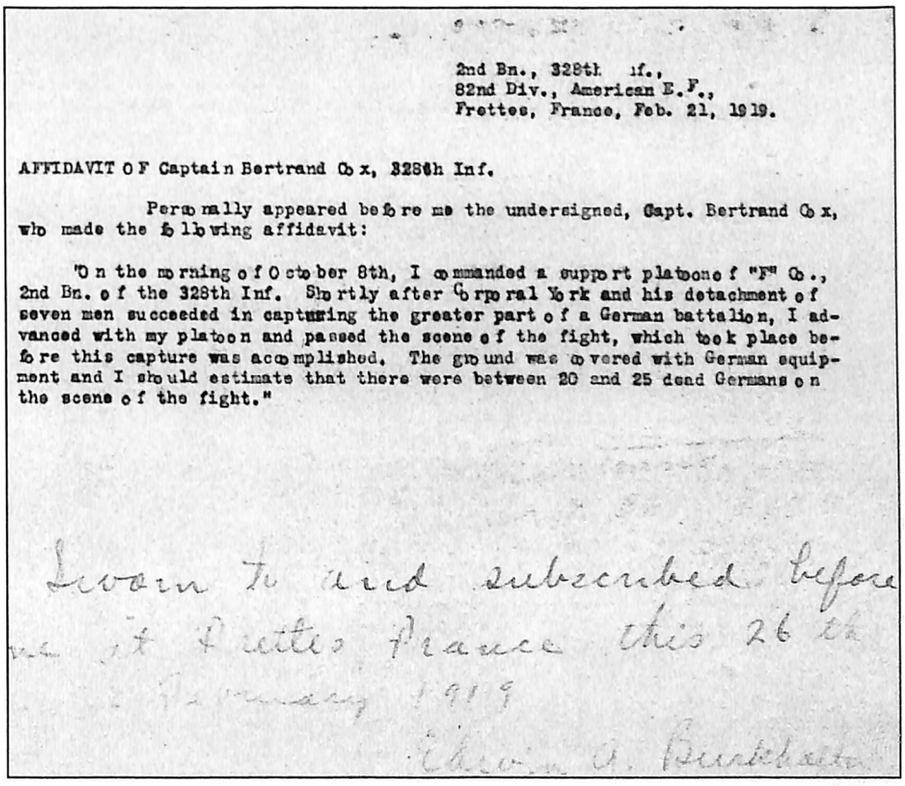
Then a Lieutenant, Bertrand Cox was the support platoon leader for Company F, 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment. He testified that during his unit's movement to the Decauville Railroad, they passed over the ground where York's fight occurred. He

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[1090] Major Danforth letter to Captain Swindler, 5 August 1929, and LTC Buxton letter to CPT Swindler, 23 July 1929, RG 165, US National Archives, College Park, MD.
[1091] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 153.

confirmed that there were 20-25 dead Germans here as well.[1092] His sworn affidavit was given on 21 February 1919 and states the following:

> On the morning of October 8th, I commanded a support platoon of "F" Co., 2nd Bn of the 328th Inf. Shortly after Corporal York and his detachment of seven men succeeded in capturing the greater part of a German battalion, I advanced with my platoon and passed the scene of the fight which took place before this capture was accomplished. The ground was covered with German equipment and I should estimate that there were between 20 and 25 dead Germans on the scene of the fight.[1093]



2nd Bn., 328th Inf.,
82nd Div., American E.F.,
Frettes, France, Feb. 21, 1919.

AFFIDAVIT OF Captain Bertrand Cox, 328th Inf.

Personally appeared before me the undersigned, Capt. Bertrand Cox, who made the following affidavit:

"On the morning of October 8th, I commanded a support platoon of "F" Co., 2nd Bn. of the 328th Inf. Shortly after Corporal York and his detachment of seven men succeeded in capturing the greater part of a German battalion, I advanced with my platoon and passed the scene of the fight, which took place before this capture was accomplished. The ground was covered with German equipment and I should estimate that there were between 20 and 25 dead Germans on the scene of the fight."

Sworn to and subscribed before me at Frettes France this 26th day of February 1919

Chas. A. Burbeck

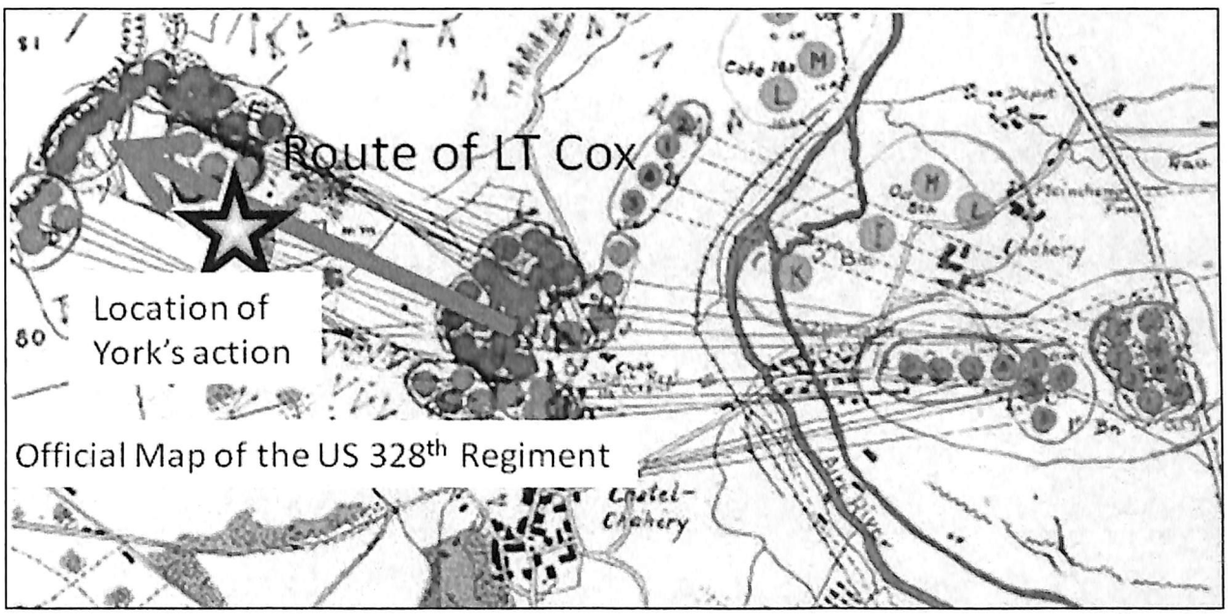
This account is unambiguous in that Captain Cox attests to both being the only officer recorded as crossing the York site within a short period of time of the event, which lays out a clear statement attesting to the location by declaring that it was terrain that his unit passed through. With such an account in hand, it seems a bit specious that there should be any debate regarding the location of the York site. A further inquiry into the 328th Infantry Regiment official

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[1092] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," *Infantry Journal*, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 349-350.

[1093] Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919.

history, published shortly after the war, illustrates the movements of all units during that battle. The red dots on the map below denote each platoon in York's battalion. The superimposed arrows follows the route of Cox's unit, which is precisely across the location identified as the York site.[1094] Captain Cox's affidavit and the corresponding 328th Regimental unit map clearly depict that he led his men across the southern face of Humserberg.[1095] From this, it can be discerned that Company F roughly traveled up the northern road into and against the eastern face of Humserberg and at 1700, occupied the



northwestern slope of Hill 167, which included taking the North-South Road (Decauville Railroad). This is the same center hill one and one-half kilometer northwest of Châtel Chéhéry referred to in German sources as Humserberg. Not only is it logical from a

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[1094] History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.

[1095] Senator Bachman, Alvin C. York, US Congress. Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Report No. 120, 24 February 1937, 2.

military perspective, but is also confirmed by both American and German eye-witness reports.[1096]

Captain Cox was the only American officer in the historical records to have traversed "the York site" within hours of the action.[1097] The importance of Cox's testimony is highlighted by the fact that it was included in York's Medal of Honor recommendation, submitted by the 82nd Division Commander (Major-General Duncan) and signed by General John J. Pershing himself.[1098] Unfortunately, his account has never been used in American research into the battle, but his sketch collaborates the historical assessment of the York site being at the base of Humserberg, 1 1/2 kms northwest of Châtel Chéhéry.

Cox's testimony was collaborated by several sources. Lieutenant Colonel Buxton includes it in the division's history that was published in 1919, saying, "...Cox passed the scene of this fight during the forenoon with a portion of F Company. He estimates that approximately twenty dead Germans lay on the hillside."[1099] The 328th Infantry Regiment's official history includes an important piece of information that depicts the movement of each platoon, there seems little conflict or doubt as to where the site could be other than the location at the base of the center hill.[1100] This route is in the official

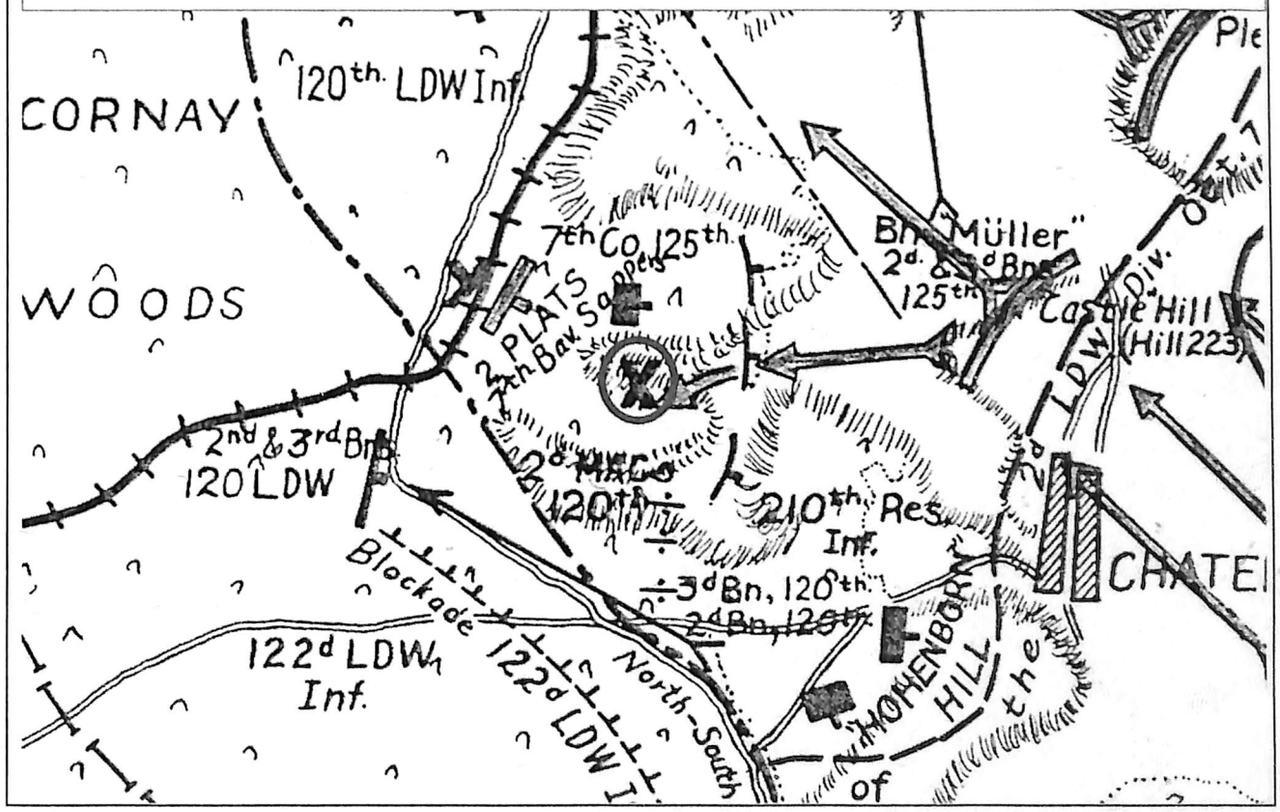
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[1096] History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.
[1097] George Brand Duncan, *Reminiscences, 1886-1919*, University of Kentucky, 153.
[1098] Letter from General Pershing on 22 March 1919 to the American Expeditionary Force Adjutant General. See also Affidavit of Captain Bertrand Cox, given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919.
[1099] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63.
[1100] History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.

American Battle Monuments Commission study on the operations of the 82nd Infantry Division in 1918 as well.[1101]

This ignores the question as to where the Germans say the battle occurred. After the war, the Germans conducted an inquiry into what transpired on 8 October 1918. To do this, a group of the officers and enlisted men involved in this battle gathered separately at Potsdam to recount the events. This included most of the key players, such as Lieutenant Paul Vollmer, Lieutenant Paul Lipp, Lieutenant Max Thoma, Lieutenant

German map sketch of the 8 October 1918. The "X" is where they confirm as the location of where Alvin York's action occurred.



[1101] American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War,* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1944).

Kübler, and Sergeant Major Haegele. These soldiers represented the units fighting against York (120th and 125th Württemberg and the 7th Bavarian Mineur Company).[1102] A key account in the search for the York site is this map that this report included from the eyewitness accounts of these officers. Unlike the post-war maps of Danforth and Buxton, who did not participate in the York action, the German officers agree where York's action occurred and their location is congruent with Captain Cox's testimony. Not surprisingly, the German sketch also depicts a company of the 125th Württemberg, under Leutnant Paul Lipp, stationed on the center hill (referred to as Humserberg).[1103] As added affirmation of the accuracy of this German map is the fact that the only trench located anywhere in the area is just east of the "X." The trench is essential in that it was from this location that German Leutnant Fritz Endriss deployed his platoon and ultimately led his failed bayonet attack against York.

A third map confirms this location, the 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division combat deployment overlay related to the 8 October battle. This piece of evidence was recently recovered in the archives. The overlay places Lieutenant Lipp's men on the southern edge of the center hill (Humserberg), northwest of Châtel Chéhéry, confirming and complementing the German eyewitness accounts in addition to the testimony of Captain Cox.

These three map resources and accounts provided a high level of confidence as to where the York engagement occurred. There can be no other logical or historically

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[1102] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.
[1103] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

supported location for the York action to have occurred other than the center hill, northwest of Châtel Chéhéry. Although these provide definitive support to where the York action occurred, there are many more sources to confirm this.

The challenge of finding the York site is less a problem than otherwise believed. This is borne out by photographic evidence recently discovered in the archives. During the February 1919 investigation, an Army combat photographer documented the terrain walk with York by taking a series of photos. A caption on one of the photos is candid as to where York took his commanding general, saying, "Vicinity of Sgt. York's raid, 1 1/2 kilo northwest of Châtel Chéhéry..." In addition, the photographic series matches the terrain of the center "Humserberg" hill as well. The photo and map, with the caption on the back of the photo are displayed on the following figure. Finally, the location is precisely where Captain Cox said where he moved F Company shortly after the York engagement.

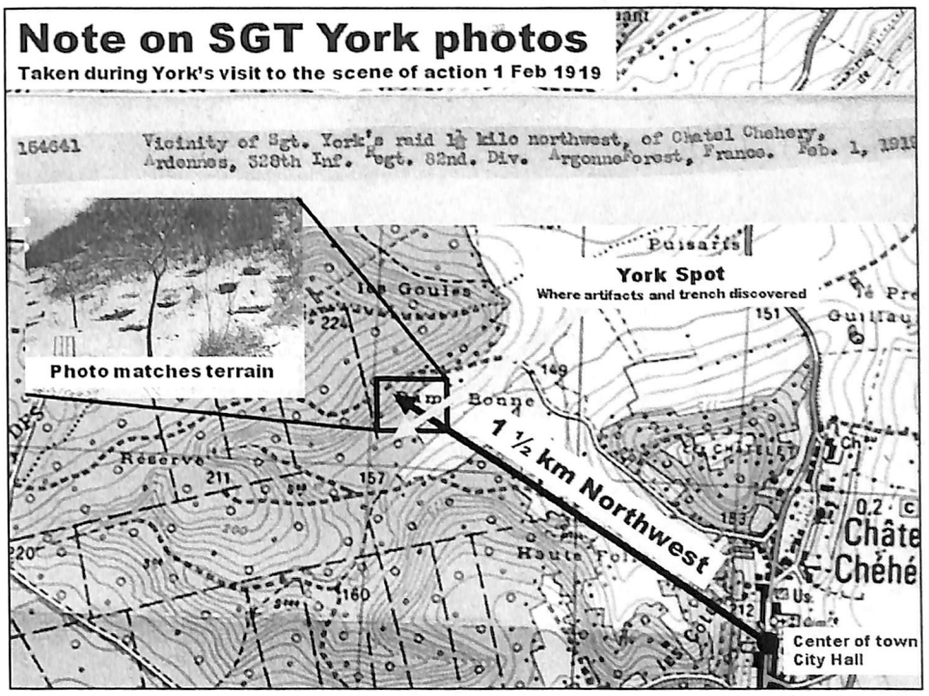
The history is clear that it was here that a group of Americans broke through the German lines (this included York), and then captured Leutnant Paul Vollmer's Battalion Headquarters (1st Battalion, 120th Landwehr Württemberg Regiment). Within moments of accomplishing this, a 125th Landwehr Regiment machinegun on the hill above (Humserberg) under the local command of Lieutenant Lipp opened fire on the Americans. It was this machinegun (and the supporting riflemen) that Alvin York charged and eliminated.[1104] Based upon this well-documented data (consistent with both

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[1104] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army). Also, see the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr

the US and German archival data) the search for the "York Site" took us to the southern slope of Humserberg (the center hill) where the action occurred.

The "York Site" must be consistent with not only the regimental border between the 120th and 125th Württemberg Landwehr Regiments, but also where elements of the 210th Prussian Reserve Regiment arrived. The 210th Prussians were sent on 8 October as a reinforcing unit to support the 120th's counterattack against the Americans. Fortunately, this was the only time in four-years of warfare that there was a convergence of these three regiments: (the 120th Württemberg, the 125th Württemberg and the 210th Prussian. This convergence was also along the southern slope



Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Argonne Defensive Line, Ia 5608, 31 August 1918 (Nr. 28) (2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division).

of Humserberg. With this data, the search for the York Site was narrowed down to a 100 meter area of the Argonne Forest (as depicted on an earlier map).

History provides other clues that are necessary to identify where York fought. The chief among these is the existence of a trench, which both the Germans and Americans discuss.[1105] This portion of the Argonne is far from the front lines, of late 1914 to 1918 trenches and there are very few trenches anywhere near Châtel Chéhéry. Yet, the history states that that a German Platoon, under Lieutenant Fritz Endriss, fought from a trench. In fact, the bayonet attack led by Fritz Endriss came from this trench.[1106] Of this bayonet attack, York said, "In the middle of the fight a German officer and five men done jumped out of a trench and charged me with fixed bayonets."[1107]

The only trench anywhere in this battle were border trenches dug by land owner in the 1600s. One of these border trenches is on the southern portion of Humserberg where Cox moved his Platoon. The location of this trench, combined with the regimental locations of the 120th, 125th and 210th Regiments is of utmost importance. This is one of the most important aspects of the written testimony provided by both the American and German belligerents and the only man-made object remaining on the battlefield to this day. In fact, there is only one trench in the entire valley, above the meadow located along

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[1105] York, *Sergeant York*, 255-276.
[1106] Official History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. 1917-1919. The Bobbs-Merrill Company; Brooklyn, NY, 1919.
Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 4. Stuttgart, Belser: 1920.
"Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt.
Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 (Belser Verlasbuchhandklung, Stuttgart; 1922),161-173.
[1107] Alvin York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*,(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928).

the eastern portion of the 120th, 125th and 210th convergence area. The location of this trench is on target as it is near the three regiment convergence area within 50 meters of the 125th and 120th regimental boundary.[1108]

Testimonials from Germans and Americans say that the location of York's action must also be near two roads,[1109] located in a meadow (where German Battalion Commander Paul Vollmer established his headquarters,[1110] and also along the southern portion of Humserberg,[1111] and near a small stream.[1112] These, combined with the

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[1108] Buxton, Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919, 58-63.
[1109] History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.
Cooke, James J. The All-Americans at War: The 82nd Division in the Great War, 1917–1918. West Port, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999.
"Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt.
120 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, 01 July 1918 – 01 December 1918.
I Battalion, 120 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, translated by Doug Mastriano.
Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63.
[1110] Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 (Belser Verlasbuchhandklung, Stuttgart; 1922).
Das Württembergische Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918, Stuttgart 1920, aus der Reihe: Hugo Flaischen (Herausgeber): Die Württtembergischen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918, Band 4, Belserche Verlagsbuchhandlung Stuttgart; 87 pictures, 2 maps und 21 map drawings.
[1111] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment* of Infantry, Eighty-Second
Division American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.; I Battalion, 120 Landwehr Regiment Battle Account/History 23 September 1918 – 18 October 1918; II Battalion, 120 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion, 120 Landwehr Regiment Battle Account/History, October 191; II Battalion, 120 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch 21 September 1918 through 21 October 1918; III Battalion, 120 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; 125th Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918; I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch.
[1112] Alvin York, Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary,(Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928); History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.;

location of the 210th, 125th and 120th regiments and the "trench," narrows greatly the location of York's battle.

This testimonial based screening criteria related to what and where the York site is located are discussed below in some detail. The first test of the York site, does it agree with historical facts about German units involved and unit defense locations? York took prisoners from the following four German units,[1113]

1. 120th Württembergische Landwehr Regiment, 2nd Württ. Landwehr Division
2. 125th Württembergische Landwehr Regiment, 2nd Württ Landwehr Division
3. 210th Prussian Reserve Regiment, 45th Prussian Reserve Division
4. 7th Bayern Mineur Company (Bavarian Mining Company)

The German archives reveal that, between 1914 and 1918, there is only one location in the entire Argonne where these units served together. The fact that York secured prisoners from each of these units further confirms the location.[1114]

Incidentally, the machine guns must be in a location where the German machine gunners were able to observe the actions of the American 328th Infantry Regiment

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[1113] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army), Gustav Strohm, *Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120,* (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922), 160-166. Also, see the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918.

[1114] Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College; *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* Band 4. Stuttgart, Belser: 1920; *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 122 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* Band 27 Stuttgart, Belser: 1923; *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* Band 38 Stuttgart, Belser: 1926; Mitglieder Verzeichnis des Offiziervereins, Inf-Regt. Kaiser Wilhelm Konig von Preussen (2. Württ.) Nr. 120. (Stuttgart Augustenstr. 13, 1937); *Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120* (Belser Verlasbuchhandklung, Stuttgart; 1922),

trapped in the valley and in the meadow.[1115] That is, this machine gun position have observation of both York and the main battle in the valley to the east. This is one reason why Captain Danforth's guess depicting the scene of the action is so grossly inaccurate as it places the machine gun on the far western side of Hill 2, where there is no line of sight into the valley whatsoever. This notwithstanding, the only position feasible is along the regimental borders of the 120th and 125th as earlier discussed. [1116]

Another clue from the archival data related to the location of the York site is that it must agree with historical facts about German units involved and unit defense locations. Of this, the report of the 120th Regiment stated the following:

> The flank of 6th Company reported an enemy surprise attack. Next, the remnant of 4th Company and personnel from the 210th Regiment were caught by this surprise attack, where Lieutenant Endriss was killed. The company was shattered or was captured. Also First Lieutenant Vollmer ended up in the enemy's hands. Now the situation was worse. Bad news followed more bad news from Châtel to the Schöne Aussicht a large enemy column moved towards the Schliesstal Mulda and the Boulassonbachs [up the valley into the Argonne]. By this, we knew that the enemy was moving against the North-South Road. [1117] The German unit

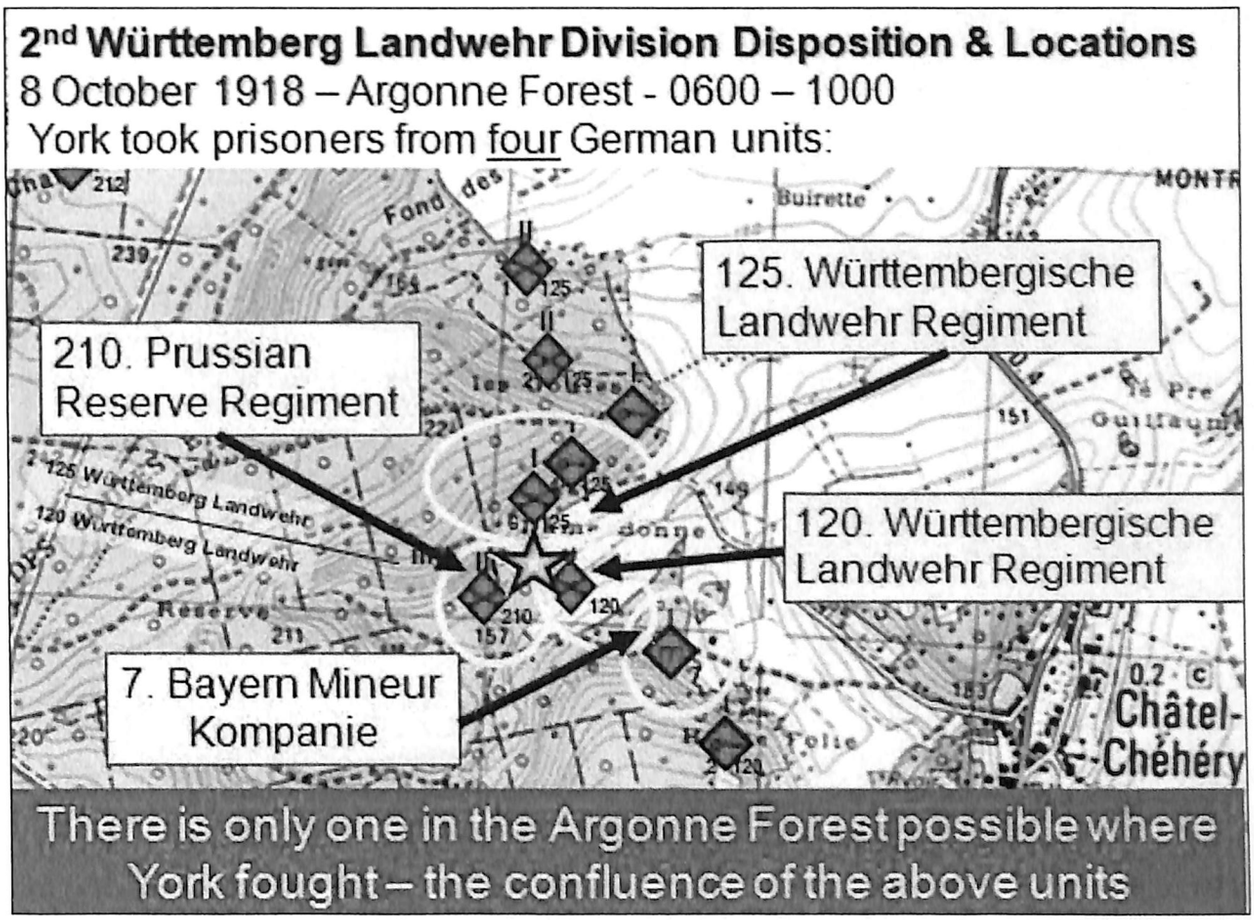
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[1115] Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishchen Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 (Belser Verlagsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart; 1922); Das Württembergische Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918, Stuttgart 1920, aus der Reihe: Hugo Flaischen (Herausgeber): Die Württtembergischen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918, Band 4, Belserche Verlagsbuchhandlung Stuttgart; 87 pictures, 2 maps und 21 map drawings (Herausgeber): Die Württembergischen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918, Band 25. 2nd Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Report, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army notebooks 4, 5), 6-9 October 1918; 2nd Machine Company, 2nd Landwehr Division, Kriegstagebuch, October 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

[1116] Alvin York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928.

[1117] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army). Also, see the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, a* massive work of 454 pages containing 29 photos, 2 color maps, a divisional organization chart in color, reprints of commendations received by the division, and a complete regimental roster with brief service histories of all men serving in the regiment; Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of

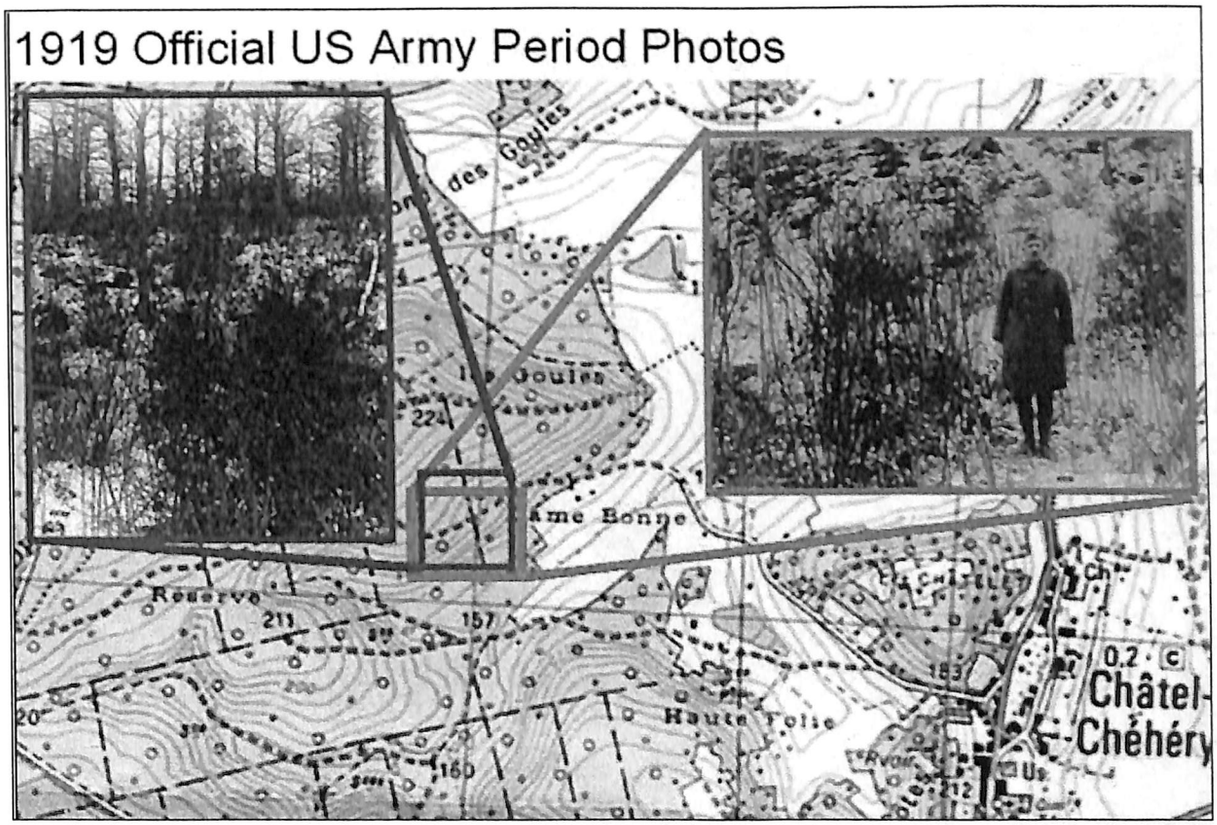
dispositions for October 1918 are very clear and precise in the various German documents.[1118]



German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47)

[1118] General der Artillerie. Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921); Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 4. Stuttgart, Belser: 1920; Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 122 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 27 Stuttgart, Belser: 1923; Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 38 Stuttgart, Belser: 1926; Mitglieder Verzeichnis des Offiziervereins, Inf-Regt. Kaiser Wilhelm Konig von Preussen (2. Württ.) Nr. 120. (Stuttgart Augustenstr. 13, 1937).

