

ON THE TRAIL OF A LEGEND

By **DAVID BAEZ**
Herald-Citizen Staff



Tennessee Tech History Professor Michael Birdwell, *pictured above*, had visited a certain spot in the woods of rural France countless times in his mind since taking on Sgt. Alvin York as a subject of study in 1985.

On Oct. 8, 1918, the Pall Mall-born York became a World War I hero when he picked off at least 20 German machine-gunners during an engagement near the French front line. The engagement was key to the success of the Meuse-Argonne offensive, which forced a German retreat that led to the eventual signing of the armistice.

York was awarded the Medal of Honor.



Through York's diaries and correspondence, affidavits from other soldiers, and documents from a 1929 reenactment of the battle, Birdwell could almost see the site where York's heroics took place. A valley, a creek, woods. But as he embarked on a biography of York, he knew that soon he would have to actually set foot in the spot. *Alvin York pictured left.*

Then, last summer, he got his chance.

That's when Thomas Nolan of Middle Tennessee State University contacted him about using Geographic Information Sciences technology to pinpoint the location of the engagement, which had been in dispute since 1919. It would be perhaps the first time that a GIS expert and a historian had joined forces in this way.

"Not too many historians are interested in GIS, and not too many GIS people are interested in history," said Nolan.

Combining Birdwell's knowledge of the historical details with Nolan's cartographic skills, the pair created a digital database that superimposed the historical data over a map of the modern French landscape. Once in the field, Global Positioning System technology would allow them to track their progress during their investigation.

What followed was a year of discussions with the French government and reams of paperwork. Finally, in early March, the pair, along with historian and documentarian David Currey, found themselves scampering up the snow-covered French rural hillsides, armed with a couple of plastic shovels, a Chinese knock off of an American entrenching tool, and a handheld data recorder with an icon that mirrored their movements across the landscape.

They arrived on Sat. March 4, but didn't get to the field until Sunday; they would have to return on Wednesday.

The site is near the tiny village of Chatel-Chehery. With a population of around 200 farmers, it's a throwback to a bygone era, and heightened the team's sense of stepping directly into history. The stone-

masonry houses are hundreds of years old. An 11th century abbey is nearby. There isn't a single cafe or grocery store or place to buy anything. Hardly any children can be seen.

The villagers are well aware of the military history of the area. In the 1950s, they had spread out in the woods and picked up every piece of brass they could find for scrap metal. The current mayor is in possession of tons of memorabilia from the occupation, including postcards the Germans had made from photographs of the town for the troops to send home. Many of the villagers invited the team into their homes for wine or food.

"They're very appreciative that we liberated them twice in the last 100 years," Nolan said. "Occupation was not nice either time."

The mayor even joined them to help in the dig. The team had narrowed down the site location to about a 200-acre area. All that Sunday's search turned up was a German musket and a belt buckle, hardly decisive evidence.



"I was getting concerned we were going to come up empty-handed," said Currey.

But on Monday they found machine guns, grenades and rifle cartridges - they had hit upon the German machine gunners position on that long-ago day. From there, they were able to surmise the approximate location of York, within the sight lines of the German gunners. On Tuesday, they found American shell casings along the creek that they believe were fired from York's rifle.

It looked like they'd found the spot. But there was one crucial piece of evidence missing.

Pictured above: Researchers say this stream near the French village of Chatel-Chehery, shown in a photo they took earlier this month, is believed to be the site where Sgt. Alvin C. York single-handedly stopped a band of German machine gunners and captured more than a hundred prisoners of war.

"We didn't find any .45 rounds," Birdwell said. "Without those, we can't say for certain it's the site."

In an affidavit, York's commander said that he fired 15 rounds from his rifle and 21 or 22 from his .45 pistol.

"The combination of those numbers in one area would be conclusive in terms of identifying the site," said Nolan.

The three men are determined to complete the project, and hope that their success in early March will help them get financing. (They paid for the first trip out of their own pockets).

"We're trying to plot strategy on what to do next," said Birdwell. "We're going to photograph all the artifacts we have. I have an article to write. Tom has a dissertation to write. Dave's got a documentary to finish. And we have to go back."

Published March 25, 2006 4:08 PM CST : Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN



From left, historian David Currey, TTU professor Michael Birdwell and Middle Tennessee State University professor Thomas Nolan review some of the materials they gathered during their search for the battlefield that made Alvin York famous.

TTU'S BIRDWELL ON NATIONAL PBS SHOW TODAY

TTU -- In the South, some might say **Michael Birdwell** is "gettin' above his raising" being in a film to be aired nationally on PBS.

That's exactly the point that Birdwell, a Tennessee Tech University history professor, will make during his appearance in "People Like Us: Social Class in America," a national broadcast to air locally on WCTE-TV on Sunday, Sept. 23, at 8 p.m.

"The working title of the segment I appear in was called 'Gettin' Above Your Raising' and it deals with the history of social class in Southern Appalachia," said Birdwell. "Attitudes about social class are different in different parts of the country.

"In some areas, class is flaunted, but in Southern Appalachia, a millionaire could be standing next to you and you wouldn't know it because people learn not to draw attention to themselves and attract resentment from others."

In the two-hour film, Birdwell comments on the story of a successful Kentucky native who works in Washington, D.C. The segment follows her on the job and on visits back to Kentucky to see her family.

"The transformation is fascinating," said Birdwell. "Her language, her dress, her body language all change when she is with her family because she doesn't want to appear to be 'uppity.'"

One of the filmmakers, Louis Alvarez, says Birdwell was just who he and his partner were looking for to appear in this segment.

"It's hard to find TV 'talking heads' whose style meshes with our half-humorous, half-serious, laid back kind of filmmaking," said Alvarez. "But Michael's easygoing manner fits right in and doesn't make the audience feel like they are being lectured to."

