

AMERICAN JEWS IN THE WORLD WAR

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From the day that the United States entered the war the Jews of America perceived the wisdom of keeping an authentic record of Jewish service in the common cause. The American Jewish Committee therefore assumed this task in November, 1917—at its first annual meeting after the American declaration of war—and has since prosecuted it, with the unstinted co-operation of the Jewish Welfare Board, vigorously and systematically, until to-day it may properly claim a collection of historical and statistical data of the very first importance. In fact, the monumental character of the undertaking—both in justice to those of our coreligionists who were engaged in the great struggle, and as a collection of source material invaluable for Jewish historiography and demography in the future—has become so significant as to make this work comparable, in magnitude, with the greatest publication enterprises of American Jewry.

In spite of the wealth of material available, however—or perhaps because of it—the time has not yet arrived for an adequate, or even a preliminary, historical survey of the contribution of the Jews of America to the winning of the war. All American war records are as yet far behind those of our co-belligerents for the obvious reason that those nations, particularly France and England, had a longer period in which to organize their historical material. The American records are still, at this writing, largely inaccessible, resting in the Central Records Office of the American Expeditionary Forces in

France, thousands of miles from the collateral material in Washington. Because of this the War Department has officially withdrawn all so-called histories of divisions that have been published hitherto, and has prohibited the publication of new histories until such time as all the records may be made available in America. These reasons, it is apparent, apply with exceptional force against the possibly premature publication of Jewish historical material pertaining to the war. The present article will therefore limit itself strictly to a consideration of certain *statistical* data of immediate interest, leaving the greater task of an authentic historical record for future development.

THE NUMBER OF JEWS IN THE VARIOUS BRANCHES OF SERVICE

The outstanding facts developed in the course of our inquiry to date¹ may be summarized as follows:

First, our collection already comprises over 150,000 records of Jews in the military and naval forces of the United States. These are individual records, free of all duplications, and furnishing, in the majority of cases, all service details—such as date of enlistment or induction, branch of service, rank, casualties or citations, etc.—and, in addition, certain details as to age, nativity, occupation, etc., of the greatest possible demographic value.

Many of these records have been forwarded directly from the camps and trenches by the soldiers themselves. Others were sent in by agents of the Jewish Welfare Board overseas, on transports, and at the camps, or by local branches of

¹ All figures are as of August 15, 1919, and are subject to constant revision as new information comes to hand.

the Board, without whose untiring co-operation, in fact, this work would have been impossible. Still others were sent by the relatives and friends of the soldiers and sailors, by the Rabbis throughout the country and by the leading Jewish organizations, national and local.

Second, of the 150,000 records at hand about 140,000 have been tabulated and classified by branches of service, rank in the service, states and cities of origin, etc.

Of these 140,000 records some 114,000 are classified in the army, 13,500 in the navy, 2200 in the marine corps, and about 11,000 in service unknown.

Of the 114,000 army records, 24,200 are known to be in the infantry, 7642 in the artillery, 7884 in the medical corps, 4558 in the signal and aviation corps, 2496 in the engineer corps, 1239 in the cavalry, 1385 in ordnance, and 13,264 in other branches. Men whose branches of service are as yet unknown, but the great majority of whom will probably be found later in the infantry, number 51,332.

As to rank, there are so far recorded 7929 Jewish commissioned officers in the army, of whom 32 are colonels, 39 lieutenant-colonels, 340 majors, 1201 captains and 4802 lieutenants. In the navy there were recorded to date 433 commissioned officers, including one rear admiral, and in the marine corps 59 commissioned officers, including one brigadier-general.

As to states and cities of origin, the largest centers of Jewish population have, of course, supplied the greatest number of Jews in the service. New York, state and city, have supplied more than one-third, the total for the state being 50,319, of which 41,376 are from New York City. Pennsylvania follows with 14,586, of which 9596 are from Philadelphia. Illinois is

credited with 7203, of which 5967 are from Chicago; and Massachusetts with 5497, of which 1423 are from Boston. Other states will be found pro-rated accordingly. The class "States not known" comprises 29,785, of which probably 40 per cent will ultimately be traceable to New York.

