

The American Doughboy 1919 medallion

Or: The Yanks in France 1917-1918

by Tony James

IT cost me \$65 at the Colorado State Coin Fair. You know how it is, you just cannot leave a coin fair with money still in your pocket, even after experiencing a feeding frenzy of exciting experiences and discovering items that do not seem to find their way south of the equator.

Of course, there was an excuse. This dealer, who just happened to be specializing in Condor tokens (otherwise known as English trade tokens), also had a selection of European art medallions and interspersed in the case were some military tokens and medallions. I knew if it had been a medallion from WWII then the collecting vultures would have already swooped, leaving the cupboard bare. However for some reason, which was to my benefit, WWI does not have the same attraction.

The medal

The medallion is 62mm in diameter and the official designation of material – AE – otherwise known as bronze – is stamped on the edge. It is between 3 and 4mm thick and also has the name F. D. Brown Inc NJ believed to be the manufacturer, incuse on the rim.

The obverse depicts a helmeted American soldier running across a battlefield. He was one of those popularly known as “doughboys,” the nickname was given to all US infantrymen. He holds his rifle, bayonet attached, with both hands front



James Montgomery Flagg's iconic "Uncle Sam" recruiting poster, inspired by Britain's Lord-Kitchener" poster. Image: Library of Congress.

of him. The rifle is either the M1903 model or M1917 Springfield, both of which were in use by the US in Europe during the period 1917-1918.

The uniform consists of wool socks, long wool underwear, (cotton in warm weather), pullover shirt and wool breeches or trousers combined with a tunic with a high necked restrictive collar. The early shoes or ankle boots were covered by canvas leggings when the doughboys

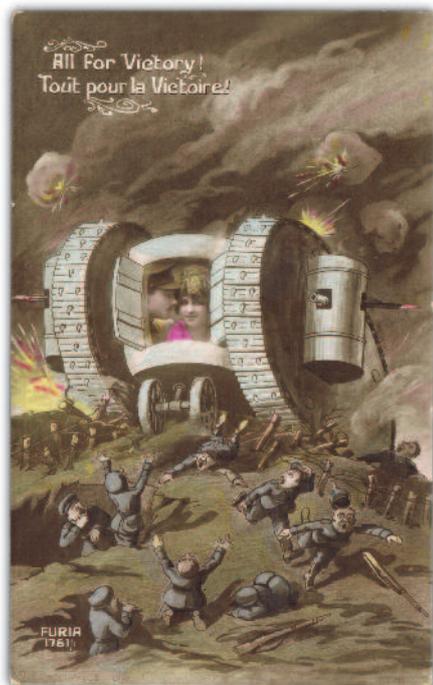
first got to France, but were eventually replaced by wool spiral wrap puttees from the top of the boot to just below the knees. The greatcoat weighing just over 3 kilos, completed the kit. The helmet, copied from the British Brodie model, was complemented by the respirator or gas mask, together with the backpack complete with mess kit, shaving kit, extra clothing, half a tent, tent stakes and the entrenching tool in the form of a small spade or pickax.



Cover of sheet music for America's most famous World War I song, George M. Cohan's "Over There". Image: Library of Congress.



Doughboy Medallion 1917-1918. Produced 1919 engraved by MP Lordonnois



Wartime postcard with soldier and girl showing destruction of Germans by tanks

The figure, in front of a battle scene with shell bursts and a trench line, has barbed wire at his feet, and to the right the words "© By M. Lordonnois 1919."

The reverse of the medallion is separated by a bridge in the lower fifth of the field and, while harder to read, tells us that it was déposé (cast) by Studer (XX?), probably the name of the foundry, together with the French Cross of Lorraine.

The legend "1917 FRANCE 1918" is curved around the top of the medallion with a large area of sky before a relief map of France depicts the names of the major battle locations where the US Army fought.

Argonne Forest

The Argonne Forest was the setting for the Meuse – Argonne offensive, which occurred between September 26 and November 11 1918 as part of Marshal Foch's plan to break through the Hindenburg Line. The Americans advanced towards the rail transport hub at Sedan on September 26 in an offensive with the French 4th Army which was the largest operation and victory for the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) during WWI. America put 15 divisions into the battle alongside the 31 French divisions, an action which together with the British and Belgian advances along the Western Front, led to the Armistice on November 11.

Belleau Wood

The Battle of Belleau Wood (Bois Belleau) consisted of two related actions, firstly at Chateau-Thierry on June 3-4, and then at Belleau Wood from June 6-26 1918. The US forces recaptured the woodland taken by the German 7th Army during their Aisne offensive in May. The



General John Joseph "Black Jack" Pershing who led the American Expeditionary Forces in World War I. Image: Library of Congress.

Second Division's Marine Corps took the wood with their second highest casualty rate ever - a total of 9,777 casualties, of which 1,811 were fatal. (the highest being at the capture of Tarawa from the Japanese during WWII in November 1943).

Château Thierry

The Battle of Château Thierry on the River Marne, fought on July 18 1918, was one of the first actions fought by the AEF under General "Black Jack" Pershing. Part of the Second Battle of the Marne, it had the Americans fighting against a new German offensive launched on July 15 in what was the first assault for over a year, and it took place along a 40 km wide front. The attack went without the usual preparatory artillery bombardment, instead being closely followed by a synchronised rolling barrage.

Reims

The Second Battle of the Marne also known as the Battle of Reims, took place 15 July-6 August 1918. It was the last major German Spring Offensive on the Western Front during WWI and the counter attack by French and American forces stopped the advance of the German 7th Army which tried to split the French forces in two. The Sixth French Army was joined by the British XXII Corps and 85,000 American troops, halting the advance on July 17.

