

SGT Alvin C. York

By

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NCO History Briefing

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Group Room L11

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NCO HISTORY BRIEFING OUTLINE  
Sergeant Alvin Cullum York  
WWI, Medal of Honor Recipient

I. Introduction

A. References:

1. Alvin C. York by Dr. Bridwell,  
<http://www.alvincyork.org/AlvinCullomYork.htm>
2. Alvin York, Army Legend, by John Silva,  
<http://www.grunts.net/legends/alvinyork.html>
3. The Real Sergeant York by Thomas A. Burzynski,  
<http://www.thenewamerican.com/tna/1998/vo14no01/vo14no01york.htm>
4. Alvin York In Lions Den,  
<http://acacia.pair.com/Acacia.Vignettes/Alvin.York.In.Lions.Den.html>
5. Tennessee's "Christian Warrior", By Stan Griffen,  
<http://www.workersforjesus.com/york.htm>
6. David D. Lee, SGT York, An American Hero. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky

B. Brief Statement. The purpose of this NCO History Briefing is to capture a few of the major events in the life of Sergeant Alvin C. York from the Cumberland Mountains of Tennessee to the Argonne Forest of Germany whereas he became one of America's greatest war heroes in World War I.

II. Agenda

- A. History of the York Family
- B. Conversion from a radical civilian to a born again Christian
- C. Call to Duty 15 Nov 1917/drafted
- D. Recognition/Fame 1918 to 1919
- E. Marriage

F. Contributions to Society

(1) Established the Agricultural Institution and Bible School

(2) The movie "SGT York"

G. Illness and Death

H. Conscientious Objectors and Religion

III. Closing

A. Summary. For the past 15 minutes I have given you information on the life of a WWI Medal of Honor recipient, SGT Alvin Cullum York and how the conscientious objectors' plays a role in the war we are fighting today.

B. Questions. Are there any questions?

C. Concluding Statement. Alvin Cullum York was one of the greatest heroes America ever produced. His faith in God, his modest and honorable character, and his sacrifice on behalf of his country continue to command the utmost respect and admiration from Americans. His life serves as a model for future generations of Americans.

### **Sergeant Alvin C. York, 1887-1964**

Alvin Cullum York was born in a small town called Pall Mall, Tennessee, on December 13, 1887. Alvin was the third child born out of eleven children. He had seven brothers and three sisters. They live in a little cottage in the hills of Tennessee. In his diary, he says that his family grew up like a lot of little pigs, playing on the mountainside and running wild ([www.alvincyork.org](http://www.alvincyork.org)).

All the boys of the family were very familiar with guns and they were all good hunters who provided for their family. The York family had a hardscrabble existence of subsistence farming, supplemented by hunting to feed a family of eleven ([www.alvincyork.org](http://www.alvincyork.org)). Alvin himself grew up as a tough and rowdy young man; he was extremely good with a rifle, and loves to get into fist fights with other boys. As he entered his teens, Alvin became known as a hell-raiser and a "nuisance" to the community as he frequented bars ([www.grunts.net](http://www.grunts.net)).

Alvin's mother was very concerned about his lifestyle as she could see him turning into something bad. Alvin's mother wanted him to grow into a respectable man like his father and grandfather who had been in two wars, the Mexican-American and Civil Wars. After coming in late one night, she made him promise that he would never drink, smoke, fight, chew tobacco or gamble ever again. He never drank any whiskey, never touched cards, never smoked or chewed, and never fought or rough-housed since that night ([www.hyperhistory.net](http://www.hyperhistory.net)).

In 1914, Alvin accepted Jesus Christ after learning that his best friend was killed in a terrible fight. He became a member of the Church of Christ in Christian Union and was soon teaching Sunday school classes and leading the choir ([www.grunts.net](http://www.grunts.net)).

In 1917, Alvin was notified by the Army that he was being considered for the draft, back then it meant receiving a "red slip". The Army notified him four times and each time he said no. Alvin even tried to explain that his religious beliefs precluded him from going to war. Although Alvin's religious beliefs viewed war as wrong, he was also raised to be patriotic. Finally, the government told him that he must register for the draft. Alvin registered for the draft, and took a physical which gave him a clean bill of health. When York registered for the draft he wrote simply on the form, I don't want to fight ([www.thenewamerican.com](http://www.thenewamerican.com)).

When Alvin finally reached his first unit in the Army, Company G, 328th Infantry, 82nd Division, his religious disbeliefs about the war were very high, and expressed these beliefs with his commanding officers. His company commander sent him to see Battalion Commander, General George Edward Buxton. Buxton was a devout New Englander. He and York spent hours discussing the Bible's teachings about war. General Buxton listened to Alvin's concerns for hours, and then he quoted several scriptures, which made Alvin even more confused. Alvin the discussion, General Buxton place Alvin on a ten day pass to clear his head and come back ready for war. ([www.workersforjesus.com](http://www.workersforjesus.com))

Alvin returned to camp after his pass, and on April 19, 1918, his unit got ready and deployed to France. Upon arrival in France, Alvin got his first look at the cruelties of war. 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'. And all through the long night those big guns flashed and growled just like the lightning and the thunder when it storms in the mountains at home (<http://acacia.pair.com>)

October 8, 1918 Corporal York and fifteen other soldiers were given a mission. The missions of these soldiers is to destroy enemy machines guns that have been strategically placed by the German military. The mission was to be a dangerous one, but it was a very vital to the unit. They arrived to the enemy site when Corporal York and his fellow soldiers observed more than thirty machine guns, less than thirty yards away from their location.

