

# THE LITERARY DIGEST

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## CONSCIENCE PLUS RED HAIR ARE BAD FOR GERMANS

THE biggest reception yet given to any returning American soldier greeted a big bashful American mountaineer, with hair red enough to satisfy anybody who believes that redheads make the best fighters, who reached New York from France, the other day, to be hailed both by many of his fellow citizens of Tennessee and by the newspapers at large as the greatest hero of the war. Part of his heroism was his honesty in changing his convictions when he was convinced that he was wrong, for Sergeant Alvin C. York was a member of that strict religious sect, the Church of Christ and Christian Union, and hence was a conscientious objector early in the war, for the Church of Christ and Christian Union is opposed to fighting in any form, at any time, under any consideration. But, on the other hand, Mr. York had an inquiring mind, ready to absorb Biblical evidence both for and against an appeal to arms. Another consideration was the fact that he was fond of rifle- and revolver-shooting; he was the best marksman around his native village of Pall Mall, Fortress County, Tennessee, where good shooting is the rule. A third consideration was red hair. The third consideration may have had as much as anything else to do with the conversion of Alvin C. York from a backwoods conscientious objector into a leading American hero. A number of Germans cooperated, it is true, by trying to charge Sergeant York, shoot him with machine guns, bomb him, and bayonet him. This was on October 8, 1918, in the Argonne Forest, and so profusely did the "Heinies" present him with targets that he killed twenty or twenty-five of them, captured 132 others—including a major and three lieutenants!—and put out of action thirty-five machine guns, all in very short order. It was with this achievement in mind that New York received Sergeant York with plaudits and more substantial things, as described by *The Tribune*:



Sergeant York was greeted at the dock in Hoboken by a reception committee of the Tennessee Society of New York, with a special pass from the Adjutant-General in Washington granting him five days' leave in New York. For a hectic half-hour this Tennessee hill-country blacksmith was the vortex of a swarm of photographers, reporters, 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 French mud.

Then he was assisted (which made him chuckle) into a big automobile and ferried to New York and thence to the Waldorf-Astoria. Two bell-boys fought for the honor of carrying his blanket-roll, trench helmet, and pack into the hotel.

Oscar Tschirkey, the manager, has greeted potentates with far less warmth than he showed to Sergeant York yesterday. Oscar waved off a clerk who presented the register for the sergeant's signature. He could register in his suite, the one adjoining the suite reserved for the President of the United States. Then Oscar led the way, using his own portly form to batter a path through the idlers in Peacock Alley. It was Oscar who held the gate of an elevator until the sergeant and all his retinue of bell-boys and reception committee were inside, and again it was Oscar who clapped his hands for maid servants



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to unlock the doors of Sergeant York's suite. The sergeant entered a room with wondrous pictures on walls lined with heavy brocade, upholstered furniture, and a gilded piano gleaming in a corner. He took off his overseas cap and looked for a nail on which to hang it. Then he laid it down on the edge of a divan and stood up.

E. A. Kellogg, a member of the Tennessee Society's reception committee, turned toward the soldier a silver picture-frame, standing on a table. The red-haired man looked at the spectacled old lady whose photographed likeness gazed back at him. Then he said:

"That's the first picture I've seen of my mother in several days."

After that there was a dinner, and then another surprize was sprung on the sergeant, as the report relates:

The telephone rang. Telephone operators half-way across the continent had juggled cords and plugs until a bell had tinkled in the general merchandise store of R. C. Pile, in Pall Mall. Mr. Pile himself must have shouted the summons across the winding hillside road and brought to the wall telephone in the store Mrs. York, the mother of the sergeant, and his seven brothers and three sisters.

When Mr. Kellogg called the sergeant to the desk telephone in his drawing-room at the Waldorf last night he shoed the members of the reception committee into an adjoining room, and, following them, closed the door softly.

Fifteen minutes later the sergeant opened the door. The telephone receiver was back on the hook. Possibly a telephone-girl at some wire junction had held a cam open while mother and son exchanged love and blessings, but none other had heard. Anyway, the sergeant didn't talk about it, but his grin was there beneath his stubbly, red mustache.

