TRIBUTE TO NORWICH SOLDIER HERO

ISRAEL A. COHEN

rael Aaron Cohen, son of Mr. and Herman Cohen of 62 Spring et, news of whose death in action previously been received here, e the supreme sacrifice in the last orious charge of the U. S Ma- s that captured Mont Blanc ridge the Germans on October 8th last. belonged to the 75th Company, h Marines. Out of his company, four survived to answer the roll after that final charge.

he following tribute to this Nor- hero has been written by one who him intimately:

was an evening in the begin- of May, 1917. A colonel of ma- s was addressing the students of New York University Law School, Washington square, New York. than a month before, the United es had declared war upon Ger- y, and the colonel was appealing he students for volunteers to join Marine Corps.

e colonel finished speaking and ained standing. And then amidst hush that followed several stud- arose. Among them was a Jewish one of the youngest of those pre- . With firm steps he walked to platform, to offer himself—and his if need be—to the cause of his try. His action had broken the , and student after student fol- d his example, until nearly forty had arisen.

is young man, who had thus vol- ered, had been born nineteen s before in Norwich, Conn., where ad lived almost continuously un- is entrance to the university. Born a Jewish home, where family tra- ns and the religious spirit were strong, he received from his child- a sound training in those traits were later to make him the ideal ne and true American. His na- city was well adopted for this ing, for there are few American where the life and principles mericanism are as strongly felt as e old New England city on the nes. He thus grew up, unselfish fearless, devoted to every cause was just, and giving himself un- ingly to whatever he undertook. on that May evening in 1917, were few other students prese t, combined in themselves as he did, characteristics of the Ameri- soldier, which played the greater In leading the allied forces to ry.

t even though he had joined the nes, it was not for him to re- in America, while men were ing for civilization and democra- cross the sea. A year later he nteered for immediate service in ce, and for six months he played part in the great war. And then a glorious week when he and his r-marines wrote an imperish- le in the history of mankind. Mont , where 60,000 Frenchmen had n in vain was taken, and the en- was retreating in all directions. just then, at the very climax of his glorious life, happy in the realization that that for which he had fought and suffered was now about to be achieved, died Israel Aaron Cohen, rifle in hand, facing the enemy.

Israel Aaron Cohen was born in Norwich in 1897, the youngest son of Herman and Dora Gordon Cohen. He received his grammar school education in the West Chelsea District and attended at the same time the Hebrew Free school, where he obtained a good knowledge of Hebrew and the Bible. He graduated from the Mt. Pleasant Street school in 1912, and was very popular in his class. How great an impression his cheerful, noble personality made on those who knew him, can be seen from the fact that the pupils of this year's graduating class of the Mt. Pleasant Street school have named their recently formed club the Israel Aaron Cohen club, in his memory.

He then entered the Norwich Free Academy, pursuing the Academic course, and distinguished himself in public speaking. Here, too, he took an active part in athletics, as he was skillful in all sports. Upon his graduation in 1916, he entered the Law School of New York University. He was a general favorite with all who knew him, his genial frank nature endearing him to both professors and fellow-students. A long bright career lay before him, for he liked the work and threw himself whole-heartedly into the tasks before him.

It was while just about to complete the first year of his law course, that he volunteered and joined the Marine corps. He received his first training at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, but was soon transferred to the naval station at Iona Island. Here in this naval arsenal on the Hudson, he soon became an adept in all those branches of the military and naval sciences for which the Marine Corps is famous. Thus he spent the summer and winter of 1917, both day and night guarding the big ammunition depot on the Hudson, against enemy spies and plots.

The severe winter of 1917 dragged on into summer, and it was approaching a year since his enlistment. Meanwhile a change had taken place in the American participation in the great war. The president had decided to send a large force—as large as possible—instead of the small force originally intended. Two regiments of marines, true to their motto "First to Fight" had now been for several months in France, and were training for their great task by the side of the French in the Verdun trenches.

During that long summer and winter, Israel Cohen had but one regret—that he could not be at the front at the side of his fellow-marines. The opportunity for which he greatly longed finally came. From the commander in France came a call for replacements, for men to take the place of the marines who had fallen in the attacks in the trenches.

