Service Record and Account of

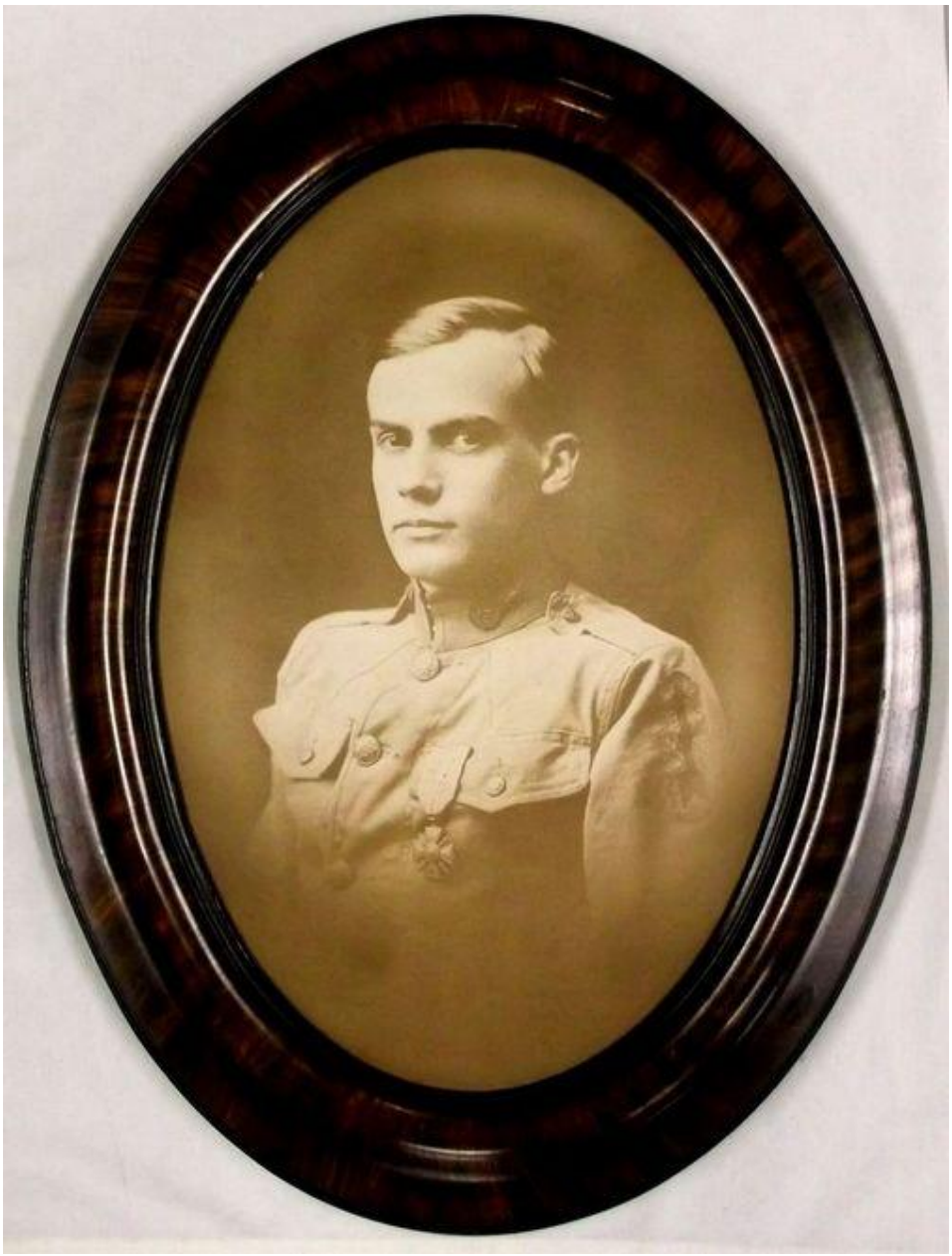
Private, Alva Henry Cook

Serial Number 263501

Infantry, Company K, 125th Regiment, 32nd Division, U.S. Army

Compiled by Daniel A. Anthony, Grandson of Alva H. Cook

Last edited 07 January 2021



Alva Henry Cook, portrait dated October 09, 1920

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Yellow Highlights mostly represent unresolved issues.

Display case photos need updated. New display case received 8/15/2019 but contents re-arranged.

Introduction:

This is a study based on an original typewritten account of his time served in World War I by Alva H. Cook, my Grandfather (my Mother's Father), also with some of his time and experience after the war and a few anecdotes from his survivors. A copy of the original account is provided, and the account is also shown in italics below. This study corrects several phonetically spelled locations in France, and grammar; and is organized in a timeline, bulleted fashion for readability. Hyperlinked references are also provided for further verification and interest. The order of events and locations, as written, is awkward to reconstruct at times, and I have attempted to make this as accurate as possible. In some cases, place names had to be reconciled with the movements of the 32nd Division during WWI and associated war records or most plausible locations in the general area of operations. Additional information is also provided by service/testimony not described in his original account. Research to confirm locations of various wartime facilities was conducted, and other publications or evidence, or other testimony among his papers or peers provide additional insight into his service.

serial no 263-501

History Of

Private Alva Henry Cook,
Company K 125 US Infantry
32 nd Division,

Went to camp Custer Battle Creek Michigan September 21 of 1917 and was Transfered in the 160 Depot Bergade the 9 Company Third Battalion and was Transfered October 24 of 1917 To Camp Macarthur Waco Texas In Company K of the 125 Inf The Saginaw Company ,

Trained From October the 27 of 1917 Till January 17 of 1918 and was Transfered to Camp Merrit New Jersey and arived there the 23 Day of january of 1918 and stayed there in Camp Merrit Ten Days and from there we went to Hoboken new jersey and borderedthe boat febeuary 7 of 1918 and sailed the 10 of Febeuary of 1918 for France, we were 14 Days going over and the sea was very rough we went over on the Martha Washington boat we arrived at Breast France Febeuary the 24 of 1918 and was sent from there to Isutille france where we were at hard labor for one month and was transfered to pericort france for further drilling there, left there the 10 Day of May of 1918 and arrived at secret france the 14 Day of May of 1918 and was transfered to guiganhime Germany in the alsace sector in the reserve trenches for one day and then we went in the first line trenches this was the 3day of june of 1918 and after 13 Days of fighting we were relieved and was sent back for a few days rest at a little place called centimes and then we went in for 20 Days in the trenches and the same sector and after the 20 Days the troopes was transfered to chateau therry france just a little way from there is a little place called sergies france on the 31of July of 1918 we went in the fireing line in one days battle there was about 90 of us left in the Company I was a Company Runer which carried orders from place to Place on the Battle Field while in france on the 10 Day of August of 1918 I was Recomended for a Croixdeguerre with silver star and citation that is amedal for Bravery from the french Goverment

We went in the lines near the Vayel River for nine Days and then was Relieved the 13 Day of August of 1918 and from there to Juvigny France I was the Magors Orderly for Three Weeks and the drive at juvigny the Scissons sector I was Wounded august the 28 of 1918 by a machine gun bullet one in the left abdomen and one in the right arm and laid on the battle field 12 Hours before getting any first aid I got my first aid in a big cave near Tarters France and was sent to the 127 Field Hospital and Ihad an Operation that was the 30 day of august of 1918 Was there 9 Days and then Transfered to Paris France to the Vacuation hospital no 2 on september the 7 was transfered to denantes france to base hospital no 38 on october the 16 of 1918 had an other Operation and then was Transfered November the 21 of 1918 to Savanny France to Base Hospital No 8 and then was Changed over to Base Hospital no 69 and December The 10 of 1918 had an other operation on my hip and arm on the 11 Day of March of 1919 was transfered to stnazier france and march the 12 My Birthday of 1919 sailed for the United States on the ussKrounland and landed in new port news Virgina on the 24 Day of March of 1919 and stayed there 10 days on the 4 th day of april of 1919 was Transfered to the U.S.A. General Hospital no 36 Detroit Michigan Landed there April the 6 th of 1919 and stayed there till the 17 of June of 1919 and then was Transfered to the U.S.A.General Hospital No 28 at Fort Sheidan Ills For Further Treatment ,on the 4 th Day of October of 1919 had an other Operation on my hip and on the third day of April of 1920 I Recieved my Discharge From the United States ARMY.

Undated and unaltered original account by Alva H. Cook. (Serial number is his service ID number). A slightly abridged version of this was generated after he was awarded the Silver Star medal.

This original account was taped inside the cover of one his favorite books - and valuable reference in this reconstruction: "The 32nd Division in the World War, 1917-1919".

There are other information sources that involve the 32nd Division during WW1 listed in the references section below, or linked as hypertext interspersed in this document.

His story begins:

- *Went to Camp Custer [in] Battle Creek, Michigan September 21 of 1917 [this was his induction date] and was transferred to the 160 [160th] Depot Bergrade [Brigade] of 9 [9th] Company, Third [3rd] Battalion.*

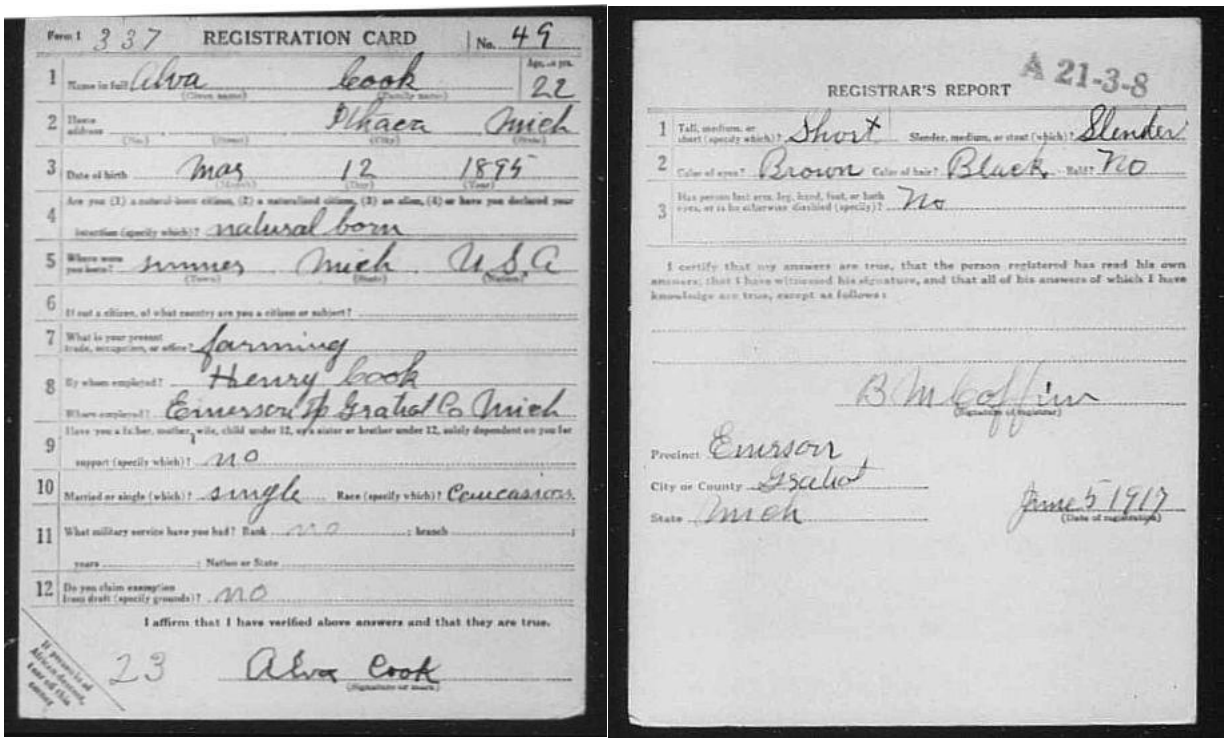
The US declared war on Germany on 06 April 1917. His account did not say clearly whether he enlisted or was drafted. The first U.S. draft for WW1 began June 5th of 1917 for men aged 21 to 31. Other accounts of his story (years later) tell that he tried to enlist soon after war was declared, and he was rejected for being underweight (only 94 pounds he claimed). But the draft came later and he ended up being drafted into the Army anyway. A copy of his draft card dated June 5th, 1917 (the first day of the draft) lists him as being "Short" and of "Slender" build. (Note that the card does not provide specific details of height and weight, which could possibly have resulted in Alva being rejected by a draft board for being below the specified criteria. The U.S. Army wanted soldiers with stamina.) Alva was age 22 on that day. At the time of his service, he was not married and lived in Ithaca, MI. His occupation was listed as "farmer" when he joined the Army – the most common occupation of newly drafted men of the time.

Why he wished to join the Army is hard to assess, but once war was declared, many thousands of men stepped forward to answer the call to defend the honor of their country, with little hesitation. There was heavy propaganda (news, songs, posters, etc.) promoting enlistment – and peer pressure too. Many of those young men probably saw the opportunity for adventure and to prove their manhood, as well as get out of the drudgery of working in farms, factories or other jobs of menial labor. Most had little more than an 8th grade education – high school was not mandatory nor covered at public expense during that time. Alva had no further education beyond the 8th grade, and subsequently had worked the family farm in Ithaca, MI, and the eldest son. My mother (Alva's daughter) Sandra also had indicated to me that Alva's father - Henry Cook - was a harsh taskmaster and would often beat his children as punishment. She writes:

> "Actually your grandpa [Alva] left the farm, at a young age, to work for "other farmers", who treated him better. He was the 1st-born male. Grandpa [Henry Cook] was mean and

would horsewhip him if he could not get done all that he wanted done, in that period of time, for whatever reason. [As a child] He also had to hold an umbrella, over his [older] sister, to keep the sun off her, while she worked in the field, at a very young age. She was the 1st-born. They became very close through the years. There were four other brothers [born] after him."

Joining the Army was Alva's opportunity to escape a dreary farming life and to find his way in the world.