Alvarez and fellow film maker Andrew Kolker, twice winners of both the Peabody Award and the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award, have produced critically praised documentaries on American culture over the past 25 years.

For more information about the film, visit www.pbs.org/peoplelikeus.

Published September 21, 2001 2:23 PM CDT: Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

THE HISTORY CHANNEL'S NEWEST 'STAR' --

By **CINDIE MILLER**

Herald-Citizen Staff

The words of **Michael Birdwell**, adjunct history professor at Tennessee Tech University, may explain how "Birdy" keeps up the frenetic pace of his life. Last year, the professor's book "Celluloid Soldiers: The Warner Brothers Campaign Against Nazism" was a critical hit, spurring interest from television's History Channel, A&E and other venues. The History Channel filmed a documentary based on the book, called "Terror in the Heartland." The book has been translated into German and released in Germany under the title, "The Other Hollywood of the 1930s: Warner Bros.'s Campaign Against the Nazis." A paperback edition of "Celluloid Soldiers" is slated for release in February.

Birdwell is not one to rest on past successes, however. He doesn't have time, even if he had the inclination. A recent guest speaker at Pigeon Forge, Birdwell has been asked to return during the city's November Veterans' Salute. Birdwell will speak there on Nov. 9, 12, 13 and 18.

"I'm going to be opening for Bob Dole," Birdwell joked. Dole will be the keynote speaker on Nov. 13. The event is a fundraiser for the World War II Memorial; Birdwell will be discussing Sergeant Alvin C. York. On Thursday, Nov. 9, he will moderate a roundtable symposium titled "Reflections on World War II"; on Nov. 12, he will be among those authors discussing and signing books; and on Nov. 18, he will be discussing "World War II Cartoons for the Grandchildren." It is rumored that producers of the television show "Booknotes" will be there.

Sandwiched between those dates, the History Channel is airing "Save Our History: Dear Home: Letters from WWI," which honors World War I veterans and features Cookeville veteran Albert Smith and the letters he wrote from the front to his family.

"Albert will be a centerpiece for this program," Birdwell says. "The letters are incredible. Albert felt a great responsibility to do right by his family."

Birdwell is serving as a consultant on the program, which premieres Friday, Nov. 10 (see related story). His involvement in it is a bit of serendipity that reflects the momentum of his current charge toward television.

"I was asked to write an article on Rutledge Smith," Birdwell says. "Just 'because I live in Cookeville.' I got in touch with Smith's sister, Miss Dolly Williams, in Camp Monterey. I got the information for that article, which I wrote and she approved before she died. Then, Patsy Williams, Miss Dolly's daughter-in-law, called and asked my advice on what to do with all the letters Albert had written. I helped her sort and arrange them -- they range from May 1917 to April 1919 -- which led to my writing an article on him. That article was published in the Tennessee Historical Quarterly in the Summer 1999 issue.

"Then, Sara Bader of A&E called and asked me about getting some of the York letters for this program, 'Dear Home.' After reading them, she decided they weren't what she was looking for -- Alvin York was not a great letter writer then -- and I sent Bader a copy of the article about Albert Smith. She wanted more about him, then. . . I believe Albert's letters will be a significant addition to the story of World War I."

Albert Smith was "racked by the war," Birdwell said. "He never got over it."

Further developments in Birdwell's career include a documentary about the concept of class in America. Producer Louis Alvarez of New American Media visited 50 states and asked people about their concept of "class." Alvarez called Birdwell and discussed with him the idea of class in Appalachia. "Getting Above Your Raisin" is the resulting segment, which shows the transition in the life of a Kentucky woman who

moved from a coal mining community to Washington, D.C., and some of the preconceptions metropolitan people had about Kentuckians and vice-versa.

"What kind of bread do you eat?" was the last question Alvarez asked each of his subjects.

"That is a very revealing question," Birdwell said. "Apparently I was the only one who answered by asking in turn, 'store-bought or home-made?'"

This show, which will air in several segments, will be broadcast sometime next year.

The third television show is a two-hour documentary on non-commissioned officers and how they are treated differently than commissioned officers. Named "Sarge," the program will include those perceptions as shown in books and movies as well as in real life. Louis Gossett Jr., Mort Walker, Bill Mulden and other well-known personae will be involved in it. Birdwell will be discussing Sergeant Alvin York. That program will air on the History Channel sometime in December.

In the midst of activities commemorating those who fought in our nation's wars, Birdwell is working on a book about this area with local historians Calvin Dickinson, Steve Gwilt and Homer Kemp. That manuscript, a history of eight adjoining counties with transportation and architecture as its focus, will cover the years 1769 to about 1960; it is nearing its self-imposed deadline and will be published by Nashville's Hillsboro Press early next spring. Photographs, which will number about 100, have been supplied by Jim Heard.

"We're going to have a hard time narrowing down the images," Birdwell said. "They're fantastic representations of the area in its developmental stages."

Birdwell is also co-editing an encyclopedia of Appalachia, which is a "huge project," according to the editor, and will not be completed for a couple of years.

Birdwell is assigned a section of the volume, about 10,000 words. The project will be about 1,000 pages in total length and will include business and industries from all of Appalachia, not just Tennessee.

"Everything from aerospace to zinc, including such industries as auto, banking, candy, and railroad, and all points in between," Birdwell said.

He's working on a series of Looney Tunes as related to WWII, and he has two "serious" writing projects in the works, one on movie mogul Harry Warner and a York biography.

Somewhere among all of these projects, Birdwell teaches four classes at Tennessee Tech University and is actively involved in Cookeville Drama Center productions.

How does he do it all?

"Well, obviously, have to take my vitamins," Birdwell says. "And I walk four to six miles a day."