To that small station in the Hudson, there came the call for volunteers for immediate service in France. There were, all told, about 120 marines on the island, and as the call for several volunteers was read to them, Israel Cohen was among the first to step forward. About ninety men volunteered, but only a few could be taken. The names were put into a hat, and in the drawing that followed, Israel Cohen's name was the second chosen.

I remember the eagerness and happiness with which he informed relatives and friends that he was going to leave for France. Now, he, too, could do his share amongst the shot and shell to defend his country's honor and life. "You cannot realize," he wrote his brother at this time "how glad I am that I am going over. Now I have my chance."

From Iona Island, he was sent immediately to Quantico, Virginia, the assembling station for the men about to leave for France. Here he was given an intensive training in modern trench and gas warfare. This was continued for ten days and then the men were informed that they were to depart [illegible] He had just time to [illegible] New York to bid us a final farewell. I remember him well that [illegible] afternoon in April, as he was waiting for the train in the Pennsylvania station to leave. I see him now before me that stalwart, handsome lad, with the smile lurking about his once pale face. Boyish, were boyish looks now beneath that boyish smile, visible the man, the trained soldier.

Three days later, on April 21, 1918, he sailed from Hampton Roads for France, as a member of the 149th Company of the 3rd Replacement Battalion. "Don't worry" were the closing words of the last letter that he wrote on American soil. "I will soon be back."

Two weeks later he arrived in France, and was sent to a training camp near Verdun. It was the beginning of May, and France, still beautiful where the hand of the invader had not been, of such like reminiscences of his school days in Belle France. Along in July came letters with references like this: "You must have heard what the Germans did at Chateau Thierry. Gee! I felt the pride that he had as he wrote for those days of Chateau Thierry had proved what the entire world knew, that the American Marine. And he belonged to them, he was a part of them. The losses in France had been enormous, and he was assigned to the 1st Provisional Replacement Battalion of the 73rd Army Corps.

For the 6th was a memorable long in the memory. He had by this time become [illegible] of the use of French, and was placed on detachment duty, acting under the direction of the Replacement Headquarters. He was stationed for a while at Le Havre and then at other cities. He is consequently travelling, he writes, and seeing a great deal of France.

Meanwhile in the latter part of July had taken place the thrust toward Soissons, where again the marines played a prominent part. Their losses were heavy and they were withdrawn to a rest area in the northern part of the Toul sector to enable their depleted ranks to be replenished.

And here Israel Cohen rejoined his comrades, being placed in the 75th Company of the Sixth Regiment. For preparations were now being made for the great offensive in the St. Mihiel sector. This was to be the first real test of the American army, with the Americans operating along a distinct sector of their own.

The Second Division consiting of the two regiments of marines and the 9th and 23rd regulars, now rated as first class "shock troops" was given a place of nonor in the hardest fighting along the southern [illegible] of the salient, where the German resistance was stiffest. In the beginning of September, they took their places in the line running from Remenauville to Liney, and here Israel Cohen for the first time came into active contact with the enemy.

The part that he played in the hard fighting that followed we will not be able to learn for some time, for the two or three survivors of his platoon are at present in Germany. Of his daring and bravery, his cheerfulness and unselfishness, we have evidence in a letter from a comrade-in-arms, and in the esteem of his captain, a marine of marines, who knew not the meaning of fear, and who recognized this quality in his young private.

The 75th Company, to which he belonged, had been refilled five times. It had already lost as many men as the company originally called. It now entered the fighting at St. Mihiel with a full quota of 250. Of this number only twelve men and a sergeant came out of the jaws of death of St. Mihiel and Mont Blanc. This fact alone tells the story of that terribe fighting in which the marines played such a conspicuous part, it is a sufficient commentary on their daring and bravery. This alone explains why the allies won the war, for it was this very fearlessness, this stubbornness, this refusal to yield an inch, this willingness to give more than their lives to their country, that broke the back of the German resistance, and bent them to their knees in defeat.

