



### **Nelson Miles Holderman**

Captain, United States Army

Born November 10, 1885, Trumbull Nebraska

Served during World War I

Died September 3, 1953

Nelson Miles Holderman was born on November 10, 1885 in Nebraska, the fifth out of six children of Upton and Myra Holderman. He was named after Nelson Appleton Miles, a Civil War hero and Medal of Honor recipient that his father had served under during the Civil War. His family moved from Nebraska to Tustin California in 1893. Nelson Holderman attended Tustin Grammar School and was part of “Zeke’s Bunch” under principal John Zielan.

Holderman began his military career as a private in Santa Ana’s California Army National Guard Unit, Company L. He served for five months during 1916 at the Mexican border during the time of Pancho Villa’s raids. Holderman rose quickly through the ranks and by the time America entered World War I on April 6, 1917, he was promoted to Captain and was commander of his Company L Unit.

As Company L arrived at the Western Front the following year, they along with Holderman were assigned as replacements for Company K of the 307<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, part of the 77<sup>th</sup> Division of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF).

Captain Holderman was well respected and his reputation as a “soldier’s soldier” who never turned down a patrol and viewed his military career as an adventure.

Company K became involved in the fierce battles in the Argonne Forest, with the purpose to break the German’s lines who were entrenched there. The battalion under the leadership of Major Charles Whittlesey were able to break through enemy lines, in fact going too far. They became known as the Lost Battalion after being cut off. Attempts to

reach Major Whittlesey's unit failed until Captain Holderman's Company K reached them, also becoming cut off and part of the Lost Battalion. They were surrounded by the enemy for five days-without help or supplies. Captain Holderman had been wounded on three of those days, yet continued to lead and encourage the officers and men under his command with unflinching courage and determined success in a series of counterattacks against the large German force.

He was wounded on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> he continued to personally lead and inspire his men. On October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1918, although wounded, he rushed through enemy machine gun and shell fire and carried two men to safety. His and his company's actions have been cited as the primary reason for repeated German attacks failing to capture the position. Author Robert Laplander states in his book "Finding the Lost Battalion" that Captain Holderman would not leave until all of his men were cared for and evacuated, even though the Captain was suffering from seven separate wounds as well as a plethora of minor ones, most of which were infected. He sat in a bloody heap or leaned on his two broken rifles until his men were safe.

Company L returned to Santa Ana and a rousing welcome during April of 1919. At a servicemen's recognition celebration on Sept. 9, 1919, Capt. Holderman received the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf Clusters, the Mexican Service Medal, World War I Victory Medal, the Legion of Honor from France, two Croix de Guerre medals, Officer of the Order of the Crown and the Knight of the Order of Leopold from Belgium for his courage and bravery in leading his men. He was one of the most decorated soldiers of World War I.

After returning to Tustin, Capt. Holderman rejoined the National Guard and was appointed a colonel. The governor of CA named him commandant of the Yountville Soldier's Home in Yountville, CA, in 1926. Colonel Holderman worked tirelessly on behalf of veterans, building two new dorms and a hospital. He served until his death on Sept. 3, 1953, and is buried at Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno, CA.