

**DISCOVERING SERGEANT YORK:
FINDING AND PROMOTING AN AMERICAN HERO**

by

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In memory of Dr. Michael Birdwell

Scholar, Mentor, Friend

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first time I was aware of the significance Sergeant Alvin C. York had as a Tennessee icon and hero was during a meeting with Tennessee's Adjutant General, Major General Gus Hargett, at the Tennessee Military Department Headquarters in Nashville many years ago. The Military Department had just hired me as its first full-time historian responsible for recording and documenting the Tennessee National Guard units deploying and returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I was called to a meeting to talk about expectations for the position and a few other projects the department planned for me. When I arrived, I noticed in the waiting area outside of Hargett's office was a large portrait of Sergeant Alvin C. York near the desk where Hargett's executive assistant worked. When I saw the portrait, I found it curious that the head of the Tennessee Military Department, which is responsible for the Tennessee Army National Guard, Tennessee Air National Guard, Tennessee State Guard, and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, would have a portrait of York, a draftee from World War I, hanging in such a prominent place. I did not think York had ever been a member of any of the organizations the Military Department was comprised of.¹ It hung next to portraits of Major General Andrew Jackson, who had commanded the Tennessee Militia, and Sam

¹ I would discover later that on July 11, 1941, Alvin York accepted an appointment as a Lieutenant Colonel and was assigned to the staff of the Tennessee State Guard's Third Regiment. On the same day he was elected the Tennessee state chairman with the Fight for Freedom Committee, which advocated for U.S. intervention at the start of World War II. (See *Kingsport Times*, July 20, 1941, 5; *Knoxville Journal*, July 12, 1941, 3; and *Chattanooga Daily Times*, July 12, 1941, 1.)

Houston, who was once an Adjutant General for Tennessee. Following their military service, Jackson became the president of the United States and Houston the president of the Republic of Texas. York, on the other hand, was a draftee and enlisted soldier who became a farmer and school principal.

York's portrait stood out for reasons other than its location and the company it kept. The composition was unique (see Figure 1). Most photos and paintings of soldiers have the subject leaning on their weapon, holding it by the barrel, or slung across their back or shoulders. Modern photographs of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan almost always have the soldier holding their weapon in front of them with their trigger finger fully straightened over the trigger housing, to ensure everyone that they do not have their finger on the trigger. But not York's portrait, he is cradling his rifle. It is a unique pose with the rifle carefully resting across his arm in a manner commonly used by hunters. It is comfortable and keeps the weapon easily accessible. It is also interesting to note that the bolt is not in the closed position, but partially open, showing that the weapon is safe and not able to be fired, but it quickly could be.

I later learned that the portrait hanging in Hargett's office was the original painting commissioned by the Tennessee Historical Commission as part of the celebration for Alvin York's 100th birthday on December 13, 1987. Painted by Bart Lindstrom, a Chattanooga-based artist, the portrait was also used for a poster issued by the Tennessee Historical Commission. It was distributed to school classrooms across the state as part of York's centennial birthday celebration, which was declared Sergeant Alvin C. York Day. The portrait was commissioned in conjunction with the installation

of the York monument in front of the town hall in Chatel-Chehery, France (near the World War I battlefield where York performed his feat of arms), during Memorial Day of that year. The original portrait was then placed in the Tennessee State Museum's permanent collection.²



Figure 1. Portrait of Sergeant Alvin C. York by Bart Lindstrom, 1987. Image courtesy of the Tennessee State Museum, Nashville, Tennessee. The portrait was commissioned by the Tennessee Historical Commission as part of York's centennial birthday celebration that was promoted across Tennessee.

² "Local Artist Unveils Sgt. York Portrait," *Chattanooga News-Free Press*, October 25, 1987, clipping in Lindstrom Portrait File, Alvin York Patriotic Foundation Papers, Pall Mall, Tennessee [hereafter AYPFP]; and "York Portrait in Unveiled," *[Memphis] Commercial Appeal*, October 17, 1987, 11.

After seeing the portrait, I started becoming interested in and aware of York and how he was celebrated throughout Tennessee. I visited his statue on the grounds of the state capitol, saw the film *Sergeant York*, and visited his homestead that is now the Sgt. Alvin C. York State Historic Park. Also, my fiancé is a medical provider at the Alvin C. York Veterans' Administration Medical Center in Murfreesboro. As the years passed, I became more interested in York and the painting, and I continued learning about the importance of York to Tennessee and the nation. I realized that how Bart Lindstrom had posed York in his portrait told a much bigger story. York was more than a soldier. He was heralded by Tennesseans and Americans as a marksman, hunter, Christian, and educator as well as a devoted father and husband. York represented the spirit of who Tennesseans wanted to be and who they thought they were. His likeness and name can be found throughout the state, the nation, and even globally. It took years of research and study and the decision to earn a Ph.D. to finally understand that portrait--why it was painted in such a manner and what it represented. However, I did not do it alone. I owe a large debt of gratitude to many people who supported and assisted me as I researched and wrote this dissertation, which examines how an uneducated draftee from Pall Mall, Tennessee, became a celebrated national hero.

First and foremost, no one can be thanked more than my dissertation chair, Dr. Amy L. Sayward. She patiently and carefully guided me through the steps necessary to complete this project. If it were not for her guidance and relentless determination to see me complete this project, I would have never finished. Her relentless persistence to keep me on track and to hold me accountable is the reason you are now reading this

dissertation. Not only was she determined to see me finish, but she also taught me to look at my subject from different perspectives and to see the forest, not just the trees. Dr. Sayward made me a better writer, a better thinker, and a better historian. She kept me on track to completion even though I came upon never-ending roadblocks and constantly found reasons to derail myself. As I have told her many times, she is a saint, and I cannot give her enough credit and thanks for all she has done for me. Prior to the start of this project, I had taken a few master's and doctorate-level courses with her. Dr. Sayward was my most demanding professor, holding us all to the highest of standards, but also devoting the most time of any professor I have ever known to making sure we learned and got better at our craft every day. This dissertation is only finished because of her tireless support and dogged optimism in me.

One of my most influential teachers, supporters, and inspirations for this project is Dr. Michael Birdwell. A professor from Tennessee Technological University and the foremost scholar on Alvin York and his family, he graciously agreed to take me under his wing. Not only did he agree to be a reader on my dissertation committee, but he also allowed me to intern for him as part of the Tennessee Great War Commission, which he chaired. While I worked with the commission as head of the Public Relations committee, Dr. Birdwell and I shared many meals together while hosting and attending commemoration events, as we promoted the history of World War I in Tennessee. We climbed through trenches, drove a Great War-era bread truck, and gave presentations on various World War I topics to numerous civic groups together. He championed me as I gave my first presentation to the public, a lecture on Luke Lea and his attempt to kidnap

the Kaiser during World War I, at the East Tennessee Historical Society and Museum. He also recommended me and set up my first public lecture on Sergeant Alvin York where I was the keynote speaker at a Veteran's Day ceremony in Crossville, Tennessee.

In 2018, I had the privilege of visiting Chatel-Chehery, France, to see and walk the ground York fought on. I made three separate trips to France that year for the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the war. During my first trip to Chatel-Chehery, I called Dr. Birdwell when I arrived at the area where York earned his Medal of Honor. Dr. Birdwell was a member the Sergeant York Project with Dr. Tom Noland, Michael Kelly, and others, who used historical, archaeological, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to find the location where York's patrol fought on October 8, 1918. After arriving at the location and calling him, we switched to a videoconference, and he spent the next few hours guiding me through the battlefield on my own personal tour. He showed me where various parts of the fighting took place, where the first German prisoners were captured, and where the fallen Americans were originally laid to rest. I was privileged to have had such a tour, and it was one that few received.

Dr. Birdwell always took the time to educate and talk with anyone who was interested in history. As an undergraduate at Tennessee Tech, he was one of my most inspired teachers. He taught us that history is more than names, places, and dates; it is about people and their passions. We examined what binds all people together, like the importance of art, literature, food, theater, and cinema. He also gave me my first taste for what Public History was. He is the reason I continued as a graduate student and earned my master's degree in history from Middle Tennessee State University. He also

recommended me for the Ph.D. program in Public History. Unfortunately, and at a grave loss to the historical community, Dr. Michael Birdwell died on March 20, 2022, after battling cancer for more than sixteen years. If you met him, you would have never known the personal war he was waging, as he was one of the most energetic and passionate historians I have ever known.

I would also like to thank Dr. Brenden Martin and Dr. Louis M. Kyriakoudes, both of whom spent countless hours reading and commenting on this text while providing advice and recommendations that significantly improved the story I attempted to tell. Both are gifted writers and always challenged me to look at my project from new and different perspectives. Dr. Kyriakoudes always brings passion to his projects. The first time I met him we were judges together during Tennessee's History Day regional competition at Middle Tennessee State University. We spent the day analyzing, critiquing, and judging student documentaries, as he told riveting and meaningful stories to the students to calm their nerves and show them the importance of their work. It was a master class in how to teach, judge, and communicate with students while inspiring passion in what they were doing. He has an unmatched talent for it. As I worked through the classwork for my masters and my doctorate, Dr. Martin was one of my most influential professors. I completed more classes with him than any other member of the Middle Tennessee State University History Department faculty, and he taught me the most about being a public historian. His classes resulted in the development of my first museum exhibit display, which was installed at Murfreesboro's Bradley Academy, and I assisted with the revamping of the museum space at Old Stone Fort State Archaeological

Park in Manchester. His classes were always hands-on and practical, and he taught his students to see through the eyes of the public.

When Dr. Michael Birdwell unexpectedly passed away toward the end of my project, he left a vacant spot on my committee that was nearly impossible to fill. Luckily, Dr. Derek Frisby accepted the opportunity and jumped in to help. A talented military historian, he looked at my work critically and brought a new perspective to my project. A talented and spirited military historian, he looked at my work through the eyes of a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who understood the perspective of a soldier in combat. Years earlier, we had worked together on a project about the history of the Middle Tennessee State University's ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps) program. I never would have completed it without his expertise and assistance. The same goes for this project.

I cannot express enough thanks to all my committee members for giving of themselves and such a great deal of their time to help me realize this project. You are all talented professionals.

Further, I must express my gratitude to the Rangers at the Sergeant Alvin C. York State Historic Park—Joshua Waggener, Tanner Wells, and Joseph Gamble. Over the years, I made many research trips to the Sergeant Alvin C. York State Historic Park, and they were always the most helpful and gracious hosts. With the support of the Alvin C. York Patriotic Foundation, I was given unfettered access to Alvin York Family Papers that are still being cataloged and not yet open to the public. I met, talked with, and shared meals with members of the York Family. Rangers Wells and Gamble gave me behind-the-scenes tours of the York homestead and the surrounding buildings, we had lengthy

conversations about the York legacy, and we worked together on a myriad of living history programs that commemorated the World War I centennial. In 2018, Waggener and Wells also attended the centennial of York earning the Medal of Honor at a ceremony in Chatel-Chehery, France. There I helped lead a contingent of Tennessee National Guardsmen on on a week-long professional development trip of World War I battlefields, culminating in the 100th Anniversary ceremony. While there, we toured the York battlefield together with Douglas Mastriano, the head of the Sergeant York Discovery Expedition, which had also set out to find the exact location where York earned the Medal of Honor.³ Afterwards, Wells gave the team I was hosting a tour of Mountfaucon, and we then we had the privilege of folding the American flags at the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery. One time while visiting the Alvin C. York State Historical Park, Wells even allowed me to climb into the M247 Sergeant York DIVAD (Division Air Defense) self-propelled anti-aircraft gun before it was removed from the park and returned to the Tennessee National Guard Armory in Jamestown, but the bee's nest inside kept the tour short. The Rangers at the York homestead--Waggener, Wells, and Gamble--all have a genuine passion and excitement about York's life and masterfully interpret his life story and home. I am glad to be able to call them friends.

³ Douglas Mastriano's site is in a different location than the site discovered by Dr. Michael Birdwell's team. Both groups have made strong arguments that they have found the correct site since they both started looking for it in 2006. They each have argued that their site is in the correct location and have publicly debated one another in the press. Mastriano went so far as to build a walking trail and monument in Chatel-Chehery, France, to try and end the argument. I was lucky enough to have the rare privilege of visiting and being guided through both sites by key members for each team.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I must thank my fiancé, Samantha, and daughter, Emma. Over the years, they have given so much of themselves as we traversed many of life's challenges while I continued to work on this project. We weathered deployments and operations with the National Guard and Army Reserves, Samantha earning her doctorate, and countless other work projects. Our most challenging obstacle came on October 17, 2017, when she called me at work to tell me I needed to come home immediately. Our house was on fire. As I drove toward our home, I could see and smell the smoke from miles away, long before I got there and saw our street choked with firefighters and onlookers. By the time the fire department arrived, the house was fully engulfed in flames. No one was hurt, but our home and property were lost entirely. Unfortunately, all my dissertation records; every file folder, thumb drive, laptop, and artifact I had collected over the years was in my home office and destroyed. None of it was recoverable. The next day we began the arduous process of starting over with just the clothes we were wearing from the day before. As I thought about giving up my doctoral aspirations in the face of such a personal challenge, Samantha refused to let me. She was the voice of reason during this challenging time, as we rebuilt over the next few years. She encouraged me as I duplicated every research trip and rewrote every lost word. My daughter also persevered through these challenges and gave much of herself. There were many "Friday night movie nights" I missed as I wrote in my office, and I am confident Emma knows more about Sergeant York than anyone at her school. She walked the home and grounds of the Sergeant Alvin C. York State Historic Park so much it is memorized;

she would make a great tour guide. I cannot thank my fiancé and daughter enough for their patience, sacrifice, and dedication.

There are countless others who inspired me as I worked on this project over the years and were forced to listen to my stories. You all know who you are, and thank you. I am forever grateful. I would also like to thank Dr. Clarisse Bernier, Dr. Mark Phillips, and Dr. Bill Jones for constantly reminding me that what I was doing mattered. There were many times when Dr. Jones would tell me, “Darrin, if I can become a doctor, anyone can, even you.” Dr. Bernier always took the time to look at me in a disappointed manner, the way a passionate teacher does after telling them you did not do your homework. Whenever she asked about my progress (which she often did) and I had to admit that I was not as far along as I hoped, she gave me that look of disappointment that inspired me to do better. Dr. Phillips was always encouraging, the way you would expect from a man with multiple degrees in divinity.

Again, I would like to thank everyone who helped make the completion of this dissertation possible, and I cannot express my thanks enough.

ABSTRACT

The actions of Sergeant Alvin C. York during World War I, which earned him America's highest military award for valor, the Medal of Honor, have been studied and celebrated since journalist George Pattullo published an article written about York in the April 26, 1919, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*. When Pattullo's story was printed, York became an instant national hero, celebrated throughout the United States and becoming a heroic figure representing the U.S. doughboy and the American fighting spirit. He was memorialized in books, comics, paintings, a Hollywood film, monuments, sculptures, and even his own action figure. Roads, bridges, and governmental buildings were named after him, and his home is now a Tennessee State Historic Park.

This dissertation explains why York's story and image resonated more with the American public than other U.S. World War I veterans or heroes. It also examines the reasons York became so popular with the public. First, I examine what it means to be a hero in early twentieth-century America. Next, I study the people and events that propelled York into the public spotlight and the role they took in crafting a heroic, myth-like version of him. Lastly, I try to explain what was different about York's story and how it captured the imagination of the U.S. public. This dissertation argues that public needed to have a heroic figure who personified traditional American values and represented how his fellow citizens idyllically viewed themselves. They found that in Sergeant Alvin York.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the draft of 1917, a man from Tennessee
Overseas to the trenches he went, from the land of the free
Into war he brought two things along, a rifle and his faith
Joined the ranks as a private, assigned to 338th

--Sabaton¹

On the morning of October 8, 1918, just a few weeks before the end of World War I, soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd Division of the U.S. Army's American Expeditionary Force, were attacking down the reverse slope of Hill 223 near Chatel-Chehery, France, as part of the Allied Meuse-Argonne offensive. The unit's overall objective was to seize the Decauville railroad, a logistical lifeline to the enemy German forces operating in the area. While advancing down Hill 223 and across open ground in a valley leading toward the rail line, the battalion became pinned down under severe enemy machine-gun fire which stalled its advance. Company G was on the far left of the battalion's front, with its four platoons divided into two waves, two platoons in the first wave and two in the second/support. When the unit first became pinned down, the two support platoons were farther back up Hill 223, as part of the attack's second wave. The left support platoon was Company G's 1st Platoon led by Sergeant Harry Parsons, then in command because his platoon leader was dead. Once the

¹ Sabaton, "82nd All the Way," by Brodén and Sundström, recorded 2019, track on *The Great War*, Nuclear Blast Records.

company began taking fire advancing down Hill 223, Parsons and his men were cut off from their company commander, who was now trapped with his two forward platoons.²

To help the company and brigade continue advancing forward and find cover on the other side of the valley, Parsons split his soldiers into groups. He then formed a patrol with one group to sneak around the enemy's flank. Its mission was to destroy German machine-gun emplacements and free up the American brigade to continue its attack.

Parsons knew it was dangerous and was concerned that the patrol might never return. He feared that these men could be killed or captured but knew it was a necessary risk.

Parsons put Corporal Bernard Early, the senior squad leader and now acting sergeant, in command of sixteen other U.S. soldiers making up the seventeen-man patrol. The three other squad leaders supporting Early were Corporals Murray Savage, William Cutting,³ and Alvin York, a draftee from Pall Mall, Tennessee.

² There are many book-length works that chronicle the story of Alvin York and his military heroics that are detailed in the coming pages. The most popular are James P. Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York: The Other Sixteen* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2023); Michael Kelly, *Hero on the Western Front: Discovering Alvin York's WWI Battlefield* (Yorkshire, UK: Frontline Books, 2018); David Lee, *Sergeant York: An American Hero* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985); Edward Lengel, *Never in Finer Company: The Men of the Great War's Lost Battalion* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2018); Douglas V. Mastriano, *Alvin York: A New Biography of the Hero of the Argonne* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014); James Carl Nelson, *The York Patrol: The Real Story of Alvin York and the Unsung Heroes who Made Him World War I's Most Famous Soldier* (New York: William Morrow, 2021); John Perry, *Sgt. York: His Life, Legend and Legacy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997); and Sandra Turner, *Sergeant Alvin C. York: The Making of a Hero and Legend* (Middletown, DE: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).

³ Cutting's actual name was Otis Bernard Merrithew. When the U.S. declared war, Merrithew's mother did not want him to register for the draft or enlist in the U.S. military. But he registered for the draft against her wishes, using an alias he saw in a storefront window. He was inducted into the Army in October 1917, under the name

After briefing his squad leaders on their objective, Parsons ordered them to advance. The patrol then fell back and entered the woods at the base of the hill to try and find, flank, and destroy the machine guns. According to historian James Carl Nelson, this was the beginning of the “York Patrol” and when the York legend was born.⁴ Next, the patrol moved into the woods and began making its way up the hill. While trying to get behind the German lines, the patrol killed a sniper, survived machine-gun fire, and witnessed an American artillery barrage on the German front line. When Early and his team reached the top of the hill, they followed what they believed to be an old German trench and then a footpath that led them 300 yards behind the German lines. The patrol spread out and began searching for the enemy deep in the German rear.

The Early patrol soon stumbled upon a small stream and two Germans wearing Red Cross insignia. The patrol ordered the Germans to surrender, but they ran away with the Americans giving chase into a clearing where dozens of German soldiers were relaxing and possibly preparing for combat. The patrol edged up to the clearing and then opened fire on the unsuspecting Germans. Some German soldiers were killed, some ran off, but most of them surrendered to the American patrol. Early had his men cease firing and surround the captured German soldiers. He then walked up to Lieutenant Paul Vollmer, the German battalion commander and senior German officer, and told him to get his men organized and lined up to be taken to the American forces as prisoners. Vollmer started forming his soldiers into columns of twos when everyone heard a

William B. Cutting, and used the alias throughout the war. See Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 9.

⁴ Nelson, *The York Patrol*, 97.

German voice call out from a small hill above them, “Heruntersteigen!”⁵ On the hill above, German machine-gun teams were in defensive positions facing the opposite direction toward the American lines. When they heard the American patrol fire on the Germans behind them, many of the gunners swung their weapons around to help save their fellow comrades but saw them surrendering to the Americans. They held their fire until they were in position to help, and they did not want to accidentally shoot their own men. When they were ready, they yelled for their comrades to “get down” and began shooting at the standing Americans.

The German prisoners ducked as machine-gun fire ripped into the American patrol. Alvin York’s best friend, Murray Savage, was immediately killed, ripped apart as nine bullets tore through his body. More than half of the patrol were casualties; six were dead. Savage, the acting sergeant, was one of the deceased, and Corporals Early and Cutting were wounded. York survived the initial burst of machine-gun fire unscathed. He was positioned farther up the hill and hidden from the enemy guns by brush and German prisoners. With the patrol leadership dead or wounded, York assumed command of the fight. Over the next few minutes, with most of his patrol pinned down, the Germans tried to press the attack and kill the rest of the Americans. York, in an advantageous position, returned fire on the machine-gunners overhead. To fire on York, the German gunners had to expose themselves to see him, and then York, who was an expert marksman, killed them.⁶ As the fight went on, the Germans grew frustrated, and five of the soldiers decided

⁵ *Heruntersteigen* is German for “get down.”

⁶ After the battle, Alvin York was credited with killing 20-25 German soldiers on the top of the ridge.

to charge York's position. Using an old turkey-hunting trick where you shoot the last turkey in a line and move up so as not to scare the other turkeys from flying off so you can kill them all, he fired on the attacking Germans who were running across twenty yards of open ground toward him. He shot the last soldier first, moved his way up, shooting the final soldier just before he could stab York with a bayonet.

After that failed attack, the enemy guns on the hill fell silent. At that time, Vollmer came to York and asked him not to shoot anymore of his fellow soldiers, and he said he would get the remaining Germans to surrender. York agreed, and Vollmer blew his whistle and had the remaining gunners joined the other captured Germans. As they were coming down the ridge, a German soldier tried one last time to kill York by throwing a concealed grenade in his direction. It exploded, injuring a German prisoner but not York. In retaliation, York shot the German, and that was the last time there was an issue with the prisoners.

York formed the prisoners into columns and decided to have the surviving Americans position themselves in the middle of the prisoners to blend in and deter possible German snipers from shooting at the U.S. patrol. More than twenty-five dead enemy soldiers littered the ground. Once the wounded Americans were ready to move and everyone was in line, Alvin York put Vollmer at the head of the column with York behind him, a pistol in Vollmer's back. The roughly 110 German prisoners and eleven Americans then headed back to the American lines. Nearly one hour and fifteen minutes transpired since the American patrol began. As the group began to try and find its way, they ran into more German combatants, and York took them as prisoners too. Eventually,

York was able to find friendly soldiers with the 328th Infantry Regiment (his unit) and turn the enemy prisoners over to their higher headquarters, the 164th Brigade, in Varennes, France. At the final count, York and his squad had captured 132 enemy German soldiers and numerous machine guns and other weapons.⁷

The Making of a Hero

Great deeds alone do not guarantee recognition or honors. When York and his patrol returned from the woods near Chatel-Chehery with 132 enemy prisoners, the herofication and mythification of Alvin York and the events that transpired on October 8, 1918, began immediately. While York turned the 132 captured German soldiers over to the brigade headquarters in Varennes, Brigadier General Julian R. Lindsey, commander of the 82nd Division's 164th Brigade, said to York, "I hear you have captured the whole damn German army." York simply responded that he only captured 132.⁸ The story of what happened spread throughout the Division and on October 23, a little more than 2 weeks before the war ended, York was submitted for the Distinguished Service Cross, the second-highest award for bravery a U.S. soldier can receive.⁹ The medal was awarded to

⁷ This narrative of the York patrol's fight on October 8th is a composite summary of those events as told by journalists, authors, film makers, and historians over the last 100 years. In recent years, this story has come under great scrutiny as scholars have argued over the story's validity, what transpired in Chatel-Chehery, and even where the location of the actual battle site is. James P. Gregory's most recent work, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, critically reinterprets the story of the York patrol and deviates from what is told by numerous previous historians. For Gregory's analysis, see *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 121-129.

⁸ Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 5.

⁹ Recommendation for Distinguished Service Cross for Corporal Alvin C. York, memorandum from the Commanding Officer, 328th Infantry, to the Commanding

York on November 30, 1918.¹⁰ But York's division commander, Major General George Duncan, urged a thorough investigation by the 82nd Division, to have York's Distinguished Service Cross upgraded to the Medal of Honor, the highest award for bravery. His interest prompted Joseph Cummings Chase to paint York's portrait in France and the follow-on investigation resulted in the interest of the press.¹¹ Historian Sandra Turner referred to Duncan as York's first press agent during this period who pushed the story on Chase and the press.¹² York was awarded the medal on April 18, 1919, while he was still in Europe. This award, and now the story and likeness of this battlefield hero, had been committed to paper and canvas.

However, it took George Pattullo, a correspondent with the *Saturday Evening Post*, to fill out that story in a way that connected with the weekly magazine's readership of over two million people. Published on April 26, 1919, "The Second Elder Gives Battle" blended adventure, patriotism, romance, religion, and a humble innocence into a well-crafted heroic tale that resonated with an American public hungry for tales of heroism.¹³ Pattullo told the story of a devout Christian and farmer from Tennessee who had initially sought conscientious objector status when drafted into the U.S. Army in June of 1917. Denied because the army refused to recognize his denomination (the Church of Christ in Christian Union), York became an infantryman with the 82nd Division and

General, 82nd Division, October 23, 1918, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, National Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Missouri [hereafter NPRC].

¹⁰ Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 26.

¹¹ Joseph Cummings Chase, *Face Value: Autobiography of the Portrait Painter* (New York: Rolton House Inc., 1962), 77-79.

¹² Turner, *Sergeant Alvin C. York*, 21.

¹³ George Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," *Saturday Evening Post* (April 26, 1919): 3-4, 71-74.

ended up fighting at Saint-Mihiel and in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the largest battle in American military history to that point. Pattullo also claimed that York,

killed twenty Germans on October eighth, captured one hundred and thirty-two prisoners, including a major and three lieutenants, put thirty-five machine guns out of business, and thereby broke up an entire battalion which was about to counter-attack against the Americans on Hill 223 in the Argonne sector near Chatel-Chehery. He outfought the machine-gun battalion with his rifle and automatic pistol. There were seven other Americans present at the fight, but it was York's battle and only York's. But for him not a man of them would have come out alive except as prisoners.¹⁴

Hundreds of stories and newspaper articles about York followed Pattullo's, echoing what he wrote and the claims he made. When York returned to the United States, people celebrated his return home and praised him throughout his life.

Due to the Pattullo article, York became a national sensation. He quickly changed from an unknown soldier in the American Expeditionary Force to a celebrated and famous national hero known throughout the United States. His status grew quickly, and he became the most famous and enduring U.S. hero to emerge from the Great War. Unfortunately, most of the narrative and "facts" for the York story reprinted across the U.S. came primarily from Pattullo's article, which contained errors, was told from a biased perspective, and was mixed with a dramatic writing style the public enjoyed.¹⁵

York and his heroic story resonated beyond his heroic deed due to the way the Pattullo and the press portrayed him, his family, his birthplace, and his character. York outwardly symbolized what it means to be American: pious, hardworking, and rural. His southern heritage rooted in Appalachia also brought honor to the South, still rebuilding

¹⁴ Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4, 71-74.

from the effects of the Civil War. He seemed to represent everything that many Americans felt was good and right about their country. York was a devout Christian and farmer from a rural, agrarian community representing an archetype like Tennessee frontiersmen Daniel Boone and David Crockett. He was a conscientious objector who initially did not want to fight but chose to defend his country when called in 1917. His pacifism was not archetypical, but his actions still spoke to many U.S. citizens; when threatened and forced to fight, he sacrificed everything to protect his fellow soldiers and fought for what he believed in. He was also an expert marksman in the same vein as American heroes Boone, Crockett, and Nathaniel "Natty" Bumppo, the protagonist in the series of James Fenimore Cooper's novels known as the *Leatherstocking Tales*. As such, York represented a pure, sturdy, hardworking American who was an expert rifleman fighting for U.S. ideals and values. He fought to keep U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's pledge that "the world must be made safe for democracy."¹⁶ By receiving the nation's highest award for military valor, the Medal of Honor, there was a platform from which York's story could be told and it gave it merit. Due to the way that his story spoke to Americans and Tennesseans, the famous sergeant was able to inspire people throughout his life—building a living legacy. And this hero has managed to continue speaking and inspiring his fellow citizens, even after his death in 1964.¹⁷

¹⁶ "Wilson before Congress," April 2, 1917, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/world-war-i-american-experiences/about-this-exhibition/arguing-over-war/for-or-against-war/wilson-before-congress/#:~:text=He%20also%20argued%20that%20autocratic,Transcript.>

¹⁷ When he died in 1964, more than 8,000 people attended his funeral in rural Pall Mall, including Tennessee's Governor, Frank Clement.

York's Heroism and its Impact Today

For more than a century now, York's heroic tale has inspired countless Americans and a legend has been created around the events of October 8th. During York's life, his story was used to inspire patriotism, celebrate World War I veterans, and promote America's entry into and participation in World War II. During his life and after his death, York's name and likeness was memorialized on canvas and bronze, and countless places and structures are named in his honor. His impact can be found globally, but particularly in the southern United States. In Tennessee, York is one of the state's most enduring historical figures. The York Institute—the school he founded in Jamestown, Tennessee, after returning from the war—which opened in the fall of 1929, is still open and bears his name. As an educational advocate, multiple other schools are named after York.¹⁸ Given his military heroism, it is not surprising that the National Guard Armory in Jamestown and a Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital in Murfreesboro bear his name as well.¹⁹

The importance of York's life and legacy to his home state—recuperating its reputation as the “Volunteer State”—is evident in the multiple memorials to this famous

¹⁸ Michael Birdwell, “Sgt. York's Educational Legacy,” in *Sergeant Alvin C. York: A Sketch of Life as It Was and the Story of the Founding of York Institute*, by Alvin C. York and Michael Birdwell (privately published by Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation, 2010), 23.

¹⁹ The National Guard Armory in Jamestown was named the “Sgt. Alvin C. York Armory” by House Joint Resolution Number 267 on May 10, 1984. (See *Public Acts and Resolutions of the State of Tennessee, Ninety Third General Assembly, 1984*, 1337-1338.) The Veterans Administration Medical Center in Murfreesboro, opened in 1940, was rededicated as the “Alvin C. York Veterans Administration Medical Center” on August 8, 1985. (See *Honoring a Legacy . . . Building for the Future*, Alvin C. York Veterans Administration Medical Center dedication program in Alvin York File, Tennessee Military Department Archives, Nashville, Tennessee [hereafter TMDA].)

son. A statue of York—firing his rifle in his World War I uniform—graces the Tennessee state capitol lawn in Nashville.²⁰ Additionally, just inside the state capitol—outside the Governor’s office—is a painting titled “The Pride of Tennessee.” Painted by Michael Sloan, York’s image is painted alongside ten other notable Tennesseans who made unique contributions to the state and the nation.²¹ The state also invested in the York legacy by preserving his home, which is now part of the Sgt. Alvin C. York State Historic Park. The park includes a visitor center (modeled after York’s General Store), his home, a grist mill, the York Bible School, and other areas that were a part of his farm. In 1977, the Sergeant York Historic Area, as it is called, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. During the World War I centennial celebration from 2017 to 2018, Tennessee State Parks built trenches behind the York homestead to assist in the

²⁰ It was sculpted by Felix de Weldon, who also created the famous Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima Memorial) in the Washington, D.C., area. The monument was dedicated on December 13, 1968, York’s birthday. (See Jerry Thompson, “York Statue Unveiled at Capitol,” in *[Nashville] Tennessean*, December 14, 1968, 1-2.)

²¹ The prominent Tennesseans depicted in Sloan’s painting include Ida B. Wells-Barnett, an investigative journalist and early civil rights leader who was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); David Crockett, a folk hero, frontiersman, and politician who is commonly referred to as the “King of the Wild Frontier”; Anne Dallas Dudley, an activist in the women’s suffrage movement who helped lead the efforts to get the Nineteenth Amendment ratified, especially in Tennessee; William Handy, a popular composer and musician who is often referred to as the “Father of the Blues”; Cordell Hull, the longest-serving U.S. Secretary of State and Nobel Prize recipient for helping establish the United Nations; Andrew Jackson, the seventh President of the United States and hero of the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812; Andrew Johnson, the seventeenth President of the United States following the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln; James K. Polk, eleventh President of the United States (and Governor of Tennessee) who instigated the Mexican-American War, formalized U.S. control over the Oregon territory, and annexed Texas; Sequoyah, a Cherokee Nation representative who developed a writing system, which was the first for a North American Indigenous group; and John Sevier, one of Tennessee’s founding fathers and the state’s first governor.

interpretation of the war, one of the few sites in the United States to do so. On a smaller scale, museums across the state have established exhibits about York's exploits, and various buildings, roads, and civic organizations are also named in his honor.²²

York is not just a hero to Tennesseans. He exemplified the virtues of the U.S. military and the 82nd Airborne Division in particular. The 82nd has kept his memory alive at its home at Fort Benning, Georgia, with monuments, sites like the York Theater and the York Field named in his honor, and a museum exhibit dedicated to its former sergeant.²³ But not all York memorials are limited to places. During the 1980s, the U.S. Army developed the M247, a 40-mm self-propelled anti-aircraft gun named the Sergeant York. One was displayed until recently at the Sergeant Alvin C. York State Historic Park, and another can still be visited at the Alvin York National Guard Armory in Jamestown, Tennessee. In 1997, the U.S. Army acquired a former racehorse that it renamed Sergeant York. He served as a "riderless horse" with the 3rd Infantry Regiment, also known as the Old Guard, as part of the Caisson Platoon stationed at Fort Meyer, Virginia, next to Arlington National Cemetery. In 2004, Sergeant York served as the riderless horse behind the casket of President Ronald Reagan with Reagan's personal riding boots in his stirrups. In 2018, the Association of the United States Army began publishing a comic book series about the Medal of Honor. York was the first recipient selected to be in the

²² Michael Birdwell, "Alvin Cullum York: The Myth, the Man, and the Legacy," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 318-39.

²³ On the sixtieth anniversary of Fort Benning, Felix de Weldon, the sculptor of the York Monument on the Tennessee State Capital grounds, donated a statue he created to the National Infantry Museum where the statue is on permanent display. (See "Alvin York Statue Is Benning's Birthday Gift," *The Bayonet*, October 6, 1978, 11; and "Post Remembers 60 Years," *The Bayonet*, October 13, 1978, 4.)

first issue.²⁴ The U.S. Army and the 82nd Division continue to promote York and he is still used as an example for how they want modern soldiers to behave. In the U.S. Army Field Manual on Military Leadership, he is used as an example for the value of character, writing that York’s “strong and honorable character enabled him to destroy the morale and effectiveness of an entire enemy machine gun battalion.”²⁵ The U.S. Army continues to this day to celebrate his exceptional soldier skills and hold him as an example for what they expect from today’s soldiers. When the U.S. Postal Service decided to issue a distinguished soldier stamp series in 2000, York was one of four Army veterans so honored.²⁶

When York returned from combat following his service in World War I, his celebrity, heroism, and legacy did not stop with Tennessee and the U.S. military. One of the most impactful developments to continue endearing the public to York and his legacy throughout the decades was the release of Warner Brother’s Academy Award-winning film, *Sergeant York*, in 1941. Directed by Howard Hawks, it was the highest-grossing film of 1941 and won two Academy Awards; Gary Cooper won Best Actor for his portrayal of

²⁴ Association of the United States Army, *Medal of Honor: Alvin York* (Arlington, VA: AUSA, 2018).

²⁵ Department of the Army, *Military Leadership*, Field Manual No. 22-100 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, July 31, 1990), 25-28.

²⁶ The U.S. Postal Service chose to honor four soldiers, two from World War I and two from World War II, in their distinguished soldiers stamp sheet. John L. Hines in World War I and Omar N. Bradley in World War II represented the career military leaders who led ground forces in combat. Alvin C. York in World War I and Audie L. Murphy in World War II were both rural, enlisted soldiers representing the brave soldiers who fought against a fierce enemy and led their fellow soldiers to victory. See “York Commemorative Stamp Issued May 6th,” *Fentress Courier*, May 10, 2000, 1, 20; and Sergeant York Postage Stamp File, Sergeant York Patriotic Foundation Papers, Pall Mall, Tennessee [hereafter SYPPF].

York, and the film also won for Best Film Editing. It was nominated for an award in nine other categories, including Best Picture, Director, Supporting Actor, and Supporting Actress. *Sergeant York* was added to the Library of Congress's National Film Registry in 2008. It is one of only 500 films selected to be preserved. Curators select films for preservation based on their "cultural, historical, or aesthetic significance."²⁷

Unfortunately, the film's artistic license helped construct and spread a series of myths that, along with the Pattullo article, continue to surround and cloud the interpretation of York as a historical figure. One example is the film's portrayal of York's conversion to Christianity. He once said that when he was converted, "it was like being struck by lightning."²⁸ In the film, a drunken Gary Cooper (who played York) left a saloon on the Kentucky-Tennessee border on his mule, and both were literally struck by lightning and knocked to the ground. The lightning strike bent the rifle he intended to use to kill the film's antagonist, Zeke (played by Clem Bevans). York then stumbled into Pastor Pile's church during a sermon and was saved. York personally disliked the scene, because it simplified and belittled his conversion experience, which took months.²⁹ While simplistic, the movie did accurately highlight York's life-changing conversion, which very much shaped both the rest of his life and his legacy.

Lastly, due to his heroic appeal, Alvin York is still celebrated and honored with ceremonies and monuments internationally; most significantly, in France. In the town of

²⁷ Brett Zongker, "'Terminator,' 24 Others Join U.S. Registry," *Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 2008, section 3, 3.

²⁸ Michael Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Bros. Campaign against Nazism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 119.

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Lee, *Sergeant York*, 9-10.

Chatel-Chehery, there is a monument celebrating York in front of the village's town hall. Erected in coordination with the Tennessee Historical Commission, it was installed in 1987 to honor the 100th year of York's birth.³⁰ A little more than 30 years later, on October 7, 2018, the monument was at the center of a ceremony to honor the 100th anniversary of York's heroics. To honor the anniversary of York's battle which earned him the Medal of Honor, Major General Terry "Max" Haston, Tennessee's Adjutant General, took a contingent of fifteen of the state's Army and Air National Guardsmen to France to participate in a ceremony held by the townspeople of Chatel-Chehery. He was also one of the keynote speakers. Accompanied by two state legislators, Senator Paul Bailey and Representative Kelly Keisling, they spent the day participating in a multi-national ceremony.³¹ During the event, Haston laid a wreath at the York memorial located at the base of the steps of Chatel-Chehery's town hall. The town mayor and retired Colonel Gerald York (the grandson of Sergeant Alvin C. York) also laid wreaths. Also attending the ceremony from Tennessee were members of Tennessee State Parks (particularly rangers from the Sergeant Alvin C. York State Historic Park), the Sergeant

³⁰ "French monument to Sgt. York," *Cleveland Daily Banner*, May 26, 1987, 1,9; Darrin Haas, *Guidebook, Sergeant York: The Tennessee National Guard Retraces the Footsteps of WWI Hero Sergeant Alvin C. York* (Nashville: Tennessee Military Department, 2018), 54-55.