Having established that the York location is in the proper area as related to the German unit disposition of 8 October 1918, the next question is whether the terrain of this area, matches photographs taken in 1919 during the inquiry into York's actions? During this investigation, the division's photographer took photographs of the terrain where York performed his heroic deed. The images taken of where York earned the Medal of Honor are superimposed on the above map.



From these photos, shadow imaging demonstrates that York was facing south (just below Humserberg) - confirming our location. Additionally, the photo shows the cut line of the German road along the top of the image. This astounding piece of evidence demonstrates that the site of York's action had to be along the southern edge of Humserberg, as the road is along the top of York's photo. This same road exists in the Argonne today and is the access route to the York monument built by the Americans and

the French. From this assessment of the photographs, it is apparent that the York site is in this vicinity.

The next question to answer is this location of the York site it close to the 1st Battalion, 120th Württemberg Regiment sector? This is of significant importance as the German history is clear that this unit received the brunt of the American attack, as well as encountering York. Of this, the 120th Regimental history says, "Without any artillery preparation, the adversary launched a violent attack and there was heavy fighting, which lasted well into the evening. The enemy was repulsed almost everywhere. 1st BN absorbed the brunt of the enemy attack without wavering, due to its good defensive position."[1119]

The central German figure in the York story is First Lieutenant Vollmer, the commander of 1st Battalion, 120th Württemberg Landwehr Regiment. His testimony states that he made numerous trips between the front and where the 210th Prussians settled down to eat breakfast. As Vollmer was in the midst of a fierce battle against the American attack, the location of the York site had to be near the front where Vollmer traversed. Anything beyond 300 meters would be too far for Vollmer to freely move back and forth – while staying engaged in the battle. The York site as annotated on the previous figure is within the range of the battlefront to allow Vollmer this freedom of movement.[1120]

[1119] Dr. Gustav Strohm, *Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120* (Belser Verlasbuchhandklung, Stuttgart; 1922), translated by Sonja Gleichmann and Doug Mastriano, pp 161-173.

[1120] "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt; 120 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, 01 July 1918 – 01 December 1918; I Battalion, 120 Landwehr Regiment

As to the German and American testimony, the eyewitnesses identified specific terrain features corresponding to where Alvin York engaged the 120th and 125th Württembergische Landwehr Regiments. The correct location must have all of these identifiable terrain features in evidence to be accurate. Both York and Vollmer's testimony agree that there were two roads near the battle. The designated location of the York site is located just 50 meters below the northern German supply road and 100 meters above a southern supply road. Both of these move in an east - west direction from the Argonne Forest to Chatel Chéhéry. They converge at the base of Hill 223. The location is adjacent to these two roads, with York crossing over both of them during the melee.[1121]

A key geographic terrain feature discussed in the historical records is a meadow.[1122] Of this, the Germans said,

> The first battalion, 120th Landwehr, under Lieutenant Vollmer, deployed below Humserberg in the meadow valley west of Châtel Chéhéry... The men of the 210 regiment arrived west of Châtel Chéhéry and stopped in the meadow... Vollmer, the former supply officer of the 125th, deployed along the southern edge of

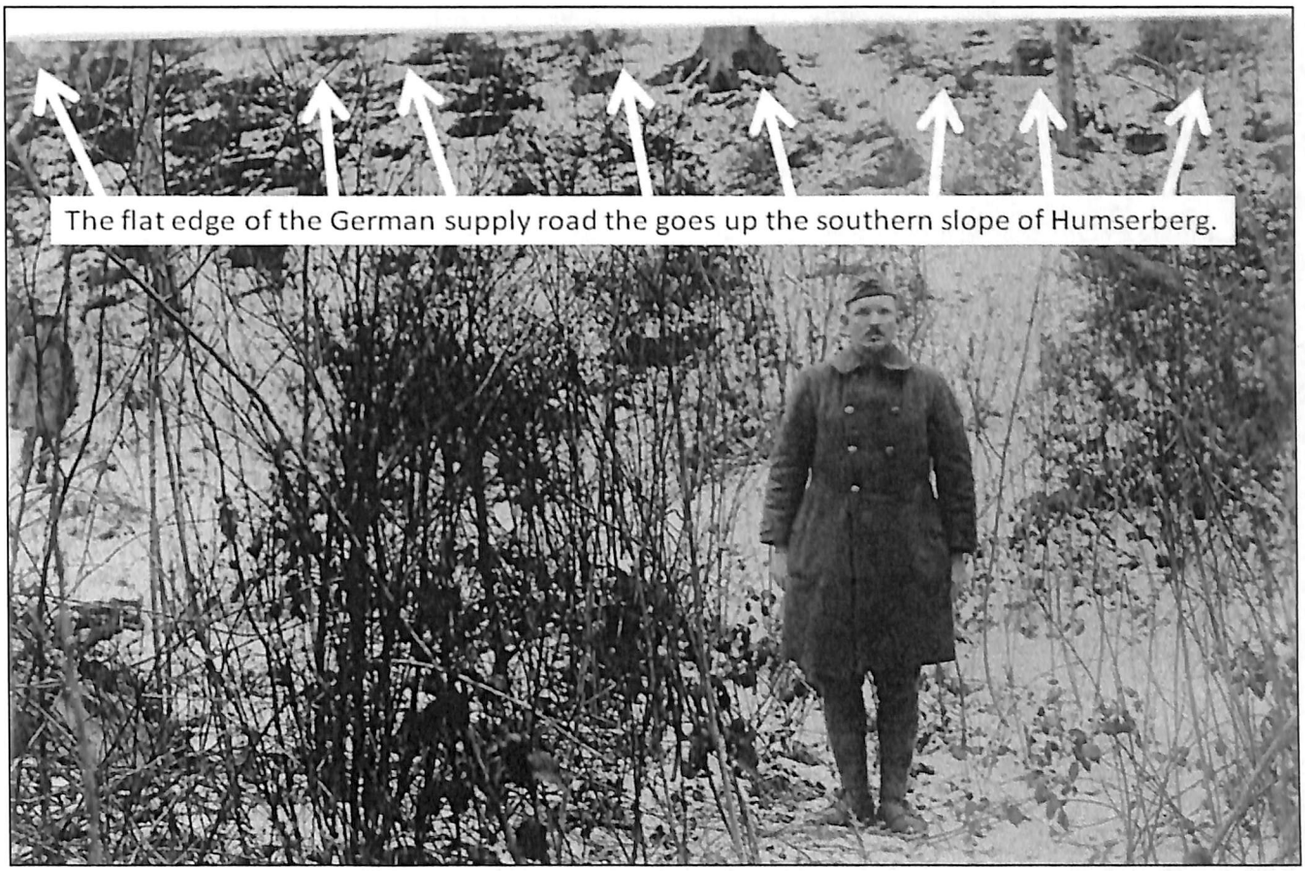
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Kriegstagebuch, I Battalion, 120 Landwehr Regiment Battle Account/History 23 September 1918 – 18 October 1918; Fromm, Oberst z.D.: Das Württembergische Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918, Stuttgart 1920, aus der Reihe: Hugo Flaischen (Herausgeber): *Die Württtembergischen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918*, Band 4, Belserche Verlagsbuchhandlung Stuttgart; 87 pictures, 2 maps und 21 map drawings; Gustav Strohm, *Das Württembergische Landwehr-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918,* Stuttgart 1922, Christian Belser AG, 89 pictures, 1 map, 25 map drawings.

[1121] History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.; Cooke, James J. The All-Americans at War: The 82nd Division in the Great War, 1917–1918. West Port, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999; "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York."

[1122] Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 (Belser Verlasbuchhandklung, Stuttgart; 1922); Das Württembergische Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914 - 1918, (Stuttgart 1920); 2nd Machine Company, 2nd Landwehr Division, Kriegstagebuch, October 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.

Humserberg, in the meadow… the Reserve Infantry Regiment 210 arrived in the meadow."[1123]



The battalion commander of 1/120, Leutnant Vollmer, as well clearly stated that his position was in the forward area of a meadow at the base of Humserberg. This is in line with both the 120th and 125 official histories. The York site as designated on the previous map is congruent with this terrain and is exactly where and how both the divisional and regimental records state as it is both in the meadow and the edge of

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[1123] Viktor-Karl Lapple, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926), 167-173; Dr. Gustav Strohm, Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120, (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922), 160-166; Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60.

Humserberg.[1124] The division and regimental reports go to great lengths to state that the dominant hill where the battle with York occurred was the southern edge of Humserberg. This is in agreement with the aforementioned York site.[1125]

Another unusual feature described in York's remembrance of the 8 October battle is the presence of a stream.[1126] Of this, York said in his diary that just before they captured the German battalion commander, that... "We then jumped across a little stream..." This stream passes through the meadow where Vollmer's 1/120th was deployed and was crossed by York and the other 16 Americans to reach Vollmer's battalion headquarters. Again, the stream location, in addition to several other terrain features, are harmonious with the York site. This particular stream cuts through the meadow from the south and moves in northeasterly direction after it clears the meadow and flows into the valley.[1127] It would have served as a clean water source for Vollmer's

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[1124] "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt; Viktor-Karl Lapple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926), 167-173; Dr. Gustav Strohm, *Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120,* (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922), 160-166; Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60; Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army).

[1125] 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, a m*assive work of 454 pages containing 29 photos, 2 color maps, a divisional organization chart in color, reprints of commendations received by the division, and a complete regimental roster with brief service histories of all men serving in the regiment; Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918.

[1126] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," *Infantry Journal*, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 348F.

[1127] Alvin York, Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928; Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 59-62.

men as it flowed from several local artesian wells, all within one or two kilometers of where his men were deployed.

Additionally, the York site must be near the trench used by Leutnant Endriss' bayonet attack. Of this, York said, "In the middle of the fight, a German officer and five men done jumped out of a trench and charged me with fixed bayonets."[1128] This trench is just slightly northeast of the designated York site by approximately twenty meters and is therefore correctly situated to be part of the fight.[1129] This trench remains one of the most important aspects of the written testimony provided by the Americans and Germans because this battle was largely open warfare – there were no prepared German trenches in the area. The nearest prepared German trench was on the military crest of Hill 223 (Castle Hill). The only trenches that existed in the York incident area were dug during the reign of King Louis the XIV in the 1600s. There are two of these French border trenches in the area; one on the north face of the ridgeline below south of the York site

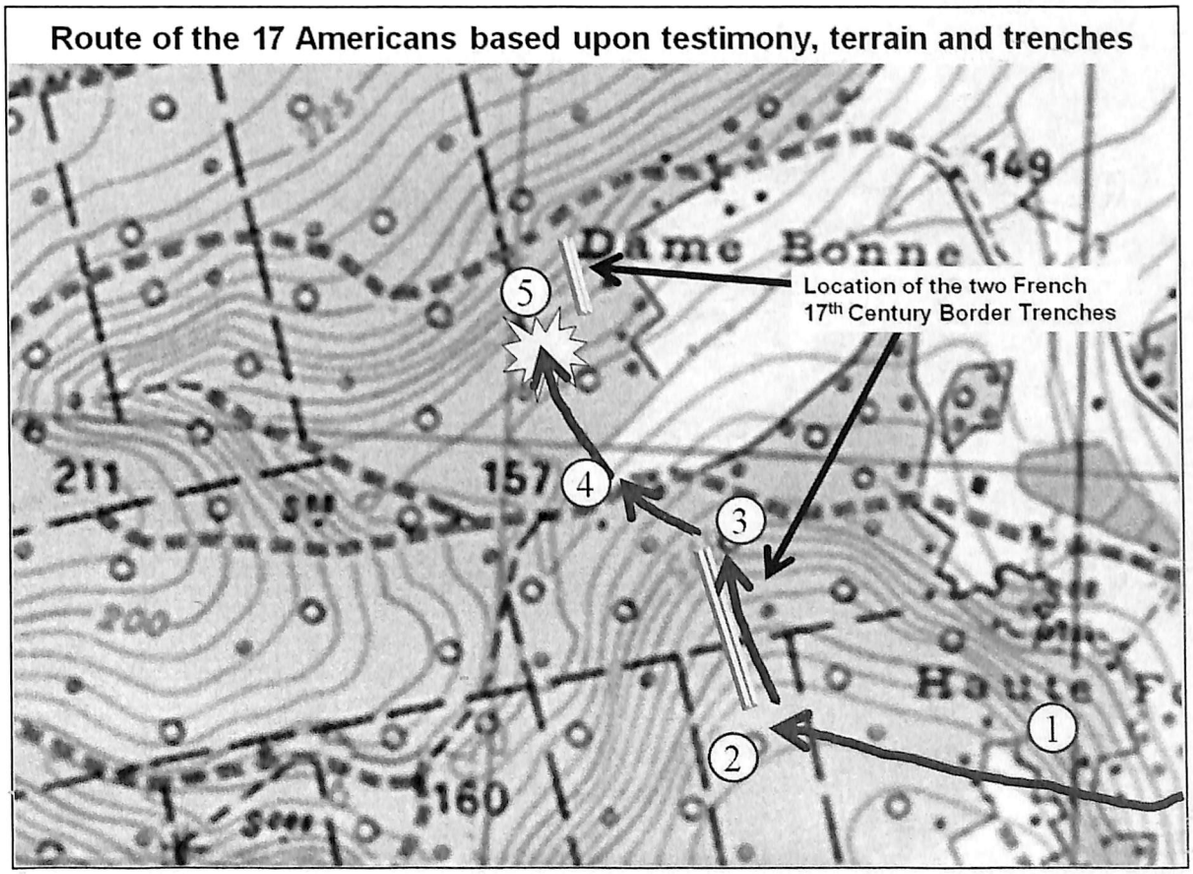
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[1128] Alvin York, Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928).

[1129] Viktor-Karl Lapple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926), 166-173. Also, see the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, a m*assive work of 454 pages containing 29 photos, 2 color maps, a divisional organization chart in color, reprints of commendations received by the division, and a complete regimental roster with brief service histories of all men serving in the regiment; Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army).

and one in the meadow.[1130] These enduring terrain features are but one of eight specific consistent facts lay out from both the German and American sources as to where the York site was located. In fact, the history states that both of these French 17th Century border trenches played a part in the battle and serve as key landmarks as to where the squad of seventeen Americans followed in this action.

Corporal William B. Cutting (Otis Merrithew in civilian life), mentions the



French border trenches in his testimony. Of the movement towards the German rear area, Cutting says that the leader of the group, Sergeant Early, was focused on taking out the

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[1130] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919, (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 59-62; Viktor-Karl Lapple, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926), 166-173; Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 55-56.

machineguns that were firing upon Hill 223. This means that his target was in the center of the valley, with Humserberg being his objective. After maneuvering behind the German first echelon, Sergeant Early ordered his men to "circle back" so that they could outflank the German machine gunners. To do this, from the top of the southern ridge line, Early led his men down "an unoccupied trench and then scattered into the woods."[1131] In fact, it was Early's discovery of this old French border trench that aided with his decision to circle back at this point in the fight. Cutting's statement is bolstered by research into this battle conducted by a *Saturday Evening Post* reporter, George Pattullo. In his now well-known article, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," Pattullo says that the Americans "... came upon an old wide trench, probably built by the French earlier in the war. They entered this and followed it."[1132]

This trench is a straight, roughly, north-south line on the northern face of the southern ridgeline, not designed for battle, but to delineate communal property from private lands. After walking down this trench, the men came upon a German supply road overlooking the meadow between the ridge and Humserberg. After a short distance on this road, Early's men encountered two German sanitation soldiers, with Red Cross armbands, whom they chased to Vollmer's headquarters on the other side of the meadow.[1133] It was here that the second trench (and the only other trench in the region) is located. From here, Leutnant Endriss led his failed bayonet attack against York. This map depicts this with key points designated numerically.

[1131] Robert Ellis Cahill, "America Needed a Hero," in *War Wonders,* Peabody, Massachusetts; 1984), 31.
[1132] George Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," *The Saturday Evening Post,* (26 April 1919), 3-4.
[1133] Cahill, 30-33.

Point 1 designates the route that the Americans followed after safely clearing the battlefield in the valley below. As they slowly progressed in a westward direction, the group encountered the trench described by both York and Cutting at point 2. After holding a discussion with the squad leaders, Sergeant Early decided to take the men down this trench to circle behind the Germans.[1134] This was a sound and logical decision from a tactical point of view. By this point in the battle, the Americans had circumvented the German front lines and were in a sound position to strike into the rear of the enemy machine gunners on Humserberg proper. Additionally, the unoccupied border trench offered concealment for the Americans to reduce their vulnerability to observation from any German troops in the area.

After safely using this trench to move down the north face of the ridge, the Americans arrived at point 3 and "scattered into the woods" according to Cutting and then followed a "winding dirt path."[1135] This description is precisely consistent with what one finds even today at point 3. The border trench empties into the woods and just below it is a "winding dirt path." This dirt path was part of a German supply route carved into the forest in 1915.

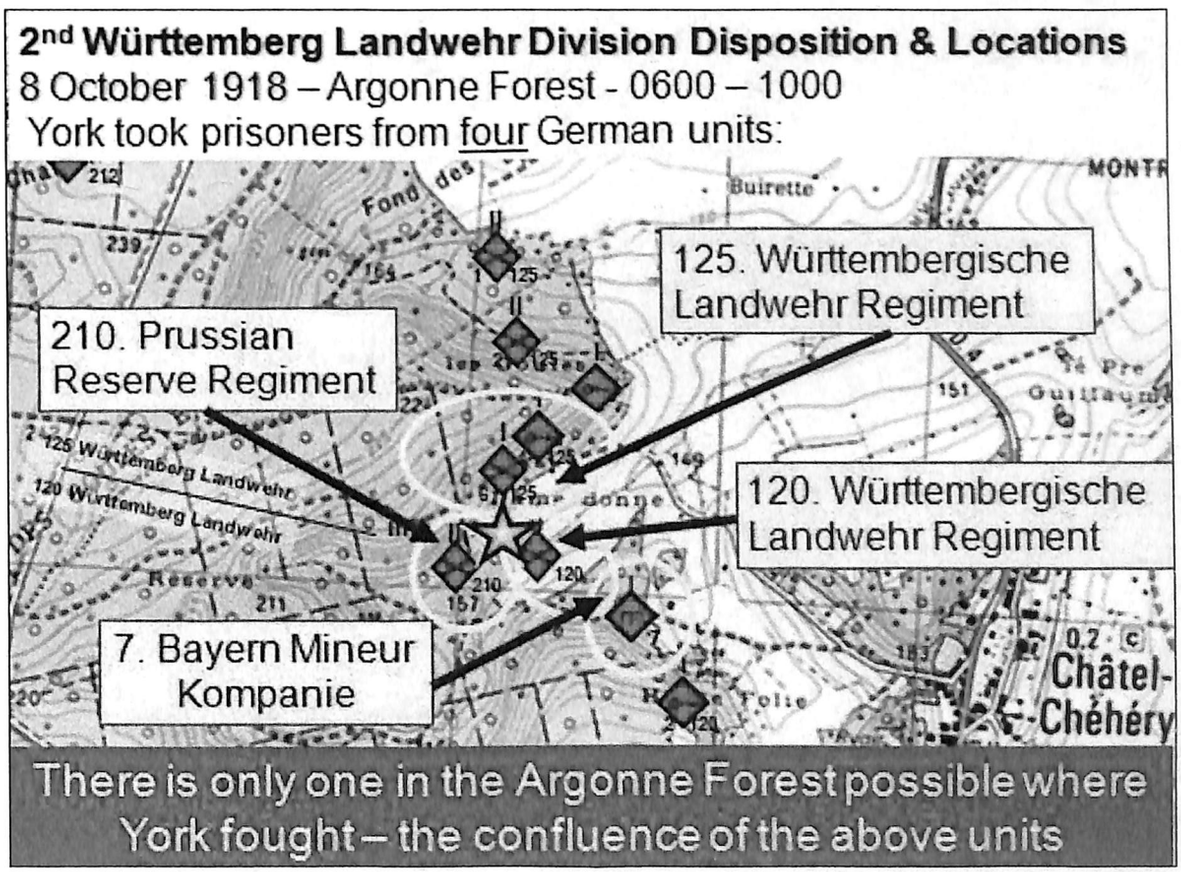
As the men moved down the path, they encountered the German sanitation soldiers, who were fetching water for Leutnant Vollmer's Headquarters, from the nearby stream at point 4.[1136] Upon seeing the Americans, the two German sanitation soldiers fled directly to Vollmer's Headquarters on the other side of the meadow, with the

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[1134] Cahill, 31.
[1135] Cahill, 31.
[1136] York, *Sergeant York, 254-266*; James A. Hoobler, "Sergeant York Historic Area, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVIII, Number 1, Spring 1979, 4.

Americans following closely behind.[1137] This led to the ensuing firefight at point 5, which is adjacent to the other ancient trench in the valley, occupied by Leutnant Fritz Endriss, who was to attack York later in the fight.[1138] Therefore, the American first hand sources concur with this site, particularly that of the testimony of Captain Cox.

The location is also logical from a tactical military perspective and in conformity with period tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs), which shall be discussed later in detail. It is a position where the machine guns were able to engage both the US battalion in the valley and York's element in the meadow below. It also agrees with written



[1137] Cahill, 31.
[1138] York, Sergeant York, 254-266.

German and American testimony in every detail and is located along the flanks of the 120th and 125th Württemberg regiments (only one possible location).

Finally, the detailed description of the terrain, including everything from a small stream to a trench, are all prerequisites that must be in evidence to determine the locale of the York battle. The designated York site has all of these features and fits with a high fidelity to the diverse German and American accounts of that battle. It is the combined results of the terrain analysis, combined with the archival documentation that lends. Indeed, the archival data is fairly conclusive as to where the York site is located, and based upon this information alone; there is no other possible site in the Argonne that is consistent with this position.

Having illustrated the historically documented location of the key German units engaged against York in the previous chapter, the next question is this in agreement with German and American tactics techniques & procedures (TTPs)? Reviewing the terrain from a tactical perspective, this is not only logical from a military perspective, but is also in conformity with period tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs). It is a position where the machine guns were able to engage both the US battalion in the valley and York's element in the meadow below. According to German military doctrine, the machine gun was not held in reserve and was used extensively in support of both offensive and defensive operations. The deployment of this machinegun along this position is consistent with German military doctrine for this asset and was a site with

excellent observation and line of sight.[1139] In this battle, the 2nd Landwehr deployed its machine gun assets the night prior to the American attack to be in a location to engage them from three sides.[1140] The key terrain for this action was the center hill or Humserberg, which dominated the entire area. This is why the 125th Landwehr Regiment was positioned here in support of the repulse of the American attack.[1141]

Here, along the flank of the German 125th and 120th Regiments, is where York had his action, at the base of "Humserberg."[1142] Both the German and American records describe how on the morning of 8 October, a group of Americans broke through the German flank, captured the 120th Battalion Headquarters (under Vollmer) and then proceeded to engage in a fire-fight with the 125th Landwehr on the hill above (Humserberg – the center hill) under the local command of Lieutenant Paul Lipp.[1143]

[1139] Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 153-187.

[1140] See the following book for a personal description of the employment of German machineguns in both offensive and defensive battles; Franz Seldte, *M.G.K.*, (Leipzig, Germany, K.F. Koehler; 1929).

[1141] Viktor-Karl Lapple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926), 166-173. Also, see the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, a* massive work of 454 pages containing 29 photos, 2 color maps, a divisional organization chart in color, reprints of commendations received by the division, and a complete regimental roster with brief service histories of all men serving in the regiment.

[1142] Strohm, 160-166. Also, see the following reports and unit histories; Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Argonne Defensive Line, Ia 5608, 31 August 1918 (Nr. 28) (2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 4 October 1918, 1:25,000.

[1143] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army). Also, see the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr

Having demonstrated that the site for the York battle is congruent with both the German and American sources, the next step is to answer if it is logical from a tactical military perspective. During the battle for the Argonne, the German Imperial Army used the natural lay of the terrain to minimize vulnerability to enemy fire and canalize enemy movement.[1144] The location of the York site must make sense from such a tactical point of view and be within the tactics, techniques and procedures used by Germany in 1918. The key aspect of this consideration are the machineguns along the military crest of the center hill (Humserberg). The position of the German units around the York site provides clear observation to Castle Hill (Hill 223), which means that the Germans could engage the Americans as soon as they departed Châtel Chéhéry.[1145] In fact, the lay of the

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Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, a m*assive work of 454 pages containing 29 photos, 2 color maps, a divisional organization chart in color, reprints of commendations received by the division, and a complete regimental roster with brief service histories of all men serving in the regiment; Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Argonne Defensive Line, Ia 5608, 31 August 1918 (Nr. 28) (2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 4 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 5 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 6 October 1918, 1:25,000, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 7 October 1918, 1:25,000 Ia6503 (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army).

[1144] Department of the Army, *Intelligence Analysis Field Manual 34-3,* (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the Army; 1990), 4-8.

[1145] Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 153-187.

valley completely favored the defense in that the Germans on Humserberg could engage the Americans at maximum range, while the Americans had very limited ability to respond as they were in lower terrain. This location of the machineguns, with extended line of site is ideal for such a defensive action from the German perspective. The York site as discussed in the German and American archival data is harmonious with this.[1146]

The next consideration is called fields of fire. Fields of fire is the area that



a weapon can cover with fire. The German positions surrounding the York site provide excellent fields of fire. This means that the American battalion could be seen and fired

[1146] Department of the Army, *Intelligence Analysis Field Manual 34-3,* (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the Army; 1990), 4-7 to 4-8.

upon using the maximum effective range of the German weapons.[1147] Therefore, not only could the German defenders observe the Americans in the valley, but they further had excellent fields of fire from which to engage them.[1148]

Cover & Concealment is the next aspect of terrain analysis to evaluate and is something that the Germans would have considered carefully for this battle. Cover is the ability of gaining protection from direct and indirect fires. Concealment is the ability to secure protection from ground and aerial observation.[1149] The area surrounding the York site provides ample cover and concealment due to the nature of the forest. That is the Germans, by using the lay of the land, sunken roads, and forest vegetation, established effective cover and concealment to support their defensive plan.[1150]

Another aspect of terrain analysis is obstacles, which includes both natural & man-made terrain features that stop, delay, impede, divert, restrict or canalize movement. Of this, the Army manual states, "Obstacles, whether artificial or natural, are very important considerations in the conduct of terrain analysis. Obstacles significantly impact a force's ability to maneuver or move rapidly through an area."[1151] Here, the Germans used the hilly terrain and the steep ridges to in effect channel the American attack into a

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[1147] Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 153-187.
[1148] Department of the Army, *Intelligence Analysis Field Manual 34-3,* (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the Army; 1990), 4-8.
[1149] Department of the Army, Field Manual 34-130: Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, (Washington, DC, US Army; July 1994), 2-11.
[1150] Department of the Army, *Intelligence Analysis Field Manual 34-3,* (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the Army; 1990), 1-4 through 4-8 to 4-9.
[1151] Department of the Army, *Intelligence Analysis Field Manual 34-3,* (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the Army; 1990), 4-10.

kill zone, which is precisely what transpired that 8 October 1918 morning.[1152] For the American attack, the high ridges and thick forests of the Argonne were in effect obstacles that limit and canalize their movements to the valley where they would be susceptible to German fires. This sharp high ground, fortified with machineguns and infantrymen became an obstacle.[1153]

Of all the considerations in the construct of military terrain analysis, identifying key terrain is perhaps the most important. Key terrain is an area or feature whose control affords a marked advantage to a belligerent. That is, whoever controls a specific terrain feature in battle may directly influence the outcome of the battle.[1154] There are numerous examples from the annals of history of terrain playing a decisive part in the outcome of both wars and battles. A prime example is how the large farm structure at Hougoumont blocked Bonaparte Napoleon's advance on the right flank of Wellington's line and thereby determined, or at least greatly influenced the outcome of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Another example is how the Federal Army held the vital key terrain of Little Round Top and Culp's Hill at the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, and thereby, was able to defeat Confederate General Robert E. Lee's numerous assaults upon their line. It is in a like manner that terrain here also played a decisive role in the outcome of this final battle of the Argonne.

[1152] Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60.
[1153] Department of the Army, Field Manual 34-130: Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, (Washington, DC, US Army; July 1994), 2-14.
[1154] Department of the Army, *Intelligence Analysis Field Manual 34-3,* (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the Army; 1990), 4-10.

There is the prospect of a terrain feature being so critical to an engagement that it be considered decisive terrain. "Decisive terrain is that terrain which, if not controlled or if controlled by the opponent, significantly."[1155] During the 8 October 1918 battle of the Argonne west of Châtel Chéhéry, the decisive terrain was the center hill that the Germans called Humserberg. Whoever held this hill at the end of the battle would win because this hill controls all movement in the area.[1156] Additionally, from this area was the marshalling area for follow-on attacks into the Meuse Valley or against the North-South Road in the forest proper.[1157] Indeed, Humserberg was a sort of gateway, or hinge that controlled access into the Argonne Forest between the French villages of Apremont, Châtel Chéhéry and Cornay. In the end, this terrain feature could not be bypassed or avoided if one intended to win the battle at hand.[1158]

It is because of Humserberg that the 125th positioned a ring of machineguns along the eastern and southern slope of this hill. It was here, along the center hill's southern slope that the engagement between York and the 125th Landwehr machine guns occurred on the southern portion of Humserberg.[1159] This fact is clearly stated in the German records and corresponds to the deployed location of Vollmer's 1st Battalion, 120th Landwehr Regiment.[1160] The fight had to occur here in order to take the pressure off of York's battalion, which was trapped in the valley east of where he performed his

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[1155] Department of the Army, *Intelligence Analysis Field Manual 34-3,* (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the Army; 1990), 4-10.
[1156] Department of the Army, Field Manual 34-130: Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, (Washington, DC, US Army; July 1994), 2-14.
[1157] Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60.
[1158] J.M. Tillman, 82nd Division Field Orders, History of Operations, Great War, 82nd Division Archives and Museum, (Fort Bragg, NC) 1929.
[1159] Franke, 52-60.
[1160] Strohm, 160-166.

heroic deed. Winning control of any other hill in this valley would have no significant effect upon this particular engagement.[1161] Control of Humserberg proved decisive to the outcome of the Battle of the Argonne, as the loss of it forced the Germans to retreat from this area the next day.[1162]

Furthermore, the York fight had to occur here, at the base of Humserberg to take the pressure off of York's battalion, which was trapped in the valley east of where he performed his heroic deed. Once this hill was cleared, the US 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment was able to advance and achieve their objective. This explains why the German high command was willing to deploy two regiments (the 210th and 212th Prussian Reserve Regiments) to the area.[1163] These reserves were committed at a time when the Germans were woefully limited on extra forces.[1164]

Avenues of approach is the route a force uses to seize its objective or key terrain. This focuses the direction of an attack and therefore requires good lines of communications, some cover and concealment, reasonable mobility and little canalization.[1165] The area of operations surrounding the German positions, on and around German-occupied Humserberg, provides two axis of advance to counterattack for the

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[1161] Franke, 52-60.
[1162] Department of the Army, *Intelligence Analysis Field Manual 34-3,* (Washington, DC, Headquarters, Department of the Army; 1990), 4-10.
American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe,* Washington,, DC., United States Printing Office; 1938), 227-232.
[1163] Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60.
[1164] "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Potsdam, Germany (1929); 2nd Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Report, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army notebooks 4, 5), 6-9 October 1918; 2nd Machine Company, 2nd Landwehr Division, Kriegstagebuch, October 1918, Baden-Württemberg Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart.
[1165] Department of the Army, Field Manual 34-130: Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, (Washington, DC, US Army; July 1994), 2-18.