Published November 03, 2000 2:06 PM CST : Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

TAKE IT TO THE EDGE: 'THE BORDERLAND'

EXPLORES OUR PERCEPTIONS

Cindie Miller

Herald-Citizen Staff

For the final performance of the 1999-2000 season, the Cookeville Drama Center will present an intense play by Jim Grimsley about stereotypes and prejudices. Directed by Tennessee Tech history professor **Michael Birdwell**, "The Borderland" stars Charles Long, Brad Brown, Michelle Winebarger and Dawn Luegge in what are departure roles for the entire cast.

By CINDIE MILLER

"I've always been a good guy," Charles Long said. "The boy next door or the neighbor -- my last three roles were as preachers. So this is a real treat."

This is Long's 37th show and his first opportunity as the "villain." Long plays Jake in "Borderland," a drinkin', wife-beatin', redneck son-of-a-gun whose portrayal will draw chills down your spine.

"This is a guy you love to hate," Long said. "But at times you almost like him -- you can identify with him, which makes him even more frightening. I've been able to draw from my own observance of life. I know people like this."

Long's Jake is at times so close to real that you freeze in your seat and hope he doesn't look your way.

Dawn Luegge, who portrays Jake's victimized wife, Eleanor, is just beginning college but has worked in theater all her life. She is active in "Mystery Theater" performances as well as numerous other engagements. Luegge is the picture of the stereotypical pretty blonde wife of a drinking husband. But she says that Eleanor is a part that will stretch her range.

"I'm glad to have this experience," Luegge said. "This kind of part is very new to me, and playing a victim is definitely a challenge. I've never been in a situation like this."

For research, Luegge also watches other performers and has rented movies to get the realistic feel of her character's situation.

The other stereotype in the play is that of the "normal" couple, played by Brad Brown and Michelle Winebarger. For "Borderland," Brown is a yuppie accountant named Gordon, and Winebarger is his wife, Helen. The childless couple has decided to move to the country and begin their family, only to find themselves unable to conceive.

When they find themselves neighbors to the redneck Jake with his brood of five little rednecks, their frustration turns into resentment.

A couple in real life, Brown and Winebarger have what is perhaps the most difficult challenge: they must separate their roles on the stage from those at home.

"In real life, I'm much more like Gordon than Helen," Winebarger says. "The part of Helen has affected me in such a way that I find myself becoming like her. Helen doesn't take anything from anybody. I look at Brad a lot, and people I know, who don't seem to take anything from others. Since Brad and I know how

the other is going to respond, we kind of react to each other in the play. Hopefully, our energy is at a high level, and we'll let it build line by line."

"I've seen this situation," Brown says. "There's a weird parallel between the Gordon and Jake characters in that there's a lot of emotional battering of Helen. 'Borderland' looks at both kinds of abuse. You ask yourself, which is worse? It's a good way for people to examine their own relationships and how little things can be magnified."

Brown has had extensive work in theater and just came from "I Hate Hamlet" with director Steven Gwilt. He will graduate from TTU in December with a marketing degree.

But while *Borderland* can be said to have domestic violence as its central theme, it also deals with class issues and the conflicts between city people and country people. On a deeper level, it deals with how we look at each other and how we solve problems.

"It's about the transgression of boundaries," director Birdwell said. "It's not quite what it seems to be in the beginning. What it points out is that there's no easy resolution in some problems."

Birdwell said that it's possible "The Borderland" may be entered in a competition if he can cut it down to fit into the time restrictions. It is the kind of play that would be a good entry, with its timely issues and complex characterizations.

First, though, it will be shown to Cookeville audiences. "The Borderland" opens Friday, June 23, at Cookeville Drama Center and runs through two weekends. For ticket information, call the Drama Center box office at 520-5296.

Published June 16, 2000 2:43 PM CDT : Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

AUTHORS TO SIGN WORK THIS SATURDAY AT BOOKWORKS

By CINDIE MILLER

Herald-Citizen Staff

Bookworks presents a trio of Tennessee authors this Saturday, July 17. **Dr. Michael E. Birdwell**, assistant history professor at Tennessee Tech University and local actor, will sign his book, **Celluloid Soldiers: Warner Bros.'s Campaign Against Nazis**. In it, Birdwell examines Warner Brothers studios' campaign against Nazi-ism before World War II even started, and how the federal government and Hollywood fought them. Harry Warner was a man who stood for ordinary people and was one of the first to recognize the threat of Hitler's propaganda. "Celluloid Soldiers" also examines the life of Tennessee hero and pacifist Alvin York, and how Warner's movie of York's life affected him. Birdwell is an archivist for the Sergeant York Historical Association and has worked with A&E's "Biography" series on York's life. He will be signing "Celluloid Soldiers" from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

With Birdwell will be Jim Jones, author of **Every Day in Tennessee History**, a compilation of anecdotes about the famous and infamous in Tennessee's history. The format follows a yearly calendar, with a vignette on each day. Most days have several stories which may pertain to different years. For instance, today, July 15, has a story from 1673, 1789, 1863, 1898, 1915 and 1992. It's like a walk through history. Tidbits about Davy Crockett, Elvis Presley, President Andrew Jackson and many others cover the state from the Mississippi to the Smoky Mountains. Jones is a public historian with the Tennessee Historical Commission and is the author of over 50 articles dealing with history.

He received the Marshall T. Wingfield Award in 1994, given by the West Tennessee Historical Society, and co-authored **Passport to Tennessee History** in 1996. He lives in Murfreesboro.

Local storyteller, poet, and artist Wayne Hogan will be in the children's room at BookWorks from 2 to 3 p.m. for a combination story hour and interactive session with kids. Hogan will be reading from illustrated children's books as well as from his own work.