³¹ Senator Paul Bailey represented Tennessee's 15th State Senate District comprised of Bledsoe, Cumberland, Jackson, Overton, Putnam, and White counties in rural Middle Tennessee. Representative Kelly Keisling represented Tennessee State House District 38 which is in Middle Tennessee along the Kentucky border made up of Clay, Fentress, Macon, Pickett, and Scott counties. Alvin York's hometown of Pall Mall is in Fentress County.

York Patriotic Foundation, and the Tennessee Great War Commission. Many of York's descendants were also present. The Sergeant Alvin C. York State Historic Park, located in Pall Mall, held a mirror ceremony for the centennial.³² The town of Chatel-Chehery is inundated with York's image. Inside the town hall there is a small museum dedicated to York and there is a three-mile-long Sergeant York Historic Trail and Monument built by Douglas Mastriano as part of the Sergeant York Discovery Expedition. Named the "Circuit du Sergeant York," the trail has two monuments and nine interpretive markers written in English, French, and German.³³ These are not the only monuments to York in France, throughout the country there are painting, portraits, and books at nearly all of the World War I sites throughout the country.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the long-lived memory of York, a significant difference remains between Alvin York--the farmer and Medal of Honor recipient from Pall Mall, Tennessee--and the legend or myth of Sergeant York in film and popular culture, which now spans over one hundred years. During that time, public interest in his heroics has changed as construction and interpretation of the man and his legend have shifted. Each retelling reflects the cultural, emotional, and political passions of the era. The release of *Sergeant York* and the start of World War II constituted a watershed in the development of what became the York legend. After 1941, much of the public's understanding of York and his actions were based on the film, which is filled with historical inaccuracies and ultimately turns the three-dimensional man into a two-

³² Darrin Haas, "Sgt. York: Centennial Commemoration," *Volunteer State Guard Magazine* 18, no. 4 (December 2018): 8-15.

³³ Mastriano, *Alvin York*, 191.

dimensional, heroic caricature. The current, simplified depiction of York mostly resembles the latter.³⁴

The Academic Debate

York has also continued to enthrall historians and writers for more than a century. In recent years, Alvin York's military exploits have become the subject of an academic and archaeological dispute in the media and on the internet.³⁵ The Sergeant York Project (led by geographer Thomas Nolan of Middle Tennessee State University and historian Michael Birdwell of Tennessee Technological University) and the Sergeant York Discovery Expedition (led by Douglas Mastriano, an intelligence officer with the United States Army) both searched for the exact location where York fought on October 8, 1918. Between 2005 and 2007, both teams searched for and believed they had located the specific site where York earned the Medal of Honor. Unfortunately, the two different

³⁴ Dr. Michael Birdwell, the foremost scholar on Alvin York and his family, has written extensively on the film *Sergeant York* and the use of York in current popular culture. See Birdwell, "Alvin Cullum York," 318-35; Michael Birdwell, "A Change of Heart: Alvin York and the Movie *Sergeant York*," *Film & History* 27, no. 1 (1997): 22-33; Michael Birdwell, "Gobble Like a Turkey: Alvin C. York in American Popular Culture," in *Rural Life and Culture of Upper Cumberland*, edited by Michael Birdwell and Calvin Dickinson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 159-77; Michael Birdwell, "Heroes and Hollywood: *Sergeant York*," in *Tennessee in American History*, 2nd ed., edited by Larry Whiteaker and Calvin Dickinson (Needham Heights, MA: Ginn, 1991): 203-10; and Michael Birdwell, "The Making of the Movie *Sergeant York*: A Journey from Reality into Myth" (master's thesis, Tennessee Technological University, 1990).

³⁵ Tom Nolan, "Search for Sgt. York Site Turns into Modern Media Battle," *The [Middle Tennessee State University] Record*, November 17, 2008, 2; Brad Posey, "Re-Fighting the Meuse-Argonne: Alvin York and the Battle over World War I Site Commemoration," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 276-93; Stephan van Meulebrouck, "Hot on the York Trail?" *Western Front Association Bulletin* 84 (June/July 2009): 27-31.

locations are roughly 500 meters apart, prompting both teams to argue for their specific location in various websites, newspapers, magazines, journals, and academic works. The debate even reached the *New York Times*.³⁶ In 2008, the Sergeant York Discovery Expedition went so far as to construct a walking trail and various monuments and historical markers to York to cement its claim as the correct site.³⁷ Monument construction was premature. Both teams have done considerable work to find the correct area, but unfortunately, neither have found indisputable evidence that guarantees that they are at the right site. The Sergeant York Project has come the closest, finding a G Company, 328th Infantry Regiment uniform collar disk, a disk that would have been worn by a member of York's patrol on October 8, as well as the graves of the American Soldiers who were killed and buried on the battlefield following the fight. The debate over the site's correct location continues to this day.³⁸

Unfortunately, there has been little analysis about how Alvin York became such a popular U.S. war hero directly following the Great War and why his story resonated with

³⁶ Craig S. Smith, "Revisiting Sgt. York and a Time When Heroes Stood Tall," *New York Times*, June 18, 2006.

³⁷ Taylor V. Beattie, "In Search of York: Man, Myth, Legend," in *Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Forces in Memory and Remembrance*, ed. Mark Snell (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2008), 165-91; Taylor V. Beattie with Ronald Bowman, "In Search of York: Man, Myth, Legend," *Army History* 50 (Summer-Fall 2000): 1-14; Taylor V. Beattie, "Continuing the Search for York," *Army History* 66 (Winter 2008): 20-28; Douglas Mastriano, et al., *Sergeant York Discovery Expedition (SYDE) Report on the Discovery of Where Alvin C. York Earned the Medal of Honor, 8 October 1918*, January 2007, Sergeant York Discovery Expedition, <https://www.battledetective.com/images/York%20Spot/Lt%20Col%20Mastriano%27s%20report.pdf>; Thomas J. Nolan, "Battlefield Landscapes: Geographic Information Science as a Method of Integrating History and Archaeology for Battlefield Interpretation" (PhD diss., Texas State University, 2007).

³⁸ Kelly, *Hero on the Western Front*.

the American public. Sandra Turner was the first scholar to examine how York became a hero. In *Sergeant Alvin C. York: The Making of a Hero and Legend*, based on her 1974 master's thesis for the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Turner examined the press coverage York received from the events surrounding October 8, 1918, until York's death in 1964. She focused on nine newspapers and attempted to trace, "the development of his hero's image and his eventual elevation to the status of legend through stories in the American popular press."³⁹ She argued that the publicity heaped on York by the press, and how it was written and styled, determined how the public perceived him. She wrote that,

To find a story possessing more "human interest" elements than the York story would have been difficult in 1919 and perhaps even today. Adventure, religion, patriotism, romance, and a kind of innocence all mingled in the tale, and those publications that, capitalizing on these elements, attempted to "sell" York as the "greatest" hero of the war were primarily interested in selling magazines or newspapers.⁴⁰

Based on her research, she determined that many of the stories published in newspapers used parts and reflected the tone of George Pattullo's "The Second Elder Gives Battle." Turner briefly examines the impact the article had on the press, but she does not answer the question of why the story of this Medal of Honor recipient so enamored the public and media.

Over the past few years, some books have attempted to differentiate the man from the myth and investigate how the icon was created. One of the first scholarly biographies to appear, and the best book-length work, is David Lee's *Sergeant York: An American*

³⁹ Turner, *Sergeant Alvin C. York*, 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

Hero. Lee attempted to “penetrate the myth surrounding York to establish the facts of his life.”⁴¹ He believed that York was a valuable national symbol that was more important to the U.S. public than his contribution as a soldier and citizen. He represented what Americans thought they were, but as a man, York was a contradiction. He represented a simpler life but devoted his post-war years to bringing education and industrialization to Tennessee. Lee also argues, “As a conscientious objector turned successful soldier, York was a perfect reflection of America’s reluctant but forceful involvement in European affairs.”⁴² He investigates why York resonated with the public and stated that “In 1919, the United States was desperately in need of a hero.”⁴³ Lee argues that York best represented what the country needed at the time. He briefly examines this through the Pattullo article, but he does not fully realize all the attention given to York by the other press outlets, which Turner examined. He also does not fully examine the motives, reasons, and underlying forces that resulted in Pattullo writing the article nor why the article was so well received and utilized by the public and press.

There are other contemporary works, but they have difficulty separating the man from the myth. Nor do they analyze York from a new perspective. John Perry’s *Sgt. York: His Life, Legend and Legacy* is a hagiography that uncovers nothing new about York or his place in society. It does not site any of its sources or tell where its facts and information came from. But it is entertaining and appeals to a broad audience; it also touches on parts of York’s life that no other author researches. The Sergeant York

⁴¹ Lee, *Sergeant York*, xi.

⁴² *Ibid.*, x-xi.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 49.

Patriotic Foundation embraced this volume and reissued it as a special edition with a commemorative binding and signed by the author. Perry also wrote a short work titled *Sergeant York*, which was part of a Christian Encounters book series that highlighted the religious aspects of York's story.⁴⁴

A more recent, and controversial biography written about York is Douglas Mastriano's *Alvin York: A New Biography of the Hero of the Argonne*. Throughout his work, Mastriano focuses on York's short military career and the events that occurred on October 8th. He conducted extensive primary research surrounding the German perspective of the battle and provided the best account of the enemy's disposition. Unfortunately, the rest of his work offers no new analysis on the York story and is similar in value to Perry's work. It is mostly a celebration of York as a religious figure and soldier, backed with a narrative about Mastriano's battlefield research in Chatel-Chehery.⁴⁵ In January 2021, James Gregory, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Oklahoma, filed complaints with the University Press of Kentucky and the University of New Brunswick, where Mastriano earned his Ph.D. Gregory claimed that many of Mastriano's citations were false and did not match what he was referencing.⁴⁶ As of March 2021, Gregory claims to have found 35 fraudulent citations in Mastriano's *Sergeant York*, greatly diminishing the validity of that research.⁴⁷ This began a deep look into Mastriano's book as well as his Ph.D. dissertation. By October of 2022, Gregory had

⁴⁴ John Perry, *Sergeant York* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

⁴⁵ Mastriano, *Alvin York*, 191-216.

⁴⁶ Mark Scolforo, "In French Woods, Rivals Take Aim at Senator's WWI Research," *Associated Press*, March 20, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/doug-mastriano-research-alvin-york-backlash-96db4958d0caeb992347d9b83198084f>.

⁴⁷ James Gregory email with author, March 21, 2021, in author's possession.

examined Mastriano's dissertation and discovered 213 allegations of academic misconduct and filed a formal complaint to the University of New Brunswick. Since then, the university has opened a formal investigation to examine Mastriano's dissertation which was "plagued by factual errors, fabrications, omissions and amateurish archeology."⁴⁸ These accusations bring great scrutiny to Mastriano's claim of having accurately discovered the actual York battlefield in Chatel-Chehery.

With the arrival of World War I's centennial celebration, the American public and scholars have shown greater attention to the great war. Numerous articles, books, films, museum exhibits, and ceremonies have occurred to honor, remember, and understand the war. The first book released during the centennial to examine York's exploits was Michael Kelly's *Hero on the Western Front*. A member of Tom Nolan's team of researchers on the Sergeant York Project, Kelly's book set out to "highlight the discovery of the true site in the Argonne Forest where York fought on 8 October 1918."⁴⁹ A meticulously detailed study of documents and archeological evidence, Kelly's book is the most exhaustively researched study of the battlefield and supporting documents to date, giving firm evidence to its claim to have discovered the correct site of York's battle. He uses Pattullo's article as evidence in his site research but shows little attention to the birth of the York myth, which is not the intention of his research.

⁴⁸ Michael MacDonald, "University of New Brunswick Starts Formal Investigation into Trump Ally's PhD," *Toronto Star*, May 3, 2023, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2023/05/03/university-of-new-brunswick-starts-formal-investigation-into-trump-allys-phd.html>.

⁴⁹ Kelly, *Hero on the Western Front*, xxvii.

The second work published during the centennial discussing York is Edward Lengel's *Never in Finer Company*. York is not the direct subject of the book, but he is one of four men Lengel studies to examine how those men's lives were changed by the events surrounding the "Lost Battalion."⁵⁰ York's heroism is often examined as an isolated battle in Chatel-Chehery, but Lengel places York's actions in the broader context of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. He shows how York's October 8th engagement in Chatel-Chehery, and the actions of the 82nd Division, affected the outcome of the Lost Battalion. Lengel gives readers a better context for York's actions. He also examines how the Lost Battalion affected the four actors in the book and how they coped with their experiences.⁵¹

The last centennial work focusing on York is James Carl Nelson's *The York Patrol*. Another retelling of the events on October 8, 1918, Nelson attempts to tell the full story of the battle by not just focusing on York but examining the role and actions of the other sixteen soldiers on the patrol.⁵² Unfortunately, the work falls short of fully

⁵⁰ The Lost Battalion is the nickname given by the press to nine companies of the 77th Division with the American Expeditionary Force who became isolated during a U.S. attack in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. German forces surrounded and relentlessly attacked for nearly seven days more than 550 U.S. soldiers who never surrendered. Once the unit was rescued, only 194 soldiers of the original force were alive and able to walk off the battlefield. Roughly 197 were killed, and 150 were missing or taken prisoner. (See Robert Laplander, *Finding the Lost Battalion: Beyond the Rumors, Myths, and Legends of America's Famous WWI Epic* (Waterford, WI: Lulu Press, 2017).)

⁵¹ Lengel's *Never in Finer Company* examines Major Charles Whittlesey, a New York lawyer and commander of the "Lost Battalion"; Captain George McMurtry, a veteran of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War and a New York lawyer who commanded a battalion under Whittlesey; Sergeant Alvin York, a soldier and conscientious-objector with the 82nd Division; and Damon Runyon, a newspaper reporter and war correspondent for the *New York American* covering the actions of the "Lost Battalion." (See Lengel, *Never in Finer Company*, 1-5.)

⁵² Nelson, *The York Patrol*, ix-x.

integrating the roles that the other members played and is still heavily focused on York's heroics. It does show that after York became famous after the war, many members in the patrol began looking for credit and started to argue that York did not deserve all the accolades he received from the public. Nelson does use often overlooked or previously discredited accounts of the other members of the "York patrol," but he does not fully embrace them and maintains the traditional Alvin York story. The work also does not add anything new to why York's story resonated and was so celebrated by the public in the spring and summer of 1919.⁵³

The most recent and controversial work to examine York and his legacy is James Gregory's *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York: The Other Sixteen*. Just released in 2023, it was "written with the goal of presenting a balanced history of Sgt. Alvin York."⁵⁴ He writes about the other sixteen patrol members and tells their story to "integrate their perspectives into the narrative where they can take their rightful place alongside Alvin York."⁵⁵ Gregory argues that the myth and legend created about York is missing the role and stories of the other patrol members who fought with him. For various reasons, they were removed from the narrative, and became victims of the U.S. Army leadership trying to push York's story to help their own careers. Gregory's work is groundbreaking scholarship in the field of Alvin York because he writes about the participants and battle's eyewitnesses who have been neglected for over 100 years. He

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 6.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 7.

presents a more balanced history of the patrol on October 8th and dispels the myth that York acted alone.

Purpose of this Dissertation

Despite the recent scholarly attention, there are gaps in understanding how York became so famous and celebrated for his actions. During World War I, 124 Medals of Honor were awarded to 119 individuals.⁵⁶ On October 8, 1918, alone, thirteen U.S. soldiers, including York, performed heroic acts that earned them all the Medal of Honor,⁵⁷ and two of them, James Karnes and Calvin John Ward, were Tennesseans. But out of all these potential candidates, York is the soldier who most Americans remember and celebrate. Tom Mahone, in an article written for the *American Legion Magazine*, slightly criticized York by writing, “By the thousands, other doughboys fought in more savage actions, gave more of themselves, suffered far more and endured more over longer periods of time.”⁵⁸ York’s accomplishment and claim to fame only lasted a short 15 minutes, “but he captured the imagination then and now by an individual performance at the precise moment when nothing in infantry training could have been enough to save him or his companions or to have brought a far larger enemy force to its knees.”⁵⁹ He was the soldier who received persistent attention from the press, countless accolades, a Hollywood film, and the attention of the America public.

⁵⁶ Ron Owens, *Medal of Honor: Historical Facts and Figures* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing, 2004), 92.

⁵⁷ Nelson, *The York Patrol*, 3.

⁵⁸ Tom Mahoney, “Alvin York and Frank Luke: Legendary WWI Heroes,” *American Legion Magazine* 85, no. 3 (November 1968)003A 22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Throughout this dissertation, I analyze how York's story made its way into the national consciousness following the war, why it was idealized and why it resonated with the post-World War I U.S. public. Past works examine various aspects of what made York's story interesting or how it manifested, but none fully answers the question: what made York's story more interesting and popular than the thousands of other soldiers with the American Expeditionary Force who were awarded medals for their heroics? Also, previous scholars do not explain the public climate and what led to the public's support and interest in York. Lastly, I will examine the conditions that set-in motion events that created an icon and legend still celebrated today. From the first time York's name appeared in print, journalists and public figures have crafted a narrative that is not always genuine nor accurate but has fueled the public imagination and given them the hero they wanted.

Chapter one is this introduction where I discuss the background leading to this area of study. In chapter two, I examine what it means to be a hero and how the U.S. public defines and selects citizens they choose to honor. Historically, Americans have a unique outlook on who they transform from public figures to heroes wrapped in myth, and it often changes over time. Prior to World War I, the American public was still honoring key figures like generals and political leaders and were just beginning to highlight the importance of individual soldiers during wartime. The news media was a critical participant that heralded in this change especially during World War I.

As I move into chapter three, I look at Joseph Cummings Chase, a portrait painter who was commissioned to paint historic portraits of American military leaders in the

American Expeditionary Force. He participated in helping shift the public interest onto individual soldiers and what they accomplished in battle. While working, Chase independently decided to paint and celebrate junior soldiers who were awarded medals for heroism, painting an additional 50, and more than 140 total, during his short time in France. While searching for subjects to capture on canvas, Chase learned of York's story and the painting he created began the public herofication and myth of York. It is also believed that Chase was responsible for relaying the story to his friend, George Pattullo, who was a journalist for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and similarly looking for soldiers to honor in print. It would be George Pattullo's article that presented York in mythological terms to the public and made York famous.

Chapter four primarily looks at how George Pattullo, who set out to find the archetypal American war hero, discovered the York story. As a credentialed war correspondent and avid author of western fiction, Pattullo was a talented writer searching for a soldier who accomplished a truly heroic feat he could write a story about. When he heard about York, Pattullo set out to meet, interview, and write about him. Luckily for Pattullo, it happened at just the right time when the 82nd Division leadership was studying York's actions and considering him for the Medal of Honor. This encounter also occurred as the United States was lessening its censorship restrictions which affected how journalists could write stories about individual soldiers and specific units. Throughout the war, the United States, and other warring nations, had restrictions on journalists and what they were allowed to write and cover. This, and strict credentialing, made it difficult for reporters to tell heroic tales of individual daring, especially during industrialized combat

where millions of people died, and individual heroism seemed scarce. In this chapter, I also examine, in detail, the symbolism, herofication, and mythology in Pattullo's article, "Second Elder Gives Battle." The chapter deconstructs the article to study the various elements to understand why the public received it so well. The article turned York into a war hero and public celebrity nearly overnight due to its symbolism, style it was written, and how it reflected the American ideals of what a hero should be. Unfortunately, the article contained various inaccuracies and hyperbole which helped create a myth about who York was and what he did. Pattullo was not just a journalist, he was a writer of western fiction, and the article has many of the elements seen in that genre of writing. Many of his statements are still used and written as facts today.

Throughout chapters five and six, I chronicle how York's legend was initially presented to the American people and then the response he received when he returned home from France. York's response to the celebrity and attention he garnered from the public and media upon his homecoming added to his story and the myth created about him. In the beginning, York may have been an unwitting bystander to the attention he received, but he soon began making decisions that enhanced his simple, southern persona and made him more endearing to the public over the long term.

The final chapter concludes with how York's legend and myth was enhanced through the help of himself, authors, and film makers. Three books and a film were all released with the consent and help of York, each one enhancing and propelling the themes and myth George Pattullo created. These books and film are still used today to tell the York story. Thanks to the film, *Sergeant York*, much of the modern-day public, when

discussing York, have images of Gary Cooper in their minds and believe York acted that way. Because of these works, York's name and likeness is still recognizable to many Americans more than 100 years later.

Overall, this dissertation is not a military history study about what happened in the Meuse-Argonne on October 8, 1918, which has been well covered and exhaustively analyzed by other scholars. This is how York's heroic story resonated beyond his heroic deed due to how the press portrayed him to the public. York unwittingly symbolized, through Pattullo's article, what it means to be American: pious, hardworking, and rural. His southern heritage rooted in Appalachia brought honor and respect to the South, still rebuilding from the effects of the Civil War. He represented, to many Americans, everything they felt was good and right about their country. After the Pattullo article was published, The American press cultivated and promoted the image of York as pure, sturdy, hardworking American who was an expert rifleman fighting for U.S. ideals and values. For over 100 years, Sergeant Alvin York's heroism has continued to be celebrated not just because of what he did, but because of what he represented. He is still remembered today even though the sacrifices millions of Americans made during World War I have largely been forgotten.

CHAPTER 2:
**HEROES AND HEROIFICATION: THE UNITED STATES AND PUBLIC
 MEMORY PRIOR TO THE GREAT WAR**

Heroes should be people who enlarge our horizons, ennoble our lives, or give us visions of what is possible rather than merely practical.

--Gerald Leinwand¹

Where have all the good men gone and where are all the gods?
 Where's the streetwise Hercules to fight the rising odds?

--Bonnie Tyler²

Following the Armistice ending the Great War, Sergeant Alvin York returned to the United States as a national hero for his actions in the Argonne Forrest. His celebrity endured throughout the next century, becoming one of the nation's most well-known Tennesseans and a benchmark for how Americans honor and select their heroes. But the role heroes play in the United States, or any culture, is never stagnant; instead, it changes over generations and reflects the culture from which it originates. As historian Marshall Fishwick wrote, "Every hero mirrors the time and place in which he lives."³ That is true with York.

¹ Gerald Leinwand, *Heroism in America* (Danbury, CT: Franklin Watts, 1996), 9.

² Bonnie Tyler, "Holding out for a Hero," on *Secret Dreams and Forbidden Fire*, produced by Jim Steinman and Dean Pitchford, Columbia Records, 1986.

³ Marshall Fishwick, *The Hero, American Style* (New York: David McKay Company, 1969), 9.

The Great War was a unique period in U.S. history and shifted the traditional way Americans honored and selected heroes. Generally, after every conflict, a country celebrates military heroes for victories on the battlefield or acts of valor and heroism. Prior to 1918, most nations, especially the United States, traditionally elevated and revered great leaders, but that changed as America entered the industrial age. Millions of soldiers were fighting, charging against machine guns, tanks, airplanes, artillery, and poison gas, and the military leadership were ordering thousands to their death without winning any decisive engagements to ensure victory and win the war. This new style of warfare limited heroic options for an American public hungry for heroics and people to glorify. According to historian Robert Zeiger,

The Great War was not a war of heroes or individual heroism. It was mass, industrial warfare, a war of attrition. Although the public might thrill to tales of individual exploits and heroic gestures, few soldiers survived their ordeal by fire with notions of valor and glory intact.⁴

President Woodrow Wilson and General John Pershing also failed to live up to the standard of heroics expected by Americans and they did not become “the hero *par excellence* of the World War.”⁵ Following the U.S. Civil War and codified during World War I, Americans shifted from celebrating and honoring leaders and officers to glorifying enlisted soldiers, who risked or gave their lives for their country. There was also an increased interest in honoring and remembering those who never returned home or whose

⁴ Robert Zeiger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 107.

⁵ Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero Worship* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 393.

bodies were never identified, the unknown soldiers. According to historian Dixon Wecter,

Every previous war in our history gave us a few idolized generals and admirals, soldiers and sailors of single deeds that thrilled the nation. Each earlier war had given us at least one military president. The World War was different. Instead of plumes and epaulettes and chargers there were grim new media of destruction which depersonalized war – tanks, planes, machine guns, gas grenades, and artillery of enormous range. New tactics called for a war of defensive position. There were no charges up Cemetery Ridge or San Juan Hill. . . . Teamwork rather than individual brilliance was the new order of the day.⁶

Therefore, this war marked something of a turning point in the way Americans identified and elevated its war-time heroes. Groups or units were celebrated, like the Marines at Belleau Wood or the soldiers in the Lost Battalion. A few individual soldiers who survived extreme odds, like Major Charles Whittlesey, First Lieutenant Samuel Woodfill, Sergeant Daniel Daly, and Sergeant Alvin York, along with the unknown soldiers who never returned from combat, became America's new heroes.⁷ The shift in who Americans honored did not occur overnight, it took a mixture of time, industrialization, and wartime censorship to make it happen.

During the fifty years following the Civil War, Americans struggled with the changes in U.S. society brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Small towns, farms, and

⁶ Ibid., 407.

⁷ Major Charles Whittlesey is a Medal of Honor recipient who led the "Lost Battalion" in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. For five days, he led his unit as they were surrounded by German forces, and he refused to surrender. War correspondents nicknamed his unit the Lost Battalion and voraciously covered his fight in the press. First Lieutenant Samuel Woodfill is a Medal of Honor recipient who led his company and personally neutralized three German machine gun emplacements while under the effect of mustard gas. General John Pershing called Woodfill the most outstanding soldier in World War I. Sergeant Daniel Daly became a legendary and celebrated Marine when he is said to have yelled, "Come on you sons of bitches, do you want to live forever?" before charging the Germans during the Battle of Belleau Wood.

agrarian societies had largely defined the nation, but now big cities, factory work, and a more urban culture characterized the United States. Language, economics, religion, and customs were fluctuating as well. The American population struggled with an evolving value system and tried to find a new identity within the ever-changing landscape.⁸ The first major conflict of the twentieth century also brought drastic change to the citizens of the United States, as they continued to adjust to modernization, new technologies, growing cities, increased immigration, and a shift to a more bureaucratic and centralized government.⁹ These changes and modernization forced Americans to reshape their collective identity, to redefine what they valued as a culture, and to question how they viewed their role in the nation and world. When it came to the new, industrial warfare specifically, individual daring was rare, and when it did appear, strict censorship rules often stifled the soldier's name, unit, and location of heroics, limiting the press coverage about individual soldiers and detail accounts of what they did or accomplished.¹⁰

⁸ Lee, *Sergeant York*, 49.

⁹ Lisa Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁰ According to the first American Expeditionary Force's Correspondents' Agreement, reporters were not allowed to give the name or location of any army or army unit or any reference to the possible location of their staff headquarters. They were also not allowed to mention names of officers except division commanders of higher. These rules were meticulously followed and often expanded upon, prioritizing security over good storytelling. (See Correspondents' Agreement from Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces, Office of the Chief of Staff Intelligence Section, RG 120: Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (World War I) General Headquarters; General Staff; G-2; Censorship and Press Division (G-2-D) correspondence and other Records Relating to Press Correspondence in Territory Occupied by Allied Armies, 1917-1919, National Archives, College Park, Maryland [hereafter NACP].)

The changes wrought by industrialization, modernization, and the new methods of warfare also brought a gross increase in the number of dead, missing, and unidentifiable soldiers following the war. Across all theaters, the war killed more than nine million service members and another five million civilians.¹¹ With so many deaths—coupled with the destructive power of modern weapons, the number of missing soldiers and unidentifiable bodies grew exponentially. The impact of not being able to identify and honor the dead seemed even more devastating to the American public given the large number of draftees who fought and died but who did not volunteer to do so.

Once World War I ended, various nations, including the United States, chose to honor the unknown soldier, and in doing so, honored every soldier of that country who had not returned from the battlefield. While in France, the United States conducted a ceremony meant to ensure that the unknown soldier chosen was anonymous and therefore representative of the roughly 4,500 American unknowns of all races, ranks, and social standings. This was a conscious and symbolic step toward constructing a national community due to the changes brought by modernization.¹² Following the example of France and England, the United States built the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in 1921 located at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.. France honored its fallen with a memorial at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and Great Britain commemorated its unknown war dead at Westminster Abbey in London.¹³

¹¹ Martin Gilbert, *The First World War: A Complete History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), xv.

¹² Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 15, 100.

¹³ For more information on the Unknown Soldier and Arlington National Cemetery, see Philip Bigler, *Tomb of the Unknown Soldier: A Century of Honor, 1921-2021* (Quicksburg, VA: AppleRidge Publishers, 2019); and Robert Poole, *On Hallowed*

The veneration of the unknown soldier was part of a general trend, especially in the United States, to exalt the individual enlisted soldier in this war, a departure from past wars' focus on senior officers and generals.¹⁴ This trend was particularly evident in the way Americans built memorials following the war. Municipalities across the nation chose to honor the war dead by replicating Ernest Moore Viquesney's sculpture, *Spirit of the American Doughboy*, which depicted a World War I infantryman preparing to throw a grenade and clutching a rifle as he charges forward.¹⁵ After the war, many veterans' groups and civic organizations "embraced the statue as an icon: a symbol of individual heroism and, in 1920, a sign of loyalty and 'one hundred percent Americanism.'"¹⁶ Communities across the country erected seven-foot-tall replicas of the *Spirit of the American Doughboy* in commemoration of the war. There are currently 140 communities in 35 states with this memorial. Additionally, Viquesney sold twelve-inch-tall models for home display as well as one made into a lamp. During the five years between 1921 and 1926, Americans across the country purchased roughly 25,000 smaller statues and lamps. The statue represented a U.S. soldier who was simultaneously realistic and idealistic.¹⁷ According to art historian Jennifer Wingate, the doughboy statue was both an "abstract symbol and individual soldier."¹⁸ It was so well liked that Sergeant Alvin York also

Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery (New York: Walker and Company, 2009).

¹⁴ Fishwick, *The Hero*, 5.

¹⁵ Steven Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919-1941* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 110; Jennifer Wingate, *Sculpting Doughboys: Memory, Gender, and Taste in America's World War I Memorials* (Brulington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 59.

¹⁶ Wingate, *Sculpting Doughboys*, 59.

¹⁷ Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory*, 110.

¹⁸ Wingate, *Sculpting Doughboys*, 64.

approved of the twelve-inch tall version, being quoted in an advertisement for the statue in *American Legion Weekly* as saying, “It is a wonderful statue and should be in every American home.”¹⁹ While the period following the Great War saw a focus on the regular, which was a notable change, there were other elements of post-WWI hero-making that echoed deeper patterns.

The Heroic Myth

Globally, heroes, especially those found in mythology and literature, have similar characteristics and themes that cross cultures and time. Joseph Campbell, a renowned comparative mythologist who is also considered the founder of “heroism science,” wrote,

There is a certain typical hero sequence of actions which can be detected in stories from all over the world and from many periods of history. Essentially, it might even be said there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people.²⁰

Each hero follows a standard path or formula known as a monomyth, consisting of a rite of passage all heroes must complete. The three steps in the path are simple, called the nuclear monomyth, they are separation, initiation, and return. Summarized by Campbell, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow

¹⁹ Advertisement, *American Legion Weekly* 3, no. 35 (September 2, 1921): 32. Alvin York also owned a statue that is currently on display in his house as part of the Sergeant Alvin C. York State Historic Park.

²⁰ Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, “The Hero’s Transformation,” in *Handbook of Heroism and Heroic Leadership*, edited by Scott T. Allison, George R. Goethals, and Roderick M. Kramer (New York: Routledge, 2017), 380; Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 166.

man.”²¹ Alvin York follows this pattern, as did almost every U.S. soldier who fought in France with the AEF, except George Pattullo’s article vividly told the story to the American public following the monomyth model. Nearly every heroic candidate follows these steps, or a framework of them, in almost all literature and heroic stories to become a hero within their culture.²²

The story of Alvin York’s deeds in the Argonne Forest on October 8th, as depicted in Pattullo’s article “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” combines both the generic hero of the monomyth and the heroic common soldier of the Great War the public sought. These elements allowed York to become nationally and internationally honored and revered. He was an everyman who represented what America wanted to be, and his path to earning the Medal of Honor followed the monomyth formula containing all elements of a mythical hero.²³ According to sociologist Orrin Klapp,

For every culture, the hero is a collective symbol. The hero is seen to be embodied in specific persons, but to have an abstract or general character which transcends the person of the hero. Heroes are apparently selected or “recognized” according to this pattern because of certain extraordinary “acts” or features which are called “heroic.” The general description of this pattern might be called the problem of the description of the hero as a social type. Since the emphasis of a social type study is not on specific persons but on a collective mental construct, it is seen to be more suitable to the study of the hero than the “great man” approach, which tends to be substantive and individualistic.²⁴

²¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 30.

²² Ibid.

²³ For a more detailed analysis of George Pattullo’s article, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.

²⁴ Orrin Klapp, “The Hero as a Social Type” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1948), 7.

Each nation and culture have different values embodied in the person they choose to honor as their heroes. In the United States, as in many democracies, paying homage to and having heroes among everyday citizens is a vital part of patriotism.²⁵ One of the key elements of hero creation is that the public determines who the community will honor. In dictatorships and other types of tyrannical governments, hero-worship can be used as a weapon to sway public opinion and keep leaders in power. But democracies, like the United States, typically have societal protections that limit hero-worship and keep the public from blindly following dictators. According to Dixon Wecter's classic, *The Hero in America: A Chronology of Hero Worship*, "in a democracy the hero must be the people's choice."²⁶ In April 1919, it was the public—not a government-directed public relations campaign or an organized effort by a particular group or organization—that propelled Sergeant York into the national spotlight. Wecter also writes that "In a democracy, where the favorite should rightly be the people's choice—and not the elect of hereditary honors or of a mythmaking "party" leadership—he (the hero) is an index to the collective mind and heart. His deeds and qualities are those which millions endorse."²⁷

When citizens of the United States determine who is elevated to hero status, Wecter argues that there are multiple aspects that go into determining who becomes an American hero. Historian Gerald Leinwand distilled Wecter's heroic aspects into eleven factors against which Americans generally use to select their heroes:²⁸

²⁵ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11; Fishwick, *The Hero*, 1.

²⁷ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 488.

²⁸ An abbreviated listing of the eleven factors used is in Leinwand, *Heroism in America*, 33-42; Wecter's principles are in *The Hero in America*.

1. *In a democracy, heroes must be chosen by the people.* Americans tend to pick heroes who are admired for what they do, stand for, and possibly symbolize. The government has a limited ability to sway public opinion, but the media can influence and steer public perception by elevating or downgrading a heroic candidate's value. This can happen while the hero is alive or dead. The public's interest in the individual can also increase or decrease based on current events or new information learned about the hero.²⁹

2. *People of good will become heroes.* Americans typically dislike personal arrogance, boasters, or people lacking values or ethics. According to Wecter, "No hero must announce that he is infallible. He must be greater than the average, but in ways agreeable to the average . . . the doer of brave deeds is expected to belittle himself—to credit luck, or his soldiers, or his mother, or God."³⁰ Americans value humility, and the hero is a servant to the public, not above it. Soldiers are generally not idolized, and if they are, it does not last for a long. The most famous American soldier, George Washington, was not honored for his military prowess or success. As a soldier, he was honored for his faith in the cause of the American Revolution and his sense of duty to the country. He never wavered in that duty and was willing to sacrifice his own livelihood for an ideal. When the war was over, Washington, who exemplified the modern-day Cincinnatus,³¹

²⁹ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 11; Leinwand, *Heroism in America*. 34.

³⁰ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 11.

³¹ Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus was a Roman statesman and military leader who is often cited as an outstanding example of leadership and civic virtue. Around 458 BC, Cincinnatus was ploughing a field at his farm when he was appointed as a Roman dictator to fend off an attack on Rome. He accepted, took control of the government, and defeated the attacking army. Fifteen days after taking control of the Roman Empire, he relinquished command of the army and returned to his farm, abandoning power and all control of the government.

demonstrated that he was not a professional soldier, but longed for the peaceful life of a citizen. According to Wecter, “Americans have a special affection for the man of peace—like Sergeant York in the World War—who leaves his trade only long enough to beat the military at their own game.”³² Sergeant York’s humble disposition and Christian beliefs were characteristics which the public endeared themselves to.

3. *American heroes must be perceived as giving unselfish service to the people and the nation.* This is one of Americans’ most unwavering requirements. Normally, democracies do not find their heroes appealing if they seem to endeavor for personal glory, honors, and their own self-interest. Their success needs to appear as if it was for the benefit of the public rather than the individual.³³ York was drafted into the U.S. military and fought not for himself, but for his country and the soldiers in his patrol.

4. *Living American heroes are rarely taken seriously by the people.* Americans tend to be more critical of living people than the dead, and no one is truly declared heroic until future generations decide on the merit of their accomplishments. Also, the more prominent a public figure is, the more public scrutiny they undergo by the press and critics. Also, Americans typically prefer to be informal with their heroes. They give them nicknames. It allows Americans to be on more common terms with their heroes, and it also makes them more relatable.³⁴

³² Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 12.

³³ *Ibid.*, 12-13; Leinwand, *Heroism in America*. 35.

³⁴ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 13; Leinwand, *Heroism in America*. 35-36.

5. *American heroes are, as often as not, as well known for their failures as for their successes.* Citizens of and immigrants to the United States venerate the American dream and the supposed ability and opportunity each person has to successfully attain that dream. Unfortunately, for most people, that dream has been unobtainable. Americans are sympathetic of underdogs and admire lost causes. The underdog ideal began with the Revolutionary War when the American colonies defeated an overwhelming British adversary against all odds. The American infatuation continually persisted in events like the Alamo and the defeat of the Confederacy during the Civil War. According to Wecter, “there is a subconscious wish that the hero should not in every way appear to be strong, resourceful, lucky, and invincible. The crowd is thus able to achieve closer kinship between him and themselves.”³⁵ When Sergeant York fought against overwhelming numbers on October 8th, he was the battle’s underdog and the chances of surviving the ordeal were slim.

6. *American heroes overcome personal handicaps.* In democracies, people who tend to come from wealth, power, or any level of strength are not as revered as those who need to overcome various obstacles to meet success. Americans are sympathetic to those who have overcome failure, struggle, or handicap, which seems to make the heroes’ successes even more powerful, meaningful, and dramatic. Historically, U.S. citizens also have a popular distrust of people of wealth and privilege. They prefer a more self-made hero or underdog.³⁶ Sergeant York fit that mold as a lower-class farmer and a man who was uneducated.

³⁵ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 14; Leinwand, *Heroism in America*. 35.

³⁶ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 15-16; Leinwand, *Heroism in America*. 36.

7. *American heroes symbolize values and attitudes that are distinctively American.* According to Leinwand, “Americans want their heroes to be free of vanity or arrogance. They prefer, but do not insist upon, heroes who are humbler in origin, kind, honest, God-fearing, and preferably church going.”³⁷ In many ways, these values are more characteristic of the rural parts of the nation, hearkening back to simpler times. In this way, this element of American heroes makes them something of a throwback to pre-industrial times. It also harks back to the American Revolution where Americans pride themselves in being “red-blooded” and their status is not derived from nobility. In the case of Sergeant York, his upbringing and values represented all of the characteristics Leinwand feels Americans want in their heroes.