Germans. The York site is fully supported by these precepts of terrain analysis and German tactical doctrine of this time.[1166]

Analysis of the terrain surrounding the York site using military terrain analysis demonstrates that the area is logical from a military perspective. It provides excellent observation, exploits the advantages offered by the dense Argonne Forest and rugged hills, has good fields of fire, makes use of key terrain to the advantage of the Germans, employs natural obstacles to defeat the American attack and has two axis of advance to support the planned German counterattack.[1167]

Additionally, the area favored the German defensive scheme. The Germans had a concept of operations consistent with their doctrine. Once the tactical advantage was achieved, the Germans intended to transition to the offensive to retake the lost ground and to secure their position in the Argonne. Of this defensive design, the US Army manual *Operations* states;

> D*efensive operations* are combat operations conducted to defeat an enemy attack, gain time, economize forces, and develop conditions favorable for offensive or stability operations. The defense alone normally cannot achieve a decision. However, it can create conditions for a counteroffensive operation that lets Army forces regain the initiative. Defensive operations can also establish a shield behind which stability operations can progress. Defensive operations counter enemy offensive operations. They defeat attacks, destroying as much of the attacking enemy as possible. They also preserve control over land, resources, and populations. Defensive operations retain terrain, guard populations, and protect critical capabilities against enemy attacks. They can be used to gain time and economize forces so offensive tasks can be executed elsewhere.[1168]

[1166] Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60.
[1167] Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 153-187.
[1168] United States Army, *Operations FM 3-0,* (Washington, DC., Headquarters, Department of the Army; 2008), 3-10 to 3-12.

This is precisely what the Germans intended for that battle. The first phase of their operation was to defeat the impending American attack, using the combined effects of the terrain and concentration of fire power. After having accomplished this, a four-regiment strong counterattack, that would include the 120th and 125th Württemberg Landwehr Regiments (2nd Württemberg Division) and the 210th and 212th Prussian Reserve Regiments (45th Prussian Division) would be launched to push the Americans out of the valley and off of the hills.[1169] Achieving this, the eastern area of the Argonne Forest between Apremont and Cornay would be clear of Americans and secure from a German military perspective. This would safeguard their vital North-South Road in the midst of the Argonne and pose a continued threat to the American main attack up the Meuse Valley below.[1170]

The location of the York site is consistent with military terrain analysis. The engagement between York and the machine gunners on the center "Humserberg" hill proved decisive in that it unhinged the German defensive plan.[1171] The center hill was key to the German plan, as it controlled movement along the two avenues of approach into the Argonne.

Indeed, General Franke, the local German divisional commander, reacted swiftly to the loss of Humserberg. He sent up the 2nd Landwehr's operational reserve, a squadron of cavalry and additionally had his two units in the south conduct a reverse slope defense, which resulted in a short battle for the deep ravine about a kilometer away

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[1169]Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60.
[1170] Strohm, 160-166.
[1171] von Merkatz, 153-187.

from here.[1172] Nonetheless, without control of Humserberg, the center hill, the battle was all but lost. The 125th Württemberg and 212th Prussian Regiments still launched a successful counterattack at 10:30 that resulted in capturing one-hundred Americans. But, with Humserberg in American hands, the victor of this battle, and the fate of the Argonne Forest was forever sealed.[1173]

It seems that the York site was never actually lost, but rather poor or incomplete research had blurred the facts. This combined with the embrace of legend, or myth, made it seem daunting, if not impossible to find the York site. Yet, the documentation has been available for decades, waiting for someone to fuse the German and American accounts together. From the analysis of these sources, there is but one place where the York action could have occurred, precisely one and one-half kilometers northwest of Châtel Chéhéry. If this is true, then, battlefield archeology should confirm this.

[1172] Franke, 52-60.
[1173] Strohm, 160-166.

Chapter 17 - Needle in the Haystack?

Using German and American archival data and military terrain analysis to evaluate the York Story

I find that documentary records and oral traditions of the past are usually accurate but not necessarily precise. Archaeological work recovers, records, and interprets an independent data set that can be used to compare, corroborate, or test the documentary and traditional testimonial views of a past event... At the same time, the details that can be teased out of the artifact analysis regarding individual behavior on the battlefield add a level of precision to cite specific interpretations that is difficult to find in the written sources.

Dr. Douglas Scott, an expert on applying Archaeology on Battlefields[1174]

Having ascertained where the German and American sources say the York site is located and confirming this by means of terrain analysis, it was possible to conduct battlefield archeology. Battlefield archeology is the only way to overcome the often subjective and limited descriptions found in the historical documents. This also enables us to evaluate the eye-witness accounts, to see if the story surrounding the events is in line with what is buried by more than ninety years of forest litter on the once forgotten battlefield in the French Argonne.[1175]

Fortunately, there is sufficient clarity from the German and American records to demonstrate roughly what happened and where. But adding the discipline of physical ground research provides clarity hitherto unknown in this battle. This would not only help

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[1174] Dr. Douglas Scott, "The Archeology of Battlefields," Interview conducted by the Archeology Institute of America, 11 October 2005. Available online at the following website: http://www.archaeology.org/online/interviews/scott.html (accessed 30 July 2011).

[1175] Interview with Dr. Susan Blair, Department of Archeology, University of New Brunswick, 8 May 2012.

us to confirm or deny what we know, but also bring a level of detail and understanding of that engagement not held since 8 October 1918.[1176]

Of course, there must be a degree of caution in this approach. As in any field of study, it easy to be seduced into a hasty conclusion based on the discovery of a surprise artifact that appears to support a preconceived notion. Indeed, the researcher must guard against basing deductions or conclusions on one specific artifact or item such as a button or collar disk. Rather, one should approach this in a holistic historical research manner where the preponderance of the finds recovered should tell the story for us and allows the artifacts speak for themselves.

The reason for such a caution is manifest. The fact of the matter is that a large battle occurred in this area with three American battalions and four German regiments fought in the area. Although the battle lasted little more than a full day, commencing on the afternoon of 7 October on Castle Hill and ending in the afternoon of 8 October with the 28th Division's battle for the ravine 600 meters south of the York site, there are thousands of military artifacts, or battlefield litter, scattered throughout the locale. This is why it is of great importance to "look" in the right area, otherwise one could conceivably find enough battlefield litter to interpret or even fabricate a story.

A central question before discussing the search for battlefield artifacts is just how contained is the area where York fought? Did any other units fight there on 8 October 1918, or even in World War Two? What about French agriculture activity after the war? As far as being "contaminated" by artifacts from other battles, there is a high degree of

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[1176] Dr. Douglas Scott, "The Archeology of Battlefields," Interview conducted by the Archeology Institute of America, 11 October 2005. Available online at the following website: http://www.archaeology.org/online/interviews/scott.html (accessed 30 July 2011).

certainty that the only specific action to have occurred here was York's. The closest unit from York's battalion was Fox Company, which fought up Humserberg some 100 meters to the east of the location.

There is documentation indicating that there was another action within a kilometer of the York site. This action transpired later on 8 October between the 28th Pennsylvania Division and various German units some 600 meters south of the York position in a deep ravine. This was a clearing operation, with the German defenders using reverse slope defense to delay the advance of the Americans. This action did not come close to the York site. Although other battles swirled around the York site, there is no evidence that any other action occurred at this specific location either in the First or Second World War.

Agriculturally, the French largely have left the York battlefield site untouched. Farm pasture activity and any cultivation is no closer than 400 meters to the site. This is due to the rough nature of the Argonne Forest, which has prevented deep penetrations of either agricultural or construction activities near its rugged ravines and boggy artesian wells for time immemorial. The closest invasion of man-made activity into the forest is a dense grove of coniferous trees that was planted on the low southern slope of Humserberg. Thankfully, this ends some fifty feet from the York battle site. Other than this, the battle area has no evidence of man-made intrusion. Archeologically then, the

site is not impacted by other materials, the items to be recovered are essentially surface, and it is a single event/component site.[1177]

The first visits to the battlefield were conducted without metal detectors and was a military terrain analysis review, which spanned from the autumn of 2002 through late 2005. This entailed considering the eye-witness accounts of the battle and then "applying" these testimonies and reports to the actual ground. Indeed, the first actual visits to this site brought much of what was studied to life. Not so surprisingly, the local French historian in the village of Châtel Chéhéry already knew the location of the York site without having spent hundreds of hours scoring over documents in the archives. Coincidently, he pinpointed the York battle precisely where the study of the archival data placed it; behind the only trench in the entire valley. With such an assurance, the study went forward.

Finding the Endriss trench was no problem as this 17th century border trench is still in terrific shape after some 300 hundred years of existence.[1178] Matching the photographs taken in 1919 by the York inquiry to the site was a challenge in that several large trees and other dense vegetation grown since 1919 obscure the view to the German supply road on Humserberg. Yet, if one stands just outside this heavy growth and looks up, everything matches spatially.

Finding the location of the German machinegun in the action was perhaps the easiest endeavor. The site had to be slightly above the German supply road on

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[1177] Interview with Dr. Susan Blair, Department of Archeology, University of New Brunswick, 8 May 2012.

[1178] This supposition was confirmed during an interview with the Mayor of Châtel Chéhéry, France, Roland Destenay, the local French historian, Dr. Lucien Houlemare and the Director of the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, Phil Rivers, in 2006.

Humserberg based upon York's testimony and the German reports.[1179] The leveled ground to support the machinegun position stood out quite plainly carved into the rise above the road and overlooking both the meadow and the valley where the Americans attacked. Furthermore, just behind and above this location are the two sunken roads, which the infantry support platoon would have used as a fighting position.[1180] As mentioned, the line of sight for a machinegun deployed at this location was excellent, ranging out to the hills astride Châtel Chéhéry.

The process to attain authorization to work in the Argonne proved to be somewhat complex. To ensure that we functioned legally, we developed a multi-pronged approach that included gaining the authorization, endorsement and support of both the French and American authorities in the region. The most important component of this was to secure the approval of the Mayor of Châtel Chéhéry. This was imperative as the preponderance of the work would be on communal land and fell under his legal authority and jurisdiction. Châtel Chéhéry is home to only 164 people, yet, the mayor has the authority on his own initiative to approve or disapprove any work on land belonging to the village.

Additionally, it was imperative to also have the active support of the Director of the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, American Battle Monuments Commission

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[1179] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," Infantry Journal, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 349-350; History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.: Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919; Official History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. 1917-1919. The Bobbs-Merrill Company; Brooklyn, NY, 1919.
Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 4. Stuttgart, Belser: 1920; "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt.

[1180] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

(ABMC), located fourteen kilometers away in Romagne. ABMC has jurisdiction over the American cemeteries and monuments located in the region and the director is the American representative on all commemorations, and monuments as well as oversees the recovery of fallen America Doughboys from the Great War in the area. As our work would fall within the jurisdiction of ABMC, we approached the Director in the Meuse Argonne, Mr. John Phil Rivers, who was the senior American in the region. In a formal meeting with Mr. Rivers, we provided a detailed layout of the methodology and objectives. Mr. Rivers suggested placing a marker on the spot so that future visitors to the area could "walk where York fought." Mr. Rivers approved our concept and offered to assist in any way he could. The support of Mr. Rivers was more valuable then we realized. At this point he had worked for the ABMC in France for more than thirty years and had participated in diverse digs that had uncovered the remains of missing soldiers. He had intimate knowledge of how this sort of work should progress.[1181]

In early spring of 2006, Mr. Rivers arranged a meeting with the Mayor of Châtel Chéhéry, Roland Destenay to secure permission to begin the field work in the Argonne. Mr. Rivers hosted the meeting at the Meuse Argonne Cemetery and served as the translator as well. After hearing the approach and methodology, the mayor enthusiastically approved the plan to begin work without reservation or conditions. As the field work was on Châtel Chéhéry communal land, the mayor assumed full responsibility to coordinate his approval of the work with the appropriate regional French agency. At the conclusion of this phase of the field research I would be required to

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[1181] See Phil Rivers Obituary; http://obits.dignitymemorial.com/dignity-memorial/obituary.aspx?n=Joseph+Phillip-Rivers&lc=2371&pid=161175285&mid=5315392 (accessed 28 March 2013).

submit a formal report of the findings as well as give a back brief to the regional archeologists. Wanting to ensure that no legalities were violated, another intercessor would be utilized to inform/coordinate with the regional officials of the work in the Argonne: the French Military Mission (FMM) to NATO in Heidelberg, Germany.

The FMM served as a liaison to NATO Land Headquarters (one of two, the other is located in Spain). The FMM to NATO Land Headquarters, Heidelberg, included a small staff led by a French Brigadier General.[1182] The FMM proved to be very helpful and supportive. It frequently contacted local officials, translated scores of documents into French for the mayor and other officials to use in the region, and provided advice on how to proceed in the French bureaucracy. Prior to each trip to the Argonne, the FMM would contact both the Gendarmerie in Grandpre (they have law enforcement jurisdiction over our zone of work) and would also inform the mayor of the work as well. The bottom line is that each visit required permission and approval. There were times when my request was denied due to a hunt being conducted in the area and for safety reasons, the mayor would kindly ask us to reschedule.

Having secured the appropriate clearances, the work began in earnest in the spring of 2006. Throughout this period, the mayor provided oversight, advice and was satisfied with the methodology and progress of the work. He often walked with me to see where we intended to work, provided advice and suggestions as to how to proceed, desired

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[1182] The reason for this small staff goes back to 7 March 1965 when President Charles de Gaulle announced the withdrawal of France from NATO's military command. De Gaulle's goal was to destroy the alliance and replace with one led by Paris. His design was to highlight that the Europeans were being led by Americans and that Europe should see to its own fate. As one observer wrote of this epoch, "[this remains] the most traumatic moment in NATO's history." See James Ellison, "Defeating the General: Anglo-American Relations, Europe and the NATO Crisis of 1966," *Cold War History* 6:1, February 2006, 85-86.

frequent back briefs on our progress/discoveries and updates on each phase of the work. The mayor also would assist in reporting live ordnance that was discovered during the research (grenades and artillery rounds) to the local authorities for disposal. Joining the mayor of many of the visits was Damien Georges, the mayor of the nearby village of Fleville. Damien's interest in our work was based upon his secondary responsibility as a forest manager, which included the communal lands of Châtel Chéhéry. After monitoring our work, he too was satisfied with our methodical approach. Some months later, together with Mayor Destenay he would take several of us to a local restaurant for fresh boar meat to celebrate the discovery of the York spot after we recovered .45 ACP cartridges.

Numerous experts would lend their advice and support to the work over the next months. These would range from prominent historians to archeologists. Of these, one of the most important was Jean-Paul and Brigit DeVries, who own and operate the 14-18 Museum in Romagne, a renowned museum filled with artifacts recovered from the region. Jean-Paul and Brigit are lifelong battlefield archeologists who had been conducting research in this part of France for three decades. I invited Jean-Paul and Brigit to join me and found their advice among the most important I received. It turned out that through his many years working on this part of the Western Front, he could see obscured defensive positions and artifacts without using a metal detector. Within a few minutes, Jean-Paul and Brigit had identified the location of the 1st Battalion, 120th Landwehr Regiment's garbage pit, several German fighting positions as well as

identifying the caliber of shell impacts in the area. They also provided advice on how to proceed in the research, which helped narrow the search area to some extent.[1183]

Our approach to the work in the Argonne was methodical, thorough and embraced an approach referred to as "surface finds" in some archeological circles.[1184] This did not entail the sort of dig that one would find at an ancient ruin or colonial village, but focused on scanning the surface of a 100 square meter area for artifacts in zones where my research suggested they should be located. This approach is within the range of acceptability for such an archeological work that encompassed largely surface finds. As the work progressed, I determined that it would be beneficial to grid the area into five-meter squares both physically on the ground as well as superimposed on a map. This would ensure the integrity of the work in addition to providing a better basis for which to manage the artifacts.[1185] As the work was spread over several months, the amount of personnel available to assist ranged to twenty in number equipped with metal detectors, field gloves, and an assortment of hand tools. The equipment used during this portion of the work included rakes, large shovels, coal shovels, note books with pens and markers, laminated maps, GPS, medium scoop shovels, Ziploc bags, labeling markers, marking tape, knee pads, safety glasses, work gloves, towels and cloth rags, marker stakes,

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[1183] See the museum website: http://www.romagne14-18.com/index.php/en/ (accessed 28 March 2013).
[1184] This term was used by Dr. Susan Blair of the University of New Brunswick when I briefed her on my methodology and approach. She coined this term in that the preponderance of the artifacts would be roughly 2-4 inches in the ground, while some were actually on the surface. Interview with Dr. Susan Blair, Department of Archeology, University of New Brunswick, 8 May 2012; Heather Burke and Claire Smith, *The Archeologist's Field Handbook,* (Crow's Nest New South Wales, Australia; 2004), 85-112.
[1185] Gavin Lucas, *Archeological Field Manual*, (Reykjavik, Iceland, FSI; 2003), 5-10; Heather Burke and Claire Smith, *The Archeologist's Field Handbook,* (Crow's Nest New South Wales, Australia; 2004), 85-113.

photographic equipment, hand trowels, hoes (hand held and full size), full size and hand held spades, hand held cultivators and hand-sized small shovels.[1186]

As the metal detectors tended to interfere with each other, a minimum of five meters separated each team, with each team numbering between two-five personnel. The procedure of how to recover an artifact was that the soil would carefully be removed from around it, then it would be recorded, photographed, and bagged/marked for further evaluation. Because of this meticulous approach, I determined that we would not use any heavy machinery, such as backhoes. Although making for rapid work, the heavy equipment destroys the artifacts and displaces them from their original location. The use of a backhoe would only be necessary if we were to become hasty in the research, something that we would avoid as it would discredit our approach.[1187]

One of the most important advisory support for the work came from the Center of Military History (CMH). Under the leadership of Dr. Jeffrey Clark, CMH provided expert advice throughout this process. Their most important support came in how to preserve the artifacts. The museum specialists at CMH relayed that there was a debate in archeological and museum circles on what method to use to preserve the artifacts and that ultimately it was up to the individual leading the field research to determine the best

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[1186] Heather Burke and Claire Smith, *The Archeologist's Field Handbook,* (Crow's Nest New South Wales, Australia; 2004), 115-145; Gavin Lucas, *Archeological Field Manual*, (Reykjavik, Iceland, FSI; 2003), 1-12.

[1187] Thomas F. King, *The Archeological Survey: Methods and Uses*, US Department of Interior, Washington, DC; 1978, 1-15; Heather Burke and Claire Smith, *The Archeologist's Field Handbook,* (Crow's Nest New South Wales, Australia; 2004), 64-88; Heinz Klein and Michael Myers, "A Set of Principles for Conducting and Evaluating Interpretive Field Studies in Information Systems," MIS Quarterly, Vol., 23, No. 1, March 1999), 67-88; Department of the Army, *ADP 5-0 The Operations Process*, US Army, Washington, D.C., May 2012, 6-15 and US Army War College Curriculum on Design, used in support of Theater Strategy, Department of Military Strategy, Plans and Operations, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2012.

approach. The purist approach was to leave the artifacts in the state and condition in which they were recovered. However, this does little to stem the deterioration of the objects. The other extreme was to chemically treat the objects. Of course this alters the appearance of the artifacts considerably, making them glisten with a chemical coating. Neither of these extremes seemed correct, and we opted with the concurrence of CMH for a more centrist approach, where the artifacts were cleaned with mild soap and water to remove the soil and other decaying agents, dried and then sealed in plastic bags. Dr. Doug Scott, the famed forensic historian, used this approach when analyzing artifacts and this seemed the best of the three options.[1188]

As mentioned, the preponderance of the artifacts were discovered between 2-4 inches from the surface. Those in the meadow, or at the bottom of the sunken roads tended to be a bit deeper, sometimes as far as ten inches below the surface, while artifacts on the hill tended to be either on the surface, or quite near it. The desired end of this work was to attain a picture of what the fight looked like for York and the Germans on 8 October 1918. Over the course of the work, I determined that we would not be seduced into a hasty conclusions based on the discovery of an artifact, such as a collar disk, that appeared to support a predetermined estimate of the location of York's fire fight. The simple fact was that a large engagement occurred in the area as part of a flanking operation to relieve the nearby "Lost Battalion." in October 1918. Subsequently there are thousands of military artifacts scattered throughout the zone. To that end the location and type of military artifacts uncovered must be consistent with the previously delineated

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[1188] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 1-12.

screening criteria for the correct location, otherwise these artifacts could be from a separate action.[1189]

By late 2006, enough artifacts had been recovered to make conclusions as to how the battle looked from an archeological perspective. The back brief to the regional archeologist of the field research occurred in December 2006 at the Meuse Argonne American Cemetery with Phil Rivers the mayor of Châtel Chéhéry, and Kory O'Keefe (a US Army contractor) present. The archeologist was satisfied with the approach and methodology, but was displeased that the mayor had not followed bureaucratic procedures to report the field work. As the mayor had civil administration and legal jurisdiction over the site, he was unapologetic on this matter. That notwithstanding, the regional archeologist said that he looked forward to reading the report of the work, which was submitted to him in January 2007.

What was found? Although this will be discussed in considerable detail later, it is of some use to provide an overview of what we found and where. More importantly, just what do these discoveries tell us of the 8 October battle? In the meadow, we found evidence of a German battalion headquarters, large quantities of live German ammunition and emblems of both the (German) Prussian and Württemberg armies. These were from soldiers of the 120th Württemberg and Prussian 210th Regiments, who the Americans surprised and captured without a fight.

[1189] Heather Burke and Claire Smith, *The Archeologist's Field Handbook*, (Crow's Nest New South Wales, Australia; 2004), 64-88; Heinz Klein and Michael Myers, "A Set of Principles for Conducting and Evaluating Interpretive Field Studies in Information Systems," MIS Quarterly, Vol., 23, No. 1, March 1999), 67-88; Thomas F. King, The Archeological Survey: Methods and Uses, US Department of Interior, Washington, DC; 1978, 1-15.

On the hill above the meadow, hundreds of shell casings and cartridges from a German machine gun and rifle positions were recovered, in addition to pieces of German equipment and belt clasps. These were from the soldiers of the 125th Württemberg Regiment who attempted to fight off the 17 Americans, but were eventually forced to surrender (after York eliminated the German soldiers in this machine gun position).[1190]

American 30.06 shell casings and cartridges were also recovered in the midst of the meadow (among the artifacts of the surrendered Germans) and also near the German machine gun position above. But the exact location of the "York Spot" eluded us. A big breakthrough occurred in October 2006 after we found four shot (spent) US .45 caliber bullets. The four slugs were spread over a 20-meter line, near the mouth of the only trench in the area. The trench was the position from which German Lieutenant Endriss led the doomed bayonet attack against York and is the single most important enduring man-made terrain feature in the area.[1191] German uniform buttons were also uncovered in the area, indicating that some of these slugs may have hit their mark. Just twenty meters below this locale, the most important find in the search for the "York Spot" was uncovered. Twenty-four Colt .45 Automatic Colt Pistol (ACP) shell casings that according to history should have been fired by York in this area.[1192]

[1190] Fromm, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* Band 4. Stuttgart, Belser: 1920. Kling, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 122 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* Band 27 Stuttgart, Belser: 1923, Laepple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* Band 38 Stuttgart, Belser: 1926.

[1191] Buxton, *Official History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. 1917-1919.* The Bobbs-Merrill Company; Brooklyn, NY, 1919, 50-60; 2nd Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Report, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army notebooks 4, 5), 6-9 October 1918 (Stuttgart Stadt Archiv); "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt.

[1192] Buxton, *Official History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. 1917-1919.* The Bobbs-Merrill Company; Brooklyn, NY, 1919, 50-60;

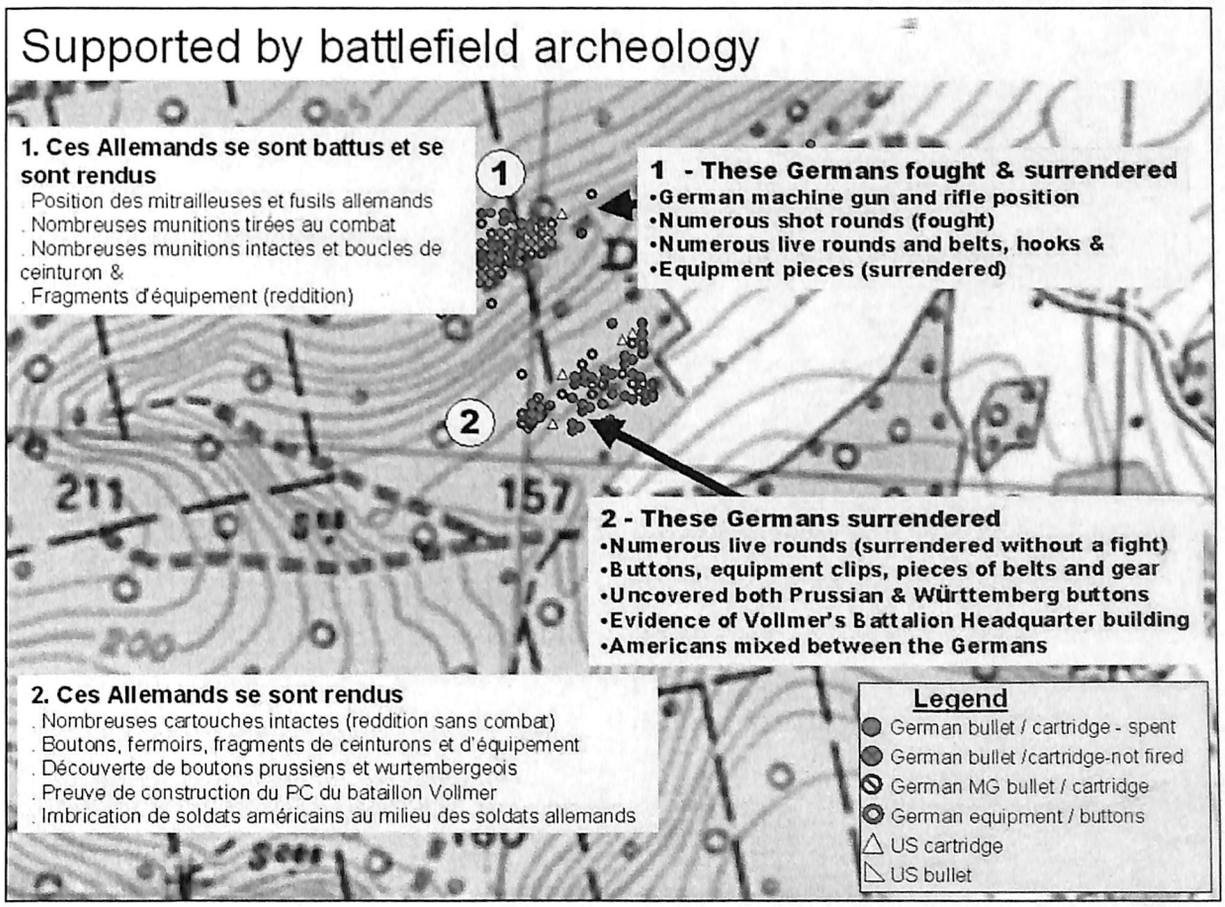
Shortly after the discovery of the twenty-one .45 ACP cartridges, we uncovered the location where York used his Enfield 30.06 rifle to eliminate the German machine gun. The battlefield records state that York "charged" the 125th machine gun. Just above where York's .45 cartridges were recovered is a position that outflanks both the German machine gun and supporting infantry positions. It is likened as the base of a "V." During this battle, the Germans used two sunken roads as impromptu trenches to engage the Americans below. From this position of the base of a "V," York literally swept two German lines that silenced the machine gun and killed approximately 20 Germans. The history states that York fired all of the bullets from his front pouches – for a maximum of fifty total shots. We found forty-six, complete with matching stripper clips.[1193]

The battlefield archeology recovered seems to describe the York story in total. The artifacts in the meadow show that the Germans there surrendered without resistance. In the midst of the various German discoveries, there were American 30.06 cartridges and shell casings, showing that among the German prisoners, there were American soldiers. Further up the hill, and near the trench where we recovered the Colt ACP shell casings (from York), there were a considerable number of buttons and miscellaneous pieces of German equipment that are likely to have come off those York shot during the German bayonet attack. Finally, on the hill, the German machine gun and rifle positions contained numerous shell casings, some cartridges and buttons/equipment pieces. The

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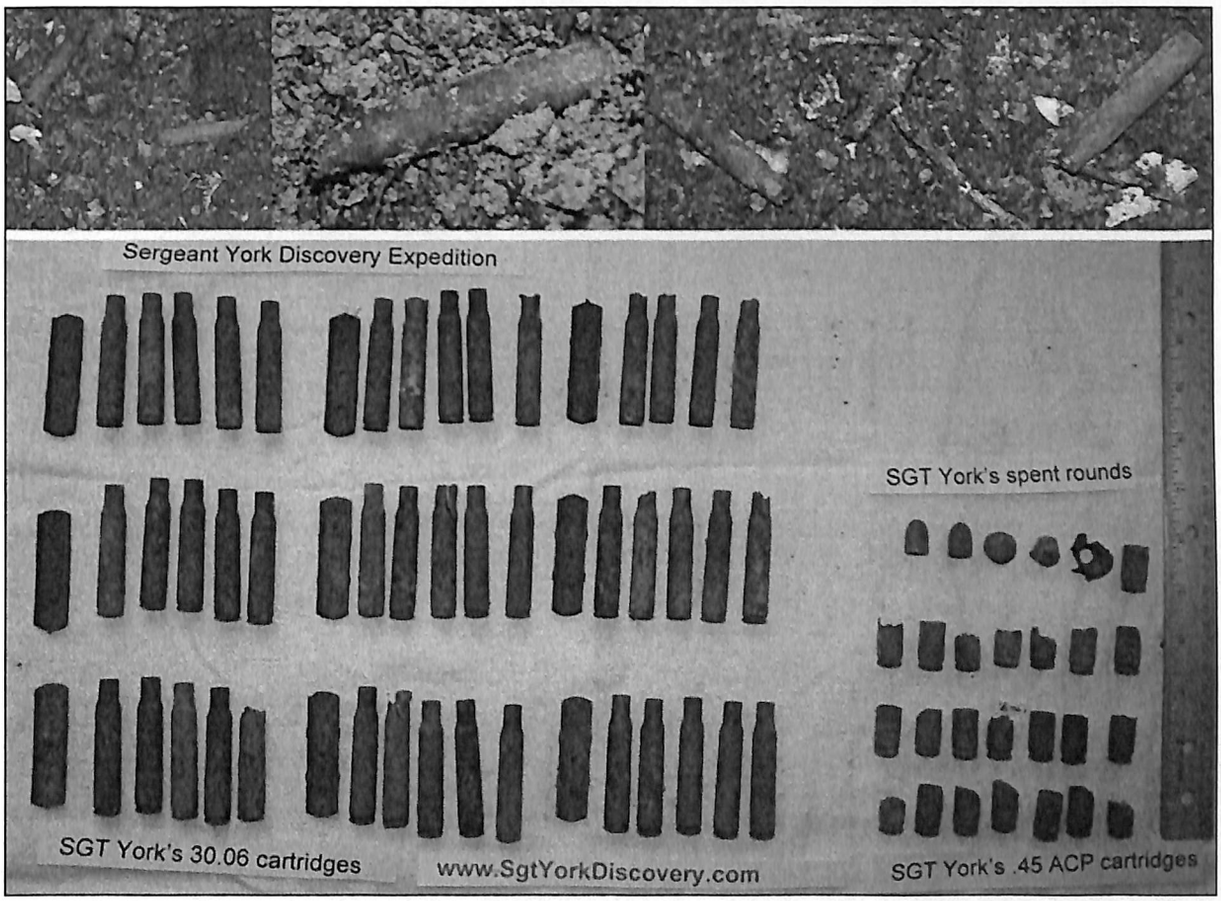
[1193] Cooke, James J. *The All-Americans at War: The 82nd Division in the Great War, 1917–1918.* West Port, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999; Buxton, *Official History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. 1917-1919.* The Bobbs-Merrill Company; Brooklyn, NY, 1919, 50-60; 2nd Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Report, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army notebooks 4, 5), 6-9 October 1918 (Stuttgart Stadt Archiv); "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt.