Published July 16, 1999 2:11 PM CDT : Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

GRANT TO INSTILL PASSION FOR LOCAL HISTORY IN TEACHERS

TTU – For high drama, romance, intrigue and suspense, look beyond summer's blockbusters to American history, where the content rivals the best fiction and films.

That's the message the Tennessee Tech history faculty member Michael Birdwell, who infuses his classes at Tennessee Tech with the gorgeous and sometimes awful landscape of our heritage, including the local history of our region.

For his enthusiasm and desire to share the relevance of history with students, Birdwell has been appointed project director of a nearly \$1 million grant from the U. S. Department of Education. Coordinated through the White County Board of Education, the newly formed Cumberland Plateau Consortium Teaching American History will bring the passion of the past to middle and high school teachers throughout the region.

"It's been said that all politics is local," said Birdwell, an assistant professor of history. "Well, all history is local, too. We have a wealth of resources here, thanks to the TTU archives and numerous regional history museums. One of the things we're going to do with this program is make history more personal."

Over the next three years, the consortium will bring area school teachers to campus for a series of eight week-long summer institutes that will cover the greatest hits of American history – from colonization and settlement to the Civil War and Reconstruction and on into modern history. Sprinkled throughout the curriculum will be the personalized approach to history that can help bring the topics alive for area youngsters.

"History doesn't just happen to great people and isn't just about great events – history happens to all of us," said Birdwell. "When you teach local history, you give students a hook they can latch onto. They say, 'Gee, it isn't something that happened far away to people we don't know; it happened to our families, and now we have a vested interest in wanting to know more.'"

In addition to the summer institutes, the program will offer mini-institutes throughout the school year, as well as annual workshops, regional lectures, mentoring and net-working opportunities, and a web site that will serve as a hands-on-curriculum resource.

"This is a real opportunity for teachers to have access to other teachers in their area," said Birdwell. "And in these times of limited resources, the program will make it much easier for teachers to build up their libraries."

"That's especially important at the middle and high school level, where history classes are sometimes taught by teachers who specialized in other areas. And with the enacting of the No Child Left Behind federal legislation, it's never been more important to address teacher-credentials.

"The big push with No Child Left Behind is for all teachers and teacher assistants to become 'highly qualified,' to specialize in the subject they're assigned to teach," said Karen Benningfield, federal programs director/grant writer with the White County Board of Education, which will administer the grant.

Many history teachers are certified in general social studies, which covers a variety of topics but leaves little room to emphasize a specific area such as American history. The new program will address that, giving teachers an opportunity for meaningful staff development.

“One way teachers can prove they’re highly qualified is through a ‘professional matrix,’ which recognizes years of experience, credit for college courses and staff development in the specific area they’re teaching,” said Benningfield. “this grant is perfect for that, because participants are going to have hours and hours of study in their specific area.”

Teachers taking part in the summer program will have access to a rich source of supplemental materials. The idea is to encourage teachers to rely less on the textbook and more on supplemental material, so that students get more out of their classes.

TTU history chairperson Jeff Roberts, academic director for the grant, has always been a proponent of hands-on learning.

“Field trips, for instance, are very effective,” he said. “They inspire people; they make students want to go out and learn more. We certainly do that here, and I think you can do that on the secondary level just as successfully, especially since our region is so rich with Civil War sites and other local history sources.”

That’s what brings history to life, Roberts said; that’s what makes history relevant.

“When History is personalized,” said Benningfield, “it becomes so much more meaningful. Often times, our teachers are so overloaded, so overworked, that they don’t have the time to get out and explore our area to learn about local history. The Tennessee Tech faculty will be able to pull all that together for them.”

The US Department of Education has funded similar programs in other parts of the state. They all share the goal of improving the way American history is taught. And they have one other thing in common: They’re all partnerships between secondary education and higher education. That’s a partnership whose time has come, said Michelle Ungurait, social studies specialist with the Tennessee Department of Education.

“It’s my hope that every public university in the state will get involved in partnerships like this,” she said. “the willingness of Tennessee Tech and White County to work together was inspiring; they were immediately willing and eager to jump right in. Both sides stand to learn a great deal from each other.”

The grant forming the Cumberland Plateau Consortium Teaching American History is the largest ever to involve faculty from TTU’s History Department.

YORK GETS HIS OWN STAMP

Amy Goodpasture
Herald-Citizen Staff

Pall Mall is anticipating a large crowd Saturday. And the members of this crowd will all have one thing in common: their admiration for World War I hero Sgt. Alvin C. York -- who has once again stirred national attention.

The occasion of such a gathering is to celebrate the issuing of the Sgt. York commemorative stamp as well as to "honor Sgt. York and really perpetuate what he stood for," said Kathy Lewis of Allardt, a board member of the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation.

"That's the whole mission in all of this -- to make people aware that he didn't just fight."

The celebration will begin at 1 p.m. at the newly reconstructed Alvin C. York and Sons General Merchandise Store and Wolf River Post Office with an official ceremony honoring York.

Afterward, York enthusiasts will have the opportunity to purchase the new stamp during its first day of sale in Pall Mall, following the US Postal Service's official release of it at the Pentagon in Washington, DC, on Wednesday.

First-day covers will be available, all postmarked from Pall Mall with the official date of its issuing: May 3, 2000.

Also, the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation will have limited edition portfolios available, which have illustrations depicting different facets of York's life -- as a soldier, a Christian, an educator, a business man -- and some of his accomplishments, including his starting York Institute, York Bible School and York Chapel.

The cost for a first-day cover is \$3, and a portfolio is \$30 plus sales tax.

"We will be processing and handing out the new stamps and the portfolios," Lewis said. "We'll be working from behind the old post office facade, handing them out through the front of it -- all in a celebration of the life and times of Sgt. York."