On the 1th of September the preparations for the attack on the St. Mihiel salient were complete. That night, there began an intense artillery bombardment of the enemy's position which lasted for four hours. 5 a. m. was the zero hour when the order to advance was given, with two days' objectives ahead of them. The marines advanced in the first wave. Before them lay successive lines of barbed wire defenses, and behind them the enemy trenches and machine gun pits. In the face of all this and amidst terrific hail of shot and shell, the marines charged forward. They smashed through the stubborn enemy lines and advanced to the Bupt de Mad, a small river, crossed it on stone bridges and occupied Thiaucourt, the first day's objective. But it never occurred to them to stop there. They rushed right on, scaled the heights just beyond it, smashed their way to the Bevaux forest and there rested, having obtained their second day's objective by [illegible] p. m. of the first day.

Here in the Bevaux Forest, they remained for several days, with several sorties into No-Man's Land, and here as well as in the previous fighting, Israel Cohen distinguished himself. He had already in no small way by his heroine and genial nature, attracted the attention of Captain Chandler, the company commander, who had learned that his fearless young private could speak both French and German. He had found by the side of the commander, at the head of the troops, and had served as interpreter in questioning the many prisoners taken.

The second division were now withdrawn to a rest camp, far back of the lines, and from there Israel Cohen wrote his last letter. There is a great difference between the tone of this message and the previous letters. He had now passed through the horrors of hell, with death constantly stalking by his side. For weeks he had lived in veritable demons, with shot and shell whistling about him; he had repeatedly faced wire defenses under the fierce murderous barrage, he had charged machine gun pits. He had seen hundreds comrades fall beside him and had the next minute witnessed their death. He is supremely confident of the victory to come, but he makes but a passing reference to his return, instead of the confident words of his former letters, "We have the Boches on the run. The war will be over before the end of the year, and I will soon be home."

The first two of these predictions came true and also the last, but he went to another home, to his eternal home beyond the grave. His last letter which follows is not dated, but it was written about September 25th:

On Active Service, A. E. F.

My Dear Parents, Brothers and Sisters: Quite a long time has elapsed since I wrote home, but of course, I have excuses to offer. The fact is, I have experienced my first attempt at the front. Of course you have read of our great victory this month. The part that I played I shall some day relate to you. I am sure you will be contented when I tell you that I came out without a scratch. I am confident of myself now, for I had complete control of myself and never lost my nerve.

I am far behind the lines now and drilling again. They call this rest when we must arise at 5.30 a. m., and are on the go until 6 p. m. From 6 p. m. until 9.30 p m the time is our own. You can believe me, it is no cinch. I wish I were home now.

We are billeted in a nice town now after having spent three weeks in the woods and on the firing line. The ground was my bed, and I had one lovely blanket, with my tent as my home. This town and billet are like the Garden of Eden and a palace in it. I am perfectly contented, but, of course, I am lonesome for home.

The holidays will soon be here and I surely would like to be with you. Of course, I shall observe them for we are not at the lines. The prospects are that we are to rest for quite some time.

Here's wishing you a Happy New Year.

Your son and brother
ISRAEL A. COHEN,
U. S. Marines, 75th Co.
American Exp. Forces.

But his prospects for a long period of rest were not realized. The marines were once more to be called on to save the allies. Again as at Belleau Wood, they were to perform an exploit which would take its place among the heroic deeds of the world.

In the end of September it became necessary for the allies to capture the bold, jagged ridge, twenty miles due east of Rheims, known as Blanc Mont Ridge. Here ninety thousand Frenchmen had given up their lives in a vain attempt to wrest it from German hands. It was the keystone of the German defense, the fall of which would have a far-reaching effect upon the enemy armies.

The region, writes Edwin L. James, correspondent of the New York Times, was the most difficult in a most difficult country. The German positions during the four years had been fortified with each new improvement that experience had taught. The latest device were shelters of reinforced concrete for machine guns, where several stories were arranged, one above the other. In addition to the machine gun posts, barbed wire and trestles were placed in every conceivable place. Here too were the best troops of the German army—Guards, Jaegers, and other troops that had distinguished themselves. For the Germans realized the importance of the position, they realized what its fall meant.

The fighting had been very intense. The Fourth French Army, under General Gouraud buoyed up by the victories of the past month, were putting forth all their strength, but it was of no avail. They could not dislodge the Germans. The French dead were piling up higher and higher on the slopes of Mont Blanc. Rheims had been taken, but the entire advance of the allies was stopped.