8. *People of good character become American heroes.* Virtuous and modest heroes are preferred by most Americans. But that does not require them to be perfect or saint-like in their behavior.³⁸ Americans put a higher value on a heroes’ character than their intelligence. At a basic level, according to Wecter, heroes “must be self-respecting, decent, honorable, with a sense of fair play.” They also “must be firm and self-confident in leadership . . . hard work, tenacity, enterprise, and firmness in the face of odds are the qualities that Americans most admire.”³⁹ Heroes are looked upon to represent what is right and good about society and tend to be self-reliant. They need to be trusted to take care of those less fortunate and to do what is always right. As a democracy, the survival

³⁷ Leinwand, *Heroism in America*. 39-40.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁹ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 482.

of the nation depends on the good character of its citizens. Sergeant York also reflected the characteristics of descent, honorable, and showed steadfast bravery in the face of great odds.

9. *Americans must see something of themselves in their heroes.* Americans prefer heroes whose lives are somehow like their own. They are more accepting of heroes who play sports or musical instrument or who participate in popular activities like going to the movies or eating at restaurants.⁴⁰ To the American people, Sergeant York represented the stereotypical southerner and the farmer who represented what most Americans thought of themselves and their country. He resembled the ideal of what Americans were and the reality for many in rural America.

10. *Americans want their heroes to do for them what they cannot do for themselves.* Heroes are typically required to help the American people make the change they want to see in society, government, or even the world. They can also perform a lifesaving act or selflessly help those in need. A heroic person needs to change the country for the better.⁴¹ By taking charge of the patrol and saving the lives of the American survivors, Sergeant York met all those criteria as he used his marksmanship skills and experience as a hunter to defeat the German machine guns.

11. *Accidental circumstances help make American heroes.* Typically, heroes are not people who actively look for opportunities to become great. Events, and sometimes even accidents, happen and afford a person an opportunity do something great or demonstrate great courage. Heroes are therefore products of circumstance and rise to

⁴⁰ Leinwand, *Heroism in America*. 40.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 40-42.

meet those challenges, emphasizing their similarity with the everyman.⁴² Sergeant York reluctantly served in the American Expeditionary Forces, after he was drafted. He was not a volunteer. He did not go looking to be a hero and all events leading to that day on October 8th, were brought about by circumstance, York did not want to serve or fight.

These eleven aspects are not all-encompassing elements defining who Americans choose to honor. They fluctuate over time, and there are always exceptions. But the bottom line is heroes are everyday people of goodwill who perform unselfish service for their fellow men.⁴³ Sergeant York personified many of these elements and traits, leaving his Tennessee farm as a conscientious objector and fighting for the United States, not because he wanted to, but because he had to. He then humbly returned home, seeking no glory. Americans rallied and exalted him above all other veterans from the United States because of how he acted and what he represented. Wecter even called York “the greatest individual of the war,” arguing that he was so honored because the U.S. public was eager to glorify an amateur soldier over the professional.⁴⁴ In this way, heroes are barometers of the national “climate of opinion.”⁴⁵ York represented the ideal citizen-soldier who was drafted to promote democracy, fought valiantly, and then returned home -to a simple and humble American life.

Not everyone fully accepts Wecter and Leinwand’s eleven principles. Joe Cummings, an author who specializes in the commemoration of David Crockett, believes that there is a natural progression in how citizens become heroes in the United States. He

⁴² Ibid., 42.

⁴³ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 409.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

writes, “Generally, the talents and abilities of a hero are first recognized on the local level by his neighbors, then by the citizens of his state, and then by the nation at large.”⁴⁶ York defied this paradigm by leaving his community and becoming famous away from his home and state. He returned a different person, representing all that is good about the community he left. This added to his community’s identity. York then better fits Cummings’ model in which the hero is “remembered and honored by their former neighbors who look at their lives as examples of the type of greatness that can spring from within.”⁴⁷ York also follows Joseph Campbell’s monomyth formula of the mythic hero which better ties in with the concepts of Wecker and Leinwand.

Cummings argues that David Crockett is the only true Tennessee hero, and York is specifically a national hero with Tennessee ties, but I disagree. Both are known nationally and celebrated within Tennessee. The main difference between them is Crockett lived in various locations throughout the state, allowing for more local communities to celebrate him as a member, resulting in two state parks and various monuments and museum exhibits. York, on the other hand, represented Tennessee as a war hero, but he lived in Pall Mall his entire life, limiting the ability for communities to directly relate with him. Nonetheless, his life and deeds resonated with many throughout the state, leading to his name being attached to numerous structures across Tennessee.

Some will argue that being a national hero is not always beneficial. Michael Birdwell—historian, professor, and author of *Celluloid Soldier: Warner Bros. Campaign*

⁴⁶ Joe Cummings, “Celebrating Crockett in Tennessee,” in *Crockett and Two Hundred: New Perspectives on the Man and the Myth*, edited by Michael Lofaro and Joe Cummings (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 67.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

against Nazism—argues that York has been a victim of herofication.⁴⁸ James Loewen, a Harvard sociologist, defined herofication as a degenerative process that turns interesting and flawed real people into simple and two-dimensional heroes for public consumption. He wrote, “Through this process, our educational media turn flesh-and-blood individuals into pious, perfect creatures without conflicts, pain, credibility, or human interest.”⁴⁹ Birdwell believes that this happened to York following the release of the film *Sergeant York*, on July 2, 1941. Gary Cooper portrayed York as the title character, and the script sought to shift public opinion toward intervention in World War II. Birdwell argues that through the process of herofication, York was “bled of all that made him human and interesting; he has been ossified, nearly deified, and completely obscured from reality.”⁵⁰ Because of this, Birdwell believes that the public has been robbed of learning about the real man, who was much more interesting than the myth that is propagated by the *Sergeant York* film.

The process of herofication also does more than just mold people into caricatures of their true self or create two-dimensional heroes for the public. It is a part of a national myth-making process that creates people and stories used to inspire a culture. Michael Kammen defines a myth as a story that “is more likely to be fabulous than true, . . . more likely to involve some sort of story, and quite likely to concern deities, demigods, or heroes in order to explain aspects of a societies cosmology or sense of identity.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 3-4.

⁴⁹ James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Text Book Got Wrong* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 11.

⁵⁰ Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 4.

⁵¹ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 25.

According to him, myths in the United States flourish even if there are easily assessable and abundant facts which contradict the stories being publicly told.⁵² Once created, myths can easily grow a mind of their own and be taken as truth. They are often publicly manufactured and created and are key to developing the heroes we honor in the United States.⁵³ Curiously, the American myth-making process is often contradictory to how ancient cultures created them. According to Sydney Fisher,

It is curious that American myth-making is so unlike the ancient myth-making which as time went on made its gods and goddesses more and more human with mortal loves and passions. Our process is just the reverse. Out of a man who actually lived among us and of whose life we have many truthful details we make an impossible abstraction or idealized virtues.⁵⁴

Because the United States is a comparatively young nation compared to others around the globe, popular myths that originate in the U.S. often do revolve around living people that idealize what it means to be an American. They personify our sense of self and character, even if it is idealized and not factual.

Much of the story about Sergeant York and his rise as an American hero, is based in myth and mythmaking. Journalist George Pattullo, artist Joseph Cummings Chase, and others created a story about York that quickly grew York's popularity, endeared him to the American public, and made him one of the most celebrated American soldiers of the Great War. The American myth they created is often devoid of historical fact, even though it is abundant and available, and forwards the herofication process of York. These actors (Pattullo, Chase, etc.), were pivotal in creating the York myth and highlighted

⁵² Ibid., 26.

⁵³ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁴ Sydney George Fisher, *The True Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1898), 6.

many of the eleven heroic aspects which Leinwand and Wecter argued Americans generally used to select their heroes, elevating York to hero status with the American public. Also, when news of York's heroics first became public, he may have been an unwitting participant, but his actions helped craft the myth and how it was used, and he quickly embraced and continued to promote it throughout his life. By analyzing the process of mythmaking and herofication and applying them to the emergence of Alvin York, much can be learned about what is important to American culture, especially during and directly following the Great War. In fact, by examining how York has continued to be honored and remembered, it reveals a complex, multifaceted, and shifting York who has seemingly been endlessly fascinating to people across borders and ages.

CHAPTER 3:

PAINTING A HERO:

JOSEPH CUMMINGS CHASE DISCOVERS AND PAINTS SERGEANT YORK

The art of the hero wasn't about being brave: it was about being so competent that bravery wasn't an issue.

--Christopher McDougall¹

When the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917, Joseph Cummings Chase was living in New York, painting portraits, and illustrating magazine covers. Commissioned by various newspapers and magazines, including the *American Magazine*, *Life*, and *Scientific American*, he was an accomplished 38-year-old artist and considered one of the most talented portrait painters in New York.² The United States' subsequent entry into the Great War altered the direction of his career and sent him on a path leading to the discovery of Sergeant Alvin York. Chase's portrait of York, which was displayed on New York City's 5th Avenue and published in a monthly magazine, gave Americans their first literal glimpse of the war-time hero. Chase, who had painted many generals and officers, gave York's portrait an everyman look that Americans could relate to and embrace. As the nation's citizens subsequently met the man and heard of his wondrous deeds, Chase's portrait was critical to the mythology and hero-making process

¹ Christopher McDougall, *Natural Born Heroes: How a Daring Band of Misfits Mastered the Lost Secrets of Strength and Endurance* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 13.

² Chase, *Face Value*, 52-53.

and was one of the initial catalysts. Without Chase, York may not have been celebrated by the American public as ravenously as he was upon his return to the United States.

The Education of a Portrait Artist

Born in Kents Hill, Maine, in 1878, Chase showed interest in art and music from an early age. He attended school in Buckport, Maine, and often visited town meetings and churches, where he drew pictures of local citizens. After he acquired a hand printing press, he progressed to printing a homemade 24-page quarterly magazine he titled the *Roaring Gimlet*, which mostly consisted of advertisements purchased by local businesses that subsidized the free publication. He also made line-cut drawings of the town's leading citizens for the magazine and delivered it to houses throughout Buckport. His artistic talent became so well known that when Chase was fifteen years old, the *Lewiston Daily Journal* invited him to sketch portraits during the Maine State Fair. He was paid five dollars a day for his efforts. As he aged, he became focused on becoming a professional artist.³

When Chase was nearly twenty years old, he traveled to New York City where he enrolled at the Pratt Institute to study art and began working as a sketch artist for the city's newspapers. A short time after starting art classes, he met a newspaper reporter living in his same boarding house who recommended that Chase make sketches of any important event happening and submit them to the managing editors of various newspapers to see if there was any interest. After publishing his first pencil sketches in

³ Ibid., 19-20.

the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Chase began working steadily as a sketch artist. He covered banquets at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, boxing matches, trials, and celebrated visitors to New York City, such as famed writer Mark Twain. Chase also sketched important political figures at state and national political conventions, including former President Theodore Roosevelt.⁴

Chase continued working as a sketch artist until he turned 25 and decided to further his talents and become a trained portrait painter. In 1903, he set sail for Paris and began studying portrait painting at the Academy Julien in the studio of famous artist Jean Paul Laurens. Sketching for newspapers paid the bills, but he had always wanted to become an accomplished painter and artist. While attending classes, Chase continued sketching and submitted his work to New York-based newspapers to make money. He then began undertaking commissions from French publications and businesses for sketch and artwork. While working and attending art school, Chase was able to sketch King Edward VII of Great Britain and Italy's King Victor Emanuel. Towards the end of his education, Chase submitted two portraits to an international art competition. To his surprise, he won both first and second place and earned enough money to return to New York.⁵

For the next ten years, Chase honed his skills as a portrait and commercial artist, using several different styles and media. He painted illustrations for publications like *American Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, *Life*, and *Scientific American*. He began to

⁴ Ibid., 24-29.

⁵ Ibid., 31-40.

focus on magazine covers and different ways to use color in his paintings and portraits. He also accepted contracts to paint portraits for people and organizations. In 1916, the Niantic Club in Flushing, New York—a social club for the elite members of the community—commissioned him to paint thirty life-sized portraits of the club’s members to hang on the walls of its dining room.⁶

Having largely perfected his skills as an artist, U.S. entry into the Great War in the spring of 1917 brought Chase many commissions and increased professional demands. Many of the publications across the United States focused their reporting on the war effort. Illustrations and portraits were in high demand. Numerous magazines, which Chase often took commissioned work from, asked him to paint portraits of various military and governmental leaders. *Leslie’s Weekly* requested portraits, and the *Literary Digest* commissioned him to paint a portrait series focused on those who were helping to manage the war and its production demands.⁷

Throughout 1917, Chase spent significant time in Washington, D.C., painting portraits of various national and world leaders. He completed portraits of cabinet members, congressional representatives, senators, and various military leaders. Chase also painted many foreign ambassadors, including those from Belgium, Britain, France, and Italy. The monthly magazine, *The World’s Work*, requested Chase to produce six to eight color portraits monthly. One of the first portraits that Chase produced for it was the former American Ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau. The color portrait

⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁷ Ibid., 64.

accompanied Morgenthau's personal account of his experiences in Turkey during the outbreak of the world war in 1914. On a few different occasions, Chase had the opportunity to paint President Woodrow Wilson. He painted Wilson in the White House, and then three separate magazines contracted Chase for additional portraits.⁸

When Chase visited the White House to set up an appointment to repaint the President, he learned from the president's secretary, Joseph Patrick Tumulty, that Wilson was no longer sitting for portraits until after the war was over. Chase was disappointed but asked Tumulty if Wilson was going golfing. If he was, Chase offered to sketch Wilson as he played, thereby meeting the needs of his magazines while also respecting Wilson's decision not to sit for pictures until the end of the war. Lucky for Chase, Rear Admiral Cary Grayson, the President's personal aide and physician whose portrait Chase had painted in the past, arrived and coordinated for Chase to sketch the President as he attended the opening of a local baseball game. Chase was able to make three major sketches in charcoal and several smaller sketches and studies during the sixteen-inning game.⁹

With his country at war, Chase decided to become more active in the war effort. Since he was 38 years old, and beyond draft age, Chase enlisted in a National Guard field artillery unit in New York where he trained during the week. Chase wrote, "I was a

⁸ Ibid., 64-65; Joseph Cummings Chase, "The Diplomatic Representatives of Our Allies," *World's Work* 36, no. 4 (August 1918): 365-68; Henry Morgenthau, "Ambassador Morgenthau's Story," *World's Work* 36, no. 1 (May 1918): 42-73, Chase's portrait appears on p. 43.

⁹ Chase, *Face Value*, 65-66.

corporal and was shouting harsh words at my squad as it learned to wheel, to charge, to practice marksmanship.”¹⁰ This training occurred a few nights a week and did not interfere with his painting. However, in October 1918, he discovered a way to contribute his artistic skills to the war effort. He received a phone call inviting him to apply for a position as a portrait painter with the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). General John J. Pershing, the commander of the AEF currently serving in France, was “asking for a portrait painter to be sent to him to complement the work of author-historians who already were on the job.”¹¹ Pershing recognized the need to better illustrate for the American people the work of their sons and fathers overseas to maintain support for the war, help fund the war through bond sales, and encourage the industrial production needed to support the American and Allied war effort. Pershing also became aware that the current work being done by the official artists with the AEF was unsatisfactory.¹²

The Committee on Public Information (CPI), led by George Creel, was responsible for crafting and illustrating messages throughout the war that would hold the United States together and mobilize Americans to wage the war at home and overseas for the duration of the conflict. To this end, it managed the flow of information from Europe, created propaganda posters for domestic consumption, and crafted news stories and newsreels about the war. Creel’s main purpose, especially with pictorial publicity, was

¹⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹¹ Ibid., 70.

¹² Cablegram from Harris, Acting Adjutant General, to General John Pershing, August 26, 1918, Record Group 120, Correspondence Relating to the Eight Official Artists in the AEF, 1917-1919, box 1, NACP.

“in building morale, arousing the spiritual forces of the nation, and stimulating the will of the people.”¹³ It used the methods then emerging from advertising as well as the new social science of psychology to create its messages—both verbal and visual. Although the CPI’s mission was largely unprecedented in U.S. history (leading to its speedy dismantling after the conflict), it was effective in sustaining the war effort. Chase was about to become part of this information offensive. The Art Committee for the War selected the new AEF portrait painter, and its chair was Charles Dana Gibson, head of the Pictorial Publicity department within the CPI.¹⁴ Chase’s response to being selected to serve as the government’s official AEF portrait painter showed a keen appreciation for his new working environment: “I cannot say I was elated. I realized with a shock that trying to paint portraits of lusty generals with shells falling and cooties crawling would not be in a congenial atmosphere.” He nonetheless accepted the challenge, even though he believed there were other portrait painters better suited for the job.¹⁵

Art and the American Expeditionary Force (AEF)

The U.S. War Department and the AEF recognized that it would need art to illustrate the war effort for a variety of reasons, well before it selected Chase. They knew

¹³ Committee on Public Information, *Complete Report of the Chairman of the Committee on Public Information: 1917; 1918; 1919* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), 40.

¹⁴ James Mock and Cedric Larson, *Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1939), 71-72.

¹⁵ Chase, *Face Value*, 70.

they needed art to illustrate articles about the army that would circulate in the press and periodicals on the home front as well as creating a historical record of the AEF's actions. To these ends, the War Department commissioned eight artists and designated them as official artists in the AEF. Their mission was "to create a pictorial memoir of the war."¹⁶ William James Aylward, Walter Jack Duncan, Harvey Thomas Dunn, George M. Harding, Wallace Morgan, Ernest Clifford Peixotto, J. Andre Smith, and Harry Everett Townsend departed for France in early 1918, tasked with producing art in very austere conditions. Complicating matters was the fact that most of these men had very little military training or experience before heading overseas to paint, draw, and sketch their way from France to Germany. Chase knew five of these illustrators from his earlier work in Washington and with *World's Work*. He considered them "all well chosen for the work" and believed that they had "produced an invaluable collection of pictures. . . . under many difficulties."¹⁷ But not everyone agreed with Chase's opinion of the artists' performance. Various officers working and responsible for these official artists found their productivity and the quality of their projects lacking. On August 28, 1918, the Adjutant General of the AEF sent a telegram complaining about the artists' work to Pershing and the Intelligence Section (since all artists were attached to G-2D, the Press and Censorship Division was in the Intelligence Branch of the General Staff).¹⁸ He wrote,

¹⁶ Alfred Emile Cornebise, *Art from the Trenches: America's Uniformed Artists in World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 10.

¹⁷ Joseph Cummings Chase, *The Romance of an Art Career* (New York: J. H. Sears & Company, 1927), 207.

¹⁸ Cornebise, *Art from the Trenches*, 26.

pictures “received to date have artistic merit in varying degrees but are generally unsatisfactory and unsuitable for publication in the periodical press.”¹⁹ Other officers also echoed his sentiment. Another officer wrote that the pictures “do not serve either a military purpose nor propaganda purposes.”²⁰ In other words, regardless of their artistic merits, the artists were not producing enough work of the type desired by the AEF for home front consumption or to illustrate the historical deeds of the AEF’s officers. As a result, the AEF determined in November they needed a portrait painter to remedy the surplus of illustrators. Of the eight artists in theater, there was “only one . . . who knows anything about portraiture and his specialty is oil rather than pastel work, which the Historical section has decided is the principal need.”²¹ On November 18, Pershing therefore requested for “two artists expert in pastel work be commissioned immediately in Engineer Corps and sent here to make portraits of high command down to divisional commanders and their Chiefs of Staff.”²²

What subsequently allowed Chase to discover York and his story as well as create art that satisfied both the AEF and him was his decision to work as a civilian rather than as a captain, which the previous artists had. When Chase was first considering his new

¹⁹ Cablegram from Harris, Acting Adjutant General, to General John Pershing, August 26, 1918.

²⁰ Letter to Captain Andre Smith from Major N. A. (name unknown), August 13, 1918, RG 120, Correspondence Relating to the Eight Official Artists in the AEF, 1917-1919, box 1, USNA.

²¹ Memorandum from Dennis E. Nolan to Chief of Staff, November 19, 1918, RG 120, Correspondence Relating to the Eight Official Artists in the AEF, 1917-1919, box 1, USNA.

²² Telegram from General John Pershing to the Adjutant General, War Department in Washington, November 19, 1918, RG 120, Correspondence Relating to the Eight Official Artists in the AEF, 1917-1919, box 1, USNA.

position, he received some advice from a friend, George Mellon, who had been corresponding with Martin Egan, a liaison officer on General Pershing's staff. Mellon recommended to Chase not to take the rank of captain, which meant all travel plans had to be approved by higher ranking officers and orders issued. Such "army red tape" had proved a significant impediment to their work. Chase therefore sought to be sent overseas as a noncombatant, similar to other civilians who worked for the government and operated under Pershing's orders. Chase went to Washington D.C. to discuss it with the Army's Personnel Office. The arrangement was that Chase would wear an officer's uniform when in the AEF, but without an officer's insignia (or pay) and with a correspondent's armband (a white band with the letter C emblazoned on it). Although final details still had to be worked out by Pershing when Chase arrived in Chaumont, France, he now held the official title of "Official Portrait Painter with the AEF," under the sponsorship of the War College, War Plans Division.²³

Chase's mission was multifaceted, as multiple federal departments wanted his portraits for their own purposes. As a result, he received additional instructions before embarking for France. While the War College wanted portraits of "the American combat generals and Pershing's staff for the official records of the war," U.S. Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson wanted "four paintings of particularly heroic doughboys to be used as posters in the Fifth Liberty Loan Drive" that would help fund the war. Chase also received requests from the Treasury Department and the Committee on Public

²³ Chase, *Face Value*, 71; "Martin Egan to Be Added to Gen. Pershing's Staff," *Boston Globe*, April 17, 1918, 9; Chase, *Romance of an Art Career*, 207-9.

Information. Additionally, Chase hoped—like he had during art school and while in training in France—to send “back to various magazines which were in a receptive mood many drawings and paintings, on the side, since my mission carried with it no salary.”²⁴

Two weeks after meeting with the Army Personnel Office in Washington D.C., Chase boarded a French ship to cross the Atlantic and start his work with the AEF. He had assembled his new officer’s uniform to replace the enlisted uniform he had from being a National Guard Corporal, and he had also purchased new paints, brushes, and other necessary supplies. While at sea, he busied himself with painting portraits. The ship was soliciting contributions for the French War Officers Fund, so on the second day of the voyage, the ship’s captain asked Chase if he would paint a portrait of the highest bidder as a prize. Chase spent his time on the two-week voyage painting a new portrait each day for the winner, a total of fourteen. He later remarked that the work kept him “tuned up for the almost unbelievable adventure just ahead.”²⁵ In France, he would be similarly challenged to produce high quality work at a blistering pace.

Chase’s first test came shortly after his ship ported in Bordeaux and he reported to Pershing’s headquarters at Chaumont, a former military school. He first met Brigadier General Le Roy Eltinge, Deputy Chief of Staff for the AEF’s General Headquarters, who asked Chase when he wanted to begin. When Chase enthusiastically retorted “Now,” Eltinge had him paint his portrait. Chase recalled, “Then and there I made my first big mistake; I painted that portrait in three hours, in oils, life-size to the waist, with hands.

²⁴ Chase, *Romance of the Art Career*, 210. See also Chase, *Face Value*, 71.

²⁵ Chase, *Face Value*, 71.

All of my portraits were done in oils; any other medium would have been too fragile.” The mistake was that Chase painted the portrait too quickly, and he feared he was now expected to paint every portrait with the same speed and quality. Once the portrait was complete, Eltinge took the painting into General Pershing’s office for inspection. According to Chase, “If it had been intended as a test, evidently I passed.”²⁶

Although Chase had passed the test, his initial mistake did lead to a frantic schedule. Coordinating this work was Brigadier General Dennis Nolan, the Assistant Chief of Staff for the AEF’s Intelligence Section, who was specifically responsible for Chase, his schedule, and issuing the orders he needed to meet everyone he needed to paint. Nolan took Chase “under his wing with complete co-operation and started me on my dizzying round . . . based upon the assumption that I was to paint a portrait every three hours of daylight, and for each day the lay-out looked like a busy barber’s daily record of hair cuts.” Every two weeks Chase received a similar schedule until he had completed portraits of all the necessary officers. During his time in France, Chase’s orders were to paint portraits of Pershing, the generals with Pershing’s staff, the two Army commanders, the seven Corps commanders, and the commanders of the 29 combat divisions. Occasionally, another officer who Nolan and Pershing felt merited a portrait was added to Chase’s list.²⁷

To paint so many officers in the field where they were stationed, Chase and his enlisted driver encountered significant dangers in traversing dangerous, battle-damaged,

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 72. See also *ibid.*, 73; Cornebise, *Art from the Trenches*, 26.

and devastated areas of the French countryside. They averaged fifty miles a day, and during one two-week period, they had five separate accidents. Traveling after dark was most hazardous, as AEF policy banned the use of both lights and horns. Even though Chase was only tasked to paint throughout the daylight hours, this was rarely feasible, as travel time to the location and availability of the soldier varied significantly. Chase recalled, "I carried coach candles to frequently supply the light for many a painting, because of my everlasting endeavor to catch up with my schedule. Half of the portraits were painted at night, in shacks, in tents, in castles – anywhere." The late hours and long days traveling along the front lines, accidents were bound to happen. According to Chase, he was given a car and a military chauffeur and they traveled constantly. During the few months Chase was in France, he had four cars get destroyed while two of his drivers were injured and one was killed. Chase continued his hectic pace after getting his fifth car and new driver, which experienced only minor accidents resulting in flat tires or broken springs.²⁸

Whenever Chase returned to the AEF's headquarters at Chaumont with newly painted portraits, he reported to General Nolan to have them reviewed. Nolan and Pershing then inspected the portraits for quality and to ensure they met the AEF's historical needs. However, Chase recalled that "Never once did either of the Generals criticize or make suggestions; always they seemed surprised and content. It was lucky for me that so recently I had been painting so many portraits in Washington D.C., each

²⁸ Chase, *Face Value*, 73-74.

rapidly.”²⁹ Chase’s quick pace was also fortunate because the artist himself chose to do additional work.

Chase Paints a Hero

Chase was enthralled by the regular soldiers he encountered. While the Treasury Department had requested “‘over there’ portraits of four boys who had done deeds of extraordinary heroism” to inspire Americans to contribute to the Fifth Liberty Loan, Chase “found the task so absorbing that I could not stop with that small number, but painted fifty.”³⁰ Each of the enlisted soldiers were recipients of either the Distinguished Service Cross (the second highest military decoration for heroism), the Distinguished Service Medal (presented to soldiers who have distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious service), or the Medal of Honor (the highest award a service-member can receive for honor), and this was how Chase first encountered York and the story of his remarkable achievement.

On January 17, 1919, Chase heard York’s story toward the end of another long day of painting portraits. He had been focusing on units assigned to the AEF’s 5th Corps, starting with Major General Charles Summerall, commanding the 5th Corps in the town of Nogent-en-Bassigny. Chase continued throughout the day painting Major General Harry Hale, commander of the 26th Division at Montigny le Roi; Major General Charles Morton, commander of the 29th Division at Bourbonne-les-Bains; and lastly, he visited

²⁹ Ibid., 73.

³⁰ Joseph Cummings Chase, *Soldiers All: Portraits and Sketches of the Men of the A.E.F.* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1920), 16-17.

Major General George Duncan, the commander of the 82nd Division. By the time Chase arrived in Prauthoy to paint Duncan, it was late into the night, cold, and he was already tired from painting three other officers. While Duncan was sitting for his portrait, he asked Chase if he was “painting any of the boys?” After Chase had explained his Treasury Department order for four portraits of soldiers who had exhibited valor, Duncan recommended that a painting of Alvin York, one of the soldiers in his division who, by this time, had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for actions in the Argonne on October 8th. Despite the cold and the late hour, Chase asked if York was available to sit for a portrait that night. Although York was some twenty miles away, Duncan dispatched his aide to bring York to Prauthoy. Duncan replied, “I’ll have him brought in as soon as you have finished with me.” Duncan described York’s exploits as “the most remarkable I have heard of in the whole war. Pretty good too, for a ‘conscientious objector.’”³¹

Duncan’s telling of York’s exploits intrigued Chase, who later retold the story in great detail:

His full name is Alvin C. York. ... He is a tall, raw-boned mountaineer, with a red face and red hair, and he is probably about twenty-eight years of age. He is a drafted man, and belongs to the 328th Infantry. He “got religion” previous to the war, and although he had “toted” a gun ever since he could carry one, and was an expert squirrel shot, he now had a fixed conviction that it was wrong to kill. However, he did not resist the draft, and in fact, he became a very excellent corporal. His captain took an interest in the boy, and spent the major part of one night arguing with his conscientious objector, using scriptural quotations as the main part of his arguments. The result was that York was converted to the war,

³¹ Joseph Cummings Chase, “Corporal York, General Pershing, and Others,” *World’s Work* 37, no. 6 (April 1919): 648. See also Chase, *Face Value*, 72; Joseph Cummings Chase, *Speaking of Heroes: Portraits of the Men of the A.E.F. from Generals to Privates in Both World Wars and Korea* (Milwaukee, WI: privately printed, 1972), 76.

and decided to fight. Soon after, he was sent out with a combat group in charge of the sergeant. They came under fire of a Hun [German] machine gun nest, and the sergeant in command and all the members of the party were killed outright, except Corporal York and five men. Corporal York assumed command, charged the machine gun nest, and captured in and took several prisoners. The party then proceeded, and again came under machine gun fire. The corporal, men, and prisoners flattened themselves out on the ground, the corporal yelling to his five men to cover the prisoners. York unlimbered his weapon, and, in his old-time manner as a squirrel hunter, aimed his rifle fire at the enemy machine gunners.

I asked him afterward how many shots he had fired, and he said “about twenty-four times.” This was an interesting statement, for after the encounter we found that twenty-four dead Boche were his bag.³² In fact, the fight only ended when the officer in charge of the German machine guns offered to stop the machine gun fire if York would stop his rifle fire. The enemy surrendered, Corporal York and his men marched to battalion headquarters 132 prisoners, including four officers. Another remarkable fact is that Corporal York delivered his prisoners to the nearest battalion headquarters, which was not his own, and that at his own headquarters he made no mention of the affair. It was only by accident that the story came to his own commander, from the adjacent battalion some time later. The facts were then verified, and for this action, York received the Distinguished Service Cross, and has been recommended for the Medal of Honor.³³

Duncan also told Chase that York was shy about what he had done and that it was difficult to get him to tell the story of what happened. For Chase, this was the hero above all the worthy heroes that he had painted for the bond drive. Though he did not enunciate this, we can see it in his narrative; not only had he achieved a remarkable feat of military arms, but here was the rural, religious, self-effacing, everyman (not an officer), expert marksman in the lineage of Daniel Boone that Chase knew—from his many years of sketching and painting for periodicals that eagerly sought their audience—would become

³² “Boche” was a slang term used for German soldiers by the Allied forces. It is believed to be a French word deriving from the French slang, *caboché*, meaning “rascal” or “German.”

³³ Chase, “Corporal York, General Pershing, and Others,” 648.

beloved by the people of America. So, Chase absolutely had to hear from York himself and paint this hero, regardless of the hour or the temperature.

Chase, having finished General Duncan's portrait (who then moved to a couch and fell asleep), was eager for York's arrival despite being exhausted from three nights of painting. When York arrived, Chase sought to make the sergeant feel at home and tell his story, advising York to keep on his overcoat during the sitting, due to the cold in the room. As the portrait-painter set to work, he asked York questions. The sergeant, believing that he was under orders to comply, told a version of his exploits to Chase, who wrote it down on the back of his portrait after he had finished painting.³⁴ He wanted to be sure that he did not forget the details of York's heroic exploits, knowing a great story when he heard it.

The portrait Chase painted of York differed from many of the officers' portraits and other honored enlisted men. York, bundled up in his overcoat, buttoned completely with collar flipped up, was virtually indistinguishable from most any man bundled up on a cold day, coming home tired from the day's work. The coat had no indication of rank and the only way to identify York as a soldier was the small ribbon attached to his coat, the Distinguished Service Cross he had been awarded for his actions on October 8th. York's body posture and facial expression is blank as he stares uncomfortably off the page, looking like a man who has never posed for a painting before and whose humility made the process painful. Chase's unique portrayal of York and how he was depicted

³⁴ Chase, *Face Value*, 77-79.

helped Americans connect to York, while at the same time, his heroism and remarkable military achievement set him apart, making him hero material.

As Chase finished up his work of painting the staff generals, he knew that York's story and portrait were what would speak to the American people, and he became eager to share that story and image. Before his work was finished, according to some biographers, Chase was traveling along the front after painting York, and "ran into" George Pattullo with the *Saturday Evening Post*.³⁵ Chase told him about meeting and painting York as well as his amazing heroic tale which sparked Pattullo's interest to investigate the subject resulting in his subsequent interview and article.³⁶ Pattullo wrote that he learned about York from a fellow traveler along the front, "That I hit on the story was an accident. Got a tip from a traveling companion on a ride to the Argonne after the Armistice."³⁷ As Chase's contracted work was winding down and having survived the war-time conditions and completed 142 portraits (plus additional ones for friends and as

³⁵ "Mr. Chase and the Sergeant," *New Yorker* 17 (July 12, 1941): 10-11.

³⁶ Mastriano, *Alvin York*, 136; Perry, *Sergeant York*, 101; Turner, *Sergeant Alvin C. York*, 24; Lengel, *Never in Finer Company*, 287.

³⁷ Letter from George Pattullo to Westbrook Pegler, January 17, 1968, James Westbrook Pegler Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa [hereafter HHPL]. Not all biographers agree with Chase being the person who told Pattullo about York. Nelson argues that the person is unknown based on Pattullo's letter. Gregory gives credit to Major General George Duncan, the commander of the 82nd Division, and Lee says Pattullo received a tip from an anonymous traveling companion. (See Nelson, *The York Patrol*, 156; Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 14-15, 27; Lee, *Sergeant York*, 53-54.)



Figure 2. Portrait of Alvin C. York by Joseph Cummings Chase, 1919. Courtesy of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Behring Center. The image is of the original portrait Chase painted. The images seen in Chase's *World's Work* article and his book, *Soldiers All: Portraits and Sketches of the Men of the A.E.F.*, were both printed in black and white, which was how a great number of Americans first saw York.

favors), Chase was more than ready to embark for home on January 30th.³⁸ He would arrive in New York aboard the French steamship, the *Espagne*, on February 7th.³⁹

Chase's portraits of the heroes of the war—the everyday doughboys who had performed heroic feats—that he had painted for the Treasury Department, quickly became a national sensation. When he returned to the United States, he immediately telephoned the department to inform them that the four portraits they had requested were complete and in New York. The department personnel quickly came to pick up the paintings, but instead of selecting the four portraits they initially requested, they took all 142 paintings.⁴⁰ The Liberty Loan personnel—like Chase—knew that Americans would connect with these men much more readily than the officers of the AEF. We can imagine the men browsing through the portraits, charmed and awed by each of them and thankful they had selected Chase, who had so exceeded his contractual obligations and created a veritable gallery of heroes. These were the common heroes of uncommon deeds who could speak to everyday Americans, convincing them to sacrifice, save, and purchase additional war bonds. The Treasury Department framed and displayed the portraits in windows along 5th Avenue in New York City between 23rd and 59th streets during the

³⁸ Chase, *The Romance of an Art Career*, 236; “Schedule of Home-Coming,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, January 31, 1919, 2.

³⁹ “2000 More U.S. War Heroes Arrive from Overseas Battlefields,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 8, 1919, 1. Chase returned the United States in February after sailing on the steamship *Espagne* with more than 400 other soldiers returning to New York. (See “Three Ships Bring 1,975 Troops Back,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1919, 8.)

⁴⁰ Chase, *Face Value*, 97. Chase painted a total of 142 portraits, which primarily included 72 portraits of generals, 50 decorated doughboys, and the last 20 being officers of varying ranks. General John Pershing had two portraits painted of himself.

Victory Loan campaign. Approximately 300 works of art were on display, with Chase providing the bulk during the campaign that ran from April 21st to May 10th.⁴¹

But before all the paintings were displayed along 5th Avenue, a select few were published in a magazine article Chase authored. He selected his favorites from his collection of worth heroes to be published in his April 1919 issue of *The World's Work* magazine: "Corporal York, General Pershing, and Others." The choices made and the way he wrote the title—having York ahead of Pershing—was not accidental. Chase and the magazine editors knew that it was York that the American people would love; it was York who was the type of hero that citizens of the United States would embrace and hold up as all that was good and right in their country. While there had been an official press release about York and his heroics as part of the announcement that he had won the Medal of Honor,⁴² Chase's article gave Americans a face and a story (not just a history of military feats) that it could embrace.⁴³

With the Victory Loan campaign underway and the *World's Work* article published, newspapers began to run reproductions of the paintings with narratives of their heroics.⁴⁴ Americans throughout the country were able to see Chase's work, not just

⁴¹ "Paintings to Present History of the War," [Louisville, KY] *Courier Journal*, April 19, 1919, 9; "Spectacular Campaign for the Victory Loan," *New York Times*, April 20, 1919, 3.

⁴² "Tennessee Boy Awarded Medal," [Clarksville, TN] *Leaf-Chronicle*, March 21, 1919, 1.

⁴³ Chase, "Corporal York, General Pershing, and Others," 648.

⁴⁴ Chase, *Face Value*, 97; "Brave Americans," *Fort Worth Record*, May 3, 1919; "How our Heroes Look," *Ellis County [OK] Capital*, August 1, 1919, 3; "Gallant Americans," *Elmira [NY] Star Gazette*, May 26, 1919, 14.

those in New York. Once the Victory Loan showing was complete along 5th Avenue, the portraits were in great demand. Chase had all of them copied and later printed in a book titled *Soldiers All: Portraits and Sketches of the Men of the A.E.F.* which he published in the spring of 1920.⁴⁵ Then the original paintings were showcased at the Touchstone Gallery in New York beginning in December 1919.⁴⁶ Peyton Boswell, the New York Tribune's art director, wrote that each painting "presents merely the portrait of a rugged, keen, resourceful and daring American soldier ... One whole room is lined from floor to ceiling with these portraits. They are spontaneous and present the men just as they came out of the firing line, with the glint of battle and the spirit of dare-deviltry in their eyes."⁴⁷ Once they were finished being on display in New York, they were taken to their permanent home in the U.S. National Museum of the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., where they were enshrined as a key part of the country's history, a history of everyday citizen-soldiers who had heroically answered the call when their nation had needed them.⁴⁸

When Joseph Cummings Chase initially joined the AEF as a portrait painter, he did not know what the war would hold in store for him. He knew his gift was portraiture and he use it the best way he knew to serve his nation at war. The war altered the direction of his career and sent him on a path leading to the discovery of Sergeant Alvin

⁴⁵ Chase, *Soldiers All*; Doran Books advertisement, *New York Times Review of Books*, March 28, 1920, 2.

⁴⁶ "Exhibition of War Portraits to be Opened by Cummings at Touchstone Gallery," *New York Tribune*, December 28, 1919, 10.