Germans here fought and then surrendered. Finally, York's rifle position was discovered; the spot from which he eliminated the 125th MG position.[1194]



[1194] Buxton, *Official History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. 1917-1919*. The Bobbs-Merrill Company; Brooklyn, NY, 1919, 50-60; 2nd Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Report, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army notebooks 4, 5), 6-9 October 1918 (Stuttgart Stadt Archiv); "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt.

After a formal report of the discoveries was submitted to the Champagne-Ardenne Regional Archeologist, the Mastriano site was endorsed by the Center of Military History, the Meuse Argonne American Cemetery of the American Battlefield Monuments Commission, the mayor of Châtel Chéhéry (who are responsible for the communal land where the discoveries were made), the French Military Mission to NATO, the



Association of Development of the Grandpre Region (which has jurisdiction over this area) and the federal senator of the region, Senator Jean-Luc Warsmann. With this, the French leadership of the region endorsed the construction of a five kilometer trail "to follow in York's steps" that centered around Mastriano/SYDE's work in the Argonne. Named by the French, "Circuit du Sgt York" the trail includes nine interpretive historic

markers in French, German and English. At the location where York is credited with fighting off a bayonet attack, two large monuments were erected.

The Battlefield Archeology

Having secured the proper authorization to work,; an odyssey that would entail more than 100 days of work in the Argonne.[1195] The work commenced at the area previously identified as the most likely location of Leutnant Paul Lipp's 125th Württemberg Landwehr Infantry Regiment machinegun position on the southern slope of Humserberg.[1196] The machinegun in action along the southern/south eastern slope of

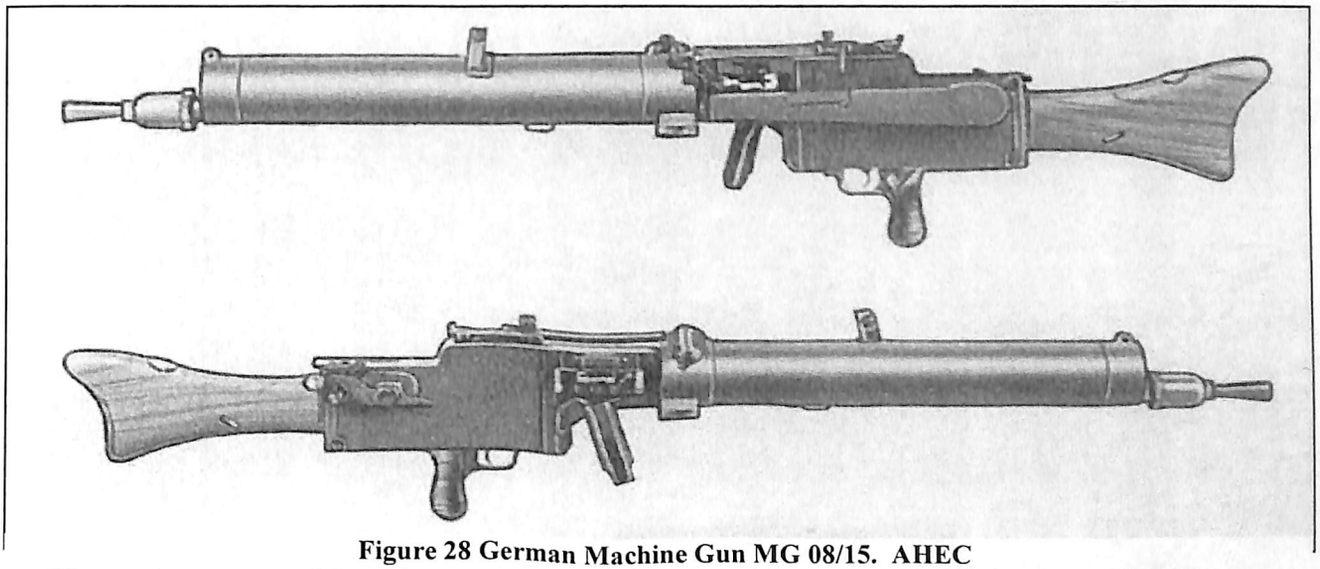


Figure 28 German Machine Gun MG 08/15. AHEC

Humserberg was a Maschinenengewehr Gerät 08 or Maschinenengewehr Gerät 08 / 15 light version of the same weapon.[1197]

This weapon, known among the Allies as M.G. 08, was first fielded in 1908, with the upgraded lighter version reaching the field beginning in March 1917.[1198] These were

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[1195] Interview with Dr. Susan Blair, Department of Archeology, University of New Brunswick, 8 May 2012.

[1196] German Archives, Potsdam, "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936.

[1197] Viktor-Karl Lapple, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926).

the standard issue machinegun for virtually all German units during the Great War and the 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, the higher headquarters of the 120th, 125th and 122nd Württemberg Regiments, had both types in its inventory.[1199] Each infantry company was equipped with six such weapons. Both the heavier MG 08 and the lighter MG 08/15 series machine gun fired the same bullet, a 7.9mm round. This was the same size ball fired by the rifle used by most German soldiers along the Western Front during the Great War, the M1898 Mauser.[1200] It is widely believed that York encountered the MG 08/15, and there is one such gun claimed as the one York fought against in the United States. It is on display in the Museum of Appalachia in Clinton, Tennessee. The American Salvage Corps recovered some thirty German MGs after the battle that encompassed both types of weapons. The claim of the Appalachia Museum notwithstanding, it is impossible to confirm that theirs is "the one."[1201]

This machinegun was fed by a cloth belt, called in German *Patronengurt* (cartridge belt), that typically came in 250 round sets. The *Patronengurt* had metal spacers between the rounds and the cloth that would enable it to feed through the

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[1198] David Nash (Introduction), *German Army Handbook; April 1918,* (London, Arms and Armour Press; 1977), 54-61.
[1199] Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 153-187.
[1200] John Walter, *Military Rifles of Two World Wars,* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Stackpole Books; 2003), 64-67; David Nash (Introduction), *German Army Handbook; April 1918,* (London, Arms and Armour Press; 1977), 54-61; Robert W. Ball, *Mauser Military Rifles of the World* , (Wisconsin: Krause Publications; 2006), 160-167..
[1201] Based upon a very informative email from the editor, and weapon expert, of the premier German, Austrian and Swiss gun magazine, Visier, Dr. David Schiller. 1 August 2011.

machinegun at a rate of between 400-500 rounds per minute.[1202] The machinegun position identified as part of the York action yielded literally hundreds of cartridges and shell casings. These were five to ten centimeters beneath the soil and in considerably good condition. The preponderance of these 7.9mm German cartridges were recovered in an area 1.5 meters wide, to 2.4 meters long. In the end, the discovery here encompassed approximately 800 spent cartridges and over 150 live rounds.[1203] Virtually all of the cartridges and live rounds recovered from this position had head stamp markings consistent with what the 2nd Landwehr Württemberg Division used at this point of the war.

[1202] This is the cyclic rate of fire, rather than the practical sustained rate of fire. Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 78-80.
[1203] Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 153-187.

The markings around the primer were S67 / P / 2 / 18.[1204] This means that these rounds were manufactured in 1918 at the *Polte Werke, Zentrale* in Magdeburg, Germany.[1205] Due to the deteriorating war economy of Germany, the head stamps also reveal that these particular cartridge cases were comprised of 67% copper and 33% zinc.[1206]

As the German infantry rifle M 1898 rifle and the MG 08/15 machine



Figure 29 - 7.9mm casings from the German Machinegun position eliminated by York on 8 October 1918

[1204] A. Eisnecker, "Kammer Diener: Vor 120 Jahren begann die Karriere der Patrone 8 x 57," *Visier*, (December 12, 2008), 6-18.
[1205] Martin Nathusius, "Vor 50 Jahren wurde Polte gegründet. Jubiläum der angesehenen Magdeburger Maschinenfabrik," *Magdeburgische Zeitung*, 6-7 April 1925, 7 and *Polte Armaturen- und Maschinenfabrik (Hrsg.), 1885-1935, 50 Jahre Armaturen*, (Magdeburg, Germany, Polte; 1935).
[1206] See the following source as the single most informative discourse on the 7,9 mm cartridge: Brant Hamann und Dr. Windisch, *Die Militärpatronen Kaliber 7,9 mm: ihre Vorläufer und Abarten*, (Schwabish Hall, Germany, Journal-Verlag Schwend; 1981).

gun fired the same caliber round, it was of great importance to find actual evidence of the cloth belt, or the metal brackets that the MG used to feed the rounds.[1207] Unfortunately, as the cloth material would have been exposed to the elements for some ninety years, the expectation to find pieces of it were unpromising. Evidence of infantry riflemen were recovered five meters east of the site and in the sunken road behind the machinegun position (five meters north of it). The evidence of this was the remains of the five round stripper clips as well as a rifle butt place from a M1989 Mauser. This was anticipated, as we know that the German soldiers supporting the machinegun were armed with the M1898 Mauser.[1208]

[1207] Robert W. Ball, *Mauser Military Rifles of the World* , (Wisconsin: Krause Publications; 2006), 160-167; Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 153-187.

[1208] See the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918;

The absence of stripper clips at the assumed machinegun position is not sufficient evidence that the MG 08/15 was actually there. Nonetheless, this concern was when a series of the metal separators from a MG 08/15 *Patronengurt* were recovered. These separators were discovered both loose in the ground and also fused to several of the live rounds. Rather surprisingly, fragments of the cloth *Patronengurt* had also survived the effects of ninety years of exposure and were also recovered with the rounds. These finds of both the cloth *Patronengurt* and metal feeder separators from the ammunition belt provided firm evidence that a MG 08 / 15 was indeed in action at this location during the 08 October 1918 Battle of the Argonne. The type of rounds found here supports the supposition that a machinegun was indeed in action for a time. This is congruent with what we understand of the York action from both the German and American sources.[1209]

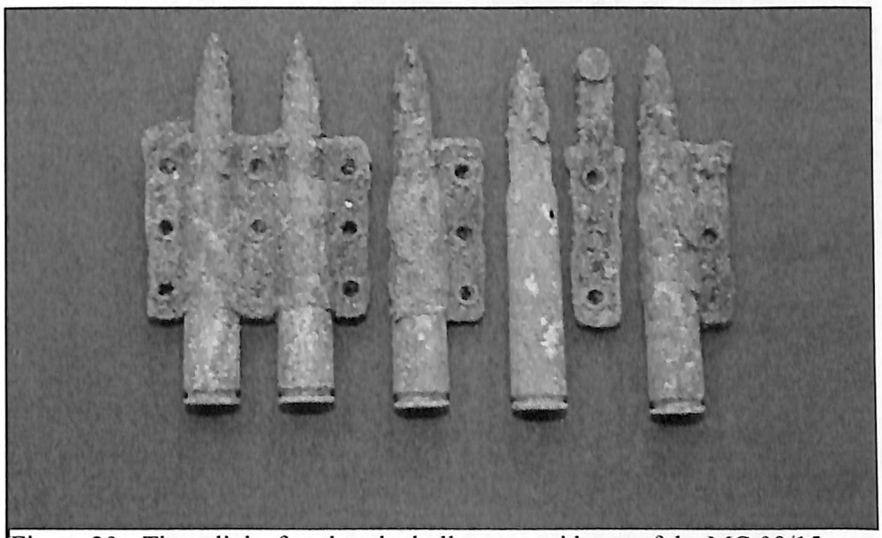


Figure 30 - These links fused to the bullets are evidence of the MG 08/15

In addition to the numerous cartridges found around the machine gun position, there were some 100 other artifacts collected. This included a large quantity of German uniform buttons, metal equipment buttons as well as scores of eyelets from German

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[1209] Freidrich von Merkatz, *Unterrictsbuch fur die Maschinengewehr=Koampagnien*, (Berlin, Eisenschmidt; 1917), 153-187.

shelter halves. An interesting find at the far eastern side of the machinegun position, where the M1898 rifle stripper clips were uncovered, was the Butt plate for this type of German rifle.[1210]

It is clear from American and German sources that there was a group of riflemen firing in support of this machinegun.[1211] As mentioned, there are two ancient sunken roads immediately above and behind this machine gun position. The first is six feet above and behind (north) of the machinegun, and the second, rising slightly higher than the first, approximately 18 feet behind the machinegun. The depth of each was more than two meters. The view from the crest of these into the meadow is excellent, and would have offered the infantry using these sunken roads as an impromptu trench. From a tactical perspective, these two sunken roads provided excellent observation, fields of fire, and both cover and concealment to anyone using them. As to its location geographically, these were perfect for infantrymen to use in providing supporting fires to their machinegun team, especially shooting into the meadow below, where York and the other sixteen Americans would have been positioned.[1212]

[1210] Robert W. Ball, *Mauser Military Rifles of the World* , (Wisconsin: Krause Publications; 2006), 160-167. Also see, Daniel W. Kent, *German 7.9 mm Military Ammunition; 1888-1945,* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, Edwards Brothers, Incorporated; 1973).

[1211] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," Infantry Journal, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 349-350, History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.; Alvin York, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary,* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1928; First Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Second Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Third Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918.

[1212] Kriegsministerium, *Schiessvorschrift für die Infanterie, (*Berlin, Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn; 1909), 2-11.

A dozen soldiers were recorded as falling in action here, these two sunken road trenches were literally filled with thousands of artifacts.[1213] Of course, there was an assortment of expended 7.9mm cartridges, stripper clips, and live rounds, as one would expect from a location where soldiers were likely killed in action. Additionally, there were scores of buttons (uniform shirt and undergarment buttons), equipment latches, a German pocket watch, and fragments of a Württembergische belt buckle as well as dozens of eye lets from the German shelter halves. Suffice it to say that there was ample evidence here of a battle, and something then happen to cause the soldiers to leave their gear and clothing, which was most likely being killed or wounded in action.

The depth of the artifacts ranged from 5-20 centimeters. The deeper artifacts were found in the center of the sunken road, where erosion would bury these more than those found either on the lip of the sunken road, or closer to the sides of it. The condition of the artifacts varied, with those being deeper suffering from more corrosion when compared to those recovered from a medium depth. The most corroded of the objects tended to be those near or literally sitting exposed on the surface, such as the belt buckle, which was in terrible shape from exposure.

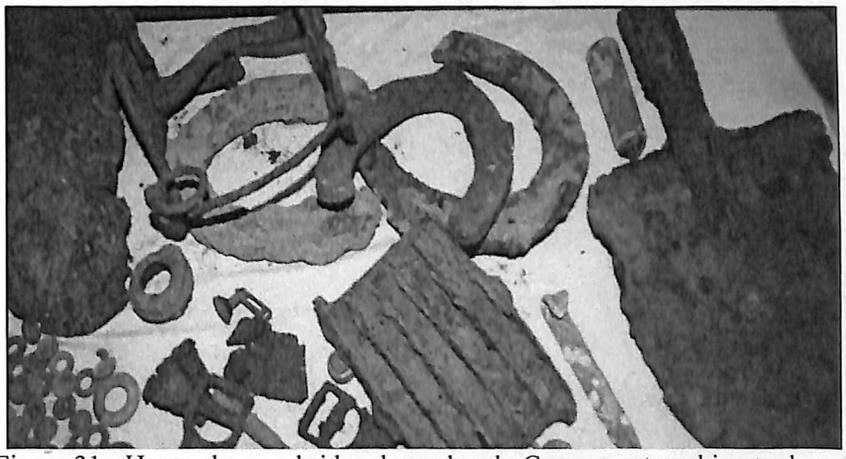
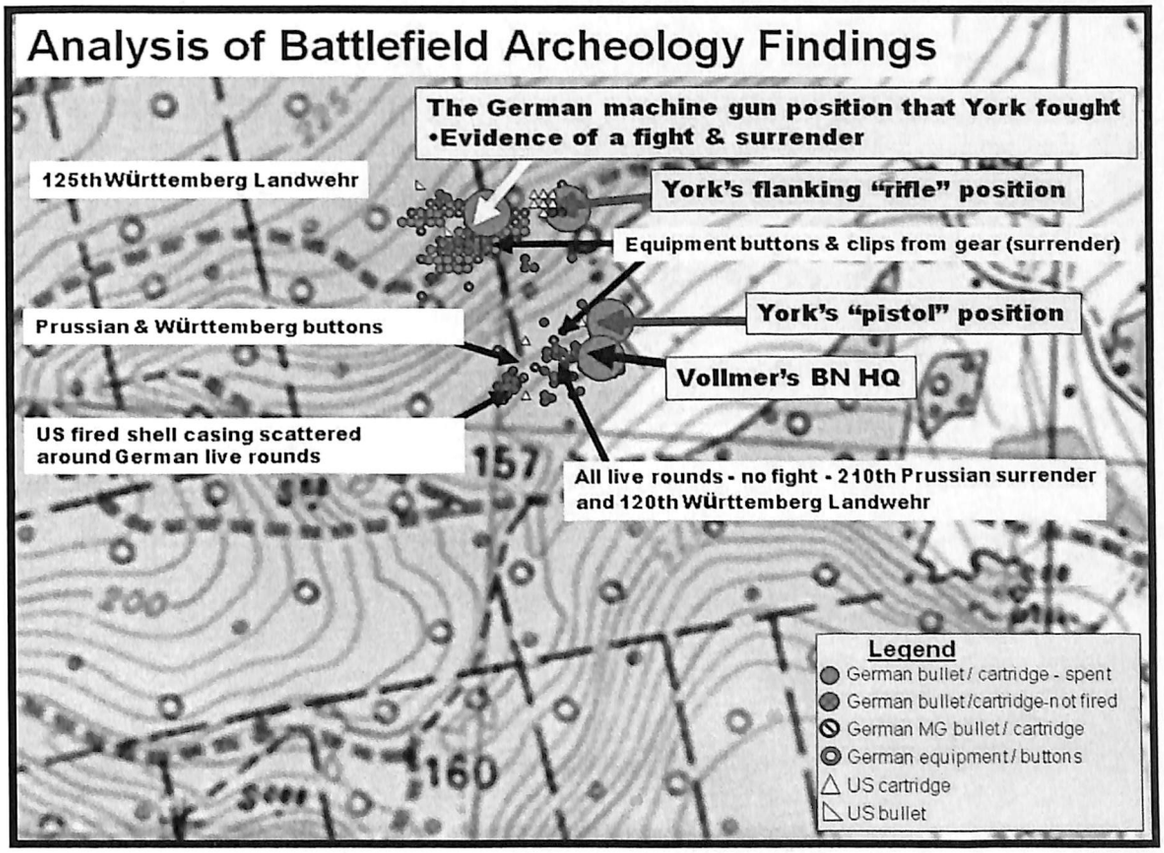


Figure 31 - Horse-shoes, a bridge, horse brush, German entrenching tool, buttons and clasps found near the German machinegun position

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[1213] Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919.



Other finds in this area included evidence of horses. This group of finds encompassed a horse brush, several horse shoes, a bridle and even the bones of a horse. This was probably the remains of one of the nine horses that the 125th Württemberg Landwehr Infanterie Regiment reported killed on 7 October 1918 by artillery. The German archival data states that on 7 October there was a particularly lethal American artillery barrage literally swept across Humserberg in support of the afternoon attack of the 82nd American Division against Castle Hill. Castle Hill is the hill adjacent to the village of Châtel Chéhéry.[1214]

[1214] Viktor-Karl Lapple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926). Also see the following unit reports; First Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Second Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Third Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918.

Interestingly, several spent American caliber .30 ball rounds (bullets) were found around and above this area, suggesting that a soldier was engaging targets in these positions. The next question related to the German machinegun and its supporting sunken road riflemen is, how did an American(s) contend with these well emplaced soldiers? An indication to how this occurred is found in Alvin York's Medal of Honor citation, where it says,



Figure 32 30.06 cartridge and stripper clip at the site where York outflanked the German Machinegun

"The Argonne Forest, France, 8 October 1918. After his platoon suffered heavy casualties, Alvin York assumed command. Fearlessly leading 7 men, he charged with great daring a machinegun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon. In this heroic feat the machinegun nest was taken, together with 4 German officers and 128 men and several guns."[1215]

As discussed, we know that York crossed the small German supply road along the southern perimeter of Humserberg during his "charge" against the machinegun position. Yet, any attack against the front, left flank, or the rear of the machine gun

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[1215] Extract from York's Medal of Honor Citation.

would expose him to the fires of the infantry men in the sunken roads. There is only one place where York could outflank both the German machine gunners and infantry support platoon, the lower sunken road.

The lowest of the two sunken roads runs almost parallel with the supply road, which is just three meters south and lower than it. The other, and higher sunken road runs at an angle against the other sunken road and converges with it some 15 meters east of the machinegun position, pointing towards Châtel Chéhéry. Here the two sunken roads converge and form the base of a "V." From the tip of this "V," one has perfect line of site up both sunken roads, as well into the flank of the MG 08 machinegun position. Incidentally, there is no other place to outflank all three of these "lines' of German defenders than this one specific position on the southern face of Humserberg.

The battlefield archeology at this flanking position yielded some of the most important finds to date of the York battle. Within an area of 1.5 meters diameter, we recovered forty-six American Remington Arms .30 cartridges (also referred to as 30.06 caliber). Of these, all except one was fired. Additionally, nine associated American .30-06 stripper clips were also recovered at this site among the .30 cartridges.

The discovery of forty-six cartridges is consistent with the testimony of what York fired during this engagement. Several sources say that York fired all the ammo from the front of his belt pouches.[1216] The basic combat load of American soldiers

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[1216] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," *Infantry Journal*, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 349; Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63.

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carried on their cartridge belt, was a total of 100 rounds in ten pouches.[1217] Based upon written account, this means that York fired a maximum of fifty rounds from his rifle during this engagement.[1218]

The discovery of the forty-six rounds, in addition to the location of this site, as a flanking position against the three "lines" of German defenders, is consistent with the York narrative. This marks the exact position where Alvin York used his Eddystone M1917 rifle against the 125th Württemberg Landwehr Infantry Regiment on 8 October 1918.[1219]

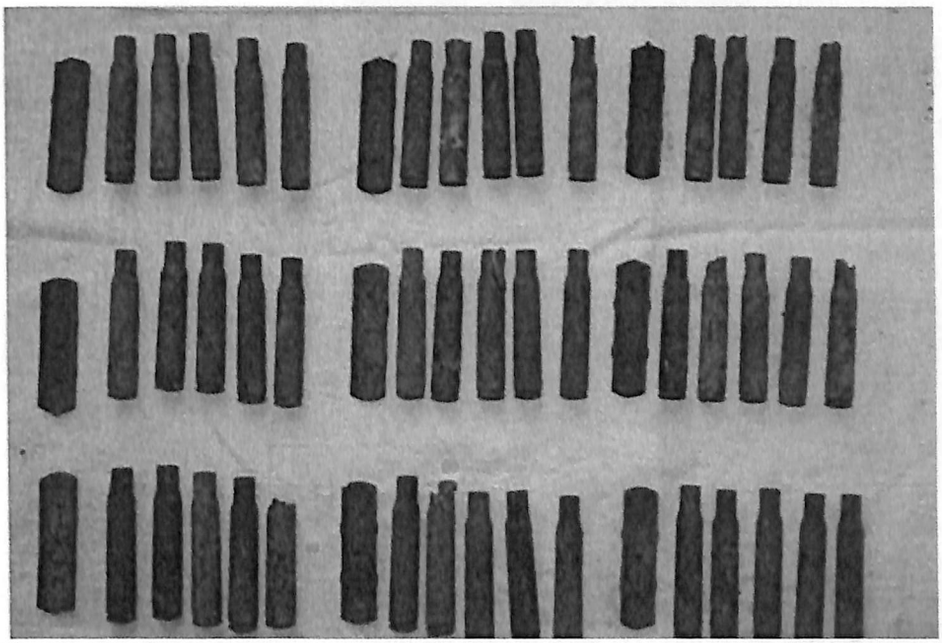


Figure 33 - The forty-six American 30-06 cartridges believed to be York's

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[1217] John Biddle, Soldier's Handbook of the Rifle; United States Rifle Model of 1917," (Washington, DC., Government Printing Office; November 1917), 13; H.L. Scott, Manual for Noncommissioned Officers and Privates of Infantry of the Army of the United States 1917, (Menasha, Wisconsin, George Banta Publishing Company; 1917), 148-161; Bret Werner, Uniforms, Equipment and Weapons of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I, (Atglen, Pennsylvania, Schiefer Military History Book;2006), 68-75.

[1218] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63.

[1219] Roy Marcot and Joe Poyer, "The Story of Eddystone," available online at the following website; http://www.remingtonsociety.com/rsa/journals/Eddystone, (accessed 30 July 2011); Cooke, James J. The All-Americans at War: The 82nd Division in the Great War, 1917–1918. West Port, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999..

In addition to the recovery of York's 30.06 Model 1917 Eddystone rifle cartridges, another momentous find was to occur on Humserberg in 2008. This discovery would not only be of great consequence to the York narrative, but have far-reaching effects in Germany as well. Further up on this hill, the personal effects of a missing German soldier were recovered. This included both of his shoes, most of his undergarment buttons, several military buttons, his gas mask, and numerous assorted accoutrements. The single most important artifact was the recovery of this soldier's complete identification tag. The tag provided the following information:



Figure 34 - The identification tag of Wilhelm Härer evidence that the 125th Landwehr defended Humserberg

SCHÜTZE WILH HAERER (Gunner/Private Wilhelm Härer)

STEINBACH O/A BACHKNANG (Hometown of Steinbach am Backnang)

2. M.G.K L.125 (2nd Machinegun Company, Landwehr Regiment 125)

GEB 1. 11. 1882 (Birth date 1 November 1882)

The soldier, Wilhelm Härer, was a machine gunner assigned to the 2nd Machinegun Company of the 125th Landwehr Württemberg Regiment, the same unit to fire upon York and the other Americans on 8 October 1918. Wilhelm Härer was born on

1 November 1882 and worked as a carpenter when he was drafted into the 121st Infantry Regiment on 23 March 1915. In April 1915, Härer was transferred to the 246th Reserve-Infantry Regiment, and on 11 March moved to the Regiment's Machine-Gun Company. On 23 July 1915 he was assigned to the 2nd Machine-Gun Company of the 125th



Figure 35 - Some of the personal effects and equipment of Wilhelm Härer

Württemberg Landwehr Infantry Regiment (the regiment that York fought against in the Argonne battle of October 1918). From 21 February to 30 September 1916, Wilhelm Härer fought in the battle of Verdun. Between 28 June to 3 July 1917 he took part in the Avocourt-forest assault, and from 17 and 18 July 1917 he was involved in the battles for the Haucourt-Esnes road. On 4 September 1917 his unit was transferred to the Argonne.

On 22 November 1917 he received the Silver Württemberg Military Meritorious Service Medal for bravery and loyalty.[1220]

The recovery of Wilhelm Härer 's military identification tag was a major coup in the field research related to the York battle, in that there now was a specific name and unit directly linked to the 8 October 1918 fight. As to his role in the fight, on 8 October 1918 Härer was assigned to German Leutnant Paul Lipp's portion of Humserberg. Lipp commanded the machine gun which Alvin York assaulted and destroyed. Lipp himself was captured. As a result of York's actions, Wilhelm Härer's gun crew fell back with the rest of his regiment under heavy American pressure.[1221] As they withdrew, Wilhelm Härer fell in battle on Humserberg as the Americans attempted to take the hill. It is not clear if he fell due to artillery fires, or American small arms fire, as there was evidence of both near his remains. Unfortunately, due to the withdrawal of the line, Wilhelm Härer was not reported missing in action until 10 October by his unit's regiment.[1222]

The discovery may be perhaps the strongest undisputable piece evidence directly linking a specific soldier with the York site. This is significant in that detractors can explain away buttons, and collar disks, which hundreds of soldiers carried and thereby brings an element of subjectivity. The recovery of Härer's ID tag is harder to ignore and adds evidenced based credibility of not only the center Humserberg Hill being where the

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[1220] Roland Idler, "Heimkehr nach 90 Jahren – Das Schicksal des im Ersten Weltkrieg vermissten Steinbachers Wilhelm Härer (1882 bis 1918)," *Backnanger Jahresbuch*, (Backnang, Germany; 2009), 182-199.

[1221] Viktor-Karl Lapple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926). Also see the following unit reports; First Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Second Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; Third Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918.

[1222] Matthias Nothstein, "Ein einzigartiger Akt der Versoehung," *Backnang Kreiszeitung,* 30 April 2009, 19.

German machine gunners fought against York, but the only geographic location wherein the York site could be located from both an historic and artifact based analysis.

