Family Secures Silver Star Recognition for World War I Hero

by Zak Dahlheimer For Riverbender.com
November 11 2026 2:25 PM





MADISON COUNTY – A photo of a young Illinois telephone lineman and a century-old Army citation tell two sides of the same remarkable story: a civilian skill that became an act of wartime heroism on a World War I battlefield.

On Oct. 18, 1917, as Celestine “Cell” Corzine prepared to enter military service, his telephone company coworkers presented him with a wristwatch as a farewell gift. Contemporary newspaper accounts documented his departure for Army Signal Corps training, although they differed on his initial destination.

Corzine subsequently served overseas as a member of Company C, 307th Field Signal Battalion, 82nd Division, American Expeditionary Forces. Before and after the war, he worked in the telephone industry, including employment with Central Union Telephone, Kinloch Telephone, and Illinois Bell. His civilian career is also documented in a family photo dating to 1914.

Additional research conducted with help from the Madison County Historical Society in Edwardsville has documented Corzine's nearly four decades in telecommunications. His June 1917 draft registration identifies him as a telephone repairman with Central Union Telephone Company in Alton, while later company publications commemorate his 30th service anniversary in 1942 and retirement in 1949 after 37 years in the industry.

On Oct. 10, 1918, near La Forge Farm, France, Corzine repaired telephone lines under exceedingly heavy shellfire, according to 82nd Division General Orders No. 1, dated Jan. 13, 1919. The order further records that he continued working long hours, day and night, through Oct. 30, maintaining lines repeatedly broken by enemy fire during the Meuse- Argonne Offensive.

More than a century later, Corzine’s descendants have assembled his wartime portrait, the original citation, and other historical records to preserve and share his story.

In a letter dated Oct. 15, 2026, the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) authorized the furnishing of Corzine's Silver Star, World War I Victory Medal with Meuse-Argonne Battle Clasp, and World War I Victory Button (Bronze).





As of Veterans Day (Nov. 11, 2026), NPRC approval and processing were complete, and the request was awaiting fulfillment by the U.S. Army's TACOM–ILSC Clothing & Heraldry Product Support Integration Directorate in Philadelphia. The family has not yet received the physical decorations.

“What's most moving to me is that the skills Cell developed throughout his civilian career became the very skills he relied on while risking his life to keep American soldiers connected,” said Zak Dahlheimer, Corzine's great-grandson. “Finding the original account of his courage made this history deeply personal. Our family's hope is that future generations will know not only what he did, but who he was: a Madison County man whose heroism deserves to be remembered.”

Corzine died Dec. 8, 1963, and is buried at St. Patrick’s Cemetery in his hometown, Godfrey, Ill. His family is exploring plans for a permanent memorial with Gent Funeral Home in Alton, Ill., and is working with the Madison County Historical Society to preserve and further document his life and service. The family plans to share more information when the decorations arrive and when any memorial dedication details are confirmed.