Then, just at this crucial moment, even as at Chateau Thierry came to the rescue the American Marine. One hundred kilometers they had come, from far to the south, these Teufelhunde, as the Germans called them. Hardly settled in their rest billets from the fighting at St. Mihiel, they were placed on trains and then on motor trucks until they had come to Champagne. For two days they remained in reserve in a little wood to the east of Mont Blanc, while an attempt was made by the 36th Division, men from Texas and Oklahoma, to take the hill. Brave and daring were these men from the middle west, yet they never before had been under fire, and under the terrible rain of shell and machine gun bullets, they were forced to give ground and return.

Now it was the turn of the marines. On the evening of October 2d, they went into line, taking over a position of three and a half kilometers, running eastward from Somme-Py. In order to get a good starting point, they seized, during the night, the German second line positions in front of them, taking armored trenches and wired lines. When the main attack started on October 3d at 5.30 a. m. in the morning, the marines were successful from the start. They charged up the hill in a steady persistent advance. And here they showed that more than bravery was necessary to take that strongly fortified position. For the machine-gun pits built on concrete tiers were, in truth, impregnable in a frontal attack. The only way that they could be taken was by attacking them from the flank and thus overcoming the defenders.

Into a veritable hail of hissing bullets, they advanced in true American fashion, first advancing ten or twelve yards, then kneeling and firing. There was no wave formation—in squads they went at the machine gun pits and overpowered the defenders. Men fell on all sides, but they made their way constantly higher and higher. Three hours continued that steady, constant advance three hours they charged the impregnable defenses and won. In that incredibly short period they reached the top of the Hill of Mont Blanc and the Gibraltar of the Hindenberg line was taken.

And they pushed right on. Medeah Farm fell before their onslaught and they took possession of the high ground that looked down into the valley of the little Aisne river, on which Ste. Etienne was situated. Their advance of six kilometers had however, brought them into great danger. They had come so far ahead of the troops on the left that they were in jeopardy of being enclosed, when a fresh French division was put in behind them to protect their left flank.

The next morning they resumed the attack at 4.30, and met the very heavy German machine gun and artillery resistance north of the Aisne river. They fought their way through to the neighborhood of Ste. Etienne, taking a position on the plateau of Orfeuil. The day of the 6th was devoted to consolidating their newly-won positions. All this time there was a murderous fire from the Germans, with constant gas attacks. The American positions were being fired at from the front and both flanks, as the supporting troops on either side were constantly lagging behind. Every inch was being won at terrible cost, for the Germans knew what would be the result of losing that high ground and they were resisting the advance with every means possible.

And now on the 6th, the marines stood before the little village of Ste. Etienne. It lay in a valley and on the hill opposite were the Germans with their artillery and machine guns. Before the village was a most complicated set of barb-wire defenses, rendered more impregnable by the hand grenades which the Germans had built in the wires. These hand grenades were about a foot long, and were exploded by pulling a string attached to a cap at one end. The strings hung loosely on the wires, and many a marine when attempting to cut through the entanglements would pull one of these strings and the next moment would be torn to bits. And it was here, at the wire entanglements, that the artillery fire was thickest, for the men had to stop and cut their way through, exposed to direct fire and no opportunity for defense.

Against these diabolical defenses, the marines of the 74th and 75th companies charged the next morning. They charged, cut their way through, and took the town, driving the enemy headlong before them to the defense of the strongly fortified positions on the hill beyond, the last hill of the entire ridge. But this great attack went for naught, for the French troops had not come up on their left. They were far behind; they had not been able to advance against the heavy counter-attacks of the enemy. From the very beginning of the attack on Mont Blanc on the third, the marines had kept ahead of all the troops of the entire allied forces in Champagne, but in the previous fighting, the French had always come up in time to save the little band of marines from being encircled. This time they had failed them, and only one thing was possible for the two companies in Ste. Etienne. It was murder to remain in that open exposed village, with the German artillery trained on them from front and sides. And so Captain Chandler ordered his men to fall back to the position of the night before.

