

Mortimer Harvie Jordan III  
Written by Mortimer Jordan V

Dr. Mortimer Jordan III was born and raised in Jefferson County, AL. Both sides of his family had been in Jefferson County long before the founding of Birmingham. His father, also Dr. Mortimer Jordan, was one of two doctors who remained steadfast in Birmingham during the Cholera Epidemic of 1873, an episode that almost destroyed the young city. Through his father, young Mortimer became imbued with a philosophy of civic service and sacrifice.

Mortimer III attended the University of Alabama at a time when it was still a military school. He adapted to the military system, but not at the expense of an adventurous spirit or a love of literature. He was named poet laureate at the University and interrupted his education to become a cowboy at a lonely outpost in Wyoming.

After receiving his medical degree, he opened a practice in Birmingham. His commitment to his city and county went far beyond his medical practice. He was civically active, a newspaper columnist, and a prominent advocate for building an improved national defense and building the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama National Guard. He helped start a National Guard unit, Company K, in Birmingham, and was elected Captain by his men.

In 1916, the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama was called up and sent to Nogales, Arizona as part of border protection following the bloody incursion of Pancho Villa at Columbus, New Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. There, the Alabamians began a record and legend that would follow them and grow throughout the War years.

When the United States entered World War I, the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Guard was nationalized and sent to France in late 1917 as the 167<sup>th</sup> Regiment, part of the heralded 42<sup>nd</sup> Rainbow Division. Captain Jordan declined joining the Medical Corp so that he could stay with his men from Alabama. In time, he became the regiment's Operations Officer. In the summer of 1918, the 167<sup>th</sup> began to see combat action – more than any other American unit.

At the Battle of Champagne on July 15th, the 167<sup>th</sup> fought with such determination that a French general labeled them the “Alabama Tigers.” Captain Jordan received a Distinguished Service Cross for his actions there.

At the Battle of Croix Rouge Farm on July 26th, their tenacity was such that General Douglas MacArthur, their brigade commander, would later call it “perhaps the greatest display of valor” that he saw in his entire military career. Captain Jordan played a vital role in changing the tide of battle and securing victory.

Two days later, the 167<sup>th</sup> was engaged in another brutal battle at the Ourcq River. A vital message needed to be delivered to a command post on the front lines. The bombardment and machine gun fire were so severe that Captain Jordan refused to order an enlisted man to take it, choosing to go himself. He was mortally wounded and died three days later.

The 167<sup>th</sup> went on to additional important victories, and its men returned as heroes in Alabama and beyond. Local newspapers called them “The Immortals.” Captain Mortimer Jordan was looked upon as both a hero and a symbol of the heroism of all the Alabama Guardsmen.

After the war, there was a community-wide drive to honor the men of the 167<sup>th</sup>. The bridge over the railroad tracks on 21st Street (Arrington Blvd.) was christened The Rainbow Bridge and a Southside park was named after Capt. Jordan. But the community wanted to do more. In a movement driven in large part by returning veterans, attention was turned to the new high school being constructed in Morris. It presented itself as the perfect match of man and school. The naming of Mortimer Jordan High School honors a man, but also honors the dedication and sacrifices of all Alabamians who fought in that, our most terrible war.