Form 1 337 REGISTRATION CARD No. 49

1 Name in full: Alva Cook — Age: 22
2 Home address: Ithaca Mich
3 Date of birth: May 12 1895
4 Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? natural born
5 Where were you born? Emmes Mich USA
6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?
7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? farming
8 By whom employed? Henry Cook
Where employed? Emerson & Grahal Co Mich
9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? no
10 Married or single (which)? single Race (specify which)? Caucasian
11 What military service have you had? Rank no; branch
years; Nation or State
12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? no

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

23 Alva Cook (Signature or mark)

REGISTRAR'S REPORT A 21-3-8

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? Short Slender, medium, or stout (which)? Slender
2 Color of eyes? Brown Color of hair? Black Bald? No
3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? No

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers; that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

B M Coffman (Signature of registrar)

Precinct Emerson
City or County Gratiot
State Mich
June 5 1917 (Date of registration)

Alva's Draft Registration Card (Front and Back), dated June 5, 1917

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Custer_Training_Center

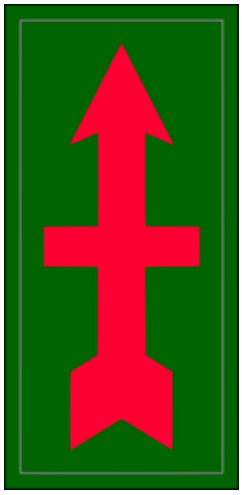
Library of Congress: Photo of Camp Custer in 1918

I have no information about what transpired while he was assigned to the 160th Depot Brigade, 9th Company, 3rd Battalion. It may well have been an organization in existence before war was declared, but a command center ready to accept the influx of new troops to be re-assigned later. Camp Custer was built in a hurried five months as troops began to arrive. At that time they were initially assigned to the 85th Division. At least one reference suggests that it perhaps was the 160th *Field Artillery* Brigade, and composed of other companies and regiments. However I have not reconciled how an infantryman was assigned to a Field Artillery (FA) Brigade. Perhaps as assigned as part of a depot, he assisted in the supply/logistics associated

with the FA brigade, or it was just temporary place in order to initially supplied and trained before the Army was to be expanded. Nevertheless, he was there only about one month. Most probably he received his uniform and other basic supplies; and some initial indoctrination as an infantry soldier before being transferred to Waco, TX. He might have had opportunities to learn about Artillery or other aspects of Army organization and operations if assigned to a FA brigade. See also:

https://ss.sites.mtu.edu/mhugl/2016/10/16/camp-custer-and-world-war-1/

- *Transferred October 24 of 1917 to Camp MacArthur, Waco, Texas to Company K of the 125th Infantry, [32nd Division, U.S. Army], the Saginaw Company.*



Insignia of the U.S. Army "Red Arrow" 32nd Division

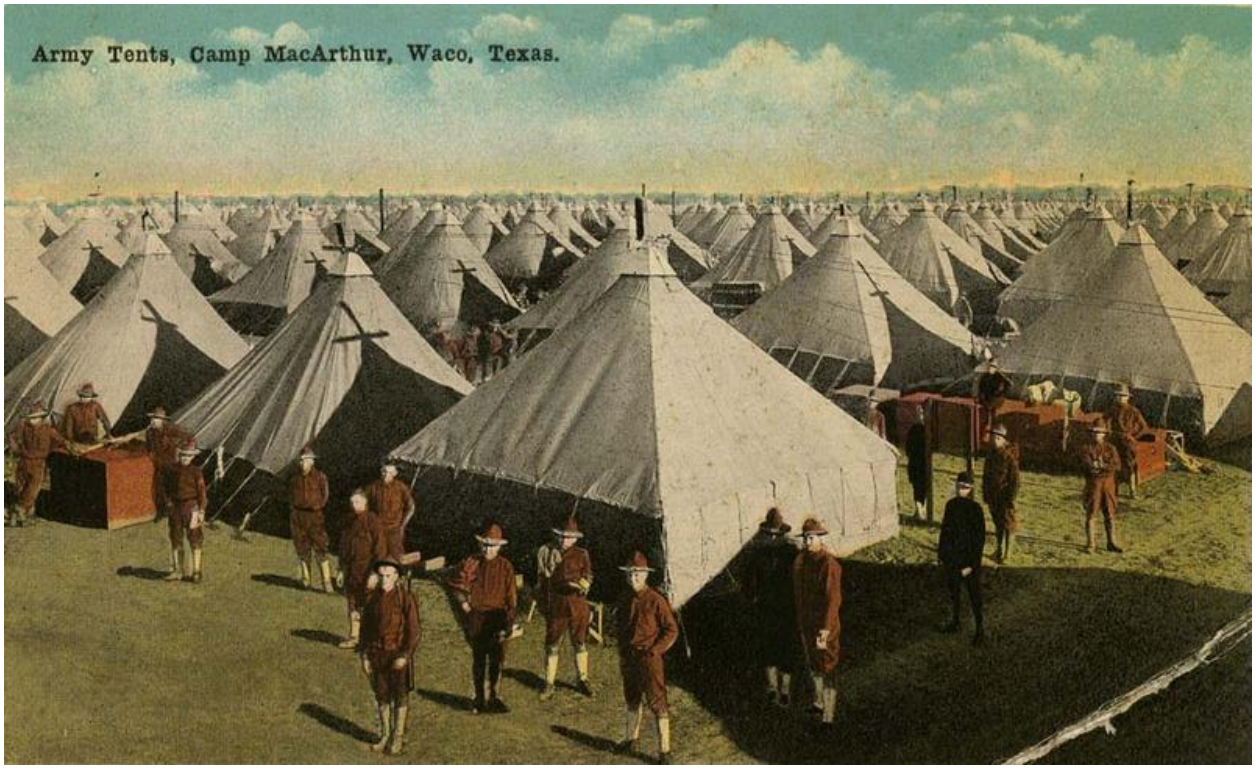
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Company_(military_unit)

Soldiers had no unit insignia until after seeing battle in France, at which time each Division created and adopted their unique insignia. The red arrow symbolizes movement of the 32nd Division penetrating lines of enemy defenses and was adopted after their performance at the 2nd Battle of the Marne (Aisne-Marne Campaign), at which time a French General Charles Mangin gave the AEF 32nd Division the complementary moniker “Les Terribles” (The Terrible Ones). The 32nd Division, along with the rest of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) played a pivotal role that ultimately lead to Germany suing for peace.

The 32nd Division began almost exclusively of men from Wisconsin and Michigan. Initially, most of the officers were either from the regular Army or from the National Guard of each State, and there were insufficient numbers of officers to manage a rapidly growing Army. During the war, after battles and from other re-alignment, new officers would arrive and men from other states would be assigned to the 32nd.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_MacArthur

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/32nd_Infantry_Division_(United_States)



Postcard of Camp MacArthur, Waco TX (Note electric lines strung between tents.)

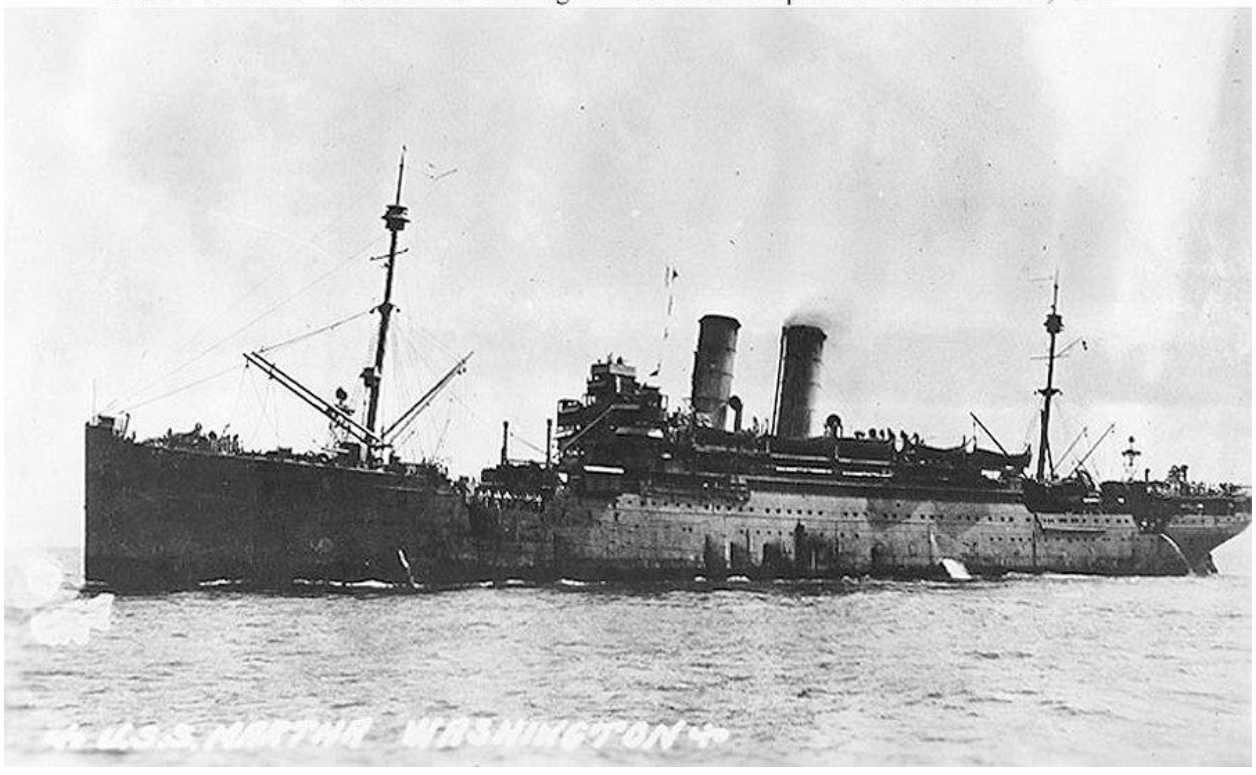
- *[I] Trained from October the 27 of 1917 until January 17 of 1918 and was transferred to Camp Merrit [Merritt], New Jersey, and arrived there on the 23rd day of January of 1918. And stayed there in Camp [Merritt] ten days, and from there we went to Hoboken, New Jersey and boarded the boat [ship] February 7 of 1918, and sailed the 10th of February of 1918 for France. We were 14 days going over [the Atlantic Ocean] and the sea was very rough. We went over on the boat [ship] USS Martha Washington. We arrived at Breast [Brest], France on February the 24th of 1918.*

http://www.bergencountyhistory.org/Pages/campmerritt.html

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_Merritt,_New_Jersey

Alva does not indicate the nature of his training at Camp MacArthur, but the U.S. was woefully unprepared to enter into major warfare from the very beginning, and logistics probably never achieved its full potential during the entire course of the war. Many historical references cite that it was a very cold winter across the country – including at Camp MacArthur. Most likely Alva's primary shelter would have been an eight-man pyramid army tent for the entire winter. (The book by Gansser indicates that wood stoves and floors were added to the tents at the onset of winter. Images of the camp show electric lines strung across the array of tents, probably for electric lighting, not heating.) Many soldiers initially trained with obsolete weapons (if they had them at all), including use of the bayonet (or just a broomstick if nothing else was available). Nearly all infantrymen spent the winter in tents, and conditioned and trained in the form of long marches (both day and night) with full packs, rifle practice (often with inferior or worn-out weapons), use of grenades and gas masks, digging of trenches, simulated battles (including movements under cover of darkness), etc. Machine gun and artillery brigades also suffered from lack of proper equipment and understanding of the nature of trench warfare, and the infantry would get little practice in coordinated attacks. Even then, the supply chain for food, clothing, and shelter, etc. was unprepared to deal with the many thousands of soldiers' suddenly needing provisions – and this condition persisted throughout much of the war, with front-line troops suffering the most.

Photo # NH 2749 USS Martha Washington inbound to Hampton Roads from France, 1918



USS Martha Washington, 1918

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Martha_Washington_%28ID-3019%29

The USS Martha Washington generally ran out of Newport News, VA but the Wikipedia article confirms her as departing New York on 10 February 1918. The USS Martha Washington should not be confused with the SS George Washington – also a commissioned troop transport working out of New York about the same time, and also carrying troops of the 32nd Division that departed nine days later. The book by G.W. Garlock (then commanding the 128th Regiment) titled "Tales of the Thirty-Second" states that *"… troops in our convoy included the 125th, 126th, 127th and 128th Infantry regiments …" and has his convoy arriving in Brest on March the 4th, 1918.* [No one ship could possibly carry the entire 32nd Division, however.] Another reference has Company B, 119th Machine Gun Battalion of the 32nd Division also sailing with Garlock. That same reference states: *"The 32nd Division suffered its first casualties of the war when, on 5 February [1918], the SS Tuscania was sunk by a German submarine crossing the Atlantic just off the Irish Coast. 13 [thirteen] soldiers from the 32nd Division (of 107th Engineering battalion) lost their lives in the sinking."* … *"On 24 January 1918 the advance party of the 32nd Division arrived at Brest, France."* Another source has the 126th division arriving at Brest a week after arrival of the 125th. Different dates make it apparent that different companies from the 32nd Division and 125th Regiment departed on different ships at different times.

Troop ships traveled in convoys and had armed escorts, since the Germans were adept at submarine warfare during WW1, and most troop ships had little armament. During the course of the voyage, all soldiers would have been trained in evacuation drills (how to abandon ship) in case of attack. During the voyage, it is entirely possible that up to three men could have been assigned to share one bunk – sleeping in shifts in order to maximize the number of troops a ship could deliver. (By March 1918th, this had become standard policy. While each man was issued a life vest, it is unlikely that there would be enough lifeboats to handle all the men if they were required to abandon ship.)

Most transport ships at the time were painted with "Dazzle" camouflage – intended to confuse U-boat commanders about the ships size, speed and bearing. Whether such camouflage was effective remains controversial.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dazzle_camouflage

- *[My Company] was sent from there [Brest] to Isutille [Is-sur-Tille, Côte-dOr province], France where we were at hard labor for one month …*

Shortly after landing, the 32nd Division immediately became part of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) under command of Gen. John J. Pershing, and became part of First Army under his command.

The book "Tales of the Thirty-Second" by G.W. Garlock says the 125th Regiment was put to work building railroads and warehouses. Another reference (Gansser) also supports that the 32nd Division was assigned to the Service of Supply (SOS) in order to regain some stamina lost in the long voyage over the Atlantic (e.g. hard labor), and to manage the supply of AEF resources that continued to pour into France.

- *… and was transferred to pericourt [probably Pierrecourt in Haute-Saone province] France for further drilling there. Left there the 10th Day of May of 1918 and arrived at Secret, France the 14th day of May of 1918, then was transferred to Guewenheim [a.k.a. Gewenheim] Germany [German territory won during the Franco-Prussian War, and recently taken back by other allied soldiers, and considered a relatively "quiet" front] in the Alsace [Alsace-Lorraine] sector in the reserve trenches for one day.*

Reserve trenches are those built behind the first line trenches to defend in case of enemy penetration of the front lines, as rest for reserve soldiers immediately prior to deployment to the front lines, or otherwise to assist in bringing forth supplies or reserve soldiers to the front line.

- *Then we went to the first line trenches. This was the 3rd day of June of 1918 and after 13 days of fighting [more like "defending with occasional testing"]; we were relieved and sent back for a few days rest at a little place called Centimes [probably Sentheim, Haut-Rhin province, France]. And then we went in for 20 days in the trenches in the same sector.*

Eventually the 32nd Division saw front-line duty. While considered a "quiet" sector, (the book by Gansser on the 126th Regiment states that) once the American's arrived in Alsace, the German's would test them with occasional artillery barrages (including use of poison gas), machine gun fire, small raids to take prisoners, and aerial bombing and strafing. The American's were also disinclined to respect the relative "truce" that was held between the French and Germans there before their arrival. Raiding parties from both sides occasionally took small groups as POW's. The 126th suffered a few casualties, and the 125th might also have had its first taste of battle there as well.