⁴⁷ Chase, *Face Value*, 98.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

York. Chase's portrait gave Americans their first literal glimpse of the war-time hero. As the nation's citizens subsequently met the man and heard of his wondrous deeds through George Pattullo's article in the *Saturday Evening Post* and the numerous follow-on newspaper and magazine stories that would surpass York's lifetime, Chases' portrait was critical to the hero making process and was one of the initial catalysts. Without Chase, York may not have been celebrated by the American public as ravenously as he was upon his return to the United States.

CHAPTER 4:

FINDING AND CREATING A HERO:

GEORGE PATTULLO AND “THE SECOND ELDER GIVES BATTLE”

If any have forgotten Abraham Lincoln’s origin, the exploits of Sergeant York will do as a reminder that our “mountain whites” are of unexcelled American stock.

--Springfield Republicans¹

As World War I came to an end on November 11, 1918, the United States had to come to terms with what the war had cost and what it had meant. Thousands of Americans had been killed on foreign battlefields, and many of them never returned home.² Unfortunately, detailed stories about the battles fought and the heroism these Americans demonstrated were difficult for reporters and accredited correspondents to get to the U.S. public. Strict censorship rules put into place by the Committee on Public Information, the American Expeditionary Forces Intelligence Section, and the agreement correspondents signed when arriving in France, made it difficult for reporters to tell complete and detailed stories honoring soldiers who lost their lives or performed great feats of bravery.³ All accredited correspondents had to sign an agreement with the AEF

¹ “Topics in Brief,” *Literary Digest* 61, no. 10 (June 7, 1919): 23.

² According to Lisa Budreau, in 1919, the American Graves Registration Service was reporting that 34,063 American soldiers were killed in action, 14,215 died of their wounds, 23,210 of disease, 4,588 died of other causes, and 4,012 were missing in action. That came to a total of 80,178 combat deaths in the American Expeditionary Forces. (See Budreau, *Bodies of War*, 19.)

³ Eberhard Demm, *Censorship and Propaganda in World War I: A Comprehensive History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 8-9.

which gave strict rules as to their conduct. Should they breach the agreement, the AEF could suspend their privileges, dismiss them from the combat area with a public reprimand, or detain them.⁴ With strict censorship rules and punishments in place, the battles taking place overseas, and the nature of modern warfare limiting the chances for individual glory, honoring individuals and celebrating a possible military hero became even more difficult.⁵ By the end of the war and into early 1919, the American public was “desperately in need of a hero.”⁶ Although combat stories and narratives honoring many of the Medal of Honor recipients had been published, there had yet to be one good story that all Americans could rally behind that represented the nation and what it stood for. Reporters looked for those soldiers to honor and wrote about them, but it was George Pattullo who was the right reporter at the right time who narrated the actions of Sergeant Alvin York and made him a national hero.

⁴ Correspondents’ Agreement from Headquarters, American Expeditionary Forces, Office of the Chief of Staff Intelligence Section, folder 1, box 1, RG 120, NACP.

⁵ Censorship rules for correspondents changed as the war transpired, but when he began, it was very clear cut. First, all correspondence had to be sent to and cleared by the press officer. Second, correspondents were not allowed to repeat information received at the front unless cleared by the censor. Third, and one of the most restraining when writing about American soldiers, was that they were not allowed to give the name or location of any army or army unit or any reference to the possible location of their staff headquarters. They were also not allowed to mention names of officers except division commanders or higher. Fourth, they could not reveal any future plans (known or fictitious); describe defense systems, tactical plans, details of batteries, observation posts, the building of railroad bridges and implanting mines; or any information the Intelligence Section felt might be of value to the enemy or harm the allied armies. Fifth, they could not conduct themselves in a manner that might injure the morale of soldiers. Sixth, correspondents’ movements were governed by a press officer. Lastly, all correspondents had to accept instructions and changes to the censorship rules at any time. These rules can be found in the Correspondents’ Agreement cited above.

⁶ Lee, *Sergeant York*, 49.

Armistice Day: November 11, 1918

As the Great War came to an end, Sergeant Alvin York was at the lakeside town of Aix-les-Bains in southeastern France close to the Swiss Alps. Halfway through a ten-day leave along with the other soldiers from his company, York and his comrades were spending their time motorboating, visiting historical places like Roman baths, and touring parts of nearby Italy. According to York, they had “been in the Argonne for several weeks without any relief and were tired and worn out and went down there to rest.”⁷ But when the soldiers learned of the Armistice, everyone began celebrating the conflict’s end. York wrote, “It was awful noisy, all the French were drunk, whooping and hollering. The Americans were drinking with them, all of them. I never done anything much. Jes went to church and wrote home and read a little. I did not go out that night.”⁸ Even with the war over and far from the battlefield, York stood out from among his peers.

While York celebrated the Armistice by attending church and reading, Joseph Cummings Chase, who York had not yet met, was painting portraits of senior officers and selected soldiers throughout the American Expeditionary Force. In about two months they would meet, and Chase would paint York’s portrait. But as York rested and Chase painted, one of the most important people in the subsequent discovery and promotion of the York story—George Robson Pattullo—was in Hoboken, New Jersey, preparing to board the *S.S. Northern Pacific* enroute to France.⁹

⁷ Tom Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary* (New York: Racehorse Publishing, 2018), 283.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁹ Nelson, *The York Patrol*, 153.

A renowned correspondent with the *Saturday Evening Post*, Pattullo was key to making York a national hero. His article, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” was the catalyst that made the Tennessee sergeant a household name. Without Pattullo, and the article he crafted, York could have easily faded into history like many other Medal of Honor recipients from the Great War. But it was not simply good timing or pure happenstance that led Pattullo to tell this story or write it in a way that fully engaged the American people. It was a skill he had learned from years as a journalist, magazine writer, and most importantly, a writer of western fiction. George Pattullo had the requisite skills and experience in crafting narratives that connected with Americans from various parts of the nation and united them through his use of symbolism and mythology.

George Pattullo: Reporter and Western Writer

Perhaps because Pattullo was born north of the U.S. border, he had a clearer eye to see what was often invisible to Americans—the ideas, symbols, and mythology that united this nation made up primarily of immigrants. He was born in 1879 in Woodstock, a town in southwestern Ontario, a little more than 150 miles northeast of Detroit, directly above Lake Erie. He attended the Woodstock Collegiate Institute and afterward began a career as a reporter writing for newspapers in Montreal and London, Ontario.¹⁰ In his late twenties, Pattullo moved to the United States, and by 1908 he was a reporter for the *Boston Herald* newspaper. Often working seven days a week and in a high-stress

¹⁰ Robin Fisher, “Duff and George Go West: A Tale of Two Frontiers,” *Canadian Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (December 1987): 501.

profession, the reporter's life began to take a toll on Pattullo. He wrote, "The long hours and anxieties had affected my health; one eyelid had begun to flutter, a finger would frequently twitch out of control—and I was only in my mid-twenties."¹¹ He frequently struggled with the lifestyle, often working thirteen hours a day, but he wanted to continue being a professional writer. One evening, after Pattullo had been at the *Herald* for about a year, he attended the theater and saw the play, *Mademoiselle Modiste*. He later recalled that one of the actors spoke a line that changed his life: "If you feel you have it in you, go to it."¹² So immediately after the play, Pattullo went back to the office and resigned so that he could "get back my health and become a magazine writer."¹³ He also hoped to explore more of the United States, away from its cities and closer to the areas that, it seemed to him, had helped to forge America's identity.

Pattullo was ready to head to the western United States, especially since he had already met and befriended Erwin Evans "Tex" Smith, a 22-year-old photographer from Bonham, Texas, who was studying at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The young Canadian had been assigned to write an article about Smith's photographic exhibit there of cowboy life. Though the young Texan would later establish his artistic reputation as the "cowboy sculptor," Pattullo was drawn to both the man and the images of America's frontier. As Smith and Pattullo became friends, Pattullo became fascinated with idea of living in the West. The journalist's laments about his job and his poor health prompted

¹¹ George Pattullo, *Era of Infamy* (San Antonio, TX: Naylor Company, 1952), 178-79.

¹² As quoted in *ibid.*, 178.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 178-79.

Smith to suggest that his friend join him in Texas and write some stories about this new locale, which Smith could then illustrate with his photographs.¹⁴ So when Pattullo resigned from his position at the newspaper, he had a destination in mind. He and Smith traveled to the Lone Star State, where Pattullo took a job as a ranch hand at the J. A. Ranch near Clarendon, Texas, just east of Amarillo.¹⁵

For the next few years, Pattullo worked at various ranches throughout the southwest, attracted to the rugged lifestyle and self-reliance required of those who settled along the frontier. While his newspaper experience had given him an eye for the telling detail and the authentic quotation that would enliven a story, Pattullo found himself drawn into longer-form writing to fully describe and bring his reader into this life that Pattullo was experiencing first-hand. He learned to be a cowboy and lived this rugged lifestyle, interviewing ranch owners and writing western stories based on his own experiences and observations, which made them more authentic than many such frontier stories. Soon Pattullo was not just writing newspaper-style articles but also experimenting with both fictional and non-fiction articles with a story-telling focus. He began publishing some of these early articles, which Pattullo said were “written with pencil while sitting on a lard bucket in roundup camps.”¹⁶ While living and learning about the west, Pattullo

¹⁴ H. P. English, “George Pattullo, Author: George Pattullo, Novelist, Seeks Health in Texas and Soon Climbs Ladder of Fame,” *Bonham [TX] Daily Favorite*, January 15, 1924, 4; Eldon S. Branda, “Portrait of a Cowboy as a Young Artist,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (July 1967): 73.

¹⁵ English, “George Pattullo,” 4; Branda, “Portrait of a Cowboy,” 74.

¹⁶ Pattullo, *Era of Infamy*, 179; Fisher, “Duff and George Go West,” 508.

became acutely aware that this era of the cowboy and frontier was quickly disappearing, so he set out to record it.¹⁷

The former Boston newspaper reporter's first stories about the West vicariously expressed some of his own feelings of having discovered new depths and resiliency in himself away from the city and on the frontier, which required one to be resourceful and self-reliant in exchange for its freedom. One of his first western articles to be published was "Blackie: A Texas Night Horse," which was about the early life of a colt who survived being attacked by wild animals and is eventually tamed by cowboys.¹⁸ Told loosely from the perspective of the horse, it is reminiscent of Jack London's canine-centric *Call of the Wild*, which ran as a serial in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1903.¹⁹ Pattullo sold "Blackie"—accompanied by Smith's photographs—to the *Saturday Evening Post* for 150 dollars.²⁰ This was the first time that the former newspaper reporter met George Horace Lorimer, the editor for the *Saturday Evening Post*, who Pattullo called "the ablest and most forceful man I have ever met."²¹ Encouraged by the publication of the story, Pattullo continued writing cowboy tales and selling them primarily to the *Post* but also *Collier's*, *Sunset Magazine*, and *McClure's*.²² But while Pattullo was selling his

¹⁷ Fisher, "Duff and George Go West," 508.

¹⁸ George Pattullo, "Blackie: A Texas Night Horse," *Saturday Evening Post*, July 4, 1908, 16-17, 22.

¹⁹ "The Call of the Wild" by Jack London was first published in *The Saturday Evening Post* as a serial. It ran in five consecutive issues from June 20, 1903, to July 18, 1903. Pattullo wrote other animal-centric works as well over his career; one example was "Shiela," for *McClure's Magazine* (August 1910), a fictional account of a wolfhound and the ranchers who owned her.

²⁰ English, "George Pattullo," 4.

²¹ Fisher, "Duff and George Go West," 508.

²² *Ibid.*; English, "George Pattullo," 4.

articles to magazines headquartered in the Northeast, he quickly discovered that that region was no longer his home.

At the end of Pattullo's first season working as a ranch hand, he and Smith returned to Boston for the winter. Pattullo had planned to write more stories there, based on the copious notes and numerous interviews had had recorded. Smith had returned north with him, continuing their partnership of writing and illustrating. However, they found the urban situation too distracting and alienating and moved back to Bonham, Texas, in the spring of 1909.²³ Pattullo then wrote his first novel, *Natalie Graves*, which the author himself admitted was "rotten." However, he was still able to sell and publish it, though at a low price.²⁴ The novel was not successful, but it taught Pattullo about what the public was interested in reading and would sell. Pattullo continued honing his craft and traveling throughout the Southwest as a western writer, eventually settling down in Dallas.

Over the next couple of years, Pattullo continued to write about people (much like himself) and Blackie, who had been "tamed" but continued to yearn for the wild, despite all its dangers. The authentic ring of his Western stories led to a string of additional stories being published in national magazines as well as growing his popularity as one of the best western writers of his day. By 1911, he had enough stories to publish his first

²³ English, "George Pattullo," 4; Fisher, "Duff and George Go West," 508; Branda, "Portrait of a Cowboy," 74.

²⁴ English, "George Pattullo," 4. The novel, *Natalie Graves*, was also published in the magazine *Women's Stories* as a five-part serial from March 15, 1914, to May 15, 1914.

collection of writings, titled *The Untamed*.²⁵ Pattullo then wrote and published his second novel, *The Sheriff of Badger*, printed in 1912.²⁶ The story was a fictional account made up of a collection of more than forty stories about Lafe Johnson, an ordinary rancher elected as sheriff who takes on the challenge of restoring law and order to the unruly town. His main claim to becoming a Sheriff was defeating the region's bullying gunfighter using a little ingenuity and humor. Johnson is "fearless without bravado, and responsibly develops reliability and an honest sense of duty."²⁷ He succeeds by being a good man who puts duty above all else.²⁸ These characteristics echo the virtues Pattullo celebrates when he meets York. The novel was well received, and by the next year, Pattullo married and bought a house in Dallas, making Texas his permanent home.²⁹ As he continued to write and publish, he was soon considered a "foremost writer of western fiction in this country."³⁰ By 1915, Pattullo was becoming famous and well known, especially in the southwest. His fame even resulted in him being impersonated. In February of that year, a man arrived in Waco, Texas, pretending to be Pattullo. He was so convincing that the Mayor of Waco put him up in the best room of the Riggins Hotel, where guests and newspapermen visited, paying for his drinks and meals. After five days, people began to question the imposter and felt something was amiss, so he skipped town.

²⁵ George Pattullo, *The Untamed: Range Life in the Southwest* (New York: Desmond FitzGerald, Inc., 1911).

²⁶ George Pattullo, *The Sheriff of Badger: A Tale of the Southwest Borderland* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912).

²⁷ "Sheriff of Badger Review," *Hartford [CT] Daily Courant*, September 23, 1912, 17.

²⁸ Pattullo, *Sheriff of Badger*.

²⁹ English, "George Pattullo," 4.

³⁰ Fisher, "Duff and George Go West," 508.

He was eventually caught and forced to pay his bills.³¹ By this time, Pattullo was at the top of his craft and recognized by the public as a great journalist and writer.

One of the reasons Pattullo was so successful was that he was one of the first generation of western writers who helped define many of the traditional characteristics of the western genre. According to Robin Fisher, “Pattullo had a reporter’s eye for detail and ... he placed great emphasis on accuracy and portraying range life as it was actually lived.”³² His training as a reporter and the magazines he worked for gave him his own style of writing that resonated with readers. It was clear and efficient, as he made his characters feel larger than life while also being realistic. He wrote about what he saw from the perspective of a detached observer who had become enamored with the cowboy lifestyle and the southwest. According to Fisher,

Pattullo’s stories reflect many of the standard verities about the cowboy character. He tended to sympathize with the underdog and, in the battle between good and evil, believed that individuals succeed on their own merits rather than on the basis of where they came from. Individual initiative, persistence, and hard work were qualities that Pattullo’s heroes exemplified.³³

Historian William H. Hutchison agrees, writing, “Pattullo saw with a reporter’s eye, and he wrote of what he saw with a deep awareness of the foibles of mankind, the idiosyncrasies of livestock, and vagaries of chance.”³⁴ The values Pattullo embraced in his writing were also what interested George Lorimer, who believed strongly in

³¹ “Fake Magazine Writer Victimized Waco People,” *Fort Worth [TX] Star-Telegram*, February 17, 1915, 16.

³² Fisher, “Duff and George Go West,” 510.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ W. H. Hutchinson, “The Cowboy in Short Fiction,” in *A Literary History of the American West*, edited by J. Golden Taylor and Thomas J. Lyon (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1987), 517.

individualism and self-help, so he welcomed cowboy and ranch stories to be published in the *Saturday Evening Post*.³⁵ But, throughout Pattullo's articles, short stories, and fiction, he was not necessarily writing history, but developing a style and theme that established a mythological element to his topics. He promoted the idea of rugged individualism and heroism with ranchers and cowboys while celebrating what remained of the former American frontier.³⁶ Pattullo's unique, outsider perspective on his adopted home in the West provided him with fame and important connections at the *Post*, but it also primed him for his first wartime experience – one that shared many parallels to his Western experience.

George Pattullo: War Correspondent

When the Great War erupted in Europe in 1914, Pattullo found himself both pushed and pulled into a new genre, writing about military affairs. The beginning of the war greatly reduced the fiction market, leaving the western writer awake at night, wondering how he would make his house payments and support his new wife.³⁷ He struggled financially for a while, but then an opportunity arose; Pancho Villa and a group of Mexican raiders attacked the U.S. Army garrison in Columbus, New Mexico, on March 9, 1916. Pattullo quickly went to the nearby border to cover the attack and the American response, which initially mobilized National Guardsmen to defend the border

³⁵ Lewis Atherton, *The Cattle Kings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), 106.

³⁶ Fisher, "Duff and George Go West," 512; Atherton, *Cattle Kings*, 102-10.

³⁷ English, "George Pattullo," 4.

and then dispatched the “Punitive Expedition” under U.S. Army Major General John J. Pershing. Pattullo sold his first articles to *Collier’s* and then the *Post*. He continued to rise in popularity as his work found new audiences interested in well-written coverage of the current situation on the border. Pattullo’s previous fame also ensured him a warm welcome in these southwestern towns where he traveled to report.³⁸

Pattullo’s articles went beyond a simple recounting of the events, giving more depth to the events and delving into the human aspects of the situation. His first article was an account of Mexican women accompanying their husbands who were fighting in the Mexican Army. Next, he focused on American soldiers, telling earthy stories about them and their experiences. Pershing even invited Pattullo to be his guest at the Leon Springs training camp near Fort Sam Houston. From there, Pattullo got a front row seat to witness what was happening on the U.S.-Mexico border and to interact with the American troops. He also earned the respect and trust of Pershing and the other senior officers on his staff. During this time, Pattullo was earning valuable experience as a war correspondent that would be needed and greatly helpful when the United States declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917.³⁹

When the United States entered World War I, the *Saturday Evening Post* offered Pattullo a position as a war correspondent for the magazine based on his work at the border and his growing appeal to a broad, national readership. He continued writing on

³⁸ Ibid.; “George Pattullo, Famous Writer of Western Fiction, Here to ‘Cover’ Mexico,” *El Paso [TX] Morning Times*, March 20, 1916, 5.

³⁹ Nelson, *York Patrol*, 151; “Pattullo of ‘Henri’ and Mexican Fiction Fame, Quits the Lobby,” *El Paso [TX] Morning Times*, April 14, 1917, 3.

Mexico until July, when the new war correspondent left for France following some training with the U.S. Army.⁴⁰ By August, Pattullo had sailed for Europe and started writing stories for the *Saturday Evening Post* that began being published in September. Pattullo had two brothers already serving in France, so his initial articles focused on the Canadian troops; as he waited for American soldiers to arrive in Europe, begin their training, and start fighting. One of his first stories was “Fightin’ Sons-of-Guns,” which celebrated the martial and fighting spirit of the Canadian soldier, who had been engaged in the Great War since 1914.⁴¹ Pattullo wrote a letter to his father saying, “It was rather a hard job covering the subject of the Canadians in one article—but that was all the space they could allow in these wondrous times.” Pattullo also added that he had “been working hard—four articles and a short story already accepted since I came over and another one about done. Lorimer cabled, ‘Fine work,’ so I feel encouraged.”⁴² Writing about the Canadian soldiers primed him to write about the U.S. soldiers but also likely reminded Pattullo of the differences between his home country—where Canadians immediately joined the Great War as loyal members of the greater British Empire—and his adopted country, which had only joined the conflict after years of developing its ideas that it should fight so the world could “be made safe for democracy.”⁴³

⁴⁰ “George R. Pattullo Going to the Front,” *Victoria [Canada] Daily Times*, July 6, 1917, 11.

⁴¹ George Pattullo, “Fightin’ Sons-of-Guns,” *Saturday Evening Post* 190, no. 19 (November 10, 1917): 3-4, 90-98.

⁴² Letter from George Pattullo to George Pattullo Sr., September 18, 1917, box 1, file 4, Pattullo Family Correspondence and Other Papers, sub series MS-1188.B, Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria, British Columbia [hereafter RBCM].

⁴³ A. Scott Berg, *Wilson* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2013), 437.

Throughout the winter and spring, Pattullo traversed the front and wrote stories about the American doughboys in action. However, wartime censorship restrictions banned him from mentioning the names of individual soldiers.⁴⁴ In October he was injured while jumping into a trench.⁴⁵ Particularly noteworthy was his article, “The First Raid,” which chronicled the story of Americans troops coming under fire and being raided by the Germans while manning a trench as part of their final training with the French. During the article, Pattullo wrote about Private Charles Orr who risked his life to save his friend who was injured and was buried in his trench from a German artillery attack. Pattullo called Orr one of the first American heroes and Pattullo saw that there was interest in stories about doughboys performing heroics.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, by February of 1918, Pattullo was bedridden at the Thirteenth Field Hospital in Paris with the mumps. While in the hospital, he endured an air raid where a German plane approached the hospital and dropped eight bombs landing near the hospital and firing machine guns. The concussion blew out the hospital windows. He was not injured, but experiencing the horror of an arial bombardment like the soldiers at the front would make him more relatable to his subjects and gave him an experience of war that he could relate to the soldiers with.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Chris Dubbs, *American Journalists in the Great War: Rewriting the Rules of Reporting* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 255.

⁴⁵ “Pattullo, War-Writer, Wounded; Has a Stone Bruise on his Heel,” *Santa-Fe New Mexican*, October 20, 1917, 4.

⁴⁶ George Pattullo, “The First Raid,” *Saturday Evening Post* 190, no. 26 (December 29, 1917): 3-4, 42-45; “They’re All Heroes,” *Freeport [IL] Daily Journal-Standard*, January 14, 1918, 4.

⁴⁷ “Attack American Hospital,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1918, 3.

When Pattullo returned to the front, he continued to write other stories, the most important being “Hellwood,” about the Marines fighting in Belleau Wood.⁴⁸ He continued to celebrate the fighting man in his works, which can be seen in the opening paragraph to “Hellwood,” where Pattullo wrote, “A wonderful thing has come to pass, a little force of Americans—a mere handful—has put new life into the Allied armies and raised the dropping spirits of two nations.”⁴⁹ He wrote about the value and need for the Americans to be in France and how important their sacrifice was. He also published articles about what American soldiers were doing while not in the front lines, which were excerpted in newspapers across the nation.⁵⁰ Pattullo’s fame was growing; he was already a well-known western writer, but now he was becoming one of the most respected and revered war correspondents in France writing for one of the biggest magazines in the United States. Crucial to his ability to write such articles was the opinion of the AEF Censorship and Press Division, which managed all the accredited correspondents and cleared all the journalist’s stories to be published. The personnel in this division admired that “Pattullo visited the front at various times and other parts of the Army area and has done excellent work of a magazine nature. His articles were neither political nor military, but a reflection of the Doughboy as seen by a man who writes cleverly of whatever he

⁴⁸ George Pattullo, “Hellwood,” *Saturday Evening Post* 191, no. 9 (August 31, 1918): 3-5, 34-36.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁰ Examples include “The Resourceful Doughboy,” [*Memphis, TN*] *Commercial Appeal*, December 15, 1918, 15; and “The Resourceful Doughboy,” *Enid [OK] Daily Eagle*, November 14, 1918, 4.

sees.”⁵¹ After spending more than a year overseas covering the war, Pattullo returned to the United States in the fall of 1918, for a short rest at home before returning to Europe to discover and write his most famous war-time story which made Alvin York a hero.⁵²

In November of 1918, Pattullo returned to France with the mission of finding a hero Americans could embrace, a hero who could help his fellow citizens find justification for the cost and sacrifice of the war by embodying the nation’s and its people’s highest values and best aspects.⁵³ This was what George Horace Lorimer, the editor-in-chief of the *Saturday Evening Post*, was looking for when he told Pattullo that this trip to Europe would be indefinite. Pattullo would stay with the American Expeditionary Force for as long as necessary and then cover other assignments abroad once the war was over.⁵⁴ Lorimer also instructed Pattullo to “lay off the battle stuff, unless something tremendous breaks--just plain, homely stories that will bring the man with the pack and rifle close to the people on this side.”⁵⁵ Pattullo was in search of the quintessential U.S. doughboy who the American people could easily relate to.

On December 1, 1918, Pattullo crossed into Germany with the Army of Occupation and spent the next three weeks working on articles, one of which would be “So This is Germany!” chronicling the 1st Division’s entrance into Germany and what its

⁵¹ Memorandum from Captain Arthur Hartzell to Colonel Moreno, March 3, 1919, p. 4, box 6132, RG 120, USNA.

⁵² “George Pattullo, Back from Fighting Line, Tells Striking Story of One Soldier’s Sacrifice for Democracy,” *Fort Worth [TX] Record*, September 23, 1918, 8.

⁵³ Dubbs, *American Journalists in the Great War*, 255.

⁵⁴ Letter from George Pattullo to George Pattullo Sr., November 1, 1918, box 1, file 4, Pattullo Family Correspondence, RBCM.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

soldiers experienced when they arrived.⁵⁶ He spent time with the U.S. Marines and toured throughout the occupied area. He was actively looking for interesting stories that celebrated American soldiers. Recently, censorship rules had been lifted, giving reporters more flexibility on what they wrote about and what they could say. As the new year of 1919 began, Pattullo was writing about the occupation in Germany. By the end of January, he learned of the exploits and heroics of Sergeant Alvin York with the 82nd Division. Skeptical at first, he decided to take a chance and left the Third Army's headquarters at Coblenz, Germany, and went to meet the Tennessee Sergeant.

Finding the Sergeant Alvin York Story

On the night of January 17, 1919, while Pattullo was working in Coblenz, portrait painter Joseph Cummings Chase was in Prauthoy, France. He had just finished listening to the heroic tale of Alvin York and painting his portrait. That night, Chase knew York's tale was special and worth more than a portrait for a bond drive. York had not just achieved a remarkable feat of military arms, but here was a uniquely rural, religious, humble everyman who was an expert marksman that Chase knew—from many years of painting for periodicals that eagerly sought their audience—would speak to the American people. So, as Chase finished up his work, he became eager to share the story he had heard that night. According to some biographers, at some point during the next few weeks, Chase was traveling along the front after painting York and “ran into” George

⁵⁶ George Pattullo, “So This Is Germany!” *Saturday Evening Post* 191, no. 3-4 (February 22, 1919): 55-62; letter from George Pattullo to George Pattullo Sr., December 26, 1918, box 1, file 4, Pattullo Family Correspondence, RBCM.

Pattullo.⁵⁷ Chase told him about York, regaling the reporter with the sergeant's amazing heroic tale. It sparked Pattullo's interest to investigate the subject; it was the very type of story he had been looking for and that his editor wanted.⁵⁸ According to *The New Yorker*, Pattullo then "dug up York" and began writing his article.⁵⁹ Pattullo, on the other hand, did not give Chase direct credit, writing that he learned about York from a fellow traveler along the front: "That I hit on the story was an accident. Got a tip from a traveling companion on a ride to the Argonne after the Armistice."⁶⁰

Not all biographers agree that Chase was the person who told Pattullo about York.⁶¹ Pattullo wrote that he also heard about York from an officer in the 82nd Division. According to Pattullo, after hearing from a "traveling companion," he then heard about York again from Major Edward Buxton, who was York's battalion commander.⁶² Buxton had also been an experienced newspaperman before the war, working as a staff reporter and even a war correspondent for the *Providence Journal* before the United States entered the war. Now that there were two different people verifying the story, and both well respected professionals, Pattullo's interest peaked.

Another theory about how Pattullo learned about York's heroics is from historian James Gregory. He gives credit to Major General George Duncan, the commander of the

⁵⁷ "Mr. Chase and the Sergeant," *New Yorker* 17 (July 12, 1941): 11.

⁵⁸ Mastriano, *Alvin York*, 136; Perry, *Sergeant York*, 101; Turner, *Sergeant Alvin C. York*, 24; Lengel, *Never in Finer Company*, 287.

⁵⁹ "Mr. Chase and the Sergeant," *New Yorker* 17 (July 12, 1941): 11.

⁶⁰ Letter from George Pattullo to Westbrook Pegler, January 17, 1968, box 142, folder Pattullo 1, Pegler Papers, HHPL.

⁶¹ Nelson, *York Patrol*, 156; Lee, *Sergeant York*, 53-54.

⁶² Letter from George Pattullo to Westbrook Pegler, January 17, 1968.

82nd Division. When the war ended, he became sort of a press agent for York. Duncan was the officer who recommended York when Chase asked for a heroic soldier to paint, and he told Chase York's heroic story as well as his unique background. This encounter sparked Chase's interest to select York's story to add to his article in *The World's Work* magazine--"Corporal York, General Pershing, and Others," which was published in April 1919. Duncan supposedly repeated the tale again when he instructed the 82nd Division headquarters to contact George Pattullo directly to suggest the story. The division headquarters invited Pattullo to Chatel-Chehery to conduct interviews and meet with York and the rest of the staff.⁶³

Even though the exact way and date when Pattullo learned about York's heroics—and who had the most influence—is questioned, at some point toward the end of January 1919, Pattullo learned of him and prepared to conduct interviews and write a story. On January 26, a telegram was relayed to the 82nd Division saying that Pattullo "would be glad to undertake story of corporal York if it is withheld from newspapers."⁶⁴ At the time, Pattullo was still with the Third Army at Coblenz and decided to see if the story was true and worth writing. But he was concerned that if the York story was true and other journalists found out, the newspapers might beat him to the press with the story. Pattullo knew that after he finished writing any story, it took weeks after delivery to the editors at the *Saturday Evening Post* before it would be on the newsstands.

⁶³ Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 14-15, 27.

⁶⁴ Telegram from Thomas to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, January 26, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, Press File, NPRC.

Newspaper stories, on the other hand, could be in print within a day or two. Not only was he worried about another journalist finding out on their own, but he was also concerned about the censors leaking the article. He feared that the censors, who had grown friendships with correspondents, may mention the article deliberately or just when making small talk. "I knew my story might be given to the newspaper correspondents who could beat me six weeks by cable," wrote Pattullo. So, Pattullo went to Brigadier General Dennis Nolan, the head of the AEF's intelligence section, and asked if he would talk with General Pershing, "and get protection for my stuff." Nolan told Pattullo that it was not necessary to talk to Pershing. Nolan assured the journalist that if other correspondents discovered the story on their own, there was nothing he could do about it, but he would guarantee that the censors would not leak it."⁶⁵ That was all Pattullo needed to hear.

Pattullo made plans to meet with the 82nd Division leadership and York to hear his story, but the journalist was not fully convinced. He believed that there was an outpouring "of alleged war heroes . . . so many are newspaper made; the soldiers over here could explode many a bubble reputation at home."⁶⁶ He decided to have a follow-on article planned as well. He also wanted to write about the battle in the Argonne, because he considered it "imperative in view of criticism" that the battle was getting. To that end,

⁶⁵ Letter from George Pattullo to James Pegler, January 17, 1958, Pegler Papers, box 142, folder Pattullo 1, HHPL.

⁶⁶ Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 4.

Pattullo asked for battle data to be readily available when he arrived in France.⁶⁷ He also made travel plans. By February 3, Pattullo had arrived in Chaumont and was later picked up by a member of the 82nd Division staff and brought to their headquarters to conduct interviews.⁶⁸

After visiting the 82nd Division headquarters, Pattullo “spent three days with York and his buddies in the fight, going over every foot of the terrain in the Argonne.”⁶⁹ He stayed with the unit as they continued training – post Armistice. Pattullo interviewed York in detail, learning his personal history and hearing about his family and his time in the military. Pattullo validated the sergeant’s military records and interviewed York’s leadership. On February 7, Pattullo joined York and an investigative team as they visited the location of the October 8, 1918, battle site in Chatel-Chehery. York had already been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions, but he was now being recommended for the Medal of Honor; the team needed to validate the heroic story to submit him for the award. Pattullo joined Major General George Duncan, 82nd Division commander; Brigadier General Julian Lindsey, 164th Brigade commander; Major James Tilman, 328th Regimental commander; Lieutenant Colonel Edward Buxton, battalion commander; Captain Edward Danforth, company commander; and Private Frank Philips,

⁶⁷ Telegram from Colonel Moreno to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, January 30, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, Press File, NPRC.

⁶⁸ Telegram from George Pattullo to Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters, January 29, 1919; telegram from Colonel Gordon Johnson at 82nd Division Headquarters to Colonel Moreno, January 31, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, Press File, NPR.

⁶⁹ Letter from George Pattullo to James Pegler, January 17, 1958, Pegler Papers, box 142, folder Pattullo 1, HHPL.

a photographer for the U.S. Army Signal Corps.⁷⁰ It was cold the day of the investigation, and the ground was covered in snow; but the officers and Pattullo walked the battlefield and interviewed York about what happened that day. The photographer also scoured the battlefield, taking pictures of York and the graves of the men who were killed during the battle.⁷¹ When the investigation was complete and Pattullo had finished his interviews, he wrote, “Let me say here and now that York’s story is genuine from start to finish . . . I questioned every soldier in the detachment with York, checked up every detail with the official reports and information, and went over every step of the ground while he told his story.” After interviewing York and walking the battlefield, he was convinced that York “had performed the most remarkable individual feat of fighting to the credit of the American Expeditionary Force.”⁷²

It did not take Pattullo long to get the article written after the interviews and tour of the battlefield. By February 18, he had a draft of “The Second Elder Gives Battle” submitted, reviewed, and cleared through the censor’s office and on its way to Lorimer at the *Saturday Evening Post*.⁷³ Now he just had to wait and hope that no other reporters

⁷⁰ Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 33.

⁷¹ Frank C. Phillips, Signal Corps Photographs 49189, 49190, 49191, and 49192, February 7, 1919, USNA.

⁷² Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle.”

⁷³ Censor’s copy of “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” by George Pattullo, Record Group 120, Articles by Correspondents, Stories by George Pattullo for *Saturday Evening Post*, USNA.

stumbled on the story and that the censors would not leak it before it was published. As he waited, Pattullo moved on to other stories, eventually returning to Germany to continue covering the occupation and how that nation was recovering from the war.⁷⁴



Figure 3. U.S. Army Signal Corps photograph, 49191, by Private Frank Philips, February 7, 1919. Courtesy of the National Archives, College Park, Maryland. The image was used on the front page of the “Second Elder Gives Battle” article published in the *Saturday Evening Post* on April 26, 1919. The article’s author, George Pattullo, is visible in the upper left corner of the image.

⁷⁴ Junius Wood, “George Pattullo had Spanish Flu in Paris,” [*Omaha, NE*] *Evening World-Herald*, July 8, 1919, 12.

Luckily for Pattullo, no other reporters discovered or learned about York's story over the next six weeks, so his article was published on April 26, 1919, as the main feature. The article became a national triumph. Pattullo wrote, "the story was plastered on [the] cover in big way, and led all else, made a tremendous sensation, and York, the former conscientious objector, became a hero overnight."⁷⁵ The journalist demurred, saying that "I had merely recorded it in a fashion which made every big newspaper in America wire Lorimer for permission to run it."⁷⁶ Those same newspapers gave Pattullo a tremendous amount of publicity, but he wrote that he "didn't bother to read because I never valued it."⁷⁷ At the time of the article's publication, Pattullo knew he had a good story, but he did not fully comprehend the sensation it would make or how it would change York's life.

Symbolism in "The Second Elder Gives Battle"

Millions of Americans read the article, either in its original form or in excerpts and summaries in newspapers around the country. Previous stories about the exploits of other soldiers fighting in the AEF earning the Medal of Honor or Distinguished Service Cross had been released, but none of them resonated in the American consciousness like York's. There are many reasons for the great interest in York's story. First, it was published in a distinguished magazine with a readership reaching over two million

⁷⁵ Letter from George Pattullo to James Pegler, January 17, 1958, Pegler Papers, box 142, folder Pattullo 1, HHPL.

⁷⁶ Letter from George Pattullo to James Pegler, March 23, 1960, Pegler Papers, box 142, folder Pattullo 1, HHPL.

⁷⁷ Letter from George Pattullo to James Pegler, January 17, 1958.

subscribers that was available throughout the United States. Second, Pattullo was a well-known and well-respected author. While these two elements ensured a wide readership and brought a broad awareness to the story, it was the style of Pattullo's article that excited Americans and helped the story resonate with them. As a talented western writer with an eye for the dramatic and what the public enjoyed reading, he developed the tale around public tastes and heroic themes to deliver what the American public was looking for—a hero.

York's was not just another story of martial glory or another display of combat heroism. According to historian David Lee, he was a symbol that transcended his contribution to the war as a soldier and a citizen.⁷⁸ York represented both what Americans thought of themselves and what they aspired to be. Lee wrote that “for millions of Americans, York was the incarnation of their romanticized understanding of the national past when men and women supposedly lived plainer, sterner, and more virtuous lives.”⁷⁹ In his article, Pattullo taps directly into that need and writes in a way that cast York as the consummate hero. Therefore, it was primarily responsible for starting York's national celebrity and began his legend.

The Tennessean seemed to be tailor-made to become a national hero. As a draftee, York represented most American servicemen. More than 2.7 million men were drafted into the American armed forces, with just 8,000 going into a branch other than the U.S. Army. Those draftees came from a pool of 24 million American men who had registered

⁷⁸ Lee, *Sergeant York*, ix.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, x.

for the draft between 1917 and 1918.⁸⁰ When the U.S. government passed the Selective Service Act on May 18, 1917, it also allowed citizens to volunteer for the regular Army, Navy, and National Guard but not the national Army, which made up the majority of the American Expeditionary Force. By the end of the war, the national Army comprised roughly 77 percent of the U.S. fighting force.⁸¹ As a reporter who had been amongst the officers and enlisted soldiers of the AEF for the past year, Pattullo knew that most combat soldiers were draftees who had not volunteered to serve but fought nonetheless on behalf of their country when they were called to serve.

Pattullo also knew the symbolic importance of York being from the 82nd Division. In his article, he pointed out that,

The 82d Division was originally a Southern division – nearly all its officers hail from the South. But various shifts and changes resulted in every state of the Union being represented in the 82d in considerable numbers. For instance, one regiment can boast that thirty-five training camps have contributed men to its ranks. Therefore the 82d wears AA on its insignia – All American; and they are almost as proud of it as the veteran First Division is of the red numeral on the left shoulder. The men of the First think that means more than a Croix de Guerre; and I am inclined to agree with them.”⁸²

The 82nd Division symbolically represented every soldier in the United States, and there was a possibility for anyone to be in the unit. The 82nd was a part of the national Army and organized in Georgia at Camp Gordon in August 1917. When it was originally formed, it was comprised of men drafted from Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee, and

⁸⁰ Edward Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 29.