And 80-year-old Elaine Williams, the official post mistress of Pall Mall, will be on hand to hand cancel each stamped envelope.

In addition, "We'll have tents set up outside, and there'll be a food booth. We'll have pickers on the porch. We'll have a quartet who'll sing the national anthem, and we'll end the program with 'Fly Eagle Fly,' which is a very moving patriotic song," Lewis said.

"And in the middle of all that, the York Institute Band's going to play a five-minute medley of old gospel hymns."

Lewis said the three surviving York children will be at the celebration, as well as most of the grandchildren.

"They'll be there if people want a photo made in front of the old post office with them," Lewis said.

No parking will be allowed in the store parking lot. "Everybody will park at the York Mill Park across the road, and then we'll run shuttle vans," Lewis said.

The Sgt. York stamp is part of a series of four stamps commemorating the heroism and achievements of distinguished officers from both world wars, the other three being Gen. John L. Hines, Gen. Omar Bradley and Second Lt. Audie Murphy.

"It is not a single stamp -- it comes out in a page of 20, so there are five of each person being honored," Lewis.

Lewis said the release of the Sgt. York stamp was due in a large part through the efforts of Sandi Swanson of Rockford, Ill., who became intrigued by the York family when she visited Pall Mall nine years ago. After much research, she decided to push for the issuing of a Sgt. York commemorative stamp.

"It became a mission of hers," Lewis said. "She's the one who worked and wrote all the letters and coordinated the effort."

"She really led the fight on getting all of the petitions in and signatures and that sort of thing."

She added, "But the Veterans administration departments and the American Legion and all those folks nationwide helped, too. It took lots and lots of folks to ever get the postal service to agree to issue a stamp in his honor."

It was a five-year struggle to get the stamp issued, Lewis said, because the US Postal Service is swamped with requests for commemorative stamps -- and usually no more than 30 are issued each year.

The Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation, a national foundation, has been in existence since 1993, Lewis said.

She said she expects Saturday's celebration to have the biggest gathering of anything the foundation has organized thus far.

"We had a large crowd for the reopening of the store, probably 250," she said. "The weekend before that, the black powder shoot was held, and over 200 of the top shooters in the United States and Canada were there to compete.

"But this will be the very biggest major event the foundation has promoted."

And she "wouldn't be surprised if we had somewhere between 500 and 1,000 -- at least."

Lewis said the coordination of this event has been a collaborative effort of many.

"It's all the agencies and people working together who are making this happen," she said. "There's never an event worthwhile that happens unless a lot of folks are involved, and that's the way this project has been. And a lot of hard work has gone on between a lot of folks.

"And we all do it with a mission: to promote the principals and ideas that Sgt. York had, which carried him through his trials and significantly improved our lots in life.

"We want that to go on for generations after we're here. And that's the whole point of the foundation -- to be sure that's preserved and kept so that it will be perpetual."

** For more information on the Sgt. York commemorative postage stamp, the portfolio or becoming a member of the Sgt. York Patriotic Foundation, call Lewis at (931) 879-2138. The Sgt. Alvin C. York State Historic Site in Pall Mall is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and can be reached by calling (931) 879-6456.*

Published May 04, 2000 12:34 PM CDT: Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN

SITE OF YORK HERORICS FOUND?

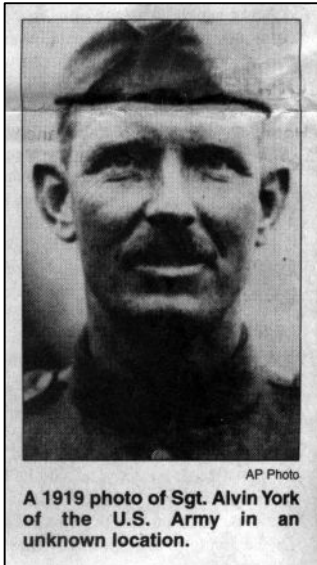
By Jenny Barchfield: Associated Press Writer

PARIS (AP) – Nineteen .45-caliber cartridges buried in northeastern France may mark the spot where Sgt. Alvin York became America's most celebrated soldier of World War I, a research team said Thursday.

The Sergeant York Discovery Expedition said that after four years of work it found the cartridges buried 2 to 4 inches in soil near the village of Chatel-Chehery where York single-handedly took out a nest of German machine guns.

But last March, a group led by academics from York's home state of Tennessee said they were "80 percent sure" they had found the spot where York carried out his heroic deeds – a location different from that announced Thursday.

The most recent group to claim they found the "York spot" said the presence of the cartridges – which they earlier group had not found – was the "final piece of the puzzle" needed to identify the spot with "100 percent certainty," the group said in a statement.



It cited American military documents stating that York had fired at least 21 .45-caliber rounds with an automatic Colt pistol in his October 8, 1918, assault on the German position.

"The battlefield archaeology confirms what we know about the York story," the statement said, adding that it had unearthed the cartridges last weekend.

The group said it also discovered a host of other artifacts, including 250 German machine gun casings, at the site in the Argonne forest near France's border with Belgium.

York, a member of the 82nd Division, was awarded the Medal of Honor for heroism for taking on the nest of 35 machine guns. York – at the time a corporal – captured 132 German soldiers and killed at least 20 others in the battle.

Gary Cooper starred in a 1941 movie about York, who died in 1964. The research team's leader, Lt. Col. Douglas Mastriano, said the film had inspired him to begin his search. For more than four years, the U. S. Army officer, who is stationed in Heidelberg, Germany, spent his free time trolling through German military archives and made about 40 trips to the battlefield.

"I was shocked to finally find the actual site," Mastriano said, adding that it was "like finding a needle in a haystack."

Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Friday, 27 October 2006.