- *And after the 20 days the troops were transferred to Chateau-Thierry, France. Just a little way from there was Sergies [Cierges], France.*

I wish Alva had said more about this. IMO, the endgame of the Great War began at Chateau-Thierry. The 32nd Division would follow days later. Germans had reached Chateau-Thierry during their major Spring Offensive (of 1918), and only 60 miles from Paris. That put Paris within artillery range of their very biggest guns. It was the first full test of U.S. capability and

resolve - U.S. Marines fought their fiercest battle there (Belleau Wood), and the endgame of the Great War began. The 32nd Division joined the fray after initial troops from multiple Allied divisions drove the Germans away from that strategic city. The 32nd Division began their push at Roncheres. Once the Allied forces started to push the Germans back – the end of the Great War began.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Belleau_Wood

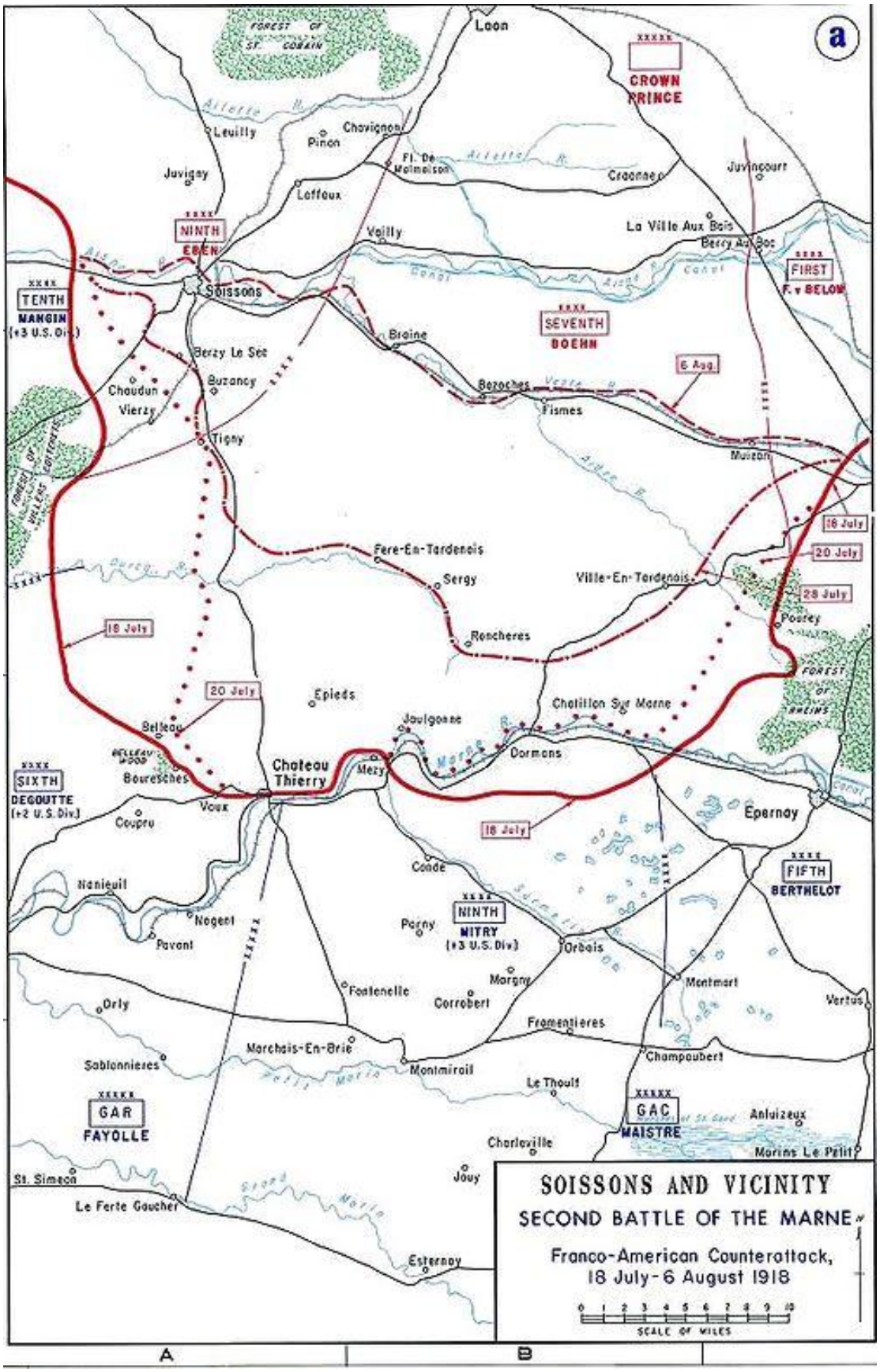
Cierges is a village twelve miles NE of Chateau-Thierry. About that time was the start of an Allied offensive to push back the Germans, with the 32nd Division was moved in to relieve the 3rd and 28th Divisions which had pushed the Germans back to Roncheres. The entire 32nd Division did battle at Cierges. It was a major objective during the drive to Fismes on the Vesle River, during the 2nd Battle of the Marne (A.K.A. Aisne-Marne Campaign). In a coordinated attack, other Allied troops on either side of their approximately two mile wide "corridor" also contributed to drive back the German forces from Chateau-Thierry northward toward Fismes.

Alva could have also intended to write Sergy, France, a village only 1.5 miles northeast of Ciergies - also at the edge of the 32nd Division's battle corridor at that time. The historical accounts by Garlock and Gansser both place the 125th Regiment passing across the Cierges-Sergy road. However, other maps show that the 42nd "Rainbow" division took Sergy, so Cierges was the initial objective for the 32nd. Either way, Alva was in the thick of that battle, which continued nonstop for many days in early August 1918. He contributed to push the Germans backwards from territory they won only months earlier.

It his 2007 thesis "Onward Through Hell: Company L of Menominee – 125th Regiment 32nd Division – at Hill 212 in World War 1", the author (Ross Parcels) cites that Companies I, L, K, and M of the 125th Regiment together formed the 3rd Battalion of the 32nd Division. On July 31, 1918 (and with support from other battalions on each side of them, they fought and ultimately succeeded in driving German defenses off that hill between Sergy and Ciergies, with Jomblets Woods to their left, and Reddy Farm on the right. Hill 212 was a wheat field about half a mile southeast of Sergy, and filled with German machine gun emplacements. After that difficult engagement, the Germans were in full retreat, and the drive continued for many more days to push them nine miles northeast to Fismes and back across the Vesle River.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Battle_of_the_Marne has a map, showing Sergy in the center (Ciergies is not marked, but it lies between Sergy and Roncheres), just NE of Chateau-Thierry near the fighting. It also shows locations of Soissons, Vesle River, and Juvigny (Juvigny, Aisne) just north of Soissons. During this battle, the 32nd Division, working in concert with other Allied forces, drove the Germans from their defensive positions northward. A copy of

the map is included below. For the part of the 32nd Division, their start of the battle was a 1-2 mile wide corridor between Sergy and Roncheres, and moved north-northeast toward the Vesle River at Fismes, and ultimately the Aisne River (which runs west through Soissons). The Vesle River is south of the Aisne and converges at the Aisne River at Soissons.


a
Laon
FOREST OF ST. GOBAIN
CROWN PRINCE
Ailette R.
Leuilly
Chavignon
Pinon
Fl. De Malmaison
Juvigny
Laffaux
Craonne
Juvincourt
NINTH
EBEN
Vailly
La Ville Aux Bois
Berry Au Bac
FIRST
F. v BELOW
Aisne R.
Canal
TENTH
MANGIN
(+3 U.S. Div.)
Soissons
SEVENTH
BOEHN
Braine
Berzy Le Sec
Buzancy
Chaudun
Vierzy
Beroches
6 Aug.
Fismes
Vesle R.
Muizon
Tigny
FOREST OF VILLERS COTTERETS
18 July
20 July
28 July
Fere-En-Tardenois
Sergy
Ville-En-Tardenois
Ourcq R.
Roncheres
Poursy
FOREST OF RHEIMS
Epieds
Jaulgonne
Chatillon Sur Marne
Belleau
Marne R.
Dormans
SIXTH
DEGOUTTE
(+2 U.S. Div.)
Bouresches
Chateau Thierry
Mezy
Coupru
Vaux
Epernay
Conde
Nanteuil
FIFTH
BERTHELOT
Surmelin R.
NINTH
MITRY
(+3 U.S. Div.)
Parny
Nogent
Pavant
Orbais
Margny
Montmart
Fontenelle
Corrobert
Vertus
Orly
Frementieres
Marchais-En-Brie
Champaubert
Montmirail
Sablonnieres
Petit Morin
Le Thoult
GAR
FAYOLLE
GAC
MAISTRE
Anluizeux
Charleville
Morins Le Petit
St. Simeon
Jouy
Le Ferte Gaucher
Grand Morin
Esternay
SOISSONS AND VICINITY
SECOND BATTLE OF THE MARNE
Franco-American Counterattack,
18 July - 6 August 1918
SCALE OF MILES
A
B

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Soissons_%281918%29

- *On the 31st of July of 1918 we went in the firing line [front lines, and then over the top]. In [after] one days battle there was about 90 of us left in the Company. I was a Company Runer [Runner] which carried orders from place to place on the battlefield while in France. On the 10th day of August 1918, I was recommended for [and ultimately received 16 March 1919] a Croix de Guerre with Silver Star citation - that is a medal for bravery from the French Government.*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croix_de_Guerre

"Croix de Guerre" translates to "Cross of War". There are several possible citations associated with the Croix de Guerre medal.

Alva's WW1 Croix de Guerre with Silver Star, with a replica service ribbon

The Croix de Guerre medal could have come with a service ribbon of the same cloth (shown above). However, I had no original service ribbon to go with that medal, so I purchased a modern replica ribbon to add to his display case. Affixed to his Croix de Guerre is a slightly tarnished silver star. (See the Wikipedia reference for details on the various certifications associated with the medal.) The Silver Star signifies that he received citation at the Division

level – a high honor. The book "The 32nd Division in the World War, 1917-1919" Page 311 under the 125th Infantry also lists Pvt. Alva Cook for Division Citation. This confirms a silver (not silver gilt) star being attached to the fabric of his Croix de Guerre Medal.

He seems to have received the actual medal after he returned to the U.S. He is pictured wearing a Croix de Guerre medal in his portrait (dated October 1920). I also have the citation certificate for the medal, issued by the Republic of France, dated 22 September 1925 – long after the war was over and about five years after he the award was declared. My sister Jill also has a larger citation in a frame, written in French but with essentially the same information, including the same issue date. I guess the French were slow in handing out certificates, but in retrospect, such certificates would probably not survive under battle conditions anyway.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Company_%28military_unit%29

A Military Company typically consists of about 80-250 soldiers, usually commanded by a Major (but sometimes by a Captain or even a Colonel). The books by Garlock (page 195) and Gansser (page 57) both say that each Company averaged about 200 men at the start of the Aisne-Marne offensive. If Alva had 90 left in his company, then over half of them had become casualties (dead, wounded or missing). After the battle was over and the 32nd Division pulled back for rest, resupply and training; some re-alignment occurred to bring each company up to a partial strength of about 125 men before heading to Juvigny (Juvigny, Aisne).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Runner_%28soldier%29

A postwar newspaper article citing his service indicates that Alva considered it an honor to be assigned to be a Runner. The Wikipedia article on a Runner also suggests that it was one of the most dangerous jobs in the war, since a Runner must often leave the relative safety of trenches and shell holes in order to convey messages, be tasked to carry items such as food, medical supplies, or ammunition to front-line units; or perform other duties-as-assigned.

The author Richard Faulkner in “Pershing’s Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War 1” has a very good narrative about the life of a Runner. It says:

> “Being a messenger on the battlefields of the Great War was a serious matter. As one doughboy put it, “Runners didn’t last. Everyone knew that.” …. Commanders often sent out multiple runners in the hope that at least one of them would survive the sprinting odyssey back to headquarters [and back]. During fighting near Fismes in August 1918 an infantry captain had to send three runners back at short intervals to deliver one message. … In many cases, the attributes needed for the job and the dangerous nature of the mission meant that messengers were volunteers. … [General Charles Summerall’s] efforts to stop

his subordinates from using messengers in combat were futile, because in the end, they were often a commander's only means of communication in battle."

In regards to his Croix de Guerre medal, he gave additional account for the Midland Daily News in 1975. Alva states: *"The Company was due to make its move at 6 p.m., and somehow I got through despite sniper fire and delivered the message shortly before 6 p.m. It added up to saving the Company Commander and his 27 men."*

In response to the recent movie "1917" by Sam Mendes, several articles gave additional story about the life of a Runner. The typical front-line runner had to travel light – no rifle, but perhaps a pistol. No backpack or other heavy gear – just a carry bag, helmet and gas mask, and light provisions. A runner would often have to memorize messages in case the paper copy was lost or damaged, or destroy it before being captured. They often didn't exactly know where to find the company heads or command posts or other officers along the way. To cover 300 yards they might have to zigzag through a mile of trenches toward their destination.

https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/real-history-trench-runners-ww1-messengers-1917-what-like/

> Knowing that being a runner at the front lines was such a dangerous and important task, it was often assigned only to those willing to volunteer. IMO the simple willingness to be a runner and act under fire justifies a Silver Star award for Gallantry in Action.

What Alva does not talk about –either in this diary or other dialogue - is the hardships and horrors of war that he experienced. The memory of such ordeals is hard to bear, much less discuss. In my research of the life of an infantryman during the Great War, I can understand how horrible it might have been. But even today, words cannot truly convey the pain, the stress, the carnage, fears and hardship. One interview for a newspaper long after the war has Alva simply stated that "*everyone had cooties [lice]"* I am certain that there is much more that he could have said. There are many personal accounts of others of the AEF that clearly show that life in infantry was arduous, and duty in the trenches and across the battlefield was absolutely horrible.

- *We went [fought and/or defended] in the lines near the Vayel [Vesle] River for nine days and was then relieved the 13th day of August of 1918.*

The Aisne-Marne Campaign effectively ended with the capture of Fismes, France along the Vesle River, with the Germans driven across the river and the town secured around August 7th, 1918. By then, the 32nd Division was relieved and other Allied units continued to engage the German forces who retreated to the north side of the Aisne River. According to Gansser, the infantry push was so fast that at times their supporting artillery and mobile kitchens could not

keep pace with the foot soldiers. (This might also explain the demand for runners, as the signal corps could also have had difficulty laying telephone/telegraph lines as the troops advanced.)

The French command awarded the Croix de Guerre with Palm to the entire 32nd Division's brigades and regimental colors, and those colors are presented by U.S. Army color guards even today. The Palm is an even higher award. (I do not know if that went to individual soldiers as well). The text of French General Mangin's citation is in the book by Gansser.

While Alva does not discuss this, the 32nd Division was exposed to persistent German gas attacks during the drive to Fismes, as indicated in the report: U. S. ARMY CHEMICAL CORPS HISTORICAL STUDIES, GAS WARFARE IN WORLD WAR I, THE 32nd DIVISION ADVANCES TO FISMES, August 1918, found at:

http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a955207.pdf

He may have been exposed to various chemical warfare attacks in other battles too, but I do not have any further information on that. Soldiers of the time were expected to carry gas masks with them at all times. Multiple chemistries of warfare agents were implemented.