As the full significance of these figures may be grasped only in their relation to certain questions that are, of necessity, uppermost in the minds of those interested in this subject, it may be well to present the information developed so far in the course of the inquiry in the form of questions and answers—it being understood, however, that as these figures are not final, any deductions drawn from them must also lack finality.

What was the total number, and percentage, of the Jews in the army and navy of the United States during the war? The best available evidence indicates that there were from 200,000 to 250,000 Jews in the service, or from 4 to 5 per cent of the total forces of the United States, which numbered approximately 4,800,000 men. These estimates are based upon several independent calculations which tend strongly to confirm one another.²

How does the percentage of Jews in the service compare

²One of these calculations is based upon the fact that our records have until now, for practical reasons that need not be entered into at this point, been gathered by *extensive* rather than by *intensive* methods. The 150,000 records in our files, therefore, represent only the first pick. It has been found that in several towns where, for exceptional reasons, an *intensive* survey was made, at least fifty per cent of new names were added to our present figures. Should this average increment prevail for the country at large, it would add 75,000 names to our present figures, thereby bringing the total to 225,000. In addition to this, New York, in particular, is at present grossly under-represented. When thoroughly surveyed, it will probably add 25,000 more records to the present total, bringing it up to 250,000.

with the percentage of the Jewish population in the United States? The entire Jewish population of the country, according to the latest estimates, is about 3 per cent of the total population. The Jews in the military and naval forces of the United States, however, have constituted from 4 to 5 per cent of the total personnel. On the face of these figures it would seem that the Jews of America contributed at least one-third more than their share to the armed strength of the United States. There is reason to believe, however, that the final figures, when available, will demonstrate that the Jewish contribution has been even greater than this. It is well known that the selective service system has operated more effectively in the North and East than in the South and West, and in the urban more than in the rural districts—that is, in the larger centers of population, which happen also to be the centers of Jewish population. Moreover, the number of industrial exemptions has been greatest in agriculture, mining, and the metal industries, where the Jews are least extensively employed. It has therefore developed, as an unavoidable and incidental feature of the draft system, that the Jewish elements of the population have perhaps been drawn upon more heavily, in proportion to their numbers, than any other elements.

But the principal reason for the high percentage of Jews in the service rests elsewhere. It is to be found in the remarkable number of Jewish volunteers. The evidence as to this is definite and conclusive. The great majority of the records in our files state the exact ages of the men reported. By actual count it has been ascertained that of all the men whose ages were known fully 10 per cent were well outside the draft ages at the time that the count was made—before the registration of September 12. If, in addition to this number,

there be added the 15,700 sailors and marines, who are all volunteers, the total of such volunteers at present recorded rises to more than 20 per cent of the total in our files. Should this ratio represent fairly the proportion of Jewish volunteers in all the arms of the service—and at present there is no reason to believe otherwise—this would indicate that there were from 40,000 to 50,000 Jewish volunteers in the service. In other words, the normal Jewish quota of three per cent seems to have been contributed through the draft, and the excess to have been supplied by volunteers.

How were the Jewish soldiers distributed among the combatant and non-combatant branches of the service? Although distinctions of this nature have become, in the organization of modern warfare, almost meaningless, and are therefore not to be over-emphasized, certain comparisons that have been noted in this connection are so striking as to compel instant attention. According to the latest official figures available as to the strength of the United States army as a whole and of each of its component branches, the total strength was, in November, 1918, about 3,700,000, of which the infantry, artillery, cavalry, engineers, and signal-aviation branches together constituted 60 per cent, and the other branches, such as ordnance, quartermaster corps, etc., constituted 40 per cent. But among the 114,000 records of Jewish soldiers in our possession the distribution among the first-named branches is fully 67 per cent. The infantry branch constituted 26.6 per cent of the entire army, while among the Jewish records it constituted 48 per cent. Artillery was 14 per cent of the United States army, 8 per cent of the Jewish total. In cavalry the rate for the entire army is 2 per cent, for the Jews only 1.3 per cent. The engineer corps constituted 11 per cent of the army

strength, and but 3 per cent among the Jewish records. The signal and aviation corps represented 7 per cent of the United States total, and 15 per cent of the Jewish total. The medical corps was 8 per cent of the army total, 9 per cent of the Jewish total. Ordnance was 1.7 per cent of the army total, and 1.5 of the Jewish total. The quartermaster corps was 6.2 per cent of the army total and 5.9 per cent of the Jewish total.

