



Army Heritage Center
Foundation
*Telling the Army Story...
one Soldier at a time*

Voices of the Past

WORLD WAR I

Highlights:

- Sixteen year old Donald Kyler enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1917 with his parent's consent.
- He fought unscathed through some of the bloodiest and climatic battles of World War I, such as Saint-Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne.
- Kyler served in the trenches, as a runner, and as a company mechanic, responsible for repairing equipment and supervising carrying parties bringing food and supplies to the front.
- Kyler was one of ten Soldiers out of the original 250 in his company who was not killed or wounded.
- Kyler's memoirs of WW I are part of the collection at the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and are available to the public.

Read more at
www.armyheritage.org

Questions or
comments please
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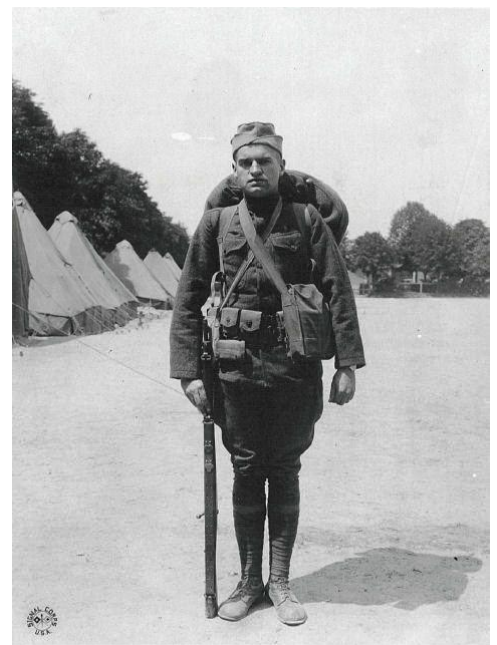
Part of the Army Heritage Center Foundation's Educational Series

Donald Kyler: Over the Top

(Europe, 1917-1919) Donald Kyler was sixteen years old when he enlisted in the Army in April of 1917. A native of Whitley County, Indiana, he grew up on a farm in the small town of Collamer. With his parent's permission, he enlisted at Fort Wayne, Indiana. He wrote of that experience:

"In April our country declared war on Germany. Soon after that I inquired about the requirements for enlisting in the army. The requirements were that one had to be at least sixteen years old, and with the consent of a parent or guardian one could enlist in the Regular Army. I obtained consent and soon I and several other boys from South Whitley went to Fort Wayne and requested enlistment at the recruiting office there. We were given meal tickets, which were good at a local restaurant and sent to a hotel. The next day we were put aboard a special railroad car, together with a lot of other young men from the region. As the car was about to be coupled to a passenger train, the recruiting sergeant came through the car and said that he was taking contributions for beer for the trip. Almost everyone gave something. That was the last we ever saw of the sergeant – and we got no beer. That was an introduction to the dishonest and crooked practices by some elements of the army that I later grew to hate. The car proceeded to Fort Thomas, Kentucky, and arrived there the next day. We were lined up, the roll was called, and we were given a meal in one of the barracks. Next, in another building, we were ordered to take all of our clothes off, and were given a hasty physical examination. All passed the test because the army

wanted men. Then in still another building, we were briefed on military laws, and told the seriousness of the commitment that we were about to take. We were warned that if we had any doubt or inclination to withdraw- to do so then; because after being sworn in it would be too late, and to do so then would be desertion: a serious crime in military law. None withdrew that I was aware of. We raised our right hands and repeated the oath as prompted by an officer. I do not remember the exact words of the oath, but I do remember the meaning of it in full measure.



This unidentified U.S. Infantryman is seen with the same basic equipment Donald Kyler and other U.S. Soldiers would have carried, minus the helmet. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC.



The 18th Infantry training in France, June-Oct, 1917. This picture shows trench supports and illustrates the tight quarters Soldiers faced during trench warfare. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC, Signal Corps World War I Collection.



Capt. Byrd McD. Hart, U.S.A., 366th Inf. 92nd Div., Chauchat automatic rifle taking part in the maneuvers, 1st Army Corps School, Gondrecourt, Meuse, France, August 14th, 1918. Photo courtesy of the USAHEC, World War I Miscellaneous - Roy Coles Album 3.

To bear true allegiance to the United States of America and to faithfully serve against all its enemies whomsoever. To obey all orders of the President of the United States and all officers and noncommissioned officers duly appointed over me, and to serve for such pay and emoluments as shall from time to time be prescribed until death, or until given a discharge as prescribed by law.

Upon completion of the oath the officer declared us soldiers in the Regular Army of the United States."

Assigned to Company G, 16th Infantry Regiment, First Infantry Division, Kyler was among the first Soldiers deployed to France. He took part in seven major campaigns, including the defense of the Aisne-Marne Sector and the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne Offensives.

Kyler's combat experiences included fighting in the front line trenches and serving as a message runner for his combat commander. Runners had to be fleet of foot as they often had to cross through hostile territory to deliver their messages. On one occasion, Kyler knocked out a machine guns nest using grenades and rifle fire. Kyler was promoted to company mechanic, repairing arms and directing carrying parties delivering food and supplies to the front.

During the war, Kyler kept notes on his experiences. He was seventeen-and-a-half when the war ended, a hardened, professional Soldier. Of the 250 Soldiers initially assigned to Company G, he was one of only ten who returned to the U.S. with the Regiment in 1919, the rest having been wounded or killed.

Source

Donald Kyler. Memoir. "The Thoughts and Memories of a Common Soldier." World War I Veterans Survey. USAMHI.

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