LEGEND COMES TO LIFE

By LINDSAY McREYNOLDS

Herald-Citizen Staff

The legendary attack in which a young Tennessee sergeant led a group of 17 soldiers through Chatel-Chéhery, France, during World War I to capture more than 100 Germans was given new life on Friday thanks to a group of historians and archeologists.

From the campus of Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee Tech history professor Michael Birdwell, geographer Tom Nolan of MTSU's geosciences faculty and history instructor Jim Deppen of the Nashville College of Business and Technology unveiled what they say is conclusive evidence that shows the location of Pall Mall native Sgt. Alvin C. York's victory over the Germans during the first World War.

The three showed a sample of items they brought back from a November trip to France, where they uncovered more than 1,400 artifacts from what they believe to be the Oct. 8, 1918, battle site.

The trip was the second time the group had gone looking for the York battlefield this year. In March, the group uncovered a few items, but the bulk of what was discovered as well as some of the most significant items were found during the November trip.

During that trip, Nolan, Birdwell and Deppen teamed up with French archaeologists Yves Desfosse and Olivier Brun; Belgian archaeologist Birger Stichelbaut; World War I historian Michael Kelly, a guide with Bartlett Battlefield Journeys in the United Kingdom; military artifact experts Eddie Browne and Ian Cobb of Great Britain; Frederic Castier, historian and official representative of the First Division Museum; the mayor of Chatel-Chehery, Roland Destenay; and the mayor of Fleville, Damien Georges, who also serves as the regional forester for the Argonne.

Nolan explained that the group used old maps and historical accounts of the battle combined with geographic information systems technology to pinpoint the likely coordinates of the battle site.

"One of the things GIS allows you to do is combine information from a variety of sources and convert all those to the same scale," Nolan said. "It allowed us to build a model of the landscape as it existed in 1918 and superimpose the figures on top of that."

On Friday, Nolan pointed out the maps they used in deciding where to dig and the artifacts they found including buttons from a German uniform, remnants of eyepieces for a German gas mask, a bolt from a German rifle, a German bayonet, bottoms to a German stick grenade, 45-caliber pistol cases, expended machine gun cartridges and several cans of grease the Germans used to lubricate their weapons.

But what is probably the most significant discovery that puts York and his men at that location is a collar button with "328 G" on it.

"328 G is York's company," Birdwell said. "It makes it very clear we are in the right location and that it came from one of the six soldiers who was killed."

In their discovery of the collar button, Birdwell said, "Kelly found it. I dug it up, and Jim washed it off. Then he (Jim) started yelling '328! 328! 328!'"

Birdwell said the reason the discovery of the 328 G button is so significant is that the location of the battle as well as the likelihood that it took place has been in dispute for years.

"Of the three locations, our evidence proves we've been correct from the get go," Birdwell said. "It's important for Pall Mall. It's important for France. This is an economically depressed region (in France)."

And Birdwell believes the discovery is significant for Americans as well during a time when few veterans of World War I remain.

"For America, it's important because this gave us the most recognizable hero of World War I," Birdwell said. "Eight guys bringing in 132 German prisoners. A lot of guys said it couldn't happen. But we have 1,454 artifacts that say, 'Yeah, it did happen.' It verifies what took place."

For Birdwell, the discovery of the 328 G button appears to be a pinnacle in 20 years of studying York's life.

"He was a fascinating, complex character," Birdwell said. "He didn't think what he did was extraordinary. He always gave credit to other soldiers -- to the seven survivors."

Birdwell noted York's position as a "conscientious objector" to the war but how York was able to adapt and excel in military life.

He also tried to bring a little of what he saw to be a highly educated world outside the one he was familiar with back home to Tennessee.

"He recognized the value of education, and he lobbied for the creation of a school," Birdwell said.

For Nolan, the York site discovery in France is a significant testimonial to what can be accomplished when history and science work together.

"World War I archaeology in France is in its infancy," Nolan said. "There's probably other areas to use these techniques to clarify history."

Nolan and Birdwell said that they are turning over many of the items they found to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation for processing. The 328 G collar button is expected to wind up in the Tennessee State Museum, and the other items are expected to be preserved in other museums and collections in Tennessee and in France.

The group plans to go back to France in October for a ceremony to dedicate the battle site with a historical marker.

Published December 09, 2006 3:12 PM CST: Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN



TTU professor Michael Birdwell displays some of the artifacts he and his group found from the apparent York battle site. A close-up of some of the artifacts is above. Herald-Citizen Photos/Ty Kernea

YORK'S HEROICS COME SECOND TO EDUCATION IN HIS HOMETOWN



MUFREESBORO (AP) - While two researchers celebrate discovering what they say is the site of Sgt. Alvin York's World War I valor in France, the Medal of Honor recipient's heroism is secondary to his legacy as an education trailblazer back home.

(Photo: This is a 1919 photo of Sgt. Alvin York of the U. S. Army in an unknown location. AP photo U. S. Army).

Bob Pile, a greenhouse business owner in York's rural hometown of Pall Mall, said that while York is "by far the most celebrated person" in

all of Middle Tennessee, he is most remembered for delivering on a promise to "bring education" to a poor, rural community.

York had little formal education and Pile said his wartime notoriety allowed him to influence the eventual opening of the Alvin C. York Institute, a school in Fentress County.

"He is revered more for that," said Pile, a county commissioner.

York lived in a Cumberland Plateau cabin with 10 siblings, and Birdwell said the Army provided him better living conditions and food than he had at home. Birdwell said York had little formal education and used his political clout after the war to push for a school in his community.

Bob Pile, a greenhouse business owner in York's hometown of Pall Mall, said York is "by far the most celebrated person" in all of Middle Tennessee.

