

The Enduring Legacy of a Soldier and a Christian

by Lt.Col Douglas Mastriano Lieutenant Colonel Doug Mastriano is recognized as an expert on Sergeant York. Doug has spent many years researching York and where he performed his heroic feats in the French Argonne region. He has been interviewed on numerous worldwide television programs and written articles for several prestigious military magazines. Bill and Karen Rudge conducted initial research on the ground in the Argonne in September 2004 with the leader of SYDE. They have followed the discovery over the past several years and agreed to partner with SYDE to erect a monument near the York spot and the construction of a SGT York Historic Trail as part of their military outreach.

On October 8, 1918 - the 2nd Battalion of the American 328th Regiment was fighting for its life after it attacked into the Argonne Forest to cut an important German road and rail network. Accomplishing this mission would not be easy as the experienced German 2nd Württemberg Landwehr Division was ready to repel this American attack. The carnage was terrific as two German regiments blasted away at them from three commanding hills and ridge lines.

As the Germans unleashed their trap on the American battalion, 17 Americans were ordered to find a way through the German line to clear out the machine guns that were holding up the American attack. The 17 worked their way through the German line after a belated American artillery barrage providentially covered their movements. The 17 ended up in a meadow, surprising a large group of German soldiers from the 210th Prussian and 120th Württemberg Regiments under the command of German Lieutenant Paul Vollmer. These surrendered without a fight due to their shock of having American soldiers suddenly appear in the German rear-area. Meanwhile, on the hill above, machine gunners and riflemen of the 125th Württemberg, under German Lieutenant Paul Lipp, witnessed the events. After signaling to the captured Germans in the meadow to fall to the ground, they opened fire; killing or wounding 9 of the 17 Americans.

Corporal Alvin C. York was now in charge. Using his expert rifle skills, he eliminated the German machine gun position and its supporting riflemen and single-handedly fought off a valiant German bayonet charge. This compelled the already captured German Lieutenant Vollmer to offer the surrender of the Germans on the hill above, an offer that York accepted. As they made their way back to the American lines, York scooped up additional prisoners from the 2nd Württemberg Machine Gun Company and the 7th Bavarian Miner Company, for a total of 132 prisoners. York's action saved his battalion from destruction. As a result, he was promoted to sergeant and awarded the Medal of Honor. The Twilight of Revisionist Historians

Per our times, revisionist historians questioned if York was given more credit than he deserved; especially as his feat was so extraordinary. In order to discover the truth, a team of soldiers, historians, and family members came together under the banner of "The Sergeant York Discovery Expedition (SYDE)." The challenge that SYDE faced was where to search in the Argonne Forest. Precision was vital in that other groups had undertaken a similar search and ended up in the wrong place, uncovering artifacts from different engagements. Since two American and five German regiments fought in the area between October 7-9, it was imperative that the search occur at the correct location. Historical Detective Work: the Battlefield Speaks

The breakthrough for the search occurred in the German Archives where detailed descriptions of what happened on October 8, 1918 were uncovered. This was the missing piece of the puzzle that no other American group searching for the "York Spot" used. With this information, the search area was narrowed down to a 100-meter area where York was the only American to use a Colt .45 ACP making this a centerpiece of the search.

Thousands of German and American artifacts were uncovered as the team launched a forty-day intensive search for the truth. These artifacts confirmed the York story as recorded in both the German and American archives, but we still did not have the exact location where York fought.

The breakthrough occurred in October 2006 after we found four shot (spent) US .45 Automatic Colt Pistol (ACP) bullets. These were near the trench from which German Lieutenant Endriss led the doomed bayonet attack against York. This greatly helped to narrow the search area. Just twenty meters below this locale, the biggest single find in the search for the "York Spot" was uncovered. Twenty-one of the Colt .45 ACP cartridges fired by York were found. The 1919 History of the 82nd Division A.E.F. states that York fired three complete clips from his sidearm - for a total of twenty-one cartridges. This, combined with the other German artifacts and the proximity to the German trench confirmed it, at last, the "York Spot" was rediscovered. Saving the York Legacy for the Next Generation

The evidence is overwhelming with the battlefield archeology and the German and American first hand sources confirming that York did what he was awarded the Medal of Honor for. This will silence the revisionists and perpetuate the York legacy for another generation. In the meantime, we are working closely with the local French officials, the US Army's Center of Military History and the American Battlefield Monuments Commission to create a historic trail to ensure that what he did is not forgotten or subjected to unwarranted second-guessing in the future. Bill Rudge Ministries and SGT York

Bill and Karen Rudge conducted initial research on the ground in the Argonne in September 2004 with the leader of SYDE. They have followed the discovery over the past several years and agreed to partner with SYDE to erect a

monument near the York spot and to support the construction of a SGT York Historic Trail as part of their military outreach so that all visitors to the area can walk where York walked. Memorializing SGT York -- Why?

- A Medal of Honor winner, a patriot, Christian and the most famous American in World War One
- Honor the sacrifices and memory of all who served in France 90 years ago
- Give visitors to the Argonne the opportunity to walk where York walked
- Part of the Boy Scouts of America Meuse-Argonne Historic Trail in France
- Perpetuate the Christian witness of SGT York (Revelation 12:11)

Finally, the memorializing will serve as a witness and reminder to future generations of the importance of faith. A conversation between Sergeant York and his Division Commander, General Lindsey, in January 1919 when they toured the site where York captured 132 Germans, stresses the importance of this:

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:

General Lindsay: "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."