The weapons were located on the other side of a slope from where Corporal York and the soldiers were standing, and to reach their designated location, the soldiers would have to climb a hill, which would expose them to some of the enemy soldiers located in the vicinity. Corporal York and the soldiers climbed the hill without suffering any casualties, and then began sneaking up on the German machine guns from the rear.

During their advance, the soldiers captured one German soldier as another one was able to flee the area. Corporal York and the soldiers began firing their weapons immediately hoping the Germans would give up and surrender to them. Corporal York and the soldiers decided to depart with the prisoners that they had captured, when all of a sudden they found themselves being fired upon by several enemy machine gun fires. Some of the soldiers and those that they had captured were immediately killed or wounded, including the sergeant in charge of the operation. When it all boiled down, only Corporal York and seven subordinate soldiers were left to fight and guard the remaining enemy prisoners. At that time, Corporal York realized that he and his men were up against a German machine gun company, and all he had was his rifle and a pistol. From that moment on Corporal York took the entire situation into his own hands. Corporal York began firing his rifle and killing the German soldiers one by one with a single shot.

After Corporal York saw how easy it was for him to kill the German soldiers, he began to feel sorry for the enemy soldiers that he was killing. Each time after he would shoot and kill an enemy soldier, Corporal York would beg them to surrender, but of course the Germans would not surrender. Corporal York continued to kill the Germans one by one with his rifle until he ran out of ammo, then used his pistol with same amount of accuracy. Corporal York continued to fire and kill the enemy until all the machine guns had stopped firing. By the time the machine gun fire ceased, Corporal York had killed almost 25 German soldiers.

Soon after the machine gun fire ceased, Corporal York met some German officers who promised that if he would not shoot them, they would persuade the other machine gun operators to surrender. Corporal York agreed, and the remaining machine gun operators located on top of the hill surrendered to Corporal York and his men. The very next day, the soldiers realized that Corporal York had single-handedly taken out twenty-eight machine gun operators, and they had captured 132 German soldiers, three of which were officers and thirty-five enemy machine guns.

For his courageous actions, Sergeant York was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor and also received French Croix de Guerre from Marshal Foch and called his actions the greatest thing accomplished by any private soldier of all the armies of Europe ([www.thenewamerican.com](http://www.thenewamerican.com)). Sergeant York was also applauded by several senior U.S. military officers, and he even joked once with Brigadier General Lindsey, after the General joked he captured the entire German army, he replied he did not capture the entire German army, but he did get 132 of them.

Sergeant Alvin York later went on to be the most popular and famous war hero of World War I. He returned to the United States and received a huge parade in New York City in his honor. Soon after, he returned to Tennessee to marry a young woman named Gracie who had been waiting his return from the war. Sergeant York had asked Gracie to marry him before he went to war, but they agreed to have the wedding once he returned. Sergeant York and Gracie married and later had five sons.

Sergeant York believed that he was called by God was to help create and build schools in his homeland. The donations given to him was used to create a school building fund in which he raised over \$10,000. His original goal was to build several schools throughout the Tennessee mountains, but he found this to be unachievable. So instead of several schools, he only created one private school it became known as the York Industrial Institute. It later became a public school. Alvin managed this school himself, although he was in poor health by this time. Alvin spent the rest of his life speaking at different institutions about his war experiences, and he also published a book about these same experiences. A movie was also created in honor of Sergeant York, called "Sergeant York".

In 1954, Alvin suffered a stroke that left him stricken to a wheel chair and the bed for the rest of his life. In 1964, Sergeant Alvin York died at the Veterans Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee, he was 76 years old.

For most of us, the 13th Amendment abolished slavery and guaranteed that we have the right to withhold our labor. It doesn't protect Soldiers. The reality of it is that some of our Soldiers are objecting to the gulf war. On 21 May 2004, Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejía, a former member of the Florida National Guard, was sentenced to one year in prison for refusing to return to fight

in Iraq. Staff Sergeant Camilo Mejia was charged with desertion after failing to return to his unit after an October furlough. He turned himself in during March 2004, when he claimed he did not want to fight in an oil-driven war. Camilo Mejia was released 15 February 2005. Sergeant Hasan Akbar, the soldier assigned to the 326<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, who was convicted of premeditated murder and attempted murder in a grenade and rifle attack that killed two of his fellow soldiers and wounded 14 others in Kuwait during the opening days of the Iraq war. Prosecutors said Sergeant Akbar, a Muslim, was objecting to the fact that he was there on a mission to kill fellow Muslims. So as you can see, although thousands sign the dotted line every month to enter military service, not all are in complete agreement with the contract they swore or affirmed to uphold. Should a soldier be forced to go to war if they don't want to, or should the contract we sign swearing to defend the constitution be honored no matter what our personal feelings or beliefs are? As leaders, I'm sure we all agree that if an individual objects for whatever reasons to fighting wars for this country, then you should not volunteer to serve in the military. Imagine the problems our military could face if the United States does reinstitute the draft? The challenge is on us, senior leaders of this military, and with the proper training, education and being positive role models, I am very confident that conscious objectors will be just another hurdle that we will overcome.

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