EDWIN WILLIAM ARMSTRONG

DATE OF BIRTH
November 19, 1894

DATE OF DEATH
November 2, 1970

HOMETOWN
Hiawatha, Kansas

ENTERED THE MILITARY
February 8, 1918

BRANCH OF SERVICE
U.S. Army

UNIT
89th Division, 346th Infantry Regiment, Company K

RANK
Lieutenant Colonel

AWARD(S)
Bronze Star with Oak Leaf Cluster

CEMETERY
Site 3133, Plot M
Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
BEFORE THE WAR

On November 19, 1894, Edwin William Armstrong was born in Atchison, Kansas, the eldest son of Thomas and Estella Armstrong. His father was a farmer and Armstrong worked on the family farm. After graduating from Atchison High School, Armstrong attended the College of Emporia. In his enlistment records, he indicated that his hobbies included fishing and golf.

MILITARY EXPERIENCE

ENLISTMENT AND TRAINING

In February 1918 Armstrong enlisted in the U.S. Army. He served as a private in Company K of the 356th Infantry Regiment, 89th Division. The 356th Infantry Regiment was organized at Camp Funston, Kansas on September 5, 1917. After nine months of training, the 89th Division embarked for France. Company K set sail on the SS Carolina on June 3, 1918, and landed in Le Havre, France, on June 21. After six weeks of intensive training in the Lucey sector, the 356th Infantry Regiment was on the move toward its first major action of the war.

SAINT MIHIEL SALIENT

According to the official history of Company K, “Right in front of Metz was this Saint Mihiel Salient which had to be crushed out in order to straighten the American battle line, so that we could start on the final phase of the war which was the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.” On September 12, men of the 356th Infantry Regiment went “over the top” near the towns of Flirey and Bois de Jury in one of the first great all-American drives in World War I.
The official history notes the work of chaplains in comforting the troops during the ordeals of battle. Perhaps the care shown by the military chaplain in his company contributed to Armstrong’s decision to attend seminary after the war and later become a military chaplain himself.

After successfully taking and holding the Jaulny sector outside of Metz, the 356th Infantry Regiment was relieved by the 37th Division on October 9.

**MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE**

Ordered back to the front as part of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the 356th Infantry Regiment was directed to cut the German lines of communication along the Meuse River. Doing so would cut off the supplies of half the German Army and potentially force that portion of the army to surrender.

To sever the communication lines, the 356th Infantry Regiment needed to capture the Heights of Barricort. Slow advancement behind an artillery barrage brought Company K to its objective and in sight of the Meuse River on November 6.

Armstrong suffered from a German gas attack on November 9, 1918, just two days before the Armistice was signed, ending World War I. According to after actions reports, the “interest taken in the welfare of the company [K] by its personnel has caused it to be continually rated as the best in the battalion.”
VETERAN EXPERIENCE

Upon returning home at the end of the World War I, Armstrong married Alice Willmeth on June 8, 1921 and they had three daughters. He attended Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1926 he was ordained and became the pastor of Woodland Heights Presbyterian Church where he served for four years before becoming pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Parsons, Kansas. He led the church for the next twenty years.

On February 21, 1928, Armstrong was appointed as a chaplain in the Officers’ Reserve Corps. Four years later, in 1932, he spent two weeks of active duty at Fort Riley learning under the instruction of Chaplain Perry O. Wilcox. Armstrong reported his training to be a “most profitable time.” He also stated,

“I feel that I have a little better knowledge of the place and duties of a Chaplain with troops. I had the opportunity of observing and participating in a military funeral, an overnight hike with troops, and the Chapel services... Because of my pleasant two weeks at Fort Riley, I sincerely hope that I can have two weeks of active duty again next year.”

These periods of training would prepare Armstrong for his continued service as a military chaplain during World War II.

WORLD WAR II

With the threat of war looming, Armstrong re-enlisted in the U.S. Army on January 5, 1938. In 1940 he was authorized for extended active duty and in April 1941 was ordered to active duty. Armstrong served at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and the 27th General Hospital in San Francisco, California during World War II. Armstrong ministered to the wounded and dying, conducted services and led worship, and provided pastoral care and counseling. On his evaluation records at the conclusion of the war he is noted as “a very fine man.”
AFTER WORLD WAR II

After World War II, Armstrong returned to Parsons, Kansas, where he resumed his work as pastor at First Presbyterian Church. He was active in the community as president of the Parsons Ministerial Organization, president of the local Rotary Club, and a member of the Masons, Parent Teacher Association, Young Men’s Christian Association, and the Red Cross. He received high honors such as a place on the Governor’s Council of World Affairs and also was named a member of the Board of Trustees for the College of Emporia.

COMMEMORATION

Edwin William Armstrong passed away on November 2, 1970 at the age of 75 and is buried at Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

A letter from Office of the Chief of Chaplains to Armstrong stated, “Sound and vigorous spirituality in thought and action is the only sure foundation for real patriotism and personal peace and happiness.” Edwin W. Armstrong’s unwavering patriotism was the foundation of his many years of service to his country as a private in World War I and as an Army chaplain in the years following.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Trabold, Private E. *Gassed patients of 82nd and 89th Divisions...Royaumeix, France.* Photograph. 1918. National Archives and Records Administration (111-SC-22012). Image.