St Mihiel

The St Mihiel offensive on the River Meuse was the first US operation and victory by an independent American Army in WWI. The battle occurred between September 12-16 1918 south east of Verdun and involved the US First Army and

one French Corp commanded by General John J. Pershing. The Americans took 15,000 prisoners and 257 guns at a cost of 7,000 casualties. It was during this offensive that Lt Col George S. Patton created leadership principles that he was to use during WWII. He was also responsible for commencing the use of Renault tanks which the Americans had observed being used by the British at the Battle of Cambrai. While the Germans were extremely well informed of the offensive, due to a Swiss newspaper publishing the date, time and duration of the preparatory barrage, they lacked sufficient manpower and leadership to mount a counter attack.

Soisson

The Battle of Soisson (also known as the Battle of Soissons and of the Ourcq) was fought between July 18- 22 1918. The Americans, with eight large US divisions and 350 tanks, supported the 24 French divisions and several British divisions, and the French recaptured most of the ground lost during the German Spring Offensive in May of that year.

Verdun

The last major combat in the Verdun sector of the Western Front took place during the Meuse-Argonne offensive and was carried out by the AEF from September 12 until the Armistice on November 11 1918. This part of the Western Front was the scene of combat from the earliest



Local currency notes used in the area where AEF was fighting. Marne, Montmedy, St Dizier and Sedan

days of the war and was the scene of nearly a million casualties over the four years of warfare.

Other works by Lordonnois

The Doughboy medallion of 1919 was produced in two sizes, the second being 110mm diameter with a suspension ring. Other medals include the “Journée Serbe” Serbian commemorative medal of 1916, issued to raise funds for Serbian refugees, fleeing from the Central powers (Austro-Hungarian Empire) - France played a major role in rehabilitating the retreating Serbian Army. The medal, in patinated brass, has the double headed Serbian eagle with the French legend “JOURNEE SERBE” and conjoined busts of King Peter I and Prince-Regent Alexander I. The signature “T.S.M. LORDONNOIS – GRAVEUR EDIT” is along the lower edge of the medallion (Traitements de Surface et Mécanique). Lordonnois also designed the Panama Republic Gold medal showing Patria writing on a memorial tablet and the Arms of Panama and dates 1917-18, on the reverse. An example was offered at the Heritage auction No. 378 in 2005.

The details of Marcel Prosper Lordonnois are sparse. We do know he was a sculptor and medallist, born in Paris, he studied under Mouchon (stamp engraver), F. Vernon (designer of 1900 Olympic medals) and Kluge, and exhibited several medals and portrait plaquettes which “attracted good taste and technical ability” during the seasons of 1896, 1898, 1902/3/4/and 1906. His subjects were port-

raits of notable politicians and governors as well as classic representations of Music, goddesses Diane and Gallia – Gaul or France. The fact that his granddaughter passed away while living in Newport Rhode Island would indicate that Lordonnois had a strong connection with the US and the Doughboy medallion, while possibly struck in Europe, was probably prepared in the US by F.D.Brown Inc of New Jersey. The plentiful availability of

copies of this medallion indicates a large mintage and distribution amongst the armed forces after the War.

References

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Gallipoli Coin Raises Queries

PERTH MINT'S Gallipoli coin, the first in their new coin series that honours famous battles in Australia's history, has proved that Aussie numismatists in general and *CAB's* readers in particular, are remarkably sharp-eyed - and knowledgeable.

The coin appeared on the cover of the April edition. Within a few days a post card arrived from one reader who pointed out that there appeared to be an anachronism. The WWI digger illustrated at the coin's left was carrying a WWII Lee-Enfield rifle.

Subsequently, numerous readers rang, wrote and e-mailed from across Australia. *CAB* passed on their concerns to the Perth Mint who looked into the matter and agreed that, “Unfortunately, the coin does portray a later version of the Enfield rifle that was correctly depicted on the packaging.” In their defence they point out that, “the artwork for the coin design was forwarded to several external authorities for approval and this detail was not corrected.”

For those not privy to the subtleties of the guns concerned, several readers provided details. Unfortunately, changes in nomenclature of these rifles between and after both world wars do not made these various explanations easy to reconcile.

Essentially the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) Mk IA, known commonly as ‘Smelly’, was introduced to the British Army on 1 January 1904. Its visual trademark was its blunt nose. Only the bayonet boss protruded slightly beyond the nosecap.

By the time the First World War rolled around the Mk IA had evolved to become the Mk III and, subsequently, the Mk III*. These became the standard rifles used by Diggers and other imperial troops during WWI. Their essential configuration remained the same as the Mk I. Both had the blunt nose and it is the absence of this feature that shows the identity of the rifle on the coin is incorrect. [And, for the pedants among us, in 1926 the Mk III* was redesignated as Rifle No.1 Mk III*.]

Between the world wars various redesigns of the SMLE were attempted but Rifle No. 1, Mk III (and III*) were still there when war broke out. A new version, Rifle No. 4 Mk I, was introduced in 1939 but not officially brought into service until 1941. This was lighter, stronger and easier to mass-produce than earlier versions. Unlike the No. 1, Mk III the barrel on the No 4, Mk I protruded from the end of the forestock. Its bayonet was reduced to a spike that led to it being nicknamed ‘the pigsticker.’ This appears to be the rifle on which the coin design was based.

The No. 1, Mk III (and Mk III*) continued to be widely used by Australian troops throughout WWII who were issued with only small quantities of Rifle No. 4, Mk I. Among Australians the latter gun's use was confined mainly to secondary units including the Volunteer Defence Corps. And for those who really need to know it was the SMLE Mk III that was manufactured at Lithgow during WWI and WWII.

We commend our sharp-eyed and knowledgeable readers.

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