If, therefore, such distinctions are still held valid, it may be said truthfully that the relative proportion of Jews in the combatant branches is far greater than in the non-combatant branches.

If additional evidence as to this point is desired, it may be found in a comparative study of two branches of the service differing so widely in their functions as the quartermaster corps and the marine corps. In view of the fact that the quartermaster corps is essentially the business organization of the army, and that the Jewish recruits, as a class, undoubtedly possess greater business training and greater capacity for organization than their non-Jewish comrades, it may reasonably have been expected that this branch of the service would possess a far higher percentage of Jews than all other branches. The evidence at hand, however, points definitely to the contrary. While the personnel in the quartermaster corps constituted 6.2 per cent of the army as a whole, it constituted only 5.9 per cent of the Jewish total.

The marine corps, on the other hand, is essentially a fighting organization. Every man in this corps is a volunteer, enlisted with the full knowledge that the corps would be sent wherever the fighting was thickest. Now of the 65,000 marine corps records examined to date about 2300, or 3.4 per cent, proved to be Jewish, while probably an additional 200 were

likewise Jewish, but not definitely traceable by our methods. And of these 2500 Jewish marines, fully 30 per cent joined immediately after June 5, 1918, the day when it was published to the world that the marines were the American "shock troops" at Chateau-Thierry.

QUALITIES

How did these thousands of Jews in the American forces measure up—as soldiers, as comrades, as men? The volume of spontaneous evidence as to the high quality of Jewish courage, loyalty, and devotion on the battlefield is most impressive. No men are better qualified to speak of Jewish heroism than those Americans, non-Jews, who fought side by side with them, commanded them as officers, stayed with them in the trenches, shared with them the miseries of war, and rejoiced with them in the glories of victory. It is no secret that when the regular army officers were, in the early days of mobilization, confronted with the problem of converting the city-bred Jews into what they conceived to be proper soldier material, they were openly sceptical, not to say apprehensive. But it was not long before the ready wit of the Jewish recruits, their cool intelligence, their amenability to discipline, and the deadly seriousness with which they threw themselves into the work, convinced all sceptics of their worth.

It is reported that one of the officers at Camp Upton, who was assigned to a unit which contained 60 per cent of Jewish recruits, at first made no effort to conceal his dismay. Two months later, however, when a call was sent to him to transfer a selected number of his men to Camp Gordon, he was careful to retain practically all of the Jewish boys in his command. He had learned to appraise them accurately; and his revised opinion of their qualities was later thoroughly justified by the conduct of his men in Argonne.

Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas Campbell, addressing a meeting at the Educational Alliance, New York, on April 8, 1919, declared: "The Jewish boys of the 77th Division were the best soldiers on earth. They have participated in the greatest battles, and emerged sound. The 77th Division, of which 40 per cent were Jewish young men, was the only American division to reach the Aisne, after having penetrated into the German lines further than any other division. The fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers of the Jewish boys may well be proud of them."

The tribute paid by Major-General Clarence R. Edwards, of the 26th Division, is particularly interesting. Speaking at the Temple Ohab Sholem, in Boston, he said: "I want to tell you that the Jews made an enviable record *I remember instances where formerly intolerant Gentiles asked that the Jews be made officers in order that they might be leaders.* Many a Jewish lad of the 27th gave his life with a smile on his face."

Captain Harrigan, of the 307th Infantry, is a particular admirer of the Jewish "doughboy." "Too much cannot be said for the boys who went across from the East Side," he has frequently declared. "They stood out for conspicuous bravery and utter disregard for self when they went up against the Germans in France. I wish I could remember all the things that came to my attention when we were in action."