Then his Tennessee admirers informed Sergeant York that Tennessee folk were buying him a \$50,000 farm stocked with the best animals money can buy, and that the New York Tennesseans were going to make him a present of a \$2,000 Victory note. Later he was taken about in an automobile to see the sights of the city, including the Stock Exchange, the tower of the Woolworth building, and other places. Then he went back to the Waldorf, where a dinner and reception had been prepared for him by the Tennessee Society, to which a thousand guests had been invited, including Maj.-Gen. George Duncan, who commanded the 82d Division, to which York belonged. York confided to a reporter for the *New York World*, as he was getting back to the hotel: "I tell you I'm pretty weary. New York is certainly a great city, but it do tire a fellow out some." The *World* account of the reception follows:

At the dinner Sergeant York sat at the right of Dr. James J. King, president of the Society, who was toastmaster. Major-General Duncan was at the left.

Vice-Admiral Gleaves; James Cummings Chase, the artist who has painted the portraits of "York and of every general in the Army," as Dr. King exprest it, and Representative Hull, from York's district in Tennessee, were others who sat at the sergeant's table and did honor to him.

It was from the lips of Major-General Duncan, who commanded the 82d, or All-American, Division, that the greatest praise came for the husky young six-footer who performed what has been repeatedly called the greatest individual feat of the whole war.

"It is a unique distinction for me," Major-General Duncan began, "to have on one side of me the Admiral who safely conducted all of our troops overseas and on the other side one of the most distinguished soldiers the world has ever pro-





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duced. His deeds are of the character that will go down in history for our boys and girls to read of and admire.

"York was awarded his medals for having been the leader of a small party which brought in a large number of prisoners after he had killed twenty-five. When I heard of his feat I ordered a full investigation, which resulted in the award of the Congressional Medal. I am happy to see your Society doing honor to a man who so thoroughly deserves it.

"I hope your unprecedented policy of banqueting a non-commissioned officer will be forever followed and honor done to the man who carries the gun—the man who goes over the top."

Then in response to numerous cries of "Speech," and "Tell us how you killed those twenty-five Germans and captured 132 others," Sergeant York rose and said:

"I guess you folks all understand that I'm just a soldier boy and not a speaker. I'd love to entertain you-all with a speech to-night, but I just can't do it. I do want to thank Major-General Duncan for his courtesy in coming to this dinner-party you-all have given for me, and I want you-all to know that I thoroughly appreciate all your kindness and attention. I just never will forget it."

Following the dinner and reception at the Waldorf, Sergeant York, in company with Cordell Hull, the Congressman from his district in Tennessee, took a late train for Washington. In that city, according to the *New York Tribune*—

An impromptu reception was tendered York when he visited the chamber of the House of Representatives, where his presence was made known by Representative Hull.

"Here sits in the gallery the man who has been credited with the greatest individual feat of bravery of the war—Sergeant Alvin C. York, of Tennessee," Mr. Hull said in calling the attention of the House to the distinguished Tennessean. The House rose and cheered, while York rose from his seat in the Speaker's section of the House gallery, and saluted.

At the War Department York received the congratulations of Secretary Baker and Adj.-Gen. Peter C. Harris and other officers of the Army.

"You are a brave man and I congratulate you," Mr. Baker said in grasping the hand of the big soldier.

Leaving the War Department, Sergeant York went to the White House to meet Secretary Tumulty.

Sergeant York proved one of the most modest of all heroes. He was pleased with everything he saw here to-day and all was as new and interesting to him as was the war itself.

He saw President Wilson in Paris while on a seven-day furlough, so after he had been through the White House this morning he declared he had "seen it all."

Sergeant York's exploit in the Argonne is considered by those best-competent to judge, the greatest individual feat of the war, and won for him not only the Distinguished Service Cross, but also the rare Congressional Medal of Honor. When the facts concerning the astounding deed became known, York, then a corporal, was commended before all the officers of the



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82d Division by Maj.-Gen. C. P. Summerall, in the following words:

"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."