⁸¹ David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 149-50.

⁸² Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 71.

designated as a Southern national Army division, because draftees were sent to divisional training camps by their region.⁸³ But by November of that year, the division was transformed by the transfer of many of its soldiers to other divisions, particularly the 30th and 31st, which were Southern National Guard divisions preparing to depart for France. By the end of the month, they were replaced by recruits from states in the New England and Middle Atlantic areas.⁸⁴ Nearly 14,000 new draftees came from training camps in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts, with others from camps in Maryland, Virginia, and the Midwest. They all arrived at Camp Gordon, bringing the strength of the division back to over 26,000 soldiers and officers, near combat strength.⁸⁵ While the unit was still training in April of 1918, Major General John Burnham, the division commander at the time, thought it was important for unit morale to give it a nickname to rally around. He published a general order saying that “the Eighty-Second Division represents the best men from every state in the union. In view of this fact, the commanding general designates this division and orders that it be known as the ‘All-American Division.’”⁸⁶ The 82nd became well-known in the public for what it represented, being a heterogenous representation of the entire United States and all those who fought.

⁸³ James J. Cooke, *The All-Americans at War: The 82nd Division in the Great War, 1917-1918* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 1999), 27.

⁸⁴ American Battle Monuments Commission, *82d Division: Summary of Operations in the World War* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1944), 1; Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 5.

⁸⁵ Excerpt taken from Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 27.

⁸⁵ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 5-6.

⁸⁶ As quoted in Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 27.

Pattullo also knew that it was important that York was a Southern mountaineer. It made him stand-out amongst the other members of his patrol. The 82nd was not just made up of Americans from across the country, but many of the draftees who came from the Northern states were not yet U.S. citizens and had difficulty speaking English.⁸⁷ Roughly 18 percent of Americans drafted were foreign-born, and collectively they spoke at least 46 different languages.⁸⁸ Alvin York fought and served alongside many of these foreign-born soldiers. On October 8, when he set out on the patrol, he fought alongside sixteen other soldiers, six of whom were killed during the fighting and another four were wounded. One of the reasons Pattullo singled York out from all those soldiers was because seven were foreign-born, eight were from the Northeastern states, and only one other soldier was from the South. They were mainly from, or enlisted in, urban centers like Buffalo, New York City, New Haven, and Philadelphia.⁸⁹ According to historian Michael Birdwell, Pattullo's article was also written during a time when "America was experiencing its first Red Scare and was suspicious of anything foreign."⁹⁰ To combat

⁸⁷ Cooke, *All-Americans at War*, 5.

⁸⁸ Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 64; Alexander Barnes and Peter Belemonte, *Forgotten Soldiers of World War I: America's Immigrant Doughboys* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2018), 28.

⁸⁹ Of the sixteen other soldiers of the "York Patrol," the seven foreign-born members came from four different foreign countries: two were from Ireland, two from Italy, two from Poland, and one from Russia. Out of the eight members of the patrol who were born in New England states, one was from Connecticut, one from Massachusetts, one New York, four were from Pennsylvania, and one was from Rhode Island. Private Thomas Johnson was the only Southerner, other than Alvin York. Johnson was born in and enlisted from Lynchburg, Virginia. More information on these soldiers can be found at Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, 7-13.

⁹⁰ The first Red Scare occurred between 1917 and 1920, following the Russian Revolution. Americans were intensely patriotic during the period and feared a rise of

this, Pattullo focused specifically on York, writing that “it was York’s battle and only York’s.”⁹¹ Throughout the article, Pattullo limited the exposure he gave to the other servicemembers, particularly those who were foreign-born, and focused primarily on the actions of York. To do so, Pattullo, focused on various themes that he felt would resonate with the public, particularly York as a Christian and a Tennessee mountaineer.

York, the Christian Warrior

The first theme Pattullo showcases at the very beginning of “The Second Elder Gives Battle” is York as a Christian warrior. The very title of the article implies it by referring to York’s position in his church.⁹² Then in the very first sentence, Pattullo references York’s church. He writes that York’s particular sect “is opposed to any form of fighting; they are conscientious objectors.”⁹³ Throughout the entire article Pattullo highlights York’s Christian beliefs and showcases York as a Christian warrior fighting on the side of God and believing whole-heartedly in his faith. When first referencing York’s heroism, Pattullo wrote that, “in my estimation it stands out as the greatest individual feat of the war, not only because of the amazing things he did that day but because of the man’s deep religious convictions and scruples.”⁹⁴ Pattullo emphasized York’s

communism in the United States, like what was occurring in Europe, and an increase in anarchists and left-wing social agitation. (See Birdwell, “Gobble like a Turkey,” 163.)

⁹¹ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 3.

⁹² York was a member of the Church of Christ in Christian Union in Pall Mall, Tennessee. At the time York was drafted for World War I, he held the position of second elder, also the “singing” elder, and he performed church services in the absence of the pastor. (See Lee, *Sergeant York*, 15.)

⁹³ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

convictions throughout the article and even explained his struggle with being a conscientious objector. According to Pattullo, the church was unanimous that York must request exemption as a conscientious objector.

But after lengthy discussion and prayer, York refused. He belonged to the church and believed its doctrines, “but he was not going to back out of serving his country when it was drawn into war. As with a great many other courageous men patriotism was stronger in the Tennessee mountaineer than any other impulse.”⁹⁵ York highlighted what it meant to be a hero and personified the reluctant soldier who went off to war to fight because it was his duty as an American. When war broke out in 1914, many U.S. churches clearly expressed anti-war views and continued to promote national isolation. Many Americans wanted to avoid war, and the churches promoted peace. Even during the presidential election of 1916, the churches continued to speak out against war and promote isolationism. But by the time the U.S. declared war in 1917, the public was calling for a holy war, and churches began promoting a holy crusade against Germany.⁹⁶ Americans had a tradition of being able to justify violence through religion, seeing war as a way to advance God’s kingdom. They also believed intervention could promote global Christianity.⁹⁷ Most nations, especially the United States, as they move toward war, turn conflict into a religious crusade by following two themes. First, the government and media frame the nation’s enemy as anti-Christian. They demonize their enemies to make

⁹⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁶ Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 92.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 93.

it easier to engage in war and kill them. According to Jenkins, “This process became much more intense, and much uglier, when the rise of democracy and mass media forced governments to arouse popular support.”⁹⁸ Second, war rhetoric and language become pervaded with the thoughts of redemption and sacrifice. The language of war heightens and glorify these principals, and they can be embodied through service in the military and in combat. The most extreme advocates of this war movement came from progressive Christians who wanted to “build a better world free of social injustice.”⁹⁹ York’s decision to fight might have violated the teachings of his religious sect, but not the beliefs held by majority of Christians in the United States in the early summer of 1917.

Pattullo also showed York as an ideal representative of Christian Americans. U.S. society at the start of the war believed that citizenship, faith, and manhood in combination with strenuous action would result in individual and societal progress. The elements of “Struggle, strain, and sacrifice ... vitalized American culture, and gave life to the American nation.”¹⁰⁰ Pattullo portrayed York as just that person. According to Pattullo, “York is a whale of a man, standing six feet, and tipping the scales at two hundred and five pounds. Once he wore a shock of red hair; now it is clipped close, as becomes a soldier, but it still flames like a headlight. His features are not rugged, but clear cut, and his habitual expression is one of kindly humor.”¹⁰¹ The journalist described the soldier as a large and sturdy man, but with a gentle and kind heart. Pattullo also wrote

⁹⁸ Ibid., 96-97.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 94, 96.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁰¹ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 3.

that “whenever he [York] is stirred to resentment his eyes contract and take on the peculiar high and piercing quality of the hawk’s. I suspect that the second elder would be a bad hombre in a mix-up.”¹⁰² He referred to York as very confident and a man whose “steady gaze is absolute sureness of self.”¹⁰³ The contrast of these two statements reinforces the conflict in York as a hero and his story. Pattullo describes him as a Christian Warrior, a conscientious objector who killed 25 enemy soldiers. Through his imagery, Pattullo illustrated that York was not just a religious philosopher, preacher, or singer; York was a man of action. According to historian of religion Jonathan Ebel, during the early 1900s, “the properly religious man was a man of action, willing to welcome danger and sacrifice, and happy to deal harshly with ‘God’s enemies.’”¹⁰⁴ Christians “believed in the righteousness of the cause, believed in the communal and personal value of their errand, believed that in answering the call to arms they were answering the call of their faith.”¹⁰⁵ This is exactly how Pattullo portrayed York.

To complement the warrior aspect of York’s persona, Pattullo regaled readers with stories of York’s talent with firearms. This was a skill he already knew, not something taught to him by the U.S. Army. Pattullo wrote that “the weapons he [York] used were peculiarly American weapons – a rifle and a pistol. The big redhead is sure death with either.”¹⁰⁶ Pattullo then explained that York had often won shooting competitions in Pall Mall and in nearby towns prior to the war. He could shoot the head

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ebel, *Faith in the Fight*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 4.

off a turkey with nearly any weapon and was a better shot than those who lived around him, where firearms were a necessary tool of life in the mountains. Pattullo also wrote about how York stopped violence during a bar fight by using a pistol to shoot the head off a tree lizard who was running up a tree on the opposite side of the road. It quelled the argument and the fighting. According to Pattullo, when York became a soldier, he became “the crack shot of his battalion with the rifle, and in a contest with the automatic pistol against Major Tillman the corporal hit a penny match box every shot at forty paces.”¹⁰⁷ These were important elements to his warrior persona, especially since Pattullo wrote that York’s heroics stemmed from his ability to defeat a machine-gun battalion single-handedly, armed with just a rifle and a pistol.¹⁰⁸ These characteristics and skills resonated with the American people and accentuated the fact York was also a Tennessean and a mountaineer from the Appalachian area.

York being an excellent rifleman also resonated throughout the AEF. According to historian Richard Faulkner, “The infantryman’s rifle was the source of his individual power, his protector, and his curse.”¹⁰⁹ Compared to the other Allied forces, the AEF was a “rifle-centric organization.”¹¹⁰ General Pershing was a firm believer in open or maneuver warfare doctrine which differed from the style of warfare the French and British were currently fighting with. Pershing believed that the Allies were too dependent on artillery and trench warfare, where the French were utilizing the doctrine of

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Faulkner, *Pershing’s Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 214.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 215.

destruction, or the idea that artillery and firepower was the key to defeating the enemy while the infantry was used to occupy territory.¹¹¹ Pershing chose to organize and utilize the AEF focusing on warfare that relied more on the ingenuity and flexibility of the American infantryman. According to Pershing, “Our mission required an aggressive offensive based on self-reliant infantry.”¹¹² Thus, making the infantry soldier the most important part of the America Army and Alvin York reflected the type of soldier Pershing and the leadership of the AEF was trying to train, support, and fight with throughout the war.

Pattullo did not just characterize York as a good marksman with rifles and pistols, he also referred to the Tennessean as a good gunslinger, writing, “have you ever seen a gunman of the old Southwest? A real gunman, not the loud, quarrelsome, spurious saloon hero? Well, that’s York.”¹¹³ This language spoke both to Pattullo’s history as a western writer and to Americans’ love of the genre. According to historian Richard Slotkin, “the source of myth-making lie in our capacity to make and use metaphors, by which we attempt to interpret a new and surprising experience or phenomenon by noting its resemblance to some remembered thing or happening.”¹¹⁴ Pattullo knew that bringing up particular imagery that was well-known to the American public would evoke emotions that represented the type of story he was trying to convey. Pattullo’s reference to York’s

¹¹¹ Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30.

¹¹² John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War*, 2 vols. (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1931), 2: 237.

¹¹³ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 3.

¹¹⁴ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 6.

size, appearance, and mannerisms all coincided with what Americans thought of Western cowboys even as York was depicted as a Tennessee mountaineer.

Mountaineers and Moonshiners

Pattullo also focused on the theme of York as a “Tennessee mountaineer” in his article.¹¹⁵ Born on December 13, 1887, in Pall Mall, Tennessee (situated along the Tennessee-Kentucky border), York was one of eleven children. According to Pattullo, York’s family had lived there for generations. His father was a blacksmith and had a small farm where he grew corn, oats, wheat, and other crops.¹¹⁶ York represented a popular stereotype of people from the Appalachian region of the United States. He was a rural farmer, hardworking, and raised in a large family. He represented what America used to be before the onset of the industrial age. According to historian Henry Shapiro, York made possible the “separation of the mountaineers from the mountains made possible the emergence of a mythology about them, at the heart of which lay the notion that the mountaineers did in fact compose a distinct element in the American population.”

¹¹⁵ The Appalachian region of the United States is not coherently defined nor agreed upon by scholars. But it represents a cultural region in the Eastern United States, primarily around the southern Appalachian Mountain range, where the inhabitants live in the rural areas of Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. For more information, see Jeff Biggers, *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2006); Richard Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001); Henry Shapiro, *Appalachia on our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978); and Colin Woodard, *American Nations: A History of the Eleventh Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

¹¹⁶ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 4.

Because of this, mountaineers took “their place alongside the shrewd Yankees, the sharp-dealing Jews, and the rhythmic blacks in the pantheon of American types.”¹¹⁷ Pattullo highlighted York’s mountain and rural roots throughout his article, writing about York’s dedication to his mother, his rural background, and his shooting skills that hearkened back to pioneer days. York maintained this mountaineer identity even though he left home for fight in France. Shapiro argued that “York was never simply an American hero. He was first and last a mountaineer, and no less a mountaineer because his virtues were the virtues of the native American folk.”¹¹⁸ Pattullo described him as a mythic mountaineer who had answered his nation’s call to arms, but as soon as the fighting was done, all he cared to do was return to his simple life in the mountains.

Just after the turn of the century, the American public’s understanding and depiction of what it meant to be a mountaineer, particularly in the Appalachian region of the United States, came from the silent motion pictures’ depictions of mountaineers and Southerners. By the early 1900s, films were reaching a larger audience than novels had; the primary audience for these short films was working-class and ethnic populations, and the films clearly influenced the perception of mountaineers in the American consciousness. More than 400 films made between 1904 and 1920 were set in the mountains and featured stories about the men and women who lived there.¹¹⁹ These films were incredibly popular prior to World War I. In 1904, Biograph Film Company released

¹¹⁷ Shapiro, *Appalachia on our Mind*, 263.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹¹⁹ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 57-58.

The Moonshiner, a widely released short film about a moonshiner and his fight against government agents. It led to a wave of similar films that peaked in popularity in 1914, when more than seventy new titles related to moonshiners were released that year, averaging more than one per week.¹²⁰ An underlying theme in these was male dominance, “with strong, virile men winning out over weak or self-centered ones.”¹²¹ But these themes were not always positive. According to historian Michael Birdwell, “A garish stereotype emerged, featuring hard-drinking, violent, isolated, and ignorant people. Unaware of the fruits of Industrialization, these latter-day Luddites were clannish, unkempt, homegrown exotics. These hillbillies prided themselves in their power with weapons and their ability to produce and consume moonshine.”¹²² These cinematic notions of mountaineers from Appalachia greatly affected how Pattullo depicted and how the public originally viewed York as a heroic figure.

Pattullo knew that the public would bring some negative connotations to York’s mountain heritage, so the writer used this to his advantage. He ensured that he dispelled the negative elements immediately, writing that the “Pall Mall people do not belong, however, to the class of mountaineers known as moonshiners. Neither are they feudists, though living close to the mountainous districts where feuds flourish. They won’t stand

¹²⁰ Ibid., 58; J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 179.

¹²¹ Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 59.

¹²² Michael E. Birdwell, “Lights, Camera, Action! The Upper Cumberland in Theater and Film,” in *Rural Life and Culture in the Upper Cumberland*, edited by Michael Birdwell and Calvin Dickinson (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 302.

for moonshiners or lawlessness in Pall Mall; they are a devout population.”¹²³ In this way, Pattullo distanced Pall Mall and York from the popular stories about the Hatfield-McCoy feud that primarily occurred during the 1880s in the Tug Fork region between West Virginia and Kentucky.¹²⁴ Pattullo distanced York from the resulting stereotypes of nearly lawless and passionately territorial hillbillies, while retaining more treasured aspects of York’s mountain heritage. The result was York as a reformed and modern mountaineer.

Heroic Symbolism and Mythology

One of the final elements Pattullo integrated into his *Saturday Evening Post* article was the use of heroic symbolism and mythology. According to psychologists Scott Allison and George Goethals, there are four possible arcs a person can follow that transforms them into a heroic figure. The story of Alvin York follows the classic hero arc, which “begins with the hero living life as an ordinary individual, and after being thrust into the journey he becomes transformed into a highly moral or competent hero by the story’s end.”¹²⁵ Pattullo knew that heroes in mythology and fiction, particularly western fiction, followed a transformative arc. Characters set out to deal with a conflict,

¹²³ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 4.

¹²⁴ For more information on the Hatfield and McCoy feuds, see Lisa Alther, *Blood Feud: The Hatfields and the McCoy: The Epic Story of Murder and Vengeance* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2012); Dean King, *The Feud: The Hatfields and McCoy: The True Story* (New York: Little, Brown, 2013); and Altina Waller, *Feud: Hatfields, McCoy, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

¹²⁵ Allison and Goethals, “The Hero’s Transformation,” in *Handbook of Heroism and Heroic Leadership*, edited by Allison, Goethals, and Kramer, 385.

persevere, and in the end their community--and sometimes themselves--are better for it. Pattullo used this formula in writing his non-fiction article about York, making him a heroic figure whom people could easily relate to and be inspired by.

Pattullo might not have fully known or understood it at the time of his writing, but heroes have similar characteristics and themes to their stories that cross cultures and time. Joseph Campbell, a renowned comparative mythologist, wrote in his classic work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, “Essentially, it might even be said there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people.”¹²⁶ This monomyth is a three-stage formula heroes must follow as a rite of passage to becoming a heroic figure. The three stages, referred to as the nuclear monomyth, are separation, initiation, and return.¹²⁷ Summarized by Campbell, “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered, and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”¹²⁸ Pattullo clearly follows this pattern throughout his York article, using it as a framework for the story. He cleverly ensured that he devoted ample coverage to York’s past and upbringing, his transformation on the battlefield, and what he planned to do when he

¹²⁶ Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, 166.

¹²⁷ Campbell uses the term monomyth to describe the path a mythological hero must follow as a rite of passage to become heroic (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 30). The term originates from James Joyce, *Finnigan’s Wake* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), 581.

¹²⁸ Campbell also identifies the nuclear monomyth as “a separation from the world, a penetration of some source of power, and a life-enhancing return.” (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 35.)

arrived home. The article was not just a simple account of heroics during a battle; Pattullo narrated York's transformation into a hero.

Within the structure of the basic three-stage monomyth, there are also various subsections or additional steps most figures follow to become mythological heroes, for a total of seventeen. These steps establish the full adventure the hero must undergo, even though not all steps must be met in order or fully completed. Campbell identifies five steps in the separation phase: the call to adventure, the refusal of the call, supernatural aid, the crossing of the first threshold, and the belly of the whale. The six stages of the initiation phase are the road of trials, the meeting with the goddess, woman as the temptress, atonement with the father, apotheosis, and the ultimate boon. The monomyth's return phase also has six elements: refusal of the return, the magic flight, rescue from without, the crossing of the return threshold, master of the two worlds, and freedom to live.¹²⁹ But, when telling a mythological heroic tale, not all steps need to be followed in the exact order or substantially. Each step can just be implied or referenced within the story.¹³⁰ Some steps can also be combined. If some of the sub-steps or elements are omitted or not present, that can also tell you about the society and time where the story came from, and the heroic tale is just as valid.¹³¹

Scholars who followed Campbell's 1949 publication have further refined and streamlined his ideas, but they have retained the core belief that "all stories consist of a few common structural elements found universally in myths, fairy tales, dreams, and

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

movies.”¹³² Collectively, these elements are now known as the Hero’s Journey.¹³³ While writing the “Second Elder Gives Battle,” Pattullo followed this pattern and framework even if he did not know it. According to Christopher Vogler, the author of *The Writer’s Journey*, “way stations for the Hero’s Journey emerge naturally even when the writer is unaware of them.”¹³⁴ Vogler distills Campbell’s seventeen steps of the monomyth in to twelve steps of the Hero’s Journey. Each of the twelve Hero’s Journey steps are clearly seen throughout the *Saturday Evening Post* article and are described in the paragraphs that follow:

1. *Ordinary World*: When a heroic journey or story begins, and the protagonist, who becomes the story’s hero, is first introduced, he is a part of the ordinary world. They are usually leading a simple, normal, and mundane life with nothing extraordinary happening to demonstrate that the character is heroic. The protagonist will soon leave the ordinary world and is taken or travels to someplace new, foreign, which is in vivid contrast to where the story begins.¹³⁵ In Pattullo’s article, York begins his journey in Pall Mall, Tennessee, located in Fentress County, where “living is simple.” He is the son of a blacksmith and grew up on a small farm on the Wolf River, just five miles from the

¹³² Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, 3d ed. (Studio City, CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2007), xxvii.

¹³³ The Hero’s Journey is very similar to the seventeen-stop monomyth except that it has a more simplified twelve-step process. It mirrors Campbell’s monomyth except a few steps are streamlined and combined. The Hero’s Journey steps are Ordinary World, Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, Meeting with the Mentor, Crossing the First Threshold, Tests, Approach the Innermost Cave, Ordeal, reward, The Road Back, Resurrection, and Return with the Elixir. For a comparison of the Campbell monomyth and the Hero’s Journey, see Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 6.

¹³⁴ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 7.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

Kentucky border. Before York is drafted, Pattullo describes York's origins as simple, plain, and idyllic, living in the ordinary world.¹³⁶

2. *Call to Adventure*: During this phase, the protagonist is presented with a challenge, issue, adventure, or problem they need to fix or undergo. They can no longer stay in the ordinary world and must venture into the unknown. This phase also establishes the goals and risks of the adventure.¹³⁷ The call to adventure for York was clear; he was drafted by the U.S. government to fight in France during World War I. He was to be taken from his home and occupation as a farmer and sent to fight in a foreign land in his new role as a soldier. The draft served as the element by which "destiny has summoned the hero."¹³⁸ Throughout the article, Pattullo also ensured that the reader knew York was a draftee and not a volunteer. He wrote that York struggled with his draft notification before becoming a member of the 82nd "All-American" Division, comprised of fellow draftees. He did not ask or seek out to serve in the armed forces; it was thrust upon him, especially since York's religious convictions meant that initially he did not want to fight.¹³⁹

3. *Refusal of the Call*: Often when the protagonist is called to go on a journey or quest and they reach the threshold of the adventure, they refuse the calling or at least express fear, doubt, or reluctance to go. The potential hero considers not accepting the adventure and may refuse to continue. Often, a mentor persuades them, there is a change

¹³⁶ Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 4. See also *ibid.*, 3-4.

¹³⁷ Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 10-11.

¹³⁸ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 58.

¹³⁹ Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 4, 71.

in circumstance, or something changes that gets the hero past their fears so they can begin their journey.¹⁴⁰ Alvin York twice refused the call to fight, to serve his country, and start his adventure. The first instance was when he first learned he had been drafted.

According to Pattullo, York's "church is against fighting in any form, so when the draft came along and reached out for York he was in a difficult dilemma. For not only was he a member of the church, but second elder; often he led the services. He took a leading part in the singing, and several Sunday schools in the country owed their origin to him. What should he do?" York showed doubt and reluctance to go, but he ultimately decided to "let the draft take its course with him." The second instance when York refused the call was after he had joined the 82nd Division and was preparing to sail for France. According to Pattullo, during training, York "was still troubled in regard to war; his conscience was not at ease; his religious convictions gave him many hours of worry."¹⁴¹ He struggled with reconciling the killing of another human being with the teachings from his church. So just before York was scheduled to depart for France, he met with Captain Edward Danforth, his company commander, and Major Edward Buxton, his battalion commander, to discuss the killing of humans and how he was conflicted. Both officers debated theology with York and quoted the bible, particularly about the employment of force. After the conversation, York was satisfied, and "from that night all his doubts seem to have been laid; from that night he plunged whole-heartedly into the duties of a soldier."¹⁴² Pattullo

¹⁴⁰ Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 11-12.

¹⁴¹ Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 4.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 4, 71.

clearly showed how York refused the call to adventure twice, yet he chose to continue his journey and become a hero.

4. *Meeting with the Mentor*: Near the beginning of a heroic journey, the protagonist usually meets or confers with a mentor who helps the hero prepare for the quest. The mentor—usually senior to the hero in a symbolic way—may also help him with things he encounters during his adventure. The mentor gives guidance, advice, and often a tool that the hero will use to help him along his journey. But the mentor cannot participate in the final quest, as the hero must do it alone.¹⁴³ In Pattullo's article, York's mentor was Captain Edward Danforth, his company commander. Danforth was senior to York and was his leader, but they also had a special relationship. As mentioned in the previous step, Danforth often had religious conversations with York, helping him reconcile his role as soldier with his religious beliefs. Danforth explained through scripture that using force was acceptable and sometimes necessary employing the example of using "physical force to ensure the safety and honor of women and children; did York think that he would be criticized for protecting the helpless and the pure?" These religious sessions prepared York to deal with his own spiritual concerns and prepared him for the combat he would encounter in France—in effect, they gave him a tool to use on the French battlefields on the Western Front. Pattullo also wrote that, "though York joined the army when drafted he remained troubled for months, and it was only after his captain had laid his doubts by quoting biblical authority for taking up the sword that he saw his duty clearly. Once his conscience was at ease the second elder went

¹⁴³ Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 12.

in for fighting in earnest.”¹⁴⁴ Danforth gave York guidance, advice, and the gift of serenity to do his job as a soldier with a clear conscience and heart.

5. *Crossing the First Threshold*: At this stage, the potential hero decides they will face the problem or adventure presented to them. He sets off into the unknown and the real adventure of the story begins. The protagonist is fully invested in completing the quest or fixing the problem.¹⁴⁵ For York, the real adventure began when he finally chose to be a soldier with a clear conscience and to fight for his country. After meeting with his mentor, he sailed for France and became a diligent soldier. He was soon promoted to corporal, and on the morning of October 8, 1918, he was with his unit when they pursued their objective to seize the Decauville railroad by fighting around Hill 223 just north of Chatel-Chehery. York’s battalion had to cross a wide valley where the unit was taking enemy fire from three directions. According to Pattullo, York was on the far left of the battalion’s advance, with his platoon in support of the assault company on their left. The machine-gun positions enfiladed the Americans. At that point, Sergeant Harry Parsons, who commanded York’s platoon, was ordered to move them forward and cover the company’s left flank. The enemy fire was intense, so Parsons had the platoon move around the foot of a hill to find some protection. Next, Parsons directed Sergeant Bernard Early to take two squads from the platoon and find and destroy the enemy machine guns. Pattullo wrote, “that was when the real business began.”¹⁴⁶ According to Campbell, this is the time when the hero meets the threshold guardian, and “beyond them is darkness,

¹⁴⁴ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 4.

¹⁴⁵ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 12-13.

¹⁴⁶ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 71.

the unknown, and danger.”¹⁴⁷ York was now directly engaged in the very combat he had been drafted and prepared for. Beyond was the unknown of combat in a hostile environment. York had distinctly crossed the first threshold of his journey into the very heart of battle.

6. *Tests*: During this phase of the journey—after passing the threshold, the potential hero meets tests and challenges. These are usually small issues, and the protagonist begins to learn about the new world he is in and how to navigate it.¹⁴⁸ At this time in Pattullo’s story, York was with his platoon and attacking enemy German soldiers. York’s platoon began moving; it was a clear day, and as they began to fight up the hill, they were visible to the Germans along the ridges. While moving, the U.S. soldiers received fire from the machine guns on Cornay Ridge, which was behind them. Luckily, vegetation was thick, so they escaped without anyone in the patrol getting shot. At that point, the patrol set out to circle behind the gun emplacements on the other side of the hill. According to Pattullo, “The Americans went stumbling upward through the leafy jungle, bullets whipping the branches above and round them. None were hit, however, and soon they gained above the fire.”¹⁴⁹ Next, the Americans found an old, wide trench, so they climbed in and followed it. Pattullo wrote that the patrol travelled “warily in single file, now stopping to listen and make sure that no enemy lurked near, now moving with painful caution lest they be heard, the detachment penetrated upward through the dense woods and began to descend the other slope.” The Americans found no enemy

¹⁴⁷ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 77.

¹⁴⁸ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 13-14.

¹⁴⁹ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 71.

soldiers until they stumbled upon a path with fresh footprints. They followed the path, veered to the left, and after a few minutes, York and the patrol found another trail that was well travelled and full of more fresh footprints. At one point, Sergeant Early, the patrol leader, asked York which direction he thought they should go. York replied, saying they should do a right oblique and continue searching, so that is what the patrol did. They continued forward and came upon a stream where the patrol saw two German soldiers wearing arm bands with red crosses. As soon as the Germans saw the Americans, they took off running. A few of the Americans opened fire causing one of the Germans to surrender, while the other escaped and disappeared into the woods. At this point, Pattullo wrote that York said, "It looked like a battle was coming . . . so we went into skirmish order."¹⁵⁰ Throughout this phase of the fight, York met and was tested by a few small challenges that helped him to learn to navigate the new world he had entered. He was understanding the terrain and the conditions he was fighting in. York met each of these challenges and was now reaching the most dangerous part of his heroic journey. Campbell referred to this next part of the journey as entering the belly of the whale, where the hero is swallowed by the unknown and symbolically appears to have died.¹⁵¹

7. *Approach to the Inmost Cave*: At this point in the Hero's Journey, the protagonist arrives at one of the most dangerous part of his trials. It is the location of the ordeal that the hero will have to persevere though to be successful. Once the hero enters this area, he passes his second major threshold, which is referred to as the "approach."

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 90.

Often, the hero may pause momentarily to plan the next part of their ordeal and how to win.¹⁵² As Pattullo writes, at this point in the battle, York scattered out with his fellow soldiers and followed the runaway German. They immediately met 20 to 30 enemy German soldiers who were near a small hut by the stream. It looked like the officers were gathered and holding a conference, while many of the soldiers were sitting down and preparing to eat. York and the patrol quickly attacked, closing with, and firing at the Germans. A few of the Germans fired back, but they quickly threw down their weapons. The entire group, including a major who was in command, surrendered. Wasting no time, the Americans began preparing the Germans to be taken out of the woods as prisoners. But as they were getting ready, Pattullo wrote, “all hell broke loose.”¹⁵³ Just up the hill from the camp they were in, about thirty yards away, there were multiple enemy machine guns dug in to protect the area. They were facing away from the camp, but once the gunners saw what was happening below, they swung the guns around and began firing at the Americans, and even some of their own troops. According to Pattullo,

At the first blast of fire every Heinie prisoner dropped flat on his stomach and hugged the ground. The Americans followed their example. Some took refuge behind trees, others burrowed amid the underbrush; but six were killed. Sergeant Early was shot through the body; Corporal Cutting had three bullets through the left arm; Private Muzzi had a wound in the shoulder; Private Beardsley, who had an automatic, and was crouched down near Corporal York when the trouble started, crept back to a big tree for protection. On one side of him lay Private Dymowski and on the other was Private Wareing. Both were riddled with bullets—shot all to pieces.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 14.

¹⁵³ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 71.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 71, 73.

At this point in the fight, everything looked bleak, and York had reached the part of his ordeal that was the most dangerous and where he had to win. It is the point at which the hero will have to persevere to fulfill his heroic deed successfully. At this point in the story, Pattullo writes, “Nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a million would have considered the situation hopeless. The millionth man was Corp. Alvin C. York. The second elder was down on his haunches amid the brush picking off the boches as fast as he could shoot. From this moment the battle became all York’s.”¹⁵⁵ Often, heroes may pause momentarily to plan the next part of their ordeal and how to win, but York just went to work.

8. *Ordeal*: During this phase, the potential hero confronts the worst part of his journey and his greatest fear. He faces death, battles an enemy, and at the point where success is within his grasp, but he must endure his greatest struggle. During the ordeal, which is the critical moment of the story, the hero must die, or appear to die, so that they can be resurrected as a heroic figure. It is also the most important stage of the heroic ordeal.¹⁵⁶ In this part of Pattullo’s story, the Germans had killed six of the American soldiers. The sergeant commanding the detachment was wounded, along with two others, leaving only York as the senior, uninjured soldier and seven other privates. Unfortunately, each of the survivors was in an unfavorable position and was either guarding the prisoners or not in a position to fire back at the enemy. Defeat and death looked imminent, and the situation seemed hopeless. But according to Pattullo, as soon as

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 73.

¹⁵⁶ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 15-16.

the machine gun fire began, “York dropped to earth.” He happened to be in a narrow path leading toward the machine-gun emplacements. The prisoners were in front of him, and the enemy machine guns were firing down on the Americans. Luckily, York was in a good tactical position, York supposedly said, “If I’d moved I’d have been killed in a second. The Germans were what saved me. I kept up close to them, and so the fellers on the hill had to fire a little high for fear of hitting their own men. The bullets were cracking just over my head and a lot of twigs fell down.”¹⁵⁷ York was in a situation where he could be considered to have appeared to have died. At that point, according to Pattullo, “the second elder got going on his own account. Sighting as carefully as he was wont to do in the turkey matches at home in Tennessee he began potting the boches in their fox holes, and the boches who were hiding behind trees, and the boches who were firing at him from the shelter of logs. And with every shot he brought down an enemy.” As York fought back, he said, “You never heard such a clatter and racket in all your life. I couldn’t see any of our boys.”¹⁵⁸ As far as he knew, he was all alone. The thought of surrender never came to his mind; he just wanted to make the enemy give up as quickly as possible. He also remembered what his father used to tell him; he would say that if York ever got in trouble, “all I had to do was to keep cool and I’d come out.”¹⁵⁹ So, as he fired his rifle, he yelled for the Germans to surrender and come down from the hill.

¹⁵⁷ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 73.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. To reference York’s profession as a farmer, he uses the term “potting,” which is a reference to putting a plant in a pot.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 4.

After the fight, York said, “Somehow I knew I wouldn’t be killed. I’ve never thought I would be—never once from the time we started over here.” After firing through a few clips of ammunition, a German soldier threw a grenade at York, but missed, killing one of the German prisoners instead. York was able to avoid the blast and shot the advancing German. Next, an enemy officer (a lieutenant) stood up from one of the attacking machine guns with seven other soldiers and began charging down the hill at York. He was holding his pistol, and as they charged at him across twenty yards of hillside, York says that he shot the lieutenant in the stomach, “and he dropped and screamed a lot. All the boches who were hit squealed just like pigs. Then I shot the others.”¹⁶⁰ Once the firing was over and the enemy Germans saw the lieutenant had been killed, many quit firing their machine guns at the Americans, and the battle slowed down. York kept shooting, but then the captured German major came over to York and told him that if he stopped shooting, he would make the soldiers surrender. York agreed and then the Major called for his troops to give up, which they did. As they descended the hill, they joined the other prisoners, who now numbered approximately ninety. Other machine guns farther off were still firing, and York was uncertain if German reinforcements would arrive and attack the Americans again in this vulnerable state. He knew that it was crucial he get the survivors of the patrol and the prisoners back to the U.S. lines immediately. The main ordeal was over, but now York had to get back “home.” Campbell wrote that at this point, “the ease with which the adventure is here accomplished signifies that the hero

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 73.

is a superior man, a born king.”¹⁶¹ York had faced death and defeated an overwhelming force of enemy soldiers. Once he defeated the enemy and fought back from certain death, York was resurrected and was now the leader of the American patrol. He used his skill as a marksman and woodsman as well as his faith, reinforced by his mentor, to pass the ordeal that made him a hero.¹⁶²

9. *Reward*: After completing the ordeal, the hero receives a reward, and he has earned the title of “hero” by defeating his enemy/completing his trial and risking his life for his community.¹⁶³ York’s reward was threefold. First, he survived the main ordeal, which was the main battle, and made it through the fight with his life. He also stopped more Americans in his patrol from getting killed or captured. By attacking a series of machine-gun emplacements, which was the purpose of the patrol, he potentially saved the lives of many more U.S. troops in the battles to come. Second, he captured the enemy German force that had attacked him. When the battle was complete, according to Pattullo, York had “killed twenty Germans ... captured one hundred and thirty-two prisoners, including a major and three lieutenants, put thirty-five machine guns out of business, and thereby broke up an entire battalion.”¹⁶⁴ These prisoners acted as a trophy and the catalyst for York’s third reward, U.S. and foreign medals for bravery. When Pattullo was writing the article, York had already earned and been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, which is the U.S. Army’s second highest award for soldiers in combat who display

¹⁶¹ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 173.

¹⁶² Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 73.

¹⁶³ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 16-17.

¹⁶⁴ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 3.

extraordinary heroism against an enemy force. He had also been promoted to Sergeant and recommended for the Medal of Honor, the highest military decoration in the United States for valor. These honors carried great weight with the military and the American public and instantly gave him the title of hero, just by being awarded them.

10. The Road Back: At this part of the journey, the hero must now deal with the consequences of what he faced during the ordeal. He is escaping the area near the innermost cave and is often still pursued by some of the evil forces he just defeated. It is also at this point when the hero realizes that the world he journeyed to must be left behind. But there are still dangers and tests ahead for the hero that he must face before he can return home.¹⁶⁵ Once the battle was complete, York had to figure out how to lead his prisoners out of the area and return to the safety of the American lines. According to Pattullo, “After the turmoil of fighting none but a woodsman could have found his way back.”¹⁶⁶ York and his patrol—in a weakened state—were still in danger and had to escape from the enemy German lines. So, York began to lead the column of prisoners and wounded U.S. soldiers off the battlefield. He placed the German major in front of him at the beginning of the column and began to march. It was a long line that was dangerously vulnerable as they travelled around a hill and down through a valley. It was difficult to see where they were going, and after traveling a few hundred yards, they stumbled upon another German machine-gun nest. Using the major as a shield, York pointed his pistol at the enemy machine-gun crew and ordered them to surrender. Luckily, York was able to

¹⁶⁵ Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 74.

get them to abandon their position and added them to his growing number of captives. During the journey back, York captured several more machine-gun nests. One resisted, requiring York to kill another enemy soldier. Pattullo wrote that “York and his small detachment pretty well cleaned up that hill before they arrived on the other side. He says that somebody was shooting at them from behind as they went along, but without any damage.”¹⁶⁷ Once York and his column reached the far slope of the hill, they ran into a group of U.S. soldiers yelling at him to halt, ready to fire on them. York heard them yell, and he shouted back, identifying himself and notifying the soldiers about their prisoners. York then advanced, and they arrived near a dugout where the Americans had recently established a battalion command post. At this point York had made his escape from the innermost cave and survived the road back. He had been pursued by some of the evil forces he had just defeated and passed more tests along the way. York had gotten back to the U.S. lines and left the world he journeyed to, behind.

