

This Day in History... December 13, 1887

Happy Birthday Alvin York

Alvin Cullum York was born on December 13, 1887, in Pall Mall, Tennessee. The third of 11 children, York only attended school for nine months. His father withdrew the children from school so they could help work on the family farm and hunt and fish to provide food for everyone.

York's father died in 1911, leaving him to help raise his younger siblings. A member of the Church of Christ in Christian Union, York had a religious experience in his 20s that reaffirmed his faith. In 1917, at the age of 29, he registered for the draft as required by law. He declared himself a pacifist and filed a claim for conscientious objector status, but was denied. York was then drafted into the Army that November.

York was concerned that fighting was in direct opposition to his beliefs. A conversation with his company commander convinced him that the Bible supported the service.

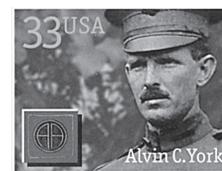
York went on to gain fame for his actions in the Argonne Forest on October 8, 1918. After losing his superior officer and eight other men, York became the leader of the small squadron. Serving as an acting corporal, he led 17 men against a German stronghold. They fared well at the start – taking several captives and no enemy fire. The Germans then counterattacked, killing six of York's men.



This stamp was issued in 2018 for the 100th anniversary of WWI.

York left his men behind to guard the prisoners while he set out to finish the mission. He took out 17 gunners with his sniper rifle before being charged by seven soldiers. After killing them all with just his pistol, York completed his mission and brought back 132 German prisoners. He was promoted to sergeant and earned the Medal of Honor for his actions

York's heroism didn't immediately gain attention back home. Once it did, the Tennessee Society arranged for him to visit New York City and Washington, DC. After being discharged, he returned home where he was honored with several more celebrations and got married. In the weeks and months to come, York was offered thousands of dollars for appearances, product endorsements, and movie rights, but he refused those and instead promoted charitable and civic causes. He did accept a farm gifted to him by the state of Tennessee, but he ended up going into debt trying to run it.



Alvin York was one of America's most decorated soldiers of World War I, earning the Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Cross, among others.



Cooper played York in the movie about his life.

York went on to found a school in Tennessee and in the 1930s worked as a project superintendent with the Civilian Conservation Corps. He oversaw the creation of Byrd Lake in Cumberland Mountain State Park and worked as the park's superintendent until 1940. Also that year, York finally agreed to allow a movie to be made about his life, so he could use the funds to finance a Bible college.

As World War II began, York advocated for US intervention. President Roosevelt was moved by York's speeches and often quoted them. York attempted to re-enlist in the Army, but he was in poor health. He was commissioned a major in the Signal Corps and toured training camps and led bond drives.

York's health continued to decline and he died on September 2, 1964. After his death, President Johnson said York was an example of "the gallantry of American fighting men and their sacrifices on behalf of freedom."



This stamp pictures the Army, Air Force, and Navy/Coast Guard/Marines Medals of Honor.

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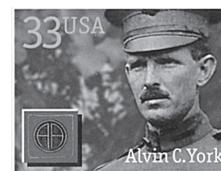
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