

THE LITERARY DIGEST

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SERGEANT YORK'S OWN STORY



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SERGEANT YORK AND HIS PRESENT COMMANDER.

"She can have me for the takin' when I git back," said York, starting for the war.

AS YORK FOUGHT, there was a prayer on his lips, we are told in "Sergeant York and His People," by Sam K. Cowan (Funk and Wagnalls). He "prayed to God to spare him and to have mercy on those he was compelled to kill." In his own happy phrase, York's rifle killed "a-plenty," for he hailed from Pall Mall, a tiny village in the mountains of Tennessee, where every boy learns to shoot. It is the land of the "Long Hunters." As Mr. Cowan informs us, a carving on a tree near Pall Mall reads: "D. Boon CILLED a BAR ON Tree in The YEAR 1760."

"Our contemporary ancestors," these mountain people have been called, for their way of life has changed little since the first settlers entered the Appalachian country in pre-Revolutionary times. Says Mr. Cowan:

The mountaineer of to-day is the transplanted colonist of the eighteenth century; he is the backwoodsman of the days of Andrew Jackson; his life has the hospitality, the genuineness and simplicity of the pioneer. 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.



York on the ground of his great triumph

Sergeant York

"Sergeant York and His People" is not a war book. It is a Mountain book. It traces "the molding of a man," as Mr. Cowan puts it, and one notes with curious interest the very striking part that religion played in the molding—religion and another sentiment as strong. When York was drafted,

He sent a note to Gracie, telling her his "little blue card" had come, and he asked her to meet him at the church—which always stands open by the roadside. As they walked toward her home they arranged to meet the next morning at the rock under the birch trees, when she would leave to "carry" the cows to the pasture. It was there she promised to marry him—when he returned from the war.

Men at the store saw Alvin come down from the mountain and he could not escape some banterings over the success or failure of his early morning tryst.

"Jest left it to her," he is said to have frankly confessed; "she can have me for the takin' when I git back."

He and his mother were alone in their home for several hours. When he left he stopt at the Brooks' porch, where relatives and neighbors had assembled. As he walked away he turned, unexpectedly, up the path toward the rock on the mountain-side. It is now known he went there to kneel alone in prayer.

When he came down to the store, to the men waiting for him, he spoke with an assured faith he had not shown before.

"I know, now, that I'll be back," he told them.

But, while this is not a war book, it nevertheless tells the story of York's superb feat of daring and marksmanship at "York's

Hill," as the people of France have named the scene of his exploit in the Argonne Forest. And, naturally, Mr. Cowan tells the story of events leading up to it.

In a small, red, cloth-covered memorandum book, intended for no eyes but his own, Sergeant York wrote the title, "A History of Places Where I Have Been." It became instead a history of Alvin C. York, mountaineer, soldier, and consummate hero, during the World War. The little volume, now broken-backed and worn, was always with him—in camp, aboard the transport, and at the front. Tho careless of grammar, now and then, and sometimes even of spelling, it has the interest that attaches always to a hero's own words.

He reached Camp Gordon, near Atlanta, Ga., on the night of November 16, 1917, and his diary relates:

"I was placed in the 21st training battalion. Then I was called the first morning of my army life to police up in the yard all the old cigarette butts, and I thought that was pretty hard as I didn't smoke. But I did it just the same."

Later on, he wrote:

"I stayed there and done squads right and squads left until the first of February, 1918, and then I was sent to Company G, 328 Inf. 82nd Div."

This, so Mr. Cowan explains, was the famous All-America Division, in which every State in the Union was represented as well as all the Allied countries. How happy York's life at Camp Gordon was may be judged from his notes:

"Well, they gave me a gun and, oh my! that old gun was just full of grease, and I had to clean that old gun for inspection. So I had a hard time to get that old gun clean, and oh, those were trying hours for a boy like me trying to live for God and do his blessed will. . . . Then the Lord would help me to bear my hard tasks.



(Image Added)

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Home, Sweet Home

Back home again in the Tennessee mountains.

Sergeant York

"So there I was. I was the homesickest boy you ever seen."