Pile said in a telephone interview that York's legacy is not his military heroics but delivering on that promise to "bring education" to children in his community and the eventual opening of the Alvin C. York Institute, a school in Fentress County.

"He is revered more for that," said Pile, a county commissioner.

ON THE NET: The York Project: www.sergeantyorkproject.com

Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, December 10, 2006.

MIKE BIRDWELL SPEAKS AT DAR MEETING CLUB NEWS

The Old Walton Road Chapter of the DAR met on Tuesday October 26 at the home of Jan MacKenzie. Refreshments were served by Frances Benedict and Edith Toline.

Regent Claude Ann Burton called the meeting to order and led the members in the ritual. Chaplain Kaye Craig gave the devotional, Kate Harwood gave the National Defense Message, and Jessie Watts gave a Constitutional Side Light reporting that grades 5-8 have been given two options for the essay contest. The students can write an obituary for George Washington or interview a Senior Citizen.

Frances Benedict announced three new members: Eunetta Jenkins, Paula Anderson and Kendra Walker Huseman. A new recording secretary was elected, Ronda Brewster Walker, who read the minutes from the September meeting and after a couple of additions were approved as read.

Vice Regent Dr. Eleanor Mitchell introduced program speaker Dr. Mike Birdwell, history professor at Tennessee Tech University. Dr. Birdwell gave an in-depth profile of a World War I soldier from Monterey, Albert Perrin Smith. Birdwell gained insight into Smith's life through letters Smith wrote to his family during the war.

Other members in attendance included Catherine Compton, Hannah Hall, Aurelia Hannon, Jimmie Jaquess, Margaret Markum and Martha Willis.

Ronda Brewster Walker

Recording Secretary

Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Published November 19, 1999 4:37 PM CST

Nickname "Sergeant York"

Place of birth: Pall Mall, Tennessee

Place of death: Nashville, Tennessee

Allegiance [U.S. Army](#)

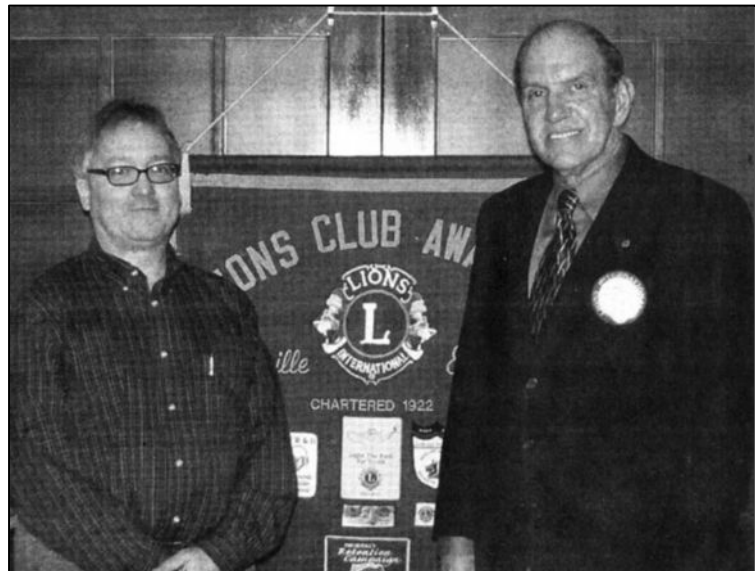
Unit [82nd Infantry Division](#)

Battles/wars [World War I](#)

Awards [Medal of Honor](#)
[Legion of Honor](#)
[Croix de Guerre](#)
[Croce di Guerra](#)
[War medal \(Montenegro\)](#)



<http://www.ajlambert.com>



GUEST SPEAKER

The Cookeville Evening Lions Club welcomed guest speaker Mike Birdwell, associate professor of history at TTU, who discussed his excavation trips to France to identify the actual site where Sgt. Alvin C. York completed his heroic mission against the Germans, thus establishing his position as one of America's greatest heroes of World War I. Birdwell presented photos of artifacts that were discovered, discussed the cooperation from the French authorities with the American group and mesmerized members with inside details of his adventure.

Herald-Citizen newspaper, Cookeville, TN: Sunday, 24 February 2008, page C-5.

TTU'S BIRDWELL FEATURED IN WARNER BROTHERS DOCUMENTARY

TTU -- What does Tennessee Tech University history professor Michael Birdwell have in common with actors Dennis Hopper, Tab Hunter and George Segal?

They all recently participated in a project to create a film documentary about the lives of Albert, Harry, Jack and Sam Warner -- the Polish immigrant brothers who founded the legendary Warner Bros. motion picture studio in Hollywood.

The Brothers Warner is an American Masters presentation premiering nationally on Thursday, Sept. 25. Locally, it will be aired in high definition on WCTE-TV, Channel 22, at 9 p.m., and listings show it is scheduled to re-air at noon and midnight on Friday.

A Warner Sisters production, the feature-length film was unveiled at an invitation-only showing in Los Angeles on March 27 and marks the 85th anniversary of the brothers' founding of the studio in 1923.

It's framed by the perspective of Cass Warner, who is the project's writer, producer and director, as well as granddaughter of former Warner Bros. president Harry Warner. She is also the author of "Hollywood Be Thy Name: The Warner Brothers Story" (University of Kentucky Press), which is in its sixth printing.

The film also features Eddie Schmidt as writer/producer.

His previous credits include "This Film is Not Yet Rated" and the Oscar-nominated "Twist of Faith."

Birdwell was chosen for participation in "The Brothers Warner" based on his book "Celluloid Soldiers," published in 2000 by New York University Press.

"The book offers a historical look at the efforts of Warner Bros. to make America aware of Nazi activity prior to World War II," Birdwell said.