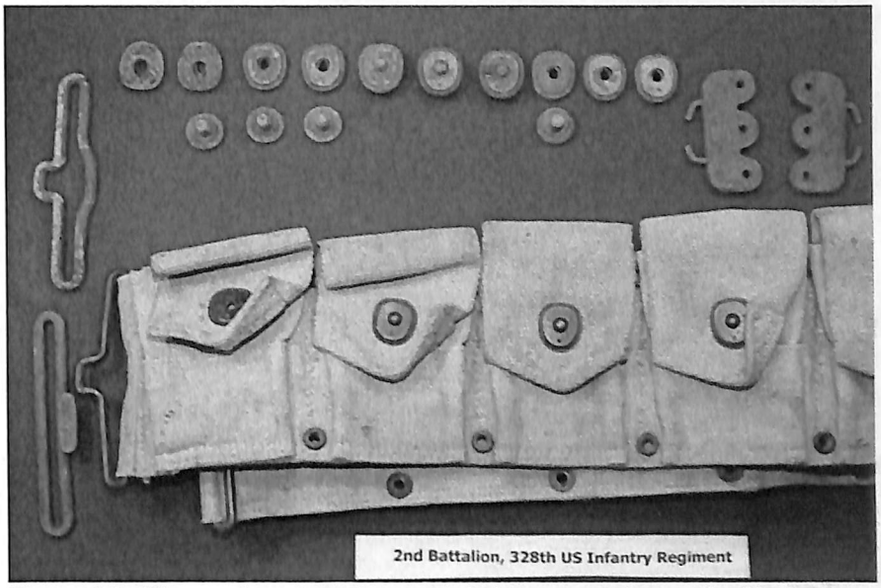


Figure 36 - Pieces of an American web-belt recovered near the York site next to a museum quality piece for comparison

As to Wilhelm's personal effects, they were returned in an official NATO ceremony with full military honors to his hometown near Stuttgart. Major General Hertling, then the 1st US Armored Division Commander in Germany, presided over the event.[1223] The ceremony included descendants of Wilhelm Härer, and the son of Count Claus von Stauffenberg (the Colonel who attempted to assassinate Hitler in July 1944).[1224] To foster American-German friendship, Wilhelm Härer's descendents returned half the lower half of his identification tag to the United States to add to the Sergeant York collection as definite evidence of this important discovery.[1225]

[1223] David Schiller, "Späte Heimkehr: Die Geschicte des Wilhelm Härer," *Visier*, June 2009, 86-87.
[1224] Roland Idler, "Heimkehr nach 90 Jahren; Erkennungsmarke aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg," *Stimme & Weg*, April 2009, 17.
[1225] Jose Rodriguez, "World War One German Soldier Memorial," The Observer, Spring 2009, 5.The repatriation of his personal effects was a moving ceremony and the people of his town were touched by the interest of Americans to honor one of their fallen soldiers. It is fitting to include Major-General Hertling's remarks at the repatriation ceremony to remember Wilhelm Härer: *Soldier Härer has now come home and in doing so – almost one hundred years after he died – he gives us the chance to reflect on how people fight for what they believe in, even to the point of giving their life in the cause. There are German and American soldiers just like Härer doing just that in several foreign countries today.* Fighting together *for what they believe in, even while they are longing to be home. because that is the true character – the true strength --*



Figure 37 - Several American uniform buttons and a US National Army collar disk (worn by York's unit), recovered from Humserberg

Other discoveries from Humserberg encompassed a large collection of American artifacts that tell the story of the struggle that transpired here on 8 October 1918. This included the tattered remains of two American Army tunics replete with buttons, numerous US personal effects, ammunition and other items. Also found here was an aluminum field grooming combs, field mirrors, a pocket frame (for photos of loved ones), a pocket watch, several mess kits with eating utensils, buttons, rifle cleaning kits, US Model Carlisle first aid kits (both used and unused), canteens, and coins. The location and condition of these signify that they were from York's unit, the 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd US Infantry Division[1226]

The battlefield archeology in the meadow at the base of Humserberg provided even more clues to what transpired here during this battle. Here, the history tells us that Leutnant Vollmer and his staff were captured at a small wooden shack that served as his

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of soldiers. They are all so incredibly noble for what they sacrifice. Soldier Härer, I salute you and today, all of us are proud that you remind us of these universal truths.

[1226] Captain Bertrand Cox, Affidavit given on 21 February 1919 in Frettes, France. Filed by the 328th Infantry Regiment Advocate General. Actual swearing of the affidavit was on 26 February 1919.

battalion headquarters.[1227] It was here, the sources say, that soldiers of the 120th Württemberg Landwehr Infantry and Prussian 210th Regiments were surprised and captured without a fight.[1228] The only recorded resistance offered by this group was led by Leutnant Fritz Endriss towards the end of the battle. What both German and American sources attest to is that the preponderance of the men here capitulated without firing a shot in anger. With this in mind, what was uncovered in the meadow and does it compliment or contradict the York story as we know it today?

An important find was evidence of Vollmer's battalion headquarters building. Situated thirty meters below (south of) the Endriss trench, it was ideally suited to both monitor the battle and to centrally command his battalion. His battle area of operations stretched from the supply road on Humserberg (which was over watched by Paul Lipp's men), south to the next set of ridges where he deployed the 7th Bavarian Mineur Company. It was from here that Vollmer would command the valley in addition to be

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[1227] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 59-62; "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt

[1228] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry*; Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Argonne Defensive Line, Ia 5608, 31 August 1918 (Nr. 28) (2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 7 October 1918, 1:25,000 Ia6503 (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Viktor-Karl Lapple, *Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 125 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Belser, Stuttgart; 1926), 167-173; Dr. Gustav Strohm, *Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120,* (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922), 160-166; Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60.

able to quickly receive reinforcements and plug them into the line, much as he had done with the 7th Bavarian just moments before the American attack.[1229]

The reason for this small wooden shack being in the forest is fairly easy to appreciate. Between 1914 and 1918, the front line stabilized some ten kilometers south of here. With that in mind, the German Army set up rest camps here, where the soldiers could rotate out of the line.[1230] These rest areas were close enough to the front to be able to rush these soldiers back into the line if needed in a crisis, but far enough back to give the men time away from battle to recuperate.[1231]

The Germans made the best of these areas, which included in some of the local towns the construction of various diversions for the soldiers to enjoy, such as casinos, bath houses, exercise areas, shops, cantinas, unit newspaper printers, and even a Limonade (lemonade) factory in one nearby village. Since the German Army included skilled workers from virtually every aspect of life, there were carpenters, stone masons,

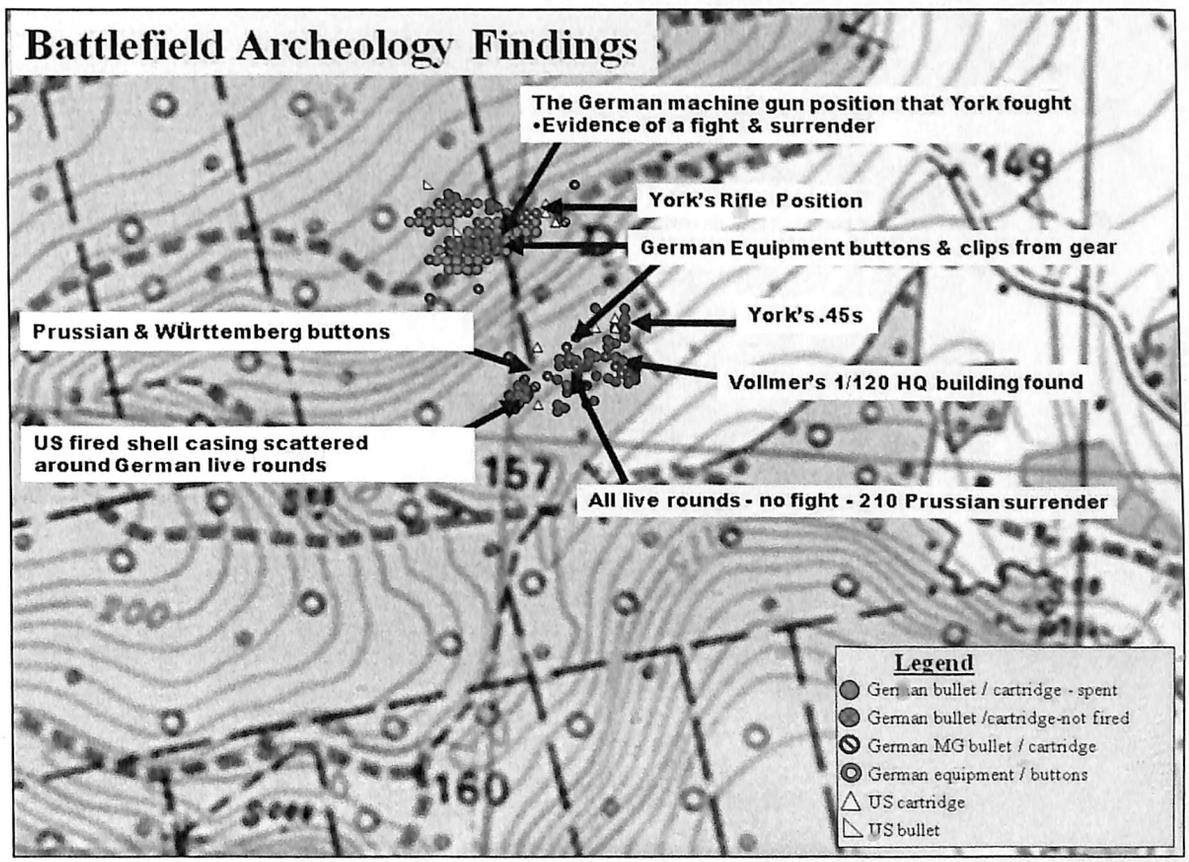
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[1229] Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army). Also, see the following reports and unit histories; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch of the Regimental Staff, October 1918; 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch, July – November 1918, I Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; II Battalion 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Kriegstagebuch; III Battalion, 125 Landwehr Regiment Leader Roster, 01 July – 04 December 1918; *History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, a m*assive work of 454 pages containing 29 photos, 2 color maps, a divisional organization chart in color, reprints of commendations received by the division, and a complete regimental roster with brief service histories of all men serving in the regiment; Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations/unit situations/front line trace of German forces, 6 October 1918 (Nr. 46) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne unit deployment locations, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army);

[1230] Captain Viktor-Karl Lapple, Das Württembergische Landwehr Infanterie Regiment Nr. 125 Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Stuttgart, Belser; 1926), 72-74; General Anton Franke, Die 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Verlag Berger's Literarisches Buro, Stuttgart; 1921), 21-31.

[1231] Dominique Lacorde, *Gesnes en-Argonne*, L'imprierie, Fort Moselle, France; 2005), 90-99.

brewers, constructions workers, metallurgists and others in the ranks to improve the quality of life of the soldiers near the front.[1232] So industrious were the Württembergers that the 120th was one of the few regiments on the Western Front to actually prepare and bottle their own beer in a brewery they built in the nearby village of Romagne. [1233] The 120th's sister regiment, the 125th Landwehr, likewise built a Limonade bottle plant in Epinionville.[1234]



[1232] Captain Viktor-Karl Lapple, Das Württembergische Landwehr Infanterie Regiment Nr. 125 Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Stuttgart, Belser; 1926), 72-74; General Anton Franke, Die 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Verlag Berger's Literarisches Buro, Stuttgart; 1921), 21-31.
[1233] This has been firmly established by the life-long research of Brigit and Jean-Paul Devries and their extensive archeological work around Romagne, which is on display at their 14-18 museum in the village. Information on this and other research related to German life behind the lines in the Meuse-Argonne Region can be found at the following website: http://www.romagne14-18.com (accessed 28 July 2011).
[1234] General Anton Franke, *Die 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division im Weltkrieg 1914-1918,* (Verlag Berger's Literarisches Buro, Stuttgart; 1921), 23-26.

As to Châtel Chéhéry, the Germans used it as both a rest area and a convalescence village to treat the wounded. The soldiers constructed a series of lodges and huts to relax in the forest west of Châtel, in much the same fashion as the Germans still do along their hiking trails today. Forest houses ranged in luxury from a basic hut with a cast iron stove (such as the building used by Vollmer on 8 October 1918), to very comfortable ones, with fireplaces, windows, paneling and furniture, which was taken from the local village houses. Images of these structures west of Châtel Chéhéry were captured by a US Army photographer during the February 1919 investigation into York's actions. Vollmer's selection of a less luxurious hut was due to necessity as it was the best suited due to its central location in his area of operations. This central location made it ideal to command his battalion.[1235]

There were numerous archeological finds associated with Vollmer's headquarters facility. The artifacts were located in a fairly narrow space of some five meters in circumference, included a door lock, nails, hinges for the door, a large water bucket, as well as pieces of a destroyed cast iron stove being the chief items. Incidentally, the American Expeditionary Forces was notorious for destroying every German cast iron stove they came across. Fearing booby traps, the soldiers would regularly drop grenades in the stoves to destroy them.[1236] The condition and location of the stove, and the various

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Captain Viktor-Karl Lapple, Das Württembergische Landwehr Infanterie Regiment Nr. 125 Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Stuttgart, Belser; 1926), 90-91

[1235] Captain Viktor-Karl Lapple, Das Württembergische Landwehr Infanterie Regiment Nr. 125 Im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Stuttgart, Belser; 1926), 85-101.

[1236] Also affirmed by the life-long research of Brigit and Jean-Paul Devries and their extensive archeological work around Romagne, which is on display at their 14-18 museum in the village.

metal pieces typically found in a wooden structure supports the German and American



documented claims of Vollmer's headquarters being located in the meadow, not too far from the base of Humserberg.

Not too far from this headquarters was the battalion garbage pit. This shallow area contained German wine and beer bottles and fragments of clay schnapps containers, which the soldiers would sip prior to a battle. The preponderance of these were broken. The depth of artifacts here started on the surface and were buried down to 20 centimeters in the ground. This would be a common find near any headquarters, as units in the field

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Information on this and other research related to German life behind the lines in the Meuse-Argonne Region can be found at the following website: http://www.romagne14-18.com (accessed 28 July 2011).

endeavored to maintain some sort of sanitation and field discipline regardless of the length of stay at a particular location.[1237]

The remainder of the meadow area along the southern base of Humserberg, where the 210th Prussians and the headquarters of the 1st Battalion, 120th Württemberg were deployed yielded thousands of other artifacts.[1238] Of particular interest was the discovery of hundreds of German 7.9mm rounds. This is the same type of ammunition used by German infantry soldiers along the Western Front during the Great War, with the standard Model (Gewehr) 1898 Mauser.[1239] These rounds were recovered from depths of five to twenty centimeters. The rule of thumb for this was is that the closer the artifacts are to a hill, or rise/land elevation, the shallower they are. Conversely, the further and lower they are in a meadow, or trench, the deeper they tend to be due to the effects of erosion, etc. The condition of the artifacts varied considerably. Those in the moist meadow tended to show more corrosion than those closer to the hill.

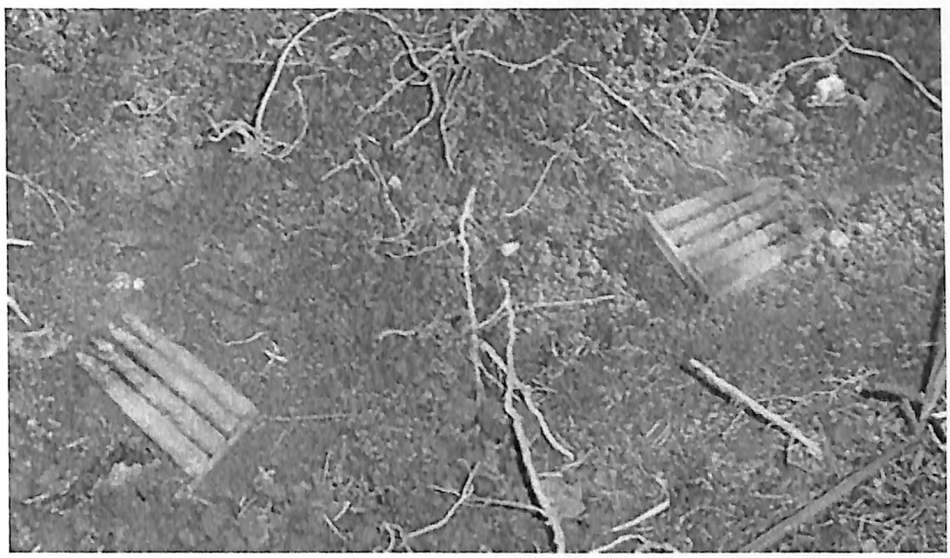
[1237] Brigit and Jean-Paul Devries and their 14-18 museum in the village. Information on this and other research related to German life behind the lines in the Meuse-Argonne Region can be found at the following website: http://www.romagne14-18.com (accessed 28 July 2011).

[1238] History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d. Cooke, James J. *The All-Americans at War: The 82nd Division in the Great War, 1917–1918.* West Port, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999; Gruppe Argonne Attack plan/objectives between Fleville and Gesnes, 6512, 7 October 1918 (Nr. 47a) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne and Gruppe Aisne unit deployment locations, 8 October 1918, 1:25,000 (Nr. 50, Nr. 51) (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); Gruppe Argonne Unit Order of Battle, 7 October 1918, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2. Württemberg Landwehr Division Argonne Defensive Line, Ia 5608, 31 August 1918 (Nr. 28) (2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 4 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 5 October 1918, 1:25,000; 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 6 October 1918, 1:25,000, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army); 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Map/Overlay, 7 October 1918, 1:25,000 Ia6503 (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army).

[1239] John Walter, *Military Rifles of Two World Wars,* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Stackpole Books; 2003), 64-67; David Nash (Introduction), *German Army Handbook; April 1918,* (London, Arms and Armour Press; 1977), 54-61.

There were two groupings of bullets and accoutrements. The first was a scattered and irregular smattering of them across a portion of the meadow. The other group was a literal line of ammunition recovered, at five meter intervals in good military fashion, just east of Vollmer's headquarters, facing the direction of the American attack. This arrangement, or lack thereof, of the artifacts in the midst of the meadow along the southern face of Humserberg fits well with the description by both German and American sources regarding the condition of the 210th Prussian advance guard when they arrived early on 8 October 1918, literally dropping their gear and weapons to eat breakfast before going into battle just west of Vollmer's battalion headquarters. The organized cache of ammunition and equipment on the east side of this headquarters would have been belonged to Vollmer's Württembergers, who were in battle array and already fighting.[1240]

Figure 38 - unfired rounds from the 210th Prussian Regiment in the meadow



[1240] J.M. Tillman, 82nd Division Field Orders, History of Operations, Great War, 82nd Division Archives and Museum, (Fort Bragg, NC) 1929; Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 59-62; "Testimony of

The recovered German rifle ordnance from both the organized and scattered groupings of the German ammunition were live. This means that there were no expended or fired German rifle rounds recovered in this area. This would of course suggest that either these soldiers did indeed surrender without a fight, or something else transpired for them to abandon their ammunition and personal effects. Either way, it seems evident that this portion of what we know of the York battle is accurate as well, as not one expended German rifle munitions was recovered in this area.

Hundreds of military accoutrements, latches, equipment brackets and clasps were recovered here. This encompassed the metal pieces one would find attached to World War One German belts, web gear, cartridge belts, helmet chinstrap mounts, pouches and straps. What is more, a half-dozen harmonica reed plates were found as well among these items. During the Great War, harmonica playing was a particularly popular for German soldiers.

In addition to the diverse accoutrement finds, several military uniforms buttons associated with both Württemberg and Prussian infantry regiments were recovered from the meadow. These included a wide assortment of Imperial German army tunic buttons, equipment buttons, rear of tunic belt hooks, undergarment buttons and jacket buttons. Of these, several buttons with the Prussian Eagle emblazoned on them were also recovered, confirming the presence of 210th Prussian Reserve Infantry Regiment here. Additionally, a large Imperial Prussian Crown brass stickpin was also recovered. It is of

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German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt

some importance to note that the Württemberger regiments would never have had these Prussian Eagle buttons, nor the Prussian stick pin, thus giving tangible evidence of the presence of the 210th Prussian Regiment in this location. Other artifacts recovered here included uniform buttons, a trench art ring, probably carved from an artillery brass retaining band (a common practice for soldiers in the line), several sewing thimbles, German coins dating to this period and numerous other personal effects were recovered.



Figure 39 - An Imperial Crown device from the 210th Prussian Regiment excavated near the York site.

Another interesting find was an Imperial Prussian brass crown accoutrement, supporting the assessment that the 210 Prussian Regiment was deployed here. The wide array of these diverse personal effects, combined with the abundance of live German ammunition, supports the supposition that the soldiers in this area were captured, and therefore abandoned these items that otherwise would not have been left the battlefield.



Figure 40 - Harmonica pieces, latches, clips and diverse accoutrements recovered from the meadow

There were also American finds recovered among this plentiful grouping of German military artifacts. The important items included a several American .30-06 caliber cartridges (fired) as well as a cache of Chauchat rounds, which included a large group of both expended and live rounds . The recovery of spent American .30-06 rounds indicates that York's surviving squad members did provide some covering fires as he attacked the German machinegun.

What was interesting among the American related finds, conversely, was the large amount of French Chauchat 8mm Lebel rounds recovered at the base of Humserberg, approximately 40 meters west of the Endriss trench. This light machinegun

was carried by Private Percy Beardsley, who had claimed to have played a bigger role in the battle than he has been otherwise recognized for. What the cache tells us is that Private Beardsley may have indeed provided active suppressing fires against the German machinegun position to enable York to safely move to his flanking position. As the Chauchat had open magazines, it was notorious for jamming during firing. To overcome these jams during battle, Beardsley would have pried loose a series of live rounds from the magazine, to enable the weapon to fire again. This would explain the mix of live and expended French 8mm Lebel rounds in this area, which also adds a whole new dimension to the York legacy.

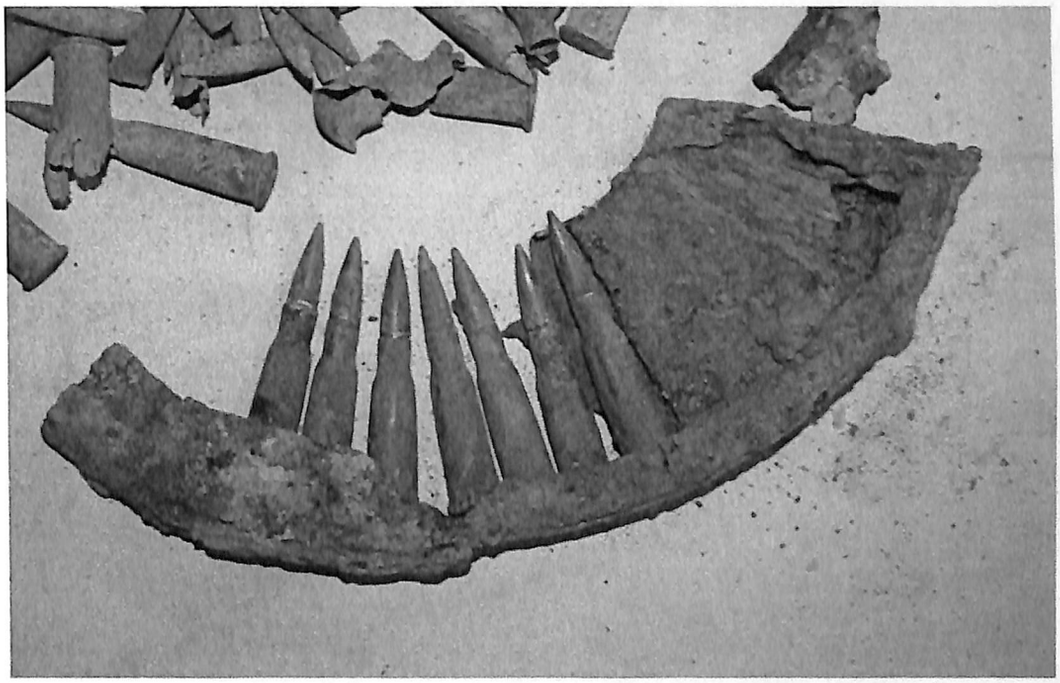


Figure 41 Fragment of Chauchat clip recovered near the York site, likely dropped by Private Beardsley

The final area related to this specific engagement where battlefield archeology was conducted is the southern face of Humserberg. This encompasses the area from the meadow to the supply road. Once again, several key finds were recovered from this area

to help us understand what transpired here on 8 October 1918. As in the meadow, German uniform related accoutrements, pieces of equipment, latches, etc., were recovered, as well as mess kit items. Additionally, a German M1916 Ersatz steel bayonet was found here. The evidence of such discoveries is congruent with members of the 125th Württemberg dropping their gear here as they made their way down the hill to surrender to the Americans after York had knocked out the machinegun and had induced Leutnant Vollmer to order them to drop their weapons. As interesting as these finds are, the most noteworthy were near the Endriss trench. As previously described, the trench was a 17th Century border trench, carved into a portion of Humserberg facing due east. This trench was used on 8 October by Leutnant Fritz Endriss' platoon during the American attack into the valley. It was also from this trench that history tells us Endriss led a forlorn bayonet attack against Alvin York.

The documentation tells us that this encounter between York and Endriss occurred after York eliminated the 125th Württemberg machinegun and infantry support platoon higher up the hill. At some point during his return trip down to rejoin his men and the German prisoners in the meadow, Endriss caught sight of York and ordered his men to follow him in a bayonet attack against this lone American. During the subsequent melee, six Germans were gunned down, which included Leutnant Endriss being the last to fall in action. This is the famous incident in which York allegedly shot the last man first so as to ensure that those ahead of him would not go to ground, and then kill the leading soldier last.

The lower end of the trench mouth, closest to the meadow, was a treasure trove of artifacts. The finds included the usual assortment of items, clasps, buttons and ammunition usually found where soldiers fell in action. Among these finds, the grouping lowest, and closest to York in the meadow, included a German officer's whistle, complete with cork and reed. As Endriss was the only German officer recorded to fall in action along the southern half of Humserberg, it is with high probability that this whistle was his. This is an incredible find, in that it accurately places the last man shot by York, being Leutnant Fritz Endriss, within ten feet of where York was fighting from. This matches the narrative discerned in both the German and American archives.

However, it was a series of important artifacts just west (behind) the Endriss trench that would ultimately lead us to the position from which York probably fired his .45 Automatic Colt Pistol. Nearly in a line near the Endriss trench, we recovered four American .45 caliber shot rounds lodged into the earth. Having marked these finds, we brought a small arms expert to the site. After he reviewed the location of these fired rounds, he pinpointed the specific location from where one would have to be to fire these four rounds in such a pattern. The

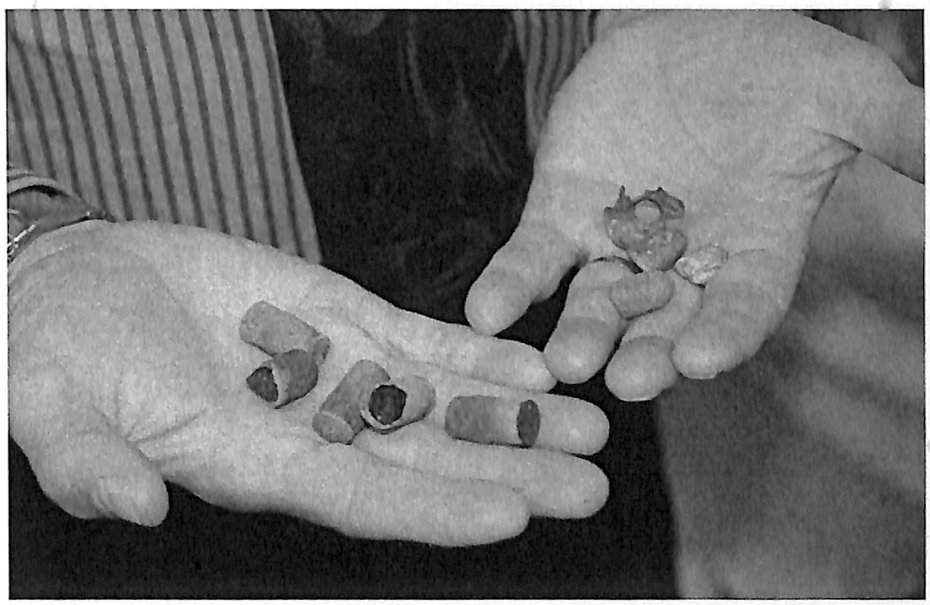


Figure 42 - American .45 caliber bullets and cartridges recovered near Endriss trench. Photo: Courtesy of Kory O'Keefe

location he suggested to scan was twenty meters southwest of the Endriss trench. This expert's precision proved incredible as twenty-four .45 caliber cartridge casings were recovered from this location.

The 1919 History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. is clear that York used a .45 Automatic Colt Pistol during this melee.[1241] All twenty-four of the .45 ACP cartridges that we uncovered were in a narrow area and five to ten centimeters in the Argonne earth. From a logical military, terrain analysis and sourced based perspective, this site corresponded precisely to where the position from which York used his side arm to defeat the Endriss bayonet attack.

This impressive array of artifacts and their locations indicate that what the history says of the York story is largely true. The key is not to hinge such an assessment on a few artifacts. Only by holistically reviewing what was recovered and overlaying it with the terrain and history, can one make such a determination. In review, what does the archeology tell us about the York battle? In the meadow, we found evidence of a German battalion headquarters, large quantities of live German ammunition and emblems of both the (German) Prussian and Württemberg

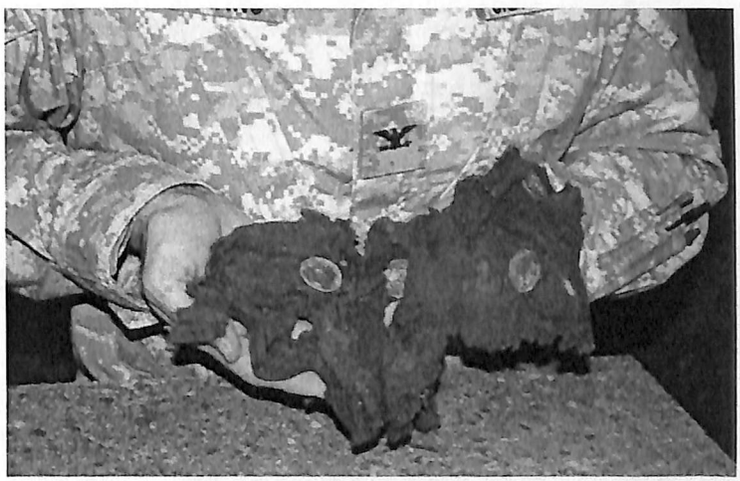


Figure 43 - A fragment of one of two American Army tunics recovered near the York site. Note the buttons are intact. Photo: Courtesy of Josiah Mastriano

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[1241] Buxton, 58-63.

armies. These were from soldiers of the 120th Württemberg and Prussian 210th Regiments, whom the seventeen Americans captured without a fight. On the hill above the meadow, hundreds of shell casings and cartridges from a German machine gun and related rifle positions were recovered, in addition to pieces of German accoutrements, equipment and belt clasps. These were from the soldiers of the 125th Württemberg Regiment who attempted to fight off the 17 Americans, but were eventually forced to surrender.[1242]

Several American 30.06 shell casings and cartridges were also recovered in the meadow among the artifacts of the surrendered Germans. Two important breakthroughs occurred after we uncovered three fired (spent) US .45 caliber bullets. The first was a concentration of 30.06 casings at the junction of the two sunken roads. This concentration, number and position conforms to York's description of his action in this area.

