Sergeant
Alvin York

Profile in Leadership

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Alvin Cullum York

- Born December 13, 1887

- Died September 2, 1964

- Was a United States soldier

- Famous for his heroism in World War I.

Background

- York was born in poverty in Pall Mall, Tennessee.

- His family owned a small farm and often hunted.

- As a result, young Alvin became an expert marksman in the area woods.

- York was something of a "nuisance" as a youth, frequently getting into drunken brawls.

- In 1914 his best friend was killed in a bar fight, prompting York to change his ways.

Why he is a hero

- York eventually was drafted into the 82nd Infantry Division in 1917.

- As a corporal in its 328th Infantry, in the Battle of Meuse River-Argonne Forest on 1918 October 8, he assumed command of his platoon after three other NCOs fell.

- He led seven others in a charge on an active machine-gun nest. They killed 25 German soldiers and captured 132, including four officers. (He is said to have explained this feat by saying they had surrounded the enemy.)

His Awards

- He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Medal of Honor.

- France, whose forces he was directly aiding and whose territory was involved, added its Croix de Guerre and Legion of Honor.

- Italy and Montenegro, also allies, awarded him their Croce di Guerra and War Medal, respectively.

- At the time of his heroics, he was in fact only a corporal; his promotion to sergeant was part of the honor that he received for his valor but resulted in his becoming known to the nation (and much of the world) as "Sgt. York".

His Citation for the Medal of Honor

- Corporal, U.S. Army, Company G, 328th Infantry, 82d Division.

- Place and date: Near Chatel-Chehery, France, 8 Oct 1918.

- Citation: After his platoon had suffered heavy casualties and 3 other noncommissioned officers had become casualties, Cpl. 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 officers and 128 men and several guns.

The Medal of Honor

- The highest decoration any member of the Armed Services can receive

- Awarded for exceptional valor and heroism at the risk of one's own life

- About 3200 men and one woman have received it