"Warner Bros. was really the only major motion picture studio to take such a proactive stance against the Nazis, and in my research, I found that Harry Warner functioned essentially as the behind-the-scenes social conscience of the studio," he continued.

Birdwell traveled to Los Angeles last year to be interviewed about his research, and Schmidt and Warner said the TTU professor's historical knowledge of the political motivations of Warner Bros. really enhanced the documentary's material.

"The studio's efforts to mobilize the country -- both onscreen and off -- were largely led by the personal convictions of Harry Warner," Schmidt said.

Warner agreed, saying, "But Harry was a quiet man not prone to boasting, so Michael's interview -- and his book -- helped paint a fascinating and rounded portrait of my grandfather's achievements, as well as the courage of Harry himself.

"Appropriately, the interview was filmed at the home of my mother, Betty Warner (Harry Warner's daughter), so the whole thing was a real family affair," she continued.

Birdwell said, "This is the ninth documentary in which I've been involved, and out of those nine, it's the biggest film I've been involved with."

Wednesday, Sep 24, 2008: Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN

ARTIFACTS FROM YORK'S FAMED WWI BATTLE SITE

BROUGHT BACK TO TENNESSEE

Tom Nolan, Michael Kelly, Fred Castier, Yves Desfosses, Michael Birdwell and Roland Destenay recovered hundreds of artifacts from the battlefield in France. Destenay is holding a collar disk stamped 328 Infantry G.



COOKEVILLE — Remnants of American history from a World War I battle that ended 94 years ago are going on exhibit, beginning in war hero Alvin C. York's home state of Tennessee and eventually traveling to other states and on to France.

After years of research to verify the battle site where York and his men overtook a German stronghold outside Châtel Chéhéry, France, a Tennessee Tech University

historian and a Middle Tennessee State University geographer led a team in 2006 to find the battlefield and begin recovering more than 1,400 artifacts of war.

"Americans are woefully ignorant of the First World War, and as we approach the 100th anniversary of the conflict, the exhibit will, hopefully, begin to create new interest in the conflict," said Michael Birdwell, TTU associate history professor.

"While involved in just over eight months of fighting in 1918, more than twice as many Americans died than in 10 years in Vietnam. It is altogether fitting that this exhibit opened on the eve of Veterans' Day."

Uncovered shell casings, gravesites and German and American artifacts strongly support that the site is indeed the battleground where York's company killed 21 German soldiers and captured another 132 during an attack Oct. 8, 1918.

The most prized find for Birdwell is a U.S. Army collar disk, stamped 328 Infantry G.

"The collar disk connects us to the people who fought in this war, and assures us that we know where some of them rest," said Birdwell. "Seeing these artifacts helps us walk in their shoes and tangibly experience history instead of just talking about it."

One of those people that Tennesseans readily connect to is York. One of Tennessee's most celebrated veterans and a native of Fentress County, York was one of 17 members of Company G of the 328th Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Division.

The 328th was sent to rescue nine companies from the 308th Infantry of the New York 77th Division, members of the Lost Battalion who were cut off from allied supply lines and surrounded by German troops.

The rescue effort took place during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, an allied assault on German lines and the last major battle of World War I.

After 47 days of fighting in the hillsides between the Argonne Forest and the Meuse River, near Châtel Chéhéry, France, York was promoted to sergeant and awarded the Medal of Honor, which details his actions on Oct. 8, 1918.

“After his platoon had suffered heavy casualties and three other non-commissioned officers had become casualties, Cpl. York assumed command,” according to the medal’s documentation. “Fearlessly leading seven men, he charged with great daring a machinegun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon. In this heroic feat, the machinegun nest was taken, together with 4 officers and 128 men and several guns.”

The battle raged until Nov. 11, 1918. York and seven Company G soldiers, all of whom are commemorated in the exhibit, went on to march about 200 prisoners of war more than six miles south to the brigade headquarters in Varennes.

The site of the Oct. 8 fight was under dispute for years, given that a stream in the area had been rerouted and scholars had differing opinions on the exact site.

In 2006, MTSU’s Tom Nolan used geographic information system technology to combine spatial information from French and German battle maps and maps annotated by York’s commanding officers, Col. G. Edward Buxton and Maj. E. C. B. Danforth, with written accounts by both German and American participants. The information was then superimposed upon the modern landscape to help the international research team focus their metal detection fieldwork.

“The first trip, we were in the field three days and found nothing. Then we realized our metal detectors were on different settings,” Birdwell said. “We were right on top of it.”

From 2006 to 2009, the team recovered hundreds of artifacts as well as the graves of the six members of the 328th who died in the fighting on Oct. 8. Pvt. William E. Wine is known to have died with a head wound. A helmet with a gunshot hole was uncovered by the research team and will be on exhibit. It is believed to be Wine’s helmet.

Other found artifacts are items discarded by German soldiers as they surrendered to U.S. forces, including gas masks and filters, bayonets, Mauser rifle bolts and fired German rifle rounds.

Spent Colt .45 rounds were found at the site as well. York is known to have had a pistol, and forensic testing by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation on the artifacts has concluded that at least one other American soldier carried a revolver. Pistols were not standard issue for non-commissioned officers during World War I, but most soldiers made sure they acquired one, Birdwell said.

“In the Footsteps of Sergeant York” opened Nov. 10, at the Military Branch of the Tennessee State Museum, which is in the War Memorial Building on 6th Ave. in downtown Nashville. Admission is free.

Former TTU student and Southern Illinois University alumnus David Currey designed the exhibit panels, written by Nolan and Birdwell and commissioned by Dr. David McCoy and the Museum of the American Military Experience.

For directions and parking information, visit www.tnmuseum.org.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 25 November 2012

*Read more about the History of Putnam Co., TN and other interesting stories at:
<http://www.ajlambert.com>