The second breakthrough was the location of the three Colt .45 bullets found in a line over a 20-meter area, near the mouth of the only trench in the vicinity. The trench, the single most important enduring man-made terrain feature here, was the position from which German Leutnant Endriss led his doomed bayonet attack against York.[1243] German uniform buttons and accoutrements were also uncovered in the area, indicating

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[1242] Viktor-Karl Lapple, 167-173; Dr. Gustav Strohm, *Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120,* (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922), 160-166; Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. *Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918*, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60.

[1243] *Official History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. 1917-1919.* The Bobbs-Merrill Company; Brooklyn, NY, 1919; 2nd Landwehr Division, Divisional Situation Report, (Generalkommando z.b.v. 58, Fifth German Army, German Imperial Army notebooks 4, 5), 6-9 October 1918; "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt; Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 59-62.

that some of these slugs may have hit their mark. Just twenty meters below this locale, the biggest single find in the search for the "York Site" was uncovered. Twenty-four of the Colt .45 Automatic Colt Pistol (ACP) shell casings were found. It seemed clear that most, if not all of these had to be York's as they were within 20 meters of the only trench in the area; Fritz Endriss' trench. The discovery of a German officer's whistle at the spot where Leutnant Endriss would have fallen seems to tie the whole story together. The preponderance of the archeology supports most of what has been passed down as York's performance on 8 October 1918. The important consideration is that these findings also largely support the events as recorded in both the German and American archives.

As a recap, it is of some importance to review the findings in the context of the battle. Starting in the meadow, the artifacts recovered suggest that the Germans here surrendered without resistance. In the midst of these various German items, there were American 30.06 shell casings showing that among the German prisoners, there were American soldiers firing in support of York's movements. Slightly further up the hill, and near the trench is where the Colt .45 shell casings were discovered. Near these, were a number of buttons and miscellaneous pieces of German equipment that were likely to have come off those York shot during the German bayonet attack, which includes the Endriss' whistle. On the hill, the German machine gun and rifle positions contained not only evidence of a machinegun, but also numerous shell casings, some cartridges and buttons/equipment pieces. The Germans here fought and then surrendered. Finally, York's rifle position was discovered; the site from which he eliminated the 125th MG position in a location supported by both US and German history.

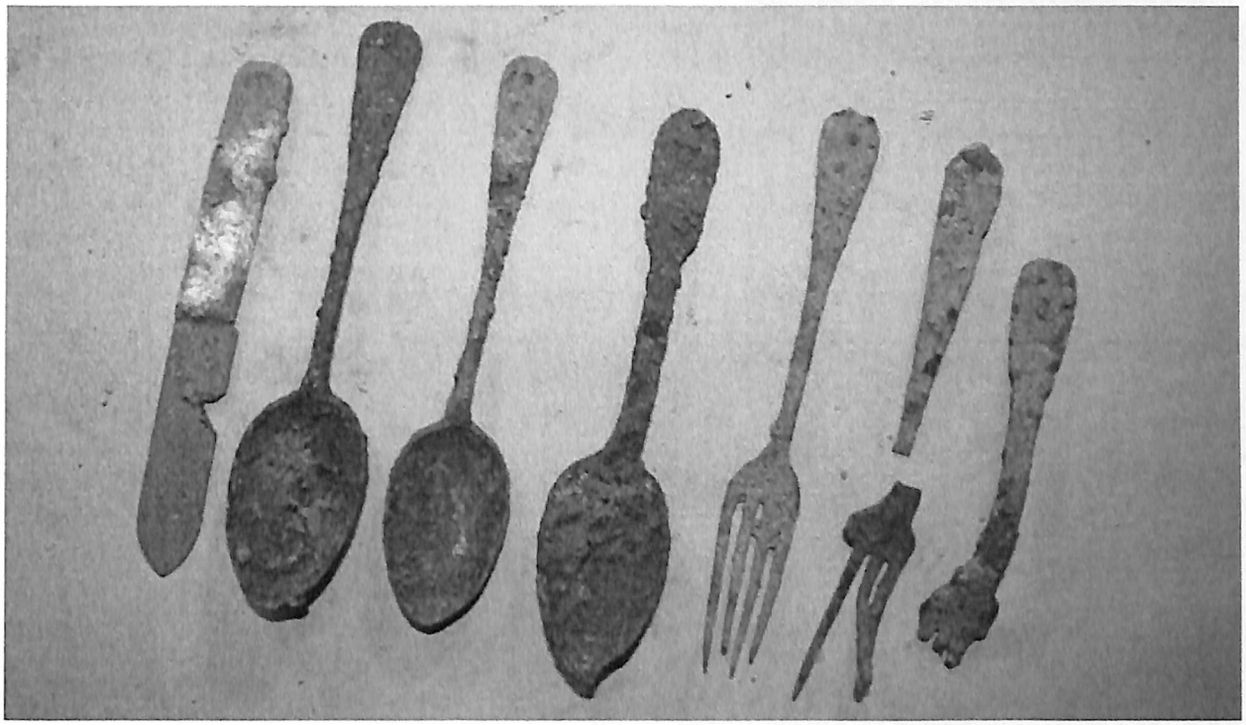


Figure 44 - American mess kit utensils recovered on Humserberg, near the York site. Photo: Mastriano Collection

Another link to the Sergeant York story was the complete recovery of the identification tag and personal effects from the unit fighting against Alvin York on 8 October 1918. The soldier, Wilhelm Härer, was a machine gunner assigned to the 125th Landwehr Württemberg Regiment. His effects were located on Humserberg and irrefutably confirm the location of the 125th's right flank and thereby supports these conclusions. This was a major coup in that we discovered a name and unit directly linked to the 8 October 1918 fight against York's unit. We know that on 8 October 1918, Wilhelm Härer was part of Leutnant Paul Lipp's portion of Humserberg. Lipp commanded the machine gun which Alvin York assaulted and destroyed. Lipp himself was captured by York. As a result of York's actions, Wilhelm Härer's gun crew withdrew with Wilhelm Härer falling in action on Humserberg.

Taken together, the events of the 8 October 1918 battle seem to come to life. Everything was exactly where it should have been based upon the numerous threads of information discernible from the German and American battle accounts. The only twist to the tale thus far was the discovery of a cache of Chauchat rounds; both expended and live, suggesting that Private Percy Beardsley played a more significant role that he was recognized for. However, forensic analysis of the .30-06 and .45 caliber cartridges would provide both more clarity and even another twist to the York story.



Figure 45 Gas mask belonging to Wilhelm Härer
Photo: Mastriano Collection

Chapter 18 - CSI meets Sergeant York

Using Firearm Identification to confirm or deny the York Story

The historical record is a truly astounding data set, but it is just one data set that should be used in studying the past. Oral tradition or historical documents are impressions of those who set them down. While they may be more or less accurate, I will reiterate that the archaeological record is often more precise about past events in space and time, as well as an independent line of evidence that can be compared and contrasted with the other lines of evidence to achieve a fuller picture and understanding of the past.[1244]
Dr. Douglas Scott, Archaeology on Battlefields

The discovery of fired casings from an American .45-caliber pistol and an American 30.06-caliber rifle is congruent with the American and German testimony of where York fired such weapons. All were certainly central finds in the archeology related to the 8 October battle.[1245] So too was the recovery of fired .45-caliber bullets. Although the discovery of these artifacts was important, what does the application of forensic firearm identification analysis say regarding these rounds and cartridges?

Forensic firearm is a mature science, developed in criminal law enforcement theory throughout the western world. This science uses metallic "finger prints" to identify the source of bullets and shell-casings. Firing pins and receivers all leave tell-tale marks on the brass casing, while the rifling of barrels leaves marks on bullets; the basis of this science. An analysis of the bullets and cartridges can, for example, tell us what type and which specific model of weapon they were fired from. This disciplined approach to

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[1244] Dr. Douglas Scott, "The Archeology of Battlefields," Interview conducted by the Archeology Institute of America, 11 October 2005. Available online at the following website: http://www.archaeology.org/online/interviews/scott.html (accessed 30 July 2011).
[1245] Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," *Infantry Journal*, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 349. Captain Swindler also points out that York used all of the ammo from the front pouches of his belt, which equals a maximum of fifty rounds fired. This agrees with G. Edward Buxton's statement on this given in the 82nd Division History from 1919.

forensics is called "firearms identification."[1246] From this approach, Dr. Scott states, that "forensic identification techniques [can be applied] to historical data or questions."[1247] Indeed, firearms identification can be an extremely valuable scientific discipline to apply in the evaluation of the York site. The fact of the matter is that each rifle and side-arm has a distinct signature, or finger-print, that it leaves upon both bullets and cartridges.[1248] Although there is overwhelming historic evidence to support the supposition that the forty-six 30.06 cartridge casings, six .45-caliber bullets and twenty-four.45 cartridge casings are York's, forensic analysis can be applied to these to accept or reject this historic based analysis.[1249]

The goal is to have an expert in the field evaluate these artifacts to determine if they match the type and model weapons used by him. This would introduce an unbiased and un-subjective review of our research methodology in addition to achieving an unparalleled understanding of the York story. This would provide irrefutable evidence to support, or contradict, what we know of the 8 October 1918 Battle of the Argonne.

Dr. Douglas Scott generously offered to conduct forensic based firearms identification. This was quite an honor as there is none more qualified than Dr. Scott. He was among the first in the field to apply this approach to battlefield archeology and is not only known around the world, but deferred to as the expert in this field. Having conducted archeology work since the 1960s, Dr. Scott achieved fame for his application

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[1246] Brian J. Heard, *Handbook of Firearms and Ballistics: Examining and Interpreting Forensic Evidence*, (The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, Wiley-Blackwell; 2008), 4-1 through 4-4.
[1247] Email correspondence from Dr. Doug Scott to Douglas Mastriano, 24 August 2011.
[1248] Physical Evidence Program Manager, *Firearm/Toolmarks Procedures Manual DFS Document 240-D100,* (Richmond, Virginia, Department of Forensic Science; 2007), 42-117.
[1249] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63.

of forensic-based battlefield approach associated with the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and numerous other studies from the American Civil War and US -Indian conflict. Since then, Dr. Scott has served as an expert on international forensic analysis teams not only in North America, but also in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. He is currently full-time faculty teaching Anthropology and Geography at the University of Nebraska. Suffice it to say that there is no one more qualified to conduct analysis of the York artifacts. As his report from this analysis is central to this chapter, it shall be quoted from extensively.

Dr. Scott was given the forty-six American 30.06 cartridges recovered from the position where York outflanked the 125th Württemberg machinegun position, the twenty-four .45 cartridges from the edge of the Humserberg meadow, and the fired .45-caliber bullets that were recovered near the Endriss trench.[1250] The purpose of his analysis was to apply forensic firearm identification techniques to these artifacts to identify the make and model of the weapons they were fired from. The analysis would determine if the artifacts matched the weapon York fought with on 8 October 1918 and thereby confirm or deny the accuracy of the York site but to also bring a new clarity to what we know.

Firearms identification analysis of expended cartridges provides valuable scientific information. Of the value of scientific analysis of cartridges, the Federal

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[1250] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919, (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63; Dr. Gustav Strohm, Die Württembergishchen Regimenter im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 25, Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 120, (Stuttgart, Belser Verlasbuchhandklung; 1922), 160-166; Anton Franke, General der Artillerie. Die 2. Württemberger im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, (Berlag Berger's Literarisches, Stuttgart, 1921), 52-60; Captain H.O. Swindler, "Turkey Match," Infantry Journal, Col. XXXVII, No. 4 October 1930, 349; Edward G. Buxton, Jr., Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919, (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63.

Bureau of Investigation says, "Cartridge-case... examinations can determine the caliber or gauge, the manufacturer, and whether there are marks of value for comparison... The microscopic characteristics of evidence cartridge cases and shot shell casings can be examined to determine whether they were fired from a specific firearm."[1251] The University of Virginia's Department of Forensic Sciences outlines the following components of data that can be gathered from fired cartridges,

> Determination of Marks - Visual and microscopic examination of the cartridge/cartridge case may reveal a variety of markings. Types of marks that might be found may be as follows:
> Breech face class marks
> Extractor marks
> Ejector marks
> Resizing marks
> Chamber marks
> Anvil marks
> Magazine marks
> Ejection port marks
> Firing Pin Impression (class and individual characteristics)
> Firing Pin Drag
> Slide Scuff Mark
> Slide Drag Mark[1252]

The result of this forensics firearms analysis as outlined above is to not only identify the caliber and manufacturer of the rifle and pistol cartridge, but also to identify the specific weapon it was fired from, because,[1253]

> ... the tremendous pressures on the base of the bullet are also exerted in an equal and opposite direction on the cartridge case. The case is thus slammed into the standing breech face replicating, in reverse, the tool marks thereon. As the cartridge is extracted from the chamber, the extractor claw imparts its own class

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[1251] Kim Waggoner (editor), *Handbook of Forensic Services*, (Quantico, Virginia, US Department of Justice, FBI Laboratory Publication Federal Bureau of Investigation; 2007), 64.
[1252] Physical Evidence Program Manager, *Firearm/Toolmark Procedures Manual DFS Document 240-D100,* (Richmond, Virginia, Department of Forensic Science; 2007), 31.
[1253] Brian J. Heard, *Handbook of Firearms and Ballistics: Examining and Interpreting Forensic Evidence*, (The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex Wiley-Blackwell; 2008), 145-203.

and individual tool marks on to the rim of the cartridge. The ejector striking the base of the cartridge to tip it away from the gun will also leave its own class and individual characteristics. [1254]

The question then arises, what type of rifle did York carry into battle on 8 October 1918? On this point there has been some confusion. The most celebrated rifle used by the United States during the Great War was the M1903 Springfield. This was the standard rifle used by the United States Army before the war and it was renowned for its reliability and accuracy.[1255]

However, York's regiment, the 328th Infantry, was issued the M1917 U.S. Enfield "Eddystone" Rifle, not the Springfield M1903. Of this, the division's official history says, "...the 1917 Eddystone rifle was issued... and much energy was concentrated on preliminary training for service practice at the Divisional Rifle Range at Norcross, Ga.[1256] The reason for fielding an arguably less effective M1917 Enfield instead of just producing more M1903 Springfield rifles was that in 1917, the United States was unprepared for war. The Springfield Armory and Rock Island Arsenal just could not, on their own, produce enough rifles to support the massive expansion of the American war effort. The saving grace was that the Remington and Winchester Arms Company plants in New Haven, Connecticut, Ilion, New York and Eddystone, Pennsylvania were already producing thousands of the British Pattern 1914 .303 caliber rifles.[1257] Once the United

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[1254] Brian J. Heard, *Handbook of Firearms and Ballistics: Examining and Interpreting Forensic Evidence*, (The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex Wiley-Blackwell; 2008), 175.
[1255] Bret Werner, Uniforms, Equipment and Weapons of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I," (Atglen, Pennsylvania, Schiffer Military History; 2006), 166-169.
[1256] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919*, (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 1-12.
[1257] John Walter, *Allied Small Arms of World War One*, (Wiltshire, England, The Crowood Press, Limited; 2000), 175-177.

Stated declared war, these three arms companies altered their machinery to produce the M1917 Enfield rifle for the standard American 30.06-caliber cartridge. Only by doing this could the United States support the massive and rapid creation of a national army.[1258]

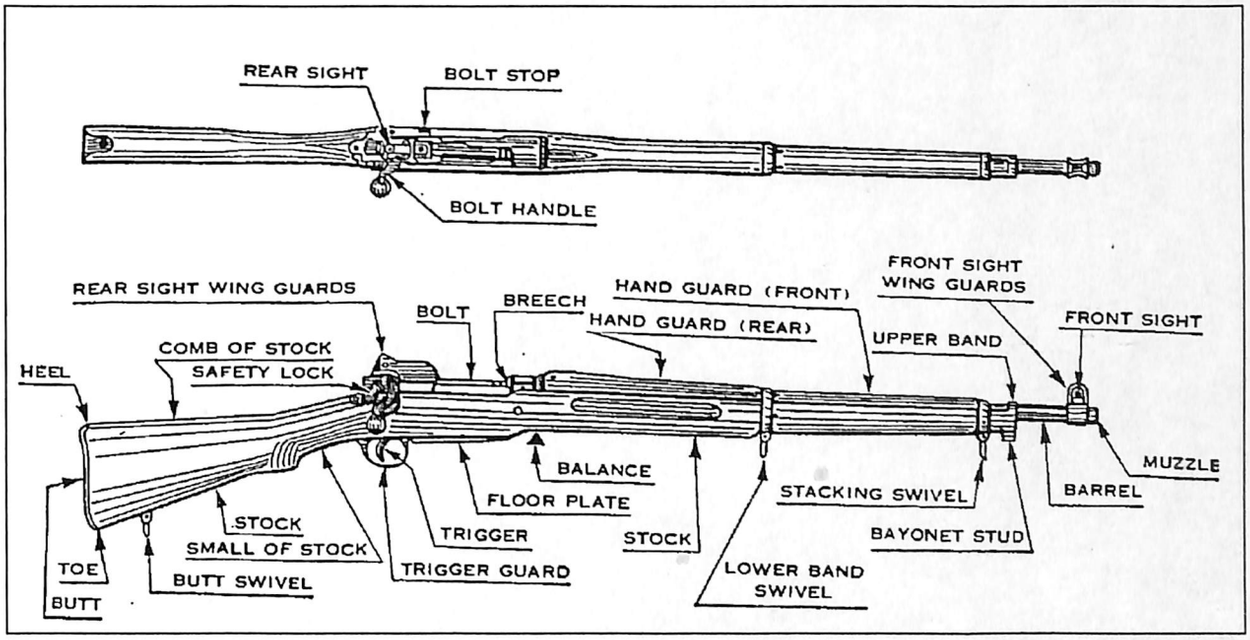


Figure 46 The U.S. Rifle Caliber .30 M1917 (Enfield) - the weapon used by Alvin York
Source: US War Department Field Manual 23-6, 1942

The confusion over the weapon carried by York is because of the movie *Sergeant York.* In the movie, York is armed with the M1903 Springfield Rifle, a weapon he never carried. Warner Brothers faux pas had nothing to do with depicting York with the correct weapon; rather they used what was available at the studio, which was the Springfield.[1259]

This has led some to argue that York, and York alone in the 328th Regiment had a M1903 as he, "somehow he finagled to swap his issue rifle out for a Model 1903

[1258] Bruce N. Canfield, *U.S. Infantry Weapons of the First World War*, (Lincoln, Rhode Island, Andrew Mowbray Publishers; 2000), 76-80.
[1259] Morgan Simmons, "Family keeps York's legacy alive," *Chattanooga Times*, 24 August 2009.

Springfield."[1260] Yet, the history and documentation on this are clear. Not only did the 328th Infantry Regiment have the M1917 as its standard infantry weapon, but so did the entire 82nd Division. The idea that York could randomly decide which weapon he wanted in the 82nd is preposterous. Such self arming would have been impossible for a soldier within the strict regimentation of General Pershing's concepts of military discipline and weapon accountability. Finally, he would not have had any opportunity to "finagle" a Springfield from the battlefield, and gotten away with it, as, until 8 October 1918, he was only in a minor battle during the St. Mihiel Operation. Perhaps in sustained combat, a soldier could carry an extra weapon from the field of battle, but York, up until this point, had not been afforded such an opportunity and therefore had as his primary weapon the less alluring M1917.[1261]

The only occasion when the 328th Regiment and the 82nd Infantry Division parted from their M1917 Eddystone Rifles was when they trained with the British 66th (2nd East Lancashire) Division near the Somme in June 1918. While with the British, the M1917 rifles were held in the rear area as the Americans were directed to use the British .303 Lee-Enfield's due to the local ammunition supply. Once the regiment left the British sector and was ordered to move to another part of France, "The Lee--Enfield rifles... were turned back to the British and the U.S. 1917 Rifle (Eddystone) was reissued."[1262] Despite the glamour of York armed with an American weapon, the Springfield M1903, his unit

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[1260] Garry James, " Sgt. York American Rifleman American Hero," *American Rifleman* (March 2005), 46-51.
[1261] ABMC, *82d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War*, (American Battle Monuments Commission; Washington, DC., United States Government Printing Office; 1944), 5-14.
[1262] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 12.

was outfitted with the M1917 Eddystone, a British design re-bored for the US Army 30.06 standard ammunition.[1263]

With this unambiguous understanding that Alvin York indeed had a M1917 Eddystone Rifle, it is possible to have the forty-six 30.06 cartridges from the York site examined to ascertain if they came from a make and model of the rifle that matched York's. After preparing the cartridges for analysis, Dr. Scott conducted a surface examination of them. This revealed that the head stamps of all forty-six of the 30.06 cartridges from the York site were produced by Remington Arms Company in 1917 and 1918. This is consistent with the ammunition that would have been used at that time by the American Expeditionary Forces in the Great War.[1264]

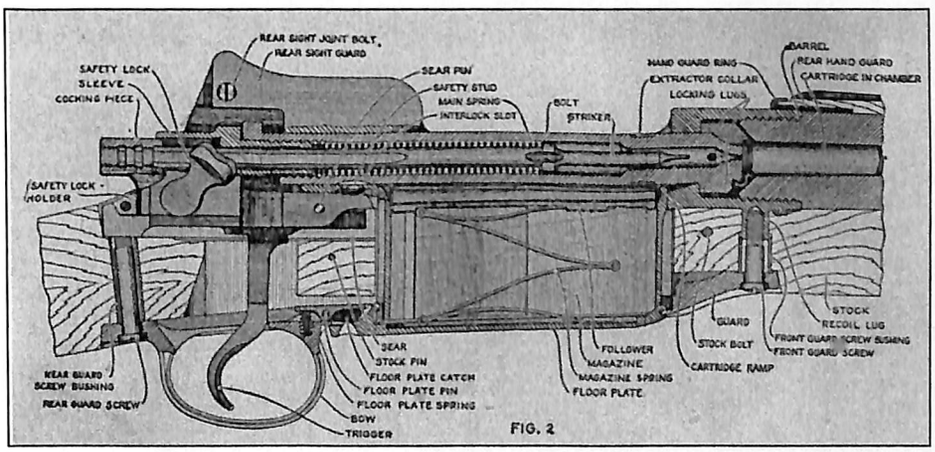


Figure 47 Cross-section of the U.S. Rifle Caliber .30 M1917 (Enfield). Source: Soldier's Handbook for the M1917 Rifle, published in 1917

As mentioned, forty-five of the forty-six recovered 30.06 cartridges were fired. Dr. Scott analyzed the forty-five fired cartridges to determine whether they came from the correct weapon associated with Alvin York. To conduct this research, Dr. Scott used

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[1263] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 1-7.
[1264] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 7.

an "American Optical Universal Comparison Microscope," with magnifications ranging from 10x to 40x.[1265] During this evaluation, he scrutinized each cartridge to assess the condition of ejector marks, chamber marks, extractor marks, breech face marks, the firing pin impression and any other signature features that would identify these with a specific weapon.[1266]



Figure 48 Cleaned .30-06-caliber cartridge case heads and the Remington-UMC 1918 and 1917 dated head stamps. Note the similarity in the firing pin impressions between the two cartridge cases. Source of Photo and caption: Courtesy of Dr. Doug Scott

During this comparative analysis of the cartridges, Dr. Scott determined that the cartridges fired from a M1903 Springfield Rifle differed greatly from those fired from a

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[1265] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 5-11.

[1266] Brian J. Heard, *Handbook of Firearms and Ballistics: Examining and Interpreting Forensic Evidence*, (The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex Wiley-Blackwell; 2008), 164-178.

M1917 Eddystone. The key differentiation was that the M1917 ejector mark is more pronounced on the case head, as the extractor on this weapon is "flatter and blunter." Based upon this observable signature difference between from the M1903 and M1917, Dr. Scott determined that the "...cases have strong extractor and ejector marks that are consistent with being fired and extracted from a Model 1917 Enfield rifle."[1267] As will be elaborated more later, Dr. Scott determined that all the cartridges were fired *from a single M1917 Enfield.*

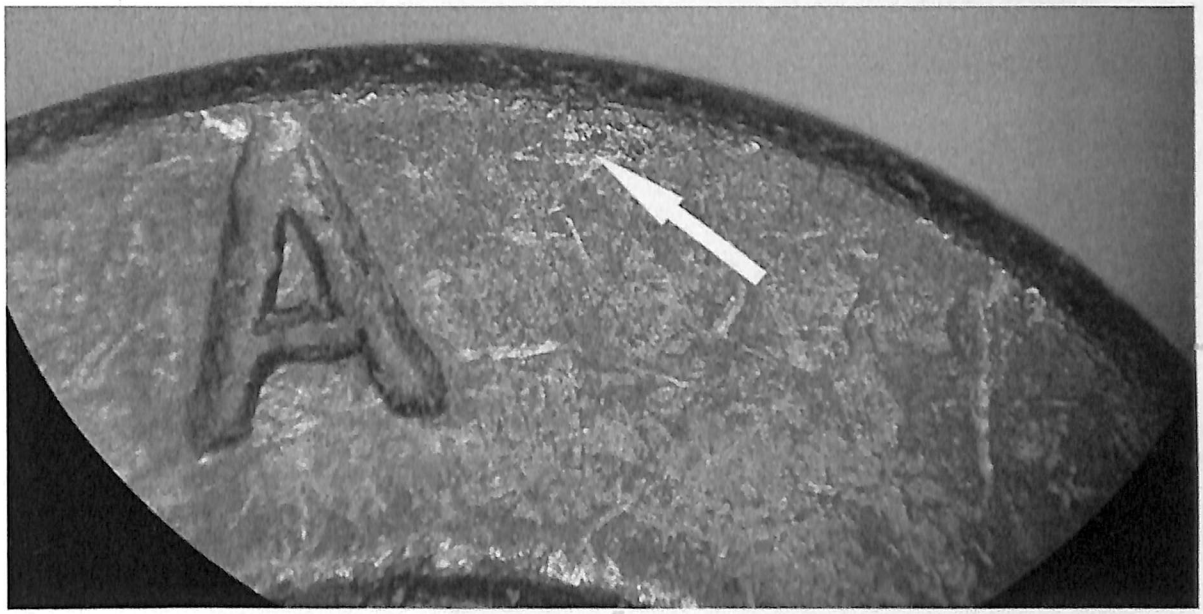


Figure 49 Arrow points to an extractor mark on head of a .30-06-caliber cartridge case that are consistent with the M1917 Enfield Rifle. Photo and caption courtesy of Dr. Doug Scott

Having determined that the forty-five 30.06 cartridges matched the M1917 Eddystone, Dr. Scott next conducted microscopic analysis of the breech face marks. During firing, the individual tool marks of a weapon leave a metal fingerprint on the

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[1267] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 7-9.

cartridges. These marks of the harder weapon tools, leave tell-tale chamber, firing pin, and breech marks "striation" on the softer cartridges and bullets that can be traced to not only the make and model of a weapon, but also a specific rifle. This works in much the same manner as a fingerprint can lead police to a specific individual.[1268]

Dr. Scott's comparative analysis of the 30.06 cartridges was very illuminating. Using microscopic pattern analysis on the fired cartridge cases, it was clear that "each primer exhibited a series of unique breech face marks imprinted on the case when it was fired as well as the hemispherical firing pin imprint. From this, it was determined that all forty-five fired cartridge cases were consistent with being fired in the same M1917 Enfield Rifle" the same type of weapon York used.[1269]

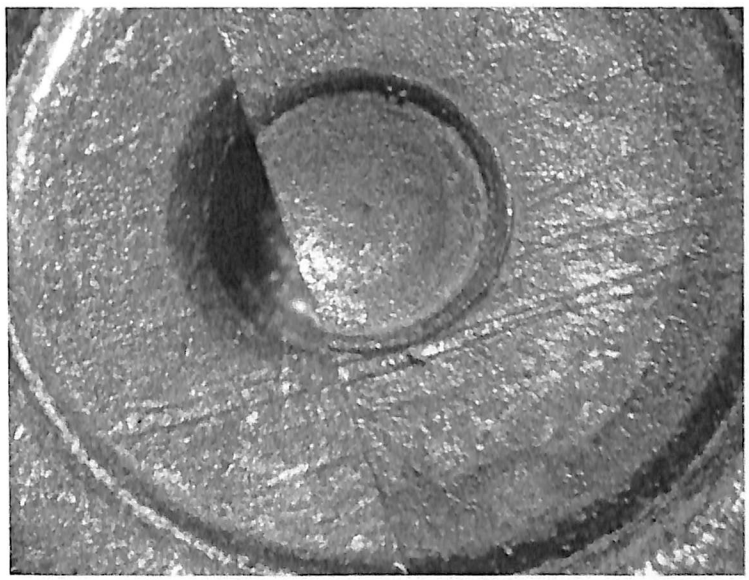


Figure 50 Comparison photo-micrograph of two .30-06-caliber cartridge cases. The firing pin and breech face marks on both cases match indicating they were fired in the same M1917 Enfield rifle. Photo and caption courtesy of Dr. Doug Scott

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[1268] Brian J. Heard, *Handbook of Firearms and Ballistics: Examining and Interpreting Forensic Evidence*, (The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex Wiley-Blackwell; 2008), 174-179.
[1269] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 10.