- *And from there to Juvigny [Juvigny, Aisne], France. I was the Major's [who was the Major at the time?] orderly for three weeks, and in the drive at Juvigny in the Soissons sector I was wounded August the 29th of 1918 by [a] machine gun bullet[s]. One in the left abdomen [at the hip] and one in the right arm. And I laid on the battlefield for 12 [twelve] hours before getting any first aid.*

The date and place of his wounding puts him in the thick of the Oise-Aisne Campaign, the next major battle for the 32nd Division after Aisne-Marne. The 125th and 126th regiments of the 32nd Division, under the command of the French 10th Army, began the drive toward Juvigny directly west of the town starting on August 28th, 1918, with the 127th and 128th regiments initially held in reserve. Alva did not give a time of his wounding but stated in a future interview that he departed from his position at 0430h (4:30AM) on the 29th and was shot soon after that. The historical record shows that there had been a soaking rain on August the 29th. The push had stalled at railroad tracks west of town, and during the night of the 29th, his regiment was relieved by fresh troops of the 128th regiment. The next day, Juvigny was captured by Allied forces, but the war continued beyond Juvigny.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_campaigns_in_World_War_I

In an undated article in the Bay City Times, he stated that he was under the [regimental] command of Capt. William H. Martin. After the war, Mr. Martin provided an affidavit to help support Alva's legal battle for disability benefits. Other accounts by Alva (published in

newspapers years after the war) state that he crawled away from the battlefront over a half mile, and was saved from bleeding to death by the fact that some of his clothing had penetrated his wound and formed a sort of patch that slowed his bleeding. However, he was certainly seriously injured. And even after the bleeding stopped, that same cloth had to be surgically removed to prevent further infection. Another account he gave to a newspaper after the war states that he was discovered by members of the Signals Corps. Another account told to his son Alva Cook Jr. also has a bullet pass through his gas mask, and another ricochet off his helmet.

> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_campaigns_in_World_War_I#Oise-Aisne.2C_18_August_.E2.80.93_11_November_1918

Another copy of Alva's service history was in his Silver Star Medal case. It too was typewritten with some minor alterations to the original shown above. However there is a most notable footnote at this point in his story. In parenthesis, it says:

- *(Alva received the American Silver Star medal for leaving his shell-hole to give a critically wounded officer first-aid after being wounded himself.)*

This additional testament gave justification for him receiving the belated Silver Star award in 1944.

Alva offers no more information about the officer or what became of him. As a runner, he would probably have been expected to stay close to his officers in case messages needed to be passed. It might possibly have been Capt. Martin himself, or one of his Lieutenants. Notably, one of the lieutenants of his Regiment and Company, 1LT William H. Rust, is listed in "The 32nd Division in the World War", page 219, as having Died of Wounds on 29 August 1918.

> Michigan State University (Michigan Agricultural College at the time) gave tribute to many of their alumni killed in battle. Wm. H. Rust is listed as having been wounded 29 August and died on 01 September 1918. (Other sources list him as died of wounds between 29 Aug. and 02 Sep. -DAA) The citation reads:
>
> > "… **William H. Rust,** class of 1918, died on September 1, 1918. He was a 1st Lieutenant in Company K, 125th Infantry until his death. He was wounded in action on August 29 while in battle near Juvigny (Aisne). Rust was awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star. The citation states "The only remaining officer of the company [perhaps this should read "platoon" rather than "company"?, since most other officers of Co. K survived the war. -DAA], he led it

to the attack with bravery and remarkable energy. [He] Was killed near the objective which had been assigned to him." Rust was 25 years old."

https://msuarchives.wordpress.com/2018/09/04/m-a-c-world-war-i-casualties/

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:The_history_and_achievements_of_the_Fort_Sheridan_officers%27_training_camps.djvu/146

1LT Rust is also cited as having received officers training at Fort Sheridan and then transferred to Camp Custer. He is also listed in the roster for invitation to the Company-K Thanksgiving dinner of 1917 (as was Alva) when stationed at Waco, TX. He is buried (or at least has a gravestone) at Evergreen Cemetery in Grand Blanc, MI. Less than a mile away, there is a park named after him.

http://www.cityofgrandblanc.com/departments/city-parks

To continue with Alva's testimony:

- *I got my first aid in a big cave near Tartiers, France, [a few miles west of Juvigny] and was sent to the 127th Field Hospital.*
- *I had an operation on the 30th day of August of 1918.*

Eastern entrance to gigantic cave occupied as P. C. during the drive on Juvigny. This entrance leading to this section of the cave was used as an ambulance dressing station. Nearly 6,000 men could be crowded into the cave. Tartiers, France. Sept. 1st.

Post of Command (P.C.) at Tartiers near Juvigny, also serving as a front-line first-aid station.

http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/fieldoperations/chapter13.html lists details of medical operations in the area. (An extract is copied below, with underlines added for emphasis.):

AMBULANCE COMPANIES

> On August 26 [1918] headquarters of the ambulance section and two of its companies were near La Vache Noire, but later, on the same day, the entire ambulance section of the sanitary train was advanced to Vic-sur-Aisne. On August 27 a dressing station was established in cellars at Tartiers, with ambulance head at Bieuxy.[61] On September 2 the station at Tartiers was closed and a new one opened at Valpriez Ferme [Farm], with ambulance head at the railroad, west of Juvigny. Litter bearers went from this station to the aid stations in and beyond that town. The largest number of wounded transported in one day was 1,429, during the 24 hours ending September 1.[61] Because of the great number who had to be cared for, some sick and slightly gassed cases accumulated at the

dressing station, but this congestion was overcome by the aid of 12 trucks obtained from the division quartermaster. All ambulances were unloaded at the triage at Montois and thus released for immediate return. With the exception of one ambulance damaged by shell fire on August 29; all these vehicles were operated continuously.[61]

FIELD HOSPITALS

On August 27, at the beginning of the operation, the divisional triage was established at Montois by personnel from Field Hospital No. 127, and was operated as an entirely distince [distance] formation. About 182 meters (200 yards) from it Field Hospital No. 127 cared for seriously wounded cases, these two institutions together having some 500 beds. In the same locality Field Hospital 126 received gas cases. Field Hospital No. 128 remained at St. Etienne, received the sick, psychoneurotic, slightly gassed, and slightly wounded. Field Hospital No. 125 was held in reserve at Vic-sur-Aisne, its commissioned and enlisted personnel assisting in the services of other hospitals.

This is a bit confusing, since the referenced section on AMBULANCE COMPANIES above suggests there was more than one cave/cellar involved in first aid/dressing and/or tirage at the time of his wounding: one in "cellars at Tartiers", the other at "Valpriez Farm" about two miles closer to Juvigny. I therefore cannot confirm that the image above is where he was sent. He said that he was sent to a "big cave near Tartiers". It could be either. (My instincts tell me the cave at Valpriez was the first-aid station, since it was closer to the battlefront, although I've not been able to find more detail about either cave/cellar. I suspect only a trip to France might clarify it.).

This reference puts the 127th Field Hospital at Montois about the time he was wounded, not far from Tartiers. In discussion about one of his wounded officers, Lt. Col. Garlock also confirms this in his book. Tartiers is about three or four miles away from the battle at Juvigny. Montois is about six miles (SE) of Tartiers, farther away from the battle front. Valpriez Farm is only about two miles from Juvigny.

- *[I] was there [127th Field Hospital] 3 [three] days and then transferred to Paris, France to the Evacuation Hospital Number 2*

This "Evacuation Hospital Number 2" gave me the most difficulty in locating, but I now believe I have it reconciled.

First of all, there were several Evacuation Hospitals in the Paris area at the time. He may have meant one of these. However, the American (AEF) Evacuation Hospital Number 2 was in

Baccarat, France, 200 miles east of Paris and not a likely place to be sent - Alva having been wounded in Juvigny, 60 miles NE of Paris.

He could have been sent to a French Evacuation hospital. For example:

> http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/fieldoperations/CombatDivs.html states that the U.S. was unable to provide all the required Evacuation Hospitals in France. For the 32nd division in particular: "There being no American evacuation hospitals in the sector all evacuations from the division were made through French evacuation hospitals."

My research indicates that the French Evacuation Hospital No. 2 was located in La Ferte-Milon, France, between Soissons and Paris in early August 1918, then moved to Crezancy on the Marne, just east of Chateau-Thierry and also south of Soissons later in August. However, Crezancy is still 55 miles NE of Paris.

Another alternative is U.S. Evacuation Hospital No. 5, located at Villers-Cotterets at that time. Villers-Cotterets is about 35 miles NE of Paris.

Nonetheless, Alva thought he was in Paris. Considering that Evacuation Hospitals can be somewhat mobile (often moving or supported by trucks and/or trains), he could have been transferred to another hospital somewhere else in Paris as well.

Furthermore, the 32nd Division was under French 10th Army command during the Oise-Aisne Campaign and fought alongside the French army. So transfer to a French hospital is possible.

However, there is one more possibility and it is the most probable: The American Red Cross had established hospitals in France long before the U.S. declared war or landed in Europe. The reference below places the American Red Cross Military Hospital No. 2 at 6 Rue Piccini, in Paris, (headed by Dr. Joseph A. Blake, a famed surgeon from New York) and that it also served as an Evacuation Hospital during that time. It was considered to be one of the finest hospitals of its day; with operating rooms, laboratories, x-ray imaging, and up to 300 beds. It came under joint U.S. Army and Red Cross administration after the Americans' declared war, but before then it was simply called the "Red Cross Hospital". I consider this the most likely place that Alva was transferred to.

> See the Google Books online volume "Annual Reports of the War Department, Volume 1, Part 3, Report of the Surgeon General (continued)" for more information about American Red Cross Military Hospital No. 2 starting page 3741, and other information within the document for the Base Hospitals listed below.

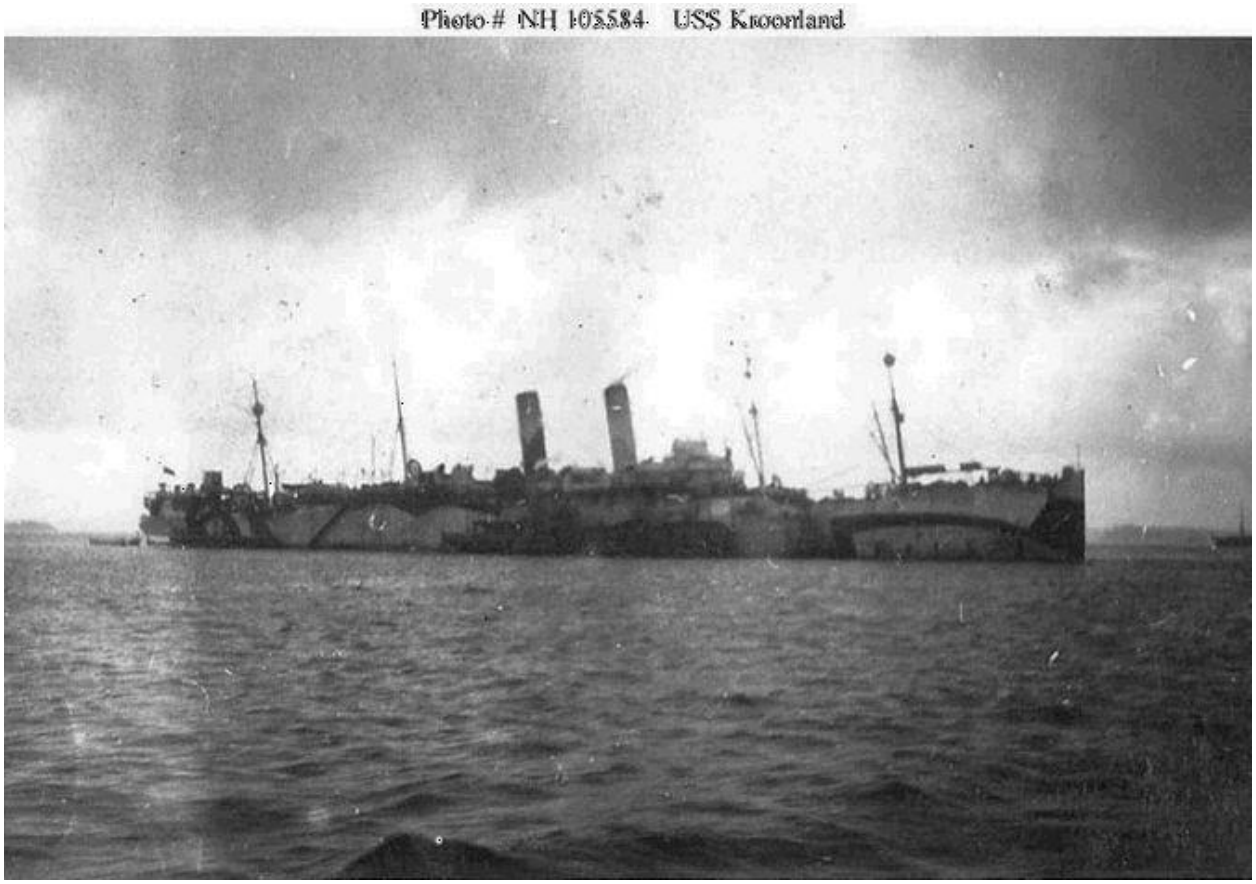
American Hospital at 6 Rue Piccini, as it looked during WW1. It looks much the same today, but has been converted to an apartment/condo complex. (The building today would be incapable of meeting current standards for medical care.) It is only a few blocks away from the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

- *On September the 7th [I] was transferred to deNantes [Nantes, or technically Ville de Nantes], France to Base Hospital Number 38.*
- *On October the 16th of 1918 [I] had another operation and then was transferred to [then unfinished, Provisional] Base Hospital Number 8 [Savenay, France] …*

"Annual Reports of the War Department, Volume 1, Part 3, Report of the Surgeon General (con't)" starting page 3600 says that Provisional Base Hospital No. 8 was slapped together hurriedly, on muddy ground and poorly supported.

- *and then was transferred November the 21st of 1918 to Savanny France to Base Hospital Number 69 [Lor-Inferieure in Savenay, France] …*
- *and on December the 10th of 1918, I had another operation on my hip and arm.*
- *And on the 11th day of March 1919, I transferred to Saint-Nazaire, France, and on March the 12th (my birthday) of 1919, [I] sailed for the United States on the USS Kroonland, and*

landed in Newport News, Virginia the 24th Day of March of 1919. And stayed there [Newport News or Hampton Roads] 10 [ten] days.



USS Kroonland (1918 photo, with "dazzle" camouflage)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Kroonland

The Armistice was signed on 11 Nov 1918, so the risk of submarine warfare after that date subsided. Alva was probably relieved to finally be back on U.S. soil and obtaining better medical care.

http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/adminamerexp/chapter24.html states "On January 20, 1919, Evacuation Hospital No. 35 relieved Base Hospital No. 43, the latter organization leaving for the United States from St. Nazaire on March 12 on the *Kroonland*. It arrived at Newport News, Va., March 24, and was demobilized at Camp Gordon, Ga., shortly afterwards." This means that not only did Alva leave France, but an entire Evacuation Hospital with patients and staff probably left for the U.S. on the same ship together.

- *And on the 4th day of April of 1919 was transferred to the U.S. Army General Hospital Number 36 [a.k.a. Henry Ford Hospital]. I landed [arrived, probably by train and*

ambulance, not by aircraft] there [Detroit. Michigan] on April the 6th of 1919 and stayed there until the 17th of June of 1919. And then was transferred to the U.S. Army General Hospital Number 28 at Fort Sheridan, Illinois for further treatment. On the 4th day of October of 1919 [I] had another operation on my hip.