11. Resurrection: During this moment, the hero may face a second life-or-death moment. It may be similar to the death he faced in the ordeal. Once the hero completes this final task and passes the final test, it ensures that he learned from the ordeal. At this point, the hero is completely reborn and can return to the ordinary world with a new understanding of the world and a treasure that can help his community. He is now truly a hero.¹⁶⁸ According to Pattullo’s narrative, York’s resurrection happened very quickly. After returning to the U.S. lines and being told to take the prisoners farther up the line,

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey*, 17-18.

the route they traveled through the valley was long and still within view of the Germans. As York was marching to the next American site to drop off the prisoners, a German observation post on a knoll at Cornay, France, alerted German artillery about the column, which seemed to be a good target. According to Pattullo, “A few seconds, and shells began bursting close to the column. The prisoners yelled and squealed and some of them attempted to scatter. The Americans herded them back into line and York broke the whole column into a run, which was sustained until they got beyond the shelling.”¹⁶⁹ This was the final trial by combat that York endured in the *Saturday Evening Post* article. York built on his previous experience to get his prisoners to their destination without sustaining further losses. He was now completely reborn and still had a treasure he could share with his community.¹⁷⁰

12. Return with the Elixir: At this final stage, the hero returns to his ordinary world, but he needs to bring with him some form of elixir, which can be knowledge, a treasure, or a magic device. It can be as simple as a good story to tell or as significant as knowledge that the special world he returned from can be defeated. The hero must return with the elixir to remind him what he persevered through or to help the community, else he may be doomed to repeat the quest.¹⁷¹ When York completed his heroic journey, he not only brought back his awards and a new sense of pride for Southerners and Tennesseans, he brought back an even firmer faith. According to Pattullo, York claimed

¹⁶⁹ Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 74.

¹⁷⁰ After York and his patrol delivered the prisoners and were relieved of that duty, they returned to the company and continued fighting in the Meuse-Argonne.

¹⁷¹ Vogler, *The Writer's Journey*, 18-19.

to have “no regrets over the necessity which compelled him to kill so many of the enemy, but he is fortified by the knowledge that he was fighting in a sanctioned cause and so his soul is at peace.”¹⁷² Once the fighting was over, Pattullo wrote that, “the last I saw of the big fellow he had only one worry – that he might be late getting home for the April meeting. They have a week of revival every spring in Pall Mall and he wants to be on hand; but he was gassed and greatly fears that his voice will be ragged for singing.”¹⁷³ According to the Pattullo article, York would bring the elixir of renewed faith and belief in God back home to Tennessee, along with his testimony about how his faith had kept him safe and allowed him to accomplish his mission.

As detailed in the twelve steps above, Pattullo’s article narrated York’s Hero’s Journey utilizing many of the elements in Joseph Campbell’s monomyth structure. This turned Pattullo’s story from just another interesting tale, into an almost fictional tale of heroism. York was written as a mythological-type figure, almost supernatural, who followed the same heroic process as many of the great heroes across cultures and over thousands of years. Campbell explained, “mythology does not hold as its greatest hero the merely virtuous man.”¹⁷⁴ Pattullo did not write York that way, instead making him larger than life. While Pattullo was not writing by Campbell’s formula, the popular writer knew that he was engaged in writing a hero’s story in such a way that it would resonate with a national—if not a world-wide—audience.

¹⁷² Pattullo, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” 3.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 74.

¹⁷⁴ Campbell, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, 44.

Once Pattullo finished crafting his article, “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” and it was published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, it had every element needed to present York as a not just a national hero, but a near mythological or supernatural figure. It was published in a distinguished magazine, it was written by a well-known and well-respected author, and it was written in an original style whose themes transcended the American consciousness. The story also met the requirements Pattullo received from George Lorimer before returning to Europe for the second time as a correspondent. It had everything needed to be successful and garner a lot of public interest. But nobody could foresee how the public would react when the story was published, and York came home from the war.

CHAPTER 5:
SERGEANT YORK EMERGES AS A NATIONAL HERO

Yah, I was with Sergeant York that day that he took out 30 Germans single handedly, he got a lot of them, I got a few myself. We like our heroes...

--*Leatherheads* movie¹

Newspapers and magazines are making much over Corporal Alvin C. York.

--*The Journal and Tribune*²

In the later part of the Warner Bros. film, *Sergeant York*, just after York and his patrol dropped off their 132 German prisoners to an unknown U.S. officer, there is a scene in which a company of American soldiers are marching down a muddy road heading to what appears to be a rest area just after fighting the Germans. As they are slogging through the mud, a U.S. soldier riding a motorcycle drives up to the leader marching at the front of the unit and excitedly tells him, "Hey Sarge! York by himself captured 132 Germans!" The unit's leader then turns around to the man behind him and relays the story. It continues down the ranks, but it does not stay the same, becoming more embellished with each telling. Some do not believe it. But others keep passing the story on as it grows, beginning with York capturing 132 Germans alone, then an entire German division with senior officers, then it was half the German Army and a general. When the tale reached the end of the group, the story had ballooned with the last soldier

¹ *Leatherheads*, directed by George Clooney (Universal Pictures, 2008), DVD.

² "The War's Greatest Hero," [*Knoxville*] *Journal and Tribune*, April 29, 1919, 6.

being told about York, “They say he captured Hindenburg³ and the crowned prince, brought em’ all back, ya see!”⁴ The last soldier turned around to continue the tale, but there was no one behind him. The next scene cuts to two filthy American soldiers trying to clean themselves, with the original soldier who heard the news bathing his feet. The soldier behind him leans forward and says, “Say Sarge, did ya hear? York captured the Kaiser!”⁵ The sergeant looks back in shock. Both scenes are humorous in the film, but they also try to illustrate the incredible rise in York’s fame. Although these scenes are not historically accurate, there are some elements of truth in what they represent.

When York’s heroic feat was first documented, the military had originally honored and celebrated him just as it would any other Medal of Honor recipient. The press greeted the initial military reports about his heroic feats with very little fanfare or interest; York was like the more than 100 other soldiers who had earned the highest honor awarded to American men-in-arms. But when painter Joseph Cummings Chase, journalist George Pattullo, and others painted portraits in oils and words that showcased York, they provided the press and public with the living and breathing hero they had been seeking. The news spread like wildfire across the nation, prompting additional investigation into York’s background, into those aspects of his life that Americans connected with or admired, eventually filling out the portrait of the common man’s hero of the Great War.

³ General Paul von Hindenburg rose to the rank of Chief of the Great General Staff during the Great War.

⁴ *Sergeant York*, directed by Howard Hawks (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1941), Blu-ray Disk, 1080p HD.

⁵ Ibid.

It was not inevitable that York would become a well-known American hero and subsequently the spokesperson for the nation's veterans of the Great War. It took Chase and Pattullo to discover, package, and sell York's heroics in a way that promoted the hero-making process. As Pattullo himself said, "Men who do big things seldom like to talk about them, and are never fluent. This would be a useful fact to remember when next you listen to the outpourings of alleged war heroes. So many are newspaper made; the soldiers over here could explode many a bubble reputation at home."⁶ But the journalist and the painter both recognized that the self-effacing York was a genuine hero who the American people could love if they just really came to know him. His military feats were indeed notable, but when Chase and Pattullo met York—who seemingly had to be forced to tell his story—and then learned more about his background from those around him, they realized that they had truly found the hero that they themselves had been looking for. And they also knew that the American people had been yearning for that hero. In the spring of 1919, thousands of U.S. soldiers began returning home, bringing with them countless stories of heroism and bravery that sometimes found their way into local and national newspapers and magazines. Many of these articles were very celebratory of the soldiers returning home, but exaggerations of their deeds crept in, sometimes by the tale the soldier told, and other times by the exuberance of the writer. But those at home—who had been leery about this conflict across the ocean and who were now welcoming their soldiers home—soon latched onto a man and a story that reinforced their ideas about their

⁶ Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 4.

nation, their soldiers, and all that was best about themselves during a dubious international peacemaking process and an on-going overseas crisis.

The Military Announces York's Military Feats

Americans had their first opportunity to hear about York's heroics more than five months after the battle occurred in the Argonne near Chatel-Chehery on October 8, 1919. On March 21, 1919, the AEF issued a media release announcing that Alvin York had earned and been awarded the Medal of Honor, which resulted in the Associated Press wire service picking up the story. As a result, the announcement ran in numerous newspapers—primarily from the 21st to the 22nd of March. Unsurprisingly, Tennessee newspapers gave the news item the most attention, with all the major metropolitan papers picking up the story as well as some of the smaller media outlets.⁷ In this coverage, York was honored as a Tennessee citizen, and the papers ensured that it was prominently mentioned in their headlines, often running the story on the front page. However, despite the prominent placement of the articles, they were decidedly short and without color. It was mostly a republication of the AEF's press release. (see, for example, Figure 6.1) Interestingly, there were no additional, local stories to follow or provide additional information and depth to the initial articles. Reporters did not visit or interview York's family in Pall Mall. In the same newspapers, there were some stories of other local

⁷ "Tennessee Boy Awarded Medal," [*Clarksville, TN*] *Leaf-Chronicle*, March 21, 1919, 1; "Tennessean Awarded Highest Medal of Honor," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, March 22, 1919, 3; "U.S. Medal of Honor, Highest Decoration, Given to Tennessean," *Knoxville Sentinel*, March 21, 1919, 1; "Highest War Cross to Tennessee Soldier," [*Memphis*] *Commercial Appeal*, March 22, 1919, 7; "Medal of Honor for Tennessean," *Nashville Banner*, March 21, 1919, 1.

soldiers who began to return home, especially National Guardsmen, and were able to be interviewed or were writing letter to their local papers telling them about what they were doing overseas. Many of these stories came from officers or soldiers who were known in their areas before they left for the war. Apparently, Tennesseans were content to have one of their own win the nation's highest military honor, but their pride and the straightforward news had not completely piqued their curiosity. There were also five other Tennesseans from the U.S. Army who earned the nation's highest award.⁸ Two were from the same region as York in Tennessee and all of them, but one, were from East Tennessee.⁹

Other Southern states also gave the story more coverage than northern states. In this treatment, we can see those from the former Confederate States of America taking pride in their martial heritage and rejoining that narrative with that of the entire country as it celebrated its returning, victorious veterans. One Nashville newspaper wrote in an editorial, "We are proud of York; the state is proud of him, the South is proud of him, the nation is proud of him. But he is not a 'Yank,' . . . neither is he a descendant of the

⁸ It was announced, also on March 22, that Private Calvin Ward from Morristown had earned the Medal of Honor for capturing a machine-gun nest. He was originally a National Guardsmen from the celebrated Third Tennessee Regiment. (See "Tennessee Private is Given Medal of Honor," *[Memphis] News Scimitar*, March 22, 1919, 12.)

⁹ The five other Tennessee Medal of Honor recipients with the U.S. Army all started the war as Tennessee National Guardsmen and were in the 30th Division fighting with British forces during the war. Sergeant Alvin York was the only draftee and the only soldier in the 82nd Division. The other recipients were Sergeant Joseph Adkinson from Memphis, Private Calvin Ward from Morristown, First Sergeant Milo Lemert from Crossville, Sergeant James Karnes from Knoxville, and Sergeant Edward Talley from Russellville. Ward and Karnes conducted their heroics on the same day as York, while Talley, Lemert, and Adkinson performed their deeds before York. For more information see, Darrin Haas, "Tennessee Guardsmen in WWI: Medal of Honor," *Volunteer State Guard Magazine* 18, no. 1 (January 2018): 8-18.

Pilgrim fathers. He comes from the stock that fought and won the battle of King's Mountain . . . The woods of Tennessee is full of 'em."¹⁰ Indeed, the news of York's decoration was included in news articles published nationally, including in decidedly un-Southern places like New York, Nebraska, and Massachusetts.¹¹ But regardless of region, after a brief, two-week flurry, the media stopped spotlighting York.¹²



Figure 4. "Tennessee Boy Awarded Medal," *Leaf-Chronicle*, March 21, 1919, 1.

¹⁰ "Forum of the People," *Nashville Banner*, June 10, 1919, 8.

¹¹ Assessment based on search of newspapers available on www.newspapers.com, January 3, 2023.

¹² One article appeared after that time period simply listed York among a long list of others from the state: "Tennesseans Decorated for Deeds of Valor," *Nashville Banner*, March 30, 1919, 1.

Chase Helps Create a Regional Hero

Chase was determined to better introduce the Tennessee Sergeant to the American people. In April 1919, he published his own version of York's story that he had heard from the sergeant and Major General George Duncan, his division commander, who eagerly retold York's feats to the artist. Combined with the black-and-white portrait of York in his overcoat, Chase set off another round of media attention when he published his article, "Corporal York, General Pershing, and Others," in *World's Work* magazine.¹³ This is notable given that twelve of the eighteen pages of the article were full-page reprints of some of Chase's AEF portraits from France, with only one being of York. However, the title of the article tipped off the reader that there was a corporal who Chase was elevating above even the AEF commander, though there were two portraits of Pershing in the article. In the six pages of text, Chase expanded slightly from the military press release on York's heroics, adding to the story based on what Duncan had told him while sitting for his portrait. But what really caught the attention of readers was this military hero's initial identification as a conscientious objector.¹⁴ Despite the relatively small circulation of *The World's Work* (which had expanded to 140,000 readers nationwide due to its focus on the global conflict),¹⁵ Chase's story drew the attention of the other news agencies, and starting on April 12, 1919, newspapers began publishing excerpts from and abstracts of Chase's article.

¹³ Chase, "Corporal York, General Pershing, and Others," 648.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 636-55.

¹⁵ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1855-1905* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 773, 783.

The portrait artist's prose—and especially York's conscientious objector status—had for the first time prompted newspaper reporters to look beyond the Medal of Honor recommendation and into York's character and upbringing. The *Chattanooga Daily Times* ran an article on April 13th titled, "Just a 'Mommer's Boy,'" that emphasized the common aspects of this war-time hero. In addition to the title's Southern vernacular and common appeal of a boy's connection to his mother, the article opened with a quotation from Duncan, identifying York as "a tall, rawboned mountaineer, with a red face and red hair."¹⁶ The article continues to quote Chase's article and made mention of elements that both helped enshrine York as the public's war-time hero and made clear to the Chattanooga audience that he was very much like many of their rural neighbors: he was a draftee, an expert squirrel shot, and stoutly religious, and he thought it was wrong to kill.¹⁷ Other newspapers published similar excerpts based on the Chase article.¹⁸ They also published copies of York's portrait.¹⁹ This flurry of press attention was decidedly different from the earlier one. While the articles still identified York as a war hero, they now had a homespun flavor and focused more on his character than his actions.

¹⁶ "Just a 'Mommer's Boy,'" *Chattanooga Daily Times*, April 13, 1919, 30.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*; "Just a 'Mommer's Boy,'" [*Spokane, WA*] *Spokesman Review*, April 17, 1919, 4; "Just a 'Mommer's Boy,'" *Chickasha [OK] Star*, April 18, 1919, 10; "Just a 'Mommer's Boy,'" *Sunday Morning [Oregon] Observer*, April 13, 1919, 5; "A Kind of a Mommer's Boy," *Kansas City Star*, April 4, 1919, 32; "The Oracle," *Holyoke [MA] Daily Transcript*, April 9, 1919, 18; and "Tennessean's Deed was Most Remarkable Exploit of War," *Atlanta Semi-Week Journal*, April 11, 1919, 3.

¹⁹ "Brave Americans," *Fort Wayne [IN] News and Sentinel*, April 29, 1919, 2; "Brave Americans," [*Russellville, KY*] *News-Democrat*, April 26, 1919, 9; "Brave Americans," *The [Omaha] Bee*, April 30, 1919, 7; "Brave Americans," *Fort Worth [TX] Record*, April 28, 1919, 7.

In Tennessee, the publication of the *World's Work* article not only garnered press attention but also initiated steps to honor York beyond the laudatory newspaper coverage. On April 11, Tennessee's Senate adopted a resolution that recommended York be promoted to the rank of Colonel. The wording of the resolution was drawn from Chase's article and stated that York was a "boy of the mountains of East Tennessee, who entered the draft army a conscientious objector but who, after observing the brutality of the Germans, decided to fight and fought well."²⁰ This was one of the first known uses of the phrase "conscientious objector" in the press. The resolution also quoted Duncan from the *World's Work* article, declaring that York's heroism was "the greatest single exploit of the war."²¹ However, the apparent haste of the resolution led not only to a misunderstanding about how someone in the military became a colonel but also to the misidentification of York's unit—writing that he was a member of the 119th Machine Gun Battalion in the 30th Division, a unit primarily comprised of Tennessee National Guardsmen, and not the 82nd Division. Chase's article also triggered an announcement on April 28 that the faculty and executive committee of the Tennessee Polytechnic Institute in Cookeville had voted unanimously to offer York free tuition, board, and incidentals to earn a degree in any academic department he might choose. They felt that his exploits "made him the distinct hero of the war throughout this upper Cumberland section."²² The school might have imagined that York's humble roots had previously

²⁰ "Legislature Honors York," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, April 12, 1919, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² The Tennessee Polytechnic Institute in Cookeville would be later renamed Tennessee Technological University in 1965. The school is located just a little more than 55 miles from York's home in Pall Mall, Tennessee. "Offers to Educate York," *Chattanooga News*, April 28, 1919, 9.

made him unable to consider a college education. However, the institute and the residents of Cookeville might have also wanted to use the attention the Pall Mall resident was garnering to shine a spotlight on their own community, because the newspaper also noted that prominent citizens in Cookeville were also considering offering York and his mother a residence in Cookeville to make the city their new home.²³ There was also an interest in renaming Fentress county after York, or renaming Jamestown in his honor.²⁴ In this way, a strong regional interest in the Tennessean making national headlines had developed. He was slowly capturing the interest of newspapers throughout the United States, but he had not yet caught the full attention of the national audience.

There was smattering of short stories in other papers, especially the New York papers, that were preparing for and welcoming U.S. soldiers' home. The *New York Times* and *New York Herald* both published the initial announcement of York's Medal of Honor on March 22. They were brief, with very little context about who York was. The *Times* added just a little more flavor with its headline: "Congress Cites Corporal; Tennessean with Seven Men Took 132 Prisoners and Machine Guns."²⁵ This announcement is written in a way that makes it look like York led seven other men to charge a machine-gun nest and that they captured the enemy soldiers together, downplaying York's individual heroics. Nor were any human-interest elements added to the story, just that he was a Tennessean. Surprisingly, *The Yonkers Herald* repackaged a small story about the Tennessee legislature trying to promote York to Colonel. They even added that when

²³ "Offers to Educate York," *Chattanooga News*, April 28, 1919, 9.

²⁴ "York and Jimtown," *Nashville Banner*, May 16, 1919, 10.

²⁵ "Congress Cites Corporal," *New York Times*, March 22, 1919, 6.

York was in France, he “performed exploits which read like fiction.”²⁶ Two days later they published a short editorial discussing Pattullo’s *Saturday Evening Post* article highlighting the fact that York was a mountaineer from Tennessee who performed this great feat with the help of men with foreign sounding names. They proudly represented immigrants that make up America and were highlighted in the story.²⁷ Unsurprisingly, these brief accounts did not spark any additional interest from the New York press. Since the War Department was announcing awards for soldiers almost daily, these announcements were becoming a mundane occurrence meriting little public attention. Nor did the Chase article elicit any additional follow-up from the New York papers. The newspaper coverage in New York during this period and throughout the month of May was considerably less than in other parts of the country. Very little was written about him until May 22, when the newspapers reported on York’s inevitable return and the plans for his homecoming.²⁸ From the 22nd forward, just like in Tennessee, the papers covered York’s return and nearly every move he made until he arrived back in Pall Mall to be reunited with his family followed by his marriage to Gracie Williams. From York’s return to the United States forward, York was covered by numerous reporters and frantically written about as a national celebrity and a household name.

²⁶ “Legislature Would Change Corporal to Colonel,” *Yonkers [NY] Herald*, April 26, 1919, 10.

²⁷ “Americans All!” *Yonkers [NY] Herald*, April 28, 1919, 4.

²⁸ “Fog Delays Landings of Four Ships with American Troops,” *New York Tribune*, May 22, 1919, 19.

Pattullo Captures America's Heart for York

It was George Pattullo's *Saturday Evening Post* article, "The Second Elder Gives Battle" that was instrumental in making York an American hero. It took a professional writer to capture the imagination of the American public and provide a much larger platform to make York a household name. This article was the jumping off point for the subsequent media frenzy and the start of the mythicizing and herofication of Sergeant York. The way the article was written, (see chapter 4 of this dissertation) and the high national profile the *Post* provided, was the perfect platform to make York the unwitting media darling and celebrity fit for postwar America.

Famous for its Norman Rockwell covers during the First World War, the *Post*, was "the most powerful magazine in the country during World War I."²⁹ It—along with the *Literary Digest*—attracted readers throughout the Great War due its ability to send its own correspondents to the front and therefore provide war news and comment well beyond that available from the newspapers. As a result, the *Post*, which had the largest circulation of any magazine in the world, "became both a powerful and continuing social force and almost a sign and symbol of the country itself."³⁰ Therefore, war-time propaganda and other government agencies cared about what was between the covers of

²⁹ James Playsted Wood, *The Curtis Magazines* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1971), 86.

³⁰ James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States*, (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1956), 155. See also *ibid.*, 694, 696; John Tebbel, *George Horace Lorimer and The Saturday Evening Post* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 79.

the *Post*, and its large, well-established audience was primed to read about York's heroics.³¹

On April 26, 1919, the *Saturday Evening Post* released the article six weeks after Pattullo interviewed the Tennessee corporal in France. It was the first time the American public, particularly the *Post's* two million readers, were able to read York's story and see the first published photograph of him on the battlefield.³² His thick trench coat and standing in the winter snow greatly resembled the portrait made by Joseph Cummings Chase. With the publication, York became a sensation and the hero Americans had been looking for. According to Pattullo, "The story was plastered on (the) cover in (a) big way and led all else, made a tremendous sensation, and York, the former conscientious objector, became a hero overnight."³³ When discussing the York story later in life, Pattullo wrote, "What motivated me more than anything, however, was that York had done the fighting. I had merely recorded it in a fashion which made every big newspaper in America wire Lorimer for permission to run it. (Including Hearst chain, first of them all to want it.)"³⁴ Pattullo was correct, newspapers and other magazines throughout the

³¹ See also Wood, *The Curtis Magazines*, 694, 696; and John Tebbel, *George Horrace Lorimer*, 79.

³² The photograph published on the first page of "The Second Elder Gives Battle," written by George Pattullo, was originally taken by a U.S. Army Signal Corps photographer in the Argonne Forest near Cornay, France, on February 7, 1919. The photograph was taken during the investigation to award York the Medal of Honor, and it is also where he was interviewed by journalist George Pattullo. Pattullo, "The Second Elder Gives Battle," 3-4, 71-74.

³³ Letter from Pattullo to Pegler, January 17, 1958, HHPL. Pattullo writes that his article was on the cover of the *Post*, but a Normal Rockwell painting with two children and a dog adorn the cover. "The Second Elder Gives Battle" is the first and feature article of the April 26, 1919, issue beginning on page 3 and has the magazine's masthead.

³⁴ Letter from George Pattullo to James Pegler, March 23, 1960, HHPL.

United States immediately became absorbed in the tale, and interest in York crossed the nation.

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The Second Elder Gives Battle

By GEORGE PATTULLO

ALVIN C. YORK comes from a Fall Mall, Fentress County, Tennessee, and is second elder in the Church of Christ and Christian Union. The sect is opposed to any form of fighting; they are conscientious objectors. But York refused to ask exemption, went to war, and as Corporal York of Company G, 328th Infantry, killed twenty Germans on October eighth, captured one hundred and thirty-two prisoners, including a major and three lieutenants, put thirty-five machine guns out of business, and thereby broke up an entire battalion which was about to counter-attack against the Americans on Hill 235 in the Argonne sector near Chateau-Chierry.

He outfought the machine-gun battalions with his rifle and automatic pistol. There were seven other Americans present at the fight, but it was York's battle and only York's. But for him not a man of them would have come out alive except as prisoners. In my estimation it stands out as the greatest individual feat of the war, not only because of the amazing things he did that day but because of the man's deep religious convictions and scruples. For though York joined the army when drafted he remained troubled for months, and it was only after his captain had laid his doubts by quoting biblical authority for taking up the sword that he saw his duty clearly. Once his conscience was at ease the second elder went in for fighting in earnest—and he surely did one fine job.

Which is not to say that he has no regrets over the necessity which compelled him to kill so many of the enemy, but he is fortified by the knowledge that he was fighting in a justified cause and so his soul is at peace.

"What do you suppose Pastor Pile will say when he hears of your exploit?" I asked him there on the scene of his achievement.

"What can he say? What can any of them say?" he replied earnestly. "Honest is the peacemaker, isn't he? Well, there was sure some stir-up in this country!"

York is now a sergeant and has been decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross. He has also been recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor. To him said Maj. Gen. C. P. Sumnerall, in front of all the officers of the 8th Division—and "Honest John" is some soldier himself: "Corporal York, your division commander has reported to me your exceedingly gallant conduct during the operations of your division in the Meuse-Argonne Battle. I desire to express to you my pleasure and commendation for the courage, skill and gallantry which you displayed on that occasion. It is an honor to command such soldiers as you. Your conduct reflects great credit not only upon the American Army, but upon the American people. Your deeds will be recorded in the history of this great war and they will live as an inspiration not only to your comrades but to the generations that will come after us. I wish to commend you publicly and in the presence of the officers of your division."



Corporal Alvin C. York standing in the spot where he fought a machine-gun battalion. The bullets were on the steep, stony bank of him.

York stood there, unflustered, looking in his eye as one man to another. To him had been given the honor of carrying the colors that day. Never once did he do the wrong thing, though he was several times in situations about which he had received no instruction. This Tennessee mountaineer seems to do everything correctly by intuition; army officers who have been over the ground where he fought assert that no amount of military training could have improved his tactics, yet with York it was entirely the working of instinct, for until November 14, 1917, he was living on a small farm on Wolf River, five miles from the Kentucky border. On that day he joined the army at Camp Gordon, Georgia, and became No. 1,310,421.

He has always farmed or worked at blacksmithing. Possibly that is where he gets his physique, for York is a whole of a man, standing six feet, and tipping the scales at two hundred and five pounds. Once he wore a shock of red hair, now it is clipped close, as becomes a soldier, but it still flames like a bonfire. His features are not rugged, but clear cut, and his habitual expression is one of kindly humor; but whenever he is stirred to resentment his eyes contract and take on the peculiar high and piercing quality of the hawk's. I suspect that the second elder would be a bad bowler in a mile-up.

Have you ever seen a gunman of the old Southwest? A real gunman, not the loud, quarrelsome, sporting saloon haw? Well, that's York. The same rather gentle voice in ordinary conversation, with a vibrant note when he is stirred that fairly trumpet danger; he has the same gray eyes, fleeted with brown—eyes which can harden to pin points. And he has the same incurved, half-indolent confidence of manner. In his steady gaze is absolute sureness of soul.

Somewhere he didn't suggest limber for a conscientious objector, so after staking him up a while I asked a question: "York, you didn't always belong to the Church of Christ and Christian Union? Haven't you raised a little excitement now and again in your day?"

He was slow in replying, but the answer was as I expected. "Yes, I used to drink and gamble some. I went all the gait. But when I got to drinking I was kind of liable to fight, and it was like to get me into a right smart of trouble." He was silent a moment; then countered with: "A feller does a heap of things he's ashamed of later, don't he?"

I admitted it—no use in arguing facts.

"And now you neither drink nor gamble?" You don't even swear?"

The answer came like the crack of a whip. "No, sir; I play the game straight."

That was like him too. He added: "A man can't do any of those things and belong to our church. He can't just be a Christian on Sundays. He's got to live up to it all the time."

Now we were standing on the spot where he had crouched amid the brush, with machine-gun barrels showering down twigs on his head as he shot it out against an

Figure 5. Image of page 3 of George Pattullo's "The Second Elder Gives Battle," from *The Saturday Evening Post*, April 26, 1919. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Immediately after the release of the Pattullo article, newspapers were flooded with stories about Alvin York. They wrote stories quoting and extensively using Pattullo's article as a source. Almost every article following the publication of the "Second Elder Gives Battle," use it for the background information on York and what he accomplished in France.³⁵ The benign interest, which was regionally focused, became a national fervor with the public wanting to know more details about the hero, particularly who he was, where he was from, and his family. People started to crave interest in more details and information in the *Tennessean*.³⁶

In early May, a reporter from the *Nashville Banner*, named Robert Fields, visited Pall Mall, and interviewed York's mother at her cabin home to learn more about the hero

³⁵ A few examples include "How a 'C.O.' Won the DSC," *Kansas City Star*, April 28, 1919, 12; "Corporal in 82d Division Kills 20 and Captures 132," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 28, 1919, 1, 4; "The War's Greatest Hero," *[Knoxville] Journal and Tribune*, April 29, 1919, 6; "Admirable Self Restraint," *Wichita [KS] Beacon*, April 30, 1919, 12; and "Corpl. York, Real Hero," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, April 28, 1919, 4.

³⁶ With newspapers running stories about York and the state legislature passing resolutions while Cookeville was offering York a free education before the release of the *Saturday Evening Post* article, it is difficult to believe that York's family was not aware of his exploits. According to author John Perry, the first time York's mother, Mary Elizabeth York, heard about York's heroics was when Will Wright, the president of the Bank of Jamestown, showed up at her home sometime after April 26, and presented her with a copy of *The Saturday Evening Post* with "The Second Elder Gives Battle." She could not read, so Wright had to read her the article multiple times. (See Perry, *Sergeant York*, 115.) Other authors also argued that until the publication of the Pattullo article, York's family was unaware of York's heroism, as York had not told them about it. (See Lee, *Sergeant York*, 54.) York personally may not have told his family, since the letters he wrote generally took about a month to cross the Atlantic Ocean and arrive in rural Pall Mall, but Lieutenant Colonel Gonzalo Edward Buxton wrote a letter to Gracie Williams on February 26. In that letter, he wrote that York had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and had received the personal thanks from General Pershing. He also told of York's accomplishments and wanted Williams and York's mother to know of the respect he had earned from his leaders. (See *Diary of Sgt. York: 1917-1919*, (privately printed by the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation, 2011), 51-52.)

before he returned home. The *Banner* celebrated the fact that Fields was one of the first reporters to visit the hero's home. According to the newspaper, Fields "rode eighty miles on horseback in thirty hours through the wildest mountain country in Tennessee, swam two rivers and raced miles in a rattling 'flivver' to catch a train in order to let the *Banner* 'beat' the country on the best story of the year."³⁷ He wrote multiple articles that were a detailed portrait of York and his family, focusing on his rustic background and simple past living in the "rough country" in the Upper Cumberland Mountains and the Wolf River. One article, which appeared on May 8, elaborately discussed York's homeland and the difficulty traveling there.³⁸ The main article he wrote detailed York's family by interviewing York's mother and other members of his family and citizens who knew him.³⁹ A photographer also visited Pall Mall with Fields and captured the image of Pastor Pyle and York's 13-year-old brother Robert posing with York's rifle, dog, and a German helmet he had received from his brother.⁴⁰ Around the same time, the Nashville Rotary club began raising funds to provide York a fitting memorial, to host him in Nashville, and to raise money to purchase York a farm. In a just little over a week of raising funds they had already amassed 2,000 dollars from across the state.⁴¹ Articles related to the

³⁷ "Banner Gets First Story from Home of Mountain Hero," *Nashville Banner*, May 6, 1919, 1

³⁸ Robert Fields, "In Wilds of York's County," *Nashville Banner*, May 8, 1919, 1, 10.

³⁹ "Mountains Await 'Big Un's' Return," *Nashville Banner*, May 6, 1919, 1, 6; "York Greatest as Churchman," *Nashville Banner*, May 7, 1919, 1-2; "Elder York, the Tennessee Mountain Lad who Is the Great Individual Hero of the War," *St. Louis Post Dispatch Sunday Magazine*, May 18, 1919, 3, 15.

⁴⁰ "York's Church in the Mountains and his Pastor who Converted Him," *Nashville Banner*, May 7, 1919, 1.

⁴¹ "First Gifts are Received to Fund for Alvin York," *Nashville Banner*, May 8, 1919, 1; "Fund for York Now over Two Thousand," *Nashville Banner*, May 14, 1919, 16.

solicitation of funds and to announce the status of the fundraiser littered newspapers statewide. Organizations were created, like the “Alvin York Club,” and started fundraising programs like “Tag Day” to organize and donate funds to present York a farm.⁴²

During the month of May, outside of Tennessee, stories about York continued to be repeated throughout the United States using Pattullo’s article as the main source for information on the Tennessee hero.⁴³ The majority of the articles either published large sections of the Pattullo article or heavily quoted it. In the month of May, newspaper articles about York ran in every one of the 48 states and two territories in the United States, except three.⁴⁴ These articles fueled the public’s interest and curiosity in York and his family as well as interest and excitement about his impending return to New York on his way home to Tennessee. When York finally returned to the U.S. on May 22, most of the newspaper coverage shifted from talking about his heroics and story to chronicling his return and homecoming.

⁴² “‘Alvin York Club’ at Smithville,” *Knoxville Sentinel*, May 20, 1919, 3, and “Alvin York Tag Day,” *Nashville Banner*, May 6, 1919, 10. For a more detailed analysis of the fundraising and gifting to Alvin York of a home and farm, see Amy Lynch, “A Gift for Sergeant York,” *American History* 33 (December 1998): 18-24, 73; Amy Lynch, *Service above Self: A History of Nashville Rotary* (Nashville: Rotary Club of Nashville, 1995), 26-35.

⁴³ Examples include “A Farm Boy the War’s Hero,” [*Pennsylvania*] *People’s Register*, May 22, 1919, 7; “Lanky Tennessee Mountaineer, Conscientious Objector, Proves One of Greatest Heroes of World’s War,” *Chattanooga News*, May 6, 1919, 7; “How a ‘C.O.’ Won the D.S.C.” *Wellington [KS] Daily News*, May 1, 1919, 2; “The Story of Sergt. Alvin C. York, the Man Who Whipped a Battalion,” *Tucson [AZ] Citizen*, May 31, 1919, 4; “Church Elder Greatest Individual Fighter of War,” *Shelby County [MO] Herald*, May 14, 1919, 3; and “Wonderful Exploit by ‘All Americans,’” *Plainfield [NJ] Courier-News*, May 2, 1919, 11.

⁴⁴ Search data from www.newspapers.com accessed on April 15, 2023.

The newspaper coverage in New York during the month of May was much less than in Tennessee. Very little was written about him until the end of the month. The interest in the hero piqued around May 22, when the newspapers reported on York's inevitable return and the plans for his homecoming.⁴⁵ From the 22nd forward, just like in Tennessee, the papers covered York's return and nearly every move he made until he arrived back in Pall Mall to be reunited with his family. From York's return to the United States forward, York was covered by numerous reporters and written about relentlessly.

From March 22, 1919, to June 15, 1919, just short of three months, York received considerable press coverage. The time period covered the announcement of York being awarded the Medal of Honor through his return and ending with his marriage to his wife, Gracie Williams. In New York, the *Times* printed fourteen articles on York, the *Tribune* published six, and the *Herald* would publish a total of eighteen.⁴⁶ Tennessee newspapers devoted considerably more newspaper space to York. In less than three months, the six major Tennessee newspapers combined published 222 articles about York and his family. The *Nashville Banner* was the most prolific with 62 articles published.⁴⁷ Interest in him was considerable and brought on by the publication of Chase's and Pattullo's articles. But as you will see in the next chapter, York also played a big part in promoting his story and endearing the press and public to him. His actions drove the press to want to keep writing about him as well as making the public hungry for more information.

⁴⁵ "Fog Delays Landings of Four Ships with American Troops," *New York Tribune*, May 22, 1919, 19.

⁴⁶ Turner, *Sergeant Alvin C. York*, 38.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

CHAPTER 6:
SERGEANT YORK RETURNS FROM FRANCE AS A HERO

The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life.

--Joseph Campbell¹

Those New Yorkers made so much over Tennessee's war hero, Sergeant Alvin York, the first thing you know they'll be claiming that their town was named for him.

--Nashville Southern Lumberman²

In the final weeks of April and the first week of May 1919, Sergeant York and the rest of the 328th Infantry Regiment, after being overseas for roughly one year, finally prepared to depart France for the United States. The unit marched to the embarkation camp in Bordeaux, France, in late April, cleaned and packed their equipment, drilled, finalized paperwork, and prepared to sail for home. The soldiers also held talent shows, vaudeville acts, and music shows to keep themselves entertained. However, that did not always work. Sergeant York spent the time homesick and wrote, "I just sat around there in the rain and the mud doing nothing and waiting for that-thar old ship to come and take us home."³ While York and his fellow soldiers were passing the time waiting to sail back to the United States, they were unaware that in the meantime York's was becoming famous as the combination of Joseph Cummings Chase's portrait and a new story in the

¹ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 218.

² "Topics in Brief," *Literary Digest*, June 21, 1919, 18.

³ Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York*, 292.

Saturday Evening Post was offering the American people the hero they had sought from this far-away war.

York had fulfilled one the key elements of hero-making by overcoming incredible odds while fighting in France, proving the worth and importance of the U.S. soldiers in that drawn-out European conflict. He had done so at great personal cost, having had to wrestle with how to reconcile his religious beliefs with his military service as well as having to leave home and his family behind in Tennessee to travel overseas. These feats earned him the Medal of Honor and previously the Distinguished Service Cross. By the end of 1919, he would be awarded additional foreign citations like the *Medaille De Bravoure* from Montenegro, *Croce Di Guerra* from Italy, the *Medaille Militaire* from France, and the *Croix de Guerre with palm* from France.⁴ With Chase's portrait and article, but especially with George Pattullo's article, York had become a household name.

The subsequent publicity showed that the story resonated with a wide swath of American citizens, and this public would determine that York—rather than Pershing or any of the other U.S. soldiers who had served admirably and bravely in the Great War—was the people's hero of this great global conflict.⁵ Newspapers began to run editorials about his exploits, reporters visited his hometown of Pall Mall, and New York City prepared to celebrate his homecoming. (See chapter 5) York, however, was largely

⁴ King of Montenegro award citation, May 31, 1919, memo to Adjutant General of the U.S. Army about Italian Citation, July 22, 1919, Award Authorization List, date unknown, and the receipt of French Military Medal, November 3, 1919, all in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC. Alvin York was also authorized the World War I Victory Medal with clasps for St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne and the Defensive Sector.

⁵ Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 393.

unaware of the celebration's scope and the public interest that awaited him, adding to the mystique and humble appearance Pattullo portrayed in his article. The events that transpired over the next few days, how York reacted to them, and the media interest all helped and continued to endear York to the public and confirmed his status as an American hero.

York Sails for Home

York and his unit were eager to depart from France, but the logistics of moving the army across the Atlantic were complicated. On May 8th, the 328th's Regimental Headquarters departed for New York aboard the *U.S.S. Sierra*. The Regiment's 1st and 2nd Battalions, with York and his company a part of the 2nd, were set to follow on the 9th aboard the *U.S.S. Scranton*, which they would board at the American docks in Bassens. However, when York arrived at the docks, as he would write, "At last we got ready to sail. The boat done come, I'm a-telling you I was tickled. So were the boys. But when we got down to the wharf and begun to load there were so many of us the boat wouldn't hold us all."⁶ Unfortunately, when York and sixty-six of his fellow comrades with Company G arrived to board the *Scranton*, they were turned away "due to limited accommodations."⁷ They had to wait an extra day before they boarded the *U.S.S. Ohioan*, along with the regiment's Third Battalion, Supply, and Machine Gun Company. This

⁶ Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York*, 292.

