

Boy Scout earns Eagle and accolades through Alvin York project

By Tom Conning and Carol Kerr

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President Barack Obama recognized the military family's challenges in the face of multiple deployments, multiple moves, and demanding lives when he declared November as Military Family Month.

"With loved ones serving far from home, military spouses take on the work of two. Their children show courage and resilience as they move from base to base, school to school, home to home. And even through the strain of deployment, military families strengthen the fabric of each community they touch and enrich our national life as shining examples of patriotism."

The president could have been referring to Josiah Mastriano, military family member at Carlisle Barracks, Pa., who has moved from base to base, school to school, and home to home over his 15-year lifetime.

Josiah has participated in the Boy Scouts for ten years while he attended the new schools, new homes and new bases. He has followed his father, Col. Doug Mastriano, a U.S. Army War College student, throughout a military career that has taken the family to Europe, Canada and Pennsylvania.

In Canada, Josiah earned Canada's highest Scouting honor, the Chief Scout Award as well as the Duke of Edinburgh Award. He is about to earn his Eagle Scout badge on December 1, based on completion of an Eagle Scout Service Project that took him to World War I battlefields.

The Armed Forces Network (AFN) interviews Josiah Mastriano on the site where Alvin York won the Medal of Honor for his actions in WWI. Josiah and a group volunteers erected the sign at the site and made numerous other improvements along the Alvin York walking trail in France in May, 2011.



In France's Argonne Forest, Josiah led a volunteer group of 30, performing more than 300 hours of work, to create a historical walking trail designed to honor an American Soldier.



It was an ambitious project, according to his dad, that honors the actions of Corporal York, who earned the Medal of Honor for his battlefield actions of Oct. 18, 1918.

Josiah Mastriano stands on a pile of gravel that he and a group of volunteers will spread over the Sgt. York walking trail in France. In May, 2011, Josiah's Eagle Scout project improved and expanded a trail through the battlefield where Alvin York won the Medal of Honor.

Over a seven-year period, during two assignments to Germany, father and son visited the battlefield and tried to determine where York fought, said Josiah. He chose this project because of his, his dad's and other Eagle Scouts' commitment to the battlefield.

"I accomplished the legacy of continuing on what my dad and other Eagle scouts started," Josiah said.

"His work entailed improving and expanding the five-kilometer trail on the World War I battlefield where Alvin York fought off a German bayonet attack, eliminated a German machinegun and captured 132 German prisoners," said his dad.

They placed 25 tons of gravel, built curbstone to stop erosion, planted flowers and grass, produced and placed tourist brochures in multiple languages at the trail entrance, installed signs and log rails along the trail and created a paved pool for an artesian well to prevent flooding.

When the Sergeant York Patriotic Foundation Board learned of Josiah's accomplishment, the members voted unanimously to give Josiah the Sgt York Award at his Eagle Scout Ceremony Dec 1 at the Carlisle Barracks Chapel.

Josiah Mastriano and other volunteers spread-out the last load of gravel on a one kilometer stretch of the Sgt. York walking trail. The group spread multiple tons of gravel on the trail in May, 2011 for Josiah's Eagle Scout project.



"It is normally reserved for college age recipients, and they made this exception for Josiah due to his extraordinary efforts to honor the legacy and memory of Sgt. York," said Doug.

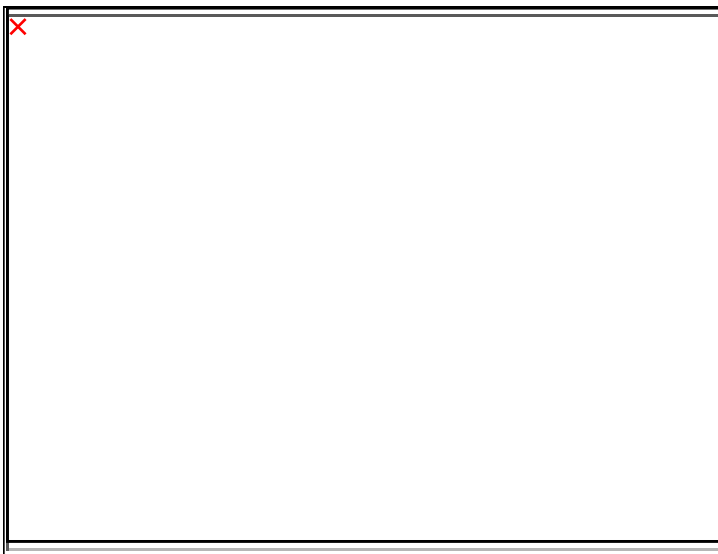
Sgt. York's son, George Edward York, traveled from Tennessee to present the award, with his father, retired Army Lt. Col. Gerald York, of Virginia.

We were in communication with the Mastrianos during the project, said Gerald. "We went to France for the 60th anniversary of the WWI event and met the family.

"There is a generation that doesn't know about Sgt. Alvin York and what he did. There were years in which the military was not well respected," he said, about the Josiah's work to introduce new generations to the Sgt. York story that unfolded Oct. 8, 1918, near Chatel-Chehery, France. After his platoon had suffered heavy casualties and 3 other noncommissioned officers had become casualties, Cpl. York assumed command. Fearlessly leading 7 men, he charged with great daring a machinegun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon. In this heroic feat the machinegun nest was taken, together with 4 officers and 128 men and several guns.

York was honored with the Medal of Honor for his actions as a U.S. Army corporal in Company G, 328th Infantry, 82d Division.

"Probably more important than what he did in war was that he came back and did not seek attention and glory, and turned down commercial deals," said Gerald. "He felt he did his duty."



York returned to his Tennessee home with an understanding that the world was much larger than he'd known before the war, and he wanted the kids in Tennessee to get a good education, said Gerald, explaining the story behind the Alvin York Foundation.

New Eagle Scout Josiah Mastriano, c, is congratulated for his achievements for Scouting and for the legacy of Sgt. Alvin C. York, by York's grandson, Lt. Col. (Ret.) Gerald York (I) and son, George Edward York.

York founded the York Agricultural Institute in 1926, using his own money and hands to build the original school, buy school buses and pay teachers. In 1937, he transferred the York Institute to the state of Tennessee, which continues to operate it as a public high school.

The Sergeant York Patriotic Foundation is restoring the historic York Institute; see <http://www.sgtyork.org/index.html>.