The next analysis was the .45-caliber bullets and .45-caliber cartridges. Before reciting the analytical findings, it is of some importance to discuss the types of side arms used by the American Expeditionary Forces in World War One. Just as there was more than one type and model of rifle, so too there were multiple types of side arms issued to soldiers during World War One. Just as with the crisis in rifle production, so too keeping up handgun production to the demands of the rapidly expanding National Army compelled the United States to field an array of models and makes of automatic pistols and revolvers.[1270]

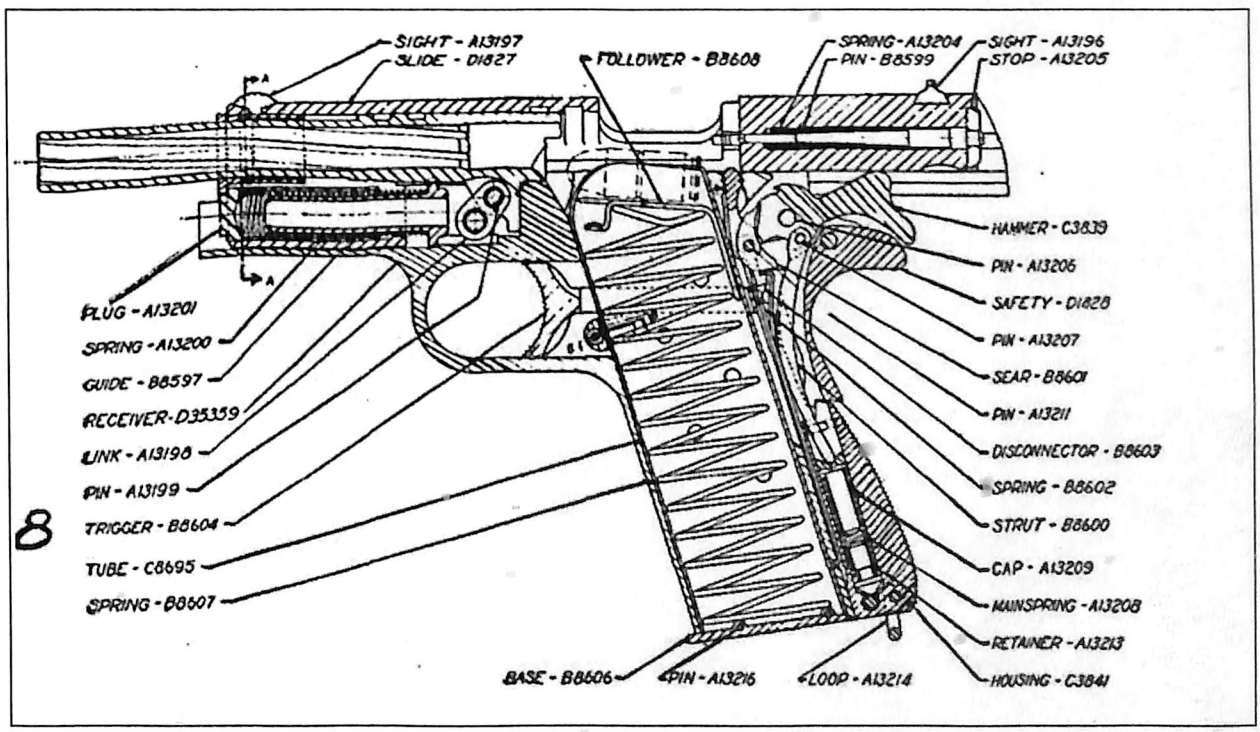


Figure 51 The .45 Automatic Colt Pistol (A1).
Source: US War Department Field Manual 23-35, 1940.

[1270] Bruce N. Canfield, *U.S. Infantry Weapons of the First World War,* (Lincoln, Rhode Island, Andrew Mowbray Publishers; 2000), 52-62.

The best and the most celebrated sidearm issued to American Doughboys in the Great War was the M1911 .45 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol).[1271] Equipped with a seven round magazine, the .45 ACP was issued primarily to officers and non-commissioned officers in the United States Army. The design of this weapon enabled it to use the recoil generated during firing to not only eject the expended cartridge from the chamber, but also to load the next round from the magazine.[1272] For soldiers, the M1911 was the pistol of choice due to its accuracy and hitting power, and I it was this sidearm that York used on 8 October 1918.[1273] It was produced by not only Colt-Browning Arms Company, but also contracted out to Springfield Armory for production.[1274] Despite this, the arms companies were unable to keep up with the rapid and incredible demands to equip a two-million man American army.[1275]

Since the production of the M1911 ACP could not keep pace with America's military demands, ten other side arms were used by the American Expeditionary Forces in World War One (not counting small numbers of more antiquated side arms). Of these other pistols issued to its soldiers, a considerable number of .45-caliber handguns were used during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Of these, the .45-caliber M1917 Smith & Wesson and M1917 Colt Revolvers were some of the most common. Both of these

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[1271] Bret Werner, Uniforms, Equipment and Weapons of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I," (Atglen, Pennsylvania, Schiffer Military History; 2006), 180-183.
[1272] George C. Marshal, *Field Manual 23-45 Automatic Pistol, Caliber .45 M1911 and M1911A1,* (Washington, DC., United States Government Printing Office; 1940), 1-3.
[1273] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., *Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919,* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63; Bruce N. Canfield, *U.S. Infantry Weapons of the First World War,* (Lincoln, Rhode Island, Andrew Mowbray Publishers; 2000), 51.
[1274] Jerry Kuhnhausen, *The Colt .45 Automatic - A Shop Manual*, (McCall, Idaho, Heritage - VSP Shop Manual; 1990), 5-8.
[1275] John Walter, *Military Rifles of Two World Wars,* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Stackpole Books; 2003), 136-139.

M1917 revolvers were equipped with a classic Western style six-round cylinder and, when shot, they each left a distinct striation signature on the cartridges and bullets fired from them. These marks and striations differ significantly from those found on the cartridges and bullets fired from the .45 ACP.[1276]

Due to the lack of enough production of .45-caliber side arms in both the automatic and revolver models, the United States also distributed .38-caliber revolvers to its soldiers during the First World War. These six-shooters included the Smith & Wesson 1899, the Colt M1892, M1894 and M1901, M1903 and M1905 revolvers.[1277] In all, some ten types of side arms were issued to the American Expeditionary Forces between 1917-1918.

Whenever possible, National Army units, such as York's 82nd Infantry Division, received the more up to date M1911 Automatic Colt Pistol. Meanwhile, the preponderance of the revolvers were issued to or used by National Guard units which more often than not, already had these dated weapons in their inventory. This included units such as the Pennsylvania-based 28th Infantry Division "Keystone" in the ravine some 600 meters south of the York site late on 8 October 1918. [1278] Coincidently, relic hunters in this ravine, well outside of York's battlefield, succeeded in uncovering scores of such American revolver cartridges (determined to be so after analysis was conducted on them by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigations). These revolver cartridges were

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[1276] John Walter, *Allied Small Arms of World War One*, (Wiltshire, England, The Crowood Press, Limited; 2000), 140-142.
[1277] John Walter, *Military Rifles of Two World Wars,* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, Stackpole Books; 2003), 174-177 and Bruce N. Canfield, *U.S. Infantry Weapons of the First World War,* (Lincoln, Rhode Island, Andrew Mowbray Publishers, 2000), 52-54.
[1278] Bruce N. Canfield, *U.S. Infantry Weapons of the First World War,* (Lincoln, Rhode Island, Andrew Mowbray Publishers; 2000), 52-54.

from a battle that transpired between the American 28th Keystone Division and the German 122nd Württemberg Landwehr Regiment, which used reverse slope defense to slow the American advance. Neither of these two units was directly involved in York's feat.[1279]

There is no doubt that York used the .45 ACP. Pop culture has a way to muddle fact, again confusion produced the movie *Sergeant York* muddles the issue of which pistol he used. In the scene where Gary Cooper depicts York in action against the Germans, Cooper used a captured Luger to fight off the bayonet attack led by Leutnant Fritz Endriss. As with the confusion over the M1903 Springfield Rifle, the use of a Luger by the actor had more to do with convenience than authenticity. At the time of the filming, the studio simply did not have blanks for the .45 ACP, but it did for the Luger. Therefore, the Luger was substituted in the battle scene in *Sergeant York.*

There is no historical doubt what type of sidearm York used on 8 October 1918, as this is confirmed by both the official divisional history and War Department documents clearly stating this.[1280] A 24 June 1919 letter from Army Major-General Henry Jervey, Assistant Chief of Staff to the Director of Operations, states that York's.45 Automatic Colt Pistol was serial number 244048.[1281] Sergeant York turned this pistol

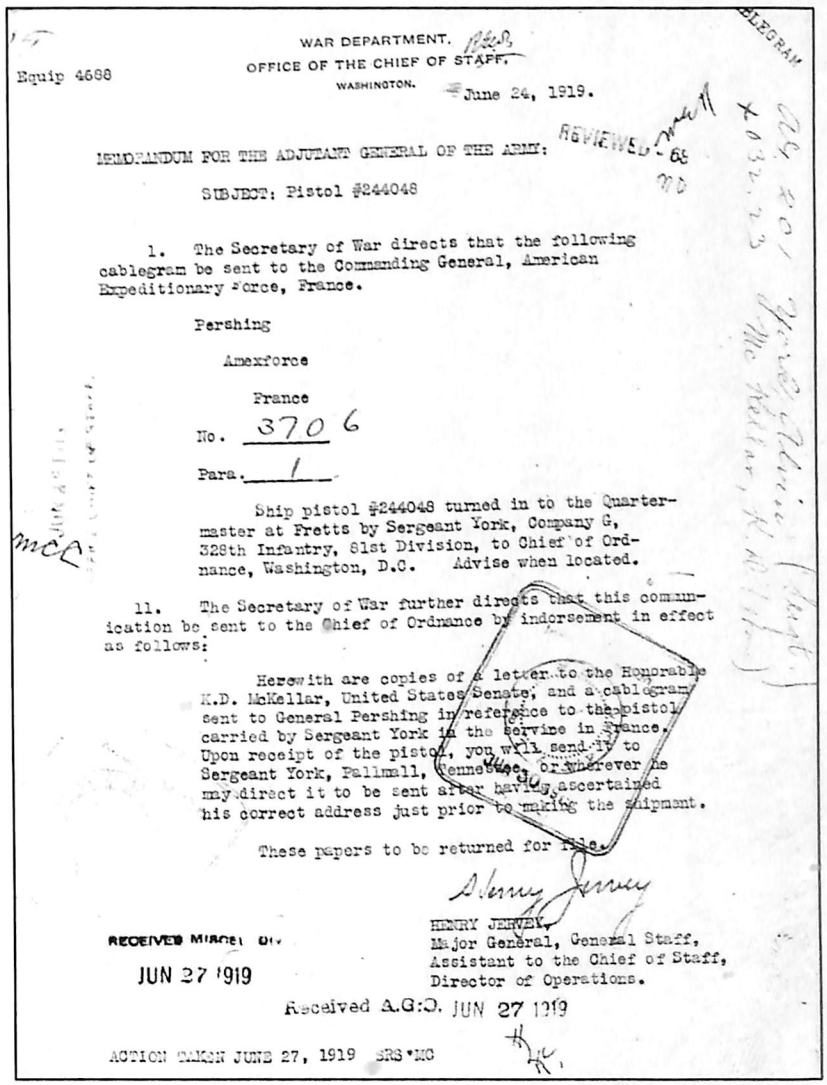
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[1279] Das Württembergishche Landwehr Infanterie Regiment nr. 122 im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, Band 27 (Stuttgart, Belser: 1923).

[1280] Edward G. Buxton, Jr., Official History of 82nd Division American Expeditionary Forces, 1917-1919, (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Publishing; 1920), 58-63; History of the Three Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Regiment of Infantry, Eighty-Second Division, American Expeditionary Forces, United States Army. Atlanta, GA: Foote & Davies, Co., n.d.; Cooke, James J. The All-Americans at War: The 82nd Division in the Great War, 1917–1918. West Port, Connecticut: Praeger, 1999; "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt.

[1281] Letter from Major-General Henry Jervey, to the Adjutant General of the United States Army, 24 June 1919, United States War Department, Office of the Chief of Staff.

into the Army Quartermaster office in Frettes, France, prior to boarding a ship home to the United States in May 1919.[1282] Incidentally, after the war, Tennessee Senator K.D. McKellar requested, on behalf of York, that the War Department to find and give back this weapon to Alvin. Once the War Department realized that they would have to go through 65,000 awaiting shipment back to the United States, pistols at ports in France the issued was dropped.[1283]



WAR DEPARTMENT.
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF,
WASHINGTON.

Equip 4688

June 24, 1919.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ADJUTANT GENERAL OF THE ARMY:

SUBJECT: Pistol #244048

1. The Secretary of War directs that the following cablegram be sent to the Commanding General, American Expeditionary Force, France.

Pershing

Amexforce

France

No. 3706

Para. 1

Ship pistol #244048 turned in to the Quartermaster at Fretts by Sergeant York, Company G, 328th Infantry, 81st Division, to Chief of Ordnance, Washington, D.C. Advise when located.

11. The Secretary of War further directs that this communication be sent to the Chief of Ordnance by indorsement in effect as follows:

Herewith are copies of a letter to the Honorable K.D. McKellar, United States Senate, and a cablegram sent to General Pershing in reference to the pistol carried by Sergeant York in the service in France. Upon receipt of the pistol, you will send it to Sergeant York, Pallmall, Tennessee, or wherever he may direct it to be sent after having ascertained his correct address just prior to making the shipment.

These papers to be returned for file.

HENRY JERVEY,
Major General, General Staff,
Assistant to the Chief of Staff,
Director of Operations.

RECEIVED MILITARY DIV.
JUN 27 1919

Received A.G.O. JUN 27 1919

ACTION TAKEN JUNE 27, 1919 SRS MC

Figure 52 United States Army memorandum delineating the serial number of York's .45 Automatic Colt Pistol

Dr. Scott began work on the pistol bullets and casings by examining two of the .45 bullets founds adjacent to the Endriss Trench. As with cartridges, firearm identification can reveal quite a bit of information from a fired bullet. Of this, the Federal Bureau of Investigation says; "Fired

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[1282] US Army Service Record Report, "York, Alvin C.," 28 May 1919, United States War Department, Misc. 470.

[1283] Letter from Senator K.D. McKellar, to Secretary of War Baker, 12 June 1919; Letter, from Henry Jervey, Army Operations Chief of Staff, to the Army Adjutant General, 24 June 1919; Memorandum to discontinue search for the York .45 ACP, 21 July 1919, York Military Service Record, 1919.

bullets can be examined to determine general rifling characteristics such as caliber, physical features of the rifling impressions, and the manufacturer of the bullets. The microscopic characteristics on evidence bullets can be compared with test-fired bullets from a suspect firearm to determine whether the evidence bullet was fired from that firearm."[1284]

The two artifacts included a fired .45-caliber bullet with little impact damage and a "cupro-metal [full-metal] jacket." Dr. Scott conducted an analysis of the artifacts, measuring not only the pitch and twist of the groves on the bullets, but also the depth, width and number of such on each bullet.[1285] Just as the previously described fingerprinting occurred on the M1917 Enfield Rifle cartridges, so too, this happens to bullets. From such analysis, one can both determine the make and model of the firing weapon and the specific rifle or pistol that it was shot from. One of the world's foremost authorities of this phenomenon describes this as the following:

> The rifling of each weapon will possess a series of family resemblances which will be present in all weapons of the same make and model. Correctly called 'class characteristics' they relate to the number of lands and grooves, their direction of twist, inclination of twist, width and profile. Whilst these dimensions can be extremely useful in identifying the caliber, make and model of the weapon which fired a particular bullet, they cannot be used to individualize the weapon... Whilst all weapons of the same make and model will have the same class characteristics, statistically and empirically, it can be shown that no two weapons will have exactly the same individual rifling characteristics. These individual characteristics are caused by small defects in the rifling which are produced during the manufacturing process. They are totally random and, as such, are as individual to a particular weapon as fingerprints are to a person. These marks

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[1284] Kim Waggoner (editor), *Handbook of Forensic Services*, (Quantico, Virginia, US Department of Justice, FBI Laboratory Publication Federal Bureau of Investigation; 2007), 64.
[1285] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 11-13.

are called individual characteristics.[1286]

After conducting microscopic analysis on the two bullets, Dr. Scott identified "clear land and groove impressions" on the bullets. He determined that these bullets were both fired from a M1911 .45 ACP and they were fired from the same pistol.[1287]

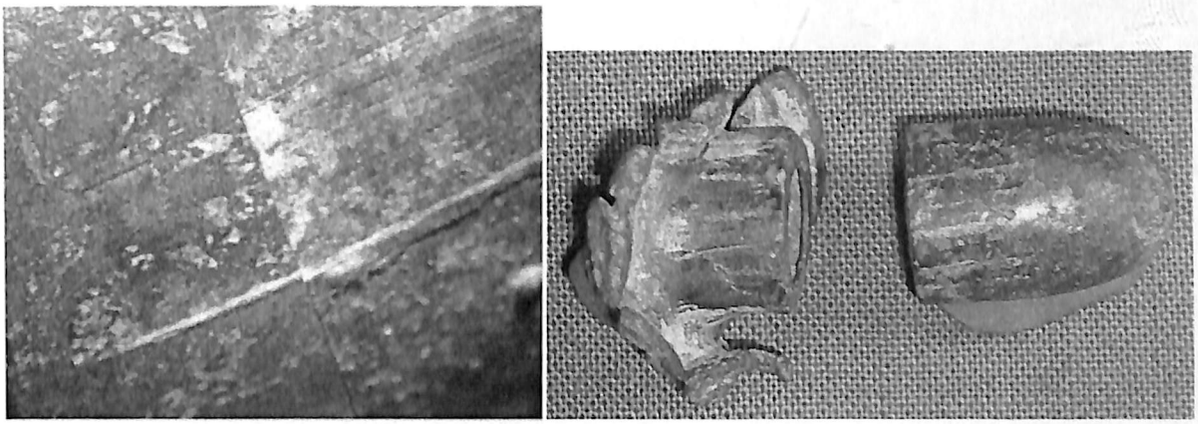


Figure 53 Comparison microphotograph of a land impression on the bullet jackets of the two recovered bullets indicating that they were fired from the same M1911 Colt pistol. Photos and caption courtesy of Dr. Doug Scott

The final forensic ballistic analysis conducted by Dr. Scott encompassed the twenty-four .45-caliber cartridge cases recovered southwest of the Endriss Trench at the base of Humserberg. An evaluation of the head stamps on all of these cartridges revealed that they were marked with REM-UMC 17. This means that these were produced by Remington Arms and the Union Metallic Cartridge Company in 1917.[1288] Remington Arms Company and the Union Metallic Cartridge Company merged in 1912, and used

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[1286] Brian J. Heard, *Handbook of Firearms and Ballistics: Examining and Interpreting Forensic Evidence*, (The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex Wiley-Blackwell; 2008), 170-171.
[1287] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 11-12.
[1288] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 13-14.

the head stamp REM-UMC on their production line. After the United Stated entered the war in 1917, Remington and Union were under contract to provide ammunition to the AEF.[1289] This is consistent with the type of ammunition issued to soldiers in the 82nd Infantry Division in 1918.[1290]



Figure 54 The heads of two of the .45-caliber cartridge cases illustrating the range of preservation observed. All .45-caliber cartridge case were made by Remington-UMC and dated 1917. These were fired from two different weapons. Photo and caption courtesy of Dr. Scott

Dr. Scott next conducted comparative micro-photographic analysis of the twenty-four .45 cartridges. Using 10X-40X magnification, Dr. Scott clearly identified both the

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[1289] Remington Arms Company website; history, available at the following website; http://www.remington.com/Pages/Our-Company/Company-History.aspx (accessed 09 August 2011).
[1290] Bruce N. Canfield, *U.S. Infantry Weapons of the First World War,* (Lincoln, Rhode Island, Andrew Mowbray Publishers; 2000), 46-52.

extractor marks and ejector marks found on cartridges.[1291] Further forensic ballistic analysis by Dr. Scott provided an interesting twist to the York story.



Figure 55 All twenty-four of the .45 cartridges. Photo courtesy of Dr. Doug Scott

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[1291] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 13-17.

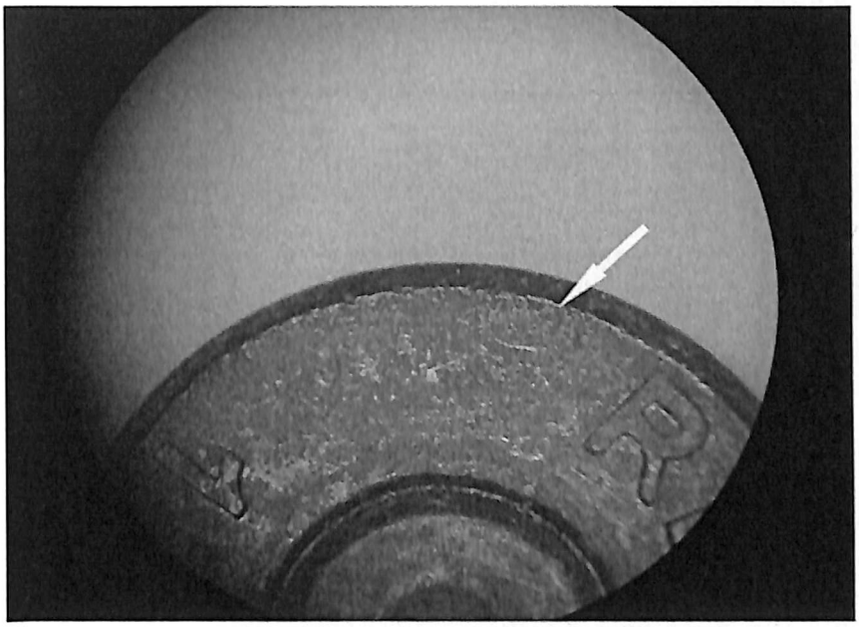


Figure 56 Arrow points to ejector mark on the head of the .45-caliber cartridge case confirming that it was fired from the type of pistol used by York. Photo and caption courtesy of Dr. Doug Scott

Microscopic analysis of the firing pin impressions provides abundant information related to the specific weapon that a cartridge was fired in. This includes the type, class and condition of the firing weapon.[1292] The first conclusion was that all twenty-four of these cartridges firing pin impressions were that they were from a .45 ACP. Nine of these cartridges displayed a distinct drag to the firing pin impression, with the other remaining group showing a clean firing pin impression in the primer. This means that there were two .45 ACP in action here, one firing fifteen rounds, while the other fired nine.[1293]

This ground breaking finding resolves a ninety year controversy surrounding the battle. Several of the other squad members had claimed that they had played a more significant role in the battle than the United States Army Recognized. In this vein, two of these men were subsequently awarded a medal for heroism. The only other soldier who

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[1292] Physical Evidence Program Manager, *Firearm/Toolmark Procedures Manual DFS Document 240-D100,* (Richmond, Virginia, Department of Forensic Science; 2007), 30-35, 75-77, 110-113.
[1293] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 13-17.

has clear archeological evidence supporting his claim is Private Percy Beardsley. As described in the previous chapter, there is ample archeological evidence that he put his Chauchat Light Machinegun into action during this fight just west / southwest of the Endriss Trench.[1294]

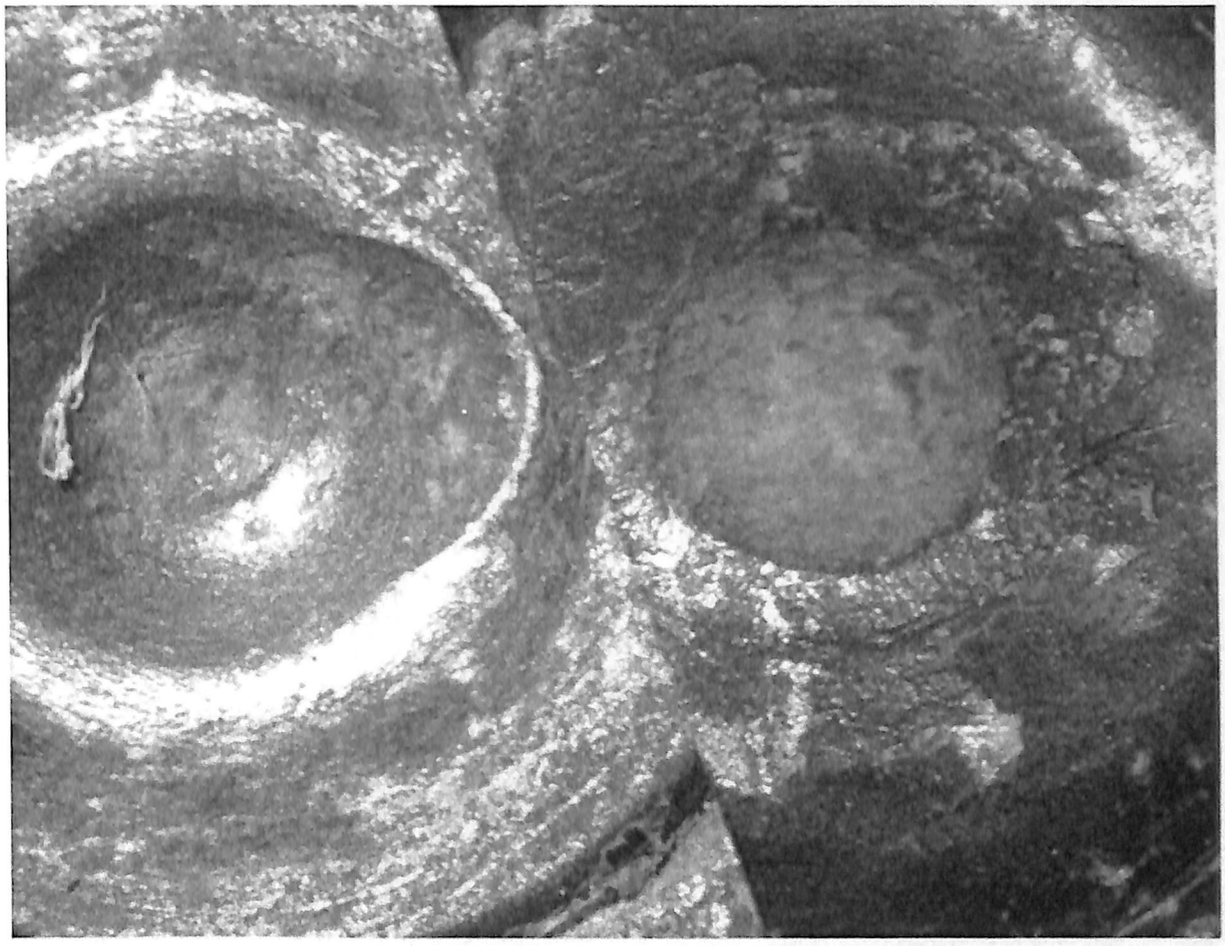


Figure 57 Comparison photomicrograph of two .45-caliber primers with firing pin imprints. Note the drag mark on the left image. The mark indicates the firing pin did not fully retract during case ejection from the pistol. The right image has a very slight firing pin drag impression as well. Photo and caption courtesy of Dr. Doug Scott

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[1294] Affidavit of Private Percy Beardsley, retained by the 2nd Bn. 328th Inf. 82nd Div. A.E.F. Frettes, France, February. 1919.

In addition to evidence that he fired the Chauchat, Beardsley quietly maintained after the war that he also fired his .45-caliber pistol in support of York. The others in this group of seventeen soldiers armed with a .45 ACP included Sergeant Early, Corporal Cutting and Corporal Savage. Sergeant Early was shot by six bullets and Corporal Cutting (Merrithew) was severely injured by five bullets and thus neither were able to play a pivotal role in the battle after being injured. Corporal Savage was killed outright when the German machinegun on the hill opened fire upon the group. As the only other soldier in this armed with a .45 ACP not critically injured, it is manifest that these nine rounds were fired by Private Beardsley.[1295]

Private Beardsley would have fired his sidearm when German Leutnant Fritz Endriss led the bayonet attack against Alvin York. Beardsley most likely moved to York's location to assist him in fighting off the attack. This course of action is the most logical in that the Germans state that some dozen soldiers initially charged against York, with more than half of them falling in action. The intensity of the firing caused the surviving six Germans to return to their trench for cover evidently due to the combined effects of York and Beardsley fire power.[1296]

Sergeant Bernard Early and Corporal Cutting (Merrithew) were belatedly awarded by the United States Army medals for heroism due to their personal efforts to be thus publically recognized.[1297] Unfortunately, due to Beardsley's unassuming nature, he did not seek recognition for his role in the battle and therefore remained overlooked. The

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[1295] Tom Mahoney, *Sergeant Alvin York*, American Legion Magazine, 20 November 1968, 22, 45-47.
[1296] "Testimony of German Officers and Men about Sergeant York." Trans by US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, June 1936, Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt.
[1297] Tom Mahoney, *Sergeant Alvin York*, American Legion Magazine, 20 November 1968, 22, 45-47.

irony is that based upon battlefield archeology and firearm identification analysis, Beardsley is the only soldier, other than Alvin York for whom there is physical evidence to support a claim of an active and important role in the battle.

Speaking of the importance that forensic analysis can provide to battlefield archeology, Dr. Doug Scott said,

> The historical record is a truly astounding data set, but it is just one data set that should be used in studying the past. Oral tradition or historical documents are impressions of those who set them down. While they may be more or less accurate, I will reiterate that the archaeological record is often more precise about past events in space and time, as well as an independent line of evidence that can be compared and contrasted with the other lines of evidence to achieve a fuller picture and understanding of the past.[1298]

This is precisely what Dr. Scott's firearm identification analysis provided; a level of understanding and clarity of what actually transpired in this battle hitherto unknown since 1918. Additionally, Dr. Scott's analysis enabled us to proceed with this understanding without applying mental gymnastics, speculation, rationalization or explanatory remarks. Finally, this forensic analysis is complimentary to the thorough and well rounded approach taken to both investigate and to locate the York site. For instance, the evidence from the rifle position was particularly important in that not only did the firearm analysis prove that the cartridges were fired from the type of rifle used by York, but further confirmed that all of them were fired from the same specific rifle. These findings go a great way to bolster the holistic historical, and geospatial approach that was followed to located the York site.

[1298] Dr. Douglas Scott, "The Archeology of Battlefields," Interview conducted by the Archeology Institute of America, 11 October 2005. Available online at the following website: http://www.archaeology.org/online/interviews/scott.html (accessed 8 August 2011).

Furthermore, the analysis of the .45-caliber cartridges and bullets proved vitally important as well. Not only did these prove to come from the correct make and model of weapon, a .45 Automatic Colt Pistol, but the firearm analysis illustrates that another soldier, Private Percy Beardsley, played a significant role in the battle. For Beardsley, this was not just that he used his Chauchat French Light Machinegun, but that he also employed his .45 ACP in concert with York to defeat the German bayonet attack led by German Leutnant Endriss. This is congruent with documented claims and thereby resolves a debate in history circles as to what type of and how much help Alvin York had by the surviving seven soldiers on that day in October 1918. Dr. Scott concluded his analysis and study of these important artifacts from 1918 by saying;

> The... examined cartridge cases represent two gun types, a M1917 Enfield rifle and a Colt M1911 pistol. The forty-five .30-06-caliber cartridge cases are each consistent in class and individual characteristics with being fired in a single M1917 30-06-caliber Enfield rifle. The 24 .45-caliber Colt M1911 cartridge cases appear to represent two separate M1911 Colt semi-automatic pistols... The bullets examined represent a .45-caliber M1911 Colt pistol... The .45-caliber bullet and bullet jacket are consistent in class and individual characteristics as being fired from the same gun.[1299]

Such validation for this type of investigation into a battle is rare and has thereby greatly contributed to what we know of the Battle of 8 October 1918 near Châtel Chéhéry in the French Argonne Forest. Dr. Scott's analysis confirms scientifically that we had accurately located where York fought.

[1299] Dr. Douglas Scott, "An Examination of Cartridges Cases and Bullets from the World War I Châtel Chéhéry Area, Argonne Forest, France," Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, May 10, 2010, 17.

Chapter 19 - Conclusion

Many good Americans have died fighting for this country and there was one guy in my outfit who was a conscientious objector - but once he was in the thick of battle, he fought like a true American and almost captured the whole d-nmed German Army single-handed. His name was Alvin York and he was a hero.