⁷ Shipping statement on May 22, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC.

confusion at the docks would cause confusion with the press later as they tried to determine exactly which ship York had sailed on.

The men aboard the *Ohioan* faced a difficult journey home in their Atlantic crossing. At 2:26 p.m. on May 10th, the *Ohioan* departed France, and by that evening, York and more than 1,600 soldiers on board could no longer see land.⁸ For the next five days, the *Ohioan* weathered storms and rough seas that made for a difficult voyage for York and his comrades. York wrote that he “was right-smart sick for several days. Had to stay down part of the time in my berth and part of the time on top of deck. I sure would have liked to see some trees of those old mountains.” In his diary, he recorded that he was sick for the first four days of the voyage. During that time, York wrote that he “didn’t feel like talking or doing anything but lying down and being left tol’ably alone.”⁹ Seasickness aside, these days were some of the few remaining when York would be able to find much time alone.

As the *Ohioan* made its way across the Atlantic, news of York’s heroics spread like wildfire. Newspapers published stories based on Pattullo’s article in the *Saturday Evening Post*; these continued to expand interest in York and the exploits of his patrol.¹⁰ One of those stories was fittingly titled “Americans All!” and was published on May 10th in New Jersey—it spoke to the way that New Jerseyans embraced this Tennessean as a

⁸ Skeyhill ed., *Sergeant York*, 292.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁰ See, for example, “Corporal in 82d Division, Brilliant Exploit of Alvin C. York, Kills 20 and Captures 132,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 25, 1919, 1, 4. Also look at chapter 5 of this dissertation.

quintessential American. The article declared that York and his patrol represented “probably one of the most wonderful exploits of any small body of Americans in the war.”¹¹ Such editorials reinforced and amplified the patriotic and heroic tone of Pattullo’s article, celebrating the virtues of U.S. soldiers personified in Sergeant York as well as the heroic ideal that was meant to inspire his countrymen. The article declared, “From them [the soldiers], who did so much for America, comes the call to us to do our duty to our country.”¹² Interest in York’s story and identification with this Tennessean continued to spread.

As the curiosity about the famous sergeant intensified, reporters from around the country began to follow up on the leads provided by the Pattullo article. In the early weeks of May, Robert Fields from *Nashville Banner* traveled to rural and remote Pall Mall, Tennessee, to interview and photograph York’s family and friends. (see chapter 5 of this dissertation) He interviewed York’s mother, Pastor R. C. Pile (who had fostered York’s faith), members of the church, and even neighbors for an article. Pall Mall residents and the York family had begun to hear of his heroics from various newspaper articles, but they were certainly surprised by Alvin’s sudden celebrity. According to Fields’ article (published on May 18th), “Mountain folks up in the Wolf river county don’t know Alvin York as a hero. They’ve heard rumors to that effect, following the stories published in all the papers of America. York himself has never written home of

¹¹ “Americans All!” editorial in *South Amboy [NJ] Citizen*, May 10, 1919, 3.

¹² Ibid.

what he did.”¹³ The article therefore reinforced both York’s humility as well as his humble, rural, and religious background, home life, and upbringing. As such, the articles he wrote strengthened and reaffirmed Pattullo’s original reporting and helped add to York’s legend, as the country’s yearning for York’s return and a chance to meet the man in person approached a fever pitch.

One organization that took great interest in York’s heroics and his return to the United States was the Tennessee Society of New York. Founded in 1899 by university graduates from East Tennessee who had moved to New York City, the organization was originally a luncheon group to maintain friendship among members, as they conducted business far from home. But by 1919, it was an elite social club headquartered in New York City whose purpose was “to bring into closer social relationship former residents of the State of Tennessee, to advance their common interest, and to preserve a spirit of loyalty among them.”¹⁴ Very prominent and distinguished Tennesseans were members, and they grew to serve as a “gate-way of welcome to all Tennesseans coming to New York.”¹⁵ In the society’s privately printed history booklet, *The Tennessee Society in New York*, it was written,

Tennesseans generally are interested in one of their fellows who attains distinction. Such distinguished Tennesseans are not few, and they frequently have occasion to be in New York – returning from achievements abroad or visiting after fame gained at home. As individuals in the metropolis, former Tennessee

¹³ Robert Fields, “Alvin C. York, Hero of the 82d, and his Home,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 18, 1919, 2.

¹⁴ Constitution of the Tennessee Society of New York, box 1, folder 4, Tennessee Society in New York Collection: 1905-1949 [hereafter TSNYC], TSLA.

¹⁵ Unknown author, *The Tennessee Society in New York*, privately printed, 5, box 2, folder 10, TSNYC, TSLA.

residents can hardly give proper acclaim to these distinguished fellows. The society, however, forms a medium of bestowing fullest honors, and frequently sees that honors are paid to worthy visitors who otherwise might pass through unnoticed.¹⁶

When the society's members learned about York's heroics through the Pattullo article and the various newspaper stories and learned that he was returning to the United States through New York, they decided that they needed to welcome and celebrate York when he returned. In this way, the Tennessee Society was uniquely situated and organized to aid in the hero-making process for York.

To sufficiently prepare for a welcome-home ceremony that would suitably showcase the heroics of this Tennessee native son, Dr. James J. King, a prominent physician and the President of the Tennessee Society, contacted York while he was still in Bordeaux, France, to learn when he was returning to the United States. He replied by letter that he had not departed France yet but planned to soon and that he was neither sick nor wounded.¹⁷ After corresponding with York, King gave the task of organizing York's reception to E. A. Kellogg, the chair of the Society's Entertainment Committee and a veteran of the Spanish-American War. York would be the guest of honor at a banquet that would also honor other Tennesseans who had also distinguished themselves during the war. Kellogg requested that the U.S. Army allow York a furlough to report to the Waldorf Astoria Hotel upon arriving in New York, where he had arranged for York's

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Note from Dispatch Office, Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, New Jersey, May 6, 1919, in York Service Record, NPRC.

room and board.¹⁸ Kellogg also wrote letters to the U.S. Army Adjutant General in Washington, D.C., and Major General David Shanks, the senior officer at the port of Hoboken, New Jersey, to seek approval for York to attend a banquet once he arrived in the United States. The requests caused the U.S. Army staff to begin seeking approval but also to determine when and where York would be arriving home. There was confusion in the Hoboken Troop Movement Office about which ship he had boarded in France, given that the 2nd Battalion had been divided between two ships. However, after a few rounds of correspondence, the Port of Embarkation at Hoboken learned which ship York boarded and knew he would be arriving on the 22nd aboard the *Ohioan* instead of the *Scranton*.¹⁹

Although the military had recognized York as a hero, it was reluctant to recognize one soldier above the others. Shanks was not keen on authorizing York a furlough. On May 5, he responded to Kellogg's request: "We find it is always a dangerous thing to give special favors to men because they are quoted as precedents in other applications. If a man finds that someone else has had a privilege, he is sure to feel a grievance if he is denied that privilege himself." Nonetheless, Shanks had decided that York would undergo the required medical examinations as soon as he arrived in the United States and had also granted him a 48-hour pass to attend the banquet.²⁰ The latter was not Shanks'

¹⁸ Letter from Major General David C. Shanks to E. A. Kellogg, May 5, 1919, in York Service Record, NPRC.

¹⁹ See letter from James Peale to E. A. Kellogg, May 6, 1919, telegram from E. A. Kellogg to War Department, May 19, 1919, letter from Kerr to Port of Embarkation, May 21, 1919, and letter from unknown author to Captain Goodale, May 6, 1919, all in York Service Record, NPRC.

²⁰ Letter from Major General David C. Shanks to E. A. Kellogg, May 5, 1919, in York Service Record, NPRC.

preference, but the decision was made by the Adjutant General's office, which had begun receiving letters and garnering interest in York's homecoming.²¹ The senior Army officials better understood the public relations benefit of allowing York special treatment and letting him meet with senior officials. The involvement of senior Army leadership in the homecoming preparations demonstrated both York's rising status as well as the Army's recognition of how this celebration could be an excellent opportunity to build the reputation and status of the armed forces.

The Tennessee Society appreciated the Army's approval but believed that 48 hours was an insufficient celebration period, especially as its plans had extended beyond the celebratory banquet in New York City to include a visit to the nation's capital. Influential Tennesseans in both cities had requested to meet the Volunteer State's increasingly prominent fellow citizen. The public profile of the banquet had also grown, with a public announcement being published in the *New York Tribune* on May 10th.²² Shanks, however, was not to be persuaded by the Tennessee Society.

However, at this point, a very influential Tennessean intervened to elevate and celebrate the state's newest hero. Peter Harris, the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army, overruled Shanks when U.S. Representative Cordell Hull (D-TN), who sat on the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, asked about the furlough and the

²¹ Telegram transcript from the Office of the Adjutant General, Peter Harris, to Commanding General, Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, New Jersey, May 5, 1919, in York Service Record, NPRC.

²² Announcement is in the "Briefs" section of the *New York Tribune*, May 10, 1919, 24.

homecoming preparations.²³ As a result, on May 15th, Shanks extended York's furlough from two days to five days so he could visit the U.S. Capitol before going to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, to be officially discharged from the U.S. Army.²⁴ News traveled fast, and on the same day as the leave was approved, York received a wire at sea to make him aware that he was going to be participating in a reception when he docked.²⁵ The Tennessee Society also let the public know that they were planning to welcome the hero home where he will be the guest of honor at a dinner once he arrives in New York.²⁶

York, however, as a humble man who was yearning for dry land and especially for his family in Tennessee, reacted to the news by writing in his diary that the formal reception in New York City had him worried and that if he could, he would have just gotten off the boat and walked home.²⁷ While prominent citizens and military leaders prepared for York's return, he was recovering from sea sickness, especially as the seas calmed after a storm it endured on the 19th. On Sunday, he participated in church service, and then after more than twelve days at sea, the *Ohioan* arrived in the port of New York. As the vessel sailed into the harbor, York wrote that he "stood there in the front of the ship as we steamed up the harbor and when we passed the Statue of Liberty I sorter looked her in the eyes and kinder understood what the doughboy meant when he said:

²³ Memorandum from the Adjutant General of the Army to Major General David C. Shanks, May 15, 1919, in York Service Record, NPRC.

²⁴ U.S. Army Memorandum from the Office of the Adjutant General of the Army, Peter Harris, to Commanding General, Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, New Jersey, May 15, 1919, in York Service Record, NPRC.

²⁵ Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York*, 294.

²⁶ "Sergeant York to be Honored," *Knoxville Sentinel*, May 13, 1919, 2.

²⁷ Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York*, 294.

‘Take a look at me, Old Girl. Take a good look at me, because whenever you want to see me again you will have to turn around.’”²⁸ In this way, York reflected the attitude of many of the returning soldiers who, having survived serving in a war overseas fully intended to return home and stay there. But while York was thinking about himself as just one of so many doughboys—33,000 of whom were disembarking in the greater New York City area that day—others were waiting to single out the sergeant from Tennessee, elevating him above his peers.²⁹

A Hero’s Welcome

The hero’s welcome planned by the Tennessee Society genuinely stunned York, and his bashfulness helped cement him as the people’s hero. York knew that a committee from the Tennessee society was going to meet him when he arrived, but he was surprised by the “most awful fuss,” they made over him.³⁰ As the *Ohioan* sailed toward the dock in Hoboken on May 22nd, a tugboat carrying more than fifty Tennesseans from the Society began circling the ship with the Volunteer State delegates shouting, “York! York! We Want York!”³¹ Although he knew that there would be a welcoming party organized by the Tennessee Society, this certainly surprised him, as did the welcome party on the pier

²⁸ Ibid., 295.

²⁹ “33,633 Soldiers Due in Today, Leviathan and Imperator among Transport Arrivals, Alvin C. York Expected, Conscientious Objector Said to Have Made Great Record,” *Brooklyn [NY] Daily Times*, May 22, 1919, 1.

³⁰ Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York*, 295.

³¹ “Hero who Shot 25 of Foe Quails at Welcome Ordeal,” [*New York City*] *Evening World*, May 22, 1919, 1.

that included numerous society members, reporters, photographers, and even camera men for the motion pictures.³² As the boat pulled up to the dock, York could see people on the pier, and he decided that he was not ready for such attention.

York's reluctance did not deter the ardor and determination of those greeting him. Once the ship docked, the welcoming committee was escorted aboard the *Ohioan* to meet York and welcome him home. According to an accompanying reporter from *The Evening World* (a New York City newspaper), after the welcoming committee climbed aboard, York could not be found. Some of the officers and soldiers volunteered to locate him but were unsuccessful. After twenty minutes of searching, York was eventually found locked in a stateroom and was ordered to come out. After another five minutes of coaxing, York finally met his welcoming committee.³³ He said that he was "plumb scared to death," by all the attention directed at him.³⁴ The committee was excited to finally meet their hero but were a little shocked by his appearance. He wasn't wearing any of his medals. All he had adorning his uniform was a small chain across his shoulder attached to a whistle, which he was required to have because he was a sergeant. One of the Tennesseans asked where his medals were and York replied that they were in his pocket, he found them embarrassing and didn't want to show them off. After some coaxing from the welcoming committee saying that, "wearing them would reflect glory on the grand old State of Tennessee and loyal Tennesseans everywhere," York reluctantly pinned them to his

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 1, 16.

³⁴ "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," *New York Times*, May 23, 1919, 15.

chest.³⁵ After shaking more hands and talking with members of the Tennessee Society, the committee led York through the delousing station on board the ship and then to the upper decks of the vessel where York fielded questions from reporters, posed for photographs, and was filmed for newsreels.³⁶ According to the *Literary Digest*,

For a hectic half-hour this Tennessee hill-country blacksmith was the vortex of a swarm of photographers, reports, movie-camera men, and members of the reception committee, all of these last fighting for the privilege of carrying some part of the dunnage that Sergeant York bore on his flat shoulders for many a weary mile in the French mud.³⁷

Once the questions were asked and the photographs were taken, the entourage made their way off the ship and to the pier.³⁸

York's fellow soldiers, the men from the 328th Infantry, cheered him as one of their own, even as he was being elevated to hero status. The soldiers were not fully aware of the public's interest in York, but they would soon learn. When interviewed by the press, one of them said, "Not once, since he received the highest military honor bestowed by our government, has he shown any disposition to regard his exploit as important."³⁹ This was consistent with York's own statements to the bewildering range of press that he confronted. When being interviewed by the *New York Times*, the Pall Mall native stated, "I don't see why people make such a fuss over me, I want to go home as soon as I can to

³⁵ "Sergt. York Upsets Old Notions of a Hero's Looks and Conduct," [*New York Sun*, June 1, 1919, 3.

³⁶ "Hero who Shot 25 of Foe Quails at Welcome Ordeal," 1, 16.

³⁷ "Conscience Plus Red Hair are Bad for Germans," *Literary Digest* 61, no. 11 (June 14, 1919): 42.

³⁸ "Hero who Shot 25 of Foe Quails at Welcome Ordeal," 1, 16.

³⁹ "Give Great Ovation to Sergeant York," 15.

see my girl.” Even with all the adulation, York’s actions and statements continued to support the ideas the public had about the Tennessean. He mentioned that he was considering entering the ministry after he had an opportunity to recover from his overseas war-time experience: “It was impossible for a man to go through what we did without the help of God. I feel it was through Him that I accomplished what I did.”⁴⁰ York’s evident embarrassment at the attention - “blushing until his face was almost as red as his hair,” his reliance on his Creator, and his ardent desire to return home all further endeared the Tennessee sergeant to the public. As a result, York “found it impossible to break through the crowd which surrounded him,” despite his efforts to duck out of the limelight.⁴¹ The descendent of Daniel Boone—the sharp-shooting, pious, humble, man from rural Tennessee—that Pattullo had sketched in his *Saturday Evening Post* article was living up to all of the hype, reinforcing and galvanizing all of the elements of mythmaking and ironically deepening the public’s interest in him.

We can only imagine how the bashful York must have responded to all the attention, pomp, and circumstance that animated the next five days, which surely exceeded any of the ideas he might have imagined when he learned at sea that he would be publicly welcomed. For the next few days, he was honored as “no other soldier of the Great War has been honored, and as no other American soldier or General ... is likely to be honored.”⁴² As his new entourage were off the ship, he learned from King that his

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Sergt. York Upsets Old Notions of a Hero’s Looks and Conduct,” [*New York Sun*, June 1, 1919, 3.

furlough had been extended five days long and that he would be the guest of the society for the duration. He was loaded into a convertible adorned with Allied and Tennessee flags and then made his way to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. Of the trip, York wrote in his diary,

They drove through the streets in an open car; and the streets were so crowded we could only go slow. It seemed as most everybody knowed me. They threwed a most awful lot of paper and ticker tape and confetti out of the windows of those big skyscrapers. I wondered what it was at first. It looked like a blizzard. I didn't understand that it was for me until they told me.⁴³

When York arrived at the hotel, he was given a suite next to the one reserved for only the President of the United States. E. A. Kellogg escorted him to the room, which included a photograph of York's mother in a silver frame, to make him feel more at home in the alien surroundings.⁴⁴ After a short rest, he was taken to see some of the popular sites around the city before returning to the hotel to prepare for dinner.⁴⁵

Such a grand event would have been even more overwhelming if York had not had the opportunity to share it with some familiar faces—Joseph Cummings Chase (who had painted his portrait in France) and Major General George Duncan, York's Division commander.⁴⁶ That evening, Sergeant York was the guest of honor at a banquet with one thousand invited guests. York sat at the head table next to James King, the President of the Tennessee Society who served as toastmaster. Other dignitaries at the head table

⁴³ Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York*, 296.

⁴⁴ "Conscience Plus Red Hair are Bad for Germans," 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; unknown author, *The Tennessee Society in New York*, privately printed, 5, box 2, folder 10, TSNYC, TSLA.

included Rear Admiral Albert N. Gleaves, a Tennessean who commanded the cruiser and transport force in war; Paul Cravath, a Tennessean who led the New York Bar; and Tennessee's powerful U.S. Representative Cordell Hull.⁴⁷ Hull—who had been born just sixteen miles from Pall Mall, in Olympus, Tennessee—best understood York's background and anticipated how uncomfortable the shy sergeant would likely be at the gala, so the Congressman asked York who he wanted to sit next to him at the dinner and had brought Chase along with him.⁴⁸ York asked to have Chase sit next at the head table with him. Despite the energetic crowd and the speeches made in York's honor, the sergeant focused on the man who had experienced the hardships of France and who had admired the bravery and heroism of the common soldiers there. Chase recalled that, unlike the celebratory crowd surrounding them, we “were not boisterous; we were remembering.”⁴⁹

Among the many speeches, York likely connected most directly with that of his former division commander, a man who knew him and who had the utmost respect for the bravery and work of regular soldiers like York. Duncan was the most vocal in praising York and the society for its attention to the sergeant: “I hope your unprecedented policy of banqueting a non-commissioned officer will be forever followed and honor

⁴⁷ Congressman Cordell Hull (D-TN) championed York throughout his entire return to the United States and in his later life. On May 22, 1919, Hull wrote to Newton Baker, the Secretary of War, requesting that the War Department consider that “prior to his discharge, Sergeant York be given the greatest increase in rank at all consistent or permissible under any military law now in existence.” (See York Service Record, NPRC.)

⁴⁸ Chase, *Face Value*, 99.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

done to the man who carries the gun—the man who goes over the top.”⁵⁰ The Major General recognized the bravery needed to leave the relative safety of the World War I trenches and rush across “no man’s land.” York exemplified that courage and the accomplishments of the regular soldier, who the Tennessee Society was recognizing, and Duncan praised it for this, despite York’s discomfort at the high society banquet. His first day back in the United States had been long, and York looked forward to resting in one of the two beds in his suite.

York’s second day in the nation’s biggest city continued to be larger than life. He toured the city, but first, Hull and King took their hero to the dentist to take care of a toothache. York wrote, “I hiked a-plenty all over that old city. So you see I was still hiking. I done more of that when I was in the Army than anything else.”⁵¹ It must have stunned York to have the New York Stock Exchange suspend trading in order to recognize him. Afterwards, he visited some prominent people and then went to the top of the Woolworth’s Building followed by another reception and dinner.⁵² After his meal, the Congressman took York on a midnight train ride to Washington, D.C., where he would be a guest at the Cochrane Hotel.⁵³

The next day, the 24th, York visited with the officials who had first declared him a hero by awarding him the Medal of Honor. He and Hull visited the War Department to

⁵⁰ “Conscience Plus Red Hair are Bad for Germans,” 44.

⁵¹ Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York*, 297.

⁵² “Big Dinner Closes Busy Day for York,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1919, 2.

⁵³ “Tennessee War Hero Greeted by Baker after New York Ovation,” [*Memphis*] *News Scimitar*, May 24, 1919, 1.

meet Secretary Newton Baker and Peter Harris, the Army Adjutant General who had intervened to get York his furlough. The famous sergeant then visited Congress where the House paused its discussion on railroad legislation to honor and cheer York who stood in the gallery and saluted back.⁵⁴ After the applause and being escorted to the House floor by Hull, York met and talked with the members of Congress and continued his tour of Washington. The next day, he took a train back to New York City where he continued his whirlwind tour.

On the 26th, York enjoyed his final full day in the city. He started the morning with a drive through Central Park and then he visited Grant's Tomb. Following the tour, he was then the guest at another luncheon hosted by the Tennessee Society followed by York being able to "achieve the desire uppermost in his heart since landing at Hoboken of seeing the New York subway system."⁵⁵ Following lunch, the president of the Interborough Rapid Transit Company, Theodore Shontz, met York at Grand Central Station in the *Mineola*, his private subway car. Shontz, along with other experts and key leaders from the subway, gave York and other members of the Tennessee Society a full tour of the subway system. Following his ride in a subway car, York ended the day with a musical revue at the Winter Garden.⁵⁶

By the morning of the 27th, York was back at Camp Merritt, having completed his five-day furlough.⁵⁷ He rejoined some of the soldiers from the 82nd Division and was

⁵⁴ "Yank who Beat Back Whole Foe Battalion Is Cheered by House," *Washington Times*, May 24, 1919, 1.

⁵⁵ "York Sees Subway from Private Car," *New York Times*, May 27, 1919, 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ "Sgt. York Kept Travels Secret," *Nashville Banner*, May 27, 1919, 7.

glad to be back with his combat buddies. Before going back to Camp Merritt, he graciously said to “tell the folks in New York I’m glad I visited them. I sure had a fine time. The Tennessee Society certainly did everything possible for me from the time I landed.”⁵⁸ It had been a whirlwind experience for York while also engaging the public and various journalists with his southern charm. Boyden Sparkes, a reporter for the *New York Tribune*, wrote that “Sergeant York conquered New York with less effort and as few words as he employed in killing twenty-five Germans and capturing 132 others.”⁵⁹ Numerous stories about York’s experiences visiting New York and Washington and about the public’s reaction to him ran in the city papers and were reprinted in Tennessee and throughout the United States. He had arrived in New York and gave the people what they wanted to see, even though it was not always what they expected. Herbert Asbury, writing for *The Sun*, wrote,

When Sergeant York reached New York he didn’t act at all like a hero is popularly supposed to act. Nobody in the world, accustomed as the world is to heroes who take themselves seriously and are always engaged in the proper performance of what they conceive to be their duty as heroes, would have taken the Sergeant for a hero. He isn’t at all a distinguished and imposing figure.⁶⁰

York was humble, pious, and had eyes that “twinkle merrily instead of having in them that stern and forbidding and brooding look that one always associates with the eyes of heroes.”⁶¹ He avoided giving speeches, turned down offers and gifts, and kept quiet about

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “With Sergeant York as He Mops up New York,” *New York Tribune*, June 1, 1919, 3.

⁶⁰ “Sergt. York Upsets Old Notions of a Hero’s Looks and Conduct,” *The [New York] Sun*, June 1, 1919, 3.

⁶¹ Ibid.

his exploits, answering questions politely but very briefly.⁶² One time, he answered the question of what he did on the battlefield with an “Aw, shucks. I didn’t do nothing much.”⁶³ Asbury also wrote that,

No more modest hero ever entered the portals of New York than Sergeant York. Honors were paid to him that were enough to turn the head of almost any man, but Sergeant York accepted them all with the utmost calm, not in the sense that he seemed to think they were due him, but just because he couldn’t get out of accepting them, and so as a good soldier he did it with just as little fuss as possible.⁶⁴

After five days of touring New York and Washington, York was beyond ready to return to Tennessee. But the time in New York had not changed him. Asbury wrote that, “at the end of five days of that (honored in New York and Washington) he was still Sergeant Alvin C. York, wearing the same size hat and just as modest and self-effacing as he was when he stepped from the gangplank of the transport.”⁶⁵ York had given the public in New York City and Washington D.C. the very hero they wanted and needed. His demeanor and actions reflected and reinforced what Pattullo and Chase had written about him.

⁶² When York returned from France, he was inundated with business offers. He was asked to represent companies, perform in vaudeville, sell the rights to make a movie about him, and endorse products, and he was even asked to sire a baby. During the first few days in New York, he received over \$50,000 worth of endorsements that he turned down. (See Birdwell, “Alvin Cullum York,” 336.)

⁶³ “Sergt. York Upsets Old Notions of a Hero’s Looks and Conduct,” 3.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

York Returns Home

At some point, very late on the 27th or the next day, York left Camp Merritt by train headed to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, which is just south of Chattanooga, Tennessee, to be discharged from the U.S. Army. The national hero was finally headed home, and the people of Tennessee were excited to see him. Around 8 a.m. on May 29th, York's train arrived in Knoxville and stopped at the Southern railway passenger station. With just a ten-minute layover for exchanging passengers before continuing to Chattanooga, York did not want to leave his Pullman sleeper car. But a large crowd had gathered outside wanting to see him. When a Red Cross worker asked him to meet all the well-wishers who had come to the station to meet him, he stepped onto the platform of his train car to meet with the crowd.⁶⁶ One citizen, like many before him and many after him, asked York how he had accomplished the remarkable feat that had won him so much fame. The sergeant responded, "Well, the main thing was to keep cool and not get excited."⁶⁷ The response mirrored his statement in Pattullo's article in the *Saturday Evening Post*. After the brief stop, York continued to his next stop in Chattanooga where another crowd awaited his arrival.

Around 10:50 a.m., York arrived at the Terminal station in Chattanooga to a massive reception. City officials, citizens, and Brigadier General W. S. Scott, the commander of Fort Oglethorpe, were there to greet York, who received flowers and the

⁶⁶ "Two Big Heroes of War Here as Visitors Today," *Knoxville Sentinel*, May 29, 1919, 1.

⁶⁷ "Knoxville Turns out to Greet Hero at Early Morning Hour," *Chattanooga News*, May 29, 1919, 2.

cheers of the crowd. Scott chose to meet the sergeant and escort the hero during his entire time in the city. Also, part of the welcoming party was the Chattanooga Mayor, Jesse Littleton, as well as members of the Kiwanis Club, the Rotarians, the retail merchant association, Mountain City Club, and many other civic organizations who had organized the welcoming committee.⁶⁸ Next, York was taken to Hotel Patten where he received a shave, haircut, and manicure. He was also gifted a newly tailored uniform, and a local jeweler opened his shop to engrave York's name on his Medal of Honor. Once York had cleaned up, Brigadier General Scott escorted him to a luncheon with the Rotarians attended by three hundred other guests. During the meal, York was made an honorary member of the Chattanooga club, and he was given a gift to present to his mother when he returned to Pall Mall. After lunch, York was a special guest at the Spring festival held at Warner Park, where he rode a roller coaster, threw baseballs, and enjoyed the festivities. By 5 p.m., York was finally escorted to Fort Oglethorpe, the reason he was Chattanooga, where the Army gave him special treatment by expediting a final physical and completing his discharge in just a few minutes. At that point, after roughly eighteen months in uniform, York was no longer a member of the U.S. Army. Once his paperwork was complete, he returned to the Andrew Jackson suite at Hotel Patten, where he was staying the night, and got ready for dinner where he was again the guest of honor. After that was finished, he went to sleep after a long day and rested up for an early-morning

⁶⁸ "Whole City Unites in Greeting Hero," *Chattanooga News*, May 29, 1919, 2.

train ride home.⁶⁹ The city had done its best to provide York a welcome-home celebration on par with New York City and fitting for its heroic son.

While York was traveling home and being feted in the cities he was passing through, the U.S. Army was trying to deal with issues that kept arising with York's celebrity, some of which it had created itself. First, the U.S. Army learned that York desired to have his Army-issued pistol returned to him, so he could keep it as a souvenir. While in Chattanooga, many of the local officials heard York say he would like to have it, so they sent Tennessee's U.S. Senator, Kenneth McKellar, a telegram to see if the weapon could be recovered and returned.⁷⁰ The Senator supported the idea and forwarded it with his endorsement to the War Department. Secretary of War Newton Baker immediately authorized the U.S. Army to locate and return the pistol to York, even though "there are important reasons why government arms should not be distributed among individuals, but the case of Sergeant York is unique as concerns the combination of battle prowess and subsequent national recognition of fame."⁷¹ The U.S. Army attempted to locate the handgun, but the task proved incredibly difficult. When the weapons had been collected in France, there were no records kept of the weapon's serial

⁶⁹ "York's Record of One Day as Guest of Chattanooga," [*Chattanooga*] *Daily Times*, May 30, 1919, 5; "Chattanooga Opens Arms to Alvin York, of Argonne," [*Chattanooga*] *Daily Times*, May 30, 1919, 5; "Alvin York Comes to Oglethorpe for His Final Release from Army," *Chattanooga News*, May 29, 1919, 1.

⁷⁰ "York's Record of One Day as Guest of Chattanooga"; transcript of letter from John Lovell to Senator Kenneth McKellar, June 29, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC.

⁷¹ Letter from Major General Henry Jervy, Assistant to the Chief of Staff, to Senator Kenneth McKellar, June 24, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC.

numbers. Now there were 65,000 handguns in storage, and limited manpower to conduct a detailed search as the war-time army demobilized. Although the Army instructed those soldiers responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of the weapons to turn the pistol over when it was found, it was never located.⁷²

Next, the U.S. Army recruiting office in Knoxville wanted to “make [a] serious effort” to offer York a position as a recruiter with either full- or part-time work.⁷³ The office staff had sought to have the celebrity sergeant stop in Knoxville for the day to meet with the recruiting officer while he was heading to Oglethorpe, but the Army was not able to coordinate it quickly enough. The Knoxville office offered York the position and continued to do so finally giving up on June 9th.⁷⁴ York was more interested in going home to his mother and getting married than recruiting soldiers and doing publicity for the Army. Lastly, the War Department, with the full support of Representative Cordell Hull, tried to offer York a commission as an infantry Second Lieutenant in the Reserve Corps, with an inactive duty status. But the department found it difficult to get York to respond to the offer, which he eventually declined.⁷⁵

⁷² Letter from Major General Henry Jervy, Assistant to the Chief of Staff, to Senator Kenneth McKellar, July 18, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC.

⁷³ Index sheet from Knoxville Recruiting Officer, June 2, 1919, letter from Peter Harris, Office of the Adjutant General, to Captain Edmund Hackett, U.S. Recruiting Publicity Bureau, May 27, 1919, and telegram from Lythe to War Department, May 28, 1919, all in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC.

⁷⁴ Letter from Peter Harris, Office of the Adjutant General, to Knoxville Army Recruiting Officer, June 9, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC.

⁷⁵ Letter from Major General Henry Jervy, Assistant to the Chief of Staff, to Representative Cordell Hull, June 26, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC.

The Army was also fielding requests from various people and departments that sought York's support or wanted to honor the famous soldier. For example, the chairman of the War Stamps Committee, John Skain, attempted to have York stop in Lexington, Kentucky, before heading home to help sell war stamps for about two days—a request that was not acted upon.⁷⁶ Such requests continued to reach the War Department for decades.

At approximately 5 a.m. on the 30th, Alvin York departed Chattanooga on the last leg of his journey home.⁷⁷ He did not get very far. A few hours later, by 8 a.m., his train was met at the Spring City train station by the Mayor of Rockwood and another crowd of citizens and officials. From there, the mayor took York by car to Rockwood where he had breakfast at Hotel Mourfield before visiting and giving a short speech to the students at Rockwood High School. Next, York was ushered by car to Harriman, where he visited with their mayor at Harriman City Hall for a welcome-home ceremony followed by a meal hosted by the Rotary Club.⁷⁸ The Rockwood mayor had wired York the day before and asked him to stop in Rockwood between trains for the reception, and luckily, York was able to accommodate the stop.⁷⁹ Next, York was rushed to Kingston for a similar

⁷⁶ Telegram from John Skain, Chairman of the War Stamps Committee, to Major General George Duncan, 82nd Division Commander, May 28, 1919, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC.

⁷⁷ "Aged Mother Welcomes York," *[Knoxville] Journal and Tribune*, May 21, 1919, 5.

⁷⁸ "Harriman Tenders Sergt. York Reception," *[Knoxville] Journal and Tribune*, May 21, 1919, 5.

⁷⁹ "Chattanooga Opens Arms to Alvin York, of Argonne," 5.

visit and then he was ushered back to Rockwood where he was the guest of honor at a luncheon with local Union and Confederate veterans.

Being from Tennessee, York represented the Christian southern warrior and was from the part of the state with a strong Confederate heritage. When York had first joined the U.S. Army he grappled with his Christian beliefs, but his officers understood his concerns and “through their knowledge of the South and the South’s people, and the curious characteristics of the religious zealots of the Southern mountains, York’s officers saved for the American army the man who later become its greatest hero.”⁸⁰ York was unabashedly Southern and was the living embodiment of the southern stereotype. But his beliefs changed long before he attended a luncheon with Confederate and Union veterans.

According to Herbert Asbury, he wrote,

Since he [York] went to war and about the world and saw things his feelings toward the North and the people of the North have undergone a decided change. In many sections of the South there is still the same bitter prejudice against the Yankee and the land of the Yankee that there was during and immediately after the civil war. This is particularly true of the mountain sections, and probably York carried his share of that prejudice to camp. “But I fought side to side and back to back with Northern boys,” the sergeant said, “and I know they are good fighters, and I am right sure that a lot of them are my good friends.”⁸¹

After the meal, York and the veterans posed for a photograph before saying good-bye to the Civil War veterans. During this entire tour, York was accompanied by an extensive entourage, but he also met up with Private Thomas Wittenburg on the train to Rockwood, an old friend from the 82nd Division, who accompanied him for most of the day.⁸² After

⁸⁰ “Sergt. York Upsets Old Notions of a Hero’s Looks and Conduct,” 3.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² “Alvin York is Feted by People at Rockwood,” *Chattanooga Daily Times*, June 1, 1919, 4.

a fast and furious morning, York and his friend boarded the Tennessee Central train and departed for Crossville.

Around 2:15 p.m. on the 30th, York's train pulled into the Crossville train station where more than 350 local citizens met and welcomed him home. The town's mayor, E. G. Tolitt, and a delegation of prominent citizens from Fentress County were also there waiting to celebrate York's return. When he arrived, York was escorted from the train to the south end of the depot platform to meet with all of his visitors.⁸³ During the welcome, York said, "I am certainly a happy kid to be back among my people in the mountain region where I was born and raised."⁸⁴ After an hour-long celebration at the station, Attorney J. Tom Wheeler and Judge Walt R. Case of Jamestown—and the rest of the Fentress County delegation—escorted their native son to six waiting cars. They were in a hurry to get York to Jamestown but made a quick stop at the W. F. Banby store for soft drinks before beginning the fifty-mile road trip. The route through the rugged mountain country took about four hours to complete. Once the six-vehicle convoy arrived in Jamestown, York was taken to the Mark Twain Hotel where he greeted family, friends, and neighbors, but most importantly, his mother, who had made the trip from Pall Mall to meet him.⁸⁵ After reuniting with his mother and a quick meal, they continued in the vehicles to York's cabin in Pall Mall. According to the *New York Times*,

Few cars attempt the thirteen miles over the treacherous trails leading to the Forks and the hero, accompanied by the neighbors who had heard the news in Pall Mall,

⁸³ "Greatest War Hero Here," *Crossville [TN] Chronicle*, June 4, 1919, 1.

⁸⁴ "Aged Mother Welcomes York," 5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; "Greatest War Hero Here," 1; "Sergt. York Home, His Girl Says 'Yes,'" *New York Times*, June 1, 1919, 25; Lee, *Sergeant York*, 61.

rode down the trail in their rattling rigs behind sure-footed mules. At every house along the stony road that wound over gulleys [sic] and around giant beeches, neighbors ran out to greet the man who was returning to them.⁸⁶

It was well after dark when the procession of vehicles and men on horses finally made it to the end of the trail in Pall Mall. When they arrived at York's home, Pastor Pile, York's brothers and sisters, and other neighbors and family members were waiting on him. After another and final homecoming, York talked in detail to Pastor Pile as the crowd left him for the night at home with his family.⁸⁷

Once Pastor Pile and Alvin York finished talking, Pile left the cabin, but York's night did not finish there. Now that everyone was gone and he was finally alone, York walked to Gracie Williams' house to see if she was still interested in marrying him. When he arrived, they both walked outside in the dark and discussed their future and renewed their vows to love one another. Gracie agreed to marry York as soon as they could make the arrangements.⁸⁸ They did not have to wait long. A little more than a week later, Alvin York and Gracie were married in Pall Mall on Saturday, June 7th.⁸⁹ Held on a hillside near York's home just above the Pall Mall store, a large boulder served as the platform where the ceremony was complete and presided over by Tennessee Governor Albert Roberts.⁹⁰ Hundreds of people drove to Pall Mall to witness the ceremony where "Sergeant York looked every bit the picture of the hero that he is."⁹¹ Following the

⁸⁶ "Sergt. York Home, His Girl Says 'Yes.'"

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Perry, *Sergeant York*, 117-18.

⁸⁹ "Wedding Bells for Sergt. York," *Nashville Banner*, June 7, 1919, 1.

⁹⁰ "He Looked Every Bit a Big Hero," *Knoxville Sentinel*, June 9, 1919, 3.

⁹¹ Ibid.

ceremony, Alvin York, Gracie, and Alvin's mother took a quick, three-day honeymoon to Nashville where they dined with the Governor and first lady, York was presented a Tennessee Medal at the Ryman Auditorium, and they visited the Hermitage, the home of Andrew Jackson, where a luncheon was held in their honor.⁹² During the honeymoon, they also attended Sulfur Dell where York threw out the first pitch of the Nashville-New Orleans baseball game and they were guests at the Princess Theater where they watched a vaudeville performance and then they went to 5th Avenue and saw a movie.⁹³ When York and his small entourage returned home after touring Nashville, he settled down to begin the next chapter of his life.

It is not hard to imagine York's relief when his tours of the nation's financial and governmental capitals, as well as of Tennessee towns and cities, had ended and he was back home in Pall Mall with his new wife. He had been feted by the Tennessee Society; a variety of politicians, military leaders, and financiers; as well as the people of New York City, Chattanooga, Nashville, and most every city in between. The rest of the nation heard about the celebrations and learned that York the man very much resembled the story they had read about. His homecoming and how he responded to it solidified York as the hero the people of the United States expected and wanted. He was a humble southerner who had accomplished a great feat of arms and then shunned the

⁹² "York and Wife to Dine with Governor," *Nashville Banner*, June 7, 1919, 1; "Presentation of Medal to York," *Nashville Banner*, June 7, 1919, 1; "York's Mother Wears Gingham Dress and White Apron at Reception," *Chattanooga News*, June 10, 1919, 5.

