

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**JOHN PAVLIK**  
Ambulance Driver, Army, World War I  
1989

OH  
1722

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**1722**

**Pavlik, John**, (1900-1991). Oral History Interview, 1989.

Approximate length: 10 minutes.

*Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

In this oral history interview, John Pavlik a West Allis, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War I service as an ambulance driver with the National Guard 32nd Infantry Division in France and Germany, his return to his post-war life, work, and involvement with the American Legion and VFW. Pavlik enlisted into service and talks about National Guard basic training in Milwaukee (Wisconsin), Army basic training in Waco (Texas), trip overseas to Alsace-Lorraine (France), and time in the Army of Occupation in Germany after the war. Pavlik discusses the reception of veterans back home in Milwaukee. He also describes the poem *In Flanders Fields*, its significance, and origins. The interview ends with his recitation of the original poem and the American response to the poem.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Pavlik served with the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division during World War I. He was involved in France and Germany. He returned home after serving as part of the Army of Occupation in 1919.

**Archivist's Note:**

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Unknown, 1989.

Transcribed by Joshua Goldstein, 2012.

Reviewed by Robert Brito, 2016.

Abstract written by Robert Brito, 2016.

## **Interview Transcript:**

- Interviewer: We're here today to interview Mr. John Pavlik. Mr. John Pavlik is a veteran of World War I. John what is your age?
- Pavlik: Right now my age is eighty-nine and I will be ninety on August the 2<sup>nd</sup>. I enlisted at the age of 16, not quite 16, but I said that I was 18, and they accepted that.
- Interviewer: John, in what outfit did you serve while you were in the armed forces?
- Pavlik: I enlisted in the Wisconsin National Guards, and they were starting a new ambulance company which was motorized. Before that we had horses and mules to draw the ambulance wagons. This seemed like seemed like a very interesting position to get into since automobiles were first coming into being, and so I enlisted in the Motorized Ambulance Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Got my basic training at the Goldsmith Building. Have squads right and left and first aid and so forth. Later on when our vehicles came they were stationed at Whitefish Bay [WI] and we were there for a week camping in pup tents getting used to the pup tents, and the vehicles. Then we drove from Whitefish Bay to Madison [WI]. That was an all day ride and stayed at Camp Randall overnight. And next morning we went to Camp Douglas and got there about 4:00 in the afternoon.
- Interviewer: Okay, the dates that you served?
- Pavlik: My date that I served was—I enlisted on April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1917 and of course the war was declared on April 6, 1917. And I was discharged 1919 on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May in 1919.
- Interviewer: You did serve overseas?
- Pavlik: Yes, when we went to Waco, Texas for our training from Camp Douglas the Wisconsin National Guards and the Michigan National Guards were combined to make up a Division. And our Division was numbered the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division. We have the Red Arrow as an insignia indicating that all of the lines, the front that we fought on, we broke through those lines and that's what the arrow indicates.
- Interviewer: And when you were overseas I'm assuming you were in France. What part of France?

Pavlik:

We got on the boat in February of 1918 and landed in Brest, France, and then from there we went by train to the 10<sup>th</sup> French Training Area. Later on we were then sent to Chateau-Thierry to support the Marines and the 26<sup>th</sup> Division who took over the Marines position at Chateau Thierry. Then of course we went to Soissons area in Givigny and than later on we went to the Argonne woods, and we finally got the enemy out of their dugouts. And then we regrouped our group again, the 32<sup>nd</sup> Division, and went back into the line and start pushing again. At the time Armistice was signed we were in a town called Dun-sur-Meuse where city Dunn is on the Meuse River. At that time that was in early November, and we continued on, and at that time we were told Armistice was going to be signed on November 7<sup>th</sup>, but instead it was signed on November 11<sup>th</sup>. After the Armistice was signed we were assigned as the troops to cross the Rhine River. That was three Divisions; the 32<sup>nd</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Army of Occupation. We were the only three Divisions that were on the other side of the Rhine River. Our headquarters was at Dusseldorf, and we were in little village called Wain it is near Ehrenbreitstein, a short distance also from Koblenz, Germany. After serving three months there we then went back to Brest by train and sailed home. We were on a battleship, USS Virginia that brought us to Newport News in Virginia, and then from there by train we went to Camp Sheridan in Illinois, and we were separated from there and came on back to Milwaukee. And of course the next day we had our Memorial Day Parade in Milwaukee, and I participated in that parade at that time. I have been trying to participate in that parade ever since that time. The parade was a very long one. We started at 35<sup>th</sup> & Wisconsin and ended up at the Northwestern Depot which was at the foot of Wisconsin Avenue. As you know when we got home we soon found out that some of our newspaper people that were covering the war by looking in the files of *Stars & Stripes* and some of the other newspapers and they found a poem written by a Canadian physician who was serving his mother country England in Belgium in the province of Flanders. And at that time the good doctor was on constant duty there, and that was the first time that the gas was used by the enemy. And he contracted pneumonia, and he had died a year later. However, the poem was written, but it never was published in the newspaper or much was said about it. We World War I veterans, after it was published, discovered that and put that as part of our ritual at the opening and closing of our meetings and so forth. And at this time I'd like to recite *[In] Flanders Fields* for you as it was written originally and America's answer to those who made a supreme sacrifice in Flanders Fields. The poem was very, very meaningful. It can be

applied to all veterans of all wars in any part of the world that it is being fought by just substituting a word or two here and there.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place, and in the sky  
The lark still bravely singing, fly  
Scarcely heard amid guns down below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though the poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

America's answer to those who made a supreme sacrifice is as follows:

Rest ye in peace, ye Flanders dead.  
The fight that ye so bravely led  
We've taken up. And we will keep  
True faith with you who lie asleep  
In Flanders fields

With each a cross the mark his bed,  
And poppies blowing overhead,  
Where once your life blood ran red.  
So let your rest be sweet and deep  
In Flanders fields.

Fear not that you have died for naught;  
The torch ye threw to us we caught,  
Ten million hands will hold it high,  
And freedom's light shall never die!  
For we've learned the lesson that ye taught  
In Flanders fields

Your torch and poppie red we now wear in honor of our dead  
Your flaming torch aloft we bear,  
When a burning heart and oath we swear,

To keep the faith to fight it through,  
To crush the foe or sleep with you,  
In Flanders Fields.

Thank you.

[\*Mr. Pavlik's recitation of the poem and the reply is repeated on the tape. His answer to the poem appears to be a composite of various versions.]

**[End of Interview]**