

# The Great War – remembering a family hero

by Michael Martin Rauh



*Philip Martin in a photo taken around 1917.*

## Private Philip Martin

In 1958, I was a 5<sup>th</sup> grade student. While studying world history, my class learned about *World War I*, also known as the Great War. We read about the terrible battles where trench warfare, poison gas, and modern weaponry took many lives. I learned then that America had entered the war on April 6, 1917.

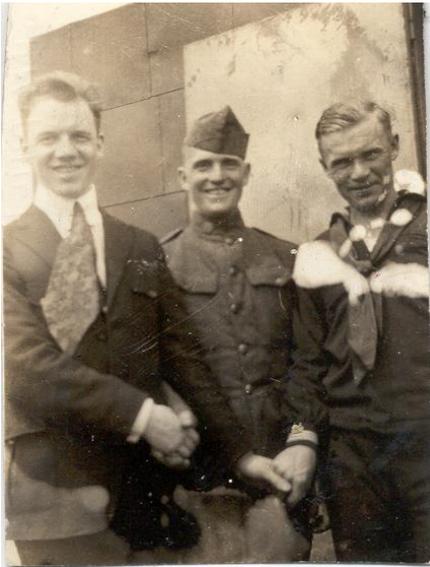
To help mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these events, I want to tell my family the story I learned so many years ago.

At the end of the term where I learned about World War I, there was an old black & white movie on TV about the life of Sergeant Alvin York. He was one of the many American heroes who fought in the great war. For his actions, he received many awards and was the most decorated soldier of the war. I was

very impressed with the movie and was surprised when my mother told me my great-uncle was a member of the same infantry unit as Sgt. York, and that he had fought in the same battles.

What I know about my great-uncle, Philip Martin, is an oral history that was told to me by my mother, Gladys Lorraine Rauh, nee Martin.

Private Philip Martin was one of 10 children born to my great-grandparents, John and Philipina Martin. He was born on January 24, 1892. His younger brother, John Jr., was my grandfather. He had an older brother, Frank, who served with the US Navy during the war (twin brothers Edward, and John died in childbirth). He also had five sisters, Mabel, Lillian, Pauline, Margaret, and Anna. At that time the Martin family members were all living in Brooklyn, New York.



*Photo at left: L to R – the three brothers, John Jr., Philip, and Frank Martin. This photo was taken on an apartment house rooftop in Ridgewood, NY shortly before Philip left for duty in France.*

I've been able to learn a little about what Philip did before the war. He was a glass cutter for the Crystolon Cut Glass Company in Brooklyn, NY. He was also a concert violinist. None of the family members that I've spoken to over the years can recall what orchestra he played with.

When America declared war on Germany, Philip joined the Army and became a member of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, 328<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, and he was assigned to Company "L." The 328<sup>th</sup> formed up in Camp Gordon, Georgia on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August of 1917. Since its initial members came from all 48 states, the unit acquired the nickname *All-American*, which is the basis for its famed "AA" shoulder patch. Sgt. Alvin York was a member of this unit assigned to Company "G."



In May, 1918 the entire 82<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division sailed for France and became part of the American Allied Expeditionary Force.

At the time this unit arrived, there were other American units already fighting. Over 400 miles of American trenches had been dug in France. The American Army was under the command of General John J. Pershing. On September 12, he had the 328<sup>th</sup> Regiment attack St. Mihiel. The untested Americans surprised everyone with a swift victory.

After the battle, General Pershing moved his 400,000-man Army to the Argonne Forest. Here, the next battle was coordinated by then Colonel George C. Marshal. It was known as the Meuse – Argonne Offensive. This was one of the final campaigns of the war. It began on September 26, 1918, and ended on September 30, 1918. It then restarted on October 4<sup>th</sup> and continued until the Germans surrendered on November 11<sup>th</sup>.



During the 47 days of battle, the offensive cost the Americans 26,277 killed and 95,786 wounded. The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the largest battle ever fought by the United States. It involved 1.2 million American soldiers, and was one of several Allied army attacks known as the Hundred Days Offensive.

Since I was interested in history, my grandmother gave me my great-uncle's wound certificate. The top of the framed certificate is titled with the words: **Columbia Gives to Her Son the Accolade of the New Chivalry of Humanity.** On the bottom it states that "**Private Philip Martin served with honor in the World War and was wounded in battle.**" It bears a facsimile signature of President Woodrow Wilson. I have always kept this award hanging in my home.

Shortly before my mother died in 1998, she gave me my great-uncle's World War I Victory Medal. It has three campaign bars on it. There is one for each area he served in: St. Mihiel, the Meuse – Argonne, and the Defensive Sector. I also received his World War Disabled Veterans pin – shown at right.

I learned from my mother that my great-uncle had not only been wounded, but that he was also disabled during a German mustard gas attack. This gas creates burns and blisters on the skin. It causes blindness and attacks the lungs.

After the mustard gas attack Philip was placed in an American military hospital. His condition was poor, and he was sent home. He lived with his mother and father, and his breathing was difficult. He returned to work as a glass cutter, but he was in poor health as his lungs continued to deteriorate. My great-grandmother, Philipina Martin, kept his room very cold during his last winter as the cold made it slightly easier for him to breathe. She stayed in there with him to the end, exclaiming, "my son will not die alone."

After a long period of hanging on, fighting against a slow death, Private Philip Martin died at home with his mother Philipina at his bedside.



Photograph below was taken in the packing room of the Crystolon Cut Glass Company in Brooklyn, NY.

John Martin Jr. is the 6<sup>th</sup> from the right with his hand on a cut glass pitcher.

Philip Martin is the 8<sup>th</sup> from the right. He is holding a cut glass pitcher.