⁹³ "York Not 'New,' but Sergeant Tops Ball World Today," [*Nashville Tennessean*], June 10, 1919, 8; "York Returns to Pall Mall," *Nashville Banner*, June 12, 1919, 1.

accompanying credit. York's shy nature endeared the public to him even more than the stories written about him. The interviews he gave also verified and solidified the story written by Pattullo. The writer had created a myth, and the sergeant filled out the legend, which only grew after he returned home and continued to cultivate his persona.

**CHAPTER 7:
YORK AND OTHERS CRAFT HIS HEROIC IMAGE**

Well look, see, I got a World War One rifle, it's my own. See, I used it when I was fighting side-by-side with Sergeant York. Ya see, Sergeant York didn't capture all those Germans by himself. I was there. But I was in the back, bringing up the rear, as usual. And it's got his initials on it.

--*Sanford and Son*¹

A hero was recently defined as a soldier who has been found out. They certainly got the goods on Sergt. Alvin York.

--*Nashville Banner*²

Once Sergeant York returned from the war and endured the initial celebratory welcome from an adoring public, he continually remarked that he was just looking forward to returning home to his mother and leading a quiet life as a farmer. On the night of May 30th, after a long and tiring journey, he finally made it to his family's quiet cabin tucked deep in the Cumberland Mountains in the Valley of the Three Forks of the Wolf River. Two weeks later he was married and had completed his honeymoon and was back in Pall Mall as a married civilian with his service as a soldier in the U.S. Army complete. But his role as an American hero and national celebrity was far from over. The public still had a part for him to play, and it was not ready to let him return to the quiet life he had prior to the war. Americans wanted to learn more about what had happened in the Argonne and how he accomplished his feat of arms. York knew that it would be

¹ "Have Gun, Will Sell," *Sanford and Son*, Season 2, Episode 7, aired November 3, 1972.

² *Nashville Banner*, May 20, 1919, 8.

beneficial to him and his family if he continued to play the hero and promote the myth, which turned him into a legend.

When York earned the Medal of Honor, he became a world-famous war hero with numerous financial opportunities. He was also immediately elevated to a prominent citizen in his community. With the help of family and friends, he began promoting his folksy, humble image by first denying the many offers given to him by various people and businesses. This initial refusal to profit from his notoriety made him more heroic in the public eye. But after a few weeks at home, he began to see the benefits of accepting some of the offers. He realized his fame could have a positive impact on his community and others. So, he began to make tactful choices on what offers he accepted and what the money would be used for.

Unfortunately for York—who had a third-grade education and little experience outside farming, his local community, and what he had seen during the war—he was not fully prepared for what his future held. Historian David Lee wrote that York was not suited for the life he now had: “The years after York’s return to Pall Mall often brought him personal failure and public embarrassment. In many ways the civilian York seems to be a decidedly unheroic figure.”³ He struggled with his finances, various business ventures, politics, and trying to bring education and modernity to his community. But he had a talent for promoting his myth and legend, as well as finding the right people to help him. York spent the next forty years of his life immersed in and promoting his own celebrity and embracing the “Sergeant” persona that he utilized to benefit his community,

³ Lee, *Sergeant York*, 69.

his family, and himself. Every business he created or money-making venture he set out on was wrapped in his own brand and was promoted by his uniform, war record, and heroic persona.

Out of all the countless money-making undertakings York engaged in, there were three that were the most effective in maintaining and promoting the York myth as well as cementing it in the public consciousness. Each one embraced and forwarded the themes of George Pattullo's article and kept York in the public arena as a national celebrity instead of slowly being forgotten. The first was the publication of the book by Sam Cowen, *Sergeant York and His People*, in 1922. It reinforced and focused on York's roots as an American pioneer.⁴ The second was another book, this one written from York's perspective, providing more detail about what had happened in the Argonne but in a folksy manner. Tom Skeyhill's 1928 *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary* reinforced the theme of York as a traditional and humble mountaineer who just wanted to do his duty for his country. Lastly, but the most important myth-making product, was the Warner Brothers film, *Sergeant York*, which was released to the public in 1941. It was a major Hollywood film that used Skeyhill's book as the basis for the screenplay and tapped into all the themes crafted by Pattullo. The film also created a few new, false elements about York and his story that the public embraced and believed were true. Thus, continuing and adding to the York myth. Currently, the movie provides the public's most recognizable and referenced version of the York story. Without these books and movie,

⁴ Sam Cowen's book examined York and the Pall Mall community's heritage as descendants of pioneers and long-hunters like Daniel Boone. (See Sam K. Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1922).)

York might have faded into obscurity; instead, these major myth-making vehicles kept the Tennessean's story before the public's eyes as yet another war loomed on the European horizon.

The Authorized York Books

Even though the George Pattullo article had been a smashing success and hundreds of newspaper stories and articles about York's heroism had followed, people still wanted to know and learn more about their American hero. During the next decade, two books, and a third children's book, all authorized by York, were published in major presses. Each looked at York's life in greater detail, expanding on his backstory, hometown life, and war-time accomplishments. Each one perpetuated and expanded the York myth originally begun by Pattullo and helped to cement him as a symbol of national values.

The first biography was written just two years after York returned to Tennessee. In the spring of 1921, a freelance journalist named Samuel Cowan travelled to Pall Mall with the goal of making York and his hometown the focus of a magazine serial or a book. Originally from Nashville, Cowan was living in New York, writing freelance articles for magazines like the *Literary Digest* and *McClure's*, when he heard of York and thought he would make an excellent subject.⁵ So, Cowan travelled to Fentress County, introduced

⁵ John Perry argues that George Welch, York's business advisor at the time and Tennessee's Railroad Commissioner, selected and approached Cowan to write the book. They set up a contract for the work throughout 1920, and Perry began work on the manuscript starting in the spring of 1921. (See Perry, *Sergeant York*, 167.)

himself to York and his family, and received permission to write a book about him and his fellow townsmen. According to Cowan, York's "consent was gained for the publication of the story of his people, but it was with the pronounced stipulation that 'it be told right.'"⁶ When Cowan asked York later what he had meant by that, he said, "I don't want you bearing down too much on that killing part. Tell it without so much of that!"⁷ So Cowan began interviewing the residents, researching Alvin York's early life, the history of the area, and York's family. After many weeks in Fentress County interviewing the local citizens who also helped with his research, Cowan interviewed York himself. He was very helpful and open about his life and befriended Cowan, doing multiple interviews and even showing him parts of the diary York had kept during the war. The diary was "originally written for York's eyes alone, and in York's own way."⁸ But Cowan was one of the first people, outside his family, allowed to read it. According to Cowan, "the volume would be unintelligible to a reader. . . it is made up of swift-moving notes that enter into no explanatory details."⁹ But it was not written to be understood by someone other than the original author. It was written for and by York and was meant to help him recall the details of his time in the Army.

Prior to Cowan arriving in Fentress County to do this research, the details of the publication contract made between Cowan, York, and George Welch (York's business advisor) were made public. Many members of the Tennessee Society of New York were

⁶ Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, 23; "'Sergeant York and His People,' Notable Book by Sam K. Cowan," *Nashville Banner*, April 23, 1922, 43.

⁷ Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, 24.

⁸ "Sergt. York's Own Story," *Knoxville Sentinel*, May 13, 1922, 4.

⁹ Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, 57.

angry over the contract, feeling that Welch was taking advantage of York, who would receive fifty percent of the book's profits, with Welch—who was running for re-election as Tennessee's Railroad Commissioner—taking forty percent of the profits! The society was also aware of other lopsided contracts Welch had with York¹⁰ and demanded that they be made public; the scandal put a cloud over the book's publication but also led to Welch publicly renouncing any profit from the volume.¹¹

In the meantime, Welch and Cowan ran into difficulties finding a publisher interested in the book-length story. It had taken Cowan some time, back in New York, to write up the results of his research in Fentress County, and publishers believed that the public had tired of war stories.¹² Initial efforts to get it published as a book or serial failed, even with the help of a professional literary agent. In desperation, Cowan finally decided to take the manuscript around personally to numerous New York book publishers. Luckily for the author and his book, York had been back in the public eye. York's wife, Gracie, gave birth to a son, Alvin Jr., in March of 1921, now making York a family man, but one who needed his finances settled. He was also undergoing a financial crisis. The farming season was against him. According to the *New York Times*, "His hay

¹⁰ "Bryson Reveals Welch Contract with Sergeant York," [*Nashville*] *Tennessean*, July 20, 1920, 1.

¹¹ In a reply to the article published in the *Nashville Tennessean* on July 20, 1920, about the contracts, George Welch replied with a letter saying that he would not accept any proceeds from the book above being reimbursed for what he had advanced Cowan to write it. Any other profits would go to York to help pay off his home and to finance the York Institute. (See, "Here's a Hot Open Letter to Luke Lea," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, August 1, 1920, 4.)

¹² "'Sergeant York and His People,' Notable Book," 43.

was practically burned up, and other crops failed, and Alvin was left in the hole.”¹³ He also began making his financial difficulties with the “gift” of his farm public with the press beginning to trying and raise money to help him.¹⁴ With York back in the news, and the public showing interest in him, Funk and Wagnalls decided to publish Cowan’s book.¹⁵

Funk and Wagnalls Publishing Company undertook a significant marketing campaign for Cowan’s *Sergeant York and his People* (published on April 20, 1922), but the book struggled to find its audience. The company sent 150 copies to the largest newspapers in the country for review and another three hundred to smaller news outlets. It also ran a four-column newspaper advertisement in 156 newspapers and an ad in *Literary Digest*, which had a circulation of 1.3 million. Unfortunately, the initial response to the book was disappointing. Lukewarm reviews and only three hundred advance orders meant that some retailers would not stock the book until they started seeing a demand for it. Eventually, interest began to rise, and sales started climbing as the book became more

¹³ “Hero York Harassed, Can’t Make Farm Pay,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1921, 3.

¹⁴ When York’s heroics became public, the Nashville Rotary Club felt it would be fitting to gift York a farm stocked with machinery and livestock to thank him for his service. They began a fundraising committee to secure donations but initially raised just \$7,000 of the \$25,000 needed. The Rotary Club decided to purchase the farm in 1919 and just mortgage the rest, expecting to continue receiving donations from the public. The club paid the first mortgage in 1920, but by 1921, it was out of money; so the club and bank expected York to pay the mortgage. He was unable and was at risk of having the farm foreclosed on due to farming losses he took over the previous two years. The public came to his rescue and eventually raised the funds through donations to pay off the mortgage. See Lynch, “A Gift for Sergeant York,” 18-24, 73.

¹⁵ Perry, *Sergeant York*, 176-77.

widely available. But overall, it did not reach the sales York had hoped for which was hampered by its limited circulation.¹⁶

One reason for the low sale numbers was because of the way Americans were consuming published material in the early 1920s. At that time, citizens in small-town American mostly read borrowed library books. A relatively small, urban, well-off business class was responsible for purchasing most new books. Other Americans purchased few books that were not Bibles, children's books, or Christmas gifts.¹⁷ In the 1920s, it is estimated that only 0.8 to 5 percent of the U.S. population regularly purchased books, while libraries served as the book source for 40 to 50 percent of Americans.¹⁸ On the other hand, weekly and monthly periodicals were cheaper and widely available, both at libraries and delivered to citizens' homes. Since the author's work was available at a cheaper price, and was a part of a larger magazine with stories that could appeal to other members of the purchaser's family or friends, readers often opted for a magazine subscription than a book. Additionally, these magazines often serialized books, paying a good amount to authors but further dulling the book market.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 179. York was not satisfied with the overall exposure he received, the money he made, or the hoped-for increase in donations for his school. To help raise funds, the Alvin C. York Agricultural Institute began sending boxes of books to York's speaking engagements to give as gifts to anyone who donated six dollars or more to his fundraising campaign. (See *ibid.*, 199-200.)

¹⁷ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), 230.

¹⁸ Kimberly J. Lamay Licursi, *Remembering World War I in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 77.

¹⁹ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 231-32; Licursi, *Remembering World War I in America*, 77.

Not intended to be strictly a biography, *Sergeant York and His People* focused primarily on the last two years of York's life, when he went to war and what he had been attempting to do since returning home. But it was mostly a vivid portrait of life in the mountain area of Tennessee and the type of people who lived there. Cowen toiled to paint a picture of the people and land where York came from. According to the *New York Times*, "Mr. Cowan has utilized Sergeant York as the 'peg' upon which to hang a more or less intimate description of the people of the Cumberland Mountains."²⁰ In the book, Cowan recounts the history of the area and its frontier roots. He explains that York descended from the last of the long hunters, who "were the pioneers of the pioneers." He also came from "a line of ancestors who were cane-cutters and Indian fighters."²¹ Cowan pushed the heroic and truly American image of York and his deep roots as a pioneer and frontiersman. The book expanded on the already mythologized version of York's past and heritage, reinforcing and even expanding on what Pattullo had previously written. According to historian David Lee, the book "is really a patriotic tract which offers no substantial analysis of Alvin York," therefore perpetuating the heroic myth already established in the *Saturday Evening Post* article.²²

A few years after the publication of *Sergeant York and His People*, another author, Tom Skeyhill, approached York about publishing his life story. Skeyhill was an

²⁰ "Tennessee's War Hero," *New York Times Book Review and Magazine*, July 16, 1922, 2.

²¹ Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, 31, 27.

²² Lee, *Sergeant York*, 94. *Sergeant York and His People* was reprinted multiple times over the next century including during World War II by Grossett and Dunlap, in the 1980s by the Fentress County Historical Society, and in 2013 by the Sergeant York Patriotic Foundation.

Australian and a wounded veteran of the Great War. Following Armistice Day, he toured the United States on lecture circuits, speaking about his heroics and other adventures. He was a charismatic public speaker and became an “emblem of the Australian fighting spirit.”²³ But he was not all that he appeared to be. Tim Fisher, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, wrote that, “Skeyhill was a great embellisher of the truth . . . his life and exploits raise some serious moral issues, especially when we consider the extent of the various exaggerated claims he made for himself.”²⁴ In any case, Skeyhill had a talent for telling exaggerated stories, and sometimes completely fictitious ones, that his audiences greatly enjoyed. This spinner of tales thought that Alvin York was ready-made for his story-telling skills.

In the spring of 1927, Skeyhill had just terminated his lecturer contract with the Redpath Chautauqua Bureau and was driving through Tennessee when he decided to meet Sergeant York. When Skeyhill made it to Pall Mall, York was in Florida as part of a speaking and fundraising tour. But the Australian was able to meet with Arthur Bushing, York’s good friend and business partner. They discussed York’s heroics and his goal of bringing more advanced education to the area through building a school in Jamestown. After Skeyhill’s visit to Pall Mall, he began corresponding with both Bushing and York, and a few months later he returned to meet with York personally to discuss his war story and the idea of a book.²⁵ The meeting was serendipitous. York was currently in need of

²³ Jeff Brownrigg, *Anzac Cove to Hollywood: The Story of Tom Skeyhill, Master of Deception* (Sydney: Anchor Books Australia, 2010), 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, viii.

²⁵ Lee, *Sergeant York*, 94-95; Perry, *Sergeant York*, 207.

more money for his school, and he also needed to pay off the second mortgage he took out against his farm. To do this, he was entertaining the idea of selling his war diary to create a new book that would be more successful than *Sergeant York and His People*.²⁶ The publishers York was talking to had turned him down since the diaries were too small and did not have enough material to be made into a book. They recommended to York that he expand on the diary, since it was so sparse, with an account of his life. He did not want to at first, but now that Skeyhill was here and willing to work on it for him, the opportunity to publish the diary and relieve some of York's financial woes presented itself.²⁷

During the winter of 1927 through 1928, Skeyhill lived in Pall Mall with Arthur Bushing, working on the manuscript, and conducting interviews of York and other members of the community, sometimes using a stenographer.²⁸ York also authorized Skeyhill's access to his service records at the War Department.²⁹ Skeyhill had unfettered access to York, his hometown, his war records, and York's diaries—only the second person to see them. The York diaries have always had an air of mystery surrounding them. Cowan first referenced them in 1922 writing that “when York went to war he carried with him a small, red, cloth-covered memorandum book, which was to be his diary . . . He kept the little volume—now with broken-back and worn—constantly with

²⁶ Perry, *Sergeant York*, 206.

²⁷ Lee, *Sergeant York*, 95; Perry, *Sergeant York*, 207.

²⁸ Brownrigg, *Anzac Cove to Hollywood*, 178.

²⁹ Letter for Sergeant Alvin C. York to War Department, December 22, 1927, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, Press File, NPRC.

him.”³⁰ Cowan claimed to have seen and used it. Skeyhill, was allowed to use the diaries as well, but only after the sergeant had initially demurred. He wrote that York had only taken it out of the vault twice “to please two journalists who were determined to read it.”³¹ In Skeyhill’s story, there is no mention of Cowan seeing the diary. When Skeyhill asked York if he could read the diary, he was initially denied, but York eventually relented and showed it to him. Skeyhill wrote that York said, “I kept a little notebook in America jes to remind me of places I had been. When I got to France I bought one of them little black French notebooks. I carried that little diary in my pocket.”³² Cowen had seen a red, cloth-covered memorandum book, while Skeyhill mentioned a black, French notebook. Dr. Michael Birdwell, who spent years as the archivist of the York family papers, believed that he may have seen it once. Andrew York, Alvin York’s son, took a small, yellow book out of a safe one day in Birdwell’s presence, saying that it was his dad’s war diary, but he never let the historian look through it or near it.³³ David Lee, one of the most prominent York biographers who worked with the family during the publication of his book, noted that he never saw the actual diary.³⁴ Another author who worked with the York family during the publication of his book, John Perry, wrote that the diary is still with the York family and locked away in a bank vault due to its fragile state.³⁵ The only “official” version of the text that is written inside the diary therefore

³⁰ Cowan, *Sergeant York and His People*, 67.

³¹ Skeyhill, ed., *Sergeant York*, 26.

³² Ibid.

³³ Oral history interview with Dr. Michael Birdwell by the author, June 3, 2017, Tennessee Technological University.

³⁴ Brownrigg, *Anzac Cove to Hollywood*, 180.

³⁵ Perry, *Sergeant York*, 374.

comes from Skeyhill. But since the diary was first published, it has been edited and some of the entries have changed. According to Jeff Brownrigg, a cultural historian at the University of Canberra, “After Tom [Skeyhill]’s death, York may have reworked the published text expunging those elements that Tom thought added liveliness and colour to the York story.”³⁶ Some of the diary may have also been censored by the York family after his death to hide elements of historical racism within it.³⁷ Different versions of the diary were seen on the alvincyork.org website.³⁸

By April of 1928, Skeyhill was officially contracted to write the biography and edit the diary. He had already received a \$30,000 advance from Doubleday-Doran to write it. The publisher, who owned more than 120 bookstores, expected to make it a best seller.³⁹ According to John Perry, York received a 10,000 dollar advance for the publication of the book on February 6, 1928, and he gave half to Skeyhill. Just a few weeks later, the serial rights for the diary were sold to *Liberty* magazine for thirty thousand dollars.⁴⁰ In July, *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary* began being published in *Liberty* magazine and was then printed in book form in the fall. While it generally received good reviews, not everyone was fond of Skeyhill’s writing and editorial style. One reviewer in *The Chattanooga News* commented,

We don’t doubt for a minute that the admirable Sergt. York uttered the 275 pages attributed to him. . . . But why did the publishers have to go down and ferret out

³⁶ Brownrigg, *Anzac Cove to Hollywood*, 183.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 181-184

³⁹ Letter quoted in *ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁰ Perry, *Sergeant York*, 211. *Liberty* magazine published the first of a four-part series of the York diary on July 14, 1928. (See “The Diary of Sergeant York,” *Liberty* 5, no. 28 (July 14, 1928): 7-10.)

the sergeant, drag him into the literary spotlight, and make him pose in every attitude supposed to be typical of the heroic mountain man? Why this laborious attempt at the sergeant's own language? The sergeant would never have written a book this way. Can it be that the supple Tom Skeyhill is neatly prodding the sergeant into appropriate attitudes? We do not wish to be classed with the children of darkness, but we wish very much that Mr. Skeyhill had let the sergeant jolly well alone.⁴¹

This was not the first time Tennesseans complained about how York's speech was presented.

The final published manuscript was far from York's original diary. Skeyhill had used his interviews with York to draft recollections as diary entries, using language that York would never have written and thus propelled York's myth as an uneducated Tennessee backwoodsman. According to Lee, "Skeyhill wrote most of the autobiography as if York himself were telling the story in first person. Although Skeyhill had York speak in mountain dialect, people who knew both the writer and his subject contend that Skeyhill gave York an accent he did not really have."⁴² The biography and diary "masqueraded as York's own work. Tom was credited as editor, though it is clear that most of the words were his in a book filled with questionable history of the type he had made a career of peddling."⁴³ When compared to Cowan's book, there was much more focus on York's wartime experience, and Cowan's work was published in a way that clearly delineated between York's words and Cowan's. Even with these issues, the book was well received, and York used it as a platform to go on more speaking tours to raise

⁴¹ "Sergeant York's Story," *Chattanooga News*, December 28, 1928, 23.

⁴² Lee, *Sergeant York*, 96.

⁴³ Brownrigg, *Anzac Cove to Hollywood*, 175.

money for the institute. He even prepared a speech where he would read excerpts of the book for the audience and to promote sales of the book.⁴⁴

With the success of the *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, Skeyhill felt he could continue profiting off York by rewriting the diary for the juvenile market. According to John Perry, in 1929, Skeyhill “began rewriting the York story as a frontier adventure for boys called *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters*.”⁴⁵ In the spring of 1930, he signed a contract with John C. Winston Company in Philadelphia to publish the book and split the advance with York fifty-fifty. The book was published later that year and was full of fictionalized stories about York and the area he was from. There were stories of Indian fighting and sensationalized stories and illustrations throughout the text designed to entertain boys, but not necessarily tell the factual biography on York.⁴⁶ This work continued to add to the York myth and gave Skeyhill the title: Official Biographer of Sergeant Alvin C. York.⁴⁷ Skeyhill had used previous sources, and made-up other parts, to create his children’s book. According to Jeff Brownrigg, “Tom, used as he was to borrowing the writings, experiences and even the lies of others, expanded on Pattullo and Cowan’s journalism eclipsing both with two substantial biographies.”⁴⁸ Both books by Skeyhill and the earlier biography by Cowan were built upon from the Pattullo article and continued engraving the York myth into the American consciousness.

⁴⁴ Perry, *Sergeant York*, 215.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 220.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 224-25.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 224; Tom Skeyhill, *Sergeant York: Last of the Long Hunters*, (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1930), front piece.

⁴⁸ Brownrigg, *Anzac Cove to Hollywood*, 175.

The Hero Goes to Hollywood

The most significant myth-making vehicle that embedded the York myth into the American consciousness was the Hollywood film, *Sergeant York*. Ever since returning from the war, York had been continuously bombarded with offers to sell his story to a Hollywood studio so it could be made into a motion picture. He relented on March 24, 1940, signing a contract in Nashville with Jesse Lasky, a life-long film producer, who pitched the idea of a film about Alvin York to Warner Bros. studios. Lasky believed that York's story and heroism had a special resonance in light of heightened international tensions. York typified the quintessential nineteenth-century hero, and his story was a perfect patriotic tale during a world-wide crisis of Nazi and Japanese aggression.⁴⁹ So, between the summer of 1939 and the spring of 1940, Lasky made four trips to York's home, first to convince the sergeant to agree to the movie and then to interview his family and friends to fill out the story.⁵⁰

The film was initially to be about York's attempts to bring education to Tennessee's Upper Cumberland region, but with World War II looming and already engulfing much of the globe, Lasky and Harry Warner, president of Warner Bros., convinced York to alter the film's plot, transforming it into a plea for U.S. intervention in World War II.⁵¹ York was slow to approve, but on April 21, 1940, Lasky and a team of writers came to Pall Mall to gather information for the screenplay. Photographs of Pall Mall were used to construct the movie sets and make costumes. In the fall, a film crew

⁴⁹ Birdwell, "A Change of Heart," 23-24.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

took background footage and film of locals interacting with one another to help the actors reproduce local mannerisms in their film portrayals. York also provided Lasky with the war letters he wrote to Gracie, other letters, photographs, and various records to make the film more authentic. Lasky and the writers also read Pattullo's article and Cowan and Skeyhill's books. By May 8th, the initial script was complete, and on July 8th, York approved the final revised script.⁵²

But to make the film more palatable to the public, certain parts of the York story were fictionalized. One of the biggest changes was the creation of a fictionalized character, a fellow soldier from New York City named "Pusher" who befriended the Tennessean. In reality, York did not have a good relationship with his comrades during the war and was often alienated due to his religious beliefs, and with all of the attention that York received following the war, he became even more alienated from his comrades in arms. In the film, having Pusher as York's friend made York more likeable, highlighted the contrast between urban and rural personalities, and acted as comic relief.⁵³

There were many other fictitious components of the film, but some were brought in by necessity, not just to for more dramatic storytelling. Since many of the characters depicted were still living, Warner Bros. had to have their permission to use their likeness, and not everyone gave it. York had ten siblings; but only two are depicted in the film, because the others would not give their permission. Asbury Williams, Gracie's father,

⁵² Ibid., 24-25.

⁵³ Ibid., 25; Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 112.

also refused to give permission, because he had never approved of York marrying his daughter. So, in the film, Gracie lived with her uncle, Elijah Williams.⁵⁴ Similar issues arose when Warner Bros. tried to get the permission of the surviving patrol members. Many originally gave up their rights but then later tried to have to movie stopped, arguing that they had not known what they were signing at the time. Even with these issues, production continued. Throughout the fall, sets were built, and actors were hired.⁵⁵

By December of 1940, Howard Hawks, who was assigned as the director, began working in earnest, and filming began in January. Hawks viewed initial scripts as outlines, and as filming progressed, changes were made. Major rewrites included expanded combat sequences and how York experienced his religious conversion. In reality, York had turned to the church to come to terms with the death of his good friend, Everett Delk, and to spend more time with Gracie. But York did not want Delk's family to relive the death of their son again, and it was an odd plot point to say that York found religion so that he could see a girl. So, the conversion sequences were fictionalized; he was converted after being hit by a bolt of lightning that bent the barrel of his muzzle-loader.⁵⁶

Filming and editing lasted all spring, and on July 2, 1941, *Sergeant York* premiered at Broadway's Astor Theater in New York. There was an elaborate opening that included a parade down Fifth Avenue by the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) as well as York and Lasky arriving at the theater in a convertible limousine. Various

⁵⁴ Birdwell, "A Change of Heart," 24-26; Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 113-14.

⁵⁵ Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 114.

⁵⁶ Birdwell, "A Change of Heart," 26-28.

dignitaries also attended—including Tennessee Governor Prentice Cooper, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and General John Pershing—as well as the film’s stars, Gary Cooper and Joan Leslie. The film was praised by Norman Vincent Peale, a prominent American clergyman, for being “the most important film of the year.”⁵⁷ Charles Enfeld, Warner Bros. head of publicity, felt that the film was “potentially the most important picture ever made in our industry.”⁵⁸ Throughout the summer, it aired in limited release. But when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and war broke out, *Sergeant York* became a smash hit. York was back in the public limelight as the film played around the country and regularly on American military bases. Prints of the film were also given to each of America's allies to promote the war effort. It went on to be the highest-grossing film of 1941. Though it was Warner Bros.' first movie to cost over two million dollars, it went on to be one of the studio's most successful pictures. It also won two Academy Awards; Gary Cooper won Best Actor for his portrayal of York, and the film also won for Best Film Editing. It was nominated for awards in nine other categories, including Best Picture, Director, Supporting Actor, and Supporting Actress. Later, *Sergeant York* was added to the Library of Congress’s National Film Registry in 2008, one of only 500 films selected to be preserved at the library for its “cultural, historical, or aesthetic significance.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁸ Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 126.

⁵⁹ Brett Zongker, “‘Terminator,’ 24 Others Join U.S. Registry,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 31, 2008, section 3, 3.

The film propelled the York myth to entire new generation of Americans and moviegoers. Much of the story was fictionalized and derived from the stories that Pattullo, Cowan, and Skeyhill had previously told about York.⁶⁰ Currently, the film is the public's most recognizable version of the York story. Out of all the various articles and events that took place to propel and enhance the York myth outside of the original Pattullo article, it was the film, Cowan's biography, and Skeyhill's diary that cemented his myth in the public consciousness. Each one embraced and forwarded the heroic themes in Pattullo's article and kept York in the public arena, sustaining his status as a national celebrity. They also enhanced and added to the story, slowly pushing it farther from the truth and making it harder for Americans to distinguish between fact and fiction. They reinforced the theme of the long-hunter persona of York, celebrating him as an American pioneer, a Christian warrior, and the hero Americans wanted.

⁶⁰ Brownrigg, *Anzac Cove to Hollywood*, 174.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

More than one hundred years have now passed since George Pattullo published “The Second Elder Gives Battle,” and much of what he wrote still echoes in the way York is remembered today. York is portrayed as a larger-than-life conscientious objector who represented everything Americans wanted to believe about themselves—that they were small-town, religious, self-reliant, hard-working, and deadly with firearms.

Historian Michael Birdwell wrote,

To a world disillusioned by the rapacious efficiency of modern and total warfare, York represented a simpler, more innocent time in America’s history. He reminded Americans of Natty Bumppo, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Abraham Lincoln, and even Dwight L. Moody – archetypal American heroes who sprang from humble origins to greatness without desire for aggrandizement. York’s seeming innocence appealed to the nostalgia of Americans uncertain about the destruction unleashed on the world. He embodied the values of their nineteenth-century heroes.¹

Many of the heroic ideals and themes that originated from Pattullo’s article--and were reinforced by Joseph Cummings Chase’s portrait and article--had elements of the heroes Birdwell mentioned and became the basis for the Alvin York myth that has been repeated and reinforced over the last century. Birdwell also wrote that York “represented a nostalgia for the frontier for Americans who no longer had one, and the contrast between an idyllic mountain life and the bustling noise and harried pace of urban life.”² The

¹ Birdwell, “Gobble Like a Turkey,” 163.

² Birdwell, “Alvin Cullum York,” 323.

Saturday Evening Post article gave the public a hero to honor and a near mythological character to embody their desire to honor what they believed about America and their national patriotic fervor, which was still sweeping the country at the end of the war.

York also became an instant celebrity who used his fame to better himself, his family, and the lives of those in his community. Once he returned from the war and had endured the initial public adulation, he devoted the rest of his life to being “Sergeant York” and using his notoriety and name to raise money for himself and various civic projects. With his name, celebrity, and the success of the film *Sergeant York*, he even helped mobilize the United States for the Second World War by being a face of the World War I generation, which had overcome initial reservations to serve their country and win the war for the Allied powers.

Unfortunately, not everything that came from the Pattullo article was positive. Once it was in print, York quickly ceased to be a man made of flesh and blood and was turned into a caricature of himself, a mythical figure who was less representative of York than about America. As Birdwell argued, York became a victim of herofication, and he was “bled of all that made him human and interesting.”³ Birdwell believed that the herofication process began when Warner Bros. first released the film, *Sergeant York*, to the public in limited release in 1941 and in wide release in 1942. The film reinforced heroic themes and told a historically inaccurate version of the key events of York’s life,

³ Birdwell, *Celluloid Soldiers*, 3-4.

James Loewen defined herofication as a degenerative process that turns interesting and flawed but real people into simple and two-dimensional heroes for public consumption. He wrote, “Through this process, our educational media turn flesh-and-blood individuals into pious, perfect creatures without conflicts, pain, credibility, or human interest.” (See Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, 11.)

primarily around his experiences in the war. The public and critics embraced the film, reinvigorating York and his celebrity to the American public. The themes, elements, and portrayals of York in the film were reiterated in subsequent books, comics, and various public history interpretive sites and events as historical truths. While Birdwell identified the roots of York's herofication in the release of *Sergeant York*, the film was based on Tom Skeyhill's *Sergeant York: His Own Life Story and War Diary*, which followed the same mythic themes that originated in Pattullo's "The Second Elder Gives Battle."⁴ While the film took some of its own artistic liberties with York's story, I argue that the public's deification and herofication process began much earlier, as soon as Chase's and Pattullo's articles hit the newsstands in April 1919.

Throughout the history of the United States, artists, historians, scholars, and journalists of all types have played a critical part of creating the myths that animate America. In relation to Alvin York, it was Pattullo and Chase who began the myth-making and herofication process that we continue retelling. The heroism that earned York a Distinguished Service Cross and the Medal of Honor was certainly ample to have earned the Tennessee sergeant the accolades of his own hometown and state. But it was these magazine articles that roused the public's interest at the national level. It was Pattullo's use of mythology, the steps of the heroic journey, and western language that truly captivated the American imagination and endeared York to the people of the United States. Once the story was published, York's humility and actions enhanced the story and advanced the myth. According to historian Robert Athearn, in the short history of the

⁴ Skeyhill ed., *Sergeant York*.

United States, “we have probably created more ‘heroes’ by means of publicity and manufactured myth than have any of our older sister nations during their long histories.”⁵ America’s free press, its multi-cultural society, and the vast expanse of the country has generated a need and an audience for its pantheon of heroes.

When myths are crafted in the United States, they are generally focused on real people, not deities or gods and goddesses. According to historian Sydney Fisher, “American myth-making is so unlike the ancient myth-making which as time went on made its gods and goddesses more and more human with mortal loves and passions. Our process is just the reverse. Out of a man who actually lived among us and of whose life we have many truthful details we make an impossible abstraction of idealized virtues.”⁶ Pattullo chose the parts of York’s life to celebrate, decided which parts to leave out, and then wove them together in a manner that excited the readers. Pattullo pulled various constructs and romanticized ideas from the real-life York and built a memorable and engaging story for the general reader. When the elements of the story are the only things that the reader knows about the figure, they begin to selectively remember only those aspects of the heroic tale and the hero’s life that they are honoring. This process of selective memory makes the hero’s story—in this case York—widely accepted by the nation’s population. As a result, according to historian Michael Kammen, “issues involving collective memory are not, ordinarily, hotly contested in the United States.”⁷ Myths and heroes, like York, rarely fall under public scrutiny, and even when it does

⁵ Robert Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 257.

⁶ Fisher, *The True Benjamin Franklin*, 6.

⁷ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 701.

happen, such scrutiny is often dismissed as jealousy of the hero or someone looking to make a name for themselves on the back of that hero.⁸ Scrutiny of York happens occasionally, particularly when he is considered for another honor,⁹ but he still inspires the public.

Sometimes that inspiration has been construed in a negative sense. During a study in the late 1980s, psychologist Steven Giles argued that a “love of guns and country”—the “Sergeant York Syndrome”—resulted in a higher rate of soldiers from Appalachia being killed in Vietnam compared to other parts of the country (downgrading the causal connection to the continuing lack of economic opportunity that has plagued the region). He said, “If you were from a large, urban area you were much more likely to have been in Vietnam. If you were from Appalachia, you were 50 percent more likely to have been killed in Vietnam.”¹⁰ He believed that these young men grew up hearing about York’s exploits, particularly his skill as a soldier, his mastery with the pistol and rifle, and his humble rural origins. He represented the best in men from Appalachia. When the Vietnam War was raging, these impressionable young men who went to fight overseas wanted to emulate their Tennessee hero. So, when they were drafted or volunteered, a

⁸ Gregory, *Unraveling the Myth of Sgt. Alvin York*, ix.

⁹ Letter from John Rains to Calvin Coolidge, December 12, 1925, in Alvin C. York, U.S. Army Service Record, NPRC. The letter was referencing a bill being put forward in Congress to promote Alvin York to captain and retiring him so he could earn a lifelong pension from the U.S. Army. John Rains wrote, “a lot of us Republicans and his neighbors feel like he has had enough done for him. At lest [sic] us people here done a lot for him and he has proved to be enemys [sic] to us all.”

¹⁰ Leanne Waxman, “War’s Toll Higher on Appalachians,” *Johnson City [TN] Press*, March 12, 1989, 5.

disproportionate number chose to serve in the infantry.¹¹ This collective choice led to more deaths among soldiers from the Appalachia areas than in other parts of the country.¹²

Despite the ways that York's mythic persona could inspire deadly choices, the story of the heroic Tennessee sergeant is still positive and heroic, and it still positively inspires the American public as well as those in France. As mentioned in the introduction, on October 7, 2018, a contingent of elected officials and soldiers and airmen with the Tennessee National Guard traveled to Chatel-Chehery, France, to honor York and celebrate the deeds he had performed on the battle's centennial. The town mayor hosted a day-long ceremony and celebration at various locations in Chatel-Chehery. Wreaths were laid at the center of town on the York monument at the foot of the steps of town hall, and others were laid at a separate ceremony at the York memorial near the battle site. French living historians also hosted a town luncheon and put on battle demonstrations throughout the day. York's family, members of the Sergeant York Patriotic Foundation, members of the Tennessee Great War Commission, and park rangers from the Sgt. Alvin C. York State Historic Park were also present. During the main ceremony at town hall, Major General Terry "Max" Haston, Tennessee's Adjutant General, was one of the keynote speakers.¹³ During his speech, which was also translated into French, he heaped praise on York's heroics, often perpetuating the same myth that began one hundred years earlier

¹¹ Those who were drafted were almost exclusively put in the infantry due to their shorter (two-year) term of service, which meant they received less training. Also, poorer education could result in a higher likelihood of being assigned to the infantry. Black soldiers also suffered higher casualty rates for these reasons.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Darrin Haas, "Sgt. York: Centennial Commemoration," 8-15.

with Pattullo's article. But in the second half of the speech, Haston did not talk about the battle. Most of these comments centered on what York did after the war—how he had tried to help his community. At the end of the speech, Haston changed gears, saying,

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, he [York] continues to bring people together to remember that there is still good in the world. As I look out across this crowd this morning, I see people, organizations, and two countries together that normally would not be, here to honor a man few living people have ever met, and we do this to celebrate his humility, courage, and example.¹⁴

Haston had put a new spin on an old myth. He saw York, a soldier who killed 20-25 Germans, as a beacon of good who brought together two dissimilar communities from two sides of the world. They joined in friendship to remember and honor a soldier, not for his military prowess, but for his character.

In the one hundred years since the publication George Pattullo's "The Second Elder Gives Battle," much of what he wrote still echoes today. It can be seen the articles that are written, the museum exhibits, and the way he is interpreted at the Sergeant Alvin C. York State Historical Park. York was portrayed as the hero Americans desperately needed, and they embraced him as the embodiment of the Southern, Christian soldier draped in an American flag. Even after a century, Americans still remember and honor him and look to him as a beacon of what they aspire to be. The American public still holds on to the myth, the legend, the hero, and what he represents.

¹⁴ Speech for Major General Terry Haston, Alvin C. York Centennial Commemoration Day, October 7, 2018, (written by Major Darrin Haas), Tennessee Military Department, 2018 Speeches, Joint Public Affairs Office Archive, Nashville, Tennessee.

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