On another occasion, discussing the comparative qualities of the city-bred soldiers, Captain Harrigan said: "They have splendid nervous endurance. They can stand things. But that is not all—not by any means. One particular thing that was proven by the 77th was that there is no better soldier anywhere than the Jewish boy. About 40 per cent of the

division were Jews, and what fighters they were! They put into their fighting the same qualities that the Jew puts into business or professional work, and that make him successful; in other words, they use their keen Jewish intelligence in the business of fighting just as they would use it in any other business. The Jew is essentially intelligent, keen, determined to make good; the Jewish boys of the 77th fought just that way. They would go after a concealed German battery just as they would go after the conquest of some business difficulty—and they would get it!”

In a similar vein runs the testimony of Colonel Whittlesey, who won immortal fame for himself and the “Lost Battalion” in the Argonne. “We officers who served with the 77th Division,” Colonel Whittlesey told the present writer, “have had an opportunity to know many Jewish soldiers, and have come to think of them with great admiration. Indeed, I feel reluctant to comment on the bravery of the East Side men, for it is something we have learned to take for granted. But some of them stand out so unforgettably in the memory that it is impossible not to speak of them. There was one man, for example, who seemed the worst possible soldier-material—thick-set, stolid-looking, extremely alien in face and speech—and yet on that day when we were holding the bank of the Vesle he performed feats as a runner that, to my mind, place him in the front ranks. To communicate with our commands it was necessary to send a runner up hill and down hill, through thick underbrush, in a terrain that would have been difficult enough to cover under ordinary circumstances. Under fire this became almost impossible, yet this boy volunteered four different times, and, using reserves of wit and cunning, of physical pluck and nervous endurance that no one would have

suspected him to possess, made the trip successfully every time."

HONORS

Evidence as to the high quality of Jewish courage in the war is to be found in the official citations for gallantry in action or devotion "above and beyond the call of duty." Of such honors we have so far recorded some 600 to the credit of American Jews, of which 378 were conferred by the American command, 162 by the French command, and the remainder by other Allied commands. What proportion these six hundred bear to the total of such honors conferred we have, as yet, no means of knowing; but all available evidence would seem to indicate that they greatly exceed the proportion of Jews in the service.

Of the rare Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest distinction awarded by the United States, the Jews have at least three to their credit:

Sergeant Sydney G. Gumpertz, of Chicago, a volunteer in the 132d Infantry, who, on September 26, 1918, in the Bois de Forges, when his advancing line was held up by a machine-gun nest, left his platoon and started, with two other soldiers, through a heavy barrage toward the enemy. Although his two companions were soon killed by a bursting shell, he "continued on alone in the face of direct fire from the machine gun, jumped into the nest, and silenced the gun, capturing nine of the crew" (General Order No. 16, January 22, 1919). Sergeant Gumpertz also received the *Medaille Militaire*, the highest French honor, and the *Croix de Guerre* with palm.

A similar exploit earned this medal for Sergeant Benjamin Kaufman, of the 308th Infantry. In the Argonne Forest, on

October 4, 1918, he had taken out a platoon to check a machine-gun company. Although separated from his platoon, and his right arm shattered by a machine-gun bullet, "without hesitation he advanced on the German line, throwing grenades with his left hand, and charging with an empty pistol. Thus he scattered the machine-gun crew, and brought the gun and one prisoner back with him to the first-aid station."

Particularly human and moving a story is that of William Sawelson, of the 312th Infantry, who, "in action at Grand Pre, October 26, 1918, hearing a wounded man in a shell-hole some distance away calling for water, upon his own initiative left shelter, and crawled through heavy machine-gun fire to where the man lay, giving him what water he had in his own canteen. He then went back to his own shell-hole, obtained more water and was returning to the wounded man, when he was killed by a machine-gun bullet" (General Order No. 16, January 22, 1919). The medal was awarded after Sawelson's death and presented to his father, Jacob L. Sawelson, at Governor's Island.