Otis Merrithew (aka William B. Cutting)
21 October 1965

The life and legacy of Alvin C. York continues to have an influence on the American psyche. This fixation has as much to do with his battlefield heroism as it does with his lifelong legacy of trying to make a lasting contribution to improve the lives of his people. It is this that perhaps makes him stand out among so many other worthy heroes from the Great War. Clearly, it was the 8 October 1918 battle in the Argonne that brought Alvin notoriety, but it was what he did with the fame that so impressed his nation. It was York's endeavor to use his name and fame to build schools, to help the poor and needy in the Cumberland Valley, that served as evidence to the public at large that this man was "the real thing."

There were two major turning points in the life of Alvin York. The first of these was his conversion to Christianity on 1 January 1915. It was this that brought a moral and personal transformation that set the conditions for Alvin's subsequent life. It also led him to initially object to military service and then once that was resolved, gave him the spiritual assurance that no matter what happened, he would come out alive. It also gave him the humility to use his fame to help others. Without his conversion, York would have faded into history as so many had, and certainly would not have performed as he did on the field of battle. This is because his new faith was the basis of his confidence and resolve, and laid the foundation from which he could go on to accomplish what he did.

The second turning point was the 8 October 1918 Argonne battle, which brought him renown and forever changed his life. Both of these dates are inseparably and firmly linked. For York, one could not have transpired without the other.

Of course, throughout his life, and even to this day, there have been a string of detractors, who question whether the York saga is genuine, or perhaps the result of propaganda. Usually the detractors suggest that his feat of 8 October 1918 was contrived, or exaggerated for some nefarious reason. Another tactic employed by his detractors is to belittle him by portraying his religion in a negative light. Both of these approaches require attention.

The subtle approach of assailing York's fundamentalist type of Christianity seems more informed by a post-modern negative view of faith in general, than fact. Earlier biographers and writers on York from the inter-war period never questioned his faith. Writing at a time when church attendance was still the norm and faith was more widely accepted, Skeyhill, Cowan and others treated York's beliefs respectfully. Yet, modern writers, such as Lee, use harsh words or phrases when addressing Alvin's deep faith, calling it volatile mixture of faith and violence. They assume, reflecting the cynicism of our age, that faith is naïve, irrational and misguided. A study of his denomination, and how it was practiced by York, his family and Pastor Pile, illustrates that York's faith was sincere, modest and unassuming.

In fact, York's faith seems more in line with New Testament practices of grace, mercy and kindness than otherwise. For instance, when York was thrown-in with his rowdy, partying platoon mates, there is no record that he condemned, judged, or otherwise told them that he disapproved of their drinking, and womanizing. Instead,

York, and his friend Murray Savage, sought to live out their faith in honesty and integrity in the army without casting aspersions upon those who lived differently. York looked to his own house and did not sit in judgmental condemnation over those who did not share his faith. It was this that impressed his officers. Despite his moral dilemma, York tried not to cause trouble in his unit, and whatever work he was given, he did it to the best of his ability. This may in part explain why Buxton and Danforth tried so hard to convince him why he could fight for his nation as a Christian. This is borne out by the fact that there is no derogatory information in his service record; he obeyed orders and steered clear of trouble. Furthermore, his church proved that it was not strict and legalistic as it did not "excommunicate" him for fighting in the war.

Finally, what of York's detractors: those who assailed his integrity and character, such as Cutting and Bernard Early? York answered the critics without harsh censure. The only time he defended his war record was in May 1919, when a New York Times reporter made a fabricated claim that there were those in his unit who questioned his Medal of Honor. York's only remarked was "Sure 'nough? Well the [soldiers] made affidavits... that I had done all the things claimed."[1300] Years later, when Merrithew [aka Cutting] attacked York's war record, he refused to be baited to discuss the matter. Such is the measure of a man walking in grace and freedom, and not under the self-righteous patterns of a stern, and volatile mixture of faith and violence.

The most common approach to undercut York is to question the accuracy of the 8 October 1918 Argonne action. Although it is true that newsman and other York boosters

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[1300] "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 23 May 1919, 15.

added hyperbole and exaggeration to what transpired, neither York nor the Army ever claimed that he single-handedly mastered the Germans that day. As this dissertation demonstrates, based upon the archival record, battlefield archeology, ballistic forensic evidence, and analysis done by some of the nation's leaders in these fields, what was claimed by York and the army about the action did happen. However, we now know that York did have good help in that battle, which the army investigation of 1919 alludes to and the ballistic evidence specifically pointing to Private Beardsley. Beardsley had the opportunity during the division's investigation in 1919 "blow his own horn", but instead he took the honorable road. York was obviously not aware of how important Beardsley's support was that day, being focused on the charging enemy. Despite this, York continuously mentioned the other men who were with him in that fight and *never* claimed or alluded to being a "one-man army."

Another increasingly popular approach to undermine what York accomplished on 8 October 1918 is to dismissively suggest that those Germans were eager to quit the war. These statements are not supported by historic fact. If the Germans were in such a poor condition, why did they fight so hard? York's sister battalion (1st Battalion) attacked through Châtel Chéhéry on 7 October 1918 to seize Hill 223, and suffered the highest single-day casualty rate of their service in the Great War that day. This does not sound like a broken force of old and battle weary Germans. Likewise, when York's unit attacked into the Argonne the next day, they, too, suffered their highest one-day casualty rate in World War One. Historically stated, the Germans fighting in the Argonne were not eager to quit, but did their best to make the Americans pay for every foot of ground with blood.

Even the lead detachment of the 210th Prussians, who performed poorly that day, redeemed themselves thereafter. It was these, who were caught eating breakfast that 8 October morning. Conversely, when York's unit clashed with them a week later near the Kriemhilde Stellung, they fought tenaciously. So it was all along the line. Although these were not the same fresh troops of 1914, they knew how to fight and fought tenaciously until the armistice went into effect, causing nearly 11,000 Allied casualties in the last hours of the war, more than the American losses in Normandy over a twenty-four hour period on 6 June 1944 (it will be remembered that the Great War ended at 1100am).

Another popular theme among York's detractors is to avoid talking about the history and instead suggest that there was some great conspiracy to elevate York because, "America needed a hero." The premise is that since York was Caucasian, Protestant and Anglo, he fit the mold of an American hero. This weak hypothesis goes on to suggest that because of this ethnic-religious blend, York was given special treatment, and elevated above all other heroes of that time. Yet, nothing could be further from reality.[1301]

Firstly, York would have been more palatable had he been from a mainline denomination, and not from a fundamentalist, "back to the Bible" branch of Christianity. Furthermore, there was no clamoring for a hero in 1918 as scores of them were being written about, and introduced to the public. Even the *Ladies Home Journal* touted heroes in their magazine for some years after the war had ended. Frankly, modern writers making these statements that "America needed a hero" betray their ignorance of that

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[1301] Lee, 110-115.

period.[1302] Indeed, there were heroes aplenty, as one would expect from 1.2 million men fighting in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. If that was not enough, there were scores of national heroes available from the other campaigns fought by the AEF on the Marne, in Belleau Woods, Cantigny, etc. No, America had plenty of heroes. It was not looking for another one, especially not York, at least not yet.

As argued in this work, York's rise as an icon had more to do with the personal initiative of the war artist Joseph Chase contacting reporter George Pattullo than some sort of government orchestration. It was Pattullo's article in the *Saturday Evening Post* that gave York notoriety, and then the initiative of the Tennessee Society who wanted their native son to have a celebration in New York City. This denotes the acts of private citizens and not some national conspiracy to elevate a hero. Understandably, both Chase and Pattullo were intrigued by York's unique story. They both correctly noted something unusual about York, that is, of course his conversion going from objector to fighter.

This begs the question then, why does York continue to stand out as an American icon, while hundreds of other Great War heroes have been virtually forgotten? It appears that York stood out for a number of reasons, not least what he did with his fame. Had he been a typical person, he would have accepted the offers of fame, made his fortune, and then perhaps faded from the collective memory. Yet, Alvin York was different. He not only refused offers to become rich, but as soon as he could, returned to Tennessee to go back to his life as a farmer.

[1302] Michael Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers,* (New York NYU Press; 1999), 87-101; Lee, 110-115.

Adding to this curious case, after Alvin returned to Pall Mall, he realized that he could not let life go on in the Cumberland Valley in blissful ignorance. With that awareness, he used his fame to build schools, and make other improvements to life in the region. He did this not to enrich himself, but to help others. Adding to his unique personality, York typically refused to talk about his war experience. When his heroism was mentioned, he dispelled ideas that he acted alone and continually pointed the fact that there were other men with him. When Cowan and later Skeyhill came forward to write a book on York's experience, he agreed to do so only so that he could use the money to build and to maintain his schools. That he died a pauper is testimony that the money he raised went to the schools, and not York's bank account. It was also in part his continual touring of the nation to solicit donations for his school projects that had the effect of keeping his heroism alive in the memories of the general public.

Some writers suggest that Alvin was a confused isolationist, wanting to withdraw the nation behind the oceans as it had before the Great War. This is a misrepresentation of the facts. York preferred that the nation fight only defensive wars. As the threat of Japan and Germany became clear, he was one of very few public voices calling the nation to arms. To be sure, the 1930s were a turbulent era for the United States. It was reeling from the Great Depression, with the preponderance of the public and politicians demanding some form isolationism. This was endorsed by America's most popular citizen, Charles Lindbergh and bolstered by the America First Committee under the political leadership of US Senators Nye and Wheeler.[1303] It was at this point that the

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[1303] Kathryn S. Olmsted, Real Enemies, New York, Oxford University Press; 2009, 50-51.

United States needed a hero, someone of credible pubic influence to withstand the political clout of the anti-interventionalists. That hero would be York. York's credentials were already established and the attempts of earlier detractors to damage his reputation had largely failed.

By 1936, at the height of the isolationist grip on power, York called the nation to stop Japanese aggression in China. By 1938, he was calling the nation to "knock Hitler off of the block." York, on his own initiative, and at the risk of being condemned as a warmonger (the approach of Senator Nye) took the unpopular position of calling the nation to military intervention. This could have hurt him both personally and publically, in that by taking such a stand, his endeavors to raise money for his Bible School would suffer. At this point, he was virtually a solitary voice taking on the influential Lindbergh and the powerful anti-interventionists senators in Washington, D.C., making this a rather brave position.

York's premonition about war and his public view on Hitler and Nazism proved correct. With this in mind, Jesse Lasky came forth with the proposal in 1940 for making the *Sergeant York* movie and successfully appealed to Alvin's patriotism to convince him to do it. It was this movie that would forever burn the York saga into the collective memory of the American collective identity. Interestingly, the movie would propel York to such renown that he is even used as a model for other nations to propel their own

heroes, with Canada claiming their own Sgt York in Normandy 1944 and the Red Chinese in their 1949 Civil War.[1304]

There seems to be much that appealed to the American public in the movie at that time. In one sense, York served as a bridge from America's Colonial to the World War Two generation. He looked like a modern Davy Crocket or Daniel Boone to many, and personified the Minuteman ideals of the famer/soldier of the American Revolution putting down his plow, to take up his rifle to fight off the Red-Coats, or in this case, the Germans. But, there is more yet to the saga. The *Sergeant York* movie not only presented the past, but also represented the present.

When *Sergeant York* came out in 1941 the nation was literally preparing for war. Never before was a movie better timed to reflect what the average American family was going through in real life. The scene of York registering for the draft in 1917 was really happening to millions of young Americans in 1941. The portrayal of York saying good-bye to his tearful mom and crying girl was literally being played out around the nation. People in the nation saw themselves reflected in York, if not as him, then as the girl being left behind, the mom, brother, sister, or others seeing a loved one off to war. The young man, registering for the draft, saw York dealing with the moral dilemma of killing in the name of his country, and then, his struggle to fit in with strange and different recruits from around the nation.

Such timing served to engrave the ideals of Alvin York on an entire generation, who would thereby keep his name alive for generations to come. In this way, York

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[1304] "Canadian Private Seizes 160 Germans, *New York Times*, 22 August 1944; "Chinese Reds Come Up With Own Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 14 May 1949.

represented not only the First World War generation, but also the Second World War generation as well. He seems to personify how and what Americans thought of themselves, and the value of seeking after the greater good of the nation.

Alvin C. York proved to be a hero throughout his life. He took politically unsafe positions in the 1930s to call the nation to arms; he nearly went broke to build schools, and gave more back to his community and nation than his nation gave to him. Throughout it all he never compromised his faith. The decision he made in 1915 to become a Christian was the single most important point in his life and was the hinge upon which everything else he put his hands to swung. It was this that made him the hero in the end, as he actually lived up to the lofty ideals that Americans once believed about themselves. In York many saw the personification of a connection with America's past, perhaps a glimpse into the nation's founding fathers, or the pioneers of old. This unassuming modest man appealed to the very soul of America, even those struggling with the ideas of isolationism and war, Christianity and peace, and the rise of America as a global power. Only when pressed and when all other options had been exhausted, did York take up the call to arms. This seemed a reflection of the nation's own struggle with going to war.

Despite being repeatedly tempted to compromise his faith, he consistently chose the right over the expedient. Whether being surrounded by French wine and women in 1918, the enemy in the Argonne or hostile board members in Jamestown in 1934, York endeavored to do the right thing. Had he compromise his beliefs to appeal to the public at large, or given in to the temptations that come with fame and money, York's name

would have made him a by-word for our cynical post modern generation. It was, however, his faith in daily choosing to walk his talk that continues to intrigue people.

For some, his personal testimony is too much to bear, and they seek a way to cast aspersions upon him to avoid the conviction that one must face when looking into the life of a genuine hero, yet, with York we find a man who was faithful in both the small and big things in his private and public life. Meanwhile, for others, Alvin York serves as an example of what one can accomplish when they choose this day to serve the Lord. York remains an interesting subject of discourse because of not only what he did, but also for what he believed. Either way, it is evident that Alvin York he lived life well and left behind a legacy worthy of emulation.

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Glossary

AEF - American Expeditionary Forces

BEF - British Expeditionary Force

CEF - Canadian Expeditionary Force

Curriculum Vitae

Candidate's full name: Douglas V. Mastriano

Universities attended (with dates and degrees obtained):

Eastern University, St. Davids, Pennsylvania, 1986 BA History
Joint Intelligence College, Washington, D.C., 1992 Masters Strategic Intelligence
US Air Force Air University, Alabama, 2001, Masters Military Operations
US Air Force Air University, Alabama, 2002, Masters Air Power Operations
US Army War College, Pennsylvania, 2010, Masters Strategic Studies

Publications:

Jeff O'Leary, *Brave Hearts Under Red Skies*, (Honor Books: Colorado Springs, CO, 2003). 91-95, 177-182, 231-236. I have three chapters in this book.

Robert Boardman, *C-Rations for the Warrior's Heart*, (ACW Press: Eugene, OR, 2003). 87-94. I have one chapter in this book.

Douglas Mastriano, "Sergeant York Fought Here," *Armchair General*, July 2007, 84-89.

Douglas Mastriano, "View from the Other Side," *Military History*, September 2006, 22-29.

Douglas Mastriano, "The Difference in Leadership," *Command*, June 2002.

Conference Presentations:

NATO School course designer - taught the ISAF Intelligence Course at the NATO School in 2007-2009 in Oberammergau, Germany. The week long course prepares officers and soldiers from the twenty-eight NATO nations for deployment to ISAF by providing them a strategic view of the region. The course provided the intelligence setting of Afghanistan as well as how to perform intelligence analysis and to employ all components of the intelligence system in meeting the commander's mission requirements.

Maxwell Air Force Base (AFB), Montgomery, Alabama - Led a leadership / character course at Maxwell AFB for officer trainee cadets from the Air and Space Basic Course in 2001-2002.

Guest lecturer - subjects include Afghanistan, intelligence, Iraq, World War One, World War Two, Cold War, Desert Storm, Civil War and Sergeant York. I was a guest speaker at conferences in Warsaw, Poland, Krakow, Poland, London, United Kingdom, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) (Mons, Belgium), National Ground Intelligence Center (Charlottesville, Virginia), Heidelberg, Germany Kabul, Afghanistan and across the United States.

Battlefield tours - Led scores of battlefield tours to the Meuse-Argonne region (France) and of American Civil War battles. The tours included international officers, NCOs, scouts and students. He is a member of the Guild of Battlefield Tour Guides.

Links related to research:
Sergeant York Discovery Expedition: My group's Website for our SGT York research
http://www.sgtyorkdiscovery.com/Home_Page.html

New York Times, the International Herald Tribune
http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/10/26/news/york.php

Stars & Stripes Newspaper:
http://www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=39951&archive=true

Military History feature / cover story for, September 2006 on the German side of the Alvin York story.
http://www.historynet.com/wars_conflicts/world_war_1/3717286.html?showAll=y&c=y#

Meuse-Argonne Historic Trail (created for Scouts in the Argonne Region of France)
http://www.tac-bsa.org/ResHistTrail_files/meuse_argonne_hist_trail.pdf

Douglas Mastriano bio;

Commissioned as a Lieutenant in the United States Army in 1986, and son of a career Navy man - Colonel Douglas Mastriano started his career on the Iron Curtain with the US Army's Second Armored Cavalry Regiment based out of Nurnberg, Germany. After several years of serving along the East German and Czechoslovakian borders, he witnessed the end of the Cold War and within months of this, he deployed to Iraq with his Regiment as part of Operation Desert Storm. In Desert Storm - his regiment led the main attack against Saddam's elite Republican Guards. Having survived several "close calls" in the desert by God 's grace, he subsequently served in tactical, operational and strategic levels of command that included assignments with the 229th Military Intelligence Battalion, the Pentagon, the 3rd Infantry Division "Rock of the Marne," and in US Army Europe Operations and Plans. His last assignment was as the senior intelligence office in NATO Land Headquarters in Heidelberg Germany, from where he deployed three times to Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, he served as the leader of the ISAF Joint Intelligence Center, leading between 70-100 soldiers from 18 NATO and non-NATO nations. In his career, he has served outside the United States for twelve of the past 24 years. Doug is a military historian, a graduate of the Advanced Military Studies Jedi Course and has a Masters in Military Operational Art, Masters in Strategic Intelligence, Master's in Airpower Theory and a Masters in Strategic Studies. He has shared this career with his beautiful wife of 25 years, Rebecca, and his wonderful son Josiah.

Corrigendum

“Thunder in the Argonne! Alvin York, the Reluctant Hero: The Story Behind the Man, the Myths and the Events of 8 October 1918” by Douglas Mastriano

1. Add the following explanatory footnote to the photo used on page 203:

There are three "versions" of this photo with different descriptions and date stamps. The photos are in the U.S. National Archives Records Group (copies are also located in the Army Heritage Education Center) and are filed in a chronological numbering system. The lower numbered photos were received and processed by the US Army Signal Corps earlier. The original photo was processed on 26 October, with two identical copies of it added later to the collection on 26 December 1918 and 28 March 1919.

> 111-SC-23041 - received on 26 October 1918 - the oldest and most descriptive of the three photos in the archive. The official US Signal Corps caption on this photo states, "The Americans Advance in Argonne: Prisoners captured by the Americans in the Argonne drive being conducted to an American division headquarters behind the lines."
>
> 111-SC-31859 - received on 26 December 1918 - two months after the original photo was processed and the date inexplicitly changed from 26 October, to 26 September. This seems to be a clerical error with 26 September being erroneously used simply as the date for the beginning of the Meuse-Argonne Campaign.
>
> 111-SC-45799 - received on 28 March 1919 - five months after the original was processed and retains the altered date of the December version.

The earliest of these photos is 111-SC-23041, is 'undated,' but 'received' on 26 October 1918,

The later photo cards are copies and have changed the 'date taken' to September 26, 1918, and 'received' December 26, 1918/ March 28, 1919, which conflicts with the original photo card (111-SC-23041). The later cards were generated by clerks AFTER the Armistice, in which the October 26 date was altered to September 26th.

The reason for changing the date from 26 October to 26 September was most likely because "26 September" was the beginning of the Meuse Argonne Campaign.

Many of the photos have penciled in remarks added by unknown persons that have no attribution, adding to the confusion. As a result, any serious researcher should stick with the official typed text.

The photo seems to show Corporal York marching his prisoners into the American lines, with what is likely the German officers Paul Vollmer (120th Württemberg), Max Thoma (7th Bavarian), and Paul Lipp (125th Württemberg) in the foreground and York behind them in the helmet, looking slightly to his right. Page 198 of the dissertation states, *"York took the German*

officers (Lipp and Vollmer) and placed them at the head of the formation with Vollmer at the lead. Another officer, Leutnant Glass had an overcoat on, and was not observed as being an officer." Thoma, the likely Bavarian officer in the center of the photo, would be added after the initial engagement with elements of the 120th and 125th Württemberg Regiments.

The later filed duplicate photo claims it was from the 35th Division on 26 September 1918. This is problematic from a historic perspective. The book, *Thunder in the Argonne*, describes how the US 35th Division performed miserably in the opening days of the Meuse Argonne Offensive. Very few of the division's units had any cohesion after the first day of fighting. It was because of this that Lieutenant Colonel George S. Patton nearly lost his life, who, on foot, tried to lead a group of 100 plus 35th Division stragglers. These 35th Division soldiers retreated when German machine guns opened fire near the French Village of Cheppy, leaving Patton severely wounded. The 35th had to be relieved by the US 1st Infantry Division (Big Red One) after it was driven out of Exermont, and the line was being held by a group of chaplains and engineers (with remnants of several battalions).

Additionally, the 35th fought almost exclusively elements of the 1st Prussian Guards. The photo, however, seems to depict Württembergers and what looks like a Bavarian officer. The 35th Division did not face any Bavarian or Württemberg units in September. Additionally, the German officer on the left is missing his military awards and rank, which corresponds to what page 200 of the dissertation states, *"After they made it safely back to Châtel Chéhéry an American Officer saw Vollmer and cut off his rank and Iron Cross. Vollmer protested but was told to shut up..."*

The photo's text says "The Americans Advance in Argonne: Prisoners captured by the Americans in the Argonne drive being conducted to an American division headquarters behind the lines." This can't be the 35th Division in that it did not conduct any operations in or in support of the Argonne Forest. The 35th fought in the Meuse Valley. The American Divisions that conducted combat operations in the Argonne were the 77th, 28th and 82nd (York's unit). The Argonne "drive" was a supporting effort, with the main push being up the Meuse Valley, where the preponderance of the Franco-American units fought. Additionally, what we now call "combat photographers," often did not remain with their units when they were no longer in contact with the enemy. I experienced this first hand in 1991 during Desert Storm, where once my regiment was pulled out of combat, the photographers moved to other units still in combat with Iraqi forces.

2. Add the following descriptive footnote to page 241 after the first paragraph

Captain Bertrand Cox was tasked to take affidavits, interview witnesses and determine if any of the other soldiers involved in the action should also receive a commendation. The complete award packet is easily 50 pages long (with several duplicate affidavits in it) and is not readily available to the public. It took several months of research to secure a copy. (Investigation Memorandum, 14 March 1919 signed by Captain Cox, forwarded to the 328th Regimental Commander, Alvin York Military Service Packet, US War Department, 1919).

3. Replace the second paragraph on page 59 with the following:

> *As with anyone with a new lease on life, nevertheless, Alvin found old habits difficult to break. He had developed a taste for alcohol, smoking, and the thrill of fighting, cussing and gambling. When the weekends came around, the temptation to revert to his old pattern of living was intense, "Sometimes Everett or Marion or some of the other boys would drop around and tell me they were putting on another party and invite me to join them. Then it was that I was most sorely tempted. I prayed most awful hard and got a good hold on myself and didn't go." Alvin refused to "backslide," and found that "Each time I refused, it was so much easier next time: and every day it became easier. In a few months I got them there bad things out of my mind."168 This time of struggle with personal sins was arguably the most significant point of his life. Resisting the old patterns demonstrated considerable personal courage. Standing against peer-pressure, while choosing to do the right thing, built moral courage in Alvin's life.169 Looking back, he summed up the struggle, "And that is the greatest victory I ever won. It's much harder to whip yourself than to whip the other fellow, I'm a-telling you, and I ought to know because I done both."*

4. Footnote 240 on page 79 should be page from York, page 183, with the following description added to the footnote:

> York said, *"Captain E.C.B. Danforth, Jr., was my company commander. He come from Augusta, and was a Georgia 'Cracker.'* ***He was tall and tough jes like a hickory pole****..."* (Bold added)

Add an additional source to this footnote, Skeyhill, *Last of the Long Hunters*, page 181.

5. Dissertation page 209, footnote 613.

> *Replace the block quote in the dissertation with the following:*
>
> "…All was terribly quiet in the field. And I jes couldn't help thinking of the boys that only the day before was alive and like me. Dymowski-dead. Weiler-dead. Waring-dead. Wins-dead, Swanson-dead. Corporal Murray Savage, my best pal, dead. Oh, my, it seemed so unbelievable. I would never see them again. I would never share the same blanket with Corporal Savage. We'd never read the Bible together again. We would never talk about our faith and pray to our God. I was mussed up inside worser than I had ever been. I'm a-telling you when you lose your best buddie and you know you ain't never going to see him again, you sorter know how terrible cruel war is. There was nothing I could do now for Corporal Murray Savage or any of the other boys that done lost their lives. I could only pray for their souls. And I done that. I prayed for the Greeks and Italians and the Poles and the Jews and the others. I done prayed for the Germans too. They were all brother men of mine. Maybe

their religion was different, but I reckon we all believed in the same God and I wanted to pray for all of them." Footnote 613, York, 272

6. Dissertation page 82, footnote 256

Source remains the same, change to page numbers: 46, 190, 194.

7. Dissertation page 88, footnote 271

Add the following source to footnote 271, Cahill, 30-38.

8. Dissertation page 88, footnote 272.

Source: Skeyhill, *Last of the Long Hunters*, page 181-183.

Add to foot note 272 the following description:

Cutting (Merrithew) not only had a false last name, but he also told his platoon members that he was a Boston iceman to fabricate a macho persona, York, 187

9. Dissertation page 104, footnote 323.

Add source: Skeyhill, *Last of the Long Hunters*, page 171-173.

11. Dissertation page 104, footnote 324.

Add source: Skeyhill, *Last of the Long Hunters*, page 173.

12. Dissertation page 281, footnote 894.

Change to York, pages 306-307.

13. Dissertation page 198, footnote 577, add the following descriptive

This source is an affidavit of one of the soldiers who survived the action. It provides a superb description of the terrain from a perspective other than York's. Additionally, it is a source that confirms that York placed the German officers at the head of the formation. The description of the area supports the conclusion that York could not safely retrace his steps across the rugged terrain with the prisoners and rather followed a German supply road out of the forest.

Add the following source to this footnote York, page 229.

14. Dissertation page 200, footnote 585

Change the York source pages referenced to 228-238.

15. Footnote on Page 113 Dissertation page 202, footnote 588. Add the following description to the source in the footnote:

This is regarding the photo described earlier, which is used in several magazines and publications in both Europe and North America over the past several decades, to include a re-publication of York's "autobiography" edited by Richard "Little Bear" Wheeler in 1998. The "debate" regarding the photo is delineated in (1) above.

The photo seems to show Corporal York marching his prisoners into the American lines, with German officers Paul Vollmer, Max Thoma, and Paul Lipp up front, and York behind them in the helmet, looking slightly to his right. Page 198 of the dissertation states, *"York took the German officers (Lipp and Vollmer) and placed them at the head of the formation with Vollmer at the lead. Another officer, Leutnant Glass had an overcoat on, and was not observed as being an officer."* Thoma, the likely Bavarian officer in the center of the photo, would be added after the initial engagement with elements of the 120th and 125th Württemberg Regiments as Alvin York moved the prisoners out of the Argonne towards Hill 223 (Castle Hill). Hill 223, also called Castle Hill by the Germans is at the edge of the Argonne Forest, jutting above the village of Chatel Chehery.

16. Dissertation page 256.

Delete footnote 798.

Move footnote 797 to end of the paragraph.

17. Dissertation page 236, footnote 712.

Add the following descriptive text to footnote 712:

There were three telegrams sent by Pattullo and confirms his participation in the York Medal of Honor investigation as well as the effort he put in traveling from Coblenz, Germany. Coblenz was the headquarters of the AEF's occupational force (led by the U.S. Third Army) on the Rhine River. There are three telegrams from Pattullo, two of which are particularly useful as brief as they are. The telegrams confirm that Chase convinced Pattullo to interview York (in addition to asking hard questions about the conduct of the Meuse Argonne Campaign of the 82nd's leadership), and that Pattullo would arrive in early February. It appears that the Commander of the 82nd Division (MG Duncan) postponed the investigation until Pattullo arrived.

The most informative telegram is the 30 Jan 1919 telegram, which says. *"Telegram just received period too late to make chehery period will arrive chaumont on monday february third and visit your hdqrs period can you have corporal York there question."*

This confirms that Pattullo contacted the 82nd Division (Specifically Colonel Gordon Johnson) and that he wanted to question York. This is a solid primary source affirmation of what Chase and Pattullo wrote in their own published works.

18. Dissertation page 236, footnote 714. Add the following descriptive text to this footnote.

The appeal of the Sgt York account to Pattullo seemed rooted in the struggle Alvin had in reconciling his religious beliefs with fighting for his country. This is borne out in Pattullo's April 26, 1919 piece in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

19. Dissertation page 263, footnote 827, change page number to 25 and add source, "Sergt. York Home, His Girls Says, 'Yes," *Kingsport Times*, Kingsport, Tennessee, 06 Jun 1919, Page 2.

20. Dissertation page 287, footnote 914.

Add the following text to the footnote:

This paragraph highlights the beginning of Cutting's (Merrithew) dispute with York. The first quote in this paragraph refers to Cutting's invitation to Washington, D.C. for the 1929 reenactment of the York action. This seems to be the genesis of the Cutting's (Merrithew) dispute. Included in this paragraph are six other references which describe Cutting's divergent remembrance of the engagement. These references are useful in a deeper understanding of the growing rift between Cutting and York:

> "Plane Ride Refused by Sergeant York," *New York Times*, 22 September 1929.
> Cahill, 30-38:
> "Sergeant York Winches," *New York Times*, 19 January 1927:
> "Sergeant York Here in School Fund Drive," New York Times, 4 February 1928, 2:
> Otis B. Merrithew, "Statement Regarding Argonne Engagement," 11 Dec 1929, B00374, Folder 2880, WBA:
> Mahoney, 22, 45-46.
> "Sergeant York's Exploit," New York Times, 7 October 1929.

21. Dissertation page 287, footnotes 916 and 917. Add the following text to the footnotes:

This seems to be attributed to Sgt Harry Parsons in the article. Parsons is the first name mentioned after the quote and it is be reasonable to assume that he was the source for this 1929 New York Times article. The New York Times Gazette likewise discusses the debate and offers several statements from interviews supporting York, especially by Sgt Parsons, who is credited with being among the first to see York come out of the Argonne with the prisoners and who was one of York's most vocal defenders.

22. Dissertation page 320, footnotes 1032 and 1035. Add the following text to the existing footnotes:

Captain Cox, in his affidavits and account in the unit history, is the only officer known to have traversed York's battlespace close to the conclusion of it. If there was another officer present, it is not evident in any affidavits or primary source material.