- *And on the third day of April of 1920, I received my [honorable] discharge from the United States Army.*

I'm quite amazed at the number and frequency of movements from hospital to hospital he made, particularly in France after being so severely wounded. And the number of operations he received, considering the state of medical treatment of the day. Despite the carnage of all the battles since 1914, the "Spanish Flu" (H1N1 Influenza) pandemic was on the rise in 1918, and actually killed more people around the world than the entire Great War. I'm sure hospital staffs everywhere were overwhelmed with patients.

No doubt Alva was a changed man after the war. Not just by wounds alone, but also the psychological change that invariably happens when a soldier goes to hell and back, and the difficulties adapting to a new civilian life. We can only guess.

Alva's honorable discharge papers are marked to show that he received the Silver Victory Button at the time of his discharge. During WWI, those wounded were to be awarded a "Wound Chevron" (to be worn on the right sleeve of his uniform) and the silver version of the World War Victory (Lapel) Button was awarded to those wounded (or possibly those KIA). (The Purple Heart medal did not exist until 1932, so he must have applied for it after the war. Those wounded after hostilities could apply for the Purple Heart at that time.) Another reference says WWI Silver Victory Buttons were awarded to those who had been wounded in action and were recipients of the wound chevron. (There is some confusion on my part about the nature and regulations of the Wound Chevron if you read the reference below. However, further research indicates rule changes after the war for both Wound Chevron and Service Chevron's.)

> "The Silver Victory Button for wounds received in action will be issued only upon evidence of such wound or wounds as shown on the discharge certificate of enlisted men or certificate of discharge of officers." from Army Regulations as amended 17 September 1918. Those who were not wounded prior to discharge were issued a bronze Victory Button.

The symbol embossed on the Silver Victory Button later became the symbol for the American Legion, in which Alva would ultimately become a member and commander of a local post.

Sample images of a Silver Victory Button and Wound Chevron (NEEDS UPDATED)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wound_Chevron

http://www.usmilitariaforum.com/forums/index.php?/topic/239123-us-army-navy-marine-corps-ww-i-wound-chevrons/

http://www.emersoninsignia.net/files/Download/8ServiceandWound.pdf

Having also served in France, Alva would also have been entitled to at least one gold chevron to be worn on the left sleeve of his uniform signifying time in overseas duty, and probably two. However I suspect he had no uniform to wear in his days while hospitalized in France. Again, if he had any, none of these chevrons have survived to this day.

NOTE: 7/31/2019 I purchased three replica gold-thread wound chevrons from a seller on E-bay. It looks slightly different than pictured since they have a black felt backing rather than khaki, but is said to be WW1 style chevrons, with actual gold thread on wool. Modern chevron's have a "curl" to them, and these are straight consistent with WW1 issues. I believe this should complete all items I intend to have displayed. These chevron's are worn point-down on the sleeves, not up as on shoulders as to indicate rank. Alva's day of arrival in France (24 Feb 1918) to day of departure (12 Mar 1919) was over 12 months, and as a result of rules established after the war, he would be entitled to two overseas stripes – one for every six months of time spent overseas. Despite spending much of the time in hospitals, he was not formally discharged until after he reached the U.S.

Alva probably had collar buttons (discs) for his uniform, but the only enlarged photograph of him in uniform (his portrait) does not show a clear image of the collar discs. There are many variations of AEF collar discs by unit, state, and type of service, and it is hard to know exactly what was issued to Alva. No original's made it into my possession. From what I can see on his portrait, the only visible collar disc on his left collar says "US" with an unclear number

embossed under it. The buttons on the uniform are standard issue, showing the U.S. Eagle insignia. A wound chevron, if issued, would have been worn on his right sleeve and (one or more) overseas service chevron(s) would be worn on his left sleeve. Alva's records or memorabilia have no indication of any chevrons though.

There is a place called "Repros by Ray" in Wisconsin that makes replica collar discs and other uniform insignia for WW1. "Ray" now carries a replica for the 125th regiment in its inventory. Here is some sample pictures of representative collar discs that Alva might have worn at the time. I recently purchased vintage "US" and Infantry (crossed rifles) with company K collar discs from Ebay to add to his display case. These two are the most likely to have been issued, but there are a few others he might also have had access to.

Authentic WW1 Collar discs (representative of Alva's service. Plain US and Infantry (Company K) for sale on E-bay (and purchased)

Replica WW1 Collar discs for Michigan, and 126th Regiment (I now have a replica 125th disc – need to change image) (32nd Division), also purchased. Alva may or may not have had collar discs such as these, but they are still representative of his service.

Alva would also have been issued a pair of identity discs, but these have not been found either. The most common were pieces of round aluminum with markings stamped on them, usually with name and serial number; and sometimes unit, rank, and possibly even service role and religious affiliation. (The term "dog tags" became more commonplace during WWII, but they served the same basic purpose – to help identify the dead and incapacitated).

Example WW1 identity discs

What follows is a copy of the front and back of his discharge papers:

Honorable Discharge from The United States Army

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

This is to Certify, That* Oliver H. Cook

†[illegible]

THE UNITED STATES ARMY, as a TESTIMONIAL OF HONEST AND FAITHFUL SERVICE, is hereby HONORABLY DISCHARGED from the military service of the UNITED STATES by reason of ‡ S.C.D. Ord. Dept. Chicago Ill March 29, 1920

Said Oliver H. Cook was born in Vermont, in the State of Mich

When enlisted he was 22½ years of age and by occupation a Farmer

He had Brown eyes, Brown hair, Dark complexion, and was 5 feet 2½ inches in height.

Given under my hand at [illegible] this 3d day of April, one thousand nine hundred and Twenty

W. H. Curtis

Major, Medical Corps, U.S.A.

Commanding.

Form No. 525, A. G. O. Oct. 9-18.

3—3164

*Insert name, Christian name first; e. g., "John Doe."
†Insert Army serial number, grade, company and regiment or arm or corps or department; e. g., "1,620,302"; "Corporal, Company A, 1st Infantry"; "Sergeant, Quartermaster Corps"; "Sergeant, First Class, Medical Department."
‡If discharged prior to expiration of service, give number, date, and source of order or full description of authority therefor.

ENLISTMENT RECORD.

Name: Alva H Coole 263501 Grade: Private

Enlisted, or Inducted, Sept 21, 1917, at Athens, Mich

Serving in First enlistment period at date of discharge.

Prior service: * None

Noncommissioned officer: None

Marksmanship, gunner qualification or rating: † Inft Transportation

Horse [redacted]:

Battles, engagements, skirmishes, expeditions: Q.M.C. Thierry Sector Aisne Sector 1918

Decoration, Medals, Badge, and Citations

Knowledge of any vocation: Farmer

Wounds received in service: Gas

Physical condition when discharged: Good

Typhoid prophylaxis completed

Paratyphoid prophylaxis completed Oct 16/17

Married or single: Single

Character: Excellent

Remarks: [illegible]

Signature of soldier: Alva H. Coole

I CERTIFY THAT A BRONZE - SILVER VICTORY BUTTON WAS ISSUED ON APR 3 1920

Geo R Randall
CAPTAIN, M.C.
Recruiting Officer

D.F. Curtis
Major, Medical Corps, U.S.A.
Commanding Dept. of Lakes

Fort Wayne, Mich. The issue of clothing per Act Apr. 2, 1919, completed this date. H. F. Nolley 1st Lieut. M.C. Transportation Officer DEC 24 1920

FINANCE OFFICE
Fort Sheridan, Ill.
APR 3 - 1920
Paid in full
Including $250 Gratuity Allowed by Act Approved February 24, 1919.
1st Lieut. M. C. FINANCE OFFICER

FORWARDED APPROVED BY ... FOR VICTORY MEDAL WITH CLASPS, LT. COL. CAV. ASSEMBLY

RECRUITING STATION GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

SOLDIER PAID TRAVEL PAY AT RATE OF FIVE CENTS (5¢) PER MILE UNDER ACT OF CONGRESS APPROVED JANUARY 20, 1920

* Give company and regiment or corps or department, with inclusive dates of service in each enlistment.
† Give date of qualification or rating and number, date, and source of order announcing same.

3—3104

✪ ✪ ✪

Alva received the U.S. version of the Inter-Allied Victory Medal sometime after the war ended, with two bars (A.K.A. battle clasps, awarded for service during major offenses). His bars are marked with the areas ("Aisne-Marne" and "Defensive Sector") he served in. He may also have received a ribbon/bar of the same rainbow cloth also, but I cannot account for it. That would probably have at least two silver battle stars affixed to it. But given the date and place of his being wounded, he should have been honored with another battle clasp marked "Oise-Aisne" (the next battle beyond Aisne-Marne) along with a third star on a ribbon. I managed to purchase a replica ribbon (and three silver stars, each corresponding to a battle clasp/service area) to add to his medal case, a normal-size clasp for “Oise-Aisne”. (Jill later found an original replica ribbon with three silver stars among her collection). I had the original medal restored with a new, longer drape to accommodate the third battle clasp. The final result is shown here:

Alva's original WW1 Inter-Allied Victory Medallion, with a newly purchased service ribbon with three stars affixed, and a recently purchased original "OISE-AISNE" battle clasp and medal ribbon restoration.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awards_and_decorations_of_the_United_States_Armed_Forces

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I_Victory_Medal_%28United_States%29

✪ ✪ ✪

After the War:

Details of his life immediately after post-discharge are scarce. There are other written accounts in his record detailing the severity of his wounds in some legal papers. At one time, he was preparing a lawsuit against the U.S. Government to prove that he was permanently disabled in

order receive disability insurance benefits. [There is a War Risk Insurance policy in his records, and Gen. Pershing encouraged all soldiers to buy a policy with their wages before going into battle. After the war, there is much to be said about the role of the Harding administration Veterans Bureau (predecessor to the VA) corruption and misappropriation of funds, particularly involving a Mr. Charles R. Forbes, the appointed director. That in itself is a story, and no doubt Alva was affected by that, and the other government actions that did great disservice to Veterans prior to WW2. I've not seen any articles that give a full accounting of all the money embezzled by Forbes. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_R._Forbes I need to dig up that policy and read it over more carefully, along with other claim documentation made by Alva.] Alva lost some intestines, and with nerve damage and a poorly healed hip and atrophy of his leg, and with recurring infections, he was in physical pain for the rest of his life. Doctors feared he might never walk again, but he proved otherwise. Despite obtaining work for a local optical company, he was unable to sustain activity at work due to his disability. For many years, he was nearly destitute.

I received a response from a query I put to the National Personnel Records Center on any payroll records for Pvt. Alva H. Cook. They found some limited information. It appears while in service he received between $63.00 and $78.20 per month. That is less than $3.00/day. However, soldiers were often encouraged/expected to pay premiums for "war insurance", buy bonds, and/or send money home to family. But I have no idea where his pay went. Who knows – it could also have been spent on the local economy, stolen or lost, etc. Diary of another 32nd Division soldier (Corporal Arthur W. Scherr of 107th Field Signal BN.) says he was paid in Franc's in the early stages of the war.

Soldiers lost stuff all the time, and could not have carried all they owned while engaged in battle. A report by members of Company C of the 127th Regiment (also of 32nd Division), having dropped off most of their personal gear behind their lines to be retrieved later, recorded that French troops in their relief had raided their stash and stole almost everything of value.

What follows is an Excerpt from the Affidavit justifying Alva's disability claim (est. date 1941) developed by Alva and his legal counsel. (Note: "deponent" refers to Alva.):

> *" ... after war was declared by the Unites States on April 6th, 1917, deponent became subject to the draft and realizing this he attempted to enlist in the United States Army, but was unsuccessful inasmuch as he only weighed 94 pounds; that after deponent was rejected he returned to his work at the Chevrolet Motor Company at Flint, Michigan until he received notice from his Local Board notifying him to report for examination; that deponent was accepted for service by said Local Board and went to Camp Custer, where he was placed in the 160th Depot Brigade, 9th Company, 3rd Battalion on September 21st, 1917; that deponent remained for thirty days in quarantine and was then sent to*

Camp MacArthur at Waco, Texas and later assigned to Company K, 125th Infantry, 32nd Division." …

" That therefore this deponent, as a member of said 32nd Division, was transported to France, arriving at the port of Brest, France on February 24th, 1918 and was put into the front line trenches in the Alsace-Lorraine sector on May 5th, 1918; that during deponents entire service prior to, on and after said May 5th, 1918; he acted as orderly for his Commanding Officer; that deponents Commander during his entire service in France was Captain William H. Martin; that on August 28th, 1918 said 32nd Division engaged with the enemy in the Soissons sector, having just previously captured the Village of Juvigny [Juvigny, Aisne]; that on the night of August 28th, 1918 the Division received further orders to continue the attack on the morning *of August 29th, 1918; that deponent, acting as orderly for and in the company with his Battalion Commander, Captain William H. Martin, started forward at about 4:30 A.M. on the morning of said August 29th, 1918 and after they had advanced for some distance and at approximately 5 A.M. of said day deponent was shot in the abdomen and his hip by a machine gun bullet; that said machine gun bullet perforated deponents abdominal wall and intestines and penetrated the head of the left femur; that later deponent was shot in the right forearm by another machine gun bullet; that as a result of said machine gun bullet perforating deponent's abdominal wall and intestines it became necessary to remove a portion of the intestinal system and especially the intestines connecting with the stomach and that intestinal system had to be raised and sewed onto the stomach; that ever since said would the jointure of said intestines and stomach has formed adhesions, causing deponent pain at recurrent intervals, making it impossible for him to either stand, sit or lie down continuously for any length of time; that said machine gun bullet penetrated the head of the left femur and that the bone anklyosised with the result that deponent has no movement of the left leg from the hip to the knee and must therefore swing his leg when walking; that deponents left leg is one inch shorter than his right, that said machine gun bullet also shattered the sciatic nerve in said left leg and as a result deponent has what is known as "Drop-foot" and has very little feeling in said left foot; that deponent is unable to dress his left leg; that deponent, after being so wounded, started to crawl across the battlefield toward his first aid dressing station, but collapsed due to loss of blood; that deponent was saved from being fatally injured and bleeding to death at the time he was shot because part of his clothing was shot into his intestines and this acted to form a wad and packing which stopped the internal bleeding, but that said clothing caused internal infection; that deponent laid on said battlefield from to-wit: 5 A.M. to 6 P.M. of said August 29th. 1918 before he was finally brought in by first aid stretcher bearers; that deponent thereupon became totally and permanently disabled; that deponent was taken to the 127th Field Hospital, where a major operation was performed on his*

abdomen at 4 A.M. on August 30th, 1918; that deponent remained at said hospital for three days and was transferred by ambulance to another hospital, where he remained for ten days; that deponent was then transferred to Base Hospital No. 2 at Paris, France, where he remained for ten days or two weeks; that deponent was then transferred to Base Hospital No. 38 in Denantes, France about the first part of October 1918 and while at said hospital deponent had hemorrhages as a result of said internal infection, which had set in his wounds on the battlefield; that an operation was performed upon deponent by cutting away the affect parts and tying the artery and in November 1918 deponent had a blood transfusion; that in the first part of December 1918 deponent was transferred to Base Hospital No. 8 at Savenay, France and remained there, unable to move his body, until March 12th, 1919 when he was sent back to the United States." …

"That deponent arrived at Hampton Roads, Virginia on March 24th, 1919 and remained there ten days; that deponent was then transferred to Base Hospital No. 36 at Detroit, Michigan (Henry Ford Hospital); that on June 17th, 1919 deponent was transferred to Base Hospital No. 28 at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, where an operation was performed on deponent's hip by suturing the sciatic nerve in October 1919; that deponent remained at said hospital until his discharge from the United States Army and said hospital on April 3rd, 1920."