But, as already intimated, Sergeant York did not start his army career as a rampant warrior, ready to shoot large, ragged holes in the anatomy of his fellow man and otherwise muss him all up. Far from it. Mr. George Patullo gives a brief sketch of York's life in *The Saturday Evening Post*, from which it appears that he was born at Pall Mall, December 13, 1887, and comes of a family that has lived in Tennessee for generations. He is one of eleven children. His father was a blacksmith and small farmer and the son has followed the same occupations. York is described as "a whale of a man, standing six feet, tipping the scales at 205 pounds." He has flaming red hair, clear-cut features, and a habitual expression of kindly humor. Like most men of the Tennessee mountain region, York is an expert with rifle or pistol. In turkey shoots in his home town, where the stunt is to shoot the head off a turkey with a rifle, York always carried off the money. Life is quiet and simple in the Pall Mall section of the country. The people are neither feudists nor moonshiners, but a law-abiding and devout population. York confesses, however, that he himself was inclined to raise a little excitement at one time in his life, stating that he drank and gambled a little and "went all the gaits." But early in 1915, largely through the influence, it is said, of a young lady in his home town, whom he expects to marry, he was induced to join the Church of Christ and Christian Union. The rules of this sect are very strict, but York was determined to follow them to the utmost. Among other things this Church is against fighting in any form, and so, quoting Mr. Patullo:

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 county owed their origin to him. What should he do?

The congregation were unanimous on the point: York must ask for exemption as a conscientious objector. Pastor R. C. Pile urged it long and eloquently. His mother, faced with the prospect of losing the head of the household at a time when her health was not robust, and with three



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small children on her hands, backed up his arguments.

But York refused. He belonged to the Church of Christ and Christian Union and subscribed to 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.

So York became a soldier at Camp Gordon. But his conscience kept pestering him. He could not reconcile the teachings of Christ, as he had learned them in his Church, with the things that were being done in the war. This is a little matter, by the way, which has pestered other minds wiser and more learned than that of the blacksmith from the Tennessee hills, and in the opening months of the war several persons exprest themselves on the subject, through the public prints and otherwise, at considerable length. Scruples tho he had against it, York took readily to soldiering, seeing which, Captain Danforth, the commander of his company, essayed to reason away his conscientious objections, which, it is said, caused the Tennessean many hours of worry. Captain Danforth, who, it appears, was by way of being somewhat versed in Scriptural teachings himself, quoted sundry texts from the Bible to overcome the objector's scruples, among them, according to Mr. Patullo:

The thirty-sixth verse of the twenty-second chapter of St. Luke: "Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." Or St. Matthew x, 34: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." Or again, St. John xviii, 36: "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight."

Finally York's objections were laid low by the argument contained in the thirty-third chapter of Ezekiel, read to him by his captain as follows:

Son of man, speak to the children of thy people, and say unto them, When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: If when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; Then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take away, his blood shall be upon his own head. . . . But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. "All right," said York at last; "I'm satisfied." From that night all his doubts seem to have been laid; from that night he plunged whole-heartedly into the duties of a soldier.

Eventually York found himself in France, where he was soon promoted to corporal in Company G, 328th Infantry, 82d Division.



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On the morning of October 8, Corporal York was one of a body of sixteen men in the battle of the Argonne who were ordered to put certain enemy machine guns out of action. The guns they were after were on the other side of a slope. To gain their objective, the Americans were forced to climb a hill, exposed a part of the time to enemy fire from other positions. They accomplished this without loss and began to descend on the other side, their object being to advance upon the enemy from the rear. Presently they found themselves in a cuplike valley among the hills where they spied two Germans ahead of them. One of these surrendered and the other disappeared. Anticipating battle, the detachment went into skirmish order and continued to push forward. Arriving at a small stream, the Americans discovered on the other side some twenty or thirty Germans, among them several officers who were apparently holding a conference. The Americans fired, with the result that the entire body of Germans surrendered. Just as they were on the point of departure with their prisoners, dozens of enemy machine guns, hidden on the steep slope of the hill facing them not over thirty yards away, opened up on the American detachment. Captors and captured immediately dropt flat on their stomachs, but not before six Americans had been killed. Three men were wounded, among them the sergeant in command. York and seven privates remained. Of these one had taken refuge behind a tree raked on both sides by enemy fire so he could not get away, and the others were guarding the German prisoners. Hence York was left to fight an entire machine-gun battalion alone. Quoting further from Mr. Patullo's story:

He never thought of surrender. His problem was to make the enemy give up as quickly as possible, and he kept yelling to them to "Come down!"

Bang! Bang! "Come down!" York would shout, precisely as tho the surrender of a battalion to an individual soldier were the usual thing—and I really believe he regards it that way, provided the soldier be an American.

"Somehow I knew I wouldn't be killed," he said. "I've never thought I would be—never once from the time we started over here."

At the first crack of the machine guns on the slope opposite him York dropt to earth. He was in a narrow path leading toward the emplacements. Directly in front lay the *Boche* prisoners, groveling in fear of their comrades' fire. The machine guns were less than thirty yards away and were blazing straight down. Their stream of fire mowed off the tops of the the greatest reception ever given a non-commissioned officer in this or any other country, upon his arrival in New York City the other day. The things about York that made the deepest impression on those with whom he came in contact in New York were his modesty and his self-possession. He comes from a little town in the Tennessee mountains and confessed



that he used to think Knoxville in that State quite a city. His experiences in the metropolis, therefore, where he was lionized in true American style, were entirely new to him. Yet he was utterly unabashed throughout and carried himself with the dignity becoming the man who performed the greatest individual feat in the war. According to the *New York Sun*—

He attributes all his prowess as a soldier to the grace of God, while admitting that he was one of the best shots with the rifle and pistol in his neighborhood, being able to shoot the head off a turkey with either rifle or six-shooter. He said to his questioners that he felt stronger spiritually since he had "come out of there, with the help of God. The American Army and the American flag won the war because they had God behind them, and when you have God behind you, you can come out on top every time."

Alvin C. York's exploit will go down in history as one of the finest examples of American valor. No doubt it will form the inspiration for writers of song and story for many a day. Already one of our American balladists, Richard Butler Glaenzer, has celebrated it in the following poem, entitled "A Ballad of Redhead's Day," which recently appeared in the *New York Times*:

### **A BALLAD OF REDHEAD'S DAY**

**Talk of the Greeks at Thermopylæ!**

**They fought like mad till the last was dead;  
But Alvin C. York, of Tennessee,**

**Stayed cool to the end tho his hair was red,  
Stayed mountain cool, yet blazed that gray  
October the Eighth as Redhead's Day.**

**With rifle and pistol and redhead nerve**

**He captured one hundred and thirty-two;  
A battalion against him, he did not swerve**

**From the Titans' task they were sent to do—  
Fourteen men under Sergeant Early**

**And York, the blacksmith, big and burly.  
Sixteen only, but fighters all,**

**They dared the brood of a devil's nest,  
And three of those that did not fall**

**Were wounded or out of the scrap; the rest  
Were guarding a bunch of *Boche* they'd caught  
When both were trapt by a fresh onslaught.**

**Excepting York, who smiled "Amen"**

**And, spotting the nests of spitting guns,  
Potted some twenty birds, and then**

**Did with his pistol for eight more Huns  
Who thought they could crush a Yankee alive  
In each red pound of two hundred and five.**

**That was enough for kill-babe Fritz:**

**Ninety in all threw up their hands,  
Suddenly tender as lamb at the Ritz.**

**Milder than sheep to a York's commands;  
And back to his lines he drove the herd,**

**Gathering more on the way—Absurd!  
Absurd, but true—ay, gospel fact:**

**For here was a man with a level head.**

**Who, scorning to fail for the help he lacked,**

**Helped himself till he won instead:**

**An elder was he in the Church of Christ,**

**Immortal at thirty; his faith sufficed.**