The fighting had now been going on steadily for five days. Lacking food, lacking supplies, without rest, without relief, the marines had gone forward—forward every time. During all these terrible days of fighting, Israel Cohen had played no small part. For one and and a half years he had been training for this week for eighteen months he had been receiving all that the greatest service in the world—the Marine Corps—had to offer in the making up of a soldier. And this intensive training had been intensified in the camps in France. "We are practicing shooting three hours every day," he wrote several times during the summer.

He had become a marksman, an expert rifleman, a sharpshooter. And in addition to rifle shooting drilled in every branch of warfare that was practiced. For not only his life, but that of his comrades depended upon his accuracy and skill. And all this training had now been brought to bear in the fight on Mont Blanc, the most severe battle, with the exception perhaps, of Belleau Wood, of the American army in France.

Straight up through that hellish torrent of bullets, he had charged, advancing, halting, firing, then advancing, halting and firing again, cutting his way through wire entanglements, smashing his way through other obstructions, until reaching the machine gun posts, he had forced its defenders to surrender. And this kind of fighting had now continued steadily for five days.

Of Israel Cohen's bravery and daring in action his comrades speak, and each time point to another service in which he distinguished himself. The company had received orders to take the hill, and having taken it awaited new commands. It was Israel Cohen's task to keep liaison between the French troops and his battalion. And a dangerous task it was for during those days of fighting the Germans had often come within an ace of encircling the American division.

The losses had been enormous. In the fighting on the 5th, Israel Cohen's "chunkie," Gunnery Sergeant Pigott, had fallen by his side, overcome by the deadly gas. The ranks of the marines had grown thinner and thinner every day, but the advance had continued.

And now on Monday night, the 7th of October, those that remained of the 74th and 75th companies of Marines were again intrenched before the village which they had just evacuated. It was Israel Cohen's last night on earth. It was not, however, a night of rest, for as on previous nights, he was accompanying his commander, Captain Chandler, on his nightly patrol. How they must have looked out for signs of the coming of the French, who had been lagging so far behind.

The dawn had not yet arisen the next morning, when an order was received to take the village again. Of the 200 men of the 75th company that had come to Champagne, less than 120 were left as the result of five days' of fighting. Leaving a few men behind to protect the communications, Captain Chandler, at the head of two platoons—all that could be mustered, of each company, led the attack. It is the custom writes Brigadier General Catlin in his recent book for officers in the marines to carefully explain their orders and tell their men just what is expected of them. But that morning there was no explanation. Perhaps Captain Chandler himself did not understand the orders, perhaps the orders to advance had come too suddenly. At any rate, as Sergeant Campbell of the 75th Company, now in Pelham Bay Naval hospital, told me, the whole matter was all tangled up. The men were sent forward, without any clear idea of what was expected of them.

And now began the last great fight of the marines a fight made more terrible by the fact that just at that time.

(Continued on Page Nine, Col. Seven)

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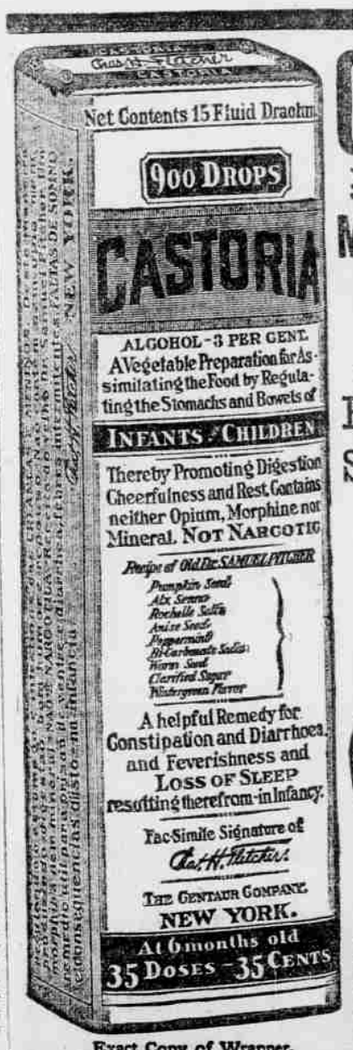

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