There is much more to this affidavit of how, after his discharge, Alva's disability made his life difficult, particularly in his ability to perform work even at the local optical company. He was in pain his entire life from his abdominal/hip wound, but defied predictions from doctors that he might never walk again. Over time he was able to walk without a cane or walker.

This affidavit also says he was sent to Base Hospital No. 2, vice Evacuation Hospital No. 2 after his wounding. Base Hospital No. 2 was at Etretat on the French coast of the English Channel, and primarily supported the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) instead of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF). It is unlikely he was there. I contend that he was sent to Red Cross Military Hospital No. 2 in Paris, France, which also operated jointly with the AEF as an Evacuation Hospital.

Postwar Activities, Awards and Recognition:

Those who fought in WW1 were offered no benefits after being discharged, despite the great numbers with disabilities. After the War, many veterans were petitioning the Government for benefits. Sometimes benefits were offered at the State level. In the “The Midwest Goes to War” by John W. Barry, personal accounts referenced in the book state that Wisconsin troops

received better benefits after the war than Michigan Troops. While each troop received "discharge papers, a uniform, a pair of shoes, a coat, and the $60 bonus" at the time of their discharge, at least one of the Wisconsin troops received a $30/month education bonus for taking university classes. Michigan later offered re-training of troops for civilian jobs. Alva received training as a bookkeeper, but struggled to maintain a job due the severe pain of his injuries. Alva and many other veterans needed disability benefits and none were offered at the time.

After the end of hostilities, even able-bodied veterans serving overseas lost out in good job opportunities at home, snapped up by those who never served, or were discharged early having never left the U.S. It took several months or more after the armistice before soldiers serving overseas were given the opportunity to return home. And certainly those more able-bodied had advantages over those who returned as disabled. The Great Depression (starting in 1929) created additional hardship for most veterans.

In order to appease veterans, one thing the War Department did was issue a propaganda poster to all WW1 veterans after the war. Alva received one and an example is pictured below.

In 1921, President Wilson requested artist E.H. Blashfield (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwin_Blashfield) to design an illustration for use on a certificate that would be presented to every veteran wounded or killed in action during the recent World War. This (example) design was later authorized for use in the official emblem of the "Disabled American Veterans of the World War", now known simply as the "Disabled American Veterans" (or DAV).

I have the actual Blashfield-designed certificate (effectively a poster) with calligraphy to "Alva Cook, Pvt., Co. K, 125th Infantry" in a frame on my bedroom wall. (Similar posters are for sale on Ebay in the price range of $125-200.00) At the bottom, his says he "SERVED WITH HONOR IN THE WORLD WAR AND WAS WOUNDED IN ACTION."

For the record, I should photograph his original, rather than show this example IMO this was issued to help appease those who fought in the war and later seeking compensation. Albeit artistic, it is just a piece of unceremonious paper after all. His was sent to him in a mailing tube – no presentation otherwise.

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Later, Alva Cook petitioned the Army for the Silver Star Medal, and it was awarded in 1944 with testimony by his Commanding Officer and other eyewitnesses stating that he provided aid to a wounded officer, having already been severely wounded himself.

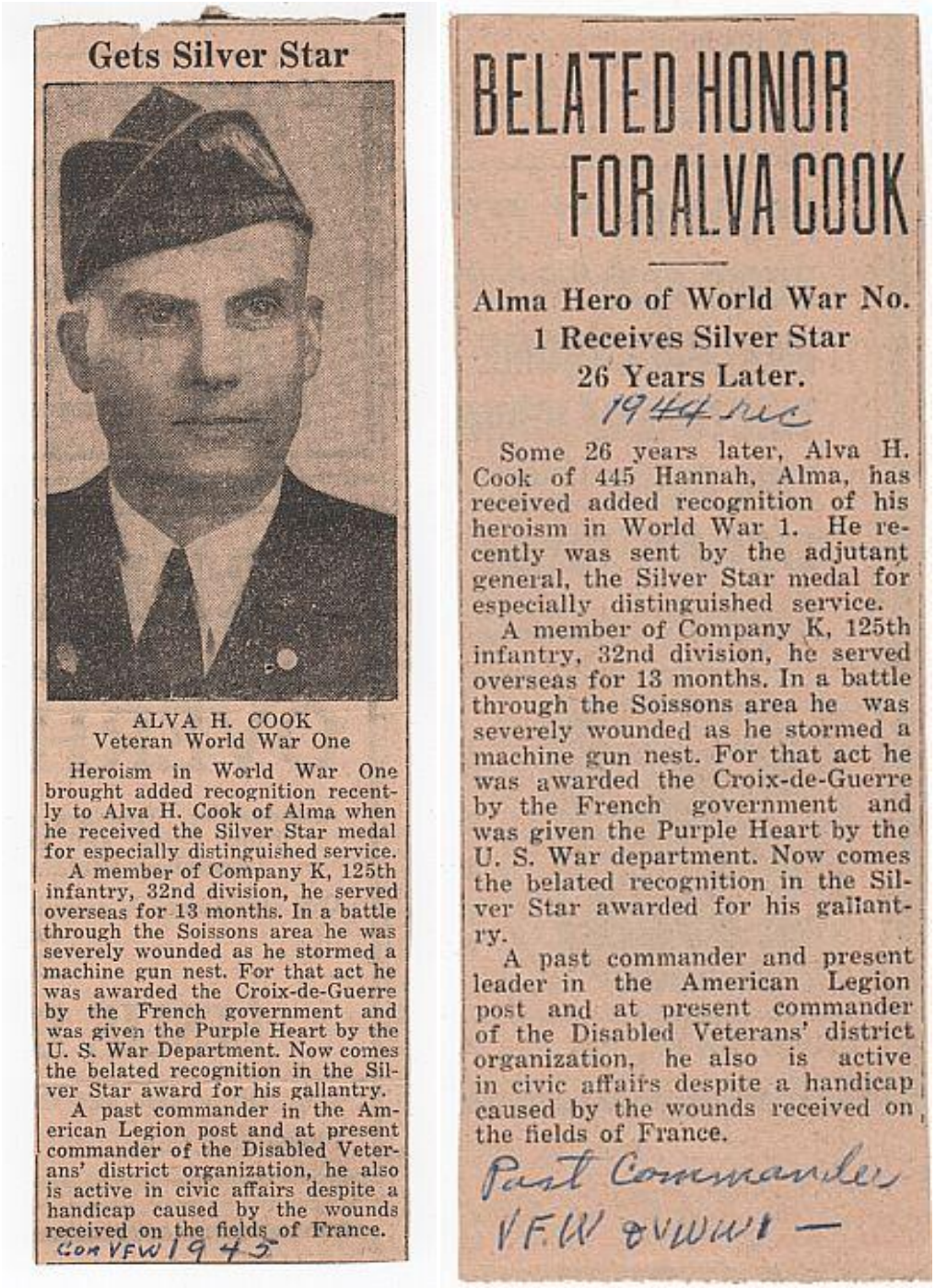
I have no details of when he was awarded the Purple Heart, but it must have been received on or after 1932 since it was not created until then, and he probably also petitioned to receive one (and was certainly entitled to one). I do not have any citations to go with either of these medals. I purchased replica service ribbons to add to his medals in his display case. (Jill later managed to find original ribbons for both Purple Heart and Silver Star among her collection). The medals themselves are original (albeit a bit dirty, faded or frayed), and both are engraved on the back "Alva H. Cook". It is possible that to obtain the Purple Heart medal, he must return (exchange) any of either the Silver Victory Button or a Wound Chevron.

Alva's original U.S. Purple Heart and Silver Star medals, with service ribbons

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purple_Heart

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver_Star

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awards_and_decorations_of_the_United_States_Army



Gets Silver Star

ALVA H. COOK
Veteran World War One

Heroism in World War One brought added recognition recently to Alva H. Cook of Alma when he received the Silver Star medal for especially distinguished service.

A member of Company K, 125th infantry, 32nd division, he served overseas for 13 months. In a battle through the Soissons area he was severely wounded as he stormed a machine gun nest. For that act he was awarded the Croix-de-Guerre by the French government and was given the Purple Heart by the U. S. War Department. Now comes the belated recognition in the Silver Star award for his gallantry.

A past commander in the American Legion post and at present commander of the Disabled Veterans' district organization, he also is active in civic affairs despite a handicap caused by the wounds received on the fields of France.

Con VFW 1945

BELATED HONOR FOR ALVA COOK

Alma Hero of World War No. 1 Receives Silver Star 26 Years Later.

1944 rec

Some 26 years later, Alva H. Cook of 445 Hannah, Alma, has received added recognition of his heroism in World War 1. He recently was sent by the adjutant general, the Silver Star medal for especially distinguished service.

A member of Company K, 125th infantry, 32nd division, he served overseas for 13 months. In a battle through the Soissons area he was severely wounded as he stormed a machine gun nest. For that act he was awarded the Croix-de-Guerre by the French government and was given the Purple Heart by the U. S. War department. Now comes the belated recognition in the Silver Star awarded for his gallantry.

A past commander and present leader in the American Legion post and at present commander of the Disabled Veterans' district organization, he also is active in civic affairs despite a handicap caused by the wounds received on the fields of France.

Past Commander VFW & VWW1 —

Two newspaper articles on (belated) award of the Silver Star to Alva H. Cook (published 1944)

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Veterans Organizations:

Alva H. Cook was actively involved in seeking veteran's benefits in his lifetime, and served as Commander in Michigan (Gratiot County) local chapters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and the American Legion. Perhaps the most important fact of his legacy - For a period of time he was the local Commander of all three organizations at the same time. He served in office for over 50 years for the local DAV (35 years as a Commander), using his experience with obtaining government benefits to help other disabled veterans, and working with state and federal officials to make sure they do not forget their obligation to support surviving soldiers who suffer even today with the hardships of disabilities from modern warfare. My Uncle says he performed nearly 100 man-years of service in these three veterans' organizations, and in support of veterans of WW1, WW2, Korean War, Vietnam; and various battles, skirmishes and other military actions in-between. A newspaper article from 1975 details his record as follows:

> Following the war, Cook remained active in veterans' affairs. He is a past commander of the VFW Post 1454 in of Alma and was elected first commander of the Disabled American Veterans in 1934 and held that office for 32 years. At the same time, he was commander of the American Legion and a member for 56 years of the St. Louis Post 256. He was a service officer for the [American] Legion 27 years, for the VFW 10 years and the DAV for 32 years. Cook was commander only this past year of the Tittabawassee Barracks, World War I Veterans based in Midland.

Alva was part of history after the war, lobbying tirelessly for benefits for all wounded veterans. With his comrades, he fought one final battle for the rest of his life - to ensure that veterans of his and future generations obtained treatment and benefits in accordance to the sacrifices they made.

Veterans Service logo's

His service to the members of these organizations is important to honor and remember. I purchased some embroidered patches and three 10K gold "past commander" lapel pins to add to his display case to reflect his post-war service.

Alva H. Cook, photo dated August 1944. Medals L-R are French Croix deGuerre w/Silver Star, Purple Heart, and Inter-Allied Victory Medal with two battle clasps. He received the Silver Star medal after this photo was taken. A reconditioned third battle clasp on the IA Victory Medal was added by me. Equivalent Service Ribbons are not shown. I cannot tell for sure, but based on size and sheen, that could be a Silver Victory Button on his left shoulder at the collar.

Alva H. Cook, DAV Post Commander, Alma, MI. (undated portrait)

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Sometime after the end of the War, he received a commemorative medal from Saginaw County in thanks for his service. I have no citation to go with this medal but it is pictured below.

Saginaw County WW1 commemorative medal, front and back. The sweep pin on the backside is not present (broken or otherwise missing).

In September 1993, he received a surprise in the mail – a 75th anniversary (of WWI) commemorative medal (pictured below). This is an honorary medal, not a service medal. There was no service ribbon or other accessories issued with this medal. Alva was 98 years old at the time, and there were very few WW1 veterans still alive then. Alva passed away the following year.

Alva's 75th Anniversary of WWI Commemorative Medal. The affidavit follows.

ROBERT R. McCORMICK TRIBUNE FOUNDATION
435 N. MICHIGAN AVENUE, SUITE 770
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60611-4041
312/222-3512
FAX: 312/222-3523

September 22, 1993

Dear World War I Veteran:

Enclosed is your 75th Anniversary of World War I Commemorative Medal.

The Medal is a gift of the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation, a private, not-for-profit foundation located in Chicago, Illinois. Patterned after the World War I Victory Medal, awarded to those who served in that war, this Commemorative Medal is surrounded by a wreath of laurel signifying honor. The wreath is encircled by a band bearing the inscription "75th Anniversary of World War I" at the bottom. The band is blue indicating loyalty and devotion to duty. On the reverse is a branch of oak, which symbolizes strength and acknowledges the sacrifices and contributions of the veterans who fought for our freedom. The inscription "They came on the Wings of Eagles" is from the famous World War I American Memorial Monument at St. Nazaire, France. Also included is the dedication, "A Grateful Nation Remembers" and the commemorative dates, "1918-1993."

We are proud to provide this Medal to you on behalf of the McCormick Tribune Foundation as our gift to the Nation's World War I veterans during this commemorative period. The Foundation takes this opportunity, as does the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to honor your courage, dedication and sacrifice.

The Department of Veterans Affairs would also like to take this opportunity to let you know that they are standing by ready to assist in answering your questions and providing personal assistance with claims for veterans benefits and/or health care. If you require assistance or have questions, please call the toll-free number 1-800-827-1000 to speak to a local VA representative.

Again, the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation and the Department of Veterans Affairs congratulate you on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of World War I.

Neal Creighton
President and CEO
Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation

Jesse Brown
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

In my research, I discovered another commemorative medal that I decided to not include in his collection, although I could easily obtain one. Soon after the War, the American Legion began to issue a commemorative medal for those who served in France and rode in one of their small, narrow-gauge box (freight) cars, typically marked “40 hommes [men] - 8 chevaux [horses]” signifying their rated capacity for either. Compared to American box cars of the time, they were cramped (only 20.5 feet long and 8.5 feet wide) and uncomfortable (often lacking suspension and certainly lacking seating or toilet facilities, and often not cleaned between uses.) Such freight cars were the butt of jokes by American soldiers, although I suppose riding in one was slightly better than the alternative – having to march long distance with all their gear. I believe it is highly likely that Alva rode in a French boxcar (at least when transported from his port-of-entry at Brest to areas east of Paris prior to battle duties, or on his return from Paris to his point of departure), although he did not state so, nor do his children have any recollection of him mentioning it. The French road system was not up to the task of moving whole Army divisions with supplies and gear over 200 miles from Brest – railroads had to have been employed.