The act for which Sawelson was cited—that of risking his own life to save a wounded comrade—is recorded so frequently in the citations of Jewish soldiers that we were prompted to make an investigation of all citations, with a view to determining whether, in fact, this supreme quality of self-sacrifice was a distinguishing characteristic of Jewish soldiers in action. For this purpose we selected for careful study exactly 200 citations of which the official text was available, and—at random—an equal number of citations of non-Jews. It was found that, although these citations described every conceivable act of valor that the circumstances of modern warfare have called forth, they were nevertheless classifiable into six or seven main

groups. The outstanding characteristic of each group and the number of Jews and non-Jews in each are indicated below :

	Jews		Non-Jews	
	Total	%	Total	%
<i>Stubborn Devotion to Duty:</i> Persistence in carrying out a task, in spite of danger and above and beyond the call of duty. Refusal to leave the field, though wounded.	52	26	63	31.5
<i>Acts of Mercy. Risking Own Life to Save Wounded:</i> In utter disregard of personal safety, leaving shelter and advancing under fire, to administer aid to wounded, or to carry wounded to places of safety. Aiding other wounded, though himself severely wounded and in great pain, refusing medical treatment until other wounded are treated.	64	32	46	23
<i>Runner and Reconnaissance Duty:</i> Volunteering for mission as runner, after others had been shot down, and when going meant almost certain death. Successful accomplishment of mission often saved situation.	37	18.5	26	13
<i>Coolness Under Fire and in Other Dangerous Circumstances:</i> Exhibiting self-composure in critical moment, thereby saving a dangerous situation.	8	4	13	6.5
<i>Intelligence in Action. Resourcefulness:</i> Display of sound judgment and cleverness, instrumental in performing acts of heroism and leading to important results. Exercise of initiative and assumption of responsibility in critical moments. Efficiency in planning and execution of a vital task.	24	12	14	7
<i>Intrepidity in Action. Dare-deviltry:</i> Privates who alone, or with few companions, conquered large group of enemy. Officers who led small detachment which vanquished much larger number.	9	4.5	28	14
<i>Miscellaneous:</i> Unclassifiable.	6	3	10	5
	200	100.00	200	100.00

It will be noticed that in some of the classes the Jews and the non-Jews are approximately even. There is little to choose between them in stubborn devotion to duty, in coolness under dangerous circumstances, and in runner duty. In some of the other classes, however, the difference is striking. In acts of

mercy, in risking their own lives to save the lives of wounded comrades, the Jews excel in the proportion of 64 to 45. In intelligence and resourcefulness in action they excel by 24 to 14. In dare-deviltry, in sheer "bull courage" which forges ahead without knowing, or perhaps realizing, the cost, the Jews are easily excelled.

This observation, although it is not advanced as conclusive in any sense, nevertheless demonstrates so well what may have been expected of the Jewish character that it is considered at least worth recording at this point.

CASUALTIES

At the present writing (August, 1919), the War Department is still revising its casualty lists. Any definitive statement as to the number of Jews who have made the supreme sacrifice for their country, or who have been wounded in battle, is therefore impossible. The office of Jewish War Records at present, however, has the records of 2500 deaths, of whom some 1300 were killed in action, 390 died of wounds, and 800 died of accident, disease, and other causes. The list, however, is known to be far from complete, it being estimated that probably 1000 additional names will be recorded in the near future. In other words, the total of Jewish deaths will probably aggregate 3500, or about 5 per cent of the total American deaths recorded to date.

Of wounded there are at present about 8000 on file, with a possible increment of an additional 4000 to be incorporated.

Altogether, therefore, it may be noted that the number of Jews who have either given their lives for their country, or shed their blood for the American cause, will probably aggregate from 15,000 to 16,000.

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In conclusion, it has become apparent, from the information now available, that the record of Jewish War Service, when fully developed, will demonstrate incontestably that the Jews of America have contributed their full quota to the winning of the war, and a generous margin beyond their quota; that they have enlisted cheerfully, fought gallantly, and died bravely for the United States. Those who knew the quality of Jewish loyalty needed no proof of this. They knew that the qualities which had enabled the Jew to survive through the centuries—his capacity to endure, without breaking, prolonged and intense nerve strain; his qualities of initiative, his elasticity of mind, his capacity for organization, and above all, his idealism—would make him a worthy fighter in America's cause. In this they have not been disappointed. But to communicate this knowledge to the outside world it becomes necessary to establish the known facts on the soundest possible foundations. This the present record promises to accomplish.