This same little red book contains Sergeant York's own story of the exploit Marshal Foch called "the greatest thing accomplished by any private soldier of all the armies of Europe." Wrote the American:

"On the 7th day of October we lay in some little holes on the roadside all day. That night we went out and stayed a little while and came back to our holes, the shells bursting all around us. I saw men just blown up by the big German shells which were bursting all round us.

"So the order came for us to take Hill 223 and 240 the 8th.

"So the morning of the 8th just before daylight, we started for the hill at Chatel Chehery. Before we got there it got light and the Germans sent over a heavy barrage and also gas and we put on our gas-masks and just pressed right on through those shells and got to the top of Hill 223 to where we were to start over at 6:10 A.M.

"They were to give us a barrage. The time came and no barrage, and we had to go without one. So we started over the top at 6:10 A.M. and the Germans were putting their machine guns to working all over the hill in front of us and on our left and right. I was in support and I could see my pals getting picked off until it almost looked like there was none left.

"So 17 of us boys went around on the left flank to see if we couldn't put those guns out of action.

"So when we went around and fell in behind those guns we first saw two Germans with Red Cross bands on their arms.

"Some one of the boys shot at them and they ran back to our right.

"So we all ran after them, and when we jumped across a little stream of water that was there, there was about 15 or 20 Germans jumped up and threw up their hands and said, 'Comrade.' The one in charge of us boys told us not to shoot, they were going to give up anyway.

"By this time the Germans from on the hill was shooting at me. Well I was giving them the best I had.

"The Germans had got their machine guns turned around.

"They killed 6 and wounded 3. That just left 8 and then we got into it right. So we had a hard battle for a little while."

This modest reference to "a hard battle for a little while" covers the affair of one man fighting single-handed against a hundred Germans in machine-gun nests. The story continues:

"I got hold of a German major and he told me if I wouldn't kill any more of them he would make them quit firing.

"So I told him all right. If he would do it now.

"So he blew a little whistle and they quit shooting and came down and gave up. I had about 80 or 90 Germans there.

"They disarmed and we had another line of Germans to go through to get out. So I called for my men and one answered me from behind a big oak tree and the other men were on my right in the brush.

"So I said, 'Let's get these Germans out of here.' One of my men said, 'It's impossible.' So I said, 'No, let's get them out of here.'

"When my men said that this German major said, 'How many have you got?'

"And I said, 'I got a plenty,' and pointed my pistol at him all the time.

"In this battle I was using a rifle or a 45 Colt automatic pistol.

"So I lined the Germans up in a line of twos and I got between the ones in front and I had the German major before me. So I marched them right straight into those other machine guns, and I got them. When I got back to my Major's P. C. I had 132 prisoners.

"So you can see here in this case of mine where God helped me out. I had been living for God and working in church work some time before I came to the army. 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 He did save me."

Alvin York's supreme reward of heroism is the York Foundation. After a farm had been given him,

He asked that no other gifts be made, but instead the money be contributed to a fund to build simple, primary schools throughout the mountain districts where there were no state or county tax appropriations available for the purpose. Of the fund, not a dollar was to be for his personal use, nor for any effort he might put forth in its behalf.

So again the form of Sergeant York rose out of the valley, above the mountains, and the sunlight of the nation's approval, fell upon it. Men of prominence volunteered to aid him in his efforts for the children of the mountains, and the result was the incorporation of the York Foundation, a non-profit-sharing organization, that is to build schoolhouses and operate schools. Among the trustees are an ex-Secretary of the United States Treasury, bishops of the churches, a state governor, a congressman, bankers, lawyers and business men. The fund is already a substantial one, steadily growing, and success is assured.

In connection with each school is to be land to be tilled by the students as a farm, and besides providing instruction in agriculture, the farm is to aid in the support of the school, and no child of the community is to miss the opportunity to attend through inability to pay the tuition charge. As each unit becomes self-supporting, another school is to be established in a new district.

Sergeant York

In this new endeavor Alvin wished to do what he could to shield the boys now at play among the red brush upon the mountainsides from being compelled to say, after they had grown to young manhood, what he himself had been forced to confess: "I'm just an ignorant mountain boy."

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