American Legion Commemorative Medal “40 hommes/8 chevaux (a.k.a. 40&8)”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forty_and_Eight_veterans_organization

https://www.skylighters.org/encyclopedia/fortyandeight.html

The American Legion intended this medal to support a "fun making" club/social/fraternal activity rather than a truly honorary award. I'm sure many soldiers who never served on the front lines at least served in France in Service of Supply (or the subsequent Occupation of Germany) and rode on such trains, and the medal was intended to help build camaraderie among all those who wore the uniform whether they saw battle or not. I have no information on whether Alva was ever offered or received one. References indicate this award persisted through (and after) WW2, as American troops also rode the same trains. Even if I had absolute proof that Alva rode in a "40 & 8", I consider this medal to be undignified and little more than a souvenir or conversation piece – not worthy of being worn on a uniform or added to his display case. The 75th Anniversary commemorative medal is different – there were few who fought in WW1 still living 75 years after the Armastice.

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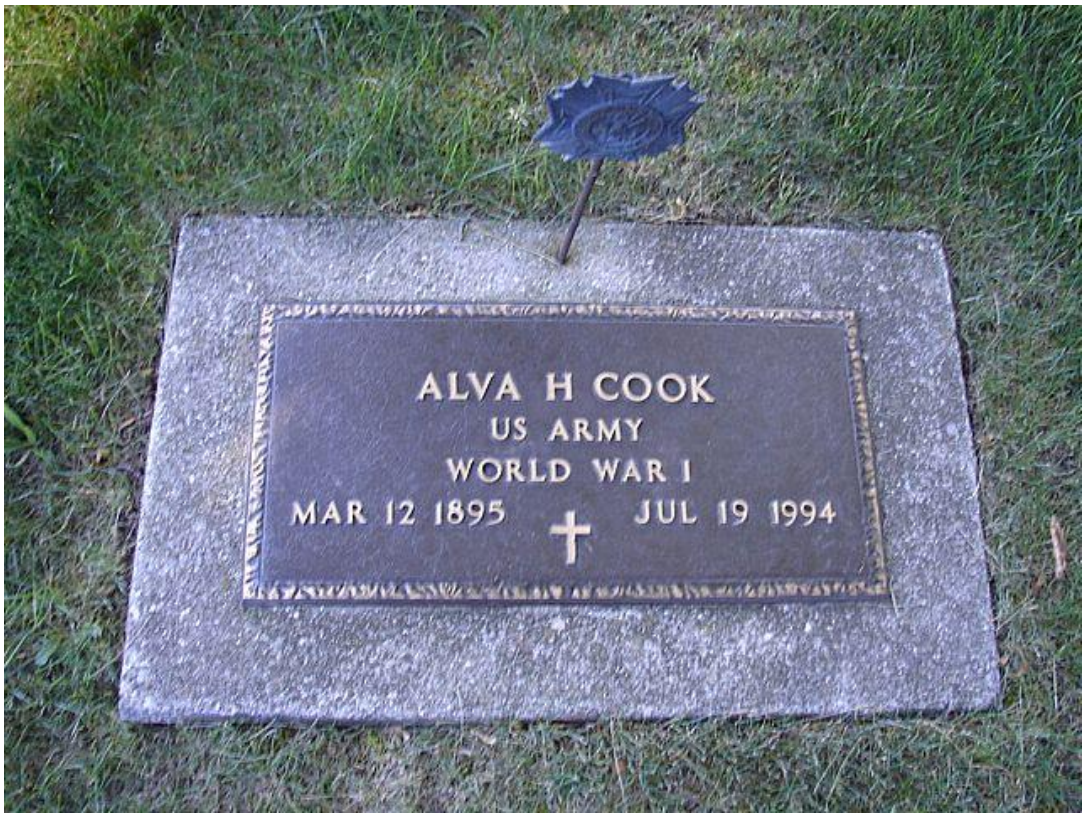
Alva Henry Cook married Ruby Belle Wright June 23, 1923 in Gratiot Co., Michigan. Both are buried in Ithaca, MI. Alva and Ruby are survived by two children (at this writing, Jan 2021) - my mother Sandra Jane (Cook) Anthony and my uncle, Alva Cook Jr., eight grandchildren and more great-grandchildren. His first son Wilbur died as an infant in 1924 and is buried alongside Ruby and Alva.

Alva was born March 12th, 1895, and died July 19, 1994 at 99 years old. He was an active Baptist in his lifetime.



Military Plaque behind Alva's headstone in Ithaca, MI

Headstone for Wilbur, Ruby and Alva Cook in Ithaca, MI (taken 29 May 2016)

Obituaries

Alva H. Cook

Alva H. Cook, 99, of Midland, and formerly of St. Louis, died Tuesday evening, July 19, 1994, at the Aleda E. Lutz V.A. Medical Center of Saginaw.

He was born March 12, 1895, in Sumner, son of the late Henry and Dinah (Storey) Cook. Mr. Cook entered the U.S. Army in September 1917 and remained on active duty until April 1920. In August of 1918, he was critically wounded while serving as a messenger with the "Red Arrow", 125th infantry, 32nd Division in France. He was hospitalized for two years as a result of his injuries. Mr. Cook was awarded the Purple Heart and Silver Star Medals in addition to the French Croix de Guerre with a silver star. In 1934, Mr. Cook founded the Gratiot County Alma, Michigan Chapter #30 of the Disabled American Veterans and served as its commander and service officer for 32 years. In 1970, Mr. Cook moved to Midland and joined the local chapter #94 of the Disabled American Veterans. He had served as their chaplain until near present. Mr. Cook also served as commander and/or service officer for the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and World War I Veterans. He had contributed over 100 man years while serving simultaneously as an officer in various veterans organizations.

Mr. Cook married the former Ruby B. Wright on June 23, 1923, near Ithaca. She predeceased him Dec. 31, 1988. He was a former member of the First Baptist Church in St. Louis and a member of the First Baptist Church of Auburn.

Surviving are his children, Alva Cook Jr. and his wife, Sylvia of Banning, Calif. and Sandra Anthony and her husband, Tom of Midland; eight grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. Also surviving are two brothers, Willard and Gordon Cook. Mr. Cook was predeceased by an infant son, Wilbur; two brothers, Stanley and Donald Cook and a sister, Flossie Snellenberger.

Funeral services will take place Saturday, July 23, 1994, 1 p.m. at the First Baptist Church, St. Louis. The Rev. Charles Vermilyea and Rev. Rick Weber will officiate. Burial will be in Ithaca Cemetery, with military services being conducted under the auspices of the V.F.W. Post #1454 of Alma.

Mr. Cook's family will receive friends at the Ware-Smith-Woolever & Co. Funeral Home, 1200 W. Wheeler St., Midland today from 7-9 p.m. and Saturday at the church from noon until the time of services. The Disabled American Veterans Chapter #94 of Midland will conduct a military service 7:30 p.m. this evening at the funeral home.

Those planning an expression of sympathy are asked to consider the First Baptist Church of St. Louis, the First Baptist Church of Auburn or the donor's favorite charity.

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Author Notes:

I have deliberately neglected to detail his efforts to receive disability benefits after the war – that is a story all by itself, and I have limited information on many things. I know that it took many years before he started receiving any sort of benefits. There was also some sort of lawsuit involving a war insurance policy he took out before going overseas. I need to take some time to review those papers, but I don't think it will add much more to his story.

In my memory, Alva didn't talk about the war experience in any detail. Based on historical accounts of the 32nd Division and 125th Regiment, he undoubtedly endured many long marches with heavy packs, going over the top, life in the trenches. Every one of his senses would be stimulated: the sights of destruction, death and mayhem all around; the sounds of artillery barrages and gunfire from both sides; the smell and taste of chemical warfare or bad food. The physical senses of uncomfortable and unsanitary conditions, including exposure to lice and swarms of flies, and the fatigue of long marches. He would be fighting day and night with little food or fresh water, sleep or rest. He felt the loss of his comrades; and experienced the landscape of tremendous carnage and destruction, and the overall horrors of death and decay and suffering all around. He also saw the terrible afflictions of his surviving comrades in various hospital stays, even well-after the war. It was Total War. I have no doubt that his Christian faith carried him all those remaining years to his final passing.

It had to have been Hell serving in the front lines, and I have no doubt he experienced it all. Many of his friends in Company K "The Saginaw Company" might not have survived the war, including some he knew in Ithaca at the time of enlistment and were alongside him in training and deployment.

I have no letters to (or from) home that might give additional insight to his experience.

The typical infantry soldier stayed in the trenches or in battle 10-20 days before being rotated out for temporary relief and resupply (later to return for another tour at the front). While in the trenches or engaged in battle, soldiers seldom slept, changed clothes or got a bath until they were rotated out. Years after the war in a newspaper article, Alva said "everyone had cooties (lice)", but he didn't elaborate further. Sanitation was a problem almost everywhere, and most housing in the French countryside also lacked running water. Enlisted men often slept in barns or tents when on relief. If he got food during battle (and he might not) it was cold most of the time, and probably insufficient. Potable water (or just about anything else) would also be in short supply at the front lines. However, the 32nd Division and U.S. Army spent relatively little time in the trenches – they were soon "over-the-top" driving back the Germans.

The battles did not stop on account of darkness or weather, and after several days of nonstop fighting, units were soon exhausted both physically and by casualties. Without the support of the American Expeditionary Forces, the war on the Western Front would have remained a bloody stalemate. I'm sure Alva could have told a lot more of his story, but many soldiers are reluctant to re-visit the horrors of war. But there are many other references that tell the tales of the typical WWI infantryman that give insight to Alva's experience.

There are other pictures of various hospitals of WWI available online or in books. I would like to add a decent map of France with general locations of his movements portrayed. To start, I've made a number of markings in my edition of Google Earth.

So far I have spent over $250 to help fill his display cases with items he either should have had at one time, or had earned but never received or were lost. I purchased replica ribbons and pins for each service medal (Purple Heart, Silver Star, Croix de Guerre and Victory Medal) and added them to his display case, I also purchased a second display case, a replacement hasp for his old medal case, black felt for his old medal case (to match his new medal case). I purchased three small silver stars to be affixed to his replica Victory medal ribbon – one star for each battle clasp. I was also fortunate to have purchased an authentic Silver Star Victory Button to replace his missing one. He may have had to exchange that (or a Wound Chevron) for a Purple Heart medal, but I believed he deserves to have an original or replica with his medal display, in accordance to that indicated in his discharge papers. I added two vintage collar discs to the case, and two more replicas. I purchased a set of replica uniform buttons as well. I purchased gold "past commander" pins his service to the DAV, VFW, and American Legion, as well as embroidered patches for each of the veterans' organizations. Once complete, the entire set could be worth over $500 on the open market. But the story of Alva H. Cook is worth much more.

His favorite book on the 32nd Division is available in the public domain online, and there are also other books (including some e-books) about the 32nd Division in WW1. Hardcopies of his favorite book sell online for about $50 and up, although his is in poor condition and not worth the expense of having a book binder restore it. There is also a copy in many Michigan and Wisconsin libraries, including the (Midland MI) Grace A. Dow Memorial Library. My sister Jill also had a copy of the same book in her care, in a much better binding which she recently passed to me. I have a few other souvenirs from his days in France, as well and two other books.

Other original medals, including training or other service medals, ribbons, patches, or other insignia or citations are not in my possession. I have attempted to reconstruct as much as I can reasonably do based on his writing and the historical account of the 32nd Division.

I have no intention of becoming a collector of anything beyond what Alva would have been entitled to. Nevertheless, some things I'd like to acquire include his original dog tags, his uniform or at least chevron sleeve patch(es) (he may be entitled to two chevrons – one for his wound to be worn on the right sleeve, the other for his time in overseas service, to be worn on the left sleeve); and any certificates or citations associated with the wound chevron, two overseas service chevron's; and any citations associated with his purple heart, silver star, and victory medals (I have a late-dated citation for the Croix de Guerre in English, and Jill has another, provided a framed Croix de Guerre certificate in French). Plus any other insignia or memorabilia that signify his Army training and service. I have no letters to or from home in my collection – this might have offered additional insight to his life at the time. I have a replica of the 32nd Division shoulder patch, but it does not look quite the same as he has in his portrait. His postwar uniform, battle and marching helmets, and Veterans association's hats are gone.

I'm not convinced that the metal helmet he held after the war was his original, as I can't believe that he would have been carried from the field with his helmet – it was extra, unnecessary weight to carry and easily disposed of in any of his hospital stays. It did have evidence of a bullet ricochet on its surface at least. An account by his son Alva Cook Jr. says that he had to pound a dent out of his helmet after a ricochet – the helmet I once held had no evidence of a serious dent or marks from pounding.

Something I haven't completely reconciled is a large panorama photograph (looking northward, with the south-end of Lake Margrethe in the background) embossed with the words "Mobilization Camp Grayling, Mich, -1917-", given to me by Alva many years ago. It is known that certain Michigan and Wisconsin national guardsmen to be assigned to the 32nd Division were initially mobilized there prior to transfer to Waco, TX. The MI National Guard was composed of veterans who served before the draft, (often in the recently concluded Mexican-American war) and a great many officers of the 32nd Division would come from those more experienced veterans. Other literature (Gansser) says that the 126th regiment (sister regiment to the 125th) was also camped in Grayling prior to transfer to Waco, and that some personnel was transferred from Camp Custer to Camp Grayling. However Alva does not mention how he came to receive this photograph, and I cannot recall any sort of story behind it. It probably would have been given to him after the war, as I doubt it could have survived in all his time in France. Was the 160th Depot Brigade also serving or visiting Camp Grayling? I can't seem to find any details about the role of the 160th Depot Brigade, 9th Company, 3rd Battalion other than it was stationed at Camp Custer at the time. None of his writing shows he had any other direct association with Camp Grayling. This photo of Camp Grayling in 1917 is also accessible at the Library of Congress website:

http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007664157/

His son, Alva Cook Jr., believes the photograph may have been given to him by one of his commanding officers who went through officer training in Camp Grayling. Camp Grayling may also have been used for 32nd Division artillery training at that time.

After a few years of thought and research, I decided Alva had weak ties to Camp Grayling, and it was not worth keeping and sold it at a rummage sale in 2019 for a few bucks. Had Alva given me more information about it, I might have kept it. Since a digital (also annotated) version is also available at the Library of Congress, I decided I could part with it.

In further discussion with his son, Alva Cook Jr. regarding at least one newspaper article about him receiving the Silver Star, disputes that he was actually "storming" a machine gun nest. Certainly he was "near" enemy lines, but such a citation may have been necessary in order to award him the Silver Star. I cannot know for sure. Other information stated that he provided aid to severely wounded officer at the time, which might offer further justification for the award.

I'm having a hard time finding anything more about this "cave" or "cellar" at/near Tartiers where he received first aid after being wounded. This picture appears many times in several references and is shown in two of his books. The man in pushing the wheelbarrow seems interesting to me – is that a Moroccan (Foreign Legion) soldier? They provided relief when it was time for the 32nd Division to retire for a brief rest. Why is he hauling out stuff? Is the cave still in existence? What was its original purpose? Was it a defensive fortification or an old wine or root cellar? That area of France is known to have a vast number of chalk or limestone mines/quarries that pre-date the war, and were used as shelters by both the German Army and the Allies. What is its condition now? I found reference that the "cellar" at Tartiers was previously occupied by the Germans during the War (they had added better ventilation) before being overtaken by the Allies, who set it up as a Post of Command (P.C.) and dressing station days before the battle at Juvigny. But there seems to have been more than one underground first aid station in the area around that time – one in (or near Tartiers), and then another near Valpriez Farm. So it is not clear which cave he was actually sent to for first-aid. Alva simply says he was in a "big cave near Tartiers". My best guess is that it was the cave 300 yards east of Valpriez Farm. It is marked on the map in a history of Company C of the 127th Regiment. The "jump off" point for the 32nd Division operations was about 1 mile east of there also – first aid stations need to be close to the lines.

A caption on the photo at WorldCat (a library cataloging service) has plans stored at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison, WI. It describes:

" … shows the cave used by the 32nd Division as a command post and aid station, including unit headquarters, raised floors, vents, radios, parking, and roads. "Aug. 31st 1918."

I have requested more information on what they have on the cave. I am most interested in its exact location, pre-war history (even history during the war, as Germans probably occupied it) as well as any other info on its current state or use. Visiting that museum might be a good retirement trip to make too. It seems to have some very knowledgeable staff, and more in their collection. They ultimately sent me a scan showing the "cave at Tartiers" layout. Most of the cave appeared to be dedicated to various battalion and regimental commands, not shelter for wounded men.

When I was a child, Alva gave me his white marching (pith) helmet with the 32nd Division with red arrow logo on it, along with a steel battle helmet (which had a bullet ricochet across the top). Both have been lost to time, although I saw a picture of him (taken after the war) wearing the marching helmet and a dress uniform. I seem to recall he also gave me some sort of service ribbon as a keepsake, but that too is lost and I don't even know what service ribbon it was. Jill later found a number of ribbons so perhaps she held it. I now wish I had better kept these items. It may be that the helmets and maybe some other memorabilia were donated by Mom to the Midland historical society.

Once this report is "done", I should print a hardcopy to add to his record box, and probably also make a CDROM of all the computer files. But it remains a work in progress until I decide otherwise. The more I read about WW1 in general, new insights about his experience spring forward.

There are two more "odd" things that I still haven't reconciled. Both oddities make me doubt that his uniform, accessories, or other property remained with him after being wounded.

- His oval portrait shows him wearing what appears to be a collar disc for the 12th Regiment (a field artillery battalion of the US Army 2nd Division), not the 125th infantry regiment of the 32nd Division. (You need strong light and a magnifying disc to see the collar disc in detail, and still it is not absolutely clear). Perhaps he borrowed this from a friend? He may have lost everything he had before he entered hospitals in France, uniform and all. (Recall also that soldiers often left non-combat items behind when heading to the front – possibly stolen by soldiers coming up in relief – or even his fellows who presumed he would not be back to claim it.) Also the shoulder patch, while resembling a 32nd Division "red arrow", looks a bit odd, although I've seen a few variations from the patch I have in the collection.
- The Croix de Guerre medal he is wearing in his portrait appears to have a longer drape (cloth) than the one in his medal case. In a B&W photograph, you cannot tell if the citation

star is silver or bronze – there is a distinction for that accessory. Again, I wonder if his uniform and accoutrements were lost after he was shot and never restored, and/or he posed for the portrait using someone else's uniform and medal.

- The English version of the Croix de Guerre certification I have on my wall has the appearance of being hand-written by a calligrapher over a template, and is dated 1925 –five years after the portrait was taken and seven years after he was wounded. Jill has a larger Croix de Guerre certificate (written in French, typed over a poster/template) that has the same date and similar information, and with the seal of the French Military Attaché in Washington DC. She has now passed that certificate to me, and the translation is nearly identical to the English-language certificate I had in my possession. Perhaps the French gave recognition in the field, and followed up with certificates and actual medals after the war had ended. Both certificates are in glass frames and are not easily removed. My copy says:

REPUBLIC OF FRANCE

Minister of War

Croix de Guerre Law of the 8th of April 1915

"The Minster of War Certifies that Alva Cook formerly a private, Company K, 125 Inf:, 32 Div., A.E.F. has obtained the Croix de Guerre for a Divisional Citation order No. 14, 517 "D", 16 March 1919, Headquarters of the French Army of the East during the Campaign of 1914-1918 against Germany and her Allies. Done at Paris the 22d of September, 1925 for the Minister of War by the General, the Military Attaché,

(signed) E. Dumont

Seen and registered in the Office of the Minister of War under the No. Etats Unis 3785"

At his funeral in 1994, I personally placed at least three of his four major medals on his chest, which were retrieved prior to his burial. I am confident that the Silver Star and the Purple Heart were two of them, but I don't recall if the WW1 Victory Medal or the Croix de Guerre was the third. Alva was buried with full military honors.

MISSING from his display case is uniform shoulder insignia designating status. Need to research this. It is possible that's Private's wore no rank badge during that time. (Seems to be so given further research). He was not promoted during his time in service or thereafter.

His daughter (my mother, Sandra [Cook] Anthony) had taken care of Alva most of his last years after his wife Ruby died, but she finally relinquished him to a VA-contracted nursing home in 1993. He contracted double-pneumonia and was transferred from the nursing home (Pleasant

Manor in Mt. Pleasant, MI) to the VA hospital in Saginaw for three weeks, then back to the nursing home. She observed a lot of issues in the quality of care he received at the nursing home and wrote a very detailed letter to them about it. She or my father would spend time at the nursing home almost every day he was there. She says in the letter: she isn't complaining that he died, but rather HOW he died. He was diabetic with only one working kidney, and they gave him diuretic medicines to control BP which was not required, mixed up doses, and failed to monitor his medical condition adequately. Nursing aids failed to listen to his early complaints, and later failed to coordinate with doctors' on-call, and their records management was terrible.

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Alva Cook Jr. (Alva's Son) read an earlier version of this document and sent the following message to me on 12 Nov 2016:

> *Dan:*
>
> *I have read all the material you sent me on Dad's military history. Below are some thoughts that may fill in some blank places or places that may need explaining according to my understanding.*
>
> *With reference to the pix of Camp Grayling, Dad knew personally a number of WW1 survivors who lived in the area around Alma. One was the commander of the National Guard during my childhood. One year, when I was a small child, the entire family was invited to attend the Guard "exercises" at Camp Grayling. Dad knew the commander of this unit because they served together in the War. It's very possible Dad obtained this old pix of the Camp by one of his war buddies.*
>
> *At one time, Dad served the veterans in the area as commander of all three organizations at the same time---American Legion, VFW and DAV. Busy man!*
>
> *As for storming a machine gun nest, I know nothing about and to me is someone else's idea. Some of the veterans had a tendency to exaggerate battlefield experiences. It's more likely that Dad was the one who was "stormed". Sometimes errors are made in dictation. I recall that at one time, until it was corrected, Dad was supposedly "shell shocked".*
>
> The "storming a machine gun nest" was written in the newspaper articles on his Silver Star award. Perhaps this was intended to help him get the award. "Storming" is probably an exaggeration. More likely he was "Approaching" it

instead. Nobody really knows at this point, but I accept that he and his Company was under fire and advancing toward Juvigny. –DAA

"Shell Shocked" is akin to what we today call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Al Cook Jr. didn't elaborate on this and I'm rather reluctant to ask how it might have affected him. However this might explain a lot why Alva didn't like to talk about the war. I suspect this was quite common among surviving WW1 veterans serving on the front – even those who were not physically harmed. But I also suspect that the best "therapy" for Alva was his lifetime service in the various veterans' organizations and his Baptist faith. Even today, there is no "cure" for PTSD – only treatment.

The following is exactly what Dad [Alva] described to me, no more, no less:

He had been on a messenger mission and the sun had set. He was in no-man's-land, so he hid himself for the night. Early in the morning, he moved out of his place to return to American lines. He was spotted by a German machine gunner who fired on him. The first round hit him in the abdomen spinning him around and going through his first aid kit. Other rounds hit him through his gas mask, one on his helmet and one in the upper right arm (a flesh wound). The round through his abdomen went through his hip joint. He then found a shell hole to hide in and pounded out the dent in his helmet with a stone. He said that after he was shot he had an extremely strong desire to live.

(The helmet I had in my possession had evidence of a bullet ricochet that had been painted over with olive-drab paint. But I recall no evidence of a dent, or it having been pounded over with a rock. I have my suspicions – not that he was hit in the helmet – but rather that the helmet I once had in my possession was not original. I also had suspicions (listed in this document) that the helmet once in my possession could have been carried with him from the front or throughout his hospital stays and transport to the U.S.)

Sometime during the day, he heard the cry of a soldier for help. (And this is where the hero comes into the picture.) He crawled out of the shell hole to the man in need. He was seen by his fellow soldiers doing so and told to stay put. But Dad was too moved by this man's cry and went on anyway. He was badly wounded in the leg, a commissioned officer. Dad gave him first aid and some water, [and] then crawled back to the shell hole. From early in the morning to about 6 p.m. in the evening he waited for rescue by the Signal Corps.

It is possible (and consistent), in my discussion elsewhere in this document, that he rendered aid to 1LT William H. Rust, an officer of his K-company and severely wounded and later deceased the same day at Juvigny.

If that first bullet had not turned Dad around, he would have been killed. And if he had not survived afterwards, I, Sandy and you would not exist!

Although the government received reports of heroism and recommendations for medals, the soldier had to apply for them and show qualifications. In Dad's earlier years he did not know this. My understanding is that Dad was recommended by his commanding officer for the Distinguished Service Cross. When Dad applied for it he was told that he waited too long but that he could receive the Silver Star medal instead.

Because Dad could work [initially], he was given a low percent disability pension. How much I don't know. But later, when he could no longer work, he had much difficulty obtaining [qualifying for] what is termed "permanent and total disability". Of course, he received the 100% pension the rest of his life.

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References:

Alva's favorite book: "The 32nd Division in the World War, 1917-1919", Issued by the Joint War History Commission of Michigan and Wisconsin for the Library of Congress in 1920, is available for download at:

https://archive.org/details/32nddivisioninwo00wisc

Another of his books and a popular reference for 32nd Division history: "Tales of the 32nd Division" by G.W. Garlock, Badger Publishing Co, ©1927. (Alva's copy is signed by the author.) Despite the date of publication, I have been unable to obtain a downloadable copy. However, softcopy may be viewable at:

https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015071163359;view=1up;seq=7

There are many other references that involve the 32nd Division during WW1, including:

"Company B, 119th Machine Gun Battalion, Price County's WWI Heroes" ©2011: available online at:

http://www.pricecountygenealogicalsociety.org/pdf/119BnFinalBookGBz.pdf

Annual Reports of the War Department, "War Department Annual Reports, 1919, Volume 1 (of 4), Part 3 Report of the Surgeon General (con't from Part 2)"

http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/fieldoperations/chapter13.html

http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/adminamerexp/chapter24.html

"The Midwest Goes to War" by John W. Barry, Scarecrow Press, ©2007. It is copywrited but may be available for viewing at:

https://foflibrary.cf/disk/ebooks-pdf-the-midwest-goes-to-war-the-32nd-division-in-the-great-war-by-john-w-barry-pdb.html

"Onward Through Hell: Company L of Menominee – 125th Regiment 32nd Division – at Hill 212 in World War 1", by Ross Parcels, ©2007. Hill 212 lies between Sergy and Ciergies, France and was fought over during the Aisne-Marne campaign. While this book – actually more of a thesis, has some adequate reference material, it is poorly written and the author provides unsupported commentary in many areas, and I am reluctant to endorse it. It is available for viewing at:

http://patrickandshawnareawesome.com/Onward_Through_Hell___Company_L_of_Menominee,_125th_Infantry_Regiment,_32nd_Division,_at_Hill_212_inh1m.pdf

The 126th Infantry Regiment fought alongside the 125th. The book "History of the 126th Infantry in the war with Germany" by Emil B. Gansser is also a useful reference. Participation of the 125th Regiment is occasionally mentioned, and with locations and actions closely associated with the 125th and other units of the 32nd Division. The e-book is available for download at:

https://books.google.com/books/about/History_of_the_126th_Infantry_in_the_War.html?id=PMkLAAAAYAAJ

There are a great many books on the exploits of the AEF in WW1, broader in scope but often more illuminating on the conditions that the infantry faced, but occasionally containing more personal stories and experiences of selected personalities. Other books that I have read or have in my collection include:

- "Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I" by Richard S. Faulkner, ©2017, University Press of Kansas.
- "My Fellow Soldiers: General John Pershing and the Americans Who Helped Win the Great War" by Andrew Carroll, ©2017 Penguin Press.
- "The Last of the Doughboys" by Richard Rubin, ©2013 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- "Back Over There" by Richard Rubin, ©2017 St. Martin's Press

Finally, there is a terrific website with daily articles on WW1 history (not just AEF but all participants). Mike Hanlon is the producer of "Roads to the Great War".

http://roadstothegreatwar-ww1.blogspot.com/

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Hierarchy of units in which he served:

1. United States Armed Forces (Consisting of Army, Navy, and Marines at the time. Air Force did not exist at the time – only Army Air Corps.)
2. United States Army
3. American Expeditionary Forces (AEF – generally those who served overseas in 1918)
4. First Army (2nd Army of the AEF was not formed until Oct 1918, by which time the war had nearly ended.
5. Third Corps (consisting of several inter-allied Divisions, including the 32nd Division. Technically the French 10th Corps commanded the U.S. 32nd Division during the 2nd Battle of the Marne and Oise-Aisne campaigns, to which Alva served.)
6. 32nd Division, U.S. Army (originally troops from Wisconsin and Michigan, but replacement troops came from all over the U.S.)
7. 63rd Brigade (consisting of 125th and 126th Infantry Regiments and the 121th Machine Gun Battalion, and with support from the 57th (A.K.A. 157th https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/157th_Maneuver_Enhancement_Brigade "Iron Brigade") and 158th field artillery brigades, and the 107th Trains, Engineers. Signal Battalion, MP's, etc.)
8. 125th Infantry Regiment – Michigan troops in the beginning.
9. 3rd Battalion of the 63rd Brigade (consisting of Companies I, L, K, and M of the 125th Infantry, plus other supporting elements such as machine gun and artillery batteries)
10. Company K of the 125th Infantry Regiment (which he called "the Saginaw Company", consisting of soldiers who originally lived in that general area of MI. Alva came from Gratiot County, to the immediate west of Saginaw County.)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Company_(military_unit)

(Platoons are the next level of military hierarchy – I have no information on how Company K was divided in battle. It could have varied depending on battle conditions and available manpower.) See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Platoon

To some degree, this is confusing due to multiple contradictory references, or possibly reorganizing that might have occurred in war period.., The 32nd Division in WW1 was composed of the following units:

- 125th and 126th Infantry Regiments - Michigan troops.
- 127th and 128th Infantry Regiments - Wisconsin troops.
- 119th, 120th, 121st Machine Gun Battalions
- 119th, 120th, 121st Field Artillery (another Reference says 57th FA Brigade consisting of the 119th, 120th and 121st FA, plus 158th FA Brigade with 332nd, 333rd, and 334th FA, plus 308th Trench Mortar Battery and 308th Ammunition Trains)
- 107th Supply Train (to include supply train, sanitary train, ammunition/mortar train, engineering train, signal battalion, MP's, and motor supply/ambulance truck unit, etc.)

Alva's "complete" medal case (as of 08 Sep 2019).

Another display case was established hold his postwar service to DAV, VFW and American Legion with gold pins indicating "Past Commander" status for all three organizations, and embroidered patches for all three.